

Growing God's People

a journal for teachers and other learners

Whatever happened to solitude and silence?

The water broke softly against the bow and moved into the swirling currents of the paddle tips. Beyond the perimeter of the kayak, the lake surface remained calm, as though stilled by the voice of God. Leaved branches of saplings reached up from the flooded waters in a desperate grasping for air.

A passage that had sat parsed, picked-apart, and analyzed on my desk, became alive and illumined in the dialogue between my soul and the Spirit of God. Its words grew, slithering down softly like roots into my own heart, and erupted in song, praise, and prayers for healing and insight.

As the sun warmed the sky, the winds moved and the waters lifted into waves. So too did I in a time of quiet solitude. Maybe

it's time for you too to retreat into a sacred solitude of the heart, and in the silence tune your soul's ear to the voice of God.

This issue of *GGP* offers a counter-cultural call to the discipline of solitude, toward a path offering a deeper filling of the Spirit, in which you enjoy intimate connection with a Father who speaks His assurance and instruction in the sacred silences, and sends us forward into a purposed life of loving others.

Imagine a church full of members who have increasingly shaken free from the constant noise, and the suggested goals, appetites, diversions, and delights of this Age, and come to hear the voice of a Shepherd saying, "I love you...now go and return, and in love, feed my sheep."

The Discipline of Solitude

When we practice the spiritual disciplines, we stand against the basic principles of this world. Through participation in these "disciplines of grace" we come to know more deeply the intimate love of God and the sufficiency of His grace.

By Robert Hodge

Our lives are full of noise, and the noises keep us occupied, keep us from the stillness and silence that might reveal an emptiness of the soul—keep us from the healing words of God.

In the discipline of solitude, we embrace a calm, quieting of the heart, in a practice purposed for listening to God, hearing divine words that touch our brokenness, address our hidden sin, and turn our eyes to the needs of others.

Practicing the discipline of solitude doesn't mean moving to the desert, wearing a robe, and living on berries. It does, however, require us to train our minds to control the input we receive, and to actively create a state of mind and soul where we can retreat, and be alone with God.

"Solitude is more a state of mind and heart than it is a place. There is a solitude of the heart that can be maintained at all times. Crowds, or the lack of them, have little to do with this inward attentiveness," writes Richard

Foster in *Celebration of Discipline*. "In the midst of noise and confusion we are settled into a deep inner silence. Whether alone or among people, we always carry with us a portable sanctuary of the heart."

Jesus Christ made a point of being alone. In the gospels He is repeatedly seen exiting the stage for a retreat into intimate dialogue with the Father.

Matthew and Mark make it apparent that Jesus' time of solitude in the wilderness was a deliberate preparation for the years of public ministry.

Luke tells us that prior to calling the Twelve to follow as disciples, Jesus "went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God."

Burdened with news of John the Baptist's death, Jesus "withdrew from [Nazareth] in a boat to a desolate place by himself" (Matt. 14:13), and after spending a day healing the sick and feeding more than 5,000 through the miracle of the loaves and fish, Jesus "went up on the mountain by himself to pray" (Matt. 14:23).

A careful reading of the gospels reveals a pattern: life in ministry tires both body and soul, and retreat must follow and precede works of faith in the advancement of the kingdom.

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Discipline of Solitude, continued.

PRACTICING THE DISCIPLINE

It's hard getting away, so start by "reclaiming" the small periods of solitude afforded you each day: the drive to work, the first waking minutes of the day, the cup of coffee on the back porch, the lunch hour spent in your office with the door closed and the lights off.

Second, use your DayTimer to your advantage, and mark off an afternoon or morning as a purposed time of solitude. Go to a quiet park, to the Ijams Nature Center, or the Smokies, and there meditate, in silence, on a passage of Scripture.

Third, mark out an entire day for solitude. If possible go all day without speaking. Writes Foster: "Do it not as a law, but as an experiment. Note your feelings of helplessness and excessive dependence upon words to communicate. Try to find new ways to relate to others that are not dependent on words. Enjoy, savor the day. Learn from it."

If you can, create a space in your home where solitude is recognized. One friend has a special chair in the house, where family members know—when seeing him there—that he is to be helped in his solitude and left to meditate in the sacred silence upon God. Perhaps it's as simple as that, or an office or bedroom could be cleared of computer and/or TV and set aside so that family members can pursue intimacy with God.

