



SOLITUDE AND SILENCE

a practice guidebook

“Let him who cannot be alone beware of community... Let him who is not in community beware of being alone... Each by itself has profound pitfalls and perils. One who wants fellowship without solitude plunges into the void of words and feelings, and one who seeks solitude without fellowship perishes in the abyss of vanity, self-infatuation, and despair.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*

In the craziness of our modern world, most of us have everything we could possibly want at our fingertips. Well, just about everything. There is one thing that most of us can't seem to find, and if survey data can be trusted¹, it's something that the vast majority of us long for: some quiet time alone. The modern digital age threatens to fill every waking moment (and for some, the sleeping moments as well) with a barrage of voices, information, entertainment, and noise. As Jesus warned us, it seems that it's becoming easier than ever before to “gain the whole world but lose our soul.” (Matthew 16:26)

Of the ancient practices that apprentices of Jesus have been engaging for the past two millennia, silence and solitude are the most foundational. Dallas Willard says that solitude practiced with silence are the most important disciplines for people today, and in many ways, they act as of foundation for the rest of the practices of Jesus. It doesn't seem to be much of an overstatement to say that time spent with God in solitude and silence is the pathway to emotional and spiritual vitality. But how, in the midst of our modern world, do we get there?

The following booklet is designed to work through a bit of the “how” of this practice. The “why” will largely be covered as part of the teaching series at York Alliance in May 2019. (www.yorkalliance.org/sermons) The ideal way to engage these truths is reflected by the Bonhoeffer quote at the top of this page; while solitude is a practice that, by its very definition, is engaged alone, we are best to do it as individuals within community. Therefore, while there are certainly individual parts of this practice, you are also encouraged to engage them with your Discipleship Partner(s) as well as your Community Group.

The exercises in this booklet will stretch over the next six weeks, with an optional retreat on the seventh week. I have tried to cite specific ideas and quotations where appropriate. Beyond those citations, these exercises have been developed in heavy reliance on several sources: *Invitation to Solitude and Silence* by Ruth Haley Barton (which is the recommended reading for this practice as well), *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster, *Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Willard, and the “Solitude and Silence” section of www.practicingtheway.org.

The weeks will be laid out as follows:

- Week One: Baby Steps
- Week Two: Feeling in the Silence
- Week Three: Casting Cares
- Week Four: Lectio Divina
- Week Five: Hearing from the Father
- Week Six: Going Out

As you engage these exercises, let me encourage you to do so with an eye to both your personality and your stage of life. From a personality perspective, I'm especially speaking of where you land on the introvert to extrovert spectrum. The more introverted you are, the more time you will likely need... and desire. However, even the most extroverted among us needs some solitude! Therefore, recognize your personality and adapt accordingly, but don't use it as an excuse to avoid this practice. Equally, the stage of life you are in necessarily impacts your engagement of this practice. The retired empty-nester will engage this far differently than the young mother of four, which will be different than the traveling executive or the college student. Again, don't use your stage of life as an excuse, but be creative! Maybe a spouse or a friend can spend time with the kids while you spend some time in silence, and then you can return the favor. Maybe your time will be early in the morning, late at night, in traffic, or on a plane. Be creative!

Above all, recognize the need to unplug, disconnect, and quiet your soul. As Paul Tournier said, “Modern people lack silence. They no longer lead their own lives; they are dragged along by events.” May we, as apprentices of Jesus, learn to lead our own lives following Him!

¹ www.thecut.com, “85 Percent of Americans Would Rather Just Be Left Alone Some of the Time, Thanks”, Melissa Dahl, May 21, 2015. This article cites a Pew Research survey from February 2015.

Week One: Baby Steps

In the chaos of our hyper-connected world, just slowing down and finding a few moments of quiet can be a huge task. The goal for this week is simple: to find a time and place that works for you, establish a daily/weekly rhythm of solitude and silence, and learn to push out distractions and practice the presence of Jesus.

