

Devotional Life (Part 1)

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[0:00] We just barely got into the subject of the devotional life.

In fact, I think I may have covered just a few points. In case you weren't here, let me run through the first part of this very quickly. I do that because we didn't get very far in this last week, and so it won't take us long to get ourselves back up to speed.

I made the statement that one of the highest priorities for the Christian is to develop his or her devotional life with the Lord.

A devotional life that is vital and regular and meaningful. It's so crucial for the life of the believer.

Now, for a number of reasons that we're going to get to eventually, but you'd have to agree with me, this is a high priority for life.

[1:07] Now, remember, we're talking about spiritual formation, and we've kind of gone through some preliminary things, some foundational things, you know, under the subject of holiness from a positional standpoint and a practical standpoint, and now we're going to go forward in the practical side of this.

And that is the part that God certainly enables us to do by His grace. He's the enabler, and God is very much involved in our practical growth, practical holiness.

But it is that side of our holiness that we participate with God in. And to participate with Him, then, we need to make this a priority to develop a devotional life.

Jesus did. Jesus had a devotional life with the Father. And you can find so many examples of it or statements concerning it in the Gospels.

I mentioned a couple, or I think I put in your notes a couple there in Mark 1.25. It says, Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight.

[2:20] Have you ever done that? Got up a long time before daylight. It may not be something you do every morning. Maybe it is for you. It is a good time to have a time with the Lord, especially if you have little ones still in the house or other family members.

You know, the best time to get alone with God is when everybody else is asleep. So, then there are also times I think you would testify to. Special times, certain times, maybe times where there are some big things going on.

Maybe some special burdens that God just wakes you up early in the morning. And, you know, I've done this. I don't know how many times I'll lie there and just fret about it when I can't go back to sleep.

And then finally, I think it dawns on me that I just need to get up and spend some time with the Lord. Maybe there's a reason for that. I don't always know what the reason is. You know, sometimes we do.

Sometimes we don't. And maybe we discover later why. And we didn't know at the time and a host of other scenarios. But Jesus got up early in the morning, at least on this particular occasion.

[3:28] I think this might be a testimony to a normal habit in his life. So that he could go out, depart to a solitary place, and there he prayed.

Great statement or description of Jesus' devotional life with the Father. And then I mentioned also Luke 5.16. He himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.

So, a statement of getting alone with God, praying to the Father. And the statement there that probably is the most meaningful part of the passage is that he did it often.

He did it often. And if he did, then so should we. If it was important for the Lord of glory, who's perfect and sinless, who is the very Son of God, if it was important for him in regard to his earthly life here, then it certainly is important for us.

Now, I gave you a short answer to the question, what is a devotional life? And you have a place where you can jot this down. It's not a really profound definition of the devotional life, but it just simply is this, spending time alone with God for purposes of prayer and meditation on his word. [4:48] That's it. Now, that kind of makes it seem trivial, that very short little answer. But certainly, your own devotional life fleshes that out a whole lot more, makes it a lot more meaningful to you.

But basically speaking, a devotional life, in the context of the personal devotional life, is spending time alone with God for purposes of prayer and meditation on his word.

And then we started on the objectives of the devotional life. And there are a number of those that I would share with you, and I think we got through two of them. Let me go ahead and start with number one again.

To maintain an intimate daily walk of fellowship with God. That's an objective. Pretty basic, but crucial.

The objective of your personal time with God, and this is what we're talking about here. Again, I would remind you, as I did last week, that the devotional life, in the larger context, is a much broader thing than just simply your whatever time you spend early in the morning or in the evening or what we would call our quiet time or whatever term you use.

[6:08] The devotional life is much broader than that, but in the context of that personal time with God, the objective is to walk with Him in fellowship with God, to have fellowship with Him.

1 John 1.3 Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. So we're not just Christians in name only. And our fellowship with Him is not just simply meant to take place when we need to have fellowship with Him or have some need from Him or have a time when we feel especially close to Him.

We're to be constantly, always, in fellowship with the Father. Father, I gave you this quote from a seminary professor of mine years ago.

And I mentioned his name, but you wouldn't know him. So here, I'll just give you this quote.

