

The Importance of Solitude **Pastor Donn Jibben**

Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed. - Mark 1:35

This passage from the Gospels about Jesus is a great example for us today, because it shows us that Christianity is a living, loving, personal relationship with our Heavenly Father and Creator through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Christianity is relational, it is intimate, it is loving! That is what sets it apart from all other religions.

When an individual is “born again”, they are born from above, by the breathe and life of God, through His Holy Spirit. As believers, the Life of Jesus Christ, the Living Word has now been breathed and birthed into our hearts. This new nature that dwells within us must be nourished in order to grow and develop, that we may mature and become like Christ.

Have you ever heard anyone say that you become like the person who you spend the most quality time with?

A father can say, “I feel my son is drawing nearer to me as he grows older, but he has always lived with me and been near me since he was born.” What is taking place here? Their relationship is growing into a deeper, more intimate relationship where their hearts are being united by a deeper love and understanding of each other. This is because of the time they have spent together and invested in each other. However, the same father and son can live in the same house together and not know each other very well, because they never developed an intimate relationship by spending quality time together, communicating and sharing their hearts.

This is true in our relationship with our Heavenly Father as well. We must spend time in solitude with Him in order to know Him intimately.

We are His children and He is our Father. When we draw near to Him, He draws near to us (James 4:8). The result is that His presence brings about transformation in our lives and hearts. It is a great privilege to spend time with our Heavenly Father.

Why is that some find God in ways others do not? Some believers may drag along while others grow, mature and produce fruit. The difference lies with man, not with God. There is no other way to grow, mature and produce fruit, outside of spending time with our Heavenly Father. What an honor that He allows us to come into His presence, sit at His feet, drink from His cup of living water, and lay our heads upon His chest. He is forever our loving, faithful friend.

A common practice among believers long ago was to “practice the presence of God”—to routinely get alone with the Lord, to be near Him and to sit in His presence. In my own life, I can attribute my greatest seasons of spiritual growth, understanding and maturity to the time I spent in solitude with my Heavenly Father.

I once hear John Maxwell share a story from his college days. He would leave the campus after lunch, and walk to a nearby utility shed, where he would spend an hour alone with God. He talked about how his spirit would soar with anticipation as he approached that old utility shed, knowing he was about to meet with the Creator of the universe. He did this routinely throughout his four years in college.

After Graduation, he got married and became the pastor of a small church in Southern Indiana. One of the first things he did was establish a place of solitude. He lived on forty acres, and in a certain area, there was a large rock. He would climb up on it and spend time alone with God. He did this for more than three years, until the next phase of his journey took him to Ohio. Arriving in a new city, he found a park that overlooked the city, where would spend many hours in solitude with God there.

One day, he woke up to a loud commotion outside of his house. He looked out the window and saw a large flatbed trailer carrying a huge rock. He saw his brother, who was not even walking with the Lord at the time, as he directed the driver to place it in the woods near the house. John walked outside and met his brother, who told him he knew how much the large rock in Indiana meant to him, so he brought him this rock, so that he could sit on it while he prayed and spent time with God.

John Maxwell grabbed hold of the life-changing principle of simply spending time alone with God, and I know that you can as well. When we, as believers, take care of the *depth* of our relationship with God, He takes care of the *width* of our relationships and ministry. When we are healthy, our families are healthy, and when our families are healthy, our churches and communities are healthy. Another word for this is “discipleship”.

Discipleship is sitting at the feet of another, learning from them, putting it into practice and then teaching others what you have learned. When we do this, the Great Commission that Jesus laid out for His disciples in Matthew 28:16-20 is fulfilled.

JESUS IS OUR GREATEST EXAMPLE

Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed. - Mark 1:35

Immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He sent the multitude away, and when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray. - Mark 6:46

However, the report went around concerning Him all the more; and great multitudes came together to hear and to be healed by Him of their infirmities. So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed. - Luke 5:15-16

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 6:12

About eight days after Jesus said this, (vs. 27 “I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.”) he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray (the Transfiguration). - Luke 9:28; emphasis added

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” ... Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. - Matthew 26:36, 40

Just as Jesus confronted the disciples about spending time with Him, so He also does with us, kindly and lovingly, knowing the essential importance of our spiritual well-being and how it will transform our hearts and lives. Time alone with our Heavenly Father is never wasted. Jesus often spent time alone with God, especially right before major events in His life and ministry.

MARY HAS CHOSEN WHAT IS BETTER

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” - Luke 10:38-42

“Mary has chosen what is better ...”

We too must choose what is better—spending time in solitude with the Lord, and allowing His presence and Spirit to touch our hearts. It’s great to come into God’s presence during a corporate worship service, but that is not enough. We must have *solitude*—time alone with God.

