

Chris Murphy

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Scripture: Luke 4: 38-44

Sermon Title: The Spirituality of Jesus and Solitude

Prayer...

Introduction

Are you an introvert or extrovert or are you in the middle?

(Story of learning that I was an ambivert)

I tend to think Jesus was an ambivert who had more energy than most ambiverts.

In our story today, Jesus cares for Simon Peter's Mother In law by healing her of a fever. She feels so much better that she shows hospitality by serving those visiting her home. Then in the evening Jesus heals many people of various diseases and casts out demons.

At daybreak, Jesus goes out to a deserted place to pray. We do not know how much time he is able to spend in prayer, but eventually as people wake up they go searching for Jesus. They want to keep Jesus in their town, but he tells them they he must proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God to other cities.

What can we learn about the spirituality of Jesus from this story?

In Henri Nouwen's writing he talks about the rhythm of Jesus' life as being a flow from solitude to community to ministry. Jesus is very active in his ministry. He seems to have almost boundless levels of energy, but he also creates boundaries for himself as the needs of

people come to him. One of those boundaries is his own practice of solitude.

It was Jesus' habit to spend a portion of his morning and sometimes the evening in prayer in solitude. He needed time for himself to get away from the crowds and to connect to his own heart and to God.

How do you feel about solitude? My hunch is that for some of us it feels hard to spend time alone. We may struggle with loneliness or we may feel bored when we are alone. For many of us when we do have alone times, we gravitate toward social media, television, or movies as a form of engagement. As wonderful as entertainment can be, I think we all agree that it is difficult for many of us to create space in our lives for solitude.

Solitude is different than simply being alone. Solitude is a spiritual practice where we connect to God and ourselves. As part of connecting to ourselves we seek to be aware of our bodies, including our emotions and feelings.

Last Wednesday, my wife Karen Murphy, daughter Chiara Murphy, elder Ciaran Hynes, and I had the privilege of hosting a lunch at our church with about 25 Newberg pastors. It was a wonderful gathering with a focus on good conversation and ministry support. We took time to share with them about our First Friday Prayer Retreats and Ciaran was able to share with the whole group about the creation of our Newberg Peace Garden. The good news is that all of these ministry leaders had exciting updates about good ministry outreaches being done as part of the mission of each church. As pastors spoke, I felt both appreciation for them and my own pastoral concern for all of us that even as we do good ministry we need to make sure we stay healthy and not get overworked. I am hoping that some of these pastors might join

us for our First Friday Prayer retreats in order to experience some rest and the gift of solitude.

If Jesus needed solitude to effectively do his ministry, we also need solitude.

Some tips for following the example of the spirituality of Jesus is creating space for solitude.

Solitude:

- Make it restful and reflective. Solitude is not a time to be in a hurry.
- Reflect on your life. How are you? How do you feel? What hurts?
- Bring your feelings and needs to God knowing that God is love.
- Listen to God and consider journaling what you hear.
- Take some time to dream about your future.
- Spend time in nature if you can. As my wife likes to say, the closer we are to nature, the closer we are to God. Look for spacious places.
- Spiritual reading is helpful. Stories that inspire you can be spiritual reading. Of course meditating on Scripture is helpful.
- There is value in taking naps. Listen to your body.
- Enjoy food and drink as part of caring for yourself.
- Enjoy music, painting, drawing, or other forms of art.
- Consider moderate exercise, walking or jogging.
- Avoid technology if you can and if you do look at something, have it be edifying. Movies that inspire are better than movies that disturb. Be gentle with yourself.

- Okay to wrestle with God in your solitude, but the hope is to eventually come to a place of rest and peace. Like a child being held by her or his mother.
- You may wish to flow from solitude to community to ministry, so you may plan your day to include a little of each. At our prayer retreats, we make space for solitude, but then we also enjoy conversation in community. As we clean up our dishes and prepare food for lunch, we even do some serving of one another.

Remember Jesus enjoyed the gift of solitude. It may have been his most important spiritual practice because it helped him stay close to his Father in Heaven's heart. Solitude helped Jesus be led by the Holy Spirit.

Remember if solitude and prayer are hard for you, be gentle with yourself. Start with 30 minutes or 1 hour of solitude and go from there. Eventually you will become more comfortable being alone in solitude without filling your time with always doing. We are human beings not human doings, so we need space to slow down and simply be with ourselves and God.

If you would like to try solitude with the help of community, consider joining us for our First Friday Prayer retreat. The prayer materials can also be used on your own.

(Finish Sermon with Reflections on Prayer and the movement of Revival happening at Asbury University.)