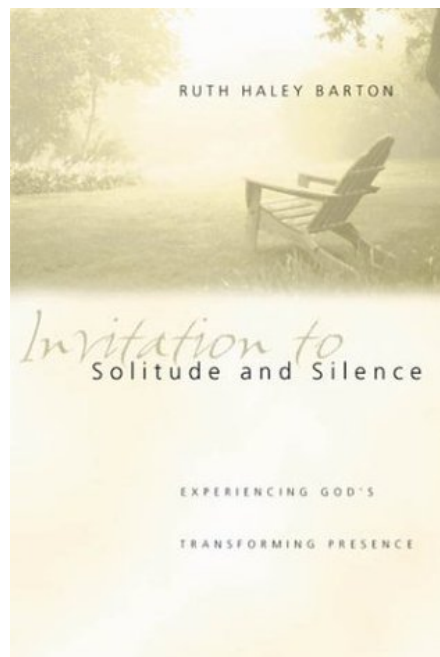




Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence

Ruth Haley Barton , Dallas Willard (Foreword) , R. Ruth Barton

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Winner of a *Christianity Today* 2005 Book Award!

To seek to fill a book with words about moving beyond words into solitude and silence is a daunting task; it is laughable really, if one sees the irony in it all. I have found myself . . . drawn to the task and yet somehow strangely resistant. On the one hand, I have been drawn to the task because my journey into solitude and silence has been the single most meaningful aspect of my spiritual life to date. . . . On the other hand, I am aware of the continuing challenge solitude and silence represent in my own life. Even though it has been well over ten years since I first said yes to God's invitations to enter more intentionally into these disciplines, I still find it challenging to protect space for these times apart which so deeply satisfy the empty places of my soul.

Ruth Haley Barton describes how she has discovered the real presence of God--the God who is present through the practice of solitude and silence. Her book invites you to meet God deeply and fully outside the demands and noise of daily life. It is a call to the adventure of spiritual transformation--an adventure that will lead you to freedom and authenticity, allowing you to become the person God created you to be.

In *Invitation to Solitude and Silence* Barton offers spiritual guidance for your journey, helping you to hear God's call more clearly and showing you concrete ways to say yes. Chapter by chapter she combines teaching and reflection on different aspects of the journey with activities and disciplines that will help you to practice solitude and silence. Barton offers the prophet Elijah as a biblical guide for your journey. And she offers her own perspective to help you understand the ups and downs you might experience along the way.

The beauty of a true invitation is that you really do have a choice. You can say yes or no. God is waiting for you to respond to him from the depths of your desire for relationship, belonging and transformation. Will you say yes?

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From Reader Review Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence for online ebook

Laurie says

I would love to be able to take "retreat days" -- I remember doing so when I lived and taught in SB and I was single. Life has a way of imposing responsibilities. Maybe this summer.

So true: "What deadens us most to God's presence within, I think, is the inner dialogue that we are engaged in within ourselves, the endless chatter of human thought. I suspect that there is nothing more crucial to true spiritual comfort than being able from time to time to stop that chatter, including the chatter of spoken prayer. FREDERICK BUECHNER, TELLING SECRETS"

Love this quote: "Blaise Pascal, the remarkable scientist, theologian and Christian of the seventeenth century, remarked in his *Pensees* (section 136) that "all the unhappiness of men arises from one single fact, that they cannot stay quietly in their own room.""

1 Kings 19 - Elijah's weariness and God's encouragement: ""Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?""

Simple truth: "A good journey begins with knowing where we are and being willing to go somewhere else."
RICHARD ROHR

Must apply to many of us: "But the deeper truth was this: even though I had been a Christian for many years I did not know how to love-really. Particularly when love was demanding or inconvenient or interfered with my own desires, I did not know how to die to myself in even the smallest way."

"in silence there is the potential for each of us to "know that I am God" with such certainty that the competing powers of evil and sin and the ego-self can no longer hold us in their grip."

Another great quote: "When we make room for silence we make room for ourselves.... Silence invites the unknown, the untamed, the wild, the shy, the unfathomable-that which rarely has a chance to surface within us. GUNILLA NORRIS, SHARING SILENCE" -- so what is the "wild, the shy, the unfathomable" within me?

Listen -- that is my one word for 2016 --

"Without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life. ... We do not take the spiritual life seriously if we do not set aside some time to be with God and listen to him. HENRI NOUWEN"

Or from the bondage of our own expectations for ourselves--"In solitude God begins to free us from our bondage to human expectations, for there we experience God as our ultimate reality-the One in whom we live and move and have our being. In solitude our thoughts and our mind, our will and our desires are reoriented Godward so we become less and less attracted by external forces and can be more deeply responsive to God's desire and prayer in us."

