

# Solitude



Choosing to step free from human relationships for a lengthy period of time.

Solitude is to stop. Stop work, and stop achieving. By doing nothing, one leaves it all up to God. Solitude is the primary spiritual discipline. It is the national anthem of the Kingdom.

Henri Nouwen states that: "our society is... a dangerous network of domination and manipulation in which we can easily get entangled and lose our soul.

Solitude is not a place where (as you may expect) to rest, recovery, and get back out in the fight, it is "the place of conversion, the place where the old self dies and the new self is born."

He calls it the "furnace of transformation." It is there we can face our sin, show our wounds, meet with Christ and allow him to heal us. He urges us to create our own desert to withdraw to every day and "dwell in the healing presence of the Lord" and we become compassionate as we die to our neighbor – in other words we stop judging them. "Thus in and through solitude we do not move away from people... we move closer to them" however "the goal is not people. It is God."

This discipline helps us make room for occupation of our lives by God. This one is especially important in freeing us from hurry. Examples of Jesus: Matt 4:1-2,

Mark 1:13, Luke 4:42, 5:16, 6:12, 9:28. Moses Ex 3:1. There is an important relationship to the law of the Sabbath (Ex 20, Lev 23 & 25). It requires a lengthy period of time, with intensity – in other words a determined effort to do nothing. While doing it you grow aware of things inside you and around you. One of the things that happen when you put yourself into solitude the devil shows up – very common. Look at Jesus in the wilderness.

If I do nothing, I am saying that the world will continue just fine without my effort, or control. We find that we can live without constant interactions with others, and they without us. The world does not rest on our shoulders. We have time to focus on God, and to clear the storm of life and mind for decision and planning. The place is made for the practice of other disciplines, silence, fasting etc. Dangers. Insensitivity to others dependant on us. Avoidance of responsibilities and problems,

Introvertive indulgences. The inability to do nothing in solitude and turning into more work. Practicalities. Getting sufficient time for solitude to work – it requires a certain intensity. Making sure that legitimate responsibilities are cared for. You must work through the expectations as to what is “supposed to happen”. In other words – nothing is supposed to happen. But when you practice solitude, something may happen as you become more aware of what is going on inside of you, and more aware of God.

We must create a habit of regularly setting a time and place for solitude and silence. Solitude – teaches me that I don’t have to be in control and the world continues on just fine. It is a cure for hurry.

## Silence.

Two forms of silence: to be quiet and have no sound, and refrain from speaking.

Silence is not an absence but a presence: a positive reality. Silence is the way to make solitude a reality. Nouwen quotes Arsenius with the words “I have often repented of having spoken, but never of having remained silent.”<sup>2</sup> James 1:26, If you claim to be religious but don’t control your tongue, you are just fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless. Talking often strengthens what you don’t like about the other person.

Silence and waiting go hand in hand 9Is 40:31, Ps 25:3, 5, 21; 37:7, 34;62:5, 69:3).

Prov 10:19 When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise. Also Eccl 5:2-3; Luke 6:45; James 1:19-20; James 3:1-12.

Silence leads one to be free from having to say anything, not having the last word, and helps resist the temptation to sound important. It teaches me that I don't have to talk for people to like me. It helps to say the right thing at the right time as our freedom grows, and it helps us not want control the world with our tongue. Talking reaches out for contact, for reassurance that someone is there. It is a great act of faith to commit what other people think of us to the Lord.

Nouwen describes the development of our culture with an enormous increase in words and noise, and one of the effects of this is that words have lost their creative power. He describes three aspects of silence: silence makes us pilgrims (speaking leads to sin); silence guards the fire within (it tends the inner fire of God and keeps it alive. Our greatest temptation is towards too many words which weakens our faith and makes us lukewarm) and silence teaches us to speak (a word with power is a word that comes from divine silence). The Primary way we access the life of God is by choosing to retain him before our conscious thought and practice at all times. "I have set the Lord always before me..." (Psalm 16:8). God will not compete for our attention. It is up to us to seek Him.

In solitude we make space for the discovery of our soul before God, for God to "move in". We hold ourselves there. Silence completes solitude.  
Examples of Jesus: Luke 4:1-2, 42; 5:16, 6:13, 9:28, 22:39.