

## INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY GUIDE

### What Is *Silent God* About?

As Christians, many of us confront periods in our lives when God goes silent. For reasons that are unclear to us, we don't sense His loving, powerful presence as we once did. Although we are not in open rebellion against God, and although we've been following Him as best we know how, He seems more distant than ever, and our spiritual lives are dry. What is wrong? *Silent God: Finding Him When You Can't Hear His Voice* offers a fresh approach toward the pain and bewilderment—as well as the mystery and power—of intervals of God's silence in the Christian journey.

One of the reasons we may lose our sense of God's presence is the noise of our lives drowns Him out. We are bombarded by the physical noise from freeway traffic and televisions and other people's music and hundreds of other noises that assault us from morning to night, but even worse is the mental clutter that floods our brains in the form of e-mail, cell phones, media voices, Web sites, and many other sources. In one sense, we may love all this commotion. It makes us feel vibrant, connected. We may even become *addicted* to this buzz, constantly checking e-mail and cell phone messages and filling nearly every moment with *some* kind of sound. We do the same with our schedules, cramming in more and more, wearing our busyness as a badge of success and importance. As the noise in our lives accumulates, we don't deliberately block out God, but we simply find ourselves living in such a state of spiritual clamor that we lose the desire or ability to settle down and really commune with Him and listen to Him.

We are not powerless, however, to quiet the noise and reconnect with God. *Silent God* explores practical and valuable ways of getting the noise of our lives under control and reaching a state of spiritual sanity.

## SILENT GOD

Noise, however, does not explain every period of God's silence. This book also considers ways He uses silence to work out His spiritual purposes in our lives. The Christian life is full of comforting spiritual benefits and practices, but the danger is that our connection to the spiritual practices and habits may become stronger than our connection to God himself. These spiritual comforts begin not to *point* us to God but to *replace* Him. When we are truly following Christ, there are times when He yanks that flimsy scaffolding away from us. He is silent until He has our attention. We reach the place where we have nothing to rely on but Him alone. We face dangers during these painful periods, such as misinterpreting God's silence, turning to cynicism, or giving up on Him altogether. But when we hang on during these times, allowing Him to do His work, God's presence comes flooding back, and we emerge not only more spiritually mature but also amazed at the surprising ways in which He carries out His design in us.

### How This Guide May Help You

*Silent God* is well-suited for use in small groups, Sunday School, and for personal study. I have had the pleasure of teaching portions of the book to two different classes while I was writing it. I have written this guide to help you in your personal study or to lead a small group through these issues of God's silence. The book itself contains questions at the end of each chapter for discussion or reflection, and this guide provides additional suggestions for activities, questions, and examples that are not included in the book.

*1*

## CRYING OUT TO A SILENT, SLEEPING, HARD-OF-HEARING GOD?

### Key Questions and Activities

*Is God's voice growing fainter in our world?*

That question may be a good one to start your study of this book. What are the first impressions when asked that question? How would it be answered at this early point in the study?

Because the purpose of this chapter is simply to introduce the main issues the book will address, you may want to combine the study of this chapter with the next chapter if you are working in a group. The first chapter will help you establish the *relevance* of the issues of God's silence in people's lives. Here are some questions that may help you set the stage for what is to follow:

### When God Goes Silent

1. Read the scripture verses that begin this chapter. Did they surprise you? When the writer addresses God with complaints such as, "*Get up, GOD! Are you going to sleep all day?*" or "*GOD, don't shut me out; don't give me the silent treatment, O God,*" does that strike you as being too disrespectful toward God? What kind of relationship do you suspect the writer had with God in order to feel comfortable enough to be this blunt with Him? Do you ever speak that way to Him yourself?
2. Can you think of a specific time when you felt the depth of frustration with God's silence that is illustrated in the opening scriptures and in the excerpts from other psalms quoted near the end of this chapter? Think about that time. Did other people know you were in such a desperate state, or did you keep it to yourself? How did you handle it? What are other ways people

## SILENT GOD

sometimes handle such periods? Rebellion against God? Withdrawing from Him and from other Christians? Sinking into cynicism? The rest of this book will offer perspectives on ways to emerge from those times having grown deeper in your faith.

### **Bombarded by Noise!**

1. Review the first few pages of this chapter. How is *noise* defined in those pages? Make a list of the various ways that “noise” manifests itself in our lives.
2. After looking at your list, what spiritual impact do you think such noise may have on you? This book will examine the impact of noise in our lives as Christians and will show ways of quieting the noise that drowns out God’s voice.

### **Where This Study Is Headed**

From what you have read so far in this opening chapter, what stands out to you as the idea or question you most hope to explore in your study?

### **Key Quote**

“For some, disappointment or tragedy ushers in a period when God seems far off. His silence can descend on us during times of doubt and during times when we are running from Him. At other times we cannot point to any known cause of such a painful period. We have been following the Lord for years, but the closeness of His Spirit fades, and we feel spiritually stuck, adrift. The worship services, the music, the prayer that used to embody His presence now leave us cold. A cynicism may develop in us—toward the church, toward fellow believers, toward God himself. Where we

*A Guide for Personal or Group Study*

once were full participants in the Body of Christ, we now stand aloof and set ourselves up as critics of all things Christian. We get good at pointing out all the flaws in the church and in other believers.”

**Key Scripture**

“GOD, don’t shut me out; don’t give me the silent treatment, O God” (Ps. 83:1, TM).