

Brian Heasley

Be Still

A Simple Guide
to Quiet Times

 24-7 PRAYER

There is no greater gift that can be given to another than teaching someone to know and be known by God. In *Be Still*, Brian Heasley is offering that gift. Brian is a man who sits at the feet of Jesus, and in these pages, you'll want to join him there.

TYLER STATON, national director of 24–7 Prayer USA

This book describes the direction I would like to go in my prayer life. The author reminds us that there is not one but many ways to pray and that we can listen to our own minds and hearts to discern which way is best for us at this time. Since I am well into my senior years, I especially appreciated his reminder that God surprises us with new things in every season of our lives. So true!

ALICE FRYLING, spiritual director and author of *Aging Faithfully: The Holy Invitation of Growing Older*

A practical and vitally important framework for enriching this daily discipline.

MARK SAYERS, author of *A Non-Anxious Presence: How a Changing and Complex World Will Create a Remnant of Renewed Christian Leaders*

Whether you are experienced in the daily habit of “quiet time” with God, starting out, or seeking refreshment, I wholeheartedly commend this beautiful book. A witty, vulnerable, utterly practical, rich, and creative guide, it will assist every genuine seeker after God.

THE RIGHT REVEREND SOPHIE JELLEY, Bishop of Doncaster

Brian Heasley

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*I would like to dedicate this book to my father,
Billy Heasley, whose life of prayer, perseverance, and
discipline has been an inspiration to me.*

Romans 8:28

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Foreword

Pete Greig, 24–7 Prayer

You will never change your life until you change something you do daily. The secret of your success is found in your daily routine.

JOHN MAXWELL

I BELIEVE THAT THIS BOOK is going to be enormously important in your life for two reasons: First, it is going to *inspire* you to cultivate a deeper daily encounter with God. Second, it's going to *equip* you simply and practically to do so. If John Maxwell is even half right and our ultimate destinies and identities are indeed determined by the details of our daily routines, nothing could possibly be more transformational than the ultimate holy habit of a daily quiet time. It really could be as important as that.

Brian Heasley and I are close friends. We traveled the world together and spent the best part of our adult lives serving the Lord side by side. We laughed a very great deal, argued, apologized, embarked on adventures, wept—and of course we prayed together. I recounted some of Brian's amazing story in a book called *Dirty Glory*, but here in this one he shares the real secret of his life, the key to his ministry, the heart and soul of his faith. Best of all, he teaches us how to do the same.

A few weeks ago I stayed in Brian's house and saw the chair, described in this book, that is his place of daily encounter with the Lord. He tends to wake earlier than I do, so I often come down in the morning, wherever we are in the world—on the Mediterranean island of Ibiza, high in the Rocky Mountains, even in Windsor Castle—to find Brian sitting quietly with his Bible and a cup of coffee, spending time alone with his Lord. Sometimes he will call me during the day from far away to inquire about some detail of my life, or to share something he has sensed from the Lord, and I know that it is because he has been praying for me that day. Occasionally I've asked him without warning to share a devotional thought at a staff meeting or at a leaders' retreat, and Brian always, without fail, has something insightful to say—drawn, no doubt, from his quiet time that morning.

Henri Nouwen, the Dutch priest who swapped professorships at Yale and Harvard for life within a community of mentally disabled adults, wrote:

We have, indeed, to fashion our own desert where we can withdraw every day, shake off our compulsions, and dwell in the gentle healing presence of our Lord. Without such a desert we will lose our soul while preaching the gospel to others. But with such a spiritual abode, we will become increasingly conformed to him in whose Name we minister.¹

Brian is someone who learned to “fashion [his] own desert,” and it is in this space that he has conformed a little more each day into the likeness of Jesus. But one of the things I so appreciate about this book is that there’s no hint of legalism or guilt. I found myself excited by Brian’s example and equipped by his insights without any hint of a heavy *should*, just a tantalizing *could*.

But my excitement about the release of this book has been mingled with astonishment that it needed to be written in the first place. Talk to any of the great heroes of the faith (not just the famous ones, but the quiet, humble ones you may already know personally), and you will quickly discover that the key to their faith is the time they spend daily with the Lord in prayer and biblical reflection. Quiet times really are that fundamental to a real relationship with Jesus. And yet the research reveals that, tragically, this cardinal practice is declining, especially among the young, even at a time when the Bible is more freely accessible than ever before.

