REFLECTION SHEET

What Silence Does That Words Cannot

Silence is not the absence of something. It is a presence with its own work to do.

Watch what happens in almost any conversation when the talking stops. Three seconds go by. Then four. Somebody laughs a little, or changes the subject, or asks a question nobody needed answered. In a study at Pavia, the deepest drop in heart rate and blood pressure did not come from any of the music played — it came during the silent pauses in between. The condition everyone assumed was the empty one turned out to be the one doing the most.

A Practice to Begin

Two minutes, nothing added. Set a timer. Put the phone in another room. No music, not even the calm kind, and nothing to accomplish. Let the first wave of restlessness arrive at about forty seconds and do not fix it. Afterwards, notice one thing: what showed up in you once nothing else was being added?

Reflection Questions

1. Where in your day is there no silence at all, and who decided that?
2. What is the noise you are making yourself?
3. When a silence falls in a conversation, what do you do with it — and what are you protecting?
4. Has there been a season when you had no words? What did the people around you make of it?
5. What might be trying to reach you that cannot get through?
6. What would it cost to be, for a few seconds at a time, less useful than you would like to be?

An Invitation for the Week

Three seconds before you answer. One drive with the radio off. One meal nobody narrates. Small, and not easy.

Silence can hold what language has to cut into pieces.

— What Silence Does That Words Cannot