

TAKING TIME WITH GOD

The story of Mary and Martha gives a perfect example of the dilemma many of us face. It seems like we are stuck with a choice between knowing God and serving God. Life is simply busy. With work, school, relationships, and ministry involvement, finding time to simply spend with God can be quite difficult. Yet, nothing is more important to our day to day lives than spending time with God. Just as most of us would not choose a lifestyle that neglected eating and bathing, we should prioritize our time with God as such an integral part of our daily routine, that it becomes a deeply embedded discipline.

A commitment to having regular personal devotions (also known as a “quiet time”) is essential to sustaining a dynamic, personal walk with God. Whether you are a newer Christian who is just starting to learn how to pray and study the Bible, or an older Christian who has read the Bible cover to cover, your relationship with God simply requires a certain amount of time alone with Him. Just as you would expect that any relationship between two humans requires time and commitment to deepen, so our relationship with God needs time and commitment if it is to grow.

The writers of the New Testament spoke often of their relationship to the Lord. Peter encouraged us to “...grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). Paul prayed for the believers in Ephesus, “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better” (Ephesians 1:17). Even Jesus took regular time to be alone with God. Mark 1:35 tells us that Jesus went off by Himself, early in the morning (when there were fewer distractions) to spend time in prayer with His heavenly Father. Luke 22:39 suggests that a place called the “Mount of Olives” was a favorite quiet time spot for Jesus. Luke 6:12 even records that Jesus spent an entire night in prayer before choosing the twelve apostles. If Jesus, God in the flesh, found it necessary to spend uninterrupted time with His Father, how much more should we?

Three important ingredients for a valuable, daily devotional life are choosing a definite time, choosing a definite place, and having a guiding goal and plan. It may be best to follow Jesus’ example and take time with God early in the morning, before the distractions of the day have started to pull us in a dozen different directions. For those of us who just aren’t “morning people,” another time of the day can work, as long as we ensure that we block out the time to spend with God, and refuse to let anything else intrude on it.

Just as choosing a specific time to spend with God is important, finding a specific place to be with God is also important. Where you have your quiet time is not important in the sense that it needn't be a particularly “religious” location. Wherever we spend time with God, it should be a place of minimal distraction, where we will be able to spend uninterrupted time with Him. Regardless of where your “date” with God is planned, it’s important that you prepare yourself to arrive at your pre-planned time and place with a God-centered mindset.

The guiding goal and plan while having our devotional time with God should include at least two vital disciplines: allowing God to speak to us through His Word, and speaking to God through prayer. While there are other worthwhile ways to spend time with God, we must never let prayer and Bible study become neglected. These are two primary avenues to develop our relationship with God. We should seek to know and experience God by meditating on the Bible and focusing on His attributes. Attributes such as: His love for us, His grace in saving and forgiving us, His power displayed through creation, His majesty and greatness—each are worthy of our attention. When we read a passage of Scripture that speaks to us, we need to highlight it or write it down. For example, if we come upon a passage about loving one another, and then become aware of a relationship where we have not displayed love, we can assume that the Holy Spirit is drawing attention to our need to deal with that area. God communicates to us through His Word. This communication deepens as we respond to and apply what He is teaching us.

Just as in any other relationship, there needs to be the give and take of two-way communication. As God speaks to us through His Word, we need to speak to Him through our prayers. In prayer, we can be completely open and honest with Him. We can share our failures, confess our sins, discuss the things that trouble us, praise Him for who He is and thank Him for what He's done. As we continually seek God in prayer, we will find Him more clearly directing us concerning what we ought to do or avoid.

The acrostic ACTS can be a helpful guideline for our prayers:

- (A) Adoration -- Praise God for who He is.
- (C) Confession -- Acknowledge your sins to Him.
- (T) Thanksgiving -- Express your appreciation for all that the Lord has done and promises to do.
- (S) Supplication -- Present your requests and concerns to Him.

While we need to continually keep prayer and Bible study as two important parts of our quiet time, creativity and variety also play an important role. It may sound unbelievable, but some Christians actually find ways to make intimate time with the God of the universe seem dull and uninteresting. Just as finding a variety of activities to enjoy together is important in human relationships (imagine how dull a dating relationship would get if the only "date" they ever went on was dinner and a movie), finding a variety of ways to spend time with God is important. Some other activities we can share with God during our quiet time include: listening to a teaching tape, singing praise choruses, praying through Scripture, memorizing a passage, outlining a book of the Bible, keeping a journal of your prayers, doing a theme or word study, listing ways God has blessed your life, taking a prayer walk, writing a letter to God, being silent and listening to God, painting while focusing on God, reading a Christian book, praying about current events as you read a newspaper, meditating on God as you listen to inspirational music, or writing poetry to God. The possibilities are endless.

Where should you start? You should begin with an honest evaluation of what your devotional times with God look like now. How often do you have them? How long do they usually last? Are you actually planning your time with God or just trying to slip it in between "important activities"? Are your times with God meaningful, or are you distracted, or stuck in a rut? Are there activities you should cut back on to make more time to spend with God? Start fresh today, by spending 15 minutes asking God what needs to change in your schedule, in your heart, and in your life, to get this vital area of your relationship with Him on the right track.