

ON BEING STILL

Psalm 46:10: "Be still, and know that I *am* God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth."

Psalm 4:4: "Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah."

As I write this article, I have already missed the Wednesday evening service, but I was blessed to have watched it online while at home. I appreciate the earnestness and content of Brother Matthew's message. Today, the Lord willing, I am sitting with you in the services enjoying Brother David Burkholder this morning and looking forward to hearing from Sean Teis, our missionary to the fatherless this evening.

I am doing something that is not very easy; I am attempting to be still. According to the doctors, nurses, my wife and every church member, I am being exhorted to be still. I think "ordered" would probably be a more appropriate word. How very thankful I am that the surgery went well. I do understand in the long run, taking time to recuperate could not only save my health, but save time, lest I relapse and take a longer period of time to recover. And although the doctor said the headaches would get worse at first, as of this writing, I can happily say, they seem to be getting better. I am going longer intervals of time without the prescription medicines. Pray for me as I prepare for my follow up doctor visit this coming Wednesday.

I have cancelled two meetings and now being out of our own pulpit for three and possibly four consecutive times is hard for me. I am devoted to the call of God on my life to preach and I love to preach. I also am privileged to come to the bedside of our people when sick and I have already missed three opportunities to visit in the hospital. Again, I am thankful for Brother Matthews taking the time and making those visits for me.

Let me share with you three things I am learning about being still.

I. LIFE GOES ON WITHOUT ME

The truth of the matter is that eventually, unless the church is raptured anytime soon, the day will come when we will all be leaving this world. The Bible says, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

With the passing of every loved one to the other side, I experience the same emotion. Nearly every time as we all fall back into our rhythms of life, I feel like saying, "Wait a minute; how can we go on without Grandma, Grandpa, Mom or Dad here with us." But life indeed goes on. The Bible says, in Ecclesiastes 1:4, "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever."

The long-range goal for all of us should be to live a life that we're not ashamed of. If you blow it, and all of us do in some form or another, repent and do not repeat. Learn from the falls in life and remember Psalm 37:23, 24: "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him

with his hand.” Proverbs 24:16a teaches us, “For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again....”

One of the most unusual characters I have ever known was Pop Stauning. Pop was an old Norwegian fisherman who, with his precious wife, retired to Florida and was a member of the church where my father pastored. Pop and I became fast friends during my teen-age years. I became acquainted with him not long after we had studied Ernest Hemmingway’s “The Old Man and the Sea” in school. Pop became my real life personification of the old weathered protagonist. Some of the most precious memories of my teen years were spent in the company of this old fisherman. I see now the wisdom of my parents during my tendency to rebel against authority; they often sent me to Pop. As soon as I walked into this man’s presence, I was in another world and in another time. He leaned slightly to one side, yet still maintained a good height. He had a short white beard and wore an old seaman’s hat with which he was inseparable; the one exception was when he was in church. He had a fantastic boat that he made by his own hands. He installed the engine himself. Even now in my memory I see him at the stern. The further out to sea we went, the more animated and talkative he became. I hear him now in his broken English and strong Norwegian accent. I learned so much from this old man. I learned to respect the water. He studied it as well as any doctor would study Grey’s anatomy. I learned to love the simple pleasures of nature. There is hardly any sky to compare with the sky at sea. One valuable lesson was learned while we were walking along the shore of Captain Johnny’s Island. You may think I have added this to our story to make it more interesting, but I have not. One day when Pop and I were out setting trotlines, we took an excursion to a little island off Florida’s west coast. I asked him as we began to go ashore, “Pop, what’s the name of this island?” He replied, “It doesn’t have one, but as of today, it is Captain Johnny’s Island.” Don’t look for it on any map and I could not even take you there if you set me down in Tampa Bay, but it is forever sketched in my memory. While we were walking along the shore of this small island, I kicked an empty crab shell. He grabbed me by the arm and said, “Never do that!” I asked, “Why? The crab is gone; that’s just his empty shell.” He answered, “Ya, but ‘dere was life ‘dere once and you must always remember to respect life!” I have never forgotten that lesson.

You will not find Pop’s name on Wikipedia. But as long as I live, that lesson Pop taught that day will go with me and now I have left it with you. Yes, life must go on without us one day, but let’s leave something behind that blesses those who follow. Etienne de Grellet, the Quaker missionary said, “I shall pass this way but once; any good that I can do or any kindness I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer nor neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.”

II. I OBSERVE THINGS THAT HAVE PREVIOUSLY GONE UNNOTICED.

Jesus said in Luke 12:27, “Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.”

“Stop and smell the roses” may be a cliché, but new research suggests it’s sound advice for finding satisfaction in life. A forthcoming study in the *Journal of Personality and Individual Differences* suggests that appreciating the meaningful things and people in our lives may play an even larger role in our overall happiness than previously thought. In the study, Rutgers University psychology professor Nancy Fagley had nearly 250 undergraduates take a survey measuring their levels of appreciation, which Fagley defines as “acknowledging the value and meaning of something—an event, a behavior, an object—and feeling positive emotional connection to it.”

Our Lord knew the value of coming apart from the busyness and distractions of life as we see in Mark 6:31, “And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat.” He also said, Luke 12:24, “Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?” Observe the lilies, check out the birds. There is a calmness when we appreciate things far too often overlooked.

III. STILLNESS IS THE ANTEROOM THAT INVITES THE MANIFESTATION OF GOD’S PRESENCE.

Psalm 46:10a: “Be still, and know that I AM God....” Simple, yet profound. We get still and God shows up. Now, He was there all the time, but sometimes our life is so loud, that we cannot hear Him. Matthew 13:9: “Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.” Our life is so cluttered, we cannot see Him. Matthew 5:8: “Blessed *are* the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” We are so full, we cannot taste His presence as Psalm 34:8 invites us, “O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.”

Dr. Oliver Sacks, author of the book *Awakenings*, has done remarkable research on reviving the catatonic mind. Dr. Sacks and his colleagues at Beth Abraham Home for Incurables and now named Beth Abraham Hospital discovered that people who were paralyzed and speechless, would listen to music usually of their youth and the journalist Roberta Hershenson said, “Breakthroughs do occur: the speechless talk, the frozen smile, and the silent hum.” In the stillness of their imprisoned body, they heard the music and responded.

In the stillness of my first night home after the surgery, I found it hard to sleep. I put on hymns of my youth and remembered what the Puritan John Brown defined the fear of God as: “When God’s frown is our greatest dread and God’s smile is our greatest delight.” And in the still, silent night, I sensed His smile as I drifted off to sleep. Psalm 4:4: “Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah.”

I love you all. And thank you again for your prayers.

-Pastor Pope-