



## SESSION 2 — CULTIVATING A DEVOTIONAL HABIT

- Pastor Keith -

Matthew 4:4 (Deuteronomy 8:3) — “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” → God let them hunger, so that He could satisfy them with manna and with the promises of God’s Word! Life wasn’t designed to work apart from God’s Word.

### WHY SHOULD WE HAVE A REGULAR DEVOTIONAL HABIT?

God’s Word tirelessly promises about its own benefits. [*Illustration*: an add for a medication in which someone helped by the medication advocates on its behalf (i.e., the commercial with the elephant sitting on the lady’s chest)—in this case, the medicine itself makes a “guarantee” about what it can accomplish.]

- **Satisfaction in knowing Christ** (Deuteronomy 29:29; Jeremiah 9:23-24; Psalm 16:11; Philippians 3:7-16; 2 Peter 1:1-4)
  - Deuteronomy 29:29 — This is why God gave us His Word.
  - Jeremiah 9:23-24 — This alone should be our delight.
  - Psalm 16:11 — “In your presence” & “as your right hand” = God desires an intimacy of fellowship in our relationship with Him. [*Illustration*: Pastor Phelps clinging to Scripture after the bus accident]
  - Psalm 3:7-16 — Paul learned that everything else of “value” was like “rubbish” compared to the “surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord”; and that is what he pursued, to “make it [his] own”...this is real “maturity.”
  - 2 Peter 1:1-4 — The “knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord” is the very substance/essence of our faith that brings with it a host of incredible blessings!

- **Application**: This “renews our mind” which is necessary for the next two benefits.
- **Avoidance of sin and spiritual defeat** (Psalm 119:9, 11; 1 John 2:14; John 17:15, 17; Ephesians 5:26; 6:10-14a, 17b; Matthew 4:4, 7, 10)
  - Psalm 119:9, 11 — In “black and white” language, God’s Word is said to enable us to “keep our way pure” and “not sin against God.”
  - 1 John 2:14 — Per our theme verse and mission statement, the only way that we will be “strengthened to overcome the evil one” is if “the Word of God abides in us.” John 17:15, 17 echoes that.
  - Ephesians 5:26 — We are sanctified and cleansed “by the washing of water with the Word.” [*Illustration*: We don’t need a different medicine, but a bigger dose (Berg).]
  - Ephesians 6:10-14, 17 — “the armor of God” → makes us “strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” → so that we can “stand” ... that armor is “truth” and “the Word of God”!
  - Matthew 4:4, 7, 10 — Jesus combated visible Satanic opposition by quoting God’s Word just as Psalm 119, 1 John 2, and Ephesians 6 encourages us to.
  - **Application**: We are lazy and stupid to hate our sin, pray for rescue from our sin, purpose in our hearts to refuse our sin, and then not immerse ourselves in God’s Word!
- **Growth into Christlike maturity** (Acts 20:32; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 Peter 2:1-3; 2 Peter 1:4; [Ephesians 4:15])
  - Acts 20:32 — God’s Word is called “the Word of His grace” and it is able “to build us up.”
  - 2 Corinthians 3:18 — Steve Pettit preaches a powerful message from this passage (<http://bit.ly/1wh0kfM>), in which he reminds us that God intends for our “gazing upon His glory” in the pages of His Word to “transform us into the same image from one degree of glory to another.” Again, this couldn’t be more clear!
  - 2 Timothy 3:16-17 — Scripture is “profitable” to teach us what is right, what is wrong, how to make it right, and how to keep it right, so that we might be “complete and equipped.”

