

Spiritual Disciplines: Solitude

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Date: 21 February 2021

Preacher: Kent Dixon

- [0 : 0 0] Good morning and welcome to our online service for Sunday, February 21st, 2021. My name is Kent Dixon and I'm the lead pastor here at Bramar Baptist Church.
- Well, not here. Here is my living room. But when we meet in our church, and that's my role as lead pastor of our church, Bramar Baptist. So welcome here this morning.
- Welcome to you, whether you're joining us live online right now on Facebook, or you're tuning in later in the week, watching the video later in the week, or perhaps watching on some of the other channels we have available, YouTube, or looking at our Facebook library, visiting us on our website at bramarbaptist.com, or wherever and however you're connecting with us, welcome here this morning.
- God bless you as you join us as we gather together this morning. It's a joy for me to be the pastor of Bramar, and it's a joy for me to welcome you this morning as we come together to worship our God.
- As we recognize the God of the universe, the creator of all things, is our Heavenly Father. That's such a great comfort to us, especially, I believe, during this time.
- [1 : 2 0] Well, just one quick note. If you are connected with our church, and a person who regularly attends our church, our annual general church meeting is this Wednesday on Zoom.
- So that's Wednesday, February 24th. Please watch your email for the link to that meeting. I encourage you to join us to hear some updates about things that are going on in the church.
- As well, it's a great opportunity on Zoom to see each other face-to-face in the way that we can right now. So it'll be a great opportunity to connect, to spend some time together, and to learn about how God is at work in and through our church.
- So we hope to see you there. Again, watch for that in your email. We do send out a regular email newsletter every week on Thursdays, and a message comes out from me every Tuesday by email as well.
- So if you'd like to be part of that, if you'd like to receive those messages, please send a message to info@braemarbaptist.com, and we will make sure we add you to the distribution for those.
- [2 : 3 1] So those are some great ways to connect with us. Let's open in prayer this morning. Father God, we praise you for using us to bring joy to your Son, Jesus Christ.
- In the midst of all the struggles, pressures, and discouragement we face in our frail, failing bodies, please continue transforming us into servants who are always of good courage.
- Lord, lead us by your Holy Spirit to find rest in the grand promises that you've revealed to us in your word. Lord, we confess that we are weak and we need your help.
- Prepare us for the day when you will judge and account of all of our works and offenses. Lord, we thank you for the day when you are in your grace. Lord, we thank you that through your grace, through the sacrifice of your Son, Jesus, we have an opportunity to be forgiven of our debts, forgiven of our sins.

Lord, though we don't deserve your grace, we can't even begin to express our gratitude for nailing our guilt and shame upon the cross through the crucified Jesus Christ.

[3 : 50] Lord, we earnestly long to experience the moment when you will declare to us, well done, good and faithful servant.

Enter into the joy of your Master. Lord, help us this week as we continue our walk of faith, looking forward to the day when our faith, as your word tells us, will become sight.

And Lord, it's in the name of your Son, Jesus, that we pray. Amen. Well, let's join together this morning singing three songs, and they will hopefully, likely, possibly be familiar to you.

We're going to sing Jesus Paid It All, Just As I Am, and I Stand Amazed. And it's appropriate that as we begin the season of Lent, as we begin the season of waiting and leading up to Easter, we recognize the sacrifice of Jesus.

We begin to think about that, to reflect upon that, and to possibly consider giving some things up, as we've talked about fasting in the past recently.

[5 : 06] Giving some things up and letting some things go to create space for you to be close to God, for you to draw close in relationship with God.

And so we're going to sing, I begin with singing, I Stand Amazed. And the lyrics will appear on the screen, and our worship leader will lead us as we sing. So God bless you as you worship God with your voice, and may you be encouraged by these words.

