



Expectant Stillness

Be Still #4 | Jan 28, 2024 | 8:00, 9:30, 11:00 AM | Preached by Steve Howell

Opening

As I start out today's sermon, I wanted to share a story...



I was thinking about a vivid memory I have from growing up on the farm in western Kansas. I was probably around six or seven, and I was riding in a big grain truck with my dad and my older sister, Allison (I can still feel the scratchy seat cover, smell the dirt and the hay as we bounced down the dirt road). We're heading back to the house after "helping" dad in the field on an early summer day, but as we headed west, we saw the darkest storm clouds you can imagine rolling in. The clouds were ominous, and from our vantage point you could see a sheet of rain advancing about a mile away.

With all seriousness, my dad gave my sister and I instructions. The mission, should we choose to accept it? Hop out, get the mail out of the mailbox, and run inside before the rain hits!

Note: *I didn't say this was a high stakes story, ok? It doesn't seem too important now, but in that moment, it was intense!*

Sitting in the truck, waiting for the moment, Allison and I began our preparations. Shoes tied? Check. All our stuff gathered? Check. Hand on the door handle? Check. Poised and ready to run? Check.

Dad's truck barreled up the hill closer and closer to home, as did the rain. By the time he quickly braked by the end of our driveway, we didn't have much time. The door flew open!!! Allison and I scampered out of the seat, flung open the mailbox as dad pulled away, snatched the mail, slammed the mailbox shut, then turned to sprint toward the house.

Past the windbreak! (You can smell the rain now)

Past the garage! (You can hear the downpour advancing in the grass)

Down the path! (Hear come fat raindrops on the concrete sidewalk!)

My mom was waiting for us with the door open, and we jumped through without a moment to spare as the rain began to pound our roof! But Allison and I...were... safe. And the mail...was...dry!

And my dad...I don't remember. He probably came in soaked a few minutes later, because HE had to still walk back from the shop through the deluge! But it was an exhilarating mission for a couple of kids, like we had just escaped death!

So what does that have to do with “being still?”

Today we are wrapping up our short sermon series based on Psalm 46:10

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

We said that trying to have spiritual success without waiting on God is a mistake. We need to **be still** (to “let go,” to “release,” to “be slack”) and allow God to work. The battle is not ours, so we need to take a step back and watch Him do His thing!

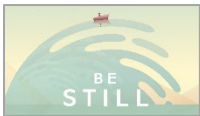
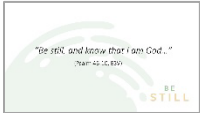
- In the first sermon, we talked about cultivating the spiritual disciplines of **silence and solitude** to leave more room for God to be in charge of our lives – to help us *be still* while He acts.
- In the second sermon, we talked about **patience** – how we wait, why we wait, and how long we wait. We said that none of us can wait *long enough*, so God empowers us to *let go* and trust Him.
- Last week, we said that being called upon to do something *in the moment* is easier if we’ve been practicing regularly *outside the moment*. So, we focused on the idea of making regular time for **Sabbath** – to rest intentionally, habitually.

And now, we come to today’s message. We’ve learned that *being still* isn’t laziness and it isn’t inaction; it is an intentional and decisive choice to let God be God. It is challenging yet rewarding because we are trusting God with the results, rather than trusting ourselves. We know the *goal* is to “Give up, and know that He is God,” but the *way* we surrender control matters.

Our posture as we wait is of critical importance. Do we wait on God with our feet kicked up, leaning back with our eyes closed? Or do we wait on God like Allison and I waited on my dad in the truck - locked in, prepared, and ready to move when he says the word, “go”?

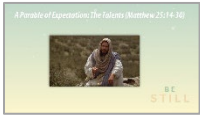
I think you know the answer.

Today I want to talk about “expectant stillness.” I want you to consider how ready you are to move when God gives the green light. I want you to think about your posture and attitude as you wait. And I want you to “be ready” while you are “being still.”



A Parable of Expectation

Scripture is filled with real-world examples of men and women who had to *be ready* while they *were still*. We've talked about some of them in this series – Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Paul – and we can continue to learn from their experience. But in addition to their real-world examples, we can also learn from Jesus' teachings.

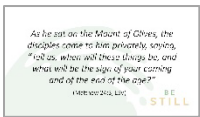


We have direct teaching from Jesus on this matter, presented in the Gospel of Matthew using a short story called a “parable” – aka “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.”

The story that demonstrates “expectant stillness” can be found in Matthew 25. Jesus is approached by his disciples near the end of his ministry.

