

HOW
— **TO BE** —
STILL
— **AND** —
KNOW
GOD

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Finding God in a World That Won't Stop Talking

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INTRODUCTION: THE CRISIS OF NOISE

"Cease striving and know that I am God"

—Psalm 46:10 (NASB)

Your phone buzzes. Again.

It's 6:47 AM, and you haven't even gotten out of bed yet, but you've already checked your notifications three times. Email. Text messages. News alerts. Social media updates. The digital deluge begins before your feet hit the floor, and it won't stop until long after you close your eyes tonight—if it stops at all.

You scan the headlines while brushing your teeth. You listen to a podcast while driving to work. You scroll through social media while eating lunch. You answer emails during what used to be called "downtime." You fall asleep with the television on because the silence feels too heavy, too exposing, too... much.

Welcome to the twenty-first century, where we have more ways to connect than ever before and feel more disconnected than we've ever been. Where we have unlimited access to information about everything and intimate knowledge of almost nothing. Where we can learn about God with a simple Google search but struggle to experience His presence in our actual lives.

We live in the loudest moment in human history.

And we're dying of spiritual thirst in the midst of the flood.

THE PARADOX WE FACE

Here's what makes our moment so spiritually dangerous: we have never had more access to spiritual content, and we have never been less capable of spiritual contemplation.

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Think about it. You can download the Bible in dozens of translations onto your phone. You can stream thousands of sermons while you commute. You can access centuries of theological writing with a few clicks. You can listen to worship music 24/7. You can join online prayer groups, follow Christian influencers, and participate in virtual Bible studies from your living room.

We are drowning in information about God.

But when was the last time you actually encountered God?

Not learned *about* Him. Not heard someone else talk *about* Him. Not read theological propositions *about* Him.

When did you last experience the living presence of the God who spoke the universe into existence? When did you last sit in silence long enough to hear the "sound of a gentle blowing" that Elijah heard in the cave (1 Kings 19:12)? When did you last feel the weight of glory, the terrifying and wonderful reality of being in the presence of the Holy One?

If you're honest—and this book requires honesty—you might not remember.

You're not alone.

THE COST OF CONSTANT NOISE

I spent twenty-three years as a firefighter and paramedic. I know what noise does to a person. Not just the obvious kind—the sirens and the chaos of emergency scenes—but the deeper kind. The kind that never stops. The kind that gets inside your head and won't let you rest. The kind that keeps replaying the calls you can't forget, the faces you couldn't save, the decisions you second-guess at 3 AM.

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After I left the fire service and entered full-time ministry, I discovered that the church has its own version of noise. Different sound, same effect. The constant demands. The urgent needs that are always urgent. The programs to run. The people to please. The metrics to meet. The image to maintain. The theology to defend. The spiritual productivity to demonstrate.

Ministry nearly destroyed me.

Not because I didn't love God. Not because I didn't care about people. But because I was too busy *doing things for God* to actually *be with God*. I was so caught up in the noise of religious activity that I couldn't hear His voice anymore. I was so exhausted from performing that I had no energy left for His presence.

I burned out spectacularly.

And in the wreckage of that burnout, in the silence that followed the collapse of my carefully constructed ministry life, I finally heard Him whisper: "Cease striving and know that I am God."

WHY WE CAN'T BE STILL

The hardest part wasn't the burnout itself. The hardest part was realizing why I had driven myself to that point: I was terrified of being still.

Because stillness exposes things.

In the quiet, you can't hide from yourself anymore. You can't outrun your pain. You can't distract yourself from your doubts. You can't drown out the questions you've been avoiding. You can't maintain the false self you present to the world. You can't pretend you have it all together when there's nothing left to hide behind.

Stillness strips away our defenses. It reveals our addictions to control, approval, achievement, and self-sufficiency. It confronts us with our poverty. It forces us to face the reality that apart from Christ, we can do nothing (John 15:5).

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And that feels like death.

So we fill the silence with noise. We fill our calendars with activity. We fill our minds with content. We fill our lives with things that matter less so we never have to face the one thing that matters most.

We avoid stillness because we're afraid of what we'll find there.

Or more accurately: we're afraid of *who* we'll find there.

THE GOD WHO WAITS IN THE QUIET

But here's what I've learned in the years since my burnout, in the slow and painful process of learning to be still: God doesn't meet us in the noise.

He can't.

Not because He's not powerful enough to shout over our chaos—He certainly is. But because the kind of knowing He invites us into requires stillness. Real intimacy doesn't happen in the midst of distraction. Deep transformation doesn't occur when we're multitasking. The voice of God is not competing for our attention among a dozen other voices; it's waiting for us to finally stop listening to everything else.

"Cease striving," He says. Stop. Let go. Release your grip. Lay down your weapons. Surrender your control. Abandon your agenda. Be still.

Then you will know.

Not before. Not while you're still running. Not while you're still performing. Not while you're still drowning out My voice with the noise of your religious activity.

Be still.

Then know.

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This is not a suggestion. It's a command. And it's a command we're culturally conditioned to disobey.

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Let me be clear about what we're talking about here. This isn't about adding another spiritual discipline to your already overcrowded schedule. This isn't about becoming more contemplative so you can become more effective in ministry. This isn't about learning techniques for stress management or strategies for work-life balance.

This is about knowing God.

Not knowing *about* Him. Knowing *Him*.

The difference is everything.

Jesus said, "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3, NASB). Eternal life isn't just about duration—living forever. It's about quality—knowing God intimately. It's about the kind of relationship that transforms everything else.

The Apostle Paul said he counted everything as loss "in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8, NASB). Everything. His pedigree. His education. His achievements. His reputation. His religious credentials. All of it was garbage compared to knowing Christ.

This is what's at stake: the very purpose for which you were created.

You were made to know God. Not to know about Him, but to know Him. To experience Him. To be in relationship with Him. To be transformed by His presence. To find your identity, your security, your meaning, your joy, your peace, your life itself in Him.

Everything else—every activity, every achievement, every ministry, every relationship, every possession, every experience—is secondary.

Knowing God is primary.

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And knowing God requires stillness.

WHO THIS BOOK IS FOR

If you've picked up this book, I'm guessing you're exhausted.

Maybe you're a pastor or ministry leader who's burning out under the weight of everyone's expectations—including your own. Maybe you're a marketplace Christian trying to maintain your faith in the midst of a demanding career. Maybe you're a parent overwhelmed by the noise of modern family life. Maybe you're a first responder carrying trauma you can't seem to process. Maybe you're someone who walked away from church because the religious noise became unbearable.

Maybe you're just tired of the shallowness of your spiritual life and hungry for something deeper.

Whoever you are, if you've sensed that there has to be more than this—more than information, more than activity, more than performance, more than the exhausting treadmill of spiritual productivity—then this book is for you.

This is not a book about doing more. God knows we're all already doing too much. This is a book about being still. About learning to cease striving. About discovering what it means to simply be with God rather than constantly doing things for God.

This is a book about the narrow way that few find (Matthew 7:14). About the better part that Mary chose while Martha was distracted by her many tasks (Luke 10:42). About the one thing necessary in a world of a thousand supposedly urgent things.

This is a book about knowing God.

THE JOURNEY AHEAD

I need to warn you: this journey will cost you something.

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It will cost you time. It will cost you control. It will cost you the illusion of self-sufficiency. It will cost you the approval of people who measure spirituality by activity rather than intimacy. It will cost you the comfortable patterns that keep you safe from encountering the living God.

Paul said it plainly: "I have suffered the loss of all things...that I may know Him" (Philippians 3:8, 10, NASB).

The question is: are you willing to pay that price?

Are you willing to suffer the loss of your overcrowded schedule to gain sacred space? Are you willing to suffer the loss of constant stimulation to gain silence? Are you willing to suffer the loss of productivity metrics to gain God's presence? Are you willing to suffer the loss of control to gain intimacy with the One who is in control?

This book will explore why we struggle with stillness, why knowing God requires it, and what it will cost us to pursue it. We'll look at the cultural forces that conspire against contemplation. We'll examine the internal resistances that keep us running. We'll study biblical models of stillness and the fruit it produces. We'll explore practical pathways toward cultivating a life oriented around knowing God rather than just knowing about Him.

But I can't give you easy steps or quick fixes. There aren't any. The spiritual life is not a technique to be mastered; it's a relationship to be nurtured. And relationships—especially relationship with the Holy God—require presence, not productivity. They require stillness, not striving.

A WORD OF INVITATION

Three hundred years ago, William Penn wrote words that seem impossibly countercultural today but desperately necessary: "In the rush and noise of life, as you have intervals, step home within yourselves and be still. Wait upon God, and feel His good presence; this will carry you evenly through your day's business."

Step home within yourselves.

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Be still.

Wait upon God.

Feel His good presence.

This is the invitation that stands at the center of the Christian life, and it's the invitation most of us have been too busy to accept.

God is not impressed with your productivity. He's not waiting for you to accomplish enough to earn His approval. He's not keeping score of your spiritual disciplines or comparing you to other believers. He's not measuring your worth by how many people know your name or how successful your ministry appears.

He's simply waiting for you to be still.

To stop striving.

To cease the endless religious activity that masquerades as intimacy.

To come home to the secret place where He's been waiting all along.

The world is loud enough. Your life is busy enough. Your mind is full enough.

What if, just for a moment, you stopped?

What if you turned off the noise, stepped away from the demands, released your grip on control, and simply sat in His presence?

What if you discovered that what you've been seeking in a thousand places is found in one: in the quiet, in the stillness, in the presence of the God who says, "Be still, and know that I am God"?

That's what this book is about.

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Not doing more.

Being still.

Not knowing more about God.

Knowing God Himself.

Not religious performance.

Sacred presence.

The journey begins here, in the acknowledgment that we cannot continue as we have been. That the noise is killing us. That the busyness is destroying us. That the constant striving is separating us from the very thing we claim to seek.

The journey begins here, with a confession: I don't know how to be still.

And an invitation: But I want to learn.

If that's where you are—exhausted, hungry, willing—then turn the page.

God is waiting for you in the quiet.

And He has so much more to give you than information.

He wants to give you Himself.

Are you ready to be still?

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CHAPTER 1: THE TYRANNY OF NOISE

"My soul, wait in silence for God alone, for my hope is from Him."

—Psalm 62:5 (NASB)

The alarm goes off at 5:30 AM. Before you're fully conscious, your hand reaches for your phone. You tell yourself you're just checking the time, but thirty minutes later you're still scrolling. You've read the news, checked your email, responded to three text messages, looked at social media, and watched two videos that the algorithm assured you were exactly what you needed to see.

You haven't prayed yet. You haven't opened your Bible. You haven't had a single moment of silence.

But you've already filled your mind with the noise of the world.

This is how most of us begin every single day. And it's killing our souls.

THE CULTURE OF CONSTANT STIMULATION

We live in a world that has declared war on silence.

I'm not being dramatic. Think about it. When was the last time you experienced true quiet? Not just the absence of loud sounds, but actual silence—no music, no podcasts, no television, no notifications, no background noise of any kind. For most of us, it's been so long we can't remember.

We wake up to alarms. We scroll through our phones before getting out of bed. We listen to podcasts in the shower. We check the news while eating breakfast. We're on calls during our commute. We have music or talk radio filling the car. We arrive at work to a barrage of emails, messages, and meetings. We eat lunch while watching videos or scrolling social media. We listen to audiobooks while exercising. We have the TV on during dinner. We fall asleep to streaming services or white noise machines.

From the moment we wake until the moment we sleep—and sometimes even then—we are bombarded by noise.

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And we've convinced ourselves this is normal.

The Neurological Hijacking

Here's what's happening to us, and it's not an accident: our brains are being rewired.

Neuroscience has shown us that our brains are remarkably plastic—they adapt and change based on what we consistently expose them to. Every time you check your phone, every time you switch between tasks, every time you consume a piece of digital content, you're creating neural pathways. Do it often enough, and those pathways become highways. Do it constantly, and those highways become the default routes your brain automatically takes.

This is why you can't sit through a sermon without checking your phone. This is why you struggle to read more than a few verses of Scripture before your mind wanders. This is why prayer feels so difficult. This is why you can't drive five minutes without reaching for your phone or turning on a podcast.

Your brain has been trained to expect constant stimulation. And when it doesn't get it, it starts screaming for its fix.

We call this "staying connected" or "being informed" or "multitasking." Scientists call it fragmented attention. Psychologists call it continuous partial attention. The Bible would call it a form of slavery.

Because that's what it is. You're not in control anymore. The noise is controlling you.

I saw this in my years as a firefighter, particularly in the younger recruits who came in after smartphones became ubiquitous. They couldn't sit still in the station. They couldn't handle the quiet moments between calls. They needed constant input, constant stimulation, constant noise. And when the real emergencies came—the moments that required focus, presence, and clear thinking—they struggled. Their attention was so fragmented that they couldn't fully be present for the crisis in front of them.

The same thing is happening to us spiritually.

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The Productivity Illusion

We tell ourselves we're being productive. We're "staying on top of things." We're "maximizing our time." We're "getting things done."

It's a lie.

Study after study has shown that multitasking doesn't work. When you think you're doing two things at once, you're actually rapidly switching between them, and every switch costs you time, energy, and effectiveness. Research from Stanford University found that people who regularly multitask perform worse than those who focus on one thing at a time—not just at multitasking, but at everything.

You're not being productive. You're being distracted.

And distraction is not a neutral state. Distraction has a spiritual cost.

When you're constantly distracted, you cannot think deeply. You cannot reflect. You cannot contemplate. You cannot listen. You cannot be present—not to other people, not to yourself, and certainly not to God.

Distraction is the enemy of depth. And God is found in the depths, not on the surface.

Jesus had a word for this kind of life. He called it being "worried and bothered about so many things" (Luke 10:41, NASB). Martha was busy. She was productive. She was getting things done. But she was missing the one thing necessary: presence with Jesus.

We've become a culture of Marthas, frantically busy with many things, missing the one thing that matters.

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THE SPIRITUAL CONSEQUENCES OF NOISE

David wrote, "My soul, wait in silence for God alone, for my hope is from Him" (Psalm 62:5, NASB).

Read that again slowly. *My soul, wait in silence for God alone.*

When was the last time your soul waited in silence? When was the last time you were silent before God—not praying, not reading, not listening to worship music, just silent?

For most of us, the honest answer is: we don't remember. Or maybe: never.

And this is a spiritual crisis of the first order.

When the Soul Cannot Wait

The Hebrew word David uses for "wait" is *damam*. It means to be still, to be silent, to cease activity, to rest. It's the same word used in Psalm 46:10: "Cease striving" (*damam*) "and know that I am God."

David isn't talking about passive laziness. He's talking about active, intentional stillness. He's talking about a soul that has learned to stop, to be quiet, to wait expectantly in God's presence without needing to fill the silence with words or activity.

This is a foreign concept to most modern Christians.

We don't wait well. We don't do silence. We fill every gap with noise—even our "quiet times" are full of activity. We read devotionals, work through Bible reading plans, listen to worship music, pray our lists. All of these can be good, but notice: we're still *doing* things. We're still in control. We're still managing our spiritual lives.

When do we simply wait?

When do we give God space to speak without our agenda?

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When do we sit in His presence without trying to accomplish something?

The inability to wait in silence is a symptom of a deeper disease: we don't trust God enough to be still. We're afraid that if we stop doing, stop producing, stop performing, something terrible will happen. The world will fall apart. Our ministry will fail. People will be disappointed. We'll be exposed as frauds.

Or worse: we'll have to face ourselves. And we'll have to face God. And we're terrified of what we might find in that encounter.

So we fill the silence with noise. We stay busy. We stay distracted. We stay "productive."

And our souls shrivel.

The Erosion of Contemplative Capacity

Here's what I've observed in over two decades of ministry: we're losing the ability to contemplate.

Contemplation is not the same as thinking or analyzing or studying. Contemplation is the practice of sustained attention—focusing on one thing long enough and deeply enough that it begins to transform you. It's the difference between skimming an article and meditating on Scripture. The difference between hearing a sermon and letting truth sink into your bones. The difference between saying prayers and praying.

Our culture has made contemplation nearly impossible.

We skim instead of read. We listen to summaries instead of engaging with whole books. We watch video clips instead of sitting with ideas. We want the highlights, the bullet points, the key takeaways—quickly, efficiently, without wasting time.

And then we wonder why our faith feels shallow. Why prayer feels rote. Why Scripture doesn't move us. Why we don't sense God's presence.

It's because we've lost the capacity to be still long enough for God to work.

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Imagine trying to have a deep conversation with someone who checks their phone every thirty seconds. Who interrupts you mid-sentence to respond to a text. Who's clearly thinking about the next thing on their schedule while you're talking. You wouldn't feel heard. You wouldn't feel valued. You certainly wouldn't share the deep things of your heart.

This is how we treat God.

We give Him our divided attention, our fragmented focus, our distracted presence. And then we complain that we don't hear from Him, that we don't experience His presence, that our spiritual life feels dry.

The problem isn't that God has stopped speaking. The problem is that we've lost the ability to listen.

THE LOST ART OF LISTENING

The story of Elijah in the cave is one of the most profound passages in Scripture about how God speaks.

Elijah was running for his life, exhausted and discouraged, hiding in a cave on Mount Horeb. God told him to stand on the mountain because "the LORD was about to pass by. And behold, a great and strong wind was rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of a gentle blowing" (1 Kings 19:11-12, NASB).

The wind. The earthquake. The fire. These are the spectacular, the dramatic, the impossible-to-miss. These are what we expect from God—the big moments, the powerful experiences, the undeniable manifestations.

But God wasn't in any of those.

He was in the "sound of a gentle blowing"—or as some translations render it, "a still small voice" or "a low whisper."

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God spoke in the quiet.

And if Elijah hadn't been still, he would have missed it.

Why We Can't Hear God's Voice

Most Christians I talk with say they struggle to hear God's voice. They read their Bibles faithfully, they pray regularly, they go to church, they serve in ministry—but they don't sense God speaking to them personally. They don't experience His guidance. They don't feel His presence.

The problem isn't that God has stopped speaking. The problem is that His voice is being drowned out by the noise we've allowed into our lives.

God's voice is gentle. It's subtle. It's quiet. Not because God is weak, but because intimate communication is always quiet. You don't shout at someone you love when you're sharing your heart. You whisper. You speak softly. You expect them to lean in close to hear you.

God whispers.

But we're surrounded by shouting. The news is shouting. Social media is shouting. Our calendars are shouting. Our anxieties are shouting. The demands of work, family, ministry, and life are all shouting for our attention.

And God's gentle voice gets lost in the cacophony.

This is why the psalmist says, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10, NASB). The stillness isn't optional. It's not a nice addition to the spiritual life for those who have extra time. It's a prerequisite for knowing God.

You cannot know God—truly know Him, not just know about Him—without learning to be still. Without learning to quiet the noise. Without learning to listen.

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Hearing About God vs. Hearing From God

There's a critical difference between hearing about God and hearing from God, and I'm afraid most of us have settled for the former.

We listen to sermons about God. We read books about God. We attend conferences where people talk about their experiences with God. We follow podcasts that discuss theology and biblical interpretation. We accumulate information, insights, and ideas about God.

And we mistake this for knowing Him.

But information is not intimacy. Hearing about someone is not the same as hearing from them directly.

Think about a marriage. You could read every book about marriage, attend every seminar, listen to every podcast, and still have a terrible marriage if you never actually talk to your spouse. Knowledge about marriage is not a substitute for relationship with your spouse.

The same is true with God.

You can know everything about Him—His attributes, His actions in history, His character as revealed in Scripture—and still not know Him personally. You can have perfect theology and zero intimacy.

This is what Jesus meant when He warned about people who would say, "Lord, Lord," and He would reply, "I never knew you" (Matthew 7:21-23, NASB). They had religious activity. They had correct language. They even did miracles in His name. But they didn't have relationship. They didn't know Him, and He didn't know them.

Knowing God requires direct encounter. It requires listening to His voice, not just hearing others talk about His voice. It requires personal interaction, not just theological education.

And that kind of knowing requires silence.

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The Disciplines of a Listener

When I was a rookie firefighter, one of the first things they taught us was to listen. Not just for the obvious sounds—the crackle of fire, the groaning of compromised structures—but for the subtle ones. The sound of a PASS device buried under debris. The faint cry of a victim through thick smoke. The change in wind direction that could turn a manageable fire into a flashover.

The veterans could hear things we couldn't. Not because they had better ears, but because they had trained their attention. They had learned what to listen for. They knew how to filter out the chaos and focus on the sounds that mattered.

The same principle applies spiritually.

God is always speaking. The question is: have you trained yourself to listen?

This requires practice. It requires discipline. It requires doing things that feel counterintuitive in our noise-saturated culture:

- Turning off your phone for extended periods
- Sitting in silence without filling it with activity
- Creating space in your schedule with no agenda
- Being present in the moment instead of thinking about the next thing
- Waiting on God without trying to manufacture an experience
- Embracing boredom instead of reaching for distraction

These aren't just techniques. They're acts of resistance against a culture that wants to keep you too distracted to hear from God.

Because here's what the enemy knows: if he can keep you busy enough, distracted enough, and noisy enough, he doesn't have to keep you from God. You'll do that yourself.

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THE MIRROR THAT REFLECTS GOD

Three centuries ago, a German mystic named Gerhard Tersteegen wrote something that haunts me: "God is a tranquil being and abides in a tranquil eternity. So must your spirit become a tranquil and clear little pool, wherein the serene light of God can be mirrored."

A tranquil and clear little pool.

When was the last time your spirit felt like that?

For most of us, our inner life feels more like a churning ocean than a tranquil pool. Waves of anxiety. Currents of distraction. The constant churning of thoughts, worries, plans, and noise.

And you cannot see God's reflection in churning water.

You've experienced this physically. Stand next to a lake on a windy day, and all you see is ripples and waves. No reflection. No clarity. Just disturbance.

But stand next to that same lake on a still morning, when the wind has ceased and the water is like glass, and suddenly you can see everything reflected perfectly. The sky. The trees. The mountains. The beauty surrounding you becomes visible in the mirror of stillness.

This is what Tersteegen understood: God's presence requires stillness to be perceived. Not because He's absent when we're busy, but because we cannot see Him clearly when our spirits are churning with noise and distraction.

The tranquility of God is always available. The question is: are you still enough to reflect it?

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THE CHOICE BEFORE US

We stand at a crossroads.

One path leads deeper into noise. More connectivity. More productivity. More distraction. More information. More activity. More of everything except what our souls actually need.

This path is wide, and many travel it. It's the default path of our culture. You don't have to choose it; you just have to not resist it. The current will carry you there.

The other path leads into silence. Into stillness. Into the uncomfortable practice of ceasing activity and waiting on God. Into the narrow way that few find.

This path requires intention. It requires resistance. It requires going against the grain of everything our culture values. It requires saying no to good things so you can say yes to the best thing.

Which path are you on?

Be honest. Not which path do you wish you were on. Not which path you think you should be on. Which path are you actually on right now, today, in the reality of how you live?

If you're like most people—including most Christians, most ministry leaders, most pastors—you're on the wide path. You're caught in the tyranny of noise. You're overwhelmed by constant stimulation. You've lost the capacity for contemplation. You can't hear God's voice because you've never learned to be quiet long enough to listen.

And you're exhausted. You're spiritually dry. You're going through the motions of religious activity while feeling increasingly disconnected from the God you claim to serve.

This is the crisis of noise.

And it will not resolve itself. The culture will only get louder. The technology will only get more addictive. The demands will only increase. The noise will only intensify.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Unless you choose to step off the path.

Unless you choose to be still.

Unless you choose to wait in silence for God alone, where your hope is from Him.

The question is: will you?

In the next chapter, we'll explore why this choice feels so difficult. Why silence feels threatening. Why we run from stillness even when we know we need it. We'll look at what we're actually afraid of when we avoid the quiet.

Because until we understand why we fear stillness, we'll never embrace it.

And if we never embrace stillness, we'll never truly know God.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

CHAPTER 2: WHY WE FEAR THE QUIET

"All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone."

—Blaise Pascal

I remember the first time I tried to sit in silence after my burnout.

I lasted about ninety seconds.

I had turned off my phone, closed my laptop, and sat in a chair with no agenda except to be still. To wait. To listen. To be present with God without doing anything.

Almost immediately, my mind started racing. *I should be working on that sermon. I need to return those emails. Did I pay that bill? What am I going to say to the board about the budget shortfall? I should probably text my daughter. This is a waste of time. I have too much to do to just sit here.*

Ninety seconds, and I was reaching for my phone.

Not because something urgent had come up. Not because I remembered some critical task. But because the silence was unbearable.

I realized in that moment that I had become afraid of quiet.

And I wasn't alone.

RUNNING FROM OURSELVES

In the seventeenth century, the French philosopher Blaise Pascal made an observation that's even more relevant today than it was in his time: "All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone."

Think about that. *All* of humanity's problems. Not some. Not many. All.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Pascal understood something we've forgotten: the real crisis isn't external. It's not the noise around us. It's the noise within us. The chaos in our own hearts and minds that we spend our entire lives running from.

Because here's what silence does: it removes all the distractions that allow us to avoid ourselves.

What Silence Reveals

When the external noise stops, the internal noise becomes deafening.

All the thoughts you've been avoiding. All the feelings you've been suppressing. All the pain you've been numbing. All the questions you've been drowning out. All the regrets, the anxieties, the unresolved conflicts, the haunting memories, the persistent doubts—they all come flooding to the surface when you stop running.

In the fire service, we had a saying: "The quiet times are the hardest." Not the emergencies. Not the three-alarm fires or the multiple-casualty incidents. Those kept you so busy you didn't have time to think. The hardest times were the long shifts when nothing was happening, when you were alone with your thoughts, when the calls you couldn't forget started replaying in your mind.

That's when guys would start pacing. Or cleaning the station for the third time. Or finding busy work that didn't need to be done. Anything to avoid being still with what was going on inside them.

Some of them self-medicated. Some of them developed addictions. Some of them went through multiple marriages. Some of them ate their guns.

All because they couldn't sit quietly in a room alone with themselves.

The church does the same thing, we just use more acceptable addictions. We busy ourselves with ministry. We fill our schedules with religious activities. We serve on committees, volunteer for programs, attend every event, and stay constantly engaged in "kingdom work."

And we tell ourselves it's for God.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

But often—more often than we want to admit—it's to avoid ourselves.

Because when you finally get quiet, you have to face the reality of who you are underneath all the performance. You have to confront the gap between the person you present to the world and the person you actually are. You have to acknowledge the brokenness you've been pretending doesn't exist.

The False Self Exposed

Thomas Merton wrote extensively about what he called the "false self"—the persona we construct to hide our true selves from others and from God. It's the image we manage, the brand we build, the reputation we protect. It's who we pretend to be when we're in public, when we're "on," when we're performing our role.

For pastors, it's the spiritual leader who has it all together, who never doubts, who always has the right answer, who maintains perfect faith in every circumstance.

For Christians in the marketplace, it's the victorious believer who lives blessed and highly favored, whose business is prospering because of their faithfulness, who can't wait to share another testimony of God's goodness.

For parents, it's the perfect family who does devotions together every morning, whose children are well-behaved and spiritually mature, who has this whole Christian parenting thing figured out.

For first responders, it's the tough guy who can handle anything, who isn't affected by the trauma, who never needs help processing what they've seen.

These false selves require constant maintenance. They require us to stay "on" all the time. They require perpetual performance. They require noise—activity, distraction, external validation—to survive.

Silence kills the false self.

Because in silence, there's no one to perform for. There's no audience to impress. There's no image to maintain. There's just you and reality. You and who you actually are underneath all the pretense.

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And that's terrifying.

I'll never forget the day—about six months into my recovery from burnout—when I finally sat still long enough for God to show me the truth: I had built an entire ministry on a false self. I had created an image of the strong leader, the spiritually mature pastor, the man who had overcome his demons and now helped others overcome theirs.

But in reality, I was broken. I was hurting. I was barely holding it together. I was performing strength I didn't have and offering healing I hadn't received.

The silence exposed it all.

And I wanted to run. I wanted to fill the quiet with activity again. I wanted to get back to doing ministry so I wouldn't have to feel the pain of being me.

But God, in His mercy, wouldn't let me run anymore.

He kept whispering: "Be still. Stop performing. Let me show you who you really are—not so I can condemn you, but so I can heal you."

The Inner Chaos We Avoid

Here's what most of us discover when we finally get quiet: we're a mess.

Not externally—externally we've gotten pretty good at looking put together. But internally, we're chaos.

Our minds race with worries we can't control. Our hearts carry wounds we've never processed. Our souls are weary from years of striving and performing. Our consciences bear guilt we've never confessed. Our emotions are tangled knots we've learned to ignore.

We're like the Pharisees Jesus described: whitewashed tombs that look beautiful on the outside but are full of dead men's bones on the inside (Matthew 23:27).

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Silence forces us to open the tomb. To look at the bones. To acknowledge the death we've been covering up with religious paint.

And we don't want to look.

So we stay busy. We stay distracted. We stay in the noise where we can pretend we're okay, where we can maintain the illusion that we have our lives together, where we can avoid the uncomfortable reality of our own brokenness.

But here's the paradox: the very thing we're running from—the confrontation with our true selves—is actually the doorway to healing. You cannot be healed from what you refuse to acknowledge. You cannot find freedom from what you won't name. You cannot receive God's grace for the person you're pretending not to be.

Silence isn't the problem. Silence is the solution. But it feels like the problem because it exposes the real problem: the inner chaos we've been avoiding our entire lives.

RUNNING FROM GOD

But we're not just running from ourselves. We're running from God.

And we've been doing it since the beginning.

The First Hide-and-Seek

Genesis 3:8 contains one of the most tragic sentences in Scripture: "They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden" (NASB).

Read that again. *They hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God.*

This was before sin had fully corrupted them. This was before the fall had run its devastating course through human history. This was at the very beginning, when humanity was still relatively whole.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

And their first instinct after sinning was to hide from God.

Not to run to Him. Not to confess. Not to seek restoration. To hide.

They heard God coming, and they ran.

Why? Because they knew something had changed. They had eaten the fruit. They had chosen their own wisdom over God's. They had asserted their independence. And now they were naked—physically, yes, but more importantly, spiritually. All their defenses were stripped away. All their fig-leaf coverings were inadequate. All their attempts to manage their own righteousness had failed.

They were exposed. And they couldn't bear to be seen.

So they hid. They filled the garden with noise—the rustling of leaves, the sound of their own movement, the distance they could put between themselves and God's presence.

And we've been hiding ever since.

The Prophet Who Ran

Jonah's story is usually taught as a lesson about obedience. But it's really a story about running from God.

"The word of the LORD came to Jonah...saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh...'" (Jonah 1:1-2, NASB). Clear direction. Specific call. Unmistakable command.

And Jonah's response? "But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD" (Jonah 1:3, NASB).

He didn't just refuse to go to Nineveh. He actively fled *from the presence of the LORD*. He got on a boat going in the opposite direction. He literally tried to sail away from God.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Why? Not because he didn't know God's will. Not because he didn't understand the command. But because he knew God. He knew that if he went to Nineveh, God might actually show mercy to Israel's enemies. And Jonah didn't want that. He wanted them destroyed.

So he ran from God's presence rather than submit to God's character.

Here's what we miss about Jonah: he was a successful prophet. He knew Scripture. He could quote theology. He could explain God's attributes. He had information about God.

But when confronted with God's actual presence and purposes, he ran.

This is the danger of substituting knowledge about God for relationship with God. You can have perfect theology and still be running from His presence. You can memorize Scripture and still avoid stillness. You can be busy with religious activity and still be fleeing from the God you claim to serve.

How Busyness Becomes Spiritual Avoidance

I need to say this as clearly as I can: ministry can be a form of hiding from God.

Yes, you read that right. The very activities we think are bringing us closer to God can actually be sophisticated ways of avoiding His presence.

I know because I did it for years.

I was busy with "God's work." I was preaching sermons, leading worship, counseling people, attending meetings, planning programs, visiting the sick, managing staff, overseeing budgets. I was doing all the things a pastor is supposed to do.

But I wasn't sitting still with God.

I would read my Bible to prepare sermons, not to meet with God. I would pray about ministry decisions, not to simply be with Him. I would study theology to teach others, not to be transformed myself. I was using spiritual disciplines as tools for ministry rather than as means of intimacy.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

And it worked. For a while. People praised my preaching. The church grew. My reputation expanded. I looked successful.

But inside, I was spiritually starving. I was doing everything for God while simultaneously running from God. I was so busy serving Him that I had no time to actually be with Him.

This is the insidious nature of religious busyness: it provides cover for spiritual avoidance. It gives you plausible deniability. It lets you say, "I'm too busy serving God to spend time with God," as if that makes sense. As if Jesus would ever affirm such an arrangement.

Remember His words to Martha: "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41-42, NASB).

Jesus didn't praise Martha's service. He corrected it. Because she was busy doing things for Him while missing the opportunity to be with Him. She was distracted by her many tasks while her sister sat at His feet in stillness.

And we do the same thing. We stay busy with religious activity to avoid the one thing necessary: simply being still in God's presence.

The Uncomfortable Holiness of God

But why? Why would we run from the God we claim to love? Why would we avoid the presence we say we long for?

Because God is holy. And His holiness is both attractive and terrifying.

Isaiah understood this. When he saw the Lord "sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted" with the seraphim crying "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts" (Isaiah 6:1-3, NASB), his response wasn't excitement or joy. It was terror.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

"Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (Isaiah 6:5, NASB).

Ruined. Undone. Exposed. Every pretense stripped away. Every defense penetrated. Every comfortable delusion shattered by the reality of God's holiness.

This is what awaits us in the stillness: encounter with the Holy One. Not the God of our comfortable theology. Not the God we've domesticated and packaged for easy consumption. Not the God who exists to bless our plans and affirm our choices.

The actual God. The God who is "a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29, NASB). The God who "dwells in unapproachable light" (1 Timothy 6:16, NASB). The God before whom the seraphim must cover their faces.

We run from stillness because we sense—even if we can't articulate it—that in the quiet, we will encounter this God. And this God will expose everything. Will burn away everything that isn't real. Will require everything from us.

And we're not ready for that.

So we fill our lives with noise. We stay busy. We avoid the quiet place where He waits. Because deep down, we know: if we meet Him there, we will not emerge unchanged. We will be ruined. We will be undone. We will be exposed and refined and transformed.

And as much as we say we want transformation, we're terrified of what it will actually cost.

THE ADDICTION TO CONTROL

There's something else happening in our avoidance of stillness, something deeper than fear of self-confrontation or even fear of God's holiness. We're addicted to control.

And stillness requires surrender.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Why Stillness Feels Like Death

Paul wrote, "The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so" (Romans 8:7, NASB).

Read that carefully. The mind set on the flesh—the part of us that wants to be in control, that trusts in our own strength, that refuses to depend on anyone else—is *hostile* toward God. Not neutral. Not merely resistant. Hostile.

And what does God command us to do? "Be still. Cease striving. Stop. Wait. Surrender control."

To the flesh, this feels like death.

Because it is death. It's the death of the ego. The death of self-sufficiency. The death of the illusion that we're managing our lives successfully. The death of control.

When you're busy, you feel productive. You feel useful. You feel like you're accomplishing something. You feel in control of your time, your work, your life.

But when you're still? You're not in control anymore. You're not producing. You're not accomplishing. You're not managing. You're simply... being. And the flesh hates that.

I saw this vividly in firefighting. Some guys couldn't handle the medical calls where we had to wait for the paramedics or transport. They had to be doing something—checking vitals again, organizing equipment, cleaning up—anything to feel useful and in control.

The best medics I worked with were different. They could sit with a patient in stillness. Hold their hand. Speak calmly. Be present without needing to do anything. They understood that sometimes the most powerful thing you can do is to simply be there.

But that requires surrendering control. And control is what we trust instead of God.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

The Illusion of Self-Sufficiency

Here's a hard truth: most of our busyness isn't about loving God or serving others. It's about proving to ourselves that we're sufficient.

We stay busy to demonstrate our value. To prove we're needed. To show we can handle it. To maintain the illusion that we're indispensable. To feel like we're earning our keep in the kingdom.

This is the lie of self-sufficiency: that we can manufacture our own righteousness through activity. That we can earn God's approval through productivity. That we can justify our existence through achievement.

And stillness destroys this lie.

Because when you're still, you're not producing anything. You're not accomplishing anything. You're not proving anything. You're simply receiving. You're depending. You're trusting that God is enough even when you're not doing anything.

This is why Jesus said, "Apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5, NASB). Not "Apart from Me you can do very little." Not "Apart from Me you'll be less effective." Nothing. Zero. Zilch.

All our frantic activity, all our religious busyness, all our ministerial productivity—apart from Him, it's nothing.

But we don't believe that. Not really. We believe that God needs our activity. That the kingdom depends on our efforts. That people will suffer if we don't stay busy.

Stillness confronts this delusion. It forces us to face the uncomfortable truth that God was managing the universe just fine before we came along, and He'll continue managing it just fine if we stop for a while.

He doesn't need our activity. He wants our attention.

He doesn't need our performance. He wants our presence.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

He doesn't need our self-sufficiency. He wants our dependence.

Surrendering the Illusion

The journey into stillness requires dying to the illusion of control. It requires admitting that we're not sufficient. That we can't manage our own lives. That we need God not just as a helper in our agenda but as the Lord who sets the agenda.

This is terrifying to the flesh. Because the flesh wants to be God. It wants to be in charge. It wants to call the shots. It wants to maintain the illusion of independence.

But the Spirit says, "Let go. Stop striving. Be still. Surrender control. Trust that I am God and you are not."

Every time you choose stillness, you're choosing to die to the flesh. You're choosing dependence over independence. You're choosing surrender over control. You're choosing to trust God instead of yourself.

And the flesh screams in protest.

This is why stillness is so difficult. It's not just a schedule problem. It's not just about finding time. It's about surrendering control. And control is what we worship instead of God.

FEAR OF MISSING OUT (FOMO) - ANCIENT AND MODERN

We need to talk about Martha.

Many Distractions

Luke tells the story: "Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word. But Martha was distracted with all her preparations" (Luke 10:38-40, NASB).

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Notice what Luke says: Martha was *distracted*. Not just busy. Distracted. The Greek word is *perispao*—to be pulled or dragged away, to be over-occupied with many things.

Martha had Jesus Christ—God in human flesh—in her home. The Word made flesh. The One she had been waiting for. The Messiah. The answer to every longing, every question, every hope.

