



The Quiet Place

WEEK 01

“The invitation to solitude and silence is just that. It is an invitation to enter more deeply into the intimacy of relationship with the One who waits just outside the noise and busyness of our lives. It is an invitation to communication and communion with the One who is always present even when our awareness has been dulled by distraction. It is an invitation to the adventure of spiritual transformation in the deepest places of our being, an adventure that will result in greater freedom and authenticity and surrender to God than we have yet experienced.”

—RUTH HALEY BARTON, *INVITATION TO SOLITUDE AND SILENCE*

Overview

Smartphones, alerts, Wi-Fi, email, social media, streaming services, and the endless queue of entertainment — the noise of the digital age is with us 24/7.

On top of that, we hear daily the “noise” of opinion, political polarization, outrage over the culture wars, and more.

Not to mention the literal noise of modern life: automobiles, delivery trucks, freeway traffic, airplanes overhead, construction all around. The world is louder and louder with each passing year.

This poses a major problem for those of us who apprentice under Jesus. As Mother Teresa once said, “We need to find God, and he cannot be found in noise and restlessness.

God is the friend of silence.” She was re-voicing what all the saints and sages have said for millennia: The two primary places we discover God are in community — in deep, long-term, loving, open relationships with other apprentices of Jesus in the family of God — and in solitude, silence, and stillness.

You see this pattern in the life of Jesus himself. Jesus would regularly slip away into the *eremos*, a Greek word that can be translated “the desert” or “the deserted place” or “the

solitary place” or even “the quiet place.” There he would pray; he would open to his Father and draw on the Holy Spirit for strength, wisdom, direction, and joy. Then he would come back to the world of people to love and serve.

This back-and-forth rhythm of community and solitude is one we desperately need to reclaim for the modern age. Most of us get intuitively that we *need* relationships with other followers of Jesus to flourish, but many of us are less in touch with our need for intentional times in the quiet to be alone with ourselves and our God. As Henri Nouwen put it, “Without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life.” All close friendships require dedicated time alone together.

How do we befriend God, let God befriend us, amid all the noise, distraction, and busyness of modern life?

We follow Jesus’ example, and we go into solitude.

As we’ll explore over the coming four weeks, solitude is both a *place* and a *practice*. As we take small steps forward together, may you discover new layers of possibility with God as you follow him day by day.

Practice

WEEK 01: THE QUIET PLACE

The exercise for Week 1 is very simple; it's to begin your day with a few minutes of solitude, silence, and stillness.

You may find this exercise works better for you at night before bed, midmorning when your toddler is napping, or on your lunch break; that's great. But for the vast majority of people, we recommend first thing in the morning, when your body is rested, your heart open, and the day is new.

Here's a step-by-step exercise to try.

- 01 Find a quiet place in your home or outside in nature that is as *distraction-free as possible*. Make sure your phone is in another room and settle into a comfortable position.
- 02 Begin to take long, slow breaths from your belly all the way up through your lungs. Inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth. If you want, count up 5 seconds on the inhale and down 5 seconds on the exhale.
- 03 With each inhale, prayerfully welcome the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit into the deepest place within you. You may want to repeat a simple prayer like "Come Holy Spirit" or "Lord, have mercy on me" or just "Jesus." Something to keep your mind focused and to let this be more than just breathing, but prayer.
 - Your mind *will* seize this opportunity to run wild with thoughts, feelings, memories, to-dos, and distractions. That's okay. Don't judge yourself, feel bad, give up, or worry. Distraction doesn't mean you're "bad" at prayer; it means you're *human*. When you notice your mind starting to wander, just come back to your breathing or your prayer word.
 - In the beginning, just 1-2 minutes of this type of prayer is a win. Ten minutes is a home run.

