

THE QUIET TIME

By Alfred P. Gibbs

I. The Importance of the Quiet Time

Each Christian should make it the habit of his life to spend a quiet time with God at the beginning and the conclusion of each day. Before he steps out upon the untrodden path of a new day, he should take time to listen to the voice of his heavenly Father from the Bible and commune with Him by prayer. The same should be true at the close of the day, ere he retires for the night.

Through this reading of the Scriptures and prayer the believer evidences his complete dependence upon God for wisdom, guidance, blessing and the supply of his temporal needs. From this interview with God, the Christian emerges spiritually strengthened and prepared to meet the problems, temptations and testings of the pilgrim pathway (Isa. 40:29-31).

No one can begin the day well, go on well, or end up well, who fails to make provision for this "quiet time" with God.

This period must be deliberately reserved and conscientiously kept for God. Nothing should be allowed to interfere with it, for nothing can compensate the Christian for its loss. The Devil, the world and the flesh will combine in their attempts to crowd it out of the day's program, on the plea that "there is no time"; but time must be made and maintained for it, if one's character and testimony are to count for Christ. Just as Shammah, one of David's mightiest men, gained victory and renown by defending a piece of ground for the attack of the Philistines; so let us defend this "quiet time" from all attempts on the part of the enemy to take it from us (II Sam 23:11, 12).

The tragedy of thousands of wrecked lives and ruined testimonies, which we see around us, would never have taken place had these Christians put God first in their lives by honestly observing this "quiet time". Their neglect of this resulted in carelessness of life, slackness in the discharge of their responsibilities, and inability to resist temptation and sinful desire. Then came the consequent disaster which robbed them of their joy in the Lord and their usefulness in His service.

We are all naturally weak and need strength; fearful, and need courage; ignorant, and need wisdom; wayward, and need guidance; sinful, and need restoration. The "quiet time" is where this strength, courage, wisdom, guidance and restoration is supplied.

Let us, like the prophet Habakkuk, say: "I will stand upon my watch and set me upon the fenced place (margin), and will watch to see what He will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved" (Hab. 2:1). May we, too, put a fence around this "Quiet time" and reserve it, at all costs, for God.

II. The Preparation for the Quiet Time

Though we shall speak particularly of the morning quiet time, the same principles will apply to that of the evening.

First, select the best time for it. This will vary with the circumstances. Be sure to allow time for dressing, for being prompt at the breakfast table, and for leaving in time to be punctual at school or business. Remember, in selecting this period, that you are reserving the most important part of the day for God.

Second, get up in time to observe this period. This getting up is not so easy as it sounds, for it calls for considerable determination and self-discipline. It is much easier to lie in bed and contemplate getting up, than to throw off the bedclothes and get up! A devoted Christian was once asked if he made it a matter of prayer about getting up for this quiet time. He replied, "I don't pray about getting up - I get up!"

Rising on time is largely dependent on getting to bed on time the night before. The Bible puts it thus: "It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late" (Ps. 127:2)! Cultivate the proper hours for retiring. The custom of rising at a particular time each morning will soon become habitual and will yield rich returns in spiritual blessing to the believer. An alarm clock is useful if there is a tendency to oversleep.

Third, get washed and dressed promptly, this will thoroughly awaken you, so that you will not be half-asleep during the quiet time. This is most important, for one should be his best physically and mentally, lest he rob God and himself of this period by lack of concentration due to drowsiness.

III. The Observance of the Quiet Time

Each Christian must determine for himself the amount of time he is to devote to this "quiet time". Let us suppose that he chooses 15 minutes. It could very well be more, but certainly should not be less than this. We will therefore take the irreducible minimum of 15 minutes as the basis of our suggestions as to the best use to this time for both morning and evening.

This 15-minute period should serve a threefold purpose: first, for the reading of the Scriptures; second, for meditation on what has been read; and, third, for worship, praise and prayer. It would be well to devote five minutes to each of these purposes.

1. The first five minutes should be taken up with the **reading** of God's word. The average chapter of the Bible can easily be read within this time. It is best to follow a definite course of reading that will carry you consecutively through the Bible. A good plan would be to take a chapter from the New Testament each morning and a chapter from the Old Testament each evening.

This chapter should be read reverently and deliberately, and not raced through. Remember, it is the Divinely inspired word of God, which is "profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness" (II Tim. 3:16). It is best to read it audible but quietly, so as not to disturb anyone else. This will prove to be a great aid in concentration and will prevent the mind from wandering during the reading.

Seeing that by the reading of the bible God's voice is heard in the soul, it would be good to ask God for spiritual enlightenment as you take the sacred book into your hands. David's prayer is a good one: "Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law" (Ps. 119:18). Thus, in simple dependence upon the Holy Spirit's guidance and teaching, the Word of God is carefully read (John 16:13-15).

