

intimate
conversations

DEVOTIONS *to* NURTURE *a* WOMAN'S SOUL

alicia britt chole



a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Published by Revell
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.revellbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Chole, Alicia Britt.

Intimate conversations : devotions to nurture a woman's soul / Alicia Britt Chole.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-8007-3289-9 (pbk.)

1. Mothers—Prayers and devotions. 2. Christian women—Prayers and devotions. I. Title.

BV4847.C49 2009

252'.6431—dc22

2009014450

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Published in association with the literary agency of Alive Communications, Inc., 7680 Goddard Street, Suite 200, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80920. www.alivecommunications.com

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Foreword

I first met Alicia Chole backstage at a women’s conference in Minnesota where we were both to speak. From that time on, we have shared many cups of tea, great conversation, and friendship.

Let me introduce you to the Alicia I love—she will become your friend too as you read the pages of this book.

I like to think of people as if they were colors. I do this because I am blind and can’t see them to form a visual image, but I find even sighted people can see what I perceive when I describe a person as if they were a color. So, if you’ve never met my multicolored friend Alicia Chole, let me introduce you to her by showing you the colors I see.

Alicia is *sage*. Sage is the grayish green color of sage leaves. Either fresh or dry, the leaves are used aromatically as seasoning. Sage is also defined as having wisdom that comes from age and experience. A person who bears the title “Sage” is a mentor in spiritual topics and is characterized by profound wisdom.

Sage is definitely one of the colors of Alicia because she is warm, aromatic, wise, and willing to lead others to wisdom. The green hue of Alicia’s sage is that of the pastures which the good shepherd leads us to lie in. Her soul bears the color of peace. But in certain

light, I can see the color gray more prominently—it's the tint of thoughts churning and honest deliberation. Whether gray shows up more on some days or lots of green is primary on others, the well-seasoned color sage is the color of Alicia. It's the color of wisdom and spice, depth and experience. In the coming pages, you may read black print on white paper, but you will certainly see the color sage because Alicia has allowed what God has written upon her life to be wisely written in this book.

Alicia is *terra-cotta*. Terra-cotta is the distinctive orangey, brownish, and rust color of ceramic clay. What makes terra-cotta so unique and lovely is that it gains its deep and rich intensity from exposure to the elements. It's out there.

Just like Alicia, terra-cotta doesn't gain its beauty from the shadowed protection of tidy safety. It gains its rich hue from the wind, weather, and sun. Alicia's soft and open soul is terra-cotta because she has allowed herself to be touched, tenderized, and toughened by the world she lives in. I think you will really like it when you see this color in her writing. But, she's also terra-cotta to me because she is earthy! I always kid her when we go to the coffee shop together, "I hope they have tea earthy enough for you; if not, we'll bring a shovel and you can drink some fresh-brewed dirt and grass!" It's not far from true. Her poetic and practical style reflects the warm and organic hue of orangey, rusty brown that will warm you. When your eye catches a tinge of terra-cotta as you read, you will say, "She knows how I feel" or "I've thought that same thing." In these pages, you'll see the rich, inviting color of life well lived.

Alicia is *ruby red*. Ruby red is one of the most intense hues in the spectrum of the color red. It's dazzling, eye catching, and captivating. Rubies have always been held in high esteem. They were historically used to ornament armor, scabbards, and harnesses of noblemen in China and India. Rubies were even laid beneath foundations of buildings because it was believed that rubies at the base would secure good fortune to the structure.

Why do I see Alicia as ruby red? It is because she has an intensity that's attractive; she's dazzling and highly esteemed. But mostly it's because down deep, beneath that warm, tender, and wise woman is a girl with some sassiness and pizzazz! Just like a subtle sprinkle of cinnamon on your coffee, a bright red cherry on your sundae, or a dazzling red balloon at your birthday party, Alicia gives you that extra zing that makes you smile. She does it with wit and a whimsical way of looking at life. You'll see little splashes of ruby red as you take this devotional journey; and when you glimpse it, you'll smile and thank God for how good life can be!

Alicia Britt Chole is uniquely qualified to offer a book called *Intimate Conversations* because I know for a fact that she engages in intimate conversations with her heavenly Father every day, and it has made her life beautifully colored with the shade of his grace.

Oh, I know you will love *Intimate Conversations*, I sure do. I challenge you to answer the questions at the end of each devotional, for the truths they reveal will bring out the colors of your soul. You too will reflect the lovely and subtle shades of his grace, wisdom, and love that come only from spending intimate time in conversation with the beautiful one.

Pour yourself a cup of tea—one that has more flavor than dirt—and spend some time letting my friend Alicia provide a charming place for you to gain a deeper friendship with your heavenly Father. Her colorful life has done that for me, and I know her words along with God's Word will color your life with richness.

