

KEEP THY HEART

A Bible-Based Devotional

Turn to: **Matthew 17:1-13**
“How to Have a Quiet Time”

I believe that our personal, private devotions with God are far more important than we often realize. Satan constantly tries to distract and discourage Christians; and in the mornings (Psalm 57:8), by having quiet times with God, we can help refresh our souls in Him. The important thing isn't only that we have them, or that we spend a certain amount of time, but that we have a humble spirit and are really seeking God in private (Matthew 6:6). In fact, I believe that usually, we can trace spiritual failures back to when our quiet times with God falter or aren't heartfelt. I think this passage offers us several tips for having quiet times in the presence of God.

1: Get alone (v1-3). First, to have an effective quiet time, we must get **apart**, away from all of the noise and business of life, if at all possible. Like scaling a **high mountain**, this is often hard work. And like these disciples, it is often hard to stay awake (Luke 9:32), especially early in the morning! But it is worth it.

(v2) When they wake up, they see Jesus **transfigured**; they recognize Him, but it must have been shocking! No longer did He have the appearance of an ordinary person, but **his face did shine as the sun**. Christians will be transfigured one day, too; no longer will they have ordinary, mortal bodies full of sickness or weakness; but they will have immortal, powerful, wonderful, healthy bodies instead. **His raiment was white as the light**, not just white as snow (Mark 9:3), meaning, I think, that it actively shined light, not just reflected it. When we get alone with Jesus during our quiet times, we'll see new and exciting things in the Bible and in Him that we never even knew were there before.

(v3) I imagine the disciples were shocked to see two others, as **behold**, it's **Moses and Elias** (perhaps representing the law and prophets). I think the Old Testament is also

important in quiet times; it points forward to Jesus Christ in incredible and unique ways.

2: Listen carefully (v4-5). Second, to have an effective quiet time, we must have a teachable spirit. **Peter** often **answered** at the wrong times; and sometimes I think we'd do better just to remain quiet in certain situations. Let's try not to say stupid things. Peter was effectively putting **Jesus** on the same plane as **Moses**, and **Elijah** by wanting to build a tabernacle for each of them; but Jesus isn't just another prophet! He is God in the flesh, and so this would be quite inappropriate. Also, the Person in your quiet times (Jesus) is more important than the physical place (**tabernacles**), though finding a nice, quiet place is a good idea, I think. How did they recognize Moses and Elijah? Did they use each other's names? ("Hey, Moses!" "What's that, 'Lij?") Or did they simply "know" it was them somehow? Won't it be wonderful to recognize fellow saints in heaven, with brains sharp enough to actually remember all their names?

(v5) Sometimes, God interrupts us (in a good way) **while we yet speak**; we should pray He does (cf. Psalm 141:3)! And what an unusual **cloud**; instead of getting darker as it loomed over them, apparently things get **brighter**. If we want to please God, we should **hear Jesus** and tremble at His Word (Isaiah 66:2). Don't spend all your prayer time simply asking God for things (as I often have); listen for His leading to know what to do. Thank and praise Him. Try to find something you need to change in your own life when you read and pray. The Bible isn't just a book of interesting but meaningless facts; it is an instruction manual for practical, everyday life.

3: Humble yourself (v6-8). Third, to have an effective quiet time, we must humble ourselves and **fall on our faces**. Something which I think is often missing in our modern church culture is a reverence for the sanctity of God and His Word. We should have joy in the Lord, and even happiness in Him when possible; but we should never have a smirking, mocking heart for holy living or the things of God. Worship isn't just a "slappy happy" time; it should include reverence, standing in awe of the incredible power and glory and holiness of

Jesus Christ, and having godly contrition for our sin and the sin of our people (Hebrews 12:28); such sorrow is actually healthy many times in this sinful world (Ecclesiastes 7:3).

(v7) God wants us to fear Him, but **not to be afraid** of Him in the wrong way, assuming we're living right. Our fear of God should not be the spooky fear of the unknown or the type of fear we have of a criminal on the loose, but the fear we have of a good father, a protective policeman, or a righteous and thorough judge; even a godly dread (Isaiah 8:13).

(v8) **When they had lifted up their eyes**, were their eyes still trying to adjust from all that previous light? What a shock to **see no man, save Jesus only**; and similarly, the power of God is all around us if we've saved, even though it's invisible (Hebrews 13:5).

4: Share your experiences (v9). Fourth, maximize the effectiveness of quiet times by sharing the power of Jesus Christ with others. I imagine the disciples exchanged a few looks of surprise and wonder **as they came down from the mountain**; and when we leave our quiet times, we can spread the joy to others, since **the Son of man has risen again from the dead**. *Now* is the time to share His Word. Whenever you feel prompted by the Holy Spirit, you can share things like, "I read this cool verse today," "I've been praying about this...", "I'd like to share what the Lord has been teaching me through His Word," etc.

5: Study the Bible (v10-13). Finally, to have effective quiet times, we should study the Bible. Yes, people can often become arrogant about their Bible knowledge, and we must warn against that; but we must also be careful not to devalue biblical knowledge either. A solid grasp of the Word of God is a glorious thing (II Timothy 2:15). These disciples **asked Jesus** a very specific question about **Elijah** (whom they had just seen). In your quiet time, try to dive deep into the truths of the passages, praying about them. We shouldn't just skim them without giving any thought. When a passage seems confusing, I've found that often, it helps to keep reading, or maybe cross-referencing or study to figure it out (Acts 17:11). **(v11)** As we study, I think **Jesus** and the Holy Spirit often

answer our specific questions in our hearts (John 16:13).

(v12) Isn't it sad that even though the **scribes** (verse 11) knew a lot *about* Elijah and the prophecies, when he actually **came**, **they knew him not**? These PhD's **had done unto him whatsoever they listed**; they treated him like dirt and did anything their evil hearts could devise. It's one thing to know *about* Jesus' coming again; but when He actually comes, will you be ready? Or will you be like these scribes? Let's also make sure we don't miss things in God's will because we're not ready for them.

Unlike the Pharisees, we must not use quiet times to merely fill our heads with knowledge. Some people boast about how much time they spend in the Bible and in prayer, yet from the attitude of some of them, they seem to have missed the whole point. They might even talk as though they have hearts of fire for God, yet from their lives and words, you can tell it's just for show. In such cases, I think it would be better if they never had devotions at all. Let's check our motives and be sure we're meeting with God with "the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (I Corinthians 5:8).

(v13) But isn't it exciting when you're reading your Bible, and **Then**, you **understand** what it means? Interestingly, you can read a passage over and over and still get new things out of it each time.

Conclusion. In conclusion, I believe we see five tips for having effective quiet times with Jesus from this passage. (1) Get alone, away from all the noise and business of life. (2) Listen carefully; have a teachable spirit, not one that always feels it must speak. (3) Humble yourself, feeling the awesome reverence of God's holiness and power. (4) Share your experiences, looking for opportunities to share the Word of God with the lost and with the saved. And (5) Study the Bible, not simply accumulating head knowledge (the scribes had a lot of this), but letting it soak into our hearts as well.