2. The second five minutes should be spent in **meditation**, or in thinking about what you have read. This meditation is not easy, but it can be developed by practice. Meditation is to reading what digestion is to eating. Just as digestion turns what we have eaten into blood, muscle and bone, to be expressed in energy and growth; so meditation translates what we have read into spiritual blood, muscle and bone, that expresses itself in a life lived to the glory to God and enables us to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (II Peter 3:18). Surely we shall not deny to God's Word the thoughtful consideration we give to other books.

As an aid to this meditation, here are a few suggestive questions each may well ask himself after he has read the portion from the Bible. The answers to these questions will serve to impress upon our hearts and memories what we have read so that the Scriptures will thus become an indispensable part of our lives:

- 1) What persons and places have I read about, and what have I learned about them?
- 2) What, in my own words, is the principle subject of this chapter?
- 3) What, to my mind, is the best verse? Can I repeat it from memory? (this verse should be underlined with a pencil.)
- 4) What example did I see in this chapter that I should follow? What command or precept did I read that I should obey? (Let us never forget that obedience to the known will of God is essential to true discipleship (John 7:17; 8:31; 13:17; Luke 6:46; James 1:22-24).)
- 5) What warnings were there for me to heed?
- 6) What prayer was there for me to echo?
- 7) What guidance did I receive for my path today?

The answering of these questions will call for real concentration of thought, but the effort is well worth while, for it will make the Word of God a living reality in one's life and result in the formation and development of a sterling Christian Character-truly an invaluable possession!

3. The third five minutes should be devoted to **worship, praise and prayer**. Let us think of them in order:

1) Worship. This is literally "worthship", or the ascription of worth to One Who is worthy. It is the heart's occupation with God himself, to the exclusion of all else. It is the overflow of a grateful heart under the sense of Divine grace and favor. God desires and seeks the worship of His blood-bought people. See John 4:23, 24. It is the highest occupation of the child of God in this life and shall be his service for eternity (Rev. 4:11; 5:12). We praise God for his blessings; we pray to God for our needs; but we worship God for all He has revealed Himself to be in His beloved Son. Thus, with reverence, awe, amazement and gratitude the believer is occupied with God.

2) Praise. God wants a praising and thankful people. "Who offers praise glorifies God" (Ps. 50:23). We are enjoined to "enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise" (Ps. 100:4).

We should praise God for the gift of His Son, Who gave Himself for us; for the Holy Spirit, Who indwells, teaches and guides us; for the holy Scriptures, God's full revelation to us; for all the spiritual blessing that are ours in Christ; for the many temporal mercies He has bestowed on us in the way of health, food and clothing; and for answered prayer.

Every Christian should cultivate the habit of thanksgiving and praise. Surely it is a poor thing to be always asking favors from God and never giving Him a word of praise for all He has done, is doing and will yet do for those He has saved by his grace. See Phil. 4:6, 7; Eph. 5:20; Ps. 69:30, 31; 92:1.

3) Prayer. By prayer the believer expresses his absolute dependence on God for the supply of all his needs, and, at the same time, his supreme confidence that God will hear and answer his requests, if asked in faith and in accordance with His will (I John 5:14, 15). God commands, inspires, hears and answers prayer (Hebrews. 4:14-16; Luke 18:1; Matt. 6:6-12; Ps. 65:2).

First, there should be prayer for oneself. This involves the frank confessing and forsaking of all known sin, "if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Ps. 66:18; compare I John 1:9). Make known to your Father in heaven all your needs with the simplicity, directness and confidence of a child coming to its earthly father. The Lord Jesus said, "Your heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have need of" (Matt. 6:32). Spread your problems before Him and seek Divine wisdom to solve them (James 1:5-7). Cast all your care on Him, for it matters to him about you (I Pet. 5:7). Remember, nothing too small to mention to Him, for God delights to hear the simple fervent and believing prayers of His children.

Then, there should be supplication for others. We should not be selfish in our prayers and think only of ourselves, but also remember the needs of others. God wants us to be intercessors on behalf of others. See Eph. 1:15, 16; Col. 1:9; I Sam. 12:23. We should pray for those in authority over us, that God will grant them humility of heart and Divine wisdom that shall enable them to rule us wisely and well (I Tim. 2:1-4). We should pray for our family, relatives and friends, particularly for the unsaved ones, that they may be convicted of sin and led to put their faith in Christ. We should pray for all who are seeking to preach the gospel, either in the homeland or the foreign field.

Remember, it is still true that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16). Prayer is a mighty force, because it moves the hand of Him Who moves the world. Prayer changes things; therefore, pray!

As an aid to memory, many Christians keep a prayer list and record the name of those they desire to remember at the throne of grace.

Surely the Christian reader will agree that this "quiet time" is an absolute necessity to the child of God, and that 15 minutes, as a minimum, is not too long to spend in the presence of God, reading and meditating in His Word, and communing with Him by prayer.

May it be yours and mine to make and maintain, at all costs, this essential preparation for each day of our Christian life.

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