

# Devotional Life

When we think of a Christian's devotional life, we likely think of the time that a Christian spends reading the Bible, meditating, and praying. This worship time may include journaling, singing, and fasting. New Christians are instructed to make this a daily discipline. In our Decrees, we go so far as to state: "It is further to be desired that personal devotional life with God is to be considered of more importance than Christian service." Really? We'd rather have people sitting in the woods worshipping God personally than out there clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, or sheltering the homeless?

In Matthew 6:33, we read in the context of worrying about our needs being met each day, But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Matthew 22:37,38 records Jesus telling the lawyer, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. In a parallel setting recorded by Mark, Jesus adds, with all thy strength to the list.

In these passages, we learn that loving God is our primary duty. Our lives are to be devoted to God. We prove this devotion by giving ourselves, our intellect, the essence of who we are to Him. For example, the word "strength" in Mark seems to indicate that our physical activity is devoted to God as well as the inner heart, mind, and soul. Another way we prove this devotion is by seeking Kingdom interests before our own.

Devotion, devotional, and devotions come from the root devote, which means "to give or apply (one's time, attention, or self, for example) entirely to a particular activity, pursuit, cause, or person or to set apart for a specific purpose or use." Considering this definition, it seems limiting a Christian's devotional life to private Bible reading and prayer, we may be missing something fuller. Should we speak instead of a Christian's devoted life?

Enoch, Noah, Abraham, David, Elijah, Daniel, and Jesus Christ are examples of men who devoted their lives to God. The motivation for each of them was walking with God and doing His will. We learn from them that private worship is important, but a life of serving follows just as surely as the sun rises in the east. Acts of service may be performed without sincere worship, but we will never be able to sincerely worship without actively serving – the two are sides of the same coin. To make too much distinction between worship and service can hinder true devotedness and promote dualistic living.

In the spiritual discipline of meditating on the written Word and personal prayer, we can face obstacles. One hindrance at times can be expectations. Many are the testimonies of encouragement, inspiration, and strength for the day just by reading the Bible. What are we to do when this is not our experience? Our Bible seems to have nothing for us. Or maybe we have had an especially meaningful personal encounter with God, and the following hours are fraught with temptations and frustrations. It's almost as if the universe is plotting to upset the wonderful time we spent with God. If we come to personal worship with expectations other than to worship sincerely and truthfully seeking some gain, I believe we will be disappointed, and it will be tempting just to skip personal time with God altogether. God seeks those who worship in spirit and in truth, which is a life of worship and surrender. It is a devoted life, and

the Bible reading, meditation, praying, and fasting spring from this devotion. This is not to say there is no value in the disciplines even if we “don’t feel like it.” It is to try to realign our focus on God Himself and our devotion to Him instead of focusing on an activity to try to make Him fit our purposes.

Sin in our lives (Psalm 66:18) and broken relationships (Matt 5:23-24) are also hindrances. To overcome the hindrance of sin, we must repent and confess to God. We must also make restitution to those we’ve wronged before we can experience the blessedness that personal worship time can bring to the Christian. Seeking reconciliation with those around us is the only way God intends for His children to live. Anything short of this will hinder our personal spiritual life.

Not all hindrances are spiritual. We need a quiet, tech-free zone where we can personally approach the Lord. Someone once said we should find a place where we can hear no man-made noises. This may be a physical impossibility for some, but the point is well taken. Find that “closet,” and do not be afraid of silence. Leave the phone elsewhere. If you read your Bible on a device, turn off all notifications while reading.

The busyness we have allowed in our lives can also be a hindrance. It would be far better to be a poor person with rich personal worship time than a rich person with no time to seek God personally. What we consider success in life often doesn’t match God’s definition of success.

It is helpful to create a routine to make sure we spend time personally with God. Some people prefer mornings, others evenings. The time isn’t that important, but we need to find a routine that we can maintain consistently. Making prayer lists for each day will keep prayer from becoming dry and lazy.

What about devotional books? They may have their place for young Christians learning to mine the Scriptures for truth, but the books can become crutches. The little “bites” of Scripture tend to be light; perhaps even shallow; focusing more on emotional appeal. I believe mature Christians will move away from devotional helps. We teach young children the prayers like “God is Great” and “Now I lay me down to sleep,” but if we asked a reasonably mature Christian to lead in prayer at mealtime, we would be alarmed if he could not manage to offer thanks to God for the meal spontaneously. A devotional book may be helpful, but it should never replace personal, purposeful Bible study.

Another concern about devotional books is the source. Too many devotional books being used are from authors we would never invite to speak. But their doctrines must as surely come through the writing as the speaking. It is intellectually dishonest to think we can read all the doctrine from authors who are not upholding Scripture as we understand it, and not be affected by it.

The blessing of personal worship is growing in all spiritual graces. We become like what or who we worship. God wants us to worship Him. In fact, He seeks people who will. Will we be one of those He finds? Will we be known as people who walk with God?

~Lyndon Burkholder