



Cultivating a Quiet Life

A VISION FOR A *different* WAY TO LIVE



Denise F. Hughes

A Look Inside

*“Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life:
You should mind your own business and work with your hands,
just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders
and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.”*

1 THESSALONIANS 4:11-12

| | |
|--------------|----------------------------------|
| Introduction | The Vision That Compels Us |
| Devotion 1 | The Ambitions That Drive Us |
| Devotion 2 | The Goal That Defines Us |
| Devotion 3 | The Habits That Shape Us |
| Resources | More Encouragement to Inspire Us |



Introduction

THE VISION THAT COMPELS US

“Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life.”

1 THESSALONIANS 4:11a

WELCOME! I'm so glad you're here. Grab your favorite pen and settle into a comfy chair as we explore a countercultural vision for a different way to live.

We live in a world that values speed, volume, and productivity, so we are constantly on the move. Whether we're working outside or inside the home, raising kids, volunteering at church, or all of the above, there is always something that needs doing. And many of these things that need our attention are really good things! But without a clearly articulated vision for living well in a loud and restless world, we can easily find ourselves worn out from the rush of it all.

That was me a few years ago. Just. Plain. Tired. Thankfully, there's a simpler and gentler way to live. It's called “the quiet life.” It's a vision for living with a deliberate aim and purpose — the kind that brings peace and confidence. But I must confess: This vision wasn't my idea. The Apostle Paul coined the phrase when he said: “Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life” (1 Thessalonians 4:11a).

A quiet life doesn't mean a life of silence; it means a life free from the constant drive and hustle that permeates our hurried and frenetic lives. It's a life that is characterized by a clear focus, a quiet confidence, and a steady peace.

Paul's admonition to lead a quiet life was not only countercultural then, but it's still countercultural today. And his instructions to believers, both then and now, have never been more needed.

What does a quiet life look like in today's fast-paced, always-on world?

That's what we're going to talk about in the following three devotions. We will sketch a picture of the quiet life by examining 1) the ambitions that drive us, 2) the goal that defines us, and 3) the habits that shape us. As we embrace a quiet life, something shifts inside us and a life of frenzied productivity no longer defines us. We are then freed to love God and others more fully and more deeply.

Cultivating a quiet life isn't a trend or a brand; it's a way of life that emanates from a soul committed to becoming more like Christ. Are you ready? Let's get started!

The quiet life is a vision for living with a deliberate aim and purpose — the kind that brings peace and confidence.

#cultivatingaquietlife

Denise

DH

Devotion 1

THE AMBITIONS THAT DRIVE US

"Make it your ambition..." 1 THESSALONIANS 4:11a

When Paul tells us to make it our ambition to lead a quiet life, is he saying we need to cast aside all of our dreams and ambitions? Is all ambition bad?

The short answer is "no." Not all ambition is bad!

There are two kinds of ambition: unholy ambition and holy ambition. The first is the "ardent desire for rank, fame, or power."ⁱ It's the insatiable drive to achieve, succeed, and climb higher on the social and economic ladder, no matter who gets stepped on in the process. But the second kind of ambition is void of any negative connotation.

Ambition is good when our dreams and desires align with good ends and include good means.

#cultivatingaquietlife

Simply put, ambition is also the "desire to achieve a particular end."ⁱⁱ The "end" in question could very well be a worthy goal. In this light, ambition is good when our dreams and desires align with good ends and include good means.

The Bible affirms the reality of both unholy and holy ambitions. In James 3:14 we're warned: "But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth." Here, ambition is described as selfish, but in Romans 15:20 Paul describes a different kind of ambition: "It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known." Here, we see a good and righteous kind of ambition.

How can we tell if our ambitions are directed toward good and righteous ends?

How can we know for sure that our ambitions are leading us toward a quiet life?

Five Ways to Discern Holy vs. Unholy Ambitions

Before we can make it our ambition to lead a quiet life, we must take inventory of the ambitions that already have a firm hold in our hearts. The following five questions will help us tease out any unholy ambitions lurking inside our hearts, but do keep in mind, these five questions are meant to be diagnostic only, not condemnatory.

Having holy ambitions isn't something we achieve once-and-for-all; rather, it's an ongoing process. Just as we continue to be sanctified as we follow Christ, our ambitions are also being sanctified as we seek to emulate



him. So, let's take a quick heart x-ray of our ambitions.

