

C.07 Silence and Solitude

In Which We Withdraw From The World
To Draw Near To God

The modern world considers solitary confinement and enforced silence as among the worst long-term punishments — with good reason; it is a terrifying thing to be cut off from the consolations and diversions of society. And yet, the very severity of that terror hints at the fertile spiritual soil to be uncovered when we deliberately cultivate time away from the distractions of ordinary human life...

Memory Verse: “Now when it was day, He departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowd sought Him and came to Him, and tried to keep Him from leaving them; but He said to them, ‘I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent.’ “ — Luke 4:42-43 (NKJV)

Assigned Reading

Richard Foster: *Celebration of Discipline*

7. Solitude

Donald Whitney: *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*

10. Silence and Solitude

Eugene Peterson: *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*

7. Security: “God Encircles His People”

Ruth Haley Barton: *Sacred Rhythms*

2. Solitude: Creating Space for God

Anecdote

Read 1 Kings 19. What happens to Elijah while he is alone with God?

1 Kings 19

1 And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, also how he had executed all the prophets with the sword. 2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time." 3 And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, "It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!"

5 Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, "Arise and eat." 6 Then he looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again. 7 And the angel of the LORD came back the second time, and touched him, and said, "Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you." 8 So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God.

9 And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

10 So he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."

11 Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; 12 and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.

13 So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a voice came to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

14 And he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."

15 Then the LORD said to him: "Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria. 16 Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. 17 It shall be that whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill. 18 Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

19 So he departed from there, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him. 20 And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, "Please let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you."

And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?"

21 So Elisha turned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh, using the oxen's equipment, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant.

Bible: Luke 4

1 Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, 2 being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry. 3 And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread."

4 But Jesus answered him, saying, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'"

5 Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. 6 And the devil said to Him, "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom-ever I wish. 7 Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours."

8 And Jesus answered and said to him, "Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"

9 Then he brought Him to Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here.

10 For it is written:

'He shall give His angels charge over you,
To keep you,'

11 and,

'In their hands they shall bear you up,
Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'"

12 And Jesus answered and said to him, "It has been said, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'"

13 Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.

14 Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. 15 And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

16 So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read.

17 And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written:

18 "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me

To preach the gospel to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,

To proclaim liberty to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,

To set at liberty those who are oppressed;

19 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."

20 Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. 21 And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." 22 So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, "Is this not Joseph's son?"

23 He said to them, "You will surely say this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in Your country.'"

24 Then He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country. 25 But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; 26 but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. 27 And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian."

28 So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, 29 and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff. 30 Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way.

31 Then He went down to Capernaum, a city of Gali-

lee, and was teaching them on the Sabbaths. 32 And they were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority. 33 Now in the synagogue there was a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon. And he cried out with a loud voice, 34 saying, “Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!”

35 But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be quiet, and come out of him!” And when the demon had thrown him in their midst, it came out of him and did not hurt him. 36 Then they were all amazed and spoke among themselves, saying, “What a word this is! For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out.” 37 And the report about Him went out into every place in the surrounding region.

38 Now He arose from the synagogue and entered Simon’s house. But Simon’s wife’s mother was sick with a high fever, and they made request of Him concerning her. 39 So He stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. And immediately she arose and served them.

40 When the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them. 41 And demons also came out of many, crying out and saying, “You are the Christ, the Son of God!”

And He, rebuking them, did not allow them to speak, for they knew that He was the Christ.
Jesus Preaches in Galilee

42 Now when it was day, He departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowd sought Him and came to Him, and tried to keep Him from leaving them; 43 but He said to them, “I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent.” 44 And He was preaching in the synagogues of Galilee.

We start at the very beginning of Jesus’ public ministry, just after his baptism in the Jordan by John (cf. Luke 3:21).

1 Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness,

For whatever reason, God often uses the wilderness to refine his saints, to prepare them for ministry. [C.1] Even Jesus, though He was already perfect, had to learn obedience though suffering (cf. Hebrews 5:8) — both spiritual and physical:

2 being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry.

As he is fond of doing, the devil seizes the opportunity to tempt us in an area of both our pride and our need:

3 And the devil said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.”

Jesus had just had His Sonship confirmed by a heavenly voice (cf. Luke 3:22), so obviously He knew who He was). And surely, Jesus had both the ability and the authority to create His own food — at least in principle.

Yet, Jesus had a reason for withdrawing from human company (and human nourishment). Though He knew what it was to be God, He had to learn what it meant to obey God the way we mortals do. Which meant giving up His natural — and supernatural — privileges in submission to God’s word:

4 But Jesus answered him, saying, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.’”

[C.2]

Perhaps this act of self-denial and submission helped prepare Him for the next test:

5Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. 6And the devil said to Him, "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for [this] has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. 7Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours."

