

How do I 'be still' before the Lord? \* Q's from the pews  
July 14, 2019 \* Langford Community Church \* Graham Gladstone

This morning's question came to me in the form of a statement – "learning how to just be still and trusting – learning that the answer will come."

I take it that this person wants to get better at being still before the Lord and that's a great thing to want to do. As the culture around us gets busier and busier, we're going to have to get better and better and slowing ourselves down so that we can hear from God and be renewed by Him. That is something that we all need and so I'm glad to be able to explore this with you this morning.

To that end, I want to sharpen our focus and ask two questions – One - what does it mean to be still and trust the Lord? And two – how do I do that? What exactly is being still before the Lord all about and how do I do it? That's the plan of attack for this morning so let's get right into it.

What does it mean to be still and trust the Lord?

Broadly speaking, you already know what it means. It means to slow down, to quiet your thoughts, to focus your mind and your heart on God in order to hear from Him and to spend time with Him. It means "taking your eyes off of the things that worry you and fixing them on the God who loves you" and it means "actively choosing to trust that God will take care of those things."

I don't know if you've ever done that – just sat quietly before the LORD – but I find that when I do, it is refreshing and life giving. When I do – I'll admit - all my instincts say that I should be 'doing something', that I have something else that I should be doing – but when I stop thinking as a westerner and a Gen-Xer and start thinking as a child of God and just slow down to hear from Him, it changes everything. All of a sudden, I can breathe deeply. All of a sudden I can see circumstances through God's eyes, and I am reminded that He is more than able to handle what's happening, if I will only trust Him. Being still and trusting the Lord is a really important spiritual discipline and I'm going to give you a chance to try it out at the end of this message.

Before that though, I want to dig a little deeper into what it means to 'be still before the Lord.' I went through this week and looked at all the places in the Bible where God tells us to 'be still' and there are a handful of places where that happens.

One though caught my attention, one that I'd never really clued into before, and one that I want to spend a little time with this morning because it really opened up my understanding of what it means to be still and trust the Lord.

This 'be still' command happens right smack dab in the middle of Exodus, Exodus 14, starting around verse 10. Pharaoh has agreed to let the Israelites go and now thousands of former slaves are making their way out of Egypt and towards the Red Sea. I wonder what they were thinking in that moment – it had all happened so fast! This man Moses came in the name of YHWH and stood up to Pharaoh; he proved again and again that his God was superior to Egypt's gods; they had all seen the destruction wrought upon Egypt while they sat safe beneath the blood of a lamb – and now they were on their way to freedom. Moms and dads and sons and daughters who'd known nothing but backbreaking work at the slave-driver's hand were now free!

But then things took a turn for the worse. Pharaoh changed his mind and sent his army – the most formidable in the world – to round up the slaves and bring them back.

How do you think they're going to respond? With faith or with fear? Look at verse 10 –

10 As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD.

11 They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt?"

12 Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!"

Can you identify with the Israelites? They're facing a really difficult situation. They're in WAY over their head and there's no way that they have the resources to deal with this situation. They see this army coming and they lose it. They freak out. They give in to fear. "It would have been better if we had just remained slaves in Egypt!"

Now I want you to notice something. What are the people of Israel thinking about in this moment? What are they focused on? Look again at those three verses – how many times do they mention Egypt?

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What are they focused on? The Egyptians. How much attention does God get? Verse 10 says they cry out to Him, but they seem pretty fixated on the problem and not the solution. And then Moses steps in in verse 13 -

13 Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again.

14 The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still."

(Exo 14:10-14 NIV).

Now I find that incredibly fascinating, because when I think 'be still,' I immediately think 'sitting quietly in a chair, eyes closed, mind focused on God.' Now certainly, 'mind focused on God' is central to being still, but it doesn't mean that we are standing still. Here, on the bank of the Red Sea, with the Egyptian army bearing down on them, God tells his people through Moses to 'be still.'

That makes me think that being still is more than just sitting quietly. Being still means trusting that God is in control, even when you're not. Being still means slowing down enough, fixing your attention on God enough, to actively trust that God is in control, even when you're not.

See, Israel looked at their circumstances and said 'there is NO way we can handle this! This is so far beyond our control that it's not even funny.' They trusted in their own strength, found their resources lacking, and gave in to fear. They lost it.

