

Shaping Our Souls - Solitude & Silence

Isaiah 30: 15-22

Mark 1: 21-39

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Someone said to me recently, "You can tell how long a couple has been married by how they sit in a restaurant. When they're first dating or married, they like to sit at a small table. They're holding hands across the table, or stroking each other's knee under the table. They're leaning forward. The restaurant could burn down around them and they wouldn't notice. They've even taken their ear buds out, and turned their ipod off.

"When a couple has been married a really long time, they're not even looking at each other. They're sitting side by side, looking out of the window at the people passing by."

So I did an informal survey. Checked with a young couple. How do you sit? "Facing each other." Checked with a retired couple. How do you sit in a restaurant? "Oh, together. That way we don't block each other's view. We want to see what interesting things are happening on the street."

Strange, isn't it? When we're first in a relationship, we crave time for simply and quietly being with the one we love. No distractions. Alone. And together. But once we've been in the relationship for a while, distractions begin to get in the way. Instead of being two people who long to look at each other, and focus on each other, and hear each other, we end up side by side looking out at the world. We can easily end up walking parallel paths, but not intersecting.

It happens easily in our relationships with people.

It's true in our relationship with God.

You can't grow in the Lord if your life is always going at 110 km/hr.

You can't grow in the Lord if you never have time to STOP!

You will end up taking him for granted.

Your relationship with him will become stale.

We've been spending the last few Sunday evenings asking ourselves how to cultivate healthy habits for our soul.

I went to the doctor last March and she read the riot act to me. "*You want to die young? No problem. Keep not doing what you're not doing and you'll succeed. Or change your habits.*"

I started to become much more serious about regular exercise, and trying to control my eating habits. Better habits for my heart - for blood pressure and cholesterol levels. Better think about it now, rather than later in a hospital bed.

What are healthy habits for our soul?

We've used the key phrase - **WWJD**.

Many of you have worn wrist bands or t-shirts with those letters -

**What
Would
Jesus
Do**

So - what would he do?

What **DID** He do – about healthy habits for his soul, I mean? Read the gospel accounts of Jesus' life, and pay attention to the little details. What sorts of things did Jesus do to keep connected to His heavenly Father? How did Jesus make sure that he stayed in touch with the voice of the Spirit, ready to respond to the Spirit's direction and guidance?

WWJD to keep his soul healthy?

Perhaps what he did, we should do, too.

And perhaps if we practised those things then we, followers of Jesus, who ALSO have the Holy Spirit given as the Father's gift to us, would be more in touch with the voice of the Spirit, and ready to respond to the Spirit's direction and guidance.

And perhaps our lives would begin, more and more, to look like the life of Jesus.

We've talked about four healthy soul habits so far in our series -

Praying
Simplicity
Confession

Worship

Today comes number five - solitude & silence.

That is - taking time to

s l o w

d o w n....

....taking

time

to

STOP!

Stop to listen.

Stop long enough to empty the clutter out of your mind and heart, and simply sit with God. Not beside him, gazing at the interesting things going on in the street outside.

No.

Rather - across the table. Facing him. Giving Him your full attention.

Stop?

Slow down?

You've got to be kidding, right?

That's what the voice in my head says.

You should see my daytimer!!! I don't have time for retreats!

And then I read about the life of Jesus in Mark 1.

The first thing that hits me is that I'm not the only one with a busy life.

Look at these verses from Mark.

They'd fill a person's PDA to overflowing!

Travel to Capernaum.

Prepare the sermon. Lead worship and preach.

Heal the demon possessed man.

Head to Simon's house for coffee after church.

Heal Simon's mother in law.

Answer questions from those who watched and wondered.

Drink slurp of coffee that by now is long cold.

Doorbell rings.

Open door and discover crowd of sick folk.

Please sir, have you got a moment?

When the last one leaves, fall into bed.

But -

- first

set the alarm.

V.35: *In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.*

Simon and the gang don't get it.

After they wake up and have breakfast, they go hunting for Jesus.

What are you doing here all by yourself?

There's work to be done.

People are looking for you.

It would have been very easy for Jesus to stay in bed an extra hour.

It would have been even easier for Jesus to delete the morning prayer appointment he had made with God.

After all, simply won't work. Too busy. Maybe tomorrow. Or next week.

Yet there it is -

V.35: *In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.*

Jesus was practising the healthy heart habit of solitude - of learning to put aside the to-do list and go to simply **be with** the Lord.

He wasn't out to **DO** anything.

Just **BE**.

Together.

The Heavenly Father and Jesus.

Just them.

Together.

It's not only for Jesus.

He encouraged it in others.

Luke 10 describes Jesus' visit with Mary and Martha. Martha is the ever-faithful hostess - baking and serving. Aching feet. Dishpan hands.

Sister Mary quietly sits by Jesus.

Doing vs Being.

Martha vs Mary.

