

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

www.ffbic.org

SERMON: *A little peace and quiet...*

SERIES: *Hurry Up*

SCRIPTURES: *Mark 1; Luke 5:15-16; Psalm 46:10*

SPEAKER: *Shaun Kipe*

DATE: *2021 - 2 - 7*

**Credit to John Mark Comer (Ruthless Elimination of Hurry); Ruth Haley Barton (Invitation to Silence and Solitude); Dallas Willard (Renovation of the Heart); Thomas A Kempis (The Imitation of Christ).*

Well good morning, it so great to worship with you. Want to say welcome to all of you in this room and to so many gathered on-line, at home, tuning to the live stream. I'd like to try something this morning. So if you're watching on youtube or facebook, no your audio isn't going bad...this morning we are going to talk about solitude and silence...

SILENCE – 1 min. (A graphic...that just says “**Shhhhhh**”)

That was one minute of silence. Did it seem long? Awkward? What were you thinking as that minute was passing by? I wish someone would talk? Well, if he's not gonna talk, this is a waste of our time? Maybe it's more of a waste when he does talk! Did you want to grab your phone?

In contemporary society (especially the religious context) someone needs to tell us about solitude and silence – just to let us know there are such things. Someone then needs to tell us it's ok to enter them. Someone needs to tell us how to do it, what will happen when we do, and how we go on from there. (Willard pg 13)

Two weeks ago, we started this series (**SERIES GRAPHIC**) talking about the most significant threat to our spiritual lives...and it's not secularism or materialism or threats to our religious freedom...according to Dallas Willard it's our hurried, over-scheduled life-styles.

Willard writes that **“Hurry is the great enemy of spirituality in our day. You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your lives.”**

So two weeks ago, we talked about the hurry problem that is so prevalent in our lives. A lifestyle that often leaves us exhausted, anxious, depressed, irritable. Last week saw your life doesn't have to be that way. Jesus invites us into a different kind of life. He says, **“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest...for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”**

And so last week we talked about the easy yoke of Jesus. It sounds great doesn't it? But how do we get it? That's what the next three weeks are about. We are going to look at three spiritual disciplines required to eliminate hurry.

Solitude and Silence

Sabbath

Simplicity

First two qualifiers:

1. Ruthless

Notice...Willard uses the word **ruthless** in his quote...*“You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.”* He says this because “life-change” is not easy. If you want to eliminate hurry, you will have to desire it, you will have to be intentional, and you will have to be tough, gritty, determined.

Paul says it like this...

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 - ²⁴ Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. ²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training...²⁶ Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. ²⁷ No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave...

Solitude has a learning curve. And like anything worth doing, our first efforts will be pained.

We will long for email, to-do lists, a sink full of dishes, the unread messages on our phone—anything that can turn our attention away from that quietly simmering something that makes solitude so troubling. (Mike Cospers)

Why I am doing this? Is it really making a difference? Couldn't I do this some other way? Your mind, body, will...will rebel against this.

Remember Jesus said, love God with what...**“all of your heart, soul, mind, your strength.”**

So just be prepared to engage your whole self in this process of change...ruthless.

Second, the Good News is

2. You're not alone.

As with all spiritual transformation you need to know there are two parts. God's part and your part. You cannot simply by will-power overcome hurry sickness. You will need God's help. Please do not think we are talking about “earning” our way to transformed lives or simply self-help techniques or New Age meditation. Part of transformation is God's presence in your life and God's grace on your life.

Paul says...“work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you.”

There must always be a sense that even as we put forth personal effort, we are at the same time, leaning into and constantly relying on God’s strength. Does that makes sense?

And, in case you weren’t sure, God has done and is constantly doing His part. You don’t need to wait on Him before you can get started. He’s already working on you and has been. So what we need to talk about is your part.

God has given us tools for life transformation (spiritual disciplines). Tools that we can choose to put into practice or choose not to put into practice and in that regard, transformation is also dependent upon our efforts.

This morning we want to talk about two disciplines that go hand in hand.