And she was too busy to sit with Him.

Why? Because she was worried about the meal. The preparations. The serving. The hosting. She was caught up in the urgent demands of the moment and missing the important person in the room.

Jesus' response is gentle but pointed: "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41-42, NASB).

Only one thing is necessary. Not the meal. Not the perfect hosting. Not the many preparations. Just one thing: being present with Jesus.

And Mary chose it. While Martha ran around distracted, Mary sat still at Jesus' feet and listened.

The Ancient FOMO

Martha was experiencing the ancient version of FOMO: fear that if she stopped serving, something important wouldn't get done. Fear that if she sat down, she would be seen as lazy. Fear that if she chose stillness over busyness, she would miss out on being a good host.

She was so afraid of missing out on lesser things that she missed out on the greatest thing: unhurried time with Jesus.

This is the tyranny of urgency. Everything feels urgent when you're anxious. Everything feels critical when you're worried. Everything feels necessary when you're driven by fear.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

The meal needed to be prepared. The guests needed to be served. The hosting needed to be perfect. All of these things felt urgent to Martha. They felt like the necessary things. They felt like what she couldn't miss.

But Jesus said there was only one thing necessary. And it wasn't the meal.

How many times do we make Martha's mistake? How many times do we let the urgent crowd out the important? How many times do we miss Jesus because we're too busy serving Jesus?

The Modern FOMO

Our generation has taken FOMO to new levels. We're not just afraid of missing out on important tasks. We're afraid of missing out on information, experiences, opportunities, conversations, trends, news, updates, and connections.

What if something important happens while I'm not checking my phone? What if someone needs me and I'm not immediately available? What if I miss a crucial email? What if there's breaking news I don't know about? What if everyone else knows something I don't? What if I'm not part of the conversation?

So we check constantly. We stay connected perpetually. We monitor notifications continuously. We scroll endlessly. We make ourselves available 24/7.

And we call it being responsible. Being engaged. Being present. Being available.

But we're not present. We're distracted. We're "worried and bothered about so many things." We're like Martha, running around serving many things while missing the one thing necessary.

Thomas Merton saw this coming decades ago: "We are so busy that we have no time to look at anything... We don't see anything. We gulp it down and go on to the next thing."

We gulp down life. We consume experiences without digesting them. We accumulate information without contemplating it. We rush from one thing to the next without ever being fully present to anything.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

And in the process, we miss the presence of God. We miss the still small voice. We miss the gentle blowing of the Spirit. We miss the one thing necessary.

Because we're afraid that if we're still, we'll miss out on all the other things.

Urgent vs. Important

Here's the truth that will set you free if you let it: most of what feels urgent isn't actually important. And what's truly important rarely feels urgent.

The email that just came in feels urgent. Sitting in silent prayer doesn't.

The social media notification feels urgent. Meditating on Scripture doesn't.

The phone call feels urgent. An hour in solitude doesn't.

The meeting feels urgent. Being still before God doesn't.

We've let the tyranny of urgency dictate our lives. We respond to whatever feels most pressing in the moment without asking whether it's actually important in the long run.

And stillness with God—the one thing Jesus said was necessary—never feels urgent. It feels optional. It feels like something you do if you have extra time. It feels like a luxury for people whose lives aren't as busy as yours.

But what if it's the other way around? What if stillness is the urgent thing, and everything else is optional? What if being with God is the necessary thing, and everything else is negotiable?

What if Mary actually chose better than Martha?

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Satan's Accusations vs. God's Conviction

Here's where we need to be careful. Some of you are reading this and thinking, "I knew it. I'm failing. I'm not doing enough. I need to add contemplative prayer to my already impossible schedule. I need to be more spiritual. I need to try harder."

That's not conviction. That's accusation.

Satan is called "the accuser of our brethren" (Revelation 12:10, NASB). His voice always condemns, always heaps on guilt, always tells you you're not enough and you need to do more.

God's voice is different. His conviction leads to repentance, which means change. It says, "Stop. You're running. You're hiding. You're exhausted. Come to Me. Be still. Let Me give you rest."

Satan says, "You're failing at stillness too. You can't even be quiet right. You're a terrible Christian."

God says, "I've been waiting for you in the quiet. I'm glad you finally stopped. Come, rest in My presence."

Can you hear the difference?

One voice drives you to more striving. The other invites you to cease striving.

One voice increases your fear of missing out. The other reminds you that you've already found what you've been looking for.

One voice tells you to try harder. The other tells you to stop trying and start trusting.

If reading this chapter has left you feeling condemned, defeated, and more anxious—that's not from God. Repent of listening to the accuser, and choose to hear your Father's voice instead.

If reading this chapter has stirred something in you—a longing for the quiet, a desire to stop running, a hunger to be still—that's God's conviction. That's the Spirit inviting you to something better.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

THE INVITATION REMAINS

So why do we fear the quiet?

We fear confronting ourselves.

We fear encountering God's holiness.

We fear surrendering control.

We fear missing out on lesser things.

These are real fears. Valid fears. Universal fears.

But they're also fears that keep us from the very thing we most need: intimate knowledge of God that can only be found in stillness.

The good news is that God knows our fears. He's not surprised by them. He's not angry about them. He's patient with our running, our hiding, our avoidance.

But He also won't let us stay in our fear forever. He keeps calling us back to the quiet. He keeps inviting us to be still. He keeps whispering, "I know you're afraid. But I'm here. And I'm worth the risk."

In the next chapter, we'll look at what happens when we stay in the noise. What we lose when we refuse the invitation to stillness. What's at stake when we let our fears keep us running.

Because until we understand the cost of our avoidance, we won't be willing to pay the price of stillness.

And the cost of stillness is nothing compared to the cost of continuing to run.

What are you afraid of in the quiet?

Name it. Write it down. Bring it into the light.

Because what you're running from is the doorway to what you've been searching for.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

CHAPTER 3: THE SPIRITUAL POVERTY OF BUSYNESS

"Satan will always find mischief for idle hands to do, but the work of God is done by people who know how to be still."

—A.W. Tozer

I can tell you the exact moment I realized I was spiritually bankrupt.

It was a Tuesday morning, and I was preparing to preach a sermon on the abundant life. I had my notes organized, my illustrations ready, my three points alliterated perfectly. I had prayed over the message—or at least I had said words to God about it. I was ready to deliver truth to my congregation.

But as I sat at my desk reviewing my outline, a thought struck me with devastating clarity: *I don't have what I'm about to tell them they should have.*

I was going to preach about abundant life while living in spiritual poverty. I was going to exhort them to intimacy with God while I was a stranger to His presence. I was going to promise them that following Jesus leads to rest and peace while I was exhausted and anxious.

I was a tour guide to a place I'd never been.

And I had been doing it for years.

ACTIVITY VS. FRUITFULNESS

Jesus said something that should terrify every busy Christian: "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:4-5, NASB).

Apart from Me you can do *nothing*.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Not "very little." Not "less than you could." Nothing. Zero. None of your activity counts. None of your religious work produces spiritual fruit. None of your ministry accomplishments matter.

Apart from abiding in Christ, it's all nothing.

This is one of those passages we've heard so many times that we've stopped actually hearing it. We nod our heads in agreement and then immediately go back to frantic activity, as if Jesus didn't just say that everything we're doing apart from intimate connection with Him is worthless.

The Delusion of Self-Generated Spiritual Productivity

Here's the delusion we live under: we believe we can produce spiritual fruit through our own effort, planning, and hard work.

We create programs to grow the church. We implement strategies to make disciples. We adopt methodologies to produce spiritual maturity. We set goals and metrics and key performance indicators. We work harder, plan better, organize more efficiently.

And we call it ministry.

But Jesus calls it nothing.

Because spiritual fruit—real, lasting, transformative spiritual fruit—doesn't come from our activity. It comes from abiding. From staying connected to the vine. From remaining in intimate, dependent relationship with Jesus.

The branch doesn't produce fruit by trying harder. It produces fruit by staying attached to the vine. The life-giving sap flows from the vine into the branch, and fruit appears naturally, organically, inevitably.

But we've convinced ourselves that we can manufacture fruit through our own efforts. That if we just work hard enough, smart enough, faithfully enough, we can produce the results God wants.

This is not humility. This is not faithfulness. This is arrogance masquerading as diligence.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Because implicit in all our activity is the belief that the kingdom depends on us. That God needs our efforts. That without our hard work, His purposes will fail. That we are indispensable to His plans.

I lived this way for over a decade in ministry. I believed that if I didn't work constantly, if I didn't say yes to every opportunity, if I didn't push through exhaustion to serve, the church would suffer. People would fall through the cracks. The kingdom would lose ground.

I was the branch trying to produce fruit by sheer force of will, while my connection to the vine grew weaker and weaker.

And eventually, I had nothing left to give. Because I was trying to give what I wasn't receiving. I was trying to pour out what wasn't being poured in. I was trying to produce fruit without abiding.

It doesn't work. It can't work. Jesus said so Himself: apart from Me you can do nothing.

Martha vs. Mary: A Study in Contrasts

Let's return to Martha and Mary, because their story illustrates perfectly the difference between activity and fruitfulness.

Martha was busy. Frantically busy. She was working hard to serve Jesus. She had good intentions. She was trying to be a good host, to honor Him with her service, to meet the needs of the moment.

But Jesus said she was worried and bothered about many things. She was distracted. She was scattered. And most importantly, she was missing the one thing necessary.

Mary, on the other hand, did one thing: she sat at Jesus' feet and listened.

She wasn't doing anything productive by Martha's standards. She wasn't serving. She wasn't preparing food. She wasn't helping with the many tasks that needed to be done.

She was just... being present. Listening. Abiding.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

And Jesus said she chose the good part. The better part. The part that would not be taken away from her.

Here's what we miss: Mary's apparent inactivity was actually the most productive thing anyone in that house was doing. Because she was abiding. She was receiving. She was connecting to the source of all true fruitfulness.

Martha was busy but barren. Mary was still but fruitful.

This is the paradox that drives our productivity-obsessed culture crazy: doing less can produce more. Being still can be more fruitful than constant activity. Sitting at Jesus' feet can accomplish more than all our religious busyness.

But we don't believe it. We can't believe it. Because it violates everything our culture has taught us about success and productivity.

So we choose Martha's way. We stay busy. We fill our schedules with good things. We work hard for Jesus.

And we miss Jesus in the process.

The Fruit of Abiding

Here's what real spiritual fruitfulness looks like: it flows naturally from intimacy with Christ. It's not manufactured. It's not forced. It's not the result of strategic planning or harder work.

When you abide in Christ—when you spend time in His presence, when you listen to His voice, when you remain connected to Him—fruit appears. Not because you're trying to produce it, but because life is flowing from Him into you and through you.

Love that isn't manufactured but overflows from being loved by God.

Joy that doesn't depend on circumstances but flows from communion with the Source of all joy.

Peace that isn't achieved through better time management but received from the Prince of Peace.

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Patience that doesn't come from self-control but from knowing the One who is patient with us.

This is the fruit of abiding. And it can't be produced any other way.

I learned this the hard way. After my burnout, when I finally stopped all the religious activity and started spending time simply being with God, something surprising happened: I became more effective in ministry, not less.

Not because I was working harder. I was actually working less. But because what I was doing was flowing from intimacy rather than striving from emptiness. I was giving out of overflow rather than trying to produce from depletion.

People noticed the difference. "You seem different," they would say. "More peaceful. More present. More... real."

I was the same person. I just wasn't trying to manufacture spiritual fruit anymore. I was abiding, and fruit was appearing naturally.

This is what Jesus promised. This is what He invites us to. Not more activity, but deeper abiding. Not harder work, but truer connection.

WHEN MINISTRY BECOMES IDOLATRY

I need to say something that might offend some of you, but it needs to be said: your ministry can become an idol.

Not can as in it's possible. Can as in it probably already has.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Jesus' Pattern: Withdrawal While Needs Pressed In

Look at Mark 1:35-38: "In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there. Simon and his companions searched for Him; they found Him, and said to Him, 'Everyone is looking for You.' He said to them, 'Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for'" (NASB).

Let's break down what happened here:

Jesus had been healing people the night before. The entire city had gathered at the door (Mark 1:33). He had cast out demons, healed diseases, ministered to the sick. It was a revival meeting. The kind every pastor dreams of.

And the next morning, while everyone was looking for Him—while the needs were pressing in, while the ministry opportunities were at their peak—He withdrew to pray.

Not after the needs were met. While they were still urgent.

Not when it was convenient. When it was inconvenient.

Not when He had time. When He didn't have time.

He prioritized solitude with the Father over meeting needs. He chose stillness over service. He said no to good opportunities because He needed to be alone with God.

And when the disciples found Him and said, "Everyone is looking for You"—which was their way of saying, "The ministry is happening! The revival is going! Come back and capitalize on this moment!"—Jesus didn't return with them.

He said, "Let's go somewhere else."

He left opportunities on the table. He walked away from a successful ministry moment. He disappointed people who were looking for Him.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Because He knew something we've forgotten: being with the Father was more important than doing things for the Father.

The Pastor Who Cannot Be Still

If Jesus—perfect, sinless, fully God—needed to withdraw regularly to pray, how much more do we need it?

Yet most pastors and ministry leaders I know live in perpetual motion. They're always on. Always available. Always responding to needs. Always in ministry mode.

They're the first ones at the church and the last ones to leave. They answer emails at midnight. They take phone calls on their day off. They cut vacations short when someone has a crisis. They sacrifice their families, their health, and their own spiritual lives on the altar of ministry.

And they call it faithfulness.

I call it idolatry.

Because here's the test: if you cannot stop ministering without feeling guilty, anxious, or like you're failing God, then ministry has become your idol.

If you define your worth by your ministerial productivity, ministry is your idol.

If you sacrifice intimacy with God for the sake of serving God, ministry is your idol.

If you can't say no to ministry opportunities without feeling like you're letting God down, ministry is your idol.

If your identity is wrapped up in being needed, being successful, being recognized as a spiritual leader, ministry is your idol.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

I worshiped at this altar for years. The idol of ministry. The idol of being needed. The idol of making a difference. The idol of building something significant for God.

And God, in His mercy, demolished it. He let it all fall apart. He let me fail. He let me burn out. He let me hit bottom.

Because He loved me too much to let me keep worshiping a false god, even when that false god wore religious clothing.

Doing for God vs. Being with God

Here's the fundamental question every Christian—especially every Christian leader—must answer: Is your relationship with God primarily transactional or relational?

Transactional means you relate to God primarily through what you do for Him. You pray so you can serve better. You read Scripture so you can preach better. You worship so you can lead better. Your time with God is functional—it exists to fuel your ministry.

Relational means you relate to God primarily for the sake of relationship itself. You pray because you want to be with Him. You read Scripture because you want to hear His voice. You worship because you love Him. Your ministry flows from the relationship, but the relationship doesn't exist for the ministry.

Be honest: which one describes you?

For most of my ministry life, I was transactional. I used God to fuel my ministry rather than letting ministry flow from my relationship with God. I treated intimacy with Him as a means to an end rather than as the end itself.

This is why I burned out. Because transactional relationships are exhausting. They're performance-based. They require constant effort to maintain. And eventually, you run out of steam.

But relational intimacy is life-giving. It's not about performance; it's about presence. It's not about what you do; it's about who you're with. It's not exhausting; it's restoring.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Jesus invites us to the second kind of relationship. "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28, NASB). Not "Come work for Me." Come to Me.

But we've turned it around. We come to Jesus to get assignments, not to find rest. We approach Him for our to-do list, not for intimacy. We want Him to tell us what to do for Him, when He just wants us to be with Him.

The Uncomfortable Truth

Here's the truth that exposed my idolatry: God doesn't need your ministry.

He really doesn't. He's been running the universe for quite some time without your help. He called you into ministry not because He needs you but because He wants relationship with you. Ministry is meant to be an overflow of that relationship, not a substitute for it.

When ministry becomes primary and relationship becomes secondary, you've made ministry an idol.

And God will not share His glory with an idol—even an idol that looks like faithful service.

This is why He let me burn out. Why He let my ministry collapse. Why He stripped away everything I was using to define my identity and worth.

Because He wanted me. Not my service. Not my productivity. Not my ministerial success.

Just me. In relationship. In stillness. In the secret place where it's just Him and me with nothing to prove and nothing to produce.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

BURNOUT AS SPIRITUAL CRISIS

Burnout is not just exhaustion. It's a spiritual crisis. And it's epidemic in the church.

Elijah Under the Juniper Tree

First Kings 19 gives us one of the most honest portraits of burnout in Scripture.

Elijah had just experienced the greatest victory of his ministry. Fire from heaven. The prophets of Baal destroyed. The nation turning back to God. It was his Mount Carmel moment—the kind of ministry success every leader dreams about.

And immediately after, we find him running for his life, hiding under a juniper tree, praying to die.

"It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers" (1 Kings 19:4, NASB).

This wasn't just physical exhaustion. This was spiritual, emotional, and psychological collapse. Elijah had given everything—and it wasn't enough. The revival didn't last. Jezebel still wanted him dead. Nothing had really changed.

And he was done.

Notice what God didn't do: He didn't rebuke Elijah for his weakness. He didn't give him a pep talk about being strong in the Lord. He didn't tell him to try harder or have more faith.

He let him sleep. He fed him. He gave him forty days to journey to Horeb. And then, in a cave, in the quiet, after the earthquake and wind and fire had passed, He spoke to him in "a sound of a gentle blowing" (1 Kings 19:12, NASB).

God met Elijah in his burnout not with demands but with presence. Not with pressure but with rest. Not in the spectacular but in the still small voice.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

This is what burned-out believers need: not more ministry, but more presence. Not more activity, but more stillness. Not more productivity, but more intimacy.

When We Outrun Our Souls

David wrote, "Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me?" (Psalm 42:5, NASB).

This is the cry of someone who has outrun their soul. Someone who has moved so fast, pushed so hard, strived so relentlessly that their inner life couldn't keep up. The body kept going, but the soul got left behind somewhere.

I experienced this viscerally during my burnout. I kept showing up, kept performing my duties, kept saying the right words and doing the right things. But inside, I was empty. My soul had checked out. I was running on fumes, going through the motions, performing the role of pastor while being spiritually dead.

You can outrun your soul. You can push past your limits so many times that something breaks inside. You can ignore the warning signs—the joylessness, the cynicism, the exhaustion that sleep doesn't fix, the prayers that feel like they bounce off the ceiling—until you collapse.

This is what happens when we refuse to be still. When we refuse to let our souls catch up to our bodies. When we refuse to rest in God's presence and insist on producing for God's kingdom.

We become the walking dead—alive on the outside, dead on the inside. Going through all the motions of spirituality while having no spiritual life.

The Exhaustion That Comes from Striving in the Flesh

Paul distinguished between two kinds of work: work done in the Spirit and work done in the flesh.

Work done in the Spirit flows from intimacy with God, is empowered by His grace, and produces lasting fruit without destroying you in the process.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Work done in the flesh is driven by your own effort, powered by your own strength, and leaves you exhausted, empty, and burned out.

The problem is that both can look identical from the outside. Both involve activity, service, and ministry. Both appear productive. Both seem spiritual.

But one gives life, and one drains life.

How can you tell the difference?

Work done in the Spirit produces the fruit of the Spirit in you: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

Work done in the flesh produces the opposite: irritability, joylessness, anxiety, impatience, harshness, cynicism, inconsistency, aggression, lack of self-control.

Be honest: which list describes you lately?

If you're exhausted, burned out, joyless, anxious, and irritable, you're not working too hard for God. You're working in the flesh instead of in the Spirit. You're striving instead of abiding. You're running on empty instead of overflowing from fullness.

And no amount of time off will fix this. No vacation will restore you. No sabbatical will heal you.

Because the problem isn't that you're working too much. The problem is that you're working apart from abiding. You're doing ministry without being with Jesus. You're serving God without knowing God.

And that will always lead to burnout.

My Story of Burnout

I need to tell you my story because some of you are exactly where I was, and you need to know you're not alone.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

I burned out after fifteen years of ministry. Fifteen years of saying yes to every opportunity. Fifteen years of sacrificing family time, personal health, and intimacy with God for the sake of building a successful ministry.

And it worked. By external measures, I was successful. The church grew. People were saved. Programs flourished. My reputation expanded.

But inside, I was dying.

I couldn't pray anymore—not really. I could say prayers, perform prayers, lead prayers. But I couldn't connect with God. It felt like talking to a wall.

I couldn't read Scripture for myself. I could study it to prepare sermons. I could exegete it academically. But I couldn't receive it as God's living word to me. It was just information, not transformation.

I couldn't rest. Even on my day off, I was thinking about the church, checking emails, planning the next thing. My mind never stopped spinning.

I couldn't feel anymore. Joy was gone. Peace was gone. I was numb, going through the motions, performing the role of pastor while being spiritually dead inside.

And I couldn't stop. Because if I stopped, if I admitted I was drowning, if I let people see that I wasn't the strong spiritual leader they thought I was, everything would fall apart.

So I kept going. Until I couldn't anymore.

Until one Sunday morning, I stood up to preach and couldn't remember what I was supposed to say. My mind went blank. My carefully prepared sermon disappeared. I stood there in front of hundreds of people and had nothing.

That was the beginning of the end. Or rather, the beginning of the beginning.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Because that's when I finally stopped. That's when I finally admitted I was broken. That's when I finally surrendered the idol of ministry and started learning what it meant to simply be with God.

It took two years to recover. Two years of sitting in silence, learning to pray again, learning to hear God's voice again, learning to be still.

And in that stillness, God taught me what I should have learned before I ever entered ministry: He doesn't need my activity. He wants my attention. He doesn't need my productivity. He wants my presence. He doesn't need my ministerial success. He wants me.

Just me. Still. Quiet. Dependent. Abiding.

THE POVERTY OF CONSTANT ACTIVITY

A.W. Tozer said, "Satan will always find mischief for idle hands to do, but the work of God is done by people who know how to be still."

Read that again. The work of God—real, lasting, fruitful kingdom work—is done by people who know how to be still.

Not by people who work the hardest. Not by people who have the fullest schedules. Not by people who sacrifice the most. But by people who know how to be still.

Because stillness is where you learn to abide. Stillness is where you connect to the vine. Stillness is where you receive what you need to give. Stillness is where you meet God and are transformed by His presence.

Activity without stillness is spiritual poverty. It looks rich—so much happening, so much being accomplished, so much productivity. But it's bankrupt. Empty. Nothing of eternal value is actually being produced.

Because apart from abiding in Christ, you can do nothing. No matter how busy you are. No matter how hard you work. No matter how much you accomplish.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Nothing.

The Hard Questions

Let me ask you some questions, and I want you to be brutally honest in your answers:

When was the last time you sat in silence with God with no agenda, no prayer list, no Bible study plan—just to be with Him?

When was the last time you said no to a ministry opportunity because you needed to protect your intimacy with God?

When was the last time you felt spiritually alive—not performing spiritual activity, but actually alive in your relationship with God?

When was the last time your service flowed from overflow rather than from depletion?

When was the last time you experienced joy in your ministry instead of obligation?

If you can't remember, you're in trouble. Not because God is angry with you, but because you're headed for burnout. You're running on empty. You're trying to give what you don't have. You're striving in the flesh instead of abiding in the Spirit.

And it will catch up with you. It always does.

The Way Forward

Here's the good news: you don't have to stay in spiritual poverty. You don't have to keep living in burnout. You don't have to keep running on empty.

But the way forward isn't more activity. It's stillness. It's ceasing striving. It's learning to abide.

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Jesus said, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30, NASB).

Notice: He doesn't say, "Work harder and you'll eventually break through to rest." He says, "Come to Me and I will give you rest."

The rest comes first. The abiding comes first. The intimacy comes first.

Then the fruitfulness follows. Not before. Not while you're still running. Not while you're still striving in your own strength.

First, be still. Abide. Rest in His presence. Connect to the vine.

Then fruit will appear. Naturally. Organically. Inevitably.

Because that's how fruit works. The branch doesn't produce it through effort. The branch receives it through connection.

AN INVITATION TO THE WEARY

If you're exhausted, burned out, spiritually dry, and running on empty—this is not a failure. This is an invitation.

An invitation to stop.

An invitation to be still.

An invitation to cease striving and know that He is God.

An invitation to come to Jesus and find rest for your soul.

An invitation to choose the good part that will not be taken away.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

God is not angry with you for being tired. He's not disappointed in your exhaustion. He's not measuring your worth by your productivity.

He's inviting you to stop trying so hard and start abiding more deeply.

He's inviting you to lay down the idol of ministry and pick up intimacy with Him.

He's inviting you to discover that what you've been trying to produce through frantic activity actually flows naturally from stillness with Him.

The invitation stands.

Will you accept it?

Will you stop long enough to be still?

Will you cease striving long enough to know that He is God?

Will you choose Mary's way instead of Martha's?

Because the good part is still available. The better part is still there for the choosing.

And it begins with being still.

What would it look like for you to stop striving and start abiding?

What would you need to say no to in order to say yes to stillness?

What idol of productivity are you clinging to that God is inviting you to release?

The answers to these questions will determine whether you continue in the spiritual poverty of busyness or discover the abundance that comes from knowing God in stillness.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Choose wisely.

Your soul depends on it.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

CHAPTER 4: THE COMMAND TO BE STILL

"Solitude is not simply a means to an end. Solitude is its own end. It is the place where Christ remodels us in his own image and frees us from the victimizing compulsions of the world."

—Henri Nouwen

We need to establish something crucial before we go any further: stillness is not optional.

It's not a spiritual discipline for advanced Christians. It's not a nice addition to your devotional life if you have extra time. It's not a suggestion for people whose personalities lean toward contemplation.

It's a command.

God doesn't say, "If it works for you, consider being still." He says, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10, NASB).

This is imperative language. Divine instruction. A non-negotiable directive from the Creator of the universe to His creation.

And we need to understand what He's actually commanding.

PSALM 46:10 - DEEP DIVE

Let's look at this verse in its original language, because what's happening in the Hebrew is far more radical than most English translations convey.

"Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." (Psalm 46:10, NASB)

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

"Cease Striving" - The Hebrew Word *Raphah*

The Hebrew word translated "cease striving" or "be still" is *raphah* (רָפָה). And it's a powerful word.

Raphah means to let go, to release, to abandon, to surrender. It means to let something drop from your hands. To stop holding on. To cease your efforts.

In its various uses throughout the Old Testament, *raphah* can mean:

- To let your hands hang limp (2 Chronicles 15:7)
- To withdraw or let go (Judges 8:3)
- To sink down or relax (Exodus 4:26)
- To abandon or forsake (Psalm 37:8)
- To be weak or feeble (2 Samuel 4:1)

This is not gentle language about taking a break or pausing for a moment of reflection. This is forceful language about complete cessation of effort. Complete release of control. Complete surrender of your striving.

When God says *raphah*, He's saying: Drop it. Let it go. Stop fighting. Lay down your weapons. Release your grip. Abandon your efforts to control. Cease your striving.

The Military Context: Laying Down Arms

Psalm 46 is a psalm about war. About nations in uproar. About kingdoms tottering. About the earth giving way and mountains falling into the sea. It's about chaos, threat, and the terror of overwhelming enemies.

And in the middle of this psalm about war, God commands: *Raphah*.

Lay down your weapons.

In ancient warfare, *raphah* was what defeated soldiers did when they surrendered. They let their weapons drop. They released their grip on their swords. They stopped fighting.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Think about the weight of this. God is commanding His people to do what only defeated soldiers do: lay down their arms. Stop fighting. Surrender.

But here's the twist: they're not surrendering to the enemy. They're surrendering to God.

They're acknowledging that the battle is not theirs but the Lord's. That their frantic efforts to defend themselves are unnecessary because God is their refuge and strength. That their striving to save themselves is actually getting in the way of God's salvation.

"The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent" (Exodus 14:14, NASB). Not *"The LORD will help you fight."* The LORD will fight *for* you. Your job is to be still. To lay down your weapons. To stop striving.

This is deeply uncomfortable for us. We want to help God. We want to contribute to our own salvation. We want to do our part. We want to maintain some control.

But God says: No. *Raphah*. Let go. Release your grip. Stop striving. Lay down your weapons. I am God, and you are not.

Your frantic activity is not helping. Your constant striving is not necessary. Your refusal to rest is not faithfulness—it's lack of faith.

Be still. Let Me be God.

"Know" - The Hebrew Word Yada

The second part of the command is equally important: "and know that I am God."

The Hebrew word for "know" is *yada* (יָדָע). And this is not intellectual knowledge. This is not knowing about God. This is intimate, experiential, relational knowing.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Yada is the word used when Adam "knew" Eve and she conceived (Genesis 4:1). It's the word used for the most intimate union between husband and wife. It's deep, personal, experiential knowledge that comes from intimate relationship.

When God says "know that I am God," He's not saying "acknowledge the theological fact that I am God." He's saying "experience Me intimately. Know Me personally. Be in such close relationship with Me that you understand from experience who I am."

And here's the crucial connection: you cannot have *yada* knowledge of God without *raphah*.

You cannot know God intimately while you're still striving. You cannot experience Him deeply while you're still fighting for control. You cannot be in close relationship with Him while you're still trying to manage your own life.

Intimate knowledge of God requires surrender. It requires stillness. It requires laying down your weapons and trusting Him completely.

This Is Command, Not Suggestion

Notice the structure of the verse: "Cease striving and know that I am God."

This is not "If you cease striving, you might know that I am God." It's not "Consider ceasing striving as one path toward knowing God." It's not "For those interested, stillness can lead to deeper knowledge of God."

It's a command followed by a result. Do this, and this will happen. The causality is direct and unavoidable.

Raphah (cease striving, be still, surrender) leads to *yada* (intimate knowledge of God).

You cannot skip the first to get to the second. You cannot know God intimately without being still. You cannot have experiential knowledge of Him while still striving in your own strength.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

The stillness isn't optional if you want to know God. It's prerequisite. It's the doorway. It's the only way.

God is not making a suggestion here. He's giving a command: Be still. And He's making a promise: When you are, you will know Me.

THE SABBATH PRINCIPLE

The command to be still isn't just found in Psalm 46. It's woven throughout Scripture, beginning with the foundational structure of creation itself.

Exodus 20:8-11 - Remember the Sabbath

"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy." (Exodus 20:8-11, NASB)

This is one of the Ten Commandments. Right there with "You shall not murder" and "You shall not commit adultery." God places the command to rest—to cease striving, to be still—in the same category as the most fundamental moral laws.

Why? Because Sabbath is not just about physical rest. It's about trust. It's about worship. It's about acknowledging that God is God and you are not.

Think about what God is commanding here: Stop working. One day in seven, cease all productivity. Let your fields lie fallow. Let your business close. Let the work remain undone.

And trust that the world will not fall apart. Trust that your security does not depend on seven days of productivity. Trust that God can sustain you on six days of work and one day of rest.

This is terrifying to our productivity-obsessed minds. What if we lose business? What if someone needs us? What if we fall behind? What if our competitors gain ground?

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

God's response: Be still. Trust Me. Remember that I am God and you are not.

Sabbath as Resistance Against Egypt's Taskmasters

Here's something crucial to understand about Sabbath: it was given to people who had just been freed from slavery in Egypt.

In Egypt, there was no Sabbath. The taskmasters demanded constant productivity. Bricks without straw. Quotas that had to be met. No rest. No mercy. Produce or be punished.

The Hebrew slaves had internalized this system. They had learned that their worth was measured by their productivity. That their security depended on meeting quotas. That rest was not an option.

Then God brought them out of Egypt and immediately gave them Sabbath. One day in seven, you rest. No productivity. No quotas. No striving. Just rest.

This was not just about physical recuperation. This was about spiritual reprogramming. This was God saying: You are no longer slaves to Egypt's taskmasters. You are My people. And My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

Sabbath is resistance. Resistance against the tyranny of productivity. Resistance against the lie that your worth is measured by your output. Resistance against the slavery of constant striving.

When you practice Sabbath—when you cease striving one day in seven—you're declaring: I am not a slave to productivity. I am a child of God. And my Father can be trusted to provide even when I rest.

This is radical. This is countercultural. This is revolutionary.

And it's commanded, not optional.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Hebrews 4:9-11 - The Sabbath Rest That Remains

"So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience." (Hebrews 4:9-11, NASB)

This passage is stunning in its implications. The author of Hebrews says that Sabbath rest is not just an Old Testament command—there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. Present tense. Available now. Required now.

And notice what he says: "The one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His."

We rest from our works the way God rested from His. Not because the work is complete—there's always more work to be done. But because we trust that what has been accomplished is sufficient. That we can lay down our tools and trust God to sustain what we've built.

This is faith. This is worship. This is the ultimate act of trust: releasing control and believing that God is capable of managing the universe without our constant intervention.

And then notice the final phrase: "Let us be diligent to enter that rest."

We must be *diligent* to rest. We must work hard to stop working. We must strive to cease striving.

This sounds paradoxical, but it's profoundly true. Rest doesn't happen accidentally in our culture. You have to fight for it. You have to protect it. You have to diligently guard space for stillness in a world that demands constant productivity.

Ceasing as an Act of Faith and Worship

When you practice Sabbath—when you choose stillness over striving—you're making a theological statement.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

You're declaring that God is God and you are not.

You're proclaiming that your security rests in Him, not in your productivity.

You're announcing that His grace is sufficient, even when your efforts cease.

You're testifying that the kingdom does not depend on your activity.

You're worshiping by trusting rather than by producing.

This is why Sabbath is not legalism. True Sabbath is the opposite of legalism. Legalism says you earn God's favor through works. Sabbath says God's favor is given by grace, so you can rest.

When you cease striving, you're not being lazy. You're being faithful. You're not being irresponsible. You're being worshipful. You're not being unproductive. You're being trusting.

Because the highest form of worship is not what you do for God. It's trusting that what He has done for you is enough.

THE PATTERN OF JESUS

If you're still not convinced that stillness is essential, look at Jesus.

Luke 5:16 - His Consistent Practice

"But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray." (Luke 5:16, NASB)

The Greek word here is important: *hēn hupokhōrōn*, which means "He was withdrawing" or "He was in the habit of withdrawing." This wasn't occasional. This wasn't when He had extra time. This was His consistent, regular, habitual practice.

Jesus—who had only three years of public ministry, who had multitudes pressing in for healing, who faced constant demands and urgent needs—regularly withdrew to solitary places to pray.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Think about what this means:

Jesus was fully God. He didn't need to pray to remember who He was or to recharge His divine batteries. His divinity was never depleted.

But He was also fully human. And as a human, He needed what all humans need: time alone with the Father. Stillness. Solitude. Silence. Prayer.

If Jesus—perfect, sinless, fully God—needed regular withdrawal into solitude and stillness, what makes you think you don't?

Mark 6:31 - His Invitation to His Disciples

"And He said to them, 'Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while.' (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.)" (Mark 6:31, NASB)

The disciples had just returned from their first ministry tour. They were excited. They had cast out demons and healed the sick. They had seen the power of God at work. There was so much to share, so much momentum, so many needs still to be met.

And Jesus said: Come away. Be secluded. Rest.

Not after the needs are met—they didn't even have time to eat, which means the needs were pressing in urgently. But in the midst of the urgent needs, Jesus prioritized rest.

He didn't say, "Let's capitalize on this ministry momentum." He didn't say, "The harvest is plentiful, so we can't afford to rest." He didn't say, "People are suffering, so rest would be selfish."

He said, "Come away...and rest."

Because Jesus knew what we've forgotten: ministry that flows from exhaustion is not sustainable. Service that comes from depletion will eventually burn out. Activity that isn't rooted in intimacy with the Father will ultimately be fruitless.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

The Pattern Throughout His Ministry

Look at the rhythm of Jesus' ministry:

Before choosing the twelve apostles, He spent the night in prayer (Luke 6:12).

Before feeding the five thousand, He withdrew to be alone (Matthew 14:13).

After feeding the five thousand, He sent the crowds away and went up on the mountain by Himself to pray (Matthew 14:23).

Before His arrest and crucifixion, He spent hours in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46).

Major moments of ministry were preceded by extended times of solitude. Significant decisions were made after nights of prayer. The most intense ministry came from the deepest stillness.

This was not incidental to Jesus' effectiveness. This was the source of it.

He didn't minister despite spending time in solitude. He ministered effectively because He spent time in solitude.

If Jesus Needed It, How Much More Do We?

Here's the unavoidable logic:

Jesus is the Son of God. Fully divine. Without sin. Perfect in every way.

And He regularly withdrew to be alone with the Father in stillness and prayer.

You are not the Son of God. You are not fully divine. You are not without sin. You are not perfect in every way.

If Jesus needed regular withdrawal into stillness, how much more do you need it?

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If Jesus couldn't sustain His ministry without solitude, what makes you think you can?

If Jesus prioritized being with the Father over doing things for the Father, shouldn't you?

The logic is inescapable. If Jesus modeled it, we need it. If He commanded it, we must obey it. If He practiced it consistently, we dare not ignore it.

SOLITUDE AS ITS OWN END

Henri Nouwen, who spent years in contemplative ministry, wrote something that challenges our utilitarian view of spiritual disciplines: "Solitude is not simply a means to an end. Solitude is its own end. It is the place where Christ remodels us in his own image and frees us from the victimizing compulsions of the world."

Read that again: Solitude is not a means to an end. It's its own end.

We want to make stillness functional. We want it to serve our productivity. We want to use it as a tool to become more effective in ministry.

But Nouwen says no. Solitude is not about making you more productive. It's about transformation. It's about being remodeled in Christ's image. It's about being freed from compulsions.

The Place of Transformation

Stillness is where transformation happens. Not in the doing, but in the being. Not in the activity, but in the rest. Not in the striving, but in the surrender.

When you're still before God, without agenda, without performance, without trying to accomplish something—that's when He can work on you. That's when He can expose what needs to be exposed, heal what needs to be healed, transform what needs to be transformed.

You cannot be remodeled while you're in constant motion. A sculptor cannot work on marble that won't hold still. A potter cannot shape clay that keeps jumping off the wheel.

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God wants to remake you in Christ's image. But you have to be still long enough to let Him work.

Freedom from Victimizing Compulsions

Nouwen talks about "victimizing compulsions"—the drives, addictions, and patterns that control us without our permission. The need to be needed. The addiction to approval. The compulsion to prove ourselves. The fear that drives us to constant productivity. The anxiety that keeps us in perpetual motion.

These compulsions victimize us. They control us. They drive us. They rob us of freedom and joy and peace.

