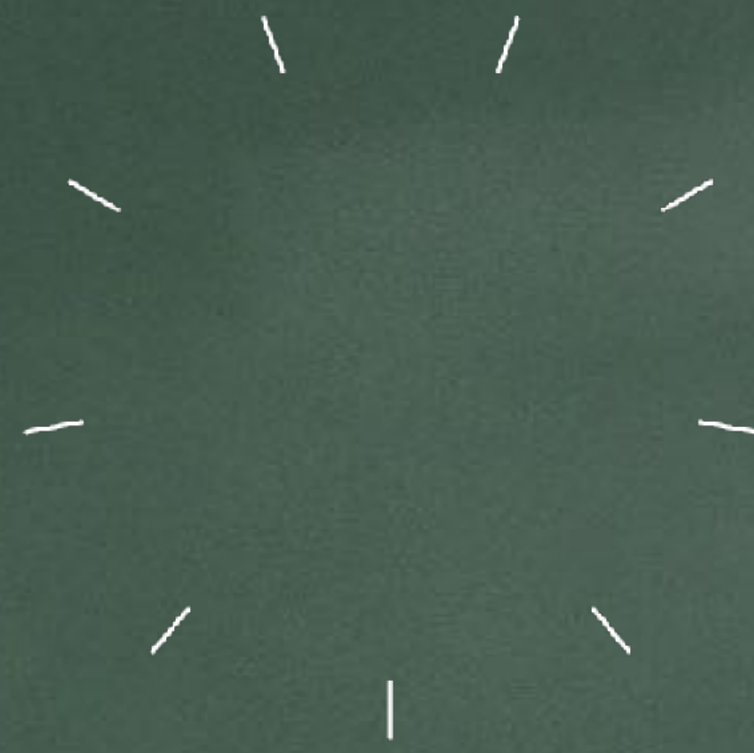




The Solitude Practice

Three Encounters in Solitude:

1. Encounter with Our Self
- 2. Encounter with Our Enemy**
3. Encounter with Our God

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.’ Jesus answered, ‘It is written: Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’

—Matthew 4v1-4 (ESV)

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ‘If you are the Son of God,’ he said, ‘throw yourself down. For it is written: He will command his angels concerning you.’ Jesus answered him, ‘It is also written: Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’

—Matthew 4v5-7 (ESV)

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All this I will give you if you will bow down and worship me.' Jesus said, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.' Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

—Matthew 4v8-11 (ESV)

eremos:

wilderness, desert, solitary place,
quiet place

The eremos isn't the place of weakness.

- It's the place of strength.

The Desert Fathers & Mothers

- Started in the late 3rd to 4th century
- Fed up with Cultural Christianity
- Developed practices of asceticism: training, voluntarily giving up bodily comforts and worldly pleasures in pursuit of spiritual goals
- Started monastic movements that then shaped the trajectory of Christianity

They did not go into the eremos to
escape, but to engage.

The Three Enemies of the Soul

An unholy trinity

- The World — the system of ideas, values, and social norms of a sinful society
- The Flesh — our base drives for self-gratification: lust, greed, fear
- The Devil — a real spiritual being, the animating force of evil in soul and society

How they show up in solitude:

- The World — we see how deeply our hearts have been shaped by a sinful social order
- The Flesh — our bent, warped, or disordered desires all come up
- The Devil — demonic thoughts, or temptations assault the mind

Discerning the Voices

Evagrius of Pontus
Talking Back
Antirrhêtikos



A Monastic Handbook
for Combating Demons

Translated with an Introduction by David Brakke

Evagrius Ponticus — Talking Back: A Monastic Handbook for Combating Demons.

When the enemy speaks, don't debate.
Do what Jesus did: talk back.
Redirect to the truth of Scripture and speak
it against the lie.

God's Voice vs. Satan's Voice

- God convicts and draws closer — Satan condemns and drives away
- God steels you — Satan rushes / hurries you
- God reassures — Satan frightens
- God enlightens — Satan confuses
- God encourages — Satan discourages
- God calms — Satan obsesses

The Resistance

Three layers of resistance

- From the world — the attention economy; there is money to be made on diversion
- From the flesh — our own heart making excuses, bowing out last minute
- From the devil — noise as the primary strategy

Solitude Leads
to Freedom.

And Jesus returned to Galilee
in the power of the Spirit.

—Luke 4v14 (ESV)

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina

- Read — slowly, notice what shimmers or stands out
- Reflect — linger, turn it over; what might God be saying?
- Respond — pray those impressions back to God
- Rest — sink into God's presence and peace

Discussion Questions

- What resistance do you need to work through to actually enter the desert place of solitude?
- Have you ever experienced the desert as a place of strength rather than escape?
- How might framing solitude as resisting the world, the flesh, and the devil change how you approach the practice?