

Developing Personal Devotional Practices

There's no one-size-fits-all pattern for our personal devotional practices. In fact, part of one's growth in the faith is the development of a unique way of expressing and building Christian commitment. Nevertheless, some basic practices can be recommended, as well as some common-sense principals for incorporating these practices into our lives.

Time

Most of us will benefit from choosing a consistent time in our daily routine for most of our devotional practices. A morning time has the benefit of helping set the tone for the day, but the most important consideration is that it be a time of day we can really commit to. For instance, if you've never been an early riser, don't commit to 4am devotions.

Pattern

The content of your devotional practices may change over time, but the following elements form a well-rounded list from which to derive a routine that works for you. It may be wise to start with just a couple of these elements and expand your devotions with time.

- **Encourage your spirit** and renew your commitment to Christ by savoring one of the following passages that praise Christ and affirm His lordship:
 - Philippians 2:5-11
 - Colossians 1:15-20
 - Hebrews 1:1-4
 - 1 Corinthians 15:1-5
- **Pray the Lord's Prayer.** In the Lord's prayer we pray for daily needs, including the need to exalt God's name and seek his kingdom, and we are challenged to rely on God for everything.
- **Read/Pray a Psalm.** The reading and praying of the Psalms has been an important element of Christian devotion throughout the ages. As you use the Psalms devotionally, be prepared for some challenges. It can sometimes be difficult to identify with the Psalms, such as when they deal with military oppression or battle, or when they include prayers for the destruction of enemies. In such instances, it can be helpful to remember that the Psalms represent the prayers of the whole Church, and a Psalm which is difficult for you to pray may speak pointedly for other believers, perhaps half a world away, and may help you pray for them. It can also be helpful to consider how a given Psalm helps us to think about Christ and, in a sense, pray with Him as we consider His own undeserved opposition, His unique relationship with the Father, and His present battle against spiritual forces of evil.
- **Read one or more Bible chapters,** using a method like the M'Cheyne Bible Reading Plan (available via link on the church website), gradually working through the whole Bible. Completing the Bible within a year or two helps one develop a good bird's-eye-view of Scripture. If you're new to the broad reading of Scripture, be aware that you will likely encounter passages that are perplexing or that seem unrelated to your own spiritual life. Be encouraged that through this process you are building important knowledge and perspective, and as you progress, don't be afraid to seek help from others.
- **Memorize Scripture** to internalizing truths crucial to your life in Christ. Take up a new passage each week, reviewing and meditating on that passage each day. "A Year of Bible Memory" (available on the church website) is a good resource, listing 52 Bible passages hand-picked by Pastor Eikenberry.

- **Pray** for your needs and the needs of others, and for the glory and purposes of God. It can be helpful to keep a prayer list or journal as a reminder of prayer items. As you pray, you can reflect on the Scripture passages you have read that day. Keep in mind that the best prayer catalyst may simply be sufficient unhurried time in which to pray about issues as your mind is drawn to them. Of course, we shouldn't limit our prayers to a particular time each day. As much as possible, make your life an ongoing discussion with God, praying and praising as needs and blessings present themselves.
- **Study deeply.** It is wise to balance the bird's-eye-view experience of reading through the Bible (see above) with the slower, deeper study of Scripture and the study of topics related to Christian faith and life. Depending on how many of the other items you include in your daily habits, it might be difficult to add deep study every day of the week. But even if it occurs less frequently, detailed study in the areas of Bible, Theology, and Christian practice is a fascinating, fulfilling and God-honoring use of our minds, and it helps us serve Christ better. Allow your interests, passions, and needs to guide your choice of topics, and consult trusted Christian ministers and friends for recommended study methods and materials. If you would like to start at a fairly basic level, some good resources would be *New City Catechism* (a web-based learning tool linked from the church website), *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know* (Wayne Grudem and Elliot Grudem), and *What's In the Bible: A Tour of Scripture from the Dust of Creation to the Glory of Revelation* (R.C. Sproul and Robert Wolgemuth).
- **Bless the Lord at mealtimes.** While this won't necessarily be part of one's devotions (unless one's devotional time is right before a meal), it is a good practice and part of how many Christians exercise their faith. The Lord Jesus himself followed the Jewish tradition of blessing the Lord at meals, likely with a brief acclamation in praise of God as the giver of the food. Our own adoption of this practice provides opportunity to continually acknowledge the Lord's goodness, as well as the opportunity to express unity with other believers when dining together.

Community

In addition to your private time in these practices, you are encouraged to read, study and pray with family, fellow church members, and Christian friends. Families can keep a shared prayer list and can study the *New City Catechism* together. Parents can pray with children at bedtime. A study group can gather to discuss Scripture.

A crucial element in our spiritual health is the encouragement and counsel we exchange with other believers, usually outside of worship services. An excellent way to facilitate this type of relating is for a small group of believers to set aside weekly time during which each member talks about the state of his or her spiritual life and the other members offer encouragement, challenge, and prayer.