

Solitude: Following Jesus Into The Desert And Up The Mountain

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[0 : 0 0] All right, thank you, Elliot, very much. Again, my name is Jesse, so good to see you all, and yeah, very excited for this morning. First two service Sunday, and the 9 a.m. did go well, although there was some crisis that they alluded to, but all good, 11 a.m. seems to be going a lot better, and I was so excited for today that my body clock woke me up at two in the morning and I could not get back to sleep, so I am running on pure adrenaline at this point and coffee, but yes, it is good to be with you.

Those who are new to us, thank you for coming and being a part of us today. Those who are listening online, thank you for listening. We are continuing in our New Year series.

It's a four-part series, and it's called The Way, Becoming More Like Jesus, you know? When we're taking this moment of New Year's, and oftentimes we think of those as resolutions, we look back at last year and we say, like, some good stuff, some bad stuff, how can I make this year better?

How can I improve on this? And so we're looking and saying, actually, man, the most important thing that we wanna hold out to you as Christians, like, man, it's all about becoming more like Jesus, and if you're here and you're checking out Christianity, we want to let you know and invite you in to come and look and see what beholding Jesus is all about.

We're hoping that stirs something in your heart because that's all where it starts for any of us. And so this thing, when we talk about the way, becoming more like Jesus, it is what Robert Mulholland calls an invitation to a journey, an invitation to follow Jesus, who is our Lord and our Savior.

[1 : 4 0] It's what Eugene Peterson kind of refers to as a long obedience in the same direction. And I wanna say, like, following Jesus, don't get into your mind. It is about following this narrow path of keeping all the right rules, knowing all the right things, being very rigid.

There's no fun in the kingdom of God because that's not what it's all about. What we wanna do is, yes, we are saved into good works. Ephesians tells us that, right? The Apostle Paul says you are saved, and God has prepared good works for each of us that he calls us into and do.

And so those are things that we should be doing, but ultimately what we're holding out to you is we're holding out to you these environments where you can come and behold Jesus and look to Jesus and see him because that's where it all starts, all right?

It all starts. It doesn't start with what you do, and then God's gonna love you. It starts with coming and beholding him. And we would say there are three key environments where this beholding happens.

And so one of them we're gonna look at next week is the assembly of believers. It's gathering like we're doing right now a church on a Sunday, and actually, when you, you know, if you're in church, you hear don't forsake the gathering of the saints, the gathering of the church.

[2 : 50] And actually, the word in there that is used for assembly, the gathering, it means that everybody is accounted for. And it's saying like, hey, if you are a part of the church, it isn't like, eh, I'll show up whenever I want.

It is show up on a Sunday if you are a part of a church family in the moment where everybody is to be accounted for. And we come together, and we don't come together to be entertained.

We don't come together because like, I don't have any friends. I wish I had friends. Although we do build friendship, we are family, but we come together to behold Jesus, to exalt him and to praise him and to build each other up in the faith.

And a lot of good things happen in that assembly. And we're gonna talk about, we're gonna unpack that more next week. And then another one is just the one anotherings of being a disciple. It's like, hey, we're called into a family and we have these friendships and these spiritual friendships, and we get to one another together.

And we're gonna talk about that in two weeks, what that looks like, right? Those informal kind of gatherings, which just at various times we can do that. But today we're gonna focus on something that every one of us can be involved in on a daily basis, right?

[3 : 55] You don't have to like figure out your calendar and line it up with your friends to see when you can one another. You don't have to make sure that you're keeping your schedule clear on Sunday so you could be at the gathering of the saints.

This is something that every Christian can do and every Christian is encouraged to do on a daily basis. And it is solitude. The practice, this environment of solitude.

So before we go any further, it's probably important to define what solitude is. And first I wanna do that by defining what it isn't, right? Because that's what every good preacher does, you know, just a little twist there.

And so solitude, what it is, and solitude isn't trying to have some kind of time with God, with young kids running around and screaming around your legs, right? That's not gonna work.

And I would say like, man, if you're able to do that and still focus and be totally present with God and kind of drown out those noises and quiet your soul in that environment with all that happening, I wanna say like, you're probably already ready for heaven.

[5 : 01] Amen? That is amazing. For the rest of us, not so much. Another thing I wanna say that solitude isn't, it isn't a Bible study. And I'm not knocking Bible study.

Bible study is good. I would encourage anybody to do Bible study. There is some great tools and gatherings for Bible studies out there. There's a thing called community Bible study that happens weekly, even in our area where people get together and they gather around the word and they kind of dissect it and they learn from a really good teacher and they look it over.

And it's helpful. It's good. It's good to get in with some rigorous study. But here's the thing about solitude, man. You don't need huge stacks of books and commentaries in your interlinear Greek Bible to have a good solitude time, praise the Lord.

You don't need any of those things, right? So solitude isn't any of those things. Now, what is solitude? Well, it's getting away, it's going to a solitary place, a quiet place to commune with God, to fellowship with the Trinity.

And some people have called it a devotion. You may have heard it that way. Others, it's a quiet time. But basically the idea here is detaching and getting away from every possible distraction of life to seek intently after God.

[6 : 20] And that time, this time of solitude, it's spent with listening to God and speaking to him. And it's listening through Bible reading and speaking to him in prayer and listening to him in prayer and responding with that.

