

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

*From the Introduction*

Ruth Haley Barton

*"Without solitude it is impossible to have a spiritual life." --Henri Nouwen*

It is a wonderful thing to be invited. Not coerced or manipulated but truly invited. To the home of someone you have looked forward to getting to know...to a party with fun people...on a date with someone who is intriguing. There is something about being invited that makes the heart glad. It means someone is seeking me out, desiring my presence enough to initiate being with me.

The invitation to solitude and silence is just that. It is an invitation to enter more deeply into the intimacy of relationship with the One who waits just outside the noise and busyness of our lives for a space within which meaningful connection can occur. It is an invitation to communication and communion with the One who is always present even when our awareness has been dulled by distraction. It is an invitation to the adventure of spiritual transformation in the deepest places of our being, an adventure that will result in greater freedom and authenticity and surrender to God than we have yet experienced.

The invitation to solitude and silence is a winsome one but it is not casual; it is an invitation from God's very heart into the depths of our being. It warrants serious consideration because it is an invitation to a journey, a quest really, for something we have been longing for all our lives. Unlike a trip which is primarily utilitarian in nature (meant to get us where we're going as efficiently as possible), a quest requires us to leave familiar dwelling places for strange lands we cannot yet envision without knowing when

we will return. It is a journey that requires a willingness to say good-bye to life as we know it because our hearts are longing for something more.

Such a journey requires commitment—a willingness to press on through sun-lit days and dark nights, unspeakable beauty and terrible danger, sometimes finding companionship and sometimes feeling utterly alone, sometimes sure we are headed in the right direction, other times afraid we have completely lost our way. It is that perilous and priceless journey inward to that place at the center of our being where God dwells.

You might wonder why this book is about solitude and silence rather than solitude and scripture, or solitude and prayer, or solitude and journaling. All of these are important elements of the spiritual life, but I have chosen to write about solitude and *silence* because I believe silence is the most challenging, the most needed, and the least experienced spiritual discipline among Protestant Christians today. It is a whole lot easier to talk about silence and to read about silence than to actually be silent!

We are a very busy, wordy and heady faith tradition. Yet we are desperate to find ways to open ourselves to our God who is, in the end, beyond all of our human constructs and human agendas. With all of our emphasis on theology and Word, cognition and service (as important as these are) we are starved for mystery—to know this God as one who is totally Other and to experience reverence in his presence. We are starved for intimacy—to experience God in ways we can see and feel and know in the very cells of our being. We are starved for rest—to know God beyond what we can do for him. We are starved for quiet—to hear the sound of sheer silence that is the Presence of God himself.

The invitation to solitude and silence is an invitation to all of this, and the beauty of a true invitation is that we really do have a choice. We can say yes or no. God extends

the invitation, but he honors our freedom and will not push himself where he is not wanted. Instead he waits for us to respond from the depths of our desire. When your invitation comes, I pray you will say yes.

Ruth Haley Barton is co-founder and president of the Transforming Center. A spiritual director, teacher and retreat leader, she is the author of *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, *Sacred Rhythms*, and *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*.

©Ruth Haley Barton, 2009. Adapted from *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence* (InterVarsity Press, 2004). This article is not to be reproduced without written permission from the author or The Transforming Center. [[www.thetransformingcenter.org](http://www.thetransformingcenter.org)]

TRANSFORMING CENTER  
Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership