



## Daily Devotionals: Rhythms | May 22, 2022

### Silence & Solitude

In silence and solitude, God invites us to slow down, defy distractions, settle in His presence, and listen intently for His voice. Our culture drives harder and harder, moves faster and faster, and demands more and more from us. The Kingdom of God slows us. Steadies us. Solidifies us.

Ruth Haley Barton says, "There is something about being invited that makes the heart glad. Someone is seeking me out, desiring my presence enough to initiate encounter. The Invitation to solitude and silence is just that. It is an invitation to enter more deeply into the intimacy of relationship with the One who waits just outside the noise and busyness of our lives. It is an invitation to communication and communion with the One who is always present even when our awareness has been dulled by distraction. It is an invitation to the adventure of spiritual transformation in the deepest places of our being, an adventure that will result in greater freedom and authenticity and surrender to God than we have yet experienced."

We want to make space to listen to the voice of God above the noise of our lives, to be anchored in and attentive to His presence through His Spirit, and to stay connected to Jesus moment-by-moment. And connection is important to remember for any practice. God is always the goal and driving factor of any of our rhythms; it's quite easy to be silent or alone with acknowledging God at all. In fact, it's easy to do that for any of the rhythms we're exploring in this series. When we fix our eyes on Christ, though, a moment of silence can become a moment of transformation.

Begin wherever you are. Let go of achieving and just accept the invitation to be with God.

### Scripture

*Mark 1:35 (NIV):* "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed."

*Mark 6:31-32 (NIV):* "Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place."



## **Practices**

As we move from the reading of Scripture and from a bit of the theory behind silence and solitude, let's look at three practices for you to choose from to actually begin incorporating moments stillness into your everyday life. Here are three different practices you can choose from. You don't need to do all three. We'd recommend picking one and sticking with it for the week!

### **Practice 1 – Moments of silence**

We can get tricked into thinking that silence or solitude needs to be a long practice, like several hours or even a day-long retreat. In fact, silence can be found in the extra spaces of our days, whether you're just starting the practice or you've been doing it for years.

For starters, look for those extra moments and use them to get used to being silent. Here are a few ideas:

- Drive with the radio off for the week.
- Take a short walk during the day with no phone or music or distractions and observe what's happening in and around you.
- Find a quiet place at lunchtime to sit for 2 or 3 minutes.

### **Practice 2 – Silence and Solitude**

Below you will find a simple, but thorough way to practice silence and solitude adapted from [PracticingTheWay.org](http://PracticingTheWay.org).

1. Identify a time/place that works well for you

- Time: For most people, first thing in the morning works best. You're rested, fresh, and the day is young. For others, a more optimal time slot is when kids are napping in the late morning, or on a lunch break, after work, or before you go to bed. Feel free to experiment until you find the right fit. It doesn't matter which time, just that you find the time that's best for you.



- Place: Find a place that is quiet and as distraction-free as possible. A comfortable chair with a blanket and candle nearby works well for a lot of people. Weather permitting, a park or nature reserve are also a good bet.

## 2. Set a modest goal and begin wherever you are.

- Beginners: It's better to start small and work your way up. We recommend you start with ten minutes, 3-5 days a week.
- Intermediate: If you already practice silence and solitude a few times a week, consider upping it to every day.
- Advanced: If you already practice silence and solitude daily, consider upping your time (to, say, an hour), or just giving your time a high level of focus.

Then, for the practice...

- Put away your phone or any other distractions, settle into your time/place, and get comfortable.
- For most people, sitting with your back straight, shoulders relaxed, legs on the floor is a good start. Others do better lying on their back in a relaxed position.
- Some of you may prefer to do this exercise while walking or doing something simple with your hands, like laundry or drawing to begin.

## 3. Begin with a breathing prayer

- Close your eyes. Take long, deep, slow breaths (if you want, count 4 seconds in, 4 seconds wait, 4 seconds out, repeat). Inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth.
- Start to pay attention to your breathing. Just "watch" your breath go in and out.
- Release the constant chatter in your mind. Let each thought go as quickly as it comes, and just focus on your breathing.
- Your mind will seize this opportunity to run wild with thoughts, feelings, memories, to-dos, and distractions. That's okay. Don't judge yourself, feel bad, give up, or worry. When you notice your mind start to wander, just recenter with a quick prayer, like, "Father..." or "Be still and know..." and come back to your breathing.
  - In the beginning, just 1-2 minutes of this is a huge win, and 10 minutes is a home run.



4. Spend a few minutes “abiding in the vine.” Transition from your breathing prayer to “the practice of the presence of God.” Notice God’s presence all around you, in you. For some people it’s helpful to imagine the Father is sitting in the chair across from you or on a throne. Welcome his love, joy, and peace from the Holy Spirit. If you want, open your mind and imagination to listen for God’s voice, or get something off your chest in prayer. But the main goal here is simply to “be with Jesus.” Don’t feel like you have to “do” anything. Just relax and enjoy his presence.

5. Close in a prayer of gratitude and commit the rest of your day to the Father.

- A few things to note: You can’t “succeed” or “fail” at this practice. All you can do is show up. Be patient. This takes some people years to master. Resist the urge to say, “I’m bad at this” or “This isn’t for me.” Don’t judge yourself, especially if you’re an overachiever type! If you’re more of an active-type person, and sitting still is just death, you might want to begin by trying this while doing a stretching exercise or going on a walk somewhere quiet and distraction-free (like a park or short hike). Apply the same idea to a walking prayer, and just focus on your walking instead of your breathing.

### **Practice 3 – Retreat**

Practice 3 is to take a solitude retreat.

The retreat doesn’t have to take long, but it does need to be an intentional “leaving” of your normal day to spend time alone with Jesus.

1. Choose your time and place and put it on the calendar. Like practice 2, start small. Shoot for an hour or two before trying a 3-day silent retreat. Think of a place that is comfortable for you, where you can be aware of God’s invitation to join him in the solitude: in nature, a cozy spot in a quiet place, even in the corner of a busy coffee shop.
  - a. One note: it is most often better to do this away from your home—there are a lot of distractions calling your name when you’re in your house.
2. Use the steps from practice 2 to help you with your time.



3. You don't have to be still the whole time. You can practice silence and solitude while walking, for instance. If you need a change of scenery, go for it.

**Questions for reflection:**

1. Which practice did you experiment with this week? What was doing it like for you?
2. How did this practice help you remove distractions and experience God more? Explain.
3. What takeaways or invitations from God did you experience as a result of using this practice this week?