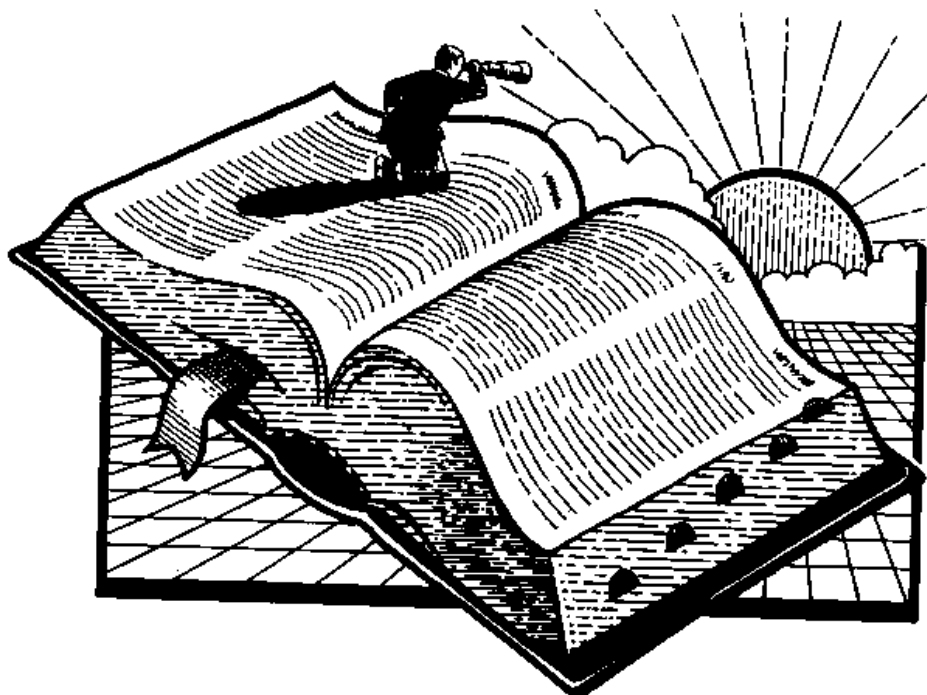


Practical QT



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Introduction

This guide was originally presented as a series of email devotions (eDevs) during the period March – July 2009. It provides some practical tips and hints for having a daily devotional time. Many people call this a “Quiet Time” (QT). While many Christians know that you should have a QT, they don't know how. We hope this guide will help you to develop a rich and meaningful QT for yourself.

The tips have been rearranged from the order in which they were presented in the original eDev series to form a rough progression, but they aren't in a totally systematic order. Hopefully, once you've worked through the complete series, you'll have a fuller picture.

In addition to the short Scripture references that were provided in the original eDev series, this booklet also includes suggestions for slightly longer readings. You might like to consider using these readings as the basis for your Quiet Times over a period of three weeks, gradually expanding your “repertoire” of QT techniques, and putting them into practice as you work through the series.

We'd also value your comments and suggestions for improving or adding to this booklet. These can be emailed to: PracticalQT@gmail.com

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#1 Don't go it alone!

Read: *Psalms 119:17–32*

Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. (Psalms 119:18)

³² *They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” ... ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. (Luke 24:32–45)*

To get us started, here is a quick overview:

WHAT: A simple daily time where we draw near to God

PURPOSE: Worship God and recalibrate our lives.

ACTIONS: Slow down, Quiet down, Reflect on Truth, Worship and Pray.

KEY VALUES: Simplicity, Regular, Sustainable and Honest

A typical QT lasts 10–20 minutes and involves:

1. Slow down, stop the racing mind, become aware of God's presence.
2. Pray for God's help (more on this in a moment).
3. Read Scripture (not study, but read and reflect on it).
4. Reflect on where you are right now, hear what God is saying to your soul.
5. Pray.

If you look at the passages above they all have one thing in common: the verb “open” and the fact that God does it.

We need the help of the Holy Spirit when we come to Quiet Times:

- He can open our eyes, because we're often too preoccupied to notice Truth.
- He can open our hearts, because they can be hard.
- He can open the Scriptures to us, because they are God-breathed and not just human literature.

So.... Tip #1: Ask God to help you as you have your QT!

