

Reflections on Stillness 26.07.2020

Hello

Today we are thinking about renewal and stillness. Tim asked me to share some thoughts on stillness.

St Augustine said that “our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God.” That God has made us for himself, to be in relationship with Him, implying that away from Him we cannot fully know rest and peace.

Our starting point, therefore, is closeness to God.

A favourite verse, and one that seems to have been particularly important in recent months, is Psalm 131 v 2 *“But I have calmed and quieted myself, I am like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child I am content.”*

A maternal picture of intimacy with God. Sat on his knee, satisfied and at peace. Content. [Spurgeon, the famous 19th century Baptist preacher](#), wrote several sermons on this a psalm and if you are interested to explore more, I’ve included a link on the transcription, as well as bible verses referred to later.

The weaned child is contented and satisfied but the weaning child is one that is fretting and not at peace. So, what stops us from being still in God’s presence?

Another verse that I come back to time and again on stillness

Isaiah 30 v 15 *“In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength,”*

But I’m always shocked that the verse continues *“But you would have none of it.”* God invites us to receive so much from Him, in fact everything we need. so Here are some thoughts on what might stop us. And I for all our protestations Jesus and God’s word has an answer

- Busyness - Martha - only one thing is necessary. Luke 10:42 Be still and know that I am God Psalm 46:10
- Preoccupation - take each thought captive to Christ 2 Corinthians 10:5
- Exhaustion/Weariness - Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Matthew 11:28-29
- Sadness and pain both in our hearts and in our physical bodies. Our tears are precious to God, he captures them in jars Psalm 56:8-9.
- Discontent that keeps us striving for more – Spurgeon has much to say on this

A great counter to envy and discontent is thankfulness. And thank you to Ruth Norman for her recent and really helpful thoughts on the practice of thankfulness. My thankfulness jar reminds me of all that I have when I am tempted to be envious.

And the really BIG one!

- Anxiety - do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow has enough worries of its own. Matthew 6:24
- Past hurts and broken relationships – the offer of forgiveness to both give and receive Luke 6:37

Fear not for I have redeemed you I have called you by name and you are mine. Isaiah 43:1

Therefore if our past is redeemed and our future secure we only have the present – today – that’s why it’s called a gift. Thanks, Muriel, for this gem!

Lockdown has given some of us opportunities to do things differently. Instead of commuting to work - driving, listening to Pray As You Go and interceding – this has been replaced with what I would call a proper quiet time - the sort of special time with God I can only achieve at weekends or on retreat. A time alone with God to sit on his knee, to hear His heartbeat, to listen to Him and also to share what is on my heart.

It’s been a really rich and precious time spiritually. But I’ve really needed it and I think it is something that has sustained me through what has been a very challenging, busy and, at times, exhausting period. But out of that place of stillness with God He has enabled me to do so much.

I still have periods when I forget to just come and be and sit on Abba’s knee, dear Dad’s knee. Thank you Les for that enduring image of our heavenly Dad always welcoming us. Always waiting. And when we finally get there saying, “What took you so long!”

In music we have a pause. Also in drama the dramatic pause and in dancing where a ballerina appears suspended. It seems to enable us to enjoy more or to feel and experience the weight of something more deeply. I was struck by the new term in lockdown - Anthro pause. That the huge ceasing of human activity that’s had an amazing impact on the natural world. Many accounts of less pollution from human activity has enabled creation to thrive again when we know countless species of animal and plant life are on the verge of extinction. Anthro pause – yes for many of us that silence and stillness was delicious – silence often the companion of stillness - and it’s not surprising therefore when we are still it benefits the whole of creation.

And we need these still points throughout the day. A rhythm of prayer and activity. Like the tide’s ebb and flow and the monastic rhythm of prayer giving us opportunities to re-centre. We need to work out of a place of rest not just rest from activity. I think there is something called a Fulcrum point which is the centre that enables an activity to happen. Stillness with God I would say is our fulcrum – Jesus is our centre point.

And Jesus is our role model as we know there are many examples where he withdrew to be alone with God. I hear you say “Yes sure but it was ok for Jesus he didn’t have to work like we do” - he didn’t have to juggle childcare, work, domestic chores, looking after neighbours, pets, parents etc etc.

I find the story of [Charles Wesley’s mother Susanna](#) really inspiring. She is renowned for throwing her apron over her head which signified that she was not to be disturbed - it was her time with God. I had an image of her sitting there and just taking 5. No this mother of 10, with not exactly a supportive husband, would sit for 2

hours under her apron, her tent of meeting, during the day to be alone with God whilst her children studied, played, and created. Amazing.

The metaphor of the weaned child, and intimacy to the mother or the father may be images that are painful for some of us. If that is the case, then I would encourage you to speak to someone you trust at church. To help and support you to work through difficult emotions and feelings. Or maybe we can share with someone any of the things that would stop us from getting close to God and being still.

Spurgeon asks what are weaned from? is it self-sufficiency, self-will, self-seeking? Yes, all these things but it takes practice it's a long steady process of becoming more and more dependent on God. Of building a trusting relationship with him. We cannot go out and run a marathon - we need to train. If you find it difficult being still in God's presence, then start small. 30 seconds a day then a 1 minute. 5 minutes. 10 minutes and just see where it leads

Spurgeon asks another question. Do we have a Psalm 131 soul? Do we have a still and quiet soul that is content in God with the life he has given us?

I'd like to finish with the words from a song and a prayer

To be in your presence
To sit at your feet
When your love surrounds me
And makes me complete
This is my desire, o Lord
This is my desire

To rest in your presence
Not rushing away
To cherish each moment
Here I would stay
This is my desire, o Lord
This is my desire.

Lord Jesus, create in us a greater desire to seek stillness in Abba's presence, knowing that it is the place where we are fully satisfied in that healing Shalom. Where we are truly at peace. Holy Spirit work in us to remove barriers and obstacles to that place of intimacy so that we, your children, can say we trust you fully for all our tomorrows for they are safe in your loving hands.

AMEN