The Silence of God by G. Dan Harris

Introduction

There is little doubt that the world we encounter today is a fallen world. One of the results of the fall in the Garden of Eden is that man lost the ability to walk and talk with God in ways that are clear and distinct. This does not mean that God no longer communicates with man. The biblical record is full of incidents where God has chosen to speak. Christians today live with the promise that Jesus Christ left us with before He ascended into heaven:

"But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment..."

1 John 16:6-8, NASB

We understand this “Helper” that Christ spoke of to be the Holy Spirit. Christians hold to the belief that it is the Holy Spirit who helps us in our efforts to hear the voice of God today. But despite this promise, we will encounter individuals in our ministry who will come to the conclusion that God just does not speak into the lives of Christians like He did in biblical times. They will claim that God is far more silent today than He was in biblical times. They will use examples of how He spoke clearly and distinctly to the biblical heroes, and how these same biblical heroes seemingly never had to deal with times of silence like Christians today have to deal with. In section one of this paper, it will be my task to use the biblical record to reveal that this notion that God spoke more in biblical times than He does today is not at all the case. In addition, I will show that these

1 John 16:6-8, NASB
same biblical heroes, who heard God’s voice in unique and amazing ways, were also faced with periods where it seems that God also left them to deal with silence.

Once that has been established, section two of this paper will address the role that Christians today often play in what they view as God’s silence in their lives. It is important for us to remember that even if we are able to show Christians that the silence they are experiencing from God is similar to what many of their biblical heroes had to deal with, there may be things they can do to help resolve, or at the very least better understand, the issue of God’s silence.

We begin this process by helping the Christian to re-evaluate not only their perception of who God is, but also their perception of how God speaks. One way we can do this is by examining the life of Job, a biblical figure many Christians believe they can relate to. In doing so, our effort will be to encourage Christians to take ownership of the fact that their view of who God is may be more a result of non-biblical influences in their lives than what they have been taught in scripture.

In addition, Christians must also be willing to believe that through the Holy Spirit, God has made available for them a channel of communication. It is through gaining a better understanding of how the Spirit speaks to them and helps them speak to God that Christians can find a greater confidence in God during times of silence. We will conclude section two with a brief look at Os Guinness’s view of Keyhole Theology. Often an individual’s view of God and what that individual thinks he or she hears the Spirit saying may get confused. Humans are finite creatures and don’t have access to the entire picture. What God is doing may be hidden for a time from us, and jumping to false conclusions can be very detrimental.
The final section of this paper will suggest to the Christian some practical ways to begin applying a more correct view of God. We will do this by helping them answer three questions. 1) What can the individual who is facing silent times from God do to fix any faulty impressions they may have of God? 2) What can the individual do to open up the channels to hear God better? 3) What is the best understanding of the reality of God’s silence?

Section 1 – God Spoke More in Biblical Times

One very common response given by those who are dealing with the issue of God’s silence is that God’s silence is a more common problem today. They can become convinced that God spoke more in biblical times. They will be quick to point out portions of scripture that reveal that God spoke clearly to those biblical heroes like Abraham, Joseph and Moses. The Bible does indicate that God used clear and understandable methods in speaking directly to Abraham, through a burning bush to Moses, and through the use of dreams in the case of Joseph.

“Writers of the Bible lived in the ‘Holy Lands,’ where bushes burst into flame, where rocks and volcanoes gushed sacred metaphors and the stars bespoke God’s grandeur. No longer. The supernatural world has seemingly gone into hiding, leaving us alone with the visible.”² This “no longer” idea is what many believe today, but is it true? Even more important for this study is to consider that not only may the “no longer” be incorrect, but the implication that these fantastic displays of God speaking were commonplace in biblical times may be incorrect as well. Further investigation shows that

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² Philip Yancey, *Reaching for the Invisible God: What Can We Expect to Find*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000) 28. This quote, taken from Philip Yancey was used by him to make a point. His writings indicate rather that this is not a view that he would promote.
these same biblical heroes who received amazing messages from God also had to deal with long periods of silence. Many of their questions and prayers went unanswered for long periods of time, and in some cases God may have chosen to never answer them at all. Joseph Bentz came to just this conclusion in his studies of the biblical accounts. “I discovered that almost no one whose story is recorded in the Bible was spared those long stretches when he or she must have wondered what God was doing and why he was taking so long to do it.”

