

# HEARING GOD

DISCERNING HIS VOICE

## LIFE GROUP STUDY • WEEK 9

WEEK OF MARCH 17



### READING ASSIGNMENT

*Hearing God* by Dallas Willard – pages 276b-280; and *Bible Study Methods* by Rick Warren (PDF)



### GETTING STARTED

*REMINDER:* This is our last week of Life Groups for the Winter Life Group Session. For your study, you will spend some time discussing this weekend's message and study, as well as reflecting on some of your favorite memories and most important lessons from this session. We will also be taking communion together.

This weekend, in the *Hearing God* series, we focused on *The Keystone Habit* of spending time with God one-on-one. As you begin the study, take a few moments and spend some time meditating on the verse below.

*The news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.*

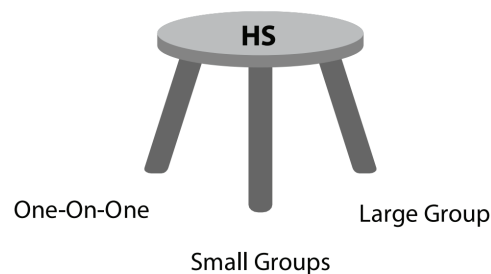
**Luke 5:15–16**



### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. This weekend, Michael shared that if we want to truly pursue God and develop a deep personal relationship where He can teach, lead, and guide us, we need to pursue Him in three key ways. We call this the *three-legged stool model* for spiritual formation or spiritual transformation. And each leg of the stool is important. If any one is missing, our growth will be hindered.

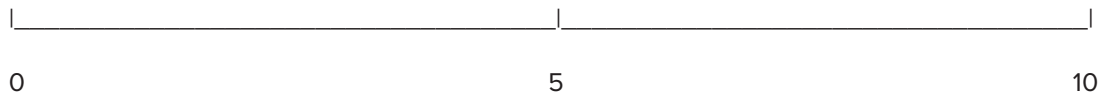
- *Large Groups*
- *Small Groups*
- *One-on-One*



Which of these three ways is most challenging for you to maintain?

2. Michael shared that if we want a deeply personal relationship with God, we need spend time with Him one-on-one on a regular basis.

- a. How would you rate your one-on-one time with God on the scale below? (0 being poor–10 excellent)



3. This weekend Michael taught on 1 Timothy 4:7-10, 15-16.

- a. Slowly read through these verses. What is the Holy Spirit highlighting for you?
- b. Spend a few minutes and jot down any commands that you find in these verses.
- c. In these verses, the Apostle Paul uses the analogy of an athlete training for competition. Michael highlighted four key words in 1 Timothy 4:7-9: *godly, train, labor, and strive*. Take a quick look at your message notes. Jot down any insights you gained about these words from Michael's teaching. What would it look like, in your life, to apply these words to the way you approach your one-on-one time with God?

4. Michael's two main points this weekend were:

- *Spiritual Transformation ... Is Not Automatic*
- *Spiritual Transformation ... Requires A Plan*

- a. Which of these two points challenged you the most? Why?

5. In the PDF reading this week from Rick Warren's *Bible Study Methods* (pg. 234), Warren writes:

*"But I have no time!" is an excuse we hear so often. Every person in the world has exactly the same amount of time each week—168 hours. You will spend some of those hours on things you think are important. You don't have time for everything; you must make time for things that really count. It's not a matter of time, but a matter of priorities. What is really important to you?*

- a. If we are serious about succeeding in any area of life (sports, music, school, work, finances, etc.), we will need to come up with a good plan. In his quote above, Warren asks, *"What is really important to you?"* Can you think of some areas of your life that were important to you, where you made a plan and reached an important goal? Why did you want to reach that goal? Why was that goal so important to you? What was your plan?

6. Warren's point is that we make time for the things that are most important to us, no matter what. If you are serious about pursuing God one-on-one, what might your plan look like?

7. Michael finished the message with one final question: *How Big ... Is Your Why?* And he shared the concept of a *keystone habit*—a single habit that sets in motion a whole series of powerful changes in our lives.

- a. Michael suggested that spending regular time with God one-on-one is a *spiritual keystone habit*. But creating a new habit like this is not easy. We need to have a big enough "Why?" How big is your *why* right now? Does creating space for God in your life this way sound appealing? What would need to change to make this possible? What changes would you need to make in your schedule or priorities? Are there things you need to cut out of your life to create space for this new priority?

b. Let's say you make these changes and your one-on-one time with God becomes part of the regular rhythm of each week. What do you think your relationship with God would look like a year from now? How would this change impact other areas of your lives? How might it impact your relationships? What impact might it have on your stress and anxiety levels?



## LOOKING BACK

We have been on quite a journey during this Winter Life Group Session. We have learned so much through our study. Take a couple minutes and review each of your Life Group studies from the last 10 weeks. What have been two or three of the most impactful insights for you from this session.



## COMMUNION

We celebrate communion to remember what Christ has done for us on the Cross. When we participate in communion, we are celebrating the Gospel. This week you will be celebrating communion in your Life Group. To prepare for this, read and reflect on Matthew 26:26-30 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

# HOW TO HAVE A MEANINGFUL QUIET TIME

Throughout this book I have made references to the quiet time. I have assumed that any person who is committed to personal Bible study also has a regular quiet time. Unfortunately, however, some people do Bible study just for the intellectual stimulation it brings them.

This appendix is for those who know they should have a quiet time, but are not sure how to go about it.

The quiet time has been called many things in the history of the Christian church. It is known as the “morning watch,” “personal devotions,” “appointment with God,” or the “personal devotional time.” It really doesn’t matter what you call it as long as you have it regularly.