I. Solitude and Silence.

If you’re being honest with yourself...many of us, right now are trying to decide if this really is a good idea. Does it change my life, transform my character to spend time in silence and solitude?

Henri Nouen has said, “*Without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life...We do not take the spiritual life seriously if we do not set aside some time to be with God and listen to him.*”

Remember Richard Foster’s statement from a couple of weeks ago...

In contemporary society our Adversary majors in three things: noise, hurry, and crowds.

One of Satan's primary tactics is to fill your world with noise and hurry...so that you lose your sense of awareness about life, about yourself, about God's presence.

Solitude and silence help us to re-focus attention. They force us to be aware of ourselves, our surroundings and God's presence.

So first let's look at

A. Solitude and silence in the life of Jesus.

If you are going to be a disciple of Jesus...if you want the life of Jesus, you must practice the lifestyle of Jesus. (COMER)

And you might be surprised to learn that solitude and silence were a regular part of Jesus' life. We often hear and tell the stories about Jesus' miracles and his interactions with other people. And it causes us to miss the regularity with which Jesus was going off on his own.

The Greek word we want to hone in on for a couple of minutes is "**eremos**". It's often translated as "**desert or wilderness**" in your Bible, but it also means "**solitary place or lonely place or quiet place.**" This word shows up over 30 times just in the Gospels alone and most of those are in reference to Jesus.

If you have a Bible, turn with me to Mark 1. And start in verse 9 with me, just kind of skim over the storyline, for a moment. Jesus is beginning his time of ministry. So he goes to John the Baptist to get baptized. After his baptism, what does he do?

Mark 1:12 - ¹² At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness...

That's right heads straight for the eremos. And this is not just an overnight trip. Look at the next verse (13)... **13 and he was in the wilderness forty days...**

Jesus, the Messiah, God in human flesh...begins the most grueling stretch of his life, 3 years of ministry and then his crucifixion, death, resurrection, by preparing for 40 days in solitude and silence.

Now keep reading, this is not an isolated incident. After 40 days of solitude, he returns to begin his ministry...calls his disciples and (verse 21) then head for Capernaum. Arrives in Capernaum on the Sabbath. And heads straight for the Synagogue and Jesus begins teaching (remember he's a rabbi!). We don't know how long he preaches for. But he has busy morning.

When finishes teaching we are told, **"just then"** (v.23) a man with an evil spirit confronts him. He takes care of the evil spirit. Then **"as soon as they left"** (v.29) they headed for Simon and Andrews house. Turns out Simon's mother-in-law is ill. He goes there to spend some time with the family and heal her. And then (v.32) **that evening after Sunset, many came and they brought the sick, the demon-possessed.**

Suffice it to say it was a pretty full day for the Messiah. So what does Jesus do next? Verse 35...

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.

Let me give you couple more examples...

Mark 6:31-32 – ³¹ Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”

³² So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.

Matthew 14:13 - ¹³ When Jesus heard what had happened (death of John the Baptist), he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.

Matthew 17:1 - After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.

Luke 5:15-16 – ...the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. ¹⁶ But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

You didn't know solitude showed up so often in the life of Jesus, did you? It's so easy to miss.

Jesus made it a point, a common habit, a regular practice....he was ruthless about finding solitude and silence in his life. It wasn't a onetime deal for Jesus it was part of his lifestyle.

I think sometimes when we think about Jesus, we immediately think...well he was the Son of God, he had special super-human-powers that we don't have to live the life He lived and in the process we disregard his humanity. Jesus did this to refuel and re-center himself.

And notice this, it wasn't that Jesus didn't have anything to do. It's not that he didn't have a full-time job. There were people to heal, sermons to preach, people to feed, crowds following...He was the Messiah. Ever feel like your just being pulled in

all directions by life? But in order to be able to give the best he had. Jesus knew he had to be fully rested and filled up. He needed connected to God.

