

PERSONAL DEVOTIONS

OR

QUIET TIMES

A short guide to help you
to practice and maintain
quality time with God!

Six fundamental Tips on Quiet Times!!

Compiled by Andries Combrink.

To inspire everyone
to enjoy life changing time with God!

June 2009

1. Tip#`1 on Quiet Times: Do not do this in your own strength!

We have to realise that we must **be open to God** in order to spend quality time with him. Because we need to know, from the beginning, **that God does it!**

It is always God that reaches out to us. His prophets and apostles speak his words to us and encourage us to "reason with God" in order to restore a loving relationship with him.

It is God who sent his only Son, that no one who believes in him will perish.

It is God, and his Son, who poured out the Holy Spirit on the Church - in other words also on us, that we may be able to have a relationship with God, because the Spirit reveals to us who Jesus is, and Jesus takes us home, to God.

Psalm 119:18 says: Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law, and Luke 24:32-45 teaches: 32 They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" 45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.

If you look at the passages above they have two things in common: The verb "open" and the fact that **God does it.**

We need the help of the Holy Spirit when we come to personal devotions, or as many people call it: "Quiet Times":

- The Spirit can open our eyes, because we're often too preoccupied to notice Truth.
- The Spirit can open our hearts, because they can be hard and cold.
- The Spirit can open the Scriptures to us, because they are God-breathed, meaning Spirit inspired, and not just regular spiritual literature.

So at all times remember Tip#1: Always ask God to help you during your Quiet Time!

As ministers in the church, we realise more and more how many people have questions around this topic. When I read through a devotional series by Theo Groeneveld, minister at Emmanuel Presbyterian Church, on quiet times, I immediately realised that we here at CPC too have a dire need for better understanding and practical Tips around having meaningful and life changing daily devotional time.

Many people call them Quiet Times.

While most of us know that you should have them, many simply don't know how to go about it.

So, let's start with a quick overview and then in 7 mini chapters, covering 6 fundamental Tips, try to be as practical as we want to be Biblical, in helping to answer your questions on how to practice and maintain meaningful, life supporting and life changing Quiet Times.

WHAT IS QUIET TIME: A simple daily time where we draw near to God.

PURPOSE: To worship God and realign our lives with God's purpose and plan for us, through intimate personal time spent with him.

ACTIONS: Slow down, Quiet down, Reflect on Truth, Worship and Pray.

KEY VALUES: Simple, Regular, Sustainable and Honest

A typical Quiet Time lasts 10 - 20 minutes and involves:

1. Slow down, stop the racing mind, become aware of God's presence.
2. Pray for God's help
3. Read Scripture, not a book about Scripture, because only the Bible is God inspired. Books about the Bible are truly helpful when we do Bible Study. But when you seek God's face and wait upon his guidance in

fellowship with him, just read the Bible, God's own Word to you. Listen to what God says - and reflect on it.

4. Reflect on where you are right now, hear what God is saying to your soul. Allow God to open your heart, your eyes and your brain to his plan with you on that day, and all the days of your life.

5. Worship and Pray.

Expect God to speak to you. His character is to seek fellowship with you, he welcomes your worship, he listens to your prayers and he speaks into your life! None of this can be done in your own strength. God does it!

Tip#1 - Always ask God to help you as you have your Quiet Time!

Tip#2 on Quiet Times: Always Reflect.

While most of us know that we should have times of personal devotion, we often simply don't know how. We also know that we need them and that we need the impact it will have on our lives, yet we struggle to keep up to practice it.

Warning: We do not see the fruit of personal devotions, because we rush through them and do not have any expectations around them.

So lets learn about Tip#2 on Quiet Times: Always reflect.

Psalms 42:5 says: Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.

The psalmist, suffering from a "soul that is downcast" in other words "depressed", has a "talk with his depressed, sad soul".

My contemplation of what God has to say to me today, always should include a "talk with my soul", in other words, reflection time, - even if I do not feel sad. Whatever the day or the week requires of me, God needs to speak to my soul through his Word in one way or another and I need to make sure that I don't restrain the message by storing it only in my mind, yes, only dealing with it on an intellectual level.

