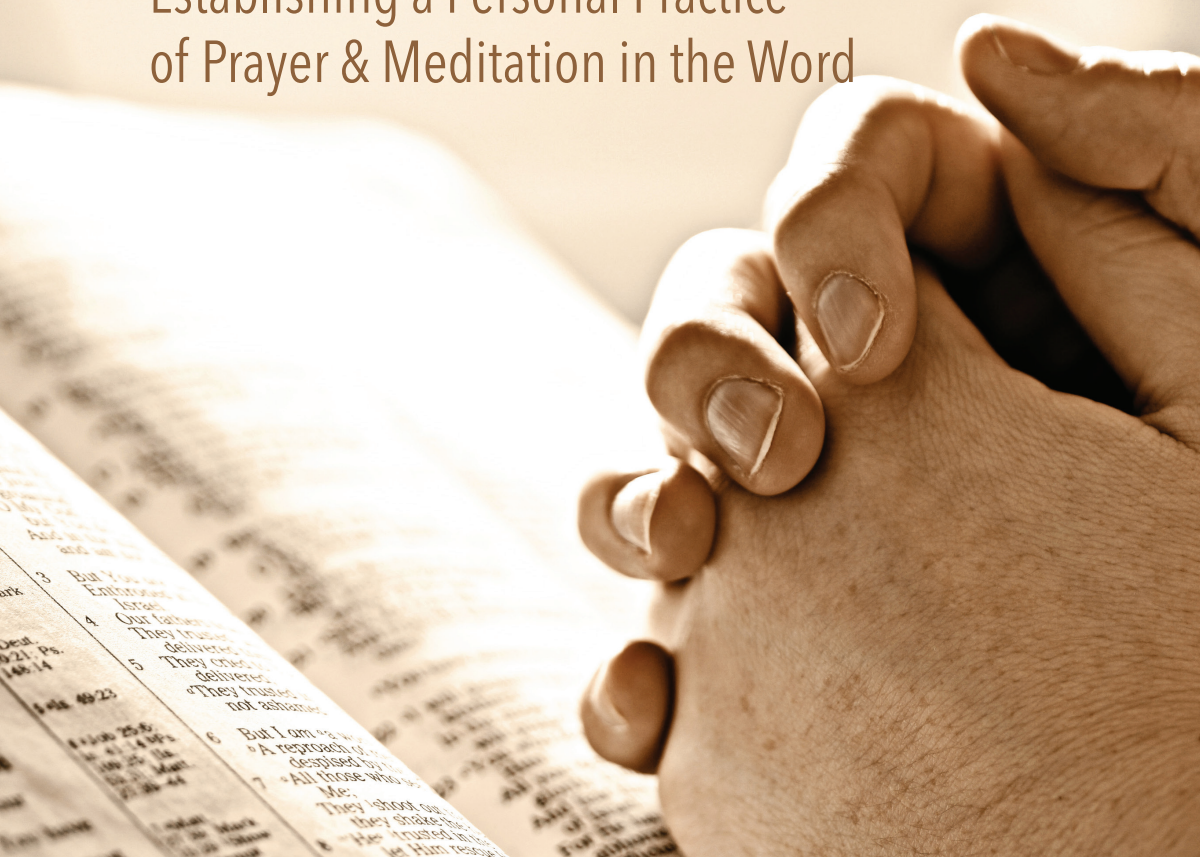


A six-session devotional study for individuals and small groups

Your Time Alone with God

Establishing a Personal Practice
of Prayer & Meditation in the Word



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with Bruce Buchanan, M. D



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preface

WE ALL KNOW that personal time with God is the expected habit of Christian believers. This knowledge most often only brings guilt because what we know and what we practice don't match up. Many things work against the habit of personal devotional life. Not the least of these is time pressure. In order to accommodate all the expectations of life we are always in a hurry. Any activity lacking obvious production needs to be forgotten. Any project that requires extended concentration is put aside for the more immediately effective activities or we attempt to include it as we "multi-task" our way through each day.