- 04 Now that you are centered in your body and in God, spend a few minutes just resting in God's love for you. Let the Holy Spirit make his presence known to your whole body. Just soak in his love and peace and joy. Let God love you.
- You may want to visualize the love of the Father being poured out in Christ and into the depth of your being by the Holy Spirit.
 - Or you may want to listen for God's voice and see what comes to mind.
 - Or you may want to worship and express your love to God in your own way.
 - But don't try to fill up this time. And don't try to make anything happen or control the experience — just *be* with God.
- 05 After a few minutes, you may want to continue your time in solitude by praying a psalm or reading a story from the Gospels or a passage from Scripture. Or by praying over your life. Or by journaling to God. Follow your heart.
- 06 Whenever you're done, close your time with a simple prayer of gratitude to God for his presence, love, and goodness in your life.

Please note: Our strong recommendation is that you do this *every single day* this coming week and, if you can, for a little longer on the Sabbath. If you only get to do it once or twice, that's still great, but there is something about the practice of beginning every day in the quiet with God that is very basic, yet ancient and powerful.

This practice of beginning your day in silent prayer is not for everybody; it may not work best for your personality or stage of life. But so many of the great followers of Jesus throughout history tell us that the way to begin to be with Jesus *all* the time is to set aside our first moments upon waking to intentionally be with him for *some* of the time.

Reach Exercise

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Reading

Read chapters 1-3 of *Invitation to Solitude and Silence* by Ruth Haley Barton.

Podcast

Listen to episode 1 of the Solitude series from the Rule of Life podcast by Practicing the Way.

Exercise: A full hour of quiet prayer daily

When Henri Nouwen asked Mother Teresa for spiritual counsel, she told him to “spend one hour each day in adoration of your Lord.” Life is busy for all of us, but many people find that a full hour gives the necessary space to really slow down and experience God’s presence and voice.

Our Reach Exercise for week one is to spend a full hour in the quiet each morning *before* you touch your phone.

Begin with the above exercise, but then spend the rest of your time as you feel moved — reading Scripture, listening for God’s voice, offering petition and intercession, journaling, or whatever you feel a stirring in your heart toward. Follow your desire for God wherever it leads.

Remember: Following Jesus in the modern era is less about adding new activities into our already overbusy, tiring lives. It’s more about taking activities out, about slowing down to rest and delight in Jesus as he rests and delights in us.

Special note: Retreat

With spiritual exercises, it's always best to start very small and slowly work your way up. Don't try to be heroic; be gentle with yourself, as God is gentle. That said, for the final week of our Solitude Practice, we're going to invite you to go on retreat. A daily quiet time is an essential practice, but there are some things that can only happen in longer periods of solitude.

You may choose to begin with just a few hours of retreat, or you may want to go away for a half day or full day. But you may choose to go away overnight, or even for a few days. If so, you will need to begin planning now.

Look for retreat centers near you, or monasteries — they usually have guest rooms available for people who want to go pray in the quiet. You may have access to a family cabin or empty guest house, or you may choose to rent a cabin or quiet place to be alone. And if you don't have access to a place to go on retreat, just follow Jesus' example and go outside. Go on a long hike or camping by yourself, or just find a place in nature to be alone.

Those of you with children may want to alternate days away with your spouse or call on your community and/or family for help at home. This practice of retreat can be a time for your community to come together. One of the best gifts we can give each other is the gift of time away to rest and be with God. Communities can share the gift of solitude and sabbath with those members who don't have easy access to it.



Solitude Reflection

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Reflection is a key component in our spiritual formation.

Millenia ago, King David prayed in Psalm 139v23-24:

Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

Trevor Hudson, a scholar on Ignatian spirituality, has said, “We don’t change from our experience, we change when we reflect on our experience.”

If you want to get the most out of this Practice, you need to do it, and then *reflect* on it.



Solitude Reflection

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Before your next time together with the group for Week 2, take five to ten minutes to journal out your answers to the following three questions:

01 Is solitude a practice in your life right now? Do you find it difficult? Do you find it enjoyable?

02 How are you hoping to grow in solitude over the next few weeks?

03 What support do you need from this community as we go on this journey with God? Be specific.

Note: As you write, be as specific as possible. While bullet points are just fine, if you write it out in narrative form, your brain will be able to process your insights in a more lasting way.