

**Turn Up the Volume**  
**Series: Mute – Part 2**  
***Various Scriptures***

Does it ever seem to you that God is giving you the silent treatment? Does it ever feel like prayer works a little bit like your frequent flyer miles? When you really need them, you can't use them. There are all kinds of blackout dates and restrictions. And you've got some things in mind. And you go to check when you can use it, and it's not available during that time. Does prayer ever feel like that to you? Have there been times in your life where you've really needed to hear from God; you've needed a word from the Lord in some area, and heaven seemed silent? You've needed God to act on your behalf in some way, and it just seems that God has done nothing.

So, what do you do in the silence? That's what we're talking about these two weeks. We're studying the intertestamental period. It's the time between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Now in history you're talking about a span of around four hundred years where God goes black. There's no noise. There's no sound from heaven. He goes AWOL, so it would seem. They cry out to Him but there's nothing. No word from the Lord. No prophet talking from God or speaking on God's behalf. What...? What happened?

So as we study this intertestamental period there are just some things that we're learning, because we're going to have some of those silent years as well. Well, maybe not years...but certainly days...maybe weeks or months...where we cry out to God and heaven seems silent. It seems as though someone hit the mute button on God.

So here's what we discovered last week as we studied this intertestamental period. We learned that **in the silence God is still at work**. He is still at work. And though you may not hear Him speaking, if you listen closely, you will hear Him working. And in those four hundred years God was working faithfully to prepare the world for the birth of His Son Jesus. In hindsight we see it clearly. God was still at work. And you can be sure that in your silence God is still working. Even if He's not speaking, He's still working.

Secondly, we discovered last week that **in the silence God keeps His promises**. We wonder why God hasn't spoken, but we are reminded that He has already, in fact, spoken through His Word. So in the silence we open up God's Word, and we're reminded of what He's already said is true.

The third thing we discovered is that **in the silence God is still watching**. God is still watching.

And the purpose of God's silence may not be to test your faith. There are all kinds of reasons why God may seem silent. It may not be to test your faith, but your faith is always tested in the silence. So we talked about how the teacher is silent during the test. That God has prepared you; you are ready for this moment. So when it seems that God is silent, you pick up your number two pencil and you be faithful and you get to work. Because in the end there is a crown of life for those who are faithful.

But here's what I want us to talk about this week: **What if the silence is because of something happening on our end?** You see, our tendency is to say, "Why...? Why isn't God speaking? Why is heaven silent?" But what if...what if the problem is on our end? Is there something we can do to turn up the volume so we can hear God more clearly, so that our prayers can be more effective?

Because here's what I'm convinced of: Oftentimes when there feels like there is a sound barrier between us and God, where He's not getting our prayers and we don't seem to be hearing from Him, it's because of something on our end. So I want us to talk about that.

If you've ever tried to fix a piece of electronic equipment, you know that in the back of the user's manual is usually what's called "a troubleshooting guide." Are you familiar with this? Do you know what I'm talking about? Where you're trying to repair something, and you don't know a lot about it. But something is wrong with it, and so there's a troubleshooting guide in the back for you to make your way through.

Let's just say it's a printer, right? Because a printer is one of those items where, you know, it's not so expensive that you want to call someone to repair it for you—it wouldn't be worth it—but you don't want to go buy a new one, so you're going to do a little work yourself. So you open up the user's manual and you start to make your way through the troubleshooting guide.

So how does a troubleshooting guide work? It works like this. You eliminate what isn't the problem so you can isolate what is the problem. You go through a list and you say, "Well, that's not it. That's not it. That's not it. This is it." So you make your way through the list in this troubleshooting guide of frequently experienced problems with that piece of equipment.

That's what I want us to do as we talk about our communication from God, as we talk about turning up the volume. When it seems that someone has hit the mute button on God, what are some common reasons for that?

**So, I want us to put together a troubleshooting guide for us to use in our prayer life.** Now this is not a comprehensive list—these troubleshooting tips—but I do hope they'll help

us, because I think some of these things are common problems that oftentimes don't get addressed when we feel frustrated with the silence of heaven.

