

EXTENDED TIMES WITH GOD

LUXURY OR LIFELINE?

By Jim Feiker

Walking on the Forest Home Conference Grounds of Southern California one afternoon, I desperately sensed a need for God's fresh touch and anointing for my increasing ministry responsibilities. I had set aside a day to wait upon God for His voice.

As I walked and prayed, I came upon a memorial to Billy Graham that marked the very place he had driven an important stake in his life and ministry. His covenant with God was to solely use the Scriptures as his authority in his preaching even though others might not. Many believe it was this hour of decision, honored by God that gave Billy power in his preaching.

That day I asked God to make me a man with similar convictions. I prayed that I would have a lifelong commitment to master the Word of God as much as possible in my lifetime and to use it faithfully as my authority in life and ministry. As I look back over my life, it has always been during such extended times with God that He has driven major, life-changing stakes deep into my value system.

THE PRIORITY OF EXTENDED TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

The devotional lifestyle of men and women of God in the Scriptures went far beyond daily fellowship with God. They committed themselves to extended times alone with the Father, waiting on Him in prayer for His will and blessing. Examples can be found in the lives of Abraham (Gen. 18:22), Jacob (Genesis 32:22-32), Moses (Ex. 3), Nehemiah (Neh.1), Daniel (Dan. 9), and even Jesus (Lk. 6:12).

God has always forged and developed His servants in prolonged times set aside for/and with Him. Why is this essential?

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL AND REVITALIZATION (Ps. 51:10-12)

How often have our hearts cooled to the Lord in the midst of a demanding ministry? Being in God's presence for an extended time revives our love relationship with Christ and allows Him to search our hearts for sin we need to confess or encumbrances we need to prune. We need times with Him to strengthen our defenses against a subtle and deceptive enemy, as we fix our eyes on our Sufficient Companion and Commander – Jesus Christ. As the saying goes, we need to come apart, or we will come apart. . . emotionally and spiritually.

REFLECTION TIME AND MEDITATION (I TIM. 4:15-16)

Finding time for reflection in a high-paced society is one of our greatest needs. We are constantly bombarded by the world's values. We need time to consider what we are learning and how to absorb it into a biblical value system. Even secular leadership stresses the need for creative planning and reflection. Every Saturday night my dad made vegetable soup. It was delicious when first cooked. But when it sat for a couple days, it was scrumptious! Why? During that time the flavors blended, the seasonings were assimilated into every portion of the soup. So it is in our Christian life. Unless we take time to reflect on what God is teaching us through the Word and life experiences, they will not blend into our spiritual blood system and internal character. The route between head knowledge and heart conviction is meditation.

ETERNAL FOCUS

It is easy to lose sight of eternity! We become so immersed in our immediate circumstances that we cannot interpret them from an eternal perspective. Like viewing a battlefield from a reconnaissance plane, a day of prayer helps us see the world from God's viewpoint. Increased time in the Scriptures retunes our lives to play in symphonic harmony with God's eternal purposes and will (2 Cor. 4:16-18).

CLARIFICATION OR CONFIRMATION OF HIS WILL

We are prone to be driven beyond the will of God for our lives by our enemy, Satan. He delights in seeing us get overcommitted so that we wear out. God often needs to slow down the erratic pace of our lives so that He may bring our heart beat in rhythm with His own. I believe it was in Moses' special times of prayer that God intimately revealed Himself, His ways, and His future plans to him. The Israelites only saw the acts of God as they unfolded day by day (Ps. 103:7).

REHEARSING THE WORKS OF GOD (Ps. 77:11-12)

The Lord often reminded Israel to recall and review His works for their own sakes, their children, and future generations. It was their refusal to maintain this vital growth principle that plagued Israel's courage, faith, praise and vital relationship to God. Periodically rehearsing the things God has done restores new confidence in God and our love to Him.

UNHURRIED INTERCESSION FOR OTHERS

This is a great time to get caught up on praying for missionaries, non-Christians, our pastors and Christian associates, and our government – to name a few. We need to learn to pray with authority and to break down Satan's strongholds around the world.

INCREASED PREPARATION AND MEMORIZATION OF SCRIPTURE

Most often we prepare today what we will teach or share tomorrow. We need to be preparing now for the future, giving the Word of God time to brew in our lives so it becomes part of us before we pass it on. I have heard that Howard Hendricks chooses a book of Scripture to study in depth each month. This becomes his reservoir for future messages. Bill Gothard sets aside one day a week for meditation and memorizing a chapter of Scripture.

SETTING PERSONAL OBJECTIVES...SPIRITUAL GROWTH, MARRIAGE, FAMILY, MINISTRY

Where is God working in our lives right now? Our families? What would we like to see God do in our lives and ministries in the next six months? We need to take extended time for personal inventory and get new direction from the Lord in these vital areas of life.

THE PRACTICE OF EXTENDED TIMES WITH GOD

A. Divide The Time With God Into Four Parts.

1. Wait on the Lord in reading Scripture, in confession, and in worship.

IN THE SCRIPTURES...you may want to read a large portion of Scripture or just review verses you have previously underlined. Read out loud.

IN CONFESSION AND CLEANSING ...Ask God to search your heart for areas in your life that are blocking real fellowship with Him. As the Holy Spirit reveals sin, confess it. This is not to be a time of morbid introspection, digging up past garbage that has already been dealt with, but a time of forgiveness and cleansing. If God reveals sin against a brother, write it down and take care of it when you return.

IN WORSHIP...Psalms 103, 111 and 145 are great portions to pray over in worship. Enjoy the Lord's presence unhurriedly.

2. Reflect and Meditate.

ON THE WORKS OF GOD...Journal the ways you have seen God work, answers to prayer, vital encounters with God, things you are thankful to God for (from as far back as your conversion). Review these faith-builders each time you spend extended times and add fresh accounts.

ON YOUR CALLING TO MINISTRY...Review often why you know God has called you to your particular life ministry. This gives renewed conviction that He will use you and enable you to do what He has called you to do.

ON THE PROMISES OF GOD AND LIFE-MOTIVATING VERSES...What are some promises God has sustained over the years? What are some life verses that have motivated you and given you direction? Periodically review them on days alone with God.

ON WHAT GOD IS TEACHING YOU IN HIS WORD...Journal your daily encounters with God, then use these extended times alone to review what He has been teaching you.

3. Intercede for yourself, your family, and others.

4. Prepare and plan, setting new objectives for life and ministry for the next six months.

B. SET EXTENDED TIME ALONE WITH GOD ONE OR TWO MONTHS IN ADVANCE.

Expect something will always come up to keep you from this time. The enemy knows the life-changing impact of this time. You must make time, or you will never find it.

C. CHOOSE A PLACE FREE FROM DISTRACTIONS, where you can walk and pray aloud. It needs to be away from your home and office. Christian retreat centers usually allow you to spend time away like this, or if necessary, go to a motel. You need to get away from your present environment to be able to see objectively.

D. PREPARE FOR THE TIME ALONE THE DAY BEFORE. Bring a bag lunch...Determine where you will read...What challenging book to bring along...A notebook to journal thoughts...An extra pen...A hymnal for worship, etc.

Times alone with God must be tailored to your personality and style. These times will be challenging to maintain but will pay great dividends in your life and ministry.