1. Do you have relationships with people who cannot benefit you in any way?

In other words, do you regularly enjoy someone's company for the sheer sake of enjoying their company and not because your association with them could potentially benefit you in some way? Our response to this question reflects the ambition-direction of our hearts. When our ambitions are rightly aligned with God's Word and aimed toward good ends, we can enjoy the presence of individuals who may not have anything to offer in terms of a potential promotion or a positive association. Unholy ambitions lead us to see people as resources and opportunities, whereas holy ambitions lead us to love everyone we encounter regardless of their station in life.

2. Do your ambitions/dreams take you away from your family to an inordinate degree?

Most of us can think of a season (or two) when we were incredibly busy — busy to the point where we weren't spending as much time with our families as we wanted to. But when this "busy season" becomes ongoing and turns into "regular life," this is an indicator of an unholy ambition in our hearts. When our families continue to make sacrifices for our ambitions — with no end in sight — then it's time to reconsider our ambitions.

3. How well do you honor and observe the Sabbath?

Observance of a God-ordained weekly Sabbath is a key litmus test. If we can't accomplish everything on our plates in six days and then rest on the seventh day, then something is amiss. If we consistently feel like we must work seven days a week in order to get everything done, then our ambitions have definitely veered into unholy territory.

4. Are your ambitions/dreams about making God's name great or your name great?

This can be tricky because oftentimes our ambitions and dreams are a mixture of both good and not-so-good intentions. Part of us genuinely wants to see God's kingdom expanded, but in the process, we wouldn't mind being known as one of God's favorite agents in bringing about said expanded kingdom. The same is true in a non-church context. Part of us sincerely wishes to see our work bring about good outcomes for others, but in the process, we wouldn't mind being known as the person who helped bring about those good outcomes that others enjoy. It all comes down to credit. Are we okay if no one but God knows about our good deeds? If we can answer this question affirmatively, then our ambitions are likely in check.

5. Will you be okay with God if your ambitions/dreams never come about in this lifetime?

Let's say our ambitions and dreams have good ends and good means. Let's say we're even okay with no one but God knowing about the good deeds we accomplish. But what if our dreams never come to fruition? If our biggest dreams and deepest longings are never realized, will we still follow after God? If our answer is yes, then that's a good indicator our hearts' ambitions are on the right path.

Are we okay if no one but God knows about our good deeds? If we can answer this question affirmatively, then our ambitions are likely in check.

#cultivatingaquietlife



If you're anything like me, you've got a mix of both holy and unholy ambitions in your heart. It's what it means to be human. And yet, this is something we can recognize in ourselves with honesty while also asking God to work on our hearts in these areas. God always welcomes our humble admissions and sincere pleas for his forgiveness, wisdom, and strength in these areas.

Your Turn . . .

READ IT: Open your Bible and read 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12.

WRITE IT: In the space below, write out this passage.

PRAY IT: If any of the five questions above brought to mind a less-than-holy ambition in your heart, pray the following prayer with me as we move forward in cultivating a holy ambition to lead a quiet life:

Lord, I confess that sometimes my ambitions have been all about me.

Please forgive me for the times I have sought to make my own name great.

I pray you realign my heart's motives with yours. Help me to love others the way you love them.

Continue your gracious work in me until my heart finds true peace — the kind that comes only from knowing you. I pray my heart's ambitions will continue to be sanctified by your grace.

Grow in me a vision for leading a quiet life that seeks to bring honor to you.

For you are worthy of all praise. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.



Devotion 2

THE GOAL THAT DEFINES US

"... to lead a quiet life..." 1 THESSALONIANS 4:11a

If a quiet life is our aim, what does this look like in practical terms? Well, as soon as we begin to describe the "outward appearances" of a quiet life, we may wander into legalistic territory because we don't "acquire" a quiet life from the outside in. A quiet life must begin from the inside out. That's why we start with an honest examination of our hearts' ambitions. The next step in the process, then, is to clearly articulate the goal of a quiet soul.

In today's noisy world, one of the loudest messages found in books, TED talks, and social media posts says: "Live your best life now!" or "Live your one life well!" The rationalization for this kind of message is the idea that we're only given "one life," so we might as well make it a good one. But the underlying theme of this message is fundamentally untrue.

