

## 10 FAQ's to Practicing Silence

### **1. Why is this so hard?**

You have a lifetime of not being silent. Imagine not running or exercising your entire life and then beginning. It will be difficult. Very difficult. Over time, however, it will become more and more natural. The same comes to exercising your God-given muscles to pay attention to God through silence. Remember: God commands us to be still (Ps. 46:10;Ps. 37:7). Every human being has a contemplative dimension that longs for silence with God. A relationship with God requires we listen and be, and not simply talk incessantly.

### **2. Isn't this the same as Eastern meditation, New Age, or some secular programs on mindfulness?**

We should not be surprised all other religions have silence (they also have worship, Scriptures, community, etc.). The largest difference is that we are *not* emptying our minds into nothingness or looking for an altered state of consciousness. We practice silence in the presence of the Living God. This type of prayer is rooted in Scripture and goes back to Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, Jesus, and the monastic heritage of 2000 years of Christian history. We are *being with* the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moreover, this is part of our larger prayer life that includes worship, confession, petitions, etc. It is not to be confused with Transcendental Meditation, Hindu, Sufi, or Buddhist methods of meditation or any New Age technique.

### **3. What is the goal of silence each day before God?**

Our aim is to be with God. As Thomas Keating has summarized so well: It expresses our intent to surrender our will to God's presence and action. Practicing silence is about cultivating our personal relationship with Him.

### **4. How often is it recommended to practice silence before God?**

For the last twelve years, I have recommended people begin with two minutes (See [Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Day by Day](#)). But I have recently moved to recommend 5 minutes to start and then expand to 15-20 minutes each day as your "muscles for paying attention" develop. The [Centering Prayer](#) ministry (filled with great resources) recommends 20 minutes, twice a day. Over the years I have settled in to 20 minutes one time a day as part of my morning Office. I find that early in the morning is best, before the activities of the day begin, but that is not possible for everyone. I integrate other times of silence during my midday and evening Offices (These may range from 1 to 10 minutes).

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### **5. *What do I do when my mind wanders?***

This is the number one challenge for every person. You are not alone! Our minds can wander 100 times in a five-minute period! Much has been written about this the last 2000 years. I do three things. First, I focus on my breathing, become aware of my inhaling and exhaling as gifts of God. This is used in the Eastern Church quite a bit and is commonly talked about in secular trainings for “mindfulness.” I find it very helpful when I am particularly distracted. Secondly, I focus on one word “Abba” or “Jesus” to return to every time I realize I have wandered. This keeps me anchored on Him. And finally, I will first spend time in Scripture, a devotional reading, or journal if I have a lot on my mind before I begin my time of silence.

### **6. *I don't have a quiet place in my house or work. What do I do?***

It is very possible to experience interior silence even when we are unable to have exterior silence. I have practiced silence in Times Square, subways, buses, airplanes, stairwells of our church during events, park benches, highway rest stops, my car, on the beach, and empty church buildings. I know teachers who use closets, sanitation workers who used their trucks, and students who use libraries.

### **7. *What kinds of things have you found to be helpful to grow in this practice?***

I may light a candle to remind me of the light of Christ. I use the timer on my phone each morning, setting it for 20 minutes. Scripture, as the Word of God, is a core component of my time with God –either before or after our time of silence. Meditating, memorizing, studying, and reading Scripture has become so much richer for me as I have created ample space to be still. I also have a special chair that I use in my office, giving me a sense of sacred space that is set apart.

### **8. *Why don't I hear God speak when I am silent? This is not working.***

The goal is not to hear from God but to be with God. I am not looking for guidance (yet it often comes). I do find that He says a lot when I am quiet! Part of maturing in Christ is not judging the quality of our time with Him based on how we feel. The goal is to be with Jesus – not feel good. There are many benefits during the day of practicing silence – greater awareness of God and ourselves, being less triggered, a wider sense of peacefulness, etc. Just showing up to be with Jesus in silence is an expression of dependence on him. That is success.

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### **9. *What do I do if I don't have enough time and feel rushed?***

I adjust to the time I have allotted. If, for example, I have only 10 minutes for a Midday Office with God, I will choose to structure the time based on what I need to commune with Jesus. This may include more or less silence, Scripture, etc. The goal is not to get through a reading or time set aside for silence. Our aim is *to be* with the person of Jesus.

### **10. *I did it for a while but I got bored and quit.***

Like any other practice in life, you will find your way over time. There is a great deal to learn about the interior movements of your heart and silence with God. Getting started is the most difficult – much like jogging or exercise. Over time, however, you will wonder, as so many others before you, how you ever lived without it. I highly recommend you begin by looking at the [Centering Prayer](#) website materials of Thomas Keating and the resources found at [The Transforming Center](#). And I would encourage you to look up the many evangelical authors who are now writing on the integration of contemplative spirituality within a Protestant theological framework.