

“SOULed OUT”
Session 10: The Gift of Solitude
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INTRODUCTION

Mark 6:31-36

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." So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things. By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late. Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat."

Luke 5:15-16

The news about Jesus spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

The success of a soul search is dependent on being able to hear from God

Psalms 139:23-24 (literal)

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; Examine me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful or idolatrous way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.”

Handling our overloaded circuits: What studies on multitasking have revealed

“As our minds fill with noise — feckless synaptic events signifying nothing — the brain gradually loses its capacity to attend fully and gradually to anything,”. Desperately trying to keep up with a multitude of jobs, we “feel a constant low level of panic and guilt.”

The brain is built to ignore the old and focus on the new. . . So what does this have to do with my iPhone or computer? Well it’s hard to imagine a more powerful novelty-generating device.

Every time it buzzes to signal a new email or text message, it is wiring even more firmly [through the release of dopamine] into my brain the desire to pick up the device and look for that precious nugget of new information.

“As observers, we’ll watch people during work, and then after every 12 minutes or so, for no apparent reasons, someone working on a document will turn and call someone or e-mail,”... Our increasingly shorter attention spans probably have something to do with it. One study found that after only 20 minutes of interrupted performance, people reported significantly higher stress, frustration, workload, effort and pressure.

Everything in our faster paced society is working against times of solitude and the ability to focus. A new term has been coined called **Attention Deficit Tendency** (ADT). Unlike ADD which has a genetic component and really only affects 5% of the population, ADT springs entirely from the environment and affects many more people.

Google “*Overloaded Circuits: Why Smart People Underperform*” in the Harvard Business Review for a full article on this subject.

Feeling overwhelmed is the greatest impediment to solitude

The most dangerous disability that anyone faces when it comes to learning, retention and other cognitive functions is FEAR. A fear about our self, a fear that we cannot keep up or get something done in time, puts the brain in survival mode, firing emotions like anxiety, impatience, anger or panic. The brain gets overwhelmed and locked up when this happens. The result is impulsive judgments and rushing to bring closure.

Observations:

We often view emotional overreactions as moral or character flaws, when actually it can be ones physical, emotional spiritual health is out of balance.

If we have lost the ability to focus and feel listless when we do stop, sabbaths and solitude achieve nothing. They become opportunities for the mind to race in pointless directions.

Proverbs 17:24 *“An intelligent person aims at wise actions. But a fool starts off in many directions.”*

Proverbs 12:11 *“It is stupid to waste time on useless projects.”*

I. Build a positive fear-free emotional atmosphere

Proverbs 25: *“Anxiety in a person’s heart weighs it down.”*

Proverbs 14:30 (Living Bible) *“A relaxed attitude lengthens a man’s life.”*

Proverbs 17:32 *“Being cheerful keeps you healthy. It’s a slow death to be gloomy all the time.”*

We must cultivate an environment where we have contact with others and where there is trust and respect.

Solitude actually works best when others are nearby who we know are supportive, and can listen when insights are gained.

Solving our problems alone (even if that alone is with God) where we can trust no one else with our burdens, will not lead to peace and relief.

Comments?

II. Take Care of Your Brain!

- a. Get enough sleep (Can you wake up on time without an alarm clock?)**
- b. During the day snack on: fruits, grains, vegetables. Start the day with protein, Take a multivitamin and omega-3s**
- c. Exercise a half hour every other day**

III. Make room for peace during the day

Philippians 4:8-9

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. 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.

Q: What has worked in your life to make this kind of space for God?

