

# ***Knowing God Through Personal Devotions***

***By Philip Venables***

Our Saviour said **I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full** (John 10:10b). But what is at the heart of this life which our Saviour introduces us into? It is knowing God. Accordingly, our Saviour when speaking to His Father says **“Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent** (John 17:1-3).

True life is eternal life and is experienced in knowing the Father and the Son. It is formed in relationship. The gospel is the message which brings us into that relationship. When we receive the gospel message we come to know God. From that point on we have the knowledge and delight of growing in our knowledge of God. Peter concludes his second letter by urging his readers to **grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen** (2 Pet. 3:18).

Two key areas which help us in this growth are found in our personal and family devotions. These are the times we spend individually, and as families, seeking to know the LORD. We look in this study the personal side of our seeking after God.

### WHAT?

Our whole lives should be given over to seeking the LORD and knowing Him, but there are those special times which we can set aside to seeking after Him. We often call these our 'Quiet Times'. It is a time when you can be alone with your LORD God and with your Saviour.

It cannot be emphasised too much that Quiet Time is not about the performance of a religious duty to curry favour with a distant God. Rather it is about the development of a relationship. Relationships of any kind only develop and strengthen as we spend time with others, and that applies as regards to the relationship we have with our God. It all pivots around communication.

We need to be reminded here that our God exists in relationship. Our God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The three persons of the Trinity permanently fellowship with each other in beautiful harmony. God, in His mercy, introduces us into sharing that relationship.

### WHY?

Quite simply we should spend time alone with God because God views these times as very important in our lives. The importance of spending time alone with God is demonstrated in the life of our Saviour.

So we read of Him **Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed** (Mark 1:35). And further **Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed** (Luke 5:16).

He was the greatest man who ever lived and He was doing the most important work that ever needed doing, yet he was concerned that he would spend time alone with His Father. If such activity was indispensable to the Son of God so it should be to us.

To emphasise the importance of the personal and private seeking of the LORD we have one book of the Bible which by-and-large contains the dealings of God with an individual in secret. The book of Psalms gives us the experiences of individuals, mainly David, and how they expressed themselves in the presence of God regarding what they were passing through in their lives.

So Quiet Times are those special times when we can be fulfil the LORD's injunction upon us to **"Be still, and know that I am God** (Psalm 46:10a). Some would argue *"I am continually drawing near to God, why do I need to set aside a certain time for this?"* Continually drawing near to God is to be encouraged, but if our Saviour needed special times to be alone with his Father so do we.

Let me say at this point that I believe it is true that every Christian who has been strong in God and useful for Him has had a vibrant intimate experience of God in private. In such situations the presence of God is known and our characters are altered. Accordingly it is written of Moses:

**When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. But whenever he entered the LORD's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the LORD** (Ex. 34:33-35).

It is a truth of human experience that our characters are affected by the company we keep. The more we keep company with the LORD then the more godly we will be.

But we also need to remember the delight that God Himself has in His people seeking Him. He seeks for His people to come to Him in worship. And so we read **Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks** (John 4:23). Our LORD has come that we might have fellowship with God. In 1 John 1:3 we read **We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.**

## HOW?

### 1. The Timing

When are we to set time to seek the LORD? The most important thing here is that we do resolve to spend time seeking the LORD. If we aim at nothing we are sure to achieve nothing. So set a time, and I suggest that it is preferable to do this in the morning. I know some of us are people who thrive late in the day, but generally we are freshest in the morning. Moreover, by seeking the LORD in the morning we are setting ourselves up for the day, committing all to Him.

David says,

**Listen to my words, LORD,  
consider my lament.  
Hear my cry for help,  
my King and my God,  
for to you I pray.  
In the morning, LORD, you hear my voice;  
in the morning I lay my requests before you  
and wait expectantly.**  
(Psalm 5:1-3)

As regards to the length of time spent in Quiet Times it must be a personal matter. However, here are a few pointers:

- Satan wants to get us away from our Quiet Times as soon as possible because he realises that much power for God flows from there.
- **Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him** is the Word of the LORD in Psalm 37:7a. Don't rush your quiet time.
- Our Saviour spent the night in prayer.
- For myself I have to specifically allocate time or I will be easily dragged away by the demands of life. Others may be more spiritual and can flow with the LORD, but my experience is that I have to allocate a certain time.