- 1 Peter 2:1-3 — Again, in “black and white” language, we are told that God’s Word, which tastes like grace, will enable us to “grow up into salvation.”
- 2 Peter 1:4 — God’s promises have been given to us so that by them we might “become partakers of the divine nature, escaping corruption.”
- ***Spiritual blessing, including refreshment, stability, wisdom, & joy*** (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:3; 19:7-8; Jeremiah 15:16; James 1:25)
  - Joshua 1:8 — Immersing in and obedience to God’s Word is promised to bring “prosperity” and “success.”
  - Psalm 1:3 — God’s Word brings stability and fruitfulness.
  - Psalm 19:7-8 — God’s Word “revives the soul” (our heart) “makes us wise” (our decisions), “rejoices our heart” (our emotions), and “enlightens our eyes” (our worldview).
  - Jeremiah 15:16 — The Bible brings joy and delight.
  - James 1:25 — Attentiveness to God’s Word (i.e., “perseveres and does”) brings “blessing in our work.”
  - ***Application:*** God’s Word was the means of giving us spiritual life in the first place (2 Corinthians 4:6; James 1:17-18).
- ***Means to minister to others*** (Isaiah 50:4; Colossians 3:16)
  - Isaiah 50:4 — God’s Word equips us to “sustain with a word him who is weary.”
  - Colossians 3:16 — When “the Word of Christ” is dwelling in us richly, then we are able to “teach and admonish one another.” [***Illustration:*** knowledge and kindness are the only qualifications for biblical counseling, cf. Romans 15:14]
  - ***Application:*** It may be that we do “community” so poorly because we have nothing to offer one another.

## WHY DON'T WE HAVE A REGULAR (OR RICH) DEVOTIONAL HABIT?

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- ***Opposing things are controlling us*** (James 1:21; 1 Peter 2:1-2).
  - James 1:21 — “Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.”
  - 1 Peter 2:1-2 — “So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk.”
- ***Earthy things are distracting us*** (Matthew 13:22; Luke 10:41-42).
  - Matthew 13:22 — The soil of your heart may be like thorny soil, which when it hears God’s Word is immediately choked by “the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches” and becomes “unfruitful.”
  - Luke 10:41-42 — But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.” → “anxious/troubles about many things” VS “one good thing is necessary”
- ***We aren’t treasuring God or His Word*** (Job 23:12; Psalm 119:97; Matthew 6:21).
  - Job 23:12 — Job treasured God’s Word more than he did his daily meals.
  - Psalm 119:97 — Of “God’s Law” (NOT the NT!), David declared, “Oh how I love it!”
  - Matthew 6:21 — Something else has our treasure, and that’s why our heart is so disinclined to hear God’s Word.
- ***We aren’t listening*** (James 1:19).
  - James 1:19 — In a context that clearly deals with God’s Word (cf. vv. 18, 21), we are told to be “quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.”

- ***We aren't pursuing understanding*** (Matthew 13:19, 23; Proverbs 2:1-5).
  - Matthew 13:19, 23 — We are susceptible to Satan stealing away the Word from our heart when we “hear it and do not understand it.” Alternatively, when we “hear it and understand it,” we prove to be good soil and bring forth fruit.
  - Proverbs 2:1-5 — “My son, **IF** you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, **IF** you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, **IF** you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, **THEN** you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.”
- ***We are lazy*** (Isaiah 50:4; Mark 1:35; 2 Timothy 2:15).
  - Isaiah 50:4 — The fruitful Bible student “awakens morning by morning” to hear God’s Word.
  - Mark 1:35 — Jesus “rose very early in the morning, while it was still dark” to be alone with God.
  - 2 Timothy 2:15 — We are challenged to “do our best to...not be ashamed” as a “worker,” “rightly handling the Word of Truth.”
- ***Immerse yourself in God’s Word*** (Ephesians 5:26).
  - Ephesians 5:26 — Sanctification happens when we are “washed”: a bigger dose. This is why “daily” devotions are encouraged.
- ***Meditate on God’s Word*** (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2; Psalm 119:148).
  - Joshua 1:8 — commanded (for “prosperity and success”)
  - Psalm 1:2 — commended (“blessed”)
  - Psalm 119:148 — practiced (“My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises” NIV.)
- ***Endure in studying God’s Word*** (Matthew 13:20-21; Jeremiah 29:13).
  - Matthew 13:20-21 — The heart of rocky soil immediately looks promises, but is as barren as the other bad soils, because it does not “endure” when it hears God’s Word—in fact, this person “falls away.” You must endure through “tribulation and persecution that arises on account of the Word” (and maybe that’s self-inflicted).
  - Jeremiah 29:13 — “You will seek Me and find Me, when you seek Me with all your heart.”

