

QUIET TIME

We're talking about spiritual practices, and last week I told you about some words that Jesus gave people who wanted to know how to pray. And they're good ones! Of course, we don't have to use them: we can also pray using our own words. But sometimes, our words can actually get in the way of our connection with God, and we need to be quiet and still to get it working again. Being quiet and still can be a spiritual practice. It can be called meditation, or contemplative prayer, but it doesn't need to be called anything at all.

What happens when you're quiet and still? I'd like to invite you to try it out. Find a comfortable spot, close your eyes, and see if you can pay attention to what's going on around you that you can't see. What can you hear, or smell, or feel? Is it hard for you to be still or does it feel relaxing? Can you pay more attention to sounds when your eyes are closed?

Next, pay attention to your body. Lots of things happen in your body without you having to make them happen: your heart pumps, blood moves through your veins, you breathe in and breathe out. Can you feel those things going on? You can also notice how your body is feeling. Do you hurt anywhere? Are you feeling relaxed, or tense? Alert, or sleepy? And can pay attention to your emotions. Are you content? Worried? Sad, or joyful? What is your body telling you at this moment?

Sometimes, I have trouble paying attention to my body because I keep getting distracted. I get distracted by things going on around me, and by thoughts pushing themselves to the front of my mind. How do I stop that from happening? Well, for me it's kind of like trying to go to sleep: when I try it feels like I'll never fall asleep, but when I let myself think about other things I just drift right off. So when I'm trying to be quiet and still I notice sounds and sensations around me, and thoughts in my head, and then I let them go without focusing on them so much that they stop me from noticing other things.

As you sit and notice—or stand, or lie down—you might be able to feel God's presence around you, or hear what God wants you to know today. Or maybe you'll be able to listen to yourself, and hear what you want yourself to know today. (Is that funny? Sometimes it's really hard to pay attention to yourself!) What does it feel like to be paying attention to God, or to yourself?

As you're being quiet and still, you might be thinking about your breathing. Breathing is interesting because it's something that happens automatically, but that we can control if we want to. You can use your connection to your breath to focus your quiet time with God in another spiritual practice called breath prayer. That's when you have a short phrase that you repeat in time to your breathing. People who write about breath prayer suggest that as you breathe in you call on God, and as you breathe out you tell God something. So your breath prayer might be, "Jesus, help me" or "God, you're great" or "Holy Spirit, fill me".

Of course, there's no right way or wrong way to connect with God or yourself using your breath. As you notice how you're feeling you'll notice what your mind and body need at that moment. Sometimes when I'm feeling angry or scared I'll use something like a breath prayer to help myself calm down, but instead of thinking words as I breathe I think about breathing out anger or stress and breathing in God's peace.

And that's what I have for today! I wonder what caught your attention? How would you like to find some quiet time?

flip over for more!

Wondering Questions

I wonder where your favorite spot to be quiet is?

I wonder how often you pay attention to your breath? When do you notice your breath the most?

I wonder why, so much of the time, it's so hard to sit still?