

PART II

Spiritual Meditations About Our Conversations with God

1 God in the Stillness

He said, “Be still, and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10)

We can find God in stillness. “Be still and know that I am God” sounds wonderful! All we need to do is be still according to the Psalmist (46:10). However, most of us may have challenges to overcome before experiencing stillness. Hearing “be still” unfortunately may remind some of us of a reprimand from our parents as children. We had more to say than they wanted to hear. Or we talked back to our parents and the consequence was punishment of some kind.

“Being still” as a positive message may seem unfamiliar to most of us as adults. Experiencing stillness may seem far out of reach when people need it the most. During a typical day, we may be too busy to even consider introducing a moment of quiet into our routine. At bedtime, we may have too many loose ends swirling around in our heads, or we are so exhausted that we cannot stay awake long enough to pray. Being still is probably a foreign experience to many people, with our tendencies being to mostly expect noise of some kind, stay busy, overschedule, rush through our day,

worry about what we should do tomorrow, try to ignore or push back inner and outer chatter, and perhaps try to find stillness outside of ourselves rather than within.

Being still is also usually foreign to much of what a social worker's work world is like, too. Our tasks are many—being observant of what our clients need, attempting to engage them and develop empathy with them, encouraging them to share what is on their minds and what they need, followed by helping them find solutions to their problems. And often, all of this is supposed to occur within a short time frame. We are also expected afterwards to recall and record all their important comments for accountability purposes. Stillness can be a desirable goal, but it must compete with these and other demands.

Yet, if stillness finds a way into our routine, it can bring calmness to us and our clients. Further, it can help us remain in the present moment with both our clients and colleagues, a desirable place to be if we are to be effective. We need to have some perspective on this. Not all cultures are like ours. Being still can be a natural experience in much of the Eastern World. And among those who practice mindfulness in the United States and those who immigrate to the U.S. from countries with these and other traditions. Indeed, people with such a background will likely have a natural tendency to strive less to *do* and more to *be*.

Virtually all of us will want stillness if it can bring us closer to God. However, the key question is: how are we to do this? In our prayer life, we will need to spend less time in our heads and more in our hearts. Being still is mostly a heart-felt experience. We must learn how to relax and free ourselves from noticeable distractions. We need to empty ourselves of our own thoughts and emotions so that God has our full attention. Still other challenges await us when we do try to experience stillness. When we attempt to bring more stillness into our prayer life, we are likely to be overwhelmed by internal distractions. The quieter we

become on the outside, the more noise we may experience on the inside.

Internal chatter inevitably appears when we sit quietly, partially because of the unfamiliar void that is created within us. However, if we find that such chatter is interfering with our stillness, then we can follow some basic guidelines from the practice of mindfulness. We can just observe our chatter without engaging it. We can view it as a sensation that is external to us. We observe it, remain a passive spectator, and gently nudge it away and return to stillness. We can select and say to ourselves a sacred word that we choose, such as “Lord,” “Jesus,” “Love,” or “Peace” whenever the chatter re-emerges. Saying this word can bring our attention back to God’s stillness and away from the chatter. We gently repeat the sacred word over and over until the internal chatter disappears.

Exercise:

Please briefly assess what your experiences are with being overextended. Are you overscheduled, too busy, often exhausted, or preoccupied with things of the past or future? Are these problems for you? If so, spend some time recognizing how they may affect your life in a negative way. Next, take time now or when you are free to complete an exercise to be still in the moment! Begin by finding a place and time in your schedule that is free from interruptions. Possibly begin by lighting a candle or setting up an icon or other spiritual object in the space in front of you. The flames of the candle or possibly the eyes of Christ in the icon may be seeking to reach you and help you disengage from your interruptions. Continue with this exercise as long as it feels comfortable.

Afterwards, reflect on what this experience was like and ponder some questions. What did this experience of being alone and still feel like? Was it relaxing and comforting? Or was it difficult to do and challenging to manage your internal chatter? Consider the comfort and awe that can

be brought to your consciousness when you are still. No worries, no thoughts of any kind, just rest and relief in the moment with God. Nothing to do or expect. Nothing to accomplish. See if you can find a regular time and a quiet place to experience more stillness during the days immediately ahead.

Additional Resources: 1 Kings 19:11-13; Cunningham & Egan, chapter 8, 1996; Hicks, 2009; Williams & Penman, 2012.