



Who Needs Quiet Time?—You Do!

By Fran Paris

The alarm clock rings.

Fifteen minutes later, you roll out of bed. Late again. With toothbrush in hand, you step into the shower where you have what passes for "devotions" - a hasty, "Good morning, Lord."

While getting dressed, you spot your Bible on the bedside table facing you like a leather-bound judgment.

"One of these days," you say to yourself, "I'll get my act together and have a regular Quiet Time..."

Some people just can't wait to get into their daily Quiet Time with God. And then there's the rest of us - born-again believers who find it hard to commit to a daily time with the Lord.

What is your idea of a "Quiet Time"? Time to study your Bible, pray, listen to a teaching tape, go for a walk - or just Sit peacefully and stare at the wall? Your version of Quiet Time might be different from mine, but the real definition is very simple - it's just a chunk of time you devote to being alone with God. A time to get away from nagging responsibilities and distractions so you can hear the heart of your Creator.

We plan a Quiet Time to silence everything else that's going on and to come away from the "tyranny of the urgent." It's a time set apart to allow God to increase our awareness of who He is so we can become more sensitive to Him. No matter what's going on in our lives - His presence can always soothe and remind us of what is truly important. Quiet Time can make God more real to us.

There was a period in my life when (in moments of strong determination) I'd take myself by the nape of the neck and *make* myself have a Quiet Time. Feeling all the weight of my responsibilities as a wife and mother, I would think, "How can I justify spending so much time alone with the Lord each day?"

And from some other Christians I would hear comments like: *"I can talk to God anytime I want to, so what's the big deal about having a Quiet Time?"* or *"If I don't feel like being alone with God, it's only going to be a dead, ritualistic exercise, isn't it?"*

Unfortunately, this kind of reasoning fails to take into consideration one most basic truth: *Daily Quiet Time is vital to the Christian life.* I didn't realize then how the lack of Quiet Time could affect my growth as a child of God, let alone my own sense of peace and fulfillment.

Today, I believe that becoming a joyful child of God - as opposed to a duty-bound, joyless believer - comes down to one word: **RELATIONSHIP.**

Many Christians have a problem when they imagine what a relationship with God is like. Many of us think that it's founded on mystical, supernatural encounters that set our spirits tingling. Or that we have to do something super duper or extraordinary - or even weird. Nothing is further from the truth. God made us to have a relationship with Him. Therefore knowing Him should come in simple and natural ways.

In Acts 17:24-28, the Apostle Paul bears this out. He tells us God created the whole world and He determined exactly where and when you and I would live. That means real, intimate involvement with the everyday details of our lives. Paul even reveals God's purpose for such involvement: *"... that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist ..." (Acts 17:27,28)*

God plans your life and mine so that our circumstances will cause us to *seek* Him! And what's going to happen when man seeks God? He's going to *find* Him - because God is not hiding! And making Quiet Time a daily priority is just one way of saying, "The meaning of my life is relationship with God - therefore I'm going to set apart special time to *build* this relationship."

Think about it for a minute. When we talk about the beauty and marvel of the "natural" world, we can often get our focus wrong. It's true that a maple tree aflame with golden leaves is beautiful, waterfalls inspire peace, and snowcapped peaks are majestic - but nothing is more natural and beautiful than the relationship God wants to have with His children. Redwood forests and mountain lakes were not created with a natural ability to relate to God - *you were!*

How can we fathom this tremendous privilege? Above all created things on earth, we were given special place in God's sight - the privilege of relating heart-to-heart with our Creator. In fact, if we choose to do the unnatural thing and ignore the divine relationship for which we were created, we're really choosing to hurt ourselves - *and* wound the heart of God.

Is it any wonder, when we ignore our Quiet Time or see it as drudgery and obligation, that we come to feel so lifeless, cold, and duty-bound? Or feel that we're failing in our relationship with God?

So it's time to face facts - in this case, the *beautiful* facts. *God wants to have a relationship with you that's far deeper than you can even imagine!*

Intimacy With God

God not only created us with the ability to relate to Him - He also built into us a natural capacity to relate *intimately*.

My closest and most committed relationship on the face of this earth is my relationship with my husband. Now how would I be able to maintain that relationship adequately if I never had time alone with him? If we never had private time together, we'd never understand one another. We'd lack real sensitivity to each other's hopes, wants, and needs. A marriage like that quickly runs out of gas.

And in just the same way, a spiritual relationship with God that lacks the day-to-day intimacy of a Quiet Time also runs out of gas. Some Christians spend all their time "doing" - serving, preaching, teaching, witnessing, giving, sharing, sacrificing. They take little or no time to be alone with God, and that gives me a great sense of sadness.

