

Call to Worship

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” (Psalm 46:10)

Prayer

God, my Father, help me to still my soul in your presence as I come to worship you. Speak to me, convict me of anything I am hiding from you and lead me to repentance, speak to me that I may grow in knowledge of you and obedience to your will. Lift my spirit to praise, to exalt you. All this in the name of Jesus I pray. Amen.

Song: *by P Baloch*

1. Open the eyes of my heart, Lord, open the eyes of my heart.
I want to see You, I want to see You.
2. To see You high and lifted up, shining in the light of Your glory.
Pour out Your power and love, as I sing holy, holy, holy.
3. I cry holy, holy, holy, You are holy, holy, holy
I want to see you.

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Prayer of Intercession

Father God, I pray with those Christians whose families are torn apart by persecution in so many countries around the world.

- I pray with those in Nigeria whose children are kidnapped, whose neighbours are killed, whose homes and churches are burned by Islamist attacks.
- I pray with those in Iran who are imprisoned and executed for their faith, who worship you in hiding.
- I pray with those in Pakistan who can only work in jobs, more akin to slavery, because they are Christians.
- I pray with those in India who are attacked in their church buildings and house churches by Hindu extremists.

Father, give them hope that you will be exalted in the nations.

Lord, they teach us to take those words in Habakkuk seriously: Though the fig tree does not bud, and there are no grapes on the vine, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, there are no sheep in the pastures and no cattle in the stalls, yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Saviour.

Amen.

Bible Reading:

- **Psalm 131** My heart is not proud, Lord, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me. But I have calmed and quieted myself, I am like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child I am content. Israel, put your hope in the Lord both now and forever more.

Song: *by L Herrington, T Fettke*

1. Be still and know that I am God, be still and know that I am God,
Be still and know that I am God.
2. I am the Lord that healeth thee, I am the Lord that health thee,
I am the Lord that healeth thee.
3. My boundless mercy shall endure, my boundless mercy shall endure,
My boundless mercy shall endure.
4. In Thee O Lord I put my trust, In Thee O Lord I put my trust,
In Thee O Lord I put my trust.

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Message: “Be Still”

“It was a dark and stormy night” is a traditional start to a mystery or detective story, just as “Once upon a time” are the traditional opening words of a fairy story. A dark and stormy night was a significant time in the life of the prophet Elijah. He was coming off a euphoric big win against the prophets of Baal when he got a message from Queen Jezebel, a nasty piece of work, that she was going to kill him. So, he fled in fear for his life, trying to get as far away as he could. He travelled for over a month to Mt Horeb (probably Mt Sinai) and hid in a cave. He confessed to God his fear, his loneliness and his belief that he was the only one left in Israel that believed in God.

So, God showed him his mighty power with a ferocious wind, and a great earthquake and fire, which cracked the mountain and sent the rocks flying. God didn’t speak to him in the middle of these noisy and spectacular events, but when things had quietened down, and were still, God spoke into that silence and encouraged and strengthened him, told him to go back to his job as a prophet, and told him there were 7000 people in Israel who still believed in the one and true God. God fed his soul when he despaired and was hungry for help, encouragement, and assurance.

Elijah teaches us an important lesson. We need to get alone with the Lord often so he can feed our souls and fill our “love tanks”. The Psalm above, the shortest of the Psalms, has David calming and quieting himself and likening himself to a weaned child sitting on his mother’s lap. It is a beautiful image. Just sitting, content to enjoy the closeness and love of his mother. We may sometimes think we don’t need to do that. God is with us all the time, isn’t he? The Holy Spirit empowers us. We are promised victory in life. Why take time to just sit? There are things to do! But this is a mature child. He is weaned. He no longer needs his mother’s milk. But he does need to sit with his

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mother, filling a deep need, just as we need to sit with the Father. Spurgeon said Psalm 131 is the shortest to read, and the longest to learn!

Psalm 23 reminds us of the importance of stillness. “He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside still waters, he refreshes my soul.” Such an important foundation as we face all aspects of life when we need God’s presence and guidance (“He guides me along the right paths”), when we travel through troubled and challenging times (“Even though I walk through the darkest valley [or “the valley of the shadow of death”], I will fear no evil for you are with me”), as we rejoice in the provision of the Lord and the uplifting moments of life (“You prepare a table before me You anoint my head My cup overflows”), and in the eternal hope we have (“I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever”). Enjoying the stillness and the presence of God is such an important, transforming and restoring part of our daily walk with the Lord.

