

## **AN INTRODUCTION TO STILLNESS by Rev Jackie Sears**

**This resource sheet introduces the spiritual discipline of stillness and the practice of “doing nothing” as you come before God.**

### **Giving God our time**

The Psalmist wrote: **‘Be still and know that I am God’**...(Ps 46:10).

Let us take these words into our lives.

### **How can I master a discipline of stillness?**

I wonder if it is possible to keep an inner stillness even as our lives are so different in this present moment?

The Psalmist encourages us to keep a still place deep within our hearts. As we learn to take this on board, it is also the place from where we can speak in a healing way to all the people we come across. Without that still space - our minds keep spinning about all the things we should be doing, but with that stillness God can be our gentle guide in everything we think, say or do.

### **What is stillness:**

Basically, it is about ‘doing nothing’. And it is the most productive activity you will ever undertake. So doing ‘nothing’ - literally means ‘doing nothing’.

Hope I haven’t lost you yet!

### **Doing nothing:**

- It is not prayer (at least not in the sense of talking to God’)
- It is not problem solving
- It is not planning

Doing nothing is being still, quietening your mind, cutting out all voices, and simply *being*. Some of the ancient wisdom literature points to the importance of such a practice.

Ps 37:7 ‘be still before the lord and wait patiently for him’

Ps 46:10 says ‘Be still and know that I am God’.

Ps 23: ‘we lie down in green pastures...

This is not easy in our present culture of a constant media, permanently noisy society. Noise crowds into every empty space, leaving us spiritually, mentally and emotionally exhausted.

**Mother Teresa of Calcutta said:**

*"We need to find God, and He cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is the friend of silence. See how nature—trees, flowers, grass—grows in silence; see the stars, the moon and the sun, how they move in silence. . . . We need silence to be able to touch souls."*

One of the ancient desert fathers, Abba Poeman taught his disciples *"If you are silent, you will have peace wherever you live."*

**Why You Need Stillness**

I doubt you need convincing that you need some measure of what I am describing here. As I have shared about this topic with others, they inevitably say, "Oh, I *so* need that in my life! How do I start?"

Nevertheless, here are three of my own reasons for practicing the discipline of stillness:

1. I want to maintain perspective. If I don't make time to be still, then I find myself in reactive mode—influenced by hundreds of little voices with big demands.
2. I want to stay connected to my true self. I don't want to get confused, thinking that I am the image I present to the world. They are related, of course, but I want to live *from the inside out*.
3. I want more peace in my life. More room to notice what matters most and be thankful for it.

**How to Practice Stillness**

This is not something I have enough experience with to write. In fact, I feel pretentious for even attempting it.

But perhaps that is the value I can add to this conversation. I am not so experienced that I have forgotten what it is like to be a beginner.

In that spirit, let me offer a few suggestions for how you can practice stillness in your own journey and reclaim some interior peace.

- 1. Plan a time.** I plan stillness first thing in the morning. This time has become so precious to me, that I don't want to start the day without it. I practice this first—before prayer, before bible reading, before diary writing and before exercise.
- 2. Find a place.** When I was am on holiday, I try to sit looking at the mountains, or the sea. This is ideal, but it is not my real world. Now I simply go into my study, or my place of quiet and shut the door. The main thing is to set aside fifteen minutes a day. In my limited experience this seems about right. It is amazing how my perception of this time changes from day to day. Sometimes it seems like forever. Other times, it goes by very quickly. I use a timer on my phone.
- 3. Relax your body.** I simply sit in a soft chair with my eyes closed. I then systematically relax my body and become quiet. If you can't sit still, then engage in any mindless physical activity, like rocking in a chair or watching some natural motion like fire or running water. Some people have tried playing soft music.
- 4. Quiet your mind.** This is the biggest challenge. Just when I get still, I have some random thought or a whole flurry of thoughts. But I am getting more used to it. Some people will call this meditation - and that is a great practice - but this stillness means doing nothing.
- 5. Be present.** Spend time in the present. This isn't the time to go through regrets or celebrating the past. Don't worry or dream about the future. Instead, collect your thoughts and be present—in this moment. It is the most important time you have. In fact, it is the *only* time you have to learn to receive from our Lord.
- 6. Learn to return.** This has been the most helpful component. It involves recalling a "place of peace," where maybe you had a particularly vivid experience of peace and stillness. A place of beauty for instance - where you didn't need anything else.

Perhaps the most important thing is just to start. It's easy to blow the discipline of stillness off as something you don't have time for. Don't. The busier you are the more important it is.

Practising stillness will change the way you view life - more than you know. Even if you can only set aside five minutes a day, do it. And if you miss a day or two, don't regret - just start again.



**Prayer:**

Lord, help me to be still. Help me to do nothing but 'be'...and perhaps allow you to speak, guide, lead and be God. Here I sit in the stillness of the present moment - allowing nothing to take away the peace of your presence. Amen.