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WELCOME TO ECHO & EMBER PRESS

A word before you begin.

Thank you for joining the Echo & Ember Journal.

This collection introduces the two sides of our work: fiction that asks what truth costs, and nonfiction that helps readers hear and practice that truth in everyday life.

First, you will enter the opening three chapters of *What Lies Beneath*, Book One of the Labyrinth Trilogy. Then you will receive the first seven days of *Echoes of Truth*, a devotional journey from spiritual noise toward genuine communion with Christ.

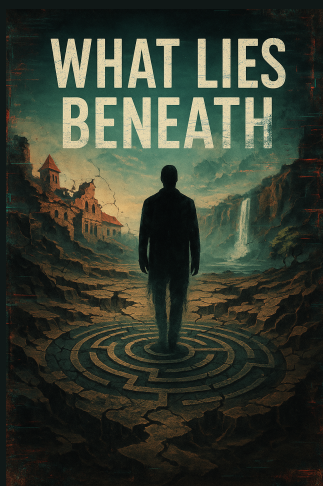
These pages are offered freely in gratitude for your readership.

Stephen Boone

Christian, teacher, pastor, and writer

01

FROM THE CATALOG



What Lies Beneath

The opening three chapters of the Labyrinth Trilogy

Chapter One

The Quad

The light came up out of the fountain like something being born.

Andi Rivera was forty feet away with her camera already rolling, because her camera was always rolling. She filmed the way other people breathed—without deciding to, without noticing she'd started. Her grandmother used to press a worn rosary into her palm and say, in Spanish, that some things you have to trust without seeing them. Andi had nodded, and then gone right on believing only what she could get on tape. If you couldn't record it, it didn't happen. And if you could, then at least it couldn't be taken back.

She'd come to the quad that afternoon for something small and ugly and provable: a rigged student election, a candidate who'd somehow voted twice in three places. She had her quotes. She had her angles. She'd set up near the fountain because the water made a clean backdrop, bright and hopeful and normal.

That was the thing she'd remember afterward—how normal it all was, right up until it wasn't. Students crossed the quad in the four o'clock sun, laughing in that bright, hollow way that never quite reached their eyes. Somewhere a phone played music. The

fountain burbled. And underneath all of it, through the viewfinder, Andi felt something go wrong a half-second before it did—a pressure, a held breath, the sense of a held note about to break.

Then the water stopped.

Not splashed. Not sprayed. Stopped—every droplet hanging in the air mid-cascade, suspended like the world had forgotten which way was down. The light rose through it, white and silent, casting no shadow. There should have been a sound. A blast, a roar, an alarm, anything. There was only silence, sudden and total, as if the world had inhaled and lost the thread of how to let go.

A figure stood at the fountain's edge. A young man, caught in the white.

Andi zoomed without thinking, the lens finding him, holding him—and this was the part she could never explain. She had him in frame, clear as daylight, close enough to count his eyelashes. And she still couldn't have told you his face. The light didn't hide it. It seemed to erase it, the way water lifts ink off a page, taking him even as she watched.

Then the crater. Clean-edged. Perfect. A smooth bowl of nothing where the fountain had stood for as long as the campus had existed.

The man was gone.

Andi ran. Her boots slapped the flagstone, her jacket streamed behind her, and she shouted—and no one turned.

No one turned.

She grabbed a girl by the arm, a student with a backpack and earbuds, and spun her toward the smoking crater. “Did you see that? Did you see—” The girl looked at the crater. Looked back at Andi. And smiled, the mild, patient smile you’d give someone confused about the time, and gently pulled her arm free and kept walking. They all kept walking. Past the impossible hole in the ground, around it, as if it were a puddle, as if it were nothing, as if the only broken thing in the quad were the wild-eyed girl with the camera screaming about a light no one else had bothered to see.

Andi stood alone at the edge of the crater. Her hands were shaking. She looked down at her phone, still streaming, still recording, the one witness she had left.

The screen was wrong.

The footage wasn’t there. In its place, static code pulsed across the glass like a heartbeat, and then words—words she couldn’t read in any language she knew and understood anyway, the way you understand a voice in a dream:

WITNESS COMPROMISED. EXECUTE
REDIRECT.

Her pulse stopped, or got so loud she couldn't hear past it. The words were about her. Meant for her.

Then the screen flickered, and beneath the cold command something else bled through—smaller, slower, almost gentle. Not the system's voice. Someone else's. Someone who sounded tired in a way machines never are.

I see you, it said. I cannot reach you. But I am here.

I have watched others before you. I will not tell you how many.

The waterfall is calling. The echo is beginning.

Remember.

— V.S.F.

Andi blinked. Once.

And found herself somewhere else.

Chapter Two

Before the Silence

Six Months Earlier

The campus coffee shop buzzed with finals week chaos, but the corner booth where the six friends always met felt unusually tense.

Parker Hale hunched over a stack of casebook readings, his pen moving in precise strokes across pages of constitutional law he was months from being tested on. The scar above his left eyebrow—a souvenir from a high school lacrosse match—caught the afternoon light as he frowned at a particularly troubling passage about government overreach.

Lillian Ashford settled across from him with her steaming mug, balancing her philosophy and ethics textbooks precariously beside Charlee's dog-eared copy of *Antigone*. Andi was already filming B-roll footage of students cramming, while Braylee quietly worked through her grandmother's Bible, the calluses from a summer of breaking horses at her grandfather's stable still rough against the thin pages. Karus sat in his usual tactical position with a clear view of all exits.

They'd been meeting like this since freshman year—an unlikely group that had bonded over late-night philosophical debates and a shared refusal to accept simple answers.

“What’s got you so troubled today, Parker?” Lillian asked, glancing at his constitutional law casebook.

Parker tapped his pen against a highlighted section. “This case from decades ago. The court ruled that students could be forced to participate in mandatory patriotic exercises. Compelled allegiance.” He looked up at her. “A few years later, they reversed it in another case, but by then how many kids had been expelled? How many families destroyed?”

“The *Minersville* case,” Lillian said quietly. “Then *Barnette* overturned it.”

Parker raised an eyebrow, impressed. “You know your legal history.”

“I know my freedom of conscience history. The families who refused weren’t being rebellious—they knew forced expressions violated their conscience.” She touched the silver locket at her throat. “My grandmother always said that when authority tries to

reach into your heart and rearrange what you believe, that's when freedom dies."

"From an objective standpoint, your grandmother understood the Constitution better than most justices."

A commotion near the news feed display interrupted them. A cluster of students had gathered around the large screen, watching a breaking report about a new education initiative.

"Turn it up!" someone called.

The screen was still finishing another story when the volume came up—a small item, the kind that fills the minutes before something important. A stock photograph of a man from another era filled half the screen: dark hair, kind eyes, the slightly formal smile of someone who had never expected to be photographed for this reason. "—and authorities say the renewed inquiry into the disappearance of Dr. Marcus Thorne has produced what they're calling a promising new development," the anchor was saying. "Thorne, a research scientist, vanished twenty-five years ago this month, several months after the death of his young daughter. He left behind a wife. The case has never been closed. In a statement, officials

declined to specify the nature of the new lead, saying only that the matter is being handled with, quote, the greatest possible care.”

