

CONNECTIONS

SMALL GROUP STUDIES

Quiet Time 101: How to Have a Personal Time with God

Dear Small Group Leader,

Today's fast-paced society encourages and even demands that we live efficient and productive lives. Modern technology makes it possible for us to complete in the proverbial blink of an eye tasks that took previous generations days or weeks. Unfortunately, this has given our generation a “microwave” mind-set. We want what we want, and we want it now!

Statistics show that the church has not escaped this microwave mentality. To accommodate the quickened pace of life, many churches have pared worship services down to the bare essentials. Their intentions are good—most churches that resort to such a schedule are doing what they think is necessary to capture the attention of the ever-preoccupied consumer, providing a taste of heaven and hopefully planting seeds that bear spiritual fruit. Yet in some cases, what is meant for good goes bad. Rather than bearing fruit, most Christians who buy into microwave spirituality start withering. Jesus warned as much (John 15:1–8). Quality fruit comes from quality time. Life is fast, no doubt. But some things in life call for a more deliberate approach. Personal time with God is one of them.

But how, your group might ask, can we establish meaningful personal time with God in a culture that moves “at the speed of light”? The answers are not clear-cut; each person will have to respond in a way that corresponds to his or her unique circumstances. However, the lessons in this unit will present the building blocks and give helpful suggestions. With your guidance and the support of the group, each person can put together a personal time with God.

Blessings,

The Connections Team

CONNECTIONS

Quiet Time 101: How to Have a Personal Time with God

Study 1

Notes

Get Into God's Word

Objective: To develop an understanding of why it is important to read God's Word and employ systematic Bible study (devotions) for life.



CONNECT WITH EACH OTHER

- Warmly greet everyone as they come in. After a few minutes of social interaction, begin the session.

Say: We often say and hear that it is important for us to regularly, if not daily, read the Bible. Do you believe that reading the Bible daily is important? Why or why not? (*Allow responses. Answers will vary.*)

Say: Think about how often you read the Bible. Do you believe you are making the best use of the Bible's potential for your life? How do you think you could make the time you spend reading the Bible more meaningful? (*Allow responses. Answers will vary.*)

Say: Today we will talk about getting into God's Word. We will look at why the Bible is important and how using it can deepen our relationship with God.



CONNECT WITH GOD'S WORD

F Why is it important to read and study God's Word? (*Allow responses. Answers may include: it brings us closer to God, we can know God's plan for our lives, it gives life direction, etc.*)

- Ask volunteers to read the following Scriptures aloud: Psalm 119:11,105; John 17:17; Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 3:15,16; 1 Peter 2:2,3.

Study 1 / Get into God's Word

Notes

Q What do we learn about God's Word from these verses? What do they mean to you? *(Allow responses. Answers will vary.)*

Q Have you ever needed direction and sought the Bible for answers? *(If anyone is willing to share an example, allow them to do so. Be sensitive!)*

Say: "Seeking the Bible for answers" does not mean that you open the Bible and point to a verse, even though most of us have done that at least once in our lives. So how do we find answers in the Bible? *(Allow responses. Answers will vary and may include: through reading about God's promises to us, through reading about how He helped people in situations similar to ours, etc.)*

Say: Reading the Bible is vital for Christians. In fact, devotional time is important, too. How can we use the Bible during devotional time with God? Is it different from Bible reading? *(Allow responses. Answers will vary. Some may say that Bible reading is no different than devotional reading.)*

Say: For some, Bible reading and devotional reading are synonymous. That's okay. Others prefer to choose a passage, study it, do research on the verses, and figure out their life application. Still, others prefer to read a devotional book that highlights a passage for them and provides application. There are as many ways to do devotions as there are people that do them.

➡ Ask someone to read Joshua 1:8 aloud.

Q What do you think it means to "meditate on" God's Word? *(Allow responses. Answers will vary and may include: think about it, consider it, apply it, etc.)*

Say: Meditating on God's Word is more than just trying to read as much as you can in fifteen minutes. Meditating is about ensuring that our time in God's Word is quality time. It's not about necessarily spending ten minutes, twenty minutes, or even two hours reading; it's about consistently maximizing the quality of your time with God through focusing on His divine message to you.

Q So what does this "quality time" with God look like? *(Allow responses. Answers will vary and may include: it should be quiet, it should be private, it should be secluded, etc.)*

Say: Quality time can look different for each of us, but it often includes similar aspects: Bible reading, praise and prayer, reflection, and dedication.

