

What Is a Quiet Time?

A quiet time is a meeting with God. The presence of God is the birthright of every believer. This is important to fix in your mind. Otherwise quiet time can become merely a set of routines and techniques for Bible study and prayer. As we cultivate a quiet time, we take seriously the pervasive theme of Christianity, that the presence of God is our birthright. The angel named Jesus Immanuel, which means **“God with us.”** Jesus’ last words recorded by Matthew are **“Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”** ([Matthew 28:20 \(NASB\)](#)).

God’s abiding presence is a special blessing offered to Israelite leaders in the Old Testament. Abraham, Joshua, Samuel, David and Jeremiah were among those who knew and expected the presence of God. Moses’ expectation of the presence of God is especially inspiring to me. After his encounter at the burning bush, the presence of God became the norm of his life, and he was not willing to live without it.

After the golden calf incident Moses lamented the burden of leadership and asked for guidance. The Lord responded, **“My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”** To this Moses replied:

[Exodus 33:14-16 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁴“And He said, “My presence shall go *with you*, and I will give you rest.”

¹⁵ Then he said to Him, “If Your presence does not go *with us*, do not lead us up from here.”

¹⁶ “For how then can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the *other* people who are upon the face of the earth?”

As he led the nation, Moses set up a tent called the **“tent of meeting”** on the outskirts of the Israelite camp. There people could **“inquire of the Lord.”** In that tent Moses met with God **“face to face.”** When we have a quiet time, we are setting up a tent of meeting, a place outside the busy routines of our lives where we can be with God.

The Pursuit of God

Meeting with God is never easy. The author of Hebrews writes that **“And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him”** ([Hebrews 11:6 \(NASB\)](#)). Through the prophet Jeremiah, God says to Judah, **“You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart”** ([Jeremiah 29:13 \(NASB\)](#)). We must reach out for God even as we sit down to be with him.

A. W. Tozer observed that “contemporary Christians have been caught in the spurious logic that those who have found Him need no longer seek him.” Nothing could be farther from the truth. The paradox of the Christian faith is that those who know Him are those who seek Him. Tozer writes, “Come near to the holy men and women of the past and you will soon feel the heat of their desire after God. They mourned for Him, they prayed and wrestled and sought for Him day and night, in season and out, and when they found Him, the finding was all the sweeter for the long seeking.”

The psalms provide interior glimpses of those who knew and pursued God. David writes, “**One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the LORD And to meditate in His temple**” ([Psalm 27:4 \(NASB\)](#)). In another psalm he says, “**My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; When shall I come and appear before God?**” ([Psalm 42:2 \(NASB\)](#)). In [Psalm 84](#) we read, “**My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.**” ([Psalm 84:2 \(NASB\)](#)). These psalms stir up our hearts to pursue God as well as record the psalmist’s pursuit of him.

The language of Christian spirituality is filled with words like **desire, thirst, hunger, pinning, seeking, restlessness and yearning**. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) wrote, “We taste of Thee, O Thou Living Bread, And long to feast upon Thee still; We drink of Thee, the Fountainhead and Thirst our souls from Thee to fill.” Jonathan Edwards, the leader of the first Great Awakening in the American colonies in the eighteenth century, wrote, “Spiritual good is of a satisfying nature And the more a man experiences this ... satisfying sweetness, the more earnestly will he hunger and thirst for more.”

During a quiet time we can experience that satisfying sweetness to which Edwards and St. Bernard refer. We create the time and space for God’s Spirit to break through. Occasionally something rises up—a yearning toward God. I never know exactly why it happens, but there is a sense of being drawn. Like embers that become a crackling fire when they are fanned, a yearning for God fills my heart and cries out, “**Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”**” ([Galatians 4:6 \(NASB\)](#)). I know cognitively *and* affectively that I belong to God. Affection and gratitude brim over in my heart. When that happens, I usually close my Bible, put away my prayer lists and just sit in worship.

It is always possible to know God better than we do. Paul prays for the Ephesian church that God “**that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.**” ([Ephesians 1:17 \(NASB\)](#)). We need to press on. Having a quiet time is an essential way to do that.

The Practice of Spiritual Disciplines

Even as I encounter God and pursue him, knowledge of him can elude me. I become frustrated with the disparity between my knowledge, actions and thought patterns.

Doctrinal formulations alone do not keep me in healthy fellowship with God, as Jesus' encounters with the Pharisees and Sadducees illustrate. Nor are shaking experiences with the Holy Spirit (I have had a few of them) enough to sustain me in daily holiness.

In my four years at seminary I read a lot about God. But reading a profound truth in Scripture or a great Christian book did not cause me to appropriate it into the daily patterns of my life. I needed to encounter God's truth in a transforming way. As I struggled with this, I discovered spiritual disciplines, such as **solitude, silence, fasting** and **meditation**. While not means of achieving salvation, these disciplines do promote spiritual growth in Jesus Christ.

