A GUIDE FOR TAKING QUIET DAYS
Practical Tips

INTRODUCTION
Taking time to be with God is a priority for any leader. Sadly in the busyness of ministry it is so easy to allow this to be squeezed out. Time each day is vital, but many also find that practising the spiritual disciplines of solitude and silence is a helpful way to maintain a vibrant relationship with Jesus. The following guidelines are offered in the hope they may provide some insights in how to make use of a day set aside to be with God. There are many ways of doing this, and many resources available to help. Some are listed at the end.

FOR BUSY LEADERS
Our primary calling as a Christian leader is to be a child of our loving Father, a follower of our living Lord Jesus, and a bearer of the fruit of the Spirit. Nurturing this primary relationship with God as Trinity is the first responsibility of all Christian leaders. Taking time to cultivate this relationship is vital.

TAKING TIME OUT

- **How often?** For most people establishing a regular pattern is a real help. This may be taking a day aside once a month, every six weeks, every two months, three times a year. Whatever, the key is to establish the pattern, put it in the diary, and stick to it. Be warned, everything will conspire against you taking this time.
- **Where to go?** It's important to find somewhere that helps you to relax and be still and quiet. A retreat house, a friend's home if they are not using it during the day, a particular spot of natural beauty (although be aware that ideally you need a place you can go to in all seasons). It needs to be relatively nearby, because you don't want to spend the whole day travelling.
- **How long?** This will depend on your personal circumstances. Some find it really helpful to go the night before and that enables them to have a relaxing evening simply unwinding. Others go for the day i.e. 9am-5pm. Whichever, try and make sure that you don't have anything work-oriented planned into your dairy for the evening of that day, and preferably nothing major planned for the next day, otherwise you will spend your whole time with your mind on what you've got to do.
- **What do I do?** Be clear about the purpose of the day. A quiet day set aside to spend time with God is different from a prayer day. The latter is important, but normally involves us going with a set idea of what we want to do, i.e. to pray specifically for some aspect of our lives or ministry. Nor is it a study day where we take loads of books (albeit Christian ones) to learn more about God, or the work we're doing. The whole focus of a quiet day set aside to be with God is simply to meet with him, and in that sense we allow God to set the agenda. It is a day of abandoning ourselves into his hands. We are saying 'Here I am Lord, please meet with me in whatever way you think fit.'
- **How can I best prepare?** Try to make sure you don't enter the day exhausted. Get some good sleep during the previous few nights. Identify what you are going to do over the weeks leading up to the day. Be sure that by the day before you've got a clear outline in your mind of passages you might read. Ask for others to pray for your day, that you meet with God afresh. The night before, offer yourself to God in prayer, handing over the day to him and asking for his blessing.
- **How might such a day be shaped?** This is, of course, entirely up to you. Be sure not to overfill the day, and to allow space for relaxation and doing something re-creational. Here is a suggested pattern.

  9-9.15 Quieting down by acknowledging God's presence, offering yourself to him, and writing down any things that come crowding in that you need to take note of but are not a part of this day.

  9.15-10.00 Read a predetermined passage of Scripture in a meditative way (the Lectio Divina method pioneered by Ignatius can be really helpful). The aim of this time is not to prepare for your next sermon or talk, but to ask God to meet with you and speak with you through his word.

  10.00-10.30 Journal on the meditation, reflecting on what God has said. Here are some questions that might help in the journaling process.

  ⇒ What went on? What struck me? How did I feel about this?

⇒ What did the Lord show me? Anything I need to do?

⇒ Any recurring distraction?

⇒ Is there some point to pick up in my next prayer time?

During the review thank God for his favours and ask forgiveness for sin. Throughout ponder what God may want you to do in your life.

⇒ What is the next step in my relationship with God?

⇒ What is the next step in the development of my character?

⇒ What is the next step in my family life?

⇒ What is the next step in my work?

10.30-11.30 Do something relaxing/creative. Go for a slow walk. Take notice of creation and allow God to speak to you through it. Paint, write poetry, compose a song, make something, write a Psalm, take photographs. In essence find a way that works for you of being creative, expressing something of what is in you to God, or allowing him to continue to feed you.

11.45-12.15 Meditate on your second pre-chosen passage.

12.15-12.45 Journal on your meditation.

12.45-1.45 Have lunch, or if you are fasting pray for the poor of the world.

1.45-2.15 Have a snooze. Go on, treat yourself. Alternatively get some gentle exercise.

2.15-3.30 Meditate on a third pre-chosen passage.

3.30-4.00 Journal on your meditation and on the day as a whole perhaps asking:

⇒ What do I sense God has been saying to me through this day?

⇒ What might I need to do as a result of this day?

⇒ How might I shape my daily life as a result of this day

4.00pm Day ends. If at all possible do something you really enjoy in the evening. Go to see a film, have a meal out with someone you love, go ten pin bowling, go to a concert... basically have fun!

- **What do I do if the day is a real struggle?** We need to recognise that by placing ourselves entirely in God's hands we cannot govern the outcome of the day. Just because we have set aside a day to be spent in quiet with God doesn't mean it will necessarily be a spiritual high. That is why this is a discipline. God may well decide to hold himself back; because there are things he wants us to grapple with. Sometimes quiet days are not much more than hard work. That is why it is really important to prayerfully plan the day in advance and then stick to it, thereby not allowing our feelings or tiredness to govern the agenda. It can also be really helpful to have a wise and godly spiritual director who you can meet with two or three times a year to talk through your spiritual life, and perhaps share something of what happens on your quiet days.
- **How can I find out more?** Talk to older wiser Christians about their experience of setting aside time with God. In particular talk to those outside your tradition. You won't agree with everything they say, but you will gain valuable insights into how to spend time with God. You may also find the following books helpful.

RESOURCES

- Liberated to Lead, Chapter 2 on Journaling, Colin Buckland (Monarch)
- The Life you've Always Wanted, John Ortberg (Zondervan)
- Seven Days of Solitude, Brother Ramon (Liguori Publications)
- Open To God, Joyce Huggett (Hodder)