While solitude and silence can certainly be practiced in conjunction with other disciplines like Bible study, Scripture meditation, prayer, etc., for this first week you are encouraged to simply focus on abiding with Christ and “being” in His presence. Therefore, for this week, come to your time of solitude and silence without any distractions, including a phone, computer, journal, or even a Bible. It’s important to recognize that these things aren’t *bad* (and in some cases they are very good!) but that your goal this week is to learn to simply *be* in the presence of your Father.

1. First, choose a time and place. For most people the first thing in the morning works the best, but lunchtime and evening are also good options based on your schedule. Choose a place that’s relatively free of distractions as well as extra noise. A quiet space outside, like a park or wooded area, is also a possibility. Avoid places of “work” (like an office or a kitchen) if you can.
2. Set a modest goal—it’s better to have a plan than simply wait until you “feel” like being done. If this practice is new to you, a short goal like 10 minutes a day for 3-5 days during the week is good. If you are already spending quiet time with God in reading and prayer, consider adding this time to the beginning or end. Those who are already engaged in a regular daily practice might consider adding a second daily time to their rhythm. (For instance, if you are already taking time each morning, add 10 minutes at night before bed to review your day with the Lord.)
3. Settle into your time and place. Remove distractions (phones, computers, or anything “connected”), and take just a few moments to “clean up” the area so that you aren’t distracted by clutter. Sitting with your back straight and palms up can be helpful for some people. Some people prefer to keep a blank piece a paper and a pen beside them so they can write down “distractions” and get back to them

later in the day. Others prefer to do light repetitive activity in order to focus. (walking, folding laundry, etc.)

4. Begin with breathing prayer. Slow your breathing down and breathe deeply, taking 4-5 seconds (or more) to breathe in or out. During this time you might focus on a single word or phrase such as “Father” or “Jesus” or “Loved One.” Consciously remove extraneous and distracting thoughts and focus in on God.
5. Spend time simply “practicing God’s presence.” Envision God all around you—or for some it helps to imagine Him sitting across from you. Don’t emphasize speaking to Him or hearing from Him; just seek to be with Him. However, if you desire to speak to Him or hear Him speaking, certainly engage Him in that way.
6. End your time in gratitude for the privilege of sitting in Him presence as His child. Commit the rest of your day to Him. Some find it helpful to end this time by slowing praying the Lord’s Prayer.

That’s it! It’s important to note that you can’t succeed or fail at this. The goal is a modest one: simply *be* with Him. If you’re the type of person who doesn’t sit still well, feel freedom to engage this practice on a slow walk, a hike, or a bike ride. However, keep the focus off of the activity and on the One with whom you are spending this time!

Questions for Community:

- How does this practice feel to you? Why do you think that is?
- What is your sense of God’s presence during your times of silence and solitude?
- What are the biggest barriers to you in carving out this time?
- How do you feel coming out of these times?
- How does Jesus’ model of getting away to the “desolate places” provide a model for you in engaging the Father in silence and solitude?

Week Two: Feeling in the Silence

One of the byproducts of the hyper-pace of our lives is that many of us fail to truly experience our emotions as we should and in the way in which we were created to feel. We tend toward a steady “numbness” that can now and then explode in a torrent of emotion, surprising everyone... often ourselves most of all.

Adele Calhoun makes the observation: “In quietness we often notice things we would rather not notice or feel. Pockets of sadness or anger or loneliness or impatience begins to surface.”² Because we’d *rather not* notice these feelings, we tend to avoid silence. Instead, we fill it with music, television, a podcast, or the new drug of choice for so many of us, scanning social media. However, it’s vitally important that we learn to *feel* what’s happening in our hearts.

This is the goal of this week: to actually engage your feelings and process them before the Father. After a short time for breathing prayer and practicing the presence of God, you are encouraged to *feel* whatever comes. Name your emotions as a primary step toward truly hearing from God. Answer that haunting and powerful Elijah question: “What are you doing here, _____?” (1 Kings 19:9) For some, this will be a natural and easy process. For others, this will feel very foreign and difficult. However, trust God that in His presence is a safe place.

