

***THE SOLITARY PLACE:
ALONE WITH GOD***
MARK 1:35-39
**WALKING WITH JESUS MESSAGE:
FOURTEEN**

000528AM

Jesus lived the perfect human life.

He lived in a whirlwind of activity.

He was constantly eating, walking, talking, and sleeping with twelve men who never seemed to leave Him alone.

Vast crowds and desperate individuals sought him out.

He was chided, rebuked, and even scoffed at by His own family.

He was the personal target of Satan, who tempted Him, tried to derail Him, and entered people to drive them to destroy Him.

He was attacked by every demon that could be rounded up to scream at Him, thrash around in front of Him, and seek to bother Him.

Civil and religious authorities, always plotting to catch Him and take Him off for punishment and execution, hounded him.

His life was so full of people and ministry that he often didn't even have a moment to stop to eat.

Yet, in the midst of all that,

Jesus was peaceful, calm, focused, and confidently following God's will.

How did He do that?

If we follow Him, we can find His secret. Though we can never be sinless, we can learn and follow His pattern for the perfect life in step with God's will. Although Jesus lived an extremely full, busy, and demanding life, every time He is seen in the Scriptures, He is

quiet, composed, and led by the Spirit.

Jesus was God, yet He lived the perfect human life as a man. What kept that perfect life on earth so strong? What was His secret? His secret was the time He spent alone with God—solitude, time away from everything and everyone else.

Jesus had to be alone with God, and Jesus wanted to be alone with God. He found times and places to be alone with God, no matter what else was going on.

Mark, after recounting the very busy day and, probably, a very late night Jesus had had the day before, tells us:

Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed. And Simon and those who were with Him searched for Him. When they found Him, they said to Him, “Everyone is looking for You.” But He said to them, “Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth.” And He was preaching in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and casting out demons (1:35-39).

You can revitalize your walk in this world by starting or restarting a habit of cultivating time alone with God—time in the Word and time in prayer. The songwriter captures this solitude in secret with God:

There is a place of quiet rest, near to the heart of God, a place where sin cannot molest, near to the heart of God.

There is a place of comfort sweet, near to the heart of God, a place where we our Savior meet, near to the heart of God.

There is a place of full release, near to the heart of God, a place where all is joy and peace, near to the heart of God.

Chorus: O Jesus, blest Redeemer, sent from the heart of God, hold us who wait before Thee near to the heart of God.¹

In the last lesson we saw how full life was on that Saturday in Capernaum recorded in Mark 1:21-34. Jesus had gone from morning to night, giving of Himself to all who came to Him. Multitudes—on donkeys, in carts, carried by family, surrounded by crowds—had flocked to the Messiah, the Healer, and the Friend of sinners. The truth of this statement is shown in the last three verses as Mark tells Peter's account of the works done by Jesus at the close of a busy day:

And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto Him all that were diseased,

¹ McAfee, Cleland B. “Near to the Heart of God.” *Amazing Grace—366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions*. Ed. Kenneth W. Osbeck. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1997.

and them that were possessed with devils; and all the city was gathered together at the door. And He healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils...(1:32-34 KJV).

Capernaum was witness to more of Christ's miracles than any other spot on earth. He preached more sermons in and around Capernaum than at any other place during His entire ministry. It is also here, just outside Capernaum, that we discover the life-long habit that gave Jesus the power and strength to live such a life filled with giving: "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).

As we see in these verses, Saturday's river of miracles continued with a wonderful Sunday morning: Jesus had gotten as much sleep as he desired, and he awoke. It was dark, and everyone was asleep in the house. He noiselessly stole out of the room and found his way to the street. Soon he was out of town and climbing a hillside to some remote spot, possibly a hidden hollow, where he lifted up his soul in ecstasy to the Father.

That Jesus regularly sought time alone with God in prayer is evident from a study of the gospels. Look at the following passages:

Matthew 14:23: "And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there."

Mark 6:46: "And when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray."

Luke 4:42: "Now when it was day, He departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowd sought Him and came to Him, and tried to keep Him from leaving them;"

Luke 6:12: "Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God."