So, enjoy!

Jennifer Rothschild
author of *Lessons I Learned in the Dark*
and *Self Talk, Soul Talk*
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A decorative border in light gray surrounds the text. It features a central floral motif with a large five-petaled flower, smaller flowers, and a vine with leaves and small blossoms.

Dear God . . .

I Ache

to Know You More

Uh-



Good morning, God, I'm so gra— (excuse me, God).

"You can have a snack after lunch."

I'm so grateful for th— (just a second, God).

"Your shoes are in the laundry room."

I'm so grateful for this time we ha— (sorry for the

interruption, God). "They're there. Mooove things."

I'm so grateful for the time we have together to—

(God, I think we'll have to continue this lat—).

"No, you are not old enough to change baby's poopy diaper. I'M COMING!"

Complete sentences. What a luxury.

This was one of the first things my friends commented on when I suddenly became a mother through the miracle of adoption at the age of thirty-one. We used to spend hours talking each week about the great mysteries of life. I was a highly focused conversationalist—a sincere listener who was rarely distracted.

Now? Well, I am still a sincere listener—I am continually listening for the sounds and (of greater concern) the non-sounds of my three children whenever I am on the phone. Frankly, I think I miss half of what my friends say and it can take minutes to complete a single sentence *if* I do not forget what it was we were talking about in the first place.

In addition to giving me more empathy for those who live with attention-deficit disorders, this new chronically interrupted era of life has provided an opportunity for me to reconsider how I

nurture relationships—with my husband, with my children, with my friends, and especially with my God.

Specifically, the new era revealed a weakness: I was too dependent on shared words, on well-formed sentences, on neat and tidy blocks of time.

The last dozen years have affirmed an encouraging reality: intimacy with God is not on hold, waiting for me to control my environment and carve out serene aromatic spaces. Intimacy with God is not on pause until I can complete sentences and listen without interruptions.

Each minute of every loud, distracting day is pregnant with potential for intimacy if I can simply and intentionally live it *with* God.

Being *with* God was—and still is—the first priority of a disciple’s job description:

Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.

Mark 3:13–15

The Gospels record Jesus’ conversations and teachings. However, the printed page cannot convey what a 24/7 camera would have captured. Most of Jesus’ three years with the disciples was spent not in deep ponderings but in daily proximity. They simply experienced life side by side, walking together, sitting together, working together, and consciously being near one another.

Right now, this same Jesus is *with* us. With or without interruptions. With or without words.

As we awaken each morning, God issues us a personal invitation to intimacy.

(RSVP desired.)

For Discussion and Reflective Journaling

I am always with you.

Psalms 73:23

One. In this season of your life, how much can you relate to this devotional's starting prayer?

Two. What adjectives would you use to describe your structured devotional life?

Three. Jesus certainly set the example of private prayer times. But he also set an example that is less quantifiable: he consciously lived each moment connected to, and aware of, his Father God. Spend a few minutes meditating on the following statements that Jesus made:

If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

John 14:23

Remain in me, and I will remain in you.

John 15:4

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.

John 15:9

Four. Consider the point made in the devotional about how Jesus and his disciples spent the majority of their time together. Make a conscious effort today to “see” Jesus with you, near you, in your daily life. Remember that he is with you while you are making your bed. Gratefully acknowledge his presence while you respond to an email. Smile at him as you are stuck in traffic.

Then throughout this coming week, intentionally increase your awareness that God is *with* you (and he is happy about it!).

Everything



For decades I have prayed that somehow God would allow me to know him as Brother Lawrence knew him—moment by moment. *The Practice of the Presence of God* is one of the most well-loved and well-worn books in my home. On one of its discolored pages, Brother Lawrence penned sentences that haunt me:

People seek for methods of learning to love God . . . Is it not much shorter and more direct to do everything for the love of God . . . ?¹

Every-thing for the love of God.
Every-*thing* for the love of God.

Brother Lawrence goes on to say,

In the way of God, thoughts count for little, love does everything. And it is not necessary to have great things to do. I turn my little omelet in the pan for the love of God; when it is finished, if I have nothing to do, I prostrate myself on the ground and adore my God, who gave me the grace to make it, after which I arise, more content than a king.²

Brother Lawrence was a monk in a monastery. I am a mother in Missouri. So what does “everything for the love of God” look like for me?

Today I . . .

changed my baby's diaper . . . for the love of God
picked up the family room . . . for the love of God
mediated a sibling dispute . . . for the love of God
hugged my beloved husband . . . for the love of God
set up a lunch with a young writer . . . for the love of God
paid a bill . . . for the love of God
put away dishes . . . for the love of God
wiped milk off the floor . . . for the love of God
gave away a book . . . for the love of God
wrote this devotional . . . for the love of God

God accepted each act as worship! And tomorrow I hope to remember him more . . . *everything* for the love of God.

