

Be Still

by Preston Pouteaux

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Noise, distraction, comedies, drama, opinions, demands, and news stream loudly before us everyday. We are never in short supply of things that we should listen to, look at, or respond to. Ours is a culture of ready entertainment, work, and diversion. What many of us find in short supply is not excitement but true moments of quiet, stillness, and a brief reflective pause in the midst of the rush.

Researchers are finding that stillness may be more valuable than we know. In 2013 researchers in Germany and the United States found that silence or white noise helped generate cells and neural connections in parts of the brain that were required for responding to the world around us, and for processing memories. In other words, silence actually helps our brains to work better. A constant barrage of noise may prevent our brains for responding appropriately.

Other researchers have found that boredom and true 'down time' for our minds is important for fostering other abilities - namely, creativity. When we stop what we're doing and allow our minds to wander, we may be more likely to come up with better ideas and process the complex challenges we face.

When we find ourselves swimming in noise and distraction, we are also less likely to listen well to others. The important messages that our spouse, friends, or co-workers might be conveying to us could be lost in the din of sounds and busy-ness that fill our lives. By slowing down and resting our minds, we are able to hear those we care about and welcome their important input into our lives.

Our neighbourhoods are important and even vital places for our wellbeing. The friendships we make, the care we give and receive, and the sense of connectedness are all essential for our health and happiness. However when we are distracted we can pass right by our neighbours without paying attention to the important place they have in our lives.

There are several simple rhythms that we can introduce into our lives to help us find moments of silence in the midst of our busy days. The first is to think about planning a day of rest several times a month. By learning to turn off distractions and focus on what's most important, we reshape the way we live in our fast-paced world. The second rhythm is to go for a walk in your neighbourhood. By slowing down your pace and listening for the sound of

birds and kids playing, we pay attention in new ways. The Wild Time Network in Britain encourages families to make outdoor experiences a regular part of family life. A third rhythm is to turn off cell phones or tv screens for extended periods. Creating a disconnected moment in your home will help you find valuable silence again.

When we discover the joy of stillness in our day, we open the door for others to step into our lives - not as problems to solve or opportunities to exploit, but as valuable friends for the journey worthy of our attention, affection, and delight. May you discover stillness in your life and neighbourhood this week.

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