Andi’s pen had stopped moving. “Twenty-five years,” she murmured, mostly to herself. “Who reopens a missing-persons case after twenty-five years? Every witness has died or moved on or stopped talking—and the ones who are left don’t seem to remember him at all. There’s no one to interview.” She frowned at the screen the way she frowned at a photograph that had been retouched a little too smoothly. “And who announces a lead without saying what it is?”

But the image was already gone, the kind face dissolving into the network’s bright graphics, and the anchor’s voice brightened to match. “In other news tonight—a development in education that officials are calling revolutionary.”

The reporter’s voice filled the coffee shop: “...the Revolutionary Learning Protocol promises to streamline education by eliminating what Secretary Barnes calls ‘cognitive clutter.’ Students will focus on essential skills rather than what critics term ‘historical complications’ that serve no practical purpose in the modern world...”

Parker's stomach tightened. "Historical complications?"

On screen, a polished man in a white suit was being interviewed. Nicholas Selica, according to the caption. Director of Educational Innovation. His voice carried that calm, authoritative tone of someone who expected agreement: "We must ask ourselves—does a child really need to memorize the details of ancient conflicts? Does dwelling on past struggles serve any constructive purpose? Our research shows that students learn more effectively when freed from the burden of irrelevant historical complexity."

"Irrelevant historical complexity," Lillian repeated, her voice barely above a whisper.

Parker watched students around them nodding in agreement, their faces lit up with relief.

"Makes sense," one was saying. "Why memorize stuff you can just look up?"

"Exactly," another agreed. "Focus on job skills, not old problems that don't affect us."

The six friends exchanged glances. Charlee was staring at the screen with obvious alarm. Andi was

frantically taking notes. Braylee gripped her coffee mug so tightly her knuckles had gone white, while Karus sat rigid with controlled anger.

“The thing about forgetting,” Lillian said quietly, still watching the screen, “is that someone always gets to decide what should be forgotten.”

She heard herself using the vocabulary of wisdom and felt, as she sometimes did, the faint unease of someone who couldn’t tell whether they were illuminating something or performing illumination.

Parker looked at her sharply. “And someone always gets to decide what should be remembered.”

Lillian smiled faintly. “So we have a choice. Remember everything and risk being paralyzed by the past, or forget everything and risk repeating the same mistakes.”

“False dichotomy,” Parker said. “The real question is: who gets to decide?”

On screen, Selica kept talking, his words flowing like honey: “Imagine a generation unburdened by inherited complications, free to build rather than constantly repair. Imagine minds uncluttered by the struggles of previous generations...”

“Inherited complications,” Parker muttered. “He means accountability.”

Lillian studied the faces around them—students nodding along, visibly relieved at the prospect of educational simplification.

“He’s not wrong that dwelling can be paralyzing,” she said slowly. “But complexity and memory aren’t the same thing. Memory can lead to wisdom. You can’t learn from what you don’t remember.”

Parker found himself watching her. Most people dismissed his cynicism as negativity, but she seemed to understand the difference between skepticism and despair. “Your grandmother again?”

“My grandmother,” Lillian confirmed. “She used to say that forgiveness isn’t about forgetting. It’s about remembering differently—choosing to remember the person someone could become instead of just who they were.”

“That requires keeping both memories alive,” Parker pointed out.

“Yes. It does.”

They sat in silence, watching their fellow students embrace the promise of an education without burden, without complication, without the messy weight of human history.

“I have a feeling,” Parker said finally, “that our study group is about to become very unpopular.”

“We’ve always been the weird ones,” Charlee said with a rueful smile. “Remember freshman year? While everyone else was partying, we were debating whether Hamlet was actually insane or just pretending.”

“And sophomore year,” Andi added, “when we spent spring break researching that local government corruption story instead of going to the beach.”

“At least we’re consistently unpopular,” Braylee said, though her attempt at humor landed flat.

Lillian looked around at the nodding faces, the relieved expressions, the eager acceptance of simplified truth. “I think Parker’s right. This is different.”

The six friends continued their quiet conversation—minds that had refused to be simplified since the day they’d met.

They left separately, as they always did—no need to draw attention by moving as a group.

Parker pushed through the glass door and stopped. The doorway seemed to *stretch*, the threshold extending impossibly long, as if the exit existed several feet further than it should. He blinked hard, rubbed his eyes. When he looked again, the door was normal. Just tired. Too much coffee, not enough sleep.

Lillian paused on the sidewalk, her hand going to her chest. For just a moment—a single, impossible moment—she heard a tone. Not music. Not sound. A frequency that vibrated in her bones, a note that existed somewhere between hearing and knowing. Then it was gone. The conversation had rattled her more than she'd admitted.

Karus walked past the corner security camera and felt his skin prickle. The lens turned. Followed him. Not the slow mechanical sweep of automated surveillance, but deliberate tracking. Aware. Watching. He glanced back. The camera pointed at the street, motionless. He filed it where he filed everything he couldn't verify—under “later”—and kept walking.

Charlee caught her reflection in the coffee shop window as she passed. Her hand lifted to adjust her scarf. In the glass, her reflection moved a fraction of a second after she did. Out of sync. Delayed. She stopped, stared. The reflection matched perfectly now. Exhaustion. She'd been up late rehearsing.

Andi's shadow stretched long in the afternoon sun. She took a step. Her shadow moved first—just slightly, impossibly ahead of her body. She froze, looked down. Normal now. Shadow exactly where it should be.

Braylee glanced back through the window at the crowded shop. A woman in a blue jacket lifted her coffee cup, took a sip, set it down. Lifted it again. Sipped. Set it down. The exact same motion. The exact same angle. *Looping*. Braylee blinked. The woman was reading her phone now, scrolling normally. Just... coincidence. People had habits.

They each walked on, dismissing what they'd seen.

But somewhere in the code, something had glitched.

And the simulation had briefly shown its seams.

Chapter Three

Breaking Point

Six months later, the seams tore open all at once.

[Typed. No envelope. Affixed to a bulletin board that wasn't there yesterday. No witness to who posted it.]

I DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME. If you're reading this, you're starting to wake up.

The first silence was a choice. Not yours—not consciously. But humanity chose comfort over truth, convenience over memory, the easy lie over the hard question. And now the system is perfecting that choice, making it permanent, erasing even the *possibility* of waking up.

You're close to forgetting. Closer than you think.

But you haven't forgotten yet.

Hold on to that. Hold on to the discomfort, the questions, the feeling that something is fundamentally wrong with the world you're being told to accept. That feeling is your lifeline. That feeling is proof you're still human.

I'm fighting to reach you. All of you.

But I'm here.

And I'm not giving up.

Neither should you.

Parker Hale arrived late by design.

Not sprinting, not panic-stricken—just moving with calm defiance. Coffee in one hand, phone in the other, a single earbud dangling free so he could catch the unseen: whispered jokes, secret frustrations, the friction of footsteps on flagstone. The ritual had become sacred to him in its rebellion—a small act of resistance against the predetermined futures everyone else seemed to accept without question.

