



DEVELOPING A DEVOTIONAL HABIT

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Personal Relationship: A Christian is one who has a personal relationship with God. It's not about how much doctrine you know or how well you obey God's law. It's all about how well you know and love the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the essence of developing a devotional habit—it's all about a personal relationship with the living God.

Communication: As in any inter-personal relationship, the most important tool to develop and maintain the relationship is *communication*.

- A Christian *hears* from God primarily through the Bible
- A Christian *speaks* to God primarily through prayer

Therefore devotions should focus on these two elements. Other things may be a part of devotions, but the Word of God and prayer must be at the center. These are the two key ingredients to effective communication with God.

How often should I have devotions?

Daily. If the essence of Christianity is personal relationship with God, then personal devotion to God must be a daily exercise.

What should I do during my devotional time?

1. Find a quiet time and place to reserve for your personal devotions.
2. Begin with prayer asking God for wisdom to understand the Scriptures and to open your heart to His will.
3. Read a passage of Scripture. There are many plans available to guide a Christian in reading through the Bible. To start with, try reading a chapter or two from the Gospel of Mark or John every day. The Psalms also provide good devotional material.
4. Think about any new concepts you have learned, what you discovered about God from the reading, and how to apply it to your life today.
5. Close with an extended time of prayer.

How can I make my devotional time more rich and meaningful?

1. Be deliberate about focusing on the character of God. In every story and teaching that you read in the Bible, think about what it teaches on the character of God.
2. Be thorough in self-examination. For instance, when you're reading about a particular sin, carefully search your own heart to see if you would potentially have any tendencies towards that sin.
3. Be quick to focus on the work of Christ on the cross. This is especially important as you learn more about the holiness of the character of God and the indwelling sinfulness of your own heart. For every glance at your own sin, take ten long looks at the cross.

What else can I do during my devotions?

1. Memorize meaningful Scripture verses. Memorizing God's Word will enable you to control your thought life and will make you more alert and observant about sin in your life. Your teaching skills and confidence will be strengthened, and discipline will be established in your life. Here is a suggested list of memory verses on key subjects (the bold ones are key texts to begin with).

- Psalm 19:1 – General Revelation
- **2 Timothy 3:16-17 – Inspiration of Scripture**
- 2 Peter 1:20-21 – Inspiration of Scripture
- Psalm 119:105 – Word of God
- Hebrews 4:12-13 – Power of Scripture
- Isaiah 8:20 – Authority of Scripture
- **Deuteronomy 6:4-5 – Monotheism**
- **Isaiah 46:9-11 – Sovereignty of God**
- **James 1:17 – Immutability of God**
- **Isaiah 6:1-5 – Holiness of God**
- 1 Peter 1:15-16 – Holiness of God
- **Revelation 1:8 – Eternality of God**
- Romans 11:33 – Wisdom of God
- 2 Chronicles 16:9 – Omniscience of God
- Psalm 7:11-12 – Justice of God
- Lamentations 3:22-23 – Mercy of God
- 1 John 4:18-19 – Love of God
- **Romans 5:8 – Love of God**
- **John 15:26 – Holy Spirit**
- **John 1:14 – Incarnation**
- Galatians 4:4-5 – Incarnation
- Acts 2:22-24 – Life of Christ
- **John 10:30 – Deity of Christ**
- Isaiah 9:6 – Messiah
- Hebrews 2:17-18 – Priesthood of Christ
- **2 Corinthians 5:21 – Substitution of Christ**
- Isaiah 53:5-6 – Atonement of Christ
- Philippians 2:8-11 – Glorification of Christ
- **1 Timothy 2:5-6 – Mediator**
- John 14:6 – Christ
- **Hebrews 13:8 – Christ**
- Genesis 1:1 – Creation of the World
- **Genesis 1:26 – Creation of Man**
- Exodus 20:1-17 – Ten Commandments
- **Romans 3:23 – Sin**
- Jeremiah 17:9 – Depravity of the Heart
- **Romans 6:23 – Penalty of Sin**
- **1 Timothy 1:15 – Gospel**
- Romans 1:16-17 – Gospel
- **2 Corinthians 5:17 – Regeneration**
- John 3:5-6 – Regeneration
- Hebrews 11:1 – Faith
- Acts 4:12 – Faith
- **John 3:14-16 – Faith**
- **Acts 2:38 – Repentance**
- **1 John 1:9 – Confession**
- Proverbs 28:13 – Confession
- Psalm 103:3-4 – Forgiveness
- Romans 5:18 – Representative Justification
- **Ephesians 2:8-9 – Justification by Faith**
- **Romans 3:28 – Justification by Faith**
- **Romans 8:1 – Justification**
- **Galatians 2:20 – Union with Christ**
- Romans 6:4 – New life
- **Romans 8:15 – Adoption**
- Titus 3:4-7 – Grace
- **2 Corinthians 12:9 – Sufficiency of Grace**
- 1 John 5:13 – Assurance of Salvation
- 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 – Sanctification
- **Ephesians 1:22-23 – Church**
- Proverbs 1:7 – Fear of the Lord
- Revelation 5:12-13 – Worship
- **John 4:24 – Worship**
- Luke 17:20-21 – Kingdom of God
- Mark 11:24-26 – Prayer
- Matthew 9:38 – Prayer (missions)
- **Matthew 6:9-13 – Lord's Prayer**
- Colossians 3:2 – Holiness in thought
- Hebrews 2:18 – Temptation
- **1 Corinthians 10:13 – Temptation**
- Galatians 5:22-23 – Fruit of the Spirit
- **1 John 4:7-8 – Love**
- Philippians 4:4-8 – Joy
- John 14:27 – Peace
- **Philippians 4:11-13 – Contentment**
- Isaiah 57:15 – Humility
- 1 Samuel 2:3 – Humility
- **Ephesians 6:11-17 – Armor of God**
- **Proverbs 16:18-21 – Pride**
- Obadiah 3 – Pride
- James 1:19-20 – Anger
- Proverbs 26:20 – Gossip
- Proverbs 20:33-34 – Laziness
- 1 John 4:18 – Fear
- **Psalm 23 – Loneliness**
- James 1:2-3 – Suffering

- Hebrews 12:11 – Discipline of God
- Proverbs 3:11-12 – Correction
- Psalm 42:11 – Discouragement
- Psalm 73:26 – Weariness
- **Isaiah 40:31 – Renewal of Strength**
- Hosea 6:1-3 – Renewal
- Nehemiah 4:6 – Work
- James 1:22 – Obedience
- **Romans 12:1-2 – Service**
- **Matthew 28:18-20 – Great Commission**
- Matthew 5:13-16 – Testimony
- Romans 10:13-15 – Preaching
- **1 Peter 3:15 – Apologetics (defending the faith)**
- Proverbs 12:15 – Counsel
- 1 Timothy 4:12 – Youth
- Psalm 48:14 – Death
- Revelation 10:15 – Hell
- **Revelation 7:16-17 – Heaven**
- Philippians 3:20-21 – Glorification

2. Keep a prayer journal, being careful to note when and how God answers your prayers. Write out what you prayed for, being as specific as possible. Review your prayers often noting which ones God has answered, and how. Be careful, however, not to let all your prayers become self-focused. Learn how to use Scripture to direct your prayers. Pray through some of the Psalms, journaling your thoughts and insights.

“Begin and end the day with prayer, but content not yourself with an indolent or hurried exercise of devotion without heart or meaning, and a cursory or irregular glancing at a passage of Scripture, under an idea of satisfying conscience, or doing your duty. Consider seriously the chief end of the appointment, as the prescribed channel of intercourse with God. Your strength, success, and preservation from evil, all depend on communion with Him. Everything will go well or ill with you, in proportion as you are brought into contact with the divine Spirit. In reading the Bible (I am now speaking of religion and its practical application to your heart and conscience, and not of theology as a science and profession), take a few verses, and meditate and pray over them till you get the spirit and meaning of them wrought into your soul. If you do not understand a passage, you may apply to a commentator for explanation; otherwise be your own expositor—preach to your own heart and feed on the Word of God amidst the aspiration of prayer and praise, and heavenly thought and affections. Examine yourself by it, to obtain conviction of sin, and to discover your defects and besetments. Look forward to the probably events of the day, and seek grace and help to meet trial and improve opportunity.” ~ Legh Richmond (1772-1827)

3. Sing a hymn or chorus of praise to God. It doesn't matter if you don't think you have a good voice because God simply asks you to make a joyful noise to the Lord (He does not require a beautiful or perfect noise). Here are some classic hymns to utilize during your devotional time.

PRAISE AND WORSHIP TO GOD

- Holy, Holy, Holy
- Great is Thy Faithfulness
- O Worship the King
- Immortal, Invisible
- Praise to the Lord, the Almighty
- How Firm a Foundation
- A Mighty Fortress is Our God
- Come Thou Almighty King
- To God be the Glory
- This is My Father's World

PRAISE TO JESUS CHRIST

- Fairest Lord Jesus
- Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus
- Joy to the World
- O Sacred Head Now Wounded
- When I Survey the Wondrous Cross
- Christ the Lord is Risen Today
- Crown Him with Many Crowns
- All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name
- Arise, My Soul, Arise

SALVATION BY GRACE

- Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing
- Amazing Grace
- Rock of Ages
- O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus
- My Hope is Built on Nothing Less
- Nothing But the Blood of Jesus

SANCTIFICATION

- Love Divine, All Loves Excelling
- Take My Life and Let it Be
- My Jesus I Love Thee
- More Love to Thee, O Christ
- Have Thine Own Way, Lord
- It is Well With My Soul
- Like a River Glorious
- Savior Like a Shepherd Lead Us
- Leaning on the Everlasting Arms

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

- Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken
- The Church's One Foundation
- For All the Saints
- We Gather Together

4. Do a word study on an important or unknown word using a concordance. Many Study Bibles have a short concordance at the back. For a comprehensive study, refer to an exhaustive concordance such as *Strongs*. All the occurrences of that word in the Bible will be listed. As you look up each reference, classify them according to what is taught in each verse. When you are finished, you will have a good summary outline of the Scriptural teaching on that word. Here are some suggested words to study.

