

LIVE IN STILLNESS

Often in our walk of faith, we are called to be still and wait for God's timing or sit still and rest. Other times, we are surrounded by a stillness that we can't understand – God's stillness. Either form is challenging for a believer to endure. Like standing on a dancefloor with music blaring and your body aching to move along, your mind just can't grasp inaction. They come though, those times when, at your Partner's request, you must wait in stillness.

Be Still

Time was fast approaching for me to begin this month's topic. I scanned through my possibilities and prayed. I felt a sense that I was to hold off on choosing. I had an upcoming event to prepare for and felt I was to pour my energies into that.

Maybe to you that sounds simple enough, but not for me – no way! I need a plan, like, a far in advance plan. If I held off on choosing and beginning this topic, I would be behind schedule. Heaven forbid I would be behind schedule!

I'm behind schedule. Today is Tuesday, and this chapter is due to my editor Friday. Seriously, that's not enough time. Surprisingly, I'm not freaking out at all. Yesterday, the day I knew I would be making the decision, a simple question arose in my spirit, a question from *the Spirit*. *Where are you living now?* That was an easy answer: I am living in stillness.

I have been camping in the Book of Ruth for the past few weeks. Once I arrived at the verse below in Ruth's story, it spoke to me in such a significant way that I now can't seem to get away from it. It's there in the back of my mind reminding me the work of these web chapters is a call from God.

“Then she said, ‘Sit still, my daughter, until you know how the matter will turn out; for the man will not rest until he has concluded the matter this day.’” (Ruth 3:18)

The last two words “this day” are obviously just a figure of speech in my case. “This day” has come and gone many times over and here I sit...still. I want to do something. I want to act on my gut instinct, but God is telling me to sit still. He has something to accomplish prior to my next steps. But sitting still just might kill me.

Can you relate? When God tells you to sit still, that you must wait for whatever it is you're hoping for, how do you handle that? The following is a favorite verse of mine and maybe for you as well:

“Be still, and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10)

It's odd really that we favor that verse since most of us hate being still. Ultimately, the last phrase is what reassures us: He is God. What do you do when told to sit still? Focus on the One who asks you to be still. Remember His goodness and faithful love for you. He wouldn't steer you wrong. You know that. He sees hours, days, weeks and more ahead of you. We just see “this day,” and we want to take control of it. When He gives you a sense deep within that you must be still, or if He gives you a straight-out Word like He did with me in the verse from Ruth, you are wise to simply be still.

So what exactly do we do while being still? Do we do nothing? Absolutely not. In my case as I wait right now, I know God is calling me to keep following what He's already told me to do. There's safety in that. When you have God's leading in a matter, until He tells you otherwise, carry on. I might be still in the sense that I'm not making new decisions or acting on what I feel I should do, but I'm carrying on with kingdom business.

What are you called to keep doing in your stillness? Where does God currently have you focused? You'll work through that in greater detail in the Takeaway. For now I want to make a few observations:

1) When I asked what you are to keep doing, that implies you are doing something. If you answered that you are doing nothing, then there may be reason for concern. God is always at work in and through you if you allow Him access to your life. If you read His Word or listen to a pastor or teacher, God has certainly given you directions in some areas. Love people. Be kind to others. Represent the royal family well. In your stillness, you are to keep on doing those things.

2) Your "keep doing" may just be the drudgery of everyday life. You know, shampoo, rinse, and repeat. Whatever your family status, you have responsibilities. Do those things as unto the Lord (Colossians 3:23). Keep making dinner and doing dishes. Wash clothes. Work hard at home or at the office – or both. Just keep doing what you know is required of you.

3) Your stillness for a time is likely what is setting the stage for your next activity. If we aren't faithful in the little things, we sure can't expect to receive more. (THIS VERSE FOR THE TAKEAWAY.) I'm learning this the hard way: my stillness makes my faith stronger. Stronger faith sets the stage for how He will use me next. I don't want to stall out. I pray that I remain faithful.

4) Trust Him in your stillness. I told you I wanted to choose a topic to write but felt His hand stay that choice. I have a past with Jesus. He has proven Himself trustworthy a thousand plus times. Because of that, I can trust Him when He says sit still. If I had chosen a topic last week and gotten started, this isn't the topic I would have chosen. It was a contender, but not ultimately my final choice. I have no idea why this one was His plan for this month. I can only conclude that someone needs this exact word.