But on the brink of disaster, God says to them – be still. You’re not in control, but I AM and you can trust me with this.

And then what does He do? In one fell swoop, with the crash of water on the pride of Pharaoh’s army, God destroys His enemies and delivers His people. He demonstrates that He is indeed in control.

Even though they were not in control, God was; they just needed to slow down to remember that.

And that’s relevant for us too. We live busy lives in a busy culture and we often get it into our heads that the buck stops with us. In a sense, that’s true – God has created us to be self-sufficient and capable people – but sometimes we get to thinking that we’re in this alone. That we’re the only ones looking out for us. And when we come up against something that’s bigger than us, our instinct is to fear because WE lack the resources. When something happens that we don’t understand, we worry, because our finite minds can’t process it all. When a decision has to be made, we stress out because we don’t have all the answers.

But in the midst of it, God says to us – BE STILL. You may not be in control, but \*I\* am. You may not have the strength or wisdom or insight to handle this but that’s ok, because I do and I will take care of you.’ That’s the whole point of Psalm 46:10 – God says - 10 "Be still, and know that \*I\* am God." God reminds us that He alone is God and He is in control.

Sometimes we need that reminder don’t we?

(Turn to the person next to you and say ‘You are not God’ and then say ‘but God is in control.’)

And you know what? We need to slow ourselves down enough to recognize that. We need to actively choose to trust in Him.

Sometimes we’ll do that sitting quietly in our living room; other times we’re going to be doing it right in the thick of it, walking through the Red Sea as it were. A couple of times this week when things got a little out of hand, I had to slow down, take a deep breath and remind myself – God is in control and I can trust in Him. In the moment, you might not have time to sit and meditate, but you can take a mental break to be still and know that God is in control.

So that’s what it means to be still before the Lord – to trust that God is in control, even when you’re not. But here’s the million dollar question – how do we do that? How do we take the knowledge that God is in control and apply it throughout our lives so that we can trust Him?

Well, again, I want to look to our Exodus story. Moses gives us three pretty good points of application – verse 13 and 14 – “Do not be afraid.” “Stand firm.” And “trust that the Lord is at work.”

If you want to get good at being still and trusting the Lord, then do not be afraid, stand firm and trust that God is working. Let’s unpack those.

First, do not be afraid. In a lot of ways, we’re a lot like the Israelites. Fear comes very naturally to us. We face a difficult or unknown situation and our instinctive response is often to be afraid. We come up against something that’s beyond our natural ability and we worry how we’ll get through it.

When we do that though, we forget that God is with us. We have a God who loves us, who will never fail us or forsake us, whose plans for us are not to harm us but to prosper us. Rather than letting our fears get the best of us, we need to see those fears in light of the sovereignty of God and trust that He will take care of them. Because He WILL take care of them. We need to actively choose confidence in the Lord over fear of our circumstances.

I like what Victor Hamilton says about this in his Exodus commentary. He writes: “All these fears that God addresses are normal and real. They are not illusory. God does not lie to us about danger; nor does He plant in us the idea that they are figments of our imagination. What He reminds us is that in order to these frightening situations to get to us, they will first have to get past Him. We can rest, not because of the absence of danger, but because of a God in whom we can trust” (Hamilton, 216). We need not fear - not because of the absence of danger - but because of the presence of God with us.

If you are facing a difficult situation, slow yourself down and do not fear.  
But instead...

Stand firm – on the bank of the Red Sea, the people of Israel faltered because they put more faith in their own strength than in God’s. They focused on their own abilities, found them lacking and so gave in to fear. They were standing on shaky ground.

But Moses got up and said “Guys, come over to a firm foundation – the God who has ALREADY set you free! Remember the plagues? Remember the Passover? Those weren’t one and done flukes. That was just a taste of the limitless power of God and He will continue to expend that power for You. So forget your limited strength and stand on God’s.”

Those are words that we need to hear too.

Remember the Cross, where Jesus died for our sin? Remember the resurrection, when Jesus rose again to conquer death? Remember every time God has provided for you and kept you through trials in the past? Those weren’t one and done flukes – that was God exercising His mighty power on our behalf and

When you don’t know what to do  
When you don’t know what will happen  
When you doubt that we can handle it

God will exercise that power again. We need to stand firm on the knowledge that God is in control and that He loves us so fully that we can never lose.

