St. George on Yonge
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SESSION 4 — SOLITUDE

Creating Space to Be Alone with God in Silence and Stillness

"Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."
Luke 5:16

We live with constant noise, activity, responsibilities, conversations, and digital distractions. It is possible to spend our whole day busy—even doing good things—without giving God our undivided attention.

Jesus regularly stepped away from the crowds and demands around Him to be alone with His Father and pray (Luke 5:15–16; Mark 1:35). He would withdraw to a quiet place and then return to continue His work of teaching, healing, serving, and loving people.

This is the pattern we want to learn through the practice of solitude.

Solitude is intentionally stepping away from people, activity, noise, and distraction for a time so that we can be alone with God and give Him our attention. It is not about escaping from people, emptying our minds, or mastering a special technique. We withdraw for a time so that we can be with God—and then return to our everyday lives more attentive to Him and better able to love and serve others.

In solitude, we slow down, become still before God, pray, reflect on Scripture, listen, and honestly bring before Him what is happening within us. We may become aware of things that busyness has hidden—our worries, fears, tiredness, desires, or areas where God is calling us to change.

Solitude itself does not transform us; **the Holy Spirit does**. By stepping away from distraction and turning our attention toward God, we create space to become more aware of His presence and allow the Holy Spirit to search us, renew us, guide us, strengthen us, and gradually make us more like Jesus.

The goal is not to have a special spiritual experience or to become good at being silent. The goal is simply to make intentional space to be with God.

Anchor Passages

Scripture	Theme
Luke 5:15–16	Jesus often withdrew to quiet places and prayed.
Mark 1:35–39	In solitude Jesus prayed and returned with clarity about His mission.
Matthew 4:1–11	Jesus entered the wilderness in the Spirit and resisted temptation with Scripture.
Matthew 14:22–23	After ministry to the crowds, Jesus went up a mountainside alone to pray.
Luke 6:12–13	Before choosing the Twelve, Jesus spent the night in prayer.
Matthew 26:36–46	In Gethsemane Jesus brought His anguish to the Father and surrendered His will.
Psalm 46:10	Be still and know that God is God.

Main Idea

Solitude is a voluntary and temporary withdrawal from people, activity, and distraction for the spiritual purpose of being alone with God. Silence is the temporary laying aside of speech and noise so that we can attend to Him. Stillness is the posture of ceasing our striving and becoming present to God.

The aim is not merely to feel calm. As we become quiet before God, we may become more aware of what is happening within us, the distractions or resistance we face, and most importantly, God's presence and work in our lives.

What Solitude Is – and Is Not

Term	Meaning
Solitude	Chosen separation for a spiritual purpose: to be fully present to God.
Silence	Voluntarily reducing speech and external noise so that we can listen and attend.
Stillness	Ceasing inner striving and yielding ourselves to God.
Not loneliness	Loneliness is a painful sense of absence; Christian solitude is chosen time in the presence of God.
Not isolation	Isolation withdraws from relationship; solitude strengthens us to return and love people well.
Not merely being alone	We can be alone while scrolling, watching, working, or consuming. Solitude intentionally sets these distractions aside so that we can give God our attention.
Not emptying the mind	We do not aim for mental blankness. We bring our thoughts back to God, Scripture, and prayer.

Why Solitude Matters Today

We live in a world of continuous words, alerts, opinions, entertainment, and digital stimulation. Even when no one else is present, our devices keep us connected to the noise. This makes it possible to go through an entire day - or an entire life - without being truly alone with God.

- Noise makes it difficult to notice what is happening within us.
- Distraction weakens sustained attention to God and Scripture.
- Constant connection can make us dependent on the opinions and expectations of others.
- Hurry keeps us reacting rather than discerning.
- Entertainment can become a way of avoiding pain, fear, grief, anger, or conviction.

Why is this important to me?

We can be busy doing good things—even praying, reading Scripture, serving, working, and caring for others—yet rarely become quiet enough to notice what is happening within us or to give God our undivided attention. Solitude helps us step away from competing voices and distractions so that we can slow down, become attentive to God, examine our hearts, pray, reflect on Scripture, and allow the Holy Spirit to shape how we live.

The Pattern of Jesus: Retreat and Return

Throughout His earthly ministry, He intentionally made time to be alone with His Father in prayer. The Gospels show a repeated rhythm: Jesus withdrew to a quiet place to pray and then returned to teach, heal, serve, and obey.

- Before public ministry, He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness (Matthew 4:1).
- After intense ministry, He rose early and went to a solitary place to pray (Mark 1:35).
- As the crowds increased, He withdrew more intentionally (Luke 5:15–16).
- Before major decisions, He spent extended time with the Father (Luke 6:12–13).
- In grief and pressure, He withdrew to pray (Matthew 14:13, 23).
- Before the cross, He brought His anguish and surrendered His will in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36–46).

Jesus did not retreat to escape His calling. He retreated so that He could return in the strength, direction, and love of the Spirit.

