

# Silence and Reflection

*'We need to recover an oasis of silence within the rhyme and reason of our active life, for it is in the silence that we meet God face to face.'*

– Max Picard.

*'You must come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while.'*

– Mark 6:31

But how comfortable are we with silence and stillness? How often are we alone in a quiet place?

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## The Big Silence

A recent three part BBC series, *The Big Silence*, followed five 'ordinary' people as they stayed in a retreat centre for eight days of silence under the direction of a Benedictine abbot.

The participants seemed both optimistic and fearful about what their days of silence would bring and what they would find when the noise and clutter of the world is stripped away. Gradually the silence grew on them, and even led to serious moments of spiritual enlightenment. John (54), a businessman who started the retreat being anti-religious, eventually invited Jesus into his life. Trish, an extrovert mum and Carrie learned to come to terms with the deaths of their fathers. Helen, who had just turned fifty, got a lot out of it on a human level but wasn't quite ready for God. David who worked in a restaurant, and was so busy he couldn't attend the first day of the introductory weekend, remarked that he was reflecting more and more deeply as the days progressed.

In the last episode, each participant had to bring their newfound experience of the value of silence back into the 'real' world. They eventually found space for silence in their daily lives. Carrie, the only believer at the start of the series, was baptised, Trish started going to Mass, John decided to wind down his business and do a degree in counselling and Helen went regularly to church services. David, after initially quitting his job because of the long hours, found a less drastic solution – working some night-time reflection into his daily routine.

The programme was moving, challenging, and inspirational – these were people that started the series with lives that many people would describe as normal but busy, yet in their search for some meaning they, to their own surprise, found it in the Big Silence.

1. Why do you think the silence was frightening for the participants at first?

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2. How successful do you think they would be in continuing their appreciation of quiet reflective time when they get back to their own lives?

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Everyone needs a place of stillness beyond the routine of everyday life. For many people, Christian meditation offers just that. Practised for thousands of years, meditation is now recognised as incredibly relevant to people's lives today.

- ▶ Sit comfortably with your back straight and both feet on the floor
- ▶ Close your eyes lightly
- ▶ Sit as still as possible
- ▶ Breathe deeply, staying both relaxed and alert
- ▶ Stay focused on this. When thoughts enter your mind acknowledge them and let them pass
- ▶ Remain in this position for 5 minutes
- ▶ Slowly open your eyes and bring your attention back to class.

**Discuss**

What did you find worked well for you?

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Would you be able to improve this exercise with practice?

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