



Alone Time in a Stressful World

by Robert J. Wicks

Author Anne LaMotte once wrote, “Almost anything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes . . . including *you*.” Her words came to mind for me when I was up on Capitol Hill speaking to some members of Congress and then a larger group of their chiefs of staff. I heard that when one senator was asked, “What is the greatest challenge facing the American Congress today?” he replied, “Not enough time to think.”

I believe the same can be said about our spiritual life. The challenge for most of us is that we think that “alone time” (time spent in silence and solitude or simply being quietly reflective even when in a group) is a luxury. However, without it we cease to be able to enjoy and share freely the gift of life given to us by God. Alone time also provides us with the psychological and spiritual inner space to breathe and simply be.

Yet many of us resist such time. This is because during those quiet periods, we create a mental vacuum. Since nature abhors vacuums, often the information in our preconscious, that mental area just below our level of awareness, rises into our consciousness. We are able to see more clearly the fears, games, worries, anxieties, angers, lack of faith, and desires that are lying just beyond our normal thinking.

People sometimes get upset during quiet moments when this information rises to the surface. However, this should not be so because the only memories that will hurt us are the ones that are present just beyond our awareness and operate as invisible mental puppeteers. Also, if we truly believe in God’s love—or need to recognize that we don’t at this point—it is important to face *all* of our thoughts and beliefs while silently walking with the Lord in the garden of new possibility.

I always encourage people to take at least two minutes each day to sit in silence and solitude while wrapped in gratitude before God. If it helps, I suggest that a person first read a bit of sacred scripture or take a word to heart such as “gentleness” or “Mary” or “Jesus” and use that as a mantra. This frees us from rushing to our grave doing practical things while thinking this is the best way to live. I also ask people to mindfully walk with God in silence and enjoy the gifts that are around them—the trees in a rural area, the bustling energy of a city—instead of simply walking mindlessly in a cocoon of thought while missing God’s gifts and the signs that are present in the ordinary surroundings in which we live.

People will often ask me, “Why spend only two minutes in silence and solitude?” and I respond, “Well, how long are you doing it now?” Just as in the case of physical exercise, regularity is more important than only sporadically doing it for longer periods. Hopefully, these two minutes will expand into more time as we take the following straightforward steps toward enhancing alone time in our lives:

- **Give priority** to alone time in your schedule. Stephen Covey said, “Don’t simply prioritize your schedule . . . schedule your priorities.” I have found that taking time in silence and solitude each morning is the most important way to center myself—especially during busy, dark periods.
- **Use the spaces that are already there.** There are many “crumbs of alone time” already in your schedule—the quiet moments before you jump out of bed in the morning, when in the shower, during a break in the day, lunchtime, on the drive home, or just before you fall asleep.
- **Expand the number of places** where you can experience alone time. Instead of thinking you need a special place (church) to be quiet and grateful in front of the Lord, think of times when you are in traffic, in a line, sitting in a park or your office, or at night feeding milk to your child as holy places of alone time.
- **Reflect with the right spirit.** Ann LaMotte once quipped, “My mind is like a bad neighborhood . . . I don’t like to go there alone.” In other words, make the world your church by always avoiding judging yourself, picking on others, or becoming discouraged. Instead, allow yourself to be *intrigued* even when you feel a negative sense about yourself, others, or the situation.
- **Just start where you are.** Enjoy quietly being with yourself and your environment and appreciate that all is gift. In the quiet, you may see more of the gifts that are around you.

Alone time in the presence of God is the portal to a healthy perspective; it makes the whole world a church. Without it, the only time you will see what is really important is when someone is ill or dying or another tragedy befalls you. It is a shame to live like that when it is unnecessary and a waste of life . . . *your own life*.



Robert J. Wicks is professor emeritus at Loyola University Maryland. He received his doctorate in psychology from Hahnemann Medical College and presents on the themes of self-care, resilience, maintaining a healthy perspective and integrating psychology and spirituality. He is the author of a number of books including Riding the Dragon, Bounce: Living a Resilient Life, and Perspective: The Calm within the Storm.

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With the help of professionals and those who have struggled with stress, anxiety, and other mental health issues, we're offering insights, resources, and suggestions for a path to healing and a road to hope in the midst of dark and scary times.