

The Missing Skill: Silence

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Key Scripture

Psalm 46:10 (ESV) “Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!”

Sermon in One Sentence

In an increasingly noisy world, the intentional practice of silence is not merely an absence of sound but a profound spiritual discipline essential for truly knowing God and experiencing His presence and power.

Introduction

I want you to try something with me, right now, just for a moment. Close your eyes, if you feel comfortable. Now, pay attention to the sounds you hear. The hum of the HVAC, the rustle of clothes, the distant traffic, perhaps even the beating of your own heart. Now, try to imagine a world without *any* of those sounds. A world of complete, absolute silence. Does that bring a sense of peace, or perhaps a feeling of unease? For many of us, silence isn't a friend; it's a void we rush to fill. Our lives are awash in an incessant river of noise: notifications, podcasts, music, news, chatter, the constant hum of digital connection. We live in a world that often equates busyness with importance, and quiet with idleness.

Yet, this relentless assault on our senses is not without consequence. It fragments our attention, dulls our spiritual ears, and leaves us feeling perpetually restless, often leading to a profound sense of anxiety and spiritual drift. We yearn for peace, for clarity, for a deeper connection with God, but we often don't realize that the very thing we avoid—silence—is a crucial pathway to these desires. The ancient wisdom of the Scriptures, however, offers a powerful antidote to our modern predicament, inviting us into a counter-cultural discipline that promises to transform our spiritual lives.

Today, we will turn our hearts and minds to a powerful, yet often overlooked, spiritual discipline that promises to reorient our souls and deepen our relationship with the Almighty: the lost art, the missing skill, of silence. Our key passage from Psalm 46:10 provides a profound, divinely-given invitation to "Be still, and know that I am God." It's an invitation not just to stop making noise, but to enter into a sacred space where divine revelation can break through.

Historical & Biblical Context

Psalm 46 is a magnificent hymn of trust and triumph, often attributed to the Sons of Korah. It's believed to have been composed in response to a significant national crisis, possibly the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem in the days of King Hezekiah (2 Kings 19, Isaiah 37). In the midst of overwhelming external threats—nations raging, kingdoms tottering, the earth giving way (Psalm 46:2-3, 6)—the psalmist declares God's unshakeable presence and power as "our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1).

The psalm is a profound affirmation of God's sovereignty over all chaos, both natural and political. It culminates in the famous declaration of verse 10: "Be still, and know that I am God." This command to "be still" (Hebrew: *rapha*) is not just about physical cessation of activity; it carries the connotation of letting go, ceasing striving, relaxing, and surrendering. It is an invitation to cease the frenetic human efforts to control or resolve the crisis and instead to recognize God's ultimate authority and divine battle plan. The context highlights that this command isn't issued in a tranquil meadow, but amidst tumult and terror, underscoring its profound significance as a spiritual lifeline in the midst of life's storms.

Main Point I — Silence as Surrender: Cease Your Striving

Scripture: Psalm 46:10a (ESV) - "Be still..." The first profound truth about silence is that it demands surrender. The Hebrew word often translated "be still" (*rapha*) carries a rich meaning. It's not merely about being quiet physically; it means to slacken, to let go, to cease striving, to relax, to drop your hands. Imagine a warrior in the midst of battle, exhausted and defeated, finally lowering his weapons and ceding the fight. That's the essence of "be still" in this context. It's a command to abandon our frantic efforts to control, manipulate, or solve everything in our own strength.

In our modern lives, we are conditioned to believe that active problem-solving, constant communication, and ceaseless productivity are the keys to success and peace. Yet, God's call here challenges that deeply ingrained belief. He invites us to lay down our anxieties, our agendas, our self-sufficiency, and simply *be*. This act of ceasing our striving, of entering into silence, is an act of profound humility and trust. It confesses that we are not God, that we are not in ultimate control, and that our best efforts sometimes stand in the way of His divine intervention. It is in this place of surrendered stillness that we make space for God to work and for our souls to untangle themselves from the grip of worry.

Main Point II — Silence as Sanctuary: Cultivating Divine Awareness

Scripture: Psalm 46:10b (ESV) - "...and know that I am God." The purpose of being still is not idleness but intimacy. God doesn't command us to "be still" for stillness's sake; He commands it so that we might "know that I am God." This "knowing" is not merely intellectual assent; it's a deep, experiential, relational knowledge. It's the kind of knowing that comes from encountering His presence, experiencing His character, and recognizing His absolute sovereignty. Silence creates a spiritual sanctuary, a sacred space, for this divine encounter to occur.

