



Groups

Thanks for checking out our sermon-based Study Guides! If you've never used our Study Guides before, you'll find some basic instructions beginning at the bottom of page 2.

NEW this year: These study guides will be written by thoughtful and experienced Life Group Leaders. As always, use these guides as a head-start in your own preparation as the needs and culture is different from each group. And of course, please continue to give us feedback.

LIFE GROUP STUDY GUIDE

for the Sermon given on November 27, 2022

by Pastor Bryan Wilkerson

"WHEN GOD IS SILENT" - Malachi 4:4-6/ Mark 1:1-8

Question: Why was silence so important to that first Christmas, and how might it enrich our experience of Christmas today?

Bottom Line: The silence of God prepares us to hear the voice of God.



We hope you had much to be grateful for during your Thanksgiving holiday and enjoyed spending time with family and friends. Welcome to the first week of Advent! Pastor Bryan kicks off our new series discussing the role of silence in Scripture.

Pastor Bryan shared that the most popular Christmas song of all time is “Silent Night.” He elaborates on the amount of noise and silence that are mentioned in the biblical record. He raises the question “what role do sound and silence play in the With-God life we’re talking about this year?”

Silence isn’t always something that we seek; sometimes silence is thrust upon us, whether we want it or not. Sometimes, in fact, it feels like God has gone silent. What is that and *what do we do with that silence?*

Let’s begin in prayer before we begin reading and discussing our text.

Main Scripture Reading: Malachi 4:4-6/ Mark 1:1-8

Malachi 4:4-6

⁴ “Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel.

⁵ “See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. ⁶ He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.”

Mark 1:1-8

1 The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah,^[a] the Son of God,^[b] **2** as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way”^[c]—

3 “a voice of one calling in the wilderness,

‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.’”^[d]

⁴ And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. ⁶ John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And this was his message: “After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I baptize you with^[e] water, but he will baptize you with^[f] the Holy Spirit.”

Group Discussion Questions

1. After the prophet Malachi shared the promise of Yahweh's return (Malachi 4:5-6), there was a 400-year period of silence that preceded Christ's birth. Pastor Bryan made reference to *A Grief Observed*, written by Christian scholar C.S. Lewis. In this excerpt, he describes his own experience with God's silence after his wife died from cancer only 3 years after their marriage:

Meanwhile, where is God? When you are happy...and turn to Him with gratitude and praise, you will be—or so it feels—welcomed with open arms. *But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. You may as well turn away....What can this mean? Why is He so present a commander in our time of prosperity and so very absent a help in time of trouble?*

Have you ever experienced the silence of God? A time or season when it felt as though God had forgotten you, or abandoned his post?

2. After 400 years of silence, the first thing mentioned in the Gospel of Mark is a loud "voice crying in the wilderness." The first thing the Voice says is to "prepare." The Voice referred to John the Baptizer. Mark 1:6 describes John the Baptist: *"John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey."* Observe how the Israelites responded to John. Imagine being one of the Israelites listening to John's message after 400 years of silence (Mark 1:4-8). What would you think about his radical message?
3. Pastor Bryan states, "silence prepares us for what's coming; for what we're about to hear," comparable to the moment before a performance begins at a symphony hall. Have you experienced a period of silence that prepared you for what God was about to say or do?
4. In our fall sermon series, *Exodus: Scenes from a With-God Life*, we talked about making room for God in our lives through spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation and solitude. With all of the noise, stress, anxiety and expectations associated with gift giving and social events of the Christmas holiday, *when and where can you find time and space for silence to hear God's voice?*
5. How long has it been since you have heard the still, small voice of God? What new thing might God want to say or do in your life, in your home, in our church, this Christmas season?

Take Home Message:

Silence prepares us for what's coming; for what God is about to say or do. It quiets our minds. It opens highways to our hearts. *Sometimes, it seems, we're not ready to hear from God, until He, or we have gone quiet for a while.*

Homework Until Next Time:

Ask the members of your LG to complete the Discipleship Planning Tool and the GPS Assessment Tool before your next meeting. Here is some fresh language:

We're all on a journey; where is yours taking you?

The beauty of the way of Jesus is that it's not just good for us, it's good for the world around us. But that kind of beautiful life doesn't come from just hearing the words of Jesus; it comes from putting them into practice. Three kinds of practice, actually:

- The with-God life of our personal habits and routines;
- The with-others life of our genuine and life-changing relationships; and
- The for-the-world life that makes an impact beyond our immediate homes and families, into our communities and beyond.

Growing as disciples of Jesus will make a Kingdom difference in our world and a transformative difference in our lives as believers and as a group. And these resources are helpful in identifying the next steps for our journeys.

Let's Pray

Support for the Leader (These Teaching Points are provided to help the group leader make connections from the message to their group with both insights from the Biblical text and also opportunities in the life of our church).

Teaching Points:

- Silence is anticipatory. It prepares us for what's coming next; for what we are about to hear. In the spiritual realm, it prepares us for what God is about to say or do.
- During periods of silence, lean in and listen with expectancy for new ways God wants to speak into your life
- Silence can shape and prepare us by opening our ears, eyes and hearts to receive His message
- Go to [grace.org/the journey](https://grace.org/the-journey) → scroll down to Advent resource library

For Further Biblical Study:

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Luke 1:11-20

¹¹ Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. ¹³ But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. ¹⁴ He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. ¹⁶ He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

¹⁸ Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

¹⁹ The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. ²⁰ And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."

Psalms 27:14

Wait for the LORD;
be strong and take heart
and wait for the LORD.

Lamentations 3:25-26

²⁵ The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him,
to the one who seeks him;
²⁶ it is good to wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD.

Galatians 1:15-17

¹⁵ But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. ¹⁷ I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus.

Revelation 1:9-10

⁹ I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰ On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, ¹¹ which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

Isaiah 43:19

See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?

How to Use These Study Guides:

- Consider sending out the Scripture passage to your group members ahead of time.
- Begin each meeting with a short time of checking in with one another.
- You may want to begin the discussion by reading the Scripture passage together out loud, or by summarizing the passage if everyone has read it ahead of time.
- Don't feel like you need to discuss every question included in the Study Guide. Pick one or two to start with, and see how the conversation flows.
- If your group meets over Zoom:
 - You may need to do more overt facilitating over Zoom than you would in person. Feel free to call on people to invite them to share.
 - Try to be sensitive to attention spans over Zoom—keep the meetings shorter than they would be in person.
- Be sure to set aside time for sharing prayer requests and praying together.

Group Leader Support: Please reach out to your Campus Pastor or your Coach if you have any questions about leading your group or concerns about your group dynamic. If you have questions about or feedback on the Study Guides, please reach out to Pastor Tim or Grace Lee from the Group Life team.