

Devotional Life (Part 2)

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[0:00] We have covered, I believe, a couple of these.

I know at least one. And let me start there, just in case you weren't here last time,! And you can kind of fill in your little blank there. But the first one is isolation.

Isolation. A quiet time alone with God. The key word is alone. You may not always have a place that's utterly quiet.

It's kind of nice to have such a place. But it's difficult in our day unless you get up before the crack of dawn. And maybe, you know, you might live alone or you might have a place where you can go to be alone.

If at all possible. It will help us in our devotional life. That kind of specific time, that quiet time. Find a place that's not only quiet, but where we can be alone with God.

[1:11] And that's what we need. And I mentioned this. I believe we covered this. We need a place. I mean, this is just, this is not complicated. And so I'm not trying to be insulting here.

But maybe we can kind of, you know, put all these things together. They may seem quite obvious. But we put them all together and it helps us kind of define what we mean by a quiet time alone with God.

We need a place to be alone. We need plenty of time. And I can't tell you how much time that should be. I do remember a quote.

I think it was from Spurgeon. A couple of guys in here know Spurgeon pretty well. Not know him personally. A lot about him. So you may correct me later.

But I think it was Spurgeon. Maybe it was somebody else. But anyway, whoever it was, and I won't quote him, but he said, you know, if I've got a really busy day, that means I've got to spend more time in prayer.

[2:10] Instead of two hours, I'll spend four hours. Now, maybe you don't have two hours. Maybe you don't have one hour. The time, the amount of time is not the issue. Now, at some point it is an issue.

I don't think it's probably advisable if your place alone is while you're taking a shower for five minutes or less, that that could be your quiet time.

Probably that wouldn't work very well. But you'll have to decide how much time. But you need plenty of it. Sometimes you may need more. Sometimes you may not be able to take as much as you like. But if we are deliberate about it and plan ahead, we usually can find the time we need for the things we really want to do.

Right? We really can. And so, find a place. We'll find plenty of time. So, don't rush it. Privacy. That's what the word alone means, doesn't it?

[3:10] Privacy. And the proper tools. And I kind of gave you in parentheses there a few suggestions. It really is a no-brainer to say you need to have your Bible with you.

That would be advisable. Bible. Prayer list. If that is your habit, I would recommend it. Devotional books are good to use.

But I wouldn't use a devotional book solely without the Bible. Now, some devotional books are rich in Scripture. But still, I think you need to have a Bible and read God's Word.

And not just what one man or one woman has said about God's Word, which is the case usually in devotional books. But a devotional book is good. A journal to write things down.

And a host of other things that we could list there. You know, other types of books. Some people like to read parts of a biography in their quiet time with the Lord.

[4:13] I wouldn't make that a big chunk of it. But anyway. All right. So, number one, isolation. Number two, meditation.

We did cover this, I think, last time, didn't we? Meditation and what the word meditation means, of course. Strictly speaking, that is the Hebrew word is a term that describes the cow chewing the cud. And it's very descriptive. Maybe a little crude, but it's descriptive. Just bringing it back up and chewing on it some more. Let's use this analogy of bringing it to mind and thinking on it more. Which, of course, is the idea. And I mentioned that meditation, in fact, I gave this quote to you. Meditation is simply an extension of memorization.

Meditation is an extension of memorization. I don't know how much time you spent memorizing Scripture. I don't spend enough time doing it. But even, you know, at a very basic level, when you're reading your Scripture during your quiet time, there's going to be at least one thing that will stand out in your mind in that Scripture that you'll pause and think about.

[5:45] And you'll kind of mill it around in your head there. The Holy Spirit will speak to you. I mean, that happens to you, doesn't it? All the time. I mean, whether you're reading a big block of Scripture because you are committed to reading through the Bible in a year, and so you've got a pretty good block of Scripture to read, or whether you use some other method, maybe it's a chapter of the Proverbs once a day, and then you can read through Proverbs in a month, or if you want to read five Psalms in one day, and I've used that method too, and then you can read all the Psalms basically in a month, that's a pretty big chunk, especially when you get to Psalm 119.

You know, it by itself is a big chunk. But even if you read a lot of Scripture in your quiet time, there will always be a small part of it that God will speak to you through, and something that will just stand out to you.

And that's the Scripture I'm talking about, that you read and reread and think about it and pray about it, and then throughout the day, you ought to try to bring it back up in your mind and chew on it some more.

