

Quiet Time Tools

The other day I noticed several loose doorknobs in our house. I am pretty handy and I do have several screwdrivers and a small can of oil. In no time the doorknobs were fixed. In the same way, a few tools can keep our quiet time in good working order. We don't need to be very "**spiritually handy**" or have a large library of biblical and theological wisdom. If the doors to our quiet times aren't swinging open smoothly or there seems to be a catch in the latch, we can bring out a few spiritual tools to tighten things up and smooth out the catches.

Fasting, journaling and Christian literature are tools that I have found especially helpful. Used wisely, these can bring depth, variety and inspiration into our lives. Fasting puts us in touch with our spiritual and physical appetites; keeping a journal sharpens our spiritual senses; reading Christian literature puts us in touch with like-minded companions who are experienced and articulate about meeting with God.

Fasting

Fasting is a spiritual discipline that is broader than our quiet times. We may set aside half an hour for a quiet time, but a fast goes through a day or more. It is a helpful tool, however, because as a spiritual discipline, fasting enhances our spiritual sensitivity. It is partially or completely abstaining from food for the purpose of seeking God. Fasting plays a significant role in the Scriptures. It was used as an emergency measure when things looked desperate. David fasted when he sought God for the life of his dying child ([2 Samuel 12:16–23](#)).

2 Samuel 12:15-23 (NASB)

¹⁵ So Nathan went to his house. Then the LORD struck the child that Uriah's widow bore to David, so that he was *very* sick.

¹⁶ David therefore inquired of God for the child; and David fasted and went and lay all night on the ground.

¹⁷ The elders of his household stood beside him in order to raise him up from the ground, but he was unwilling and would not eat food with them.

¹⁸ Then it happened on the seventh day that the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they said, "Behold, while the child was *still* alive, we spoke to him and he did not listen to our voice. How then can we tell him that the child is dead, since he might do *himself* harm!"

¹⁹ But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David perceived that the child was dead; so David said to his servants, "Is the child dead?" And they said, "He is dead."

²⁰ So David arose from the ground, washed, anointed *himself*, and changed his clothes; and he came into the house of the LORD and

worshipped. Then he came to his own house, and when he requested, they set food before him and he ate.

²¹ Then his servants said to him, “What is this thing that you have done? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept; but when the child died, you arose and ate food.”

²² He said, “While the child was *still* alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, ‘Who knows, the LORD may be gracious to me, that the child may live.’

²³ “But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me.”

When Judah was invaded by an overwhelming army, King Jehoshaphat called a national fast ([2 Chronicles 20:3](#)).

[2 Chronicles 20:3 \(NASB\)](#)

³ “Jehoshaphat was afraid and turned his attention to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.”

And when the Jews of Persia were to be massacred, Mordecai and Esther called a fast to seek God for deliverance ([Esther 4:16](#)).

[Esther 4:16 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁶ “Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish.”

Sometimes fasting expressed repentance, as when the exiled Jewish nation returned to the Promised Land under Ezra and Nehemiah ([Nehemiah 9:1](#)). As Ezra read the Law, the exiles discovered how far they had departed from the ways of God. Fasting was their repentant response.

[Nehemiah 9:1 \(NASB\)](#)

¹ “Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the sons of Israel assembled with fasting, in sackcloth and with dirt upon them.”

Fasting was also used as a means of dedication and preparation. Jesus fasted for forty days in the wilderness prior to the beginning of his ministry ([Matthew 4:2](#)).

[Matthew 4:2 \(NASB\)](#)

² “And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry.”

Paul and Barnabas fasted prior to their missionary journeys ([Acts 13:1-3](#)).

[Acts 13:1-3 \(NASB\)](#)

¹ “Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was *there*, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

²“While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

³Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.”

Fasting is one of the last spiritual disciplines I explored. I like to eat, and so I avoided it. But while meditating on Jesus’ teaching about fasting in the Sermon on the Mount ([Matthew 6:16–18](#)), I realized that it *was* for me.

Matthew 6:16-18 (NASB)

¹⁶“Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

¹⁷But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face

¹⁸so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you.”

As I began to fast, I saw that food is promoted endlessly. “Eat, eat, eat” is the insistent, incessant message. It tests my resolve to place God above my appetites each time I fast. Like no other discipline, fasting involves all of me, body and soul, in the pursuit of God. When my body is hungry, my appetite working overtime and my will wavering, I am reminded that I have chosen God above all other desires. Hunger actually becomes my friend. Every hunger pang I feel reminds me to lift my requests to God. Each food commercial is an opportunity to say no to food and yes to God.

