

## Why We Need a Quiet Time

Many years ago when I worked at The University of Iowa I visited the Art Institute of Chicago. I took an entire day to walk through the European art, beginning in the fourteenth century and moving from room to room until I reached the twentieth century. The early rooms contained nothing but religious art; the last rooms, nothing but secular art. Somewhere along the way subjects other than God became more interesting to Western artists.

As the morning wore on, the images began to run together. I left the Art Institute, went down the steps past the lions, crossed Michigan Avenue, dodged several cars and went to lunch a couple of blocks away. After lunch I resumed my pilgrimage. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were my favorites. Technique was vastly improved, and not all the art was religious. I actually found that a relief. God is revealed in all of life.

Finally I came to twentieth-century and modern art: incoherent forms in unrecognizable scenes. The works seemed harsh and metallic. I felt more affinity with the early European paintings. It was easy to think about God in rooms filled with Christian art and religious symbols. It felt “normal.” You need to consider that at the time I was not born again.

I felt no affinity with the works of my age. In the twentieth-century rooms I felt “abnormal.” There was no place for God. Not that he was openly denied or attacked—he just wasn’t there. In those rooms I felt out of place, uncomfortable, even lonely. My Catholic faith didn’t fit. I felt immersed in spiritual blindness and the absence of God.

Modern culture affects me the same way. God has been intellectually, socially and institutionally excluded from the college campus, the marketplace and leisure time. We are socialized into unbelief and spiritual darkness. It is as if we are standing on an escalator that is constantly moving downward. Educated into a one-dimensional reality, it is hard for us to believe in the existence of anything beyond the five senses. **Heaven, hell, God, the soul, prayer**—these things aren’t tangible, so we doubt that they are real, even if we are determined to believe they are.

Most Western Christians have been influenced by secular culture. Like everyone else, we go through the day with little occasion to call on God. Unless we take conscious precautions, we too can develop God-blindness. A colorblind person can’t see red or green because the rods and cones in the eye are damaged. Many colorblind people are unaware of their condition until they reach their teens. They use the words *red* and *green* without having any experience of the actual colors.

God-blindness works the same way. The rods and cones of our spiritual eyes are damaged. We have the word **God** in our vocabulary, but the experience of God is missing. And like colorblind people, we go about our lives without realizing that something is wrong. When we practice quiet time, we counter the forces of God-blindness. Quiet time focuses our spiritual sight so that we can meet with God.

## **Avoiding God**

According to [Genesis 3](#), God met Adam and Eve each afternoon for a walk. But then they sinned and hid themselves in the bushes. Ever since, human beings have moved farther and farther away from God. This avoidance of God is our spiritual disease. We are all in the bushes because God makes us uncomfortable.

This allergic reaction to God is not limited to the ungodly. The history of Israel is a record of repeated running away from God. Even King David, a man after God's own heart, wrote in one of his psalms, **"Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?"** ([Psalm 139:7 \(NASB\)](#)).

I don't have to look very deep to find this dynamic of avoidance active in my own heart. In my early teenage years I didn't want anything to do with God. I left the church and God when I was fourteen and began to look for meaning in other directions. It was the sixties, the Age of Aquarius, the era of universal peace and love. It was the era of chaos.

It is a good thing for me that God is not put off by resistance. He continues to seek us even as we run.

I can even turn my own spiritual pursuits into a substitute for God. I remember spending a good part of one morning in serious study of the Scriptures. Suddenly I had a strong sense that God was sitting in a chair beside the desk. I felt a pull on my heart to put down my pen, turn to face him and just sit in quiet heartfelt worship. My response to this sense of call was irritation. I had determined that this was to be a study time. I wanted to wave away this call, grumbling, "Not now, God; can't you see I'm studying the Bible?"

Attending church and all sorts of religious activities can have the appearance of seeking God when in fact it is another means of avoidance. Rousing worship services full of inspiring music and moving prayers are not enough to overcome this. Nor is being doctrinally correct a guarantee that we are OK. In fact, all of these can be dangerous, because they allow us to cherish the illusion that we are spiritually growing when in fact we are in spiritual darkness. Isaiah wrote about outward forms of religious practice: **"Then the Lord said, "Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote."** ([Isaiah 29:13 \(NASB\)](#))

One of the seven deadly sins that Christians in the Middle Ages feared was sloth. **Thomas Aquinas** defined sloth as “**sorrow about spiritual good.**” It is a joylessness about God, who is the source of all joy. It is despairing passiveness that gives up on seeking God. It is a cold sin that has passed beyond disobedience and rebellion. Sloth is what happens to us when we avoid God and then pretend that we are still religious.

The compulsive busyness of our culture is also a means of avoiding God. Most of us spend forty to sixty hours a week at work. We spend another ten to twenty hours in front of the television. Details of living like paying bills, keeping up the house and chauffeuring children eat up the rest of the week. Even as we maintain such a crazy pace, we lament it. Why do we drive ourselves? It’s just another way to avoid a divine encounter. If we ever slowed down, the presence of God might just begin to get through.

Slowing down and getting quiet then is just what we must do. As we practice quiet time, we begin to counter spiritual apathy. As our churches encourage us to move beyond being busy with Christian activities and understand the faith as more than Sunday worship, they will become powerhouses for God. God is there to meet us if we open up.

## **Guided Quiet Time**

### ***Resisting God***

**“Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?”**  
**[\(Psalm 139:7 \(NASB\)\)](#)**.

While there is something deep within us that longs for God, we sometimes avoid Him as well. During a counseling session, a young woman came face to face with her avoidance:

“I’m not sure what I am upset about, but I know it has to do with the way I see God,” she said. “I realized that I keep God at a distance. I want to know Him, but I don’t. It’s like Jesus is standing at the door of my life and I have it open just a crack. If I open it all the way, I am sure that He is going to burst in and tell me I have to be a nun. I hope that if I can just keep His laws and don’t look at Him directly, then maybe I can still live my life the way I want to.”

There are various reasons for avoiding God:

We feel guilty and are afraid to face Him.

We are disappointed by Him.

We are angry at Him and feel that He has let us down.

We are afraid that He will make unreasonable demands on us.

If we are to grow spiritually, we must be able to discern how we avoid God. One of my personal patterns of avoidance is the “just a minute” syndrome. When I sit down to read Scripture, my eye will catch a magazine article that I want to read. I put down my Bible, telling myself I’ll get back to the Scriptures in just a couple of minutes. But somehow I never do. Another of my patterns is the “I’m too busy” syndrome. Initially, my excuse is that there is too much to do today, and I’ll get to it tomorrow. But “tomorrow” turns out to be a couple of weeks.

### ***Approach***

Make a list of things that come between you and Him. Lift each one up to the Lord and ask Him to take it.

### ***Study***

1. Let's look at this principle of avoidance. Read [Genesis 3:6-10](#). What's going on?
2. Read [Psalm 53:2-3](#). Summarize its meaning.
3. Jesus confronted religious leaders who appeared to be seeking God but in fact were not. In [Mark 7:6](#) he says: "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.' " What is Jesus' point?

### ***Reflect***

1. If we are to grow spiritually, we must be able to identify and eliminate the ways in which we avoid God. What patterns of ingrained avoidance do you see in your own life?
2. What difference would it make in your life if you stopped avoiding him?

### ***Pray***

Ask God to help you identify patterns of avoidance. Ask him to free you from these patterns so that you can grow in seeking him.