

SILENCE & SOLITUDE



CHRISTIAN
SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

SILENCE & SOLITUDE: CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

Edition 2.0

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Dear Friend,

We are excited for you to read this series on the Christian Spiritual Practices. At the Retreat Ministry we have personally experienced these practices as foundational in our own times of retreat, as well as in our journeys with God. Likewise, we hope that this will be a rich resource for you in your own times with the Lord.

Our desire as a ministry is that this series would help you to further cultivate a life that is marked by abiding and fully living in Christ.



John 15:4 (ESV)

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.

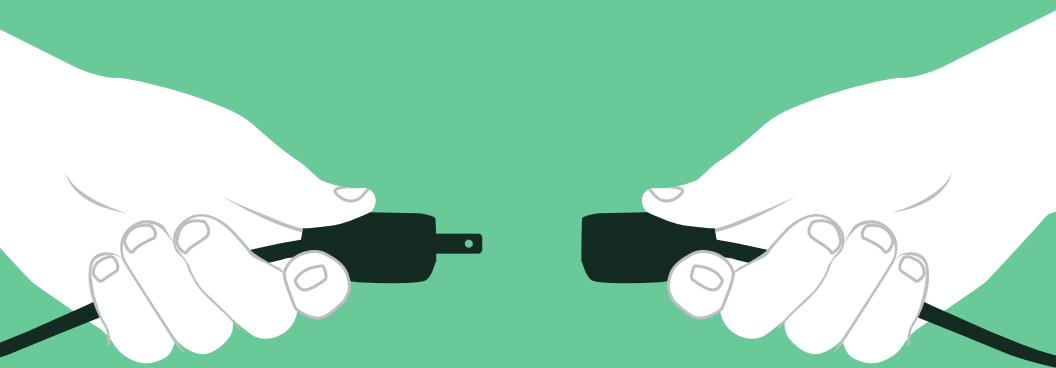
Peace to you as you continue on this journey with him.

Saddleback Spiritual Maturity Team

www.saddleback.com/retreats

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CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL PRACTICES



CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

The phrase “Christian spiritual practices” can seem a bit lofty. However, the hope for this series is that these practices would provide grounding for you as you connect with God. The word “practice” is used intentionally to acknowledge that we are all learners and will make mistakes as we grow. You will not be able to do these practices perfectly. Nor will these practices earn you more favor with God. Instead of seeing Christian spiritual practices as a list of things to do, envision them as an invitation into deeper relationship with God. These practices are the means of opening our hearts to God’s transforming work in light of our motivations and beliefs. In that sense then, the word “practice” points to a broader purpose, one that impacts the way we live our lives. These are not practices for the sake of practice, but a means to inform a way of life—a way of life in which we are with him at all times—abiding in his transforming love.

It is challenging to begin a new practice. We can be so eager to start something new, but often it proves difficult to continue practicing. When we find ourselves in this place, it is easy to give up and fall into guilt. This is not the goal of any spiritual practice. Rather, the hope is to help you discover these “unforced rhythms of grace,” as described in Matthew 11:28–30 (beautifully captured in *The Message*):



Matthew 11:28–30 (MESSAGE)

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

In this booklet, you will be exploring the spiritual practice of silence and solitude. As you read, take time to pause and prayerfully reflect. Ask God whether this is a practice he would have you engage in. Prayerfully consider why you are drawn to this particular practice. If you find that you are cautious or nervous about embracing this practice consider with God why that might be. There is no requirement or expectation that you say “yes” to this practice right now in your life. The content here is presented in such a way that you can explore with God whether it would be helpful in your current season of life. This booklet contains prayer prompts and reflective questions designed to assist you in your process of discernment. These may be helpful questions to contemplate as you consider the practice of silence and solitude with the Lord.

THE HABIT LOOP







WHAT IS
SILENCE & SOLITUDE?



WHAT IS SILENCE & SOLITUDE?

Silence and solitude are such stark words. They likely conjure up many differing thoughts and feelings, yet their definitions are quite simple. In silence, we abstain from speaking or from being around noisy places, while in solitude we abstain from the company of others. While these are two separate practices, they seem to naturally work well together, since silence is easier to practice when withdrawn from other people. Silence and solitude provide a chance to be still, to stop, and to rest. We practice them to purposefully remove ourselves from the daily demands of life in order to intentionally be with God. It is a way to practically live out the command found in Psalm 46:10 to “Be still and know that I am God.”