Spending 1 hour with God may sound like an impossible task, but it is not. I want to show you how you too can learn to get away with God in solitude.

In my own life, I spent many hours in the presence of the Lord through worship and Bible study in my office at the cattle farm. This time with God radically changed my heart and life. My heart’s passion went from desiring to build my own little kingdom, to surrendering to the Holy Spirit and the Lord’s call to ministry. I gave up my childhood dream and everything I ever loved doing, such as raising hereford cattle. I had to give up what I loved to choose what was better.

THREE WAYS TO FIND SOLITUDE WITH GOD

When we enter into solitude with God, it is vital that we maintain a mindset of willingness to obey Him. Solitude is not about negotiating with God. It’s about coming into His presence to be transformed, as we learn to love and obey Him. In His presence, we must allow God to love us, (Romans 5:5), search us (Psalm 139:23-24) and show us (Jeremiah 33:3, James 1:5).

1) The First Way To Find Solitude With God is Thru PRAYER.

Resources Needed: Bible, Prayer Journal, Note Pad, Hymnal/Chorus Book/Devotional, Worship CD's

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to the Father, who is unseen. Then your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. - Matthew 6:5-6

Every believer needs to establish a place of solitude in prayer, where they can be alone with God. Just as Jesus had His secret places of solitude, so must we. As we meet with God in secret, He promises to transform our hearts by His presence. He then becomes greater and we become lesser!

The acronym A.C.T.S. is easy to remember when we come into the Lord's presence to pray and worship.

A = Adoration

C = Confession

T = Thanksgiving

S = Supplication / Silence

Here are some key things to remember as you pray:

- Pray in the manner that fits you best—walk, kneel, sit, lay prostrate, bow.
- Be yourself—be transparent with God. He knows your heart—your joys, your needs, your hurts, your struggles and your disappointments.
- Talk to God and let Him talk to you.
- Pray—in your understanding and in the Spirit.

ADORATION:

I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. My soul will boast in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together. - Psalm 34:1-3

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess His name. - Hebrews 13:15

We lose something of our humanity when we fail to adore and worship God; Romans 1 tells us this very clearly and profoundly. Adoration towards God is the release of love from our human heart and soul, acknowledging the majesty of God. Think of all that God has revealed of Himself to us and what we have discovered of Him - His creation, His love, His grace, His glory, His greatness, His forgiveness, His mercy, His faithfulness, etc. How can we not desire to be with Him, to spend Solitude time with Him and adore Him?

CONFESSION:

He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy. - Proverbs 28:13

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. - 1 John 1:9

If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; but God surely has listened and heard my voice in prayer. Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me. - Psalm 66:18-20

Prayer should always include the confession of sin. Unconfessed sin can consume us and even destroy us as we take on bitterness, resentment, unforgiveness, anger, hatred, etc. This grieves the Holy Spirit and affects our relationship with the Lord.

Steps to confessing sin:

- Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal every sin.
- Confess each sin to the Lord.
- Seek His cleansing, healing and deliverance from that sin.
- Make restitution as the Lord leads you.
- Thank God for His forgiveness.

Having a clean heart is vital! Psalm 24:3 says, “*Who may ascend to the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy Place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart ... such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face , O God of Jacob.*”

THANKSGIVING:

It is vital that we come into God’s presence with thankful hearts. We need to express thankfulness to God for His unconditional love and abounding grace that has touched our lives.

Make a joyful shout to the Lord, all you lands. Serve the Lord with gladness; Come before His presence with singing. Know that the Lord, He is God; It is He who made us and not we ourselves, We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise, be thankful to Him and bless His name. For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting and His truth endures to all generations. - Psalm 100:1-5

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. - 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Is it possible that there is a lack of gratitude among the Christian community today? Why is this, when we have so much to be thankful for? Things such as our salvation, spouse, children,

parents, friends, health, job / boss, material possessions, church / pastor. We need to come to God with our hearts full of thanksgiving for all He has blessed us with.

SUPPLICATION:

Prayer should also include the expression of our needs and the needs of others. We have a lot of things to pray for!

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God. - Philippians 4:6

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers intercessions and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. - 1 Timothy 2:1-4

- Nehemiah wept, fasted and prayed to the God of Heaven (Nehemiah 1).
- Daniel would get down on his knees and pray three times a day (Daniel 6).
- Elijah—Widow's son, fire upon the altar, rain (1 Kings 17-18, James 5).
- King Uzziah—As long as he sought the Lord, God gave him success (2 Chronicles 26).
- The New Testament Church prayed for Peter, and he was miraculously set free (Acts 12).

