

“How to Find Peace When Your Mind Won't Shut Off”

Series: Real Talk — Honest Conversations with God | Week 1

Matthew 7:7–8; Luke 5:15–16 ; Philippians 4:4–7; Psalm 46:10

Have you ever been completely, thoroughly exhausted — but your mind absolutely refused to cooperate with your body?

You finally get to bed. The lights are off. The house is quiet. Your body is saying, “Thank you. Finally. Sleep.” And your brain says: “Actually, I'd like to schedule a committee meeting.”

And so it begins. You remember the conversation from two days ago that you wish you had handled differently. You think about the bill you forgot to pay. The appointment you still need to make. The weird noise the car made on the way home. That thing someone said three weeks ago that still kind of bothers you. The child you're worried about. The medical result you're waiting on. The state of the world.

Your body says sleep. Your mind says let's review everything.

I got home Friday about midnight after driving Becky to the drop-off point for her mission team from Clifton UMC to start their journey to Colombia. I was exhausted, but I couldn't fall asleep. My mind started reviewing everything I need to remember for the coming week – ministry priorities, people needing pastoral attention, preparing for worship, plans with the kids, and of course, Becky's travel. It took a couple of hours for me to finally go to sleep.

So what do we do when life is quiet on the outside, but loud on the inside?

That question is exactly why we're starting this series today.

Here's what I want you to know from the start: this is not just your problem. This is a human problem. And it's a very real one right now.

We live in a world designed to keep our minds constantly stimulated. Notifications. News alerts. Text threads. Social media. Work emails that never really stop. Financial pressure. Health concerns. Caregiving responsibilities. School schedules and sports calendars and family drama and community worry and church responsibilities.

We are carrying more information, more noise, and more emotional weight than we were designed to carry alone. Maybe that's you. Maybe you're the one who holds everything together for everybody else, and nobody ever asks how you're doing.

And underneath all that noise, many people are wondering: How do I find peace? How do I pray when I don't even know what to say? Is God actually listening? Why does prayer feel so hard?

Those are honest questions. And this summer, we're going to take them seriously.

This series is called *Real Talk: Honest Conversations with God*. It's not about learning religious language. It's not about pretending life is easier than it is. It's not about polished prayers or perfect people.

It's about learning to bring your real self to God.

And this week, we start at the beginning — not with words, but with stillness.

Our verses from Luke say that Jesus often withdrew to lonely (or quiet) places and prayed. I want you to notice something in that verse. Jesus was not pulling away from the crowds because things were slow. Things were busy.

Things were growing. People were coming from everywhere to hear him, to be healed, to get something from him.

This is not a picture of Jesus having an open afternoon. This is Jesus in the middle of real, relentless demand — and Luke says he often withdrew. Not once. Not occasionally. Often.

Jesus did not pull away because the work didn't matter. He pulled away because the work did matter, and he knew he couldn't sustain it without staying connected to the Source.

Here's the thing: If Jesus needed intentional space with God, then we shouldn't be surprised that we need it too.

Stillness is not laziness. Solitude is not escape. Prayer is not avoidance.

Prayer is how we return to the Source of life before we're swallowed by the noise of life.

And if we never step away from the noise, we shouldn't be surprised when the noise starts shaping us.

In his letter to the Christians in the Greek city of Philippi, the Apostle Paul said something that sometimes gets misread.

When Paul says “do not be anxious about anything,” some people hear it as a command to just stop feeling what they feel. And if you struggle with anxiety, those words can land like a rebuke: what's wrong with me? Why can't I just not worry?

But Paul is not shaming anyone here. Paul is writing from prison. He knows suffering. He knows uncertainty. He knows what it is to be in a situation you cannot control. He's not describing what the anxiety-free life looks like. He's describing where to take the anxiety you already have.

The phrase “in every situation” is the key. Bring it all. Every worry. Every fear. Everything your mind was rehearsing at 2 in the morning. Bring it to God with honesty and thanksgiving.

And then Paul says something remarkable: the peace of God will guard your heart and mind.

Not erase your worries. Guard them. Stand watch over them. The image is a soldier posted at the gate. You bring your concerns to God, and God's peace stands between you and the spiral.

That's not a small thing. That's everything.

But notice — it starts with bringing it. The practice matters.

We also heard some words from the end of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in our text from Matthew. After Jesus has spent chapters laying out what the life of the kingdom looks like — he lands here. Just ask. He said, “Ask, and it shall be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will open for you.”

It's almost disarmingly simple, isn't it? After all that teaching about love and mercy and right living, he says: ask. Seek. Knock. And keep doing it.

The verbs in the original Greek are a continuous form. It's not “ask once and wait.” It's more like “keep asking. Keep seeking. Keep knocking.” There's a persistence implied here — a relationship, not a transaction.

But I also think Jesus is saying something even more foundational than that. He's giving permission. He's saying: you are allowed to bring your needs to God. Your questions, your fears, your longings, your confusion — all of it. God is not annoyed by your asking. God is not overwhelmed by your need. The door is open. Knock on it.

For people who were raised to believe that prayer is for spiritual giants, or that you have to have your life together before God will listen, or that asking for things is somehow selfish or small — this verse is a correction. Jesus himself says: ask. That's not weakness. That's faith.

And here's what ties all three of these passages together: Luke shows us Jesus withdrawing to pray, Paul shows us where to take our anxiety, and Matthew shows us that God is not a reluctant listener — God is an open door.

Which means we don't have to have it figured out before we come. We just come.

Before we learn the full prayer Jesus taught his disciples — and we'll work through that together all summer — we begin here. Just this.

Be still.

For many of us, being still is genuinely one of the hardest things we do. Because stillness means we stop running. We stop scrolling. We stop solving. We stop managing everyone else's emotions. We stop rehearsing tomorrow. We stop reliving yesterday.

And for a few moments, we simply become present to God.

There's a practice called centering prayer — and it's not complicated or mystical or reserved for monks in robes. It's simple. The goal is not to empty your mind, because that's almost impossible. The goal is to notice when your mind wanders — and gently return to the presence of God.

And here's the key: that returning is not failure. That returning is the prayer.

A woman went to her pastor to talk about her struggle with prayer. She had tried to center herself in prayer, but was frustrated. “I keep getting distracted,” she told her pastor.

The pastor answered, “That’s okay. How many times did you come back to the prayer?”

“Maybe 20 times,” she said.

The pastor responded, “Well, then, that’s 20 prayers. Distractions aren’t wrong; they are an opportunity for faithfulness.”

Here's what it looks like. Sit comfortably. Feet on the floor if you can. Hands open or relaxed. Take a slow breath. And then pray, slowly:

Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know.

Be still.

Be.

Pause between each phrase. Let the words slow you down. And then if you want, come back:

Be still.

Be still and know.

Be still and know that I am God.

That's it. That's where we start. Not with perfect words. Not with a polished prayer life. Just with stillness, and the trust that God is already there.

What could happen in your life if you began to slow down and bring your real self to God? Not your Sunday self. Your anxious self. Your distracted self. Your tired self. Your uncertain self. Your worried-about-the-kids self. Your grieving self. Your overwhelmed self.

What if prayer became less about saying the right words and more about trusting that the door Jesus talked about is open for you, right now, exactly as you are?

That is what this series is for. Not to give you a new set of religious techniques. But to help you find your way back to God — again and again, through all your days.

Because peace doesn't come from finally getting a quiet life.

Peace comes from learning to bring a noisy mind into the presence of a faithful God.

And if you don't know where to begin, you can begin right here: **Be still and know that I am God.**

A pastoral note, and I mean this with care: for some of you, anxiety isn't occasional — it's chronic and heavy. This message is not meant to shame you. Prayer is not a replacement for counseling, medication, or the support of wise people around you. God works through all of those things. Prayer is one of the ways God meets us in the middle of the healing, not a shortcut around it. Peace may come gradually. That does not mean you are failing. It means you are human, and God is patient.

Let us pray.

God of peace, we bring you our noisy minds, our anxious thoughts, our unfinished lists, our worries, our questions, and our deep need for rest. Teach us to be still. Teach us to trust that you are near. Help us bring every burden into your presence — and let your peace, the peace that passes all understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.