



Jesus MAFA, *Garden of Gethsemane*, 1973

Greetings!

Please read [Luke 5](#) (notice how vs. 16 connects together the entire chapter) and [Mark 6](#) (notice Jesus' teaching to his disciples in vs. 31).

Recently, I was driving to visit one of our churches. A story came on the radio news program I was listening to about the benefits of silence. I knew some of the findings from my own spiritual practices. In our world of sensory overload, taking ourselves away is an ever-increasing mountain to climb. And while this challenge may seem insurmountable, it can be accomplished. The story revealed the health benefits of intentional silence. A study was cited in which the regular practice of 12 minutes of silence a day benefits the hippocampus, the portion of the brain connected to memory.¹ In fact, silence has a restorative effect in strengthening the brain with the production of new cells.² Science is confirming the benefits of silence for physical health, but for Christians, we already know of the spiritual benefits – a deeper relationship with God. While the benefits of silence won't be described this way in secular writing, the connecting points between health benefits, attitude, personal outlook and well-being have unmistakable spiritual markers.

Jesus often got away from everyone. He stole away from his leading, healing, teaching and preaching to restore his soul. Silence, meditation, contemplation and prayer - really all pieces of a spiritual life - are restorative. Whether it is the prayer of gratitude "God restores my soul" (Psalm 23) or the deep pathos of the plea "How long?" (Psalm 13), silence is a transforming experience.

This transformation can occur in a number of ways and locations. The secular world is capitalizing on this by providing places and spaces for people to get away and turn off the world.³ Even here in Ohio you can find many retreat places for silence. Some who need to learn the discipline of "turning off" the world can place their cellphone in a

locked box for the duration of their silent retreat! Others find sensory deprivation the way to go, in an attempt to turn off the brain. Perhaps helpful, perhaps over the top – but perhaps not. Disciplined living requires different disciplines for different personality styles. Let me share with you what I have learned about myself.



Jesus Mafa, *The Transfiguration*, 1973

In my own spiritual life I have found silence challenging - it is hard for me to turn off. Silent retreats have been an important part of my diet of formation over the years. The first couple of days are difficult, but then I am able to settle in. Easier and more accessible is to find a prayer style that naturally connects with who you are and interject moments of silence into your practices. Silent

retreats are infrequent for me now, but I need to face the need for silence daily. Mornings work best for me. Silence is restorative in all the senses mentioned beforehand. My dominant prayer style is Acts of Dedication in the style of Franciscan prayer.⁴ I learned this from the wonderful spiritual formation book, Prayer and Temperament, written by Michael and Norrissey. The book matches Myers Briggs personality styles and connects them with historic Christian prayer practices. My personality style is ESTP, and my dominant prayer style comes out of the SP portion. The prayer style is in the form of the teachings of St. Francis. The way that I incorporate silence is that it is an intentional act or Act of Dedication on my part to the glory of God. I can mow grass, hike, drive to a ministry setting, sit on the porch and contemplate – all acts of dedication that include silence. But I wish I was better at living this life. Even with years of practice, it is still difficult.

The temptation to be available at all times is a stress than many feel daily, even many of us in the ministry. I feel it. Putting down the phone and disengaging is a growing edge for me! The piece to grasp from Jesus is this: his preaching, miracles and teaching were only as good as his prayer life. Jesus had an outstanding prayer life. Search the Gospels and you will find at least 25 instances of prayer – getting away with God – preceding what Jesus did. Sometimes those silences were challenging for him, but nonetheless, Jesus was prepared. Jesus' ministry matched his ability to engage in the silence. In other words, nothing of significance in his ministry would have happened if Jesus hadn't first engaged in the silence.

As you you and I live our life and engage with others, our ability to be present is largely dependent on our presence in silence.

Questions to consider

- How is it with your soul?
- How have you embraced silence?
- What are you noticing about the impact of silence and communion with God and the output of your ministry?
- How could you recommit yourself to the Wesleyan practices of *Words of Piety* and *Works of Mercy*, using silence to order your life?

¹ <https://www.news-medical.net/health/Hippocampus-Functions.aspx>

² <https://www.lifehack.org/377243/science-says-silence-much-more-important-our-brains-than-thought>

³ <https://news.wosu.org/ideastream/2020-01-22/shhh-the-impact-of-sound-and-the-health-benefits-of-silence>

⁴ <https://www.piercedhands.com/franciscan-spirituality/>

Peace,



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