

when all we hear is silence

being found by God
in tough times

Though you have made me see troubles,
many and bitter,
you will restore my life again;
from the depths of the earth
you will again bring me up.

Psalms 71:20

At times we all wonder where God is. Our prayers bounce off the ceiling; no one seems to be listening. Our lives have troubles, but God is nowhere to be seen. We call out to God, and it seems like all we hear is silence.

Recently, a young woman wearing a headscarf came to our church with some friends. She was in the midst of chemotherapy for an aggressive cancer. All through the service she was agitated and obviously not at ease. In the end she got up and left long before the service finished. Her friends apologised afterwards. She was struggling, angry with God and not sure how to deal with him. Her faith had been the centre of her life, Jesus the source of her identity, but now she doubted God's love and did not know who she was any more.

Many react in similar ways – maybe you have been at that point yourself. Why would God, who loves and cares for you, let you go through whatever you are facing?

In psalm after psalm you see a repeated refrain: 'where are you God, why have you forgotten us?' Psalm 71 reminds us that God does not change – when he seems far off he is, in fact, near. When he seems silent, he is present.

However, he does call on us to wait on him. Israel waited four hundred years of divine silence after the last prophets spoke; they endured occupation and defeat. Yet at the end of that long wait, Jesus appeared. The God of the universe did not just speak, he came and made his dwelling among them (John 1:14)!

I have faced such long, dry seasons myself. In my twenties I spent many years in the spiritual wilderness. I was not sure if God cared for me and was not convinced by what other Christians told me about him. I struggled with suffering (both my own and that of friends, colleagues and patients). But over the years, several Christians came alongside me, and through living out their faith authentically I began to find my way back to God. Or, more precisely, I began to allow God to find this prodigal son and bring him home. Those wilderness years taught me patience, both with God and with those who struggle and doubt.

We all go through dry seasons, waiting seasons and hard seasons that test us, soul and body, to the limit. You may be in one right now. But God has not changed, he has not given up on you, however it seems.

You may be on solid ground right now, but know others struggling and weighed down. Will you be that faithful friend, colleague or nurse who waits patiently and helps another find their way towards spiritual restoration in the midst of suffering?

Faith is not an easy certainty, but a struggle. However, it is not a solitary struggle, but one faced in the midst of family. 🌱