In solitude we learn to quit talking, we clean our ears of the echoing noise of our culture, we find the inadequacy of words to express the deeper yearnings of our souls, we discover that the Spirit of God speaks to the children of God as they rest their weary heads, and look heavenward for the call to love, to obey, to draw near to the Lover of our souls.

Teaching and Learning God's Way



Chosen for Learning

By T.M. Moore

When we remember that the root meaning of the word, "disciple," is "learner," it's not hard to understand why education has played such a major part in the history of the Christian movement. Today, in fact, the Church is more involved in and more committed to Christian education than at any time in the

past. More people participate in Christian educational activities, more time and money are spent on teaching and learning, and more facilities and other material resources are devoted to the various tasks that comprise this endeavor than ever before in Church history.

That being so, why do we have so little to show for all this activity? Why is it that, year after year, the Church becomes more marginal, Christian values are more easily shrugged off, and church attendance continues to decline?

It has to do, at least in part, with our view of learning. When God chose Abraham to be the recipient of His covenant promises He had a very specific purpose in mind. He tells us about that purpose in Genesis 18:19: "For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him."

God chose Abraham so that, under his urgent teaching and instruction ("command"), his children and household (over 300 people, Gn. 14:14) would do righteousness and justice. As they did, all the promises of God's covenant – which we

examined briefly in our last installment in this space – would become the possession of Abraham and those whom he taught. Learning, as God defined it, is only complete when it issues in life-change, specifically, in lives of righteousness and justice. In the Church today we seem to be content with a view of learning that is primarily related to the mind. We want people to understand the doctrines of the faith, to grasp the overall message of Scripture, to see the subtleties of Paul's teaching – or John's or Peter's or Isaiah's – and know the difference between Christian ideas and those of the world. So we give them careful outlines, colorful handouts, useful memory devices, and clever illustrations to drive our points home. We are content to fill people's heads with knowledge, but knowledge is only one aspect of learning. Learning is not complete – and we will never experience the fullness of God's covenant blessings – until we urgently instruct and lead our learners to work the truth of God down into their lives, until righteousness and justice come out with greater and greater consistency.

God chose Abraham "so that" his children and all those entrusted to his care would walk in the way of righteousness. For this to happen, Abraham was directed to "command" his charges to bring their lives into conformity with the expectations of Him who had extended to them such exceeding great and precious promises, and who was prepared to bring those promises to full realization as they showed themselves to be trustworthy vessels by their obedience to His Word. God's view of learning, and His purpose for raising up teachers in the Church today, has not changed since those early days of His covenant. He has chosen us to teach, but to teach with such urgency, passion, clarity, and conviction that those entrusted to our care take His Word into their *lives*, not just their heads.

Preparing to Teach

Biblical Interpretation



Mark 1:35

“And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.”



Over and over, we see Jesus leaving the crowds and finding a quiet place for time with the Father.

If we desire to be more like Jesus, we must learn to do the same. This issue’s *biblical interpretation* involves more **practice** than it does word study, and in the practice of meditation and prayer, we hope you will discover the treasures our Lord sought when “rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place” to pray.

1

WORD STUDY

Use the following passages to answer the following question: If Jesus’ disciples had been asked to describe the “praying practices” of their Master, what would they have included in their description?

desolate

Matthew 3:3
Matthew 4:1
Mark 1:45
Mark 6:32
Luke 7:24

pray

Matthew 6:5-7
Matthew 14:23
Matthew 26:36-44
Luke 5:16
Luke 9:28,29
Luke 11:1-13



the treasure we seek

What is it about wilderness, or wild places, that appeals to our heart?

What role does “wilderness” play in the Old and New Testaments?

2



meditation

Choose a short passage dear to your heart, and after spending a few minutes praising God, confessing sin, and giving thanks, transition to silence. In the silence, meditate on the verse(s), asking the Spirit to talk to your own spirit.

3



journaling

Consider keeping a journal. Experiment for a week, or a month, writing brief summaries from daily reading and insights from times of reflection in solitude.

4



text



word study



commentaries



meditation



outline



presentation