

# Having Personal Devotions

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Having a quiet time is an essential part of our relationship with God. As communication is an essential part of any relationship - God has provided Bible reading as a means to hear Him speak and prayer as a means for us to communicate with Him. As much as we need to eat and drink to stay alive physically, the Bible reminds us that we are to eat (Psalm 19:10; Matthew 4:4) and drink (Psalm 42:1-2; John 7:37-38) in a very real spiritual sense to flourish in our walk with God.

This document is meant to be a tool to help you in thinking about what a quiet time is and how to have one. In the "General Instructions" sections, we'll walk through the components of a quiet time. In the following sections, we'll take the time to go into more detail on some of the spiritual disciplines such as Bible reading, Prayer, Journaling, etc. One thing to keep in mind is that while there are some components that should be a part of everyone's quiet time (such as Bible reading and prayer), we recognize that not everyone is the same, and not every quiet time should look the exact same. So, feel free to incorporate those things into your quiet time that are most helpful for you. For instance, if you are an artist you may find it helpful to paint your reflection of your Bible reading from time to time, rather than only journaling. Enjoy!

## General Instructions

When having a quiet time, it's important to have the right heart, time, place and plan.

**The right heart** – When we come to God, it's good to do a heart check

- **Expectant** – The writer of Hebrews reminds us that those who in faith seek after God can expect the reward of God Himself (Hebrews 11:6; also Jeremiah 29:12-13)
- **Willingness to Obey** – If we come listening not for what God has to say to us, but what *we want*; chances are we won't hear Him. In John's Gospel, Jesus reminds us that coming with a willing heart is important (John 7:17)
- **Teachable and Humble** – When coming before the King of kings, the proper attitude is humility, not pride; being teachable, not a know it all (James 1:19-21; 4:6; Psalm 119:33-34)

**The right time**

- **Morning, afternoon or evening?** In deciding when to have your quiet time, choose the time that you are at your best: alert, focused, and fresh. Jesus' custom was to meet with the Father early in the morning (Mark 1:35), and for many people, that's the best way to start the day. But whatever you decide, make sure to be consistent with it and to schedule it in your calendar as you would any other important meeting!
- **How long will your quiet time be?** If having a quiet time is new to you, start with a shorter amount of time and then build up as your appetite increases. Everyone is different, just be sure to give yourself ample time to slow down, read, pray, and reflect. If beforehand we decide and schedule how long (at a minimum) our quiet time will be, it not only frees up our schedule, but cultivates the discipline of slowing down and giving God our best time.

**The right place**

- **Comfortable and quiet**
- **Good lighting**

- **Free of distractions:** Turn off your TV, phone, or internet – anything that would distract. Have a pen and notebook handy to write down the “To do” list that comes to your mind; if you’ve written it down, you can forget it and come back to it later.

### The right plan

- **Why a plan? Why is discipline so important?** For some type “A” personalities, these may seem like silly questions; but others cringe at the idea of having a plan and being disciplined with it – why not just be free and ‘let it happen’? Having a plan is not meant to be a rigid set of rules; but many times we don’t spend time with God *because* we have no plan. Elton Trueblood explains the relationship between discipline and freedom saying,

We have not advanced very far in our spiritual lives if we have not encountered the basic paradox of freedom...that we are most free when we are bound. But not just any way of being bound will suffice; what matters is the character of our binding. The one who would be an athlete, but who is unwilling to discipline his body by regular exercise and abstinence, is not free to excel on the field or the track. His failure to train rigorously denies him the freedom to run with the desired speed and endurance. With one concerted voice, the giants of the devotional life apply the same principle to the whole of life: Discipline is the price of freedom

-Elton Trueblood in *Leadership Magazine*

### What will you need?

- Bible
- Pen or pencil
- Notebook

### What can you do?

Though there are a number of different ways we can have a quiet time, it is essential to always include prayer and Bible intake. Below is a suggested approach

**1 . Begin with a short prayer to prepare your heart and mind.** For instance, you could pray through the acronym IOUS:

- I - Incline my heart to Your testimonies (Psalm 119:36)
- O - Open my eyes that I might behold wonderful things in Your Word (Psalm 119:8)
- U - Unite my heart to fear Your name (Psalm 86:11)
- S - Satisfy me in the morning... (Psalm 90:14)

### 2. Read through your planned section of the Bible

- **Read Slowly** – Give yourself time; no need to rush
- **Read Systematically** – Don’t just open your Bible randomly, read through the Bible as it was written: working your way through different books of the Bible in both the Old and New Testament. You may consider a good Bible Reading Plan [See “Bible Reading” below for more detail]
- **Read Reflectively** – Take time to reread sections until you’re able to picture what the writer is saying. With your pen and paper handy, record your thoughts, prayers, and applications along the way (See “Journaling” below for more detail)
- **Respond in prayer.** Based on what you’ve read and reflected on, what can you worship God for? What sin do you need to confess? What action step do you need to commit to do by God’s grace? What do you need to remember? What can you thank God for? Why is this difficult to you? Who do you need to be praying these truths for?