So me! "Reliance on our own thoughts and words, even in our praying, can be one facet of a need to control

things, to set the agenda, or at least to know what the agenda is even in our relationship ship with God. It is in silence that we habitually release our own agendas and our need to control and become more willing and able to give ourselves to God's loving initiative. In silence we create space for God's activity rather than filling every minute with our own."

Think about this: "You may not realize it, but your desire for God is the truest and most essential thing about you...Your desire for God and your capacity to connect with God as a human soul is the essence of who you are."

And this! "But there is an even greater truth: before you were even aware of your desire for God, God desired you."

And sometimes the "music of my life" gets stuck on replay -- stopping must become intentional: "When we stop the music of our life to enter into solitude, we sit down right where we are at that moment, and that's where we meet God. We meet God in our present delight or our present sadness. We meet God in the tears of our life and the laughter of our life. We meet God in our most unnerving questions and in the answers we are celebrating, ebrating. No matter where we are on any given day, when the music stops and everything gets quiet, we sit down right where we are and allow ourselves to be there with him."

True for me also -- journaling has always helped in this: "Now I know that my high school experience of emptiness-and the choice not to numb that emptiness in the ways teenagers often do-forced me to cling to God with the desperation of one hanging over an abyss. It enlarged my capacity for God and enabled me to receive ceive the presence of God. This would have been totally unnecessary if my life had been full of all I thought I wanted."

Been there and it's worth the wait: "Waiting, in the realm of the soul, presents us with the same agony. We sit in the waiting room of the soul because we need something. Yes, we could get up and leave, but we would be walking away from the very place where our need could be met. And so we remain in the waiting place, totally at the mercy of God's timing and initiative in our life. And sooner or later God does make himself known."

Parallels to Elijah -- 2000-2015: "I believe there was a literal wind, a literal earthquake, a literal fire. But I also believe that this elemental chaos is a metaphor for the inner chaos that surges within when we stay in the presence of the Unchanging changing Real long enough for pretense and performance and every other thing that has bolstered our sense of self to fall away. When we have been stripped of external distraction, we face the fact that the deepest level of chaos is inside us, at our very core. In this place we are buffeted feted by all manner of questions and emotions. False patterns of thinking and being and doing that have lurked unnoticed under the surface busyness of our lives are all of sudden on the surface, wreaking havoc on the structures and foundations on which we have built our identity. Things that seemed sturdy and utterly solid-our sense of who God is and where he can be found, our sense of ourselves and how we identify ourselves in this world, our sense of how much we can control outcomes in our own life and in the lives of others-now swirl around us in broken pieces, propelled by forces that are clearly more powerful than we are."

Remember "still": "I began to see that my motives for much of my activity were not as pure and altruistic and "spiritual" as I had wanted to believe. When these questions came for the first time, I had to face the fact that much of my hard work and service vice up to that point had been driven by an effort to please others and prove my worth to them-particularly those in positions of authority. Over time I became aware that even though I had a sincere desire to serve God, there was also a compulsive need to prove myself...It was confusing and frightening to see this and to name it in God's presence. Even more devastating was the realization that these patterns terns of relying on performance to prove my worth were so deeply rooted that I had no idea how to change them...It takes every bit of strength we have gained in that resting to stand firm in the midst of the storm that is created by these first glimpses of ourselves as we really are. Perhaps we

glimpse an ego-driven self that is bent on control and image management. ment. Perhaps we see an empty self that is hungry to fill itself with the approval of others. Perhaps we glimpse the broken self desperately seeking to preserve its identity as one who has it all together. Or maybe we see a wounded self that has spent untold energy seeking healing where healing cannot be found." (Perhaps all of the above)

"It is comforting-and absolutely essential-to know that this is a very predictable place on the spiritual journey. In classic Christian tradition it is known as the process of illumination (waking up to what reality actually is) and purgation (being stripped of that within us that is false). If we are unaware of this stage, we might fear that we are somehow falling off the spiritual path rather than trusting it"...

"It is the process that began for Saul when we was blinded by the light of God's presence on the Damascus Road and sat in darkness for three days until the "scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored" (Acts 9:18). During those three days, he saw himself for who he was and responded deeply to the invitations of God in his life. He was changed forever." -- I have never before thought about how gut-wrenching those days must have been for Paul as he saw himself in truth.

"Henri Nouwen says, solitude is not a private therapeutic place. Rather it is the place of conversion, the place where the old self dies and the new self is born."