There is more than one lesson here. Because I have chosen to trust Him and wait, my faith has grown. I sit here today writing with absolute peace. I don't feel rushed or hurried like I thought I would. Whatever is coming down the pike for me, this is part of my preparedness and training.

Whatever is coming down the pike for you may require stillness on your part in order to get you ready. In a physical sense, strengthening muscles takes weight resistance. It's the same with your spiritual muscles. Only resistance will build faith muscles strong enough to carry the next load. God knows your next season. He knows what area of your faith must be grown to accommodate what's just around the bend. He will make you ready. You can trust that. It really is okay to be still since He is God.

Sit Still

Technically, this isn't a stand-alone section but more of an observation piggy-backing off the Be Still concept. I used my great "sit still" verse in the section above, but that phrase sure would have gone well with this section. Thing is, this title carries a different connotation than our verse in Esther, a perspective you would be wise to consider when you find yourself still.

Have you ever considered that maybe your time to be still is God's way of saying sit still for a while? It's less about you not taking a next step and more about resting from the steps you've already taken. There are times in life when God's call to sit still is a gift, an offer to rest with Him.

"Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." (Mark 6:31)

This verse is spoken by a caring Friend to His disciples when the masses are pressing in on them. Sound familiar? Are your *masses* of people pressing in on you? You wear many hats and carry many titles. You may be any or all of these things: student, wife, mom, breadwinner, caregiver, church leader or volunteer. Life is chaos for most of us, especially

women who tend to bear the burden of so many important people in our lives. We love beyond ourselves so often that we forget to love ourselves. I'm guilty of that for sure.

Funny how I'm leaving a "be still" season just as I've entered a sit still season. I'm experiencing some issues with my blood pressure. Rather than it being high like any normal person, mine is exceptionally low. I'm tired, like, really tired. If you knew me you would know I'm a ball of energy all the time. I do and do and do. Right now I sit and sit and sit. I see something that needs to be done and just shrug my shoulders. I've got nothing right now, no energy or get up and go.

For someone like me, that kind of stillness is just as agonizing as not taking next steps in some work or personal matter. I'm fit to be tied right now, or I would be if I had the energy for a fit.

Throughout my writing and speaking, I often share how I tend to overextend myself. Don't we kind of brag about that? We tell people how busy we are like it's something to be proud of. Or sometimes we say it so that people will quit dumping more on us. They will if we let them. We are a hurried and harried people. We say yes to way too much and no way too little.

I would complain more if I didn't set most of my own deadlines. I'm to blame ninety-nine percent of the time. You might be too in many situations when you're overscheduled. That might be something you take a quick peek at in your life, just how often your hectic schedule creates chaos in your life.

In my case, my schedule wasn't to blame for my medical issues, but God sure is using this time to show me the importance of sitting and resting with Him more and living by unrealistic deadlines less.

Maybe this lesson is for me to share with you today. You may not be sitting still right now, but you may be tomorrow. Tuck this away for future use. I can pretty much guarantee you'll take a seat eventually.

I've known many faithful servants of the Lord who had to sit for a spell after overcommitting and overextending themselves in ministry and family and work and social schedules. Good things aren't so good when allowed to tip out of balance.

I love that God loves us enough to require us to sit and rest with Him when we fail to do that for ourselves. Any good Father would.

Endure the Stillness

We want answers. We want activity, ours or others' or God's. We need to see that Someone is working on our behalf. When we don't get answers or see God's activity, we tend to panic and act out of fear. We make things happen even if they're the wrong things. We're human. That's what humans do best. step into the role of god when God's hand or word isn't readily visible.

If you have journeyed with God for more than a minute, then you likely know what I'm talking about. There are times when answers to our questions don't come. If they do, they aren't what we were hoping for. I have known times when God didn't seem as close as usual. Since He will never leave me, I have to suppose I am the one to have taken a step away. But what of those times when I know I'm near? Can I live with His silence, trusting Him to speak or act when the time is right?

I know we have all experienced times where we felt there was a cloud between us and the presence of God. I went through just that in the early stages of writing the *You. Are. Loved.* book. It was a dark season, and I can't say that I did the best at enduring. Recalling that time reminds me of a phrase I've encountered several times: "the dark night of the soul." I experienced the reality of that vividly during that time I felt like I was constantly sitting in the dark and not understanding why.

