

## Practicing The Way

# SILENCE & SOLITUDE

A person in a blue jacket stands in a vast, open field with a forest in the background under a cloudy sky. The person is looking towards the horizon. The field is dry and brown, and the forest is dense with evergreen trees. The sky is blue with white clouds.

### **How do we escape the chaos of life?**

In the chaos of the urban, digital age, it's easier than ever before to “gain the whole world, and yet lose your soul.” How do we stay emotionally and spiritually alive and awake? Among the ancient practices of the way “silence and solitude” is the number one practice for apprenticeship to Jesus. Simply put, it's a moment of intentional time in the quiet to be alone with God. In the modern era, this just might be the first step to a life well lived.

### **Weekly Practice**

Follow along with each week of this practice. We recommend you work through it with a community like a small group, a weekly meal with friends or neighbors, your roommates, whatever works. Get a group of people, set a time each week to share a meal, then talk and pray for about an hour. Transformation happens in community.

Learn more about Practicing The Way  
[practictheway.org](http://practictheway.org)

# Week 1: The Basics

By John Mark Comer

## Read this overview

In our over busy, digital, distracted world, the first challenge we face in silence and solitude is simply our lack of ability to slow down and focus. To “be ourselves with God,” we must first learn to center our mind and body.

The goal of week one is to first identify a time and place that works well for you to practice silence and solitude, set a modest goal, and then start with the basics: begin with a breathing prayer, and then just spend some time abiding.

It sounds easy, but, like all good things, it takes practice. So be patient with yourself and God, and enjoy the journey.

## Begin with silence and prayer

*5 min*

Gather together as a Community in a comfortable setting (around a table, on the couch, the floor of a living room, etc.). Say a quick prayer to invite the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together. Then spend a few minutes in silence. Why silence, even while together? Because we live in a busy, noisy world, under a non-stop assault of distraction. In the midst of all the chaos, it’s hard at times to hear the voice of God, and that of our brothers and sisters. As we gather together as a family, we want to hear what the Father is saying to and through each of us, and respond in turn. A great way to do that is to begin each time with silence and prayer.

## Debrief the teaching in small groups

*15-20 min*

If you are in a Community of seven or more, divide into small groups of 3–4 people each (ideally same gender).

Spend a few minutes catching up on life...

Then talk through the following debrief questions:

1. Did you listen to the teaching? What did you think?
2. Is silence and solitude a regular part of your discipleship to Jesus? If yes, what does that look like in your life rhythm? If no, why not? (Note: The point of this question is honest conversation, not guilt or shame. Work hard to create a safe place in your community for people at every stage.)
3. How does the idea of silence and solitude make you feel? Excited? Scared? Too busy?

If you have time, tell a story of something cool God said or did in you life through an experience with silence and solitude.

## **Open to the Bible together**

*10 min*

Have somebody read Luke 4v42 and another person read Luke 15v15-16

Talk about the following questions:

1. Why do think Jesus would regularly slip away to “lonely places”?
2. What role do you think the regular practice of silence and solitude played in Jesus’ emotional health and spiritual life?
3. What challenges would Jesus have faced to carve out time to be alone with himself and God? Do you face any similar challenges?

## **Talk about the coming week’s practice as a Community**

*10–30 min*

Here’s the practice for the coming week:

First...

1. Identify a time/place that works well for you

- Time: For most people, first thing in the morning works best. You’re rested, fresh, and the day is young. For others, a more optimal time slot is when kids are napping in the late morning, or on a lunch break, after work, or before you go to bed. Feel free to experiment until you find the right fit.
- Place: Find a place that is quiet and as distraction free as possible. A comfortable chair with a blanket and candle nearby works well for a lot of people. Weather permitting, a park or nature reserve are also a good bet.

2. Set a modest goal

- Beginners: It’s better to start small and work your way up. We recommend you start with ten minutes, 3-5 days a week.
- Intermediate: If you already practice silence and solitude a few times a week, consider upping it to every day.
- Advanced: If you already practice silence and solitude daily, consider upping your time (to, say, an hour), or just giving your time a high level of focus.

Then, for the practice...

1. Put away your phone or any other distractions, settle into your time/place, and get comfortable

- For most people, sitting with your back straight, shoulders relaxed, legs on the floor is a good start. Others do better lying on their back in a relaxed position.
- Some of you may prefer to do this exercise while walking or doing something simple with your hands, like laundry or drawing.

