



Getting to Know God Through a Daily Quiet Time

Simple steps to developing
a life-changing relationship with God

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Of all the things that have helped me to know God better, having a daily quiet time is at the top of the list. First as a college student, and then in my early twenties, when I was working in accounting and then for a newspaper, I found that my intimacy with Christ was directly related to my daily quiet times. Now that I'm in my mid-fifties, having a daily quiet time continues to be a spiritual lifeline for me.

Throughout thirty years of working with college students and then, in recent years, with people in their twenties, I have taught thousands of young men and women—in large groups, small groups, and especially one-to-one—about how to cultivate their walk with God through having a daily quiet time.

I am excited now to share with you what I have learned about getting to know God through a few minutes of prayer and reading the Bible on a daily basis. For some, what I share here will be brand new. If that is you, I am praying that the few words you are about to read will bring you both joy and depth in your relationship with God. For others, this will all be review. If that's the case, I pray that the reminders you find here will add new life to your relationship with Christ.

Not for Me . . .

The first time I heard the phrase “quiet time,” I was a high school senior and a new follower of Christ. I recall overhearing some people, whom I thought were very committed to God, using the phrase, and since I wanted to be committed too, I thought I should try having a “quiet time.”

A few days later, I found a spot where I could sit and be quiet, but that is all I knew: to be quiet. I realize now that sometimes just sitting in silence can be a very useful experience, but back then I just sat and wondered when “it” would happen. I wasn't sure what “it” was, but I imagined that something “spiritual” would surely happen if I just sat quietly.

Well, nothing happened that day. And nothing happened the next day either; so I decided that quiet times were not for me. After all, I had tried sitting quietly, but doing so had not made me feel especially spiritual.

My First Real Quiet Time

Fast forward to my freshman year of college, when I met some believers in my residence hall who were involved in The Navigators. One of them, an upperclassman named Cary, asked me if I would like to have a quiet time with him the next day.

Hmmm, that's a little odd, I thought to myself. (I imagined myself just sitting quietly with another dude.) *Well, maybe that's the trick to the whole quiet time thing,* I reasoned. *You must have to be quiet with someone else—and then it works.*

“Okay,” I told Cary. “I'll have a quiet time with you.”

“Great!” Cary replied. “Oh, and Larry is going to join us too.”

Hmmm, I thought. *This will be interesting—three guys sitting quietly next to each other.* Because my friendship with Larry was marked by jokes and laughter, I imagined that it would be hard for us to sit quietly next to each other. *But,* I thought, *these guys seem legit, so I will definitely give it a shot.*

Cary added, “I'll come by your room at 6:30 tomorrow morning, and we can have our quiet time downstairs and then go to breakfast.” I was shocked that I was going to be doing anything at 6:30 in the morning, but I told Cary, “Okay, I'll be ready.”

The next morning—at 6:30—I answered the knock on my door, and as I walked out, Cary said, “Where’s your Bible?” A bit red-faced, I went back in and grabbed my big brown Bible. On the way downstairs, I scolded myself for not figuring out earlier that the Bible would obviously have something to do with a quiet time!

After we sat down in a corner of our cafeteria basement, Cary asked Larry to pray for our time. I remember being aware of God’s presence with us as Larry prayed a short prayer with everyday words.

Next, Cary suggested that we read a short psalm out loud, so we each took turns reading a few verses. We talked for a few minutes about what we had just read, and then we each picked one verse as our favorite verse from the psalm.

Cary shared his verse, Larry shared his, and then it was my turn. I was so excited: I actually had a verse that stood out to me that morning! I was aware of not having to borrow something I had heard from someone else. I had personally read something directly from the Bible that stood out to my own mind and heart!

Cary went on and reminded us that the Bible says we should “*be doers of the word, and not hearers only*” (James 1:22, ESV). So we all agreed that we should pick one specific thing we would do that day because of what we had just read.

Again, Cary shared what he would do, Larry shared, and then I did too. I was cool on the outside but bursting on the inside, as I actually had a specific thing I could do that day because of what I had read in the Bible.

