

MARK 1:35-39

THE SOLITARY PLACE: ALONE WITH GOD

Jesus lived the perfect human life.

He lived in a whirlwind of activity.

He was constantly eating, walking, talking, and sleeping with twelve men who never seemed to leave Him alone.

Vast crowds, and desperate individuals sought him out.

He was chided, rebuked, and even scoffed at by His own family.

He was the personal target of Satan who tempted Him, Satan who tried to derail Him, and Satan entering people to drive them to destroy Jesus.

He was attacked by every demon that could be rounded up to scream at Him, thrash around in front of Him, and seek to bother Him. Civil and religious authorities always plotting to catch Him, and take Him off for punishment and execution hounded him.

His life was so full of people and ministry he didn't even have a moment to stop and eat.

Yet in the midst of all that, what was He?

Peaceful, calm, focused, and confidently following God's will.

How did He do that?

If we follow Him, we can find His secret. Though we can never be sinless, we can learn and follow His pattern for the perfect life in step with God's will. So Jesus lived a super full, ultra busy, demanding life. But every time He was seen in the Scriptures He is quiet, composed and led by the Spirit. He was God, yet as man was living the perfect human life. What did that perfect life on earth have to keep it so strong? What was the secret? The secret is the times Jesus spent ALONE WITH GOD. SOLITUDE, time alone with God, time in secret away from everything and everyone else.

Jesus had to be alone with God, and Jesus wanted to be alone with God. And Jesus found **times** no matter what was going on and **places** no matter where He was, to be alone with God.

Mark 1:35-39

Jesus had to be alone with God, and Jesus wanted to be alone with God. And Jesus found **times** no matter what was going on and **places** no matter where He was, to be alone with God.

This morning you can revitalize your walk in this old world by starting or restarting a habit of cultivating time alone with God. Time in the Word and time in prayer, alone with God. The songwriter captures this solitude in secret with God:

There is a place of quiet rest, near to the heart of God, a place where sin cannot molest, near to the heart of God.

There is a place of comfort sweet, near to the heart of God, a place where we our Savior meet, near to the heart of God.

There is a place of full release, near to the heart of God, a place where all is joy and peace, near to the heart of God.

Chorus: O Jesus, blest Redeemer, sent from the heart of God, hold us who wait before Thee near to the heart of God.¹

Life was full on that Saturday in Capernaum we studied last week. Mark 1:21-34 was just ONE DAY! Jesus had gone from morning to night giving of Himself to all who came to Him. And how they had come, on donkeys, in carts, carried by family, surrounded by crowds, multitudes had flocked to the Messiah, the Healer, and the Friend of Sinners.

¹ Osbeck, Kenneth W., *Amazing Grace—366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications) 1997.

The truth of this statement appears in the last 3 verses of last week's text (v. 32-34), as Mark is rehearsing Peter's account of the works done by Jesus at the close of a busy day:

"And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto Him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils; and all the city was gathered together at the door. And He healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils."

Capernaum was witness to more of Christ's miracles than any other spot on earth. He preached more sermons in and around Capernaum than at any other place during His entire ministry. But it is also here just outside Capernaum that we discover the life long secret habit that gave Jesus the power and strength to live such a life filled with giving.

Jesus had cultivated the discipline of solitude. He had perfected the art of getting alone with God. He had learned the secret of waiting on God. And as our perfect example, He calls each of us this morning to do the same. We must learn to seek and find a solitary place in our life to regularly get alone with God.

Was this regular in Christ's life? Yes, from start to finish. Notice with me:

Matthew 14:23 And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there.

Mark 6:46 And when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray.

Luke 4:42 Now when it was day, He departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowd sought Him and came to Him, and tried to keep Him from leaving them;

Luke 6:12 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 22:39-46 Coming out, He went to the Mount of Olives, as He was accustomed, and His disciples also followed Him.⁴⁰ When He came to the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation."⁴¹ And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, ⁴² saying, "Father, if it is Your

will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.”⁴³ Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him.⁴⁴ And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.⁴⁵ When He rose up from prayer, and had come to His disciples, He found them sleeping from sorrow.⁴⁶ Then He said to them, “Why do you sleep? Rise and pray, lest you enter into temptation.”

John 6: 15 Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.

