

SILENCE AND SOLITUDE

Some comments on the value of Silence and Solitude

Sally Longley

- **We can so easily lose touch with ourselves.**

Many of us run from silence and solitude. We become very busy, and we fill any spaces we might have with computer activity such as email and face book, or with music and even watching programs on television which we really are not particularly interested in. People often speak of having 'lost' themselves, or of being 'out of kilter' with their true self. This is often the result of losing touch with our very centre, the true essence of who we are and what we are carrying around within us. We can sometimes fear simply 'being' in our own presence and in the presence of God, and this may be because we are running away from issues and events that have impacted us and yet we don't want to process. So we run and run! When we finally stop, some of these things then begin to surface and this can be quite uncomfortable and yet very necessary. It is precisely those times of placing ourselves with open hands and open hearts in God's presence, that we begin to find ourselves again – and find God again in a more authentic way.

"...solitude is a place inside myself where God's spirit and my spirit dwell together in union" (Barton, *Sacred Rhythms* 2006).

In order to make space for silence and solitude, we need to be intentional about making changes to the way we live. And more often than not it is by simply changing the way we live rather than trying to add a huge space of silence into our already full lives that this can come about.

- **What IS silence?**

- Silence isn't just absence of noise, it includes a surrender of our ego, cessation of exterior noise as well as the interior chatter.
- Temptations, fears, anger ... all these can surface when there is suddenly no activity or noise to help us escape what is there
- Our false selves have no role in silence – silence facilitates the emergence of truth
- A form of "dying to self"
- A time to offload the emotional junk that surfaces!
- Solitude affords us the time to explicitly become aware that we need to live before an audience of One.
- God alone is our reference point.
- Solitude is a condition of a helpless person. Like a beggar with open hands asking the disciples for help (Acts 3:1-8). We bring nothing but ourselves.
- There are many examples –e.g. from music!

- **If Jesus needed silence and solitude we probably do too!**

The Scriptures teach that Jesus practiced silence and solitude. **Matthew 4:1**, "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." The Holy Spirit led Jesus into this lengthy period of fasting and solitude. In Luke's account of this experience, it's interesting to observe that he says Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit" (Luke 4:1) when He was led into this, but that afterward He returned to Galilee "in the power of the Spirit" (Luke 4:14).

See also: Matthew 14:23, Mark 1:35, Luke 4:42.

- **Where can I find solitude and silence??**

Solitude can indeed be a place – and sometimes it needs to be a place. You may choose to have a favourite chair in your home, or a rock that you sit on overlooking a headland, or a place in your garden where you can be in silence and solitude. However, for many of us, our lives are lived in the midst of noise and demands, people and activity, children and demands of all sorts. So what can we do to realistically find solitude and silence?

- If you exercise, can you combine the two?
- If there are times when most people in the house are watching a TV program, you have the opportunity for a fixed amount of time: escape to another room!
- Do you wake in the night? Can you productively use this time rather than fret about not being asleep?
- What do you do while showering? This is a great opportunity, even if it is short, it is valuable.
- Making use of walking or driving – these are times you may be able to withdraw into yourself and find that still centre.
- Using the concept of *the eye of the storm* – in the midst of a busy and noisy office, or a crowd of people, it is possible to become aware of your own interior and find the 'eye of the storm' within your own being, and find the peace of God right there.

- **It is another way to Express worship to God**

Observe these verses:

Habakkuk 2:20: "But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him," **Zephaniah 1:7**: "Be silent before the Lord God!", and **Zechariah 2:13**, "Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord."

Worshiping God in silence may occur because your heart is so full that words cannot express your love for Him. At other times you may feel just the opposite, so passionless that any words seem hypocritical. Regardless of the state of your emotions, there is always a place for wordless worship.

- **What about me?? I am an extrovert – I am not made for silence and solitude!!**

If this is you, it is worth remembering that when you are in the company of God, there is the Trinity: God the Creator, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Add these three to yourself and there is a group of 4 – and you will relate to each of the trinity differently. So there is a group of four of you! That's good news for an extrovert!

- **Facilitating personal transformation**

As an explicit expression of security in God's sovereignty. Twice in **Psalm 62** David displays this kind of faith. In verses 1-2 he affirms, "My soul waits in silence for God only; from Him is my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be greatly shaken." Then in verses 5-6 he says again, "My soul, wait in silence for God only, for my hope is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be shaken."

- i) Biblical reality calls us to family, fellowship, evangelism, and ministry for the sake of Christ and His kingdom. And yet through the Holy Spirit, "deep calls to deep" (**Psalm 42:7**) in such a way that there is a part of our spirit that craves silence and solitude.
- ii) Think of silence and solitude as complementary disciplines to fellowship. **Without silence and solitude we're shallow. Without fellowship we're stagnant.**
- iii) **Isaiah 30:15** – "In repentance and rest you shall be saved, in quietness and trust is your strength." Faith is frequently expressed through prayer. But sometimes it is exhibited through a wordlessness before the Lord which, by its quiet absence of anxiety, communicates trust in His sovereign control.

- **For refreshment, direction and clarity**

- i) Refreshment: Jesus prescribed for His disciples, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while" (Mark 6:31).
- ii) Clarity: To discern His will about a matter. Jesus did this in Luke 6:12-13 when deciding whom to choose as the disciples who would travel with Him: "And it was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. And when day came, He called His disciples to Him; and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles."

iii) Direction: Elijah going to Mt. Horeb where he heard the gentle whisper of God's voice (1 Kings 19:11-13), Habakkuk standing on the guard post and keeping watch to see what God would say to him (Habakkuk 2:1), and Paul going away to Arabia after his conversion so he could be alone with God (Galatians 1:17).

- **A way to control our 'unthought-through' urges**

For example, learning to keep silent for extended periods of time can help us control our tongue at other times.

There's no doubt that learning control of the tongue is critical to Christ-likeness. The Bible says that the religion of the person with no tongue control is worthless (James 1:26). Proverbs 17:27-28 relates the Christ-like qualities of Godly knowledge, understanding, and wisdom to the power to rein in words: "He who restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding. Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is counted prudent."

James 3:2, we find this teaching: "For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well." Practicing the discipline of silence leads to Christ-likeness because it helps develop control of the tongue. And here we see that **control of the tongue promotes a Christ-like control of "the whole body as well."**

Silence and solitude is worth trying.