

STAY AWAKE PRACTICING SILENCE AND STILLNESS

RE-FOCUS

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

FOCUS **24**

Megan Ellenberger, 21 [Stevens, Pennsylvania]

Once a year, my youth group went on a retreat to get away from our normal routine and to do something special together. Most often we went to the mountains of Fulton County, Pennsylvania. With a beautiful view and an indoor pool, we always had an awesome time.

The most important parts of those retreats, however, were the times we spent focused on God. We gathered for lessons twice each day and participated in amazing worship services, in which God’s presence was real. We worshiped together, prayed for one another, and took time alone to pray and to listen for God.

Getting away from the daily grind to spend time in God’s presence and to grow in faith is important. If being part of a youth retreat is not possible for you, how can you create your own “retreat moments” to spend some focused time with God? <

GIVE ME STILLNESS:

Too much noise
Too much yelling
Too much shine
Too much glitter

Everything distracts
Everything takes away
Everything calls my name
Everything seeks my attention

Give me quiet
Give me peace
Give me stillness
Give me You

I want to focus only on you, God; but the world distracts. Help me to look beyond the glitter and noise of this world to see what really matters: You.

Emily Acker [Plover, Wisconsin]

STAY AWAKE

PRACTICING SILENCE AND STILLNESS

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

**For God alone my soul waits in silence;
from him comes my salvation.**

Psalm 62:1 (NRSV)

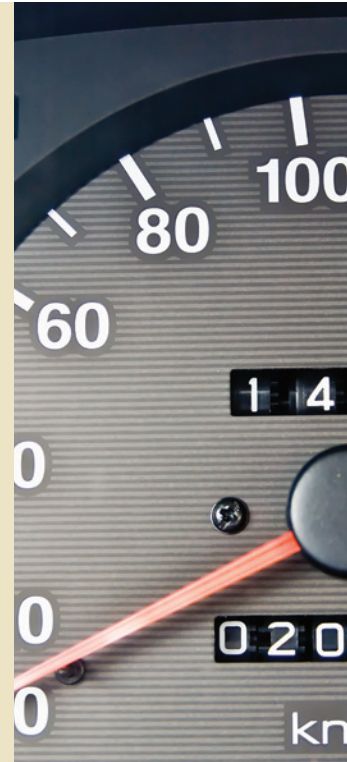
8 IN THE SILENCE

Rachel Starr Thomson [Ontario, Canada]

Ever since I co-founded a performing arts group two years ago, I've spent a lot of time on the road. I live four and a half hours from the group's home base, so I easily spend nine hours traveling back and forth each week—and that's not counting the hours spent traveling to and from performances.

This constant traveling makes me feel uprooted and more appreciative of home. It also gives me a lot of silent time for reflection—to think, to talk with God, to examine what I'm doing and where I'm going. As my car travels over the highway, I'm reminded that my life is headed somewhere too. Each day is another kilometer under the wheels, another hour in a definite direction.

The silence gives me time to think about my life's journey—the direction it is headed and the person I want to be when my journey comes to an end. Maybe the biggest blessing of being on the road is the way it pulls me out of my daily routine so that I can look at my life more objectively and learn to live it to the fullest. <



TAKE A REST STOP: Where are you headed on your life's journey? What road are you traveling? Who or what awaits you at your final destination? Incorporate into your journey a spiritual practice that helps you to look at your life more objectively so that you may live each day to the fullest.

STAY AWAKE PRACTICING SILENCE AND STILLNESS

PATIENCE

WEEKEND!

TOM ARTHUR

learning patience in solitude

I hate waiting. I hate waiting so much that waiting for the microwave drives me crazy. I hate waiting for pictures to download on my phone. I hate waiting for a stop light to turn green. I especially hate waiting for people. I hate waiting for my family to get ready to leave. I hate waiting for people to stop talking so that I can say what I want to say. If all these people weren't around, life would be so much more enjoyable. I'm not a patient person, especially when it comes to other people.