## 2. Begin with a breathing prayer

- Close your eyes.
- Take long, deep, slow breaths (if you want, count 4 seconds in, 4 seconds wait, 4 seconds out, repeat). Inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth.
- Start to pay attention to your breathing. Just “watch” your breath go in and out.
- Release the constant chatter in your mind. Let each thought go as quickly as it comes, and just focus on your breathing.
- Your mind will seize this opportunity to run wild with thoughts, feelings, memories, to do’s, and distractions. That’s okay. Don’t judge yourself, feel bad, give up, or worry. When you notice your mind start to wander, just recenter with a quick prayer, like, “Father...” and come back to your breathing.
- In the beginning, just 1-2 minutes of this is a huge win, and 10 minutes is a home run.

## 3. Spend a few minutes “abiding in the vine”

- Transition from your breathing prayer to “the practice of the presence of God.”
- Notice God’s presence all around you, in you. For some people it’s helpful to imagine the Father is sitting in the chair across from you or on a throne.
- Welcome his love, joy, and peace from the Holy Spirit.
- If you want, open your mind and imagination to listen for God’s voice, or get something off your chest in prayer.
- But the main goal here is simply to “be with Jesus.” Don’t feel like you have to “do” anything. Just relax and enjoy his presence.

## 4. Close in a prayer of gratitude and commit the rest of your day to the Father

A few things to note:

1. You can’t “succeed” or “fail” at this practice. All you can do is show up. Be patient. This takes some people years to master. Resist the urge to say, “I’m bad at this” or “This isn’t for me.” Don’t judge yourself, especially if you’re an overachiever type.
2. If you’re more of an “S” on the Meyer’s Briggs, and sitting still is just death, you might want to try this while doing a stretching exercise or going on a walk somewhere quiet and distraction free (like a park or short hike). Apply the same idea to a walking prayer, and just focus on your walking instead of your breathing.

## **Work through these discussion questions**

*10-15 min*

1. How does the idea of a breathing prayer hit you? Does it sound appealing? Stupid? Uncomfortable?
2. What challenges do you face in carving out time for silence and solitude? (Ex. Overall busyness, work schedule, little kids, apartment living, extroverted personality, etc.)
3. What is your deepest fear and greatest hope for this coming week’s practice?

## **Close in prayer**

*10-15 min*

# Week 2: Emotional Health

By John Mark Comer

## Read this overview

Human beings are emotional creatures. We feel, deeply at times. Sadly, American church culture can be quick to write off “feelings” or “emotional health.” But Jesus puts on display a high level of emotional awareness. For Jesus, emotions - positive or negative - are places to meet with God.

The goal of week two is to get in touch with your feelings and process each one with the Father. After a short time for breathing prayer and abiding, we encourage you to let yourself feel whatever comes. Naming our emotions is often the first step toward hearing from God. When you're ready, ask yourself the Elijah question: “What are you doing here, \_\_\_\_\_?”

This week will be easy for some and very hard on others . That's okay. You're safe with the Father.

## Begin with silence and prayer

*5 min*

Gather together as a Community in a comfortable setting (around a table, on the couch, the floor of a living room, etc.). Say a quick prayer to invite the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together. Then spend a few minutes in silence. Why silence, even while together? Because we live in a busy, noisy world, under a non-stop assault of distraction. In the midst of all the chaos, it's hard at times to hear the voice of God, and that of our brothers and sisters. As we gather together as a family, we want to hear what the Father is saying to and through each of us, and respond in turn. A great way to do that is to begin each time with silence and prayer.

## Debrief last week's practice in small groups

*15-20 min*

If you are in a Community of seven or more, divide into small groups of 3–4 people each (ideally same gender).

Spend a few minutes catching up on life...

Then talk through the following debrief questions:

1. How did it go?
2. What was the best part? The hardest part?
3. What did this practice reveal about your relationship with the Father? (Positive or negative. Remember, work hard to create a safe place for honest conversation.)

