

Be Still and Know God

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When Loni, who just gave the opening prayer, was younger, around eight years old, the two of us were spending some time together. At that time I had been home from my mission less than a year and was still in the missionary mode in some ways. That day I felt the need to help young Loni gain a greater love and understanding of the scriptures. So I began to tell her how answers to any problem or concern she might have could be found in the scriptures. I really thought I was doing a fantastic job with my little impromptu lesson, so I ended it by enthusiastically asking her if she had anything troubling her at the time so I could show her how the process worked. She thought for a moment and then said a bit shyly, “Well, I am having some trouble in math.” Math. I was completely caught off guard by her response. I wasn’t expecting an answer like that at all, so it took me a second to think of a story that had numbers in it, and then off we went!

The scriptures really do have the answers to all questions or concerns—even math. One verse in particular has helped me numerous times in my life. It is found in section 101 of the Doctrine and Covenants. In verse 16 the Lord says: “Therefore, let your hearts be comforted concerning Zion; for all flesh is in mine hands; be still and know that I am God.” I love this

scripture, particularly the last part: “be still and know that I am God.” Today I would like to talk about how being still helps us gain a better understanding of life’s events and why things happen or don’t happen and how that helps us know God. Situations can be hard because we want to know and understand. We ask, “Our way was great—why didn’t it work out that way?” or “Why do bad things happen to good people?”

Maybe you didn’t get into the major you wanted; maybe class isn’t turning out how you thought; maybe a family member is sick. There are lots of disappointments in the world that may be hard to understand. Instead of stressing over them or blaming others, sometimes it is best to “be still,” become humble, and put your trust in God that all is well.

Now, those who know me, I am sure, are laughing a bit, because I am certainly not the poster child for a stress-free attitude! This is something I have struggled with my whole life. I actually used to think I thrived on stress. I thought I got my best work done under stress, so I actually piled it on. In addition,

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my personality is such that I also worry and stress over just about everything! The stress and worry caused me to become physically sick.

About a year ago I was talking to a friend who turned to me and simply said, “To worry is to lack faith.” This struck me quite hard. Think about it; it makes sense. If we worry and try to put it all on our own shoulders, we are not trusting that the Lord is in control or that He understands the situation. I cannot tell you the number of times this counsel has helped me and calmed me when I didn’t understand why events occurred—and in the process I think (at least hope) I have grown.

This past spring I was with a group of nursing students in the United Kingdom on a Study Abroad program where we were learning about the health care system. It was a wonderful trip, and like past Study Abroad programs that I have participated in, you do not expect everything to go exactly as planned. However, this trip seemed to bring on more challenges than usual. Now, in the nursing program classes are a bit different because we not only have our required classroom time but we also have a required number of hours that students must spend in a clinical setting such as a hospital or (for people like me, a public health nurse) in the community in a school or public health department.

In England we had partnered with a university that had arranged for us to be in the local hospital. After only about one and a half weeks into our clinical rotation, I was told that due to some changes in the visa rules and how they had interpreted them, we had to immediately stop going to the hospital. The news was shocking. We still had many hours we needed to complete in order to comply with the clinical hour requirement. More important, our main purpose in coming to England was to be involved in the health care system. What were we going to do? Well, we scrambled and prayed hard and were able to arrange alternative experiences for the students in other

parts of the health care system besides that one hospital. In the end the students even acknowledged that the unexpected change in events had actually been a blessing in disguise because we were able to see a much broader view of the health care system and were exposed to so much more. A change that at first seemed devastating became a blessing because we changed our perspective.

I am grateful for the students and their positive attitudes during this trip. Numerous things didn’t work out as planned on the trip. It got to the point that we would literally just laugh when the next scheduled event did not work. In many ways “be still and know that I am God” literally became our motto. Along with some wise counsel, a friend of one of the students shared, “It isn’t what happens in life that matters but only how we react to it.”

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin further counseled us, “The way we react to adversity can be a major factor in how happy and successful we can be. . . . The simple secret is this: put your trust in the Lord, do your best, then leave the rest to Him” (“Come What May, and Love It,” *Ensign*, November 2008, 26, 28).

If we learn to be humble, look at things with a more eternal perspective, and put our trust in the Lord, all will be well. Realize that often the experiences we may be having are to help us. This does not mean we should sit back and do nothing! Agency and our personal choices definitely affect outcomes. We must do our part! Just remember to give up some of the control and put your trust in God.

Let me share a brief example from my own life. It occurred when I received my mission call. I actually had graduated with my degree in nursing when I was 21. So I left on my mission soon after I had graduated. I am a bit embarrassed to admit it now, but one of the reasons I went into nursing was because I really wanted to serve a welfare/humanitarian mission, and I thought a nursing degree would increase my chances to do this.