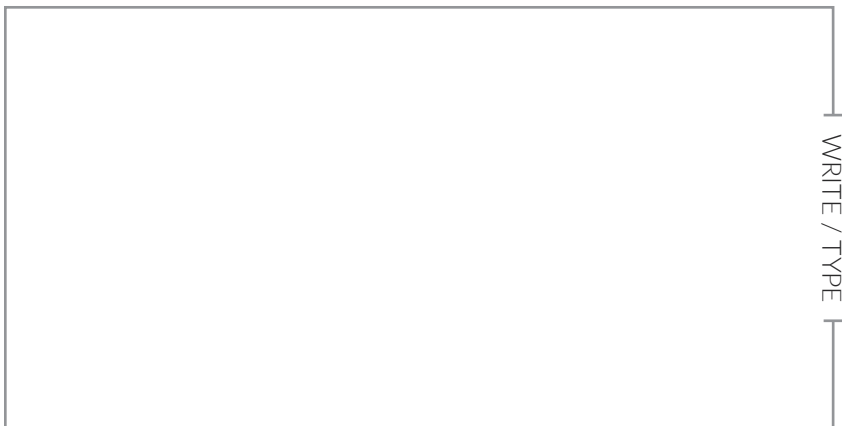
The practice of silence and solitude involves both listening and looking. As we cease to speak, we intentionally allow space for God’s voice. Even though God loves to hear the cries of our hearts, we easily forget that he may have something to say as well. By observing silence, we humble ourselves and acknowledge that he is wisdom, truth, and love. We admit that we do not have all the answers. When we take the time to pause and listen, we may be surprised by what God has to say.

As we enter into silence and solitude, we also begin to look. We look for what is happening in our hearts. We look for God’s fingerprints in our lives. We look on him, enjoying his presence. In our daily lives, God can often be pushed into the background. Through silence and solitude we intentionally re-focus our sight on God. We express this not just with our thoughts or feelings, but with our physical bodies. We literally remove ourselves from others, stop speaking, and turn our

entire selves toward him. As we move toward God, capturing a glimpse of his glory, we cannot help but be changed (2 Corinthians 3:18).

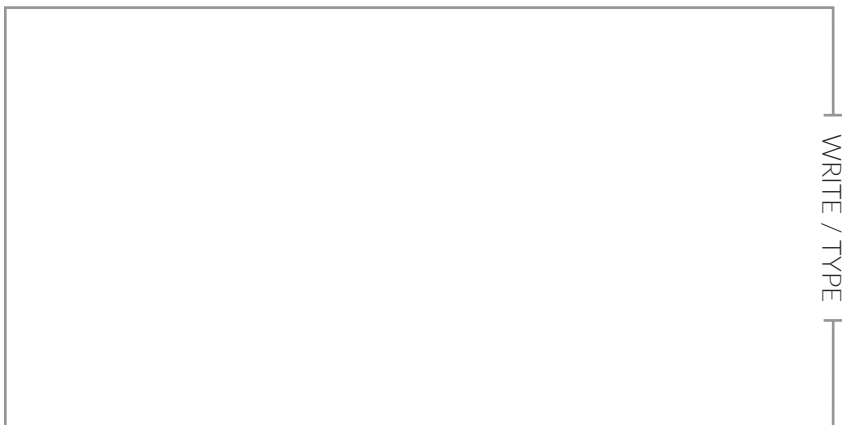
Take a moment to pause and consider these questions:

What has been my experience with silence and solitude?



WRITE / TYPE

What are my fears in practicing silence and solitude? Take this space to reflect with the Lord on your silence and solitude experiences and share honestly with him.



WRITE / TYPE





WHY IS
SILENCE & SOLITUDE
IMPORTANT?



WHY IS SILENCE & SOLITUDE IMPORTANT?

