



RAUS AUS DEM INNEREN HAMSTERRAD

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During the years of my training at the theological seminary, I often took time to discuss my concerns with God on long prayer walks. There was a path right next to the tracks of a busy railway line that I often took; when I was feeling well, but especially when I wasn't feeling so well. Whenever a train passed by, there was so much noise that you could really call out to God - unheard by others - and really "let off steam", so to speak. "Can you talk to God like that?" you might be asking. But certainly, just read the Psalms. They are full of vociferous prayers in which people unabashedly and honestly let God know what was bothering them. However, I loved these times and often travelled there, especially as I was able to escape the sometimes very cramped boarding school life (without much privacy) and thus maintain my inner mental balance. Today, these hours would probably be called quality time.

A SPIRITUAL QUALITY TIME

Et was only after a while that I realised what made these times of prayer so precious and special to me: When I had a lot on my mind, I often went on very long prayer walks. There was also a lot to talk about. That's why it sometimes happened that

I was still miles away from home, but I had finished praying, so to speak. I had told God everything I wanted to lay out before him. So I made my way back in silence, at best praying quietly in new languages, but mostly I just kept quiet. And then something marvellous often happened. It was as if God had waited until I was finally finished. In a gentlemanly manner, he simply let me finish and waited patiently until - yes, until I was silent. And then he often began to speak to me. Sometimes it was simply a deep inner peace coupled with the certainty that he cared about my concerns. Sometimes it was a spontaneous idea that came to my mind about how to solve a big problem. Other times, however, it was also a direct answer to my prayer, to my urgent questions.

I can still remember one such experience very clearly. It was in the spring of 1992, when I was 26 years old and about to complete my training at the theological seminary. I was thinking a lot about the future. Above all, however, I was tormented by the fact that I still didn't have a girlfriend, even in my mid-20s. I had been unhappily in love in the past, but so far I just hadn't found a suitable partner. I was really frustrated, moping around and had a real emotional breakdown. So I decided to have a serious word with God about it. As usual, I took a long, very long walk to tell God about my concerns, sometimes loudly in the noise of the trains rushing past. Eventually I was through and simply didn't know what else to pray. Everything had been said. So I set off - in silence - on the long walk back through the fields and small woods. I was almost at my destination, I could already see the houses and the railway station of the village where I lived, when I felt as if I heard

I heard a voice deep inside: "Don't worry, be patient and trust me. Next year will be the time!" Suddenly a deep peace filled my heart and my thoughts. My frustration and worries suddenly fell away from me. It was the end of my goal panic. I knew that I knew that I knew - that everything would be alright. God would take care of it and guide me properly. And in *his* time, I would most certainly meet the right woman. I walked the last kilometre exhilarated and with a song on my lips. And what can I say? I had this experience in the spring of 1992. Almost exactly one year later, on 3 March 1993 (I had almost forgotten the experience of the year before), I met my Marion in Berlin. In a few weeks we will have been married for 30 years. But that's another story. Since then, I keep thinking about this beautiful experience and how God often speaks to us in solitude and silence. Silence is the key word. In Psalm 46 we read a very interesting statement:

PSALM 46:11 "Be still and know that I am God."

In other translations, instead of "Be still", this passage reads: "Cease, desist, cease your rebellion". This describes our typical human behaviour quite well. We often make a lot of noise and commotion, get caught up in hectic activity and are determined to get our way. Especially when we are disorientated and don't know what to do next and then fall into panic mode. But this is how we often fail to hear God. The fact that we don't hear God is often simply because we don't really listen, but not because he says nothing and remains silent. He often doesn't speak at all!

I recently read an article in the newspaper. It reported on a new business idea that is currently an unexpected and incredible success in the USA: the so-called 'dumbphone', i.e. the exact opposite of the smartphone. With the dumbphone, all you can do is make phone calls! There is no display and no internet, no apps, no social networks and no games. What a great idea! People long for peace and quiet, they just want to switch off again, they want to escape the noise, the loud noise and the constant sound. I believe that God has created this longing in them. He wants to speak to us humans, but because there is this constant noise storm around us - and within us - he can hardly be understood.