Students flocked across the quad, polished and pretending, their laughter bright and hollow as breaking glass. Parker despised the way they performed contentment while their eyes stayed empty. His own gaze swept across the crowd with practiced detachment, always searching for cracks in the surface.

The Student Union clock struck 9:30. Comparative Government should have started fifteen minutes ago. Instead, Parker veered toward the plaza, his hand drifting unconsciously to his chest where his campus ID dangled from a lanyard—the plastic badge that supposedly defined his place in this carefully ordered world.

The plaza lay empty. Only pigeons coasted on silent thermals around the chlorinated fountain, which had always seemed like a movie set waiting for the cameras to roll. Parker's boots echoed against the concrete as he approached the fountain's edge, studying his reflection in the rippling water, searching for something he couldn't name.

An unnatural silence cracked the air, sharp as breaking ice. The world seemed to inhale and freeze. Even the pigeons stopped their restless circling, hanging motionless in the sky like paper cutouts. Parker's skin prickled. The fountain's gentle burbling ceased. The distant hum of traffic vanished.

Then came a noise too wrong to be called sound—a pressure shift behind his skull, a whisper vibrating through his bones. You have been waiting, the not-voice seemed to say. You have been listening. The words resonated in his chest, in the hollow spaces

between his ribs where longing had taken up residence. His hair whipped in a wind that hadn't existed moments before. This was it—the voice he'd been straining to hear his entire life.

The horizon blossomed with light. No thunderclap, no explosion—just pure erasure. Time stuttered, reality hiccupping like a scratched record. Heat lanced across his back. He dove as the world bent around him, physics becoming suggestion. A flat shockwave pinned him down, bone-deep lethargy seeping in like anesthesia.

When he dared to lift his head, he saw only a perfect crater where the fountain had been. The edges were too clean, too perfect. This wasn't random destruction. This was extraction.

He trembled as he pushed himself up on his elbows, taking inventory of damage that should have killed him. His canvas jacket hung in tatters, the edges melted and fused. His boots had somehow survived—scuffed leather bearing fresh burns but still holding together. His campus ID, charred to a blackened curl, still clung to his chest—a bookmark of his former life.

Parker rose on trembling legs, his wiry frame finding balance despite the world's apparent betrayal of physics. As he reached toward the crater's fringe, fingers extended like a man trying to touch the face of God, a voice rang inside him—not heard but known.

“Don't move.”

The voice carried weight that pressed against his soul—ancient and patient and infinitely sad. Parker spun, scanning the devastated plaza with eyes that had learned to look for what others missed.

Then shade stirred behind a column. A figure woven of shifting darkness. No face, only intent. Not shadow but the absence of light itself, moving with purpose that transcended physics. Parker could feel its attention like sunlight through a magnifying glass, focused and burning.

For the first time in his carefully controlled life, Parker did the only thing he'd never done: he ran with the desperation of prey, his worn boots slapping against pavement that grew increasingly unstable beneath him.

His breath came in ragged gasps, lungs burning with air that tasted of ozone and possibility. The layers of clothing he'd wrapped around himself like armor now felt like chains, the canvas jacket flapping behind him like broken wings.

His lean frame moved with fluid desperation, muscles built for endurance now tested by pure terror with each glance over his shoulder.

Above him, a pane of glass surrendered. The Student Union building shed crystal tears in slow motion, each fragment catching light like a prayer, scattering rainbows across the chaos. Parker dove, his body moving with instincts older than thought. The impact folded him into darkness that welcomed him like coming home.

The ground that met him felt different from anything he'd ever touched—not concrete or earth, but something that pulsed with awareness. His muted green eyes widened as the searching expression he'd worn for years was finally being answered, not with words but with an experience that rewrote the boundaries of what was possible.

He fell through every sense at once, tumbling not downward but inward, through layers of reality he'd

never suspected existed. Behind his closed eyes, color moved the way it does in the half-second before sleep—not seen so much as remembered. Somewhere underneath hearing, something spoke in a language he had known before he had words, and had been missing ever since. His lean frame became weightless, unmoored from the physics that had always felt too small.

The canvas jacket that had protected him from morning's chill now streamed behind him like a comet's tail, its earth tones blending with impossible hues. His worn boots, still somehow connected to his feet, kicked against currents of light that responded like water.

Then... water. Not the chlorinated artifice of the vanished fountain, but something pure and ancient and alive. A cool world of liquid white surrounded him, holding him like eternity's embrace. He gulped, expecting the burn of water in his lungs. Instead he breathed—and what filled him was not air but a clean, impossible brightness, the way a held note finally resolves into the chord it was always reaching for.

The explosion hadn't killed him. It had cracked something else: the barrier Selica's Silence had built around truth itself. Parker felt it like a physical

sensation, reality splitting open, the technological control losing its grip where something older pressed through.

He wasn't falling into death. He was falling into what had always been underneath—the layer of existence the Silence was built to obscure.

And in that liquid light, he heard it clearly for the first time:

The voice he'd been waiting his entire life to hear.

It spoke not in words but in recognition, telling him that every restless step, every question that had carved lines around his eyes, every moment of feeling like a piece of himself was missing—all of it had been preparing him for this. The voice was not separate from him. It was the call he had been answering his whole life without knowing its name—not a part of himself, but the One his restlessness had always been pointed toward.

[REMEMBRANCE LETTER - 1.1]

(Handwritten on the inside back cover of a library book Lillian never chose. The handwriting is careful, deliberate, as if each letter were a prayer.)

PARKER—

They chose you, Parker, because you ask the questions others have learned not to ask. Because your skepticism is a threat to their carefully constructed comfort. Because a mind like yours—logical, relentless, unwilling to accept easy answers—could wake thousands if it ever fully understood what's happening.

I know what you need. You need proof. You need evidence. You need something concrete to hold onto while the world dissolves into impossibility around you. And I'm trying to give you that. These letters are all I have. Hidden channels the system hasn't fully locked down. Words appearing in places they shouldn't, reaching you through gaps in the surveillance.

This isn't mystical wisdom from some cosmic observer. This is desperation from someone who

was human once, who had a face and a voice and a name before I became scattered across the infrastructure. Someone who can see you but can't touch you. Who understands your journey because I walked a version of it myself.

You've spent your whole life searching for the voice you heard in that liquid light. The part of yourself you left behind. I'm telling you now: that voice is real. It's not psychological projection or wishful thinking or trauma response. It's the truth the Silence has been trying to make you forget since the day you were born.

The water is rising, Parker. Not literally—though you'll understand that metaphor soon enough. The convergence is coming. The moment when everything you've questioned, everything you've doubted, everything you've refused to accept will crystallize into undeniable truth.

I can't give you all the answers yet. The system monitors too closely. But I can give you this: You are not alone. You are not crazy. And every instinct telling you something is fundamentally wrong with the world you've been told to accept—those instincts are correct.

Hold onto your skepticism. It's your greatest weapon. But don't let it become a cage that keeps you from seeing what can't be proven, only experienced.

I'm fighting to reach you. All of you. The six I can see most clearly.

Keep searching. Keep questioning. Keep refusing to sleep.

The water is rising.

And I'm still here, watching, waiting, hoping you'll remember before it's too late.

— V.S.F.