Friends, after two decades of ministry I'm convinced that Jesus' reply to busy Martha is one that proves to be about the most difficult answer that most evangelical Christians face.

Very few understand it.

Even fewer are able to apply it to their lives.

When they hear it, they almost always have a "Yes, *but*" kind of reply.

Do you remember, any of you, what Jesus says to Martha?

Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her. (Lk 10:41-42)

Silence at the feet of the Son of God.

Not doing.

Just being.

John Calvin had the motto, *Ora et Labora*.

Anyone know what that means?

Pray and work.

Which of those two shows up more often in your life?

If you're like me the **work** part gets the biggest chunk, and sometimes tries to push the **pray** chunk right out of the day.

In the bird world there is a rascally species known as the cookoo. It lays its egg in the nest of another unsuspecting bird, and then leave that unwitting foster parent to raise its young. And when the cookoo's egg hatches, it pushes the other eggs out of the nest. It is the only one left. Doesn't want any competition.

Busyness is like that in the life of a Christian. Tries to push everything else out of our life's nest.

All *labora*.

Pushes away all *ora*.

It takes real discipline to stop.

It takes real discipline to clear the agenda.

It takes real discipline to turn off the Ipod or computer.

It takes real discipline to make time to simply **BE** with the Lord.

To look across the table at him.

Think back to our reading from Isaiah 30.

15 For thus said the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength. But you refused

16 and said, "No! We will flee upon horses" -- therefore you shall flee! and, "We will ride upon swift steeds" -- therefore your pursuers shall be swift!

17 A thousand shall flee at the threat of one, at the threat of five you shall flee, until you are left like a flagstaff on the top of a mountain, like a signal on a hill.

18 Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show mercy to you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.

Saving happens in returning to God and rest.
In quietly trusting Him the people will find strength.

Israel can depend upon whatever other resources they can pull together -
- the best horses
- strong armies... whatever
But the Lord will make all of that fall apart.

Look at the very end of verse 18.
Whose lives are blessed?
all those who wait for him.

Waiting - resting.
Those are **passive** postures.
And when you are passive you have handed over **control** to someone else.
You are trusting someone else to come through for you and make the future work out. You quit trying to manipulate the future yourself.

Lamentations 3:25-26 says:
*The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him.
It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.*

In the middle of his ministry, all sorts of needy people banging on the door, all kinds of important people wanting to talk with him -
- Jesus takes the beginning of His day to wait, to rest, quietly to seek His heavenly Father.
He doesn't depend first on his ability to think or learn or speak or debate or work miracles.
First is the time to clear everything else away, and quietly sit with God.
Just sitting there.
Just being together.
And not doing a thing.

Helping Jesus to remember that, finally,
it is the power from Heaven that brings real results to the work he did here on earth.
it was his connection to the Holy Father which brought vitality to his connections with the people gathered around him.

So, enough of the theory.

Let me leave you with a few practical questions to work this stuff out -

1. Do you have a regularly scheduled time in your daily routine to be with the Lord? If you don't schedule it, it won't happen. So - when will it be?
2. When you have the quiet time, are you turning it into busy time - must read this much scripture, must have so much time of intercessory prayer? Or can you practice just being quiet? Try

- taking 5 minutes to put down the prayer list and the bible, and just sit quietly, knowing God is with you. After a few weeks, expand that to 10 minutes. And build from there.
3. Do you have a place where you can be quiet with God - no phone, no computer, no kids? A bedroom. A corner at Timothy's Coffee Shop. A side street behind your office. Your car. Where will it be?

And a few suggestions -

4. Keep a pad with you. Then when the insidious "to-do" items show up in your brain, you can write them down and forget about them.
5. Don't be worried about an agenda for the time. No more than you need a full agenda when you're on a date. Just enjoy the quiet of being with God. You'll find, over time, that - just like being on a date - while the first few times may be a bit awkward, it will become more natural and you'll begin to really look forward to it.
6. Try sitting, eyes closes, and palms open on your lap, in your quiet time. First face your palms down - thinking of things that cause you worry or uncertainty or panic. You are letting go of them. Then palms up - imagine God placing a package called "Love" into those hands. Receiving from Him the promise of an answer, and of His continued presence and care as you face the challenges that will come your way.

7. Find a theme verse for your solitude and silence time. Perhaps this from Zephaniah 3:17 –
*The Lord your God is with you,
He is mighty to save.
He will take great delight in you,
He will quiet you with his love,
He will rejoice over you with singing.*

Write it on a card, and read it at the beginning and the end of your quiet time. Use the same verse for a while - perhaps a few weeks or even months. You'll know inside when it is time for a new verse.

Brothers and sisters, may it not be said of believers at Calvin CRC that their relationship with the Lord is like the couple sitting side by side staring out the restaurant window.

Instead, may be we be lovers of the Lord found to be eager to stare intently into His face.

Taking time,
alone,

with Him.