

## REH Week 3: Silence and Solitude

October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Good morning and welcome Connection family! I'm Emily Layser and I'm currently serving here on staff as the Director of Spiritual Formation and Congregational Care as I journey through the Candidacy Process in the Global Methodist church to become a deacon and serve as Associate Pastor. You'll find me up here preaching about once a series.

Today is week 3 in our sermon series, The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry. The first week, we learned about the problem of a hurried culture and examined our own lives. Are we eating "the bread of anxious toil" or "the bread of life"? Last week, we talked about the solution to the problem-the easy yoke that Jesus has for us and His invitation to come to Him for rest.

After hearing these messages the first 2 weeks, I hope you feel encouraged and know that you are not alone in wanting to live your life a better way. Also, I hope it is reassuring to learn that there is a different way of life out there for all us that isn't pressured, and utterly exhausting.

But we can't just stop with knowing we need to change. We need tools to help us do it! So for the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of this series, starting today and the next 2 weeks, we're going to be giving you practical ways you can begin to un-hurry your life.

And we're going to start with what may be the most difficult practice of all-silence and solitude.

Let's pray.

It's hard to believe, but some of us knew a time before we had the whole world in our pockets. What started as a search engine research project by 2 students at Stanford University, became Google on September 4, 1998, when it was officially founded and launched for public use. 27 years later, Google is still, googling.

So if you are older than 27 like me, we can tell our kids that we are older than Google. (but lets not!)

I remember when my family moved to Hershey in 1995 and shortly after, we purchased our first family desktop that sat in the corner of our living room. It was the coolest thing, and my brother and I had these CD-ROM games that we would play over and over again. I also

remember when that computer first got hooked up to the internet and the sound it would make as AOL booted up and blocked the phone from working.

It was a BIG deal to get home from school and get some time on the family computer. David and I actually first started talking back and forth on AOL instant messaging, AIM. Anyone remember that?

Yet for the younger generations today, they don't remember a time WITHOUT the whole world being at their fingertips. The creation of the internet launched us into the next generation, calling Gen Z the "digital natives" for kids born during this time. The following generation, Gen Alpha, has seen the rise and rapid growth of the internet and has had an even stronger reliance on technology, which was only accelerated during the pandemic.

In fact, John Mark Comer, the author of the book Ruthless Elimination of Hurry, cites a study from 2015 by Kevin McSpadden. He appropriately named his study, "You Now Have a Shorter Attention Span than a Goldfish" and in it, he asked young adults this yes or no question- "When nothing is occupying my attention, the first thing I do is reach for my phone." 77% of them answered yes. Sadly, this study is from 10 years ago, so that response would probably be way higher is asked today. Show of hands if this is you?

We are distracted. We are not present. We carry the tension of trying to be present in too many places at once. We're trying to be present on here (phone) and here (church) with one another that we're not really present anywhere.

Want to know a fun fact? This next generation, Gen Beta, is starting 2025-and they will never know a world without AI. Terrifying.

How quickly has technology escalated and shaped our culture! Not in all bad ways, but definitely not in all good ways either.

Many of us who remember that season, before technology took over, tend to reminisce and wish we could go back to that "simpler time." Anyone?

Why is that? Why do we wish that things could be simpler? Quieter? Less chaos more calm?

We all have that need to simplify and get back to being undistracted. And that's not just a coincidence. Our creator created us that way. He created us to be at one with Him. To be able to find stillness and rest in Him. We were created initially to be in community with Him, day in and day out, in a beautiful garden where we could walk and just be with Him.

But you know the story, and when sin entered the world so did the noise that just pulls us farther and farther away from Him.

What we need is silence and solitude.

The Psalmist says,

*“My soul is quiet and waits for God alone. My hope comes from Him.” Ps. 62:5*

We are starting with this practice today because it is unarguably the most difficult to accomplish in today’s world.

But before we can practice silence and solitude or even learn how to implement it in our lives, we need to break it down and learn more about each one.

Let’s start with silence.

Silence is the complete absence of sound. Think about the last time that you have had complete silence. If you’re anything like me, it’s probably been a long time or like #never. There is always noise, everywhere.

It’s important to note that there are 2 different types of silence.

First, we have external silence. This means no noise around you. Maybe it’s at a campsite in the middle of the woods or hiding in your closet in your house, or staying up after everyone goes to bed, but it’s a place where everything around you is silent.

The next kind of silence is internal silence. This means no noise from within you. Quieting our minds. No running monologue in our brains. No clutter, or commentary or “mental chatter”. And this is the one we seem to have the hardest time escaping from. We can’t just run away from ourselves. We must learn how to tame it, how to quiet it and still it.

