Secrets of the Silence

the power of praying without words

a 21 day journey of prayer
Secrets of the Silence

the power of praying without words

a PrayerCanvas book

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For Cindy

“The notes are silver,
The rests are gold!”
-Mozart
Introduction

We generally think of prayer as something we speak out loud. We ask the blessing on our food, bring our prayer lists to God and go through them line by line; our pastor opens the worship service with prayer, prays for the offerings and sends us off with a benediction.

Prayer is for most of us an SOS raised toward heaven in times of trouble. There is nothing wrong with that at all. God wants to and will be our help! Even for those of us who pray every day, through good and bad times, our prayers are mostly requests- “God, do something here. Act on our behalf.”

But there is a secret; when we come before Him in silence, God answers even the prayers we never pray. God listens to our hearts. Even more encouraging, He already knows our needs and is more than willing to guide us and provide for us.

There is power in speaking aloud our concerns and delights to God. There is an equal, and perhaps even greater, power to silence in prayer. Isaiah said “In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.” (30:15) It is into this strengthen-
ing quietness that I want to lead you as we go through this book.

I have heard it said that it takes three weeks to make a new habit or break an old one. Over the next twenty one days as you read this book you can make a new habit of prayer that will strengthen you and give you confidence and greater joy in God’s presence.

I want to invite you on a three week journey of silent prayer and stillness before the God of Love. Our ultimate intention is not to replace your spoken prayers but to enhance them with a power that only comes in the secret place with God, in quietness and stillness.

The book is in three sections, each with seven chapters. I encourage you to read a chapter each day for three weeks. Set aside a special time each day to read and pray. Early morning is a good time for a variety of reasons:
- it is your first activity of the day,
- there are fewer disturbances, and
- it will help set the tone for the rest of your day.

Regularity of practice is the enemy of complacency. If your schedule will not permit the same time, make sure that you set aside a time
each day in advance. Prearranging your prayer time will help you keep to it.

Set aside a special place where you can be undisturbed for the entire time you spend with God. If that is not practical, choose a kind of place— a bedroom, a garage, a hotel room, the car, an empty office, on a walk— where you know you can be alone. As we form this habit of a regular meeting place, we will come to expect to meet God in the silence when we enter.

Limit your visual and aural stimulation as much as possible. Perhaps this is why King David calls it the “secret place” and Jesus talks about the “closet of prayer” in the Bible. Turn off the television and the radio, close your computer, refrain from speaking… be still.

Decide on a length of time that you will spend in the silence each day and stick with it. Don’t be idealistic and over reach your attention span. Ten, twenty, thirty minutes are all good. Do what you can. Again, prearrange this and stick to it. If you use a planner, enter the time of day and length of time you’ll spend in silence just like you would any other appointment.

Create an environment that is suitable for prayer. Listen to the PrayerCanvas ambient
prayer music that was produced specifically for this purpose. You might close the door, pull the curtains, dim the lights—whatever will minimize your distractions.

Let everyone in your household or workplace know of your commitment and ask for their respect of it. Make it a sacred meeting, one not to be disturbed, not even by the seemingly urgent needs of the day. If you still find yourself constantly interrupted, find another more suitable time and place to practice silence.

Do not combine your time with God with other responsibilities, such as making chore lists or planning your day. You are called to this time for one purpose only—to meet God in the silence. Keep it sacred and inviolable.

However, if you find yourself distracted by thoughts of responsibilities, keep a note pad nearby so that you can jot these thoughts down and dismiss them immediately from your mind. As soon as possible you should learn to do without the note pad and discipline yourself to reject these thoughts.

Resist the urge to simply make this a reading time. The Bible or Christian books are good, but are they better than Jesus Christ Himself? We
come to this time for one purpose; to meet God in person and learn to hear His voice. Don’t let even good things keep you from the best thing.

I also want to invite you to take an unusual challenge;

-Make a prayer list before you begin. Use the page at the back of the book titled My Prayer List. Write down all the concerns you would be speaking to God in your prayer times.