“As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”” (Matthew 24:3, ESV)

What will your return be like? Jesus shares a lot of information in response, but he includes the following parable as he replies:



Parable of the Talents¹ (Matthew 25:14-30)

“Again, the Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip. He called together his servants and entrusted his money to them while he was gone. He gave five bags of silver to one, two bags of silver to another, and one bag of silver to the last—dividing it in proportion to their abilities. He then left on his trip. “The servant who received the five bags of silver began to invest the money and earned five more. The servant with two bags of silver also went to work and earned two more. But the servant who received the one bag of silver dug a hole in the ground and hid the master’s money.” (Matthew 25:14–18, NLT)



I'll end the quote there for time purposes, but most of you know the rest – the master returns, sees the profit from the first two servants, praises them, and rewards them. The last one, though, is rebuked for doing nothing with his bag...not even earning interest!

Explanation

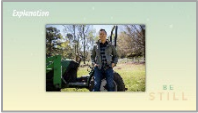
While waiting for the master's *action* of returning, the servants had a choice: do *something* or do *nothing*. They could work to enhance their productivity and position before the master returned, or they could do no work at all.

¹ Talent = Amount of Money



You've probably heard this parable told in sermons or studies to challenge you to use your spiritual gifts. Churches want you to use your *spiritual talents* to benefit the body of Christ. It's not a bad application, but I want to be more specific.

Think about Jesus' purpose in sharing this short story. Why does He tell it? To answer that we need to remember the context, and the context of this parable is all about *waiting*. It answers the question, "What should we do while we wait for Jesus' return?"



We learned a couple of weeks ago that we need to wait **patiently**, like a farmer waiting for his crops to grow. There should be calm and peace as we wait; we should have a confident trust that God will move. There should be *stillness* in our hearts.

Yet in his patience, the farmer waits with "expectant stillness" – he waits with an assumption that God *will* act. And when God does, the farmer will be ready! So, he pulls weeds, he keeps his tools in working order, he arranges for extra help come harvest time. He is patient; yet he is ready to move at a moment's notice.

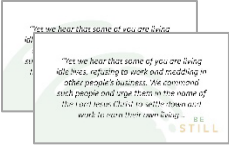
In Jesus' story, Jesus encourages his disciples (then and now) to have that same kind of "expectant stillness." The Day of the Lord could come at any moment, and we need to be ready. God will act, so we must work well as we wait.

Practicing Expectant Stillness



I want you to consider how active and expectant you are now as you wait for God to give the green light. I want you to think about your posture and attitude as you wait. I want you to "be ready" while you are "being still." We can't be stubborn, stupid, or stuck. Instead, we just do what is right.

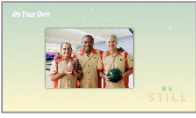
The apostle Paul wrote a letter to some Christians who were considering how to act while they waited for Jesus' return, and he gave some good instruction:



"Yet we hear that some of you are living idle lives, refusing to work and meddling in other people's business. We command such people and urge them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and work to earn their own living. As for the rest of you, dear brothers and sisters, never get tired of doing good. Take note of those who refuse to obey what we say in this letter. Stay away from them so they will be ashamed. Don't think of them as enemies, but warn them as you would a brother or sister." (2 Thessalonians 3:11–15, NLT)

Instead of being idle and lazy while we wait (or worse, off track spiritually), Paul says do the work. Take care of the things that need to be done, both physically and spiritually! Do good! Pursue unity and purity! Leave the results to God, but do the work.

On Your Own

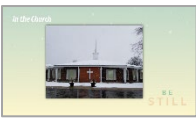


On one level, this encompasses your *individual* choices. You could do the work with your finances, your time, your energy, your spiritual gifts...with anything God has provided to you. Turn your one talent into two! Turn your five talents into ten!

Make a plan of things you can do to honor Jesus, invest in people, and make a difference in the lives of those around you. There is an *individual* component to your “expectant stillness.”

But that’s not all...

In the Church



Doing the work while we wait also encompasses *corporate* (all-congregation) choices. As a church, we must wait expectantly, too.

- We don’t want to be **stubborn** as a church...unwilling to listen, refusing to go where God leads us.
- We don’t want to be **stupid** as a church...not comprehending God’s plans, understanding our situation, or recognizing our opportunities.
- We don’t want to be **stuck** as a church...unable to respond to needs or react to change.

Instead, Tonganoxie Christian Church needs to *be still*. We need to patiently wait on God, following His timing and trusting that the battle belongs to Him. But we do so *actively*, not passively. We do so *expectantly*, excited to see God move!

What does that look like in practice? Well, to help answer that question I want to invite up to the stage one of our elders at TCC, the chairman himself: Jerry Parrish.



Give him a warm welcome!

Interview: Jerry Parrish (10-15 minutes)²

➔ **For those who don’t know you, Jerry, can you introduce yourself?**

Share your 60-second story.