### 2. The Manner

As we come to draw near to the LORD it is good to think about the image of washing ourselves so that we are fit for His presence. We come into the presence of the Holy One so we need to follow the pattern of 1 John 1:7-9 **But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.**

1. Confess our sins. We should continually be repenting of and confessing known sin in our lives. But as we come to Him, in our personal devotions we may not be aware of obvious sin in our life. However, the LORD is holy and we have sin in our deepest nature and we need to humbly confess our unworthiness.
2. Then we confess the all prevailing value of Jesus and His blood. We are accepted in Him and in Him alone. Surely the Father is pleased when we are immediately drawing attention to His Son.

### 3. The Attitudes

Let us ponder upon the attitudes that we need to have as we come to God and want to know Him and enjoy Him and to be with Him. To this end let us look at Psalm 130.

Scripture	Attitude
<b>1 Out of the depths I cry to you, LORD;</b>	Longing for God. There is a sense of being desperate to know God. We should not be casual about whether we meet with Him or not. Rather, we long for Him.
<b>2 Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.</b>	Needing God's help. As we come to God we desire to know Him listening to us and helping us. We cannot survive on our own
<b>3 If you, LORD, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand?</b>	Sensitive to sin. We realise He is a holy God. It is no causal matter to enter His presence
<b>4 But with you there is forgiveness; so that we can, with reverence, serve you.</b>	He is forgiving. We can come because he is a forgiving God. Therefore we honour Him.
<b>5-6 I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope. I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than the watchmen wait for the morning.</b>	Willingness to wait for God. God sometimes test the genuineness of our faith by keeping us waiting. We will not rush on without Him. We will wait; we need to wait
<b>7-8 Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.</b>	We expect from Him. We expect Him to work for His people. Our optimism is in Him and nowhere else.

#### 4. The Ingredients

When we come into His presence the main thing to have in our thinking is that of relationship. In relationships there is communication, but sometimes there is also silence. We need to be good listeners as well as good prayers.

In facilitating vital communication in our Quiet Times there are two essential ingredients; prayer and the Word of God. I suggest we use these together. Let us listen to George Mueller on this issue:

*Before this time my practice had been, at least for ten years previously, as an habitual thing to give myself to prayer, after having dressed myself in the morning. Now, I saw that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the word of God, and to meditation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reproved, instructed; and that thus, by means of the word of God, whilst meditating on it, my heart might be brought into experimental communion with the Lord. I began therefore to meditate on the New Testament from the beginning, early in the morning. The first thing I did, after having asked in a few words the Lord blessing upon his precious word, was, to begin to meditate on the word of God, searching as it were into every verse, to get blessing out of it; not for the sake of the public ministry of the word, not for the sake of preaching on what I had meditated upon, but for the sake of obtaining food for my own soul.*

*The result I have found to be almost invariably this, that after a very few minutes my soul has been led to confession, or to thanksgiving, or to intercession, or to supplication; so that, though I did not, as it were, give myself to prayer, but to meditation it turned almost immediately more or less into prayer. When thus I have been for a while making confession, or intercession, or supplication, or have given thanks, I go on to the next words or verse, turning all, as I go on, into prayer for myself or others, as the word may lead to it, but still continually keeping before me that food for my own soul is the object of my meditation.*

*The result of this is, that there is always a good deal of confession, thanksgiving, supplication, or intercession mingled with my meditation, and that my inner man almost invariably is even sensibly nourished and strengthened, and that by breakfast time, with rare exceptions, I am in a peaceful if not happy state of heart.*

As an example take. Ephesians 2:8 **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.** Here are some prompts we can take from this scripture:

- We can adore God as the God of all grace.
- Be overwhelmed that the grace of God has reached me.
- We thank God for our salvation and the Saviour.

- We ask that others would be saved.
- We pray that we would be given gospel opportunities today.
- Seek God for the salvation of specific individuals.
- Give thanks to God for the gift of faith.
- Thank Him for all His gifts.
- Worshipping Him as a giving God.
- Praise Him for giving Jesus to rescue Me.
- Ask Him for help that day to live as a grateful person.

