

Chapter 1

ARE YOU A STATIC JEDI?



EVERYONE MOVES AT some point in life. To an apartment, house, college, or hut. We are transient creatures.

I remember moving when I was a kid. A family relocation means a new place, new schools, and lots of unknowns. I was fine with those. What I didn't like about moving was the packing. I had to pack, haul, and then unpack. I didn't like having my room torn apart or having to reset everything as it was.

I have never met anyone who likes the ancient ritual of moving. When my cousin recently told me he was moving, he said it with that special "This is really going to stink" tone in his voice. Moving is work, and it's emotionally, physically, and financially draining. Going to a new address requires time and money, and once you've moved in, you have to hunt for the television remote and the pizza cutter. They are probably in the same box. After our last move the cutter was nowhere to be found, so I used my wife's scrapbook scissors with the zigzag edge to slice a frozen pizza. My favorite thin crust never had such beautiful lacy edges.

In our recent move things were lost, one after another, into the black hole of the moving space continuum. For weeks I couldn't find critical proprietary pieces for a shelf unit. The shelves wouldn't go together, and one of the missing pieces is probably only found on a remote island near Sweden, so I couldn't dash to the local hardware for replacement parts. But then, during the

final walk through of our old house, like a retired beach bum I raked my son's backyard sandbox and found the missing piece. If you wonder where something is, check the sandbox. It's rule number 346 of parenting. Rule number 347 is buy a new pizza cutter.

On moving day I stacked boxes containing my earthly belongings into the truck. One box on top of another, I built a huge cardboard wall. Soon the belongings—the pizza cutter, the incomplete shelving unit, and my turbo nose trimmer—stacked behind the wall were no longer visible.

I think our lives can become a lot like that cardboard barrier.

Build a Wall

Think about your average week. Consider your daily routine, specifically how you invest your time. More specifically focus on your level of noise—those tasks you know don't really matter. The urgent and not-so-urgent that pull you from the important. This noise would be those things that distract us, not including work, school, sleep, or our daily commute. We'll look at the overarching installments of each day as we continue on, but for now let's focus on the noise.

How many hours do you invest every day ingesting your noise? Total the investment of your time in hours from all the different sources of noise in your life. What would your noise number be?

For me I've had to ask how many hours in a day, collectively, I'm on the Internet—clicking, checking, swiping, updating, posting. How much time do I invest watching television and movies, searching YouTube for a laugh, or playing video games? Where am I choosing to entrap myself in endless conversations scribed one text line at a time? How many hours, collectively, am I glued to a screen? With my phone in hand, bending my gaze toward my Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts takes minutes at a time, but when the reality is compounded, it takes up much more, maybe even hours.

This could include non-digital forms of distraction too, such as newspapers, magazines, board games, and romance novels. (No, I'm usually not caught reading romance novels; however, you may be. Your noise currents may be different from mine. Different generations and different people have different noises, but all of it is still noise.) Make a note of the hours you invest in noise each day. Write this note in this book (if you are reading a hard copy), your journal, a napkin, or your digital notepad.

For this example let's say you honestly invest two hours each day immersed in your noise. Maybe it's way more for you. Maybe it's less. Whatever the case, be honest with your number and generous in your definition of noise. I say to be generous with your definition because sometimes we rationalize the noise until we're convinced what we're doing and hearing is actually building substance into our lives. I see this concept most prevalent in the current landscape of social media. We justify our actions and interactions with noise as educational or relationally productive.

Is it? How do you know? How can you be sure?

Now let's take that daily number in our example of two hours per day and multiply it by seven days in a week. Two hours each day in the noise x seven days a week = fourteen hours invested each week in the noise.

Let those fourteen hours be represented by fourteen cardboard boxes. Every hour in the noise is represented by one box.

If your daily noise number is one, then you would have seven boxes here. If your number of noise hours is three, you would have twenty-one boxes.

For our example now we're going to multiply fourteen boxes per week by the average number of four weeks in a month. This is simple mathematics. I'm not trying to do quantum physics, account for a leap year, or figure the gravitational pull of the earth during the winter solstice of the southeastern hemisphere. If you have your calculator app or old-school TI-85 calculator

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with you, put it away. There will be no graphs. Or you can draw one if it makes you feel better.

