

WHY?

SERIES DEVOTIONAL

"WHEN GOD IS SILENT" | SUNDAY, MAY 17, 2020

GRACE
FELLOWSHIP

KEY THOUGHT

#1

When God is silent, we trust that He is too wise to make a mistake.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9)

The Hebrew word translated "thoughts" (v.8-9) comes from a word that means "to braid, to weave." Just as an expert craftsman weaves cloth by carefully crossing and connecting material in a pattern with a beautiful purpose in mind: a rug, a scarf, etc., the God of the universe – the Master Weaver – is carefully crossing and connecting circumstances in a pattern with a beautiful purpose in mind for the world and our lives.

Just as the underside of a woven rug may appear haphazard and a mess, but the top side is orderly and beautiful, let's remember that we see only the present—the underside—but God sees the present *and* the orderly and beautiful end. We see only what is right in front of us, but God is high above us and sees all of life at one glance. The apostle Paul spoke of our limited understanding: *"For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known"* (1 Corinthians 13:12). The mirror Paul refers to was made of polished metal, before the discovery of quicksilver and the development of clear glass. Paul's mirror provided a reflection, but it was imperfect and clouded. He was saying that in this life our vision of how God is at work is imperfect and clouded, our knowledge is partial. But Paul emphasizes that one day we will see perfectly clearly as if "face to face" (v.12).

Until we see things with perfect vision, we may have the impression that God is silent—maybe even that He is withholding information from us. But He is calling us to trust that He is weaving circumstances toward a beautiful end for His children. We don't always know what the future holds, but we always know Who holds the future. You can trust God's intentions and ways—He is too wise to make a mistake.

TALK ABOUT IT:

- In what ways is the idea of an expert weaver a helpful analogy of God's good and purposeful work in our world and in our lives?
- Why do you think God may, at times, speak to us in a still small voice—like a whisper deep down in our heart—rather than communicating loudly with a shout?
- Why is it important to remember truths about God's character—such as "He is too wise to make a mistake"—when we're going through adversity and suffering?
- How would you respond to a new Christian who asks, "Is God silent"?

KEY THOUGHT

#2

When God is silent, we trust that He is too loving to be cruel.

"We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." (Romans 8:28-29)

Notice what these verses do not say. They do not say that everything that happens is good; this is because everything that happens isn't good! They don't say that God causes everything that happens; this is because God doesn't cause everything that happens! Nor do they say that everything will turn out okay for everyone; this is because everything will not turn out okay for everyone!

But it does say that God is at work in the world, especially in the lives of those who love Him. God's ultimate purpose is to shape us into the image of His Son, Jesus (v.29), so He uses all things—good and bad—to accomplish this purpose. The phrase "work together" (v.28) describes a pharmacist blending chemicals to make a medicine. These chemicals, if taken separately, could harm us, but when mixed in the right proportions, can heal someone. That's what God does in our lives—He takes the good and bad events, that which He sends or allows, and uses them to make us more like Christ. Don't give up—God has a loving purpose for our pain, a productive reason for our struggle, and an eternal reward for our faithfulness! Everything will turn out okay *for those who love God and are committed to His purposes (v.28).*

William Cowper wrote these insightful words about the mystery of God's ways and the love of God in his poem "The Mysterious Way":

"God moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm.
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense but trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face."

TALK ABOUT IT:

- Over the marble fireplace in Princeton University's mathematics building is a sign written in German that says, "God is subtle, but He is not malicious." Do you agree or disagree with this sign's statement? Why?
- How can knowing that God's purpose is to shape us into the image of Jesus change our perspective on suffering?
- How do you think a person can assess their progress (or lack of it) in growing in the image of Jesus?
- In reference to Cowper's poem above, which do you tend to see in your mind's eye when you are suffering: God frowning or God smiling? Why?

KEY THOUGHT

#3

When God is silent, we trust that He is too close to be unaware.

"I will take joy in the God of my salvation. ¹⁹ God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places." (Habakkuk 3:18-19)

Habakkuk was referring to a mountain climbing deer known for its sure and steady feet. Even on the most treacherous terrain it never fell. Habakkuk says the Lord will keep us on our feet as we travel the treacherous paths of life. He may not always get us out, but He will always get us through! Corrie ten Boom said, "When the train goes through a tunnel and the world gets dark, do you jump out? Of course not. You sit still and trust the engineer to get you through."

Isaiah 26:3 says, "You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you." Our job when suffering is to keep our mind fixed on God. When we do so, He promises to give us peace because we are trusting in Him. All of life comes down to this question: "Do you trust God or not?"

If you want an increased awareness of God's presence in your life, you must take time to deepen your relationship with Him through taking in His Word and communicating with Him through prayer. Here are several benefits that become realities when we are aware of God in our lives:

- 1) Peace – We experience increased peace because we are putting our troubles and hardships under His authority,
- 2) Holiness – We experience increased holiness because we won't want to tolerate sin in our lives,
- 3) Wisdom – We experience increased wisdom because we can immediately call on the Lord as our Helper and Guide.

TALK ABOUT IT:

- How can being aware of God's presence in your life increase your love for Him?
- How can being aware of God's presence in your life increase your effectiveness as a witness for Christ?
- It has been said that God's greatest desire is that we become more aware of His nearness. How does suffering help us become more aware of God's nearness?
- What advice would you give to a new Christian on how to draw closer to God?
- What are some lessons we can learn when God rescues us out of trouble? What are some lessons we can learn when God journeys with us through trouble?