



2.15.26...Is God Distant or Near? | Psalm 22:1-2, Psalm 13:1-6

“Well, where is God...if he’s alive? And why doesn’t he speak anymore?”

That harsh line is spoken by Mrs. Coulter played by Nicole Kidman, the villain in *His Dark Materials*—Philip Pullman’s often-described *Chronicles of Narnia* for atheists.

But how can we expect a good word on God from Mrs. Coulter. If someone doesn’t believe in God, it’s not surprising they don’t hear from God.

That one’s pretty easy to dismiss.

Ten years after Mother Teresa died, a collection of her private writings was published under the title *Come Be My Light*. What shocked the world was not her devotion or her years of faithfulness, what shocked everyone was her honesty.

For decades—decades—she wrote about feeling God’s absence. She described living in what Christians have long called the dark night of the soul: seasons when God feels distant, silent, unreachable. Mother Teresa struggled with this for nearly 65 years.

And the question is hard, hits close to home.

Because I’ve had people look me in the eye and ask, “Amy, I don’t hear God like you do. I’ve never heard his voice. I’ve never sensed his presence. Why doesn’t God speak to me?”

I know at least one confirmation student who quietly wonders if maybe—someday—maybe, Jesus will feel less distant. They hope faith will make sense later, because right now God feels far away and silent.

Scripture gives voice to these experiences.

Psalm 13 cries out: “How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?”

And from the cross, Jesus himself prays these haunting words of Psalm 22: “Eli, Eli, lema sabachtani?” “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

It is startling and at the same time deeply comforting that this question lives at the heart of our faith. Even Jesus asked it.

I know I have asked it.

I asked it sitting beside my mother as cancer slowly took her life, while praying for healing that never came.

I asked it again watching my brother die piece by piece over twenty-five years as alcoholism finally claimed him.

In those moments, God felt painfully silent. I didn't get answers. I didn't feel comfort, only emptiness. And I still wonder, Where were you, where are you God in all this pain of grief and loss?

Maybe you've asked that question too.

After a diagnosis no one expected. After losing a child. After a marriage ended or a spouse passed away. After the job ended and the money ran out. After prayers stretched on for years with no reply.

Sometimes God feels silent when Scripture feels dry, or worship songs end up feeling hollow. Or when prayer feels like it hits the ceiling and falls back into your lap. Long nights of talking to yourself.

And then the questions come: "Is God absent? Have I been forgotten?" Or even, "Why keep hoping, why keep trying"?

Psalm 34 says: The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. But when God feels hidden and absent, we wonder—Really? Are you?

So, what do we believe about God when he remains silent and seems so distant? Is God distant or near to us?

I appreciate this question as we approach Lent this week. Lent, a season of repentance, reflection, and longing. Scripture invites us not to resolve that question too quickly, but to bring it honestly before God.

Do you know why our Bibles include psalms of anger, doubt, despair, and protest?

Because God can handle the truth. God can handle our honesty and our pain.

Lamb asked his Christian college students, “What might a Christian say if they saw another Christian hanging on a cross and crying out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”

Here are three responses that were well-meaning but just so painful.

“You shouldn’t talk like that. The book of Romans tells us that nothing can separate us from the love of God.”

Or, “Don’t be so discouraged. Gabriel told Mary that nothing is impossible with God.”

And, “It can’t be that bad. The prophet Jeremiah tells you that God knows the plans he has for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you.”

Lamb wondered why do we often quote “happy” passages at people who are in pain?

When Jesus was on the cross, he didn’t focus on happy scriptures. Jesus lamented, mourned and grieved.

And if Jesus can express his pain, can give voice to his pain, so can we.

Maybe God is remaining silent because there is stuff we need to get off our chests?

Maybe we need to get honest with ourselves and God and pour it out in prayer?

Or think about the way relationships work at their deepest level. When a relationship is shallow, it needs constant words, constant reassurance, constant noise.

But when a relationship matures, silence can become a shared space rather than a threat. Two people who deeply trust one another can sit in silence without fear, without panic, without needing to fill the space.

There is something else Scripture quietly teaches us about God’s silence: Silence is not the same thing as abandonment.

In Scripture, silence often appears at moments of transition—between promise and fulfillment, between prayer and resurrection. There are 400 years of silence between Malachi and Matthew. No prophets. No fresh word. Just waiting.

