

Be Still and Know

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, if you don't know me, I'm Jesse. I'm one of the pastors here at City Grace Church, and we are glad that you're here. We're continuing on in our prayer series, and I wanna ask you this question. How is your prayer life going so far in 2026, right?
- So like on a scale of one to 10, one being it's in the toilet, or 10 being it's like the equivalent of being up in the third heaven, right? How's it going? So if you ask me that on any given day, it's somewhere on that spectrum, right?
- I might be down in a one. I might be up in a 10. I would say you're like right now, I'm at a five. And even the prayer that I tried today was like, you know, knocked me down a peg, so.
- But all that to say is don't give up on prayer. Don't give up on prayer, just do it. Like Elliot kicked off our series, just do it. It's important, like we talked about last week, come with confidence.
- Not confidence that you do it really well. We're all beginners when it comes to prayer, and always will be, but come with confidence. Not on the basis of how good you are, but on the basis of your weakness and your need, because God is gracious and mercy, and Jesus chose to put on your weakness and neediness.
- [1 : 0 8] He knows you better than you know yourself. So come to him with confidence. And then also, with regards to prayer, don't measure how you're doing on prayer based on your performance.
- Am I doing it enough? Is it long enough? Is it perfect enough? And here's the thing, performance is grilled into our sense of being, and it's grilled into how we get our self-worth.
- And that's from the time we were very small. We are measured by a lot of things. We're measured by our grades. We move, then we move on from there, and we're measured at our work by our output.
- And you know, successful companies, they do performance reviews, and they make sure that you are, they're getting a good return on their investment of employing you. And then successful students, right?
- Their GPA is at a certain level, or they graduate magna cum laude, not like the rest of us Neanderthals sitting in the seats on graduation day, right? Well, what about successful Christians?
- [2 : 0 5] What do we measure success by? Is it church attendance, community group attendance, frequency, length of time in the Word, and Scripture, and prayer, having the most devoted devotion ever, devoted to God, those kind of things?
- Is it serving, how often we serve, or how much we give? Do we measure success? Do we measure our success as a Christian by any of those metrics and measures?
- And I'm guilty of thinking about those things. Those are metrics we look at often to gauge if the church is healthy or not healthy, right? So the big teaser today is this.

What does God measure success by? Does he care about what we do? Absolutely, right? Jesus talks about abide in me, you're gonna bear fruit. There has gotta be some evidence that we are connected into the life-giving power of Jesus Christ and the person of Jesus Christ.

But what does that mean? What does that look like? How is success measured? The first church began in Acts, and it grew to 3,000 people quite quickly because of one sermon that Peter preached on the heels of the Holy Spirit showing up in a very big way, in a very tangible way.

[3 : 18] And on the heels of that, and on the heels of God adding that many people to the church, they did stuff. They met in homes. They fellowshiped together. They poured over the apostles' teachings about Jesus and the gospel.

They prayed together. They covered each other's natural needs as those needs became relevant. Like there was food distribution. We know that to be true. And then they went and they evangelized everywhere they went.

They gossiped Jesus, as one writer said, everywhere they went. Jesus, think about that. When you look at the gospels, Jesus never told his disciples how to do church.

Did he? He said, come and follow me. And yet, Jesus ascends to heaven. The Holy Spirit falls. 3,000 people are added.

And their natural response is that, what they did, was to come together, to meet together, to be together, to be devoted together. And one of those ways was to include prayer. And when you look at the way Jesus did discipleship and the way the apostles did it and the early church did it, they were concerned.

[4 : 23] Their measure of success, they were concerned primarily about people's faith. faith. And that faith being manifested in a life that glorified God by loving God and loving others.

That's what they were looking at. If you were to just read the breadth of the letters that Paul writes and Peter writes and John writes and all those folks, that's what's coming across time and time again.

Jesus even said that multiple times. This is my commandment, that you love one another. He said that a lot of times. 1 John repeats that a lot of times in his various letters. And then if you look at specifically John 15 where Jesus says, I'm the vine, you the branches abide in me.

He goes on to say, this is what it means to abide in my love, that you love one another with the love of the Father that we've come to know through Jesus, that you've come to know through Jesus.

So God's measurement for us is the condition of our hearts, which he gets to measure. And you and I, I mean, I would like to be able to look at anybody's particular heart and say like, ooh, they're, you know, they're growing.

