



The
FLOW
Adult CURRICULUM

#22

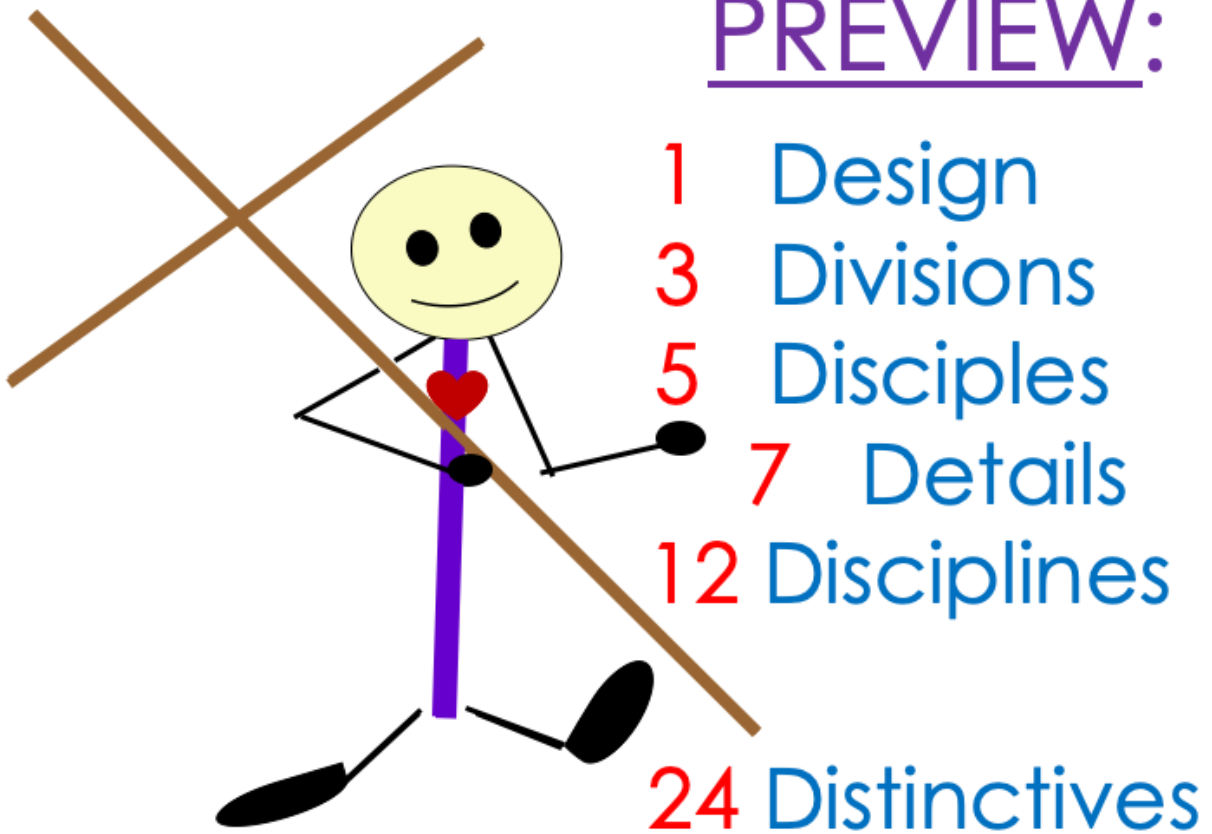
Solitude

Psalm 23

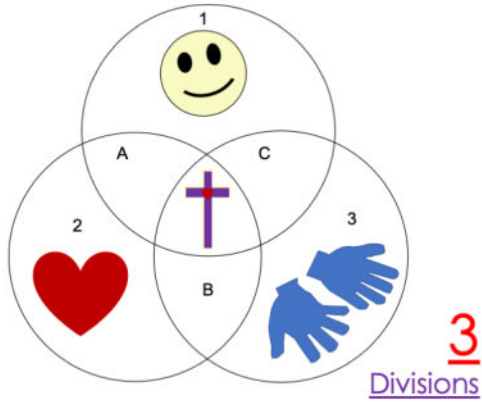
(Come And See Christianity book pages 70-71)

The FLOW

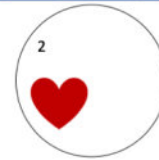
PREVIEW:



