



// OVERFLOW
LIVING WATER FOR AN EMPTY AGE

**SOLITUDE
& SILENCE**

GUIDE



OVERFLOW PODCAST

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Ruth Haley Barton, and Justin Earley.



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**THIS IS WHAT THE SOVEREIGN LORD,
THE HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL, SAYS:**

**“IN REPENTANCE AND REST IS YOUR SALVATION,
IN QUIETNESS AND TRUST IS YOUR STRENGTH...**

ISAIAH 30:15



WHAT IS SOLITUDE & SILENCE?



SOLITUDE IS THE SPIRITUAL PRACTICE OF EMPTYING OUR CALENDARS AND NEGATING OUR TO-DO LISTS TO SPEND TIME ALONE WITH GOD. SILENCE IS THE DISCIPLINE WE ENGAGE TO COMPLETE OUR SOLITUDE.

THIS MONTH, WE WILL INTENTIONALLY CARVE OUT TIME TO WELCOME GOD INTO OUR LIVES. THE PRACTICE OF SOLITUDE AND SILENCE CAN HAPPEN IN MANY DIFFERENT RHYTHMS: DAILY, WEEKLY, MONTHLY, AND YEARLY. THIS MONTH, WE INVITE YOU TO CONSIDER HOW TO CREATE SPACE TO SPEND INTENTIONAL TIME WITH GOD.



For many, solitude and silence may feel intimidating.

To begin, consider your experience with solitude and silence. Then, write a few sentences in your journal that reflect your feelings on being asked to engage with the practice of solitude and silence.

OUR PROMISE

In a world full of distractions and noise, the practice of solitude and silence can leave you feeling uniquely energized and renewed. This is a decision to act in dependence and vulnerability to God, trusting him to complete the practice alongside you. God promises to value and honor your time with his presence, so enter this practice with the expectation of meeting with the Creator of the Universe.

Why are solitude and silence combined for practice this month?
Ruth Haley Barton says it best,

SILENCE IS REQUIRED TO COMPLETE SOLITUDE, FOR UNTIL WE ENTER QUIETNESS, THE WORLD STILL LAYS HOLD OF US. WHEN WE GO INTO SOLITUDE AND SILENCE WE STOP MAKING DEMANDS ON GOD. IT IS ENOUGH THAT GOD IS GOD AND WE ARE HIS. WE LEARN TO HAVE A SOUL, THAT GOD IS HERE, THAT THIS WORLD IS “MY FATHER’S WORLD.”

This is a practice of intention. There is never enough time, there is always something to be done. If we spend our lives waiting for the perfect time, or more time, we will miss the best gift of all: the invitation to be in a relationship with our living God. The way to a deep connection with God lies through decision and practice.

A FEW POINTERS & SUGGESTIONS:



RELEASE THE GUILT:

Sitting in God's presence is perhaps the singular most important thing you can do with your life. Instead of feeling like you should be doing *something*, reframe that to acknowledge this practice allows you to be sitting with God.



BE STILL:

The beauty of this month's practice is that there is no control in solitude and silence. While the lack of ability to control a situation can be freeing, it can also be terrifying. Embrace the experience and freedom offered in the life of Christ. Empty your mind, be still and know God is in control.



TAKE NOTICE:

We struggle to comprehend everything happening around us. We cannot take in all that occurs in each moment of each day. This month, notice all that asks for your attention and see what receives your focus.



In your Overflow Journal, reflect on what has already filled your mind today. This may be tasks to accomplish, children who need school lunches made, tasks at work you are mentally preparing to achieve, or perhaps the news you turn on each morning. Whatever it is, list all that has entered your mental space today and release the mental chatter.

WHY DO WE PRACTICE?

Did you know that the world is actually getting louder? This is a measurable fact. Let us use a fire engine siren as an example.

In 1912, composer and environmentalist R. Murray Schafer found that a fire engine siren reached 96 decibels. In 1974, that number rose to 114 decibels. Then, journalist Bianca Bosker reported in 2019 that modern fire engine sirens are reaching 124 decibels.

Perhaps this does not feel like a huge jump, but it is. Justin Zorn and Leigh Marz explain it best in their article “The Power of Silence in a Deafening World.” They write, “decibels are on a logarithmic scale, so 90 decibels is ten times the sound pressure as 80 decibels, registering as roughly twice as loud to our ears.” As an example, our fire engines have more than doubled in loudness since 1912.