[5 : 32] They're on a, it's good or it's bad, but we can't do that. We don't get to measure that kind of stuff. So we typically fall into measuring what we can, performance, the things that we can see, all the stuff that I stated.

And we even might call that evidence of bearing fruit, but here's the danger. That lends itself to a culture of busyness where people spend a lot of time doing for God and spend very little time being with God.

But God's priority for us, his measure of success for us, and he says, hey, I want you to prioritize presence with me over performance.

But he also knows that presence is going to lead to a faithful and fruitful life. And a life of presence means slowing down.

A life of presence means that we push back against the performance culture that we live in. A life of presence means doing life at the speed of relationship. And in church, it means that the prayer meeting should be one of the best attended meetings and not the least attended meetings.

[6 : 43] As the old saying goes, Sunday attendance tells you how popular the preacher is. The prayer meeting attendance tells you how popular Jesus is. And we are wanting to become a praying church.

That's why we did this series. It's something we're really wanting to run at. We really feel God calling us to you and why we're doing this series. And today's topic is one of the old forgotten ways of praying.

A spiritual discipline that's been quite neglected for a long time. But you know what's interesting over the past 10 years? It's one that is being rediscovered. And it's exciting. And here is this discipline, this type of prayer that I want to put before us today.

It is being still before God. Where the culture is forming us into a mold of performance-driven living, this practice of stillness is a counter-formation practice.

It is putting us into the mold of the relational-driven life Jesus wants us to live toward. So the first question, I think that would be good for us to ask, is where is this practice of stillness in the Bible?

[7 : 54] Well, it's actually in more places than you realize. But we're going to look at Psalm 46, verses 8 to 10. It says, Come, behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth.

He makes wars to cease to the end of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear. He burns the chariots with fire. Be still and know that I am God.

I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth. This is God's word. Be still and know that I am God.

I love Western movies. I don't know if you care for them, but I really do. So naturally, when the Yellowstone series came out, it piqued my interest, but I couldn't stick with it because I like Westerns, not soap operas masquerading as Westerns, right?

But I watched it long enough to hear a prayer that seemed like a very core religious belief of the modern cowboy. Lord, give us rain and a little bit of luck and we'll do the rest.

[9 : 04] Sounds great, right? The implication in this hard knock life, we need to be resilient and we are resilient. God, all we need is a little bit of help from you every so often.

And that is good Southern fried gospel. It's just not true. And scripture tells us that, that it's not true. It says, no, no, be still.

Wait on God. Wait on him for his salvation. Wait on him for what he is going to do. So do that. Be still. Wait on God. Don't order the fried chicken.

There's gonna be a time in your life when you realize that nothing you can do is going to fix the problem you're facing. Nothing you can do is gonna make tomorrow predictably safe.

It's in that place where stillness is gonna be so helpful. Where stillness is the best and only answer. Where waiting is more appropriate than action.

[10 : 06] And there you learn what is true about God and yourself. Stillness is an act of surrendering anxieties and recognizing God is in control not us.

When God brought Israel out of Egypt he led them to a peninsula where they camped. First time out of Egypt camping surrounded by the sea and I'm all for seaside camping.

Love it. Unless that turns into a death trap with no escape which is exactly what happened to Israel. Pharaoh changes his mind. He brings his special forces chariots the might of his army.

He's chasing Israel down and they are trapped. They got nowhere to go. Like for all it's going to be like desert storm where we mowed over the Iraqi troops. Now put yourselves in Israel's shoes facing that.

Imagine the size of that army coming at you and you have nowhere to run. Three sides of you is surrounded by water. And you are a nation of shepherds not warriors.

[11 : 12] They've got horses and chariots all you have is sheep and cattle. Exodus 14 10 to 12 this is what they did.

When Pharaoh drew near the people of Israel lifted up their eyes and behold the Egyptians were marching after them. And they feared greatly. Kind of makes sense right? And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord they said to Moses is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness.

What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not what we said to you in Egypt? Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians for it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.

Israel's having a good old fashioned freak out here right? They are melting down. This is like rock bottom in their life and in their faith. Right? Things were bad in Egypt as slaves but man this is far worse.

When have you hit rock bottom? When have you felt helpless to fix what needs fixing? Have you been there? Do you understand that feeling?

[12 : 19] Do you understand that helplessness and that hopelessness? See God brought his people to that place on purpose. He brought them to the place where they could only they couldn't say hey we got this God just a little help.