And it's worshipful. It's all those things. It's all these beautiful movements. And I would say, like, if you wanted to, like, distill it down to, like, a simple word to get a hold on it, I would say abiding.

That word abiding is probably the best one. And I love that word because of what it does. It evokes this concept of faithful, meaningful, intimate fellowship.

And that's what solitude is about. It's about investing in your relationship with God in a way that promotes intimacy. And it's a time of drawing close to God's heart rather than getting into the Bible and dissecting a passage which, you know, it has its place and trying to figure out what every word means and the Greek means and the context and all of that.

And it's worth mentioning here that as wonderful and holy as, like, saying, like, yes, I do solitude, as holy and wonderful as that sounds, it's not something that you and I naturally do.

[7 : 38] Let's be honest. I don't do that. It is not natural for me to seek out a quiet time and alone time with God because we grow up in a culture that is so busy.

We are groomed to be busy all the time, to not want to run to quietness, to not want to run to putting our phone down and disconnecting and being alone where there's just vacuous emptiness of no noise.

It probably sounds very scary for a lot of us, right? And I would say, actually, that distraction, that tendency to want to be distracted and being very comfortable with busyness and the noise that comes at us at life all the time, being comfortable with that, that's a really big obstacle for us adopting solitude in our lives.

And another hurdle I would say is discouragement. For some of us, we may have tried this thing of quiet time and devotion or solitude and just plain failed at it. We tried it, been there, done there, bought the T-shirt, burned it, right?

But perhaps, you know, perhaps in that time, you tried it, it was just, you know, you just, man, I just can't focus in those times. I get so easily distracted. Or, man, I did it and I just got nothing out of it.

[8 : 49] It was meaningless. Or, man, I got into it and the Bible was confusing. There was a lot of weird names that didn't make any sense. And maybe you had the King James Version and you're just like, who speaks in this language anymore?

But, you know, any of those things could be happening where we walk away just very discouraged and kind of just want to detach and say like, eh, tried it, didn't work out, I'm gonna give up on that. I just want to say, man, just listen to me.

Like, even though you may have been super discouraged from the past, just like lean in and listen maybe for the first time because I want to encourage us today and hold out to you how wonderful and beautiful solitude can be.

And then at the end, give you some practical handles of how you can do that well, okay? And here's the thing I want every single one of us to realize, like God wants that for you, okay?

Because he wants to have good relationship and build good intimate relationship with you. Satan does not want you to be pressing into a daily time of solitude. He does not. For him, that would be a win if you don't do that because he doesn't want you to become more like Jesus.

[9 : 49] And it's not, it's, solitude isn't the only way you become more like Jesus, but man, it is one of those significant ways that you become more like Jesus. And Satan knows better than anyone that solitude with God is a danger for him and his kingdom because man, you know who got away to solitude all the time?

Jesus, right? When you read the gospels, you see two places in Jesus's life where he kind of stole away to all the time for solitude with God. Solitude happened for Jesus in the desert and on mountaintops.

And we're gonna look at both and both are important for us, but one I would say is definitely scarier than the other. You know, as modern followers of Jesus, we often associate solitude with a mountaintop imagery, right?

It's refreshing, it's beautiful, it fills us with awe and wonder. Like, you know, we want to experience God in powerful ways, like the glory cloud coming down and we're just in it.

And like four hours later, we wake up from some trance and God had spoken to us and this happened and that happened and we can go away from this like envision and empowered and just like we're ready to go. It's like, man, if we could have that every single day, how amazing would that be, right?

[11 : 02] And that's all good stuff. Mountaintop moments are important. I would say big time important. They're just rare, but, and I would say this too, that the first place Jesus went for solitude in his own life wasn't up the mountain.

It was into the desert. It was into the wilderness, which I want us to reckon with because I think what it's gonna do, it's gonna give us some relief and it's gonna break us out of this narrow framing of what we think solitude is meant to produce, the experience that we think we're supposed to have.

Because solitude, I don't want you to walk away and thinking like, and maybe you came in with this, like, man, you know what, solitude, it's a way of escaping from life's problems. It's a way of spending time with God and recharging.

And it definitely can be those things, right? And that's okay. But I would just say that is not all of it. And what is it? Well, I'm gonna quote a guy who is probably a guru at this solitude thing.

His name was Henry Nguyen. He's an old dead dude, good guy. All the old dead dudes are really, you know, some of those guys are really powerful and we can learn from them. And this is what he said. Solitude is the furnace for transformation.

[12 : 13] Solitude is the furnace for transformation. The furnace, the wilderness, let's be honest, it's not the experience we're looking for from solitude with God, right?

That does not sound nice. I don't like doing yard work in the summertime, right? I don't like being hot. But God will take us to those places of discomfort. God will take us and allow the heat of light on us because he's doing something.

And I would say even though we don't want that from our time of solitude with God, I wanna say this. That is the experience God intends for us many times for us to have with him.

And you say like, wow, Jess, that's really weird. Like really, God wants me to be uncomfortable? God wants me to be in a place of the desert where it's hard and it's difficult and it's tough? Is he some kind of sadist? And I would say no, because in the desert is where our hearts are tested and they need to be tested.