TIME OF SILENCE - SILENT TIME ...

V few years ago, Marion and I travelled through southern Norway. We also travelled to the Hardangervidda. This is a huge, lonely area of high moorland. There are no villages or towns and only one road runs through it. This road

leads to a hotel for hikers. It is the starting point for many hikes and hikes in this plateau. The Hardangervidda is probably the loneliest and therefore quietest area in the whole of Europe. There are no sounds of civilisation, no trees, no birds - just pure nature! There is an incredible silence there. If you spend time in this area, you must observe a few rules. For example, it is strongly advised not to hike there alone. Not only because you would otherwise be alone in the event of an accident, which can be life-threatening. There is one reason in particular why people are warned against being alone: it is so quiet there that you can hear your own blood running through your veins and many a tourist cannot stand such silence and goes crazy, having a nervous breakdown. You might be laughing now. It may be that you long for silence instead of the constant clamour of children or the constant stress of work and leisure. But are you really sure that you can stand silence and loneliness?

Perhaps you feel the same way as a well-known US television preacher. His services were always loud and always accompanied by large choirs. There was hardly ever a moment of peace, always just action, always accompanied by music. One day, a friend took him on a hike in the Rocky Mountains. After a few hours, they came to a clearing in the forest. The friend asked the preacher to wait there for a moment: "We'll stop here and I'll get some firewood so we can make ourselves a nice coffee!" Says, walked off and left the preacher alone in the clearing. To be on the safe side, he stayed nearby and hid behind a bush to see what would happen. The preacher later reported that the sudden total silence just fell over him and overwhelmed him. He panicked and

The sweat of fear stood on his forehead. He simply couldn't stand it, couldn't bear this silence. The friend didn't torment our preacher for too long and stepped back into the clearing, relieving him of the silence in this desolate place. But what can I say: since then, there have been regular times of silence in this preacher's meetings. We modern city dwellers first have to learn to endure silence, but also times of boredom. Because only then can we find inner peace so that God has the chance to really get through to us.

In my youth, in many churches, church services and youth classes, it was emphasised that as a good Christian you should have regular 'quiet time'. Preferably in the morning, directly after getting up. This strict concept of personal Bible reading and regular prayer was always somehow repugnant to me. I often tortured myself with pure discipline through this pious exercise. I was a real morning grouch. But it was rarely edifying, rather annoying and exhausting. But today I'm beginning to realise that I simply had my focus wrong: I thought it was simply about an important exercise in pious self-discipline. This is of course a very good thing, no question about it. But the quiet time was stylised as a purely compulsory exercise, it was only about diligence and discipline - not about joy, strength for the day and enjoyment. In short: my actions, my reading, my prayer and my performance were at the centre of it. Ultimately, it was all about me, not about God. Quiet time, time of silence, however, simply means: stopping doing, letting go of "doing"; it means: listening and actively listening. Quiet time means: being completely in the now, engaging with God, consciously waiting for him, coming to rest before him, seeking him and really listening attentively. In this personal place of silence, in the "secluded chamber" (Matthew 6:6), new strength and energy flows to us (see: Psalm 102:5), where a deep trust in God develops and grows. In silence we hear him, we get to know God personally and from heart to heart (see: 1 Kings 19:11-13).

COME, YOURSELVES ALONE, TO A DESOLATE PLACE

Jesus was very often travelling with his disciples or apostles and ministering to people. There was always something going on, people were constantly coming and going in and out of his camp. Sometimes there were whole crowds of people who wanted to hear Jesus, be healed by him or wanted to have a personal word with him. From time to time, Jesus also sent his disciples - always in pairs - to the neighbouring villages to preach, heal the sick and set the captives free. In Mark 6, we are told how one day they returned from one of these missions. Tired and exhausted, but also happy and a little proud, they told Jesus all that they had done and taught. There was a constant coming and going at the time, so they didn't even have time to eat. So hectic, stress and hustle and bustle already existed in antiquity, it is not a modern phenomenon. Service for Jesus and full commitment: yes, absolutely! But certainly not to the point of burnout. That's not what God had in mind. And so Jesus hits the brakes here. He knows: now is the time for rest! So what does Jesus do?

