

Silence

By [Diane Roth](#)

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Once a month, on Monday evenings, I was worshiping at a new service at my husband's church. There is no sermon at this worship service. There are no hymns, but the service does open and close with a meditative chorus. There is instrumental music in the background. There are two or three short scripture readings. There is plenty of silence between the scripture readings.

The point of the service is prayer: prayer and silence. There are prayer stations and candles and places to write down your prayers and invitations to pray with one of the pastors. When entering the sanctuary, each worshiper gets a page of worship and prayer helps, including some printed prayers and some quotes regarding the value of taking time away from the noisiness of the world for a time of intentional silence.

Every time I went, I was confronted with this quote from Meister Eckhart: "Nothing is so like God as silence." And every time I went, I had a little argument with these words. I don't know exactly what it is. Maybe it is that I am just a contrary person by nature. I love arguing, especially with saints. Yes, Meister Eckhart knows a lot more about God than I do. He has experience. And yet...

Silence is good, and also countercultural. I will give you that. There is not really a lot of silence in world. But when I see the saintly quote, I get all Lutheran and Word-y and I think that Silence is good, but it's not enough. There is the space for silence, the space we do not fill with words. It is a space for trust that God will, somehow and in some way, speak. The silence of our listening is not a strategy or a feat. It is the pause while the conductor raises the baton. It is the silence before the curtain rises. It is the silence of trust and expectation. At least, that is the Christian confession. We listen because God will speak. It's not that God will give us all the answers, or solve our problems. But God will call our names. God will ask us questions. God speaks.

But if we are honest, this is also the problem. I remember reading Shusako Endo's

historical novel *Silence* many years ago, when I was a missionary in Japan. The novel was about the early Christian movement in Japan, and what happened, and what did not happen, when Christians were imprisoned, tortured and killed for their faith. The title of the novel refers to what the author calls the Silence of God in the face of the suffering of Japanese Christians.

So perhaps Meister Eckhart is right. Perhaps God is really like silence. But that would not necessarily be good news.

The world needs silence, but not just silence.

The world also needs a word—not "the answer," not a strategy, not a user's manual. The world also needs a word, the right word at the right time: a question, a name, an invitation, a light.

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