We'll do the rest. And he still does that with his people today just so you know. Not because he's mean hearted. He's a good father and he cares about us and he has a redemptive purpose for doing that.

Verse 13 the story goes on like this. Moses said to the people fear not Israel fear not stand firm aka stop the meltdown stand firm and see the salvation of the Lord which he will work for you today.

For the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again the Lord will fight for you and you have only to be silent. Fear not stand be silent.

Do nothing. Look to God look to his salvation look to his power and to his strength and the rest of the story goes that God comes through saves Israel makes a way through the sea destroys Pharaoh and his army be still wait and watch God make a way.

[13 : 48] And thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians so the people feared the Lord and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.

At the end of this episode it started with fear and trembling it started with them hitting rock bottom it started with them having a faith crisis it started with them lamenting and having doubt and saying God why would you do this to us this makes no sense God says just hold on be quiet stand there watch me do the thing that I do and at the end Israel knew God better than they did at the beginning.

That's the benefit of stillness. We start to learn that God's power can do a lot more than our efforts. His performance accomplishes a lot more than ours can.

Now let's go beyond us personally just thinking about our own lives and our own walk with Jesus let's bring this into us as a church and our togetherness and to our calling as disciples that care about God's redemptive purposes and we want we're a church that wants to see God glorified in our city and our neighborhoods and our families and our friends and our schools we want we want to see more people believing in Jesus and trusting and obeying him and here's the thing that is too big a task for us to approach with God just need a little rain and a bit of luck we'll do the rest now will God use us to accomplish his redemptive purposes in our city absolutely but we also know that he's the one that parts the waters not us and that's one of the greatest benefits to stillness and practicing this discipline of stillness and this prayer these prayers of stillness you start to see God's power at work more than your performance and the other benefit is that it improves your ability to hear

God's voice stillness what it does it quiets our hearts to hear God's voice busyness can't do that slowing down will to see God part seas or to see him send fire down from heaven or send cancer that is a pretty awesome thing to be able to behold right that is a faith booster for sure but that is different to discerning God's voice Elijah was one of the ancient prophets of Israel he lived thousands of years ago and he learned this this thing of quieting the heart to discern God's voice but before he got to that point kind of started with you know Israel sliding into apostasy they stopped worshiping God and they started worshiping this false God Baal and so Elijah picked a fight with these guys Baal and the prophets of Baal and he said I'm going to challenge let's have a God challenge here and you get your

[16 : 56] God to rain fire down on a sacrifice you offer him and I'll get my God to rain fire down on a sacrifice and so they met on Mount Carmel to see what was going to happen and Baal failed and God didn't God came through big time in fact he went scorched earth right the sacrifice was consumed the altar was consumed the water that they poured over the altar was consumed point made now you would think that that powerful display would resolve all of Elijah's problems that Israel would suddenly wake up but actually things got worse first kings 19 1-3 ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword and then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah saying so may the gods do to me and more so if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow ahab and Jezebel were the king and queen of Israel at the time then Elijah was afraid and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba which belongs to Judah and left his servant there so Elijah right threat of his life runs flees into the wilderness right and God takes care of him there feeds him and says to Elijah hey you got 40 days journey further to go in to the wilderness

God calls him to Mount Horeb and that's where he goes so here we find Elijah on the run alone 40 days in no man's land running for his life rock bottom what does God have for him there another display of power let's see and there he came to a cave and he lodged it and behold the word of the Lord came to Elijah and said to him what are you doing here Elijah and he said I have been very jealous for the Lord the God of hosts for the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant throw down your altars and killed your prophets with the!

God says to Elijah go out and stand on the mount before the Lord and behold the Lord passed by and a great strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord but the Lord was not in the wind and after the wind an earthquake but the Lord was not in the earthquake and after the earthquake a fire but the Lord was not in the fire and after the fire the sound of a low whisper and when Elijah heard it he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave and behold there came a voice to him and said what are you doing here Elijah God's power can definitely grab our attention especially amidst life's noisiness but God's quiet whispers can only be discerned in the stillness and for that matter our soul's desperate cries can only be heard best in the stillness as well and God wants to speak to those deep places those deep places in our soul where the underlying fears and the doubts live where the deep questions and our deepest cares lie and our deepest worries lie despite

