

# SERMON | SOLITUDE & SILENCE

## SERIES | PRAYER & FASTING

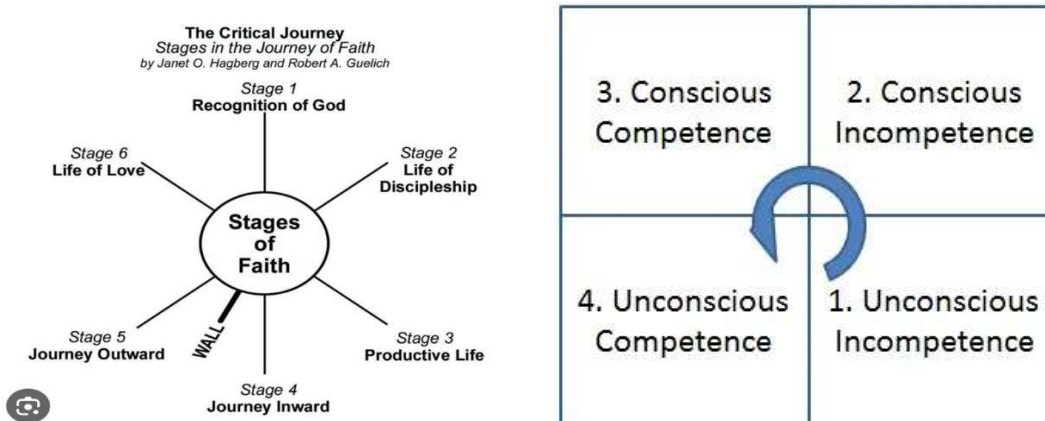
STUDY GUIDE | DAVID STOCKTON | SUNDAY, JANUARY 21, 2024

### SERMON SUMMARY

We want to live more like Jesus, bearing His beauty, truth, and love. We want to resemble Christlike meekness, kindness, patience, goodness, and self-control. We yearn for spiritual growth and to grow closer to Jesus. We want to be more compelling and more missional as disciples. We want to be humbly devoted as a follower of Christ, friend, husband, wife, father, mother, son, or daughter. To be more courageous and competent in our Christian walk.

So, what can we do to grow? How do we live like Jesus? It is God who brings the increase. It is only God who can transform. Spiritual disciplines are the way we chase away the birds. Spiritual practices are the way we offer ourselves to the multiplying and transformative work of Jesus. We find ourselves in different stages within our faith journey, as God transforms us from glory, to glory, to glory. The Lord is the Author and Perfector of our faith. That means God gives it to us, and wants it to grow, purify, and produce holy power in our life.

### THE CRITICAL JOURNEY – STAGES IN THE JOURNEY OF FAITH:



**Stage 1:** Awakening to the truth of God’s grace and moving out of unconscious incompetence.

**Stage 2:** Where you and God begin to try new things and let go of old things.

**Stage 3:** Where your life starts to bear a different kind of fruit. You think more in line with values of Jesus’ Kingdom, instead of the world’s kingdom, or your own kingdom. You start to think more about others than yourself. Stages 2 & 3 are a combination of your effort and God’s grace. It would be in the categories of conscious incompetence and conscious competence.

**Stage 4 & Stage 5:** God’s work in our lives and our effort at this point is to stay. Many will abandon faith at this point or revert to stage 1. Many people just keep moving through stages 1,2, and 3, and don’t see much change over time. Those who hang in there with God and His desire to grow and refine their faith, get to have a deep transforming work happen inside them, which leads to unconscious competence in the fruits of the Spirit. The greatest of which is love.

**The Wall:** This is the point at which your effort can't get you any further. You need a deep dependence on God. The wall is the point at which the well you have is not providing enough water for the growth in your life. You need to dig a deeper well. The wall is the dark night of the soul. It is the pain, the struggle, the disappointment, the challenge which makes us aware of our need and lack, which is intended to make us reach out to God our Maker. It is God's mercy and love for us that makes Him allow the hard things in our life. God speaks to us in our joys and shouts to us in our pain. Pain insists upon being attended to.

**Stage 6:** Complete surrender to the Lord, no longer striving, living out a real-life walking with Jesus. Have an understanding that things don't really rely on you, but on Jesus, and faithful with whatever the Lord puts in front of you.

