The Road Less Traveled:  
Silence and Solitude  
1 Kings 19:9-15  
Englewood Baptist Church  
Sunday morning, Sept. 19, 2010

Open your Bible to 1 Kings 19.

Last week, I began a series of sermons entitled “The Road Less Traveled.” This group of messages is meant to challenge our spiritual depth and cause us to consider how passionately we are pursuing Christ. Most people in our world today invest very little time in things like prayer, fasting, meditation, and Bible reading. The spiritual disciplines truly are the roads less traveled. Today I want to discuss the discipline of silence and solitude, of quiet time.

It was author Jean Fleming who once said this about our planet:

“We live in a noisy, busy world. Silence and solitude are not twentieth-century words. They fit the era of Victorian lace, high-button shoes, and kerosene lamps better than our age of television, video arcades, and joggers wired with earphones. We have become a people with an aversion to quiet and an uneasiness with being alone.” --Jean Fleming

I think she’s right. This past July, I spent two consecutive weeks in isolation and study. I entered Union’s Doctoral program for preaching and I became a resident of a small, cozy campus in a wooded portion of Memphis, TN. All day long I listened to a teacher talk, and then at night, I would retreat to my room where there was no phone, no television, no Nintendo Wii, no radio, no 6 year old or 5 year old or 3 year old or 2 year old. No wife. No friends. No news anchors. No nothing. Just a bed, a bathroom, and a big stack of books.

The first few nights were like detox. I felt like I was being purged from the daily demands and pressures of life. No one was begging me to get in the floor to do a solar system planet puzzle. No green garbage can was crying out my name saying, “take me to the curb.” It was a drastic change of pace, and it felt kind of nice at first. Week one, I have to admit, was wonderful. But, then came the second week. Week two was eerie. The sound of silence became awkward and deafening. I found myself avoiding the room and lingering longer at the supper table with classmates. I was realizing how much my life is marked by noise and how strange it feels to be alone with my thoughts.

It forced me to ask this question: how comfortable am I with being alone? How often am I alone with no one but the Lord to converse with? No music, news, sports, or friends filling up my ears? Just me and the Lord. How about you? How much time do you devote to silence and solitude?
Most of us spend very little time in complete quiet, and yet these are the moments in which we are most able to hear God speak. In his book, *The Still Hour*, Austin Phelps said it this way:

"It has been said that no great work in literature or in science was ever wrought by a man who did not love solitude. We may lay it down as an elementary principle that no large growth in holiness was ever gained by one who did not take time to be often alone with God. —Austin Phelps, *The Still Hour*"

Are you often alone with God?

In the passage of Scripture that we have turned to today, we find the prophet Elijah. He is not surrounded by the faces of foes at Mt. Carmel. He is not followed by a great mass of miracle seeking men and women. He is completely alone, in a cave. I wish I could tell you that the Lord was happy with him for taking a personal retreat, but Elijah was NOT running to God; he was running away from God, and away from God’s will. He had resigned his post as prophet to the people.

There he sat in a sea of self-pity, and watch how God breaks the silence. Here comes the penetrating question.

Read 1 Kings 19:9-15.

People get depressed when they think that God has gone to sleep. A father grows angry when his son remains a prodigal. A wife turns her back on God when her husband refuses to follow her to church. A young woman gets bitter when her boyfriend suddenly breaks off the relationship. Circumstances so easily make us sour.

Elijah was as sour as a green apple. Matthew Henry says he went to this cave to “indulge his melancholy.” That’s an old way of saying, “host a pity party.” He had seen God do a miracle on a mountain when blazing fire sent the prophets of Baal running. All this was a high-water mark for his ministry, but when the smoke had cleared from that event, things were still lackluster in his homeland. That one victory did not bring his desired results. After all, why was the nation still so spiritually dead? Jezebel was still killing the godly and Elijah had lost all hope for nationwide revival.

He thought, “God, I've done my part, where are you?” That was his thought, even though it was not spoken. Elijah was depressed and this is readily seen in vv. 3-5. Skip back up and see how sad he was.

Read vv.3-5...
“I’m not better than my ancestors,” he said. It sounds like a humble, godly statement, but the truth is, Elijah was acting like an atheist. He compared himself to his forefathers who were spiritually dead and did nothing for God. He felt incapable of causing any real change in his country. “God is asleep and so are these people. I’m no use here. It’s hopeless.”

And God had had enough of Elijah’s rotten attitude, so he speaks up in v.9, “What are YOU doing HERE?” he asks. “Why have you left your post with your people where I appointed you to serve as my spokesman?”

And Elijah says in v 10, “Because I’m the only one that cares!” “I have been very zealous, I’ve been living the life, but nobody else is. Israel is a lost cause.”

And God says, “Get up and go to the mouth of the cave.” If God ever tells you to get up and go to a mouth of a cave, you should do it. Elijah listened. The end of v.11 pictures three phenomena that announce the Lord’s arrival: wind, earth, and fire.

