

Questions and Answers to Finding Stillness

1. What do I think about?

I can't empty my head of everything. I cannot stop thinking. Is this like Eastern mysticism? No, we never said stop thinking about anything. We are encouraged rather to think about ONE THING – The Lord and him alone. David said it well, "One thing have I desired, that will I seek after." (Psalm 27:4) It is not mindlessness but "mindfulness" as some ancient Christian mystics termed it. It is also called "centering" that is, getting the gaze of your soul on Him. I like the word "focus," for all of these steps into intimacy with God are about focusing on one thing at a time. It is about total focus or concentration on only one prayer issue at a time.

2. How long do I do this each day?

As you begin this discipline I suggest one hour, or 60 minutes. Jesus challenged his sleepy disciples in Gethsemane by asking, "Could you not focus (be watchful) one hour?" If time does not permit that much holy leisure then I recommend you work on this step every day for a minimum of 20-30 minutes.

3. How can I find time to do this?

I have a busy mind and a busy schedule. You have got to carve out the time from other things and lavish it on Jesus. You will never have enough time if you let your world dictate your pace. Take control of your schedule. Cut out TV time. Get up an hour or half-hour earlier to do this. Do not cheat yourself out of God-time because someone else demands your time. Be a time-bandit for God.

4. Can I do this in my car on my way to work?

Of course you can pray and enjoy the Lord in the quiet of your vehicle. I do it all the time and find it a wonderful place to be alone with God, but this is not the stillness we are talking about. Why? Well for one thing its like talking on a cell phone while driving the car. You are multitasking, not being focused or being still. Though you may not perceive it when driving your mind is busy about many things. You must be focused on the guy in front of you, the cars darting in from side roads, the truck pulling over into the passing lane, the deer

jumping out on the road, the traffic light changing, etc. That is anything but rest. I am not suggesting that you should not pray or worship while driving. Not at all. But being still cannot be done rightly while you are doing other things.

This step needs your total attention. You can do any of the other prayer steps while driving your car but this one. You cannot close your eyes, lay down prostrate while driving your car. So don't try.

Having said that I need to say I understand that you drive to work and that may be your only time alone with God. OK, then try it, but make sure your cell phone, radio, or CD player is off. Also, be sure this is not being tried in congested traffic areas. External stimuli will ruin quietness. Also, I want you to be aware that God is not pleased in being squeezed into your over-tight schedule. The Lord is not to be our afterthought. "Seek ye first" does not mean whenever you get a quiet moment. Stillness is a discipline. It must be made. It demands room. It requires unfettered time. It mandates silence. Can you really do that in your car?

I suggest that if the car is the only place you find peace then try leaving for work fifteen minutes early, or a half hour early and try sitting quietly in your car in the parking lot with your eyes closed and your mind on the Lord alone.

5. I am a mother with little children. I cannot find a quiet place in my house let alone moments to myself. Moms have all my sympathy. When I preached on these things early in my ministry my wife came to be in tears the next day and said, "You don't understand. I don't have a moment of silence all day with two very active children." I understand now. A mother with little children can hardly take 15 minutes to a half hour to get quiet. Mom, your context is different. Here are a few feeble suggestions. 1) Try getting up a few minutes earlier to get some much needed stillness time. If junior awakes at 5 am every morning that may not work. It may be that the evening is the best time for you to be still. 2) Try using nap time for your quiet time. You used to use it to tidy up the kitchen or watch Opra. Now sanctify that time or a portion of it to being still. If your children don't have specific nap times then you need to learn some discipline for your children or they will run your life. 3) Try using bathroom breaks as brief moments of silence. Susanna Wesley, mother of John and Charles gave birth to 19 children. Her only silent moment was in the

kitchen. She would sit in a chair with her apron over her head. When she did this the children knew it was “Do not disturb” time.

