Practices of Jesus: Silence and Solitude

Implement a 60 second period of silence into service right before speaker comes up

Vision: Before we get started tonight, I would just like to invite us into a moment of aligning ourselves with what God has prepared for us tonight. We are going to eliminate distractions for just 60 seconds – no phones, no whispering, no underscore music. Just silence. 60 seconds of asking God to do a work in your life tonight. End with “Holy Spirit Come”

(THIS HAPPENS BEFORE THE BUMPER VIDEO)

INTRO

**STRONG/CONFIDENT** A study done by the University of Arizona over the course of 8 years showed that the average person speaks about 16,000 words per day. (optional repeat SIXTEEN THOUSAND words!!) Multiply that by how many people are in the world and you have roughly 124 TRILLION words spoken around the world each day. And for you and me, if you take the life expectancy in the US at 79 years – we find that on average, a person speaks a total of 455 million words in their lifetime. Those words make up a multitude of things from jokes and stories, to passing comments and life-altering advice. It’s safe to say there’s power in the words we speak so it’s important we are always intentional to build others up with what we say.

BUILD TENSION

**SOFT/PAUSE** But what about the space between those words? The still silence where we are left alone with our thoughts, feelings and emotions. Where you can hear the faint buzz from the appliance down the hall, and you notice your heartbeat and breathing patterns while the world around you presses on in the form of a ticking clock on the wall. I would bet many of us here in this space try to avoid that silence at all costs. Maybe you’re in constant fear of missing out on what your friends are doing. I know some of you here just HAVE to always be doing something and refuse to sit still. Maybe you refuse to sit with the death of your family member because it’s just too painful. Perhaps you avoid that silence because you don’t know how to process through the abuse you have endured in your life. **PAUSE.** Don’t forget about those anxious thoughts that flood your mind any time you get to relax. Some of you are trying to avoid wrestling with that shame you feel from the addiction no one knows about. There is a chance some of you just become angry at the brokenness of the world if you aren’t distracted from it. All of those things can be covered up momentarily by chasing after the noise of the world and refusing to sit in the silence. But **ONLY** momentarily – because whatever it is, will still be there when it’s quiet.

**PRAY**

If you are new to Northview Students, we occasionally have these one-off messages called “Practices of Jesus” where we take time to intentionally pursue a study of how Jesus modeled different spiritual disciplines (i.e. Prayer, Fasting, Meditation, etc). It is our belief as Christians that we should set out to live a life that is reflective of the life that Jesus lived. And it’s our hope as pastors, staff and adult leaders to equip you all to do so.

Open your Bibles to Matthew 4. Here we find the beginning moments of Jesus’ ministry on earth after He was baptized. It wasn’t anything spectacular that drew in hundreds and thousands of people. Jesus didn’t perform miracles right away or even address the religious leaders that were there doubting and insulting Him. Here’s what happens instead:

**SUPPORTING TEXT**

Matthew 4:1-3

“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

Feel free to read the rest of the story (through v. 11) but emphasize that we are focusing on 1-3

**BIG** THIS is how this Jesus guy starts it off? This is the first thing He does? Why would the spirit lead Him into the wilderness? You’re trying to tell me that he didn’t eat for FORTY DAYS and still fought off the devil?

LISTEN, I would be lying if I said I have never asked those questions myself. To be fair, it all seems a little bit out of place at first glance. But we believe that the Bible is truth. We, by faith, know that what is said in here ACTUALLY happened. And it isn’t until you look at it a little deeper that you understand the purpose of the time Jesus spent in the wilderness. The word ‘wilderness’ here comes from the Greek word “Eremos” (say it with me “Eremos”) which has a variety of translations such as the ‘desolate place’, ‘lonely place,’ or ‘the quiet place’... Eremos. Whatever word you want to use, just know that Jesus was there for forty days without food or drink. After these days were over, the devil himself came to Jesus to tempt Him when he was hungry, without water, and without social interaction for forty days; he HAD to have been so weak! Right? John Marc Comer – Teaching Pastor of Practicing the Way, is convinced this is where many of us get it wrong when it comes to this story here – we are under the assumption that the tempter is coming to Jesus in His greatest moment of weakness. Instead, Pastor John Mark points out that the wilderness or “Eremos” isn’t the place of weakness but the place of strength. **REPEAT** Perhaps a little perspective shift here would help you see that the spirit led Jesus into that desolate place because those forty days of silence and solitude with the Father were exactly what Jesus needed to go toe-to-toe with the devil. Physically, Jesus was at the breaking point. He was human! **PAUSE** But spiritually, Jesus was stronger than ever.