#2 Establish a routine

Read: *Daniel 6:1–21*

Then they said to the king, “Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day.” (Daniel 6:13)

This is one of the toughest tips, but mastering it is very worthwhile. Daniel had a daily routine: he prayed three times a day.

People knew about it. I imagine his family and staff at home expected it and structured their lives around it. We know his enemies knew it — they built their trap around the predictability of Daniel's prayers.

The routine was so well-established that Daniel didn't even think about changing it. I imagine that even if he had thought about changing his pattern in the light of the king's decree, he would find himself moving on autopilot toward the prayer-room when the usual prayer time came.

I also imagine that the routine survived because it nourished and replenished him. We don't easily sustain habits that don't add something to our lives. (Even bad habits have a short-term pay-off even though there is a long-term loss).

There is value in getting a routine for your QT:

Try and make it the same time and same place every day.

Pretty soon those around you will respect that time and help make it work for you. (There is the lovely story of a mother of three who used to climb into the playpen with her Bible while her boys crawled and played outside. They used to bug her at first until they realised the the mommy who climbed out of the playpen after her QT was nicer than the one who climbed in!)

The routine puts us on autopilot to do the QT even when we're tired, depressed or out of sorts. And, once it's done, we're glad we did!

#3 Brain required... but also the heart

Read: *Psalms 107:23–43*

*Whoever is wise, let him heed these things
and consider the great love of the LORD. (Psalms 107:43)*

Our Quiet Times are not a leave-your-brain-at-the-door moment. We should come to our meeting with God with full-devotion, full-passion, full-sensitivity and full-concentration.

The ancient Church Leaders called us to contemplate God. If “contemplate” sounds airy-fairy or navel-gazing, then you might want to use the word “consider” because this is a word Scripture uses:

- Psalm 107 is a psalm that recounts the history of God's dealings with Israel. The call to *consider* God's love comes at the end of the psalm.
- In Psalm 8 the psalmist *considers* the heavens and the things God has made.
- In Psalm 119 he *considers* God's Laws.
- In Ecclesiastes 7:14 we are reminded to *consider* God's working in the good times and bad times.

- In Isaiah 41:20 we are called to *consider* God's greatness compared to the futility of idols.
- Jeremiah calls people to *consider* their ways in the light of God's awesomeness (2:19).
- Jesus reminds us to *consider* the lilies and learn about God's provision (Luke 12:27,28).
- In Romans 11:22 we are urged to *consider* the kindness and sternness of God.
- In Hebrews 12:3 we are urged to *consider* the example of Christ in the face of hardship.

So, we're to think about God. We're to consider His creation, His work in our past, what His Word says about Him, the uselessness of idols when compared to Him, His presence even in our tough times, His greatness, His provision, His holiness and the example of His Son.

We're to think about God thoroughly, with wide-awake brains and alert faculties. We're to observe His fingerprints in creation and analyse the evidence and conclude that He is good.

But we have to come back to the word “contemplate” because the danger with “consider” is that it can seem to imply only a mental exercise. “Contemplate” reminds us to let our considerations drop 30cm from our head to our heart.

Consider + Worship = Contemplation!

#4 Be systematic

Read: *Acts 18:18–28*

Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. (Acts 18:24)

Apollos was able to assist the church in debates with the Jews because he could effectively argue from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah. He was “well-versed” in Biblical truth.

Now a daily QT is not primarily about studying Scripture or learning to defend our faith from Scripture, but there is value in being systematic. Don't just dip into Scripture at random. Follow a plan. Read through a Gospel, even if it is only about a third of a chapter at a time. You could also follow a daily devotional guide or read around a theme, but the point is to be systematic. This has three benefits:

1. It creates continuity between yesterday, today and tomorrow.
2. It helps you get a fuller picture (when we read at random we tend to go to what we know all the time and never expand our horizons).
3. It broadens your general knowledge of the Bible.

A suggested method: Read through a gospel (Matt, Mark, Luke or John) at the rate of about one Bible page at a time. Then do about 10 psalms over two weeks, maybe longer if they are long. Then go to some of Paul's letters, or Acts, then go back to one of the gospels. Once you've covered all of these start with some of the other books, always coming back to the gospels (they're worth doing more than once!).

Reading according to a plan is very beneficial and builds a good foundation.

#5 Get it into your head!

