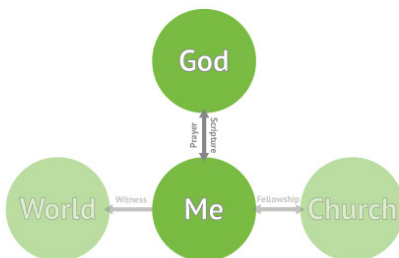


Making God and His Word a Priority

Our Daily Bread University
This course was developed by
Our Daily Bread University



I. Finding Time to Spend with God



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If communicating with our Father in heaven through Bible study and prayer is foundational to our spiritual growth, we need somehow to carve out time in our busy lives to spend with God on a consistent basis. But how can we find the time? And when we do meet with God, what do we do? This lesson will help to answer those questions.

Do you relate to either of these people?

An executive nervously organizes his weekly calendar having heard that middle-management downsizing will begin next month.

A young mother of twin toddlers struggles to get some time to herself, but the children keep waking each other up from their afternoon nap.

The two examples mentioned above are busy people who want to walk with God throughout the day. Yet both have one thing in common. Each is in an environment that makes it difficult to spend quality time with God in prayer and Bible reading. It's precisely when we are stressed by life's demands that a time of spiritual refocus becomes all the more important.

Many of us live with a sense of guilt because we are neglecting our personal devotional time with God. During the hectic demands of the day, it's easy to let the care of our inner lives fall by the wayside.

But if we measure our spirituality by counting the number of times we have met with God during the week, we have missed the point. Devotions are a matter of our hearts more than the discipline of our daily calendars.

I. Finding Time to Spend with God



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II. A Relational Approach to Spending Time with God

Today's Agenda	
Morning	8:00-8:30 David - Meeting with God
Midday	10:00-1:00 Ezra - Meeting with God
Night	8:00-9:00 David - Meditate on God's Word
	10:00-11:00 Blessed Man - Meditate

Right after the creation of the first man and woman, God is seen “walking in the garden in the cool of the day” (Genesis 3:8). The Sovereign of the universe did not hide behind closed doors and angelic executive assistants in order to keep His creatures out. Instead, He took the initiative to seek out Adam and Eve for spiritual companionship.

A healthy and consistent devotional time is one important way we can respond to God’s desire to walk with us. Couples who are in love do not need to be coerced into spending time together. Each has a deep longing to experience life in relationship with the other person. When life’s interruptions keep them apart, each one seeks opportunities to reconnect.

That is what a quiet time is all about. We want to spend time with God to experience His presence, comfort, and guidance. And in a mysterious way, as we spend time with God and “are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18 NIV). We find that spending time with God actually changes the kind of people we are.

II. A Relational Approach to Spending Time with God

The same fellowship-seeking God Who walked in the cool of the day with Adam and Eve is reaching out to each of us today. But when should we try to connect with Him?

The Bible encourages meeting with God during any time of the day.

David wrote, “You, O God, are my God; earnestly I seek you” (Psalm 63:1 NIV).

Ezra, the priest, “read [the Law] . . . from daybreak till to noon” (Nehemiah 8:3 NIV).

David meditated on God’s Word during the “watches of the night” (Psalm 119:148 NIV).

And the first psalm in the Old Testament refers to the blessed man whose “delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night” (Psalm 1:2 NIV).

The Bible provides wonderful freedom about when to meet with God. So, what time of day will work best for you and your schedule? In your current situation, you may find morning to be a good time. Often you may read a passage in the morning, reflect on it during the day, and then review it again in the evening. It helps to have the same biblical thought throughout the day.

What matters most of all is to establish a regular time of the day when God can speak to you through His Word, and you can respond to Him in prayer.

Once you have chosen a time, it's important to be disciplined in keeping your appointments with God. But how do we do that?

III. Building a Relationship

Two people who love each other are intentional about spending meaningful time together. To do this, both discipline and love must work together. Taking time requires deliberate planning.

A similar focus is necessary to cultivate meaningful time with God. Often, we begin the day fully intent on having devotions at a set time. But as the day goes on, we are bombarded by one urgent item after another. Soon devotions are postponed until tomorrow. But when a quiet time is the priority, centering ourselves in God puts things in perspective. This relational connection requires discipline.

In 1 Corinthians 9, the apostle Paul used the imagery of athletic games to illustrate the need for a spiritual discipline. "Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training" (1 Corinthians 9:25 NIV).

The term used for temperate really means "the power of self-control; to practice abstinence."

When athletes say "yes" to the Olympics, they say "no" to other distractions. Rigorous control of diet and exercise are the only way to win in their chosen competitive sport. Similarly, by setting up a daily devotional discipline and making it the priority, a host of other positive habits can follow.