6. I am a college student in a noisy dorm. How can I get alone in a solitary place? I hear ya! My first year in college was in a dorm room with four other men and two more in the adjacent room. We shared the bathroom. There were no quiet moments in that room. We all struggled with privacy issues. I remember being on my knees weeping as I prayed for the lost and being interrupted by a well meaning friend to see if I was alright. What an intrusion! So, eventually I found my spot in that very busy dorm. It was the boiler room where they kept the garbage cans. I found that behind the boiler no one walked through and no one could hear me. The smells and noise of the boiler were not pleasant, but the presence of the Lord was in that place as I waited on Him. Two students in my church told me they found a crawlspace no one knew about and used that as a prayer closet. Jonathan Edwards found a place in the back field where he build a make-shift shelter for his prayer times. Where there is a will, there is a way.

7. I cannot lay prostrate or get on my knees because of a bad back or bad knees. First, ask God for healing of your knees and back, enough so you can kneel and lay before Him. Secondly, stop thinking of no pain. You know the athletic expression, “No pain, no gain.” It is often true spiritually as well. We should stop looking for comfort and start looking for the Lord. Paul and Silas prayed in prison while chained, in a dark damp dungeon, probably with rats and water at their feet. Did they feel no pain? No, they ignored the pain and focused on the main thing. Now I am not trying to be callous or indifferent toward you painful knees or back, but I also know some of my friends with severe back pain can and do work and play with the pain and despite the pain. Don’t let Satan rob you of time alone with God because of pain. If you really cannot kneel or lay down then find other ways of expressing your surrender to God. David and Job both referred to laying on their beds and praying. Just stay awake.

8. Can’t I just sit and do this? You can, but you won’t. Sitting is our all American favorite position. Don’t give God what comes easy. Don’t sit in the presence of the King. Demand your body to show some respect for the King of kings. You sit through everything else in life, why not give it up for the King?

Calvin Coolidge was asked by reporters why he went to church every Sunday, and didn't he think he could worship God on the golf course. Silent Cal, known for his few words answered, "I can, but I don't." Sure you can sit and pray, but remember just because you can doesn't mean you should. The few times in the Bible where sitting in prayer is mentioned the outcomes were not good. Position often does reflect attitude. Just as facial expressions reflect emotion, so physical posture can signal devotion.

9. Can I do this stillness thing on my morning walk?

Yes, I can see much value in quiet meditation, contemplation, even memorization on your morning stroll. But for stillness to take place there must be stillness, not movement. Stillness requires solitude where you can, without embarrassment; fall on your face before God. A walk can be part of this step but not all of it. I find an initial walk helpful in slowing me down when I start on this search for stillness. If you are a walker be sure you stop as Elijah did in the entrance of the cave and listen for his still small voice. In Mark 1:35 Jesus "got up a before dawn, left the house, found a solitary place, and then prayed." He didn't just go for a walk. He walked to get away so that he could arrive and be still.

10. Is there a way to speed things up? These steps, especially this first one, seem very time consuming. Is there any way around that? You can't hurry bread in the oven. You cannot hurry a pregnancy. It takes time. Time is part of the process and part of the desired result. God wants time with you, not production from you. All disciplines take time. We all have an equal amount of time each day. Every one of us begins the day making decisions about how we will use or abuse our allotted time. If you tithed your waking hours to God, how much would he get? Do you give it to him or rob it from him and give it to something you value more? Does God own your time? Is God in a hurry? You have 24 hours every day. There are no short changed days. If you sleep for eight hours you have 16 left. If you work an eight-hour job, you still have eight left. Eight hours is 480 minutes. A tithe of that is 48 minutes every single day. Is that too much? Is God worth that investment? Jesus asked his disciples an important question, "Could you not be vigilant with me one hour?" We are not suggesting that you start this process with 48 minutes every day. We suggest that you give the Lord five minutes a day for six days a week doing one step each day until you establish a routine. Personally, I started out with a very costly 3-minutes a day

on each of the six steps. Six times three is 18 minutes. Is that too much to waste on Jesus?

11. I am not a morning person. Do I have to do this in the morning?

God made us all but wired us differently. Not everyone is an early riser. The early bird gets the worm but some of us would rather have sleep. Many years ago I asked a man of God about this matter for I was a night owl, not a morning person. He shared that he too was more alert and alive for the Lord at night than in the morning and encouraged me to give God my rhythms. Give God the hours you are most alert. So, no, you do not have to be a morning person to do this step. Do it whenever you are alert and ready.

