



Hindrances to Your Friendship with Jesus

Walt and I met in January of 1946 at Wheaton College. I was a sophomore, he a freshman (not because I was smarter than he, but because he'd worked for Boeing and Pan American in the war effort for three years). We spent every possible minute with each other. By Easter time, we were committed to spending the rest of our lives together.

But summer vacation loomed. He had to go back to Seattle for the summer to earn his college tuition. Transcontinental phone calls were terribly expensive. So we wrote. Every day. If a letter did not come, I was inconsolable. When two letters arrived on a Monday, I was incapable of doing any work until I'd read my sweetheart's letters.

That was more than 70 years ago, and I still have those precious letters. I have the love notes that man wrote me through 67 years of marriage, and I come across them still: one tucked away in a drawer, or taped to the inside of a cabinet door, or slipped into a suitcase pocket, and I smile.

You'd think I'd be even more excited about a letter from my beautiful Savior. But sometimes I'm not as excited as I wish I were. Once in a while, when I'm getting ready for bed, I remember that I haven't read my



Beloved's letter that day, and occasionally, when that happens, I think, "Oh, dear. I haven't read my Bible!" Why wouldn't it be, "Oh, wonderful! Now I have the time to read my love letter from God"?

Why? I'm not a hypocrite. So why would I sometimes find reading my Bible a chore instead of a delight? Strangely enough, not all of the hindrances to our intimacy with Jesus are bad; some of them are actually good things, things we ought to do, but they can diminish our love for our best Friend if we give them first place.

1. Friendship doesn't flourish in a hurried atmosphere. It takes intentionality. It takes time.

How did King David express his resolve to seek God's face? (Psalm 63:1,2)

What reward does God certainly offer those who seek His presence? (Proverbs 8:17)

But what if you're a mother, and your three-year-old threw up all night, and you still have to be up at dawn to get your husband to work and the older children to school?

What if there is a crisis at work, and you've had to work overtime day after day, and you are overwhelmed at home just to catch up with essentials?

When you are under great pressure, reading your Bible might seem to be just another obligation to check off the list.

You have a wonderful surprise coming! Your commitment to read the Word, even when it just seems a duty, has its own sweet rewards. Your Heavenly Father knows all about you. He knows the pressures you are under, the stress you are coping with. He will meet you where you are. Read it, even if you read it only to check off another obligation fulfilled. To read it because you feel obligated is better than not to read it at all.

I remember a truly difficult time in my life. We had seven children. Walt was pastor of a large church whom we loved to minister to, but they could not always schedule their needs, so interruptions were constant. I was accountable for the daily chapels at Southside Christian School. I wrote a weekly story for children in my father's newspaper. Walt's mother lived with us. She was in her eighties, and she struggled with dementia.

I remember one night I got up to check on Mother Handford and found her completely drenched. I struggled to get her into clean clothes and dry bedding. When I tucked her in again, she asked me sweetly, "Did you find what you were looking for?"

I went down the basement steps with an armful of wet laundry. I remember praying as I went, "Lord, I sure haven't had much time to talk to you recently. I do love you, but I haven't been able to tell you so. Please don't forget about me." My best Friend wrapped His loving arms around me, and I was deeply comforted. I was assured of His love that bleak night.

How could I be sure He understood the pressures I was under? Psalm 103:13,14:

Why does He understand me so well? Hebrews 4:14-16:

Friendship requires intentionality. But friendship also can flourish when burdens are heavy and stressful. Talk to Him when you are stressed. He understands. He'll help you.

2. You might “stumble because of persecution,” feeling torn by loyalties and outside pressures.

The parable of the sower in Mark 4:16,17 tells us about some who hear the Gospel and respond to it with gladness. But what, according to that Scripture, might keep the seed from bearing fruit?

You likely are studying this lesson because you do have a deep hunger for a genuine relationship with God. But it may be that your mate, or family member, or friend, is not particularly spiritually-minded. When you seek more from God it seems to pull you further away from those you love.

A woman may find this true in her marriage: the closer she tries to get to the Lord Jesus, the further away her husband seems to drift.

But the closer you get to the Lord Jesus, the more you experience His grace, His benediction, the more Christ-like you will become. That will hopefully ease tensions between

you. A husband does need to know he is your first priority. You can meet his needs, with God’s help, and still have time for God. How can you know this is true? (Ecclesiastes 8:4-6):

Here’s the way the New Living Translation puts it:

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*The king's command is backed by great power.
No one can resist or question it.
Those who obey him will not be punished.
**Those who are wise will find
a time and a way to do what is right.**
Yes, there is a time and a way for everything,
even as people's troubles lie heavily upon them.*

3. Mark 4:16,17 describes those who “have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time.” What might cause them to stumble, according to this Scripture?

Face it: the culture you live in is hostile to God and to His authority. So you mustn’t be surprised when unbelievers ridicule you and your faith. When that happens, remember what Paul said when he was persecuted, in Philippians 3:10: “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the *fellowship of His sufferings*, being conformed to His death.”

When you are rejected by the world, you are feeling what Jesus felt when He, the perfect, holy God Himself, was

tormented by people He had created and would die for! You will feel a kinship with Him as you endure persecution.

4. You might be hindered in your intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus because of the ordinary burdens of life and even the need to earn a living.

What does Mark 4:18,19 say about this?

I don't think of myself as materialistic person. But I've had to learn it is as materialistic to worry about money you don't have as to trust too much in the wealth you do have!

When the seven children were very young, we were establishing a new church and money was very tight. One morning the three oldest told me the PTA was sponsoring hot dog day, and they each needed a quarter for lunch.

I barely had enough change to give them each a quarter. All day I fretted about my empty billfold. I had no excuse for worry, because I had seen God supply our needs, day after day, month after month, year after year. When I realized that my focus on money had dishonored Him, I told my Very Best Friend Forever I was sorry.