Here are some ways to set up a devotional time before you actually begin:

1 Corinthians 9:25

Everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things.

III. Building a Relationship

| Set up a devotional time:

1. Reserve a daily time to reconnect.
2. Determine how much time to spend.
3. Find a quiet place.
4. Set up realistic expectations.

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- Reserve a daily time to reconnect.

Whether we need a highly disciplined schedule or prefer a more relaxed one, we all need a plan. So first consider your schedule, and then set aside a time when you will meet with God daily.

- Determine how much time to spend.

A classical guitar instructor once told a student, “It’s better to practice 15 minutes a day every day, than to practice for several hours on only a few days.” He was right, especially when it comes to establishing new habits.

This principle clearly applies to our devotional time. It’s better to block out 15 minutes and seek to remain faithful to honoring that time than it is to let our daily discipline be eaten away by daily distractions. After praying about how much time to spend, enter that time block into your calendar.

- Find a quiet place.

We all concentrate or are distracted in different ways. C. S. Lewis brings up a surprising suggestion in his book *Letters to Malcolm*. His admonition on devotional time is to make sure we have “just the right amount of distraction” to help us concentrate. Lewis tells the story of a man who had his time of Bible reading and prayer in a railway compartment because complete silence left him open to inner distractions. Ironically, his focus was enhanced when it was challenged just slightly.

The point is that we’re not always going to find a place that is as quiet as an undiscovered cave. Invariably, minor distractions are likely to occur. But we need to look for a place we believe is sufficiently quiet to help us concentrate. Now jot down on your calendar the place for reconnecting with the Lord.

- Set up realistic expectations.

A student in a Christian college was an excellent writer. The problem was that he always turned in his papers late. Why?

“If I can’t do it right, I won’t do it!” was his response. His commitment to perfectionism led him down a path of inconsistency. This is a common problem in maintaining a devotional time. It is the “all or nothing” approach to a devotional life.

Realistically, daily devotions are more about progress than about perfection. It's better to have a shorter and even less meaningful devotion time on a given day than it is to skip it in the name of high standards. When we wait for the perfect circumstances to have "quality time" with the Lord, they rarely occur. Manageable, bite-sized devotional times can lead to greater consistency.

But what happens when the time and place are reserved and you actually show up for your quiet time, but you're not in the mood to have one?

IV. Exchanging Human Strength for Divine Strength

Isaiah believed that waiting on the Lord was anything but a passive process. This idea of "staying power" required a radical exchange of human for divine strength. The Hebrew word for renew means "to substitute, to exchange, to show newness, to sprout."

"Those who hope in the Lord will renew [exchange] their strength" (Isaiah 40:31 NIV).

The Christian is not supposed to stir up his or her willpower but, instead, is to exchange human energy for divine energy.

Another student at a Christian college had a discipline problem when it came to studying. Activities with his friends competed with getting assignments in on time and being fully prepared for exams.

One night after class, the young man discussed his problem with one of his professors. After talking to him, the student felt compelled to single out his devotional time as the top priority of the day. It would be the one project he planned on getting done first thing every morning.

The next day as he began the new commitment to prioritize his quiet time, he found a sudden sagging of resolve. He just didn't feel like it. He wasn't in the mood.

Claiming Isaiah 40:31, he decided to become transparent with the Lord and "exchange his own strength" for God's. The young man told God that his heart was cold and he felt little motivation to spend time with Him. He confessed his apathy as sin and thanked God for His forgiveness (1 John 1:9).

IV. Exchanging Human Strength for Divine Strength

Renew:

"To substitute, to exchange, to show newness, to sprout"

Then the student chose to surrender his mood to God and asked Him to change it. He asked God to replace his own stagnation with His spiritual vitality. The student read through the biblical passage that he was scheduled to read, and he recommitted himself to pray for transformation.

After about 20 minutes of this, the young man began to pray over other projects that needed his attention later in the day. He told God about assignments he didn't want to do and asked Him for the strength necessary to deal with them.

By the time the young man's feet hit the asphalt on his way to class, he began to feel an energy, a focus, and, most important, a discipline that he had previously lacked. That semester his grades went up. He had found a way of exchanging his own strength for that of the living God.

V. Cultivating Two-way Communication

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Have you ever opened your heart to someone in a letter? You probably felt vulnerable as you waited for a response. How would you have felt if the written response to your letter ignored everything you had said but talked only about issues concerning the other person?

This could be the view from heaven as many a quiet time goes on day in and day out. The Bible is a letter to us from our heavenly Father. Yet too often our prayers do not reflect the actual portion of Scripture we have read. Instead, the content of the letter is ignored as our many pressing needs are petitioned upward. What needs to happen, however, is spiritual two-way communication.

- God speaks to us through His Word.