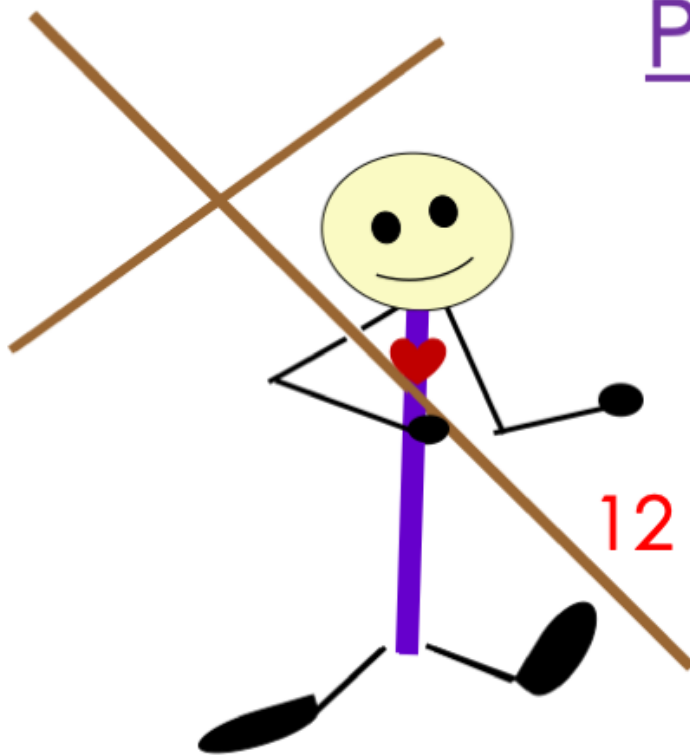
SECTION FIVE: 12 Disciplines



The
HEART



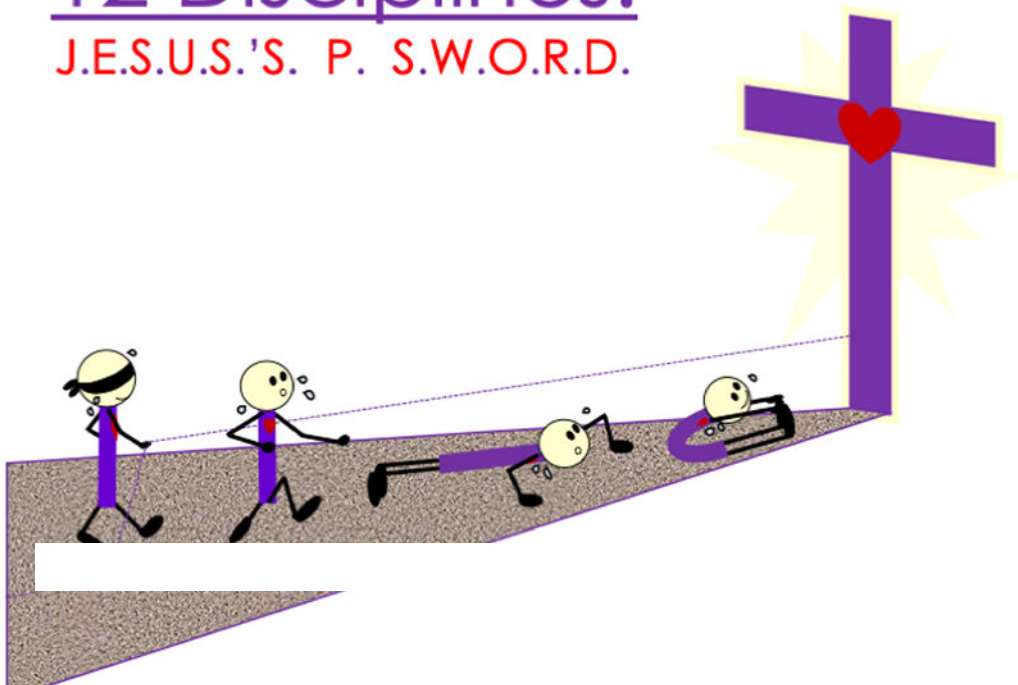
PREVIEW:



12 Disciplines

12 DISCIPLINES: Here are some heart exercises for you...
These discipleship “**disciplines**” can help Christians to **strengthen** their **faith** and grow as missional & maturing Christ-followers.

