

Devotional Life (Part 3)

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[0:00] We have just a little bit to cover and I'll be finished with all this section that I've called the devotional life.

We're studying, of course, the subject of spiritual formation. At least that's what many call it and that's a good enough thing to call it, spiritual formation.

And specifically in the area of the devotional life, next time we'll look at prayer more specifically. So getting a little bit more fine-tuned in the course of our study.

Okay, now what I want to finish with, and I guess all we've got the notes there, the interactive guide. I've got some more over there.

What we're going to be looking at tonight is reading the Bible devotionally. We all know that, you know, especially those of you who are Sunday school teachers, and there's several right in here, right in this room, and I'm a preacher, so I know, you know, that, you know, to some extent we've learned how to study the Bible in preparation for teaching.

[1:26] And that's all very good, to study the Bible in that way, for that particular purpose. But we also need to study the Bible devotionally.

And there is a difference between the two. And I suppose one primary difference is really kind of inside of us.

Maybe the difference lies with our outlook, our goal, our objective. If our objective to study the Scripture is only so that we can share it with someone else, then it's very easy to allow our study in what God has to say in the Scripture to bypass us and not be allowed to speak to us.

So, you know, there's that pitfall, that danger. If you're a teacher, a preacher, there is always that pitfall to always be approaching the Scripture with this idea.

I'm approaching it to share it with somebody else. And so we need to read it devotionally. And there's just some practical, maybe some practical advice that I would give you about that and divided this into kind of three parts and alliterated, so maybe you can remember it.

[2:49] And the first one, just simply read it. That sounds real profound, doesn't it? And, of course, you didn't know that. If I hadn't told you that you should read it, then you would never know that, would you?

Well, of course, you know reading it. But let's flesh that out a little bit. How should we read it? If we're going to read it devotionally, how should we read it? Well, we should read it with a quiet body and mind.

A quiet body and mind. And one of my favorite verses in the Bible, certainly in the Psalms, is Psalm 46:10. Be still and know that I am God.

Every time I read that or quote that, I always have a tendency to slow down. Be still. And when I use that or that verse comes to mind during my devotional time or at other times in my life, whenever that verse comes to my mind, always comes to my mind at an opportune time.

When I am just so busy and my mind is just so busy, whether it is in my quiet time or even in my sermon preparation time.

[4:07] Or even unrelated activities. You know, that is unrelated to my vocation. Our minds can just get so busy.

We're just racing. We're just thinking. And we just have all these things, all the stimulus, maybe even stimulus. And sometimes this verse will just come to mind. And I'm always compelled to, if I don't quote it out loud, I do in my own heart and mind.

Be still. Be still. Okay. Be still. And know that I am God. Do you know how to quiet your mind and your body?

And I'm not talking about, you know, some Eastern mysticism, you know, yoga. Or, you know, there are, God help us, those out there that, you know, have put together this kind of Christian yoga kind of thing.

I don't think we ought to be affiliated or connected in any way to Eastern religion, transcendental meditation, or whatever other terms are used. But do you know how to quiet your mind and quiet your body?

[5:20] It takes some discipline. It takes some determination. Whether it is during your quiet time or maybe it's on a Sunday morning or Sunday evening during a worship service.

Does your mind wander at all during the worship service? No, I'm glad that it doesn't. Not usually. Well, thank you, Teresa. Well, you know, sometimes we can enter into the time of worship in the corporate sense.

And, you know, our mind is just thinking about so many different things. Can you, have you ever just stopped and said, now wait to yourself.

All right, I got this going on over here in my family. Maybe it's an extended family issue. Can I just put that aside right now?

[6:19] I'm just not going to think about that right now. Or, some major decision in life. Or maybe even some trivial thing. You ought to stop yourself and even ask the Lord to help you.

Say, God, let's just, would you help me just put that aside for now? That doesn't mean they're not important. But let's just put them aside. And, you know, shut those mouths, you know, shut them for now.

You be quiet. And let me focus on God. Or focus on the Word of God being preached. Or focus on the Word of God being presented in song.

As I'm participating in that worship. In every element of our worship service. Get quiet in your body, you know. Are you fidgety? I'm kind of one of these guys when I sit down.

Suddenly my legs going like this. Anybody like that in you? And it's just a nervous little habit. But I can't. I have discovered that I can stop that if I want to.

[7:25] All right. And so we just need to quiet our body. Quiet our mind. To bring it down to one thing we're focusing on.

