

Russell Kelfer

“Be Still”

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Series: Let God Be God

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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I- THE SAGA OF BUSY BERTHA

It was a joy just to watch him! So transparent was his life, yet so deep; so filled with a zeal to minister, yet so calm. Somewhere there just had to be a secret that would reveal just what made this man tick. A woman in his congregation was about to find out what it was...if only she would listen.

His name was Wally Wisdom. He was the Senior Pastor of the Trinity Community Church, and as he walked through the church corridor on this beautiful Monday morning, it was almost as if the sunshine had been packaged and released inside that tiny building. He was singing “Rock of Ages, cleft for me”. That in itself was not a miracle, though he was certainly no candidate for the choir, but the miracle was that he could sing without so much as erasing even a fraction of that sun like smile that always covered his rugged, but peaceful face.

As the good pastor rounded the corner to head for his study, a harried, hurried parishioner turned the same corner going the opposite direction at a speed closely akin to the speed of sound. The parson didn’t even need to look. He knew it had to be Busy Bertha. Bertha was one of the pillars of the church. She sang in the choir (though occasionally off-key), played piano for the children’s chorale, was president of the Women’s Guild, visited in the nursing homes twice a week, was vice-president of the Sunday School class for “mature women” as they called it, and she served on four committees, including the committee to form other committees.

One of her dear friends had suggested that they rename the chapel “Bertha’s Bible Church”, because, they implied, if Bertha ever went on to heaven, they might as well just shut it down. The wise old pastor reached out his hand to shake Busy

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Bertha’s and asked intentionally, “Well, how is my most active member today?” Bertha beamed. No greater compliment could have been paid to her than that.

“Oh, I’ve just so much to do”, she replied. “I’ve got to meet Cynthia and talk about the decorations for the class banquet, and I’ve got to stop by the music shop and get the music for the choir cantata, and it’s my job to make the name tags for the Women’s Missionary Banquet on Thursday,” she puffed, half out of breath. “Doing God’s work is all I care about, but it’s so tiring,” Bertha added, looking anxiously at her watch, realizing she really didn’t have time for small talk with so many important things to accomplish.

The pastor looked lovingly at the eager saint, whose eyes were darting about nervously, and said “Bertha, when was the last time you sat still?” Taken by surprise, and somewhat offended, she replied, “Oh, dear pastor, there isn’t time to be still in this busy world we live in; I’ll be still when I get to heaven. Now I simply must be going, but thank you for your concern,” she added, a bit curtly.

“Please come into my study for just a moment,” the wise old man responded, “I’d like just a moment out of your busy schedule to speak to you of things that cannot wait.” With that, the parson ushered Busy Bertha into his study where, after thanking her profusely for all she did to make Trinity Church function, he lovingly began to show her that it was not what she was running to do; it was what she might be running from that concerned him. He read to her once again the story of Mary and Martha, and he asked how long it had been since she had slowed down her busy pace long enough to just *be still* in the presence of God to worship, and praise, and wait. Tears began to form in Busy Bertha’s eyes. It wasn’t that what she was doing was wrong, it was all good. It’s just that the enemy had taken the good things she was doing and had made them gods, robbing her of the one priority in life that makes everything else fit into place, the priority of taking time to be still in the presence of a Holy God.

Lovingly, Pastor Wisdom sat Bertha down and went over

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her schedule and showed her the things she was doing that others could do just as well, others who actually needed something to do. He showed her the things she was doing that she was over-doing, things that she was giving a higher priority to, perhaps because of their high visibility, but things that had little eternal significance. And lastly, he took her calendar and blocked a section in each week’s schedule called “BTTJBS”, which stood for “Bertha’s time to just be still”. He gave her a little booklet that offered suggestions on how to sit quietly before God, and then smiling, he said, “Bertha, we are grateful, and God is grateful for all you do for Him and for His church... but oh, Bertha, how much more effective you will be if you will just take time to be still.

