

LUCY
RYCROFT

Be still

30

DEVOTIONS FOR THOSE WHO
FEEL ANYTHING BUT



‘Down to earth, practical and wise – much like Lucy! I particularly love the stillness idea each which gives readers a chance to try out ways to be still and find the one that works best for them. A valuable resource for restless hearts and times.’

Rachael Newham, author and theology of mental health specialist

‘Lucy’s accessible and thoughtful devotional will help you to embrace God’s gift of peace and rest – even if your life continues at what feels like a breakneck pace. Birthed out of a year of exploring stillness in the Bible, her guide is filled with engaging scripture and practical suggestions for how to get still and know God. One to make time for.’

Amy Boucher Pye, author of *Holding onto Hope* and spiritual director

‘Despite my best intentions, being still in body, mind and soul often eludes me. Relentless demands and problems can distract me from being present to God’s presence and promises. Perhaps you can relate, for similar or other reasons. But Lucy has gone ahead of us. She has put into practice and now shares with us her wisdom gleaned from prayerful response to scripture. Her poignant stories, relatable insights, doable suggestions and thought-provoking reflections cover a helpful range of relevant scenarios where “being still” might evade us. Lucy’s clear rich writing, her honest vulnerable sharing and at times, her gentle humour, are a gift to help anyone longing to be still yet who feels anything but.’

Anne Le Tissier, speaker, preacher, devotional writer and author of *Dwell*

‘We all long to be still and savour God’s presence in the chaos of our busy lives, but often can’t even begin to see how it’s possible. Lucy is an empathetic fellow traveller through life’s chaos and the words of her devotional are a wise and welcome guide, helping chronically busy Christians find places in their daily lives to pause and reconnect with God’s peace, joy and hope. This is a great, encouraging read, reminding me that stillness can be a daily practice, even in seasons when it feels impossible. I’m grateful for Lucy’s wise words and practical, down-to-earth suggestions. I will continue to use them long after I finish the book.’

Georgie Tennant, author of *The God Who Sees*

‘I love that *Be Still* has been written by someone as busy as Lucy! It means that the text is totally relatable and honest, as she shares what she has learned after a year of delving into what the Bible has to say about being still. Understanding that most of us have responsibilities we can’t lay down, Lucy unpacks why she now believes being still is a state of mind and something we can achieve whatever our circumstances. Lucy is a great writer, and there is much within these pages to encourage as well as challenge. If you want a devotional that will not only fit into your morning routine with ease but provide you with truths to dwell on throughout the day, I heartily recommend *Be Still*.’

Claire Musters, author, speaker, editor and host of the *Woman Alive* book club

‘This book is such an encouragement. The tone is perfectly supportive with practical tips and encouragements that never feel overreached. Too often we put pressure on ourselves to strive for perfection in our faith. *Be Still* encourages us to pause and helps us to recognise the value we already bring to the here and now.’

Jack Imbert-Terry, publishing support & development manager, Bible Society

‘I read Lucy’s book wearing two hats. As a vicar I loved how *Be Still* brought deep truth in Lucy’s typical relatable and encouraging way; it read like a friend gently pointing me back to God. But as a parent, I loved that it was realistic! I could actually read it in the brief moments of peace I had to myself. A moment of peace in the beautifully messy reality of family life.’

Andy Baker, priest in charge, St Michael le Belfrey, York

‘Compassionate, realistic and Bible-centred – Lucy manages to encourage a habit of stillness without making “Be still” into just another goal to achieve! You have her permission to read this book slowly, giving yourself space to embed just a few of the “stillness ideas” to bring real refreshment into your busy life.’

Lisa Cherrett, editorial project manager, Bible Society

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Ministries

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For my mum, Caroline Baynes, who has always given me the best example of being still in every circumstance.

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INTRODUCTION

Stillness is an alien concept in today's busy world.

