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KEEPING OUR APPOINTMENTS WITH GOD

What if we could find a place to meet quietly with someone who

loves us—someone who accepts us just as we are, while seeing in us far more than we see in ourselves? What if this person could relieve our stress, our guilt, our insecurity, and our boredom?

If such a place and such a person existed, we can be sure that our enemy would try to talk us out of going there. Yet, as RBC writer Dennis Fisher shows us in the following pages, the place and the Person are waiting for us. What remains is for us to find practical ways of wearing a path to Him.

May the God of all peace fill you with joy as together we learn to walk with Him in the quiet and rush of our days.

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Cover Photo: Terry Bidgood

Printed in USA

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STRESSED BY LIFE'S DEMANDS

A middle-age executive nervously organizes his weekly calendar, having heard that mid-management downsizing will begin next month.

A young mother of twin toddlers struggles to get some time to herself, but the children keep waking each other up from their afternoon nap.

A recent high-school graduate with a newly shaved head struggles for privacy in his bunk at Marine Corps basic training.

The examples mentioned above are busy people who want to walk with God throughout the day. Yet all three have one thing in common. Each is in an environment that makes it difficult to spend quality time with God in prayer and Bible reading. It's precisely when we are stressed by

life's demands that a time of spiritual refocus becomes all the more important.

Many of us live with a sense of guilt because we are neglecting our personal devotional time with God. During the hectic demands of the day, it's easy to let the care of our inner life fall by the wayside.

*Devotions
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our daytimer.*

But if we measure our spirituality by counting the number of times we have met with God during the week, we have missed the point. Devotions are a matter of our heart more than a discipline of our daytimer.

Right after the creation of the first man and woman, God is seen “walking in the garden in the cool of the day” (Gen. 3:8). The Sovereign of the universe did not hide behind closed doors and angelic executive assistants to keep His creatures out. Instead, He took the initiative to seek out Adam and Eve for spiritual companionship.

A healthy and consistent devotional time is one important way we can respond to God’s desire to walk with us. Couples who are in love do not need to be coerced into spending time together. Each has a deep longing to experience life in relationship with the other person. When life’s interruptions keep them apart, each one seeks opportunities to reconnect.

That is what the quiet time is all about. We want to spend time with God to experience His presence,

comfort, and guidance. And in a mysterious way, as we spend time with God “beholding as in a mirror the

***“We love Him
because He
first loved us.”***
I John 4:19

glory of the Lord, [we] are being transformed into the same image” (2 Cor. 3:18). We find that spending time with God actually changes the kind of people we are.

This booklet is a short, practical guide on how to “reconnect with God.” It is designed to help you seek the One who created you for a relationship with Him, and to encourage you to draw upon His strength to live a growing spiritual life. In short, it is a guide to “keep our appointments with God” because of what He has done for us.

A RELATIONAL APPROACH TO SPENDING TIME WITH GOD

Successful marriages are as diverse as the variety of snowflakes. Athletes marry artistic types and social butterflies marry the shy and retiring. The obvious differences can be a source of conflict. Yet with a growing understanding of one's self and one's spouse, each can learn to adapt to the other's idiosyncrasies for the long haul.

Our walk with God is much like a spiritual marriage. Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom, has sought us out for eternal relationship. Because each of us has a different temperament, uses a different thought process, and is at a different level of spiritual maturity, each possesses a unique relationship with Christ.

Jesus, our Good Shepherd, is well aware of our individuality and wants to give us just what we need to grow in our walk with Him. As we study the Bible, we learn more and more about His amazing personal qualities and compassion for us. And in response to His overtures of love, we will want to find time to spend with Him.

The same fellowship-seeking God who walked in the cool of the day with Adam and Eve is reaching out to each of us today. But when should we try to connect with Him?

Many people emphasize the importance of starting the day with devotions. I once heard someone say that the guiding code for his own devotional life was "No Bible, no breakfast." But depending on your metabolism and current lifestyle, you may be more mentally alert

at midday, or even late at night. Everyone is different.

