

PURSUING A DYNAMIC RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

“...As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?” Psalm 42:1b, 2 (NIV)

- A. Consider the opening words of John Piper in his book, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*, “Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t.”¹ Piper goes on to assert that, “worship is...the fuel of missions...[because] you can’t commend what you don’t cherish.”²

The goal of the Christian life is not to do more, be more loving, or joyful, or obedient – or even to try and be good. The goal of the Christian life is Christ Himself – to grow an intimate, passionate, dynamic relationship with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

B. Seeking God First

The heart of our ministry is to the Lord. Everything we are, have, and do must come from our intimacy with Him. If we aren't seeking Him and walking in the light of a growing intimacy with God, our ministry to others will eventually have little value. If we aren't seeking Him to find out who He is and what He's doing, we labor in vain.

Seeking God in worship and prayer is the most vital thing we do.

Only God can meet our deepest needs. If we aren't seeking Him consistently (as a lifestyle), making time to seek Him constantly, we'll begin to look to others to meet our needs, and eventually be frustrated (Contemporary idolatry: putting people or things in the place of God.)

We are invited to be branches of His vine (John 15).

Those called upon to lead others must be finding resources in God in order to give to the needs of others. The chief cause of "burn out" is the failure of a personal and growing intimacy with God.

It's vital we "pray without ceasing," but also that we commit time for relationship with God to worship Him, to seek Him, to know Him, to serve and obey Him. Commitment is time - we give time to what we value.

THEREFORE THE LEADER MUST NURTURE INTIMACY WITH GOD AS THE PRIMARY VALUE IN LIFE. That means beginning most days with time with God for worship and prayer. That means a commitment to systematic study. The key is understanding we are seeking God because only He can satisfy the desires of our hearts - and that seeking Him is a lifestyle. The more of Him we know and have the more of Him we want.

We also know that revelation of God necessitates a heart that desires to be obedient - even when we're struggling.

C. Personal Devotional Time

1. Begin the day before by getting enough sleep to be sufficiently refreshed for communing with the Lord.
2. Find a quiet and undisturbed place where you can be alone and without interruption.
3. Begin by focusing on the Lord, and inviting the Holy Spirit to come to lead you in fellowship and intimacy. You may want to use the acrostic *A.C.T.S.*, which stands for a progression of *Adoration*,

¹ John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Missions*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), p. 11

² *Ibid.*

Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. **Helpful hint:** Have a separate pad of paper and pen available to record “to do” list items as they come to mind. Writing them down will help you clear your mind and refocus your attention on God.

- Whether you read consecutively through each book of the Bible or read topically, read the Bible devotionally, asking the Holy Spirit to speak to you. (Reading 3-4 chapters a day will take you through the Bible in a year - or consider a Bible reading plan.
- Or/and, use the Lord's Prayer (actually the model prayer) as a loose guide...

Our Father in heaven, we honor Your holy name. . .

Worship the Lord! Tell Him how wonderful He is, thank Him for all He's done, is doing, and will do in your life and the life of your family. Pray and sing prayers of adoration to our heavenly Father. If you have a prayer language spend some time and pray and sing in the Spirit (1 Corinthians 14:15). Invite the Holy Spirit to come and teach you how to better worship the Father!

We ask that Your kingdom will come now. . .

George Ladd writes concerning the kingdom of God that, “*we live in the presence of the future.*” The Christ Event (Jesus' birth, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension) established the kingdom of God on the earth, while Christ's Second Coming will be the consummation of the kingdom of God on earth. We have the great privilege of living between the two! Pray for His righteousness, peace, joy, and power to be manifest in your life today (Romans 14:17). Ask for His rule to be extended in, and through you, your home, your church, your community, etc.

May Your will be done here on earth, just as it is in heaven. . .

Pray His revealed will back to Him! In other words, pray back to God what you know to be His will. Pray for workers to be raised up for the fields which are white, for leaders of the nation, the state, the churches, CAI; pray for the church to be filled with the presence and power of God; look up commands concerning prayer in the Word and pray them! Pray back to God what He has shown you is His will concerning you, your family, our church. Pray for Him to reveal His will in matters that are unclear to you - specifically. Pray for wisdom.

Give us this day our daily bread...

Petition God concerning your needs. Specifically define them, ask God for them, and trust Him to provide the resources you need, giving thanks for His mercy and provision. Remember to include Jesus' entreaty – “yet not my will, but Thine be done” (Luke 22:42).

Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who sin against us...

