

Faith in Action

Week 3: Faith and the Silence of God

Genesis 22:1-13

Our church family lost someone special this week. A young man named Saige Erickson (show pictures), died unexpectedly from a brain aneurysm. He had just turned 16 years old.

Saige was a volunteer in our worship and production ministry. He started serving on that team when he was just 12 years old, often times running a camera with his floppy, beach-blond hair bouncing up and down as he went to get the next shot. He was funny, bright, and always willing to lend a hand.

I want to invite us to spend a few moments praying for Saige's family and friends. Pray for our own media team that's like a close-knit family. That God's comfort and grace would be near as they grieve.

It's in times like these that it's easy to wonder, *where's God?* What's He doing? Walking through times of suffering and pain leads so many people to question their faith, if not abandon it all together. And, what makes it even harder is when it feels like God is silent during those times. Like, you cry out and there's no one there.

In times of silence, we tend to question everything we thought we believed. We question God's love and wonder, "Do you even care?" Or, we question His power and why He didn't, or couldn't, step in and do something. As difficult as life can be sometimes, the pain is only magnified by the apparent silence of God. Which is why I believe, and have found in my own life, **Times of silence reveal the strength of our faith.**

The silence of God reveals what our faith is really made. If we're truly confident in what we hope for and assured of what we cannot see. Silence puts our faith to the test and has a way of exposing the things we actually put our confidence and assurance in other than God. Times of silence reveal the strength of our faith.

But, if we allow them to, those times when God seems silent can also strengthen our faith. They can make us draw closer to him. Walk with a greater sense of trust, even if we walk with a limp. The silence of God can become a training ground for our faith to grow stronger.

In a blog post I read last week, Randy Alcorn says, **"The call to wait on God is an invitation to trust and hope. It entails believing that one day – *even if today is not that day* – he will make all things right."**

Today, as we continue our Faith in Action series, we're going to explore how we can walk in faith during the silence of God. How we can grow through those times, and not just go through them. And, we're going to use an account in Abraham's life as our guide. So, if you have a Bible or a Bible app you like to use, turn with me to Genesis 22.

Abraham is mentioned more than anyone else in Hebrews 11. He kind of stands above everyone else in the Old Testament as someone who put his faith into action and followed God. In Genesis 12, God tells Abraham to uproot his entire family, leave everything he'd ever known, and go to a land he would show him.

So, that's what he did. They packed their bags, gathered their family, and they started walking, not knowing where God was leading. The only thing guiding them was the promise that God would show them where to go and that he would build a nation through them.

Later, in his old age, God made a promise to Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. The only problem is, he didn't even have one and they were well past their child bearing years. But God makes this promise to Abraham in **Genesis 17:19. He says...(READ)**

So, all of these promises that God makes Abraham about building a nation and numerous descendants, all of them hinge on his son, Isaac, that God would provide. Well, sure enough, some time goes by and Sarah gives birth to a son. God again promises Abraham that he will build a great nation through Isaac. Which had to make what happened next so confusing to him. Look at our text. **Genesis 22, starting in verse 1...(READ vs. 1-2)**

This had to leave Abraham with so many questions. We know from the text that God was testing the genuineness of his faith, but Abraham didn't know that. All Abraham knew was that the God who promised to build a nation through this son was now telling him to sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering. I imagine it left Abraham wondering, "God, what are you doing?" And yet, just like he'd always done, Abraham trusted God and followed him. **Verse 3...(READ vs. 3-4)**

Three days of silence... Three days of unanswered questions. Three days of crying out on the inside, while having to put on a good face on the outside. The author doesn't go into any details about what Abraham was thinking, but I've got to imagine he was feeling everything from anger to sadness. Betrayal, fear. And all the while, God was silent.

What do you do when God is silent?

Let's look at what Abraham did and see if there's anything we can take away from it. **Verse 5...(READ)**

Notice, not "I," but "we." "WE will come back to you." He could have just said that to not raise suspicion. "I will come back to you" would have made the two servants with him wonder, "What about Isaac?" Would have made Isaac wonder, "What about Isaac?" So, we could have said, "we" so he didn't have to go into what was about to happen.

Or, Abraham could have said “we” because in those three days of silence, Abraham’s faith grew in confidence and assurance. Confidence in the God he followed and assurance that He is good and faithful to His promises.

In our guiding text for this series, Hebrews 11, the author gives us some insight into Abraham’s thought process that the narrative doesn’t. **Verse 17 says...(READ Heb. 11:17-19a)**

This is fascinating to me. You see, Abraham had no concept of the dead coming back to life. Dead things had always stayed dead in Abraham’s life and faith. And yet, he took all that he knew about God’s power and strength, combined with his care and promises, and he *reasoned* that God must be planning to raise Isaac back to life.

