

# Silence: It's Not Just Golden

I was alone the night a violent thunderstorm hit our town and the electricity went out. At that moment I was watching a football game, scanning twitter and listening to music. When darkness arrived in a split second I realized that the battery on my iPhone was almost gone. A brief moment of panic ensued.

*How could I possibly know whether the big men in golden helmets and tights would take the oblong ball across the field before being tackled by the big men in orange helmets! (These are important things in 2018.)*

I realized that in a matter of minutes I would be thrust into the lifestyle millions of people enjoyed in the 1800s! The silence and lack of media connection was unnerving at first. It was then that I sensed the presence of God speaking to me about my addiction to noise. After 15 minutes I had rediscovered the beauty of silence. These days, silence is something we have to fight to achieve, but it is definitely worth the fight. The National Center of Biotechnology stated in a study that two minutes of silence is more relaxing than listening to "relaxing" music, based on changes in blood pressure and blood circulation in the brain.

However, this is not new knowledge for people of the Book. The Bible urges us to experience silence as a spiritual discipline. Every day we are faced with the choice of constant communication, noise and blather or intentional, Jesus-focused silence. Don't wait for a power outage in order to spend time in silence. God might be trying to tell you something but all the ambient noise and entertainment leaves you deaf to His voice. I believe we would be astounded by all God wants to say to us and yet He never gets a chance because of our preoccupation with news, messages, conversations and entertainment.

*“The sole cause of man’s unhappiness is he does not know how to stay quietly in his room.” Blaise Pascal*

Indeed, silence is something we must continually and actively seek. It’s not the default these days. The white noise of politics, entertainment, social media, viral videos, large crowds, streaming music, and binge-watched dramas clutter our minds and heighten our already over-stimulated minds. Meanwhile there is a whispering voice that speaks and yet is rarely heard,

*The most powerful buttons in your home are the on/off ones.*

The more we turn off the noise, the greater opportunity we have to hear from God. Most spend their lives watching fake people live fake lives on rectangular screens. It inhibits us living the real life God beckons us to live. Today, it takes discipline. Lots of discipline, but the pay-off is priceless.

Silence isn’t just golden, it is godly.

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## **The Power of a Broken Life**

Annie Johnson Flint’s life declares the greatness of God in the midst of confusion and pain. She was orphaned as a baby. She lived in a home that bordered on poverty and spent her days as a caregiver to her adopted mother who suffered from a number of strokes. In midlife, she also fell ill and spent most of her remaining years crippled, bed-ridden, dealing with depression and suffering from chronic pain. How could God glorify Himself in all her unanswered prayers, suffering and

depression?



While most would look at her life and ask this question, Annie focused on all God was doing in the midst of every challenge she faced. She didn't hide her pain. Instead she chose to be an encouragement to the small community around her. Because of her faith, God gave grace to her. Believers have continued singing her testimony for well over 100 years. In one stanza, her life became a wellspring of encouragement to those who face adversity, pain and the anomaly of illness:

*He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater,  
He sendeth more strength when the labors increase;  
To added affliction He addeth His mercy;  
To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace.*

*When we have exhausted our store of endurance,  
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,  
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,  
Our Father's full giving is only begun.*

*His love has no limit; His grace has no measure.  
His pow'r has no boundary known unto men;  
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus,  
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again!*

So often, we're enamored by success, security, beauty and prestige. Our economy is alien to the equity of Heaven. Our self-made narratives are houses of cards when they stray from the truthful, painful process of brokenness.

*This doesn't happen on the platform. It happens in the*

*closet.*

I think about Annie Flint's life and I hear her song in the middle of my own questions about suffering. I must trust the same God Annie trusted. He is enough for today's struggles and tomorrow's crucibles. He was enough for her. He is enough for us.

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## 5 Ways to GO BIG Today

I walked into a karaoke ambush! Students and parents alike were singing important musical compositions like- "Call Me Maybe," "We are the Champions," and "Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting" and it was an amazingly fun experience. That is, until the entire room began to chant my name. Every bone in my body wanted to bolt but when a pastor hears students chant his name, he shall not leave. Trust me. It's in Leviticus. I think.



