

Abbey Baptist Church, Reading
Worship Service 10:30am 22nd February 2026
Zoltan Biro leading and Simon Bird preaching
www.abbeybaptistchurch.org.uk
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Silence with God: Solitude vs Loneliness

Notices

Call to worship

Lord God, maker of heaven and earth, we gather in Your name.

We come as living sacrifices, to offer You our worship and thanksgiving, our praise and our prayers.

Come among us, living Lord. Through the power of Your Holy Spirit, transform our hearts and minds, so that we may recognize Your presence, hear Your voice, know Your will, and walk in Your way.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

Song MP445

Lord, the light of your love is shining
In the midst of the darkness, shining
Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon us
Set us free by the truth you now bring us
Shine on me, shine on me

*Shine, Jesus, shine
Fill this land with the Father's glory
Blaze, Spirit, blaze
Set our hearts on fire
Flow, river, flow
Flood the nations with grace and mercy
Send forth your word
Lord, and let there be light*

Lord, I come to your awesome presence
From the shadows into your radiance
By the blood I may enter your brightness
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness
Shine on me, shine on me

As we gaze on your kingly brightness
So our faces display your likeness
Ever changing from glory to glory
Mirrored here may our lives tell your story
Shine on me, shine on me

*Graham Kendrick
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Prayer of approach

In you alone we put our hope,
God the Father, Creator and Sustainer,
**who gives all good things
seen and unseen.**

In you alone we put our hope,
God the Son, Saviour and Redeemer,
**who died for our sins
and rose again.**

In you alone we put our hope,
God the Spirit, Teacher and Comforter,
who moves us to sing "Our God reigns!"

In you alone we put our hope.

Song MP 1076

Jesus be the centre
Be my source be my light
Jesus

Jesus be the centre
Be my hope be my song
Jesus

Chorus
Be the fire in my heart
Be the wind in these sails
Be the reason that I live
Jesus, Jesus,

Jesus be my vision
Be my path be my guide
Jesus
Michael Frye © 1999 Vineyard Songs

Family time

Worshipping God with our offering - The offering will be taken during the singing of this song

Song MP 34

As the deer pants for the water
So my soul long after thee
You alone are my hearts desire
And I long to worship thee

Chorus
You alone are my strength, my shield
To You alone may my spirit yield
You alone are my hearts desire
And I long to worship thee

You're my friend and You are my brother,
Even though you are a king.
I love you more than any other,
So much more than anything.

Chorus

I want You more than gold or silver,
Only You can satisfy.
You alone are the real joy Giver,
And the apple of my eye.

Chorus

Martin Nystorm © 1984 Universal Music

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Eternal God,
the refuge and help of all your children,
we praise you for all you have given us,
for all you have done for us,
for all that you are to us.
In our weakness, you are strength,
in our darkness, you are light,
in our sorrow, you are comfort and peace.

We cannot number your blessings,
we cannot declare your love:
For all your blessings we bless you.
May we live as in your presence,
and love the things that you love,
and serve you in our daily lives;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

St. Boniface (ca. 672-754)

Children leave for their classes

Bible Readings - Psalm 62:5-8 & Matthew 14:17-23

Song – MP 111

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
forgive our foolish ways!
Reclothe us in our rightful mind;
in purer lives Thy service find,
in deeper rev'rence, praise.

In simple trust like theirs who heard,
beside the Syrian sea,

the gracious calling of the Lord,
let us, like them, without a word
Rise up and follow Thee.

O Sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
where Jesus knelt to share with Thee

the silence of eternity,
interpreted by love!

Drop Thy still dews of quietness,
till all our strivings cease;
take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of Thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire
Thy coolness and Thy balm;
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
speak through the earthquake, wind and fire,
O still small voice of calm!

John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892)

Sermon: Appreciating silence with God – Solitude vs loneliness (Ps 62:5-8, Matt 14:17-23)

This is a series about Holy Habits. We heard before about reading the Bible, regular prayer, fasting, meditation and service. These habits are like water, nutrients and warmth to a seedling. It needs all of them to grow. We don't just read the bible; we don't just pray. The spiritual habits work together, with the result that we draw near to God, are transformed and become mature Christians.

Zoltan showed us a picture of a seedling and growing and bearing fruit. I add another thought with this with a picture a mighty oak. In summer, we absorb warmth and light. All year, we draw water and nutrients from our roots and, year on year, we add layers of wood, so our tree and branches become stronger. This means we mature and endure the storms of life and grow fruitful. This is a picture and promise for us as we consistently apply the spiritual habits. Isn't this what you want in your spiritual life, to be that tree we read about in Ps 1:3?