It needs to reach my innermost self - the control centre of my emotions, values, dreams, plans. I (*my emotions, spirituality, values, expectations, plans*) have to facilitate God speaking to my soul!

The danger is that it can become ego-centric: all about me and what I want and need.

This is why the Psalmist's talking to "his soul" is helpful. It is a discussion that takes place about my life, but I participate in the third person, in the context of God's greatness, his Word, his will, his plan and his feelings, about me. I should talk to my soul in such a way that I ensure that the Lord is really talking to my soul, and therefore is truly talking to ME!!

After you asked God to help you, remember that you must always make time "to reflect".

Create space and time to talk to your soul, that God can speak to your soul too!

Tip#3 on Quiet Times: Engage your brain with your heart!

Do you remember the first 2 Tips on Quiet Times?

*Tip#1 was: Always ask God to help you when you have your Quiet Time!
The Holy Spirit will help us to hear God's message!*

Tip#2 was: Always reflect.

Talk to your soul! Quiet down and ensure that God's message reaches the control centre of your being.

And now Tip#3: Engage your brain with your heart !

Psalms 107:43 says: Whoever is wise, let him heed these things and consider the great love of the LORD.

The fact that our Quiet Times are about fellowship with God, sharing our innermost questions, desires and needs with him and listening to his comforting, loving and directing voice, does not mean that we should leave our brains, our thought-processes, our learning abilities and our insight outside!

As much as we fully commit our hearts, emotions and passions, we should also commit our ability to concentrate and understand to our personal devotional time, through which we enhance our intimate relationship with the Lord!

The ancient Church leaders called on us to contemplate God. If "contemplate" is not part of your regular vocabulary, use consider! Consider is a word that Scripture uses!

Psalms 107 is a psalm that recounts the history of God's dealings with Israel. The call to consider God's love comes at the end of the psalm.

In Psalm 8 the psalmist considers the wonders of the heavens and everything God has made, thinking about God's greatness and the strange truth that mankind is more important to God than any of the natural wonders.

In Psalm 119 we are called many times to consider God's commandments.

In Isaiah 41:20 we are called to consider God's greatness compared to the futility of idols.

Jeremiah calls people to consider their ways in the light of God's awesomeness (2:19).

Jesus reminds us to consider the beauty of the lilies and thus learn about God's provision.

In Romans 11:22 we are urged to consider the kindness and austerity of God.

In Hebrews 12:3 we are urged to consider the example of Christ in the face of hardship.

We are to think about God! We are to think about his remarkable works of creation and his sustenance of everything, including ourselves! Most of all we need to think about what the coming of God to us in Jesus Christ means: *God's anger about our sins that Jesus carried, God's grace by which we are forgiven in Christ, God's power by which we are enabled to win through the resurrection power of our Lord, who owns all authority in heaven and on earth. We are to think about the meaning of being filled with the Holy Spirit and that the Spirit enables us to follow the example of God's Son.*

We are to think about God with our brains awake and sharpened. We are to consider his revelations in nature, in Scripture and most of all in Jesus Christ, and conclude that God is good and that we are saved and safe!

Apply now Tip#3 on Quiet Times: Engage your brain with your heart!

Soul seeking worship, engaged with our intellectual considerations, results in complete surrender of heart and mind to Christ. And Worship plus Consideration equals Contemplation!

Tip#4 on Quiet Times: Read the Bible well!

Romans 15:4 says: For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

We are reminded of the wealth of education that the Scriptures contain. Being well versed in what God decided should be revealed to us in his Book, enables us to endure in the race for God's work. Like an athlete prepares for his challenge, Scripture prepares for the testing of our faith and it remains the only encouragement that ensures that we remain in the hope of God, even under the most severe pressure.

Reading the Bible well will be of great benefit to us.

Tip#4 for our Quiet Times is: Read the Bible well: systematic and with insight.