And it's amazing, and I think you could say this has happened to you a number of times, it happens to me all the time, that when I first read it, and something just really profound stands out to me, that sometimes later in the day I think, well, why did I ever think that?

You know, that doesn't even make sense with the Scripture. And then God will speak to me in some other way. Or, you know, multiple things happen in that way, because the Holy Spirit is speaking to you about that Scripture.

[7:28] But if you don't get it in here, you can't meditate on it. Now, you meditate on it on the spot at the time. What we're talking about here is kind of an ongoing kind of process throughout the day.

Now, I'm a preacher, of course, and one of the difficulties of being, and I think teachers probably could vouch for this as well, one of the difficulties is that you approach your reading of the Bible with this mindset, now how can I preach that or teach that?

And, you know, without, rather than, say, now what's God saying to me about that? But now, having said that, this might sound like I'm speaking out of both sides of the mouth, after having done that, what are you saying to me?

Then I think I have a freedom to tell you what God said to me about that passage, because you might want to say something to you about it. So, you know, so preachers and teachers have kind of an extra kind of excitement about meditating upon the Scriptures.

Many things that end up in the pulpit happened or come out of God just speaking to my mind and heart about a certain passage or text that I didn't read in a commentary.

[8:54] You know, now, sometimes I'll go to a commentary later and say, well, I'll be. He said the same thing. God told me. Go figure that. But this is all part of meditation.

Re-chewing it. Re-thinking it over and over and over again. Number three, saturation. This is kind of along the same lines as meditation, or at least there are some kind of overlapping.

There's kind of an overlapping here. There's saturation living your day in an atmosphere of meditation and prayer. Now, remember, I've said this a number of times since we started this study, that when we talk about the devotional life, we certainly are talking about a specific time.

And I think everybody ought to have a specific time that they call my devotional time or quiet time or holy hour or, you know, a lot of different names for it. But though there is that specific time, in the broader sense, the devotional life is something that takes up the whole of life.

And so it's important for us to think of it in those terms. And so that's what I'm talking about here with this word saturation. Living your day throughout the day in an atmosphere of meditation.

[10:10] I don't mean walking around with your head up in the clouds somewhere where, you know, you can't even do your job. Anything like that. I'm not talking about that. But, you know, we

can be performing our work or whatever it is.

And if we see this as vital and important and if we decide to make it deliberate in our lives, then we'll find that even in the normal routine of life, we can be thinking about meditating upon Scripture, upon the Lord, upon what He's done.

We can pray, even though we may not go to the prayer closet, so to speak. You might be sitting at your desk or wherever it is you work or whatever it is you do through the day, and you can utter a prayer to the Lord as God just prompts you.

This is what we're talking about, about a saturated life. This really is, in the truest sense, the devotional life. Now, we might think of this as just an open communication with God.

With the advent of cell phones and, you know, especially Bluetooth technology, which I don't use, and I don't walk around with this little thing in my ear, some of you might do that.

[11:30] I remember when that first kind of started coming out, you know, people have, and you wouldn't always see that in the ear, and I can just remember walking through Walmart, and there's this guy walking down the aisle, and he's talking to himself.

And it seems so weird. Do you remember that? Is it weird now? Not near as much now. Maybe some of it. But, you know, it's not an odd thing.

We know right off what that person is. He's talking on his cell phone or her cell phone. But we could use that. I'm using that as kind of an illustration or an analogy.

Though I wouldn't recommend that you just, you know, wherever you work, whatever you're doing, that you're just talking out loud to God all the time. People be looking at your ears, see if you've got anything there, and if you don't, then they may call the guys in a white suit.

What technology is. What are you talking to? Yeah, yeah. Well, yeah, he's got some new technology. Yeah, right. But Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians 5.17, which is that very famous passage, pray without ceasing.

[12:43] And I don't think anybody in this room is confused by that passage, you know, that what do you mean, preacher? Am I supposed to just give up everything and just, you know, stay secluded in a closet and pray all the time?

Of course you know he's not talking about that. So what does this mean? I don't know if I put this in your notes. All right. Meditating, or excuse me, maintaining a surrendered heart.

That's what it means to pray without ceasing. Second, to maintain a surrendered heart. No rebellion. Second, maintaining a cleansed life.

No unconfessed sin. So, here's what I think Paul's driving at. Not explicitly, but these things are implied in the kind of believer who's going to obey this, to pray without ceasing.