12 Disciplines:
J.E.S.U.S.'S P. S.W.O.R.D.





Solitude

SOLITUDE:

Getting **alone** with **God**
and **His Word** is the **best way**
to **get to know Him...** Even more,
quiet time with God
helps us to surrender and
intimately & ultimately worship Him.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17so that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

INTRO:

Welcome to another major transition point in your discipleship journey and our Come And See Christianity curriculum. By way of review, thus far, we have gone through Section One's single lesson on God's divine DESIGN, then Section Two's three unifying and introductory lessons on every human's 3 DIVISIONS (our HEAD, HEART, and HANDS); we then followed up with the universally inclusive definitions and descriptions of humanity's 5 types of people, also known as biblical DISCIPLES (the LOST, LOVER, LEARNER, LEADER, and LIFER), each having received their own lesson. Next came what we just completed, Section Four's 7 lessons on Christianity's fundamental, knowledge-based truths, also known as The DETAILS (FOUNDATIONS, FRAMEWORK, FACTS, FIGHT, FAITH, FAMILY, and FOREVER).

Now, in the same way that Sections 1-4 (and their 16 compiled lessons) all concentrated on aspects of "The HEAD" and the truth of God's Word, Section 5 will contain 12 complementary lessons (**J.E.S.U.S.'S. P.S.W.O.R.D.**) that focus on HEART exercises, also known as spiritual DISCIPLINES, that can help to grow and strengthen the Christian's truth-filled, loving, and faithfully obedient HEART...

12 HEART Strengthening DISCIPLINES:

1. *Journaling*
2. *Eat-nothing (Fasting)*
3. *Scripture intake*
4. *Understudy of Scripture*
5. *Solitude*
6. *Stewardship*
7. *Prayer*
8. *Serving*
9. *Worship*
10. *Outreach*
11. *Relationships*
12. *Development*

PRAYER:

LORD, we seek to bless You with all that is within us. Help us here, we pray, to be that blessing as we come to better understand You and Your eternal truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Help us to see with Your eyes and love with Your love, all that You would reveal to us through Your Word, Your will, and Your ways. May we grow in our grasp of Your realities, Your means of restoration, and Your mission of reproduction. In the holy name of Jesus, we pray. Amen and Amen

CONTEXT:

Macro

Spiritual Disciplines

(The content herein is predominantly derived and expanded upon from Dr. Don Whitney's *Spiritual Disciplines* & Dr. Chuck Lawless' *Disciplined Warriors*.)

I. SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES ... FOR THE PURPOSE OF GODLINESS

*Ours is an undisciplined age. The old disciplines are breaking down.
... We **need** the rugged strength of Christian **character**
that can come only from discipline.*

- V. Raymond Edman

Discipline without direction is drudgery!

The Bible says of God's elect, "*For those whom He foreknew He also predestined **to be conformed** to the image of His Son"*
(Romans 8:29)

Although God will grant Christlikeness to us when Jesus returns, until then He intends for us to grow toward it.

We aren't merely to wait for holiness; we're to pursue it.

All who come to God trusting in the person and work of Jesus to make them right with God are given the Holy Spirit (see Ephesians 1:13-14). The presence of the Holy Spirit causes all those in whom He resides to have new holy hungers they didn't have before.

Hebrews 12:14 is clear:

Anyone who is not striving for holiness will not see the Lord!

The urgent question every Christian should ask is, *“How then shall I pursue holiness... How can I become more like Christ?”* God’s Word offers a clear answer in...

1 Timothy 4:7

“Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.”

The only road to Christian maturity and godliness (a.k.a. Christlikeness & holiness) passes through the practice of the Spiritual Disciplines.

Godliness is the goal of the Disciplines... remember this and the ***Spiritual Disciplines become delights vs drudgery.***

II. WHAT ARE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES?

Spiritual Disciplines are those practices found in Scripture (and in application) that promote spiritual growth among believers in The Gospel.

Spiritual Disciplines are the **habits of devotion** and **experiential Christianity** that have been **practiced** by the people of God since biblical times.

