

What's Your Excuse?

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Some time ago, I sent a questionnaire to women from across the United States in relation to the matter of a daily devotional life. Here are some of the obstacles these women encountered in trying to develop a consistent devotional life. The barriers they identified are ones that most of us have experienced at one time or another in our walk with the Lord. For example, you may have found yourself thinking (or saying) . . .

"I just can't find the time!"

By far, this issue of time was the number one obstacle identified by women. The fact is, if we don't make a conscious, deliberate effort to set aside time to be with the Lord, other things will demand our attention. One of my spiritual mentors (now with the Lord) used to say: *"Don't try to squeeze God into an already overcrowded schedule. Determine your schedule around Him!"* Make an appointment with God and keep it as you would any other type of appointment.

"My life is so busy!"

Every once in a while, we need to stop and reevaluate our schedule and activities in light of our God-given priorities. If we don't have time to cultivate our relationship with the Lord, then undoubtedly we are doing some things that are not on God's agenda for our lives. If we want to have an intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus, we must be willing to bring all our activities under the scrutiny of His Spirit and to let Him show us which ones are not His priorities for us—at least for that season of our lives.

"I just can't fit everything into my day."

As we evaluate our schedules in light of our God-given priorities, we must then determine to eliminate (or limit) any activities that hinder us from fulfilling those priorities. As tough as it may be to admit, if you and I are too busy to cultivate our relationship with God, then something is wrong—something has to change. The change required may be a relatively minor adjustment in our schedule, or

it may be a drastic reordering of priorities.

“My time with the Lord often seems hurried.”

I have come to believe that a rushed or hurried attitude is one of the deadliest enemies of an effective devotional life. I have purposed in my heart to do whatever was necessary to secure unhurried time to let God speak to me on a daily basis. I have had to make adjustments in my schedule; I have had to make some “sacrifices.” But the fruit of spending unhurried time with Him has been precious and sweet.

“How do I deal with interruptions and distractions?”

Many distractions can be avoided simply by getting up earlier. Ask God to help you recognize and ignore unnecessary distractions. Then, be flexible in responding to “divine interruptions.”

“When I try to read or pray, my mind wanders. I can’t concentrate.”

I have found that it often takes time to get a quiet heart before the Lord. You may want to start your time with Him by singing some worshipful choruses, reading aloud a psalm of praise, and asking Him to settle your heart in His presence. When I am struggling to concentrate, I will sometimes stop and ask the Lord to help me “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5).

When unrelated thoughts or tasks come to mind, rather than stopping to attend to them at the moment or trying to remember them until later, simply jot them down on a notepad. In fact, rather than fighting those thoughts, as you write them down they can become direction for specific prayer. I find that as I place those concerns before the Lord, He gives me wisdom and insight I need to deal with those matters, as well as helping me to prioritize me day.

Reading Scripture aloud, praying aloud, writing down insights from the Word, and writing your prayers are other practices that can help increase concentration.

“What if I have young children?”

Here are some practical ideas from mothers:

- “Take time when they are asleep.”

- “Get up before they do. This season of life does not always lend itself to longer, in-depth study of the Word, but even a few verses and a short prayer and worship time help me through the day.”
- “Post verses on cabinets and over the sink to make memorization and meditation of Scripture easier.”

“I’m so exhausted that I don’t have the energy to have a quiet time.”

I have discovered that the more tired I am, the more I need the refreshing of God’s presence. There is something energizing about time spent in the Word, praise, and prayer. Perhaps that is because when we express our weakness and need to God, He pours out His grace. Look for creative ways to wake up and stay awake: get out of bed; take a shower; stand or walk to pray; sing; weather permitting, have your quiet time outside.

“My husband isn’t supportive.”

The wise woman will look for ways to prioritize both her relationship with the Lord and with her husband. If your husband is jealous of your time with the Lord, ask yourself:

- Does my husband feel that he is not really important to me? Have I made him feel like he has to compete with God for my time and attention?
- Does he have physical or practical needs that I have not been meeting?
- Do I express genuine interest in the things that are important to him?
- Am I using my quiet time as an excuse for neglecting responsibilities in my home?
- Does my husband feel that I look down on him as being “unspiritual?”

“Sometimes I feel like I’m having my quiet time just out of duty.”

First of all, our feelings are rarely a reliable gauge of reality. Further, there is value in maintaining any good habit, even when it is not motivated by warm feelings or intense desire. Frequently, the faithful carrying out of a discipline will result in greater desire. Our heart’s devotion for Him will deepen and grow as we choose to put Him first and invest time in the relationship, regardless of how we feel.

“How do you handle dry spells?”

Ask God to show you any specific issues that may be creating a barrier in your

relationship with Him. Is there any known sin that you have not confessed or repented of? Is there unforgiveness in your heart toward a family member or an individual who has wronged you? Is there some step of obedience you know God wants you to take that you have delayed? All of these issues can produce spiritual dryness.

Sometimes spiritual dry spells are simply God's way of revealing what is in our heart—whether we love Him because of the spiritual sensations He gives us, or whether we love Him just because He is God. Other times, dry spells are an evidence that we are in a rut in our devotional life. We may have become too focused on the mechanics of what we are doing, rather than the meaning. This can be dealt with by varying our routine.

“Truthfully, I don’t have a strong desire to spend time with God”

The more we eat spiritual food, the more hungry we become and the more we want to eat. The more you taste of the Word of God, the more you will long for it. The more you partake of Jesus, the Bread of Life, the more you will hunger for Him. If you do not have an appetite for spiritual food, there is a good chance you have not been fueling that appetite.

Try weaning yourself from the world's diet—be prepared for some withdrawal symptoms when you turn off the TV and eliminate unnecessary activities. Then begin feeding on the Word of God. At first, it may seem bland and boring; but, in time, you will discover that it satisfies in a far deeper, richer way than those things you once thought were so filling.

“Sometimes God seems a million miles away.”

There are times when God withholds from us the conscious sense of His presence—times when God seems far away and we no longer have feelings of intimacy we may once have enjoyed. I believe this is because He wants us to learn to walk by faith and to seek Him with all our hearts. God is pleased with the faith that is strengthened in the darkness (Isa. 50:10). When you get discouraged and feel like throwing in the towel, don't quit! Keep pursuing Him. Your search will be rewarded.