V. 11, *then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord.* A great tempest, a storm struck the side of the mountain and it ripped rocks loose and sent them running down to the valley. But the Bible says, “The Lord was not in the spectacular.”

V. 11, *then the floor began to rumble. “After the wind there was an earthquake.” And it must have registered a 10.0 on the scale. “But the Lord was not in the spectacular.”*

V.12, *then the fire from heaven fell, “After the earthquake came a fire,” but the Lord was not in the spectacular.*

And then it says…. *And after the fire came a gentle whisper, “ELIJAH.”* And there was the Lord soaring through the silence. So present was the power of God, that Elijah joined the company of angels in Isaiah, who covered their face before Him. God was near.

James E. Smith says in this commentary of the Kings:

*Through these signs God taught Elijah an important lesson. The spectacular and dramatic have their place in God’s order of things. Most often, however, the divine program is carried forward through the still small voice which speaks to the hearts of people.* –James E. Smith, in the Old Testament Survey Series

Has God ever given you that still, small voice? If you are ever so blessed to hear it, come to the mouth of the cave. Pay attention.

God revived Elijah, and He did it through soft silence and through solitude. If God wanted to speak to you, would he be able to find a window of peace and quiet…or is it all filled up with noise? Another question…if God wanted to say something to you, would
He be hard pressed to find two holes in your head unfilled by the tyranny of the urgent the obsession to be productive?

You see, in our world, there’s an old adage that says, “Don’t just sit there, do something.” Isn’t it just like God to turn conventional wisdom upside down. “Don’t just do something, sit there.”

God speaks gently to those who are positioned to hear.

With the remaining time today, I want to build a biblical case for quiet time. I want you to see how biblical this is.

Follow with me…

Five Reasons To Carve Out Quiet Time

1. Because Jesus did it. (Matt. 4:1; 14:23; Mark 1:35; Luke 4:42)

Matthew 4:1 “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted…” Jesus began his ministry with people by spending 40 days without so much as a single breathing friend. He was led through a lengthy period of fasting and solitude and he learned in that time to hear the voice of the Father and to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit. Luke 4:14 tells us that when Jesus came back from this 40-day retreat, he came “in the power of the Holy Spirit.” He came back with new power! The solitude had spiritually charged his batteries.

Solitude makes people less shallow. It creates oceans of depth in our soul and re-creates compassion for those we serve. Jesus served people, but he withdrew from those people in order to regain his strength. Is your heart happy with people right now? If not, maybe you need to find a cave.

2. Because it is worshipful. (Hab. 2:20; Zeph. 1:7, Psalm 46:10)

We often think about worship as a big group of people singing out loud to the Lord, but the Bible often presents a picture of worship as Psalm 46:10, “be still and know that He is God.” It is humble to bow before God in silence and to surrender to His lordship. In the book of Habakkuk, it says this:

But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before Him.
–Habakkuk 2:20

There are times to speak to God and then there are times to be like the wise men who came to the feet of the Savior and beheld his glory. We too are wise to fix our eyes upon him and to be still.

This is the beauty also, might I say, of being outdoors in God’s created world. Nature is God’s theatre and we miss opportunities to gaze at His splendor when we always sit in
front of a glowing screen. Drive down the road of your neighborhood one night slowly and just count how many homes have the soft glow of television flickering in the background. We are captivated by the motion picture, and so we often miss out on the giant panoramic above the roof—the stars that shout God’s glory from above. Is it any wonder that David became a man after God’s own heart, as he was sleeping on his back in the fields with sheep. David became a mighty man in the eyes of people because he had invested years in worshipful quiet time. As Psalm 19 says, “The heavens declare the glory of God.” David had come to know it. And so should we. Watching a sunset should move us as much as a solo sung on a Sunday. Let all the earth be silent before him. It’s worshipful.

Number 3, we should carve out quiet time…

3. Because it rejuvenates the inner and outer person. (Mark 6:31)

Once, after Jesus had poured out his life to the needy, he and his disciples were worn out and exhausted. Jesus knew when to draw the line and when to pull away. Mark 6:31 depicts Jesus caring for his disciples by calling it quitting time. After a hard day, he says this:

“Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” Mark 6:31

My boys have a battery powered 4-wheeler that tops out at 5 mph. They have ridden that red machine so much that the plastic tires are wearing through. On the steering column, is a gadget with 4 lights, which tells the driver how much juice remains before it shuts down. The first thing they do when they hop on that ride is they punch that button. They wanna know how much energy remains.

Sometimes I wish that human beings had such a gadget strapped to their foreheads. I wish I could walk up to you right now and find out how much Jesus you have in your tank. When that lady in line at the grocery store is rude to me, I could just touch her forehead and say, “Now I understand you! Your charge is low. You need to go find a cave.”