Our world is physically growing louder, and as a result, it is getting even harder to focus our attention.

That does not even consider the second kind of noise central in our world today: informational noise. The CEO of Google, Eric Schmidt, said in 2010, “Every two days, we now create as much information as we did from the dawn of civilization up until 2003.” That was before Artificial Intelligence; imagine what that stat would be today. The Radicati Group, a technology market research firm, found that the total number of consumer emails sent and received per day in 2021 exceeded 319 billion and is forecast to grow to over 376 billion by year-end in 2025.

We simply cannot handle this much information.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, affectionately known as the “father of flow,” founded positive psychology, where he sought to define the psychological state of optimal performance. In his 2004 TED Talk, he presented that each time we listen to another person speak, we must process approximately 60 bits of information per second. Add to that the distractions you encounter while listening (like checking the time or glancing at a text message) and the number continues to climb. **Meaning, we can only understand one message at a time.**

THIS LEADS TO WHAT EXPERTS REFER TO AS CONTINUOUS PARTIAL ATTENTION.

The abundance of information being presented continuously causes a vicious cycle for us. One outcome is that now humans are trained to constantly seek input and more information. Perhaps you have experienced this. Imagine you just sat down to watch a television show or the nightly news. Do you find yourself with a tablet or a smartphone in your hand, scrolling on different sites, and simultaneously engaged in a conversation? Or maybe you are on a phone call with a friend but also sending an email. We often fool ourselves into thinking we are efficient multitaskers when, in reality, we have accomplished little because we are unable to focus on the tasks at hand.

**HOW DO WE FIND GOD WITH THIS MANY STIMULI
SURROUNDING US DAY IN AND DAY OUT?**

**HOW DO WE FOCUS ON WHAT IS BEFORE US
INSTEAD OF WHAT IS AROUND US?**

This is why solitude and silence are so imperative in our modern society. With each passing year, finding ways to quiet our world becomes more complex and critical. We must practice being quiet, creating space, and focusing our attention on God instead of all that distracts our attention away.



In your Overflow Journal, reflect on the noise in your life. You previously made a list of all that occupies your mind. What would you consider noise in front of you? (Meaning, noise that should get your primary attention.) What would you consider noise surrounding you? (This means noise in the peripherals that is demanding attention but should not necessarily receive it.)

WHAT DOES SCRIPTURE TEACH?



SCRIPTURE OFFERS MANY
PICTURES OF GOD. GOD AS
CREATOR (GENESIS), GOD AS
PROTECTOR (2 SAMUEL), GOD AS
THE GIVER OF LIFE (PSALMS), AND
GOD AS SAVIOR (ISAIAH). THE LIST
DESCRIBING GOD'S CHARACTER IS
BOUNTIFUL AND ENDLESS.

THERE ARE NOT AS MANY PLACES
THAT DESCRIBE WHERE GOD
IS FOUND.

Read 1 Kings 19:1-19 and consider:



- What is the first thing Elijah does in this narrative?
- Why is Elijah running?
- Who is the pursuer in this story?
- Where is God found?
- Was Elijah even looking for God?

Elijah was exhausted.

Have you ever noticed after a particularly highly emotional day you are exhausted? Our emotions, both the good and the bad, seem to physically drain our bodies. Elijah's story is similar. He is on the run from Jezebel, afraid for his life, and fear has driven him to complete exhaustion.

Perhaps you find yourself in a similar situation. Our fast-paced world demands much of us and many of us are running on fumes.

Notice that Elijah did not flee with a plan. Instead, God met him on his journey, at Elijah's speed.

God will come to you.



In your Overflow Journal:

Write out a personal ask of God. What do you need from him so you can practice solitude and silence this month?



WHAT DID JESUS DO?



EVEN IN HIS DAY, JESUS
EXPERIENCED NOISE AND
PRESSURES THAT FELT
OVERWHELMING. HE, OF COURSE,
DID NOT HAVE THE TECHNOLOGICAL
AND INFORMATIONAL NOISE OF
THE 21ST CENTURY. INSTEAD, HE
HAD CROWDS THAT FOLLOWED HIM
ACROSS GALILEE, FORCING HIM TO
SEEK QUIET BY CROSSING THE SEA
AND SPENDING NIGHTS ON BOATS.