And here's why. Think about what a test is. What is the purpose of any test you take, right? In school, you take a test to find out what you know and what you don't know. It exposes where you are right and where you are wrong.

[13 : 21] It exposes those things. And think of medical tests, right? You come and I'm at the age now, I gotta get like blood labs done every single year. And you know what? They do that to reveal what is going on inside, where you are unhealthy and where you are unhealthy.

It reveals what is hidden. Tests don't lie. They expose what is. That's what they are for. And that's why God tests our hearts.

And he does that in the wilderness. He wants to expose what is in our hearts. And that is so good for us. And he does this to every single one of us without exception. Even Jesus went into the wilderness to get tested.

Matthew 4, verse 1 to 11. If you've, you know, probably many of us are very familiar with this. Jesus just got baptized, right? Heaven's opened up.

Like a voice came down from heaven. People heard it. The spirit descended on him like a dove. God says over him. God the Father says over him, Behold, this is my son in whom I'm well pleased. Man, what a great start, right?

[14 : 25] To public ministry. Here's what happens next. Then Jesus was led by the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting 40 days and 40 nights, he was hungry.

Shocker. And the tempter came and said to him, If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread. But he, Jesus answered, It is written, Man shall not live by bread of limb, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

And 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, You will command his angels concerning you.

And also on their hands, they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against the 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 to you, if you will fall down and worship me.

[15 : 26] And then Jesus said to him, Be gone, Satan, for it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve. And then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

So, obviously, the desert isn't a refreshing place. That's not what we can pull out of this at all. And actually, it looks downright terrifying, and it can be.

Think about what Jesus did here. In the desert, he faced down three core temptations. And Henry Nguyen, he points out that these temptations weren't just randomly selected by Satan.

They are these core temptations. And what they do is, what they are doing is what Satan is doing, and he does this to all of us. He is trying to get us in every temptation and every proclivity towards any sin that he is trying to do.

He is trying to get us to build a false self. That is what he is doing. That is what he is trying to do with Jesus. So, think about this. The first temptation, number one, is the false self he is trying to get Jesus to build is you are what you can do.

[16 : 31] Right? Satan wanted Jesus. He wanted his identity to be built around his own power, his self-reliance. Right? So, Jesus, you are hungry?

Turn these stones into bread right now. You can eat. And Jesus says, whoa, whoa, whoa, buddy. I know what you are trying to do. I am not falling for that. Like, man does not need to live by bread alone, but by every word. He says, like, no. I am not going to go for independence from God.

I am going to go with dependence on God. I am going to push into that. That is what he says. Can anyone relate to that one? That proclivity towards building an identity around I am what I do. Another false self, number two.

Right? You are what you have. Like, Satan tempts Jesus with saying, like, hey, see all the kingdoms of the world. Right? And I know I'm going out of order here with the temptations, but forgive me.

All these kingdoms of this world, you know what? I can give them to you. Take them. You deserve it. It's why you're here. It's who you are. And how many of us gain identity from the clothes we wear, the cars we drive, the houses we live in, the toys we own, the hobbies we have, the friends we keep, all of that stuff.

[17 : 42] Right? We can build our false, we can build an identity around so many false selves. Here's false self number three. You are what others say about you.

That's another temptation that Satan is trying to get Jesus to build on. And this happened because he brings them up. Right?

He takes them to the temple. Now, remember, the temple is on the mountain in Jerusalem, and then it was a very high place. Maybe the highest place in all of the city of Jerusalem.

He takes them to the very top of the temple. So Jesus is at a place where probably everybody could see him. In the most populated city in Israel, in the place where all the religious leaders and the important people in the seat of government was.

Okay? And so Satan is saying, hey, if you throw yourself down from here, God's angels will save you. And you know what? The unspoken implication is, this all the people are going to see.

[18 : 43] And then they'll say, ooh, this Jesus guy, who's this? Wow, he must be somebody really important. And so he's trying to get Jesus. He's tempting him into that.

Man, Jesus builds your life, builds your identity around not what God says you are, but what other people, what you can get from other people, what they say who you are. And so all these things are happening, right? And we can relate to those things.

We live for people's praise. It's one of my, it's one of the sins that I struggle with and have struggled with all my life. Man, I long for man's praise. I long for people's affirmation over God's affirmation.

And think about this. We live in an age where this is, this thing of you are what others say about you is so fed by social media.

What do we do on social media? Why do we post? We want the like button. We want the comments, right? Because it says something about us.

[19 : 38] It's easy to build identity around those things. And so what we see here is Jesus going into this furnace of temptation willingly.

He stays until the battle is done, and then he wins. And only then does he return to begin his ministry, right? His heart has been tested. It's been proved righteous.

He's faced down the devil. And when we think about this, it's like, oh man, following Jesus, becoming like Jesus, that's the place, that's the kind of stuff he wants to lead me into, to wrestle with in the furnace?

That sounds pretty scary. And it's kind of where the way of Jesus loses its attraction, to be perfectly honest. Doesn't sound fun, right? None of us want the challenge of the furnace. We want the change.

We want the transformation. We just don't want the challenge. But that's not how anything works, right? Not the way God has built this world in life. It's just like, man, you get the change through the challenge.