1. Settle into your time and place. Make yourself comfortable. Remove any distractions. (Refer to Week One for more specifics) It might be helpful to bring at least a journal/notebook and a pen for this week, and a Bible as well.
2. Practice breathing prayer, slowing your breaths in and out, and focus on a word or phrase like “Father” or “Jesus.”
3. Spend a few minutes practicing the presence of Jesus.
4. Let yourself feel. Ask God to bring emotions to the surface, both large and small. What are they? Write down the best description you can

of what you are feeling. As you name them, allow yourself to fully feel them in God’s presence. Recognize the safety of His presence. Think of this as a place where you are opening yourself up to God in new ways.

5. Answer the Elijah question: “Why are you here, _____?” The answer might be where you are with God right now, or what your state is in the midst of these emotions. What might God be trying to say to you?
6. Pray through each emotion. Be completely honest before God. Don’t filter your emotion. If you’re happy, rejoice! Maybe even sing and dance! If you’re grateful, tell Him why. If you’re worried, give it to Him and ask for His peace in return. (Philippians 4:6-7) If you’re grieving, talk with Him about your grief and receive His comfort. And so on...
7. When you are finished, end your time in gratitude and commit everything you’re feeling to the Father.

After a few sessions of this kind of solitude, it’s probably a good idea to take some time to make an extended entry in your journal or notebook. If you are struggling to find words to express your emotions, ask God specifically to give you a word for what you’re feeling. If you feel as though you’re struggling to do this, don’t worry—keep practicing! For many of us our emotions have been numbed for years, and it will take time to develop a full range of feelings again.

Questions for Community:

- Do you find it easy or difficult to name your feelings and process them before the Lord? Why do you think that is?
- How might your upbringing and family of origin impact the way you handle emotions?
- What are some ways other than prayer in which you cope with pain, anxiety, or grief? What about joy?
- As you begin to process your emotions with the Father, what is the result? Do you feel differently in any way?

² Adele Calhoun, *The Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, (InterVarsity Press, Downer’s Grove, IL, 2005), pg. 108.

Week Three: Casting Cares³

The statistics are startling: nearly 1 in 6 Americans over the age of 12 are regularly taking antidepressants.⁴ However, the obvious reality is even more shocking: millions more are suffering from depression and anxiety to various degrees and are not taking medication. Many of us have simply learned to live with a steady low-grade anxiety that comes as a result of the digital world in which we exist, the relational pain we carry, and normal stress of life.

Jesus invites us to cast those burdens and cares on Him. (Matthew 11:28-30, 1 Peter 5:7) This act is a part of the joy and invitation of solitude and silence, and one that we will seek to engage throughout this week. The instructions here may seem a bit silly or unnecessary, but I would encourage you to engage the process in its entirety. Engaging in not just a mental and emotion act but a physical one as well can be the breakthrough necessary to truly release our burdens to Him.

In order to do this exercise completely, it's best to set aside 1-2 hours for solitude and silence. This may require you planning ahead for things like childcare, work responsibilities, etc. However, the end result will be worth the effort and sacrifice!

1. Settle into your time and place, removing distractions and preparing your mind and body. Also bring with you several small sheets of paper and a pen/pencil.
2. Spend just a few minutes in breathing prayer and practicing the presence of Jesus.
3. Intentionally invite the Holy Spirit to come and speak to you. Ask Him to show you areas of personal or relational fear, anxiety, or undue stress. These might be present concerns or future ones. Ask the Father to reveal areas of unbelief in your life where you don't believe that the Father will care for you.
4. Write. As He reveals them, write each one down on a separate piece of paper, using a word or a phrase that represents that concern. Take

your time with this section. Wait on the Spirit to speak and don't simply anticipate His voice by writing what you expect that His answer(s) might be. Listen for Him.