**TIP #1: CONFESS YOUR SIN. (Isaiah 59:1-2; Proverbs 15:29)**

**So here's troubleshooting tip number one: *Confess your sin.***

That if you're having a hard time hearing from God or if it seems that God is not turning His ear toward you, it may be that there is some sin in your life that you need to repent of.

Imagine it like this. Imagine that this afternoon you're at home and you're trying to watch a game. And you have the volume turned up, but you still can't hear what's going on. And there's just a lot of noise in the house. Maybe a blender is going or the vacuum or somebody's got the radio turned up. So you pick up the remote to turn up the volume on the TV, and then you realize it's up all the way. Do you ever have that—where you can't hear very well so you think, "I just need to turn up the volume"? So you go to turn up the volume and it's already full blast and you still can't hear. What's the problem? The problem isn't that you need to turn up the volume. The problem is that everybody else needs to turn down the noise, right? You could hear fine if there wasn't so much noise surrounding.

And unconfessed sin in our lives is like a lot of noise that keeps us from hearing God, and it makes it harder for God to hear us. So, when we confess our sins, it's like...um, every time we confess a sin it turns down the volume on some of the noise that surrounds us spiritually. And when we confess our sin, it allows God to hear us more clearly. It allows us to hear from Him more clearly. So we see this connection in Scripture.

So the question for you to kind of think through here is an obvious one: **Is there a sin that you need to *repent of*?**

If you're having a hard time hearing from God or you feel like your prayers aren't that effective, is there a sin that you need to repent of? Is there something in darkness that needs to be brought out into the light? Is there something that you need to confess to God, something that you need to come clean about?

Isaiah makes this connection for us. In Isaiah chapter 59 Isaiah writes these words. He says, *"Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear."*

That's not the problem. You think the problem in your relationship with God is God: that God is not able to help you, that His arm is too short to save, or that He's not able to hear you, that His ears just aren't picking that up. You're crying out to Him, but it's...it's a busy

season up there so there's a lot going... Maybe that must be the problem. The problem is God.

Isaiah says, "The problem is not God." He says, "Here's the problem." *"Your iniquities have separated you from your God."* And then he goes on to say, *"Your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear"* (vv. 1-2).

We think the problem is God's problem. "God, what's wrong? Why won't You hear from me? God, why don't You do something here? God, what's the problem?" And God says, "Look, the problem is not Me. The problem is not that I can't save you. The problem is not that I can't hear you. The problem is that your sin has separated you from Me." So you need to confess your sin. You need to make Jesus your Savior so that your sin can be removed from you, so that God can communicate freely with you.

So, is there a sin that you need to confess? And so, what I want us to do here is just have about thirty seconds of silence. And I don't necessarily want this to be a time of confession and repentance, because thirty seconds isn't enough time, and you probably need a little different posture than just sitting here for thirty seconds. So, here's what I do want to do: I want us just to have some silence where we give God a chance to maybe speak into our hearts about some area of our lives that needs some attention. Is there something...? Is there something in your life that you need to repent of? That you've said, "It's no big deal," but it is a big deal?

Or it's just been a struggle for so long you've kind of given up and you've just accepted it and you think, "Well, maybe God's accepted it, too." He hasn't. Is there some sin in your life that maybe God would want to draw to the surface so that you'll deal with it and be able to communicate with Him more clearly? Let's have just about thirty seconds of silence and allow God to speak to us. Bow your hands just for about thirty seconds. Listen.

### ***(Quiet for thirty seconds)***

All right, has God brought something to your attention? The Bible says, *"When we confess our sin He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9).

