



## The Practice of Silence - Part 2

### Welcome:

*This is part 2 of a two-part series on the practice of silence. This material invites your group to choose a communal practice of silence and equips you with two different ways of practicing silence: breath counting and the Jesus Prayer.*

### Value for Today's CG:

Our value for this installment is *rootedness*. In material dedicated to identifying a group's communal practice of silence, rootedness — i.e. the willingness to commit to one another — is a key value. Observe how choosing to make commitments can deepen your roots in you CG and make your group more invested in one another's (not just your own) growing relationship with God.

### A Way of Practicing Silence - Breath Counting:

As a tool for slowing down into silence with God after a busy day with a frenetic state of mind, breath counting is remarkably helpful; in fact, it has Scriptural ties. The Hebrew name for Spirit of God, *Ruach Elohim* (see Genesis 1:2), *Ruach* translates to “spirit,” “wind,” and “*breath*.” So the language of Scripture invites us to connect our breath with the *Ruach Elohim*— the Spirit, the Breath of God — especially when we consider Genesis 2:7: “Then 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.” We might remember this Biblical framework when practicing breath-counting prayer.

Breath counting is as simple as it sounds. Open with a short prayer, dedicating the time to interaction with the Holy Spirit. Simply count your slow breaths, restarting the count each time you reach ten. Let focus on these breaths slow and still your mind and open your heart to God. When an important impression strikes you, follow that in prayer. If nothing strikes you, simply continue your breathing prayer and remember the presence of God with you.

### Connection and Unity Exercise:

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

How did you experience breath counting as prayer? What came up in silence that you might want to share with the group?

### **Silence Today:**

These days, we only need to consider a rapid pace of life, unending notifications, or ever-present advertising to see the need for the peace, clarity, and connection to Jesus that silence brings. But what does a contemporary practice of silence look like for us today?

When we consider silence today, it's best to first think of the noise it stands in contrast to, which includes media and entertainment, news and opinions, traffic and construction, gossip and music, and so on. Clearly not all these examples of noise are wrong in and of themselves. Yet to the degree that they detract from mindfulness of God and awareness of His presence and His thoughts toward creation, they might be doing us a disservice.

Indeed, in a poll of RSF church members, an overwhelming number of respondents identified problems with extreme distraction and noise. They identified a practice of silence as an important need for their well-being and relationship with God. Silence today, therefore, might be seen as an important counter-cultural response, in which we replace the noisiness of the world with moments absent of sound, media, and chatter in order to interact with God.

#### **Ask:**

1. What are some common themes in the kinds of noisiness your group experiences that tend to draw your attention from God?
2. What is missing or stagnant in your life which practicing silence with God might be able to help? For those who observe regular practices of silence already, what changes have you noticed?

### **A Way of Practicing Silence - The Jesus Prayer:**

The Jesus Prayer (a rephrasing of the tax collector's prayer in Luke 18:10-14) distills key parts of the Gospel into a single-sentence prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Try repeating this prayer to guide you into silence, focusing on its Gospel message. A particular phrase might give you pause to consider the Lordship of Jesus, His mercy and grace, your own life, or your sin. When these arise, follow them into further interaction with God in prayer. Take 5 minutes of quiet together as a group to practice this prayer.

[If interested in learning more about this practice of prayer in narrative form, consider reading *The Way of a Pilgrim*, the story of a humble Russian peasant who sets out to pray with only the Jesus Prayer.]

### **A Communal Practice of Silence:**

So far in our conversation or in personal prayers, we might notice some common themes regarding the sources of noise in our lives. We likewise might see commonality in what seems to be missing or have common thoughts about how silence helps. With so much commonality, how might we support one another in practicing silence? The Christian life was never meant to be lived alone. For this reason, we think it's important that, at least for a season, we choose to opt in and take on a common practice of silence together as a church and as particular CGs.

Just as a house must be built on a foundation, a community's devotion to God must be built on foundational spiritual practices — in this case the practice of silence. What might your group's practice of silence look like? What's a doable yet stretching rhythm of silence that your whole group could commit to keeping and supporting one another in? Walk through these steps to create a doable yet stretching and unifying communal practice of silence. Note-taking is encouraged!

1. *Unified Vision For Why:* Why do or don't you think silence is an important practice for our community? What good might result in our relationships with one another and God as a result of practicing silence?

Here are examples of the conclusion your group may come to:

- “We believe silence will help us find greater peace and intimacy with God.”
- We believe silence will make us better listeners and more supportive friends to one another.”

2. *Getting Specific:* What would the communal practice of silence look like for your group? Is it a practice of journaling, praying with Scripture, or some combination? Also, get specific with time (regularity and duration) in order to form a spiritual habit of silence.

Here are examples of the conclusion your group may come to:

- “We'll keep a practice of silence by praying the Jesus Prayer or meditating on Scripture (each person's choice) for 5 minutes when we wake up each morning for the next month.”
- “We'll keep a practice of silence by journaling 20 minutes, twice per week, for the next month.”

Note: Some might want to do more, and some may want to do some less. The key to defining this practice will be that it is doable, stretching, and unifying for all members of the group. It's most important to do it *together*. Plus, those who want to do more can always choose to do so for themselves.

3. *Checking In With One Another:* Since practices are meant to open our hearts to God, how will the group check in with one another about the state of our hearts as we practice silence? There will be opportunities to check in with the guided material, but would anything else be helpful?

Here are examples of the conclusion your group may come to:

- “We'll regularly ask one another how our practice of silence is opening our hearts to God and listening with curiosity.”
- “We'll break into groups of two and check in with one another to encourage and support.”

4. *Room For Adjustment:* Choosing a communal practice of silence is not a life sentence! There's room for revisiting and adapting the group's practice in order to make sure that it

is always doable yet stretching and unifying. How can the group revisit this plan in open, non-judgmental discussion?

Here is an example of the conclusion your group may come to:

- “We’ll keep this practice for a month, but we’ll revisit then and see how doable, stretching, and unifying it has been for us.”

5. *Tying It Together:* Given this conversation, what is the practice of silence that our group is going to do together and support one each other in? Write it down. Come to agreement and potentially change the plan in order to get the whole group (or as many as possible) onboard.

**Ask:**

Considering this communal practice of silence that the CG just defined, what makes you excited, worried, resistant, or hopeful about practicing silence together as a CG and church?

**Closing Prayer:**

Take a minute of silence and then have one person close your time in prayer.