

Why is God So Quiet?

June 11, 2005

Introduction:

SLOW Illustration 1:

In Mungonero in Western Rwanda, there is a Seventh-day Adventist Church and Hospital Complex.

On the 14th and 15th of April 1994, during the genocide, Tutsi's were encouraged by their church pastor to seek refuge from what was taking place around the country as the Hutu's butchered their countryman mercilessly. Over a 48 hour period over 2,000 people crowded into that church praying for protection and safety.

A group of junior pastors sent a letter to the senior pastor of the church seeking assurance that the people would be alright. A reply came back from the Seventh-day Adventist pastor – "You must be eliminated, God no longer wants you."

The following day, local citizens and soldiers went into that church and butchered every last one of them with guns and machete. The slaying were on all day. To make sure they had got them all they fired in tear gas to make the people cry so they know whether they were alive or not.

Where was God? Why didn't he stop that?

SLOW Illustration 2:

About 7 years ago in the Alstonville Church there was an eight year old boy that contracted Leukemia, Nathan Thompson was his name.

His parents were godly people.

They followed biblical instruction on health principles

They had both grown up in Seventh-day Adventist homes and were active in their church

Nathan was a godly child.

He had a knowledge, a trust, and a hope in God well beyond his years.

He was baptized.

During the period of the disease the mood of the church was measured by the state of health of little Nathan.

Many special prayer sessions were held for Nathan

There was confidence,

There was faith,

There was full assurance that there would be a miracle wrought

How could it be God's will that this child die?

HE DIED AT AGE 10.

More than 5 years after his death there are still members of that church that stand on a very insecure base for the faith as a result of the seeming disinterest of God in the healing of Nathan.

One Christian that hosts a national radio program in the United States put it this way:

SLOW “I have no trouble believing God is good. My question is more, What good is he? I heard a while back that Billy Graham’s daughter was undergoing marriage problems, so the Graham’s and the in-laws all flew to Europe to meet with them and pray for the couple. They ended up getting divorced anyway. If Billy Graham’s prayers aren’t answered, what’s the use of my praying? I look at my life – the health problems, my own daughter’s struggles, my marriage. I cry out to God for help, and it is hard to know just how He answers. Really, what can we count on God for?”

Do those sort of questions never get asked in the Seventh-day Adventist church?
It’s not just, why do bad things happen to good people....it is why is God so quiet – why doesn’t He intervene?
Why don’t we have some super broadband access to a heavenly chat room to be able to talk about this stuff?

David had the same problem:

SLOW “Unto thee will I cry, O LORD my rock; be not silent to me: lest, if thou be **silent** to me, I become like them that go down into the pit. Hear the voice of my supplications, when I cry unto thee, when I lift up my hands toward thy holy oracle.”
Psalm 28:1,2

Job had the same problem:

"I cry out to you, O God, but you do not answer; I stand up, but you merely look at me. Have I not wept for those in trouble? Has not my soul grieved for the poor? Yet when I hoped for good, evil came; when I looked for light, then came darkness. The churning inside me never stops; days of suffering confront me."
Job 30:20,25-27 (NIV)

“Even when I call out or cry for help, he shuts out my prayer.
I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is.
So I say, "My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the LORD."
Lamentations 3:8,17,18 (NIV)

Over the next three Sabbath’s I have hear I want to try and provide, to the best of my ability, and to the extent of understanding that God reveals, some answers to these sort of perplexing questions.

I want to explore a few reasons why God may seem silent, or may in fact, be purposely silent.

I don’t have all the answers, but that does not mean we should shy away from the difficulty of the question.

Body:

1. Silence is not absence

SLOW In order to give an understanding of the first principle, let me illustrate.

My wife had a great deal of trouble with me early in our relationship. We did not have a lot of conflict, but whenever we did have conflict it was either over microwave mushrooms or my lack of communication.

I am basically a pretty quiet guy,
I have never been extroverted, and any little attempts to try and be have always ended in profound embarrassment.

Initially, Vanessa found that pretty hard to deal with.

“TALK TO ME”

“When you are silent, I feel that you are distant and don’t care.”

“When you are silent, I feel that you are absent”

The truth of the matter was, that if there was any sport to be heard any where near our conversation, I was actually absent from the conversation.

But at other times, I was fully engrossed in the moment, but just with less words.

In dealing with God’s silence, we shouldn’t mistake his silence for absence.

Complete comfort in a relationship allows silence – are we that comfortable with God?

Allowing God to be silent, knowing that He still loves us.

SLOW Let’s go back to those passages from the bible that we looked at at the start of the service:

Ø David, in Psalm 28, after pleading with God not to be silent, affirms his trust in God and has confidence in the fact that he is heard in verses 6,7

Ø Job in Job 27 (the start of his discourse) says:

"As surely as God lives, who has denied me justice, the Almighty, who has made me taste bitterness of soul, as long as I have life within me, the breath of God in my nostrils, my lips will not speak wickedness, and my tongue will utter no deceit. will never admit you are in the right; till I die, I will not deny my integrity. I will maintain my righteousness and never let go of it; my conscience will not reproach me as long as I live.

Job 27:2-6

Ø Jeremiah says in Lamentations:

“Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

Lamentations 3:21-23

Ø Glen shared with us last week on Friday night a Greek word found in Revelation 14:12,

SLOW Here is the patience of the saints - hupomone

“the characteristic of a man who is not swerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings. ¹”

God cares – He is not absent.