The Disciplines could be described in several ways:

- “First, the Bible prescribes both **personal** and **interpersonal** Spiritual Disciplines.”
- **Spiritual Disciplines are activities, NOT attitudes.**
 - Disciplines are practices... NOT character qualities, graces, or “fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22-23).
 - **Disciplines are things you do!**

The goal of practicing a given Discipline, is not about “DOing” as much as it is about “BEing,” that is, BEing like Jesus. But the biblical way to grow in BEing more like Jesus is through the rightly motivated doing of the biblical Spiritual Disciplines.

- We do specific practices *sometimes* that cultivate being more like Jesus *all the time*.
- Spiritual Disciplines are practices taught or modeled in the Bible. (Without this limitation, we might call anything we fancy a Spiritual Discipline.)
- Spiritual Disciplines found in Scripture are sufficient for knowing & experiencing God & growing in Christlikeness.
 - See 2 Timothy 3:16-17
 - See 2 Peter 1:3 & Philippians 4:13
- Spiritual Disciplines are practices derived from the gospel, NOT divorced from the gospel.
- ***Spiritual Disciplines are means, not ends.***

Godliness is both closeness to Christ and conformity to Christ.

CAUTION: *While we cannot be godly without the practice of the Disciplines, we can practice the Disciplines without being godly...*

So, the Spiritual Disciplines are those personal and interpersonal activities given by God in the Bible as the sufficient means believers in Jesus Christ are to use in the Spirit-filled, gospel-driven pursuit of godliness, that is, closeness to Christ and conformity to Christ.

III. SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES... AS MEANS TO GODLINESS

Godliness comes through discipline.

- God uses **three primary catalysts for changing us** and conforming us into Christlikeness, but only one is largely under our control.
 - #1: God uses people to change people.**
 - *"Iron sharpens iron," says Proverbs 27:17.*
 - *Sometimes God uses our friends to sharpen us into more Christlike living, and sometimes He uses our enemies to file away our rough, ungodly edges.*
 - #2: God uses circumstance(s) as His catalyst for change.**

#3: God uses spiritual disciplines to change His people.

*God uses spiritual disciplines
to work on His people from the **inside out**.*

Colossians 1:29 illustrates how **the efforts of a Christian & the work of God—can occur simultaneously** in a person indwelt by the Holy Spirit (cf. Philippians 2:13).

See here divine grace AND human responsibility...

*As physical disciplines promote bodily strength, so
the Spiritual Disciplines promote godliness.*

- Think of the Spiritual Disciplines as ways by which we can spiritually place ourselves in the path of God's grace and seek Him, much **like Zacchaeus** placed himself physically in Jesus' path and sought Him. The Lord, by His Spirit, still travels down certain paths that He has ordained and revealed in Scripture. We call these paths the Spiritual Disciplines...

*If we will place ourselves on these paths and look
for Him there by faith, we can expect
to encounter Him.*

IV. SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES... GOD'S WILL FOR CHRISTIANS

*"Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness"
makes it plain that **this is a command of God**, not merely a suggestion.*

- **Holiness is not an option for those who claim to be children of the Holy One** (see 1 Peter 1:15-16), so neither are the means of holiness—that is, the *Spiritual Disciplines*—an option.
- Jesus is the model of discipline in & for godliness.
- Many professing Christians are spiritually undisciplined and seem to have little Christlike fruit and power in their lives. Yet, many of them are remarkably disciplined in other areas of their lives.
- Too many Christians trivialize their effectiveness for the kingdom of God through a lack of discipline.
- The danger of neglecting the Spiritual Disciplines is the danger of bearing little spiritual fruit—your life counting little for the sake of the kingdom.

"I'm not afraid of failure. I'm afraid of succeeding at things that don't matter."

- William Carey

"Freedom and discipline have come to be regarded as mutually exclusive, when in fact freedom is not at all the opposite, but rather the final reward, of discipline."

Elisabeth Elliot

If your picture of a disciplined Christian is one of a grim, tight-lipped, joyless half-robot, then you've missed the point.

*By means of the Disciplines,
let the truths of The Gospel restore your soul.*

Micro

It seems a bit odd and out of place to discuss SOLITUDE with others... There is irony to be found in our collective focus and digging into a topic that is, by definition, in a secular sense, "the state of being alone; seclusion; a place absent of human activity." By contrast, in the context of biblical Christianity, SOLITUDE is not only defined and described differently, as we will see, for the transformed Christ follower, God-honoring SOLITUDE is divinely designed to biblically, missionally, and passionately strengthen our personal relationship with the One and only, living and loving God.

