



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

7643 Huron River Drive

Dexter, MI 48130

734-426-8480

---

### Connection: Silence And Solitude

**July 20, 2008**

**Rev. Stephen G. Bringardner**

~ Scripture: Psalm 46 ~

### INTRODUCTION

Show Nooma DVD, entitled **“NOISE”** (approx. 10 minutes).

The video raised this question: *Is there a connection between the amount of noise in our lives and our inability to hear God?* I think we’d have to answer “YES”!

**ILLUSTRATION** The other day I was visiting Edie D. at CRC (where she is recovering from hip surgery. Was getting her hair done...waiting for her hair to dry...hairdresser kept turning on the hair dryer (for another customer)...I kept having to ask, “What did you say?”

What is the antidote to NOISE? How can we HEAR God above the din of sounds and noise? There is an answer in **Psalm 46**. This is the Psalm we turn to in moments of national/inter-national catastrophe (like 911). . .or personal calamity. It’s the Psalm that says:

**“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present [when you need it!] help in trouble” (v. 1).**

**“The LORD Almighty is with us” (v. 7).**

**“The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress” (v. 11).**

Through repetition, the composer drives the point home: God is in control. . .God is in our midst . . .God is with us. . .God is our protection.

When I read the Psalm, You will notice the little word **SELAH!** It occurs often in the Psalms, and is like a musical rest / a pause. It means, literally, *“Pause, and let that sink in.”* It’s the pause that lets you hear the sound of God’s voice in the silence.

**ILLUSTRATION** One time, years ago, when we were living in Minnesota, we took a trip way up north into the “arrowhead region” (where the BWCA is). There are four trails—varying in length from 5-6 miles to 66 miles. I got out on the shortest one and did some hiking. . .came upon a remote lake. . .no cabins, no roads. . .no noise. The calmness and peacefulness was astounding. It is the one time in my life I remember actually “hearing the silence”. *Truly a SELAH moment!*

The word occurs 3 times in this Psalm, forming an outline of 3 stanzas. Each stanza describes a life-threatening situation, then affirms that God is still in control. Look at the **first stanza**. . .

**2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,**

**3 though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. SELAH!**

Even if there is a natural disaster or a holocaust...or your personal world crashes around you—God is in control! In the *next stanza*, look at God’s provision. . .

**4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God [Jerusalem], the holy place where the Most High dwells.**

**5 God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day.**

**6 Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts.**

**7 The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. SELAH!**

Jerusalem, God’s holy city, has no river running through it. God promised that He would always sustain and protect this city as long as its people would depend on Him. Nevertheless, war & destruction are inevitable. Still, as we see in the *third stanza*. . .

**9 He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire.**

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

**11 The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. SELAH!**

So, after all these images of chaos—mountains sliding into the ocean, cities under attack, bows breaking, and chariots burning—comes this absurd command (in v. 10): **“Be still. . . Cease! Relax! Be quiet! Quit your striving! Do nothing!** In the midst of turmoil and trouble, God says: *“Cease! Be still, so that you may know that I am God!”*

Psalm 46:10 calls us to the discipline of SILENCE.

**ILLUSTRATION** Years ago, Dan Rather conducted a TV interview with Mother Teresa. He asked, “When you pray, what do you say to God?” “I don’t say anything,” replied M.T., “I listen.”

“Well, OK, when God speaks to you, then, what does He say?” “He doesn’t say anything. He listens.” As if that wasn’t enough to bewilder D.R., she added: “And if you don’t understand that, I can’t explain it to you.”

It’s one of the mysteries of faith: If you will cease, God will reveal! And vice versa! If we can’t quiet ourselves before Him—if we let the noise of the world distract us (like the hairdryer), we may *know something about God* but we won’t really *know Him!*

SOLITUDE + SILENCE! They go together like PB & Jelly. They make a wise investment—because they will enable you to share the weight, the strength, the glory of your life with others.

However, a DISCLAIMER is in order. While **Ecclesiastes 3:7** says, *“There is a time to keep silence and a time to speak”*, it is also true that *“there is a time NOT to be too much in solitude”*:

- If it leads you into isolation / seclusion / estrangement;
- If it leads you to escape or withdraw from people;
- If it feeds a depression (i.e.: pervading melancholy / foreboding despair / sense of hopelessness).

That said, let me take you quickly through three questions. . . . .

## I. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF SILENCE & SOLITUDE?

The purpose is not to receive secret messages from God. You probably won’t hear any audible instructions from God. Yet somehow, in our quietness:

- He will sift the essentials of life from the chaff and train your mind on what’s important.
- He will give new insights and help you apply them to your most perplexing problems.
- He can help you cease striving so that your greatest problems will start to shrink.
- You will have a healthier perspective of who you are and what He’s called you to do.

- Also, in our stillness, He will be better able to protect and guard our hearts from the clamor of the world (that pollutes it).

## II. WHY IS SILENCE SO DIFFICULT?

Obviously, all the NOISE in our lives (depicted by the NOOMA video).

