

## Soul Care | *Spiritual Basics for Hungry People* Week 9 – Approaching Shared Experience: In Light of Community



“Your desire for more of God than you have right now, your longing for love, your need for deeper levels of spiritual transformation than you have experienced so far is the truest thing about you. You might think that your woundedness or your sinfulness is the truest thing about you or that your giftedness or your personality type or your job title or your identity as husband or wife, mother or father, somehow defines you. But in reality, it is your desire for God and your capacity to reach for more of God than you have right now that is the deepest essence of who you are. There is a place within each one of us that is spiritual in nature, the place where God’s Spirit dwells with our spirit, and here our truest desires make themselves known. From this place we cry out to God for deeper union with him and with others.”

– Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*

“The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.”

– Jesus, *Luke 17:20b-21* (NIV)

## Jesus Prayer | *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.*

- Savor the words and dive into them
- Not a mantra, but a “groove builder” for our souls
- Rest button for what is essential
- Connects us to the church historical and worldwide

See *The Way of a Pilgrim* (several versions)

Also *The Jesus Prayer* by Lev Gillet (a monk of the eastern church)

## Corporate Prayer | *experiencing solitude and silence together*

- Let’s set aside this space and time as sacred
- Let’s begin with a modest goal of five minutes
- Settle into a comfortable yet alert physical position
- Ask God to give you a simple prayer that expresses your openness and desire for God, perhaps using the *Jesus Prayer*
- Close with a prayer of gratitude for God’s presence with you, or simply pray the Lord’s Prayer
- Resist the urge to judge yourself or your experiences in silence

adapted from *Invitation to Solitude and Silence* by Ruth Haley Barton

## Withdrawal | *focusing our soul care by withdrawing “from” and “to”*

- Have a close connection and revelatory aspect with our themes of hunger, growth, being and mystery.
- Deepens and transforms our approach to Scripture and Prayer

## Jesus' Withdrawal | *But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.* (Luke 5:16 NIV)

*Thus we see an outline of the content and method of Jesus' guidance. There was a rhythm of dealing with individuals, groups and crowds, saying and doing whatever would best reconcile them to their larger life with one another and in the Holy One.*

*There was one other dimension of this rhythm: solitude. Jesus' culminating preparation for this ministry was alone, in the wilderness, going through the dark, diverting, corrupting forces of evil, until they were faced down and their power shriveled. He emerged empowered, emboldened, with an indomitable sense of vocation. After this time, he continued to go off alone to pray from time to time.*

Tilden H. Edwards, *Spiritual Friend*

## Solitude | *withdrawal from our community to focus on communion with the Trinity*

*O my God, when will silence, retirement, and prayer become the occupations of my soul as they are now frequently the objects of my desires? How am I wearied with saying so much and yet doing so little for You! Come, Jesus come, You the only object of my love, the center and supreme happiness of my soul! Come, and impress my mind with such a lively conviction of Your presence that all within me may yield to its influence. Amen.*

Thomas à Kempis

*To enter into solitude and silence is to take the spiritual life seriously. It is to take seriously our need to quiet the noise of our lives, to cease the constant striving of human effort, to pull away from our absorption in human relationships for a time in order to give God our undivided attention. In solitude God begins to free us from our bondage to human expectations, for there we experience God as our ultimate reality – the One in whom we live and move and have our being.*

Ruth Haley Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*

*Let him who cannot be alone beware of community. He will only do harm to himself and to the community. Alone you stood before God when He called you; alone you had to answer that call; alone you had to struggle and pray; and alone you will die and give an account to God. You cannot escape from yourself; for God has singled you out. If you refuse to be alone you are rejecting Christ's call to you, and you can have no part in the community of those who are called. "The challenge of death comes to us all, and no one can die for another. Everyone must fight his own battle with death by himself, alone...I will not be with you then, nor you with me." (Luther)*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*

*The desert initiates us into the life of the spirit by helping us to discover who we most deeply are. To follow Christ means that we must let go of excessive attachments to passing pleasures and possessions, to ploys of autonomous power, to tangible goods as if they were ultimate. Christ asks us to abandon our idols, whatever they may be, and to love Him with our entire being.*

*"Pray to thy Father which is in secret." God is a God who hides Himself to the carnal eye. As long as in our worship of God we are chiefly occupied with our own thoughts and exercises, we shall not meet Him who is a spirit, the unseen One. But to the man who withdraws himself from all that is of world and man, and prepares to wait upon God alone, the Father will reveal Himself. As he forsakes and gives up and shuts out the world, and the life of the world, and surrenders himself to be led of Christ into the secret of God's presence, the light of the Father's love will rise upon him. The secrecy of the inner chamber and the closed door, the entire separation from all around us, is an image of, and so a help to that inner spiritual sanctuary, the secret of God's tabernacle, within the veil, where our spirit truly comes into contact with the Invisible One.*

Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*

Deserts, silence, solitudes are 'not necessarily places but states of mind and heart.' These deserts can be found in the midst of the city, and in the every day of our lives. We need only to look for them and realize our tremendous need for them. They will be small solitudes, little deserts, tiny pools of silence, but the experience they will bring, if we are disposed to enter them, may be as exultant and as holy as all the deserts of the world, even the one God himself entered. For it is God who makes solitude, deserts and silences holy.