At just 2 hours per day invested in noise, our 14 hours each week multiplied by 4 weeks in an average month equals 56 hours per month. In a month we have built a wall consisting of fifty-six cardboard boxes. In a year that number grows to 730 hours, being that there are 365 days in a year. If you divide 730 by 24, it equals about 30 days—meaning that approximately 1 whole month out of each year of our life is invested in noise. What if that math is applied to 10 years of your life? The result from that application can be startling.

It's a slippery slope, and we slide it blindly. Sliding down further than we realize at just two hours a day invested in the noise.

In one decade we fall just shy of losing an entire year to the noise—at only two hours a day.

That's almost 10 percent of your life spent investing in the noise.

We are often unaware of the gradual decline and the erosion our lives but not unaware of the gnawing feeling it brings.

If you feel that gnawing, that pull within you to focus on what really matters, that call within to live differently, then you are becoming aware of this and are no longer blind to it.

Without awareness change is difficult.

If you don't adjust the math, then every ten years you live your life, you will have lost about one of them—to the noise.

A year of your life: that's watching the screen for one year. That's twelve months you failed to live.

You merely existed. Like a banana slug. Which are yellow and have one lung. Wild West yellow too—not a color you want to be labeled.

Breathing in, exhaling out.

A half-life.

Turn twenty years old at this rate of investment in the noise and that's two years of your life lost searching YouTube for

treasure. The treasure chest was empty, a pointless quest the reward. At forty years old, the traditional midpoint celebration of life, about 10 percent or so of your life will be gone to the noise at just two hours a day invested in it.

Your child turns ten years old, but to you, he or she is still nine because you missed a year. Almost twelve months of not being face-to-face in relationship with your kids.

Instead, you were screen to face.

They were in the other room.

This may not apply directly to you if you're not a parent. However, if you are as I am, you may be haunted by the number of hours you spend together with your kids. The time you spend so easily decreases when you factor in hours of school, church, music lessons, and a couple summer camps. Children are only children for a brief number of years, and that goes by too fast. For some the rate of responsibility is even faster as kids are pushed into adulthood in our society of the fatherless. It doesn't have to be this way. The amount of noise in our life potentially steals an additional two years away from what has been said to be the cornerstone of culture and successful communities: the family.

But back to our wall, which is another rising cornerstone of culture, the noise.

Wall of Noise

In one month we have fifty-six cardboard boxes that each represent an hour of noise. To build our wall, let's put seven boxes in a row and stack another row of seven on top of those seven. Eventually we have a wall that is seven boxes wide and eight boxes tall. The wall of noise.

Walls keep things out.

Walls keep things in.

We hide stuff behind our walls.

Walls have gone up, come down, and remained strong throughout the history of the world—the Great Wall of China,

the Berlin Wall, the walls of a city called Jericho, the walls of our hearts—to name a few.

The Bible tells us that huge walls surrounded Jericho. Some archeological evidence argues there were actually two walls and that Jericho stood on a hill. At the base of the hill would have been a stone retaining wall that rose twelve to fifteen feet high. Built upon that retaining wall was possibly a mud brick wall some six feet thick and twenty-six feet tall. At the top of this hill, where Jericho perched, was a second mud brick wall.¹

Both sides of any historical/archeological debate can agree Jericho was an impressive structure for its time. Possibly towering fifty feet into the sky, the Jericho fortifications must have appeared intimidating as the Israelites marched around the walled structure—I know they would have for me if I had only a handmade spear in hand.

The story in the Bible ends with the walls coming down.

Do the Math

Let's begin to tear down our walls of noise.

Standing in front of our example of fifty-six boxes, we can remove them one at a time—but how we do this will be a special process. Just as we thought about our average week and how we invest time ingesting noise, let's do that again now, only from a different angle.

Instead of focusing on noise, now concentrate on the time you invest in clarity. This is time devoted to things that change us, grow us, and draw us to become more like Christ. Moments when the sands of the hourglass do not slip through our fingers, but when we instead grab hold of every precious grain. These are the occasions spent with Jesus and the moments that really matter.

It's this communing with clarity that moves us toward becoming a Static Jedi.

One who masters the noise.

If you placed a number on how many hours each day you

invest in clarity, what would that number be? How frequently do you remove yourself from the noise? How much time do you spend in meaningful conversation, breaking bread, engaging face-to-face with your family, or fasting in private? How many hours or minutes in a day, collectively, are you praying, seeking, reading, or memorizing the Word? How much time do you invest in bringing the balance back to where God's voice is the loudest or withdrawing to the stillness of the morning? Do you, even in the chaos of the day as you're stuck in traffic or baptized in the hustle of life, find ways to continue to focus on acknowledging the presence of God?

