

## **iROUS: Retreats of Unusual Silence The Day Alone: Part I**

### **Discussion Question:**

1. What are our motivations or reasons we seek to be with others?
2. What are the benefits of having time alone to during the day?

***A Christian learns that silence and solitude is a necessary part their personal relationship with God and with others.***

*Let him who cannot be alone beware of community. Let him who is not in community beware of the being alone. (p. 78)*

God's divine reality of Christian community was not meant to cure human loneliness.

1. Bonhoeffer warns that people should not seek community to run away from their fears or to use it as a distraction. Two examples are mentioned: seeking fellowship to cure their loneliness and personal issues. These motives will lead to disappointment, a breakdown in communication, and spiritual death.
  - a. *Many people seek fellowship because they are afraid to be alone. Because they cannot stand loneliness, they are driven to seek company of other people. There are Christians, too, who cannot endure being alone, who have had some bad experiences with themselves, who hope they will gain some help in association with others. They are generally disappointed. Then they blame the fellowship for what is really their own fault. (p. 76)*
  - b. *The Christian community is not a spiritual sanatorium. The person who comes into a fellowship because he is running away from himself is misusing it for the sake of diversion, no matter how spiritual this diversion may be. He is really not seeking community at all, but only a distraction which will allow him to forget his loneliness for a brief time, the very alienation that creates the deadly isolation of man. (p. 76)*

Participating in Christian community involves understanding when to be alone and in fellowship with others.

1. The balance between community and solitude starts with acknowledging Jesus Christ in our alone and community life.
  - a. *Let him who cannot be alone beware of community. He will only do harm to himself and to the community. Alone you stood before God when he called you; alone you had to answer that call; alone you had to struggle and pray; and alone you will die and give an account to God. You cannot escape from yourself; God has singled you out. If you refuse to be alone you are rejecting Christ's call to you, and you can have no part in the community of those who are called. (p. 77)*
  - b. *Let him who is not in community beware of being alone. Into community you were called, the call was not meant for you alone; in the community of the called you bear your cross, you struggle, you pray. You are not alone, even in death, and on the Last Day you will be only one member of the great congregation of Jesus Christ. If you scorn the fellowship of the brethren, you reject the call of Jesus Christ, and thus your solitude can only be hurtful to you. (p. 77)*
  - c. *We recognize, then, that only as we are within the fellowship can we be alone, and only he that is along can live in fellowship. Only in the fellowship do we learn to be rightly alone and only in aloneness do we learn to live rightly in fellowship. **It is not as though the one preceded the other; both begin at the same time, namely, with the call of Jesus Christ.** (p. 77-78)*

Silence and solitude means that we approach God's Word with humility, clear headedness and self-control.

1. The silence that Bonhoeffer speaks about is the silence of our mouth and heart as we listen and meditate on the Word of God. Silence is not just the lack of sound coming from our mouths but also the stillness of the chatter from our hearts. Silence is a sign of humility when we are in God's Word and in prayer.
  - a. *Silence does not mean dumbness, as speech does not mean chatter. Dumbness does not create solitude and chatter does not create fellowship...The speech, the Word which establishes and binds together in fellowship, is accompanied by silence. (p. 78)*
  - b. *Silence is the simple stillness of the individual under the Word of God. We are silent before hearing the Word because our thoughts are already directed to the Word, as a child is quiet when he enters his father's room. We are silent at the beginning of the day because God should have the first word, and we are silent before God before going to sleep because the last word belongs to God. (p. 79)*

- c. *We keep silence solely for the sake of the Word, and therefore not in order to show disregard for the Word but rather to honor and receive it. Silence is nothing else but waiting for God's Word and coming from God's Word with a blessing. (p. 79)*
2. Silence and solitude is beneficial to our relationships in Christian community. It teaches us humility in sharing God's Word. Times of silence allow us to communicate more clearly with others. It disciplines our heart and mind in what and when to speak to others.
  - a. *The silence of a Christian is listening silence, humble stillness that may be interrupted at any time for the sake of humility. It is silence in conjunction with the Word. (p.80)*
  - b. *There is a wonderful power of clarification, purification, and concentration upon the essential thing in being quiet. This is true secular fact. But silence before the Word leads to right hearing and thus also to right speaking of the Word of God at the right time. Much that is unnecessary remains unsaid. But the essential and the helpful thing can be said in a few words. (p. 80)*
  - c. *After a time of quiet we meet others in a different and a fresh way. Many of a household fellowship will be able to provide for the individual's need to be alone, and thus preserve the fellowship from injury, only by adopting a regular order. (p. 80)*

#### Conclusion:

The goal for finding daily silence and solitude is to be able to have uninterrupted time of meditation, prayer and intercession with God.