

- Research also suggests that people are **more caring** when they're around nature.<sup>[7]</sup>

This is not to say that you cannot find great benefits from quiet spaces indoors, but rather going outdoors is likely to increase the benefits of time in a quiet space. There are often less distractions than indoors, and outdoors can often be the place where we allow ourselves to be quiet, to explore sounds and contemplate.

### What makes an ideal space?

What are we looking for in a quiet space is likely to be different for each of us. The naturalist John Muir wrote: "**Climb the mountains and hear their good tidings... the winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy.**" Yet getting into the mountains is not a daily possibility for most of us, and can often mean we can restrict spending time in a quiet space to when on retreat or in certain settings.

However, research suggests even **the tiniest kinds of engagement with nature deliver a psychological boost**. Office workers who glimpse a tree are both happier and more productive; in one analysis, of a university building in Oregon, workers on the greenery-facing side took 19% fewer sick days. If you're treated in hospital for bipolar disorder, the evidence suggests, you'll be discharged several days sooner on average if your room is naturally lit. Even looking at photographs of natural scenes lowers blood pressure.<sup>[8]</sup>

The ideal quiet space is, of course, going to be different for everyone - one person's ideal spot will be different to another's. Having said that there are likely to be certain key features. **Prospect/Refuge Theory** says we're happiest looking out at nature from places of safety, with a good view of predators and no need to watch our backs. A quiet space that allows us to observe (prospect) without being seen (refuge) might be a good starting place.

**Being comfortable and warm** will be important to our enjoyment, as will our **feeling of safety**.

Further Reading and Footnotes at: [www.quietgarden.org/2016/fyqs](http://www.quietgarden.org/2016/fyqs)

## QUIET GARDEN MOVEMENT

sharing outdoor space for the inner journey

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# FINDING YOUR QUIET SPACE

## LEADERS NOTES

### Finding your Quiet Space in the ordinary / everyday life

Where is your quiet space? A sit spot under a tree, a bench in a quiet garden, a walk in your local park? This exercise enables us to explore what makes our ideal quiet spaces, how we can create (or find) them and what we can do to help ourselves spend time there.

Created by Matt Freer / Quiet Garden Movement.

Download handouts at: [www.quietgarden.org/2016/FYQS](http://www.quietgarden.org/2016/FYQS)

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The Quiet Garden Movement nurtures low cost, accessible, outdoor space for prayer, contemplation, rest and inspiration in a variety of settings, such as private homes, churches, schools and hospitals. Many Quiet Gardens run regular quiet days, retreats and events, and make their spaces available to individuals and groups.

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# SESSION PLAN



## 1. Stilling Exercise [5 mins]

Start with a time of stillness. A time of silence, perhaps introduced and closed with a suitable reading, meditation or prayer. Lead people into the silence, perhaps focusing on the breath.

## 2. Introduction [5-10mins]

We often have good intentions to find time in our schedule to spend time-out in a quiet place, but 'life' can often seem to get in the way. This exercise aims to help us create (or find) our Quiet Space in ordinary life. We will identify what might make our ideal quiet space, and how we might overcome the obstacles and challenges to spending time there.

> **Group Question** - Ask people to share the place they can't wait to go back to and why?

We are likely to have different approaches to how we understand what quiet space is for us. It could be about making space in our life for prayer, meditation and contemplation – and enabling the space for these moments to occur.

It can be an actual space, in a particular place, that we visit or nurture. Whilst a specific space can be very helpful, we can also develop the art of using any space, anywhere and at any time to be present - and become aware of God's/Divine presence around us.

This exercise is for both finding a quiet space in an actual place we visit, as well as finding space in our lives.

Before you start the exercise you might want to share something from the **BACKGROUND** section (pgs 8-10) about what makes ideal spaces and why being outside is helpful.

# BACKGROUND



## Why focus on the outside?

When we conducted a survey about the ideal quiet space, the majority of respondents said it would be outside (75%). That isn't surprising because research suggests time spent outdoors is naturally loaded with many benefits:

- Time outdoors is often where moments of **awe and wonder** occur - with no instruction manual or a set range of possible outcomes, the natural world holds infinite possibilities, and often introduces transcendent moments, when we feel deeply connected to something bigger than ourselves. These moments are important for our spiritual growth – in short time outside enjoying nature can be **good for our souls**.<sup>[1]</sup>
- Time outdoors seems to make us **happier and healthier** - prisoners who can look out at nature get sick less often, patients in hospitals recover more quickly when their view is of greenery rather than concrete.<sup>[2]</sup> In short time outdoors is restorative to our wellbeing
- Being outdoors often brings about **positive emotions and makes us feel good** - and importantly it seems the benefits are not restricted to just the time we are outside, they seem to be durable, and may influence subsequent interests and behaviours.<sup>[3]</sup>
- Time outside **awakens our senses**. It seems that our alpha brain waves, which can help with creativity and inspiration, are often switched on when we are outdoors in nature.<sup>[4]</sup> Back in 1958 a study found that in the act of contemplating nature, the brain is relieved of 'excess' circulation (or activity) and nervous system activity is reduced.<sup>[5]</sup> Later studies found that an experience of nature can help strengthen the activities of the right hemisphere of the brain, and restore harmony to the functions of the brain as a whole - a technical explanation of the process that occurs when we 'clear our head' by going for a walk in a natural setting.<sup>[6]</sup>

- Permission is important – how do we give ourselves permission?
- How do we combat a feeling of guilt for taking time out?
- What else can get in the way? – ask the group

You might consider doing it with others, such as a regular quiet morning in a Quiet Garden?