His name is Jesus.

Moreover, He has declared Himself to have "*all authority in heaven and on earth*" [Matthew 28:18], while simultaneously promising (to His born again "*ambassadors*" [2 Corinthians 5:20], that He "*will be WITH YOU ALWAYS, even to the end of the age*" [Matthew 28:20]. Thus, per Creator Christ and His inspired Word (2 Timothy 3:16-17), every genuine Christian is guaranteed to never be alone – especially when in biblical SOLITUDE.

Loneliness is inner emptiness. Solitude is inner fulfillment.

Richard J. Foster

Message

While much of the Bible's inspired instruction comes through God's direct commands, that is not His only way of teaching. Much of what the LORD has for the equipping of His disciples is delivered via the power of demonstration. In short, examples (both good and bad) often help to inform, inspect, and inspire. Case in point, a walk through the Psalms (i.e. Psalm 23) is a wonderful way to engage, experience, and exemplify the sanctifying power and purpose of biblical SOLITUDE.

"The man who fears to be alone will never be anything but lonely, no matter how much he may surround himself with people. But the man who learns, in solitude and recollection, to be at peace with his own loneliness, and to prefer its reality to the illusion of merely natural companionship, comes to know the invisible companionship of God. Such a one is alone with God in all places, and he alone truly enjoys the companionship of other men, because he loves them in God..."

Thomas Merton

*I commend solitude to any of you who are seeking salvation, first, **that you may study well your case as in the sight of God.***

Few men truly know themselves as they really are.

Most people have seen themselves in a looking-glass, but there is another looking-glass, which gives true reflections, into which few men look. To study one's self in the light of God's Word, and carefully to go over one's condition, examining both the inward and the outward sins, and using all the tests which are given us in the Scriptures, would be a very healthy exercise; but how very few care to go through it!

C.H. Spurgeon

BIG IDEA:

Quality quiet time, alone with God, helps Christians to surrender, as well as intimately and ultimately worship the One true God.

PREVIEW:

1. Solitude's WHO?
2. Solitude's HOW?
3. Solitude's WHY?

TEXT:

Psalm 23

1The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. 3He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 4Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. 5You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. 6Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

1. Solitude's WHO?

Illustration:

If you are not being missional about SOLITUDE,
you don't know what you are missing.

Put yourself in Jesus' sandals for a moment.

*People are clamoring for your help and have many real needs. You are able to meet all those needs. Can you ever feel justified in pulling away to be alone? **Jesus did.** We love to feel wanted. We love the sense of importance/power/indispensability (pick one) that comes from doing something no one else can do. But Jesus did not succumb to those temptations. He knew the importance of discipling Himself to be alone.*

Donald S. Whitney

Explanation:

A. Christ modeled missional SOLITUDE.

Jesus told His followers, "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (Matthew 6:6, NIV).

"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where He prayed" (Mark 1:35, NIV).

"Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, He called His disciples to Him and chose 12 of them, whom He also designated apostles" (Luke 6:12-13, NIV).

"...crowds of people came to hear Him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed" (Luke 5:15-16, NIV).

"As soon as Jesus heard the news (that John the Baptist was beheaded), He left in a boat to a remote area to be alone" (Matthew 14:10-13, NLT).

"Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and His disciples followed Him. On reaching the place, He said to them, 'Pray that you will not fall into temptation.' He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, 'Father, if You are willing, take this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done'" (Luke 22:39-42, NIV).

B. Christians should be Christlike when it comes to biblical SOLITUDE.

John 20:21

As the Father has sent Me, so now I send you.

Application:

It has been said that no great work in literature or in science was ever wrought by a man who did not love solitude. We may lay it down as an elemental principle of religion, that no large growth in holiness was ever gained by one who did not take time to be often long alone with God.

Austin Phelps

2. Solitude's HOW?

Illustration:

“On the whole, the longing for solitude is a sign that there still is spirit in a person and is the measure of what spirit there is... In our day we shrink from solitude to the point that no use for it is known other than as a punishment for criminals.”

