

Luke 11:1-13

Jesus Teaches About Prayer

B: Best Verse

S: Scripture

C: Christ Is..

O: Observations

D: Difficulties

E: Essentials

A: Applications

F: Final Thoughts

P: Prayer

Bible Devotionals

Your Practical Guide to Meaningful Daily Devotionals
by Pr. Michael Taylor

One of the essentials of having a close walk with God is the ability to get into the Bible and pull out something that touches your heart. Unfortunately, our trips into the Bible are often done with our brains, not with our hearts. We view the Bible as a holy book full of Truth, and read it hoping to gain new Truth (usually measured in the form of information). There's a proper time and reason to get into the Bible for information - called Bible Study - but there's also a time and reason to get into the Bible for something else. We don't just need Truth; we need a connection with the One who said, "I am The Way, The Truth, and the Life." (see John 14:6).

Daily devotionals are a chance to grow your relationship with God. If you read through a passage in the Bible and all you get is the satisfaction of checking another box off on your reading plan, then you didn't actually "do your devotional". If you don't close your private worship time more devoted to Jesus than when you started, then you didn't actually "do your devotional". There are many ways that you can connect with God in a meaningful way through His Word, and this guide will help you with a couple of the "easiest" approaches and most helpful suggestions.

The first suggestion I have is to SLOW. DOWN. When people are first starting with their devotional life, the most frequent approach (and the most talked-about approach) is to try to read through the Bible in a year. While it's great to read through your Bible and at least be aware of the basic content and stories of the Old and New Testament when you're first starting on your walk with God, I'd suggest that your bird's eye view of the entire book should be done alongside your devotionals unless you have an hour to devote to your readings each day. Reading through the Bible in a year requires a consistent pace of 3-4 chapters a DAY; good luck tackling that in 15 minutes right after you wake up or just before you go to bed in a way that lets you draw closer to Jesus.

Instead of trying to sprint through the Bible, let's thoughtfully stop and appreciate each passage like a masterpiece in an art gallery. Slow down and tackle just a small section - maybe a dozen verses - and prayerfully seek to hear God speaking to you in those words. One of my favorite books on how

to have a meaningful walk with God suggests the same thing. In Steps to Christ, we find:

“But there is but little benefit derived from a hasty reading of the Scriptures. One may read the whole Bible through and yet fail to see its beauty or comprehend its deep and hidden meaning. One passage studied until its significance is clear to the mind and its relation to the plan of salvation is evident, is of more value than the perusal of many chapters with no definite purpose in view and no positive instruction gained.” (Ellen White, Steps to Christ, p. 90)

The value in a devotional really happens when a passage connects your heart & mind to the ministry of Jesus on your behalf. This is where my second suggestion comes in: use S.O.A.P. daily. If it isn't obvious, S.O.A.P. is an acronym that you can use to approach a passage and make basic connections. (S.O.A.P. isn't the only system that works; it's just 1 of many. I'll actually describe 2 here, and tell you that Andy Deane has a fantastic book called Learn to Study the Bible (40 Different Step-by-Step Methods to Help You Discover, Apply, and Enjoy God's Word) that has many more approaches for you to try. Obviously.)

(One note: the power of your devotional gets magnified when you write it down in a (physical or digital) journal. It forces your brain to put more work in when you combine reading and writing, and it is easier to remember what you found when you look back an hour, a week, or even a decade later.)

What is S.O.A.P.? It's a 4-part process for your devotionals. There's a 5th part that comes before these 4: pray, and ask for God to speak and for His Spirit to help you listen. After all, “[spiritual things] are spiritually discerned” (see 1 Corinthians 2:14). The 4 parts of S.O.A.P. are:

- S. Scripture: Read through the passage to familiarize yourself with it. Do it again, but now more slowly and carefully. Now pick your favorite verse from the passage and write it down. ProTip: this might make a good verse to commit to memory throughout the day.
- O. Observations: Take note of the details of the passage. Keep track of the 5 W's (who, what, when, where, and why). Is there anything said or that happens that strikes you as meaningful, confusing, or otherwise interesting? Do you learn anything new about God?
- A. Applications: Based on your observations and overall reading of the passage, prayerfully apply what you read in your own life. Is God asking you to start or stop something? Is He pushing you for an attitude or theological change? Be specific and be personal!
- P. Prayer: Based on your S, O, and A, now it's time to P. Ask God to help you take a specific step toward His ideals for you and your life today.

S.O.A.P. is a great way to structure your devotionals so that you're getting more intentionally personal and relational, but it's not the only one. Another method (one that works better for me) was one I found in Andy Deane's book that I just mentioned. It's the “Alphabet Method”:

- A: A Title. (Give your reading a title that you can remember.)
- B: Best Verse. (What verse spoke most clearly to you?)
- C: Christ Is... (What do you learn about God through what is said or done in the passage?)
- D: Difficulties. (What is hard to understand in this passage? What is hard to explain to others?)
- E: Essentials. (In a sentence or two, what is this passage all about?)
- F: Final Thoughts. (What does this passage have to do with me?)

Finally, a common question I get from someone looking to have a devotional life is where to start. I've seen people just flip the Bible open to any random passage and start reading. (I've done it myself too. One time, God ended up giving me a really great sermon idea out of some random Old Testament story about some kings. It's okay if you've done this before.) After all, Paul wrote, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16)

While flipping your Bible open to any random passage *might* work for you today, it also might not. Imagine walking up to a buffet at a restaurant and taking random spoonfuls of food (regardless of whether or not you're in the mood for what they're serving). A scoop of this, a pile of that. You might end up with an unappetizing meal. Others may stick to their favorite sections and read them over and over again. Be careful! If you do this too often, it's possible that you might end up with an unbalanced spiritual diet or incomplete faith.

If you're looking for where to start or what to read next, I have a few suggestions. Unless you're committed to reading intentionally through the Bible from cover-to-cover, I'd say to jump to one of the 4 “Jesus Books” (the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. Of the 4, I typically suggest reading Luke first.) Next, read the book of Acts to see what happens to the disciples. Then head back to the famous stories of the Old Testament, such as the ones found in Genesis, Exodus, and/or Daniel. Once you have a good handle of the basic stories, go into other literature types: check out some of the poetry of the Psalms; listen to God's voice thunder through a major or minor prophet; read one of Paul's letters to a church in need of advice, etc. You'll eventually work your way through the Bible, but what's your hurry? Just enjoy your time with God each day. You'll have all eternity to get to know Him and His Word.