

Resistance to Religious Practices

By Susan Vogt

“I’m spiritual, but not religious.” Many parents of adult children have heard some variation of this. Perhaps you have said it yourself. Explore for yourself where you stand, sit, or kneel on the issue of religious practice and whether or not it’s important to believe in God.



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For

Adult, Couple

Season

Winter

Needed

Printed copy of this activity for each person, pen

Prepare in Advance

Decide whether to do this activity on your own or to invite your spouse or young adult child(ren) to join you.

Activity Plan

1. Take a moment to remind yourself of God’s presence. Offer your own heartfelt prayer or use the following prayer:

Mysterious God, I think you exist. I want you to exist. But I’m not quite sure. I don’t know if you are real, yet my heart seeks meaning beyond what I can see, hear, or touch. Send your Spirit to firm up my faith. I want to believe. Help my unbelief. Amen.

2. Whether you are doing this activity alone or with others, begin by examining your own faith, doubts, and religious practices, if any. Write your responses to the following questions:

What gripes you about the religion you were raised in and may still practice? (For example: too many rules, hypocrisy, not concerned enough with the poor, teachings about sexuality ... you get the idea.) Let it all hang out.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

What do you find appealing about organized religion, if anything? (For example: supportive community; place to be reminded of the transcendence of God; worship; joint effort to feed, clothe, and shelter those in need; arts and music ... you get the idea.)

_____	_____
_____	_____

If you believe God exists, how do you describe God?

If you're not sure about God, but do sense that there is something that gives life meaning, how do you describe your spiritual yearning?

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3. *List the moral values that guide your life.* (For example: The Ten Commandments, honor, integrity, honesty, care for others, generosity.)

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4. Sit with your responses for a while and ponder the connections between what draws you to life of faith and what is an obstacle.
- Which is stronger, those things that draw you to a life of faith or those things that are obstacles?
 - Would you change your life in any way if you were sure God exists? If so, how?
 - Would you change your life in any way if you were sure God does not exist? If so, how?

5. *If you are doing this activity with someone who does not have the same religious beliefs or practice as you,* exchange papers and read each other's responses. Don't discuss them right away. Take at least five minutes—perhaps even an hour or a day—of silently honoring the gift that the other has given you by opening his or her heart to you. Seek to understand the other's experience. Resist judging or comparing this person's beliefs to your own. After a suitable time, listen to each other expand on what has been written. Don't ask questions. Just listen.

6. *Perhaps at a later time,* you may be able to take the discussion further and inquire more about the other person's thinking, but avoid a debate of who is "more right." Belief in God cannot be forced, only voluntarily lived. Through this exploration, some initial obstacles that caused resistance to organized religion may ease. Likewise, you may find that to be true to yourself, you need to change how you practice religion or deepen your spiritual life.

