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Creative Ideas for Quiet Corners

14 visual prayer ideas for quiet moments with children

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Introduction

What is a quiet corner?

A quiet corner is a place of discovery. It is multisensory, offering opportunities to look, feel, smell, taste and touch as you are drawn into stillness and prayer. It is a place where you can learn more about yourself and understand more about God. It is a place of growth where your relationship with God can develop. It is a place of worship, a quiet corner for prayer, a sacred space.

The beauty of a quiet corner is that it is non-directive. There are suggestions for use, but there is no pressure to use the materials in a prescribed way. Where there are several prayer areas or stations, it can be interesting to observe connections being made—for example, a cross on the world map, confetti stars floating on the water in the pebble pool, or a model of a sheep at the foot of a cross. The non-directive approach is not without its difficulties. For some people the process is too open-ended. There is often no visible end product and results are not easily measured. Our society is geared to results and accountability. From a very young age our children are pressured to achieve and their levels of attainment are compared with others of the same age, not just locally but nationally.

Where children are concerned—and even for many adults—a quiet corner may be a rare place where they can simply ‘be’. Individuals can choose how to spend their time in a peaceful environment by reading, doing or simply sitting quietly. The quiet area is aimed at helping them learn about God and enter into a relationship with God in a non-pressured way, at their own pace and on their own terms. The overall results can only be gauged over time. It is to be hoped that by spending time with God, listening as

well as talking, the fruit of the Holy Spirit will become more evident in adults and children alike, so that all will develop love, happiness, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23).

Why do we need a quiet corner?

We live in an increasingly busy and demanding world. Nearly everywhere we go, we are bombarded by noise—in shops, on the street, when we travel. When we do encounter silence, we often find it threatening or disturbing and we try to fill the silence with noise. How many of us automatically switch on the radio or television as soon as we get home or when we are driving alone in the car?

In our attempts to involve young people in the life of the church, it is often assumed that young people like noise, movement and busyness. This is reflected in lively youth groups, and family or all-age worship with lots of activity and movement. In many of our churches, music fills the silences before and after services and during the administration of Holy Communion. Music and lively activity can certainly enhance worship but it is also possibly to overlook the benefits of quietness. When God met Elijah, he did not speak through the strong wind, the earthquake or the fire but in the gentle breeze (1 Kings 19:1–13).

Close your eyes for a moment and listen. What can you hear? If you live in the city, you may well hear traffic noise, sirens, roadworks, music from passing vehicles or open windows, mobile phone ringtones, the voices of passers-by or children in the school playground or park along the road. If you live in a rural area you might hear aircraft noise, tractors, chainsaws, birdsong and animal sounds. If you are at home there may also be the sounds from the television or radio, the rumble of the washing machine, the whirring of the fan oven and the gentle hum of the computer. We are surrounded by noise. Some people find it easy to either block out

noise or remain focused in a noisy environment. Others find it more difficult, and for them personal prayer can be an uphill struggle.

Many people today query the need for silence. We can pray to God wherever we are and whatever we are doing; we don't need to be still. God can and does speak to us through other people, through music, or through books. Why do we need to be still? Jesus shows us the importance of retreating from the busyness. In Mark 1:35, we read about Jesus getting up early in the morning and going to find a place where he could be alone to pray. Later on, we read that Jesus and the apostles are surrounded by so many people that they don't even have time to eat. They leave in a boat for a place where they can be alone (6:31–33). Mark tells us also that Jesus took Peter, James and John with him up a high mountain where they could be alone (9:2). Finally, on the night before he died, Jesus went to the garden of Gethsemane with his disciples. He walked a short distance from them so that he could be on his own to pray (14:32–36). If Jesus needed to spend time on his own in silence before God, then surely we do also.

Many of us have forgotten or were never taught how to use silence. We often long for silence and acknowledge the need to retreat from busyness, but when we get the opportunity we don't know how to use the silence. The quiet corners suggested in this book aim to help all of us discover or rediscover how to be silent before God and use that time constructively. Helping our children to meet with God in silence may be one of the most enduring gifts we can give them.

Where can we have a quiet corner?

A quiet corner can be set up in a church, a church hall, a school, at home, or even outdoors. You may decide to create a small corner around a single theme or, if a large space is available, you may like to create several separate prayer stations.

