

# Silence in Prayer

## Lesson 2: The Power of Silence

### Vocabulary:

advertisement	to argue	to renew	to beat
microwave	balanced/out-of-balance	vision	soldier
air conditioning	proud	angel	self-control
electricity	active/activate	to heal	to take turns
light bulb	to develop	will	to interrupt
candlelight	to focus	to imagine	competitive
relaxation	to meditate/meditation	to nail	compassionate
brain	sense	cross	to spread

### Discussion:

Today, our lives are filled with **noise**: the sounds of television, radio, cars, computers, video games, **advertisements**, telephones, **microwaves**, and even **air conditioning**! Constant noise is all around us.

Before the late 1800s in America, quietness in the home was normal. Why? No one had **electricity** or **light bulbs** at their jobs or in their homes. They used **candlelight**. As a result, most families stayed in one room in the evening around a fire, reading, talking, or playing games. There were no radios or televisions. No one worked at night because there was not enough light to work. In fact, many Americans said *no* to the introduction of the light bulb and electricity into their homes during the Industrial Revolution because they were afraid that using light bulbs instead of candles would pull people away from God. They followed this saying, "*The closer you are to nature, the closer you are to God.*" In many ways today, we can see that they were right.

How do you think light bulbs and electricity have changed our lives? Or work schedules? Our families? (think also about the development of computers, televisions, cell phones, video games, movies, etc...)

Most of us are not very comfortable with silence because noise around us is normal. Is silence normal for you? Take this quiz:

Between the numbers 1-10, how comfortable are you with silence when you are at home alone? What do you do to avoid the silence?

Between 1-10, how comfortable are you with silence during a conversation? What do you do to avoid the silence?

Between 1-10, how comfortable are you eating in silence? What do you do to avoid the silence?

Proverbs 17:1 says, "It is better to having nothing but a dry piece of bread to eat in peace than a whole house full of food with everyone **arguing**" (ERV). God enjoys a house that is filled with peace and quiet. He says that silence is better than a big, delicious meal!

If we look at how God made our bodies, we understand why quiet time and silence is so important to our health. Scientific studies have shown that quiet times of **relaxation** calm the area of our **brains** called the *basil ganglia*. Below is a chart of how our basil ganglia affects us when our basal ganglia is **balanced** or **out-of-balance**. (Write the definition of the words below in your own language.)

Balanced Basal Ganglia	Out-of-Balanced Basal Ganglia
Relaxed	Anxious
Motivated	Exhausted
Happy, excited	Depressed
Solution-oriented	Overwhelmed
Hopeful	Fearful

Why do you think we become more solution-oriented when we have times of quiet and silence?

Dr. Daniel Amen, who is known for his studies of the brain, says that we need 20-30 minutes of quiet relaxation daily and time alone to balance the basal ganglia. He says we should breathe slowly, calmly, and deeply while pushing away every stressful thought.

God wants us to have these quiet times in our lives so that we can pray. When we pray, we may not know what to say to God. If we sit quietly and wait, God will allow our deeper thoughts and needs to rise in our minds. Ralph Waldo Emerson, an American writer from the 1800s, understood the value of this experience and urged people of his day to return to the quietness of nature to find themselves. When speaking of nature's elements, he wrote, "In their eternal calm, [man] finds himself."<sup>1</sup> In the 1750s, Swiss philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau encouraged people to go alone to the countryside. He felt that solitude in nature would help people to turn off the noise of social pressures and competition so that man could hear the voice of his inner and true self.<sup>2</sup>

How can silence help us to connect with our deeper thoughts, true feelings, and inner self? How could this experience help us in prayer?

Listening silently *after* we pray also opens our hearts and minds to hear the Lord. During that time, God may place solutions to problems, right thoughts, and good direction on our hearts. Silence opens our minds and hearts to hear the Lord's solutions in the Bible. After quiet times of prayer and silence, the Lord can speak deeply to us through His Word, but our minds must be quiet enough to hear Him.

How much time do you spend each day just being silent?

Jesus says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30, NIV). We fill our minds with many things.

What do you think about most during the day?

As Christians, God wants us to fill our minds with Him. But we have to make room in our minds for God. Psalm 10:4 says, “Because he is **proud**, that evil person doesn’t turn to the Lord. There is no room for God in any of his thoughts” (NIRV).

Why do we not make room for God in our minds?

If we want to be close to the Father, we must fill our minds with Him. We can focus our minds on God through reading the Bible, praying, listening to teachings about the Bible, listening to Christian music, etc. But silence calms our minds to *hear* God. Silence actually allows us to use more parts of our brain to connect with our Father in heaven – to love the Lord with *all* of our mind.