So I bid adieu to my pride, dignity and reputation as I nervously grabbed the mic. The chosen lyrics flashed on the big screen. The tune: "Achy Breaky Heart." The DJ went for the mother-load of all tacky country songs. The other concerning aspect of this moment was the number of smartphones that seemed to pop up like petunias on a spring day. I said to myself: OK. Go big. If you're going to lose all dignity, lose

it with great enthusiasm.

This is the spirit of Paul's challenge to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. Live out your sacrifice to the glory of God. This is the audacity that will change a culture. When it comes to loving God we should, with even greater enthusiasm, "Go big." Take the leap. Forget safety. Forget dignity. Leverage your courage. Say the extra sentence God is asking you to say. Give a little more away. Fight a little harder for the weak and see what happens! What if we lived everyday like this as believers, parents, disciples, coaches, and mentors? It would be a game-changer. That's a fact. This type of holy daring requires vulnerability and a brave heart, but the rewards are far greater than the risks.

***Here are 5 ways to Go Big that you can start doing today!***

**1 We can GO BIG by giving more than we're comfortable giving.**

Here's an inventory question: Who needs your money, your clothes, your time more than you do? I'm sure several names have flashed in your mind when you read that question. Why not meet at least one person's need. It could change the course of a person's life. Many times a degree of change can help a person go further.

**2. We can GO BIG by using words to express love.** Who needs to hear that you love them? Next to Jesus, the word love is the strongest weapon in our arsenal against the enemy. Why don't we say it more? Some say, "Well, with all the things I do they should know that I love them without me having to say it."

I'm reminded of the classic Broadway musical "Fiddler on the Roof." The old couple— Tyve and Golde come to the realization of that their arranged marriage actually gave birth to love. They sing:

*Do you love me?*

*It doesn't change a thing*

*But even so*

*After twenty-five years*

*It's nice to know.*

At that moment in the musical we are all in on the actual truth of the song: Actually it changes a lot.

### **3, We can GO BIG by taking irrational risks for Jesus.**

Do you want to hear a sentence that is never said in Heaven?

*"I wished I wouldn't have risked so much for Jesus."*

When life is over and all the pieces of our lives are neatly tucked away for good. The only thing that's really left are the risks we took and the brave acts we achieved for the sake of Jesus.

### **4. We can GO BIG by saying that one other sentence.**

I'm a fairly good sentence arranger. And I am very comfortable speaking before a larger group. One thing I'm still working on is personal "care-fronting" or "truthing" it. These two coined words from a few more brilliant minds describe the act of saying tough words for the benefit of the listener.

Proverbs 27:6 applies: *Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.*

Me? I don't like the idea of causing friend and family pain but ultimately a true friend will speak truth even if it hurts.

### **5. We can GO BIG by going small.**

Amazingly, one of the characteristic of people who live large in the Lord is the get useless things, needless activities, and corrupt companions out of their lives. It's multiplication by subtraction. The more margin you have in your life, the more room you have for the things you were born to do. You can start today by:

- Cutting a subscription service
- Selling the dang toy (the camper you haven't used in 6 months, the boat, the extra car)
- Get rid of the storage unit junk. (And in so doing the monthly payment for the ball and chain rental agreement)
- Donate your fat clothes/skinny clothes/embarrassing clothes (whatever the case may be) and lighten your closet. I makes your wardrobe decision making every morning a whole lot easier.

These are just a few ways you can GO BIG. You have only one life, one chance, one journey. Why not make it big? At the end of your life you will have fewer regrets.

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## **Kids and Permanent Markers**

How have we hidden them? On top of the refrigerator, hidden in the top drawer of a dresser, or guarded by Navy Seals in an iron safe and monitored by infrared security alarms. *Somehow* my kids found a way to get them and use them.

We moved into our dream home a few years back. We were all so delighted with all the extra space. It was really the first home Darlene had been able to plan everything from the paint to the carpet to the kitchen island. She was in heaven. We watched expectantly as the last brick was in place and the last roll of carpet had been installed.

As we joyously walked into the home that first morning, I said to my youngest son who had just turned three, "This house is so big you might not be able to find your room!" I should have been more discerning as I looked at his worried little face as he pursed his little lips together and furrowed his brow at that one comment.

I knew something was wrong when I awoke the next morning to the sound of my wife's plaintive wail. I rushed out of the bedroom and immediately understood her sorrow. Our youngest had taken a magic marker and drawn a line from the front door down the foyer, up the stairs, into his room, ending the line with the point of an arrow fixed in place at the foot of his bed. He explained, as best he could, that he didn't want to forget where his room was.

