

when God is

silent...

The sun was just peaking out above the horizon. Karen had already been awake for several hours, pondering yet another lonely day. It had been three months since she had lost Charles. They would have been married thirty-eight years next month.

That thought shattered her.

She was thankful for all the initial support, and the outpouring of love she received had been overwhelming. But as the days wore on into weeks, and the weeks into months, she found herself more and more alone.

She was busy with a challenging job, a family and service to her church, but somehow she felt her life slipping away. It no longer held the same meaning it once did. Life's landscape had turned gray and colorless.

But worst of all, the God she had known for so long, the One with whom she had walked through so many other trials, now seemed to be completely quiet and the silence was deafening. How could she go on? Why did things have to change so abruptly and why now did God appear to be so silent?

Life = Constant Changes

Nothing ever seems to stay the same, does it? Constant change brings with it many losses—losses that all of us have experienced at one time or another. Some are small enough that we move in and out of them without missing a beat, while others can reach the point of shattering our lives, changing them forever.

by Trish A. Clauson

When we can't feel his presence; when we don't see evidence of his working in our lives; when we don't feel our prayers reaching his throne, is God really being silent?

How many of us, like Karen, have gone through one or more of these life shattering experiences while at the same time feeling that God was silent? Why is it when our losses seem the greatest, God can feel the furthest away?

When we can't feel his presence; when we don't see evidence of his working in our lives; when we don't feel our prayers reaching his throne, is he really being silent? And if he is, why?

Why, when we need him the most, does he appear to be the most unattainable?

I do believe there are times when God is silent. I, like so many, have lived in that silence, but I now also believe that his silence is not indicative of his absence. Instead,

I believe the answer lies in one word—*sovereignty*.

God's Apparent Silence

The book of Job explains God's sovereignty. In one day Job suffered the loss of all of his children, all of his wealth and security, as well as a major part of his health. This was loss upon loss! As he sat in the ashes with his "friends," he felt alone, rejected and abandoned by the God he loved and worshiped so faithfully. Job struggled, trying to understand all the "whys" that had turned his life upside down, while at the same time experiencing what seemed to be the deafening sound of God's apparent silence.

But was God ignoring Job? It certainly seemed that way to Job, because for a time, he couldn't know otherwise. Yet, when we read the book of Job, we are totally aware of just how involved God really was in all of it, so much so that it was he who gave Satan permission to bring all of this upon Job in the first place. In the end, what we find is that Job had to wait until God decided to make his presence known.

As we examine the story of Job, several things become clear. God allowed what happened. He left Job alone for a while to contemplate all the reasons why, though he appeared distant and silent, he was always present.

And finally, in his time and in his way, he responded to Job's prayers. All of this points, I believe, to one thing—God's great sovereignty.

God knows everything there is to know about us in this moment, every detail of our past as well as every possibility of our future. Within the bounds of his great sovereignty also abides his unconditional love. What this ultimately means is that whatever happens in our lives, good or bad, it always fits into his great plan for us personally.

When innocent lives are taken prematurely by some random evil, power of nature or any other unnatural cause—where is God's sovereignty then? Where is his justice?

Because God knows all—past, present and future—he is not confined to measuring justice within the parameters of our physical lives. Instead he is able to measure his justice within the framework of eternity. This is why we don't always understand the seemingly unjust events that occur. They only seem unjust because we are measuring them within the context of our lives instead of in the framework of eternity.

At some point in our lives, we too may find ourselves in the middle of an unknown abyss of our own personal tragedy. In our desperation to find answers we may feel thwarted by God's apparent distance, evidenced by his silence. Even though God's sovereignty guarantees that he will always work out the best possible outcome for us, the only way we can experience that outcome is if we surrender our lives totally to his management.

Karen finally surrendered to this. She trusted God's sovereignty and justice. She reluctantly decided to sit with her pain and to endure the silence. She accepted that with loss comes grieving, and with grieving comes pain and solitude. This was a process that she needed to experience. It was a slow process, but the more she decided to wait in the silence and to believe in God's sovereignty, the more she was able to feel solace in the silence. Eventually the silence was completely broken.

Like Karen, you may have already had a tragedy so life-altering as to question God's presence or absence in your life. By God's grace you may know, as does Karen, that God's silence is never about his absence or his distance. It is all about his great sovereignty. One of the great lessons we learn from walking with God is that only by accepting his great sovereignty are we able to find solace in his silence. God never ignores us with his silence, he is just working within the boundaries of his own sovereignty. □

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