Back to Mark 1: 35. Notice that this Passion of Jesus is seen in His PRE-DAWN solitude, time alone with God. Why? Because the story² of Saturday's river of miracles continues with a wonderful Sunday morning, as verse 35 reveals:

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”

Jesus had gotten as much sleep as he desired, and he awoke. It was dark, and everyone was asleep in the house. He noiselessly stole out of the room and found his way to the street. Soon he was out of town and climbing a hillside to some remote spot, possibly a hidden hollow, where he lifted up his soul in ecstasy to the Father.

E. Stanley Jones once described time in God's Word in solitude and prayer as a “time exposure to God.” He used the analogy of his life being like a photographic plate which, when exposed to God, progressively bore the image of God in keeping with the length of exposure.

Jesus exposed his humanity to God as our Perfect Example. As God the Son, Jesus needed no more of the fullness of God (Colossians 2: 8, 9). Jesus is the exact representation of God's nature (Hebrews 1: 3). But the reason for Jesus' prayers was to show he did not live his life as God the Son apart from God the Father, but rather as a man in dependence upon God. He said,

“[T]he Son can do nothing by himself” (John 5: 19) and
“The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work” (John 14: 10).

² These ideas drawn from Hughes, Mark 1:35-39.

Jesus came, lived, and died constantly doing the will of God His Father, as we should seek to live our lives in step and under the control of God's Spirit.

Jesus lived this way, seeking to be alone with God, because he wants us to live our lives this way. Jesus shows us that intimate communion; alone with God was needed to live a godly life full of power. No less is needed for us! What an overpowering argument.

Solitude, time alone with God in His Word, is the great necessity of our spiritual lives. We need to be alone with God daily! We need to find times to get away alone. We need to get up early if necessary. Few of us are called to spend many hours in daily prayer, but *all* of us must spend *some* time. If it is impossible when the family is awake, pray before they get up. If you have no place you can do this at home, find a place to park your car on the way to work and pray in the anonymity of the passing traffic.

When I was in seminary and had four roommates sharing a tiny apartment, I could not think or pray in there, so daily I would get into my car and drive down to the local shopping center and park my car among the other cars. I would slouch down behind the wheel and pray. Or I would go to a local park, sit on a bench, and pray. Nothing bothered me there. Or I would park my car along the way. We need to do this. It does not have to be hours and hours, but we need to spend time alone with God! We must have that divine time exposure to God without interruption. Jesus did it, and we need to do it. Begin small, but do it.

Notice next that though Jesus was out there all alone in his deserted place communing with God, he was not safe. Like our world each day, Jesus was interrupted:

“Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: ‘Everyone is looking for you!’” (vv. 36, 37).

The disciples had stumbled out of Capernaum, combed the hills, spotted Jesus on a hill, perhaps the magnificent panoramic cliff of Arbel, and when they found him they mildly scolded him. The idea was, “Hey Jesus, things are really rolling for this new ministry you called us to after last night. We need to get right back and capitalize on it!”

But that was not the will of the Father. And only Jesus had bothered to get in tune with that will. Only Jesus had made the time to get alone with God.

“Jesus replied, ‘Let’s go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.’ So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons” (vv. 38, 39).

Listen to Kent Hughes³ as he captures this moment:

That memorable Sabbath day and the Sunday following revealed wonderful things about the heart of Jesus, a heart of love and compassion. The outstretched hand to Simon’s mother-in-law revealed the reflex of Christ’s loving heart. This heart labored tirelessly to bring healing to needy men and women. This is still true today. His healing heart was (and is) a heart that lived (and lives) in prayer. In respect to us, his heart desires above all else that we experience the ultimate healing of the gospel. To those who do not know Christ we hold up his healing heart. If you are not a believer, can there be anything more attractive than a heart that beats for you? As believers we need to permit the Holy Spirit to produce Christ’s heart in us. If you do not know the reality of the healing heart of Jesus, you can know it. Christ wants to bring his healing touch to your life.

This morning, how can we start cultivating time alone with God? Jesus demonstrated it is our priority. Where do we start? First, we can get alone with God most readily by *reading* God’s Word! This is the voice of God, we must listen. It is amazing that a Christian can imagine that he or she can live a Christian life without regularly reading the Bible, for that is impossible! Our minds are such that we do not retain what we need to know. They need to be refreshed again and again. Some who have been believers for years have never read the Bible through once. There are truths God has for us that we have not inconvenienced ourselves enough to discover. No wonder we are empty. What a difference reading the Word can make in our lives.

