Church of the Apostles
Lenten Series 2015
Soul Training Exercise/Discussion Template

Years ago, a pastor friend invited me to attend a silent retreat. I responded with laughter, “Love you. Mean it, but are you kidding? I don’t have time for that and I am just not the silent type! I’m more the get it done kinda of person. I thought you knew that about me.” That wasn’t the answer she was looking for; she saw a deeper need than I recognized in myself. She looked at me, smiled, paused a little while and responded: “Ok, dear friend,” she said. “I’m going to make a few calls and I’ll see you at the retreat.” She wasn’t kidding. Judy called my husband and my boss. She made sure I had child care for Luke; she even paid for me to attend the retreat!

God met me the day of that silent retreat in a way I’d never met him before. Though the distractions were many, as I settled into the space, I began to notice Jesus surround me. I found myself simply being in the set apart time and space with him. No agenda. No to do lists or other people asking me to do anything other than just be. Simply God and me in his creation, his word, his loving presence. In the silence the Lord opened soul space in me that I hadn’t known before as I heard him call me his daughter who he loves.

From that time until now, God has used the soul practice of silence in my life to draw me closer to him and cause me to be aware of His presence and voice in my life and the life of others I love.

Now as a mom of teen and tween boys, if it’s not the constant beat of a basketball, the blare of the tv, or the general forte pound of teen voices, when my guys are around, there is a lot of noise. If I’m honest, though, even when they’re not around, I can have a tough time avoiding all the distractions around me. I still like to ‘get it done’. Yet, I’ve learned over the years of practicing silence that doing the hard work of carving out time to be alone and undistracted in silent time with Jesus, makes me more aware of God’s presence even in the midst of the noise and distractions of my life.
For me, the best time to practice silence with God is in the morning when the house is quiet and I am getting dishes put away from the dishwasher and our boys lunches ready. These are such mundane tasks that I can concentrate on simply being with God as I do them. I also enjoy driving my car without any other noise around me. Yet, intentionally scheduling a day of solitude and silence to simply be with God is what I think has undergirded the other silent spaces in my life. As I make myself available to God in silence he meets me, he loves me, and I adore him in quiet reverence of knowing and being known.

**Scripture:** Exodus 33:12-23, Matthew 5:1-7, Psalm 46:10.

**Reflective Questions:**

(Examples for Silence)
1. Psalm 46:10 says “Be still and know that I am God.” What does that mean to you?
2. Do you have silence with God in your life? If so, how and where?
3. What challenges might you face in practicing silence and reverence?
4. Do you avoid or resist silence? If so, how do you?
5. Do you think God values time with you in silence?

**Soul Training Exercise: (practical steps and options to the soul training exercise)**

1. Consider doing a mundane task in silence while seeking to be with God as you do it. Drive without the radio. Wash the dishes without any other entertainment or background noise around you. Fold laundry, rake leaves. Begin your time by offering it to God: “Here I am Lord. Be with me as I do this.” Continue the task by offering it to God with a listening heart. What is it like for you? What distracts you from God and your presence to Him?

2. Find a quiet place, comfortable place where you won’t be interrupted. Take at least five minutes and simply be present and
available to God in silence. Set a timer so that you don’t have to keep track of time. As you sit with God, breath in his love for you and breath out any distractions. If distractions arise, you may want to repeat the scripture: “Be still and know that I am God”.

3. If you find being silent a natural or very helpful practice, consider taking a longer period of time to devote to this exercise. Carve out a half a day to be in silence: no books (other than your journal and Bible), no music, just listen. What surfaces? How do you want to interact with God about his gift of silence?

Community Discussion Guide:

Open in prayer for the group and God’s leading in discussion of scripture and the soul training exercise.

Soul Training Exercise Reflection (15 min) – (last week’s Soul Training Exercise)

1. Were you able (Soul Training Exercise) this week? If so, describe what you did and how you feel about it now.
2. As you tried to (Soul Training Exercise), what was the most challenging or difficult? What was the most helpful or rewarding?
3. How did you experience or learn about God as you (Soul Training Exercise)
4. What if anything did you learn about yourself?
5. Do you see yourself trying to practice (Soul Training Exercise) again in the future?

Opening to God in Scripture: (10 min) – read the scripture out loud. Then sit in shared silence with God’s Word as you offer God’s Word back to Him.

Engaging the Scripture and Sermon (15 min) - same three questions each week:
1. As you consider the scripture reading and the sermon, what stands out to you? What did you notice in yourself or in the scripture as it was read?

2. How does the scripture address the (soul training exercise) for this week?

3. What are your thoughts and/or responses when you considering practicing (soul training exercise)?

**Looking ahead to the coming week: (10 min)**

1. Soul training overview
2. Prayer Requests
3. Closing Prayer