5. Pray. Visualize yourself sitting with the Father, and then, one by one, handing each of these anxieties, fears, and stresses to Jesus. This should create a picture of Jesus receiving each of these and you trusting His ability to care for them.
6. Release. After you have already mentally given all of these to Jesus in prayer, rip each piece of paper up one at a time and throw it away. Feel the release from the weight and responsibility when you complete this act!
7. When you are finished, ask the Holy Spirit if there are any other areas He would like to point out in your life. If you sense Him pointing to another area, go back to (4) and write again. If this happens, resist the urge to rush through the process. Take your time with each step.
8. Close your time in gratitude and thanksgiving to God for receiving your burdens and bearing them for you.

It's likely that you will only need to engage this specific activity once over the course of the week. However, regularly revisiting this portion of the practice now and then can be very helpful, and there are ways to incorporate it even within your daily rhythm. *Note: If you are experiencing debilitating anxiety or depression, you should seek out a professional counselor or medical professional.*

Questions for Community

- How did you feel about this practice going into it? Was it daunting to think about 1-2 hours of silence and solitude?
- How did you feel about it after you had completed it?
- Which portion of the exercise was the most difficult for you? What about the most joyful or the easiest?
- What are some ways that a practice like this could be part of your regular life rhythm?

³ Adapted from Bethany Allen, *Silence and Solitude: Casting Cares*, www.practicingtheway.org

⁴ www.nbcnews.com, "One in Six Americans Take Antidepressants."

Week Four: Lectio Divina

This week will introduce an ancient form of Bible reading and meditation called lectio divina or “spiritual reading.” The goal of lectio divina isn’t primarily study or gaining new knowledge or insight; the goal is meeting God through the Scriptures, hearing from Him, and growing into further intimacy with Him. The Scriptures act as a Divine guide in our relationship with God.

The practice consists of six distinct actions, or movements:

1. Preparing to meet with God (Silencio)
2. Reading (Lectio)
3. Reflection (Meditatio)
4. Response (Oratio)
5. Rest (Contemplatio)
6. Resolve (Incarnatio)

Any passage of Scripture can be used to practice lectio divina. If you aren’t sure which passage to use, the following suggestions will carry you through this week and beyond:

- Psalm 23
- Psalm 91
- Matthew 5:3-12
- John 10:7-18
- John 15:1-17
- Ephesians 2
- Romans 8
- Romans 12

1. Settle into your time and place, removing distractions and preparing your mind and body.
2. Spend just a few minutes in breathing prayer and practicing the presence of Jesus.
3. Preparation/Silencio: Relax your body, clear your mind, breathe deeply, and invite Jesus to speak to you through His Word.

4. Reading/Lectio: Read the passage slowly (out loud if possible) pausing between sentences. Listen for a word or phrase that catches your attention. Repeat that word or phrase a few times silently.
5. Reflection/Meditatio: Thinking about your word, read the passage again. Ask God how this passage, and specifically this word, connects with your life.
6. Response/Oratio: Talk with God about your personal response to this word and this passage, listening if He is calling you to act in some way.
7. Rest/Contemplatio: Read the passage one more time, returning to a full posture of rest in God.
8. Resolve/Incarnatio: As you leave this encounter, resolve any specific actions that need to be carried out of this passage in daily life.
9. Close your time with gratitude to God for speaking to you through His Word. Be specific as you thank Him for speaking.

Keep in mind that the goal of this process isn’t to gain more knowledge, but to draw closer in relationship to God. Resist the temptation to study during this time, and simply draw close to Him.

Questions for Community:

- Did you enjoy reading the Scriptures more or less than you normally do this way? Why?
- As you read the passages, in what ways did you feel as though you were actually in contact with God?
- Do you hear from God more readily through His Word and a practice such as this than through typical prayer or other forms of silence and solitude? Why do you think that is?
- What are some of the things that were revealed about God to you through these passages?

