

**August 4, 2019**  
**"Be still" ... I'll get right on that!**  
**Psalm 46**

***I Can't Sit Still***

*"Mrs. Fidget, as she so often said, would 'work her fingers to the bone for her family.' They couldn't stop her. Nor could they - being decent people - sit still and watch her do it. They had to help. Indeed they were always having to help. That is, they did things for her to help her to do things for them which they didn't want done. The Vicar says Mrs. Fidget is now at rest. Let us hope she is. What's quite certain is that her family are."* (C.S. Lewis). Many of us can identify with Mrs. Fidget. Or her family.

If we are not officially working at our occupations, we make sure we have projects around the house, leisure activities or other things so we never slow down. When we do find ourselves with "nothing to do" we get restless, edgy, trying to find something to do ...

Even in terms of our spirituality, we measure it in terms of busyness – Bible studies, "quiet" times, reading books, listening to podcasts, doing stuff around the church.

It is easy to get caught up in doing things – very good things – but lose any sense of purpose, or enjoyment that might come with it. There is so much to be done and no one can do it like me ... If I don't do it no one else will ... I (and other people) measure my self worth based on how much I accomplish ("I didn't get much done today; I feel awful about myself"). I am uncomfortable simply relaxing – I have to keep going and keep busy.

One of the reasons I keep busy is because I worry too much. I worry what people will think of me if I'm not busy all the time. I worry I will not get everything done if I'm going every moment. I worry that if I don't do it, it won't be done right. And busy-ness keeps me from thinking too much: if I'm not busy I worry about this, that and the other thing.

I get the sense the sons of Korah (Psalm 46's authors) are worriers, too. They worry about natural disasters. They worry about geopolitics. They watch too much news.

When Moses was overworked (he worried too much; he was at his wits' end), he said to God, *"You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favour with me.' If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favour with you."* How did the LORD reply? *"My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."* (Exodus 33:12-14). What is God saying to stressed out, overworked Moses? What is God saying to the fear-full sons of Korah?

*"God is your refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble ... Be still, and know that I am God. The Lord Almighty is you."*

## ***Why "Be Still"?***

God gave the sons of Korah – and us – a direct command: *"Be still and know that I am God."* That's not polite advice – look at it: it's a blunt command. God doesn't give us this order to be mean or to frustrate our career ambitions: He says it for our own good.

Once upon a time, when people suffered from hypertension, high blood pressure, ulcers and other stress-related symptoms, medical and mental health workers tended to prescribe drugs. These days the trend has been away from treat symptoms with drugs (which have side effects and often just mask the real problems) to echo God's prescription – a healthy balance of work and rest, relaxation, diet, and exercise. Don't just deal with the symptoms, deal with the cause. Change your lifestyle.

God doesn't just want to mask symptoms either. He always wants to deal with root causes. So He says, *"You shall have no other gods before me"* – so we don't get led down the garden path to put our faith in shadows, from the empty promises of materialism to the twisted ideas of internet gurus.

God tells us: *"You shall not murder or commit adultery or steal"* – to remind us that doing these things have nasty consequences for our lives – don't go there. God commands us to tithe, to give the first portion of our earnings to his work – why? Because he knows how easy it is for us to get wrapped up in ourselves and miss the joy of giving. The greatest joys in our lives come from giving ourselves to others: God knows that. He wants us to know it too, so He commands us to give freely, for He loves (and honours) a cheerful giver.

The same is true with this command - *"Be still and know that I am God."* It is there for our good. In the Bible the principle of rest is very important ... *"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour ..."* The "Sabbath principle" goes right back to Genesis 1 and 2 – God rested on the seventh day to enjoy His creation – if God chose to create Sabbath it's probably good for us, too.

Do you recall what Jesus said about the Sabbath? *"The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath ..."* (Mark 2:27). It was instituted by God, by the one who made us and knows how we work best, for our spiritual, physical, social, and mental health. He knows we don't function well when we to drive ourselves 24 hours/day, 7 days/week, 365 days/year. We need "down time" to recharge our batteries - physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually.