Jesus came out of his solitude and silence with clarity about his identity and calling. He was grounded. Centered. He was in touch with God and himself. (Comer)

Now, think about it...if you want the life of Jesus (if you want a life marked by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, perseverance, contentment, rest)...if you want the life of Jesus you have to practice the lifestyle of Jesus.

Jesus spent significant time in silence and solitude. If you don't...how successful do you think you will be at receiving the life of Jesus?

How often do you get away for silence and solitude?

Second, this practice of Jesus has been handed through the history of followers of Jesus.

B. Examples from great hero's of the faith.

Some of the great hero's of our faith understood the significance of solitude to following Jesus.

A few years, I was recommended a devotional masterpiece called the "The Imitation of Christ." The book is written by a 14th century monastic by the name of Thomas A Kempis (**PIC OF THOMAS**). And I know as soon as I say the word monk, some people start getting a little uncomfortable. So, no, I am not advocating for monasticism. And yet, I do believe there is something valuable to be learned by a man who spent the majority of his life and energy trying to imitate Jesus. Here is what A Kempis wrote...

*“Seek a convenient time to retire into thyself, and meditate often upon God’s loving-kindness...the greatest Saints avoided, when they could, the society of men...A certain one hath said, **“As oft as I have been among men, I have returned home less a man than I was before.”*** (A Kempis pg. 33)

I quoted from Nouen earlier (**PIC OF NOUEN**). There’s a great story about Henri Nouen and Mother Theresa (**PIC OF MOTHER THERESA**). Nouen was dealing with a number of problems in his soul and went seeking wisdom and advice from Mother Theresa. Her response was rather simple, but profound and challenging... she said...

“When you spend an hour day adoring your Lord and never do anything which you know is wrong...you will be fine!”

From Jesus to A Kempis, to Nouen, to Mother Theresa, to Dallas Willard...you cannot get away from the reality that spiritual change happens when we eliminate hurry and spend time practicing solitude and silence.

C. What exactly do you do?

1.

If you have a bulletin more than likely, you picked it up and noticed that under letter C. point# 1...it’s blank. There’s nothing there. And you thought, *“That’s a typo in the bulletin. They forgot to type in point# 1.”* Wrong. It’s supposed to be blank.

Your next thought might be something along the lines, *“Well that’s a waste of space. If you weren’t going to put anything in there...then just leave it out! Your wasting paper.”* Wrong again.

Point #1 is blank on purpose. When it comes to solitude and silence and you ask, well what should I do then...the answer is “nothing.” You’re not supposed to do anything. That’s the whole point!

There’s this really great verse in the **Psalm 46** that says...

Be still and know that I am God.

Notice it simply says BE...not do and in your “Being still” you know God. You become present with God. It doesn’t say “first pick up your Bible.” It doesn’t say “first listen to worship music.” It doesn’t say “volunteer for a ministry.” It says first just be still and focus your attention on God.

To be in silence is to choose to do nothing. For extensive periods of time. All accomplishment is given up. We stop making demands on God. It is enough that God is God and we are his. We learn we have a soul, that God is here, that this world is “my Father’s world”. (WILLARD/Barton pg 13)

No listening to a podcast. No TV. No toddler screaming demands. No unloading dishes. No folding laundry. No organizing, fixing, cooking, tweeting, Facebooking, instagramming, googling...

Simply start with stillness.

"Stillness is always a prerequisite for receptivity." (Ortberg, Love Beyond Reason)

So for many of us the first step to the discipline of silence and solitude is to practice stillness. Quiet.

How do I get time away from all that noise/hurry/people? This is why you have to be “ruthless”/intentional.

Your boss will never say, *“You’ve put in enough hours, we’ll keep paying you, but you just head home for some solitude.”*

The chores around the house will never stop needing done. The television will never turn itself off.

You might have to be as intentional as putting it into your schedule. Keeping your attention and thoughts on God. Keep your mind trained on Him will not be easy at first.

This is where silence and solitude begin...the practice of stillness. Ok, but that’s not all there is to it. There are a few things that you can actually do to practice putting your attention on God during the solitude and silence.

2. Think on Good things.

Paul wrote to the church in Philippi.