Reflect on these words as we sing them together in this way this morning. I Stand Amazed
I Stand Amazed In the Presence Of Jesus the Nazarene And wonder how he could love
me A sinner condemned unclean Singing how marvelous, how wonderful, And my song
shall ever be How marvelous, how wonderful is

My Savior's love for me For me it was in the garden He prayed not my will but thine He
had no tears for his own grief But sweat drops of blood for mine Singing how marvelous,
how wonderful, How wonderful, how wonderful, How wonderful is my Savior's love for me
How marvelous, how wonderful, How wonderful is my Savior's love for me

He took my sins and my sorrows He took my sins and my sorrows He made them his very
home He made them his very home He brought the burden to Calvary And suffered and
suffered and died alone Seeming how marvelous, how wonderful, How wonderful, how
wonderful, And my song shall ever be How marvelous, how wonderful is My Savior's love
for me My Savior's love for me

[8 : 48] Singing how marvelous, how wonderful, How wonderful, how wonderful, And my song
shall ever be Singing how marvelous, how wonderful, How marvelous, how wonderful,
How wonderful, how wonderful, And my song shall ever be How marvelous, how
wonderful, How marvelous, how wonderful, How wonderful is my Savior's love for me For
me.

I hear the Savior say, Thy strength indeed is small. Child of weakness, watch and pray.

Find in me thine all in all. Jesus made it all.

All to Him I owe. Send our love to crimson stain. He washed it white and snow.

Lord, now indeed I find Thy power and thine alone Can change our love but spots And
melt the heart of stone.

[10 : 41] Cause Jesus made it all All to Him I owe. Send our love to crimson stain.

He washed it white and snow. And when before the throne I stand and incomplete Jesus
died my soul to save.

My lips shall still repeat That Jesus made it all All to Him I owe.

My own sin Sin how that's a crimson stain He washed it white as snow. He washed it
white as snow.

Jesus who left it with The Scripture from I know 10 years with six hours And sharing his lips When I finish ■■■ in Some so ■■■ I am without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me, and that Thou bidst me come to Thee, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

[12 : 47] I am without one plea, but that Thou bidst me come to Thee, O Lamb of God, I come.

O Lamb of God, I come, I come. O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, Thou will receive, will welcome heart and cleanse relief.

Because Thy promise I believe, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me, and that Thou bidst me come to Thee. Just as I am without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me, and that Thou bidst me come to Thee. O Lamb of God, I come.

[14 : 18] Just as I am without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me, and that Thou bidst me come to Thee.

O Lamb of God, I come, I come. O Lamb of God, I come. O Lamb of God, I come.

O Lamb of God, I come. O Lamb of God, I come. So this morning, as you reflected on those songs, do you stand amazed? Do you stand amazed in the presence of Jesus?

Do you stand amazed in the recognition of what He has done for you? The opportunity that now stands before you to be in relationship, perfect relationship with God again.

That opportunity is before you every day and every moment to connect with God.

Because of the price that Jesus paid, here we are.

[15 : 27] We can stand amazed in the presence of Jesus, and we can stand freely before God, recognized as His children, welcomed into the family, just as we are.

It's not about preparing ourselves or prettying ourselves up to be ready to be with Jesus. He will accept us just as we are. If you're broken, if you're struggling, that's why Jesus died for you.

He died so that you could be whole again, so that you could be restored in relationship with Jesus. So there's your mini sermon with our songs this morning.

I hope that they were a blessing to you. Well, we're continuing in our sermon series titled, Spiritual Disciplines Exercise Your Faith. And we've been recognizing through this series that as followers of Jesus, as His disciples, we can benefit from tools and skills that will help us on our journey.

And these skills and tools are known as, as we've learned, spiritual disciplines. Well, spiritual disciplines are intended to help us put ourselves before God, put ourselves in a state of mind, a state of heart, where we can best interact with Him.

[16 : 44] And we're continuing now with our exploration of the outward spiritual disciplines. These are the disciplines and practices that are most visible to other people.

Today, we're going to focus on the spiritual discipline of solitude. We're also going to consider that the idea of silence, which is often noted as a spiritual discipline of its own by some people, it's certainly a quality at least that is obviously and easily paired with solitude.

So what comes to mind for you when you hear the word solitude? Again, this would be audience participation, but here we are. Solitude.

Well, the word might not necessarily have a clear meaning for you, and that's okay. It may, out of context, you may not have a, it may not strike you as anything in particular, or a certain kind of feeling, emotion, anything like that.

