



By Maggie Kurtts

About a month before COVID brought our world to a grinding halt, I wrote a book review on Ryan Holiday's latest book [Stillness is the Key](#). At the time, I was feeling pretty overwhelmed by all the demands I had placed on myself and my family. This book gave a simple solution to my problem — stop.

It took a worldwide pandemic to remove external demands from our life and return my focus to my family. Schedules once driven by sports, school, and activities now feel long forgotten. When I read the words below, of my pre-COVID self, struggling to meet pre-COVID demands, I realize that I might have found exactly what I was seeking.

### Busy is a choice

Our family calendar looks more complicated than my old flight schedule. Matching aircraft, crews, and mission equipment to a week's worth of flights has **NOTHING** on running a

household these days. Trying to get kids to all their activities, while making sure you volunteer “enough” at school, attend PTO meetings, and maybe sneak in a workout is more complex than air assault planning!

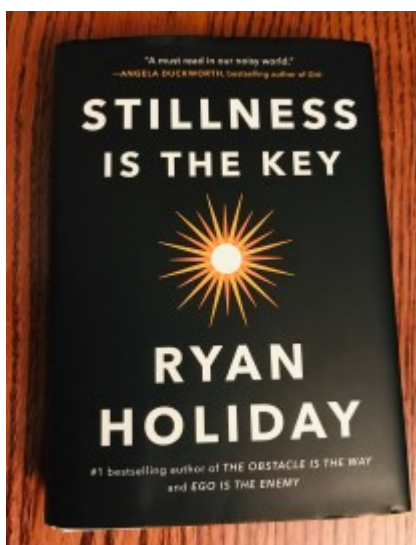
As I looked at our upcoming week’s worth of activities and struggled to figure out how I could be in two different places at the same time on Friday night - I realized something very critical.

### **I chose all this**

Not a single event on this calendar was forced upon me or my family. We chose to do sports, or volunteer groups, or workout classes. I begrudgingly added my name to the now endless number of “to bring” lists in signup genius.

Why...?

Ryan Holiday’s book [\*Stillness is the Key\*](#) hit me right up front with an ugly truth: I am doing all this because I think *I am supposed to do it*. Other people need me right? This is the kind of person I am - or I want to be...Right?



[\*Stillness is the Key\*](#) helped me take the first step to answering that question in my overly busy life. It was remarkable simple, but shockingly difficult.

## Stop

Stop doing. Hold still. And listen. Ryan explores how life bombards us in three critical dimensions: mentally, spiritually, and physically. We experience demands imposed upon us by others and we struggle when we try align our three dimensions with someone else's values.

"Stillness" provides a roadmap for the reader to get their mental, spiritual, and physical self off the *express highway of external demands* and back onto the road of self. For me, as I read the book, I focused on my tendency to overcommit - both myself and my family - to things we did not need. I reflected on how these demands drew me away from our real goals and family values, despite maybe looking pretty good to everyone else.

Each night, as I worked my way through this short book, I started to slow down just a little bit more. I thought about ways to live deliberately. I started seeing where I was committing time and energy to things others valued but I did not.

Today, I strive to read more of *everything*, play epic legos wars with my kids, and enjoy the peace of a quiet walk with my dog. I try to listen to the chirp of birds on my walk rather than drown out the nature's chorus with a podcast or audiobook.

It took slowing down to see just how much time I really had. And just like that, I wasn't busy anymore.

*Maggie graduated from the United States Military Academy in 2004 and served in Iraq and Afghanistan as an aviation officer. She has a PhD in nuclear engineering and is a military spouse. Today, Maggie continues to serve as a parent, a writer on Veteran issues, and a*

*researcher. A version of this post can be found at [owlsvoyage.com](http://owlsvoyage.com).*

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