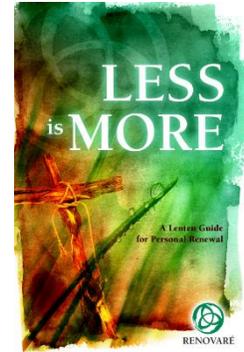


Less is More – Week One

Solitude: Less Noise, More Listening

Lent 2023

This guide for group discussion is based on the Renovare resource, Less is More, written by Pastor Kai Nilsen with contributions from Richella Parham and Rachel Quan.



Opening Questions

- What draws you to this small group or theme? What is something you hope for?
- What are some of the sources of noise in your life? Which ones are blessings? Which ones are distractions?

Opening Prayer

This responsive reading comes from the opening hymn for Wednesday worship.

One: Come and find the quiet center in the crowded life we lead,

All: Find the room for hope to enter, find the frame where we are freed:

One: Clear the chaos and the clutter, clear our eyes, that we can see

All: All the things that really matter, be at peace, and simply be. Amen.

Introduction:

Multi-media. Multi-sensory. Multi-tasking. We are bombarded on a daily basis with sounds, sights, and smells. As exciting and stimulating as life in the 21st century can be, it can also drain our soul's resources.

The discipline of solitude is a purposeful retreating from all the stimuli of everyday life, withdrawing to a place of quiet and rest, if only for a few minutes at a time. Practicing this discipline may seem foreign to those who are accustomed to being perpetually connected via phone, email, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. But all this connection produces a great deal of noise in our minds and hearts — and it can dull our ability to hear God's voice.

Imagine yourself sitting next to a loved one, saying nothing. There are times when no words need be spoken. It's enough to be together. Nothing spoken. Yet, nothing left unsaid. That's the discipline of solitude. Less Noise/More Listening.

What Does the Bible Say?

Spend a minute in silence. When the group is ready, read each phrase slowly. Pause for a moment of silence before reading the next phrase.

Psalm 46

Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I am

Be still and know

Be still

Be

Solitude is not something you must hope for in the future. Rather, it is a deepening of the present, and unless you look for it in the present, you will never find it.

– Thomas Merton, monk

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

- How does quiet and solitude help us focus on who we are as God's people?
- What keeps you from moving to that quiet place? Desire? Logistics of life?

Quiet can be renewing but also unsettling. Thoughts may flood your mind that you would rather keep at bay. Rather than avoid quiet and solitude, place those thoughts and emotions on a piece of paper. Looking at them ask, "What do I need to do or who can I talk to about what I just wrote down?"

What Do Others Say?

Our Guides

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 inward attentiveness. -Richard Foster, Celebration of Discipline

- Imagine what it would be like to be in a continual state of solitude and connection to God? How would that affect how you approach your work, your relationships, your daily life?
- Do you know anyone who seems to approach life in that way? What distinguishes their life, their attitude and their interactions from others?

Rather than simply teach us how to be alone with ourselves, Christianity teaches us to embrace solitude as a means of connecting with God and, ultimately, our purpose. In solitude, we discover that we are never alone because God is always with us. – Jeremy Langford, Seeds of Faith: Practices to Grow a Healthy Spiritual Life

If you know someone like that, make a point of talking with them about how they got to that place in life and that state of mind.

What Do Others Say?

Personal Reflections written by Pastor Kai Nilsen, Richella Parham and Rachel Quan

A confession: I have contemplative envy! I'm riddled with jealousy over those who seem to effortlessly move from active engagement in the world to active listening to God through times of quiet and solitude. I'd rather be studying, serving, and engaging others in life-giving conversations than just sitting and being quiet. For years, I didn't see the point. Even when I did begin to understand the reasoning behind it, I couldn't talk myself into it. What's the benefit? What will I gain? Will it work?

My questions uncovered the false assumptions I had about solitude in particular, and the spiritual disciplines in general. I was assuming a cause and effect relationship with God. I am quiet. You, God, speak. I give. God, you reward. If I didn't get the response I wanted, I would say something like "That didn't work" and move on to something else.

Then, one day, my daughter said, "Daddy, come and sit with me." I assumed she wanted me to do something. She just wanted me next to her.

Aha. So does God. Solitude became God's invitation to "come and sit with me." If, in the quiet, I heard something from God, I was grateful. But, it was enough just to be together

Does wanting something or needing something from God keep you from just being with God?

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

- How does that image of a daughter wanting to be next to her daddy, shape your thoughts about solitude?
- What have been your greatest challenges in finding solitude?
- If you have had the opportunity to practice solitude, what have you discovered? Have you had any insights or leadings that could be God's way of speaking to you?
- What is the greatest source of "noise" in your life? What tangible steps can you take to diminish that noise and be more open to the voice of God?
- What have you learned from others (including this group) about how to practice solitude?
- What other faith practices do you follow regularly or in the season of Lent?

Faith Practice: Solitude

If you are accustomed to solitude, make sure you build it in to the rhythm of the next week. If you are not, here is a place to start:

- Find a quiet time, maybe before others wake up or after they are asleep.
- Choose a place that is good for your soul and removed, as much as possible, from the noise of the world. Create a place in your home. If you love nature, go to a beautiful spot.
- Sit in quiet beginning with five minutes and increasing as you become more comfortable.
- Breathe deeply, focusing as you start, on each inward and outward breath.
- As thoughts come, imagine a little conveyor belt next to you. Place the thought on the conveyor belt and let it go away, knowing you can get back to it when finished.
- Some people find that focusing on a word (peace, love, etc.) or an image allows them to bring their focus back when their minds wander. Whatever is helpful for you, do it.
- When finished, say something like, "Thank you God, for being present in my life."

Closing Prayer

Share the date, time and location for the next gathering.

Holy God, you are with us in times of noise and times of solitude. You are a steadfast presence of love and grace in all of life. Walk with us and guide us as we journey through this season of Lent. Help us to become more fully present to you in the faith practices we explore in this time. Bless our time together as a group. Bless the days between now and when we are together again. Amen.

Faith Practice Questions:

- What do you think about this practice?
- What do you think is the core intention, or hope?
- What is helpful about the practice? What is challenging or difficult? What do you wonder about?
- What are some other ways to do this practice, keeping in mind the purpose?

Come and Find the Quiet Center. Text: Shirley Erena Murray, (c) 1992 Hope Publishing Company. CCLI License #404667.

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