And, when did he reason that? It was during those three days of silence. His mind never stopped working and processing what he knew to be true about God. That he is powerful and he cares. He is faithful and will keep his promises. Even still, knowing that doesn’t make walking by faith, or the silence of God, any easier. And then Isaac asks a question that had to pierce the heart of his father. **...(READ Genesis 22:6-8)**

Again, we see Abraham leaning into what he knows about God. Trusting what he knows to be true. Abraham could look back on his life and see all the ways that God had provided. From when he left his homeland to go to a place God showed him, to providing a son to him and Sarah, even in their old age. God had always provided and Abraham trusted he would do it again. **Verse 9...(READ vs. 9-12)**

In the 3 days of silence, plus the time it took them to reach the top of the mountain, Abraham never stopped listening for the voice of God. He walked in faith through the silence, waiting for God to speak again. And He did at just the right time.

So, what can we learn about walking in faith through the silence of God from this account in Abraham’s life? How can we engage in the silence of God so that when our time comes, we don’t just go through it, but **grow** through it? As we wrap up today, I want to share some things I’ve learned from the account and from my own times of walking through the silence of God. And the first thing is this, **Embrace the hardship.**

The silence of God is so confusing and frustrating. It can make you question everything you thought you believed. Embrace those questions and feelings. Don’t be scared of them. When God seems absent or quiet, be honest with yourself and with Him about what you’re feeling.

You can fight it or ignore it and just try to make it through, but I’ve found in my own life that those times I’ve embraced the silence of God and the struggles that come with it, I’ve actually grown in my own faith during those times more than any other. The silence of God makes you come face to face with what you actually believe about God. It strips everything else away that doesn’t matter so you can focus on what truly does.

Second, in times of silence, **Lean into what you *do* know.** Silence can leave you with a lot more questions than answers, so lean into what you do know instead of just focusing on what you don't. Look back and remember the times when God did more or act or speak. Lean into the characteristics of God and remind yourself of who He is and what He's actually like, not what your emotions are telling you.

In his book, *God on Mute*, Pete Greig writes, **"When we are scared and hurting, when life feels chaotic and out of control, it is more important than ever to anchor ourselves in the absolute and eternal truth that we are dearly loved, and deeply held by the most powerful being in the universe."**

Remember who God is and what He's done and remind yourself that He's the same God that can do it again.

Third, when God is silent, **Listen to what He's already spoken.** In a way, God is never silent, even if we feel like He is. We are constantly surrounded by his voice. God speaks through His Word. The Apostle Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 3:16 that all Scripture is God-breathed. They are the very words of God breathed out and spoken to us. **Hebrews 4:12 says...(READ)**

God's Word is living and active and it speaks to any situation we face. In it, we hear the voice of God speaking words of comfort and love. Direction. It gives words and speaks to our fears and disappointments and doubts. God speaks through His Word, but He also speaks through His world. **Psalms 19:1 says...(READ)**

Creation reveals and testifies to the goodness of God. When God feels silent, I often times will just get out in nature. Go on a hike or a run. Hop in my kayak and spend some time outside. God often times speaks through His creation.

Finally, when God feels silent, **Keep taking the next right step.** Keep doing what you know you're supposed to do. If sent you in a direction and then went silent, it must mean He wants you to keep going in that direction and he'll tell you when to stop. So just keep taking the next right step. Don't give up. Don't get discouraged. Do what you know to do and eventually, God will burst through the silence and speak.

Which is what we see in our text. Abraham kept taking the next right step and eventually, God broke his silence, saved his son, and provided the sacrifice, just like Abraham believed. Look at **verse 13...(READ vs. 13-14)**

Abraham trusted that God would provide and He did. And thousands of years later, God would provide another substitute sacrifice on that exact same mountain. Jesus, God's one and only Son, would later walk up to this same place, faithfully going where the Father was leading Him.

Jesus was familiar with the silence of God. The night before he walked to the spot where he'd be crucified, Jesus prayed and pleaded with God 3 times to take this cup of suffering from him and three times, God answered with silence.

You see, Jesus didn't just carry our sin to the cross and die the death we deserved, he experienced everything we do, including the silence of God. He knows that pain and anguish and he's our perfect example of walking by faith in the silence of God.

From the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus went to the cross and allowed himself to be pierced for sin....and God was silent.

After His death, they took his body down and placed it in a tomb...and God was silent.

The disciples mourned and all hope seemed lost...and God was silent.

But, after three days of silence, God spoke through the resurrection of Jesus. He provided a way for us to be forgiven and set free from our guilt, sin, and shame. He provided a way for us to find new life and a fresh start.

The silence of God can often times feel deafening, but even in the midst of it, we can walk in faithfulness and trust that, at just the right time, God will break through the silence and speak the very words we need to hear.