Whatever the time of day or night, there is always somewhere to go, someone to connect with, something to watch or read or listen to. It feels like stillness is a naughty word, with forces combining to ensure that we *never have to be still*. Even with my Scrooge-like approach to TV streaming services, I still have access to thousands of different viewing options at any one time. Take advantage of all of them, and that figure probably heads into five or six figures. My phone alone offers me a seemingly infinite number of podcasts to listen to, articles to read, websites to crawl and people to keep in touch with.

It's not just the digital space that means stillness is hard to come by. There are more and more options of how we spend our free time, where we eat our meals and where we shop – many of which are open much longer hours than they might have been in a previous generation. My children have a huge choice of extracurricular classes, entertainment parks, holiday clubs and leisure activities to choose from. Even the Christian world is not exempt. I've just been to a Christian conference where the number of organisations represented in the exhibition area was staggering, each with a number of different programmes, initiatives and campaigns vying for our time, energy and (let's be honest) money.

Our brains were not designed to cope with such an incessant pace of life. We know that there are well-being benefits to slowing down, enjoying screen-free activities and a good night's sleep. The question is: how do we access these when life's frenetic pace doesn't seem easy to shift?

As a working mum of four children (plus a dog, who's worth another three) and wife of a church leader, I wasn't finding it easy to follow the biblical imperative to 'be still'. To truly live a life of stillness, I'd need to knock off a few members of my family, which (*checks Exodus 20*) would go against another important biblical imperative.

I wanted to find moments to 'be still' within a busy life, so I claimed these words for a year, and went on a journey to discover what the Bible had to say about stillness. Unbeknownst to me at the time, that year was to become the busiest of my life. God was teaching me that stillness was a state of mind as much as a physical state. However, it wasn't long into my journey when I realised that carving out even small pockets of physical stillness would make a difference to my well-being and my relationship with God.

You may have picked up this book because, like me, you are wondering how to slow life down. You may be a chronic overachiever, a Type A personality or a 'busy-holic'. (Welcome to the club!) Or you may be none of those things, but you have a desire to delve deeper into the concept of stillness. I welcome you all. This is my journey of reluctantly laying down a compulsion to do everything, be everywhere and see everyone – and instead to allow God to renew my approach to how I use my time: activity *and* stillness.

I hope that, as we dive into scripture, this will become your journey too.

How to use this book

Each devotion begins with a ‘bite-size stillness’. Treat this like a mantra to take into your day – a soundbite of the day’s Bible reading.

The ‘stillness ideas’ at the end of each devotion are optional. Many of them involve embedding a habit over a longer period, and as such I would recommend that you only pick two or three from the whole book which stand out to you.

If you do this devotional on consecutive days throughout a month, it will be impossible to properly embed all the stillness ideas. However, if you spread out the devotionals, doing one per week or per month, you may find yourself being able to attempt more.



Be Still

– even when jobs remain undone.

Introduction

While I've always been a night owl, I can pinpoint – almost to the day – the time in my life when I made a choice to prioritise activity above sleep. I decided that the things I wanted to get done in the day, and what I wanted to do with my life, were worth staying up into the early hours for. A decade later, while I'm definitely improving at going to bed at a reasonable time, I still battle the desire to stay up late to finish a project or just get that last job done. Are you someone who, like me, doesn't like to go to bed without a sense of 'completion'? Or maybe you're an early bird, rising before everyone else in order to crack on with all the things that overwhelm you during the day. If so, today's verse is for you.

Read Psalm 127:2

**In vain you rise early
and stay up late,
toiling for food to eat –
for he grants sleep to those he loves.**

At the very start of my ‘be still’ year, this psalm was read out during a sermon at my church. Verse 1 had always been significant in my life, but this time it was verse 2 which stood out, an obvious moment of hearing from God.

We all get 24 hours in the day, but busy people tend to want to cram these to the max. This might be because of a need to prove ourselves, a desire to live life to the full, a struggle to say ‘no’ or a combination of these factors (and others). We’re not so good at setting boundaries for ourselves or realising how much time, headspace and energy a particular commitment might require. So although we know that roughly one-third of our time is supposed to be sleeping, we will often find ourselves stretching our day out as much as we think we can cope with, surviving on less sleep than is healthy.