Read: *Psalms 119:1–16*

I have hidden your word in my heart

that I might not sin against you. (Psalms 119:11)

Memorising Scripture sounds very old-fashioned — something that our grandparents did and that we were asked to do at Sunday School. (For some folk the Sunday School memory-work was not reward-based, and so we don't even have good memories of it).

But the principle is sound: when the concepts and values of Scripture are ingrained in our memories and subconscious we will find that the truths pop out of our minds at just the right time to help us or to be an encouragement to others.

Memorising verses by rote isn't the only way to get Scripture into our heads. The real secret is to pay maximum attention when we are reading Scripture. I realised a long time ago that I should use all the study tools I employ when studying text-books to when I read Scripture. I need to do all I can to ensure that my mind is fully engaged.

So...

- I summarise what I read
- I draw mind-maps of the characters and plot-lines
- I take my Bible with me to church and Bible study so that I'm in my familiar “study environment” whenever the Bible is being taught
- I write notes in the margin of my Bible when someone preaches on a text I didn't understand well before.
- I have a bunch of coloured pencils and a colour code that I use when I read my Bible
- I have a Bible that I don't mind writing in. If yours is too precious to write in, go and get one that you will be willing to write in. The paper and ink aren't holy — the message is.

These are all things that I do to make my Bible reading time most effective. What I have found is that Biblical truths are being ingrained into my heart and mind (I can't always tell you chapter and verse, but I can remember more or less what the verse said and more or less where on the page it is and what colour it is underlined with! ☺)

It's not about memorising Scripture as an incantation — rather it is that the truths of Scripture live in our hearts and minds.

#6 Retain it!!! Act on it!

Read: *James 1:19–27*

²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does. (James 1:23–25)

It's hard to imagine forgetting what you look like. Mirrors were probably less abundant back then than they are today and yet James seems to think that it was still inconceivable that people would forget their appearance.

He is therefore quite scathing about those who do not retain and act upon what they have read in Scripture. Reading Scripture without being transformed is inconceivable for James. He is certain that life-change and blessing is the result of a meaningful encounter with Scripture.

He assures blessing for those who interact well with God's Word. Here are his key thoughts:

- We need to look intently
- We need to see Scripture as law that sets free, not rules that cage
- We need to study it regularly
- We need to get it into our daily life experience and not just forget it
- We need to put it into practice.

Otherwise we are just a caricature — a thoughtless person who forgets even their own face.

#7 Pray through ACTS

Read: *Ephesians 6:10–20*

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. (Ephesians 6:18)

A daily QT is a prayerful exercise. I find myself muttering comments to the Lord as I read my readings for the day, as I write in my journal, and reflect on the day past and the day ahead.

But there also needs to be a focussed time of prayer. The acronym **ACTS** is useful:

- **Adoration:** Praise God for who He is, His character and nature. Worship Him for His holiness, majesty, glory, power and love.
- **Confession:** When we let the light of His holiness shine on us, we realise our imperfections and sin. It's quite simple: you can pretend its not there or you can talk to God about it.
- **Thanks:** This is different from Adoration and many people confuse the two. Adoration concentrates on God's nature. Thanks takes us to what He does in our lives and creates “gratitude-attitudes”, “cup-full perspectives”, and “blessings-counted contentment.”
- **Supplication:** These are our prayers for others and for ourselves. Our prayers at QT should not focus on long lists of prayers for others. In my QT I pray for my family, for the critical issues I'm facing at the moment, and two or three folk who I am prompted to pray for. I use other times to pray through my prayer-list and for the congregation.

BUT the acronym is a *guideline*. Paul calls us to pray in the Spirit. This means that we should pray as the Spirit prompts us. We should pray with a listening heart. This means that some days my prayers of confession are the main business of the day (those aren't easy days, but they are good in the long run!); other days I spend 90% of my time in worshipful adoration. Some days I'm banging on heaven's door for someone in great need, and other days there is just a lovely sense of contentment as I count my blessings.

Use ACTS as a framework, but keep it real...

#8 Important Tool

Read: *2 Timothy 2:14–26*

¹⁵ *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)*

Think about a craftsman like a carpenter or a blacksmith...

While there are certain concepts and truths that carpenters or blacksmiths only need to learn once (like “measure twice, cut once”, and how bellows will make the fire hotter) there are other aspects

that take on-going practice. Using a saw and chisel or being able to hammer a sword into shape are skills that must be regularly and repeatedly practised.