Invite the Holy Spirit to reveal those sins that you committed, in thought, lust, attitude, in words spoken, motives of the heart, actions, lack of doing good when you knew to do it, etc. Ask for specific forgiveness for each revealed item, then give thanks that if you confess your sins God is faithful and just to forgive them! Then ask God to show you if you hold resentment or unforgiveness towards anyone. Forgiveness to release people and yourself from the chains of the sin of unforgiveness. (Take time to bathe in the mercy and forgiveness of God, worshipping Him for the blood of Christ that cleanses us.)

Don't bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one...

Pray for the Spirit to fill you so you won't fulfill the lust of the flesh; pray for God to keep you from the things that tempt you, and to be strong on your behalf when the enemy attacks you. Thank God that He that is in you is greater than the enemy, that you are His child, clothed in His armor, that in your weakness His strength is your resource.

For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen

This is not about us, this is about Him.

- Write down a verse from your reading that was especially helpful, meditate on it through the day, praying it back to God. Try to think of it often enough to have memorized it by the end of the day, falling asleep with that verse a part of you.

7. Stay in touch! Throughout the day talk to the Lord - casually as a friend, seeking Him as you go, asking for wisdom, asking for His mind, direction, worshipping Him etc. If you fall short, ask for immediate forgiveness. Look for the Lord in the day, try to see what He's doing and obey His promptings, asking Him to teach you as you go.
8. If you're married, after praying alone, pray together for things you especially want to agree about: your family, children, marriage, work situation, needs of the day, etc., or just worship together. Pray for another. Pray for healing when your partner is sick.
9. If you have children, have a brief prayer with them before they leave for school, or before their day begins. After dinner, take time (5-15 minutes) to read a few verses, discussing them (not lecturing) with the children, using relevant examples. Pray for each one before they go to sleep. (Sacrifice your TV time to give to your children - the rewards are enormous!)

C. Personal Study Time

Seeking God is a lifestyle, not a temporary diet. Our lives should revolve around seeking (and finding) God! We must give time to what we value - and there's no greater value than knowing (being intimate with) God!

We suggest setting aside a few times for study each week, possibly 30 to 60 minutes two nights a week. The Word is wonderful! It's incredibly interesting, tremendously satisfying as it leads us to better know God, and tremendously relevant.

There are several ways to study the Bible. All should begin with a prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit to (a) teach you about God (b) lead you into greater intimacy with God.

1. Begin at Genesis or Matthew, and study a chapter at a time until you're through the Old and/or New Testament.
2. Pick a book in the Bible you'd like to study, and get to know it as well as possible.
3. Pick a topic you'd like to know more about, and study its course through the Word.
4. Pick a word that fascinates you, and study all the references.
5. Pick a person you'd like to study about. When you've decided what you want to study, gather resource material that will help you. Some say only use the Bible and let the Spirit lead, but I believe God has used people to help me understand what He's saying. Study the history behind what you're reading -gather facts and information, time, date, location, circumstances, etc. Ask the pastor for advice concerning the best study aids, commentaries, tapes, books, etc.

Keep a notebook of what (a) you are learning and (b) God is saying to you personally.

The Word is not God, but He's given it to us that we might come to more fully know Him. The goal of instruction is not knowledge, but Love. (I Tim. 1:5).

6. Share what you're learning in appropriate and relevant situations.

E. Devotional Resources

“Read not to contradict or confute, nor to believe and take for granted, nor to find talk and discourse, but to weigh and consider. Some books are to be tested, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested.” - Francis Bacon (1561-1626)³

John Wesley’s favorite devotional reading:

Imitation of Christ (Thomas à Kempis, 1380-1471)

Holy Living and Dying

A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life (William Law, 1686-1761)

J. Oswald Sanders’ favorite:

Lectures on Revivals of Religion – Charles G. Finney

J. Oswald Sander’s counsel for making our reading “worthwhile and profitable”⁴:

- What you intend to quickly forget, spend little time reading. The habit of reading and forgetting only builds the habit of forgetting other important matters.
- Use the same discrimination in choosing books as in choosing friends
- Read with pencil and notebook in hand. Unless your memory is unusually retentive, much gained from reading is lost in a day. Develop a system of note-taking. It will greatly help the memory.
- Have a [journal] as they are called – a book to record what is striking, interesting, and worthy of second thought. In that way you will build a treasure trove of material for future use.
- Verify historical, scientific, and other data.
- Pass no word until its meaning is known.
- Vary your reading to keep your mind out of a rut. Variety is as refreshing to the mind as it is to the body.
- Correlate your reading – history with poetry, biography with historical novel. For example, when reading the history of the American Civil War, take up a biography of Lincoln or Grant and the poetry of Whitman.

