

How to have a Quiet Time

So what's a quiet time? Well, it says in Scripture that Jesus would often withdraw to a quiet place in order to pray. "Very early in the morning," says Mark 1:35, "while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed." (While admittedly quiet time might sound a little juvenile, as you read this verse, what else would you call it? Solitary time? That would sound like a prison sentence, so we'll stick with quiet time.) During this daily quiet time, Jesus habitually removed himself from the busyness of life and spent time in intimate communion with his Father.

If Jesus needed this time apart with the Father, it would seem logical to assume we need it just as much, if not more so. Let's define quiet time as "a point during each day when we remove ourselves from the busyness of schoolwork, dorm life, and the ever-increasing demands of Facebook to spend time praying, reading God's Word, and quietly listening to what God has to say to us."

Here are 3 guides to help you get started: a Bible study guide, a prayer guide and a quiet time guide:

A BIBLE STUDY GUIDE:

When one is studying a passage of Scripture, a basic but helpful pattern to follow is the threefold process of observation, interpretation, and application.

Observation

This is pretty straightforward: observe what the passage is saying and describing. First, read through a portion of Scripture and then go back and make some initial observations about it: Who are the characters? What's going on? Where is this taking place? Revisit the part of your brain that houses all of that literary criticism stuff your English teacher went on and on about while you doodled with your new four-color ballpoint pen. As a quick refresher, remember to ask yourself some basic who-what-when-where observational questions:

- WHO is speaking? Who is this about? Who are the main characters?
- WHAT is the subject or event covered in the chapter? What do you learn about the people, event, or teaching?
- WHEN do/will the events occur or did/will something happen to someone?
- WHERE did or will this happen? Where was it said?
- WHY is something being said or mentioned? Why would/will this happen? Why at that time and/or to this person/people?
- HOW will it happen? How is it to be done? How is it illustrated?

Interpretation

Often observation slides right into interpretation. But strictly speaking, observation refers to trying to understand what's being said, while interpretation refers to understanding the overall meaning.

From what you've learned in your observation of the text, you are trying to discern a primary meaning of the passage—what the biblical author was seeking to communicate and what God was seeking to communicate through that biblical author. A particularly fruitful way to pull these things out of the passage is to ask questions such as "What sinful, broken, or fallen condition is being addressed or corrected by the passage?" "What is the deeper sin beneath the behavior?" and "What prompted the author to write this passage?" Keeping these questions in mind can help you uncover the primary meaning of the text.

Application

So, how does the passage apply to you and to others? And what are some actions you need to take in order to apply God's Word directly to your life? Let me suggest something here. I think our reflections tend to skip along the surface level of behavior or habits that need changing. This is okay, but often a more significant application resides at the level of our relating to God—our experiencing his grace or trusting in his character or promises. In light of this, I like to pray through certain questions that help me to apply what I've been reading to my walk with God.

- God, what are you trying to say to me through this passage?
- In what ways am I looking to find life in things besides you, Lord?
- In what ways am I seeking to earn your favor rather than live by grace?
- What do my actions suggest that I'm wrongly believing about your character, our relationship, and what you've said in your Word?
- In what ways do we need to be more intimate in our relationship? In what way is Jesus the answer to my problem?

A GUIDE FOR PRAYER

A helpful model for me as I respond to God in prayer is the ACTS model: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication.

- Adoration: Telling God how great he is, why he's great (merciful, kind, and so on), and how much we love him for it.
- Confession: Acknowledging to God any known sin that is displeasing to him so that we can come to him unhindered, completely surrendered and cleansed.
- Thanksgiving: Thanking God for his grace and forgiveness in our lives, and thanking him for all the things he's done for us and given to us.
- Supplication: Asking God for things that we want.

Let me give you some reassurance about this last piece of the puzzle: supplication. Once your heart and mind are in alignment with God, it's okay to go ahead and ask him for stuff—personal stuff, physical stuff, an A on your statistics paper, whatever. He wants you to come to him with everything. There's nothing too big, nothing too small, so ask away, no matter how ridiculous you think it sounds. And the closer you grow to God through praying and reading Scripture, the better you will get at discerning his will for you, at knowing what he wants you to pray for. This is prayer that moves mountains.

Using this pattern of ACTS has helped me when I've not had the desire to pray. I've had to jump-start with ACTS when I've been confused, weary, sad, depressed, and outright weak. I just say to myself, Okay, adoration, right. Then I begin to pray: "God, you are greater than I am." On many an occasion, ACTS has guided me into an intimate time with the Lord when an intimate time with the Lord seemed impossible.

A GUIDE FOR QUIET TIMES

The template for our quiet times, then, is as simple as combining our templates for studying the Scripture and our ACTS template for prayer. But with one little nuance: sandwiching your Scripture reading between the prayer so that you're praying before and after. It looks like this:

1. Talk to God

- Adoration: "Lord, I praise you for ... (some quality of attribute of God)."
- Confession: "Lord, forgive me for ... (for some sin or shortcoming)."

2. Listen to God – reading the word

- Observation - What does it say?
- Interpretation - What does it mean?
- Application - What does it mean for me?

3. Talk to God

- Thanksgiving: "Lord, I thank you for ... (some specific blessing)."
- Supplication: "Lord, I ask you for ... (requests for yourself and others)."

GO FOR IT!

So go for it...go ahead and get started. Choose a regular time...maybe 20 minutes or 30 minutes daily where you will meet with Jesus one on one. Find a quiet place, turn off distractions (computer, cell phone), and enjoy connect with the Lord! Don't be afraid to mix in a prayer walk, sing worship songs with your I-pod, etc. from time to time.