A thick red felt tip pen on eggshell carpet does not help the resale value but it does remind us to pray for our children.

We've had a number of similar incidents. Since we wouldn't let our kids do the temporary tattoos from the cereal boxes—(An attempt to teach Levitical law to them. See: Lev. 19:23-28)—they took turns creating eagles or some other type of winged creatures on each other's bellies. Suffice it to say they found a work-around. At least it wasn't on their foreheads.

They found many other applications and surfaces for permanent markers:

- On the couch to reserve a permanent seat
- On the wall to record important milestones
- On the cat paws (Why? Why Not?)
- On rags (hurriedly cleaning up the marker stains before they got busted)
- On the pages of my Thompson's Chain Reference Bible (One son thought the black and white outlined maps were coloring pages. I actually saw this happen to my Study Bible while I was preaching with my large print Bible. What a helpless feeling. It's impossible to interject "Jacob, stop that," in the middle of a message about the eternity of our souls.

My greatest prayer these days is that when they are old, God will make a much more permanent mark on their souls. Every



stroke of parenting, every opportunity to bless and discipline leaves a spiritual and emotional mark. Daily, I'm reminded of the things we did and the things that we didn't do to aid them on their journey. We made our mark, but if I had it to do all over again I'd make more of them.

One thing is for certain I'm an expert on permanent marker removal and if you need help, hunt me down on Facebook. I'll walk you through it.

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## **If I die, I die.**

A few years ago, a friend of mine was diagnosed with throat cancer. It was a devastating diagnosis that ultimately brought him to his knees in utter fear and doubt. Lots of emails went back and forth between the two of us. He had very limited ability during those days to talk but the email thread was extensive. He wrote about the frustrations and fear. He shared his anger and utter lack of understanding. What do you say to a friend who is facing such a burden of uncertainty? I visited with him in the hospital just moments before they wheeled him into the surgeon. When I saw his face I knew there was something different., strangely peaceful about him. He handed me an index card and smiled. It simply read, "If I die I die. -Esther 4:16" I'm sure I must have looked perplexed because he almost chuckled as he looked up at me from the gurney.

It was a strange proclamation but I finally figured out what he was saying to me. He had come to grips with his own mortality and surrendered to every possibility, even the worst-case scenarios. Just as Esther, a young woman who faced her own mortality to face the consequences and dangers of trusting God, Joey was prepared to face his. It was as if he

was saying, "I'm trusting God and I'm up for whatever happens." I've often been challenged by that visit in the hospital. So often I get stuck in the mud of worse-case thinking but then I take a page from his playbook (and Esther's) I'll be obedient and trusting. I'll whisper, "If I die, I die!"

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## The Brown Branch

my grandfather lived

in a simple house near a winding cool branch with slippery  
stones

and verdant woods

I approach the treeline where

mystery lay

and there in the shade of autumn's bough

i see darkness rising.

close of day.

(but death,

a far

closer

one)

visited then and will on all men

it is unchanged, like the virgin nest of the wip-poor-will

though unwelcome

tender unforgiving visitor on the side of the hill

where i last heard his voice.

It is a limitless forum

universal joy wrapped in shrouds of morning

bringing all things into One

All chances and choices

flowing across the deep scored soil of experience

over the grit and the mud

cool and ever present current

and I stand in the mud of this branch call brown

and wait.

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## **7 Questions Every Father Must Ask**

I have a confession to make. As a father, leader and husband I've often failed. *Often* is not a hyperbole either. I mean, I

have **often** failed. If Paul had a thorn in the flesh, I've got a briar patch.

But as a Christ-follower and a man, I can do two things with my failures. First, I can learn from failures and actually grow, knowing that God often restores the messes we have created. Secondly, I can teach others out of the abundance of my experience.

That's why I am so thrilled to share these seven questions that I ask myself every week. Perhaps this week you'll ask them as well. I believe these questions have been game changers for me.

