

July 2008—*Where Is God in the Silence?*

There are times in our spiritual lives when God is silent and seemingly absent. In some cases this can be God's way of getting our attention about certain sins that we are blind to. But in others, the reason is not clear, and the experience of His silence can be disorienting and painful.

In *A Grief Observed*, C.S. Lewis tells us about such an experience he had while in profound grief after the death of his wife, Joy:

Meanwhile, where is God? This is one of the most disquieting symptoms. When you are happy, so happy that you have no sense of needing Him, so happy that you are tempted to feel His claims upon you as an interruption, if you remember yourself and turn to Him with gratitude and praise, you will be—or so it feels—welcomed with open arms. But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. You may as well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will be come. There are no lights in the windows. It might be an empty house. Was it ever inhabited? It seemed so once. And that seeming was as strong as this. What can this mean? Why is He so present a commander in our time of prosperity and so very absent a help in time of trouble?

I tried to put some of these thoughts to C. this afternoon. He reminded me that the same thing seems to have happened to Christ: 'Why hast thou forsaken me?' I know. Does that make it easier to understand?

Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him. The conclusion I dread is not 'So there's no God after all,' but 'So this is what God's really like. Deceive yourself no longer.'¹

As we see with Lewis, people who are well-grounded in the faith and strongly committed to Christ can have times when God seems very distant. At such times, there are real dangers to our souls—we are vulnerable to feeling forsaken and to reacting with wrong thoughts about Him and wrong attitudes toward Him. At such times, it is important to refuse the temptation to give up on God. Because C.S. Lewis did not give up, in time he was able to say, "I have gradually been coming to feel that the door is no longer shut and bolted."² He came to see that God's silence during his grief was not a sign of indifference, cruelty, or abandonment. Rather, God had been at work for good in his life in ways he could not sense or imagine—bringing him into a deeper experience of the Lord than he had ever known before.

Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall! My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

LAMENTATIONS 3:19-23 ESV

¹C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996), pp. 5-7.

²Ibid, p. 46.