

Getting the Most Out of Your Next Solitude Experience: Practical Suggestions

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Be still, and know that I am God. (Psalm 46:10)

As our lives get busier and noisier, it becomes necessary for us to regularly get away and seek a quiet place where we can be still and come into the presence of God in a personal and intimate way. Our busyness consumes us and prevents us from “stopping the craziness” to wait on Him. Our abundant lifestyle fills our space and makes it a challenge to find a quiet and restful place to seek Him. The ever-present distractions of our everyday life clutter our minds and make it difficult to draw close to God to hear Him. And, the bombardment of information overruns our thoughts and keeps us from focusing on His Will for our lives.

This set of practical suggestions can help you take one hour (or more) out of your routine to pray, listen to God, and meditate on His Word, so that you might be refreshed in your knowledge of Him and renewed in your relationship with Him.

**PREPARATION:
Planning for a Solitude Experience**

A Solitude Experience is neither complicated nor contrived. It should be a simple commitment, not a production! A little “up-front” preparation, though, can greatly enhance your experience.

1. **Pray first.** Ask God to create a desire in you to “get alone with Him” regularly.
2. **Ask for prayer partners.** Explain to some close friends and family members that you are trying to learn the *practice of solitude*. Ask them to pray for you.
3. **Schedule the time.** Choose a date and time when you can block off 1-2 hours without interruption. Remember to schedule travel time, if necessary. Then, be sure to note the commitment on your calendar, so that you learn to treat your times of solitude as any other important appointments.
4. **Choose a place.** Getting alone with God does not require a special environment. You can meet Him in your living room or backyard, at your kitchen table or a local park. Or, you can choose somewhere further from home, such as the beach, desert, or mountains, as long as it is **safe, quiet, and comfortable**. If you are going away from home:
 - a. Make sure that you keep to well-known public locations. Do not wander into private or isolated areas.
 - b. Make sure that someone knows where you are, how to reach you in case of emergency, and how long you expect to be gone.

- c. Consider taking a “silent partner” (a friend) on a Solitude Outing with you. Make sure that he/she understands that the goal is to be quiet and alone with God. Pick a place where you can sit apart from, but in view of, each other.
5. Consider your **physical needs**.
 - a. Consider whether you will need a lawn chair or blanket to sit or recline comfortably.
 - b. Consider the appropriate dress for your location, including sudden changes in the weather (for example, a jacket, gloves, and sturdy shoes if you are headed to the mountains on a cold, potentially snowy day; a hat, sunglasses, and umbrella if you are going to the beach on an overcast winter day). Remember that being uncomfortable can be a serious distraction. Be prepared!
 - c. Make sure you have **water**.
 - d. Consider whether you will want/need to bring food: a light lunch, piece of fruit, or other snack.
 - e. If you have decided that this will also be a time of **fasting**, make sure that you have water and juice (no soda) with you. You want to be careful of dehydration.
6. Consider your **materials**.
 - a. Take your Bible, pen, and journal.
 - b. Take a notepad – it is good for jotting down those distracting thoughts that interfere with your focus.
 - c. Decide if you want to take along any other book. It’s fine to use another book in conjunction with your Bible – such as a Solitude Guide or Scripture meditation book – as long as it enhances and compliments your focus. Remember, though, that this time isn’t about studying or reading.
 - d. If you are not going to use a Solitude Guide, it is important to decide in advance what Scripture you want to use – in order to encourage the best use of your time with God. (See the end of this document for some Scripture suggestions.) Mark the passage in your Bible; consider writing it in your journal in advance.
 - You may want to choose a few Psalms to begin and end your time.
 - You may want to focus on one of Jesus’ parables or sermons as your main Scripture.
 - e. Some people find that quiet background music helps them focus on God and eliminate intruding noises. Consider taking a portable CD or tape player and some worship music. Remember that your purpose is to listen to God, so be sure to select music that will not distract you. Instrumental music is usually best.

