STUDY GUIDE · 20 JULY 2026

Still and Ready: Overcoming Anxiety Through Spiritual Disciplines and Discipleship

Discipleship, Prayer, Scripture

Anxiety and restlessness are not merely external pressures but flow from internal postures of pride and self-sufficiency that crowd out trust in God. Both Martha's distracted striving and the proud heart described in Psalm 131 illustrate how we generate our own dis-ease.

When Martha welcomed Jesus into her home, she was not doing something wrong — she was serving. But the sermon on Luke 10 observes that 'the distracted Martha now distracts Jesus and Mary,' and that under pressure 'it brings out Martha's true color — she was self-centered.' Her problem was not busyness itself but that her busyness had pulled her away from Jesus. The sermon names what so many of us recognise: 'We are distracted. We are pulled in every other direction. We are self-centered. We are anxious and restless.' Phones, family, finances, career — the list of things that displace attentiveness to Christ is long, and each item on it promises relief while delivering more restlessness.

Psalm 131 reaches deeper still. The sermon on that psalm describes pride as 'the default setting of the human heart,' an inward posture in which we 'live for me, to not be full of God and his

purposes, but be full of myself.' A proud heart, the sermon explains, 'acts as though God were subject to it rather than that it is subject to God.' This is not merely a moral failure — it is the engine of anxiety. When I am functionally my own god, every uncertainty becomes a threat, because everything depends on me. The weaned child of Psalm 131:2 offers the counter-image: not a child who has ceased to have needs, but one who has learned to trust that its parent will provide. 'It's only when we stop fighting and collapse in the arms of our Heavenly Father,' the sermon says, 'that we can live and be at peace.' The first step toward that rest is the honest admission that our pride is the problem.

- Where do you recognise Martha's distracted busyness — pulled away from Jesus by good-sounding things — in your own daily life?
- Psalm 131 describes a 'lifted-up heart' as pride that leads us to live for ourselves rather than God — where does that show up as anxiety in your experience?
- The sermon on Psalm 131 states that 'the root of our anxiety and our restless hearts is our pride' — do you agree, and what evidence do you see of that in your own life?
- What distractions — phones, family pressures, financial worries — most consistently pull you away from attentiveness to Jesus?
- How does the image of a newborn screaming for milk contrast with the weaned child resting in its mother's arms, and which image better describes your current relationship with God?

Psalm 131 prescribes a three-part humility — of the heart, of the eyes, and of the intellect — as the active, daily discipline that displaces anxious pride. A humble Christian is a peaceful Christian.

Psalm 131:1 describes humility in three registers, and the sermon on this psalm unpacks each one. The heart that is 'not lifted up' is the heart that has stopped overestimating itself before God and

has begun to live for his purposes rather than its own. The eyes that are 'not raised too high' are eyes that have stopped coveting — the sermon draws the parallel to Ahab, who was 'so bitter in his soul because his neighbor has a vineyard that God has not given to him.' The observation lands close to home: 'How often have you felt just fine in your life and at peace until you opened up social media and started looking at the lives of your friends?' Comparison, the sermon notes, 'never leads us to satisfaction. It can't, it doesn't lead to contentment. It doesn't lead to peace.'

The third dimension of humility is intellectual: 'I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.' The sermon commends Deuteronomy 29:29 — 'the secret things belong to the Lord our God' — as a verse worth memorising for exactly those moments when unanswered questions are driving us 'crazy, getting depressed, going way off course in our Christian lives.' The humble intellect, the sermon says, 'knows when to stop asking questions and when to start getting to work in obedience.' Taken together, these three disciplines form a full-bodied posture before God: heart, eyes, and mind all oriented away from self and toward him. The payoff is directional: 'a humble Christian is a peaceful Christian. And a humble Christian is a Christian who looks a lot like their Savior, Jesus,' who 'lived in submission and humility, dependent upon prayer and relationship with his Father,' even to the cross.

- David's humility in Psalm 131 involves the heart, the eyes, and the mind — which of these three is hardest for you to submit to God and why?
- The sermon compares coveting others' lives on social media to Ahab lifting his eyes to Naboth's vineyard — how does comparison fuel anxiety for you?
- What 'things too great and too marvelous' — unanswered questions, divine mysteries — are you straining to resolve on your own, and what would it look like to hand them to God?

- Deuteronomy 29:29 is cited as a verse for the humble intellect: 'the secret things belong to the Lord' — how might memorising this verse change how you handle theological doubt or unanswered prayer?
- The sermon states that 'a humble Christian looks like Jesus' who lived in submission and prayer even through crucifixion — what concrete step could you take this week toward that kind of surrendered humility?