Dr. Harry Ironside, a man of little formal education but great power, read the Bible fourteen times by the age of fourteen. His mark is still on Chicago and indeed the entire world. Five pages a day is a good place to begin. Within a year you will have read the entire Bible. We

³ Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Mark—Jesus, Servant and Savior*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books) 1997

begin to get alone with God only when we take God's Word seriously as more important than our daily meals.

Second, time alone in solitude with God comes through *memorization*. Mrs. Barnhouse said of her famous preacher husband:

Someone once asked him how long it had taken him to prepare a certain sermon. His answer was "Thirty years and thirty minutes!" He had immersed himself in the Bible from the time he was fifteen years old, when he memorized the Book of Philippians a verse a day until he knew the entire book by heart, then went on to other passages. He felt it was not enough to learn by rote — it had to be by heart; because you loved and believed it.

Why not begin with a verse — perhaps a verse a week — fifty-two in one year!⁴

Few have lived as stressful and frenetic a life as Hudson Taylor, founder of China Inland Mission. But Taylor lived in God's rest, as his son beautifully attests:

Day and night this was his secret, "just to roll the burden on the Lord." Frequently those who were wakeful in the little house at Chinkiang might hear, at two or three in the morning, the soft refrain of Mr. Taylor's favorite hymn ["Jesus, I am resting, resting in the joy of what Thou art"]. He had learned that for him, only one life was possible—just that blessed life of resting and rejoicing in the Lord under all circumstances, while He dealt with the difficulties, inward and outward, great and small.

Third, we can learn to be alone with God by *meditating* on it. This is the secret of God's great warriors. Hudson Taylor, the founder of China Inland Mission, conquered immense hardships by daily meditation on God's Word. Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor record this in his biography:

It was not easy for Mr. Taylor, in his changeful life, to make time for prayer and Bible study, but he knew that it was vital. Well do the writers remember traveling with him month after month in northern China, by cart and wheelbarrow with the poorest of inns at night. Often with only one large room for coolies and travelers alike, they would screen off a corner for their father and another for themselves, with curtains of some

⁴ Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Ephesians—The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books) 1997.

sort; and then, after sleep at last had brought a measure of quiet, they would hear a match struck and see the flicker of candlelight which told that Mr. Taylor, however weary, was poring over the little Bible in two volumes always at hand. From two to four a.m. was the time he usually gave to prayer; the time he could be most sure of being undisturbed to wait upon God.

Meditating upon the Word brings us immediately into the intimate presence of God, but too few are willing to pay the price.

"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither" (Psalm 1:1–3).

Ct Studd was one of God's great servants. His life was like his grass hut, there were no doors to shut, he lived with - and for, his beloved pygmy tribes. How did he prepare to teach as many as 5,000 at a time? How did he get ready to disciple the scores of church leaders who came to sit at the foot of his cot every morning, so that he would awake to a sea of black faces and white teeth waiting for him to open the Book of God to them? Simply in his own words, may I read from his diary⁵ dated February 7th, 1886?

"The Lord is so good to give me a large dose of spiritual champagne every morning which brace one up for the day and night. Of late I have had such glorious times. I generally awake about 3:30 AM and feel quite wide awake, so I have a good read, and then have an hour's sleep before I finally get up.

Studd's family described these times as -

"A Bible is taken down from the shelf, and Bwana is alone with God. What passed between them in those silent hours was known a few hours later to all who had ears to hear."

Studd continues in his diary,

" I find then that what I read is then stamped indelibly upon my heart all through the day; and that it is the very quietest of times, not a foot astir, nor a sound to be heard, saving that of God. If I miss this time I feel like Samson shorn of his hair and

⁵ C. T. Studd, *Cricketeer and Pioneer*, p. 57, 206.

so of all his strength. I see more and more how much I have to learn of the Lord. I want to be a workman approved of the Lord, not just with a pass degree as it were. Oh how I wish I had devoted my early life, my whole life to God and His Word. How much I have lost by those early years of self pleasing and running after this world's honors and pleasures."

