

BLOCK Three | Becoming Radical Presence

That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"

Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons. -Mark 1:32-39 NIV

Sacred Phrase

The Goal is Him



Week One | Becoming Radical Presence | Solitude

I light this candle, tuning into the presence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit here with me now...

Pause... Take at least two full minutes to recover your breath.

5-second inhale. 2-second hold. 7-second exhale.

And now let's begin...

God, I choose to trust that You are here with me, desiring to meet me in this moment. As I begin to pray, I breathe slowly, focusing my scattered thoughts on Your presence. I welcome the fullness of who You are into the fullness of who I am, right here, right now.

*I enter into this sacred risk of the practice of solitude and silence. I welcome you into the **encounter** and the **process**.*

“In the morning, long before dawn, he got up and left the house and went off to a lonely place and prayed there.’ In the middle of sentences loaded with action - healing suffering people, casting out devils, responding to impatient disciples... we find these quiet words: “in the morning long before dawn, he got up and left the house, and went off to a lonely place and prayed there.” In the center of breathless activities we hear a restful breathing. Surrounded by hours of moving, we find quiet stillness. In the heart of much involvement, there are words of withdrawal. In the midst of action, there is contemplation. And after much togetherness, there is solitude.

The more I read this nearly silent sentence locked in between the loud words of action, the more I have the sense that the secret of Jesus’ ministry is hidden in that lonely place where he went to pray, early in the morning, long before dawn.

In the lonely place, Jesus finds the courage to follow God’s will and not his own, to speak God’s words and not his own, to do God’s work and not his own. he reminds us constantly: “I can do nothing by myself... I aim to do not my own will,

but the will of him who sent me” (John 5:30)...It is in the lonely place, where Jesus enters into intimacy with the Father, that his ministry is born...

Without a lonely place, our lives are in danger. Somewhere, we know without silence, words lose their meaning, that without listening, speaking no longer heals, and that without distance, closeness cannot cure. Somewhere, we know that without a lonely place, our actions quickly become empty gestures.

The careful balance between silence and words, withdrawal and involvement, distance and closeness, solitude and community forms the basis of the Christian life and should, therefore, be the subject of our most personal attention.” *Out of Solitude*, by Henri Nouwen

Imagine yourself immersed in the soul, mind, and embodied life of Jesus as described in this story from the first chapter of Mark’s Gospel. What might it have felt like to embody His life in this scenario? What do you see, sense, hear, and notice around you? Within you? What do you experience relationally?

How might God be revealing His presence and provision to you through this embodied reflection? What are you noticing?

If Jesus were living your life as if he were you, what specific rhythms of solitude and silence might He cultivate?

Reflect on your relationship with solitude and silence.

What role do silence and solitude play in your life right now? In what ways would you like to change? And what must happen for this change to become a reality?

Week Two | Becoming Radical Presence | Silence

I light this candle, tuning into the presence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit here with me now...

Pause... Take at least two full minutes to recover your breath.

5-second inhale. 2-second hold. 7-second exhale.

And now let's begin...

God, I choose to trust that You are here with me, desiring to meet me in this moment. As I begin to pray, I breathe slowly, focusing my scattered thoughts on Your presence. I welcome the fullness of who You are into the fullness of who I am, right here, right now.

*I enter into this sacred risk of the practice of solitude and silence. I welcome you in the **death**, and I welcome you in the **birth**.*

“Silence completes and intensifies solitude... Silence is the way to make solitude a reality... Silence is solitude practiced in action. The Desert Fathers praised silence as the safest way to God.” -*The Way of the Heart*, Henri Nouwen

The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.” Exodus 14:14 ESV

Saint Diadochus of Photiki in the 5th century invites us to envision silence in this manner:

“When the door of the steambath is continually left open, the heat inside rapidly escapes through it. Likewise, the soul, in its desire to say many things, dissipates its remembrance of God through the door of speech, even though everything it says may be good... The door of our steambath is open too much of the time. Our lavish ways of sharing are more compulsive than virtuous, and instead of creating community, they tend to flatten out life together.”

Take this time to enter into solitude. Through the doorway, go even deeper into silence.
Reclaim the ancient path through doing nothing.

Be Still and know that I am God.

Be Still and know.

Be Stil.

Be.

-Psalm 46:10

Week Three | Becoming Radical Presence | Oil

I light this candle, tuning into the presence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit here with me now...

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God, I choose to trust that You are here with me, desiring to meet me in this moment. As I begin to pray, I breathe slowly, focusing my scattered thoughts on Your presence. I welcome the fullness of who You are into the fullness of who I am, right here, right now.

*I enter into this sacred risk of the practice of solitude and silence. I welcome you in **conversation** and I welcome you in honest **relationship**.*

“When my coming draws near, heaven’s kingdom realm can be compared to ten maidens who took their oil lamps and went outside to meet the bridegroom and his bride. Five of them were foolish and ill-prepared, for they took no extra oil for their lamps. Five of them were wise, for they took flasks of olive oil with their lamps. When the bridegroom didn’t arrive when they expected, they all grew drowsy and fell asleep. Then suddenly, in the middle of the night, they were awakened by the shout, ‘Get up! The bridegroom is here! Come out and have an encounter with him!’ So all the maidens got up and trimmed their lamps. But the foolish ones were running out of oil, so they implored the five wise ones, ‘Share your oil with us because our lamps are going out!’ ‘We can’t,’ they replied. ‘We don’t have enough for all of us. You’ll have to go and buy some for yourselves!’ While the five maidens were out buying oil, the bridegroom appeared. Those who were ready and waiting were escorted inside with him and the wedding party to enjoy the feast. And then the door was locked. Later, the five foolish maidens came running to the door and pleaded, ‘Lord, Lord, let us come in!’ But he called back, ‘Go away! Do I know you? I can assure you, I don’t even know you!’ That is the reason you should always stay awake and be alert because you don’t know the day or the hour when the Bridegroom will appear.” -Matthew 25:1-13

What if solitude and silence allow the flask of your soul to be filled with the oil that is God? How much oil is in my lamp and flask at this moment?