The Bible encourages meeting with God during any of these times. David wrote, “O God, You are my God; early will I seek You” (Ps. 63:1). Nehemiah, the great reformer, “read [the Law] . . . from morning to midday” (Neh. 8:3). David mentioned his anticipation to meditate on God’s Word during the “night watches” (Ps. 119:148). And the first Psalm mentioned in the Old Testament refers to the blessed man whose “delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night” (Ps. 1:2).

The Bible provides wonderful freedom about when to meet with God. The central issue is not what your metabolism is like, but rather what time of day will work best for you and your schedule. In my current situation, I find

morning to be a good time. Often I will read a passage in the morning, reflect on it during the day, and then review it again in the evening. It helps to have the same biblical thought throughout the day.

What matters most of all is to establish a regular time of the day when God can speak to you through His Word and you can respond to Him in prayer.

***It’s important
to establish
a regular time
each day
with God.***

Once you have chosen a time, it’s important to be disciplined in keeping your appointments with God. But how?

BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP

“Everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things” (1 Cor. 9:25).

Two people who love each other are intentional about spending meaningful time together. To do this, both discipline and love must work together. Taking time requires deliberate planning.

A similar focus is necessary to cultivate meaningful time with God. Often we begin the day fully intent on having devotions at a set time. But as the day goes on, we are bombarded by one urgent item after another. Soon devotions are postponed until tomorrow.

But when a quiet time is the priority, centering ourselves in God puts things in perspective. And this relational connection requires discipline.

In 1 Corinthians 9, the apostle Paul used the

imagery of athletic games to illustrate the need for spiritual discipline. The term used for “temperate” really means “the power of self-control; to practice abstinence.”

When athletes say “yes” to the Olympics, they say “no” to other distractions. Rigorous control of diet and exercise are the only way to win in their chosen competitive sport.

Similarly, by setting up a daily devotional discipline and making it the priority, a host of other positive habits can follow.

Here are some ways to set up a quiet time before you actually begin:

Reserve A Daily Time To Reconnect.

Whether we need a highly disciplined schedule or prefer a more relaxed one, we all need a plan. If you are using a daily planner, computer software, or some other calendar, you might

want to set aside a time when you will meet with God daily.

Determine How Much Time To Spend.

When I was taking classical guitar lessons, the instructor told me, “It’s better to practice 15 minutes a day every day, and then to practice for several hours on only a few days.” He was right, especially when it comes to establishing new habits. But new habits are sometimes hard to form.

It’s not by accident that the author of Hebrews wrote that we are not to forsake “the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some” (Heb. 10:25). He understood that church attendance, like any other activity, is a habit that needs to be cultivated.

This principle clearly applies to our devotional time. It’s better to block out 15 minutes and seek to remain faithful to honoring

that time than it is to let our daily discipline be eaten away by daily distractions. After praying about how much time to spend, enter that time block into your calendar.

Find A Quiet Place.

We all concentrate or are distracted in different ways. C. S. Lewis brings up a surprising suggestion in his book *Letters To Malcolm*. His admonition on the “quiet time” is to make sure we have “just the right amount of distraction” to help us concentrate. Lewis tells the story of a man who would have his devotional time in a railway compartment because complete silence left him open to inner distractions. Ironically, his focus was enhanced when it was challenged just slightly.

The point is that we’re not always going to find a place that is as quiet as an undiscovered cave.

Invariably, minor distractions are likely to occur. But we need to look for a place where we believe it is sufficiently quiet to help us concentrate.

Now jot down in your calendar the place for reconnecting with the Lord.

Set Up Realistic Expectations. I knew a student a number of years ago who was an excellent writer. The problem was that he always turned in his papers late. Why?

“If I can’t do it right, I won’t do it!” was his response. His commitment to perfectionism led him down a path of inconsistency. This is a common problem in maintaining a quiet time. It is a “throwing the baby out with the bath water” mentality. It is the “all or nothing” approach to a devotional life.

But in a realistic sense,

daily devotions are about progress more than perfection. It’s better for us to have a shorter and even less meaningful devotional time on a given day than it is to skip it in the name of high standards. When we wait for the perfect circumstances to have “quality time” with the Lord, they rarely occur. Manageable bite-size devotional times can lead to greater consistency.