We went on and each prayed briefly, thanking God for what He had talked to us about during our time together with Him. We also prayed for the day ahead. We spent no more than twenty-five minutes huddled together before we left those chairs and went back upstairs.

I was so excited that I practically floated to breakfast! I had just had a genuine, bona fide quiet time! I was conscious of having met with the living God. I was aware of not putting any energy into trying to be religious or spiritual or holy. I was just being me—and I, along with a couple other men, had actually just met with God!

That morning changed my life.

It’s About a Relationship

Ever since that morning, I have cultivated the habit of having a daily quiet time. I did not start having a bunch of mystical experiences, and I did not merely add a spiritual discipline to my life. No! What was really life-changing was that I started pursuing my relationship with God.

In John 17:3, Jesus prayed, “*Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*” The word *know* in that verse comes from the Greek word *ginosko*, which implies personal experience and relationship. Jesus said that eternal life is not just something that happens when we die or when we “say a prayer” or when we are baptized. No, Jesus spoke of His followers having an actual relationship with the Father and with Him!

Essential Ingredients in Developing a Relationship

In your life, you have probably discovered that there are some essential ingredients that are required in developing your relationships with other people. Here are some of the ingredients I have found:

Time. Any relationship takes time in order for it to grow and deepen. It would be completely unreasonable to expect that someone you just met would immediately be your

confidante and good friend in life. A relationship like that takes time to develop!

Effort. Without both parties putting effort into a relationship, it's not going anywhere! What if you repeatedly showed up for dinner with your friend, but that friend was always backing out because they had better things to do? After a while, you would realize that you were the only one putting effort into the relationship.

Communication. Similarly, a relationship can only go so far if you never talk with each other. In any growing relationship, there is a lot of mutual listening, talking, and understanding. You will also likely find some storytelling, some words of advice, and some encouragement.

Shared Experiences. As a relationship grows with a friend, a spouse, or a sibling, you will, over time, share some memorable experiences. You know that a relationship is deepening when you can say to each other, "Remember when . . ." It is likely that those memories will bring back the original emotions of joy, sorrow, fear, or laughter. Hearts are often bonded together through shared experiences of life.

Essential Ingredients in Developing Your Relationship with God

Let me remind you that the God of the Bible is not a "force" or a "concept" or a "philosophy." As we saw in John 17:3, God is a person whose intention is to be known: He desires a relationship, and—think about this—He desires a deepening relationship with you!

Too many Christians think that an initial "introduction" to God is sufficient to have a relationship with Him. Now, meeting God for the first time is the most important thing someone could ever do! But imagine if all you ever did in life was shake people's hands and learn their names. You could hardly say that you really had relationships with all those people.

It is no different with God. He wants a relationship with you—and the ingredients in developing your relationship with Him are not that different from the ingredients in successful relationships with people.

If you want to have a deepening relationship with God, it will involve time, effort, communication, and shared experiences with Him.

And that is where quiet times fit in!

Having a quiet time with God is not an end in itself. Having a quiet time is really just a tool to help you develop and deepen your relationship with God.

What Is a Quiet Time?

Let's get a bit more concrete. A quiet time is time that you set aside to focus on God. Typically, a quiet time will involve talking with God (praying) and listening to God (reading the Bible). A basic outline for a daily quiet time involves:

- **Prayer.** Talk with God about Him and about yourself.
- **Bible.** Read and reflect on a passage in the Bible and its implications for your life.
- **Prayer.** Talk again with God about what you have read and about the thoughts and intentions you have formed based on what He has said in His Word.

Having a Spiritual Sandwich

One of my friends, Mike, calls this "having a spiritual sandwich." With the "bread" being prayer and the "meat" being God's Word, he got a number of us into the habit of asking each other, "Have you had your spiritual sandwich yet today?"

Prayer

During your first round of prayer, use the ACTS guideline for prayer, but just focus on A and C at this point. (You'll focus on the T and S during your second round of prayer.)

