

Copyright © 2016 James William Ewing

All rights reserved. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has permission to reproduce and disseminate this document in any form by any means for purposes chosen by the Seminary, including, without limitation, preservation or instruction.

EQUIPPING THE MEMBERS OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH,
CALVERT CITY, KENTUCKY TO DEVELOP THE
PRACTICE OF PERSONAL DEVOTIONS

A Project
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
James William Ewing

December 2016

APPROVAL SHEET

EQUIPPING THE MEMBERS OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH,
CALVERT CITY, KENTUCKY TO DEVELOP THE
PRACTICE OF PERSONAL DEVOTIONS

James William Ewing

Read and Approved by:

Joseph C. Harrod (Faculty Supervisor)

Donald S. Whitney

Date _____

To my faithful and loving wife, who
has stood by my side for so many years,
to our four amazing children
who have blessed my life,
and to my Lord Jesus
who has allowed me the privilege
of serving His church.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	vii
PREFACE	viii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose	1
Goals	1
Context of the Ministry Project	2
Rationale for the Project	4
Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations	5
Research Methodology	7
2. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR THE PRACTICE OF DAILY PERSONAL DEVOTIONS	11
Introduction	11
God Desires a Personal Relationship with Man	13
Biblical Means of Interaction with God	20
Biblical Methods of Interaction with God	26
The Frequency of Personal Devotions	37
Conclusion	42
3. THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE PRACTICE OF DAILY PERSONAL DEVOTIONS	44
Introduction	44
The Practice of Devotional Reading	45

Chapter	Page
The Practice of Devotional Meditation	49
The Practice of Devotional Prayer	59
A Basic Structure for Personal Devotions	65
Journaling as a Tool to Support Daily Personal Devotions	69
Avoiding the Pitfalls of Daily Personal Devotions	72
Conclusion	76
4. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT	77
Introduction	77
Project Promotion	77
Summary of Project Goals	78
Conclusion	95
5. EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT	96
Introduction	96
Evaluation of the Project Purpose	96
Evaluation of the Project Goals	97
Strengths of the Project	102
Weaknesses of the Project	102
What I Would Do Differently	103
Theological Reflections	104
Personal Reflections	105
Conclusion	107
Appendix	
1. CONGREGATIONAL PRACTICES QUESTIONNAIRE	108
2. CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC	112
3. PRE- AND POST-COURSE SURVEY	114

Appendix	Page
4. QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT OF COURSE EFFECTIVENESS	118
5. PRE- AND POST COURSE SURVEY RESULTS	121
6. DESCRIPTION OF MEDITATIVE PRACTICES OF BISHOP JOSEPH HALL	124
7. SUMMARY OF MEDITATIVE METHODS OF DONALD S. WHITNEY.....	129
8. PRAYING THE BIBLE, DONALD S.WHITNEY.....	133
BIBLIOGRAPHY	136

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Congregational attitudes about daily personal devotions	80
2. Familiarity with the practice of daily personal devotions	80
3. Use of the Bible and devotional books	81
4. Member practice of devotional meditation	82
5. Hindrances to personal devotional practice	82
6. Personal accountability practices	83
7. Use of a journal in personal devotions	84
8. Correlation between reading and prayer	85
9. Correlation between reading, prayer, and church attendance	86
10. Session review scores	88
11. Summary of pre- and post-course survey results	92
12. Results of t-test for dependent samples	92
A1. Pre-Course Survey Results.....	123
A2. Post-Course Survey Results	124

PREFACE

This project actually began when I was a seventeen-year-old high school student. Through the ministry of Don Nelson, I was led to faith in Jesus Christ. I was further mentored by John Johnson, who helped me understand much about walking with the Lord. When I was a cadet at the United States Air Force Academy, Navigator leaders Jimmy Covey and Rob Mahon introduced me to the concept of personal discipleship through the disciplines of Scripture memorization and daily personal devotions.

Following my military retirement, I entered vocational ministry and soon discovered that many church members evaluated their spiritual development based on accumulated theological knowledge rather than a deep personal relationship with God. The common missing element was the lack of a regular interaction with the Word of God. The motivation for this project was to address this missing element in the local church.

As I complete this project, I must thank my wife, Cheryl, for her patience allowing me the time to read, think, plan, and write. I want to thank Dr. Donald S. Whitney for helping me understand much more about the dynamics of spiritual life. I offer a special thanks to Dr. Joseph C. Harrod as both an instructor and as my project supervisor. Dr. Harrod's extensive knowledge in this field of study, his enthusiasm, encouragement, and his friendship were constant companions throughout this effort.

Above all, I want to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for offering grace to a young man over forty years ago and for the privilege of serving in His church.

Jim Ewing

Benton, Kentucky

December, 2016

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip members of First Baptist Church (FBC), Calvert City, Kentucky, to develop a daily practice of personal devotions.

Goals

The first goal of this project was to assess the understanding and practice of personal devotions within the congregation. This goal was measured by administering a congregational questionnaire to high school-age and adult members regarding their understanding and practice of personal devotions.¹ This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of seventy percent of the adult members complete the questionnaire and the questionnaire was analyzed, yielding a clear picture of the current understanding and practice of personal devotions among FBC members.²

The second goal of this project was to develop an eight-session curriculum to equip members to practice a daily time of personal devotions. The curriculum covered the theology of personal devotions, presented a range of techniques and tools, and established an accountability process to provide participants with additional motivation and encouragement to stay committed to the practice of daily personal devotions. This goal was measured by an expert panel of five current and former pastors using a common rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and

¹See appendix 1 for congregational questionnaire.

²A minimum of 105 members.

effectiveness of the curriculum.³ This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of ninety percent of all the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level.

The third goal of this project was to equip a group of eight high school-age and adult members to develop the practice of daily personal devotions through an eight-week course of instruction. This goal was measured by administering a pre and post-course survey that measured the participant's level of knowledge, confidence and motivation, and consistency of practice of daily personal devotions.⁴ This goal was considered successfully met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre and post-survey scores.

The fourth goal of this project was to obtain qualitative feedback from the course participants to help make changes to this course for future classes. This goal was measured by administering a post-course subjective survey that evaluated the participant's qualitative views regarding the usefulness of the course for personal spiritual development and for recommended changes for future courses.⁵ This goal was successfully met when course participants completed the post-course survey.

Context of the Ministry Project

The ministry project took place in the context of First Baptist Church, Calvert City, Kentucky. FBC has a long history in the community and it is the oldest church in Calvert City, being formally established in 1876.⁶ This longevity is a key reason many FBC members have come to understand the idea of a personal relationship with God

³See appendix 2 for the curriculum evaluation rubric.

⁴See appendix 3 for the pre and post-course survey.

⁵See appendix 4 for the qualitative post-course survey.

⁶"First Baptist Church, Calvert City, Kentucky, Centennial Celebration: August 1, 1876 to August 1, 1976," historical pamphlet published by First Baptist Church, Calvert City, August, 1, 1976.

more in terms of carrying on traditional church practices than in terms of personal spiritual development. Four factors related to this ministry context suggest the importance of pursuing this ministry project.

The first factor was that many church members appeared to understand a relationship with God primarily in the context of corporate activities such as Sunday school and the weekly preaching event in corporate worship gatherings. While the concept of a personal relationship with God is routinely addressed in these corporate venues, the actual practice of this relationship still appeared to be a somewhat uncommon as evidenced by the fact that members generally affirmed the importance of this practice, but it was not common for them to talk about their own personal experiences.

A second factor was that most conversations about a personal relationship with God were general in nature and often expressed in terms of answers to prayers for minor difficulties or thankfulness for a fortunate turn of events. It was rare to hear members describe how the Holy Spirit gave them a fresh understanding of or application for a familiar text of Scripture or how God used an unfamiliar text of Scripture to shed light on God's purpose in a difficult situation. The lack of such talk suggested that personal time with God was not a common experience for many members.

Third, the application of God's Word to contemporary issues, both within the church and within the culture, is a struggle for many members. Tough political or social issues are often met with hesitancy, either in an attempt to avoid hurt feelings or to avoid offering an inaccurate or unpopular response. Many members wait for the pastor to offer his thoughts before committing openly to a particular position. The most notable recent examples included struggles over the issue of divorce and the selection of deacons, the cultural debate over same-sex marriage, and the recent issue of greater access to alcohol in local restaurants. The lack of a regular time of interaction with God and His Word has apparently left some church members uncertain about how to address these issues biblically.

A fourth issue was that apparently most adults were uncertain about how to pass on the practice of personal devotions to family members. Additionally, discussions with long-time church members indicated that none of them recall an attempt to equip FBC members for the practice of regular personal devotions. The unintended but clear result was that individual families, and the church body as a whole, continued to understand a relationship with God in terms of attendance and activities, rather a vital relationship with living and personal God.

These four factors highlighted the need to take immediate steps to address the lack of understanding and practice of regular personal devotions. Pursuing this project was intended to help FBC members make substantial progress in their personal relationship with God. It also intended to be a useful tool to equip members to begin to address the issues and challenges that are a part of contemporary life.

Rationale for the Project

The contextual factors outlined above suggested that FBC had an immediate need for an effort to equip members to pursue the practice of personal devotions. Most members understood that a regular personal time with God is an essential element of a relationship with God. Consequently, the pursuit of this project was favorably received by church members.

Second, few members seemed to have made daily devotions a consistent practice despite the fact that most were aware of the importance the Bible places on regular time in God's Word (Josh 1:8, John 15:7). In candid discussions, some members expressed the fact that their experience with God's Word is little more than a rote practice with minimal impact on practical, daily living. Rather than questioning their experience, they have accepted this as a normal situation and have learned to cope with their disillusionment. This experience is one key reason why several local church members have learned to accept attendance and activity, rather than demonstrated

spiritual depth, as the measure of spiritual maturity. This project helped participants understand the importance of daily personal devotions as a means of developing a strong and vital relationship with God.

Third, many faithful saints have read the Bible for years with very little evidence of spiritual growth. However, just as believers must learn how to put off the old man and put on the new man (Eph 4:22-24; Rom 12:1-2), they must also learn the dynamics of a personal relationship with God through His Word. The project directly addressed this need by providing instruction in the theology and practice of daily personal devotions. An eight-week, small group course employed individual study and readings, as well as group discussions and exercises to address the biblical and practical reasons for a time of daily devotions. Class work focused on the mechanics of daily devotions and addressed many of the misconceptions, problems, and issues participants experienced. Finally, the course provided a process of accountability to reinforce the instruction and to ensure the greatest probability of building the habit of daily devotions into a long-term spiritual discipline.

The benefit to the church body of this project was that participants developed the knowledge and skills necessary to enjoy a vital daily relationship with God. The intended future impact will be that as members gain skill in the practice of daily devotions, the church's major teaching ministries will bear greater fruit because they will be building on the solid ground of growing relationship with God (Matt 7:24-27). As they begin to experience the work of the Holy Spirit in their heart and lives, the church will be blessed with spiritually strong members that are capable of taking advantage of new ministry opportunities, addressing challenges biblically, and leading the church to fulfill its Great Commission task (Matt 28:19-20).

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms are used in the ministry project:

Accountability. Accountability is “the obligation to answer to another for choices, decision, and actions in light of their consequences and outcomes.”⁷ For this ministry project, accountability applied to the commitment to complete the weekly classroom exercises and in making regular contact with participants during the time between classroom sessions.

Discipleship. Discipleship is “a process that takes place within accountable relationships over a period of time for the purpose of bringing believers to spiritual maturity in Christ.”⁸ Correspondingly, a disciple is one who is actively involved in the process of becoming spiritually mature.

Personal devotions. “Personal devotions” is the name given to a regular time established “in advance for the sole purpose of a personal meeting with our Savior and Lord.”⁹ This concept has also been described as quiet time, personal worship, morning watch, and as an appointment with God.¹⁰

Spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines are “those practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth among believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ.”¹¹ This project will focus on the spiritual discipline of daily personal devotions. The sub-elements of this disciplines include reading, meditation, and on prayer. The premise is that these are essential disciplines for spiritual maturity.

Two limitations applied to this project. First, the accuracy of the pre and post-

⁷ Glen G. Scorgi, ed., *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), (2004), s.v. “accountability.”

⁸Ron Bennett, *Intentional Disciplemaking: Cultivating Spiritual Maturity in the Local Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2001), 23.

⁹Ibid., 17.

¹⁰Jean Fleming, *Feeding Your Soul: A Quiet Time Handbook* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1999), 17.

¹¹Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: 2014), 4.

series surveys depended on the willingness of participants to be candid in their assessment of their devotional practices. This issue was mitigated by the use of surveys that are not tied directly to the respondent by name. Second, the effectiveness of the classroom instruction was diminished where participants failed to attend each class session. To mitigate the impact of missed sessions, expanded instructor notes were made available to participants.

Two delimitations were placed on the project. First, the project was conducted over an eighteen week time frame. This ensured sufficient time to prepare and teach the eight-week series and to administer the pre and post-series surveys, and assess the results. Second, the instructional group was limited to eight participants to ensure an environment conducive to candid discussion, personal leader involvement, and to permit effective accountability for all assignments.

Research Methodology

The first goal of this project was to assess the understanding and practice of personal devotions within the congregation. This goal was measured by administering a congregational questionnaire to adult members regarding their understanding and practice of personal devotions.¹² The questionnaire was created by the author and distributed in a mailing to each adult member of the church. In addition, copies were made available in the church office. The requested turn-around time was four weeks from the release date. Members were notified about the questionnaire in the church newsletter, in Sunday school announcements, and from the pulpit each week beginning one month prior to the release date until the expiration of the four week turn-around time. The questionnaire asked participants for basic demographic data to identify the age, gender, length of time as a Christian, and length of time as a church member. It followed with questions

¹²See appendix 1 for congregational questionnaire.

regarding the nature and frequency of personal devotional practices. Questions were a combination of fill-in, multiple choice, and statements in which the participant chose one of the following six responses on a six-point Likert scale: strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D), disagree somewhat (DS), agree somewhat (AS), agree (A), strongly agree (SA).¹³ To ensure the greatest possibility of candid comments, the questionnaire was completely anonymous. Participants returned completed questionnaires by mail, in Sunday school classroom, at the church office, or directly to me. Once questionnaires were collected, I prepared a detailed assessment of the results.

The second goal of this project was to develop an eight-session curriculum that equipped members to practice a daily time of personal devotions. To ensure high quality course materials were used, I organized an expert panel of five current and retired pastors to review the material from each session. These pastors were individuals with whom I have had a long-standing relationship and who were recognized as effective, knowledgeable, and faithful leaders in their churches and communities. Reviewers used a grading rubric that consisted of eleven questions that addressed biblical and theological accuracy, the appropriateness of course materials, teaching methodology, scope, and effectiveness of the each lesson.¹⁴ The same rubric was used to evaluate each lesson. The turn-around time for each expert panel review was one week but most reviewers required less time to complete their review. The expert panel provided feedback to the author via email, telephone, and personal contact. No major corrections were noted, however, reviewers provided some helpful additions to the course material.

The third goal of this project was to equip a group of eight high school-age and adult members to develop the practice of daily personal devotions through an eight-week

¹³All of the research instruments used in this project was performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

¹⁴See appendix 2 for the curriculum evaluation rubric.

course of instruction. Participants were chosen based on volunteers from the congregation who made personal contact with the author. Only five participants volunteered for the course so I approached other members directly and recruited three additional participants. To measure this goal, I created a pre and post-course survey that measured each participant's level of knowledge, confidence and motivation, as well as consistency in practicing daily personal devotions.¹⁵ The survey consisted of thirty statements asking participants to choose one of the following responses on a six-point Likert scale: strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D), disagree somewhat (DS), agree somewhat (AS), agree (A), strongly agree (SA). The pre and post-course surveys were identical to facilitate the use of a t-test for dependent samples assessment tool to determine the impact of the course on each participant's devotional practices. The pre-course survey was administered to the eight participants during the first small group session while the post-course survey was administered at the end of the eighth session. To preserve anonymity, and to ensure the greatest possibility of candid comments, responses were matched by using a personally-selected four-character identification code.

The final assessment of the effectiveness of the eight-week course employed a t-test for dependent samples process. This test "involved a comparison of the means from each group of scores and focuses on the difference between the scores."¹⁶ This test was the appropriate statistical tool for this project because the pre and post-course survey was given to the same group of people. By comparing survey results, it was possible to determine if changes in knowledge and behavior were due to the course of instruction.

The fourth goal was intended to support my overarching efforts to create a discipleship program for First Baptist Church. This post-course survey incorporated subjective evaluations of the overall usefulness of this course in the pursuit of personal

¹⁵See appendix 3 for the pre- and post-course survey.

¹⁶Neil J. Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008), 191.

spiritual development, the duration of the course of instruction to include individual lesson length as well as overall course length, the usefulness of course materials and assignments, and any changes they would recommend to improve future presentations of this course.¹⁷ Since this project was the inaugural effort, the feedback from this initial group will play an important role in determining how to best incorporate this material in an ongoing discipleship program.

¹⁷See appendix 4 for qualitative post-course survey.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR THE
PRACTICE OF DAILY PERSONAL DEVOTIONS

Introduction

“No Spiritual Discipline is more important than the intake of God’s Word.”¹

This sentiment would likely be echoed from the sanctuary or Sunday school class of any Christian church. The unfortunate reality, however, is that relatively few Christians have actually developed such a practice. Author and long-time staff member of the Navigators, Jean Fleming, makes an important observation regarding the practice of spending regular time with God in his Word:

Some people tell me that they talk to God throughout the day and wonder if it is still necessary to set aside special time for fellowship with Him. I think so. No relationship flourishes without some face-to-face time when we give our total attention to the other person. In our busy age, we pride ourselves on accomplishing multiple tasks at one time. We talk on the phone, read the newspaper, and watch the baseball game—all the while helping our children with their homework. This may seem necessary, even admirable, but unless we give some undivided attention to our closest relationships, they will wither.²

These words seem obvious, but the practice of a daily time with God through the Bible is still a struggle for many Christians. Part of the difficulty lies in the fact that this discipline is often assumed or overlooked as part of discipleship training. Alister McGrath speaks to this common oversight,

One such weakness is [the] assumption that people will instinctively know how to read the Scripture for all that it is worth. This is simply not true—people need help and guidance. Many young Christians are told to ‘read Scripture’, so they begin to do so—but soon find themselves puzzled, perplexed, and confused. Their spiritual

¹Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), 22.

²Jean Fleming, *Feeding Your Soul: A Quiet Time Handbook* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1999), 19.

lives then wither, and their young faith can collapse. This is because they are not being given help.³

As noted in chapter 1, the accumulation of biblical knowledge and frequent church attendance are often accepted among church members as the evidence of a vital and growing relationship with God. Personal experience, however, demonstrates that it is rare to hear Christians discuss how God's Word has given them fresh insights or helped them work through difficult life circumstances. It is more common to hear members talk about learning new concepts than to describe new experiences with God.

A second part of the problem lies in the fact that the Bible does not define or provide specific details regarding the individual practice of daily personal devotions. Richard Foster acknowledges this lack of specificity but claims, "In the first century and earlier," these disciplines were so common that "it was not necessary to give instructions" because they "were so frequently practiced and such a part of the general culture that the 'how to' was common knowledge."⁴ Foster's assessment appears reasonable regarding the practice of meditation because it is frequently mentioned in Scripture with no apparent instructional guidance. However, one might assume that the practice of prayer would have also been well understood, yet Jesus' disciples requested instruction on how to pray (see Matt 6:1-13, Luke 11:2-4). Despite the apparent lack of specific or consistent instruction concerning elements of personal devotions, the Bible does demonstrate that daily time with God and his Word was expected by God and practiced by his people.

Among evangelical Christians, these practices have been designated variously as "quiet time," an "appointment with God," or "personal devotions."⁵ This project will

³Alister McGrath, *Beyond the Quiet Time: Practical Evangelical Spirituality* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College, 1995), 22.

⁴Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Harper, 1998), 3.

⁵Fleming, *Feeding Your Soul*, 17.

use the title “personal devotions.” While this term is not explicitly biblical, its use is common among contemporary evangelical Christians and provides a useful shorthand description: “Personal devotions are the individual and private exercises practiced to enhance the spiritual life by focusing the mind and senses in reverence toward God.”⁶ Some evangelicals would include Bible study, fasting, periods of silence and solitude, and the like, as part of personal devotions.⁷ Acknowledging the variety of opinions about what constitutes personal devotional activities, the focus of this project will be on the most common practices of reading, meditation, and prayer.

This chapter will demonstrate that the practice of daily personal devotions is supported by the Bible as a foundational part of the life of a faithful and growing Christian.

God Desires a Personal Relationship with Man

One recurring and significant theme in Scripture is that God created humans as relational beings with the capacity, need, and desire to experience communion with their maker. Though Adam’s fall severed this communion, God gave his people various means by which they might draw near to him. Among these means are hearing, reading, and mediating upon Scripture and the practice of prayer. These means of communication were available to God’s chosen people under the old covenant. With the atoning work of Christ on the cross, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, they are made all the more vital for Christians.

On the sixth day of the creation story God created man “in the image of God” (Gen 1:26-27).⁸ Theologian Wayne Grudem notes that one key implication of being

⁶Glen G. Scorgie, ed., *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), s.v. “devotions, personal.”

⁷Ibid.

⁸Scripture references based on the New American Standard Bible (updated ed., 1995).

created in God's image is that man has "a spiritual life that enables us to relate to God as persons."⁹ Kenneth Mathews expands on Grudem's understanding explaining that "this existential reading of the 'image' dwells on relationship, but the relationship is the consequence of the 'image' rather than its context."¹⁰ In other words, it appears that God created man for the specific purpose of engaging in a continuing relationship with Him. God's design for this personal interaction is also observed in Genesis 3:8, where God is described as "walking in the Garden in the cool of the day." The clear implication is that "it was not unusual for him to be heard walking in the garden" and that "maybe a daily chat between the Almighty and his creatures was customary."¹¹ Mathews affirms that the "anthropomorphic description of God 'walking' (*mithallēk*) in the garden suggests the enjoyment of fellowship between him and our first parents."¹²

Readers see God's relational initiative in the fact that even as mankind fell under the curse of death as the result of their sin, God chose not to destroy them but provided for their continuing needs. Genesis 3:21 explains that "the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them." Mathews observes that in God's benevolent act of mercy, "his action in behalf of the couples is salvific in character."¹³ Even as God condemns sinful humanity to destruction by the great flood, he chose to keep a remnant alive through the family of faithful Noah (Gen 6-9) that would "provide the linkage between the antediluvian world and the new world."¹⁴ The personal

⁹Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 446.

¹⁰Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, The New American Commentary, vol. 1A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 166.

¹¹Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 76.

¹²Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 239.

¹³*Ibid.*, 255.

¹⁴Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 400.

interaction with man that began in the Garden of Eden was apparently something God intended to continue.

The Abrahamic Covenant

As human history unfolds, Genesis 12 describes God's initiative in identifying a specific man to become the seed from which he would raise a new nation. The words of a covenant promise given to Abram were not only a guarantee of God's commitment to Abram and the future nation of Israel; they are also a commitment to the eventual welfare of all humanity. "I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Gen 12:2-3). From this point forward, God fulfilled that promise to Abraham, his descendants, and to all mankind by repeatedly restoring breaks in relationship with his most prized creation (cf. Ps 8:4-8). Gordon Wenham explains that at the heart of the Abrahamic Covenant blessing is God's continuing desire for relationship with mankind. "Indeed, the presence of God walking among his people is the highest of his blessings (Leviticus 26:11-12). Material blessings are in themselves tangible expressions of divine benevolence . . . The promises of blessing to the patriarchs are thus a reassertion of Gods original intentions for man."¹⁵

The Mosaic Covenant

Early in the book of Exodus, God raised up Moses to represent him as he led the Hebrews out from slavery in Egypt. And it was through Moses that God expanded his promise to the Hebrew people: "So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exod 3:8). Once again, God took the initiative to overcome the obstacles to an intimate and continuing relationship with mankind, at this

¹⁵Wenham, *Genesis*, 275.

point represented by the new nation of Israel.

