St Martins C3 – November 2, 2025
Ancient Practices – Solitude and Silence

Sermon Notes:
We are doing a series at the moment called *Ancient Practices*. Some of the practices of ancient people have endured because they create deep spiritual formation.

Read Luke 5:15-16; Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12; Matthew 6:6

The habit of silence and solitude is based upon the life of Jesus. He practised it regularly; it seems that in his humanity he needed to withdraw from the demands that were placed on him so that he could pray. He taught his followers to do the same.

There is a pattern in scripture of God speaking to people at times when they give Him space and attention.

Silence and solitude is when we still the noise of the world around us and find space to focus on our loving Father.

Silence
We take in so much information every day. We are consuming more than ever before, nearly 12 hours of information per day. We have information overload.

A lot of this feeling of being overwhelmed comes from our phones. We are now spending on average two and a half months of waking hours on our phones each year. The ancient practice of silence and solitude can be our way of escaping.

Turn the Sound Down

The first way we can practice silence is by taking the times we regularly fill with audio or visual noise and making them silent moments. Everything from exercising to driving can be done unplugged.

Digital Detox

This is where you voluntarily refrain from digital devices and the internet for a set period. It might look like not using devices at home for an entire week.

Solitude

Solitude is when we make space just for us and God. It can become a regular rhythm in our lives. Here is how:

1 – Daily: 10 minutes of silence and solitude

2 – Monthly: An hour of silent solitude

3 – Yearly: A half day of silent reflection

Finding time and desire to make space for silence and solitude can be hard. So can overcoming fear and distraction.

"We are so afraid of silence that we chase ourselves from one event to the next in order not to have to spend a moment alone with ourselves, in order not to have to look at ourselves in the mirror." Dietrich Bonhoeffer

When all is stripped away and we simply come to Him we can fill ourselves with the truth of who we are in Him. We are the beloved and God is pleased with us.

Questions for Connect Groups:

Key Point

Silence and solitude allow us to connect with God by releasing us from the noise of our world and prioritise focusing on Him.

Questions

What stood out to you from this week's message?

What does this message tell you about God and humans?

Share your average phone / device time from the last week. What did you spend the majority of that time on?

What would it look like to spend less time on your phone?

How do you avoid or resist silence?

Do you like to fill silences with sound or learning – podcasts, music, news, and so forth? What does this mean?

Where do you have silence with God in your life?

What would it look like to create times of solitude?

What would be a good rhythm of silence and solitude each day, month and year?

Group Exercise:

Spend ten minutes in silence together. Ask people how they found the experience. Was it boring, emotional, enlivening? Discuss the difficulties and value of such time.

Monday Devotion: Tip One - Listen

Read John 10:1-16; 25-39

In this week's devotion, we will look at five tips for hearing God's voice. As we come into a place of solitude and silence, we want to hear Him speak. These tips will help us to draw closer to God.

In John 10, Jesus compares His leadership with the leadership of the Pharisees. He shows that He is deeply committed to His people and will lay down His life for them. He also calls Himself the good shepherd and shows that His kind of leadership is based on a relationship, where His people hear His voice and readily obey.

I once listened to a radio quiz where they played obscure quotes from famous actors and asked a listener to identify the actor. I was surprised how easily I mixed up Matthew McConaughey and Tom Cruise. I have not spent enough time listening to their voices, so I didn't fully recognise them.

We can also mistake God's voice, and we can only remedy this by spending more time in His presence listening to the sound of His voice.

Spend time every day this week listening for the voice of God. Begin to recognise what happens inside of you when God speaks and how His voice is different from the other thoughts inside your head.

Tuesday Devotion: Tip Two - Surrender

Read Matthew 6:9-13

It is essential in our prayer life to surrender to God. Surrender is necessary when listening for God's voice too.

I once heard Andy Stanley talk about the Lord's Prayer. He helpfully broke it down into three parts.

- Part One: Give God praise and adoration (verse 9).
- Part Two: Submit to God's will (verse 10).
- Part Three: Bring requests and issues to God (verse 11-13).

Stanley then stated that the most challenging part of this prayer is when we ask for God's will to be done. Praying this way requires us to lay down our ideas of what should happen in the world and take up God's. It requires us to come with pure motives, a repentant heart, and no preconceived notions of what God will say (Hebrews 10:22).

When asked how long we should spend surrendering our will to God, his comment was profound: "as long as it takes". Sometimes it will take five minutes; other times, it may take an hour. Only then can we get into the place to be ready to hear what He has to say about our lives and our world.

Today, spend time with God, simply surrendering your will to Him. Obediently lay things down as He leads you.

Wednesday Devotion: Tip Three - Expectations

Read John 16:8-15

Jesus promises that the Spirit of truth will guide us into all truth. However, there is no one guide as to what form this takes. Very few people hear God speak in an audible voice, and most times, He speaks He gives a single idea.

In my experience, hearing the voice of God is often not like having an entire conversation. Biblically, it often seems that God would send an angelic messenger if he wanted to have lengthy conversations.

It is often, for me, like a prompting. At times it is a thought to stop; other times, I know I should go; occasionally I feel I should wait; sometimes I have an impression to speak.

For some people, there is a feeling, which they prayerfully explore. Others have a picture that comes into their mind. There are times when a thought will come to a person that has no relationship to their thoughts.

Even if God doesn't speak, that's okay. It's not about getting what we want but by shaping our lives in God's presence.

Today, as you listen for God's voice, try and discern the ways that God most clearly speaks to you.

Thursday Devotion: Tip Four - Ask

Read James 1:5-8; Luke 11:9-13

The tip today is to ask for God to speak. This may seem simple, but there are many times when people who struggle to hear God's voice have not asked for Him to speak. They expect if they are a Christian, then God will be busting down their door, overwhelming them with wisdom and advice. Yet, God wants them to ask.

In James 1, the writer tells us that this asking needs to be focussed and whole-hearted. This means we ask with the expectation that God is going to respond. In so doing, our hearts will be receptive to what He wants to say.

Luke 11 reminds us that God, in His goodness, wants to reward those who keep on asking. What is the reward they receive? The Holy Spirit poured out on their life.

I am always asking God in counselling situations for wisdom. People come with significant problems that are way beyond me, so I simply pray, "Holy Spirit, help me to hear what is going on underneath the surface and give this person what they most need." Often when I do, something will jump out, and we will explore it together and then pray into it, and God will bring a degree of freedom for them.

Spend time asking God and then wait in expectation for His Spirit to come and for Him to speak to you.

Friday Devotion: Tip Five – Test It

Read 1 John 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:16-17

An excellent question to ask is: How do I know an impression or word is from God? The reason this question is important is that it is easy to get confused.

Many voices speak to us. We may be hearing our voice, the voice of the devil or our spouse's voice and mistake it for God. That is why we must test the word we receive. Here are some key questions to ask to determine if it is God speaking.

1 – Is this in line with the Bible?
2 – Is this in line with the way God is leading in my life?
3 – If it is for someone else, will it build them up?
4 – Does it challenge but not condemn?
5 – Do I sense that God will bring peace through it?

Correctly understanding the final question is essential. We have been taught that if we sense peace around something, then it is from God, but if we don't feel peaceful, it is not. However, we may selfishly sense something is easy and mistake it for God's peace. Equally, God will often ask us to do things that will make us feel very uncomfortable. That is why it is better to ask whether God will ultimately bring peace through this word rather than just temporary relief.

Think about the things God has been speaking to you about this week and test them against these questions.