As you are at this moment, what would you say? How much time do you invest in clarity?

Clarity Defined

We live in a busy time. Always moving, perpetually in motion—tasks, distractions. We are so adequately named the human *race*. Always running. *Human race* is a spiritual classification and condition, far more than just a sociological label.

In an age where time just speeds by, we can easily, carelessly, and foolishly squander it. But here's the thing. No one can retrieve time already squandered. Each day our twenty-four-hour allotment is typically invested in rushing around with tasks, school, homework, cleaning, kids, sleep, and our jobs. I've had mornings when the first thing I do after waking up is grab my handheld digital noisemaker and check statuses and e-mail and then fight fires—putting out urgent and unimportant matters with my limited life's energy and my finite twenty-four-hour allotment. It's like a cosmic eight ball that I can't get out from behind, and then the cycle repeats. There are days when my breath seems like something I can never catch, and enough is never enough. Then I end days like this by turning on the fan or a digital noisemaker to sleep.

We need the noise to sleep, to rest.

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The silence has a foreign nature to it.

It's too quiet.

It's uncomfortable.

It's out of place,

out of pace,

with our lives.

We've all felt this way, and if we're honest, these days turn into weeks, then months, then years. This habitual way of living creeps into the chambers of our hearts and diverts and dictates our life-giving flow. Unless we are purposeful and watchful regarding our daily moments, all those precious minutes are ruthlessly stolen by the noise.

Except on Sunday.

Sunday is always the Sabbath at home, right?

Nope.

Too often Sunday becomes the catch-up-and-prepare day—catch up the loose ends left over from the week before and prepare for the onslaught that's coming in the week ahead. It's nothing like a Sabbath day, remembered and set apart. So how much time would you put down in pursuit of God and clarity?



Clarity is silently and stealthy exchanged for noise. #staticjedi @ericamueltimm

Every time I ask this question when I'm speaking and painting at churches, conferences of young people, or with leaders in ministry, it gets really quiet. The silence and personal stories reflected from the audience tell me that sometimes the Bible is not even opened in a given week. Christ followers are more apt to rake over a quick devotional than shovel and dig into God's Word by wrestling, studying, and memorizing it. I'm not looking for spiritual trophy-case displays here, but it burdens my heart as I meet followers of Christ who can quote copious amounts of

movie dialogue and music lyrics but can't give me five verses by heart from God's Word.

Even for a hundred bucks. (Some of you were there when I tried this at camp one time. I still have the hundred-dollar bill in my office!)

The Word and prayer dwindle to something dashed off perfunctorily before we eat or go to sleep—if then. Church becomes a social club or a box on the to-do list that we check off for the week. Discipling others gets lost in the shuffle of life, as we have left the path long ago of being disciples ourselves. The only thing we are caught withdrawing to is anything that keeps us from withdrawing from our toxic addiction to noise. For many, it isn't an illegal substance we fear withdrawal from. It's that spiritually toxic addiction to the static, to the noise. It's easy to stay hooked in our full world. We despise the morning and don't ever have to really feel hunger pangs.

Clarity is silently and stealthily exchanged for noise.

In fact, countless devotionals and study Bibles are based on the concept of getting our clarity in two minutes or less. This trains us to think there is "time with God" and "our time." The compartmentalization of His voice to set times we commune with Him is a dangerous place to live. Is it our goal to spend the slightest amount of time possible with the Lord and still be in relationship with Him? I'm not discounting the effectiveness of these publications or their place in our lives at certain times, but their very existence validates a system that tries to battle the noise with the least amount of commitment—just like a specific type of soda in your grocery store indicates a precise kind of beverage-drinker guzzling down that exact flavor of food coloring or aspartame. (What exactly is caramel color, anyway?)

Noise is battled fifteen, ten, and five minutes at a time.

But do you think it's working?

As the body of Christ, are we winning this struggle?

Has it worked for you?

Are you still a servant—or, more truthfully, slave—to the noise? I'll let you decide.

Continually packaging God's Word in compact and easy-to-use ways will continue to produce compact and easy-to-use followers of Christ—who possibly have compact dreams and easy visions.