And maybe it's that particular Bible verse or text that we're reading through devotionally. That's what we're talking about here. Reading the Bible devotionally.

Just focus on that one thing. Now God, what do you want to say to me here? That's why I think I mentioned last week, week before, whenever it was, that I like to take the Scripture and write it out as I'm reading it.

And it slows your mind down. And it becomes much more visual. And it not only slows your mind down, but it also forces you to focus.

I mean, when you're writing something, you have to use a good deal of your attention more than you would just reading something. Because, you know, you can read something and suddenly you're thinking about something else and you may go a whole paragraph.

[8:34] I mean, you're still reading somehow, some way. Has this ever happened to you? And you've gone a whole paragraph, maybe to the end of the page. But then you realize, I don't have any idea what I just read.

I was thinking about something else. And yet, you know, the mind is so complex that somehow it can continue to read at the same time. I don't understand it. But when you write it down, or maybe it's just a portion of a passage, you know, maybe a key part of a verse, you know, let me just write that down.

And what does that say? Maybe write it two or three times. And it just slows you down. So you quiet your mind, quiet your body. Be still and know that I am God.

And I'm giving you this example. Well, it's the classic example, the examples of Martha and Mary in Luke chapter 10, verses 38 to 42. And I don't even, I mean, as soon as I mention that, you know pretty much what I'm going to say.

Now, I have a hard time. Sometimes I think Martha gets a bad rap, maybe more than she deserves. And yet, there's no getting around it.

[9:44] We can see two very distinct characteristics in these two sisters. And Mary, the Bible says very clearly, sat at Jesus' feet and heard his word.

Now, that's very clear, very deliberate. And I believe that Luke, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote it just like that because there's a message there.

So, this is Mary. She sat at Jesus' feet. Martha, on the other hand, is what? She's distracted with much serving. Anything wrong with serving?

Well, nothing wrong with serving. My goodness, I'd be the last person to say, well, you know, you don't really need to serve. I'll just, you know, Jonathan and I and Chris, we'll just do everything. And you don't have to do anything here in the church. All right. The opposite.

[10:49] Opposite of that. Okay. All right. You know what I'm saying. So, service is important. Service is good. We need to be serving. But when it comes to reading God's word devotionally or sitting in a worship service and listening to the proclamation of God's word, we need to focus on that.

And we need to consider ourselves sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to his word, hearing his word, rather than being distracted with much serving.

We can be distracted with much serving even when we're not serving. We can just be so distracted in our minds with thinking about it and wondering about it and fretting about it.

You know, and on and on we could go. Whether it's church related or family related or work related or whatever it may be. Jesus said, Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things.

But one thing is needed. And Mary has chosen that good part. It's just a wonderful, very instructive passage. And, you know, don't worry about Martha.

[12:04] I mean, you know, we need to consider what Jesus is saying to us. We need to sit at his feet. We need to hear his word. And we need to have a receptive heart.

James 1.21. Receive with meekness the implanted word. Now, what does that verse mean? Well, I don't know if I broke this out for you in your notes.

Receive means to take it in. Embrace it. When you're reading God's word, don't just read so that you can fulfill the duty.

Or check it off on your read through the Bible in one year list. You know, or whatever. So that when you're done, you say, well, I've done that.

And look at me. I'm great. I'm keeping up with my... And I'm going to read through the Bible. But if you are not taking it in, receiving it, even if it's just one part of it, if you don't get anything out of it, what good is it?

[13:06] Not good for anything, really. You know, I don't think that you'll be handing out any awards in heaven because you read through the Bible more than anybody else.

Now, I'm all for reading through the Bible. So, please don't misunderstand me. And if you're on that kind of a program right now, or maybe you have a devotional Bible that does that, a one-year Bible, then keep at it.

Just make sure that even if it takes you a little longer or even if you risk it a little behind by not completing that whole section that you needed to read, take some time to at least focus on a part of that that God would be speaking to you with and embrace it.

That's what James 1.21 means when it says receive. And then when it says with meekness, that means with submission, submissive attitude, a teachable spirit.

Like that fat, you know, that Kim was talking about and the fat boy is here. Know about faithful, available, and teachable.

[14:19] We need to be teachable. So, that's what it means to receive with meekness the implanted, the given word. Mentally, spiritually, emotionally, how do you approach the word of God?

Ask yourself these questions. How do you approach it when you read it? How do you approach it when you hear it? Just to get it done or to hear something?

