

# Quieting





## — Quieting —

*“Be still and know that I am God.”*

— Psalm 46:10 —

I remember one weekend I officiated at a wedding that took place outside at a beautiful farm. The wedding was as busy and hectic as weddings usually are — tight schedules, equipment and food deliveries, tense, emotional family members. But it struck me that the setting of the wedding, the actual place where the rings were exchanged, was not tense, tight, or emotional. The farm itself was calm, quiet, and slow.

At one point, when the post wedding celebration had begun, I stepped away from the people for a while and walked down a gravel road. I noticed that the sunset came in its usual way — calm and peaceful. None of the plants were in a hurry. And as the day ended the birds slowed down and began to roost and rest. I was struck again with the way most of God’s creation does things — slowly, quietly, and calmly. All of creation, **with the exception of humanity**, knows how to wait.

Why are we so busy and what can we learn from our created counterparts? When Jesus said *“look at the birds ... see how the flowers grow”* what did he mean? What does it mean to wait?

**Be still and know that I am God**

**Be still and know that I am**

**Be still and know**

**Be still**

**Be**

But it is so hard for us to simply “be.” We are not taught to “be.” We are taught to “be busy!” And so, when someone asks, *“What have you been doing lately?”* we often answer, *“Trying to stay busy,”* as if busyness is a good measurement of our worth.

As Charles Swindoll writes:

*The One who said, ‘Be still, and know that I am God’ must hurt when He witnesses our frantic, compulsive, agitated motions. In place of a quiet responsive spirit, we offer him an inner washing machine, churning with anxiety, clogged with too much activity, and spilling over with resentment and impatience. <sup>1</sup>*

Busy, demanding, hectic, fast-paced — this describes our prevailing way of life. The word “*speed*” comes to mind. But did you know what the term “*speed*” originally meant in old English? It meant success and prosperity. It had nothing to do with velocity. And so, to wish someone Godspeed did not really mean, “*May God hustle you along.*” It meant, “*May God give you a successful journey*” ... which often takes quite a bit of time and usually requires that we learn the value of slowing down, even waiting.

*Be still for the Lord  
and wait patiently for Him.  
— Psalm 37:7 —*

*I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,  
and in His word I put my hope.  
— Psalm 130:5 —*

We all grew up hearing the proverbial statement —

*“Don’t just sit there,  
do something.”*

And I like to think that the intention of this proverb was to encourage or inspire a healthy kind of “*doing*,” a positive form of action. But since the new version of “*doing*” has changed, pushing everything else out of the way as it impatiently elbows its way to the front, I would like to suggest a new arrangement of the old proverb —

*“Don’t just do something,  
sit there.”*

And I know how this might sound. I know that sitting and waiting have a bad reputation. We don’t like to wait in line. We don’t want to get stuck in traffic. We don’t like to sit in waiting rooms.

But there was a time when people practiced quietly sitting. They enjoyed sitting as a frequent practice. It was a part of their daily life. You would find them out on the front porch of their homes, sitting, or on a bench in front of a store sitting, or during the colder months, they would be in chairs huddled around a pot-bellied stove, sitting. There were sitting benches on the courthouse lawn. There were park benches along the sidewalks. Houses even had “*sitting rooms.*”

Sitting. Thinking. Quietly talking. It might look like nothing is happening, but recharging a battery does not look active either. And how dim our lights would be without the time our battery simply sits and waits!

Let me ask a question — Does God force his way into our lives? Does he storm our hearts and take over our souls by overpowering us? Does he even want that kind of relationship? No, he comes in when we stop, become still and quiet. We issue the invitation and then we wait.

Stop moving. Stop talking. Take a deep breath. Don't just do something ... sit there! And when we do, we will more easily understand three spiritual practices expressed by the Psalmists.