The quiet time is simply a daily time of personal fellowship with God through the Word and prayer. It is a time we deliberately set aside in which to meet with him. The objective is that we might grow in our personal relationship with God, so that we can know him, love him, and become more like him.

This appendix deals with three practical aspects of the quiet time—*why we should have a quiet time, how to have a meaningful time with God, and how to deal with common problems* that arise during our quiet times.

## WHY SHOULD WE HAVE A QUIET TIME?

“Why” is certainly a legitimate question. What are some good reasons for it? The Bible gives us three major reasons:

- Because we need fellowship with God
- Because it is our privilege as Christians
- Because we gain tremendous benefits from it

## BECAUSE WE NEED FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

The first reason we should have a quiet time is that we need fellowship with God. Because we are Christians, now rightly related to the eternal God of heaven and earth, we must have regular fellowship with him in which we get to know him and love him more intimately.

Why is daily fellowship with God so important?

1. *We were created to have fellowship with God.* God created people in his own image for the purpose of fellowship. We are the only creatures in all creation that have the capacity to have fellowship with the Creator. Adam had that fellowship perfectly in the garden of Eden before the Fall (see Gen. 2–3).

2. *Jesus Christ died on the cross so that fellowship could be restored.* When Adam sinned, his fellowship with God was broken. And all of us sinners who have followed in Adam's footsteps cannot by nature have fellowship with a pure and holy God. But God considered that relationship important enough to send his Son to this world to die for our sins so that we might again have the privilege of a personal relationship with him. And God has called us Christians to have fellowship with him (see 1 Cor. 1:9; 1 John 1:3–4).

3. *The regular quiet time during Jesus' ministry was a source of his strength.* Personal fellowship with his Father in heaven was the top priority of Jesus' life (see Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16; 22:39–44). He was never too busy for it; in fact, when his ministry was the busiest, that's when he made certain that he kept in daily touch with the Father (see John 5:30). If Jesus needed this time with God, how much more we need it.

4. *Every great man or woman of God throughout history has spent much time alone with God.* Anyone who has ever been used mightily by the Lord was a person of the Word and prayer. The regular quiet time was the one thing they had in common. The common denominator among Moses, David, Daniel, Paul, John Calvin, John Wesley, Charles Finney, Dwight L. Moody, Charles Spurgeon, Billy Graham,

and all of the other great saints of history is that they all spent much time with God in personal fellowship. Their writings and ministries clearly show this.

Someone has said, "If you want to find out what a man is really like, find out what he is like alone with God." Martin Luther, the father of the Reformation, once said, "I have so much to do today that I must spend at least three hours in prayer." The busier he was, the more time he needed with God. If you are too busy to have a quiet time, then you're too busy!

5. *We cannot be healthy, growing Christians without daily fellowship with the Lord.* The quiet time is not just a nice suggestion; it is a vital necessity for a child of God. It is absolutely essential for Christian growth and maturity.

Have you ever gone without food for a day? If you kept it up, you would get weak and sick. The same is true in your spiritual life, for the Bible is the necessary food for your soul. If you go without reading it very long, you will get spiritually weak and sick. Yet many Christians get by with one "meal" per week (for some, perhaps two meals) in church on Sundays. You would not survive long on one or two physical meals per week, so how can you in your spiritual life?

Job considered the Word of God more necessary than his daily food (Job 23:12). Jesus, quoting the Old Testament, declared that man needs to live by every word coming from God (Matt. 4:4; see Deut. 8:3). Peter called the Scriptures nourishing milk (1 Peter 2:2), and the writer to the Hebrews thought of the Word as solid food (Heb. 5:14).

Have you ever gone for some time without a bath? If you have, then you know how "sticky" you feel after a while and how your odors get more pronounced. The Bible says that when we read the Word of God, we are cleansed. A daily quiet time is a spiritual bath. Many Christians who would not think of offending their friends by not bathing regularly do not realize that they can be offensive to the Lord with their spiritual odors! (See Psalm 119:9; Ephesians 5:26; John 15:3.)

From the above observations, you can conclude that if you are not having a regular quiet time ...

- You are missing out on the privilege for which you were created.
- You are rejecting that which Jesus died for to make possible.

- You will never experience the same power and refreshment Jesus did.
- You will never be used greatly by God.
- You will remain a weak and sickly Christian all your life.

“But I don’t have the time!” is an excuse we hear so often. Every person in the world has exactly the same amount of time each week—168 hours. You will spend some of those hours on things you think are important. You don’t *have* time for everything; you must *make* time for things that really count. It’s not a matter of time, but a matter of priorities. What is really important to you?

The key to making time for the quiet time is your commitment to Christ and the kingdom of God. Jesus stated, “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matt. 6:33). Put God first in your life and you will have more time. Don’t let anything rob you of that time of fellowship with the Lord. Preserve it at all costs. If Jesus Christ is first in your life, you ought to give him the first part of every day. Your quiet time should be the absolute number one priority and commitment of your life.

## BECAUSE IT IS OUR PRIVILEGE AS CHRISTIANS

We should have a quiet time each day because it is a tremendous privilege to have been granted a personal interview and time of fellowship with the Creator of the universe. The quiet time allows us four great privileges:

- We give devotion to God.
- We get direction from God.
- We gain delight in God.
- We grow more like God.

What happens when we have a quiet time?

1. *We give devotion to God.* The first privilege of the quiet time is to *give*, not to get. A psalmist said, “Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness” (Ps. 29:2). Another psalmist urged, “Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker” (Ps. 95:6).

