

Watching the winter sun

Like the sun, God seems distant sometimes.

By [Michelle Henrichs](#)

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I have set a chair by the window in our house. It allows me to look out the window and sit in the sun. This is where you will often find me, especially during these winter months.

I sat in this chair this week, enjoying a rare afternoon of sun in a January where it has largely escaped us. The sun was shining directly in only because it is January. Even at noon, the sun sits low in the south sky. In the summer, I don't experience as much direct sunlight. But on a sunny winter day, I enjoy the full sun in my face from sunrise until the afternoon as the sun sits low on the southern horizon.

We've lived in this house for ten years, and it wasn't until living here that I realized how much the sun moves during the year. For example, our bedroom has east-facing windows. In June, the sun rises in the northernmost window and in December, it crosses the room to rise in the southernmost. Likewise, during the fall months, I am blinded by the sun as it sets in the southwest corner of our dining room. Certainly this is due to the shorter days, but it's also because the sun has shifted to the south. It's amazing how much the sun moves in a year.

But ever since Galileo, we know that the sun doesn't really move. It is the earth that tilts differently in its rotation around the sun. We move closer and further depending on the time of the year. It's not the sun that moves. It's us.

This made me think about God and how we say that God feels distant or close. We look at the evil and suffering in this world and wonder, "Where has God gone?" It's so like us to assume God has gone somewhere else, that God has left us on our own.

This week when I was at [Divine Intervention](#), a local ministry to people who are homeless, I sat down with a young woman who was staying with us for the first time. I don't know what her situation was but her case worker had brought her to us to provide emergency shelter until she could find something more permanent. As I went through the covenant each guest is asked to sign and abide by, she kept stopping me with questions of where would she sleep, where did the men sleep, what would she have to sleep with, was it clean, what was she to do when Divine Intervention closed at 8 a.m. until she could return at 5:30 p.m. She also kept saying she didn't know anyone here.

I tried to be a calming presence as I responded to her questions, assuring her that this was safe place for her to be. I explained that I or the other host would be right here all night, awake, if she needed anything. After she signed the covenant, we got her settled. She laid down, pulled the blanket over her head, and didn't get up again before I left at 3 a.m.

As I sat keeping watch, I listened to the heater as it went in and out, to sleep talking, coughing, snoring, and gas passing. And I thought how foreign these sounds were to her in this unfamiliar place. I thought about how she didn't know the women sleeping on either side of her. I wondered if she remembered where the bathroom was. And I thought about how alone she must have been feeling. **Does she wonder if God had moved?**

The change is subtle as the earth spins on its axis. I don't usually realize how much the sun has moved until it is coming in a different window or I need to move my chair during dinner. It's easy to forget that we're the ones who have moved. That the sun is right where it always is, providing light and heat. The sun is always there, even when hidden by the clouds.

As I wait for the next sunny day when I can sit in my chair and feel its warmth, I take comfort knowing the sun is there. And I find peace and hope knowing that, despite our circumstances, God doesn't move either.

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