



Be Still and Know

God's Presence in Silence

STUDY GUIDE

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Be Still and Know: Study Guide

Here is a six-session syllabus, with suggested readings and study and discussion points, to be used in conjunction with the book, *Be Still and Know: God's Presence in Silence*. This study guide is intended for use in classrooms and church groups.

Each week includes reading assignments to be completed before the session. It is important to read ahead so you can be ready for discussions and queries. There are also some suggested ideas for consideration, as well as practical methods.

There is an additional companion one-hour ethnographic field study film, also titled *Be Still and Know*, that may also be utilized in conjunction with the book and this study guide. Screenings, with running times specified, are suggested weekly. Alternatively, the entire one-hour film may be screened before or after the series. The film includes in-depth interviews and conversations with some contemporary ascetics as well as tours of monastic locations featured in the book. It is available for download from www.bestillandknow.info. The film offers illuminating insight and access to never-before-seen places—with unprecedented blessings for filming never given before, and unlikely to be granted again.

Also included is also a set of materials on the Jesus Prayer, including another book and feature film, by the author, titled “Mysteries of the Jesus Prayer.” More information may be found at www.JesusPrayerMovie.com.

I. ANCIENT TIMES AND METHODS

WEEK 1. INTRODUCTION TO HESYCHIA (THE PRACTICE OF SILENCE AND CONTEMPLATION)

Read: Preface and Introduction (pages ix–16)

This first week, the subjects are the possibility of communication with God and the various methods employed through the ages. The concepts of Uncreated Light, image, likeness, purification (*apatheia*), and grace are discussed. Mention of Scripture, classical philosophy, and early theological thoughts advance our understanding. We are introduced to early Christian desert theology.

Questions for Contemplation and Discussion:

- Do you think it is possible to communicate with or experience God?
- Is an intermediary, such as Jesus Christ the Son, necessary?
- Why did the ancients find it necessary to put the things of the world aside to be silent in order to commune with God? What does this mean when you consider that some theologians thought that God may be found in creation?

Screening: First 10:40 of the film *Be Still and Know*.

WEEK 2. THE EARLY DESERT CHRISTIANS

Read: Chapter 1 (pages 19–50)

Chapter 1 includes St. Antony, St. Pachomius, the Cappadocian Fathers and Mother (St. Gregory, St. Basil the Great, and St. Macrina), St. John Cassian, Evagrius, Diadochus, St. Symeon the New Theologian, St. Gregory Palamas, and the *Philokali*. The chapter also discusses centuries of Christian thought on purification, renunciation, control of mind and body, and experience of God through “likeness” and “energies.”

Questions for Contemplation and Discussion:

- Do you agree with Peter Brown that there is a difference between philosophy and an “anti-intellectual” mode of gaining knowledge by spiritual means (i.e., Christ)?

- What do you think St. Antony means by such terms as *warfare in his own heart* and *internal demons*? (See page 25.)
- Explain St. Gregory of Nazianzus’s statement that “you have within yourselves the standard by which to apprehend the divine . . . [that is,] the likeness of [God’s] own nature, as if it were the form of a carving into wax.”
- Delve a little deeper into the theologies of the Athonite Saint Gregory Palamas, about “essences” and “energies” of God.

Screening: 10:40–23:24. Sequence: The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom.

WEEK 3. COMPARING PRACTITIONERS AND MONASTIC LIFE

Read: Chapters 2–3 (pages 51–66)

This week, we take the philosophies, theologies, and practices of the ancient sages and saints and put them into context with monastic life. This section also includes an introduction to the Jesus Prayer.

Questions for Contemplation and Discussion:

- What are the three main types of asceticism and monastic communities, and how do they differ from one another?
- Compare the practical theologies and terminology of St. Macrina and St. Gregory Palamas.
- Unpack the differences between Evagrius’s “prayer of the mind” to Ps. Makarius’s “prayer of the heart.”
- What is meant by the Christian term *hypostatic union*, and how does it agree with the Holy Trinity?

Screening: 23:25–32:25. A visit to St. Antony’s monastery on the Red Sea in Egypt.

II. CONTEMPORARY PRACTICES

WEEK 4. CONNECTION WITH GOD

Read: Chapter 4 and Introduction to Contemporary section (pages 67–80)

Now we take what we have learned from the great monastic fathers and mothers into the present. We visit working monasteries in Egypt, Mt. Sinai, Greece, and Eastern Europe (specifically Romania) and speak with Bishops, Archbishops, monks and nuns. Be sure to see the connection between what you’ve learned from the ancients with modern practices.

Questions for Contemplation and Discussion:

- Archbishop Damianos paints a picture of methods for prayer and connection with God. Are you reminded of any ancient saint’s wisdom and direction in his counsel?
- Archimandrite Theofil talks a lot about starting prayer in the heart. What is his method of integration with the intellect? What cautions does he offer, and what methods of dealing with problems does he discuss?
- Mother Superior Irina at Voronets teaches us Christ’s words to “love God and love our neighbor,” as the essence of true peace. How do we do that?

Screening: 32:26–44:55. A visit to Greece: Serifos Island and Holy Mount Athos.

WEEK 5. BUILDING COMMUNICATION WITH GOD

Read: Chapter 5 (pages 81–90)

The conversation with both living practitioners and contemporary theologians now centers around prayer (specifically the Jesus Prayer), Kyrie Eleison, or just the Holy Name of Jesus. Different stages of prayer are brought to the fore, as is a distinction between different aspects of the body, mind, and psyche.

Questions for Contemplation and Discussion:

- How is the Jesus Prayer both a praise and petitionary prayer?
- Father Makarios experiences God in a different way; how is his spiritual practice unique?
- Do you think it is necessary to struggle or fall away from God or to endure suffering to find God?
- Do you think it is necessary to undergo a kind of purification or renunciation of the self to experience God? What are some methods of becoming ready?

Screening: 44:56–59:27. The end of the film.

WEEK 6. PRACTICE

Read: Chapters 6–8, and the Conclusion (pages 91–121)

This is the concluding lesson of this series. It sends participants off with suggestions for ways to connect and communicate with God, as suggested by monks and nuns, spiritual leaders, and even a Patriarch.

Questions for Contemplation and Discussion:

- Throughout the book, there are references to the word, or state of “sin.” How do you define this word? What are the variations of definitions of sin you’ve discovered in studying this book and film?
- There are also mentions of the words *repentance* and *confession*. Define and discuss these terms and actions.
- His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel of Romania says that we can speak with God. How might this be done?
- What do the ascetics say we need to do with our attention, beliefs, and activities?
- Make a list of methods for finding God and returning to God from the suggestions in this week’s readings. Consider keeping this list with you as a reminder when needed.
- In most of the ancient and contemporary words of wisdom, we are reminded of the importance of finding a spiritual guide, or experienced Spiritual Father or Mother, and to not undertake ascetic practices on one’s own outside of a monastery. (See pages 110–112.) Also, it is not recommended to try any specific body postures or breathing exercises along with prayer.

We hope that this study guide, book, and film have been helpful to you. We would love your thoughts and comments. Please visit our Facebook and Twitter pages, found under “Be Still and Know.” And visit our website for more information, www.bestillandknow.info.

Thank you, and God bless you.