- Be specific. The more general your prayers are (i.e., “for peace in the world” or “that You should bless our family”) the less likely you are to be able to identify actual answers to prayer. Specific prayers get specific answers.

- Make it as complete a list as you can. “in everything… let you requests be known to God.” (Phil 4:6)

- Set it aside for the next three weeks. You won’t be referring to it at all during this time. We’ll come back to it at the end of the book to see whether God has been at work on your behalf while you have been with Him in silence.

Each day we will consider a Scripture and an aspect to silent prayer. You’ll learn the secrets
and experience the power that God has promised to those who seek Him. These secrets are not occult practices unknown to the masses. They are not unknown, they are simply not done.

After teaching His disciples the night before the crucifixion, Jesus told them “now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.” (John 13:17, italics added) The secret is that this kind of prayer actually works, but the power is only experienced in the doing.

“He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.” (Psalm 91:1)

Let’s go to the secret place to find the secrets of the Silence.
Week One

The Power of Silence
Silence Is…

“Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul.” Ps. 131:2

Listening to God is more important than anything else you will ever do. Ever, in all your days. It is more important than your prayer requests, worship, Bible reading, fellowship, witnessing, preaching or any work you do on God’s behalf. There is nothing, no matter how saintly or necessary it may be or appear, that is more essential to your life.

John tells us “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” (John 1:1) God is expressive. He desires to communicate with us. He is a person and He is seeking a relationship with you. If you believe that “the word of God is living and powerful,” (Heb. 4:12) it is then imperative that you hear Him.
Listen.

Silence is the medium. It is necessary to cease our activities, eliminate our distractions, close our mouths and open our ears to the voice of God. He has promised to speak to us if we will listen.

The silence we seek in prayer and meditation is not simply to stop speaking but to quiet our hearts. It is not an outward rule to follow but a state of being to have. We can self-impose a strict ‘no talking’ rule without ever having stilled our spirits in the way that makes us most receptive to God’s Spirit.

Still.

Quiet.

Rest.

When Elijah heard the voice of God outside the cave in 1 Kings 19 the King James Bible called it a “still, small voice” while another translation called it “the sound of gentle stillness” and still another described it as a “delicate whispering voice.” These are picturesque, and they also show us that God is wanting us to be still enough
to hear the delicate whispering of His voice that the din of our lives can so easily drown out.

Why is silence and stillness so important? Can’t God speak to us in every circumstance? Surely He can and does speak to us whenever we are listening. It is the listening that is so difficult to do in the midst of activity, noise and other distractions.

If you want to hear from God you must listen for His voice. Rarely does God overpower us with His speaking. As with Elijah, He isn’t in the thunder, the whirlwind or the earthquake. He speaks softly. So we still our hearts to hear Him.

We cannot have a quiet heart simply by closing our mouths. That’s a good start but not a good finish. As we close our mouths we must also open our ears and hearts to the Holy Spirit. We surrender all of ourselves to His scrutiny. We wait patiently before Him as a servant does to his master or a student does to his teacher. We listen for the delicate, whispering voice of God.

Here is the first secret of the silence; it is for listening. You cannot listen well while you are speaking. To truly hear we must quiet our voices, minds and spirits. In any conversation one must be silent while another speaks.
Do you believe that God wants to speak to you?

We can know about God by reading the Bible. He will sometimes make some particular scripture come alive to us— we say He speaks to us— as we read it. However, God is more than the sum of the words on the pages of the Holy Bible. He is a person and He desires to be known.

As one hymn writer said “Beyond the sacred page, I seek Thee, Lord.” God wants to be known and knowing Him comes by hearing Him. As we listen, God reveals Himself to us. This is the amazing truth of Christianity; God will reveal Himself to anyone who will seek Him out.

“Father, give me a quiet and listening heart today. I come to listen and to know You. Thank You for calling me Your own and revealing Yourself to me.”
The Peace of Silence

“O, Death, where is your sting? O, Grave, where is your victory?” 1 Cor. 15:55

There are two kinds of power to silence. The first kind, which we will discuss today, happens within us. It is exemplified most in the confidence we have before God and in ourselves. This power of silence is the power of surrender.

