

How to have a Quiet Time

Joe Peabody

I met God in the morning when the day was at its best,
And His Presence came like sunrise, Like a glory in my breast.

All day long the Presence lingered, All day long He stayed with me,
And we sailed in perfect calmness O'er a very troubled sea.

Other ships were blown and battered, Other ships were sore distressed,
But the winds that seemed to drive them, Brought to me a peace and rest.

Then I thought of other mornings, With a keen remorse of mind,
When I too had loosed the moorings, With the presence left behind.

So, I think I know the secret, Learned from many a troubled way:
You must seek Him in the morning If you want Him through the day!

Bishop Ralph Cushman

On a hot Saturday night in August, as a fifteen year old, I sat on the back row of an outdoor youth revival. While the preacher preached, I, having been an usher, straightened the dollar bills and stacked the quarters and dimes. When the invitation came, I was shocked to find that I was walking past friends, through fresh saw dust, to kneel at a home made altar rail. Echoing an experience I had had in the same place two years before, I gave my heart and life to Christ. This time it "took."

Later that week my mother's best friend, whom I called "Aunt Lucy," took me aside and asked, "What are you going to do to keep the fires of faith burning?" The blankness of my stare was a prelude to my non-response. I had no idea.

With great patience Aunt Lucy told me about the early days of her Christian commitment and to a secret she had learned many years before. "I discovered that I needed a method for beginning every day with God, and a place to start over again when I inevitably let things slip. I call it my 'Quiet Time.'"

She then went on to teach me the basics. I share them with you because there is no one thing I have done across the past fifty plus years which has helped my spiritual life as much as a daily Quiet Time. To my loss, I have not always been faithful, but I have always found God ready to bless when I sought him. One of the most significant promises in the Bible is James 4:8a "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you." (KJV) The Quiet Time is the way I draw near to him.

The Basics

Step 1. Set aside a predictable time to spend with God. For some it is first thing in the morning. For others it is just before sleeping. More than a few young mothers have made the Quiet Time of their children's nap do double duty. I've known teachers who used their lunch hour. My father, an architect working for himself, set aside the first thirty minutes of his day at the office, away from the frantic leave takings of five energetic sons going their separate ways.

Step 2. Find a resource which will give you a place to start. I have used the American Bible Society Daily Suggested Reading Guide, off and on. It is available free from the American Bible Society. Many of my friends have been blessed by A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants, by Reuben Job and Norman Shawchuck. Others use the Upper Room. The main thing is to find a place to start.

Step 3. Read until something "jumps off the page" for you. It may be information you did not have before. It may be a promise which uniquely suits what is happening in your life right now. It may be a perspective you have not considered, or a word of warning about some path you have been considering. You will know it when you see it. You may read one verse or you may read several chapters, but look with the eyes of faithful expectation and God will speak to you through his word. Aunt Lucy encouraged me to write this special verse out, because the act of writing would help me to keep it in my mind and heart.

Step 4. Write God a two or three sentence prayer which puts into words what you have heard God saying to you.

Standing Questions

Of course, I have modified and changed things from time to time. For example, I have discovered that it is valuable to have some standing questions ready when approaching a text. On any given day one question may dominate the others.

1. There is the question of the HEAD.

What do I need to know in order to understand what this writer is saying? For example: How long is a cubit? Where is Cappadocia? What is a "body of death?" What is justification? What is Paul talking about when he refers to "works?" What is Jesus talking about when he talks about the "Kingdom?" What head knowledge, available from commentaries and dictionaries, do I need?

2. There is the question of the HEART.

What promise is God holding out to me? What rebuke to my actions or attitudes do I see here? What spiritual principle am I seeing concerning which I need to be reminded? What is God saying to my heart about the spiritual condition of my life?

3. There is the question of the HAND.

Having spent this time with God. Having listened to him speak. Having meditated on what he is saying to me, what is God calling me to do? Whom should I call? Whom should I visit? To whom should I apologize? From whom should I seek forgiveness? Whom should I forgive? Is there money God wants to give through me? Where can I put my talents and abilities, hands and feet to work in the Kingdom of God?