As the fledgling nation begins their wilderness journey to the Promised Land, Moses received God's first written commands in what we know as the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:1-17). The primary intent of these instructions was to provide a means through which God might continue to live in fellowship with Israel. As Durham notes, "Yahweh had opened himself to a special relationship with Israel, but that relationship would develop only if Israel committed themselves to Yahweh alone."¹⁶ This clearly was not a passive enterprise, but a reciprocal relationship where the people must interact with God.

After giving Israel these commandments, God established a formal system of worship as well as detailed guidelines for living within the new nation, collectively known as the Law of Moses (see Josh 8:31, 1 Kgs 2:3, Ezra 3:2). The books of the Torah, particularly Exodus through Deuteronomy, describe a range of cultic practices that touch on all aspects of the life of the new nation. For a failure to comply with God's commands, responses were commanded that range from repayment of debts (see Exod 21:19, 22; 22:16) to stoning as a means of execution (see Lev 20:27, 24:23; Num 15:36). The purpose of those actions was to keep sin from taking hold within the nation (see Deut 21:21; 22:24). But the greater purpose behind those laws was twofold. One was to demonstrate to the unbelieving nations the power and greatness of the God of Israel (Deut 4:7-8), and second, so that God might remain in fellowship with his people: "Since the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp to deliver you and to defeat your enemies before you, therefore your camp must be holy; and He must not see anything indecent among you or He will turn away from you" (Deut 23:14).

Soon after the people entered the Promised Land their rebellion resulted in God's acts of judgment "in order to test Israel by them [attacks by the surrounding

¹⁶John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 3 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 285.

nations], whether or not they will keep the way of the LORD to walk it” (Judg 2:22). Yet despite their sin, God continued to provide a means to rescue the relationship. “The LORD raised up judges for them” because he “was moved to pity by their groaning” caused by those who oppressed and afflicted them (Judg 2:18).

As a result of generations of unfaithfulness, 2 Kings 17:20 describes the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel: “The Lord rejected all the descendants of Israel and afflicted them and gave them into the hand of plunderers, until He had cast them out of His sight.” While enduring another one hundred and fifty years, the Southern Kingdom of Judah suffered a similar fate at the hand of the Babylonians under King Nebuchadnezzar. And in the process, the great temple built by King Solomon, the place where Scripture says that “the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD” (1 Kgs 8:11) was destroyed. Through disobedience fellowship with God was broken. Yet, while Judah was in captivity, God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah and explained that his relationship with them had not ended. Through the words of Jeremiah God explained that he would return the nation to their homeland once again. “You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you . . . and I will restore your fortunes and will gather you from all the nations . . . and I will bring you back to the place from where I sent you into exile” (Jer 29:10-14). God’s punishment was the result of the nation’s sin, but for God it was a means of purifying them so that they might once again enjoy an intimate relationship with their maker. As the prophet would reveal just a chapter later, “You shall be my people, and I will be your God” (Jer 30:22).

The blessing that God promises through the Abrahamic Covenant would eventually be fulfilled in a new covenant that provided the means for a more extensive relationship with his people. Jeremiah 31:31-34 describes this new covenant whereby God promised to “put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be

their God, and they shall be My people” (see Ezek 36:26-38, Joel 2:25-32). This was one more demonstration of God’s desire for relationship with his people and his willingness to find a means to remove the barriers caused by their sin.

This promise was also a message to the nation regarding the nature of their new relationship with God. The writer of Hebrews explains, “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb 10:4). David Allen argues that the word translated “take away” (*aphaireo*) is in the present tense and “at least implies a continuing situation” affirming that God’s requirements for relationship would never be predicated on external acts of obedience.¹⁷ Instead, a continuing relationship would be based on the intent of the individual’s heart (see Jer 29:13, Ezek 36:26). The fullest expression of this new covenant relationship, however, would not be manifest until the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

The Advent of Messiah and the New Covenant

With the birth of Jesus, God once again took the initiative to pursue a renewed fellowship with Israel; an initiative that would soon extend to all humanity. Announcing the birth of the Christ child to his adoptive father Joseph, the angel said, “He will save His people from their sins” (Matt 1:21), the central cause of broken fellowship with God. Jesus described God’s efforts to rescue his relationship with mankind in his well-known dialogue with the Pharisee Nicodemus: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him” (John 3:16-17). Gerald Borchert explains that “God’s purpose in sending Jesus was not to condemn (*krinē*) but to build the bridge in reconciling sacrifice

¹⁷David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary, vol. 35 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010), 495.

(*hilasmon*, cf. 1 John 4:10) for human beings.”¹⁸ This bridge, once opened, would no longer be closed by man’s sin.

In preparation for his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension Jesus describes a crucial aspect of God’s more enduring and intimate plans for maintaining a relationship with his people, the gift of his Holy Spirit: “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you” (John 14:16-17). God would be present in a much more profound and explicit manner. Puritan John Owen (1616-1683) notes that the Holy Spirit would transform “their whole souls, their minds, wills, and affections, a gracious, supernatural habit, principle, and disposition of living unto God” which would result in the birth of a “new and divine nature which is wrought in them . . . repaired by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, whereby we are made conformable unto God, firmly and steadfastly adhering unto him through faith and love.”¹⁹ Grudem affirms this work of the Holy Spirit suggesting that “one of his [the Holy Spirit’s] primary purposes in the new covenant age is to manifest the presence of God, to give indication that makes the presence of God known.”²⁰

Speaking to the heart of the ancient Abrahamic covenant, the Apostle Paul connects God’s plan to bless “all the families of the earth” through the Holy Spirit’s new covenant work of reconciliation:

For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity . . . so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, . . . for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no

¹⁸Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1-11*, The New American Commentary, vol. 25A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 184.

¹⁹John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, bk. 4, *Pneumatologia: A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1981), 469.

²⁰Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 641.

longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household (Eph 2:14-20).

From the moment of creation forward, the Bible describes God as taking steps to initiate and maintain access to fellowship with his highest creation. In Revelation 21:3-4 God says that one day man will find that “the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them.” The nature of this fellowship is neither mystical nor academic. Descriptions such as God walking in the Garden (Gen 3:8) and God speaking to Moses “face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend” (Exod 33:11) describe a means of interaction that would be familiar and in which mankind had the innate capacity to engage. The repeated examples of God’s effort to keep himself accessible to mankind, and to offer the means for maintaining that access, provides the foundation and motivation for the practice of daily personal devotions.

Biblical Means of Interaction with God

The foundational elements of the practice of personal devotions are evident in the emphasis the Bible places on two specific means for sustaining a personal relationship between God and man. The first of these is the guidance contained in the Word of God. The second is the enduring presence of the Holy Spirit as an immediate means of helping to explain and apply God’s Word to the life of the believer (see John 14:15-22; John 16:13-15).

The Word of God

Early biblical records describe God’s interaction with mankind primarily through individual leaders such as Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets. As the Torah narrative focuses on the establishment of the nation of Israel, the giving of the Ten Commandments was the signal to Israel that the written Word of God would be the central means by which Israel would maintain fellowship with God.

If their relationship with God was going to continue, God now demanded something from the people: diligent obedience to His Word.²¹ This would not be a simple task as Douglas Stuart has noted: “The Israelites had to learn to see the underlying principles in any law and not let the specifics of the individual casuistic citation mislead them into applying the law too narrowly.”²² The people were now responsible not only for obeying what God has specifically commanded but also for interacting with the law to ensure its proper application to situations to which the law did not specifically speak.

This participatory requirement was expanded as Moses handed off the mantle of leadership to his protégé Joshua. Moses gathered the people together one final time to review God’s law, now greatly expanded:

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the Lord your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. (Deut 30:15-18)

If Israel was to enjoy unbroken fellowship with God, then they must understand and diligently obey his Word.

As the people prepared to step into the Promised Land, God reminded Joshua again about the connection between knowledge of his law and obedience to the law: “This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success” (Josh 1:8). David Howard explains that “the keys to success in life lie in being intensely focused upon God

²¹Durham, *Exodus*, 284.

²²Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, The New American Commentary, vol. 2 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 443.

and in consistent faithfulness to him and his revealed Word.”²³ This idea of fidelity toward God and his Word was affirmed by the psalmist in Psalm 1:1-3:

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers.

Again, the favor and blessing of God would require man’s full engagement with God and his Word.

This strong emphasis on the role of the Word of God in the life of the faithful believer continues in Psalm 119, not only the longest chapter in the Bible, but a one with a singular focus on God’s Word. Willem Van Gemeren affirms the focus of Psalm 119 and sees its emphasis as key to genuine fellowship with God: “This is a psalm not only of law, but of love, not only of a statute, but of spiritual strength, not only of devotion to precept but of loyalty to the way of the Lord.”²⁴ At the outset, Psalm 119:1 confirms “How blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord.”

With the advent of Messiah, this emphasis on the obedience did not diminish, but the context changed somewhat. With Jesus came the New Covenant and the complete fulfillment of the Mosaic Law (Rom 8:1-4). Yet despite this reality, Jesus and the New Testament writers continued to emphasize the relationship between obedience to God’s Word and man’s continuing relationship with God. In John 14:23 Jesus explained, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him,” and in John 15:10-11, “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy

²³David M. Howard, Jr., *Joshua*, The New American Commentary, vol. 5 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 90.

²⁴Willem A. Van Gemeren, *Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, in vol. 5 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 736.

may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.” Speaking to the church in Rome, the Apostle Paul explains, the commands of the Mosaic Law and the record of God’s interaction with the nation of Israel were intended to bring mankind New Testament blessings: “For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Rom 15:4). The hope was that they might avoid the instances of broken relationship with God suffered by their predecessors.

The weight of the biblical evidence clearly supports the premise that the primary means by which man would engage with his God is through the intimate knowledge of, and diligent obedience to, his Word.

The Spirit of God

In Ezekiel 36:26-28 God gave his people a vision for a new blessing. While obedience to God’s commands would always be a part of life for those who would follow him, something new would take place that would make that process much more effective and fruitful:

Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God.

As Lamar Cooper notes, “This new internalized covenant would lead the people to turn to the new shepherd, the Messiah, and exchange their rebelliousness for a new heart sensitive to the will of God. The enabling power to do this would be provided by a ‘new spirit.’”²⁵ In the days immediately prior to his crucifixion, Jesus affirmed Ezekiel’s descriptions of the role of the Holy Spirit: “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your

²⁵Lamar Eugene Cooper, Sr., *Ezekiel*, The New American Commentary, vol. 17 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 316-317.

remembrance all that I said to you” (John 14:26). He described the Spirit’s ministry more fully in John 16:13-14, “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.” Following Jesus’ departure, the believer’s primary means of guidance was through of the Word of God, but, as Jesus had explained, the Holy Spirit would provide a more intimate means by which God’s people would come to understand and apply God’s Word correctly.

After Jesus’ departure, the evangelistic focus expanded to the Gentile world. And as the mission to the Gentiles began to produce converts, questions arose regarding what instructions should be given to these new converts since the Jewish religious practices were no longer required. A gathering of Jesus’ remaining disciples, along with other recent converts, met and formulated a set of guidelines for these new Gentile converts (Acts 15). The letter crafted by the council provides an important example of how the Holy Spirit would lead and the role that God’s people were to play in decision making: “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials” (Acts 15:28). John Polhill notes that “just as the Spirit had been instrumental in the inclusion of the Gentiles (Acts 15:8, 12), so now in the conference the Spirit had led the Jerusalem leaders in considering them for their inclusion.”²⁶ Millard Erickson supports Polhill’s thoughts, noting that this case was an example of the intercessory work Jesus spoke of in John 16: The Spirit “can get to the very center of one’s thinking and emotions, and lead one into all truth, as Jesus promised.”²⁷

Much of the early discussion of the work of the Holy Spirit is focused on

²⁶John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 335.

²⁷Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), 889.

Paul's ministry to the Gentiles. However, in his pastoral letters Paul describes the activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of individual Christians. Writing to the church at Corinth, Paul explained that believers received "not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God" and that it would be the Spirit that would assist the individual believer by making known to them "the things freely given to us by God" (1 Cor 2:13). Paul would go on to say that without the Spirit's guidance these "things of the Spirit" simply could not be understood "because they are spiritually appraised" (1 Cor 2:14). Gordon Fee elaborates upon this text explaining that to have the Spirit is to have "the mind of Christ"²⁸ (1 Cor 2:16) indicating that the Holy Spirit would inform all aspects of the believer's life. In his letter to the Romans, Paul described this work of the Spirit as an essential aid to the Christian's pursuit of holy living. "In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words" (Rom 8:26). The Spirit encourages the believer to stand strong because "hope" is granted by "the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15:13). Moreover, it is the intercessory work of the Spirit that helps the Christian walk faithfully with God. "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh" (Gal 5:16).

Even with the presence of the Holy Spirit, personal efforts to remain obedient to the commands of God remained a non-negotiable element of a believer's commitment to a relationship with God. The Apostle John explains, "The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us" (1 John 3:24).

The witness of Scripture is that for the believer, the primary means to engage in a personal and enduring relationship with God will be through his Word. The Holy Spirit assists the believer by illuminating the mind to both understand God's original

²⁸Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 100.

intent and to help find appropriate application in the context of daily living.

Biblical Methods of Interaction with God

Having demonstrated the central role of God's Word in the believer's relationship with God, and the importance of the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit, it is important to understand the methods by which believers can interact with Scripture. Donald Whitney cites several means of Bible intake that include hearing, reading, studying, memorizing, and meditating.²⁹ For example, hearing offers church attendees access to the Word of God who do not, or cannot read the Bible for themselves. Scripture memorization provides a means to bring God's Word to bear on the immediate circumstances of life (see Ps 119:9-11). And, of course, in-depth Bible study is an essential means to understand the key doctrines, principles, and overarching themes of the faith. While all of these methods are important, productive, and biblically affirmed (see Deut 6:7-9, Ps 1:1-3; and Ps 119:11), this project is specifically focused on the methods of reading and meditation. The reason for limiting Bible intake methods for this course is because they are tasks that can be accomplished most anywhere and at any time with nothing more than a copy of the Bible. Intake through hearing is usually only possible when preaching or teaching is available. Scripture memorization is certainly accessible anywhere and anytime, but given the short duration of the course it would seem wiser to avoid addressing multiple means of intake and use the time to develop skills in prayer and journaling as well as learning to address the inevitable issues of devotion-time obstacles.

No matter the means of intake, interaction with God's Word should not be thought of as a one-way process. As Whitney notes, "God has not only spoken to us clearly and powerfully to us through Christ and the Scriptures . . . prayer is second only

²⁹Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 27-54.

to the intake of God's Word in Importance."³⁰ For this reason, the practice of prayer is also an essential element in the practice of daily personal devotions and is included in this discussion.

Reading the Word of God

John Jefferson Davis, Professor of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, explains, "For the first fifteen hundred years or so of the history of the Christian church, prior to the invention of the printing press, the only access to the Scripture that most Christians would have had would have been hearing them publicly read in the church during liturgy."³¹ When the Apostle Paul wrote to his young protégé, Timothy, explaining the multifaceted profit of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17), public reading was still the primary means of Scripture intake. As printed copies became more common, individuals had greater opportunity to directly engage God's Word for themselves. While access to the printed Word of God is still limited in some areas of the world, American Christians today have virtually unlimited access to both printed and electronic versions of the Bible. A 2012 survey by Lifeway Christian Resources indicated that 84 percent of Americans owned at least one copy of the Bible while many owned several copies.³² Again, limiting the means of Bible intake for this course to reading and meditation in no way suggests that the other means such as hearing, memorizing, and study are in any way less productive or valuable.

The process of reading the Word of God, however, can take several different forms. One can read with the intent to become briefly familiar with an issue or topic such

³⁰Ibid, 80.

³¹John Jefferson Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God: Contemplating Scripture in an Age of Distraction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 104.

³²Stoyan Zamov, "Poll: Americans Own Many Bibles, But Rarely Read Them," *The Christian Post*, March 12, 2012, accessed September 5, 2014, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/poll-americans-own-many-bibles-but-rarely-read-them-71823/>.

as in scanning through the major sections of the Bible. One can read with the intent of gathering facts for the purpose of research. Or, one can read with the intent of a devotional focus, seeking to allow the material to influence one's perspectives and thinking. John Jefferson Davis affirms the value of devotional reading suggesting "that a devotional and meditative reading of Scripture is not a second-class reading when compared with academic study, but in fact, very much in keeping with the primary purpose of Scripture—a document given by God to the people of God to nourish faith and piety."³³

God's earliest revelations are recorded as spoken words that were passed along orally to subsequent generations. As the people neared the Promised Land, God's commands to his people began to be recorded in written form. As a result, in Deuteronomy 30:10 Moses calls on the people to "obey the LORD your God to keep His commandments and His statutes which are *written* in this book of the Law" (my emphasis). As noted earlier, with the departure of Moses, God would speak much less frequently through individuals, and instead expect the people to draw primarily from guidance read from his recorded Word. While most did not have personal access to the written Word, it was the Word recorded in the Torah that was to be taught in each home (Deut 6:4-9) and that God said was "very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it" (Deut 30:14).

As the people settled in the Promised Land, God knew that the nation would one day call for a king, and the king's regular reading of the Word of God would be an essential element in the success of the nation. Consequently, God included specific guidance in Deuteronomy 17:18-19:

Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear

³³Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God*, 104.

the LORD his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes.

Israel's kings, in the same pattern as Joshua (see Josh 1:8), were to meditate on "the book of the law" and to carefully follow "all that is written." Eugene Merrill connects God's command to Joshua as the new leader of Israel with his more universal command in Deuteronomy 17 to explain that "each king must, through all the years of his tenure, read the document so that he might properly revere God, the Great King, and adhere to every provision of covenant law and statute . . . and to do so in line with the holiness and righteousness of the Lord."³⁴ By creating a personal copy of God's Word, and reading it regularly, these leaders would come to understand and accurately apply all of God's law to their life and to the life of the nation. Despite the importance of this command, it is surprising that there is no biblical record of a king performing this task. Merrill suggests that when King Josiah found the copy of the book of the law in 2 Kings 22: it was likely the official version kept by the priests, rather than a copy created by a previous king.³⁵ The biblical record does, however, demonstrate that the majority of Israel's kings failed to follow God's guidance which resulted in the split of the nation (1 Kgs 11-12). It eventually led to the captivity of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (2 Kgs 17) and the seventy-year exile of the Southern Kingdom of Judah (see 2 Kgs 24-25, Jer 29:10, Dan 9:2). To the extent that the kings were obedient, they experienced prosperity and peace.

The Bible lists four kings of the united nation of Israel, twenty kings of Judah (the Southern Kingdom), and nineteen kings of Israel (the Northern Kingdom). A study of the records of the kings contained in 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles confirms that diligent obedience to the commands of God was a rare characteristic for any king. Of the kings of the united nation, David was unique in being affirmed by God as a man after his own heart (1 Sam 13:14). But he also committed

³⁴Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary, vol. 4 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 266.

³⁵Ibid.

adultery and murder (1 Sam 11), initiated a prideful census of the nation (2 Sam 24), and he was ultimately denied the opportunity to build the temple in Jerusalem because of the great amount of blood he shed in battles and in during his administration (1 Chr 28:3). David's son Solomon was granted unparalleled wisdom and discernment (1Kgs 3:12) yet his foreign wives turned his heart away after their gods, despite multiple warnings from God, which resulted in the eventual division of the nation (1 Kgs 11:11). As great as these kings were in so many ways, neither was counted as continually faithful.

Of the kings of Israel, only King Jehu was cited for any significant obedience, tearing down pillars of Baal worship. However, 2 Kings 10:31 notes that he “was not faithful to walk in the law of the Lord.” Of the kings of Judah, the Scripture records six kings that were affirmed by God for significant instances of obedience to his commands.³⁶ Yet at some point each of these leaders failed to be fully faithful. One can only wonder how diligent obedience to the command of Deuteronomy 17:18-19 might have changed the history of the nation.

Looking to the New Testament, the Word of God retained its primary place in the life of God's people. While as in the Old Testament days, personal copies of the written Word were rare, it was still through the knowledge of God's Word that his people were to learn how to live in relationship with him personally, and within the community at large. The apostle Paul helps us recognize this dual focus urging the Colossians to “let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col 3:16-17). Peter O'Brien presents arguments for both an individual and a collective focus for Paul's exhortation.³⁷ He references the work of F. F. Bruce

³⁶Asa, 1 Kgs 15:9-14, 1 Chr 4:1-16:14; Jehoshaphat, 1 Kgs 22:41-40, 2 Chr 17:1-20:37; Uzziah, 2 Kgs 15:1-7, 2 Chr 26:1-23; Jotham, 2 Kgs 15:32-38, 2 Chr 27:1-9; Hezekiah, 2 Kgs 18:1-20:21, 2 Chr 29:1-31:21; and Josiah, 2 Kgs 22:1-23:30, 2 Chr 34:1-13.

³⁷Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 44 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 207.

who suggests that Paul “would not have wished to be pinned down too firmly on the alternatives” but that “if one of the two [individual or collective emphasis] had to be accepted, the collective sense might be preferred in view of the context.”³⁸ It seems reasonable to accept Bruce’s view as it harmonizes nicely with the Bible’s consistent emphasizes on a relationship with God in the context the believing community (cf. Deut 11:18-21, Eph 2:14-22, 1 Pet 2:9-10). As the individual believer pursues a close walk with God, the corporate body is built up and drawn closer to God.

The individual believer’s intimate interaction with the Word of God has the power of to reveal one inner thoughts and motivations:

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. (Heb 4:12-13)

Finally, as the apostle Paul taught his young disciple Timothy, it was the public reading of the Word of God (1 Tim 4:13) that would ensure God’s blessing and watch care because, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17).

For the purpose of personal devotions, there is no effective distinction between the impact of hearing and reading as the primary means of access to God’s guidance was once again the written/recorded Word of God. Despite changes in culture and technology, the written Word of God remains our central source to God’s guidance for mankind today.

Meditation

Part and parcel with the reading of God’s Word is the effort required to

³⁸O’Brien, *Colossians-Philemon*, 207.

understand both its meaning and its application. This activity is commonly referred to as “meditation” and the practice is mentioned throughout the Bible. *The Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* describes the basic concept of meditation as “the spiritual practice of focused attentiveness.”³⁹

The English word “meditate” is translated from three primary Hebrew words. The most frequently used word is *siach*, conveying the idea of “complaining or musing,” used “primarily in a transitive sense (11x), for reflection on the saving deeds of Yahweh on behalf of Israel and secondarily in an intransitive sense (2x), to speak of the psalmist’s act of complaint or lamentation.”⁴⁰ It is found in Psalm 119:15, “I will meditate on Your precepts and regard Your ways,” as well as Psalm 119:27, 78, 148 and 145:5. In Joshua 1:8, the first specific mention of the practice of meditation related to God’s Word, the Hebrew word is *hagah*, which means “to murmur, growl, or to speak.”⁴¹ Joel Beeke, a professor of systematic theology and homiletics, explains that this practice “involved reciting to oneself in a low undertone passages of Scripture one had committed to memory.”⁴² In other words, the use of verbal repetition was a means to reflect on the meaning and application of God’s Word. The Hebrew *hagah* is also found in Psalm 1:2 and Psalm 63:6. The least frequent Hebrew word translated as “meditate” is *baqar*. It is found in Psalm 27:4, “to meditate in His temple,” and it suggests the related idea of examining, inspecting, scrutinizing, or inquiry.⁴³ It seems apparent that in the context of

³⁹ Glen G. Scorgie, ed., *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishers, 2011), s.v. “meditation.”

⁴⁰A. R. Pete Diamond, “meditate,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. Van Gemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 3:1234.

⁴¹William Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, trans. Samuel P. Tregelles (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1979), s.v. “hagah.”

⁴²Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality: A Practical Theological Study from Our Reformed and Puritan Heritage* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2004), 74.

