

## **Be Still!**

*Psalm 46:10 (NKJV)*

Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.

*Mark 1:35 (NIV)*

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

**I**n the midst of our daily tasks, chores, and responsibilities, where and when do we take time to be still in God's presence? In Psalm 46, the only place where God speaks is in verse 10. God speaks with a command: "Be still, and know that I am God." It comes after tremendous works of the Lord. Verses 8-9 of Psalm 46 say, "Come and see the works of the Lord, the desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire" (NIV).

In the midst of what God has done, He says, "Be still and know that I am God." Those are powerful words flowing with life. We have the privilege to take the time and be still getting to know our Heavenly Father better.

Jesus set aside time to be still with His Father. In that time they fellowshiped and loved one another. God guided His Son. Jesus did what He heard and saw His Father do.

Where and when do we take the time to "be still, and know that I am God"? Do we wait until we receive bad news about someone we love? I believe we need to be still before the Lord daily. In that place where we choose to commune with God, we begin by centering and focusing on God. Put aside the distractions and plans for the day. It takes time to be still and not think of things to do.

I enjoy trying to be still in the morning with a closed door and in silence. I let the thoughts of the day pass and try to focus on God. I hear the clock ticking and occasionally a car going down the road. Center and focus on God. In the peaceful moments, my heart slows as my body becomes calm. Try it! You don't have to say anything, but desire to seek the Lord and be open. God loves to meet with us any time.

*God, we thank you for the opportunities and privileges you give us in life. We pray that we would have the desire to be in your presence listening. We thank you and love you. In the name of Christ we pray, Amen.*

*Pastor Mark O'Shields  
Evangelical United Methodist Church*

## Beatitudes

*Psalm 68:19 (NIRV)*

Give praise to the Lord. Give praise to God our Savior. He carries our heavy loads day after day.

People who know me well may tell you that I am a very positive, calm, and patient person. The year 2015 provided a challenge that I never before experienced and tested all of my gifts from God. As the year was nearing its end, I had the opportunity to sit back quietly and realize what a great year it turned out to be and how blessed and how grateful I am.

- Blessed am I for God's grace, blessings, and forgiveness.
- Blessed am I to have a wonderful family, starting with my parents and with Kent, our three children, their spouses, and our grandchildren.
- Blessed am I to have experienced health issues in today's world of medical technology, modern medicine, and skilled doctors that have allowed me, with their help, to continue in good health.
- Blessed am I to live in a country and community where I am free to worship as I choose and with whom I feel a bond, such as church family and friends.
- Blessed am I when I become perplexed and feel a need for comfort to have God's word in Philippians 4:6-7: "Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life" (The Message).

*My thank you note to God: Father God, thank you for the many blessings you have given me in my life. Your generosity, grace, and forgiveness along with these blessings are at times overwhelming for this humble child. Accept my prayer in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

*Bonnie Hackney  
Zion Community Church*



The decisive test of one's belonging to Christ is not reception of baptism, nor partaking of the Lord's supper, but solely and exclusively a union with Christ through faith which shows itself active in love.

*Emil Brunner*

*Tuesday, March 1*

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## **We Are Never Alone**

*Matthew 28:20 (NIV)*

And surely I am with you always, to the end of the age.

**S**ome years ago, a dear friend invited me to accompany her to New York City. As we were preparing to leave, we prayed for safe travel. Then she asked me to pray for a good parking spot. I usually do pray for safe travel, so I get that. But is it right to ask the Lord of the universe for a good parking spot? Really!! Besides, I enjoy walking. But, to placate my friend, I joined her in prayer for safe travel and a good parking spot.

Driving to and through NYC is always a challenge, but our trip that day was uneventful. When we arrived at our destination, there it was! The perfect parking spot waiting for us! “I am with you always...”

The Lord provides for us in many ways. I am convinced that the Pitman Pantry is a blessed ecumenical ministry. I have seen God’s hand working there so many times that I no longer fret if I see empty shelves. I know the Lord will provide. He always does.

As I was leaving church on the day before Thanksgiving, I noticed our pantry cart was overflowing with food donated by our congregation. I loaded it in the trunk of my car to take it to the pantry. It filled my trunk!

