

## **Be Still**

by Jeff Strite

Psalms 46:1-46:11

How many of you have ever heard the term: "Circuit Riders"?

Circuit Riders were preachers back in the 1700s and 1800s who would ride from church to church and hold services. There were more churches than preachers in that day and a Circuit Rider would travel from congregation to congregation.

One Circuit Rider was out riding one afternoon and came upon a man out working in his field. Thinking to start a conversation and invite the man to church, the preacher called out: "Fine day isn't it?"

"It's fine for you", the man replied, "All you have to do is ride around on that horse thinking about God all day long, while I have to sweat here in this field and then walk home afterward. I don't think it's right you should have things so easy while I have to work so hard."

The preacher responded: "You're right. You do work hard in the fields and I admire that, but you need to realize that the kind of work I do is a work of different kind."

"Yeah, sure", the man answered. "But it's not really work. All you do is ride around thinking about God all the time. That's not hard."

"Oh, but it's harder than you think", the minister answered. And then a thought occurred to him: "I tell you what. Just to prove to you how difficult it can be to 'think about God' - if you can think about God and nothing else for 1 minute... I'll give you my horse."

"You can't be serious," said the farmer.

But the preacher assured him he was.

"You're on", said the man and immediately he sat down in silence.

Ten seconds went by... then 20 seconds... then 25 seconds.

About then, the farmer looked up at the minister, and said,

"Does that include the saddle?"

All the man had to do to get that horse was say nothing.

All he had to do was "THINK" about God... and nothing else for 60 SECONDS.

But he couldn't do that.

"Be still and know that I am God." Psalm 46:10a

That sounds like God is asking us... to be still.

Just be quiet in His presence and know that He's God.  
But just like that farmer there are a lot people have a hard time doing that.

I've heard it said that "Nature abhors a vacuum."  
In the same way, many people abhor... quiet.  
They struggle with silence.

ILLUS: I just read an article by a Medical Doctor telling about the time he was Resident attending a Seminar. He wrote:  
"In one discussion group the discussion leader asked us a question to which no one had an immediate answer. So he waited. And waited. And waited. Finally, one of my colleagues offered an answer that happened to be incorrect but which then sparked a lively discussion we all found quite valuable.  
After the seminar, I had a chance to talk with the discussion leader and remarked how unfazed he'd seemed by the silence that had greeted his question, which had seemed to stretch on for what I'd figured to be almost five minutes.  
The man replied that the silence had only lasted 30 seconds.  
'Wow,' I said. 'Only 30 seconds? It seemed like a lot more.'"

Why would he think it went on for so long?  
Because many people abhor... silence.  
They'll do just about anything to fill the emptiness because too much quiet is unsettling to them.

- A person will step into their car, start the engine, and the radio will immediately come on filling the car with sound until that person is done driving.
- One man I talked to this week said that when his mother the first thing she does is turn on her TV ... and she leaves it on all day long. She hardly ever watches it, but it never goes off until she gets ready for bed at night.
- And then there are people who walk or run in town, and they've got these "things" in their ears. What's in their ears? Ear buds. They are listening to something. And they are so inwardly focused, that they don't see anyone else while they're on their run.

There's music and all kinds of noise that bombards us everywhere we go.  
At department stores  
At Malls  
In Restaurants

At the grocery  
At Walmart  
Even in elevators

People seem to feel the need to fill every waking moment with noise.  
It's like they can't stand to be around silence.

But... that's really not always true.

I once read an expert that noted that people only feel comfortable being silent when they're in the presence of someone they're comfortable with. When they're with those people... it's nothing to just sit and say nothing.

ILLUS: Have you ever seen a young boy and girl out on a date. They could sit and look at each other forever and not notice. Because they like being around each other.

Or a husband and wife who are deeply in love, can feel totally at ease sitting down at the table together and being together. Because they enjoy each other's company.

Be still, and know that I am God.

The only way you can be silent around God is if you're comfortable in His presence.

OR if you want to LEARN to be comfortable in His presence.

You see, the way to learn to be truly comfortable around God is start practicing being quiet in His presence.

ILLUS: Years ago I attended a seminar on Prayer down at the Indian Creek Christian Church. Preachers attend seminars all the time and often times these gatherings don't tell you much you didn't already know. But this speaker taught things about prayer I'd never considered before. And one of these things he talked about was this idea of being still in God's presence.

