

Settling in God's Presence

If we want to meet with God, we have to set aside time. This is not easy. Most of us feel that we have too much to do and not enough time. Moreover, our materialistic age teaches us that “**time is money.**” Unplanned time leads to failure, while controlled time, governed by our purposes and priorities, is the key to success.

But as Christians, we find the focus of our culture too narrow, too limited and too secular. For us, the real issue is not “**time is money,**” but *time is holy*. If we let the principles and priorities of material success govern us, we will become spiritually impoverished. We need to order our time for our spiritual health.

God's Time

God built time spent with him into the Ten Commandments. “**Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy**” ([Exodus 20:8 \(NASB\)](#)). The purpose of this gift of time was to celebrate his creation of the world as well as his redemption of Israel from slavery in Egypt ([Deuteronomy 5:15](#)).

[Deuteronomy 5:15 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁵“**You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.**”

In the course of a year five feasts were celebrated, two of which lasted a week. These feasts were Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread in March/April, Pentecost and the Feast of Weeks in May, the Feast of Tabernacles in September/October, the Feast of Trumpets in late September and the Day of Atonement in early October.

Not only were days and weeks set aside, but years were holy as well. One year in seven, the sabbatical year, was devoted to rest and worship. Two consecutive years, a Sabbath year every forty-ninth year followed by the Jubilee year in the fiftieth year, were holy times when all debts were forgiven and all slaves were set free.

What was the message of these feasts? God creates time, meets us in time and orders time. Therefore the use of time is to revolve around Him. By observing those designated days, weeks and years, Israel was to experience the centrality of God over and over again. And their celebrations would teach them something essential about God. More than a burden, the days of rest were reminders of God's saving care. They were true holidays (holy days). People were set free from toil and debts to rest, worship and celebrate.

Sadly, Israel missed the significance of this gift of holy time. Because the holy days were ignored, the nation was condemned by the prophets. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God commanded the wayward nation, **“You shall not bring a load out of your houses on the Sabbath day nor do any work, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your forefathers”** ([Jeremiah 17:22 \(NASB\)](#)).

Daniel understood the essential issue. Living in pagan Babylon, he prayed three times a day—morning, noon and evening. He maintained his pattern, even when it got him thrown into the lions’ den.

By Jesus’ day, the gift of holy time had been turned into a legalistic burden. People couldn’t cook or walk over a mile on the Sabbath. The Sabbath was no longer understood as protected time in which God could be worshiped and enjoyed.

Christians of the Middle Ages ordered time around worship. The day was ordered around the prayer times of Prime, Sext and Vespers. The week was organized around Sunday. The seasons were organized around the Christian festivals of Christmas, Easter, Ascension and Pentecost. And the years were organized around the birth of Christ, B.C. and A.D. Churches kept the time because they had the only mechanical clocks.

Today we have lost the sense that time is ordered by God. Holidays are merely vacation times, and Sundays are days for sports and leisure. Christmas and Easter are times to exchange gifts. Our culture has lost any sense of making time to be with God.

Seizing the Time

How can we establish time patterns that will allow us to meet with God? ***We must choose to set aside holy time.*** Time focused on God is not just an interruption in our day, but a reminder that all of our time is under His lordship. When I was working in a secular job I used to read Scripture and pray at lunch. This gave me half an hour alone with the Lord. A working mother in our church gets up half an hour before other family members, at 5:30 a.m.

Making room for a regularly scheduled time is almost an act of violence initially. I must seize the time and set it aside. Something else will have to give: an hour of sleep, time with friends, and a TV program. If this seems like too much of a sacrifice, consider that you find time to eat several meals a day. Shouldn’t we be able to find time to feed our souls as well?

We must seek to have regular holy times. They need to be anchored into the routine of our lives. The prophet Daniel used mealtimes of morning, noon and evening. That may not be realistic for you, but you need to find something that is.

Many people prefer early morning. Mark records that at the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry, before sunrise, Jesus got up to pray ([Mark 1:35](#)). Perhaps lunchtime works

better with your schedule, or maybe you can designate time in the evenings to spend with the Lord.

My regular times with the Lord have varied over the years. I like spending time with the Lord at my desk in the morning before anyone else arrives. Then I have a sense of being prepared to face the rest of the day in the presence of God, with the strength and wisdom that He provides. Again it may vary. Sometimes it's when I am walking alone with God.