And stillness exposes them. In the quiet, when all the noise and distraction cease, these compulsions become visible. They lose their power to hide. They can be named, confronted, and by God's grace, broken.

This is why we avoid stillness. Not just because it's uncomfortable, but because it threatens the compulsions that have been running our lives. It exposes the idols we've been serving. It reveals the false gods we've been worshiping.

And in that exposure, if we don't run away, we find freedom.

THE INVITATION AND THE COMMAND

So here we stand, faced with both invitation and command.

The invitation: "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28, NASB).

The command: "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10, NASB).

These are not contradictory. They're complementary. God commands what He knows we desperately need. He invites us to what will save our lives.

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The command is not burdensome. It's liberation. He's commanding us to stop the very thing that's destroying us. He's ordering us to cease the striving that's exhausting us. He's instructing us to lay down the weapons that are wounding us.

This is not a harsh command from a distant deity. This is a loving command from a Father who sees His children killing themselves with busyness and says, "Stop. Be still. Rest. Let Me be God."

What Obedience Looks Like

Obedience to this command looks like:

Creating space in your schedule for stillness, not as an afterthought but as a priority.

Saying no to good opportunities in order to say yes to being with God.

Practicing Sabbath—actually ceasing work one day in seven, trusting God to provide.

Withdrawing regularly from the noise and demands for solitude with God.

Laying down your weapons—your efforts to control, your striving for approval, your attempts to earn God's favor—and trusting Him completely.

Choosing Mary's portion over Martha's distractions.

This is not legalism. This is not adding another rule to your already burdened conscience. This is liberation. This is permission to stop. This is the command you've been waiting for: Be still.

The Promise That Follows

And here's the promise: when you obey, you will know God.

Not know about Him. Know Him. Intimately. Experientially. Personally.

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You will discover what you've been seeking in a thousand places but can only be found in one: in the stillness, in the quiet, in the secret place where it's just you and Him.

You will find rest for your soul. Peace that passes understanding. Joy that doesn't depend on circumstances. Freedom from the compulsions that have been driving you.

You will experience transformation. You will be remodeled in Christ's image. You will become more like Him—not through trying harder but through being still longer.

This is not a reward for spiritual achievement. This is simply what happens when you obey the command to be still. When you cease striving, you know God. Cause and effect. Promise and fulfillment.

THE CHOICE

The command stands: Be still.

The invitation stands: Come to Me and rest.

The promise stands: You will know God.

Will you obey?

Will you cease striving? Will you lay down your weapons? Will you release your grip on control? Will you surrender your compulsion to productivity? Will you trust that God can manage the universe without your constant intervention?

Will you practice Sabbath? Will you withdraw regularly for solitude? Will you follow Jesus' pattern of prioritizing time with the Father?

Will you be still?

This is not about adding another item to your spiritual to-do list. This is about subtracting. About removing. About ceasing. About stopping.

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God is not asking you to do more. He's commanding you to do less. To be more still. To know Him more intimately.

The world will tell you this is irresponsible. That you can't afford to rest. That people are depending on you. That the work won't get done if you stop.

God says: Be still anyway. Trust Me. Lay down your weapons. I will fight for you. I will provide for you. I will accomplish what needs to be accomplished.

Your job is not to manage the universe. Your job is to know Me.

And you cannot know Me without being still.

In the next chapter, we'll explore what it means to truly know God—what's at stake, what we gain, and why it's worth the cost of stillness.

But for now, sit with this command: *Raphah*. Let go. Release. Surrender. Be still.

And in that stillness, you will know that He is God.

"Be still, and know that I am God."

This is not suggestion.

This is command.

Will you obey?

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

CHAPTER 5: KNOWING GOD - WHAT'S AT STAKE

"God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing."

—C.S. Lewis

There's a question that haunts me, one that I've asked hundreds of people in pastoral ministry, and one that exposes the crisis at the heart of modern Christianity:

Do you know God, or do you just know about Him?

The responses are revealing. Most people pause. The question catches them off guard. They've been to church their whole lives, read their Bibles, served in ministry, attended Bible studies. They can quote Scripture. They know theology. They understand doctrine.

But do they know *God*?

The pause tells you everything.

Because deep down, most Christians sense the truth: we have accumulated vast amounts of information about God while having very little actual experience of God. We know the facts but not the Person. We know the doctrines but not the Divine. We know *about* Him without truly *knowing* Him.

And this is not a small problem. This is not a minor gap in our spiritual formation. This is a crisis of eternal proportions.

Because knowing God is not ancillary to the Christian life. It's not one option among many spiritual pursuits. It's not the cherry on top of an otherwise complete faith.

Knowing God *is* the Christian life. It's eternal life itself. It's the purpose for which you were created. It's the destination of all true spirituality. It's everything.

And most of us have settled for far less.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

THE CHIEF END OF MAN

What We Were Created For

The Westminster Shorter Catechism begins with a question and answer that every Christian should memorize:

Question: What is the chief end of man?

Answer: Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.

Not to serve God. Not to work for God. Not to build His kingdom or accomplish great things in His name.

To glorify Him and *enjoy* Him. Forever.

That word "enjoy" is crucial. We were created not merely to serve a distant Master but to enjoy intimate relationship with our Father. To delight in His presence. To find our greatest pleasure in knowing Him. To experience joy in communion with Him.

This is the chief end—the primary purpose, the ultimate goal, the reason for our existence. Everything else is secondary. Every other pursuit, achievement, or experience in life is meant to flow from and point back to this: knowing and enjoying God.

But look at how most Christians live. Look at how most churches operate. Look at what we measure and value and pursue.

We've made service the chief end. Or ministry. Or theological correctness. Or moral living. Or evangelism. Or social justice.

All good things. All important things. But none of them is the chief end.

The chief end is knowing God. Enjoying Him. Being in relationship with Him.

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Everything else flows from that. And without that, everything else is empty religious activity.

John 17:3 - This Is Eternal Life

Jesus said something absolutely stunning in His high priestly prayer: "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3, NASB).

Read that again slowly. *This is eternal life.*

Not "this leads to eternal life." Not "this is one aspect of eternal life." This *is* eternal life: knowing God.

We've reduced eternal life to duration—living forever in heaven. But Jesus defines it as relationship—knowing God and knowing Christ.

Eternal life is not primarily about quantity of days. It's about quality of relationship. It's about intimate, personal, experiential knowledge of God through Jesus Christ.

This means that eternal life doesn't begin when you die. It begins the moment you come to truly know God. You can be alive physically but dead spiritually if you don't know Him. And you can have eternal life right now—in this moment, in this world—if you know Him.

The tragedy is that many people will spend their entire lives pursuing things they think will give them life—success, security, pleasure, achievement, even religious accomplishments—while missing the one thing that actually is life: knowing God.

Philippians 3:8 - The Surpassing Value

Paul understood this. After listing all his credentials—circumcised on the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, a Hebrew of Hebrews, a Pharisee, blameless according to the Law—he said this:

"More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:8, NASB).

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The surpassing value. The worth that exceeds all other worth. The treasure that makes everything else look like garbage by comparison.

Not serving Christ. Not working for Christ. Not even believing correct things about Christ.

Knowing Christ.

Paul had everything the world values—education, pedigree, reputation, religious achievement, moral righteousness. And he counted it all as rubbish. Garbage. Dung.

Why? Because he had discovered something worth infinitely more: knowing Christ Jesus his Lord.

This is not hyperbole. This is not poetic exaggeration. This is sober assessment of reality. When you truly know Christ—when you experience the reality of His presence, the depths of His love, the wonder of His character—everything else pales in comparison.

Paul didn't say, "I count some things as loss" or "I've made some sacrifices." He said *all* things. Everything. Whatever he once counted as gain, he now counted as loss for the sake of knowing Christ.

This is the value of knowing God. It's worth everything. It's worth more than everything. It makes everything else look worthless by comparison.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN KNOWING ABOUT AND KNOWING

But we need to be clear about what "knowing" means, because this is where most of us get it wrong.

Hosea 6:6 - What God Delights In

Through the prophet Hosea, God says something that should shake us: "For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6, NASB).

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Think about what God is saying here. He's speaking to people who were faithfully bringing their sacrifices. They were observing the rituals. They were doing the religious activities God Himself had commanded.

But God says, "I don't want your sacrifices. I want you to know Me."

The sacrifices were meant to lead to knowing God. But the people had made the sacrifices the end in themselves. They thought that by performing the rituals, they were fulfilling their religious duty. They had *religion* without *relationship*.

And God said: I don't want your religious activity. I want your heart. I want you to know Me.

This is what we do. We think that if we attend church, read our Bibles, pray our prayers, serve in ministry, and maintain moral lives, we're doing what God wants.

But God wants more than our religious observance. He wants us to know Him. Not just to do things for Him, but to be in relationship with Him.

Head Knowledge vs. Heart Knowledge

There's a crucial distinction we must understand: the difference between head knowledge and heart knowledge. Between intellectual information and intimate experience. Between knowing facts about God and knowing God Himself.

You can know all the right theology and still not know God.

You can quote Scripture perfectly and still be a stranger to His presence.

You can understand systematic theology and still have no experiential knowledge of the God that theology describes.

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Think about it in human terms. I could read everything ever written about my wife—her biography, her personality profile, her psychological assessment, her medical history. I could know facts about her that even she doesn't remember. I could become the world's leading expert on information about her.

But if I never spent time with her, if I never talked with her, if I never experienced her presence, if I never had actual relationship with her—would I know her? Of course not. I would know *about* her. But I wouldn't know *her*.

This is the difference between head knowledge and heart knowledge. Between information and intimacy. Between theology and relationship.

And this is where most Christians live: we know about God without truly knowing God.

The Pharisees: Expert and Empty

The Pharisees are the ultimate warning about the danger of knowing about God without knowing God.

They had head knowledge. They had memorized the Torah. They knew the Law inside and out. They could debate fine points of theology. They were the scholars, the experts, the religious authorities of their day.

But when God stood in front of them in human flesh, they didn't recognize Him. When Truth Himself spoke to them, they called Him a blasphemer. When the very One they claimed to worship came to them, they crucified Him.

How is this possible? How could the most religiously educated people of their time completely miss God when He was right in front of them?

Because they knew *about* God without knowing God Himself. They had information without intimacy. They had theology without relationship. They had religious activity without heart connection.

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Jesus' harshest words were reserved for these religious experts: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness" (Matthew 23:27, NASB).

Beautiful on the outside. Religiously impressive. Doctrinally sound. Morally rigorous.

But dead inside. Because they didn't know God.

The Knowledge That Transforms

True knowledge of God is not just intellectual. It's experiential. It's relational. It's intimate. It's the kind of knowledge that comes from spending time in someone's presence, from conversation, from shared experience, from relationship.

This is the knowledge that transforms. Not because you try to change yourself based on information you've learned, but because you become like the One you spend time with. Because intimacy with God naturally produces transformation.

Second Corinthians 3:18 says, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit" (NASB).

We are transformed by beholding. By gazing at Christ. By spending time in His presence. By actually knowing Him, not just knowing about Him.

This is why stillness is essential. You cannot have this kind of knowing—this beholding, this gazing, this intimate presence—without being still. You cannot accumulate this knowledge through study alone. You must experience it through relationship.

And relationship requires presence. Time. Attention. Stillness.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE DON'T KNOW HIM

The consequences of not knowing God—truly knowing Him—are devastating. This is not a minor issue. This is life and death.

Hosea 4:6 - My People Are Destroyed

God says through Hosea, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children" (Hosea 4:6, NASB).

Notice who God is talking to: "My people." Not pagans. Not unbelievers. His own people. The ones who claim to follow Him. The religious ones.

And they're being destroyed. Not disciplined. Not corrected. Destroyed.

Why? Lack of knowledge.

But they weren't ignorant. They had religion. They had rituals. They had activity. What they lacked was actual knowledge of God Himself.

This is sobering. You can be religious and be destroyed. You can be active in church and lack the knowledge that saves. You can go through all the motions and still not know the God you claim to serve.

Matthew 7:21-23 - I Never Knew You

Jesus' words in Matthew 7 are perhaps the most terrifying in all of Scripture:

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness'" (Matthew 7:21-23, NASB).

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Let that sink in. These people:

- Called Jesus "Lord"
- Prophesied in His name
- Cast out demons in His name
- Performed miracles in His name

This is ministry activity. This is spiritual power. This is religious success by any external measure.

And Jesus says, "I never knew you."

Not "I used to know you but you fell away." Not "I know you but you've sinned too much." "I *never* knew you."

They had religious activity without relational intimacy. They had ministry without knowing the Master. They performed spiritual works without having spiritual relationship.

And all their activity—all their prophecy, all their miracles, all their ministry—meant nothing. Because they didn't know Him, and He didn't know them.

This should terrify every pastor, every ministry leader, every Christian who's busy with religious activity. Because it's possible—entirely possible—to do ministry in Jesus' name while never actually knowing Jesus.

Religious Activity Without Relational Intimacy

I've met so many people—and I was one of them—who had all the external markers of vibrant Christianity but no actual relationship with God.

They attended church faithfully. Served in ministry consistently. Read their Bibles regularly. Prayed daily. Gave generously. Lived morally.

But they didn't know God.

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They knew about Him. They knew what they were supposed to believe. They knew how they were supposed to behave. They knew the religious language and the spiritual activities.

But they had no experience of His presence. No intimate knowledge of His character. No personal encounter with His love. No relational connection with His heart.

They had religion without relationship. Theology without intimacy. Activity without knowing.

And it's killing them. Because you cannot live on information about God. You cannot be sustained by religious activity. You cannot find life in theological correctness.

You can only find life in knowing God Himself.

C.S. Lewis was right: "God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing."

You cannot find what you're looking for anywhere except in knowing God. Not in ministry success. Not in moral achievement. Not in theological sophistication. Not in religious busyness.

Only in knowing Him.

And if you don't know Him—if you only know about Him—you're destroying yourself. Slowly. Surely. Inevitably.

Because we were made to know God. That's our design. That's our purpose. That's our life.

And anything less than that is death, no matter how religious it looks.

THE INVITATION TO INTIMACY

But here's the good news—the almost unbelievable good news: God wants to be known.

He's not hiding. He's not distant. He's not disinterested in relationship with you.

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He's inviting you. Pursuing you. Calling you to intimacy with Him.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 - What's Worth Boasting About

"Thus says the LORD, 'Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,' declares the LORD" (Jeremiah 9:23-24, NASB).

God lists three things people typically boast in: wisdom, might, and riches. Intelligence, power, and wealth. The things our world values most.

And He says: Don't boast in any of these.

If you're going to boast—if you're going to find your identity, your worth, your significance—boast in one thing only: that you understand and know God.

Not that you're smart. Not that you're successful. Not that you're wealthy. Not even that you're religious or moral or theologically correct.

Boast only in this: you know God.

This is what matters. This is what has value. This is what's worth pursuing, worth achieving, worth living for.

Understanding and knowing God.

And notice the final phrase: "for I delight in these things."

God delights when people know Him. He takes pleasure in relationship with His people. He's not a reluctant deity who tolerates our presence. He's a loving Father who delights in intimacy with His children.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

This changes everything. This isn't about earning God's favor or performing well enough to get His attention. This is about responding to His invitation. Accepting His pursuit. Entering into the intimacy He's offering.

2 Corinthians 4:6 - The Glory in Christ's Face

Paul writes, "For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6, NASB).

The knowledge of the glory of God. Not information about God. Not theology about God. Not facts about God.

The knowledge—the intimate, experiential, personal knowledge—of God's glory.

And where do we find this knowledge? In the face of Christ.

This is profoundly relational language. You don't know someone's face from reading about them. You know their face from looking at them, from being with them, from spending time in their presence.

God has revealed Himself in Christ. And we come to know God by gazing at Christ, by being in His presence, by spending time looking into His face.

This requires stillness. This requires attention. This requires the kind of intimate presence that can only happen when we stop everything else and simply be with Him.

You cannot see someone's face while running past them. You cannot know someone by staying busy and distracted. You cannot have intimate knowledge without intimate presence.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Song of Solomon - The Language of Love

Throughout Scripture, God uses the language of romantic love to describe His relationship with His people. The entire book of Song of Solomon is an extended metaphor of God's passionate love for His bride.

"I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine" (Song of Solomon 6:3, NASB).

This is intimate language. This is the language of lovers. This is how God wants us to understand our relationship with Him—not as slaves to a master, not as subjects to a king, but as beloved to Beloved.

God is not content with your service. He wants your heart. He's not satisfied with your religious activity. He wants intimacy with you. He doesn't want you as a worker in His kingdom. He wants you as a lover of His soul.

This is the invitation. This is what's on offer. This is what's at stake.

Not religion. Relationship.

Not activity. Intimacy.

Not knowing about God. Knowing God Himself.

The Pursuit of God

A.W. Tozer wrote a book titled *The Pursuit of God*, and in it he captures something essential: "We pursue God because, and only because, He has first put an urge within us that spurs us to the pursuit."

You're not forcing yourself on an unwilling God. You're responding to a God who is already pursuing you. Your desire to know Him is a response to His desire to be known by you.

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Every longing you feel for God is actually God's longing for you, placed in your heart. Every hunger for His presence is His hunger for your presence, awakened in your soul. Every desire to know Him is His desire to be known, stirred up within you.

This is why Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44, NASB).

The very fact that you're reading this book, that you're feeling the pull toward stillness, that you're hungry for more than religious activity—that's God pursuing you. That's Him drawing you. That's Him inviting you into intimacy.

He wants to be known. By you. Personally. Intimately. Deeply.

WHAT KNOWING GOD PRODUCES

When you truly know God—not just know about Him, but actually know Him through intimate relationship—it changes everything.

You Find Your Identity

When you know God, you discover who you are. Because your identity is not found in what you do, what you achieve, what others think of you, or how well you perform. Your identity is found in being known by God.

You are the beloved of God. That's who you are. Not because of what you've done or what you've accomplished, but because of whose you are.

When you know this—when you experience this deeply, when you encounter God's love for you personally—you stop striving for approval. You stop performing for acceptance. You stop trying to earn worth through achievement.

Because you already have what you've been seeking. You're already fully known and fully loved by the only One whose opinion ultimately matters.

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You Find Your Security

When you know God—when you've experienced His faithfulness, His provision, His unchanging character—you find security that circumstances cannot shake.

You're not anxious about tomorrow because you know the One who holds tomorrow. You're not devastated by loss because you know the One who is your true treasure. You're not afraid because you know the One who is in control.

This isn't positive thinking or psychological manipulation. This is the natural result of knowing God intimately. When you've experienced His character, you trust Him. When you've encountered His love, you rest in Him. When you've known His faithfulness, you depend on Him.

You Find Your Purpose

When you know God, you discover why you exist. You're not trying to create meaning through accomplishments or activities. You've found meaning in relationship with the One who created you.

Your life has purpose because you know the God who purposed you. Your days have significance because you're walking with the One who is significant. Your existence has meaning because you're known by the God who gives meaning to everything.

And here's what's beautiful: when your purpose is rooted in knowing God rather than in achieving goals, you can't fail. Because the purpose is fulfilled in the relationship itself, not in what you accomplish through the relationship.

You Find Your Satisfaction

This is what C.S. Lewis understood: God cannot give us happiness apart from Himself because there is no such thing.

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Every desire we have—for love, for security, for significance, for joy, for peace, for satisfaction—is ultimately a desire for God. We try to satisfy these desires with a thousand lesser things, and we're left empty every time.

Because only God can satisfy the God-shaped hole in our souls. Only knowing Him can fill the hunger He created. Only intimacy with Him can quench the thirst He placed in us.

When you know God—truly know Him—you find what you've been searching for in all the wrong places. You find the satisfaction you've been seeking in every achievement, every relationship, every experience, every possession.

You find Him. And in finding Him, you find everything.

Augustine prayed, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

This is the human condition. Restless. Searching. Longing. Striving. Trying to fill the emptiness with anything and everything.

Until we rest in God. Until we know Him. Until we find in Him what we've been seeking everywhere else.

THE COST AND THE PRIZE

Knowing God costs everything. Paul said he counted all things as loss. He suffered the loss of all things. He gave up everything that once defined him.

But look at what he gained: Christ. Knowledge of Christ. Intimacy with Christ. The surpassing value that made everything else look like garbage.

This is what's at stake. Not additional religious knowledge. Not theological sophistication. Not spiritual experiences to collect.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Knowing God Himself. Being in intimate relationship with the Creator of the universe. Having personal, experiential knowledge of the One who is love, who is life, who is everything.

This is what stillness leads to. This is why the command to be still is so critical. Because you cannot know God without it. You cannot have this intimacy without presence. You cannot experience this relationship without time.

What Will You Trade For It?

The question is: what are you willing to give up to gain this knowledge?

Will you trade your busy schedule for stillness?

Will you trade your constant productivity for presence with God?

Will you trade your religious activity for relational intimacy?

Will you trade knowing about God for knowing God?

Will you trade your comfortable, manageable, controllable spiritual life for the wild, transformative, intimate encounter with the living God?

Because that's what this requires. That's what stillness demands. That's what knowing God costs.

Everything.

But here's the promise: what you gain is worth infinitely more than what you give up.

You gain Him. And in gaining Him, you gain life itself. Eternal life. The life you were created for. The life that satisfies. The life that transforms. The life that matters.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

The Invitation Still Stands

God is inviting you right now. Not to do more for Him. Not to serve Him better. Not to be more religious or more moral or more theologically correct.

He's inviting you to know Him. To be still in His presence. To experience His character. To encounter His love. To have intimate, personal, transformative relationship with Him.

This is what's at stake. This is why stillness matters. This is why you must cease striving and be still.

Because in the stillness, you will know God. And knowing God is everything.

It's the chief end of man. It's eternal life itself. It's the surpassing value. It's what your soul longs for even when you don't have words for the longing.

Don't settle for knowing about Him. Don't be satisfied with religious activity. Don't mistake theological knowledge for intimate relationship.

Be still. Be present. Be with Him. Know Him.

This is what you were created for. This is the invitation. This is life.

"This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."
(John 17:3, NASB)

Do you know Him?

Really know Him?

Or have you settled for knowing about Him?

The invitation stands.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Be still.

Know God.

This is everything.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

CHAPTER 6: BIBLICAL MODELS OF STILLNESS

"What makes the desert beautiful is that somewhere it hides a well."

—Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, quoted by Thomas Merton

We need models.

We need to see what stillness actually looks like. Not in theory. Not in abstract spiritual principles. But in real people, living real lives, facing real challenges.

Because here's what I've discovered: the concept of stillness sounds nice until you try to practice it. Then it feels impossible. Your mind races. Your body fidgets. Your responsibilities scream for attention. You wonder if you're doing it wrong, if it's supposed to be this hard, if maybe this whole stillness thing isn't for people like you.

That's when you need to look at the people who came before you. The ones who walked this path. The ones who learned to be still in the midst of chaos, crisis, calling, and ordinary life.

They weren't special spiritual superhumans. They were shepherds and fugitives, warriors and women, prophets and apostles. They were people like you—busy, broken, called to impossible things, struggling to hear God's voice in the noise of life.

But they learned something we desperately need to learn: God speaks in the stillness. He meets us in the quiet. He reveals Himself when we stop long enough to notice.

Let me introduce you to five biblical models of stillness. Five people who demonstrate what it looks like to be still before God and what happens when we are.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

MOSES AT THE BURNING BUSH

The Setup

Moses was on the backside of the desert, tending his father-in-law's sheep. This was not a temporary gig. He'd been doing this for forty years. Forty years of obscurity. Forty years of wilderness. Forty years removed from the palace, the power, and the purpose he once thought was his.

He was eighty years old, watching someone else's sheep, in the middle of nowhere.

And that's when God showed up.

Exodus 3:1-6 - The Encounter

"Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. So Moses said, 'I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up.' When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.' Then He said, 'Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground'" (Exodus 3:1-5, NASB).

Notice the sequence: God appeared in the burning bush, but He didn't speak until Moses turned aside. The bush was burning the whole time. God's presence was there. But the conversation didn't begin until Moses stopped, turned, and gave his attention.

"When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him."

God speaks when we turn aside. When we stop our routine. When we give our attention. When we become still enough to notice what He's showing us.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Remove Your Sandals

God's first instruction to Moses is telling: "Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

This is the posture of stillness. Not comfortable. Not casual. Not keeping one foot in your agenda while giving God half your attention.

Remove your sandals. Become vulnerable. Become present. Acknowledge that you're standing on holy ground, in the presence of the Holy One.

This is what stillness requires: recognizing that where God is, the ground is holy. That His presence demands our full attention. That we cannot rush through an encounter with the Living God while checking our watches and thinking about our to-do lists.

Moses removed his sandals. He became still. He gave his attention.

And God spoke. God revealed. God called. God commissioned.

The entire liberation of Israel from Egypt began with a man who turned aside from his routine, removed his sandals, and became still in God's presence.

The Lesson for Us

How many burning bushes have you missed because you didn't turn aside?

How many times has God been trying to get your attention, trying to speak to you, trying to reveal Himself—but you were too busy, too distracted, too caught up in your routine to notice?

God doesn't usually shout. He reveals Himself—often in ordinary moments, in the middle of routine days, in the wilderness of your regular life. But you have to turn aside. You have to stop. You have to become still.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

And when you do—when you remove the sandals of your agenda, your productivity, your constant forward motion—you discover that the place where you're standing is holy ground. That God has been there all along. That He's been waiting for you to stop long enough to notice.

The call on your life doesn't begin with activity. It begins with stillness. With turning aside. With becoming present to God's presence.

Moses didn't go looking for the burning bush. He was just doing his job. But when he saw it, he turned aside. He stopped. He gave his attention.

And everything changed.

ELIJAH IN THE CAVE

The Context

Elijah had just experienced the greatest ministry success of his life. Fire from heaven. The prophets of Baal defeated. The nation turning back to God. It was a Mount Carmel moment—the kind every ministry leader dreams about.

And then Jezebel threatened to kill him, and he ran for his life.

He ended up in a cave, depressed, suicidal, convinced he was the only faithful one left. God had just demonstrated His power spectacularly, and Elijah was ready to give up.

This is where we find him when God shows up to teach him how to recognize His voice.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

1 Kings 19:11-13 - The Sound of Gentle Blowing

"So He said, 'Go forth and stand on the mountain before the LORD.' And behold, the LORD was passing by! And a great and strong wind was rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of a gentle blowing. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave" (1 Kings 19:11-13, NASB).

This is one of the most important passages in Scripture about how God speaks.

The wind. The earthquake. The fire. These are spectacular. Powerful. Impossible to miss. These are what we expect from God—the dramatic, the overwhelming, the undeniable.

But God was not in any of them.

He was in the "sound of a gentle blowing." The still small voice. The whisper. The quiet.

Waiting Through the Spectacular

Here's what strikes me about this passage: Elijah had to wait through the wind, the earthquake, and the fire before he heard God's voice.

He had to resist the temptation to assume God was in the spectacular. He had to keep waiting. Keep listening. Keep being still.

How many times do we do the opposite? We experience something dramatic—an emotional worship service, a powerful conference, a miraculous answer to prayer—and we assume that's God speaking. We don't wait for the gentle blowing. We don't listen for the quiet voice.

Or worse, we create the spectacular ourselves. We manufacture emotional experiences. We engineer dramatic moments. We produce impressive ministry events.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

And we miss God's actual voice in the quiet.

Elijah had to learn—and we have to learn—that God's voice is not usually in the earthquake. It's in the gentle blowing that comes after. It's in the stillness after the storm. It's in the quiet that we only hear when we stop trying to create our own thunder.

Learning to Recognize God's Voice

When Elijah heard the gentle blowing, he knew it was God. How? Because he had spent enough time with God to recognize His voice.

You can't recognize a voice you're not familiar with. You can't identify the gentle blowing as God's voice if you've never heard it before.

This is why stillness is not optional. This is why regular time in God's presence is essential. You're learning to recognize His voice. You're becoming familiar with how He speaks. You're training your spiritual ears to hear the gentle blowing.

Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:27, NASB).

His sheep hear His voice. Not because they're specially gifted. Not because they're more spiritual than other people. But because they know Him. Because they've spent time with Him. Because they've learned to recognize the sound of His voice.

You cannot learn this from a book. You cannot download this information. You can only learn it through experience—through spending time in His presence, through practicing stillness, through learning to distinguish His voice from all the other voices competing for your attention.

The Gentle Blowing Requires Stillness

Here's the crucial point: you cannot hear gentle blowing if you're not still.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

A whisper is only audible in silence. A gentle breeze is only felt when you stop moving. A quiet voice is only heard when everything else is quiet.

This is why our culture makes it so hard to hear God. We're surrounded by wind, earthquake, and fire—constant noise, constant movement, constant stimulation. And in all that chaos, the gentle blowing of God's Spirit is drowned out.

You have to get still. You have to wait. You have to resist the spectacular and listen for the quiet.

God is speaking. He's always speaking. But His voice is gentle. His presence is like a quiet breeze. His communication is often in the stillness.

And if you never get still, you'll never hear Him.

The Lesson for Us

Stop waiting for the earthquake. Stop looking for God in the spectacular. Stop trying to manufacture dramatic experiences.

Get still. Get quiet. Wait through the noise. Listen for the gentle blowing.

That's where God is. That's how He speaks. That's when you'll hear Him.

Not in the programs and the productions. Not in the excitement and the emotions. Not even in the miracles and the manifestations.

In the sound of gentle blowing. In the still small voice. In the quiet that you only discover when you become still.

Elijah learned this in a cave, in the depths of his depression and discouragement. God didn't meet him with more spectacle. He met him with a whisper.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

And that whisper was enough. That gentle voice sustained him. That quiet presence gave him what he needed to continue.

Because God Himself is enough. His presence—even when it's quiet, even when it's gentle, even when it doesn't feel dramatic—is everything we need.

DAVID THE SHEPHERD

The Warrior-King Who Knew Rest

David is one of the most complex figures in Scripture. He was a warrior—a man who killed giants and led armies and conquered enemies. He was a king—a ruler who united Israel and established Jerusalem. He was a musician, a poet, a man after God's own heart.

And he was someone who knew how to be still.

This is what makes David such a powerful model. He wasn't a contemplative monk. He wasn't a mystic withdrawn from the world. He was a man of action, of leadership, of responsibility.

But he had learned something most leaders never learn: the secret of rest. The practice of stillness. The discipline of being quiet before God.

Psalm 23 - Compelled to Rest

"The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul" (Psalm 23:1-3, NASB).

Notice the language: "He makes me lie down."

Not "He invites me to lie down if I have time." Not "He suggests I might want to consider lying down." He *makes* me lie down.

This is forceful language. Compulsion. God has to make us rest because we won't do it on our own.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Sheep won't lie down unless four conditions are met: they're free from fear, free from friction with other sheep, free from pests, and free from hunger. A good shepherd creates those conditions. He makes it possible for the sheep to rest by removing everything that would keep them anxious and alert.

God does the same for us. He creates space for rest. He removes the obstacles to stillness. He makes it possible for us to be still.

But we have to let Him. We have to accept His making. We have to stop resisting the rest He's trying to give us.

David understood this. He was a shepherd himself. He knew that sheep needed to be made to lie down, because left to themselves, they would just keep grazing, keep moving, keep doing.

And he knew he was the same way. He needed God to make him lie down. To compel him to rest. To force him into stillness.

Psalm 131 - A Quieted Soul

"O LORD, my heart is not proud, nor my eyes haughty; nor do I involve myself in great matters, or in things too difficult for me. Surely I have composed and quieted my soul; like a weaned child rests against his mother, my soul is like a weaned child within me" (Psalm 131:1-2, NASB).

This is one of the most beautiful descriptions of stillness in all of Scripture.

David says he has "composed and quieted" his soul. This is active language. He's done something. He's taken action to bring his soul to a place of rest.

Stillness is not passive. It's not just waiting for peace to happen. It's actively quieting your soul. It's deliberately choosing to rest. It's intentionally bringing yourself to stillness.

And notice the image David uses: like a weaned child rests against his mother.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

A weaned child isn't nursing anymore. He's not getting anything from his mother except her presence. He's not there to be fed or to receive something. He's just there. Resting. Content. Present.

This is the kind of stillness David had learned. Not coming to God to get something. Not approaching Him with an agenda. Just resting. Just being present. Just content to be held.

The Shepherd's Secret

David learned to be still before he became king. He learned it in the wilderness, watching sheep. He learned it in the lonely places, the quiet places, the long hours with nothing to do but be present.

Those years in the wilderness weren't wasted. They were preparation. They were when David learned to hear God's voice. When he learned to worship in solitude. When he learned to be still.

And that's what sustained him when he became king. When the responsibilities pressed in. When the enemies multiplied. When the crises came.

He knew how to return to the green pastures. He knew how to quiet his soul. He knew how to rest against his Father like a weaned child.

This is the secret of sustainable leadership. This is the key to long-term faithfulness. This is what separates the leaders who finish well from the ones who burn out or fall away.

Not greater strength. Not better strategies. Not more resources.

The ability to be still. The practice of rest. The discipline of quieting your soul.

The Lesson for Us

You don't have to choose between action and contemplation. Between leadership and stillness. Between responsibility and rest.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

David didn't. He was both warrior and worshiper. Both king and shepherd. Both man of action and man of prayer.

But notice the order: he learned to be still before he learned to lead. He learned to rest before he learned to rule. He learned to quiet his soul before he learned to fight battles.

The stillness came first. And the stillness sustained him.

You cannot lead well if you haven't learned to rest. You cannot sustain faithful action if you don't practice regular stillness. You cannot keep fighting battles if you don't return regularly to the green pastures.

God will make you lie down. One way or another. Either you choose rest, or eventually, He'll force it on you through burnout, illness, or breakdown.

Choose the green pastures now. Learn to quiet your soul now. Practice stillness before the crisis forces it on you.

Because the warrior-king who knew how to be still was the warrior-king who finished well.

MARY AT JESUS' FEET

The Radical Nature of Sitting

We've talked about Martha and Mary before, but we need to look at this story again because Mary is one of the most powerful models of stillness in Scripture.

And what she did was radical. Far more radical than we usually realize.

Luke 10:39 - Listening at His Feet

"She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word" (Luke 10:39, NASB).

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Let me tell you what this meant in first-century Jewish culture.

Sitting at someone's feet was the posture of a disciple. This was how rabbis taught their students. The teacher sat, elevated, and the students sat at his feet, learning from him.

But women weren't disciples. Women weren't taught by rabbis. Women were expected to serve, to work, to stay in the kitchen while the men discussed theology.

Mary violated cultural expectations. She took the position of a disciple—a position reserved for men. She sat at Jesus' feet—a place women weren't supposed to be. She chose to learn—an activity deemed inappropriate for her gender.

And Jesus defended her choice.

Sitting as Radical Discipleship

When Martha complained—"Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me" (Luke 10:40, NASB)—Jesus could have told Mary to get up and help.

He didn't.

Instead, He said, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41-42, NASB).

Only one thing is necessary. And it's not serving. It's not productivity. It's not meeting needs or accomplishing tasks or keeping busy.

It's sitting at Jesus' feet. Listening to His word. Being present to His presence.

This is radical discipleship. Choosing to learn over choosing to serve. Choosing to receive over choosing to give. Choosing stillness over activity.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

And Jesus says this is the better choice. The good part. The one thing necessary.

Choosing Presence Over Productivity

Mary made a choice. She could have helped Martha. The work needed to be done. The guests needed to be fed. There were legitimate tasks that required attention.

But Mary chose presence over productivity. She chose Jesus over everything else. She chose the one thing necessary over the many things that seemed urgent.

This is what stillness requires: the willingness to choose presence even when productivity seems more important. The courage to sit when everyone else is busy. The wisdom to recognize what's actually necessary versus what's merely urgent.

Martha thought the meal was necessary. Jesus said Mary's choice was necessary.

We get this wrong constantly. We think the tasks are necessary. The ministry is necessary. The work is necessary. The productivity is necessary.

And Jesus says: No. One thing is necessary. Sitting at My feet. Listening to My word. Being with Me.

Everything else flows from that. Without that, nothing else matters.

The Part That Won't Be Taken Away

Jesus makes a promise about Mary's choice: "which shall not be taken away from her."

The meal Martha was preparing? Gone the moment they finished eating.

The service she was providing? Temporary. Over in an hour.

But what Mary received by sitting at Jesus' feet? That couldn't be taken away.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

This is the eternal value of stillness. What you receive in God's presence—the knowledge of Him, the transformation in His presence, the intimacy of relationship—cannot be taken from you.

Ministry results can be taken away. Buildings can burn. Programs can fail. Accomplishments can fade. Success can evaporate.

But knowing God? That's yours forever. That's the treasure that cannot be lost. That's the good part that will not be taken away.

The Lesson for Us

Stop letting the Marthas of the world—including the Martha voice in your own head—shame you for choosing stillness.

You're not being lazy. You're not being irresponsible. You're not neglecting important work.

You're choosing the one thing necessary. You're choosing the good part. You're choosing what will not be taken away.

And Jesus defends that choice. He honors it. He says it's better.

So sit. Even when others are busy. Even when tasks need attention. Even when it seems unproductive.

Sit at Jesus' feet. Listen to His word. Be present to His presence.

This is radical discipleship. This is the choice that matters. This is the one thing necessary.

PAUL'S ARABIAN SOJOURN

The Silence in His Story

Most people don't notice this detail in Paul's story, but it's crucial.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

After Paul's dramatic conversion on the Damascus road—blinded by light, confronted by the risen Christ, transformed from persecutor to believer—what did he do?

We might expect him to immediately begin his ministry. To start preaching. To use his gifts, his education, his passion for the gospel.

But he didn't. Not immediately.

Galatians 1:17 - Three Years in Arabia

"...nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus" (Galatians 1:17, NASB).

Paul went to Arabia. For three years.

Three years in the desert. Three years of solitude. Three years away from ministry, away from teaching, away from the urgent needs of the early church.

Three years to be alone with God.

This is stunning when you think about it. Paul had just had the most dramatic conversion in Christian history. He had encountered the risen Christ. He had been commissioned as an apostle to the Gentiles. He had a world-changing mission to fulfill.

And he spent three years in the desert before he started.

Revelation Requires Separation

Paul needed this time. Not because he didn't know enough—he was already one of the most educated men of his time. Not because he needed to work up courage—he had already proven his zeal by persecuting Christians.

He needed time alone with God because revelation requires separation.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

You can't receive new revelation while clinging to old paradigms. You can't be transformed while surrounded by the voices and expectations that shaped your old identity. You can't learn a new way while the old way still has access to your daily routine.