The term "**spiritual disciplines**" may conjure up images of hooded monks chanting in the early hours of the morning. These monks have left the world in order to pursue an ascetic lifestyle—most impractical for us "normal" folk. In reality, spiritual disciplines are tremendously practical. They are truly essential to those who experience the daily challenge of living out their Christian lives in the marketplace.

Throughout this teaching, I am going to focus on several disciplines which fit into a half-hour quiet time. **Silence** is the discipline of getting quiet so you can listen for the Lord. **Solitude** is the discipline of setting aside some place where you and the Lord can be alone together. **Bible study** is the discipline that helps you grasp the meaning of the biblical text. **Meditation** is the discipline that helps you penetrate and embrace the Scriptures. **Prayer** is the discipline of asking God for help for yourself and others. While I won't specifically address worship or confession, these disciplines will begin to show up naturally (supernaturally) as the Lord meets you.

As I began to practice spiritual disciplines in my quiet time, my spiritual senses developed. I spent time in meditation, looking to God with the eyes of my heart. Although I didn't see Him in a physical sense, I perceived His presence and knew He was there. As I stopped doing all the talking in prayer and began to listen with spiritual ears, answers came to questions that I had been struggling with. And more than just answers, a restful, even tender quiet filled me. I knew that God loved me and that he is good.

Spiritual Desire

The human heart has an innate hunger for God. **Psychoanalyst Gerald May** writes in his book *Addiction and Grace*, "After twenty years of listening to the yearnings of people's hearts, I am convinced that all human beings have an inborn desire for God. Whether we are consciously religious or not, this desire is our deepest longing and our most precious treasure." Quiet times allow us to properly address that hunger.

Just as we can't live without daily bread, we can't live without daily feeding on the life of our Creator and Savior. God's Spirit inside believers creates a taste for him. Through his work inside our hearts, we come to relish his Word. It becomes "**sweeter than honey**" ([Psalm 19:10](#)). It is spiritual milk that causes us to grow up in our salvation ([1 Peter 2:2](#)).

How do we get the sustenance of God's life into our lives—our daily bread? The pastoral imagery of [Psalm 23](#) points the way. We allow ourselves to be led into green pastures. God wants to take us to a quiet place beside still waters from which we can drink. [Psalm 1](#) also gives a clue. The person who is blessed by God, like a tree planted by a stream, is nurtured as he continuously meditates on God's Word. Both the sheep in the pasture and the tree by the stream are images of quiet rest in the presence of God—a quiet time.

When we have a quiet time, we feed our souls. We lift our eyes beyond the here and now to the eternal. We lift our hearts from the miasma of mixed motives to the unadulterated Good. We look past the dark god of this age to the God of eternal light. The Lord is present; all creation sings his glory. Through our quiet time, we can know his presence in our work, our family, our recreation—everything.

Guided Quiet Time

***The Lord's Attention* ([Matthew 4:23–5:2](#))**

Psalm 73:23-24 (NASB)

²³“Nevertheless I am continually with You; You have taken hold of my right hand.

²⁴With Your counsel You will guide me, And afterward receive me to glory.”

Sunday-morning worship is important to me. I love being surrounded by people who sing songs and hymns in a heartfelt way and pray as if their lives depended on it. But I have found that Sundays are not enough. I need personal time with God as well: just me and God. I need to know that He knows my name and is involved in the details of my life. I need His personal guidance.

Peter, Andrew, James, John and the other disciples must have felt the same need. Jesus often took them aside for personal attention and private instruction. In the Sermon on the Mount we have the most complete and concise summary of Jesus' direct teaching of His disciples. Such personal instruction was not limited to the first disciples. It is available to you and me. All that is required is that we respond, read and listen.

Approach

Someone once commented, “God doesn't have favorites, but He does have intimates.” Write a couple of sentences to God telling Him that you want to be close to Him and know Him better.

Study

1. Read [Matthew 4:23–5:2](#). News about Jesus spread throughout Galilee as he began his ministry. What was Jesus doing and saying to attract such crowds?

2. Consider the large crowd that Matthew mentions. What could be some of their reasons for seeking Jesus?

3. Consider other significant events related to mountains in the Scriptures. Look up the following passages and write out a summary of each one: [Exodus 19:20–20:1](#); [1 Kings 19:11–13](#); [Matthew 17:1–7](#); [Acts 1:10–12](#).

What might be the significance of Jesus' teaching on a mountain?

4. Why do you think Jesus might focus on his disciples rather than the crowd?

Reflect

1. What would it be like to be following Jesus among the crowds? Write down what you might feel emotionally and physically and what you might hear and say to others.

2. Consider your own motivations regarding Jesus Christ. What would be your reason for being in the crowd?

3. Just as Jesus called the disciples away from the crowd to teach them, Jesus wants to give you the same personal attention. How would you respond if Jesus called you to personally receive his instruction?

4. Write down the hindrances to being a disciple that you find in your heart and turn them over to the Lord.

Pray

Ask God to give you the attitude of a disciple, with a listening ear and a responsive heart.

Pray that Jesus' kingdom would continue to expand and that many would hear His word and receive His healing touch.