We look this morning at finding solitude and rest in God. What is going on in your life now? Work, paying the bills, worries, time spent on devices, interviews, BNO applications, politics? These may not necessarily be wrong, but they take our attention and stop us finding peace with God. You see, we have an inner life which needs refreshing. One writer described it this way, 'we always carry with us a portable sanctuary of the heart.' Refresh this, and we better cope with the world. It is entering Sabbath rest. This is not just going away on your own, or being quiet, but it is finding an inner place, whether there are crowds around or not.

What does Jesus say? 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and...you will find rest for your souls.' (Matt 11:28-30)

I will look at three biblical characters who practised this. Jesus (of course), David and Elijah, and then give a few tips on how to enter this inner sanctuary.

What did Jesus practise? Our reading was of Jesus feeding the 5,000 (Matt 14:17-23). He had been trying to withdraw to a solitary place, but the crowds followed and 'he had compassion on them and healed them.' (vs 13-14). He met their need of food. After this day of major miracles and being with the crowds, he first sends his disciples ahead, because they needed a break. Then Jesus himself goes up a mountain to pray, where he was alone (23). This was a pattern in Jesus' life. 'Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.' (Luke 5:16). If the Son of God did this, how much more should we?

Jesus knew he was accepted and loved by the Father. His close walk with his Father guided him (Jn 5:19). We sustain our spiritual lives too by knowing our status as children of God and that we are loved and accepted. (Eph 1:4-7). The problem is we try to work the other way. This leads to stress. So, come to him, learn from him and find rest.

What did David find? Many Psalms of David's, like our reading, speak of David finding God to be his sanctuary, rock, fortress and deliverer (Ps 18:1-2; 62:2, 6; 63:2). David did not discover this on some pleasant walk in the country. But he was a refugee from Saul, a warrior in the wilderness, a king of an empire and someone who sinned. The mountains were, for David, literally places of escape from extreme stress, and that is how he described his refuge with God. He finds strength with others and in God. When David and his band of men were guerillas in the wilderness, they returned to their base at Ziklag to find it had been raided, and their women and children taken captive (1 Sam 30:1-6). David and his men wept bitterly (they shared their sorrow), but then the men turned and talked of stoning him. Then it says, 'David found strength in the LORD his God.' (6). This is how David found his inner strength. Will we learn the same?

Where did Elijah go? Elijah had a remarkable experience of God, which seems beyond our reach, but many find Elijah's story speaks exactly about hearing from God. You will remember the Lord worked a great victory through him over the prophets of Baal. Jezebel was trying to kill him and he was running away in fear. By all accounts he was exhausted and depressed. He needed rest and refreshment. God lets him eat, sleep, eat, sleep and eat. First God meets his physical needs. Then Elijah journeys to the lonely mountain place – just him and God. God asks him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' (1 Ki 19: 9, 13). As we enter God's presence he often challenges us to be honest. The Lord sent wind, an earthquake and fire, but he was not in these. Finally, God comes in a gentle whisper (a still, silent, small, gentle voice). Then God spoke to re-commission him. We sometimes expect or want the spectacular, but God's voice is so often a passing, fleeting thought or impression. This is what we need to learn to hear, and we do so with inner attentiveness and practice. Are you prepared to try?

Let's do it!

I offer here a few of my tips, which build on the other spiritual habits - prayer, having a quiet time as Jill told us and meditating on the scriptures as Zoltan told us. There is a huge contemplative tradition to call on, many books written down the centuries with what Christians have discovered.

These help us start, but really, we just need to quiet and wait. The most important thing is to be assured in our heart that God loves us. Remember the words Jesus heard, 'This is my Son, whom I love.' Also, we need to be sure that God wants to speak to us. 'My sheep hear my voice.' 'Those who are led by the Spirit are children of God.' You may find it helpful to go through steps of praise, worship, confession of sin and meditating on scriptures. Try concentrating on one scripture that stands out to you, 'Be still and know that I am God.' I find praying in tongues helps here. Then decide to sit quietly for 10 mins.

A helpful image is we are travelling in a boat up a river towards the cross. All sorts of distractions pass – a bit of deadwood, another boat. Just notice them and let them pass. A note book is helpful if you remember something important to do.