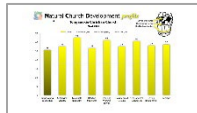
- *Be sure to include faith journey.*
- *“...and as part of that journey, you are now serving as an elder at TCC”*

² This interview is not fully scripted. Pay attention to what is being said and show slides if and when they are referenced!

You and I have been working together as Senior Minister and Chairman of the Elders for the past few months. And one of the projects that has had our attention relates to the idea of “expectant stillness” – it’s a plan for where we as a church should focus our attention for the next few years.

➔ **Before we talk about developing the plan, what prompted us to start the conversation about it?**

- *E2 – developing church health.*



- *Survey*
 - *Share survey results (see slide)*
 - *Generally “healthy” (always room to improve, but good starting place)*
- *Conference – discussion about the challenges church face today*
 - *Church closings*
 - *Social issues*
 - *People walking away from the church*

So to sum up...this is where we are right now (recap), and a fully healthy church (recap the different areas from the survey) is where God wants us to be.

We know that the growth is going to happen because of what GOD is doing...but we have a choice on how we wait on Him.

- We can “Be Still” and wait patiently but expectantly, working well while we wait...
- Or we can “be frozen” and do nothing.

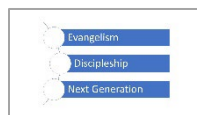
➔ **You heard the Parable of the Talents earlier, Jerry. Which one should we do?!?**

So back to the plan. We’re developing this set of ideas to help us wait expectantly. The term we’re using is a “strategic plan,” but I don’t want people to think that this is all about business and process improvement and numbers.

(It’s not like the Better Together capital campaign...which was valuable, but more about building the trellis than the vine)

We want growth in those areas, but this plan is more about aligning our priorities. It’s about making sure that we focus on the things that are important to God, not to TCC!

➔ **Can you talk about the three areas that will get our attention, and why they are important?**



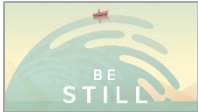
- *Evangelism*
- *Discipleship*
- *Next Generation*

There’s a lot to discuss and do in those areas. We’re working with some volunteers to flesh out those areas and set a direction (all subject to God’s guidance!). The idea is to

roll out the plan later this year, after we've prayerfully worked through it all. And then we will invest in trying to make it a reality.

We'll always stay subject to God's guidance. The Spirit may move us to go in a different direction. But this gives us a focus so we can wait on God expectantly!

➔ **Thank you for sharing, Jerry. Would you pray for us?**



Prayer

Invitation

Whether as a church, or as individuals, we need to consider how active and expectant we are as you wait for God to give the green light. I want us to think about our posture and attitude as we wait. I want us to “be ready” while we are “being still.”

- We don't want to be **stubborn**...unwilling to listen, refusing to go where God leads us.
- We don't want to be **stupid** ...not comprehending God's plans, understanding our situation, or recognizing our opportunities.
- We don't want to be **stuck**...unable to respond to needs or react to change.

Maybe that's where you've been. Or maybe there's a situation that is happening now that is making it hard to be ready or be still.

If so, can we pray for you? Come share with me during our song as we stand and sing in a moment.

The goal is to live in expectant stillness. Acting with the knowledge that God's got this. I hope that you can “let go,” “release” and “be slack” as you trust Him.

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

Let's stand and sing.

PRAYER REQUESTS:

Interview Transcript

Notes

A Parable of Expectation

Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30)

Practicing Expectant Stillness

(2 Thessalonians 3:11–15)

On Your Own

In the Church

Interview: Jerry Parrish

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

- When you are waiting for someone, what is your favorite way to pass the time? Would you count that time as wasted or productive? Why?

Growth—Thinking About Spiritual Matters

- Think back through some of the Bible characters and stories you know. While waiting for God's promises to be fulfilled, how did they wait well? Share a specific example.
- Read the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30. Which servant do you most identify with? Why?
- What kind of work might the servants have done to increase their return on investment with their talents (aka money)? Was there only one way to approach the task, or were there multiple good options? How can we apply that idea to the way we wait for God? Should waiting well look the same for everyone?
- What would be the spiritual equivalent of the "one talent" servant's actions? List three attitudes or actions that would waste our waiting.
- Do you view Jesus' return as imminent or far off? How does that impact the urgency of your activity while waiting? What (if anything) would change if you knew he would return tomorrow?
- As a church, why is it important to set directions and goals while we wait for Jesus' return? What type of goals are most helpful to prepare us for that day?
- In what ways is Tonganoxie Christian Church succeeding at those goals? In what ways do we need to improve? How do your individual contributions (time, talent, treasure) impact our success as we wait on God?

Prayer – Taking Your Thoughts to God

- Pray for our church leaders as they work on a strategic plan for the congregation. Ask for God's guidance and protection, and ask that He would uncover any stumbling blocks that are stopping us from serving Him well.