Brethren, if you love Jesus, you will want to spend time with Him. And if this is not your feeling, do it anyway.

I just, you know, you don't always feel like it, do you? Do you always feel like having that, I mean, specific time, set time, where you get alone with God and pray and read God's Word?

[7:26] Do you always feel like doing it? Maybe I'm the only one. Boy, that makes me feel so unspiritual. You know. And I can be pretty unspiritual sometimes.

How about you? Or is it just me? So, you know, that resonates with me. You know, do it anyway.

And sometimes, you know, I'm sure you've discovered that you start to feel like it once you get to it. And then maybe we might even argue, I might even argue that some of the sweetest times I've had with the Lord started out with my resistance. My, you know, kind of coolness.

And then it just turned out to be something very special. Number two is to allow God to speak to your heart and give you instructions, guidance for your life.

That certainly is an objective of that quiet time with the Lord. And I might just say to you that that will almost always require additional times being alone with God.

[8:42] Sometimes when we are in dire need of some guidance. Then it's the need for guidance that drives us to spend some time with Him alone.

That would be separate from or outside of our normal regular routine of Bible reading and prayer. Throughout the day, something arises.

Some phone calls. Some email. Some text in our day. Or just something happens. And it drives you to spend some time with God and pray and seek His face.

And seek some answer. Some guidance. Some direction. So this is certainly an objective for the devotional light. Number three. And this is new territory now.

I think this brings us up. Gets us up to speed from last week. Number three. To deepen your understanding of God's Word. Is that important?

[9:44] Absolutely, isn't it? 2 Timothy 2.15 Rightly dividing or accurately handling. Let me give you a little interpretation. The Word of truth.

That's what we need. To be able to rightly divide it. Now I know that that passage is written by Paul to a young preacher. It's not just preachers who need to rightly divide the Word of truth.

Clearly, I admit to you that the primary intent of that passage is directed toward those who have been given that special ministry of the Word as preachers.

But it also extends to those who are teachers. And you say, well, I'm not a teacher. But it also extends to every believer. We need to be able to rightly divide or accurately handle. Correctly understand. We could even broaden it to that. The Word of truth. A vital, regular, deliberate, devotional life with the Lord will deepen our understanding of God's Word. [10:57] Number four. To develop your prayer life. Making prayer the vital outflow of your life. I want to suggest to you, and I kind of hesitate to say this because there are obviously some exceptions.

But there are times when I have heard someone pray out loud. And the way a person prays out loud can often give you an indication or a window into what kind of prayer life they have in secret. If a person's public praying is very weak, very general, very awkward feeling, then it's very likely that they're not spending enough time in personal prayer.

Now, I understand, you know, the dynamic of being intimidated and nervous about praying out loud. So I'm kind of discounting that.

I understand that. But listen, a regular, daily, personal, one-on-one with God prayer life will make you a better prayer.

[12:28] And so when you have those opportunities where you're asked to pray for someone. Maybe it's a friend. Maybe it's a small group.

And you're going to pray. And maybe, you know, you have other occasions where you're going to be praying with someone. God, through a vital, daily prayer, personal prayer life, will enhance your and give you a special ability to pray in other circumstances, other contexts.

It'll develop that prayer life. It'll make prayer more of a kind of second nature. Maybe first nature. Because you're so used to praying.

And I would add to that that this will take place if your personal time, your prayer time with God is much more than just simply that one time a day.

This is why I say that devotional life is a much broader thing. It's a throughout the day kind of thing. Prayer is a part of your life.

[13:43] The more you do it, the better you are at it. I'm not talking about just developing some kind of human skill.

I'm talking about the natural result of spending time alone with God and actually praying.

And God will enhance that prayer life. Make it just part of your life. Alright? Number five. To enrich your spiritual life by learning from the testimonies of other men and women who have walked with God.

Now, how would that apply here? Well, in the first place, when you incorporate the reading of God's Word in your prayer life, invariably you're going to be reading about men and even women in Scripture.

People of faith in the Bible where God has used them. And they have served the Lord. And their testimonies will enrich your life and your walk.