The lesson for us: If Jesus intentionally withdrew from people and activity to be with the Father, we should not expect to live healthy spiritual lives while constantly surrounded by noise, activity, and distraction. Solitude is not escaping our responsibilities; it helps prepare us to return to them with greater clarity, love, and dependence on God.

How Solitude Creates Space for the Holy Spirit

Solitude does not make God appear or force Him to speak. It reduces the noise and resistance that often prevents us from noticing, receiving, and responding to His work.

- We become more attentive to God's presence and the work of the Holy Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit searches our hearts and reveals what needs attention.
- He reminds us of Scripture and guides us into truth.
- He exposes lies, unhealthy attachments, and self-will.
- He reminds us of our identity as God's children.
- He strengthens us to obey, endure, forgive, and love.
- As we turn our attention to Christ, He gradually transforms us to become more like Him (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Any thought, impression, prompting, or desire that arises during solitude should be discerned. We should not automatically assume that every thought is from God. The Holy Spirit will not contradict Scripture or the character of Jesus. We test what we sense against Scripture, the character of Jesus, the fruit it produces and, when needed, seek counsel from mature Christians.

Three Encounters in Solitude

What might happen when I become quiet?

Do not expect every time of solitude to feel peaceful. When the noise and distractions stop, we may become aware of things we have not noticed before. We may become more aware of ourselves, experience resistance, or become more attentive to God.

1. Encounter with Ourselves

When the distractions stop, we often become aware of what has been beneath the surface: exhaustion, anxiety, sadness, anger, shame, unresolved grief, or a need to control. This does not mean solitude is failing. The quiet may simply be revealing what is already within us.

We do not need to analyze ourselves endlessly or condemn ourselves. Instead, we bring what arises honestly before God: “Search me, God, and know my heart” (Psalm 139:23–24).

Solitude can become a place of confession, healing and surrender, where we are reminded that our identity and worth come from belonging to Christ rather than from our achievements or the approval of others.

2. Encounter with Resistance and the Enemy

Solitude can also expose resistance: excuses, restlessness, temptation, distracting thoughts, or lies about God and us. Jesus' wilderness experience reminds us that the quiet place can involve spiritual struggle as well as spiritual strengthening (Matthew 4:1–11).

We resist lies with the truth of Scripture, as Jesus did. We do not become preoccupied with the devil or assume every distraction is demonic. We remain watchful, submit ourselves to God, resist evil, and return our attention to Christ.

3. Encounter with God

The deepest purpose of solitude is to be with God. We do not come merely to gain insight, solve a problem, or feel better. We come to give Him our attention and spend time in His presence.

We may experience peace, conviction, direction, comfort or strength—or simply spend quiet time with Him. We do not need to force an experience. As we turn our attention toward Christ, the Holy Spirit gradually transforms us to become more like Him (2 Corinthians 3:18).

In summary: In solitude, I may discover what is happening within me → encounter resistance that I need to overcome → but ultimately, I am there to be with God.

Five Movements of Silence and Solitude

These movements are not five rigid steps, and they may not occur in a fixed order. They are five ways of yielding control and becoming present with God.

You do not need to complete all five movements every time. They are simply a guide to help you become attentive to God. You may spend most of your time in just one of them.

1. Relax – Settle into God's presence

Allow your body and mind to slow down. Breathe naturally and deeply. Read a Psalm or a short Gospel passage slowly. Use a simple prayer such as “Come, Holy Spirit," or "Let the peace of Christ rule in me." The purpose is not a breathing technique; it is to become present to the God who is already present.

2. Detach – Give God what you are carrying

Notice the concerns occupying your mind—work, family, plans, fears, disappointments, the need for approval, or things you are trying to control. Bring them honestly to God and place them in His hands. Pray with Jesus, “Not my will, but Yours be done.” The purpose is to stop holding tightly to everything and learn to trust God.

3. Look – Behold Christ

Turn your attention to Jesus. Think about His character, His love, mercy and goodness. Simply focus on who He is and rest in His presence. As we keep our attention on Jesus, the Holy Spirit gradually changes us to become more like Him (2 Corinthians 3:18).

4. Listen – Wait humbly before God

Listening does not mean trying to hear an audible voice. Remain quietly attentive to God. A Scripture may come to mind, you may become convicted about something, remember someone you should pray for, or simply remain in silence. Do not force an answer or assume every thought is from God. Test everything by Scripture.

5. Love – Receive and return God's love

The goal of the spiritual journey is love. Rest in the Father's love given through Christ and poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Let God love you, and respond with worship, gratitude, and willingness to love others. Solitude is complete when it sends us back into the world more able to love and serve.

A 10-Minute Solitude Practice

Time	Practice
Minute 1	Arrive: put away the phone, sit comfortably, and become still.
Minutes 2–3	Relax: breathe slowly and pray, "Come, Holy Spirit."
Minutes 4–5	Detach: name and release your concerns and desired outcomes.
Minutes 6–7	Look: turn your attention to Jesus and His love.
Minutes 8–9	Listen: wait quietly; receive a Scripture, conviction, or simply silence.
Minute 10	Love: thank God and ask for grace to love and serve others today.