For Discussion and Reflective Journaling

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians 3:17

One. Picture Brother Lawrence turning an omelet at the monastery for the love of God. Now picture yourself turning an omelet in your kitchen for the love of God. The monastery did not make the act into an offering of spiritual intimacy—Brother Lawrence's attitude did.

Two. Make a list of the small things you must do today. What would it be like to do them "for the love of God"?

Three. This principle opened up to me a world of new opportunities to develop intimacy with God. What changes might you experience as a result of integrating this attitude deeper into your life?

Cuddle Time



When our eldest transitioned to a “big” bed, we began a treasured tradition called *cuddle time*. After the last bathroom stop, after the toothbrush is rinsed, after we pray and sing “Jesus Loves Me,” we simply cuddle and enjoy being together.

My husband and I both work from home—we enjoy the kids’ company all day long. But this time at night is still special, unique, and protected. The kids consider this space sacred.

Lest anyone think that being quiet and still is natural for my kids, allow me to share that visitors have a hard time believing we have only three children because it sounds, and feels, like we have six. I am quiet but my kids are LOUD. I enjoy stillness but my kids are VERY active.

Except during cuddle time.

Then Jonathan softly asks me penetrating questions. Keona dreams with me about her future plans. Preverbal Louie offers me his favorite car and looks deeply into my eyes. When words cease, Jonathan tries to hear my heartbeat. Keona asks me to scratch her back. Louie stays perfectly still, not wanting the moment to end.

This is cuddle time. This is one of the precious, priceless jewels in my mommy-heart.

As I give one more kiss and walk out the bedroom door, I am often reminded that God’s daddy-heart treasures such times with me. He longs for me to curl up in a chair and rest with him. He waits for me to softly ask penetrating questions and listen for his heartbeat. He hopes that I will offer him my physical treasures and look deeply into his eyes.

My kids may someday “outgrow” cuddle time with me. But I pray that none of us ever outgrow cuddle time with Father God.

For Discussion and Reflective Journaling

He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”

Mark 9:36–37

One. Nothing can quite touch the experience of a child falling asleep in your embrace. What adjectives would you use to describe how you feel when a child sinks into your arms and drifts off to sleep?

Two. Take those adjectives and use them to describe how Father God feels when you rest in him: “When I become still and lean on God, he feels _____.”

Three. Tonight, before going to bed, try to carve out a few minutes to become still enough, long enough, alone enough to sigh and whisper, “Father, I love you.”

Fresh Ink



Fresh ink was on my Day-Timer. A glass of cool water sat on my desk. My fingers were dancing across the keyboard when I heard Father God whisper in my soul:

“Child, walk with me. The day is new and my heart longs for you.”

My fingers paused as I hesitated. Withdrawing from the swift current of that day’s “to-do” list—as a wife, mother, speaker, and mentor—was like resisting gravity. Closing my eyes, I recalled the countless lost promises of “Soon, Father God, soon.” Turning from the ocean of undone, I took his offered hand.

The wet grass soaked the bottom of my pant legs, and we began walking together. The silence we shared was like breathing pure life. Then he spoke again:

“Child, am I your Love or your business partner? You seem to find more value in being busy than in simply being.”

“But, Father God,” I countered, “in the world, even in the church, busyness is a sign of commitment.”

“Yes, child. But commitment to whom? Commitment to what?”

I began to think: Why am I so busy? When did I begin to find value in a full schedule? What motivates my “yes” to task and to people?

I began to study: The voice of need always cried out to Jesus, yet he never seemed hurried, stressed, or driven. He disappointed many people to stay true to the purpose of his Father.

Then I dared to ask: I am busy, but am I fruitful?

And so a new chapter in my spiritual journey began. “Less busy, more fruitful” became my mantra. “Simplify and focus” became my means.

That conversation took place long ago. Looking back, I now realize that Father’s words not only simplified my life, they saved my life.

For Discussion and Reflective Journaling

Be still, and know that I am God.

Psalm 46:10

One. Survey your initial response to the dialogue above. What words, phrases, concepts capture your interest?

Two. If someone unfamiliar with God were to describe—from observation alone—your relationship with God, what words might he or she select? God is your . . . Co-worker? Love? Coach? Critic? Friend? Santa Claus? Life? Source? Other?

Three. Does your schedule seem livable? If you could change three things about your schedule and pace of living, what would you select? Why?

Four. What would it cost—in time, money, favor, future—to make these three changes?

Five. What will it cost—in heart, spirit, health, vision, family, eternity—not to make these changes?