⁴³David Denninger, “meditate,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. Van Gemeren (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1997), 3:706-07.

these verses, the practice of meditation encompasses the intentional focus of the intellect and reason to understand what God intended in his Word. Puritan Thomas Watson (1620-1686) corroborates this assessment explaining that meditation was “a holy exercise of the mind whereby we bring the truths of God to remembrance, and do seriously ponder on them and apply them to ourselves.”⁴⁴

Looking back to Joshua 1:8 this understanding of meditation seems to be affirmed and even brings with it a promise of success: “This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.” Psalm 1:2 affirms this view of meditation and appears to make the assumption that the mechanics of the process was well understood: “But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His Law he meditates day and night.” Meditation as a time of concentrating on God and his Word is also affirmed in Psalm 6:6: “I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches” and again in Psalm 77:6: “I will remember my song in the night; I will meditate with my heart; and my spirit ponders.” Psalm 119 also confirms the practice of meditation in verse 27, where the psalmist meditates on “Your wonders”; in verse 48 he meditates on “Your statutes”; in verse 78 he meditates on “Your precepts”; and in verse 148 meditation is focused on “Your word.” The same idea is found in Psalm 145:5: “On the glorious splendor of Your majesty, and on Your wonderful works, I will meditate.” All of these verses appear to incorporate meditation as part of a time of personal worship.

The New Testament does not express a similar emphasis on the specific practice of meditation, but the theme of focused contemplation of God’s Word is still prevalent. It is expressed less in the form of a personal devotional practice, than it is in

⁴⁴Thomas Watson, “A Christian on the Mount; Or, A Treatise Concerning Meditation,” in *The Sermons of Thomas Watson* (1990): 197-291, quoted in Joel Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality: A Practical Theological Study from our Reformed and Puritan Heritage* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2004), 74.

the form of a means to an intimate relationship with God. John 14:23 says, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word.” The Greek word for “keep” is *tereo* which means “to watch over, protect, guard, or give heed to,” which first requires that one diligently seek to understand and apply God’s Word to the activities of every-day living.⁴⁵ This understanding is corroborated in John 15:7, where Jesus said, “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” But also introduced here is the important idea of “abiding.” The Greek word for “abide,” *meno*, is used frequently in the New Testament and means to “await, be in store for, withstand or endure but also to continue in a place or state in which one is.”⁴⁶ The Scriptures are affirmed as God-breathed (2 Tim 3:16), and useful as a tool to search the motivation of the human heart (Heb 4:12-13). As used in John 14:23 and 15:7, the words “keep” and “abide” suggest that careful consideration of God’s Word—meditation—is necessary to experience an intimate relationship with God, which is the primary goal of personal devotions.

Overall, the biblical record affirms that meditation is necessary for the believer to properly understand and apply God’s commands to all aspects of life. Peter Toon explains that “the art of meditation for the Jews was to . . . impress its content truth deeply on the heart and mind as well as to commit it to memory.”⁴⁷ James 1:25 supports Toon’s perspective noting that it brings effectiveness and blessing: “But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.”

⁴⁵Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), s.v. “tereo.”

⁴⁶U. V. Unmack, “abide,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984), 2-3.

⁴⁷Peter Toon, *The Art of Meditating on Scripture: Understanding Your Faith, Renewing Your Mind, Knowing Your God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 66.

Prayer

While God was concerned about man's willingness to fully understand and obey his Word, He also desired that man not only know *about* him, but also know him *relationally* and *experientially*. As noted earlier, there is an important difference between devotional interaction with God's Word and studying to gain information. Studying is usually focused on the activities of increasing in knowledge while devotional reading is usually focused on the activities of relationship. The primary activities of relationship are speaking and listening. J. I. Packer and Carolyn Nystrom write,

Since God is personal, it should come as no surprise that his relationship to humans involves two-way speech. God addresses Bible characters (and thereby us) using language, and we, like Bible characters, are called to converse with God, using language. . . . God communicates with humankind in writing, as by letter (the written word of God), and humans in response communicate with God in direct speech, as by phone (prayer). But none of this would be possible if God were not personal.⁴⁸

Whitney points to Scripture and explains that the believer should not “think of prayer as an impersonal requirement. Realize that it is a person, the Lord Jesus Christ, with all authority and with all love who expects us to pray.”⁴⁹ Whitney cites Matthew 6:5: “And when you pray,” Matthew 6:6: “But when you pray,” and then as Jesus begins his model prayer in Matthew 6:9: “Pray then in this way,”⁵⁰ The command to pray is specifically prescribed as a regular and continuing practice is found in 1 Thessalonians 5:17: “pray without ceasing” (see Acts, 2:42, Rom 12:12, Eph 6:18). These verses not only emphasize the importance of prayer as a specific spiritual practice, but coming from skilled and experienced practitioners (Jesus and Paul), they provide important insight into what is necessary for a deep and dynamic relationship with God.

The concept of prayer, much like the concept of personal reading and

⁴⁸James I. Packer and Carolyn Nystrom, *Praying: Finding Our Way through Duty to Delight* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 22.

⁴⁹Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 80.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 80-81.

meditation, is a practice that is not systematically described in the Bible, but very clearly demonstrated. The Bible characterizes Moses' direct interaction with God in Exodus 33:11 in terms of a relationship: "Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend." In Exodus 33:12-13 Moses expressed the relational aspect of his interaction with God even more pointedly: "You have said, 'I have known you by name, and you have also found favor in My sight.'" It is instructive to note that the Hebrew word translated as "know" comes from the root *yada* which speaks to intellectual and experiential knowledge, both of which are characteristic of a deep and intimate relationship:

In the broadest sense, *yd'* means to take various aspect of the world of one's experience into the self, including the resultant relationship with that which is known. The fundamentally relational character of knowing (over against a narrow intellectual sense) can be discerned, not least in that both God and human being can be subject and object of the vb.⁵¹

The words of Psalm 5:1 also speaks to the relationship of prayer and meditation. "Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my groaning." Whitney notes that "the Hebrew word rendered as "groaning" may also be translated "meditation."⁵² He goes on to reference Psalm 19:14, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight" as King David's follow-up to a time of meditation.⁵³ Psalm 119:18 is a prayer for insight from God's Word: "Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law."

In the New Testament, the relationship between God's Word and prayer is evidenced by Jesus' well known practice of the discipline. Luke 5:16 explains, "But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray." Robert Stein notes that the "tense of this verb and the next (both imperfect periphrastics) emphasizes that this

⁵¹Terence E. Fretheim, "know," *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*. In vol, 2, ed. Willem A. Van Gemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 410.

⁵²Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 86.

⁵³Ibid.

was a regular practice of Jesus.”⁵⁴ The apostle Paul urges the Philippian church to recognize the importance of prayer as a means of understanding God’s direction and attaining to spiritual peace: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:6-7).

Employing the disciplines of devotionally focused reading, meditation, and prayer, the believer is given the tools necessary to experience the reality of an intimate relationship with God.

The Frequency of Personal Devotions

Having demonstrated a biblical rationale for the practice of personal devotions, and affirming reading, meditation, and prayer as primary means for engaging God and his Word, the appropriate next question is to address how often a Christian should pursue this practice. As noted earlier, the Bible does not address the issue of personal devotions as a discreet practice, or spiritual discipline. Consequently, it should be no surprise that the issue of frequency is not directly addressed. That being said, there are clues within in the biblical text suggesting that a time of personal interaction with God’s Word was expected to be a daily practice.

Even before God created man, he set in place a structure around which man would order his life. Mathews explains, “The universe was systematically and progressively organized by the establishment of boundaries through separations and limits.”⁵⁵ One of the most basic boundaries and limits was that of time. Time was described in macro terms in the creation story as a cyclical movement from lesser to

⁵⁴Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, The New American Commentary, vol. 24 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 173.

⁵⁵Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 124.

greater lights (Gen 1:5). Gordon Wenham expands on Mathews' comments suggesting that believes that "there can be little doubt that here "day" has its basic sense of a 24-hour period."⁵⁶ Despite the fact that there is considerable debate within the academic community about the actual length of the day mentioned in the creation story,⁵⁷ Wenham observes that while one does not need to "assume his [God's] week's work was necessarily accomplished in 144 hours" but "by speaking of six days of work followed by one day's rest, Genesis 1 draws attention to the correspondence between God's work and man's, and God's rest as a model for the Sabbath."⁵⁸ In other words, man's normative interaction with God appears to be bounded and ordered by the common construct of a twenty-four hour day. Looking to the fourth commandment regarding the Sabbath (Exod 20:8-10), the correlation between the seven days of creation and man's seven day week is confirmed. This understanding of a "day" as a means of ordering life is a crucial element in developing a biblical rationale for the daily practice of personal devotions.

This concept of daily time with God's Word is found in Joshua 1:8, "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night." The phrase "day and night" comes from the Hebrew *yomam layelah*. This phrase is found fifteen additional times in the Old Testament alone and in each case uses the same Hebrew words and grammatical construct.⁵⁹ Considering the word translated "day," Pieter Verhoef notes that it can have a range of meanings from a "complete cycle that includes both daytime and nighttime," to an expression that suggests "the period of an action or state of beginning (e.g., "in the day that")," but "its primary meaning is the time

⁵⁶Wenham, *Genesis*, 19.

⁵⁷Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 149.

⁵⁸Wenham, *Genesis*, 40.

⁵⁹Gen 8:22; Lev 8:35; 1 Kgs 8:59; 1 Chr 9:33; 2 Chr 6:20; Neh 1:6, 4:9; Pss 1:2, 42:3, 55:10; Jer 9:1, 16:3, 33:20, 33:35; Lam 2:18.

of daylight as distinct from the period of darkness, the night.”⁶⁰ A study of the Hebrew word for “night” (*layil*) suggests that it typically represents the period of time when the sun has set, but A. H. Konkel explains that *layil* “occurs frequently with day to indicate a period of twenty-four hours.”⁶¹ In each of the sixteen Old Testament occurrences of the phrase “day and night” the expression appears to indicate a recurring period of time based on the common understanding of the terms day and night. This analysis suggests that God’s intent was for Joshua to take counsel from his Word within every twenty-four hour period. Joel Beeke affirms that Puritan authors, whose writings on the practice of meditation were substantial and prolific, emphasized the literal reading of this phrase: “If Joshua, as a busy commander, was ordered by God to meditate on His law day and night should we not also delight in meditating on God’s truth every morning and evening?”⁶² Beeke describes the benefits of this spiritual practice: “Daily meditation on the Book, and a strict observance of its gracious provision for a life in covenant fellowship with the Lord, will mean a happy achievement of life’s goal and prosperity.”⁶³

These same words are found in Psalm 1:2, “But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His Law he meditates *day and night*” (author’s emphasis). As noted earlier, the Hebrew text is identical in wording and grammatical structure suggesting that it should be understood in the same way as in Joshua 1:8. This serves to reinforce the idea that God intended for his people to engage with him and his Word each day. If this phrase means anything other than the common definition of daily, it is difficult to determine from the context or the grammar precisely what else it might mean.

⁶⁰Pieter A. Verhoef, “day,” *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. Van Gemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 2:419-20.

⁶¹A. H. Konkel, “night,” *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, ed., Willem A. Van Gemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 1:714.

⁶²Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality*, 80.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 63.

Moving into the New Testament, the temporal indicators of “day and night,” although changed in sequence to “night and day,” are used in a few instances in the context of devotional activities, but less specifically than in the Old Testament (see 1 Thess 3:10, 1 Tim 5:5, 2 Tim 1:3). That said, there are still indicators suggesting that devotional time with God was on a daily basis.

Matthew and Mark provide representative references to Jesus’ practice of spending time alone with God in prayer. In Matthew 14:22-23 Jesus followed a busy day that included the miraculous feeding of five thousand-plus people with a time alone in prayer: “He went up to the mountain by Himself to pray and when it was evening, He was there alone.” In a similar manner, Mark 1:35-37 records Jesus’ devotional activity: “Rising in the early morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went out and departed to a lonely place and was praying.” Luke provides the most helpful discussion of the frequency of Jesus’ devotional practices in Luke 5:16, “But He Himself would *often* slip away to the wilderness and pray.” While the Greek text does not include the word “often,” it seems to be suggested by the context. The previous verse describes Jesus’ activity as if it were a typical day: “But the news about Him was spreading even further, and great multitudes were gathering to hear him and be healed of their sickness.” This reinforces the idea that Jesus’ time away in prayer was also a typical practice and supports the New American Standard insertion of the word “often” in verse 16. Joel Green corroborates this observation noting that “Luke’s summary statement holds together two related phenomena: the growth of Jesus’ reputation and his ongoing practice of retreating for prayer.”⁶⁴ Noted earlier, Robert Stein explains that “tense of this verb and the next (both imperfect periphrastics) emphasizes that this was a regular practice of Jesus.”⁶⁵ This normative expectation of a practice of daily devotional activity

⁶⁴Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 238.

⁶⁵Stein, *Luke*, 173.

is also suggested in Jesus' parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18. Seeking justice from an obstinate judge, Jesus affirms her actions as a positive example of the kind of persistent prayer to which God is pleased to respond: "Shall not God bring about justice for His elect, who cry out to Him day and night?" (Luke 18:7). This practice is also suggested in 1 Thessalonians 3:10 where Paul says, "We night and day keep praying" that he and his fellow workers might soon see the member of the young Thessalonian church, and again in 1 Timothy 5:5 where Paul affirms the elderly widow who "continues in entreaties and prayer night and day."

In John 15:1-10, the text introduces the word "abide" not only as a measure of intimacy, as noted earlier under the topic of meditation, but also as a measure of consistency. Expanding on the imagery of the vine and branches, Gerald Borchert explains that "as a branch separated from the supply of nourishment cannot produce fruit, neither can the Christian. Fruit bearing for the disciple is totally dependent on a direct connection to Jesus."⁶⁶ The close relational connection inherent in this concept would suggest that a believer's connection with the Word of God should also occur with a high degree of regularity. The wording of Psalm 1:3 supports this idea: "He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers." Peter Craigie describes the imagery contained in this text,

A tree transplanted from some dry spot, (e.g., a wadi, where the water runs only sporadically in the rainy season) to a location beside an irrigation channel, where water never ceases to flow, would inevitably flourish Just as a tree with a constant water supply *naturally* flourished, so too the persons who avoid evil and delights in Torah *naturally* prospers.⁶⁷

Extending the metaphor somewhat, it seems entirely reasonable to note that a branch is

⁶⁶Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12-21*, The New American Commentary, vol. 25B (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 142.

⁶⁷Peter Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 19 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 2004), 60.

continuously connected to a vine, rather than occasionally. While the text does not specifically express this connection as “daily,” it is intuitive that any time away from the vine would have serious negative effect on the survival of the branch. Correspondingly, the greater the time away from God and his Word, the greater the deteriorating impact.

The ongoing academic debate regarding the actual length of the creation day notwithstanding, if the meaning of “day and night” suggests anything other than the common day that guided the religious life of Israel, and that guides mankind even today, then the impact of God’s command to Joshua seems all but lost. Beeke cites Puritan William Bates (1625–1699): “If the bird leaves her nest for a long space, the eggs chill and are not fit for production; but where there is a constant incubation, the they bring forth; so when we leave religious duties for a long space, our affections chill, and grow cold; and are not fit to produce holiness, and comfort our souls.”⁶⁸

In short, there seems to be no reason to interpret the words “day and night” as anything other than the common meaning of a twenty-four hour cycle of time. While some might correctly argue such a practice is not specifically mandated, one could not look to Scripture to defend any other position on frequency of devotional activity. As a result, it appears that the most reasonable way to understand the Scriptural exhortations and examples regarding interaction with God through his Word, is that God intended it to be a literal daily practice.

Conclusion

As noted at the outset, the Bible does not describe a discreet spiritual discipline of daily personal devotions. The lack of specific guidance is not uncommon with the practice of other activities that can be classified as spiritual disciplines and practiced by

⁶⁸William Bates, “On Divine Meditation,” in *The Works of William Bates* (1990): 3:124–25, quoted in Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality: A Practical Theological Study from our Reformed and Puritan Heritage* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2004), 80.

individuals in the Bible. For example, what was often mandated under the Mosaic Covenant became a personal choice for the New Testament believer. With regard to the practice of giving, Paul urges the Corinthian church to give generously, yet leaves a wide margin for personal choice with the words, “Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor 9:7). The lack of specificity, however, in no way diminishes or makes optional the practice of giving, “see that you abound in this gracious work also” (2 Cor 8:7). Obedience to God is still not negotiable, but neither is it set solely in the context of specific or rote religious practices. Instead, it is wrapped up in the individual’s desire to develop and invest in a vital relationship with God.

That same perspective fits nicely with the biblical record regarding daily personal devotions. While the believer is not commanded to follow a set pattern of devotional activity, nor follow a set of specific procedures; it is clear that time with God and his Word have always been an essential element for experiencing a deep and enduring relationship with God. A study of the Bible and the lives of those who walked most closely with God offers strong reasons to develop the discipline of daily devotions. Looking one final time to Paul, he reminds readers that “he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (2 Cor 9:6). In the end, each believer must decide for him or herself how deep a relationship they wish to have with God.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES RELATED
TO THE PRACTICE OF DAILY PERSONAL
DEVOTIONS

Introduction

Having established a biblical and theological framework for the practice of daily personal devotions, it is important to reaffirm that this practice is not an end unto itself. A time of daily personal devotion is fundamentally a discipline intended to help the Christian pursue a vital and growing relationship with God. And as with any relationship, the means by which it is pursued are highly dependent on the nature of the relationship as well as the nature of the participants. The Bible offers some important clues about both participants. In John 4:24 Jesus says, “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” While humans were created as physical beings, God provided for the means of interaction when he said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (Gen 1:26). These twin realities are the basis for man’s ability to have a personal relationship with God. And as the previous chapter demonstrates, God has also not only provided the capacity to interact with him, he has also commanded that we do so. George Müller (1805-1898) explains in his autobiography that it is through the thoughtful and diligent pursuit of this relationship that “the believer becomes more and more acquainted with the nature and character of God, and thus sees more and more, besides His holiness and justice, what a kind, loving, gracious, merciful, mighty, wise, and faithful Being He is.”¹

¹George Müller, *Autobiography of George Müller: A Million and a Half in Answers to Prayer* (Denton, TX: Westminster Literature Resources, 2003), 175.

This chapter builds on the biblical and theological foundations of the previous chapter by examining the practical application of reading, meditation, and prayer in the practice of daily personal devotions. The practice of journaling will be introduced as an aid to daily devotions. Following that discussion, this chapter will present a basic devotional structure for the practice of a daily personal devotions. It will conclude with a brief discussion of pitfalls commonly faced by those seeking to develop this spiritual discipline.

The Practice of Devotional Reading

King Solomon offers sobering words to all who would seek to enter into the presence of the Lord: “Guard your steps as you go to the house of God and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil. Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few” (Eccl 5:1-2). While the context of Solomon’s instruction is focused particularly on Jewish temple worship (“house of God”), the intent of this verse is that any time one approaches the holy God of the universe, they must begin by preparing themselves to listen before they would presume to speak. In reference to Solomon’s instruction, Duane Garrett explains that “the supreme act of impiety is the presumption that one can be in a position of control when dealing with God.”² This warning is just as relevant for today. In accord with Solomon’s imperative, this paper will begin by looking at the primary means by which God speaks to his people, through his written word.

The Importance of Devotional Reading

The apostle Paul urged his young protégé Timothy to make the Word of God a

²Duane Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, The New American Commentary, vol. 14 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 311.

pervasive influence in his life because it was “the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15). Donald Whitney summarizes the point succinctly: “No spiritual discipline is more important than the intake of God’s Word.”³ Expanding on these ideas, John Jefferson Davis writes,

The presence of the Holy Spirit in and through the text not only illuminates truth in some objective, propositional sense (though it is indeed this) but is *God himself* present to us through the text and by faith; the Holy Spirit is God himself present to us and speaking to us, communicating to us the Father’s love for the Son and the Son’s joy in being loved by the Father.⁴

Davis goes on to explain that “Scripture was given not only for the purpose of providing information and instruction for ourselves and others—sermon outlines and Bible studies—but also, and more finally, for bringing us into the enjoyment of communion with the Lord who sees us, and who is really present to us through the Scriptures.”⁵

The Nature of Devotional Reading

Devotional reading is not simply a spiritualized title for reading through the Scriptures. Bible reading plans abound, and as Whitney draws the analogy, they provide “an overview of the lake and a swift, passing view of its depths,”⁶ but devotional reading is focused on mining the depths of Scripture to understand the mind of its author. It is the difference between reading for academic understanding and for the purpose of nourishing the soul of the believer. Davis explains that “a devotional and meditative reading of Scripture is not a second-class reading when compared with academic study, but in fact very much in keeping with the primary purpose of Scripture—a document given by God

³Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), 22.

⁴John Jefferson Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God: Contemplating Scripture in an Age of Distraction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 102.

⁵*Ibid.*, 106.

⁶Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 31.

to the people of God to nourish faith and piety.”⁷ Peter Toon writes, “The purpose of formative reading is to be ‘formed’ by the text: that is to be formed by Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit who both inspired and interprets the sacred text.”⁸

The Practice of Devotional Reading

There are several tools and techniques readily available for devotional Bible reading. As Whitney has noted, the majority of those tools are focused on a broad-brush or overview perspective of Scripture most often driven by the calendar, not the content. Yet devotional reading is less focused on completing a reading schedule or collecting information and more focused on giving “us a personal, experiential knowledge of God’s love and fatherly character.”⁹

Puritan Henry Scudder (c.1585-1652), in his classic work, *The Christian’s Daily Walk*, offers this guidance for devotional reading: “When you read any part of the word of God, you must put a difference between it and the best writings of men, preferring it far before them.”¹⁰ He urges the reader to “receive it not as the word of men, but (as it is truth) the word of God, then it will work effectually in you that believe, 1 Thess. 11.13.”¹¹ In his book *Beyond the Quiet Time: Practical Evangelical Spirituality*, Alister McGrath offers a thoughtful framework to such reading:

We can read the Bible as a guidebook to Jesus Christ, appreciating the way in which the many strands of the Old Testament find their fulfillment in him. Yet there is another way of reading the Bible, which supplements this. It is to read Scripture in order to deepen our relationship with Jesus Christ; and that means learning more

⁷Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God*, 104.

⁸Peter Toon, *Meditating as a Christian: Waiting Upon God* (London: HarperCollins, 1991), 58.

⁹Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God*, 93.

¹⁰Henry Scudder, *The Christian’s Daily Walk* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1984), 98.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 99.

about him (the objective side of things), and deepening our commitment and love for him (the subjective side of things). These two aspects are like the two sides of the same coin. They both need to be there. The head and the heart are both caught up in Christian faith. . . . We need to pause and savour each verse, drinking in its significance as if it were a precious vintage. We need to think ourselves into the situations being described, in order that we may grasp as much as possible of the experience of God that is being described. We must do everything we can to allow Scripture to address us and challenge us. It holds the key to our renewal; we must use it wisely.¹²

Clearly, McGrath speaks not to a specific method, but to a mindset regarding how one should engage and appropriate the message of Scripture.

Peter Toon, in his work *Meditating as a Christian*, describes devotional reading in this way:

To read Holy Scripture formatively, I must make space and time on a regular basis—preferably daily. . . . I think of it as if it were a short section, intended particularly for me, of a love Letter sent from heaven to earth. The Letter is in fact a love letter sent by the Beloved. Thus I am not to approach it objectively and scientifically, but carefully and tenderly. I am to savor its every word and appreciate its inner and hidden meaning, which love can see, feel and know.¹³

As Hebrews 4:12-13 explains, the word of God, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the human heart. Since the word of God is able to show us ourselves as well as express God's intentions, then it clearly behooves Christians to develop the skill of careful and thoughtful reading of Scripture.

Slow Reading

In recent years professional educators have proposed the return to a concept called “slow reading” which is also the title of a book written by one of its leading proponents, Thomas Newkirk. Newkirk makes some very important observations about such reading:

To read slowly is to maintain an intimate relationship with a writer. If we are to respond to a writer, we must be *responsible*. We commit ourselves to follow a train

¹²Allister McGrath, *Beyond the Quiet Time: Practical Evangelical Spirituality* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 1995), 17-18.

¹³Toon, *Meditating as a Christian*, 60-61.

of thought, to mentally construct characters, to follow the unfolding of an idea, to hear a text, to attend to language, to question, to visualize sense. It means paying attention to the decisions a writer makes.¹⁴

Patrick Kingsley, the Egypt correspondent for the British daily newspaper *The Guardian*, commented on Newkirk's work in a 2010 article explaining that "because of the internet, we have become very good at collecting a wide range of factual tidbits, we are also gradually forgetting how to sit back, contemplate, and relate all these facts to each other."¹⁵ He goes on to cite the work of author and technology expert Nicholas Carr, explaining that "our hyperactive online habits are damaging the mental faculties we need to process and understand lengthy textual information."¹⁶ An expanded examination of Carr's findings were published in his 2011 book titled, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*.¹⁷ Although the slow reading movement is primarily a secular trend, its insights into the cultural decline of reading, especially among younger generations, are directly applicable to Christian devotional reading. Consequently, careful and deliberate instruction in the basic concept of slow reading is essential to developing a daily devotional practice.