God's power Elijah's soul felt overwhelmed to the point of death see it wasn't in the display of God's power on Mount Carmel that Elijah's soul found hope nor was it in his performance as the faithful prophet of God it was actually in that quiet place that God gently spoke hope into his troubled soul and the Lord said to him go Elijah return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus and when you arrive you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place and the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death and yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him there's

Elijah's hope in the stillness and so Elijah learned the power of stillness with God the power of the quiet whispers where God speaks to you in meaningful ways where Elijah learned the priority of presence over performance see it's besides the still waters isn't it that the shepherd restores our soul as the psalm says it's there that we learn that we truly do live without lack because of this amazing shepherd who cares for us and he's there with us being still before God being still and knowing who God is in that stillness it is what we need more than we know so some practicals on how to engage in stillness prayer just want to give us some handles if you're wondering like well how do you actually do this well stillness practical number one pick a quiet solitary place right like

[22 : 43] God brought Elijah you don't have to travel 40 days into the wilderness like Elijah did right you ain't gotta do that just pick a quiet solitary place Bible figures like Daniel they went indoors to shed out the noise of Babylon when they prayed Jesus who didn't have a place to rest his head he said would steal!

out into the countryside into a quiet solitary place the apostles recorded he went outdoors to pray away from the crowds so whether it's a closet whether it's your back porch whether it's out in creation find that quiet solitary place where you can shut out the noise of life and just pay attention to God and to your soul and the place is important but along with the place make sure you enter with the right expectations stillness practice number two engage with the goal to simply rest in God don't measure your prayer success this kind of stillness prayer don't measure success by whether like you got scrolls from God on the mountain and you came down with this great amazing message to give to everybody else right don't measure that success of whether or not God spoke to you if all you get that is a home run the goal here is being present with

God and that's it being with him and when you go with that goal and you're saying you know God I'm handing over all the outcomes of this to you like you don't come in trying to bend that moment to your desired outcome you know when I was a kid I grew up dirt bike riding that was one of my fun things I did with my dad and so we got into the desert and we ride in these various places and you know out in the desert there's these not dry lake beds there's these dry river beds and dry river beds have a lot of loose sand in them and it is one of the most difficult things to learn how to ride a dirt bike in those things because the sand kind of forces the instinct is to go slow but actually the prevailing wisdom is to not go slow but to actually go fast you actually are better going faster than that well

I didn't know any of this and I'm six years old and my dad says hey let's go on a ride he picked me up put me in front of him and I grabbed the handlebars on his 350 Honda and we headed out and we hit a dry river bed and we started going and the bike starts doing this and I'm like my heart beats like you know there was not calm and serenity and little six year old Jesse at that point and I remember like a little bit into it about a minute or two into it my dad says like hey stop trying to control the bike I got this and you're letting go and you're saying you know what God I'm going to let you have the outcome of this one and again this is a way to pray not the only way to pray but this is a good practice to put in your prayer regimen it's a good tool to put into the toolbox let go let go of the desired outcomes and

I want to say this to you as you get into this just thinking about coming with no expectations coming with this expectation expect to feel like you're feeling hard when you start this because your mind and soul are going to be full of so many things because you cannot typically be plugged into the noise machines of social media and the news cycle and music for hours on a day and end up with an empty soul you're going to come in filled with all of that messaging and your soul is going to be like a saturated sponge that can't take anything else in and it needs to be squeezed out so squeeze out that noise that you've taken in by bringing your worries to God I guarantee you if you're going to try this you're going to sit down and be like wow I'm thinking about this thing I'm thinking about these chores that I got ahead of me or this difficult project at work that

[27:17] I got to get done or I have this concern about my family or something and it's making me sad or furious or anxious or I'm feeling overwhelmed I don't know what to do I can't change it so I give it to you go ahead and do that just as those things pop up it's okay to do that I had a friend who when he started learning how to do this practice he said you know it was helpful for him was bringing a journal to his stillness time so that he could write down all the top of mind stuff that came into his mind all the intrusive thoughts that he didn't want to have and write them down in those first few minutes and then what he would do is he would look at it and he would say and he would close his journal and he would say to God these are all the things Lord that are important to me and right now I am temporarily setting them aside to be with you I am setting aside everyone and everything for these next few moments just to be with you and he just said and you can pick those up later on or you can bring them to