Jesus had a life was so full of people and ministry he didn't even have a moment to stop and eat. Yet in the midst of all that, what was He?

Peaceful, calm, focused, and confidently following God's will.

How did He do that? What was the secret? The secret is the times Jesus spent ALONE WITH GOD. SOLITUDE, time alone with God, time in secret away from everything and everyone else.

Jesus had to be alone with God, and Jesus wanted to be alone with God. And Jesus found **times** no matter what was going on and **places** no matter where He was, to be alone with God.

APPENDIX

Spiritual⁶ disciplines: Writers have distilled the Christian life into disciplines. Some say there are 12 (Foster), others have found 15 (Dallas Willard). One simple list by Bill Hull lists just four:
Conversing with God through His Word by prayer and solitude;
Denying self through fasting and frugality;
Serving Christ's church through submission and sacrifice; and
Obeying Jesus by equipping and evangelizing.

Charles⁷ Swindoll also finds four disciplines that lead us to enjoying Intimacy With The Almighty. He has called these:
Simplicity: a reordering of our lives around God and His plan;
Silence: stillness of the soul that waits on God
Solitude: an essential for Intimacy with God;
Surrender: because intimacy requires letting go of our selves and yielding to God. "Refuse to be a slave to anything but God" (coffee, alcohol, TV, etc.)

JESUS SHOWS US WE SHOULDN'T LET THE MECHANICS HOLD US BACK.

⁶ Bill Hull. Building High Commitment In A Low-Commitment World. Fleming H. Revell, Grand Rapids, MI. p. 96.

⁷ Intimacy With The Almighty, Anaheim, CA, Insight For Living, 1996, p. 33.

Jesus doesn't teach us about one special posture when we get alone with God – because any posture will do. In the Bible, people got alone with God in all different positions:

- ✓ Abraham's trusted servant found he was alone with God while standing at a well (Gen. 24:12-14).
- ✓ Moses responded to being alone in God's presence by bowing down (Ex. 34:8).
- ✓ Paul said that one way to enjoy getting alone with God was by lifting holy hands (1 Tim. 2:8).
- ✓ Jesus was on His face once when He was alone with God (Matt. 26:39).
- ✓ The Nation of Israel in a time of repentance and returning to the Lord were alone with God as they were sitting and seeking Him (Jud. 20:26).
- ✓ Elijah was alone with God and so intense that he knelt and put his head between knees (1 Kings 18:42).
- ✓ A leper came alone before God as he was kneeling (Mk. 1:40).

- ✓ Daniel some times was facing the direction of Jerusalem's Temple, when he got alone with God (Dan. 6:10).
- ✓ Jesus got alone with God His Father with uplifted eyes as He walked down the Kidron Valley toward Gethsemane (John 17:1).

DON'T LET YOUR LOCATION HOLD YOU BACK.

Jesus never taught that there was only one place to get alone with God – because we are able to, and invited to, get alone with God everywhere. In the Bible, people found a quiet place in God's presence in all different places:

- ✓ David confessed that he needed at times to get alone with God while he lay in bed (Ps. 4:3-4, 8; 63:6).
- ✓ Solomon learned how to get alone with God in the Temple, which was God's house (1 Kings 8:27-30).
- ✓ King Abijah was marching in battle when he found time to get alone with God (2 Chron. 13:14-15).
- ✓ Elijah was alone with God in a cave (1 Kgs. 19:9-10).
- ✓ Jesus taught we could get alone with God in a closet (Matt. 6:6), or in the street (Matt. 6:5).
- ✓ Jonah had an incredible time alone with God in a fish (Jonah 2:1-10)
- ✓ Peter had an unforgettable time alone with God on a house top (Acts 10:9)
- ✓ Paul instructed the early church that they could get alone with God everywhere they found themselves (1 Tim. 2:8).

- ✓ Paul found a place he could be alone with God while staying in someone's home (Acts 9: 39-40), another time by a river (Acts 16: 13), often in prison (Acts 16: 23-26), and even by the sea (Acts 21: 5-6).
- ✓ Jesus looked for and found spots to be alone with God in a garden (Matt. 26: 36-44), on a mountain (Lk. 6: 12), in a remote spot away from the city of Capernaum (Mk. 1: 35), in the wilderness (Lk. 5: 16), and finally on a cross (Lk. 23: 33, 34, 46).