The Practice of Devotional Meditation

In any discussion of devotional meditation, one must recognize the ancient and influential practice of *Lectio Divina*, or spiritual reading of Scripture.¹⁸ This practice is composed of four elements: reading (*lectio*), meditation (*meditatio*), response or prayer

¹⁴Thomas Newkirk, *Paying Attention*, accessed September 4, 2015, https://www.bloomfieldschools.org/uploaded/downloads/Instructional_Leadership/An_Introduction_to_Slow_Reading.pdf.

¹⁵Patrick Kingsley, "The Art of Slow Reading," *The Guardian*, July 15, 2010, accessed September 4, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/jul/15/slow-reading>.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2011).

¹⁸Eugene H. Peterson, "Spiritual Reading (Lectio Divina)," in *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Glen G. Scorgie (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishers, 2011), 68-69.

(*oratio*), and contemplation (*contemplatio*).¹⁹ This fourfold approach, developed during the early medieval period, shaped the daily life of monks and has received renewed attention in recent years.²⁰ Despite this increased attention, it is not a method that is universally understood or practiced. Adele Calhoun adds an initial element she calls *silencio* which is focused on “quiet preparation of the heart.”²¹ Evangelical authors James Wilhoit and Evan Howard add a fifth element that follows contemplation they call “acting.”²² In practice, *Lectio Divina* places a strong emphasis on a personal message from God, or as Calhoun describes it, “knowing that transcends the intellect; it is direct, sensate and experiential.”²³ This leaves open the opportunity and danger of finding very subjective meanings that may have no relationship to the message intended by God or the original authors. Additionally, this technique is often an integral part of the mystical practices of monastic communities and shares affinities with some eastern religions.²⁴ Peter Toon offers an important observation that will limit the utility of this practice for many lay evangelicals: “For laity not living within a Christian community where there is a *lectio continua* [the continuous, daily reading of Scripture and participation in the daily chanting of psalms, canticles, creeds and prayers] the practice of *Lectio Divina* in a strict sense is probably impossible.”²⁵ While a study of the method of *Lectio Divina* may offer some helpful insights for devotional meditation, because of the potential for misuse of the

¹⁹Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 168-69.

²⁰Toon, *Meditating as a Christian*, 89.

²¹Calhoun, *Spirit Disciplines Handbook*, 168.

²²James C. Wilhoit and Evan B. Howard, *Discovering Lectio Divina: Bringing Scripture into Ordinary Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 26.

²³Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 168.

²⁴Toon, *Meditating as a Christian*, 89-90.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 90.

Scripture, especially for less mature Christians, this project will not consider its use.

Hand-in-glove with the practice of devotional reading is that of devotional meditation. The practice of devotional meditation has long been part of Christianity. Citing Puritan Thomas Watson (c. 1620-1686), David Saxton quotes: “Without meditation the truth of God will not stay with us; the heart is hard, and the memory slippery, and without meditation all is lost; meditation imprints and fastens a truth in the mind. . . . As a hammer drives a nail to the head so meditation drives a truth to the heart. Without meditation the word preached may increase notion, not affection.”²⁶ The monastic Thomas á Kempis (c. 1380-1471) encouraged his readers with words of meditative urgency: “Let it be the most important thing we do, then, to reflect on the life of Jesus Christ.”²⁷ Martin Luther (1483-1564) offers additional emphasis in his brief work, *A Simple Way to Pray*: “I first take up each command as a teaching, the way it intends itself to be, and I ponder what it is in the command that our Lord God requires of me in such earnest.”²⁸ In his sermon, *Christianity to the Life*, Puritan Cotton Mather (1662/3-1727/8) writes: “By Meditation on the Holy walk of the Lord Jesus Christ, a Christian will be help’d unto the Imitation of it, and a great elevation of Holiness. Contemplation produces Imitation.”²⁹ Peter Toon agrees: “Meditation is thus a particular way of receiving the revealed and dynamic Word of God into the heart from the mind so as to direct the will in the way of God’s guidance.”³⁰ Much more could be

²⁶Saxton, *God’s Battle Plan for the Mind*, 6.

²⁷Thomas á Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. William Creasy (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2003), 10.

²⁸Philip D. W. Krey and Peter D. S. Krey, *Luther’s Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), 23.

²⁹Cotton Mather, *Christianity to the Life: Or, the Example of the Lord Jesus Christ Propos’d unto the Meditation, and Imitation, of every Christian* (Boston: T. Green, 1702, accessed through The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Library via the Early American Texts: 1639-1800 database).

³⁰Peter Toon, *From the Mind to the Heart: Christian Meditation Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987), 10.

said, but the clear implication is that biblical meditation has been, and remains, a crucial element of personal devotional practice.

A Cogent Warning

Unlike the topic of devotional reading, numerous authors over the years have written on the practice of devotional meditation. As Donald Whitney observes, “Because meditation is so prominent in many spiritually counterfeit groups and movements, some Christians are uncomfortable with the whole subject and suspicious of those who engage in it.”³¹ For that reason is it helpful to describe what meditation is *not* for the purposes of this project. John Jefferson Davis argues that the western world has an incredible range of religious practices to draw from but with regard to the practice of meditation, it seems to be coming primarily from eastern mystical religions.³² Peter Toon describes the focus of eastern forms of meditation as “achieving pure awareness without thought and of experiencing mystical consciousness.”³³ Christian meditation, then, is not focused on emptying the mind of all thoughts, finding one’s inner self, or in seeking an emotional experience. Such an approach is unhelpful at best, if not completely counterproductive to the practice of daily personal devotions. Peter Toon prophetically reminds us that for eastern mystical meditation, the goal is to “find the centre of one’s being” while for “both Judaism and Christianity meditation is always paying attention to, and responding in mind, heart and will, to the God who has made and makes Himself known.”³⁴

The Importance of Devotional Meditation

Puritan authors are well known for both the depth and practicality of their

³¹Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 46.

³²Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God*, 13-14.

³³Toon, *From the Mind to the Heart*, 10.

³⁴Toon, *Meditating as a Christian*, 19.

writing. With regard to the practice of meditation, few have written on the subject more completely than Bishop Joseph Hall (1574-1656), in his great work, *The Art of Divine Meditation*. In his preface Hall offers a detailed description of the importance of meditation,

For by this do we ransack our deep and false hearts, find out our secret enemies, buckle with them, expel them, arm ourselves against their re-entrance. By this we make use of all good means, fit ourselves to all good duties; by this we decry our weakness, obtain redress, prevent temptation, cheer up our solitariness, temper our occasion of delight, get more light into our knowledge, more heat to our affections, more life to our devotion. By this we grow to be (as we are) strangers upon earth, and out of a right estimation of all earthly things into a sweet fruition of invisible comforts. By this we see our Savior with Steven [Acts 7:35], we talk with God as Moses [Exod. 24:12], and by this we are ravished with blessed Paul into Paradise [2 Cor. 12:2-4], and we see that heaven which we are loath to leave, which we cannot utter. This alone is the remedy of security and worldliness, the pastime of saints, the ladder of heaven, and, in short, the best improvement of Christianity.³⁵

Donald Whitney concurs and likens meditation on the Scripture to soaking a tea bag in a cup of hot water: “Meditation on Scripture is letting the Bible brew in the brain. Thus we might say that as the tea colors the water, meditation likewise ‘colors’ our thinking . . . about God, about God’s ways, and His world, and about ourselves.”³⁶ It is interesting to note that the practice of meditation has garnered the attention of secular scientists.

Neuroscientist Andrew Newberg of the Center for Spirituality and the Mind at the University of Pennsylvania concluded: “Activities involving meditation and intensive prayer can permanently strengthen neural functioning in specific parts of the brain that are involved with lowering anxiety and depression, enhancing social awareness and empathy, and improving cognitive and intellectual functioning.”³⁷ While these benefits appear to be valid for biblical meditation, Newberg does not limit them to a religious tradition, noting that “there are so many meditation techniques to choose from that the

³⁵Frank Livingston Huntley, *Bishop Joseph Hall and Protestant Meditation* (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1981), 71.

³⁶Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 47.

³⁷Andrew Newberg and Mark Robert Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain: Breakthrough Finding from a Leading Neuroscientist* (New York: Ballentine Books, 2009), 149.

trick is to find the one that resonates best with who you are and what your specific goals might be.”³⁸

Acknowledging the physiological benefits of meditation, it is important to also consider the spiritual benefits. These benefits can be broken down into four overarching categories: to know God, to know oneself, and to know the will of God.

Devotional Meditation to Know God

A primary goal of a devotional meditation is to know God. As Moses entreated God, “Now therefore, I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight” (Exod 33:13). And as Jesus explains in John 17:3, “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” Davis offers these hopeful words, “Meditating on Scripture in faith can be a gateway and point of access through which we enter into this experience and Trinitarian fellowship even now, in this life, in anticipation of an even deeper experience in the life to come.”³⁹ Peter Toon notes that the doctrine of God as personal has important advantages for meditation: “In meditation the aim is to be in dialogue and fellowship with the Father through and in the Son by the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁰

Devotional Meditation to Know the Word of God

Throughout the Bible the people of God are commanded to know God’s Word (Josh 1:8, 2 Tm 2:15). Through the disciplines of meditation one gains a detailed and ready grasp on what God has given His people in His Word and is equipped to engage the tasks and challenges of the day with the certainty of God’s approval. The psalmist

³⁸Newbrrg and Waldman, *How God Changes your Brain*, 192.

³⁹Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God*, 55.

⁴⁰Toon, *Meditating as a Christian*, 28.

explains that “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (Ps 119:105).” Psalm 119:9-11 highlight the importance of a ready knowledge of God’s Word is necessary to stay unstained from the world: “How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word. With all my heart I have sought You; do not let me wander from Your commandments. Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You.” The apostle Paul reminds the Ephesian church that the Word of God is “the sword of the Spirit,” the believer’s only offensive weapon in the spiritual armor of God to challenge the attacks of the evil one (Eph 6:17).

Devotional Meditation to Know the Will of God

Jesus affirms the inescapable connection between a personal knowledge of God and a knowledge of his word. “He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him” (John 14:21). Meditation provides a means by which the believer may come to better understand the nature and purpose of God’s commands, his affirmations, and his warnings. Saxton writes: “Deliberate meditation upon Scripture builds a habit of thinking through decisions in a biblical and thoughtful manner. Christians easily fall for all kinds of errors because they lack this practice,” and he cites Puritan William Bates’ affirmation: “Meditation is that that doth take away the darkness of understanding.”⁴¹

Devotional Meditation to Know Oneself

Puritan Henry Scudder encourages Christians to prepare themselves for the new day by meditation “the matter whereof should be an inquiry into your present state, how all things stand between God and you; how you have behaved since you last prayed

⁴¹Saxton, *God’s Battle Plan for the Mind*, 98.

and renewed your peace with God; what sins you have committed, what graces and benefits you want, what fresh favors God had has bestowed on you.”⁴² As Hebrews 4:12 reminds us: “For the word of God is living . . . and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” Only by an understanding the “thoughts and intentions of the heart,” can one begin to respond to God rightly and faithfully.

Meditation and Epistemology

Adding to the weight of the experiential evidence supporting meditation, John Jefferson Davis has developed an interesting and exciting theory of epistemology called “logopneumatic (Word and Spirit)” suggesting that meditation literally connects the believer to spiritual realities.⁴³ This new epistemology is required, as Davis explains, because the old methods of knowing through empiricism (by experience) and by rationalism (by logic) fail to account for the spiritual realities described in the Bible: “But Paul would deny that sense experience and reason *exhaust* the possible sources of knowledge; he knew that God’s word of divine revelation and the Spirit of God are sources of knowledge about the invisible realities of God, salvation, heaven, eternal life, and the world to come.”⁴⁴ Davis explains further, “When we become children of God by adoption, the Spirit supervenes directly upon our human spirits to give us a personal, experiential knowledge of God’s love and father character.”⁴⁵ The important implication of this new epistemology is that biblical meditation becomes the means by which the Christian engages these non-empirical, non-rational but nonetheless actual spiritual realities. “It is the Spirit of God who reveals the things of Christ to us and illuminates them to our hearts and minds, and puts us into actual contact with the spiritual realities in

⁴²Scudder, *The Christian’s Daily Walk*, 33.

⁴³Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God*, 93.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 92.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 93.

the biblical texts”⁴⁶ Davis’ theories would seem to validate the experience of generations of Christians and suggest that meditation is not simply a spiritual practice, but the very means by which the Spirit will communicate with us (see John 14:26 and John 16:13-15).

Methods of Devotional Meditation

Unlike devotional reading, there are numerous methods for devotional meditation. Once again, it is important to understand when drawing from the writings on meditation that it is most commonly articulated as a discrete or stand-alone spiritual discipline. For that reason, not all that is written applies readily to the practice of daily personal devotions. That being said, there is still much that can be incorporated into this spiritual discipline. Bishop Joseph Hall, in his classic work *The Art of Divine Meditation*, describes two types: “meditation extemporal,” or meditation on topics and issues that are a part of daily experiences; and “meditation deliberate,” which focuses on a particular subject.⁴⁷ The methods described below are built on deliberate meditation that is focused on the specific text used during a time of personal devotion.

Joel Beeke offers some helpful practices that can easily apply to devotional meditation.

Pray for the power to harness your mind and to focus the eyes of faith on this task. . . . Think of illustrations, similitudes, and opposites in your mind to enlighten your understanding and enflame your affections. . . . stir up affections such as love, desire, hope, courage, gratitude, zeal and joy to glorify God. . . . apply your meditation to yourself to arouse your soul to duty and comfort, and to restrain your soul from sin. . . . Examine yourself for you own growth in grace. Reflect on the past as ask, “What had I done? Look to the future, asking, “What am I resolved to do by God’s grace?” . . . Conclude with prayer, thanksgiving, and Psalm-singing.⁴⁸

Beeke’s list follows closely to the list of Bishop Hall, who describes multiple detailed

⁴⁶Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God*, 99.

⁴⁷Huntley, *Bishop Joseph Hall and Protestant Meditation*, 72.

⁴⁸Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality: A Practical Theological Study from our Reformed and Puritan Heritage* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2004), 83-87.

steps of meditation.⁴⁹ A summary of Hall’s description of meditative practices is provided at appendix 6. David Saxton adds three more overarching insights to Beeke’s summary: (1) Pray dependently for Gods assistance, (2) Willingly accept the difficulties of meditation, and (3) Persevere in the habit of meditation.⁵⁰

While most of the early writing is focused on overarching principles, there are some helpful contemporary works that are focused on meditation as part of an overall devotional practice. InterVarsity Press published a small booklet titled *Quiet Time: An InterVarsity Guidebook for Daily Devotions* that offers some practical guidance for meditation as an element of daily personal devotions. “Remember that you are coming to the Scriptures at these times for the satisfaction of your own needs.”⁵¹ To that end, the authors provide a list of six questions that can be used to foster meditation that leads to specific application:⁵² “Is there any *example* for me to follow? Is there any *command* for me to obey? Is there any *error* for me to avoid? Is there any *sin* for me to forsake? Is there any *promise* for me to claim? Is there any *new thought about God Himself*?” While these six questions are very basic, they are also very easy to use and they are quite consistent with the intent of biblical meditation presented by earlier writers.

Another contemporary source of guidance for meditation is Donald Whitney’s *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. While Whitney also writes on meditation as a discrete spiritual discipline, his techniques can have immediate application in the context of daily personal devotions. He offers seventeen methods, noting that “I use all of them some of the time and none of them all the time. . . . Because you’ll likely resonate with some of these methods more than others, while the inclination of someone else might be

⁴⁹Huntley, *Bishop Joseph Hall and Protestant Meditation*, 85-108.

⁵⁰Saxton, *God’s Battle Plan for the Mind*, 129-32.

⁵¹ *Quiet Time: An InterVarsity Guidebook for Daily Devotions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976), 21.

⁵²*Ibid.*

just be opposite of yours. And like me, you'll probably want some variety.”⁵³ A summary of these seventeen methods are at appendix 7.

What generations of practioners have noted regarding biblical meditation is instructive for the contemporary Christian and extremely relevant to the development of the practice of daily personal devotions. It is essential to remember that meditation, like other spiritual disciplines, is not an end in itself. Additionally, meditation is not a set practices with hard and fast rules. At its most basic, meditation is a means by which one can wrestle with God's truth and allow the Holy Spirit to illuminate and inform the mind and motivate the will. Meditation on the truths of God's Word offers the Christian the tools to take great truths into the heart and ultimately into life.

The Practice of Devotional Prayer

In his recent book, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God*, Timothy Keller observes, “Prayer is a conversation that leads to an encounter with God.”⁵⁴ He suggests that through prayer the truths gleaned through Bible reading and meditation are applied to the heart of the individual. Puritan John Bunyan (1628-1688) described prayer as “the opener of the heart of God, and a means by which the soul, though empty, is filled.”⁵⁵ Isaac Watts (1674-1748), in *A Guide to Prayer*, said prayer was a “language in which a creature communicates with his Creator and in which the soul of a saint often gets near to God, experiences great delight and, as it were, dwells with his heavenly Father for a short time before he comes to heaven.”⁵⁶ Since the purpose of the practice of daily devotions is to help the believer make a sincere connection with God,

⁵³Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 56.

⁵⁴Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (New York: Dutton Press, 2014), 165.

⁵⁵John Bunyan, *Prayer* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2012). 11.

⁵⁶Isaac Watts, *A Guide to Prayer* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 8.

then prayer as an element of daily personal devotions is axiomatic.

The Importance of Devotional Prayer

Prayer is a natural follow-on to reading and meditation. George Müller explains that following his reading of Scripture he would intentionally transition to meditation, “searching, as it were, into every verse, to get blessing out of it” and his focus “turned almost immediately more or less into prayer.”⁵⁷ He went on to write, “The result of this is, that there is always a good deal of confession, thanksgiving, supplication or intercession mingled with my meditation, and that my inner man almost invariably is even sensibly nourished and strengthened.”⁵⁸ Looking once again to Keller: “The Bible is all about God, and that is why the practice of prayer is so pervasive throughout its pages. The greatness of prayer is nothing but an extension of the greatness and glory of God in our lives. The Scripture is one long testimony of this truth.”⁵⁹ Again, while Keller is not writing in the specific context of daily personal devotions, prayer is clearly an important element of this spiritual discipline.

The Nature of Devotional Prayer

Keller urges his readers to move from a theoretical understanding of biblical truth to a practical one: “It is possible for Christians to live their lives with a high degree of phoniness, hollowness, and inauthenticity. The reason is because they have failed to move that truth into their hearts and therefore it has not actually changed who they are and how they live.”⁶⁰ As noted in chapter 1, this lack of connection between biblical truth and practical life is the primary reason for pursuing this project. But as prayer

⁵⁷Müller, *Autobiography of George Müller*, 153

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

⁵⁹Keller, *Prayer*, 26.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 167.

follows the apprehension of Spirit-revealed truth, the individual is able to move from the theoretical to the personally practical. Keller urges us to recognize: “Prayer must, however, eventually take us beyond a mere sense of insufficiency into deep honesty with ourselves.”⁶¹ He goes on to cite the work of Scottish Theologian, Peter Forsyth who said, “Prayer, true prayer, does not allow us to deceive ourselves. It relaxes the tension of our self-inflation. It produces a clearness of spiritual vision. . . . It saps our self-deception and its Pharisaism. . . . So by prayer we acquire our true selves.”⁶²

A Method for Devotional Prayer

In some ways, considering a method for prayer is much like considering a method for interacting with a friend or loved one. The nature of the relationship will drive the form of the interaction. Isaac Watts explains in his classic work, *Prayer*, that “it must be granted, there is no necessity of confining ourselves to a form in prayer.”⁶³ His point is that circumstances and current concerns will often guide how one prays. Yet without some basic or foundational method, it can be difficult to know how to begin to pray. Looking to the New Testament, Jesus’ disciples asked him to give them some kind of method: “Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1). What Jesus provided to them is a form commonly known as the Lord’s Prayer (see Matt 6:9-13). While this text is often recited as a stand-alone prayer, as Craig Blomberg explains: “The key word in v. 9a is ‘how.’ Verses, 9b-13 illustrate key components and attitudes that Jesus’ disciples should incorporate into their prayer lives.”⁶⁴

⁶¹Keller, *Prayer*, 134.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Watts, *A Guide to Prayer*, 67.

⁶⁴Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 120.

A Method from Isaac Watts

Drawing from the basic outline that Jesus gave his disciples, Isaac Watts offers a sequence and form containing eight elements that is both practical and easy to use in the context of daily personal devotions. Because Watts' outline is easily adapted to daily personal devotions, a summary follows.

The first element is "Invocation" which includes mentioning one or more of the names or titles of God as "a declaration of our desire and design to worship him. . . . [and a] desire of his assistance and acceptance, under a sense of our own insufficiency and unworthiness."⁶⁵ The second element, "Adoration," speaks to the "honour paid to God by the creature" and includes "mention of his nature as God, . . . mention of his many attributes . . . mention of his many works . . . [and] mention of his relation to us a creator, as a father, as a redeemer, as a king, as an almighty friend, and our everlasting portion."⁶⁶ Third is "Confession" which address a recognition of "the lowliness of our original nature; our distance from God . . . or our sins . . . our sense of all our aggravated sins, that we deserve punishment and are unworthy of mercy. . . . humble representation of our wants and sorrow of every kind."⁶⁷

Fourth is "Petition" which speaks to "a desire of deliverance from evil (called deprecation), and a request of good things to be bestowed (sometimes called comprecation). For both these we must offer up our petitions to God for ourselves and our fellow creatures."⁶⁸ "Pleading" is fifth, and is focused on looking to God for his divine assistance "from the greatness of our wants, our dangers or our sorrows . . . from the perfections of the nature of God . . . from the several relations in which God stand to

⁶⁵Watts, *A Guide to Prayer*, 10-11.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 11-12.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 13-16.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 16-20.

men, particularly his own people. . . . the various particular promise of the covenant of grace . . . the name and honour of God in the world . . . former experiences of ourselves and others . . . the name and meditation of our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁶⁹

“Profession” or “Self-dedication” is sixth and deals with a “profession of our relationship to God. . . . of our former transactions with God. . . . surrender of ourselves to God and a profession of the present exercise of our affections and graces toward him. . . . [and] our humble and holy resolutions to be the Lord’s forever.”⁷⁰ Seventh is “Thanksgiving” which looks to the “benefits which God has bestowed on us without our asking . . . [and] the benefits we have received as an answer to prayer.”⁷¹ Eighth is “Blessing,” which speaks to the many attributes and glories of God with inward joy, satisfaction and pleasure. . . . and wishing the glories of God may forever continue, and rejoicing at the assurance of it.”⁷² And the ninth element is “Amen” or “Conclusion” which considers confidence in what was offered in prayer, “wishing and desiring to obtain” it, “confirmation of all our profession, promises and engagements to God. . . . [and] hope and sure expectation of the acceptance of our persona, and audience of our prayers.”⁷³

Praying Scripture

Also included in Watts’ work is a very important observation regarding prayer. Having described several foundational guidelines for prayer, he writes,

If after all we find our hearts very barren and hardly know how to frame prayer before God of ourselves, it has often been useful to take a book in our hand which contains some spiritual meditation in a petitionary form, some devotion reflections

⁶⁹Watts, *A Guide to Prayer*, 20-26.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 26-29.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 29-32.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 32-33.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 33.

or excellent patterns of prayer; above all, the psalms of David, some of the prophecies of Isaiah, some chapters of the Gospels, or any of the Epistles.⁷⁴

For anyone who has attempted to make prayer a consistent practice, Watts' observation will ring true. His ideas have found contemporary support. Timothy Keller writes: "From earliest time, the Christian church adopted the psalms of the Old Testament to be its prayer book."⁷⁵ Citing a letter written by fourth-century theologian Athanasius, he quotes: "Whatever your particular need or trouble, from the same book [the Psalms] you can select a form of words to fit it, so that you . . . learn the way to remedy your ill."⁷⁶ As any reader of the book of Psalms will affirm, they reflect a wide range of human emotion and issues that are as relevant today as they were when they were written.

