

How to be quiet in God's Presence

Last week, we discussed the need to spend quiet time with God. At this point, we can all be divided into two groups, those who have created time to be with God and those who have not. For those of you who have not decided to create a schedule, I can only urge you to listen to last week's message again and pray that God open your ears and spirit to do what He needs you to do. Then, if you decide, create a schedule that you will stick to which will allow you to spend time with Him.

For everyone who has created a schedule of the times you will be spending with God, I promised that this week, I would give you the "How-to" part of spending time with Him. In a nutshell, as we enter into our quiet time with God, there are several different ways we can spend that time. Like any relationship, sometimes we will need to do all the talking; sometimes we will need to do mostly listening. Sometimes, we will just sit next to Him in a peaceful silence as we think and imagine. As we enter our quiet time, we should come to God first in prayer for an understanding of how He would like us to spend this time with Him.

The different things we might do are: Being still, Reading and studying, Listening, Visualizing, Writing, Praising, Meditation and Praying. In many cases, we will do several of these things together. Let's look at each one in a little detail. A quick point: each of these could be an entire message by itself. This means that you will be getting a very quick introduction of these things. Feel free to do some more research on these to help yourself grow in their use.

Being Still:

Have you ever sat with someone and you didn't really have anything to say, so no one says anything and you begin to think, "How awkward! I wish he would say something!" or "I wish I had something to say." That is normal for us as humans to do when we are with someone we really don't know. On the other hand, how many times are you with people you love, maybe a spouse or a child or a parent and again, there is nothing to say? This time, you hardly even notice that no one is talking. In fact, you are quite at peace and content to just stay silent. That also is normal for humans to do when we are with people we are comfortable with.

In the same way, when we are with God, at first, we will feel like we need to say something, to do something. But as time goes on and we become accustomed to being in His presence, we will no longer need to DO something and instead, we will find ourselves content to simply be with Him. This is called Being Still.

Psalm 37:7a "Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him;" and Psalm 46:10a "Be still, and know that I am God;" are two verses that tell us that we need to get to that point of being still and just being with Him. When we are still, we give God the opportunity to speak, to do, or to simply Be. When we are running around, doing things, talking all the time and never getting comfortable enough to be quiet in His presence, we

never really come into that relationship that God has called us to be in. We need to wait patiently for Him and know that He is God.

Reading and studying:

Richard Foster writes in *Celebration of Disciplines*, “It hardly mattered who I read in those days – Brother Lawrence’s *The Practice of the Presence of God*, Teresa of Avila’s *Interior Castle*, John Woolman’s *Journal*, A.W. Tozer’s *The Knowledge of the Holy* – they knew God in ways far beyond anything I had ever experienced. Or even wanted to experience! But as I continued to soak in the stories of these women and men who were aflame with the fire of divine love, I began desiring this kind of life for myself. And desiring led to seeking and seeking led to finding. And what I found settled me, deepened me, thickened me.”

Richard Foster found that another way to be with God in quietness was through reading. Through reading the classics, we give ourselves the desire to be like those we read about, we find ourselves desiring to know more. Our faith begins to grow and deepen and our relationship with God begins to grow and deepen as well.

We need to be reading books that tell us the truth, that lead us to Him. There are many books out there that will point us to another God, not necessarily to the Jesus of the Bible. We need to be careful to recognize that not everything that uses God’s name or Jesus’ name is automatically correct. We used to hand out a reading list of different kinds of books. I have reprinted that list so that those of you who desire, can begin to spend some time with God through reading.

But it is not nearly enough to read any book. In addition to reading books, we need to read THE BOOK. The Bible is the most important book we can read. In it, we learn about Jesus, about God, about the Holy Spirit, about His plan for us. Sure there is history, and teachings and prayers and a host of other things. But the main reason for the Bible is for us to KNOW Him.

