

HOW TO DO DAILY DEVOTIONS

An Introduction to Devotions.

Few skills are more important in the life of a disciple of Jesus than learning how to be shaped by the Word of God. Contrary to popular usage, the Bible was not written to be an inspirational quotebook nor a set of principles to be mastered. It is a guidebook to knowing God and a revelation of truth that when followed, produces a life of godly character and wisdom. Being shaped by the Word of God comes from learning to read, study and do the Scriptures. It's not hard to do, but it is a skill that we do need to learn and develop.

The Holy Spirit is the One who is making us more and more like Christ. His primary tool is Scripture. Our job is to cooperate with the Spirit's work in our life. One of the ways we can cooperate is by starting each day with the Word of God: reading, studying, memorizing and praying God's Word. The Holy Spirit will use the Word of God to release and form the life of Christ in us.

Jesus lived his remarkable life "Connected to God through the Word and Prayer." He said as disciples we are to "abide in the vine," a metaphor for staying connected to God in a life-giving way. At Church of the Open Door, we publish Daily Devotions that are designed with a built-in format to help you in the process of drawing out the life-giving truth of the Bible through prayerful study. I want to teach you this process in the pages that follow.

Daily Devotions at a Glance.

Each week a **memory verse** is provided and as you memorize the verses, they begin to shape your thinking and values. Writing it out every day helps dramatically in memorizing it. Then, say and repeat the memory verse several times. By the end of the week, you will have it memorized.

In addition to a memory verse for the week, you will see a selection to read marked **Reading God's Word**. Copy in your Journal the selections from the New Testament and the Psalms. Then slowly and thoughtfully read the passage from God's Word each day. Think about it as you are reading, don't just race through it. Each day a verse has been chosen and marked **Meditating on God's Word**. As you begin to study the passage, choose whether you want to focus on this verse or the verses around it or even another verse from the daily reading that captured your attention.

Ask, Analyze, Apply.

Once you've narrowed down what verse or verses you want to focus on, there are three phases or steps to the process of drawing out the life-giving truth from the Word of God: Ask, Analyze and Apply.

The first step is **"Ask."** You are going to bombard God and His Holy Word with questions: ask, ask, ask, ask, ask. Don't worry about asking God too many questions; He loves it. Jesus said in **Matthew 7:7, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."**

ASK

The first thing you want to ask God for is His insight. **James 1:5** says, **"If any of you lacks wisdom, ask God."** So, the first question we want to ask is, "God, would You open my eyes? I'm asking You, Lord, to give me insight into Your Word." In **John 14:26** Jesus said the Holy Spirit is the "Helper" who would "teach us." We can't understand the Word of God without the help of the Spirit of God, and it doesn't make much sense to try to understand the Word without consulting its Author. Pray! Ask!

The Holy Spirit inspired the Word to be written, He illuminates it to open understanding, and He is the best interpreter of the Word of God. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand, interpret, and apply the Word of God. Ask Him throughout the process. Make your study of the Word a dialogue with its Author. This is how you cooperate with the Spirit. This is the inhale action of Spiritual Breathing. Prayerful study of the Word of God is the only way to rightly divide the Word of truth. As you're praying, read and reread the passage. The more times you read it, the better.

As you prayerfully read the text, start asking questions about the passage that you're reading. Don't read it, put it down, and then ask questions; as you're reading it, ask questions. A time-tested way to ask questions is to use what's called the six journalistic questions: who, what, where, why, when, and how? You're using these six questions to do three things: you're observing, investigating, and exploring what the text says. This is the mindset you want to have as you're bombarding the text with questions. Your goal is to grasp what is the main point of this passage of Scripture.

