

# The Sound of Silence

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"For God alone my soul waits in silence."--Psalm 62:1

One of my favorite themes, and one of the most important things that we can do to manage our human condition is to find time to be still, quiet, and at peace.

A century ago we had less to distract us, although we were in the midst of the Industrial Revolution and on the verge even then of a technological revolution that would engulf us within a few more generations. A century ago nearly 30% of all Americans worked on a farm; today less than 2% do so yet provide far more food.

Prior to 2010 "There's an app for that," had become the standard response to someone's plight or complaint. That phrase was trademarked by Apple in 2010 because they used it in a commercial for their iPhone. I just read, "If you want to alert people not to push you, because you're close to the edge, and you might lose your head, there's an app for that."

Technology is part of our life; we cannot deny it, and we cannot go back to the way it was when a third of the population worked on a farm. I am pro-technology; I enjoy the gadgets, the apps, the internet, the access it gives me to information and other peoples' knowledge. It just seems to me that it hasn't really made my life less busy; it just has made life different.

It all seems faster and more stressful; so much information to manage that it is difficult to find the time to just be still. We are able to do more, so we do more. Can't go to bed quite yet, one more email to write, one more text to send, one more tweet to distribute.

And I find that with the growth of technology and the growth in the ways that we can communicate with each other our communication has become less substantial. We have learned to communicate in sound bites, and messages limited to 140 characters.

Thank goodness there are some technologies that allow true communication, like Skype or Face Time. But even then, we miss the true emotional experience of touching our loved ones, hugging them, and seeing more than just their face on a screen, although for me that is superior to just hearing their voice or reading their words.

My concern with such dependence upon technology is that we cripple our ability to communicate with each other, intellectually and emotionally. What disquiets me is to see people around me who are unable to love each other or connect with each other because we no longer have a sense of who the other really is. If we are not aware and take the proper precautions, this describes our behavior: We don't listen; we chat. We don't talk; we tweet. We don't discuss; we post.

This is not a new problem with humanity. It has been going on ever since there have been two people anywhere. If we don't stop and listen, what we hear is often misleading.

“Hey Adam, take a bite of this apple. It's ok; the snake said it'll be fine.”

Now if Adam had just paused and asked, “Hey God ... I know you've said to stay clear of the apple, but Eve said the snake said it was ok.” Or even if he had become still and asked himself a simple question, “Why is there a talking snake in our garden?”

Sometimes we just don't listen. I grew up with the words of wisdom: stop, drop, and roll in case we suddenly caught on fire. Fortunately, I never had to heed those words. Other words have kept me safe, like “Don't put your hand in that open flame, Patrick. Don't walk into a burning building.”

As an adult other words of wisdom are more pertinent: stop, be still, listen. These words serve me better today than the fire safety techniques of my childhood.

It reminds me of a story I heard. Before the times of refrigerators, a man worked in an ice house. He lost a valuable watch and spent hours carefully raking through the sawdust. Over the next several days others went into the ice house looking for the watch.

Then a small boy went and within minutes emerged with the watch in hand. Amazed, the men asked him how he found it. “It was

simple,” the boy replied. “I just closed the door, lay down in the sawdust, and kept very still. After a bit, I heard the watch ticking.”

The owner of the watch and the other men couldn't find the watch because, although they were busy looking, they weren't listening. Many of us are like this, we aren't hearing what we need to hear because we aren't listening for what we need to hear.

What we need to hear is the voice of God, that still small voice that comes from the Silence. It is the sound in the silence, the sound of silence, and we often don't hear it because we are only listening for the things we want to hear and we ignore the rest. Or maybe we are listening, but the voice of the World is so loud that we cannot hear the voice of God even though we want to. But rest assured, God will find a way to break through and somehow confront us.

It is like the story in 1 Kings, involving Elijah, a great prophet for God. God had called Elijah for a special mission in Jordan. Elijah thought he had the right focus and was completely devoted to God. But facing the threatening and wicked forces made him feel afraid, defenseless, overpowered ... in other words, his human nature reared its nasty little head. The Israelites he was speaking to didn't want to hear the word of God; they rejected God's covenant and had put other prophets to death, and now they were turning on Elijah.

So he fled. After 40 days he found himself on Mount Horeb. In a cave he heard God speak to him “Go stand in my presence, and I will reveal myself and my ways to you.” So Elijah stood outside the cave and witnessed a spectacular demonstration of the power of God.

As 1 Kings 19:11-12 reads, *“Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. <sup>12</sup> After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.”*

Other translations tell us that Elijah heard a still small voice. What Elijah really heard, however, was a brief sound of silence. Elijah recognized that this sound of silence was none other than the voice of the Lord. And so, he covered his face because he knew that he was standing in the presence of the Divine One.

And from this profound silence came God’s voice, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” That’s probably not what Elijah expected to hear. So he responded the way he felt, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.” God went on to speak to Elijah, saying, “Go back the way you came,” the Lord said. “I have some work for you to do yet.”

The story teaches an important lesson: The spectacular and dramatic have their place in God’s order of things. But more often than not, God’s Will is imparted through the brief sound of silence in which Spirit speaks to the hearts of his people. Elijah learned that sometimes he needed to be still and listen. Sometimes he needed to be quiet and let the Holy Spirit speak.

This is a lesson for all of us. When we are discouraged and frustrated, when things don't go our way, when our efforts seem useless, when we've had enough, then it's time to stop, be still, and listen. Rather than becoming angry at the way things worked out, we need to be still. Rather than complaining about our circumstances and expecting God to change them, we need to be quiet. Rather than blaming someone else for our misfortunes, we need to close our mouths and open our ears. Rather than accusing others of stifling our efforts and good intentions, we need to hear what God is saying to us. We need to stop our efforts, be still and listen to the sound of silence. Are we really listening within?

I like the adage, "Still waters run deep." Of course, the corollary to that saying is, "The shallowest creeks make the most noise." Is the shallowness of our egoistic thoughts creating so much noise that we cannot hear the voice from the silence, the gentle tick, tick, tick of the still small voice we so desperately need at times? Do we spend our time around babbling brooks spewing their shallow ideas or around the quiet call of deep waters?

We are told: Be still and know that I am God. The greatest awareness of God comes from being still of body and mind. The sound of silence is not necessarily the absence of all sound. When we sit outside we can be silent of thoughts within our minds. We can hear the sounds of nature, the wind blowing through the trees, the trickle of a stream or even the roar of the ocean and be still, quiet, and listen to the silence.

If we are away from our busy lives and the stresses and noises of life, then what we listen to is silence. The accompanying melodies of nature simply add to the sounds of silence. It is from this silence, when we listen openly, expectantly, and without force, that we hear the still small voice, the whisper or nudge from God.

Mary and I can sit in the same room or drive in the car for a couple of hours and not converse. Although this is odd to some people, Mary and I have found that in love silence can be intimate; we can be drawn closer with someone through silence.

So it is with God. When we sit silently and tune into the sounds of the silence within us and around us, even if we don't perceive God communicating with us, we are still communing with God; we are present with God, and whether we know it or not, we are being guided, healed, and loved.

It is my prayer, always my prayer, that you make the time to be quiet and after you have spoken to God, sharing your joys and concerns, that you simply sit in the quiet of Spirit and listen for that still small voice, or nudge, or tickle from Spirit that are all part of the sounds of God's Divine Silence.

Let us pray.....