Devotionals and Shaving

That's why I think some devotionals are like shavers. Manufacturers started out with one blade; then they added two blades. Later they determined we need two blades and a lotion strip. OK, wait—three blades, a gel strip, and an AAA battery with a heater and automatic lotion dispenser with a tanning application. Then a fourth blade for that really close shave, and by the way, it's got an MP3 player with a thumb drive in the base, and it runs on both operating systems. And it has to be pink.

Or red.

The overarching marketing message here is the need to make it faster and easier with the least amount of effort for the consumer.

Workout videos are the same way. Eight-minute abs, five-minute abs, two-minute abs, one-minute abs, and then buy the electric belt and it works it out for you with electrostimulation.

Like automatic sit-ups without the *up*.

Just the sit.

Just sit and enjoy your popcorn—the *up* is taken care of.

This easy, quick, convenient mentality has compartmentalized our walk with the Lord. The one-minute Bible and quick devotions are aimed at us. What are we teaching about time spent with God?

What's next—the thirty-second study Bible?

Maybe we should just make Christianity microwaveable. Something like Microwaveable Christianity Hot Pockets.

Or maybe God would like us to show up once in a while without it being fast and easy.

And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.”

—MARK 8:34–35

Maybe the life Jesus is talking about here is our social life—that rapidly expanding, partly cyber, private-yet-public social life.

But maybe He just means our life, which raises a few questions:

What is our life?

What makes up our life?

What is the life Jesus is talking about here?

The breath that enters our lungs?

The house we live in or the pursuit of the one we wish to own?

Our math class?

The political party we belong to?

Our opinions?

Our experiences?

I say all of it.

The word *life* in Mark 8:34–35 is the Greek word *psychē*.² It is a powerful, colorful word that means “breath” or “the vital forces which animates the body and shows itself in breathing.” When we see the breath leave a body, it then stops the perpetual motion of breathing. We then understand this as life having left their lungs. *Psychē* also refers to “the seat of feelings, desires, affections... (our heart, soul, etc.)”

So the better question may be, what feelings, desires, or affections in our lives are seated where they shouldn’t be?

The noise.

Since we are all body, soul, and spirit (1 Thess. 5:23), we all have the same basic moving parts to us. In Christ the spirit is made new and is connected to the Spirit of God. Our bodies are simply our shells, the package for the spirit and the soul.

But the soul is the battleground.

The noise is focused on eroding the soul.

We store much in the soul. The soul is where we remember. The soul is where we remind ourselves what was, not always what the Spirit of God says is.

Like a flash drive or hard disk in a computer, we record our lives, will, experiences, opinions, and emotions—all within our souls. Thoughts, feelings, personalities, and dreams...it's no wonder there is a struggle within us to get the soul to continue to align with the spirit. What the spirit wants must overcome what we want so the mind and then the body can follow.

It's a struggle for the throne of hearts, for the seat of our minds.

The noise constantly wants that seat.

To be on that throne.

This sacred throne of our soul is what the enemy seeks to occupy. So maybe the life Jesus is saying we should be laying down is a life that involves anything that is seated where He should be.

This could be an exhaustive list of things such as our past or future, callings, dreams, money, kids, time, talents, Facebook, opinions, and anything or everything that encompasses us and the earthly kingdoms we build with our hands, from paycheck to paycheck.

This is the life, the *psychē*, we are to lose.

There are no shortcuts. When we lose our life for Him and for the gospel, we save it.

Maybe it's not that important to watch that movie. Maybe we'll pick up our cross for two hours instead. Possibly we should go serve the poor or make a tangible two-hour difference in someone's life through our own sweat and earthly effort to bring a heavenly result. What if we got up early, before the ones we love, to pray for the ones that need love? What if we hungered for God more than food?

Maybe we should start asking ourselves questions like that.

I started asking myself those questions, and God started

showing me answers. Of course, they were answers I *needed* to hear but not always ones I *wanted* to hear. You know what I mean?

It's not an easy road to become a Static Jedi.

It means a shedding of distracting noise.

It's also a shedding of darkness that wants to distract.

Maybe the darkness knows the noise too?

