

BE STILL

MATT SEARLES

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PSALM DEVOTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him (Ps 37:7)

Ours is a restless, rushed society. Life seems to move ever faster each year. We struggle to fit as much in as we can, and many of us rarely pause for reflection. Perhaps the same is true of our spiritual lives. We can so easily feel that our walk with the Lord is just one extra thing to squeeze in to our crowded days and weeks.

But rather than the Lord being just another clamouring voice making demands on our time and energy, in fact he is the one who gives rest. He came to carry our burdens, not lay burdens on us. Psalm 37 has the repeated instruction 'do not fret'. Fretting and restless activity are the hallmarks of those who have no loving heavenly father to provide for them. But David tells us to 'Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him.'

These devotions are intended to help you do just that. Over the past year I've been more conscious of the need just to 'be still' before the Lord; to spend time meditating on just a verse or two of scripture, and to turn them back to him in prayer.

Thomas Brooks, a seventeenth-century church leader, described the importance of slowing down in this way:

"Remember that it is not hasty reading but serious meditation on holy and heavenly truths, that makes them prove sweet and profitable

to the soul. It is not the mere touching of the flower by the bee that gathers honey, but her abiding for a time on the flower that draws out the sweet. It is not he that reads most but he that meditates most that will prove to be the choicest, sweetest, wisest and strongest Christian.”

The devotions in this book are all short, focussing on just a verse or two. But each devotion is split into two or more sections, with a break marked ‘Selah’. At this point you may wish to pause to reflect and pray, or maybe even stop and resume the rest of the devotion another day.

My primary audience as I’m writing is those who are already followers of Jesus. We may be in very different circumstances to the original psalm writers, but we worship the same God, so *their* words can become *our* words, and we can learn from their experiences. The words of the psalmists can retune our hearts as we sing and pray along with them.

But, of course, you may be reading this because you are looking into Christianity, or maybe not sure where you are on your journey of faith. I hope that you too will feel very welcome, as you spend a little time with the psalmists, and see what life looks like through their eyes. The psalmists, like Christians today, are far from perfect and don’t have all the answers. But they do testify to a God who is faithful, can be trusted, and makes wonderful promises to his people. I hope that the presentation of the Christian life that these psalms give might make you want to come to know Jesus for yourself, and participate in the promises offered in these psalms.

I’ve chosen these four psalms because they lend themselves so naturally to being meditated on in small sections. But I hope that you’ll take the principle of lingering on just one verse or image and apply this to other Scriptures, forming habits of meditating on God’s word. Time with the Lord is not one more item on our ‘to do’ list, but rather a gift from God, the refreshment that our weary souls so desperately need. Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him.

PSALM 16 v 1 *Dependence*

Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge. (Ps 16:1)

Psalm 16 is a beautiful example of what it means to have one’s heart set on God. David pours out his heart to his Lord in prayer, and in so doing paints a portrait of the devoted life: dependence, delight, fellowship, turning from idols, contentment, security, hope and joy.

David is not doing this to shame or intimidate us, rather he is giving us an example to follow. These are words to grow into. David calls us to sing along with him, and allow the Lord to retune our hearts so that we grow more and more into these wonderful characteristics. You might want to skim the whole psalm now and think which aspect of David’s devotion you find most appealing.

—Selah—

David begins the psalm by asking the Lord to preserve him — to keep him safe. These are words to cry out to God in times of deep distress, in affliction and trial. These are words we would do well to learn and store in our heart for times when we need to cry out to God.

But in this psalm these words aren’t spoken in time of distress. Rather they find themselves in a warm, joyous psalm of devotion to God, sung by the worshipping congregation of Israel.