The Pitman Pantry is located at the First Baptist Church. From the church parking lot, the sidewalk slopes steeply down to the pantry entrance. As I was transferring bags of food into the pantry cart, I realized the parking lot was empty. It seemed I was alone, and I really needed help. It would be impossible for me to get that heavy cart full of food down that sidewalk and into the pantry by myself. But it was the day before a holiday, and no one was around. As I was deciding who to call, a young woman I didn’t know drove up and asked if I needed help! Together we maneuvered that heavy cart down the sidewalk and into the pantry. I have never seen her before, or since.

“I am with you always...”

As God’s people we should be secure in the assurance that whether we are rejoicing on the mountaintops of this life or in deep despair in its valleys, our Father is with us ALWAYS.

*Heavenly Father, thank you. Thank you for being with us always – every moment of every day. Thank you.*

*Grace Kier  
Pitman United Methodist Church*

## Bless Me Indeed

*1 Chronicles 4:10 (KJV)*

And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that Thine hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested.

Two years ago, I was given a special handmade, warm blanket for my sick father who lived in North Carolina. He was always cold. I was told it was a prayer shawl that had been prayed over by members of our congregation. I was so touched. So was he. The smile on his face was priceless and something I will treasure. When he went home to be with the Lord, my Mom wanted to give the prayer shawl back, but I told her to give it to someone she thought may benefit from it. She did and was able to share the love.

During some of my last years of teaching, I was able to learn how to crochet baby hats. That brought me great joy. I knew there must be some ladies in our church who would be able to teach me more. After all, someone had made that beautiful prayer shawl. When I retired, I found some ladies who were interested in getting together to share patterns, knowledge, and stories of how people were blessed with these prayer shawls. I also learned that this was the group that made the blankets for babies who were baptized.

There used to be a group called the *Knitwits*, but most of them were no longer able to knit or able to drive to come and meet. A wonderful lady (Jane) was willing to come and get me started, and all of a sudden God blessed me. In fact, He “blessed me indeed.” I found a new way I can do the Lord’s work: being in charge of our new group called *Hooks and Needles*. But I don’t do it alone. We work together. We meet every Monday. We began crocheting many pieces and went through a closet of yarn. In the past year, we have created and given away 45 prayer shawls, 16 baby blankets, and almost 200 baby hats. The baby hats are given to Elmer Hospital and Virtua Hospital in Voorhees. We also have created hats and scarves for the Mitten Tree in the back of the sanctuary to be given to the Neighborhood Center and Urban Promise.

Soon our yarn closet began to run low. We asked the congregation for help and donations. Once again, the Lord “blessed us indeed.” Our closet is filled again, thanks to the generosity of our congregation. God is so good. We are blessed to be given this ministry. So many hurting people have been wrapped in God’s comfort, healing, peace, and love. During this Lenten season, I give thanks for all that God has given us. May we be open to and accepting of opportunities He continues to show us.

*Dear Heavenly Father, thank you so much for “blessing me indeed.” Please continue to inform us of all the people who need to be wrapped in symbols of your love. You have done so much for us. We are thankful for the opportunities you give us to reach out to the family of God.*

Sue Simmons  
Pitman United Methodist Church

## The Secret to Gaining Strength

*Isaiah 40:29 (NIV)*

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

**W**e search for many things in life. But some things are harder to find than others. The verse above says that God gives us strength when we are weary and weak. How do we acquire that strength? Is it something we do or find? If so, where?

I love music, sports, a good joke, doing yard work, and planning. They were not skills and activities I decided to acquire in my life, but gifts. From God, maybe? From my dad, definitely! What my dad liked to do and what he was good at influenced me. I was not forced to do the same things, but his skills and favorite activities were imparted to me because of my association with my dad. They are gifts that were passed along to me because of my time spent with him.

I think that's a good analogy about our lives with God. If we live in the same space as God, if we are in His midst, He will rub off on us. His ways will become our ways. His thoughts become our thoughts. A few verses later, in Isaiah 40, it says, "But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength." The same thought is there. The Hebrew word that is translated "hope" actually gives us the same picture of what happened with my dad and me. I hung around him. I was in his presence. My life was interwoven with his. Thus his ways became my ways.

Looking for strength? Hang out with God. Let your life be interwoven with His. Then, His ways will become your ways. His strength will be yours. Not through a search or some exercises, but through hanging out with Him.

*God, let my life be so interwoven with yours that I become more like you just because I am in your presence so much. Then, in my weakness I will find your strength. Amen.*

*Pastor Paul Melson  
Trinity United Methodist Church*



The things that are closest to our hearts are the things we talk about,  
and if God is close to your heart, you will talk about Him.