Let's practice together on **Proverbs 2:1-6**. Here's how this works. The first journalistic question I often ask is "Who?" Who is speaking in Proverbs 2:1-6? Of course, I believe the answer to this question is always "the Holy Spirit." He inspired these words to be written. But He chose to

inspire these words to be written through specific people for specific reasons on specific occasions. The more I can understand these circumstances and occasions, the easier it will be to understand what the Holy Spirit was saying through these words. As I am asking questions of the text, I am doing it in dialogue with the Holy Spirit. Throughout this process I am asking, "Holy Spirit, what is happening in the text? What are You saying through this passage?"

So, in the text, who is identified as speaking? Verses 1-5 don't answer that question so we have to apply one of the most important principles to understanding the Word of God: look at the context. This means you have to look beyond the immediate verses or even beyond this chapter. The context is the verse, verses, and chapters before and after the verses you are studying. So, in our case, when we look at the context of Proverbs 2 to find out who is speaking, we keep going back all the way to **Proverbs 1:1** where we find that Solomon is the one who is speaking.

In asking the "who" of the text, we want to find out who is speaking, who is writing, who is being written to, and who the main characters are. And so, in this passage, to whom is Solomon writing, or speaking? It's there in the first words of chapter 2: his son, right? So I wrote down on the journal page: "Solomon writing to his son."

When I am working my way through a book of the Bible day by day like we do in our church wide devotions, oftentimes the "who" is the same several days in a row, so I skip right to the next question: "what?" As I read through the text, I began to ask, "Okay, what is he saying?" Well, here in Proverbs 2:1-6, he's talking about gaining wisdom and knowing God. So I wrote down "Solomon is teaching his son how to find wisdom and the knowledge of God." That leads us to the next question, which is "how?" Verses 1-4 answer the "how" as Solomon poetically explains that it takes diligence in seeking God.

You will find that not every passage has an answer to each of the six journalistic questions. Furthermore, you don't have to ask them in any particular order, nor do you have to be limited to these questions. I am just giving you the classic starter questions so you know where to start. As you bombard the text with questions, look for key words and phrases, contrasts, comparisons or conclusions. Continue to ask God to give you insight into what the text says.

So step one is "Ask" and step two comes right along with it: **"Analyze."** Here I want to analyze the information that I've discovered from the questions I've asked and answered in step one. In the classic model of inductive Bible study, I've moved into the interpretation stage. Remember, in every step along the way, I am praying, dialoguing with, breathing in the Holy Spirit. He is the great interpreter of the text, and so I am living in this dialogue with Him as I go through this process. I am praying, "Holy Spirit, open this text to me. What is it saying? What does it mean?"

I'm analyzing the text and analyzing the answers to my questions to sort out the meaning of the text. Again, my goal is to grasp what is the main point of this passage of Scripture.

ANALYZE

The Analyze step has two parts. The first part is you analyze the Scriptures, and the second part is you let the Scriptures analyze you. It's very important that you do both parts. As I'm analyzing the Scripture, again, I am praying. I pray through the whole process. "Holy Spirit, what are You saying here? What does this mean?" I pray and I ponder. This is thinking and mulling it over. I'm not in a hurry. I wonder what this is about. I ponder why He said that. I wonder why this is here. God wants us to use our brain and to think.

As I am analyzing the verse, I may picture the setting or paraphrase the verse and try to summarize the main point in the passage. I try to distill all that I've been studying in the Ask and Analyze phases. As I do this, I've already started to move into this next phase of letting God analyze me, letting the Word of God analyze my heart and my mind.

Here I use **Psalm 139:23-24** as a guide. I ask God to "**search me, know my heart, test me, know my thoughts.**" I will often say, "Let Your Word be like a lens that the Holy Spirit shines through into my life." I love that picture: the light of the Holy Spirit shining through the Word into my life, searching me, analyzing my heart, my mind, and my motives.

This is a powerful time in my day. I will often kneel in my study, and with the Bible open before Me, I'm asking God, "What are You doing in this passage? Open this up to me, Lord. Teach me. I submit myself to Your Word." It's not me, the "master," trying to understand the Word by myself; it's me, the "servant," saying "give me understanding as I submit to Your words and truth in this text." The text is not something that we master as much as it is something that masters us.