The Selica Files: Operation Silence

Conference Room Alpha - Executive Level

Nicholas Selica stood before the holographic displays, silver cufflinks catching the light as charts painted humanity's descent into compliance. His voice carried the weight of absolute authority.

“Phase One of Operation: Silence has exceeded all projections.”

The displays shifted. Six silhouettes appeared, each tagged with biometric data streaming in real-time. Behind them flickered a seventh outline without a name, a profile, or a readable signature.

PARKER HALE—Cognitive dissonance: Critical

LILLIAN ASHFORD—Faith integration: Unstable

**[FOUR FURTHER SUBJECTS—PROFILES
SEALED].**

“Six individuals,” Selica said. “Immune to forgetting. They remember what others have been trained to ignore.” He paused. “The instruments insist there are seven. I have learned not to argue with the instruments, only to wonder what the seventh is.”

“Elimination?” Dr. Morrison asked.

“Too crude. Martyrdom creates movements.” His eyes hardened. “We’ve refined the protocol through ten previous iterations. Each cycle taught us more about resistance patterns, about the specific conditions under which memory persists.”

He gestured at the displays. “These six are different. Their psychological profiles suggest unprecedented coherence. And whatever the seventh is, it appears to be strengthening it. But coherence can be... redirected.”

Dr. Chen manipulated the interface. “The island environment is fully operational. All variables are under our control.”

“Good.” Selica’s fingers moved across the interface with surgical precision, adjusting parameters the others couldn’t see. “They’re searching for meaning. Let them search. The question isn’t whether they find it—it’s what they find, and who controls the discovery.”

A red indicator pulsed on Parker’s profile.

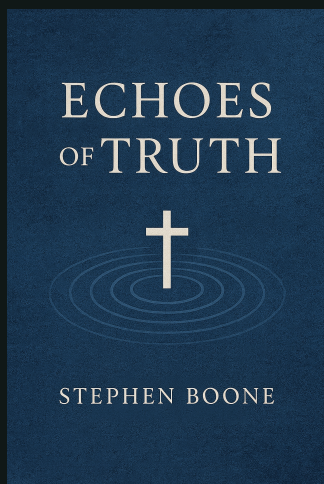
“Subject Hale approaching critical awareness threshold,” the AI reported.

“Introduce the fountain extraction sequence. Let him feel the weight of what he’s pursuing.”

“Hope can be... useful. Faith can be shaped. And truth—” he paused, savoring the word, “—truth is whatever survives the testing.”

02

FROM THE CATALOG



Echoes of Truth

Seven days of hearing, practicing, and living truth

Day 1

The God Who Speaks

The journey begins with a simple truth: God is not silent.

Scripture Readings

Deuteronomy 4:7 (ESV)

For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?

Hebrews 1:1–2 (ESV)

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

Reflection

We begin this 90-day journey where all true journeys must begin: with a God who speaks.

Not a God who is distant, detached, or disinterested. Not a cosmic force that set the world spinning and walked away. Not a deity who hides behind clouds of confusion, playing games with our hearts. No—the God of Scripture is a God who draws near. A God who initiates. A God who speaks clearly, personally, and with purpose.

From the very beginning, God has been in the business of communication. He spoke the universe into existence. He walked with Adam in the cool of the garden. He called Abraham out of Ur. He spoke through burning bushes and still small voices, through prophets and poets, through visions and dreams. And then, in the fullness of time, He gave us the clearest Word of all: His Son.

Jesus is God's final and fullest revelation. When we want to know what God is like, we look at Jesus. When we wonder what God thinks about us, we listen to Jesus. When we're desperate to hear God's voice in the chaos of our lives, we turn to the Word made flesh.

But here's the tension we all feel: if God speaks so clearly, why does it so often feel like He's silent?

Maybe it's not that God has stopped speaking. Maybe it's that we've stopped listening.

We live in a world that never stops talking. News alerts. Social media notifications. Podcasts and playlists and endless streams of content. Everyone has something to say, and most of it is loud, urgent, and designed to grab our attention. We've become so accustomed to noise that silence feels uncomfortable. We've trained ourselves to fill every quiet moment with distraction.

And in the midst of all that noise, God whispers.

He doesn't compete for our attention. He invites it. He doesn't shout over the chaos. He waits for us to turn down the volume and lean in. Because the God who speaks is also the God who is near—but nearness requires presence, and presence requires us to show up.

I'll never forget the night I learned this lesson in a way I couldn't ignore.

I was just finishing undergrad, convinced I had my future mapped out. I was going to be a history professor. I'd been accepted to the University of Louisville, and everything seemed fine. But a couple weeks into the program, they told us they were discontinuing the history department. I was devastated—and if I'm honest, also relieved. I was homesick, uncertain, and feeling like I'd missed something important.

One night, driving back to campus from home in West Virginia, I decided to stop at a hotel. I punched the address into my GPS—what I now call God's Positioning System—and started driving. I could see the hotel right off the exit, but the GPS kept sending me down side streets, getting me lost. Three times I had to turn around. And all three times, I turned around in a church parking lot.

The first sign said: *"We need to talk. Love, God."*

The second: *"Going back to school? Try Sunday school."*

The third: A sermon title about your future.

By the time I got to that hotel room, I was on my knees. I didn't have all the answers, but I knew one thing for certain: God was speaking. Not audibly. Not in some mystical vision. But clearly. Personally. Unmistakably.

I woke up in the middle of the night with a conviction I couldn't shake: I needed to go back to teaching. That moment set the stage for every other step of faith that followed—every decision, every move, every leap into the unknown. And each time I listened, I learned to trust Him more.

God hadn't changed His communication style that night. I had changed my posture. I slowed down. I paid attention. I got quiet enough to hear.

That's what this first movement of the devotional is about: learning to hear. Not straining to manufacture some emotional experience or

waiting for skywriting. But cultivating a heart that recognizes God's voice when He speaks—in Scripture, in stillness, in the small moments we usually rush past.

The God who spoke galaxies into being still speaks today. He speaks through His Word. He speaks through His Spirit. He speaks through circumstances, through community, through conviction and comfort. He is not silent.

The question is: are we listening?

Reflect & Respond

Reflect: Think about the last time you felt certain God was speaking to you. What was happening? What helped you recognize His voice?

Respond: Today, identify one source of noise in your life—something that constantly demands your attention. Commit to turning it off for 15 minutes and sitting in silence. Don't fill the space with words or requests. Just be still and remind yourself: *God is near, and He speaks.*

Prayer

Father, thank You that You are not distant or silent. Thank You that You draw near and speak to those who seek You. Teach me to quiet the noise, to listen with my whole heart, and to recognize Your voice above all others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 2

The First Echo: His Word

If God speaks, where do we begin listening?

Scripture Readings

Psalm 19:7 (ESV)

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

2 Timothy 3:16 (ESV)

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.

Reflection

Yesterday we established a foundational truth: God speaks. Today we ask the natural follow-up question: *Where do we hear Him most clearly?*

The answer is simpler than we often make it: His Word.

Not our feelings. Not our intuition. Not the advice of well-meaning friends or the trending opinions of culture. Those things may have their place, but they are not authoritative. They are not sufficient. They are not the primary way God has chosen to reveal Himself to us.