A. Have time each day to think and plan and pray. Line up your priorities.

- Have a “to do list” and a “don’t do list”
- Put tasks within your various roles: ex Husband, father, employee, leader
- Put in the most important things first in your calendar
- What do you need right now? Joy, hope direction, wisdom, forgiveness

B. Break down larger tasks into smaller ones and do your critical tasks first. This clears your mind and lowers anxiety so you can focus on priorities

Matthew 6:33-34

Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things (clothing, food , provision) will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

C. Slow down: take time to comprehend, to listen, to ask questions, and digest

Some ways to do this:

- a. Write in a journal**
- b. Do the reflection questions from Sunday Seminars**
- c. Prepare your small group questions**
- d. Do the Digging Deeper in the small group questions**
- e. Review Scott’s Sunday message**
- f. Go through a daily quiet time guide**
- g. Do the monthly Bell scripture reading plan and S.O.A.P**

Deuteronomy 11:18

Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.

For Personal Application: 15 ways to put zest back into your relationship with God

1. Dialogue with God about the Ten Commandments.

God revealed His holy character and standards through the Ten Commandments. Pray conversationally about each one. Speak to Him just as you would a good friend. If you pray about the commandment “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex. 20:3), you might say something like, “Lord, I know You don’t want me to make anything in my life more important than You. But too often, I do. At times, I let things crowd You out because they seem to anesthetize me when I’m hurt. In reality, I’m always disappointed when I don’t give You first place in my life. Help me to identify my idols and destroy them.”

Don’t be in a rush. Wait for Him to answer. His answers may prompt new questions or requests on your part.

2. Let God question you.

Our natural tendency is to ask God why He does what He does. We think He owes us an explanation. It is the master, though, who questions the servant, not the other way around. In the book of Job, we see God question Job three times (Job 38:3, 40:7, 42:4).

For one week allow God to ask you the questions in your quiet time. What would He ask about your time, your secret attitudes, your goals, your pain, or your fears? What are you giving your life to? When we allow God to interrogate us, instead of the other way around, we put Him back in His rightful place as Lord.

3. Read outside your comfort zone.

Try reading religious authors you are not familiar with. Pick up some books representing denominational or theological perspectives different from your own. They may cause you to strengthen your own convictions, develop new ones, or equip you for evangelism. In Acts 17, Paul used his knowledge of pagan Greek poetry to challenge his audience. You don’t have to agree with what you read. Try to discover why others believe what they believe.

4. Pray through the newspaper.

As you read the newspaper, pray about people and events. Remember that politics, law, economics, crime, and social issues have implications for us as Christians. Paul urged Timothy “that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness” (1 Tim. 2:1–2).

We should pray not only for political leaders, but also for cultural leaders. You can also find issues that need prayer in the sports, comic, entertainment, real estate, and travel sections. Instead of frustration or despair, the newspaper should provoke prayer.

5. Set your mind on Christ.

Think about a different role for Christ each day for a week. For example, Monday—Christ as Deliverer; Tuesday—Christ as Good Shepherd; Wednesday—Christ as Master; Thursday—Christ as Man; Friday—Christ as God; Saturday—Christ as Light; Sunday—Christ as Friend. Meditate throughout each day on Christ's role and what that means to you personally as well as to the rest of mankind. Study the scriptural context where each of His various names is used. If you find this helpful, consider expanding your week to a month of meditations.

6. Pray differently than you usually do

Kneeling (Acts 20:36) is only one way to pray. The Bible discusses a variety of ways to approach God. Each has symbolic meaning. Try standing like Jeremiah (Jer. 18:20), sitting like David (2 Sam. 7:18), or lying prostrate like Jesus (Mt. 26:39). An attitude of worship can be shown by praying with your face toward the ground (Neh. 8:6). Hands lifted up and outstretched toward heaven (Ps. 28:2) can symbolize your desire to reach up to God. Perhaps there are postures you can assume or places you can pray that have special personal meaning for you.

7. Explore unknown territory in the Bible.

Examine your Bible and note what books you have read and studied. Then select a book you have not read or studied and spend time in it. The verses we really need to study are not necessarily the ones we have underlined, but the ones not underlined. It is easy to spend time with sections of the Bible that comfort us; maybe we should spend time with sections that would challenge us.