When you hear it taught and preached. So, there's several different kind of venues where we are engaged with the word of God.

We read it for ourselves or when we hear it, hear it taught, hear it preached, Sunday school class, worship service. Maybe you tune in to one of your favorite preachers on the radio or maybe on the TV.

You know, as long as that's a good one. There are a lot of really bad ones, radio and TV. But, how do you approach it? I mean, at all three levels.

[15:24] Mentally, spiritually, emotionally. How do you approach it when you hear it taught? Hear it preached? Do you focus? Do you listen? Do you allow it to sink into your heart?

Or, when you study it and meditate upon it. How do you approach the word of God? When you prepare to teach it. It is another kind of venue, another context of this.

And, again, several of you are teachers. How do you approach the word of God when you are preparing to teach it? And, consider all of these various ways.

Alright, then, number two. I'm going to read it. Read systematically through the Bible. I think this is very important. It's interesting, when you think about it, how many people approach, their approach to reading the Bible is so totally different than their approach to reading any other book.

You don't pick up, you know, maybe a classic or, you know, a novel or any other book.

[16:38] You don't just pick it up and just turn to the middle of it somewhere and read a paragraph of it. Do you? Now, maybe some of you have been tempted to turn to the last page and read the last part of the book.

And, then I'll find out what happened. Then, I don't have to worry about the rest of it. Now, none of you would ever do that. So, why is it that we have a tendency to want to cherry pick verses out of Scripture and read a little bit here and a little bit there and a little bit over there.

And, let's see, what will I read this morning during my quiet time? You know, I haven't read anything out of Judges for a while. And, so, you turn over to Judges. Or, the Psalms.

You know, we just pick out one. You don't read books that way. We ought to kind of discipline ourselves and make it our, kind of our regimen to read through a book of the Bible.

Just like you would read any other book. Read slowly. Read slowly. Oh, by the way, let me back up a minute. And, this is not in your notes. But, I know that you've noticed that your preacher generally preaches through books of the Bible.

[17:53] And, why do I do that? Well, number one, because that's how you read a book. I've already covered that. Number two, there is much less danger of taking a verse out of its context.

You know, just picking a verse here and preaching on it. There's always that danger of making it say something the author never intended for it to say. Reading or preaching through books of the Bible.

And, these principles apply to our reading of it as well. Reading or preaching through a book of the Bible helps us understand the author's theme that runs through the Scripture.

That we may never see if we just pick a chapter here or a few verses there and then go on to some other book. And, I could list many, many other benefits to it.

So, we ought to read systematically. Read slowly. Do not hesitate to pause. Do not hesitate to pause.

[19:06] So, you need to pause. You need to hesitate. You know, take some time. Stop. And, I know, I know you're thinking that I just am totally against this reading through the Bible in a year.

But, I can't help but say, or at least give the caution, that if, you know, there's so much pressure to read that whole block of Scripture so that you can keep on the schedule, so much pressure that you don't pause a moment, or you don't have time to, then you're going to miss something.

You're going to miss something that God wants to say to you. You need to, when you read Scripture, you need to plan for enough time to be able to pause.

Pause. Take time to look at a single verse. You know, just stop. You say, just wait a minute here. What did that say?

And you read it again. Not only a single verse, but a portion of the verse. Even one word. Even one word.

[20:30] I believe in the divine inspiration of Scripture. I mean, it's God-breathed. And it's inerrant. There aren't any mistakes in God's Word.

I believe not only that it's inspired as a whole, but it's inspired in its parts. Even down to the very words.

That's called verbal inspiration. That means each individual word is inspired by the Holy Spirit. And so if each individual word is inspired by the Holy Spirit, then each individual word is a word from God.

And it's there for a reason. And you can learn from it. Now, I know, you know, not, you know, pause on every single word.

But you know that you know, I have preached on one word. We can study one word. And mine from it everything that is there.

[21:39] And so, pause, take time to read and look very intently at a single portion of Scripture.

And then keep a notebook to write down those things that speak to your heart. Make a note. Now, I, my habit is to write it in the margin of my Bible.

Or in some space that is there. some people have a problem with that. And that's okay. You know, they, you know, the idea that maybe I'm marring God's holy word and have a certain level of reverence for it.

And I don't have a problem with that. You'll just have to make your decision about that. But make notes on a piece of paper or something.

