

# The Quiet Time

*A talk given by W. Keith Newman at  
the MRA Conference*

*“Love, The Divine Imperative”*

*Kingston, Jamaica, April 4th, 1997*

## **...give God a chance**

**T**hat is the first point I want to make—the purpose of the quiet time is to give God a chance to speak to us. We do not make the rules, He does. Therefore the experience that each of us has will be different, because each of us is different and God meets us at the point of our need, even when we are not aware that we have a need.

So God can speak to anyone, anywhere, at any time if that person is open to receive it.

## **What kind of thoughts?**

**W**hat kind of thoughts might you get?

The first day I tried listening, what I wrote down in my book was a lot of nonsense, which made no sense at all. It was a perfect reflection of the state of my mind at that time. However, when I looked up I saw a first aid kit on the dresser. Now I had stolen this kit from the store where a friend was working, and I knew what I had to do. But knowing doesn't make it easy, and it took me a week to decide to act. Acting on that thought set my feet on a path that I have been walking for thirty-nine years now.

That is one kind of thought that God gives. He often puts his finger on specific acts or attitudes which highlight the less attractive sides of our characters, then leaves us free to decide if we will do something about it. If we don't, we never know what we are missing.

## **...relationships**

**Y**ou might get a thought about a relationship.

**O**ne of the most striking examples of this, for me, was my thought the morning I proposed to my wife. I still have that piece of paper in a safe deposit box at home, but I remember it as if it were this morning. The thought I wrote down was, “Joy is the one, I give her to you but she remains my child. Care for her. Nourish her spiritual growth.”

**N**ot only did I gain a wife, but I was given a clear insight into how God saw the marriage relationship. I can't pretend I have ever come anywhere near what I should to carry out that commission, but it put the whole relationship on a proper footing for me, and I have been eternally grateful.

## **...but it doesn't seem to make any sense!**

**A** third kind of thought you might get is what I call the cryptic thought. You know it is special, but it

doesn't seem to make any sense. Three years ago I was at the Moral Re-Armament centre in Caux, Switzerland. I had been thinking of our relationship with the First Nations people of North America.

**T**he thought that came was, "You will never have true partnership until you are prepared to go on their ground instead of always inviting them on to your ground."

**I** had been at conferences with First Nations people before, and we had often worked with First Nations people. Several had been members of our Council of Management. Only once had they initiated anything from their culture and tradition. But what can you do about it? You don't go up to people who your race has put down for centuries and say, "Initiate something!", not if you want to see a restoration of the pride and dignity that has been so undercut over decades and centuries.

**S**ince that time, in amazing ways, I have been led into situations where First Nations people are taking initiative. Three weeks ago some of us met in Minneapolis to plan for a conference which will be held there at the end of June. I had asked a Cree friend if he would accept a leadership role in this. He agreed if we would include a friend of his, a man none of us had met. Because his plane had been delayed, he arrived after the meeting had started, so we had no chance to talk with him beforehand, yet every time either of these two men spoke they took us to a whole new spiritual level. It was breathtaking.

### **...you may get no thoughts at all!**

**F**inally, you may get no thoughts at all.

**F**or me, this happens very often. But the time of quiet, when I can put myself in the presence of God, is refreshing.

### **Tools needed**

**S**o how do I get started with this thing called the quiet time?

**A time of quiet.** At first you may need physical quiet though with discipline and experience you may be able to withdraw into quiet in the midst of noise. What is important is to have a quiet spirit.

**A piece of paper and a pencil** can be very helpful. Writing thoughts down does not sanctify them. It simply frees your mind to receive the next thought that comes, and the next, and the next... If I try to remember the first good thought, I block out all the rest.

**A measuring tool.** Obviously not every thought that goes through your mind comes from God, so it's helpful to measure the thoughts that come to see which ones do. If you act on thoughts that measure up to absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness and absolute love, you are not likely to hurt anyone. So these four points of measurement or evaluation are vital.

**Grounding in your spiritual tradition** is helpful. This isn't essential to begin with, but if you are not led to study and searching into your own spiritual tradition, you may need to question the source. Spiritual

values, at their highest, will often help you to see which thoughts come from God, though you need to beware that you don't put too narrow an interpretation on spiritual truth.

**F**inally, friends who you can share your thoughts with are a great help and source of encouragement; the kind of friends who love you enough to tell you the truth about yourself, and stick by you through difficult times. In my experience, it is through relationships with others that God often shows us the truths about ourselves.

## **What hinders God's guidance?**

### **1. Thoughts that are not acted on.**

If God has told me to do something and I haven't done it, often He can't lead me further because the second step is dependent on having taken the first.

### **2. Limits on what I will do.**

If I have a small idea of what God expects of me, or of what He may want to do through me, I will be deaf to thoughts that lead me beyond those areas. When I say, "Oh, God couldn't ask me to do that," I limit Him.

### **3. Limits on the people I will work with.**

Often the flowers in a bouquet are all different and although they are all beautiful in themselves, they are even more beautiful when properly arranged together because each brings out the best in the other. God can often show us things about ourselves through people whose experiences have been very different from our own. God wants us to bring out the best in each other, but if we refuse to mingle with people, or we refuse to get into situations beyond our understanding or approval, He can't show us the magnificence that He has planned this diversity for.

## **...God can speak anytime**

**G**od can speak anytime, but I find it helpful to make a specific time available to Him every morning. That is the time in my life when I am least likely to be disturbed. And, if I tune in in the morning, I am better able to hear God should He speak in the midst of the daily rush of life.

**S**o, in summary, the basics of the quiet time, as I see them, are: a quiet spirit, a pen and paper, four absolute standards for measurement, a developing understanding of spiritual truth, and a group of faithful and loving friends.

## **...enough time to forget time**

**T**ake enough time to forget time. You may start with fifteen minutes but you will probably find at least a half-hour is needed, and many find an hour not too much. Take what you need.

**Y**ou should also be ready to take a minute or two at any time you have a decision to make that needs careful thought.

**B**ut above everything else, you have to commit yourself to act on the thoughts that you get, or the whole exercise is meaningless.

*Keith Newman*  
*Kingston, Jamaica, April 4, 1997*