While it remains true that our Quiet Times are not Bible Study, it remains central to our conversation with God, our fellowship with him and our Spiritual growth through meaningful communication with our God to read the Bible well.

It means that we do not just dip into Scripture at random.

Follow a plan. Read through a Gospel, even if it is only about a third of a chapter at a time. One could also read according to many Bible reading rosters that are available; some follow a theme and others are designed to help us to understand the complete message revealed in the whole Bible. This prevents us from reading only from our "favourite" Bible Books or the passages we consider to be "easy", as this method results in us missing an important part of God's message that will have a great impact on our lives, intervening and guiding us on our way. The point is: ***be systematic.***

It has three benefits:

1. It creates continuity between yesterday, today and tomorrow.
2. It helps you get a fuller picture. When we read at "random" we tend to go to what we know all the time and never expand our horizons.
3. It broadens our general knowledge of God's Word.

Here follows one method - a simple yet valuable and helpful one:

Read through a gospel (Matthew, Mark, Luke or John) at the rate of at least one third of a chapter at a time. Then over two or more weeks read 10 psalms, depending on how long the Psalms are. Then turn to some of Paul's letters, or to Acts, ***and then go back to one of the gospels.***

Once you have covered all of these, start with other books, (remember the Old Testament forms the largest part of our Bible) - but regularly come back to the Gospels, learning from the ministry of Jesus as your central source.

- Reading according to a systematic plan is beneficial and builds a good foundation.
- Making notes helps to remember what we read, and it deepens the process of reflection and enables considering what God is saying to me.
- In your journal, have specific topics under which you note the messages over a period of time. Your Quiet Time journal may have the following "chapters" where you make the various notes:

Statements worth noting.

1. Warnings.
2. Promises and prophecies.
3. Messages that have a profound impact on me and my decisions.
4. Commands, decrees and instructions.

You end up with a personalised journal that you can go back to, to often find a message, a solution or a promise you really need at the time. This is how we ensure that we are educated and encouraged through the Bible reading during our Quiet Time.

Tip#4: Read the Bible well: systematic and with insight.
Be educated and encouraged for your challenges and calling.

Tip#5 on Quiet Times: - remember the power of prayer (A)

Ephesians 6:18 says: *“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.*

With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying, for all the saints.”

A. A time of personal devotion without prayer, is unthinkable, because

1. Prayer is God’s appointed way to receive from God what we need. The main reason why we lack God’s complete provision, is the neglect of prayer.
2. The holy men and women in the Bible regarded prayer as the most important activity of their lives. Give a prominent place to prayer during your Quiet Times.
3. Prayer occupied a very prominent place and played a very important role in the earthly life of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Follow his example.
4. Praying is now the most important part of the ministry of our risen Lord in heaven. Ask Jesus to pray for you.
5. Prayer is the means that God has appointed for us to receive mercy, and obtaining grace to help us in time of need. Remember to ask for mercy - *“In your mercy, Lord, hear my prayer.”*
6. Prayer in the Name of Jesus Christ is the way he has appointed for his disciples to obtain fullness of joy.
7. Prayer is the means that God has appointed that we may receive freedom from anxiety and the peace of God, which passes all understanding. Just tell him what scares you, makes you anxious and is the challenge you face.
8. Prayer is the means that Christ has appointed whereby we will not be overcome by the cares of this life. Tell God about your worries and concerns.
9. Prayer promotes our spiritual growth. It is fellowship with God. Also share with God what makes you happy and excited - thanking him for it.
10. Prayer brings power into our work for him. Ask for the guidance and the power of the Holy Spirit.
11. Prayer benefits the needs of others. Name the needs of those who's troubles and challenges are on your heart.
12. Prayer brings blessings to the church. Pray for the congregation you attend, the current agenda points you are aware of, the minister, the elders, all the leaders, members who asked for prayer - by name, for the children and youth ministries and for the outreach where the church is involved.

B. Pray in the Name of Jesus:

Jesus said: *“And I will do whatever you ask in my Name so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my Name and I will do it.”*

But what do we mean when we say we pray in the Name of Jesus?

