



MILLION MINUTES

HELPFUL TIPS FOR YOUR SILENCE FROM MATTHEW VAN DUYPENBODE

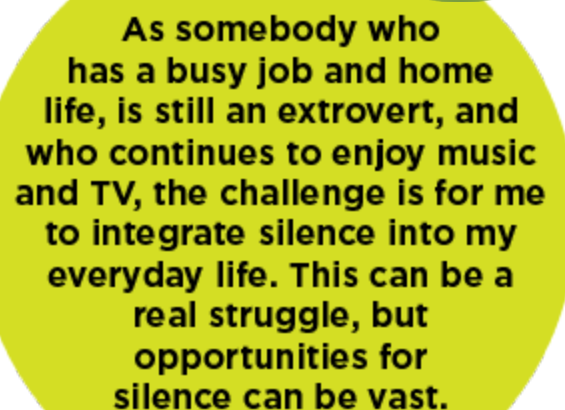
I grew up in a lively Catholic family, with 3 older siblings and lots of activity going on around me. There was lots of laughter in my house, as well as the occasional argument. The TV was often on and our home resounded with competing musical tastes and piano practice.

As my teenage years progressed, I found the prospect of being on my own a little bit intimidating, and deliberately surrounded myself with people and noise. I think I was a little scared of what I might end up discovering about myself if I spent time on my own, and preferred not to risk it! You may well be similarly anxious about the prospect of spending 24 hours in silence for Million Minutes.

A big change came for me around the time of my Confirmation, when I was 15. That summer, I went to a Catholic youth camp and discovered a group of people who seemed at peace with who they were – and I wanted what they had! Their difference seemed to be that they talked of a real experience of God, who they met in prayer.

In the years that followed, I became increasingly aware of the need to find quiet space for God in my life. I would sometimes read the Bible or pray the rosary, but mostly, I would simply light a candle, tell God about some of my concerns and joys, and then wait in the quiet. Sometimes I wouldn't feel anything, and occasionally I would get the impression of a few words of affirmation running through my mind. But always, I received a sense that God was drawing me into his peace through this silence.

Some time after my Confirmation, I found myself in a monastery in France spending a week in silence. It was hard work - I hit 2 or 3 different 'silent walls', each one demonstrating to me a more profound level of quiet existed on the other side. By the end of the week, I even felt my heartbeat had slowed down to be attentive to God! And it was in that place that I found the beginning of the answer to a question I think I had been asking since I was a child: *'Who am I - really?'*



As somebody who has a busy job and home life, is still an extrovert, and who continues to enjoy music and TV, the challenge is for me to integrate silence into my everyday life. This can be a real struggle, but opportunities for silence can be vast.



This period of silence offered me the opportunity to recognise that I had been searching for an answer to this question all my life. In a sense, it's not important what the answer has been for me (before you ask, I never became a monk!)

What is important is that silence offered me an opportunity to come face to face with the reality of life - which so much (sometimes very good) stuff on the surface distracts me from noticing.

As you prepare for spending 24 hours in quiet, perhaps now might be a good opportunity to ask God to help you reflect on a big question in *your* life?

Nowadays, as somebody who has a busy job and home life, is still an extrovert, and who continues to enjoy music and TV, the challenge is for me to integrate silence into my everyday life. This can be a real struggle, but opportunities for silence can be vast:

- I try to leave slightly early for things when I can - the few moments of quiet while I wait help me to re-centre myself
- I sometimes head out for a day somewhere I know I won't be disturbed
- When I can, I walk places - rather than drive or get a lift
- When I listen to my iPod, I don't immediately start another album or playlist when the one I'm listening to finishes, instead I try to appreciate what I've just listened to
- I try to spend time outdoors - nature is amazing and makes me stop!
- If I remember, I turn the radio off for a bit of my journey to work
- And finally, I don't wear a watch! Especially out of school or work, this can really help me focus on the 'now' rather than what's coming next

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