



# **Flee, Be Silent, Pray: An Anxious Evangelical Finds Peace with God through Contemplative Prayer**

*Ed Czerwinski*

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When daily prayer and Bible study leaves a Christian anxious, doubtful, and frustrated, is there any hope for finding peace with God?

Ed Cyzewski grew up in a restrictive Catholic Church, immersed himself in the hard-working world of evangelical Christianity as the path to knowing God, and then graduated uncertain about praying or finding God. The Christian prayer tradition known as contemplation, primarily preserved in monasteries through practices such as centering prayer, was the answer he didn't want to find. If his Protestant faith was going to survive, he needed to move beyond his past grudges in order to learn Christian meditation and contemplative prayer from Catholic teachers.

Contemplative prayer goes beyond the limits of Bible study and experiences the loving presence of God described in the scriptures. While scripture and spiritual disciplines have their place, Cyzewski learned that the unstoppable love of God forms the foundation of all Christian spirituality, and that daily contemplative prayer helps us rest in God's loving presence.

Using Henri Nouwen's *The Way of the Heart* to highlight the three movements into contemplation with the words flee, be silent, pray, Cyzewski found what it means to quiet his religious anxiety by resting in the love of God. Anxious evangelicals and Christians on the brink of losing their faith will find an accessible path toward using this simple, proven approach to daily prayer.

## **Flee, Be Silent, Pray: An Anxious Evangelical Finds Peace with God through Contemplative Prayer Details**

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# From Reader Review *Flee, Be Silent, Pray: An Anxious Evangelical Finds Peace with God through Contemplative Prayer* for online ebook

## Natalie Hart says

While my Christian culture isn't American evangelical, I do suffer with anxiety and grew up in a Christian culture that emphasizes duty and obedience, and often treats faith as an intellectual matter. This book is a lifeline. It encourages us to bring more rest into our spiritual practices, to spend time in God's presence, to release our need for results and definable progress, to release our use of mountain-top experiences and stunning revelations as proof that we're on the right track. *Flee, Be Silent, Pray* is a call to return to our spiritual roots and to the time-tested practices of the desert fathers and mothers, a call to let our spiritual roots extend way down deep in God's love for us, which we can do nothing to earn and which can utterly transform us. I've been on that path of seeking to rest more in God, of adding gentleness with myself to my spiritual practices, of accepting my status as God's beloved child, and this book is a tremendous encouragement to keep going.

Many moments made me cry, this one especially, because I can never hear it enough: "Whether you need a booming voice from heaven to shake you free from your anxious thoughts or you need a gentle whisper to call you back to your first love, God is speaking to you right now in this place...This message is for you if you can take it on faith, even right now: 'You are my child, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'"

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## Nick says

This is a very interesting and helpful book on contemplation and the Christian mystical tradition, as it applies to the contemporary Evangelical movement. The author, a former Catholic, has an academic background with a master of divinity degree from an evangelical seminary, and subsequently has written quite a bit about Christian discipleship, prayer, and contemplation. I have read some of his other books as well. But this one, his most recent, is by far my favorite.

There are multiple interesting chapters, and the author has a humorous, conversational style of writing which is engaging and enjoyable to read. Although he is an expert, he comes across as very humble and relatable. There's also helpful list of recommended resources and further reading at the end of the book.

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## Judith says

I just finished reading this book (the eBook was given to me and the only request in return was that I share an honest review). The author is an evangelical Christian and describes his unexpected journey of embracing contemplative prayer. His honest portrayal of his doubts and struggles are things I find so encouraging. I also want to share one verse that spoke to me as I wondered about a kind of prayer that has you sit in silence. How else will we be able to respond as Samuel did when God spoke to him? 1Samuel 3:9 "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

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## **Adam Shields says**

Short Review: I believe this is my sixth book by Ed Cyzewski. He is one of the many younger authors that is piecing together a living by publishing books independently and working as a freelance author for articles and other pieces.

What I like about the ability for independent authors to publish their own work is that many of the traditional constraints on publishing have been removed. Ed does not need to be famous or put out a book a year or have the traditional 180 or 208 pages. Many of his books are on the short side for traditional books, but they are also not free of fluff to expand them to the necessary length. *Free, Be Silent, Pray* is only 130 pages. A couple of his books are even shorter (several are longer.)

Ed grew up nominal Catholic, but left the Catholic church when he came to faith via an evangelical ministry. In many ways he and I are fairly similar. We are roughly the same age. We both went to seminary but are not pastors. We are both stay at home Dads while working part time. We both have pursued serious spiritual growth. I identify with his style and method.

