

A GUIDE FOR SILENT PRAYER



[based heavily on the guide put forward by Ruth Haley Barton in her book 'Invitation to Solitude and Silence']

A note:

Entering into silence and solitude, getting comfortable with it, experimenting with it, 'getting started' with it can be a process that takes a few weeks, or even months. Stick with it. Be patient with the process.

1. Identify your sacred space and time

For some of us establishing a rhythm and a place that means we can enter silent prayer is genuinely difficult. I suspect for most of us though (myself included), it's not as hard as I think, if I just my mind and my resolve to it!

Try physical spaces - a chair, lying on the floor, sat in the garden, out in the countryside, on a walk. Home is always a little better, it's more convenient. Maybe having some sort of 'spiritual' artifact with you may prove helpful - a cross or similar. Some of us will be resistant to this, and that's OK!

Once you're figuring out what's working for you, you might need to chat too family members, roommates etc just so they are aware, and give you a little grace and space.

2. Begin with a modest goal

If you're like me, you expect to be able to run before you can walk. If silence is a new practice to you, or you're expecting to find it uncomfortable, start with just 5 minutes. Or 10. Gradually build up. The amount of time is less important than the frequency with which you try it. So, 5 minutes a day, every weekday is better than 1 hour once a week. And if you plan to do 5 minutes, do 5 minutes, not 10, or 15. Stick to it!

3. Settle into a comfortable, yet alert physical position.

As you settle in to prayer, be aware of your body. Where might you get uncomfortable and distracted? For me (Tom) I tend to sit cross legged on a reasonably comfortable sofa - upright enough so I'm not tempted to nod off!

4. Ask God to give you a simple prayer that expresses your openness and desire for God.

We don't need big words. We don't need to 'hurry God up' in the process by excited prayers. Simple prayers, like "Here I am Lord", or "I'm here for you, Lord" might be enough.

5. Distractions are inevitable

Let them float by like a cloud - don't hurry them away, necessarily. Maybe have a notebook and pen if you needing to remember something - this helps you 'let us go' until after your time of prayer has passed.

It will take a while to learn to quiet your mind. Just go with it!

6. Close your time with a prayer

A prayer of thanks, or gratitude, or maybe a prayer like the Lord's Prayer (below)

7. Resist the urge to judge yourself or the experience of silence itself.

Our temptation is immediately to go "I'm not good at that", or "I'm just not wired for quiet" or "I didn't get any powerful encounter from that". Silence is about coming to God as we are, and letting Him transform us. He's gracious, and kind, and won't throw us into the chaos - He leads us beside still waters as a good shepherd (Psalm 23), or a loving Father.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.