Luke 22:39-46:

Coming out, He went to the Mount of Olives, as He was accustomed, and His disciples also followed Him. When He came to the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done." Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. When He rose up from prayer, and had come to His

disciples, He found them sleeping from sorrow. Then He said to them, “Why do you sleep? Rise and pray, lest you enter into temptation.”

John 6:15: “Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.”

E. Stanley Jones once described time in God's Word in solitude and prayer as a “time exposure to God.” He used the analogy of his life being like a photographic plate which, when exposed to God, progressively bore the image of God in keeping with the length of exposure.²

Jesus, as our perfect example, exposed his humanity to God. As God the Son, Jesus needed no more of the fullness of God (Colossians 2:8, 9). Jesus is the exact representation of God's nature (Hebrews 1:3). The reason for Jesus' prayers was to show he did not live his life as God the Son apart from God the Father, but rather as a man in dependence upon God. He said, “...[T]he Son can do nothing by himself...” (John 5:19 NIV) and “...The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work” (John 14:10 NIV).³

Jesus had cultivated the discipline of solitude. He had perfected the art of getting alone with God. He had learned the secret of waiting on God. His life shows us that intimate communion with God is needed to live a godly life full of power, under the control of God's Spirit. He calls each of us to do the same. We must learn to seek and find a solitary place in our life to get alone with God regularly.

Solitude, time alone with God in His Word, is the great necessity of our spiritual lives. We need to be alone with God daily. We need to find times to get away alone. We need to get up early if necessary. Few of us are called to spend many hours in daily prayer, but *all* of us must spend *some* time. If it is impossible when the family is awake, pray before they get up. If you have no place you can do this at home, find a place to park your car on the way to work and pray in the anonymity of the passing traffic.

When I was in seminary and had four roommates sharing a tiny apartment, I could not think or pray there. Sometimes I drove down to the local shopping center, parked my car among the other cars, and slouched down behind the wheel to pray. Other times I went to a local park and sat on a bench to pray or just parked my car along the way. Nothing bothered me in those places.

We all need to find a way to spend time alone with God. We don't have to spend hours and hours, but we must have that divine time exposure to God without interruption.

² Qtd in Hughes, R. Kent. *Preaching the Word: Mark—Jesus, Servant and Savior*. 1:35-39. Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1997.

³ These ideas drawn from Hughes.

Jesus did it, and we need to do it. Begin small, but do it.

Notice that though Jesus was out there all alone in his deserted place communing with God, he was not safe. As we are in our world each day, Jesus was interrupted: “Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: ‘Everyone is looking for you!’” (1:36- 37 NIV).

The disciples had stumbled out of Capernaum, combed the hills, spotted Jesus on a hill, perhaps the magnificent panoramic cliff of Arbel. When they found him, they mildly scolded him. Their idea was, “Hey, Jesus, after last night things are really rolling for this new ministry you called us to. We need to get right back and capitalize on it!” But that was not the will of the Father. Only Jesus had bothered to make time to be alone with God and to get in tune with His will: “Jesus replied, ‘Let’s go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.’ So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons” (1: 38-39 NIV).

Kent Hughes, using the events of Mark 1, reminds us of our need to be conformed to the image of Christ through communion with God:

That memorable Sabbath day and the Sunday following revealed wonderful things about the heart of Jesus, a heart of love and compassion. The outstretched hand to Simon’s mother-in-law revealed the reflex of Christ’s loving heart. This heart labored tirelessly to bring healing to needy men and women. This is still true today. His healing heart was (and is) a heart that lived (and lives) in prayer. In respect to us, his heart desires above all else that we experience the ultimate healing of the gospel. To those who do not know Christ we hold up his healing heart. If you are not a believer, can there be anything more attractive than a heart that beats for you? As believers we need to permit the Holy Spirit to produce Christ’s heart in us. If you do not know the reality of the healing heart of Jesus, you can know it. Christ wants to bring his healing touch to your life.⁴

How can we start cultivating time alone with God? Jesus demonstrated it is our priority, but where do we start? Here are some suggestions:

1. READ GOD’S WORD EVERY DAY.

We can get alone with God most readily by reading God's Word. This is the voice of God, and we must listen. No Christian can lead a Spirit-filled life full of power without regularly reading the Bible. Our minds are such that we do not retain what we need to know. They need to be refreshed again and again.