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But what happens when the time and place are reserved and you actually show up for your quiet time, but you’re not in the mood to have one?

EXCHANGING HUMAN STRENGTH FOR DIVINE STRENGTH

“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew [exchange] their strength” (Isa. 40:31).

Isaiah believed that waiting on the Lord was anything but a passive process. This idea of “staying power” required a radical exchange of human for divine strength. The Hebrew word for *renew* means “to substitute, to exchange, to show newness, to sprout.” The Christian is not supposed to stir up his or her willpower, but instead to exchange human energy for divine energy.

When I was a sophomore in college, I had a discipline problem when it came to studying. I found all kinds of other activities with my friends that competed with getting assignments in on time and

being fully prepared for exams.

One night after class, I discussed my problem with one of my professors. After talking to him, I felt compelled to single out my devotional time as the top priority of the day. It would be the one project I planned on getting done first thing every morning.

The next day as I began my new commitment to prioritize my quiet time, I found a sudden sagging in my resolve. I just didn't feel like it. I wasn't in the mood.

Claiming Isaiah 40:31, I decided to become transparent with the Lord and “exchange my strength” for His. I told Him my heart was cold and that I felt little motivation to spend time with Him. I confessed my apathy as sin, and then I thanked Him for His forgiveness (1 Jn. 1:9).

Then I chose to

surrender my mood to God and asked Him to change it. I began to depend on Him to replace my stagnation with His vitality. I read through the biblical passage again that I was scheduled to read. I recommitted myself to pray for transformation.

After about 20 minutes of this, I began to pray over other projects that needed my attention later in the day. I told God about assignments I didn't want to do and asked Him for the strength necessary to deal with them.

By the time my feet hit the asphalt on my way to class, I began to feel an energy, a focus, and most important, a discipline that I had previously lacked. My grades went up that semester. I had found a way of exchanging my strength for that of the living God.

CULTIVATING TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

Have you ever written a letter to someone in which you really opened your heart? You probably felt vulnerable as you waited for a response. How would you feel if the written response to your letter ignored everything you had said but talked only about issues that concerned the other person?

This could be the view of heaven as many a quiet time goes on day in and day out. The Bible is a love letter from our heavenly Father. Yet too often our prayers do not reflect the actual portion of Scripture we have read. Instead, the content of the love letter is ignored as our many pressing needs are petitioned upward.

What needs to happen, however, is spiritual two-way communication.

God Speaks To Us Through His Word.

First Samuel 3:21 says that “the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel . . . by the word of the Lord.” The Hebrew word for *reveal* means “to show or uncover.” The Creator discloses His thoughts, character, and will through His Word. In biblical history, God either spoke directly or inspired His meanings into the sacred text. Today, He illuminates the Bible so we can have our understanding enlightened by the Holy Spirit as we read it.

In approaching a portion of Scripture, there is a time-honored process that can help make examining the Word of God fruitful.

First of all, we need to ask, “***What does the passage say?***” We answer this by looking at the actual words of the text as they are used in context. Allow the Bible passage

to speak for itself in its original historical and cultural setting. For example, let the Bible character wear his robe and sandals instead of expecting him to wear a business suit.

The second step is to ask, “***What does it mean?***” Within the Bible passage is an eternal spiritual truth that is meaningful in all ages. Often the main idea is not time-bound to an era hundreds of years ago but can be seen in our own time’s contemporary clothing.

Finally, we need to ask, “***How does it apply?***” The indwelling Holy Spirit will change our thoughts, speech, and behavior when we allow Him to use the spiritual principles we find in God’s Word. A key question to ask is, “In what measurable ways should my life change as a result of studying this passage?”

Now let's look at our conversational response to God.

We Respond To God In Prayer.

Daniel 6:10 says that Daniel “prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.” A group of the king's advisers knew about Daniel's prayer habit and plotted to use it against him. They were angry and jealous that the king was considering giving Daniel political power. So they influenced the king to pass an edict that would put to death anyone who prayed to any god or man other than the king himself. Yet, despite the danger, Daniel kept his appointment with God at an open window as he had always done.