Paul needed to be separated from everything he had been—from his identity as Saul the Pharisee, from his reputation as a persecutor, from the theological framework that had shaped his life—so that God could reveal to him who he was now and what he was called to do.

This didn't happen in a weekend retreat. It took three years. Three years of silence. Three years of solitude. Three years of sitting with God and letting Him completely reorient Paul's understanding of Scripture, of the Messiah, of the gospel.

Before Ministry, Intimacy

Here's the principle that's easy to miss: Paul learned who Christ was before he taught who Christ was. He encountered God before he represented God. He was transformed before he tried to transform others.

Three years of preparation for a lifetime of ministry.

We do it backward. We get saved and immediately jump into ministry. We have an encounter with God and immediately start telling everyone about it. We receive a calling and immediately start trying to fulfill it.

And we wonder why we burn out. Why our ministry is shallow. Why we're teaching truths we haven't fully grasped ourselves.

Because we skipped the Arabian sojourn. We skipped the time alone with God. We skipped the separation and silence and stillness where revelation happens.

Paul didn't make that mistake. Before he planted a single church, before he preached a single sermon, before he wrote a single letter, he spent three years alone with God.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

And that's what made his ministry sustainable. That's what gave his teaching depth. That's what allowed him to endure persecution, rejection, hardship, and imprisonment without losing faith.

Because he knew God. Not just knew about Him. Not just knew correct theology about Him. He had spent three years in intimate relationship with Him. He had received revelation directly. He had been transformed in the secret place.

And you can't take that away. You can't shake faith that was formed in three years of Arabian solitude. You can't undermine truth that was revealed in the desert.

The Necessity of Time

Notice: three years. Not three days. Not three weeks. Three years.

Some things can't be rushed. Some transformation takes time. Some revelation requires extended stillness.

We live in a culture of instant everything. Instant food. Instant communication. Instant gratification. We want instant spiritual maturity too.

But that's not how it works. Knowing God takes time. Being still in His presence requires extended periods, not just moments. Receiving revelation that transforms you completely requires more than a weekend conference.

It requires an Arabian sojourn. A deliberate season of separation. An extended time of solitude with God.

For Paul, it was three years. For Moses, it was forty years in the wilderness before the burning bush. For Jesus, it was forty days in the wilderness after His baptism. For David, it was years as a shepherd before he became king.

How long is your Arabian sojourn? How much time are you willing to give to simply being with God, without agenda, without ministry, without productivity?

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Because the depth of your future ministry will be determined by the depth of your current intimacy with God.

The Lesson for Us

You cannot give what you haven't received. You cannot teach what you haven't learned. You cannot represent God well if you don't know Him deeply.

Before you do anything else—before you start ministry, before you launch that program, before you accept that position—spend time with God. Extended time. Deliberate time. Prioritized time.

Your Arabian sojourn might not be three years in the literal desert. But it needs to be something. Regular, extended times of solitude. Sabbath seasons of withdrawal. Deliberate periods of being with God without doing anything for God.

This isn't delay. This isn't wasted time. This isn't avoiding your calling.

This is preparation. This is the foundation. This is what makes everything else possible and sustainable and fruitful.

Don't rush into ministry. Don't skip the stillness. Don't bypass the Arabian sojourn.

Spend time with God. Let Him reveal Himself to you. Let Him transform you in the secret place. Let Him give you what you need before you try to give to others.

Because the world doesn't need more activity from Christians who barely know God. The world needs people who have been with Jesus—people who have spent time in His presence, people who know Him deeply, people who carry the authority that only comes from intimacy.

Be one of those people. Take your Arabian sojourn. Spend the time. Make it a priority.

Your future ministry depends on it.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

THE WELL IN THE DESERT

Thomas Merton, quoting Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, said, "What makes the desert beautiful is that somewhere it hides a well."

This is the secret of stillness. It looks like emptiness. It feels like doing nothing. It seems like wasted time in a desert of inactivity.

But somewhere in that desert, hidden beneath the surface, is a well. A source of living water. A spring that will sustain you for the rest of your life.

Moses found the well at the burning bush.

Elijah found it in the sound of gentle blowing.

David found it in green pastures and quiet waters.

Mary found it at Jesus' feet.

Paul found it in three years of Arabian solitude.

They all went to the desert. They all embraced the stillness. They all chose to be present with God rather than busy for God.

And they all found the well.

Not because they were looking for it. But because they were willing to enter the desert. They were willing to be still. They were willing to wait. They were willing to stay in the apparent emptiness until they discovered the hidden treasure.

This is what stillness offers you. Not activity. Not productivity. Not impressive ministry results.

A well in the desert. Living water that will sustain you forever. Intimate knowledge of God that cannot be taken away.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

The Choice

These five models show us different facets of stillness:

Moses shows us that **God speaks when we turn aside**. That encounter begins with stopping, with giving our attention, with acknowledging holy ground.

Elijah shows us that **God's voice is in the gentle blowing**. That we must wait through the spectacular and listen for the quiet.

David shows us that **the warrior must learn to rest**. That leadership requires stillness, that action must flow from contemplation.

Mary shows us that **presence is more important than productivity**. That sitting at Jesus' feet is the one thing necessary, the good part that won't be taken away.

Paul shows us that **revelation requires separation**. That time alone with God before ministry is not optional, it's essential.

These are not just ancient stories. These are models for us. Patterns to follow. Examples to emulate.

The same God who spoke to Moses in the burning bush wants to speak to you.

The same gentle voice that Elijah heard in the cave is speaking to you now.

The same rest that sustained David is available to you.

The same choice Mary made is before you today.

The same Arabian sojourn that prepared Paul is waiting for you.

Will you follow their example?

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Will you turn aside like Moses?

Will you listen for the gentle blowing like Elijah?

Will you learn to rest like David?

Will you choose the good part like Mary?

Will you take your Arabian sojourn like Paul?

The desert is calling. The well is hidden there. The stillness is waiting.

And God is ready to meet you there—in the quiet, in the solitude, in the stillness—just as He met every one of these biblical models who came before you.

Which of these models speaks most to where you are right now?

What would it look like to follow their example in your life today?

What's keeping you from your own burning bush, your own cave, your own green pastures, your own place at Jesus' feet, your own Arabian sojourn?

The well is hidden in the desert.

Will you enter the stillness to find it?

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

CHAPTER 7: THE FLESH WARS AGAINST THE SPIRIT

"The spiritual life is not a life before, after, or beyond our everyday existence. No, the spiritual life can only be real when it is lived in the midst of the pains and joys of the here and now."

—Henri Nouwen

Let me tell you about the day I realized I didn't want to be still.

I had blocked off a morning for solitude and prayer. No agenda, no sermon prep, no counseling appointments. Just time with God. I had driven to a quiet spot, turned off my phone, opened my Bible, and sat down to wait on the Lord.

Within five minutes, I was making a mental list of everything I should be doing instead.

Within ten minutes, I had convinced myself this was a waste of time and I should get back to "real" ministry.

Within fifteen minutes, I was in my car driving back to the office, feeling relieved that I could get back to being productive.

And then it hit me: I didn't actually want to be still. I wanted to *want* to be still. I liked the idea of stillness. I appreciated the theology of contemplative prayer. I could preach about the importance of being with God.

But when faced with actual stillness—with the reality of doing nothing, producing nothing, accomplishing nothing, just being present with God—I fled.

Not because I didn't love God. But because something in me—something powerful, something I didn't fully understand—was violently opposed to stillness.

That something was my flesh. And it was at war with my spirit.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

THE BATTLE FOR STILLNESS

Galatians 5:17 - The Opposition Within

Paul writes, "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please" (Galatians 5:17, NASB).

This is not poetic language. This is a description of actual warfare. The flesh—that part of us that operates independently from God, that trusts in our own strength, that finds identity in our performance—is in active opposition to the Spirit.

Not neutral toward the Spirit. Not indifferent to the Spirit. Not just slightly resistant. In opposition. At war. Actively fighting against.

And here's what we need to understand: stillness is a spiritual discipline. It's something the Spirit calls us to. Which means the flesh will oppose it. Violently. Consistently. Relentlessly.

This is why stillness is so hard. It's not just difficult because you're busy or distracted. It's difficult because something in you is actively fighting against it. Something in you experiences stillness as a threat and will do everything possible to prevent it.

Romans 7:18-19 - The Struggle of the Will

Paul gets even more specific about this internal battle: "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want" (Romans 7:18-19, NASB).

This is the frustrating reality every Christian knows: you want to do what's right, but you end up doing what's wrong. You have the desire, but not the follow-through. You know what you should do, but you do the opposite.

This is exactly what happens with stillness.

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You want to be still. You know you need it. You understand the theology. You've read the books. You've heard the sermons. You have the desire.

But when it comes to actually doing it—actually sitting still, actually ceasing activity, actually being present with God—you can't. Or you don't. Or you do it for five minutes and then find a reason to stop.

The willing is present, but the doing is not.

This is the flesh at work. This is the opposition Paul is describing. This is why spiritual disciplines feel so difficult.

Why Spiritual Disciplines Feel Like Death

Here's the truth we need to face: spiritual disciplines feel like death because they are death.

They're death to the flesh. Death to the ego. Death to the false self. Death to all the ways we try to be god instead of trusting God.

Every time you choose stillness over activity, you're killing something. Every time you cease striving and rest in God, you're putting to death your addiction to control. Every time you sit quietly instead of staying busy, you're crucifying your need to prove yourself through productivity.

This is why it's so hard. This is why your flesh fights it so violently. Because at some level—deeper than conscious thought—your flesh knows that stillness is death.

Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20, NASB).

Crucifixion. Death. This is the path of following Christ. Not improvement. Not self-actualization. Not becoming a better version of yourself.

Death. The old self must die so the new self can live.

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And stillness is one of the primary tools God uses to accomplish this death. Because in stillness, you can't hide. You can't perform. You can't prove your worth through activity. You can't maintain the illusion of control.

You just die. And Christ lives.

The flesh hates this. Which is why the flesh will fight stillness with everything it has.

The Nature of This Battle

Understanding that there's a battle helps explain why stillness is so difficult. You're not crazy. You're not weak. You're not less spiritual than other people.

You're at war. And the enemy is not external—it's internal. It's your own flesh fighting against what the Spirit is calling you to.

This battle will manifest in different ways:

Restlessness: An inability to sit still, a constant urge to move, to do, to be productive.

Rationalization: Convincing yourself that stillness is selfish, that you don't have time, that other things are more important.

Guilt: Feeling guilty for "doing nothing" when there's so much that needs to be done.

Anxiety: Becoming anxious when you stop being busy, as if the world will fall apart without your constant activity.

Boredom: Experiencing stillness as boring, empty, a waste of time.

Distraction: Finding your mind wandering to a thousand other things the moment you try to be still.

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All of these are the flesh fighting against the Spirit. All of these are your old self resisting its death. All of these are the internal opposition Paul describes.

And here's what you need to know: this battle doesn't mean you're doing it wrong. This battle means you're doing it right. The very fact that you're experiencing resistance is evidence that you're engaging in something that threatens the flesh.

If stillness came easily, if your flesh didn't resist it, you should be concerned. Because that would mean it's not actually accomplishing what it needs to accomplish—the death of the old self.

The battle is the proof that transformation is possible. The resistance is evidence that something real and significant is at stake.

THE PRIDE OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY

But let's get more specific about what the flesh is protecting. What exactly is being threatened by stillness? What is the flesh fighting so hard to preserve?

Pride. Specifically, the pride of self-sufficiency.

Proverbs 3:5-6 - The Command We Resist

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5-6, NASB).

This sounds simple. Trust God. Don't trust yourself. Acknowledge Him. Simple, right?

But notice what it requires: you must stop leaning on your own understanding. You must release your grip on your own wisdom, your own plans, your own ability to figure things out.

This is terrifying to the flesh. Because the flesh's entire existence is built on self-reliance. On the belief that you can handle it, you can figure it out, you can manage your life without depending on anyone else—including God.

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The flesh says: I am sufficient. I can do this. I don't need help. I'll figure it out. I've got this.

And God says: No, you don't. Trust Me. Lean on Me. Acknowledge that you need Me.

Stillness forces this issue. Because when you're still, you're not doing anything. You're not figuring anything out. You're not solving any problems. You're not moving forward with your plans.

You're just being dependent. Trusting. Waiting. Acknowledging your need.

And the flesh absolutely hates this.

Our Addiction to Self-Reliance

I'm going to say something that might sting: many of us are addicted to self-reliance.

We don't call it that. We call it being responsible, being mature, being independent, being capable. We see it as a virtue—and in some ways, it is. God doesn't call us to be lazy or irresponsible.

But there's a difference between responsible stewardship and addictive self-reliance. There's a difference between healthy independence and the refusal to depend on anyone, including God.

Many of us—especially those of us in ministry or leadership—have built our entire identity on being the one who doesn't need help. The one who has it together. The one others can depend on. The one who's strong enough to carry the weight.

We've made a virtue out of never being needy. Never being weak. Never being dependent.

And we call this maturity. We call this strength. We call this faithfulness.

But God calls it pride. And it's the kind of pride that keeps us from truly knowing Him.

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Because you cannot know God deeply while clinging to self-sufficiency. You cannot experience His provision while insisting you don't need provision. You cannot receive His strength while pretending you have your own strength.

How I Learned This the Hard Way

I built my entire ministry on self-sufficiency. I didn't call it that, of course. I called it "being strong for others." I called it "not being a burden." I called it "leading well."

But underneath all the spiritual language, here's what I really believed: I can handle this on my own. I don't need help. I'm strong enough. I'm capable enough. I'm sufficient.

This worked until it didn't. Until the weight became too much. Until the responsibilities exceeded my capacity. Until the crisis came that I couldn't handle.

And then I broke.

My burnout wasn't just physical or emotional exhaustion. It was the collapse of my self-sufficiency. It was the demolition of my pride. It was God saying, "You cannot do this on your own. You never could. And I let you keep trying until you finally understand that you need Me."

The stillness I was forced into during recovery was excruciating. Not because it was boring or uncomfortable. But because it exposed my helplessness. It revealed my dependence. It stripped away the illusion that I was sufficient.

I couldn't produce. I couldn't perform. I couldn't do anything to prove my worth or demonstrate my capability.

I could only be dependent. Only receive. Only trust.

My flesh fought this every single day. Every day, I wanted to get back to being productive, to proving I was okay, to demonstrating I was still capable.

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And every day, God said: No. Be still. Stay dependent. Learn that you need Me.

Stillness Exposes Our Helplessness

This is why stillness is so threatening. It exposes what we've been hiding: we are not sufficient. We cannot do it on our own. We are fundamentally, utterly, completely dependent on God.

When you're busy, you can hide this reality. You can create the illusion of self-sufficiency through constant activity. You can convince yourself that you're managing, handling, succeeding.

But when you're still—when you stop doing, stop producing, stop accomplishing—the illusion crumbles. You're left with the stark reality: apart from Him, you can do nothing (John 15:5).

Nothing. Not just "very little." Not "less than you'd like." Nothing.

Your productivity is His grace working through you.

Your strength is His power made perfect in your weakness.

Your wisdom is His Spirit teaching you.

Your capacity is His resources flowing through you.

Your sufficiency is His sufficiency, not yours.

Stillness forces you to face this. And the flesh hates it. Because the flesh's entire identity is built on the lie of self-sufficiency.

The Pride That Masquerades as Virtue

Here's what makes this so insidious: self-sufficient pride often masquerades as spiritual virtue.

You're not proud—you're just responsible.

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You're not refusing to depend on God—you're just being a good steward.

You're not clinging to control—you're just doing your part.

You're not self-reliant—you're just mature and capable.

But underneath all these justifications is the same core issue: you believe you can do it without fully depending on God. You believe your sufficiency is found in yourself, not in Him.

And stillness threatens to expose this. Which is why you resist it. Why you rationalize it away. Why you find a thousand reasons to stay busy instead of being still.

Because if you get still—if you stop performing and producing and proving—you'll have to face the truth: you're not sufficient. You never were. You never will be.

You need God. Not just as a helper in your agenda. But as the source of everything. The foundation. The supply. The sufficiency.

And admitting that feels like death to the flesh. Because it is.

THE NEED TO BE NEEDED

There's one more layer we need to excavate. One more obstacle the flesh uses to resist stillness. And it's deeply embedded in those of us who serve in ministry.

The need to be needed.

Ministry as Ego Gratification

I need to say this as clearly and directly as I can: ministry can become a form of ego gratification.

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Yes, you read that right. The very thing we think is most spiritual—serving God, helping people, doing ministry—can actually be feeding our ego. Meeting our need for significance. Providing the validation we crave.

We do ministry for God. But we also do ministry for ourselves. For what it gives us. For how it makes us feel. For the identity it provides. For the sense of purpose and importance and significance.

And here's the dangerous part: because it's religious activity, we don't recognize it as ego. We don't see it as selfish. We think we're being selfless, sacrificial, giving.

But often—more often than we want to admit—we're actually feeding a deep need to be needed. A desperate craving for significance. A hunger to matter, to be important, to be indispensable.

This is the messiah complex. And it's rampant in ministry.

The Messiah Complex

The messiah complex is the belief—usually unconscious—that people need you. That the ministry will fail without you. That you are indispensable. That your constant availability, your tireless service, your sacrificial giving is what's holding everything together.

You can recognize the messiah complex by these symptoms:

You can't say no to ministry opportunities without feeling guilty.

You can't take time off without worrying about what will happen without you.

You feel responsible for everyone's spiritual wellbeing.

You derive your worth from being needed by others.

You feel threatened when others are capable and don't need your help.

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You experience anxiety when you're not busy serving.

You struggle to celebrate when others succeed without you.

You feel most alive when you're needed, wanted, called upon.

This is not servanthood. This is ego dressed in religious clothing. This is pride masquerading as humility. This is the need to be god in someone's life instead of trusting God to be God.

And stillness threatens this completely.

What Stillness Reveals

When you practice stillness—when you step away from ministry, when you say no to needs, when you stop being available 24/7—something shocking happens:

Things continue without you. The ministry doesn't collapse. People don't fall apart. God somehow manages to work even when you're not working.

This should be freeing. But for those of us with the messiah complex, it's devastating.

Because it exposes the truth: you're not as needed as you thought you were. You're not indispensable. People can survive without your constant intervention. God can accomplish His purposes without your tireless activity.

During my forced stillness after burnout, I had to watch my church continue without me. I had to watch other people step up and serve. I had to watch God work through others.

And you know what I felt? Not relief. Not joy. Not gratitude.

Jealousy. Resentment. A sick sense of being replaced.

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Because my identity had been so wrapped up in being needed. My sense of worth had been so tied to my ministry. My ego had been so invested in being the one people called, the one who knew what to do, the one who was always there.

Stillness stripped that away. And it was excruciating.

But it was also necessary. Because I needed to face the truth: my need to be needed was not about serving God. It was about serving my ego. It was about finding in ministry what I should have been finding in my relationship with God.

John 3:30 - The Decrease That Terrifies Us

John the Baptist said something that should define all ministry: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30, NASB).

This is the opposite of the messiah complex. This is the recognition that it's not about you. That your job is not to be indispensable but to point to the One who is. That your goal is not to be needed but to help people need Jesus.

But here's the problem: decrease feels like death. Becoming less feels like losing. Stepping back feels like failure.

Because the flesh wants to increase. The ego wants to be needed. The false self wants to be important.

And ministry provides a perfect cover for this desire. You can feed your ego while looking spiritual. You can pursue your own significance while claiming to serve God's kingdom. You can build your identity around being needed while calling it sacrificial service.

Until God says: Decrease. Be still. Step back. Let Me be God.

And then you discover how much of your ministry was actually about you.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

The Test of Stillness

Here's the test: Can you step away from ministry without anxiety?

Can you say no to a need without feeling guilty?

Can you watch someone else succeed in ministry without feeling threatened?

Can you be still—truly still, not just taking a vacation—without feeling like you're abandoning your calling?

Can you trust that God can accomplish His purposes without your constant activity?

If the answer is no, you have a messiah complex. You've made yourself indispensable in your own mind. You've elevated your role above what it should be. You've confused faithfulness with constant availability.

And stillness will expose this. It will reveal how much of your ministry is about you, not about Him. It will show you where you've been finding your identity in being needed instead of in being loved by God.

This revelation is painful. But it's also liberating.

Because you were never meant to be the messiah. You were never meant to be indispensable. You were never meant to find your worth in being needed.

You were meant to decrease so He could increase. You were meant to point to Him, not to yourself. You were meant to find your identity in being His beloved, not in being needed by others.

The Freedom on the Other Side

Here's what I discovered through my forced stillness: when you stop needing to be needed, ministry becomes joy instead of burden.

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When you're not constantly proving your worth through service, you can actually serve from overflow instead of obligation.

When you're not finding your identity in being indispensable, you can celebrate when others are capable and gifted.

When you're not driven by the messiah complex, you can rest without guilt and say no without anxiety.

When you decrease, He increases. And that's actually what you wanted all along—not to be great yourself, but to see Him made great.

But you can only get there through the death of the need to be needed. And stillness is the tool God uses to accomplish that death.

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE IN THE MIDST OF IT ALL

Henri Nouwen wrote, "The spiritual life is not a life before, after, or beyond our everyday existence. No, the spiritual life can only be real when it is lived in the midst of the pains and joys of the here and now."

This is crucial to understand: the battle with the flesh is not something you fight once and then move on from. It's ongoing. It's daily. It's in the midst of your everyday life.

You will never reach a point where stillness comes easily, where the flesh stops resisting, where self-sufficiency no longer tempts you, where the need to be needed disappears completely.

The battle continues. The flesh keeps fighting. The pride keeps resurfacing. The messiah complex keeps trying to reassert itself.

But here's the good news: you're not fighting alone. The Spirit is at work. And every time you choose stillness in the face of the flesh's resistance, you're allowing the Spirit to win. You're participating in your own transformation. You're dying to self so Christ can live.

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The Daily Choice

This is why stillness must become a regular practice, not a one-time decision. Because the battle is daily.

Every day, the flesh will resist.

Every day, your self-sufficiency will try to reassert itself.

Every day, your need to be needed will try to pull you back into constant activity.

And every day, you must choose stillness. Choose dependence. Choose to let Him increase while you decrease.

Not because it's easy. Not because it feels good. Not because you've mastered it.

But because it's the way of death and resurrection. It's the way of the cross. It's the way of following Jesus.

The Promise

But here's the promise: every time you die, you rise. Every time you decrease, He increases. Every time you acknowledge your helplessness, you experience His sufficiency.

The battle is real. The resistance is fierce. The flesh will keep fighting.

But the Spirit is stronger. And He's fighting for you, not against you. He's working in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).

You're not alone in this battle. You're not fighting in your own strength. You're partnering with the Spirit, who is already at work, already accomplishing what needs to be accomplished.

Your job is simply to keep choosing stillness. Keep dying to self. Keep letting go of control. Keep acknowledging your need. Keep decreasing so He can increase.

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The flesh will rage. Let it rage.

Your pride will resist. Let it be exposed.

Your need to be needed will fight. Let it die.

And in that death—in that stillness, in that surrender, in that decrease—you will discover something worth infinitely more than what you've lost:

You will discover Christ. Not just information about Him. Not just theology about Him. But Him.

And He is enough.

More than enough.

He is everything.

"For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another." (Galatians 5:17, NASB)

The battle is real.

But so is the victory.

Keep fighting.

Keep choosing stillness.

Keep dying to self.

He must increase.

You must decrease. This is the way.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

CHAPTER 8: HUNGER AND THIRST - DO WE REALLY WANT GOD?

"We have been snared in the coils of a spurious logic which insists that if we have found Him we need no more seek Him."

—A.W. Tozer

There's a question I've been avoiding. A question that makes me uncomfortable every time I think about it. A question that cuts through all my theological explanations, all my spiritual excuses, all my religious activity.

The question is this: Do I actually want God?

Not do I believe in God. Not do I serve God. Not do I know things about God or do things for God.

Do I *want* Him? Do I hunger for Him? Do I thirst for Him? Is He what I'm truly seeking, or have I settled for something less?

This is the question underneath all the others. Because if we don't truly want God—if we're not genuinely hungry for Him—then nothing else matters. All our talk about stillness, all our attempts at spiritual disciplines, all our religious activity becomes empty performance.

You cannot pursue what you don't desire. You cannot seek what you don't want. You cannot find what you're not actually looking for.

So before we go any further, we need to face this uncomfortable question: Do we really want God? Or have we become content with spiritual mediocrity? Have we settled for knowing about God instead of actually knowing Him? Have we accepted a comfortable faith that doesn't cost us anything or change us deeply?

This is the question Jesus asks. And it's the question we must answer honestly if we want to move forward.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

THE QUESTION JESUS ASKS

John 5:6 - Do You Wish to Get Well?

There was a man by the pool of Bethesda who had been sick for thirty-eight years. Thirty-eight years of being paralyzed, unable to walk, unable to work, unable to live a normal life. He spent his days by a pool where people believed an angel would stir the waters and whoever got in first would be healed.

Jesus came to him and asked a question that seems almost cruel in its obviousness: "Do you wish to get well?" (John 5:6, NASB).

Of course he wants to get well. What kind of question is that? Who would choose to remain paralyzed? Who would prefer sickness over health?

But notice the man's response. He doesn't say "Yes!" He doesn't say "Of course I want to be healed!" Instead, he makes an excuse: "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me" (John 5:7, NASB).

He's been there for thirty-eight years. And he's gotten comfortable. He knows this life. He knows how to survive as a sick man. He knows where to sit, how to beg, what to expect. His entire identity is built around being the paralyzed man by the pool.

And Jesus is asking: Do you actually want to change? Because healing will cost you everything you've built your life around. It will require you to stop being the sick man and become someone new. It will demand that you give up the comfortable identity you've constructed and embrace an uncertain future.

Do you wish to get well? Or have you become so comfortable with your sickness that healing is actually threatening?

The Uncomfortable Application

Here's the uncomfortable truth: many of us have become comfortable with our spiritual paralysis.

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We know how to be the spiritually mediocre Christian. We know how to maintain a respectable faith without it costing us too much. We know how to look religious without experiencing real transformation. We know how to be busy with spiritual activity without actually being with God.

And we've gotten comfortable with it.

We complain about our dry prayer life, but we don't actually want to do what it takes to change it. We lament our lack of intimacy with God, but we fill our schedules with everything except time with Him. We say we long for His presence, but we avoid the stillness where His presence is found.

Jesus' question to us is the same one He asked the paralyzed man: Do you wish to get well?

Do you actually want to change? Do you truly desire intimacy with God? Are you willing to give up your comfortable spiritual mediocrity for the demanding reality of knowing God deeply?

Or are you content to stay by the pool, making excuses, explaining why you can't get in the water, maintaining the familiar identity of someone who *wants* to be well but never actually gets healed?

The Comfort of the Familiar

There's a strange comfort in spiritual mediocrity. It's predictable. It's manageable. It doesn't require too much. It doesn't cost everything.

You can maintain your comfortable life, your controlled schedule, your manageable faith. You can be religious enough to feel good about yourself without being so devoted that it disrupts everything. You can have God as an accessory to your life without making Him the center.

But real intimacy with God—the kind that comes from being still in His presence, the kind that transforms you completely, the kind that costs everything—that's uncomfortable. That's unpredictable. That's uncontrollable.

That kind of knowing God requires you to give up your comfort, your control, your familiar identity. It requires you to become someone new. It demands transformation, not just information.

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And transformation is uncomfortable.

So we stay by the pool. We make excuses. We explain why we can't quite get to the healing water. We maintain our spiritual paralysis while claiming we want to be well.

The Cost of Transformation

Jesus is asking: Are you willing to pay the cost?

Are you willing to give up your comfortable mediocrity for demanding intimacy?

Are you willing to trade your predictable routine for transformative stillness?

Are you willing to surrender your controlled faith for a wild encounter with the living God?

Are you willing to stop being who you've been to become who He's calling you to be?

Because that's what getting well requires. That's what true spiritual health demands. That's what knowing God costs.

The question stands: Do you wish to get well?

Not "Do you wish you were well?" Not "Do you like the idea of being well?" Do you *wish* to get well—are you willing to do what it takes, pay what it costs, surrender what must be surrendered?

Your answer to this question will determine everything else.

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER

Matthew 5:6 - The Beatitude We Misunderstand

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matthew 5:6, NASB).

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

We often read this as a nice spiritual sentiment. A gentle encouragement. A comforting promise.

But do you understand what Jesus is actually saying? Do you know what real hunger and thirst feel like?

Real hunger is not "I'd like a snack." Real hunger is consuming, desperate, all-consuming need. It's when you haven't eaten for days and food becomes the only thing you can think about. It's when your body screams for nourishment and everything else fades into the background.

Real thirst is not "I could use a drink." Real thirst is life-threatening desperation. It's when you've been in the desert without water and your throat is parched, your lips are cracked, your body is failing. It's when water becomes more valuable than gold because without it, you die.

This is the intensity Jesus is describing. This is the kind of desperate need He's talking about. Not mild interest. Not casual desire. Not "I'd like to know God better if it's convenient."

Hunger and thirst that will not be denied. Need that cannot be ignored. Desperation that consumes everything else.

And Jesus says: Blessed are those who experience *that level* of hunger and thirst for righteousness. For God. For intimacy with Him.

Why? Because they're the only ones who will be satisfied. They're the only ones desperate enough to seek Him until they find Him. They're the only ones who won't settle for substitutes.

Psalm 42:1-2 - The Desperation of the Soul

The psalmist writes, "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?" (Psalm 42:1-2, NASB).

Picture a deer in the wilderness, pursued by hunters, running for its life. It's exhausted. Its mouth is dry. Its body is failing. It reaches a stream and drinks desperately, gulping water as if its life depends on it—because it does.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

This is the image. This is the intensity. This is what hungering and thirsting for God should look like.

Not polite spiritual interest. Not mild curiosity about deeper things. Not casual desire for a better prayer life.

Panting. Desperate. Life-or-death need.

When was the last time your soul panted for God like this? When did you last feel desperate for His presence? When did knowing Him feel like a matter of life and death?

The Intensity of Spiritual Desperation

Here's the honest truth: most of us don't feel this kind of desperation for God. And this is a problem. A huge problem.

We feel desperate for a lot of things:

- Desperate for financial security
- Desperate for relational fulfillment
- Desperate for career success
- Desperate for our children to be okay
- Desperate for health, comfort, stability

But desperate for God? Panting for His presence like a deer for water? Hungering and thirsting for Him with all-consuming need?

That's rare. That's uncommon. That's what's missing in most of our spiritual lives.

And here's why this matters: you will seek only what you desperately need. You will pursue only what you cannot live without. You will sacrifice for only what you truly hunger for.

If you don't hunger for God—truly, desperately, consumingly hunger for Him—you won't seek Him. You won't pursue stillness. You won't make time for His presence. You won't pay the cost of knowing Him.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Because you don't actually need Him. Not desperately. Not in the life-or-death way that drives real seeking.

You need Him theologically. You believe you should want Him spiritually. You think you ought to desire Him religiously.

But you don't actually hunger for Him. Not really. Not the way the deer pants for water.

When God Becomes Optional

Here's how you know God has become optional in your life: you can go days without thinking about Him, without seeking Him, without spending time in His presence, and not feel desperate.

You can fill your life with everything except God, and still feel relatively okay. You can be busy with work, family, entertainment, even ministry, and not feel the aching emptiness of His absence.

You've learned to survive without Him. You've figured out how to manage your life without His constant presence. You've developed substitutes that seem to satisfy.

And so the hunger dies. The thirst dries up. The desperation fades.

And you become spiritually content with spiritual mediocrity. You become comfortable with knowing about God without truly knowing Him. You settle for a faith that doesn't cost much and doesn't change much.

This is the danger Jesus is warning against. This is why He pronounces blessing specifically on those who hunger and thirst. Because they're the exception, not the rule. They're the ones who haven't settled. The ones who haven't become comfortable. The ones who are still desperate for what they were created for.

The question is: Are you one of them? Do you hunger and thirst for God with this kind of intensity? Or have you lost your appetite for the very thing your soul most needs?

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

COUNTERFEIT HUNGERS

But here's the problem: we're always hungry. Always thirsty. Always seeking something to satisfy the emptiness inside.

The question is not whether we hunger. The question is what we hunger for.

Jeremiah 2:13 - Broken Cisterns

God says through Jeremiah, "For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13, NASB).

This is stunning imagery. God is the fountain of living waters—fresh, pure, life-giving, never-ending. He's the source of everything we need, everything we're thirsty for, everything that can truly satisfy.

And we forsake Him. We turn away from the fountain. We walk away from the source.

Why? To dig our own cisterns. To create our own sources of satisfaction. To find fulfillment in things we can control, manage, achieve.

But here's the problem: our cisterns are broken. They can't hold water. They can't satisfy. They can't deliver what they promise.

Yet we keep digging. We keep trying. We keep going back to the broken cisterns, hoping this time they'll finally satisfy, this time they'll hold water, this time they'll give us what we're desperate for.

They never do. They never can. They're broken.

How We Substitute Lesser Things for God

What are these broken cisterns? What are we substituting for God?

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Success. We hunger for achievement, for accomplishment, for climbing the ladder. We think if we just reach that next level, get that promotion, build that ministry, achieve that goal—then we'll finally feel satisfied, significant, fulfilled.

The cistern is broken. Success never satisfies. There's always another level, another goal, another achievement. The hunger remains.

Approval. We thirst for validation, for recognition, for people thinking well of us. We think if we can just get enough likes, enough praise, enough affirmation—then we'll finally feel secure, valued, worthy.

The cistern is broken. Human approval is fickle. It changes. It's never enough. The thirst remains.

Relationships. We hunger for human connection, for intimacy, for someone to complete us. We think if we can just find the right person, have the perfect family, be surrounded by good friends—then we'll finally feel loved, known, satisfied.

The cistern is broken. No human relationship can satisfy the God-shaped hunger in your soul. The emptiness remains.

Pleasure. We thirst for experiences, for entertainment, for the next exciting thing. We think if we can just have more fun, more adventure, more sensory satisfaction—then we'll finally feel alive, fulfilled, happy.

The cistern is broken. Pleasure fades. The high wears off. You need more and more to feel less and less. The thirst remains.

Ministry. Yes, even ministry. We hunger for spiritual productivity, for making a difference, for building something significant for God. We think if we can just serve more, impact more, accomplish more for the kingdom—then we'll finally feel purposeful, valuable, pleasing to God.

The cistern is broken. Ministry without intimacy is empty activity. The hunger remains.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Ecclesiastes: Vanity of Vanities

The writer of Ecclesiastes understood this deeply. He tried everything:

"I said to myself, 'Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.' And behold, it too was futility" (Ecclesiastes 2:1, NASB).

He tried pleasure. It was empty.

"Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 2:11, NASB).

He tried achievement. It was meaningless.

He tried wisdom, wealth, relationships, legacy. He tasted everything life could offer. He drank from every cistern available.

And his conclusion? "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 1:2, NASB).

All the substitutes are broken. All the counterfeits fail. All the lesser things leave you empty.

Because they were never meant to satisfy. They're not bad things—many of them are good things. But they're not God things. They cannot do what only God can do. They cannot satisfy what only God can satisfy.

Why We Keep Going Back

So why do we keep going back to the broken cisterns? Why do we keep trying to satisfy soul-hunger with temporary things?

Because it's easier. It's more immediate. It's more controllable.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Going to God requires stillness. It requires waiting. It requires surrender. It requires time and patience and faith.

But the broken cisterns? They offer immediate gratification. Quick fixes. Instant satisfaction—even if it doesn't last.

You can achieve something today. You can get approval right now. You can have pleasure immediately. You can stay busy with ministry this very moment.

But being still before God? That's slower. Less predictable. Less controllable. You can't manufacture intimacy with God the way you can manufacture success or pleasure.

So we take the path of least resistance. We drink from broken cisterns. We try to satisfy our God-hunger with God-substitutes.

And we wonder why we're still thirsty.

CULTIVATING HOLY DESIRE

But here's the good news—the almost unbelievable good news: your hunger for God can be cultivated. Your thirst can be awakened. Your desire can be deepened.

You don't have to stay in spiritual mediocrity. You don't have to remain content with broken cisterns. You can develop a desperate hunger for God Himself.

Psalm 73:25 - Whom Have I in Heaven But You?

Asaph writes, "Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth" (Psalm 73:25, NASB).

This is exclusive desire. Single-minded hunger. Undivided thirst.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Not "I desire You plus other things." Not "You're my top priority among many priorities." But "Besides You, I desire nothing."

This is the kind of hunger we need. And here's the key: Asaph didn't start with this. If you read the whole psalm, you see he struggled. He envied the wicked. He questioned whether godliness was worth it. He was tempted by the broken cisterns.

But then he says, "When I came into the sanctuary of God, then I understood their end" (Psalm 73:17, NASB).

He entered God's presence. He experienced God in the sanctuary. And in that experience, his desires were reordered. His hunger was redirected. His thirst was awakened for the right thing.

Intimacy with God changed what he wanted. Presence with God reoriented his desires. Knowing God made everything else look worthless by comparison.

This is how holy desire is cultivated: through encounter with God Himself.

1 Chronicles 16:11 - Seek His Face Continually

"Seek the LORD and His strength; seek His face continually" (1 Chronicles 16:11, NASB).

Notice the command: seek His *face*. Not just His hand (what He can give you). Not just His power (what He can do for you). His face. His presence. Him.

And notice the frequency: continually. Not occasionally. Not when it's convenient. Not when you're in crisis. Continually.

This is how you develop hunger: you keep seeking. You keep coming to His presence. You keep spending time with Him. You keep choosing stillness even when you don't feel like it.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Because here's what happens: taste creates appetite. The more you experience God's presence, the more you want it. The more you encounter His love, the more you crave it. The more you know Him, the more you desire to know Him.

But you have to start. You have to come. You have to seek His face even when you're not sure you want to.

Taste and See

The psalmist says, "O taste and see that the LORD is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!" (Psalm 34:8, NASB).

You have to taste before you can see that He's good. You have to experience before you can understand. You have to encounter before you can develop appetite.

This is why stillness is so crucial. It's where you taste. It's where you experience. It's where you encounter.

You can read about how good God is. You can hear testimonies of His goodness. You can study theology about His character.

But until you taste—until you actually experience His presence in stillness—you won't develop the hunger. You won't awaken the thirst. You won't cultivate the desire.