A—Adoration. Focus on praising God, adoring Him for who He is and what He is like. Almost every morning, I spend time quoting and praying over Lamentations 3:21-24:

*Yet this I call to mind
and therefore I have hope:
Because of the LORD'S great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him."*

The Holy Spirit uses this passage to whisper to me that God loves me and is faithful to His Word and to me. He gently points my mind and heart to the truth that every day He has new compassion for me. He reminds me that He is the portion I get in life—so I choose to trust in Him.

C—Confession. Confess any sins that you have not already confessed to Him. Now, don't waste time or energy "re-confessing" sins from last week or last year (or last decade!)

First John 1:9 declares, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."* What good news for us followers of Jesus! When we confess our sins to God, He completely forgives us and purifies us. We don't have to wait to "feel forgiven," nor do we need to "punish ourselves" for our sin. No—Jesus was punished for our sin instead! After we confess our sins to God, we can breathe a sigh of relief as we receive His forgiveness and then move on!

Bible

During this time, do your "ABCs"! (Slightly juvenile, I know—but you'll remember it!)

A—Ask. Ask questions about what you are reading. Here are some of my favorite questions that I ask during my own quiet times:

- Who is saying this?
- To whom?
- Why?
- What was the writer's intent in saying this to his original audience?
- What were the original hearers likely thinking as they heard or read this?
- What is the main point in this passage?
- What can I apply to my life today from this passage?
- What does it seem that God is saying to me here?

B—Best Verse. As you read and ask questions, look for one verse in the passage on which you can "hang" the big lesson or truth you think God has been talking to you about. The "best verse" you choose might not be the verse that captures the theme of the passage you are reading; it is just the verse that sticks out most to you on that day. There are times when I have shared a quiet time with two or three other men, and we have all chosen a different "best verse."

As I go through my day, I will sometimes return to that "best verse," perhaps rereading it or just taking a few seconds to talk with God about it. Often, the Holy Spirit will bring it to mind in the middle of an unexpected situation. It's in that situation that I especially see the relevance of the verse to my life.

C—Commit. Choose one area of your life—or some part of your upcoming day—that

you can commit to God. It might be a sales call or a presentation or a test or a meeting with a particular person. What is it about your “best verse” that resonates with your life? Commit that to God.

Sometimes what we commit to God is an attitude of the heart: “Today, Lord, I trust you with this.” Sometimes it is a specific action we should take: “Yes, Lord, I will go to her and ask her forgiveness.”

Prayer

Now, use the ACTS guideline to pray again, this time focusing on the T and S.

T—Thanksgiving. Thank God for what He spoke to you. Thank Him for your “best verse” and for the truth or lesson that He talked to you about. This is also a good time to thank Him for other things, such as your job, your family, your coworkers, your home or apartment—even your struggles and hardships—and for how God wants to use those in your life.

S—Supplication. To “supplicate” is to ask, so this is time you can use to ask God for anything you need. You might ask Him for His help with your latest project or for patience with your coworker or for eyes to see your day the way He sees it. I will often ask God for wisdom in dealing with the situations and challenges I am facing, for help in resisting temptation, and for patience with others.

Planning Well for Your Daily Quiet Time

Over years of helping men and women establish the habit of developing their relationship with God, I have found that planning well for a quiet time helps almost everyone. Here are some things that can help you plan well:

Time

Find a good time of day to have your quiet time. Mark 1:35 says, “*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.*” As a student, I began the habit of spending time with God every morning. For a while, I thought, *Surely the morning is the most “spiritual time” to have a quiet time.* Wrong! I think the principle is that Jesus, as busy as He was, did indeed carve out some time to be with His Father.

Beyond that, I think it wise to give some of your best time to meeting with God.

As a “morning person,” my best time is in the morning. My son Tim is a “night person.” When I am barely functioning at the end of the day, Tim is revving up. When he visits us these days, I will be crawling up the stairs to bed, only to see Tim sitting in his room, wide awake, having his “spiritual sandwich”! (It’s pretty much a guarantee that if I tried to meet with God after 10:00 p.m., I would have a very quiet time—because I would quickly fall asleep!)

The best time of your day is likely the time in which you can be most present with Him—the time you can be focused, free of distractions, and totally attentive to Him.

