

SILENCE

DESIRE	To free myself from the addiction to and distraction of noise so I can be totally present to the Lord; to open myself to God in the place beyond words
DEFINITION	Silence is a regenerative practice of attending and listening to God in quiet, without interruption and noise. Silence provides freedom from speaking as well as from listening to words or music. (Reading is also listening to words.)
SCRIPTURE	<p>“But oh! God is in his holy Temple! Quiet everyone—a holy silence. Listen!” (Habakkuk 2:20 <i>The Message</i>)</p> <p>“After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper” (1 Kings 19:12).</p> <p>“There was silence in heaven for about half an hour” (Revelation 8:1).</p> <p>“But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed” (Luke 5:16).</p>
PRACTICE INCLUDES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> setting a period of time in which you don’t speak, but isolate yourself from sounds (other than perhaps the sounds of nature) <input type="checkbox"/> driving or commuting without the radio or CD player turned on <input type="checkbox"/> leaving the TV off; spending time in silence with God alone <input type="checkbox"/> exercising without attending to noise; listening to God <input type="checkbox"/> having personal retreats of silence
GOD-GIVEN FRUIT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> being attentive to the voice of Jesus <input type="checkbox"/> having freedom from negative habits of speech (deception, gossip, impulsive chatter, small talk impression management, the need to express your opinion or critique)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> freedom from addictions to noise or sound (radio, TV, phone, iPod, etc.)<input type="checkbox"/> receiving quiet from the chaos and the noise in your life<input type="checkbox"/> having deeper intimacy with God<input type="checkbox"/> growing in self-awareness as the silence invites the subconscious to move into deeper levels of knowing<input type="checkbox"/> developing increased listening skills
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Silence challenges our cultural addiction to amusement, words, music advertising, noise, alarms and voices. Silence asks for patience and waiting. Silence and waiting make us uncomfortable. They seem so unproductive. We can't tell if we are *doing* anything in them. So when we come upon silence, we fill it.

In the midst of so many words it becomes difficult to know which messages are really important and which ones we need to remember.

This habit of glancing at words and people extends to our relationship with God. We want pithy, memorable sermons. Could it be that what we need is time alone with God and a lot fewer words "Do Not Disturb" – learn what it is to be available to God alone.

We need to realize that the world can go on without us for an hour or a day or even longer. We don't need to respond to every word and request that comes our way. The discipline of silence invites us to leave behind the competing demands of our outer world for time alone with Jesus. Silence offers a way of paying attention to the Spirit of God and what he brings to the surface of our souls.

In quietness we often notice things we would rather not notice or feel. Our own outer agenda looms larger than our desire to be with God in silence. And as the silence settles in and nothing seems to be happening, we often struggle with the feeling that we are wasting time. Everything we notice in this struggle can become an invitation to prayer. Like a can opener the silence opens up the contents of our heart, allowing us deeper access to God than we experience at other times. As we remain in the silence, the inner noise and chaos will begin to settle. Our capacity to open up wider and wider to God grows. The holy One has access to places we don't even know exist in the midst of the hubbub.

It is Holy Spirit's job to keep the inner process of revelation underway. But in order for the Spirit to do his job, we need to cooperate and put ourselves in a place to deeply and reflectively listen. Be alone with God in the silence. Offer your body and your attention to God as a prayer (Rom. 2:1, 2).

There is nothing you need to do here. This is not a time to come up with strategies for fixing your life. Silence is a time to rest in God. Lean into God, trusting that being with him in silence will loosen your rootedness in the world and plant you by streams of living water. It can form your life even if it doesn't solve your life. Let the silence lead you to prayer.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Where do you have silence with God in your life? (i.e., no words, printed or audible)
2. Do you think God values time with you in silence? Explain.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

1. Begin with ten minutes. Setting a timer can help a novice who keeps watching the clock. The timer lets you forget the time and settle into the quiet. After ten minutes, reflect on what it was like for you to simply become still enough to hear the background. The benefits of being silent are often seen in the fruit it bears rather than in the experience of silence per se.
2. While doing a task, turn off any background noise and continue the task by offering it to God. Be in the present, doing what you are doing with a listening heart.
3. Meditate on Psalm 37:4.
4. Go into silence, placing yourself in the presence of God with the words "Here I am." As distractions come to mind, let them go by imagining they are boats floating down a river. Let the current take the distractions away. Don't follow the distractions. Gently return to God repeating "Here I am."
5. Spend a half day in silence: no books (other than the Bible).