Recently, I got the idea to take a four-day, three-night spiritual retreat all by myself at a local campground. I decided to take my retreat at the slowest time of the camping season: the day after Christmas. I contacted the camp about my idea, and they told me they had a perfect cabin. It was heated and had a fireplace, a kitchen, and an indoor bathroom; and no one would be in the campground. Sweet! I thought. *I won't have to wait for anybody!*



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STAY AWAKE

PRACTICING SILENCE AND STILLNESS

PATIENCE

WEEKEND!

> SOLITUDE

Have you ever been silent and by yourself for four whole days? The only people I saw were in a car that drove by the cabin and a couple who were walking on the ice across the lake. Otherwise, I was completely alone.

The morning of the second day, I wrote in my journal: "I have been given the gift of time. Time feels extravagantly abundant. I have not been here 24 hours, but it feels like forever. I move at whatever pace seems good—no rush to do anything. It is wonderful. I read when I want to. I stop when I want to. I nap. I cook. I eat. I tend the fire. I sleep. And I have about two and a half days left. Will I become restless? I do not have many expectations of what will happen. Mostly, I'm just slowing way down and waiting on God." Did you notice how many times I said "I"?

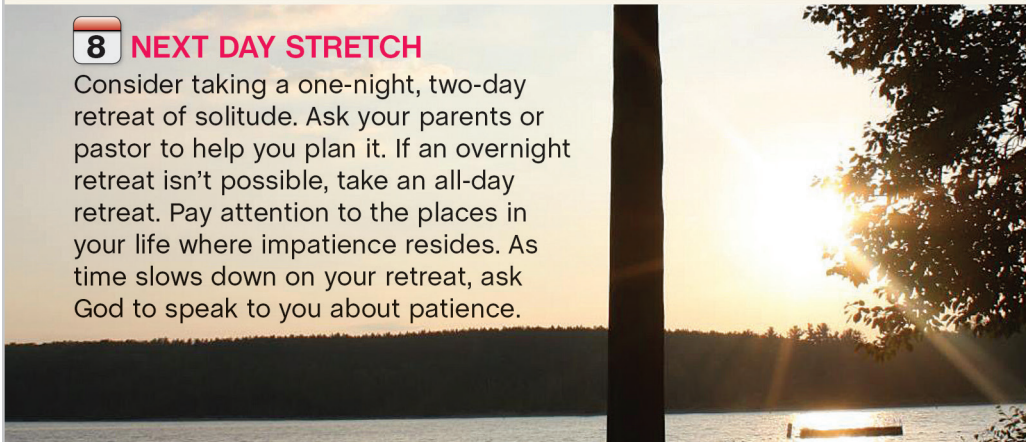
I didn't anticipate how much I would begin to miss people. Later in the retreat, I wrote in my journal: "I am starting to get lonely. I've been silent and alone now for almost 30 hours, and I have another 40 to go." Can you hear me beginning to get impatient with those 40 hours? When will this retreat be done so that I can be with people again?

In those four days, I gained a deeper patience with other people. I realized how important they are to me and how little I wait for them. I realized that people are less an inconvenience and more a community that provides companionship and an opportunity to learn to love in the midst of the waiting. In my heart, God was slowly growing love and patience for those around me. When I got back home, I appreciated everyone more than I had when I left. <

Tom Arthur is the pastor of Sycamore Creek Church in Lansing, Michigan (sycamorecreekchurch.org). He and his wife Sarah have a toddler and a newborn, who are giving him many opportunities to learn patience.

8 NEXT DAY STRETCH

Consider taking a one-night, two-day retreat of solitude. Ask your parents or pastor to help you plan it. If an overnight retreat isn't possible, take an all-day retreat. Pay attention to the places in your life where impatience resides. As time slows down on your retreat, ask God to speak to you about patience.



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STAY AWAKE PRACTICING SILENCE AND STILLNESS

OUT OF
THE ORDINARY
WEEKEND!

KASEY HITT



take a retreat where few dare to go

Juggling scarves? Check.
Bubbles and puzzle? Check, check.
Coloring book and pencils? Got them!
Bible and journal? Packed.

I'm ready. How about you? Want to join me for an out-of-the-ordinary experience? It will be an adventure—going where few dare to go! Ever heard of a silent retreat? My first taste many years ago was so good that I wanted more. Now, I not only go on silent retreats, but I offer silent retreats to others. I invite you to give silence a taste too.

