

Quietness in a Noisy World

~ Llewellyn Martin

Beep, someone texted; *ding*, another email to follow up on; *ring*, someone calling with a question; *bleep*, an instant message from a friend; *waa*, the baby cries for our attention; and on and on.... In our busy, fast paced, highly connected society, the need to be still and know God is greater than ever before.

The weekly journal *Nature* once reported, “Given the choice, many people would rather give themselves mild electric shocks than sit idly in a room for 15 minutes, according to a study published ... in *Science*.” Say what? In an experiment led by social psychologist Timothy Wilson at the University of Virginia, 409 undergrads were asked to sit alone without mobile devices, books, or any other kind of entertainment for 15 minutes. That’s it. 15 minutes. Nearly half found this unpleasant. Allowed to repeat the experiment in the comfort of their own homes, “nearly one-third of the study subjects later admitted to cheating.”

And now comes the bizarre part: “In the next experiment, participants were given a small electric shock—akin to a jolt of static electricity—that was so unpleasant that three-quarters of them said they would be willing to pay not to experience the shock again.” But when participants sat in the room “alone with their thoughts, 67% of male participants and 25% of female subjects were so eager to find something to do that they shocked themselves voluntarily.” Let me reiterate that. A significant percentage of women and majority of men got so bored sitting quietly for 15 minutes that they chose to hurt themselves rather than just sit there. The article adds, “That difficulty is not limited to college students. The results still held when researchers repeated the experiments with a broader age group sampled from a church and a farmer's market.”

We may say that we aren’t wrapped up around electronics nearly like the world is. We don’t have TV, and we have endeavored to keep social media out of our lives. But as I evaluate my life I see the same root struggle. We need to work to support our families. Our spouses and children have emotional and spiritual needs for us to fulfill. We are on committees for the benefit of the church. We have places to fill in church life. There are other outreach opportunities of the church that we can help with. People call and need help or advice with things they are facing. Upkeep items around the house are beckoning for our attention. On top of that we have our own spiritual needs that we dare not neglect. It is easy to fill our lives up with things, not necessarily wrong things, to the point that we don’t have time, or rather don’t make time, to lay everything aside and focus on God. Satan doesn’t care what keeps us from spending time with God, and so he is willing to fill our lives with anything just to keep our core needs from being met.

The verse that comes to mind is, “*Be still, and know that I am God.*” What does it mean to be still? What does it mean to know God? How do we make it happen? Is the world trying to offer us answers for this problem?

One of the first questions we think of after reading the report above is, “Why can’t people handle quietness?” On the surface, people may say that we have been dragged into all this noise, and we have become addicted to having noise, to the point that we can’t handle sitting still without anything to do. While there is some truth in that, the issue runs a lot deeper. When God created the very first man in the Garden of Eden, He created him with a void, or a need that only God could fill. God desires a

relationship with us, and He desires our adoration and praise. So He created us in a way that our lives will be empty until we allow Him to fill that place in our hearts. We don't need to spend any time convincing you that our world today has taken many steps to remove God from our lives. The results are self-evident ... emptiness. Satan, not wanting us to feel that emptiness, fills our lives with other things before God can come and meet our deepest need. Therefore, the further mankind moves from God, the emptier their lives become, requiring more and more things to fill that emptiness in their hearts.

If you ask, "Does the world have any answers to this problem?" you will obviously get a wide variety of answers depending whom you talk to. On one side, people don't see this as an issue. They encourage you to go out and have fun and fill your life with things so that you can have a "fulfilling" life. There are other people that see the need to have quietness in their lives, and they propose another answer, yoga. Yoga is being pushed more and more in our noisy world, and when we address this topic, we need to also address this practice.

From a distant casual view, the question arises if yoga is wrong in itself. What is wrong with sitting quietly with your legs crossed, clearing your mind, and meditating? You don't need to study very deep into this practice to start seeing dangers. The following is a quote from an article by Christian Ministries International:

"Yoga purists are bent out of shape." This was the headline of a recent article in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* newspaper. The article explained that traditional yoga "experts contend that Hindu religious elements are being profaned by fad versions of the ancient practice."

So, what are these "fad versions" of yoga that are upsetting the Hindu yogis? The article cites as an example the "millions of Americans ... practicing yoga to improve flexibility, strengthen muscles and relieve stress." These 16.5 million American yoga enthusiasts "spend nearly \$3 billion annually on classes and products." The problem with this, according to the Hindu yogis quoted in the article, is that yoga was never designed to be an exercise, let alone an exercise "fad." Rather, yoga is an ancient Hindu religious practice intended to unite a person's soul with the impersonal, universal force Hindus call "god."

