

# Session 5

# The Gift of Solitude

*Mark 1:35-38; Luke 5:15-16*

## Memory Verse

*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he got up, went out, and made his way to a deserted place; and there he was praying.*

– MARK 1:35, CSB



# The Gift of Solitude

**THEOLOGICAL THEME:** Jesus often withdrew from the crowds and from His disciples to seek alone time in prayer with the Father (and we should, too).

**CALL TO ACTION:** Find a time this week to meet God in the quiet in silence and solitude.

In today's world, we are so rarely truly alone.

Even when not in the presence of other people, not many of us escape the consistent presence of busyness—a mile-long to-do list, the laptop that makes working from nearly anywhere possible, the phone that always keeps you connected (whether you like it or not).

Our world is fast-paced and filled with noise. Sometimes we don't even slow down to eat, scarfing down a drive-thru dinner in the car on the way to soccer, or at the dance studio, in between classes.

But this more, more, more, go, go, go lifestyle isn't the example we see from Jesus in the Gospels or from many of the faithful believers that have gone before us in church history.

They practiced solitude.

The German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, saw silence and solitude as essential elements of the Christian life. He said, "There is a wonderful power of clarification, purification, and concentration upon the essential thing in being quiet."<sup>1</sup>

There's a reason spiritual disciplines like solitude have been practiced throughout church history. Beyond any other example or encouragement toward this practice, we have the life of Jesus, who often went to be alone to spend time with the Father. Today, we will consider why we need this time too.

**?** Have you ever sought to learn or grow in the spiritual discipline of solitude?

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**?** What makes this practice challenging to you personally?

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## Session Summary

In the hustle and bustle of Jesus’s ministry, in between healing and teaching, Scripture tells us that Jesus “often withdrew to deserted places and prayed” (Luke 5:16). This wasn’t just a one-time occurrence. No, Jesus did this often. It was a priority reflected by Jesus’s actions.

### 1. Deserted Places (Luke 5:15-16)

**?** What is surprising about the juxtaposition of the events described in these verses?

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**?** How might you have been tempted to respond differently if you were Jesus?

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This account in Luke happened fairly early in Jesus’s ministry and is nestled between the story of two miraculous healings.

In the first, Jesus cleansed a man “who had leprosy all over him” (Luke 5:12). When he came to Jesus in faith: “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” Jesus touched him and “immediately the leprosy left him” (Luke 5:13).

The second account is the story of Jesus’s teaching being interrupted by a group of friends who, when they could not find a way to Jesus through the crowds, lowered their friend on a mat from the roof to get to Jesus. Jesus saw the man, who was paralyzed, and forgave his sins and healed him (this man, who had previously been paralyzed, walked home).

In between these two accounts, Luke gives a brief but powerful insight into Jesus's priorities. At this point, Jesus's ministry was active. He had begun to call His disciples and was healing and teaching people. What He was doing was important. It was full. It was busy. And yet . . . He withdrew.

How many of us resist slowing and rest because of the busyness in our lives? This is especially tricky to justify in our minds when our busyness is made up of good things. Maybe we volunteer with church ministries. We are acting as the hands and feet of Jesus, serving the people in our community. Maybe we teach, living out the Great Commission by making disciples. Maybe we volunteer in our church. There are so many vital functions in our church that church members make happen, and they all take time. From teaching in our children's or youth ministries, to greeting people at the door, to taking up the offering, to praying for our congregation, to putting out the donuts and coffee.

All of these activities are important. But when you fill your schedule with so many things that you can't invest where it matters—even when those “things” are good—you are still left with too many things.

 **Where might you be in danger of being overly busy—even with “good” things?**

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Jesus was busy, too. And His ministry was important—literally the most important thing to ever happen on this earth. But He still made time to withdraw.

Jesus not only resisted the temptation to give into the busyness of His schedule, He resisted the temptation to give into the pressure of others. Luke recorded that “the news about him spread even more” (v. 15) and large crowds were coming to both hear His teaching and receive healing. Many would lean into this, capitalize on the momentum and seek to grow their fame even larger. Jesus didn't.

As we think about the busyness we tend to fill our schedules with, we may recognize the role ego plays for some of us in the stuffing of our schedules (even those who are well meaning). Our ego can tell us to hold onto the role, the position, the recognition longer than is wise (and to add more to our plates!). Our world praises


this behavior. Our society is built around staying busy. But this is not the behavior we see from Jesus in the Gospels.

Luke said, “yet he often withdrew” (v. 16). This was clearly a priority that Jesus made time in His schedule for. And while He was alone in the “deserted places” (v. 15), He spent time with the Father. Jesus prayed. He knew how essential this time with the Father was, and so, He made time for it often.

## 2. There He Was Praying (Mark 1:35)

 What does this passage teach us about Jesus’s practice of solitude?

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 What further evidence do we have that Jesus was intentional about this practice?

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In our first passage, we saw a time in Luke when Jesus went off alone to be in solitude and prayer with the Father. This passage in Mark gives us more gospel evidence of this practice of Jesus.