Be still! Why the very words seem out of place in our society. Time was, just a generation or two ago, when all of life moved at such a slower pace that man scheduled his days by the position of the sun, rather than by the second hand on the clock or the second ring of the phone. Evenings were often spent sitting on the front porch, or taking a leisurely stroll, or actually sitting down as a family and...*talking!* Children, whose attention span seemed far longer than it is today, were content to play for hours with cardboard boxes or tin cans and string, or to use their imagination with such things as building blocks or clay, or rocks from the back yard. Sometimes an hour would go by and nothing would be said; but life was going on, and lives were being formed partly through the miraculous science of silence.

Though mother had fewer appliances to help her through the day, she also had fewer electronic intrusions into the world of her mind to keep her from thinking while she labored so hard. It may have taken Dad longer to get where he needed to go, but without a FM radio, a CB, and the latest music player to listen to on a non-existent freeway, he had time to think. He had time to be still.

I know, we’ve come a long way, and none of us is implying that we should return to the “good old days”, but I am implying that some of us need to get off the merry-go-round of unnecessary activities and slow our lives down to a pace

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where we can clearly hear what God is trying to say without forcing Him to hit a moving target.

II - THE KEY TO THE SEA

If there is a theme that is dominant in the Old Testament that affects the living of a life pleasing to God, it is the theme vividly depicted in Exodus, chapter fourteen. To get the background clearly focused in our minds, we will glance back to chapter thirteen and we will read just a few verses from the Living Bible to bring us up to date:

So at last Pharaoh let the people go. God did not lead them through the land of the Philistines, although that was the most direct route from Egypt to the Promised Land. The reason was that God felt the people might become discouraged by having to fight their way through, even though they had left Egypt armed; he thought they might return to Egypt. Instead, God led them along a route through the Red Sea wilderness.

(Exodus13:17,18 TLB)

The Lord guided them by a pillar of cloud during the daytime, and by a pillar of fire at night. So they could travel either by day or night. The cloud and fire were never out of sight.

(Exodus13:21,22 TLB)

Now let's take a quick look at some picture book principles found in this passage to set the stage for what God is about to say.

Principle 1- The people were now free. (verse17) The fact that they did not understand freedom did not alter that fact. They thought freedom from bondage meant freedom from conflict. As we shall see, they were wrong. Conflict produces faith. Faith produces victory. Victory produces testimony. But all they understood, and all we understand on occasions is that if we are free, we ought to be free from harassment by the enemy. Not so.

Principle 2- God did not take them the shortest route because they couldn't handle it. The intensity of the battle they faced was limited then, *not to what their God could do, but to what they had the faith to believe their God could do.* I Corinthians 10:13, to be exact.

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Principle 3- God gave them constant direction. Never was the direction they had to go up to them. So long as they kept their eyes on the Glory Cloud, they knew which way to go, and when to make their move. God did not leave them in doubt. Their only choice was whether or not to follow.

Principle 4- There was never a time when God hid His presence from their view. So long as they were willing to look, He was always there.

We, too, have been set free in Christ. Totally free. Yet how often we, too, rail at God for taking us through enemy territory and exposing us to the battle. We, too, perhaps, thought freedom from defeat meant freedom from the conflict itself. So a loving God takes us carefully over out-of-the-way trails in the backwoods of life, allowing us only that amount of enemy fire our faith can endure. And doesn't He know exactly what we can endure? Of course, He does! And does not our loving God give us, both from His Word and through His Spirit, constant direction? Is not our choice only whether or not we will obey? Is His presence not always with us? Does He not promise us:

My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest?

(Exodus 33:14)

So God was leading His children step by step, carefully guiding them through dangerous territory, but not through territory so dangerous that they would turn and flee.

We take up reading there in Exodus 14:

Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

“Speak to the children of Israel, that they turn and camp before Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, opposite Baal Zephon; you shall camp before it by the sea.

For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, “They are bewildered by the land; the wilderness has closed them in.”

Then I will harden Pharaoh's heart, so that he will pursue them; and I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD. And they did so. (Exodus 14:1-4 NKJV)

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Principle 5- When God leads His children *into the conflict*, Satan always assumes that they have lost their way and that he can have a field day (verse 3). He did with Jesus in the wilderness. But they were where they were by divine decree. They were at the *very edge of the water*, the seemingly impenetrable obstacle that Satan considered to be their Waterloo. God led them right up to the shores of the impossible. He did so to do the impossible. Satan always misreads that.

