



GENERAL CONFERENCE WOMEN'S MINISTRIES

Back to Basics: **A Close Walk with God**

Personal Growth Seminars

Bonita Shields
[March 2010]



**BACK TO BASICS:
A close walk with God**

“. . . I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you”
(John 14:20, NLT).

What are Personal Devotions?

We often think of personal devotions as something we “do.” However, we could more accurately describe personal devotions as the time we spend with God each day because we love Him and are devoted to Him.

But one may ask, “Isn’t spending time with God in Sabbath School and a worship service on Sabbath enough?” Not if we want to know God personally and intimately.

Finding Time

Most women find that their plates are not only full, they are overflowing. How can they fit one more thing onto their “To Do” list?

However, we spend time on what we consider most important; that’s the way we are. Relationships are no exception. For relationships to grow strong, we must invest time in them—quantity as well as quality.

Unfortunately, we women often place unrealistic expectations on ourselves, and sometimes get caught up in an “all-or-nothing” mentality. But this call to invest time in our relationship with the Lord is *not* a call to perfection, such as “I must spend a certain amount of time with the Lord or it’s not good enough.”

It is a call to make our relationship with the Lord a top priority in our lives. Because every woman’s life is unique, carving out time for this relationship will require creativity as well as a commitment to *expect progress, not perfection.*

Close and Personal

When we commit to placing God at the center of our lives, we will find it helpful to use certain tools to aid and support us in cultivating the most important relationship in our lives!

Tool #1: Solitude

Solitude is useful for at least two reasons. First, solitude removes the distractions that threaten to drown out the voice of God speaking to us.

The book *9 Creative Ways to Find and Spend Time With God* reminds us that solitude can be found at home in a favorite chair, in your car as you drive to work, as you run in the quiet hours of dawn, or even at a local retreat center.

Second, solitude helps us to recognize and rely more on hearing God's voice than on responding to the voices of others. Thus, when we emerge from our solitude into the hustle and bustle of our lives, we can more effectively respond to others with the love and grace that we have experienced during our time with the Lord.

Tool #2: Study

We trust our friends and family because we have spent time with them, and we know their characters enough to believe that they are worthy of our faith. Faith is defined in Scripture as “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” It is based on the knowledge of the one Who offers us that assurance and conviction. God's Word reveals Who God is and why we can trust Him.

Spending time in God's Word offers us a constant reminder of Who He is, Whose we are, and how we are to live within that godly identity. Remember, too, that nature has been called “God's Second Book.” Thus, spending time “studying” nature also offers us glimpses of God's character as well as opportunities to hear Him speak.

Keep a devotional journal. It can be a very useful tool for remembering how things touched you and for reflecting further or at a later date. A dedicated notebook and pen or pencil are useful for this and should be kept with your devotion Bible.

Tool #3: Prayer

We can easily fall into the habit of “praying” to God only when we have a request. However, when we remember that the purpose of prayer is to know God, prayer takes on an entirely new meaning. Instead of merely checking in occasionally to “pray” for Aunt Mary's cancer or Johnny's math test—which are important to pray for—we desire to be in

conversation with God about *everything* in our lives! By talking with Him, listening to Him, and beholding Him, we become changed.

Tool #4: Journaling

Keeping a prayer journal doesn't have to be another thing on our To-Do List to give us guilt! And it doesn't have to be used daily. Keep a journal next to your Bible and devotional reading material, and write when you feel as if you want to talk to the Lord in a different manner. Often, our hands will write what our mouths cannot speak. Are you struggling with an issue? Write. Are you joyful and full of praise? Write. Did the Word of the Lord speak so clearly to you that you have to remember it? Write. It can become a Book of Life for you to read, renewing your spirit.

Tool #5: Spontaneity

While it's helpful to dedicate a specific time and place for your time with the Lord, by no means does this have to put boundaries on how you express your love to your Beloved! Read, write in your journal, talk, sing, write a love poem, sit still and listen to the sound of silence, walk, run, observe nature, listen to Him speak through your baby's breath—the options are endless. I think God loves spontaneity!

Creativity for spiritual growth

The following ideas have been collected from 12 women who value their relationship with God. You might enjoy trying a few.

