

Solitude: Following Jesus Into The Desert And Up The Mountain

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[0 : 0 0] All right, thank you so much, Elliot. Good morning, everybody. You guys doing well? Good, good. As Elliot said, my name's Jesse, one of the pastors here. And if you're listening online, glad you can do that.

If you are new, my hope and wish is that you don't leave with the impression of we are the church of the uncomfortable chair. We really hope that this is a place where you found a friendly face, a warm welcome, and most of all, you encountered the risen King.

So we're hoping for that, but glad that you are with us. If you got your Bible, go ahead and turn to Matthew 4. Like Elliot said, we're continuing on in our series that we're starting. It's a four-part series on the way, becoming more like Jesus.

And so for the next few weeks, we're going to look at particular ways that Jesus leads us into, particular things Jesus leads us into to become more like Him. And you know, you can think about these things as either obligations or opportunities.

And I kind of want to front end my talk with you by saying like, you can hear this in two ways. You can hear it as an obligation of like, man, I better do this or God won't love me.

[1 : 0 7] Or I got to do this or God won't be pleased with me. And you can live a life of trying to earn God's love and try to please God and earn His pleasure over you. Sorry. Or you can see these things as a means of grace, as opportunities to encounter God's love and to encounter His grace so that you can know Him more richly.

And so I really encourage you to hear me in the latter way, not the former. And so what we're going to be talking about over the next few weeks is three key environments that Jesus leads us into.

And it's three environments that are very important for every disciple to be moving between on a regular basis. And so the first one is how He leads us into the place of solitude or alone time with Him.

There's another one of how He leads us into the place of one anothering and small groups, what Elliot was just talking about with community groups and how important that is. And then there is the environment of the weekly full gathering, which is like what we are doing right now.

Today, however, we're going to look specifically at the significance of solitude and what that means for us. And so before we jump into it, let's define what solitude is. So we're all on the same page here. And here's a simple working definition.

[2 : 1 9] I hope we could all agree on. Solitude is simply this. It's a quiet space and an unhurried time in which we can focus on God and meet with Him. And you listen to that and you're like, man, that sounds awesome.

That sounds beautiful. That sounds wonderful. How do I get into that? Sounds super holy, right? But it is not natural to any of us, if we're honest with ourselves. It is just not natural because we live in our modern times, we live in a moment that really grooms us to not slow down, to not set aside times like that.

We are groomed into busyness, in constant busyness. We move from work into our hobbies, into bingeing on Netflix, into doom scrolling on our phones.

I mean, that's what we do. We fill every moment of our day with something. And we feel like we have to because we want to make this life count. That's like what's held out to us all the time. Don't waste your life.

And so because we don't want to waste it, what do we end up doing? We end up filling it with way too many things. As a friend of mine, a pastor says, we lived with oversaturated souls.

[3 : 27] We're consuming way too much. We're way too busy. And so busyness is a major hurdle to entering this place of solitude. But here's another one, discouragement. Discouragement is a real thing.

Some of us, we've tried the solitude thing before. And we slowed down and we got quiet and our minds were way too loud. We thought we were losing our minds, right?

We thought we were about to go crazy. Or perhaps your solitude turned into nap time, right? Got a little too quiet, got a little too comfy. And then suddenly you wake up and you're just like, oh man, that just went by.

But you know, let's just call it holy sleeping. That's okay. It's all good. Or maybe you've cracked open the Bible. You've tried prayer time. And man, it just wasn't the fireworks show that you were expecting.

And there is a myriad of ways that solitude can fall short of our expectation. And it's tempting for those setbacks to discourage and disappoint us so that we just would give it up.

[4 : 28] But here's what I want you and I to realize. Satan is going to use distraction. He is going to use discouragement. And he is going to use disappointment to keep us from solitude because he doesn't want us to become more like Jesus.

And he knows better than anyone that solitude with God is a danger for his designs in our life because Jesus did it all the time. And he doesn't want us to behave like Jesus so that we become like Jesus.

And when you read the Gospels, you see that Jesus did this all the time. He went into solitude. And there was two places that we see Jesus get to in those times of solitude to be with God.

