



Going Deeper - Weekly Sermon Discussion Guide
Reimagine: A New Normal Series - Week 5
May 24, 2020

Humans make a lot of noise. Have you noticed this? Pastor Bill said “There is a direct correlation in our inability to hear the voice of God and our refusal to turn down the noise around us.” A couple definitions to start with: Solitude is attending to God by stepping away from other people and things. Silence is turning down the noise to attend to God. The fruit of these disciplines is increased sensitivity and compassion for others, rather than the selfishness this practice can look like at first glance. When we fail to plan and make real space for this in our lives, it looks like escapism with a whiney, “I need some me time.” Mark 1:35 says that “Jesus went off to a solitary place where he prayed.” In the midst of miracles and activity, Jesus took the time to get up early and move away from all the noise, to attend to God. This was a regular rhythm for Jesus. There was purpose and intention behind it. He was positioned to hear his father on purpose. This is the standard. And, He invites us to participate as well. Mark 6:30 says “come with me, by yourselves, to a quiet place, and get some rest.” Solitude and silence are essential to our physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being.

We cannot give to others things we do not already possess. There are things we can only receive from God in a place of solitude and silence. Without solitude our togetherness bears little meaning. Without silence our words lose their weight. Our lives are made to be shared. Our worth is not connected to our usefulness. There is fruit in *being* rather than *doing*. I keep having to learn this one the hard way.

A couple months ago, I was in a mindfulness class. It was a small group of grad students. We sat in uncomfortable chairs as the Professor asked us to close our eyes and allow our minds to quiet. And, when a thought came up, imagine putting the thought on a leaf and setting it in a stream and watching that thought and the leaf float away. Before he rang his little bell, the class agreed this sounded like a really peaceful thing to do. I was not convinced I could achieve this level of mindfulness. Sure enough, the bell sounded and as hard as I tried to focus on my breath, I could not ignore the thunderous amount of thoughts flying at me. I started trying to imagine the mountain of leaves I’d need to float all of this away. By the time this short exercise in futility was over, I had imagined that I had stopped up my stream because of the sheer volume of leaves/thoughts I had put into the water. When asked how it went, most people acted like this was a fruitful way to become more mindful. When I was asked how it went, I was out of breath and exhausted. I told him and the class that I apparently had several lawn and leaf bags full of thoughts and not enough river to push them away fast enough. This was the most stressful seven minutes of my life. The professor stifled a laugh and managed to handle all of my insanity with so much compassion. He remarked that I have a busy brain. A brain that is agile. This is a strength, not a weakness. Our brains are designed to do more than one thing at a time - beyond keeping us breathing, our heart beating, and our temperature regulated, we are digesting food, and regenerating cells with incredible regularity and this is to say nothing of the thousands of messages we are receiving from outside ourselves at any given moment. The ability to hold ourselves in a quiet place in order to experience the compassion and love that God is pouring over us all the time, is also a gift. This place of rest is where we remember who God made us to be, and where He wants to partner with us.

1 Kings 19:11-13 - has become such a formidable life verse for me. “*But the Lord was not in the Fire, after the fire came a gentle whisper,*” utter silence. When Elijah heard it, he covered his face and went to the door of the cave. God asked him, “What are you doing here?” We might hear the same question. Not out of punishment, just curiosity. This question demands an answer. What is it we want to hear from God? God has been waiting for us to find him in the silence. Change is possible, and it is a process. This discipline takes time to engage. Solitude and silence create space in our souls to expose what is already there. There is nothing in us dark enough that our Heavenly Father isn’t already intimately acquainted with it. There is no fear or condemnation in God’s presence. He wants to join us in an intimate relationship. I seem to get so caught up in accomplishing, this time of quarantine has taught me that this stillness is live giving. It isn’t always the big, loud, get-er done things that make a difference. Sometimes, (more often than not) it is the simple, quiet, deep listening, and time away to hear God rather than myself, that makes a world of difference.

So Consider:

1. Does my lifestyle look like someone who wants to listen to God? What needs to change?
2. What is the noisiest thing in your life/mind?
3. Why is it easier to allow the noise rather than to turn to solitude and silence?

Take Action:

The challenge to begin this week: once a day, take 15 minutes in silence and solitude. Once a week, spend another hour in silence and solitude with God. And, once a month, take the majority of a day to be alone with God. But, remember, this new attentiveness and responsiveness takes planning. For this practice, Pastor Bill encouraged us to find a place to go that we can find solitude and silence. And, take nothing with us when we go there.

Blessings to you this week, Amie