

THE PLAN



INTRODUCTION

Consider relationships. What makes a relationship strong? What makes a relationship weak? Much could be said, but without question, strong relationships spell love *T-I-M-E*. Ask the elderly couple holding hands in the park, ask the friends who have known each other for decades, ask the co-workers who truly work as a team, and common to each is a relationship forged by participants investing time in the others.

Press a little further, and more will be learned.

In short, the investment of time does not just happen. Relationships built on a passive approach are relationships that are not built. Strong relationships build through the investment of time in the other person's life because the time has been planned. The elderly couple converses at dinner—every night—exceptions are rare. The friendship spanning decades changed when college was over, but they continue to meet—every August—exceptions are rare. The co-workers who work as a team have consistent off-site meetings—every quarter—exceptions are rare. Time is never available unless time is made. The investment of time takes planning.

What's true of our relationships with people is true of our relationship with God.

If we are going to cultivate ongoing and authentic relationships with God, then we must invest time. If this investment of time is going to happen, we must be thoughtful. The exercise that follows is designed to help plan intentional time with God. Planning does not mean you won't periodically break your plan or that you are confined by your plan. It's your plan, and you'll change it as circumstances change. But without a plan, there will always be something else you can do.

For purposes of this exercise, we will consider two forms of time.

Daily Time

This is the time invested in the normal rhythms of life. At the person-to-person level, this is family dinner, lunch every Tuesday with a friend, or a couple's date night. Planning daily time with God will ensure an increase in this time truly happening.

Breakout Time

This is a periodic time when you're given the freedom to do and enjoy what you most want to do. At the person-to-person level, this is the yearly vacation or the quarterly retreat with the team. Considering what you could do to cultivate your relationship with God on an open afternoon or during a time when the pressure is off will enrich your relationship greatly.

WHO ARE YOU?

Before creating your plan, consider your uniqueness. Do two things:

- 1) Check the descriptions that resemble you.
- 2) Of those you check, as best you can, rank them.

_____ **ARTIST:** Artists most naturally think in pictures and metaphors and often connect with God best through sensory stimulation. The sounds of instruments, the smells of incense, and the sights of the cathedral all draw the heart of an artist upward. Artists are strongly influenced by environment, their physical setting, and are wise to be mindful of this when entering into conversations with God. Artists also discover God through the work of their hands. Through painting or photography or other artistic endeavors, they both celebrate God's creative power and uncover new spiritual depths through their work.

_____ **ATHLETE:** Athletes prefer movement and often connect with God best during physical activity. A brisk run or a vigorous workout at the gym serve to release energy and clear the mind in ways that allow them to hear God's voice more clearly. Oppositely, attempting to connect with God through quiet prayer or still meditation may feel initially odd to athletes but may also be something they benefit from, so long as it is done in smaller doses, especially at first. Too much, and the athlete will punt.

_____ **CONTEMPLATIVE:** Contemplatives are happiest when deep in thought and often connect with God best through reflective meditation. They are often discerning and keenly aware of their surroundings. In contrast to the athlete, the contemplative experiences the greatest clarity in a place of stillness and quiet. This tranquility affords them the freedom to openly explore the nuances and trace the contours of any spiritual truth or thought that comes to mind.

_____ **MUSIC LOVER:** Music lovers are often musicians but not always. They are those who know the difference between music that is cliché and music that is captivating. No doubt they have favorite genres, but more than the genre, they appreciate good music. They do not love music just for the sake of distracting noise; they love music because it touches something deep within them. Thoughtful music lovers will intentionally select particular songs for their time with God that inspire the kind of connection for which their hearts are most hungry. Even more, for those with skills of their own, time with God will often include writing and creating musical expressions of their own.

_____ **OUTDOOR ENTHUSIAST:** The outdoor enthusiast is most at home in the great outdoors and often connects with God best through experiences of nature. As with any description, they come in different stripes. There are those who prefer arduous hikes up a mountain, and there are those who prefer quiet walks in a garden. Either way, the heart of the outdoor enthusiast swells at the sights and sounds associated with breaking out of confinement and into fresh air. The wide open view from a lake, the tree-lined trail, the intricate detail of a tiny rose bud, experiencing and recognizing these majestic moments inspire the outdoor enthusiast toward thoughts of God.

_____ **STUDENT:** Students are characterized by an insatiable hunger for knowledge and are driven to understand truth at deeper and deeper levels. Accordingly, they often connect with God best through study of Scripture. Students are rarely satisfied with simply being told *that* some spiritual reality is true. Rather, they have a great need to understand *why* it is true and

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how it fits with other spiritual truths. Students enjoy deep theological reflection and understanding Scripture in its full and original context.

_____ **WRITER:** Writers may or may not write page after page, but they revel in refining their thoughts through words. For them, it is not just the unloading of words on a page but the ping of a finely tuned phrase or the arc of a well-crafted paragraph. They love the stringing together of words, and when they converse with God, they will search for the exact phrase that captures not just the content but the tone of the thought. Like woodworkers shaping a form by sanding away the roughness, writers sand phrases to smooth out their thoughts. Through the process, they not only express their own voice, but increasingly, they hear the voice of God.

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_____ **OTHER:** _____

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BRAINSTORM

With your uniqueness in mind...

- 1) Brainstorm ways you could cultivate your relationship with God. Resist analyzing the ideas. This is just brainstorming. Planning comes next.
- 2) Based on the nature of the idea, place it in either the Daily Plan or Breakout Plan column. (Definitions of *daily* and *breakout* are on the cover page of this exercise.)

DAILY PLAN

Examples for an athlete / outdoor enthusiast:

- Work on Scripture memory as I ride the exercise bike at the gym.
- Talk to God about the daily Scripture readings as I go for my nightly run.

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BREAKOUT PLAN

Examples for an athlete / outdoor enthusiast:

- Go hiking alone one weekend and use this time to talk to God.
- Plan a camping trip with my Running Partners. Bring my guitar for worship together.

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DAILY PLAN

With your brainstorming in mind, create a Daily Plan. A good plan will reflect the realities of your life and the realities of your uniqueness. A few things to know...

- ▶ Each week you will be given a Conversations with God guide.
- ▶ The Scripture Cards, included with your notebook, offer a simple way to track your daily Scripture readings and Scripture memory. This information is also found on the website.
- ▶ Make your plan realistic rather than idealistic. A little bit over a long time will bring great depth.

WEEKLY:

1. CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD INTRODUCTION:

Choose a day of the week to read the Conversations with God guide and begin each new week: _____

DAILY:

2. READ:

Choose a time of day you will read the daily Scripture reading:

Choose a location conducive to the realities of your daily life and the uniqueness of your spiritual personality:

3. MEMORIZE:

Choose a time of day you will review the Scripture memory cards (while running, before bed, first thing in the morning, at lunch, while doing dishes, while driving, etc.):

4. MEDITATE:

Choose a time of day you will meditate on what you've been reading and move into an authentic conversation with God. It may or may not be the same times as one of the above. Balance the uniqueness of you with the realities of life:

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BREAKOUT PLAN

With your uniqueness in mind...

- ▶ Plan at least one breakout time.
- ▶ Consider a monthly, quarterly, or yearly tradition you may want to implement.

Note: If planning your breakout times feels burdensome, then reconsider either your ideas or your timing. Breakout time should be highly reflective of your uniqueness and something you look forward to doing.

ONE PLANNED BREAKOUT TIME

A MONTHLY, QUARTERLY, OR YEARLY TRADITION

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