- **Bible reading:** It is immensely important for a believer to spend time reading his or her Bible, and it is nearly as important that the reading be done as a regular part of a daily routine. However, don't let a plan get in the way of your understanding. It is more important for you to understand what you are reading than to complete a prescribed amount of reading.
- **Praise and prayer:** Talk to God. Take time to thank and praise Him for what He is doing (and has done) in your life and in the lives of those around you. Bring concerns and needs to Him in this time, believing that He will answer. Spend time in His presence.
- **Reflect:** Spend time thinking about what you read. What can you learn from it? What is God saying to you? How is He challenging you?
- **Dedication:** Remind yourself of your commitment to follow God and live for Him every day. This helps focus and remind us of our goal when we struggle and face temptation—following Him.



Break the group into smaller groups of two or three people. Ask the groups to formulate a Bible study plan that they can commit to for the remainder of this topical study. Give them five minutes to work out a plan. Ask the groups to share their plans with the rest of the group.

Say: Making a commitment and sticking to a Bible reading plan isn't always easy to do. It always seems as if life tries to get in the way. But God will give you the ability to do it because He desires to have a deep, fruitful relationship with each of us.

- ➔ Conclude your time in prayer. Feel free to pray your own prayer, or use the following prayer:

Dear God, we are so thankful that You desire a personal relationship with us. We commit to knowing You better through reading Your Word. May the Holy Spirit remind us that we need to spend time with You. Speak to us through Your written Word that we may know You better, Amen.

CONNECTIONS

Quiet Time 101: How to Have a Personal Time with God

Study 2

Notes

Waiting on God

Objective: To help your group explore and embrace the principle of waiting on God.



CONNECT WITH EACH OTHER

- Greet people as they come in. After a few minutes of social interaction, begin the session.

Say: Today we're talking about waiting on God. In that phrase, the word "waiting" might not have a negative connotation. But if I say you're going to have to "wait" in another context, what images and emotions fill your mind? (*frustration, standing in line, wasting time*) We don't like to wait, and we do everything we can in order to prevent waiting.

F In what places do you hate having to wait? (*Allow response.*) Why? (*Answers will vary and may include: we live at a rapid pace and often expect others to match our pace and keep our schedule.*)

F Why will you wait on some things longer than you will wait on others? For example, we often will wait with patience longer in our doctor's office than in a fast food line. (*The importance of the situation and the limit of our options are the biggest factors in waiting.*)

Say: In our last session, we talked about building personal time with God. Today we're going to focus on the value and benefit of waiting on God.



CONNECT WITH GOD'S WORD

- Ask volunteers to read the following Scriptures aloud: Psalm 1:1–3; Isaiah 40:30,31; Lamentations 3:22–26; 1 Corinthians 2:9,10.

? What do those verses say to you about waiting on God? (*Allow response. Answers will vary.*)

Say: When we have to wait in life, it sometimes means someone isn't doing their job correctly or efficiently. Is it easy to think God isn't doing His job correctly when we have to wait on Him? (*Allow response. Answers will vary.*)

Say: Our verses tell us the truth. They remind us that waiting on God is a necessary part of our relationship with Him. We haven't done anything wrong, and God hasn't done anything wrong, when we have to wait. In fact, waiting is an opportunity to deepen our relationship with Him.

Say: I want to share with you three keys to waiting on God:

1. Listen to God. We need to quiet ourselves and listen for God's voice.

➡ Ask someone to read John 10:27 aloud.

? What gets in the way of our knowing God's voice and listening to Him? (*Answers will vary and may include: we often come to God with our own priorities and dominate our time with them.*) Listening to God's voice means letting His priorities control the time we spend with Him.

? How do you feel when you talk to someone who does not listen to you? (*Answers will vary.*) When you picture the people who are closest to you, are they people who listen to you? (*Allow response.*)

? Let's brainstorm ways we can listen to God. (*Answers may include: prayer, reading the Bible, reflection on what He has shown us, awareness of His presence each day.*)

2. Meditate on God and His Word.

➡ Ask someone to read Psalm 1:1–3 again out loud.

? What do you think biblical meditation is? (*Biblical meditation is turning God's thoughts and truths over in your mind*) What things do we usually meditate on? (*Responses will vary.*)

Study 2/Waiting on God

Say: We often meditate on things that frustrate or worry us. When we replay them over and over in our minds, we allow them to grow larger and larger. In the same way, meditating on God's truth will allow that truth to grow larger.

3. Trust God to act on your behalf. Truly trusting God is a discipline that is foundational to a strong relationship with God, but it's also really difficult.