Often, it is also helpful to choose a consistent time of day to meet with God. Whether it’s morning, evening, right before lunch, or right after you get home from work, having a consistent daily time with God will help you make a daily quiet time a healthy habit.

Place

This might not be as important for everyone as it is for me, but it does help me to have a regular place for my quiet time. In the verse we just looked at, we read that Jesus went to “*a solitary place*” to talk with His Father.

In my home, I most often sit in the large overstuffed chair in our family room. I like that chair because it is right by our fireplace and a large picture window. Because I know I will sit there to meet with God in the morning, I will often place my Bible (which is on my iPhone), my journal, and a pen on the arm of the chair before I go to bed. (That prevents me from spending five minutes looking for those items in the morning!)

For you, it might be at your desk, on the train to work, in your car, or in a coffee shop. You might not be as obsessive as I am in all this, but I think it will help you to have it figured out beforehand so you can jump right in and not waste time deciding where to meet with God.

Plan

Early on, I discovered that if I did not know what I was going to read in God’s Word for my quiet time, I could spend ten or more minutes trying to decide what to read. (Add that to five minutes of looking for my Bible and deciding where to sit and, well . . . you get the idea of how futile that scenario is!)

So now I usually decide in advance what in the Bible I am going to read. This month I am reading through 1 Peter in my quiet times. Today I read and reflected on the last few verses of chapter 2. Guess what I am reading tomorrow? That’s right—the first few paragraphs of chapter 3. I don’t have to debate it in my mind or hunt around for some other passage. It’s already decided. So when I sit down, I just start where I left off yesterday.

It also helps me to decide if my time in God’s Word will be for depth or breadth. If I am reading for depth, I will usually read just a few paragraphs a day. Sometimes I will even read the same few paragraphs several days in a row. I try not to move on to the next set of paragraphs until I sense that I have all that God wants to give me from that passage.

When I read for breadth, it is likely that I will read three or more chapters a day, usually as part of one of the many Bible reading plans that are now available online.

Where Should I Start?

If the idea of having a daily quiet time is new for you, here are a few suggestions:

- Spend your first quiet time reading Psalm 1.
- After that, pick one of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John) for your daily quiet time. Decide to read a chapter a day—or a story a day. If you like action, start with the gospel of Mark. If you like a lot of deep truths, start with John. If you like a lot of little details here and there, read Luke or Matthew.
- Next, read through Acts, which is the story of Christ’s followers after He died, was resurrected, and ascended to heaven.
- At some point, especially if you have never done it, pick a Bible reading plan and read through the Bible. My friend Tom does this several times a year. When I graduated from college and started working as an office manager, I read through the Bible several times. I still like to read through the Bible every few years. It always helps me, mostly because seeing the big picture of the whole story gives me a context for the individual books, chapters, and paragraphs I read when I am going for depth.

What Is the Best Length of Time for a Quiet Time?

This is actually a trick question! There is no “correct” length of time for a quiet time. My initial quiet times, when I was a student, would last about fifteen minutes. Gradually they built up to about thirty minutes, which was broken down into an initial three or four minutes in prayer, about twenty minutes reading and reflecting, and then another five or six minutes praying again.

Then, when I worked in one of my management positions (sometimes for sixty hours a week) a few years after college, my quiet times shortened to about fifteen minutes again. When we had three young sons at home, my wife Nancy and I would take turns caring for our sons so that each of us could have a quiet time. If we each got thirty minutes in those days, it was a good day!

Some of my twentysomething friends today have long commutes, so their quiet times often involve a few minutes of prayer before they head out the door, and then they listen to an audio Bible as they drive or take the train into the city. Sometimes the first thing they do at work is write in their journal and pray through their day.

What If My Quiet Times Are Boring?

I have had several friends ask me about this. And I have had some boring quiet times myself! The reality is that most relationships, even if they start out full of excitement, newness, and maybe even passion, will settle down into a sort of “everydayness”—a relationship marked more by comfortable familiarity than by drama and thrill.