I fast periodically, usually during times of special need. A couple of times I fasted when I needed God’s direction in my ministry and career. Once I fasted in regard to a fundraising deficit. There are times when I feel out of touch with God, ministry and family. Fasting in these situations lifts my spirit and strengthens my faith. For the past several years I have chosen to fast for several different reasons. Fasting at this time helps me enter into the pain of Christ’s work on the cross.

How do you actually go about fasting? On a twenty-four hour fast I eat nothing after the evening meal until the time of the evening meal on the following day. Actually that is only missing breakfast and lunch. A thirty-six hour fast means I eat nothing after the evening meal and skip all meals the following day. It’s also possible to do a selective fast, abstaining from certain types of food. You might skip meat for a period of time, or coffee or soft drinks. I find this type of fast harder than total abstinence.

In the world we are surrounded by people who are saying, “Have some more, have some more, have some more.” However, when we fast we are saying, “No, thank you. I’m saving room in my life for Someone else.”

Journaling

Reading and writing have always played an important role in the Christian faith. From Moses' account of the Exodus, to the disciples' record of Jesus ministry, to the apostle John's vision of the new heaven and earth, God's people have been directed by the Spirit to write down their experiences with him. Although we aren't writing inspired Scripture when we journal, we do enter into an experience of God through the written word.

When we journal, we write down what we think, feel and learn as we meet with God. We describe on paper what is going on inside our hearts. We can also record our prayers and our questions for God. This enhances our spiritual discernment of God's presence and work in our lives.

You may find it hard to express thoughts on paper initially. I have found that writing in a journal functions as a siphon. As I write down a word or two, new words and insights come. Suddenly doors open, the logjam breaks and the words begin to flow.

Writing in a journal helps me to pray. Sometimes I have a sense of communication with God just by going over my concerns mentally, saying my prayers in my heart. But sometimes I seem to be talking only to myself. My remedy for that is to write out my prayers. Once I write down what I want to say to God, I usually sense that a real dialogue is taking place.

Develop your own style of journaling. When I write out my prayers, I seldom use complete sentences. A word or a phrase on the page is usually enough to bring before the Lord. I also write down my questions for God. "God, what do you want me to do about _____?" Or, "God, what are you going to do about _____?"

Writing down general thoughts and ideas that come to mind during my quiet time has proven useful. This can stimulate insights that answer questions from previous days. However, these insights often raise other questions. So I write them out in the form of prayer.

One day I was reading through several months' worth of journal entries. It became clear that I was reading a conversation, a dialogue between two people. Someone was asking questions, and someone else was answering! It dawned on me that I couldn't claim credit for my brilliant insights. God had been answering my questions all along.

Try recording your reflections at the end of your quiet time. You will deepen your spiritual insights as you reflect back on your interaction with God. We "re-cognize"—think again—about our time with him. This will reward us with new insights into the ways that God is working within us.

Practical Details

Keeping a journal notebook to review in later years can be helpful because it provides a written record of your pilgrimage with God. On the other hand, throwing away your notes at the end of your quiet time can be very freeing. Your interaction with God is the important thing, not the writing itself. Once you have expressed yourself to God on paper, your purpose has been served.

If you do keep your journal sheets, be sure to include the date and place of each entry. We have done a fair amount of moving, and it is interesting to look back on thoughts recorded in Romania, Honduras, Brazil, Zimbabwe, Philippines, or Indonesia.

Don't be legalistic about keeping a journal. If you want to keep it daily, that's great. But writing in it a couple of times a week or a couple of times a month is great too. Both offer opportunities to reflect and record the work of God in your heart.

Christian Literature

Christians throughout the ages have written about their thoughts and experiences with God. Their writings can enrich our quiet times. Some books were written to be used as devotionals—aids to worship. The most famous is probably *The Imitation of Christ*. It was written just before the Reformation by **Thomas à Kempis**. Protestants as well as Catholics have used it ever since. For each day there is a bite-sized thought filled with practical spiritual wisdom. Passing references to purgatory and a fourth section of meditations on the Lord's Supper (the Mass) have been omitted from most Protestant versions. The fact that Puritans, Pietists and Protestants of every generation have found this book worth "sanitizing" is a testimony to its continuing value.