Sooner or later, pressures and circumstances will sap their spiritual energy. Too many dedicated men and women fall away from God because they don't know how to draw steadily on His power and presence. That is a tragedy - because *we are created for relationship*. First and foremost with God, and then with one another.

But here's the great news: Developing this daily love relationship with God gives your spiritual life the full, steady, growing edge you've been desiring. It will keep you from burning out or giving up, and it will change you from the depths of your being!

You *can* have the loving encounters with God you've longed for. If that's what you truly want, here are some simple adjustments you can make that will revolutionize your Quiet Time.

Readjust Your Heart

Too often we're kept from having a Quiet Time because of misunderstandings and incorrect attitudes. We think, "God doesn't really want to hear from me," or "God's probably disgusted with me because I haven't read my Bible or prayed very much lately."

Do you face Quiet Time with the sense that God is uninterested, disappointed, or angry with you? Then no wonder it's difficult! Who would want to face a God who felt like that?

In Psalm 27:8, David marvels: "*When Thou didst say, 'Seek My face,' my heart said to Thee, 'Thy face, o Lord, I shall seek.'*" Do you see two choices being made in that verse? Who makes the first choice? God. What's His choice? To have a daily and intimate relationship with you. That's one matter you need to forever settle in your heart - *God desires relationship even more than you do!* Do you understand what that means? He's chosen to take a very humble and vulnerable position toward you and me by waiting patiently for us - funny, silly little creatures that we are - to choose Him.

But I also believe God's heart *aches* when we ignore Him. How would you feel if you really loved somebody and you stretched out your arms to them - and they just walked away? Would you feel disappointed? Heartbroken? I think God feels all those things - and has for thousands of years. But God is actually *excited* when we seek friendship with Him! He's not disgusted or disappointed with your failures, but *He does want you to spend daily time with Him!*

Readjust Your Priorities

You may be thinking, "Doesn't an intimate relationship just happen spontaneously? This is beginning to sound like work!" We need to realize that there's a cost involved - it takes *planning* and *discipline* to develop a relationship. When we fall in love, we readjust our time priorities so we can be with the one we love. True intimacy always requires time alone, and time alone requires *a deliberate choice* made by the two individuals involved.

During one very busy time in my life, I missed my Quiet Time for a couple of days. When I finally sat down to get quiet before the Lord, I heard Him gently say to me, "Fran, I missed you the last two days."

That's the way God's heart is - incredibly tender toward us! But we'll only learn to sense that tenderness when we get in that quiet place with Him. In our relationship with the Lord, we need to make Quiet Time our top priority - even above our jobs, hobbies, homes, families, and friends. We do it, not out of legalism, but because we're summoned every morning by the One who says, "*Arise, my love... and come away...*" (*Song of Solomon 2:10*)

Readjust Your Hopes

Our prayers reveal where our hopes really lie. We can pray in hope that God will supply money, a healing, a restored relationship with someone, a changed attitude - and it would be right to petition God for any one of those things.

But has your Quiet Time ever felt like a dry, endless recitation of prayer lists? Have you struggled to "persevere" day after day, pounding at God's door? If your focus has gone from seeking God to seeking favors, dry perseverance *will* be the result.

Psalms 147:11 (RSV) shows us a different approach: "*The Lord takes pleasure... in those who hope in His steadfast love.*" To hope in God means that you *seek Him*, not primarily for His favors, but for the pleasure and delight of His company.

Recently, some friends gave me a surprise birthday party, and I was overwhelmed by all the love and gifts they shared with me. But later that night, I got the best gift of all. My young son, Jonathan, patted me on the shoulder and said, "You're *my* sweetest gift, Mom."

Imagine how God feels when you honestly say to Him, "No matter how big or important my needs - I put my hope in *You!*" As you come to trust wholeheartedly in Him, He in turn *delights in you!*

Readjust Your Beliefs

Some Christians think that when God wants to speak to them on major decisions, He Will always do so in a dramatic, "stomach-tingling" kind of way. They think the only way to have God's word to them confirmed is to have a stranger lay hands on them and prophesy. But this concept of hearing from God *overemphasizes* the supernatural.

We think that unless God's word to us is *dramatic*, He doesn't really care. But that kind of thinking only sets us up for frustration, disappointment, and a sense of abandonment. God has given His Word to us in the Bible, and that's the bottom line. God spent an awesome amount of time and energy over thousands of years just to get the Bible to us. We must be careful, as we yearn for a *personalized* word from God, not to devalue the awesome gift of His *written* Word.

What a privilege to be able to read His Word daily, letting it become bone and fiber of our being! God's Word will always direct our decisions and actions so that, no matter what confronts us, we won't have to panic or feel lost.

