

Wesley Cottage Quiet Garden

Jesus said, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest" (Mark 6:31)



I am pleased to share this third Quiet Day pack. It is intended for use in **early summer 2020**. I will be following it here at Wesley Cottage on my own. This pack enables you to join in, on any day in early summer in the comfort of your own venue of choice.

This is a Quiet Day, not a Silent Retreat. It is an opportunity to listen for the natural and normal sounds of everyday that you might otherwise miss in the busyness of modern life. As we ease out of 'lockdown' it provides you with a space to simply 'be' – to leave the worries of the day to one side and replace them with a stillness within, opening yourself to what God may have to say to you through His word and the natural world.

Here are some reminders of how to prepare for the day:

- 1) remember this is a gift to you, so allow yourself the time to make the most of it
- 2) find a comfortable seat for the main part of the day, and if possible an adjacent outdoor location for the quiet times (or create your own 'outdoors' indoors, perhaps another room or corner of a room).
- 3) if you need it, ensure you have a bottle of water handy to drink
- 4) prepare a simple lunch beforehand, so that you don't have to spend much of the lunch break preparing food
- 5) be prepared to turn off all media for the whole of the time – don't be tempted to 'just check' for messages during the lunch break as that will affect your appreciation of the afternoon session – if you're expecting an urgent phone call, then choose another day to have your quiet day – you need to be quiet *inside* yourself
- 6) you'll need a Bible and you may want to have a notebook handy as well as these notes
- 7) if you're in isolation with your household, invite them to join you for the Quiet Day. If they don't or it's not appropriate for them, explain to them what you're doing and ask them to allow you the space
- 8) for the 'Worship' parts of the day, you may want to choose beforehand music to play, prayer books to read, and a 'worship centre' of meaningful items to focus on (perhaps a cross, a candle, some flowers or a picture)

Senses Exercises for use in your Quiet Day

Sight

Owl / Hawk Eyes – explore your vision

Firstly, explore how wide you can make your vision, like an Owl. Soften your gaze and hold your arms in front of you with your fingers wiggling. Gradually open your arms out, wiggling your fingers until you can no longer see your moving fingers. Experiment and see how wide your vision can be.

Secondly, sharpen your vision, like a Hawk. Focus on the detail of something nearby, examining as much detail as you can.

Sound

Counting sounds - explore the sounds around you. Start with your hands in fists in front of you. Close your eyes, and count each different sound you hear (ending up with your hands opened up, having counted ten sounds).

Deer ears – experiment with your hearing by mimicking how a deer moves its ears. Cup your hands behind your ears with your palms facing in front of you. Notice the difference it makes to how you hear sounds in front of you. Now cup your hands in front of your ears (with your palms facing behind you) and notice how you hear sounds behind you.

Fox feet – experiment walking silently. Bend the knees a little, relax the body, and gently step forward with one foot, toes first. If, as you begin to set your foot down it seems like you might make a noise, lift the foot and place it somewhere else. Once that foot rests quietly on the floor, shift your weight onto that foot, and repeat with the other foot. Experiment with putting the foot down heel first, and both inner and outer sides of the sole first.

Look up and not at your feet – this frees up your dominant sense of sight so you can tune into everything around you and not just your feet.

Smell

Silent smell – pick (or run your fingers gently up and down) a leaf or stalk of some fresh herbs or plants with a strong smell (rosemary, mint, chives). Hold each plant in turn with your eyes closed and spend two minutes exploring the smell. Hold it near your nose and then far away.

Touch

Silent touch – experiment by picking up an object in your hands and with your eyes closed, silently explore the object with just your hands. Explore the sensations of holding it up to your face, touching it with your cheek and perhaps your lips. Does your sense of touch change with your eyes closed? Is there a temperature difference? How does it feel differently touched to your cheek?

Here's a rough outline for the day, based on the usual pattern:

Quiet Day pattern	
10.30am	Settling down
10.45am	Worship
11.15am	First quiet session
12noon	Review of morning

12.15pm	Lunch break
1pm	Worship
1.30pm	Second quiet session
2.15pm	Review of afternoon
2.30pm	End

In practice, we found we never stuck exactly to time, because we allowed the Spirit to lead. I think it's helpful to have an overall pattern to structure the day to prevent spending too long on one part and not allowing enough time for another.

Detailed notes for each part of the Quiet Day are shown below

1] Settling down

Check again that there are not likely to be any interruptions (turn the phone off, put a notice on the front door, help others in your household to know what you are doing) If a hot drink helps you to relax, then start with one here. If it helps you, create a worship centre and symbolically hand over your worries, perhaps by lighting a candle to represent them, or leaving your diary or quiet (switched off) phone there as a sign of your commitment to the day (and to yourself).

Make sure you are comfortable, legs uncrossed, feet on the floor. Be aware of your breathing. Gradually slow your breathing and breathe in and out more deeply. You may like to say the Jesus prayer in your head as you breathe: breathing in 'Lord Jesus Christ' and breathing out 'have mercy on me.' It may help to close your eyes to concentrate on this for a while.

Gradually relax each part of your body in turn, starting with your head. Try to dispel any tensions, any furrowed brow, as you leave any worries with the LORD. Are your face muscles taut? Concentrate on relaxing them. Is your neck stiff? Gently exercise your neck muscles by slightly rolling your head in a small circle. Move your shoulder muscles if there's tension there. Continue down your arms to your hands and fingers, relaxing each in turn; and then your torso, upper and lower legs and ending with your feet and toes. If you fall asleep doing this exercise it proves how much you need this Quiet Day!



