



April 1994. Immaculée Ilibagiza was stuffed into a 3x4 foot bathroom together with seven other Tutsi women fleeing the Rwanda genocide. She would stay there for three months barely able to move, scared to make a sound. And in that silence, she began to pray. Just her and God.

One of her greatest struggles was to forgive those hunting down her people. In her book *Left to Tell*, she writes:

*“Please open my heart, Lord, and show me how to forgive. I’m not strong enough to squash my hatred—they’ve wronged us all so much . . . I struggled with the dilemma for hours on end. I prayed late into the night, all through the next day, and the day after that, and the day after that. I prayed all week, scarcely taking food or water. I couldn’t remember when or for how long I’d slept, and was only vaguely aware of time passing.”*

And finally, God spoke to her, broke through her darkness.

*“I held on to my father’s rosary and asked God to help me, and again I heard His voice: ‘Forgive them; they know not what they do.’ I took a crucial step toward forgiving the killers that day. My anger was draining from me—I’d opened my heart to God, and He’d touched it with His infinite love. For the first time, I pitied the killers.”*

Granted, most of us are never going to be in such extreme situations, but the spiritual battles can be just as difficult. Yet so often we try solving things through our own actions instead of silencing all around us and listening to what God has to say. Sure, the problems don’t disappear into thin air, but we learn to see things and people the way God does. We learn how to hear his voice.

That’s the first step for anyone who wants to advance in the spiritual life. **Spiritual silence is not thinking about nothing—there’s a lot of communication going on between God and us—silence is tuning into God’s channel.**

Prayer is our lifeline, and we can’t wait for someone to lock us in a room and throw away

the key before we start spending time with God.

(In other words: 1. Stop. Yes, right now. 2. Silence any distractions—this time has to be just you and God. 3. Speak to God like a friend, personally. 4. Listen.)