And solitude happened for Jesus in the desert and it happened on mountaintops. Both of those places in solitude are two important places for me and you to get to.

But I want to say they're two very different experiences. Okay. One is definitely scarier than the other. I think most Christians today would associate solitude with more of the mountaintop industry, with more of the mountaintop imagery.

[5 : 33] It's the Psalm 23, he leads me beside still waters. He leads me to green pastures. He restores my soul. That's the thing we want to see. We want to see the God of glory. We want to see the God who cares for us and shepherds us and is kind to us and blesses us.

And we want those moments. And those are good moments. And let me just say this. We should want those moments. We should want to experience our great king, our heavenly father in those ways, who cares for us in those ways.

However, that's not all it's going to be. Actually, the record that we have in the Gospels is that we see at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, he didn't start up the mountain.

Actually, he gets baptized and then immediately he's led into the desert. And I think that's good for us to realize. It can help set a good expectation for what solitude can be.

And it's not just an escape from life's demands. It's not just a place where we get recharged. It's not just a place to behold God's glory. And it can be, but it's not all there is.

[6 : 35] To quote Henry Nguyen, he said this, Solitude is the furnace for transformation. Oof, doesn't sound very nice. It's like the furnace?

We don't want to go to the furnace, do we? Jesse, what was that quiet streams and still waters? What was the green pastures? Let's get back to that place, right? But the furnace, the desert, is not the experience we may want, but often that is where God intends to bring us to.

And he needs to bring us to because he knows this, in the desert is where our hearts are tested. And that's good for us. Think about it.

Think about what is the purpose of a test? All of us, we've grown up, we've been taking tests most of our lives, in some way, shape, or form. In school, it's where we find out what we know and what we don't know, right?

It exposes where we're right and where we're wrong. Then there's medical tests. And the purpose, what is the purpose of the medical test? Well, they're there to reveal what's really going on in the body.

[7 : 37] Tests are important. Tests don't lie. They're there to expose what is. Now, that prospect alone should freak us out to a degree.

Now, I want to pick up my wife a little bit, love my wife Haley, because she'll get some strange symptom all of a sudden and then go on WebMD. And then suddenly, she's got leukemia or lupus or something like that, right?

She is convinced. But at the same time that she's worried about having these diseases, she's like, man, I don't want to go to the doctor, because what if the doctor tells me I have them, right?

Which is kind of like, wouldn't you want to know if you had them? You know, it's like, well, she doesn't, by the way. She doesn't have any of the things. As much as we want to, we can kind of relate to that in a funny way, moving from the natural to the spiritual, thinking about ourselves and our walk with Jesus in our own hearts.

Aren't we a lot like that? Right? We know something's wrong. We know something isn't right, but we're too scared to face it. We're too scared to face what might be wrong with us.

[8 : 44] But that's why Jesus wants to lead us into the desert. That's why he calls us to follow him in there. He wants to show us what's really going on in our hearts. And he does this for every single one of us, without exception.

And he didn't just, he just doesn't lead us into that. He went there himself. He went to the desert to get tested. And I'm going to read from Matthew 4, chapter 1.

The scriptures will be up behind me as well. And, you know, just for the sake of giving our derriers a little relief, let's stand and read the script. And we'll listen to the scripture and read it together standing.

This is something that a lot of different churches do. It's a tradition. And so, we'll just join them in this moment, since we don't have good cushions. It says this, Matthew 4, verse 1 to 11.

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting 40 days and 40 nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, if you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.

[9 : 50] But he answered, it is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, if you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, he will command his angels concerning you.

On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone. Jesus said to him, again, it is written, you shall not put the Lord your God to the test. Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.

And he said to him, all these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me. Then Jesus said to him, be gone, Satan. For it is written, you shall worship the Lord your God and him only you shall serve.

Then the devil left him. And behold, angels came and were ministering to him. This is God's word. Amen. You can be seated. Amen. So we see Jesus led into the desert, goes into the desert, 40 days, no food, faces down the devil.

Very impressive. I once did a five-day water fast. Once. And I did it in air conditioning.

[11 : 11] And the devil didn't have to come because I think I actually turned into him at the end of it. But I love this story and I love that God chose to put this in there.

