

# Quiet Down

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CHURCH IN  
Bethesda

## TODAY'S PASSAGE

*11 The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by."*

*Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. 12 After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. 13 When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.*

*Then a voice said to him,  
"What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

*- 1 Kings 19:11-13 -*

# NOISE

How'd that extended moment of silence feel to you?

Confusing?

Rejuvenating?

Annoying?

Wasteful?

Peaceful?

We live in a noisy world, and it can be nearly impossible to find quiet places in our lives of traffic, and cabs, and trains, and construction sites, and family, and entertainment.

But this is only half of the problem when it comes to finding quiet places because all of those things are external.

What about inner noise? What about noise in the soul? Our overactive minds that can't stop, even for a second.

Laying down on our beds at night with our minds racing on a loop.

*“Could I have said that better in that meeting today? Did they notice that I was faking it? I just didn't have enough time to prepare.”*

*“I wonder if he likes me. He stopped by my desk today. He saw how neatly I keep my cubicle. I wonder if he thinks I'm a clean freak?”*

*“Oh my God! I left my laptop charger at the coffee shop! It's probably gone by now. There goes another 90 bucks I don't have. It's fine, I'll make it up by making my coffee at home for... let's see... what's math... 18 days.”*

Thoughts rushing at warp speed through the asteroid field of noise in us.

We sit down and try to pray, but even then our minds are so full of noise that we often

give up just minutes into the process because it's just too crazy inside.

It's like a war is going on inside of us.

And the easiest to make the noise go away is to drown it out with more noise.

ABC News reports that people unlock their phones 110-150x a day on average. That's 9 times an hour!

We fall asleep in front of screens and speakers.

Our headphones are often just as much part of our body as our ears are.

We fill every amount of free space with noise.

Why? Because rest and silence are like foreign lands to us. We don't know the geography of such places and we don't understand the language of the culture there, so we do all that we can to avoid ever having to go there at all.

## LIFE

Our passage for today comes from the 19th chapter of the book of 1st Kings in the Old Testament, and I want to read it again because it's something that's just profound enough for us to hear twice.

*11 The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by."*

*Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. 12 After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. 13 When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.*

*Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

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## PARALLELS

Man is that like life!

The great and powerful winds swirling around us, tearing the mountains of our dreams apart, shattering the rocks of determination and hard work that we've turned into trophies in our minds.

The earthquakes of the human condition that rumble all around us, hijacking our attention.

The flames that flare up in our everyday lives that keep us frantically rushing from one fire to another without a moment to spare.

And God's word for us today here in the modern West is the same as it was when this passage was scribed.

God is trying to speak to us and guide us in everything that we are facing, but in order to hear the message we have to let some things pass us by. We have to deliberately ignore the noise so that silence can emerge.

## SILENCE AND HEALTH

Taking time to sit and be silent – making a rhythm of sitting in silent trust is vital to our lives and our health (spiritual, mental, and physical).

There was a study that was published in the New York Times that said this about taking time to sit and be silent.

*"...people who meditated for 30 minutes a day for eight weeks had measurable changes in gray-matter density in parts of the brain associated with memory, sense of self, empathy, and stress... M.R.I. brain scans taken before and after the participants' meditation regimen found increased gray matter in the hippocampus, an area important for learning and memory. The images also showed a reduction of gray matter in the amygdala, a region connected to anxiety and stress. A control group that did not practice meditation showed no such changes."*

– The New York Times

The Times is not a religious publication, and yet in some strange way, it is saying the very same thing here, in clinical language what Elijah is saying in the language of the soul.

## NOT DOING

The longer that you go to church here, you'll find that it's impossible for me to make it through a calendar year without invoking the genius of Aaron Sorkin.

In one of my favorite Sorkin shows, "The West Wing" there's a scene that mirrors this topic beautifully.

Leo MacGarry The President's Chief of Staff is advising the Acting President, Glenn Allen Walken about some decisions that he's being pressed to make quickly, and Leo says to the President,

"This office isn't always about doing something. Most of the time it's about not doing something."

-The West Wing, Season 5, Episode 2, "The Dogs of War."

And I would say that life is very much the same. Succeeding in life isn't always about doing something. Most of the time it's about not doing something.

We may think the answer for everything is to add more activity, more appointments, more speed, and more volume, but the scriptures teach us something very different.

## SULLY

I moved here at the end of August, and I've been enjoying getting to know all of you better.

One of the people in our congregation that I find myself spending a lot of time with is Sully. For those of you that don't know Sully, he is the reason that all the checks get written and the lights and the heat and the air conditioning are working. He gives so much of his time and effort to our

community so that we have a safe and welcoming place to gather and listen for God.

Sully is also an INTJ on the Myer's Briggs, as am I, so I enjoy talking with him because he says things in a way that makes sense to me.

He said something in passing a few weeks back, and I'm not even sure he knows how profound it was. It's been something I've been thinking about and putting into practice a lot in my life since I heard him say it.

We were discussing some pressing things about one of our contracts here at CiB, and as we all know, sometimes when we're discussing things that have big financial implications in our lives, the potential for distraction, and noise, and hurry to get things done quickly are almost impossible to resist.

And I was getting ramped up about how to bring closure to the thing we were

discussing as quickly as possible, and Sully said,

*“I’m learning the importance of the restraint of pen, the restraint of tongue, and the restraint of hitting the ‘send’ button.”*

And in that moment, I heard the wisdom of God in those words.

I thought about all the times that I’d acted too quickly, responded too quickly, and spoken too quickly, only to regret the fruit that it caused to sprout up in the garden of my life later on.

And this is what God is saying to us here today in our lives that are screaming at us through a megaphone, “Let’s go! Hurry up! Get this done! You don’t have enough time to sit and think about this! Act! Act now!”

But you know what? We do have time.

It may not always be a lot of time, but we always have the opportunity to stop and get

quiet and think in between the earthquake and our response.

We always have time, even if only a few moments, to let the fires burn as we pause and listen for the voice of God— a God who is wanting to speak to us.

And maybe, just maybe, if we make that an ongoing practice in our daily lives we'll find more equilibrium. We'll look further down the road instead of always being so frazzled about the thing right in front of us. Maybe it'll help us make plans, consider the cost, and see our lives as a journey, a process, and an unfolding— not just a series of one time events.

I pray that we would be a slower people.

I pray that we would learn to relax and trust, especially in those moments where we want to tinker with the outcome of everything.

I pray that we would learn to let things take their course.

I pray that we would get comfortable as human beings, not human doings.