In recent years two wrong emphases have been permeating the American church. The first is the overemphasis on *getting*: What will I get out of church, out

of Sunday school, out of doing what God says? It is the result of our culture's great emphasis on entertainment, in which the people being entertained must be satisfied. When carried over into spiritual matters, it becomes self-centered religion and is definitely not biblical. That's why so much is being said today about following Jesus, but little is said about the cost of discipleship. We offer prizes to get Christians to come to church when they ought to be coming because they love the Savior.

The other error is the overemphasis on *working* for God and neglecting the *worship* of God. Satan, the god of this world, has sold us a bill of goods in getting us to substitute work for worship. Most of us are so much on the go, even in doing fine Christian things, that we don't know the real meaning of worship. Jesus said, "*Worship* the Lord your God, and *serve* him only" (Matt. 4:10; see Deut. 6:13). Worship comes before service.

We are to give daily devotion to God because God *deserves* our devotion. When John saw the multitudes of heaven singing praises to God, he heard them say, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power" (Rev. 4:11; see 5:12). Because God is our Creator and Redeemer, he deserves to be worshiped and praised. We should go to our quiet times each day out of love for God, not out of a sense of duty: "God, I've come to worship you because you deserve to be worshiped and adored!"

We are also to give daily devotion to God because he *desires* devotion from us. Jesus told the woman at the well, "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks" (John 4:23). God *seeks* our worship.

A verse that is often used in evangelism, and properly so by way of analogy, was actually written in context to Christians in a lukewarm church. Here Jesus is saying, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will go in and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20). The Savior *desires* fellowship with us. He stands outside the door of our lives wanting and longing to have fellowship with us and receive our worship. He is like the ideal human father who wants to spend time with his children.

How long has it been since you took time alone with God just to tell him that you love him?



2. *We get direction from God.* The second privilege of the quiet time is for us to get direction from God for daily living. This was David's attitude in life: "Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long" (Ps. 25:4–5; see also Pss. 40:8; 73:24; 143:10; Isa. 42:16). The quiet time is a great opportunity to receive counsel from the Lord.

In this fast-paced age of hurry, we need a time when we can slow down, collect our thoughts, evaluate what is happening around us, and get direction from the one who knows the end from the beginning. Pascal once said, "All the troubles of man arise from his inability to sit still." On a number of occasions Jesus invited his disciples to "come apart" with him for a while (e.g., Mark 6:31 KJV) that they might recuperate physically and spiritually. Vance Havner has said, "If you don't 'come apart' periodically, you will literally come apart!" It is also interesting that often Jesus explained his teachings to the disciples when they were alone with him (see Mark 4:34).

When we get direction from God in our quiet times, he causes us first to *consider our ways*. We take the time to assess our lives. That's what David did: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23–24; see also Prov. 4:26; 14:12). Are you keeping on track for the Lord? Are you growing daily in your spiritual life? Have you allowed some sins to pile up in your life? Take these and similar questions and try to look at your life from God's point of view. This will help you keep God's perspective on things, because over and over you can get so caught up in the necessary details of life that you lose the overall picture.

The quiet time is also a time to *commit our day* to the Lord. Solomon urged, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight" (Prov. 3:5–6; see also Ps. 37:5). Ask God to show you his will for the day; commit your schedule to him, and ask him to guide you in the upcoming activities. You might even ask him to help you budget your time so you can get more done (see Ps. 90:12). Ask him to help you sort out the necessary from the unnecessary (see 1 Cor. 10:23).

It is only as you are in touch with the Lord daily that you will see life's problems and opportunities from the right perspective. Only through your meeting with

him will he be able to guide your life more effectively. One of the most important requests you can make while committing your day to the Lord is to ask him to prepare and direct you to someone to whom you can witness that day. Let God pick out your witnessing opportunities.

3. *We gain delight in God.* The third privilege of the quiet time is to enjoy God and simply to bask in his presence. David told God, “You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy *in your presence*” (Ps. 16:11). The secret of real joy is knowing God personally (see Pss. 34:8; 37:4; 42:1–2; 63:1; 73:25; Phil. 3:10). Many Christians are miserable and lead unhappy lives because they never spend time in God’s presence.

Do you really *know* Christ, or do you merely know about him? To know him intimately was the apostle Paul’s number one priority in life (see Phil. 3:7–10). How is it with you?

To get to know someone intimately and enjoy him personally, you must . . .

- Spend quality time with him.
- Communicate meaningfully with him.
- Observe him in a variety of situations.

These same criteria apply in getting to know and enjoy God, too. Remember that it is hard to have a love affair in a crowd; you need to get alone with that one person. This is why the Bible speaks of our relationship with God through Christ as a love relationship. In fact, it is called a marriage: Christ is the Bridegroom and we in the church are his bride.

When I first met Kay, my wife, and God knit our hearts together in love, more than anything else I wanted to spend time alone with her. We spent time with each other, we communicated, and we observed one another in a variety of situations. That is the way your relationship ought to be with God.

Are you anxious to get alone and share intimately with Jesus? If not, you should be. Make your goal for the quiet time, not just to learn *about* Jesus, but actually to meet *with* him. Expect to meet him each morning, for he’s there waiting to meet with you.

Sometimes we get so busy working *for* God or with our own affairs that we forget just to love him. God once said through his prophet, “Does a maiden forget

her jewelry, a bride her wedding ornaments? Yet my people have forgotten me, days without number” (Jer. 2:32). We particularly forget God when we fail to read the love letter he has written to us—the Bible.

