

Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*

FASTING:

“In fasting, we abstain in some significant way from food ... The discipline teaches us a lot about ourselves very quickly. It will certainly prove humiliating to us, as it reveals to us how much our peace depends upon the pleasures of eating ... If nothing else, though, it will certainly demonstrate how powerful and clever our body is in getting its own way against our strongest resolves. Fasting confirms our utter dependence upon God by finding in him a source of sustenance beyond food ... We are discovering that life is so much more than meat (Luke 12:33). Our belly is not our god, as it is for others (Phil . 3:19, Rom . 16:18); rather, it is his joyful servant and ours (1 Cor . 6:13). Persons well used to fasting as a systematic practice will have a clear and constant sense of their resources in God. And that will help them endure deprivations of all kinds, even to the point of coping with them easily and cheerfully ... Fasting teaches temperance or self-control and therefore teaches moderation and restraint with regard to all our fundamental drives. Since food has the pervasive place it does in our lives, the effects of fasting will be diffused throughout our personality.”

ON SILENCE:

“In silence we close off our souls from “sounds,” whether those sounds be noise, music, or words. Total silence is rare, and what we today call “quiet” usually only amounts to a little less noise. Many people have never experienced silence and do not even know that they do not know what it is ... Silence goes beyond solitude, and without it, solitude has little effect. Henri Nouwen observed that “silence is the way to make solitude a reality.” But silence is frightening because it strips us as nothing else does, throwing us upon the stark realities of our life ... But we must also practice the silence of not speaking. Why do we insist on talking as much as we do? We run off at the mouth because we are inwardly uneasy about what others think of us. Eberhard Arnold observes: “People who love one another can be silent together .” But when we're with those we feel less than secure with, we use words to “adjust” our appearance and elicit their approval ... In not speaking, we resign how we appear (dare we say, how we are?) to God. And that is hard. Why should we worry about other's opinions of us when God is for us and Jesus Christ is on his right hand pleading our interests (Rom. 8:31-34)? But we do.”

ON SOLITUDE:

“We have already seen what a large role solitude played in the life of our Lord and the great ones in His Way. In solitude, we purposefully abstain from interaction with other human beings, denying ourselves companionship and all that comes from our conscious interaction with others ... The normal course of day-to-day human interactions locks us into patterns of feeling, thought, and action that are geared to a world set against God. Nothing but solitude can allow the development of a freedom from the ingrained behaviors that hinder our integration into God's order ... In solitude we find the psychic distance, the perspective from which we can see, in the light of

eternity, the created things that trap, worry, and oppress us ... In stark aloneness it is possible to have silence, to be still, and to know that Jehovah indeed is God (Ps. 46:10), to set the Lord before our minds with sufficient intensity and duration that we stay centered upon him—our hearts fixed, established in trust (Ps. 112:7-8)—even when back in the office, shop, or home."

Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out*

The word solitude can be misleading. It suggests being alone by yourself in an isolated place. When we think about solitaires, our mind easily evokes images of monks or hermits who live in remote places secluded from the noise of the busy world. In fact, the words solitude and solitary are derived from the Latin word *solus*, which means alone, and during the ages many men and women who wanted to live a spiritual life withdrew to remote places—deserts, mountains or deep forests—to live the life of a recluse.

It is probably difficult, if not impossible, to move from loneliness to solitude without any form of withdrawal from a distracting world, and therefore it is understandable that those who seriously try to develop their spiritual life are attracted to places and situations where they can be alone, sometimes for a limited period of time, sometimes more or less permanently. But the solitude that really counts is the solitude of heart; it is an inner quality or attitude that does not depend on physical isolation. On occasion this isolation is necessary to develop the solitude of heart, but it would be sad if we considered this essential aspect of the spiritual life as a privilege of monks and hermits.

It seems more important than ever to stress that solitude is one of the human capacities that can exist, be maintained and developed in the center of a big city, in the middle of a large crowd and in the context of a very active and productive life. A man or woman who has developed this solitude of heart is no longer pulled apart by the most divergent stimuli of the surrounding world but is able to perceive and understand this world from a quiet inner center.

In solitude we can slowly unmask the illusion of our possessiveness and discover in the center of our own self that we are not what we can conquer, but what is given to us.

In solitude we can listen to the voice of Him Who spoke to us before we could speak a word, Who healed us before we could make any gesture to help, Who set us free long before we could free others, and Who loved us long before we could give love to anyone . It is in this solitude that we discover that being is more important than having, and that we are worth more than the result of our efforts. In solitude we discover

that our life is not a possession to be defended, but a gift to be shared. It's there we recognize that the healing words we speak are not just our own, but are given to us; that the love we can express is part of a greater love; and that the new life we bring forth is not property to cling to, but a gift to be received.

BEING ALONE

Dietrich Bonhoeffer pointed out the significance of solitude not only for our life alone, but also for our lives together: "Let him who cannot be alone beware of community . . . Let him who is not in community beware of being alone . . . Each by itself has profound pitfalls and perils. One who wants fellowship without solitude plunges into the void of words and feelings, and one who seeks solitude without fellowship perishes in the abyss of vanity, self-infatuation, and despair."

Howard Thurman, *Meditations of the Heart*

Again and again I am conscious that I am seeking God. There is ever present in me a searching, longing for some ultimate resting place for my spirit—some final haven of refuge from storms and upheavals of life. I seek ever the kind of peace that can pervade my total life, . . . covering me completely with a vast tranquility. This I seek not because I am a coward, not because I am afraid of life or of living, but because the urge seems to steady me to the very core.

With sustained excitement, I recall what, in my own urgency, I had forgotten: God is seeking me. Wonderful assurance; God is seeking me. This is the meaning of my longing, this is the warp of my desiring, this is my point. The searching that keeps the sand hot under my feet is but my response to His seeking. Therefore, this moment, I will be still, I will quiet my reaching out, I will abide; for to know really that God is seeking me; to be aware of the NOW is to be found of Him. Then as if by a miracle, He becomes the answer to my need. It sufficeth now and forever that I am found of Him.