Beginning in the twelfth chapter of Genesis, the Bible indicates that God began to speak to Abraham: “Now the LORD said to Abram…” This would not be the last time that God would speak to Abram, later Abraham, but despite this clear and direct form of communication, it is very possible that Abraham actually had to endure long periods of silence. Although God may have communicated on more occasions than those recorded in the biblical record, Dr. Gary Habermas believes that “Abraham…may have endured a period of thirteen years without hearing from God.” And what is even more significant is the promise Abraham had to hold to during this time of silence. God had promised an 86-year-old Abraham he would be the father of a great nation, a seeming impossible reality that Abraham, at least for a time, had to deal with while God was apparently silent.

Despite the time of apparent silence in Abraham’s life, God did eventually speak to him again. More than just audibly speaking, God spoke through the son who was the


4 Genesis 12:1, NASB

answer to the promise he had made to Abraham. Abraham did become the father of a
great nation, and one of those in his line of descendents who also heard the voice of God
was Joseph. Because Joseph heard from God through dreams, his story could be used to
illustrate how God has chosen many different ways to communicate his promises.
However, for this study we will focus on the fact that despite hearing the voice of God
through dreams, there were apparent times of silence in Joseph’s life as well.

Joseph first heard God when he was just seventeen years of age. His immaturity
in both his understanding of how to interpret a word from God and how and when to keep
his mouth shut ended up leading Joseph into years of repeated trials and difficulties.
Joseph’s story is one that many Christians today who also believe they have received a
clear vision from God can identify with. Not fully understanding just how God is
planning on completing this vision, many Christians immediately take it upon themselves
to decide just how and in what way God should make it happen. When things don’t go
just as they have planned, they interpret it as silence from God. Although the Bible does
not present Joseph as one who complained about the events that transpired over the many
years toward the fruition of his vision, it does give the Christian today a great example of
how to handle what they might perceive as God’s silence.

“Joseph…didn’t want to prolong these detours one minute longer than was
necessary. But while he was in these places, he didn’t allow himself to be overtaken by
resignation or self-pity. He behaved as if he were fulfilling God’s plan.”\(^6\) In making this
statement, Joseph Bentz declares that during times of silence in Joseph’s life, his service
to God never waivered. Thrown into a pit, sold into slavery, falsely accused and thrown

into prison, and yet he served God faithfully in every situation, no matter how bleak. Commenting along these same lines, Peter Greig declares, “There will always be unanswered prayers that defy explanation and agonizing times when God will inexplicably withdraw from our conscious experience and leave us to ‘carry out from the will alone duties which have lost all relish.’ During such confusing seasons of life, there is nothing more powerful than our faithfulness expressed in perseverance.”

The stories of Abraham and Joseph will begin to help shed some light on a healthy way to view God’s silence. Despite His silence, He continues to work to bring about His plans through those who remain faithful. But if the Christian still holds to a notion that God spoke more often in the Bible to these great heroes than He does for us today, we can shift their focus onto the story of Moses and the Israelites.

The story of Moses is not well understood without understanding the full implications of Moses’ meeting with God in the desert in Exodus chapter three.

“I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob…I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their suffering. So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from the land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey...*

It is true that God did come to speak to Moses, in this case in the form of a burning bush. It is also true that God’s voice was clearly heard and understood by Moses. But in viewing this story of God speaking to another hero of the Bible in a

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8 Genesis 3:6-8, NASB
dramatic and vivid way, we must not neglect the period of silence that preceded it. Moses was approximately eighty years of age by the time this occurs. And what about the Israelites, those whose cries God speaks to Moses about? What did they know about God’s silence? “Before the Israelites left Egypt and experienced God’s incredible protection, they had served as slaves for hundreds of years.”