Probably the first warning signs that most of us notice when we've been pushing too hard or worrying too much is our bodies talk to us - we lose energy, we ache, our digestion acts up. Often along with those symptoms go emotional ones - depression, irritability, frustration and anxiety. Socially we turn in on ourselves, we pull back from others, we become short tempered. Most seriously, our spiritual life dries up - we don't have time to pray, study, come to church. It all becomes drudgery.

In our twisted culture, we sometimes actually pin those symptoms like medals on our chests: *"I have a hiatus hernia, heart murmurs, AND panic attacks."* Crazy. I had one friend who used to crow about how many heart attacks he'd had.

We need to sort out our priorities.

To not be still is sin. Why? Because it affects not only us (our health, our personal well-being, etc), it also directly effects others.

### ***How Can I Be Still?***

I may know I need to be still, but I don't know how to do it. So ...

First, I have to admit I have a problem. I need to recognize what's happening to me. Denial doesn't help. Realistic, honest confession to ourselves, to our family/friends and to God that I am going too hard and my body, relationships and spirit is suffering is essential. That can be hard to do ... I can ask other people (those closest to me) to monitor my stress; and I can ask God to help me see my problems.

Second, I need to make and take quality time with those who are important to me. If I were to make a list of the five priorities in my life, my relationship with God and family would be right at the top. My relationships can be a tremendous source of satisfaction and enjoyment in my life ... but I have to work at them. They are also amongst the easiest things to crowd out of my life.

Recent statistics suggest that fathers spend an average of a minute per day giving focussed attention to their junior high children; we do less well with preschoolers: fathers average 37 seconds/day in focussed, on-on-one conversation or play. When we think of how important our relationships are to us, we need to do some serious examination of how we spend our time, so our time commitments reflect our priorities. Time invested with those we love reaps incredible rewards.

Third, I need to understand that I am too busy NOT to spend quality time with God. If I do poorly spending quality, focused time with my family and friends, I admit I am probably doing even worse in my relationship with God. Yet in my list of priorities He is at the top. I say prayer is the most important force in the universe, but then I keep myself so busy, I never actually pray.

Rather than wringing my hands wondering what I should do or working my fingers to the bone in frantic activity, I need to hear the Word, so I hear Him speaking to my issues and my circumstances.

Jesus constantly used the phrase, *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear"* ... He understood that, although we all have ears, not all of our ears are necessarily tuned to

HEAR. We can listen to sermons, listen to music, read books (including the Bible), and the words can roll like water off a duck's back. We need ears that actually hear.

Then we can hear afresh Jesus' words in Matthew 11:28-30: *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* More than just hearing them, we can decide to LIVE them.

Prayer is the most powerful force in the universe. But very often we keep our selves too busy to actually pray. Or, when our health changes, we lament that, since we can no longer do "active" things for God, we are useless. Yet we can still pray!

Let's be honest, it's hard to be still. It's hard to be quiet.

Our challenge is to persist in the effort.

After all, prayer is much more than bringing our shopping list or asking God for nice weather for golf. Prayer is when we share our souls with God, when we ask Him to examine us and help us see those areas in our lives with are causing problems, where we ask him to help us deal with the real tough issues in our lives, where we share with God the deep issues in the lives of those around us.

Prayer is when we listen to God. That's hard. Prayer is when God speaks directly to us, but we have to allow Him the opportunity. This means we have to take the time to be still in His presence. It is a discipline that comes from the conscious decision to be still, and the conviction, in faith, that He will speak to us. He will.

Next time you pray, try to allow God to do at least – even more than – half the talking; keep a piece of paper and pen with you to jot down His words. And then aim to live it out as He leads.

- *"My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest"* (Exodus 33:14) ...
- *"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest ..."*
- *"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul"* (Psalm 23:1-2) ...
- *"Be still and know that I am God ... the Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress"* (Psalm 46:10-11) ... and if God is with us, who can be against us?

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