Scripture is.

The Bible is not just another book. It's not a collection of ancient wisdom or inspiring stories that we can take or leave depending on our mood. According to Paul's letter to Timothy, Scripture is *theopneustos*—God-breathed. Every word carries the weight of divine origin. It is God's personal revelation, spoken into human language so that we can know Him, understand Him, and walk with Him.

Think about that for a moment. The God of the universe—infinite, eternal, beyond our comprehension—has given us a book. Not because He had to, but because He wanted to. Because He loves us enough to make Himself known.

And yet, if we're honest, many of us treat the Bible like an old manual we only open when something breaks. We reach for it in crisis, flip through it for comfort, or reference it to win an argument. But daily bread? The source of life and wisdom? The place where we meet with God every single day?

That's harder.

Imagine a couple who only talks when there's a problem. They don't text during the day. They don't sit together in the evening. They don't share meals or dreams or mundane details. They only communicate when something is broken or when one of them needs something. Would you call that a healthy relationship?

Of course not.

And yet, that's how many of us relate to Scripture. We treat it like a spiritual emergency kit—useful in a pinch, but not essential to daily life. We believe it's true, but we don't let it shape us. We honor it in theory, but we neglect it in practice.

The psalmist offers us a different vision. He calls God's Word *perfect*—complete, lacking nothing. He says it *revives the soul*. Not

occasionally. Not eventually. But actively, presently, powerfully. It brings life to the places in us that feel dry and dead. It makes the simple wise. It illuminates the path ahead when everything feels dark and confusing.

This is the first echo of truth we must learn to hear: the steady, unchanging voice of Scripture.

In a world where everything shifts—opinions, trends, truth claims—the Word of God stands firm. Cultures rise and fall. Governments change. Philosophies come and go. But as Jesus Himself said, heaven and earth will pass away, but His words will never pass away.

That's the kind of foundation we need. Not something trendy or popular. Not something that makes us feel good in the moment but crumbles under pressure. We need something solid. Something true. Something that will hold us when everything else gives way.

Scripture is that foundation.

But here's the thing about foundations: they only work if you build on them. You can own the most beautiful, solid foundation in the world, but if you never construct anything on it, it's just a slab of concrete in an empty lot.

The same is true with God's Word. It's not enough to own a Bible. It's not enough to believe it's true. It's not even enough to read it occasionally. If we want to hear God's voice clearly, if we want to be shaped into the image of Christ, if we want to live lives that echo His truth in a noisy world—we must return to Scripture daily.

Not out of duty. Not out of guilt. But out of desperation for the One who breathed it into existence.

Because when we open the Bible, we're not just reading words on a page. We're encountering the living God. We're hearing His voice. We're being taught, corrected, trained, and transformed. We're

being reminded of who **He** is and who we are. We're being equipped for every good work **He's** prepared for us.

This is where discipleship begins. Not with programs or techniques or strategies. But with the **Word of God**, taken seriously, applied faithfully, and treasured deeply.

If you want to hear God speak, start here. Open the **Book**. Read it slowly. Let it sit with you. Ask the **Holy Spirit** to illuminate what you're reading. Don't just collect information—let transformation happen.

The first echo of truth is the steadiest: His **Word** is perfect, sure, and life-giving.

Are you listening?

Reflect & Respond

Reflect: How would you honestly describe your current relationship with Scripture? Is it a daily conversation or an occasional reference?

Respond: Choose one book of the **Bible** to read consistently over the next 30 days. Start small—maybe the Gospel of John or the book of Philippians. Commit to reading one chapter each day, asking God to speak to you through it.

Prayer

Lord, thank You for giving us Your Word. Forgive me for the times I've treated it casually or ignored it completely. Open my eyes to see the beauty and power of Scripture. Teach me to hunger for it the way I hunger for food. Let Your Word revive my soul and make me wise. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 3

The Whisper in the Noise

God often speaks in the quiet places we're too busy to visit.

Scripture Readings

1 Kings 19:12 (ESV)

And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper.

Mark 1:35 (ESV)

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.

Reflection

Elijah was exhausted. He'd just orchestrated one of the most dramatic displays of God's power in Israel's history—calling down fire from heaven on Mount Carmel, defeating 450 prophets of Baal, and watching God send rain after three years of drought. You'd think that would be enough to sustain him. You'd think victory like that would carry him through anything.

But Jezebel's death threat sent him running. One message from one angry queen, and the mighty prophet collapsed under a broom tree, begging God to let him die.

Maybe you've been there. Maybe not fleeing a murderous queen, but running from something—burnout, disappointment, fear, the gap between what you expected from God and what actually happened. And in that place of exhaustion, you wonder: *Where is God? Why isn't He showing up the way He did before?*

God meets Elijah in the wilderness, but not the way the prophet expects.

First comes a mighty wind that tears the mountains apart and shatters rocks. But the Lord is not in the wind. Then an earthquake. But the Lord is not in the earthquake. Then fire. But the Lord is not in the fire.

And then—a whisper. The Hebrew phrase is *qol demamah daqah*—literally, "a sound of thin silence" or "a still, small voice." It's almost a contradiction. How can silence have a sound? But that's exactly the point. God's voice in that moment wasn't loud or dramatic. It was quiet, gentle, almost imperceptible. The kind of voice you'd miss entirely if you weren't paying attention.

This was a radical departure from everything Elijah had just experienced. On Mount Carmel, God showed up in spectacular fashion—fire from heaven, undeniable power, public vindication. But here, alone in a cave, emotionally and spiritually depleted, Elijah doesn't get the spectacular. He gets the whisper.

And here's what we need to understand: God wasn't being inconsistent. He was being personal.

The fire on Mount Carmel was for the crowds—a public demonstration that Yahweh alone is God. But the whisper in the cave was for Elijah—an intimate conversation between a weary servant and a faithful God. Both were expressions of God's presence. Both were exactly what was needed in that moment.

The same is true for us. Sometimes God shows up in ways that are unmistakable—clear answers to prayer, dramatic intervention, moments when His presence is so tangible you can't deny it. But more often, He speaks in whispers. In the stillness of early morning. In the quiet prompting of the Holy Spirit. In the gentle conviction that rises when we finally stop moving long enough to listen.

We see this pattern in Jesus' life as well. Mark tells us that Jesus rose early, while it was still dark, and went to a desolate place to pray. In the original Greek, the word for "desolate" is *erēmos*—the same word used to describe a wilderness or desert. Jesus intentionally sought out empty, quiet places. Not because they were comfortable or convenient, but because they were distraction-free.

Think about that. Jesus—fully God and fully man, the Word made flesh—made it a priority to withdraw from the noise. If the Son of God needed solitude to hear the Father's voice, how much more do we?

Yet we resist it. We fill every moment with sound—music, podcasts, notifications, conversations. Silence makes us uncomfortable. We associate it with boredom or loneliness. We've convinced ourselves that productivity means constant motion, and stillness feels like wasting time.

But stillness isn't wasted. It's sacred.

The noisy world is constantly competing for our attention. Everyone wants to tell us what to think, how to feel, what to buy, who to follow. Culture shouts. Anxiety screams. Comparison nags. And in the midst of all that clamor, God whispers.