## **Open to the Bible together**

*10 min*

Have somebody read Luke 22v39-46

Talk about the following questions:

1. What did Jesus do with his overwhelming emotions of sorrow and dread? What kind of example does that set for us as Jesus' apprentices?
2. What was the result of Jesus "getting in touch with his feelings" and then giving his emotions over to the Father in prayer?
3. What are some of the reasons that we, like Jesus' apprentices in the story, have a hard time meeting God in our emotions, specifically our negative emotions?

## **Talk about the coming week's practice as a Community**

*10-30 min*

Here's the practice for the coming week:

1. Put away your phone or any other distractions, settle into your time/place, and get comfortable.
2. Begin with a breathing prayer.
  - Close your eyes.
  - Take long, deep, slow breaths (if you want, count 4 seconds in, 4 seconds wait, 4 seconds out, repeat). Inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth.
  - Start to pay attention to your breathing. Just "watch" your breath go in and out.
  - Release the constant chatter in your mind. Let each thought go as quickly as it comes, and just focus on your breathing.
  - Your mind will seize this opportunity to run wild with thoughts, feelings, memories, to do's, and distractions. That's okay. Don't judge yourself, feel bad, give up or worry. When you notice your mind start to wander, just recenter with a quick prayer, like, "Father..." and come back to your breathing.
  - In the beginning, just 1-2 minutes of this is a huge win, and 10 minutes is a home run.
3. Spend a few minutes "abiding in the vine"
4. Let yourself feel.
  - What emotions rise to the surface of your heart, big or small? You might feel joy, gratitude, sadness, emptiness, fatigue, worry, guilt and shame, conviction, or any number of positive or negative emotions.
  - Name "the good, the bad, and the ugly" of your emotional state.
  - Don't run away from what you're feeling. In the Father's presence, face each emotion head on. Let yourself feel it, deeply.
  - Remember: emotional pain isn't something to avoid. Instead, think of it as a place to meet God and open yourself up to him in new ways.

5. Ask yourself the Elijah question: “What are you doing here, \_\_\_\_\_?”

- Another way to ask this is: Where are you at with yourself and God right now? Is there anything God is trying to say to you through these emotions?

6. Pray: Get it all off your chest. Give whatever you are feeling over to God - the good, the bad, and the ugly. No filter. The point here isn't to be good, but to be honest.

- Different emotions call for different kinds of prayer.
- If you're happy - celebrate! Sing! Dance!
- If you're grateful, tell God what for with specificity.
- If you're anxious, give your worry over to the Father and ask for his peace in return.
- If you're sitting in unanswered questions about your life or future, hold that tension before God. Tell him how it feels not to have an answer. Don't force clarity where there is none. Just be patient before God with all that is unsolved in your heart.

7. Close in a prayer of gratitude and commit everything you're feeling to the Father.

Note: After a few days of this practice, or toward the end of the week, we recommend you do two things:

1. Set aside a little time to write out your experience in a journal.
2. Go share your experience with a close friend or Community member.

Finally: Continue to resist the urge to say, “I'm bad at this” or “I didn't get anything out of it.” Just practice. And be patient.

### **Work through these discussion questions**

*10–15 min*

1. Would you say you are “in touch with your feelings” in a healthy, Jesus-like way? Or is that hard and difficult for you? If so, why?
2. Was emotional awareness a part of your upbringing? How did your family of origin deal with emotional pain? How has that shaped your life today?
3. We all face emotional pain in life. In those times, what happens when we use coping mechanisms other than prayer?
4. What is your coping mechanism of choice? (Ex. escapism, alcohol, denial, overwork, busyness, church activity, etc.)

### **Close in prayer**

*10-15 min*

Go around the room and have each person quickly share one prayer they have for the coming week's practice. Then pray that over each other.

Note: if you have a large Community and are running out of time, we recommend you get back into small groups of 3-4 people.

# Week 3: Casting Care

By Bethany Allen

## Read this overview

Most people, whether they are aware of it or not, are living with some form of low-grade anxiety. Between digital distraction, relational pain, and daily stress, many of us are carrying burdens much larger than we often choose to acknowledge.

This week we want to extend our practice of silence and solitude and focus on casting your cares and burdens on Jesus. We'll do this through the practice of release. It involves five movements. 1) Create for yourself a quiet space to meet with God, 2) Invite the Holy Spirit, 3) Write, 4) Imagine and 5) Release. The goal is not to rush or to do an exercise, but to find freedom in entrusting yourself more fully to Jesus.