We're always maintaining a surrendered heart. No rebellion toward God. Maintaining a cleansed life. No unconfessed sin. Maintaining a consistent schedule for quiet times with God.

[13:55] Devotional times with God. And maintaining an open communication with God. Someone has called it constant whispers of prayer.

About anything and everything. Do you do that? Not all the time. Do you?

I don't all the time. We ought to be more deliberate about that. And I like the, you know, this idea of constant whispers of prayer.

When things come to mind. When things happen. We don't have to wait until the next morning for our scheduled quiet time or that evening.

We can go ahead and pray about those things right then. I used to be real deliberate about this.

And it's easy to get lax about it. But you know, as a pastor, people will ask you, would you pray for me about something?

[14:58] And you used to be very deliberate about saying, well, let's just pray right now. And that's the best thing to do. Is to pray right then. But we can do that also as individuals.

When God just brings something to our minds. Just whisper a prayer right then. Number four. Devotional reading. Talk about elements of a rich devotional life.

Number four is devotional reading. And this too is kind of an overlap. But the Bible, devotional books, commentaries. That sound like something you'd like to, you know, kind of sit down and read a commentary.

Sermons. Read sermons. Well, yeah, you hear sermons. Listen. No, I read them. Oh, you read them. Two days a week. You really do. I will study three days a week.

All right. Very good. And I would add to the list, biographies are good to read. Before I mentioned devotional books.

[16:02] Other books on Christian themes and subjects are good to read. But the Bible, of course, would be number one. Number five. Association.

Is the word I've chosen there. Association. Just spending time with like-minded Christian friends. And not isolating yourself.

But spending time with other believers. Is a part of the... Enhances a rich devotional life. That is, if... When you fellowship with other believers, there is a tendency or even a desire to speak about spiritual things. Think about it when you get together with friends.

Maybe the last time you had someone over for dinner, you went to their house for supper, went out to lunch, or did something. You just had a little time to get together. Think about it.

[17:03] Did the subject of God come up in the whole conversation? Or the Lord. Or the church. Or any of the... Any spiritual things.

It's amazing. When you think about it, you'd be ashamed of yourself. And we're all in that same boat. But make use of our Christian friends and talk about spiritual things.

And that will enrich your devotional life. Extension is number six. And this, maybe it would be a little bit more isolated, but a special season of prayer, Bible study, beyond your normal devotion.

And we're talking about something that's prompted by some unique occasion. Something in your life. Some specific need. It might include fasting.

I highly recommend that. If you can... If you can fast... I always qualify this.

[18:14] If you can block some time where not only are you fasting, but you have opportunities for prayer. Personal prayer.

Because fasting by itself is just going on a diet. Maybe we need to. But that's another issue. But fasting should always be combined with prayer.

Prayer and fasting. And so if you're going to have a season of time for fasting, then make sure, not that you have to, you know, always have a time where you can have no responsibilities.

Sometimes we'll fast and we still have some of our normal responsibilities. But make sure that you have consistent opportunities to pray while you're fasting. And what I...

We're talking about here not some regimented thing that you do, I'm going to do this, you know, every other day or once a week or something. We're talking about when there is a special need in your life.

[19:17] Something in the family or something in your church or something in your personal life.

And maybe you're looking and seeking for God's special guidance and some decision that you need to make.

And we could just go on and on with possibilities. There are some valid times to extend your specific devotional time, have an extended time of prayer, maybe coupled with fasting, extended time of reading God's Word where you're really searching diligently for what He has to say about a certain subject or whatever.

Alright? Now, maintaining a consistent devotional life. I've got several suggestions there, about five of them, I think. Maintaining a consistent devotional life.

That's what we want, isn't it? I think I said early on as we were kind of... I gave you kind of that very brief definition of the devotional life.

In fact, I'll read it to you. Got it right here. Spending time alone with God for purposes of prayer, meditation, of His Word. It needs to be consistent.

[20:27] How do you maintain a consistent devotional life? As opposed to a, well, if I can work it in kind of thing. Maybe it's hit and miss. Maybe I can go a week or two and then say, oh, I just need to spend some time praying in God's Word and let's see, let me find a new devotional book that will inspire me and we'll get started back on this thing.

Or whatever, you know, you might grab for to help you do it. Instead of that kind of, you know, on and off and on and off kind of thing, how about a consistent devotional life?