While we can know a lot *about* Scripture, this is not the end of the process. We may even know a lot of Scripture — maybe we've read the Bible a couple of times and have a good grasp of the content — but this is still not the bottom line.

Paul uses the analogy of workman correctly and regularly working with his tools. A good workman uses his tools regularly and well. He does not use the saw as a hammer and the screwdriver as a chisel. He applies each tool to the correct task, maintains his tools and uses them regularly. Each tool becomes a friend and an extension of the craftsman.

Scripture is our toolbox and we should use it well and correctly. This only comes with *practice* and *repetition*. Scripture was given to us so that we can *interact* with it. It wasn't given to be summarised, analysed and dissected for mere academic purposes. Scripture was given as a tool for day to day life.

Imagine asking a carpenter to do his job without tools or asking a blacksmith to use tools he isn't familiar and comfortable with. Would they be effective??

If your Bible is dusty and you're not interacting with God and His Word, there is a very good chance that work you do for Him will not be of a high standard.

#9 Eat this book¹

Read: *Revelation 10:1–11*

So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, "Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey." (Revelation 10:9)

Jeremiah and Ezekiel are the OT prophets who join John in being partakers of this unusual diet. It certainly is an unusual image.

Peterson notes that there is a passage in Isaiah that speaks of a lion growling over its caught prey — a little like a dog growls over a bone as he worries it and gnaws the meat off it. The Hebrew word for "growls" in Isaiah 31:4 is "hagah", which is a very interesting word because in other contexts it is also translated as "meditates". For example, in Psalm 1:2 we read "on God's law he meditates [hagah] all night".

So, to meditate over Scripture is to gnaw on it, to rumble over it with a purring growl of contentment. It is about *eating* the book. To masticate, swallow and digest. It means getting beyond the pleasure of attaining knowledge to the challenging reality of applying it to our lives (sweet as honey in the mouth, but turning our stomach sour).

One can read the Bible to accumulate knowledge or even to complete a challenge (like reading the Bible in a year) but we need to come to a point where we read as though our very lives depend on it — that we read because we are hungry and our nutrition can only come from Scripture's pages. We need to gnaw on the bones of Biblical truth and feast on the honey of its life-giving light-to-our-path. But we must realise that it will sour our stomachs as we subject our broken, sinful desires to Scripture's relentless authority.

Throughout his visionary tour, John has been writing down the Revelation that he had been seeing, but there came a time that he needed to internalise the vision. When it comes to reading Scripture, there comes a point where we stop taking notes and we *eat* the book.

1 Eugene Peterson's *Eat This Book* provided a lot of the ideas for this section.

#10 How to chew

Read: 2 Timothy 3:10–17

¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that God's people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16,17)

As you read the previous section, you might have been left with the thought: “OK Theo and Eugene, you've convinced me — I need to internalise Scripture (Eat the Book), but where's the *practical* part?”

Fear not: in this section I will try to give one or two suggestions about how to chew!

Paul, writing to Timothy identifies Scripture as a tool for ministry and our personal growth as Christians. When we read Scripture (as opposed to any other devotional literature) we feel, as it were, the very warmth of God's breath. The words of Scripture impart the beat and thrust of the heart of God to you and me in a way that no other literature can.

But how do I read it effectively?

One of the ways of doing that is to follow the “Kairos” method (Kairos means special or appointed time). Start by reading about a chapter or two a day. Some sections of the Bible are more densely packed than other sections. If you're reading from the long narratives of the OT you might want to read two chapters, if from the gospels then maybe only one.

Read slowly and thoughtfully, putting yourself into the story. Imagine the colours and sounds. Imagine the people and their responses. Then divide a page (I use an A5 page) into five rows (not columns) and put the following headings into each rectangle.

1. Summary of passage
2. What does it say about God? (Father, Son, Spirit)
3. What does it tell me about myself? (Does it convict, comfort, guide, or give an example)
4. What must I do? (Give thanks, Pray, something more specific)
5. Which verse would I like to remember through today?

(You might even want to photo-copy this as a template and put the templates in a file and then work your way through Matthew or Luke over the next few weeks as an experiment).

You then fill in each rectangle thoughtfully and prayerfully. Doing it regularly over a couple of weeks really sharpens your focus and teaches you to chew!