I didn't understand this for years. I thought I should want God more. I felt guilty for not hungering for Him like I should. I beat myself up for choosing broken cisterns over the fountain of living water.

But I was trying to manufacture desire through willpower. I was trying to create hunger through guilt. It doesn't work that way.

Hunger comes from tasting. Thirst comes from drinking. Desire comes from experiencing.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

When I finally got still—when I finally stopped my frantic activity and actually spent time in God's presence—something shifted. The more I experienced Him, the more I wanted Him. The more I tasted His goodness, the less satisfying the broken cisterns became.

Presence created appetite. Encounter awakened hunger. Stillness cultivated desire.

The Prayer: "Lord, Give Me a Greater Hunger for You"

This is the prayer we need to pray: "Lord, give me a greater hunger for You."

Not "Lord, help me do better." Not "Lord, make me more disciplined." Not "Lord, help me want what I should want."

"Lord, give me hunger. Awaken thirst in me. Create in me desperate desire for You."

This is a prayer God loves to answer. Because He wants you to want Him. He desires that you desire Him. He longs for you to hunger and thirst for Him.

And here's the promise: "You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13, NASB).

When you search with all your heart—with desperate hunger, with consuming thirst, with passionate desire—you will find Him.

Not maybe. Not possibly. You will find Him.

God is not playing hide-and-seek with you. He's not making it difficult to find Him. He's waiting for you to actually seek Him with the intensity He deserves.

When you do—when you hunger and thirst with desperation—you will be satisfied. Jesus promised it. God guaranteed it.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

A.W. Tozer's Warning

Tozer wrote something that should haunt every comfortable Christian: "We have been snared in the coils of a spurious logic which insists that if we have found Him we need no more seek Him."

This is the lie we believe: I've been saved. I've found God. I can stop seeking now. I can maintain this level of relationship without continued pursuit. I can coast on past experiences.

But finding God is not the end of seeking. It's the beginning. Salvation is not graduation from pursuit. It's enrollment in a lifelong journey of deeper and deeper intimacy.

You never stop seeking. You never stop hungering. You never stop thirsting. Not because you haven't found Him, but because the more you find, the more you want to find. The more you taste, the more you want to taste. The more you know, the more you want to know.

This is what being satisfied looks like: not the end of hunger, but hunger that's constantly being satisfied in a way that makes you want more.

Like a meal that fills you but makes you excited for the next meal. Like water that quenches your thirst but makes you appreciate water more. Like love that satisfies but deepens your capacity for more love.

This is the paradox of knowing God: the more you're satisfied, the more you hunger. The more you find, the more you seek. The more you taste, the more you want to taste.

Henry Ward Beecher's Truth

Beecher said, "The unthankful heart discovers no mercies; but the thankful heart will find, in every hour, some heavenly blessings."

Here's what he understood: your posture determines what you perceive. Your heart attitude affects what you see. Your thankfulness awakens you to God's presence.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

The unthankful heart—the heart that takes God for granted, that's comfortable with mediocrity, that's not desperately hungry—that heart misses God's mercies. They're there, but the heart doesn't perceive them.

But the thankful heart—the heart that's awake, that's hungry, that's paying attention—that heart discovers God's blessings constantly. In every hour. In ordinary moments. In the midst of everyday life.

Gratitude cultivates hunger. Thanksgiving awakens desire. Recognizing God's goodness makes you want more of Him.

This is practical: start thanking God. Start noticing His mercies. Start paying attention to His blessings. Start cultivating a grateful heart.

And as you do, you'll find your hunger for Him growing. Your thirst for His presence deepening. Your desire for intimacy with Him intensifying.

THE HONEST QUESTION REMAINS

So we come back to where we started: Do you wish to get well?

Do you want to move from spiritual mediocrity to desperate hunger?

Do you want to trade broken cisterns for the fountain of living water?

Do you want to hunger and thirst for God with the intensity that Jesus pronounces blessed?

Or are you comfortable where you are? Content with knowing about God without truly knowing Him? Settled into a manageable faith that doesn't cost too much or change too much?

The question requires an honest answer. Not the answer you think you should give. Not the religious answer. The real answer.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Because if you don't actually want God—if you're content with your spiritual comfort, if you're satisfied with broken cisterns, if you're not hungry enough to seek Him desperately—then nothing else in this book will matter.

You can't pursue what you don't desire. You can't seek what you don't want. You can't find what you're not actually looking for.

The Path Forward

But if your honest answer is "Yes"—even a weak, tentative, "I think I want to want Him more"—then there's hope. There's a path forward.

The path forward is this:

Start seeking His face. Even when you don't feel like it. Even when you're not sure you want to. Start spending time in His presence. Start being still.

Pray for hunger. Ask God to give you greater desire for Him. Ask Him to awaken thirst in you. Ask Him to create holy hunger.

Taste and see. Don't just read about God. Experience Him. Don't just study His character. Encounter His presence. Don't just learn theology. Know Him personally.

Stop drinking from broken cisterns. Identify what you're trying to satisfy your soul-hunger with. Recognize the substitutes. Stop going back to what can't satisfy.

Cultivate gratitude. Thank God for His mercies. Notice His blessings. Recognize His presence. Let thanksgiving awaken your hunger for more of Him.

Keep seeking. Don't stop once you've had one encounter. Don't coast on past experiences. Keep pursuing. Keep hungering. Keep thirsting. Keep seeking His face continually.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

This is the way. This is how hunger is cultivated. This is how desire is awakened. This is how you move from spiritual mediocrity to desperate pursuit of God.

The Promise Still Stands

And here's the promise that makes all of this worth it:

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matthew 5:6, NASB).

You will be satisfied. Not maybe. Not hopefully. You will be.

When you hunger and thirst for God with this kind of intensity, when you seek Him with all your heart, when you pursue Him desperately—you will find Him. You will know Him. You will be satisfied.

Not with broken cisterns that hold no water. But with the fountain of living water that never runs dry.

Not with temporary pleasures that fade. But with eternal joy in His presence.

Not with substitutes that disappoint. But with God Himself, who is everything you've been searching for.

This is what's possible. This is what's available. This is what you were created for.

The question is: Do you want it?

Do you really want God? Or have you settled for less?

Your answer will determine everything.

"Do you wish to get well?" (John 5:6, NASB)

This is the question.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Everything depends on your answer.

What will you say?

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

CHAPTER 9: I HAVE SUFFERED THE LOSS OF ALL THINGS

"Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen, such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of God upon earth."

—John Wesley

There's a moment when you realize what knowing God will actually cost you.

Not what you thought it would cost. Not the sanitized, respectable version you were comfortable with. But the real cost. The everything cost. The lose-your-life cost.

For me, that moment came in a hospital room after my burnout. I was physically, emotionally, and spiritually bankrupt. Everything I had built—my reputation as a successful pastor, my identity as a strong leader, my carefully constructed image of having it together—all of it had collapsed.

And in that wreckage, God whispered a question that terrified me: "Are you willing to let all of it go? The ministry, the reputation, the need to be recognized, the drive to prove yourself? Are you willing to lose everything to simply know Me?"

I didn't answer right away. Because I knew if I said yes, there was no going back. Knowing God—truly knowing Him—would cost me everything I had been clinging to. Everything I had been using to define myself. Everything I thought I needed to survive.

The Apostle Paul faced this same moment. And his response became one of the most radical statements in Scripture. A statement that should haunt every comfortable Christian. A statement that exposes what we've made Christianity into versus what it actually is.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Let me take you through Paul's words carefully. Because in them, you'll find the cost of knowing God. And in that cost, you'll find something worth more than everything you'll give up.

PAUL'S RADICAL REORIENTATION

Philippians 3:7-11 - The Full Passage

Let's read Paul's words in full. Don't rush past them. Let them sink in:

"But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead." (Philippians 3:7-11, NASB)

This is not gentle spiritual language. This is not a nice sentiment about prioritizing God. This is radical. This is revolutionary. This is a complete reorientation of everything Paul valued, pursued, and lived for.

Let's break it down.

Whatever Things Were Gain

In the verses before this passage, Paul lists his credentials:

- Circumcised on the eighth day
- Of the nation of Israel
- Of the tribe of Benjamin
- A Hebrew of Hebrews
- A Pharisee
- A persecutor of the church
- Blameless according to the Law

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

These weren't trivial things. These were everything in his culture. His pedigree. His education. His religious achievements. His moral righteousness. His reputation. His identity.

These were "gain"—things that gave him status, significance, security, identity. Things that proved his worth. Things that defined who he was. Things that gave him value in the eyes of others and in his own eyes.

Paul had it all. He was at the top. He was successful, respected, righteous. He was everything his culture said a person should be.

And he counted it all as loss.

Loss for the Sake of Christ

Not just "less important than Christ." Not "secondary to Christ." Not "I'm adding Christ to my list of valuable things."

Loss. Aoss. Damage. Forfeit. Things he actively rejected, threw away, counted as worthless.

For the sake of Christ. To gain Christ. To know Christ.

He performed a spiritual cost-benefit analysis and concluded: Everything I once counted as valuable is actually worthless compared to knowing Christ.

But he doesn't stop there.

More Than That

"More than that..."

Paul intensifies his statement. As if what he just said wasn't radical enough, he goes further.

"I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Not just the religious credentials he listed. Not just the achievements he enumerated. *All things*. Everything. Every possible thing that humans count as valuable. Every achievement, every possession, every relationship, every reputation, every comfort, every security.

All of it. Loss. Compared to knowing Christ.

The Surpassing Value

The Greek word for "surpassing" is *hyperballo*—to throw beyond, to exceed, to surpass. It's where we get our word "hyperbole."

But this isn't hyperbole. This is sober assessment of reality.

Knowing Christ Jesus has value that exceeds—that throws beyond—the value of everything else combined. It's not slightly more valuable. It's in a different category entirely. It makes everything else look worthless by comparison.

Paul is saying: I've done the math. I've weighed the options. I've compared knowing Christ to everything else life offers. And the value of knowing Him is so great that everything else becomes loss in comparison.

Suffered the Loss of All Things

This isn't theoretical. Paul isn't speaking hypothetically. He actually did it. He actually suffered the loss of all things.

Suffered. This wasn't easy. This wasn't painless. This wasn't a simple exchange. It was suffering. It was loss. It was costly.

He lost his reputation. His career. His standing in the community. His relationships with family and former colleagues. His identity as Saul the Pharisee. His security. His future. Everything.

And he calls it *rubbish*.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Rubbish - The Shocking Word

The Greek word Paul uses here is *skubalon*. It's a crude word. Translators sanitize it as "rubbish" or "refuse." But *skubalon* means garbage, dung, excrement. The stuff you throw in the trash or scrape off your shoe.

Paul is saying: Everything I once valued—my pedigree, my education, my achievements, my righteousness, my reputation—I now consider it garbage. Dung. Worthless waste.

Not because those things are inherently evil. But because compared to knowing Christ, they have no value. They're like holding onto trash while being offered treasure. Like preferring garbage to gold.

That I May Know Him

And here's the purpose of it all. The goal. The reason for counting everything as loss:

"That I may know Him."

Not "that I may serve Him better." Not "that I may build a successful ministry." Not "that I may accomplish great things for God."

That I may *know* Him.

This is *ginosko* knowledge in Greek—intimate, experiential, relational knowledge. The same word used for the most intimate human relationships.

Paul gave up everything for one thing: to know Christ. Personally. Intimately. Experientially.

And then he clarifies what this knowing includes:

"...the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death."

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Knowing Christ means experiencing His resurrection power. It means sharing in His sufferings. It means being conformed to His death—dying to self, dying to the world, dying to everything that's not Him.

This is what knowing God costs. This is what stillness leads to. This is what intimacy with Christ requires.

Everything. Absolutely everything.

WHAT MUST WE LOSE?

So what does this mean for us? What are the "all things" we must count as loss? What must we give up to know God the way Paul knew Him?

Luke 9:23 - The Daily Cross

Jesus made it clear: "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me" (Luke 9:23, NASB).

This isn't a one-time decision. This is daily. Every single day, you pick up your cross. Every single day, you deny yourself. Every single day, you die.

And what are you dying to? What are you denying? What's on that cross?

The Idol of Reputation

We must lose our need for human approval. Our concern for what others think. Our carefully managed image. Our reputation.

This is one of the hardest things to give up. We want to be well thought of. We want people to respect us. We want our reputation to be intact. We want to be known as successful, together, spiritual.

But knowing God requires you to stop managing your image. To stop controlling what others think. To stop needing their approval.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

You have to be willing to be misunderstood. Criticized. Judged. You have to be okay with people thinking you're foolish, lazy, or fanatical for pursuing stillness and intimacy with God instead of constant productivity and visibility.

During my recovery, this was excruciating. I had to watch my reputation as a strong, successful pastor crumble. I had to let people see me weak, broken, unable to perform. I had to release my need for them to think well of me.

It felt like death. Because it was death—death to the idol of reputation.

But here's what I discovered: when you stop needing human approval, you find freedom. When you release your reputation, you find rest. When you die to what others think, you become alive to what God thinks.

And His opinion is the only one that ultimately matters.

The Idol of Comfort

We must lose our attachment to comfort. Our insistence on ease. Our resistance to anything that disrupts our comfortable lives.

Western Christianity has become the religion of comfort. We want God to make our lives better, easier, more pleasant. We want Him to solve our problems, meet our needs, give us the comfortable life we think we deserve.

But knowing God requires discomfort. Stillness is uncomfortable. Silence is uncomfortable. Confronting yourself in God's presence is uncomfortable. Transformation is uncomfortable.

You cannot know God deeply while clinging to comfort. You cannot experience His refining fire while demanding that everything feel good. You cannot be transformed while insisting that nothing hurt.

The cross is not comfortable. Death is not pleasant. Resurrection comes after crucifixion, not instead of it.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

If you want to know God, you must be willing to be uncomfortable. You must release your demand for ease. You must embrace the discomfort of stillness, the pain of self-confrontation, the difficulty of transformation.

The Idol of Security

We must lose our need for control and security. Our insistence on knowing how everything will turn out. Our demand for predictability and stability.

We want guarantees. We want to know that if we do X, Y will happen. We want to control the outcomes. We want security—financial security, relational security, vocational security, emotional security.

But knowing God requires risk. It requires surrender. It requires stepping into the unknown without guarantees.

Abraham left his homeland without knowing where he was going. Moses confronted Pharaoh without knowing how God would deliver. David faced Goliath without guarantee of victory. Mary said yes to bearing the Messiah without understanding how her life would change.

Faith and security are incompatible. Trust and control cannot coexist. Intimacy with God requires releasing your grip on security and trusting Him with the unknown.

This means you might lose financial security by choosing stillness over endless work. You might lose vocational security by stepping back from the ladder-climbing. You might lose relational security by prioritizing time with God over time with people.

But what you gain—intimacy with the God who holds all security in His hands—is worth infinitely more than any security you're giving up.

The Idol of Control

We must lose our insistence on being in control. Our addiction to managing every detail. Our refusal to release our grip.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

This is perhaps the deepest idol of all. We want to be god. We want to be in control. We want to determine outcomes, direct circumstances, manage situations.

But you cannot know God as God while trying to be god yourself. You cannot experience His sovereignty while clinging to your own. You cannot rest in His control while refusing to release yours.

Stillness strips away control. When you're still, you're not doing anything. You're not managing anything. You're not controlling anything. You're simply being—dependent, trusting, surrendered.

And the flesh screams in protest. Because losing control feels like death.

It is death. Death to the false god of self. Death to the illusion that you're managing your life successfully. Death to the pride of autonomy.

But on the other side of that death is resurrection—resurrection into the freedom of trusting God, into the rest of His control, into the peace of surrender.

Matthew 16:25 - Lose Your Life

Jesus said it plainly: "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 16:25, NASB).

You must lose your life. Not improve it. Not add to it. Not make it more spiritual.

Lose it. Let it go. Give it up. Count it as loss.

Your plans. Your dreams. Your agenda. Your timeline. Your definition of success. Your expectations. Your comfort. Your security. Your control. Your reputation.

All of it. Loss.

For His sake. To gain Him. To know Him. To find real life in Him.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

This is what it costs. This is the narrow way. This is why so few actually walk it.

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

But here's what changes everything: when you see the value of what you're gaining, the loss doesn't feel like sacrifice anymore.

Matthew 13:45-46 - The Merchant Seeking Fine Pearls

Jesus told a parable: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Matthew 13:45-46, NASB).

Notice: the merchant was already seeking fine pearls. He was already in the business. He knew value. He understood worth.

And then he found one pearl that was so valuable—so surpassingly precious—that everything else he owned became worthless by comparison.

He didn't agonize over the decision. He didn't reluctantly give up his possessions. He didn't feel like he was sacrificing.

He went joyfully and sold everything to buy the one thing worth more than everything.

This is what knowing God is like. This is what the radical reorientation feels like when you truly see the value.

The Joy of Finding What's Worth Everything

When you truly encounter God—when you taste His goodness, experience His presence, know His love—everything else loses its luster.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Not because you're trying to be spiritual. Not because you feel like you should value God more. But because you've genuinely found something worth more than everything else combined.

Paul didn't grit his teeth and force himself to count everything as loss. He encountered Christ on the Damascus road, and immediately everything he had valued looked like garbage compared to knowing Him.

This is the secret: when you see the value of the prize, the cost doesn't feel like sacrifice anymore.

When you find a treasure buried in a field, you don't sadly, reluctantly sell everything to buy the field. You do it joyfully. Eagerly. You can't believe your good fortune. You're getting the deal of a lifetime.

This is what knowing God should be like. Not grudging sacrifice. Not reluctant obedience. Not forced surrender.

Joyful exchange. Eager pursuit. The deal of eternity.

No Sacrifice Is Actually Sacrifice

This is why Paul could say he "counted" everything as loss. It was a deliberate calculation. A rational assessment. A cost-benefit analysis.

And the conclusion was obvious: knowing Christ is worth infinitely more than everything I'm giving up.

The reputation? Worth losing to know Him.

The comfort? Worth sacrificing to experience His presence.

The security? Worth releasing to trust Him.

The control? Worth surrendering to rest in His sovereignty.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

None of it was actually sacrifice. Because what he was gaining was worth so much more than what he was losing.

It's like trading monopoly money for real gold. Like exchanging broken cisterns for the fountain of living water. Like selling garbage to buy treasure.

When you see it clearly, when you understand the value, it's not sacrifice. It's wisdom. It's the obvious choice. It's the best deal you'll ever make.

But You Have to See It

Here's the problem: most of us haven't seen it. We haven't tasted deeply enough. We haven't experienced intimately enough. We haven't encountered God powerfully enough to see the surpassing value of knowing Him.

So we think we're being asked to sacrifice. To give up good things for religious reasons. To deny ourselves out of duty or obligation.

And we resist. Because sacrifice without sight of the prize is just loss. Giving up without understanding the gain is just deprivation.

But when you see—when you truly encounter God, when you experience His presence, when you taste His goodness—everything changes.

Suddenly the cost doesn't seem like cost anymore. The loss doesn't feel like sacrifice. You're not giving up anything valuable. You're trading trash for treasure.

This is why stillness is so important. This is why you must take time to actually be with God, to experience His presence, to taste His goodness.

Not so you can manufacture desire through discipline. But so you can see the value of what you're pursuing. So you can taste and see that the Lord is good. So you can encounter Him in a way that makes everything else look like garbage by comparison.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

THE NARROW WAY

Matthew 7:13-14 - Few Find It

Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13-14, NASB).

The narrow way. The road less traveled. The path that few find.

Why is it narrow? Why do so few walk it?

Because it costs everything. Because it requires loss. Because it demands surrender. Because it means death.

The wide way is comfortable. It doesn't cost much. It doesn't require sacrifice. It doesn't demand transformation.

You can be religious on the wide way. You can be busy with spiritual activity. You can maintain a respectable faith without it costing you everything.

But it leads to destruction. Not because God is punishing you. But because a faith that costs nothing is worth nothing. A spirituality that doesn't transform you leaves you in your sin. A religion that lets you stay comfortable keeps you from the very thing you need: knowing God.

Why So Few Choose Stillness

The narrow way of stillness is particularly narrow. Particularly costly. Particularly rare.

Why?

Because stillness exposes everything. It reveals what you're really living for. It shows what you're actually trusting in. It strips away all the religious performance and forces you to confront who you really are.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Stillness requires you to stop producing. Stop performing. Stop proving. Stop controlling. Stop managing.

And most people can't do that. Most people—most Christians—would rather stay busy with religious activity than get still and actually encounter God.

Because busyness is safer. Activity is more comfortable. Productivity feels more valuable. Performance seems more spiritual.

Stillness feels like waste. Like doing nothing. Like failing to use your gifts or fulfill your calling.

So we choose the wide way. The busy way. The productive way. The way that lets us feel good about our spirituality without actually being transformed by God's presence.

And we miss the narrow way. The still way. The way that leads to actually knowing God.

The Road Less Traveled Requires Intentional Choice

No one accidentally walks the narrow way. No one stumbles into deep intimacy with God. No one finds themselves practicing stillness without choosing it.

The narrow way requires intentional choice. Deliberate decision. Conscious counter-cultural commitment.

You have to choose stillness when the culture screams for busyness.

You have to choose presence when the world values productivity.

You have to choose intimacy when religion rewards activity.

You have to choose the loss when everyone else is pursuing gain.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

You have to choose the narrow way when the wide way is so much easier, so much more popular, so much more acceptable.

This is why it's narrow. This is why few find it. This is why most Christians never experience deep intimacy with God.

Not because God makes it difficult. But because we're not willing to pay the cost. We're not willing to lose everything. We're not willing to count it all as garbage for the sake of knowing Christ.

John Wesley's Challenge

Wesley said, "Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen, such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of God upon earth."

One hundred people. Just one hundred. Who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God.

People who have counted everything else as loss. Who have given up reputation, comfort, security, control. Who have walked the narrow way. Who have chosen stillness over busyness, intimacy over activity, knowing God over serving God.

Just one hundred such people would change the world.

But where are they? Where are the ones who desire nothing but God? Who have lost everything to gain Christ? Who have walked the narrow way to find Him?

They're rare. Few. Hard to find.

Not because God is selective about who can know Him deeply. But because so few are willing to pay the cost. So few are willing to lose everything. So few are willing to walk the narrow way.

Will you be one of them?

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

COUNTING THE COST

Jesus said, "For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?" (Luke 14:28, NASB).

Before you commit to the narrow way, count the cost. Before you pursue deep intimacy with God, understand what it will require. Before you embrace stillness, know what it will cost you.

It will cost you:

- Your reputation
- Your comfort
- Your security
- Your control
- Your carefully constructed religious identity
- Your need to be productive
- Your addiction to busyness
- Your fear of what others think
- Your insistence on understanding everything
- Your demand for immediate results

It will cost you everything you've been clinging to, everything you've been using to define yourself, everything you've been trusting instead of God.

Count that cost. Know what you're signing up for. Understand what the narrow way requires.

And then—when you've counted the cost, when you understand what you're giving up—remember the surpassing value of what you're gaining.

You're gaining Christ. You're gaining knowing Him. You're gaining intimacy with the God of the universe. You're gaining life itself—eternal life, which is knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.

The cost is everything. But the prize is worth infinitely more than everything.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

This is not sacrifice. This is wisdom. This is the deal of eternity. This is trading garbage for gold, broken cisterns for living water, the temporary for the eternal.

The Invitation Still Stands

Paul's testimony stands as both challenge and invitation: "I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."

He walked the narrow way. He paid the cost. He lost everything.

And he never regretted it. Never looked back. Never wished he had chosen differently.

Because what he gained was worth infinitely more than what he lost.

The same choice is before you. The same narrow way is available. The same surpassing value is within reach.

Will you count everything as loss for the sake of knowing Christ?

Will you take up your cross daily and follow Him?

Will you lose your life to find it?

Will you sell everything to buy the pearl of great price?

Will you walk the narrow way that few find?

The cost is real. The loss is genuine. The sacrifice is actual.

But so is the prize. So is the treasure. So is the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus your Lord.

Count the cost.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Then choose Christ.

Because He is worth everything.

And more.

"Whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ." (Philippians 3:7, NASB)

What will you count as loss?

What will you give up to gain Him?

What will you lose to find Him?

Everything?

He's worth it.

More than worth it.

He's worth everything.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

CHAPTER 10: THE PRICE OF STILLNESS IN A NOISY WORLD

"You can do more than pray after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed."

—John Bunyan

Let me tell you what happened when I started practicing regular stillness after my burnout.

My phone rang constantly with people who needed something. Text messages accumulated. Emails went unanswered. Meetings got declined. Opportunities passed by. People expressed concern about my "absence." Some questioned my commitment. Others wondered if I was okay. A few suggested I was being selfish, irresponsible, even unfaithful.

One board member said, "We hired you to lead, not to sit in silence."

A fellow pastor asked, "Don't you think all this contemplative stuff is just an excuse for laziness?"

A church member complained, "You're not as available as you used to be. We need a pastor who's there when we need him."

They weren't being malicious. They were genuinely concerned. But their concern revealed something crucial: in our culture—even church culture, maybe especially church culture—stillness is seen as waste. Silence is viewed as absence. Choosing intimacy with God over constant availability to people is considered selfish.

This is the price you'll pay if you choose the narrow way of stillness. This is what it will cost you to swim against the current. This is the reality of being countercultural in a world—and a church—that worships at the altar of productivity.

The question is: Are you willing to pay it?

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

SWIMMING AGAINST THE CURRENT

Romans 12:2 - The Command to Be Different

Paul writes, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2, NASB).

Do not be conformed. Do not let the world squeeze you into its mold. Do not adopt its values, its priorities, its definition of what matters.

This is not suggestion. This is command. You are called to be different. Set apart. Countercultural.

But here's what we miss: the world Paul is talking about isn't just "out there." It's in here. It's in the church. It's in our Christian culture. It's in the way we've baptized busyness and sanctified productivity and made an idol out of constant activity.

The world says your worth is measured by your output. And the church says the same thing, just with spiritual language.

The world says you must stay busy to be successful. And the church says you must stay busy to be faithful.

The world says rest is for the weak. And the church says stillness is for those who don't have important work to do.

To choose stillness in this environment—to prioritize intimacy with God over productivity for God—is to swim against a powerful current. A current that exists not just in secular culture but in Christian culture.

And swimming against the current is exhausting. Lonely. Misunderstood. Costly.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

The Cost of Being Countercultural

When you choose stillness, you're choosing to violate one of our culture's most sacred values: productivity.

You're saying no to the idol our culture worships. You're rejecting the metric by which our culture measures worth. You're refusing to play by the rules that govern how "successful" people live.

And this makes people uncomfortable. Because your choice to be still indicts their choice to stay busy. Your prioritizing of intimacy challenges their prioritizing of activity. Your willingness to be "unproductive" threatens their belief that productivity equals value.

They won't say this directly. Instead, they'll express concern. They'll question your commitment. They'll suggest you're being irresponsible. They'll worry you're becoming flaky, unreliable, selfish.

Some will stop inviting you to things because you've said no too many times. Some will stop calling because you're not immediately available. Some will write you off as impractical, mystical, no longer useful.

This is the cost of being countercultural. This is what happens when you refuse to conform. This is the price of transformation.

Misunderstanding from Others

The hardest part isn't the external costs. It's the misunderstanding.

People won't understand why you're saying no to opportunities. They won't grasp why you're unavailable sometimes. They won't comprehend why you're choosing to do less when you could be doing more.

They'll misinterpret your stillness as laziness. Your boundaries as selfishness. Your prioritizing of time with God as neglect of people.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

And here's what makes it harder: you can't really explain it. You can try. You can talk about the importance of intimacy with God, about the necessity of stillness, about the command to be transformed not conformed.

But until they've experienced it themselves—until they've tasted the goodness of God's presence in stillness, until they've been transformed by sustained time with Him—they won't get it. They can't get it.

So you'll be misunderstood. And you have to be okay with that.

Because the alternative—conforming to the world's values, even when those values are dressed in religious language—is to miss God. To miss intimacy. To miss transformation. To miss the very thing you were created for.

Better to be misunderstood and know God than to be understood and miss Him.

PRACTICAL SACRIFICES REQUIRED

Let's get specific. Let's talk about what stillness will actually cost you in concrete, practical terms. Because it's easy to agree with the concept until you face the reality.

Time: What Will You Give Up?

Stillness requires time. Substantial time. Regular time. Protected time.

Not leftover time. Not whatever time remains after everything else. Not five minutes squeezed between appointments.

Real time. Significant blocks of time. Time that would otherwise be used for something else.

This means you will have to give something up. You cannot add stillness to an already full schedule. You cannot practice contemplative prayer on top of everything you're already doing. You cannot pursue intimacy with God without sacrificing something else.

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So what will it be?

Will you give up entertainment? That hour of Netflix? The scrolling through social media? The consuming of content that fills your mind with noise?

Will you give up some ministry activity? That committee you serve on? That program you volunteer for? That speaking opportunity you accepted?

Will you give up some work? Those extra projects? That overtime? That side hustle that's consuming your margins?

Will you give up some social time? Those gatherings that are good but not essential? Those relationships that are pleasant but shallow? Those commitments that fill your calendar but don't fill your soul?

Something has to go. Because you only have 24 hours in a day, and you're already using all of them. To make space for stillness, you must remove something else.

This is where most people quit. Because giving up things is hard. Saying no is uncomfortable. Creating margin requires sacrifice.

But here's the truth: if you don't intentionally give up something to make space for stillness, you're not serious about it. You just like the idea of it. You want to want it. But you don't want it enough to actually pay the cost.

Technology: Setting Boundaries

Technology is not neutral. Your phone is not just a tool. Your devices are designed to capture and hold your attention. To keep you connected. To prevent you from ever being truly still.

If you want stillness, you must set boundaries with technology. Real boundaries. Enforced boundaries. Boundaries that cost you something.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

This might mean:

Turning off notifications. All of them. Not just some. Not just during certain times. All notifications. Let people wonder why you didn't respond immediately. Let them learn to wait.

Deleting apps. The ones that pull you in and won't let you go. The ones you check compulsively. The ones that fill the silence you need to be still.

Setting phone-free times. Hours—not minutes—where your phone is off, away, inaccessible. Where you're unreachable. Where you're not available.

Establishing tech-free zones. Your bedroom. Your prayer space. Your car. Places where devices aren't allowed, where silence is protected.

Taking regular digital sabbaths. Full days where you're offline. Disconnected. Available only to God and the people physically present with you.

These boundaries will cost you. You'll miss things. You'll not know about things immediately. You'll not be able to respond right away. You'll feel out of the loop sometimes.

People will notice. Some will be frustrated. Some will think you're being difficult. Some will stop trying to reach you.

But here's what you'll gain: silence. Space. The ability to actually be still. The capacity to hear God's gentle voice instead of the constant ping of notifications.

You cannot be still while tethered to technology. You cannot hear God while your attention is fragmented by devices. You cannot have contemplative prayer while your phone is within reach.

Set the boundaries. Pay the cost. Protect the silence.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Relationships: Saying No to Good Things for the Best Thing

This is perhaps the hardest sacrifice because it affects other people. Because saying no to people feels cruel, selfish, unkind.

But if you're going to practice stillness, you will have to say no to people. Good people. People you care about. People whose requests are legitimate. People who genuinely need something.

You'll have to say:

"No, I can't meet you for coffee this week. I have time set aside for solitude."

"No, I can't join that committee. I'm protecting margin for prayer."

"No, I can't take that speaking engagement. I'm prioritizing stillness over visibility."

"No, I can't be available 24/7. I need boundaries to sustain my relationship with God."

And here's what will happen: some people won't understand. Some will be hurt. Some will think you don't care. Some will stop asking. Some will drift away.

This is the cost. And it's a real cost. Relationships matter. People matter. Community matters.

But here's what you have to understand: you cannot love people well from an empty tank. You cannot serve people sustainably from a depleted soul. You cannot give what you haven't received.

When you say no to people in order to say yes to stillness with God, you're not being selfish. You're being sustainable. You're protecting the source of everything you have to give. You're ensuring you have something real to offer instead of just religious activity.

Mary chose to sit at Jesus' feet instead of helping Martha serve. And Jesus defended her choice. He said she chose the better part.

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You'll have to make the same choice. And people won't always understand. Martha didn't understand. She thought Mary was being lazy, unhelpful, selfish.

But Jesus knew: intimacy with Him is not selfishness. It's wisdom. It's the necessary thing. It's what makes everything else possible.

Money: How Simplicity Creates Space

Money and stillness are connected. Because complexity is expensive, and expense requires work, and work consumes time, and time is what you need for stillness.

The more you own, the more you need to maintain. The more you maintain, the more you need to earn. The more you earn, the more you need to work. The more you work, the less time you have for stillness.

This is the treadmill. And getting off requires financial simplicity.

Living on less. Not spending everything you make. Creating margin in your budget so you're not constantly stressed about money.

Owning less. Getting rid of stuff that requires time, money, and mental energy to maintain. Choosing simplicity over accumulation.

Working less. If possible, choosing a simpler job over a more lucrative one if it buys you time for stillness. Rejecting the lie that more money equals more life.

Saying no to upgrades. The bigger house. The nicer car. The constant pursuit of better that keeps you on the earning treadmill.

This is countercultural. Our culture says more is better. Bigger is success. Upgrade constantly. Keep accumulating. Never be satisfied with what you have.

But simplicity creates space. Financial margin creates time. Living on less means working less. And working less means more time for stillness.

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This might mean you drive an older car. Live in a smaller house. Take simpler vacations. Have less stuff. Look less successful by the world's standards.

But you'll have time. You'll have space. You'll have margin for stillness. You'll have the ability to actually be with God instead of constantly working to maintain a lifestyle that's killing your soul.

Money or margin. Accumulation or stillness. The choice is yours.

THE OPPORTUNITY COST

But here's what keeps most people from choosing stillness: opportunity cost. The fear of what they'll miss. The anxiety about what they're giving up.

What We'll Miss While Being Still

Let's be honest: you will miss things if you choose stillness.

You'll miss some opportunities. Some conversations. Some events. Some ministry moments. Some networking possibilities. Some chances to be seen, known, recognized.

While you're in solitude, life is happening. People are connecting. Opportunities are being given. Decisions are being made. Things are moving forward.

And you're not there. You're not in the mix. You're not available. You're missing it.

This is real. This is the actual cost. This is what opportunity cost means.

That hour you spent in silent prayer? You could have used it to respond to emails, make that phone call, attend that meeting, take that opportunity.

That morning you spent alone with God? You could have used it to start that project, make that connection, advance that agenda.

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That day you took for solitude? You could have used it to be productive, get ahead, make progress on your goals.

The opportunities were real. And you missed them. By choice.

The FOMO Is Real but Misguided

The Fear of Missing Out is not irrational. It's based on reality. You will miss out on some things if you choose stillness.

The question is: what are you actually missing out on?

You're missing out on more busyness. More activity. More productivity. More visibility. More religious performance.

But are those things worth having? Are those things actually valuable? Are those things what you were created for?

Or are they just the broken cisterns we talked about? The counterfeits? The substitutes for what your soul actually needs?

Here's what I've discovered: FOMO is misguided when it makes you fear missing things that don't actually matter while causing you to miss the thing that matters most.

You fear missing the opportunity to serve on another committee while you miss the opportunity to know God.

You fear missing the chance to be seen while you miss the chance to be transformed.

You fear missing out on religious activity while you miss out on intimacy with God.

The FOMO is real. But it's focused on the wrong things.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

What We'll Miss If We're Not Still Is Greater

Here's the truth that reorients everything: what you'll miss if you're not still is infinitely greater than what you'll miss while you are still.

If you don't practice stillness, you'll miss:

Intimacy with God. Not just knowledge about Him. Personal, transformative, intimate relationship with Him.

Transformation. Not just behavioral modification. Deep, Spirit-worked, lasting change.

Hearing God's voice. Not just reading what others say He said. Actually hearing Him speak to you personally.

Rest for your soul. Not just physical rest. Deep, satisfying, restorative rest that only comes from His presence.

Sustainable ministry. Not burnout-producing religious activity. Service that flows from overflow, not from depletion.

Real life. Not just religious existence. The abundant life Jesus promised.

You'll miss all of this. Not eventually. Not in some distant future. You're missing it now. Every day you choose busyness over stillness. Every hour you choose productivity over presence. Every moment you choose activity over intimacy.

The opportunity cost of stillness is real. But the opportunity cost of not being still is infinitely greater.

You choose what you'll miss. Choose wisely.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

PERSECUTION AND MISUNDERSTANDING

But here's the cost that catches people most off guard: when you choose stillness, when you prioritize intimacy with God, when you set boundaries and say no and protect time for solitude—people will not always understand. Some will criticize. Some will mock. Some will accuse.

Luke 6:26 - Woe to You

Jesus said something shocking: "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way" (Luke 6:26, NASB).

Wait—woe to you when people speak well of you? That seems backward. Shouldn't we want people's approval? Isn't it good when everyone thinks well of us?

Jesus says no. Because if everyone speaks well of you, it probably means you're not saying anything challenging. You're not doing anything countercultural. You're not calling people to anything that costs them anything.

You're comfortable. Safe. Non-threatening. Just like the false prophets who told people what they wanted to hear instead of what they needed to hear.

The true prophets were persecuted. Rejected. Misunderstood. Opposed.

Not because they were mean or harsh or wrong. But because they were calling people to something that violated the culture's values. Something that cost something. Something that required transformation.

When you choose stillness in a culture of noise, you're being prophetic. You're challenging the idol of productivity. You're rejecting the false god of busyness. You're calling people—by your example—to something countercultural.

And some people won't like it.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

When Stillness Is Seen as Laziness

The most common criticism you'll face is that you're being lazy. Irresponsible. Not pulling your weight. Not doing your part.

"Must be nice to have all that time to sit around."

"Some of us have real responsibilities."

"I guess not everyone feels called to actually do ministry."

"It's easy to be spiritual when you're not serving anyone."

These comments hurt. Because they're designed to hurt. Because they're attacking not just your choices but your character, your commitment, your faithfulness.

And here's what makes it worse: sometimes these criticisms come from Christians. From church people. From ministry leaders. From people who should understand.

They don't. They can't. Because they've made an idol out of activity. They've confused faithfulness with busyness. They've equated service with constant availability.

And your choice to be still exposes their idol. Your rest threatens their drivenness. Your boundaries challenge their lack of boundaries. Your intimacy with God indicts their religious activity without relationship.

