



# Be Still #1

Be Still #1 | January 7 | 8:00, 9:30, 11:00 AM | Preached by Steve Howell

## Series Introduction

Good morning! I'm excited to be up here with you as we begin a new year together at Tonganoxie Christian Church!



Last week, I was able to take some vacation time to hang out with family from out of town. Deb's family came up from Arizona and Texas (and over from Missouri), and we had a big group hanging out for many days.

*\* See family picture*

Usually at Christmas, as many of you know, it is OUR family that makes the journey. We typically drive to the Southwest and celebrate in Yuma, AZ, where Deb's parents and sisters live. The road trips are great – they're part of our family tradition. However, this year was more restful...maybe bordering on *boring*...as we just relaxed and had time *off*.

*\* Side note: We owe that to our awesome volunteers at TCC.*

*Thank you, Reece, for a great message last week. If you missed it, you can always catch it on the TCC app. And if you didn't take the chance last week, please share your encouragement and appreciation for him and his message as he shared from God's Word!*

I tell you all of this to let you know that I'm rested and refreshed and ready to go!

So, where do we start?



Well, I had an entire sermon series mapped out for us to begin the new year. Our world has seen its share of conflict in 2023, and as I was planning sermon topics, I thought it would be valuable for us to reclaim a spiritual perspective on **war**. I wanted to talk about the biblical and Christian positions on war, as well as explore our role in conflict.

It's 2024. Let's go hard!!!

But...

As we drew closer to the new year, I felt unsettled. A quiet, persistent voice in my spirit kept hinting about another direction. I wanted to hit the gas with my plan, but instead I pumped the brakes. The words of one passage silently drowned out everything else -- the opening words of Psalm 46:10



*"Be still, and know that I am God..." (Psalm 46:10, ESV)*

**[PAUSE]**

## *New Year's Resolution*

“Be still” is not exactly what I wanted as we start a new year. Now is the time for resolutions, for plans of action!!! It is the time of year when we’re ready to move (often literally) after the holidays. It’s a time when people start exercising and make radical new changes! Those changes might not stick past January 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup>, but the resolutions are an imperative to act!

It’s 2024! Let’s goooo!!!!



Instead, this new sermon direction screamed, “It’s 2024! Let’s stoooooppppp!!!!”  
(*Pretty inspiring, right?!*)

I know. “Be still” is not exciting. Yet, “be still” is important.

- Try to build a new home 15 minutes after the foundation is poured, and you’ll wish you had been still!
- Try to back out of your driveway without checking for traffic, and you’ll wish you had been still!
- Try to snack on a bowl of popcorn before your nail polish is set, and you’ll wish you had been still!

In the same way, if you try to have spiritual success before waiting on God, you’ll wish you had been still!

Being *still* isn’t laziness and it isn’t inaction; it is an intentional and decisive decision. It is challenging yet rewarding.

*“Be still, and know that I am God...”*

We need to be still. And so, over the next few weeks, we’re going to get better at being still. We’ll explore some important areas related to stillness, such as patience and Sabbath. We’ll look at some key passages and try to provide some practical advice for when we wait.

Next month we’ll move forward with the other sermon topics that are planned, but for now let’s be content learning to be still, learning to know that He is God!

## ***Silence by the Sea (Exodus 14)***

Before we look more closely at Psalm 46, I want to take you to a place where we see stillness and silence described and commanded in the Bible.

It’s a place where you might expect stillness – on the shores of the sea.



*Over break, I got a text from Eric Staples wishing me a happy new year. He included a picture from their family’s vacation spot in Hawaii (gross, right? Who needs that kind of sun and warmth at this time of year?). But the picture was*

*beautiful and peaceful and serene. When I think about the seashore, that's what I think.*

But in Exodus 14, we find a situation that is far from serene and still.

The Israelite people are encamped by the Red Sea. They've recently been released from slavery, rescued by God himself and his mighty acts against the Israelites' Egyptian enslavers. As they make an exodus from Egypt, the king of Egypt (Pharaoh), has regrets.

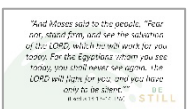


*“When word reached the king of Egypt that the Israelites had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds. “What have we done, letting all those Israelite slaves get away?” they asked. So Pharaoh harnessed his chariot and called up his troops. He took with him 600 of Egypt’s best chariots, along with the rest of the chariots of Egypt, each with its commander. The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, so he chased after the people of Israel, who had left with fists raised in defiance. The Egyptians chased after them with all the forces in Pharaoh’s army—all his horses and chariots, his charioteers, and his troops. The Egyptians caught up with the people of Israel as they were camped beside the shore near Pi-hahiroth, across from Baal-zephon.” (Exodus 14:5–9, NLT)*

Can you imagine? It's the equivalent of 600 tanks bearing down on a refugee camp. The military might of Egypt is focused on these people...and they are afraid! They need to do something – anything! – to stand against Pharaoh. As they cry out to God for rescue, they turn to their leader, Moses, for answers.