MARK 6:31 And he said to them: Come ye yourselves alone into a desolate place, and rest a while.

Three things stand out in this verse. There are three important keys that will help us to live powerfully over the long haul and to hear God's voice more clearly and distinctly:

1. "COME, YOURSELVES, ALONE!"

To really find peace and quiet, you need to retreat into temporary and consciously sought solitude. I'm not talking about isolation and a retreat out of frustration. That is not what is meant. What is meant is a personal time alone with God. Jesus says: Go into your room, close the door behind you and pray to your Father (Matthew 6:6). The world continues to turn without you. Allow yourself these times! St Paul also recommends this to married couples, for example, saying:

1. CORINTHIANS 7:5 Do not withdraw yourselves from one another, except by agreement for a time, that you may devote yourselves to fasting and prayer.

'Withdrawal' or silence here means a time without distraction (which is what fasting essentially means). A time dedicated solely to listening prayer and reserved solely for God and his word.

2. "IN A DESOLATE PLACE" (I.E. WITHOUT MOBILE PHONES AND SOCIAL MEDIA)

There's always something to do, tidy up or take care of at home. Our mobile phones, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram and co. are constantly vying for our attention. The distraction is huge. Putting it all aside can lead to real 'withdrawal symptoms' for some people, such is our dependence on it.

MATTHEW 6:6-8 But when you pray, go into your closet and shut the door, and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. When you pray, do not babble like people who do not know God. They think that they will be heard if they use many words. Don't do like them! For your Father knows what you need even before you ask him.

A 'desolate place' means that I withdraw from it, retreat, go into my 'chamber' and lock it behind me. Perhaps your chamber is a forest, a park, the beach ... Create your own personal 'desolate' and 'closed chamber', away from all the hustle and bustle.

3. "REST A LITTLE ..."

"Rest!" Jesus says to the diligent! Diligence is an important virtue. A commitment with all your heart and with all your strength, the willingness to really work yourself to the bone, all this has its time. But there is also a suitable time for stillness and "silence before God", as it says in Ecclesiastes 3.

PREDIGER 3:1-11 Everything that happens on earth has its God-ordained time: ... keep silent and speak ... God has predestined a time for everything, at which he does it; and everything he does is perfect.

OUT OF THE INNER HAMSTER WHEEL

Dhe silence before God carries weight. These times are so precious and so important. They refresh the inner person. The 'secluded little chamber', wherever it is, is your place of strength, your 'refuelling station'. There you can really 'come down' and recharge your batteries. Dare to So - trusting in God - consciously switch off the noise and the hectic pace for once, get off the hamster wheel of hectic activity and consciously switch off from time to time:

- the demands and requirements of other people,
- the chatter of TikTok and WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram,
- the addictive, candy-coloured games,
- but also to escape the feeling of their own importance and indispensability,
- and to escape the shrill, loud, energy-sapping 'thorn bush' of brooding, worrying thoughts (see Matthew 13:22). None of this really gets you anywhere, it doesn't help you.

How does your trust in God grow? Through times of silence before God and in the times that you spend only with him and in which you give him all your undivided attention:

PSALM 62:2 Only in God does my soul quietly trust; from him comes my help.

So overcome your 'inner bastard', jump over your shadow and dare to get off the inner hamster wheel. You will be amazed at how clearly you can hear God and clearly hear his voice - if only you learn to really listen to him properly.

PSALM 46:11/YESAIAH 30:15 "Be still and know that HE is God. (...) For thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel: By repentance and rest you will be saved. In quietness and in trust is your strength.

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