Principle 6- Satan, then, becomes so gleeful over the believers' plight, that he overlooks the fact that God led them into it; and God never leads His children into a wall He does not plan to speak into oblivion. You ask, “How can Satan be so blind?” Beloved, he who has blinded the eyes of millions has deceived himself. For the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked; who can know it? Not even Satan!

You remember, I assume, what happened next. Pharaoh gets wind of Israel's plight, calls his chief of staff, and orders his crack cavalry units into action, including 600 of his newest Mercedes chariots. His heart hardened into blindness, he pursues what he construes to be the helpless Israelis, until lo and behold, he reaches the shores of the Red Sea... and there they are.

Meanwhile, back at the camp, the heroic Hebrews have stopped for lunch. They hear a noise in the background and, assuming somebody is just playing his Sony Walkman too loud, they investigate. Guess what? It's not the Sony; it's the phony—Mr. Pharaoh. What appears to be the entire Egyptian nation is thundering down the hillside, just as they did in that Cecil B. DeMille extravaganza that was showing at the Cairo Majestic Theatre last week. Only this one was a bit too realistic to suit the petrified Jewish mob who watched in utter disbelief. And then they did what any group of red-blooded cowards would do. They panicked.

And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD.

Then they said to Moses, “Because there were no

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graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt?

Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, ‘Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians?’ For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness.”

(Exodus 14:10-12 NKJV)

They panicked! First, they cried to the Lord. Nothing wrong with that. But they hardly cried in faith; they cried in bitter anguish. They prayed the way some of us pray when God allows us to be backed against a wall so He can deliver us and vindicate His Holiness. They said, “Thanks a lot, God; you led us out of bondage just to watch us suffer. What kind of God are you, anyway?” Oh, we don’t use those words, but remember, God looks on the heart; and that is precisely our heartbeat oftentimes when the heat gets so intense we think we’re going to burn.

Moses had an idea. It had better be a good one, because he faced, on the one hand, a whole army full of angry, vindictive Egyptians who had just lost their cheap labor; and on the other hand, he had his own gang of heroes, who were so insecure in their faith, that they were blaming him for leading them into a watery grave. It had better be a good idea, indeed. Maybe he had a secret weapon. It turns out he did. Maybe he had a secret plan. It turns out he did. Hush, now, Moses is about to speak, and he’d better talk fast. Pharaoh’s frustrated friends are rounding the bend, and there are enough of them to start World War ½, and win it in a minute. Say something, Moses. It’s eleven fifty-nine and not holding. Moses speaks:

And Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever.

The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.”

(Exodus 14:13,14 NKJV)

God’s man unveils God’s plan, and as usual, from man’s perspective, it makes no sense at all. You say, “Moses, shall

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we attack and try to throw them off balance?” Moses answers, “No.” You say, “Moses shall we flee and try to outrun them?” Moses answers, “No.” “Then what shall we do, Mo? What shall we do? What? You want us to do what?”

“Stand still! Stand still, so you can see.”

“See what, Moses? Our own death?”

“No, my faithless children,” said Moses, “so you can see God save you. Stand still and see what your God will do next.”

From a Scriptural vantage point, it was not an unusual command at all. You remember II Chronicles, chapter 20, don't you? Jehoshaphat faced incredible odds, like those Moses faced, and he and the people feared and began to fast and pray. And God spoke through Jahaziel to the people those immortal words:

Thus says the LORD to you: “Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's.

You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the LORD, who is with you, O Judah and Jerusalem!” (II Chronicles 20:15b,17 NKJV)

Don't make a move just yet. Just be still, totally still. God has allowed your life to get complicated, so that you will be totally inadequate without Him. Begin to initiate some frenzied plan and you'll ruin it all. You don't need to fight this battle. God wants to fight for you. But you will miss the battle, and certainly miss the victory, if you don't deal with your frenzied anxiety and learn to be...still.

III- BESIDE STILL WATERS

That's one of the enigmas of the Christian experience. We belong to a God who wants to lead us *into battle, but doesn't want us to fight the battle*. That's hard on man's ego. It certainly runs at cross-purposes with man's natural bent. Man says, “Either we flee the battle or we fight the battle. The one thing we don't do is stand still and expect someone else to fight it for us” (unless of course, we agree to do it God's way).

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God’s way, you see, is to lead us into storms; but as we pass through the storms, to quietly place us beside still waters. The Christian in the will of God lives *in the eye of the storm*. All about him, the bombs are falling; yet his immediate battle zone is always meant to be calm. The winds are raging, yet he is seated peacefully beside still waters.

That’s what the Psalmist meant when he said in Psalm 23:

He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my
soul: (Psalm 23:2b,3a)

The reason God is calling on us to be still, even while life’s storms are out of control, is because unless we will be still, He cannot possibly restore us into His likeness.

The method God will use to restore us, once we finally become still, is to show us Himself. For so long as you know who God is, you cannot be afraid, nor will you attempt to fight the battles of life on your own. God wants us to be still so we can know that He is...

Turn to Psalm 46. It is a perfect portrait of the Christian’s stance in the midst of life. In verses 1-3, you have the circumstances. In verses 4-9, you have the challenge; and in verses 10 and 11 you have the command and the cure.

First, The Circumstances: They are impossible!

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

Therefore we will not fear, Even though the earth be
removed, And though the mountains be carried into the
midst of the sea;

Though its waters roar and be troubled, Though the
mountains shake with its swelling.

(Psalm 46:1-3 NKJV)

The circumstances are impossible. It sounds as an atomic war has been declared. The earth is reeling under the impact of a supernatural disaster. The mountains are crumbling and falling into the ocean, the waters of which cannot be controlled. There appears to be no hope. God’s word says we have a refuge in the midst of circumstances such as this.

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Second, comes the Challenge. It says, “Look at your God.”

In verses 4-9, the Psalmist reminds us just who our God is. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God. God is in the midst of His City. He will not be moved. And then the Psalmist places the might of God against the greatest force known to the natural man, the armies of enemy nations. That is what we all fear most, a nuclear bomb falling or an enemy invasion. The Psalmist says this will be the scenario:

The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted.

The Lord of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge.
(Psalm 46:6,7 NKJV)

He goes on to describe what real peace is like when God finally puts to rest the ravages of war.

Third we have the command and the cure: in verse 10,

Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! (NKJV)

Be Still! That’s the command. And here’s the cure. Be still so you can come to realize I AM is God. Until you learn to be still, you cannot win life’s battles; you cannot learn life’s lessons; you cannot know God’s heart; you cannot know your God *until you learn to Be Still!*

An interesting study to do is a study of how God, whenever He wanted to demonstrate His might, told the elements to *be still*. He told the sun to *be still*. He told the raging winds to be still. He told the rampaging sea to *be still*. *Whenever God wants to show Himself to be God, He must first make all of life stop its frantic movement and be still*. Not slow down but *be still*. There is a world of difference.

IV- WHAT WOULD HAPPEN...IF?

I wonder what would happen if each of us set a determined goal that above all else in life *for the next twelve months, our primary objective as Christians would be to learn to be still?* I believe our lives would be revolutionized. I believe our churches would be revolutionized. I believe a lot of committees

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would stop functioning, and I believe the Kingdom would go right on. I believe a lot of meetings would be cancelled, and time would be better spent at the feet of Jesus. I believe a lot of our running around frantically might be replaced by quiet, determined waiting on God; and the steps we take might be far fewer, but far more effective.

It’s time for us men to learn to be still. We claim the roles of spiritual authority given us in Scripture, but so often interpret that authority as the *right to make spiritual decisions, rather than the responsibility to become spiritual leaders*. My friend, there is a wealth of difference. One is assuming a position. The other is demonstrating a possession. Filled with spiritual pride, we men so often achieve high levels of visibility in the Christian community and assume that God just has *to be impressed with our place in the Kingdom*. Meanwhile, we may let our wives, as they labor in the shade unnoticed and linger in God’s presence unnoticed by the world, become the spiritual jewels in the family crown. We are often too spiritually blind to see it. Some of us need to stop being impressed with our ministries and return to being impressed with our God. We need to learn to be still.

