

## Key #2: Give yourself a break!

*Be still, and know that I am God.* (Psalm 46:10)

I'm grateful for my Christian upbringing. It kept me from making some regrettable choices. The downside is that I emerged with an overconfidence of my self-righteousness. Unaware of my brokenness, I wandered in the desert of roller coaster Christianity for 40 years before I finally got off the ride. I came to realize that I couldn't live a holy life without holy intervention, even if I knew the answer to "What would Jesus do?" in every situation.

We can try to think positive and saturate our brains with endless motivational posts on Facebook but does it really change us? How can self improvement help when myself is the one who needs help? Have you ever stopped to think how crazy "self help" sounds? The one who needs help trying to help himself? And no, the saying "God helps those who help themselves" is not found in the Bible. When I became ready to accept what Jesus said in John 15, "***Without Me you can do nothing,***" I knew I needed to start trusting him for more than just my eternal destiny. I need him to save me *now*.

There is something we have to understand before we can grow in our faith and that's having a correct view of our relationship with Christ. Yes, his attributes and abilities are without limit and we are nothing compared to him but he also wants to be our friend:

*I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.*  
(John 15:15.)

When we think of God as a taskmaster who wants to control us like puppets, our experience with God becomes nothing more than taking orders and hoping that we've done enough to please him. This robs us of our initiative and freedom that comes with true friendship with God. He enjoys watching our creativity as we serve him out of love.

When people asked Jesus what they should do to do the work that God requires, he said, "***The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.***" (John 6:29) He then goes on to describe what believing in him involves. "***I am the bread of life; he who comes to me will never go hungry and he who believes in me will never be thirsty...unless you eat of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.***" I love how Jesus uses shocking analogies in his teaching! Basically he is saying that he is to the soul what bread is to the body. We need him in us to nourish and support our spiritual life.

The Pulpit Commentary on Biblehub.com had this take on that passage:

*"To 'believe on him,' to habitually entrust one's self to the power and grace of Christ, to make a full moral surrender of the soul to the Lord, includes in itself all other work, and is in itself the great work of God.*

This is not to say that there is no work for us to do. As James says, "***faith without works is dead.***" (James 1:26) We just have to remember not to go it alone: "***without faith it is impossible to please God.***" (Hebrews 11:6) So, works without faith is dead, too. But when "***it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure***" (Philippians 2:13) and we do it for the glory of God, we can give it all we've got! Eric Liddell, in the movie, Chariots of Fire, said, "*When I run, I feel His pleasure.*"

How, then, can we get Jesus in us? The Holy Spirit, who resides in those who have accepted Christ, connects us to Jesus and the Father and he also guides and teaches us, mainly through the Bible, by making the words jump out of the page and into our hearts to convict and encourage us. But he doesn't force himself on us. When The Holy Spirit is mentioned as working powerfully in people's lives in the Bible, it usually refers to them as being *filled* with the Spirit. The little books of Galatians and Ephesians mention "the Spirit" 30 times. Even though Christians have the Holy Spirit, we are advised to walk by, be led by, live by, pray by, keep in step with and be filled with the Spirit. This is how we can defeat sin in our lives: ***Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.*** (Galatians 5:16) We need to keep filling up with the Spirit because we "leak." So, where's the station to go ask the Holy Spirit for a fill-up?

***He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty...He shall cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you shall take refuge.***  
(Psalm 91:1, 4)

***When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*** (Mathew 6:5, 6)

No one can get you close to God. This is something you must do on your own. That's why it's called the secret place. Sermons or teachings can be helpful, but they can never be as effective as opening the word of God for yourself and meeting him one on one. We need to shut the door to all distractions and sit still long enough to hear from him. We also need this time to intercede for others as well.

The noise and beckoning call of the internet, TV, and smart phones have hijacked our opportunities to rest, reflect, and recharge. Staying in touch with social media from dawn until dusk camouflages our need to deal with how *out* of touch we are with God and how spiritually shallow our lives have become. We eat on the run and pray on the run. We keep the radio on to keep out the quiet because the silence makes us notice and feel things, like sadness or anger or loneliness. Praying while we work or drive is great but we can connect more deeply with God when he doesn't have to compete with other drivers or interruptions. We can bring him our hurts and fears and he can get our attention when we put our agenda on hold for at least a little while.

This is not to say we should then get up and carry on for the rest of the day on our own. In the coming sessions we'll cover how to keep in touch with Christ throughout the day.

Even Jesus needed to get away from the crowds and find a secret place to pray to his Father. The gospels record him getting up before dawn and spending the night in prayer before he chose his disciples. So, if it was important enough for Jesus to get alone with his Father, we should, too! God is jealous for *you*. Isn't that amazing?

## *Dig Deeper*

Serving God and trying to live right is very important, but how many of us prepare properly before we go out? How many of us just wing it without first putting on the armor of God? But we can't take up the shield of faith or swing the sword of the Word if we're not prayed up or filled up with scripture. Reading your Bible and praying may seem like a counterproductive use of your time at first. But if you stick with it, you'll soon acquire a taste for your "daily bread" and your soul will begin to crave spiritual food. Now, let's get started!

1. How would you describe where you are in your spiritual journey? Are you stuck or frustrated? If so, how? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What would you like to see changed? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Are you addicted to hurry, rush, and adrenaline? Explain: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. How do you feel about being stuck behind cars that go slowly? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Where is your prayer closet? \_\_\_\_\_

Your secret place should be where you can get away and not be bothered. It doesn't have to be inside. Some feel closer to God when they are outside.

## *Dive in!*

I have heard it said that we will never *have* time for prayer—we must *make* time.

1. **Set a goal:** If you're just beginning, start with 10 minutes, 5 to read your Bible and 5 to pray. Gradually increase your time. Any new change in lifestyle is difficult at first, like getting to bed earlier in order to get up earlier. But as you apply the keys in the upcoming months, I believe you'll begin to look forward to being with the Lord.

**Your initial goal for your daily meeting with God:** \_\_\_\_\_ minutes

2. **Make an appointment:** If you just meet with God whenever you get around to it, you won't do it very often. Schedule a recurring appointment with God and put it on your calendar. I prefer first thing in the morning since it sets the tone for the rest of the day and is a catalyst for my walk with him. But you may choose lunch or an unhurried time in the evening.

**Your daily appointment time:** \_\_\_\_\_

3. **Read:** Don't try to do an exhaustive deductive study of scripture if you only have a few minutes in the morning for your quiet time. Deep Bible study is important and we'll explore that in a future session, but that should be done when you can devote more time to it. For now, just start reading a section of scripture at a time, asking the Holy Spirit to impress on you what he wants you to hear. Don't speed read. Reading out loud will keep you at a good pace.

4. **Reflect:** When you come to a passage that grabs your attention, prayerfully ponder what God is trying to teach or invite you to do. He may convict you to repent of a sin or he may just want to encourage you. This is **meditation**; reading while praying for insight. Unlike Eastern meditation that empties the mind of all thoughts, Christian meditation replaces our thoughts with thoughts of God and his word.

5. **Record:** Keep a journal of verses that spoke to you and what you learned as well as questions to research later when you have time.

6. **Pray:** Begin with worship and thanksgiving. Next, lay your concerns and the needs of your friends and loved ones at his feet. My mother has always covered me with prayer and I am grateful for it! We'll discuss different ways to pray and to keep in touch with God in the next Key.

Do you ever get bored or have trouble concentrating when you try to read your Bible or pray? Well, guess what? So does everybody! Don't feel guilty if your mind wanders or if you miss a quiet time.