

Alone with God- A Field Guide
By Mike Williams

*This hurried mind, so apt to fret
Has found the place where time was set
There alone with He may rest
On His lap, against His chest
Where I hear His heart so well
Storms subside, voices- quell
My rhythm broke, a pace so prized
To His Spirit synchronized
The only Source where peace resides
The fount of where my soul derives
It's comfort, cause- the centered state
The only place where I ran late*

The Struggle: Getting Alone with God

I don't like being alone. As much as I treasure my "me time," the truth is I am never really... alone. Whether it's the list of things I know must be done, the race for an identity of purpose, or the mindless distraction I crave in between, I constantly keep company with thoughts of where I am *not*. I often find myself running so hurriedly and impatiently that I can miss the very thing I had prayed to receive- to experience. For me, to "*Be Still*" (Exodus 14:14) may be the greatest gift I simply cannot bring myself to open. Why?

But I have also experienced the divine peace of His presence. Where the frames of my fast-forward life have fallen away to reveal the deepest and richest pieces of a day whose fears failed to scale the walls of my "High Tower," Him. What took me so long? In this part of "Alone with God," I want to share how God has shown me, in His word and within my own life, how important it is to set a time and place in order to experience a truly alone state with Jesus at home or even at work.

The Big Idea: We get alone with God by setting a time and a place at home or at work.

Step One- Set a Time: The Importance of an Appointment

I have worked for over thirty years in the business of persuasion: sales. One thing you learn quickly about people is that no one has time. Whether it's for the critical or mundane- no one can talk, much less listen. We all have perceived priorities, whether by default or by design, to something "more important ." Only when something is important enough do we devote an allotted time to it- an appointment.

As a kid, I remember the first time I heard the term "devo" at church camp. I've always been a bit of a "word nerd," so the term "devotional" is especially meaningful. To devote means to simply "vote." We literally "elect" priority when we set time with the Lord as most important. This

daily election is the most important decision I make, and sometimes, I fail to cast the right vote. But God doesn't lose in this – I do. I wasted my vote that day. Although we are to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess 5:16-17), being truly ALONE with God can require preparation, a very deliberate choice as we cast our vote for that day.

Why Set a Time: God puts a lot of importance on preparation as we serve a God of order (1 Cor. 14:40). When we set a time, we are preparing to meet with the Creator of the Universe as we "devote" a set time to meet with Him alone. We are then setting that time apart from anything else- there's a word for that, too- "sanctify" or "to set apart as Holy." High Priests used to prepare to go beyond the veil into the Holy of Holies by purifying themselves and their thoughts. Although through Christ we have a High Priest that intercedes on our behalf through the Holy Spirit- the preparation of priority can be powerful, as seen in the following scriptures:

Mark 1:35

Leviticus 16: 1-34

James 4:6-8

Why This Time is "Free": Time is the stuff that life is made of, and unlike other resources, you can't get it back after it's been spent. Then why give it away? We don't. What's beautiful about the time I spend with the Lord is that He redeems it (and then some) in a way only He can. How can I "give time" to the one who creates it? Only He can truly give time and even multiply it. In Luke 10:41-42 Jesus encourages Martha to set aside the work that just couldn't wait for "the better thing" of time with Him. I relate to Martha's harried exasperation with the lie of running behind in the very presence of the eternal. When I am alone with God, He owns the time we share, as seen in the scriptures below:

Psalms 31:15

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Isaiah 40:31

Step Two- Set a Place

In James Clear's bestseller "*Atomic Habits*," he discusses four rules for creating an environment for an activity you want to repeat consistently. He calls the first rule "Make it Obvious ." Although a great read, Clear is merely repeating a biblical principle God knew would help us to get near Him consistently: a setting or a place. These places create memories and watermarks for our faith. I recall the time I asked God if He was "still there" as my faith had faltered seeing my parents' divorce.

It was after a long night shift waiting tables at Bennigan's in Las Colinas. I sat on a step with my bare and sore feet in the cold water of the fountain in Williams Square. I remember the silhouettes of frozen horses and the sound of the water rushing over the stones as I stared bleakly into the night. A star shot across the sky just as I asked my question- being answered before I could finish. I'll never forget that place. That was over 35 years ago.

All through Jewish history, we see the importance of places and the memorials ("ebenezers") that served as a marking for the importance of that moment in time. As Jesus was about to ascend into heaven, He said, "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:3) as a groom traditionally would do in preparation for his bride. When I set a place for my appointment with God, I get to anticipate the time I will have with Him. I often enjoy the anticipation of an event almost as much as the event itself. What a way to "delight" in the Lord (Psalm 37:4) as we anticipate the time to meet. The following are scriptures where a place was designated by God to establish its importance and to serve as a reminder of what took place:

Genesis 22:1-19. Abraham to Mount Moriah (Golgotha)

Luke 5:16

I Kings 19:11-13

Step Three: Practical Ways to Set a Time and a Place at Home or at Work:

Devote Time: Give your First and Best

Many of my friends set aside their "first fruits" by devoting an early morning to the Lord. I like this, but I have found my most productive "best" time is after I have worked out, showered, and headed to work. My "best" is that time when I am fully awake and aware, so my flesh just wants to be productive. Then, I exchange that beginning of the workday for time with Him. For me, this feels sacrificial. As David said, "I will not give unto the Lord that which costs me nothing" (2 Sam 24:24). I find this trade-off reminds me of why I work. It also sets the tone for how I will operate my day and helps me to reconcile the urgent vs. the important, as my pace is synchronized before I do my first work task. When consistent, I experience a life of rhythm and fruit that I could never achieve alone. Instead of a task, this time becomes my fuel- my Source.

Make A Place: Prepare a Setting at Home or Work

I have two places at home and one place at work that I have prepared. At work, I bought a little "C desk"; it's a foldable table that sits next to my work desk. It is "set apart" from my work desk and only has my study materials: my Bible, my journal, and maybe another study book I may be reading to sharpen me. Nothing else is on this desk, and when I turn to sit at it, I know that nothing else is to take place during that time. At home, I'm either on the back porch with my Bible and journal or at the dining room table. I am less disciplined with "place" at home as I can always find a distraction, it seems. My favorite is the porch, as I feel very alone there with the Lord- it's quiet.

Your Next Step: Go for it!!!

Pray about these principles and ask the Lord about your best Time and Place. Then "devote" these to Him and trust that he redeems all time and that He has more for you as we seek time alone with Him.