

Practice 1: The Basics

Overview

Whether you are a graphic designer, a pastor, a small business owner, a parent of young children, retired, or unemployed, one of the significant challenges we face in our apprenticeship (discipleship) to Jesus is our difficulty making space to *be* with Jesus.

As a whole church, throughout the course of this Fall, we are going to make space and intentionally pursue “being with Jesus” - both together and individually. Our first step in this direction will be to familiarize ourselves with the practice of “Silence & Solitude”. Not because it’s magical, but because most of us desperately need to create a space to get in touch with our own hearts and minds, and more importantly Jesus. The remaining Fall practices will build on the foundation of “Silence & Solitude”, but are geared to be more active/interactive (no need for extroverts to panic).

Our goal for today is to introduce “Silence & Solitude”, actually practice it (at least to some measure... the solitude part is debatable), and make plans for how we will implement it personally this week.

Note before you start: *Be patient with yourself and God, and enjoy the journey.*

Prayer *5 min*

As you begin, take a few moments to pray as an MC and invite the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together.

Debrief *10 min*

Talk through the following debrief questions:

1. What did you think of the sermon this week?
2. Is silence and solitude a regular part of your discipleship to Jesus? If yes, what does that look like in your life rhythm? If no, why not? (Note: The point of this question is honest conversation, not guilt or shame. Work hard to create a safe place in your community for people at every stage.)
3. How does the idea of silence and solitude make you feel? Excited? Scared? Too busy?

Open to the Bible together *10 min*

Have somebody read Luke 4:42 and another person read Luke 5:15-16. Work through following questions:

1. Why do you think Jesus would regularly slip away to “lonely places”?
2. Where do you see the role of silence and solitude played out in Jesus’ emotional health and spiritual life?
3. What challenges would Jesus have faced to carve out time to be alone with himself and God? Do you face any similar challenges?

The Explanation & Prompt *5-10 min*

Here’s the practice for this evening and the upcoming week.

1. Put away your phone or any other distractions, settle into your time/place, and get comfortable

- For most people, sitting with your back straight, shoulders relaxed, legs on the floor is a good start.

2. Begin with a “breathing prayer” (this is just a fancy term for ↓)

- Close your eyes and take long, deep, slow breaths (if you want, count 4 seconds in, 4 seconds wait, 4 seconds out, repeat). Inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth.
- Start to pay attention to your breathing.
- Release the constant chatter in your mind. Let each thought go as quickly as it comes, and just focus on your breathing.
- Your mind will seize this opportunity to run wild with thoughts, feelings, memories, to do’s, and distractions. That’s okay. Don’t judge yourself, feel bad, give up, or worry. When you notice your mind start to wander, just recenter with a quick prayer, like, *“Father, you are here with me.”* and come back to your breathing.
- The main goal this week is to practice “stilling” our heart and mind.
- In the beginning, just 3-5 minutes of this is a huge win, and 10 minutes is a home run.

3. Close in a prayer of gratitude to the Father (simple version: thank Him that he is near to us)

A few things to note:

1. You can't "succeed" or "fail" at this practice. All you can do is show up. Be patient. Resist the urge to say, "I'm bad at this" or "This isn't for me." Don't judge yourself, especially if you're an overachiever type.
2. If sitting still feels like death, you might want to try this while doing a stretching exercise or going on a walk somewhere quiet and distraction free (like a park or short hike).

The Practice *5 min*

Dismiss everyone to go find a spot to be silent and "do" the practice. (The leader will set a timer once everyone has found a place). Feel free to take a notebook/pen with you. When the timer is up, return to the group.

Work through these discussion questions as a group *10-15 min*

1. How did it go?
2. What was the best part? The hardest part?
3. When will you practice this week? What barriers do you think you will face in practicing silence at least 5 minutes 3 times this week? How will you navigate those?
4. What is your deepest fear and greatest hope for this coming week's practice?

Close in prayer *5-10 min*

Tips for the Coming Week

1. Identify a time/place that works well for you

- Time: For many people, first thing in the morning works best. You're rested, fresh, and the day is young. For others, a more optimal time slot is when kids are napping in the late morning, or on a lunch break, after work, or before you go to bed. Feel free to experiment until you find the right fit.
- Place: Find a place that is quiet and as distraction free as possible: a comfortable chair or a park are also a good bet.
- For most sitting with your back straight, shoulders relaxed, legs on the floor is a good start. Others do better lying on their back in a relaxed position.
- Some may prefer to do this exercise while walking or doing something simple with your hands like drawing or knitting.

2. Set a modest goal

- Beginners: It's better to start small and work your way up. We recommend you start with 5-10 minutes, 3-5 days a week.
- Intermediate: If you already practice silence and solitude a few times a week, consider upping it to every day.