In the cacophony of daily life, God's voice, though ever-present, often goes unheard—not because He isn't speaking, but because our spiritual senses are overwhelmed. Silence acts as a spiritual filter, quieting the clamor of the world and the chatter of our own minds, allowing our inner ear to discern the whisper of the Holy Spirit. It's in the quiet places that we encounter Him not just as a theological concept, but as the living, active, all-powerful God who speaks, sustains, and saves. This cultivation of divine awareness through silence allows us to recognize His hand in our trials, His wisdom in our decisions, and His love in our very being. It is how we move from simply believing *about* God to truly *knowing* Him.

Main Point III — Silence as Sovereignty: Witnessing God's Exaltation

Scripture: Psalm 46:10c-d (ESV) - "I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" The individual experience of knowing God through stillness profoundly connects us to His grand, global plan. Our personal surrender and divine awareness are not ends in themselves; they are integral to God's ultimate purpose: His exaltation among the nations and in the earth. When we cease our striving and truly know that He is God, our perspective shifts from our limited concerns to His limitless power and purpose. We begin to see our lives, our challenges, and our worship as part of a much larger narrative where God's glory is center stage.

Our willingness to embrace silence and know God enables us to align with His will and participate in His divine work. It empowers us to live as witnesses to His power, secure in the knowledge that no matter how chaotic the world around us becomes, God remains sovereign. His promise to be exalted is not dependent on our constant activity or noisy protests, but on His inherent nature. When we embrace silence, we step out of the illusion that we are indispensable to God's plan and into the reality that He is sovereign, and we are privileged to witness and participate in His unfolding glory. This deep-seated conviction, born in the quiet knowing of God, fuels a confident hope and empowers us to live lives that reflect His exaltation to a watching world.

Illustration

In the early 19th century, a young man named George Müller felt a divine call to care for orphans in Bristol, England. He made a radical commitment that he would never solicit funds, appealing instead directly to God through prayer. This meant frequent seasons of profound silence, not necessarily an absence of sound, but an intentional quieting of his own restless spirit and the clamor of external demands to simply "be still, and know that I am God." Often, food for hundreds of children was needed by breakfast, and Müller would be found in silent communion, waiting on the Lord. Time and again, at critical moments when the cupboards were bare, provisions mysteriously arrived—sometimes by the sudden inspiration of a local baker, other times through unexpected donations. Müller ran his orphanages for 60 years, providing for over 10,000 orphans without ever asking a single soul for money, save God alone. His life was a testament to the power of being still, ceasing his own striving, and thus experiencing the living God who was truly "exalted in the earth" through His miraculous provision.

Practical Application

- 1. Schedule Silence:** Intentionally carve out 5-10 minutes each day, perhaps first thing in the morning or before bed, to sit in complete silence. Turn off all devices, find a quiet space, and simply breathe, allowing your soul to settle. Gradually increase this time as you become more comfortable.
- 2. Practice Silent Reading of Scripture:** Instead of rushing through your Bible reading, choose a short passage (e.g., Psalm 23, John 14:1) and read it slowly, contemplatively, in silence. Pause after each phrase, allowing the words to sink deep into your heart, listening for the Holy Spirit's whisper.
- 3. Engage in a "Noise Fast":** For one hour, or even an entire afternoon this week, commit to turning off all non-essential audio and digital input. No music, no podcasts, no TV, no social media. Notice what anxieties or thoughts rise to the surface, and bring them before God in silent prayer.

4. Identify and Surrender a "Striving" Area: Pinpoint one area in your life where you are constantly striving, worrying, or trying to control the outcome in your own strength. In your silent time, consciously "let go" of this burden, picturing yourself placing it into God's hands.

5. Cultivate Observational Silence: Take a walk in nature or sit by a window. Instead of labeling or judging what you see, simply observe it in silence. Allow the wonder of God's creation to speak to you without the need for commentary or analysis, fostering a deeper awareness of His presence.

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways does our modern culture make the practice of silence feel counter-intuitive or even uncomfortable?
2. Can you recall a time when you intentionally "ceased your striving" and experienced a deeper sense of God's presence or provision?
3. How might regular, intentional silence change your relationship with God and your understanding of His sovereignty?
4. What is one practical step you can take this week to incorporate more silence into your daily routine, and what challenges do you anticipate?

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, we confess our busyness and our noisiness, our tendency to fill every moment with distraction. Forgive us for our striving and our reluctance to simply "be still." We pray for the courage to lean into the silence, trusting that there, in the quiet, we will truly know You. Open our hearts and our spiritual ears, Lord, that we may hear Your voice, surrender our burdens, and witness Your glorious exaltation in our lives and in the world. Amen.

Benediction

Now, may the God of peace, who commands us to be still, guide your steps into a deeper knowing of Him, as you go forth to live lives reflecting His amazing grace and quiet strength.