The Hindu Sanskrit word "yoga" literally means to be yoked or joined in union. And the goal of every Hindu yogi is to use the religious practice of yoga to lose their personality and individuality and to become one with the monistic-pantheistic spiritual force of Hinduism. This is done through Hatha yoga (the physical postures), where one seeks to tap into what Hindus call the Kundalini, a spiritual force described as a "coiled white serpent of light" which lies at the base of the spine. Hindus believe the Kundalini can aid them in their transcendence to impersonal spiritual monism. Thus, for the Hindu, the physical postures of yoga are essentially keys that unlock the spiritual realm for the purpose of losing all attachment to the physical, material world, which they believe is an illusion. There should be no doubt about it; yoga is completely antithetical to a biblical worldview. It is a 2,000-year-old Hindu religious practice designed for very specific spiritual and occult purposes.

As we can see in this article, Yoga is a Hindu religion designed to worship their "god." God strictly forbade the Israelites in the Old Testament to mix heathen practices with their worship of Him. They were commanded to destroy the heathen so they could have a pure worship of God and not be led astray by evil worship practices. God's view of heathen practices is no different today. He is a jealous God and wants our pure worship of Him, not some tainted practice from the devil. While there may be some limited physical benefits, we need to realize that we are playing with fire to try to practice a mild form of yoga.

What does the Bible have to say on this topic? Let us go again to Psalm 46:10,

“Be still, and know that I am God.” The word *still* means to relax or let drop. The only way that we can truly experience quietness in our lives is if we let go of the noise. When we sit down to have our personal devotions, we need to in a sense empty our minds of everything else and focus on God and His Word. We need to stop long enough to be able to relax and turn our focus on God. If we are holding a ball in our hand, we understand that we are still holding it until we let go of it. It is the same with our minds. We haven’t let go of the noise in our lives until it is no longer in our minds affecting us. Someone has once said, “The basic purpose for devotional periods is to detach us from the world and attach us to God.” Until we can be still before God and let go of this world, we will still be attached to it.

The second part of that phrase says, *“Know that I am God.”* The word *know* means what it says. We can know *of* someone or we can know *about* someone, but that isn’t what this verse is talking about. If you know someone, you have a relationship with them. You know them personally, you know how they think and what they believe. You know what is important to them. But it goes a step farther. When we truly know God we will *experience* Him. We will experience what He does in people’s hearts. We will experience His life in us. One of the problems with yoga is that it tries to empty your mind from the inside out. In itself that is good but holds no true value until you fill that emptiness up with God. Otherwise, Satan will be there to fill it with something else.

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown’s Commentary brings another interesting dimension to this verse. “Leave off to oppose Me and vex My people. I am over all for their safety.” One of the reasons that people have noise in their lives is that they are running from something in their life, or they are running from God. The NIV uses the words, “cease striving.” When we have things to deal with in our lives, we start striving with God and struggling with ourselves. Instead of dealing with the issues, we fill our lives with noise so we don’t sense or see those things that need to be dealt with.

When we analyze this verse in its context, we see the greater picture of what God is wanting. The end of the verse goes on to say, *“I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.”* The beginning of the psalm outlines God’s protection for His people in the midst of trials and disturbing events. The psalmist talks about God being in the midst of His people. He comments about the anger of the heathen and how God dissolves it and how God brings wars to an end. He ends the passage by saying that God will be exalted. What is this greater picture? God wants to be God in our lives. He wants to be our protection and shield. He wants to be exalted in our lives. When we get caught up in the noise of this life, we fail to see God, and we fail to let Him be in control and protect us from the world around us. We try to solve our problems ourselves. We try to fight the battle with our own strength. We try to be our own god.

Another reason that we struggle with finding quietness in our lives is that we separate our lives into compartments. We have our personal life, work life, and spiritual life. So we focus on God for our personal devotions and going to church, and then we move on and focus on our personal or work responsibilities. Experiencing God isn’t a ten-minute procedure every day. It is an all-day experience. God wants to be involved in all the aspects of our lives. He wants to walk with us through the day, guiding our eyes, holding our hand, and strengthening our feet. When challenges come throughout the day, call out to God and ask Him for His grace and wisdom. And when things go well, breathe a prayer of thanksgiving, realizing that it is God that meets our needs.

In closing we will look at a couple practical helps in finding quietness in our noisy world. I find it works best for me to have my devotions first thing in the morning. My mind is clearest then, before it is bogged down with the responsibilities of the day. Keep a pen and paper handy to jot down those things that come to your mind that you need to remember. Then you can forget about them until you are done, freeing your mind to focus on God. What distracts you from your time with God? Your children, your phone, your job, your computer? What do you need to do to eliminate those distractions? We realize that the stage of life you are in affects what distractions you can remove. Mothers need to care for their children, but maybe they can find a time that the children are sleeping or busy with other things. But probably most of us allow ourselves to be distracted by unnecessary things, filling our quiet time with God up with noise and drowning out what God would like to say to us.

Our prayer is that all of us can be still, let go, and experience the richness that God has for each of us.

~ Columbiana, OH
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