# *7 Desert Practices to Enrich Your Spiritual Life in a Modern Distracted World*

We live in the age of efficiency and fast pace, and of our value being commoditized by how much we can produce. During the Fall on Sundays we learned from the Desert Mothers and Fathers who lived in the 3rd and 4th centuries.
As Christianity became tied to imperial power in Rome, the desert mothers and fathers saw societal pressure to conform, produce, and climb as spiritually damaging. Hungering for a deeper relationship with God, they moved away from the distractions of their modern society (from the shouts) into the desert to seek a deep relationship with God (to hear the whispers), and to build a life of centeredness in God living in simplicity--many living in community holding all things in common. They have much to teach us in our modern society about carving out space to connect with God.
A "spiritual desert" did not have to be the literal desert, but could be anywhere where they purposely got away from distractions to center in God.
Their "desert" lives challenge us to practice *The Way of Jesus*, a rhythm of daily life, which ends up not being a barren desert! but a place ALIVE with God's presence!—that feeds the rest of our lives as we are held by Beloved!

1.Which of these 7 Practices speaks to you today as something you need in your life?
2.Which is the hardest for you?

Gracious God, the whole point of all these 7 practices is to have a deeper connection with You, the One who loves us like a Good Mother and a Good Father. God, help us create a rhythm of continually being with You in all we do, and there find deep connection, life, love, and peace with You. Amen!
I appreciate and love you, the Westview Family!
-Pastor Dan

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## 7 Practices of the Desert Mothers & Fathers

### Silence

**1Kings 19:12-13.** **12** After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. **13** When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face [in reverence] and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave [for God was in the whisper!].
Do you want to hear God better? Then learn to become a friend of silence. For God speaks in a whisper. The Desert Mothers and Father called silence *"hesychia"* which means inner quiet, rest, and stillness. Silence helped them with discernment and to hear God. We let go of all the external and internal chatter to draw near the whisper of God and discover the space between words. In practicing silence I am learning to be more selective in my words and often choosing not to speak just to make my opinion known. Silence helps us to intentionally create a space to surrender to the unknown and to hear what another Voice, God's voice, has to say. To hear the whisper of God requires learning to wait quietly in silence.

## Solitude

The Bible highlights solitude as an intentional spiritual discipline for withdrawing from daily distractions to experience intimacy, prayer, and renewal with God.

**Mark 1:35** 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.

The Desert Mothers and Fathers faced their *"demons,"* their shadow side, their fears and doubts when they live in solitude. Richard Rohr writes that *"solitude is a courageous encounter with our naked, most raw and real selves, in the presence of pure love.*" Anthony the Great wrote: *"The man who abides in solitude and is quiet, is delivered from fighting three battles: those of hearing, speech, and sight, Then he will have but one battle to fight – the battle of the heart."*

We run from facing our darker selves through numbing ourselves with busyness, noise, food, alcohol, shopping or whatever distract us from befriending, talking and managing with our own "demons." We flee but we can't hide. Meeting God [Beloved] in solitude and in his tender, accepting embrace, we can openly address our sins and imperfections and become shaped by his presence. I value more than ever the practice of retreat and morning private prayer.

## Simplicity

**Matthew 6:19-21, 33**"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy... But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."-Jesus.

*"The monastic path of simplicity isn't just about relinquishing physical belongings. It also invites a holding loosely of our habits and patterns in life, which weigh us down. It calls us to release our expectations of what we want to have happen and yield to what actually arrives."* – Christine Valters Paintner

The Desert Mothers and Fathers remind us to travel light. Let go of our burdens, anger and bitterness that block us from God. Focus only on carrying the essentials. Setting aside desires, a former strength that used to serve me well, and even my self-identity

and grasping only the hand of God makes this part of my journey simpler. Less stuff, more spirit in my satchel. Live simply and share so others can simply live.

## Prayer

**Revelation 3:20** [20] "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me," -Jesus.

The heart of the desert life included both vocal prayer and contemplation. Prayer was primary for the Desert Mothers and Fathers and they spoke continually with God. They were deeply connected to Jesus teaching and hungered to be close to God. To pray always – this is the real purpose of the desert life. Theophan the Recluse wrote, "*to pray is to descend with the mind into the heart and there to stand before the face of the Lord, ever present, all seeing within you."* Many of their prayers were wordless; but <u>being with God in their daily activities</u>. Words were lifted up sparingly. Prayer was not complicated but <u>a way of life</u>. I am learning not so much to "do" prayer but <u>to be in prayer</u>.

## A Beginners Mind

Matthew 18:3-4 *"Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."*

*"We always begin again."* Let us always be learning, and believe in seeking wisdom throughout life. Sometimes we have to unlearn too and be willing to let go of outdated, narrow thinking. The Desert Mothers and Fathers teach us to be open to new insights and to practice lifelong learning.

## Love

**Mark 12: 30-31** **30** Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' **31** 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'-Jesus. These wise men and women remind us that the love of God and of our neighbor should rule our heart, mind and actions. The more we love, the more we are surrounded by love! Be charitable. Daily finding ways to love and to be love is how we become fully human.

## Humility

**Philippians 2:3–7:** **3** Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, **4** not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. **5** In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: **6** Who, being in very nature God… made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant.

The word humility comes from the root word, *hummus*, meaning of the earth or earthiness. To remember we are NOT God and our faith isn't in ourselves but in God. Take ourselves lightly. This is not humiliation, not being worthless, but acknowledging we are created in love by God. It's about God, not us.