We have to believe the promises of the bible

- Cast all your cares on him, for he careth for you 1 Peter 5:7
- Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavily laden Matthew 11:28,29
- Ye shall find rest unto your souls
- “Yea I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee”
Jeremiah 31:3

SLOW You know why God has to hide and be silent sometimes?

To allow us to maintain our power of choice – in a couple of sermons time I want to look at this whole question from the Great Controversy perspective, but at this time suffice it to say that:

God seems to be in a difficult position:

1. If He is too active in human affairs Satan could raise the accusation that people are only loving God for the insurance policy, the protection, the material gifts that that relationship brings
2. On the other hand, if God is too silent, human conclude that He doesn't care.

So the intervention of God in human affairs must be measured – but be reassured that He is always there.

SLOW You know, my daughter is the worst Hide-and-Seek player. I count and I hear her giggling all the way to the hiding spot. She then continues to shuffle and giggle. I act as if I can't find her and say, “Is Lucy in the cupboard” And she says, “NO!” Is she is under the bed? NO!”

Why does she make so much noise? Because the joy is in the finding, not the hiding.

And although God has to be careful, I think He is also like that. He likes to leave a lot of clues around to tell us how to find Him.

If you don't want to pick up on those clues, let me give you some suggestions:

1. Avoid silence
2. Avoid solitude
3. Concentrate on money, career, and status or your grievances
4. Always keep the radio and TV on
5. Read everything but the bible
6. Play a lot of video games
7. Have a mobile wherever you go

¹Strong, J. 1996. *The exhaustive concordance of the Bible : Showing every word of the test of the common English version of the canonical books, and every occurrence of each word in regular order.* (electronic ed.) . Woodside Bible Fellowship.: Ontario

2. Silence checks our trust level –

SLOW There is a time that God has to let us go, to help us grow.

In the last 12 months Lucy has learned to ride her two wheeler – without the trainer wheels.

As any parent knows learning to ride a bike includes letting go of the seat. You have to test the faith of the child to believe that you will be right behind them jogging along ready to grab them if they fall.

It would look ridiculous for me to be running along holding the seat when she is 30. There has to come a point of testing the trust level.

SLOW We have to have confidence that God knows what is going on:

“Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:” Isaiah 46:9,10

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”
1 Corinthians 10:13

Often the most powerful are achieved through the simplest people.

In another slaying inside a Seventh-day Adventist church in Rwanda, there was a lady that was in the church with her husband, and family seeking refuge.

The Hutu's came with their machetes and she witnessed the death of her husband, and saw the face of the man that did it. He also mutilated her including a large slash across her face that opened her up.

She lay still but conscious until the murderous gang felt that had killed all.

She managed to get help and slowly but surely recovered.

Not long after the war ended she decided she would go and visit the man that she had seen cut her husband to pieces.

She was allowed into the prison and talked to him of the forgiveness of God, and told him that she had forgiven him. She continued to visit him and ministered to his needs in that prison.

She befriended him, took him meals, prayed with him and for him.

Eventually that murderer was released from prison, and this humble Christian lady adopted him as her son.

It wasn't God's will that almost 1 million people die in Rwanda – but for those having unfailing trust in a God that knows the end from the beginning – great things can still happen despite the pain and suffering.

SLOW George Everett Ross makes the following point:

“There are two kinds of faith. One says “If”, the other says “Though” One says: “If everything goes well, if my life is prosperous, if I am happy, if no one I love dies, if I’m successful, then I will believe in God and say my prayers and go to church and give what I can afford.” The other says: “though my wife has left me, though I have been diagnosed with cancer, though I seem to struggle with discouragement, though the plans I made for my life are not working out – nevertheless, precisely then , I will trust the Lord who made me. Job could cry out “Though he slay me, yet will I trust him.”

Two often our prayers are “Lord take me out of this trial” when our prayers ought to be “Give me the strength to endure this trial and grow in it.”

SLOW The more you know someone the better you ability to trust them, but also in order to get to know someone you have to trust them.

I used to like long distance running as a younger man. I did a few City to Surf runs in the early 1990’s.

In 1994 I was determined to break an hour for the 14 kilometre course and had been training hard in the cold of the Bathurst winter (the City to Surf is run in August) My wife and I had been married a little over a year, known each other for about four years. We pride ourselves on being pretty punctual people.

The arrangement was for me to finish the run, catch a train to Hornsby station and she would pick me up. I finished the run, got national TV coverage staggering around, had a near death experience and was placed on an IV drip for half an hour to sort me out.

Meanwhile Vanessa is sitting on Hornsby station waiting for me.

The fact that she knew me well and trusted me, meant that when I did not turn up on time, she knew something was seriously wrong.

She did not cast me off and stop loving me because I wasn’t there – the strength of our relationship meant that she continued to love me even though I wasn’t there.

The stronger our relationship with God, the more our faith has been tested by silence, the more we are able to trust and love knowing that we are in a strong relationship with a God that loves us.

SLOW Maybe our life needs to be complicated in certain ways to make it strong. We need to trust God with a level of wisdom to know the complications that are right for us.

And develop that bedrock of faith that is a constant in a challenging and increasingly messy world.

Conclusion:

A few weeks ago when I was at Jindabyne, I walked to the top of Mount Kosciusko. The difficulty of the 9 kilometre walk to the summit was worth the experience on the top.

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;

2 Corinthians 4:17

The challenges on the way are worth it to get to the view at the top.