## Begin with silence and prayer

*5 min*

Gather together as a Community in a comfortable setting (around a table, on the couch, the floor of a living room, etc.). Say a quick prayer to invite the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together. Then spend a few minutes in silence. Why silence, even while together? Because we live in a busy, noisy world, under a non-stop assault of distraction. In the midst of all the chaos, it's hard at times to hear the voice of God, and that of our brothers and sisters. As we gather together as a family, we want to hear what the Father is saying to and through each of us, and respond in turn. A great way to do that is to begin each time with silence and prayer.

## Debrief last week's practice in small groups

*15-20 min*

If you are in a Community of seven or more, divide into small groups of 3–4 people each (ideally same gender).

Spend a few minutes catching up on life...

Then talk about the following debrief questions:

1. How did it go?
2. Was it easy or difficult to “let yourself feel”?
3. Were there any specific things you heard from God?

## Open to the Bible together

10 min

Have somebody read the following texts:

- 1 Peter 5v7
- Psalm 62v8
- Philippians 4v6

Talk about the following questions:

1. In 1 Peter 5v7 we are told to cast all of our anxiety on him (Jesus) because he cares for us. Name 1-2 things you are currently anxious about. Do you ever question God's care for you? If so, why?
2. Psalm 62 tells us we're to "pour out our hearts to God", what do you think the writer means by this? If you have done this before, what did it look like?
3. We are told over and over that God wants to take our anxiety and bear our burdens. For many this is hard to do. Identify and share two reasons this may be difficult for you.

### Practice for the coming week:

1. Create for yourself a quiet space to meet with God.

- Set aside a modest time on a particular day (we estimate this will take 1-2 hours) to be alone with God. Find a time and place that is quiet and distraction free.

2. Invite the Holy Spirit to come.

- Now ask Him to show you areas of personal or relational fear/anxiety. Next, ask Him to show you areas of fear/anxiety associated with the present or future. Take your time and wait on the Holy Spirit.
- Ask the Father to reveal any areas of unbelief in your life where you don't believe the Father will care for you.

3. Write: Jot down and list these anxieties/fears down on a piece of paper. Take a few minutes to reflect on what you have written.

4. Pray: Pray and visualize yourself with the Father, and then, one by one, imagine giving (handing) each anxiety to Jesus.

- This exercise should create a mental snapshot of Jesus doing exactly what He says He will do (Ps. 55:22; Matt. 6:25-26). By handing Jesus your anxieties you are expressing your trust in His ability to take care of you.

5. Release: Once you've given all of your anxieties to Jesus in prayer, rip up each anxiety you wrote down and throw it away. This symbolizes that the anxiety has been given to Jesus and that you are now released from the weight and responsibility of the burden.

## **Work through these discussion questions**

*10-15 min*

1. How do you feel about this 1-2 hours of silence and solitude? Scared? Excited?
2. How could you incorporate this practice into your day-to-day rhythm?
3. What is the importance of acknowledging/naming your anxieties and giving them to Jesus?

## **Close in prayer**

*10-15 min*

# **Week 4: Listening Prayer**

**By Gerald Griffin**

## **Read this overview**

When conversations work well they are usually two-sided. Likewise, prayer is to be a conversation where both parties share openly and listen carefully to each other. This is week you are invited to practice listening during prayer with the Father instead of just talking to Him.

Have you ever experienced a time during worship or prayer when you could almost tangibly feel God's presence, and while in that moment a beautiful thought came to mind? Maybe you saw a picture or image that was comforting or encouraging? That's exactly what listening prayer is like. While we are focussing on the Father we ask Him to speak, and often the very next thought is from Him. God mingles His thoughts with our thoughts in what is called listening prayer.

## **Begin with silence and prayer**

*5 min*

Gather together as a Community in a comfortable setting (around a table, on the couch, the floor of a living room, etc.). Say a quick prayer to invite the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together. Then spend a few minutes in silence. Why silence, even while together? Because we live in a busy, noisy world, under a non-stop assault of distraction. In the midst of all the chaos, it's hard at times to hear the voice of God, and that of our brothers and sisters. As we gather together as a family, we want to hear what the Father is saying to and through each of us, and respond in turn. A great way to do that is to begin each time with silence and prayer.