And it seemed my plan had worked. My original mission call was to be a mission nurse in Venezuela. However, while in the MTC we had difficulty obtaining visas to enter Venezuela. Some missionaries had been in the MTC an extra two months just waiting for their visas. Finally it was decided that our calls would be changed. Within a day my call was changed from Venezuela to Puerto Rico; and instead of being the mission nurse, I would be a proselyting missionary! That very evening I was on a plane heading to Puerto Rico.

I was in utter shock. Although not so much now, at the time I was incredibly and painfully shy. This shyness was the reason I wanted to serve a welfare/humanitarian mission and not a proselyting mission. Nursing was something I could do because it was helping and serving others. Talking to absolute strangers scared me to death. For several months after I got there, I secretly thought the whole thing was a mistake and that I would soon be going to Venezuela. No, it was not a mistake, and I served my entire mission in Puerto Rico.

With a lot of prayer I learned to strike up a conversation on just about anything. I learned to really trust the Lord. My Spanish was never as good as it should have been, and I am still not the most outgoing person in the world, but I can honestly say I did the best I could, and the events that transpired were what I needed to grow. The Lord knew this even if I didn't.

Now, this was many years ago, but, looking back, I can see that these experiences have changed and shaped my life in so many ways. First, although my original intentions of studying nursing seemed ill guided, I can see now that the Lord was directing me—just for reasons different than I thought. Nursing is part of my mission in life. Second, serving a proselyting mission really made me stretch much more than anything else would have, and I am so very grateful it did. Finally, this change from my plan brought me experiences I never could have imagined for myself.

I am a planner, and so I originally thought I would return from my mission, go back to New England, work a few years as a pediatric nurse, get married, and have a family. But the Lord had a different path for me. On my mission I learned how much I loved being out with the people. Also, upon my return I found that I wasn't enjoying hospital nursing—I missed being with the people in their own settings and focusing on empowering them to change themselves. An opportunity soon arose—because I had learned to speak Spanish—to work as a school nurse in a Spanish-speaking area in Utah. Then other experiences and opportunities to further my education occurred, and here I am back at BYU. I have had the opportunity to travel and learn about other countries and cultures, and that has greatly enriched my life. It has shown me that the world isn't as black and white as I saw it. Although at the time it occurred I couldn't understand why, looking back now I can see the Lord's hand guiding me. I am a far better person for these experiences than my plans would have made me. How little I knew!

C. S. Lewis captured these unexpected twists in life when he said:

*Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. [George MacDonald, cited in C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 160]*

This reminds me of the beautiful folktale of the three trees. There were three trees on top of a mountain. The first tree wanted to become a chest to hold gold and the greatest treasures. The second tree wanted to become a ship to carry kings across oceans. The third tree wanted to grow to be the tallest tree so that when people looked heavenward, they thought of God.

One day woodcutters came and cut the three trees down. The first two trees were excited—their dreams would now come true.

The first tree was not made into a treasure chest but instead a feed box for animals. The second tree became a small fishing boat, carrying stinky fish all day. The third tree was made into lumber and put in a pile. “What happened?” they thought.

Time passed on, and the trees nearly forgot about their dreams. But then one night a new star appeared in the sky and a newborn babe was placed in the feedbox (or manger). The tree suddenly realized he was holding the greatest treasure in the world. It was better than he could have imagined.

A few years later the second tree, which was made into a boat, had a traveler fall asleep in it when a storm arose on the water. The man awoke, stood, and stretched his hand and said, “Peace.” The storm stopped, and the second tree realized he was carrying the King of Kings.

Finally, one Friday morning the third tree was taken and fashioned into a cross upon which this same man was crucified. The tree felt ugly. But on Sunday the sun arose and the tree realized that God’s love changed everything and that every time people thought of the third tree, they would think of God—and that was better than being the tallest tree.

Each tree had dreams, but the Lord saw their full potential, which brought a much greater reality. (See Angela Elwell Hunt, *The Tale of the Three Trees: A Traditional Folktale* [Colorado Springs, Colorado: Lion Publishing, 1989].)

In Psalm 46:10 the phrase “be still, and know that I am God” is used again. With the help of Dr. Dana M. Pike, professor of religious education, I learned that the Hebrew base that is translated as *still* in this text means “stop, cease your own human striving and watch the Lord do His work.” Moses commanded the children of Israel as they fled from the Egyptians: “Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord” (Exodus 14:13). Then He parted the waters of the Red Sea. Remember, the children of Israel were frightened and complained that they wanted to return to Egypt. They lacked the faith that the Lord would really deliver them. Often we are so distracted by the things around us that we do not have the faith to believe the Lord can do anything, and so we complain.

After learning the Hebrew origin of *still*, I went to the basic dictionary to learn about the etymology of the English word *still* (a habit I learned from my father, an English major who loves the *Oxford English Dictionary*). *Still* actually comes from a base meaning “standing” or “immobile” (*Webster’s New World Dictionary*).

