

A Gentle Stillness **[Deeper Sheet 7.12.09]**

Read Matthew 14v13, Mark 1v35, Mark 6v46, Luke 4v42, and Luke 5v16

Hiding in plain sight in the Gospels there are clues to Jesus' own habits and practices. Brief details introduce significant moments in Jesus' life and ministry—these are the clues. They tell us that Jesus regularly went off to solitary places to pray. While finding a quiet place to carve out time and pray is significant in itself, Jesus was doing more than making quiet time for prayer. He was seeking internal silence. Jesus was always seeking God in the gentle stillness.

In 1 Kings 19, the Lord commanded Elijah to stand in his presence. Before God appeared, a great wind began blowing, but God wasn't in the wind. Then came an earthquake, but God wasn't in the earthquake. Then a fire, but God wasn't in the fire. Finally, there came a "gentle stillness", and when Elijah heard this gentle whisper, he walked out to stand in the presence of the Lord. Elijah understood that God was not found in the spectacle but in the gentle stillness.

Something profound happens in silence. Henri Nouwen describes silence as "the place where the inner fire of God is tended and kept alive". In other words, when we stop thinking, striving, and trying to accomplish, in order to simply allow ourselves to be in God's presence, we become deeply connected to the source of all life. Immediately following moments of silence and solitude Jesus did things like walk on water, heal people, and cast out demons. Jesus' continual tending to "the inner fire of God" enabled him to incarnate God's *shalom* in the world in powerful ways.

Silencing exterior noise is easy. Learning to silence the interior noise is the challenge. There are all kinds of voices rattling around inside us, constantly jockeying for our attention. Solitude and silence bring us face to face with them. It's no wonder we're uncomfortable with silence. The challenge is to remain in the solitude and silence long enough to gain distance from all the thoughts and interior noise so that we can experience the presence of God. Solitude and silence aren't practices where we find rest. They're experiences that transform us because we've encountered the Living God.

What voices or noises jockey for your attention when you're silent? Think about what goes through your mind during your morning routine or a daily commute.

How would you describe the difference between awkward silence and divine silence?

Describe or reflect on a time when you experienced with a group of people the silent and gentle stillness of God's presence.

Find some time to practice solitude and silence this week. [To learn more about how to practice solitude and silence, check out our Spiritual Practices Reader at marshill.org/teaching/sp.]