

Developing a Devotional Rhythm

We encourage Christians to set aside time daily with God to **adore** Him, to **behold** Him, to **hear** what He has to say to us through scripture, and to **respond** in prayer as God renews and transforms us.

We don't just want to know about God (theology), we want to know him, the way one person knows another. *Who is God?* He is our Father, our Lord, Redeemer and Friend, our Comforter and our Guide. If we really know him this way, then our time talking with him will grow into what John Knox called, "an earnest and familiar talking with God."

Essentials for time with God

- **Time:** *Set aside regular time (daily is a good method) before you start your day, or on your commute, or in the evening as the chaos of the day winds down.*
- **Scripture:** *One way that God talks to us is through what he has already said his Scripture. Hebrews 1:1-3 tells us that Christ is God's final word, so our time in Scripture and in prayer should be centered on God's clearest communication about his person/character: Jesus.*
- **Prayer:** *Prayer is dialogue. It's us taking up the other side of the conversation that God has initiated in Scripture.*

Methods for Devotional Prayer

Each of the below methods in some way incorporates meditation upon God's Word and responding to what God says, whether it's easy or challenging to us, through prayer.

Ed Clowney said, "*The Bible does not present an art of prayer; it presents the God of prayer.*" Tim Keller notes, "*We should not decide how to pray based on the experiences and feelings we want. Instead, we should do everything possible to behold our God as he is, and prayer will follow. The more clearly we grasp who God is, the more our prayer is shaped and determined accordingly.*"

The goal is to **know** God as he is and to **respond** in joy, worship, confession and repentance, godly sorrow, and in hope and expectation.

A Basic Method for Meditation and Prayer

- **Be Still:** (and know that He is God): Take a moment to be impressed with what you're about to do. Some ideas — think about:
 - "Come, let us bow down and worship Him. Let us fall on our knees before the Lord our Maker."
 - God is my Father, therefore I can come to Him as a child.
 - Jesus is my High Priest: I have access to the throne of grace.
 - The Spirit is inside me: What I pray will be through His leading.
- **Invite:** Invite the Holy Spirit who searches our hearts to open your mind and heart, and to give you a humble and responsive heart.
- **Read:** Read the passage 2-3 times. Read slowly for understanding.
 - Note the who/what... What did this mean to it's first audience?
 - What does the text say about God? (e.g. His attributes, desires, promises, commands) About humanity? Create a 2 column chart. List observations about God on the left; humanity on the right.
- **Meditate: Become aware** of God's loving presence and read the passage again, perhaps out loud. Notice how He might be speaking to you. **Dwell on** a word, phrase, or idea that jumps out at you.
 - What has connected to my heart or mind? (a characteristic of God to be grasped, a command to obey, a comfort to be savored)
 - Think deeply about it. What is it really saying? Put it in your words.
 - Why is God showing me this *today* ? If I took this seriously, how would I be different?
 - What can I adore God for *because of this*? What sins can I confess? What can I thank Him for? What requests can I make?
- **Pray:** Talk to God about what He has shown you through this text. Be yourself; ask questions; try not to rush. A response can also be silence, tears, or worship.
 - **Adore** God for who He is (His attributes revealed in this passage)
 - **Confess** the sinful emotions, attitudes, and behaviors that result when we forget who He is
 - **Thank** God for what He has done
 - **Ask** God to transform you and to help you apply His word.
- **Behold:** "See the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." End by adoring and appreciating some aspect of the excellence and beauty of Christ.

Tips for Developing a Rhythm

- **Be Expectant:** Expect more from prayer. Expect God to be delighted when you say hello. Expect God to reveal Himself to you. We can't dictate or force the experience — there's no formula or magic button — but we can expect more.
- **Be Intentional:** Find one or more consistent times each day when you're fully alert and free of distractions. Plan ahead. If you want to spend time with God in the early morning, go to bed early; if you're tempted to check email, turn off your devices; if you find yourself preoccupied with the day ahead, keep a to-dos notepad next to you.
- **Be Realistic:** Start small and let the length of time grow. Break it up into smaller chunks throughout the day (maybe morning and evening devos). It may take time to get used to meditative prayer. That's okay. Only by practicing this in longer slices of time will you get to a place where you can do it naturally in just a few minutes.
- **Be Creative:** The quiet stillness of the early morning or bedtime is ideal, but you may want to experiment with times and places that work well with your temperament and schedule. For example, extroverts might find it easier to concentrate while sitting alone in a crowded café, kid's nap time might have fewer interruptions, etc.
- **Be Open:** A combination of worship, scripture, meditation, and prayer is a good pattern, but be open to how the Spirit leads you. Ex.: some days may be spent primarily in rejoicing and singing, which may then lead to meditation of a Psalm; other days God's Word may cause you to repent, and be gently restored by His quiet, loving presence. There is no one process or formula.
- **Be Kind to Yourself:** Remember that we can't earn God's love by being super disciplined; nor can we ever lose His love if we forget or get derailed. He loves us, period. God does not keep score of how often we meet with Him. He is our loving, ever-patient Father — it gives Him joy when His children come home to Him; and He misses us when we've wandered away.