During this established time of prayer, Daniel undoubtedly petitioned God about his own personal needs and interceded on behalf

of the needs of others.

As Daniel was making his requests known to God, a spirit of thanksgiving permeated his prayer-time. The whole idea of giving thanks carries with it the idea of gratefully responding to God for gifts already given. It is part of the dialogue that expresses appreciation. Immersion in the Word has a way of serving as a springboard of praise to God for who He is and what He has done for us.

TAKING TIME TO DIGEST YOUR MEAL

“Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts” (Jer. 15:16).

A delicious meal is not very appealing if you experience indigestion afterward. Slowing the

intake of the Word through careful reflection is also essential.

When encountering the pages of the Bible, it is so easy to skim over a given passage without seeing its significance. But the prophet Jeremiah, with his deep love for the Word of God, made it his first priority. The Hebrew word translated “were found” means both “to acquire and secure” and “to encounter and meet.” When looking at a passage, we should slow down and acquaint ourselves with the text until it becomes secured in our soul.

The passage then refers to one of the most enjoyable aspects of the culinary experience—actually eating the food. The word *eat* can mean “devouring, consuming food” as well as “burning fuel like a fire.” When we begin to “chew” on a

passage we begin to taste the wonderful spiritual flavors it contains.

Have you ever been hungry and found yourself sitting down to a wide range of entrees with distinctive flavors? As your stomach begins to fill with protein, fat, and carbohydrates, you actually begin to feel a lifting of your mood emotionally. Jeremiah felt a rush of “joy and rejoicing” as he ingested God’s Word into his heart. The word the prophet used for “heart” means “the inner man, thinking, reflection at the seat of appetites.” The Word of God nourishes our thoughts and emotions, and brings joy.

The foundation for delighting in feeding on God’s Word can be seen in the concluding section of this small but meaningful verse: “I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts.” To Jeremiah,

meaningful time in God's Word is always tied to our relationship with Him. In our devotional time, we become aware once again that we are called by the eternally existing Lord of heaven and earth. And this realization transforms our spiritual dryness into a dynamic encounter with the One who created us for fellowship with Him.

WRITING IT DOWN

Without getting buried in paperwork, there are some advantages to writing down your personal time with the Lord.

Our thoughts and feelings are a constant revolving door of varied life experiences. If we have a written record of what is covered in our quiet time, various trends in our walk of faith will be revealed.

In addition to this, we will see progress that has been made in different areas

of our lives that would go unnoticed if it were not written down.

The guide given below could be copied down in a notebook and kept as a concise record of your daily quiet time.

DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

Date: _____

Passage Read Today: _____

Version: _____

Highlight (chapter & verse): _____

Insights: _____

Application: _____

Prayer-time: _____

VARYING YOUR METHODS

Recently I was at a local Christian bookstore doing some browsing. I asked the woman behind the counter about books to help with daily devotions. She took me over to a whole section of different helps for a personal quiet time.

There was a popular day-by-day devotional. Not far from it was *My Utmost For His Highest* by Oswald Chambers, a devotional classic adapted for a daily quiet time. Farther down the aisle was another selection of readings for going through the Bible in one year.

In most of these books, a relevant inspirational excerpt or story draws a lesson from a suggested Bible reading. One reason for the popularity of this kind of devotional guide is that it has a short, memorable lesson that

is both inspiring and applicable to daily life.

One caution in using this kind of guide, however, is the temptation to just read the story and skip the Bible reading for the day. Once this becomes a habit, the believer can find his life built on inspirational thoughts instead of the Word of God—a spiritual life that is built on very shaky ground.

If you use one of these devotional guides, be sure to read the Bible passage along with the stories that illustrate the biblical truth. If we build our lives on anecdotes and excerpts rather than on the Word of God, we can develop an improper view of the Christian life and may be setting ourselves up for a fall. God has promised to bless His Word, not our illustrations about it (2 Tim. 3:15-16).

