

As I was preparing for Men's Group tonight, it occurred to me that I could give this greater exposure by posting it here. We are currently discussing how to take care of your soul - how to maintain your relationship with the God you love. This is not something that happens casually, you must make an effort to pursue Him. Just as your relationship with your wife will die over time if not maintained, so too will your relationship with Jesus die unless you take care of it.

Do you have a regular time with God? I'm not talking a few minutes while you drive to work or a few minutes as you're on the "john" - I'm talking dedicated time reading and "being" with God. There really is no shortcut and no other way - you need to spend time to get to know Him.

What follows is from Pat Morley of Man in the Mirror. I hope it gives you a little perspective as to what "time with God" looks like.



What is a Quiet Time?

In our Christian culture we hear a lot mentioned about a device called "the quiet time". A quiet time is a routine period, usually at the beginning or end of the day, in which five, fifteen, thirty minutes, an hour or more are set aside to read and study God's Word, pray, and possibly perform other spiritual disciplines. For example, sometimes I sing hymns (no one besides God would want to hear), journal or read devotional materials.

Actually, the Bible calls for continual prayer and Bible meditation. "Pray continually" (1 Thess.5:17). "Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests" (Eph. 6:18). "His delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:2).

The quiet time, then, is an accommodation to an overly busy culture. Nevertheless, the concept of setting aside a regular time for

concentrated meeting with the Lord can greatly enhance anyone's walk with God. In fact, without it, it is questionable if you can really have an ongoing relationship with Christ.

How much time should you devote to daily quiet time? If you don't already have a quiet time, why not consider giving five minutes a day to read one chapter of the New Testament (read one chapter a day five days a week and you will complete the 260 chapters of the New Testament in one year). Then, say a prayer like The Lord's Prayer, or you could use the ACTS acrostic (A-adoration, C-confession, T-thanksgiving, S-supplication). Consider setting a maximum time limit for devotional life, rather than a minimum. This will keep down the guilt. Later, if you want to increase the time you spend, fine. Many spend 15 or 30 minutes. It is not uncommon for some to devote an hour, and some invest as much as two hours. But start with a realistic goal. The best length of time is the one you will actually do. Don't bite off more than you will chew.

How often should you have a quiet time? Shoot for five days a week. Don't expect to make it every day (allowing for early morning meetings, glitches, etc.) You wouldn't expect to eat once or twice a week and be healthy. Neither can you feed your spirit only once or twice a week and expect spiritual health.

When and where should you have a quiet time? Pick the time of day that you are most alert—your quality time. Give God your peak concentration. Also, it's probably best to have a routine time and place. It's the same principle your mother taught you about your schoolwork.

What if you don't feel like having a quiet time? From time to time I don't "feel" like listening and speaking to God—but I do it anyway. What if God said, "I don't feel like meeting with you today either." You would think he doesn't love you very much. Whenever a man tells me that he doesn't feel very close to God the first question I ask is, "Tell me about your devotional life." Often the problem is just there. If you don't feel like meeting with God, I suggest you substitute discipline for a lack of natural interest. In time the "feelings" and natural interest will return.

Since the two principal activities of a quiet time are reading the Bible and prayer, let's look more closely at these two.

Reading The Bible



The Bible is God speaking to man. The Bible communicates the truth of God to men in search of ultimate reality. The God who is, is revealed in Scripture. The Bible, then, is the starting point of a life with God. He is rich who dwells upon God's Word. Psalm 19: 7-11 says this:

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

A friend in the publishing business tells me that only 30% of college graduates never read a book again after graduation. Reading and study have largely been replaced by television and video. For the Christian, however, reading and study open the door to communication from God.

Frankly, after more than twenty years of following Christ, I find I no longer read my Bible. My Bible reads me. On its crinkly pages I see myself—my motives, my ambitions, my longings, my pain, my sufferings, my sins, my hope, my joy. As the rustling pages turn I see God—His love, His forgiveness, His birth, His death, His resurrection, His sovereignty, His holiness, His character. I love my Bible. I love the Bible because I don't have to worry about receiving "flash updates" or corrective bulletins." I don't have to worry about factory "recall." I don't have to be concerned about whether or not a "retraction" will appear in tomorrow's version. I love my Bible because it is true, and truth doesn't

change. In a world awash with change, I'm glad to have an anchor, a solid rock upon which to build my life.

Prayer

Prayer is man speaking to God. God wants us to pray. Prayer is how we communicate with God.

When a friend of mine became deathly ill with cancer, another friend asked me how he was doing. "He's a very sick boy," I said. "I guess the only thing we can do is pray."

"No," he corrected. "The thing we can do is pray." What gave his statement added authority was that he offered this advice just six months after his own wife of 26 years had died from cancer. Another friend was going through a crisis at work. "I've tried everything I can think of. I guess I'll pray."

Why is prayer often the last thing we do and not the first? Why don't we pray more? First, we don't pray because we're not sure that prayer really works. If we really believed God hears and answers our prayers, we would pray all the time. If we really understood prayer, it would be the principal habit of our hearts. It would be our first resort, not our last.

Second, prayer can be hard work. One day I was in the car with Bill and Vonette Bright. At the time Vonette was the chair of National Day of Prayer-she even got Congress to make it a law! I nearly ran off the road when she said, "Prayer is hard work. Sometimes I find it hard to concentrate. My mind wanders." Well, I already knew that was true for me! But I didn't know it was true for one of the world's great prayers! What an encouragement! Prayer is hard work. At times it's hard to stay focused. Also, no one holds us accountable to pray.



Prayer is the currency of our personal relationship with Jesus. However, it does us no good if we leave it on account. We must make a withdrawal and spend some of it through prayer. Pray with a pencil-the benefits of seeing how God has worked will be well worth the efforts.

Prayer changes things. However, God doesn't answer petitions that are not presented. If we go about solving our challenges in our own strength, we rob God of the glory He wants for Himself. He would rather us come humbly before the throne of His grace so that He can give us mercy and help in our times of need.

Prayer changes us. Prayer breaks strongholds. Prayer determines the destinies of men, their families, their communities, and their nations. Only an army of men on their knees can turn the destiny of America back to God. It's time for us to get on our knees and fight like real men!

Reflection and Application

1. How important is Bible Study? Can you think of any other way to become a Biblical Christian other than by studying the Bible? I can honestly say that I have never known a man whose life has changed in any significant way apart from the regular study of God's Word. Why not consider making a commitment to study God's Word as an exercise of spiritual discipline?

For example, in our quiet time you could read a chapter a day from the

New Testament as already mentioned. Or, you can purchase a one year plan to read through the Bible at your Christian bookstore. Personally, each year I read through The One Year Bible in a different version- it only takes 10 to 20 minutes a day. If you want accelerated growth, read your Bible with a pen and pad nearby. Write down questions about passages you don't understand. Then ask your pastor or a Bible teacher what God meant in those passages.

2. What is your prayer life like? Is prayer a significant part of your life? Do you sense a close, personal communion with Jesus when you pray? Or is your prayer life more limited, mechanical and unrewarding?

3. What kind of commitment do you currently have to a quiet time with Bible reading and prayer? What kind of commitment are you prepared to make? This may be one of the most important decisions you will ever make.