

SOME HELPS FOR STILLNESS

Be still and know that I am God.

Psalm 46:10



Being still is often easier said than done. The Psalmist tells us in Psalm 131:2 that he has ‘calmed and quieted (his) soul’. As we seek God in the midst of our busy lives, we often find that the first hurdle is we can’t be quiet, we are distracted not only by all that is going on around us, but by the turmoil of our inner thoughts. Down the centuries Christians have found a number of different ways to find stillness. Sometimes they use these exercises as preparation for another kind of prayer, and sometimes they become the way they meet with God in the silence.

The posture we adopt as we come to quiet may seem unimportant, but prayer is much easier if we are relaxed and comfortable. There is biblical precedent for:

- Sitting (Luke 10:39)
- Standing (Luke 18:11, 13)
- Kneeling (Psalm 95:6)
- Lying face down (Ezekiel 1:28)
- Moving around (2 Samuel 6:14)

There is no ‘right’ way – choose what feels best to you.

Relaxing in God's Presence – Awareness of My Body

Find a relaxed position. The following suggestions begin from a sitting position, but you can adapt them for any of the postures on page 1. Many people prefer to close their eyes, but some find it easier to gaze at something, such as a candle.



Begin with your back straight, your feet flat on the floor, and your hands resting gently on your lap. Take a moment to become aware of the feel of your feet as they press against the floor. How does the ground feel? Notice any constriction of your footwear, feel your toes – wiggling them might help.

Now let that point of awareness move up into your lower legs. Flex the muscles, let any tension you find there relax and flow away.

Let that point of awareness move slowly up and around your body, gently travelling from one part to the next; from your calves up through your thighs, buttocks, trunk, back, shoulders, arms, hands, neck, head. Let the point of awareness move slowly round your body, gently travelling from one part to the part next to it. Notice the feeling in each place, and let any tension ebb away before moving on.

When you have reached your head and face, spend some time there and then return to your feet and slowly repeat the journey of your awareness again, releasing any tension that you missed the first time.

When it feels as if the exercise has reached its natural conclusion, let the point of awareness, come to rest somewhere at the centre of yourself, and remain there quietly in God's presence.

Awareness of My Breathing

As in the last exercise begin by finding a relaxed comfortable position. Slowly become aware of the pattern of your own breathing, concentrate your attention on the physical feeling of breathing in, then breathing out. Notice whether it is deep or shallow, regular or irregular, through your mouth or your nose, or both.

Don't try and change or control your breathing. Just notice as you breathe in, and as you breathe out. If this exercise makes you feel breathless, or causes you any concern at all, leave it and move to one of the other exercises.

You may want simply to rest in the quietness that this awareness of breathing leads to. If, however, you want to turn this exercise into more explicit prayer, then as you breathe in, feel yourself drawing God's life-giving Spirit deep within. As you breathe out, release anything that might separate you from God, or get in the way – your distractions, worries and anxieties.

You may find it helpful to use a simple prayer, such as "Lord God, you are closer to me than my breath. Breathe into me the peace of your Spirit. Take from me all worry and anxiety."

Focusing on breathing in this way can work well in conjunction with a simple prayer such as The Jesus Prayer (Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner), or a verse or phrase of scripture such as "Be still and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10) "O Lord my rock and my redeemer." (Psalm 19:14) "I have called you by name, you are mine." (Isaiah 43:1)



Awareness of

Sounds



Begin in a relaxed position. Take a few moments to focus on any sounds you can hear outside the room where you are, for example the sound of birds or traffic. Try to identify each, and for a moment or two focus on that sound alone.

Then without trying to block out those sounds, let your attention move inwards, to any sounds you can hear in the place where you are – perhaps the ticking of a clock, the hum of a machine, or the central heating. For a few moments, let your whole attention be on these sounds.

Again, without blocking any of these sounds, let your point of attention move inwards, and be aware of all the 'noise' within yourself. This may be physical, such as the sound of your own breathing or the rumbling of your tummy, or it may be an awareness of thoughts and feelings racing in your heart and mind.

Finally let your awareness come to rest in some quiet, still place at the centre of yourself. Rest there in the quiet for as long as seems good to you

Some of this material comes from 'Helps for Prayer' compiled by Paul Nicholson SJ with Ruth Holgate and Stephen Hoyland (adapted)