But it may sound like other words that you know, or that are more familiar. How about solo or solitary? Well, the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines solitude as the quality or state of being alone, or remote from society.

[18 : 12] Or, another definition is given, a lonely place such as a desert. Well, that doesn't sound particularly positive or appealing, does it?

Well, fortunately, there are other definitions available. Wikipedia, the public encyclopedia that lots of people go to, that public source of information, also offers an interesting definition of solitude.

It defines it as a state of seclusion or isolation, i.e., the lack of contact with people. Well, Wikipedia does, however, recognize, depending on the circumstances, that solitude can be something positive.

Well, for fans of superhero characters, we've lived in a superhero-focused world for a long time, in terms of movies and things like that.

But for fans of superhero characters, especially some of the classic ones, they may remember that Superman's hangout, his refuge, his man cave, the place where Superman went to be alone, was known as the Fortress of Solitude.

[19 : 28] So, sure, Superman seems to be the strong, silent type, right? But maybe there's something to that solitude idea. To me, solitude is the spiritual discipline that essentially helps set the stage for most of, if not all of, the other disciplines.

Well, let's agree to redefine solitude, then, as the practice of being alone. Okay? That's how we'll simplify it.

And whether you've actually recognized it or not, you've already spent time in solitude, or you do spend time in solitude, as part of your extended times with God.

Solitude really needs to have priority amongst the various disciplines. It needs to be practiced on a regular basis.

Theologian Dallas Willard says, Of all the disciplines, solitude is generally the most fundamental in the beginning of the spiritual life.

[20 : 35] And it must be returned to again and again as that life develops. The practice of solitude is easily missed, I think, in the Bible at times.

Likely because it was a rhythm of life, it was a way of living, that was recognized and practiced by many of the most prominent characters in Scripture.

If we go back and reflect, you'll realize just how fundamental the idea of solitude was for the people of God right from the beginning.

For example, not surprising, we can recognize how intentionally that Jesus himself practiced solitude throughout his life and his ministry.

And he often spent time alone to refocus and recharge. As we read in Matthew 4, At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus went into the wilderness for an extended period of fasting and prayer.

[21 : 39] And you may particularly remember that set of circumstances involved temptation by Satan. Well, in Mark 1, Jesus sought solitude before preaching to a crowd.

Mark 1 verse 35 says, Later in Mark, we also read that Jesus spent time in solitude after he had healed a leper.

He removed himself from the circumstances at that time and retreated into solitude. In Matthew 14, Jesus chose solitude after hearing about the death of John the Baptist.

Matthew 14 verse 13 says, After Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.

Jesus also spent time alone before he chose his disciples. Towards the end of his life, we read that Jesus retreated into prayer alone, into solitude alone, in the Garden of Gethsemane.

[23 : 03] Clearly, Jesus' own actions and patterns of behavior demonstrated that the discipline of solitude is important. But why is that?

Well, in a very basic sense, we could argue that if solitude was a priority for Jesus, then certainly shouldn't it be a priority for us as well?

If Jesus needed time to be with the Father, if he made that a priority in his life, how much more do we need to do that?

Author John Ortberg says, Solitude is the one place where we can gain freedom from the forces of society that will otherwise relentlessly mold us.

I want you to hear this again. Solitude is the one place where we can gain freedom from the forces of society that will otherwise relentlessly mold us.

[24 : 11] Solitude is the one place where we can gain freedom from the forces of society that will otherwise relentlessly mold us.

Theologian Henry Nguyen describes solitude as, I love this, describes it as the furnace of transformation.

Solitude is the furnace of transformation. That creates such a powerful word picture, doesn't it? Potters shape malleable clay into nearly any object or form imaginable.

But for a potter's work to become fixed, to become more permanent, it must be fired in a kiln.

Scripture often talks about us being like clay in the hands of God, who is the potter. God can mold us.

[25 : 19] God seeks to mold us and shape us into who he wants us to be. And friends, solitude serves as the kiln through which God's transforming work in us can be realized.

We can be changed by God when we seek solitude with him. Solitude is time alone.

But let's remember that we're technically not alone at all. Solitude is about us and God. Our relationship with, our connection with, our God, our Father.