Week Five: Hearing from the Father⁵

Relationships and conversations are typically two-sided affairs. Many of us can likely think of “friends” with which conversation is more monologue than dialogue, and it’s difficult to see those as true friendships. They can feel more like therapy sessions than relationships. God’s desire for relationship with us can be seen through this lens—He is longing for a two-sided conversation, not simply to be on the receiving end of a monologue.

Silence and solitude are important ways to develop that conversation with God. Tony Jones uses this example, which captures the essence perfectly: “It’s like being on the phone with a friend who has something important to tell me. I will move out of the noisy room where the TV is on and the vacuum is running and shut myself in a closet so I can really hear what my Friend is saying. That’s the kind of attentive listening that silence and solitude engender.”⁶

The goal of this week is to hear from God through intentional times of seeking His presence and His voice. You are encouraged to engage this practice at least four times this week, following the model below. This can and should be an ongoing aspect of your relationship with Jesus. These four are simply offered as a starting point.

1. Settle into your time and place, removing distractions and preparing your mind and body.
2. Spend just a few minutes in breathing prayer and practicing the presence of Jesus.
3. As you enter into a time of listening, pray something similar to this in order to “clear the room” and prepare to hear from Jesus alone: “In the Name of King Jesus, who has all authority in Heaven and Earth, I command all demonic beings to leave this space and never return. In the Name of Jesus any voices that are not of God must be silent. Jesus, you have said, ‘My sheep listen to my voice and follow me.’ I only want to hear your voice, so please speak to me.”

4. Do the following exercises:

Notes: Each one of these should take roughly 15-20 minutes, so plan your time accordingly. Also, be sure to pray the cleansing prayer (point 3) before each exercise, but particularly on Day 3.

Day 1: Receiving Forgiveness

It can be difficult to hear God’s voice when we are unwilling to forgive as our Father does. This often begins by agreeing with God that we ourselves have been forgiven. Ask in prayer,

“Father, is there anything from my recent or distant past for which I don’t believe I’m forgiven?”

Wait and listen. Slowly read and meditate on 1 John 1:9, bringing anything that comes to mind before God. Ask the Father to give you an image of that sin being taken away once and for all. Thank Him for His forgiveness and journal anything that stands out to you.

Day 2: Forgiving Others

Once we’ve recognized the forgiveness God freely gives to us, we are prepared to forgive others freely as well. By refusing to forgive someone, we are actually bound and connected to them; however, we can be free by offering forgiveness. Ask the Father to bring to mind anyone you need to forgive. When they come to mind, pray the following:

“In the name of Jesus I release (name) in forgiveness for doing (act/offense) to me. In Jesus’ Name I ask that you would bless (name) and restore my heart towards them.”

Ask God to give you a picture of what it looks like to be free as you forgive this person. Thank Him for His work through forgiveness and journal anything that stands out to you.

⁵ Adapted from Gerald Griffin, *Silence and Solitude: Listening Prayer*, www.practicingtheway.org

⁶ Tony Jones, *The Sacred Way*, (Zonderan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005), pg. 40.

Day 3: Hearing Your True Identity

A powerful aspect of hearing from the Father is the name and identity He has for you. Ask the Father,

“What are the false names and identities that I have heard and believed about myself?”

Listen and write down what you hear. Then ask,

“Father, what is the true name that you call me? What is my true identity?”

Listen and write down what you hear; there may be one clear word or several things. Ask Him what He wants you to know about this identity. Then agree with Him that the false names or identities are dead and gone and thank Him for the true name and identity that He has given. Journal anything that stands out to you.

Day 4: Listening for Others

There are times in prayer that God brings another person to mind about whom He wants to speak to you. This can be something that He simply wants you to hear, or it could be a message of encouragement that He wants you to give to them. There are also times that He will give you a word for the whole church. Ask the Father to bring to mind any person that He wants to speak to you about. Then, ask Him what He would like to tell you about that person. Listen, and as things come to mind, write them down. Ask if there’s anything else and wait and listen for Him. Thank God for what He has shown you. Ask Him to discern whether you are being called to share this message with the person or the church leadership team.