He asked how many of us were or had been parents. He noted that most parents end up having their kids come and sit in their laps.

Sometimes a child will come and sit there and chatter away.

Sometimes the child will ask for things.

Sometimes the child will just talk about something that intrigues them or bothers them.

But every once in a while a child will just crawl up into their parent's laps

and just sit there.  
They don't want anything.  
They don't even want to talk about anything.  
They just want to be with you.  
Sit with you.  
Just be held by you.

Do you remember how it felt to have a child do that?  
You'd do anything for that child.  
You might give them whatever they want  
But there's nothing like the feeling of having a child that just wants to be with you.  
That one action says I LOVE you.  
I TRUST you.  
I feel SAFE with you.  
There is nothing in this world that compares to that feeling.

Now when people pray – what do they usually do?  
That's right, they ask God for things.  
And there's nothing wrong with that.  
God tells we don't receive because we don't ask (James 4:2)  
And Jesus taught us "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" Matthew 7:7

There's not a thing wrong with asking God for anything in prayer.  
But, can you imagine what it must be like for God, when one of His children just wants to be with Him. When a child of God just comes to Him and wants nothing more than to silently sit in His "lap"?

But how could you possibly do such a thing?  
Well, the speaker at the prayer seminar then suggested a couple of things.  
First, he noted that the Bible talks about the different positions people would take in prayer.  
o Some folks would lay prostrate on the ground.  
o Elijah bowed himself down on the earth and put his face between his knees.  
o And others would lift up their hands in praise.  
Every position helped the worshipper visualize something in prayer.

So this speaker suggested holding out your hand as if you were holding God's hand.

OR stretching out your hands as if reaching up for God.  
And then, just not ask for anything... not say anything.  
Just sit there, stand there, lie there and visualize yourself being alone with God.

So on the way home from the Seminar, driving down the road in my car (not closing my eyes) I reached across the seat as if God was sitting beside me and visualized holding His hand. And I did that for a fair amount of time (I didn't clock it).

This wasn't about "putting in my time" or going thru a ritual.  
This was a gift I was giving to God.

Since I've come here I've taken to coming into church (when there's no one around) and standing front of the communion table - and lifting up my hands as if reaching out for God. I'll hold that position as long as I can (arms get tired) and then I may bring my arms down closer to my body, or put eventually put them down at my sides. I'll continue doing that until I feel that I've felt that I've given God proper attention.

I've found that I can do this for about 10 to 15 minutes (again, it's not about how long I do it... but whether I feel I've given God a time of special intimate attention) but when I do it I find that I feel closer to God and better about myself. And I've found that my other prayer times have begun to focus more on giving thanks to God than on getting things from God.

Now, this isn't about attaining a certain level of righteousness.  
You don't become MORE righteous than someone else by doing this, if you do this at all. This is all about trying to give a special gift to God by spending time alone with Him and communicating a desire to show Him how much you love Him.

Now, I have encountered a couple of problems while doing this kind of activity.

1st, my mind tends to drift.  
Has your mind ever drifted? Sure it has.

I'll be standing there, trying to think about God... and my mind will stray.  
I'll begin to think about something that needs done.  
I'll remember a phone call I meant to make.  
Of someone I need to visit.  
A bill that needs to be paid.

And before you know it my mind is far away from God.

One of the techniques I've found helps to combat this... is to go thru the Alphabet.

A – God you are the Alpha and Omega.

B – You are the Beginning and the End.

C – You are the Creator.

A, B, C, D, etc. all the way through Z.

(Q and X can get difficult, so you can skip them).

Or I'll go over a list of things that I'm thankful for.

I'll do this for a few moments and then I find its' easier to return to being focused on God.

But there is another problem.

I do this "quiet" thing in order to feel closer to God and offer up my time to God in a special way.

But there's times when I don't feel that DESERVE to be in His presence. Like it would all be a sham because I've fallen short in one way or another. And when I get to feeling that I don't deserve to be able to spend this time with God I have developed a little phrase I use to focus my thinking...

I say to God:

"I'm not doing this because I DESERVE to come into your presence.