Praying from the Scriptures is easily adaptable to daily personal devotions. Donald Whitney has taught and written extensively on the practice. In his recently published book, *Praying the Bible*, he explains: "That's why, if you will look briefly at just five psalms, at least one of them almost always puts into words the burden of your heart at the time. The main reason why the psalms work so well in prayer is that the very purpose God put then in his Word to us is for us to put them in our words to him."⁷⁷ A summary of Whitney's teaching using the Psalms is included in appendix 7.

The practice of daily devotional prayer is an opportunity for us to speak to God about what we have read and what our minds have attempted to grasp. It is a time for God to make good on the promise made by Jesus that the Holy Spirit would "guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). Martin Luther, having written a lengthy piece on the use of the Lord's Prayer as a guide to organize personal prayer, made this concluding remark about prayer, "If the Holy Spirit comes from under such thoughts and begins to preach in

⁷⁴Watts, *A Guide to Prayer*, 54.

⁷⁵Keller, *Prayer*, 255.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Donald S. Whitney, *Praying the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2015), 54.

your heart with rich, enlightening thoughts, accord the Spirit the honor. Let the determined thoughts you were pursuing pass, be quiet, and listen closely to the one who can do it better than you.”⁷⁸

A Basic Structure for Personal Devotions

The purpose of the previous review was to develop a clear understanding of the foundational elements of a practice of personal devotions presented in Scripture. It is readily apparent that all three elements are interrelated and non-negotiable. And, as Watts affirmed, there needs to be a degree of flexibility in the actual execution of a devotional discipline. But as is often the case in practices that have room for flexibility, it can be difficult to find a place to begin. The final section of this chapter will provide a basic structure for a time of daily personal devotions. This structure will fold in many of the practices and insights discussed previously, while providing a basis from which to make changes as one gains experience in the discipline.

Drawing once again from Müller’s autobiography, one can see this pattern at work:

Now I saw, that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the Word of God and to meditation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, instructed; and that thus, whilst meditating, my heart might be brought into experimental communion with the Lord. . . . The first thing I did, after having asked in a few words the Lord’s blessing upon His precious Word, was to be meditate on the Word of God, searching, as it were, into every verse to get blessing out of it . . . for the sake of obtaining food for my own soul.⁷⁹

Through Müller’s journal entry a pattern emerges. His time of personal devotion begins with an opening prayer. Isaac Watts’ description of “Invocation” and “Adoration” fulfill this purpose. This is a time of establishing oneself in the proper frame of mind for a sincere and reverent interaction with God. The next step was a careful and intentional

⁷⁸Krey and Krey, *Luther’s Spirituality*, 224.

⁷⁹Müller, *Autobiography of George Müller*, 152-53.

reading of the Word of God, with the expectation that the Holy Spirit would illuminate his mind with the meaning of the text. Müller then makes a smooth transition into meditation to allow the Spirit to make application to his life.

Müller goes on, “I did not, as it were, give myself over to *prayer*, but to *meditation*, yet it turned almost immediately more or less to prayer. When thus I have been for awhile making confession, or intercession, or supplication, or have given thanks, I go onto the next words or verse, turning all, as I go on, into prayer for myself or others, as the Word may lead to it.”⁸⁰ One can easily identify in Müller’s words the majority of headings that Watts outlined for prayer. From this we can develop a basic method for daily personal devotions.

Preparation

Following the pattern of Watts and Müller, one should begin a time of personal devotions by allowing time to settle the heart and mind by considering with whom they are seeking to commune, the holy creator of the universe. This includes affirming the desire to seek his attention with great humility. Follow this with a time of praise, calling to mind God’s greatness, his power, and his love for us. It might be helpful to consider the titles of “Invocation” and “Adoration” from the work of Watts (see Eccl 5:1-6). Another element that is appropriate for this initial time is Watts’ concept of “Confession” to address sin issues that might otherwise inhibit interacting with God. “If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear” (Ps 66:18).

Reading

Müller and Watts would agree that devotional reading should also include and an initial an acknowledgment of the need for God’s active assistance in opening the mind and heart to understand his word. The intent here is to allow God to have the first word

⁸⁰Müller, *Autobiography of George Müller*, 152-53.

(see Eccl 5:1-2) by reading a portion of text slowly and carefully. In her helpful and practical guide, *Feeding Your Soul: A Quiet Time Handbook*, Jean Fleming writes, “The amount you read is up to you. Some mornings one verse may occupy the entire time. At other times, you may read a larger chunk (probably not more than a chapter). Read slowly and thoughtfully.”⁸¹ The insights from Newkirk’s slow reading concepts are helpful here, as well. To maintain the coherence of the biblical message, it would be most helpful to work through an entire book of the Bible, as opposed to reading from different texts and genres of Scripture each day. Once again, it is important to remember that the goal of devotional reading is not to gather as much information as possible or to read a set portion of text in each session. Rather, the devotional goal is to read slowly enough to allow the Holy Spirit to impress an idea on the heart. Less is generally better.

Meditation

As Müller explained, the transition to meditation is typically a seamless movement rather than the beginning of a discreet new effort. Meditation begins by anticipating that God will impress upon the reader some idea or truth that deserves specific attention. One must also focus on discovering the meaning of the text to the original readers. As part of this effort, it is helpful to make an intentional effort to understand how the message might apply to any personal situations or circumstances. This may take some time as personal application might not be immediately obvious. A helpful tool comes from the InterVarsity booklet *Quiet Time* with the six questions mentioned in the earlier section concerning methods of devotional meditation (see Ps 1:1-3 and Josh 1:8).

⁸¹Jean Fleming, *Feeding Your Soul: A Quiet Time Handbook* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1999), 36.

Application

Application flows naturally from a time of meditation. God's Word is intended to impact real life, so the final step of the devotional exercise is to focus on discovering a point of practical application. To aid in application, one might also search for tools to stay faithful to the truth God has revealed. Such tools could include making notes, establishing a schedule or "to do" list, or enlisting a friend or friends to hold oneself accountable to a specific commitment (see Prov 27:17, Eccl 4:9-12, Gal 6:1-2). It is quite possible that a specific application may not come with every devotional setting. InterVarsity's *Quiet Time* includes as one of its meditative elements, "is there any *new thought about God Himself*?"⁸² Given that the purpose of daily devotions is to pursue a personal relationship with God, this kind of insight would seem to be a perfectly reasonable and desirable outcome.

Prayer

This is the time where one begins to respond to what God has brought to mind. Looking to the pattern given by Watts, a time of prayer should at least include petition, pleading, blessing, and conclusion. It is important to note from Müller's words, a time of prayer does not necessarily conform to a set order. The different facets of prayer can be added, removed, or rearranged based on the actual circumstances of the devotional time, the subject under consideration or the specific application. And as noted earlier, a helpful tool for adding variety in daily devotional prayer, is the use of the Psalms as a guide for focusing your words (see Heb 4:16).

Summary

While this basic pattern is relatively simple, it is faithful to the examples and commands found in the Scriptures, as well as the insights of generations of faithful

⁸²*Quiet Time*, 21.

Christians. Additionally, this pattern provides a point of departure to ensure that key elements are not lost as new tools or practices are added. By incorporating the biblical tools of engaging the Word of God, meditating on that word, and engaging God through prayer that both listens and responds to him, it remains faithful to the command God gave to Joshua to engage the Word of God on a daily basis that he might find the keys to prosperity and success in a relationship with God (see Josh 1:8).

Journaling as a Tool to Support Daily Personal Devotions

Another practice that can add considerable value to the discipline of daily devotions is that of journaling. While journaling is not commanded in the Scripture, it has received some important attention in recent years.

Jean Fleming cites the command given to the king in Deuteronomy 17:18-19 to make a copy of the Mosaic Law for his personal study. From this command, she finds contemporary application, noting: “Writing makes demands on an additional parts of our brain. Your total person is more fully involved. Writing slows you down and keeps you from bounding over ideas without really touching on them”⁸³ She goes on to explain that journaling also promotes meditation and is an aid to memory.⁸⁴ In a fitting closing to her discussion, she quotes novelist E. M. Forester, who wrote, “How do I know what I think until I see what I say?”⁸⁵

Advantages of Journaling

The process of journaling can add tremendous value to the overall devotional effort. Fleming writes, “As I read these past quiet time pages, I find that the insights,

⁸³Fleming, *Feeding Your Soul*, 84.

⁸⁴Ibid., 85-86.

⁸⁵Ibid., 87.

which had stirred me three months ago or three years ago, still flame up when I return to them. They are words to me from God. These revelations are gifts to be attended, considered again, run through the grid of my current circumstances, prayed over, and applied afresh.”⁸⁶ Donald Whitney affirms Fleming’s expression of the advantages of journaling, but adds another important observation, “My journal is the place where I record my progress with all the Spiritual Disciplines.”⁸⁷ Whitney would also argue that journaling is a helpful tool for leaving behind a spiritual heritage.⁸⁸ As an example, Christians today are beneficiaries of the diary work of evangelist George Whitefield (1714-1770) who crafted a list of fifteen questions intended to evaluate his spiritual progress each day.⁸⁹ And one of the most prolific journal writers, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), has profoundly influenced Christian thoughts regarding personal spirituality. Whitney explains that an essential element of their spiritual development “was their use of the Spiritual Discipline of journaling to maintain self-accountability for their spiritual goals and priorities. Before we give all the reasons why we cannot be as godly as they were, let us first try doing what they did.”⁹⁰

A Method of Journaling

Journaling is not a science but rather a personal record of one’s interaction with God. A journal is a helpful tool to record insights from devotional reading. Whitney describes several advantages to journaling, with one of the most significant being a means to improve meditation by helping focus attention and avoid distraction.⁹¹

⁸⁶Fleming, *Feeding Your Soul*, 86.

⁸⁷Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 264.

⁸⁸Ibid., 258.

⁸⁹Ibid., 263-64.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Ibid., 254

Additionally, it is useful for recording the details of devotional prayer for later review. It is also an ideal place to keep track of one's progress in the pursuit of a specific point of devotional application.

The basic tool for journaling is a notebook. It can be of any type or size; a bound journal or a loose-leaf notebook that contains blank pages or lined pages. Some may prefer an electronic tool such as a laptop or a tablet. The key is to find a tool that is easy to use and that is durable enough for repeated use.

While there is no prescribed format or specific context for recording one's daily activity, a useful exercise would be to read Augustine's (354-430) *Confessions*, or excerpts from the journal entries of former spiritual giants such as Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892), George Whitefield, John Wesley (1703-1791), or Jonathan Edwards. Jean Fleming offers a simple outline that will allow the first-time journal-keeper to make useful and organized notes from devotional sessions. Begin each day with a new page and record the date, and then add the heading "Read," noting the specific text under consideration; "Report," describing what the text was saying by summary or by quoting a particularly helpful portion of the text, as well as the apparent meaning; "Reflect," noting what the Holy Spirit brought to your attention and what specific application seems most appropriate; and finally, "Respond," writing down in summary fashion the general content of your prayer interaction with God.⁹² For those who are particularly organized, another pattern may feel more natural. Whatever organizational structure is selected, it is important to remember that a journal is not a formal document that must meet the standards of a style manual; the journal is a slave, not a master. As one gains experience in the practice, it is likely another format may prove to be more advantageous.

⁹²Fleming, *Feeding Your Soul*, 36-38.

Avoiding the Pitfalls of Daily Personal Devotions

By virtue of describing daily devotions as a specific spiritual discipline, by suggesting that there is biblical warrant for a daily practice of this particular discipline, and by developing a basic format for the practice of the discipline, an immediate problem arises. The problem is a tension between grace and works; the responsibility of the Holy Spirit to bring about change in our lives and the responsibility of the individual believer to pursue that growth through spiritual disciplines. Gordon Smith, in his article *Grace and Spiritual Disciplines*, addressed this dynamic: “One can and must be sympathetic to both sides of this tension and appreciate of the challenge of articulating the relationship between them.”⁹³ Smith recognizes that different Christian traditions will “nuance this relationship differently,” and offers a helpful perspective,

And yet there are two fundamental axioms that can help them navigate these waters. The first is that the Christian life is one of complete dependence on the grace of God; it is not a self-construction project. And the second axiom is its counterpart: that indeed the Christian can and must take responsibility for his or her actions and reactions, and that the grace of God becomes housed or experienced when divine grace is intentionally apportioned.⁹⁴

Smith’s guidance is affirmed by Scripture as the believer is urged to rely on grace not works for their standing in Christ (see Rom 5:2 and Rom 11:6), and the consistent call to personal diligence in the process of sanctification (see Luke 9:23, 2 Pet 1:5-11).

This tension between grace and works can manifest itself in at least three common expressions: legalism, pride, and a disdain for structure. Each expression is a basically a reflection of humanity’s fallen nature. Unfortunately, the desire to avoid these pitfalls can easily mask an attempt to avoid the hard work of pursuing personal holiness. Spiritual disciplines, by their very nature are neither easy, nor are the benefits always immediately apparent. But as the writer of Hebrews explains, “All discipline for the

⁹³Gordon T. Smith, “Grace and Spiritual Disciplines,” in *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Glen G. Scorgie (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishers, 2011), 222.

⁹⁴Ibid.

moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (Heb 12:11).

Legalism

At its most basic, legalism can be thought of as an attempt to manipulate a response, either from God or from other people. In the context of personal devotions, legalism is an attempt to earn the favor of God through a diligent commitment to the discipline. This is essentially a form of works-based righteousness. Martin Luther, in his sermon *The Freedom of a Christian*, warns against legalism stating “these works must not be done in the belief that through them a person will become righteous before God, because faith cannot tolerate such a belief; it is alone and must be righteousness before God.”⁹⁵ J. I. Packer writes that “*biblical religion is essentially heart religion*, real Christianity, as the Puritan Richard Baxter constantly insisted, is ‘*heart-work*.’”⁹⁶ R. Kent Hughes amplifies Packer’s and Baxter’s observations by noting the difference between discipline and legalism: “The difference is one of *motivation*: legalism is self-centered; discipline is God-centered. The legalistic heart says, ‘I will do this thing to gain merit with God.’ The disciplined heart says, ‘I will do this thing because I love God and want to please Him.’”⁹⁷

One must always remember that works by themselves are never the basis for a relationship with God. Yet James acknowledges the importance of works: “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works” (Jas 2:18). Both works and faith are necessary components of a relationship with God. The antidote to legalism is often a recognition that the pursuit of

⁹⁵Krey and Krey, *Luther’s Spirituality*, 81.

⁹⁶J. I. Packer and Carolyn Nystrom, *Praying: Finding Our Way through Duty to Delight* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 26

⁹⁷R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 15.

personal holiness is not simply an attitude; a diligent personal effort is also essential to Christian piety. As the author has often quoted during sermons, “Knowing something is not the same thing as doing something. Doing something actually requires doing something.”

The practice of daily personal devotions will require a regular and sustained effort, but that fact in itself, does not warrant the charge of legalism. Joel Beeke references the work of John Calvin writing that “the pious Christian is neither weak nor passive but dynamically active in the pursuit of obedience much like a distance runner, a diligent scholar, or heroic warrior, submitting to Gods will.”⁹⁸ While legalism is a constant possibility, it must never be an excuse for spiritual laziness.

Pride

This pitfall is closely related to legalism except that it is typically focused on the individual rather than God. The key difference is that in this case the disciplined practice of devotions leads one ascribe to themselves a special level of maturity or holiness. Pride can devolve to the point where keeping a consistent daily practice becomes the primary focus, rather than meeting with God. Jean Fleming calls this a “performance syndrome” and offers some clarifying questions to highlight the presence of this pride-driven perspective: “Are you meeting with God or with a habit? With God or a duty? With God or a command? Because you want to or to win the approval of others? If you heart is right, habit helps, duty is a delight, command is not burdensome, and even imperfect fellow believers are a source of joy.”⁹⁹ One does well to remember the words of Proverbs 16:18, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling.” Isaac Watts writes, “Do not attribute to yourselves what is due to God, lest he be

⁹⁸Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality*, 24.

⁹⁹Fleming, *Feeding Your Soul*, 74.

provoked.”¹⁰⁰

Distrust of Structure

This pitfall is often related to a sense of distrust in a structured method of spiritual activity and a desire to avoid a works-based relationship with God. John Bunyan and Isaac Watts were both well known for their disdain of formulaic prayers. Bunyan writes, “The last thing that hinders prayer is, the form of it without the power. It is an easy thing for me to be very hot for such things as forms of prayer, as they are written in a book; but they are altogether forgetful to inquire within themselves whether they have the spirit and power of prayer.”¹⁰¹ In similar manner, Watts warns, “The confinement of ourselves to a form, though not always attended with formality and indifference, is very apt to make our spirits cold and flat, formal and indifferent in our devotion.”¹⁰² While both men were speaking specifically to prayer, the application to the discipline of personal devotions is obvious. Alister McGrath speaks effectively to this concern:

Part of the problem is evangelicalism’s natural suspicion of direction and structure, both of which it regards as potentially leading into some form of legalism. . . . Evangelicalism has not been very responsive to this point, often failing to recognize that people need structure and guidance, on account of their weakness. If structure and guidance are seen as end in themselves, they are inexcusable. However, they *should* be seen as a means to a greater end—the fuller knowledge of God.¹⁰³

Jesus offered an outline for prayer in Matthew 6:9-13, known commonly as the Lord’s Prayer. Form in itself is neutral. Its purpose is to guide as a coach guides an athlete or a teacher guides a student. Only after mastering a skill, can one experience the spontaneity that provides the greatest satisfaction. Like all spiritual disciplines, the goal is not to

¹⁰⁰Watts, *A Guide to Prayer*, 162.

¹⁰¹Bunyan, *Prayer*, 52.

¹⁰²Watts, *A Guide to Prayer*, 39.

¹⁰³McGrath, *Beyond the Quiet Time*, 22-23.

complete a spiritual task, but to experience a personal relationship with God.

Conclusion

The Bible describes the process of sanctification as a work of the Holy Spirit and at the same time requiring the diligent effort of the individual believer. Spiritual discipline, as highlighted by Gordon Smith “speaks of intentionality, of firmly purposing to live by the grace of God. In so doing, one anchors one’s life in the justifying grace of God—the deepening assurance that one is loved, accepted and forgiven—but also in the sanctifying grace of God—that grace by which, as Thomas Oden notes, one is gradually transformed toward loving God and resisting evil.”¹⁰⁴

While the Bible urges the believer to be both diligent and reliant on the grace of God, there are few specific methods for accomplishing spiritual disciplines outlined in the sacred text. Generations of faithful believers have attempted to fill this void by describing practices and offering insights into this process. This chapter provides both theoretical insights and practical applications into the particular spiritual discipline of daily personal devotions. The methodology presented here is not the only way to pursue this discipline. That said, the need of the day is less for a complete, unassailable; one-size-fits-all method and more for a biblically faithful starting point. Once again, the goal is to help believers begin to enjoy a daily personal interaction with God. As with any relationship, one must start somewhere and this chapter has provided that place.

¹⁰⁴Smith, “Grace and Spiritual Disciplines,” 225.

CHAPTER 4
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT

Introduction

This chapter describes the project preparation actions and then follows with a detailed discussion of the four project goals and the associated results. The purpose of this project was to provide a group of eight members of First Baptist Church of Calvert City, Kentucky with the training necessary to develop the spiritual discipline of daily personal devotions. There were four key elements of the project that included developing and administering a congregational survey, developing and reviewing lessons plans for an eight-week course of instruction, pre-and post-course participant surveys, and a post-course qualitative survey. Implementation of the project began on January 6, 2016 and continued through May 22, 2016.

Project Promotion

Promotion and recruitment for the project began on January 6, 2016. During this first week of promotion, a total of 85 separate mailings were sent to church members, providing sufficient copies in each mailing for 120 active members from high school age through adult. The survey was accompanied by a detailed letter describing the purpose and scope of the survey, educational and future church-wide objectives for this course of instruction, and it identified January 24, 2016, as the desired return date. For the next four weeks the congregational survey was promoted weekly from the pulpit during corporate worship services, in advertisements in the weekly worship bulletin, in the weekly Sunday school announcements sheet, weekly Wednesday prayer meetings, and in the January 2016 edition of the monthly church-wide newsletter. Beginning in week 3,

January 17, 2016, the eight-week course of instruction was also advertised from the pulpit during corporate worship services, in advertisements in the weekly worship bulletin, in the weekly Sunday school announcements sheet, weekly Wednesday prayer meetings, and through personal interaction with members. The original goal was to start the class on February 21, 2016. As a result of a slow rate of return of the congregational surveys, the class start date was adjusted to March 6, 2016. The goal of eight participants was attained by week 10, one week prior to this revised class start date.

Summary of Project Goals

This project was structured around four goals. The first goal was to develop and implement a congregational survey that would gather information regarding the devotional practices of the high school-age and adult church membership. This goal was to be considered successful when approximately 100 members completed the survey. The second goal was to develop an eight-week course of instruction, supported by the research described in chapters 2 and 3 of this report. This goal would be successful when the combined rating of a five-member expert panel earned a 90 percent “sufficient” rating for each lesson plan. The third goal was to teach an eight-week class that provided participants with a biblical background on the practice of daily personal devotions as well helping them develop the skills necessary to continue this spiritual discipline into the future. The third goal would be considered successful when instruction was complete, each participant completed a pre- and post-course survey, and a t-test for dependent samples assessment was accomplished showing a positive correlation between the course work and changes in participant behavior and perspectives. Because this course was intended to be a part of multi-faceted discipleship program for the church, the fourth goal was to solicit subjective inputs from the course participants that would make follow-on classes more effective. This goal would be accomplished when each participant completed a qualitative post-course survey.

Goal 1 Results

The first goal of this project was to assess the understanding and practice of personal devotions within the congregation. This goal was measured by administering a congregational questionnaire to high school age and adult members regarding their understanding and practice of personal devotions. The results of this questionnaire was used to tailor the focus of individual course sessions. A copy of the congregational questionnaire is at appendix 1.

Forty completed questionnaires were returned by the requested return date of January 24, 2016, and an additional twenty-four were received by February 14, 2016 at the end of week 7, for a total of 64 questionnaires received. I chose this as a cutoff point to ensure time to assess the survey results and to influence course development. Because of the low rate of return, and delay this created in course development, I began to make adjustments to the course content prior to receiving all of the survey inputs.

The original objective was for a minimum of seventy percent or approximately 100 of the high school-age and adult members to complete questionnaires. While only sixty-four members returned the survey, this total did represent over seventy percent of the regular weekly attendance of approximately 75 high school age and above members. Despite the lower than expected participation, the inputs provided useful insight into the devotional practices of the membership and as well as highlighting some helpful, although minor adjustments to the course material. During survey review I noted that four participants left some questions unanswered. The questions left unanswered were primarily from among the last six questions concerning the actual practice of personal devotions, but no more than two participants left the same questions unanswered. Because there was no discernable pattern to the omitted answers I did not assign any impact to the omission of these responses.

Sessions 1 and 2 of the course focused on the concept of daily personal devotions and provided a biblical background for the practice. The congregational

survey suggested that the church members had a positive view of the practice. The results indicated that most participants would likely have a positive attitude toward this course of instruction.

Table 1. Congregational attitudes about daily personal devotions

Survey Question (N responses)	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
Q9. A daily time of personal devotions is important for spiritual maturity. (64)	0	0	0	3	24	37
Q10. I find my times of personal devotions useful and inspiring. (64)	0	0	0	6	17	41
Q18. I feel comfortable explaining to others about how to have personal devotions. (61)	2	13	14	12	14	6

A large number of respondents indicated that they had instruction in the practice of personal devotions and that they had a good understanding of the practice. This suggested that participants should be familiar with the basic elements of personal devotions, but the survey indicated that only about half of the respondents were comfortable explaining to others how to begin the practice of personal devotions.