And I love that this was determined for Jesus to go through this time of testing and to be tempted when he was most vulnerable and most weak. Because in this story, we get to find out if Jesus is the real deal or not.

His heart is squeezed like a sponge. And look at what comes out. Each temptation that we see here has layers to it. Each offers a quick fix, an alternative, easier path than the one that was set before him by God.

The path that he was called to walk in here on earth. Now, what I want to do is I want to briefly touch on each one of these things because I think it's important for us to know why they're in there. Because actually, for us to be led into the desert by Jesus, what he is doing, he is actually going to expose those very things that those temptations were getting at.

Those fears and those sins that lurk deep in our hearts. The ones that he overcame and the ones that he didn't get into to prove himself perfectly righteous. But ones that he wants to show us and deal with.

[12 : 24] So the first temptation was, hey, Jesus turned those stones into bread. He had the power to do that. But that temptation wasn't about, hey, solve your hunger.

The devil was trying to make him insecure about his status as God's son. He was sowing the fear of doubt. What does it say? If you are, if you are the son of God, then you should be able to do these things.

So Satan is, if you're the son of God, you better prove it. Now, what's interesting is, just 40 days prior, God had said, God the Father had said over Jesus at his baptism, this is my beloved son.

See, Jesus, God had already declared Jesus as his son. And Jesus had to believe that what God said was true and that it was final.

Or he could doubt that it wasn't. And commanding those stones to be turned to bread would have been a vote of no confidence in the finality of the Father's declaration.

[13 : 27] And it would have been like, you know what? I need to prove this in my own power and my own strength because I have to secure my status before the Father. Father, what is the temptation for you and me that is lurking in our hearts all the time?

What is your relationship to God secured in? Is it in what he has declared? Is it in what he has done? Or is it in your own efforts? Because one is freedom and one is fear.

One will be a never-ending cycle of bondage. And that fear inside you and me, that's where we have to face it in the desert. The desert brings us to that place and it squeezes it out of us.

So we have to come to terms and wrestle with it. Then there's the next temptation. Right? Jesus, throw yourself off the temple. Odd one. It's a weird one.

Okay. But here's what the devil is implying. Jesus, do you think the Father really loves you? How do you know? Well, you should test it.

[14 : 35] Which is why Jesus said, no, no, no. You don't put the Lord God to the test. The Bible says you don't. See, Jesus, again, he already knew he had the Father's love. Again, 40 days ago at his baptism, the Father says over him, this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.

Jesus could be secure and trust that the Father's word is true and the Father's word is unchanging. Or he could live insecure and put God to the test to prove his love to him.

See, it's never a question of whether God loves us or not. It's a question of where our hearts are at.

Do we trust that to be true? Do we trust his word and his declaration and his promise that we have from his word that is secured in the person of Jesus Christ and what the Father says over us?

As we come up out of the waters of salvation and he says over us, just like he did to his son, this is my beloved son. This is my beloved daughter in whom I'm well pleased.

[15 : 41] Jesus didn't need God to prove his love through one big sensational moment after another. And he knew if he would have opened the door to that, it was opening a door to fear that could never be satisfied.

If he gave in then, he would test God's love again and again and again, being insecure about it. You know, it's interesting. That temptation began at his ministry. That same temptation was repeated at the end of his life from the taunts of the crowd while he was on the cross.

What did they say? If you are the son of God, come down. Let God save you. Prove it to us. Then we'll believe.

What is God doing in the desert? What does he bring to the surface? What does he challenge in our hearts? Are you secure in God's love, regardless of your circumstance, regardless of what that says or what others are saying?

See, we have to realize that that fear and that doubt is lurking in the shadows of our souls, and it needs to be dealt with. And let me tell you, friends, from my own experience, in my own heart, it needs to be dealt with over and over and over again.

[16 : 56] It has a good way of just creeping back in. But in that desert, God's light shines into that place in my soul, and I have to face it.

And I get to, I don't face it alone. I face it with him. I face it with the truth of his word, his promise, his declaration. That is always yes and amen.

And then finally, the devil offers to hand the kingdoms of this world over to Jesus with the caveat that Jesus worshiped him first. But Jesus knew what he was called to do.