2] Worship

This centres on Scripture. For this pack, I have chosen to base it on Jesus' words about a fruitful life, as expressed in John 12:23-24. Before reading this, prepare to hear what God wants to say to you through it – use a prayer such as the one below, or make up your own. You may like to sing or listen to a song or hymn e.g. 'Lord, I lift Your name on high', or 'Low in the grave He lay'

Prayer of preparation

Holy Spirit of God, gentle as the dove, bring your stillness to this moment. You are the tender breath of God, with gifts of wisdom and discernment. Speak to me in the quiet. Reveal to me your Word in the Scriptures and in the natural world. Lead me through this journey, as I offer this day to you and all that I am. Transform my heart and mind through your encircling love and power. May I sense your presence with me in a new way.

Come, Holy Spirit. Amen

Read John 12:23-24 in your own Bible (it is Jesus speaking to his disciples after the crowds had just welcomed him into Jerusalem with palm branches, and Greeks in that crowd had asked to see Jesus)

What struck you about these verses? What did you notice that you had not seen in them before?

When you are ready, read this meditation in preparation for your first quiet session:

My wife, and co-host of Wesley Cottage Quiet Garden, died in April. She did most of the planting for the new season and labelled the rows. However, I don't know which rows she completed and



which ones she was yet to plant up. In addition, slugs or birds have eaten some of the labels! Consequently I have had to wait until plants started to grow to know which seeds were successfully planted. Yet this is the natural cycle of the garden. Some plants thrive one season and do not appear the next. The seeds lie 'dead' in the ground over winter or the branches are bare until the springtime reveals the signs of life and growth; of fruitfulness. And of course seeds that remain in the packet will never grow until they are taken out and buried in the ground.

Although Jesus is speaking metaphorically about his own death when he talks about how the grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, I think this is also true of the grains of faith that have been sown in our lives: how our understanding has taken root, grown and been fruitful; and how that has enabled others to grow and be fruitful in turn. Nature shows us that cycle. If you have access to an open space, you can look for signs of that cycle. Otherwise try and picture those signs in your imagination. Ask God to speak to you through those signs.

3] First quiet session

Find a non-intrusive means of reminding you of the time, so that you don't go on too long nor cut short this part of your day. Move to the 'quiet place,' and use a comfortable (but not *too* comfortable!) seat. Settle into this session, perhaps by using the Senses Exercises. You may like to gather together signs of the cycle of seed dying and being buried, and of fruitful growth, to include in your worship centre. These could be natural items from your open space, or images from books or magazines.



4] Review of morning

Before stopping for lunch, review your feelings and emotions, your responses to the reading and your experiences in the 'quiet place.' Make a note of these for future reference. Are there things that you feel you are being called to do as a result?

5] Lunch break



It's possible you will have some bread product as part of your lunch. Take time to consider the natural cycle that transformed a single grain into a head of corn, and then in turn human intervention transformed that into your food. Give thanks before you eat your (hopefully simple) lunch for God's generosity, for those involved in producing, processing and delivering the food you are eating.

6] Worship

Even if a seed starts to grow, there's still no guarantee it will be fruitful. There are plenty of plants in Wesley Cottage Quiet Garden that stubbornly stay green and leafy but with no fruit or flowers as they are meant to have! Before reading the passage for this part of the day, prepare to hear what God wants to say to you through it – use a prayer such as the one below, or make up your own. You may like to sing or listen to a song or hymn e.g. 'Great is Thy faithfulness'

Prayer of preparation: Faithful God, you call me to be fruitful. Help me to grow in faith and knowledge of the person you intend me to become. As I read your word and meditate on it, enable me to use all my senses to experience the fullness of your presence and to grow in understanding of heart and mind. Amen.

Read: Luke 13:6-9 in your own Bible

What struck you about the passage? What did you notice that you had not seen in it before?

When you are ready, read this meditation in preparation for your second quiet session:

I haven't tried growing figs in the Quiet Garden. It's possible most of the garden was originally an apple orchard, although there's only one old apple tree left (and one 'new' one that's grown from an old stump). One year, the frost came when the blossom was growing, so there were very few apples that year. In 2019, Rosalind was processing apples throughout the season, there were so many! Of course, that's what apple trees are meant to do – produce apples - in abundance. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we're called to grow more disciples; to be fruitful. It is good to know that God never gives up on us, even during those times when we ourselves feel unproductive. It is perhaps at those periods in our life that God is at work, nurturing and encouraging us, pruning and shaping us for what is to come, preparing us to 'produce fruit' as effective disciples.

7] Second quiet session

Follow the pattern of the first quiet session, briefly settling yourself in again with some of the Senses Exercises you found useful in the first session. Stay open to what God wants to tell you through your experience of the natural world. What would fruitfulness look like in your life?



8] Review of afternoon



Give thanks to God for all that you have heard Him say to you from this Quiet Day. Make a note again of anything you have been prompted to implement as a result of the day. Prepare to take back some of the issues you handed over at the beginning of this day, and notice how they have been transformed by your handing them over.

9] End

Be kind to yourself as you gently re-enter the busyness of the world. Don't rush back in to all the jobs that might be awaiting you!

If, at a later stage, you would like to give some feedback from your experience of today, then please do so by email. I would love to hear from you. Anthony Hick

anthony.hick@methodist.org.uk



Quiet Garden Movement



This material is a little later than I had intended, partly because of the preparations for my wife's funeral, and the subsequent matters that needed to be sorted. Rosalind was key in developing our Quiet Garden here at Wesley Cottage and I am aware of her continuing presence in the Spirit. I have been compiling a folder of tributes to her from friends and family, and these demonstrate the ongoing fruitfulness of her life and faith. She sowed so many seeds of faith, and confidence, and love, and laughter. Now they are growing and producing more seeds.