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S.O.S—and the Sound of Silence
I Kings 19:4-14, Psalm 42

As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.

² *My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.*

When shall I come and behold the face of God?

³ *My tears have been my food day and night,
while people say to me continually, “Where is your God?”*

⁴ *These things I remember, as I pour out my soul:*

*how I went with the throng, and led them in procession to the house of God,
with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival.*

⁵ *Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help ⁶ and my God.*

*My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you
from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.*

⁷ *Deep calls to deep at the thunder of your cataracts;
all your waves and your billows have gone over me.*

⁸ *By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me,
a prayer to the God of my life.*

⁹ *I say to God, my rock, “Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I walk about mournfully because the enemy oppresses me?”*

¹⁰ *As with a deadly wound in my body, my adversaries taunt me,
while they say to me continually, “Where is your God?”*

¹¹ *Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.*

Elijah could have written Psalm 42.

He didn't, but he sure felt it, didn't he?

Do you ***remember the story*** about Elijah ?

Elijah has just come from an encounter with the prophets of Baal, a false god,
and a huge ***contest*** to prove whose God is real.

Both sides built an altar, and when the prophets of Baal prayed to their god
to light the fire on their altar, ***nothing*** happened.

When ***Elijah*** prayed to God, fire came down from heaven and lit his altar,

and all the water around it, on fire.

It was a moment of *triumph* for Elijah...but a moment that didn't last.

When Queen *Jezebel*, a devotee of Baal, heard that Elijah had killed all her prophets after the contest, she took an oath to do the same thing to him. She said to Elijah, '*So may the gods do to me and more also if I do not make your life like the life of one of them, one of my prophets, by this time tomorrow.*'"

Then Bible says in a great *understatement*, "Elijah was afraid."

Elijah is in serious trouble so he runs away to Beersheba....
where he sits under a small tree and *gives up* on life itself.
He literally wants to die.

Don't most of us know that feeling?
Maybe you feel that way *right now*....
A lot of us get to that place, where we feel like giving up.
There are so many reasons we fall into that kind of despair and *depression*....
Every person's situation is unique,
but Elijah did have some serious stressors---things we face today in different situations:

He is being chased and threatened by *evil people*,
He is *exhausted* from the big contest on Mt. Carmel,
He is *burned out* as God's prophet,
He is *overwhelmed* by the fact that he is now hiding all alone in a cave!

Ever found yourself *surrounded* by enemies?
Or *exhausted*? Or *burned out*?
Or just *overwhelmed*?
If so, you are not alone!

You might remember that the *Israelites* who
wandered in the wilderness after their Exodus from Egypt,
and looking for their next meal,
they told Moses it would have been better for them
if they had just stayed in Egypt as slaves to die,
instead of *dying of hunger* in the wilderness...

Feeling this bad—it isn't wrong—it's just *honest*.

And when we come to that honest place...
 the Bible reminds us that ***God is right there with us.***
 In the despair, in the sorrow.
 Even when we are barely hanging on, especially then.

But, what does ***God do*** for Elijah?
 Exactly what God does for ***any of us*** in the same situation.
 God responds.
 God ***provides.***

You know what God doesn't do?
 God ***doesn't*** tell Elijah--***stop whining and complaining,***
 God honors Elijah's honesty with grace and mercy.
 Just like God does ***with us,*** today

God sends ***angels*** to give him food and drink,
 Then urges him to ***rest,***

God shows Elijah that his ***life is worth more*** than his own actions,
 He shows Elijah, with the divine provision—
 With the call to a spiritual journey,
 that he is ***loved by God,*** and is ***still important*** as a prophet.

All of this is ***so similar to prayer in Psalm 42***—
 one of my all time favorite Psalms.
 As a teen I memorized this Psalm, not because I had too,
 but because it spoke to me.

You know what I mean about a Bible passage ***speaking directly*** to you?
 It's powerful, and even more so if we take it to heart and ***memorize*** it!
 That's a gift to yourself that no one can ever take away from you!

Psalm 42 is so like the journey of Elijah after fleeing Jezebel:
As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.
²*My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.*
When shall I come and behold the face of God?
³*My tears have been my food day and night,*
while people say to me continually, "Where is your God?"

Elijah prays something so similar:

"I have been zealous for you...but now, I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away" (verses 10, 14).

That's when God tells him to go stand on the mountain and the *Lord will pass by*.

Now just *imagine* what must be going through Elijah's head at this point. What does that mean—God will pass by?

What he sees is first a great *wind*—and God is not in it. Then he feels an *earthquake*—and God is not in that either. Then he sees a great *fire*—and God is not in the fire.

Finally, he hears the *sound of sheer silence*. And that is God.

Some of us know the *King James Version of this*—God comes in *a still, small voice*.

The newest English translation, the Common English Bible, puts it this way: "After the fire, there was a *sound. Thin. Quiet.*" (CEB)

Different translations are possible because the *Hebrew* can be translated in more than one way. That "*sound*" can mean "*voice*" -- or silence -- but however it is translated, it is something *soft and quiet and still*—in contrast to the *overwhelming* wind, earthquake, and fire that come before it.

For Elijah, God is not in the great pyrotechnics of nature, but rather in the *silence*.

I wonder, has that been *true* in your life?
Have you found God in the *silence, and stillness*?
When have *you encountered God* in a *quiet* moment?
Or known God was with you, when everything was completely still?

Psalm 46 is so famous for reminding us to "*Be still, and know that I am God.*" Those are some powerful words, right?