I once spent a summer on a preaching mission in Japan before my wife and I were married. While I was there, I received a letter from her every day. How do you think Kay would have felt if I told her when I got back home, “Thanks so much for writing me in Japan. I really appreciated receiving your letters. Unfortunately, I never had time to read any of them”? There would have been a strain in our relationship.

The best way to get to know the Lord is to spend time alone with him, sharing your thoughts with him in prayer and reading over and over again the love letter he has written you.

4. *We grow more like God.* The fourth privilege of the quiet time is the opportunity to grow in our spiritual lives, becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. When God created the human race, he “created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him” (Gen. 1:27). His purpose for man was that he might become like God “in [his] likeness” (Gen. 1:26). But man chose to become like the devil instead (Gen. 3). So in the act of redemption God went back to his original purpose. He wanted his people again to be like him, like Jesus Christ. “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the *likeness* of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Rom. 8:29).

How do we become like Jesus? First, we are made holy like God through the Word. In his high priestly prayer Jesus asked the Father to “sanctify [all believers] by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). Our growth in sanctification comes through time spent in the Scriptures, getting to know God intimately.

Second, daily growth comes as the Word builds us up. “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16–17). As we are taught in the ways of God, rebuked when we go astray, corrected to go back to the right path, and trained in righteous living, we grow in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Third, we grow as our minds are transformed from thinking the world’s way to thinking God’s thoughts after him. Paul wrote, “Do not conform any longer to the

pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing, and perfect will" (Rom. 12:2). Again, this comes only through Scripture, God's revelation of his perfect will for us.

Fourth, through the promises of the Word we become more like God. Peter wrote, "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires" (2 Peter 1:3–4). We can only know God and appropriate his promises through the Word.

Fifth, we grow through the help given us by our Christian leaders, who teach us the Word. Paul said that God gives us gifted leaders "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12–13).

Finally, we become like Jesus as we spend time contemplating him. Paul wrote, "We, who with unveiled faces all reflect [or contemplate] the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18). This change is gradual; as we keep on contemplating Jesus Christ in his Word, we grow to be more and more like him. It is not a five-second glimpse of Jesus that changes us, but a constant contemplation of him over a period of time.

The more you are with a person, the more you become like him. Have you ever seen a couple happily married for 50 years? They are so much alike by now! They like the same things, eat the same things, and sometimes even start looking alike. The ultimate goal of the quiet time is for us to grow to be just like Jesus Christ.

## BECAUSE WE GAIN TREMENDOUS BENEFITS FROM IT

The final reason we should have daily quiet time is the tremendous results it brings to our lives. God has promised many things to those who take the time to get to know him through the Word. What are the results of having a daily quiet time?

- *Joy* (Pss. 16:11; 119:47, 97, 162; Jer. 15:16)—The most joyful Christians are those who meet with God daily.
- *Strength* (Isa. 40:29–31)—As we meet with the Lord daily, we get our spiritual batteries recharged and gain the perspective of an eagle, seeing things as they really are.
- *Peace* (Ps. 119:165; Isa. 26:3; 48:18; Rom. 8:6)—We gain peace of heart only when we have the assurance that God is in control of all things. This assurance comes only through his Word.
- *Stability* (Pss. 16:8–9; 46:1–3; 55:22; 57:7)—When we have a regular time of Bible reading, prayer, and worship, our lives become stable; the quiet time eliminates the “spiritual roller coaster” type of living.
- *Success* (Josh. 1:8)—The only promise of success in the Bible is connected to the condition of daily meditation on the Word of God.
- *Answered prayer* (John 15:7)—As we “remain” in Christ—that is, spending quality time with him daily—we can claim this promise and be assured that our prayers will be answered.
- *Others will notice the difference in our lives* (Acts 4:13)—People will know that we have been with Jesus; it is going to show in our lives. And being with Jesus is what will give confidence and boldness to us in witnessing about him to those who do not know him.

## HOW TO HAVE A MEANINGFUL TIME WITH GOD

If we are convinced that we need a quiet time, how do we go about having one? We may become motivated to do it, but may not know how. We need to consider four essential elements of a good quiet time:

- Start with the proper attitudes.
- Choose a special place.
- Select a specific time.
- Follow a simple plan.

### START WITH THE PROPER ATTITUDES

In God's eyes, *why* we do something is far more important than *what* we do. On one occasion God told Samuel, “The LORD does not look at the things man looks

at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). It is quite possible to do the right thing but with the wrong attitude. This was Amaziah’s problem, for “he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, but not wholeheartedly” (2 Chron. 25:2).

When you come to meet with God in the quiet time, you should have these proper attitudes:

1. *Expectancy.* Come before God with anticipation and eagerness. Expect to have a good time of fellowship with him and receive a blessing from your time together. This is what David expected: “O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you” (Ps. 63:1; see Ps. 42:1):

2. *Reverence.* Don’t rush into God’s presence, but prepare your heart by being still before him and letting the quietness clear away the thoughts of the world. The prophet Habakkuk tells us, “The LORD is in His holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him” (Hab. 2:20; see Ps. 89:7). Coming into the presence of God is not like going to a football game or some other form of entertainment.

3. *Alertness.* Get wide awake first. Remember that you are meeting with the Creator, the Maker of heaven and earth, the Redeemer of mankind. Be thoroughly rested and alert. The best preparation for a quiet time in the morning begins the night before. Get to bed early so you will be in good shape to meet God in the morning, for he deserves your full attention.