A popular devotional guide of the twentieth century is *My Utmost for His Highest* by **Oswald Chambers**. I know people who work through it and then begin all over again. And there are any number of devotional magazines. I especially like the material produced by Scripture Union. It seeks to be contemporary, biblical and practical.

The danger of using a devotional guide is treating it like spiritual fast food. We read the bite-sized thought, glance at the Scripture reference and then we are off to take on the day. What happened to meeting with God?

The benefit of using a guide is that we share another Christian's insight and experience with God. This can enhance our own personal spiritual encounter with God.

Some books teach us how to cultivate a devotional life. The earliest devotional manual ever written was the *Conferences of Cassian*. In the fifth century **Cassian** traveled around the Egyptian desert and Palestine interviewing monks. He put together a record of those conversations and in so doing created a model for all spiritual instruction manuals to follow.

Since **Cassian**, thousands of instructional manuals have been written. Twentieth-century authors whose instructional books have helped me tap into the wisdom of early spiritual guides are **A. W. Tozer, Richard Foster, Henri Nouwen, Joyce Huggett** and **Eugene Peterson**. Reading these and other instructional works can enhance a quiet time, not just because they give information on how to have a quiet time but also because they impart a spirit of devotion. In reading about how to pray, we are drawn to God in a way that inspires and encourages prayer.

Some books not written as devotionals can be aids to worship. Right now I am reading a book by a contemporary theologian that many would find dry and boring. It's not to me. I feel the pull of God as I read it. In the morning, with a cup of coffee and my journal, I read a couple of pages. As I read, I am inspired to think about God, to appreciate God and to grow in my thought life about God. Every few sentences I stop to savor a thought in the freshness of the morning. My own thoughts of God are stretched as I appreciate a brother in Christ who loves God.

Don't pass up classic works that have been studied through the ages: *The Confessions of St. Augustine, The Institutes of the Christian Religion* by **John Calvin, The Works of Luther, The Journals of Wesley and Religious Affections by **Jonathan Edwards**, to mention a few. These people and others like them had great thoughts about great experiences with God. When we read them, we are taken deeper into the knowledge of God than we could ever go on our own. Standing on their shoulders gives us a better glimpse of heaven than we get standing on our own two feet.**

Guided Quiet Time

***The Revelation of Jesus Christ* ([Revelation 1:1-3](#))**

Frankly, I'm surprised at the widespread positive attitude toward the Bible. A large number of people still believe that the Bible is more than a merely human book. Even those who are not regular churchgoers or diligent Bible students believe that there is something special about it.

Andrew, a friend in Malaysia, would gather a crowd by pointing to a piece of cloth he dropped on the sidewalk and shouting, "It's alive!" When people came running to see what he was pointing to, he would lift up the cloth to reveal a Bible. Taking up the Bible and waving it in the air above his head, he would begin to preach to his listeners about the virtues of the Bible.

The Bible is alive. Something happens when you read it. Something reaches up from the page to address the mind and the heart. Something (Someone) challenges, provokes, stimulates and entices. This effect was experienced by the two disciples on the road to Emmaus after they met the Lord: "**Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?**" ([Luke 24:32](#)).

Approach

In [Revelation 1:3](#), a blessing is offered to those who read, hear and take to heart the **book of Revelation**. Read it silently and then out loud. Determine to think about it during your day. Read it out loud now and write a prayer asking the Lord to allow you to take it to heart.

Study

1. Read [Revelation 1:1–3](#). What various means of communication are used in the verses?
2. Who are the people involved in sending and receiving the revelation?
3. What assurance are we given that the messages about the future are trustworthy?
4. The revelation is about “what must soon take place.” There are different interpretations of this. Some think it refers to the first century, while others think it refers to what will happen throughout the unfolding history of the church. Still others hold that it refers to what will happen at the end of time, and a few include all of the preceding. What do you think?

Reflect

1. The word *revelation* means “**uncovering.**” The **book of Revelation** is about the revealing of Jesus Christ. Imagine that there is a veil on your heart. Ask the Lord to remove it so that you may see his presence in your life. Sit for a while and allow him to work. Write down your impressions and emotions.

2. The time frame of Revelation is the impending future. Jesus wants us to know what is going to happen. How would your behavior be affected if you knew what Jesus was going to do in your life within the next week? Consider your work, your family, your friends, your time and your money.

Pray

Ask the Lord to come back soon.

Ask the Lord to give a sense of anticipation for his return.

Pray for several fellow believers, that they would grow in a love for God’s Word.