

Finding God in the stillness

Sermon discussion guide

Based on Luke 4.1-13 from 24 May 2020

Which can be accessed via our Youtube channel here:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCxJJk0TQqaGqbUGk2t9Lkhw>

Intro: Have you taken up something new during the lock-down?

In his sermon, Dan talked about life in lock-down becoming eerily quiet for some, not just older people but also others including singles in their 20's whose work and social life may have stopped. Jesus went into self isolation in the wilderness but in His case without food and without any human contact, internet and social media. Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit as part of God's plan. It was certainly not wasted time but a fruitful formation time after which His ministry blossomed.

Dan encouraged us not to simply sit and wait for life to return to normal but to treat the quiet as a God given opportunity to mature in our faith, both individually and as a church. Dan quoted Corrie ten Boom as saying "If the devil can't make us sin he will make us busy". Both keep us from God. *Wise men have said that hurry is the enemy of spiritual life in our day and that we should ruthlessly eliminate busy from our lives. Do you agree with this? Why?*

Dan introduced the vision of the church using the lock-down as a God-given opportunity to "Go deeper with God, grow closer to each other and reach further into Shirley". He said that for some it will mean "getting out of the boat" like Peter; for others it will be using the enforced quiet to find something special. He encouraged us to use the time to allow God to work in us. We can fill our lives with noise and busyness (even in the lock-down). Sometimes very simple things can help us sense God's presence with us. *Is there anything that you find helpful in allowing God to break through the busyness and internal and external noise that might help others?*

Dan talked about the importance of silence and solitude in our relationship with God. He said that God is always there, so if He feels distant then usually He is not the culprit. *Do you find solitude easy? Are there practical steps that you could take to make time for God; to listen for the divine whisper, as Dan put it? Dan suggested adding new things into our prayer life such as journaling (writing down our prayers and what God might be saying to us in response), lament, intercession, or repentance. Are any of those, things that you would like to try adding to your prayers? Is there anything else that would be helpful?*

Dan talked about things which stop us from going deeper with God; being scared of what we might find. Fear that He is not there at all. Fear of being honest with God, having to face up with our inner noise. *Dan mentioned worries, depression, addiction, hopes, fantasies, realities, lies, motivations, coping mechanisms, desire for God or lack of desire and temptations. Do any of these ring true for you? Are there other inner noises that get in the way? Dan stressed that by bringing these to God we were exposing our flaws in a safe place and we can hear Him speaking His love to us, warts and all. How does that make a difference?*

Dan talked about listening to God and going deeper by meditating on scripture. Jesus quoted scripture as a way of resisting the devil. *Going deeper is not always easy or comfortable and we will face temptation, as Jesus did. What difficulties do you think we will face and how might we overcome them?*

Dan has put together some other ideas for going deeper (attached). Share if there are any that you think you should take on board. Are there others?

Times of crisis and upheaval give opportunities and if we don't take them now, we probably never will.

Go deeper with God

This lockdown time gives us all an opportunity to go deeper with God.

For some, that will be by exploring faith in Jesus for the first time in years or first time ever.

For others, who have been praying and trusting Jesus for years, it will mean going deeper than before.

Here are some ideas to help you go deeper with God:

Prayer

1. To help you get started with prayer: the Trypraying app or booklet (we can post one to you if you'd like one).
2. To help you pray more richly: the Lectio365 app or read Pete Greig's "How to pray" or Lyndall Bywater's "Prayer in the making"
3. Join a prayer triplet – praying regularly with 2-3 other people
4. If you're in a prayer triplet already and trust has built up: ask each other some deeper questions: What are you really struggling with at the moment? How is your personal prayer life at the moment? What is God challenging you on at the moment?
5. Try fasting – like Jesus did in the wilderness – not as a way to force God's hand, but as a way to show God how serious we are about our prayers and listening to him.
6. Go deeper in repentance: asking God to show you what he wants to amend in your life and heart. Replace the lies you've believed with truths from God's word.

Bible

7. To help you get started with reading the Bible: the YouVersion app and search through the various 'reading plans' to find one that appeals to you. We suggest using the 'New International Version' or 'Contemporary English Version'.
8. To help you go deeper with reading the Bible: the 'Bible in one Year' app or get one of Phil Moore's "Straight to the heart" series of books on different books of the Bible.

Silence and Solitude

9. Read the relevant chapters from a book on using silence and solitude as a way to draw close to God eg John Mark Comer "The ruthless elimination of hurry", Peter Scazzero "Emotionally healthy spirituality" or Richard Foster "Celebration of discipline"
10. Do the exercises those books suggest! Or look at <https://johnmarkcomer.com/#how-to-unhurry> for some videos and downloadable exercises.

What other suggestions would you add? You can comment via the blog:

<https://www.stjamesbythepark.org/blog/go-deeper-with-god>