It is the same in our relationship with God. What started as a time of great excitement and lots of new lessons might now feel slightly more predictable. Not that God is ever “predictable” or “tame,” but as we get to know Him, we can begin to anticipate what His Word says and teaches us. We grow more comfortable in knowing Him and in being known by Him.

In Psalm 16:11, the psalmist wrote, *“In your presence there is fullness of joy”* (ESV). Sometimes just being with someone is enough. Sometimes you don’t need to say very much because there is joy in just being together. When I am feeling a little bored in my quiet time, I remind myself of this verse and of the truth that just being with God is wonderful, even if He has nothing brand new to tell me.

If you have already established the habit of having a daily quiet time, you know that you can benefit from “mixing it up” a bit! Sometimes I just review verses I have memorized for my quiet time. Other times I simply listen to worship music. Sometimes I just walk and pray. No matter what I actually do on a given day, I want to fully enter into God’s presence and experience His nearness. Remember: The main idea is to focus on your relationship with Him!

What If I Am Just Too Busy to Have a Daily Quiet Time?

Busyness happens! We all have busy days and busy seasons of life. All of us have had days that started off too late—or too early—when we were barely able to whisper a prayer to God, let alone have a quiet time with Him. And then there are those days when, for some reason, the opportunity just escapes us, and we find that we only have time for five minutes alone with God.

When this happens, don’t beat yourself up over it. And don’t decide that because you missed a day, you might as well never try again.

On most days, we typically find time for the things that are important to us. The chances are that, with a little bit of desire and effort, you will usually be able to find time for your daily quiet time.

Quiet Times in Transitions

As you know, I learned how to have a quiet time as a student. It was an adjustment for me to continue that discipline once I started working full-time! Since then, I have both experienced and observed that major life transitions can interrupt even our healthiest disciplines—including having daily quiet times.

I have talked with many recent college graduates who have shared with me how challenging it has been to continue the habit of meeting with God every day. I remember one newly graduated friend who told me that he was really struggling in this area. As we talked about it, we discovered that he had grown used to having a sixty- to ninety-minute daily quiet time as a “busy” college student. Drilling down a bit more, it was clear that his idea of a daily time with God included getting a cup of coffee, relaxing a bit, answering some e-mails, checking sports scores, and having a “spiritual sandwich” in there somewhere!

His problem was that he was trying to mimic what he did in college. As he focused on just being with God and not doing all the “extras,” he found that he could genuinely meet with God for about twenty minutes every day. As he experimented with different times of day and different quiet time methods, he gradually eased into a new pattern of meeting with God that fit his new season of life.

Whether your transition involves being new to the workforce, being newly married, having a baby, or living in a new city, give yourself room to experiment with the best time, place, and manner for you to have your quiet time. Through it all, don’t forget that your main goal is simply to be with God!

Just a Tool!

Whether you call having a quiet time a “daily devotional,” a “morning watch,” or “time with God,” this discipline is just a tool that helps you intentionally spend time with God so that you can deepen your relationship with Him.

It’s the same with the other practical helps I have shared, such as praying through ACTS, having a “spiritual sandwich,” and working through the “ABCs”—all of them are just tools! They are not intended to be things you must do every day for legalistic reasons. They can be very useful in your walk with Christ, but if doing any of these becomes your focus instead of focusing on Christ—well, that misses the point of it all!

Thirty-Day Challenge

Whether you are a busy professional, a homemaker, a student, or a pastor, I have a challenge for you. Share this booklet and the ideas in it with a few of your friends. Then determine to each have a quiet time every day for thirty days in a row. (That’s plenty of time to establish a habit!) If one of you misses a day, agree that you will all start over until each of you—together—reaches thirty days in a row. Once you achieve this goal, pick a way to celebrate with one another—maybe a dinner out, a fun night, a hike, or a time when you can share with each other what you have been experiencing in your relationship with God.

Your Next Steps

Well, there you go, my friend. My purpose in this booklet has been to give you both a biblical foundation for having a daily quiet time and some practical ideas and helps. Whether the idea of having a daily quiet time is brand new for you or a spiritual discipline you dabble in or practice regularly, I pray that you have found some help in taking your next steps in developing your relationship with God—the most important relationship in your life!