Table 2. Familiarity with the practice personal devotions

Survey Question (N responses)	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
Q11. I have had instruction on how to conduct a time of daily devotions. (63)	3	13	5	14	14	14
Q12. I have a good understanding of how to conduct personal devotions. (64)	2	8	3	16	23	11
Q18. I feel comfortable explaining to others about how to have personal devotions. (61)	2	13	14	12	14	6

Several members indicated they had a good understanding of the practice of personal devotions. The survey also indicated that their devotional practice is likely guided primarily by the content of the devotional material rather than directly by the biblical text.

Table 3. Use of the Bible and devotional books

Survey Question (N responses)	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
Q13. I use the Bible in my personal devotions. (63)	1	2	2	13	22	23
Q14. I use a devotional book, e.g., <i>Our Daily Bread</i> , <i>My Utmost for His Highest</i> , biblical commentaries, etc. for my devotional reading. (62)	6	11	5	7	19	13
Q15. Any kind of religious literature is sufficient for personal devotions. (63)	21	15	7	17	2	2

When combined with the results of table 2 above the survey results suggested that early in the course participants should be provided with a biblical basis for the key elements of a personal devotional practice. In addition, since the example of Scripture is to focus on God’s Word, rather than man’s word, the course should emphasize the Bible as the primary source material for devotional practice.

Further review of the survey results also highlighted the fact that members above approximately forty-five years of age were more likely to believe they had sufficient instruction in daily personal devotions. Those below forty-five years of age were more likely to have had little or no instruction, suggesting that younger members are more likely to be open to instruction. This observation was reinforced by the fact that only three individuals above forty-five years of age were interested in participating in this course. A reasonable conclusion from these results is that the greatest opportunity to

introduce the practice of daily personal devotions will be with younger adults, and perhaps with those who are spiritually young in the faith. Additionally, this would also suggest that younger adults hold the greatest promise for the spiritual revitalization of the local church.

The survey also touched on the practice of meditation during personal devotions. Table 4 below outlines member practice of devotional meditation.

Table 4. Member practice of devotional meditation

Survey Question (N responses)	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
Q16. Meditation is an important part of my personal devotions. (64)	2	7	3	14	26	12

Eighty-one percent of respondents (52/64) indicated that meditation was an important part of their devotional practice suggesting that it will be a subject at least somewhat familiar to course participants. That said, given the high use of devotional materials other than the Bible, it is likely that meditation is driven more by the content and direction of the devotional than by the biblical text. As a result, the course included a session solely devoted to meditation

The survey also addressed the issue of hindrances to the practice of daily personal devotions. Table 5 below describes member views on these issues.

Table 5. Hindrances to personal devotional practice

Survey Question (N responses)	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
Q20. My work hours make it difficult to make time for daily personal devotions. (62)	19	20	8	8	4	3
Q21. My family commitments make it difficult to make time for daily personal devotions (62)	15	42	10	4	6	3

Seventy-six percent (47/62) indicated that work hours are not a hindrance while seventy-nine percent (49/62) said family was not a hindrance. This was a surprising result, but suggests that for those who read or pray infrequently the reason has less to do with external hindrances than with personal discipline. This finding was confirmed by ten respondents who noted that laziness and motivation were personal issues for them. Also, a few participants noted that sometimes the Bible text was hard to understand and that devotions seemed dry or uninspiring. As a result, the course was crafted to place a weekly emphasis on participants identifying the hindrances they discovered during the week. The course structure included one session focused primarily on common obstacles and methods to overcome them. The final session was developed to focus on how to maintain a faithful devotional practice during periods of distance spiritual dryness.

One survey question asked about the role of personal accountability in maintaining a consistent devotional practice. As noted in table 6 below, most members indicated that accountability was helpful in remaining faithful to the practice.

Table 6. Personal accountability practices

Survey Question (N responses)	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
Q19. Accountability helps me stay faithful to a time of daily devotions (61)	0	6	5	12	25	13

Based on the survey alone, I did not expect accountability support to be a problem for class participants. During the expert panel review of the lesson plans, two of the reviewers strongly recommended that I emphasize the use of an accountability partner to help course participants stay faithful to the practice. Their inputs affirmed my personal experience and the course was modified to require that each participant identify an

accountability partner for the duration of the course. Additionally, this practice was included as a weekly feedback topic.

A final aspect of personal devotions that was addressed in the survey was the use of a devotional journal. While chapter 3 noted that journaling was not a biblically stated practice, the fact that God required the kings to create a copy of the law (see Deut 17:18) suggests that writing is an important way to reinforce reading. Participants were not required to copy Scripture into their journals, but by requiring them to write down thoughts and impressions from devotional sessions they had to think carefully about what they were reading. In addition, like the text in Deuteronomy suggests, the written copies are also a tool for continuous review and re-application.

Table 7. Use of a journal in personal devotions

Survey Question (N responses)	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
Q17. I use a journal to record insights and prayer from my personal devotions. (64)	29	6	8	8	9	4

Only 33 percent (21/64) of respondents indicated that they used some sort of journal while 67 percent (43/64) indicated that they did not use a journal. As a result, the course was crafted to introduce the practice of journaling beginning with the homework for Session 1. A more advanced structure for journaling was built into Session 3 after having covered the basic elements of personal devotions.

In addition to the specific findings noted above, Table 8 below summarizes an interesting correlation between reading and prayer that became apparent on further review. The first table heading lists the number of survey participants that performed the listed activity at the noted frequencies compared to the total number of participants who responded to the question in the survey. Participants who read fewer than three to five

times each week were highly unlikely to pray with any regularity, and those who prayed fewer than three to five times each week were highly unlikely to read the Bible with any regularity. The implication is that the more frequently one reads, the more likely they are to take time to pray. Consequently, the prayer culture of the church is directly affected by the practice of Bible reading. Perhaps the lack of prayer that characterizes the contemporary church has its roots in a lack of time with the master and his word. This highlights the importance of making this training available to local church members.

Table 8. Correlation between reading and prayer

Reading Responses (41/64)		Prayer Responses (62/64)	
Daily	3-5/Week	Daily	3-5/Week
24	17	51	11
Read Daily		Pray Daily	
Prayer Daily	Pray 3-5/Week	Read Daily	Read 3-5/Week
21	1	22	16
Read 3-5/Week		Pray 3-5/Week	
Pray Daily	Pray-3-5/Week	Read Daily	Read 3-5/Week
16	1	2	1

Table 9 on the following page summarizes the correlation between reading and prayer and Sunday school/worship attendance. Those who attended Sunday school or worship fewer than two to three times each month were very unlikely to read or pray with any degree of consistency. These findings seem to further support the central role of the Bible in the spiritual life of church members and the church body.

The findings noted in tables 1 through 9 describe the most useful information gained from the congregational survey. While there were other insights gleaned from the survey, none were surprising, and some were relatively isolated suggesting that they would be best addressed on an individual basis.

Table 9. Correlation between reading, prayer, and church attendance

Attend Church Weekly (50/64)		Attend Church 2-3 /Month (11/64)	
Read Daily	Read 3-5/Week	Read Daily	Read 3-5/Week
18	11	4	4
Attend Sunday School Weekly (40/64)		Attend Sunday School 2-3/Month (4/64)	
Pray Daily	Pray 3-5/Week	Read Daily	Read 3-5/Week
15	2	1	3
Pray Daily	Pray 3-5/Week	Pray Daily	Pray 3-5/Week
32	8	4	0

Overall, this goal was successfully accomplished. The congregational survey confirmed that the majority of members recognize that daily personal devotions are an important element in developing spiritual maturity and in building a strong relationship with God. While the survey did not lead to major changes in the planned structure of the course, it was helpful in identifying areas that warranted additional emphasis.

Goal 2 Results

The second goal of this project was to develop an eight-session curriculum to equip members in the practice daily personal devotions. Curriculum conceptual development began on December 4, 2015 while awaiting formal approval for the congregational and pre-and post-course surveys. As noted previously, in order to stay on the basic program schedule, construction of lesson plans began before all surveys were returned. The lesson plans provided to the expert panel incorporated some of the insights from the congregational survey. Lesson plans were sent to expert panel members beginning in week 6 and final adjustments were completed by week 10, after the actual class sessions were underway.

The curriculum was reviewed by a panel of five individuals: (1) a Baptist Association Director of Missions who was a former pastor and minister of education, (2) an active pastor who had recently completed his Doctor of Ministry degree, (3) a

transitional interim pastor currently serving in a large church in another city and holding a Doctor of Philosophy degree in theology, (4) a current Kentucky Baptist Convention Pastoral Ministry Consultant with a Doctor of Ministry degree, and (5) a retired pastor with over 30 years of experience in local church ministry. The original project proposal included only three reviewers, but at the recommendation of my project supervisor, two more reviewers were added to provide a wider range of inputs. This change proved to be helpful as the two additional reviewers offered some of the most important insights.

The reviewers used an evaluation rubric (appendix 2) to assess the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and overall session effectiveness of the proposed curriculum. The assessment goal was to have a minimum of ninety percent of all the evaluation criterion meet or exceed the sufficient level. The most common critique concerned the length of and scope of Session 2 regarding the biblical foundations for daily personal devotions. As a result, some of the supporting material was eliminated. Session 3 downgrades were primarily from one rater who suggested that it was not as strong in biblical support as the other sessions. The other four evaluators found it to be sufficiently strong so I did not change the session construct. Two of the reviewers recommended that accountability partners be made an integral part of each session. As noted above, this recommendation was incorporated into each session. Minor administrative errors were corrected before the material was presented in class. Table 10 below provides an overall rating of each session. The evaluation rubric contained a total of eleven evaluation criteria for a total of fifty-five responses for each session. Table 10 below summarizes the total of exemplary and sufficient criteria ratings for each session from the five evaluators as well as the overall rating.

Two course text books were supplied to participants: Jean Fleming's *Feeding Your Soul: A Quiet Time Handbook*¹ and *Quiet Time: An InterVarsity Guidebook for*

¹Jean Fleming, *Feeding Your Soul: A Quiet Time Handbook* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1999).

Daily Devotions.² All reviewers were very positive about the value added by these course books. As an added learning tool, a participant workbook was also created that detailed each session’s goals, provided space for taking lecture and discussion notes, listing weekly reading and devotional assignments, and it included specially designed pages for journaling daily devotional sessions. The expert panel review results affirmed that all aspects of this goal were successfully met.

Table 10. Session review scores

Session Title	Insufficient	Requires Attention	Sufficient	Exemplary
An Introduction to Daily Personal Devotions	0	0	53	2
The Biblical Foundations for Daily Personal Devotions	0	0	54	1
The Basic Practices of Daily Personal Devotions	0	0	45	10
Reading for Daily Personal Devotions	0	0	53	2
Meditation for Daily Personal Devotions	0	0	53	2
Prayer for Daily Personal Devotions	0	0	52	3
Overcoming Obstacles in the Practice of Daily Personal Devotions	0	0	54	1
Overcoming Dry Times in the Practice of Daily Personal Devotions	0	0	51	4

²*Quiet Time: An InterVarsity Guidebook for Daily Devotions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976).

Goal 3 Results

The third goal of this project was to equip a group of eight high school age and above members to develop the practice of daily personal devotions using the eight-week course of instruction. Class sessions were held on Sunday from 4:00 to 5:00 p.m. The first class session was held on March 6, 2016, at the beginning of week 10, and the course concluded on May 22, 2016, at the end of week 21. Church events and holidays resulted in cancellations on March 13, March 27, April 10, and May 8 delaying course completion. Individual follow-up was accomplished for three participants that missed a class session prior to the next class meeting. For those weeks when classes were cancelled, each participant was provided additional journal pages.

The actual course work was eight one-hour classroom sessions, supported by lecture, in-class exercises, out-of-class readings, and journaling the result of daily devotions. This goal was accomplished by administering a pre-course survey at the beginning of the first session to measure the participant's level of knowledge, confidence and motivation, and consistency of practice of daily personal devotions. At the end of the eighth session, a post-course survey, identical to the pre-course survey was administered and the results of both surveys were assessed through the use of a t-test for dependent samples which provided a statistical assessment of course effectiveness. A summary of the pre- and post-course results and the t-test for dependent samples are shown in tables 11 and 12, below.

The first session provided an overview of the course structure and study materials, as well as the weekly preparation requirements. Participants were introduced to the concept of daily personal devotions, tasked to begin a daily reading discipline, journal the results of their devotional reading, and to identify an accountability partner outside the class to encourage them and pray with them throughout the course. They were also asked to make note of difficulties they faced, questions from their readings, and to keep track of suggested course changes for the qualitative course.

Session 2 provided a detailed examination of the biblical foundations for daily personal devotions. The session focused on God's desire for a continuing relationship with mankind and the means He created to sustain that relationship: the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. Participants were also introduced to the practices of reading, meditation, and prayer. They were also introduced to the idea that the Scripture clearly suggests that this time with God was intended to be conducted on a daily basis. The session concluded with a brief discussion concerning potential obstacles to a daily devotional practice.

Session 3 provided participants with a basic construct for daily devotions. Discussion focused first on when, where, and how long a devotional session should last as a starting point. The remainder of the session focused on a basic devotional structure of opening prayer, reading, meditation, and closing prayer. Participants were also introduced to a more structured format for journaling that encouraged them to practice reading, meditation, and prayer.³ The session concluded with a devotional exercise to help explain the use of the new format.

Session 4 focused on devotional reading and discussed the concept of slow reading as discussed in chapter 3. An extended exercise in the practice of slow reading concluded the session.

Session 5 discussed the concept of meditation providing a biblical warrant for the practice. The four goals of meditation, described in chapter 3 were introduced: to know God, to know the Word of God, to know the will of God, and to know oneself. Methods of meditation were discussed including the six-question tool taken from the booklet *Quiet Time*⁴ and the list of seventeen devotional methods created by Donald Whitney. Whitney's complete list of methods was also provided as an appendix to the

³Fleming, *Feeding Your Soul*, 38.

⁴*Quiet Time*, 21.

participant workbook.⁵ A devotional exercise allowed participants to practice the six-question method and the word-by-word method from Whitney's meditative methods (see appendix 7).

Session 6 discussed the practice of devotional prayer. The Lord's Prayer from Matthew 6:9-13 was used as a starting point to identify key elements and priorities in prayer. Participants were given the detailed list of prayer elements developed by Isaac Watts⁶ (see chap. 3) and then the process for praying the Scriptures developed by Donald Whitney was also covered.⁷ Participants worked through a devotional exercise using Whitney's praying the Psalms method (see appendix 8).

Session 7 discussed common obstacles to consistent daily devotions. Philosophical obstacles included legalism, pride, and a distrust of structure. Practical obstacles included busyness, fatigue, changing schedules, sleepiness, distracting thoughts.⁸ Potential solutions to mitigate these obstacles were also discussed.

Session 8 exposed participants to techniques to deal with commonly experienced periods where devotions seem to be dry or stale. The class also discussed several techniques from Fleming's book that included making changes to the pattern of devotional times, self-examination questions to reveal mental or spiritual blocks, growing in overall biblical knowledge through careful outside reading, and revisiting past times of God's faithfulness.⁹ The final session concluded with completion of the post-course

⁵Donald S Whitney, "Methods of Meditation on Scripture," The Center for Biblical Spirituality, accessed December 14, 2015, <http://biblicalspirituality.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Meditation-Methods-Summary-17.pdf>.

⁶Isaac Watts, *A Guide to Prayer* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 10-33.

⁷Donald S. Whitney, "Praying the Bible," The Center for Biblical Spirituality, accessed December 14, 2015, http://biblicalspirituality.org/category/praying_the_bible/.

⁸Fleming, *Feeding Your Soul*, 67-77.

⁹Ibid., 107-8.

survey. A summary of the results of the post-course survey are displayed at table 11 below.

This success of this third goal was measured by inputting the results of the pre- and post-course total scores for both surveys into a t-test for dependent samples formula. The results of the t-test are displayed in table 12 below.

Table 11. Summary of pre- and post-course survey results

Survey	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	Average Score
Pre	132	135	132	140	123	102	137	101	33.4
Post	147	151	142	142	152	139	154	157	39.5

Table 12. Results of t-test for dependent samples

	Sample 1	Sample 2
Mean	33.4	39.46666667
Variance	81.48965517	106.3954023
Observations	30	30
Pearson Correlation	0.8337618	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	29	
t Stat	-5.818282435	
P(T<=t) one-tail	1.31258E-06	
t Critical one-tail	1.699127027	
P(T<=t) two-tail	2.62516E-06	
t Critical two-tail	2.045229642	

Analyzing the above results, the mean score rose from 33.4 to 39.5. The t-test for dependent samples demonstrates that the absolute value of the t Stat computation of 5.818282435 is larger than the t Critical two=tail value of 2.045229642. When combined with the fact that the p-value (two-tail) of 2.62516E-06 is less than the input p value of

0.05, the test indicates the change in scores is due to the instructional intervention rather than chance. As a result, the third goal was successfully accomplished as planned.

Goal 4 Results

The fourth goal was to obtain qualitative feedback from the course participants to identify areas for change that would make the course more effective in the future. Responses were written rather than rated on a Likert Scale. This goal was measured by administering a post-course qualitative survey (appendix 4). Each week course participants were reminded to compile their recommended changes to ensure that their ideas and insights were not lost. This final goal was successfully accomplished on May 22, 2016, the final day of the course. A summary of significant results is provided below.

First, participants universally agreed that the duration of the weekly sessions was appropriate to the task. One participant noted that each weekly lessons moved them “toward a deeper understanding of quiet time.”

Second, participants indicated that the eight-week course duration was long enough to gain a good understanding of daily personal devotions. One participant recommended that class session be increased by thirty minutes to one and one-half hours. Another participant indicated they would have enjoyed additional sessions. The course delays due to church-wide schedule conflicts, which I assumed would detract from the effectiveness of the course, were actually viewed as positive, allowing participants additional time to read and apply the weekly learning objectives.

Third, participants found the workbook helpful for taking lecture notes and for recording insights from class discussions. One participant noted that at times my transitions between major lesson points at times did not track smoothly with the lesson note-taking guides. All participants affirmed the value of the two course text books. The readings expanded on the lecture and provided a source of review for lesson objectives.

Fourth, the usefulness of outside accountability partners, introduced in session one, was not found to be particularly helpful. One participant noted that since their outside accountability partner did not understand all that was taking place in the course they did not provide the support needed. The recommended change was for class participants to be accountability partners for each other in future classes. Additionally, the use of email and text messages as a tool of accountability was also cited as a possible enhancement for the next iteration of the course.

Fifth, most participants appreciated the classroom dialogue and were pleasantly surprised to find that the challenges they faced were common among group members. These common experiences apparently created a sense of closeness and unity among participants.

Sixth, participants appreciated the workbook appendices that provided expanded discussion on various meditation techniques and how to pray the Scriptures. One participant recommended that future workbooks include more detailed information on the practice of slow reading.

Seventh, additional change recommendations included periodic post-course meetings with course participants to encourage continued faithfulness to their newly minted devotional habit patterns. In addition, one participant recommended a two-to-three month reunion to further reinforce devotional practice and friendships.

Eighth, one participant requested that the course include class discussion regarding the appropriate use of devotional guides as an aid to personal devotions.

Ninth, all eight participants were very pleased with the content of the course. Each noted that it helped them begin to develop an effective and encouraging habit of daily personal devotions.

Overall, the post-course qualitative survey affirmed the value of this course of detailed instruction. Despite the fact that some of the participants already had a devotional practice of their own, none of the participants had never been provided

instruction to this level of detail. Goal four was successfully accomplished and the feedback noted above will be helpful in crafting the next presentation of this course.

Conclusion

My assessment is that all project goals were successfully accomplished and the overall project was a success. The t-test for dependent samples and the qualitative course questionnaire indicate that the participants found the course of instruction very helpful and that it positively influenced their practice of daily personal devotions. The only goal that was not met as originally intended concerned was the number of members who participated in the congregational survey. While the number of participants was lower than planned, given the fact that regular weekly Sunday school attendance is 65 and our regular weekly worship attendance is approximately 100, and the fact that several of those in attendance were below high school age, it is my assessment that the congregational questionnaires received were sufficient to provide useful insights for the preparation of the course of instruction. These results also suggest that after incorporating the recommendations for this inaugural course of instruction it can become a useful tool in the ongoing discipleship efforts of First Baptist Church of Calvert City.

As an additional important insight, given that this course was intended to be a part of a larger discipleship construct, the findings of the congregational survey suggest that there will be a relatively low number of members who will be immediately interested in participating in follow-on course offerings. Some will not participate because they believe they have had sufficient instruction in this spiritual discipline. Several others, however, will not participate because they are not regular attenders and are not well integrated into the church body life. As a result, this course, and any intentional discipleship program must be understood as a slow and steady process rather than enjoying high levels of consistent participation.

CHAPTER 5

MINISTRY PROJECT EVALUATION

Introduction

This chapter summarizes my evaluation of this ministry project. The evaluation will focus on an assessment of the project purpose and goals and of the project's strengths and weakness. It will also outline what different actions I would take given the results of the project. And finally, this chapter will include both theological and personal reflections gleaned throughout the project development and execution process. An overall conclusion will complete this project evaluation.

Evaluation of the Project Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip the members of First Baptist Church, Calvert City, Kentucky to develop the daily practice of personal devotions. This project goal is consistent with the Apostle Paul's description of the local church as the primary teaching institution for believers;

And He gave [to the local church] some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:11-12).

In addition to focusing on developing daily devotional skills, the project goal is consistent with the stated mission priorities of FBC: Encounter, Grow, Serve, and Share. The "Encounter" element of the mission statement is described as an engaging God during both corporate and private worship, where private worship is simply another way of expression the practice of daily personal devotions. Moreover, since this specific

project was to be included as a part of a mission statement-based, church-wide discipleship construct, it becomes the first of those discipleship courses of instruction.

Evaluation of the Project Goals

As with the purpose, the course goals were both appropriate and effective. They provided a logically sequenced build-up to the course of instruction. Additionally, the surveys and assessments provided a helpful tool to evaluate course progress and effectiveness. The course included four goals: (1) develop and administer a congregational survey to measure the attitudes and practices of the congregation with regard to the practice of daily personal devotions, (2) develop an eight-week course of instruction to equip members for the practice of daily personal devotions; to include an evaluation of the course material by a five-member expert panel, (3) to develop and administer an eight-week course of instruction that included a pre- and post-course survey to provide a statistical measure of success, and (4) develop and administer a post-course qualitative survey to glean insights from participants to improve follow-on presentation of the course.

Goal 1: Congregational Survey

The congregational survey was intended to measure the attitudes, perspectives, and practices of personal devotions within the FBC membership. The survey instrument was presented to FBC members of high school age and older. The original plan was for 100 of the 150 members to complete the survey. As noted in chapter 4, the survey response rate was lower than expected, with only sixty-four surveys completed, even after granting a two-week extension to accommodate late responses.

While the actual sample size was lower than planned, my assessment is that the survey responses provided sufficient feedback to adequately support the second goal of course development. The feedback from the survey was helpful in confirming many of

the initial impressions noted in chapter 1. However, I was surprised to find that a number of members believed they already had already received sufficient training in daily personal devotions. An important implication of this finding is that there is likely to be a limited response to follow-on course offering. Word-of-mouth advertising from inaugural course participants may well be one of the best methods to help gain member interest.

Goal 2: Course Development and Evaluation

The course structure and content was driven by the outline of chapters 1 and 2 with each session building on the content of the previous session. The scope of the course was robust enough for participants to develop a strong understanding of the biblical foundations for this daily devotions as well as sufficient time to develop skill in practical application. At the same time, the eight-week curriculum was sufficiently brief to ensure that participants could meet the course objectives without extended schedule commitments. Participant feedback, both in one-on-one conversations and through the survey instruments supported this statement. As noted earlier, the congregational survey did provide some useful insights into the development of each session.

The expert review panel was particularly helpful in this process. In preparation, each reviewer was given a summary of the project concept, a copy of the approved project proposal (chapter 1), instructions for completing the course evaluation rubric, copies of the rubric for each session (appendix 2), the proposed course outline, and copies of the course textbooks. The feedback was overall very encouraging and helpful as discussed in chapter 4. The potential weakness of this review process is the fact that the concept of daily personal devotions is not a universally understood or agreed upon construct. The personal experiences, practices, and preferences of each expert panel member likely influenced reviewer feedback. Three of the evaluators indicated that they had never been exposed to a course of instruction on personal devotions, suggesting

that there is a potential for their evaluations to be overly positive. The opposite could have been true, as well, however, this issue did not appear to surface in the reviews. The reviewers completed their assessments in sufficient time to allow session plan changes.