[20 : 41] If any of us discovered a way where we could be fit without going to the gym or feeling sore, I guarantee you, you would be a billionaire many times over, right?

But it'll never happen, right? Change comes through the challenge, the testing in the wilderness of solitude. That's where God does so much of the most beautiful changes in our lives.

And I would say this, and I would hold it. If you are a person that does quiet times and devotion, and you already have your solitude thing going on, right? I would say if you never face in those moments your sin or your failures, you never have a time where you're wrestling with those things, if in your quiet times you never recognize and battle the strong passions that war within you, the anger, the bitterness, the lust, the greed, the apathy, the laziness, the selfishness, the self-righteousness, the judging of others, like if you never reckon with any of those things, I would offer to you that if that's never happening, then you aren't doing solitude right.

Because God will lead you into the desert. God wants to test your heart, and he will test your heart. He uses it because he knows it's good for us. He wants to show us what's in our hearts, right?

He places us in that solitude, in that desert, and he gets our hearts in his tender, good, loving hands, and he squeezes them like a sponge, right? And you think about a sponge.

[22 : 11] Like when it's just there, it just looks like a sponge. And then when you squeeze it, all kinds of stuff comes out, right? You don't know what's in there until you squeeze it. And that's what God wants to do for you and me in the desert.

He's not squeezing it to crush it. He's squeezing it to show us what is in there. Why? Man, so because he's a good father, and he's a loving savior, he wants to show us so he can change us and transform us.

And that gives us a little bit hope for the desert because it's not just the place where we're tested. God shows up to help us and to deliver us in the desert. And here's a great example, right?

Picture story. This comes from the book of Exodus. God has just taken Israel, got them out of slavery to Egypt. They have left, and they're right at the Red Sea.

And suddenly Pharaoh, the leader in Egypt, he changes his mind, and him and his army. And they were the big army back then, right? They were the superpower. And they're just like, hey, we're gonna get all those guys back.

[23 : 17] Bad mistake. We need them as our slaves again. 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 they feared greatly.

So Israel, all the people of Israel are freaking out, right? And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord. And then they said to Moses, poor Moses, man. He always gets like, he always gets it, right?

Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? Is not this what we said to you in Egypt?

Leave us alone. Leave us in our slavery, in our misery, so we could serve the Egyptians. For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness. And then Moses said to the people, and here it is.

Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you will never see again.

[24 : 23] The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent. See, when you and I are in the desert, it feels, we relate to these Israelites.

It feels like God has left us, and he's left us to fight alone, and it's a hopeless battle, fighting our sin, defeating our sin. It's like something like, man, Lord, I'm back here again doing the same thing, struggling with the same thing.

I need your help. What is going on? But like we see in this passage, God brings them to that place to show them how helpless they were on their own.

That was the whole point of it. In the desert, we face evil and temptation, but that's to lead us to a place where we find that God is our only hope. We don't look to our strength. We don't look to ourselves.

We look to God. We run to him. He is our only hope. And here's the thing. He never fails. He never fails us. What does Moses tell the Israelites to do? If you're not, stand firm, be silent, look to God.

[25 : 24] No fighting involved, right? Like you guys don't have to get your hands bloody. You don't have to throw a punch, which is like a bad plan for a cage match, but thankfully as Christians, that's not our fight.

We don't wrestle with flesh and blood. Ours is a spiritual battle. We are wrestling with principalities and powers in the heavenly places, it says, in a verse that Paul gives us. But all those things are pointing to the wrestle and the struggle and the thing, and God is, the battle is over our hearts and our minds for those things to be changed and transformed.

And only God can do that. We can't do that. And he is willing to take us to the desert to do that. Henry Nguyen says this, solitude is the place of the great struggle and the great encounter.

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

Now, we've looked at solitude, right? From the perspective of the desert experience. Now, I wanna pivot and consider the other aspect of solitude, which is the mountaintop experience.

[26 : 37] And what happens on the mountaintops? On mountaintops, when we look through the Bible, great things typically happened on mountaintops when God met with people, right? And one of the things we see is like, you can start with Abraham.

Abraham goes up a mountain. God says, hey, your only son that you've been waiting forever and a day for, like, go sacrifice him on the mountain. I'm gonna show you. They go up and God intervenes.

He doesn't sacrifice his son. And Abraham has this revelation. Oh my goodness, on the mountain, the Lord provides. On the mountain, the Lord sees. Right?

And so he comes back down the mountain with this greater revelation and awe and wonder of God and this God who keeps his promises and his covenant. And I'm sure he just has greater faith because of that, you know?

And then there's Moses. He's just, he had run from Egypt all by himself. And then he's a shepherd over there doing his thing, hiding out. And then he sees a burning bush, goes over there and has this encounter with God that changes the trajectory of his life forever.

[27 : 40] You see Elijah on Mount Carmel, the big contest between the God of Israel and the false Baals. And God wins that, right? On the mountain. God put his temple on the mountain in Jerusalem.

He's saying, my temple's gonna be there where my people can come to me and be with me and encounter me and worship me. Jesus was crucified on a mountain.

The whole point is I'm saying in mountains, where mountaintops are big, important things we see in the Bible. It's the place of God's revelation, God's salvation, God displaying his glory and his power. And we need those times.