I go through several stages when I establish a quiet time routine. Initially I have a sense of excitement about doing something new. After a while boredom and resistance set in, and I am tempted to give up. But if I keep going, I come to anticipate meeting with God.

We not only need regular times; we need extended holy times with God that allow for a sense of leisure. In Israel, a whole day, the Sabbath, was given over to rest and worship, as well as entire weeks at the feasts of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost.

Devotional times for most people vary from fifteen to forty-five minutes. This is my normal pattern as well, but I have found that it is not enough to completely satisfy my spiritual hunger. When I take an hour or three or even a whole day to be with God, I sense the depth of His peace, the freshness of His Spirit, the tender affection and quiet of His presence. I find myself longing for and reaching out to God. These longer times make up for the limitations of regular daily meetings, which are limited to Scripture study, a few minutes of quiet seeking and prayer.

How do you set aside extended time? One way is to use the Sabbath as it was intended. After church, the Sunday meal and even a look at the paper, there is ample time to be with both the Lord and the family. While I was a theological student, I skipped study on Sundays, even if there was a test on Monday. This gave me time to worship and fellowship without the pressure of getting back to the books. It also reminded me that my grades and learning were gifts given by God, rather than my own achievements.

Initially the practice of meeting with God in holy leisure will seem strange. You may worry about wasting time. Often there is a "restlessness barrier" that I have to break through. But on the other side of the barrier is a rich, full rest.

We need a sense of continuity in our lives to cultivate holy time. Our daily routine needs to be protected. When it is disrupted, setting aside time to be with God is difficult. Students frequently report struggling spiritually during summer vacations and holidays. I find that true for myself as well. In the change of routine, the time and space created to meet with God vanishes. This need to maintain routine in our lives shows the value of the spiritual rule of the monastic orders. Meeting with God flourishes in a sense of rhythm and order.

We need to be flexible in our holy times with God. This may seem to contradict the preceding principle of continuity. But the reality of modern life is constant change. Students' schedules change from term to term and are interrupted by holidays and vacations. Working people are affected by business trips, vacations, changing jobs and deadlines. Families are in constant flux because of the burdens and pleasures of bearing and raising children.

We can cope with changes in our routines if we are determined and convinced in our hearts that meeting with God is important. We can watch for the hour or two, as they come up, to be alone with God. We must not be legalistic and get upset with ourselves when we don't get our usual devotional time. We need to be gracious toward ourselves and determined toward God.

Guided Quiet Time

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Psalm 131:1-3 (NASB)

¹ "O LORD, my heart is not proud, nor my eyes haughty; Nor do I involve myself in great matters, Or in things too difficult for me.

² Surely I have composed and quieted my soul; Like a weaned child rests against his mother, My soul is like a weaned child within me.

³ O Israel, hope in the LORD From this time forth and forever."

We are busy people who live in a busy world. But if we are going to spend time with God, we will have to slow down our pace.

We must create a space in our lives to be with God. This isn't so easy. There are always people to phone, letters to write, errands to run. The list of demands on me is endless. But if I am going to meet God, I have to get past these demands to sit worshipfully in his presence. How can I ever control these demands?

First, don't ignore them. It is because they are important to you that they have such power. **Richard Foster** writes:

"We can give up the need to watch out for number one because we have One who is watching out for us. I sometimes like to picture a box in which I place every worry and every care. When it is full I gift wrap it, placing a lovely big bow on top, and give it as a present to the Father. He receives it, and once He does I know I must not take it back, for to take back a gift once given is most discourteous."

Approach

We must give over our concerns to the Lord. Sometimes I picture myself writing out a list of pressing issues on a "to do" list and then handing it to the Lord.

Study

1. Read [Psalm 37:7](#) and [Psalm 46:10](#). Why is it important to be still?
2. Read [Exodus 14:13-18](#). How was Israel still and active at the same time?

Reflect

1. As you sit before the Lord, give over your responsibilities, concerns and fears. Write down all the things that you have to do. Put the list in a box and make a gift of it to the Lord.

2. How do you feel after turning over your cares to Him?
3. What difference will this make in the way you face today?

Pray

Pray through your list. Ask God for wisdom on each item. Ask Him to protect you from taking them back.