At my home church we have a corner set up close to the entrance. It has a pebble pool and a post-it prayer board. This rural church is always open and the small congregation have been so encouraged to see pebbles in the pool every week and occasional post-it prayers on the noticeboard. These symbols of prayer are placed on the Communion table every Sunday. It is good to see prayers written by children as well as adults. On occasions it has been a real privilege to observe parents and children holding pebbles and praying together at the pebble pool. The people and situations represented by the pebbles and the prayers written on the post-it notes are included in the intercessions at Sunday worship, together with prayers for the people who have prayed in church during the week. The small faithful congregation are encouraged to know that they are part of a much larger prayer community. The visitors are also encouraged to know that they are contributing and being drawn into the prayer life of the church. That, of course, is the purpose of the quiet corner: to lead people into prayer.

A series of multisensory prayer corners could also be set up around a church or cathedral. When we visit ancient churches and cathedrals, there is often a great deal of information about the history of the building but sometimes little that draws people into prayer. There is usually a side chapel set aside for private prayer, but this can be quite threatening for people who are unused to silent prayer. We tend to assume that prayer comes naturally, but many people find praying difficult. For many children today, their only experience of prayer is to respond with 'Amen' to someone else's prayers in a school assembly. A multisensory quiet area may help individuals of all ages take their first tentative steps into private and personal prayer.

When you know that several people may use the quiet area at the same time, and where space allows, it can be beneficial to turn a whole room into a quiet corner, placing different prayer stations around the room. This allows greater flexibility and choice for the participants. The idea has proved particularly effective at conferences,

both day and residential, providing a quiet place of retreat from the busyness. It would adapt to a church weekend away or a mission event encouraging newcomers to pray. It could also be used for a day of prayer in a church or church hall, encouraging people to pray in different ways and challenging their traditional approach to prayer.

Another idea would be to offer to set up a quiet corner in school for children to use at lunchtime. If supervision is a problem, perhaps a quiet area could be set up in a corner of the school playground where staff and helpers are on hand to oversee its use. Prayers using pebbles and a small, non-glass pebble pool may be possible outdoors, or, if not, it may be possible to make a prayer cairn with pebbles.

To make a prayer cairn, choose large, flat pebbles and place them in some wicker baskets or garden trugs. In a flat area, lay a piece of strong canvas or hessian fabric on the ground. Place the baskets or trugs containing the pebbles at the edge of the fabric. Select some of the material in the 'Praying for others' quiet corner (see pages 68–72), but direct the children to build their pebbles into a cairn (a mound) instead of using a pebble pool. As some of the material for the prayer pool contains references to water, you may prefer to substitute the following Bible readings.

Join with me in praising the wonderful name of the Lord our God. The Lord is a mighty rock.

DEUTERONOMY 32:3–4A

You are my mighty rock, my fortress, my protector, the rock where I am safe, my shield... and my place of shelter.

PSALM 18:2

Let my words and my thoughts be pleasing to you, Lord, because you are my mighty rock and my protector.

PSALM 19:14

Prayer cards and additional materials would have to be laminated or adapted to protect them from the weather.

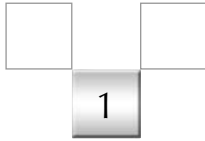
A quiet corner could also be set up at home. If space is at a premium and it is not possible to have a permanent arrangement, then some of the suggested themes lend themselves well to easy storage. Take, for example, the theme of the cross. This could be set up in a shiny silver gift box from a stationer's shop, lined with red felt. Inside this box you could keep a collection of crosses and pictures of crosses. If you keep the box with a piece of purple fabric, when you want to create a quiet corner simply lay out the purple cloth and open the box.

The opportunities for setting up a quiet corner are limitless, from portable materials in a shoebox to a station in a full-sized hall or church.

Using the quiet corners in this book

This book contains 14 quiet corners for you to choose from. You do not need to use them in any particular order. Each idea is self-contained and stands alone, so you can use just one, or you might choose to group two or three together.

The meditations are designed to guide the participant. You may want to leave copies of the book in the quiet corner, open at the appropriate chapter so that individuals can move at their own pace. Alternatively, you may wish to accompany children on their journey and read the reflective material out aloud. If you choose this route, be aware of pacing and spacing the material to allow the children time for personal reflection.



Jesus is... the true vine

In this quiet corner we begin by thinking about trees and how they grow. This leads in to thoughts about gardeners, raising awareness of God as gardener and creator. Choosing and holding a leaf can help to create a sense of awe and wonder, as each leaf is different from every other leaf and contains its own intricate pattern of veins. This sense of awe and wonder can naturally lead into a time of gratitude, expressing thanks to God for all the good things in life.

