

How to Begin Practicing Quiet Time

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(An updated version of the How to Listen to God pamphlet written for those in recovery)

Preparation:

- Commit to practicing Quiet Time for a minimum of 10 to 20 minutes daily for 30 days.
- Practice it each morning. (Get up earlier if need be. If for any reason you miss a morning, that's quite OK, simply begin counting the 30-day period over again! If you will do this for 30 days in a row, you'll likely make it a practice for the rest of your life.)
- Choose a sacred space - a quiet place where you can be alone. It should be comfortable and inviting. Reserve it only for prayer, if at all possible.
- Buy a notebook to write down your thoughts - have it ready when you begin.

Start:

- Sit in an upright posture. Remember into whose Presence you are entering.
- Read a short passage from scripture preferably beginning with the ones Dr. Bob and early A.A. members recommended: the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5, 6 and 7, Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 13 that's known as "The Love Chapter," and finally the Letter of James. So much of the A.A. program came from this short section of the Bible that A.A. was almost named, "The James Club!")
- Breathe deeply 2 or 3 times - let go of all tension and worry with each outward breath. (Add any other relaxation techniques, prayers, petitions or practices you find helpful.)
- Write a question. A very honest question that captures your real need. If you have a problem that's troubling you where you really need God's guidance, write it out and ask. Here are some examples:

1. God, I've tried getting clean and sober before - please tell me what I need to do that's different this time. (If you're already sober, look at other addictions or behaviors in your life that have you stuck and ask for guidance with them.)

2. Heavenly Father, I feel so alone and separated from you and from others, please help me feel your presence.

3. Father/Mother God, I'm withdrawing / isolating again - moving further away from my spouse (or my child). Please tell me what to do.

4. Lord Jesus (or Spirit, or My Creator), I need your guidance today as I face _____. Please show me the way so I can do your will. (Notice the different names being used for God. Choose the name that feels right for you.)

If you are struggling to find a name, start with "Unknown God" or "God, if you're there.")

- Listen for God's Voice, with your pen & notebook in hand. If the connection isn't immediate and words do not come into your mind, use your active imagination, especially when you're first making conscious contact: Say to yourself, "If God were to speak to me this is what he might say:" _____
- Write the words that come into your mind. Try not to edit them. Only listen and write. (If words come that you think are not from God write them down anyway. Put them in brackets if you like and try to re-focus on listening for God's Voice. In time, you will come to distinguish God's Voice more clearly from the voices of the ego.)
- If stuck, write your own name or write, "My child" or "My precious" or some other term of endearment that a loving Father-Mother God might use when speaking to you.
- Stop writing when it becomes strained.
- Feel the closeness of God as you experience conscious contact.

Following your Guidance:

- Share your writings weekly with a sponsor or with another individual who is also practicing Quiet Time. You may find that their writings contain some particular spiritual guidance for you or yours for them.
- Check your guidance. Does it pass the test: is it Honest, Pure, Unselfish and Loving.
- Act on your guidance - but only if it passes the test - and if it is a major move, check it also with others who are also listening to God.

SOME HISTORICAL REFERENCES:

- Dr. Bob and the Good Old-Timers tells of the 1938 report Frank Amos sent to John D. Rockefeller after studying the new A.A. movement. Amos reported “The A.A. members of that time did not consider meetings necessary to maintain sobriety. They were simply ‘desirable.’ Morning devotion and ‘quiet time,’ however, were musts.” (p.136)
- Bill Wilson: “I sort of always felt that something was lost from A.A. when we stopped emphasizing the morning meditation.” Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers (p. 178)
- In Dr. Bob’s last major talk in Detroit, Michigan in 1948, he identified some of the spiritual principles that kept him and other A.A. Pioneers sober:

“We were convinced that the answer to our problems was in the Good Book.

To some of us older ones, the parts that we found absolutely essential were the Sermon on the Mount, the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, and the Book of James. ... T

The Four Absolutes, as we called them, were the only yardsticks we had in the early days, before the Steps. I think the Absolutes still hold good and can be extremely helpful.

I have found at times that a question arises, and I want to do the right thing, but the answer is not obvious; almost always, if I measure my decision carefully by the yardsticks of absolute honesty, absolute unselfishness, absolute purity, and absolute love, and it checks up pretty well with those four, then my answer can’t be very far out of the way....”

The Big Book 11th Step instructions encourages us to “...ask God to direct our thinking” and that “we ask God for inspiration, an intuitive thought....What used to be the hunch or the occasional inspiration gradually becomes a working part of the mind. Being still inexperienced and having just made conscious contact with God, it is not probable that we are going to be inspired at all times. We might pay for this presumption in all sorts of absurd actions and ideas. Nevertheless, we find that our thinking will, as time passes, be more and more on the plane of inspiration. We will come to rely upon it.” (Big Book p. 87)

A FINAL NOTE: Sometimes people ask me, “How do you know it’s really God’s Voice you’re hearing? How do you know it’s not just you?” My answer is that I really don’t know - and in the end, it really doesn’t matter. If it’s me, it’s the best part of me I’ve ever found and it’s the part I need to start listening to more and more. It’s the small, still Voice that quiets the raucous “ego voices” of guilt and shame, anger and fear, addiction and destruction. Those are voices I’ve known and listened to all of my life. At 20 years sober, it was time for a major change to my program and not just a little tweaking around the edges. What I discovered was yet another Promise of the Big Book coming true: “When we drew near to Him He discloses Himself to us!” (Big Book p. 57)