

# Spiritual Rhythms

## SILENCE & SOLITUDE

*“For many of us, the great danger is not that we will renounce our faith. It is that we will become so distracted and rushed and preoccupied that we will settle for a mediocre version of it. We will just skim our lives instead of actually living them.”* –John Ortberg, author and minister

But Jesus calls us to something more:

*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.* –Matthew 11:28–30

What we do with our hours today shapes the person we will become tomorrow. To experience the “deeper life,” we must develop spiritual practices that help us **encounter** God, **experience** the Holy Spirit, and follow Jesus’ **example**. What we do with our time, talent, and resources reflects our level of commitment to follow Jesus.

In *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, John Mark Comer notes “If you want to experience the life of Jesus, you have to adopt the lifestyle of Jesus.”<sup>1</sup> Comer reminds us that time is one of our most precious resources, and we can never increase the amount of time we have. All we can do is learn to live within the limits of that “time,” and in this book he teaches us about practices to help us do just that.

The deeper life is exemplified in three of CCC’s DNA statements:<sup>2</sup>

- *We are all for Jesus.* When we center our lives on Jesus, our focus becomes clear, and our values align with his. This leads us to the practice of simplicity.
- *We are empowered by the Holy Spirit.* When we work from the outflow of the Spirit within us, we stop striving for outward success and the approval of people. This frees us to practice sabbath.
- *We encounter the Father daily.* To encounter God, we need to quiet our minds, slow our pace, and pay attention to the reality of God’s presence. These choices require slowing, silence, and solitude.

Comer encourages us to incorporate these practices in our daily lives.

## SCRIPTURE BASIS

Read the following verses and write down things you notice Jesus did (*hint: look for action verbs*).

- Luke 2:39–42
- Matthew 3:13–17
- Matthew 4:1–4
- Mark 1:21
- Mark 1:35–39
- Mark 2:23, 3:1
- Mark 3:7
- Mark 6:1–6
- Mark 6:45–46
- Mark 9:2–3
- Luke 5:16
- Luke 6:12–13
- Luke 9:10–11
- Luke 11:1–4
- Luke 14:1–4

<sup>1</sup> John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* (2021), page 82

<sup>2</sup> CCC’s DNA statements can be read here: [cccomaha.org/dna](http://cccomaha.org/dna)

## REFLECTION

- Where do you see contrast between Jesus' action and rest? Does he seem busy? Or intentional?
- What do you notice about Jesus' lifestyle that might be in contrast with our pace of life today?

## RESPONSE

There are two dimensions of silence: external and internal. External is where we get away from people, noise, and stimuli. Internal is when we quiet the voices in our head and center our mind on God. Which of these is harder for you and why?

## CHRISTIAN TRADITION

Julian of Norwich (~1343–1416) experienced a life-threatening illness when she was thirty years old, during which time she received visions from God. After this illness, she chose a life of complete solitude, living in a small cell attached to the church. As an “ anchoress,” she would have undergone a rigorous selection process and been “ committed” by her church to this life of seclusion. The congregation would have provided for her physical needs, while Julian devoted herself to prayers, supplication, and wise counsel for the people through a small window in her cell. Her writing, *The Revelations of Divine Love*, is the earliest surviving English language work written by a woman. While our 21<sup>st</sup>-century lifestyle may not seem conducive to complete solitude, her example serves to remind us that silence and solitude are effective pathways to experiencing God.<sup>3</sup>

## PRACTICE

**Choose one or more exercises to try this week, alone or in community.** A few things to remember:<sup>4</sup>

- Start where you are, not where you think you should be. If you can only be silent for five minutes, start there and move forward. We grow through small, incremental acts that in time become habits, which eventually become character. Beware of perfectionism or overreaching.
- Resist the urge to say, “ I’m bad at this,” or “ I can’t do it,” or “ This isn’t me.” You can’t “ succeed” or “ fail” at this practice. Be patient with the process and with yourself.
- If sitting still is hard for you, feel free to practice silence and solitude while on a walk, or while folding laundry, or during gentle stretches.

### New to this practice?

- Set aside fifteen minutes (each morning or evening, while kids are napping, or over a lunch hour) for silence. Choose a quiet place and a comfortable chair, grab a favorite beverage and blanket, and open your Bible to Psalm 1. Rest in God’s presence, like “ a tree planted by streams of water.” If you are concerned about the time, set an alarm on your phone, and place it where you can hear it, but not see or reach it.
- Turn off notifications on your phone. Schedule a specific time each day to check email or messages and only respond at that time.
- Turn off the sound and vibrate features of your phone/iPad/computer.
- Drive your commute without radio, music, a podcast, or other distracting noise.

### Ready to go deeper?

---

<sup>3</sup> [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julian\\_of\\_Norwich#Personal\\_life](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julian_of_Norwich#Personal_life)

<sup>4</sup> [johnmarkcomer.com/blog/unhurry](http://johnmarkcomer.com/blog/unhurry)

- Spend four to six hours at a beautiful park, weather permitting. Leave your phone in the car.
- Schedule a 24-hour silent retreat.<sup>5</sup> Bring your Bible and journal through one of the Gospels.
- Choose to intentionally limit your words for one day. Listen before talking. Allow others to respond before you do in a meeting. Don't use a paragraph when a couple of words will suffice. Let your family or co-workers in on your plan so that you don't come across as rude!

## PRAYER FOCUS

Use these specific prayer prompts to start your time with God:

- Creator God, thank you for these gifts... (*salvation, people, resources*)
- Almighty God, I worship you for your... (*characteristics of God, like faithfulness, power, love*)
- Father God, I rest in your presence... (*listen to God's words of love to you*)
- Gracious God, I ask for your provision... (*share your needs*)

## RESOURCES

Books and websites that support this week's practice:

- John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in the Chaos of the Modern World*, (Waterbrook, 2019). See also Comer's web resources which include exercises for the practices of silence, solitude, sabbath, simplicity, and slowing at [johnmarkcomer.com/blog/unhurry](http://johnmarkcomer.com/blog/unhurry)
- A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, (Anecko Press, 2015, updated edition)
- Ruth Haley Barton, *Invitation to Silence and Solitude: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence*, (IVP books, 2010)
- Ruth Haley Barton, *Invitation to Retreat: The Gift and Necessity of Time Away with God* (IVP books, 2018)
- Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart in Daily Practice: Experiments in Spiritual Transformation*, (NavPress, 2006)

---

<sup>5</sup> In the Omaha area, visit the Carol Joy Holling Retreat Center near Mahoney State Park or the Saint Benedict Center (Schuyler, NE). Or, take advantage of a day when your spouse or roommate are gone and stay home.