## **Debrief last week's practice in small groups**

*15-20 min*

If you are in a Community of seven or more, divide into small groups of 3–4 people each (ideally same gender).

Spend a few minutes catching up on life...

Then talk about the following debrief questions:

1. How did it go last week doing the releasing practice?
2. Were there any specific things you able to release to God?
3. Did you feel like you could hear from God in prayer?

## **Open to the Bible together**

*10 min*

Have somebody read John 10v1-6

Talk about the following questions:

1. What do you think John means by “He calls his sheep by name, and they know his voice”?
2. Do you think you have ever heard God's voice? What was that like?
3. Is listening prayer something you do regularly? If so, what's it like for you?

## **Talk about the coming week's practice as a Community**

*10-30 min*

Here's the practice for the coming week:

Before you start each day:

1. Put away your phone or any other distractions, settle into your time/place, and get comfortable.
2. Begin with a breathing prayer.
  - If you need a refresher on breathing prayer, go back and re-read Week 1's practice.
3. Spend a few minutes “abiding in the vine.”
4. Begin each time by praying something along these lines to “clear the room” of any demonic presences or voices: “In the name of King Jesus, who has all authority in Heaven and Earth, I command all demonic beings to leave this space and never return. In the name of Jesus, any voices of the enemy or any voices that are not of God must be silent. Jesus, just as you have said, ‘My sheep listen my voice and follow me.’ So now I only want to hear your voice, so please speak to me.”
5. Then do each day's exercise.

*Disclaimer: The following four exercises should each take you about 15-20 minutes to work through. Read through them quickly as a group to prep for the coming week of listening to God.*

## **Day 1**

### Receiving Forgiveness

- Often times it is difficult to hear God's voice because we are unwilling to forgive like our Father does. If you are not in agreement with what your Father says about you as a forgiven and cleansed child of God, then it is difficult to hear His voice. So we want to begin with listening prayer about the Father's forgiveness and ourselves.
- Ask, "Father, is there anything from my recent or distant past that I don't believe I am forgiven for?" Wait and listen. Does anything come to mind? If so, continue:
- "Father, your Scriptures say, 'If I confess my sin, you are faithful and just, and will forgive me of my sin and cleanse me of all unrighteousness' (1 John 1:9). So I agree with you that this sin is wrong and I receive your forgiveness and cleansing. Would you show me now an image of what it looks like for that sin to be taken away once and for all?" It may be helpful to imagine the cross, bring the sin to Jesus, and let him take it.
- Oftentimes these things we have been holding onto take up space and God wants to fill that space with gifts of His love. Ask the Father for an image of what He wants to fill that space with.
- Thank him for what he has shown in this time and you may want journal anything that stands out. re's

## **Day 2**

### Forgiving Others

- Another hinderance to hearing God's voice and having intimacy with the Father is withholding forgiveness from someone who has hurt you. Remember that forgiveness is releasing the person from the debt they owe you. It is acknowledging that they can never repay what they took from you so you release them to the Father. When we refuse to forgive someone we are actually bound and connected to them. Your good Father invites you to be free from them through forgiveness.
- Simply ask the Father to bring to mind anyone you need to forgive? When someone comes to mind pray you can pray the following:
- "In the name of Jesus I release \_\_\_\_\_ in forgiveness for doing \_\_\_\_\_ to me. In the name of Jesus, I ask that you would bless \_\_\_\_\_ and restore my heart towards them."
- Now you may want to ask the Father to give you a picture or image of what it looks like to be free from this person in forgiveness.
- Thank God for what he has done and journal whatever stands out to you.

## **Day 3**

### Hearing Your True Identity

- One of the most incredible parts of listening prayer can be hearing God's true name and identity for you. So many of us hear and believe lies about who we are. God wants to show you

those lies and replace them with his truth about you.

- As with the other days, begin with finding your quiet space and clearing the room of all demonic beings and voices.
- Then ask the Father, “What are the false names or identities that I have heard and believed about myself?” Listen and feel free write them down as they come.
- Now ask God, “Father, what is the true name that you call me?” There may be one clear name, or several. Write them down. Then ask, “Father, what do you want me to know about this?” Wait. Listen.
- Agree with Him that those false names and identities are dead and gone. Give thanks for the true name He has given! Journal whatever stands out to you.