We live in a noisy, busy world that relentlessly competes for our time and attention. Even when we are by ourselves, there are apps, screens, and social media platforms to keep our attention. Today, it is a rare thing to sit in silence. When is the last time you have experienced silence (outside of sleeping)? While solitude may be seen in our world, it is only acceptable within a narrow range of options. We value the idea of getting away into nature. Yet, to do so alone may elicit suspicious looks from our friends. Solitude tends to be accepted only when it has a very specific end in mind, such as rest and relaxation. We find ourselves in a culture that cannot bear silence and has limited value for solitude. Yet, there is a long history of the practice of silence and solitude having begun in the life of Jesus himself.

When Jesus began his public ministry he set out to the desert for 40 days by himself (Matthew 4:1–11). However, this was not merely time alone, but time alone with God. No wonder he was able to resist the temptations of the devil. The Bible continues to tell of Jesus' time away from others. For example, before choosing the twelve apostles, Jesus again went off by himself to pray (Luke 6:12). One of the more powerful images of solitude was in the garden of Gethsemane, as Jesus waited for his betrayer (Matthew 26:36–46). In these verses we are given an intimate glimpse into his time alone with God.



Matthew 26:39 (ESV)

And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."

In addition to these direct mentions of silence and solitude, Luke 5:16 says that Jesus commonly removed himself from others in order to pray. It is easy just to adopt these practices because Jesus did them. However, it is also good to understand why. Why did Jesus practice this so regularly? These times seem connected to his relationship with God. How did this help him to connect with God? Amidst all the things he could be doing, like preaching, healing, and discipling, why was silence and solitude so valuable to him?

We know that Jesus abided in a constant, loving relationship with the Father by the Spirit. He chose to intentionally take time away to focus on this relationship. In turn, these times of silence and solitude kindled Jesus' abiding relationship with the Father. Jesus modeled a way of life for us, a life of constant abiding. He invites us to participate in God's life of love, through silence and solitude. They are an important way for us to grow in deeper relationship with God.

**When is the
last time
you have
experienced
silence?**

There are also practical benefits to silence and solitude. They can help us be wiser with our words. Often we speak without considering the power our words have to harm or injure others. In the practice of silence, we learn to hold our tongue and to offer words that will benefit those we are speaking with. As we learn to be wiser with our words, we naturally grow in our listening skills. We won't feel the pressure to come up with a response and can truly give our attention



to the person speaking. Many who regularly practice silence and solitude also find increased concentration and peace. We do not practice silence and solitude for the goal of attaining these benefits, but they are often by-products of this practice.

Why are you drawn to practicing silence and solitude?

WRITE / TYPE

WRITE / TYPE





WHAT ARE THE
CHALLENGES FOUND
IN PRACTICING
SILENCE & SOLITUDE?



WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES FOUND IN PRACTICING SILENCE & SOLITUDE?

When movies were first being made, filmmakers did not make many edits. The camera would stay focused on one person or thing for a really long time before cutting to another view. Today, most films are constantly cutting away to a different view. Just think of the latest action film you watched. Sometimes the cuts are so fast that our eyes literally cannot keep up. Our eyes are taking in so much information. So, when we look back to those first films, they often can feel boring. We have become accustomed to processing more information and faster-paced storytelling. The same is true in our daily lives. Think through your day today. Most likely, you were rushing out the door as you quickly ate breakfast or checking your email while brushing your teeth. When does life slow down? The moment we actually stop, it takes some time for our bodies to catch up with this change of pace.

This is why silence and solitude can be terrifying. We have become accustomed to a way of life in which silence is almost impossible to find, and solitude is just for introverts. For some, the practice of silence and solitude is appealing. To some extent, many have a level of desire for more peace and quiet in their lives. However, the majority of people feel intimidated when they lean into these practices.

Often when talking about silence and solitude, there is an emphasis on the benefits. However, the challenges found in these practices are often dismissed or overlooked. The reality is, these practices, while

extremely simple, are difficult. Three of the more common challenges found in the practice of silence and solitude are boredom, anxiety, and distractions. Often when hitting these obstacles, we can experience guilt or fear that we are doing something wrong. This is the point when most people give up. “This must not be for me.” “What am I doing wrong?” Yet, it is when we hit these difficulties that we are being invited by the Lord to take a deeper glimpse into our hearts. These three challenges tend to stem from places we want to avoid or fear to face. Yet, those are the very places that God desires to bring into the light. Silence and solitude is not about escaping your problems. Instead it is an invitation to enter into them with the Lord.