12. I am afraid to be alone.

This is not such an uncommon admission. We live in a social world. Sometimes the influence of family; parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles can leave us with subtle attitudes and fears that will influence our prayer lives. Know this, God is not the author of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind. (2 Timothy 1:7) Fear of being alone is fear, therefore not from God. God longs for us to be alone from time to time to hear his voice. Satan will capitalize on fear to keep us out of the throne room. Deal with your fear, but don't run from solitude with God. Great men of God have had much to say about this.

13. Are there any other suggestions for establishing this discipline in my life? Yes, try any of these.

- A. **A 3-Minute Egg Timer.** It sounds crazy but it can help. My first experiences with trying to get still were very frustrating until God showed me a three-minute egg timer and how to use it to begin the process of quieting my heart. Three minutes isn't long but it seems like an eternity when your mind is busy and you are trying to get focused and quiet. Here is what I do. Lay on the floor with a pillow under you for comfort. Place the timer in front of you and as you watch the sands pour slowly through the glass ask God to still your mind and heart. Do this process in three-minute increments. If you were not still during a full three-minute period turn the timer over and start again until you succeed in being mentally quiet for an entire three minutes.

- B. A Personal Prayer Retreat.** Regularly set an appointment with God to catch up on your intimacy with God. God is a jealous God. He is jealous of our love and our attention. The commandment is “Thou shalt have no other god before (or beside) me.” In our high energy, hyperactive culture God gets the short end of the stick. He gets the leftovers. If you truly want to experience the intimate presence of God you must (there are not shortcuts or substitutes) give him ample blocks of time. Time is in short supply. God isn’t making any more time. You must budget time from what has already been allotted. You must become a time bandit. You must steal time from Satan and self and back to God. A retreat with God can be an hour in the evening, a four-hour block on a Saturday or Sunday, or a whole eight-hour day. The only qualifier is that it be a “premeditated,” scheduled time alone with God. God is looking for God-hungry people who are willing to sacrifice their precious moments to him. He is waiting for you.
- C. A Time Out:** In today’s culture when we discipline a child we give him a “time out.” Meaning he is disciplined and made to sit alone in a corner by himself until he settles down, thinks it through, and resolves to return to the other children and play by the rules. We are still kids at heart. We need to discipline ourselves by giving ourselves a “time out.” That time out should be a literal “closet” where we will be temporarily out of circulation.
- D. A Prayer Room:** When Jesus taught his disciples to pray it did not start with the Lord’s prayer. No, the first thing Jesus taught was the essential requirement of a personal prayer room. (Matthew 6:6-7) His emphasis in that first step was silence. “Do not be like the heathen who think they will be heard for their many words. Solomon said, “Let your words be few.” Jesus said, “Enter into your prayer closet and when your shut the door then pray to your Father in secret.” Every seasoned prayer warrior ought to have a prayer room. Every church ought to have a silent chapel, or a prayer room. That can be as simple as a mat on the floor behind the furnace to carefully equipped room with stations of prayer. God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, not on their own turf, but on His turf. So make a God-space in your heart and in your home.

- E. **A Prayer Shack:** Jonathan Edwards at 12 years old went out into the back woods and built himself a prayer shed. It was a simple hut with four walls and a roof where he could “get apart” alone with God and where no one would see him. The people of Israel did a similar thing at the feast of tabernacles built booths, rustic huts where they temporarily lived while at the feast. Jonah built a shelter for himself outside of Ninevah to await its destruction. It must have been a prayer hut, for despite his bad attitude God dealt with him there through the silent example of a vine, a worm, and a scorching sun. A prayer hut is a heart-response to God. It grows out of a desire to get quiet and hear God’s voice.
- F. **A Solo Camping Trip:** There are a lot of ways to get away from other people and get alone with God. It’s not about being comfortable. It’s about solitude, silence, and simplicity. Most of us probably have an old pup tent, a camper, or an RV for vacation, but we’ve never thought about it being for a solo retreat with God. Why are we enamored with the “great outdoors” but not so much with “our great God and Savior Jesus Christ?” (Titus 2:13)