

FINDING OUR RHYTHM:
LINING UP WITH THE HEARTBEAT OF GOD

Quietness

1 Kings 19:1-12

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Do you like being around someone who does all the talking and never listens? Have you ever thought about our relationship with God in those terms? We talk to God in prayer...we don't listen. We do all the talking in worship. Pretty soon, God gets the point. We aren't listening.

I was frankly amazed when I started researching the many Bible verses that insist on us growing quiet. Listen to these: "Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him." Psalm 37:7. "Be still, and know that I am God!" Psalm 46:10. "Take heed, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint." Isaiah 7:4. "But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him!" Habakkuk 2:20. "Be silent, all people, before the LORD; for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling." Zechariah 2:13. "When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour." Revelation 8:1.

If these commands are so prevalent in scripture, why do we have such trouble being quiet? Among many other things, silence means we're not in control, calling the shots. In silence, we feel helpless, and we don't like to feel helpless!

And speaking of helpless and afraid, that's where we find the prophet Elijah. He is afraid and God comforts him. By the way, this summer's Vacation Bible Camp will spend two days on this marvelous story of God providing for Elijah. The evil queen Jezebel had put a contract out on him after he had publicly shown her up and exposed the impotence of her false god Baal. The true God Yahweh had answered by fire (1 Kings 18). But now, Jezebel is coming after Elijah. He is frightened. As Elijah is hiding in a cave (v. 9), the Lord asks, "What are you doing here?" A good question for you...for us as a church as we are in this season of discernment. What ARE we doing here?

Elijah answers (v. 10). "I'm the only one left..." It's a hint of complaining, with a dash of self-pity and just a sprinkle of self-righteousness thrown in! So, God decided it was time Elijah went to school and learned something. It was time for Elijah to be weaned off the spectacular. Perhaps he has become addicted to the noisy, bombastic fireworks. After all, the God who answers by fire is always easier to spot than the God who seems absent when we are running and afraid. So Elijah is told to stand on the mountain before the LORD (v. 11). First, there was a great wind. Remember that in both biblical languages, Hebrew and Greek, the word for wind is the same as the word for spirit. Surely God is in the wind? No. Then there is an earthquake. Is God in that? We know all those psalms which talk about God being present in the earthquake. No. Then there is fire. Well, we all know God is a consuming fire. No. God isn't in any of these

pyrotechnics. After all of that, "the sound of sheer silence" (v. 12). The still, small voice. The voice of a low whisper. Or, as *The Message* puts it, "A gentle and quiet whisper." Maybe God is speaking all the time. We just have to get quiet enough to hear.

In his book, *Simplify*, Bill Hybels says that when people tell him they just want to feel closer to the Lord, he asks, "How is your daily time with God?" He calls it "chair time." And by the way, what do many of us call that time? We call it QUIET time. Sometimes, when I'm playing with my grandchildren, it's noisy. If I get a phone call from you, I usually go in another room, where it's quiet. Because I want to hear you. I respect you and want to know what you have to say, so I move to a quiet place. Doesn't God deserve as much? Don't we need as much?

Here's my concern. We are all tempted to live our Christian lives vicariously through another person--a pastor, friend, role model, mentor. No, we're each called to take up our cross and follow Jesus. This is the heart of our Baptist heritage. The priesthood of all believers, what we call "soul competency..." Like Elijah, we are each called to listen for the still, small voice.

Kathleen Norris used to teach art to elementary students in the Dakotas. The children were so lively that sometimes she had trouble getting them to settle down and pay attention. So she let them have their noisy time, followed by a quiet time. She asked them write about noise, then to write about silence, and was amazed at how silence liberated their imaginations. One little girl wrote, "Silence reminds me to take my soul with me wherever I go" [*The Sacred Way*, by Tony Jones, p. 43].

Here are a series of questions for us to quietly reflect on, adapted from the book *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, by Peter Scazzero.

1. What if constant noise and talking are doing violence to my soul?
2. What if I have been neglecting my inner life?
3. What if I started spending more time with God and trusted God to work out the rest of my schedule?
4. What if the world could go on without me, but I couldn't go on without God?