All of these and other pressures make us leave prayer, scripture reading, and meditation for leisure time. But leisure time is scarce. When we do have a bit of leisure, we are drawn to activities that provide high impact experiences which help us escape the demands of life. For all these reasons time alone with God is neglected, started but never finished or sadly in need of renewal. The authors make no claim to any special revelation. Nor have we found some higher plane of spiritual existence. Rather we present this because these very problems are ours as well.

We have designed this study as a means to begin what has been neglected or renew what has been faltering in our personal relationship with God. We find that Christians throughout the ages, from the early church fathers to medieval monks to modern missionaries have practiced time alone with God. Christians from all ages and conditions of life have profited from this discipline. Because God calls us to this exercise and not man He is the one who rewards our efforts. This study will help you to understand the principles of time alone with God as related in the Bible and to respond to God's will for your time in an easy, informal yet profound manner.

As you progress through this brief study, use the interactions with the passages to create your pattern of time alone with God. The scripture verses selected will give you a vision of quality time alone with God. Many are from the Psalms which give us a window on the devotional life of Old Testament saints. As you think deeply about the Bible passages studied and pray you will develop the habits of a quality time alone with God. In this way we hope the devotional discipline of time alone with God will be more firmly established for the growth of your relationship to God in Christ Jesus.

Vernal Wilkinson, D. Min.

Bruce Buchanan, M.D.

session one

The Challenge of Time Alone with God

DID YOU KNOW that God wants to spend time alone with you? That thought may amaze you . . . but consider it for a moment.

When a person accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, he becomes a member of God's family . . . a child of God.² He can call God his father!³ Any good father wants to spend time with His children—sometimes with all of them together . . . but often with each one alone. That is the way that a person gets to know another person well—by spending time alone with him.

So the best way to get to know your Heavenly Father is to spend time alone with Him. There's nothing mystical about it. He has made it clear that He is interested in us who are His children.⁴

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- 1 John 4:23
 - 2 Galatians 3:26
 - 3 Psalm 103:13
 - 4 1 Peter 5:7



YOUR RESPONSE

Having read “The Challenge of Time Alone with God,” read the following Bible verses and answer the questions to the best of your ability.

PSALM 116:1—2

1. Why is God so endearing to the Psalmist? _____

2. What makes both God’s attentiveness to you so outstanding and your prayer to him seem so mundane? _____

JOHN 4:23

3. What is God seeking? _____

4. What makes you that person? _____

GALATIANS 3:26

5. What has faith in Jesus made you? _____

6. How does that change the dynamic of your relationship with God? _____

PSALM 103:13

7. What is God's baseline attitude to your needs? _____

8. Why will expressing your needs to your heavenly Father be good for you? _____

1 PETER 5:7

9. What are some anxieties you could leave with God? _____

10. How would you expect Him to respond to you? _____

PSALM 25

11. List some of the benefits from spending time alone with God.

session two

The Way to Spend Time Alone With God

THE SIMPLE and yet marvelous way in which we can get to know God better through spending time alone with Him is by reading His Word and conversing with Him in prayer.

Of course we can pray to Him any time of the day—driving to work, mowing the lawn, washing the car, kayaking, fishing or golfing—but really to spend time alone with someone is to give attention to him without distractions.

Perhaps the morning is best for you . . . when you're fresh, before your active day begins. Or perhaps the evening is the best time for you to spend time with God . . . at the close of your day, as you consider the next day's plans . . . as you prepare for the rest He offers.

Whatever the time, be consistent in meeting Him. Jesus rose early to pray . . . and He went somewhere that was quiet⁵ - a good idea for us!

5 Mark 1:35



YOUR RESPONSE

Having read "The Way to Spend Time Alone with God," read the following Bible verses and answer the questions to the best of your ability.

PSALM 5:3

1. What time of the day does the Psalmist spend with God? __

2. How could you order your prayer and watch? _____

PSALM 143:8

3. What are two benefits the psalmist expects from morning time with God? _____

4. Why should trusting and lifting up your soul to God be important in your time with Him? _____

PSALMS 3:5 AND 4:8

5. When do you think the psalmist spent time alone with God? __

6. What were some of the benefits he found from evenings alone with God? _____

MARK 1:35 AND 6:45—47

7. From these passages what was Jesus' pattern of time alone with God? _____

8. Why do you think He did both morning and evening? _____

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!

Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee;

Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty!

God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

— *Reginald Heber, author (1783-1826)*

John Dykes, composer (1823-1876)

session three

The Practice of Spending Time Alone with God

THERE IS NO RITUAL to your time alone with God . . . any more than there would be in spending time alone as a son with his father.

A word of greeting should come first . . . a short prayer to God asking His blessing on your time together.⁶

You may wonder what to say as you begin. Addressing God as 'Father' is completely appropriate. Prayer is a conversation so continue as you would in your normal conversation. You may wish to begin with thanks to Him or expressions of wonder and amazement as praise. If you feel the need to get something between you and God off your chest, confess this at the beginning. This is an intimate dialogue and there is not emotion for which He is not prepared.

Some prayer items should be repeated each time you spend time alone with God. They may be constant needs of yours or those ongoing needs of others. These things require sustained prayer or discussion with God. A list can be a helpful reminder whether it is a card or notebook or on your smart phone or tablet.

6 Psalm 119:18

After praying, you'll want to read something of His Word to you.⁷ You will likely find the Gospel of John the most interesting if you are just getting acquainted with the Bible, for it is here that God's plan for you through Jesus Christ is most beautifully summed up in one book.⁸

After you have finished reading John, you may wish to continue in the book of Acts to see how the early Christians shared their faith with those around them. Sharing your faith is one of the most important things you can do for God.

If you have not read much from the Bible, you may prefer to use a modern version rather than the regular King James Version. The New Testament was written originally in common, not classical, Greek so that people could understand its important message.



YOUR RESPONSE

Having read "The Practice of Spending Time Alone with God," read the following Bible verses and answer the questions to the best of your ability.

PSALM 119:18

9. What is the psalmist asking? _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

7 Matthew 4:4

8 John 20:31

10. How could you greet God with a similar request as you begin time alone with Him? _____

MATTHEW 4:4

11. What is the significance of comparing the Bible to bread? _____


12. How could you feed your spiritual life on the Word of God?

JOHN 20:31

13. Why was the Gospel of John written? _____

14. What benefits can you seek when reading the Bible? _____

15. What do you like about the Bible you normally read? _____

 *TIP: Try comparing Bible translations to get more from your reading. Both literal (word-for-word) and "dynamic equivalence" (thought-for-thought) versions can be helpful. Paraphrases differ from translations, by using creative or common language which introduce the thoughts of men.*

session four

Meditation in Your Time Alone with God

WHILE YOU ARE READING, meditate. To meditate simply means to think seriously about spiritual things. To meditate on what you are reading is to think quietly, soberly and deeply about God—how wonderful He is, what wonderful things He has done for you, what He is going to do for you, what He wants you to do.⁹ Perhaps, as you contemplate, you will notice:

- A special promise for you to claim
- A guidepost to help you in your daily life
- A command you should follow
- A searchlight that is pointing out some sin in your life¹⁰
- A meaningful verse you will want to memorize

⁹ Philippians 4:8

¹⁰ Psalm 119:11

In your meditation as you continue to think quietly, soberly and deeply about God you may wish to reflect on ways to:

- Claim the promise you have discovered
- Seek direction for the course of your life according to the guideposts you've observed
- Obey the commands He has given
- Act on your conviction of sin in confession and restitution
- Write-out meaningful verses for review throughout your day



YOUR RESPONSE

Having read "Meditation in Your Time Alone with God," read the following Bible verses and answer the questions to the best of your ability. As you read the verses practice meditation by reading with emphases on different words, by paraphrasing in your own words, observing parallel words and thoughts in the passage.

