

Real Devotional Life

Adapted from Tim Casteel's *Spending Time Daily in God's Word*.

George Mueller (1805-1898), who is famous for founding orphanages in Bristol, England, and for depending on God for meeting all his needs, at age seventy six, wrote what he had learned from over fifty years of ministry: *"I saw more clearly than ever, that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord."*

How did he do that?

Now . . . I would give a few hints to my younger fellow believers as to the way in which to keep up spiritual enjoyment. It is absolutely needful . . . we should read regularly through the Scriptures, consecutively, and not pick out here and there a chapter. If we do, we remain spiritual dwarfs. I tell you so affectionately. For the first four years after my conversion I made no progress, because I neglected the Bible. Now I have been doing this for 47 years. I have read through the whole Bible about 100 times and I always find it fresh when I begin again. Thus my peace and joy have increased more and more.

I saw that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the word of God, and to meditation on it. . . . What is the food of the inner man? Not prayer, but the word of God; and . . . not the simple reading of the word of God, so that it only passes through our minds, just as water runs through a pipe, but considering what we read, pondering over it, and applying it to our hearts.

So how do we consistently spend time in God's Word daily feeding on the bread of life?

Two helpful steps:

1. Have a plan

Often, the number one obstacle to spending time in God's Word is lack of planning. We sit down to read, flip around a little in the Bible and, finding nothing that catches our eye, close it again. The solution is rather simple — make a plan of what you are going to read when you sit down to read God's Word. A great goal is reading through the Bible in a year, and reading in a couple different places at a time when you are in areas of Scripture that are more difficult to understand.

What to Do When You Sit Down to Read the Bible

Before you open God's Word, pray: confess any known sin and ask God to open your eyes and allow you to focus. Ask to be able to see Him clearly in scripture and for Him to change your heart as you read.

As you read, ask these 3 questions of the text:

1. What do you learn about God in this passage (who He is/what He does)?
2. What do you learn about yourself in this passage (who I should be/how I fall short)?
3. How does this passage point me to Jesus and my need to be saved (how do you see the grace of God in this passage)?

Read with a pen in your hand or a computer on which to type. This slows you down enough to really think about and write down what you are reading. Remember: the goal is not to get it done. The goal is to get God's Word inside of you and be changed by it. The goal is to see Christ clearly. The means is meditation—slow and thoughtful reading.

End in a time of prayer. Pray through the verses you've just read: asking for forgiveness, thanking God for who He is & His grace toward sinners, asking God to allow you to live out what you've just read. Lay out your day & your requests before God.

Take a minute right now to think through and write down:

1. When you will spend time with God? ("I will wake up at ___ A.M. and spend ___ minutes praying and reading God's Word")
2. Where you will spend time with God? (at your kitchen table, at _____ coffee shop, at Chick-fil-A (easily the most spiritual option); lying down in bed is not recommended)
3. What you will read when you spend time with God?

2. Do it in the Morning

"In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly." Psalm 5:3

Though there is ample evidence in the Bible of Jesus and others spending time with God in the morning, morning quiet times are not commanded in the Bible. And I realize roughly .001% of college students are "morning people." But there is a reason I would HIGHLY recommend spending time with God every morning:

It Refills Your Empty Spiritual Tanks

*I earnestly recommend that it be in the early morning, unless there are some extenuating circumstances. Entering the day without a serious meeting with God, over his Word and in prayer, is like entering the battle without tending to your weapons. It's like taking a trip without filling the tires with air or the tank with gas. The human heart does not replenish itself with sleep. The body does, but not the heart. The spiritual air leaks from our tires, and the gas is consumed in the day. We replenish our hearts not with sleep, but with the Word of God and prayer. Thousands of saints have discovered through the centuries that starting the day by filling the mind with the Word of God will bring more joy and more love and more power than traveling on yesterday's gas. (John Piper from his book *When I Don't Desire God*)*

It Allows You to Focus

But perhaps even more important than filling the spiritual tank is this: meeting with God in the morning allows you to be free from distraction. It is often easier to quiet our minds and spend time with Jesus before we get into the business of the day. A few tips I've found helpful to reduce distractions:

- Give yourself an adequate amount of time, so that you will not feel rushed to get on to the tasks of the day.
- Set an alarm on your phone for when you need to be done (to start getting ready for the day), and then set your phone to the side. This will prevent your phone from being a source of distraction when you use it to check the time.
- Have sticky notes or a notepad nearby so if a distraction comes to mind, you can quickly write it down and not have to worry about until after your devotional time.

As Christians, we need to be constantly growing in two things:

- Our understanding of who God is in order to see clearly His holiness and awesome might
- Our understanding of the depth of our own sin

That's the goal for the rest of our lives as Christians. How do we grow in those two areas? By reading God's Word. As we do that daily, the gospel will become more amazing in our eyes.

Relevant Scriptures:

- 2 Timothy 3:16-17
- 2 Peter 3:15-16
- Joshua 1:8
- Acts 17:11

Questions for Discussion:

What could your life look like if you were to meditate on Scripture daily, in the way that is described in the article?

What does your current devotional life rhythm look like? What is your plan, and how might you change your plan in response to the article?

What challenges do you face in developing a consistent, deep devotional life?

Further Reading

- PROAPT, under 1-on-1 Resources at xaatuva.com
- The Power of Memorizing Scripture, under 1-on-1 Resources at xaatuva.com
- *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart

