

Meditation, preschool-style

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Most nights, my bedtime prayer with our two oldest boys begins like this:

Be still and know that I am God.

I can't remember if it started when our litany of God-blesses maxed out with a mile-long list of everyone my kids knew: *every teacher at their schools, every former babysitter, every relative they've never met, all the poor people and sick people and sad people and homeless people and all the children in the world.*

Or if it started when we needed something fresh after all the recitations of prayers they know by heart: *Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be.*

Or if it started one late night when I was so tired that I simply needed to hear the words myself.

Be still and know that I am.

But no matter how we started, "Let's do meditation" has become the nightly plea for their bedtime routine. Who can resist that request, even at the end of an exhausting day? So meditate we do.

Be still and know.

Meditation for two squirmy kids is as simple as this. A few deep breaths to quiet our bodies to listen to God. Then a stair-step repetition of Psalm 46:10's refrain, dropping a word or two each time to shorten the sentence, then building back up again to the full phrase.

And every night, no matter how antsy I am for bedtime to end and my few precious hours sans-kids to begin, I always find that one phrase will catch me and do exactly what the psalmist says. Slow me down and remind me that God is God.

Be still.

Make no mistake about it: my kids wiggle and giggle the whole way through. They are no monks. But they know the words by heart, forward and back, inside and out. I will never forget the Sunday we sang the same psalm at church, and our oldest son's eyes shot up, astonished that everyone else knew his prayer, too.

These ancient words have become so close to my boys, already in their mouths and in their hearts. Now all they have to do is learn how to live them. All I can tell them is that it takes a lifetime.

Be.

So much of my life runs counter to this psalm's truth. I cringe to admit that a more fitting refrain for too many of my days is *Be busy and forget that God is even around* . It's all up to me, right? The kids and the work and the house and the endless to-do lists. Too often I forget to slow down and seek the One that matters most in the midst of it all.

Be still.

So whenever the boys yell, "Meditation! meditation!" while jumping on their twin beds like bouncing monkeys, I say, "Yes." I take a few extra deep breaths to slow down before we start. I need this practice as much as they do. Probably even more.

Be still and know.

After we'd been praying this meditation for a year or so, our oldest son decided one night that he wanted to lead. No longer would he wait for my prompts. He knew the words and he was off. So the tables turned. He would set the tone (quicker than mine) and huff out exaggerated faux-breaths in between each line (a token pause). But he became our prayer leader, and that was important. For him to lead and for me to follow.

A few months ago, our middle son interrupted me one night and announced that he wanted to lead meditation. I was surprised, but I let him go—and he led us perfectly. Sweet and solemn and slow. They keep teaching me what it means to pray.

Be still and know that I am.

Because at the heart of this prayer—this nightly meditation, this psalm that has calmed and consoled Christians for thousands of years—there is one single truth: God is God. We need not be.

We only need to slow and stop and remember ourselves back into right relationship with the One who created us. No matter our age, attention span, or aptitude, these words and this truth can be savored on our lips. My boys remind me of this every single night.

Be still and know that I am God.

P.S. The first line from Psalm 46 also works for this style of meditation, so we alternate nights with this prayer. (I'd love to find more!)

God is for us our refuge and our strength.

God is for us our refuge.

God is for us.

God is.

God is for us.

God is for us our refuge.

God is for us our refuge and our strength.

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