

DEEP



WIDE

v GROUP STUDY



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Deep & Wide: vGroup Study

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DEEP-SILENCE & SOLITUDE

Introvert or extravert? How many times have you answered that question or one similar as you got to know someone? Everyone's personality is different, including the amount of people we like to be around. Interestingly though, introversion and extraversion isn't really about whether you're a people person or not. An introvert can be a people person just as much as an extravert. Similarly, an extravert can like their me-time. Introversion and extraversion actually aren't about whether you like people or how many people you like to be around. Rather, introversion-extraversion is about what reenergizes and motivates you. Extraverts are motivated and energized by people. Introverts on the other hand find energy and motivation within themselves.

No doubt, there is truth to introversion and extraversion, but what if I told you we all need time alone? What if I told you we all need silence and solitude? As we continue with Deep and Wide, we're going to look closer at the spiritual habit of silence and solitude. Before we do that, let's take time to self-reflect on our past experiences and current feelings about this spiritual habit.

- Have you ever practiced silence and solitude before? If so, what has your experience been like?
- Do you find silence and solitude to be something that comes naturally to you or is it difficult? Why?
- What do you think is the spiritual benefit of silence and solitude?

One of the quintessential examples of silence and solitude in Scripture is found in the story of Elijah. Let's read about his example in 1 Kings 19:1-18.

¹Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ²Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." ³Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

⁴But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a

broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers." ⁵And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat." ⁶And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. ⁷And the angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you." ⁸And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God. ⁹There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁰He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." ¹¹And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹²And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. ¹³And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁴He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." ¹⁵And the LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. ¹⁶And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. ¹⁷And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death. ¹⁸Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

1 Kings 19:1-18

- Reflect back on Elijah. Describe his physical, emotional, and spiritual state.
- How did God use silence and solitude to help Elijah?
- God speaks to Elijah in his silence and solitude through the "sound of a low whisper," instead of wind, earthquake, and fire. Is this surprising to you? If so, why?

- How does God use Elijah's silence and solitude (i.e., deep) to prepare him for Elijah's future ministry (i.e., wide)?

In the ancient world, Israel viewed weather events like wind, earthquake, and fire as visible signs of God's activity. Yet here in 1 Kings 19, God is not present in those events. Rather, he is near, speaking in a gentle whisper. According to the NIV Study Bible, this "term describes either a hushed sound or complete silence. It probably refers either to a soft verbal message that God gives Elijah or to some undefined, silent sign of God's nearness."¹ In many ways, we are no different than Israel. We think we will hear and find God in noise, busyness, and distraction but fail to understand how God comes to us in the silence and solitude.

Elijah's experience, however, is not the only time someone experiences silence and solitude in the Scriptures. Both Moses and Jesus experience similar times of silence and solitude.

¹⁵Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. ¹⁶The glory of the LORD dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. ¹⁷Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. ¹⁸Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

Exodus 24:15-18

¹And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness ²for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry.

Luke 4:1-2

- What similarities do you notice between Moses, Elijah, and Jesus?

- Moses, Elijah, and Jesus are three important individuals in Christianity. How does their example spur you on to practice silence and solitude?

As we reflect on silence and solitude, chances are some of us will immediately be drawn to this spiritual habit while others will reluctantly question its practicality and usefulness. Here's the reality—all of us struggle with distractions, whether internal, external, or both. What will we do to remove those distractions to seek the Lord, be with him, and hear from him?

- What distractions, internal and/or external, are keeping you from meaningful time with the Lord?
- What will be your greatest resistances to practicing silence and solitude? How will you remove those resistances?
- Pastor Dustin gave several practical next steps to begin practicing silence and solitude, in particular choosing when, where, and how long you will practice silence and solitude. When, where, how long, and how often will you begin to practice silence and solitude?

In preparation for practicing silence and solitude, let's do something different together. Let's practice 3-5 minutes of silence. Afterwards, come out of that silence praying to the Lord.

REFERENCES

¹*NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 643.