

I'm Fine, just a Busy week 8

Intro:

Welcome back to week 8 of our summer small group series: I'm fine, just busy. I know this series has been a help and encouragement to me, and I pray that it has been so for you as well.

Have you ever been in a room created to completely dampen sound? It is a surreal feeling. It feels like more than silent. It's kinda cool, but it also puts me on edge. There is ALWAYS noise. Whether it is music, TV, a podcast, even just AC, or cars on the road. Even in nature, we have the wind and the birds and insects that fill our world with a baseline level of noise. Stepping away from the noise that we are so used to feels unnatural and uncomfortable.

The world we live in is so loud. There is always something playing, streaming, or talking, so you never have to confront silence. Now, noise isn't always a bad thing, but what if we were made for times of quiet? Times of stillness. Biblically, we will see today that silence and solitude are vital disciplines in the Christian's life that we must develop.

I. Biblically, the wilderness is a place of isolation and silence that is used by God to prepare people.

- Moses is a shepherd in the wilderness for 40 years before he leads Israel from Egypt¹
- The Israelites spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness as God grew their faith and prepared them to be a nation set apart to honor Him.²
- David is a shepherd out among the sheep before He slays Goliath. He is an outlaw hiding in the wilderness before He becomes a king.³
- Elijah spends 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness after running from the threat of the wicked Queen Jezebel. At the end of it, the Lord calls Him out to hear his voice. It's not in the rushing wind, or the mighty earthquake, or the roaring fire. Instead, God spoke in a still, small voice like a soft whisper.⁴
- And finally, Jesus spends 40 days in the wilderness fasting and praying before He begins His public ministry.
 - In Mark 1:35, we also see that Jesus rises early to pray in the quiet before He goes out into the craziness of His ministry.
 - Then, the night of His arrest, Jesus goes out to the Garden of Gethsemane- and He separates Himself to pray.

Consistently, we can see that God speaks the loudest in the silence. We see that in the "wilderness," or in times of focused solitude, we remove every distraction and open our hearts and minds to what God is saying.

If you are a believer, God is with you and desires a thriving relationship with you. Are you willing to step away from the noise so that you can better hear God and better prepare to live for Him?

¹ Acts 7:23,30

² Numbers 32:13

³ 1 Samuel 16:11, 1 Samuel 23:14

⁴ 1 Kings 19:11-13

II. Why do we avoid silence?

Today, we have a loud, busy, pushy, consuming world. It is difficult to find quiet- and I'm not just talking about decibels here. I am talking about a time and space where the responsibilities, worries, distractions, and idols of this world cannot reach us. Technology has connected us to everyone all the time. In many ways, that is a good thing, but we must recognize the drawbacks, or they will cripple us. This unlimited connection fills our lives with noise.

We have grown accustomed to this noise, and we crave it. We don't know what to do with silence or time with just our thoughts. The silence scares us, and so we run to something, anything, that will fill the void. Here are some habits we have that are indicative of our addiction to noise, or filler, in our lives. Not all of these are inherently evil, but they can reveal a deeper issue.

- Can I ride in my car without the radio on?
- Do I have to have the TV on to fall asleep?
- Do I scroll, binge, stream, or read until I can't keep my eyes open, then fall asleep?
- Do I always have music playing?
- Does a silent house, car, or office unnerve me?
- Can I let a text or phone call go unanswered while I concentrate on something else?
- Can I do a monotonous task without music, videos, audiobooks, or podcasts?
- How long can I pray before I get bored or distracted?

Now, I am not condemning jamming out in the car or doing some reading before you go to bed. What I want us to see is that we habitually fill our downtime with something, because we can't stand the idea of nothing. For some, it looks like filling this time with music, TV, video games, books, or conversations with other people. Others may fill this empty time with more work, or chores, or hobbies, making themselves so busy that they cannot afford to stop and embrace silence and solitude. They get so afraid of wasting time that there is no benefit to simply stopping and seeking God in silence.

