

Craig Denison

Getting the Most Out of Your Time Alone with God

Over the last few years of guiding believers into daily encounters with God's presence, I've consistently encountered one primary question: *"How do I get the most out of my time alone with God?"*

And I've discovered that this question, if left unanswered, is absolutely enough to keep someone from spending any time alone with God at all.

So, in this PDF I've unpacked four concepts I believe will empower you to spend consistent, meaningful time in the presence of your Creator. May your heart be stirred to meet with your heavenly Father as you get a glimpse into the wonderful, life-changing gifts that await you.

CONCEPT ONE

UNDERSTAND WHY TIME ALONE WITH GOD MATTERS FOR YOU

MAIN IDEA: Transition your time alone with God from being a "should" by discovering why meeting with God is important for you personally.



As much as I'd love to be a person that can consistently do something simply because I "should," I need to know why it matters to me specifically to take an action at all. I am a person driven by the why. I need to know that my time and energy are going towards something that will bear fruit. I need to know that something meaningful will happen because of what I'm doing.

I went a long time in life with time alone with God neatly nestled into the "should" category. I'd do it for a few days after a conference, retreat, or really good sermon, but I was never able to do it consistently. I'd pick up my Bible, journal, or devotional book and always be surprised at how long it had been since I last met with God. Most of my journal entries fell on Sundays or Wednesdays and consisted of musings bouncing around my head while listening to a sermon. A lot of my prayers were apologies for not being consistent enough.

Even in that season I could have regurgitated why others had told me spending time alone with God mattered. I could have spoken on its power and my need. I could have encouraged others to do it. But I had yet to discover my own "why."

My "why" came when I hit rock bottom. I remember I was sitting on the front pew of Second Baptist Church in Arkadelphia, Arkansas, when the Holy Spirit spoke to my heart. I had filled my life with every good work I could think of, but I wasn't spending any time alone with God. I was much more focused on doing worship rather than being worship. And in that moment when everything seemed to be falling apart I opened my heart and cried out for God's help. He responded, "It needs to just be me and you for a while."

I realized in that moment that I had attempted to fill my life with the external, and I needed to make space for the internal. I needed to devote myself to my relationship with the King instead of spending all my time trying to advance his kingdom. And in that process of learning how to spend time alone with God I discovered my "why." My "why" was simply this:

I was created for time alone with God.

I discovered that my identity, my righteousness, my self-worth, my calling, God's plans for my future, and the power to accomplish his plans are meant to be built on the foundation of spending time alone with God. Every part of the abundant life Jesus died to give me is meant to stem from spending time in God's presence, because it's what I was made for.

Your "why" might be a little different from mine, or it might be the same. Maybe you're in desperate need of emotional healing. Maybe you need freedom from a particular sin. Maybe you need peace. Know that God has a "why" for you, and discovering that "why" is the key to consistently spending time alone with God.

PRAYER

Take a moment alone with God right now to ask him to reveal your why. What does he have in store for you if you'll make space to meet with him? Why does time alone with him matter to your life specifically?

CONCEPT TWO

SPEND TIME ALONE WITH GOD EVERY DAY

MAIN IDEA: For God to do a deeper work in your life (freeing you from habitual sin, healing wounds from your past, revealing his will), you need to spend time with him every day.



Getting the most out of time alone with God requires consistency. It's not about checking off the "God box," or being consistent for consistency sake. If my days alone with God are scattered throughout a week or month I feel like I'm treading water. And for me, when I feel like I'm treading water with something, I tend to give up on it altogether.

But, when I'm spending time alone with God consistently, God is able to truly change my life. I've found it really difficult to apply a truth to every area of my life when I only hear about it once. I need repetition for something to sink from my head to my heart and produce life change.

For instance, sin issues need to be consistently addressed in order for me to find freedom. So much of why we sin has to do with our past, with lies we're believing, with people we're surrounded by or rhythms we've adopted. Those things take time for the Holy Spirit to highlight and bring freedom to. Without consistent time alone with God where he can convict, speak, and heal, we'll never find true freedom from sins that entangle us.

Also, the revealing of God's will is always a process. God never lays out his plans all in one sitting. No part of that would be effective. We need daily guidance to walk out the path he's laying before us well. We need to make space to discover the next step he'd have us take every day or we'll inevitably go our own way.

When Martin Luther was asked about his plans for the next day he responded:

"Work, work, from early until late. In fact, I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer."

Spending time alone with God every day isn't about adding something else to your plate. It's the foundation on which everything else is effective and life-giving. Without it, there's no guarantee that the rest of your day will have near the level of power, peace, or purpose.

PRAYER

What's keeping you from experiencing the presence of God every day? What parts of your day could you give up to make room for meeting with God? Write down a rhythm to your day that would help you consistently experience God. Share that rhythm with loved ones you live with or friends who can help you guard that time and hold you accountable.

CONCEPT THREE

WORSHIP, READ, PRAY

MAIN IDEA: Establishing a consistent rhythm to your time alone with God like worshiping, reading, and praying removes the question of what to do with the time and leads to maximum impact.



