



Our focus this year has been listening to God, but the reality is, for many faithful Christians, there are times when God seems silent.

Sometimes the silence comes when life is going well. But often, the quiet comes in the midst of pain - relational betrayals, loss of a loved one, or devastating sickness. When we need God the most, he seems the farthest.

Struggling to hear from God can shake us. When it seems like our faith doesn't work, we have questions. We are not alone in this. John the Baptist boldly declared that Jesus was the Son of God, but then he was thrown in prison. And Jesus didn't save him. In his dark time, he sent people to ask Jesus if Jesus was the Messiah (Luke 7:18-23). Peter also seemed to doubt as he watched Jesus be arrested and face death. To three different people, Peter denied that he knew Jesus (Matthew 26:69-75).

Although doubt is normal in hard times, Christians throughout history have also been strengthened as they have gone through desert seasons. Paul even said that he rejoiced in his suffering which included imprisonment, beatings, and being shipwrecked (Colossians 1:24).

So how do we weather these storms and allow them to draw us into God? Here are some ideas.

**Remember you are not alone.** Many strong women and men of faith have gone through painful seasons of silence. These seasons are not necessarily a result of sin or doing anything wrong. Even Jesus echoed the pain of being met with God's silence when he cried out from the cross, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Matthew 27:46).

**Seek God.** You have one life in which to seek Him with all your heart. What a beautiful offering to keep seeking Jesus through pain. Let the spiritual disciplines of prayer, reading the Bible, gathering with believers, fasting, and solitude carry you through this time. Even when God feels far, we can rest in the truth that He will never leave us (Hebrews 13:5).

**Change the 'why' to a 'what'.** God's ways are mysterious. We may never understand why these painful seasons happen. If we put all of our energy into trying to understand why, we may miss what God is doing. Instead ask God what he wants to do in your life through this pain. How is he using it to shape you? In what ways will He be able to use you because you have walked through this pain?

**Remember that God remains the same.** As young Christians, we often think that if God is good, He will do what we want. But God's ways are different from our ways. We can't always understand why certain things happen. But we can know who God is! He is always gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love (Psalm 103:8).

**Set your heart on eternity.** This world is temporary. The Bible describes it as a shadow, a withering flower, and a mist (Job 14:2; James 4:14). But eternity is forever. And there, every tear will be wiped away. Keep your eyes focused on this reality that is waiting for you.



4. Psalm 23:4 says, 'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I fear no evil for thou art with me'. Many of our prayers focus on asking God to take us out of dark seasons. But often, instead, God walks with us through the darkness.

Why do you think God leads us through these valleys instead of rescuing us from them?

Reflect on a time when God led you through a valley. What did that experience do to your faith, your ministry, your relationships?

5. Read Exodus 14: 5-12. As the Israelites stood along the Red Sea and saw their enemies rushing toward them, they felt completely abandoned by God. But this was God's path for salvation.

What in your life, past or present, looks like destruction but may be for your good?

6. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were about to be thrown into the fire, they said to the King, 'If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. **But even if he doesn't**, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods' (Daniel 3:16-18).

Their trust in God was not dependent on what God did or did not do. How does their example challenge the belief that 'if God is good, He will answer my prayers'. How do we learn to trust Him regardless of the outcome?

**Personal Reflections for those in a desert season:**

We pray that as you work through these questions, God will meet you and give you the strength to endure the pain you are walking through. We pray that you will know him as your Comforter and close friend. Jesus is always near to the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18)

1. The Psalms are often brutally honest about deep emotional despair while acknowledging the goodness and reality of God. For example, "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?... My heart shall rejoice in your salvation (Psalm 13:2-3, 6).

Write your own Psalm about your current situation that is both honest and faith-filled.

2. In Job's dark night he said, 'How small a whisper do we hear of him!' (Job 26:14). In challenging times, our usual ways of meeting with God often feel dry. But sometimes we can experience glimmers of him in other ways such as a beautiful sunrise or a kind word from a friend. Reflect on any faint whispers you may be hearing from God right now. What might God be saying to you in this time?

3. Above we encouraged you to change your 'why' to a 'what'. Write out the 'why' questions you have for God.

Then surrender those questions to God. Pray that He will help you to trust Him even if they are never answered.

Now write out some 'what' or 'how' questions and write what you think God may be saying.

Examples

\*What good will come out of this hard time?

\*How will you use this struggle to strengthen me and lead me into all you have for me?

\*How can I serve you faithfully in this pain?

\*What fruit will this struggle produce in my life that otherwise would not have been there?

4. Pete Greig of 24-7 Prayer said 'Our deepest suffering can become our greatest gift to the world'. With that in mind, journal about the ways God may be able to use you to minister to others as a result of your suffering.

5. Lamentations 3:19-23 says:

The thought of my suffering and homelessness is bitter beyond words

I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss.

Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this:

The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease.

Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning.

Write or share your reflections on this passage.

What does it feel like to think about God when you are suffering?