Some who have been believers for years have never read the Bible through even once.

⁴ *Preaching the Word: Mark.*

There are truths God has for us that we have not inconvenienced ourselves enough to discover. No wonder we are empty. What a difference reading the Word can make in our lives! Dr. Harry Ironside, a man of little formal education but great power, read the Bible fourteen times by the age of fourteen. His mark is still on Chicago and, indeed, the entire world.

Five pages a day is a good place to begin. At that pace, within a year you will have read the entire Bible. However, we must remember that we begin to get alone with God consistently only when we take God's Word seriously as more important even than our daily meals.

2. MEMORIZE GOD'S WORD.

Time in solitude with God comes through memorization. Mrs. Barnhouse said of her famous preacher husband:

Someone once asked him how long it had taken him to prepare a certain sermon. His answer was "Thirty years and thirty minutes!" He had immersed himself in the Bible from the time he was fifteen years old, when he memorized the Book of Philippians a verse a day until he knew the entire book by heart, then went on to other passages. He felt it was not enough to learn by rote — it had to be by heart; because you loved and believed it.⁵

Why not begin with a verse — perhaps a verse a week — fifty-two in one year?

Few have lived as stressful and frenetic a life as Hudson Taylor, founder of China Inland Mission, but Taylor lived in God's rest, as his son beautifully attests:

Day and night this was his secret, "just to roll the burden on the Lord." Frequently those who were wakeful in the little house at Chinkiang might hear, at two or three in the morning, the soft refrain of Mr. Taylor's favorite hymn ["Jesus, I am resting, resting in the joy of what Thou art"]. He had learned that for him, only one life was possible—just that blessed life of resting and rejoicing in the Lord under all circumstances, while He dealt with the difficulties, inward and outward, great and small.⁶

3. MEDITATE ON GOD'S WORD.

This is the secret of God's great warriors. Hudson Taylor conquered immense hardships by daily meditation on God's Word. Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor record this in his biography:

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⁶ Hughes, R. Kent. *Preaching the Word: Ephesians—The Mystery of the Body of Christ*. Wheaton: Crossway, 1997.

It was not easy for Mr. Taylor, in his changeful life, to make time for prayer and Bible study, but he knew that it was vital. Well do the writers remember traveling with him month after month in northern China, by cart and wheelbarrow with the poorest of inns at night. Often with only one large room for coolies and travelers alike, they would screen off a corner for their father and another for themselves, with curtains of some sort; and then, after sleep at last had brought a measure of quiet, they would hear a match struck and see the flicker of candlelight which told that Mr. Taylor, however weary, was poring over the little Bible in two volumes always at hand. From two to four a.m. was the time he usually gave to prayer; the time he could be most sure of being undisturbed to wait upon God.⁷

Meditating upon the Word brings us immediately into the intimate presence of God, but too few are willing to pay the price. For those who do, however, the rewards are great. According to Psalm 1:1-3:

Blessed is the man

Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
And in His law he meditates day and night.

He shall be like a tree
Planted by the rivers of water,
That brings forth its fruit in its season.
Whose leaf does not wither;
And whatever he does shall prosper.

C. T. Studd was one of God's great servants. His life was like his grass hut: There were no doors to shut. He lived with—and for—his beloved pygmy tribes. How did he prepare to teach as many as 5,000 at a time? How did he get ready to disciple the scores of church leaders who came to sit at the foot of his cot every morning, so that he would awake to a sea of black faces and white teeth waiting for him to open the Book of God to them? His diary dated February 7th, 1886, gives us the answer:

The Lord is so good to give me a large dose of spiritual champagne every morning which brace one up for the day and night. Of late I have had such glorious times. I generally awake about 3:30 AM and feel quite wide awake, so I have a good read, and then have an hour's sleep before I finally get up.⁸

Studd's family described these times this way: "A Bible is taken down from the shelf, and Bwana is alone with God. What passed between them in those silent hours was known a few hours later to all who had ears to hear."⁹

⁷ Hughes. *Preaching the Word: Ephesians*.