There is a peace that comes from surrender. In that act we offer everything to God and have nothing else to lose. No one can take from us what we have already freely given. If we have surrendered our very lives, what is the worst that can happen to us? Death? Even that has no power over us when we surrender to God.

“I will ransom them from the power of the grave;
I will redeem them from death.
In the quietness of our own souls we are no longer afraid. When we are truly still before God there is nothing that can disturb the peace we have. Dorothy L. Sayers used a phrase in one of her books, “the still center of the spinning world.” This is very like where we meet and abide with God.

The world may be in chaos, our circumstances may be trying, yet when we come before the Lord of heaven and earth and quiet our hearts before Him, we hear Him speak as the Prince of Peace.

Peace.

Be still.

Philippians 4 says that we are to be anxious for nothing and to pray about everything. As we do, Paul says, the peace of God which is beyond our understanding will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. It is this incomprehensible peace that we experience in the silence.

We no longer fear God. We have been ex-
posed before Him and lived. We have been accepted in the Beloved. He has purified us without destroying us. He has taken us through death into the power of the resurrection.

We learn in our silence before Him that God, who is all powerful, is also infinitely good. We can trust Him with our deepest fears and our most trifling concerns. He who counts the hairs on our heads will care for the smallest and greatest needs we have.

We no longer fear man. If we have come through a face to face meeting with God there is surely nothing any man can do to us that would strike fear in us. Personal attacks, persecution, hardships and suffering all lose their power over us in the silence.

We are confident before God. He knows us, has forgiven us and made us new. There is no accusation against us that the cause of which has not been already exposed within us and given up to God. Though the wicked flee even when no one pursues, we stand confident and fearless.

Our confidence, however, is not in anything of ourselves- our abilities, good deeds or righteousness. We have laid all that at the feet of Jesus. Our confidence is in Christ alone. Paul
tells us plainly in 2 Cor. 12:9-10 that he gloried in his weakness because in it God was strong.

Isaiah 30:15 says “In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength.” Hebrews 4:9 says “There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.” Silence is the sound of rest and restoration. Stillness is the first sign of inner confidence and strength.

“Dear Father, give me a quiet heart that I might hear You, know You and walk with You. Let the peace and confidence of Your life be evident in me today.”
The Second Power of Silence

"Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord; for he is aroused from his holy habitation." Zech. 2:13

The second kind of power in silence happens outside of us. God is roused from His silence on our behalf. He speaks up for those who have no voice. He protects those who trust in Him. He shows Himself strong for the weak.

David said in Psalm 3:3 “You, O Lord are a shield for me.” He is our strong tower. We hide ourselves in God and allow Him to be our protection. But God will not act on our behalf if we have taken that responsibility on our own shoulders. We will not be safe in His strong tower if we do not run into it. He lets us fight our battles if we will.

Our silence and stillness indicates that we are not trusting ourselves but God. We are still
while He is active; quiet while He speaks up for us. When we are weak He is strong. We are not the defender but the defended; not the protector but the protected; not the provider but the provided for.

We can spend so much time and energy defending our status, position, possessions, relationships and rights. When we are with Jesus in the silence we cede these to Him. Since all we are and have are His, He may do with us as He will. We can rest knowing He gives all good things to those He loves.

When we are still and quiet before God we allow Him the freedom to do what He wants to do in us, through us and for us. We forego so many blessings because we take on our own shoulders what God means to carry for us. In the silence we learn to abandon ourselves to Him and trust Him completely; to lay our burdens on His shoulders.

During a particularly trying summer I was earnestly praying every morning for one or two hours about a pressing need that was weighing on my mind. This went on for two months. Each morning I sat with my open Bible on my knees and prayed.
Over the course of the months I noticed that I spoke my prayers aloud less and less. The last few weeks the most I said was simply “You know.” I told no one about the need. I simply sat in His presence and meditated on Him, listening for His voice and finding my rest in the silence.

