



Encounter with Our Self

WEEK 02

“At the heart of man there is an innate silence, for God abides in the innermost part of every person. God is silence, and this divine silence dwells in man. In God we are inseparably bound up with silence ... God carries us, and we live with him at every moment by keeping silence. Nothing will make us discover God better than his silence inscribed in the center of our being. If we do not cultivate this silence, how can we find God? Man likes to travel, create, make great discoveries. But he remains outside of himself, far from God, who is silently in his soul ... There is no place on earth where God is more present than in the human heart. This heart truly is God’s abode, the temple of silence. ... The Father waits for his children in their own hearts.”

—ROBERT CARDINAL SARAH, *THE POWER OF SILENCE*

Overview

We often go into solitude tired and worn down by the stress and strain of life in the modern world, and we expect our time in solitude to be like a kind of day spa for the soul. And sometimes it is. We come to quiet and sense God's love and gentle compassion come near to our heart. We resonate with Psalm 23: "He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul."

But just as often, solitude can feel less like a day spa and more like a harrowing emotional surgery. Because we can get away from people, but we can't get away from our *self*. And often what we carry into solitude is our pain.

As Henri Nouwen put it:

"Solitude is not a private therapeutic place. Rather, it is the place of conversion, the place where the old self dies and the new self is born, the place where the emergence of the new man and the new woman occurs. ... In solitude, I get rid of my scaffolding. I have no friends to talk with, no telephone calls to make, no meetings to attend, no music to entertain, no books to distract, just me — naked, vulnerable, weak, sinful, deprived, broken — nothing. It is this nothingness that I have to face in my solitude, a nothingness so dreadful that

everything in me wants to run to my friends, my work, my distractions ..."

When we get free of our distractions, we quickly come to realize all that we've been distracting ourselves from.

Every emotion we've been outrunning through noise, hurry, and activity finally catches up with us, and we begin to *feel* our pain. Feelings of exhaustion, worry, sadness, anger, and shame all come up.

Yet from Jesus we learn that to get free of our pain, we have to face our pain. On the evening before his crucifixion, in the garden of Gethsemane, we see Jesus go to the place of pain and meet God there. He gives God his feelings, his desires, and his trust.

In solitude, we follow Jesus' example. We find a quiet place, in a garden, park, or just in the quiet of our home; we go to the place of pain; and we meet God there. It is through this simple but difficult practice of noticing and naming our emotions before God in prayer, and offering them up to God in raw honesty, that we are deeply formed into the people God has always desired for us to become.

Practice

WEEK 02: ENCOUNTER WITH OUR SELF

This week's exercise is very similar to last week. It's to begin your day with a few minutes of solitude, silence, and stillness before you touch your phone. But we've made just one addition: This week, we're also calling you to an exercise of noticing and naming your emotions and then praying Jesus' Gethsemane Prayer.

Again, we recommend you do this first thing in the morning, but you may find it works better for you after work or late at night or at a pause in your day. Just find a time when you are at peace and attentive, and attempt to stick with the same time each day.

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, begin to let yourself feel ... let whatever is in you come up. Just notice it. Don't fight it or run away from it or feel guilty about it or judge it — just notice it. Let the feeling be. Then name the emotion and be as specific as possible. You may want to utilize the following list of emotions. Just pick out 1-3 feeling words that put language to what you're experiencing in your body.

Happy	Sad	Angry	Scared	Confused
Admired	Alienated	Abused	Afraid	Ambivalent
Alive	Ashamed	Aggravated	Alarmed	Awkward
Appreciated	Burdened	Agitated	Anxious	Baffled
Assured	Condemned	Anguished	Appalled	Bewildered
Cheerful	Crushed	Annoyed	Apprehensive	Bothered
Confident	Defeated	Betrayed	Awed	Constricted
Content	Dejected	Cheated	Concerned	Directionless
Delighted	Demoralized	Coerced	Defensive	Disorganized
Determined	Depressed	Controlled	Desperate	Distracted
Estatic	Deserted	Deceived	Doubtful	Doubtful
Elated	Despised	Disgusted	Fearful	Flustered
Encouraged	Devastated	Dismayed	Frantic	Foggy
Energized	Disappointed	Displeased	Full of Dread	Hesitant
Enthusiastic	Discarded	Dominated	Guarded	Immobilized
Excited	Discouraged	Enraged	Horrified	Misunderstood
Exuberant	Disgraced	Exasperated	Impatient	Perplexed
Flattered	Disheartened	Exploited	Insecure	Puzzled
Fortunate	Disillusioned	Frustrated	Intimidated	Stagnant
Fulfilled	Dismal	Fuming	Nervous	Surprised

<https://www.ndapandas.org/wp-content/uploads/archive/Documents/News/FeelingsWordList.pdf>

05 Just sit in those feelings. Sink into them. Normally, we turn away from them and run in the opposite direction. Instead, turn and face them, like you would an ocean wave, and let it wash over you and then pass you by.

06 Then, pray Jesus' Gethsemane Prayer.

- Give God your feelings — Tell him what you are feeling, with no filter.
- Give God your desires — Tell him what you really want, good or bad.
- Give God your trust — Surrender your heart again to him. Stop grasping for control and yield yourself to God and his will for your life. You may want to pray Jesus' own prayer, "Not my will, but yours be done."

07 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, but the exercise of noticing and naming your emotions may take a bit longer. You may want to save that for a place in your week where you have unhurried time to sit with God in prayer, like your Sabbath or day off.



Reach Exercise

WEEK 02: ENCOUNTER WITH OUR SELF

Reading

Read chapters 4-6 of *Invitation to Solitude and Silence* by Ruth Haley Barton.

Podcast

Listen to episode 2 of the Solitude series from the Rule of Life podcast by Practicing the Way.

Exercise: Go for a solitude walk in creation

Most of Jesus' solitude time was spent outdoors, in the beauty of his Father's world. He was in the quiet, but also surrounded by the gentle sound of birds and animals and wind and rivers and rocks and trees. Try doing a solitary walk this week, ideally somewhere beautiful if you have access to a state park or hiking trail. If not, just find a park near your house and be with God in creation. Try to really notice the beauty all around you. Receive it as a gift from God. As you walk, let yourself feel whatever comes up and let God work deep within you as you offer your time to him.

Special note: Retreat

Just a reminder that our final week's exercise is to go on retreat. We recommend you schedule a time and place now, so you can experience this special gift of an extended time in solitude.

Solitude Reflection

WEEK 02: ENCOUNTER WITH OUR SELF

Before your next time together with the group for Week 3, take five to ten minutes to journal out your answers to the following three questions.

01 How did your practice of solitude go this week?

02 Where did you experience resistance in solitude, whether external or internal?

03 In what ways did you encounter God in solitude?

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.