Something within me rises up and says, “Not on our watch! We can’t let the quiet time die! We are called to make disciples of Jesus. Not just church attenders who can sing songs and say the creeds without their fingers crossed but a generation who truly knows how to walk and talk with the Lord intimately and how to be shaped by his Word daily.”

Bewilderingly, while there are plenty of devotional materials available, there are very few resources that actually, and practically, teach new Christians (and those who’ve been around the block a few times) how to go about having a quiet

time. Perhaps, most charitably, this is because a quiet time is such a private thing that leaders shy away from letting others into their intimate space with the Lord? Whatever the reason, I am so delighted that Brian was willing to open his heart to us, drawing together his own hard-won insights gleaned over decades of daily quiet times, and teaching them to us so powerfully and practically in this book.

So yes, I believe that this could be one of the most important books you will read this year. My heartfelt prayer is that it will help you, amid life's many distractions and distortions, to fashion your own desert, cultivating the delightful discipline of pausing daily simply to Be Still.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "P. Greig". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Pete Greig

24-7 Prayer International and Emmaus Rd church

Introduction

OVER THE YEARS I'VE LEARNED that my relationship with Jesus is less about trying harder or climbing higher and more a process of being invited deeper. I've been a Christian since I was five years old, and I've recently turned fifty. That's forty-five years of journeying through the seasons with Jesus into the greatest adventure I've ever known. I've discovered along the way that most of our lives are unrehearsed, seldom as neat or linear as we would like them to be.

My life started well in Belfast, Northern Ireland. I come from a great family with parents who were both dedicated to serving God. This dedication took them to England to lead a small church in Essex, when I was eight years old. Sadly, my mother passed away from ovarian cancer when I was eleven, and this became a defining and painful moment for our family. My faith took a battering, and as I battled through grief I also battled through my relationship with God.

For many years I used to think I was in some sort of battle between faith and doubt, but I've come to realize that

it wasn't a battle at all; I had faith and I had doubt. I had to learn to live with both, but I got to choose which one to feed and cultivate.

For a long time, I didn't feed my faith, which in turn meant I didn't have deep roots. This led to a certain dissatisfaction with life, where doubt flourished like an untamed weed, and I began to struggle to truly function as a Christian. I lived with this dualism throughout the entirety of my teenage years, wrestling with who I wanted to be, who I imagined others wanted me to be, and my own understanding of who God wanted me to be. I experienced incredible swings and roundabouts in my spiritual life. I could go from responding to an altar call in a meeting on a Sunday morning to smoking a huge joint on my way to work on a Monday. I could help energetically at the midweek children's group in church and on my way home throw that same energy into a street fight. I could sing sweet songs to Jesus, and then let my imagination run riot with all sorts of wild fantasies and lustful thoughts. I could give, but I wanted to get. I could feel love, but I sometimes showed hate. I was full of contradiction and conflict, but I knew how to perform differently in the different settings I was in, and I honestly thought I was getting away with living my double life.

Then it got too hard to maintain. When I was seventeen, the wheels came off all the lives I was trying to live. My choices became erratic and very soon led to me being asked to leave college—and home. By eighteen, I was homeless, jobless, and seemingly out of options. I rapidly lost

confidence, becoming introverted and withdrawn, which probably wasn't helped by all the weed I was smoking. I had no plan, no obvious future; I became indifferent to myself and my life, taking a step back and letting life happen to me instead of initiating any form of proactivity that would bring change. I had an inner God awareness, directing my thoughts to him, but not one that affected my external behavior. But as I muddled into my twenties, all that was about to change.

After a few visits to prison, life caught up with me, and so did God. I made a conscious choice that I would give the rest of my life to him. That was nearly thirty years ago; I am now by no means perfect, but I have been a husband for twenty-nine years, raised two children to adulthood, and enjoyed a full life serving God.

Prayer had always been a part of my childhood, from the little picture that hung on our bedroom wall of a child kneeling with the simple words *Prayer changes things* to watching my father consistently get up early to pray. But since the moment I committed my life to God, prayer has remained at the forefront of my faith. I fully believe that prayer—a devotion to relationship, encounter, and conversation with God—is the root of all we do. It's the presence of the Holy Spirit, the ministry of Jesus, and time spent with the Father that make us who we are. Directionless lives are given meaning in our relationship with God; this relationship is grown in community, through discipleship, and by establishing and developing our personal devotional lives.

One of the key ways I have sought to establish a rhythm

of prayer that sustains me through the various seasons of life is through a *quiet time*. A quiet time is simply a daily time that I set aside to specifically tune in to God through prayer, Bible reading, and reflection. It's a time when I not only speak to God but also ask God to speak to me. It also gives me the opportunity to examine my life on a daily basis, to see if I am truly practicing my faith. It is the wellspring, oasis, and source of my life as a Christian.