What would any good leader do? What defenses would he orchestrate? What escape could he plan?

As a leader, you would expect Moses to be scrambling and frantically putting together some strategy to protect the people. He should be anything but still! And yet, here is Moses' reply:



*“And Moses said to the people, “Fear not, 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**.”” (Exodus 14:13–14, ESV)*

**[PAUSE]**

It makes no sense to be still – to be silent – during an attack....does it?

## *Strategic Silence*

I guess there are times when it makes sense.



*Remember your American history? At the Battle of Bunker Hill in the Revolutionary War, an outgunned and outnumbered American militia squared off against the superior British Army. The Americans had dug in to a position on a hill in north Boston and they faced an advancing line of troops ready to drive*

them away. With limited ammunition and gunpowder, the American troops were advised to “be still” and keep their guns silent. Legend has it that one officer told the troops, “Don’t fire until you see the whites of their eyes.” Their patience would pay off with better accuracy and help the Americans hold back the British longer than anyone expected.

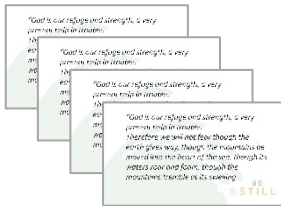
Stillness as a strategy may work at times, but it is hardly a regular and helpful plan...is it?

I guess the answer depends on *why* you are being silent and still. Psalm 46:10 tells us to “Be still and know that I am God,” but it provides additional context to that tranquility.

## ***Stillness in the Song (Psalm 46)***

### ***God’s Strength***

Listen to Psalm 46 in its entirety.



*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*

*Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.* Selah

*There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts.*

*The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.* Selah

*Come, behold the works of the LORD, how he has brought desolations on the earth. He makes wars 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!”*

*The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.* Selah

(Psalm 46:1–11, ESV)



This song is a song of confidence – a song that explicitly discusses God’s strength and power. The author expresses trust in God’s ability to keep him safe.

In Psalm 46, God is described as a “fortress.” In the face of raging nations and belligerent enemies, God is powerfully able to provide protection. He not only keeps his people safe, He projects power from his position and claims decisive victory. He “breaks the bow and shatters the spear.” He “burns the chariots” and destroys their danger.

In the face of chaos (the upheaval of mountains, the churning sea) God provides a place of safety and security for his people. He is their shield, and He invites them to “be still.”

But please don’t mistake what this stillness entails!

## *Our Weakness*

God doesn’t command stillness to increase *our* own power – it isn’t a charging station.

This might be the picture you have in your mind when you hear this verse – thinking that your stillness is the equivalent of vacation time. A chance to get away...to refresh...to recharge.



*If you’re a video gamer, you might think about health points. A character could sustain damage after battling an enemy. The meter that shows the character’s remaining health might be flashing red, showing critical damage...but if you wait and stay away from future fights, it slowly ticks back up...to orange...to yellow...to green. A character that was close to death and defeat might “be still” and then be able to return to the battle with 100% health and vitality.*

*(I guess that happens in real life, too. Stay off your feet and a sprained ankle can heal...stay in bed and you can get over the flu...we just don’t get cool graphics).*

In those cases, “stillness” is designed to fortify our own strength and our own power.

Yet Psalm 46:10 doesn’t paint a picture of quiet meditation and healing. Instead, it commands stillness by using a word that means “letting go,” “releasing,” or “growing slack.”

It could be translated as, “Give up, and know that I am God.”



This is “stillness” designed to show our *weakness*.

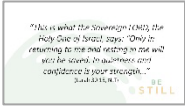
In other words, stop your striving. It’s not about you. “I’ve got this,” God says.

- How does the city of Jericho fall before the people of Israel?
- How does the fire not scorch Daniel’s friends when they are thrown in the furnace by the king?
- How does the prison open as the recently tortured Paul and Silas sing praises to God at midnight?
- How does the storm get silenced when the disciples cry out in fear?

The same way that the Israelites find safety when they are silent before God and before Pharaoh’s army. God acts! God defeats! God provides the way of escape!

He parts the Red Sea ahead of the Israelites, and He crashes it in on the pursuing Egyptians as they give chase. He speaks a word, and the storm is over. He causes an earthquake, and the prison doors open. He walks beside them in the flame, and they come out unsinged. He gives a command, and the walls come a-tumbling down.