### 6. Destinations and Way Markers [10 mins]

Everyone needs the reverse of the handout entitled 'Making a path to your quiet space' – there are three spaces for people to make notes under 'Destinations', 'Waymarkers' and '3 Steps to help you get there' - explain each one and give people time to think and make their own notes.

#### **Destinations** - Goals to give you direction

What are your intentions / goals to help you find/use your quiet space? This might be spending 30mins in a sit spot once a week, exploring your local nature reserve in every season, once a month spending time with others in a quiet garden

#### **Way Markers** - Things to keep you on the path

What will remind you why you are making time for a quiet space? What gives you permission to do it? What will help you avoid feeling guilty for taking time out?

**3 steps to help you get there:** what practical steps can you take in the next week to make a start on creating your quiet space?

### 7. Closing Exercise... [5 mins]

Close with a time of stillness and silence - perhaps ending with a suitable reading, poem, meditation or prayer.

### 3. Meditative Mapping Exercise [15 mins]

This exercise is designed to be read by the leader slowly – giving plenty of space for silence as people explore what you are saying for themselves creating a strong picture of their quiet space in their minds.

Give everyone a handout (or make sure everyone has a notepad) and a pencil. Tell people they will be being still for 10 minutes or so, so they might want to put on extra layers.

Ask everyone to sit down so they are comfortable. This could be upright in a chair with their feet firmly on the ground – or people might prefer to lay on the ground. Make sure everyone can hear you clearly – ideally without having to raise your voice too much.

Once everyone is ready, start the exercise by using this script:

*In this exercise you are going to create a quiet place in your mind that you feel comfortable being in.*

*Get yourself comfortable.*

*Close your eyes so you are not distracted.*

*Allow yourself to relax.*

*Notice your weight of your body on the chair / ground.*

*Allow your shoulders to drop.*

*Notice your breathing - as you breathe in and out.*

*I want you to imagine that you are standing outdoors.*

*Have a look around you and choose an area that you want to make your own quiet space.*

*You might like there to be a boundary around your quiet space – a line of trees or wall, a ditch or maybe just a line on the ground.*

*This is your own personal quiet place.*

*Now imagine what you want in your landscape. The kind of terrain that is there.*

*Imagine the kind of objects there are, perhaps trees, water, flowers, animals... there might be buildings.*

*And when you have that picture in your mind, imagine if there are people in your landscape or not. And if there are what are they doing?*

*Spend a few moments, looking around your landscape, taking in the big picture, the birds eye view.*

*Now go to the area of your landscape where your quiet space is and explore it. Have a walk around. Feel the ground under your feet. Feel the air on your face. Listen to the sounds that you can hear around you. What does it smell like? You might like to touch the surfaces of some of the objects or pick some up.*

*You will be able to come back to your quiet space again in the future, but for now take a few deep breathes and when you feel ready bring yourself back out of your landscape.*

*Keeping silence, open your eyes – without talking to anyone – draw your quiet space and landscape. It could be a map or a picture. Note down things that stood out. Doesn't need to be a perfect picture just capture the overview and some of the details. The feelings of being there. Use words if you like.*

Give everyone time to draw and note down what they want to and then break the silence of this exercise by saying something like...

*You can go back to your quiet spot in your mind anytime, but we're now going to move onto the next section of this exercise.*

#### **How was that? Get a feel as a group how people found the exercise.**

Just get headline reactions – and remember some people won't want to share so be sensitive to that. Some of the group may have been picturing a real place and others not, some a combination. There is no right or wrong way.

[Optional break / stretch if needed]

#### **4. Making your dream quiet space reality [5 mins]**

Ask people to spend a few minutes noting down a few things from their map/picture that they want to make real using this script:

*Now going back to your map/picture - have a good look at it.*

*Write a few things down that you want to take from your picture and make real.*

*What building blocks can you take from dream to reality ... just note down a few things, don't try to do everything.*

#### **5. How can we help ourselves spend time there? [5 mins]**

Hopefully we now have some great ideas and good intentions for our quiet spaces and how to create / use them.

As we all know though our intentions can often be good but 'life' can get in the way. Busyness can take over. The weather can put us off. Our spot isn't quite ready. Soon we'll have a list of reasons why we can put off our good intentions. So this next part of the exercise will help us identify how we can start – and not get bogged down in perfection.

There are obviously **practical things** we can do help ourselves:

- Wear warm clothes
- Make yourself comfortable
- Take a timer (e.g. mobile) and anything to make you feel safe
- Water bottle
- Notebook and pencil
- Take resources to use (or not) - instead you might take the challenge to take very little and let nature provide what you need

There are also **mental barriers** we could consider and **things** we can do to help us spend time in our spaces: