



Lesson 7: Daily Devotions

We've already learned about the necessity for both Bible intake and prayer. When we do both in a private situation, we usually call it "devotions" or having a "quiet time." Having devotions on a regular basis is a fundamental discipline of a mature Christian life. Why do we consider devotions to be a discipline?

What ought devotions to include?

Since we've previously studied the elements of a devotional life (i.e., Bible intake and prayer), we'll not cover that ground again. This lesson will focus on how to make the discipline of devotions a normal and important part of your life.

Bible Reading

Since reading the Bible is so important, we need a plan or strategy to do it. Here are some tips:

1. Make a commitment to do it. Devotions should not be an "if I have time" event. Instead, make room in your schedule so you have time to do it.
2. Determine what time of day you're going to do it. For many people, mornings are the best because it prepares you for the rest of the day. If the mornings won't work, find another time.
3. Find a quiet, comfortable spot away from distractions.
4. Before you start, ask God to help you understand. Make Psalm 25:4-5 your prayer.
5. Read according to a plan or schedule. Don't just flip open your Bible and start reading.

Potential plans:

- a. Read from various parts of the Bible
 - ♦ a section from the OT and from the NT. If you read 3 chapters from the OT and the NT daily, you'll get through the NT about 3 times in the time it takes to get through the OT.
 - ♦ from the Law (Gen-Deut), History (Josh - Esther), Poetry (Job - SoS), Prophets (Isa - Mal), and the NT
 - ♦ Start in Genesis, Job, and Matthew. If you read equal numbers of chapters in each section, you'll end at about the same time.
- b. Read the whole Bible through in a year. You can do so if you read 3-4 chapters every day. Follow a published plan, or buy a one-year Bible.
- c. Read sections repeatedly (this works especially well in the NT). Examples: loop through Luke-Romans, Galatians-Colossians, or 1 Thessalonians-Titus. Or read the same book over and over again. *What would be the benefits of doing this?*

- d. Read through a chronological Bible. This Bible arranges the information into a chronological order, so you read the events in the order in which they occurred. *By the way, there's nothing inspired about the format or set up of our Bibles. The traditional format is somewhat confusing because it doesn't follow a chronological order. Reading a chronological Bible is highly recommended—helps the reader make sense of the material better than how it is laid out traditionally.*
 - e. Read and meditate on a small passage (a paragraph or a chapter). Concentrate on understanding that passage very well.
 - f. Follow a published Bible reading schedule included in many devotional booklets and/or guides. *TableTalk*, published by RC Sproul's organization Ligonier Ministries, is a good example.
6. Read a portion that is comfortable for you, maybe 1-3 chapters.
7. Take notes as you read.
 - a. Outline the book. Note the major themes.
 - b. Write down questions and comments to study or discuss later.
 - c. Note verses you'd like to work on memorizing.
8. For a change of pace, read from a different version than you normally do.
 - a. Versions: The KJV is generally accurate and reliable, but the language is often quite difficult. The NKJV updates the language of the KJV without departing totally from the well-known phrasing and language of the KJV. The NASB is a good literal translation, as is the ESV. The NIV is quite interpretive, often giving the translator's view of what the author meant. Nevertheless, it's generally pretty accurate and is quite clear and readable. Avoid paraphrases (Living Bible, The Message).
 - b. Study Bibles: Explanatory notes can add much to your understanding of the text. The NIV Study Bible has a very good notes section. The Ryrie Study Bible has many helpful notes, as does the Reformation Study Bible. John MacArthur's study Bible is a good one. Various publishers put out Student Bibles, which are formatted especially for teens. As always, remember that the notes, while usually helpful, are not inspired and may be contrary to what you have been taught.
 - c. Parallel Bibles: These volumes have the text of several translations side by side so you can see how the different translators handled the text. This is especially helpful when one translation is unclear.
 - d. Interlinears: An interlinear Bible has the text of the original language (Hebrew or Greek) along side the English translation. Interlinears are especially helpful for those who have a basic knowledge of the original languages.
9. Use another book in conjunction with your reading, such as a good commentary, or a devotional book. Many devotional books include interesting stories but don't aid in your understanding of the text. Use those that explain the Bible or deal with significant doctrinal issues. *E.g., "Our Daily Bread" is often interesting to read, but is pretty light—not much in the way of explaining the text. Most teen-oriented devotion guides are the same.*

10. Read with a friend or a study group. Agree to read a certain section and then meet to discuss it.

Prayer

In our last lesson we covered this issue pretty thoroughly. Here are some reminders for effective prayer:

- ☐ Use the ACTS format:

Adoration (i.e., praising God for who he is) Nehemiah 9:6-7

Confession 1 John 1:9

Thanksgiving 1 Thes 5:18

Supplication Phil 4:6

- ☐ Pray briefly before you read the Bible, asking God for wisdom and enlightenment. As you read and meditate upon the Bible, you'll see principles or issues that you should pray about. Spend the majority of your prayer time after you've read the Bible.
- ☐ Use a prayer list. There are several available at church, or start your own. It's important to pray specifically. "God bless the missionaries" is a little too general.
 - ☐ Pray for others: parents, friends, pastor, church members, missionaries
 - ☐ Pray for events: church services, activities, mission work, plans
 - ☐ Pray for your self: confess sin, help with problems

You might want to break up your list into different things for each day of the week. That way you can pray briefly each day and still pray for many things within a week.

What about Fasting?

Biblically speaking, fasting is a voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual reasons. One may fast from food or from any number of regular activities like watching TV, using certain products, participating in certain events, etc. A fast is any time you refrain from doing something you usually do, for spiritual reasons. The Bible refers only to fasting from food.

The NT indicates that there will be times for fasting. Jesus stated more than once that his disciples would fast (Matt 6:16-17, 9:14-15, 17:21) and the early church participated in fasting (Acts 13:2, 14:23). However, Paul mentions it only once (1Cor 7:5) and does not suggest that fasting is a necessary part of the Christian life.

How is fasting related to prayer? Fasting is often associated with prayer (Ezra 8:23; Neh 1:4; Dan 9:3; Acts 13:3). Fasting brings a note of urgency and sincerity to our prayers. Fasting doesn't guarantee that God will answer prayer in the way that we desire, but it does show that we are serious and sincere about a matter. If you are facing a serious decision or have a significant prayer request, take meal times to pray instead of eating.

- ☐ Pray and fast for wisdom in making decisions (Acts 14:23)
- ☐ Pray and fast for deliverance or protection (Ezra 8:21-23; Esther 4:16).
- ☐ Pray and fast to express repentance for sin (1 Sam 7:6; Joel 2:12).
- ☐ Pray and fast to express and/or renew your dedication to God and to worship Him (Luke 2:37).

Conclusion: Discipline yourself to take time daily to meet with God in devotions. Bible reading and prayer are essential parts of the Christian life. Without them, there will be little if any growth or strength possible.

Discussion:

1. What do you see as the primary factors hindering your devotional life?
2. What do you have to do to overcome these obstacles?
3. Are there any valid excuses for not taking time for devotions?
4. Does it matter what physical position you take as you pray?
5. How often should one pray and fast?