Philippians 4:8 - ⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Do you see what Paul is saying? If you want God’s peace...if you want rest for your soul? Then fill up your mind with good things.

Dallas Willard says that part of our trouble in living transformed lives is that we do not train our minds to think regularly about good things.

Today we as a culture are schizophrenic on such matters. We want to say it doesn't make any difference what we look at or hear. This, no doubt, is because we want to be 'free' to show anything and to see anything – no matter how evil or revolting. But businesses still pay millions of dollars to show us something for thirty seconds on television. They do that because they know that what we repeatedly see and hear affects what we do. Otherwise they would go out of business. (Willard 114)

Scripture is the best place to start.

Thomas A Kempis...legend has it, he wrote the Bible 4 times as a way to train his mind to think on the Bible.

And this includes...Scripture memorization. Remember last summer I had you all memorizing Exodus 34. "The Lord the Lord the compassionate and gracious God..." Fill up your mind with those words. Read and memorize Jesus words in the Sermon on the Mount.

And I know some of you are thinking, "I'm just not good at memorizing." That's an excuse. Alright. I could throw up hundreds of commercial slogans or popular song lyrics and you'd be able to rattle them off. When I was the youth pastor we used to crank music on the church bus, when we went on trips. And there were hundreds of songs memorized by our teens, including Sweet Caroline, Livin' on a Prayer. Why, because they had filled their mind with those words.

The issue is not with our inability to memorize it's the discipline to focus our energy and attention on Scripture. That's all it is.

Or outside of Scripture, you can meditate on the words to some of your favorite worship songs. Rather than just playing the song. Print off the lyrics and read, think about them, allow them to soak into your soul.

Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so.

This is my Father's world...

Like it or not what you put into your mind does have an impact on the person you become. Take time in the still and quiet to think on good things.

3. Change a few life habits.

Paul writes it like this to the Ephesians...

Ephesians 5:15 - ¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

Here's how another translation interprets those verses...

Don't waste your time on useless work, mere busywork...Expose these things for the sham they are...Use your head. Make the most of every chance you get. These are desperate times!

¹⁷ Don't live carelessly, unthinkingly. Make sure you understand what the Master wants.

One way we can eliminate noise, hurry and crowds and practice solitude and silence is by learning to use our time wisely, changing a few life habits.

Average guy spends 10,000 hours on video games by age 21. (417 days)

Avg American spends 705 hours on social media per year. (29 days).

2,737.5 hours on TV. (114 days)

Avg. Iphone user is on 2 and ½ hours a day. For Millennials that number doubles.

A survey by Microsoft found that 77% of young adults answered yes, when asked “When nothing is occupying my attention, the first thing I do is reach for my phone.” (Stats...compliments to John Mark Comer!...make stats into days/concrete)

We live with a constant, sense and even dependency on something to fill my attention. We don't like the quiet/solitude/silence. We get bored to easily.

So start changing some habits to begin fostering the character of stillness and quiet, patience...slow down.

Recapture your love for reading.

In an hour of tv before bed, we could read the entire Bible in 6 months.

My kids and I have started to better with this. Each morning before school, we sit on the couch and read a book together.

Recapture the discipline of intentional prayer. Did you notice in many of those passages where Jesus was headed for the eremos...he was praying! In 20 mins of candy crush over your lunch break, you could pray for every single one of your friends and family members. What would that do for your soul and your sense of connectedness to God?

Regularly make it a part of your day **to be outside**. Go for a walk or run. And don't take your phone with.

Not turning on the television when you walk in the door.

Not turning on the radio or Itunes etc. in the car.

Pick a day each week when you will not be on Facebook or any social media.

Done with some regularity, silence and solitude can become rich. We can discover a space in our hearts and in our world where God is constantly present with us.

If hurry, noise, busy-ness is the greatest threat to our spiritual lives...to a life of joy, rest, contentment, peace with Jesus...then the solution is: ***create an environment for attention and connection to God; and I know of no better place than the eremos.***” (Comer 134)