## **SOLITUDE AND THE DESOLATE PLACE**

Last week, we talked about curtailing our appetites. Addiction to gratification (lust/covet) is curtailed by *fasting*. Addiction to consumption (gluttony) is curtailed by *silence and stillness*. Addiction to self (pride) is curtailed by *serving others, serving the poor*. And now, addiction to the approval of man is curtailed by *solitude*.

Jesus went into the wilderness for 40 days. Jesus often withdrew to desolate places. Jesus taught us to do our spiritual practices in secret, just between God and us. This will keep us from doing them with the wrong motive and producing the wrong result.

## **ADDICTION TO THE APPROVAL OF MAN IS CURTAILED BY SOLITUDE WITH GOD**

One of the temptations the devil brought to Jesus was that He would be given all authority and splendor if He worshipped Satan, alluring to the approval of man.

So, for Jesus there was temptation for the approval of man. Yet, when He came into this world He did not come as the conquering King. He did not "Lord it over" us. He came humbly and as a servant. As His weapons and strategy, Jesus used love, truth, righteousness, joy, and peace. Yet, He was rejected.

God created mankind to be the indirect object of His love. The direct object of God the Father's love is the Son, and the Son to the Father. Through creation and redemption, we became the indirect object, but we don't get a lesser love, or diminished love. Through Christ, we get the fullness of triune love. True love.

In times of rejection, disappointment, sadness, or loneliness, it is so easy to satisfy ourselves with lesser loves than the love of God. Be still and know that I am God (Psalm 46:10). Be still long enough to hear His voice, and you will receive His love. Be still long enough to find how quietness turns into confidence, and repentance turns into rest.

The desolate place is not a peaceful place. Solitude and silence do not lead us to solitude and silence. Solitude and silence reveal all the voices, desires, insecurities, and expectations we are carrying. The silence around us reveals the noise inside us. You're not doing it wrong if your times of silence and solitude are chaotic. Quieting the outside world helps us hear what is going on in our own soul. The truth is chaos might be the best way to describe our souls.

**But solitude, silence, and stillness do not bring transformation.** They create space for an encounter with God. They intentionally put us in a place where God can minister to us. God can speak into the storm of our soul and bring His calm and peace. These practices help us to tune into His ever-present, ever-faithful, and ever-loving, still voice. It is His voice, His word, that brings change. It is not by might, nor by power, *nor by spiritual practices*, but by **His Spirit** anything good happens.

## SCRIPTURE READING

**READ THIS WEEK'S BIBLE PASSAGES: Mark 1:22-38, 45; Mark 6:31, 32, 35 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. <sup>23</sup> And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, <sup>24</sup> “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God.” <sup>25</sup> But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “**Be silent, and come out of him!**” <sup>26</sup> And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. <sup>27</sup> And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” <sup>28</sup> And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.

### Jesus Heals Many

<sup>29</sup> And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. <sup>30</sup> Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. <sup>31</sup> And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

<sup>32</sup> That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. <sup>33</sup> And the whole city was gathered together at the door. <sup>34</sup> And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

### Jesus Preaches in Galilee

<sup>35</sup> And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. <sup>36</sup> And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, <sup>37</sup> and they found him and said to him, “Everyone is looking for you.” <sup>38</sup> And he said to them, “**Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.**” – Mark 1:22-38

<sup>45</sup> But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter. – Mark 1:45

<sup>31</sup> And he said to them, “**Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.**” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. – Mark 6:31

<sup>32</sup> And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. – Mark 6:32

<sup>35</sup> And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. – Mark 6:35

## BIBLE PASSAGE QUESTIONS

What stood out to you in these passages? Did the Lord highlight anything to you? What do we learn about the heart of God from these passages?

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Read these passages again (use a different translation if helpful). How did these passages help to convict, correct, or encourage you?

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## GROUP DISCUSSION

### DISCUSS THESE QUESTIONS WITH YOUR GROUP

1. Do you incorporate a regular practice of solitude in your life?
2. What makes it hard to practice silence, stillness, or being alone? What things help you overcome distractions during quiet time with the Lord?
3. What things help you get close or feel close to Jesus?
4. What stage of faith do you find yourself in (stages 1 – 6, or the wall)? Where are you struggling to move forward?
5. Sit in the stillness of Jesus presence. Ask the Lord to help you recall a moment of His transformative power in your life. A moment of conviction that led to repentance, maybe a moment of breakthrough and healing, forgiveness of others or self, or a fruit of His Spirit at work in your life. Share your story of encouragement with the group!

## PRAYER

Take some time for prayer requests and pray over one another before wrapping up.