In the midst of well-known stories about Jesus, we can see his rhythm of seeking time alone with God. It is usually just a sentence or two included at the beginning or end of a parable that is easy to miss if we do not look closely.



Read the following Gospel stories and see if you notice Jesus practicing solitude and silence. Write down, in your Overflow Journal, what Jesus did and, perhaps, what emotions you can imagine him experiencing in each unique situation below:

1. Luke 4:1-13
2. Luke 5:12-16
3. Luke 6:12-16
4. Mark 1:35-39
5. Matthew 14:22-34
6. Luke 22:39-44

Take a look at Luke 5:16 specifically.

“But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”

LUKE 5:16

The Greek word for lonely places here is *eremos*, which loosely means deserted or lonely place. For a minute, imagine Israel during Jesus' life. Within walking distance of the city, there was land free of people, where there was freedom to roam, to pray, and to be silent. Much of the landscape of modern-day Israel looks the same: rolling hills, desert regions, and gardens of olive trees.

// Jesus was seeking God in the still, quiet places. //

Our city does not look like vast expanses of land beckoning to find God in quiet places. Yet, God is still around. God is not intimidated by the noise that lives in our cities and our homes; God is zealous for our attention and hearts.

Jesus sought God by distancing himself from everything and everyone who needed his attention and demanded something from him. This month, your invitation is to follow in the footsteps of Jesus by doing the same.

MARK THE DIFFERENCE

Many people wonder how to differentiate between the practice of solitude and silence and the Sabbath practice.

Hear the good news first: whichever spiritual practice you engage in, intentional or not, will be fruitful. This year of Overflow is meant to be a journey to engage your whole self with the living God. You can do that by resting, listening, remaining silent, or walking. While we seek to educate everyone on the habits the different spiritual disciplines offer, be encouraged that God will reveal himself to you whenever you seek him.

The Sabbath practice offers rest and delight alongside your community. Many people read a fiction book or take slow walks during their Sabbath, and it almost always involves a delicious meal together. The Sabbath is for you and your well-being, providing sustaining rest to keep partnering with God in his holy work.

Solitude and silence is less about you and more about making your whole self available to God. When we practice solitude, we are pulling away to pay attention to God himself. For many, this may look like an intentional day of retreat and clearing the calendar. Silence is how we enter solitude, which allows our minds to process and think solely on the goodness of God. You may spend time in prayer, or you may

simply spend time imagining God. You can be creative as you attune your heart and mind to God in your own way.

The hardest part about solitude and silence is that it is never long enough. Once you gift yourself the freedom to enjoy the time with God alone and practice quieting your mind, it creates a sacred place of belonging, being known, and feeling the love our God has for you.

PLAN YOUR PRACTICE

This practice will take thinking ahead, especially if you have a family or high-demand work schedule to consider.



Consider solitude a practice of retreat. In the next few months, can you carve out a large portion of your time to retreat with God? If not, is there somewhere to designate even an hour or two to spend alone with God?

There is no right or wrong way to walk into God's presence.

Simply start.



In your Overflow Journal:

- What does it mean for me to spend time alone with God?
- What tools do I need to be available and successful in focusing solely on God?
- What do I need to take in my time of solitude and silence to feel comfortable and encouraged?

PRACTICE

Once you have designated your time, begin by quieting the noise. The beginning of this practice requires **discipline** to leave behind what is not finished. The **invitation** of this practice is to trust that what is unfinished is less important than the time away with God.

Silence offers freedom within your retreat. There are no prayer prompts to consider, and no planning is required. Sit in the freedom and trust God to meet you there.

You may encounter a few common experiences in solitude and silence. Consider:

1. **Fatigue:** Many who enter solitude and silence experience extreme fatigue and exhaustion at the beginning. Those who experience this are in good company; even Elijah needed time to recover before he could focus on God. Be encouraged; we are all exhausted, and that is not an uncommon experience.

2. **Fear:** Any new experience can cause anxiety and fear, as it is a normal human response. However, there is nothing to fear and nothing to accomplish in your time alone with God. Perhaps begin by confessing to God your feelings over this new experience.
 3. **Anger:** When we are alone with our thoughts, sometimes we cannot control what comes through our minds. Instead of focusing on the goodness of God, our focus drifts to the wrongs we have experienced or the wrongs we have dealt. Release the guilt and the anger, and ask God to help you experience true mental freedom in his presence.
-

TIPS FOR STARTING SMALL:

If you find yourself overwhelmed by the invitation to retreat because perhaps time does not allow that at the moment, feel the freedom to start small.

