

DAILY DEVOTIONS

In 1828 Noah Webster defined the word devotion with a religious connotation. He said the word devotion means,

1. The state of being dedicated, consecrated, or solemnly set apart for a particular purpose.
2. A solemn attention to the supreme Being in worship; a yielding of the heart and affections to God, with reverence, faith and piety, in religious duties, **particularly in prayer and meditation**: devoutness.
3. External worship: acts of religion; performance of religious duties.
As I passed by and beheld your devotions, Acts 17.
4. Prayer to the Supreme Being. **A Christian will be regular in his morning and evening devotions.**
5. An act of reverence, respect or ceremony.

Apparently, devotions is a word that for a very long time has referred to a person's time spent alone with God in reading and studying the Bible and praying. But is the idea of having a specified time each day for reading the Bible and praying a biblical concept? If it is, are there any biblical guidelines for what should be involved in such an exercise?



The Biblical Basis For Daily Devotions

The Bible indeed teaches the imperative of reading and studying God's Word and praying.

1 Timothy 4:13 - *Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.*

1 Timothy 4:15 - *Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all.*

2 Timothy 2:15 - *Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*

Proverbs 15:8 - *...the prayer of the upright is his [the LORD's] delight.*

The Bible also teaches that these things should be done regularly.

Romans 15:4 - *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*

Colossians 3:16 - *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*

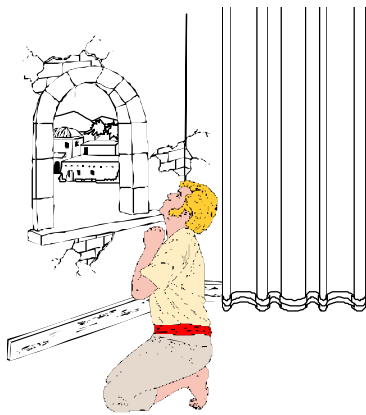
Titus 1:9 - *Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.*

Romans 12:12 - *...continuing instant in prayer.*

Colossians 4:2 - *Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.*

1 Thessalonians 5:17 - *Pray without ceasing.*

In fact, the case can be made from Scripture for doing these things on a daily basis. In the Old Testament, under the Jewish system of sacrifices, God called for devotional sacrifices to be made every day, both in the morning and in the evening. In Exodus 29:38, God prescribed that the Israelites offer on the altar *two lambs of the first year, day by day continually*. One was to be offered as the morning sacrifice and the other in the evening. God explained that *this shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the LORD: where I will meet you, to speak there unto thee* (verse 42). By this, God instructed His people to prepare themselves on a daily basis to meet with Him and hear from Him.



Later, in the life of Daniel, we see the practical application of this principle. In fact, Daniel considered his daily times with God to be so important, that he knowingly put his life at risk rather than skip them. Daniel 6:10 says, *Now when Daniel knew that the writing [forbidding prayer to anyone but the king] was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforesaid.* Daniel also spent time studying the Scriptures. This is indicated by his knowledge of Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the 70 years of captivity (Daniel 9:2).

Then there are several direct statements in Scripture regarding the virtue of daily times of prayer and Bible study.

Psalms 61:8 - *So will I sing praise unto thy name for ever, that I may daily perform my vows.*

Psalms 86:3 - *Be merciful unto me, O Lord: for I cry unto thee daily.*

Acts 17:11 - *These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*

This is reinforced by Jesus' own instruction to His disciples on how to pray. In Matthew 6:11, Jesus said that a believer's prayer should include the following: *Give us **this day** our **daily** bread*. If the request is to be for **daily** bread for **this** day, the obvious implication is that this request, and therefore prayer, should be offered to God every day.

Finally, the Apostle Paul recognized the importance of a daily committal of oneself to God. He said in 1 Corinthians 15:31, *I die daily*. No doubt, he learned this from Christ Himself

who had previously told His disciples, *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me* (Luke 9:23).

Some, of course, like to insist that daily devotions ought to be done in the morning, and some even insist that the earliest hours of the morning are the most spiritual time of the day. But the Bible shows men devoting themselves to God at all times of the day and night.

Psalm 55:17 - Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice.

Psalm 5:3 - My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.

Mark 1:35 - And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.

