

“saying our prayers.” It takes time because God has to get through so many layers of our human, self-governed, self-centered thinking before God can communicate with us. It takes time because God leads us in “quiet time” into the thorough constructive planning of our life in partnership with Him.

It is true that God intends for us to live in such a manner that we are constantly in contact with Him. In this way, God can speak to us at any time. But the men and women who have known God best have invariably found that they could not maintain constant contact without daily time spent quietly alone with the Holy Spirit.

(When Man Listens, p. 36, edited)

We are being foolish when we say we have no time to listen. What could possibly be more important than determining God’s plan for us each and every day?

It is possible to challenge those who cannot seem to find time to practice two-way prayer with this thought provoking question: “What? No time for God?” How selfish we are when we put ourselves first and try to live without the care and protection of the One who created us in the first place:

Most of us, when we say we have no time, are simply dishonest. Some of us have not realized how much time later in the day is saved through added efficiency, through clearer selection of what is important and what should be left, through the greater strength and peace which come when we have listened to God and received specific directions for our day.

(When Man Listens, p. 36, edited)

Eleanor Forde-Newton tells us that by listening to the Voice of God we can overcome the voice of self and prevent anxiety and confusion from ruining our lives. When we are overwhelmed with busyness, it is impossible for God to get through:

The Quiet Time is so important because it is only there that we can shut out the world with its clamor of duty, its conflicting appeals, and our own tangled thoughts, and realize the presence of God.

We need enough time to forget time, and this often means the sacrifice of other interests and almost inevitably that last precious hour of morning sleep. It is not too much to say that for many people the power of the whole day completely depends on that first hour alone with God. The man who would move mountains must give God his ear before the rush of life is upon him. For many it may involve the discipline of getting up earlier and letting God organize your day so that everything in God's plan for that day will be done.

(The Guidance of God, pp. 23-24, edited)

Take time—do not hurry. This is valuable advice if we are to overcome our addiction to noise and activity:

It is absolutely necessary that this "Quiet Time" be leisurely and unhurried. Haste is the death of two-way prayer.

At first you may be bored. You will want to do something or talk to someone. You are probably an activity junkie, a noise drunkard. But keep on.

(The Eight Points of the Oxford Group, p. 71, edited)

Now that we have made the necessary preparations, it is time to listen:

4. *Listen*

Just be still, quiet, relaxed and open. Let your mind go “loose.” Let God do the talking. Thoughts, ideas, and impressions will begin to come into your mind and heart. Be alert and aware and open to every one.

God speaks to us through our mind using our own words. This is why God has been described as “a still small voice.” It is reassuring to know that the voice we hear is our own. This reduces any fear we may have about listening.

Next, the author instructs us to capture our thoughts by writing them down. This is the most important part of the entire process—putting on paper what we hear. Do not question the thoughts; just record them for later review.

Many of us record our thoughts in guidance books. We do this for four reasons: first, so we will not forget what we have heard during our time alone with God; second, so we can test our guidance to separate the self-thoughts from the God thoughts; third, so we can discuss our guidance with our sharing partners; and fourth, so we can critique our activities to see if we have, in fact, followed God’s plan for us that day.

For those who are skeptical about the need to write, ask yourselves, “How can I determine if I have followed God’s guidance for the day, if I cannot even remember what it was God wanted me to?” Many of us find that, if not recorded, the thoughts we receive during our “quiet time” are quickly forgotten:

5. Write!

Here is the important key to the whole process. Write down everything that comes into your mind. Everything. Writing is simply a means of recording so that you can remember later. Don't sort out or edit your thoughts at this point.

Don't say to yourself:

This thought isn't important;
This is just an ordinary thought;
This can't be guidance;
This isn't nice;
This can't be from God;
This is just me thinking, etc.

Write down everything that passes through your mind:

Names of people;
Things to do;
Things to say;
Things that are wrong and need to be made right.

Write down everything:

Good thoughts-bad thoughts;
Comfortable thoughts-uncomfortable thoughts;
"Holy" thoughts-"unholy" thoughts;
Sensible thoughts-"crazy" thoughts.

Be Honest! Write down everything. A thought comes quickly, and it escapes even more quickly unless it is captured and put down.