The Bible focus reinforces the idea of God as gardener and turns our attention to Jesus. Jesus said, 'I am the true vine' (John 15:1) so we use images and words to help us understand what Jesus meant. This leads to reflection on the work of the Holy Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit.

Spending time contemplating the role of God as creator encourages a respect for the environment and stimulates awareness of the wonder of life and creation. Delving deeper into the image of Jesus as the vine and the role of the Holy Spirit can give us a clearer idea of who we are and how we can grow to be more like Jesus.

Getting started

Arrange some twigs in a plant pot to make a tree. Stand the plant pot on some brown fabric to represent the soil. Place the following items near the plant pot.

- Some pictures of trees
- Some leaves
- A basket containing sticky tack and small green pieces of paper for leaves
- A basket containing drawing paper, pencils, child-safe scissors and glue sticks
- A bowl of seedless grapes
- A picture of a grape vine, or a grape vine growing in a pot (available from some garden centres)
- A card with the words from Galatians 5:22–23: ‘God’s Spirit makes us loving, happy, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled.’
- Cards with the words from the ‘Staying with the story’ section (see pages 38–39)

Stilling

Spend some time quietly looking at the pictures of trees.

Choose the picture you like best and think about the tree... the soil it grows in...

Think about what a tree needs to help it grow... sunlight, warmth, rain...

Think about a young tree, a sapling, and the gardener who plants it in the ground. The gardener tends the tree, giving it food and water, and watches it grow. Gardeners take delight in watching their trees grow...

Think about God as a gardener, how he takes delight in everything that he has created, how he wants you to delight in everything that he has created...

Choose a leaf and hold it in your hand as you spend some time quietly saying ‘thank you’ to God for all the things you enjoy.

Bible focus

Jesus said to his disciples, 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.'

JOHN 15:1

Look at the picture of the grape vine.

Think about the vine... the soil it grows in... its roots... its trunk... its branches ... its fruit...

Think about the sap flowing through the vine... from the roots... into the trunk... into the branches...

Think about Jesus as the vine... and the Holy Spirit flowing through the vine...

Think of yourself as a branch in that vine and the Holy Spirit flowing through you...

Staying with the story

Jesus said, 'Stay joined to me, and I will stay joined to you. Just as a branch cannot produce fruit unless it stays joined to the vine, you cannot produce fruit unless you stay joined to me. I am the vine, and you are the branches. If you stay joined to me, and I stay joined to you, then you will produce lots of fruit. But you cannot do anything without me.'

JOHN 15:4-5

Plant your roots in Christ and let him be the foundation for your life. Be strong in your faith, just as you were taught. And be grateful.

COLOSSIANS 2:7

Jesus says, 'I am the vine, and you are the branches.' The Holy Spirit flows through Jesus just as the sap flows through the grape vine. You are one of the branches joined to Jesus, and the Holy Spirit flows

through you just as the Holy Spirit flows through Jesus. The vine produces fruit and the Holy Spirit produces fruit in you.

God's Spirit makes us loving, happy, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled.

GALATIANS 5:22-23

Think about the fruit of the Spirit as you taste one of the grapes.

Living with the story

Cut out and colour some circle shapes to look like grapes and write one of the fruits of the Spirit in each circle.

- Love
- Happiness
- Peace
- Patience
- Kindness
- Goodness
- Faithfulness
- Gentleness
- Self-control

As you cut and write, think about the fruit of the Spirit one at a time. Ask God to help the fruit of the Spirit to grow in you. Listen to God as ideas come into your mind. For example, God may suggest ways in which you could do something kind for someone in your family. Draw a branch on a piece of paper and stick your circle shapes on it so that they look like a bunch of grapes.

Keep the bunch of grapes you have made in a special place. Keep asking God to grow the fruit of the Spirit in you. Keep listening for God's suggestions.

Cut a leaf shape out of green paper and write your name on it. Place it in the picture of a grape vine or fasten it to a branch of the growing vine, as a sign that you are part of the vine and that you want to stay close to Jesus.

Prayer response

Loving God, thank you for sending your Holy Spirit to help me. Please help me to become more like Jesus every day. Amen

Living the journey

Try one or more of the following activities.

- Visit a garden centre to look at different sorts of trees and plants. Look closely at leaves and flowers and think about how God must have enjoyed creating the world.
- Grow some plants of your own. You could buy a packet of seeds in the garden centre or you could plant some orange or lemon pips.
- Do a kind deed every day.