

## Mark 1:35-39 (NLT)

### The Gospel of Mark A Disciples Invitation to Solitude

**Introduction:** If it's your first time joining us - Welcome! We are dedicating this year to deepening our discipleship to Jesus. We are taking this next season to teach through the Gospel of Mark, using it, as Christians have done for centuries, as a template to understand in a deeper way who Jesus is and what it means to be his disciples.

A recent Barna survey found the majority of self identified Christians today (52%) believe that there is much more to the Christian life than they have experienced, and 46% say their life has not changed at all as a result of going to church. What about you? Are you one of them? Do you ever let yourself imagine what it might be like to be part of a transforming community rather than a deforming community, one in which people regularly and routinely experience real life change rather than staying stuck in their ways? Or in some deep, inarticulate place have you decided it's too much to hope for?

No matter how cynical we have become, the promise that we, sin scarred human beings, can become like Christ is one of the greatest promises of the gospel.

Transformation is real and possible - God wills it, he's given us salvation, Holy Spirit, etc. Salvation is not merely about knowing where we are going when we die it is also about the possibility of Kingdom living here, now. It is about being fundamentally changed in the depths of our being so that the will of God can be done in our lives on earth as it is in heaven.

Spiritual transformation is the process by which Christ is formed in us, for the glory of God, for the abundance of our own lives and for the sake of others; it results in an increasing capacity to discern and

do the will of God.... spiritual transformation is central to the message of the gospel and therefore central to the mission of the church.

Transformation is something that Christians talk about a lot - It's kind of like prayer - everyone wants to study it, talk about it, but we rarely give ourselves to the task. But in order to experience true transformation we must give ourselves to the process - some process, some steps - how do we go about it otherwise?? How can it happen if there aren't steps, actions, and habits that we are engaging and forming?

A few weeks ago we looked at Mark's gospel being an invitation to discipleship to Jesus. An invitation to be with Jesus, to become like Jesus, and to do what Jesus did. That means then that as we walk through the Gospel of Mark we should be looking for rhythms, habits and disciplines of Jesus' life that we as disciples can follow.

*"My central claim is that we can become like Christ by doing one thing - by following him in the overall style of life he chose for himself. If we have faith in Christ, we must believe that he knew how to live. We can, through faith and grace become like Christ by practicing the types of activities he engaged in, by arranging our whole lives around the activities he himself practiced in order to remain constantly at home in the fellowship of his father.*

*What activities did Jesus practice? Such things as solitude and silence, prayer, simple and sacrificial living, intense study and meditation upon God's word and God's ways, and service to others. Some of these will certainly be even more necessary to us than they were to him, because of our greater or different need...*

*So, if we wish to follow Jesus Christ - and to walk in the easy yoke with him - we will have to accept his overall way of life as our way of life totally. Then, and only then, we may reasonably expect to know by experience how easy is the yoke and how light the burden." - Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines**

One of those rhythms that comes up again and again in the book of Mark is Jesus' discipline of solitude, silence and prayer.

(Now before I go any further let me raise a common objection - Isn't the spiritual practice of solitude and silence borrowed from Buddhism or New Age?

This is a common objection among evangelicals who are very passionate about the Word of God, and the preached word, but actually this practice of silence and solitude goes back far into the roots of Christian and Jewish faith -

**"For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation." - Psalm 62:1**

**"Be still and know that I am God" - Psalm 46:10**

**"It is good that one should wait silently for the salvation of the Lord.."  
- Lamentations 3:26**

Scripture seems to point again and again to the fact that there is something in the stillness and the silence that words cannot teach us - that we cannot learn in the regular hustle of life. There is a cultivated knowledge of the presence and protection of the Lord that can only be found through solitude and silence. This is a practice that the evangelical church has long neglected (forgotten), and yet there are many returning to it because though they know the scripture, have read all the christian classics, are immersed in community, worship, service, and prayer - they still feel empty, dry, like something is missing or there must be something more

As Willard says, - If we want transformation, the transformation the scriptures speak of, we must follow the teacher *by following him in the overall style of life he chose for himself..*