In addition to the

wonderful resources for daily devotions that you can find in any Christian bookstore, there are Web sites where additional help can be found (see www.gospelcom.net).

There is such a variety of different methods for effective devotional times and Bible study, that there's bound to be a suitable approach for you.

In our drive to make our method work, it's important to remind ourselves about our motivation. Spending time with God to experience His presence, comfort, and guidance should be our goal—not to be more “spiritual” or to alleviate guilt for our own shortcomings.

Consider the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was perfect and never sinned, yet He looked for undistracted time with His Father. Why? Because Jesus functioned on earth as

every human being was intended to function—in total dependence on the Father. Let's take a look at how He sought out time to commune with His heavenly Father.

JESUS' PRIORITY OF PRAYER

In Mark 1:35-39 we see the priority that Jesus put on prayer. After an exhausting time of healing sick and demon-possessed people late into the night, Jesus woke early in the morning, went to a solitary place, and prayed. I believe that Jesus used this time for regaining His spiritual center. Peter interrupted Jesus' devotional time to express the further demands of the needy crowd. Rather than responding to the immediate need, the Lord reaffirmed a commitment to greater outreach in other cities.

A closer look at the text will show the inner workings of our Lord's own devotional life.

SEEKING ISOLATION AND COMMUNION

“Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed” (Mk. 1:35).

Have you ever thought about why Jesus Christ even needed a quiet time? We are all aware of our own weaknesses and sins. The need for cleansing and renewal is often the felt need of the committed believer. But the Bible teaches the sinlessness of our Lord—He “who knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21). So why did Jesus go out to a solitary place while the disciples slept in?

During His ministry on earth, the Lord Jesus

chose to limit the exercise of His divine attributes. He was fully God, but He chose to depend on the Father and the indwelling Spirit working through Him. He did this to show us how we are to depend on God. That dependence can be seen in the way Jesus sought time alone with His Father. The term translated “solitary place” means “a desert, wasteland, uninhabited region.” After such dynamic emotional interactions as healing many crippled and sick from the night before, Christ needed solitude to make communion with the Father most effective.

The walk of faith requires coming repeatedly to God for His unique guidance. The result of Jesus' time alone with God redirected His vision from local needs to greater outreach.

LISTENING TO GOD'S DIRECTION AMID DISTRACTION

“Simon and those who were with Him searched for Him. When they found Him, they said to Him, ‘Everyone is looking for You.’ But He said to them, ‘Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth’ ” (Mk. 1:36-38).

The word *found* in verse 37 is better translated “hunted down.” Can you imagine a more annoying scenario? Peter thought he knew best how Christ should spend His day. And he was even willing to interrupt the Lord’s prayer-time to offer his advice. The need Simon Peter was expressing was clearly an urgent one: “Everyone is looking for You.”

No one active in ministry (either fulltime or as a volunteer) has escaped the pressure of certain

ministry “interest groups.” Their needs are often valid and they sometimes have representatives who plead for immediate attention. Yet look at what Jesus did. He was not worried about being perceived as someone who wasn’t responsive to immediate needs. Having only a limited amount of time and energy, He had received direction from His Father to go elsewhere.

You would think Jesus’ quiet time would have made Him more sensitive to the people right there with Him. But to meet only the needs directly in front of us is to ignore God’s ever-expanding concern for those who are lost. Time alone with His Father brought Jesus back to the purpose for which He came into the world: “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Lk. 19:10).

CARRYING OUT APPLICATION

“He was preaching in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and casting out demons” (Mk. 1:39).

It’s so easy to skip over the significance of the last verse of this section. It’s not just a review of what was said in the previous verse. Not by a long shot! Verse 39 is the payoff to the whole passage. Jesus actually did what He said He was going to do. He went to the synagogues and preached.

The word *preaching* would be used over and over again within the pages of the New Testament as the apostles duplicated the Lord’s pattern for spreading the good news in expanding circles of outreach. Jesus’ target area for ministry was expanded to include “all Galilee.” Later, as His disciples followed in His steps, it would extend

“to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

It’s important to apply what comes out of our prayer-time. Meaningful fellowship with Christ comes when we follow His example (1 Pet. 2:21) and we apply His Word in the power of the Spirit.