So they call it laziness. Because that's easier than confronting their own spiritual poverty.

When Intimacy with God Is Mocked as Impractical

The other criticism you'll face is that you're being impractical. Mystical. Too heavenly minded to be any earthly good.

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"That's fine for monks and mystics, but we live in the real world."

"Prayer is good, but actual work needs to be done."

"You can't just sit around contemplating God all day. People have real needs."

"This contemplative stuff is nice, but it doesn't pay the bills or change the world."

This criticism is more subtle. It sounds reasonable. It appeals to pragmatism. It argues from necessity.

But it's based on a lie: that doing things for God is more important than being with God. That activity is more valuable than intimacy. That productivity matters more than presence.

This lie has infected the church. We've become so focused on doing that we've forgotten being. We've become so busy serving God that we've stopped actually knowing Him.

And when someone chooses differently—when someone prioritizes intimacy over activity, being over doing, knowing God over serving God—we call it impractical.

But John Bunyan understood something we've forgotten: "You can do more than pray after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed."

Stillness is not impractical. It's essential. Prayer is not unproductive. It's the foundation of all true productivity. Intimacy with God is not mystical escapism. It's the source of everything real and lasting.

The people who mock stillness as impractical have never experienced the power that comes from sustained time with God. They've never known what it's like to minister from overflow instead of depletion. They've never tasted the difference between human activity and Spirit-empowered work.

They will call you impractical. Let them. Your life will be the evidence that intimacy with God is the most practical thing you can do.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

The Reality of Persecution

Let's be clear: this is persecution. Not physical persecution—at least not in most Western contexts. But social persecution. Relational persecution. Reputational persecution.

You'll be talked about. Criticized. Judged. Misunderstood. Questioned. Dismissed. Excluded.

Some people will stop calling. Some will write you off. Some will think you've gone off the deep end. Some will decide you're no longer useful.

This hurts. It's lonely. It's isolating.

But Jesus promised this: "If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20, NASB).

When you follow Jesus into intimacy with the Father, when you prioritize what He prioritized, when you choose what He chose—you will face what He faced.

Misunderstanding. Criticism. Accusations of laziness, of being impractical, of violating expectations.

This is not a sign you're doing something wrong. It's evidence you're doing something right. It's confirmation you're on the narrow way.

COUNTING THE COST

So let's be honest about what stillness will cost you:

Time - Substantial, regular, protected time that could be used for other things.

Opportunities - Ministry chances, networking possibilities, visibility, advancement.

Approval - Some people will not understand, will criticize, will judge.

Productivity - You'll accomplish less by the world's metrics.

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Financial comfort - Simplicity and margin might mean living on less.

Relationships - Some will drift away when you're not constantly available.

Reputation - You'll be seen as lazy, impractical, mystical, uncommitted.

Control - You'll have to surrender your agenda and trust God's timing.

This is real. This is costly. This is what the narrow way requires.

But here's what you'll gain:

Intimacy with God. Transformation into Christ's image. Rest for your soul. The ability to hear God's voice. Sustainable ministry. Real life. Everything you were created for.

The cost is real. But so is the prize.

You can do more than pray after you have prayed. But you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed.

Everything flows from intimacy. Everything real and lasting and eternal comes from knowing God. Everything that matters is rooted in stillness with Him.

The world—and often the church—will tell you you can't afford to be still. You don't have time. You have too much to do. Too many responsibilities. Too many people depending on you.

But the truth is: you can't afford not to be still. You don't have time not to pray. You can't sustain the work without the intimacy. You can't keep giving without receiving. You can't minister to others from a depleted soul.

Pay the cost. Make the sacrifice. Swim against the current.

Be still.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

And know that He is God.

Everything else will follow.

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." (Romans 12:2, NASB)

The world says be busy.

God says be still.

The world says prove yourself.

God says rest in Me.

The world says more activity.

God says deeper intimacy.

Choose.

The cost is real.

But so is the transformation.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

CHAPTER 11: CREATING SPACE - PRACTICAL DISCIPLINES

"We must have time alone with God. The experience of being alone with God is perhaps the most important spiritual discipline."

—Dallas Willard

We've talked about why stillness matters. We've examined the obstacles. We've counted the cost. Now comes the question that makes everything concrete:

How do you actually do this?

How do you create space for stillness in a life that's already overfull? How do you practice silence when noise is everywhere? How do you build rhythms of rest when the demands never stop? How do you learn to be still when everything in you resists it?

This chapter is about the practical disciplines that create space for God. Not techniques to master. Not steps to perfection. But ancient practices that form us, reshape us, and create the conditions where transformation can happen.

I'm going to be honest with you: these disciplines are hard. They feel unnatural at first. They go against everything our culture has trained us to do. Your flesh will resist them. Your schedule will fight them. Your mind will come up with a thousand reasons why you can't do them.

But I'm also going to tell you the truth: these disciplines saved my life. When everything else collapsed, when burnout stripped away all my religious performance, these simple practices became the lifeline that pulled me back to God. Not through my effort, but by creating space for His grace.

So let me walk you through what I've learned. Not as an expert who has it all figured out, but as a fellow traveler who's stumbled along this path and found it leads somewhere worth going.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

THE DISCIPLINE OF SOLITUDE

Jesus' Pattern: Before Every Major Moment, Withdrawal

If you want to understand the importance of solitude, look at Jesus' life. Not just His teaching, but His actual pattern of living.

Before He chose the twelve apostles, He spent the night alone in prayer (Luke 6:12-13).

Before He fed the five thousand, He withdrew to a desolate place (Matthew 14:13).

After feeding the five thousand, when the crowds wanted to make Him king, He sent everyone away and went up on the mountain by Himself to pray (Matthew 14:23).

Before His crucifixion, He went to Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36).

At critical moments—moments of decision, moments of testing, moments of major ministry—Jesus withdrew. He got alone. He pulled away from the crowds, from the disciples, from everyone and everything, to be with the Father.

And notice: these weren't convenient times. The crowds were pressing in. The needs were urgent. The disciples needed Him. The ministry was at its peak.

But He withdrew anyway. He prioritized solitude. He protected time alone with the Father.

If Jesus—fully God, sinless, perfect—needed regular withdrawal into solitude, what makes you think you don't?

Finding Your "Lonely Place"

Jesus had His places. The mountain. The wilderness. Gethsemane. Places He could go to be alone with the Father.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

You need your place too. A physical space where you can be alone. Where you can be quiet. Where you can meet with God without interruption.

For me, it started as a chair in my basement. Not fancy. Not spiritual-looking. Just a chair where I could sit without being interrupted. Where I could close the door and be alone.

Later, I found a trail in the woods where I could walk and pray. A park bench where I could sit and be still. A small chapel that was open during the week where I could sit in silence.

Your lonely place might be:

- A room in your house where you can close the door
- A chair in a corner where you won't be disturbed
- A park where you can walk or sit
- A church that's open for prayer
- Your car (parked, not driving)
- A trail in the woods
- Anywhere you can be alone and undisturbed

The location doesn't matter. What matters is that it's a place where you can actually be alone. Where you're not responsible for anything or anyone. Where you can focus on God without distraction.

Find your lonely place. Protect it. Return to it regularly. Make it your sanctuary—your place of meeting with God.

Overcoming the Guilt of Time "Alone"

Here's what will happen the moment you start practicing solitude: you'll feel guilty.

Guilty for taking time away from your family. Guilty for not being productive. Guilty for not being available. Guilty for doing "nothing" when there's so much to be done.

This guilt is predictable. Expected. And it must be recognized for what it is: an attack on your intimacy with God.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Satan doesn't care if you're busy with religious activity. In fact, he prefers it. He'd rather you be exhausted from serving God than intimate with God. He'd rather you burn out from ministry than be sustained by presence.

But when you get alone with God? When you start experiencing His presence? When you begin to be transformed by intimacy? That's when the enemy panics. That's when the accusations come. That's when guilt floods in.

"You're being selfish. Your family needs you. Your church needs you. People are suffering while you sit here doing nothing. You're wasting time. You're being irresponsible. You're neglecting your duties."

These thoughts aren't from God. They're the enemy trying to rob you of the very thing that will make you effective in all those other areas.

Jesus wasn't selfish when He withdrew. He wasn't neglecting His disciples. He wasn't being irresponsible. He was doing the one thing necessary—being with the Father—so that everything else could flow from that intimacy.

You're not being selfish. You're being sustainable. You're not neglecting people. You're ensuring you have something real to give them. You're not wasting time. You're investing in the only thing that will make your time productive.

When the guilt comes—and it will come—recognize it. Name it. Reject it. And stay in your lonely place. Stay with God. Because what's happening there is more important than anything you're supposedly missing.

Starting Small and Building

Don't try to start with a week-long silent retreat. Don't attempt four hours of solitude if you've never done fifteen minutes.

Start small. Build gradually. Be realistic about where you are and patient with the process.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Week 1-2: Ten minutes a day in your lonely place. Just sit. Be still. Don't try to pray eloquently or study intensively. Just be present to God's presence.

Week 3-4: Fifteen to twenty minutes a day. Same practice. Just sitting. Being still. Gradually increasing your capacity to be alone without doing.

Month 2: Thirty minutes a day. This is where you'll really start to notice resistance. Your flesh will scream. Your mind will race. Your body will fidget. Stay with it.

Month 3: Try a longer solitude—two to three hours on a Saturday morning. Go to your lonely place and just be. Bring your Bible if you want, but don't feel pressure to do anything. Just be alone with God.

Beyond: As you grow, try a full day. Then maybe a weekend. Eventually, perhaps a longer retreat.

But start small. Build capacity. Don't despise small beginnings. Ten faithful minutes daily is worth more than an ambitious plan you never follow through on.

THE DISCIPLINE OF SILENCE

Lamentations 3:26-28 - Waiting Silently

"It is good that he waits silently for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man that he should bear the yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone and be silent since He has laid it on him" (Lamentations 3:26-28, NASB).

Notice the progression: wait silently, bear the yoke, sit alone and be silent.

This is active language. This is disciplined practice. This is choosing silence, not just experiencing the absence of noise.

Silence is not just turning off the TV. It's stilling your heart. It's quieting your mind. It's bringing your whole being into stillness before God.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

This is harder than solitude. Because you can be alone and still be noisy—with your thoughts, your worries, your plans, your constant internal chatter.

True silence requires you to quiet all of it. To wait. To be still. To simply be present to God without filling the space with words.

Practical Steps to Cultivate Silence

Step 1: External Silence Start with the external. Turn off everything:

- No music
- No podcasts
- No television
- No radio
- No notifications
- No background noise

Create actual quiet. Most of us haven't experienced real silence in years. We've always got something making noise—even if it's just background music or the hum of electronics.

Turn it all off. Sit in actual quiet. Let the silence be uncomfortable at first. Stay with it.

Step 2: Verbal Silence Stop talking. Not just to others, but to yourself.

We talk constantly—out loud and in our heads. We narrate our lives. We comment on everything. We fill every gap with words.

Practice not talking. When you're alone, don't speak. Not to yourself. Not to God (at first). Just be silent.

This will feel strange. You'll want to fill the silence. Resist. Stay quiet.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Step 3: Mental Silence This is the hardest level. Quieting the mind. Stilling the internal chatter.

Your mind will race. Thoughts will flood in. Worries, plans, memories, random observations—all clamoring for attention.

Don't fight them aggressively. Don't try to force your mind to be blank. Instead, gently return to presence. When thoughts come, notice them and let them pass. Return your attention to God's presence.

This takes practice. Lots of practice. Your mind has been trained for decades to never stop. It won't learn stillness overnight.

Be patient. Be gentle with yourself. Keep practicing.

Step 4: Heart Silence The deepest level is stilling your heart—your desires, your anxieties, your demands.

"I have calmed and quieted my soul; like a weaned child rests against his mother, my soul is like a weaned child within me" (Psalm 131:2, NASB).

This is bringing your emotions, your longings, your fears before God and letting them settle. Like silt settling in water that's been stirred up. It takes time. It requires stillness.

You can't force this. But you can create the conditions for it by practicing external, verbal, and mental silence.

Fasting from Words, Music, Media

Here's a practical exercise that changed my life: periodic fasting from noise.

Daily Media Fast: One day a week (I chose Sabbath), no media. No social media, no news, no entertainment, no music. Just silence.

Weekly Word Fast: One day a month, speak only when absolutely necessary. Minimal words. Mostly silence.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Extended Silence Retreat: Once a year, a weekend of complete silence. No talking, no media, no music. Just silence and Scripture.

These fasts sound extreme. They are extreme. That's the point.

We're so addicted to noise that we don't even realize how dependent we are until we try to stop. Like any addiction, withdrawal is uncomfortable. You'll feel the pull to fill the silence. You'll rationalize why you need to check your phone, turn on music, say something.

Resist. Stay silent. Let the discomfort teach you how much you've been using noise to avoid God, to avoid yourself, to avoid stillness.

The first time I tried a day of silence, I lasted until 2 PM before I turned on music "just for a minute." That minute turned into the rest of the day.

I had to try again. And again. Each time, I lasted a little longer. Built a little more capacity. Learned a little more about my addiction to noise.

Now, silence is a gift. Not a burden. Not something I'm forcing myself through. A gift—the space where I meet God.

But it took practice. It took multiple attempts. It took failing and trying again.

THE DISCIPLINE OF SABBATH

Creating Rhythms of Rest

Sabbath is not just a day. It's a rhythm. A pattern. A way of living that acknowledges your limitations and trusts God's provision.

The biblical pattern is clear: work six days, rest one day. Not work until you're exhausted, then rest if you can. Six and one. Rhythm. Pattern. Built into creation itself.

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But Sabbath isn't just weekly. It's:

Weekly: One full day of rest. No work. No productivity. No catching up. Just rest, worship, being with God and loved ones.

Daily: Ending work each day. Not checking email at midnight. Not working until you fall asleep. Creating evening Sabbath—a daily rhythm of stopping.

Hourly: Taking breaks. Not pushing through for hours without pause. Creating mini-Sabbaths throughout your day.

These rhythms are countercultural. Our culture says push until you drop. Work as hard as you can for as long as you can. Rest only when you're forced to.

But God's design is rhythm. Work and rest. Activity and stillness. Six and one. Inhale and exhale. Systole and diastole.

You cannot sustain six without one. You cannot work indefinitely. You need rest. Not as a reward for working hard. As part of the design.

Sabbath as Trust Exercise

Here's what makes Sabbath so difficult: it requires trust.

When you stop working one day in seven, you're trusting that God will provide. You're trusting that the work will get done. You're trusting that resting won't cause everything to fall apart.

This is terrifying if you believe your security depends on your work. If you think your worth is measured by your productivity. If you're convinced that everything depends on your constant effort.

But Sabbath says: No. God provides. The work is in His hands. He can accomplish in six days what you can't accomplish in seven.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Every week, I have to exercise this trust. Every Friday evening, I have to stop working and trust that what didn't get done is okay. That God's got it. That resting is not irresponsible.

Some weeks, this is easy. Other weeks, it's agony. There's so much undone. So many loose ends. So many things that feel urgent.

But I stop anyway. Because Sabbath is not about having all your work done. It's about trusting God regardless of how much is undone.

This trust doesn't come naturally. It's trained. Practiced. Developed through repeated acts of stopping when you don't feel like you can.

Weekly Sabbath - Practical Guidelines

Here's how I practice weekly Sabbath (yours might look different):

Friday evening to Saturday evening: My Sabbath window. Yours might be Sunday. The day doesn't matter. The consistency does.

What I don't do:

- No work (no emails, no projects, no ministry tasks)
- No shopping (I get what I need beforehand)
- No social media (Sabbath from digital noise)
- No productivity mindset (no checking things off lists)

What I do:

- Worship (corporate gathering and personal)
- Rest (actually sleeping, napping if needed)
- Relationships (unhurried time with family and close friends)
- Delight (things that bring joy, not just duty)
- Stillness (extended time with God)

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

The key is preparation. I get ready for Sabbath on Friday. I finish what needs finishing. I plan ahead. I set up conditions so I can actually rest.

Then I stop. Even if everything's not done. Even if there's more to do. I stop. I trust. I rest.

Daily and Hourly Sabbaths

Daily Sabbath: Every evening, I stop working. I have a set time (usually 7 PM) when I'm done. No more emails. No more projects. No more productivity.

Instead: dinner with family, reading, conversation, prayer, preparation for sleep.

This daily stopping is as important as weekly Sabbath. Because without daily rhythm, you burn out before you reach the weekly rest.

Hourly Sabbath: Throughout the day, I take short breaks. Every 90 minutes or so, I stop. I stretch. I pray. I look out the window. I practice presence.

Not long breaks—five to ten minutes. But enough to interrupt the constant push, to remember I'm not a machine, to reconnect with God.

These micro-Sabbaths keep me from the frantic pushing that leads to exhaustion. They remind me throughout the day that I'm not in control, God is.

THE DISCIPLINE OF MEDITATION

Psalm 1:2 - Meditating Day and Night

"But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:2, NASB).

The blessed person meditates on God's word. Not just reads it. Meditates on it. Day and night.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Biblical meditation is not emptying your mind. It's filling your mind—with God's word, God's truth, God's character.

It's the practice of dwelling on Scripture. Chewing on it. Letting it soak into your soul. Allowing it to shape your thoughts, your perspective, your understanding.

This is different from Bible study. Study is about understanding the text intellectually. Meditation is about letting the text understand you spiritually.

Study asks: What does this mean? Meditation asks: What does this mean for me? How is God speaking to me through this?

Biblical Meditation vs. Eastern Meditation

Let's be clear about the difference, because this confuses people.

Eastern meditation focuses on emptying the mind. Achieving a blank state. Transcending thought. Detaching from reality.

Biblical meditation focuses on filling the mind with God's truth. Dwelling deeply on Scripture. Engaging thought. Encountering reality as defined by God.

Eastern meditation moves toward emptiness. Biblical meditation moves toward fullness—being filled with God's word, God's Spirit, God's presence.

Don't confuse the two. Don't be afraid of biblical meditation because you've heard about Eastern practices. They're completely different.

Chewing on Scripture in Stillness

The Hebrew word for meditate is *hagah*—it means to murmur, to mutter, to chew, to ponder.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Like a cow chewing cud. Over and over. Extracting all the nutrition. Not moving on quickly. Staying with it.

This is what biblical meditation looks like:

Step 1: Choose a short passage. Not a chapter. Not even a full story. Maybe a verse or two. Something short enough to actually dwell on.

Step 2: Read it slowly. Multiple times. Out loud if possible. Let the words sink in. Don't rush.

Step 3: Notice what stands out. A word. A phrase. An image. Something that catches your attention. Stay with it.

Step 4: Repeat it. Say it over and over. Let it roll around in your mind. Chew on it.

Step 5: Apply it personally. How is God speaking to you through this? What is He showing you? How does this truth relate to your life right now?

Step 6: Pray it back. Turn the Scripture into prayer. Let God's word shape your conversation with Him.

Step 7: Carry it with you. Throughout the day, return to this passage. Meditate on it. Let it work on you.

This is not a speed-reading exercise. One verse meditated on deeply is worth more than three chapters skimmed quickly.

The Practice of Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is Latin for "divine reading." It's an ancient practice of meditative Scripture reading that has four movements:

1. Lectio (Reading): Read the passage slowly. Maybe multiple times. Just receive the words. Don't analyze yet. Just read.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

2. Meditatio (Meditation): Reflect on the passage. What word or phrase stands out? Why might that be? What is God highlighting for you? Chew on it.

3. Oratio (Prayer): Respond to God. Talk to Him about what you're hearing. Ask questions. Express what you're feeling. Let the passage shape your prayer.

4. Contemplatio (Contemplation): Rest in God's presence. Stop analyzing. Stop talking. Just be with Him. Let the word sink deep.

Here's what this looks like practically:

Lectio: I read Psalm 46:10 slowly three times. "Be still, and know that I am God."

Meditatio: The phrase "Be still" stands out. I notice my resistance to it. I recognize my addiction to activity. I see my need to control. I chew on what "Be still" actually means.

Oratio: I pray: "Lord, I don't know how to be still. I'm afraid of it. I resist it. But You're commanding it. Help me. Teach me. Give me grace to actually stop striving."

Contemplatio: I sit quietly. I don't try to think more about it. I don't analyze further. I just rest in God's presence, letting "Be still" do its work in me.

This whole process might take 20-30 minutes. One verse. But by the end, it's not just information. It's transformation. It's God speaking personally to me through His word.

Memorization as Meditation

One powerful practice: memorize passages you're meditating on.

Not for the sake of having Scripture memorized (though that's valuable). But so you can meditate on it throughout the day. So it's available to you. So God can bring it to mind when you need it.

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When I was recovering from burnout, I memorized Psalm 23. Not all at once. A verse at a time. And as I memorized it, I meditated on it. I chewed on each phrase. I let each verse work on me.

"The LORD is my shepherd"—who is He to me? What does it mean that He shepherds me?

"I shall not want"—do I believe that? Do I trust His provision?

"He makes me lie down"—sometimes He has to force me to rest. Why do I resist?

By the time I had the whole psalm memorized, it had worked deep into my soul. It became part of me. It shaped how I thought about God, about myself, about rest.

This is meditation: letting Scripture shape you from the inside out. Chewing on God's word until it becomes part of who you are.

DALLAS WILLARD'S WISDOM

Dallas Willard said, "We must have time alone with God. The experience of being alone with God is perhaps the most important spiritual discipline."

Not just helpful. Not just beneficial. Perhaps the most important.

Everything else flows from this. Your service flows from intimacy. Your ministry flows from prayer. Your effectiveness flows from presence.

Without time alone with God—without solitude, silence, Sabbath, meditation—everything else becomes empty religious activity. You're doing things for God without being with God. You're serving without sustaining. You're giving without receiving.

But with time alone with God—with regular, protected, disciplined practice of these rhythms—everything changes.

You minister from overflow instead of depletion.

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You serve from rest instead of striving.

You give from abundance instead of emptiness.

You speak from encounter instead of information.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

So what does this look like practically? How do you integrate these disciplines into an actual life?

Here's a realistic starting point (adjust based on your situation):

Daily:

- 15-30 minutes of solitude in the morning
- Practice silence during this time (no music, no words at first)
- Meditate on a short passage of Scripture using Lectio Divina
- End work at a set time each evening (daily Sabbath)
- Take short breaks throughout the day (hourly Sabbaths)

Weekly:

- One full day of Sabbath rest
- One longer period of solitude (2-3 hours)
- One day with minimal media/noise

Monthly:

- One day of extended solitude (half day or full day)
- Fast from a specific form of noise (social media, music, news)

Annually:

- One extended retreat (weekend or longer)
- Practice extended silence

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

This might sound like a lot. It is. Don't try to do it all at once. Start with daily solitude. Add Sabbath. Build from there.

But make it concrete. Put it on your calendar. Protect it like you would any important appointment. Because it is the most important appointment—time with God.

When You Fail (And You Will)

You will fail at these disciplines. You'll miss your solitude time. You'll fill the silence with noise. You'll work through Sabbath. You'll rush through meditation.

This is guaranteed. This is part of the process. This is not failure—it's learning.

Don't quit when you fail. Don't give up when you're inconsistent. Don't abandon the disciplines because you can't do them perfectly.

Just start again. The next day. The next moment. Keep coming back.

These are called disciplines for a reason. They require training. Practice. Repeated attempts. Gradual growth.

You wouldn't expect to run a marathon without training. You wouldn't expect to master an instrument without practice. Why would you expect to master stillness without repeated, imperfect attempts?

Be patient with yourself. Be gentle with your failures. Keep starting again.

God is patient with you. He's not frustrated by your stumbling. He's pleased that you keep coming back.

The Promise

Here's what I can promise you: if you practice these disciplines—imperfectly, inconsistently, but persistently—something will shift.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

You'll find yourself becoming more aware of God's presence. More capable of hearing His voice. More sensitive to His Spirit. More transformed by His truth.

Not because you've mastered techniques. But because you've created space. And in that space, God works.

The disciplines don't save you. They don't earn God's favor. They don't make you more righteous.

They simply position you to receive what God is already offering. They create the conditions where transformation can happen. They open you to God's grace.

And that's everything.

"We must have time alone with God."

Not just helpful time.

Not just beneficial time.

Essential time.

Time that makes everything else possible.

Create the space.

Practice the disciplines.

Be still.

And watch what God does in the stillness.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

CHAPTER 12: THE INNER POSTURE - CULTIVATING STILLNESS OF SOUL

"The principal thing is to stand before God with the intellect in the heart, and to go on standing before Him unceasingly day and night, until the end of life."

—Theophan the Recluse

You can practice all the external disciplines of stillness and still have a churning soul.

I learned this the hard way. I had my solitude time scheduled. I sat in silence. I observed Sabbath. I meditated on Scripture. All the external practices were in place.

But inside? My mind was racing. My heart was anxious. My soul was restless. I was sitting still on the outside while being in constant motion on the inside.

I was doing stillness without being still.

This is the difference between external discipline and inner posture. Between practicing techniques and cultivating a soul that can actually rest. Between going through the motions and genuinely encountering God.

You can be alone without being present. You can be silent without being quiet. You can be sitting without being still.

This chapter is about the inner work—the cultivation of a soul that is genuinely at rest before God. Not just the body in a chair, but the heart in His presence. Not just the schedule cleared, but the mind quieted. Not just the external noise turned off, but the internal chaos calmed.

This is harder than the external disciplines. Because you can't schedule your soul into stillness. You can't force your heart into quiet. You can't manufacture inner peace through sheer willpower.

But you can cultivate it. You can create the conditions. You can train your soul toward stillness, the way you might train your body toward strength or your mind toward knowledge.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Let me show you how.

WAITING ON THE LORD

Isaiah 40:31 - Gaining New Strength

"Yet those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary" (Isaiah 40:31, NASB).

This is one of the most quoted verses in Scripture. And one of the most misunderstood.

We read it as a promise of never being tired. Of supernatural energy. Of constant strength.

But look at what precedes the promise: *waiting*.

Those who *wait* for the Lord will gain new strength. Not those who work harder. Not those who push through. Not those who refuse to stop. Those who wait.

Waiting is the key. And waiting is an art most of us have never learned.

Psalms 27:14 - Waiting with Courage

David writes, "Wait for the LORD; be strong and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for the LORD" (Psalm 27:14, NASB).

Notice what waiting requires: strength. Courage. This is not passive. This is not doing nothing. This is active, intentional, courageous waiting.

Waiting on the Lord is one of the hardest things you'll ever do. Because everything in you wants to act. To move. To do something. To take control. To make something happen.

But waiting says: I will be still until God moves. I will be quiet until He speaks. I will rest in His timing rather than force my own.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

This requires more courage than activity. Because activity gives you the illusion of control. Waiting strips away that illusion and forces you to trust.

Active Waiting vs. Passive Passivity

Let's be clear: biblical waiting is not passivity. It's not resignation. It's not giving up and doing nothing because you don't know what else to do.

Passive passivity is: "I guess I'll just sit here and see what happens. Whatever will be, will be."

Active waiting is: "I am intentionally positioning myself before God, alert and attentive, expectantly looking for His movement, ready to respond the moment He speaks or acts."

One is checked out. The other is fully engaged.

One has given up. The other is exercising faith.

One is fatalistic. The other is trusting.

Think of a firefighter at the station waiting for a call. He's not doing nothing. He's ready. Alert. Prepared. His gear is on. His tools are accessible. He's positioned to respond immediately when the alarm sounds.

But he's not running around creating false emergencies. He's not manufacturing calls because he's anxious about waiting. He's confident in his readiness and patient in the waiting.

This is active waiting. This is what waiting on the Lord looks like.

How to Wait

Practically, what does waiting on the Lord look like?

1. Position yourself before Him. Get still. Get quiet. Be present. This is the external discipline we talked about in the last chapter.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

2. **Expect Him to move.** Don't come with resignation. Come with anticipation. Believe that God will speak, will act, will move. Wait expectantly, not hopelessly.
3. **Be alert to His presence.** Pay attention. Notice. Don't drift off mentally. Stay engaged. Stay aware. Stay attentive to what He might be doing or saying.
4. **Rest in His timing.** Don't force it. Don't rush it. Don't try to make something happen. Trust that when He's ready, He'll move. Your job is to wait, not to control the timeline.
5. **Respond when He speaks or acts.** This is why you're alert. When He moves, you move. When He speaks, you respond. Waiting isn't the end—it's the preparation for obedience.

This is the inner posture of waiting. It's not passive. It's not anxious. It's confident, alert, expectant rest in God's faithfulness and timing.

When Waiting Is Hard

There are times when waiting feels impossible. When you're desperate. When the need is urgent. When you don't have time to wait.

I've been there. Sitting in silence while my church was imploding. Waiting on God while my family relationships were broken. Being still while my finances were collapsing.

Every fiber of my being wanted to act. To fix it. To do something. Waiting felt like irresponsibility. Like negligence. Like failure.

But here's what I learned: when I acted in my own strength, in my own timing, without waiting on God—I made things worse. My frantic activity didn't help. My rushing ahead created more problems. My refusal to wait prolonged the crisis.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

But when I finally learned to wait—to actually be still, to trust His timing, to let Him move instead of forcing my own movement—that's when breakthrough came. Not immediately. Not when I wanted it. But in His timing. And His way was better than anything I could have manufactured through my activity.

Waiting is hard. But acting without waiting is harder. Because it leads to burnout, mistakes, and the exhaustion of trying to be God instead of trusting God.

THE PRAYER OF QUIET

1 Thessalonians 4:11 - The Quiet Life as Ambition

Paul writes something shocking: "make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands" (1 Thessalonians 4:11, NASB).

Make it your *ambition*. Not your fallback plan. Not what you settle for when you can't accomplish something great. Your ambition. Your goal. What you're intentionally pursuing.

A quiet life. Not a loud, visible, impressive life. A quiet one.

This is countercultural. We're supposed to be ambitious for success, for impact, for recognition, for building something big.

But Paul says: be ambitious for quiet. Make it your goal to lead a life that's not loud, not showy, not constantly visible. A life that's hidden. Quiet. Still.

This is the inner posture that makes prayer possible. Because you cannot pray deeply while addicted to visibility. You cannot be still in God's presence while craving recognition. You cannot have a quiet soul while living a loud, performing life.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Contemplative Prayer Traditions

There's a rich history in Christian tradition of contemplative prayer—prayer that's not about words or requests or even worship songs, but about simple presence with God.

The Prayer of Quiet (Teresa of Avila): A state where the soul is at rest in God's presence, not working to produce thoughts or feelings, just being with Him.

Centering Prayer (Thomas Keating): Sitting in silence, gently returning your attention to God when your mind wanders, not trying to think about God but simply being with Him.

The Jesus Prayer (Eastern Orthodox): Repeating "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner" as a way of anchoring yourself in God's presence, not as vain repetition but as a form of continual prayer.

These traditions all share a common understanding: the highest form of prayer is not talking to God but being with God. Not asking for things but enjoying His presence. Not producing spiritual thoughts but simply resting in His love.

Learning to Simply Be in God's Presence

This is the hardest kind of prayer for most of us. Because it feels like we're not doing anything.

We're not interceding. We're not praising. We're not confessing. We're not studying. We're not even thinking theologically profound thoughts about God.

We're just... being. Present. With Him.

I remember the first time I tried this. I sat in my chair, cleared my schedule for an hour, and decided I would just be with God. No agenda. No prayer list. No Bible study. Just presence.

After five minutes, I was mentally making my grocery list. After ten minutes, I was planning my week. After fifteen minutes, I was wondering if this was a waste of time.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

I almost gave up. But something kept me there. Some sense that this—this doing nothing, this simply being—was what I most needed and most resisted.

So I stayed. And slowly, gradually, imperceptibly, something shifted. My mind quieted. My heart calmed. My soul settled.

I wasn't thinking profound thoughts about God. I wasn't feeling overwhelming emotions. I wasn't having mystical experiences.

I was just... there. With Him. Present. And He was present with me.

And that was enough. More than enough.

Practical Steps for the Prayer of Quiet

Here's how to practice this:

1. **Set aside time.** Start with 20 minutes. You need enough time to get past the initial mental chatter.
2. **Get comfortable but alert.** Sitting is usually better than lying down (too easy to fall asleep). Posture matters—sit upright, open, attentive.
3. **Begin with a simple prayer of invitation.** "Lord, I'm here. I'm present. I want to be with You." Nothing elaborate. Just acknowledgment of His presence and your desire to be with Him.
4. **Choose a sacred word or phrase.** Something simple that anchors you: "Jesus," "Father," "Be still," "I am here." Not a mantra you repeat constantly, but a word you return to when you notice your mind wandering.
5. **When thoughts come (and they will), gently return.** Don't fight them. Don't berate yourself for losing focus. Just gently, kindly return your attention to God's presence. Use your sacred word to help.

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6. Don't expect anything. Don't try to produce feelings or experiences or insights. Don't evaluate whether it's "working." Just be present. That's enough.

7. End with thanksgiving. Thank God for the time, regardless of what you felt or didn't feel. Thank Him for His presence, which was there whether you sensed it or not.

This is simple. But simple doesn't mean easy. Your mind will resist. Your flesh will get restless. You'll think you're wasting time.

Stay with it. Keep practicing. The fruit of contemplative prayer isn't immediate. It's subtle. It works on you over time, slowly reshaping your soul into a container that can hold God's presence.

GUARDING THE HEART

Proverbs 4:23 - Watch Over Your Heart

"Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life" (Proverbs 4:23, NASB).

Your heart is the source. Everything flows from it—your thoughts, your words, your actions, your responses, your character.

And you're commanded to guard it. To watch over it. To be diligent about what you allow in.

This is not optional. This is not just good advice. This is a command, because what's at stake is your life itself—"the springs of life" flow from your heart.

If you want stillness of soul, you must guard what enters your heart. Because what you consume shapes your inner life. What you allow into your mind determines the state of your soul.

What We Allow Into Our Minds Matters

Here's a reality most Christians don't want to face: you cannot fill your mind with noise, negativity, anxiety-producing content, and then expect your soul to be still.

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You cannot consume hours of news (designed to make you anxious), hours of social media (designed to make you envious and insecure), hours of entertainment (designed to keep you distracted), and then wonder why you can't quiet your mind for prayer.

What goes in comes out. What you consume shapes you. What you allow into your heart determines what flows from your heart.

If you're constantly consuming:

- **News media:** you'll be anxious, fearful, angry
- **Social media:** you'll be envious, insecure, performative
- **Entertainment:** you'll be distracted, shallow, unable to focus
- **Noise:** you'll be restless, unable to be still, addicted to stimulation
- **Negativity:** you'll be cynical, critical, joyless

This isn't moral judgment. This is cause and effect. You become what you consume. You are shaped by what you allow into your heart.

Philippians 4:8 - Think on These Things

Paul gives us the filter: "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things" (Philippians 4:8, NASB).

This is the standard. This is what you should allow into your heart. This is what you should dwell on.

Notice it's not just avoiding the bad. It's intentionally pursuing the good. It's being selective, discerning, careful about what you give your attention to.

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Ask yourself about what you're consuming:

- Is it true? (Not just factually accurate, but aligned with God's truth)
- Is it honorable? (Does it honor God and reflect His character?)
- Is it right? (Is it morally good, does it promote righteousness?)
- Is it pure? (Or does it pollute your mind and heart?)
- Is it lovely? (Does it promote beauty, goodness, life?)
- Is it of good repute? (Is it worthy of your attention?)
- Does it have excellence? (Is it the best use of your limited time and attention?)
- Is it worthy of praise? (Can you thank God for allowing this into your heart?)

If the answer is no to any of these questions, you shouldn't be consuming it. Period.

This will mean radical changes for most of us. It will mean turning off most news. Severely limiting social media. Being highly selective about entertainment. Saying no to things that everyone else is consuming.

But if you want stillness of soul, you must guard your heart. You must be ruthlessly selective about what you allow in.

Practical Heart-Guarding

Here are practices that have helped me guard my heart:

Morning protection: I don't check my phone first thing in the morning. I start with Scripture, with prayer, with silence. I set the tone for my day before the world gets access to my mind.

News diet: I limit news consumption to once daily, for a specific time period, from specific sources. I don't scroll endlessly. I don't consume opinion disguised as news. I don't marinate in anxiety-producing content.

Social media boundaries: I'm off most social media platforms. The ones I'm on, I check once a day, for a limited time. I don't scroll. I don't compare. I don't let other people's curated lives determine my emotional state.

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Entertainment audit: I regularly evaluate what I'm watching, reading, listening to. If it's not passing the Philippians 4:8 test, I stop consuming it. I don't care if everyone else is watching it.

Digital Sabbath: One day a week, I'm completely offline. No phone. No internet. No digital input. Just rest, relationships, and being present.

Evening protection: I stop consuming media an hour before bed. I read physical books, pray, prepare for sleep. I don't let the last thing in my mind before sleep be whatever's on my phone.

These boundaries feel restrictive at first. They feel like you're missing out. But what you gain is a guarded heart. A soul that's not constantly agitated by external input. A mind that's capable of stillness.

CONTENTMENT AS SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Philippians 4:11-12 - Learning to Be Content

Paul writes, "Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need" (Philippians 4:11-12, NASB).

Notice that word: *learned*. Contentment is learned. It's not natural. It's not automatic. It's not something you either have or don't have.

It's learned. Through practice. Through discipline. Through repeated choice.

Paul learned contentment in all circumstances—in want and in plenty, in hunger and in abundance, in suffering and in prosperity.

This is the inner posture that makes stillness possible. Because you cannot be still if you're constantly striving for more. You cannot have a quiet soul if you're perpetually discontent. You cannot rest in God if you're convinced you need something else to be okay.

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1 Timothy 6:6 - Godliness with Contentment

Paul also wrote to Timothy: "But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment" (1 Timothy 6:6, NASB).

Godliness *with* contentment. The two go together. You can have religious behavior without contentment—and it's just striving, just religious performance, just spiritual restlessness.

But godliness with contentment? That's great gain. That's wealth. That's treasure.

Because when you're content—when you're genuinely satisfied with what you have, who you are, where you are—you're free. Free from the tyranny of wanting more. Free from the anxiety of never having enough. Free from the restlessness of constant striving.

And in that freedom, you can be still. You can rest. You can know God.

The Cultivation of Contentment

How do you learn contentment? How do you cultivate this inner posture?

