

Solitude: In God For The World

1

Welcome: Guests, Men & Women at the Correctional Facilities. Our prayer is that your experience today will help you learn to follow Jesus with new practice, so you experience the hope of redemption
Summer Series - Be with Jesus - Spiritual Practices - worship and fasting,
Julian - generosity.

Introduction: Starting work at Definition Church. (2 part-time jobs - full-time student).

In the emergency room, the doctor asked me, "What are you doing here, Eric?"
God has asked me that same question many times.

Early in life, I interpreted the circumstances of my life as we all do. I developed a strategy to receive affirmation and acceptance. My strategy was production and achievement. Being on the stage in front of people, starting at the age of 5, I believed my role was to be exemplary in every category, because everyone was watching. Whatever I did (athletics, education, relationships, and spirituality), I had to be the example. This caused me to carry an extreme amount of pressure, and it led my body, mind, and soul to a place of exhaustion. I was very confused, and my life looked like river water. My life was marked by productivity and accomplishments, but my mind and soul were clouded by confusion.

Illustration: Shake up a jar of water with sediment.

Big Idea: In the world for God. I was doing the best that I knew how to do. If there was a spiritual activity to do, I did it. I shared my faith regularly, and I started small groups in my neighborhood with unbelievers. I went on every mission trip I could. I had a band and would play in every venue that would allow us to play, including the Four Seasons and Hanes Mall. I worked as hard as I knew how to work to be in the world for God.

Solitude: In God For The World

Transition: My experience is not that uncommon. Most of us were taught that our worth is in what we produce and accomplish in life. In our culture, it's common in a cordial greeting with someone you don't know to ask first, their name, and second, what they do. Our culture misplaced our identity in what we do, rather than who we are. But as with many things with God, we will find the exact opposite is true. God cares first and foremost about who we are, and what we do is secondary. There are many individuals in the Bible who struggled with finding their identity in what they did for God. Today, we will look at Elijah.

Scripture: 1 Kings 19:1-13 NLT

Transition: In this passage, Elijah experiences God in a new, significant, and meaningful way. He experienced God in Solitude. We see that it was in solitude that he was 1. healed, and 2. experienced love.

1. In solitude, we are healed.

Explain: Reference 1 Kings 19:5-8 NLT. We see that God meets Elijah's physical needs, but he is also healing his soul, calling him forth to continue his journey. He knew that Elijah needed to leave some things behind to experience what was to come. Notice that God came after Elijah when he was afraid, anxious, depressed, and physically running away. Did you know that God is pursuing you when you do the same things?

Argue: Henry Nouwen said, Solitude is the furnace of transformation. It is the place of the great struggle and the great encounter, the struggle against the compulsions of what is false, and the encounter with the loving God who

Solitude: In God For The World

offers himself as the substance of the new self.

- Matthew 5: 3 NLT, "God blesses those who realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is given to them.
- Matthew 11: 29-30 NLT, "Come to me, all you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke fits perfectly, and the burden I give you is light.

Illustrate: Waiting rooms. When you go to the doctor, you have to wait to be seen. To share your experience and receive wise advice and medicine for your body, you must schedule an appointment and wait. The problem is, none of like to wait for anything. We have recently seen the rise in teladoc and urgent care because we can't stand to wait! In a culture built for instant gratification and everything being on demand, we struggle to wait for anything, especially in our spiritual lives. Waiting, in the realm of the soul, presents us with agony. Unfortunately, we try something once or twice halfheartedly and claim it just doesn't work for me. We must sit in the waiting room of the soul because we need something. We need healing. We are tired and realize we need God's intervention. Yes, we could get up and leave, but we would be walking away from the very place where our needs can be met. And so we remain in the waiting place, totally at the mercy of God's timing and initiative in our lives.

In Christianity, we call this the process of illumination (waking up to what reality actually is) and purgation (being stripped of what is false within us).

Robert Mulholland says, this process of being conformed to the image of Christ takes place primarily at the point of our unlikeness to Christ's image. God is present to us in the most destructive aspects of our cultural captivity.