Jesus said, “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him” (Jn. 14:21). If we see our quiet time only as a spiritual oasis once a day, we may fall into the trap of compartmentalizing our spiritual life. From the Garden of Eden until now, God has desired to walk with His people in life’s journey (Gen. 3:8). So it’s essential that we take what we learn in our quiet time with us throughout the entire day.

CARRYING THE DIVINE DIALOGUE INTO THE DAY

Our Lord's encounter in Luke 24:13-32 with the two men walking on the Emmaus Road is filled with insights about how to keep the divine dialogue with God going throughout the day.

ENCOUNTERING JESUS IN REAL-LIFE PROBLEMS

Have you ever poured a lot of spiritual attention into your quiet time and then left it behind to face the problems of the day in your own strength? This is called compartmentalization or confining your spiritual life to an exclusive part of the day. But Jesus never intended for us to go it alone. He is eager to help us solve life's problems. Let's take a look at how

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He did this on the road to Emmaus.

Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him (Lk. 24:13-16).

Little is known about the two who walked the well-worn path from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus. But the Bible indicates that they were troubled. They had an internal conflict, an emotional struggle that was based on a disappointing experience. And this problem was being discussed by these two

friends. Human beings are problem solvers by nature, and they usually don't do it alone.

It was in this context of human need that Jesus approached the two men as they walked. "Jesus Himself drew near and went with them" (v.15). What wonderful words! The risen Christ really does want to invade our human circumstances and carry on a dialogue with us. Life is a journey and Christ wants to be our companion on it, not just someone we talked to at the last rest stop.

TRYING TO MAKE SENSE OF GOD'S WAYS

One of the great challenges of the Christian life is trying to make sense of the apparent contradictions and setbacks we all face. Much of our perplexity comes from having only part of the whole picture, which

distorts our perspective. The two men on the road to Emmaus illustrate this inadequacy and how the Lord Jesus helped them correct it.

[Jesus] said to them, "What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?" Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?" And He said to them, "What things?" So they said to Him, "The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we

were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see”
(Lk. 24:17-24).

In response to Christ’s question, the two went into detail about what was troubling them. Their summary is a concise review of the hope that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah who would redeem the nation Israel. Instead, He had been put to death in the most cruel form of

execution—crucifixion. And to make their thoughts even more agitated, there had been reports of His tomb being empty and the appearance of angelic messengers.

***To be human
is to look at life’s
events through
a keyhole.***

The two who walked next to the Lord were troubled by soaring hopes followed by shattered dreams. Their experience is similar to what many of us have experienced. To be human is to look at life’s events through a keyhole. Each of us is finite and can take in only part of the picture of any circumstance.

So often what we believe

the Bible teaches doesn't make sense in our limited perspective of an apparent tragedy. Whether it's our expectations of how God should answer a prayer or how we view life's apparent misfortunes, we are limited in our understanding.

But Jesus wants us to tell Him our concerns. He has a listening ear and is concerned about all the details of our lives. Our unique relationship with Christ allows us to communicate with Him through prayer in any of life's experiences.

LETTING JESUS EXPLAIN HIMSELF

It must have been devastating for Jesus' followers to have their hopes and dreams crushed right in front of their eyes. But when Christ was allowed to illuminate their understanding of the Word of God in their experience,

they began to get a fresh outlook on their circumstances.

Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself (Lk. 24:25-27).

Our Lord's response sounds abrupt. Yet in reality, this situation is a case study in education. Look at the wording. "Foolish ones" is a compound word that literally means "without knowledge." The disciples on the Emmaus Road were handicapped by having only part of the information.

"Slow of heart to believe" is a rebuke of their slowness

in trusting God for what He had promised.

Jesus then provided the only remedy for spiritual ignorance—more information. The Teacher focused their attention on key passages of the Old Testament that explained that the Messiah must suffer before being glorified.

