

Is Christianity a journey, a lifestyle or both? Part 2: Meeting God in Quiet time

This story continues last week's story.

After about thirty minutes of discussing spiritual texts in the Spirituality class, we moved into what Pr. Fred called "quiet time". We closed our eyes as Fred instructed us to breathe deeply. Once relaxed, Fred invited us to imagine ourselves somewhere specific with God. The image differed each week, but in every case, we were invited to both speak with God in our mind and listen to God with our hearts and minds.

This practice was familiar to me. I had learned a similar technique as a graduate student in Counseling Psychology called Guided Imagery. I knew it was a way to help people reflect on memories and recognize their current responses to various life events (usually difficult events). It was often used by people struggling with phobias introducing them to their fear while in a safe place so they could learn new ways to respond. While I had learned to use this technique, I had never imagined it as a form of prayer.

During class, I opened my mind up to the experience and became relaxed. I encountered feelings of peace and chalked it up to relaxation. As the mother of two young children, I needed all the moments of peace I could find. Yet I sensed that there was something more going on.

At the end of quiet time (about 20 minutes later) people sometimes shared their experiences. They reported a wide variety of experiences including specific feelings (often of peace), receiving insights, being challenged, consoled, or inspired. Their experiences surprised me, but what was more surprising was that they admitted it to one another and that they were believed. This was the first time I heard regular people talk about encountering God.

After attending the class for a few months, I was bold enough to share my own experiences. To my relief, I was not mocked or questioned. That gave me courage to continue coming and listening. Over time I opened my mind and heart to the possibility that God was actually showing up and stirring my soul and the souls of those around me during quiet time. I realized that maybe God wasn't so distant or passive after all. Maybe God was actively nudging me to a different kind of relationship with God. I decided to take my experiences seriously and see where they went. Even though I had been going to church regularly all my life, that is when my spiritual journey really began.