It would seem times of silence were as common in the times of our biblical heroes as they are today. This is an important reality that should be made clear to any who would claim otherwise. In revealing this fact, it is imperative that it is also revealed to them the value of the silence for these biblical heroes. Through times when God is silent in our lives, the same value can be experienced by them today. “Stand firm. Keep still. Don’t give into fear. If we do that in our own desert times, eventually our sense of God’s presence—will come flooding back. We will emerge changed, having gone deeper spiritually in ways that nothing else could have accomplished.”

Section 2 – What Part Do We Play in God’s Silence?

Once you have successfully shown the individual who made the assumption where their conclusion is unsupported, it is very likely that that same individual will still be dealing with what they perceive as silence by God in their lives. If this is the case, it may be time to help the person look at the possibility that they may be playing a large role in God’s silence.

If Abraham would have made the decision that God’s promise were impossible, or if Joseph had dismissed his unusual dreams as nothing more than an overactive

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9 Gary Habermas, *Why is God Ignoring Me?*... 61.

imagination, or even if Moses had decided to never walk over to the strange burning bush in the desert, it is likely that the message that God was speaking into their lives might have never been received. This may very well be what is happening in the life of someone who is experiencing a period of silence from God. They may want to hear God speak, but they may have placed parameters on how God will speak that God may choose not to remain inside. Our perception of who God is, and what we believe about how God acts and speaks, goes a long way in determining if we can truly hear God speak.

Our perception of God is often the result of the influences in our lives. These influences, both good and bad, tend to lead us to shape our view of God in certain predetermined ways. The more we allow ourselves to believe these false impressions of who God is, the more we allow ourselves to accept them without question. William Backus and Marie Chapian point out that “the Bible solidly teaches that man’s feelings, passions and behavior are subject to and conditioned by the way he thinks.” 11 Os Guinness believes that what we do that causes us difficulties in times of silence is this: we create faulty pictures of God.12 Guinness holds that most Christians have actually been taught a fairly accurate picture of who God is through scripture. However, when times are tough, instead of trusting in what they have been taught, they reveal a picture of God through their actions “that may be very different from what we profess to believe about God.”13 One way to see how these influences have led a Christian to view God


13 Ibid., 61.
can often be seen in how a Christian comes to understand what they believe God was doing in the life of Job. Many people feel they can relate to poor Job’s predicament. As the book of Job opens, we find that Job was living a faithful life before God. “There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil”. In a seemly cruel game between God and Satan, God allows Satan to begin to torment Job in a number of horrible ways. And all the while, it seems that God is not there to help Job. Job is suffering in silence.

The perceived silence of God is finally broken in Job 38, where God finally answers Job in a way that seems very surprising to many of us:

*Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said, “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now gird up your loins like a man, and I will ask you, and you instruct Me! Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding...”*

The question put forth is, do we approach God with words without knowledge, with concepts and views of God that are based more on what we have been told than what we have experienced in our lives and have had revealed to us through scripture? Peter Greig views God’s response to Job less as an answer, and more as a perception-adjustment lesson for us all. “The book...is not so much about why bad things happened to good people as it is about who God is and how—when faced with the gross unfairness of life—we are to respond to God.”

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14 Job 1:1, NASB

15 Job 38:1-4, NASB

What Job learned about God was far more important than the situation he found himself in. “Job realized that he knew enough about God to trust Him.” And even more important, Gary Habermas points out, “We cannot miss the point that in the greatest biblical commentary on suffering, God was with Job through the horrible times, rather than taking him out of them.” Job realized that despite the fact that God may have seemed silent, he was there all along. “From Job, we can learn that much more is going on out there than we may suspect. Job felt the weight of God’s absence; but a look behind the curtains reveals that in one sense God had never been more present.” This is ultimately the main lesson that needs to be revealed to those who are questioning God’s silence. We need to ask them the important question: what is more important, that God seems to be silent, or who we know God to be? “Job is satisfied because he realized that God can do anything, including taking care of evil. So Job makes the decision that, based on what he does know about God, he can trust Him in those things when he does not know.”

What is even more amazing about Job’s readjustment in his perception of God is the timing of Job’s response in relation to when God decided to restore to Job all and more than he had lost. It is in Job 42:3 where we hear Job’s response to God.

‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ “Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.”

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17 Gary Habermas, Why is God Ignoring Me?... 67.
18 Ibid., 68.
19 Philip Yancey, Disappointment with God: Three Questions No One Asks aloud (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992) 262.
'Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask You, and You instruct me.’ “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You; Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes.” 21 Significant here, as Philip Yancey points out, is that “Job spoke his contrite words before any of his losses had been restored. He was still sitting in a pile of rubble, naked, covered with sores, and it was in those circumstances that he learned to praise God.” 22

It would seem, then, that if Christians want to relate to Job, they too must be willing to have their false ideas about God readjusted. This readjustment begins not with God, but with us. “Once we yank out the irrationalities and lies from our thoughts and replace them with the truth, we can lead satisfying, rich and fulfilling emotional lives.” 23 And if the issue is silence, Christians must be willing to first ask if it is them, and not God, who is the cause of the silence. Hearing God may require that we put ourselves in a better position to hear his voice.

Joseph Bentz, in his book Silent God, reveals a number ways Christians themselves become the reason that God seems silent. One suggestion he gives is to call Christians back into a childlike attitude toward the possibility of hearing the voice of God.

“Maybe the very idea that we think we’re hearing from God means that we’re manipulative, presumptuous, or just plain crazy. Out of fear of being misunderstood, we might avoid ever mentioning His voice in our lives at all…As an eight-year-old new

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21 Job 42:3-6, NASB

22 Philip Yancey, Disappointment with God…270.

23 William Backus and Marie Chapian, telling Yourself the Truth…16.
Christian, I didn’t doubt the presence of the Holy Spirit in my life…His presence seemed the most real thing in my life.”

The world tells us that God is a silent being. As we grow into adulthood, being accepted by the world becomes a greater concern for some people than admitting that God might actually be able to speak to us. Our concern for what the world might think leads us to deny the presence of his Spirit. Instead of seeking his presence, we fill the void of perceived silence with the noise of the world. We don’t let ourselves get caught thinking about where we might be lacking; instead, we assume that it is better to believe that God does not speak to people anymore, and it would be better to figure out how to fix all the problems of life on our own. When this becomes the starting point, it creates a reality for Christians in which it can become very difficult to ever hear God speaking, especially during our times of struggle. If Christians can return to a childlike faith, a faith that Bentz believes is one that does not deny the role of the Holy Spirit as an active participant and communicator in our lives, they might find that they can once again begin to hear God’s voice. “Jesus said we must enter the kingdom as little children. Children do not understand relationship; they simply live it.”

Philip Yancey determined that hearing from God, especially in times of suffering and struggle, must begin with a perception of who God that is based on what scripture reveals to us. “I begin with the premise of a good and loving God as the first principle of the universe; anything contradicting that premise must have another explanation.”

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25 Philip Yancey, Reaching for the Invisible God... 188.

26 Ibid., 66.
Yancey is also quick to point out that not only is it important to begin with a correct perception of who God is, but how the Christian perceives what he has done for us through the gift of the Holy Spirit is also essential.

“No other religion makes such an extravagant claim: that the God of the universe exists not just as an eternal power whom we must obey, but as One who lives inside us, transforming from the inside out and opening a channel of direct correspondence to God.”

It is through this direct channel of correspondence that Christians finds his voice actively speaking to their hearts, especially in their times of greatest need. “Those of us who face different trials—cancer in the family, a besetting addiction, a teenager adrift, a job failure—also need the inner presence of a Spirit who intercedes for us ‘with groans that words cannot express,’ or as one translation has it, ‘with sighs too deep for words.’”

Thus, if the Christian does not allow for God to speak to them through this direct channel, if their grown-up worldly-influenced view of God and his Spirit won’t allow it to even be a possibility, it may be the Christian and not God who is the cause for times of silence.

One of the most difficult realities that every human must deal with, regardless of what view they have of God or his Holy Spirit, is the fact that because we are finite creatures, we don’t have the complete picture regarding things happening in our lives. Os Guinness calls this Keyhole Theology. Keyhole Theology results when humans are kept from knowing what is going on behind the closed doors of life. If the Christian were

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27 Ibid., 150.