Three of the more common challenges found in the practice of silence and solitude are boredom, anxiety, and distractions.

Can you think of the last time you were by yourself without any screens or stimulation? Just you? Silence and solitude are such a stark change of pace that often we do not know what to do with all of that space. In a society that seeks to be constantly entertained, boredom is not a value. In fact, it is to be avoided at all costs. As your body acclimates to a slower pace, you will likely become bored. Additionally, we often bring into these times of silence and solitude an expectation to have a meaningful experience with God. If there is not a quantifiable benefit, we can easily dismiss the time as boring or insignificant. When practicing silence and solitude, it is helpful to be aware of the expectations we bring. Remember, this practice is about being with God, not for the purpose of an experience (although that may happen).

Due to the fast-paced lives we live, we usually can only attend to what is immediately in front of us. As a result, there are many hurts, pains, and frustrations from daily life that never get processed through. And when we stop, all the things we ignored tend to show up. If this has



built up for a while, then silence and solitude can be overwhelming and stressful. Anxiety can also arise as we experience loneliness. Sometimes removing ourselves from others can trigger deep feelings of isolation. At the core, most of us want to feel seen, known, and loved. Yet, we also have deep fears tying into a suspicion that we really are alone. When we engage in silence and solitude, these fears often flare up. However, the truth is, Jesus is with us. In his departing words to his apostles he promised his presence to the end.



Matthew 28:18–20 (ESV)

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Silence and solitude then becomes the place where we allow our distorted beliefs to be revealed and sifted by God’s hands. In times of wrestling through truth, it can be helpful to have a scripture verse to meditate upon as a reminder of our true identity. This way we can continually return to the truth as our fears emerge.

Another common experience in silence and solitude are distractions. “Did I remember to turn off my coffee maker when I left the house?” “I really need to call Grandma.” “I can’t forget to send the bills in.” If there is anything on your to-do list, chances are you will think of it when entering into silence and solitude. The reality is, there will always be something you “should” be doing. However, Jesus is our model in this practice. In his short time of ministry on the earth, he regularly took time away. There are a couple of ways to address distractions. Some recommend keeping a paper and pen close by in

order to write down the to-do's and return to the purpose of this time. Another way is to take a moment to sit with the distraction and then imagine giving it to God.

As you practice silence and solitude, remember that you are not alone in these experiences. Many have struggled down similar paths as they learned to be with God. These practices involve a process, which takes time. We are not aiming for perfection. While they may come easier the longer we practice, the truth is we can never outperform the realities of our fallen world. Boredom, anxiety and distractions will always be present. Yet, God is not surprised by our limitations and welcomes us in our reality.

When have you experienced boredom, anxiety or distractions in times of silence and solitude? How did you respond to those challenges?

