

Maturing Toward Wholeness in the Inner Life

Chapter Nine

Solitude

Ushering My Soul into the Healing Silences of God

1 – I can expect at some point in life to long to go deeper with God. But I will need help in how to proceed. Solitude offers a time-tested way.

2 – What I have experienced in life with God up to now may have left me empty and unfulfilled. There may be unwanted behaviors I am unable to change.

3 – In solitude I withdraw, for a time, from social contact, physical movement, and sounds (except perhaps from the gentle sounds of nature).

4 – I offer my time and myself to God as a gift of love. Waiting in quietness and stillness, my soul comes to rest. It then reaches new clarity.

5 – For millennia solitude and silence have shaped the lives of our fathers and mothers in the Judeo-Christian faith. Silence completes solitude.

6 – Moses—God took him from Pharaoh’s court and formed him 40 years in the desert. God was shaping one of history’s most influential leaders.

7 – Being still before God can feel like a waste of time—we have so much to do! Compulsivity to achieve is driven by an unmet need to be loved.

8 – Judeo-Christian history shows that ones who have been with God, although not motivated by achievement, have led amazingly influential lives.

9 – David—His “desert” was pasturelands tending sheep. In stillness God imparted to him the foundations of Judeo-Christian worship—the Psalms.

10 – Elijah—Formed in hiddenness, God entrusted to him unusual spiritual authority. Elijah was used to turn Israel from entrenched apostasy.

11 – John the Baptist—In the wilderness until his public appearance, he catalyzed a powerful movement. His only resource—God’s hand upon him.

12 – Jesus—Like John, Jesus spent his formative years away from the limelight. Preparing to be tested by Satan, he withdrew into the desert.

13 – Jesus regularly retreated into solitude, emerged for ministry, then withdrew again. Before choosing the twelve he spent the night in prayer.

14 – To prepare for his greatest trial, Jesus withdrew to the stillness of the garden. He knew his greatest need was to be with his Father.

15 – Paul—Confronted by Christ on the road to Damascus, he had much healing and re-forming to work through. God led him into the Arabian desert.

16 – Later in life, forced by imprisonment to set aside his intense activity, Paul accomplished his most fruitful and enduring work—his writings.

17 – Anthony of Egypt—In the 3rd and 4th centuries believers faced a violent, hedonistic culture. Anthony determined not to allow it to form him.

18 – Anthony and friends withdrew in solitude to the deserts of Egypt, Syria and Palestine, seeking intimacy with God and knowledge of his ways.

19 – Crowds went out seeking wisdom from Anthony and the Desert Fathers and Mothers. Monasticism, one of history’s most transforming movements, was born.

20 – Anthony and his companions were heirs to the apostolic legacy of John the Beloved. “He who leans on Jesus’ breast hears the heart of God.”

21 – Solitude and silence distance me from activity and noise all around. Busyness, without counterbalancing stillness before God, wars against the soul.

22 – Solitude and silence usher me into the healing silences of God. I am positioned to hear my Father say “I love you”—so foundational for my healing.

23 – My compulsivities are energized by attempts to gain the love I desperately need. Others cannot meet this need—it is too great. God can!

24 – Solitude and silence offer my body the rest it needs. This increases my ability to be with God and hear him. Here is the principle of Sabbath.

25 – Much illness is due to the stress compulsive “doing” inflicts on our bodies. When the soul is disordered, the body is used in unhealthy ways.

26 – God worked for six days; then he rested. He told us to do the same. We are created to be like him. There is a rest for the people of God.

27 – What does it say about Christian faith today that one of our greatest dangers is burnout? To whom are we listening? Whom are we following?

28 – Solitude and silence make space for the kind of meditation that leads to wisdom. I live from my depths, much of which I don’t yet understand.

29 – Solitude and silence create space for listening for what God wants to say to me. One difficulty in hearing God—busyness keeps me distracted.

30 – Solitude and silence are especially important for ones called to prophetic roles. It is crucial not only to hear God, but to hear him correctly.

31 – Caution: We are not speaking here of introspection. In introspection my focus is on me. This only leads to further confusion and wounding.

32 – Introspection is pervasive in our self-absorbed culture. I gain true understanding by waiting on God, listening for what he would say to me.

33 – Solitude and silence foster clarity. Particles slowly settle after clear water is stirred. Busyness slowly dissipates as a soul becomes still.