And sometimes, maybe, just maybe we use the external noise around us to drown out the internal noise within us. Because we know what’s inside and we don’t want to hear it. We’re afraid what we’re going to hear, either from God or from ourselves, I get it. The noise is more comfortable because it’s distracting us from ourselves.

CS Lewis wrote the book entitled, “The Screwtape Letters” and it is a satire that contains series of letters written from one head demon to a junior demon as the two of them attempt to corrupt a man's soul and lead him away from God. The head demon, Screwtape, calls the devil’s realm a “Kingdom of noise” and claims that in trying to lead man astray, they will “make the whole universe noise to no end.”

The kind of silence that we need is not just silencing the internal or the external noise, but the silence of that quiets both.

Now solitude can so often be misused and misunderstood as loneliness. But the kind of solitude we are talking about is anything but lonely. **Solitude is time away with God.** It's not isolation.

I love how John Mark Comer puts it. He says, **"Solitude is engagement; isolation is escape. Solitude is safety; isolation is danger. Solitude is opening yourself up to God; isolation is putting a target on your back for the tempter."**

Richard Foster, the author of "Celebration of Discipline" wrote, **"Loneliness is inner emptiness. Solitude is inner fulfillment."**

Because when we are in solitude with Jesus, we are not alone. We are the most connected with God.

And isn't that what we need? Isn't that what we crave? To be so connected with our creator. To be at one with Him. To hear his words and promises he has for our hearts.

If we feel distant and not connected to God, He's not the one that's moved. It's us.

We need silence and solitude.

Even secular society gets it. The practice of "mindfulness" is something you've probably heard of and although it's been around for hundreds of years, it's a trend right now that's basically the practice of seeking silence and solitude without connecting it to God.

Let's get really real for a second- I am either the best or the worst person to be preaching this topic today. The irony of who I am and my personality is not lost on me. I am not just metaphorically preaching to the choir. I don't like silence. It's too overwhelming for me. And I definitely don't like solitude. I am a people person, an extrovert, a 99% on the Myers/Briggs scale for personality. I hate being alone.

But I know that I need it, I need this practice in my life. And so as I am sharing this message with you today, I know that I not only need to hear it, I'm also one of the repeat offenders of NOT following it. And I'm working on that. And I hope you want to work on that with me. We can help hold each other accountable on this journey to develop this practice into the discipline that it needs to be in our lives.

So let's keep pressing in.

If silence and solitude is so important for our walk with God, then surely we can find an example of someone in the bible that knew just how important this practice is.

So, who better to look to than Jesus?

Jesus needed silence and solitude.

At the end of Matthew 3, we see the familiar story when Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. What does Jesus do directly after this? Matthew 4:1 tells us:

*“Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit to a desert.”*

If you know how this story unfolds, this is where Jesus is tempted by the devil after 40 days in the wilderness. But I want to pull out that word, desert, and look at it a little more.

The Greek word used here is “eremos” and this can be translated into desert or wilderness, but it can also be translated into a broad range of meanings, like: a deserted place, desolate place, solitary place, or a quiet place.

I love how John Mark Comer points out here that the desert is not a place of weakness. It’s not a story of the bad guy coming at the good guy when he’s tired and hangry after 40 days.

Rather, the desert is a place of strength, where Jesus spent time and was quiet with His father, to be able to face Satan head-on and walk out unharmed. Jesus emerges from the desert and jumps into ministry full force.

And He can only do that AFTER having that time of solitude and silence.

The gospels are jam-packed with other examples of Jesus taking time to retreat and be alone with God.

Like in the book of Mark. In Chapter 1, we see Jesus after He has had a VERY eventful day of healing and teaching and casting out demons. The very next day, verse 35 says:

*“In the morning before the sun was up, Jesus went to a place where He could be alone. He prayed there.”*

When Mark is using the word “place” here, it’s the exact same word as mentioned in the story of Jesus being tempted in the desert. It’s eremos. Before the sun was up, Jesus went to a “quiet place” or a “solitary place” to be alone with His father.

And because He was up and moving before his disciples, when they got up, they didn’t know where He was. Let’s continue with verse 36-37:

*“Simon and the others looked for Jesus. They found Him and said, “All the people are looking for You.”*

Okay, who’s turn was it to watch Jesus? They finally found Him and told him, “Hey! Everyone’s worried about where you were.” But Jesus response is grounded and full of faith. Verse 38 says-

*“Jesus said to the followers, “Let us go to the towns near here so I can preach there also. That is why I came.”*

Jesus is ready to face the day. After spending time with His father, he is firm in his own identity and what He is called to do.