Maybe there is some noise in your life that you need to deal with. It's rather like...um, husbands you may appreciate this. If your wife...we won't say she's given you the silent treatment...but if she's...if she's kind of going quiet on you, what's that mean? Well, it may mean that there's something wrong – that you, more specifically, have done something wrong and you need to figure it out. And when that happens, husbands, what you know and what I know is that we're working against the clock at this point, because it's much better for us if we

figure it out on our own before we're told what we did. So, if your wife is kind of quiet, it may be any number of things, right? But it may just be that she's had a rough day. But that is an invitation as well for you to stop and think, "All right, did I do something? Did I say something in a way that I didn't maybe mean to communicate it? Was I impatient? Did I not support her with the kids? Is there something in my life...? Is there something that I need to make right?" And her silence is an invitation for you to do a little self-examination. And before you talk to her, you probably ought to think through that. Now you don't want to confess something unnecessarily, so you want to maybe ask some questions just to make sure it's you and not something else. But it is, in the silence, an invitation to just examine some things.

**TIP #2: FORGIVE** . (Mark 11:25)

**Now here's a troubleshooting tip number two: to *forgive*—to forgive.**

If you read and you study the word *prayer* in Scripture, what you find is more than any other word other than *faith* the word *prayer* is connected to the word *forgiveness*. That our connection to God has a lot to do with our connection to one another. And when there's bitterness and when there's anger in our hearts towards each other, it makes it harder for us to hear from God and for God to hear from us.

So is there somebody that you need to forgive?

Let me give you a few verses that make this connection. In Mark 11:25 Jesus says, "*And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.*" So there's that connection. How we relate to God and how we relate to each other—these things go together.

The Hebrews writer writes in chapter 12, verse 15...this is *The Living Bible* paraphrase...it just says, "*Watch out that no bitterness takes root among you, for as it springs up it causes deep trouble, hurting many people in their spiritual lives.*"

We have this tendency to think that when there is anger and there is a bitterness, lack of forgiveness between me and someone else, that that's between me and that person. But God says, "No, you know what? When there is that anger and bitterness in your heart towards someone else, that has an impact on you spiritually as well." It not only affects your connection with them; it affects your connection with Him.

**So, is there someone that you need to forgive?**

Anger and bitterness are kind of like that fluid that builds up in your ears when you have a cold, and everything just sounds muffled, and a little bit stuffed up. And until you get rid of that bitterness, until you get rid of that anger, it is harder to hear from God.

And if we can look back a slide here, this is left blank for you: “**Forgive \_\_\_\_\_.**” And I don’t want to just fill this in generically. I don’t want it to just be “Forgive people. Forgive others.” I’m really looking for you to fill this in with a name.

So, here’s what I want you to do. I want you to take just a few moments of silence and I want to give you an opportunity to listen to God and see if He doesn’t fill that blank in for you. Maybe, in the silence, God will bring somebody’s name to mind that you didn’t even think was someone you needed to forgive. It has just been a long time. It has been a while. But now God brings that to the surface, and you realize, “You know what? I’ve never really extended forgiveness and grace there.”

So let’s just have a few moments of silence where we listen to God and we see if He doesn’t want to fill that blank in for us. Bow your heads.

***(Quiet for thirty seconds)***

So maybe God has brought someone to your mind. The question is, “Will you respond to God’s voice there? Will you extend the forgiveness and grace?” Not because they deserve it, not because they asked for it, but because God has forgiven you. Or maybe what you realized is that you’re the person who needs to seek forgiveness. That’s part of this as well. Who do you need to ask forgiveness from?

**TIP #3: HONOR YOUR WIFE. (1 Peter 3:7; Malachi 2:13-14)**

**Here’s troubleshooting tip number three: *Honor your wife.***

Honor your wife. Now obviously this has some clear implications across the aisle as well. I mean, this would apply to wives and their husbands. But the Bible is so specific in this application that we want to honor that. And the Bible specifically talks to husbands about the fact that how you treat your wives, how you talk to your wives, husbands, has a direct connection to how God hears from you, how God speaks to you.

Listen to what Peter writes in 1 Peter 3:7: “*In the same way you husbands must live with your wives with proper understanding that they are more delicate than you*” (GNT). So you “*treat them with respect,*” treat them with honor, “*because they also will receive, together with you, God’s gift of life.*”

And then here's what Peter adds: *"Do this so that not nothing will interfere..."* So that "nothing will hinder," one version says. *"...so that nothing will interfere with your prayers."*

"You treat your wives this way," Peter says, "so that nothing will get in the way of your prayer life."