#11 Chew the cud

Read: *Psalms 119:89–104*

*Oh, how I love your law!
I meditate on it all day long. (Psalms 119:97)*

For your QT to have a lasting effect, make like a cow!

A cow chews, rests, regurgitates and chews again — a gross but useful analogy with regard to our quiet times. It's very useful at the end of the QT to try and summarise a key thought that we will carry with us for the rest of the day.

At one stage I realised that I was having this very intense QT with lots of reading and praying, but a

few hours later I was struggling to remember what it was all about.

A Quiet Time is not about doing set readings, getting another chapter underlined and summarised. It's not about getting through a list of prayer requests or making sure that you have followed the "recipe." A quiet time is about meeting with God and hearing Him speak.

The author of Psalm 119 talks about day, night, the early hours of the morning and all day as times when he meditates and reflects on God's Word.

The idea is that your daily QT is the mouthful of grass that becomes the cud that we chew all day. So, at the end of a QT there needs to be a consolidation: "So... what are You saying to me Lord?"

Reduce it to one sentence so that you will be ready to answer if someone were to ask you, at tea-time, lunch time or supper time "What was God saying in your QT today?"

Your answer does not have to be detailed — but at least the basic concept will be there:

"That I am loved by God."

"That He is faithful even when we are not."

"That I need to speak more carefully because words are destructive."

"That I need to treat others with more respect."

"That I need to deal with my pride."

If you can't regurgitate the cud, then you may have chewed too much or too little in your QT!

#12 Don't overeat!

Read: *Proverbs 25:1–28*

*If you find honey, eat just enough—
too much of it, and you will vomit. (Proverbs 25:16)*

In Psalm 19:9–10 David compares God's Ordinances to sweet honey...

Proverbs has many quirky sayings and provides interesting checks and balances in them. In Proverbs 24:13 we read "Eat honey, my son, for it is good; honey from the comb is sweet to your taste." But then in the very next chapter we are warned about eating too much honey!

But this is a valid principle — not only for the eating of real honey, but also the honey of God's Word. Our Quiet Times are a devotional time — the focus is drawing near to God and our very best tool is His Word, but we can overdo the Bible Study portion to the point where we are simply accumulating knowledge and not growing closer to God.

The balance we find in Proverbs is very timely as there are many people today who have put journaling at the centre of their daily QT. This is in danger of becoming very narcissistic. They need to "eat honey, for it is good."

On the other hand there are those who are reading four or five chapters a day, but it is not getting to their hearts because they are so busy underlining, summarising and accumulating knowledge that they are not applying it to their lives. They are in danger of being guilty of trying to impress others with their copious knowledge. They need to "eat just enough" so as not to vomit pride or arrogance over others.

Our capacity for honey increases with practice. Many people who start having QTs find that they are "sweet to the back teeth" after only half a chapter. As time passes their capacity for truth increases.

So, keep a careful eye on your balance.

#13 Measured responses

Read: *Acts 17:10–15*

Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. (Acts 17:11)

The Bereans are a great example to us. The Scriptures had become their reference tool. The word “canon” (from which we get the word “canonical”) means “reed” or “measuring staff.”

The Bereans had learned to measure Paul's teaching with Scripture and not human opinion or philosophy. They had a daily pattern of interaction with Scripture which provided a solid base from which they could interpret all the inputs that came their way.

Scripture remains the most reliable foundation for our Quiet Times. Without Scripture, our QTs can become

- narcissistic (too much journaling and reflecting on ourselves)
- too mystic (too focussed on our experiences)
- unbalanced (relying too heavily on Max Lucado or Joyce Meier or any other popular author)

We need a regular diet of Scripture, reflected on and applied to our lives.

Here are two more tools for reading Scripture. As with the “Kairos” method (in Tip #10), these are based on reading a chapter or two as part of a systematic plan and then using these questions to reflect (it is best to do it in writing).

Dramatic (good for the Gospels — Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John):

1. Imagine the scene. The smells, sounds, etc.
2. Imagine the people. How do they look?
3. What's the mood?
4. What are the hidden agendas?
5. What effect does what Jesus says/does have on them?
6. Who do YOU identify with?