We make excuses to get around this need to seek silence, to pray, and to listen by saying things like "I pray without ceasing," or "I talk to God throughout my day no matter what I'm doing." While we should have continual conversation with God as we go through our day, we have to recognize that it does not excuse us from times of intentional focus and prioritization of prayer and meditation on the Word of God.

I think at the end of the day, we can't handle silence because we either do not exercise control over our minds, or we cannot stand the conviction that comes with being alone with God. For some, anxieties, distractions, and daydreams just run through their mind. Yet I think we carry a much deeper reason to avoid silence: conviction of our sins

For worriers, if you stop and think, you will just get worried about that test next Tuesday, or what you said to your waitress last Monday, or how you haven't exercised all week, and now you are going to die when you're 42. Your worries and anxieties fill every moment of silence with fear and uncertainty, and so you avoid silence at all costs. Worry and anxiety can press in all around us and pull us away from silence. Remember that as a Christian, you have the fruit

of the Spirit, which includes self-control.⁵ You have been made new and are called to renew your mind.⁶ You have a Heavenly Father who seeks to bring you peace when you cast your worries and cares upon Him and shift your thoughts to the things of Heaven.⁷

Others get easily distracted. They begin thinking “what am I going to have for dinner, or are the Bengals are actually going to be good next year, or I need to do the laundry that I have forgotten to do for the last week and a half, and you know, since I am thinking of it, I should really just start that now rather than forgetting again, and oh, while I’m up i’m just going to...” And silence is disrupted because there is no focus. There will always be distractions, so we must learn how to step away from them, especially in our thoughts. We must take every thought captive and bring it into submission to Christ.⁸

Sometimes, silence can just lead to daydreams about how you are going to work out 3 times a day for the next year and get into the best shape of your life, or how you are going to remodel your house and turn it into your dream home, or whatever it is that you wished you had. Instead of staying present in the moment, you find yourself making your own fairytale, which just gets more and more disconnected from reality.

The much deeper and spiritual cause for our avoidance of silence is that we don’t want to face God because we don’t want to face our sins. We don’t want to feel conviction, and we definitely don’t want to stop our sins. This applies to the most vile sins, and the sins that don’t seem like that big of a deal. If I am silent and it is just me and God, then I know I am going to feel conviction about the things I’ve been watching. If I am silent with God, then I know I am going to feel conviction about the way I treat my family. Or I know I am going to feel conviction about how I use my time, or my money.

We refuse to face that conviction, and we run from it for as long as we can, until eventually, it overwhelms us, and we have no choice but to turn to God and ask for forgiveness. Then, we experience His forgiveness, and we have peace with God for a time, but all of a sudden, something else starts to stir our heart, and instead of handling it, we repeat the avoidance process. This cycle is evidence of who is Lord of your life.

Or maybe you are so consumed with guilt about your sin that you think God is disappointed or angry with you, and so you are afraid to face Him. So you dodge His calls. You avoid silence, or times of reflection, where it is just you and God, because you don’t want to face the music. If that is the case, you have the wrong idea about who God is. Is He grieved by sin? Absolutely. But God is not waiting for you to come back so He can punish you. No, He has already forgiven you, and Jesus has already paid the price. God wants you to come back home because He loves you and He wants what is best for you. If you are avoiding silence because you are running from God. It’s time to stop, confess your sins, and embrace His forgiveness.

III. Embracing and making the most of silence

Silence and solitude are vital parts of the Christian life that are too quickly disregarded or outright avoided. How do we take practical steps to make these spiritual disciplines a consistent

⁵ Galatians 5:22-25

⁶ Romans 12:2

⁷ Matthew 6:25-34, Philippians 4:6-8

⁸ 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

stronghold in our lives that prepares us to face the craziness of this world with the peace and strength that God offers?

We must create times of silence by removing distractions and intentionally seeking out God. Our world, our lives, and our thoughts are all constantly shouting and grabbing at us. Silence doesn't come naturally. If we want times of silence, we cannot simply live life and hope that silence happens upon us. Instead, we must seek it out. There are a few principles that are vital when seeking out silence.