He knew that he came into the world to save the world, not through immediate glory, but through suffering and death. And it was through that that he would gain the inheritance of the nations.

So what is Satan offering Jesus here? He is offering the crown without the cross. And he is offering the same thing to you and me all the time. You know what?

[17 : 58] Get to the glory. Get to the life and the blessings of God without going through the challenge, without having to die to yourself. We want all the good stuff, but the movement of the gospel, the movement of following Jesus is always through death into life.

We want the easy option. We want to go from where we're at in the suffering right to glory. We don't want to have to go down any further. But Jesus says, no, no, no, that's not the way. The way of the cross, the way of following me, the way in the desert.

And the glory of the kingdom comes through the suffering and into life. And so what happened to Jesus, what Jesus faced is what we're going to face in solitude, in the desert.

And God wants to bring us into that. Again, not because he hates us, because he knows what's good for us. He knows what's lurking in our hearts. We don't, but he does. He wants us to come face to face with the sin hidden in there, with the fears that we're not aware of.

And until then, we are going to live unaware that they exist in us. And we're not going to realize how much influence they're playing out in our lives. And how much they're exerting on our everyday actions and thoughts and behaviors.

[19 : 18] Carl Jung, a psychologist, put it this way. Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate.

This is a secular prophet saying yes and amen to what the Bible says about the sin and the fear that is lurking in our hearts. That we're not aware of.

Solitude is that place where God reveals our hearts. That dominate our decisions and motivate our actions. And God is faithful to show us those things.

Because the first step to breaking the power of those things in our life is for us to notice them and to name them. And that is just a fancy word of confession. That is a fancy phrasing of confession.

That's what confession is noticing and naming things that are real and true. And God brings us into that. Confession is naming your sins. It's naming your fears, but it's doing it before a holy God who loves you.

[20 : 18] Who wants to deliver you from them. Which is what he does in the desert. See, the desert isn't just the place where our hearts are tested. God shows up to deliver us in the desert. You know, at the end of Jesus' testing, what do we see?

The devil leaves and angels minister to him. God shows up to help. Jesus stood strong in the trial. And he waited on God. And God came through like he always does.

But God will always bring us to those places to prove that he is a God who will deliver us. And he is faithful to do that. And he's going to do that over and over and over again until we really start believing it.

Exodus 14.10. This is a great picture of this. How God shows up in the desert to deliver us. God just took his people out of Egypt. Delivered them from slavery into Egypt.

Is leading them in freedom. But now they're at the Red Sea. And then Pharaoh's armies are coming down. The Egyptian armies are coming down on Israel to take them back.

[21 : 18] And so it says this. When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes. And behold, the Egyptians were marching after them. And Israel turned to God and believed.

Now what does this say? They feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord. Lord, we trust in you save us. Now they said to Moses, it is because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness.

That you have, what have you done? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? Is not this what we said to you while we were in Egypt? Leave us alone that we can serve the Egyptians?

For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness. That is the fear coming out.

And that is the Israelites' confession in that moment. And then Moses says to the people, Chill out. Fear not.

[22 : 20] Stand firm. See the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you.

And you have only to be silent. This episode, we see it all. The Israelites, God's people, their great fear is exposed. Pharaoh, the Egyptian army.

And their great sin is exposed. They trust Pharaoh more than they trust God. Can we get, let us go back there because it was better than what you're doing with us.

Here's the thing that we see in this passage and what it speaks to us today. Our fears are Pharaoh's that we run to for our salvation. Even though they use us and abuse us.

We do that all the time. It is the craziest thing. Even though we know God is good. Even though we know he is better. Even though we know life in him and deliverance in him is offered to us.

[23 : 23] Man, we are so comfortable with our fears and our sins that we will run back to them. And we will just choose not to deal with them. When you're in the desert, it feels like God's left you to fight alone.

But like we see in this passage, he brings us to that place to show us how helpless we are on our own. In the desert, we face, we come face to face with evil and temptation.

But that's to lead us to a place where we find that God is our savior. He is our better hope. He is better than Pharaoh. He is better than our fears.

He is better than our sins. And he wants to deliver us from them. And you know what? He doesn't fail in doing that. What does Moses tell the Israelites to do? To use the old new King James or the old King James.