## **1. Jesus Rhythms**

- a. **"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. Simon and his companions went to look for him,**

**and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!” Jesus replied, “Let us 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.” - Mark 1:35-39 (NLT)**

- b. As I said solitude was a practice in Jesus’ life. A rhythm and priority - he did it frequently...we constantly find him withdrawing from the crowds, from the busyness of ministry to desolate places/the wilderness to pray - to commune with the Father.
- c. Mark noted earlier in this chapter that after Jesus was baptized he was **“driven by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness (or the solitary place) for 40 days.” (Mark 1:12)**
- d. Jesus began his ministry with forty days of solitude. No doubt Jesus intended to commune with God alone, but he also encountered Satan in the desert place. Even as his ministry proceeded we can see that he often withdrew to a solitary place to pray, often times he spent the whole night in prayer and then he served the needs of the disciples and the crowds..
- e. This rhythm and practice is highlighted by the gospel writers:
  - i. **“After bidding them farewell, He left for the mountain to pray.” (Mark 6:46)**
  - ii. **“But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.” (Luke 5:16)**
  - iii. **“One day Jesus left the crowds to pray alone.” (Luke 9:18)**
  - iv. **See Also (Luke 6:12; Luke 4:42; Matthew 14:23)**
- f. How many of us have stopped to notice in scripture, not just what Jesus said, but what he did; what the rhythms of his life were? I believe we are called to imitate every part of Jesus' life that we can. Again, it’s the idea of apprenticeship; learning and adopting his way of Life. If we are his disciples we should be

paying close attention to these things - if we are to walk in his steps, to become like him, to do what he did...

## 2. The Deep work of Solitude

- a. It's not just that we are to follow Jesus because we are his followers - Jesus was modeling for us the good life - He shows us the way life works best - the blessed life - so there are clear benefits and blessings to solitude. What are they?
  - i. (Observations of the text) - In the busyness and hustle, with demands on him from everyone - Jesus makes time, he makes it a priority, to be alone with the Father. Notice that Peter makes mention - "everyone is looking for you!" - Peter seems shocked, What are you doing? Do you know how popular we are?? How could you slip away when everyone is depending on you, when everyone wants you? Jesus, why is this priority?
  - ii. Jesus is hugely popular at this moment - he has just performed many miraculous healings, cast out many demons and been preaching on a circuit about the kingdom of God - everyone wants a piece, a private audience, a healing, everyone is curious and interested - JESUS IS IN HIGH DEMAND. Translate this to modern times - Imagine if Jesus was doing this kind of ministry in the Bay Area - it would go viral - news media, primetime interviews, twitter and facebook would be blowing up, podcast interviews, speaking and preaching request - there would be so much hype!
  - iii. And yet, Jesus quietly, silently protest all of this by rising early and going to a solitary place to pray - to be alone with the Father
  - iv. What are the constant demands on your life? What are the voices, what are the things in your life that demand priority? We often talk about the cultural demands through technology, 24/7 news, podcasting, to Marie Kondo, to Netflix - getting that dopamine hit again and again - what are these voices, those demands that

though it seems you can't live without are actually draining you, and you need to say no to, in order to say yes to God's invitation to be with him? What is the urgent, and how can we say yes to the necessary. I want to give you permission to say no to the urgent, and say yes to the necessary. In no way, do I want to make the mistake of just swinging the pendulum - But I do want you, I want me, I want us to prioritize being alone with God.

- v. Notice - Jesus says no to people's demands and Yes to being with the Father, and this strengthens him, enables him, and gives him clarity on his identity, purpose and mission. Jesus responds like we would after a full pampered vacation. He knows who he is and why he is on earth
- vi. When Peter tells Jesus about the crowds - Jesus simply responds - **"Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach - For that is why I came out."** He doesn't even acknowledge the demands on him - the voices that tell him what to do or that might try to define his purpose - Jesus has clarity. He knows who he is. Jesus is on a mission - the mission that the Father sent him on, the mission that only he can fulfill, and he has just spent time communing with the one who sent him.
  - 1. Or think of Jesus' time of 40 days of solitude after his baptism. He did battle with the intoxicating possibilities of achieving his kingdom and identity in the power of the self. He faced down the self Satan offered and instead chose his true identity as the beloved son.. He had total clarity on who he was and why he was here.
- vii. Dallas Willard says, *"Out of such preparation, Jesus was able to lead a public life of service through teaching and healing. He was able to love his closest companions to the end...Our mistake is to think that following Jesus*