[14:49] I would also add, secondly, that, and we'll talk about this a little bit later, but in your devotional life, you can incorporate not only prayer, certainly that, and the Word of God, but also other writings that would be an encouragement to you.

And I would never substitute what other people have written for the Bible. Reading God's Word must always be a part of your devotional life.

But you can incorporate reading of a biography in your devotional time. Reading a portion of it. Or reading about other great men and women of the faith.

Little excerpts in your devotional life. When you do this, see, their testimonies for Christ and how Christ has blessed them and enriched their lives and has used them.

They can be a challenge to us. They can be instructed to us in our own personal prayer life. I haven't done this since I was working on my doctorate, but I probably ought to try it again.

[16:00] But I decided I would, in my devotional time, I would read one of Spurgeon's sermons. And I have his whole collection.

And I just started reading them. Did that for several months. Now, it's difficult to have enough time. You've got to have enough time to do those kind of things. Because, you know, his sermons are not always very short.

Just like some other preachers I know. And sometimes, I'll admit to you, I wouldn't make it all the way through the sermon. You know, I might read a point or two and then come back to it later.

But it's okay to incorporate something like that as an addition to your prayer time and Bible reading in your devotional life. Some of you, probably a lot of you, use a devotional reading.

And there are many good devotional books out there. Right now, I'm reading, in my quiet time, a book by Jerry Bridges. And I would recommend Jerry Bridges to you. He's written several books, several that would lend itself to a devotional reading where there are short little chapters or short little things.

[17 : 12] And there are a number of others. Just make sure they're good ones. Okay? Make sure they're biblical. But, anyway, that's an objective.

Number six, to establish within you a biblical, spiritual mindset for living for Christ. This is probably, would be a good case for having your devotional life first thing in the morning.

I know it doesn't work for everybody. And not everybody is a morning person. But early in the morning is probably the best time to do this.

And think of the effect that time with the Lord and time in His Word has on your day as you move into it and journey through it. And what effect it has in the way you, your mindset, your spiritual mindset is established for the day.

So that whatever takes place in the day, you are much more ready for. So I think it makes the case. But that's not necessarily the only time to do it.

[18 : 26] We can say in a general sense that a very meaningful time of prayer and Bible study will enhance your mind, have the mind of Christ as you live out your day, live out your lives.

And so this is an objective for a devotional life. Number seven, to strengthen you against the temptations to sin. I mean, that doesn't go without saying, but we know this, don't we?

The greatest single thing you can do to fortify your life against the temptation to sin is to have a vital, meaningful, regular devotional life.

And you just think back if you can, if you can remember, over some seasons in your life where you struggle the most with sin.

And I think if you can remember, you would have to admit that it is those times, it happened in those times when my devotional life was kind of lax. Maybe even a season when you just weren't doing it at all.

[19 : 41] And then what do we do? We're tempted and we struggle with sin and we say, well, why am I having such a hard time? And all we have to do is say, oh, I've not been spending any time with the Lord.

I haven't been spending any time or enough time reading His Word devotionally. So, I think, in fact, we could say the greatest single thing you can do to live a victorious life for Jesus Christ in all that that means is to have a daily devotional life.

Psalms 1 is probably the best psalm that speaks to that. It says it really very clearly and it's a familiar psalm.

Let me just read it to you. I mean, you can turn to it if you want. As soon as I start reading, you'll remember. But blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful.

But his delight is in the law of the Lord. The Word of God. His delight is in the Word of God. And in his law, his Word, he meditates day and night.

[21 : 03] He shall be like a tree. Here's the result. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither, and whatever he does shall prosper.

The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish. Rich, rich imagery in this passage of the tree planted by the water and the strength.

And an image that helps fortify and describe the kind of person whose delight is in the Word of God. Now, not just that you love it and say, you know, on Sundays I just really love for someone to preach it.

Or maybe I like to hear my favorite preacher on the radio or something. But I'm talking about your delight being that you saturate your life with it. You read it, study it for yourself, you read it devotionally on a regular basis, and you then become like that tree planted by the rivers of water.

[22:17] Okay, so there are seven objectives there. Next thing we want to consider are the elements of a rich devotional life.

What does it look like? What are the various facets of what we could describe as a rich devotional life? What do you need to do in order to have a meaningful devotional life?

