

A TIME OF SOLITUDE

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There was a time in my life when I thought if I had to be alone, I would die! Overly dramatic? Perhaps, but the fear was real. But then I had an experience that redefined solitude. I joined a convent. Well, I didn't actually "join", I just joined on weekends! I was living in Toronto and discovered a weekend retreat at a local convent. I went, slept in a very humble room, ate silently with the sisters (all meals were silent), met with a spiritual director, and communed with God in the beautiful gardens. It was a life altering experience and one I would repeat many times.

In the silence, with a little bit of direction, I was able to clear all the noise in my head and hear God speak. In taking a break from the chaos I discovered peace and quiet. I discovered God in solitude.

Please read 2 Corinthians 1:3-7

In this passage the words "all comfort" are more than soothing sympathy, it means helping to make strong. At the convent I met with the God of all comfort. During this time in my life I was working through painful wounds from the past and time alone, without distractions, allowed me to hear God's voice and receive His healing touch. It gave the space for God to do some strengthening work in me that couldn't happen in the busyness of life.

I have continued a practice of solitude for many years since and the benefits have not just been a strengthening of my own soul but an increase in compassion and understanding that has allowed me to serve and care for others. It is a practice that Jesus modelled for us many times. Jesus chose solitude over people when He was preparing for a major task, recharging after a hard day, working through grief, before an important decision, in a time of distress, and when He needed focussed time in prayer.

Perhaps you are reading this and you have already decided that this isn't for you. Can't handle quiet? Mind wanders? Life is too busy to make the time? Well, solitude is a discipline. Solitude doesn't require silence but it does require planning and time. Just like your first plank wasn't 5 minutes long or your first run wasn't 25km; you had to work up to it with daily discipline. Spiritual disciplines are no different but vitally important.

Henri Nouwen wrote: "without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life." It's not about being alone, it is an absence of human activity so we can more fully experience the presence of God. Solitude exposes our idols; it is often not a fear of solitude as much as an addiction to noise, busyness, and scheduling.

In this advent season, I encourage you to make time to be in the presence of the God of all comfort. That is why Jesus came, to be God with us.

My child, I am the Lord who gives strength in the day of trouble. Come to Me when all is not well with you. Your tardiness in turning to prayer is the greatest obstacle to heavenly consolation, for before you pray earnestly to Me you first seek many comforts and take pleasure in outward things. Thus, all things are of little profit to you until you realize that I am the one Who saves those who trust in Me, and that outside of Me there is no worthwhile help, or any useful counsel or lasting remedy.

Thomas a Kempis, The imitation of Christ