He doesn't say gird up your loins and prepare for battle. He says, fear not. Stand firm. Be silent. He's basically saying, shut up, do nothing, and watch God do his thing.

[24 : 29] Our fight as Christians, we have to realize, is never with flesh and blood. The things that we see, there's always a deeper root underneath them. There's always something happening underneath them.

The battle is always spiritual. And the fight is over our hearts. It's for our souls. And God is at work in them to transform them and to change them.

And only God can do that. You and I can't do that. And so he takes us into the desert to do it. Henry Nguyen said this about solitude in the desert. It is the place of the great struggle and the great encounter.

The struggle against the compulsions of the false self and the encounter with a loving God who offers himself as the substance of the new self.

And that is an amazing offer that we should take advantage of. But let's be reminded, as painful but good as the desert is, that experience of solitude, that's not the only place God leads us into in solitude.

[25 : 32] There's also the mountaintop. And that is an important experience, an important place that we have that God leads us into when we're with him in solitude. And if the desert is the great testing and purging of our hearts, the mountaintop is where we get to behold the glory of God.

It's the place where we get to see his goodness. It is the quiet streams and the still, the green pastures and the quiet streams, the still waters, the restoring, the refreshing of our souls.

It's where we get to pop up into heaven and we get to see, oh my goodness, God, you are more amazing and wonderful and beautiful than I could ever believe. I needed to remember and see how other you are, how transcendent you are, to see that you are a God of power and wisdom and all of those things.

And actually, those moments are helpful because then we begin to be in a place where we can trust him to lead us into the desert. And when you look at the mountaintop experiences, a lot of them happen throughout the Bible.

It happened to Abraham, right? God calls Abraham to go up a mountain and sacrifice his only son. And when he gets up to the top, God interjects and says like, I'm going to provide another sacrifice. Your son is saved.

[26 : 40] And what was Abraham's response? Ah, on the mountain, the Lord provides. And the nature, a new nature of God gets revealed to Abraham in that moment on the mountaintop.

He knows God in a new way. Moses, he meets God on the mountain in a couple of places, right? The burning bush and God reveals who he is.

Go tell them. He says, God, who shall I tell them you are? And he said, tell them I am that I am. Right? That great name Yahweh comes from there.

And then on Mount Sinai, he goes up and he, again, the glory of God is revealed to Moses. And then we see that in Elijah where he goes on Mount Carmel. And there is the great duel between the prophet Elijah, God's prophet, and the prophets of Baal.

And God comes through and he rains fire from heaven and consumes the sacrifice that Elijah made in a miraculous way to prove that he is the one true and living God. The mountain is the place where God reveals his nature to us.

[27 : 45] It is a place where we behold his power and his glory. And we need those signs. We may not get them as often as we like, but we should desire them and we should be thankful for when they happen.

And here's the thing that we also need to remember. God doesn't intend for us to stay up on the mountaintop. The mountaintop, we need it because it is preparation for ministry for when we come down the mountain.

And remember this too. We don't leave God up on the mountaintop experience. Even when we descend, he goes with us. Jesus came down when he, that, that, the mountain of transfiguration, that moment where he went up and all that happened.

He came down from that mountaintop and he went right into ministry. Right into casting a demon out of a little kid. See, the goal of quiet time, this goal of solitude, this goal of being with Jesus in the desert and up the mountain, it is so that we can connect with God absolutely.

But it's to prepare us to display Jesus wherever we go, right? And so that preparation looks like this. Our ministry should look like Jesus' ministry and compassionate ministry is what Jesus was all about.

[29 : 04] And compassionate ministry flows out of solitude. The idea of a quiet time that doesn't lead to mission doesn't jive with the life of Jesus. He would spend time with the Father.

He would pop up into the glory of heaven. He'd go out into the desert, but he always came back. He'd come back into our own suffering, into our suffering to be with us and to bring heaven's life and hope and salvation.

It was necessary for him. And if it was necessary for him, how much more for us who are his disciples? And I want to ask us this question. I'm going to challenge us kindly with these questions.

What are we taking into the day? What are we taking with us into the day if we're not beginning with popping up into heaven? Beholding God and spending time with him.