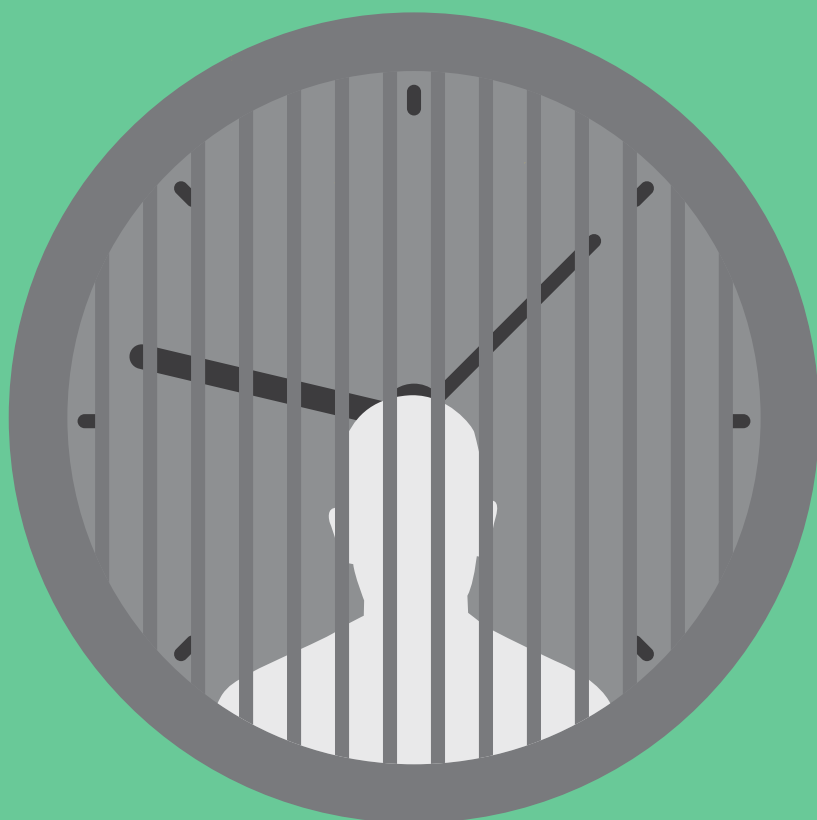
WRITE / TYPE



Is it easier to receive those challenges as condemnation or can you receive them as an invitation from God? What might God be inviting you into as you experience boredom, anxiety or distractions?

WRITE / TYPE

WRITE / TYPE





HOW DO I START
A RHYTHM OF
SILENCE & SOLITUDE?



HOW DO I START A RHYTHM OF SILENCE & SOLITUDE?

As you discern whether or not silence and solitude is a practice for you to take on right now, here are some questions you may want to consider:

WHAT DOES MY LIFE PERMIT?

In light of all that is in your life right now, family, work, service, etc., is it realistic to adopt this? Maybe you have time to practice silence and solitude for a longer period of time, or perhaps you only have five minutes a day. If you don't realistically have time, would it be wise to shift your schedule to allow for silence and solitude?

WRITE / TYPE

HOW OFTEN DO I PRACTICE?

It takes about 40 days for a practice to become a regular part of your life. It does not happen overnight. It is recommended to commit to the practice at least three times a week and to intentionally schedule a time for this to happen.

**It takes about
40 days for a
practice to become
a regular part of
your life.**

WRITE / TYPE



WHERE SHOULD I PRACTICE?

Find a place in your residence or community where you will not be distracted. Make sure to turn off your phone (or at the very least silence it) and find a place where you can sit comfortably. Pay attention to what posture is helpful in keeping you awake. A soft, comfy chair may work well, but if you fall asleep every time you sit in that chair, it may not be a great place to regularly practice silence and solitude. Conversely, a chair that hurts your back will also not be helpful in your practice.

WRITE / TYPE

WHY DOES BREATHING MATTER?

Just as we often close our eyes when we pray in order to focus our attention on God, breathing is another way in which we can turn our attention towards him. There is nothing magical in deep breathing. However, when you take deep breaths from your stomach, slowly exhaling, it naturally has a way of slowing you down and relaxing the body. That is helpful as you turn your attention towards God.

WRITE / TYPE

CAN I USE THE BIBLE?

Many people use the Bible as part of their times of silence and solitude. However, the purpose is not to study the Scriptures. So you will want to take very short passages—one to two sentences at most. Some great passages to use are Psalm 46:10, Psalm 62:1, and Luke 18:13b.

You will inevitably miss a day here or there. Don't let that stop you from continuing this practice. Remember you are learning a way of life, not punishing yourself.

WRITE / TYPE





SILENCE & SOLITUDE EXERCISE



SILENCE & SOLITUDE EXERCISE

This exercise is designed to help you as you begin to practice silence and solitude. The exercise, which takes about an hour and a half, will lead you through a few different ways to observe silence and solitude. Bring a pen, this brochure, a timer, and any other items you will need during this practice for your comfort (i.e., a sweater).

Find a comfortable, secluded place to sit during your practice. As you transition from section to section, you may want to stand and stretch before continuing. You can move to a different location between sections, but you can also feel free to remain in the same place for the entire exercise if you choose.

PREPARE

Begin these first five minutes by expressing to the Lord your desires for this time. You may want to let him know about the fears you have in practicing silence and solitude. Then, invite the Lord to guide this time. You are not responsible to make this time work. This time is held by his capable hands. Feel free to write down any reflections you have in the space below.

WRITE / TYPE

Now spend the next 10 minutes sitting in silence. You will want to start by entering into a slower rhythm of breathing. Make sure to inhale deeply and then slowly exhale. As distractions come up (all the to-do's in your life) begin to list them on a paper. Finish writing these down and pray, "Lord, thank you that you hold these things and that I can trust you with the cares of my life."