Soren Kierkegaard

Retire from the world each day to some private spot, even if it be only the bedroom (for a while I retreated to the furnace room for want of a better place). Stay in the secret place till the surrounding noises begin to fade out of your heart and a sense of God's presence envelops you... Listen for the inward Voice till you learn to recognize it. Stop trying to compete with others. Give yourself to God and then be what and who you are without regard to what others think... Learn to pray inwardly every moment. After a while you can do this even while you work... Read less (in general), but more (in terms) of what is important to your inner life. Never let your mind remain scattered for very long. Call home your roving thoughts. Gaze on Christ with the eyes of your soul. Practice spiritual concentration. All the above is contingent upon a right relation to God through Christ and daily meditation on the Scriptures. Lacking these, nothing will help us; granted these, the discipline recommended will go far to neutralize the evil effects of externalism, to make us acquainted with God and our own souls.

A.W. Tozer

Explanation:

A. BIBLICALLY (Our Blueprint)

There are many different forms of and purposes for SOLITUDE. Cultural versions include false religions, self-discovery, incarceration's solitary confinement, etc. To be clear, **biblical SOLITUDE is different.**

Solitude is the Spiritual Discipline of voluntary and temporary withdrawing to privacy for spiritual purposes. The period of solitude may last only a few minutes or for days. As with silence, solitude may be sought in order to participate without interruptions in other Spiritual Disciplines, or just to be alone with God.

Donald S. Whitney

B. MISSIONALLY (Our Bullseye)

Healthy and holy **Christian SOLITUDE is distinguished and defined by its ultimate aim; namely, bringing glory to God.** Any other foundational objective, regardless of how moral, practical, or therapeutic it may be, is NOT eternally missional. Consequently, Christianity stands alone in the biblical championing of God-honoring SOLITUDE.

“Contemplation means rest, suspension of activity, withdrawal into the mysterious interior solitude in which the soul is absorbed in the immense and fruitful silence of God and learns something of the secret of His perfections, less by seeing than by fruitive love.”

Thomas Merton

C. PASSIONATELY (Our Barometer)

The Discipline of silence is the voluntary and temporary abstention from speaking so that certain spiritual goals might be sought. Sometimes silence is observed in order to read, write, pray, and so on. Though there is no outward speaking, there are internal dialogues with self and with God. This can be called “outward silence.” Other times silence is maintained not only outwardly but also inwardly so that God’s voice might be heard more clearly.

Donald S. Whitney

There is a world of difference between the silence of apathy and the silence of passion!

John Piper

Application:

All the knowledge in the world only goes so far. Facts are indeed our friends. Understanding truly is empowering... and truth beautifully rules. Even so, there comes a time when action and obedience are required. Think about it. **Conceptual accuracy is no substitute for experienced expertise.** To that end, with regards to Christian SOLITUDE, until one actually invests their Head, Heart, and Hands in consistent, quality quiet-time with the LORD, they are empty talkers, wishful thinkers, or worse – all missing out on the amazing grace and spiritual growth that will only be realized in, through and after one’s saturation in biblical SOLITUDE.

“...nothing is more dangerous than solitude: there our imagination, always disposed to rise, taking a new flight on the wings of fancy, pictures to us a chain of beings of whom we seem the most inferior. All things appear greater than they really are, and all seem superior to us. This operation of the mind is quite natural: we so continually feel our own imperfections, and fancy we perceive in others the qualities we do not possess, attributing to them also all that we enjoy ourselves, that by this process we form the idea of a perfect, happy man,—a man, however, who only exists in our own imagination.”

Thomas Carlyle

“This solitude that you can acquire and should cultivate, this opportunity for contemplation of which you should take advantage, will be useful to you only insofar as you can substitute for those questions posed by the student for the teacher, questions posed by yourself for yourself.”

Blaise Pascal

3. Solitude's WHY?

Illustration:

Knowing why we do certain things and understanding how important those endeavors are tends to strengthen our resolve and our commitments. Let us look to Christ and BE inspired by His steadfast example and witness.

“In solitude, struggles occur that no one else knows about. Inner battles are fought here... God, who probes our deepest thoughts during protracted segments of solitude, opens our eyes to things that need attention. It is here He makes us aware of those things we try to hide from others.”

