

# SILENT NIGHT

## onechurch

### bigIdea small group discussion

When God is silent, we're tempted to think he's absent. That's why the Christmas story is so important. You can't separate the "Silent Night" of Christmas from the 400 years of Silent Nights between the Old and New Testaments. Christmas gives us a real, tangible, and historical hope. It reminds us that even when God is silent, He isn't absent.



**BIG IDEA:** Don't confuse silence with inactivity.

Sometimes silence can be deafening. While everything and everyone around you is quiet, content and fast asleep, you sometimes toss and turn at night wondering why God seems distant. You struggle to remember the last time you heard His voice. You wrestle with the distance while at the same time yearn for that missing connection. Numerous questions roll through your mind, but the one you can't seem to answer is what God is doing by remaining silent.

If you're not careful, you can easily mistake silence with inactivity. This would be a mistake. Even in the midst of those quiet moments, God is still at work. Just think about a normal holiday season. We get wrapped up in wrapping gifts, holiday ads and decorations. We rush from Christmas party to Christmas party. We spend hours online trying to find the latest deal or sit mesmerized watching Christmas specials on TV. When there is noise all around us, it can be difficult to hear the quiet voice of God. We've got mixed messages coming at us in all different directions while the message that truly matters gets lost in all the commotion.

However, other times the silence can be self-imposed. Riddled with guilt we avoid God at all costs. Similar to the next-door neighbor whose Christmas lights we borrowed and never gave back, we attempt to stay out of God's way. We know we've been slack in spending time with God so we use that as an excuse to allow the distance to continue. We feel like we should do more before we ask Him to reconnect with us. We come up with a religious checklist that we need to mark off in order to even the score and be "right" with Him.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Complete the following sentence: When God seems silent; I tend to react by \_\_\_\_\_. What causes you to react in this way?
2. Why do most of us avoid silence? What makes us uncomfortable with silence?
3. What are some questions that run through your mind when God seems distant and silent?
4. *With your Bible or YouVersion, read Lamentations 3:19-33.* What dangers exist in mistaking God's silence with His inactivity?
5. *With your Bible or YouVersion, read Psalm 13.* How does God use times of silence to awaken us to our desires for Him?
6. *With your Bible or YouVersion, read Hebrews 10:19-23.* What does it look like to "hold unswervingly to the hope we profess" in the midst of these moments of silence?
7. How would you describe your current connection level with God? For those feeling disconnected, is there a sin pattern or an obedience problem that is creating this distance?
8. How can you begin to prepare your heart to hear God's voice this holiday season?

## MOVING FORWARD

Then there are those sin patterns we refuse to give up. Having a quiet time with God feels awkward because the elephant in the room (our sin) isn't being addressed. If not dealt with, sin breaks our connection with God. Sin always pushes us into hiding and causes us to avoid exposure to light. On the other hand, maybe you keep apologizing for your sin and telling him you're sorry and failing to hear Him saying you've been forgiven.

If sin isn't causing the silence then it might be a disobedience issue. We remember vividly the last thing God asked us to do, but we blatantly refused to obey. Until we act in obedience, silence will remain. From God's perspective, there is nothing left to be said. If you want to know God's will it's to do the last thing he asked you to do.

The problem is we tend to filibuster God by talking too much. We go on and on with our requests, pleading and bargaining. Once that is done we go about our normal business. Our prayers are 99.9% talking and about 0.1% listening. Conversations aren't conversations when they are only one sided. The time has come for us to be silent and reflect.

## WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Don't panic if you can't hear God's voice. Panic causes us to rush right through reflection. God's silence is not arbitrary, but rather designed to awaken us to Him. In the midst of our sin, God is calling us to repent and receive His forgiveness. In the midst of our suffering, God is calling us to trust and lean on Him. In the midst of our success, God is calling us to praise. When God seems silent to you, it is time for you to be silent before Him. Faith requires both expectancy and contentment. Don't be surprised when God breaks His silence for the sake of His purposes. God is always working to form us into His image and shape us in holiness.

## CHANGING YOUR MIND

*The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young. Let him sit alone in silence, for the LORD has laid it on him. Let him bury his face in the dust - there may yet be hope. Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him, and let him be filled with disgrace. For no one is cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone. Lamentations 3:25-33*