**A.** Could it be also that in silence we feel helpless and not in control. We seem to need words to manage ourselves, and the things in our lives. After a period of prolonged silence in a circle of friends, we get nervous: “*Somebody say something!*”

It’s hard to be silent, because, well, who will be in charge? Who will take care of all the busyness of the day if we’re not running here & there & everywhere?

Truth is, when we are silent and practice solitude, we allow the LORD to be in control. That’s what it’s all about anyhow, isn’t it: letting HIM (rather than ME) be in control of my feelings, my attitude, my schedule, the direction of my life.

**B.** The other thing about noise is that it shuts out things that are too disturbing for us to face. What’s the hardest thing to do when you hear bad news? LISTENING, isn’t it? We want to fix it. . .cover up our own uncomfortable feelings. . .manage by words. The first thing *Stephen Ministers* (or any helping vocation) learn is how to **listen**. It’s the hardest thing to do!

Silence is such a lost art among us. There’s an old proverb: “*All those who open their mouths, close their eyes.*” The purpose of Silence & Solitude is so that you can *see* and *hear*. But if you are talking—and some (all) of us do too much of that—your ability to listen diminishes. That’s why **James** said (in **1:19**): “*Everyone should be quick to listen and slow to speak.*” It will help you understand more where someone is coming from, and avoid a lot of misunderstandings that keep you in interpersonal turmoil.

Did you know that Jesus retreated by Himself at least 7-8 times that we can identify in the New Testament. Often, after a non-stop day & evening of ministry, Jesus (the Son of God) would go to a solitary place to be renewed. In these times of retreat, He was filling Himself back up with God’s love & power so He could again minister to people. Otherwise He would be spent and have nothing to give.

So, while you might think that “solitude” means doing nothing (i.e.: wasting time), it’s not really. Insecure people need to stay busy, because they tend to measure their success and consequently their worth by what they’re “doing”. And if they’re doing nothing, then they’re not measuring up.

I want to suggest that retreating to solitude is NOT doing 0. It is not a vacation. [There’s a need for that too, but this is something different.] When you are listening (really listening), you are actively engaged. When you pull away to the solitary place, you are occupied.

## III. HOW DO YOU PRACTICE SILENCE & SOLITUDE?

Many of you are on the ragged edge this morning because you are continually in motion—constantly in the company of needs & people & demands / expectations / children pulling at you / spouse needing support / friends wanting help / groups looking for a volunteer / schedules / making plans / attending events. You find yourself tense / angry / needy yourself / self-absorbed / demanding / resentful. Maybe you’ve even been doing more harm than good lately.

When was the last time you were absolutely alone. . .sitting (better yet, kneeling) in silence? Well, let me tell you, it won’t “just happen”. You’ve got to make it happen. Sometimes GOD has to make it happen. **Psalm 23:2** says: “*He makes me lie down in green pastures.*”

**ILLUSTRATION** I’ve been getting ready for a long bike ride. Sometimes you have to push & shove aside some of the demands. . . do some creative juggling. . .make some sacrifices. . . inconvenience yourself, even to the point of losing sleep.

Vance Havner once said: “*If you don’t come apart, you will come apart.*” So, how can we take better care of ourselves so that we don’t burn out?

FIRST: Take advantage of the “little solitudes” that come your way:

- Those early morning moments in bed just as you are waking up;
- That morning cup of coffee before launching into the day’s work;
- Those little moments of refreshment and silence you take throughout the day (e.g.: my little kaleidoscope).

These “small moments” can get your back on track ≈ a compass can get you back on the trail.

SECOND: Find or create a place where you can be by yourself. Perhaps it’s a special chair in a particular room in your home. . . or a place where you go for some solitude. There’s nothing wrong with saying to the rest of the household, “Please give me some space; I need some moments alone.”

THIRD: Maybe a couple times a year, take a day or two and withdraw somewhere to a quiet place. Get alone before God. Reflect on your life’s goals, accomplishments, challenges, dreams . . . your relationships, and especially your relationship with Him. Spend that time in prayer, Bible study, reading, journaling.

It’s often in the quietness of those moments God can speak (i.e.: bring us to clarity).

You say, “But every time I try to get alone and quiet before God, my mind floods with useless thoughts, cares & worries, little reminders of what I “should” be doing. Don’t fight it; don’t feel guilty. Just let all that “stuff” filter through. Eventually your mind will settle down and be quiet. Not EMPTY (as TM tries for), but STILL. Then the Scriptures you have read, the lessons you have learned, the prayers you have begun to pray will start to mingle and finally jell. Confusion and chaos will be displaced by clarity; shallowness by deep & meaningful thoughts.

And you will know in your heart of hearts that God has spoken! You will be filled with His peace, a new sense of direction and confidence.

## CONCLUSION

We’re going to practice Silence & Solitude this morning. This service has been structured so that we don’t just *talk* about it, but *do* it. In the next 9-10 minutes, you are going to hear some reflective music and see some beautiful images that portray some of the most poignant passages in all the Bible.

I want you to take advantage of this opportunity to quiet yourself before the Lord. Please feel free to get up and move around. . . kneel at your chair. . . or come to one of the kneelers.

We’re not in a hurry this morning. This is your time. Actually, it’s God’s time—an opportunity we’re giving Him to have access to our hearts and our lives.

Let’s begin!