- 1. Practice thanksgiving.** Gratitude is the antidote to discontent. Every day, name what you're grateful for. What you have, not what you lack. Who God is, not what He hasn't done yet.
- 2. Recognize enough.** We live in a culture that says "more is always better." You must define "enough" for yourself. Enough money. Enough possessions. Enough success. Enough recognition. Define it and practice being satisfied when you reach it.
- 3. Stop comparing.** Comparison is the killer of contentment. You'll never be content if you're constantly measuring yourself against others. Social media makes this worse—everyone's highlight reel becomes your standard. Stop comparing. Focus on your own relationship with God, your own calling, your own journey.

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4. Trust God's provision. Contentment is ultimately trust. Trusting that God knows what you need. Trusting that He's provided what's necessary. Trusting that what you lack isn't because He's withholding but because you don't actually need it yet.

5. Embrace limits. You're finite. You can't have everything. You can't do everything. You can't be everything. Contentment means accepting your limitations without resentment. Embracing your creatureliness without rebellion.

6. Find satisfaction in God. The deepest contentment comes from finding your satisfaction in God Himself, not in what He gives you. When God Himself is enough—when His presence satisfies you more than any gift, any blessing, any circumstance—then you've found true contentment.

Peace in God's Sovereignty

Contentment is ultimately rooted in trust in God's sovereignty. The belief that God is in control. That He knows what He's doing. That His plans are good. That His timing is perfect.

When you truly believe this—when you trust God's sovereignty not just theologically but practically, in the actual circumstances of your life—contentment becomes possible.

You don't need to control everything because God is in control.

You don't need to strive for more because God has given you what you need.

You don't need to be anxious about the future because God holds the future.

You can be content. Not because your circumstances are perfect. But because your God is faithful.

This is the inner posture that makes stillness possible. This is the soul that can actually rest. This is the heart that can be quiet before God.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

STANDING BEFORE GOD

Theophan the Recluse wrote, "The principal thing is to stand before God with the intellect in the heart, and to go on standing before Him unceasingly day and night, until the end of life."

This is the goal. This is what we're cultivating. This is the inner posture that makes everything else possible.

To stand before God—not just physically, but with your whole being. With your intellect in your heart—not just thinking about God, but experiencing Him. Not just knowing about Him, but knowing Him.

And to go on standing—unceasingly, continuously, persistently. Day and night. Until the end of life.

This is not a state you achieve and then maintain effortlessly. This is a practice you return to, again and again, moment by moment, throughout your life.

You stand before God in the morning. You drift during the day. You return to standing before God. You get distracted. You return again. You fall into anxiety. You return. You get caught up in striving. You return.

Always returning. Always coming back. Always repositioning yourself before Him.

This is the inner posture we're cultivating:

- **Waiting on Him** instead of rushing ahead
- **Being quiet in His presence** instead of filling the silence with noise
- **Guarding our hearts** instead of allowing anything and everything in
- **Being content in Him** instead of constantly striving for more

These are not separate practices. They're all part of the same posture—the posture of standing before God with your intellect in your heart.

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This is stillness of soul. This is what makes the external disciplines effective. This is the inner reality that the outer practices are designed to cultivate.

And this is what transforms you. Not your effort. Not your discipline. But His presence, encountered in the stillness of your soul.

The Journey of a Lifetime

Let me be honest with you: I haven't arrived. I'm still learning. Still practicing. Still returning, again and again, to this posture of stillness.

Some days, my soul is quiet. Some days, it's chaos. Some days, I wait patiently. Some days, I rush ahead. Some days, I'm content. Some days, I'm striving.

But I keep coming back. I keep returning to the practices. I keep repositioning my soul before God.

Because I've tasted the difference. I know what it's like to have a churning soul—I lived there for years. And I know what it's like to have a soul at rest—I've experienced it in the stillness.

The stillness is better. The quiet is worth it. The contentment is treasure. The waiting produces strength. The simple presence with God is everything.

So I keep cultivating these inner postures. Not perfectly. Not consistently. But persistently.

And slowly, gradually, imperceptibly, my soul is being shaped. Into a container that can hold God's presence. Into a space where transformation happens. Into a stillness that sustains.

This is available to you too. This inner posture. This stillness of soul. This standing before God with your intellect in your heart.

It will take time. It will take practice. It will take returning, again and again, when you drift.

But it's possible. And it's worth it.

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Because a still soul is a satisfied soul. A quiet heart is a contented heart. And a life lived standing before God is a life truly lived.

"The principal thing is to stand before God with the intellect in the heart, and to go on standing before Him unceasingly day and night, until the end of life."

This is the goal.

This is the practice.

This is the journey of a lifetime.

Stand before Him.

Wait for Him.

Be quiet in His presence.

Guard your heart. Be content in Him. And watch what He does in the stillness of your soul.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

CHAPTER 13: HEARING GOD IN THE STILLNESS

"God's voice thunders in marvelous ways; he does great things beyond our understanding." (Job 37:5) "In silence and in stillness a devout soul makes progress and learns the hidden things of Scripture."

—Thomas à Kempis

I'll never forget the first time I clearly heard God speak to me in the stillness.

It wasn't audible. It wasn't mystical. It wasn't dramatic. But it was unmistakable.

I had been sitting in silence for about thirty minutes—which felt like an eternity at the time. My mind had finally quieted after the usual twenty minutes of mental chaos. I was just... there. Present. Waiting.

And then, so gently it almost didn't register at first, a thought formed that I knew wasn't my own: *You're trying to earn what I've already given you.*

That was it. One sentence. But it pierced me. Because it was true. I had been striving to earn God's approval through my ministry, my productivity, my performance. And in that moment of stillness, He showed me the futility of my striving and the sufficiency of His grace.

I didn't hear an audible voice. I didn't see a vision. I didn't have an ecstatic experience. But I heard Him. As clearly as I've ever heard anything.

This is what happens in stillness: you learn to hear God's voice. Not because He starts speaking more loudly, but because you finally get quiet enough to hear Him.

But here's the question that terrifies most people: How do you know it's actually God speaking? How do you distinguish His voice from your own thoughts, from your desires, from the enemy's deception?

This is not a trivial question. This is crucial. Because the history of Christianity is littered with people who claimed to hear God's voice and did terrible things as a result.

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So let me be clear from the start: there are safeguards. There are tests. There are ways to discern. God doesn't play hide-and-seek with His voice. He wants you to hear Him. And He's given you everything you need to recognize when it's actually Him speaking.

HOW GOD SPEAKS

John 10:27 - My Sheep Hear My Voice

Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:27, NASB).

This is a simple but profound promise: His sheep hear His voice. Not might hear. Not occasionally hear. Not only the super-spiritual hear. His sheep hear.

If you belong to Him, you can hear His voice. This is not special revelation for elite Christians. This is the normal Christian life.

But we need to understand how He speaks. Because God doesn't limit Himself to one mode of communication. He speaks in multiple ways, and we need to recognize them all.

Scripture as Primary Revelation

This is foundational, non-negotiable: Scripture is God's primary way of speaking to us. It's His revealed word. It's authoritative. It's sufficient. It's how we know who He is, what He's like, what He requires, what He promises.

Everything else must be measured against Scripture. Every impression, every thought, every sense of God's leading—it all must align with what He's already revealed in His word.

This is why biblical meditation is so crucial. You cannot recognize God's voice in the stillness if you don't know God's voice in Scripture. You cannot discern what He's saying personally if you don't know what He's said generally.

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In my times of stillness, Scripture is always present. Not always open—sometimes I'm just sitting in silence. But always accessible. Always the standard. Always the filter.

When I sense God speaking something to me in the stillness, my first question is always: Does this align with Scripture? If it contradicts God's written word, it's not from God. Period.

The Inner Witness of the Spirit

But God also speaks through the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. This is more subjective, harder to define, but just as real.

Romans 8:16 says, "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God" (NASB). The Spirit speaks to our spirit. He bears witness. He confirms. He guides.

This is that sense of peace when something is right. That unsettled feeling when something's wrong. That gentle conviction about a direction to take. That quiet assurance in a decision.

It's not dramatic. It's not overwhelming. It's often quite subtle—which is why stillness is necessary. You can't hear a gentle whisper over the roar of constant noise.

I've learned to recognize this witness over time. It's like learning to recognize your spouse's footsteps in another room—you just know. You can't always explain how you know, but you know.

The Spirit's witness often comes as:

- **A sense of peace** (or lack thereof) about a direction
- **A conviction** that won't go away
- **A thought** that comes with unusual clarity and doesn't originate from your own reasoning
- **A scripture** that suddenly becomes personal and relevant
- **A gentle prompting** toward or away from something

This is real. This is biblical. But—and this is crucial—this must always align with Scripture and be confirmed by other means.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

The Counsel of Mature Believers

God also speaks through other people. Proverbs 15:22 says, "Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they succeed" (NASB).

When you sense God speaking something to you in the stillness, share it with mature believers. Get their wisdom. Listen to their counsel.

I've had times when I thought God was telling me something in prayer, only to have a wise friend point out that it contradicted Scripture or didn't align with what they knew of God's character. I was grateful. Because I'd rather be corrected by a friend than misled by my own heart.

Community is a safeguard against deception. We need each other. We need multiple voices. We need the wisdom of people who know us and know God.

But notice: *mature* believers. Not just anyone. Not people who will just affirm whatever you want to hear. But people who know Scripture, who walk with God, who have wisdom and discernment.

Circumstances Aligned with God's Character

God can also speak through circumstances. He opens doors. He closes doors. He orchestrates situations that confirm His leading.

But here's the key: circumstances must align with God's character and His word. An open door doesn't automatically mean God's saying to walk through it. A closed door doesn't automatically mean He's saying no.

Satan can arrange circumstances too. He can open doors. He can create opportunities. He can make wrong things look attractive.

So we test circumstances against Scripture, against the Spirit's witness, against the counsel of mature believers. We don't follow circumstances blindly. We discern whether they're pointing toward God's leading or away from it.

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During my recovery, many doors closed. Ministry opportunities I would have jumped at before. Speaking engagements. Book deals. All closed.

At first, I was devastated. I thought these closed doors meant I was done, that God was finished with me, that I'd failed.

But in the stillness, God showed me: these doors are closed because I need healing first. Because intimacy comes before activity. Because knowing Him is more important than ministry success.

The closed doors weren't punishment. They were protection. They were God's mercy keeping me from rushing back into the same patterns that had destroyed me.

Circumstances spoke. But only because I was listening in the stillness.

DISCERNING GOD'S VOICE

1 John 4:1 - Test the Spirits

John writes, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1, NASB).

Not every voice in your head is God. Not every thought is divine inspiration. Not every impression is the Holy Spirit.

Some thoughts are just you—your desires, your fears, your assumptions projected onto God.

Some thoughts are the enemy—lies designed to deceive, accusations designed to condemn, temptations designed to destroy.

And some thoughts—some—are actually God speaking.

You must test. You must discern. You must examine what you're hearing against clear criteria.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Does It Align with Scripture?

This is the first and most important test. Does what you're sensing align with God's revealed word?

If it contradicts Scripture, it's not from God. Full stop. No matter how strong the impression, how peaceful you feel, how convinced you are—if it contradicts God's word, reject it.

God will never contradict Himself. He will never tell you to do something that violates what He's already said in Scripture. He will never lead you in a direction that opposes His revealed character and commands.

Some obvious examples:

- If you sense God is telling you to leave your spouse for someone else—that's not God. It contradicts Scripture.
- If you feel led to do something dishonest or unethical to advance ministry—that's not God. It contradicts Scripture.
- If you think God is saying you don't need community or accountability—that's not God. It contradicts Scripture.

But it's not always that obvious. Sometimes it's more subtle:

- You sense God is calling you to something, but it would require neglecting your family. Check Scripture: what does it say about your responsibility to family?
- You feel led to take a job, but it would compromise your integrity in small ways. Check Scripture: what does it say about integrity and compromise?
- You think God is saying to pursue something, but it feeds your pride and need for recognition. Check Scripture: what does it say about humility and motivation?

Always, always, always measure what you're sensing against Scripture. This is your primary safeguard.

Does It Produce Fruit of the Spirit?

Galatians 5:22-23 lists the fruit of the Spirit: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (NASB).

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When God speaks, it produces this fruit. Not necessarily immediately, but over time. His voice leads toward these qualities, not away from them.

In contrast, the enemy's voice produces:

- Fear instead of peace
- Anxiety instead of rest
- Condemnation instead of conviction
- Confusion instead of clarity
- Division instead of unity
- Pride instead of humility
- Haste instead of patience

Ask yourself:

- Does this leading produce peace, or anxiety?
- Does it promote love, or selfishness?
- Does it create patience, or urgency driven by fear?
- Does it foster gentleness, or harshness?
- Does it encourage self-control, or impulsiveness?

God's voice leads you toward His character. The enemy's voice leads you away from it.

Does It Glorify Christ?

John 16:14 says the Spirit "will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you" (NASB).

The Spirit's job is to glorify Christ. So when the Spirit speaks, He always points to Jesus. He always magnifies Christ. He always makes much of the Son.

If what you're sensing glorifies you—your ministry, your gifting, your importance—be very suspicious. That's probably not the Spirit.

If it glorifies your denomination, your theological distinctives, your spiritual experiences—also suspicious.

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But if it glorifies Christ? If it makes Jesus bigger, clearer, more beautiful, more central? That's likely the Spirit's voice.

I've had to ask myself this hard question many times: Is this leading making much of Jesus, or making much of me? Is this direction pointing people to Christ, or pointing people to my ministry?

When the answer was the latter, I knew I needed to reject it—no matter how appealing, how successful, how right it seemed.

THE GIFT OF SPIRITUAL SENSITIVITY

Hebrews 5:14 - Trained by Practice

"But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14, NASB).

Notice: *because of practice* have their senses *trained*.

Discernment is trained. Sensitivity is developed. Hearing God's voice is a skill that improves with practice.

You don't start out being able to clearly distinguish God's voice from your own thoughts. You learn. You practice. You get it wrong sometimes. You refine your ability. You grow in sensitivity.

This is why stillness is so important. It's where you practice. It's where you train your spiritual senses. It's where you learn to recognize God's voice.

How Stillness Develops Spiritual Ears

Think about learning to identify birds by their songs. At first, it's all just bird noise. You can't distinguish one from another.

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But spend time in the woods, listening carefully, with a guide who can tell you "that's a cardinal, that's a chickadee, that's a blue jay"—and gradually, you start to hear the differences. You start to recognize the patterns. You learn to identify each bird by its unique song.

The same is true with God's voice. At first, it's hard to distinguish from your own thoughts. But as you practice stillness, as you spend time listening, as you learn what His voice sounds like—you get better at recognizing it.

Here's what I've learned through practice:

God's voice is usually gentle. Not harsh. Not screaming. Not overwhelming. Gentle. Like the "gentle blowing" Elijah heard. You have to be still and quiet to hear gentle.

God's voice brings peace, even when it's challenging. His correction doesn't condemn—it convicts. His direction doesn't produce anxiety—it produces trust, even when it's hard.

God's voice is consistent with His character. He doesn't contradict Himself. He doesn't change His standards. He doesn't violate His own nature.

God's voice often challenges my comfort but affirms my identity. He pushes me beyond my comfort zone, but He never makes me question whether I'm His child.

God's voice confirms itself over time. It's not usually a once-and-done thing. He repeats themes. He reinforces messages. He confirms through multiple means.

These patterns took time to recognize. They required practice. They came from repeatedly sitting in stillness, listening, discerning, testing what I heard.

The Difference Between Mysticism and Biblical Spirituality

Let me be very clear about something: what I'm describing is not mysticism. It's biblical spirituality.

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Mysticism seeks spiritual experiences for their own sake. It values the supernatural over the ordinary. It often bypasses Scripture and reason. It's focused on achieving altered states of consciousness. It's seeking to transcend reality rather than encounter God within reality.

Biblical spirituality seeks God Himself, not experiences. It values truth revealed in Scripture. It uses reason as a gift from God. It's focused on knowing God as He's revealed Himself. It's encountering God in the midst of ordinary life, not escaping from it.

The difference matters.

I'm not teaching you to seek mystical experiences. I'm teaching you to cultivate intimacy with God through biblical means. To hear His voice as He's promised His sheep would hear. To encounter Him through His word, His Spirit, His people, His creation.

This is not exotic. This is not strange. This is not reserved for spiritual elites. This is normal Christianity. This is what Jesus modeled. This is what the early church practiced. This is what believers throughout history have experienced.

Don't let fear of mysticism rob you of biblical intimacy with God. Don't let suspicion of subjective experience prevent you from hearing the voice of the Shepherd who speaks to His sheep.

Be discerning, yes. Test everything, absolutely. But don't miss God because you're afraid of being deceived.

JOURNALING THE JOURNEY

Recording What God Reveals

Habakkuk 2:2 says, "Then the LORD answered me and said, 'Record the vision and inscribe it on tablets, that the one who reads it may run'" (NASB).

God told Habakkuk to write down what He revealed. To record it. To preserve it. Not just for memory, but so it could be read, tested, acted upon.

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This is wisdom for us too. When God speaks in the stillness, write it down. Record what you sense He's saying. Preserve it for later reflection.

Why? Several reasons:

1. **You'll forget.** Insights that seem unforgettable in the moment fade quickly. The clarity you had in prayer becomes fuzzy an hour later. Write it down while it's fresh.
2. **You can test it.** When you write something down, you can examine it more objectively. You can measure it against Scripture. You can share it with trusted advisors. You can see if it holds up over time.
3. **You can track patterns.** When you keep a record, you start to see themes. You notice what God keeps bringing up. You recognize His consistent leading over time.
4. **You can remember God's faithfulness.** Looking back at what God said and how He fulfilled it strengthens your faith. You see His track record. You remember His promises kept.

What to Journal

I keep a simple prayer journal. Nothing fancy. Just a notebook where I record what happens in my times of stillness.

Here's what I write:

Date and time: So I can track when things happened.

Scripture I'm meditating on: The passage I'm dwelling on that day.

What I sense God is saying: Not long paragraphs. Just key phrases, impressions, thoughts that seem to be from Him.

Questions I'm asking: Things I'm bringing to God, wrestling with, seeking clarity on.

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How I'm responding: What I'm committing to do, how I'm going to obey, steps I'm taking.

Confirmations: Later, I go back and note when what I sensed was confirmed through Scripture, circumstances, other people, or simply by the fruit it produced.

This simple practice has been invaluable. It's helped me:

- Test whether impressions were actually from God (many weren't)
- See patterns in how God speaks to me
- Remember His faithfulness when I'm in doubt
- Track my own spiritual growth over time
- Share with accountability partners what I'm sensing

Looking Back to See God's Faithfulness

One of the most powerful spiritual practices is reviewing your journal periodically. Going back and reading what you wrote months or years ago.

You'll see things you missed in the moment:

- God was preparing you for something you didn't know was coming
- He was warning you about something you weren't ready to hear
- He was affirming a direction you weren't confident about
- He was speaking a truth you needed but couldn't fully receive yet

You'll also see your own growth:

- Questions that consumed you then don't matter anymore
- Struggles that seemed impossible have been overcome
- Clarity you didn't have then is obvious now
- Patterns you couldn't see are clear in retrospect

I went back recently and read my journal from the early days of my burnout recovery. Page after page of confusion, doubt, fear, questioning. But also, clear through it all, God's gentle voice: *I'm not done with you. This is not punishment. Trust Me. Be still. I'm doing something good.*

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

At the time, I struggled to believe it. But now, looking back, I can see it. He was doing something good. He was faithful. He was speaking truth even when I couldn't fully trust it.

This looking back strengthens faith for looking forward. It reminds you that God has been faithful before, so you can trust Him now. It shows you that His voice has guided you truly in the past, so you can trust His voice in the present.

Practical Journaling Guidelines

Keep it simple. You don't need elaborate systems or beautiful journals. A simple notebook works fine. Don't let perfectionism keep you from starting.

Be honest. Write what you're actually experiencing, not what you think you should be experiencing. Record your doubts, your questions, your struggles alongside the insights.

Don't edit yourself. Write what comes in the moment. You can evaluate it later. Don't filter or clean up or make it sound more spiritual. Just write.

Review regularly. Go back weekly to see recent patterns. Go back monthly to see larger themes. Go back yearly to see God's faithfulness over time.

Share selectively. Not everything in your journal needs to be shared. But do share with trusted advisors when you're testing whether something is from God.

Remember it's for you and God. This isn't for publication. This isn't to impress anyone. This is your conversation with God, recorded so you don't forget and so you can test and confirm.

THOMAS À KEMPIS' WISDOM

Thomas à Kempis wrote, "In silence and in stillness a devout soul makes progress and learns the hidden things of Scripture."

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

This is the promise of stillness: you learn things you couldn't learn in the noise. You progress in ways you couldn't progress in the chaos. You discover truths that remain hidden when you're too busy to listen.

The hidden things aren't secret because God's hiding them. They're hidden because we haven't been still long enough to discover them. They're hidden because our noise drowns them out. They're hidden because we're too distracted to notice.

But in silence and stillness, they're revealed. Not all at once. Not dramatically. But gradually. Gently. As you learn to listen. As you develop spiritual sensitivity. As you train your senses to discern.

And Job reminds us: "God's voice thunders in marvelous ways; he does great things beyond our understanding" (Job 37:5).

God's voice is powerful. It's marvelous. It does great things. Things beyond our understanding.

But often, that thundering voice comes in the stillness. That marvelous speaking happens in the quiet. Those great things are accomplished when we're finally still enough to hear and obey.

WILL YOU LISTEN?

So here's the question: Will you be still long enough to hear?

Will you quiet the noise long enough to recognize His voice?

Will you practice the discernment necessary to distinguish His voice from all the others?

Will you journal the journey so you can remember and test and see His faithfulness?

God is speaking. He's always speaking. His sheep hear His voice.

But you have to be still enough to hear. Quiet enough to recognize. Discerning enough to test. Faithful enough to record and obey.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

The voice you're longing to hear—the voice that would guide you, comfort you, direct you, transform you—is speaking. Right now. In the stillness. In the quiet. In the space you've been too busy to create.

Be still.

Listen.

Discern.

Record.

Obey.

And discover what Thomas à Kempis promised: in silence and stillness, you make progress. You learn hidden things. You hear the voice of the Shepherd who knows you by name.

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." (John 10:27, NASB)

His sheep hear His voice.

You are His sheep.

Be still.

Listen.

You will hear Him.

I promise.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

CHAPTER 14: TRANSFORMATION IN THE SECRET PLACE

"The more we let God take us over, the more truly ourselves we become - because He made us. He invented us. He invented all the different people that you and I were intended to be...It is when I turn to Christ, when I give up myself to His personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own."
—C.S. Lewis

I need to tell you something that might disappoint you: transformation is slow.

Painfully, frustratingly, almost imperceptibly slow.

I wanted to be different immediately. After my burnout, after I started practicing stillness, after I began spending daily time with God in silence and solitude—I wanted to wake up transformed. Fixed. Healed. A new creation.

It didn't happen that way.

The anxiety didn't vanish overnight. The drivenness didn't disappear after a week of prayer. The need to prove myself didn't evaporate after a month of Sabbath rest. The patterns that had formed over decades didn't break after a few quiet times.

I remember sitting with my spiritual director three months into my recovery, frustrated and discouraged. "I'm doing everything right," I complained. "I'm being still. I'm praying. I'm resting. Why am I still such a mess?"

He smiled gently. "Because transformation takes time. Because becoming who God created you to be is the work of a lifetime. Because He's not interested in quick fixes—He's interested in deep change. And deep change is always slow."

I wanted to argue. But I couldn't. Because he was right.

And now, years later, I can see what I couldn't see then: God was transforming me. Not quickly. Not dramatically. Not in ways I could measure or control. But really. Deeply. Truly.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

The transformation was happening in the secret place. Where no one could see. Where there was no audience to applaud. Where God was doing His slow, patient, faithful work of making me into who He created me to be.

This chapter is about that transformation. The fruit that grows in the secret place. The change that happens when no one's watching. The becoming that occurs in the stillness.

CHANGED FROM GLORY TO GLORY

2 Corinthians 3:18 - The Process of Transformation

Paul writes, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18, NASB).

Look at that phrase: "are being transformed." Present tense. Continuous action. Ongoing process.

Not "were transformed" (past, completed). Not "will be transformed" (future, someday). "Are being transformed"—right now, continuously, progressively.

This is crucial to understand. Transformation is not an event. It's a process. It's not something that happens once. It's something that's happening, gradually, over time.

And notice how it happens: by beholding. By gazing. By looking at the glory of the Lord.

Not by trying harder. Not by making resolutions. Not by mustering more willpower. By beholding. By spending time in God's presence. By gazing at Christ.

This is what happens in stillness. In the secret place. In the quiet. You behold. You gaze. You look at Christ. And slowly, imperceptibly, you're transformed into His image.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

The Slow Work of God

We live in a culture of instant everything. Instant food. Instant communication. Instant gratification. And we expect instant transformation too.

We want the spiritual equivalent of a microwave: put in our broken self, push a button, wait three minutes, pull out a new creation.

But God doesn't work that way. He works like a master gardener, not a microwave oven. He plants. He waters. He prunes. He waits. He's patient. He's not in a hurry.

Henri Nouwen wrote, "God is waiting until my heart is empty of enough things so that I can receive Him."

This emptying takes time. This clearing takes patience. This making space is gradual.

Look at how long it took God to prepare people in Scripture:

- Moses: 40 years in the wilderness before the burning bush
- David: Years as a shepherd, then years running from Saul, before becoming king
- Paul: 3 years in Arabia after his conversion
- Jesus: 30 years of hidden preparation for 3 years of public ministry

God is not in a hurry. He's more interested in depth than speed. More concerned with character than productivity. More focused on who you're becoming than what you're accomplishing.

This is hard for those of us who are performance-oriented. Who measure everything. Who want visible results. Who need to see progress.

But the slow work of God is the deep work of God. And deep work takes time.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Gazing at Christ Produces Christlikeness

Here's the principle: you become what you behold. You're transformed by what you gaze at. You're shaped by what you give your sustained attention to.

If you gaze at success, you become driven. If you gaze at wealth, you become greedy. If you gaze at pleasure, you become addicted. If you gaze at yourself, you become self-absorbed.

But if you gaze at Christ—if you spend time looking at Him, studying His character, meditating on His life, being present to His presence—you become like Him.

Not through effort. Not through imitation. Through transformation. Through the Spirit's work. Through beholding.

This is why stillness is so transformative. Because in stillness, you behold. You're not distracted by a thousand other things. You're not trying to produce something. You're not performing for anyone. You're simply gazing at Christ.

And something mysterious happens. Something you can't fully explain. Something that doesn't happen through trying but through abiding. Something the Spirit does while you're simply being present.

You start becoming like Him. Not perfectly. Not completely. Not instantly. But progressively. From glory to glory. Little by little. Slowly but surely.

I've seen this in my own life. Not because I've tried to be more patient or more loving or more peaceful. But because I've spent time with Jesus. Because I've gazed at Him. Because I've learned to be still in His presence.

And somehow—I can't explain how, I just know it's true—I'm different. More patient than I was. More loving than I used to be. More at peace than I've ever been.

Not perfect. Not finished. Not arrived. But changed. Being transformed. From glory to glory.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

THE FRUIT NO ONE SEES

Character Formed in Secret

Here's what most people miss: the most important transformation happens in secret. Where no one sees. Where there's no applause. Where there's no recognition.

The fruit that matters most is the fruit no one sees.

Think about a tree. The part everyone sees—the trunk, the branches, the leaves, the fruit—is impressive. But the part that makes all of that possible is underground. Hidden. Unseen.

The roots.

And roots grow in darkness. They grow in secret. They grow where no one watches. They grow slowly, steadily, deeply into the soil.

Without strong roots, a tree might look impressive for a season. But when the storm comes, when the drought arrives, when the test comes—it falls. Because it has no depth. No foundation. No hidden strength.

The same is true spiritually. You can have an impressive external ministry. A visible platform. A successful reputation. But without deep roots—without character formed in secret, without transformation happening where no one sees—you're vulnerable. Unstable. Weak where it matters most.

Matthew 6:6 - Your Father Who Sees in Secret

Jesus said, "But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you" (Matthew 6:6, NASB).

Notice: what's done in secret. What no one else sees. What happens in the hidden place. That's what God rewards.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Not the public performance. Not the visible ministry. Not the impressive accomplishments. The secret. The hidden. The unseen.

Because that's where real transformation happens. That's where character is formed. That's where you become who God created you to be.

In the secret place—in your prayer closet, in your times of stillness, in your hidden moments with God—you're being shaped. Molded. Transformed. Not for show. Not for others. But for real. For deep. For lasting.

This requires trust. Because transformation in secret means you can't show anyone. You can't prove it's happening. You can't measure it or track it or demonstrate it.

You just have to trust that God sees. That He's working. That what He's doing in the hidden place is more valuable than anything visible.

Roots Grow Deep in Darkness

I love Colossians 2:7: "having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith" (NASB).

Rooted. Established. Built up. These are slow processes. Underground processes. Hidden processes.

You don't see a tree growing its roots. You don't watch it happening. You can't measure daily progress. But it's happening. In the darkness. In the secret. In the hidden soil.

The same is true with your spiritual life. When you practice stillness—when you spend time with God in the secret place—you don't always see immediate results. You don't feel dramatically different. You can't point to visible transformation.

But roots are growing. Deep roots. Strong roots. Roots that will hold you when the storms come. Roots that will sustain you when everything else fails.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

I couldn't see this during my recovery. I felt like I was wasting time. Sitting in silence while my ministry was collapsing. Being still while opportunities passed by. Doing "nothing" when I should have been rebuilding.

But God was growing roots. Deep roots. Roots I'd never had when I was too busy for stillness. Roots that are now sustaining me in ways the visible ministry never could.

The fruit no one sees is the fruit that matters most. The character formed in secret is the character that lasts. The roots grown in darkness are the roots that hold you when everything visible fails.

Don't despise the secret place. Don't underestimate the hidden transformation. Don't think you're wasting time just because no one sees.

God sees. And what He's doing in the darkness is more valuable than anything you could produce in the light.

PEACE THAT PASSES UNDERSTANDING

Philippians 4:7 - The Peace of God

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7, NASB).

This is one of the most tangible fruits of stillness: peace. Real peace. Deep peace. Peace that doesn't make sense given your circumstances.

Peace that surpasses comprehension. Peace that defies explanation. Peace that people can't understand because it doesn't depend on external conditions.

This is not the peace of having everything under control. This is not the peace of resolved circumstances. This is not the peace of no problems.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

This is the peace of God—His peace, given to you, guarding your heart and mind even when everything around you is chaos.

I experienced this in a shocking way during my darkest days. My ministry was falling apart. My reputation was in ruins. My future was uncertain. By every external measure, I should have been panicking.

But I had peace. Deep, inexplicable, unshakeable peace.

Not because I knew how it would turn out. Not because I had a plan. Not because I was in control.

But because I had spent time with God. Because I had learned to be still. Because I had discovered that His presence was sufficient even when everything else was gone.

People couldn't understand it. "How are you so calm?" they asked. "Aren't you worried? Aren't you anxious? Aren't you afraid?"

I was all those things, sometimes. But underneath it all was peace. God's peace. Peace that didn't make sense. Peace that guarded my heart even when my circumstances warranted fear.

This is the fruit of stillness. This is what grows in the secret place. This is what happens when you spend enough time with God that His peace becomes your possession, not your pursuit.

Isaiah 26:3 - Perfect Peace

"The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in You" (Isaiah 26:3, NASB).

Perfect peace. Complete peace. Shalom—wholeness, wellness, nothing missing, nothing broken.

And notice the condition: steadfast mind. Mind stayed on God. Mind fixed on Him. Mind that returns to Him constantly.

This is what stillness trains. This is what silence cultivates. This is what the secret place produces.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

When you practice returning your mind to God—when you sit in silence and gently bring your attention back to His presence every time it wanders—you're training steadfastness. You're developing the muscle of staying your mind on Him.

And the fruit of that steadfastness is perfect peace. Not perfect circumstances. Not perfect understanding. Perfect peace. In the midst of whatever you're facing.

The Unshakeable Soul

This is what the world cannot give and cannot take away. This is the fruit that's worth more than any success, any recognition, any accomplishment.

An unshakeable soul. A soul that's rooted in God. A soul that has peace because it's anchored in Him, not in circumstances.

I used to have shakeable peace. Peace that depended on things going well. Peace that evaporated when problems came. Peace that was actually just the absence of trouble, not the presence of God.

But stillness has given me something different. Not immunity to anxiety—I still have anxious moments. Not freedom from concern—I still care deeply about things. But underneath it all, an unshakeable foundation. A deep peace that holds even when surface waters are troubled.

This is the peace Paul talked about. The peace that guards. The peace that surpasses understanding. The peace that doesn't depend on comprehending your circumstances but on trusting your God.

And this peace is fruit. Not something you produce. Not something you manufacture through positive thinking. Fruit—something that grows naturally when you're connected to the vine, when you're abiding in Christ, when you're spending time in His presence.

You can't create this peace through effort. But you can cultivate it through stillness. You can grow it through silence. You can receive it in the secret place.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

JOY IN HIS PRESENCE

Psalm 16:11 - Fullness of Joy

"You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever" (Psalm 16:11, NASB).

In Your presence. Not in success. Not in achievement. Not in recognition. Not in circumstances working out.

In Your presence is fullness of joy.

This is the surprising discovery of stillness: joy is found in presence, not in productivity. In being with God, not in doing for God. In intimacy, not in activity.

I had it backward for years. I thought joy was the result of successful ministry. Of goals accomplished. Of visible fruit. Of people being helped and changed.

And when ministry brought satisfaction, I called it joy. When things went well, I felt something I labeled as joy.

But it was fragile. Circumstantial. Dependent on outcomes. And when things went poorly—when ministry struggled, when people were disappointed, when I felt like a failure—the "joy" evaporated.

Because it wasn't really joy. It was satisfaction with circumstances. Pleasure in success. Happiness with outcomes.

Real joy—biblical joy, the joy of the Lord—is different. It doesn't depend on circumstances. It doesn't require success. It doesn't demand that everything work out.

It comes from being in His presence. And His presence is available whether you're succeeding or failing, whether people are praising or criticizing, whether circumstances are favorable or difficult.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Nehemiah 8:10 - The Joy of the LORD

"Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10, NASB).

The joy of the Lord—not your joy in circumstances, but His joy in you—is your strength.

This is revolutionary. Your strength doesn't come from success or confidence or positive thinking. It comes from God's joy. His delight. His pleasure in you.

And you access this joy in His presence. In the stillness. In the secret place. Where you experience not just that you love Him, but that He loves you. That He delights in you. That He rejoices over you.

Zephaniah 3:17 says, "The LORD your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy" (NASB).

God rejoices over you. With shouts of joy. This is His posture toward you.

When you're still—when you're quiet enough to sense His heart toward you—you begin to experience this. Not as theological truth you believe, but as experiential reality you feel.

He delights in you. Not because you've performed well. Not because you've accomplished much. Not because you've earned it.

He delights in you because you're His. Because He made you. Because you're in Christ. Because that's who He is—a Father who rejoices over His children.

And when you experience this—when you actually feel His delight, His joy, His pleasure—it becomes your strength. Not manufactured enthusiasm. Not forced positivity. But deep, real, sustainable strength that comes from knowing you're loved.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Joy as Byproduct, Not Goal

Here's what I had to learn: you cannot pursue joy directly. It's not a goal you achieve. It's not something you manufacture. It's a byproduct. A fruit. A result of something else.

Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full" (John 15:11, NASB).

His joy in you. Not your joy in circumstances. His joy—becoming yours. Filling you. Making your joy full.

And when does this happen? In the context of John 15: when you abide. When you remain in Him. When you stay connected to the vine.

Stillness is where you abide. The secret place is where you remain connected. Silence is where you stay attached to the source.

And as you abide—not working to produce joy, not trying to feel happy, just being present to His presence—joy grows. His joy becomes yours. Your joy becomes full.

Not constant giddiness. Not perpetual excitement. Not manufactured enthusiasm.

But deep joy. Quiet joy. Joy that sustains even in sorrow. Joy that persists even in difficulty. Joy that doesn't depend on everything going right because it's rooted in Someone who is always right.

I have this now in a way I never did before. Not because life is easier—it's often harder. Not because circumstances are better—they're often more challenging.

But because I've learned to abide. Because I've discovered that in His presence is fullness of joy. Because I've spent enough time in the secret place to experience His delight in me.

And that joy—His joy, given to me, filling me—is strength. Real strength. Sustaining strength. Strength that carries me through what would have broken me before.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

BECOMING TRULY OURSELVES

C.S. Lewis's Profound Insight

Lewis wrote, "The more we let God take us over, the more truly ourselves we become - because He made us. He invented us. He invented all the different people that you and I were intended to be...It is when I turn to Christ, when I give up myself to His personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own."

This is the great paradox: you become most truly yourself when you give yourself to God. You find your real personality when you surrender to Christ's personality. You discover who you were created to be when you stop trying to be what you think you should be.

I spent years trying to be the person I thought I should be. The successful pastor. The strong leader. The together Christian. The person who had all the answers and never struggled.

It was exhausting. Because I wasn't being me. I was being a performance. A role. A carefully constructed image.

And in trying to be that person, I was losing the person God actually created me to be.

Stillness stripped that away. In the secret place, I couldn't perform. I couldn't pretend. I couldn't maintain the image. It was just me and God. My real self. My broken self. My needy, weak, struggling self.

And in that vulnerable honesty, something amazing happened: I started becoming myself. My true self. Not the performing self or the image-managing self, but the person God actually created.

More honest. More humble. More dependent. More real. More human. More me.

The Freedom of Being Known

There's incredible freedom in being fully known. Not by everyone—that would be overwhelming. But by God. And by a few trusted people.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

When you practice stillness—when you sit with God without pretense, without performance, without hiding—you experience being fully known and fully loved.

God knows everything about you. Every sin. Every failure. Every weakness. Every shameful thought. Every selfish motive. Everything.

And He loves you. Not despite knowing you, but while knowing you. Not in spite of who you are, but because of who you created you to be underneath all the performance.

This knowledge—this experience of being fully known and fully loved—is transformative. Because it frees you from the exhausting work of image management. You don't have to hide anymore. You don't have to pretend. You can just be.

And when you can just be with God, you start becoming who you actually are. Your true self. Your God-intended self. Not the self you've been trying to manufacture through performance, but the self He's been patiently waiting to reveal.