"Solitude eventually offers a quiet gift of grace, a gift that comes whenever we are able to face ourselves honestly: the gift of acceptance, of compassion, for who we are as we are. As we allow ourselves to be known in solitude, we discover that we are known by love. Beyond the pain of self-discovery there is a love that does not condemn us but calls us to itself. This love it receives us as we are. PARKER PALMER"

When I was praying for humility and a gentle spirit, God was waiting for me to get to this point: "We learn to recognize the gifts and dynamics of the authentic self because they are qualitatively different from those that come primarily from human striving; they come forth in peace and humility and strength to meet the deep needs of our world. When we grow quiet enough to notice the difference between these two aspects of ourselves, true spiritual guidance can begin to unfold in our life."

Interesting: "It is interesting that Elijah never asked for guidance; guidance simply came in the context of his willingness to be with God in utter openness and vulnerability. Something in the willingness to stop the flow of his own words and listen in silence opened up space for the One who longs to speak and offer guidance for our next steps and knottiest questions." -- like Elisabeth Elliott said, "just do the next thing"

I love this and so true: "Contained within each faithful response to God's guidance is the seed of the next possibility."

"

Fred says

Read this book slowly, and then read it again. Use it as a guide to spend time alone with God. This book tests the theory of Pascal that man's biggest problem is his inability to sit alone in a room. Barton will challenge us to do just that, confident that if we can stand to be alone with ourselves in God's presence we will face our false selves, our harried selves, our fake spirituality and, after discarding them, find our place as children of God, deeply loved. This book is thoroughly Christian and practical, thoughtful but not mystical.

Kristi Thomas says

So many good nuggets of wisdom in this book! I'm glad I'm reading it.

"Inner silence depends on a continual seeking, a continual crying in the night, a repeated bending over the abyss...For He is found when He is sought, and when He is no longer sought, He escapes us." -Thomas Merton

Ashley says

I think I will use this book and refer back to it for the rest of my life. It was full of such helpful thoughts and ideas, and I have adopted a few new concrete practices that I hope will blossom more trust in my heart, and then overflow in more tangible love!! Thankfully, this book did not encourage my often selfish craving to be alone and think, but challenged that tendency! She writes of how our desire for God (often masked by a desire for other things) and our capacity to connect with him as a soul is the truest essence of who we are. She notes that solitude and silence are not indulgent exercises for when we are too busy and tired, but a way of acting in dependence on Him - a decision and practice that we then carry with us into our lives with others... a way of releasing fears and concerns, noticing what is true about me, stopping the endless chatter of my thoughts. I laughed when I read the chapter on rest for the mind because it nailed me! ("...even in prayer my mind keeps me flailing around rather than settling into the rest of God. My mind distracts me from the very thing my soul is longing for, the experience of rest and communion with God. I seem to always be occupying myself with things to great and marvelous for me.. my human mind is perpetually busy trying to control things, to figure things out...") This was timely reading for me during this summer sabbatical of rest and being loved by God apart from what I do for Him.

Note to my future self: This is where I got the poem for beginning the day, the nighttime prayer of examen, the "wall of mental impasse", and the trust envelope.

Deirdre says

Just as brilliant the second time round. Barton has nailed it. She accurately names the white evangelical pitfalls of productivity and success, and her exposition of Elijah's story resonates profoundly with the holes and twisted pieces in my own faith. I read this book over months, doing the exercises at the end of the chapters, and I am still plugging away at my twenty minutes a day of silence waiting for my own shook-up jar of sediment to settle. Would recommend to anyone who finds it hard to stop, sit down, and savour God's presence.

Michelle says

While we may know deep down that we are in need of silence, it can also be very hard and disconcerting to actually sit in the silence. Barton gives simple practices to embrace silence in our lives and the presence of God that can be found there.

Alan says

Very good introduction to the spiritual practices of solitude and silence, and the value thereof.

Pegweaver says

I actually wasn't able to finish it, which gives a clue to what I thought of it. I wouldn't say I disliked the book, but it wasn't especially enjoyable to read, and it was chock full of "not new information" for me. I felt like I could have written the book, in a much more readable fashion... and collecting the royalties would be wonderful. :-)

Neal says

Although the first few chapters use the same terminology as those used in mindfulness practices, mindfulness is never mentioned. Perhaps an uneasiness in using the term with a Christian audience?

Otherwise, it's a good exploration into meditative prayer, quieting the mind (life), being present and an awareness of God's presence. Each chapter has a solitude and silence exercise, and the appendix has a leadership guide for those interested in exploring the concepts with a small group.