To lead a quiet life
is to hold the
conviction that
this life here and
now is not all
there is.

#cultivatingaquietlife

As believers in the risen Christ, we are not given "one life" on this earth and then that's it, game over. To be a follower of Christ means we are no longer citizens of this world; we are citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20). This world is not our home. We are pilgrims passing through to a better place. We know this to be true because Jesus himself declared that he was going ahead of us to "prepare of place" for each of his followers (John 14:1-3).

To lead a quiet life is to hold the conviction that this life here and now is not all there is. When our circumstances threaten to unravel us, we are held by the Spirit of God inside us, knowing that no matter what happens, nothing in this world is permanent. A better world, and a better life, awaits. This is the crux of the hope we have because of Christ. A person leading a quiet life walks through each day with eternity in view.

So, what is the goal that defines us? Our goal is to become more like Christ and spend eternity with him. The quiet life is simply the way we live out this goal.

As believers we know this already, but far too often we lose sight of this truth when we're inundated with all the challenges we face in our daily lives. We find ourselves living a stressful life instead of a quiet life. Thankfully, Scripture provides us with the sure anchor we need whenever the tempest of life swirls around us.

Two Passages That Anchor Our Souls

While there are many passages in the Bible we could point to, there are two we'll focus on here, one in the Old Testament and the other in the New.



1. In 2 Kings 6:8-18, we're told of the great spiritual army that surrounds us.

The prophet Elisha and his servant were surrounded by an enemy army. They were so outnumbered that anyone with eyes could see they were doomed, which is exactly what the servant saw. But Elisha prayed and said, "Open his eyes, LORD, so that he may see" (2 Kings 6:17). Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he beheld an even greater army of horses and chariots of fire surrounding the enemy army. This story illustrates the reality that there is more to this life than what we can see with our physical eyes. There is a spiritual realm that exists outside of our time-bound world, and this is the world where we are heading.

Elisha may have lived a quiet life, but that doesn't mean he was always "quiet" — quite the opposite, in fact. The very reason the king of Syria wanted to silence Elisha for good was because he kept proclaiming the truth as God's anointed prophet. You see, the quiet life doesn't mean a person who refrains from speaking the truth while counting the days until they can quietly go to heaven. The quiet life is really a way of speaking about a person's inner life. There's an inner resoluteness that comes from knowing there is a world beyond this world, and God is completely in control of it all.

Assured. Unflappable. This is what it means to lead a quiet life. It's to live with spirit eyes, trusting that God has every single detail under his control. Nothing is beyond his reach.

2. In Hebrews 11:13-16, we're reminded of those who held to the promise of an eternal city.

Where the story of Elisha visibly demonstrates God's awesome power at work in the spiritual realm, there are plenty of stories in our own lives where God has chosen to refrain from acting in a visibly demonstrable way. That doesn't mean he's not at work. It just means we can't see what he's up to! At least not yet. It's in these times that we must place our trust in a greater Story unfolding that we can't yet see with our eyes.

Hebrews 11 is commonly called the "Hall of Faith," for it lists several of our spiritual ancestors who had faith that God would come through on his promises, even if they couldn't see those promises coming to fruition in their own lifetimes. They "died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth" (Hebrews 11:13, ESV). They knew that God had "prepared a city for them" (Hebrews 11:16).

To lead a quiet life is to embrace the truth that we are sojourners just passing through to a better place, but while we're here, we have a mission to accomplish. We're here to be witnesses to the beauty of God's grace — the grace that he forgives us and wants to welcome us home for an eternity in the presence of his joy and peace.

The Glory We Most Desire

When examining the concept of glory, C.S. Lewis once remarked that "glory means good report with God."ⁱⁱⁱ In other words, the glory we most desire is to hear one day the divine accolade: "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matthew 25:23). While the world tells us to invest our energies into living "our best life now" or "our one life well," we know this view neglects the eternal reality of our souls (2 Corinthians 4:13-18). To lead a quiet life is to look ahead with spirit eyes and believe by faith that a better world awaits. For this is where our true hope, true peace, and true confidence is found.



Your Turn . . .

READ IT: Open your Bible and read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.

WRITE IT: In the space below, write out this passage.

PRAY IT: Pray the following prayer with me as we remember the goal for our souls.