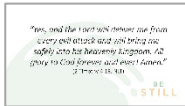
The God of Armies acts, and we...need...do...nothing. Be still. Be slack. Let it go. Stop it.



*“This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: “Only in returning to me and resting in me will you be saved. In quietness and confidence is your strength...” (Isaiah 30:15, NLT)*

God is strong; we are weak. We step back and say, “your will be done.”

There may yet be actions for us to take in our stillness, but the responsibility for the victory is not on our shoulders. We should share the attitude the apostle Paul had as he reflected on the source of his strength:



*“Yes, and the Lord will deliver me from every evil attack and will bring me safely into his heavenly Kingdom. All glory to God forever and ever! Amen.” (2 Timothy 4:18, NLT)*

## ***The Discipline of Silence***

The battle is not ours; we need only be still...be slack...be humble enough to wait for God before we act.

Yet such stillness and silence is difficult in our world. We are surrounded by noise and chaos that keeps us on the move.

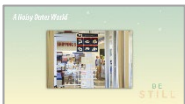


## ***A Noisy Outer World***

Some of that noise is external. We inhabit a frantic, noisy world.

Consider your average daily environments – at home, in the car, at work. How much noise do you encounter in each place?

- Do you listen to the radio in the car?
- Do you have the TV turned on at home?
- Do you have coworkers chatting, or pneumatic drills thumping at work?
- Do you have children?



The physical noise is present, but there’s also the visual noise.

*I was at the post office after Christmas and as I stood in line, I noticed a sign by the front desk to push the button if no one was at the desk (to ring for someone). The sign was simple and neat, with no frills – just printed off someone’s computer. But then there were arrows drawn on it, trying to move your eyes to the text. I think there were a couple of things taped to the sign, too, just to try to grab your attention.*

*Why was that necessary? Well, I started looking around. Do you realize the amount of messages that were on display in that tiny little room? Posters and notifications and advertisements and warnings and instructions. They covered the wall, they were taped to the counter, they popped up on the register, they*

*filled the displays. Each was designed in a way to try to get my attention. There were scores of messages in my field of vision. How in the world do you focus through that?!?!*

And that's just the stuff going on *outside* your head!



## *A Noisy Inner World*

Inside it can be just as noisy, if not noisier!

When someone asks how you've been, what is one of the most common responses? "Busy!" We celebrate the amount of stuff you and I are doing – we wear it as a badge of honor, to show that we matter...that we're important.

I always tell people that you can know what my inner world looks like by noticing the number of cups and bottles you see on my desk here at work. The more overwhelming life gets, the more Sonic cups collect there! When you see 4-5 sitting there, pray for me!!!

For many of you, the noise hits its peak right about when your head hits the pillow. Before you fall asleep, you face the checklist of everything you were supposed to do, all the things you didn't do, all the stuff you shouldn't have done, all the stuff you should have remembered...and it might be stuff from today, or stuff from 2013. Your brain just won't allow you to settle.

With all of those voices and noises and chaos, it can be hard to "be still," to "grow slack" and to "release" things to God. In the noise we think that victory over the chaos is our responsibility. It becomes difficult to hear or remember that God is in control.

But difficult things can be done...if we work on them.

## *The Discipline of Silence*



Your current level of spiritual maturity in the area of "stillness" is exactly where it should be... based on the behaviors you've been engaged in. Your relationship with God is where it is based on the amount of time you spend with Him and the quality of that time spent. If you continue to do exactly what you've been doing, you will continue to get exactly the same results. But if you want to improve that relationship – if you want to become more mature – you need to do some things differently.

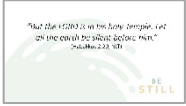
Have you heard of "spiritual disciplines" before?

Simply stated, a **spiritual discipline** is an action that one undertakes **regularly** which serves as an aid to spiritual growth. A spiritual discipline will either help you eliminate behaviors which run contrary to God, or they will help you instill behaviors which draw you closer to God.

These disciplines are not rigidly defined, but there are a number that have been found helpful by a large number of Christians throughout the centuries (ex: Bible study,

fasting, prayer, etc). We would be wise to learn from their example and practice, to use the disciplines as a tool to take our spiritual maturity to new levels.

I want to introduce you to the spiritual discipline of “silence and solitude” as a way to “be still and know that He is God.”



*“But the LORD is in his holy Temple. Let all the earth be silent before him.”*  
(Habakkuk 2:20, NLT)

**[PAUSE]**

Our relationship with and confidence in God benefits when we don’t say or do anything at all! Sometimes, it is helpful to simply be alone, to rein in the tongue, to stop *doing* and allow solitude and silence to help us grow.