Later in the book of Mark, we see Jesus do the same thing. Right before the feeding of the 5,000 (if you were here we talked about that in our Back to School series on Math week), Jesus says to His disciples in Mark 6: 31-32-

*“He said to them, “Come away from the people. Be by yourselves and rest.” There were many people coming and going. They had had no time even to eat. They went by themselves in a boat to a desert.”*

In a boat to a desert? How does that work? Maybe you guessed it. The word here again is “eremos”. Jesus is seeing that his disciples are tired and worn out and He knows exactly what they need. Time away. Silence and solitude.

Ironically, as they are seeking this time apart, they are recognized by many people and this is where the Feeding of the 5,000 interrupts their quiet time plans.

If that isn’t real life! Ever feel like your best intentions for quiet time are often ruined?

But just like David said a few weeks back, Jesus is busy but He’s never in a hurry. So He takes this opportunity to stop and teach and perform a miracle for these people.

And again, after He is done, we see what Jesus goes back to.

Mark 6:46-47 says:

*“When they were all gone, He went up to the mountain to pray. It was evening. The boat was half-way across the sea. Jesus was alone on the land.”*

After a long and chaotic day, of performing a miracle and feeding over 5,000 people, Jesus takes time alone to be with God. He sends His disciples off in a boat, and He stays behind

to seek what He knows is so important. Jesus didn't forget that He needed that time with His father. It doesn't matter if it's morning or night, He takes time whenever he can find it!

Jesus prioritized the practice of silence and solitude.

If you keep reading on in the Gospels, you'll find several other stories and times where Jesus makes the effort and takes the time to be still and seek quiet time with God. In the book of Luke, we can find no less than 9 TIMES where Jesus seeks out silence and solitude amongst His crazy schedule of teaching and preaching and healing. The busier His life and with the more demands that came at him, the more He withdrew to quiet and prayer.

If Jesus needed silence and solitude, then who are we to think that we do not?

The rhythms and details of Jesus' lifestyle have been come to be known as the "spiritual disciplines", and when we look at his practices, we can learn how to live a more fulfilled and Godly life. Putting these habits in place help us to be more like Jesus.

But it isn't all just our own willpower. We can't just try harder and do better. We can't do it alone. He need His help.

And there is no magic or perfect formula, either. I can't just stand up here and give you the perfect equation for doing this the easiest and most painless way possible.

The best we can do is to seek to be like Christ. When we read how Jesus lives His life, He encourages us to do the same. He doesn't tell us when to read are bible or exactly how many times a day to pray. He just says, "Follow me."

John Mark Comer says, "Jesus isn't anti-command...it's about example and invitation."

We all know what happens when we don't make time with God a priority. When we don't make and take the time to be silent and still with God, we reap the consequences.

Consequences like feeling distant from God, feeling distant from ourselves. Being anxious, living in an undercurrent of stress and pressure that very rarely goes away. Exhaustion. Anger. Emotionally and mentally unwell. Escaping reality to soothe our souls with our vices of choice.

How many of us can say that we have maybe been feeling some of these ways for just way too long?

Yet, conversely, when we do take the time, and make silence and solitude a priority, we will reap benefits.

Benefits like freedom. Room to breathe. Oneness with God. Responses that echo the grace of Jesus. More patience. The realization of who we are and what we are called to be. Healing of our inner wounds. Inspiration to move forward. Forgiveness. The ability to be present.

I don't know about you, but I know which one I want. I want the benefits of trying my best WITH Jesus to be more LIKE Jesus, and to spend as much time as I can in his presence.

Is that where you want to be too?

To wrap it all up today, let's get honest and real one more time. It's great to know THAT we need silence and solitude, but HOW do we do it? How do we make time for something that is so foreign to us? How do we prioritize connecting with God in a world full of commotion? I am so, so guilty of this.

The truth is, it's not easy. For many, it's not going to come like second nature. Never mind finding the space, but what about finding the time?

If you're looking for more time, you won't find it. When it comes to time for something like this, we have to MAKE it.

We have to make time and at the same time we have to be patient with ourselves. Maybe we can start with just 5 minutes a day.

Take a little longer of a walk from your desk to the bathroom. Spend the first few minutes of your lunch break in silence. Set an alarm to go off at noon and pray the Lord's prayer each day. Carve out 5 minutes in the morning or 5 minutes at the end of the day and then gradually increase it. From 5, to 10, to a half hour. Ask God to help you make it happen.

And that 20-minute commute you have, USE IT! I had an hour and a half drive this week, one way, and I knew I was going to be preaching on this for this week. So for my entire way to where I was going, I drove in absolute silence. An hour and a half. No music. No podcast. No talking to myself. Nothing (beside the occasional GPS voice giving me directions) and Jesus.

Was it hard? Yes. Was it weird? Yes.

But was it refreshing and centering and wildly helpful? Also yes.

**Make time this week for silence. Make time this week for solitude. And see what God reveals to you along the way.**

Let's pray.