*consists in loving our enemies, going the second mile, turning the other cheek, suffering patiently and hopefully - while living the rest of our lives just as everyone else does.” - Dallas Willard, The Spirit of the Disciplines*

- viii. It was out of this communing with the Father, this priority to Be with the Father that Jesus was able to be continually strengthened for the work the Father sent him to do, that he came to do, and to finish it.
- ix. And the same is true for us. Time alone with Jesus, with the Father in solitude and silence is so recalibrating. It's like the best therapy session you ever had or like when you and your spouse have time alone to talk real life stuff - Who are we; who do we want to be; where are we going? - getting on the same page
- x. Sometimes when I'm doing my times of solitude and silence with the Lord - I come with so much on my mind, with a heavy heart full of anxiety and confusion. But when I begin with just communing with God - being with him, enjoying his presence, and his love for me. IT ALWAYS puts things in perspective, I walk away with clarity, and peace. Not that I have everything solved but I have the mental, spiritual fortitude to go forward. I challenge you to cultivate this.
  - 1. *"One of the primary functions of solitude is to settle into ourselves in God's presence. This is not easy and it takes time. But it is the answer to the heart cry That erupts when we have been distracted for too long by surface concerns. "I have lost myself!" we cry. Solitude is the only way to find ourselves again. And the longer we have been lost to ourselves, caught up with external stimulation, the longer it takes to find our way home again." - Ruth Haley Barton, Strengthening the soul of your leadership*

2. Solitude is a formative place because it gives God's spirit uninterrupted time and space to do deep work
3. The point of course is to cultivate closeness or intimacy with God - but one of the positive benefits to this silence and solitude is to allow the holy spirit to speak and bring us face to face with hidden motives and compulsions. It seeks to remove all distractions, all achievements and justifications, all excuses, all masks - in order to lay our souls bare before the Lord - to know him as Father, and to be known as beloved children of God.. and like Jesus to have clarity on who God has uniquely called you to be and what he has called you to do in the work of his kingdom.
4. In solitude and silence:
  - a. We cultivate an ear for the voice of the Father.
  - b. We get a renewed Identity as his children
  - c. We get clarity on his purpose and calling on our lives.
    - i. We must learn to quiet the buzz around us.
    - ii. To quiet ourselves.
    - iii. In order to hear his voice.

**3. Closing:** A few years ago I had a conversation with a woman who told me that she had grown up in a Christian home, had gone to church and assumed that she was a follower of Jesus. At one point a crisis came into her life and she went to fall back on her faith - thinking it would hold her - but she found that there was nothing to fall back on, there was no depth, no real personal relationship with God there... She then realized she

had never cultivated a personal relationship with the Lord but had only given mental assent to the gospel and the teachings of the Bible.

- a. I fear this for some of you - Your only one crisis away from losing faith, because there is no real faith to speak of - Please hear the Father's invitation to you today! He is seeking you out, calling you to be with him - he desires to be alone with you.
  - i. Dallas Willard talks about our fear of Silence, but also points out something that we should fear even more. *"Silence is frightening because it strips us as nothing else does, throwing us on the stark realities of our life. It reminds us of death, which will cut us off from this world and leave only us and God. And in the quiet, what if there turns out to be very little between us and God?" Dallas Willard, The Spirit of the Disciplines*

**Closing Prayer:** Oh God of truth and grace, come now to find us, for we have lost ourselves in the shuffle of busyness and disguises. Let your spirit move mercifully to re-create us from the chaos of our lives. We have been careless of our days, of our loves, our gifts, our chances. Our prayer is to change, oh God, not out of despair of self, But for love of you, and for the selves we long to become before we simply waste away. Let your mercy move in and through us now. Amen. (Adaptation from Ted Loder, My Heart in my mouth)