1. Retreat from others.

Community is a vital part of the Christian life. The church is a vital part of the Christian life. Family is vital. Friends are vital. Make no mistake, we NEED consistent relationships with others. BUT, there are specific times that we must retreat from others to be alone with God. We also must recognize that not all time alone is healthy. Solitude is time spent alone with God for a purpose. Isolation is pushing people away so that you can distance yourself from the accountability and responsibility God has given you. Both isolation and solitude are times away from people, but one is a foundation for a thriving relationship with God, and the other is a debilitating cancer. Your motive in the silence matters. Am I taking this time to pursue God, to seek His voice, and draw on His strength? Or am I pulling away from others because I want to pursue my own desires? Because they might call me out on my sin.

Solitude is something to integrate into our lives, but be on guard against isolation. Ensure there is a balance between time alone with God and time spent in Godly community. Recognize your motive, and use this as a time to be with God, not a time to push away everyone and everything for selfish desires.

2. Remove distractions.

If we are seeking silence, we have to cut the noise. We have to separate from the cares and demands of this world.

- Step one is removing technology. If I am seeking a time of total silence, I need to remove the biggest silence destroyer in my life- my phone (and all other technology, really). I don't need to answer texts or calls. My time with God is more important. It is easier to completely remove technology from my time alone than to try to constantly fight the temptation to use it. Studies show that merely having your phone in the room with you, not using it, just having it sit in the room, decreases your ability to focus.⁹ If my goal is to completely focus on God and the removal of distractions, technology has to be the first to go.
- Then, find a time and place that you can go to and not worry about being interrupted. It's probably not wise to seek silence with God in the living room while everyone is getting ready for school. You will get distracted, problems will arise that you need to help with, and everything is just busy. Instead, find a time that you can step away that won't interfere with your responsibilities to others. Early in the morning isn't the only way to do it; it's just the way that Jesus did it. Late at night may also be a good time for you. Or maybe it's once everyone

⁹Ward, A. F., Duke, K., Gneezy, A., & Bos, M. W. (2017, June 26). *The mere presence of your smartphone reduces brain power*. University of Texas at Austin.
<https://news.utexas.edu/2017/06/26/the-mere-presence-of-your-smartphone-reduces-brain-power/>

finally leaves the house, or when your husband finally gets back home and can watch the kids. The time is different for everyone, but finding that time helps you to set up a consistent discipline without worrying about the people around you. You also want to set a specific place that you know won't be a distraction. Don't try to set up in high-traffic areas or in areas that are distracting to you.

- Finally, remove the distractions from your heart and mind. There will always be something to do, someone to check on, something to plan for, or something to worry about. The final distraction to remove isn't something external; it is our very heart and mind. Take a deep breath, maybe bring a notebook to write down any needs or concerns that pop into your head so that you can move on for now and address them later. Bring yourself into full focus and quiet. It feels weird at first, but that is only because we are so inundated and addicted to the noise.

3. Recognize God's presence

Once you are at a place of quiet, turn your heart and mind to God. Go to Him in prayer. Open His Word and study deeply, meditate, and pray through what you read. Confront and confess your sins, and repent of them. Identify the root of your sin and turn it over to God. Bring your needs and the needs of others to Him. Reflect on His faithfulness and blessing in your life. Give Him praise and thanks. It can be structured and organized, but it can also be more organic or loose. Just spend time in a focused and intentional relationship with God.

Conclusion:

Seek out and defend times of silence from an ever-deafening world. Identify if you hold any fear or discomfort toward silence, and ask why that is. Is there worry, guilt, shame, or sin in my life that I am withholding from God? Am I so addicted to and dependent on noise that I don't know how to function without it?

Then, begin to develop a discipline of silence in your own life. Retreat from others, remove distractions, and recognize the presence of God. Make this a time of peace, refuge, and preparation for the busy world that we face.

For our homework this week, we have a worksheet to help us reflect, remove, and recognize to develop a discipline of silence and solitude.

I hope you have a great week!