We are all human and even the best of us loses compassion for people without rest and renewal. Jesus continues to call out to his disciples today, and with a gentle voice, “Come with me by yourself to a quiet place and get some rest.” You just put your name at the beginning of that verse, “Ben, come with me by yourself to a quiet place and get some rest.” Put your name there. Do you need rest?

When is the last time you heard the Spirit say that to you? Did you listen?

And let me say this, many preachers come down hard on men who hunt and fish and golf and such. The reason for this is that far too many men worship their hobbies. However, when these things are held to a healthy balance, they make us better husbands, fathers, and employees. Just look at this word for a moment:
Recreation: refreshment of strength and spirits after work

To recreate means to re-create. When we exercise, and practice the Sabbath principle with rest, when we spend time reading the Bible by a free-flowing river or creek, what does this do to our spirit? It re-creates us. It refreshes us. It makes us better people for the people who put up with us every day. Having a consistent quiet time will recreate you. Jesus knew that, and taught that to his disciples. “Come with me to a quiet place and get some rest.”

#4, You should carve out quiet time because…

4. Because it opens our ears to God. (Psalm 40:6; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13)

Look at Psalm 40:6 with me. This is what it says…

*Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced.*
*Psalm 40:6*

When you and I read that verse, we think about a little girl getting her ears pierced for jewelry, but that word pierced means to open. In the literal Hebrew, it means, “ears you have dug for me, Oh God!” The idea is, many people are “blockheads”—eyes, nose, and a mouth, but no ears. It takes a work of God for a man’s ears to be truly opened and sensitive to spiritual things. That’s why the Psalmist says, “I praise you, Oh God, for you have pierced my ears. I know what you desire and I can hear your voice.”

When you and I choose to spend time in solitude, we prove to God that we want to hear what He wants to say. You know this phrase, “He who has ears, let him hear!” Jesus said that over and over and over in the New Testament. He was like a broken record. Why did Jesus say that so much? Because he knew that not everybody in earshot was paying attention.

Getting alone with God says, “God, I am paying attention. My ears are pierced and opened.” Talk to me. Talk to me.

#5, reason why you should carve out quiet time…

5. Because God wants to lead you. (Luke 6:12-13; Prov. 3:5-6)

How can you live according to God’s will? How do you know what college to attend, what woman to marry, what career to pursue, what house to buy, what ministry to be plugged into, what words to choose in a time of conflict? You need to hear from God. In Luke 6:12-13, Jesus is about to make 12 of the biggest choices in his life—who would he select as his disciples? He could not afford to mess this up. So what did he do? He got alone with God…
Now it was during this time that Jesus went out to the mountain to pray, and he spent all night in prayer to God. When morning came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles… Luke 6:12-13

You and I, like Jesus, are free agents of the Lord. He has given us the ability to make our own decision in this life. I don’t know about you, but I have a hard time making choices and sometimes I stress over it. Not only do we stress over the big stuff; we stress over the small stuff: should I spend my money on this? Should I let my child do that? Should I confront my friend over this?

Decisions are overwhelming. They come like the relentless waves of a hurricane and the older we get, the faster they come the shore. The pace picks up with time. I don’t know about you, but I don’t want to take one step outside of God’s will. I need his help and I need to get alone with him to talk about it.

When we create space in our day, we say to God, “I need your guidance.” And those are four words that God loves to hear.

Is your life marked by noise, busyness, and chaos? Is the sea of your schedule always chopping and churning? Perhaps its time that you let Jesus rebuke the wind and the waves. He stood up and he said, “Silence!” Is that what He’s saying to you?

Here are just a few suggestions for following through with this message.

**How To Create Some Space**

- **Set a realistic goal for this week.** Don’t walk out of here and say that you are now going to rise every morning at 4 AM and spend two hours alone with God. If you do that, your heart has left your head. Look at your schedule and set a goal for 20 minutes a day. You’ll be surprised how much you can accomplish with consistency in small chunks.

- **Set a time for a personal retreat.** If you are married, talk to your spouse about flip-flopping. You take a full day away at a hotel, or a cabin, or a bed and breakfast, and spend time alone with God. Take your Bible and a pen or some other Christian reading. Sleep, rest, and enjoy silence. When you get back, give your spouse the chance to do the same. Give God the opportunity to rejuvenate you.

Growing up as a basketball player, I learned that good players know how to box out. If you aren’t familiar with this term, when a shot goes up to the rim, players are supposed to create some space by getting low and pushing back. This space becomes theirs and if the ball happens to fall in their space, then the team can advance. I had one coach, in particular, that would stop practice and run over to me. He would blow his whistle and he would bark out these words, “Mandrell, is that yours? And he would point to my backside. (Can I say that in church?) And with an embarrassed look I would say, “Yes sir.” And he would always say, “God gave it to you, now use it.” What he meant was, “You have the power within you to create the necessary space. Do it.”
And the same is true in our spiritual lives. God has given you the ability to “box out” some space and to make room for the Spirit to move. The choice yours.

And the Word of the Lord came to Elijah, and it came in a quiet time.