



Growing through times of change

Week 3 - Finding stillness



St Paul's
LUTHERAN CHURCH BOX HILL

Stillness is something many of us struggle with. To try and just be still – with no distractions, no phone, no screen, no conversation, no activity – seems to be a very big ask.

Yet the things that stillness seems to offer can be very appealing. The concept of stillness evokes quiet, peace, calm, rest – things that we would like more of in our lives. We want the results that stillness offers – without having to invest in the discomfort of the process. Despite the overwhelming evidence that stillness and all of its associates – meditation, mindfulness, contemplation, silence – when regularly practiced in our lives result in an abundance of positive benefits, it is so difficult to make these things part of our everyday routines and intentions.

What are the benefits of stillness? Research has shown practiced intentional stillness helps maintain clear, focused attention on a task; learning and memory are enhanced; emotional regulation is improved; anxiety and irritability decrease; our ability to relax is increased; our vulnerability to depression is lowered and our capacity to experience pleasure improved. It's been shown that 10-15 minutes a day of intentional stillness is all we need to reap these benefits. The longer we spend each day and the more we develop the practice, the greater the benefits.

Like every new skill that we want to learn, being still takes intention, effort, practice and perseverance. Learning a new skill demands a lot of effort and creates upheaval and disruption. So asking any part of your system to be still when its used to being active is going to feel uncomfortable and, depending on your value system, maybe even wrong.

To over-ride our resistance to being still we need to bring what is currently going on within us to our awareness. We need to choose where we focus our attention. We need to choose what it is that we're going to prioritise - despite feelings of discomfort. We need to choose according to our desired outcome – not just in the present moment but also in the long term. And then we need to choose to step into that place of discomfort and try something different.

We need to pay attention to the part of our system that we want to be still.

Focus your attention on what is happening in your body. Notice where there is tension or agitation – notice it and breathe into that part. Intentionally relax your body one part at a time. And just for now tell it that there is nothing it has to do. Just be.

Focus your attention on what is happening in your mind. Notice the constant flow of thoughts, the disarray of ideas, the presence of worry. Try to mentally step back and notice all these things without getting caught or hooked into any of them. Tell yourself that there is nothing that you need to do about any of these things. You are going to just let them be and choose not to engage with them.

If we give ourselves some space to find stillness in our bodies and in our minds, then we can use that space to input something else. Something that enhances the stillness. We can inhabit our breath. We can focus on something beautiful or neutral in our surroundings. We can focus on something that brings peace to our minds, our hearts and our souls.

Faith is the foundation of stillness. Faith in a God who calls you to be still. Who calls you to let go of the activity of your body and mind so that your soul can find rest in him. He is the reason you can be still. Because he assures you that at any time you can leave anything with him. He'll look after it for you. And you don't have to do a thing. But be still.

As a result of this time of quiet and rest and letting go - you are actually providing yourself with the resource of greater capacity and more energy to live the life God has given you.

Maybe it's time to learn a new skill.