4. *Willingness to obey.* This attitude is crucial: you don’t come to your quiet time to choose what you will or won’t do, but with the purpose of doing anything and everything that God wants you to do. Jesus said, “If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own” (John 7:17). So come to meet the Lord having already chosen to do his will no matter what.

## SELECT A SPECIFIC TIME

The specific time has to do with *when* you should have your quiet time and *how long* it should be. The general rule is this: The best time is when you are at your best. Give God the best part of your day—when you are the freshest and most

alert. Don't try to serve God with your leftover time. Remember also that *your* best time may be different from someone else's.

For most of us, however, early in the morning seems to be the best time. It was Jesus' own practice to rise early to pray and meet with the Father. "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed" (Mark 1:35).

In the Bible many godly men and women rose early to meet with God. Some of these were

- Abraham — Genesis 19:27
- Job — Job 1:5
- Jacob — Genesis 28:18
- Moses — Exodus 34:4
- Hannah and Elkanah — 1 Samuel 1:19
- David — Psalms 5:3; 57:7–8

(See also Psalms 90:14; 119:147; 143:8; Isaiah 26:9; Ezekiel 12:8.)

Throughout church history many Christians have been used most by God when they met with him early in the morning. Pioneer missionary Hudson Taylor said, "You don't tune up the instruments after the concert is over. That's stupid. It's logical to tune them up before you start."

The great revival among British college students in the late 19th century began with these historic words: "Remember the Morning Watch!" So we need to tune ourselves up at the start of each day as we remember the Morning Watch.

If Jesus is really in first place in our lives, we ought to give him the first part of our day. We are to seek his kingdom first (see Matt. 6:33). Doctors tell us that the most important meal of the day is breakfast. It often determines our energy levels, alertness, and even moods for the day. Likewise, we need a "spiritual breakfast" to start our day off right.

Finally, in the morning our minds are uncluttered from the day's activities. Our thoughts are fresh, we are rested, tensions have not yet come on us, and it's usually the quietest time. One mother sets her alarm clock for 4 a.m., has her quiet time, goes back to bed, and then rises when everyone else in the household gets

up. Her explanation is that with kids around the house all day, early morning is the only time when it is quiet and she can be alone with God. It works for her; you need to select a time that will work for you.

You might even consider having two quiet times (morning and night). Dawson Trotman used to have code letters for his nightly quiet time: H.W.L.W. Whenever he was with a group of people at night or home with his wife and the conversation seemed to be ending, he would say, “All right, H. W. L. W.,” after which a passage of Scripture would be quoted without comment and all would go to sleep. H.W.L.W. stood for “His Word the Last Word,” and he practiced that through the years as a way of ending a day with one’s thoughts fixed on the Lord (Betty Lee Skinner, *Daws*, NavPress, p. 103).

Stephen Olford, a well-known pastor in New York for many years, said, “I want to hear the voice of God before I hear anyone else’s in the morning, and his is the last voice I want to hear at night.”

David and Daniel even met with the Lord three times each day (see Ps. 55:17; Dan. 6:10).

Whatever time you set, be consistent in it. Schedule it on your calendar; make an appointment with God as you would with anyone else. Make a date with Jesus! Then look forward to it and don’t stand him up. A stood-up date is not a pleasant experience for us, and Jesus does not like to be stood up either. So make a date with him and keep it at all costs.

The question is often asked, “How much time should I spend with the Lord in the morning?” This is a matter to be decided between you and the Lord. If you have never had a consistent quiet time before, you may want to start with seven minutes (Robert D. Foster, *Seven Minutes with God*, NavPress) and let it grow naturally. You should aim eventually to spend not less than 15 minutes a day with God. Out of the 168 hours we all have in a week, 1 hour 45 minutes seems terribly small when you consider that you were created to have fellowship with God. Here are some additional guidelines:

- *Don’t try for a two-hour quiet time at first.* You’ll only get discouraged. You must grow in this relationship as you do in any other. So begin with a



consistent seven minutes and let it grow; it's better to be consistent with a short time than to meet for an hour every other week.

- *Don't watch the clock.* Clock-watching can ruin your quiet time faster than almost anything else. Decide what you can do in the Word and prayer during the time you have selected; then do it. Sometimes it will take more time than you have set aside, and sometimes less. But don't keep looking at your watch.
- *Emphasize quality, not quantity.* There is nothing super-spiritual about having a two-hour quiet time. It's what you do during your time — whether it's 15 minutes or two hours or something in between — that's important. Aim for a quality relationship with the Lord.

### CHOOSE A SPECIAL PLACE

The location — where we have our quiet times — is also important. The Bible indicates that Abraham had a regular place where he met with God (Gen. 19:27). Jesus had a custom of praying in the garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. “Jesus went out *as usual* to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him” (Luke 22:39). Your place ought to be a *secluded place*. This is a location where you can be alone, where it's quiet, and where you will not be disturbed or interrupted. In today's noisy Western world, this may take some ingenuity, but it is necessary. It ought to be a place . . .

- where you can pray aloud without disturbing others.
- where you have good lighting for reading (a desk, perhaps).
- where you are comfortable. (*Warning:* Do not have your quiet time in bed. That's *too* comfortable!)

Your place ought to be a *special place*. Wherever you decide to meet with the Lord, make it a special place for you and him. As the days go by, that place will come to mean a lot to you because of the wonderful times you have there with Jesus Christ.

Your place ought to be a *sacred place*. This is where you meet with the living God. Where *you* meet the Lord can be just as holy as the place where Abraham met him. You don't have to be in a church building. People have had quiet times in their

car parked in a quiet place, in an empty closet at home, in their backyard, and even in a baseball dugout. Each of these places became sacred to them.