Devotional method:

1. Is there any sin to forsake?
2. Is there a command to obey?
3. Is there an example to follow?
4. Is there a new truth to grasp?
5. Is there an error to avoid?
6. Is there any promise to claim?
7. Is there any prayer to pray?
8. Is there any passage to commit to memory?

Remember that the *method* should never overcome *meaning*. These methods are meant to be aids to concentration and helps to unlock meaning. Rotate, amend and be innovative with the methods — don't ever become a slave to the methods — their purpose is to assist without getting in the way.

#14 It is an act of worship

Read: *Psalms 100:1–5*

¹ *Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.*

² *Worship the LORD with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.*

³ *Know that the LORD is God.*

It is he who made us, and we are his;

we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. (Psalms 100:1-3)

Quiet Times need to have a component of worship.

When we read Scripture, we are reminded that He is our God and creator. When we pray and reflect on prayers answered we know that we are His people and the sheep of His pasture. When we consider our own brokenness there is a joyful song when we realise that Christ has redeemed us.

Worship is the moment we move from being our own gods to turning our eyes to the one, true, ever-living God. It is a profound moment and transforms us. Our QTs are the perfect tool to kick-start this process of worship and we should allow time for that “moment” to take place.

This is often called “Contemplating God.” Someone described it as a “Copernican Revolution” — when I realise that the Son and not myself is the centre of everything (as Copernicus had to declare the the sun and not the earth was the centre of the universe).

Practically speaking, how do we do this?

Try taking two or three minutes at the end of your QT to close your eyes and to think about what you have learned about God today. Remind yourself that:

- He is our God.
- That He has made us.
- That He is our Shepherd.

Some people like to sing a favourite hymn quietly — some even have a hymn-book on standby to help. But music is not the key component — our hearts are.

During this time, make the conscious decision that John the Baptist made at the end of John 4:

“He must become greater and I must become less.”

#15 Watch for the God-incidences

Read: *Acts 10:1–23*

While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. (Acts 10:17)

Peter was on the roof of the home of Simon the Tanner. He was in the midst of a ministry run in Joppa. Unbeknown to him, a Roman soldier named Cornelius had received a vision revealing that he should send for Peter to come and minister to a group of Gentiles (a barrier that the Gospel had not crossed yet).

Peter was on the roof (houses in those days had steps on the outside leading up to top of the flat roof where people would relax in the cool of the day). He was there at midday to pray — this was his QT. During this time God spoke to him in a vision. It was a vision that didn't make sense to Peter.

Acts tells us that as he wondered about the vision there was a “knock on the door.” We know from reading the rest of the story that Peter reflected on their call in the light of the vision and that it all came together and resulted in a very significant encounter and break-through as he took the Gospel to the Gentiles for the first-time.

One of the secret joys I have when people start having regular QTs is when they breathlessly come up to me to tell of the amazing coincidences that they are experiencing as they discover that their QT readings and reflections are tying up with the challenges and situations that they are facing in their daily lives.

We must learn to keep our eyes open to way in which God causes our QT and our daily life to connect. I call these “God-incidences” and when they happen it is a great faith-booster and QT-strengthener.

The sad thing is that many people compartmentalize their QT and aren't aware when their QT is relevant for their day.

Practically speaking, the way to apply this to our daily QT and to grow this awareness is to take 30 seconds to recap yesterday's reading and reflections (a journal is useful here) in the light of yesterday's events.

Prepare to be amazed...!

#16 It doesn't harm to journal a bit...

Read: *Psalms 42:1–11*

*Why are you downcast, O my soul?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Saviour and my God. (Psalms 42:5)*

Socrates said: “an unconsidered life is not worth living”.

In a movie I watched as a teen, (I think it was called *Blue Thunder*) the main character used his ability to judge elapsed time to check his combat reflexes. When one of his critics quipped that “he uses a stopwatch to check his sanity,” someone else replied “And what do you use? A dipstick?”

Scripture calls us to meditate on life in the light of God's Truth and His Word. In Romans 12:3 Paul calls us to have a sober estimate of ourselves. Our daily QT is a great opportunity to take a moment to think through where we are.

After we've quieted our soul, praised God, and read His Word, we should reflect.

The psalmist (who may well be suffering from a bout of depression) has a little dialogue with his soul. (It's quite helpful to consider my soul as something separate from the rush and helter-skelter reactive-ness that tries to usurp who I am and need to be).