Number one, and this is so important, isolation. Isolation. Number one, isolation. A quiet time alone with God.

You need to take some time every day to get alone with God and to get still before God.

This is so important. And we're not talking about some mystical thing, you know, this getting still, quieting your mind. We're not talking about yoga or some Eastern religion, transcendental meditation or something like that.

[23:24] We're just talking about just getting alone with God and getting quiet, being isolated with Him. You need a number of things. You need a place to be alone with God.

That's not always easy. You have to work at that. Sometimes the place to get alone with God is a place where you can only be alone certain times of the day.

So, you know, so that may help you in deciding where that place is going to be. I remember it several years ago when I was a Walmart manager.

And I would go into the store very, very early in the morning. I didn't get up earlier than that to have my quiet time. I had it at the store.

You say, well, how could you have it at a store? Well, it was before it was open. Well, there's still a lot of employees there. But I always retreated to the shoe department.

[24:26] And in those days, the shoe department was more secluded. You really couldn't walk through it. You had to walk into it. And I'd go to the very back of it and find one of the little benches where people could sit to try on their shoes.

And I would have my quiet time there. It was very quiet. Nobody ever went back there. And that worked for me those days. When I went to seminary, we'd get to the seminary very early.

And I would have my quiet time there. And there at the seminary in Memphis, when the seminary was downtown Memphis, in an old Jewish synagogue, I found a place on the third floor of one of the buildings that nobody used.

It wasn't a classroom. It was just kind of a room. And I'd shut the door and go back in there and have my quiet time. There's always a place. And for some of you, it's very easy.

You know, your home is quiet maybe all the time. Or, you know, for others, it may be more difficult. But the place is key.

[25:32] Find a place to be alone with God. Second thing I would say under that, under the heading of isolation, plenty of time. You need plenty of time.

Don't rush it. You know, don't be like the guy who said, speak to me, Lord. I only have five minutes. You know, sometimes you only have five minutes.

I'm not suggesting that there will be times when you're not able to spend as much time as you would like, need. But don't let that be the normal thing.

You know, maybe you have to get up a little earlier. Or stay up a little bit later. Or make some other kind of arrangement so that you can have more time.

The point is, I'm not trying to make a point about how much time. There's no set amount of time. But I am making the point, don't rush it.

[26:36] Don't rush it. Allow for time for God to speak to you. The third thing under that, you need privacy. And, of course, that's really what I said with the first thing.

This place to be alone with God is certainly a place that must be private. Privacy is very important. Select a time and a place where you will have minimal distractions and interruptions.

I mentioned that room that I would go to in the seminary. And I've used this illustration a number of times. And in that room, there was a window.

And my first thought was, you know, this is good. I could sit here by the window and pray. And I can look out. You know, sometimes you like to look out into the sky.

The only problem was, I could also look down. There would be a sidewalk. There would be all kinds of people. Students and other people walking there. And it was so distracting. In fact, I had to move away from the window.

[27:35] I like, my favorite place to spend my time now is early in the morning. And when the weather is okay, it's not too cold, I like to spend it outside.

And some of you like that. And still, it's my favorite place. And I like to do that. But it can still be somewhat distracting. You know, especially if there are a lot of birds chirping and squirrels frolicking on your front lawn or up and down the trees.

And, you know, so I would spend probably my regular kind of I'm alone thing is here at the church. But you need to be alone.

It needs to be a place of privacy, best you can. Now, you know, I'm not going to be able to tell you how you're going to do that for you. These are just kind of general principles, general things that you ought to do.

If you're going to have a more meaningful, more productive, quiet time. It has to be a place that's alone with God. Plenty of time. Don't rush it. Individual principles. Privacy where there aren't distractions.