8. Be like Scrooge.

In A Christmas Carol, Scrooge was taken on a trip into the future to see what he would become. Because he saw where he was headed, he was frightened enough to make major changes in his life. Try imagining yourself 5-10 years from now. What do you think your spiritual life will be like then, based on your habits now? Think through your spending habits, thought life, family relationships, and struggles. We will tend to stay the same and continue to repeat our old habits unless we choose to make changes.

9. Become a historian.

In Nehemiah 9 the Levites review God's historical faithfulness to Israel. They start at Creation and work their way to the present. They cite God's goodness as they remember their own sinfulness. Why not do the same thing with your life? Review it from the beginning, recalling the times God showed Himself to you. Encourage others in your family to write their own spiritual history and pray through it.

10. Take a vow of silence.

Ours is an age of continual noise. We are bombarded with noise from car radios, automobiles, construction equipment, and television. God does not like to shout, and often waits for our souls to still themselves in silence before He speaks. With Elijah, God did not speak through wind, fire, or earthquake. Instead He spoke through a gentle whisper (1 K. 19:11–12). Why not take a temporary vow for 12 to 24 hours? Remove yourself, as much as possible, from the noise around you. Try not to speak, consecrate that time to God, and listen intently to Him. Gary Scheer says, “Our flight from silence is, ultimately, a flight from God.”

11. Practice consecrated negligence.

Like Martha (Lk. 10:38–42), some of us are busy doing so many good things we do not take time to discern what things are needed. Take time to analyze your schedule, for the week and for the month. What are you devoting your time to? What things really matter? What activities have eternal consequences? Determine what things you can leave out of your schedule without harm to yourself or others. Choose to neglect those for a period of time. After that time period has expired, look back and see if it has made any difference in your life. Do this exercise several times a year.

12. Spend a day with your best Friend.

Plan a whole day alone with the Lord. If a whole day seems like too much, block off half a day. Think of how you might spend the day with a human friend. Plan a time to share your concerns, needs, or fears. Allow time for just listening and relaxing in God’s presence. Review your annual goals; if you have none, start developing some. Catch up on praying about those requests you haven’t had time to pray for lately. Pray through some hymns. Read a whole book at a sitting. Pray through verses that you have memorized. Rededicate your life, your job, your family, your future.

13. Write your own Bible paraphrase.

Choose a favorite book or long passage from the Scriptures. Think deeply about it every day for a week. Pray through it, attack it with questions, cross-reference it, talk about it with others, and read it in various translations. How would you take these same thoughts and express them to your friends and current generation? Then write your own personal paraphrase.

14. Take a Bible hike.

Go for a long walk or hike. Before you go, ask God for biblical eyes that will allow you to see everything through a scriptural grid. When you see a tree think of all the verses you know about trees. You may thank God for the beauty of trees in general. Or you may pray about something specifically in those verses. You might end up on a path. What does the Bible say about paths? Things you observe might remind you of concepts referred to in the Bible. A broken limb might remind you of a broken marriage in the church. Raindrops that

nourish plants may remind you to thank God for how He nourishes you through fellowship with other believers.

15. Practice redemptive remembrance.

The people of Israel forgot the many times God delivered them. “When our fathers were in Egypt, they gave no thought to your miracles; they did not remember your many kindnesses, and they rebelled by the sea, the Red Sea” (Ps. 106:7).

Avoid Israel’s sin of not remembering God’s many kindnesses. He may have rescued you from physical harm, from foolish decisions, from harmful relationships, or from adverse circumstances. Set aside a time to recall in detail each time He “saved” you and let Him know how you feel about each one. Jot down your memories and your praises in a journal. Then organize your thoughts and write your own psalm.

Circle some of these you would like to try!

Coming up...

November 28th Feeding the Soul

December 5th Telling Yourself the Truth

December 12th TBD

December 19th TBD – final class

New series begins Jan 9th

The audio and notes for this and previous sessions of this series are available at www.sequimcommunitychurch.org in the Sunday Seminar section