As we consider the use of the Word in our coming to God listen to this from Paul Bucknell:

*Devotions are not devotions until we take God's Word by the Holy Spirit and interweave it with our lives.*

As a check and balance on the make-up of our Quiet Time let us think about the ACTS acronym here:

A is for adoration. Make sure that we are adoring our God

C is for confession. We are confessing our sins.

T is for thanksgivings. We have so much to be thankful for.

S is for supplication. We are asking God for necessary things in our lives and the lives of others stretching out around the world.

In incorporating these things into our Quiet Times it is worth thinking about praying through the psalms. These flow from the heart, are exercises of the godly and cover the whole realm of life. How about praying through the psalms in your quiet time.

It is also good to think about getting a good overview of God's Word and reading through the Bible. This gives opportunity to get a feel on the whole of God's Word. You may be reading something and have to stop because God has drawn your attention to a specific word, verse or text to well upon.

## 5. The Practice

Here are some practical thoughts as regards to maintaining a vital Quiet Time which nourishes our souls:

- Share with others what you are experiencing in the presence of God and learning from Him.
- Look for God to move in through your prayers and then give Him thanks.
- Use a prayer list.

- Use prayer cards. Make out a card for specific persons / organisations. Write a verse/verses for each. And then specific prayer requests for them.
- Use a journal to speak of your experiences of life and faith. Write down what God has taught you.
- Write down a verse or few words that God has brought to your attention. Put it in a small book on a piece of paper or card and refer to it during the day. I remember someone referring to having a “six-hit” to remember during the day. They memorised a maximum of six words from what they had read in the morning to keep with them during the day.
- Sing. Have your hymn book with you. You may find it helps lift your soul.
- Pray out aloud. This can help you to stop your mind from drifting.
- Tell others you are praying for them.
- Use fasting as a means of deepening your devotion to God.
- Find a place where you are not likely to be disturbed. Some might find it best to get out and go for a walk.
- It is good to think about our posture. Kneeling makes us feel our lowliness before God.

These are all thoughts, suggestions or prompts. We should not view them as obligatory. We have to find a practice that works for us. It is worth remembering as well that varying our Quiet Times also assists in maintaining freshness.

### **SOME OBSERVATIONS**

- We need to spend time in quiet before God in order to prepare for preaching messages or Sunday School lessons or Bible studies. However, our personal devotions are special. This is our time to be with our God and enjoy fellowship with Him without thinking of what we can get from Him.
- We are not spending time with our LORD just to ask Him for things. If such is the case it reveals that we have a very poor relationship with our Father.
- Personal Devotions are about fellowship; we are not performing religious duties. We are seeking to enjoy God. John Piper's catchphrase: *“God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him”* has much truth.



- We do not spend time with God just to get rewards. If we think that putting in a certain time will lead to a certain outcome and if the longer the time then the bigger the outcome we are deluded. We remember the words to Abram **After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”** (Gen. 15:1).
- Satan is relentlessly determined to keep us from fellowship with God. His first work is to keep us from salvation. Having failed in that He wants to keep us from fellowship with God. So let us not be surprised if we find it hard to have personal devotions. If we do get to have our personal devotions he wants to disrupt them. One way he achieves this is by taking our thoughts in other directions. To defeat Satan's schemes here why not think about praying about the issue your mind has drifted on to.
- When we are having our special times of fellowship with our LORD we are dealing with some of the biggest issues. We are, in a sense, involved in warfare. Remember the words of Ephesians 6:12, **For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.**
- Don't go on feelings. Sometimes we will sense the presence of the LORD. Sometimes we will feel He is distant. Whatever our experience, we should remember the promise of Matthew 5:6, **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.**
- The godliness of the church is dependant upon the godliness of the church members. The godliness of the church members depends upon their personal devotions. The importance of our personal devotions cannot be overstated.

### SOME ENCOURAGEMENTS

- The LORD delights for us to be in His presence. In John 14:23 our Saviour says **Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.**
- These times are a foretaste of heaven when our fellowship with Him will be unhindered and complete.
- It is through our quiet times that we grown and we are changed. **Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation** (1 Pet. 2:2) is what Peter says.

## USEFUL MATERIAL

<http://wwwFOUNDATIONSforfreedom.net/Topics/Devotions/Devotionsooo.html> This web-site by Paul Bucknell has so much helpful stuff to help us to draw near to God that we might be strengthened in God. I confess, I have based some of this study on material on that site.

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