Goal 3: Course of Instruction

The third goal was to present an eight-week course of instruction. As noted in chapter 4, church schedule delays extended the course four weeks past the planned end date. All participants indicated that the course textbooks were particularly helpful in reinforcing classroom instruction. In addition, they provided information not discussed during classroom sessions and they became a resource for review and additional reading after the class was complete.

The most pronounced issue discovered during the course was the fact that the participants brought to the course different levels of spiritual maturity, theological background, and understanding of the practice of personal devotions. Three of the participants had been practicing a form of personal devotions for years, coming to the course with the goal of improving their skills. One of the individuals was a relatively young believer with very little experience in any kind of personal spiritual disciplines. The remaining four participants had little devotional experience but found the course work generally easy to follow and put into practice. For those with some experience in the discipline, there was a desire for more intensive instruction to help them advance in their practice. For those new to the discipline, some of the material was beyond the scope of their immediate need as simply being faithful to a daily discipline of reading the Bible was the greatest challenge.

This last insight presents some considerations for future courses. Differing degrees of spiritual maturity and theological background may leave some participants hoping for more while at the same time leaving others feeling overwhelmed and discouraged. This is a common challenge in any academic setting, but may well be more

pronounced at the church level where there is no way to completely assess level of an individual's spiritual development. That does not mean that younger believers should be denied participation, but that some consideration should be given to assessing the spiritual maturity levels of participants when preparing for a new class. As experience with the course increases, session plans could likely be crafted to minimize this challenge.

The pre-and post-course surveys were a helpful tool to assess the effectiveness of the classroom instruction. As noted in the t-test for dependent samples (chapter 4), the course proved to be very effective in helping participants develop positive perspectives and a basic set of skills necessary for the practice of daily personal devotions. That said, the greatest weakness of these surveys is the likelihood of responding to the pre-course survey in such a way that it inflates actual practices. Likewise, the post-course survey is susceptible to inflation by members hoping to provide the instructor with a sense of success. The use of anonymous surveys is the best way to mitigate this danger, but it does not completely eliminate the problem.

Goal 4: Post Course Qualitative Survey

This final goal was developed as a means of gleaning insights to improve future class offerings. The qualitative survey was included in the course workbook and participants were asked to write down their thoughts each week so they were not forgotten. Each participant turned in fully completed surveys during the final session, as requested.

The surveys provided some helpful insights as noted in chapter 4. The single most challenging comment was not critical of the course but highlighted the important of selecting future course leaders. This particular survey stated: "The leader is critical! I'm not sure that many would participate with anyone other than you." While this comment was encouraging as the instructor, it highlighted the need to ensure future course leaders

have a high degree of credibility with the participants. For this course of instruction to exist beyond my tenure as pastor, the focus must not be simply on how we can continue offering this course, but on a strategic-level emphasis on developing strong and mature Christian leaders within the church. This emphasis is also crucial when developing additional courses in the discipleship construct referenced earlier.

As with the statistical surveys, there is always potential for feedback inflation. This problem is more likely to exist in a small group because of the intimacy of the relationships that are formed in such a setting. Additionally, it is also more likely to occur when written comments are required as opposed to multiple choice responses. There are at least two issues that my assessment of this course highlighted. The first issue is that the familiarity developed in the small group discussions made it relatively easy to determine who provided the feedback. I strongly suspect participants understood this reality. When participants completed the post-course survey, some of them did not immediately recognize their identification code. As I read out the numbers, at least two participants noted immediately that it would not be hard for me to identify who made which comments. While those remarks did not appear to be critical in nature, they do highlight the potential to take care in providing candid comments. Subsequent courses will emphasize the importance of writing down identification codes so avoid stifling candid comments. A second element that could lead to feedback inflation is that these relationships could well prevent candid comments for fear of discouraging the instructor. While I could not specifically identify any such instances, this possibility will always exist. The upshot of these observations is that truly candid comments will probably relatively rare. As a result, the post-course evaluations must be carefully crafted to glean as much as possible from participant feedback. That all acknowledged, this survey has the potential for providing significant insights and will be used in follow-on courses.

Strengths of the Project

The single most significant strength of this project is that it provided insight into the devotional perspectives and practices of the congregation. Beyond that, it provided real insight into the number of members who spend little time in reading and prayer. This not only helps explain why many members are uninvolved in church activities, but also why the local church has so little impact in the local community. The survey confirms what I have witnessed during my time in vocational ministry, that what impact we do enjoy is the result of a relatively small number of members. While this is not a newsworthy insight, it does provide clear direction for future preaching topics and discipleship efforts.

The project also highlighted the value of specific instruction in personal devotions. As noted in chapter 1, many church members understand a relationship with God primarily in the context of corporate activities such as Sunday school and the weekly preaching event. This project prepared me to address this problem directly. While many of the participants felt they had some understanding of personal devotions, there was a common sense that this course introduced them to a new level of understanding and helped them actually develop a strong personal daily devotional practice. The enthusiasm of the participants was palpable throughout the course which also affirmed the value of the course. And in keeping with the role of the church as an equipping organization, this course offers the church an additional tool in its Great Commission mandate to develop disciples (see Matthew 28:19-20).

Weaknesses of the Project

The most significant weaknesses of this project were not in the project construct or even the content, but in the early preparation for the course. As noted earlier, one of the goals that was not met as intended was the number of congregational surveys completed. While I believe there were sufficient numbers of surveys

accomplished to successfully accomplish the project, I could reasonably expect that there would be additional insights with greater survey participation.

Much of this shortfall could have been mitigated by improving how the congregation was introduced to the project. Months prior to the release of the survey, I began providing information to the congregation regarding the nature of my project, that it would include a congregational-level survey, and an eight-week class on how to develop the practice of daily personal devotions. My assumption was that my enthusiasm and regular reminders would have piqued the interest of members and resulted in greater survey participation rates and volunteers for the class. This could have been accomplished by leading up to the survey with a sermon, or a series of sermons on the importance and value of personal worship as a spiritual discipline. The information gathered for the first two chapters would have provided a wealth of support for this series. Future offerings will be preceded by at least one sermon on the topic.

Another minor, yet important weakness in this projects was not in the course structure but in the delays that extended the duration of the course. As discussed in chapter 4, this did not appear to have a negative impact on this first course, but given the uncertain level of maturity of future participants, it could cause them to lose momentum and commitment. Future course offerings must include a process to ensure that schedule delays do not cause a break in the learning cycle.

What I Would Do Differently

Recommended changes based on course outcome have largely already been addressed. Beyond those issues, the one major change that I would make if I were to execute the project again would be to more carefully craft the congregational survey.

Earlier I noted that the discipline of personal devotions does not enjoy a universally accepted set of assumptions and practices. Consequently, when the topic is presented to the congregation at large, terms such as “personal devotions, “meditation,”

“prayer,” and “journaling,” while relevant to the context of this project, are likely not commonly understood. The lack of a common definition for these important concepts may well have impacted how members answered a number of the questions, concerning their personal practices. For example, many members indicated they had sufficient understanding of how to conduct personal devotions, but the class participants evidenced a wide range of perspectives on the topic. It would seem reasonable that the course participants could be relatively representative of the perspectives of the congregation at large. As a result, the congregational survey probably did not provide as accurate an understanding of congregational practices and perspectives as expected. I believe this uncertainty could have been reduced if I had provided a brief definition of the key terms as part of the survey instrument. Additionally, this may have helped members recognize what was missing from their personal devotional practices and inspired more members to volunteer for the class.

Theological Reflections

Much of the benefit of this project came in the research and readings from the sources noted in chapters 2 and 3. I gained a new appreciation for the gracious effort God made to maintain fellowship with His creation. His repeated willingness to forgive our sin and to provide a means by which we could stay in relationship are humbling to the point of being overwhelming. Because of this great grace, it is far too easy to overlook the vast gulf between our best efforts at holiness and God’s holiness. This project reminded me, once again, of God’s tireless patience and my own need for daily fellowship with Him.

The preparation for this project also highlighted for me how the local church is falling short in helping their people develop into mature followers of Jesus Christ. Despite our familiarity with the Great Commission call to “make disciples” (Matt 28:19-20), I have concluded that we are largely unaware of what making disciples really

requires. I found that many church members measure discipleship primarily in terms of their grasp on factual knowledge alone. Many fail to understand that facts about God without a relationship with him leaves us with a cold and academic appreciation of our faith. The single greatest shortfall in disciple making is also the most important one to address: consistent and intentional time reading and meditating in God's Word. God's view of the primacy of this single spiritual discipline is affirmed by how consistently he spoke to it and how generously He provided the means for this discipline to be profitable. As the prophet Isaiah teaches us concerning God's Word, "It will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it" (Isa 55:11).

As a final insight, Paul's teaching in Ephesians 4:11-16 affirmed for me the crucial need for the church to provide more than preaching for their members to effectively make disciples. This spiritual discipline, developed over the years by faithful men and women, may not be described in great detail in the Bible, but the Bible offers us incredible insights that can help the church develop mature men and women. As Proverbs 14:4 reminds us, "Where no oxen are, the manger is clean, but much revenue comes by the strength of the ox." Translating this idea to our contemporary experience, the task of disciple making is not a neat or easy task. The goal of any project of this nature should not be to get as many people through the program as possible, but to ensure those who do participate are well established. The profit will not come with a few weeks of listening to a gifted teacher. Maturity comes only as participants are challenged, accountability is expected, and a sincere effort is made. This project, despite its shortfalls, weaknesses, and inefficiencies represents the kind of effort the church must make if it hopes to fulfill the Great Commission.

Personal Reflections

The genesis of this project was the deposit a few godly men made in my life

some forty years ago during my years in college. They introduced me to the concept of discipleship and the need for daily time with God and his Word. Developing this practice was a struggle and I still remember the day that one of my mentors told me my problem was that I really did not believe it was necessary. Those words sting today almost as much as they did back then, but they were absolutely correct. Those words motivated me to invest myself in making daily time for fellowship with God through His Word. Over the years that followed, God built in my heart a love for His Word and for a daily time of fellowship. My intent with this project was to develop a program of instruction that would provide the church God has given me to lead with at least some of the skills, perspectives, and life lessons I have learned over the years through the practice of daily personal devotions.

While I have practiced daily personal devotions for most of my adult life, I found that my understanding of the disciplines was largely confined to my own personal experiences. Through the corporate academic course of instruction, as well as the reading effort directly focused on this project, my intellectual and spiritual eyes were open to a wealth of insights, practices, and hard-won perspectives that I was completely unaware existed. I was able to peer over the shoulder of men who have made monumental contributions to Christian thought and practice. Unfortunately, most of this information is unknown to the majority of church members. The research efforts significantly increased my ability to pass along some of these spiritual gems to the church. Beyond that, my studies equipped me to offer the church a much more robust program of instruction than I received as a young Christian.

Finally, I have come to believe that this kind of instruction is absolutely crucial for the spiritual health and welfare of the local church. Passing along biblical and theological information is essential to personal spiritual development. However, unless that knowledge is used to develop practical skill sets and strong biblical convictions that become part of the fabric of the corporate body life, the teaching ministry in the local

church will produce little lasting fruit. Speaking to the importance of spiritual virtues that reflect not only attitudes but actual spiritual skills, the Apostle Peter wrote: “For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 1:8).

Conclusion

My overall assessment is that this project accomplished not only the stated project goals but my personal goals, as well. My intent was to add value to the work of First Baptist Church of Calvert City and to the lives of its members. Based on the feedback from the formal assessments efforts, from the informal conversations with the class participants, and the affirmation of the Scriptures, I believe that this project represents the kind of effort God has called the church to pursue. My hope is that my initial efforts will not only bear lasting fruit, but that God may raise up additional men and women to build on my efforts. Beyond this, my prayer is that this effort will build a few leaders who will, as Paul describes to his young protégé Timothy, become “faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2).

APPENDIX 1

CONGREGATIONAL PRACTICES QUESTIONNAIRE

The congregational practices questionnaire was used to assess the understanding and actual practice of personal devotions among individual church members. The questionnaire was completely anonymous to encourage candid responses.

CONGREGATIONAL PRACTICES QUESTIONNAIRE

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding and practices of personal devotions of the participant. This research is being conducted by James Ewing for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. The information gathered will provide an overall assessment of the understanding and practice of personal devotions within the congregation. This information will be used to help construct a small group course on the practice of personal devotions. This is an anonymous survey. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported or your name identified with your responses.

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

By your completion of this survey, and checking the appropriate box below, you are giving your informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

I agree to participate.

I do not agree to participate.

Demographic Information

Directions: Answer the following questions by marking an **X** next to the appropriate answer or by providing the requested information.

1. Gender: Male Female
2. Age: _____
3. How long have you been a member of First Baptist Church, Calvert City, Kentucky?
(Provide your answer in years, unless it has been less than one year).
_____ Years Months (if less than one year).
4. How many years have you been a Christian?
(Provide your answer in years, unless it has been less than one year).
_____ Years Months (if less than one year).

Personal Spiritual Practices

Please mark an **X** next to the answer that most nearly reflects your practices.

5. I read my Bible (check one)
 A. Daily, with few exceptions
 B. 3-5 times each week
 C. About once per week
 D. Less than once per week
6. I pray (check one)
 A. Daily, with few exceptions
 B. 3-5 times each week
 C. About once per week
 D. Less than once per week

Survey continues on next page.

7. I attend Sunday school (check one)
 _____ A. Weekly, with few exceptions
 _____ B. About 2-3 times a month
 _____ C. About once each month
 _____ D. Less than once each month
8. I attend corporate worship services (check one)
 _____ A. Weekly, with few exceptions
 _____ B. About 2-3 times a month
 _____ C. About once each month
 _____ D. Less than once each month

The Practice of Personal Devotions

Personal devotions, sometimes referred to as “Quiet Time,” or as personal worship refers to a regular time established for the particular purpose of interacting with God through his written word.

Directions: Answer the following questions: (1) Mark an **X** by the multiple-choice questions. (2) Some questions ask you to give your opinion using the following scale: **SD** = strongly disagree, **D** = disagree, **DS** = disagree somewhat, **AS** = agree somewhat, **A** = agree, **SA** = strongly agree. Please **circle** the most appropriate answer.

- | | | | | | | |
|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 9. A daily time of personal devotions is important for spiritual maturity. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 10. I find my times of personal devotions useful and inspiring. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 11. I have had instruction on how to conduct a time of daily devotions. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 12. I have a good understanding of how to conduct personal devotions. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 13. I use the Bible in my personal devotions. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 14. I use a devotional book, e.g., <i>Our Daily Bread</i> , <i>My Utmost for His Highest</i> , biblical commentaries, etc., for my devotional reading. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 15. Any kind of religious literature is sufficient for personal devotions. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 16. Meditation is an important part of my personal devotions. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 17. I use a journal to record insight and prayers from my personal devotions. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

18. I feel comfortable explaining to others about how to have personal devotions. SD D DS AS A SA
19. Accountability helps me stay faithful to a time of daily devotions. SD D DS AS A SA

Hindrances to the Practice of Personal Devotions.

There are many factors that can make a daily time of personal devotion difficult to accomplish. Please indicate the degree to which the following factors interfere with your efforts to practice daily devotions.

Directions: Answer the following questions: (1) Mark an **X** by the multiple-choice questions. (2) Some questions ask you to give your opinion using the following scale: **SD** = strongly disagree, **D** = disagree, **DS** = disagree somewhat, **AS** = agree somewhat, **A** = agree, **SA** = strongly agree. Please **circle** the most appropriate answer.

20. My work hours make it difficult to make time for daily personal devotions. SD D DS AS A SA
21. My family commitments make it difficult to make time for daily personal devotions. SD D DS AS A SA
22. Sometimes my Bible reading seems boring or irrelevant to my daily life. SD D DS AS A SA
23. I attend church regularly so daily personal devotions seem unnecessary. SD D DS AS A SA
24. Are there any other factors not mentioned above that hinder your practice of daily personal devotions? Briefly describe them in the space below

This completes the survey

APPENDIX 2
CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

The curriculum evaluation rubric was used to evaluate all course materials. The rubric consists of ten questions that address biblical and theological accuracy, teaching methodology, course scope, and effectiveness of each lesson.

Instructions: Rate each area by marking an **X** in the box that most accurately reflects your assessment of how the course materials meet the listed standard. Clarifying comments are encouraged.

Personal Devotions Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
Lesson Evaluation (To be used for all lessons)					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical and Theological Consistency					
The lesson is theologically accurate.					
The lesson is biblically faithful.					
The appropriateness of biblical support and of additional course materials					
Teaching Methodology					
The lesson aim is clearly stated.					
The supporting objectives are clearly stated.					
The lesson flow is logical.					
Lesson Scope					
The lesson provides sufficient detail to support the overall aim.					
Exercises, readings, and assignments clearly support the overall aim of the lesson.					
Overall Lesson Effectiveness					
The lesson offers effective points of application.					
The lesson content meets lesson objectives.					
The lesson supports the overall course objectives.					

Return Instructions: You may return the completed form by mail, fax, or as an attachment to an email.

APPENDIX 3

PRE- AND POST-COURSE SURVEY

The pre-course survey will be administered at the beginning of the first class session and the post-course survey will be administered at the end of the eighth class session. To ensure the greatest possibility of candid comments, participants will identify themselves by using a personally-selected four-character identification code.¹

¹Jin Su Choi, "Training Older Adults for Personal Bible Study" (D.Min. proj., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003), 116-117, accessed July 10, 2014, <http://hdl.handle.net/10392/3785>. Survey questions 8, 18, and 19 were directly influenced by Choi's pre- and post-course survey.

PRE- AND POST-COURSE SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding and practices of personal devotions of the participant. This research is being conducted by James Ewing for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. The information gathered will provide an overall assessment of the understanding and practice of personal devotions within the congregation. This information will be used to help construct a small group course on the practice of personal devotions. This is an anonymous survey. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported or your name identified with your responses.

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

By your completion of this survey, and checking the appropriate box below, you are giving your informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

I agree to participate.

I do not agree to participate.

Enter a four-digit code (numbers only) for your survey: _____
Please enter it at the bottom of the following two pages, as well.

Please indicate the degree to which these statements reflect your own understanding, practices, and perspectives on the topic of daily devotions.

Personal Devotional Practices

Directions: Answer the following questions: (1) Mark an **X** by the multiple-choice questions. (2) Some questions ask you to give your opinion using the following scale: **SD** = strongly disagree, **D** = disagree, **DS** = disagree somewhat, **AS** = agree somewhat, **A** = agree, **SA** = strongly agree. Please **circle** the most appropriate answer.

- | | | | | | | |
|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1. I find my daily devotions helpful inspiring. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2. I have a regular place and time for daily devotions. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3. Prayer time is an important part of my life. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4. I use my Bible during my daily devotions. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 5. I am happy with the frequency of my daily devotions. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 6. I incorporate meditation in my daily devotions. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7. The principle of meditation described in the Bible is also applicable to today's Christians. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

Survey continues on next page

Perspectives on Daily Devotions

Directions: Answer the following questions giving your opinion using the following scale: **SD** = strongly disagree, **D** = disagree, **DS** = disagree somewhat, **AS** = agree somewhat, **A** = agree, **SA** = strongly agree. Please **circle** the most appropriate answer.

- | | | | | | | |
|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 8. I believe that the Bible specifically commands us to have daily devotions. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 9. Personal devotions should come naturally if you are a genuine Christian. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 10. God prefers that we come to him when are in need rather than by establishing a set time each day. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 11. When reading the Bible, it is important to understand that there is only one meaning for any particular bible verse. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 12. A Bible verse can have different applications in different life situations. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 13. Done correctly, you should always find a specific life application from your daily devotions. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 14. When God seems distant in my daily devotions, it is clear evidence of unrepentant sin in my life. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 15. My daily devotional practices have an impact on the welfare of the church body. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 16. I make time for daily devotions because I believe it is a necessary practice for spiritual health. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 17. Missing a daily devotion can put me outside God's protective care. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 18. Daily devotions help me see myself as unique and special in God's eyes. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

Your four digit code

Survey continues on next page

Perspectives on Daily Devotions (*continued*)

Directions: Answer the following questions giving your opinion using the following scale: **D** = strongly disagree, **D** = disagree, **DS** = disagree somewhat, **AS** = agree somewhat, **A** = agree, **SA** = strongly agree. Please **circle** the most appropriate answer.

- | | | | | | | |
|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 19. Daily devotions help me listen more carefully for God's guidance in life. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 20. My personal devotions help me have stronger Christian influence on my family. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 21. My daily devotions keep me aware of the presence of sin and temptation in my daily life. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 22. There are multiple methods and tools available for having successful daily devotions. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 23. It is possible for anyone to make sufficient time for daily devotions. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 24. Sharing my daily devotional experiences is an effective tool for personal witnessing. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 25. Accountability is necessary to stay committed to regular personal devotions. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 26. Daily devotions are an essential ingredient for becoming a mature Christian. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 27. Personal devotions help me keep a biblical perspective on life trials. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 28. I can cite examples in Scripture that support the practice of daily devotions. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 29. I am satisfied with the frequency of my personal devotions. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 30. My practice of daily devotions sets a good example of faithfulness to fellow Christians. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

Your four digit code

This completes the survey

APPENDIX 4

QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT OF COURSE EFFECTIVENESS

This assessment was administered at the end of the eighth session. Since the course was intended to become a part of a regular discipleship training program, the qualitative feedback gathered from this assessment provided important insights into the effectiveness of this initial course, and for making changes to this course for the future.

POST-COURSE QUALITATIVE SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding and practices of personal devotions of the participant. This research is being conducted by James Ewing for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. The information gathered will provide an overall assessment of the understanding and practice of personal devotions within the congregation. This information will be used to help construct a small group course on the practice of personal devotions. This is an anonymous survey. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this survey, and checking the appropriate box below, you are giving your informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

- I agree to participate.
 I do not agree to participate.

1. What is your assessment of the individual lessons?

2. What is your assessment of the duration of the entire course?

3. What is your assessment of the usefulness of the course material (workbook, reading, and exercises)?

4. What is your assessment of the overall usefulness of this course for your personal spiritual development?

5. What changes would you recommend to make this course more effective for future participants?

6. Are there any other comments you would like to make about the course?

This completes the survey

Thank you for your participating in this initial course. Your candid inputs are an important part of efforts to improve the discipleship training efforts at First Baptist Church.

APPENDIX 5

PRE- AND POST-COURSE SURVEY RESULTS

This appendix presents the detailed results of both the pre- and post-course surveys.

