

Beyond Devotional Doldrums: Using Scripture and Prayer to Foster Intimacy with God

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- I. Introduction—the importance of cultivating our devotional lives
 - a. The Word and prayer as means of grace
 - b. J. C. Ryle: “They are appointed channels through which the Holy Spirit conveys fresh supplies of grace to the soul and strengthens the work which He has begun in the inward man.”
 - c. Too often time in the Word and prayer is “important but not urgent” (Charles Hummel)
 - d. Jeremiah 15:16

- II. Three misconceptions about our devotional lives
 - a. Personal discipline and dependence on God are incompatible
 - i. Both are critical
 1. 1 Corinthians 15:10
 2. “Our devotional practices are in response to grace, empowered by grace, and sustained by grace. All our exertions . . . are gifts of grace.” (David Mathis, *Habits of Grace*, 27)
 - ii. Digging irrigation ditches
 - iii. Sailing in the doldrums
 - b. Individual devotional practices are more important than corporate worship for growth in the Christian life (or vice versa)
 - i. False dichotomy
 - ii. Luke Stamps: “We need not choose between personal piety and a strong emphasis on the gathered Church. If we are diligent in the latter, then we will be strengthened in the former.”
 - c. There is a single key that unlocks and unleashes these means of grace
 - i. The B.I.T.S. Principle
 - ii. No silver bullets

- III. Three practices
 - a. Practice #1—Prayerful meditation on Scripture (see Steve Midgley’s resources)
 - i. What is meditation?
 1. Thomas Watson—“A holy exercise of the mind whereby we bring the truths of God to remembrance, and do seriously ponder upon them and apply them to ourselves.”

2. Slow, prayerful reading geared toward a vital and lively connection between Scripture and the particulars of your life
 3. Meditation is the bridge between reading and prayerful life transformation
 - a. Psalm 1
 - b. Psalm 119:11
 - c. Joshua 1:8
 4. Maximizing nourishment
- ii. How do we do it? (Practice with Psalm 57:1-2)
 1. Notice the state of your heart as you begin
 2. Pray for God’s Spirit to enliven and direct your reading
 3. Read through the passage slowly several times
 4. Notice what phrase captures your attention
 5. Dialogue with the text
 6. Dialogue with your heart
 7. Pivot to prayer
- b. Practice #2—the Ignatian Prayer of Examen
 - i. Originated with Ignatius of Loyola in the early 1500s. A prayerful self-assessment at the end of your day
 - ii. Consists of several parts
 1. Asking God for his perspective on your life
 2. Giving thanks
 3. Reviewing the day
 - a. Consolations
 - b. Disconsolations
 4. Asking God for help for the coming day
- c. Practice #3—Using resources prepared by others
 - i. Devotional aids
 1. Scripture Union’s *Encounter with God*
 2. Philip Reinders, *Seeking God’s Face: Praying with the Bible through the Year*
 - ii. Prepared (pre-written) prayers
 1. Aren’t spontaneous prayers better? Not necessarily! Why?
 - a. We see this practice in Scripture—Psalms, Luke 11 (the Lord’s Prayer), Paul’s prayers
 - b. We use prepared resources all the time in corporate worship
 - c. Prepared prayers can disciple our hearts into robust, God-glorifying, kingdom-centered prayer. Andrew Peterson, reflecting on John Baillie’s *A Diary of Private Prayer*: “The point is, Baillie’s words lead me gently but firmly into prayers I would not have otherwise thought to pray. In them I’m confronted by my own darkness—not just of obvious sins, but of the sins that lurk beneath

them—as well as the light of God’s great mercy, as the revenant of that Scottish saint takes me by the hand and leads me through the thorny hedges of godly shame and repentance into the wide, golden fields of gratitude for God’s mercy in Christ.” (*Every Moment Holy*, xvi).

- d. Prepared prayers join me to believers across time and space
- 2. Two resources of pre-written prayers
 - a. *Book of Common Prayer* (BCP) collects
 - i. What is a collect?
 - ii. Generally has 5 parts (see Barbee and Zahl, x-xi)
 - 1. The Address
 - 2. The Acknowledgment
 - 3. The Petition
 - 4. The Aspiration
 - 5. The Invocation
 - iii. Collect for Purity
 - 1. Almighty God
 - 2. Unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid,
 - 3. Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit
 - 4. That we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name,
 - 5. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.
 - iv. Collect for the Fifth Sunday in Lent
 - v. Overall reflections on the collects
 - b. *Every Moment Holy* (Douglas McKelvey)
 - i. A Liturgy for Changing Diapers (56)
 - ii. A Liturgy for Waiting in Line (255)
 - iii. An embodiment of 1 Thessalonians 5:17

IV. Conclusion

- a. Galatians 6:9
- b. Psalm 27:7a–9

V. Resources

- a. Arthur Bennett, ed. *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions*. Banner of Truth, 1975.
- b. Anglican Church in North America, *Book of Common Prayer*. Anglican Liturgy Press, 2019.
- c. C. Frederick Barbee and Paul F. M. Zahl, *The Collects of Thomas Cranmer*. Eerdmans, 1999.
- d. Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God*. Penguin Books, 2014.
- e. Douglas Kaine McKelvey, *Every Moment Holy*, Vol. 1. Rabbit Room Press, 2017.
- f. David Mathis, *Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus through the Spiritual Disciplines*. Crossway, 2016.
- g. Steve Midgley, “Meditating for a Change: Embracing a Lost Art” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 34:1 (2020); or audio from CCEF National Conference 2018, both available at www.ccef.org
- h. Paul E. Miller, *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World*. NavPress, 2017.
- i. Philip F. Reinders, *Seeking God’s Face: Praying with the Bible through the Year*. Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2013.
- j. Scripture Union, “Encounter with God” <https://scriptureunion.org/encounters/>