How to Build the Habit

Start small.

1. Choose a quiet, reasonably distraction-free place. This may be a chair at home, a church, a garden, a park, or a quiet walk.
2. Put your phone in another room or switch it fully off. Do not use the phone as a timer unless necessary.
3. Choose a consistent time. For many people, the first minutes of the morning works best.
4. Settle your body. Sit comfortably, slow your breathing, and acknowledge that you are in God's presence.
5. Pray a simple opening prayer: "Father, I am here. Jesus, have mercy."
6. Move through Relax, Detach, Look, Listen, and Love without forcing each stage.
7. If helpful, read a Psalm or short Gospel passage slowly. Let Scripture anchor the time.
8. When distracted, do not condemn yourself. Gently return to your prayer word, Scripture, or awareness of God.
9. Close with gratitude and write one or two sentences about what you noticed.

Common Bottlenecks – and How to Respond

Bottleneck	Faithful Response
"I cannot stop thinking."	The goal is not an empty mind. Notice the thought without following it, then return gently to God.
"I feel bored or restless."	This is normal. Your body and mind are adjusting to the absence of stimulation. Stay for the agreed time.
"I feel anxious, sad, angry, or ashamed."	Do not run immediately. Bring the feeling honestly to God. If deep trauma or overwhelming distress surfaces, seek wise pastoral or professional support.
"I do not hear God."	Silence is not failure. God may be forming trust and attentiveness rather than giving words. Remain grounded in Scripture.
"I am too busy."	Think subtraction, not addition. Remove a small activity, wake slightly earlier, use a lunch break, or create short 'minute retreats.'

"My home is never quiet."	Use a trade-off with a spouse or friend, a church building, a parked car, a walk, or a time when others are asleep.
"I keep reaching for my phone."	Put it physically out of reach. Begin with five phone-free minutes and gradually lengthen the time.
"I feel spiritually attacked or tempted."	Submit to God, use Scripture, pray the name of Jesus, and seek support from mature believers. Do not isolate from Christian community.
"I expect a dramatic experience."	Release outcomes. Solitude is an offering of love, not a technique for producing feelings or revelations.

New to Solitude? Start Here — Your Two-Week Practice

For the next two weeks, simply begin.

- Choose a quiet place and a regular time.
- Practice 5–10 minutes of solitude at least five days each week.
- Put your phone away and become still before God.
- Read a few verses from a Psalm or Gospel to focus your attention on Him.
- Talk honestly to God, then spend a little time quietly with Him.
- When distracted, don't be discouraged; simply return your attention to God.
- Finish by thanking Him.

If helpful, write one sentence: “Today I noticed…”
Don't ask, “Did something amazing happen?” Ask, “Did I faithfully make space to be with God?”

As the Practice Grows

If solitude begins to become a helpful part of your walk with God, consider developing a sustainable rhythm:

- Daily: 5–15 minutes of silence and solitude, perhaps before checking your phone.
- Weekly: A longer period of 30–60 minutes, perhaps connected to your Sabbath.
- Seasonally: A half-day, full day, or occasional retreat alone with God.

Solitude and community belong together. God forms us both in Christian community and in our personal time with Him. We need both. Healthy solitude should make us more present, patient, humble, and loving toward others—not less.

Closing Encouragement

Solitude may feel awkward before it feels life-giving. The first thing you encounter may not be peace, but distraction, tiredness, or emotions you have avoided. Do not be discouraged. Stay gently and honestly before God.

Solitude is not about becoming good at being silent; it is about intentionally stepping away from distraction so that we can be fully present to God.

Additional Scripture for Deeper Study

Old Testament

Theme	Passage	What It Shows
God in the quiet	1 Kings 19:1–13	Elijah encounters God's gentle presence after exhaustion, fear, and flight.
Be still before God	Psalm 46:1–11	Stillness is surrender to God's rule, not passive inactivity.
Waiting in silence	Psalm 62:1–8	The soul finds rest, hope, and security in God alone.
God searches the heart	Psalm 139:23–24	Solitude becomes a place of honest self-examination before God.
Listening posture	1 Samuel 3:1–10	Samuel models the disciple's prayer: 'Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening.'

New Testament

Theme	Passage	What It Shows
Beholding and transformation	2 Corinthians 3:17–18	The Holy Spirit transforms us as we turn toward and contemplate Christ.
Attentiveness to Jesus	Luke 10:38–42	Mary chooses to sit at Jesus' feet and listen rather than being consumed by many distractions.
Abiding in Christ	John 15:1–11	Jesus calls His disciples to remain in Him and depend upon Him for fruitful lives.
Bringing our inner life before God	Philippians 4:6–9	We bring our anxieties to God in prayer and learn to direct our thoughts toward what is true and good.
Drawing near, surrender and resistance	James 4:7–10	We draw near to God, humble ourselves before Him, submit to Him and resist the devil.