WRITE / TYPE



LISTEN

As you begin this section, start by taking 5 minutes to focus on listening. Begin by turning your attention to the sounds around you. What can you hear? What do you not hear? Is there any sound in particular that stands out to you? You may want to close your eyes in order to help you hear without the distractions of sight.

For 10 to 15 minutes, spend time intentionally listening to the Lord. Ask him what he has to say as you choose to be silent. You may want to begin this time with Samuel's response to God's call in 1 Samuel 3:10, "Speak, for your servant is listening." You may use the lines below to write down anything you hear.

WRITE / TYPE

LOOK

In these next five minutes, begin to take in the beauty that is around you. What do you see? What is hidden from your sight? Do not feel the pressure to see everything that is in your view. Rather, pay attention to what your eye is drawn to.

Spend the next 30 minutes in silence. Set a timer so that you do not have to worry about the time. When you get distracted or anxious, you may want to read through Psalm 46:10, “Be still, and know that I am God.” Or perhaps make this verse your prayer by saying, “Lord, help me to be still and know that you are God.” Remember to breathe slowly.

CONCLUSION

When finishing, move into a posture of reflection. Spend the last 10 minutes talking with God about your experience in each section.

What was this experience like for you? Especially pay attention to your responses to the silence. Did a particular type of prayer feel more comfortable than another? Which exercise was the most stretching for you? What surprised you about this time of silence and solitude?

WRITE / TYPE



Is there a particular type of silence and solitude that God is highlighting for you? Is there a particular format that would help you to better know God and yourself? Might this be something that you should continue engaging in on a regular basis?

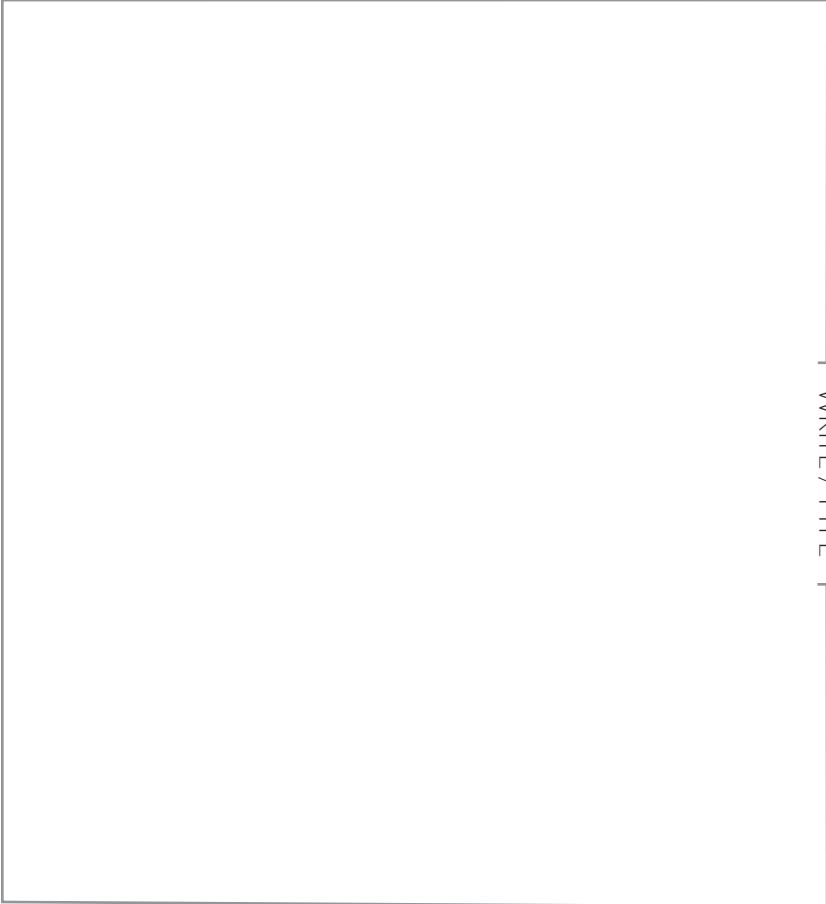
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What would help you to continue practicing silence and solitude?