- f. If time is a critical element, you can take a battery-operated alarm clock (or a watch or cell phone with an alarm function.) That will keep you from “watching the clock” constantly.

PROCEDURE:

What to do once you are there

Solitude is not about *doing something*, it is about *being* – being in the quiet presence of God; it is not about *producing something*, it is about *becoming* – becoming intimate with God. Remember, the purpose of this time is to “*Be still, and know that I am God*” (Psalm 46:10). It is a time that is set aside to *listen* to what God wants to tell you about Himself and His love for you.

1. Whether you have decided to go away somewhere or just find a quiet place at home, your first concern is to find a place where you are **comfortable, safe, and undistracted**. You should fully assess your location by taking a good look around! Make sure there are no **obvious dangers** (i.e., animal nests, poison oak, bee hives) or **distractions** (i.e., ringing phones, traffic noises, groups of people.) Notice the location of the nearest **restroom**.
2. “Settle in” to a comfortable position.
3. **Turn off your cell phone.**
4. If time is an important consideration, set your watch or clock to ring 5-10 minutes before you need to be finished.
5. If you have brought music, begin playing it softly. Remember not to let your music intrude on the quiet of others who may be around you.
6. It is very important to begin your prayer time **by intentionally quieting** your mind and heart.
 - a. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths.
 - b. Prayerfully ask God to help you tune out all distracting thoughts, interruptions, and noises.
 - c. Ask the Holy Spirit to guard you against any concerns, worries, and intruding thoughts that might interfere with this time.
 - d. Begin to focus on God. Thank Him for who He is, praise Him for His unending and faithful love. You may want to softly sing His praises.
7. Now move on. Literally, try to visualize yourself in the presence of our Lord.
8. Using the Scripture you have selected:
 - a. Consider each word slowly. Read it several times aloud softly.
 - b. Visualize a picture of what the passage is saying.
 - c. Bring your senses into the scene: Imagine the smells, sensations, sounds, and tastes.
9. Quickly and prayerfully, **dismiss any distractions.**

10. Spend a few moments **reflecting on or recording** your insights. Feel free to express your thoughts and feelings according to your gifts and creative abilities – journaling, sketching or drawing, composing a poem or song. Record your questions. These reflections are private correspondences between God and you. Be honest and simple and direct. Do not worry about grammar, vocabulary, or style. Just record what your heart says!
11. **Caution:** God will never tell you anything that is contrary to His Word. Any insight that you receive from God, through the Holy Spirit, must be in complete agreement with the Bible. If you experience any doubt or concern, or should this time reveal some past hurt or significant issue in your life, it is important that you seek counsel from the Body of Christ – either from your Small Group leader, a pastor, a church staff member, or a counselor.
12. End with genuine **thanksgiving** to God.
 - a. Thank God for the time He spent with you.
 - b. Ask God to help you take what He has shown you today and make it a real part of your life and relationships.
13. Quietly conclude your time with God. Make sure that you leave the area clean and restored to its natural condition.

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURES FOR SOLITUDE FOCUS

Psalms: 8, 19, 23, 24, 27, 42, 92, 93, 96, 98, 100, 103, 139, 145, 146, 148, 150

Teachings of Christ

The Beatitudes	Matthew 5:1-12
Salt and Light	Matthew 5:13-16
The Woman Anoints Jesus	Mark 14:3-9
The Vine and the Branches	John 15:1-17
Jesus Commissions Peter	John 21:15-25
The Great Commandment	Matthew 22:34-40
The Great Commission	Matthew 28:16-20

Miracles

Jesus Walks on Water	Matthew 14:22-33
The Rich Young Man	Matthew 19:16-30
Jesus Heals a Blind Man	Mark 10:46-52

Parables of Christ

The Four Soils	Luke 8:4-18
The Hidden Treasure	Matthew 13:44-46
The Loaned Money	Matthew 25:14-30
The Lost Son	Luke 15:11-32
Forgiven Debts	Luke 7:41-43