You know, my problem is I jot down some notes and then I don't know, in another month, I don't know where the note went. But I've got it there in my Bible. The Bible I use when I have my quiet time.

[22:48] Okay. So that's reading. Second heading is reflect upon it. And we've kind of covered this ground a little bit already. So this is a bit of an overlap.

Number one, meditate upon the Word of God. I cannot stress that more. Meditation. So very important. Joshua 1.8 This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it.

For then you will make your way prosperous. Then you will have good success. meditation is so very important. Number two, understand the meaning of meditation.

And this really is an overlap because I've dealt with this a number of times already. But just several thoughts about the meaning of meditation. Pondering words one by one, just reading it slowly and focusing on a word, one right after the other, verses, use your brain, think.

A professor liked to say that all the time. He said, brethren, think. Think. You know, it was like it never occurred to us.

[24:17] Are we supposed to think? You know, before you go find out what John MacArthur said about it, that's one of the here I'm going to not only criticize the reading through the Bible in a year, but I'm also going to give you a bit of a criticism about study Bibles.

How many of you have a study Bible? All right. Anything wrong with them? Well, no. There is one pitfall. That is that you can kind of slip into a false confidence that the guy who wrote the study notes is right on everything.

the Word of God is inspired, but John MacArthur is not inspired when he writes. Now, I love John MacArthur.

I read his commentary. I don't think there's a time I get up to preach that I haven't eventually read what he had to say about it, as I do with as many theologians and preachers as I can get my hands on.

But they're not right about everything, and they're not inspired. Now, they may be right about things, they may have correctly interpreted the scripture, and I think for some of those, some of my favorites, I think more times than not, way more times than not, they got it right, I think.

[25:56] But they're still not inspired, and they're not inerrant. And so be careful that you don't kind of have this false kind of sense of assurance or confidence that what is said below the little line below the scriptures on that page, what is said or written below there, that that's always right.

And the other problem with it is that it removes all need to think. You don't have to think about it. You've just read what it means, because you know, whoever did the study, study Bible, they have told you what it means.

So you don't have to think about it. And that's kind of like what our culture has evolved into here in America. We want everything fed to us. We don't want to have to work for it.

We don't want to have to study hard. Why don't you just tell me what it means? Okay? And then I'll know. So we don't have to use our brains, and so we don't use our brains.

But we need to think. There's one thing I do religiously when I preach, prepare to preach. I do something that a professor of mine taught me way back there in seminary, not my doctorate, but when I worked on my master's.

[27:24] And he forced us in the course of our, this course on preaching, sermon building, he forced us with every sermon to write 20 pages of what he called creative meditation.

Creative meditation. And all the world it is, is you're reading the take, not looking at commentaries, before you look at commentaries, you know, before you look at the study Bibles, or do word studies, or, you know, all the other kind of preparation tools that are out there.

You just have the Bible, and your notepad. And you read it, and you just write down what your mind, what you're thinking about as you're reading that scripture.

It's creative meditation. And sometimes, you know, maybe some weird thing, something that just, I never thought of that, you just jot it down, it may be absolutely wrong, it may just be nuts, some of the things you might write down.

And then, of course, in the course of your in-depth study of the text, the word studies, and the dictionaries, and then eventually the commentaries, which really ought to come last. I've likened it to this, here's the preacher sitting at his desk, and he's studying, his door is shut so he can be alone and quiet, and he's studying, he's preparing, and there's a knock on the door, and it's Spurgeon out there.

[28:53] He wants to come in and tell me about this text. And so I say, go away, Spurgeon, I'm not ready for you, and then another knock, and it's John MacArthur, and then another knock, and it's some other theologian, and we've got to keep the door shut until we have a time to just think about that text.

So, you know, I think that can apply, cross over into our own, you know, even study of the scripture among the laity. When you are studying it, or meditating upon it, or just reading it devotionally, use your brain.

Think about it. Just think. What does this say? Okay? Memorize it. Memorize the portion of the passage that God uses to speak to you that day.

If you want to memorize an entire verse, if you really are good at memorization, and you want to memorize the entire chapter, that's up to you, but at least read and re-read enough of those portions of the passage that God just chooses to speak to you about, or through.

Then you can memorize that short little thing, and get it down, and then see how often it will come back to you throughout the day, and that's part of meditation. Meditation, again, is inseparably linked to memorization, some measure of memorization.

[30:21] You can't meditate on something you don't have in there. All right. Apply the passage to your life, of course, words. And the Holy Spirit, if we'll be quiet and listen, the Holy Spirit will do that.