PSALM 91:14 - 16

1. Who is the *he* and who is the *I* in this passage? _____

2. How will God reward your faithfulness? _____

PHILIPPIANS 4:8

3. What are you to meditate on? _____

4. Picking one of these qualities, how would you meditate on that quality? _____

PSALM 119:11

5. What are some ways you could store, hide or treasure God's word in your heart? _____

6. Why does God's word act as your prevention to sin? _____

JOSHUA 1:8

7. When is the right time to meditate on the Word of God? _____

session five

Prayer in Your Time Alone with God

WHEN YOU'VE READ and meditated a while, then converse with God in prayer. Talk to Him as you would to your own earthly father who loves you, who wants the best for you, who wants to help you in every way possible. Some of us have been blessed with just such a relationship with our natural father, while others have not. Yet, the ideal of such a relationship seems built in to all of us. Pursue your relationship with your heavenly father according to your expectations of an ideal relationship for He has created that ideal and will fulfill it.

Perhaps you don't know what to talk over with God in prayer. Keep in mind that prayer is a conversation. Use the language of conversation in your prayer and don't hesitate to express your full range of emotion. Ask God to meet with you and speak to you through His word with the Holy Spirit. These few suggestions may help you:

- You can *praise* Him for what He is . . . Creator and Sustainer of the entire universe¹¹ . . . yet interested in each of us who are in His family!

11 Psalm 150:2 - 6

- You can *thank* Him for all He has done . . . for all He is doing for you . . . and for all He will ever do for you.¹²
- You can tell Him about things you have done and said and thought for which you are sorry . . . this is *confessing* your sins. He tells us in His Word that He is able and faithful to forgive our sins.¹³
- You can pray for your *family* . . . we have a special obligation for our own.
- You can pray for *others*¹⁴ . . . for friends or neighbors who have needs, physical or spiritual. You can ask God to work in the heart of some person you hope will come to know Christ as Savior . . . even as you have done. Remember those who are new Christians.
- You can also pray for government officials, for *your* minister and church officers, for missionaries and other Christian servants.
- You can pray for *yourself*¹⁵ . . . ask for His guidance for the new day¹⁶ . . . ask Him to help you with problems you have¹⁷ . . . Ask Him to help you do His will for the day . . . ask Him to arrange opportunities to serve Him through helping others by means of words or works.

You will find that your prayer expresses what you have discovered as you contemplated and reflected on the Word of God in your time of meditation. You may want to list your prayer requests, so you don't forget any, and so you can record God's answers . . . "yes," or "no," or "wait."¹⁸ Use a small notebook, note cards, cellphone, or tablet device.

12 Philippians 4:6

13 1 John 1:9

14 Philippians 2:4

15 Philippians 4:6

16 James 1:5

17 Job 36:5

18 1 John 5:14 - 15




YOUR RESPONSE

Having read "Prayer in Your Time Alone with God," read the following Bible verses and answer the questions to the best of your ability.

PSALM 150:2—6

1. What are some means to praise the Lord? _____

2. How could you use music to offer praise to God? _____

 *TIP:* A way to use music in your time with God is to sing a song or hymn from your church worship experience as an expression of your devotion or a form of praising God. If you are not musically inclined, simply recalling the words and music in your mind as offering to God can be helpful.

PHILIPPIANS 4:6

3. How does this verse recommend that you handle anxiety? _____

4. Compare Romans 12:12. How could you expand your prayer to be more faithful (NIV) in prayer? _____

1 JOHN 1:9

5. What are you to do to find forgiveness? _____

6. How does the verse promise God will respond to your confession?

PHILIPPIANS 2:4

7. Who could be an object of your prayer time? _____

8. How would you pray for someone else's interests? _____

PHILIPPIANS 1:9—11

9. This is a model prayer for others. What is requested in these verses? _____

10. Think of someone you could pray for. Which of these requests would you pray for that person? _____

JOB 36:5 AND JAMES 1:5

11. What do you lack and always need? _____

12. What wisdom could you ask of God today? _____

1 JOHN 5:14—15

13. Whose ability to answer your prayers do you put confidence in?

session six

Going On in Your Time Alone with God

IF YOU HAVE spent time alone with God in the morning, then continue your day, refreshed and ready for what may come your way! In this case your time alone with God should lead you into your day and the encounters that your heavenly Father brings your way.

If you have spent your time alone with Him in the evening, then go to sleep relaxed in His care, ready to rest for a new day of service to Him. Time alone with God can also equip and assure you regarding life and its challenges so that your rest is a rest not only of sleep but also of faith.