How? How was Jesus strong AT ALL at this point? Some of you are probably thinking “because it was Jesus and He can do anything!” Well, you’re right – he can. But what if I told you that Jesus didn’t rely on His divinity in this moment – meaning that it wasn’t just because Jesus is the Son of God that He was able to combat the devil. What if I told you that each of us in this room here tonight possess the capability to fight against temptation in this way through practice of silence and solitude? Not by our own doing, but in total reliance on God.

When was the last time you felt strong spiritually? Yesterday? Last month? Years ago? I’m talking the kind of strength in your soul that nothing in this world could deter you. When was the last time you were able to look temptation straight in the face and say, “Not today!”? What would it look like if together, we became a community of faith that intentionally sought out the practices of Jesus? Friends, I think the answer is right in front of us. We would see that **SILENCE AND SOLITUDE STRENGTHENS OUR SOUL**

I want to make a point of clarification. The word solitude is not a hall pass for you introverts to binge watch Netflix all day long. It’s not an excuse to play video games for 10 hours a day. Community is still ESSENTIAL to our lives and it’s important to partake in that. Solitude is not the same as unhealthy isolation. Solitude is intentional time alone with God. In the silence of the Eremos.

It was in the silence of that desolate place that Jesus could hear God’s voice. 1 Kings 19:11-12 says, “… go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for He is about to pass by.” Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.” The voice of God speaking to us isn’t this overpowering, thundering voice from the clouds that gets depicted in various cartoons. It isn’t at the forefront of all the noise this world blasts at us. It is found in the still silence of the Eremos.

The story of Jesus in the wilderness ends with Jesus refusing to fall into Satan’s temptation of self-sufficiency (stone to bread), recklessness (jumping from high point), and greed (personal kingdom). But Jesus doesn’t stop this practice because of one victory. Look at what the Gospel of Mark says about the day after Jesus returns from this solitude.

Mark 1:35-36

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place – the Eremos, where he prayed.”

Jesus was just in this baron place for 40 days and 40 nights without any food or drink, fought off temptation 3 different times and came back only to return there the next day. Even though the wilderness was a place of trauma and suffering, Jesus knew that making this a part of his rhythm was essential to strengthening His soul. He didn’t avoid the memory of being hungry and thirsty in the desert for 40 days. Instead, he pursued a retreat with God in a place that all distractions ceased to exist. Not only did Jesus do this again the next day but Luke 5:15-16 says, “Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sickness. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” Did you see that? Jesus OFTEN withdrew to that place of silence and solitude. It was a regular thing for Him in His life because it’s where He found rest in the ever-growing demand for His attention. Jesus models for us to partake in MORE silence and solitude the busier we get rather than eliminate it all together.

STORY ABOUT EFFECTS OF PARTICIPATING IN SILENCE AND SOLITUDE

A friend of mine who is a pastor in Fort Wayne told me a few years ago that there was this one week that he was so busy with school and work that he skipped lunch every day to keep working and stayed late after everyone had gone home. He said that he had never felt so anxious before in his life. He felt like he was always one step behind and playing catch up while trying to balance every other thing that life threw his way. Can anyone relate? He did this for 4 days that week. Then Friday came and he had this strange urge to take a break. Like an actual break. He decided that he was going to go to the park and sit and in silence for that next hour instead of trying to meet his upcoming deadlines. He left his phone in the car, and for that hour did absolutely nothing. He recalled the feeling of the breeze on his face he hadn’t felt in what seemed like months. He told me about how the smallest blade of grass pointed his focus back to the God that created it within this self-sustaining system on earth. He shared that his soul was refreshed and that he was set free of this anxious feeling that had haunted him that week. Once he returned back to his office, he was more energized and motivated than he had been in a long time.