For me this requires the first hour of my day, a chair, a Bible, a journal, and a strong cup of coffee; but, as we'll see in this book, quiet times don't have to look a certain way. At 24–7 Prayer, we have been helping create spaces for quiet times for years, and often not in the quietest of places! Ever since we started in 1999, we have encouraged groups of people to set up and pray in “prayer spaces” for twenty-four hours, seven days a week, and these spaces are now in place in church buildings and town halls and empty main street shops, on battleships, in breweries, in prisons, in schools, and in homes and palaces across two-thirds of the nations in the world. These tend to be creative spaces full of fairy lights and places to sit and write and respond, but they really only create one thing: an opportunity to spend time with God.

Prayer in these spaces is more than just closing your eyes; these are places where you can paint, write, sing, and become involved with activities that help you engage with God. Even though they look different all over the world, they are intentional spaces for spending time with God.

The Bible tells us that Jesus actively sought out times and

places to pray; he went to the desert, to the mountain, to the garden, to the Temple. His prayer life had intentionality, and that intentionality was fueled by the desire to spend time with his Father. The Bible says, “Be still and wait patiently for the LORD” (Psalm 37:7, NIV), which may be why the concept of a regular quiet time feels so foreign to some of us. Many of us aren’t particularly good at practicing stillness or patience—I get frustrated if a page loads slowly on my laptop! We live in a busy and very immediate culture, yet this verse calls us to be still and to wait patiently. It is not meant as an onerous obligation but an invitation from God to enter a place of encounter with him.

Some Franciscan monks once described Psalm 46:10, “Be still, and know that I am God,” as the gateway to prayer, and yet, for me personally, I once felt like God said to me, *Brian, you are not very still, and you often try to be God!* Maybe, like me, you need to reimagine quiet times as a gateway into a place of stillness, where we can know the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, immutable, eternal being who is God.

This gateway isn’t static. I believe that we can live a life in which we know and feel God’s presence at any time and in any place. In this transient age we need a portable faith. I want that sense of God’s presence whether I’m at home, in the office, at the gym, out for a walk, with friends, at a party, or in the pub—wherever I am. And I’m convinced that the discipline of a quiet time is key to making this happen. Over the years I have developed a devotional routine—which means that every morning I spend time in the same

chair—but I have learned that the devotion I have cultivated there, and the presence of God I've felt, must remain with me throughout the day, wherever I am. The quiet time strengthens my faith so that it is not shaken by geography, social-media likes, relational tension, or any of life's other variables.

I'm well aware that life isn't always easy and that we regularly experience challenges, big and small; however, in the midst of this, we can develop a deep spirituality that means we are not shaken and don't become broken as we remain deeply connected to God.

Every life is different, and as you read this book, one of the most liberating things you need to know is that everybody's prayer life is unique too. Our prayer lives will look different at different stages of life. In these pages are just a few simple ideas, some questions to ask yourself, and different points to reflect on—things that, over the last thirty or so years, I have found helpful. I hope they will help you to intentionally create and develop your own quiet time. They are not intended to be exhaustive, so do check out the bibliography at the end for more extensive books that will help you go deeper in each of these subjects. What I share in this book is not meant to be patronizing; whether you're new to this or have been practicing quiet times for decades, I hope that this book will be a tool that will help you develop and grow a quiet time that sustains you wherever you are and whatever you are going through.

1

Encounter

EVERY MORNING, I get up; make myself a cup of coffee; gather my journal, my Bible, and my books; and sit in the same chair in the corner of my living room. For the first hour of most mornings, I settle down in this spot and encounter God. A number of years ago, I wrote the following in my journal:

Lord, I want to cultivate and remember the moment I have with you in this chair so that I can go there in my mind wherever I am. I need to be able to sink into the memory of the chair at any point. I have to maintain enough God awareness throughout the day to sink back

into you at any given moment, to lean into you. My time in the chair gives me muscle memory for the day. I felt it somewhere random the other day, this familiar morning feeling. . . . I chose to feel it, to become aware of your presence in that particular moment.

The encounter I have with God in my chair creates in me an awareness of God that lingers throughout the day. So let me ask you: Where is your chair?