Now the connection there didn't seem to make a lot of sense to me until I became a father of a daughter. When I became a father of a daughter, this verse suddenly made complete sense to me. That of course...*of course* God is going to...as husbands, of course He's going to determine how He responds to us, how He speaks to us based on how we treat our wives, because our wives are His daughters. And I understand that. Because as a father of a daughter, I can tell you that if there is a man who would raise his voice, would curse at, would treat my daughter with disrespect, ridicule—he and I are going to have a real problem. I'm a pretty congenial guy, but that's going to cause a problem. Or if...God forbid, my daughter's husband yells and curses at her, or would ever lay a hand on her and physically hurt her, then, you know...look, I may not have a specific set of skills, but I'll go all John Rambo on him! I will. I mean, it's...it's going to be a problem, right? I will track him down. And as a father...as a father this makes sense to me.

And husbands, you are married to one of God's daughters. I mean, do you really think that you can treat her harshly, that you can mock her, that you can ridicule her? Do you think you can grab her and push her around and that goes unnoticed with her Heavenly Father? Do you really think you can treat one of His daughters that way and then just go to Him in prayer and that He's just going to be like, "Oh, okay, yeah. Sure, I'll help." No, no. He will oppose you one way or the other.

And so, we see this connection in Peter. We also see this connection in Malachi. At the end of the intertestamental period, there is Nehemiah and then there's also Malachi. They were contemporaries. Now Malachi ends the Old Testament. It's the last book in the Old Testament. This is around 430 years before Jesus was born and we have these words of Malachi. The last thing that Malachi...that God says through the prophet Malachi to His people before He goes silent...some of the last things He says...He leaves the people with something to kind of think about during these silent years. And that is inauthentic worship. He kind of brings that charge against His people. That your worship isn't sincere. It's not authentic. It's just ritualistic.

He talks to them about giving, and He says, "Look, you're cheating Me out of tithes and offerings." That's one of the last things God says to His people.

And then He also talks to His people... Before He goes silent here for four hundred years, He talks specifically to the men about how they are treating their wives. Look at

Malachi 2:13 and 14, *“You weep and wail because the Lord no longer pays attention to your offerings....”* And you wonder why. *“You ask, ‘Why?’”* God, why aren’t you listening to our prayers? Why aren’t you paying attention to our worship? And you get all worked up. You wonder why. And then he says, *“It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.”*

You wonder why there’s this disconnect between you and God, and God is saying, “I’ll tell you why. It’s because it’s not just the two of you; it’s the three of us.” That when you stood and you made a covenant promise to your spouse, it’s not just to your spouse; it’s to God as well. And God says, “I’m stepping in here as a witness. And you want to know why heaven seems silent? And you want to know why it feels like your worship isn’t being given much attention? It’s because I’m stepping in and I’m acting as a witness between you and the wife of your youth.” So, there’s this direct connection.

So the question is, “Husbands, do you treat your wives...do you treat God’s daughters with respect and with honor?”

So here’s what I want us to do. I just want us to take about thirty seconds.... And husbands, this would be the right time for you, during this moment if you’re with your wife, to go ahead and grab her hand. Bonus points if you’re already doing that, but go ahead and do that now. And here’s what I want us to do. I just want us to give God an opportunity to speak to us, men, about how we need to honor and to respect His daughters. So bow your heads and just listen.

*(Quiet for thirty seconds)*

**TIP #4: CARE FOR THE NEEDY.** (Proverbs 21:13; Isaiah 58:3-9)

**Troubleshooting tip number four is to *care* for the *needy*.**

Care for the needy. And this is consistent. Especially in the Old Testament you see God saying, “Why would you think that you can go and ask Me for help if there are people around you who are asking for help and you don’t seem to care? Why would you think you can come and cry out to Me and say, ‘God, I need You,’ if there are people around you who are saying, ‘I need you,’ and you don’t have any time to consider their requests?”

