



minister

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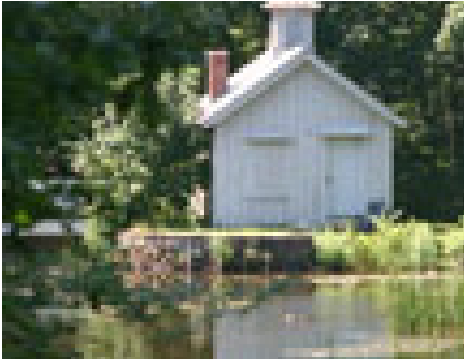


Photo Credit: Michael Sayer

Self-care

Peace, Be Still: Claiming Your Calm in a Crazy Busy World

Kirk Byron Jones



The summer had come and gone and I felt frustrated and restless. In just a few weeks it would be time to begin another academic year of teaching and another season of speaking on the road. The summer, my 50th, was to be my time of deeper than usual respite and reflection. I planned accordingly, but then life and a lack of insistence on my part undid it. Before I knew it, an extended period of relaxation had become a broken break. In a last bid to salvage what I

could from my lost Sabbath, I thought to take advantage of an opportunity to spend a week alone at a retreat center. The little yellow house on the backside of the center's forested grounds and the lake next to it saved me.

Stillness: A Sweet Summer Surprise

Sometimes thirst is enough. I received a blessing of deep peace during my few days on the lake, maybe because I wanted it so. Mornings were spent walking along the small sandy beach and wading in the water. Afternoons saw me seated on rocks in the forest looking around and within. Evenings, I lounged in the house in utter silence, broken only by the soft jazz I brought to join me. It was a time of emptying all burdens of worry, and abiding in spaces the poet Mary Oliver calls, "not thinking, not remembering, and not wanting." In the 11th hour, my summer Sabbath had been salvaged. I had touched what a great disciple of stillness, Howard Thurman, called "the physical and mental cessation of inner churning."

Just as I was about to break out into full grief for my having to go away from my get-away, I discovered that God had saved the best for last. I sought to chronicle the surprise blessing in my final journal entry of that week:

Stillness, inner peace, is not a vacation. Peace is a lifestyle. You have a lake, trails, a forest within you that you can go to anytime you desire. You do not have to go away to go away; just go within.

In that moment, I felt that I didn't have to leave the most important thing I had discovered at the lake, deep inner calm, behind; I could take it with me. Suddenly, a new awareness had hold of me: I could carry my calm inside of me all the time. This knowledge caused me to recall words that had fallen into my consciousness during a personal morning devotional moment earlier in the year:

Where Love Lives

If you can be
still enough
long enough
there is a place within
on the other side of silence
where love lives.

Overcoming our Suspicion of Stillness

In order to observe more inner calm and peace, we must come to terms with our conscious and unconscious negative valuations of stillness. For example, we associate stillness with mischief. If younger children are too quiet in a home, an alarm may go off inside of us: “What in the world are they up to?” At other times, stillness is used as a punishment: “Sit down and don’t you move a muscle!” Sometimes we punish persons who have offended us by giving them “the silent treatment.” Another example of a negative perception of stillness is our discomfort with extended pauses in conversation. Finally, we may associate quiet with trying personal life situations. I remember a seminary student linking her uneasiness with stillness with “the calm just before the storm” of another abusive assault from her father.

Though sometimes painful, identifying ways in which stillness has been negatively experienced is a way of preparing stillness to wear new garments, to take on greater positive meaning and value.

Cultivating Stillness-Desire

We receive what we deeply desire; what we focus on is what expands in our lives. Consequently, you will not realize more stillness and the resulting peace of mind and soul in your life unless you truly want it. Warning: Given that our society promotes noise and busyness, you will have to develop your desirability in a hostile environment. It is possible to increase your “want-ability factor” by periodically reminding yourself of the amazing life-transforming benefits of stillness.

Here are a few such benefits attested to by, not only writers and religious leaders, but persons in varying walks of life I have encountered in seminars and workshops around the country:

Calm
Soul Refreshing
Hearing God’s Voice
Acceptance
Release
Insight
Clarity
Soulfulness
Surprises
Originality
Connection to God, Self, Nature, and Others
Contentment
Elation

Lavish Grace
Inner Spaciousness
Courage to Face Fear
Creative Energy
Noticing More
Patience
Stretching

Take a moment to reflect on each stillness-blessing and its meaning for you, past, present, and future.