When my contemplation of God and His Word speaks to my soul in one way or another, I need to maximise that moment. I need to make sure that I don't suppress the learning that should be taking place.

One of the ways to do that is to write. Writing slows me down and helps me think clearly, and so I have a journal. But I don't use my journal as “dear Diary...” I don't write in it every time and I'm not recording my memoirs. I write when something bubbles to the surface in me: fear, doubt,

anger, loneliness, discouragement, and I write when God challenges me.

So I'll write something like: "Really challenged reading about Jesus praying 'Father forgive them...' will have to try and forgive Joe Bloggs..." Other times I'll write about a prayer answered, or a profound truth that I want to carry in my heart.

The danger is that this can become ego-centric: all about me. This is where the Psalmist talking to "his soul" is helpful — it's a discussion that takes place about my-life-in-the-third-person in the context of God's Greatness and His Word.

#17 An example of colour-coding

Read: *Romans 15:1–13*

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Romans 15:4)

Paul reminds us that the Scriptures contain a treasure of experiences and lessons to equip and encourage us. Reading the Bible well can be of great benefit to us.

During the eDev series, I mentioned that I colour-coded the passages that I read, and some folk emailed me, asking about the colour-coding system that I use. Here's what I use in the New Testament. Different parts of the Old Testament need different approaches because the literature is different. The NT system works well for OT narratives, but not for the psalms or the prophets. Proverbs and Job are hard to colour-code.

Here's the NT system I use, with examples from the book of Galatians:

- Blue: Statement worth noting — Gal. 5:22
- Red: Warning — Gal. 6:7–8
- Green: Promise, hope, prophecy — Gal. 5:16
- Yellow: Profound — Gal. 5:23b
- Orange: Instruction — Gal. 5:25–26

Remember that the colour-coding should never become an end in itself, rather it should always be an aid to concentration, learning and memorisation.

JB Phillips was a scholar and academic who was the first to produce a paraphrase of the NT. Here's a comment he made after working through the Pauline letters...

The present translator who has closely studied these letters for several years is struck... by their surprising vitality. Without holding fundamentalist views on "inspiration", he is constantly struck by the living quality of the material with which he is working. Some will, no doubt, consider it merely superstitious reverence for "Holy Writ", yet again and again the writer felt rather like an electrician re-wiring an ancient house without being able to "turn the mains off". (JB Phillips.)

#18 Go to nature when you get stuck

Read: *Psalms 42:1 – 43:5²*

⁶ *My soul is downcast within me;
therefore I will remember you*

2 Many scholars agree that these two Psalms were originally written as a single Psalm.

*from the land of the Jordan,
the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.*

⁷ *Deep calls to deep
in the roar of your waterfalls;
all your waves and breakers
have swept over me.*

⁸ *By day the LORD directs his love,
at night his song is with me—
a prayer to the God of my life. (Psalms 42:6–8)*

Sometimes I get stuck in a rut. Sometimes I find that keeping QTs going is hard. There are times of tiredness, disappointment, dryness and brokenness that tempt me to break the important habit of spending time with God.

The Psalmist has good advice for those who are taking strain and struggling to connect with God: Expose yourself to creation.

Creation points to the Creator. God isn't *in* the trees or *in* the mountain, but they are the works of His hands and the messengers of His glory.

Sometimes I'm like a stuck record/CD and I need a “bump” to get me on track again. The beauty, orderliness, majesty and “bigness” of creation kicks me out of my ruts and nudges me out of my grooves.

I have found that I don't need to go to the sea or the mountains. Just stepping out into the garden early in the morning or late in the afternoon helps a lot! A bike ride that takes me out of the suburbs and into the open areas clears my head and my heart.

The psalmist is inspired by the Jordan valley, Mount Hermon and Mizar, the rivers and the ocean. They are signposts that communicate God's love, God's presence, and our need of Him.

Sometimes the best way to deal with spiritual “stuck-ness” is to take a walk...

#19 Biographies can help too

Read: *Hebrews 13:1–21*

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. (Hebrews 13:7)

Quiet Times are devotional times that centre around hearing God's Word and worshipping Him. A Quiet Time is primarily reading the Bible, reflecting on our lives and spending time with God, and so it is with great hesitation that I have written this section...