Your mind is like any muscle within your body. The more you train it to hold focus, the easier it will become. Focus this month on spending five minutes a day in a quiet, solitary place. Below are a few ideas to help you practice solitude and silence this month.

- Arrive to work five minutes early, and instead of rushing in, sit in your car, close your eyes, and spend time in the quiet. Invite God into these moments with you.
- Take five minutes to step outside on your patio, porch, or any outdoor space nearby and spend a few solitary moments in creation. Invite God to be present with you and ask him to show himself in the nature around you.
- While preparing for bed at night, spend five minutes with God in silence before you begin praying. Invite him in, asking him to focus your attention solely on him during these moments.

GROUP PRACTICE



AS WE GATHER TO PRACTICE SOLITUDE AND SILENCE THIS MONTH, WE INVITE YOU TO EMBRACE THE QUIET PLACES. IT ALSO SEEMS IRONIC THAT WE WILL GATHER TO DISCUSS SOLITUDE, BUT REMEMBER THAT YOUR COMMUNITY IS MEANT TO ENCOURAGE US TO EXPERIENCE NEW PRACTICES, NEW PEOPLE, AND DEEPER SPIRITUAL LEVELS AS WE JOURNEY TOGETHER. WE WANT TO BE TRANSFORMED PEOPLE AFTER THESE SHARED EXPERIENCES.



SOLITUDE & SILENCE
INTRODUCTION VIDEO

LAST MONTH'S REFLECTION:

Before moving forward, make sure to reflect on last month's practice. Last month, we shared stories and practiced vulnerability. Reflect and ask together:



Did the Lord put someone in your life and open doors for you to practice covenant friendship and confession?

Were you able to reframe generosity and goodness as a gift to God instead of to those around you? Was it challenging?



Scan the QR code to watch the Solitude and Silence Teaching Video.

As a group, we will practice intentional silence this month. If you have never done this with a group of fellow believers, you may find yourself nervous or intimidated by the clock. Instead, focus on what God has for you in the still and quiet place offered in this month's group gathering.

If you worked through a breath prayer during February's focus on prayer, perhaps you want to recall it and connect it to your breathing during this time of silence. Or, maybe you want to contemplate a piece of scripture in your mind. Be creative in how you usher in quiet time with God.

BREATHING:

Group leaders may read aloud the following:

Do you know how important your breathing is? Dr. Patricia Gerbarg, a psychiatrist, co-author of *The Healing Power of the Breath*, and co-founder of the Breath-Body-Mind Foundation states that, “signals from the respiratory system have a top priority over pretty much any other signal from the body, especially when there’s a sudden change. So, when you change your pattern of breathing, you suddenly change all the signaling up to the brain.”

This is a powerful scientific finding, but not a surprising one. Scripture has already told us that our very breath from God is the distinguishing feature of our humanness.

In Genesis 2:7, scripture tells us that,

**“THE LORD GOD FORMED A MAN FROM THE DUST
OF THE GROUND AND BREATHED INTO HIS NOSTRILS
THE BREATH OF LIFE, AND THE MAN BECAME
A LIVING BEING.”**

The Hebrew translation of “living being” at the end of this verse is *nephesh*. The very breath that God breathes into you is not merely the jumpstart to your life. It is more than that.

God has placed breath within you. This is a moment by moment reminder of God’s own spirit dwelling in you. You do not have to search far for his presence.

Jump forward to the Book of Deuteronomy 6:5:

**“LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL
YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND
WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.”**

Love the Lord your God with all your *nephesh* and with all your strength. Love the Lord your God with every breath you take and every breath you exhale.

Your breath is a powerful tool to direct your thoughts and focus your attention. The best way to deliberately calm yourself is by taking a deep sigh, according to Dr. Andrew Huberman, a neuroscientist at Stanford University. In fact, studies show that learning to control your breathing during moments of stress while awake can lead to decreased respiratory rate during sleep, suggesting that it is possible to train our nervous system to become calmer.

Focusing on God's breath in you can help you *become* a calmer person.



Consider focusing on your breathing during the next few minutes as we enter a time of silence. Do not underestimate the power of your breath and how it will enable you to spend life-giving time with God.