Prayer is described as 'maybe the greatest blessing' of the Christian life — the direct answer to living alone in the suffering and anxiety of the world. Jesus himself models a persistent prayer life throughout Luke, and the Lord's Prayer gives an ordered, daily structure for bringing every burden before the Father.

The sermon on the Lord's Prayer opens with a striking claim: 'maybe the greatest blessing, the greatest privilege that we have as Christians is the gift of prayer.' The reason is direct — 'a Christian in this world is someone who does not need to live in the darkness and the suffering and the evil and the sin of this world alone.' Section 1 named pride and distraction as the root of anxiety; prayer is the Spirit-given remedy, the place where the self-reliant heart is retrained to depend on the Father. Yet the sermon is honest that this gift is 'maybe one of the more underestimated and under-talked about and under-utilized gifts in the Christian arsenal.'

Luke's Gospel, more than any other, shows Jesus at prayer — at his baptism, withdrawing privately again and again as a custom when ministry demands were greatest, rejoicing in prayer in Luke 10:21. The point, the sermon explains, is not admiration but imitation: 'God did not give us Jesus' prayer life in the Bible as something for us just to admire. He gave it so that we would learn from Jesus' life of prayer as a model.' When a disciple saw Jesus praying and asked, 'Lord, teach us to pray,' that request models the posture we need — recognising that we have no idea how to begin

and that we need to be taught. The sermon commends Martin Luther's practice: read some Scripture, pray through the Lord's Prayer once with intentionality, then pray it line by line, letting it 'lead and structure and guide your prayers.' This ordered, daily discipline is not a technique for managing anxiety but a means of bringing every burden before a Father who loves to give good gifts to his children.

- The sermon on the Lord's Prayer calls prayer 'one of the more underestimated and under-utilised gifts in the Christian arsenal' — how honestly does that describe your own prayer life?
- Jesus' disciple saw him praying and said 'Lord, teach us to pray' — what does it look like for you to want the prayer relationship Jesus has with the Father, and to admit you need to be taught?
- Martin Luther's pattern of reading Scripture and then praying through the Lord's Prayer line by line is commended in the sermon — what would it take to trial that practice for one week?
- The sermon says Christians 'do not need to live in the darkness and the suffering and the evil of this world alone' because of prayer — in what area of anxiety are you currently trying to cope alone rather than bringing it to God?
- Luke records Jesus withdrawing privately to pray again and again as a custom even when ministry demands were greatest — what does that pattern say to you about prayer as a response to pressure rather than a luxury for quiet seasons?

Mary's posture of devoted, restful attention to Jesus' word is presented as the 'one thing necessary' that displaces anxious distraction. Luke 11's lamp imagery teaches that a 'healthy eye' — a soul open to the light of

Christ — floods the whole person with light. Beholding Jesus through Scripture is the engine of transformation.

Mary's choice to sit at Jesus' feet was, the sermon points out, 'socially and culturally unacceptable' — she was breaking two codes at once, abandoning her kitchen duties and assuming the posture of a male disciple. She did not care. 'Mary chose to sit and find rest at the feet of Jesus.' The sermon connects her attentiveness to the Father's own words from the cloud in Luke 9:35: 'This is my Son, my chosen one. Listen to him.' When we understand that 'Jesus' word bears divine power and authority,' the sermon notes, 'you realize that nothing else matters. Nothing else is important including ourselves, including our problems. God, the creator, is talking to me, one to one.'

Luke 11:33–36 deepens this with the lamp-of-the-body image. The sermon on that passage draws out the warning: 'be careful lest the light in you be darkness.' True Christians, the sermon says, are 'those that are responding to the word of God and are growing in the light,' and that means actively bringing sin out of hiding rather than closing our eyes to it. The connection to transformation is made explicit in 2 Corinthians 3:18, which the sermon on Luke 2 cites: it is 'by beholding the glory of the Lord in Jesus that we're transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.' This, the sermon insists, is 'the most practical, the most productive thing that we can do on a Sunday morning.' The discipline of sitting with Scripture is not one activity among many — it is the means by which the anxious soul is slowly re-formed into the restful image of Christ. The sermon closes its invitation warmly: 'if that's you, would you draw near to Jesus today? Would you come to him and bring your burden and lay them all at his feet? He will give you the rest you need.'

- Mary 'sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching' in a culturally costly way — what social or cultural pressures make it difficult for you to prioritise sitting with Scripture over productive activity?

- The sermon on Luke 11 says Jesus is 'greater than Jonah' and is 'the fullness of God revealing himself' — how does taking that seriously change how you approach Bible reading?
- The lamp-of-the-body passage warns 'be careful lest the light in you be darkness' — what habits or thought patterns in your life might be slowly dimming your receptivity to God's word?
- Paul teaches in 2 Corinthians 3:18 that we are 'transformed from one degree of glory to another' by beholding Jesus — the sermon calls this 'the most practical thing we can do on a Sunday morning'; how does that reframe your expectations of gathering and personal devotion?
- The sermon on Luke 10:38–42 invites those who feel 'scattered, tired, restless' to 'draw near to Jesus and bring your burden' — what burden could you specifically lay at his feet this week?