The devil's minions are captured speaking with each other in *The Screwtape Letters* by C. S. Lewis. This collection of fictional letters are addressed to Wormwood, a new tempter, from a senior devil, his uncle Screwtape. In letter #22, "How to Recognize Noise and to Resist Avoiding the Silence," we listen in on the perspective and goal of the Kingdom of Noise, as Lewis calls it:

We will make the whole universe a noise in the end. We have already made great strides in this direction as regards the Earth. The melodies and silences of Heaven will be shouted down in the end. But I admit we are not yet loud enough, or anything like it. Research is in progress.³

Research yourself to make new progress on this path. It's a path littered by pieces of yourself as you walk closer to Jesus. Chunks of who you are fall down, and who you're becoming walks forward.

It's our first nature to be a slave to the noise, but your spirit man is crying out to be a slave to the King. If to live is Christ and to die is gain, we need to bring back the death of life.

But we don't like to die.

Death is scary.

Calculating Clarity

So, again, how much time would you write down?

How much time do you really invest battling the noise each day?

You will have to do your own math. But you have to answer honestly. I can't answer this question for you, but there is an answer.

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Once you have your answer, take the number and multiply it by seven. That will give you the amount of time you invest in clarity each week, whether in hours or minutes.

If you answered in minutes, take that second number and divide it by 60 to get your weekly number of hours. For example, 30 minutes each day times 7 is 210 minutes per week, divided by 60 gives you 3½ hours spent in clarity each week.

Now multiply that number by 4, and that will give you close to the number of hours you invest each month becoming a Static Jedi—one who masters the noise. Some of us have 5, 14, or 26.3 hours of clarity invested in a 4-week period. You may have only 3 or 1 hour. Maybe you have just 20 minutes.

Whatever your number, know that your future awaits you. Be encouraged to know that God is revealing something new to you even now. When we feel as if our past actions overshadow our future, His Word assures us He is simply doing a new thing. For years you may have felt your faith was a wilderness. Or maybe recently you've found yourself more connected to the things of earth than the things above. But even in these wastelands God is making a way, and there will be fresh, life-giving water there. People God uses significantly often spend time in the desert, but they don't stay there.

The desert is a place we die.

It is also the place new life is birthed.

Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

—ISAIAH 43:18–19

If you are willing to pay the price, the person you become won't recognize the person you are now, once you get to the point of becoming that new person. When you get there, you'll

do more for your current world, helping others find who they are to become in Christ too.

If you read history you find the Christians who did the most for this present world were precisely those who thought most of the next.⁴

—C. S. Lewis

Think most of what matters.

Think less of what doesn't.

For change to occur, there will be a cost, and there is a price.

It's paid when no one is looking.

Without much private discipline in the mastery of noise, there is little public reward in piercing it. We need to follow Jesus back to how we should best live with clarity.

Let's get back to the sword. Let's be people of the blade, God's Word. Through His Word we fall in love with Him more, and because of this we love more.

Can you feel it? Change is in the forecast—a 100 percent chance of the Son shining upon you. Walk into the light, out from the noise found in the shadows.

Change takes place when stress is placed upon the target, and it begins with something stirring in your heart. For this internal shift to continue, you must begin to master the noise by journeying to become a Static Jedi—a form of disciple and sensei that masters the noise that exists in many shapes and consumes your time, your real life, and your ability to hear God.

So let's begin—today.

For you, greater things await.

Today, Begin

The first step toward those greater things is tearing down your walls of noise and purposefully investing your God-given time

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into what truly matters, exchanging clarity for every box of noise you eliminate.

For every hour you invest each month in clarity, you get to take down one box from your wall of noise. So stand in front of our example of those fifty-six boxes of noise, and let's start removing them. Start bulldozing your wall from the top, one at a time.

How far did you get?

A Static Jedi lives to have no walls. Now, if God didn't like walls at all, we would have nowhere to hang awesome Christian bookstore art. But the walls God doesn't like are those that stand between us and Him or that stand in front of where He wants us to go.

Just ask Jericho.

■ INTERNAL INQUIRY ■

1. How tall is your wall?
2. What has been the source of noise in your life?
3. What could be sources of clarity in your life?
4. How do you define clarity or time with God?
5. Movie lines and song lyrics or the Word of God—which means more to you?
6. Does our level of knowledge reflect our affections?

■ EXTERNAL EXCHANGE ■

1. How much of our lives have we failed to live?
2. What are the walls of noise in your life keeping in?
Keeping out?
3. Are we “over-noised”?
4. What did you feel God spoke most to you through this chapter?
5. How can we pray for each other as we ask God to help us dismantle our walls?
6. How many hours are you surrounded by your noise each day?