## FOLLOW A SIMPLE PLAN

Someone has said, “If you aim at nothing, you are sure to hit it!” To have a meaningful quiet time, you will need a plan or some kind of general outline to follow. The main rule is this: Keep your plan simple. Don’t let it detract from your time with Christ. Foster’s *Seven Minutes with God* suggests a simple plan for beginners.

The following six-point plan is workable for a quiet time of any duration. You will need the following three items:

- *A Bible*—a contemporary translation (not a paraphrase) with good print, preferably without notes.
- *A notebook*—for writing down what the Lord shows you and for making a prayer list.
- *A hymnbook*—in case you sometimes want to sing in your praise time (see Col. 3:16).

The suggested plan may be remembered through the following words, all beginning with the same letter: *relax, request, read, reflect and remember, record, request.*

1. *Wait on God (relax).* Be still for a minute; don’t come running into God’s presence and start talking immediately. Follow God’s admonition: “Be still, and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10; see also Isa. 30:15; 40:31). Be quiet for a short while to put yourself into a reverent mood.

2. *Pray briefly (request).* This is not your prayer time, but a short opening prayer to ask God to cleanse your heart and guide you into the time together. Two good passages of Scripture to memorize are

- “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139:23–24; see 1 John 1:9).
- “Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law [the Word]” (Ps. 119:18; see John 16:13).

You must be in tune with the Author of the Book before you can understand the Book.

3. *Read a section of the Scripture (read)*. This is where your conversation with God begins. He speaks to you through his Word, and you speak with him in prayer. Read your Bible . . .

- *slowly*. Don't be in a hurry; don't try to read too large an amount; don't race through it.
- *repeatedly*. Read a passage over and over until you start to picture it in your mind. The reason some people don't get more out of their Bible reading is that they do not read the Scriptures repeatedly.
- *without stopping*. Don't stop in the middle of a sentence to go off on a tangent and do a doctrinal study. Just read that section for the pure joy of it, allowing God to speak to you. Remember that your goal here is not to gain information, but to feed on the Word and get to know Christ better.
- *aloud but quietly*. Reading Scripture aloud will improve your concentration if you have that problem. It will also help you understand what you are reading better because you will be both seeing and hearing the words. Read softly enough, however, that you don't disturb anyone.
- *systematically*. Read through one book at a time in orderly fashion. Do not use the "random dip" method—a passage here, a chapter there, what you like here, an interesting portion there. You will understand the Bible better if you read it as it was written—a book or letter at a time.
- *to get a sweep of a book*. On some occasions you may want to survey a whole book. In that case you will read it quickly to get a sweep of the total revelation. Then you need not read it slowly or repeatedly.

4. *Meditate and memorize (reflect and remember)*. To have the Scriptures speak to you meaningfully, you should meditate on what you are reading and memorize verses that particularly speak to you. Meditation is "seriously contemplating a thought over and over in your mind" (see chapter 1 for a brief discussion of this).

5. *Write down what God has shown you (record)*. When God speaks to you through his Word, record what you have discovered. Writing it down will enable

you both to remember what God revealed to you and to check up on your biblical discoveries. Recording what God has shown you is one way of *applying* what you see in the Scripture that pertains to your life (see the Devotional Method of Bible Study in chapter 1).

6. *Have your time of prayer (request).* After God has spoken to you through his Word, speak to him in prayer. This is your part of the conversation with the Lord. To help you remember the parts of prayer, think of the acrostic *P-R-A-Y*:

**P**—*Praise the Lord.* Begin your time of prayer by praising God for who he is and what he has done. The former is *adoration*, the latter *thanksgiving*. Adoration is real worship; it is giving God the recognition he alone deserves. So praise God for his greatness, power, majesty, strength, and other attributes. Examples in Scripture of pure praise may be found in Psalm 145 and Revelation 4–5. You can worship God in this way by reading the Psalms (particularly Pss. 146–50), reading great hymns of worship, or considering the names of God (see 1 Chron. 16:25–29; Pss. 50:23; 67:3; Heb. 13:5). David gives us a beautiful example of a prayer of adoration 1 Chronicles 29:10–13.

We also praise the Lord for what he has done for us, particularly in salvation and daily provision. This is developing the prayer of thanksgiving. During any quiet time, think of at least 20 things you can thank God for that day. (Read Psalm 100:4; Philippians 4:5; 1 Thessalonians 5:18.)

**R**—*Repent of your sins.* This is the prayer of *confession*. After seeing God in his holiness (see Isa. 6:5), we recognize our own sinfulness. Don't just tell God about the sins you have committed, but ask him to help you turn away from them. This is repentance. God already knows your sins; he just wants you to admit them and turn away from them. (Read Psalms 32; 51; Proverbs 28:9, 13; 1 John 1:9.)

**A**—*Ask for yourself and others.* These are the prayers of *petition* and *intercession*. Begin with your own personal requests (petition). Throughout the Bible God urges us to ask for things for ourselves in prayer. These may be physical needs such as food, clothing, and shelter; spiritual needs; or help in coping with the difficult problems of life. God loves us, wants to

bless us, and wants to give us what we need (see Matt. 7:7–9; Mark 11:22–24; John 14:13–14; Heb. 4:16). Not only are we to pray for our needs, but God is also pleased to give answers to our desires that are in his will (see Pss. 37:4; 84:11; 145:19; Phil. 4:6).

It is important to be specific in your praying, and one of the ways to do this effectively is to set up a prayer list. Just take a sheet of paper, rule off four columns, and fill them in. As you begin to fill page after page of answered prayer, your faith will grow greater and deeper.

