

62 A Hidden Starvation

Most of us live lives of great abundance: food, drink, possessions, pastimes, holidays - truly in many senses, "we have never had it so good!" as the saying goes.

Yet in the midst of all this visible plenty, there can also be the very opposite, an inner starvation. We refer here not to physical starvation, which sadly still affects many, but rather to more of a *spiritual* starvation - a starvation of stillness and silence.

We have so many helpful gadgets around us these days, each one designed to make our lives easier or more fulfilling. Televisions, mobile phones, laptops, apps, ipads, smartphones, ipods, radios, computer games – each one amazing, but each one also able to *starve us of stillness and silence*.

How easy it is to put on the radio, television or computer, or to reach for a newspaper or magazine, without a second thought. Now there is nothing *wrong* with any of these activities in themselves, but you can see how each of them, by their very presence, takes our attention, fills our time, and kills off stillness and silence. We often find it so difficult simply to *stop*, and become *still* and *silent*.

But our spiritual lives depend on such stillness and silence. It is only when we are *within* silence that we can become still enough to stop and listen, and the Holy Spirit can find us receptive enough to heed His still, small voice.

So how are you and I doing in terms of regular, personal stillness and silence?

"When you pray", the Lord tells us, "enter into your room and, shutting the door, pray to your Father in secret" (Matthew 6.6). This is about complete privacy, and freedom from the fear of being interrupted or overheard. It is about unhurriedness, about solitude, stillness and silence before the Lord.

Such a habit is vital for our spiritual health and growth. This reminds us of the old "Quiet Time" of evangelical spirituality. If this steady habit was beneficial when life was of a gentler pace, then how much more so is it for us today.

Perhaps you know of the reply of John Wesley, when he was asked about his prayer habits - "I always pray for two hours at the start of each day, unless I'm very busy of course – in which case I pray for four hours". Wesley had it right! The busier he was, the more he protected and treasured his time of stillness and silence spent consciously in the presence of the Lord.

On the eve of His selection of His twelve key disciples, Jesus spent the whole night in prayer (Luke 6.12). We are mistaken if we think that Jesus must have been *talking* the whole night through! For much of the time He was probably in complete silence and stillness in the conscious presence of his Father. The whole occasion was one of deep, unhurried, spiritual exchange between Father and Son, free from interruption or listening ears.

Our prayer times are most effective when "me doing the talking" is only the sideshow. A far higher plane of spiritual understanding is reached when **the Lord** is doing the talking, and we, for once, are doing the listening!

It is so helpful when our reading of God's Word and our saying of our prayers - two vital habits - can lead us on into that holier place, where we are consciously and silently in the very presence of Almighty God. It is when we are there that we instinctively fall still and silent, as we glimpse afresh something of the enormity and the utter holiness of the living God.

"Speak, Lord for thy servant heareth", were the words spoken by young Samuel (I Samuel 3.9). Old Eli finally realised what was going on, and had the sense to advise the boy what to do – namely, nothing much – and what to say – namely, very little! It was only because of Samuel's stillness and silence – a lesson he had to learn – that he was able to receive what the Lord was saying.

So you might care to ensure that your own spiritual habits are in good shape. And if they are not, then, by God's grace and enabling, you know what to do! May we jealously protect our times of stillness and silence. By doing that, we will cope so much more calmly and effectively with the noise, rush and busyness in the rest of our lives.

"Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46.10).

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