Here's some suggestions. Some of this is kind of a way of thinking and then there's some other things I think that will help you in more practical ways.

Number one, recognize the importance of your devotional life. Well, that's just real smart, isn't it? But really, that's what has come first.

You've got to recognize the importance of it. In fact, that's really putting it too mildly. We ought to, all of us, recognize how vital it is.

[21:39] Not just vital so that you can feel good about your Christian life. Not just vital because then you can be sure God's going to guide you and maybe keep you safe and protected, but vital on all levels of the Christian life.

Even, and especially, vital in your battle against your flesh, which is an everyday thing. And I think I've already said this before.

We don't have to think very hard and search very long in our minds when we're struggling with sin or struggling with temptation. We don't have to go very far to find out why.

It's usually because we have become lax in our devotional life. So, it's vital. We've got to recognize it's vital. It's something we just can't miss. It's, you know, maybe other things that we can put off and put aside and maybe, you know, miss from time to time, but not this.

That's how we ought to think about it. Admit that it is vital to your life every day. Like air. I mean, it's just as vital as that.

[22:54] Like air. Like water to drink. Like food to eat. Like, for some of us, the daily newspaper to read. I don't know how many of you are newspaper readers. I'm not. But there are other things I like to read, you know, and there are things I like to watch on TV.

Anybody else like that? There are certain programs that you just don't want to miss. Right? Maybe it's just the news for you. I don't know. But, it should be vital like many, many of these things.

Matthew 5, 6, Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled.

They shall be satisfied. Literally. All right, number two, make a personal commitment to excellence in your devotional life.

Just decide, I'm going to make it the best possible devotional life. Best that I can. And, we really do need to live our lives by spiritual priorities.

priorities. Why? Because then, if we don't, we'll find ourselves living a life always ruled by the urgent rather than by what is best.

[24:10] Did I put that down on your notes? That's a good thing to remember. I stole that from someone. Now, think about that. Read it again. You read it there. If you don't live your life by spiritual priorities, then you're going to find yourself always living life ruled by the urgent rather than by what is best.

every one of us have urgent things to do. And, you know, if we don't place spiritual things up front in our priorities, then we're always going to be guided and moved by whatever the urgent thing is at that time.

That's why we must be very deliberate and very committed to have an excellent time of devotion with the Lord.

Number three, make your devotion to life your delight, not your duty. And I think this is very key.

There's a big difference, isn't there, between delight and duty?

Huge difference. How long can you keep it up if it's just simply your duty? Well, probably not very long. Maybe you can for a long time.

[25:28] what a difference it makes when you finally have that moment, you know, this is a delight where you can't wait to do it.

Now, that's not going to be an everyday thing. It is with me because I'm more spiritual than you. I recorded that too.

Let me sure bleep that out because you know I had my tongue stuck firmly against my cheek. I'm not more spiritual than you. There are many times I just don't want to do it.

There are many times I'd rather get to the sermon preparation. I have my time with the Lord in the morning. And as soon as I get out of that bed, I am already thinking about, well, this week, Luke chapter 4 and verse 31 and following.

You know, and so, I want to go right to it and get right to it because that's what I love doing. But I need to spend that time with the Lord and spend time praying and spend time reading His Word.

[26:38] And so, sometimes it's a duty. But even if it's not your delight, do it anyway. Even if you have to operate on duty for a day or two or a season, continue to do it, then it's more likely to become a delight.

I mean, that's just obvious. And here's some suggestions. You can be flexible. Now, that's one suggestion.

Some people are geared in such a way that they like sameness. You know, like, you know, to be regimented. You know, it's that rut.

But some of us are happy in the rut. Anybody here happy with sameness? All right? You know, get into a routine, and we kind of thrive by the routine.

We're comfortable in the routine. But even for those of us who like the rut, which is just really a gray with both ends knocked out.

[27:44] Oh, the rut is. We ought to look for some flexibility. Flexibility in how we organize our quiet time, what we read, how we pray, my prayer list, I don't pray the whole list every day.

Block it off. You've got family, and you've got some other things. So you can kind of mix that up and be flexible, read a devotional book, maybe change and read a different devotional book, whatever.

ever. But that will help you in making it more of a delight rather than a duty. Be variable. That's probably the same word as flexible, isn't it? I don't know why I put that on there. That's stupid.

What's the difference between flexible and variable? I don't know. Change it up from time to time.

That's the same thing too. Method, place, length of time, all those things.

You'll never continue something you do not enjoy doing. We're human. Don't enjoy doing it. There's going to be a time when you'll stop doing it.

[28:54] And we can testify to that to other things in our lives as well. Whatever your role is in your family.

I think about my wife. I do a lot of things around the house and help my wife. I hope you'd ask her sometime about that and she doubts for me.

One thing I don't do is laundry. I just never have done laundry. And Sherry always does the laundry. And it's a routine.

But sometimes she gets sick of it. And then I don't have any socks to wear. And I have to say, honey, I hate to tell you this, but I don't have any socks.

does that happen to any of you? Alright. You just get tired of it and then it kind of piles up sometimes. Alright.

[29:50] Well, let's go on. Number four. Let me finish this up. Number four. Recognize that the devotional life is a spiritual discipline. It does require self-discipline.

It does. I don't know. There might be some hyper-spiritual people out there where it takes no discipline at all. It's just second nature.

I don't know anybody like that. If that's you, then you can tell me afterward and then I can call you a liar. I wouldn't do that.

But you need to consider it as spiritual discipline. It's a discipline. It requires self-discipline. Maintain your devotional life on the basis of faith.

Faith and not feelings. Did I give you the train there? Alright. There are no words in there, though, are there? Did I put the words in there? Well, I meant to leave them out.

[30:50] So you can be thinking, well, what is that train for? Well, you see, it is a pretty simple principle. The engine is fact. It's scripture. That's what drives us, what leads us, what is our power and energy.

It's God's word. And faith, and then what's the last car? Feeling. Now, what if you had feeling on the engine, and you just did everything according to how you felt?

A lot of people live that way. And if you're going to have a meaningful devotional life with the Lord that is not only sweet and enriching for your spirit, but also instructive, because the devotional life is also instructive to the brain, the mind as well, because we're putting scripture in there and truth in there, then don't ever let feeling drive that.

Or you'll never be able to maintain it. Let's see. We've got one more and we'll be finished here.

Keep a proper priority in your relationships.

Who's first? God. Second? Family. Third?

[32:15] Church. Is that the right order? I'm not trying to trick you.

That is the right order. And I would put self forth. Now, obviously, self is difficult to categorize because we do have natural things that we do for self that we must consider for our health and such.

But when it comes to the broader sense, God is always first. Family and then church. Now, pastors, would like to put church up there before family.

Not because they're against the family, but because they've got to have people here doing stuff. But that's the wrong order. I think I've told this story before.

I'll never forget it as long as I live. Some of you know the name W. Criswell, one of the patriarchs of Southern Baptists, at least in the 20th century.

[33 : 23] 50 years, I guess, pretty close to 50 years, pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas. Just a tremendous man of God, great preacher, great leader among Southern Baptists, and so forth.

You've all heard of W.A. Criswell, aren't you? Most of you have. I think it was near the end of my time working on my master's at Mid-American when he was invited.

This was in the latter years when I think he had already kind of retired. He was Pastor of Meritus at the time, First Baptist, Dallas. Anyway, Mid-America invited him to come and speak in our chapel and then gave us an opportunity to ask questions.

And he was getting rather feeble in, so they got him a chair so he could sit. And he spoke to us and then we got to ask him some questions. And there are several kind of standard questions that you would expect preachers to ask this great preacher.

And then somebody asked what, he said it was a two-part question, he said what is your biggest success and your biggest failure? Now, I don't remember what he said about the success.

[34 : 40] He said something that I don't remember, but I'll never forget what he said about his biggest failure. He said that my most, and I don't even remember the word he used, my most colossal failure, he said.

And W. Crystal, if you know anything about him, read any of his sermons, you know he used a lot of words. He was very eloquent in speaking. My most colossal failure, he said.

was that for most of the years of my ministry, I put God first, church second, and my family third.

And it was the most colossal mistake I ever made.

I spoke to, of course, preachers, but it ought to speak to all people who are in places of leadership in the church, even just if you're just a member of this church and you just love coming to church. church. Sometimes when it can take precedence over the family, and then you're going to be in trouble. Family will suffer for it. And so, let's keep, you know, got to keep proper priorities in our relationship if we're going to maintain a consistent devotional life with the Lord.

[35 : 52] to keep to keep the who are to to to!