

Time in God's presence primary requirement for spiritual discipline

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By Jim White

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ATLANTA—When it comes to spiritual discipline, simply spending time in God's presence is the primary requirement, seminary professors Linda Bryan and Loyd Allen agreed.

Bryan and Allen led a session titled "The Spirit of the Lord Upon Me" during the New Baptist Covenant gathering in Atlanta, Feb. 1.

The session relied on the central scriptural theme of the three-day celebration taken from Luke 4:18-19 as its springboard. Jesus, speaking to his hometown neighbors, began his inaugural message with the words: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me."

• [See latest photos](#) and the latest [video clips](#) from the New Baptist Covenant Meeting. [\(And go here to see our complete coverage of the event\).](#)

Allen, who teaches church history and spiritual formation at the MacAfee School of Theology in Atlanta, emphasized that Baptists of this age need to rediscover the spiritual disciplines that create Christ-likeness.

“Baptists tend to run before they are sent,” he said. “Prayer is the personal communication with the divine.”

Bryan emphasized “developing a familiar friendship with Christ” through meditation and contemplation.

Prayer must spring from one’s own voice according to Bryan. “Prayer is the time we take to sit with God. ...We have too many cookie-cutter prayers” she said.

Allen alluded to the Protestant Reformation as the point in church history when the practice of contemplation and meditation was abandoned in the tradition from which Baptists sprang.

“But the soul and body are one” he declared.

Spiritual formation impacts body as well as spirit. Each professor emphasized reading the Scriptures and praying with imagination, placing one’s self in the Scriptures.

“The text draws us into the context,” Bryan said.

Authentic prayer is the kind “that leads one to do what a Christian is supposed to do,” Allen said. It leads to “solitude, silence and simplicity.”

Touching on fasting as an expectation of Christ when he said “whenever you fast....” in Matt. 6:16, Bryan said it is a discipline that takes time and can be done in a variety of ways. “Food is not the only deprivation that creates spiritual awareness.”

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