

The Parchment

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Solitude, Silence, and the Community of God

In this issue of the Parchment I asked Lori about her experience at the SPLIT retreat. The following is her sharing from the three "solitude and silence" times.

"...Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."

--Hebrews 12:1b

The morning of the SPLIT retreat was hectic. I was up early, checking my small suitcase for last minute items, saying good-bye to the kids, and prepping myself for the two-plus hour drive up to the retreat site. My frazzled brain thought, "I need just as much stuff for one night as for a week!" I was nervous and unsure of what God had planned for me in the hours I would be away from home. I fretted about how the kids and dog would do without me.

When we arrived at the retreat, people were already doing their morning devotions. Howard had built in chunks of time for us to practice solitude and silence (listening to God) and it was quiet. I sat down and skimmed the first section which was about laying down our burdens and worries. That was a struggle. I had been nursing my worries on the drive—participating in my conversation with Howard but the burdens of the morning swirled in my head. I tried to focus my mind on thankfulness.

What did I have to be thankful for? I finished my prayer and skimmed the passages on the great commission, do not worry (Matthew 6), or be anxious (Philippians 4).

The second session of the retreat was the place where God began working on me. We looked at Hebrews 12:1-3. We talked about those things that hinder us from running the race of faith. I participated in the small group sharing and we came up with some good ways to persevere. I felt convicted of my worries but still unsure about how to let them go. So God let me struggle for the rest of the evening and I finally decided to get some rest. This is when I understood how badly I needed to hear from God.

In the morning, I read an article by Henri Nouwen. He says, in "The Life of the Beloved", "...Let me start by telling you that many of the people that I live with hear voices that tell them that they are no good...that if you want to be loved, you had better prove that you are worth loving...but what I would like to say is that the spiritual life is a life in which you gradually learn to listen to a voice that says something else...You are the beloved and on you my favor rests." A wave of clarity washed over me. These are the things that have hindered me in the past and sometimes I get tangled up in them again. As I learn to practice solitude and silence with God, I trust that I will learn to hear His voice. I need to listen carefully: "It is not a very loud voice because it is an intimate voice," Nouwen says. "It comes from a very deep place. It is soft and gentle. I want you to gradually hear that voice...it tells us who we are."