When I think I don’t need this time of quiet and stillness and resting in God, I am reminded that Jesus himself needed it. On several occasions, we read in the gospels that Jesus went alone to spend time with his Father. Sometimes it was after a busy time of ministry (e.g. after feeding the 5,000). Sometimes it was before some big decision (e.g. before he chose his 12 disciples). Sometimes he was completely alone (e.g. with his disciples rowing away over the Lake of Galilee). Sometimes the disciples were nearby (e.g. at the Transfiguration). Most famously, in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night before he died, he moved off alone to be with his Father and spent an agonising time coming to the point where he said, “... not what I will, but what you will.”

There will be times when, like Jesus, we come to the stillness of being in God’s presence when the despair and distress of things not going well washes over us. I had that experience when something I believed God called me to was not working out, and it looked as though I would have to turn my back on it. I was praying and weeping before the Father when I felt, and “saw”, Jesus approach me, put his arms around me, and say something like, “It will be alright.” And so it was. The difficulties, although real, were resolved and that calling was greatly blessed.

Some, like me, may find that putting aside time to spend in quietness before the Lord is not always easy. The biggest barrier for me is the full agenda. “I will do it after I finish this”. Or that biggest of all excuses, “What I’m doing is urgent!” I am diligent in making sure I’m on time when keeping an appointment with the doctor! How much more should I be diligent in keeping an appointment with my Lord?!

Given that I should be “led to green pastures and beside still waters’, what are some of the things I can do to make this a precious time. You will have some things that work for you, and here are some to try.

- Although you can of course pray anywhere, choose a place that is quiet and comfortable.
- Use that age-old prayer, “Come Holy Spirit”, and drink in the fruits of his indwelling presence – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

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- Avoid distractions, anything that will take your thoughts away from communing with your Father. What gets in the way for me is the things that I have to do. A piece of paper to write these things down, and then put aside, helps. Turning the phone off also cuts out a common distraction! From the Psalm above, “I do not concern myself with great matters”!
- Listen! As in any relationship there is a time to stop talking and listen (you’ve probably heard that old adage, God gave us two ears and one mouth for a reason!). God may not speak audibly, but listen for a realisation, a clarity, an understanding, an assurance, a revelation from his word.
- A friend of mine uses a candle as something to focus on. Sometimes background music helps – but you don’t want to disturb the stillness. I am listening to Vivaldi’s 4 Seasons as I write this, but that may not be your cup of tea - whatever you find peaceful and calming (maybe not hard rock!).
- Sometimes God speaks into issues that we need to address in our lives as he sanctifies us. He brings light into any darkness we are hiding – any sin, any unhealthy habits. Be open and honest with your Father.
- Satan hates this time you have with the Lord. Dismiss him in the name of Jesus.

You may have other ways that enrich the time you spend alone with God your Father. I’d love to hear them – email: <mailto:rwtiler@icloud.com>.

Song: AHB 48 “Be Still my Soul” (Katharina von Schlegel)

1. Be still my soul: the Lord is on your side; bear patiently the cross of grief and pain;
Leave to your God to order and provide; in every change he faithful will remain.
Be still my soul: your best, your heavenly friend through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.
2. Be still my soul: your God will undertake to guide the future as he has the past.
Your hope, your confidence let nothing shake, all now mysterious shall be clear at last.
Be still my soul: the tempests still obey his voice, who ruled them once on Galilee.
3. Be still my soul: when dearest friends depart and all is darkened in the vale of tears,
Then you shall better know his love, his heart, who comes to soothe your sorrow, calm your
Be still my soul: for Jesus can repay from his own fulness all he takes away. /fears.
4. Be still my soul: the hour is hastening on when we shall be forever with the Lord,
When disappointment, grief and fear are gone, sorrow forgotten, love’s true joy restored.
Be still my soul: when change and tears are past, all safe and blest we shall meet at last.

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Benediction

Go from this place of worship with the love and comfort from the Father. Go from this place of quietness into the noise and business of the world in the name of Jesus. Go from this place of submission to the Father with power of the Holy Spirit so that others may see Jesus in you. Amen

This service was prepared by Ron Tiller, HopeNet SA