Lord, I confess that sometimes I get distracted by the things of this world.
Please forgive me for the times I have worried about the many circumstances around me.
I pray you open the eyes of my heart. Help me to entrust every aspect of my story to you.
I lay my concerns at your feet, knowing that there is more happening in my world than I can see.
I pray my heart will be quieted and steadied by your unfailing love and faithfulness.
Grow in me a vision for living each day with eternity in view.
In Jesus' name I pray, amen.



Devotion 3

THE HABITS THAT SHAPE US

*“..You should mind your own business and work with your hands,
just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders
and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.”*

1 THESSALONIANS 4:11-12

So far in this journey, we've examined our hearts' ambitions and clarified our souls' primary goal — to keep our spirit eyes looking ahead to that day we are with Jesus in eternity. But what are we to do in the meantime? Surely we're not supposed to hole up somewhere, just biding our time until eternity arrives on our doorstep? By no means! We're to embrace the time we're given while living in our temporary home called earth.

As Christian philosopher James K. A. Smith aptly puts it, the earth “is not just some detour from our heavenly existence. It is the very good abode created by our heavenly Father.”^{iv} In other words, this planet is the place where God has “planted” us, if you will, for the time being, and he has given us the cultural mandate to be fruitful in our lives. We're to lean fully into all that God has called us to become. We're to live as lights (with a lowercase “l”) pointing to the one true Light of the world — all while leading a quiet life.

One of the ways we
can cultivate a
quiet life is by
diligently
embracing God's
created world
as good.

#cultivatingaquietlife

How do we do this? Well, this is where we get to some of the “nuts and bolts” of cultivating a quiet life. Let's consider some practical applications of the passage in 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 as they steer us toward leading a quiet life.

1. Retrain your focus on content that truly edifies.

“You should mind your own business...”

Paul is very straightforward when he says we should mind our own business. Ouch! That one stings a little. But the truth is, we've all been curious at times as to what is happening in other people's lives. I mean, why else would we spend so much time scrolling through social media? Now, I'm not saying that all social media is bad. We can definitely harness the reach of social media for the good of

God's kingdom. But far too often we find ourselves sucked into the vortex of mindless scrolling or even pulled into real-life conversations that aren't edifying.

Obviously, social media wasn't around when Paul wrote his letter to the church in Thessalonica, but gossip was just as real then as it is today. Thus, one of the ways we can develop a quiet life is to be much more mindful of both the quantity and the quality of the content we're consuming.

2. Embrace the physical world over the digital world.

“...and work with your hands...”



Again, the digital world didn't exist in Paul's day, but the Hellenistic culture he lived in was very much steeped in the philosophical prowess of classical Greek thought where it was considered much more noble to work with your mind than with your hands. Today, many of us work in "knowledge fields." My husband and I are no exception. We both require a laptop to do our jobs! So, I'm not saying we should reject the digital world and embrace a luddite existence. But we are wise to recognize the way we are grounded in a very real sense when we are intentional to regularly step away from the digital world and embrace the physical world. We do this whenever we close our laptops and wash the dishes or fold the laundry or prepare a meal. We do this whenever we take walks outside and enjoy the beauty of God's creation. We do this whenever we take up hobbies like carpentry or quilting — anything that involves working with our hands.

In today's highly digitized world, one of the ways we can cultivate a quiet life is by diligently embracing God's created world as good. (It is also noteworthy to mention that, while Paul preached the gospel and wrote letters, he also worked by day as a tentmaker!)

3. Immerse yourselves in the authoritative truth of God's Word.

"...just as we told you..."

Who was Paul to tell anybody what to do? Well, he devoted a fair amount of ink to telling the story of how Jesus called him to proclaim the gospel (Acts 9:1-28). Today, the church rightly recognizes his apostolic authority to write down words of truth as he was inspired by the Holy Spirit. And he wasn't the only one. God used several dozen faithful followers to inscribe the words of Scripture over the course of approximately two thousand years. We live in a world, though, that seeks to question all authority. The spirit of this age tries to convince us that nobody can tell us what is right or wrong, and it tells us to look inside ourselves to find truth. But as followers of Christ, we look to the Bible as the source of all truth (John 1:1-14). Indeed, Jesus is Truth (John 14:6).