One writer described this as being on tiptoe, with a softened heart waiting attentively. Not every time, but you may enter a place Hudson Taylor (the great missionary pioneer to China) called Union and Communion. Just sit, gaze into God, soak up his presence. When ready you may bring prayers, and finish with a time of thanksgiving.

Conclusion Lent is traditionally a time for denial and exercising spiritual habits, fasting, prayer, giving up something. Could we use Lent to give up some excess noise and stress and seek God in the stillness.

Songs MP 50

Be still for the presence of the Lord,
The Holy One is here
Come bow before Him now,
With reverence and fear
In Him no sin is found
We stand on holy ground
Be still for the presence of the Lord,
The Holy One is here

Be still for the glory of the Lord,
Is shining all around
He burns with holy fire,
With splendour He is crowned
How awesome is the sight

Our radiant King of light
Be still for the glory of the Lord,
Is shining all around

Be still for the power of the Lord,
Is moving in this place
He comes to cleanse and heal,
To minister His grace
No work too hard for Him
In faith receive from Him
Be still for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place
Be still for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place

David J. Evans ©1986 Thankyou Music

Prayers of intercession

Dear Heavenly Father,
We thank You for loving us and calling us to love one another. May our love show the world that we are disciples of Christ, and may our lives bear witness to Your grace and truth. Lord, teach us to grow in holy habits. Search our hearts, show us our shortcomings, and lead us to sincere repentance. Renew our

spiritual lives and shape us to have the mind of Christ, that we may walk in obedience and reflect Him. You are the Servant King; teach us how to serve others.

Amen.

Our church building was established in 1979. As we face needs in our building, especially concerning leaks from the roof gutters and insulation, grant us wisdom, unity, and good stewardship. Provide what we need and guide our decisions, so that this church may continue to serve You in the years ahead. We pray for our beloved sister, Gwen. May Your blessings always be upon her and grant her comfort and hope as she rests. We remember before You all within our church family who need Your healing grace and gracious provision.

Amen.

Heavenly Father, we pray for our nation. In times of low trust, economic pressure, and division, give wisdom to the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. Help them make fair decisions and lead with truth and mercy. May Britain become a land of peace. We remember those who are unemployed, the poor, and working families who are struggling. Bring hope through stable jobs and wise leadership. We pray especially for the younger generation — guide their steps and prepare a good future for them.

Amen.

Lord, we pray for Iran, Ukraine, the Middle East, and Sudan. Bring an end to violence and suffering. Give wisdom to world leaders to seek justice and peace. Comfort those who have lost their homes and loved ones. Care for refugees and all who are in need.

Amen.

Lord, we pray for Hong Kong. We remember Jimmy Lai. Give him strength, peace, and strong faith. May he know the joy of belonging to Christ. May Your justice and mercy be seen. Protect journalists, church leaders, and all who speak with conscience. Stop further suffering and persecution. Bring true peace to the city.

We pray in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Song MP990

I will offer up my life in spirit and truth
Pouring out the oil of love, as my worship to you
In surrender I must give my every part
Lord, receive this sacrifice of a broken heart

*Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring
To so faithful a Friend, to so loving a King?
Savior, what can be said, what can be sung
As a praise of Your name for the things You have done?
Oh, my words could not tell, not even in part
Of the debt of love that is owed by this thankful heart*

You deserve my every breath, for You've paid the great cost
Giving up your life to death, even death on the cross
You took all my shame away, there defeated my sin
Open up the gates of heaven and have beckoned me in

Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring...

Matt Redman © 1994 THANKYOU MUSIC

Blessing

As you go from here into the week ahead,
Keep your eyes open for God, watch for His works; be alert for signs of His presence.
For He is God, our Go, in charge of the whole earth.
And He remembers His promises, for a thousand generations.
So, go with confidence and joy, knowing that God goes with you. Amen

The Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore, **Amen.**

Events to highlight this coming week:

A short Special Church Meeting after the service today to discuss the roof.

Tuesday		Deacons' Meeting
Wednesday 25 th	10:30 12:00 2:00	Renew Café Bible study iCaf English lesson and First Steps course
Thursday 26 th	10:30 10:30	Toddlers Bible Study
Friday 27 th	10.30 5:00pm	Prayer Meeting in Upper Room Table Tennis
Sunday 1 st March	10.30	Sunday Worship with Communion Learning to compromise: Submission (Ephesians 5:20-21; 1 Peter 5:1-7)

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