## **Day 4**

### Listening For Others

- Oftentimes in listening prayer God often brings another person to mind that He wants to speak to you about. Ask the Father to bring to mind someone he wants to speak to you about. Maybe it is someone in your community or relational circle who you know who is in a difficult spot in life. Or maybe it's a word for your church.
- Ask the Father to bring a person to mind. Then ask the Father what he wants you to know about them- what does He want to say to them. Listen. As things come to mind you may want to write them down. Ask Him, “Is there anything else?” Wait. Listen.
- Give thanks to the Father for what he has said and shown you. Would it be helpful to share with this person or the church?

### **Work through these discussion questions**

*10-15 min*

1. How do you feel about practicing listening prayer?
2. What concerns or fears do you have going into this practice?
3. What is one thing you would love to hear God speak to you about?

### **Close in prayer**

*10 min*

# Week 5: Lectio Divina

By Joshua Porter

## Read this overview

Week 5 introduces the ancient practice of lectio divina, or “spiritual reading.” Lectio divina is not a new method of Bible Study. Whereas study of the Bible sets its focus on learning, lectio divina is an ancient time-tested method of meeting God in the Scriptures. In doing so, the disciple allows the Scriptures (in cooperation with the Spirit) to lead the reader into further intimacy with God as they are shaped into the image of Jesus in the process. The practice consists of five distinct movements:

1. Preparing to meet with God
2. Reading (lectio)
3. Reflection (meditatio)
4. Response (oratio)
5. Rest (contemplatio)

## Begin with silence and prayer

*5 min*

Gather together as a Community in a comfortable setting (around a table, on the couch, the floor of a living room, etc.). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together before spending a brief moment in silence. Hardness of hearing is an unfortunate side effect of the frenetic pace in which many of us conduct our lives. When your community comes together in the hopes of speaking to and hearing from God, even a momentary measure of silence can work to slow and silence the swirling chaos around us, that we might hear what God is saying in and through one another.

## Debrief last week’s practice in small groups

*15-20 min*

If you are in a Community of seven or more, divide into small groups of 3–4 people each.

Spend a few minutes catching up before you discuss about the following debrief questions:

1. How did it go?
2. Was it easy or difficult?
3. What did you hear God say?

## Open the Bible together

*10 min*

Have someone read Joshua 1v7-9 aloud

## **Talk about the coming week's practice as a Community**

*10-30 min*

Having established a time and place that are both quiet and free from distraction, set aside 3-5 times this week to practice lectio divina.

Any passage of Scripture can be utilized for the practice of lectio divina. Here are a few suggestions with which to start:

- Psalm 23
- Psalm 100
- John 15v1-17
- Romans 12

After selecting one passage, read and move slowly through each of the five movements of spiritual reading.

1. Prepare to meet with God: Turn your phone off and leave it another room. Situate yourself comfortably in a quiet, solitary place. Calm your body and quiet your mind before God as you work to prepare your heart to receive what God has spoken, and to respond accordingly. Finally, invite the Holy Spirit to guide your thinking and feeling as you read.
2. Read (lectio): Read the passage slowly and carefully. Take your time. As you move through the text, pay close attention to what words and ideas draw your attention in unique ways. When your focus is drawn to a particular word or thought, pause momentarily to reflect on them with specificity.
3. Reflect (mediatio): Upon completing the passage, return to the beginning and read again. On your second journey through the text, allow the text to connect with you personally. Which words or phrases assume a particular resonance with your heart, your season of life, your person in this moment. Posit the following questions: What do I need to know, or be, or do in light of the text? What does this mean for my life today?
4. Respond (oratio): Talk to God about your experience.
5. Rest (contemplatio): Pause to sit in God's presence before fleeing from the moment. You might express wonder, awe, gratitude, or praise through words, or you might allow yourself to feel and experience these things quietly before God.

### **Talk through the following discussion questions:**

1. Do you actually enjoy reading the Scriptures, or does it feel like a chore? Why?
2. When you read the Scriptures, do you feel as though you actually meet with and connect with God? Why or why not?
3. What makes lectio divina different than "bible study" or a teaching?