We know from the Great Commission that all authority is ultimately given to Jesus, yet we also know that Satan (in some sense) is the “ruler of this world” (cf. John 14:30). The devil is apparently offering Jesus a shortcut, a way to achieve His earthly kingdom without having to pay the price of suffering and death.

Yet Jesus — perhaps fortified by forty days of meditating on God’s ultimate purpose for His life — rejects the easy way out:

8And Jesus answered and said to him, "Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"

[C.3]

Perhaps in desperation, the devil tries one more ploy:

9Then he brought Him to Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here. 10For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you,' 11and, 'In [their] hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'" "

It is sobering to realize that the devil can even quote scripture (cf. Psalm 91:11) when it serves His purposes. That is why it is essential to not just know the letter of the law, but also to understand the heart of the Father, so we don’t abuse His love for us:

12And Jesus answered and said to him, "It has been

said, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'"

[C.4] That response is sufficient to win the battle — though the war continues:

13Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.

For the moment, though, the combination of time alone with the Spirit and victory over the devil seems to unleash an expanding wave of spiritual power:

14Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. 15And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

Which comes to a head when Jesus visits His hometown:

16So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. 17And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written:

And encounters a Word spoken centuries before:

18"The Spirit of the LORD [is] upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to [the] poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to [the] captives And recovery of sight to [the] blind, [To] set at liberty those who are oppressed; 19To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."

that came true that very day:

20Then He closed the book, and gave [it] back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. 21And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Much to their incredulous amazement:

22So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, "Is this not Joseph's son?"

Which Jesus anticipates, and responds to quite strongly:

23He said to them, "You will surely say this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in Your country.'" 24Then He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country.

25But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; 26but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, [in the region] of Sidon, to a woman [who was] a widow. 27And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian."

Though it earns Him no friends:

28So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, 29and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff. 30Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way.

Their negative reaction doesn't appear to slow Him down any, for He continues teaching:

31Then He went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and was teaching them on the Sabbaths. 32And they were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority.

And not merely with an intellectual sort of authority:

33Now in the synagogue there was a man who had

a spirit of an unclean demon. And he cried out with a loud voice, 34saying, "Let [us] alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!"

35But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" And when the demon had thrown him in [their] midst, it came out of him and did not hurt him.

36Then they were all amazed and spoke among themselves, saying, "What a word this [is]! For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out." 37And the report about Him went out into every place in the surrounding region.

Which also manifests in physical healing:

38Now He arose from the synagogue and entered Simon's house. But Simon's wife's mother was sick with a high fever, and they made request of Him concerning her. 39So He stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. And immediately she arose and served them.

40When the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them.

These miracles are an incredibly powerful witness to who Jesus truly is — yet He doesn't let those who know share that information:

41And demons also came out of many, crying out and saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of God!" And He, rebuking [them], did not allow them to speak, for they knew that He was the Christ.

Why?

Because just as the devil can quote scripture, demons can twist truth to their own ends. While their confession may have arisen spontaneously out of their duress, Jesus knew who He was, what He was doing, and when and how and to whom He would reveal Himself. He didn't let Himself become distracted by

even seemingly positive nuisances. [C.5]

Jesus knew who He was because He had spent time alone with Himself, and with His Father — a practice He continued throughout His ministry:

42Now when it was day, He departed and went into a deserted place.

Which gave Him the courage and focus to follow the path of God, rather than that of the crowd:

And the crowd sought Him and came to Him, and tried to keep Him from leaving them; 43but He said to them, “I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent.” 44And He was preaching in the synagogues of Galilee.

Which path will we follow?

Conversation

1. Have you been through the wilderness? How did it change you?
2. When have you voluntarily given up your rights in obedience to God’s word?
3. How can worshipping God alone save us from taking improper shortcuts?
4. What does it mean for us to “tempt God?”
5. Was your faith or calling ever derailed by seemingly positive opportunities? How did you get back on track?

Decision

- Repentance: Where are you taking the easy way out, and missing God’s call?
- Action: Where and when will you spend time alone with the Father?
- Worship: Meditate on how the words “authority” and “power” apply to Jesus in this chapter.

Explore More

Temptation of Christ – International Standard Bible Encyclopedia

Going Through The Wilderness With Grace – Over-ComeLikeJesus.com

Silencing the Witness of Demons

SILENCE AND SOLITUDE

For Next Week

For next week, read 2 Corinthians 4. Whom does Paul serve? Why?

Memory Verse: *“For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus’ sake.”* — 2 Corinthians 4:5 (NKJV)