Does this mean *that God is always* in the silence? I don't think so. *Moses* saw God in a fiery bush, the *Israelites* were led at night by a pillar of fire.

The people at *Pentecost* were touched by the Holy Spirit in a mighty wind.

I think the point is that *God surprises us* with His presence—
especially when we feel all alone, and depressed,
that's when God can go beyond our expectations.

I wonder if Elijah expected God in the wind, or fire or earthquake—
after all he had just seen God rain down fire on an altar that he built?
But instead, God came in a small, quiet, *unexpected way*.

And it is that expected presence of God in the silence that *enables Elijah*
to go on and do more ministry!

The Psalmist in Psalm 42 finds the same is true—just by being brutally honest
with God about his situation and despair,
he is able to remember God's provision, and go forward:

These things I remember, as I pour out my soul:

*how I went with the throng,¹ and led them in procession to the house of God,
with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival.*

⁵ *Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my help⁶ and my God.*

*My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you
...⁸ By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me,
a prayer to the God of my life.*

My favorite part of that Psalm is the *refrain*:
*Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my help⁶ and my God.*

Isn't that what *we all want to know and believe in our hearts*?
That there is *always hope*?
That *we will feel like praising God again*, if not right now?

And isn't this refrain a *firm foundation* for our faith in God?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help⁶ and my God.

You know what has been one of the *most meaningful* according to many of you, about our updated worship service?

It is the *silence, as we bring in the light of Christ*, and the lights are darkened, and we can see that little flame.

It is actually *in the quiet of the service* that our hearts can calm down and focus on God, which is why we started doing that.

I was reading a sermon by Rev. Dr. Homer Henderson, and he made such a good point about the power of *what happens—in silence*.

Holding a hand makes no noise.

A *hug* makes no noise.

Holding someone makes no noise.

All these things happen in the silence, the quiet....

You know *what else happened in silence*?

The *resurrection* of Jesus.

We have no record of a great earthquake, wind, or fire, in fact the story of Easter starts after he has been raised.

He was resurrected in *the quiet, stillness of the night*.

Shouldn't that say something to us today?

We—who are literally *surrounded by noise* all the time?

Shouldn't we be learning the power of silence?

I told the kids we all need some quiet and silence,

But it's even more true for all the adults—

Isn't this how we *find rest* for our souls?

Isn't this how we *hear from God* in new and powerful ways?

At our *ladies luncheon and retreat* I did several different prayer exercises with them, including *Lectio Divina*, which I've done with many of you.

It's just reading the Bible passage three times out loud 3 times, then quietly listening for a word or phrase, a picture or memory, and finally what God is saying to you in those words.

We did a small session of *Contemplative prayer*,

where I had the women imagine themselves in the presence of Jesus,

or focusing on something from Scripture,

and then relaxing their bodies and their hearts in God's presence.

We did *Breath Prayer* which I use so much with the kids—you just take deep breathes in and out, and say a short phrase from the Bible, like part of Psalm 46—*Be Still, and Know that I am God*.

And we did the *Examen prayer exercise* that is very powerful just before you go to sleep at night.

It's a simple review your day, remembering the good, as well as the bad, where God was with you, and where you felt far from God.

And then you rest in God's presence, and thank God for what you have learned that day.

It's a very power exercise—not just at the end of your day, it might be with family at the dinner table, or annual holidays, asking people to get quiet, and then reflect on where they saw God that day, or year.

Kind of *like God-sightings* at VBS.

You know the truth of these scriptures today is:

God shows up to help us, in surprising and unexpected ways and places---

God never leaves us or forsakes us.

Its like Jesus' words-- *Lo, I am with you always.*

And sometimes God chooses to speak to us in the calmness precisely because that's what *we need* when we are desperate or in despair. We need some *stillness, some silence.*

The question is, *will we stop long enough* to be in a still place with God? *Do you* ever stop long enough to just be quiet with God?

It's not easy to be still and quiet.

Solitude does not come naturally for most people, even for introverts who love it.

When we were practicing silent prayer at our ladies retreat, I encouraged the women to push all the intruding thoughts away, and keep focusing on God, on Jesus, on the Bible phrase.

We definitely all need silence, to *truly pay attention* to God. Sometimes this is the key to moving forward in life and faith.

I *love solitude* and quiet, and to *recharge my batteries* I need stillness.

But *I have a hard time being still*, you know? (Shocking, I'm sure 😊)
 Is it a challenge for you too?
 When I take *spiritual retreats* away from work,
 I always think of all kinds of things I could do besides just being still with God.
 But it is when I am still, and quiet, that I can truly hear God!
 Which seems to be a *theme in God's word*—a lot happens in silence, in the quiet.

So, how and where do YOU carve out that quiet time, for God?
 How can you stop running from the things that are draining you,
 The things that seem to be killing you....and let God give you REST?

Elijah is a man running for his life,
 And *trying to get away* from all that troubles him.
 A guy at the end of his rope,
 who comes face to face with the presence of God.

And we can tell that the *author of Psalm 42, felt similarly*—overwhelmed,
 persecuted, abandoned.
 And he longed for God, like a deer longs for flowing streams.

I know that feeling, don't you?
 Longing for God's presence, like water, or food?
 Who doesn't need God's presence, in the quiet?

Friends hear the *Good News of the Gospel* today.
 We all need quiet time with God—for God is often in the silence.
 And no matter what we are going through, God is right beside us,
 So we too can pray:

*Why are you cast down, O my soul,
 and why are you disquieted within me?
 Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
 my help and my God.
 For that hope, all God's people say, Amen.*