One morning I received a call from a friend. He told me that he had been praying for me for weeks and knew he had been called by God to help me in some way. He asked specifically what I was praying about. I told him about the need I was lifting up to God. Over the two months I was praying God had spoken to him to meet this need, which he did that day.

Moses told the Israelites in Exodus 14:13-14 to “stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today…. The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.”

The Hebrew meaning for “hold your peace” in this verse is “be quiet.” In their stillness and silence God won the victory for His people.

Do you believe that God loves you and calls you His own?

What have you taken on your shoulders
that God is calling you to put on His?

What battle are you fighting that God would fight for you if you let Him?

What needs are you holding instead of giving them up to the lover of your soul?

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower; The righteous run to it and are safe.”
Prov. 18:10

“Cast your burden on the Lord, And he will sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.” Ps. 55:22

“…casting all your care upon Him for He cares for you.” 1 Peter 5:7

“Dear Father, give me a confidence in your love and power today. Help me to lay all I am and have on You.”
1.4

The Purpose of Silence

“Now the Lord came and stood and called as at other times, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’ And Samuel answered, ‘Speak, for Your servant hears.’” 1 Sam. 3:10

Silence is listening. As we saw in Psalm 81, God desires that we first listen to Him, then walk in His ways. When we come to the silence we are adopting a receptive attitude, a humble and open heart and a willing spirit.

It takes time for us to feel comfortable with silence. We are so accustomed to filling the air with noise. But here there are no radio, television, computer or other distractions. We have come to do one thing; sit quietly and listen to God.

Meditate.
We may have been raised to think that meditation is too mystical and can lead to deception. We can shy away from it because the word has been co-opted. We should never let this kind of fear keep us from the pursuit of God.

First, let us be very clear; Christianity is mystical. We believe in a God we cannot see who desires to communicate with us. We believe in an invisible spiritual dimension to the universe that is teeming with life and full of activity. We were created to be a part of it.

Second, Jesus made a promise to us that if we asked God for a good gift He would not allow us to receive anything harmful. In Matthew 7 He says if we, being evil, know how to give good gifts to our children, “how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!”

If we are seeking God we are fully and completely protected from the enemy of our souls. God will give us good things as we seek Him. Not only does He allow this, He encourages it.

In fact, He is calling you to it.

“When I remember You on my bed
I meditate on You in the night watches.”
Ps. 63:6

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.”
Ps. 19:14

“I meditate on all Your works; I muse on the work of Your hands.”
Ps; 143:5

Meditation requires silence so that we may listen with our hearts. We step away from the stimulations of the outward world and remove ourselves to the inner, spiritual place- the secret place- with God. We do not do this without counsel.

Our counsel is in the Scriptures. In Psalm 1 David says that the blessed man meditates “in His law” day and night. It can be helpful to begin your prayer time by reading the Bible. You might even leave it open to be a ‘second voice’ or an ‘amen’ to you as you commune with the Spirit of God.

It can also be helpful to remember the works of God- to muse on the works of His hands.
We can ponder the majesty of nature, the grandeur of His salvation, the beauty of scripture or His faithfulness and kindness to us. This serves to open our hearts and ears to Him. But we cannot stop at merely thinking about God.

The purpose of the silence is to listen for the voice of God, learn to recognize it and to understand what He is saying to us. The silence is like a blank canvas on which He paints, an instrument on which He plays or an empty stage on which He speaks.

We are not the performers, we are the audience. We attend to God and wait on Him. It is not our time to speak or act. In this moment, in this place, words and activity are a distraction. We behold Him, face to face.

He speaks.

We listen.

“Father, I will meditate on Your law and works today and remember Your loving-kindness to me. Speak to me as I sit with You.”
Reign is one hour of ambient music—a backdrop and “distraction fighter” for your times of prayer. There are no songs, other than some ancient worship songs and simple prayers sung simply and softly in the background. Every ten minutes there is a slight lull in the music as a time marker.

Available at www.bobkilpatrick.com