A very easy, conversational reading. The focus is more about the heart, getting away from words and out of your head.

Catherine Ely says

Reading this book made me long for more of God in my life. Definitely a great book to read (and reread), contemplate, experience and apply in my life from now on.

Tricia Culp says

This is a wonderful introduction to the practices of solitude, silence, and meditation. Very accessible and practical. Barton, along with other teachers, asserts that these spiritual practices, although difficult to access and demanding at times, are the most transformative and freeing of all spiritual habits. I have found this to be true in my life, and I highly recommend this insightful guide!!

Jake Fraser says

This is a life style that tant foreign to me. However, I let the craziness of this world, along with anxiety

overcome me in a strong way, this book helped bring me back. An easy read but impactful and well written.

Ian Caveny says

This is not a book to be read, but to be experienced, month by month, ideally in a year divided by the twelve chapters. Ruth Haley Barton takes the story of Elijah on the mountain with God and dissects it into the daily Christian life. Move slowly through it, absorb it and contemplate, rest and be refreshed.

And take your time.

Audrey says

I was a tiny bit uncomfortable with some of the language the author used, many of which are regularly used in new-age publications by unbiblical "churches"...as a friend mentioned, there's a lot of text in the book and some ideas, that sound a little eastern-mystical, and I definitely don't agree with all the quotes that are listed, but those were just quotes from other (mostly Catholic) authors, and not the book itself.

Regarding the general content of the book, I really enjoyed it - she covers principles that I was taught as a new believer. Regular, quiet, intimate time and relationship with Jesus - time spent alone with Him, both speaking to Him in prayer and then listening for His direction and guidance, is what I was nursed on as a baby Christian!

Points that I resonated with:

- a. I was created with a desire for God - for reunion and communion with Him.
- b. Because of the constant 'noise' of distraction and sin, I often neglect spending quiet time alone with God but it's what my soul needs. I tend instead to get caught up in busyness, and in things, people, or activities that offer a temporary "fix" - I would call these 'broken cisterns' - something I've built to fill with water for my spiritual refreshment, but because it's not the spring from which the Living Water comes, it's broken and only leaks. I can only find lasting fulfillment in quiet time with Jesus.
- c. I have to be wary of allowing myself to become dangerously tired. If I don't get regular refreshing in the Spirit, I will burn out. Our family observes the Sabbath for this reason. The author came really close to encouraging her readers to observe the Sabbath for the purpose of regular rest and refreshing, I'm surprised she didn't. Even with observing the Sabbath though - having a day (once we get home from church) of just family hang-out time, not work or shopping or chores - I still have to watch how much I commit myself to. I am a people-pleaser because I love to bless people, so I WANT to do everything for everyone but I know I can't. I have to allow myself to say No based on putting my family and my ability to care for and be there for them first. But the second greatest commandment is to love others as yourself. And if I don't know how to love (care for) myself and my needs well, how on earth am I supposed to do so for others?
- d. She had a lot to say about quieting the mind, which I really resonate with right now. With my husband working 3/4 time for a seminary, me working 3/4 time for our previous church, both of us together pastoring a church with the hopes of getting it picked up off the ground and growing again, and raising our kids...I will say, when I finally lay my head down at night, my body may be exhausted but my brain is still running a million miles an hour. I think what I need to do more is stop working right up until bedtime, and spend that last time before I lay down in quiet time with Jesus, whether just being with Him in silence, our journaling, or

drawing...I think it will help quiet my mind so I fall asleep faster.

e. She talked (in a manner) about having a quiet spirit so that we can hear the promptings of the Holy Spirit. I am finding this to be so true as we are in ministry. If my mind is constantly full of all that must be done, I feel too busy to stop and listen to those promptings.

f. I love too, how it's often only in solitude and silence that He shows me my faults, my self-protective strategies, and how He wants me to improve.

g. Finally, I loved her chapter about how when we have built up enough of that quiet time reserve, then we'll find that we can live our busy lives, while being calm and quiet in our spirits. Life is busy! But our spirits don't have to be ruffled or "frenetic" because of it. If I continue to invest regular quiet time alone with Jesus, He will calm my waters and speak what I need to hear and restore and refresh my soul.

Joseph says

Invitation is a very honest and candid approach to placing God at the center of one's life, isolating the important and essential and blocking out the noise and distractions. Though a little preachy at times, it is not without a practical and personal reason. Many tools and processes are those that the author used herself during "noisy", busy, and trying times in order to reconnect with God, tapping into the writings and life of Elijah. Finally, many good strategies are given for short retreats or solitary moments/journal prompts.
