

The Phenomenon of Quiet Time

We should begin each day with a quiet time. Twenty minutes would be ideal. However, three minutes will work at first, until we discover that we really want more of this special time. Then we can add on as we wish. Regardless of the length of time we choose at first, engaging in quiet time is without a doubt the most difficult part of the spiritual journey for us as we begin this process. At first it might seem to be a waste of time, especially if we are having trouble letting go of the thoughts racing around in our minds. It does take time and practice to get into the swing of things and become comfortable with the procedure. It might be helpful to remember that quiet time has become the most important part of the experience for many people who have been on this journey for a long time.



The strategy behind quiet time is to learn its value and technique so that we can practice it on a daily basis. This enables us to have the ability to reorient and refocus our attention at any time and in any circumstance. The valuable benefit of quiet time, whether long or short, is that it creates a necessary break in that which is going on in our lives. It gives us a release from the grips of duty, routine and stress. In these brief moments we are allowed to see our lives in the larger picture. We are reminded that we are living in God's day by special invitation.

Although it can be very difficult to find time to put ourselves into a state of spiritual relaxation and receptivity in which God moves in and takes over, whenever it does occur it is one of the high points. Here is what can happen when we discipline ourselves to give time to quietness in our lives. At the outset we often find torn between feeling a desire to be quiet and experience intimacy with God, versus getting on with the list of chores that might seem so important. Sometimes one set of concerns wins; at other times the other wins. When the quiet time wins, the margin of victory is usually so slim that entering into the quietness is still a struggle. The counter urgency remains in the wings waiting to come back on stage. Here persistence and patience pay off.

Initially the quietness is only relatively quiet. The mind at first only reshuffles the deck and deals new extraneous thoughts onto the table for consideration. Against these odds the preliminary goal is merely to spend the time and effort, however unproductive it might seem. After having at least made the investment we can then move back into the stream of daily affairs and responsibilities, having been dutiful if not totally successful in pursuing quiet time. At this juncture it is most important that we not minimize or discount seemingly fruitless effort. In time this exercise does produce fruit.

The miracle of the extraordinary invading the ordinary occurs somewhere in the midst of the struggle to remain on track. There comes a transition from a sense of duty to do the quiet time, into a sense of comfort, satisfaction and excitement that we are now in the place we really want to be. The earlier feeling or urgency to get back to our pressing chores begins to lose its grip on us. The constraints of time begin to fade into a sense of timelessness that takes on the claim of being real time.

As if by miracle, time spent in a state of awareness of being in God's presence assumes the role of being authentic time. It is the way time is supposed to be spent.

It requires these periods away from daily pressures, renewing our awareness of God's constant presence in our lives, to enable us to return to the routine and live out our day with a new orientation. That new or renewed orientation is one in which the daily responsibilities become quite secondary to God's greater plan for us. This is that perceptual shift mentioned earlier. While we do carry out our routine responsibilities with care and diligence, we do so without their being burdensome or controlling. They are no longer allowed to dominate our lives, our day or our concerns. Rather, they become promising options for the day as we live in this mysterious companionship with God.