*A. W. Tozer*

## Laughter

*Psalm 126:2-3 (NIV)*

Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them." The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.

One of my favorite scenes in a movie is when Mary Poppins tries to bring Uncle Albert down from the ceiling because he is laughing too much. The song *I Love to Laugh* is one of those songs that stays with you all day long if you hear it in the morning. I especially like these lines:

We love to laugh, Loud and long and clear  
We love to laugh, So ev'rybody can hear  
The more you laugh, The more you fill with glee  
And the more the glee, The more we're a merrier we!

Recently, we were discussing the story of Abraham and Isaac\* at the Saturday program at Kids Alley in Camden. We helped the kids draw a correlation between the stories of Jesus being obedient to God and Isaac being obedient to his father, Abraham. In the story in Genesis 22, God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Abraham agonized for three days as they traveled to Mt. Moriah, where Isaac was to be sacrificed on the altar that Abraham would build. Isaac, who was carrying the wood for the sacrifice, asked his father, "Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham told him that God would provide the lamb. As Abraham was about to complete his mission in obedience to God, the Angel of the Lord called out to him and his response was, "Here I am," giving God a listening ear. The Angel told Abraham not to kill his son, and a ram caught in a thicket was sacrificed as a burnt offering instead.

Can you imagine the joy and laughter Abraham and Isaac experienced once they knew God had provided? That trip back home must have been "a blast." Like in this story, God has provided a way for us, too, and I'm afraid not all of us reflect that knowledge of the Gospel to others with our facial expressions and our actions. Do people see our joy and laughter?

I love to laugh, not only because I love being a clown, but because it's more than just a little smile or a giggle. It comes from your belly, out of your mouth, for all to hear. It not only helps you express your feelings, but there is a physical benefit to laughing. Sometimes when you "laugh out loud," people look at you funny. I like to think that Christ's resurrection was "LOL" in the devil's face. People thought it was crazy to follow Christ and that the crucifixion was the end. Easter is a laugh-out-loud kind of day. That joy should never be held in. Make that inner smile turn into a full-fledged laugh!

*Father God, thank you for the laughter and joy that comes from the knowledge that you provide for our every need. Let us not keep that knowledge to ourselves, but help us laugh out loud so all can hear that you are the Christ, our Savior and Redeemer.*

*Bill Schober, aka Shobo Da Clown, LAUGH Clown Ministry \*\*  
Evangelical United Methodist Church*

\* Isaac's name meant "laughter."

\*\* Loving All Under God's House

## Anticipation

2 Peter 3:11b-12a (NIV)

You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.

So much of our lives are spent in anticipation – looking forward to something that is coming. We anticipate things large and small. The big things are events that dominate every aspect of our daily lives, like getting married, the birth of a child, or retirement. Then there are the “smaller” things – looking forward to celebrating holidays and birthdays, planning a vacation, or participating in a championship sporting event. All of us anticipate things on a daily basis, too – looking forward to going home from work to be with the family, anticipating a cool glass of iced tea after mowing the lawn on a hot summer day, or simply looking forward to watching something on TV.

We anticipate things that are not of this world, too. Not too many weeks ago we celebrated Advent, a whole season of looking forward to celebrating the birth of Christ. And during this season of Lent we take time to reflect and look forward to celebrating the glorious resurrection of Christ.

But how much do we look forward to our actual meeting with Christ? Yes, we imagine and even long for the time when we will be in heaven, but do we really want to give up our time here on earth? There is a country song that says, “Lord I want to go to heaven, but I don’t want to go tonight.”\* I can certainly relate to that sentiment, and maybe you can, too.

In the Bible, Peter tells us, “But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him” (2 Peter 3:13-14 NIV).

As we live our lives day to day, looking forward to so many events we hope to experience, let us not lose our focus on what really matters. Ready or not, someday we will meet God, and how we prepare for that time is the most important thing in our whole life! Remember, all that we anticipate and prepare for here on earth is just temporary and will pale in comparison to what is coming. Now, that really is something to look forward to!

*Father, you have given us so much to enjoy in our lives here on earth, and we thank you for it. But help us remember that no matter how many blessings we experience here, what is to come with you is immeasurably better! Amen.*

*Beth Price  
Zion Community Church*

\*Prop Me up Beside the Jukebox (If I Die) written by Joe Diffie, released 1993