When the children came home from school, Debbie said, "Mother, I got two hot dogs today."

"But you had only one quarter. How did you do that, honey?"

"I told the teacher we were very, very poor."

Notice in Mark chapter 4 that the "deceitfulness of riches" can choke the Word. Money lies to you. Money tells

you your children can't have the things they deserve if you don't work hard to supply it. Money makes promises it can't fulfill. Money tells you that you have to have a certain amount saved up for retirement. Covetousness will choke the Word so you cannot grow in your spiritual life.

5. Your “desires for other things” might that make you double-minded.

What does 1 John 2:15-17 plainly command?

Matthew 6:24?

James 4:4?

6. When you are in deep trouble, or suffering great loss, you may find it difficult to focus on your friendship with Jesus.

Strange, that times of loss, which ought to draw us closer to God sometimes repel us instead. I felt that way after I lost Walt. It's as if the sore place is so tender, we don't want it touched. We don't want to weep any more.

Thank God that He remembers that He made us out of dust. He is not judgmental. He understands, and cares, and weeps with us. See how Psalm 103:8-14 explains this:

How would Isaiah 63:8,9 comfort you in a time of deep loss?

How did Asaph, temple musician and psalmist, comfort himself? (Psalm 73:26)

When can you count on your Heavenly Father's nearness? (Psalm 34:18)

I have found, when going through a time of tragic loss, that reading Psalm 34 and Psalm 103 out loud, not just once, but again and again, helps me to control my anxiety and my broken thoughts.

6. The cares of this life and inflexible schedules can hinder your intimacy with Jesus.

I think you would agree that a demanding, rigid schedule, with little time for yourself, is one of the greatest hindrances in your relationship with the Lord.

Your schedule does reflect things you think are important. Or, perhaps, it reflects what someone in authority over you thinks is important.

A friend of mine said, "I have a passion for a clean house, but it's never clean." But she did find time for things she wanted to do. She may have felt guilty for her messy house, but its cleanliness was not a passion.

My schedule in college reflected things that my father chose for me to do. But I was not willing to give up the things that I wanted to do. So I carried too heavy a load in my college years. I always felt overwhelmed. But I was the one who'd made the extra commitments.

Your priorities must change from time to time. You may have to postpone some dreams for later. You must

determine your priorities thoughtfully. As you consider them, you may have to whittle down the list to what an ordinary human being can handle.

I do need to balance this with the reminder that God is not a hard taskmaster. Recreation and rest are essential priorities, just as earning a living is.

You may need to look for faster ways to accomplish some obligations. Not every task requires perfection. Beds do need to be made, but do they need to be made so that a nickel bounces on them?

When I was a young housewife, I ordered a booklet from *Ladies' Home Journal* and read that I could make a bed in two minutes. I was stunned. All those years I'd left my bed unmade when I went to school and work because I didn't have enough time, and always embarrassed by my messy bedroom! But I tested it. Yes, I could make my bed in two minutes, and it changed my attitude about a multitude of my housekeeping tasks.

When I was a child, I remember thinking what a huge job washing dishes was. It always took me the whole morning, because I always had a book propped up on the cabinet while I worked, and often had to fish my grease-spattered book out of the dirty dish water!

Cheaper by the Dozen is the true story of Lillian Gilbreth. She earned three Ph.D's while bearing and rearing her twelve children. She combined the perspectives of an engineer, a psychologist, a wife, and a mother. President Hoover asked for her help during the depression so mothers could manage their homes and still earn money for the home.

Mrs. Gilbreth looked for shorter, simpler, and easier ways of doing housework. She designed the kitchen layout still used in modern homes. She invented the foot pedal trash can, the shelves on the inside of refrigerator doors, and the butter tray and egg keeper.

If you looked at everything you do, every motion, how often you do it, where you do it, what you repeat, you probably could find many ways to cut down the time your housekeeping chores actually take.

A silly example: Walt added a large dining room to our home to accommodate our huge dining table. The old, small dining room became the breakfast room with a small table and chairs. We made that move 19 years ago. The other day I realized I still store the table cloths for the big table in the breakfast room, and the small table cloths in the big new dining room!

Why not make a conscious effort to see where you might save time? Make meaningful conversation while taking kids to school? Use time in the wait-line for organizing tasks. Spend less time on face-book and e-mail? You have exactly as much time each day as the Queen of England. Use it well.

You can find time to talk to the Lord and listen to His Word. Don't let the cares of this world, or the deceitfulness of riches, or the lust for things choke the precious Word of God. Oh, how He longs for you to come into His presence!

More—

The Apostle Peter's Uninhibited Relationship with Jesus

Peter was passionate in his loyalties, blurted out words when he didn't know what to say, made grand promises and broke them, but his intimate, treasured friendship with Jesus is remarkable. Trace it in these Scriptures:

How did Peter show his passionate commitment to Jesus?

Matt. 4:18 ff; 14:29; 15:15; 16:15; 26:33-58

Mark 10:28;

John 6:68; 13:37; 21:15-17.

How did Jesus affirm His love for Peter?

Matt. 16:18; 17:24-26;

Mark 16:7.

How did Peter sometimes presume on his relationship with Jesus?

Matt. 16:22; 17:4; 26:37-40, 69-75;

Mark 8:33;

John 13:8; 18:10;

Galatians 1:18; 2:7-14.

But how did Peter respond when he realized he'd sinned?

Matt. 26:75;

Luke 5:8; 22:62;

John 13:9.

What useful and wonderful ministry did Peter have after Jesus' ascension into Heaven?

Acts chapters 2,3,4,5,10,12,15.

The Bible books of First and Second Peter



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