Here's another one. What power, with what power are we doing ministry if it isn't preceded by solitude? I want to encourage us and challenge us with this. Our strength is a poor substitute for the Spirit.

[30 : 07] Our own strength is a very poor substitute for God's power. It is easy to slip into doing things for God, but rarely if ever spending time with him.

And when we start doing that, what we start to do is we start to do all the things, but we just fake it. We start to just fake it in ministry. We get clever about saying the right words.

We are dedicated to doing all the right things that we're supposed to be doing. All the while, our hearts are drifting further and further and further from the heart of the Father. But the way of solitude leads us back into that.

The way of solitude leads us into the way of Jesus because when we do that, we behold the fullness of the glory of God. And the promise of that is, as we are beholding the fullness of the glory of God, we are being transformed into his likeness day by day.

And what that does is that makes us more like Jesus. And what that yields is a heart that is ready and willing and able to do compassionate ministry.

[31 : 16] Look at King David's words as he pops into heaven. In this place of solitude with the Father, Psalm 51, verse 9, he says this, Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and uphold me with a willing spirit.

We see in David's words everything that we've been talking about. There's an exposure of his heart that has happened. There is a purging of him spending time in the desert and the desolation.

But then there's this beholding of the presence of God as well. There's the joy of salvation that he is longing for and desiring yet again. And we need both. We need these two things for our growth and our goodness.

But it's also for the sake of flowing through us towards others. That grace isn't meant to terminate in us.

[32 : 31] It's meant to flow to us, but it's meant to flow through us. Because look at what David prays next. He says, man, Lord, you do all these things, and then I will teach transgressors your ways.

And sinners will return to you. Deliver me, Lord, from blood guiltiness, O God. O God, of my salvation and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

When we pop up into heaven, it prepares us for God's mission. We become humble, gentle, compassionate ministers who are ready and desire to help others meet this amazing God of glory and grace and mercy who heals and teaches and saves.

See, the time in the desert, it humbles us. And the time in the mountaintop, it fills us with faith. And we need both of those things. We need to go full of faith. And we need to go humble.

Not very impressed with ourselves. We need to go impressed with God, not impressed with ourselves. Charles Spurgeon said it this way, I will not believe that you have tasted of the honey of the gospel if you are content to eat it all by yourself.

[33 : 40] So I hope what you're hearing today is this importance of solitude.

That it is an important environment. It is an important invitation, an important opportunity for you and me to engage in. And I will say this, it does demand some discipline and routine from us.

Because it's so vital in following Jesus. And you might ask the question, well, how often do we need to do this solitude thing? And I would say as often as we need food and water.

God fed his people in the wilderness. 40 years in the wilderness. And he fed it with daily bread, bread from heaven that fell on the ground. Jesus said about himself and talking about the manna that fell from heaven, he said, you know what?

That was actually, I'm the fulfillment of that. That was an object lesson that ultimately points to me. I am the bread of life that came down from heaven. And if you eat of me, you'll never go hungry.

[34 : 46] What are we feeding on? What are you and me feeding on, followers of Jesus? What are we feeding on if we're not feeding on Jesus? We need to be feeding on him. Every day, Jesus is calling us to follow him into solitude.

Whether that's in the desert and up the mountain or both at the same time. And that place where we get to behold God's glory, that place where we get to come to terms with what God is doing in our hearts.

Where we get to realize how thankful we are for God's forgiveness and healing and grace and mercy that is in Jesus alone. That place where we get to then be commissioned with God's power to go bear witness and bring the hope of Jesus to others.

And you might be thinking, awesome, Jesse. That sounds good. What is next? What's a step I can take to do that? Maybe you don't have a devotional life right now. And I would just offer to you, man, if you're looking for a place to start, we actually, one of the things that we have found really helpful is a journal that we sell back at our next step table in the back there that you can go check out on the way out.

And it is just a journal that gets you into the word of God and it helps guide you and respond to it every single day. So, if you're looking for something to do, that is a great step to take.

[36 : 04] Now, before we finish, I want to finish by making sure you are hearing this before anything else. Because I don't want you to leave here all fired up.