As believers we are never expressing our creation and dignity anymore than while we are praying to the God of Heaven. Pray doesn't always change events, but it always changes us!

SILENCE:

Prayer is a two-way street; we need to be good listeners as well as good talkers. For that to happen, we must be silent before the Lord and wait for Him to speak.

My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. - John 10:27

Be still and know that I am God. - Psalm 40:10

But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not be faint. - Isaiah 40:31

2) The Second Way to Spend Solitude Time with God is Thru BIBLE STUDY.

Resources Needed: Bible, Commentary, Word Study, a Teachable Heart.

Bible study for the believer is essential for spiritual life, health and growth. I can't express this enough, in a time when truth is now relative. The Bible is God's divinely inspired revelation of

Himself to man; a real love letter! The Bible is historical, absolute and unchanging truth for all generations. It is relevant to our lives today.

... it is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. - Matthew 4:4

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. - 2 Timothy 3:16

For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. - 1 Peter 1:21

... but the Word of the Lord endures forever. - 1 Peter 1:25

Be diligent to present yourself approved by God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. - 2 Timothy 2:15

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. - John 1:1-2

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. - John 1:14

Why do we need to study God's Word?

- It is essential for our personal and spiritual growth. 1 Peter 2 says, *"... desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow."*
- It is essential for our spiritual maturity. Hebrews 5:14 says, *"But solid food belongs to those who are full of age ..." (mature).*
- It is essential for knowing spiritual truth. Acts 17:11 says, *"... they received the word of God with readiness and searched the scriptures daily to find out if these things were so."*

Studying and being in the Word is crucial to our walking with the Lord!

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, *"if you abide in my word, you are my disciples indeed."* - John 8:31

In May 2001, USA Today published an article about President George W. Bush, that talked about how he starts every day on his knees in prayer. He reads the Bible each morning and studies a Bible lesson daily. When Boris Trajkovski, the Macedonian president, visited, they knelt side-by-side in prayer!

Psalms 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible, and it strongly emphasizes the importance of God's Word in our lives. Please read and study this powerful chapter!

3) WORSHIP

Resources Needed: CD's and CD Player, iPod or Mp3 Player, Hymnal or Chorus Book, a Worshipful Heart.

Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is a spirit and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth. - John 4:23-24

What an incredible privilege we have to be able to enter into the Holy of Holies, and into God's presence, to worship Him. There is something unique, spiritually speaking, about worshiping and entering the presence of God. It is there that we sense His love, hope, strength and peace. In His presence, troubles vanish. In His presence, hearts are mended. In His presence, there is strength, hope, victory, peace and love.

In 2 Chronicles 20, Jehoshaphat won victory over the enemy after putting the praise/ worship team in front of his army.

In Acts 16, Paul and Silas sing praises to God, and then they are miraculously set free from prison.

We don't know what we are missing as believers when we replace our private time of worship with our corporate time of worship. We must also seek the Lord in solitude, if we desire to live victoriously.

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. - Jeremiah 29:13

It is true God is a rewarder to those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). We were created to worship the Lord, and worship Him with all of our hearts. Why should we allow the rocks to cry out to Him, when it is for us that He died?

Psalm 150 says it best! *"Praise the Lord. Praise God in His sanctuary; Praise Him in His mighty firmament. Praise Him for His mighty acts ... Let everything that has breathe praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!"*

CONCLUSION

Spending time alone with our Lord and Savior is vital to the overall spiritual well-being of every believer. This is where transformation of the heart happens, where growth and maturity truly take place.

In reality, spending an hour with the Lord is not that hard to do, when you apply the principles discussed in this article: prayer, Bible study and worship.

- Spending 20 minutes doing all of them = 1 hour
- Spending 30 minutes doing two = 1 hour
- Spending 1 hour doing one = 1 hour

- Spending 1 hour doing all of them = 3 hours

Believe me, someone will notice something unique about you when you spend time in solitude with the Lord.

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. - Acts 4:13

Is anyone in your circle of friends noticing that you have been with Jesus?

While spending time with the Lord in solitude, encountering the awesome presence of God, our hearts are transformed and our mouths will cry out ...

“Lord, deepen my love for You. Thank You for loving me.”

“Lord, keep me near the cross.”

“Lord, soften and purify my heart.”

“Lord, help me to love my spouse like You do.”

“Lord, be exalted in my life.”

“Lord, You alone are worthy.”

“Lord, save my son / save my daughter.”

“Lord, help me to obey You.”

“Lord, not my will, but Yours be done.”

In thy presence is fullness of joy. - Psalm 16:11

Practicing the Presence of the Lord, and spending time alone with the Father will transform your heart and life. Just do it!

In Christ's love,

Pastor Donn Jibben

I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. - Philippians 3:10-11