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Studd continues in his diary:

I find then that what I read is then stamped indelibly upon my heart all through the day; and that it is the very quietest of times, not a foot astir, nor a sound to be heard, saving that of God. If I miss this time I feel like Samson shorn of his hair and so of all his strength. I see more and more how much I have to learn of the Lord. I want to be a workman approved of the Lord, not just with a pass degree as it were. Oh how I wish I had devoted my early life, my whole life to God and His Word. How much I have lost by those early years of self pleasing and running after this world's honors and pleasures."¹⁰

APPENDIX

Spiritual disciplines: Writers have distilled the Christian life into disciplines. Some say there are twelve (Foster), others have found fifteen (Dallas Willard). One simple list by Bill Hull lists just four:

Conversing with God through His Word by prayer and solitude
Denying self through fasting and frugality
Serving Christ's church through submission and sacrifice
Obeying Jesus by equipping and evangelizing¹¹

Charles Swindoll also finds four disciplines that lead us to enjoying intimacy with the Almighty:

Simplicity: a reordering of our lives around God and His plan
Silence: stillness of the soul that waits on God
Solitude: an essential for intimacy with God
Surrender: letting go of ourselves and yielding to God. "Refuse to be a slave to anything but God" [coffee, alcohol, TV, etc.].¹²

WE CAN GET ALONE WITH GOD IN ANY POSTURE

The Bible shows us we shouldn't let the mechanics hold us back. Jesus doesn't teach us about one special posture when we get alone with God, because any posture will do. In the Bible, people got alone with God in all different positions:

- Abraham's trusted servant stood at the well to be alone with God (Genesis 24:12-14).
- Moses bowed down in God's presence (Exodus 34:8).
- Paul said that one way to enjoy getting alone with God was by lifting holy hands (1 Timothy 2:8).

¹⁰ C. T. Studd, *Cricketeer and Pioneer*, pp 57, 206.

¹¹ *Building High Commitment in a Low-Commitment World*. Grand Rapids: Revell, 96.

¹² *Intimacy with the Almighty*. Anaheim: Insight for Living, 1996. 33.

- Jesus was on His face once when He was alone with God (Matthew 26:39).
- The nation of Israel, in a time of repentance and returning to the Lord, sat and sought God (Judges 20:26).
- Elijah knelt and put his head between knees (I Kings 18:42).
- A leper knelt to come alone before God (Mark. 1:40).
- Daniel sometimes faced toward the distant Temple in Jerusalem when he got alone with God (Daniel 6:10).
- Jesus got alone with God His Father with uplifted eyes as He walked down the Kidron Valley toward Gethsemane (John 17:1).

ANY PLACE

Jesus never taught that there was only one place to get alone with God. We are able to, and invited to, get alone with God everywhere. In the Bible, people found a quiet place in God's presence in all different places:

- David confessed that he needed at times to get alone with God while he lay in bed (Psalms 4:3-4, 8; 63:6).
- Solomon learned how to get alone with God in the Temple, which was God's house (I Kings 8:27-30).
- King Abijah was marching into battle when he found time to get alone with God (II Chronicles 13:14-15).
- Elijah was alone with God in a cave (I Kings. 19:9-10).
- Jesus taught we could get alone with God in a closet (Matthew 6:6) or in the street (Matthew 6:5).
- Jonah had an incredible time alone with God in a fish (Jonah 2:1-10).
- Peter had an unforgettable time alone with God on a house top (Acts 10:9).
- Paul instructed the early church that they could get alone with God everywhere they found themselves (1 Timothy 2:8).
- Paul found a place he could be alone with God while staying in someone's home (Acts 9:39-40), another time by a river (Acts 16:13), often in prison (Acts 16:23-26), and even by the sea (Acts 21:5-6).
- Jesus looked for and found spots to be alone with God in a garden (Matthew 26:36-44), on a mountain (Luke 6:12), in a remote spot away from the city of Capernaum (Mark 1:35), in the wilderness (Luke 5:16), and, finally, on a cross (Luke 23:33, 34, 46).