I knew what I was supposed to say in Part One of *You. Are. Loved.*, and I had an idea of what it was supposed to look like, yet nothing seemed to be coming together. It wasn't even

that as much as nothing made sense to me. I had all these notes that I had been making for nearly a year. They were like pieces of a puzzle. No matter how many times I looked at the pieces, I couldn't see how they all fit together.

God was quiet. I kept asking for clarity; I kept asking for wisdom on how to proceed. No answer seemed to come.

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.”

(James 1:5-6)

Those months were filled with me being tossed like the wind. All I had to hang onto was that God had given me the message that I was supposed to write the book. Many times I would wonder aloud to my husband, asking him why I was even trying. He would say “Why are you?” meaning I could give it up. I could only respond, “I know I'm supposed to.” If I knew one thing, it was that. Quitting wasn't an option.

I would sit and stare at the screen and try to figure things out. I had many great concepts that seemed disjointed. Never in my history of writing had I experienced so much confusion. What was odd was that none of the pieces were confusing. They all made perfect sense when read individually. It was the snapping them into the image of the bigger picture that I couldn't seem to do.

The idea of the dark night of the soul didn't really help at the time. I knew I was in a darkened place and didn't know why. I questioned day after day. All I would get was that I was supposed to stay the course. Slowly, chapter by chapter, I began to see something emerge. Then one night as I worked late, I was nearing the end of Part One. My mind was frazzled by the whole process by that point. I sighed and said, “Lord, You're just going to have to show me what to do.”

I kid you not when I say I looked down at my hand and watched it move the mouse. I looked at the screen. I deleted a paragraph, moved another one, and wrote a concluding sentence. There it was, my first draft of Part One done. I told my son about it, and of course he rolled his eyes. But I knew something miraculous had happened. I had been stuck. The darkness had gone on too long and my confidence was shattered. But then the Word Himself took over.

I can only smile as the song “Jesus Take the Wheel” plays in my head right now. Whatever happened, it was a real occurrence that ended what had been such a dark season. That moment showed me Who God was, that He was present all along, teaching me in and through the stillness.

That was a long story to remind you that you must endure the stillness when that's what's required of you. I kept doing what I knew I was supposed to do, though the steps along the way were tiny and tentative. The path was dark, and I edged along as I could. There were times when I just stood without moving at all.

Whatever your stillness is, a tough season with your children or struggles in your marriage, learn to walk in the quietness with the God who still cares, even when your circumstances say otherwise. If your health is failing or your finances plunging, He is there in the stillness when answers aren't visible.

I often try to decide if I'm a devoted Christian or a weak one. The evidence says I'm a little of both. When I'm in a dark season, I keep begging God to help me see my way. I do feel weak, like my faith may give way at any time. It doesn't. I stay the course each time, often grumbling along the way. Then I get the beauty of hindsight, like now. I look back and see God working in and through the situation. During that slow trudge along the path of writing those early chapters, He gave me new nuggets of wisdom to add to each chapter. If I

would have flown through them like I tend to write my fiction books, I would have missed out on some of the best lessons He wanted to teach me.

Now, remembering how desperately low I felt during that dark and still season and seeing that I actually made it through, it makes me say, "Hey, I endured!" At the time I wasn't so sure I would. My dark season slowed me down to glean what God was trying to teach me. It also prepared me for the bumps ahead as I've continued this journey.

Your current walk may seem similar. Doubts may come. What am I saying? Doubts *will* come. We are human, and out of our humanity we lean toward doubt. Just don't allow doubt to stop you. Don't allow doubt to hinder your walk with Jesus even if you just keep edging along, taking baby steps through the darkness.

Still seasons, those times when you can't see God's obvious work in your life, are times you need to trust that He's there. Dimly lit, still seasons are also the playground of the devil. He will feed you lies. You would be wise to be on the lookout for his subtle and flagrant attacks. No doubt, he will come with a bushel of doubt, planning to hinder your faith. When dealing with a believer, the enemy's strategy is to cripple your effectiveness. If he can do that, then he's won a major battle. He can't steal your salvation. He can't remove you from the hand of Jesus, but he can sure make you want to roll over and play dead.

Don't just endure the stillness, embrace it. God has a plan even in those moments. Allow yourself to trust in His love to such a degree that when you stand in darkness, you know He is still present, that He is still God.