In what ways am I actively allowing my lamp and flask to be filled with God's presence?

How am I relying on others to provide oil for my lamp instead of seeking it myself?

When have I been like the wise maiden, with oil in my lamp, invited into the wedding feast to celebrate with the King and His family?

When have I been like the foolish maiden, pleading to enter but being refused because I was unprepared?

What are the most significant obstacles in my life that prevent me from filling my lamp abundantly with oil?



Week Four | Becoming Radical Presence | Out of Solitude

I light this candle, tuning into the presence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit here with me now...

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And now let's begin...

God, I choose to trust that You are here with me, desiring to meet me in this moment. As I begin to pray, I breathe slowly, focusing my scattered thoughts on Your presence. I welcome the fullness of who You are into the fullness of who I am, right here, right now.

*I enter into this sacred risk of the practice of solitude and silence. I welcome you in **conversation** and I welcome you in honest **relationship**.*

“It is not so difficult to see that, in our world, we all have a strong desire to accomplish something. Some think in terms of great, dramatic changes to the structure of society. Others aim to at least make a home, write a book, invent a machine, or win a trophy. Some seem content simply to do something worthwhile for someone. But nearly all of us measure ourselves by our contribution to life.

As Christians, we often feel a special call to do good: give advice, offer comfort, cast out a devil or two, or even preach the good news from place to place. More often than not, we not only desire to do meaningful things, but we also make the results of our work the basis for our self-esteem. Then, we do not merely have successes—we become our successes.

When we become too impressed by the results of our work, we slowly adopt the mistaken belief that life is one large scoreboard where our worth is measured by points. Before we realize it, we have sold our souls to the many grade-givers around us. This means we are not only in the world but also of it. We become what the world makes us. And the more we allow our accomplishments—the results of our actions—to define our self-worth, the more we find ourselves walking on mental and spiritual eggshells, unsure if we can live up to the expectations created by our last success.

To live a Christian life means to live in the world without being of it. Solitude is where this inner freedom can grow. Jesus often went to a lonely place to pray—to deepen his awareness that all his power was given to him, that all his words came from the Father, and that all his works were not his own but the works of the One who sent him. In those lonely places, Jesus found the freedom to fail.

A life without a lonely place—a quiet center—easily becomes destructive. When we cling to the results of our actions as our sole means of self-identification, we become possessive and defensive, viewing others more as threats to be kept at bay than as friends with whom we share life’s gifts.

In solitude, we come to understand that our worth is not tied to our usefulness. Solitude allows us to unmask the illusion of possessiveness and discover, at our core, that we are not what we achieve but what has been given to us. In solitude, we hear the voice of the One who spoke to us before we could speak, who healed us before we could help ourselves, who freed us before we could free others, and who loved us before we could love anyone else.

In this solitude, we learn that being is more important than having and that our worth exceeds the results of our efforts. We discover that life is not a possession to defend but a gift to share. It is in solitude that we realize the healing words we speak are not our own but are given to us; that the love we express is part of a greater love; and that the new life we bring forth is not something to cling to but a gift to be received.

In solitude, our hearts can slowly shed their many protective layers and grow so wide and deep that nothing human feels foreign to us. Then we can be contrite and broken, not just by our own sins and failings, but by the pain of others. From this place, a new awareness can emerge—one that transcends the limits of our human efforts.

We, who in our fearful narrow-mindedness worried there wouldn’t be enough for ourselves, find abundance. For after feeding more than five thousand, there were still twelve baskets of bread and fish remaining. Out of the solitude of our hearts, care can be born—a sign of our faithful expectation of the coming day of complete joy.”

— *Out of Solitude* by Henri Nouwen

In Conclusion: *Dallas Willard on practicing silence and solitude:*

“Being alone and quiet and not speaking or hearing are disciplines that are especially useful to break the habit of being in charge, of carrying the world on our shoulders. Leaders need some extensive time each week when they are doing nothing. As people grow in these practices, they will rediscover their soul, learn that God is here, and know that his world is in good hands, as Jesus repeatedly said.”

Taking Action

1. **DO NOTHING:** The greatest risk this month may be embracing the practice of doing nothing. It could require more courage, risk, and intentionality than anything you've done so far to consistently carve out time and moments to simply be still. Take heart—when we allow ourselves to do nothing, God often does His deepest work within us.
2. **JOIN** BGS Alumni Slack community if you still need to do so. Participants who are joining for only some of The Grove Blocks and not the entirety of the journey should have received an invitation to the Slack channel within the BGS Alumni Slack organization with the name **The-grove-all-participants**. If you have not, reach out to conrad@wildatheart.org.
3. **MEDITATE:** Engage in each weekly meditation for 5 of the next 7 days of each week. What do you notice?
4. **PRACTICE THE SACRED PHRASE - *The Goal is Him*** - in conversation with God throughout the moments of your hours and days in this next month. Return to this phrase as many times as you are able within the regular activity of your everyday life. Become curious about His particular provision and promise.
5. **ANSWER THIS QUESTION:** Your life is full. What will you set aside or intentionally let go of to make room for The Grove?
6. For handouts, recorded sessions, and anything else relevant to The Grove, go to **BecomeGoodSoil.com/TheGrove**.

For the Kingdom,
Morgan