1. **SERVING:** the spiritual discipline of service brings me close to God in a special way. I experience such joy driving home after a pet therapy session with troubled teens and my dog, Elke, because of the healing that our relationship brings to these teens. I continually marvel at the relationship between nature and humans that God established at Creation.—*Lyndelle, wife, editor*
2. **PRAISING:** my desire has been to have more power in prayer. Thus, I began praising God throughout the day for the artistic branches of the bare tree limbs against a bright blue sky in winter, for family and friends, for the birds, for beautiful sunsets—the list could go on. When we praise God, we are more likely to commend others. As a result they may also praise their friends, creating an inspiring circle.—*Myrna, wife, mother, retired editor*

3. **PRAYING:** I read Scripture and then I pray. Is it praying? I think so. Maybe not traditional praying on my knees with my eyes shut, but it is definitely talking to God as a Friend. I share things with Him, and I let the words of His Book sink into my soul. Sometimes my prayers seem routine or like a laundry list of requests, so I write poems to Him.—*Connie, wife, mother, television producer*
4. **LISTENING:** I have a 40-minute commute to work each way, so I spend time singing in the car, praying aloud, and listening to spiritual music and books on CDs.—*Leslie, wife, administrative assistant*
5. **JOURNALING:** I keep a journal. I talk over spiritual things with people around me to help keep me accountable. I also try to verbalize what I've read or experienced; that helps to clarify and solidify it for me.—*Melissa, daughter, sister, high school senior*
6. **TALKING:** I like to remember that if I liken my prayers to God to talking with a friend, then I shouldn't or don't need to limit my conversations with Him to a certain time or place. I want to remain open and with an attitude that I can talk to God any place, any time, and about anything.—*Bonnie, wife, mother, nursing administrator*
7. **WALKING:** One thing that makes my devotional time really cool is to go for a walk or run in the early morning when no one else is stirring. Springtime, when the birds are singing and the flowers are blooming, makes this an extra special prayer time for me.—*Cindy, wife, mother, small business owner*
8. **READING:** I like to dedicate my first waking moments to reading my devotional and Sabbath school lesson quarterly. I feel that God puts me first, so I want to put Him first. The exception is on Friday evening, when I do the reverse and close my hectic workweek by reading my devotional and quarterly last thing before I turn off the lights.—*Maria, daughter, legal assistant*
9. **REFLECTING:** I like to have a special place in my home to meet with God (although with a houseful of guests, I take whatever space I can find!). I also like to have beauty surrounding me: a candle, flowers, baskets for my books, a window to look out. All of these remind me that God is the author of life and beauty.—*Bonita, wife, editor*

Spiritual Makeover

God's Word contains many promises of the benefits of a life of faithfulness to Him. (All Scripture passages taken from the New Living Translation.)

1. *"For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope"* (Jeremiah 29:11).
2. *"For your Creator will be your husband; the Lord of Heaven's Armies is his name! He is your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, the God of all the earth"* (Isaiah 54:5).
3. *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light"* (Matthew 11:28-30).
4. *"Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect"* (Romans 12:2).
5. *"But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!"* (Galatians 5:22).

Pass it on

As we embrace God's promises and allow Him to make us over into His image, a natural result of that transformation is the desire to share with others what He has done and is doing in our lives. One of the best ways to do that is to join hands and seek to find ways to impact other women for God's kingdom.

Ministry ideas

1. **Take one of the relational tools** and make that the topic of a women's breakfast. Make special invitations and encourage friends to use them to invite their neighbors.
2. **Ask God to reveal to you** how you can minister to and nurture other women in your congregation. One possibility is to survey the women

in your church to determine how they would like to grow in their spiritual journeys. Then start a ministry to equip them. For example, if a large number of women in your congregation feel the need to be more equipped in the spiritual guidance of their children, organize a group that will encourage and equip them for this task.

- 3. Plan a spiritual retreat.** Incorporating one or more of the relational tools, start with a one-day retreat. Then plan a slightly longer retreat as women get accustomed to taking this special time corporately to be with the Lord and each other.

- 4. Plan a special “Day away with God.”** This one-day retreat will create a great spiritual growth opportunity for you and other women in the church. Choose a theme for the day, begin with a time for worship, and provide insights related to the theme. During the day, allow time for the ladies to enjoy time alone in prayer and spiritual reflection. After lunch together, offers a hands-on activity. This will help the women to open their hearts and listen to God’s voice. Conclude with worship.

*“As often as possible, Jesus withdrew to out-of-the-way places for prayer”
(Luke 5:16, The Message).*