The riches of God's Word are timeless in goodness, truth, and beauty. It is impossible to lead a quiet life in a world bent on deception and destruction if we are not regularly submitting ourselves to the final authority of God's Word.

4. Find refuge and contentment in the ordinary tasks of daily life.

"...so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders, and so that you will not be dependent on anybody."

Notice how Paul doesn't say, "so that your achievements may win the respect of outsiders." Sadly, we live in a world that tries to locate the source of our identity in our productivity and popularity, our intellect and influence. But whenever we succumb to these worldly values, we lose ourselves in the process. Thankfully, Scripture shows us a different way. When we embrace the quiet dailyness of the simple tasks required of us, we remain tethered to what is true and what is real. One of the ways we grow an inner quietness of heart is to find contentment in the routines and rhythms of our days.

One of the ways we
grow an inner
quietness of heart
is to find
contentment in
the routines and
rhythms of
our days.

#cultivatingaquietlife



Your Turn . . .

READ IT: Open your Bible and read John 1:1-4.

WRITE IT: In the space below, write out this passage.

PRAY IT: Pray the following prayer with me as we seek to implement these practices in our own journeys toward cultivating a quiet life:

Lord, I confess that sometimes I look to the world before I look to your Word. Please forgive me for the time I have wasted on fruitless activities and worldly endeavors. I pray you grow in me a deep and steadfast desire to know you more through your Word. Help me find contentment in the small, ordinary, and everyday tasks that are before me. Thank you for the way nature invites me to recognize your fingerprints in all of creation. Everything you have made is good and beautiful and true, and I am so grateful for all the ways you draw me to you. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.



Resources

MORE ENCOURAGEMENT TO INSPIRE US

“Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all of God’s family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more.”

1 THESSALONIANS 4:9-10

It’s important to note that the ideas and habits mentioned in these devotions are not exhaustive. If anything, they’re merely a starting point. The Apostle Paul says in another letter that we’re to “put on love” which binds all the virtues together in perfect unity (Colossians 3:14). Love is like the undercurrent in all we do. In fact, this passage we’ve been studying in 1 Thessalonians is prefaced with Paul’s admonition to believers to continue loving others as they had been (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10). Because without love, we’re just “resounding gongs” and “clanging cymbals” — which is the very opposite of a quiet life (1 Corinthians 13:1).

In the end, it boils down to this: A quiet life is a life of quiet trust — trusting God and wanting more of him. When we quiet our hearts and seek more of him than the world’s attention, we will find what we’re really looking for. Rather than the siren’s call of the social media scroll, we respond to the clarion call of the gospel, which invites us to participate with God in restoring the world and its inhabitants by sharing his grace as we yield to the time-tested instructions given to us through Scripture.

This brings us to one last point of encouragement. As you begin to cultivate a quiet life in your own context, invite others to join you. The quiet life is never meant to be lived alone. We are called to live in community and to work out our faith amidst other faithful believers who can speak into our lives. To this end, consider sharing this devotional guide with your friends. Below are some links where you’ll find some sharable resources. Let’s harness the reach of social media for good and share the quiet life with those we love!

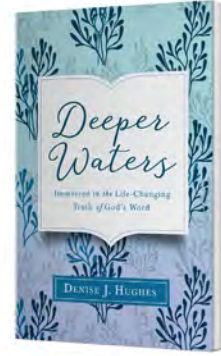
Thank you for joining me here in this space. I pray you’ll continue this journey with me as I explore more ways we can lead a quiet life through the articles I write on my website: www.denisejhughes.com. And as you cultivate a quiet life, let me know how it’s going and what is working for you. I’d love to hear from you.

Journeying Together,

Denise

More Resources for You

For more resources on how to cultivate a quiet life, click [here](#).
To dive deeper into God's Word, get your copy of *Deeper Waters* [here](#).



NOTES

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.

Scripture quotations marked ESV® are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

- ⁱ "Definition of Ambition." Merriam-Webster website, accessed January 24, 2021.
- ⁱⁱ "Definition of Ambition." Merriam-Webster website, accessed January 24, 2021.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Lewis, C.S.. *The Weight of Glory*. New York: Harper One, 1949. p.40-41.
- ^{iv} Smith, James K. A.. *You Are What You Love*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016. p.171.

Denise J. Hughes