

Prayer and solitude

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by  Michael Hume

"But Jesus often withdrew to solitary places and prayed." Luke 5.16

It is likely that Jesus did the bulk of his praying alone and possibly outdoors.

Praying alone suits my life since I am single and live alone. So even when I pray in my living room, it is mostly alone. I feel I can be myself completely with God, and pray about whatever comes to mind.

Most days I go for a walk and pray. Nearly always I head for the quietest natural places, a walk along the canal towpath for instance. As long as contact with nature is maximised and humans minimised.

Praying outdoors alone is the best format for me. I pray aloud as the norm. If I see someone ahead of me as I'm walking, I stop and after they are too far to hear me I restart praying. I feel I can praise God for his works as I'm praying. That is a huge advantage of praying outdoors. Being surrounded by water, lots of trees, yellow wild irises, waterhen splashing about in the water, all refresh me.

At some level in my mind I'm always praising God for his works when I'm praying outdoors. For me that is most sincere praise, since I genuinely like his works. Besides, nothing man-made is remotely as good as what God has made. I suppose another advantage of being alone with God in prayer outdoors is that you are away from other people and artefacts. Your soul is being purified and conformed to Gods image of being very natural.

I am a triathlete and combine my solitary training bike rides with prayer. I choose the quietest country roads for peace, safety, and alone times with God. For me biking and praying are compatible especially on the downhills and when cruising. I've combined a 62 mile bike ride with prayer many times. Again there are many things to praise God for like green rolling hills, lilac poppy fields and purple pheasants.

Sometimes I run and pray but to be honest walking and praying is easiest. I combine my running training with walking and praying so outdoor time is utilised for all activities at once.

Swimming is the only discipline of the three where I have to pray in my mind. When swimming in open water I can also praise God for the crabs scurrying away below me or the beautiful sunrise over the sea. I pray least while swimming since there seems to be a lot of other things occupying the mind like surviving and swim technique.

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You get to see seasons change, observe plants, birds and animals closely, see many striking sunsets, the stars, shooting stars and comets. It can be a most rewarding voyage of discovery with God. The insights and experiences God gives are rich rewards to this kind of living.

So whether it's an hour of prayer, two or more, my best times with God in prayer have been alone and outdoors. Time spent outdoors with God in prayer is time well spent.

Michael Hume. Christian since 1987. Believe the Bible in original form is true, and in a daily personal relationship with Jesus. A freelance writer. Copyright belongs to author.

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