Proverbs 21:13 says, *“If you close your ears to the cry of the poor, you will cry out and you won’t be heard”* (NRSV).

And in the Old Testament there's a story in Isaiah about the Israelites who are wondering why God hasn't answered their prayers. They've been praying. In fact, they've been fasting. They've been humbling themselves. It seems...it seems to them that they're doing everything right and that even what they're praying for is within the will of God, but they're just...they're coming up empty. There just seems to be no word from the Lord.

And then in Isaiah 58:3 through 9, here is what we read. It says, *"...on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers...."* You come to church and you worship and you pray, but you've spent the entire day taking advantage of people who work for you.

*"You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.... Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:"* God says, *"...to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him...?"*

*"Then,"* God says, *"you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I."*

You wonder why God isn't responding, but you're not responding to some of the people in your life who need help. There are some people that God has brought to your attention—maybe this week or this month, maybe even more recent than that—that just...they need some help. And it's within your capacity to help them, and so you pray about, "God, what's the best way to do that?" It doesn't necessarily mean... We just tend to immediately equate caring for the needy with, "Oh, that means I need to write a check. That means I need to give some money." Well, maybe. Maybe it does. Maybe it is financial help that is needed. But it may be something other than that. It may be helping them learn some things that will keep them from being in the same situation that they're in now.

So what are some things that you can do? How can you care for the needy? It has a direct impact on how we hear from God and how God hears from us.

**TIP #5: BE STILL AND LISTEN. (Numbers 22:21-31; 1 Kings 19: Psalm 46:10)**

**Troubleshooting tip number five: Be *still* and *listen*.**

Be still and listen. And this is something that, you know, we tend to struggle with. When we talk about prayer... In fact, if you just listen to messages, read books and such, what you'll find is that the focus is almost always on what we should be saying to God. "Here's what we need to be saying." So prayer is almost always described as one-way communication—right?—where we talk to God. But that's not even a healthy relationship.

Some of you have been friends with people like this before, where they talk and they talk, and you just listen. That's not much of a friendship. You know a lot about them; they don't know much about you. You don't really have a chance to speak into it. They just talk and they talk and they talk. It doesn't work very well.

Marriages...it's not meant to be the way marriages work. I mean, what do you call it in a marriage when one spouse is just talking and talking and talking and talking and talking, and the other one just listens passively? What do you call it when one person is just always talking? "Wife" is not the right answer, by the way! That's not the right answer. But it's like...it's a more dysfunctional relationship. That's not the way it's supposed to be. There is listening and there is responding.

So, look. Maybe God is speaking but we don't have the volume turned up because we're so busy talking. We're just talking over the top of Him constantly. And we have a hard time hearing Him.

Now look. I understand maybe what you're thinking. I wish God would speak sometimes a little more obviously, a little more clearly. I mean, I've had moments in my life where I've just known that I've known, "Yeah, that's God's voice." But those are not that often. Oftentimes you're listening more for a whisper.

I was reminded of the story from Numbers 22 where the Prince of Moab goes to God's prophet named Balaam and says to Balaam, "You know, I want you to go curse God's people." So, this is God's prophet going to curse God's people, and God's not going to let that happen. So God sends an angel of the Lord to stop Balaam. And Balaam is on his donkey riding with the Prince of Moab to go curse the people of God, and suddenly the donkey stops because the donkey sees there's an angel with a sword in the middle of the road. Balaam doesn't see this. The donkey tries to run off the road to avoid the angel. Balaam beats the donkey back onto the path. And in my mind, you know, I get these images of like Shrek being Balaam and the donkey.

And then they go a little bit further and you've got the angel of the Lord with a sword. Again, the donkey tries to go around him, and Balaam beats him back on the path.

That happens a third time, and then here's what we read in verse 27, *"When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, she lay down under Balaam, and Balaam was angry and he beat the donkey with his staff. Then the Lord opened the donkey's mouth, and she said to Balaam, 'What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?' Balaam answered the donkey, 'You have made a fool of me! If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now.'*

*The donkey said to Balaam, 'Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?'" (vv. 27-30).*

So, the donkey's not only speaking; he's using advanced logic here! "Have I done such things to you in the past?" And Balaam's like, "Well, no. You've got a point there, donkey. You have never done that before." And the Bible says *that "the Lord opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown"* (v. 31).

