

INTERSECT

Young Adult Discussion Starters

UNIT 1: Spending Time with God

SESSION 1: CREATING A SPACE FOR DEVOTION: THE DISCIPLINES OF SOLITUDE AND SILENCE

Intersect the Word

Matthew 3:1-12; 4:1-11; 14:13-33; 17:1-9; 26:36-46; Mark 1:1-45; 6:31; 9:2-29; Luke 6:12-16; Galatians 1:17-18

- In what ways did Jesus practice the disciplines of solitude and silence?
- Read Matthew 14:13-33. Why did the author

mention that Jesus had been fasting before the temptation?

- How has your life been different when you practice solitude and silence?
- What are some ways of incorporating silence into our lives based on the New Testament?

Solitude: Not Rationalization, Just Rational Solitude

Our society seems to act against allowing us solitude. The person who purposefully takes time to get away just to think is sometimes accused of being lazy or procrastinating.

- a. Think of examples of this dilemma and share them with the group.
- b. What are some results you see in people's

lives as a result of having no time for themselves?

- c. How would you defend a day of dreaming and goal-setting in solitude to a boss who sees that as a waste of the company's time?
- d. What are some things you will have to change in order to find times of solitude in your life?

Isolated Community: Oxymoron?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that it is dangerous to be in community without having times of solitude and that it is dangerous to be in solitude without

also having genuine community. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why? In what ways is it dangerous to have one without the other?

What's the Difference?

“Language has created the word ‘loneliness’ to express the pain of being alone, and the word ‘solitude’ to express the glory of being alone.” —Paul Johannes Tillich

What does the author mean?

Have you experienced these two views of being alone? How were they different?

Describe “loneliness” and “solitude” in your own words.

Isolation: The Art of Loneliness

Usually when we think of isolation we think of the hollow echo of loneliness. The question is, do isolation and loneliness exist only as one, or are they separable? Think about these questions:

- Do you have to be isolated in order to feel lonely?
- Can a person who feels lonely experience positive isolation?
- Why do so many people avoid spending time with just themselves?
- Can God use loneliness in a person's life? How?
- Is voluntary isolation necessary for spiritual growth?
- Is involuntary loneliness also a necessary part of the Christian life?

The Dark Night of the Soul

In his poem “*Canciones del Alma*,” St. John of the Cross twice uses the phrase, “My house being now all stilled.” In that graphic line he indicated the importance of quieting all the physical, emotional, psychological, even spiritual senses. Every distraction of the body, mind and spirit must be put into a kind of suspended animation before this deep work of God upon the soul can occur. There comes inner silence, peace, stillness. During such a time of “darkness,” Bible reading, sermons, intellectual debate—all will fail to move or excite.

When God lovingly draws us into a dark night of the soul, there is often a temptation to blame

everyone and everything for our inner dullness and to seek release from it. The preacher is such a bore. The hymn singing is so weak. We may begin to look around for another church or a new experience to give us “spiritual goose bumps.” That is a serious mistake. Recognize the dark night for what it is. Be grateful that God is lovingly drawing you away from every distraction so that you can see Him. Rather than chafing and fighting, become still and wait.

(Adapted from Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*.)

- What are your thoughts on this idea of the “dark night of the soul”?