Maybe not during the time when you're doing your devotional, not always then, but sometime throughout the day, you're thinking about that, and something will come up, something will happen, you experience something, and that will come back to you, you know, that applies here.

So, very important. Wait? Okay? Okay. All right. Chew on it over and over throughout the day. I've already mentioned this very crude explanation of the word meditation, and it really does come from a word in the Hebrew that means to chew the cud.

All right? And then finally, react to it. All right, so we have read it, we have reflect upon it, and we have react to it.

The Bible is not an academic book to be studied. It's not just an academic book to be studied. It is a life oriented book that God means to transform you, to transform your life.

[31:44] So don't put the Bible on the same level as all other good books. books, and there may be a lot of them out there.

None of them are inspired in the sense that the Bible is inspired. The Bible is unique in that sense, in the truest sense of the word inspiration, because it is in spirit.

It is God breathed. God means to transform me with. It is not just a Bible as kind of a literary exercise or just to put it on the same par as other good books and interesting books, fiction or non-fiction.

It is meant to transform your life. So this is how we ought to react to it. We ought to approach the scripture. What I am reading today, God means to transform me with.

Some part of me, some part of my life, some part about the way I think about things, and a host of other things.

[32:54] Number two, the Bible is a book to be obeyed. I bet you never knew that. James 1. 22, be doers of the word and not hearers only.

And then Matthew 7, 24 to 27, therefore, whoever hears these sayings of mine and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock.

We know this part of a portion of Jesus' teaching. Rain descended, the floods came, the winds blew, beat on that house, and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

This is an analogy of God's word. But everyone who hears these sayings of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand, and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat on that house, and it fell, and great was its fall.

So it's a Bible to be, a book to be obeyed. And third, always ask, what is God saying to me through this scripture? I borrowed this from Adrian Rogers years ago.

[34 : 10] I heard him say this. In fact, I've heard him say this and portions of it many times, and read just the other day, I'll tell you, Wes LaRue, I love that man, and I'm, you know, all the time mentioning Adrian Rogers, and so he went online and ordered for me, volume one and volume two of Adrianisms.

Have you ever seen these? Adrianisms. And it's just simply two volumes of his most famous sayings and quips and quotes and things that he was saying, and this was one of them.

And it's a good one to follow. So you're asking, you're approaching the text, asking these questions. Is there a truth to learn?

Well, you could say that every verse has a truth to learn, but is that the primary thing in that particular passage? So you ask the question, is there a truth to learn? And if there is, what is it? Is there a command to obey? Is there a principle to live? Is there a direction to go in my life?

[35 : 30] Is this verse and how God is speaking to me through it? Is God's intent to give me direction in my life? Is there a direction here for me to go? Is there a promise to claim?

You know, there are a lot of promises in the Bible, aren't there? Almost from cover to cover, there are promises. Not all the promises are, number one, meant for you.

There are many promises that were directed to a God's people Israel. And we don't necessarily have the license to say, well, that promise applies to me. Now, many of them do, but not all of them do. And not all the promises in the Bible are guaranteed.

heed. Many of the promises in the Bible are conditional. If, then, is found all throughout Scripture. If you, and then I will. They're conditional. Now, thank the Lord, salvation is not part of that. Alright, so is there a promise to claim?

[36 : 36] Is there a warning to heed? These are just kind of, you're not going to just sit there every time you read the Bible and get out your little, you know, maybe you put it on a little card and you're just going to ask all these questions every time.

You can't want to, but, you know, you ought to at least be thinking in this way. You know, is there a warning here for me? God warning me about something.

Is there a sin to avoid? Is there an example to follow? Is there an attitude to change? I guess really if you thought about it, you could add a few more to this.

The Scripture is just that deep and broad. It really just covers everything that we need.

And then, finally, make a commitment to live out whatever God says in His Word. That's silly. That's very much like number two. How silly to, if you think of Scripture in the right way, this is God's Word.

[37 : 41] I'm just, as a category, this is actually God speaking to me. How silly to believe that and then read what He says and then not do it, not obey it.

And yet we do over and over again. And this is part part of our spiritual discipline, part of our spiritual formation to approach Scripture from this standpoint.

We're reading it, quieting our minds and our bodies, and then we are, you know, we are eventually going to be reacting to it, not negatively, but reacting in the way of decisions and life-changing things, acceptance and decisions and activity and so forth.