Ask for others (intercession). The Bible calls on Christians to intercede for others—to pray one for another. So pray for your family, relatives, and friends; pray for your pastor, church workers, missionaries, and others involved in kingdom work; pray for your leaders, teachers, and employers or employees; pray for people to whom you are witnessing; pray for those whom you do not like or those who do not like you—and watch what happens! (Note these passages: 1 Samuel 12:23; Job 42:10; Romans 15:30; Ephesians 1:15–16.)

You might want to divide up the days of the week in your notebook and pray for different people on different days. Get a world map and pray “around the world” for missionaries according to their location.

**Y**—*Yield yourself to God's will.* Your prayer time should end with a time of personal recommitment to the Lord. Reaffirm the lordship of Jesus Christ in your life and pledge your submission and obedience for that day to him. (See Romans 12:12; 14:8–9.)

## SOME CLOSING THOUGHTS

- *Vary your plan.* From time to time change your methods. Don't fall into the trap of performing a method instead of getting to know Christ.
- *Spend a whole quiet time in thanksgiving.* Sometimes when prayer seems hard and heavy, spend your time just thanking God for who he is and what he has done. Psalm 145 is a good example of that: the psalmist asked nothing for himself. Or just sing some songs of praise to God.

- *Spend a whole quiet time in Scripture memory.* At times you may want to spend your whole quiet time memorizing Scripture and letting God speak to you in this special and challenging way.
- *Remember your main purpose: to get to know Christ.* Don't let your quiet time become a legalistic exercise in "doing your duty." Remember that you are there to meet Jesus Christ and get to know him.

## HOW TO DEAL WITH COMMON PROBLEMS IN THE QUIET TIME

As soon as you start a quiet time or even commit yourself to having one regularly, you will encounter problems and difficulties. Why? Because Satan will fight you tooth and nail to keep you from your daily meeting with the Lord. He hates nothing more than a Christian getting down to business with God, because he knows that such believers are dangerous to his kingdom of darkness. We want to deal with four of the most common problems:

- The problem of discipline
- The problem of dry spells
- The problem of concentration
- The problem of discouragement

### THE PROBLEM OF DISCIPLINE

Perhaps one of the greatest and most common problems you will face is the discipline of getting out of bed in the morning to have the quiet time. It is the "Battle of the Blankets," which faces you the moment you wake up, and it has to do with the question, "Am I going to get out of bed to have a quiet time?"

The devil will exaggerate to you about how tired you are, and when he and the flesh team up, it really takes work to get out of bed. Here are some tips on overcoming this problem.

1. *Go to bed on time.* In order to get up early, it helps to go to bed early (see Ps. 127:2). It's not good to burn the candle at both ends. Many Christians like to stay

up late, often watching TV, and therefore have a hard time getting up in the morning. Dawson Trotman knew this and had a set bedtime. Even if he had company in his home, he would excuse himself and go to bed, because his top priority was meeting with Christ early in the morning.

2. *Get up immediately upon waking.* The battle is usually won or lost in the first few seconds. If you wait to think about it, you've already lost. One famous Christian was asked, "Do you pray about getting up to have your quiet time?"

"No," he answered. "I just get up!"

When you wake up in the morning, it is *not* the time to pray about deciding to get up. If you do pray about it, do so the night before, and pray that you will have the willpower to get up.

3. *Be aware of quiet-time "robbers."* Be alert for things that will keep you from having a quiet time. Of these robbers, 90 percent will be found the night before, and of these, TV is the number one culprit. Another robber is the attitude that the quiet time is "nice but not necessary." You must make it a priority in order to thwart the thieves.

4. *Go to bed with thoughts of Scripture.* Go to sleep with the attitude of "see you in the morning, Lord." Ask God to wake you up with your first thoughts on him. The best way to do that is to go to sleep with a verse of Scripture on your mind. Jim Downing, in his book *Meditation: The Bible Tells You How* (NavPress), has some excellent suggestions on how that can be done to enable you to "meditate day and night" (see Josh. 1:8; Ps. 1:2).

## THE PROBLEM OF DRY SPELLS

Another common problem of those who have just started having quiet times is that they don't seem to get much out of them. It has become the "Battle of the Blahs." This difficulty may be overcome by realizing that you can never judge your quiet time by your emotions. Emotions may lie; feelings may come and go. So you shouldn't depend on your feelings. If you only have a quiet time when you "feel" like it, the devil will make sure you *never* feel like it.

Yes, some days will seem rather bland. On other days you will think that heaven has opened up and you're part of the innumerable angelic host, singing praises to God. So don't expect to have a great and glorious "experience" every morning. As

Billie Hanks says, “It’s hard to get spiritual goose bumps in the morning.”

Long periods of dryness in your quiet time, however, could be caused by one of the following problems:

1. *Disobedience.* This is unconfessed sin in your life. God won’t show you anything new until you do what he has already shown you. If God showed you something in his Word three months ago and you are still fighting it, he won’t show you the next step until you’ve dealt with the first one.

2. *Your physical condition.* Perhaps you haven’t been getting enough rest. If you come to your quiet time tired and half asleep, you won’t get much out of it. In fact, there is a direct relationship between the physical and the spiritual. Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is go to bed earlier each night.

3. *Trying to do too much in a hurry.* The great English Methodist preacher Samuel Chadwick once said, “Hurry is the death of prayer.” The same is true with your quiet time. Rushing through it with your eye on the clock will ruin your time with the Lord. Go for quality and content, not for mileage!