This practice of listening to the voice of God is foundational to developing a two-way relationship with Him. However, we all hear from Him in different ways. For some, the Week Four practice of lectio divina is a more effective way for them to hear from God. For others, this practice of listening prayer is most effective.

Don’t fall into to trap of believing that one or the other is “more spiritual” or “better.” Both are wonderful ways to develop an ongoing relationship with God. Also, if you struggle with both of these practices, don’t be discouraged! As with any relationship, communication becomes more

natural over time. Continue to practice one or both of these forms of listening, and don’t give up!

Questions for Community:

- How do you feel about seeking to listen to God in this way? Is this normal for you, or odd?
- What concerns did you have going into this practice? Did those change as you did it?
- What are some other things about which you’d like to hear from God?
- Does Lectio Divina or Listening Prayer (Weeks 4 and 5) seem to be more effective for you to hear from God? Or is a blend of both best for you?

Week Six: Going Out

Elijah's encounter with God through solitude and silence in 1 Kings 19 is, in many ways, a model for our time spent with the Father. Notable in that passage is the conclusion: beginning in 1 Kings 19:15, God gives Elijah instructions for what he is to do and how he is to act after he *goes out* from the place of solitude and silence. Vs. 19, then, records Elijah leaving the manifest presence of God through his time alone, re-engaging with the world, and *doing* what God told him to do.

Henri Nouwen describes this aspect of Jesus' time in solitude and silence succinctly: "In the lonely place, Jesus finds the courage to follow God's will and not his own; to speak God's words and not his own; to do God's work and not his own..."⁷ Our time in the "lonely place" isn't simply for what we gain during that time as an end—it is equally important that we go out from those times with the courage and strength to do what God is calling us to do.

The goal of this final week of exercises is to learn to listen to the Father's guidance for our daily living, and to receive from Him the strength to do what it is that He calls us to do. For many believers the first portion is of great interest (receiving guidance toward the will of God), but they fail to receive the strength and courage to carry out that will, which is often a significant hurdle. It's only when we are both hearing *and obeying* the will of God that we will continue to receive His clear direction.

1. Settle into your time and place, removing distractions and preparing your mind and body. If possible, it is best to do this exercise in the morning, even if your chosen time is at another part of the day. While not essential, it will be helpful to the exercise. It will also be important to have a journal/notebook and pen with you.
2. Spend just a few minutes in breathing prayer and practicing the presence of Jesus.
3. In the quiet, intentionally invite the Holy Spirit into your day. Ask Him to come and guide your steps throughout your day and be the place from which your thoughts and actions originate.

4. Next, think intentionally through what you already have planned throughout your day. Pray, "Father, as I think through my schedule today, I place it your hands. If there are things you would like to change or redirect, I will listen." Wait and listen for His voice.
5. Think of the activities that you will do throughout the day, both those you already know and those that are currently unknown. Pray, "Father, I desire for my entire life to be worship to you by being a living sacrifice. May all that I do, whether eating or drinking or whatever activity is in front of me, be done for your glory. Are there specific tasks you have for me today?" Wait and listen for His voice.
6. Now pray for the people you will encounter, both those you know you will see and those who are currently unknown to you. Pray, "Father, I long to go into my day today as a minister of reconciliation and your ambassador in the world. May the people I encounter not just encounter me but encounter You. Are there specific words or messages that you have for me to carry today on your behalf?" Wait and listen for His voice.
7. Finally, sit quietly and ask Him if there is anything else He would like to guide you in. Wait and listen. When that time is concluded, ask the Father to fill you with the strength, courage, and resolve to do that which He is calling you to do. Specifically bring to Him any areas of concern. It may be helpful to visualize the Father "filling" you with the strength and courage you will need to do His will.
8. Write down in your journal any specific direction you've received, and if applicable, add it into your schedule or rearrange it accordingly. Close your time with gratitude for His guidance.