I started reading this immediately after Jan Johnson's book on contemplative prayer. And I thought the two of them fit together nicely with almost no overlap. The two books come at contemplative prayer from very different angles.

Ed is very personal in his writing. He is talking about what he does and how he has come to find contemplative prayer helpful. Jan Johnson also talks about herself, but she is a bit more distant. She is older and further along in life, which I think is part of the distance.

Theologically they are not very different, but Cyzewski has appreciation for his previous Catholic faith and Johnson has never been Catholic, so when she approaches the ancient church she does so as an Evangelical, not as an Evangelical that used to be Catholic. And that does matter.

My slightly longer review is on my blog at <http://bookwi.se/flee-be-silent-pray/>

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## **Miah Oren says**

I wish my church had read this book when I was growing up. So often as an evangelical, silence is dismissed in favor of spectacle, of performance, and filling space with impressive-sounding words. I quickly learned that as a person who favored silence and solitude, I didn't quite belong.

Ed Cyzewski's book encourages us to escape the pressure of our busy, productivity-addicted culture by exploring what silence and solitude have to offer our anxious hearts, minds, and bodies by being fully present. It charts a path away from a task-driven anxious faith toward a deeper peace with God.

I highly recommend this book to anyone who is exhausted or anxious in their faith.

I received an advance review copy of this book.

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## **Fred says**

This is a helpful, readable guide to contemplative prayer specifically for those in the evangelical church tradition. Cyzewski goes out of his way to assure Bible protestants that he is "one of us" so that we will trust him when he recommends contemplative prayer in the Catholic tradition. I found his personal narrative persuasive and helpful. He integrates it into his explanation of prayer urging us to move from despair or "asking for things" to relationship. Can we sit in God's presence and allow him to be God? Can we be with God just because he loves us and with no other agenda? This book is simple. It is not overly mystical and does not over promise. But it does encourage me to seek God simply for himself and in response to his love.

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## **Lisa says**

It's so refreshing to read a book about a spiritual practice and feel relieved rather than pressured, excited rather than anxious. In this book, Ed offers evangelicals another way to spiritual growth. A way that can't be measured or controlled, one that is unpredictable and a little bit scary. I can't wait to get started on my contemplative prayer journey.

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## **JD Reynolds says**

Ed Cyzewski's newest book is the primer to spiritual practices that everyone anxious (or cynical) evangelical needs. A person could spend hours collecting different articles and books on the subject, and weeks reading them. Cyzewski condenses all of this and makes it accessible, with anecdotes that demonstrate how to put these practices into daily use and a list of resources for further explanation. I received an advanced copy and have already encouraged my friends to purchase it.

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## **Lisa notes says**

When we think we don't pray enough or don't do it right, this book can erase our anxiety. Ed Cyzewski presents fresh (yet age-old) ideas about how to enjoy God's presence through prayer in quieter ways, using less words but with just as much meaning. Topics include praying through the words of others (Psalms, Jesus' prayers, etc.), praying with the Examen and Divine Hours, and praying in silence (Centering Prayer, etc.)

Whether you're new to contemplative prayer or have been doing it for years, this book will inspire your practice and increase your awareness of the presence of God. I appreciate getting to read an advance copy of this book.

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## **Pamela says**

## **A Real Treasure**

Having been an anxious Evangelical for many years, this book is truly a Godsend. It confirms so many of the things God has been teaching me about simply being with Him, living in His presence. Contemplative prayer opens up a whole new world of rest and peace with Christ in our belovedness. A wonderful, helpful book!

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### **Jessica Kantrowitz says**

Flee, Be Silent, Pray is an excellent introduction to contemplative prayer for Evangelicals and others. Cyzewski vulnerably shares his own stories and struggles with spiritual anxiety within Evangelicalism, and describes how silence, contemplative prayer, and other practices like the Examen, and canonical prayers helped to calm his anxiety and reconnect him with himself and with God. He draws on the writings of Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen, Brennan Manning, Richard Rohr, and others to describe the benefits of contemplative practices contrasted with the activity-based and results-based practices of the Evangelical world. As someone already familiar with the subject I wondered if the book would have anything to offer me, but I found Cyzewski's story to be personal and compelling, and I enjoyed rereading some of my favorite quotes and stories from Merton, Nouwen, and Manning. I definitely recommend this book for those interested in learning about contemplative prayer, and I think it will be an enjoyable read even to those already familiar with the practice.

I was given an advanced copy of this book in exchange for my honest review.