Some of you women need to learn to be still as well. Like Busy Bertha, you may have slipped into the whirlwind of activity called Churchianity that assumes if you don’t do it, it won’t get done; a frame of reference that also assumes that if it is church-related, it is spiritual. And sometimes feeling spiritual because you do so much, you forget that God is not moved by what you do, but by how convinced you are of who He is. Mothers, learn to be still. Otherwise your children will miss the secret of life. They will grow up thinking knowing God consists of living in the back of a station wagon on the way to church, while a tired mom and dad are at each other’s throats. They may grow up thinking God lives in a church nursery, and that knowing Him is akin to turmoil.

Children need to learn to be still. We live in an age where children demand to be entertained around the clock. Their music is frantic; their pace at school is frantic; their evenings are often spent viewing frantic people searching for unfindable

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solutions on a video culture that has so captured their lives, that *watching it is their definition of being still*. Sad. They need to learn to listen to the crickets, to gaze at the flowers, to stare at the stars in awe and amazement; they need to experience the joy of just feeling the wind. But they won't learn that from the world they live in. It is on a collision course with confusion. They won't learn it at the Christian school; and they won't learn it at church. They will have to learn it from you.

Beloved, there are two ways to be still. You can choose to be still. Set aside the time and wait on God, or you can be stilled by the circumstances of life until you have no choice. You can force God to remove some of the spark plugs that make your engine move so fast, until reeling in total disbelief that you *can no longer race through life*, now you *have* to be still.

What would happen if we learned to be still? We would come to know more perfectly who our God is. We would be able to stand still and see Him deliver us. We would be able to rest from our own labors as we quietly benefit from His.

Here are four things you can do this year to learn to be still.

1- You can sit down today and rewrite the schedule of your life. You can block out Y.T.T.J.B.S. time (Your time to just be still), and you can determine right now that if you have to quit something to have that time, then quitting something is the will of God for you. You may have to quit one of those Bible Studies. That's not heresy. You may have to quit one of those committees. Good. That'll give someone else a chance to serve. You may have to disciple one less person so you can have something to give the ones you keep. Ask God to raise up someone else for that one, someone more suited than you. He will. Block out the time today or tomorrow or the second hand of the clock will once more sweep across your life and steal away the seconds that you had intended to use to be still.

2- Why not set aside a certain time when your family is not on call and not in gear. An evening a week or an evening a month, when you and your children, together and apart,

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learn to be still. Turn off the telephone. It can be your greatest blessing; but it can also be your greatest curse. Don't answer the door. Unplug the tube. Unplug the stereos. Turn off the artificial sounds of our generation and listen to the sounds of eternity. Spend time teaching one another to be still and know your God.

3- Learn to be quiet during your quiet times. I mean quiet in your heart. For some, quiet times have become no more than forced study times which are not bad, but which are not enough. Be still and listen. God wants to speak to you; let Him.

4- When the circumstances of your life signal “crisis”, don't do anything until you have re-read Exodus 14 and II Chronicles 20. Take time to be reminded that God isn't taking you to the edge of a roaring sea to be destroyed. *He wants you to become dependent*, so He has placed you where a violent enemy is attacking, and you are closed in by a raging river that cannot be crossed. Don't panic. Don't run. Above all, don't be afraid. Set yourself. Stand still. See the salvation of the Lord. Your God wants to fight for you, but He can't if you won't stop long enough to let Him. He'll do the fighting. You just be still.

Few secrets in the Christian life are as well-documented Scripturally, and as oft-overlooked experientially as this one. The secret is simply this:

BE STILL!

Be still, my soul—the hurried pace
No longer can endure
That frenzied pressure—is not good
Nor healthy, to be sure

You live as though the Kingdom's call
Was left but up to you
In all your pride, you've overlooked
What your great God can do!

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Be still, my soul, to quiet flee
The world will yet go on
And in the quiet night you'll find
What life is built upon

Oh, child, your God desires not
To hide from you His Will
His very nature He'll reveal
If you will...just...be still

Be still, my soul, and leave at once
That hurried path you've trod
Sit down, be still, and listen
And get to know your God!

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