

The Journey of Transformation Raymond L. Fox

Something to reflect on, comment on, and even practice on your journey.



The Humility of Silence

Some of us are extroverts who have a lot to say, others are introverts with very little to say, and many of us fall somewhere on the spectrum between these two personality types. No matter how we might view ourselves, we all must learn the humility of silence. Silence has much to reveal.

Job, after having suffered the loss of his family, his possessions, and his health, wanted to know why such overwhelming tragedy had struck him. When friends repeatedly told him that his suffering was punishment for sins he had committed, he begged them to tell him what he had done. But they were speaking without knowledge; his suffering was not a form of punishment from God. When his friends failed to console him, Job complained to God, demanding an explanation for what had happened. The moment God determined to answer him, he began his speech with a defense of his sovereign power: "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand" (Job 38:4).

His response left Job speechless, without the courage to raise any more questions. Job finally said, "I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer twice, but I will say no more" (Job 40:4-5). Job learned through his suffering to patiently wait, listen in silence, and watch the power of God restore him.

Peter learned a similar lesson about humbling himself to be silent in the Father's presence when he, along with James and John, accompanied Jesus to the top of a mountain in Judea. There on the mountain, Jesus' appearance was transformed into the brilliance of light and his face shined like the sun. Then Moses and Elijah, two prophets from centuries before, appeared with Jesus and spoke with him. Peter was stunned by what he saw and confused about how to react and what to do. He must have thought he needed to say something, so he quickly suggested, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah" (Matthew 17:4). He should have waited, silently, for the Father to act because he was about to receive a unique revelation about who Jesus was.

What does the humility of silence mean for us? When we are offended by others, experience disappointment, or suffer tragedy, we can be quick to complain about what happened, seek the pity of others, and even ask the Father for an explanation. But the Father is the Creator—he is in control. We are certain we are his children and his purpose for us is to be transformed into the likeness of his compassion and grace. Whatever happens, we can quietly wait for the Father to act because he is our defender, not our accuser. While waiting, we can humbly seek lessons to learn about patience, mercy, and forgiveness.

Jesus has much to say to us about life in the Father's kingdom; in the humility of silence we must listen, learn, and surrender to practice. When he calls us to be generous without asking whether someone deserves our kindness, to go the second mile to serve, to forgive seventy times seven, and to be merciful even to our enemies, we are prone to raise objections and justify our hesitation. But Jesus is Teacher and Lord, and his lordship compels us to be silent and learn the joy of following him in humility.

Jesus revealed to Peter that one day, "When you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go" (John 21:18). He was speaking of what kind of death Peter would face because of his faith. Peter once again spoke when it was not time to speak, wanting to know that if this would be his fate, what would happen to the apostle John. Jesus responded, "What is that to you? You must follow me" (John 21:22). We can imagine that Jesus might answer our questions and objections in a similar way: "Just follow me!"

There are also times when we must be silent and, in humility, listen to our own doubts, fears, and self-accusations. We spend a lot of time keeping ourselves busy and the noise level high to avoid listening to our inner voices. Peter also did the same. He proclaimed his courageousness in the safety of Jesus' presence, but his declarations were an attempt to drown out his fears (Luke 22:31-34). Only by finally listening to ourselves and humbly accepting who we are can Jesus finally heal us by his grace.

Without the humility of silence, we cannot even fulfill the second greatest command, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself." To practice compassion, mercy, and kindness, we must first listen carefully to our neighbors. In our rush to love, we assume we already know our neighbors' needs, but we cannot help relieve their pain until we understand what they are feeling. Remember the counsel of James, "Be quick to listen and slow to speak" (James 1:19).

The difficult question to resolve is when to speak and when to be silent. James helps us again: “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you” (James 1:5).

About Raymond

Raymond L. Fox has been teaching about transformation in the image of Jesus for forty-five years, in the U.S. and abroad. He has written four books: *Love God, Heart, Soul, Mind and Strength*, *Love Your Neighbor as Yourself*, *The Transformed Church*, and *The Fruit of the Spirit*. His work also includes character counseling and mentoring in juvenile detention facilities. He has degrees in philosophy and education.



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