

1 Kings 19:1-18  
Silence and Solitude  
WRCoB 10.27.19

I like to sit in an empty sanctuary.

I feel God's presence in the silence.

The older the church building  
The stronger the presence of God.

Maybe it's my imagination, I don't know.

It doesn't matter whether it's a European Cathedral  
Or a little mountain church.

The feeling is the same.

Like there's some sort of residual spiritual energy there.

In the silence, I can sense the prayers and petitions  
The pleading and praising through the years.

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Have you ever worshiped  
In a traditional silent Quaker meeting?

The whole gathering is nothing but silence.

Following the awkwardness of 50 people sitting in a room  
With nothing but silence for an hour

There becomes something soothing in it.

I have left a Quaker meeting  
No more inspired but no less inspired either  
Than a typical Brethren worship service.

There is something spiritual about silence.

Well, get this, a church in England,  
Has recorded a CD, entitled, “The Sound of Silence.”

And that’s just what it is . . . a CD filled with silence.

Wouldn’t you know, it has become a hit!

The CD records the silence of the church's sanctuary.

It features the sound of an occasional footstep  
Muffled voices and background traffic noise—  
But mostly just silence.

Robin Yarnton, the church technician at St Peter's, says:

*It does what it says on the [cover], silence is all you get.  
Mostly people have said it's nice and they like it,  
And that it's quiet and peaceful.*

Imagine paying \$15 bucks for a CD filled with silence.

Consider the implications of buying one?

Is it to the point now that we are willing to buy a CD  
Filled with nothing to get peace and quiet?

The reality is that the majority of Americans  
Don’t do silence or solitude very well.

When we are alone  
We fill the silence with noise  
TVs, radios, CDs  
All an attempt to cover up the silence.

Just maybe silence and solitude become irritating reminders  
Of how lonely and isolated we've become!

In our lesson today  
God teaches that a little solitude and a little silence  
Goes a long way in spiritual health.

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In our passage today  
Elijah is running for his life.

King Ahab's wife, Jezebel  
Threatening to kill Elijah  
Will not rest until he is in the grave.

He has fled into the wilderness alone  
For forty days and forty nights

And reaches Mt. Horeb  
Also known as Mt Sinai, the mountain of God.

All told, Elijah has wandered around 300 miles.

On the mountain, he finds a cave and spends the night.

There at his mountain retreat Elijah encounters God.

Not in a wind storm  
Not in an earthquake  
Not in a fire . . .  
Typical displays of God's mighty power.

Instead, Elijah encounters God in the sound of sheer silence.

He is strengthened and fortified.

He returns to his people  
Renewed, refreshed and reinvigorated!

It was in silence and solitude  
Elijah heard God's voice.

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Blaise Pascal, an early church leader from the 1600's wrote,  
*I have discovered that all the unhappiness of [persons] arise from one single fact that they are unable to stay quietly in their own room.*

Austin Phelps, from the 1800's noted, *It has been said that no great work in literature or in science was ever wrought by [someone] who did not love solitude. We may lay it down as an elemental principle of religion, that no large growth in holiness was ever gained by one who did not take time to be often alone with God.*

Deepak Chopra once said, *To make the right choices in life, you have to get in touch with your soul. To do this, you need to experience solitude, which most people are afraid of, because in the silence you hear the truth and know the solutions.*

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I am prone to addictive behavior.

And I confess my cell phone has become an addiction.

Judith and Zherina comment about my use of the phone.

During moments when I am alone  
Instead of being at peace with silence and solitude  
I am busy checking my phone.

I don't know about you, but for me  
Social media has become a distraction

And I personally need to distance myself from it  
For my soul's sake.

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We NEED to make time  
Whether you call it prayer or meditation  
To be alone and silent before our Maker.

I say silent, because too much of our time in prayer  
We spend in talking and not listening.

We need to be intentionally quiet.

Charles Stone, senior pastor of West Park Church  
In London, Ontario, Canada  
Lists 8 benefits to silence of solitude.

I use his list for my own thoughts.

**1. It breaks the power of hurry, our addiction to a ‘have-to-do-this’ mentality.**

We just need to stop and rest a spell. To rest our bodies, our minds, and our souls.

**2. It helps renew our souls.**

The Bible speaks pointedly to this idea.

- “Be silent before the Lord God!” (Zeph. 1:7)
- “My soul, wait in silence for God only, for my hope is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be shaken.” (Ps. 62:5–6)
- “For thus the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has said, ‘In repentance and rest you shall be saved, in quietness and trust is your strength.’” (Isa. 30:15)

**3. It reminds us that life will still go on without us**

It breaks the vicious cycle of constantly trying to be in control. Do something that’s not constructive, like walking in the woods, sitting by a camp fire. Life will be there when you

get back. But you will be better able to cope when you have spent time in silence and solitude recharged by Holy Presence.

#### **4. It clears the mind for wise decision making and planning.**

If you follow the patterns of Jesus closely; you will discover how much time he took for silence and solitude. He would leave his disciples and go up on a mountain for the whole night. If our Lord and Savior, the Son of God needed some silence and solitude. How much more might we?

#### **5. It creates inner space to hear the voice of God.**

In our Scripture Lesson today, Elijah trekked 300 miles, spent many a night alone and waited in silence and solitude to hear God speak to him.

We are immersed in noise. Even in our prayer time, we tend to do all the talking. Silence and solitude can slow our frenetic paces down and by doing so we can clearly sense God's guiding presence.

We are surrounded by so much outer noise that it is hard to truly hear God when he is speaking. Silence and solitude frees us from life's preoccupations so we can sense God's abiding presence.

#### **6. It allows us to disconnect from the world and deeply connect with our soul.**

Henry Nouwen said, "In solitude, I get rid of my scaffolding." And what is scaffolding? It's the stuff we use to keep ourselves propped up be it friends, family, TV, radio, books, job, technology, work, achievement, our bank account, etc

## **7. It helps us control our tongue.**

James 1:19 says, “My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. ...”

*Silence and solitude can free us from the tyranny we can hold over others with our words. When we are silent and yield to the advice in James, it becomes more difficult to manipulate and control the people and circumstances around us. When we practice silence we lay down the weapons of words. It often reminds us that we don't need to say as much as we think we do. We find that God can manage situations just fine without our opinions on the subject.*

## **8. It helps us with the other disciplines.**

*When we include silence and solitude it enriches prayer, Bible reading and fasting.*

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Frederick Buechner says this about silence.

*Before the Gospel is a word, it is silence. It is life with the sound turned off so that for the moment or two you can experience it not in terms of words you make it bearable by but for the unutterable mystery that is. “Be silent and know that I am God, saith the Lord” (Psalm 46:10).*

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Our lesson today teaches us

That a little solitude and a little silence  
Goes a long way in spiritual health.

Elijah found it.

You can too.

Busyness and the clamor in our lives,  
Is not a sign of success or happiness.

The stress associated with busyness is destructive  
To a person's spiritual health.

Slow down!

Be intentional about finding time for yourself.

Get away,  
Get alone,  
Get quiet.

Get someplace by yourself,  
And listen to the sound of silence.

It will do your soul good!

Do it, even if you have to buy a CD  
Filled with sheer silence of a cathedral's sanctuary.

You'll be glad you did.