### **1. Am I really available?**

In other words, are my kids and wife having to compete with my cell phone, my fantasy football league, my Netflix, my twitter, and my golf game for my attention? This is a difficulty for many men because we are mostly wired to be focused on one thing at a time. Women can answer the phone, fix a sandwich, text and understand the subtleties of adolescent nonverbal codes all at the same time. If I tried that mustard would be all over my phone and I'd be texting with the microwave! It just doesn't work so well for most men. We've got to work on being there. And when we are there we must be present. Eliminate distraction. Look them in the eye. Communicate their importance. Develop the skill of single-focused fatherhood and marriage.

### **2. Have I grown up?**

There's a big difference between growing up and growing old. The Apostle Paul said it like this: *When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put aside childish things* (1 Cor 13:11). So what are some childish things that we need to put away? For many of us, it's how we handle conflict. It means not slamming a door or throwing a tantrum. For others of us,

it's not withholding affection based on how our day is treating us. Childish things are lust, greed, bitterness, emotionally connecting with other women, spending sprees, and vulgar joking. All of these will affect our kids and our wives, even if they aren't done in their presence.

Growing up also means owning our failures rather than making excuses or defending our poor choices. If you want to see a real man, look at Psalm 51. It's the best expression of what a man does when he is found in the wrong. Real men have the integrity to pick the right side of a battle even at the expense of admitting past sins.

### **3. Do my kids know I love my wife?**

There's nothing that makes a child feel safer than seeing a mom and dad who truly love and cherish each other with their eyes, their words and their touch. Being "in it for the kids" is not enough. If you are finding it hard to love your wife, you need to address it *now*. Not when it's convenient, not when you have enough money to see a counselor, and not when you and your wife are living in two parallel universes of emotion. Invest and love your wife. Get help. Remember how much we are to love our wives (check Ephesians 5:25).

### **4. What do I say when I talk about God?**

If you are anything like me, this doesn't come easy. I have to work at it. Find moments to express your faith. We can do this basically by "exegeting the day". I know, I'm getting a little fancy here. What I mean is that we find a way to view our daily struggles through the lens of scripture. What did your neighbor's sorrow cause you to do? Share a part of your day with your son or grandson and how the Bible instructed you on how to respond.

### **5. Do I practice vulnerability?**

Perhaps the most daring thing I will ever do is to let his

children in on my true feelings, hurts, fears and loves. Our male ego is the enemy of this front. Your ego will try to convince you that its job is to keep you safe. Your ego doesn't believe the risk is worth the reward. When was the last time you really risked vulnerability to let your kids and your wife see who you really are? When was the last time you allowed people into the darker places of your heart? Vulnerability is not a weakness. It is a man-sized virtue.

## **6. What am I hiding?**

Yes, God uses imperfect men. In the same line, God has never called a sneaky man. And God doesn't want us to be sneaky as husbands, fathers and grandfathers. Secrets are insidious. They damage our families and our selves. Whether it is erasing the history on your internet browser, the private messages on Facebook that you send to an old flame, or hiding a grudge – secrets will damage others before they are ever even revealed. Let's challenge each other to be "secretless" in our private world, struggling together to make what's outside become a true reflection of what is inside.

## **7. Do I model generosity?**

Perhaps one of the greatest legacies a man could leave to his children is the joy of generosity. The givers are the happiest people on the face of the earth. Our kids need this lesson. There's a certain deep feeling of bliss that comes from giving with no regard for receiving. By modeling generosity, we are teaching them that it wasn't ours in the first place and so money takes on a transcendent meaning that can't be found in wealth accumulation. Tithing has taught me how to avoid the virus of materialism and learn the bliss of generosity. I learned it from my dad and I continue to speak it into the lives of my sons.

These seven questions can be touchstones that continue to shape us as fathers. Even more than that, I believe in the

long run they will shape the destiny of our families and marriages.

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## The Parable of the Three Tenors

What does it take to hear God's voice? Does it take money and importance? Actually, the pursuit of hearing God's voice will ultimately lead to spending less and being less. How's that? The pursuit of God is more about subtraction than addition.

The Kingdom of Heaven can be likened to a concert. Let's say you want to hear your favorite vocalists. Let's call them "the three tenors." (Not original. I know.) You arrive at the concert hall with high expectations, ready to tune in to the sweet melodies you've come to love, but to your dismay, you can't. You can't make out those three voices because they are buried in a 200-voice choir of dreadfully tone-deaf lounge singers. You leave the concert hall demanding a refund because you really didn't get to hear what you wanted to hear.