Devotional Books – Alphabetically, by author

A Diary of Private Prayer, John **Baillie** (Simon Shuster)

To Pray and to Love, Roberta **Bondi** (Fortress)

To Love as God Loves, Roberta **Bondi** (Fortress)

The Cost of Discipleship, Dietrich **Bonhoeffer** (Collier Books)

The Martyred Christian, D. **Bonhoeffer**

Anywhere He Leads Me (Life Messages of Great Christians), Corrie Ten **Boom** (Soho, ISBN: 156955000X)

Pilgrims Progress, John **Bunyan**

365 Bible Promises For Busy Dads, Ken **Canfield** (Tyndale, ISBN: 0842325026)

My Utmost for His Highest, O. **Chambers**

Divine Romance, Gene **Edwards** (Tyndale, ISBN: 0842310924)

Celebration of Discipline, Richard J. **Foster** (HarperCollins)

Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home, Richard J. **Foster** (HarperCollins)

Devotional Classics, Richard J. **Foster** and James Bryan Smith, eds. (HarperCollins)

The Joy of Listening to God, Joyce **Huggett** (IVP)

Too Busy Not to Pray, Bill **Hybels** & Lavonne Neff (IVP, ISBN: 0830819711)

A Testament of Devotion, Thomas **Kelly** (HarperCollins)

The Imitation of Christ, Thomas a **Kempis**

The Practice of the Presence of God, Brother **Lawrence**

Answers To Prayer, George **Mueller** (Moody, ISBN: 0802405657)

Absolute Surrender, Andrew **Murray** (Moody, ISBN: 0802405606)

Reaching Out, Cf. Henri J.M. **Nouwen** (Doubleday)

The Road to Daybreak, Henri **Nouwen** (Doubleday)

The Wounded Healer, Henri **Nouwen** (Image)

Almost any book by **Henri Nouwen** is extremely helpful

Knowing God, J.I. **Packer** (IVP)

Take a good look at **Eugene Peterson's** many books.

³ Quoted in *The Alliance Weekly*, March 14, 1956

⁴ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967), p. 106

Introduction to the Devout Life, Francis de **Sales**

Evening by Evening, C. **Spurgeon**

The Best Gift Is Love: Meditations, Mother **Teresa**, (Servant, ISBN: 0892838140)

The Attributes of God Journal, A Devotional Journey Into the Father's Heart, A.W. **Tozer** (Horizon; ISBN: 0875097057)

The Pursuit of God, A.W. **Tozer** (Cornerstone Books)

The Spirit of the Disciplines, Dallas **Willard** (HarperCollins)

Disappointment with God, Philip **Yancey** (Zondervan)

The Jesus I Never Knew, Philip **Yancey** (Zondervan)

What's So Amazing About Grace?, Philip **Yancey** (Zondervan)

Journals

Daily Light - RBC

Weavings, a journal published by the Upper Room

Every Day With Jesus, by Crusade for World Revival (out of England)

Devotional/Study Web Links

Christian Classics Ethereal Library -- <http://ccel.wheaton.edu/>

My Utmost For His Highest -- <http://www.gospelcom.net/rbc/utmost/devo/utmost.shtml>

Jonathan Edwards Online -- <http://www.jonathanedwards.com/>

The Resolutions of Jonathon Edwards -- <http://www.west.net/~cpcsb/texts/resolut.html>>

Fox's Book of Martyrs -- http://www.reformed.org/books/fox/fox_martyrs.html

The Deeper Christian Life, Andrew Murray -- <http://www.ccel.org/m/murray/>

The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life, Hannah Whitall Smith --

http://www.ccel.org/s/smith_hw/secret/secret.htm

C.S. Lewis Mega-Links Page < <http://ic.net/~erasmus/RAZ26.HTM>>

Morningstar Publications, Rick Joyner < <http://www.eaglestar.org/>>

Revival and Christianity < http://www.grmi.org/renewal/Richard_Riss/>

Christian books online < <http://www.greatermen.com/bst-favorites.html>>

Early church documents < <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/christian-history.html>>

Fasting & prayer < <http://www.ccci.org/7steps/>>

Christian theology page < <http://www.bu.edu/people/bpstone/theology/theology.html>>

Ray Stedman Library (Peninsula Bible Church) < <http://www.pbc.org/>>

A Puritan Catechism, C.H. Spurgeon < <http://www.west.net/~cpcsb/texts/catechis.htm>>