It doesn’t have to be planned. For you Type-A people in the room, you can absolutely plan it. But it doesn’t have to be. It’s also not physically/emotionally taxing. Just an intimate time of rest.

That is what this practice is all about. How nice does that sound? Yet not many of us take the time to do it. It is a literal invitation from Jesus to find rest through all of life’s turmoil.

Mark 6:31 highlights that invitation from Jesus to His disciples… “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” True. Rest. In this busy, ever moving world there is an invitation to slow down and pursue a restorative rest. There is an opportunity in front of you to retreat into that rest. Will you take it? It shouldn’t be this big dramatic thing in your schedule. It shouldn’t become a ‘have-to’ because that would be draining, not life-giving. This is meant to be a time for restoration. **SILENCE AND SOLITUDE STRENGTHENS OUR SOUL.**

I want to take a minute to address a very prevalent struggle in the room tonight. We are experiencing a mental epidemic. A PEW study from the last few years has shown that nearly 40% of America’s teens face anxiety disorders in some capacity. It has also shown that 97% of reported teens see anxiety as either a major or a minor problem. NINETY-SEVEN PERCENT. And I want to validate everything that you have on your plates. You have expectations that no other generation has ever had at your age. To know what you’re doing with the rest of your lives. To compromise on your beliefs in life because culture is diving head first into a melting pot of justification of sin. And you have access to more information than any other generation has ever had at your age. Any question you want answered can be answered with a quick google search. The algorithms on social media feed you everything you think you need/want to know. The real world is being experienced at a younger age year after year and you are taking on that brokenness right now. I just want to say that I am sorry and I see you. Jesus sees you. I can’t pretend like I know what you deal with but what I can do is offer advice that has helped me. There was a message I heard a while back that addressed this topic. It was about what to do when your anxious thoughts are getting the best of your mentality. What to do when you are constantly surrounded by your own ‘what if…?’ questions. Maybe you’re here tonight and you’re thinking, “THIS is exactly why I avoid that silence you’re talking about!” The advice was to answer your own questions. Answer those what-if questions.

“What if I fail?” – “I might get embarrassed; I might be disappointed or disappoint others. But I will learn from it and move on.”

“What if my boyfriend/girlfriend breaks up with me?” – “Then I’m single.”

“What if I’m single?” – “Then I will trust God with my relationship status.”

“What if I can’t?” – “Then I might mess up?”

“What if I mess up?” – ETC…

My point is that if you find yourself sitting with those anxious thoughts consistently, go through this process because I almost guarantee that the logical answers you come up with aren’t as scary as your mind makes them out to be.

Don’t avoid the silence because you’re scared of the answers you might get.

Embrace the silence. Turn away from the external noise of the busy world and from the internal noise of your own anxious thoughts and refocus back on God. There are a few ways to put this into practice.

1. Digital Detox: Commit to turning your phone off 1 hour/day and pursue a place of silence where you can be with God. Our Carmel Campus Pastor told me that he turns off his phone for an hour a day, a day a week, and a week a month. Sounds crazy right?? But that’s his way to pursue silence and solitude.
2. Retreat into Silence: When you feel those anxious thoughts creeping in, intentionally eliminate internal and external noise by sitting and reading/resting and pursuing the Lord.
3. Take a vow of silence: Find an extended period of time that you can go without speaking or typing out a text. This is a great way to refocus your intentions of thoughts and surrender negative emotions to the Lord.

It’s going to be weird, hard and potentially awkward because for many of you – this is brand new. Embrace it. In a world that is always moving and is always producing noise. Take time to pursue silence when you can and strengthen your soul.

**Pray**