

## Practice Stillness (3 of 5)

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Date: 29 March 2020

[ 0 : 00 ] Welcome back to message three, entitled Practice Stillness. I'm going to read Psalm 46, verses 1-7, plus 10 and 11. Psalm 46. God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her. She will not fall. God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar. Kingdoms fall. He lifts his voice. The earth melts. The Lord Almighty is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress.

Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth.

The Lord Almighty is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress. I said that this devotion is going to be called Practice Stillness. And that word is taken from a book that I've read recently by the Stoic writer Ryan Holiday called Stillness is the Key. He's not a Christian. He's got some valuable things to say. In one of his chapters, he shares a short history lesson with his readers. And here's a little piece from that. He says, as a general, Napoleon made it his habit to delay responding to the mail. His secretary was instructed to wait three weeks before opening any correspondence.

When he finally did hear what was in a letter, Napoleon loved to note how many supposedly, quote, important issues had simply resolved themselves and no longer required a reply. While Napoleon was certainly an eccentric leader, he was never negligent in his duties or out of touch with his government or his soldiers. But in order to be active and aware of what actually mattered, he had to be selective about what kind of information got access to his brain. Holiday, just a little bit later in the same chapter, also comments, if you wish to improve, be content to appear clueless or even stupid in extraneous matters. That's a quote from Epictetus. So fast forward to March of 2020, where we are barraged with information, much of which is written or presented urgently. There is simply way too much coming at us, too much data, too much detail, every nuance magnified and speculated on until our brains are ready to explode. The result is a media-fueled anxiety that prevents us from experiencing or practicing stillness.

Once again, both the life and teachings of Jesus offer us another way, another way to think, another way to process, another way to live. As you read through the Gospels, one of the things you will notice is that Jesus was never in a rush. Like we pointed out last time, though he lived much of his adult life surrounded by crowds, he never permitted this to create a false sense of urgency.

[ 3 : 50 ] In other words, Jesus never confused the insistent with the important. As a result, he could give his full attention to what was significant. Be still and know that I am God. How often do you take time to be still? To shut off all the noise, all the information, and just allow your brain to rest, to pray, to meditate on what God is wanting to say to you or teach you, to slowly read your Bible, then close it and reflect on what you've read. It's only in these purposeful times of intentional stillness that we can actually think and be at peace. Otherwise, we find we're just reacting to things based on our fears and our anxieties. So let me encourage you to take time to slow down, be still, and listen to what God has to say to you today. There's a hymn that I love called It Is Well With My Soul, and I'm going to read just verses one or stanzas one and four. When peace like a river attendeth my way and sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot thou hast taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul. And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight, the clouds be rolled back as a scroll, the trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend, even so, it is well with my soul.