There are different ways to read the Bible: you can read it to study it – know about God, be able to explain those things to others, defend your faith, like Jesus did when Satan tempted him. You can also read it for pleasure. You can read it to help you with a current issue. Finally, you can read it devotionally. *2 Timothy 3:16-17*
All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. Here, we are talking about reading it as a study, to come closer to God through study. I am a firm believer that when you read the Bible for study, it is imperative to have a good translation, a study bible with notes regarding the verses and another book, whether that be a commentary or some other book that you’ve read or know about that will help in the explanation of the text. By having at least two sources for understanding (the study notes and the commentary), you can get a basic view of how the passage should be understood.

2 things with reading and studying:

1 – Recognize that in terms of what we are doing here, this is not to take the place of your regular Bible study or reading. This reading/studying is all about spending time with God. Sometimes we will recognize that God is calling us to pick up a book or His Word and learn something about Him. If during our quiet time with Him, we are led to do this, then we are spending quality time with God. If we are doing our Bible study and decide that was our quiet time with God, then we have taken control of the time and situation and God cannot work in that.

2 – Because one can get confused as to whether their reading and study time was quiet time with God or simply time spent reading and studying, I would recommend that the only time that reading and studying are used as quiet time with God is when you are driven to read and study after sitting down and praying during your scheduled quiet time with God. If He has something He wants to tell you through the study of a book or His word, He will make that clear.

Meditation:

Psalm 1:2

But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

Joshua 1:8a

Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night,
As stated earlier, one can read the Bible as a study or devotionally. The difference between studying the Word and reading the Word as devotion is that the first is geared towards the head and the second is geared towards the heart. Here, you do not want to be analyzing the text or thinking about how you are going to share something you've read. You simply read to take in and work in your heart. The best way to do this is to read only a couple of passages, read one thought or one section and dwell on it. Go slow. Put yourself in the verses. You are the one that is being spoken to. You are the one who is having something done unto. Use your sense to feel, smell and see your environment in the passage. Are you in the desert? Are you on the sea? Are you at a feast? Meditate on the moment as well as the words. Do not necessarily understand, but experience.

Another way to meditate is to really get into what God has done. Really meditate on His works. If you can do this in nature, this can add to your experience. Meditate on the sky, the water, the wind, the trees, the plants, the birds, a pet, your own hands or arms or feet. Meditate on the things that God has created recognizing always that only He could do this.

By the way, a great example of meditating on Jesus would be the taking of the Communion meal. When we take the meal, we should be meditating on the things he has done for us. Walk in his shoes, feel his pain, feel his love.

*Psalm 39:3 My heart grew hot within me,
and as I meditated, the fire burned;
then I spoke with my tongue:*

When you meditate on God, you will find yourself coming closer to Him. When that happens, there is a burning that grows within you. This burning does not feel like heartburn. The burning is the feeling of desire, a desire to want more, to know more, to come closer. That is where God wants us to be. He wants us to desire Him more. The difference between those who are on Fire for God and those who are “lukewarm” is this burning within. When we meditate on God, on his word, we feed this fire.

Psalm 48:9

Within your temple, O God, we meditate on your unfailing love.

Psalm 77:12

I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds.

Psalm 119:15

I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways.

Prayer:

In all things, we should pray. Prayer should start out all our quiet time sessions with God. Though in reality, prayer includes listening to God, I’m using the word here as we might typically think of prayer – our speaking to God. We should open our sessions with prayer, but then we should take a few minutes to listen to see where God is leading us in the session. Many times, we will find that God wants us to stay in prayer.

When we pray, there are certain things we should pray for. Jesus gave us the model of prayer when he gave us what we call the Our Father.

Matt 6:9-13

" Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

¹⁰ your kingdom come,

your will be done

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

¹² Forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from the evil one.