I don't wanna discount those times. I don't want you to walk away thinking like, ugh, I guess I just have to care about the desert. And he's just like, mm, I really want the mountaintop experience, but it sounds like Pastor said that I shouldn't be wanting those things.

We should want those things. I just want you to realize, when you think about the life of Abraham and the life of Moses and the life of Elijah, their mountaintop experiences compared to the fullness of their life was very small.

[28 : 44] And it's okay to want those mountaintop experiences, but if your faith in God is dependent only on those things and you need them again and again and again and again and again in high frequency, you are going to be sorely disappointed because that's not how God works.

But here's the thing I want us to think about and to remember about when it comes to mountaintop experiences. God doesn't intend for us to live up on the mountaintop, right? It is preparation for ministry down the mountain, just like the desert is preparation for ministry.

Jesus came out of the desert after facing the devil right into ministry. Jesus would go up to the mountain to pray, to spend time with the Father, and then he would come down for ministry, right? He goes up on the Mount of Transfiguration, right?

And he visits with his heavenly Father and Moses and Elijah come down and he's having a little communion time with them and it's so cool that like his buddies that he brought up with them, Peter is one of his disciples and he says like, this is so amazing, we need to stay here.

We need to build houses. We need to just camp here. And God kind of interrupts Peter. He says like, sorry bud, listen to my son, follow him. And Jesus goes right down the mountain because down the mountain, there was a demonized boy who needed deliverance.

[30 : 04] There was ministry that had to happen. And so we don't get to live life as Christians, longing for and pining for and wanting to stay up in the mountain in the glory of God. As good as those things are, what they are is their preparation for us to come down and do ministry, to display Jesus wherever we go.

And I would say this compassionate ministry flows out of solitude, flows out of time in the desert, flows out of time on the mountaintops. And so when we think about solitude, the idea of quiet time, if it doesn't lead to mission, man, it doesn't seem to be in line with following Jesus, the way of Jesus becoming more like Jesus.

Because for Jesus, solitude preceded ministry every single time. And the point is, ministry follows solitude. That's the thing we need to walk away with.

And I wanna ask and put this question to each of you. How does that work in your life? How does that work in your life? And I want that to be a good gut check for us.

It's a good gut check for me. Because you know what? I fail a lot at doing that. I tend to just go and operate in my own strength. Or I tend to want to just spend time with God and be like, ah, these people are just interrupting me.

[31 : 21] But here's another gut check. What kind of ministry are we doing if it isn't preceded by solitude? Right? When Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples were probably wanting to run out and tell everybody.

And Jesus says, hold on, wait, just wait. Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. And they waited and they prayed and they waited and they prayed for the promised gift of the Holy Spirit to come. And when that happened, then they were released into ministry.

They went out. What kind of ministry are we doing if it isn't preceded by solitude? And it's not gonna be good because the flesh, our flesh, our own strength is a poor substitute for the Spirit.

Poor substitute. We do not have, on our own, we do not have what it takes to get the job done as far as Jesus's mission is concerned. We just don't. And I wanna compel us and challenge us.

If Jesus needed time with the Father, how much more do we? If Jesus needed time with the Father, how much more do we? So solitude that never leads to ministry is unlike Jesus's pattern. And ministry that never or rarely is preceded by solitude would be very unlike Jesus's pattern.

[32 : 31] And so be on guard. I want us to be on guard against mountaintop experiences that never culminate in ministry and compassionate ministry. And also be on guard against ministry that isn't regularly preceded by time with God the Father and Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit.

And think about this. If you're like, man, I just, I wanna do that, but I look at my life and maybe you're thinking like, man, I'm just an angry, bitter person. I wish I was more kind. I wish I was more compassionate.

I just can't do that. Well, maybe it's because you aren't taking time to follow Jesus and follow him into the furnace to allow God to squeeze your heart and show you the sin that remains in there to have him burn it away.

Maybe you're wondering why you just have no passion for mission. Well, maybe you need to spend time with God on a mountaintop experience where you see him in his power and are filled with his awe and wonder and just walk away with faith and have tasted of his goodness and are just like, man, more people need to know about this.

Charles Spurgeon famously said, I will not believe that you have tasted of the honey of the gospel if you can eat it all by yourself. I hope you can see how significant this solitude piece is for you and me and that we should be engaging it on a regular basis, on a daily basis.

[33 : 58] The discipline of solitude is vital to being a Christ follower. As followers of Jesus, we must follow him into the desert and up mountains.

And that looks like making time for it. We have to make time to go and be with him, the one who is like bread and water for our souls, right?

And if that's Jesus, right, if he is the source of our soul's nutrition, how many of us are malnourished because we're not going to him? What would happen though?

What would happen if you and I changed the diet of our souls this year and gave it the real food that it was made for? Man, what would happen?

Now that sounds amazing, but it's easier said than done because when we walk out these doors, the entire world is against us. It keeps us distracted and discouraged.

[34 : 54] And it demands, what it demands of us as disciples of Jesus in the face of all that distraction and discouragement is we have to be disciplined. We have to discipline ourselves. We have to establish a good routine of this daily solitude because it's vital if we are going to be true followers of Jesus.

And how often do we really need solitude? Well, as often as we need food and water. Do you know the reason that God led Israel into the desert for 40 years?