WHY?

We live in a noisy and busy world. While exciting, it can also be exhausting. Every part of us needs rest. Jesus understood. Even with a packed schedule of teaching,

healing, and traveling, Jesus took regular time away and invited his disciples to do the same. When was the last time you took a break from your to-do list, people, or technology?

Living in a noisy, busy world can make it hard to hear God's voice. When the prophet Elijah was instructed to ready himself to hear from God at the mouth of a mountaintop cave, he went and he listened. Guess what? Elijah didn't hear God's voice in the loud, obvious stuff—the whirlwind, earthquake, or fire. He heard it in the sound of sheer silence! And so can we.

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STAY AWAKE

PRACTICING SILENCE AND STILLNESS

OUT OF
THE ORDINARY
WEEKEND!



If you've ever been given "the silent treatment," you may be reluctant to try a silent retreat; but I assure you, this isn't that kind of silence. It's not silence that punishes with absence. It is silence filled with presence—God's presence!

WHERE DO YOU GO?

Somewhere safe, quiet, and with few distractions. Sure, you may be the only one in your house; but everywhere you look there is something to pull you away from your quiet retreat. My favorite spots are a local church, a convent, and a monastery. The nuns and monks at the

latter two love silence and hospitality, usually offering home-cooked food—a big bonus! A friend's house when he or she isn't home or a park where it's safe to hike and hang out can also work.

WHAT DO YOU DO?

You don't. Seriously. You get to *be*. Who are you and what are you like when it's just you and God? That's the playground of silent retreats. Maybe you take a nap. Or play like a little kid (enter juggling scarves and bubbles!). Perhaps you pull out some art supplies and get creative.

You may read the Bible to begin or to end your time. By reading first, you may receive God's guidance for the rest of your time in silence. After a nap or playing, you might be calmer and better able to hear God's voice through scripture. Remember, God is with you just as much when you're napping or playing as when you're reading the Bible. As you read, hang out awhile in a particular passage, reading it several times. Try Mark 10:46–52, and allow God to "speak" through the passage in one of these ways:

1. What word or phrase keeps grabbing your attention? Ask God, "What do you want to say to me through this word or phrase? How does it speak to my life right now?" Listen. You might journal, paint, or draw in response.
2. Enter the scene as blind Bartimaeus, and let the story unfold in your imagination. Hear Jesus ask you, "What do you want me to do for you?" How do you answer? What is his response in return?

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STAY AWAKE PRACTICING SILENCE AND STILLNESS

OUT OF THE ORDINARY WEEKEND!

As you head into the silence, remember to be patient. If you are always on the go, expecting to feel relaxed right away is like slamming on the brakes in the fast lane. Allow yourself time to slow down and to adjust. Take a walk, write down what's pestering you, breathe deeply, or play for a while. Fly a kite if the weather permits.

Speaking of weather, a silent retreat offers a safe place for all of your feelings to surface. As you know, feelings come and go—cloudy, sunny, dark. Let them. A good, cleansing cry may be exactly what you need. Anger can be released as you express it through drawing or writing. A silent retreat is about being just as you are with God, and God wants to be with you in all kinds of weather! <



Kasey Hitt is a scarf, ball, and club juggling spiritual director, who usually needs more than three hours in silence before her brain and body are in the same place. She now prefers silent retreats to any other kind.



9 NEXT DAY STRETCH

A SILENT RETREAT CHECK LIST:

- + Choose a date, and mark it on your calendar now.
- + Contact the quiet place, if necessary, to get on their calendar.
- + Plan to spend at least 3–5 hours. Silence is a companion that takes time to befriend.
- + Decide what fun things to pack (even if you don't use them all).
- + Turn off all electronics and enjoy the silence. (Once you taste it, you may crave more!)

If you struggle during your silent adventure, take heart! You haven't failed. Each retreat reflects where you are on a particular day and what is needed at that time to care for your soul (which is why I recommend a rhythm of silent retreats rather than stopping after a taste). You may be invited to wrestle with things (such as being off social media) at one retreat and to rest more at another. No two silent retreats are alike, but each will be a gift.