Jesus' call to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and follow him is not a burden added to anxiety but the very path out of it. Cruciform discipleship — relinquishing control of our lives to Christ — breaks the cycle of self-centred striving that generates fear, because whoever loses their life for Jesus' sake will save it.

Sections 1–4 have named the problem and introduced the disciplines that reorient us. Now the path sharpens. The sermon on Luke 9:23–24 is unsparing: 'There is no other way to follow Jesus, to be a Christian, to be part of his kingdom than what Jesus is laying out here for us.' The call to deny yourself and take up your cross daily means, in the Greek, to 'repudiate yourself — saying no longer me, but Jesus.' The cross image was not metaphor for Jesus' first hearers — they had walked past crucified rebels on Roman roads. The sermon explains that Jesus chose this image deliberately 'because it communicated that to follow Jesus is not to follow him in political triumph' but to

embrace 'shame and humiliation.' And yet this downward path is the only one that leads to life: 'whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.' The sermon names the mechanism precisely — 'whatever thing we keep back from Jesus… that's the thing Jesus is saying is going to destroy your life.'

The sermon on Luke 14 extends this with Dietrich Bonhoeffer's summary: 'when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.' Yet what might sound crushing turns out to be liberating. The story of the young Indian man who risked his life to return to his Muslim family and share the gospel illustrates the paradox: 'his love for his family kept growing now that Jesus was first.' To put Jesus ahead of everything is not to love others less but to love them with the love of God rather than the anxiety of self. The sermon on Luke 5 completes the arc: when Peter and the others left everything and followed Jesus, 'this is not a passage about loss. It's a passage about gain… even the loss of everything and gaining Christ is only great gain.' The treasure hidden in the field, the pearl of great price — these are Jesus' own images for why full surrender is the only rational response to who he is.

- Jesus says 'whoever would save his life will lose it' — what are you currently gripping tightly that may be costing you more peace than it is providing security?
- The sermon on Luke 9 describes cruciform discipleship as embracing 'shame and humiliation' in following Jesus — where in your life does fear of others' opinions keep you from full obedience?
- The sermon on Luke 14 uses Dietrich Bonhoeffer's line 'when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die' — how does understanding discipleship as costly reorder your expectations about what following Jesus should feel like?

- The young Indian man in the Luke 14 sermon chose to return home at the risk of his life because 'his love for his family kept growing now that Jesus was first' — how does putting Jesus first actually increase rather than diminish our capacity to love others?
- The sermon on Luke 9 identifies the idol each person holds back from Jesus as the source of their ruin — what is the thing in your own life you keep telling Jesus is 'a bridge too far'?

Luke 12:35–48 teaches that the ready, faithful disciple pours out the master's resources — truth, mercy, material goods — on fellow servants while waiting for Christ's return. This outward, generous orientation is itself a spiritual discipline that breaks the inward spiral of anxiety and self-preoccupation.

Having named the inward disciplines — humility, prayer, attentiveness to Scripture, self-denial — the guide now turns outward. The sermon on Luke 12:35–48 describes readiness for Christ's return not as a passive spiritual posture but as an active, other-directed life. The faithful servant is the one who, while the master is away, gives fellow servants 'their portion of food at the proper time.' The sermon interprets this image broadly: 'taking the master's resources that he's given to us and just liberally pouring it out on other people from what we've received from him.' That food is first 'the truth of God's word,' but it is also 'love itself. It's mercy. It's compassion' — and the Good Samaritan and the command to sell possessions and give to the poor are both cited as illustrations from Luke's own narrative.

The contrast with the unfaithful servant is stark and instructive. When the master is delayed, the unfaithful servant turns inward, becoming self-indulgent and abusive toward those in his care. The sermon identifies this as a pattern recognisable to us: under pressure, self-focus and resentment creep in. The remedy is not merely trying harder but a reorientation of the whole life around the master's return. 'Faithfulness that waits expectantly for Christ's return,' the sermon concludes, 'is a

life lived looking in love to the needs of others.' This outward movement — giving the word, extending mercy, sharing material resources — is itself a spiritual discipline. It breaks the inward spiral of anxious self-preoccupation precisely because it requires us to look away from ourselves and toward both the master who is coming and the servants who are waiting alongside us.

