



## The Practice of Silence - Part 1

### Welcome:

*This is part 1 of a two-part series on the practice of silence. This material will cover what silence is and equip you with two different ways of practicing silence: Psalm repetition and journaling.*

### Value for Today's CG:

Our value for this installment is *faith*. We trust that in our practices of silence, discussion, and Scripture readings, Jesus will be with us.

### A Way of Practicing Silence - Psalm Repetition:

Begin the time together by practicing silence with the following Psalm repetition exercise: First, pick a Psalm for this exercise. Some Psalms that work well are: Psalm 19, Psalm 40, Psalm 51, Psalm 55, Psalm 71, and Psalm 104. For the next 5 minutes, sit together in silence. As you sit, breathe in deeply and exhale deeply. Slowly read the Psalm to yourself as you breathe, connecting each line you read with your inhale or exhale. Let's take Psalm 1:4 for example:

The wicked are not so; (*while you inhale*)  
But are like chaff that the wind drives away. (*while you exhale*)

This exercise helps us to connect our controlled breathing with the reading of Scripture. It is meant to take the Psalms we are reading deeper into our souls — just as our breathing is meant to move oxygen throughout our bodies. The hope is that we would imbibe the Psalm into ourselves and that the Psalm would flow through us and give us life as we interact with God through it.

### Connection and Unity Exercise:

Using Mutual Invitation, invite each person to share their answer to the following question:

What was that experience of Psalm repetition like for you?

### Silence in Scripture:

Throughout Scripture, we see different experiences that connect silence with being present with God. Many Psalms speak about the connection between stillness and experiencing God. The authors of the Psalms understood that it can take time in silence to connect with God, to communicate with Him and for Him to communicate with them. Good examples of this are Psalm 46:10 (“Be still and know that I am God”) or Psalm 37:7 (“Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him.”). In other stories, like Elijah on the mountain with God in 1 Kings 19, Scripture

makes a connection between silence and experiencing God. Let's look closer at the story of Elijah in 1 Kings 19.

*The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave and the voice spoke to him.*

Different translations replace "gentle whisper" with "voice of thin silence," "sound of a light whisper," and "still small voice." It was in the stillness that Elijah heard the gentle whisper of God.

Jesus begins His ministry with 40 days in the wilderness to prepare for all that lies ahead. He would have been alone in a silent desert for most of that time. This practice of retreating to a quiet place was one that He consistently repeated throughout His ministry. If it's helpful for your group to read and consider them, here are some examples of Jesus practicing times of silence: Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16; Luke 6:12-13; Luke 11:1-2; Matthew 14:13; and John 6:15. These times of silence in prayer with the Father in the middle of a noisy world with all its demands were central to Christ's life on earth.

**Ask:**

1. Can you remember a time when you experienced hearing God's voice as a gentle whisper? Where were you, and what was it like?
2. Do you remember a time when you intentionally went away from a distracting noise or location for quietness, and God met you there? What was that like, and what did God seem to communicate to you?

**Addicted to Noise:**

We have become highly acquainted and accustomed with the noise around us, and because of that, silence can feel strange. Our city and culture's values of productivity and efficiency require constant communication and attention to demands that make it extremely difficult to ever feel at peace. There are loud voices consistently calling for our attention. And in the midst of our loud world, we long for silence. Most of us have had experiences of being in a place or moment where the world was quiet and the demands on our time, life, and energy were far away. Perhaps it was on a vacation, retreat, or 10 minutes in a park with no one around where you soaked in the quiet and stillness and felt, if even for a moment, at peace.

Practicing silence is an attempt to bring stillness to a frantic world. It is in silence, however, that we often become aware of all our anxiety, insecurities, and fears. In his book *Keeping Silence*, C.W. McPherson says, "Just as a long-term prisoner, released from jail, finds freedom confining

and longs for the regularity and predictability of life in the cell block, we long for what we know: noise. Our noisy world acts as a kind of insulation, a distraction from the serious concerns that silence often invites.” Even though we want the peace which stillness brings, we also find comfort in the noise we know, rather than the silence we don’t.

**Ask:**

What specifically is noise in your life?

**Listening to God:**

Have you ever tried to read while other people are having a loud conversation next to you? Listening to God in the midst of a noisy world is kind of like that. It’s not impossible; it just takes an added degree of focus and concentration.

Silence offers a respite from the noise. On its own, it can improve concentration and calm the body. It can offer balance and it makes extremes easier to manage. But more importantly for followers of Jesus, silence puts us in touch with God in the reality of our hearts, attuning us to the present moment to make room for a conversation with God. Silence, when regularly practiced and incorporated into our lives, removes ourselves from the noise so we can attend to our inner voice and commune and connect with God.

In listening to God, it may not be that we listen for a voice speaking words, as if we might hear an audible whisper telling us, “I’m God and I love you.” Not to say this never *will* happen, because it might. However, sometimes listening for God in silence is being opening to an *impression*. We get the impression that God is communicating something to us, which we heed with faith and curiosity (weighing it alongside with Scripture and dialogue with other believers). Silence opens us to such impressions from the Holy Spirit.

**A Way of Practicing Silence - Journaling:**

Finish the time together with a journaling exercise. Sit in silence for 5 minutes. Use 2 minutes of the time to be attentive to what’s going on inside of you. Then use the last 3 minutes to write a prayer about what came up and what you want to say to God. If there is time, have a few people share their prayers.