Consider the solitude of walking from the subway train or bus to your home in the evening, when the streets are quieter and there are few passersby. Consider the solitude that greets you when you enter your room to change your office or working clothes to more comfortable, homey ones. Consider the solitude of a housewife, alone in her kitchen, sitting down for a cup of coffee before beginning the work of the day. Think of the solitudes afforded by such humble tasks as housecleaning, ironing, sewing.

One of the first steps toward solitude is a departure. Were you to depart to a real desert, you might take a plane, train or car to get there. But we're blind to the 'little departures' that fill our days. These "little solitudes" are often right behind a door which we can open, or in a little corner where we can stop to look at a tree that somehow survived the snow and dust of a city street. There is the solitude of a car in which we return from work, riding bumper to bumper on a crowded highway. This too can be a "point of departure" to a desert, silence, solitude.

But our hearts, minds and souls must be attuned, desirous, aware of these moments of solitude that God gives us.

Catherine de Hueck Doherty, *Poustinia – Christian Spirituality of the East for Western Man*

The most essential question in solitude is How have I been wanting to be with God, and how has God been wanting to be with me?

Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*

- place in time
- place in the physical world
- place inside ourselves

See the Corporate Prayer above for a way to begin

## Silence | *withdrawal from aural distraction to hear the voice of God*

Be still, and know that I am God;  
I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth.

Psalm 46:10 (NIV)

But the Lord is in his holy temple;  
let all the earth be silent before him.

Habakkuk 2:20 (NIV)

There is an indifferent, or even negative, attitude toward silence which sees in it a disparagement of God's revelation in the Word. This is the view which misinterprets silence as a ceremonial gesture, as a mystical desire to get beyond the Word. This is to miss the essential relationship of silence to the Word. Silence is the simple stillness of the individual under the Word of God. We are silent before hearing the Word because our thoughts are already directed to the Word, as a child is quiet when he enters his father's room. We are silent after hearing the Word because the Word is still speaking and dwelling within us. We are silent at the beginning of the day because God should have the first word, and we are silent before going to sleep because the last word also belongs to God. We keep silence solely for the sake of the Word, and therefore not in order to show disregard for the Word but rather to honor and receive it.

Silence is nothing else but waiting for God's Word and coming from God's Word with a blessing. But everybody knows that this is something that needs to be practiced and learned, in these days when talkativeness prevails. Real silence, real stillness, really holding one's tongue comes only as the sober consequence of spiritual stillness.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*

## **Fasting** | *withdrawal from those things which fill our senses to focus on being filled by God*

*When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*

Jesus, Matthew 6:16-18 (NIV)

*Prayer needs fasting for its full growth: this is the second lesson. Prayer is the one hand with which we grasp the invisible; fasting, the other, with which we let loose and cast away the visible.*

Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*

*More than any other Discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us. This is a wonderful benefit to the true disciple who longs to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. We cover up what is inside us with food and other good things, but in fasting these things surface.*

Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*

- not commanded
- assumed
- not a “bargain with God” activity
- drawn by God to meet with God
- can be other than food

## **Retreat** | *withdrawal from hectic schedules to focus on “wasting time” with God*

- stepping beyond moments of solitude
- marked by intentionality
- can be anything from a couple hours to several days
- build a retreat “bucket”

## Pilgrimage | withdrawal from our daily places to focusing on finding our set apart (holy) places

How lovely is your dwelling place,  
O Lord Almighty!  
My soul yearns, even faints,  
for the courts of the Lord;  
my heart and my flesh cry out  
for the living God.

Even the sparrow has found a home,  
and the swallow a nest for herself,  
where she may have her young--  
a place near your altar,  
O Lord Almighty, my King and my God.  
Blessed are those who dwell in your house;  
they are ever praising you.

Selah

Blessed are those whose strength is in you,  
who have set their hearts on pilgrimage.  
As they pass through the Valley of Baca,  
they make it a place of springs;  
the autumn rains also cover it with pools.  
They go from strength to strength,  
till each appears before God in Zion.  
Hear my prayer, O Lord God Almighty;  
listen to me, O God of Jacob.

Selah

Look upon our shield, O God;  
look with favor on your anointed one.

Better is one day in your courts  
than a thousand elsewhere;  
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God  
than dwell in the tents of the wicked.  
For the Lord God is a sun and shield;  
the Lord bestows favor and honor;  
no good thing does he withhold  
from those whose walk is blameless.

O Lord Almighty,  
blessed is the man who trusts in you.

Psalm 84:1-12 (NIV)

- Psalms of Ascent (120-134)
- In light of John 4, what does pilgrimage mean now?
- Extension of solitude
- Remembrance of community
- Experienced with community

## Pilgrimage Together | Story Telling

*Come on pilgrimage.  
Let us walk together the road of life.  
We will go on well trodden paths,  
and also open us new ways.  
We will seek,  
we will search,  
we will rejoice,  
and perhaps we will sing.*

*You cannot come as an onlooker,  
that leaves you on the outside,  
yet still influencing us,  
as we influence you.  
Come and share your experiences,  
your sorrows and your joys.  
If your prayer has gone dead,  
your God is too small,  
your vision too narrow,  
Come journey into new depths,  
let life be an adventure.*

*Come and participate,  
come and discover -  
we will go to strange places,  
we may even meet dragons.  
But we do not journey alone  
we go together along the road  
and our God goes with us.*

David Adam in *The Road of Life: Reflections on Searching and Longing*