We record our thoughts because it is important to have written evidence of God's plan for our lives:

The Group advocates our use of a pencil and notebook so that we may record every God given thought and idea that comes to us during our time alone with Him, that no detail, however small, may be lost to us and that we may not shirk the truth about ourselves or any problem, when it comes to us.
(*What Is the Oxford Group?*, p. 68)

The Group strongly recommends the keeping of a Guidance Book wherein we write the inspired thoughts that come in waiting. I used to smile at this as a very kindergarten method. But I can now testify that it is abundantly worthwhile. I had no idea how well it worked until I tried it. Suggestions are soon crowded out in the day's business unless we make a note of them at once. If inspirations are not captured and acted upon, they soon evaporate.
(*The Eight Points of the Oxford Group*, p. 70, edited)

As described in a previous chapter, James Houck has provided us with an alternative to written guidance for those who have difficulty writing or cannot write fast enough to keep up with their thoughts. This is the concept of "fingertip guidance."

With this technique we touch our thumb to a finger to capture a thought. It can be very effective when we are not in a position to write, such as when driving a car or taking a shower. Up to eight thoughts can be captured this way. These thoughts can later be relayed to a sharing partner or to fellow team members during a Guidance meeting.

Many of us who write guidance use "fingertip guidance" from time to time. We wait until the end of our "quiet time" to record the thoughts we have captured. This procedure

significantly reduces the amount of paper used to record thoughts and provides the equivalent of an “executive summary” for the session.

After we write down or capture our thoughts, we need to test what we have written to separate the God thoughts from the self-thoughts. Here is where the Four Standards of Honesty, Purity, Unselfishness and Love are so important.

This is how it works. After the thoughts have slowed or we have stopped writing, we look over what we have put on paper. There is a good chance the thoughts which pass the test of Honesty, Purity, Unselfishness and Love are from God; conversely those thoughts which are dishonest, impure, selfish and fearful are based in self.

We test our thoughts because not all of them come from God. There are two voices trying to get our attention, and we must be able to tell the difference between them. Some describe these as the Voice of God and the voice of self:

6. Test

When the flow of thoughts slows down, stop. Take a good look at what you have written. Not every thought we have comes from God. So we need to test our thoughts. Here is where the written record helps us to be able to look at them.

- a) Are these thoughts completely honest, pure, unselfish and loving?
- b) Are these thoughts in line with our duties to our family—to our country?
- c) Are these thoughts in line with our understanding of the teachings found in our spiritual literature?

The author of *What Is the Oxford Group?* provides us with some very practical reasons for testing our guidance:

It is not suggested that everything we write down during our Quiet Times necessarily comes from God. The human mind, being what it is, wanders from concentration at an outside interruption, takes up a train of thought it finds hard to discard, invents or remembers a thought of its own. But to those closely in touch with God it becomes easy after a short while to differentiate between spiritual and human messages.

(*What Is the Oxford Group?*, p. 68)

By testing guidance, we learn where we need to make additional surrenders, conduct additional inventories, and carry out additional restitutions. Taking the Steps is an ongoing process that brings us closer and closer to God each time we take the actions necessary to “(perform) His work well.”

Eleanor Forde-Newton also tells us to test our thoughts. If we skip this vital procedure, we can end up with journal after journal containing streams of consciousness which may or may not have anything to do with guidance from God:

Guidance, left to itself, has no anchor. Since the most important thing about Guidance is the one from whom it comes, we must be sure we know the source of what we put on paper. As we reach out into the realm of the spirit, we can hear the aged Apostle warning us: “Believe not every spirit, but test the spirits (to determine) whether they are of God.” (1 John 4:1)

(*The Guidance of God*, p. 4, edited)

As part of the test, we need to determine what another person who is practicing two-way prayer thinks of our guidance. We may believe our thoughts are from God, but, since we have a difficult time seeing ourselves as we really are, it is important that we check our guidance with a sharing partner:

7. Check

When in doubt and when it is important, what does another person who is living two-way prayer think about this thought or action? More light comes in through two windows than one. Someone else who also wants God's plan for our lives may help us to see more clearly.

Talk over together what you have written. Many people do this. They tell each other what guidance has come. This is the secret of unity. There are always three sides to every question—your side, my side, and the right side. Guidance shows us which is the right side—not who is right, but what is right.

“More light comes in through two windows than one.” God speaks to us through others as well as through our thoughts. This reliance upon a sharing partner is essential if we are to receive full benefit from our times alone with God. We need to check our guidance to protect ourselves from “all sorts of absurd actions and ideas”:

An observer who listens to the process of sharing guidance, which usually follows the “quiet time,” will be struck by the fact that much of the guidance will be