As Paul Tautges writes - When circumstances are beyond our control, and seem to be working against us, we must hold on to the truth that God loves us and that there is nothing that can separate us from that love if we are in Christ... We are no longer at the mercy of circumstances; we cling to the mercy of God. (Tautges, 27).

Now listen, this is especially relevant when it seems like God is taking His time in answering prayer. Maybe you’re prayed about something and prayed about it and prayed about it and it seems as though God isn’t listening. This is where Psalms 37:7 kicks in - Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him.

Sometimes God answers prayer right away and other times, it takes a while, and God reminds us here – we need to wait patiently on Him, to stand firm on the conviction that He is for us and that the answer will come. Just because He's not answering your prayer now doesn't mean He won't answer your prayer. He WILL – according to His good and perfect timing. And in the meantime, we need to still our restless hearts and stand firm on the certainty that God WILL answer and that His answer WILL be good.

So don't be afraid, stand firm on God's character and finally, trust that the Lord is at work.

That comes from verse 14 of the Exodus account - 14 The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still." (Exo 14:14 NIV).

God is not saying 'slow yourself down and focus on me and hopefully something will work itself out;' He's saying 'be still and know that I am fighting for you.'

That's so important for us to hear. When we think about 'being still,' it may feel to us as 21<sup>st</sup> century Westerners as though we're abdicating responsibility, that we should be DOING something in order to work things out. But God says to us – 'you can be still because I am at work.'

The instinct might be to think that if we're waiting, then nothing's happening - we're just kinda putting in time. The car's in the shop but they're not going to do anything about it until tomorrow. That's not how God works. If He asks us to wait, then it means He's at work.

Will you trust Him enough to wait for Him? Will you rest in the promise that He is working for good?

Now listen, that doesn't mean that we do nothing – the Israelites didn't just sit on the bank of the Red Sea and hope that God would send angels to carry them across; they took active steps of faith to walk through the bottom of the sea trusting that God would keep the walls up and deal with the enemies behind them. They took responsible steps, relying on God and not themselves. And we do that too, taking responsible steps of faith and trusting that God Himself is doing what needs to be done.

So, don't be afraid. Stand firm. And trust that God is at work. There are a couple of times this week that I actually repeated that again and again in my head and it helped me, even in the middle of the action, to slow and remember that God was in control, even when I wasn't.

Now listen, when I first got this question, 'learning how to be still and trusting the Lord,' I thought – boy, that's a lifelong endeavour – and to be honest – it's the kind of thing you're going to learn more on the street than in the classroom – so let me try to give you the best of both worlds, and apply these ideas to your life. Is there something you're facing right now that's causing you concern? Some relationship that's broken or some life change that keeps you up at night?

Slow yourself down. God is in control, even when you're not.

Do not be afraid. He is able to handle it. He destroyed an army in a matter of minutes; He took death straight on and came out on top. He can handle what you are facing.

Stand firm on that. Don't rely on your own strength, don't lose sight of that fact, but actively remind yourself that God is in control. He will not fail you. He will not forsake you. You are His and nothing can change that. Root yourself in that truth and let nothing move you.

And finally trust that God is at work on your behalf. You're doing your part by trusting God; you can bet your bottom dollar that God is at work doing His. He is making connections behind the scenes, He is arranging circumstances so that it will come out right, He is changing hearts and relationships so that His kingdom will advance and His people will prosper. Trust Him to do that.

And you know what it's going to take to do that? An active choice to slow down. An active choice to trust God with it all. If you're caught in a constant cycle of activity and noise, you'll never be able to stand firm. Fear thrives in constant motion. But if you slow down to remember who God is and how He works, He will give you strength to carry on relying on Him. So let's practice.

So I would invite so sit comfortably, close your eyes and focus your attention on the God who is good. Take a deep breath. Slow your thoughts. I promise you, your mind is going to wander, just gently bring those thoughts back into focus and let's practice reminding ourselves that God is in control.

#### BENEDICTION

"Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance of the LORD. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still."