1 Samuel 3:21 says that the Lord “revealed Himself to Samuel . . . through his word.” The Hebrew word for reveal means “to show or uncover.” The Creator discloses His thoughts, character, and will through His Word. In biblical history, God either spoke directly or inspired His meanings into the sacred text. Today, He illuminates the Bible so we can have our understanding enlightened by the Holy Spirit as we read it.

In approaching a portion of Scripture, there is a time-honored process that can help make examining the Word of God fruitful.

First of all, we need to ask, “What does the passage say?” We answer this by looking at the actual words of the text as they are used in context. Allow the Bible message to speak for itself in its original historical and cultural setting. For example, let the Bible character wear his robe and sandals instead of expecting him to wear a business suit.

The second step is to ask, “What does it mean?” Within the Bible passage is an eternal spiritual truth that is meaningful in all ages. Often the main idea or principle is not time bound to an era hundreds of years ago but can be seen in our own time’s contemporary clothing.

Finally, we need to ask, “How does it apply?” The indwelling Holy Spirit will change our thoughts, speech, and behavior when we allow Him to apply the spiritual principles we find in God’s Word. A key question to ask is, “In what measurable ways should my life change as a result of studying this passage?”

- We respond to God in prayer.

Now let’s look at our conversational response to God. Daniel 6:10 says that Daniel “prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.” (NIV). During his established time of prayer, Daniel undoubtedly petitioned God about his own personal needs and interceded on behalf of the needs of others.

As Daniel was making his requests known to God, a spirit of thanksgiving permeated his prayer time. The whole idea of giving thanks carries with it the idea of gratefully responding to God for gifts already given. It is part of the dialogue that expresses appreciation. Immersion in the Word has a way of serving as a springboard of praise to God for Who He is and for what He has done.

VI. Taking Time to Digest Your Meal

When encountering the pages of the Bible, it’s so easy to skim over a given passage without seeing its significance. But the prophet Jeremiah, with his deep love for the Word of God, made God’s Word his first priority. The Hebrew word translated “were found” means both “to acquire and secure” and “to encounter and meet.” When looking at a passage, we should slow down and acquaint ourselves with the text until it becomes secured in our soul.

V. Cultivating Two-way Communication



“When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight, for I bear your name, Lord God Almighty. (Jeremiah 15:16 NIV).

Jeremiah felt a rush of “joy and delight” as he ingested God’s Word into his heart. The word the prophet used for heart means “the inner man; thinking; reflection at the seat of appetites.” The Word of God nourishes our thoughts and emotions and brings joy.

The foundation for delighting in feeding on God’s Word can be seen in the concluding section of this small but meaningful verse: “for I bear your name, Lord God Almighty.” To Jeremiah, meaningful time in God’s Word is always tied to our relationship with Him. In our devotional time, we become aware once again that we are called by the eternally existing Lord of heaven and earth. And this realization transforms our spiritual dryness into a dynamic encounter with the One Who created us for fellowship with Him.

VII. Writing it Down

There are some advantages to taking notes on your personal time with the Lord. Our thoughts and feelings are a constantly revolving door of varied life experiences. If we have a written record of what is covered in our quiet time, various trends in our walk of faith will be revealed. In addition to this, we will see what progress has been made in different areas of our lives that would go unnoticed if it were not written down.

The kinds of things you might want to record include the date, the passage read, and a verse or sentence that spoke to you. You also might want to write down any insights you gained, any application you feel you should make to your life, and how you talked to God about this matter in prayer.

VIII. Varying Your Methods

There are many devotional guides available today wherever you access Christian resources. My Utmost for His Highest by Oswald Chambers is a devotional classic adapted for a daily quiet time. Other books include a selection of readings for going through the Bible in one year.

VI. Taking Time to Digest Your Meal

Heart:

“The inner man, thinking; reflection at the seat of appetites”

VII. Writing it Down



VIII. Varying Your Methods



The devotional booklet series *Our Daily Bread* uses relevant inspirational stories to draw lessons from a suggested Bible reading. One reason for the popularity of this kind of guide is that it has a short, memorable lesson that is both inspiring and applicable to daily life. If you use one of these devotional guides, be sure to read the Bible passage along with the stories that illustrate the biblical truth. God has promised to bless His Word, not our illustrations about it (2 Timothy 3:15–16).

There are a variety of methods for having effective devotional times and Bible study, that there's bound to be a suitable approach for you. Whatever the method you use, spending time with God to experience His presence, comfort, and guidance is the goal.

The key to experiencing God's presence in this way is not so much about the method as it is about being faithful to your commitment to foster a growing relationship with God, the Father. He loves His children and desires to be personally involved with each of us. That relationship will deepen when we respond to His invitation to spend time with Him.