

In December of 2013, I had my annual meeting with Sandra Smith, my DS. In the course of our meeting, she asked me, "How is it with your soul? How's your spiritual life?" And it brought me up short.

I decided to take a risk and be honest. "I've gotten away from my spiritual disciplines," I confessed. "I've let time with God take a back seat to all the things I have to do."

I left there remembering how important my devotional time with God is. When I am spending time with God, I remember who is God and who is not (that would be me). When I do not find time for my devotions, I start operating out of my own strength, and that leads to frustration, exhaustion, and discouragement.

So, why do I fall away from my time with God? First, it's not intentional. I didn't wake up one morning and think, "These devotions are a waste of my time. I can spend it better doing something else." No, other things interfere. Maybe I have been working too hard and feel exhausted, so I choose sleep instead of my devotions. Maybe I have to "hit the ground" running, finding that my mornings are so pressed that I have to rush to get out the door. Maybe a change has interrupted my usual routine, like vacation or Annual Conference. And once the habit is interrupted, it's hard to start back again! Just like an exercise program or diet.

Sometimes these are excuses. Underneath everything I am really angry with God. Perhaps God has called me to a difficult task or shown me an aspect of myself that I don't like. And it is easier to avoid God than deal with how I am feeling. However, it is really me that suffers. I deny myself the time I need with God.

There is another reason that I fall away from my devotion time. I start feeling like what I am doing is not adequate or sufficient. I listen to others talk about their spiritual lives, compare them to mine, and feel like mine is lacking. I start trying to add other resources or practices, and my devotions begin to feel like a burden rather than life-giving.

How do I recover my time with God? First, I realize how important that time is and what a gift I receive in it. Second, I understand that I know myself and how I related best to God through my devotions. That means I get rid of the stuff that are not me and do what feels right. It doesn't mean that I never try anything new, but I also have the freedom to let go what doesn't build my relationship with God and keep what does. Third, I forgive myself for not being perfect. I do what I can and that is okay.

If you do not have a regular time with God, I invite you to find your path. Listen to what others do and try something. If it isn't for you, don't give up.

If you have let your devotions take a back seat to other things in life, I remind you of what you felt when you regularly practiced whatever discipline was yours. Find a way to resume what worked best for

you. And don't be afraid to try something new, keeping what builds your relationship with God and letting go what does not.