Daniel 6:10 - Daniel kneeled and prayed three times a day.

Psalm 119:164 - Seven times a day do I praise thee because of thy righteous judgments.

Psalm 63:6 - When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches.

Psalm 42:8 - Yet the LORD will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life.

Psalm 119:148 - Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word.



Joshua 1:8 - This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein....

Matthew 14:22-23 - And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.

The Biblical Reason For Daily Devotions

The daily sacrifices in the Temple were intended to be a sweet savour unto God (Numbers 28:24). But they turned sour when the Israelites began offering them for the wrong reasons (Isaiah 58:1-5). In recent times, having “daily devotions” has become a part of the expected routine of a professing Christian.

Supported by the printing of daily Bible reading schedules and monthly devotional booklets, some Christian leaders have been insisting that “daily devotions” are as much a part of the required activities of believers as Church attendance and tithing. But the danger of pressuring Christians to have their devotions out of some sense of obligation is that they may completely miss the point.

Daily devotions should be an exercise by which an individual believer cultivates his own personal relationship with the Heavenly Father. With genuine heart felt praise, the individual constantly affirms his real devotion to God. As Hebrews 13:13-15 expresses it,

Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.



And Psalm 61:8 says,

So will I sing praise unto thy name for ever, that I may daily perform my vows.

Then with diligent meditation upon the Word of God, the Christian grows in his knowledge of Christ and in his approval with the Father. 1 Peter 2:2 is the starting point, saying,

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.

1 Timothy 4:13-16 takes it to the next level:

Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

2 Timothy 2:15 then brings the process to a conclusion:

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Finally, prayer provides a means for the devoted Christian to practice the ministry of intercession. 1 Timothy 2:1-8 instructs us to intercede for all men. James 5:16 directs us to intercede for believers with special problems. And many other Scriptures reinforce the importance of intercessory prayer.

Too many Christians go through the motions of daily devotions and are satisfied with a sense of accomplishment from simply doing them. But when devotions become nothing more than a ritual, they can be as sour to God as the daily sacrifices of the wayward Israelites.

A story is told of a man who regularly spent time with the Lord in prayer. To make the process a little easier, he decided one day to write down all his prayer requests. As time went on, instead of thoughtfully praying for each matter on the list, it became much easier to read the list. Day by day, the wording of the list became more familiar to the man and gradually he was able to read it faster and faster. Finally, one night this poor man was too tired even to read his prayer list quickly and so he tacked it to the end of his bed and sleepily whispered, “Here are my prayer requests God. Please read them for yourself.” On the one hand, this story sounds silly. But on the other hand, it sounds all too real as an illustration for the meaninglessness of many a Christian’s daily devotions.

Following a prescribed plan for devotions may have some merit, especially for those who are just starting out. The reading schedules and devotional booklets that are available may help some establish the discipline of spending time with the Lord on a regular basis. But caution should be exercised in becoming dependent upon these things as an end in themselves. In our western modern cultural mind set, we tend to package our lives in neat little boxes so that we can check things on our to-do list assuring that we can fit everything into our demanding schedules.



Too often, the result is that everything on our list gets done, but very little of real substance is actually accomplished, especially when it comes to spending quality time with the Lord.

Having daily devotions is not about fulfilling some practical obligation we have to God. He is not concerned about whether we spend 15 minutes, or 30 minutes, or one hour in reading the Bible. He does not measure our spirituality by how long our written prayer list has become. He does not preserve a special crown for those who arise at 3:58 AM everyday to have their devotions. He is primarily concerned about developing a personal relationship with us. If that means a regular time every day in the early morning hours, then do it. But if that means shorter moments several times a day, or if it means spending two hours one day and 15 minutes another day, or if it means constant meditation and prayer throughout the day as moments are available, then pursue your relationship with God by whatever plan is meaningful and consistent for you as an individual. But pursue Him in a relational way and not by means of ritual exercises. If you do, you will surely find Him to be a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

Some Advice For Preparing Yourself For Daily Devotions

1. Determine to give yourself wholly to God and to the things of His Word (Romans 12:1-2; 1 Timothy 4:15). The daily sacrifices in the Temple consisted of burnt offerings (Numbers 29:6). Burnt offerings were sacrifices that were totally consumed on the altar. None was kept back for food. As we relate to God on a daily basis, we should devote ourselves wholly unto Him and hold nothing back in reserve for selfish or worldly interests.