### **Close in prayer**

*10 min*

# Week 6: Retreat

By Gavin Bennett

## Read this overview

Think back to a time when you were a kid sitting at the edge of a pond. The water is clear and you can see the 10 inches or so to the bottom – the small fish going back and forth, the plant life, the mud laying calmly at the bottom. Until someone steps into the water right where you're looking: They stir up the sediment on the bottom and send it whirling. What was at first totally clear is now cloudy and dark and you can't see anything in it. But over time the water clears again.

Life is similar. One moment things seem clear, then everything is stirred up and our field of vision narrows. The challenge, though, is that we're not great at stopping and waiting for things to settle in our life like we were with the pond. In the era of fast food and instant everything, waiting and slowing down have been all but eliminated. We've been practicing silence and solitude for the last few weeks in smaller bouts – 10 minutes to an hour or so – but now we want to stretch ourselves and try something longer. We want to do what we're calling a 'retreat'. The idea is to get to a space where you're totally by yourself – no phone, no tv, no work, no distractions – and spend 8 hours letting ourselves settle into silence and solitude, waiting for the Spirit to speak.

## Begin with silence and prayer

*5 min*

Gather together as a Community in a comfortable setting (around a table, on the couch, the floor of a living room, etc.). Say a quick prayer to invite the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together. Then spend a few minutes in silence. Why silence, even when we're together? Because we live in a busy, noisy world, under a non-stop assault of distraction. In the midst of all the chaos, it's hard at times to hear the voice of God, and that of our brothers and sisters. As we gather together as a family, we want to hear what the Father is saying to and through each of us, and respond in turn. A great way to do that is to begin each time with silence and prayer.

## Debrief last week's practice in small groups

*15-20 min*

If you are in a Community of seven or more, divide into small groups of 3–4 people each (ideally same gender).

Spend a few minutes catching up on life...

Then talk about the following debrief questions from last week's practice:

1. Did you practice lectio divina?
2. Which of the 5 parts to lectio divina was most difficult for you? Most helpful?
3. What insights did you gain from practicing lectio divina?

## Open to the Bible together

*10 min*

Have somebody read Exodus 33v7-11

Talk about the following question:

- The language of this passage tells us that this practice of retreating and inquiring of the Lord in the tent was common practice for the Israelites. Why do you think it was so common?

Have another person read Exodus 33v18 and 34v1-8

- How does God respond to Moses' prayer?

## Talk about the coming week's practice as a Community

*10-30 min*

Here's the practice for the coming week:

As mentioned at the beginning, we're asking every Community to participate in an extended period of silence and solitude. Here are goals to aim for:

- Ideally 8 hours
- No phone, email, TV, work, etc
- Find a spot where you can be alone and uninterrupted. If possible, go away to a cabin, beach house, park, or retreat center.

Like most things in life, this is going to take some planning. It will not be as fruitful if you just show up and sit for 8 hours. The following is a suggested schedule for how to spend the 8 hours:

- **8 – 9 AM:** Prepare your mind and heart, take a walk, or do whatever will help you set aside concerns over tasks and responsibilities. Try to arrange your morning so you can remain in silence from the time you wake up.
- **9 – 11 AM:** Read and meditate on Scripture, taking time to stop and reflect when God seems to be speaking to you through the text.
- **11 AM – 12 PM:** Write down responses to what you have read. Speak to God about them.
- **12 – 1 PM:** Eat lunch and take a walk, reflecting on the morning.
- **1 – 2 PM:** Take a nap.
- **2 – 3 PM:** Set goals that emerge from the day's reflection.
- **3 – 4 PM:** Write down these goals and other thoughts in a journal. Thank God for your time together and ask if there is anything else he wants to say. Prepare to enter back into the flow of life.

*Note: If 8 hours isn't doable, that's ok! Make it smaller. If you have little kids, this can feel impossible. It's not. Just get creative. Ask somebody in your Community to babysit while you retreat. If they can't, try splitting your sabbath or day off into two 4 hour chunks. Trade off watching your kids with your partner. But if you're able to do 8 hours, give it a try. It probably sounds daunting and maybe a bit scary. But it's more doable than you think.*

### **Work through these discussion questions**

*10-15 min*

1. What obstacles will you have to overcome to make a day retreat happen? (e.g. freeing up room in schedule, discomfort of not having phone, etc)
2. What do you think you could gain from a day-long retreat that you can't get in ten or twenty minutes?
3. Is there something that you specifically need to hear from God about right now?

### **Close in prayer**

*10 min*