Charles Swindoll

Explanation:

1) Solitude brings rewards. *(Matthew 6:6) This doesn't mean that we should avoid public prayer entirely, but that the greatest rewards belong to the person who seeks and spends time alone with the Father... Jesus' example underscores the place solitude played in His life. . . and suggests the place it should have in ours.*

2) Solitude is a worthy priority. *(Mark 1:35) Jesus could've prayed anywhere, of course—and He often did pray in public, among crowds, where others could hear and perhaps participate. But the Gospels show us that He made solitude a priority. If He did, shouldn't we?*

3) Solitude provides perspective. *(Luke 6:12-13) Facing a big decision such as which of His many followers to choose as His closest disciples, Jesus sought solitude and spent the night in prayer and clearly found the perspective He needed for such a decision.*

4) Solitude aids recovery from activity. *(Luke 5:15-16) Too often, we keep doing and doing, going and going, to the point of illness or collapse. Jesus knew that solitude is an antidote to activity, aiding a return from chronic “human doing” to our created state of “human being.”*

5) Solitude heals. *(Matthew 14:10-13) Solitude is a healing place where God can reach us and help us all the more because we're alone with Him.*

6) Solitude prepares for the impossible. *(Luke 22:39-42) What a lesson there is in those few verses. Jesus wanted His closest friends (and their prayer support) nearby, even as He sought solitude and communion with His Father. We also may discover, when facing an overwhelming task, that solitude empowers us to surrender, persevere and find strength we didn't know we had.*

- GuidePosts.org

Application:

*Solitude is the furnace of transformation.
We do not take the spiritual life seriously if we do not
set aside some time to be with God and listen to Him.
Henri Nouwen*

*There are times when solitude is better than society, and silence is wiser than speech. We should be better Christians if we were more alone, waiting upon God, and gathering through meditation on His Word spiritual strength for labour in his service. We ought to muse upon the things of God, because we thus get the real nutriment out of them. . . . Why is it that some Christians, although they hear many sermons, make but slow advances in the divine life? Because they neglect their closets, and do not thoughtfully meditate on God's Word. They love the wheat, but they do not grind it; they would have the corn, but they will not go forth into the fields to gather it; the fruit hangs upon the tree, but they will not pluck it; the water flows at their feet, but they will not stoop to drink it.
From such folly deliver us, O Lord. . . .
C.H. Spurgeon*

*The worship of God does not always require words, sounds, or actions. Sometimes worship consists of a
God-focused stillness and hush.
Donald S. Whitney*

*The practices of solitude, silence and listening to God started to slow me down and enabled me to focus my attention more and more on coming to Jesus and following him rather than talking about Jesus and slaving away for him...The focus was less and less on our activities for him and more on our attentiveness to him, on walking with him, and on working with him.
Alan Fadling*

CLOSE:

Some are greatly affected when in company; but have nothing that bears any manner of proportion to it in secret, in close meditation, prayer and conversing with God when alone, and separated from the world. A true Christian doubtless delights in religious fellowship and Christian conversation, and finds much to affect his heart in it; but he also delights at times to retire from all mankind, to converse with God in solitude. And this has peculiar advantages for fixing his heart, and engaging his affections. True religion disposes persons to be much alone in solitary places for holy meditation and prayer... It is the nature of true grace... to delight in retirement and secret conversations with God."

Jonathan Edwards

For What?

Solitude, silence, and the strait keeping of the heart, are the foundations and grounds of a spiritual life.

Robert Leighton

So What?

Language... has created the word 'loneliness' to express the pain of being alone. And it has created the word 'solitude' to express the glory of being alone.

Paul Tillich

Now What?

Without exception, the men and women I have known who make the most rapid, consistent, and evident growth in Christlikeness have been those who develop a daily time of being alone with God. This time of outward silence is the time of daily Bible intake and prayer. In this solitude is the occasion for private worship.

Donald S. Whitney

Without great solitude, no serious work is possible.

Pablo Picasso

PRAYER

Dear heavenly Father, thank You so much for the Truth and Love of Your Word, will, and ways. Please help us to absorb and apply ALL that You have shared and commanded in the Bible. May our heads be infilled with Your defining Scriptures, for the express purpose of informing, inspecting, and inspiring our sanctified hearts and serving hands.
In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen and Amen

Support Sermon:

"Provision Provided"
Psalm 23
April 29, 2012
Sermon Series: The Word Of God