God says that our attempts to do this are ‘in vain’. But if I stay up till midnight folding all the laundry or emptying the dishwasher, then I can come down in the morning to a clean kitchen. That’s not in vain. Or if I wake early to catch up with emails, then I can start my working day with a clear inbox. That’s not in vain – is it?

The problem is that these jobs don’t go away forever. We might have made life a little easier for ourselves in the short term, but in the long term we have created for ourselves a habit that will be hard to break. This is why God says that sacrificing sleep in order to pursue activity is in vain: because the activity will never truly be complete – the dishwasher, laundry basket and inbox will fill up again with new demands on our time – but that night of sleep we sacrificed is not coming back. Promises of going to bed earlier the next night or sleeping in the next

morning never actually come to fruition, because we've adopted a mindset of toil, where there will always be a job to do.

In this psalm, the example given is 'toiling for food to eat' – but the application is really *any* activity that ensures our survival (or perceived survival), whether that's literally making meals for our households, keeping on top of the dusting, preparing that Bible study for the house group we lead, or perfecting the project proposal that's due soon. Completing the laundry may ensure you don't have that particular job to do the following day, but you can be sure that we busy people will find another job to fill its role as sleep-displacer.

It is not wrong to work. Paid or unpaid work, in or out of the home, is a God-given gift. But when we absorb a mindset that we cannot rest, cannot be still, until that work is complete, then we have fallen into the trap of working 'in vain'. It is not the work that is the problem, but our attitude towards it. What a kind and compassionate God we have, to give us the gift of sleep.

Prayer

- Are you a night owl or an early bird (or both)? What are the tasks that routinely get in the way when you should be sleeping?
- Ask God to help shift your mindset, teaching you to be still even when there are still things to be done.

Stillness idea

Choose one day or night this week when you're going to be strict about your bedtime. Work back half an hour from when you'd like to be in bed with lights out, and use that as your deadline to do what you need to do. When it gets to that time, stop what you're doing. Leave it undone. Go to bed. If the issue is with early mornings, do this

in reverse! Work out when you should ideally be waking up, and set your alarm for then – no earlier.

Reflect

How did that feel? When did you manage to finish that job? Did it set you back? Was it more or less stressful than if you'd sacrificed sleep to complete it?



Be Still

– you can give God everything.

Introduction

Does your busyness make you anxious?

I'm not a natural worrier, but I can tell when I'm overstretched, as I start to feel on edge. Will I be able to successfully juggle all these different commitments? Will I forget an appointment or meeting? Will I be able to be present for my kids when they need me?

In my experience, it's often a vicious circle. You get busy, you start to feel anxious, then the anxiety itself becomes an extra burden and makes you feel even busier. Sometimes, of course, this is a warning sign to us: we need to slow down, reflect on what we're doing and lay a few of our commitments aside. But there may still be many things we *can't* lay aside. The people we care for, the homes we look after, the work which pays the bills. When our responsibilities are causing us anxiety, what biblical truths might help break that cycle?

Read Philippians 4:4–9

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

I would love this not to be the case, but when I'm busy any spiritual habits I may have had up to that point are likely to fly out the window. Every spare bit of time is spent trying to keep anxiety at bay by playing 'whack-a-mole' with my never-ending to-do list. So I think it's insightful that this section of Paul's letter to the Philippians, which is about peace, begins with a spiritual habit: 'rejoice' (v. 4). If we are to be people who can truly 'be still' even in seasons of busyness, the first thing we are to do is fix our eyes on the Lord and rejoice in the unchanging goodness of who he is. Our schedules wax and wane, but God is always good in every season.