Think about this. To me the Lord is saying, “Be immobile, be unwavering. Put your complete trust in the Lord and live.”

Someone who did this very thing was Eric Liddell, who won a gold medal in the 1924 Olympics in Paris. His story surrounding these Olympic events, including his refusal to run on Sunday, is portrayed in the great movie *Chariots of Fire*. At the end of the movie there is a short sentence that indicates that after the Olympics, Eric went to China, where he died. That is true, but a large part of the story is missing.

After the Olympics, Eric became a missionary in China. He married and had three girls, the youngest of whom he never knew because before she was born, his wife and children left China due to events leading up to World War II. Eric and many others who stayed in China ended up in a Japanese internment camp. To

me this is where Eric's life mission and trust in God became evident.

Camp life was tough—the prisoners were not given adequate food, and other restrictions were placed upon them. It was hard, as you can imagine. However, Eric, as he had his whole life, continued to live what he preached. He had come to know God; so where he was did not matter so much as how he acted.

He was assigned to teach science to the children who were also in the camp (Eric had graduated with a degree in science at the University of Edinburgh). They did not have the equipment to do the experiments, so he spent hours articulating and drawing out what would happen, making sure the children understood.

In addition, he oversaw sporting and recreational events. Children who were there in the camp remembered him always patching up hockey sticks using the sheets his wife had left him for his house. He was always serving others. He helped carry the coal for those who were older or disabled to ensure their stoves would continue to burn. He did not let the fact he was hungry, imprisoned, or away from his family stop him. He did die in the camp due to an inoperable brain tumor that had caused him great headaches. So he did all these things when not always comfortable himself.

The number of lives that he touched and shaped during this time is incredible. Scores of letters and tributes have been written by those who were in the camp with him. Yet the most touching tribute is one from his own daughter, who for years could not understand why her father had to be separated from his family. However, as she heard the tributes from the children he served, she realized the Lord knew her father was needed there to help those children who were also separated from their parents, and she knew how that felt. (See "Daily Encouragement Tuesday—Classical Testimonies . . . Eric Liddell; Finishing His Race!" Scotwise Blog, 14 August 2007;

http://scotwise.blogspot.com/2007/08/daily-encouragement-tuesday-classical_14.html; see also Ellen W. Caughey, *Eric Liddell, Heroes of the Faith* series [Uhrichsville, Ohio: Barbour Publishing, 2000].)

At his funeral, the Reverend Arnold Bryson, a close friend of Eric, said, "What was the secret of his consecrated life and far-reaching influence? Absolute surrender to God's will" (Sally Magnusson, *The Flying Scotsman* [New York: Quartet Books, 1981], 174). Eric's last words were said to have been "complete surrender"—a motto he used often in his sermons. At Eric's funeral they also sang his favorite hymn. In fact, the afternoon of the day he died, among the things Eric had written on a scrap piece of paper was the first line of the hymn. That hymn is also fitting for today. It was "Be Still, My Soul."

*Be still, my soul: The Lord is on thy side. . . .
Be still, my soul: Thy best, thy heav'nly Friend
Thru thorny ways leads to a joyful end.
[Hymns, 1985, no. 124]*

"Be still and know that I am God."

As I was preparing this talk, I asked some of my nieces and nephews what they thought D&C 101:16 meant. My eight-year-old nephew said, "Stop and listen." My 11-year-old niece added, "Reverence." They hit on a key principle, one I really struggle with: to be still we first just need to stop, and then we must listen.

About a year ago I had new tires put on my car. I soon heard a new sound as I drove. It wasn't very loud and it wasn't consistent, so I assumed it was due to the road, which was under construction. However, the noise continued, and so I brought the car back to the garage. They assured me it was just the new tires. I was relieved to hear this and drove away again, ignoring the sound. Over time the noise seemed to get a bit louder, but I unconsciously just turned up the radio a bit more, ignored the noise, and went on my way.

Months later I was in Salt Lake City picking up several friends to go to a concert. As the first friend got into my car, she immediately heard the sound and asked what was wrong with my car. I replied that nothing was wrong—did she hear something? (That tells you how much I had tuned out the sound.) She heard it loud and clear, as did the others in the car.

I brought my car to the garage the next day and was told the noise was due to an abnormal rubbing that had caused major damage. It was a dangerous situation that needed immediate repair. I thought back on the miles I had driven and how I had learned to completely tune out what became a very loud noise.

I still can't believe I had been able to tune it out. I realize it was quite crazy! I wonder what else in my life I had "tuned out" simply because I was too busy or distracted by other things in life—because I did not stop and listen.

I do not think I am alone with this; life is so busy, and we are always on the go. Elder Richard G. Scott reminds us, "Satan has a powerful tool to use against good people. It is distraction. He would have good people fill life with 'good things' so there is no room for the essential ones" ("First Things First," *Ensign*, May 2001, 7).