So the first question people usually have when learning about solitude is, Well, what do I do during that time? Best answer to that question is, Nothing.

Wait, what? Well, for some of us, the concept of solitude may feel like a waste of time. As though we're somehow being lazy or irresponsible.

[26 : 33] Can you relate to that? If you feel that, I encourage you, I encourage each of us to remember, Our value to God has nothing to do with what we accomplish.

Your busy work is not that important. So hear me in saying that if you're giving your time, if you're serving God intentionally, Seeking him to use you, that's different.

If you're looking to merely fill time with busy work, that's not what we're asked to do. One of the most important things I believe to grasp is that solitude is about, It's not about doing something.

It's actually about not doing something. It's about learning to resist the temptation to fill space. Author Richard Foster says, We must clearly understand and underscore is that our real task in solitude is to create space in our lives where God can reach us.

Shut out the noise, right? That's what we're getting at here. And Foster continues, Once that space has been created, we wait quietly, expectantly.

[28 : 06] From this point on, once we place ourselves in a position of solitude before God, From that point on, the work belongs to God.

Don't try and do God's job for him. It doesn't go well, usually. But one thing I think we can recognize, an important thing to recognize about solitude is that it really is about listening.

So it's not about doing something, but it is about listening. And as you're listening in your time of solitude before God, pay attention to what comes to you.

While your time alone with God is about hearing his voice, It's important to recognize the other conflicting voices you may hear at the same time.

In your solitude, your time alone with God, listen for the voices that may be at work in your life. One of them, most obviously, might be, I need to fill this time.

[29 : 18] I have things I need to get done. Do you have a heart that's filled with busyness and panic and worry? Or peace. Or peace.

You may hear voices of discouragement. Well, this is taking too long. Why is God not talking to me? Why is this not working? You may be discouraged about your circumstances.

Listen for that as well. You may be experiencing a sense of inadequacy in your life. In the things you have or haven't done. Things you haven't accomplished according to your own will and purpose.

You may recognize the voice of a sense of pressure to achieve. Pressure to measure up to a standard that if you listen to that voice, you'll recognize it is not coming from God.

It is not a standard that God has set for you. As we considered by the nature of the other spiritual disciplines, solitude should be already at least somewhat part of your experience.

[30 : 32] But there may be other ways to build solitude into your life. In an intentional way. Aim to spend time alone with God every day.

Prioritize it. Schedule it if you have to. Don't feel guilty about blocking out time with God in your day. You'll schedule an appointment for a doctor's appointment or an eye appointment or whatever.

You'll schedule an appointment for lunch or dinner with friends or family. Schedule your time with God. Protect that time. Once a week or once a month, seek to spend, hold on folks, seek to spend a few hours to a day in solitude.

Are you still with me? Don't take a stack of books. Time alone in solitude, especially extended time, is not about filling the space.

Do not take your phone. Do not take a computer. You know what? If God is telling you it's time to rest, you need to rest.

[31 : 52] That can be part of your solitude time as well. But it's about getting away. It's about letting God speak to you in a direct and personal way. Clearing out the clutter.

Clearing out the noise. And allowing space and time to be in solitude and alone with God. And don't worry if this sounds hard or maybe even impossible to you right now.

It may be difficult at first, but remember that we were created for peaceful community with God. We weren't created for the chaos and frenetic pace of our world.

If you recognize anxiety and worry and concern and stress in your life, it's not coming from God. It's coming from how the world has told you you need to behave.

How the world has conditioned you to act and respond. How the world has conditioned you to act and respond to your life and the world has trained us.

[33 : 03] And it will take time. It will take retraining to focus more correctly back on God. Now I've said to you before that I feel most connected with God in nature.

So that's the place where I most feel connected to him. I most feel able to hear his voice in my life. You probably recognize places like that too.

Where do you feel at peace? Maybe you have a bench that you walk past when you go on a regular walk. Maybe you like to spend time in the river valley in your city. Well, in Edmonton.

We have a beautiful river valley and we will spend time quite often in the summer and fall walking. And even in the winter sometimes. Walking there and just enjoying the peace of nature.