In studies of Christians who pray and practice spending time in silence several times a day, scientists found that multiple areas of both sides of their brains were **active** during quiet states of connecting with God. They found that the brains of these people **develop** differently. These studies showed that times of Christian prayer not only increase our mental **focus** but also **activate** our five senses! This is potentially one of the advantages of connecting to God through prayer over **meditating** by ourselves. In **meditation**, we lose our **sense** of self. Yet Jesus taught us in the Bible to pray for our own needs because God loves us and wants to lead us closer to Him. He knows we are human and how much we need Him. He doesn’t just want us to connect with the universe or our inner voice. He wants us to hear His voice and to connect with Him on a deep and personal level.

When you think of connecting deeply to the God who created you, how does that make you feel? What thoughts come to your mind?

Other studies have shown that people who take time during their day to be quiet get sick less often. Therefore, spending quiet time alone with God not only helps us to have healthier brains but also healthier bodies. Isaiah said, “Be silent before me, you islands! Let the nations **renew** their strength!”

(Isaiah 41:1, NIV)

According to Isaiah, why does God tell us to be silent? Would God agree with Dr. Amen? Why?

During our silent time of prayer, God can lead our thoughts and speak to us. God can put **visions** in our minds. Daniel the prophet saw a vision of heaven at the end of times (Daniel 7). Ezekiel also saw numerous visions of God and heard all that God wanted Ezekiel to speak to the people (Ezekiel 1-19). In the New Testament, Paul and Peter both had visions of where the Lord wanted them to go to share their faith in Jesus. People today still have visions of **angels**, messages of how to receive **healing**, visions about a new way to serve people, and direction about where to go to share the Gospel. Visions have always been a part of God’s plan to lead his people into a closer understanding of His **will** and His Word.

When is the last time you closed your eyes and **imagined** an event or place in your mind? If you can remember that time, what did you imagine?

Not only does silence help us to use several parts of our brain, but silence can also help us to be like Jesus. Jesus was often silent for many different reasons.

Can you think of a time when Jesus was silent?

When Jesus was going to be **nailed** to a **cross** and **beaten** by Roman **soldiers**, the Bible says, “He did not open His mouth. He was taken like a lamb to be put to death” (Isaiah 53:7, NIV).

How do you think silence helped Jesus during this time?

Jesus learned through times of silence and prayer on how to face difficult situations. In Hong Kong, scientists found that the practice of silence in a group setting can increase **self-control** when **taking turns** and sharing ideas. Silence teaches us not to talk too much or **interrupt**; not to be rude, angry or **competitive**; and to be kind and **compassionate** toward others.

So, where can we find these times for silence? Let’s look at these scriptures:

“The next morning Jesus woke up very early. He left the house while it was still dark and went to a place where he could be alone to pray” (Mark 1:35, ERV).

“One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray and spent the night praying to God” (Luke 6:12, NIV).

When did Jesus find this quiet time with His Father? Where did he go? With whom did he go? Why do you think he left his house? Why didn’t he just stay in his bed?

“But the news about Jesus **spread** more and more. Many people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. Jesus often went away to other places to be alone so that he could pray” (Luke 5:15-16, ERV).

How did Jesus find time to pray in his busy life?

Jesus gives us some instruction about prayer in this passage: “But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Matthew 6:6). Sometimes, finding that quiet place to pray alone is very difficult. We may simply have to wake up early before anyone else to get that time. But if we deeply want time with our Father in heaven, then He will help us to find the time and the place to meet with Him every day.

### This Week:

1. Spend some time just sitting in silence with your heavenly Father. This is a time to be still before Him or a time to listen for His voice.
2. Once you have had this time, spend some time listening more to the Lord through reading the Bible.
3. This week, choose a quiet activity over watching television, or try eating a meal in silence. In your new Prayer Notebook, write how these times affect you.

**Notes:**

*Change Your Brain, Change Your Life*, Daniel G. Amen, M.D.

*The Lively Mind*, course taught by Dr. Jody Potts, Southern Methodist University, 2007.

*Prayer May Reshape Your Brain ... And Your Reality*, by Barbara Bradley Hagerty, May 20, 2009,  
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=104310443>

*Understanding silence in problem-based learning: A case study at an English medium university in Asia*, Jin J. Clin Linguist Phon, 2013 Jul 30, [Epub ahead of print], Faculty of Dentistry, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, P. R. China, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23895282>.

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<sup>1</sup> Harrison, Charles, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger, *Art in Theory 1815-1900: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, (Boston: Blackwell), 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Bronowski, J. and Bruce Mazlish. *The Western Intellectual Tradition: From Leonardo to Hegel* (New York: Harper & Row), 1960.