

Session 4

Holy Saturday: “Where is God when heaven is silent?”



A note to leaders:

Few experiences in life are as disconcerting as seasons in which God is silent. This may be a current reality for some members of your group. Therefore, it's important to dignify their questions in this session without trying to 'solve' them.

This could be a challenging and vulnerable session for many members of your group, especially as there are no easy answers or quick fixes to the topics explored. In *God on Mute* Pete Greig says that “God’s silence is not his absence but rather his presence in another form”.

People who are experiencing God’s silence can still know his presence, so make sure you leave plenty of time for prayer. And remember that one of the main manifestations of God’s presence at such times is the loving presence of God’s people.

Please note that this session includes a graphic depiction of the torture and death of a child in a concentration camp as part of a discussion about suffering and the cross.

1. Introduce the session

5 minutes

Key verses

“My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.” –
Psalm 22:2

Introduction

Welcome to session 4 of The Prayer Course II: Unanswered Prayer!

As usual today we're going to watch a video, then we're going to discuss the questions it provokes and finally we're going to pray together.

Today we're looking at the mystery of Holy Saturday, and asking "Where" questions: "Where is God when heaven is silent?", "Where is God in the midst of my unanswered prayer, pain and suffering?" We'll be exploring the uncertainty that often comes with waiting, and the struggle when it feels like God is silent.

Begin the session by asking someone to open in prayer

2. Watch the video

35 minutes

Bible passages from the session

Psalms 22

Key points

(for your reference in case people need a little prompting!)

- Most of us live our lives somewhere between the cross and the resurrection
- Have faith in the faith of others, even when you don't have faith of your own
- The paradox of real life is hurt and hope together; praise in spite of the pain

"... they tried to kill me; I don't know how I survived. But I always say that the reason I survived is just to be a testimony for others."- Helen Berhane

3. Discussion questions

30 - 45 minutes

- Q.** What did you find most helpful, inspiring or challenging in what Pete Greig, Gemma Hunt and Helen Berhane shared?
- Q.** Where are you waiting for a breakthrough, a word from God, or an answer to your prayers? What unanswered questions are you carrying today?
- Q.** In God on Mute, Pete Greig talks about our tendency to "rush the resurrection"; to "leapfrog Holy Saturday"; to tidy up the mess too fast. What is it that makes waiting with unresolved questions such a hard thing to do?

- Q. People often say that God’s timing is perfect. Do you agree with this? Why does he sometimes seem so slow?
 - Q. In God on Mute Pete Greig says that “God’s silence is not his absence but rather his presence in another form”. In what ways have you experienced God’s presence in the midst of silence in the past?
 - Q. In the midst of your pain and silence, have there been moments where you have been able to say, like Elie Wiesel, “There is God?”
 - Q. Pete Greig shares about the significance of developing spiritual muscle memory to carry us through the darker and more difficult times of life. What does this mean for you? What ‘holy habits’ have you cultivated - or would you like to cultivate – in your life?
 - Q. The Bible articulates the reality of life; the pain and hope coming together. Are there any particular Bible passages that have sustained you during times of trial or struggle?
 - Q. Helen Berhane’s story demonstrates the power of worshipping in the midst of pain and silence. What can we practically do as a group to help one another to fix our eyes on Jesus in the midst of challenges?
-

4. Small group prayer

15 minutes

Leader’s note

If your group is more than 3 people, we would recommend splitting into smaller groups of 2 or 3 to give everyone an opportunity to share and pray for one another. Explain how much time you will have for prayer, and roughly how much time each person will have for sharing and praying.

Ask one another

- Q. Pete Greig says that it’s possible to “Have faith in the faith of others, even when you don’t have faith of your own.” Are there any particular ways in which you would like members of the group to “have faith” on your behalf in prayer now?
 - Q. Are there any other areas in which you’d appreciate prayer?
-

5. Closing comments

5 minutes

Share with the group what you've really appreciated about the session.

Next time, in our final session, we'll be focusing on the hope of Easter Sunday and our final question: "When?" – "When will my prayers be answered?"

To prepare for that, and to get the most out of the session, try to read chapters 13-14 of *God on Mute*. This is also available as an audiobook if you find that easier.

Closing prayer

Holy Saturday calls for trust, patience and a certain defiant hope. We're going to finish now with a prayer from Alan E. Lewis, one of the few theologians who made it his life's work to study Holy Saturday:

Hear our prayer for a world still living an Easter Saturday existence, oppressed and lonely, guilty of godlessness and convinced of godforsakenness. Be still tomorrow the God you are today, and yesterday already were: God with us in the grave, but pulling thus the sting of death and promising in your final kingdom an even greater victory of abundant grace and life over the magnitude of sin and death. And for your blessed burial, into which we were baptized, may you be glorified for evermore. Amen.

— taken from *God on Mute* by Pete Greig, chapter 12

Further resources & reflection

Journaling question

Who are the trusted friends I can turn to in a season of silence? How might I let them know this week how important they are to me?

Daily devotions

At the back of the book that accompanies this course - *God on Mute* - you will find "God UnMute" – a forty day devotional journey. The daily content can help you process and pray at a much deeper level.

Reflect on...

The poem *Kneeling*, by R S Thomas ¹

*Moments of great calm,
Kneeling before an altar
Of wood in a stone church
In summer, waiting for the God
To speak; the air a staircase
For silence; the sun's light
Ringing me, as though I acted
A great role. And the audiences
Still; all that close throng
Of spirits waiting, as I,
For the message.
Prompt me, God;
But not yet. When I speak,
Though it be you who speak
Through me, something is lost.
The meaning is in the waiting.*

Books

- Night, Elie Wiesel
- God on Mute, Pete Greig
- Between the Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday, Alan E. Lewis

¹ R S Thomas, *Collected Poems*: R. S. Thomas