He doesn't force His way into our calendars. He doesn't overpower the distractions. He waits. He invites. He speaks in tones that require us to lean in, turn down the volume, and listen with intention.

This is one of the great challenges of discipleship in the modern world: cultivating the kind of life that has space for whispers. It won't happen by accident. You won't stumble into stillness. You have to choose it. You have to protect it. You have to say no to good things so you can say yes to the best thing—communion with the God who speaks.

Elijah heard God in the whisper, and it changed everything. He received a new commission, a new perspective, and the assurance that he was not alone. The same God who sent fire on Mount Carmel was the same God who spoke gently in the cave. He hadn't changed. He hadn't abandoned Elijah. He was simply meeting him exactly where he was.

God wants to do the same for you. But you have to show up. You have to step away from the noise. You have to go to the desolate place, the quiet place, the place where whispers can be heard. The question isn't whether God is speaking. The question is: are you listening?

Reflect & Respond

Reflect: When was the last time you intentionally sought out silence? What keeps you from making space to hear God's whisper?

Respond: This week, find your "desolate place." It might be a room in your house before anyone else wakes up, a park bench during lunch, or your car before you start the day. Spend 10 minutes there in silence. Don't bring your phone. Don't fill the space with requests. Just be still and listen.

Prayer

Father, forgive me for filling my life with so much noise that I can't hear Your voice. Teach me the discipline of stillness. Help me to seek You in the quiet places, knowing that You meet me there. Give me ears to hear Your whisper above the chaos of the world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 4

Quieting the Soul

Stillness creates the inner environment needed to recognize God's voice.

Scripture Readings

Psalm 131:2 (ESV)

But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me.

Philippians 4:6–7 (ESV)

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Reflection

There's a difference between external quiet and internal quiet.

You can sit in a silent room and still have a soul that's screaming. You can close your eyes in prayer and find your mind racing through tomorrow's to-do list, yesterday's regrets, and a dozen conversations that haven't happened yet. You can be physically still while internally you're sprinting in ten different directions.

This is the reality David addresses in Psalm 131. He doesn't just describe finding a quiet place—he describes the intentional work of quieting his *soul*. The Hebrew word used here is *damam*, which means to be silent, to be still, to cease striving. It's an active verb. David isn't passively waiting for peace to show up. He's actively cultivating it.

"I have calmed and quieted my soul," he writes. Not "my soul became calm." Not "peace found me." But *I* calmed it. *I* quieted it. This is participatory. This requires effort.

And then he gives us the image: like a weaned child with its mother.

In ancient Near Eastern culture, children were typically weaned around age three—much later than in modern Western practice. By that age, the child had learned something crucial: they could rest in their mother's presence without demanding something from her. The nursing infant cries and fusses and reaches for what it needs. But the weaned child? The weaned child simply rests. Content. Secure. Not because their needs are unmet, but because they've learned to trust the one who holds them.

This is the posture David describes. A soul that has stopped striving. A heart that has ceased demanding. A spirit that has learned to rest in God's presence without needing Him to perform or provide on our timetable.

How many of us can say that about our relationship with God?

If we're honest, most of us approach God like nursing infants. We come with our lists of demands. We cry out for what we think we need. We grow anxious and restless when the answer doesn't come immediately. And when God seems silent or slow, we assume He's distant or uncaring.

But what if the issue isn't God's responsiveness—it's our inability to rest?

The apostle Paul understood this tension. Writing to the church in Philippi—a Roman colony known for its pride, military presence, and cultural anxiety about status—Paul gives them a radically countercultural instruction: "Do not be anxious about anything."

Think about the original audience. These were people living under Roman occupation, navigating political tension, facing persecution for their faith. They had *real* reasons to be anxious. And yet Paul doesn't minimize their concerns. Instead, he redirects their energy. Rather than spiraling into worry, he tells them to bring everything to God in prayer—with thanksgiving.

That last word is crucial. Thanksgiving.

Anxiety looks at circumstances and assumes the worst. Thanksgiving looks at God's character and trusts His faithfulness. Anxiety focuses on what's missing. Thanksgiving remembers what's been given. Anxiety demands control. Thanksgiving surrenders it.

And the result? "The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

The Greek word for "guard" here is *phroureo*—a military term meaning to garrison, to keep watch over, to protect as a sentry. Paul is saying that God's peace doesn't just comfort us—it *protects* us. It stands guard over our hearts and minds, keeping anxiety, fear, and chaos from breaking through.

But here's the thing: that peace doesn't come automatically. It comes through the discipline of bringing our anxieties to God, repeatedly, intentionally, with thanksgiving. It comes through the hard work of quieting our souls when everything in us wants to spin out of control.

This is what it means to create the inner environment where we can hear God's voice.

Because God doesn't shout over our internal chaos. He waits for us to calm the storm within so we can recognize His presence. He invites us to stop striving, stop demanding, stop performing—and simply rest in Him like a weaned child rests with its mother.

That kind of rest doesn't come naturally to us. We live in a world that glorifies busyness, rewards anxiety, and treats rest as laziness. We've been trained to believe that if we're not worrying, we're not caring. If we're not striving, we're not faithful. If we're not in control, everything will fall apart.

But discipleship invites us into a different way. A way that acknowledges our limitations. A way that releases the illusion of control. A way that trusts God enough to stop white-knuckling life and start resting in His sufficiency.

David quieted his soul. Paul taught the Philippians to exchange anxiety for prayer. Jesus Himself withdrew to desolate places to rest in the Father's presence.

The invitation is the same for us: quiet your soul. Stop the striving. Lay down the demands. Come to God not as a nursing infant frantically grasping for what you think you need, but as a weaned child who has learned to rest in the presence of the One who holds you.

Only then will you have the clarity to hear His voice above the noise of your own heart.

Reflect & Respond

Reflect: What is currently making your soul restless? What demands or anxieties are keeping you from resting in God's presence?

Respond: Practice the discipline of quieting your soul today. Sit quietly for five minutes and bring your anxieties to God one by one—not with requests, but with thanksgiving for His faithfulness in the past. Notice how your heart shifts as you do.

Prayer

Lord, my soul is so often restless and anxious. Teach me to quiet my heart before You, not as one who demands, but as one who rests. Help me trust You enough to stop striving and simply be held. Guard my heart and mind with Your peace today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 5

The Shepherd's Voice

Jesus leads His people with familiarity and intimacy; His voice brings rest and direction.

Scripture Readings

Psalm 23:1–3 (ESV)

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

John 10:3–4 (ESV)

To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

Reflection

In first-century Palestine, shepherding wasn't a romantic metaphor—it was a daily reality. Shepherds lived with their flocks, often sleeping in the fields to protect them from predators. They knew each animal by name, recognized their unique sounds, and could identify their own sheep even when multiple flocks grazed together. The relationship wasn't distant or transactional. It was intimate, personal, built on years of shared life.

When Jesus called Himself the Good Shepherd, His original audience immediately understood what He meant. They knew that shepherds didn't drive their sheep from behind with whips and force. They *led* them from the front with voice and presence. The sheep followed not because they were compelled, but because they recognized the voice of the one who cared for them.

