

Personal Bible Study

by Glen Ellard

Observations



Watch out for the Little Jack Horner syndrome: “What a good boy am I” for having regular devotions. Devotions can become merely a legalistic habit instead of genuine communication with God.



Devotions are best when you are alert. The Psalmist wrote, “Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice” (Psalm 55:17). God always listens, so choose a time when you are at your best.



Read the Word. Devotional books are helpful, but they should offer a portion of the Word—that’s where the life is.



Keep your relationships with people healthy. Peter talks about spouses’ treatment of one another, recommending their mutual consideration “so that nothing will hinder your prayers” (1 Peter 3:7). Jesus said if a brother has something against us, we should get it cleared up before we worship God. We cannot have a truly good relationship with

Spiritual Warfare

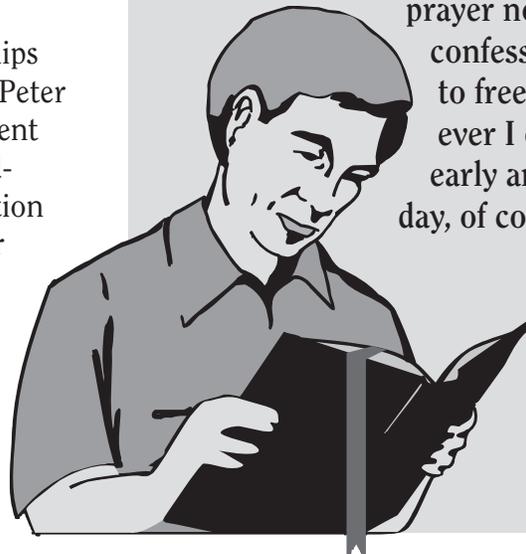
Maintaining personal devotions can be a struggle. I do not doubt that some of my fellow believers excel in this area, but for me it is a spiritual warfare. Not that I’m aware of any frontal assaults by the devil. The opposition I experience seems rather ordinary.

I don’t think much can be accomplished in 60-second devotions to God. (How can one get rid of distracting thoughts and concentrate on God in less than a minute?) But I know God can do significant things in a moment.

Perhaps personal devotions are, after all, a personal matter. People are different. Paul underscored that in talking about the members of the church being so different they could be likened to the different parts of the human body. Not everyone is an eye or an ear.

Should we expect everyone to practice devotions the same way? Shouldn’t we allow for individual differences? I hope so because I’ve practiced the range of approaches from using a prayer notebook; to the ACTS of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication; to free association; and by reading wherever I opened my Bible. I’ve gotten up early and stayed up late (not on the same day, of course).

What I offer, then, are not inspired revelations. (Even though I am enjoying a renewal in my devotional efforts.)



God if we have poor relationships with people.



Take devotions where you find them: alone in the car, out cutting the grass (I'm speaking of prayer here), or wide awake in bed in the middle of the night. And if some prime time offers itself unexpectedly, seize it. Paraphrase Deuteronomy 6:7—"The Lord is to be on your heart. Devote yourself to Him when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down, and when you get up."



Beware the Christian worker's occupational hazard: substituting lesson preparation for private devo-

tions. When you prepare a lesson, think of your students. When you have devotions, think of God.

Benefits



Circumstances may stay the same, but your attitude doesn't. You begin to learn what Paul learned: "To be content whatever the circumstances" (Philippians 4:11).



You increase the Holy Spirit's opportunity to bring things to your remembrance (John 14:26). The more familiar you are with the Scriptures, the greater your resource.



The more Bible you know, the more knowledge you can pass along—in an academic sense and in an experiential sense.



You build up your faith. In Old Testament times, the people of God rehearsed His acts of mercy, judgment, and blessing on their behalf. In this way they encouraged themselves. You can do the same by recounting to yourself and others God's deeds throughout both Testaments.

You can discover other benefits yourself—once you develop that spiritual habit called personal devotions.

Questions for Further Study—

1. Describe the state of your personal Bible study and devotional life at the present time.

2. When has your personal Bible study time been the strongest and why?