GETTING ALONE WITH GOD CAN BE AT ANY TIME.

Don't let your schedule hold you back. Jesus doesn't teach us about the times of prayer – because we are to pray at all times. In the Bible, people got alone with God at all different times:

- ✓ The priests were instructed to get alone with God every evening and morning (I Chron. 23: 30)
- ✓ Anna the saintly and aged woman who greeted Jesus when He was presented to God as a baby was characterized by getting alone with God day and night (Lk. 2: 37; 18: 7)
- ✓ Daniel one of the towering giants among Old Testament saints was in the habit of getting alone with God three times a day (Dan. 6: 10)
- ✓ The Psalmist says we should get alone with our Great God today (Ps. 95: 6, 8)
- ✓ Elijah the mighty prophet got alone with God while the evil priests to Baal danced and gashed them elves, at the time of the evening sacrifice (1 Kgs. 18: 36)
- ✓ Jeremiah confesses he had learned to get alone with God in his youth (Jer. 3: 4)
- ✓ Moses said a good time to remember to get alone with God is after enjoying the bounties of a good meal (Deut. 8: 10)
- ✓ Hezekiah the great King learned to get alone with God when he faced his greatest adversaries, and when trouble was literally at the gate, he quietly spread his hands to God (2 Kgs. 19: 3-4)
- ✓ Peter and John cultivated a pattern of retreating from all their ministry demands in Jerusalem and quieting their souls by getting alone with God in the Temple daily at the ninth hour (Acts 3: 1)
- ✓ David found he was most often getting alone with God when his troubles were hitting him daily (Ps. 86: 3)
- ✓ David also said that he ended each day by getting alone with God at bedtime (Ps. 4: 4)

- ✓ Jesus remember gets alone with God in early morning (Mk. 1:35)
- ✓ Paul gets alone with God at midnight (Acts 16:25).
- ✓ Jesus taught in His ministry to the disciples that there is a never a time that we can't get alone with God (Lk. 18:1) which caused Paul to say that our times alone with God should be ceaseless (1 Thess. 5:17).

DON'T LET YOUR TROUBLES HOLD YOU BACK FROM GETTING ALONE WITH GOD.

Jesus doesn't teach us about the circumstances of solitude – because any circumstance will do as a place to get alone with God. In the Bible, people are seen getting alone with God in all kinds of circumstances:

- ✓ When Jesus was so burdened that He was loudly crying He got alone with God in Gethsemane (Heb. 5:7).
- ✓ When Job was so incapacitated that he had to resort to sitting in ashes, and shaving his head for painful sores, he learned even there he could get alone with God (Job 1:20-21; 2:8).
- ✓ While Jesus was sweating blood, and in deepest agony, He was able to get alone with God (Lk. 22:44).
- ✓ While the Publican was smiting breast, he was able to get alone with God (Lk. 18:13).
- ✓ David had a broken heart, clothed him self in sackcloth, and was crying, but that didn't stop him from getting alone with God, and pouring out his heart (Ps. 6:6; 34:18; 35:13; 62:8)
- ✓ While Joshua was so grieved that he was applying dust to his head, he was able even then to get alone with God (Josh. 7:6).

SO WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR? FOLLOW CHRIST'S PERFECT EXAMPLE!

The posture, place, time or circumstance is not the issue of prayer. Prayer is to be a total way of life – an open communication with God, which goes on all the time. And if prayer is a way of life, then we need to understand how to pray. This is precisely why Jesus teaches us this model prayer.

He puts it succinctly in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 "Pray without ceasing. (KJV)"

A modern spiritual Goliath was George Mueller. His life may be distilled down to these words he wrote in a diary:

It has pleased the Lord to teach me a truth, the benefit of which I have not lost for more than 14 years. The point is this: I saw more clearly than ever that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord. The first thing to be concerned about was not how much I might serve the Lord, or how I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man might be nourished...Before this time my practice had been, at least for ten years previously, as a habitual thing, to give myself to prayer in the morning. Now I saw that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the Word of God, and to the meditation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reproved and instructed; and that thus, by means of the Word of God, while meditating on it, my heart might be brought into experimental communion with the Lord.⁸

⁸ Scroggie, Method in Prayer, pp.17-18.