- Holiness
- Glory of God
- Faith
- Regeneration (New Birth)
- Justified
- Repentance
- Confession
- Heart
- Body of Christ
- Disciple
- Propitiation
- Redemption
- Adoption
- Worship
- Service
- Love
- Peace
- Baptism
- Heaven
- Money
- Tongue

5. Study a central topic or doctrine in depth. Here is would be helpful to read a book along with Scripture to guide your thoughts in biblical doctrine. Here are some key doctrines along with a good book presenting the biblical teaching on the subject.

- Character of God – *The Holiness of God* by R.C. Sproul, or *The Attributes of God*, by A.W. Pink
- Jesus Christ – *More Than a Carpenter*, by Josh McDowell
- Scripture – *Sola Scriptura*, by various authors
- Indwelling Sin – *The Enemy Within*, by Kris Lundgaard
- The Cross – *The Cross of Christ*, by John Stott
- Justification – *All of Grace*, by Charles Spurgeon, or *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, by John Murray
- Spiritual Disciplines – *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, by Don Whitney, or *The Disciplines of Grace*, by Jerry Bridges

6. Do a more detailed Bible study of a particular passage of Scripture. Use the following Bible study method.

Write out the text at the top of your page.

OBSERVATION – What does this passage say?

- a. Observe the context (outline or summarize preceding and following passages).
- b. Observe the content (gather the facts).
 - 1) Who is speaking?
 - 2) To whom is it being spoken?
 - 3) What is happening in this passage?
 - 4) What are the results?
 - 5) When does this happen?
 - 6) Where does this happen?
 - 7) Why does this happen?
 - 8) How does this happen?
- c. List any key words or repeated words.

d. Determine the literary form.

- 1) Didactic (teaching)
- 2) Historical narrative
- 3) Parable
- 4) Poetry
- 5) Prophetic

INTERPRETATION – What does this passage mean?

- a. Write out the main idea of this passage based on the observation.
- b. Expand any concepts or difficult words by asking, “What does that mean?”
- c. Compare the main theme with other passages of Scripture that deal with the same topics.

APPLICATION – How do I use this teaching?

- a. Categorize the main idea of this passage. Which of the following is it?
 - 1) Truth to believe
 - 2) Promise to trust
 - 3) Attitude to change
 - 4) Action to take or to avoid
 - 5) Sin to confess and forsake
 - 6) Command to obey
 - 7) Example to follow or to avoid
- b. Formulate principles stated in your own words that you should believe or do.
- c. Relate this principle to your life and write out specific application situations.

What are the enemies to having personal devotions?

- *The World (1 John 2:15-17)*. There is so much to do in a day and there are so many things to distract you from spending quiet time in personal devotion to God. It is very easy to find excuses—sometimes legitimate excuses—to skip your devotions. But do not let the things of this world dull your spiritual senses and pull you away from your devotional time. If you don't make it a priority, the world will quickly squeeze it out.
- *The Flesh (Mark 14:38)*. Many times you will find that you desire to enter into personal devotion with God, but your flesh is weak. You may find yourself dozing off while you are trying to pray, or your mind may wander while you are reading Scripture. Be vigorous in your commitments to follow through because your spiritual well being and growth is at stake.
- *The Devil (1 Peter 5:8)*. If you determine to meet with God on a daily basis, you can count on it that Satan will be determined to see that you fail. Never forget that you are not just wrestling against the weaknesses and sinfulness of your own flesh, but you are also doing spiritual warfare against the devil. Prepare yourself in advance with the spiritual armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-17).

What are some of the results of maintaining personal devotions?

- Your *knowledge of God* will increase.
- Your *love of Christ* will deepen.
- Your *worship* will be enhanced.
- Your *victory over sin* will become successful.
- Your *desire to serve* will grow.
- Your *effectiveness to lead* will be strengthened.
- Your *counsel* will be sought by others.

Keep the Main Thing the Main Thing

The main thing is the gospel of Jesus Christ. This should be the primary focus of every devotional time—get in the habit of preaching the gospel to yourself every day. As sin is exposed in your heart, go quickly to the cross of Christ to see how your sin has been paid for by Christ's death. Linger at the cross, reflecting on God's undeserved love for you through Jesus Christ. When guilt or condemnation overcomes you, remind yourself that you are not saved by your own works, but by the works and righteousness of Jesus Christ. When you are tempted to pride or self-sufficiency, remind yourself that you can do nothing apart from Christ, but that through Christ you can do all things. When your passion wanes, remind yourself of the glorious gospel of the One who is Altogether Lovely.