INVITATION TO GROUP SILENCE:

To begin, have someone from your group open with the liturgy provided below. Group leaders may choose to read it aloud or designate someone to read it for the group:

A LITURGY FOR PAYING ATTENTION

Oh Christ who lingered,
who listened,
who welcomed interruption,
let us be generous with attention.

Busyness tricks us into scarcity,
into clutching on to time as if we could lose it.
Distracted by yesterday's failures and tomorrow's fears,
we forget the gift of today.
We long to stand attentive,
to be startled by creation again,
to be astounded by what has faded into familiarity.

May we take notice of the lives we have been given.
May we tune our ears when a friend speaks,
Make eye contact with strangers,
touch fields of flowers,
become students of trees.
May we regard how even dishes and dust have something to teach.
May our focus be always on You, looking for Your fingerprints in the world,
for to stay curious is to stay present.

May awe be the filter through which we experience the ordinary.

Lay claim to our lives again so we can
attend fully to this moment.
Slow our pace and settle our spirits
so we may bear witness to beauty,
to details in the myriad stories around us.

May our attention feel more like a prayer that never ceases,
like a rope that tethers us to You.

We lay down our need to perform and produce,
and choose to dawdle in nature,
to lengthen conversations,
to linger with neighbors,
to stroll instead of sprint,
to believe time is oil we can pour out on You.

Amen.

LITURGIES FOR WHOLENESS

Audrey Elledge and Elizabeth Moore

Psalm 16:8; 27:4 | Isaiah 43:19 | Matthew 6:28

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 | James 1:19

After the liturgy, you are invited to enter into the practice of silence for approximately fifteen minutes. Group leaders will gently remind the group that walking, moving about, and spending time in scripture are abundant ways to spend fifteen minutes with God. Give your whole self during this time, and remember it is called practice because each time, it gets easier if you commit to showing up.

After your time of silence, gather back together and reflect aloud using the prompts below:

- Did your mind find peace during your fifteen minutes?
- Were you able to quiet the noise around you and within you? If so, what was helpful? If not, what can you learn from those around you about how to focus attention?
- What about this practice was life-giving to you?

GUIDE TO PRACTICING SOLITUDE AND SILENCE AS A FAMILY

Embracing silence is about creating space and time where each member can grow spiritually, listen to God, and find peace amidst life's chaos.

UNDERSTANDING SOLITUDE AND SILENCE.

In our modern lives, there is a habit of filling silence with technology or activities, a habit that is important to recognize not only in ourselves but also in our children. It is crucial to appreciate that the practice of solitude and silence is not about isolation or a dismissal of what is around us. Instead, it offers space to foster spiritual development.

As you invite these practices into your family life, it is important to recognize and honor the individual needs and differences among your loved ones. Each person will connect with silence and solitude in their unique way. Encourage every family member to discover and embrace an approach to these practices that resonates with their age and personality.

FOR PARENTS:

Morning Ritual: Begin the day with moments of silence before the rest of the house wakes up. This can include meditation, prayer, or simply enjoying a cup of coffee in peace.

Evening Wind-Down: Spend time in solitude after the children are in bed, reflecting on the day or reading a spiritual or inspirational book.

FOR TEENAGERS:

Creative Spaces: Encourage them to use silence creatively and for fun—like sketching, journaling, or painting.

Tech Detox: Allocate periods where they unplug from all devices to find quiet time, perhaps integrating this with a hobby they enjoy.

FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN:

Quiet Time with Books: Introduce ‘silent reading time’ with their favorite books or picture bibles.

Silent Crafts: Engage them in silent crafting activities that encourage concentration and inner calm, like coloring, puzzles, or building blocks. Family puzzles can be great fun!

FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY:

Mealtime: Designate one meal a week where everyone spends a few minutes in silence, using the time to reflect or pray. There may be lots of laughter at first!

Silent Drives: Have short periods during car rides where the family sits in silence, looking out the window, and reflecting.