# Bible Reading

One thing to remember in reading God's word is that we don't examine it so much as it actually *examines us*. God's word is "living and active...discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). The Bible is like no other book!

**Bible Reading Plans** - having a reading plan is helpful not only so you know what to read each day, but to help you work through the whole counsel of God's word (Acts 20:27). There are a several good plans you can choose from so that you can work through the whole Bible over time:

- Robert Murray M'Cheyne
  1. Via email: <http://bibleplan.org/#mc>
  2. Download Printable Calendar: <http://www.edginet.org/mcheyne/printables.html>
  3. Devotional book using the plan: *For the Love of God*, by: D.A. Carson
  4. Park Community Church's "8 Minutes with God" reads through the Bible chronologically in two years.

**Memorizing Scripture** – memorizing passages of Scripture is a great way to meditate (Psalm 1:2) on God's word and have it with you wherever you are.

- **Psalm 119:11** "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you."
- **John 8:31-32** "So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, 'If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'"
- **Methodology** – "*An Approach to the Extended Memorization of Scripture*" Dr. Andrew Davis: <http://www.fbcdurham.org/writings/>

# Prayer

In the most basic sense, to pray means to ask God for what you need (Matthew 7:7-11), for in our asking and God's giving, He is glorified (Psalm 50:15). At the same time, the Bible often describes a number of other different modes of prayer such as confession, thanksgiving, or praise (Philippians 4:6).

- **Forms of prayer**
  - **Petition** – Asking God for what we need (John 14:13; James 1:5)
  - **Confession** – Admitting the guilt of our sin; or agreeing with God that the sin in our life *is* sin (Matthew 6:12)
  - **Praise and Adoration** – Giving honor to God because of His value and worth (Psalm 150:6; 1 Peter 2:9)
  - **Thanksgiving** – Giving God thanks (Philippians 4:6)
- **How to pray**
  - **Praying God's word** – God's word is meant to be the basis of our prayers (1 John 5:14; John 14:13). Robert Law once said, "Prayer is a mighty instrument, not for getting man's will done in heaven, but for getting God's will done on earth." The Psalms are actually the prayers of the people who wrote them and can serve as a helpful guide for us as we pray.
  - **Praying in Jesus' name** – to pray "in Jesus' name" is not just an empty slogan we attach to the end of a prayer. It articulates what Hebrews 4:14-16 is saying – that the basis of our confidence in coming before a holy God is not in and of ourselves; rather it is in the Person and work of Jesus who is our Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5).
  - **Prayer helps** - Praying ACTS

1. A – Adoration
  2. C – Confession
  3. T – Thanksgiving
  4. S – Supplication
- **Praying the Lord’s Prayer** (Matthew 6:9-13) – perhaps the best guide for prayer is the one Jesus offered His disciples when they asked Him to teach them to pray. When He answered “Pray in this way...” He wasn’t saying recite this prayer over and over verbatim so much as He was giving us a template or group of categories to pray that serve as a launching pad for us to pray ourselves. For example, when Jesus prays, “Your will be done,” we can pray about how God’s will might be done in our home, church, or workplace; when He prays, “Give us our daily bread,” we can pray about our daily needs and offer petitions to Him. Two good resources on the Lord’s Prayer are:
    - *Growing in Christ*, by J.I. Packer
    - *The Divine Conspiracy*, by Dallas Willard
  - **Praying the Psalms** – because the Psalms themselves are prayers, they can be helpful tools for us to read, reflect on and pray back to God as our own. For a good article on praying the psalms, see: [http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/article\\_print.html?id=61249](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/article_print.html?id=61249)

## Journaling

Journaling is the spiritual discipline of reflecting and processing with pen and paper. Journals can be anything from a spiral notebook, a moleskin, to a 3-ring binder of loose leaf paper. Journaling can include written prayers to the Lord, reflections on what you’re reading in Scripture, processing something that is going on in your life or even drawing/painting what you are reflecting on in God’s word. Journaling is not a rigid in the sense that it is going to look the same for everyone – but because we often think more clearly and process things more deeply when we are doing so with a pen, journaling can be a very helpful discipline during our personal devotions. So instead of giving a list of “how to journal,” consider the different values of journaling and let them shape what you do when you journal.

- It helps in self-understanding and evaluation (Rom. 12:3)
- It helps in meditating on the Lord and His Word (Josh. 1:8; Ps. 1:1-3)
- It helps in expressing one’s deepest thoughts and feelings to the Lord (Ps. 62:8b)
- It helps in remembering the works of the Lord (Ps. 77:11-12)
- It helps in creating and preserving a spiritual heritage (Deut. 6:4-7; 2 Tim. 1:5)
- It helps in clarifying and articulating insights and impressions (1 Pet. 3:15)
- It helps in monitoring goals and priorities (Phil. 3:12-16)
- It helps in maintaining the other spiritual disciplines (1 Tim. 4:7)

