



# Tools for Transformation

## Silence as Prayer

Okay, it sure sounds backwards to *talk* about prayer as *silence*. It certainly sounds counter-intuitive to describe what is normally understood as conversation with God as the absence of words. However, when we move beyond words and set down our own agendas and prayer lists, there develops a rich connection and a deepening intimacy with the Lord. This is a kind of prayer that comes to God with nothing but empty hands and a listening heart. It is like when you sit with a close friend in silence, simply enjoying each other's company. There may be some communication happening, but it's actually more like communing with each other. Ruth Haley Barton says, "at this point prayer is much less about technique and much more about the beyond-words intimacy that is developing in our relationship with God."

There are many names that describe this kind of prayer, each one capturing a different nuance. Silent prayer, centring prayer, contemplative prayer, prayer of the heart, etc, all aim towards the same goal which is deepening communion with God. In Psalm 62, David writes, "let all that I am wait quietly before God, for my hope is in him" (vs 5). Most certainly he experienced deep connection with God, and while his many Psalms indicate he talked a lot to God, it's clear he also engaged in silence.

Isaiah 30:15 says: "Only in returning to me and resting in me will you be saved. In quietness and trust is your strength". In silence we don't have to strive to articulate to God what is on our hearts. Rather, we simply open ourselves up to God and rest quietly in stillness, attentive to what may arise from the Holy Spirit. Give the following exercise a try!

## An Exercise in Silence:

- **Find a quiet space.** You'll need somewhere with minimal external distractions where you can comfortably be by yourself.
- **Set a timer** for the desired amount of time (10 - 20 minutes perhaps). This isn't necessary but may help while you're beginning to practice this.
- **Get comfortable and close your eyes.** This helps keep your focus inward and toward God - but don't get so comfortable that you fall asleep!
- **Focus on God's presence with you.** To do this, it's often helpful to notice your breathing. Try lengthening each inhale and exhale. Sometimes it's helpful to focus your mind by repeating just one word or phrase with each breath (called a breath prayer). This can be a simple word describing an attribute of God, a word that captures a deep longing within you, or a phrase from scripture (see examples below). It's completely normal for thoughts or distractions to arise. Simply notice them, but try not to engage them. Just let them be. Imagine putting them into a boat and sending them away. The point here is simply to be with God - to be present to his presence with you (not an emptying like in some other religions) - and to discover what unfolds from there!
- **Emerge slowly** from your prayerful silence. Take a few moments to express thanks to God.

Here are some breath prayers you can try:

- "Be still and know that I am God."
- "Here am I."
- "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening."
- "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me."
- "My help comes from the Lord, maker of heaven and earth."
- "I will trust you."
- "Not my will, but yours."
- "Come, Lord Jesus."
- "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."