F Who are some Bible figures who took matters into their own hands rather than waiting on God's solution? (*Abraham and Sarah "helping" God give them a son through her servant Hagar; Moses killing an abusive Egyptian to liberate his people; King Saul taking on the role of priest when Samuel was delayed.*)



Say: Isn't it easy to wonder why these Bible figures didn't just wait for God's answer? We have the benefit of knowing what God's answer was for them. But when you can't see the answer yet in your own life, it's not as easy to wait on God.

Hand out a 3-x-5 card to everyone, saying, "Write your name on one side and on the other, an item you have as yet before God in prayer. It could be for a spouse, a job, a healing, a conflict to be resolved, etc." Collect the cards and place them in a bag. Keep the bag for a time frame selected by your group, when you'll distribute them for people to see whether God has provided or if they are still waiting for His answer.

➔ Conclude your time in prayer. Feel free to pray your own prayer, or use the following prayer:

Dear God, we are so thankful that You want to spend time with us and want to provide for our needs. Even though it can be difficult, we want to develop the discipline of waiting on You. Your answers are always better than ours, and we want to trust You for our needs, Amen.

Notes

TIP: If your group has people who don't know these stories, read a few before moving on.

- Abraham and Sarah—Genesis 16:3–16, 21:9,10
- Moses—Exodus 2:11–3:10
- King Saul—1 Samuel 13:8–14)

CONNECTIONS

Quiet Time 101: How to Have a Personal Time with God

Study 3

Notes

Accept God's Invitation to Pray

Objective: To help your group recognize the benefits of prayer and develop a daily, intentional conversation with God.



CONNECT WITH EACH OTHER

- ➔ Greet people as they come in. After a few minutes of social interaction, begin the session.

Say: Prayer is a topic that we talk about often. But no matter how often we hear about prayer, it is often difficult to stay motivated and disciplined to pray.

? When you pray, do you spend time worshipping God and listening to Him, or do you tend to give Him a list of your wants and needs? (*Allow responses. Answers will vary.*)

Say: Although God wants us to come to Him with our requests, prayer is also a time to build a stronger relationship between ourselves and God. Today we'll focus on building a personal time with God through prayer, and we will explore how prayer can affect our lives.



CONNECT WITH GOD'S WORD

Say: If people identify themselves as Christians, should they pray? (*Allow response. Answers may include: Every relationship requires conversation and interaction, prayer is the key to fellowship with God, etc.*)

- ➔ Ask volunteers to read the following Scriptures aloud: Psalm 37:7; Psalm 61:1,2; Luke 18:1; Ephesians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:16,17.

Study 3/Accept God's Invitation to Pray

Notes

F What do these verses say to you about prayer? (*Allow response. Answers will vary.*)

F Why do you think some Christians don't have a daily, intentional prayer time? (*Allow response. Answers may include: people are too busy, they feel guilty about sins they've committed, it's not a priority.*) Would anyone be willing to share why it's hard for you to pray?

F Some people say prayer isn't necessary because God is in control and already knows what they're going to pray for. How would you respond to that? (*Answers will vary.*)

Say: God does know our needs before we ask, and He has the power to do anything in this world. But sometimes He waits to act based on His children's requests. He has invited us to be part of His work to transform the world by our prayers.

F Have you experienced God acting in a situation you were specifically praying for? (*Allow response.*)

Say: Like so many of God's commands to us, prayer not only accomplishes God's purposes on the larger scale of our world, but it also benefits us personally.

➡ Ask someone to read Matthew 6:9–13 out loud.

Say: These verses reveal to us five truths or benefits of prayer. Verse 9 shows us prayer leads us to worship God.

F Why do you think Jesus would begin His prayer with worship? (*Answers will vary and may include: worship helps us remember how mighty God is in comparison with our problems, increases our faith, and reminds us of God's supremacy in the universe.*)

Say: Beginning with worship reminds us that even though God loves us and treats us as friends, He is not our peer. He is the Creator of the universe and the God who judges all things.

➡ Ask someone to read Matthew 6:10 out loud.

Say: Another benefit of prayer is how it helps us focus on God. In this verse, Jesus tells us to never forget that we should be more focused on God's plans and desires than our own.

Study 3/Accept God's Invitation to Pray

Notes

F Why do you think focusing on God would come before the next part of the prayer, which is presenting our needs to God? (*Answers will vary and should include: it helps us realign our priorities about what we need, it helps us sift our real needs from our imagined needs.*)

➔ Ask someone to read Matthew 6:12–15 out loud.

Say: Prayer also challenges us to live in harmony with God and others. Jesus included a request for forgiveness because sin separates us from God. Asking Him to forgive us opens the door for intimate fellowship with God.