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### **Heather Caliri says**

This book proved to be a deep exhale and release from a lot of anxiety about contemplative prayer. I've been drawn into these powerful practices in recent years, but my perfectionism and anxiety made it hard to practice regularly, or feel like my experience was "successful". I also had practical questions: when--how--how much--and that nagging anxiety, -am I doing it right?-

Ed's gentle book gives readers a good introduction to the history and theological underpinnings of contemplative prayer. He demystifies the practices without being prescriptive or reductive. He emphasizes again and again that the journey into contemplation is the point, not any 'results' we achieve.

I found his incredibly kind, gracious book a huge relief. I look at my practice with different, more calm eyes, and feel connected to God because of the decrease in anxiety the book helped engender. Though I feel like Ed's book is a good jumping off point, and not the end-all-be-all of contemplative books, I would guess he would agree--it's precisely his point. He provides so many helpful quotes and references to writers with more experience in these disciplines that his book is a great primer. Readers interested in deeper knowledge of these disciplines have a built in bibliography to guide them.

Highly recommended, especially if contemplative disciplines make you nervous.

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### **Ethan says**

An exhortation for evangelicals/conservative Christians to discover the ancient spiritual practices of contemplative prayer delivered by means of the author's personal story.

The author explains how he began life as a Catholic, strongly converted to evangelical Christianity, and re-

discovered some Catholic meditative and devotional practices during a time of great spiritual distress. Most of the book features discussions of various spiritual practices surrounding contemplative prayer: the divine hours (fixed hour prayer), effective use of the examen, mindfulness centering on God in Christ, daily periods of solitude and the ability to appreciate what silence teaches, and the experience of the dark night of the soul.

Beyond such discussions the book is framed as a critique of evangelicalism as currently practiced, highly anxious, works-based and driven, relentlessly pressing forward, too easily reflecting the capitalistic and consumeristic models of the moment. The author speaks of these things in terms of his own personal experience, and goes to some length to assure the reader that he is not automatically condemning all that is in evangelicalism or its impulses, but seeks to be an encouragement for others who may, like him, have found themselves disenchanted and in great spiritual distress and who would benefit from these prayer traditions.

In general the book is a valuable resource; unlike a lot of other authors who write on the theme, Cyzewski is willing to provide some pointers for practice and to explain not only what he did in generalities but providing actual practices, references, and resources. I have read similar works and have wanted to explore the practices but felt disappointed by a lack of concrete direction. I would not consider myself an Evangelical but my heritage shares many affinities with evangelicalism, and to some degree I can relate to the author's frustrations if not his exact experiences. Throughout my nearly 20 years in Christ I have felt more than catechized in doctrine but have felt at a loss in terms of developing an effectively coherent prayer life...it is good to see someone else's journey that provides some beneficial pointers, and I am already benefited by having been pointed to the Examen along with the divine hours (which I have been doing, although not as consistently as desired, for almost a decade).

I perceived a bit of unease from the author at various points about his practices and conclusions, as if he still did not feel entirely settled and maintained doctrinal combatants in mind, and felt he would have done better at times to have maintained the confidence and boldness in his current stand. It shall be seen as to how well many Evangelicals will take to his criticisms of the movement in general even if they are not wide of the mark.

I would also caution against the seemingly uncritical acceptance of the model of those who came before, especially among the "desert fathers." The "desert fathers" arose from their own context, a reactive movement, which may provide some positive fodder for spirituality but also maintained a legacy that was a bit too extreme for its own good. Yes, indeed, Jesus retreated into the wilderness to pray...but He always returned to minister among the people.

Having said that, the likelihood of many running to such an extreme is far lower than the presently critical need for many in Christendom to flee for a moment, be silent, and pray. A highly recommended work.

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### **Tanya Marlow says**

Subtitled, 'An anxious evangelical finds peace with God through contemplative prayer' – it exactly describes its audience. This is a wonderful book on making contemplative prayer attractive, and I loved it. There are so many books on prayer that talk about prayer, yet don't result in you actually praying. The best way I can commend this book to you is the fact I kept pausing to pray as I read it, because it made me want to pray right then and there.

There are two things that make this book stand out: the sense of God's unconditional love that runs



throughout the book, and how he distils wisdom from mystics like Richard Rohr and Thomas Merton to make them much more accessible for newcomers to contemplative prayer. There are some who just talk about God's unconditional love, and then follow up with a load of rules. For me, the sense of God's love came through in every word, and the experience of reading the book on spiritual disciplines was a restful and nourishing one. I love all of Cyzewski's work, but this was probably his best so far. Highly recommended.

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### **Allison P says**

Wonderful book! A lot of "wow" moments for me. Highly recommend!!!!

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