[28:46] You know, turn your cell phone off. You know, I remember reading a book several years ago by Peter Lord. I don't know if you remember him.

but Peter Lord wrote a couple of books under the heading of Seeking God and very good and he was a pastor in oh where was it in Florida I can't remember but anyway near Miami but not Miami and he built a little kind of getaway kind of shed a little out building in his backyard where he would spend his time alone with God and also study time and he didn't have any phone out there or anything he made sure that nobody could bother him there and his wife understood they had an agreement if anybody called the house she would say he's in Miami now she wasn't lying because they called the building Miami in the backyard and so when he was out there she would say he's in Miami you know can't get a hold of him this obviously was before the days of cell phones you know these days you can't go anywhere unless you turn the phone off or just don't answer it can't get anywhere where you're not tethered to someone or anybody who wants to get a hold of you but and then the fourth thing under that you need proper tools have the proper tools

Bible of course it would be kind of ridiculous to have a quiet time with God without a Bible Bible prayer list good I use a prayer list use a devotional book you can have a devotional book a journal I you know and I probably will make this point a little bit later but one way to make sure that that your devotional life is fresh is to change it up from time to time and not get so regimented that it becomes routine and boring eventually as I do different things a devotional book might read through sermons or read certain sections of the Bible over and over journaling not done a lot of journaling in my own personal life but what I do have done a number of times is to write scripture out on paper and the scripture that I'm reading and

I may have mentioned this before this is just a suggestion to you maybe you might try it but you're reading a particular passage and then after you read it and meditate upon it then write it out and it slows your brain down when you're writing the words out it's visual it helps you remember it and I have just found often that God will speak to me about a certain passage now I must admit to you almost always my mind gravitates toward now how could I preach that what you know that's one of one of the guards I have to have in my own personal life because you know you don't want to read the bible with this objective how can I tell others about this you want it to speak to your own heart first alright so place plenty of time privacy proper tools that's isolation and we could probably say a lot more about that number two would be meditation

I need to quit don't I I didn't realize it was getting so late let me take this last one meditation I mentioned I think when I got back from Ukraine the problems I had with that word meditation in the Russian language it just didn't translate very well for them they didn't have a word for meditation other than the word that was strictly used to describe eastern mysticism and so they were really eyes wide open meditation meditation I had to do a lot of explanation on that but you understand what I'm talking about when I when I use the word meditation a process it's a process of meditating allowing the scripture to go over and over in your mind thinking about it in fact probably thinking about it with your mind your intellect as well as your heart to think about it and not just during the time of your devotional life but throughout the day this is another argument that I use and I hope you won't misunderstand me

[33:38] I'm not against these read the bible through in a year kind of programs I'm against that and if you are doing that then that's fine I don't do that I would rather read and meditate upon a small portion of scripture that I could get a hold in my brain and then think about throughout the day that's what meditation is now you can read a larger section of scripture if you're on a schedule but when you think about it you only remember or recall again later in the day a small portion of it but

get a manageable amount of scripture and think about it throughout the day and you know I think I have I know that I have explained this and you've heard other preachers too that the

Hebrew word for meditation is a word that comes from the farm it comes from the process of the cow eating the grass swallowing it going down to one of their stomachs and then they bring it back up several times in the day they chew it re-chew it chewing the cud it's very crude the thought of it obviously but that's what we're to do with God's work bring it up mill it over and think more about it and then it goes away and bring it back up a little bit later in the day someone has said that meditation is simply an extension of memorization now think about that meditation is an extension of memorization that tells you a couple of things it tells you how crucial memorization is even if it's just simply the memorizing of the gist of the truth the gist of it if you're not memorizing word for word those good memorize word the word but if you memorize the truth of it you know and then the meditation on it is an extension of that takes place throughout the day you cannot he said this this quote you cannot chew the cud if you've not put the word in your mind!

I do this quite often as a part of my preparation one of the reasons why Monday I don't take Mondays off Monday is the day that I start to work on the next Sunday sermon I don't work on the next Sunday sermon every day of the week I have blocked out different things that I do but I start on Monday and try to get as much of the main idea of what that passage is about if I can even some key points I don't have a sermon done on Monday oh no it takes a lot longer than that but I have enough of it in my mind that it's just amazing that throughout the week things remind me of it and maybe even some illustrations come to mind or occur throughout the week that I would not have connected with the passage if

I didn't already have it in my mind now that's what preachers do but you can do that as a teacher but as well but meditation is so key so here are some elements of a rich devotion life isolation meditation!

and then we'll get to the rest! to to