

Be Still and Know That I Am God

Meister Eckhart said that “When we speak of divine matters, we have to stammer, because we are forced to express our experiences in words.”

This week has been a **stressful week** for me. You see, I haven't done this for years (and I regret that some of you remember that sorry attempt). I have a good idea of what I want to relate to you, but organizing it and making it interesting is a daunting task. Getting someone to understand what is going on in my head is always just a bit difficult.

I am a **third grade teacher**. Teaching in school is easier than doing this. For one thing I don't have to work so hard to organize my thoughts because the textbook companies have done it for me. And I am not so worried about impressing my audience...they're not my peers.

One of the teaching tools we use is called “**Active Listening**”. I would like to share it with you.

The **first** point is “Sit still”. Now, this is a major task for most third graders. At least beyond one minute. You can't listen if you are moving, wiggling, poking someone else or playing with your shoes. Or mining for boogers.

The **second** is to “Put your hands in your lap.” Put everything away. Lay your pencils down. Don't pick up your crayons. Close your book. Lay your pencils down. Put that away. Can I have that. Put your hands in your lap.

The **third** requirement for Active Listening is to put your “Eyes on the speaker”. Don't look at Kierra. Don't watch Danan. Don't look out in the hall. Everyone's eyes here!

The **fourth** is to use your ears to “Listen”. You are here to learn. That is our priority. One of the best ways to learn is to listen. Not talk. Not fuss.

The **fifth** thing you need to do is “Concentrate”. Pay attention. Randy! Pay attention!

This is only a start for coming to a place where you can know God. We have a lot of stuff in the way of getting where we want to be. Why is it so hard to connect with our God. “Be still and know that I am God.” Let's start with the first word of the directive the Psalmist gives us from Yahweh.

Be. God said His Name is Yahweh. The best we can tell this is Hebrew for “I am”. I...am. ‘Am’ is the same verb as ‘be’; from the Websters “to have an objective existence: have reality or actuality”. It is a verb. I = am. God didn't just say “I”. That would have been using a noun only. It would have indicated substance. God instead used a verb. I = am. Am, is, be. A verb. Implying more than just existence. It gives the sense of action. God is not a thing. A noun. You can't place God, touch God, hold God. God is spirit. In Hebrew it is the word **ruach**. The same word for wind.

The Bible tells us that we are created in God's likeness. We also “am, be”, thus ‘being’...human being. Be-ing. We are also spirit. We are a verb, not a noun. When Jim Pierce's family voiced

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their thoughts about Jim, how did they communicate it? They told the wonderful things that Jim did. Action, verb.

Now, the word **still**. Be still. Is that hard? Oh, yes. When I first attempted, in earnest with devotion, to be still and know God, was when I was a college student. I worked hard to be still. To quiet my mind. I tried everything. When I managed to get my mind quiet...I fell asleep. "The spirit is will but the flesh is weak." Some suggested that I not try to stop thinking but view my thoughts as suggestions from the Lord. My but God had lots and lots of suggestions. They never stopped. Why is this? What is the mind that we have so very little control over it?

I want to direct your thinking to the creation story in Genesis. It says that the Lord placed Adam and Eve in the **garden of Eden**, where they had communion with God. They were intimate with God. They worked with Him in the garden. It says that God forbid them to eat of one tree, the tree of The Knowledge of Good and Evil. Hmmm. You know...they ate the fruit of it. Now what was that knowledge of good and evil. Our best indication is that their immediate response was to notice their nakedness and decide that it was bad. It shamed them. They noticed that they were individual. Other. Now that seems to have become their and our primary condition. We believe we are **Other**. To such a great effect that the next story told in Genesis is that Cain was so convinced of his Otherness, of good and evil, that he was motivated to kill his only brother, Abel. From heaven to hell in less than a chapter. That is the human condition.

Our minds are so focused on **perceived good and evil** that we are able to do very little else with our minds. It starts when we are very little. We have, at early ages, no ability to think logically. But we have a very strong sense of right and wrong. When a little one is confronted with something that he cannot understand, he struggles to understand it. It almost always comes down to deciding who is right and who is wrong. If his feelings are hurt, she either makes herself out to be wrong and evil or the other person has to fit in that role. With no ability to think logically and understand the situations, the little one **makes up a story** in his head to make things fit comfortably. It is quite a mental struggle and the little one has to work it over and over in his head. That is a pattern we learn and use the rest of our lives.

