

"Come away with me," Jesus beckons.

The Spiritual Discipline

of Silence
& Solitude

By Staci Waldvogel

Jesus invites you to come away with Him. Not because you should. Not even out of obedience. Not because it's a duty. But because He loves you. Because He thinks you are special. Because you are worthy of His time, and He wants to be with you.

The Lord calls to us, men and women, to a level of relationship and connection for which our souls long. It's what we were created for. The busyness around us, of this world, calls loudly. Work, productivity, volunteering, the raising of children, obligations, media, and constant availability. We live in a place full of commerce, social engagements, social media, news media, and distractions—all manner of enticement for our focus, our time, and our devotion.

The Lord's voice can be hard to hear in the midst of all that. His creation reminds us of Him, but do we pause very often in wonder, in awe? God created the beauty of this world, the relationships we enjoy. He created work and family. He modeled serving others. All of these are good! But when these gifts are our focus and we become distracted from the Lover of our souls, they become diversions, even barriers, to what Jesus called the better way: quietly sitting at the feet of Jesus and learning from Him.

Did you know that you have received an invitation? A personal invitation, sent with love and addressed to you? Jesus calls you "Beloved" and invites you to come away with Him. I can imagine Him saying this to me: "Find rest for your weary soul. I will give you rest. The world gives you yokes. So many of them. But I want to exchange all of those for the one I have prepared for you. Come, take this one. It is easy; this one is light. I want you to learn from me, one-on-one. Like my personal apprentice. But it's not work or another thing to add to your list. Oh no, I have hand selected you. Not because of anything you have that will benefit me. No, I picked you out because you are special in my eyes. Because I know everything about you and love you unreservedly. There are things I want to show you. A new work

that I want to do. I want you to spend time with me; just with me. I am gentle and lowly in heart, easy to get along with. I'm not calling you here to berate you or chastise you about anything. I just want to spend time with you. Time that you have set apart, recognizing that I truly am your best thought by day or by night."

*Longing for peace?
Of course you are.
Need rest for
your weary soul?
Absolutely.*

Jesus invites all who labor and are heavy laden to come to Him. We just need to accept his invitation. Longing for peace? Of course you are. Need rest for your weary soul? Absolutely. God said it would be this way! He longs to fill that space. But we have to make space for Him to fill. So what can we do about that?

Recently, Kristen Torres, Minister of Spiritual Development and Women's Ministry, and I took a much needed break from everyday life, each of us sensing the need to get away with God. We went to a serene space about an hour away, a place specifically set aside for this purpose. Both of us realized that God was moving us in similar directions. As we listened to God and poured out our hearts to each other, we knew we were not alone in this. Most women we know feel the same kinds of pressures, busyness, and longings for God.

Last summer the Dawson Women's Ministry podcast, *Everywhere You Are*, curated a series focusing on spiritual disciplines. Women from Dawson shared their stories of connecting with God through prayer, lament, studying Scripture, worship, and silence and solitude. Last fall, Jan Kennamer Hart led a Wednesday-night series that

explored spiritual disciplines, which is again offered this spring. Also, Dawson's Women's Ministry hosted three 5-hour quiet retreats last September, October, and November.

What is a quiet retreat, you ask? It's really just space. Making space, on our campus, for people to spread out, to find a quiet nook or cranny (or Life Group room, or pew, or comfy chair) to get away and be alone and quiet with God, the Lover of our souls. We started and ended by calming our bodies and focusing on Scripture and quietly stretching our muscles. As we were doing this, I recognized the tension and stress I was carrying physically—my yokes—and then released them to the Lord. Then I was able to become calm and focused on God, shutting the door to all that clamors for my attention and fully opening the door to Him. Quieting the noise of the world so I could hear the still, small voice God most often uses. Prompts helped us to get started, but then we made use of the weekday quietness of the Dawson space and just met with God individually.

In the Spring, Dawson's Women's Ministry is planning a weekend retreat April 14–16. It won't be your usual women's retreat of Bible study, worship, and fellowship, although that sounds nice too! This one will be for those longing to get away, to have a break, to hear God in the quiet, peacefulness of a beautiful place away from all that calls for our attention every day. And yes, you are invited!

"Come away with me," calls the Lord. That's what we are going to do. Carve out space to hear God, to connect deeply with Him, to find real and deep refreshment for our souls. To paraphrase a mentor of mine, "Let us wait upon the Lord and see what He is going to do!"



Staci Waldvogel works at Fuller Theological Seminary and has been a member of Dawson for three years. She and her husband, Dieter, have three children, Mathis, Tyler, and Anna. Staci and Dieter serve with Dawson Young Professionals.