## **1<sup>st</sup> — Expecting God.**

**— Psalm 130:5-6 —**

*I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,  
and in his word I put my hope.*

*My soul waits for the Lord  
more than watchmen wait for the morning,  
more than watchmen wait for the morning.*

Waiting on God. Waiting in expectation. But what is expectation? It is important to see there is a big difference between impatience and anticipation. Waiting for God is not a spiritual version of tense, nervous clock-watching. Waiting is clearly eager, but it is also patient. Notice here in Psalm 130 that there is neither a fearful hope that wonders if the dawn will ever arrive, nor an impatient pushiness that tries to “*drag the sun over the horizon.*”<sup>2</sup> Instead, there is a confident, expectant waiting. We anticipate God because we trust him. We expect God because we know he loves us. We wait for God because we need him.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> — Stilling the Noise.**

**— Psalm 46:10 —**

*Be Still, and know that I am God*

The Jerusalem Bible translates this, “*Pause a while.*” The Message translates it, “*Step out of the traffic.*” In other words, stop what you are doing. Step back, take a deep breath and relax. God does not force his way into our hearts. No. We stop, we become still, and we invite him in. And like any important truth or habit, God often comes in slowly. Careful. Sure. Permanent.

As Kenneth Leech Wisely said:

*There is no need to rush around feverishly looking for a prayer life: We need to slow down and look deeply within.*<sup>3</sup>



### 3rd — Yielding Control.

#### — Psalm 1:1-3 —

*Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked  
or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.*

*But his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and on his law he meditates day and night.*

*He is like a tree planted by streams of water,  
which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.  
Whatever he does prospers.*

When we quietly “*meditate*” on God’s words, we give up our compulsions and manipulations. We yield control to God. This decision to place God at the helm builds spiritual strength by moving us away from self-reliance and towards dependence on God. Rather than observing evil — “*walk,*” then engaging evil — “*stand,*” and finally embracing evil — “*sit,*” the man in Psalm 1 chooses to “*delight*” and “*meditate*” on the words of God. And like the tree in the story, he slowly puts down roots where he knows he will grow. And with the joy and confidence of a fruitful tree he patiently waits. It is a picture of yielding control.

Expecting God ... stilling the noise ... yielding control ... all ways to leave “space” for God. As Henri Nouwen has written:

*The word discipline means “the effort to **create some space** in which God can act.” Discipline means to prevent everything in your life from being filled up. It means somewhere you’re not occupied, and you’re certainly not preoccupied. It means to **create that space** in which something can happen that you hadn’t planned on or counted on. <sup>4</sup>*

Do not think of quiet time as simply being alone, but as being alone with God. What we are here to do is simply get out of God’s way. As Ruth Haley Barton writes about the spiritual law of gravity:

*When a jar of river water sits still, the **law of gravity** causes the sediment to eventually settle to the bottom so that the water becomes clear. We don’t have to do anything to cause that settling except leave the jar alone for a while. The same is true of the **spiritual law of gravity**. When we sit quietly in God’s presence, the sediment that is swirling in our souls begins to settle. We don’t have to do anything but show up and trust the spiritual law of gravity that says, *Be Still*, and the knowing will come. <sup>5</sup>*

Jesus himself searched for quiet —

*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark,  
Jesus got up, left the house  
and went off to a solitary place,  
where he prayed.  
— Mark 1:35 —*

*He withdrew by boat privately  
to a solitary place.  
— Matthew 14:13 —*

*After leaving them,  
he went up on a mountainside to pray.  
— Mark 6:46 —*

Looking for space, finding solitude, enjoying the quiet, learning to wait, can give us time to — Recharge ... Renew ... Rethink ... Remember ... Restore ... Rebuild ... Revitalize ... Rejuvenate ... Refresh.

So, how does this happen? How can I change? Where do I begin?

Turn some things off. Learn to say “No” to some things, perhaps even to some good things, so you can say “Yes” to some better things.

Henri Nouwen once wrote:

*Prayer is not a way of being busy with God instead of people ... [It's] standing in front of him without anything to show, to prove, or to argue, and ... allowing him to enter into our emptiness.”<sup>6</sup>*

We still the noise because we need him. We seek quiet so we can hear him. We learn to “*be still*” in his presence because he is God!

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1 Charles Swindoll, Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), p. 427.

2 Howard R. Macy, Rhythms of the Inner Life (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1988), p. 45.

3 Kenneth Leech, True Prayer (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), p. 10.

4 Henri Nouwen, “Moving from Solitude to Community to Ministry” in Leadership Journal (Spring, 1995).

5 Ruth Haley Barton, Invitation to Solitude and Silence (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), p. 36-37.

6 Henri Nouwen, Clowning in Rome (Image Books, Garden City, NY, 1979), p. 53.

Bob Chisholm  
Prestoncrest Church of Christ  
Spiritual Formation Ministry

[www.prestoncrest.org](http://www.prestoncrest.org)