Sometimes I find that I have fallen into a rut in my devotional time. (It is usually when God is challenging me in an area that I don't want to be challenged and my heart hardens). It is then that reading the biographies of significant Christians can be very helpful and inspiring.

Reading of the lives of Wesley, Wilberforce, Corrie Ten Boom, Brother Andrew, Mother Theresa, or more contemporary “saints” can help me a great deal to get back to a closer walk with God.

During my early varsity years I had a very close friend who confessed that she valued spending time with me because she was “jealous” of my closeness to God and it made her want to be closer to Him. The amazing thing was that I experienced the same “jealousy” or “hunger” for God when I spent time with her!!

Reading the biographies of significant Christians *can* and should bring us to a place of greater spiritual hunger. The danger is that the reading of biography can become an end in itself and we can simply endlessly read books about other people's faith without ever applying it to our own lives — this becomes “spiritual voyeurism”.

This is where our text for today is so important: The Hebrews-author urges us to consider and imitate the Godly faith and habits of others to inspire our own devotions.

Reading about any significant Christian should make me want that closer walk with God — it should make me want to get my QT right.

#20 Some resources

Read: 2 Timothy 4:1–22

When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments. (2 Timothy 4:13)

During the eDev series, I asked for questions and comments and received very helpful feedback. The one question that came up more than once, was a request for resources, and so, here's a quick overview.

Without being facetious, the starting point is *your* Bible. For most people, getting one Bible that they use for QT, take to church and use at Bible Studies is a great start. The idea is that you begin to feel at home in it. It needs to be easy to read (print size), and you need to feel comfortable about writing in the margins and underlining verses. What begins to happen is that opening your Bible becomes like sitting down with an old friend, and your mind changes into QT gear so much more easily.

While talking about Bibles, I think a good Bible translation with some reference tools built in is a great asset. There is a range of Bible translations available ranging from paraphrases (like Eugene Peterson's *The Message*) through dynamic translations to very literal translations (like the King James Version or the Revised Standard Version). The translations that fall in the middle of this range are the best place to start. Examples of these are: New International Version (NIV), Contemporary English Version (CEV) and English Standard Version (ESV). There are editions of all these versions that come with reference tools built-in.

The two best reference Bibles are the NIV Study Bible and the ESV Study Bible. You can also look at the Life Application Bibles (in various translations), and I use the Thompson's Chain Reference, which doesn't have commentary as much as it provides links between related verses and lists of verses on particular themes.

Finally, some other tools that are helpful:

- <http://www.biblegateway.org> lets you look for verses containing keywords.
- A concordance gives lists of words and the verses they are found in.
- Bible handbooks are very helpful, and two of the best are:
 - “What the Bible is all about” — HC Mears.
 - The Lion Handbook to the Bible.
- Rick Warren has a book on Bible Study Methods (in our church library).
- Five coloured pencils and a marking system (see Tip #17).
- A good dose of discipline, and failing that, accountability.

- A good alarm clock to wake up those few minutes earlier... ☺
- A notebook to write down prayers, journal a bit and record lessons learned.
- A sense of humble awe: “I get to meet with the King of Kings and Creator of the Universe in my QT!”

#21 Jesus did it too...

Read: *Mark 1:29–39*

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)

This thought brings us to the conclusion of this series: Jesus, the Son of God, found it necessary and meaningful to withdraw for prayer and time with His Father.

In Luke 5:16 we also read “But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”

This idea of having a daily QT is not new or unusual. It is a recognised pathway to spiritual growth and a more significant relationship with God.

We need to recognise that our sinful natures, like Adam and Eve, would prefer to hide from God in the garden. We find it easier to read a novel or even the boring parts of the newspaper than our Bibles. We can stay awake to watch a dull TV programme, but fall asleep the minute we start a QT!

In addition the powers of darkness will do anything to distract us from the “daily re-charge” that a QT provides. Satan wants our swords (the Word of God) to be covered in rust and cobwebs so that we are ill-equipped when trouble comes.

It is not easy to establish the discipline of a QT, but the growth we experience is very worthwhile indeed.

Closing Thoughts

A regular QT is a vital step toward spiritual maturity and growth. If you're battling to make it happen, chat to a trusted friend and draw up an informal accountability contract: give them the right to ask you if it's happening and, if not, to challenge you to get it right.

It's our prayer that we will all grow in this fundamental basic daily time with God.