It is like going to the bank of heaven when I go to God in prayer. I have nothing deposited there; I have absolutely no credit there, and if I go in my own name, I will get absolutely nothing; but Jesus Christ has unlimited credit in heaven, and he has granted me the privilege of going to the bank in heaven with his Name on my cheques; and when I go, believing I may draw on his credit, not relying on my own goodness, my prayers will be honoured.

Remember Hebrew 10:19 “ Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus....”

God is pleased with his Son, Jesus Christ. He always listens to him, and therefore listens to us, if we approach him in the Name of his Son. Our prayers become the prayers of Jesus before the Father, when we pray in his Name.

C. More Tips on praying:

- Speak to God respectfully, yet boldly, because you come to him not because you are just, but because Jesus is most holy and the Father loves his Son. Say to the Father: Father I come to you, because I am one with Jesus - please listen to me for his sake.
- Be sincere. Do not try to pray in the words of your spiritual hero’s - just tell God what is on YOUR mind, in the words YOU usually use to speak to your friends.
- Prepare your prayer: Make use of the prayer schedule provided by your church and other Christians. Speak to God about your needs, not forgetting the needs being brought to your attention by the church.
- Pray with the attitude of obedience. Ask from God what you understand to promote his honour, his will and the coming of his kingdom. Pray from your Bible reading journal, reminding God of the promises you came across in Scripture, asking protection as a result of the warnings you noted and answering God about the message you received through considering his Word.

Therefore Tip#5 for our Quiet Times is: Use the power of prayer in the Name of Jesus.

Jesus said, according to *John 15:7: If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given you’.*

Have you implemented Tips# 1 - 4 for your Quiet Times yet?

Tip#1: Always ask God to help you when you have your Quiet Time!

Tip#2: Always reflect.

Tip#3: Engage your brain with your heart!

Tip#4: Read the Bible well: systematic and with insight.

Now also practice Tip#5: Use the power of prayer in the Name of Jesus!

Tip#5 on Quiet Times (again): Remember the power of prayer (B)

Powerful prayer means praying in the Spirit.

Tip#5 for our Quiet Times is: *Use the power of prayer in the Name of Jesus.* We discussed this in the previous mini chapter of this booklet.

Now we will share more guidelines on the practical implementation of Tip#5, namely that we will only experience powerful prayer in the Name of Jesus, *if we pray “in the Spirit”.*

Ephesians 6:18 :”*And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.*”

Jude 20: *“But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.”*

When we pray in the Name of Jesus, his Holy Spirit inspires and leads us in prayer that God the Father answers.

1) True prayer is **prayer in the Spirit**, that is, the prayer the Spirit inspires and directs. When we come into God’s presence, we should recognise our ignorance of what we should pray for or how we should pray for it, and in accepting our inability to pray according to God’s will, we should look up to the Holy Spirit, depending on him to direct our prayers, to lead our desires, and to guide our words.

2) When we first come into God’s presence, **we should be silent before him.** We should look up to him to send his Holy Spirit to teach us how to pray. We must wait for the Holy Spirit and surrender ourselves to the Spirit, then we shall pray according to God’s will.

Christ, our Head, in who’s Name we pray, will teach us how to pray, as he taught the disciples. This happens through the work of the Spirit he sent to guide and inspire us.

3) When we feel least like praying, it is the time when we most need to pray. We should wait quietly before God and tell him how cold and

without prayer our hearts are, and look up to him for help, trusting him and expecting him to give the Holy Spirit to warm our hearts, inspiring us to pray.

4) When we wait upon the Spirit to guide us, **we will pray with faith**, and praying with faith, will make us bold.

In Mark 11:24 Jesus said: *“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it and it will be yours.”* Prayer that believes that we received what we prayed, follows our consideration of the Scriptures. We believe that we received, because we ask what the Bible already promises and proclaims.

5) Praying boldly in the Spirit requires first of all **that we in faith acknowledge our union with Christ.** Those who live in the Body of Christ are able to pray in the Spirit - the Spirit that unites us with Jesus and each other.