The word *encounter* means “to meet with someone,” “to contend with someone,” or “to come across.” For instance, we say things like “I’m encountering problems at work” or read classic books that say things like “We will encounter the enemy at dawn.” We also have encounters with people; I have had some quirky meetings over the years that haven’t gone well, which I have left thinking, *That was an interesting encounter!*

When I first encountered my wife, I was new to our church and just out of prison. I would arrive with enthusiasm most Sundays, and Tracy would be playing saxophone in the church worship band. (We should bring saxophone back to worship. I would love to hear a few Bruce Springsteen-esque sax solos on a Sunday.) I would sincerely embrace the worship but be distracted enough to put on my best worship face, all the time maneuvering into a position where I might also be able to catch Tracy’s eye. For a few weeks I thought this strategy was proving successful. I felt the chemistry, I could see the curiosity—the excitement in her eyes—as she gazed

back at me. Eventually I plucked up the courage to ask her out on a date, and, before long, we were married.

While dating, I discovered that my future wife was short-sighted; she could not see beyond the end of the stage she was standing on! She had not once looked at me; I had completely misread this moment. But still, it was an encounter that changed me.

Encounters Change Us

We all encounter people who have a profound impact on our lives: spouses, children, teachers, parents, friends, grandparents, pastors, and leaders; encounters with these people change us. Situations that we encounter, good and bad, also have a profound effect on us—illness, a near-death moment, unemployment, conflict, tragedy, a new job, the birth of a child, travel, discovering new things.

My first encounter with God definitely changed me. If you're reading this as a Christian today, I'm guessing it is because at some point you encountered God and came to the realization that he was real and that he had sent his Son, Jesus, to die for you. You encountered him and received your salvation. My hope is that this was more than a one-off encounter.

Although I encountered God in the moment of salvation, it became clear to me that I would need to have regular encounters with him if I was going to sustain my Christian faith. The reason I go to my chair in the morning is because I desire regular encounters with him.

Encounter Began in a Garden

The first regular encounter that we read of in the Bible is that of God walking with Adam and Eve “in the cool of the day” (Genesis 3:8). Sadly, we learn of this encounter when it is on the verge of breakdown:

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?”

GENESIS 3:8-9

Ellicott's *Bible Commentary for English Readers* says:

Jehovah appears here as the owner of the Paradise, and as taking in it His daily exercise; for the verb is in the reflexive conjugation, and means “walking for pleasure.” The time is “the cool (literally, *the wind*) of the day,” the hour in a hot climate when the evening breeze sets in, and men, rising from their noontide slumber, go forth for labour or recreation. In this description the primary lesson is that hitherto man had lived in close communication with God.¹

Despite the slightly antiquated language of this commentary, the primary lesson we learn from this Bible passage is that humankind originally lived in close communication with

God. What a beautiful picture: God, as the owner of this paradise, took a walk for pleasure with Adam and Eve—with the implication that this was a regular occurrence, not a one-off! When I read that they “heard the sound of the LORD God,” I believe they sensed his approach, heard the sound of his footsteps. I can almost picture them stopping, waiting, and listening, maybe with excitement rising, stilling themselves, getting ready to walk with God.

This is a striking depiction of God’s original intent: rested people walking with the Creator-God, talking as friends. People regularly encountering God, people living in close communion with God. Then one day God’s walking companions are nowhere in sight; they are hiding, and God calls out, “Where are you?” Something in me loves the weight of the old language of the King James Version, which has God calling, “Where art thou?” I think God still calls out regularly to his people, to you and me: “Where art thou?” And yet, does it seem likely that when God called out “Where are you?” to Adam and Eve he truly didn’t know where they were, that somehow the all-knowing God had lost them?

Fear and shame about what they had done wrong had caused them to hide, and it can do the same thing to us. This thought comes: *If I’m alone with God, he’s going to see things in me that I don’t want him to; I am going to be confronted with my lack of knowledge, my sin, my weakness.* I’m frightened that I will be found out as shallow and weak and useless at living this whole Christian life. Maybe I will skip the personal encounter and just get busy doing things—good

things, church things, Christian things. I will go to church meetings and encounter God in a crowd, but please, not on my own. He's going to gaze into my soul and find it shallow, dark, hypocritical, and weak. The shame hinders me from encountering God deeply. Some commentators say that God was not calling out to find out Adam and Eve's physical location—rather, what condition they were in: As we might say today, “Where are you at?” Sometimes I'd rather not answer that question!

God pursues us. It is a gracious pursuit, one that is laced with kindness, in order for him to help us recover and restore. We do not need to fear encounter because in genuine encounter we are made whole. Christ's intervention through his sacrificial death nullified the separation we experience because of sin and death. Amazing reassurance is given in Romans 8:1-2: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.” The original plan is reset: God walking and talking with people without barriers.

