

# Silence

*A Sacred Summer*

## STORY

I was a burned-out youth director who also was the Christian Education director at my church. I was a wife of a pastor and a mom to two young sons. I was desperate for some kind of relief. Thankfully my boss suggested time at the Abbey of Gethsemani near Bardstown, KY. It is a Benedictine monastery where silence is practiced, and they provide silent retreats. So I went for five days of silence.

As an extreme extrovert, my friends thought I was crazy! They suggested I try a weekend, not a week. But I knew in my heart that I needed the full five days. For five days, I let myself just be with God. I didn't realize how tired I was. I went to sleep when the monks did at 8:30 pm. It took me until Wednesday for my brain to "shut up" so I could actually start listening and hearing from Jesus. I didn't know anyone there, and I didn't talk to anyone. I asked a couple of questions of the guest master, like how I could get a toothbrush since I'd forgotten mine, but I honestly didn't speak for five days. It was amazing! I actually wished I could have stayed longer. Now five days of silence at the Abbey is an annual practice. The practice of silence saved my life and my ministry.

I know that most people don't have the luxury or the privilege of taking a five-day silent retreat. But we all can begin to practice silence in our everyday lives and learn how to open this amazing gift! We all have very noisy lives and very noisy brains! Our brains are filled with thoughts, feelings, emotions, to-do lists, etc. With all that noise, we need to learn to experience quiet so we can actually hear from Jesus. How do we begin to practice silence? What do we need to do to open this gift this summer?

First things first. You are not behind. This practice of silence and slowing down is not impossible! Take a breath. You are allowed to just be! To be in this place right now. To be with Jesus and allow his gift of silence and peace to surround you.

\*Written by Lilly Lewin.

## PRACTICES

*Each day of the week, take time to do the 5 or the 15-minute practice.*

*Plan a time to do the Going Deeper practice sometime during the week.*

- **5-minute Practice:** Where can you practice Silence? Begin your practice: in the shower, in the bathtub, in your car, in the morning before others wake up, or at night before bed. Set apart time to simply be, to disconnect, and to listen to the Holy Spirit. Set a timer for 5-minutes. When your time is over, ask what stood out to you? How do you feel? What is God doing in you today? As you start your practice of silence, talk to Jesus, say, “Here I am, Lord. I am Listening.”
- **15-minute Practice:** Find a comfortable spot where you will not be distracted. Set the timer for 15-minutes. Create a Brain Drain List writing down all the things that float through your head... the to-dos you haven’t done, the people you are worried about, the stuff that is bothering you. You can add to this list throughout the 15-minutes as needed. Invite Jesus to be with you in this silent time (He already is with you). “Here I am, Lord. I am Listening.” What do you notice? What do you hear? Talk to Jesus about this after your 15-minutes of silence.
- **Going Deeper:** Have a mini silent retreat. Intentionally set aside time to have a silent afternoon/evening, day, weekend. This will take planning with those who might gather with you to do this or need to know you are disconnecting. Your brain is noisy and filled with thoughts, to-do lists and obligations. As you feel the noise drift in, prayerfully give those thoughts to God and invite the Holy Spirit to work within you. Keep your Brain Drain List handy. You can choose how your mini-retreat will go. Take a walk, create something in art, write in your journal, rest! You might fall asleep, or you may find that your brain is full of more thoughts than you can manage. These are both normal responses to silence and sabbath. Look back at your month, week, day, and see what God has been doing in your life. After your time of silence, process your experience by sharing it with others and/or journaling. What did you learn and hear?

# SCRIPTURE

Psalm 46, Psalm 17, I Samuel 3:1-10

## QUESTIONS for Journaling and Discussion

- How do we begin to practice silence? What do we need to do to open the gift of silence this summer? How can you start baby-stepping into silence?
- What is uncomfortable about silence for you? Why? Talk to Jesus about this.
- How did Jesus practice silence?
- What are your fears in practicing silence? Make a list. Everyone has a jam-packed, noisy brain! So, you will need to create a Brain Drain List to keep beside you during your practice of silence. When thoughts, frustrations, etc. come up, write them down.
- Consider ways you can naturally add silence to your everyday life... turn off the phone, tv, music, close the computer for a period of time each day. Why is this so hard for us to do?
- Do your normal routine in silence in the morning or evening. Load the dishwasher, make the bed, get dressed in silence. Drive in silence. Take a walk in silence. What else could you do silently that might normally involve noise or talking? How does it feel to practice silence in this way? What do you notice?

## EXPERIENCES

Choose one or several to try.

- **Brain Drain List:** As you begin your time of silence, you will always find that your brain is filled with many things. So, you will need to create a Brain Drain List each time you begin! Write down all the things that are flowing through your mind. Your to-do's, worries, whatever comes up. Keep this list near you and add to it throughout your time of silence. Remember: any time you practice silence, your brain will get noisy! So, you will need to make a Brain Drain List. At the beginning of an extended practice of silence (an hour or more), use your journal or some paper and write at least three pages on all the things that are going on in your brain and in your life: all the worries, frustrations, homework, work, chores, etc. that you are carrying around with you. When setting aside a time of silence, you will need to add to this list. Tell Jesus about all that you are thinking and worrying about, and let Him hold these things for you while listening to him.
- **For Communities, Small Groups, and Families:** Eat a meal with others/your family in silence. What do you notice? Listen to the sounds, pay attention to your senses. What do you hear? What are the scents/smells? Notice the taste of the food. Have a Brain Drain List beside you to write down things that might distract you from being present to Jesus and your meal. Spend time listening. Make a list of what you notice. Take time to be grateful for these things. After the established time of silence, talk about what you saw, heard, learned, and what was challenging about this practice.
- **For Individuals, Families, and Small Groups:** Create a space to practice silence. Cover the floor with pillows and blankets. Lay down and listen to the sounds around you. "Here I am, Lord. I am Listening." What do you notice? What do you hear? What does Jesus talk to you about? If you are doing this as a family or a small group, talk about how you felt and what you heard or noticed during the silence.
- **For Individuals, Communities, Small Groups, and Families:** Plan a time to go outside and practice silence, on your own, as a family, or as a small group. Plan how long your time of silence will be together. Go outside and take time to stargaze silently, or watch the clouds, or watch a sunset or sunrise. Allow God to speak to you in the beauty of nature. After your time of silence, take time to journal what you saw, heard, learned, and/or take time to share it with your group.
- **Read:**
  - ***Silence*** by Jerome W Berryman. (Godly Play) Children's book recommended for EVERYONE
  - ***Dialogues with Silence: Prayers and Drawings*** by Thomas Merton

## PUSHBACK

Maybe you are terrified of being quiet, or perhaps you feel like you live in quiet or silence all the time because you live alone or are more introverted. We all need to practice intentional silence where we can listen for the still small voice of God.

## PRAYER

Uncrowd my heart, O God,  
Until silence speaks in your still, small voice;  
Turn me from the hearing of words, and the making of words,  
And the confusion of much speaking,  
To listening,  
To waiting,  
To stillness and  
To Silence.  
In the name of Jesus, Amen.  
(based on a Prayer by Thomas Merton)