The Transformation Others Notice

Here's what's interesting: the transformation that happens in secret becomes visible to others. Not because you're trying to be seen, but because you can't hide genuine change.

People started noticing I was different. Not in dramatic ways. But in subtle ways that mattered:

"You seem more at peace."

"You're not as driven as you used to be."

"You listen better now."

"You're more present when we talk."

"You don't seem to need to have all the answers anymore."

"You're more comfortable with silence."

"You seem more like yourself."

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

That last one caught me. More like myself. Not more spiritual. Not more impressive. Not more successful. More like myself.

Because in letting God take me over—in surrendering to His work in the secret place, in allowing stillness to strip away the performance—I was finally becoming who He created me to be.

Not someone else's version of a good pastor. Not what I thought I should be. Not an image I was trying to project.

Just me. The real me. The me God intended. The me that was always there but couldn't emerge because I was too busy performing to let him out.

THE PROMISE OF TRANSFORMATION

Let me tell you what you can expect if you commit to the secret place. If you practice stillness consistently. If you give God time to work in the hidden places.

You won't be instantly fixed. You won't wake up perfected. You won't become sinless or struggle-free or beyond temptation.

But you will be transformed. Slowly. Surely. Really.

You'll find peace where you once had anxiety. Not the absence of concern, but the presence of God that guards your heart even in troubling times.

You'll discover joy that doesn't depend on circumstances. Not manufactured happiness, but deep, sustaining joy that comes from His presence and His delight in you.

You'll become more yourself. Not the performing self or the image-managing self, but the person God created you to be. More real. More honest. More free.

You'll develop roots no one sees. Character formed in secret. Depth that holds when storms come. Foundation that doesn't shake when everything else does.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

You'll be changed from glory to glory. Not instantly, but progressively. Not dramatically, but surely. Not by your effort, but by beholding Him.

This is the fruit of the secret place. This is the transformation that happens in stillness. This is what grows when you let God take you over instead of trying to take yourself over.

It's slow. It's hidden. It's often imperceptible in the moment.

But it's real. It's deep. It's lasting.

And it's worth everything.

"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:18, NASB)

You are being transformed.

Not instantly.

Not visibly.

But really.

In the secret place.

Where God sees.

Where roots grow deep.

Where peace guards your heart.

Where joy becomes your strength.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Where you become truly yourself.

Keep going.

Keep being still.

Keep meeting Him in the secret place.

The transformation is happening.

From glory to glory.

Trust the slow work of God.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

CHAPTER 15: MINISTRY FROM THE SECRET PLACE

"Abiding is not a specialized activity for the few; it's intended to be the normal Christian life—life at the pace of grace."

—Dallas Willard

I'll never forget the first time I preached after my burnout recovery.

I was terrified. Not of public speaking—I'd been preaching for fifteen years. But of this: What if I have nothing to say? What if the well is dry? What if all those months of stillness were just wasted time, and I've lost whatever ability I had?

I stood up to speak, and something was different. Radically different.

The words weren't striving. They weren't forced. They weren't manufactured from my intellect or my preparation or my homiletical skill.

They flowed. Like water from a spring. Like fruit from a well-rooted tree. Like overflow from a vessel that had finally been filled.

I wasn't working to produce something. I was simply offering what I had received. I wasn't performing. I was testifying. I wasn't striving to be impressive. I was sharing from intimacy.

And people noticed.

Not because the sermon was more polished—it probably wasn't. Not because my delivery was more dynamic—if anything, it was quieter, gentler. But because something was different. Something authentic. Something real. Something that came from a deeper place than mere preparation.

One person said afterward, "It felt like you'd actually been with God, not just studied about Him."

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

They were right. I had been with God. For months. In stillness. In silence. In the secret place. And what I gave them that morning wasn't what I had produced through study—though I had studied. It was what I had received through intimacy.

This is ministry from the secret place. And it's completely different from ministry from striving.

OVERFLOW, NOT STRIVING

John 7:38 - Rivers of Living Water

Jesus said, "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water'" (John 7:38, NASB).

Notice: *flow*. Not *produce*. Not *manufacture*. Not *strive to create*. Flow.

Flow is effortless. Natural. Inevitable. You don't make water flow from a spring—it flows because that's what springs do. You don't force a river—it runs because water seeks its level.

This is what ministry is supposed to be like. Not striving. Not forcing. Not manufacturing results through human effort. But flowing. Overflow. The natural result of being filled.

The next verse explains: "But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive" (John 7:39, NASB).

The Spirit is the source. The Spirit fills you. And when you're filled, you overflow. You can't help but overflow. It's not work—it's spillage.

This is the ministry model we've lost. We've replaced overflow with production. We've substituted human effort for Spirit empowerment. We've tried to manufacture rivers through sweat and strategy when Jesus promised rivers that flow from intimacy with Him.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Acts 1:8 - Power When the Spirit Comes

Before Jesus ascended, He told the disciples, "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8, NASB).

Notice the order: first, receive power. Then, be witnesses.

Not: go be witnesses and hope the power shows up. Not: do your best and ask God to bless your efforts. Receive power, then witness from that power.

And notice what He told them to do while they waited for the Spirit: nothing. Wait. Pray. Be together. Don't start ministry yet. Don't launch the mission yet. Wait until you're empowered.

This violates everything our productivity culture teaches us. We think waiting is wasting time. We think we should be doing something. We think action is always better than waiting.

But Jesus said: Wait. Don't move until you're empowered. Don't minister until you've received. Don't give until you have something to give.

The disciples waited. Ten days in an upper room. Praying. Waiting. Being still. And then—Pentecost. The Spirit came. Power came. And they went from hiding to boldly proclaiming Christ. From fear to fearlessness. From weakness to strength.

Not because they tried harder. Because they received power.

This is the model: intimacy first, ministry second. Receiving first, giving second. Being filled first, overflowing second.

You Can't Give What You Don't Have

This seems obvious. But we violate it constantly.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

We try to give peace when we're anxious.
We try to give hope when we're discouraged.
We try to give love when we're depleted.
We try to give wisdom when we haven't listened to God.
We try to give spiritual truth when we haven't been with Jesus.

And we wonder why our ministry feels hollow. Why our words seem empty. Why people aren't transformed. Why we're exhausted.

It's because we're trying to give what we don't have. We're trying to produce rivers from a dry well. We're trying to overflow from an empty vessel.

You cannot give what you haven't received. You cannot minister effectively from depletion. You cannot sustain long-term fruitfulness from human effort alone.

This is why stillness isn't optional for ministry. This is why the secret place isn't just for mystics and contemplatives. This is why time with God must come before service for God.

Because ministry is meant to be overflow. The natural spillage from a life filled with God. The inevitable result of intimacy with Christ. The effortless flow from a well that's been replenished.

When you minister from stillness—when you serve from overflow rather than striving—everything changes. Not because you're more talented or more gifted. But because you have something real to give. Something you've received. Something that flows naturally instead of being forced artificially.

The Difference Is Palpable

I can tell within minutes whether someone is ministering from overflow or from striving. Not because I'm discerning—it's obvious.

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Ministry from striving is:

- Exhausting to watch (you feel tired for them)
- Impressive but not transforming
- Technically proficient but spiritually empty
- Loud but not powerful
- Busy but not fruitful
- Producing activity but not life

Ministry from overflow is:

- Restful to witness (you feel peace, not pressure)
- Transforming even when simple
- Spiritually rich even when technically imperfect
- Quiet but powerful
- Focused but fruitful
- Producing life, not just activity

The difference isn't skill. It's not education. It's not experience. It's source.

Are you ministering from what you've produced, or from what you've received? From your study, or from your intimacy? From your effort, or from God's overflow through you?

One exhausts. One sustains.

One impresses. One transforms.

One is work. One is worship.

Choose overflow. Choose to minister only what you've received. Choose to give only from what you have. Choose to wait until you're filled before you try to pour out.

It's slower. It requires patience. It demands stillness. It violates the productivity model.

But it's sustainable. It's powerful. It's real. And it actually transforms people.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

AUTHORITY BORN OF INTIMACY

Acts 4:13 - They Had Been With Jesus

This is one of my favorite verses in all of Scripture: "Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13, NASB).

Read that again: they *recognized them as having been with Jesus*.

Not as having studied about Jesus. Not as having memorized His teachings. Not as having impressive credentials or theological education.

As having *been with* Jesus.

This is the authority that matters. Not positional authority. Not educational authority. Not even theological authority. Relational authority. The authority that comes from having been with Jesus.

Peter and John were uneducated and untrained. But they carried authority that the educated and trained religious leaders didn't have. Why? Because they had been with Jesus.

They knew Him. They had walked with Him. They had spent time in His presence. They carried the unmistakable mark of intimacy.

And people recognized it.

Mark 3:14 - Called to Be With Him

Look at how Jesus called the disciples: "And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach" (Mark 3:14, NASB).

Notice the order: First, *be with Him*. Second, be sent out.

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Not: be sent out and try to be with Him when you can. Not: minister and fit in time with Jesus between tasks. Be with Him first. Ministry flows from that.

This is the pattern we keep missing. We're so eager to be sent, we skip the being with. We're so focused on doing, we neglect the being. We're so busy serving Him, we have no time to actually be with Him.

But Jesus' order is non-negotiable: be with Him, then be sent. Intimacy, then ministry. Abiding, then fruit. Receiving, then giving.

Why? Because ministry divorced from intimacy is just religious activity. Service separated from relationship is just human effort. Work without worship is just exhausting performance.

But when you've been with Jesus—when you've spent time in His presence, when you know Him intimately, when you've received from Him before trying to give for Him—your ministry carries authority. Not positional authority, but the authority of authenticity. The authority of someone who's actually encountered God, not just studied about Him.

Why People Recognize Those Who've Been Still With God

There's something unmistakable about people who've actually been with God. You can't fake it. You can't manufacture it. You can't produce it through technique.

It shows.

In their peace—they're not anxious or striving.

In their confidence—they know who they are in Christ.

In their humility—they have nothing to prove.

In their wisdom—they speak from encounter, not just information.

In their presence—they're actually present, not distracted or performing.

In their words—they carry weight, they land differently.

In their silence—they're comfortable with quiet, not filling every gap with noise.

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People may not be able to articulate what's different. But they sense it. They recognize it. They know this person has been with God.

This is the authority we need. Not more education (though education is good). Not more technique (though skill matters). Not more strategies (though planning helps). But more intimacy. More time with Jesus. More stillness in God's presence.

Because that's what produces the kind of authority that actually transforms people. The kind that comes not from position or knowledge but from having been with Jesus.

The Authority I Lost and Found

I had positional authority as a pastor. I had educational credentials. I had theological knowledge. I had years of experience.

But during my burnout, I realized I had lost something more important: the authority born of intimacy. I hadn't been with Jesus. Not really. Not in any meaningful, sustained, transformative way.

I had been busy for Jesus. I had been working for Jesus. I had been serving Jesus. But I hadn't been *with* Jesus.

And people knew. They might not have been able to name it. But they sensed something was missing. Something hollow. Something inauthentic.

When I started practicing stillness—when I began spending significant time just being with God—something shifted. Not immediately. Not dramatically. But over time, people started saying things like:

"You're different."

"You seem more grounded."

"Your words carry more weight now."

"It feels like you've actually encountered God, not just studied Him."

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I had regained what I'd lost: the authority born of intimacy. The authority that comes from being with Jesus. The authority that people recognize even if they can't explain it.

This is the authority that matters. This is what stillness produces. This is what flows from the secret place.

SERVING FROM REST

Matthew 11:28-30 - The Yoke of Rest

Jesus said, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30, NASB).

This is one of the most misunderstood passages in Scripture. We think it means: come to Jesus for a vacation, then get back to the hard work of ministry.

But that's not what Jesus is saying. He's offering a different kind of work. Work that's restful. Labor that's light. A yoke that's easy.

How is this possible? How can work be restful?

When you're working *with* Jesus instead of *for* Jesus. When you're serving from His rest instead of striving in your own effort. When you're bearing His yoke instead of carrying the weight yourself.

This is the paradox of the kingdom: you're most effective when you're most restful. You accomplish more when you're striving less. You bear more fruit when you're abiding more deeply.

The Paradox: Most Effective When Most Restful

Everything in our culture tells us the opposite. Work harder. Do more. Push through. Sacrifice rest for productivity. Burn the candle at both ends.

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And we bring this mentality into ministry. We think being busy means being faithful. We think exhaustion proves dedication. We think if we're rested, we must not be working hard enough.

But Jesus offers a different way. A way where rest and effectiveness aren't enemies but partners. Where stillness enhances service. Where being with Him makes ministry more fruitful.

I've experienced this. When I'm most restful in God—when I'm practicing regular stillness, keeping Sabbath, abiding in His presence—my ministry is most effective. Not because I'm working harder, but because I'm working from overflow instead of depletion.

My sermons are better when prepared from rest rather than rushed in anxiety.

My counseling is more helpful when I'm present rather than exhausted.

My leadership is wiser when it flows from intimacy rather than striving.

My relationships are healthier when I'm serving from fullness rather than emptiness.

This is counterintuitive. But it's true. The more I rest in God, the more effective my service for God.

Burnout vs. Sustainable Fruitfulness

I know both. Intimately. I lived in burnout for years before I discovered sustainable fruitfulness.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Burnout is:

- Constantly exhausted
- Emotionally depleted
- Spiritually dry
- Cynical about ministry
- Resenting people's needs
- Feeling trapped
- Losing joy
- Questioning your calling
- Running on fumes
- Headed for collapse

Sustainable fruitfulness is:

- Appropriately tired but not chronically exhausted
- Emotionally healthy and available
- Spiritually nourished
- Still passionate about ministry
- Genuinely caring about people
- Feeling free
- Experiencing joy
- Confident in your calling
- Running on overflow
- Able to continue long-term

The difference isn't working less. Sometimes sustainable fruitfulness involves more activity than burnout did. The difference is source. Are you working from rest or from striving? From fullness or emptiness? From intimacy or isolation?

When you serve from the secret place—when your ministry flows from stillness with God—you can sustain. You can last. You can run the race without collapsing.

Not because you're stronger. Because you're drawing from a source beyond yourself. Because you're yoked with Jesus, and His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

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Dallas Willard's "Life at the Pace of Grace"

Willard said, "Abiding is not a specialized activity for the few; it's intended to be the normal Christian life—life at the pace of grace."

Life at the pace of grace. Not at the pace of productivity. Not at the pace of other people's expectations. Not at the pace of your own drivenness. At the pace of grace.

Grace doesn't rush. Grace doesn't force. Grace doesn't strive. Grace flows. Grace rests. Grace sustains.

When you're living at the pace of grace—when you're abiding in Christ, resting in His presence, serving from overflow—you move differently. Slower sometimes. More intentionally. With more peace. With less anxiety.

Not because you're lazy. Because you're sustainable. Because you're doing only what flows from intimacy, not everything that could be done.

This requires trust. Trust that God will accomplish what needs to be accomplished. Trust that your worth isn't measured by productivity. Trust that His pace is better than yours.

But when you live this way—when you serve from rest, when you minister from the secret place, when you move at the pace of grace—you discover something revolutionary: you can actually sustain. You can finish. You can last.

And along the way, you actually bear more fruit than you did when you were frantically striving.

SPEAKING WORDS THAT CARRY WEIGHT

Jeremiah 15:19 - Extracting the Precious from the Worthless

God says to Jeremiah, "Therefore, thus says the LORD, 'If you return, then I will restore you—before Me you will stand; and if you extract the precious from the worthless, you will become My spokesman. They are to turn to you, but as for you, you must not turn to them'" (Jeremiah 15:19, NASB).

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Extract the precious from the worthless. This is the work of the secret place. This is what happens in stillness.

You learn to distinguish between:

- God's voice and your own thoughts
- What's essential and what's merely urgent
- What's from the Spirit and what's from the flesh
- What needs to be said and what's just noise
- What carries weight and what's just words

When you spend time with God—when you practice stillness, when you learn to listen, when you abide in His presence—you develop the ability to extract the precious from the worthless.

And then, when you speak, your words carry weight. Not because you're eloquent or educated or impressive. But because you're speaking precious things. Things that matter. Things from God. Things that have been refined in the secret place.

Words from the Overflow of Intimacy

There's a qualitative difference between words that come from study and words that come from intimacy. Both have value. But they're different.

Words from study inform the mind.

Words from intimacy transform the soul.

Words from study are technically accurate.

Words from intimacy are spiritually alive.

Words from study can be impressive.

Words from intimacy are powerful.

I can tell the difference when I'm preaching. Some sermons come primarily from study. I've researched. I've outlined. I've crafted the message. It's good. It's solid. It's biblically accurate.

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But other sermons come from intimacy. Yes, I've studied. But more importantly, I've been with God. I've spent time in stillness. I've listened. I've received. And what I'm giving is what I've gotten. What I'm sharing is what I've experienced.

Those sermons are different. Not necessarily better technically. But more powerful spiritually. Because the words carry weight. They land differently. They come from a deeper place.

People can sense it. They may not be able to articulate it. But they know: this person has been with God. These words come from encounter, not just study. This is testimony, not just teaching.

The Difference Between Preaching and Prophesying

Preaching is declaring truth. Prophesying is declaring what God is saying right now, to these people, in this moment.

Both are valuable. Both are needed. But they're different.

You can preach from study. You can prepare a message, deliver it well, communicate truth effectively. This is good. This is important.

But prophesying requires intimacy. It requires having been with God. It requires hearing His voice. It requires sensitivity to the Spirit. It requires being so connected to God that you can sense what He's wanting to say to His people in this moment.

I'm not talking about "Thus saith the Lord" pronouncements. I'm talking about the living word—when Scripture comes alive in a moment, when truth becomes personal and timely, when God speaks through you something that resonates because it's exactly what people needed to hear right then.

This doesn't happen through preparation alone. This happens through intimacy. Through stillness. Through the secret place where you learn to hear God's voice and distinguish it from your own thoughts.

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When you minister from this place—when you speak words that come from intimacy with God—your words carry weight. They penetrate. They transform. They accomplish what God sent them to accomplish.

Not because you're specially gifted. Because you've been with Jesus. Because you've extracted the precious from the worthless. Because you're speaking from overflow rather than generating from emptiness.

The Temptation to Speak Too Soon

Here's a trap I've fallen into many times: speaking before I've spent enough time with God. Teaching before I've learned. Giving before I've received.

When you do this—when you minister before you've been adequately filled—your words are empty. Technically they might be correct. But spiritually, they're hollow.

It's like trying to feed people from an empty pantry. You can arrange plates nicely. You can set a beautiful table. But there's no actual food.

I learned this painfully. After my burnout, I had to relearn how to prepare messages. Not just intellectually (study), but spiritually (intimacy).

I had to spend more time being with God than studying about God. I had to receive before I could give. I had to be filled before I could overflow.

This meant sometimes I didn't have something to say. Sometimes I had to wait. Sometimes I had to admit, "I'm not ready yet. I haven't received what I need to give."

This is uncomfortable in a culture that expects us to always have something to say. But it's necessary if we want our words to carry weight.

Better to speak less frequently with power than to speak constantly with emptiness. Better to wait until you've received than to rush ahead with nothing but technique.

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THE NORMAL CHRISTIAN LIFE

Dallas Willard reminded us: "Abiding is not a specialized activity for the few; it's intended to be the normal Christian life—life at the pace of grace."

Everything I've described in this chapter—overflow instead of striving, authority from intimacy, serving from rest, words that carry weight—this isn't for super-spiritual people. This isn't advanced Christianity. This isn't optional.

This is normal. This is how ministry was always meant to be. This is the design.

But we've normalized the abnormal. We've made burnout common and overflow rare. We've made striving the standard and rest the exception. We've made ministry divorced from intimacy acceptable and expected.

We need to return to the normal Christian life. The life where:

- Ministry flows from intimacy, not from striving
- Authority comes from being with Jesus, not from position
- Service comes from rest, not from exhaustion
- Words come from encounter, not just study

This is sustainable. This is powerful. This is transformative. This is what God intended.

And it begins in the secret place. In stillness. In silence. In being with God.

From there, everything else flows. Not forced. Not manufactured. Not striving. Just overflow. Natural. Inevitable. Life-giving.

This is ministry from the secret place. This is serving at the pace of grace. This is the normal Christian life.

Will you return to it?

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"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28, NASB)

Your ministry doesn't begin with activity.

It begins with rest.

Not rest from ministry.

Rest in Christ that makes ministry sustainable.

Be with Him first.

Receive from Him.

Let Him fill you.

Then overflow.

This is the way. This is ministry from the secret place. This is the normal Christian life.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

CHAPTER 16: THE LONG OBEDIENCE - A LIFETIME OF STILLNESS

"A long obedience in the same direction."

—Eugene Peterson (from Nietzsche)

"Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people."

—Richard Foster

Let me tell you what I wish someone had told me when I first started practicing stillness: this is not a quick fix.

I know I've said this before. But I need to say it again, more emphatically, because this is where most people quit. Not in the first week or the first month. But when they realize this is a lifetime commitment. When the initial enthusiasm fades. When the practice becomes routine rather than novel. When stillness stops feeling special and starts feeling like just another discipline to maintain.

That's when people quit.

They go back to the noise. Back to the busyness. Back to the familiar patterns that were killing them. Because at least those patterns don't require the long obedience. At least they offer immediate results, even if those results are shallow and temporary.

I've been practicing stillness now for several years. Not perfectly. Not consistently every single day. But persistently. Returning again and again. Making it the center of my life instead of the periphery.

And I need to tell you: it's still hard sometimes. There are still days when I don't want to sit in silence. Still seasons when God feels distant. Still moments when I wonder if I'm wasting time that could be spent on "productive" things.

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But I also need to tell you: it's worth it. More worth it with each passing year. Not because it gets easier, but because the fruit gets deeper. Not because the discipline becomes effortless, but because the transformation becomes undeniable.

This is a long obedience in the same direction. Not a sprint. Not a quick fix. Not a thirty-day challenge that solves all your problems. A lifetime commitment to knowing God. To being still. To choosing depth over superficiality.

And if you're going to last—if you're going to finish well, if you're going to become a person of depth in a culture of superficiality—you need to understand what the long obedience requires.

THIS IS NOT A QUICK FIX

Galatians 6:9 - In Due Time

Paul writes, "Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary" (Galatians 6:9, NASB).

In due time. Not immediately. Not instantly. Not in thirty days or ninety days or even a year. In due time. In God's timing. When the fruit is ripe. When the work is complete.

The promise is certain: you *will* reap. But the timing is patient: in *due* time.

This requires a fundamentally different mindset than our culture cultivates. We expect instant results. Immediate gratification. Quick fixes. Seven steps to anything. Thirty days to transformation. Rapid change.

But spiritual formation doesn't work that way. Character formation doesn't work that way. Becoming a person of depth doesn't work that way.

It takes time. Years. Decades. A lifetime.

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And the greatest danger is not that you'll fail spectacularly. It's that you'll grow weary. That you'll lose heart. That you'll quit before you reap. That you'll abandon the practice before the fruit fully develops.

The Marathon, Not the Sprint

I ran track in high school. I was a sprinter. I loved the 100-meter dash—explosive, fast, over quickly. I hated distance running. The monotony. The endurance required. The sustained effort over long periods.

But spiritual formation is not a sprint. It's a marathon. Actually, it's more than a marathon—it's a lifetime of running. No finish line in this life. No moment when you cross over and you're done. Just continued faithful running until you see Jesus face to face.

This requires a different kind of training. A different kind of commitment. A different mindset entirely.

Sprinters focus on explosive power for short duration. Marathoners focus on sustainable pace over long distance. Sprinters train for intensity. Marathoners train for endurance.

Most Christians are trained as sprinters. We do intense spiritual boot camps. We have powerful conference experiences. We go on mission trips that change us for a week.

But we're not trained for the marathon. We're not prepared for the long, faithful obedience required for genuine transformation. We're not equipped to sustain spiritual disciplines over decades.

So we burn out. We quit. We give up when the results aren't immediate. We abandon stillness when it stops feeling special and starts feeling like work.

But the people who finish well—the people who become genuinely deep, who are truly transformed, who know God intimately—they're marathoners. They understand that this is a long obedience in the same direction.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Ancient Paths in a Microwave Culture

Jeremiah writes, "Thus says the LORD, 'Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; and you will find rest for your souls'" (Jeremiah 6:16, NASB).

Ancient paths. Old ways. Practices that have sustained believers for millennia. Not new techniques. Not innovative strategies. Not the latest spiritual fad.

Ancient paths. Stillness. Silence. Solitude. Sabbath. Meditation on Scripture. Prayer. Waiting on God. These are not new discoveries. These are ancient practices that have formed saints for thousands of years.

But they're ancient practices in a microwave culture. We want instant spiritual maturity. We want depth without time. We want transformation without patience. We want the fruit of the ancient paths but with the speed of modern technology.

It doesn't work that way.

The ancient paths are slow. They're patient. They produce deep roots over long years. They can't be rushed. They can't be microwaved. They require the one thing our culture has lost: sustained faithfulness over time.

Richard Foster understood this: "Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people."

Deep people. Not more intelligent people (though intelligence is good). Not more gifted people (though gifts matter). Deep people. People who have walked the ancient paths long enough to develop genuine depth. People who have practiced the long obedience.

This is what the world needs. This is what the church needs. This is what God is calling you to become.

Not instantly. Not quickly. But deeply. Over time. Through faithful practice of the ancient paths. Through long obedience in the same direction.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

SEASONS OF DRYNESS

Psalm 42:3 - Where Is Your God?

"My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all day long, 'Where is your God?'"
(Psalm 42:3, NASB).

Let me prepare you for something that will come: seasons of dryness. Times when God feels absent. Periods when prayer feels empty. Moments when you sit in silence and hear nothing.

This is not failure. This is not punishment. This is not evidence that you're doing it wrong. This is normal. This is part of the long obedience. This is what every saint throughout history has experienced.

There will be times when you practice stillness and feel nothing. When you wait on God and sense no presence. When you seek Him and seem to find absence instead.

These dry seasons are disorienting. Discouraging. They make you question everything. "Where is your God?" people ask. And you wonder the same thing.

Song of Solomon 3:1 - Seeking and Not Finding

"On my bed night after night I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him but did not find him"
(Song of Solomon 3:1, NASB).

Even in this love song—this celebration of intimacy between God and His people—there are moments of seeking without finding. Of longing without satisfaction. Of calling out without answer.

This is not the final word. She does find him (verse 4). But the searching matters. The longing matters. The continued seeking even when not finding matters.

Because here's what dry seasons teach: you're seeking Him for Him, not just for what He gives you. You're practicing stillness because you love Him, not just because it makes you feel good. You're pursuing intimacy because He's worth it, not because it's always rewarding.

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Dark Night of the Soul

John of the Cross wrote about the "dark night of the soul"—those seasons when God seems to withdraw His felt presence to deepen your faith. When He feels absent precisely because He's doing His deepest work. When the silence is actually His refining fire, burning away your dependence on feelings and teaching you to trust Him regardless.

These dark nights are not optional. They're not punishment. They're part of the journey. Every saint who's gone deep with God has walked through them.

And here's the paradox: the dark night is actually evidence of God's presence, not His absence. He's close enough to do surgery. He's present enough to do deep work. He's intimate enough to remove your dependence on feelings so you can learn to trust Him in faith.

But it doesn't feel that way in the moment. In the moment, it feels like abandonment. Like you've done something wrong. Like God has forgotten you.

You haven't. He hasn't. This is the dark night. And you must keep practicing stillness even when—especially when—it feels empty.

Faithfulness When Feelings Fade

This is where the long obedience proves itself. Anyone can be faithful when feelings are strong. Anyone can practice stillness when God's presence is palpable. Anyone can be disciplined when the rewards are immediate.

But can you be faithful when feelings fade? Can you practice stillness when you sense nothing? Can you keep showing up when the rewards seem absent?

This is the test. This is what separates the sprinters from the marathoners. This is what reveals whether you're seeking God Himself or just seeking good feelings.

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I've walked through multiple dry seasons. Months where prayer felt like talking to the ceiling. Where Scripture felt dead on the page. Where sitting in silence felt like wasting time.

The temptation is to quit. To think you're doing it wrong. To believe God has abandoned you. To go back to the noise where at least you feel something, even if that something is just distraction from the emptiness.

But if you quit during the dry season, you miss what God is doing. You abort the deep work. You settle for shallow roots that will never sustain you when real storms come.

The way through the dry season is the same as the way through every season: faithfulness. Keep showing up. Keep being still. Keep practicing even when you feel nothing. Keep choosing intimacy even when it doesn't feel intimate.

Because the dry season isn't the final season. The feelings will return—different, deeper, more mature. The sense of God's presence will come back—richer, fuller, more sustaining. The fruit will emerge—slowly, imperceptibly, but really.

But only if you remain faithful when feelings fade. Only if you practice the long obedience even through the dark night.

THE COMMUNITY OF STILLNESS

Hebrews 10:24-25 - Stimulating One Another

"And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near" (Hebrews 10:24-25, NASB).

Here's something crucial I need to tell you: you cannot sustain the long obedience alone. You need community. You need others who are walking this path. You need people who understand the value of stillness in a noisy world.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Stillness is practiced in solitude. But it cannot be sustained in isolation.

You need people who will stimulate you to love and good deeds—including the good deed of being still before God. You need people who will encourage you when you want to quit. You need people who will remind you why this matters when you start to forget.

Finding Others on the Narrow Path

Jesus said the narrow path has few travelers (Matthew 7:14). This means you won't find fellow pilgrims on every corner. Most people are on the wide path. Most Christians are satisfied with superficiality. Most will not understand your commitment to stillness.

But there are others. Few, but real. And you must find them.

Look for people who:

- Value silence over constant noise
- Prioritize being with God over doing for God
- Practice regular stillness and Sabbath
- Speak of God from encounter, not just study
- Exhibit peace rather than constant striving
- Have depth rather than just activity

When you find these people—and they may not be in obvious places—connect with them. Share your journey. Learn from theirs. Encourage each other. Remind each other why the long obedience matters.

I've found my community of stillness in unexpected places. Not always in church. Not always among fellow pastors. Sometimes in a spiritual director. Sometimes in a small group of laypeople committed to contemplative prayer. Sometimes in online communities focused on ancient spiritual practices.

These relationships have sustained me. When I've wanted to quit, they've reminded me to continue. When I've doubted the value, they've testified to the fruit. When I've felt alone, they've shown me I'm not.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Corporate Silence and Retreat

But beyond individual relationships, we need corporate practices of stillness. Times when we're silent together. Retreats where we seek God collectively. Gatherings built around contemplation rather than activity.

This is rare in modern church culture. We gather for activity—worship services, Bible studies, fellowship events, service projects. All good. All valuable.

But we rarely gather simply to be still together. To wait on God corporately. To practice silence as a community. To support each other's journey into deeper intimacy with God.

I'm part of a small group that meets monthly for silent prayer. We gather, we share briefly, and then we sit in silence together for an hour. No teaching. No worship songs. Just silence. Together.

This corporate silence is powerful. We're alone in our individual practice, but we're together in our commitment. We support each other by our very presence. We remind each other that this matters by showing up month after month.

We also do annual retreats—longer periods of silence together. Twenty-four or forty-eight hours of minimal talking, extended solitude, corporate silence. These retreats reset me. Refresh me. Remind me why the long obedience is worth it.

If such communities don't exist where you are, start one. Invite a few people to join you for a morning of silence. Suggest a one-day retreat. Create what you need.

Because the long obedience requires community. Not community that fills the silence, but community that supports the silence. Not community that distracts from stillness, but community that encourages stillness.

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Accountability for the Long Haul

Beyond encouragement, you need accountability. Someone who will ask: "Have you been practicing stillness? Have you kept Sabbath? Have you been with God, or just busy for God?"

I have a spiritual director I meet with quarterly. She doesn't let me off the hook. She asks hard questions. She challenges my excuses. She calls me back to the practices when I'm drifting.

She's not mean. She's not harsh. But she's honest. And she loves me enough to speak truth even when it's uncomfortable.

You need someone like this. Someone who knows your commitments and will hold you to them. Someone who values stillness enough to challenge you when you're abandoning it. Someone who's further along the path and can guide you through dry seasons and difficult terrain.

The long obedience is too hard to maintain alone. Too easy to quit when no one's watching. Too simple to rationalize away when you're the only one holding yourself accountable.

Find your people. Build your community. Create structures of support and accountability. Not to make stillness another performance, but to sustain your practice over the long haul.

FINISHING WELL

2 Timothy 4:7 - The Good Fight

Paul, at the end of his life, writes: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7, NASB).

Fought. Finished. Kept.

Not "I started strong." Not "I had good intentions." Not "I was impressive for a season."

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Fought the good fight—all the way to the end.

Finished the course—completed what God called me to.

Kept the faith—remained faithful through everything.

This is what matters at the end. Not how you started. Not how impressive you were at your peak. But whether you finished. Whether you remained faithful. Whether you kept the faith all the way to the end.

Legacy of Intimacy with God

What will people say about you when you're gone? What legacy will you leave?

Not what accomplishments you achieved. Not what buildings you built or programs you started or books you wrote. But this: Did you know God? Did you walk in intimacy with Him? Did your life testify to the reality of His presence?

This is the legacy that matters. This is what will impact people long after you're gone. Not your productivity. Your intimacy.

I think about the people who've most influenced my spiritual life. They're not the most successful. Not the most famous. Not the most accomplished. They're the ones who clearly knew God. Who carried His presence. Who spoke from encounter. Who lived from intimacy.

Their legacy wasn't what they did. It was who they were. It was their depth. Their peace. Their authenticity. Their genuine knowing of God.

This is the legacy I want to leave. Not impressive ministry statistics. Not a long list of accomplishments. But a life marked by intimacy with God. A testimony that knowing Him was my priority. Evidence that stillness was worth it.

What Matters at the End

Everything else fades. Everything else proves temporary. Everything else—success, reputation, accomplishment, recognition—it all passes away.

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But knowing God? That's eternal. That's what lasts. That's what matters when everything else is stripped away.

At the end of your life, you won't care how many sermons you preached. You'll care whether you knew God. You won't care how successful your ministry was. You'll care whether you walked in intimacy with Him. You won't care what people thought of you. You'll care what He thinks of you.

And the only way to finish well—the only way to get to the end of your life with what matters still intact—is through the long obedience. Through faithful practice of stillness over decades. Through choosing depth over superficiality year after year after year.

This is not dramatic. It's not impressive. It's not the stuff of inspiring stories. It's just faithful, quiet, sustained practice of being with God. Day after day. Year after year. Through excitement and boredom. Through feelings and dryness. Through success and failure.

Just showing up. Just being still. Just choosing Him.

That's what creates the legacy that matters. That's what ensures you finish well.

Eugene Peterson's Vision

Eugene Peterson took the phrase "a long obedience in the same direction" from Nietzsche and applied it to discipleship. He understood that the Christian life is not about dramatic moments or spiritual highs. It's about sustained faithfulness over time.

It's about getting up day after day and choosing God. Again. And again. And again.

It's about practicing the disciplines when you feel like it and when you don't. When they're rewarding and when they're not. When people are watching and when no one cares.

It's about walking in the same direction—toward intimacy with God—for your entire life. Not veering off when it gets hard. Not quitting when results aren't immediate. Not abandoning the path when something more exciting comes along.

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Just walking. Steadily. Faithfully. In the same direction. For the long haul.

This is not spectacular. But it's what produces depth. It's what creates genuine transformation. It's what ensures you finish well.

THE INVITATION TO DEPTH

So here we are, at the end of this book but really at the beginning of your journey.

I've told you what stillness is. Why it matters. What it costs. How to practice it. What fruit it produces. And now, what sustaining it requires.

The question that remains is simple: Will you commit to the long obedience?

Not to trying it for a while. Not to experimenting with it. Not to adding it to your already full spiritual life. But to actually reorienting your life around it. To making intimacy with God through stillness the center of everything. To choosing depth over superficiality for the rest of your life.

This is not a decision to make lightly. This is not a quick commitment. This is choosing a path—a narrow path, a costly path, a path few find—and walking it for the rest of your days.

It will require:

- Time you don't have
- Sacrifice of things you value
- Misunderstanding from others
- Seasons of dryness
- Daily choice to keep showing up
- Lifetime commitment to the same direction

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But it will produce:

- Intimacy with God that satisfies your deepest longings
- Transformation that makes you truly yourself
- Peace that doesn't depend on circumstances
- Joy that flows from His presence
- Ministry that comes from overflow rather than striving
- A legacy that actually matters
- A life truly lived

The choice is yours. Not once, but daily. Not at the beginning, but for the long haul. Not when it's easy, but especially when it's hard.

Will you walk the narrow path?

Will you practice the ancient disciplines?

Will you choose depth over superficiality?

Will you commit to the long obedience in the same direction?

The invitation stands.

The path is before you.

God is waiting in the stillness.

My Prayer for You

As we close this book, let me pray for you:

Father, for every person reading these words, I pray depth. Not quick fixes or instant transformation, but deep, lasting, real knowing of You.

Give them endurance for the long obedience. Sustain them through dry seasons. Provide them with community for the journey. Help them finish well.

When they want to quit, remind them why they started. When feelings fade, strengthen their faithfulness. When others don't understand, give them courage to continue anyway.

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Teach them to be still. To wait. To rest. To know You—not just know about You, but actually know You intimately, deeply, transformatively.

Make them deep people in a culture of superficiality. People of stillness in a world of noise. People who know You in a generation satisfied with just knowing about You.

This is Your invitation. This is Your path. This is Your way.

Help them walk it. For the long haul. To the very end.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

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CONCLUSION: THE INVITATION STANDS

The Open Door

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me." (Revelation 3:20, NASB)

God is still standing at the door. Still knocking. Still inviting. Still waiting for you to be still enough to hear, quiet enough to open, present enough to dine with Him.

This is not a metaphor for salvation alone. This is the ongoing invitation to intimacy. To fellowship. To knowing and being known. To dining together—the picture of sustained relationship, unhurried presence, intimate communion.

The door is before you. The knock is sounding. The invitation is extended.

Will you open?

Will you be still?

Will you know Him?

Not just today. But tomorrow. And the next day. And the day after that. For the rest of your life.

This is the long obedience. This is the narrow path. This is the invitation to depth.

And it begins—continues—with being still and knowing that He is God.

"Be still, and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10, NASB)

This is the invitation.

This is the command.

This is the way.

HOW TO BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

Be still.

Know Him.

For the rest of your life.

This is everything.