Yeah, you think? I bet he did. I bet he did. Why? Because God just spoke in such a clear and obvious way.

Yet that's not oftentimes how it plays out. More often than not, God speaks to us in the silence. It tends to play out a little bit more like it did with His prophet Elijah, where God calls a meeting with Elijah on the mountain. Elijah goes; he waits for God. And then there is this strong wind that blows through the area, and Elijah thinks, "Oh, God must be in that wind." And the wind dies down and God's not in the wind. And then there's an earthquake that shakes the whole mountain, and Elijah thinks, "God's in the earthquake. Yeah, that's how He's going to speak. That's how He's showing up—in the earthquake." God's not in the earthquake. And then there's this fire that sweeps through the area and Elijah thinks, "Well, God must be in the fire." But the fire subsides and God's not in the fire. And then the Bible tells us that God speaks to Elijah in a gentle whisper. But the literal translation here is "it's even quieter than a whisper." The NRSV translates it this way: as the "**sound of sheer silence.**" That the voice of God is described as silence. That's when he hears from the Lord.

So the question for you and for me to think through here, just real honestly, is, "**Are you listening for God in silence?**" I don't mean this to be rhetorical. I mean, are you? Do you have some moments in your day where you are quiet and you are listening to God?

The Bible says in Psalms to "*Be still,*" God says, "*and know that I am God...*" (46:10). "*Be still, and know that I am God....*"

I like this definition of stillness: "**Stillness is silence on the outside and surrender on the inside.**" Silence on the outside...surrender on the inside.

Now here's the challenge. It's that we tend to be really bad at *both* of those, right? Silence and surrender are things that we tend not to do very well. But if you're trying to turn up the volume and you're trying to hear from God, silence on the outside, surrender on the inside is really important.

So are you finding some time in your life to make sure that the outside is silent and the inside is surrendered so God can speak to you more clearly?

**TIP #6: BECOME A CHRISTIAN. (John 8:47; John 14)**

I just want to give you one last troubleshooting tip. And this one might seem obvious, and I get that. I think, though, we need that sometimes, right? I mean, let's go back to the printer analogy. If you're trying to fix the printer and you're going through the troubleshooting guide, and you've pushed all the buttons and you've tried to get everything...and it still isn't working. It's still dead. What's wrong? And then, let's just say, hypothetically speaking, that you notice it's not plugged in. Have you ever had one of those moments, where you have worked and worked and worked on something and you're like, "Oh, yeah, maybe I should plug it in. That would help." But they didn't put that in the troubleshooting guide, did they? Why? Because...well, that's insulting. Of course we're going to have that plugged in. But we need that.

So I want to give you this last one, because I just think we may need it. **Number six, *become a Christian.***

I sometimes talk to people who are frustrated spiritually. They don't understand why they don't hear from God more clearly, and they feel like they can give me a track record of how they've prayed and God hasn't answered their prayers. And then I discover that they're not a Christian. They've never put their trust in Jesus Christ. Well, listen. Prayer, fundamentally, is a relationship that we have with God that's only made possible through Jesus Christ. Without Jesus Christ, we don't have that connection to God. It is through Jesus Christ that we are able to hear from God and speak to God.

So maybe some of you just need to hear this—just to become a Christian, to step over that line and to say, "Jesus, I want You to be my Savior. I am ready to make this commitment."

The Bible tells us that when we pray, we are to pray "in the name of Jesus." John chapter 8 puts it this way. John writes, "*He who belongs to God hears what God says.*" He says, "*Look, the reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God*" (v. 47). That's the problem here. The reason heaven seems silent and the reason you don't hear from God is that you don't belong to Him.

Well, how do you belong to God? How do you do that? Does He just take you and now you belong to Him? No, you belong to God when you give yourself to Him, when you surrender your heart to Him, when you say, "God, I'm Yours. I'm Yours."