4. *Being in a rut.* When your quiet time becomes a ritual instead of a relationship, it’s dead. When it is a legalistic exercise instead of a genuine anticipation of meeting the living God, it’s in grave danger. This is when you start meeting a habit, not a Person. So be flexible; change your plans and routine, perhaps even your location. But have variety and keep it interesting—to you and to the Lord.

5. *Not sharing your insights with others.* It is a fact of nature that a pond that only receives water but has no outlet will stagnate. The same is true of Christians who are always receiving and never giving. Indeed, it is a divine paradox that when we give out, we get more in return. Start sharing your quiet-time insights with others and see what happens.

If after examining your life and procedures, you are still not getting anything out of your quiet time, tell God about it. Just be honest and admit it to him. Remember that it takes time to develop a relationship with God just as it does with the people around us. You must see him in all kinds of circumstances and get to know him well. Whatever you do, don’t give up. Listen to Paul’s advice instead: “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” (Gal. 6:9).



## THE PROBLEM OF CONCENTRATION

Once you have won the two previous battles, the devil will attack you by sending many distractions along the way. You will now have to fight the “Battle of the Brain,” for your mind will try to wander in all directions during the quiet time. You will be bothered by noises, lack of sleep, poor lighting, tensions with others, worry, and a million other things that you “just can’t forget.” Here are some suggestions for conquering this problem:

- Be sure you are thoroughly awake. Take a shower, splash cold water on your face, or do some exercises.
- Read and pray aloud.
- Walk while praying. You will not fall asleep standing up, so move around.
- Keep a notebook handy. When you are reminded of something else, write it down and come back to it after your quiet time. Then you won’t have to worry about forgetting it.

## THE PROBLEM OF DISCOURAGEMENT

By far your greatest problem will be your struggle to stick with your morning quiet time. Nothing is more difficult to maintain regularly, because the world, the flesh, and the devil will work together to keep you from it. When pressures mount and you find that you have too many things to do, what are you usually tempted to drop first? The most important thing — your quiet time.

Satan’s most vicious attacks will come in connection with being diligent in your quiet time. He knows that if he can keep you out of the Word, he has defeated you. If he can keep you from spending quality time with the Lord at the start of a day, then he’s won the battle, because he knows that he will have no opposition from you.

Dropping your quiet time is usually the first step in spiritual backsliding. Many lukewarm Christians have said, “It all started when I began neglecting my quiet time.” That’s why Christ stands at their door and knocks, asking for time together (see Rev. 3:20).

In ministering to others, you can never take another person farther spiritually than you have gone yourself. If you have no input from the Lord each day, you will have nothing to share with others and will not be able to help others grow.

How may this serious problem be overcome? Here are some practical suggestions:

1. *Consider making a covenant with God.* Make a serious pact with God to spend *some* time with him during the day. First, however, consider the seriousness of making such a vow. Review Solomon's warning: "When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it" (Eccl. 5:4–5). Covenant to have a quiet time, not because others are doing it and not as a duty, but because you know that Jesus Christ wants to meet with you.

2. *Put it into your weekly schedule.* In advance, block out a set time to meet each day with God in the same way you would plan for a doctor's appointment or a business lunch.

3. *Expect and be prepared for the devil's excuses and attacks.* To be forewarned is to be armed. Realize that the devil will try to derail you from your time with the Lord and will attack you on all fronts. So follow the Boy Scout motto and "Be Prepared!" Southern Baptist preacher Robert G. Lee used to say, "If you wake up in the morning and don't meet the devil face on, it just means you're headed in the same direction!"

4. *Leave your Bible open the night before at the passage you intend to read in the morning.* When you go to bed, open your Bible to the Scriptures you intend to read in your morning quiet time. Then when you wake up in the morning, the opened Bible will serve as a reminder to you to have your quiet time.

## CONCLUSION

What if you miss a day? Don't worry about it if it happens occasionally. Don't go on a guilt trip. "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). Don't get legalistic, because missing one day does not make it a flop. Don't give up. If you miss a meal, it does not mean that you should give up eating because you're inconsistent. You simply eat a little more at the next meal and go on from there. The same principle holds true for your quiet time.

Psychologists tell us that it usually takes us three weeks to get familiar with some new task or habit; it takes another three weeks before it *becomes* a habit.

The reason why many people are not successful in their quiet times is that they have never made it past that six-week barrier. For your quiet time to become a habit, you must have had one daily for at least six weeks.

William James had a famous formula for developing a habit (*Selected Papers on Philosophy*, E. P. Dutton, pp. 60–62).

1. *Make a strong resolution (vow)*. You must always start with a strong, decided initiative. If you begin halfheartedly, you'll never make it. Make a public declaration by telling others about your decision.

2. *Never allow an exception to occur until the new habit is securely rooted in your life*. A habit is like a ball of twine: every time you drop it, many strands unwind. So never allow the “just this once” to occur. The act of yielding weakens the will and strengthens the lack of self-control.

3. *Seize every opportunity and inclination to practice your new habit*. Whenever you get the slightest urge to practice your new habit, do it right then. Don't wait, but use every opportunity to reinforce your habit. It does not hurt to overdo a new habit when you are first starting.

To these suggestions I would add one more:

4. *Rely on the power of God*. When it is all said and done, you must realize that you are in a spiritual battle and you can only succeed by the power of the Holy Spirit. So pray that God will strengthen you and depend on him to help you develop this habit for his glory.

If you are convinced that this is what you need to do, would you pray the following?

## A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT

“Lord, I commit myself to spending a definite time with you every day, no matter what the cost. I am depending on your strength to help me be consistent.”

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(signed)