



Session 4: Silence



We are rarely alone – but often lonely. Jesus was often alone – but never lonely.

There were many times when he went off to a quiet place to be with his father. Silence and solitude are fundamental to the spiritual life. In silence and solitude we purposefully cut ourselves off from conversation, interaction and stimulation. We confront our soul and who we are before God.

Previous session review

- Recap on your experience of the previous challenge. How did it go? Was it helpful?
- If you weren't able to try the challenge, explore the question: Where and how did you experience God last week?

Read

Read the passage several times through, slowly and prayerfully. It might help to use your imagination to picture the scene. At the end of the text you will find helpful background information in our 'Setting the Scene' section.

As you read, look out for shockers and blockers.

Shockers – a phrase, word, image or something from the text that resonates, stands out or connects with you.

Blockers – something from the text that raises questions for you.

1 Kings 19.7-13

Soon the Lord's angel woke him again and said, "Get up and eat, or else you'll get too tired to travel." So Elijah sat up and ate and drank. The food and water made him strong enough to walk forty more days. At last, he reached Mount Sinai, the mountain of God, and he spent the night there in a cave.

The Lord appears to Elijah.

While Elijah was on Mount Sinai, the Lord asked, "Elijah, why are you here?"

He answered, "Lord God All-Powerful, I've always done my best to obey you. But your people have broken their solemn promise to you. They have torn down your altars and killed all your prophets, except me. And now they are even trying to kill me!"

"Go out and stand on the mountain," the Lord replied. "I want you to see me when I pass by."

All at once, a strong wind shook the mountain and shattered the rocks. But the Lord was not in the wind. Next, there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. Then there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire.

Finally, there was a gentle breeze, and when Elijah heard it, he covered his face with his coat. He went out and stood at the entrance to the cave. The Lord asked, "Elijah, why are you here?"

Setting the scene:

- Elijah was a prophet (a messenger from God). Immediately before the events of this passage he had found himself in the middle of a heavyweight contest between God and the false prophets of Baal. God won (of course) by raining down fire upon a drenched alter of wood and stones.
- Queen Jezebel was mad at Elijah and sought revenge. He ran in excess of 100 miles in an effort to escape.
- Throughout the Old Testament Horeb is used as an alternative name for Mount Sinai, where Moses met with God.
- Despite witnessing God's miraculous power on more than one occasion, Elijah is afraid, mentally exhausted, depressed and scared.
- After fireworks and miraculous displays, God comes to Elijah in the gentle breeze (some translations say 'sheer silence'). Elijah lived an amazing life – seeing God at work in ways few others have. Yet he needed times of solitude where God could meet him alone to give him refreshment and guidance.

Reflect

After you have all had time to read the text, pause and be still to listen to God through the Scriptures.

Begin your reflection time by each naming your shockers and blockers. Listen carefully to each other, share your thoughts and reflect on this passage together.

You might also like to explore these questions:

Q1. How much silence and solitude do you experience each day/ each week?

Q2. Why might silence and solitude be a good thing for us?

Respond

This session leads us to explore the benefits of silence and solitude. As a group, try to create a challenge to help you experience more silence and solitude this week, or choose one of the following:

Challenge ideas:

1. Time-Out

We are surrounded by constant noise. Create space for silence this week by turning off the radio or your iPod on your journeys. Allow the car to become a place to find quietness and listen to God as you drive. If you walk the dog, resist the urge to listen to music. Instead observe, listen, and notice sights and sounds of nature.

Just find space, even for ten minutes each day to be alone and quiet with God – even if that means getting up a little earlier each day or staying up later at night. Perhaps, like Elijah, God has a question he would like to ask us?

2. Wilderness Time

Plan a time to get away – borrow a friend's house or pack a tent and head for a campsite. Take a couple of books, a Bible and take time to read, nap, walk, rest. Try to get away to be with alone with God. Perhaps the group can help by looking after your children to make this quality time happen.

3. Alone Together

We don't have to be alone to practice the spiritual discipline of silence. This week, turn your mind and heart towards God as often as you can in crowded places, maybe while in a shopping centre, on a train or at the school gate.

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'God speaks in the silence of the heart. Listening is the beginning of prayer.'

Mother Teresa

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Group Prayer

You might like to commit to praying for each person in the group this week as you look to find times to create silence and solitude. Pray for individuals to have a strong sense of meeting with God during the challenge this week.

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'Everything that happens in this world happens at the time God chooses... the time for silence and the time for talk.'

Ecclesiastes 3

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