Now walking with my family, walking with someone else. That is good time, but that's not solitary time with God. So keep that in mind.

[34 : 07] But if you watch for them, you can likely find moments and opportunities for solitude throughout your day. While you wait in traffic.

Instead of having the radio blaring, perhaps turn the radio off. Take a moment in your head and your heart to connect with God. While you're waiting for an appointment.

Solitude doesn't have to be, doesn't always need to be about the perfect time or the perfect place. Or a very intentional removal of yourself from all, from everything.

To still be valuable time alone with God. So as I said when we began, silence goes in hand, hand in hand with solitude.

The noise in our lives can come from many different sources. But most often, the most obvious one is the one we see in the mirror.

[35 : 12] Are you able to objectively consider how much you talk? I'm not just speaking to our nature to overfill our space with words.

But are you able to recognize in your own life, in your own speech, how much of your words you may be used to explain yourself. To justify your actions.

To establish your value. To defend yourself. To other people. To defend yourself. To defend yourself. Do you find peace in quiet?

I truly believe that many of us seek to fill silence with anything, right? Have you ever heard the expression silence is deafening or the silence was deafening?

I believe that speaks quite clearly to how the world has shaped us. But silence is actually about intentionality.

[36 : 16] It's about pursuing the absence of noise. In your times of solitude, I want you to try to allow the silence to exist.

Allow space and time for God to speak. Silence helps us to cut through the voices and distractions of our noisy world.

It helps us to be able to listen for God's still, small voice. To me, it becomes rather obvious that if God's voice, as Scripture tells us, is still and small, we need to be both still and small to hear it.

And the best way to do that, I believe, is through silence. Prayer. Silence.

Solitude. These are foundational disciplines. Theologian Henry Nguyen, again, I'll share another quote from him.

[37 : 28] He says, Clearly, silence is a discipline needed in many situations. In teaching and learning. In preaching and worship.

In visiting and counseling. Silence is a very concrete, practical, and useful discipline in all our ministerial tasks.

It can be seen as a portable cell taken with us from the solitary place to the midst of our ministry.

You can bring your silence with you. Silence in solitude, no one says. Practiced in action. Sorry, silence is solitude.

Practiced in action. I hope that makes sense. Often it's when we're focused on listening, that silence becomes more natural.

[38 : 29] If you're intentionally listening for something or to someone, silence becomes more natural. Some practical tips.

Well, as you sit quietly before God, I've talked about this before. Focus on, listen to, your own breathing. Allow your mind to calm down.

For time to slow down. Depending on your environment, listen to your surroundings and the other sounds that you hear.

That's especially encouraging, enriching in nature. Listen to the sounds of birds, to the sounds of wind in the trees, the sounds of water rushing if you're near a waterfall or a body of water.

In solitude, we're seeking to remove ourselves from distraction and noise. Allow silence in solitude to enfold you and direct your focus to God.

[39 : 41] Do you recognize that for the most part, neither solitude nor silence are of this world?

They seem foreign to this world, don't they? But do you recognize something else? We are not of this world either.

We're in it, but we're not of it. My friends, in the words of Isaiah 30 verse 15, In repentance and rest is your salvation.

In quietness and trust is your strength. Practice solitude. Practice silence.

And allow God to speak to you. Amen. Our benediction this morning comes in the words of Psalm 23.

[40 : 44] And wherever you are, whenever you're listening, or however you're engaging with us in this sermon, in this Sunday morning experience, you can feel free to say these words where you're at along with me.

Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd. I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters.

He refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his namesake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil.

For you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life.

[41 : 52] And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Friends, may you go and enjoy time in solitude and silence with God this week.

Go in peace and be blessed. My shoe is just what you will.

You can stay with me. I wake it up and start listening with God. Listen to that especially, I don't know the day I should do this anyway. I'm sorry you today. It's a little out there. Tell me about the thoughts of my hand or say goodbye. I wish I swear there is. It's a little out there. I wish I was first in decisions of my life.

Wonderful business as my face. Boo side with me. I wish I'm looking for you. I wish I, as fact actually that you, got me a picture of a glory storyteller.