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What Quiet? What Time?

- Elizabeth -

As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?
My [children's] tears have been my food day and night.
Psalm 42:1-3, ETV—Elizabeth Thompson Version

Ah, the glorious days of old, when I could set aside an hour every day to spend in peaceful meditation and communion with God—my “quiet times.” The concepts of *quiet* and *time* now exist in my vocabulary only as distant memories, two long-lost friends that I imagine will return to my life one day—but not any day soon! I went from feasting on the Word, to a virtual famine, in a very short time (well, in nine-and-a-half months, to be exact).

When we have children, nurturing our “walk with God” takes on a much more literal connotation. These days, my relationship with God really does develop as I am walking (or, more accurately, as I am running after a rebellious child in a parking lot; or folding laundry during naptime; or chopping vegetables for dinner while sticking a pacifier in a baby's mouth and dancing with a three-year-old and teaching a two-year-old to say “please”)—because I rarely have time to sit with God!

And yet, now that we are mothers, we still need to be

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close to God, perhaps even *more* desperately than we did in our more flexible days. We have days when our patience is stretched so thin it nearly disappears; times when we feel alone and trapped in a house that seems smaller by the minute; moments when we question our ability to raise our little Tasmanian devils in a godly way.

We all know that if we neglect our relationship with God, it will wither and our spiritual senses will grow dull. We do not want to find that, in the process of raising our children, we are losing the passionate faith we hope to pass on to them. Our goal should be to exemplify such an inspiring walk with God that our kids desire a relationship of their own one day. I always remember seeing both of my parents disappear behind their study doors every morning, for time with God—and as I grew older, I imitated their habit, a practice that I want to pass on to my own family. I may be a very imperfect mother and Christian, but I can at least set an example for my children in my daily spiritual disciplines.

Although I do not claim to be a stellar example of daily devotional time with God at this point in my life, I have not given up—I am still fighting to walk with him. Indeed, one of our aims in writing this book is to provide young moms with what could be a month's worth of daily readings—easily digestible inspirations, spiritual truths and practical lessons that you can read in five or ten minutes and take with you even on the busiest of days.

Over the past few years of my journey into motherhood, I have discovered some strategies that have made my walk with God possible—and even enjoyable. Several godly friends have taught me some of their methods, too, and I hope our collective ideas may help other new mothers to remain close to God.

THE TENDER YEARS

I love Psalm 42:8, where David says, “By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me—a prayer to the God of my life.” Not only does God send his love our way during the hectic daytime hours, but he is with us through the long nights as well. How many nights do we spend awake, nursing a newborn or rocking a sick child? Sometimes those night hours, when the house is quiet except for us and our babies, afford a precious opportunity to connect with God. As Psalm 63:6 puts it,

On my bed I remember you;
I think of you through the watches of the night.
Because you are my help,
I sing in the shadow of your wings.

(Thanks to my Grandma for the inspiration behind this suggestion!)

I think often of the scripture in Deuteronomy 6:5–9, where God says,

Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

I am learning to bring God into the everyday moments of life, and to keep his word accessible both in my heart and in my home.

I have learned to take advantage of time whenever it presents itself. I may not always find fifteen consecutive

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minutes to sit and talk to God, but many days I manage to pray for that long, in short intervals ranging from two to ten minutes. I pray when I nurse the baby; when I drive and the children are strapped in and unable to harm themselves or anyone else; when the stars align and everyone sleeps at the same time for a few blessed minutes. Sometimes I'll put the kids in the stroller and attempt a prayer walk around the neighborhood.

I now keep a Bible handy in the kitchen and in my diaper bag so that if a free moment surprises me either at home or while I am waiting for an appointment, I can read.

Since my times are so limited, I love keeping a spiritual book handy, alongside my Bible—a little like having a microwaveable meal. If I find five minutes to read, I just grab the book, pop its contents in my brain, and *voilà!*—spiritual truths are easy to read and ingest. I rarely have time to sit down, figure out what to study, and do an in-depth analysis. It helps to have spiritual insights already written out for me. When I am not reading a spiritual book, I like to have a Bible reading plan. This year I am reading through a chronological Bible divided into daily readings, and it is so helpful to have a ready-made Bible study waiting for me every day. (I confess, I am woefully behind, but plodding along anyway.)

As my oldest daughter has turned three, she can entertain herself for short periods of time. And yet, if she catches me reading my Bible in the kitchen, she immediately begins making demands. I have recently begun to set a timer for ten minutes, telling her that I am having my quiet time, and that I will be available to help her when the timer goes off. Magically, this works! She leaves the room, finds something to do, and comes back in when she hears the timer go off. (Thanks, Sarah, for the idea!)

On occasion, I ask my husband to give me twenty minutes to myself. I grab a cup of coffee and a Bible, run into a quiet room, and boy, can I get a lot out of a twenty-minute break with God! I always come out singing and at peace—much better prepared for a day of caring for my little zoo. (And thanks go to Sara and Melissa for this suggestion.)

If you can get all of your children on the same nap schedule, you will probably find yourself with an hour and a half—maybe even two or three hours, I kid you not!—in which you can spend time with God, take a nap, work out, return e-mails, speed clean your house, prepare dinner, and perhaps have five minutes left over to stare at the walls, savoring the sound of silence.

If you just can't find a consistent daily time with God, try setting aside a longer time at least once every week or so—like a mini-date with God—to sustain you during the chaos of everyday life. You may have to get up at the crack of dawn to make it happen, but the loss of sleep will be worth the spiritual renewal. It's not as if you're sleeping much anyway, right?

In the meantime, let's all learn to rely on God's grace and not berate ourselves for being horrible Christians if we can't spend as much time with God as we used to—while also challenging ourselves to be creative and make opportunities whenever we can. This stage of life is temporary, and one day we will be able to have consistent, lengthy times with God again.

I look forward to that day. But until then, I am going to walk with God, even if he has to run to keep up!

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BUILDING BLOCKS

- How can you make it easier to spend time with God when you have unexpected free time? Try planting Bibles or spiritual books in key places throughout your home, or writing scriptures on note cards that you carry in your pocket throughout the day.
- Psalm 119:62, 97
At midnight I rise to give you thanks
for your righteous laws....
Oh, how I love your law!
I meditate on it all day long.