I'm doing it because I NEED to come into your presence."

And when I THINK on that truth... I feel more comfortable spending that time because I'm able to focus on... Being still and knowing that He is God.

What I've found interesting is that God knows He needs to remind us to be still... and to wait for Him.

Psalm 4:4 says: "when you are on your beds, search your hearts AND BE SILENT."

Psalm 27:14 declares: "WAIT FOR THE LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD."

In Psalm 62:2 & 5 David says: "Truly (God) is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken. For God alone, O my soul, WAIT IN SILENCE, for my hope is from him."

And one of my favorites is from Isaiah 40:31 "But they that WAIT UPON THE LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

We need to be still.  
We need to be quiet.  
We need to WAIT for God.

And you know why people have such a problem with that?  
It's because when things are quiet, it feels so empty.  
So meaningless.  
Like there's nothing going on.  
It feels like God's just NOT THERE and not doing anything.

ILLUS: But one college professor put it this way,  
"When you think nothing is happening, be assured (with God) something is happening. He is not sitting idly by."

Or as Psalm 37:5-7 puts it "Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun. BE STILL before the LORD and WAIT PATIENTLY for him..."

ILLUS: But sometimes we get in such a rush to do things on our timetable that we miss God's timing. We can become like the man who prided himself on being exceedingly punctual.

Every work day for eight years, he followed a very precise routine every morning.

His alarm went off at 6:30 AM.

He'd get up, shave, shower and eat his breakfast.

He brushed his teeth, picked up his briefcase, got into his car, and ride the ferry across to the river.

Then he'd get off the ferry, walk into the office building, get on the elevator, ride it to the 17th floor, and sit down in his chair at precisely 8:00 AM.

He followed this same routine this every year for eight years... then one morning his alarm did not go off, and he overslept fifteen minutes.

He was panic-stricken.

He rushed to the shower, nicked himself shaving, gulped down his breakfast, grabbed his briefcase, jumped into his car, and sped down to the ferry landing.

He got out of the car and saw the ferry... just a few feet from the dock. And he said to himself, "I think that I can make this,"... and he ran down the dock made an enormous leap...and landed with a thud on the deck of the ferry.

The captain rushed down to make sure he was alright and said to him,

“Man, that was a tremendous leap! I’ve never seen anything like it. But, you know, if you would have just waited just another minute (pause) we would’ve reached the dock, and you could’ve walked on.”

People misjudge the distance between God and themselves. They think they’ve got to make up the difference all by themselves when all they had to do was BE STILL... BE QUIET... & WAIT.

Now, one last thought:

As I was working on this sermon it occurred to me that this “being still” thing sounded a lot like Eastern religions! Yoga and meditation... where people sit around contemplating their navels.

One website that promotes Yoga said it this way:

“What is meditation? ... One of my favorite answers is simple... Nothing.

That’s what happens when you meditate. Nothing at all.

That’s what meditation is. The art of doing nothing.

(<http://www.doyouyoga.com/meditation-and-the-art-of-doing-nothing-at-all/>)

But when God calls us to be still... He’s NOT asking us to do nothing.

He’s NOT asking us to focus on nothing.

You remember what God says we need to focus on????

“Be still... and know that I am God.”

Not only does nature abhor a vacuum... so does our soul.

If you don’t fill yourself with God, something else is going to fill it.

Jesus told us: “When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order.

Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first.” Matthew 12:43-45

Jesus is saying... you can’t just empty yourself out and expect everything to be good.

Your soul will not permit a vacuum.

If you don’t fill yourself with God, something else will take His place.

And YOU WILL NOT like the end result.

Be still and know that I am God.

CLOSE: A preacher friend of mine once shared with me about asking people in the congregation what their favorite Bible verse was. And of course, everybody seems to have something in Scripture that speaks to them. One young lady's answer – however - shook him.

She had palsy and there were times when she would shake uncontrollably. She raised her hand and said "My favorite verse is 'Be still and know that I am God.'"

Here was a woman whose body would never seem to allow her to be "still" and yet - that was her goal in life. That was what she longed for. Just to know God... and have Him STILL her heart. To give her His peace.

One person said it this way: Sometimes God stills the storm for His child, and sometimes He stills the storm in His child.

INVITATION