



TIME OUT

SOLITUDE [IS MY INNER LIFE TOO CLUTTERED TO “LIVE WELL”?]

THE HURDLE

In my sociology class a professor said, “We’ve become a society with an aversion to quiet and an uneasiness with being alone.” I didn’t agree with her at first, but the more I’ve thought about it I’m not exactly sure where “quiet” can even be found anymore (even if we did want it!). TVs hang in the fitness rooms, cell phone messages and texts flood in constantly, coaches and teammates and other relationship expectations come from every direction. I never thought of headphones, billboard advertisements and social media updates as forms of negative “noise,” but I suppose it all adds to the constant cluttering of my mind. I never thought about all the mental busyness that makes up my day as being something bad—is it?

Are you more of a “being” person (introspective, reflective, person-centered) or a “doing” person (task-oriented, busy, product over people)? Explain.

Do you believe one approach to life is better than the other? Why?

Which is valued more in our society? What makes you say this?

What do you think Pascal means by his quote? (to the right)

“

The sole cause of man’s unhappiness is that he does not know how to stay quietly in his room.

*Blaise Pascal
Philosopher (1623-1662)*

”

I HEAR YA

There are people in the Bible who tried to balance quiet trust with zealous activity.

People of God wait in silence: “My soul, wait in silence for God only, for my hope is from Him.” (Psalm 62:5)

God calls out His people: “In repentance and rest you will be saved; in quietness and trust is your strength, but you were not willing (to listen).” (Isaiah 30:15)

More isn’t always better: “Better is a handful, with quietness, than two handfuls with labor and chasing after the wind.” (Ecclesiastes 4:6)

A challenge to slow down: “Be still and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10)

LISTEN UP

Throughout the gospels, crowds pressure Jesus everywhere he goes. They want his time. They want his teaching. They want his power. Ironically, while Jesus certainly wants to help people, he knows his effectiveness with them depends on the quality of his time away from them.

Mark 1:35-39

1. In verse 35, Jesus got up early and literally went to an “uninhabited” place. What do you think prompted him to go to a place with no one around first thing in the morning?
2. How might someone in the crowd have felt if they had a real need and Jesus was unavailable to meet it because of His time in the “uninhabited place”? Do you think he’s justified/right in His choice to separate? Why or why not?
3. How might Jesus’ time in the “uninhabited place” affect his own relationship with God, himself, and other people?
4. What might Jesus lose by obliging the crowds all the time? What might He lose by staying in solitude all the time?
5. How is this snapshot of Jesus’ life potentially applicable to your own?

FOR THE RECORD

Like Jesus, separating ourselves from the sensory onslaught of daily life is a choice with a cost, but it’s an option that pays immeasurable returns. Moving away from the constant noise of life enables us to fully experience God and all that He has for us so that when we interact again with others, we are anchored by a steadied soul and an ability to interact more fully with all that surrounds us. Purposeful solitude empowers us to be in right relationship with God, with ourselves,

with others, and with creation around us. Regularly stepping away from the relational and sensory demands of daily life enabled Jesus to remain focused on His purpose for being on earth, producing a clarity and peace of mind and spirit now made available to all who follow His pattern. There are no short cuts: doing God’s will on the outside requires first carving out time toward being a different person on the inside.



YOUR MOVE

1. Knowing your own temperament, how difficult is it to separate yourself from the constant sensory stimulation of daily life? Are you able to create space in the midst of daily life to work on your “inner” life and fully experience all God has for you? Explain.

2. Using the list below, identify the top three obstacles that keep you from creating space for solitude.

- I have never thought about it or felt the need
- I am undisciplined
- Facebook keeps me connected to people
- What else would I do?
- I cannot stay focused very long
- Everyone else’s demands of me
- The silence makes me uncomfortable
- I am scared of my own thoughts or of being alone
- I am afraid of what God might tell me

Why are these obstacles for you?

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The intentional stripping of our creature comforts, creating a context where we are miserable without our iPods, vehicles, laptops, kitchens, debit cards and friends, is a gift to our souls. It reminds me of what matters, who matters, and the person I long to become.

Donald Whitney
Teacher/Author

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3. How would the following relationships benefit if you created space in your life?
 - relationship with God
 - relationship with yourself
 - relationship with others

4. Consider the following quote:

In solitude I get rid of my scaffolding: no friends to talk with, no telephone calls to make, no meetings to attend, no music to entertain, no books to distract, just me—naked, vulnerable, weak, sinful, deprived, broken—nothing. It is this nothingness that I have to face in my solitude, a nothingness so dreadful that everything in me wants to run to my friends, my work, and my distractions so that I can forget my nothingness and make myself believe that I am worth something. (Henri Nouwen, teacher/author)

What will it take to move from good intentions to actually creating space in your soul?

For more help in creating space in your life to renew your mind and soul, visit **The Training Room** on the next page.

AS YOU ENTER

“JESUS DEPARTED OFTEN AND WENT TO A LONELY PLACE; AND THE MULTITUDES WERE SEARCHING FOR HIM, AND CAME TO HIM, AND TRIED TO KEEP HIM FROM GOING AWAY FROM THEM.” (LUKE 4:42)

Mountaintop Experience

Climbing mountains is hard work, but the effort brings both peace and perspective. From the mountains you can see clearly—getting a birds-eye view of both what dwells beneath and what lies on high. In the same way, silence and solitude are means of experiencing those same benefits. Read the passages below and record what happens on the mountains with these particular people, then place yourself in their story.

Moses in Exodus 19:1-6 Get away to hear from God (What is God telling you?)

Peter, James and John in Matthew 17:1-5 Get away to gain vision (Where is your place?)

Elijah in I Kings 18:17-39 Get away to intercede (What are you begging God to do?)

Jesus in Matthew 5:1-16 Get away to teach (Who can you bring with you?)

Desert Experience

Intentionally restrict yourself from electronics or some other modern conveniences for three days (iPod, cell phone, stereo, texting, radio, television, computer, etc.) and record how you feel. Consider these questions: Was it hard for you? Did you have extra time? How did you fill the time? What did more quiet or space feel like? Did you have any compulsive needs? Were you able to experience any personal benefits?

I will restrict: _____ for _____ days

I felt:

Day 1

Day 2

Day 3

Sharpen Your Saw!

Sharpening your saw when cutting wood may take some time but the results are worth it...greater capacity, productivity and enjoyment. The same is true in your own life. Stephen Covey in *Seven Habits of Highly Successful People* writes that “sharpening your saw” means preserving and enhancing the greatest asset you have—you. It means having a balanced program for self-renewal in the four areas of your life: physical, social/emotional, mental and spiritual. Feeling good just doesn’t happen. Living a life in balance means taking the necessary time to renew yourself. Creating space in your life where you can withdraw from your compulsions and clutter will give you freedom to think, feel, reflect, and pray. If the Son of God needed to withdraw, how much more do we finite creatures need it?

AS YOU LEAVE

- » REMEMBER: SOLITUDE IS NOT A LUXURY—IT’S A NECESSITY!
- » SAY NO TO COMPULSIVE “CLUTTERING” AND SAY YES TO REAL LIFE.
- » CHOOSE TO MAKE TIME ON A DAILY BASIS TO GET AWAY SO YOU CAN THINK, FEEL AND PRAY.