Robert Frost had this same idea when he said:

*The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.*

[Robert Frost, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" (1923), stanza 4]

We have too much going on to stop.

Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing, was a teenager when she heard a voice. The story is told that she was under a tree at her home when "God spoke to me and

called me into His service" (in Gena K. Gorrell, *Heart and Soul: The Story of Florence Nightingale* [Toronto: Tundra Books, 2000], 21). She was not quite 17 when this experience occurred. Yet this powerful event shaped her life. Interestingly, when the voice of God told her she had a calling, He wasn't specific in what she was to do. This came later, over time, and through various other experiences in her life. However, it began quietly and calmly under a tree.

He does not come in the strong winds, nor in the earthquakes or the fire. He comes in a still, small voice. (See 1 Kings 19:11–12.)

President Boyd K. Packer reminds us: "The Spirit does not get our attention by shouting or shaking us with a heavy hand. Rather it whispers. It caresses so gently that if we are preoccupied we may not feel it at all" ("The Candle of the Lord," *Ensign*, January 1983, 53).

I love reading about the Nephites in 3 Nephi of the Book of Mormon as they are gathered around the temple in Bountiful after all the destruction has taken place. As they are talking amongst themselves, they hear a voice. However, the Lord had to repeat Himself three times before "they did hear the voice, and did open their ears to hear it" (3 Nephi 11:5). The people had to be still and in tune before they understood the message.

"Be still and know that I am God" always reminds me of a beautiful photograph taken of the Salt Lake Temple. In the picture you see just the spires of the temple as the clouds settle. To me it is as if the clouds are the unknown tumult of the world settling, and there stands eternal truth. There stands God. He never moves but is waiting for us to turn to Him.

Elder David B. Haight said, "The moment we step into the house of the Lord, the atmosphere changes from the worldly to the heavenly. . . . It is a refuge from the ills of life and a protection from the temptations" ("Temples and Work Therein," *Ensign*, November 1990, 61).

As the poem in the Washington D.C. Temple states: "Nor shout nor rush but hush . . .

for God is here” (a saying often found over entrances of old churches in England).

A few verses later in D&C 101, the Lord actually commands the Saints to “stand in holy places” (D&C 101:22). Find your own holy place where you can stop being distracted by the world and things around you and where you can stop and reflect to see the Lord’s hand in your life.

I would like to close with one of my favorite stories, which likens this journey to a bike ride:

At first I saw God as an observer, like my judge, keeping track of things I did wrong. This way, God would know whether I merited heaven or hell when I died. He was always out there, sort of like the President. I recognized His picture when I saw it, but I didn’t really know Him at all.

But later on, when I recognized my higher power better, it seemed as though life was rather like a bike ride, on a tandem bike, and I noticed God was in the back helping me pedal.

I don’t know when it was that He suggested we change places, but life has not been the same since. . . .

When I had control, I knew the way. It was rather boring but predictable. It was always the shortest distance between the points.

But when He took the lead, He knew delightful cuts, up mountains, and through rocky places and at breakneck speeds; it was all I could do to hang on! Even though it looked like madness, He [said], “Pedal!”

I worried and became anxious, asking, “Where are you taking me?” He just laughed and didn’t answer, and I found myself starting to trust. I soon forgot my boring life and entered into the adven-

ture, and when I’d say, “I’m scared,” He’d lean back and touch my hand.

He took me to people with gifts that I needed; gifts of healing, acceptance and joy. They gave me their gifts to take on my journey. Our journey, that is, God’s and mine.

And we were off again. He said, “Give the gifts away, they’re extra baggage, too much weight.” So I did, to the people we met, and I found that in giving I received, and still our burden was light.

I did not trust Him at first, in control of my life. I thought He’d wreck it. But He knew bike secrets, knew how to make it bend to take sharp corners, jump to clear places filled with rocks, fly to shorten scary passages.

And I’m learning to [be quiet] and pedal in the strangest places, and I’m beginning to enjoy the view and the cool breeze on my face with my delightful constant companion, my higher power.

*And when I’m sure I can’t go on anymore, He just smiles and says, “Pedal . . .” [Author unknown, “The Bike Ride,” *A 2nd Helping of Chicken Soup for the Soul: 101 More Stories to Open the Heart and Rekindle the Spirit* (Deerfield Beach, Florida: Health Communications, 1995), 311–12; emphasis in original]*

As President Gordon B. Hinckley reminded us: “Don’t worry. The Lord is at the helm. This is his church” (“The Lord Is at the Helm,” fireside address, Brigham Young University, 6 March 1994).

I testify that this is true. Put your trust in God, let go of your worries, and replace them with faith. Pedal when you need to pedal, take the time to stop when you need to be still, and always strive to know God.