Peace-Pockets: A New Stillness Ritual

Peace-pockets are 5-15 minute intentional intervals throughout the day for spiritual, mental and spiritual respite and renewal. During your peace-pocket time, you may listen to soft music, watch a burning candle, pay attention to your breathing, allow your mind to wander free, or give it the freedom to not wander anywhere or think of anything at all. The goal is to be “off” for a moment. The more experience you build, the better you will become at observing your peace-pockets. Here are four things to remember as you create your unique and soulfully refreshing peace-pockets:

1. *Permission.* If you don’t value your calm, no one else will. You have to become convinced of the meaning and value for peace in your own life. You have to become persuaded that you are a better person with peace than without peace. Convince yourself that stillness leads to peace, peace leads to clarity, and clarity leads to creativity. Should you begin to feel guilty and selfish about making more time for nothing, dare to believe that the deeper selfishness is not giving you such time. As long as you remain “crazy busy” you insure that the world, including those nearest and dearest to you, will never behold you at your finest. That would be selfish.

2. *Planning.* Schedule daily and weekly times of stillness, and be open to the unscheduled graces of free time to simply be. Planning them with the same intent that you plan your work signals to your conscious, and just as importantly your unconscious mind, that claiming your inner calm is as important to you as anything else in your life.

3. *Practice.* Don’t just plan your mini-respite, live it. Real change involves more than knowing you need to change, wanting to, and planning to. As valuable as they are, authentic change transcends awareness and desire. Real change is actually choosing to be different, to live differently. In addition, sustaining true change involves trusting your transformation beyond all fear and suffering.

4. *Personhood.* Know that having regular periods of stillness helps you to remember that you are infinitely more

than what you do. You are God's "fabulous you" apart from any accomplishment or achievement. God cannot love you any more than God loves you right now, despite anything you have done or will do.

You Are Already in Peace; Peace is Already in You

If you don't mind, please take a deep breath. Go ahead; breathe in deeply. Hold it. Now, exhale. Do it again. Breathe in deeply; hold; release your breath. And, just one more time, completely inhale; exhale completely.

Hopefully, you have just experienced several seconds of inner calm, a piece of peace.

I am guessing that you were so focused on taking, holding, and releasing air that you were unable to think about anything else. Not thinking about anything allowed you to be free of everything, including all anxiety, fear, and worry. Inner peace is not an elusive blissful state achievable only by the highly spiritual. It is all around you all the time. You're standing in it; it is standing in you. The arduous effort of stillness is simple awareness.

Because inner peace is God and God is everywhere, all the peace you will ever want or need is already present around and inside of you. Similarly, all the love you will ever want or need is already present around and inside of you.

One of the biggest impediments to experiencing inner peace is the perception that we are always so far from it. Always, you are much closer to peace than you think. Always, peace within is never more than a small still moment away.

Excerpted from Dr. Jones's forthcoming new book, **Say Yes to Grace: How to Burn Bright without Burning Out.**

A pastor for over twenty years, Rev. Jones was the founding minister of Beacon Light Baptist Church in New Orleans, and Senior Minister at Calvary Baptist Church, Chester, PA; Ebenezer Baptist Church, Boston, MA; and the First Baptist Churches of Randolph and Whitman, MA. He is currently pastor of First Baptist Church, Tewksbury, MA.

The Ministers Council is that Unique Place within the National Structure of the ABCUSA which:

- Offers leaders opportunities to articulate a distinct ministerial viewpoint, among the many denominational perspectives that need to be voiced and heard, as we work together for the growth of Christ's kingdom;
- Serves as an advocate for its members in times of difficulty and conflict;
- Is solely focused on the well-being of clergy as they engage in the ministerial calling in all of its dimensions.

www.ministerscouncil.org



Photo Credit: Jennifer Whitmore

The Ministers Council Provides a Community for its Members:

- To assume responsibility for the faithful practice of the ministerial calling;
- To develop and promote ethical standards that both guide and shape the way in which the vocation of ministry is performed;
- To assume personal responsibility for and to encourage physical and emotional well-being in the practice of ministry;
- To inform, support and encourage one another in the deepening of personal and communal spiritual life;
- To work together to develop the skills necessary to become effective servants of Christ's church
- To encourage growing friendships that inform and correct the leader as she or he seeks to faithfully respond to the call of God in Christ Jesus.



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The Ministers Council is the professional association of ministerial leaders within the American Baptist Churches USA. We are working together to:

Connect colleagues through Together in Ministry groups and Communities of Practice

- Establish and maintain professional and ethical standards of the Christian ministry
- Give support to the members of this body and be an advocate for them in their professional relations
- Resource ministry through our web site at www.ministerscouncil.org
- Interpret the appropriate roles of professional ministerial leadership to the constituent parts of our denomination, and to our local American Baptist Churches
- Encourage the recruitment and nurture of candidates for the various church vocations
- Provide a means of expression and debate by members of this body on issues that affect the professional ministerial leadership of the American Baptist Churches USA
- Cooperate with the appropriate units of the American Baptist Churches USA in matters of mutual interest and concern, including recruitment, placement, compensation, continuing education, and counseling



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