Questions for Community:

- Does this kind of intentionality in seeking the guidance of the Father feel foreign or comfortable to you? Why?
- Did you receive clear direction that impacted the flow of your day? How did you respond to that?
- How might this practice become a part of your daily rhythm?

⁷ Henri Nouwen, quoted in Gary Moon, *Apprenticeship with Jesus*, (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2009), pg. 169.

Conclusion: What now?

“Loneliness is inner emptiness. Solitude is inner fulfillment.”

Richard Foster, Celebration of Discipline

The goal of these past six weeks has been to help us experience the difference between the inner emptiness of loneliness and inner fulfillment of solitude before our Father. Through these exercises you have had the opportunity to encounter the Father in powerful ways, and I pray that those encounters have been filling and encouraging for you. But now the six weeks are completed—what now?

First, a word to those who have faithfully engaged in these exercises but have struggled to hear from the Father in any clear and meaningful way. If that is your experience, there are two possible answers to your dilemma. You have hopefully been engaging this process with a Community Group and/or and Discipleship Partner. They are a great place to begin to discern which of the two answers might be true for you. Choose a time you can meet with them in some degree of privacy and give them permission to speak into your life. Encourage them to honestly tell you what they see, and to help you figure out why you have struggled to hear from God.

The first possibility is that this practice is so new to you in your relationship with Jesus that you just need more time. Like all relationships, our relationship with Jesus takes time and grows in depth and power through investment. However, like human relationships, there are aspects of our relationship with Jesus that we simply can't "fast forward." God may choose to do that for some of us at certain times, but for the majority of us the process of change will occur slowly over time and will likely include some difficulty and suffering. (James 1:2-4)

The second possibility is that there is an area of sin, disobedience, or hard-heartedness in your life that is standing in the way of hearing the voice of the Father. If this is the case, it may be an area to which you are blind and therefore, have not addressed. One of the greatest gifts of community is that they are able to lovingly and with humility point these areas out to us. However, please recognize that you will likely tend to respond this loving challenge with defensiveness instead of grace and

humility. Therefore, be prayerful going into this conversation and purpose to listen with humility if an area of your life is challenged. Then, purpose to take a week or two (more, if needed) to process this area before the Father, with your community, or with a counselor. Ultimately you will want to repent with intentionality as God reveals this area of your life with clarity.

If either of the above is the case, I would encourage you to start these exercises over again. You will find that even in repeating them the Father will speak in new ways, and that you will encounter Him differently.

As you complete these exercises, you are encouraged to consider how solitude and silence can and should be a part of your regular rhythm of life. There may have been specific exercises that were particularly meaningful to you; maybe they should become a weekly or monthly practice. It's likely that a process that includes intentionally choosing a time and space, breathing prayer, and practicing the presence of Jesus should become a regular part of your daily rhythm. If you are practicing solitude and silence in short segments now, it may be that you seek to expand those times, either daily or a few times per week. As you have sought the voice of the Father throughout, ask Him now for His direction in how to best incorporate this discipline into the phase of your relationship with Him.

Finally, some may want to step into an optional exercise by taking a retreat day or even weekend away in solitude and silence. There are great resources for guiding these times, but simpler is often better. Schedule the time away ahead of time, either at a retreat center, cabin, or hotel (for overnights) or just in a park or quiet place for a few hours or a day. Take with you only a Bible and journal. Use the time to *rest* in the presence of God. Don't seek to fill every moment with productivity! Take a walk, clear your mind, and read and meditate on Scripture slowly. Take a nap! Rest in His presence with intentionality. Listen to any direction He gives you as you go out from this time and consider setting goals that emerge out of your reflections. Write them down, and step into them as you go from this time.

Paul Tournier says it well: "God's way of thinking is different from ours. The whole point is that we should take the great leap from our own thoughts to those of God." May it be so.