

Chapter 5

Enhancing Your Personal Time with God

First things first. Discover the many reasons why a person in ministry needs a personal, private, individual, regular time with the Lord. Recently I asked the current students in the sLi why a person in ministry needed a personal time with God. Here is a compilation of their excellent responses:

Personal time with God is the source of strength for the day, wisdom for having any sort of effect on others, victory in the battle with the flesh, and the only way to know the Gospel. It brings the growing realization of the need for God, recognizing His power and might. It is a definite way to learn the patience of waiting on God, the freedom of forgiveness, and the opportunity of influence on others. It is the best way to get direction and correction. Personal time with God is about change. It is about refreshment, closeness, and relationship with the Almighty. It not only is a way to hear from God, but also to honor Him, and most of all to know Him, and His thoughts. We are given the privilege to sit with the God of the universe who has adopted us into His family and desires time with us.

Next, we need to agree to some basic truths for the person in ministry regarding their personal devotional time. For starters, it is personal. For the person who feels the calling to help others find a growing relationship with the Lord, it is too easy to take everything that comes in that private time with the Lord as something to share with others for their benefit. The person in ministry needs to have a deep understanding that God first wants a personal relationship, much more than looking for the conduit to bless others through you. You are special to Him. He could accomplish what He wants to accomplish in the lives of others without you being the messenger...and has been doing it for centuries before you came along. Nevertheless, He also wants to bless you with the opportunity to have impact on others when you are ready to represent Him.

A truth about humans is that planning keeps a person in focus. One of the painful detours many have taken is to not have a plan for the time, before the time arrives. To wake up in the morning and not know where you are meeting your Friend is an invitation to miss out. The plan might change from reading the next chapter to following a center reference study of a specific word in a specific verse; but you start with a sense of direction if you are determined to be present with your Friend.

Another basic truth is that God created us in His own image. One of His characteristics is His amazing creativity. As we exemplify that characteristic ourselves, does it not make sense to seek variations in our time with Him? What happens if you do the same thing day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, in building a relationship with another person? A little variety keeps things fresh. Even though I may have a plan of how I participate in my devotional time for the next week, month, or year, there is wonderful room for some Holy Spirit driven tangents He may instigate.

Intimacy with God requires some amount of uninterrupted solitude with your Bible and Him. Quantity is not as important as quality. Reading a chapter a day without time to reflect on what He is saying to you personally in that passage leaves you with just a reading exercise. He talks to you through the Word and you talk to Him through prayer. A time of personal devotion is not a race; it is a cultivated and enjoyed relationship. If your time is interrupted with a thought or a worry about your day, feel free to make a quick note of it to get back to later. This allows you to be back fully involved with what He is saying to you.



God made us for relationship. Relationship with Him for starters. Then that relationship with Him flows over into relationship with others. Be intentional to share with someone every day what you got from your personal time with the Lord. This not only secures the thought in your own mind but also encourages others to look for gems themselves.

Many quiet times are abolished because of believing lies. Have you heard any of these? I will do it later when I am not bothered by the reality of the day. I need my sleep. The time has been so dry lately, I just need to stop trying for a while. I overslept. Oops, I forgot. I cannot find my Bible. There is too much to do today. I am on vacation. You might call these excuses but notice that excuses usually start with believing a lie. A satisfying devotional life is one that is not a duty but a choice. When you cannot keep an appointment with another person, you don't throw away the relationship. You just agree on another time to get together. That works with God too. He is available and He will help you be available also.

Here are some creative ways to get variety in your time with Him:

Personalize Scripture.

Memorize and meditate on one Scripture.

Read a different translation.

Praise from A to Z. (Jesus, you are amazing, beautiful...)

Reread notes from Sunday's sermon with the Scripture covered.

Research a question you have been contemplating (why did God call David His friend?).

Take a week to look at the way Jesus did devotional time.

Take some time to prepare a study for yourself for the next morning on verses about being thirsty.

Read someone else's devotional and accompanying Scripture.

Write your own devotional and send it to someone.

Take a month to read a parable a day.

Read one passage a day in a number of translations.

Utilize a commentary.

Memorize Philippians 3:10 and meditate on it.

Ask God for some ideas!

Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission, used to rise early, before others in the room, light his candle, then pray and study.

He said, "Give God time to reveal Himself. Give yourself time to be silent before Him, waiting to receive through the Spirit the assurance of His presence with you, His power working in you.

Take time to read His word as in His presence, that you may know what He asks of you and what He promises you." Blackwood, *The Growing Minister, His Opportunities and Obstacles*, Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1960, pp. 42, 43.