Yet even when we approach God with right heart attitudes, we still face an enemy that's running roughshod over many of us. I'm talking about guilt. Guilt is probably the greatest enemy of intimate time with God. The voice of guilt condemns you as a sinner, and says, "God really doesn't want to hear from you."

Some Christians think they're supposed to be walking in a state of sinless perfection. They point to their sinful condition with defeat and quote verses like Psalm 66:18: "*If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear...*" But these Christians fail to *balance* that scripture with verses like Psalm 25:8: "*Good and upright is the Lord; therefore He instructs sinners in the way.*"

God instructs sinners. So when we sin, we have no Scriptural basis to say, "I blew it - now I'm not good enough to talk to God." That same voice of guilt will try to condemn you when you feel confused. It says, "A spiritual Christian is *never* confused. What an embarrassment you are to God!"

For instance, the other day I'd been shopping in town and was trying to get home in time for supper. I had to make one more important business decision before leaving town, but because I was feeling so hurried and pressured, I made a real rush decision.

On the way home I began to feel guilty, wondering if I'd made the right choice. The next morning I prayed, "God, I want *You* to direct all my actions. Please show me if I've mistakenly run out ahead of you." God *did* speak to me that morning, and the important thing was this: He *welcomed* me to His side - weaknesses, conflicts, mistakes, confusion, and all.

Why do we forget the great promises of God's Word? As it says in Hebrews 4:16: "*Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.*"

Why do we insist on trying to clean ourselves up before we go to God? All He really wants is that we come to *Him* so that *He* can give us the strength and cleansing we need.

In the end, you and I have to come back to the simple truths about our salvation. God loves us. He gave everything in His Son, Jesus Christ, to bring us back into intimate fellowship with Him. We could do nothing to deserve this gift before we were Christians, and we can add nothing to His grace now. That's the beauty and wonder of it.

Enrich Your Quiet Time

Quiet Times are usually a two-way conversation between you and God. You listen, and you pray. Some Christians find it helpful to have a list of prayer commitments and then have that list divided up into days of the week. For instance, one day of the week you pray for the nations, and another day of the week you can pray for different ministries. That's one way to cover all the important responsibilities of your life in prayer. Also, here are a few simple principles that will help you further enrich your Quiet Time:

- Ask the Lord to reveal anything in your heart that would block your communication with Him. You don't have to agonize over this, but just wait a few moments. If there is some issue of unforgiveness or anger - any kind of a wall between you and the Lord - He will gently bring it to your remembrance and allow you to confess it to Him.

- Ask for the fear of the Lord. Let me just say that the fear of the Lord is *not* a negative thing. I define it as having a positive and accurate view of who God really is, ultimately leading to a more awesome respect and reverence for Him. When I pray for the fear of the Lord, I'm actually just lifting my focus from who I am to the greatness and majesty of God.
- Ask God to direct your prayers. When I start praying about intimate matters in my life, I'm usually so bound up with emotion or anxiety that I'm restricted in my communication. So I just come before the Lord saying, "God, You're great and You see this problem better than I do - please help me and give me the wisdom to pray effectively." Then I'm able to view each situation more objectively and pray the will of God instead of my own will.
- Pray that God will help you resist the enemy. Even though Satan is always trying to block us when we go to prayer, just give thanks that God is going to help you to pray through. This is a very important step because it helps us to align our mind and our will with what is true.
- Keep a daily journal. Proverbs 7:1-3 says, "*Treasure my commandments within you... Write them on the tablet of your heart.*" A sure sign that I treasure wisdom from the Lord is when I write down the words and Scriptures He gives me. Write down the verses that He quickens to you even if you're not really sure what they mean.

My journal is the written record of the *continuity* of God's dealings in my life. Without it I would feel like the events of my life were unconnected or disjointed. Often when I'm in prayer the Lord will remind me of a little thing He might have said a year ago, and then I refer back to my journal. Years and years from now, I can read through that journal and see how my mind, heart, and spirit have been beautifully molded and renewed by the Lord.

Remember - God knows *exactly* who you are, *exactly* how you think, and *exactly* what He wants to revise and change in you. God has a long-range goal for what He desires to build within you, and every daily Quiet Time is like one small piece of tile that He's carefully fitting into an intricate mosaic.

If you are serious about affecting this world for God, you need to be serious about allowing God to develop your life through daily time with Him. That's really the only way He's going to be able to form deep convictions within you. It's possible to just float along on Christian service and activities, but if your desire is to "live and move and have your being" in the Lord, you must have an ever-deepening relationship with Him. And in order to build that kind of awesome personal relationship, you need daily Quiet Time.

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