When something bad or hurtful happens to us we figure out who was right and who was wrong. **Who is good and who is evil**. Then we spend many, many hours going over and over the story in our heads to make sense of it, to figure out what we did right, what we did wrong, what we should have done, what we will do next time. We analyze our behaviors and those of the other folks forever.

Am I right? Or am I really strange?

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When I was a kid, my mom admitted that she didn't **want me** as a baby because I wasn't a girl. She said that she wanted little to do with me and sent me to my grandmother's house at every opportunity. Needless to say, I felt really alien in my own family and made up tons of reasons in my head. That became something that I analyzed for decades and sought answers to from every quarter. Is it true, Greg? I built up this persona in my mind that I chewed on whenever it was stimulated by the smallest thing. I carried it around with me like something valuable and precious.

I had lots and lots of times to add to those childhood experiences. Lot of things that reinforced those judgments of good and evil. They came in:

- School – where my dad was the superintendent of schools and the boss of everyone I came in contact with. You can imagine some of the toxic situation I got myself into.
- Adolescence – No adolescent child can figure out which way is up. And nothing makes sense. But that doesn't mean that there isn't lots of yelling and finger point and blaming.
- Dating - I don't have to tell you that my attractions to other boys made me a little crazy! Guess who came out evil there? Add to it that I was raised in a Southern Baptist Church and just about everybody was going to hell.
- Marriage – I was honest about my attraction to other men, but I believed it was like being tempted to steal. You just didn't do it. You resisted temptation. What do they say? Men think about sex about every 15 seconds or something? Well, I was newly married 17 years and you can guess what my sexual thoughts were about. Resist temptation? Good or evil?
- Jobs – I was a missionary in Jerusalem, went to seminary, decided to leave seminary to stay at Broadway Baptist Church, refusing lots of offers to either become a pastor or a campus minister. I was confused and made myself pretty crazy.
- Money – it makes all of us create evil around every corner.
- Politics – that's easy! I'm a saint, they're evil.
- And now that I'm getting some significant years on me, illness and pain create lots of wrong and right in our lives.

We carry all this around with us, in our heads, and it gets stimulated constantly and we become, or I should say, I became pretty obsessive in my trying to figure our good and evil.

Now where am I going with this thought-line?

Our minds are but a tool that we use in our everyday lives. Not much different than our hands. We use them to decide what needs to be done and how to do it. But our minds are not us! They are a tool we have at our disposal. A very powerful tool. One that runs amuck. It isn't who we are. We can get some space between ourselves and our thoughts and observe the mind at work. We can stop the mind in its activity. We can direct it. We can control it. But not without difficulty. Especially if we believe that the mind is who we are. We are not the mind. We are the presence, the being, that observes the mind.

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Meister Eckhart, a mystic, prophet, feminist, preacher, theologian and declared heretic of the 12th century wrote:

One should love God mindlessly,
By this I mean that your soul ought to be
Without mind or mental activities
Or images or representations.
Bare your soul of all mind
And stay there without mind.

There, where clinging to things ends,
Is where God begins to be.
If a cask is to contain wine,
You must first pour out the water.
The csk must be bare and empty.

Therefore, if you wish to receive divine joy and God,
First pour out your clinging to things.
Everything that is to receive must and ought to be empty.

Brother Lawrence was a lay brother among the barefooted Carmelites in Paris in 1666. He wrote:

I make it my business only to persevere in His holy presence, wherein I keep myself by a simple attention and a general fond regard to God, which I may call an actual presence of God, or, to speak better, a habitual, silent and secret conversation of the soul with God, which often causes me joys and raptures inwardly and sometimes also outwardly, so great that I am forced to use means to moderate them and prevent their appearance to others.

I know that fir the right practice of it, the heart must be empty of all other things, because God will possess the heart alone and as He cannot possess it alone without emptying it of all besides, so neither can He act there, and do in it what He pleases, unless it be left vacant to Him.

Matthew Fox, a present day heretic of the Catholic church, philosopher and theologian says:
Silence is not, of course, the absence of communication: it is more an attitude of being wholly present.

This is what Jody Thatch, Diane Bourgeois, Debbie and Bob Rockford have been trying to teach us with spiritual disciplines. To still the mind and come into God's presence.

One of the tricks I learned from reading Eckhart Tolle's The Power of Now is to see thoughts as rabbits running threw the mind. I don't watch them. I watch the rabbit hole, in my mind's eye, waiting for the next rabbit to run out. They seldom do.

Let's attempt to still the mind...and know God.

Be still and know that I am God.

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Be still and know that I am.

Be still and know.

Be still.

Be.