Just like the passage in Luke, this passage is nestled between two stories of healings. Just before this, Mark described an incredibly busy day of healing in Capernaum. After healing Simon’s (Peter) mother-in-law of her fever, many more sick and demon-possessed were brought to Jesus for healing. Mark noted that Jesus “healed many who were sick with various diseases and drove out many demons” (Mark 1:34).

Right after this passage, Mark recorded a story of Jesus healing a leper. This is the same healing found in Luke 5, and it also appears in Matthew’s Gospel.

The Gospel of Mark is known for its action focus, and we certainly get the sense of action here. Jesus was preaching and healing all manner of people, but Mark, like Luke gave us this important tidbit of how Jesus conducted His time: He “went out” (v. 35).

Jesus went out “very early in the morning” (v. 35). He woke up early, when it was still dark outside, and intentionally sought solitude in a “deserted place” (v. 35). Just like our passage in Luke, we read that Jesus was praying. He was spending much-needed time with the Father.

The practice of solitude can be grounding as we center on the most important relationship in our lives with the Lord. This practice may enable us to more calmly and confidently go about our day and exercise faith because of this time spent with the Lord. We get the sense that this may be how Jesus felt, too. His ministry was important. And His time alone with the Father was so important that He prioritized it often. This time spent with the Father was the foundation from which He served and loved. The same is true for us.

Jesus got up very early to make this quiet time with the Father happen. The passage before this indicates that Jesus was up late helping people the night before this, so it seems like He didn’t get much rest that night (again, we get the sense this time alone with the Father was vital for Him).


This is an example we can follow, too! We shouldn’t read this as advocating for no or little rest (actually, Scripture highlights the importance of Sabbath and rest), but when we are looking for a way to fit spiritual disciplines into our schedule, this is one solution: Wake up earlier. For those of us with families, especially with children in the home, waking up earlier can present a “deserted place” for us, too (at least until everyone else wakes up).



Where might God be calling you to sacrifice in one area (sleep, leisure time, etc.) to spend time with Him? Why is it worth it?

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### 3. Everyone is Looking for You (Matthew 1:36-38)

 What might these verses tell us about the difference between Jesus's priorities and that of the disciples?

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 Who are you more likely to resemble in daily life? Why?


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It's clear that Jesus was in high demand. If He had stuck around to pray, He would have no doubt been interrupted. Not that we are "in demand" in the same way Jesus was, but those of us with children have probably experienced this—if we don't figure out how to truly go out and find a deserted place, we're going to be interrupted. So this opens up the question for us: What is the "deserted place" in our lives?

We don't know how long He was away, but it was long enough that, even though Jesus evidentially left before everyone else woke up that morning, He was gone long enough that everyone ("Simon and his companions" v. 36) woke up and searched for Him (we can imagine their panic).

When they found Him, Jesus told them He intended to keep moving in His ministry. It was time to move on to the next village!

What we shouldn't miss here is the continued evidence that Jesus made this practice of solitude and prayer a priority. He made time, even when He was surely tired, and was clearly busy. How can we do the same?

 Consider what might be the "deserted place" in your life where you can regularly seek time with the Father. How will you plan to take steps toward this practice this week?

## Conclusion

In Luke 5, in the middle of the everyday grind of His ministry, Luke tells us Jesus made a choice to withdraw to deserted places and pray. It would have been easy to keep going—there were many people to heal and teach! But instead, Jesus made an important choice to instead turn to solitude. And He didn't make this choice just one time; Luke said, "He often withdrew" (v. 16).

Jesus made time for solitude into His schedule, and not just once or twice, but regularly. And this time clearly wasn't rushed! In our passage in Mark, He was gone for so long that people were concerned because they couldn't find Him.

So what can we, as Jesus's disciples learn from His example?

We must examine our schedule and see what it tells us about our priorities. We naturally make time for the things we value. So, are our priorities in order? Are we holding onto so many roles and responsibilities that the thought of carving time out of our day just be with the Lord feels impossible? Do we spend more time scrolling our phones than seriously devoting time to our relationship with the Lord?

Let's not shame ourselves over whatever our current reality is. Jesus doesn't. We have all struggled with this in some way at some time! But let's also not miss this opportunity to model the call of Jesus to make time to spend with the Father. For the believer, this is not an ideal luxury, it is vital for life and ministry!

**?** Is busyness something you struggle with? Where might God be telling you to let go or reexamine your priorities to give Him first place?

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**?** What is a realistic "deserted place" in your life? Where (and when!) could you retreat to for time in solitude with the Lord?

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**?** How do we get started from here? What are some ways we could begin to start incorporating solitude into our everyday lives?

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## **Memorize**

*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he got up, went out, and made his way to a deserted place; and there he was praying.*

- Mark 1:35, CSB

## **References**

<sup>1</sup><https://sld.saconnects.org/dietrich-bonhoeffer-on-silence-solitude/>