The lesson for us today is that though we may sometimes struggle with disappointment, we often lack all the information to make sense of it at the time. The Lord may eventually provide the people or the necessary information to bring closure to our problem. In some cases, we won't get the answer until we meet Christ face-to-face in eternity. But because life on earth is a spiritual bootcamp of sorts, it's essential to be teachable and in regular contact with our Teacher. Then our faith and knowledge can grow.

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LEARNING TO KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING

Meaningful connection with the risen Christ makes us want to linger in His presence. When the two travelers reached their final destination, they felt a strong need to stay in close proximity to the Savior.

Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. But they constrained Him, saying, "Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." And He went in to stay with them (Lk. 24:28-29).

The disciples had several miles to hear what this "mysterious stranger" had to say, and they wanted to hear more. "Abide with us," was their response. They wanted to show hospitality to the One who had given

such insight into messianic prophecy.

We all have times when our circumstances either nurture or hinder our spiritual development. We need to be sensitive to those times when we begin to lose contact with the Lord. Then we need to find ways of adapting to those circumstances so that we can reestablish our closeness to Him.

To include the Lord in our daily routine often results in seeing His divine activity at work.

RESPONDING TO GLIMPSES OF DIVINE ACTIVITY

The stranger who had walked with the two on

their journey joined them for their evening meal. And because of who their guest was, this meal would be accented with the supernatural. To include the Lord in our daily routine often results in seeing His divine activity at work.

Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" (vv.30-32).

At dinner that night, after Jesus broke the bread and blessed it, the disciples' eyes were opened and they recognized Him. Earlier, their eyes "were restrained, so that they did not know

Him” (v.16). But now their eyes were opened.

It’s interesting that the word for “opened” has the same root as the word for “foolish and ignorant.” An addition to this root word gives the word *opened* in verse 31 the meaning “to penetrate the mind.” And once their minds understood who Jesus was, they recognized Him from previous encounters.

Surprisingly, the supernatural disappearance of our Lord didn’t inspire any recorded comment between the two. Instead, they reflected on what it was like to be on the road talking with Jesus about the Scriptures.

Their hearts were aflame with supernatural insight as Jesus Himself explained the Old Testament along the way. The same Greek word used for opening their eyes to recognize Him (v.31) is used to explain how He

“opened the Scriptures” to them (v.32). He penetrated their minds with understanding.

Recognizing Christ in the Scriptures and in our life experiences should occur throughout the day rather than being limited to a once-a-day event.

So what can we learn from this incident with the resurrected Lord about extending our quiet time into the day?

- Learn how to pray while “on the go.”
- Let God into your daily problem-solving activities.
- Acknowledge to others your need of divine help.
- Expect God to act outside your own limited perspective.
- Keep reflecting on a biblical theme for the day.
- Be encouraged by the fact that Jesus has

promised to stay with us in all of life's circumstances.

SPRINGBOARD TO PRAISE

How do we know if we're making progress in our personal time with the Lord? One major characteristic will be an increase in appreciation for who and what God is. Our personal quiet time should cause us to praise Him.

The apostle Paul taught about and practiced the dynamic relationship between God's Word and a lifestyle of praise:

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord (Col. 3:16).
When we personalize

and internalize the Word of Christ, we make a place in our heart where He can feel at home. As this becomes a daily reality, we are moved to teach and admonish and learn from others about the wonders of God's character and His works. This results in instruction and encouragement, stimulating other people to praise God as well.

Our personal quiet time should cause us to praise God.

A healthy and meaningful devotional time spills over into three types of praise. "Psalms" are "Scripture songs" that have been lifted out of the pages of the Bible and set to music. "Hymns" are those

melodies and lyrics that express an individual's personal relationship with God. And "spiritual songs" refer to a variety of worship lyrics and styles of music. What they all have in common is genuine spiritual content that reflects upon God's greatness.

The final portion of verse 16 underscores one of the unique distinctives of the Christian life—the realization of God's grace. Our quiet time should be forever linked to gratitude for the grace of God. It is a recognition that God has saved us from the penalty of sin and now provides the power to walk in obedience to Him.

An amazing characteristic of being in love is wanting to please the one you love. Our ongoing daily time with the Lord will help to increase our love for Him

and enable us to please Him in all that we do.