The second truth is that we are to show our gentleness (v. 5). Note it is assumed we have gentleness. Why? Because it is a fruit of the Spirit, and with the Spirit living in us we have access to the full range of fruit. I think Paul mentions it here because when we are busy, it's easy to be short with people. We are so pushed for time that we become singularly focused on what we need to achieve. Those around us merely become pawns in the game we're trying to complete, rather than dearly beloved human beings designed and valued by God. I can't count the number of times I've been guilty of failing to acknowledge others' needs because

I was so overwhelmed by what I needed to do and how those around me might play their part in my agenda.

After rejoicing in the Lord and showing gentleness to others, we get a reminder: 'The Lord is near' (v. 5). I usually take a breath at this point when reading this passage to let the beauty of those words sink in. What a privilege, that the creator of the universe, the God of all things, the redeemer of humankind should draw near to us! Within this context, we can now be reminded to 'not be anxious about anything, but... present your requests to God' (v. 6).

I love that Paul doesn't simply tell us not to worry but gives us something practical to do to help. Often as busy people, we can think that God is not interested in the minutiae of our day or that we should save our prayer time for more significant issues, like our friend who is awaiting test results or a terrible war going on elsewhere in the world. These things need our prayers too – but we don't need to have perfect prayer lives before we ask God to help with every detail of our lives. A regular prayer of mine – particularly when my work list doesn't seem to match the number of waking hours in the day – is that God 'accelerates' my work, or draws out the hours, so that I can complete what I need to in the time I have. You can pray for your child to nap, your spouse to get home early from work, dinner to be made in half the time (or, better still, that a kind friend might drop some food round!), a miraculous slot of time to be opened up so that you can tidy up before your guests arrive, a full night's sleep on less-than-a-full-night's hours... God can do the miraculous! We can literally give every aspect of our busyness to him.

And the result? Peace (vv. 7, 9). God's incomprehensible peace which leaves you feeling still even when you're storming through life at 90 miles per hour. How can that be? It doesn't make logical sense! It 'transcends all understanding' (v. 7) because it's not dependent on our outward circumstances, but in what God is doing in our hearts. Turning our eyes to him in praise (v. 4), allowing his gentleness to work its way out (v. 5), remembering his presence (v. 5) and fixing our minds on what is true (v. 8) all help us truly give our busyness over to him. If

we can discipline ourselves to do these things every day, we will know what it means to be still, regardless of what our calendar looks like.

Prayer

- Consider the commands from today's passage: rejoice; be gentle; remember the Lord is near; present your requests to God; fix your mind on what is true. Which of these do you find most of a challenge right now?
- Ask God to come and change your heart in this area. Ask him to help you with what you're struggling with. Ask him to bring his peace 'which transcends all understanding' right now.

Stillness idea

Take the command you picked out in the prayer prompt. Write it out and place it on your bedside table or somewhere you'll see first thing each morning. Start each day by following this command. 'Rejoice' might look like reading out a psalm or using your own words to praise God for who he is. 'Be gentle' might look like asking God to fill you with this particular fruit. 'Remember the Lord is near' might involve a minute of silence or deep breathing as you acknowledge God's presence within you.

Reflect

Has this morning habit made an impact on the rest of your day? If so, how? Is it something you feel you could/should keep doing? Or will you pick a different command to try?



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'Stillness' seems like an alien concept in our frenetic, tech-oriented world.

Communication, entertainment, work and relationships seem accessible to us 24/7, and it can feel impossible to change the pace. In this book, Lucy Rycroft takes us on a journey of 30 biblical devotions, looking at the concept of 'being still'. From Moses leading the Israelites through the Red Sea, to the raw emotions of the Psalms, to Jesus calming the storm, the focus of this study is how we, as Christians living in the crazed busyness of the 21st century, can absorb biblical truths to help us discover what 'being still' looks like today.



Lucy Rycroft is the founder of thehopefilledfamily.com and a part-time music teacher. She previously worked for BRF Ministries in the Parenting for Faith team. Lucy lives in York with her husband and four children. You can follow her on Instagram @thehopefilledfamily.

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