

Seek Solitude
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After he [Jesus] had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone... Matthew 14:23

Solitude and Community seem to be two opposing ideas that cannot coexist. This is for good reason. Either a person is alone or they are not alone. If a person is not alone then they are in a community, albeit a small one. This really comes from a misunderstanding of what it means to be "alone".

In our western culture to be alone is equated with a feeling of loneliness. A person could literally be in a crowded football arena or a worship service and claim to feel alone. A social media influencer with millions of followers can be and feel alone. Loneliness is bad, lack of meaningful social interaction is arguably a leading cause of death for humans. Human touch, community, and close friendships are closely tied to a long life expectancy, right along with diet and exercise.

Jesus often sought solitude to be alone but not because he wanted to feel lonely. Jesus sought solitude to be alone with God. Think of your closest relationships in your life. Would it be good or bad for you to spend one on one time with those people? Typically, relationships are enhanced and strengthened through quality individual time together. This time can be fun, challenging, emotional, or lighthearted and all of those experiences contribute to the depth of connection and strength of the relationship.

How often do you spend time alone with God? For most of us the answer is...not that often. Frequently the issue is when we are alone without people or activity we struggle with the worries and anxieties of life. Most of us would rather be out solving a problem than sitting alone and thinking about it. Another habit is that we wait until we are exhausted to be alone with God and then we fall asleep before any meaningful relationship is developed. When we have no other options we will resort to looking at our phone or watching a screen rather than sit still and think.

Like any relationship, it can take time and effort to be alone with God and feel comfortable. But once you experience the power and blessing of that relationship you will crave that time with your best friend. The answer to life's worries and anxieties is not fixing them, it is casting them on Christ's shoulders. This happens best in solitude with God because then and only then do we truly realize the thoughts and feelings that are drowning out our ability to hear God's voice. He is still calling to us and blessing us even when activity pollution and our thoughts drown out our ability to hear Him.

Find some quiet time with God. Turn off your phone, your watch, your computer, your music. Listen to God through His Holy word, the Bible, and talk to God through prayer. Share your laughs, struggles, worries. What is stopping you? Whatever it is, give THAT to God. Schedule, worries, tasks. Write them down on a to do later list. Pray about them. Set a timer at first, but for me I do this until all that I can hear is the

voice of God saying, “I got this, and I got you” which is my paraphrase of 1 Peter 5:7, “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”

Think of that alone time with God as an opportunity to better hear and recognize the voice of God. Once we can hear it in solitude, it becomes much easier to hear it cut through the noise of life. And let’s face it, there is a lot of noise in life.