Where's Your Garden?

The Hebrew word for “garden” is *gannah*, which literally means “a covered or hidden place.” Gardens in biblical settings were usually small, walled enclosures, tranquil spaces in which you could tuck yourself out of sight and find a moment of rest. You can find many examples of these in

Morocco, Tunisia, or even Seville in Spain. These small gardens aimed to replicate the feel of larger gardens, in which you might find winding paths, running water, aromatic shade trees and plants, beautiful places to sit, fountains trickling and bubbling, and birds singing. Both settings would be beautiful places to relax and be refreshed in a hot, dry country. We don't know exactly what the garden in which Adam and Eve walked with God looked like, how tame or wild it felt, but it seems likely that in a time when God's creation was new and unspoiled, it would have been an inviting and refreshing place.

The chair where I spend my quiet times is my metaphorical "garden," my place of encounter, and morning is my time. I wake early and, at this stage of life, feeding and organizing small children for the day is no longer part of my morning routine. Location and time of day can be completely different for everyone. Your "garden" could be your car, your gym, out in the open air, or even in your bed. (Some of those may take a little more effort to turn into a quiet space, but it can be done.) Taking time in the morning is a great way to start the day, but it may be that a less distracted time for you is a walk during your lunch break—or perhaps you feel more able to focus at the end of the busyness of whatever your regular day holds. What's important is that you find a location and time for encounter within each day. I regularly travel for work, and while I am away, my encounter time changes and the location changes. But whatever my schedule looks like, I have

learned to identify the time within each day for a quiet time. In every season it's possible to find something that works.

For Jesus, the flow of his life and ministry was prayerful, reflective, and overflowed from regular encounters with his Father, and we would do well to learn from him.

Encounter When Life Is Good

When things were going well, Jesus prayed. Early on in his Gospel, Mark writes about Jesus healing many who were sick. Word spread quickly—so quickly that while Jesus was staying in the home of the mother-in-law of his disciple Peter, “the whole town gathered at the door” hoping to meet him (Mark 1:33). Many more healings followed, with people continuing to come from all over town. This was early on in the ministry of Jesus, and it already looked very successful. Thinking back to my own time as a church leader, this would have been my dream, the whole town turning up at the door, seeking an encounter with Jesus. This would be classed as real breakthrough—things would be going well, and other church leaders would probably visit to see what God was doing so they could have the same experience in their own towns.

But then we read, “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed” (Mark 1:35). In the midst of success and breakthrough, receptive crowds, people keen to become followers and eager to hear his words and witness his actions, Jesus took himself away from all of it and removed

himself to a solitary place for a quiet time. We don't know what he did in this quiet time, but Mark chooses to mention it, so it seems that there is something he wants the reader to understand.

The disciples came looking for him, perhaps rather bemused by his disappearance, and upon finding him, exclaimed, "Everyone is looking for you!" (Mark 1:37). They were basically saying, "Let's get back to it. Let's build on this breakthrough, seize this moment, ride this wave!" It's clear that God was dramatically at work in this time; this wasn't something that the disciples were used to experiencing. They could have created a revival center; people would have traveled from near and far to join them; from there, Jesus could have established his rule and reign. Job done, mission accomplished.

Jesus didn't go back to where the crowds were waiting; instead, he announced, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come" (Mark 1:38). We don't read whether the disciples were more confused or excited by this unexpected move; all we know is that Jesus came out of a place of prayer determined to preach in other places. I once heard a wise preacher speak of two things that will slow us down in our Christian walk: One is a wrong sense of responsibility; the other is responding to the wrong opportunities. I think that when we visit the garden, the quiet place, we are reminded of who we are and that God is in control.

I have observed that people are more likely to stop meeting

with God when life is good than they are when life is tough. Encounter can disappear from our lives when success leads us away from prioritizing a quiet time. It's easy for the adrenaline, the crowds, the acclaim, the status, or the money to subtly divert our attention away from God, the source of our life and peace. All these were on offer to Jesus at this point in his ministry, but that is not what he chose. He chose to withdraw to the quiet place. He chose to ignore the allure of success and distraction of attention and continue the journey he knew he was called to. He didn't imply that success was in and of itself wrong; it was more that he didn't allow the good that is found in success to lead him away from his quiet times.