28 Ibid., 153.

29 Os Guinness, *God in the Dark*…166.
able to peer through an open keyhole into what is happening on the other side of those doors, they might have a better idea of what is happening. The problem arises when, as we have discussed above, either the Christian has developed a perception of God that is inaccurate, or despite what may have been sound scriptural teaching, they tend to express a view of God that is faulty. When they can’t see beyond the door that is blocking their view, and when all they seem to get is silence from God, they begin to let their own imagination and faulty judgments determine what God must be doing. Christians have sure and sufficient reasons for knowing why they can trust God, but we still do not always know what God is doing and why.

But what if God has allowed an individual to peer through the keyhole? What if the individual you are working with has had a chance to see some of what is happening behind that closed door? “This is the trouble with keyholes. You don’t always see enough to come to a conclusion, but once you’ve seen a little it’s difficult to resist trying.” Guinness suggests that we try to help the individual suspend their judgment of what God may be doing. Guinness understands that especially during times of great struggle, suspending judgment is not easy. Individuals need to be reminded of what they know to be true of God, how he has been there in previous times of struggle and despair, and to lean on these realities. When Job was in the midst of his struggles, when his friends and his wife were jumping to conclusions concerning his situation and giving him poor advice in the process, he did all he could to resist giving in. Job, as stated earlier, never did receive a clear answer from God as to why he had to suffer, but as also stated earlier, he learned the more important lesson of why God was worthy of his trust. In helping anyone deal with times of silence from God, especially in

30 Ibid., 166.
times when the silence accompanies suffering, it is not for us to attempt to speak for God, but rather, it is our job to remind ourselves and those with whom we are working that “it is all-important that we do know why we trust God.”31 This leads us into the final section of this study.

Section 3 – What Can Someone Do To Open Up The Channels of Communication with God?

If by this point the issues that have been addressed in this paper have been successfully communicated with the individual in question, the next step is to help them address some question that they might ask concerning how to better open up the channel of communication with God. In this final section of this study, it will be our goal to address the following three questions. First, what can the individual who is facing silent times from God do to fix any faulty impressions they may have of God? Second, what can the individual do to open up the channels to hear God better? And third, what is the best understanding of the reality of God’s silence that the Christian should expect?

What can the individual who is facing silent times from God do to fix any faulty impressions they may have of God? There are a number of ways to help Christians develop a clearer picture of who God is, and this study will not be able to address them all. Regardless of the method used, the most important component must focus on helping the individual to, as William Backus and Marie Chapian discuss in their book *Telling Yourself the Truth*, 1) Locate the misbeliefs, 2) Remove them 3) Replace the misbeliefs with the truth.32

31 Ibid., 182.

Locating a misbelief can begin by identifying how misbeliefs form. One of the repeated themes of the Old Testament surrounded God calling the Israelites to remember all that God had done for them, usually after they had once again fallen into a pattern of disobedience. Joseph Bentz writes of a pattern that the Israelites often fell into that the Christian today can also fall prey to.

“It’s a pattern of

1. Restlessness, which leads to
2. Complaining, which leads to
3. Disobedience, which leads to
4. A Longer Journey”\(^{33}\)

This pattern, which caused the Israelites to have to spend forty years wandering in the desert before they could enter the promised land, can also be seen in how Christians today deal with God’s silence. Modern Christians can become restless when they don’t believe they are hearing from God. Their concern for this silence can lead them to complain, or conclude things about God that simply are unfounded. Often times, their actions towards these unfounded conclusions lead them into actions that can be viewed as disobedience, which may only cause the silence they are experiencing to be prolonged. “Some of us, having grown tired of waiting so long for an answer from God or clear direction from Him, prematurely conclude that He doesn’t care about us and that we no longer need to seek His guidance on how to conduct our lives.”\(^{34}\)


\(^{34}\) Ibid., 89.
Instead of giving into the restlessness we feel during times of silence, the Christian should reflect on how God has worked through similar periods in the past. By doing this, it is possible to break this pattern before it has a chance to get started.

