

GOD ON UNMUTE

A Forty-Day Journey of Prayer



Forty-Day Devotional

Forty-Day Prayer Devotional

Introduction by Pete Greig, author of God On Mute

It would be ironic if God had spoken to you in any way at all through a book called **God on Mute**. But if He has been whispering in your ear or stirring your heart as you've been reading, my prayer is that this devotional is going to help take that conversation a little deeper. If, on the other hand, God remains on mute, I want you to know that I've also been thinking of you in the design of this prayer journey in the hope that it can help you too.

Over the next forty days, we are going to prayerfully explore a bit of the Bible each day, alongside a quote from this book. By reflecting on these texts and turning our questions into prayers, I hope that my story, my journey, and my thoughts can take a step back so that your story, your journey, and your thoughts can be lifted before "the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort" (2 Cor. 1:3) in a very personal way.

I leapt at the opportunity, afforded by the release of this new edition, to create a prayer guide exploring the three great questions we all tend to ask when confronted with seasons of protracted suffering:

- *First*, the heart question: "How am I going to get through this?"
- *Second*, the head question: "Why aren't my prayers being answered?"
- *Third*, the soul question: "Where is God when heaven is silent?"

In this book we have seen that these three universal questions—emotional, intellectual, and spiritual—find articulation in the three days of Christ's passion:

On **Maundy Thursday**, Jesus asks the "How?" question: "Overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he cries, "Abba, Father... Take this cup from me" (Mark 14:34, 36).

On **Good Friday**, Jesus asks the "Why?" question: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46).

On **Holy Saturday**, it is not Jesus but we who must ask the "Where?" question: "Where on earth are You, God, when Your Son lies dead in the grave?"

When Should I Begin This Devotional?

Traditionally, we prepare ourselves for these days —for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday—during the season of Lent. In these forty days before Easter, millions of Christians follow in Christ's footsteps as He enters the wilderness to pray, fast, and fight temptation.

This is such familiar terrain for anyone wrestling with unanswered prayer that Lent must surely be where this devotional most naturally resides. In fact, if you start it on Ash Wednesday (the first day of Lent) and do one every day except Sunday (traditionally a "day off" in Lent), you will conclude your journey on Holy Saturday, the eve of Easter Day.

Although this is liturgically neat, it does mean that we will occasionally jump around the book a bit, not always sticking exactly to the chronology of its chapters. So don't worry if, for example, you jump backwards from chapter 6 to chapter 2, or spend almost a week in chapter 8!

This devotional does *not*, however, need to be limited to Lent. It will work equally well at other times of the year, so please don't feel you have to wait until February or March to make a start. Whenever you do it, you'll find that your journey traces the overarching shape of **God on Mute** both structurally and thematically, cycling slowly through the four days of Christ's Passion in Holy Week, and exploring the important questions and concerns raised by each one. The emphasis, however, is a little different, focusing more on the heart than the head because this context is designed to be more experiential, less theoretical, than the book.

So How Is It Going to Work?

Each day will follow a simple pattern based on the acronym P.R.A.Y.: **Pause**, **Reflect**, **Ask**, and **Yield**. (If you want to find out more about this approach, check out my book **How to Pray: A Simple Guide for Normal People**.) Alternatively, if you'd like to continue praying in this way once you've completed this devotional, you can join me and my friends each day throughout the year using the free **Lectio365** application (available on Apple and Android devices.)

Pause. At the start of each devotional you will be invited to pause; to breathe deeply and repeat a simple centering prayer drawn from the Psalms. It's best, if possible, to do this out loud. Since more than half the Psalms are lament, and since this is an exploration of unanswered prayer, these opening verses will sometimes be questions or even complaints against God, which may feel a little strange. This pausing stage doesn't need to take more than a minute or two, but it's an important moment to "be still, and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10), so resist the temptation to skip it!

Reflect. Next, there is a short Bible passage, carefully chosen along with a relevant comment and/or a passage from the book. I suggest you read these two passages slowly, more than once, and notice anything that jumps out at you. "I meditate on your precepts," says the psalmist, "and consider your ways" (Ps. 119:15).

Ask. Having reflected on the text, it's time to turn your thoughts into prayers. To help you do so, I offer two questions each day: one to ask yourself and the other to ask the Lord. These questions are just "conversation starters" so please don't take them too seriously. If your prayers head off in another direction, great!

Yield. Finally, there is an invitation to draw your prayers together in a moment of relinquishment to Christ's lordship and love using a traditional fixed prayer.

But Why Does It Last Forty Days?

There are several reasons, both psychological and theological, why forty days can be a significant length of time for a process of personal prayer:

Psychological Significance. Behavioral psychologists say that it generally takes more than a month to realign neural pathways, change habits, and alter established patterns of thought. This devotional does not promise you any miraculous breakthrough in your circumstances. There is no holy grail awaiting you at the end of the road on the fortieth day. However, it does offer you an opportunity

to adopt a new posture and gain a new perspective on your present struggles by training your brain to think differently. More than 1,700 years ago, Rabbi Shmuel wrote in the Talmud: “We do not see things as they are. We see them as we are.”³ This prayer journey may not necessarily change your situation, but at least it is long enough to change you!

Theological Significance. A span of forty days (or forty years) is also a significant period of time in Scripture. At the time of Noah, it rained for forty days and nights. Moses served as a shepherd in Midian for forty years. Later, he disappeared into the clouds of Sinai for forty days on two separate occasions. The people he was leading wandered in the wilderness for forty years. He sent spies into the land of Canaan for forty days. It was for forty days that Goliath defied the Israelites twice daily. And as for Jesus, having launched His public ministry with forty days of fasting, He ends it by waiting exactly forty days between His resurrection and His ascension. The number forty is woven through the tapestry of Scripture like a fine thread tracing the span of a generation, a season of waiting, a time of testing, a period of preparation, a context of consecration, a moment of revelation, or a sense of completion.

Entering the Wilds of Unanswered Prayer

Embedded deep within the Hebrew psyche was the understanding of wilderness as the only possible way, both geographically and spiritually, from exodus to homecoming, from promise to blessing, from the “Dear God” of despair to the ultimate “Amen.” Jesus knew that the wilderness had to be the location for his forty-day marathon of temptation, consecration, and revelation. It remains the most fitting context for anyone today asking, “How am I going to get through this?” and, “Why aren’t my prayers being answered?” and, “Where is God when heaven is silent?”

There is nothing magical about the number forty, of course, and nothing inherently desirable about the wilderness, except that it contextualizes our struggles with meaning and hope. And so, as we embark upon this forty-day journey with Jesus into the wilds of unanswered prayer, may God’s Word feed you and His Spirit lead you a little deeper each day.