You may find it possible to spend some time alone with God both morning and evening.

Be sure to remember that you can pray to Him at anytime, anywhere . . . in school, at work, at home . . . about anything . . . to ask for something that is needed or to thank Him for something that has been received. As any loving earthly father would be, God is interested in all that happens to you.

And He is looking forward to spending some time alone with you tomorrow and every day!



YOUR RESPONSE

Having read "Going on in Your Time Alone with God," read the following Bible verses and answer the questions to the best of your ability.

PSALM 1:1—6

- 1. Contrast the path and progression of the ungodly with the path and progression of the righteous: _____

- 2. How can the Word of God be effective to direct and establish your own steps as you meditate upon it? _____

Appendix

What is Biblical Meditation?

"MEDITATION" and "contemplation" are increasingly popular terms used in Christian as well as diverse spiritual circles—but often with divergent definitions. For this reason, it is important to distinguish *biblical* meditation and contemplation from what is commonly referred to as the ancient practice of "stillness" or "contemplative prayer."

For many centuries, eastern mystics and ascetics have practiced the discipline of *emptying* one's mind to enter "the silence" as a means of hearing from god. In contrast, when the scriptures speak of meditation, the context is that of *ruminating*, or bringing back to one's mind what has already been ingested—in much the same way as an animal which chews its cud. This is not a clearing of one's mind to create a *vacancy*, but rather a conscious *filling* for further reflection. As the prophet Jeremiah declared, "thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart...." (Jeremiah 15:16). While the ancient mystics sought *enlightenment* and "union with the divine" through isolation and deprivation (sometimes resulting in trances or visions) they unfortunately opened themselves to spiritual *deception* by fallen angels who sought to fill the very void they had created.

In contrast, the author and finisher of our faith bids us to "come, let us *reason* together," to "*think* on these things," and to "be transformed by the *renewing* of your mind" (Isaiah 1:18, Philippians 4:8, Romans 12:2, emphasis added). In

stark opposition to Eastern meditative practices, the God's Word gives us no special methodology or technique for conversing with our Creator—and no required posture or position except the humble inclination of our hearts: "and this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us . . ." (1 John 5:14).

In spite of this clear biblical teaching, however, some evangelical authors and speakers are increasingly embracing a mystical understanding of the biblical exhortation to "Be Still." Unfortunately, they clip this phrase from Psalm 46:10 and wrest it from its surrounding context. If we read the entire Psalm carefully, "Be still" is not a command to empty our minds in Eastern meditation; rather, it is an exhortation to be secure, and not fearful, in a time of great trouble. Specifically, "Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30:7) or the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:21, Revelation 2:22, etc.). In this marvelous Psalm, notice that the mountains are being carried to the sea, but the city of God is secure; and He makes wars to cease until the end of the earth. This can only be a prophetic reference to the Millennial reign of Christ. By extension and application, of course, we can be assured of God's presence and protection at all times. As Jesus declared, "I will never leave you or forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5) and "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world (Matthew 28:20).

Rather than emptying our mind, therefore, these are the very promises of God upon which we are exhorted to *meditate* both day and night.

Blessed is the man
 Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
 Nor stands in the path of sinners,
 Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
 But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
 And in His law he meditates day and night.

— Psalm 1:1-2

The Secret

I met God in the morning
When the day was at its best,
And His presence came like sunrise
Like a glory within my breast.

All day long the presence lingered
All day long He stayed with me;
And we sailed in perfect calmness
O'er a very troubled sea.

Other ships were blown and battered,
Other ships were sore distressed;
But the winds that seemed to drive them
Brought to us a peace and rest.

Then I thought of other mornings,
With a keen remorse of mind,
When I too, had loosed the moorings,
With His presence left behind.

So I think I know the secret
Learned from many a troubled way;
You must seek God in the morning
If you want Him through the day.

by Ralph Cushman
Spiritual Hilltops: A Book of Devotion
Abingon Press, 1962

How are you doing in your time alone with God?

Evening and morning

and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud:

and he shall hear my voice.

— Psalm 55:17