Table A1. Pre-Course survey results

Question / Participant.	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	TOTAL
Q1	6	5	5	6	4	1	6	2	35
Q2	3	6	5	6	5	2	6	2	35
Q3	6	5	6	6	5	5	6	2	41
Q4	2	6	6	4	2	1	6	2	29
Q5	1	6	4	5	3	1	4	1	25
Q6	1	5	3	3	3	1	5	2	23
Q7	6	6	5	6	5	6	6	5	45
Q8	6	5	5	5	6	6	6	5	44
Q9	5	2	5	5	5	2	2	2	28
Q10	1	2	2	6	2	5	1	2	21
Q11	1	2	3	2	3	1	1	2	15
Q12	6	5	4	6	3	6	5	5	40
Q13	2	5	3	4	4	5	4	5	32
Q14	2	2	3	3	2	1	2	5	20
Q15	6	5	5	5	4	4	5	4	38
Q16	6	5	6	5	4	1	5	2	34
Q17	2	2	1	2	1	2	1	5	16
Q18	6	2	4	2	4	1	4	5	28
Q19	6	5	6	6	5	1	6	5	40
Q20	6	5	6	5	5	1	5	2	35
Q21	6	5	6	4	5	5	6	2	39
Q22	5	5	6	5	6	6	6	5	44
Q23	5	5	4	6	6	6	5	5	42
Q24	5	5	4	6	6	6	5	5	42
Q25	6	4	6	6	6	4	4	5	41
Q26	6	5	6	6	5	5	6	5	44
Q27	6	5	6	6	5	6	6	2	42
Q28	5	5	2	2	3	4	4	4	29
Q29	2	5	2	3	2	2	4	1	21
Q30	6	5	3	4	4	5	5	2	34
TOTAL	132	135	132	140	123	102	137	101	Ave 33.4

Table A2. Post-course survey results

Question / Participant	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	TOTAL
Q1	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	48
Q2	6	6	6	6	5	4	6	6	45
Q3	6	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	47
Q4	4	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	45
Q5	3	5	3	6	5	3	6	6	37
Q6	6	4	4	5	6	4	6	5	40
Q7	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	48
Q8	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	48
Q9	2	3	3	2	5	4	2	3	24
Q10	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	5	13
Q11	1	2	3	1	6	1	1	2	17
Q12	6	6	3	6	2	6	5	6	40
Q13	5	5	5	3	5	4	5	5	37
Q14	6	2	3	5	3	2	3	3	27
Q15	6	5	6	5	6	5	6	5	44
Q16	6	6	5	5	5	5	6	5	43
Q17	2	2	1	2	1	3	1	2	14
Q18	6	5	6	2	5	5	6	5	40
Q19	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	48
Q20	6	6	6	5	6	6	5	6	46
Q21	6	6	5	6	6	6	6	6	47
Q22	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	47
Q23	6	6	5	6	6	6	6	5	46
Q24	6	6	6	5	5	6	6	6	46
Q25	6	5	6	4	6	5	6	6	44
Q26	6	6	6	5	6	5	6	6	46
Q27	6	6	6	5	5	5	6	6	45
Q28	2	5	4	4	5	5	6	4	35
Q29	2	6	3	5	4	3	6	6	35
Q30	6	5	4	5	6	5	5	6	42
TOTAL	147	151	142	142	152	139	154	157	Ave 39.5

APPENDIX 6

DESCRIPTION OF MEDITATIVE PRACTICES OF BISHOP JOSEPH HALL

This appendix contains a detailed description of the meditation practices of Bishop Joseph Hall that are summarized in chapter 3 of this project. .

DESCRIPTION OF MEDITATIVE PRACTICES.,
OF BISHOP JOSPEH HALL

*The Art of Divine Meditation*¹

The Entrance into the Work. 1. The command entrance, which is prayer. (85-86)

Prayer maketh way for meditation; meditation giveth matter, strength, and life to our prayer, by which, as all other things are sanctified to us, so we are sanctified to all holy things. But the prayer that leadeth into meditation would not be long, requiring, rather, that the extension and length should be put into vigor and fervency of it; for that is not here intended to be the principle business, but an introduction to another and no otherwise than as a portal to this building of meditation.

Particular and proper entrance into the matter, which is our choice thereof. (86)

Such is the common entrance into this work. There is another yet more particular and proper, wherein the mind, recollecting itself, maketh choice of that theme or matter whereupon it will bestow on itself for the present, settling itself on that which it that which it hath chosen; which is done by an inward inquisition made into our heart of what we both do and should think upon, rejecting what is inexpedient and unprofitable.

The proceeding of our meditation, And therein a Method allowed by some authors, rejected by us. (87-88)

For this part, therefore, which concerneth the understanding, I had rather to require only a deep and firm consideration of the thing propounded, which shall be done if we follow it in our discourse through all, or the principal, of those “laces” which natural reason doth afford you; wherein let no man plead ignorance or fear difficulty. For, as the mind, if it go loose and without rule, roves to no purpose, so, if it be too much fettered with gyves of strict regularity, moveth nothing at all.

Premonitions concerning our proceeding in the first part of Meditation. (88-89)

First, that I desire not to bind every man to the same uniform proceeding in this part. Secondly, that whosoever applieth himself to this direction think him not necessarily tied to the prosecution of all these logical “places” which he findeth in the sequel of our treatise, so as hid meditation should be lame and imperfect without the whole number. Thirdly, that when we stick in the disposition of any of the “places” following, we rack not our minds too much with the inquiry thereof, which were to strive more for logic than devotion; but without too much disturbance of our thoughts, quietly pass over to the next.

The practice of Meditation; wherein First, we begin with some “Description” of what we meditate of. (89)

First therefore, it shall be expedient to consider seriously what the thing is whereof we meditate.

¹Frank Livingston Huntley, *Bishop Joseph Hall and Protestant Meditation*, (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1981), 85-108.

Secondly, follow an easy and voluntary “division” of the matter meditated. (90)

The nature whereof, after we have thus shadowed out to ourselves by a “Description,” not curious always and exactly framed according to the rules of art but sufficient for our conceit; the next is some easy and voluntary “Division” whereby our thought shall have more room or them, and our proceeding shall be more distinct.

3. A consideration of the “Causes” thereof in all kinds of them. (90-91)

Which done, it shall be requisite for our perfecter understanding and for the the laying grounds of matter for our affection to carry it through those other principal “places” and head of reason which nature hat taught every man both for knowledge and amplification; the first whereof are the “causes,” of all sorts.

4. The consideration of the “fruits and Effects.” (92)

The next “place” shall be the “Fruits and Effects” following upon their several “causes,” which also afford very feeling and copious matter to our meditation, wherein it shall be ever best no so much to seek for all as to choose out the chiefest.

5. Consideration of the “Subject,” wherein or whereabout it is. (92-93)

After which comes to be considered the “Subject,” either wherein it is or whereabout that is employed which we meditate of.

6. Consid. of the “Appendance and Qualities” of it. (93-94)

Sixthly, shall follow the “Appendance and Qualities” which cleave unto the subject whereof we meditate.

7. Of that which is “Diverse” from it or “Contrary” to it. (94-96)

Seventhly, our thoughts, leaving a while the consideration of the thing as it is in itself, shall descend unto it as respectively with others; and therefor first shall mediate of what is “Diverse” form it or “Contrary” unto it.

8. Of “Comparisons and Similitudes” whereby it may be most fitly set forth. (96-98)

After this opposition, the mind shall make “Comparison” of the matter meditated with what me nearest resemble it; and shall illustrate it with fittest “Similitudes,” which give no small light to the understanding nor less force to the affection.

9. The “Titles and Names” of the things considered. (98-99)

The very “Names and Title” of the matter considered yield not small store to our meditation, which being so commonly imposed that they secretly comprehend the nature of the thing which they represent, are not unworthy of our discourse.

10. Consid. of fit “Testimonies of Scripture” concerning our Theme. (99-100)

Lastly, if we can recall any pregnant “Testimonies of Scripture” concerning our theme, those shall fitly conclude this part of our meditation.

Of our second part of Meditation, which is in the affection. Wherein is required a Taste and Relish of what we have thought upon. (100-101)

The most difficult and knotty part of meditation thus finished, there remaineth that which is both more lively and more easy unto a good heart; to be wrought altogether by the affections, which if our discourse reach not unto, the prove vain and to no purpose.

Secondly a Complaint bewailing our wants and untowardness. (101-102)

After this taste shall follow a complaint, wherein the heart bewaileth to itself his own poverty, dullness, and imperfection; chiding and abasing itself in respect of his wants and indisposition, where in humiliation truly goeth before glory.

Thirdly, as hearty Wish of the soul for what it complaineth to want. (102)

After this complaint must succeed an hearty and passionate wish of the soul, which ariseth clearly from the two former degrees; for that which a man hath found sweet and comfortable and complains that he still wanteth, he cannot but wish to enjoy.

4. An humble Confession of our disability to effect what we wish. (102-103)

After this wishing shall follow humble confession by just order of nature, for, having bemoaned our want and wished supply, not finding this hope in ourselves, we must need acknowledge it to Him of whom only we may both seek and find where it is to be duly observed how the mind is by turns depressed and lifted up.

5. An earnest Petition for that which we confess we want. (103)

After confession naturally follows petition, earnestly requesting at His hand that which we acknowledge ourselves unable and ono but God able, to perform.

6. A vehement Enforcement of our petition. (104-105)

After petition shall follow the enforcement of our request, from argument and importunate obsecration, where we must take heed of complement in terms with God, as knowing that He will not be mocked by any fashionable form of suit, but requireth holy feeling and entreaty.

7. A cheerful Confidence of obtaining what we have requested and enforced. (105-106)

After this enforcement dote follow confidence, where in the soul, after man doubtful and unquiet bickerings, gathereth up forces and cheerfully rouzeth up itself, and like one of David's worthies breaketh through a whole army of doubts and fetcheth comfort from the well of life [Prov. 10:11], which though in some later yet in all, is a sure reward from God of sincere meditation.

The Conclusion of our Meditation, in what order it must be, First, with Thanksgiving. (106)

The conclusion remaineth, wherein we must advise (like physicians do in their sweats and exercise that cease not over-suddenly but leave off by little and little. The mind may not be suffered to fall headlong form this height, but must descend by degree.

Secondly, with Recommendation of our souls and ways to God. (106-107)

After this thanksgiving shall follow a faithful recommendation of ourselves to God, wherein the soul doth cheerfully give up itself and repose itself wholly upon her Maker and Redeemer, committing herself to His in all her way, submitting herself to Him in all His way, desiring in all things to glorify Him and to walk worthy of her high and glorious calling.

An Epilogue. Reproving the neglect of Meditation. Exhorting the use of Meditation. (107-108)

Let him curse me upon his death-bed if, looking back from thence to the bestowing of his former times, he acknowledge not these hours placed the most happily in his whole life, if he then wish not he had worn out more days in so profitable an heavenly a work.

APPENDIX 7

SUMMARY OF MEDITATIVE METHODS OF DONALD S. WHITNEY

This appendix contains a detailed description the meditative methods that are developed by Donald S. Whitney and referenced in chapter 3 of this project.

SUMMARY OF MEDITATIVE METHODS
OF DONALD S. WHITNEY¹

Begin by selecting a passage for meditation from your time of reading God’s Word. Choose a verse or phrase that attracted your attention, or a theme verse or key verse from the passage.

1. Emphasize different words in the text. For example from John 2:5: “*Whatever* He says to you do it.” “Whatever *He* says to you do it.” “Whatever He *says* to you do it.” “Whatever He says to *you* do it.” “Whatever He says to you *do* it.” “Whatever He says to you do *it*.”
2. Rewrite the verse or phrase in your own words.
3. Formulate a principle from the text—What does it teach?
4. Think of an illustration of the text—What pictures or explains it?
5. Look for applications of the text—What should you do in response to it?
6. Ask how the text points to the Law or the Gospel.
7. Ask how the text points to something about Jesus.
8. Ask what question is answered or problem is solved by the text.
9. Pray through the text.
10. Memorize the text.
11. Create an artistic expression of the text—a song, poem, or sketch.
12. Ask the Philippians 4:8 questions of the text.
 - A. What is *true* about this, or what truth does it exemplify?
 - B. What is *honorable* about this?
 - C. What is *just* or right about this?
 - D. What is *pure* about this, or how does it exemplify purity?

¹Donald S Whitney, “Methods of Meditation on Scripture,” The Center for Biblical Spirituality, accessed December 14, 2015, <http://biblicalspirituality.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Meditation-Methods-Summary-17.pdf>.

- E. What is *lovely* about this?
- F. What is *commendable* about this?
- G. What is excellent about it that is, excels other of this kind)?
- H. What is *praiseworthy* about this?

13. Ask the “Joseph Hall” questions of the text.

- A. What is it (define and/or describe what it is)?
- B. What are its qualities and attachments?
- C. What are its divisions or parts?
- D. What is contrary, contradictory or different to it?
- E. What causes it?
- F. What compares to it?
- G. What does it cause (its fruits and effects)?
- H. What its titles or names?
- I. What is its place, location or use?

14. Set and discover a minimum number of insights from the text (set the number in advance).

15. Find a link or common thread between all the chapters or paragraphs you’ve read.

16. Ask how the text speaks to your current issue or question.

17. Use Meditation Mapping.

A. Put the verse(s), phrase, word or topic to be meditated upon in the middle of the page (when possible, this should be done in picture form).

B. Allow insights, ideas and thoughts to come quickly and freely.

C. Use key words to represent your ideas.

D. Connect your key words ideas to the central focus with lines.

E. Use as few words per line as possible.

F. P-r-i-n-t all the words for easier reading.

G. Use color for emphasis and recall.

H. Make frequent use of symbols and pictures in addition to words.

See: Buzan, Tony. *The Mindmap Book*. New York: Plume/Penguin, 1996.

Wycoff, Joyce. *Mindmapping*. New York: Berkley, 1991.

APPENDIX 8

PRAYING THE BIBLE, DONALD S. WHITNEY

This appendix contains a detailed summary of the concept of praying the Scripture as developed by Donald S. Whitney and referenced in chapter 3 of this project.

PRAYING THE BIBLE,
DONALD S. WHITNEY¹

Prayer is essential for the Christian, but it's not easy. Why is prayer so difficult? Why is prayer even sometimes boring? Why does 5 minutes of prayer feel like an eternity? Is it because we are second-rate Christians? The answer is likely, "no!" So why is it so hard to be consistent in prayer?

1. The Problem

Our problem in prayer is we say the same old things about the same old things. Prayer is often boring. When prayer is boring, we don't feel like praying. And when we don't feel like praying, it's hard to concentrate in prayer and to pray for very long.

We often pray about these same things: - Family/Friends - Finances - Future - Work or School - Church or Ministry - Current Crisis

This will not change, we will continue to pray about these same things, but in a fresh & new way. Prayer can be fresh and new every time we pray.

2. The Solution

So, what's the solution? The solution is simple and straightforward. If God expects and calls his people to pray, then consistent, meaningful prayer must be doable.

When we pray, pray through a passage of Scripture, especially a Psalm. When we sit down to pray, we are responsible for creating the words of our prayers. When we use the Scriptures, the words are provided for us, all we have to do is pray!

3. The Method

Let the words of Scripture become the words of our prayers. For example, if we pray through Psalm 23, read, "The Lord is my shepherd," and thank him for being your shepherd. Ask him to shepherd your family that day, to guide, protect, and provide for them. Pray that he will make your family members His sheep; that they will look to Him as their shepherd. Ask Him to shepherd you through the decisions you must make about your future. When nothing else comes to mind, go to the next line, "I shall not want" and continue to pray.

Simply go through the passage, line by line, praying what you find in the text or what it brings to mind. If nothing comes to mind or you don't understand the verse, go to the next one. You may choose to spend a lot of time in a verse or move quickly through the passage. Nothing says you have to pray over every verse.

Keep doing this until you either (1) run out of time or (2) run out of Scripture.

¹Donald S. Whitney, "Praying the Bible," The Center for Biblical Spirituality, accessed December 14, 2015, http://biblicalspirituality.org/category/praying_the_bible/.

Use the Psalms of the day. This divides the 150 Psalms into 5 Psalms for each 30 days in a month. Take the day of the month as your first Psalm. Then keep adding 30 to that number until you get 5 Psalms. So, on the 15th of the month, the Psalms of the day would be Psalm 15, 45, 75, 105, and 135. On the 31st of the month, use Psalm 119. Take 30 seconds to scan these 5 Psalms of the day, then choose one to pray through.

If you get distracted, just come back to the next verse and continue.

You can use any passage of Scripture to pray through.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allen, David L. *Hebrews*. The New American Commentary, vol. 35. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010.
- Bates, William. "On Divine Meditation." In *The Works of William Bates*, (1990): 3:124-25. Quoted in Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality: A Practical Theological Study from our Reformed and Puritan Heritage*. Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2004.
- Beeke, Joel R. *Puritan Reformed Spirituality: A Practical Theological Study from our Reformed and Puritan Heritage*. Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2004.
- Bennett, Ron. *Intentional Disciplemaking: Cultivating Spiritual Maturity in the Local Church*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2001.
- Blomberg, Craig L. *Matthew*. The New American Commentary, vol. 22. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992.
- Borchert, Gerald L. *John 1-11*. The New American Commentary, vol. 25A. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002.
- Bunyan, John. *Prayer*. Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001.
- Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005.
- Choi, Jin Su. "Training Older Adults for Personal Bible Study." D.Min. project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003. Accessed July 10, 2014. <http://hdl.handle.net/10392/3785>.
- Cooper, Lamar Eugene, Sr. *Ezekiel*, The New American Commentary, vol. 17. Nashville: Broadman & Homan, 1994.
- Craigie, Peter. *Psalms 1-50*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 19. Waco, TX: Word Books, 2004.
- Davis, John Jefferson. *Meditation and Communion with God: Contemplating Scripture in an Age of Distraction*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012.
- Denninger, David. In vol. 1 of the *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Edited by Willem A. Van Gemeren, 706-707. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997.
- Diamond, A. R. Pete. In vol. 3 of *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*. Edited by Willem A. Van Gemeren, 1234-1235. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997.

- Durham, John I. *Exodus*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 3. Waco, TX: Word, 1987.
- Erickson, Millard J. *Christian Theology*. 2nd, ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998.
- Fee, Gordon D. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987.
- Fleming, Jean. *Feeding Your Soul: A Quiet Time Handbook*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1999.
- First Baptist Church, Calvert City, Kentucky. Centennial Celebration: August 1, 1876 to 1976* First Baptist Church, Calvert City, Kentucky, 1976.
- Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Disciplines: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. San Francisco: Harper Books, 1998.
- Fretheim, Terence E. In vol. 2 of the *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*. Edited by Willem A. Van Gemeren, 409-414. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979.
- Garrett, Duane. *Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*. The New American Commentary, vol. 14. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003.
- Gesenius, William. *Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*. Translated by Samuel P. Tregelles. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1979.
- Green, Joel B. *The Gospel of Luke*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: W.B Eerdmans, 1997.
- Grudem, Wayne A. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1994.
- Howard, David M., Jr. *Joshua*. The New American Commentary, vol. 5. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002.
- Hughes, R. Kent. *Disciplines of a Godly Man*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001.
- Huntley, Frank Livingston. *Bishop Joseph Hall and Protestant Meditation*. Binghampton, NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1981.
- Keller, Timothy. *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God*. New York: Dutton Press, 2014.
- á Kempis, Thomas. *The Imitation of Christ*. Translated by William Creasy. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Mari Press, 2003.
- Kingsley, Patrick. "The Art of Slow Reading." *The Guardian*. July 15, 2010. Accessed September 4, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/jul/15/slow-reading>.
- Konkel, A. H. In vol. 1 of the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology & Exegesis*. Edited by Willem Van Gemeren, 710-720. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997.

- Krey, Philip D. W., and Peter D. S. Krey. *Luther's Spirituality*. New York: Paulist Press, 2007.
- Liddell, Henry G., and Robert Scott. *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Mather, Cotton. *Christianity to the Life: Or, the Example of the Lord Jesus Christ Propos'd unto the Meditation, and Imitation of every Christian*. Boston: T. Green, 1702. Accessed through The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Library via the Early American Texts: 1639-1800 database.
- Mathews, Kenneth A. *Genesis 1-11:26*. The New American Commentary, vol. 1A. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996.
- McGrath, Alister. *Beyond Quiet Time: Practical Evangelical Spirituality*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996.
- Merrill, Eugene H. *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary, vol. 4. Nashville: Broadman & Homan, 1994.
- Müller, George. *Autobiography of George Müller: A Million and a Half in Answered Prayer*. Denton, TX: Westminster Literature Resources, 2003.
- Newburg, Andrew, and Mark Robert Waldman. *How God Changes Your Brain: Breakthrough Finding from a Leading Neuroscientist*. New York: Ballentine Books, 2009.
- Newkirk, Thomas. "Paying Attention." Accessed September 4, 2015. https://www.bloomfieldscools.org/uploaded/downloads/Instructional_Leadership/An_Introduction_to_Slow_Reading.pdf.
- O'Brien, Peter T. *Colossians-Philemon*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 44. Waco, TX: 1982.
- Owen, John. *The Works of John Owen*. Vol. 3, *Pneumatologia: A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*. Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1981.
- Packer, James I., and Carolyn Nystrom. *Praying: Finding Our Way through Duty to Delight*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006.
- Polhill, John B. *Acts*. The New American Commentary, vol. 26. Nashville: Broadman & Homan, 2001.
- Quiet Time: An InterVarsity Guidebook for Daily Devotions*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976.
- Salkind, Neil J. *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008.
- Saxton, David W. *God's Battle Plan for the Mind: The Puritan Practice of Biblical Meditation*. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015.

- Scorgi, Glen G., ed. *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.
- Scudder, Henry. *The Christian's Daily Walk*. Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1984.
- Smith, Gordon T. "Grace and Spiritual Disciplines." In *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, edited by Glen G. Scorgi. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.
- Stein, Robert H. *Luke*. The New American Commentary, vol. 24. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993.
- Stuart, Douglas K. *Exodus*. The New American Commentary, vol. 2. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006.
- Toon, Peter. *From the Mind to the Heart: Christian Meditation Today*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987.
- _____. *Knowing Your God*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993.
- _____. *Meditating as a Christian: Waiting Upon God*. London: HarperCollins, 1991.
- Unmack, U.V. In the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Edited by Walter A. Elwell, 2-3. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984.
- Van Gemeren, Willem A. *Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*. In vol. 5 of the *Expositor's Biblical Commentary*. Edited by Frank E Gæbelein, 736-739. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991.
- Verhoef, Pieter A. In vol. 2 of the *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*. Edited by Willem A. Van Gemeren, 419-424. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997.
- Watson, Thomas. "A Christian on the Mount; Or, A Treatise Concerning Meditation," *The Sermons of Thomas Watson* (1990): 197-291. Quoted in Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality: A Practical Theological Study from our Reformed and Puritan Heritage*. Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2004.
- Watts, Isaac. *A Guide to Prayer*. Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001.
- Wenham, Gordon J. *Genesis*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987.
- Whitney, Donald S. "Methods of Meditation on Scripture." The Center for Biblical Spirituality. Accessed December 14, 2015. <http://biblicalspirituality.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Meditation-Methods-Summary-17.pdf>.
- _____. "Praying the Bible." The Center for Biblical Spirituality. Accessed December 14, 2015. http://biblical spirituality.org/category/praying_the_bible/.
- _____. *Praying the Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2015.

_____. *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, Rev. ed. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991.

Wilhoit, James C., and Evan B. Howard. *Discovering Lectio Divina: Bringing Scripture into Ordinary Life*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012.

Zamov, Stoyan. "Poll: Americans Own Many Bibles, But Rarely Read Them." *The Christian Post*. March 12, 2012. Accessed September 5, 2015.
<http://www.christianpost.com/news/poll-americans-own-many-bibles-but-rarely-read-them-71823/>.

ABSTRACT

EQUIPPING THE MEMBERS OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, CALVERT CITY, KENTUCKY TO DEVELOP THE PRACTICE OF PERSONAL DEVOTIONS

James William Ewing, D.Min.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Joseph C. Harrod

The purpose of this project was to equip members of First Baptist Church (FBC), Calvert City, Kentucky, to develop a daily practice of personal devotions.

Chapter 1 provides the goals, context, rationale, and definitions for this ministry project. It also describes the research methodology and discusses key limitations of the study.

Chapter 2 provides biblical and theological support for of daily personal devotions as a spiritual discipline and then introduces the biblical practices of reading, meditating, and praying over the Word of God.

Chapter 3 examines in detail the practices of devotional reading, meditation, and prayer and then provides an introductory format to help develop and maintain devotions as a daily discipline.

Chapter 4 describes the execution of the ministry project as well and includes statistical and qualitative results.

Chapter 5 offers an assessment of the project purpose, goals, strengths and weaknesses of the project, and concludes with theological and personal reflections.

VITA

James William Ewing

EDUCATION

B.S., United States Air Force Academy, 1977
Squadron Officer School, Air University, Maxwell, Air Force Base, Alabama, 1984
M.S., Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, 1987
Air Command and Staff College, Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base,
Alabama, 1988
Armed Forces Staff College, Norfolk, Virginia, 1992
U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, 1994
M.Div., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Evangelical Theological Society

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Minister with Single Adults, Broadmoor Baptist Church, Shreveport, Louisiana,
2000-2004
Minister of Discipleship, First Baptist Church, Paducah, Paducah, Kentucky, 2005-
2007
Associate Pastor, First Baptist Church, Paducah, Paducah, Kentucky, 2007-2008
Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church, Calvert City, Calvert City, Kentucky, 2008-