Now I know probably the immediate answer, which isn't wrong, is that God led them to the promised land and they kind of like said, you know what? Went in there, looked at all the people in there, all the fortified cities.

We can't do this. They just showed any lack of trust and faith that God would be able to fulfill his promise. And so God said, well, okay, then we're going to wander around in the desert for 40 years and the next generation will get into the promised land.

But there is another big reason, right? There is another big reason in God's amazing sovereign plan why he led them through the wilderness, right? Check this out. Verse two of Deuteronomy chapter eight.

[36 : 07] And you shall remember. This is Moses saying to this next generation of Israelites who are about to enter the promised land, who wandered in the wilderness for 40 years.

You shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these 40 years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what is in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not.

Now check out why he did this. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know. This strange bread-like substance that fell from heaven on the ground that they would eat every day.

Nor did your fathers know that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

That's the verse that Jesus quoted back to Satan. What was God's purpose for putting Israel in a place where there was no food, for bringing them into the desert so they would have to eat manna from heaven, supplied by him every single day?

[37 : 18] And God said that manna was not only food for their stomachs to keep them alive, it was a 40-year spiritual object lesson for them to learn and for us to learn.

And it was this, our souls, as we wander through this wilderness called life, our souls need spiritual manna every single day.

And that manna, what Moses said and what Jesus reiterated is every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. So you might say, okay, cool, Jess, does that just mean I gotta crack open and read my Bible or listen to it and I'm done, check, got it, it's good to go?

In a way, yes, but it's more than that because look at what Jesus says. John 6, verse 40, John chapter 6, verse 47. Truly, truly, I say to you, Jesus is speaking to a crowd, whoever believes has eternal life, and then he says this about himself, I am the bread of life.

Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and they died. So now everybody's like, okay, where is this going? And then he says, this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat of it and not die.

[38 : 32] I am the living bread that came down from heaven. I am the true manna. The manna that your fathers ate in the wilderness is pointing to me who is the fulfillment of that and the better and truer manna.

If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. God gives Israel manna in the desert to teach them, to teach us, that we need daily spiritual food for our souls that can only come from God.

And then Jesus says, that ultimately points to me. You need to daily, as you come to God's word, you need to come looking for me.

You need to be feasting on me. You need to be enjoying me. So it's not just opening your Bible and speed reading a chapter and saying like, whew, I got that through. I'm good to go.

No, it's coming. And it's looking to Jesus. It's the manna was going and intentionally going and getting it and eating it. And Jesus, this bread of life that has come down from heaven, he is saying, you can come to me and get this whenever you want.

[39 : 44] And feast on it. Nourish your souls. That's what he's inviting us to do. And so I'm gonna get practical here now after having given my best compelling argument for why we need solitude and how that solitude works and the one we're going to for solitude.

I'm gonna get practical. What is the best way for us to regularly go to God in solitude? And I wanna say, before I get into this, there are a lot of good ways and maybe you are doing ways that are feeding your soul and nourishing you and bringing you to Jesus.

And I would say, awesome, continue to do that. I wanna hold out something that we as a church, One Harbor, had kind of discovered by God's grace in 2015 and have really made it our kind of church thing, right?

We use this language of my thing, your thing, our thing, where it's like, man, there's things that I do that I love to do. There's things that you do that you love to do. And then there's the kind of the our thing that we like to do together as a church.

And this is kind of an our thing. This doesn't mean you were twisting your arm and saying, you better do this or else. This is just something we wanna offer to you. Okay? And it's a way to do solitude.

[40 : 51] And this our thing, it was formerly called Community Bible Reading, CBR. If you've been around long enough, you've heard those words. But it's been changed. It's now called Seeing Jesus in Solitude. And what this is, it's a way of doing a quiet time.

It's a way of doing solitude. And it isn't a Bible study. It is actually kind of follows a very old discipline that stretches centuries back that saints and Christians have used for a long, long, long time.

And all it is, it's a way of engaging with God in your solitude by not standing over the word in Bible study, but it's actually purposefully coming underneath the word and letting the word read you.

You're asking the Lord to speak to you through his word. And so, what I love about it is like you go and you're coming to the scriptures to listen to it, to let it come into your heart and penetrate deep within there for God to say and do things and reveal things.

And so, I'm just gonna like run through some quick, like a quick example of what this looks like in the rhythm because I wanna hold it out to you, especially for those who aren't doing any kind of solitude right now because what I want you to know is that this is available to you.

[42 : 04] Actually, you could, before you leave, we have journals, the Seeing Jesus Together thing that can guide you and show you how to do it. You can buy them before you leave. They're back there at the Next Step table.

And so, this is what, this is in essence what you're doing every single day. You're coming and starting by bringing yourself to God. You're stopping, and you're saying, before I get into the word, before I get into the thing, you're saying, God, here I am.

You know my heart better than I do. You know what's going on in my soul better than I do. Can you show me what is going on there so I could be fully present with you with my true authentic self before I get into anything else because I wanna bring my full true authentic self to you.

And then after that, you go and you pray a prayer of surrender to God. Right? You surrender to Him. You're coming and saying, Lord, I wanna submit my will, my dreams, my thoughts, my aspirations.