Those three tenors are the voices of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The powerful, dissonant voices are the static and meaningless noise of the day to day. Do you see the issue? If we want to hear from our Holy God, at some point we must tune out the noise and tune into His voice. God's Word, silence, private worship, and time are elements that create an atmosphere that allows us to hear what God has to say.

We often fail to hear from God because we have taken our faith and made it into a busy barrage of activity. What if Jesus'

schedule when He was on earth looked like yours does today. Can you imagine the Bible reading like this?

*Thus Jesus hurriedly got up realizing what an important day this was going to be. He ran to Galilee and there He created 13 lesson parchments, visited 15 lepers, and had a confrontation therefore with Judas who wasn't behaving.*

*Hitherto, Jesus went in haste to the zealots committee where He talked for three hours. He encountered many voice messages from the throngs of Judeans and tried to return all of them with at least a beatitude or warning.*

*Exhausted, the disciples verily tried to keep up with the Son of God but nay, they could not. They marveled at His time management skills and His strength in persuasive skills. People flocked to Him and stayed with Him, for they knew that if He could accomplish such tasks with great haste, effort, and fluidity then He must know what being an effective person required.*

It's exhausting to read, isn't it? Jesus came to bring us rest. He lived the kind of life He wants us to pursue. He connected with the Father honestly and dynamically. We, on the other hand, are often so busy doing things for God that we miss entirely the presence of God.

Before you get so caught up in the whirlwind of life—before staring at death's finality—ask yourself if you are willing to walk daily into the quiet place where God is. Ask yourself if you are willing to mute the dissonant choir in your life and tune fully into the sound of His voice. Ask yourself if you are willing to let His words wreck you and draw you into a lifelong habit of conversation with Him.

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# The Truth About Significance

Our significance is not based:

on how we look,

what we do,

what we achieve,

how much experience we have,

when we graduate,

how much we make,

how we play,

who our friends are

the things we accomplish

the good deeds we do

where we were born

the notes we can sing or play

the messages we preach

the battles we've won.

And our significance is not deflected by:

The scars on our body

the hurt that we feel

the past we want to forget

a bleak tomorrow

a job loss

a parenting failure

the label – divorced

the demons we battle

the death we face

the depression we can't seem to shake

the tragic choices we make

by friends who forsake

the 15 minutes 10 years ago we wish we could erase

our relapses and reboots

our poor financial decisions

the number on the scale

the people who criticize us

the ones who reject us

the ones who neglect us.

Our significance is best defined by a holy God who sent His only Son to be falsely condemned and violently murdered in our place so that we could be called His beloved.

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# Simple is Better

The sad tale of Bernie Madoff reminds us of the hubris, greed, and tyranny that lurks in every heart of flesh. The inventor of the world's greatest Ponzi scheme began his descent into madness out of the deep cavernous craving for more. How about us? Certainly we're not Bernie, but a little Bernie resides in all of us. What owner of a 401K doesn't squirm as he watches the Dow fall 4% in a day? What guy doesn't look at a nice car, a bigger house, a better position without that whisper for more. Jesus calls us to a greater adventure: the adventure of simplicity. Why is it that most lottery winners report being less happy than before they won it? Here's an even better question: Why spend 50 years accumulating wealth when an eternity awaits us? That's something to invest in. Live simply in this life and enjoy the extravagance of joy in the next.

It all begins with simplicity. Simplicity says: It wasn't mine in the first place, so I don't have to fight to own it. It's best given away. And once I do, life becomes less difficult. Fewer locks. Fewer statements. Less paperwork. Less maintenance. We can whittle life down to important things and we see that the best things in life are not found in malls. Needful things become fewer. Beans, Rice and water will begin to taste better than burgers and sodas. The pace slows down, the rashes disappear and sleep is less frenetic even in dreams. The body understands itself more, even on a cellular level because we were never created to endure the stress of obsession and hyper-accumulation. Preoccupation with phantom concerns and paper tigers dissolve. We encounter God because we have fewer things to hide behind. In Matthew 5-6 (*the Sermon on the Mount*) Jesus offers this truth more than once. Treasures on earth are **so** not eternal. Birds are happier. They don't worry about their kids when they fly away. They don't stay up late freaking out about the shortage of worms in the month of June. Just look at those birds and you'll forget the

bucks.