John 15:7: *“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given you”.*

To remain in Christ, to live in the Body of Christ, is to:

- renounce every thought, every purpose, every desire of our own, looking day by day for Jesus Christ to shape his thoughts, purposes and desires in us through his Spirit;
- listen to his Word to know and understand his thoughts, purposes and desires;
- pray what we hear to be his thoughts, purposes and desires.

Praying in the Name of Jesus enables us to pray in the Spirit. Our union with Christ, our living in his Body and our relationship with him, ensures that his Spirit that dwells in us, inspires and leads our understanding of his Word, and therefore teaches us to pray.

Tip#6 on Quiet Times: Keep it up, maintain it and put it into practice!

In this, our mini chapter about meaningful personal devotions, or quiet times, let's encourage each other to maintain this valuable source of Spiritual motivation and growth. Let's always continue to do this, not forgetting what we heard from God, but while keeping it up, also put into practice what we learn from our God.

James puts it in these words:

James 1:23-25: *23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--he will be blessed in what he does.*

It's easy to deal with our fellowship with God in the same way as someone who looks into a mirror, only to immediately forget what he or she looks like, because we (hopefully) never had the intention to live our lives according to that mirror image. But when we look into God's mirror during our personal devotions, we need to apply what we see during our daily "spiritual make over", our quiet times.

1) What we have learned from God about whom we are, what we should be and where we should go, by looking intently into his perfect will for our lives, we must do and apply. This will be the source of our blessings and of accomplishing God's purpose for us.

2) All relationships have an impact on us. It either makes us depressed and anxious or it motivates us, brings us joy and provides us with the emotional energy with which to continue our lives. As relationships grow and become more intimate and important to us, we depend more and more on them, learn from them and are motivated by them.

Our quiet times bring about a closer and more meaningful relationship with our God. As we worship, listen, pray and learn, we become more dependent on God to live purposeful and satisfying lives. We become dependent on our special, personal time with God. Eventually we will not be able to imagine taking on life's challenges and our calling, without our exceptional times of fellowship with God.

3) But then we must understand the importance of concentration, discipline and perseverance. We must in a disciplined way, intently, look into the mirror of God's will and plan every day, and not be sidetracked or tempted to neglect our relationship with our Saviour. Even under pressure

of daily responsibilities, we have to persevere in seeking communion, yes communication, with our God!

Tip#6 on quiet times is then, prayerfully depend on the power of the Holy Spirit to maintain your quiet times and to put into practice what you learn during these personal devotions.

If you resolve to do this, and prayerfully expect God to help you to do so, you will enrich your life, grow in your love-relationship with God, find meaning and purpose, serve God better and with more fruit and live a life that brings glory to his Name. We will be blessed in whatever we do.

May God help us to seek his face, do his will and live in an intimate, personal relationship with him!

Now, let all the Tips on Quiet Times come together in practicing our personal devotions, harvesting the fruit of true fellowship with God:

Tip#1: Always ask God to help you when you have your Quiet Time!
The Holy Spirit will help us to hear God's voice.

Tip#2: Always reflect.
Quiet down and ensure that God's message reaches the control centre of your being.

Tip#3: Engage your brain with your heart!
Make your personal devotions a time of fellowship based on both an understanding of what God says and a faith-and-love-relationship with him.

Tip#4: Read the Bible well: systematic and with insight.
Be educated and encouraged for your challenges and calling.

Tip#5: Use the power of prayer in the Name of Jesus!
When we pray in the Name of Jesus, his Holy Spirit inspires and leads us in prayer that God the Father answers

Tip 6: Maintain your quiet times and put into practice what you learn during your personal devotions.

Acknowledgements:

Thanks to Theo Groeneveld whose devotions on this topic gave very specific direction to the thoughts in this booklet on Quiet Times.

Thanks to Barbara Botha for using her course: "Teach me how to pray" as resource for this booklet.

I wish to acknowledge the influence of R. A Torrey and his thoughts on the power of prayer on this booklet.