I wanna submit it to you. I wanna submit it to your will. I wanna be conformed to your will. We pray, it's prayers of submission, prayers of surrender, prayers for understanding.

[43 : 10] Help me, Lord, as I read this passage to understand what you want me to understand, what you wanna say to me and to my heart. Right? And prayers for transformation. Lord, may this change me.

Change my heart. And now if you've come and prayed those things, you go and you listen to the daily chapter reading for that day. And you go and you read it, but you read it listening as if God is speaking His word to you in that moment.

Right? It's His written word. And it's a word He is speaking to you. And so you read it and you listen to it and you let it come into your soul and man, I always like to read it very slowly because man, I don't wanna miss anything.

And after you read, after you do that, what you do is you respond to what God may have been saying to you in His word by praying through your pen and it follows this little pattern called ACTS, A-C-T-S.

It's a little acronym that stands for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. And it's this beautiful gospel movement that starts with looking up and seeing who God is. And you're responding in this passage because you're saying like, wow, God, you know this passage, what it did, it highlighted these particular characteristics and attributes about you and I just wanna praise you for that.

[44 : 25] You know? I wanna praise you for how loving you showed yourself or how just and consistent you are, whatever it may be. And then you step back and you move to Confession and you say like, man, you know what? That passage really highlighted that I am not God at all.

He's perfect in all those things. I am far from perfect in any of those things. I fail all the time. And so Lord, I'm coming to you and confessing that I fail and I'm a sinner. Please help me. Please forgive me.

And then you move into Thanksgiving and thanking Jesus and recognizing that, you know what? You don't have to be stuck hopeless up in confession because you have a Savior who died for your sin.

He died for your failures. He died for what you and I, how we fall short of the glory of God all the time. But you know what? We say like, you know what? Jesus, thank you that you died in my place and not only that, you did all those things for me and you're working those things out in me now.

That's the beauty of your salvation. You respond in that thankfulness and then you move to prepare yourself for the day and you say, Holy Spirit, all these things I've seen, man, I need your help today.

[45 : 31] There is no way I'm gonna be able to not fall into that same sin again unless you come and help me and empower me to live for you and to display Jesus. And it's this beautiful gospel movement, right?

Because we like to say that, let me say this before I move on, it's like after all that, what we love to do and what we love about this like seeing in solitude is you kind of, you're kind of like have a connection of friendships of like a few guys or gals that are also doing this and then we, what we do is we kind of text each other.

It's like, hey, I was in this chapter today and this is really what stood out and I was really blessed by this and I hope it blesses you. And you have this like cool little moment every day where you're touching base with one another. And what I love about this is that what it does, it's not just reading the Bible to reading the Bible.

It encourages us to come in a thoughtful, submissive way to the God who can change us. And it prioritizes coming to see Jesus because when we see Jesus and we behold him and we look intently on him, we are transformed into his image in one degree of glory to the next and as we do that, we can display Jesus wherever we go, right?

When we're becoming more like him, we're more clearly displaying him and that's what we want to do. So right now, I just want to hold out to you guys like, man, I'm in two different texting groups with guys.

[46 : 56] We've been doing this for some time. There's one group that started about a month or so ago and we've like, some are new to practice this thing of solitude but what I loved about it and being involved with these guys is like, man, they, I've seen them just in a month's time how much this regular time with Jesus and beholding Jesus, how it's working in their lives and in their hearts, how it's changing them, how it's making them more authentic, being able to confess their weaknesses more but rely on Jesus more and hope more and pushing in and being thankful for community and I just want to share some of what it meant for them.

I asked them if I could quote them and so I'm going to do that and so one guy I want to quote is Grant Pridgen. He's actually here right here. He's a guy we do this with and he said like, I've enjoyed hearing y'all's individual perspectives.

He kind of, I can't quite do the cool Grant accent but you know, y'all's individual perspectives and experiences in our daily texts. I look forward to hearing from you guys and sharing my personal thoughts which has actually resulted in me spending more one-on-one time with God every day and resulted in my relationship with him feeling much more present.

And, his brother Chris Pridgen, he said this, what I've really enjoyed is when we each share our individual approach to the scriptures and bits of our own testimony, how quickly it broke down walls and helped us communicate about our individual lives and struggles.

And then Slade Pate, he said this, using this technique has really helped me gain a passion for spending time with Jesus daily. I love that I get to not only spend time with Jesus in prayer and in his word but I also get to share my thoughts every day with a great group of guys.

[48 : 38] On top of that, I get to hear the same from them every day which is really encouraging to me and increases my desire to spend time with Jesus every day. And I just want to hold out to you, man, if you're thinking like, man, I want to do something, this sounds really good if you're interested in this, like we're going to have those journals available again.

They're back there. You can buy them on the way out. We actually have like a credit card swiping thing. You don't have to have cash on you. You can do that. And I just want to encourage you, man, walk out these doors. Also, if you get home and you open it and you're just like, this is all Greek to me, what do I do?

I would say, what am I going to do this afternoon? I'm going to send a video link of the guy that made those journals and he teaches on how to do it well and it's just a video you can watch that can just get you going.

So, just want to encourage you in that, okay? Final thing, very, very, very important. Please lean in. I know I've been talking for a long time but don't walk away not hearing this because my fear is that you leave hopefully pumped up.

