

Devotions: Discovering the Riches of God's Word

What is your method for doing daily devotions?

There are a variety of options – and the Hills URC Council would like to make the congregation aware of a couple of additional resources.

But let's start at the beginning. What is the purpose of doing devotions?

The answer depends on how we're defining "devotions." *Family* devotions should have a different goal and character than *personal* devotions.

Family devotions should aim to impress God's Word on the heart and mind of the whole family, under the leadership of the husband and father.

A crucial part of the father's calling is to diligently teach God's Word to his children (Deut. 6:7; cf. Deut. 6:5-13), bringing them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). So too with regard to their wives. Husbands are called to strive for the sanctification and purification of their wives, just as Christ lovingly sanctifies the church (Eph. 5:25-33).

Faithfully leading the family in daily devotions can go a long way toward fulfilling those parallel callings as husband and father.

Central to that practice should be the practice of reading and discussing the Bible itself. If there are young children, reading of Scripture can be interspersed with explanations of what has been read and its importance. As Dad reads, he can ask questions of each child to make sure that they are paying attention and understand what they are hearing. He has the opportunity to apply God's Word to the family's life, using Scripture to strengthen his family's appreciation for God's grace and their understanding of God's commands.

Even if the household has no children, however, a husband and wife should make a daily practice of reading the Bible together, that they might grow in their mutual love for and devotion to the Savior. A house without Christ as its foundation is a house built on sand and easily destroyed (Matt. 7:24-27). Therefore we are called to build on the foundation of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 3:11 ff.), teaching our families to rightly handle the Word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15) and to imitate the Bereans in testing all things by the Scriptures (Acts 17:11).

Along with Bible reading should go prayer. Fathers and husbands have the sacred calling to bring their family before the throne of the King. We cannot underestimate the size of that privilege. In prayer, we enter the presence of Him who created the heavens and the earth, whose glory is abundant and whose help is perfect! (See Psalm 145 & 146.) What kind of leaders would we be if we neglected to help our families to enjoy that amazing privilege?

Brothers, let us teach our families to confess God's greatness and to seek His wisdom. Let us lead them in asking God for forgiveness and holiness. Let us show them what it means to draw humbly into God's presence, praying for the needs of the family, of the church, and of the nation.

There are other tools that can be used for family devotions, but Scripture and prayer must stand at the heart. Fathers, if you have trouble explaining Scripture to your family, invest in a good study Bible. (I heartily recommend the ESV Study Bible.) If your children are young, consider the valuable practice of using the Children's Catechism. (See me for a copy.)

But above all, teach them the importance of studying God's Word and of seeking His blessing each day. No other daily activity can even approach the importance of setting a priority on daily family devotions!

However, as important as family devotions are, they should not replace individual devotions.

Just as the Lord calls men to lead their families before the Lord, so He calls each of us to delight in His Word and meditate on it day and night (Psalm 1:2-3). It is by learning and meditating on Scripture that God's people learn to keep their way pure and pleasing to God (Ps. 119:9-16). Therefore we are called to seek the wisdom of God's Word as a great treasure (Prov. 2:1-8).

The question is: How?

Again, one means of doing so is by simply reading Scripture. During some seasons, I find it helpful to read a small chunk of Scripture each day, taking time to study and meditate on that tidbit. In other seasons, I strive to read several chapters each day, looking at the broad sweep of Scripture's message.

But many people find it profitable to have a guide to walk them through Scripture. That's where "devotionals" come into play.

Every two months, we receive a box of *Today* devotionals. Published by Back to God Ministries

International, these booklets feature one devotional per day. Each selection lists a Bible passage to read and a theme verse, then offers a brief meditation on that theme. It closes with a brief prayer. This format can be helpful in showing us how a particular passage encourages us with God's promises, teaches us what God has done, or calls us to submit to God.

The *Today* devotional has been appreciated by many members. However, one size doesn't necessarily fit all. Earlier this year, the desire was expressed to members of the Hills URC Council for an alternative to the *Today* devotional. Since then, members of the Council have been evaluating other options.

The Council's found no reason to object to the *Today* devotional, and we will continue to make it available. However, we also want folks to know about two other devotionals that we have come to appreciate.

The first of these, called *Our Daily Bread*, is similar to *Today*. Published by RBC (Radio Bible Class) Ministries, *Our Daily Bread* also provides a daily passage to read, a theme verse, a brief meditation, and a prayer. However, it has a different "tone" and different authors.

Like *Today*, you can receive *Our Daily Bread* for free. Simply send a request with your name and address to: RBC Ministries, PO Box 2222, Grand Rapids MI 49501. You also can access these devotionals online at odb.org. Donations are appreciated, but there is no cost for the devotional.

A more comprehensive devotional can be found in *TableTalk*. Published by Ligonier Ministries, *TableTalk* features daily devotions that tend to be more theologically focused, along with several suggested Scripture readings for each day and a built-in plan for reading the Bible in a year. *TableTalk* also provides a selection of theological articles in each monthly issue.

While it offers more, this devotional costs \$23 per year. You can learn more online at www.ligonier.org or by calling Ligonier at 800-435-4343.

Our Council recommends all three of these devotionals, urging members to use the one that best suits their needs.

In an effort to be good stewards, we also are changing the way we distribute the *Today* devotional. Rather than place one in every mail slot, we will be placing the devotionals on the table next to the mail slots. You are encouraged to take however many copies you will use.

Over time, as we see how many copies remain, we will inform Back to God Hour Ministries of how many are used, allowing them to send an appropriate number. This will allow them to save money for use in other ministries.

May the Lord ever increase our desire to know Him and His Word, and may He use that Word to mold us, day by day, into the image of His beloved Son!