

How often have you felt that if you could just get some quiet, you could relax and figure out what to do next? How often have you been surrounded by so much noise and drama that you just couldn't think? Have you ever run into people who left high paying and high pressure jobs and found incredible joy and peace as a result? Aren't quiet walks in the woods, or a hike near a mountain stream, or just sitting in the backyard sometimes the most peaceful and helpful moments you can find? You know why sometimes there is a need to just get away from it all!

Consider the unrelenting pace of Jesus life in ministry. Day after day, he was on the road, surrounded by close friends who didn't always support him as they should, and followed by crowds that were pushing to get closer and demanding healings and miracles before he went to the next town. Although Jesus was God in the flesh, he was still a man. Fully human he got tired, pushed to his limits, he got hungry, and certainly felt the frustration of daily being misunderstood or taken for granted.

In this text, disciples returned to Jesus after a first attempt at missionary outreach. They had stories to tell, frustrations to share, and questions to ask. Like kids piling into a classroom after Christmas break, they had their hands in the air and words to share. (Peter probably was the loudest and first to demand to be heard.) Some were excited, some felt they had failed, but all needed to talk. Jesus' response was, *Before we go any further, let's find a quiet place! Let's slow down and catch our breath.*

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You know the feeling, right? How does it feel when you are overwhelmed with drama, fear, tension, or grief and just don't know what to do next? When the noise just won't stop and the demands keep coming your way, what do you do? What is it like when there is so much going on that you feel you can't even think?

Jesus had moments like that too. It only made sense how often he went out of his way to get away. How many times did he search for a quiet place to pray? How often did he jump in boat, and head across the Sea of Galilee into the wilderness so crowds would leave him alone if only for a little while? Over and over, he paused to catch his breath in prayer, in meditation, in darkness, in solitude, in holy rest.

At his baptism he was introduced to crowds that had been waiting for his arrival. But he quickly left and went to the quietest place he could find. For forty days fasted and prayed in the isolation of the desert. On the night of his last supper, anticipating his arrest and death, he took time for prayer in the quiet darkness of the garden. We forget the intensity of his ministry and his intentional efforts to find balance, calm, and peace. That should be a lesson for us all!

Consider what you have been through in the past year. At work, in your own family, or with the stories of earthly calamity, disaster, and death. How do you escape the drumbeat of politics, social unrest, economic pressure, and people surrounding us with their important demands?

Don't we often feel there is no escape from the fear and drama that surrounds us on every side? There is so much anger, frustration, distraction, and noise. Even loved ones bring disturbance and tension into our living. Someone always needs a little more attention.

Sometimes we simply get worn out and don't know how to escape!

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Jesus' example is a model for our response. When caught between busy life and God the noise too often wins! But entering into a special *quiet time* and *place* allows God to fill and feed us with what we have lost or not yet found. We truly are like sheep gathered by a shepherd for rest, protection, and renewal. If Jesus needed rest, so do we!

If quiet places of prayer were so helpful for him, might they not do the same for us? And we are reminded by our text today that the gift of meditation and prayer is often the only power through which God's Spirit calms and refreshes troubled spirits. We need more quiet, not less. More empty space rather than more activity and busy-ness! You know it is true.

Several years ago, I found such peace in spending one morning each week in journaling, reading, meditation and mindful distraction. I found in such a discipline I found smaller moments of escape and prayer in each hour of my day. How helpful when I get away from my familiar places and schedule and remember to listen for God. For that is when I am able to hear God and allow God to speak to, guide, and heal me. And as good as it was, I have allowed that to slide away and forgotten how important that time was for me, my loved ones, and the people I serve.

What irony that in getting away from it all we are not escaping but finding strength to face anything! It is like an alcoholic who finally goes to AA. Or someone struggling with fear who finally accepts counseling. Or a child who gathers the courage to face parents. We need to find that quiet place outside of ourselves. This is never wasted time, but a place of "still waters and green pastures." There are so many places to start!

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The next time you just can't take it anymore, first thank God for the awareness you can't solve what you are so afraid of or angry about. In such confession comes the wisdom to remember God has been waiting all along. Then find your quiet place with Him. In the embrace of his peace, like a shepherd, he will feed you, protect you, and lead you to new pastures you never would have found on your own! Such moments are precious, miraculous, and the essence of faith.

I remember an old TV show called Gilligan's Island where castaways' only desire was to go home. And yet, in that place of peace, surrender, and new routines they became a new community as they were changed by a place of quiet peace.

What was quieter than the cross? More alone than a tomb? And what gifts those have become for us! Remember, It was in Jesus' escape to prayer and meditation that he prepared himself to give everything for us! And as we enter that same place of escape with Him, we are changed, recharged, empowered, and able to return to daily lives with power, faith, and peace. How you do it isn't important. It might be in a prayer group or your daily meditation with Portals of Prayer. It might be watching the sunset, taking a long walk, taking pictures of a lighthouse, or writing a letter to your grandchild. It might be sharing time with people who have less than you.

What matters most is surrendering yourself to God's quiet and trusting that his voice will boom, and his love will lift you up! Remember Jesus words as he said before we can deal with all that is going on, we first need to find a quiet place! Where will your quiet place be so that God (and not the world) changes you? - tws