A few thoughts:

There's no way to really know yourself except through prayer.
There's no way to change what you worship except through prayer.
There's no way to please God except through prayer, because in prayer you are laid bare, God knows it all and you're giving him all of you.

Other Methods for Meditation and Prayer

A Pattern for Prayer (Morning/Evening)

- **Morning Prayer**, 35 minutes (see OPC|M Morning Devo)
- **Read and pray Scripture** (Psalm 90 v14 for example).
- **Do M'Cheyne Bible reading**—two daily chapters.
 - **Choose** favorite verses and do meditation
 - **Pray** your meditations to God.
- **Free prayer:** Adoration, Confession, Gospel Thanks, Asking.
- **Prayers of Intercession:** Work both in confess ways you look to your work as the source of identity, ask God to help you know your identity is rooted in the finished work of Christ.

Midday Prayer (5 minutes)

Read and pray Scripture (Psalm 103 for example).

Paraphrase and pray the Lord's Prayer (Luther's method).

Self-examination:

- Have you been prickly and proud or gracious and humble?
- Have you been cold and indifferent or warm and kind?
- Have you been anxious and stressed or depending on God?
- Have you been cowardly or truthful?

Free prayer for the challenges of the day and moment

Evening Prayer (20 minutes)

Read and pray Scripture working through the Psalter with a commentary (Kidner's is really helpful).

Confess and repent for sins of the day.

Pray for the people with needs you met that day.

Intercessory prayer for...

- family, friends, opponents, neighbors, people you know with cares, burdens, and afflictions, the church in general, your church in particular, the needs of your city and community, the needs of the world

Luther's Simple Way to Pray

Adoration:

How can I love and bless God on the basis of this?
What do I see here that I can praise him for?

Repentance:

How do I fail to realize this in my life?
What wrong behavior, harmful emotions/attitudes result when I forget?

Gospel Thanks:

How can I thank Jesus as:
the **ultimate revelation of** this attribute (his forgiveness, etc.) &
the **ultimate answer to** this sin or need of mine (my distorting his ways, my idolatry, etc.)?

Aspiration:

How does this show me what I should or could be and do?
How would I be different if this truth were powerfully real to me?

Other Resources for Prayer

The Valley of Vision:

This **guide** can be helpful for using this handy book of devotional prayers from Puritans.

Prayer of Examen/Discernment:

These focus on the seeing our experiences and inner life through the lens of the gospel. See opcmilford.org/prayer for a guide.

Augustine's Confessions:

"For You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless till they rest in You." So begins Augustine's book of reflective prayers on his Christian life. Highly recommended for those new to the faith.

The Book of Common Prayer:

One of the most important books in the English language. Christians have used this book since the 16th century as a way to together adore, confess, repent and rest in the gospel.

The Songs of Jesus: A Year of Daily Devotions in the Psalms:

This short book is supremely helpful for developing a rhythm on praying through the Psalms and resting in Christ.

Reading Scripture Qs

Ask

- What is this passage talking about?
- What would this have meant to the original audience?
- What change is the author trying to bring about in readers?
- Why did God put this in the Bible?
- How does Jesus fulfill this command/ideal/principle, etc.?
- What does this passage say that they (and I) must do?
- Why can't they/I do it?
 - [Usually it's being unable to fully do something both externally and, especially, in my heart: being just, loving, generous, pure]

Summarizes the situation:

For example:

I want to be a more loving person, but I continually fall short of loving the way that I know I must. My temptation here is to conclude that I simply need to try harder. But, if I try harder and fail, what reason, hope or heart do I have for continuing on in obeying God?

Then ask how Jesus has done this on my behalf?

(Was he perfectly just, loving, etc.)?

Finally, ask: how should I now live?

For example:

- *It's only when I see that he was perfectly loving toward me when I was unlovely, that I can love my wife/family/others in the way I in which I desire. I can love them when they are hard to love (and they me, when I am hard to love), because Jesus loved me and redeemed me when I was (and often continue to be) hard to love.*
- *It's only when I see that God has already accepted me in Jesus that I can deal with the real reasons that I fail to live like the passage describes (or like a person in the passage, Nehemiah for example).*
- *It's only when I see that his love is continually poured into my heart by his Spirit (Rom 5) that I can be empowered to love out of the resources (emotional, spiritual, and physical) that he provides rather than from my own strength.*