F Jesus connected our need for forgiveness with our need to forgive others. What do you think is a possible reason for that? (*Answers will vary and may include: remembering how God has forgiven us gives us more grace for others' mistakes.*) We see how our relationship with others—how we treat people—is intertwined with our relationship with God. We need to pass on to others the forgiveness, grace, mercy, and love God has given to us.



Say: Matthew 6:13 tells us prayer gives us spiritual strength. Jesus shows us we can conquer temptation through prayer. Let's pray together following Jesus' example of worship, focusing our attention on God, presenting needs, living in harmony, and finding spiritual strength.

Ask if anyone would like to lead a section of the prayer. Lead any sections people have not volunteered for.

➔ Conclude your time in prayer. Feel free to pray your own prayer, or use the following prayer:

God, we worship You for who You are. You are the Creator of the universe, and we humble ourselves in Your presence. We want to follow Your commands, including having a regular prayer time with You. We know You are able to meet all of our needs, so we present each person's needs to You. Please forgive us for things we have done this week that don't glorify You. As we go, help each of us to resist temptation and grow closer to You, Amen.

CONNECTIONS

Quiet Time 101: How to Have a Personal Time with God

Study 4

Notes

Practice God's Presence

Objective: To help your group get in tune with God's constant presence in their daily lives.



CONNECT WITH EACH OTHER

- Greet people as they come in. After a few minutes of social interaction, begin the session.

Say: Think of one of the best friendships you have enjoyed in your life. What made that friendship strong? (*Answers will vary.*)

F How can your relationship with God compare to that friendship? (*Answers will vary.*) If it's difficult for you to compare an earthly friendship to your relationship with God, hopefully by the end of our time together you'll see how God can be the closest friend in your life.

Say: We've been discussing how to build our relationship with God. And today, we're going to focus on practicing God's presence, that is, realizing God is always with us.



CONNECT WITH GOD'S WORD

- Ask different people in your group to read the following Scriptures aloud: Psalm 139:1-10; John 15:5; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Hebrews 13:5,6.

F What do these verses say to you about God's presence? (*Allow response. Answers will vary.*)

Study 4/Practice God's Presence

Notes

Q Do you have certain times of the day or specific situations that regularly make you aware of God's presence? (*Allow response. Answers will vary.*)

Q In the Psalm verses we read, what kind of relationship did the writer seem to have with God? (*Allow response. Answers may include: David clearly had an intimacy with God, David celebrates the fact that God is everywhere he goes.*)

Say: Practicing God's presence starts with simply realizing God is always with us. It's easy to believe that in theory, but it's a little harder to picture God with you 24 hours a day—when you're driving, watching TV, talking to a friend, etc.

Q Would you change anything in your daily routine or interactions if you realized God is always with you, whether you want Him to be or not? (*Allow response. Answers will vary.*)

Q Can you think of a way to remind yourself of God's constant presence? (*Answers will vary and may include: start each day with prayer, place a note card of one of our verses somewhere you will regularly see it, talk to God when you're alone, take your hurts and struggles to God before telling them to someone else.*)

Say: Let's talk about what might happen when you practice God's presence.

➤ Ask someone to read John 15:5 and Hebrews 13:5,6 again.

Q What does this verse tell us will happen when we're daily connected with God? (*Answers may include: our fruitfulness is dependent on a connection to God.*)

Say: Branches are dependent on the vine for life, and branches will automatically develop fruit if they remain connected to the vine.

Q In our busy lives, we are often looking for balance. John 15:5 and Hebrews 13:5,6 show us that when we are connected to God, we have balance. What does balance look like in your life? (*Answers will vary.*)

Say: The things we have in life have the potential to change at any moment. When we depend on any vine other than God for balance and security—whether it's a job, a boyfriend/girlfriend, money, or looks—our lives can be thrown into a tailspin when we lose it. God is the only vine in life that never changes.



F What have you seen as God's purpose for your life? Does it involve what you do on weekdays? (*Answers will vary.*)

Say: Go through this next week consciously thinking about God's daily purpose for you and His constant presence with you.

Break the group into smaller groups of two or three people. Provide each person with a 3-x-5 card. Have the groups discuss moments in their day when an awareness of God's presence would make the greatest difference. Encourage them to write down two or three ways to help them recognize God's presence in those moments.

Say: Our lives are bombarded with general noise, which can make it hard to quiet ourselves and recognize God's tender presence. The next time we come together, I'm hoping we hear some great stories of how an awareness of God's presence affected your day.

➡ Conclude your time in prayer. Feel free to pray your own prayer, or use the following prayer:

Dear God, we are so thankful that You want to be with us every day. Your love and Your truth create peace and strength in our lives. Help us to recognize Your presence this week more than ever before, Amen.