As I grew in consistently meeting with God I found that my most meaningful mornings, my best experiences came out of a consistent rhythm. When I spent time worshiping, reading, and praying, my day was always profoundly impacted.

WORSHIP

It's so easy for my time alone with God to be all about myself. I have so many problems, questions and needs that if I'm not careful, I easily become the center of my time rather than God. Worship is a constant reminder that things are only truly good when Jesus

is at the center of them. When I take time to center myself around God's glory and goodness through worship, I find that everything else just seems to find its proper place.

Worship also softens my heart to be receptive to God's presence, plans and voice. When I begin my time by declaring God's goodness, holiness, or sovereignty, it's much easier to surrender those things that aren't in God's will to make space for all that is.

READ

Life-change begins for me when a God-revealed concept makes its way from my head to my heart. In order for this to take place I first have to be spending consistent time in the word of God. The Holy Spirit has this truly miraculous ability to reveal exactly what I need to know through his word. If I will simply make time to sit before God's word and be open to the promptings of the Spirit, he is always faithful to speak.

But simply reading God's word doesn't always produce the life-change I'm looking for. In order for principles and revelation to

not just puff up my head but to change my heart, I have to create space to ruminate on God's word. Life-change from reading happens most often for me through the practice of meditating on the word of God. For me it looks something like this:

Step One: Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal what he has for me through his word.

Step Two: Read a passage I either feel drawn to or is a part of my reading plan.

Step Three: Write down in my journal what I feel God is highlighting or emphasizing to me.

Step Four: Spend time thinking about, meditating on, or journaling ways that principle can apply to my life.

The amazing thing is that all of that can happen in as little as five minutes. God doesn't need a lot of time to do amazing things if we'll dive into time alone with his heart first, ready to receive all that he has for us.

PRAY

My time spent in direct communication with God is where my life is most changed. Worship and reading are amazing ways to begin my time with God. But ensuring that they lead to time where I'm able to ask God the questions burning in my heart, or to make space to simply listen to whatever he wants to say, is vital to experiencing the abundant life God intends for me.

Oswald Chambers said, "We think of prayer as a preparation for work, or a calm after having done work, whereas prayer is the essential work."

It's in prayer that we discover and experience the personality of God. It's in prayer that we sense his heart, his motivations, his love. It's in prayer that we learn to hear God's still, small voice. And it's from hearing the still, small voice of God in prayer that we learn to recognize it when all the world around us is shouting.

Taking five minutes to let God speak, to lay before him the weight on our hearts and discover that his burden is light is the most valuable investment of time we could make. Prayer changes things. It changes us.

PRAYER

Take a moment to hear God's voice right now. Focus your attention on his love and take note of any ideas, feelings, images or words you hear. God loves to speak to his children. Ask him what he wants you to know about himself. Ask him what he wants you to know about yourself. Make space for him and trust that he will speak to you in the perfect way.

CONCEPT FOUR

SPEND TIME ALONE WITH GOD IN COMMUNITY

MAIN IDEA: Establishing the experience of God's presence at the center of your family, friends, and church creates a culture in which you can experience abundant life.



Spending time alone with God isn't everything we need to experience the abundant life God intends for us. We need a healthy community of believers around us. But at the middle of every truly healthy community is the presence of God. Community requires selfless love. It requires people looking not just to their own interest but to the interests of others. And the only way we can live selflessly, the only way we can consistently love others, is by beginning every day experiencing God's unconditional love. To give love we have to receive love. To give grace we have to receive grace. In ourselves we have nothing to offer. But in God we can change the world.

If we're truly experiencing the presence of God consistently, it will inevitably spill over into our communities. We were made to advance the kingdom of God. We were made for healthy community. Each one of us was created with a unique calling. And the presence of God is the spark that ignites our ability to discover that calling and walk it out in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Choose to spend time alone with God for the sake of yourself and those around you, and watch as God knits together the hearts of his people under the banner of his love. Watch as he heals hearts, plants dreams, and co-labors with you to change the world. A community centered around encountering the presence of God in the secret place is a community empowered to see God's kingdom come in ways beyond what you could possibly imagine.

PRAYER

Pray for your community. Pray that God would draw you and others into his presence every morning. Pray for people at your church and in your family. Pray for your friends. How could you be a catalyst for people in your community centering their lives around the presence of God? Ask God for the wisdom and courage to take action on the ideas and dreams he plants within your heart.

A growing relationship with God comes when you experience Him daily. Christians know the importance of a daily quiet time consisting of Bible reading and prayer, yet many struggle with finding a devotional resource that is both easy to understand and relatable to daily life. We write new devotionals each day consisting of Scripture, reflection, prayer, musical worship, and a call to action. Over a million readers each month use our content to discover God in a deeper way, and it's changed their lives.



Craig Denison is the author of First15, a daily devotional guiding over a million believers into a fresh experience with God's presence every day. He writes, speaks, and he and his wife, Rachel lead worship to help believers establish a more tangible, meaningful connection with God.