ANY TIME

Don't let your schedule hold you back. Jesus doesn't teach us any particular times of prayer because we are to pray at all times. The Bible gives examples of people getting alone with God at all different times:

- The priests were instructed to get alone with God every evening and morning (I Chronicles 23:30).
- Anna, the saintly and aged woman who greeted Jesus when He was presented to God as a baby, was described as getting alone with God day and night (Luke 2:37; 18:7).

- Daniel, one of the towering giants among Old Testament saints, was in the habit of getting alone with God three times a day (Daniel 6:10).
- The Psalmist says we should get alone with our great God today (Psalm 95:6, 8).
- Elijah, the mighty prophet, got alone with God—while the evil priests to Baal danced and gashed themselves—at the time of the evening sacrifice (1 Kings 18:36).
- Jeremiah said he had learned to get alone with God in his youth (Jeremiah 3:4).
- Moses said a good time to remember to get alone with God is after enjoying the bounties of a good meal (Deut. 8:10)
- Hezekiah, the great King, learned to get alone with God when facing his greatest adversaries. When trouble was literally at the gate, he quietly spread his hands to God (II Kings 19:3-4).
- Peter and John cultivated a pattern of retreating from all their ministry demands in Jerusalem and quieting their souls by getting alone with God in the Temple daily at the ninth hour (Acts 3:1).
- David found he was most often getting alone with God when his troubles were hitting him daily (Psalm 86:3).
- David also said that he ended each day by getting alone with God at bedtime (Psalm 4:4).
- Jesus got alone with God in early morning (Mark 1:35).
- Paul got alone with God at midnight (Acts 16:25).
- Jesus taught, in His ministry to the disciples, that we can always get alone with God (Luke 18:1).
- Paul says that our times alone with God should be ceaseless (I Thessalonians 5:17).

IN ANY CIRCUMSTANCE

Jesus doesn't teach us about the circumstances of solitude because we can pray in any circumstance. In the Bible, people are seen getting alone with God in all kinds of circumstances:

- When Jesus was so burdened that He was loudly crying, He got alone with God in Gethsemane (Hebrews 5:7).
- When Job was so incapacitated that he shaved his head because of painful sores and sat in ashes, he learned even there he could get alone with God (Job 1:20-21; 2:8).
- In deepest agony and sweating blood, Jesus was able to get alone with God (Luke 22:44).
- While the publican was smiting his breast, he was able to get alone with God (Luke 18:13).
- Broken hearted, clothed in sackcloth, and in tears, David got alone with God and poured out his heart (Psalms 6:6; 34:18; 35:13; 62:8).
- While Joshua was so grieved that he was applying dust to his head, he was able even then to get alone with God (Joshua 7:6).

SO WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR? FOLLOW CHRIST'S PERFECT EXAMPLE!

The posture, place, time, or circumstance is not the issue of prayer. Prayer is to be a total way of life—an open communication with God—which goes on all the time. Jesus teaches to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17 KJV).

A modern spiritual Goliath was George Mueller. His life may be distilled down to these words he wrote in a diary:

It has pleased the Lord to teach me a truth, the benefit of which I have not lost for more than 14 years. The point is this: I saw more clearly than ever that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord. The first thing to be concerned about was not how much I might serve the Lord, or how I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man might be nourished...Before this time my practice had been, at least for ten years previously, as a habitual thing, to give myself to prayer in the morning. Now I saw that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the Word of God, and to the meditation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reprov'd and instructed; and that thus, by means of the Word of God, while meditating on it, my heart might be brought into experimental communion with the Lord.¹³

¹³ Scroggie. *Method in Prayer*. 17-18.