God later on but they're there but right now it's just you and him this kind of practice of doing that it validates the importance of those things that are going in our life that we can't abandon it forever but it also like practicing the closing it up and putting it to the side it's like a physical moment to just be with God and being with God in stillness means the only active thing that we are really doing is listening to him active listening that's what we're trying to do here stillness practical number three strive to listen and only speak when spoken to okay it's a tough one because I think all of us think of prayer as speaking to God after all right it's like man discerning that quiet whisper that he can speak to us in and when you listen to

God and you use few words in time you will see that he does feel the silence he does feel the silence sometimes he'll do that by filling your soul with peace or a sense of his goodness or his love or you'll just feel it and you'll know that Lord you are here with me and that's enough or sometimes what he does I know for some of you he pops a picture in your mind a picture that's kind of worth a thousand words and it's meaningful for something that is going on in your life or something that he communicates to you that is just like man you needed to know this that God is there and he cares and he sees you I know for me what are you seeking some of my best conversations was with God are the ones where he asked me those questions I remember we were we were wrestling through me and

Haley Asher came to us and up to this point we had been homeschooling him but he was becoming a senior and he came to us and he really felt called for his senior year to go to Newborn high school and so we were like gosh do we want him to finish out the curriculum that he's been in like going through and it's really good curriculum and it's really beneficial and he's really learning a lot of stuff and we're like we don't know what should we do and Asher kind of hit us up a couple of times and he's like so what's the decision guys and I was like actually I gotta be honest I haven't really been praying about it so I said I tell you what buddy I'm gonna go pray so I remember walking around Fort Benjamin Park in Newport they just have this trail that you could walk around I just remember walking around and I was praying I was praying and finally I was like you know I'm just going to let God speak to me and then God started to ask me questions that answered themselves and he led me right into the conclusion that yes Asher should be at Newbern High School and he had a great year and he made an influence and impact of a lot of kids there because he wanted to be a light in a place where a lot of kids didn't know

Jesus and God used him in a lot so just listen pay attention God speaks to us in the ways that he knows works for us finally stillness practical number four be still okay like really be still why why is that so important you might argue that actually Jesse I do better focusing if I'm moving around somewhere but you have to remember what this practice is pushing back on it's counter formation right because we live in a culture that says productivity is purpose moving is meaning and we're we're saying no there's there can be other things we're pushing back against that little challenge for you this week maybe schedule 10 minutes 10 minutes for stillness in a quiet solitary place wherever that works for you and if all you get out of it is a good nap praise the

[32 : 41] Lord all right God gave you some rest for your weary soul but then go share your experience with a friend or at community group this week stillness friends is a very practical way of reminding us that God is still at work even when we aren't right he doesn't need you to burn the candle at both ends for his kingdom to come you can rest when you need rest you can run at a pace that won't burn you out and he wants to be with you the band comes up and we look to respond we're going to do communion in a moment and I just want to say to you if you're here and you're not yet a follower of Jesus glad that you're here glad you're hearing the sermon and this the vibe and the focus there is to find an empty mind kind of blankness and feeling nothing this is actually you're going to a person and you're trying to have a relational experience in a very specific way but here's the thing that you need to know if you're here not you to follow

Jesus Jesus really wants to be with you because he loves you and he doesn't call the righteous he calls sinners and he calls the self righteous he calls the confused he calls the addicted he calls the scorn he calls the abused the oppressed the overlooked he calls you to come to him just as you are the only performance that Jesus demands of you is to come just as you are and to believe on him and to follow him with faith and so we do come with our sins we do come with what we think are good deeds and we find that actually man all those things in the face of Jesus performance of living a sinless life and dying the sinner's death on the cross is everything that we actually need so bring him everything you got bring all your shame bring everything that you think is impressive and hand it over to him he is!

all communion and for those who are followers of Jesus we are taking going to come to the communion table and there's communion tables on the four corners on the outside of the seating area around the room here as we come to the table it reminds us just like stillness that our performance anything that you and I can do is very much overshadowed by our saviors and what he has done for us doesn't that feel good the privilege to know God the privilege to just be with him as his kids that is firmly fixed on what Jesus has done this sacrifice that we're coming to be reminded of and to partake in just remember that as you come to the table pray with me

Lord Jesus we are about to come to do what you commanded your disciples to do to remember you to remember that your body was broken for us and that your blood was shed for us and before we come to the table before we come and we take that bread and the cup back to our seats and eat that communion drink that communion Lord do we want to stop and we want to ask that you would meet us in a very real way in this moment that we would know your presence that we would know and be reminded that you are a God that values presence over performance we thank you for all that you have done for us amen