APPLY

At this point I've already begun to move into step three in our process. The first two steps, Ask and Analyze, prepare us for the third step: **Apply**. Here, the question I ask is: how does the text apply to my life?

Studying the Bible without applying it to my life is dangerous. Knowledge is meant to affect the way I live. Knowledge without application lulls us into believing the lie that information equals transformation. **James 1:22 says, "Don't merely just listen to the Word and so deceive yourselves; do what it says!"** Doing the Word is applying the Word to my life.

Years ago, I came across an acronym that I use to help me apply the Word to my life. I don't know who to credit this to, it's not mine, but I use it all the time. The acronym is SPACE. I ask the Holy Spirit to make "space" in my life for His Word. I do this by asking five questions, each starting with the successive letters that spell out this word "space." I ask, "In light of what I've just studied and learned in God's Word:

- S** Is there a Sin I need to avoid or confess?
- P** Is there a Promise I need to claim?
- A** Is there an Attitude I need to adopt or change?
- C** Is there a Command I need to obey?
- E** Is there an Example here for me to follow?

As I ask those SPACE questions, I get better at applying to my life what I've learned in the Ask and Analyze steps. We've provided a bookmark with this Journal to help remind you of the steps in this process. Keep it in your Bible or in your Journal and use it every time you dig into the Word. I've been doing this Triple A way of Bible study for so many years it's second nature to me. As you learn this skill of how to study the Bible and practice it every day, pretty soon these steps will lose their rigidity and become second nature to you too. Skills practiced become habits that become life patterns that shape our life. Every one of us has learned behaviors that have become habits that shape our life. As we have seen, Jesus lived in the Word and applied it to His life and it shaped His life. If we want to be like Christ, then we need to learn and practice the skill of continuing to stay "Connected to God through the Word and Prayer" until it becomes a habit.

If you do, you will become more like Jesus. As you practice this habit of taking in the Word of God, it will begin to form your thoughts and influence your thinking and decision making. Living in connection with God through His Word will protect you from sin and strengthen you in

temptation. **Psalm 119:11 says, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."**

Jesus called the Holy Spirit the Helper, and said that one of the roles of the Holy Spirit in the life of His disciples is to **"remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26)**. When we fill our hearts and minds with the Word of God, the Holy Spirit will use the Word just when we need it to remind us, to strengthen us, to guide us, and to make us more like Christ.

Responding back to God through Prayer.

Now that you have heard from God through His Word, you will want to spend some more time talking to Him, worshiping Him, confessing sin and bringing your requests to Him. Prayer is this wonderful reciprocal relationship: God speaks, we respond. We hear Him through the Word, we respond with words of our own. **Luke 5:16 says that "Jesus would often go to some place where he could be alone and pray."** I encourage you to do the same. Find some place where you can be alone and spend some time connecting to God through prayer

If you are new to praying, you can use the prayer Jesus taught his disciples in **Matthew 6:9ff** as an outline (in other words, instead of just repeating the prayer word for word, use the phrases in the prayer as prompts and elaborate on each of them.) Or you can use the famous acronym A.C.T.S. which stands for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication. (Supplication is an old word that means to ask for something.) Prayer is just conversation with God and so I invite you to just start talking to God about what is important to you. Let me model that for you right now as I pray for you:

"Father, thank you for Your Word. What a gift! As we prepare to read Your Word, open it to us. Show us who You are. Holy Spirit, open our eyes to see Your truth in the words we read. Give us understanding. Just as You breathed out this Word and inspired it to be written, please breathe Your Words into our hearts and minds today. Jesus, I thank you for the one who is reading these words right now, this disciple who is about to take their next step in the daily journey of digging into Your Word. They are hungry to hear from You. So am I. We want to follow You, to learn from You, to become more like You. Help us hear from You and obey what You say. Holy Spirit, fill us with Your presence and power. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen."