

## Abide Practices – Silence & Solitude

Here is a selection of practices that you may find helpful as you seek to abide through times of silence and solitude. The goal of these practices is to learn to quiet your heart and mind; to switch off the incessant noise of the world and the clamor of your own anxieties, thoughts, and concerns and to 'switch on' to Jesus and his heart for you.

### PRACTICE 1 – STEPS INTO SILENCE

Silence and solitude isn't an easy practice to adopt because we're so unused to doing it. If you're trying it for the first time, we recommend starting small, say 5-10 mins 3-5 days a week. Then, as it becomes a regular practice and you hopefully start to experience the benefits, you can increase that time or frequency.

Here are a few simple steps to help get you started.

1	<p><b>Find a time and place that works for you</b></p> <p>For most people, first thing in the morning works best. You're rested, fresh, and the day is young. For others, a more optimal time slot is when kids are napping in the late morning, or on a lunch break, after work, or before you go to bed. Feel free to experiment until you find the right fit.</p> <p>Find a place that is quiet and as distraction free as possible. A comfortable chair with a blanket and candle nearby works well for a lot of people. Weather permitting, a park or nature reserve are also a good bet.</p>
2	<p><b>Put away your phone or any other distractions</b></p> <p>Settle into your time/place and get comfortable. For most people, sitting with your back straight, shoulders relaxed, legs on the floor is a good start. Others do better lying on their back in a relaxed position.</p> <p>Some of you may prefer to do this exercise while walking or doing something simple with your hands, like washing up or drawing.</p>
3	<p><b>Begin with a breathing prayer</b></p> <p>Close your eyes. Take long, deep, slow breaths (if you want, count 4 seconds in, 4 seconds wait, 4 seconds out, repeat). Inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth.</p> <p>Start to pay attention to your breathing. Just "watch" your breath go in and out.</p> <p>Release the constant chatter in your mind. Let each thought go as quickly as it comes, and just focus on your breathing.</p> <p>Your mind will seize this opportunity to run wild with thoughts, feelings, memories, 'to do's', and distractions. That's okay. Don't judge yourself, feel bad, give up, or worry. When you notice your mind start to wander, just recentre with a quick prayer, like, "Father..." and come back to your breathing.</p> <p>In the beginning, just 1-2 minutes of this is a huge win.</p>
4	<p><b>Spend a few minutes "abiding in the vine"</b></p> <p>Transition from your breathing prayer to "the practice of the presence of God."</p> <p>Notice God's presence all around you, in you. For some people it's helpful to imagine the Father is sitting in the chair across from you or on a throne.</p> <p>Welcome his love, joy, and peace from the Holy Spirit.</p> <p>If you want, open your mind and imagination to listen for God's voice, or get something off your chest in prayer. But the main goal here is simply to "be with Jesus." Don't feel like you have to "do" anything. Just relax and enjoy his presence.</p>

5	<b>Close in a prayer of gratitude and commit the rest of your day to the Father</b>
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<b>PRACTICE 2 - 'LITTLE SOLITUDES'</b>	
1	<p>Life can be hectic and unrelenting, particularly if you are a parent of young children or have a demanding, high-pressure job.</p> <p><b>Take advantage of the 'little solitudes'</b> that fill our day.</p> <p>Consider the solitude of those early morning moments in bed before the family awakens. Think of the solitude of a morning cup of coffee before beginning the work of the day. There is the solitude of bumper-to-bumper traffic during the rush hour. There can be little moments of rest and refreshment when we turn a corner and see something beautiful in creation.</p> <p><b>Introduce moments of silence into your family life.</b></p> <p>Instead of vocal prayer before a meal consider inviting everyone to join in with a few moments of gathered silence. Instead of always praying aloud with your children before bed, sit with them in silence for 1 minute, encouraging them to think about their day with a thankful heart and silently give their fears and concerns over to Jesus.</p>

<b>PRACTICE 3 - PROCESSING EMOTIONS</b>	
<p>As humans, we are emotional creatures. Sometimes we try to write off our emotions but for Jesus, emotions - positive or negative - were places to meet with God (See Luke 22:44).</p> <p>Silence and solitude can provide an excellent opportunity to identify and process your emotions with your heavenly Father.</p>	
1	<p><b>Begin with breathing prayer</b></p> <p>As above, take a few minutes just to still your body and heart before the Lord, and allow the 'constant chatter' of your mind fall away.</p>
2	<p><b>Let yourself feel</b></p> <p>What emotions rise to the surface of your heart, big or small? You might feel joy, gratitude, sadness, emptiness, fatigue, worry, guilt and shame, conviction, or any number of positive or negative emotions.</p>
3	<p><b>Name your emotions</b></p> <p>Name "the good, the bad, and the ugly" of your emotional state. Don't run away from what you're feeling, even if it's hard - emotional pain isn't something to avoid. In the Father's presence, we can face each emotion head on, safe in the knowledge of His love and care for us.</p>
4	<p><b>Examine yourself</b></p> <p>Ask yourself the 'Elijah question': "What are you doing here?" (See 1 Kings 19:9-13) In other words, where are you at with yourself and God right now? Is there anything God is trying to say to you through these emotions?</p>
5	<p><b>Pray</b></p> <p>Get it all off your chest. Give whatever you are feeling over to God - the good, the bad, and the ugly. No filter. The point here isn't to be good, but to be honest. When you've finished, close in a prayer of gratitude and commit everything you're feeling to the Father.</p>