



When God is Mostly Silent

by Dan Siemens

When I was in high school, I put up a poster over my bed that hung there through all my teen years. It was a glossy photograph that had been varnished onto a discarded, but fashionably-recycled, wooden grape tray—the latest artistic innovation from the vineyard culture where I grew up in the central valley of California.

The photo was of a beautiful nature scene taken in the deepest woods. Green ferns hung languidly in the shadows as scattered laser light beams streamed through the forest canopy where majestic moss-covered oak trees grew. A gurgling stream meandered through the center of the frame and collected into a small waterfall that appeared like velvety-soft, liquid silver, gently pouring itself in slow motion over the rim and cascading timelessly into the gracefully-swirling pool below.

I had adopted the caption under this peaceful scene as my personal motto during all those turbulent years of growth and discovery. The poster simply read:

*If you do not understand my silence,
you will not understand my words.*

Now years later, I was once again reminded of these very words when I listened to Graham Cooke, one of our conference speakers, relate to us one of his many succinct, pithy paradoxes. He said,

*God is mostly silent. But when He speaks,
it's an Event.*

I started to wonder. Is that really true?

Picturing God being mostly silent is quite a contrast to our noticeably-extroverted renewal culture. We are often characterized by long bouts of lusty singing and high-powered worship, clapping, shouting, dancing, and never-ending 24/7 intercessory

prayers. We also speak in tongues, sing in the Spirit, and give long words of knowledge, prophecy, and interpretation. It seems that we who call ourselves Spirit-filled are always testifying, always moving, rarely still, seldom reflective. Just from the operation of the gifts of the Spirit alone, one could easily get the impression that the majority of the time, God is pretty verbose.

So, God is mostly silent?

If our God can be experienced through our celebration and word-gifts, which of course is true, isn't it possible that He may also be found in the depths of a quality of Stillness and Holy Silence? Then the meaning of the verse on that poster on my bedroom wall also becomes relevant.

If we do not understand God's silence—by learning to cultivate, abide, and be at home with Him there—we will not, and cannot, understand His words.

Therefore, we dare not neglect cultivating a measure of solitude and silence as important elements of our spiritual development. Why? Because they anchor us in something *spiritually substantial* in order for us to safely engage in the fast-paced, global world without being merely swept along and controlled by the force of its strong current.

Without these spiritual disciplines we are apt to daily drown in media blitzes confronting us larger than life on our big screen television sets, and blaring at us from computer images, cell phones, facebooking, texting, twittering...noise and words and more words. Without learning to live *deeply from the Spirit*, how will we ever be able to hear, much less understand, the intent behind the Voice of our God whenever He does speak? I wonder if some of the shallowness of what is called "prophecy" these days is a direct result from this lack of grounding. Without cultivating silence in the presence of the Lord,

how can we discern the more subtle and intimate ways that God relates to us: channels of Kingdom “*communion*” that operate on a deeper level than mere words can ever convey. Yes, even prophetic words.

Hmmm. God is mostly silent. But when he speaks, it's an event...

If you don't understand my silence, you will not understand my words...

Cultivating authentic, interior silence in the midst of our noisy culture is not easy. The first step along the way is that we must learn to become acclimated to stillness. Coming to a place of genuine stillness means that, in a deliberate manner, we must take time to simply choose to become *unplugged*—unplugged from all of our distractions and the things that tend to drive us internally. Like a computer virus that operates in hiddenness, these things operate outside of our conscious awareness, but they affect us nonetheless. Therefore, from time to time we must take an honest personal inventory, download God's spiritual anti-virus program, and dare to unplug from that which has inadvertently become our favorite electronic Valium. This is the only way to rightly reengage our media-saturated world in personal freedom and with Kingdom integrity.

Often, it is after unplugging and seeking to live in some measure of stillness and solitude that the real battle begins. To our chagrin, we sometimes discover the real source of all the chatter and distraction is not external at all, but something internal, bubbling up from inside our own hearts and heads.

If you think extroverted personalities are the only ones who struggle more concerning becoming quiet and restful, think again. An extrovert may certainly have more trouble severing his or her over-connection to, and dependence on, their *exterior world*. But for an introvert, shutting off all of the internal noise can be even more difficult because we live predominately *inside our heads*. Just because introverted personalities tend to be more reticent in their social interactions and in their spirituality, it doesn't mean they know how to silence the tumult

that often arises from the all too familiar recesses of their *interior world*.

So, where can we start the process of coming to stillness and incorporating the spiritual discipline of solitude? Intentionally give yourself permission to be still, to slow down, to stop moving, to be alone. Start by looking for the opportunities that each day brings. This summer when you have little snatches of inaction and silence, when you happen to rise early and see a soft, morning sunrise over the lake, or you are up late wondering over the expanse and gentle solitude of a starry night...stop. Be still. Maybe you'll find yourself sitting on the deck in your backyard after a hard day's work or wading in a mountain stream casting for that trout. Go ahead. Allow your soul to be recalibrated to the rhythm of nature that, at first, may seem very foreign to the pace to which you are normally accustomed.

The created order, what the Celtic Christians called God's “Big Book”—the Bible being God's “Little Book”—holds out a sure remedy for us. (The terms “big” and “little” don't infer significance, but the actual size of each.) As we draw from God's good creation, we allow our hearts to become attuned once again to the Cadence of the Holy One. After all, it is He who fashioned the rhythm of the created order in the first place.

Lastly, with the Lord, seek to become like two best friends who know each other so well and have learned the art of relaxing and enjoying one another's presence. It's the idea that simply being together is more than enough—a place where we all can discover, or recover, the ability to gaze upon, draw from, and dwell within the rhythm of the heart-beat of our Beloved.

(If you would like to learn more about these spiritual disciplines check out *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence*, by Ruth Haley Barton © 2004.)

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