

## Solitude

*"Early in the morning, well before sunrise, Jesus rose and went to a deserted place where he could be alone in prayer." (Mark 1:35, CEB)*

It's good to be back home here in Orrville! After taking a week away to refresh my soul and hear from God in prayer, I have a lot that I'm eager to share with you. I plan to start doing that this Sunday morning, as we begin a new sermon series called *"Walking in the Ways of God."* As we travel together, we will think about what it means to be Jesus' disciples and how we can position ourselves so that God's grace will be at work in our lives. John Wesley called these intentional practices "the means of grace."

But before I go there, I want to emphasize the value of **time apart with God**. I was blessed to be able to do that at the Abbey of Gethsemani in Trappist, KY. I've now been there about a half dozen times over the last decade. Each time I go, I've found it a little but easier to ease into the rhythm of the monks and begin to hear from God as I pray, worship, hike, read, and do everyday activities like eating in silence. Now, I'll be honest - I'm not sure how the monks live that lifestyle each and every day. I don't know how I could ever do it. But, what I've discovered is that I need times apart on a regular basis to connect with God and to hear His voice above all others.

If you go to Mark's Gospel in the very first chapter, you see that Jesus is already engaging the habit of going off to a place where he can be alone with his Father in prayer. Go back and read the parts of the chapter that come right before and after verse 35. You'll see that Jesus had already become quite popular (and this is only the first chapter!). He was healing all kinds of people and casting out demons. And then that next morning, even before he could finish his prayer time and return to the town, his disciples had a whole long "To Do" list of more ministry he could be doing. They probably wondered why Jesus was "wasting his time" out praying when so many people needed him.

What was Jesus' response to all of this? He told them what his mission was, reminding them that there were more people to see, saying, *"Let's head in the other direction, to the nearby villages, so that I can preach there too. That's why I've come."* (1:38). That answer sounded almost heretical to me when I first began in ministry. I was a DO-er. Always more work to do, events to plan, worship to lead, classes to teach, etc. But as I've grown more and more into the image of Christ, at least I hope I have, I've discovered the power and the value of solitude. If Jesus needed times apart to renew his spirit and stay connected to his Father, why wouldn't I? And why wouldn't you, too?

I encourage you to find a rhythm of solitude and silence in your life. Where you intentionally set out to make space to connect with your Creator, and leave behind, as best you can, the distractions of this world. Of course, part of our rhythm is intended to be weekly, as we take Sabbath time away from our work. But, I think we also can find bits of time each day to do practice this, and we can plan for longer stretches of time seasonally or annually to allow God to do this important work in our lives.

I conclude by sharing this refrain that the monks sing multiple times in every one of their worship services: *"Praise to the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit, both now and forever. The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages."*

Grace and Peace,

*Pastor David*

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