I got my journal. I am ready to go. So excited. Solitude 2023. Here I come, right? And then, we go out there and life happens. We get busy.

[49 : 57] Work demands. Family demands. Life demands. And we just don't have time. We forget. Or that snooze button looks so tempting at 6 a.m.

Or we try it. We struggle. We give it up. Man, all those things are very possible realities. And the devil in that moment is going to come and he's going to whisper in your ear, you loser, what kind of disciple of Jesus are you?

Can't even do a little bit of solitude. Can't even keep up on a devotion. How could God possibly love you? You are worthless. And I just want to say that's going to happen because that's what Satan loves to do because he loves to pour on condemnation and he loves to pour on shame because all those things do is want to keep us in isolation.

And instead of running to people and saying, like, man, I'm struggling. I need help. We just get embarrassed. We get ashamed. We feel guilty and we just kind of like, I guess I'm just not going to try and I'm just going to be quiet about it and be quiet about my failures, right?

I'm just like, man, realize that's probably going to happen but don't run from those things, man. Step in, step into just bringing it into the light and asking for help and being encouraged and being built up in Christ because here's the thing.

[51 : 25] Jesus loves his disciples even when we struggle with solitude. The perfect example of this is the Garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus knows his time to die on the cross is right around the corner. Right before he gets arrested, he goes to this place with his disciples, got his best friends with him.

He is in a dark place, a very dark place in his soul, bitter so much and he says, he goes to pray and he says, man, guys, my closest mates, can you come along and pray with me?

And he goes and he prays and he looks back and his disciples hit the snooze button. They're asleep. And he comes back and he wakes them up and he's like, can you come, please pray with me? And they hit the snooze button again.

And he goes back again a third time, can you please come pray with me? They hit snooze again. Jesus didn't want solitude in that moment. He wanted to come with his friends, he wanted to be supported, he wanted to pray with them but solitude, he went to solitude unwillingly in that moment.

[52 : 31] His friends, you could say, let him down. They didn't support him. What was Jesus' response? Did he, was he bitter? Did he get mad? How can you mean, couldn't, what's wrong with you guys?

Forget this. You know what? This cross thing, I'm gonna give up. No, he still went to the cross. And you know what it says about him? In John 13, one it says, he loved them to the end.

Even when they failed him, even when they couldn't do solitude with him, when he asked them in person, he loved them to the end. That's you and me. That's you and me.

Thankfully, our salvation, thankfully, God's love, Jesus' love, isn't rooted in our ability to keep solitude. Right?

I'm gonna say this, God isn't going to love you more if you engage in this on a daily basis, and he's not gonna love you less if he doesn't, but I do wanna say this, you will engage and know and encounter his love more if you do.

[53 : 38] Right? His love never changes, but our experience and knowledge of that love, it's offered to us. That's what we get to do. Okay? I wanna leave us with this verse as the band comes up, Psalm 123, verses one and two.

It says this, to you I lift up my eyes, speaking to God. O you who are enthroned in the heavens, behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid servant to the hand of a mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God till he has mercy upon us.

So if you're here, you're listening, you're not yet a Christian, I wanna say to you, man, this isn't you going out and saying like, I am going to discipline myself and do the solitude thing so that Jesus will love me and I can be saved.

We're not saved by anything that we do. We're saved by faith alone and I'm not saying go and look for Jesus in the scriptures. Man, that would be great because faith comes through the word of God and I'm saying, man, if you do that, realize that your salvation, your relationship with God isn't rooted on your behaviors and your action, it's rooted on what he has done and it's rooted on faith and what he has done, his life, death, and resurrection and it starts there for you and he is holding this out to you and I wanna say to you today, if you're here and you're just checking out Christianity, maybe you're here for a whole lot of reasons.

Maybe you're here because life has kicked you in the teeth a ton of times and you may be at your lowest point and it's been tough and I wanna say to you, I have known many a friend who their testimony of their life is they came to a place where they said, you know what, I'm gonna pray honestly and earnestly, Lord, if you're real, show me.

[55 : 26] And they prayed that prayer and God answered that prayer. And it's not that God came and visibly showed himself in front of their eyes or spoke in an audible voice or anything like that.

He comes and he shows himself because he fills you with his love, he fills you with unexplainable joy and peace and goodness and kindness.

And when that happens to you, it is undeniable because it's like nothing you've ever felt before. And I want to challenge you, if you are here and that's you today, pray that prayer.

Lord, if you're real, show me. And I believe that he will. If you're already a follower of Jesus, I would say the invitation for you is also to come and see Jesus.

that's why we read the Bible. That's why we come on a Sunday. That's why we sing. That's why we pray. We come and do those things to behold him. It's not a religious duty to earn anything.

[56 : 29] We come because he is our daily bread that nourishes our soul. And I dare you to say the same prayer right now. Lord, show me how good you are.

Remind me. Fill me with your love and your mercy and your goodness and your peace and your joy and pray that with faith expecting that he will answer because he will. He's a good father.

Jesus is a loving savior and the Holy Spirit loves to make that a reality. Okay? So that's what we're gonna do. If you would stand with me and we're gonna take a moment just to quietly examine our hearts, heads bowed, eyes closed and pray that prayer.

Pray that prayer with faith.