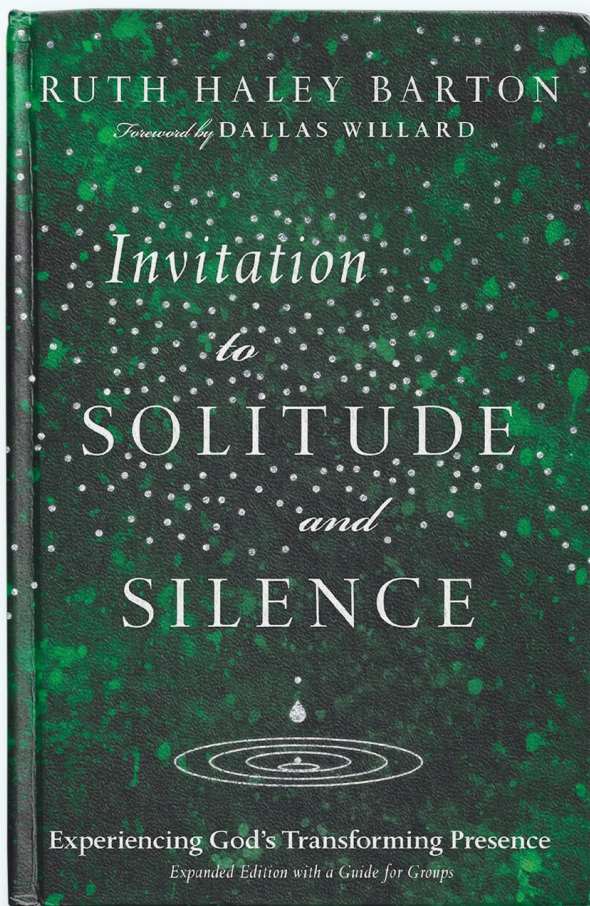
Each month, our Family Ministry Team will provide resources for your family to experience these practices in your home.



Scan the QR code to watch members from our Family Ministry Team help you as you continue to discern what this practice could look like in your family.

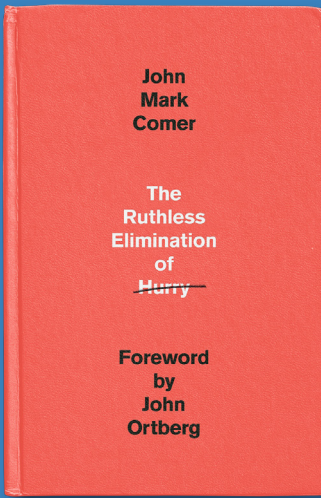
RESOURCES

Want to go deeper in Solitude and Silence Practices?
Consider reading the suggested resource below:

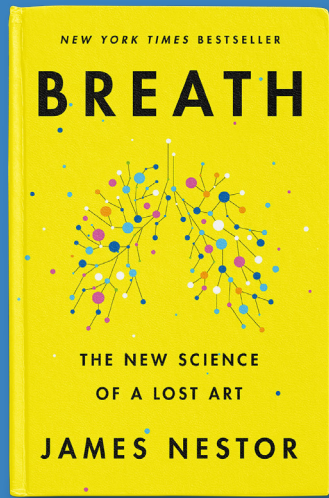


INVITATION TO SOLITUDE AND SILENCE

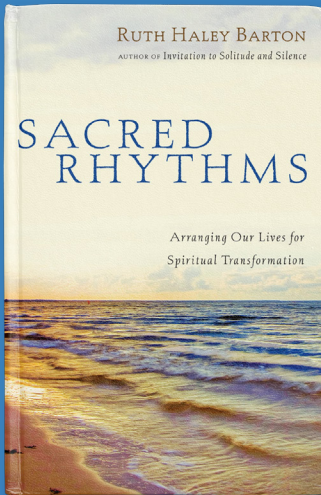
Ruth Haley Barton



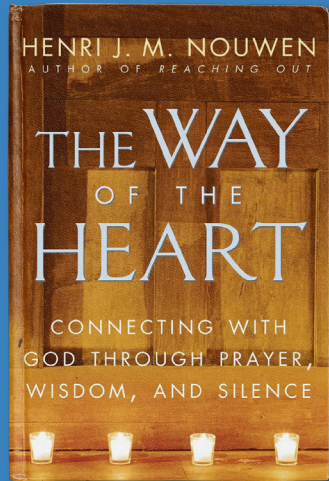
**THE RUTHLESS
ELIMINATION OF HURRY**
John Mark Comer



**BREATH: THE NEW
SCIENCE OF A LOST ART**
James Nestor



SACRED RHYTHMS
Ruth Haley Barton



THE WAY OF THE HEART
Henri J. M. Nouwen

**BE STILL AND KNOW
THAT I AM GOD.**

PSALM 46:10



**PEACHTREE
CHURCH**