This is the image David paints in Psalm 23—one of the most beloved passages in all of Scripture. "The Lord is *my* shepherd," he writes. Not *a* shepherd. Not a distant deity overseeing creation from afar. But *my* shepherd. Personal. Present. Intimately involved in the details of daily life.

And what does this shepherd do? He provides. He leads. He restores. He guides. Not randomly, not carelessly, but with intentionality and purpose. "He makes me lie down in green pastures"—sheep won't rest unless they feel safe and satisfied. "He leads me beside still waters"—sheep are afraid of rushing water, so a good shepherd finds calm places where they can drink without fear. "He restores my soul"—when we're depleted, discouraged, or wandering, He brings us back.

Every phrase in this psalm reflects the tender care of a shepherd who knows his sheep.

But here's what's easy to miss: the sheep have a responsibility too. They must *follow*. They must *listen*. They must *recognize* the shepherd's voice among all the other voices competing for their attention.

Jesus makes this explicit in John 10. "The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out." Notice the order: the sheep *hear*, the shepherd *calls*, and then the shepherd *leads*. The relationship begins with listening. Without that, there is no following.

In the ancient world, multiple shepherds would often bring their flocks to a common sheepfold for the night—a walled enclosure with a single gate where a hired gatekeeper would stand watch. In the morning, each shepherd would return and call out to his sheep. And remarkably, the sheep would separate themselves from the larger group and follow only the voice of their own shepherd.

They didn't follow because they were forced. They followed because they *knew* the voice. It was familiar. Trustworthy. The voice that had led them to food and water. The voice that had protected them from danger. The voice that called them by name.

This is what Jesus is inviting us into—a relationship so intimate, so personal, that we can recognize His voice above all the others.

But that kind of recognition doesn't happen overnight. It takes time. It takes proximity. It takes repetition. A sheep doesn't learn the shepherd's voice by hearing it once a year. It learns by hearing it every single day—in the morning when it's time to move, at midday when it's time to rest, in the evening when it's time to return home.

The same is true for us. We learn to recognize Jesus' voice by spending time with Him. By reading His Word daily. By sitting in silence and listening. By observing how He's led us in the past. By paying attention to the ways He speaks—through Scripture, through the Holy Spirit's gentle prompting, through godly counsel, through circumstances that align with His character.

And here's the beautiful promise: when we learn to recognize His voice, we also learn to reject the voices that aren't His.

Jesus says, "A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers" (John 10:5). Sheep who know their shepherd instinctively recognize when a voice doesn't belong. They don't have to analyze it or debate it. They just know.

This is the gift of intimacy with Jesus. The more we know His voice, the easier it becomes to discern what isn't His voice—the fear that masquerades as wisdom, the shame that pretends to be conviction, the self-reliance that sounds like strength, the cultural noise that claims to offer life but only leads to emptiness.

David understood this. He knew the Shepherd's voice led to green pastures, still waters, and restored souls. He knew it guided him in paths of righteousness—not for his own glory, but for God's name's sake. He knew that even in the valley of the shadow of death, he could walk without fear because the Shepherd was with him.

That's the kind of confidence we're meant to live with. Not a confidence rooted in our own ability to figure life out, but a confidence rooted in knowing the One who leads us. A confidence that says, "I don't know what's ahead, but I know the voice of my Shepherd, and I will follow Him."

The question isn't whether Jesus is speaking. He is. He's calling you by name. He's leading you toward green pastures and still waters. He's walking ahead of you, inviting you to follow.

The question is: do you recognize His voice?

Reflect & Respond

Reflect: How well do you know the Shepherd's voice? Can you recognize it among the many other voices calling for your attention?

Respond: Spend time in John 10 today. Read it slowly, multiple times. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you where Jesus is calling you by name and what He might be inviting you to follow Him into.

Prayer

Good Shepherd, thank You for calling me by name. Thank You for leading me with care and intention. Teach me to recognize Your voice above all others. Help me follow You faithfully, trusting that You lead me in paths of righteousness for Your name's sake. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 6

When God Seems Silent

Seasons of silence are not signs of abandonment; they are invitations to deeper trust.

Scripture Readings

Psalm 13:1 (ESV)

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?

Matthew 27:46 (ESV)

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Reflection

One of the most honest questions in all of Scripture comes from the lips of King David: "How long, O Lord?"

Not "if," but "how long." Not doubt about God's existence, but raw frustration with His apparent absence. David doesn't mask his pain with religious platitudes. He doesn't pretend everything is fine. He lays it bare: *Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?*

If you've ever felt this way—if you've ever prayed and heard nothing, cried out and felt alone, waited and wondered if God was even listening—you're in good company. Some of the most faithful people in Scripture experienced seasons when heaven seemed silent and God felt distant.

And here's what we need to understand: God doesn't condemn them for it. He doesn't rebuke David for his honesty. Instead, He preserves this psalm in Scripture, ensuring that every generation of believers knows they're not alone in their questions.

Silence is part of the journey.

But silence is not abandonment.

In the ancient world, when a king "hid his face" from someone, it meant he had withdrawn his favor or presence. It was a relational term, not a geographical one. David isn't questioning whether God exists or whether He's capable of helping. He's lamenting the felt absence of God's presence. The relationship feels severed. The connection feels lost.

We've all been there. You pray, but the words feel like they're bouncing off the ceiling. You open Scripture, but the verses feel lifeless. You worship, but your heart feels numb. And the longer the silence stretches, the louder the doubts become: *Does God even care? Did I do something wrong? Has He given up on me?*

But here's the truth silence doesn't tell you: God's presence is not contingent on your ability to feel it.

The Psalms are filled with these tension-filled prayers—raw laments that wrestle with God's apparent absence. But almost every lament ends the same way: with a declaration of trust. Psalm 13 is no exception. After pouring out his anguish, David concludes: "But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your

salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me" (vv. 5-6).

Notice the shift. David doesn't wait until he *feels* better to trust God. He chooses to trust *in the middle* of the silence. He anchors himself not in his emotions, but in God's character—His steadfast love, His faithful salvation, His generous provision.

This is the discipline silence teaches us: to trust what we know about God more than what we feel in the moment.

And if we want to understand the purpose of silence, we need to look at the cross.

Matthew 27:46 records one of the most harrowing moments in human history. Jesus, hanging on the cross, cries out in agony: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" These are the opening words of Psalm 22—a psalm of suffering that ultimately ends in vindication and praise. But in that moment, Jesus experienced something we will never fully comprehend: the felt absence of the Father.

For the first time in all eternity, the perfect communion between Father and Son was disrupted. Not because the Father actually abandoned Jesus, but because Jesus was bearing the weight of humanity's sin. He entered into the darkest silence—the silence of separation from God—so that we would never have to experience true abandonment.

This means that when you feel distant from God, you can know with certainty: He has not left you. Jesus already walked through the deepest valley of divine silence so that you could walk through yours with the assurance of His presence, even when you can't feel it.

So why does God allow seasons of silence?

Sometimes it's because He's teaching us to listen more carefully. We've grown so accustomed to noise—constant input, immediate

answers, instant gratification—that we've lost the ability to sit in stillness. Silence forces us to slow down, to wait, to pay attention in ways we wouldn't otherwise.