You're going out. Man, I got this solitude thing. I'm juiced up, ready to go. 20, 24. Here I come. Because we're going to get out there and life happens. And we get busy.

And we get overwhelmed. Or we forget. And you wake up at 6 a.m. And the alarm goes off. And that snooze button looks mighty tempting. And we hit it once or twice or a few times.

And then all of a sudden, it's rushing out the door. Or we try it and the experience falls short of our expectation. And we're just like, man, I just, I guess I'm just not doing it right or something.

Each one of those outcomes are a very real possibility. And you know, it'll be tempting for us to put it down. And to give up. And to be ashamed. And you know what? The devil's going to come.

[37 : 03] And he's going to use that as an opportunity. And he's going to whisper in your ear, you are such a loser. What kind of disciple of Jesus are you? You can't even keep a simple devotion. And it's so easy to start feeling guilty.

It's so easy to start feeling ashamed. And just to not want, and just to give up. But I want you to hear this. Jesus loves his disciples even when they struggle with solitude.

He does. You know, it's funny. It was right before Jesus was crucified. He's in the garden. He's praying. His soul is troubled. And he's like, oh.

He goes to his best friends. And he says, would you just stay up with me and pray? And they don't. He asks them three times. Every single time.

They come back and they're napping. What does Jesus do? He doesn't get bitter toward them. You know, John 13, verse 1, it says, Jesus loved them to the end.

[38 : 06] Those same disciples that fell asleep. Instead of joining him and being good friends. He loved them to the end. That's you and me.

You know, thankfully our salvation, thankfully God's love, isn't dependent on our ability to keep the discipline of solitude. It's just not. And we should be thankful for that.

But again, I want to hold out to us, as much as God's love isn't dependent on that, you know what? That solitude is an invitation to experience that love and to know it more.

And I want that, at the end of the day, to be the reason and the desire that you keep running back to it and keep pressing into it. And every time you fail, you know that God still loves me just as much. I'm going to try to pick it back up again and go for it.

So, as the band comes up, ways that we can respond. In a moment, we're going to take communion. But I want to say to you, if you're in the room, you're listening, you're not yet a follower of Jesus, before you come to the table, I want to say this.

[39 : 10] You got to come to the one that the table points to. And you know what? In this life, we are all going to go through the desert. Life is a lot like the wilderness, whether you follow Jesus or not.

It is hard. And it's even harder when you're facing it alone. But that is nothing. The difficulties and the pains and the trials of this life. And when you're in the furnace of it, it is nothing compared to the trial that is to come that none of us can escape, that is death.

And what is our hope in that? Well, if you're here and your hope isn't in Jesus, then your hope is only in yourself. Your hope is only in what you can possibly do.

And I want to say that Jesus is offering to you today, give up on that, because it is a pipe dream. And there is a time coming that you can't escape. And that desert, that wilderness, that trial, that furnace is never going to end.

And he has made a way for you to escape that by believing on him. Believing in him that he lived a life you couldn't live.

[40 : 21] He earned a righteousness you could never earn. He died the death for your sins that you deserve, but he took them on himself and paid for them so that you can have his righteousness considered for yourself.

And in him, you have the inheritance of eternal life and only in him, that is it. And he is offering that for you today. And if that's you, I would encourage you to come to him and respond to that call for him today.

There's going to be a prayer up on the screen in a moment for you to pray. I encourage you to pray that. For those of us who are in the room and we are followers of Jesus already, as we come to communion to eat and drink in faith, we are promised that these things nourish us.

When we take it in faith, they are meant for our good. They are meant to nourish our soul and strengthen us. Let's be reminded that as we come, that you know what?

God is a God who nourished his people through the wilderness by providing bread from heaven, by providing water from the rock. And so that is how he sustained them every single day.

[41 : 29] And we know that Jesus is the bread of heaven. He's the eternal word that we get to feast on. He is the waters of salvation that we go to. He quenches that thirst. So let's go to the table today and let's take it with confidence, not in ourselves, but in that truth, in what he has declared to be true.

And if you're lacking that confidence in him today, come to him and pray, Lord, I believe, but Lord, help my unbelief. That's a good prayer. That's an honest prayer. It's one Jesus loves to hear.