

Devotions

Ps.66

I ask a lot of folks about their devotional life- that time they set aside to be with God, to pray, and to read his word. Most people admit, with a guilty nod, *“I struggle to have consistent time with God. It’s not what I want it to be.”*

I’d guess that 9 out of 10 Christians do not have the devotional time with God that they *say* they want. I have some ideas why, but I suspect that they find them ineffective; it can feel, in a frenzied-activity-world, like you’re not accomplishing much.

I’m not here to guilt you this morning. You already feel guilty and it hasn’t changed anything. What I want to do is simply explore the sorts of questions which arise when we think about devotions. Then may God do with us as He wills.

1. How much time should I spend with God?

In a sense this is a silly question. We’re *always* with God. We live before His face. *v.4 he keeps us in life*

If you are a Christian, God is never not with you, intensely interested in your welfare, moment by moment.

If you are not a Christian, please assume God is pursuing you, also compelled by your welfare. God is present everywhere in this world. Paul preached to non-Christians in Athens and said, (Acts 17:27b-28a)

- a. *He is not far from any of us, for in Him we live, move and have our being*
- b. *God is now declaring to all men everywhere that they should repent.*

Is it a good thing that God is seeking you? Of course! Why would it be bad? Only if you’d have to give the reigns of your life over to him. Sadly, we naturally do not want to do that.

But let’s answer with a question: How much do you *want* to spend with God?

Oh Mike, it’s so hard, I’m so busy. OK, we all are. What is busyness?

Busyness is simply a reflection of your priorities. We all choose to live the way we live, so however we spend our time reveals what we choose to do. Priorities are those things you do prior, or first.

But back to the main question, how much time should you spend with God?

Divide your day into blocks of 48^{ths}. Give one, one out of 48, solely to being quiet with God. 30 minutes.

Is 30 minutes enough time? Time for what? Time to meet your goal. Ah, that raises an important question:

2. What's the goal? What are you trying to accomplish?

Devotions are not mandated in the bible. I can't show you a specific command per se to take 30 minutes with God every day. But there are lots of exhortations to pray, to worship and to meditate on God's word.

Ps.1:2 *the godly man has his delight in the law of the Lord,
on it he meditates day and night.*

Ps.77:12 *I will meditate on all thy work, and muse on thy deeds.*

Instead, the Bible shows us that God offers, indeed desires, the joy of fellowship with us, He wants time with us, can you believe it?!

It may be a duty to spend quiet time with God, but it certainly is a privilege, an honor, a glory, a joy! Tell me something more precious than the fact that the Almighty God desires to be alone with you, just you, for a time each day.

Prov.3:32 *he is intimate with the upright.*

1 John 1:3 *our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ*

John 14:23 *If anyone loves me he will keep my word; and my father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our abode with him*

For me, there are several goals for devotions:

a. **Praise** I need to adore God. I was created to. I am commanded to:

v.1 *Shout joyfully to God, all the earth; sing the glory of His name*

v.8 *Bless our God, sound His praise abroad*

He desires it, wants it, and it's good for my soul to do so. In praise we are reminded what God is like so we can love him for who he is, not simply for what he does for us.

Praise safeguards our prayers from us bending God to our agenda, to God bending us to His.

Ps.34:1-3 *I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul will make its boast in the Lord...O magnify the lord with me, and let us exalt his name together.*

Magnify the Lord, make him bigger. Big God, little problems, little God, big problems. You see the spirit of this: *Nothing I desire compares with you.*

(Prov.3:15) So get him in front of you so you'll see and then desire the one with whom nothing compares.

We need to constantly remind ourselves that there is no God like our God:
v.5 *Come and see the works of God, who is awesome in His deeds toward the sons of men.*

See the goal of praise? Ps.33:8 *Let the whole earth stand in awe of him*

Ps.:22:23 *Stand in awe of him, all you descendants of Israel*

Why stand in awe of God?

1. Because he is worthy of it.
2. Because you're at your best when you do so.

Why don't we live in awe of God?

Because we don't take the time to focus on why he is awesome.

Ps.77:13-15

Thy way, O God, is holy; What God is great like our God?