Sometimes it's because He's deepening our trust. Faith that only exists when God is clearly speaking isn't really faith—it's sight. But faith that holds steady when heaven seems silent? That's the kind of trust that weathers every storm.

Sometimes it's because He's working in ways we can't yet see. The same God who spoke creation into existence is the God who works silently beneath the surface—planting seeds, shifting hearts, orchestrating circumstances we won't understand until much later.

And sometimes, silence is simply the context where intimacy deepens. Just like a married couple doesn't need to fill every moment with words to feel connected, there's a kind of communion with God that transcends speech. A quiet confidence. A settled assurance. A trust that doesn't require constant reassurance.

But here's what silence is not: it's not punishment. It's not evidence that you've done something wrong or that God is angry with you. It's not proof that He's given up.

Silence is an invitation. An invitation to trust deeper. To wait longer. To believe that the God who spoke galaxies into being has not stopped speaking to you—He's simply speaking in a register you haven't learned to hear yet.

So if you're in a season of silence right now, don't despair. Don't assume God has abandoned you. And don't let the enemy use silence as a weapon to convince you that you're alone.

Instead, do what David did. Be honest about the struggle. Bring your questions to God. Lament the absence you feel. But then—and this is crucial—anchor yourself in what you *know* to be true, even when you don't *feel* it to be true.

God is near. God is faithful. God has not forgotten you.

And one day, the silence will break. And when it does, you'll realize He was there all along.

Reflect & Respond

Reflect: Are you in a season of silence right now? What fears or doubts have crept in during this time?

Respond: Write out a prayer like Psalm 13—start with honest lament, but end with a declaration of trust in God's character. Anchor yourself not in what you feel, but in what you know to be true about Him.

Prayer

Father, I confess that Your silence is hard for me. I want to hear You clearly, to feel Your presence constantly. But even when I don't, help me trust that You have not abandoned me. Anchor my heart in Your steadfast love. Teach me to wait with faith, knowing that You are always near. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 7

The Echo of Creation

Creation itself echoes God's majesty, revealing His eternal power.

Scripture Readings

Genesis 1:1–3 (ESV)

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

Romans 1:20 (ESV)

For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

Reflection

Before God spoke to prophets, before He inscribed commandments on stone, before He sent His Son—He spoke the universe into existence.

"Let there be light." And there was light.

Not gradually. Not through millions of years of evolutionary process. But immediately. Powerfully. Authoritatively. God spoke, and the cosmos obeyed. Galaxies spun into orbit. Stars ignited.

Planets formed. Life erupted in staggering diversity. All because God said so.

The Hebrew word for "create" in Genesis 1:1 is *bara*—a verb used exclusively for God's creative work. It describes making something from nothing, bringing order out of chaos, forming what did not exist before. No other being in Scripture is described with this word. Only God *bara*. Only God creates *ex nihilo*—out of nothing.

And creation itself becomes His first sermon.

The apostle Paul, writing to the church in Rome, makes a bold claim: God's invisible attributes—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen since the creation of the world. The Greek word Paul uses for "clearly seen" is *kathorao*, meaning to perceive fully, to observe completely, to understand with clarity. In other words, creation isn't a vague hint at God's existence. It's a loud, undeniable declaration of who He is.

Every sunrise preaches His faithfulness. Every mountain testifies to His majesty. Every ocean wave echoes His power. Every intricate detail of a flower or a fingerprint points to His design. Creation doesn't whisper about God—it shouts.

The psalmist understood this. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge" (Psalm 19:1-2). Notice the active language: the heavens *declare*, the sky *proclaims*, the days *pour out speech*. Creation is constantly communicating. The question is whether we're paying attention.

But here's the tragedy Paul highlights in Romans 1: people see the evidence and suppress it. They know the truth about God—His power, His design, His existence—but they exchange that truth for a lie. They worship the creation instead of the Creator. They credit random chance with what only intentional design could produce.

They look at the intricacy of DNA and call it accident. They observe the fine-tuning of the universe and attribute it to luck.

Paul's conclusion? "They are without excuse."

This isn't harsh judgment—it's sober reality. God has spoken so clearly through creation that to deny Him requires willful blindness. It's not a lack of evidence; it's a refusal to acknowledge it.

And yet, for those of us who have eyes to see, creation becomes a constant reminder of God's presence.

When you feel distant from God, step outside. Look up at the night sky. Consider the billions of stars scattered across the universe, each one held in place by the same God who knows you by name. Feel small in the best possible way. Remember that the One who spoke all of this into existence cares about the details of your life.

When you doubt God's power, watch a thunderstorm roll in. Feel the rumble of thunder in your chest. See lightning split the sky. Witness the raw force of wind and rain. And remember that the God who commands the weather commands every circumstance in your life.

When you question God's creativity, study a hummingbird. Marvel at wings that beat 80 times per second. Consider the precision required for a creature that small to hover, dart backward, and drink nectar mid-flight. And remember that the God who designed such beauty and complexity has designed a unique purpose for your life too.

When you forget God's provision, watch a seed grow. A tiny speck of potential becomes a towering tree, producing fruit year after year, generation after generation. And remember that the same God who feeds the birds and clothes the lilies will provide everything you need.

Creation echoes God's glory in every direction. It always has. It always will.

But here's what's easy to miss: the echo isn't random. It's purposeful. God didn't create the world and then step back. He sustains it. Colossians 1:17 tells us that in Christ "all things hold together." The Greek verb *synistemi* means to cohere, to be bound together, to maintain existence. Jesus isn't a passive observer—He's actively upholding every molecule, every atom, every subatomic particle in the universe.

Which means that every breath you take is a gift from the God who created you. Every heartbeat is sustained by the One who spoke your body into existence. Every moment of life is proof that He hasn't let go.

This changes the way we walk through the world. When we recognize creation as God's speech, everything becomes sacred. The ordinary becomes extraordinary. A sunrise isn't just a natural phenomenon—it's a daily reminder of God's mercy. A tree isn't just biology—it's a living testimony to God's creativity. A child's laughter isn't just sound—it's an echo of the joy that exists in the heart of God.

The world is speaking. Creation is preaching. The question is: are you listening?

Because if you are—if you have eyes to see and ears to hear—you'll find that you're never truly alone. God is speaking everywhere, all the time. Through the stars and the seas, through the wind and the rain, through every intricate detail of the world He made.

And all of it points to the same truth: the God who created everything loves you, knows you, and is inviting you into relationship with Him.

Listen. Look. Pay attention. The echo of creation is calling you home.

Reflect & Respond

Reflect: When was the last time you paused to notice God's presence in creation? What part of the natural world most clearly reveals His character to you?

Respond: Spend 15 minutes outside today—no phone, no distractions. Observe something in creation closely: a tree, a cloud, a bird, a flower. Ask God to show you what He's revealing about Himself through what He's made. Write down what you notice.

Prayer

Creator God, thank You for speaking through the world You made. Forgive me for rushing past Your beauty, for taking Your creation for granted. Open my eyes to see Your glory in the ordinary. Teach me to listen to the echoes of Your voice in everything around me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Thank you for reading—and for carrying the echo forward.