Once misbeliefs are identified, what can the individual do to open up the channels to hear God better? Psalm 46:10 opens with a simple, yet profound command, "Be still, and know that I am God." Within that simple command is not a call to sit and do nothing; rather it is a call to for the Christian to accept their position in relation to God, and to simply let God be God. However, sitting still and taking time to listen for God’s voice is part of this process. In our busy world today, taking time to think and contemplate can be viewed in a negative light. If the Christian is not producing something tangible through their efforts, they can fall into a trap of viewing the time spent as wasted.

Along those same lines, many who write on the issue of God’s silence and issues of doubt that arise when an individual experiences God’s silence point out that simply not rested enough can contribute falling into pattern where God’s voice becomes harder to hear. “Many people want to resist that urge to sleep, feeling guilty if they’re not doing something to further their spiritual experience. You may try to ignore the tiredness and push yourself on. But if the exhaustion itself is what is keeping you from hearing God clearly, then resting—more than prayer or Scripture reading or any other activity—may be the most important first step you need to take to prepare you to enjoy his presence.”

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35 Psalm 46:10a, NIV.

36 Joseph Bentz, Silent God…59-60.
Finding some quiet time with God and making sure the Christian is physically rested and prepared to hear God are two ways the Christian can actively participate in the opening of the channel to better hear God speaking into their lives. There are many other ways that can be suggested, including a refocused prayer life, a concentrated time of scripture reading and devotions, fasting, and simply becoming more active in the community of God. When Christians who are experiencing what seems like silence from God takes the time to reflect on the situation between them and God, they often find themselves lacking in these aforementioned areas. “An accumulation of distractions…gradually edges God away from the center of…(their) lives.”

Anything that can help bring God back into the center of the Christian’s life is going to go a long way in helping them better position themselves to hear God when He speaks.

3) What is the best understanding of the reality of God’s silence that the Christian should expect? Probably the most difficult part of the task of helping the Christian deal with the realities of God’s silence will be in helping him or her come to grips with the reality of the situation. God’s silence is real and it is very difficult at times to deal with.

“Chart out a course that guarantees a successful prayer life, the active presence of God, and constant victory over temptation, and you will probably run aground. A relationship with an invisible God will always include uncertainty and variability.”

Just like with any relationship the Christian experiences in life, there are going to be difficulties and challenges. While it is true that the God the Christian serves is perfect, the Christian is not. The Christian is going to misinterpret God’s silence, jump to incorrect conclusions, get ahead of God, and simply make bad decisions when he or she


38 Ibid., 188.
launches out alone. Ultimately what Christians will find is that the tension that exists in a relationship with God can usually be attributed to their own actions. The Christian must accept the fact that there will be times in life when God will seem silent. Since all Christians possess a different view of silence to some extent, how this will look in their lives will vary. The most important thing for Christians is to remember to take a step back, let God be God, and trust in what scripture has revealed about God. In addition, they can lean on the promise Jesus gave us concerning the Holy Spirit. Jesus referred to the Spirit as the Comforter, and we can find comfort in knowing that we do have access to God’s voice through Him.

When God seems silent, remind the Christian what the heroes of the Bible experienced. Remind them how they grew through the silence, and how God, regardless of whether He spoke or not, was always in control and always present. There is a lot more going on in the world than just what is taking place in an individual Christian’s life. Knowing and thinking about who God truly is can fill any void of silence.

“I don’t know why your prayers haven’t been answered, or why God may seem silent. But I do know that the very best thing about our lives…is that the Creator of a million stars is entirely and eternally good, that He is utterly caught up in the details of our situation, and that He cares for us more than we care for ourselves.”