Take a few minutes to consider where and how you will do this

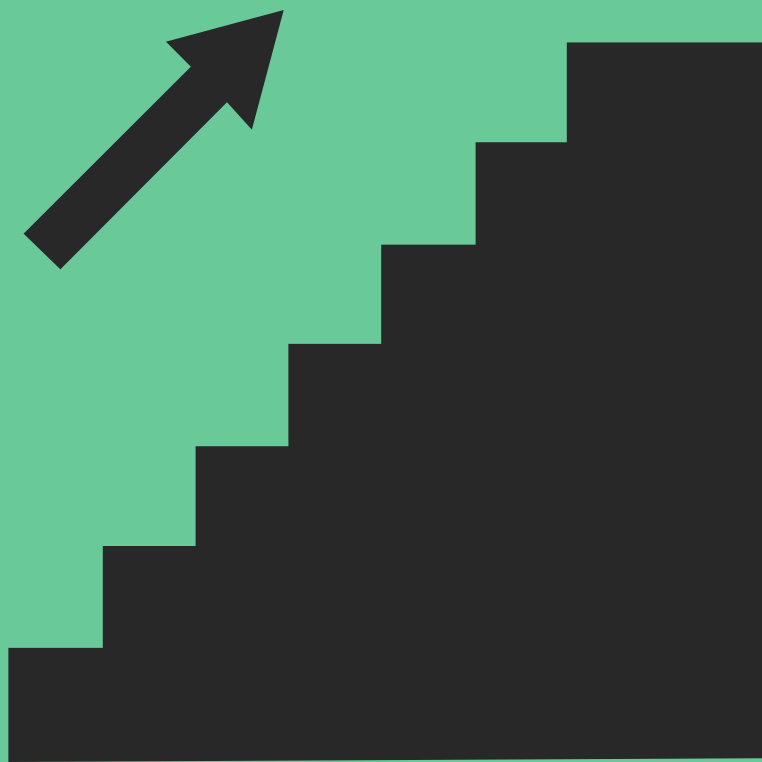
practice in the midst of your daily life. Create a plan for yourself.

You may want to share about silence and solitude with a couple of friends so that they might support you in your practice.



WRITE / TYPE

Close your time with a brief moment of silence, allowing that to express your thankful heart for this time with the Lord.





NEXT STEPS



NEXT STEPS

CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

Journaling

Are you intimidated by journaling? Wondering how journaling fits in as part of the Christian life? Searching for some practical steps on how to incorporate this into your life?

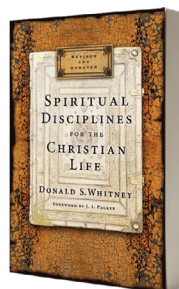
This retreat is designed to help you look at journaling as a spiritual practice and teach you how to begin. Download the free guide to do on your own or join us for an in-person Journaling retreat.



Visit **saddleback.com/retreats** to download the free retreat booklet to do on your own or join us for an in-person gathering.

Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life

If you would like to learn more about spiritual practices or disciplines on your own, check out Don Whitney's *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. With topics ranging from fasting to learning, Whitney gives practical steps to developing nine different spiritual practices into your daily life. Available at Amazon or wherever books are sold.



JOIN US ON RETREAT

We offer a variety of retreat experiences at the Rancho Capistrano Retreat Center. Consider joining us for one of our upcoming retreats:

- **Surrender:** This retreat will help you refresh and discover what it truly means to trust God with your whole life.
- **Rest:** This day retreat will give you space to enter into God's invitation to rest.
- **Behold:** This retreat will encourage you to think about the way you see the world.
- **Mercy:** This day retreat will teach you what it means to receive and give mercy.

If you have any questions or would like to connect with us further regarding this retreat experience, please contact the Spiritual Maturity Team at maturity@saddleback.com.

JOURNEY WITH JESUS

Experience "Journey with Jesus," Saddleback's interactive art-trail walking through the last week of Jesus' life before his crucifixion and resurrection. This unique experience can be done in person at the Rancho Capistrano Retreat Center, on-demand through the Journey with Jesus app, or a 360° experience on YouTube. Visit saddleback.com/journeywithjesus for all information.

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