Solitude: In God For The World

4

God is involved with us in the most imprisoning bondage of our brokenness. God meets us in those places of our lives that are most alienated from God. God reveals and heals our pride, lusts, impatience, procrastination, irresponsibility, judgement and lack of faith.

Apply:

- 2 Corinthians 5:17 NLT, "What this means is that those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun!"
- Colossians 3:10 NLT, "In its place you have clothed yourselves with a brand-new nature that is continually being renewed as you learn more and more about Christ, who created this new nature within you."

Solitude is not to be confused with passivity. We wait for God with longing, with expectancy, with alert awareness, our whole self straining to catch the earliest possible glimpse of the God who comes for us. A God who comes to heal, change, and transform us. I invite you to find a time this afternoon or this week to sit in solitude with God. Don't try to accomplish anything. This is how I am transformed from the areas that are most unlike God. My compulsion to strive, achieve, and produce so that God and others will love me. God heals that place as I am with him, and he will do the same for you.

Transition: We have seen that in this place of solitude, God wanted to heal Elijah in far deeper ways than just addressing his hunger and tiredness. The same is true for us. God wants not only to address our present circumstances. He wants to heal us and reveal to us who we truly are in him. How does he plan to do that? Through love! Love is the only thing that can heal and change us.

2. In solitude, we experience love.

Solitude: In God For The World

Explain: Read 1 Kings 19: 11:-13 NLT

The fruit of Elijah's willingness to remain open to God in the midst of inner chaos created by self-knowledge was that he came to understand through experience that he was loved and valued just as much when he was alone, exhausted and not performing very well as he was when he was standing on the mountain top calling down the fire of God in front of the false prophets and fickle followers. When Elijah experienced "the sound of sheer silence" that was full of the Presence of God, there was no need for words or any kind of cognitive response. He wrapped his face in his cloak, a sign of absolute reverence, and he went and just stood in that Presence. He let the Presence wash over him.

Argue: Psalm 46:10 NLT, Be silent, and know that I am God.

The phrase "Be still" or "Be silent" literally means to "Let go of your grip." Let go of your own understanding. Cease striving at the level of human effort, and in so doing, open yourself to a whole new kind of knowing.

Isaiah 30:15 NLT, The Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says, "Only in returning to me and waiting for me will you be saved. In quietness and confidence is your strength. But you would have nothing of it.

Illustrate: Have you ever had a friend that you felt so secure and safe around that you didn't have to say anything? Thomas Merton."The deepest level of communication is not communication, but communion. It is wordless. It is beyond words, and beyond speech, and it is beyond concept." Dallas Willard believed that silence is the language of God. We know our relationships have gone to a profoundly deep level when we can be in someone else's presence and not need to communicate verbally.

Solitude: In God For The World

6

Illustration: Jar of water. Let's look back at the water. It's much clearer than it was before. It's beginning to settle. When the water is still, and motion ceases, the sediment begins to settle. We begin to see clearly what reality is. We truly see who we are, and more importantly, who God is in our lives.

Apply: In solitude and silence, we discover our true self, a life hidden with Christ in God.

- This true self is smaller, in one sense, than the ego identity, because it does not need to be big in order to prove itself to the world.
- This self is truer because it does not rely on image management to find acceptance in the world.
- This self is softer because it does not rely on hardened defense structures to keep itself safe in the world.
- This self is freer, because it knows itself to be finally and ultimately held safely in a love that is unchangeable and real.

This love does not lose track of us, no matter what dark places we must walk into. It is a love deeper than any abyss that we might fall into. It is a love with the power to heal any brokenness we might encounter. This love eventually becomes a bedrock of settledness at the core of our being. It is worth any price we have to pay to find it.

Transition: So, God's greatest desire is not for us to do what Jesus did first. We actually don't even have the ability to do that. God's greatest desire is for us to be with him first, and then as we experience his supernatural healing and love, we, over time, start to become like him. But don't be fooled, this is not a short or urgent process. It is a place of waiting in the solitude, in the stillness, in the silence. Then and only then, God invites us to be in him for the world.

Big Idea Expanded: God invites us to be in God for the world, not to be in the world for God. **Invitation / Song: Christ Magnified**