**Conclusion**

Throughout this study, I have on more than one occasion used the word “perceived” when referring to the issue of God’s silence. In doing this, I am not denying that God can seem at times to be silent. Nor am I implying that the Christian who makes

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39 Peter Greig, *God on Mute*…54. (The italics are my words.)
the claim that they are experiencing silence from God is necessarily incorrect. I use the word “perceived” in relation to God’s silence because as a finite human, I am quite sure I cannot make any final judgments on God’s attempt to communicate with His creation. There is no doubt that every Christian will go through times in their lives when it seems that God is being silent. But for the Christian to claim to know at every moment what God is doing is simply wrong. “No time-bound human, living on a rebellious planet, blind to the realities of the unseen world, has the ability to comprehend such answers.” Any attempt to answer for God, including answers about His silence, is not for us mere mortals to make any final judgments on.

The bottom line is simply that at times, in every Christian’s life, God will seem silent. When the Christian comes to this understanding, however, it does not have to be viewed in a negative light. It is reality, and how the Christian views this reality does not change the fact that it is true. But how the Christian views this reality does go a long way in how the Christian reacts to this truth.

In section one of this study, it was my task to help to reveal to the Christian the fact that God has spoken, is speaking today, and will continue to speak for all of eternity. But when He will speak, and the form He chooses, and to what extent the Christian will be able to understand what He says, will continue to leave us at times in a state of the darkness. It is what the Christian does in these times of darkness, or silence, that is important. The heroes of the Bible did hear God speak. But they also went through times of silence. And yet, despite whether they could hear God’s voice or not, God’s plans for their lives continued uninterrupted. Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and Job did have times when they struggled with God’s silence, yet they remained faithful and came

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40 Philip Yancy, *Reaching for the Invisible God...* 57
through their struggles strengthened. So too will the Christian today have times when
God’s voice will be clear, and times when it seems to fade away. And like our heroes
from the Bible, the Christian must persevere, believing that God is always present even if
they can’t hear Him. The Christian must always remember that He never stops caring
about them.

“Over time, both through personal experience and my study of the Bible,
I have come to know certain qualities of God as well. God’s style often baffles
me: he moves at a slow pace, prefers rebels and prodigals, restrains his power,
and speaks in whispers and silence. Yet even in these qualities I see evidence of
his longsuffering, mercy, and desire to woo rather than compel.”41

A clear impression of who God is will go a long way in helping the Christian deal
with the challenges this life presents, including those times of God’s silence. Removing
the false notions of who God is and replacing them with solid scriptural truths about God
is essential. Resisting jumping to conclusions about what God is doing and what His
silence toward the Christian means is also necessary. Finally, practicing disciplines that
will enable the Christian to replace the noise in their life with God as their foundation and
center will place the Christian in the best possible position to hear from God when and
how He chooses to speak.

The Atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell wrote, “We stand on the shore of an
ocean, crying to the night and to emptiness; sometimes a voice answers out of the
darkness. But it is a voice of one drowning; and in a moment the silence returns. The

41 Ibid., 67
world seems to me quite dreadful, the unhappiness of most people is very great.” Both the Christian and the Atheist will go through times of silence. But, where the Atheist finds an ocean of despair, a deep, black ocean of silence, the Christian can find hope. The Christian can have hope because they possess a faith in the One who knows their hearts. “The ‘dark ages’ of the intertestamental period would officially end when the Messiah entered human history. God’s profound silence was broken by the most splendid turn of events. Jesus Christ, God Himself, came to live as one of us. He has felt the same pain and suffering that the Christian feels. He walked this earth as a man, and experienced all that it means to be human, which undoubtedly must have included what can be perceived as silence from God the Father. He understands the Christian’s questions, and He can sympathize with their struggles. When helping the Christian deal with the issue of God’s silence, the greatest aid is to turn their eyes toward a loving and caring Heavenly Father, who although may work and act very quietly at times, has promised, ”Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

“God’s voice can so easily be muted by our hurt, our self-harried or our crazy preconceptions about who He really is, how He speaks and what we think He will say. But when we come to God repeatedly with some deep need—perhaps for healing, or to find a partner, or for a friend who’s turned his back on Jesus—His eyes are not angry, bored or cold and passionless, assessing the merits of our request and the technique of our

42 Bertrand Russell, as quoted by Peter Greig in God on Mute...50.


44 Hebrews 13:5b, NIV
 Whenever we come to God with an open wound of longing, we come to Abba, Father, who loves us deeply.”45

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**Bibliography**


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