The discipline of silence might look like this:

- Tell the people around you that you’d like to not be disturbed for a little bit.
- Turn off all the devices around you (TV, music, airpods).
- Set your phone on Do Not Disturb and put it in the next room.
- Cover up or face away from any clocks.
- And then...sit there and listen. Don’t talk. Don’t bombard God with requests.

Just listen.

- Your brain will go into overdrive.
  - Reject the different directions it pulls you.
- You’ll hear noises and people in other rooms.
  - Don’t engage or get pulled in.
- You’ll start to lose focus.
  - Return your focus to the right place.

*“Our primary task in solitude... is not to pay undue attention to the many faces which assail us, but to keep the eyes of our mind and heart on him who is our divine savior.” – Henri Nouwen*

The discipline of silence, if you put it into practice, can truly help you to “be still” – to remember that it is God at work, not you. When you become better at giving up control, you leave more room for God to be in charge...and life is better when He is in charge!!!

So, make it part of your routine.

Start small, then build from there. Take a few minutes on a drive. Wake up 10 minutes early and make breakfast a quiet time. Stay up in the middle of the night for a few extra minutes if you have to visit the restroom. Identify places; identify times.

Then make appointments where you can enjoy silence for longer times. Set aside an afternoon. Take a whole day. Arrange childcare, trade with a friend so you can get away.



Book a hotel room, or camp at a spot by the lake. Get to know God in these quiet moments by waiting... and listening... and instilling this spiritual discipline in your life.

## ***Closing***



You and I will never have victory when we rely on ourselves.

Our church will not be healthy or grow if we outpace God and try to solve our issues without Him.

Our marriages will not honor God without giving control over to Him.

The enemies we face, the addictions we battle, the opposition we endure, the ladders we want to climb, the decisions we wrestle with...none of them will be overcome by our own power.

Instead, we need to be still...to release...to let go...and watch God work.

*Come, behold the works of the LORD, how he has brought desolations on the earth. He makes wars 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!" (Psalm 46:8-10)*

## ***Prayer***

Raise your hands with me in prayer.

*[Silence]*

*Thank you, Father, for speaking to us in silence...for acting when we don't, for moving when we can't, for doing when we didn't. Help us to know you better by being still. Equip us to give up control to you and you alone*

*In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.*

## ***Invitation***

Our invitation song today is “I Will Wait for You,” a song that pairs well with our message. And in its message, it reminds us where the power lies.

*So put Your hope in God alone  
Take courage in His power to save  
Completely and forever won  
By Christ emerging from the grave*

*I will wait for You, I will wait for You  
On Your word I will rely  
And I will wait for You, surely wait for You  
'Til my soul is satisfied*

Join us as we sing, and if you need extra prayer or if you are ready to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, then come forward and sit or kneel by the stage and one of our leaders can come pray with you, or I can talk to you as we conclude our service today.

## ***PRAYER REQUESTS:***

# Notes

---

**Silence by the Sea** (Exodus 14:13-14)

***Strategic Silence***

**Stillness in the Song** (Psalm 46)

***God's Strength***

***Our Weakness*** (Isaiah 30:15; 2 Timothy 4:18)

**The Discipline of Silence**

***A Noisy Outer World***

***A Noisy Inner World***

***The Discipline of Silence*** (Habakkuk 2:20)

# Discussion Questions

---

*Use the following questions based on today's sermon as a starting point for spiritual discussions with your family or a small group of Christian friends this week.*

## ***Fellowship—Relationship with a Purpose***

- What is the longest you think you could go without speaking? What would be the most challenging part of staying silent?

## ***Growth—Thinking About Spiritual Matters***

- Describe a time when you really listened for God's direction. What prompted you to listen? How well did you hear Him?
- Read Exodus 14:13–14 and the surrounding verses for context. What are some reasons the Israelites were told to be silent? Did they trust God to rescue them?
- Psalm 46:10 says to "be still" and know that He is God. "Be still" is better translated as "give up/let go." Does this change your view of the verse? In what way?
- Is "being still" related to activity or to attitude? (In other words, does "giving up/letting go" mean that you do nothing?) Explain your answer.
- Read Habakkuk 2:20. What does silence and stillness communicate in God's presence? In your time with God, do you speak more than you listen? Why?
- How does physical noise affect your ability to be spiritually silent? What environment would be best for you to practice stillness before God?

## ***Prayer – Taking Your Thoughts to God***

- Spend the next 10-15 minutes in silent prayer. Choose one aspect of God's character on which to focus. Don't clutter the prayer with words. Just be still and know that He is God. Ask Him to help you recognize His voice in the silence. Your goal is not to get a message from God; it is to focus ON HIM.
  - Tip: Choose a different posture than normal.
  - Tip: Fight the urge to rush.
  - Tip: If you lose focus, don't give up. Ask for His help and continue!