- The parable in Luke 12 describes a servant who 'gives food at the proper time' as a metaphor for distributing God's word, love, and resources to others — in what practical ways could you be more generous with what God has given you this week?
- The sermon notes that Jesus told his disciples 'sell your possessions and give to the poor' immediately after 'fear not, little flock' — what does the link between releasing material anxiety and generosity suggest about how we overcome worry about provision?
- The unfaithful servant in Luke 12 turns inward and abuses others when the master is away — where do you notice self-focus or resentment creeping in when you are under pressure?
- The sermon on Luke 12 says 'faithfulness that waits expectantly for Christ's return is a life lived looking to the needs of others' — who around you right now has a need you could meet as an act of faithful waiting?
- How does knowing that Jesus will reward faithful service when he returns give you courage to serve generously even when it is costly or unnoticed now?

Psalm 131 closes with a community call to 'hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore.' Colossians 1 grounds that hope in the renewal Christ has accomplished and calls believers to remain 'stable and steadfast.' Knowing who God is — his proven faithfulness across history — is what enables the weaned-child contentment that defeats anxiety.

The guide ends where Psalm 131 ends — not with a technique but with a Person. The sermon on Psalm 131 insists that the weaned child's contentment is possible only in relationship with a God who has proved himself trustworthy: 'a weaned child will be content in its mother's arms, but how many of you have tried to pick up a crying kid in this church that doesn't belong to you?' The child rests because it knows the one who holds it. And the basis for knowing this God is his track record: 'Yahweh had made them a great people. Yahweh set them free when they were enslaved in Egypt for 400 years. Yahweh brought them to the land. Yahweh raised up a king… and then Yahweh continued to make promises and continued to keep them.' The sermon explicitly names the Messiah, the outpoured Spirit, and the ingathering of every tribe and nation as fulfilments of that faithfulness — all of them grounds for hope now.

The Colossians sermon adds the warning that hope requires maintenance. The word 'stable' in Colossians 1:23, the sermon explains, means 'to be founded on a sure foundation,' and it brings to mind Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish builders. Paul knew that 'persecution, sickness, despondency, depression, despair, doubt, hardship' would tempt believers to 'take the house of their life and move it from the foundation of Jesus.' The pastoral word is direct: 'hard times are not the time to pull back from community in Christ. Hard times are not the time to leave your Bible on the shelf.' The disciplines of the whole guide — humility, prayer, Scripture, self-denial, generous service — are exactly the practices that keep the house on the rock. And the promise that undergirds them all is the one that closes Psalm 131: hope in Yahweh now and forevermore, because he who has called you is faithful, and the day is coming when all that he has promised will

be fulfilled.

- Psalm 131:3 calls all Israel to hope in Yahweh 'from this time forth and forevermore' — what specific promise of God are you finding hardest to trust right now, and why?
- The sermon on Psalm 131 recounts God's faithfulness to Israel across centuries — barren Abraham, the Exodus, the Messiah — as the basis for trust; what moments of God's past faithfulness in your own life can you use as anchors against present fear?
- The Colossians sermon warns that in hard times we are tempted to 'move the house of our life from the foundation of Jesus' — what alternative foundations are most tempting for you when suffering comes?
- The sermon on Colossians says 'hard times are not the time to pull back from community in Christ' — in what ways has fear or discouragement caused you to withdraw from the church, Scripture, or prayer?
- The sermon on Luke 5 argues that even 'the loss of everything and gaining Christ is only great gain' — does that feel true to you today, and what would it take to believe it more fully?

Conclusion

The disciplines surveyed in this guide — humility, prayer, attentiveness to Scripture, self-denial, generous service, and hope-grounded waiting — are not techniques for managing anxiety. They are the shape of a life increasingly surrendered to Jesus, lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. As Psalm 131 models and the sermons on Luke consistently affirm, peace is not a feeling we can produce; it is a fruit of relationship with the living God.

The sermon on Psalm 131 states the goal plainly: 'to grow in a mature relationship characterized by peace with God.' That maturity does not arrive all at once. It comes 'not easily, but day by day,' as

we pursue humility, choose contentment, and anchor our hope in a God whose faithfulness stretches from barren Abraham to the empty tomb and forward to the return of Christ. The sermon on the Lord's Prayer reminds us that we are not alone in this: 'a Christian in this world is someone who does not need to live in the darkness and the suffering and the evil and the sin of this world alone.' Prayer is the ongoing proof of that company.

The invitation at the end of every section of this guide is the same as Jesus' invitation in the Gospels: come, deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and follow him — and discover, as Simon Peter discovered on the lakeshore when he left everything and followed, that losing your life for Jesus' sake is the only way to truly save it. As the sermon on Luke 10 closes: 'Come, you weary heart, now, to Jesus. Come, you anxious soul, now, and see. There is perfect love and comfort in your tears. Rest here in his wondrous peace.'

Bring your archive. See what a week of teaching looks like.

See Unfold with your own sermons → unfold.church/request-demo