As we look at the model, we should recognize that Jesus taught us to recognize the greatness and holiness of God in our prayer. His name is to be hallowed. That means recognizing the sacredness of God. We might call this part of the prayer “Praise and adoration”. Notice we are supposed to pray in God’s will. We do not want our will to be done but God’s. There are some who would say that we should never pray “Your will be done” because it shows a lack of faith. But Jesus taught us that this is exactly what we should say. We should pray for the things we need. Notice it speaks of our daily bread. This means those things we need each day. It doesn’t mean the things we want. We call this part of our prayer “Requests and supplications”. Next we should be praying for forgiveness. The Psalmist in Psalm 51 teaches us that all our sins are against no one but God. If we need forgiveness, it is from God. We need to pray for that forgiveness even

as we repent of those things. We call that part of the prayer “Confessions”. Finally, we see that Jesus teaches us to pray for protection. We need God to cover us, blanket us with protection: Protection from the temptations of Satan; protection from the temptations of this world and protection from the temptations of our flesh. We will not be able to overcome alone. But God can protect us from these things and help us overcome. Notice, Jesus never says that we should not undergo temptation or that we be kept from temptation, but that we are delivered from it. We call this part of the prayer “Protection and Strength”. Finally, in our prayers for our daily bread, we should also recognize that Jesus was always teaching that we should pray for others.

Colossians 4:2

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

Acts 2:42

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Acts 12:5

So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

When we pray, recognize that God is listening to us. Sometimes, He can surprise us with His answer. In Acts 12, the church was praying for Peter, who was in jail about to be killed. God heard their prayer and released Peter from prison. The church was so surprised that Peter was not in jail, they actually did not believe it and thought that it was an angel and when they saw it was him, they were astonished. Don't be surprised when God answers your prayers. Instead, go into the prayer session with confidence that He will answer it – it just might not be what you are expecting.

Praise

Psalm 7:17

I will give thanks to the LORD because of his righteousness and will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High.

Psalm 22:26

The poor will eat and be satisfied; they who seek the LORD will praise him— may your hearts live forever!

Psalm 28:6

Praise be to the LORD, for he has heard my cry for mercy.

Psalm 42:11

Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

Psalm 63:4

I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands.

Hebrews 13:15

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name.

One of the greatest pleasures we can have and one of the greatest things that we can do for God is to give him praise. We read throughout the Bible the importance of praising

God. One of my favorite parts of the Bible is Revelation 4&5. In those chapters, we read about the way that the heavenly host praise God. How wonderful it is that we can actually do the same with Him right here and now! When we praise Him, let's not just praise him with our minds and hearts but with our bodies as well. I never learned to worship and praise Him as much as when I learned to get over the "embarrassment" of worshipping with my body. Once I started to allow myself to raise my hands, to lift my voice, to lie prostrate or get on my knees, I started to give up the control I have and allow God to be the one in control. When we praise, we need to allow God to be the one in control. Think about it. If we won't give God the control, then what are we really saying when we praise Him with "You are above all" or "You are the greatest" or "You are the one who is in control". Obviously, our words wouldn't be matching our example. If in your praise time, you feel God telling you to get on your knees, go ahead!

At this point, I just want to make the comment that these last few things might all be done together. Meditating, praying and praising might be done individually during one of your quiet time sessions, or you might do them together.

In the same way, the next few might also go together:

Listening

1 Samuel 3:9

So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

Job 15:8

Do you listen in on God's council? Do you limit wisdom to yourself?

Proverbs 1:5

let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance-

Isaiah 28:23

Listen and hear my voice; pay attention and hear what I say.

John 10:16

I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

John 10:27

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

James 1:19 My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,

How important is it to listen to God? Sometimes we want to be the ones who determine what is good for us to do, but when we take that kind of control, God does not bless that. We can do what seems to us to be the right thing, but if it is not in God's will, we will not be successful. Moses tried to free the Israelites from Egypt in his power and in his time. He ended up fleeing in the desert for forty years. Abraham tried to have a son in his own way and time. God left him for 13 years before He came back and reminded Abraham who is in charge. We need to listen to God's voice to tell us when to do something, what to do, how to do it. Which leads us to – How do we hear God's voice?