Thou art the God who works wonders; thou hast made known thy strength among the peoples, thou hast by thy power redeemed thy people

b. Communion or fellowship with God. Jesus sought such times with His Father. This is the unspeakable privilege of those brought near to God by the work of Christ. We have fellowship with God. He is a person; we want to be with him. Two truths bracket our fueling friendship with God:

1. We meet God in His word, that's why we read it. Just as with any person we have great interest in, the Bible reveals what God is like, what he has done in history, what he thinks about issues. A show I watch on the Golf Channel is called "Playing lessons with the pros." It always makes me jealous. Two novice golfers like me get to go out with a professional and they play golf. They get to ask him questions about his game, what they're doing well or wrong, etc. Would I love to do that with Tiger Woods, picking his brain about everything! How much better to do that with God!
2. Obviously, since we are not like God and fail him in a multitude of ways, at this point cleansing is important. The revelation of God's ways to my heart puts me in my place and exposes my ways: v.7c *Let not the rebellious exalt themselves* forces me to ask the Lord in what ways I am moving contrary to God's. Confess your sin. Keep short accounts with God. Keep your conscience clear.

Ps.66:18 *If I regard wickedness in my heart the Lord will not hear.*

2 Tim. 2: *If a man cleanses himself of these things he will be a vessel for honor for the Lord*

c. **Outlook**. I easily lose perspective. Apparently the psalmist does too, because he pleads,

Ps.143:8 *Let me hear thy lovingkindness in the morning.*

Ps.90:14 *O satisfy us in the morning with thy lovingkindness*

You want to get where the psalmist ends in Ps.66:20

*Blessed be God, who has not turned away my prayer,
nor his lovingkindness from me.*

He knows he is a spiritually leaky. Always leaking, ever needing filling. My heart needs refocusing on what is important, on the love of God. In a sense this is when we answer the question we all ask, however consciously, who or what do I want to be today?

In this sense my devotions are driven by need. I'm desperate. If God doesn't capture my imagination, something worse will.

For example, if you are by nature driven, this is the time to slow down. If you are by nature slow, this is the time to pick up the pace, to birth motivation. If you are controlling by nature, this is the time to relinquish; God's in control. If you want approval by nature, this is the time to rest in God's love, it trumps all.

Perhaps that is what David is after in Ps.34: 8 when he says,
Taste and see that the Lord is good...

Mull over in your heart the love of Christ for you, dying in your place at the cross, in order to get perspective on everything else. That is the tangible evidence of God's lovingkindness. He is not leaving you in your sins!

"Light from the cross made his race appear small" (Twila Paris on Eric Little)

d. **Preparation**. I'll address this fully next week. Life is a battle. I'm my own worst enemy. You have to get ready for it. By being quiet before the Lord you are reminded what is helpful and what isn't. In prayer, with the word of God as a mirror, I answer the question, what's wrong with me. How am I self-reliant, selfish, blind, proud? Where is the foolishness that is bound up in my heart likely to trip me up, the sin which so easily entangles us? What can you expect the Spirit of God to teach you?

This is cultivating the fear of the Lord.

Prov.14:27 *The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, that one may avoid the snares of death.* We need to drink from that fountain- life and death depends on it.

Like the salt march where all sea life begins, so the fear of the Lord births life in us.

Let me put all these goals together as a summary using in David's words in Psalm 27:4

*One thing I have asked of the Lord, that I shall seek;
That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life
to behold the beauty of the Lord and to mediate in his temple.*

3. How do you have devotions?

These are simply my suggestions, things I have found helpful.

a. Pick a regular time, in a quiet place, when you are alert. So if in the morning, to set the course of the day, give yourself a little time to wake up.

b. Use a readable translation of the bible, and get on a daily reading track. This is helpful because it eliminates the mystery, what am I going to read today? You simply read the next chapter.

I try to be in five places in the bible:

A Psalm to start, then a chapter of Proverbs for wisdom, then an OT text, a Gospel, and non-gospel in the NT. You're not reading for quantity, but for quality. If you have a revival in one text, don't rush on. Don't be a slave to a schedule. The goal is communion with God, not a certain amount of text. But, being in various genres in the Bible keeps your perspective broad.

c. I start with singing, sometimes aloud, usually silently. Sing until your heart warms to God. The bible doesn't guarantee any feelings. The psalms are the closest thing we have to devotions, and they say very little about feelings or sensing God's presence. If you do, great. If you don't, press on.

Praise God's attributes. Thank him for things. If people come to mind, pray for them. Then read, with a prayerful spirit.

This is basically following the ACTS format: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication. Put on the armor of God. (More on that next week.)

d. Your mind will wander. It is difficult to concentrate on God. Don't condemn yourself. Keep a pad of paper handy to make notes of thoughts or things you have to do later on.

4. Any promises?

1. You'll never regret the time spent

Time isn't money, it's holy. God isn't found in a New York minute.

2.. You'll be worse off without devotions.