Quiet for families

Teaching children to come to quiet before **God**

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Quiet for Families

How to use this guide

Think of this guide like a trellis — a structure designed to help your family's life with God to grow, rather than a step-by-step Ikea instruction booklet. The point is not a perfectly executed practice; the point is encounter with God. Feel free to color outside the lines and adjust the plan to fit your family's needs.

Also, as every new parent learns early on, while we can provide our kids with healthy food and a quiet room, we can't force them to eat or sleep. In the same way, we can't force our family to meet with God, but we can set the table and invite them to it. And, thankfully, we can trust that God is ready to meet them more than half way.

The breath prayer element is designed to calm the body, and the imaginative prayer is designed to focus the mind. Young children are not abstract thinkers and often benefit from a concrete way to pray, such as imagining sitting or walking with Jesus. Both practices "age up" well — they can be used with very young children, and in your own adult practice.

Lastly, there's a difference between physical quiet and "God-flavored" silence. For children to enjoy God-flavored silence, they need to be comfortable with physical quiet and, eventually, solitude. As you lead your family into the quiet with God, you may benefit from incorporating other physically quiet times in your household rhythms to increase their comfort level with silence in general.

Leading your family into quiet

1. Choose a time of day with the least amount of predictable chaos.
    - Morning walk to school or bus stop
    - School drop-off line
    - Slower Saturday mornings
    - Breakfast, lunch, or dinnertime
    - After-dinner hour
    - Bathtime
    - Bedtime
    - Late night kitchen chats
    - Something else?

2. Quiet as much external noise as possible.
    - Silence phones and noisy toys and store them out of sight
    - Turn off any music
    - Turn off the kitchen fan
    - If your neighborhood is noisy, close the windows
    - Offer distracting pets a special treat in another room

3. Consider gentle sensory input.

   Experiment with any of the following, or think of your own:

   – Get cozy in a comfy bed or fluffy couch

   – Light a candle to draw visual attention to a focal point

   – Burn incense or a scented candle

   – Offer silent fidget toys to older kids, e.g. spring rings

   – Offer a weighted blanket

   – Offer a small slow-melt treat like a mint or lifesaver

   – Try an outdoor spot with gentle nature sounds

   – Add some movement — walking, swinging, rocking in a chair

4. Invite the Holy Spirit's presence.

   You could say something like this:

   Come, Holy Spirit.
   We welcome you here and invite you to meet us.

5. Begin with a breath prayer.

   You could say something like this:

   Let's begin to focus on Jesus by quieting our bodies.

   Invite everyone to take a few slow deep breaths, in and out.

   After a few quiet breaths, a parent or older child can repeat a simple phrase over the inhale and the exhale (several examples below).

   Repeat the phrasing 3-4 times.

   Finish with a few more silent deep breaths, in and out.

Inhale: Come, Holy Spirit

Exhale: You are welcome here

Inhale: My soul finds rest

Exhale: In You alone

Inhale: You are my shepherd

Exhale: I have everything I need

Inhale: Fill us, Holy Spirit

Exhale: With your perfect love

6. Set the scene.

You could say something like this:

Now that our bodies are quieter, let's all close our eyes and imagine the most beautiful, peaceful, quiet place we can think of. Maybe it's the beach, maybe it's the woods, maybe it's your cozy bed…

[Give everyone a moment.]

Now that we're in this peaceful place, let's ask Jesus to come and enjoy it with us.

Jesus, can you help us picture you sitting or walking next to us?

[Give everyone a moment.]

7. Hold 60 seconds of silence. (For very young children, you may want to start with 30.)

   You could say something like this:

   Now, as we sit or walk with Jesus, let's be very quiet.
   Just keep looking at Jesus and notice anything he says or does.
   If your mind wanders, bring it back to Jesus next to you.

   God, we ask you to meet us and speak to us in the silence.

   Once your family can do 60 seconds with consistency, gradually add time. Increase by 5 second intervals for very young children; 30 second intervals for older children; 1 minute intervals for teens.

8. Close by thanking God for his presence.

   You could say something like this:

   Thank you God for your presence.
   Help us to know and love you more each day.

   Amen.

9. Debrief.

   Be curious about the experience. Ask gentle questions and model vulnerable sharing.

   For example:

   – What was that like?

   – What did it feel like to be so quiet?

   – What did you notice?

   – Did Jesus say or do anything interesting in the silence?

   – Why is it hard to be quiet sometimes?

Tips for different ages

Babies

If your only child is an infant, try the practice yourself while you hold them. Experiment with times when they are sleeping, feeding, or happily awake. How does each scenario change your practice, or how God meets you?

Littles

Plan on no more than 3-5 minutes, start to finish. Remember they are little. It's completely normal to be fidgety, silly, or uncooperative. Don't sweat the small stuff. Laugh. Try again tomorrow. Consider it a win if you can do the breath prayer and ask one good question.

Elementary

Make it into a challenge: how long do you think we can sit quietly with Jesus? Lean into the debrief questions. Help them learn what God's voice sounds like: Scripture they know, thoughts that feel true, images that pop into their minds.

Middle School

Invite their leadership in the practice. Can they lead the whole family in the experience start-to-finish? Consider drawing or prayer journaling for this age as a listening prayer tool: invite them to draw or write down anything Jesus says or does during the silence.

Teens

Encourage individual practice. Challenge them to incorporate silence into their daily rhythms and personal devotional life. Don't be discouraged if they don't participate in the family experience joyfully and wholeheartedly, or choose not to share. Differentiation is healthy and we can trust God to meet them in their growing independence.

For further exploration

Read *Into the quiet* by John Mark Comer

Modern living is inundated with noise, busyness, and a digital cycle fueled by outrage and fear. We are anxious, overstimulated, exhausted, and bone-dry in our souls. We ache for God yet can barely pay attention.

Drawing on the wisdom of the contemplative tradition and spiritual practices that date back to the earliest centuries of the church, Into the quiet is an invitation to step out of the chronic noise and constant motion of the modern world into the still, silent presence of the God of peace.

What *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* was to the speed of the modern world, this book is to the noise of it.

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