Similarly, in the Old Testament, when the children of Israel had traveled for many years through the inhospitable desert environment and were finally on the cusp of entering a life of rest and prosperity, God cautioned them through the voice of Moses: "When you eat and are satisfied, be careful that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Deuteronomy 6:11-12). When we are full and content, confident in our self-sufficiency, we can forget to go to our chair and be nourished by the Lord. Instead, we need to cultivate a holy determination to go to the quiet place of encounter in success.

Encounter When Life Is Busy

As we move further into the Gospel of Mark, we read of Jesus being very busy:

Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”

So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

MARK 6:31-34

It's clear that Jesus and his disciples were under a huge amount of pressure with great demands being made on their time, so much so that they didn't have enough time to stop and eat properly. When we neglect our basic physical needs, it's often the case that we are also neglecting our spiritual needs. Jesus said to his disciples, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place.” They jumped in a boat and headed for a solitary place to escape the crowd, but the crowd followed them. Life is like this; the crowd follows us. Sometimes our solitary place becomes crowded: crowded by the busyness of life itself, as well as by the distractions, worries, and pre-occupations that come with it. Like the crowd, these things can either prevent us from entering the quiet place or follow us into our quiet place, disrupting our well-intentioned plans.

Jesus' response to the crowd and everything that they brought with them was one of compassion. He attended to them before dismissing them: "Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray" (Mark 6:45-46).

Becoming still in the solitary place during a time of busyness can sometimes take more effort than usual. It sounds strange to say that we have to work harder at becoming still—but in practice, it can feel like that. Like climbing a mountain, we push harder and climb higher to reach the mountaintop and find a breakthrough. I've climbed mountains—though not many, if I'm completely honest—and it's not easy. It takes time and energy. But reaching a summit offers fresh perspective and a different view of the world. We don't know what happened when Jesus dismissed the crowd and went up that mountain, but we do know that after he came down, he walked on water!

One of the hardest things to do when I'm at my busiest is to take longer than usual with my quiet time. With so much ahead that needs my attention, the temptation is to rush in and out again. But I've learned that my quiet time is more important than ever when there's a lot in my schedule or on my mind. In my quiet time, I find that the Lord comes and resources me with a fresh perspective and renewed energy.

Encounter When in Crisis

For me, gardens in the Bible represents intimacy: First, the intimacy that Adam and Eve experienced in the beginning as

they walked and talked with God; later, the intimate encounter of Jesus with his Father in another garden. This account gives us insight into Jesus' time of greatest turmoil and distress but also his ultimate submission and obedience to his Father. Knowing that torture, the cross, and death were imminent, Jesus said to his disciples, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" (Mark 14:34). Then, going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible, the hour might pass from him. "*Abba*, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will" (Mark 14:36).

What a powerful moment of intimacy in a time of unimaginable crisis. Before the action came prayer; before the redemptive act that would offer salvation to all humankind, a moment of absolute intimacy took place in a garden. What was lost in a garden was restored in a garden. In the Garden of Eden, Adam surrendered to his own will; in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus surrendered to his Father's will.

Crisis brings out all sorts of responses in us. We turn to other people, and we do what we can to fix things—neither of these is wrong. But when we turn to God in a time of crisis, we receive strength to face the night as well as the day. We find hope in the midst of despair, comfort in the midst of sorrow, and perhaps deeper intimacy than at any other moment, where we find ourselves like children crying, "Father!" As someone who has experienced loss and grief, I know that these few lines inadequately cover the suffering

that accompanies crisis, that it is a deep need that raises many questions. For this I would strongly recommend the book *God on Mute*, written by my dear friend Pete Greig.

Summary

When life is good, when life is busy, in a time of crisis, we observe Jesus prioritizing a quiet time. These were not some dull, Earl Grey-sipping, devotional musings of some distant monastic, ethereal contemplator. These were life-changing quiet times that led to miracles, transformation, revelation, and salvation—destiny-shaping quiet times.

Here are some things to think about as we come to the end of this chapter:

- Where are you? Where are you at?
- Where is your chair? Where is your garden?
- When is the best time for you to go there?
- Do you need to change the time or place of your encounter with God?

If you're finding the questions above difficult to answer, consider the following:

- Find a place: your car, your gym, your bedroom, a prayer room, a local church sanctuary, your prison cell, your armchair.

ENCOUNTER

- Find a time: morning, evening, afternoon, whatever works best for you.
- Flexibility will set you free: Different circumstances and different seasons require different approaches for your encounters. But challenge yourself to start where you are. Whether you are in a season of success, busyness, or despair, God will meet you there.