2. Practice praising God throughout the day to prepare your heart for the personal times you will spend with Him. Praise is an exercise in acknowledging God. Not only does it please Him to receive compliments, but it provides a sense of connection for our hearts to His Spirit. Note the words of the following Scriptures,

Psalm 50:23 - Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God.

Psalm 86:11-12 - ...unite my heart to fear thy name. I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore.

Psalm 104:33-34 - My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the LORD....Bless thou the LORD, O my soul. Praise ye the LORD.

3. As you prepare to spend time with the Lord, try to let your spirit become quiet. Some people like to call their devotions quiet time. This is because quietness is related to a sense of sacredness and reverence. After a stormy trial involving the wicked Jezebel, the prophet Elijah

was very unsettled. God had to take him to a far away place and help him calm down so that he could hear the “*still small voice*” of the Spirit of God (1 Kings 19:12). In the midst of Job’s turmoil and suffering, Elihu, the young man who sought to give Job some perspective of his sufferings, exhorted him to “*stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God*” (Job 37:14). Daily life is entirely too noisy for most of us. It is not easy to go from the chaotic sounds of our busy lives into the quiet presence of the Divine and conduct ourselves reverently. We must take a deep breath, exhale a few deep sighs and prepare ourselves to be quiet before the LORD. Psalm 4:3-4 says,

But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the LORD will hear when I call unto him. Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.

Some Hints For Having Effective Devotions

1. Think of devotions as the cultivating of a relationship with a person, remembering that devotions are not about winning prizes but about getting closer to God.

Philippians 3:10 - *That I may know him...*

Isaiah 58:13 - *...call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD...honour him...*

2. Realize that a formalized devotional pattern is not an end in itself. It can become an empty ritual as meaningless as the Old Testament sacrifices in Israel if the heart is not kept properly tuned to the purpose for which it was designed.

Isaiah 1 :11-15 - *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me?*

Hosea 6:6 - *For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.*

3. Do not block yourself into a packaged formula that becomes restrictive. There very well may be special times for devotions but there may also need to be spontaneous times for devotions. Remember that relationships with persons are not rigid regimentations but require responses involving flexibility, diversity, spontaneity, sacrifice, submission, charity, faith, hope, and commitment.

I Corinthians 7:5 - *...give yourself to fasting and prayer...*

Proverbs 3:5-6 - *...in all thy ways acknowledge him...*

I Corinthians 13:1-13 - *...and though I have all faith...and have not charity, I am nothing.*

4. Understand that "to read the Bible and pray" is an over simplification of the biblical instructions to "praise, meditate, and intercede."

I Timothy 4:15 - *give thyself wholly to them...*

5. Read the Psalms frequently and regularly with the purpose in mind of learning how to praise God. Then practice praise throughout the day to keep your heart prepared for spontaneous devotions.

Psalms 61:8 - *So will I sing praise unto thy name for ever, that I may daily perform my vows.*

6. Establish challenges for your mind always having a purpose in your meditation. Set realistic goals that can bring reward by being accomplished within a reasonable period of time. For example, in meditating upon a particular book of the Bible, determine to assign a descriptive title to each chapter, then to each paragraph, etc.

Joshua 1:8 - ...meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein...

7. Keep an active list of people's names and needs for the purpose of intercession. But do not just read your list to God, pray from the heart.

James 5:16 - ...pray for one another
Colossians 4:3 - Withal praying also for us...

Conclusion

Every believer ought to be cultivating a personal relationship with the Heavenly Father. He is the one who opened Himself up to us in a familial way (2 Corinthians 6:18). He is the one who made the ultimate sacrifice to make such a relationship possible (Galatians 4:4-7). He is the one who graciously grants us the wonderful privilege of being His children (John 1:12). Is it really too much for Him to ask that we spend a little time with Him to get to know Him and to let Him mold our lives into His image?

Christianity was never intended to be a religion. Don't let it become that for you. Let it be what it should be, a relationship with the Divine Person. Have devotions every day, but have them in a way that will be meaningful for both you and God. 📖