Our ongoing daily time with the Lord will help to increase our love for Him and enable us to please Him in all that we do.

When God spent personal time with the newly created Adam, walking with him in the Garden, it must have been a wonderful time of love, joy, and peace. Today, we too can have a moment-by-moment revitalizing exchange with God.

HAVE YOU STARTED YOUR JOURNEY WITH CHRIST?

Our purpose in these pages has been to encourage a thoughtful, daily, heart-to-heart relationship with God. We've written primarily to those who already know God personally but want to know Him better.

But some of you may not yet know God in a personal way through His Son. You may think of yourself as a Christian only because you were taken to church as a child. Or you may take comfort from the fact that you were baptized as an infant and confirmed.

Family and church connections are an important part of religious life. But these experiences don't make a person a Christian.

Centuries ago, a religious leader named Nicodemus approached Jesus to find answers to his own spiritual questions. Nicodemus said, "We know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him" (Jn. 3:2).

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Jesus' response seems surprisingly unrelated to Nicodemus' comments: "Jesus answered and said to him, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God' (v.3).

Their conversation underscored the contrast between physical life and spiritual life. In the Garden of Eden, when God began to fellowship with Adam in the cool of the day, Adam had not yet disobeyed God. He was in a state of complete innocence. But after Adam disobeyed God by eating of the forbidden fruit, a fundamental change took place. A great barrier to fellowship between God and man damaged their relationship. When God made Himself available for fellowship with Adam as He had done in the past, Adam expressed his awareness of his disobedience by hiding from God (Gen. 3:8-10).

Sin had created an insurmountable chasm where once there had been an intimate union between God and man. The same alienation has persisted since that fateful day.

All of us were made for fellowship with our Creator, but we have chosen to go our own way. The Bible says that “all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way” (Isa. 53:6).

The tragic result of this rebellion against God is spiritual death. Adam was told that on the day he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil he would surely die (Gen. 2:16-17). Adam ate of the forbidden fruit and at that moment he died spiritually. Although he lived on physically for many years, his ability to fellowship with God had been damaged by the consequences of sin.

That’s why Jesus’ words to Nicodemus were such good news. Jesus told him that each of us can be made alive again on the inside. God’s Holy Spirit can come inside us and restore our fellowship with

God. But how does this happen?

Pascal, the great mathematician, said that inside every human heart is a God-shaped vacuum that can only be filled with the person of Jesus Christ. The Lord is eager to forgive your sin, restore your fellowship with God, and give you the gift of eternal life. But there are some biblical requirements.

First, we must admit that we are sinners and cannot save ourselves. The Bible tells us that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

Second, we need to recognize the seriousness of our sin. Our human tendency is to rationalize and grade on a curve by comparing ourselves to others. But God sets a standard of perfection in which no one can please Him based on self-effort. The Bible says that “our

righteousnesses are like filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6).

“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

***“The wages of sin
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Romans 6:23***

The good news is that Christ suffered the consequences of our sin, making it possible for us to have eternal fellowship with Him. The apostle Paul wrote, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). This means that Jesus Christ, who never did

anything wrong, gave His own life on the cross so that the penalty of sin could be paid and His righteousness applied to us (2 Cor. 5:21).

“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”
2 Corinthians 5:21

Third, it's not enough just to know that Christ died for us. We need to act on this by receiving Him as Savior and Lord. The Bible says, “As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name” (Jn. 1:12).

Are you ready to make that decision? If you are, you can go to Jesus in

prayer and share with Him your desire to receive forgiveness for sin and the start of an eternal relationship with Him.

Jesus, I admit that I am a sinner. Thank You for dying on the cross to pay the penalty for my sin. I now receive You as my Savior and Lord. Take control of my life and make me the kind of person You want me to be. Amen.

Did you pray that prayer? If you did, you can have the assurance that Christ is in your life. The apostle John wrote, “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 Jn. 5:13).

The devotional time that this booklet has talked about will now take on new meaning. Jesus Christ looks forward to spending time with you, and you will want to spend time with Him.

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