I wish I could tell you that you have to do all these interesting and crazy things. Light incense, sit in a candle-lit room, chant certain words. But the reality is, all you have to do is listen. God speaks in a soft, still voice. You have to be still to hear it. God can see

into our hearts and minds. In the same way, He can place thoughts into our hearts and minds. It is this placing of thoughts that is how God will speak to us. All of a sudden, there is a thought that seems to come out of nowhere. It's like one of those "Light bulb" moments. We like to take credit for those: The times that we just got an idea all of a sudden. Things became suddenly clear to us and we recognized the right thing to do or say. But the reality is that God placed the thought in our hearts and minds. He spoke to us to give us the answer. How interesting is it that we all have had those moments, but if asked, how many of us would say that God has spoken to us? We need to listen to God speak to us and the only way we will hear that is by being quiet and thinking of Him. Then He will tell us what we need to do.

Visualizing

St. Teresa of Avila, "as I could not make reflection with my understanding I contrived to picture Christ within me."

Sometimes, we need to visualize to help us get closer to God. We need to see Jesus standing before us. Jesus told us that when two or more are gathered in His name, then he would be there with us. Can you picture that in your mind? Can you visualize Jesus standing among you as you pray in a group? As you pray with someone about anything? And although he said he would be with us when two or more are gathered, we also know that he will be with us unto the end of the age (Matt 28:20). So even when we are alone, can we see Jesus as we ask him for help, ask him for guidance?

Visualizing helps us to center our thoughts, to pay more attention. When we visualize like this, we are less apt to lose our concentration. Let's face it: when we spend time alone with God, we will be faced with multiple things that will take our focus of Him: the phone, a person, a thought that finds its way in. We need a way to refocus and the use of our imagination to help us to visualize is an important way for us to do that.

Can Satan use our imaginations? Of course. But just as Satan can use anything around us, it is God who is in charge. And God will take our visualizations and use them for His purpose. After all, it is the Creator who gave us our imaginations in the first place; it is He who rules it. If we were to be of the world and were to visualize worldly or even demonic things, then Satan would have his foothold. However, if our aim is to come to the One who created our imaginations, then it is He who will show us things when we come to Him. When we come to God in our visualizing, we will truly be depending on Him to lead us. If we come to Him visualizing in true faith that He is the one who will show us what He needs us to know, then He will. We need to come to Him, depending on Him to do His work.

And by the way – sometimes, when those thoughts come at us from seemingly out of nowhere, it is from God, so don't necessarily throw all of those out!

Writing

Jeremiah 30:2

"This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Write in a book all the words I have spoken to you.

Revelation 1:19

"Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later.

Finally, when we have our time alone with God, we should do so with a pen and paper in hand (or a keyboard for you geeks). God will give us visions that might or might not make sense. God will give us thoughts that might or might not make sense. In any case, we do not want to move away from what He is doing to try to analyze these things at that moment. We need to write them down. Journal your thoughts and visions. After your quiet time with God is over, then take the time to review what God has shown you. Review what He has told you. See how they all fit together.

We read about all the prophets. They all spoke of visions that they had. What did they do with those visions? They wrote them down! That's how we know about them! Imagine if they did not. When God gives us a vision, we need to write it down. It might not make sense to us, but I'll bet that many of the visions that the prophets had gotten didn't make sense to them either.

We now have an idea of what we should be doing when we come to God in our quiet time. We should always start with prayer asking God what He wants us to do today and we should always spend some time listening to what He says. Then we need to go into whatever it is that God is requesting. Sometimes it will be a single act. Sometimes it will be several of these. It would be normal for God to ask you to listen and visualize while writing down what He shows you and tells you. It would also be normal for God to ask you to stay in prayer while you praise Him and meditate on His Word.

Whatever it is that God asks you to do, it will grow you spiritually and help you in your daily walk with God. Then those times that God says to "Be still and know Me," you won't feel like you *have* to do something but instead you will feel very comfortable just being in His presence.