And yet, God was not gone. God was preparing something the world had never seen.

We often assume that if God is not speaking, nothing is happening. We get bored so easily.

But the biblical story suggests the opposite: sometimes the most important work God does happens underground, unseen, unheard, growing quietly until the right moment.

Think of a tree. Long before you see height or fruit, roots have to grow—deep and wide enough to support what will eventually rise above the surface.

If the roots aren't strong, the tree can't stand.

In the same way, God often uses quiet, unseen seasons to deepen us, forcing our roots of faith to go deep into God. All to strengthen what's below the surface so that what comes later can endure.

So, when God feels silent, it may not be because you are failing.

It may be because God is forming something in you that words alone cannot produce—trust, endurance, honesty, a deeper kind of faith that does not depend on constant reassurance.

Silence does not mean God is finished. Sometimes it means God is still at work and new growth is just around the corner.

It might be helpful to review these three reasons why God remained silent in the Old Testament.

First, he knew his people well. God knew they were stiff necked, basically unwilling to be led.

An ox that is stiff necked does not follow the directions of the farmer. Likewise, a nation that is stiff necked or stubborn does not obey the commands of their God. So, they would need to be corrected, a lot.

A more relevant question would be, "Why couldn't the Israelites just control themselves and do what God asked them to do?" Problem solved. Our Bibles would be so much thinner.

Second, Yahweh wanted His people to realize that their sinful tendencies were a serious problem. Yahweh is holy, and their lack of holiness would have significant consequences.

They didn't think their sins were a problem.

How much do we worry about our own sins?

And third, Yahweh wanted them to want him. God felt the silence and abandonment from his people. Their behavior suggested that they didn't want him around.

Yahweh is not like a clinging boyfriend or girlfriend. God is not like someone who doesn't pick up the hints that the relationship is over.

God knows when to keep silent if we aren't listening or caring enough to seek God.

Sometimes God's silence is not because God is angry. Instead, silence is an invitation.

An invitation to stop performing faith, stop going through the motions and start telling the truth. To pour out what we've been holding in. To name our grief, anger, disappointment, and longing.

Yes, Scripture does tell us that at times God was silent because Israel was stubborn, careless with sin, or resistant to being led. Sometimes silence is corrective. But that is not always the reason.

Jesus was not stiff-necked. Mother Teresa was not casual about sin. Lament is not failure—it is faith refusing to let go.

And here is where the story turns, where things get really interesting.

When I first picked up this book, this is the one thing that got me and prompted me to choose it for us. It was when Lamb explained how God wants to be addressed.

The Bible first addresses God as "God" with the word "Elohim", using that word 2,600 times in the Old Testament.

God is also called "Adon" or "Adoni" meaning "Lord" at over 400 times in the Old Testament.

When God reveals himself to Moses, he does not say, "Call me by a title."

Instead, God shared his name was YHWH and it is as close to a personal name as God has revealed to us in the Old Testament.

God told Moses in Exodus chapters 3 and 15 that "this is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation"

This name would distinguish Israel's God from all false gods.

Yahweh. Not "God." Not "Lord."

God's name as Yahweh is used over 6,800 times in Scripture.

The God of the universe invites us into a first-name basis.

The God of the Universe doesn't even make us say, "Mr. Yahweh"? It doesn't seem respectful enough.

But for us to say "Yahweh" is to encourage: You are with us. You are for us. It affirms God is not distant or done speaking, even when we cannot hear.

So, what do we do when God feels silent, distant, hidden?

We keep showing up. We keep speaking honestly. And we remember that the God who sometimes feels far away is the same God who gave us his first name.

The silence does not mean God has left. It does not mean you have failed. It does not mean your faith is weak.

Sometimes the silence is simply the only space where trust is more deeply formed, where honesty grows, where relationship matures. A space where God invites us to stop pretending and start telling the truth.

As we enter Lent next week, we are not asked to have it all figured out. We are invited to draw near just as we are, even with questions, even with doubts, even with pain.

Because the God who knows your name wants you to know his, and to use it.

And even when God feels hidden, Yahweh is still here—with you, for you, and closer than your next breath. Amen.

Time of Reflection:

If God feels silent in your life right now, what might God be inviting you to bring honestly into the relationship—anger, trust, repentance, grief or simply your presence?

And how might God be inviting you to bring that into this season of Lent?