

SPENDING A DAY WITH GOD

BY DR. JIM BERG

I'm sure by now you realize that you cannot change any part of your life without a growing relationship with your Creator. You must first be reconciled with and submissive to God. In addition, something must be "going on" between you and God for any real progress to be made. Everything God allows in our lives is designed by Him to draw us to Himself in humble submission and dependence. You grow only when you are moving toward that end.

Furthermore, you cannot help others come to know God in this way if you are not walking in this kind of fellowship yourself. If you have not seen much progress in your own walk with Christ, let me suggest that you plan to take a day or weekend off and spend it alone with God. Married couples find it necessary to get alone together on a regular basis to improve their relationship with each other and to build their marriage. Sometimes they annually attend a couple's conference where, in addition to the sessions on marriage topics, they are able to spend some quiet time together reflecting on their marriage and planning ways to make their relationship stronger. Other couples plan a weekend away on their anniversary for the same purpose. The main idea is to remove themselves from daily distractions so that they can devote their thoughts and attention to each other and their relationship. Plan a similar "retreat" alone with God.

If your responsibilities will not allow you to take an entire weekend away, at least plan for quarterly outings with God. For example, arrange to free up several hours of a Saturday. Pack a lunch and drive to a local or state park or somewhere else where you will not be around many people. Take your Bible, a notebook, your prayer list, a hymnal, and perhaps a devotional book. Spend your time reading lengthy sections of the Scriptures and writing down what you are learning about God or about your own heart condition. Allow God to bring to your mind any matters that need to be reconciled with Him to others. Write down the names of the people you need to see to make reconciliation so that you do not forget to do so once you return home. Confess your sin to God and praise Him for the promises of His forgiveness.

Take some time to sing praises to Him out of your hymnal. (Go ahead and sing out loud if no one is around, even if you can't "carry a tune.") If you absolutely cannot sing, read the words out loud slowly and reflectively so that their meaning can sink into your heart. If you play the guitar, take it with you to accompany yourself, but don't get side-tracked by getting caught up on the practice time with your instrument or "performing" for anyone close by who might hear you. If it will become a distraction in any way to your worship of God, leave it home.

Set aside some time to get "caught up" on your intercessory prayer for family members, coworkers, spiritual leaders in your life, missionaries, and those enduring great affliction at this time because of illness or disaster. Make note of any "errands of mercy" you could do for them when you return home or spend a few minutes writing a letter of encouragement right then.

Choose a Scripture passage of several verses and meditate on it using the *Becoming God's Kind of Person* and *How to Meditate: The MAP Method* study sheets in Appendix A of this book. Memorize the passage and spend time prayerfully reflecting on its meaning and application for you. Ask Him to illumine you by His Spirit. Listen to Him and reflect seriously on what He says.

By now I think you get the idea. You cannot know God "on the run" any more than you can know any other person that way. Personal relationships are not built "efficiently." They take enormous amounts of time devoted to interaction with the other person. (This is why we call our time with God "devotions"; it is time "devoted" to Him.) You will find that your "day with God" will have a significant effect upon your regular, daily devotional time with Him. When you spend time with Him each day, though it be only thirty to forty-five minutes, the depth and quality of the interaction with God will be profoundly different. When you sense the shallowness creeping back in, schedule another "day with God." You cannot become an effective disciple-maker of others if you do not spend this kind of time with God on a regular basis. You will soon lose sight of the place God must play in your ministry to others. You will not be passionate about their need for God since you are experiencing no passion for God yourself. Also, you will not know how to help them develop their relationship with God since you have not done it yourself.

Consider these admonitions from C.H. Spurgeon at the age of twenty as he began his Sunday morning sermon at the New Park Street Chapel on January 7, 1855:

It has been said by some one that "the proper study of mankind is man." I will not oppose the idea, but I believe it is equally true that the proper study of God's elect is God; the proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls Father.

There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can compass and grapple with; in them we feel a kind of self-content, and go our way with the thought, "Behold I am wise." But when we come to this master-science, finding that our plumb-line cannot sound its depth, and that our eagle eye cannot see its height, we turn away with the thought, that vain man would be wise, but he is like a wild ass's colt; and with the solemn exclamation, "I am but of yesterday, and know nothing." No subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind, than thoughts of God. ...

But while the subject humbles the mind it also expands it. He who often thinks of God, will have a larger mind than the man who simply plods around this narrow globe. ... The most excellent study for expanding the soul is the science of Christ, and Him crucified, and the knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity. Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Deity.

And whilst humbling and expanding, this subject is eminently consolatory. Oh, there is, in contemplating Christ, a balm for every wound; in musing on the Father there is a quietus for every sore. Would you lose your sorrows? Would you drown your cares? Then go, plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea; be lost in His immensity; and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul; so calm the swelling billows of grief and sorrow; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout musing upon the subject of the Godhead.

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STRIVING TOGETHER FOR
THE SCRIPTURAL STRENGTH
TO SUCCEED IN OUR
SPIRITUAL STRUGGLE
(1 JOHN 2:14)

