Wait, Did He Leave?

Then she cried, "Samson, the Philistines are here!" When he awoke from his sleep, he said, "I will escape as I did before and shake myself free." But he did not know that the Lord had left him. Judges 16:20

He tweeted (or should I say "Xed") a hot take and he didn't know the Lord had left him.
He took pleasure in the failures of someone and he didn't know the Lord had left him.
He longed for the admiration of others and he didn't know the Lord had left him.
He spent so long criticizing a colleague that he didn't know the Lord had left him.
He resented his wife because of a comment or a failure and he didn't know the Lord had left him.

A Parable:

Last week I was praying about a very important conversation I needed to have with one of my many supervisors. (I seem to collect quite a few.) For several weeks I had been struggling with an issue. I also worried about the conversation.

- How would he react?
- Will he pushback on my observations and concerns?
- Will I speak the truth?
- Will he think poorly of me?
- Is it really worth his time?
  (I can do this for extended periods of time. My OCD in third gear, I suppose.)

I have a reputation of being non-confrontational so this was a very important and nerve-racking phone call. I finally got the courage to make the call on a long road trip. Although I was

skeptical about whether this was the right time or if it would it be better for me to have a face-to-face meeting with him. We began the conversation, and everything was cordial and upbeat and then I broached the **uncomfortable subject**. My monologue went on for about five minutes and then I asked a question. Silence filled the space where I expected to get feedback or even a rebuttal. I nervously rambled a little more and then a little more. I asked another question. Still silence. It was at that moment I realized that the call had dropped in the middle of my conversation. In fact, my manager tried to call me back, but I didn't look at who the caller was. I just kept rambling and ignorantly assumed that my manager was listening intently.

This slightly embarrassing slice of my life reminded me of a much larger meta-story. I thought about the fact that many times as I go through my day I can get so wrapped up in my own diatribes, anecdotes, and amusements that I fail to realize that the Holy Spirit left the building. This was Samson's predicament. He was a man of great strength but in that moment, he forgot where his strength came from and experienced the sudden realization that he had no strength because the Lord had left him. The worst thing that could happen to any of us would be for God to leave us to our own futile strategies and schemes. A dropped call might be embarrassing for a moment but realizing that the Lord slipped out of the room at your time of greatest need reeks of tragedy and despair. The Lord's presence strengthens us to do things that we could never do, while the Lord's absence only leads to our demise.

This happens with churches, too. We get so caught up in our own problems, glory, issues, budgets, concerns, activities and structures that when we finally stop for a short second we come to realize that the Holy Spirit has left the building. When things get flesh-saturated, He might just slip out the door and find another place where the focus is on God and not on our man-made idols and edicts.

We must stop. As the ancient poet Rumi said:

“Sit, be still, and listen, because you’re drunk and this is the edge of the roof.”

Step away.
Be still.
Listen.
Stop talking.
Make space.
Question everything.
Let go.
Let God.