#### HOW SHOULD WE HAVE A REGULAR DEVOTIONAL HABIT?

- ***Seek to find God*** (2 Peter 3:18).
  - 2 Peter 3:18 — “Grow...in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”
- ***Learn truth—principles*** (Genesis 3:1; Proverbs 2:1-5; Acts 17:11).
  - Genesis 3:1 — Satan’s primary goal is to make us doubt God’s Word and to undermine its power in our life. We must know it!
  - Proverbs 2:1-5 — Be diligent in your search!
  - Acts 17:11 — The Bereans tested everything they were taught against the Scriptures; they were fiercely loyal to truth.
- ***Humbly, repentantly, and earnestly obey what you discover*** (Matthew 7:24-27; James 1:22-25).
  - Matthew 7:24-27 — “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and **DOES** them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ... And everyone who hears these words of mine and **DOES NOT DO** them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.”
  - James 1:22-25 — “Be **DOERS** of the word, and **NOT HEARERS ONLY**, deceiving yourselves.” You are only fooling yourself when you refuse to put God’s Word into practice—self-deception or blessing?!
  - This is how revival comes (Nehemiah 8-9; Josiah [2 Kings 21-23; 2 Chronicles 33-35]).

- ***Share what you are learning with others*** (Isaiah 50:4; Colossians 3:16).
  - Isaiah 50:4 — The burden of sustaining others is a compelling reason to “awaken morning by morning” to listen and learn.
  - Colossians 3:16 — We have a responsibility to “one another” that must be grounded in God’s Word.
  - God’s rigged the system: talking about this with others cultivates a greater hunger for it and keeps you accountable to do it.

## TOOLS

- ***Appendix A — Devotional Sheet***
- ***Appendix B — Daily Journal***
- ***Appendix C — Ephesians 4:22-24 Chart***
- ***Appendix D — Attributes of God***
- ***Appendix E — M.A.P. Method of Meditation***

**Isaiah 50:4** — Of the Messiah, this passage says, “The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught.” If this was the testimony of our Savior, how much more should it be of us!

**“The Morning I Heard the Voice of God” — By John Piper. ©2014 Desiring God Foundation. Website: [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org)**

Let me tell you about a most wonderful experience I had early Monday morning, March 19, 2007, a little after six o’clock. God actually spoke to me. There is no doubt that it was God. I heard the words in my head just as clearly as when a memory of a conversation passes across your consciousness. The words were in English, but they had about them an absolutely self-authenticating ring of truth. I know beyond the shadow of a doubt that God still speaks today.

I couldn’t sleep for some reason. I was at Shalom House in northern Minnesota on a staff couples’ retreat. It was about five thirty in the morning. I lay there wondering if I should get up or wait till I got sleepy again. In his mercy, God moved me out of bed. It was mostly dark, but I managed to find my clothing, got dressed, grabbed my briefcase, and slipped out of the room without waking up Noël. In the main room below, it was totally quiet. No one else seemed to be up. So I sat down on a couch in the corner to pray.

As I prayed and mused, suddenly it happened. God said, “Come and see what I have done.” There was not the slightest doubt in my mind that these were the very words of God. In this very moment. At this very place in the twenty-first century, 2007, God was speaking to me with absolute authority and self-evidencing reality. I paused to let this sink in. There was a sweetness about it. Time seemed to matter little. God was near. He had me in his sights. He had something to say to me. When God draws near, hurry ceases. Time slows down.

I wondered what he meant by “come and see.” Would he take me somewhere, like he did Paul into heaven to see what can’t be spoken? Did “see” mean that I would have a vision of some great deed of God that no one has seen? I am not sure how much time elapsed between God’s initial word, “Come and see what I have done,” and his next words. It doesn’t matter. I was being enveloped in the love of his personal communication. The God of the universe was speaking to me.

Then he said, as clearly as any words have ever come into my mind, “I am awesome in my deeds toward the children of man.” My heart leaped up, “Yes, Lord! You are awesome in your deeds. Yes, to all men whether they see it or not. Yes! Now what will you show me?”

The words came again. Just as clear as before, but increasingly specific: “I turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot. There they rejoiced in me—who rules by my might forever.” Suddenly I realized God was taking me back several thousand years to the time when he dried up the Red Sea and the Jordan River. I was being transported by his word back into history to those great deeds. This is what he meant by “come and see.” He was transporting me back by his words to those two glorious deeds before the children of men. These were the “awesome deeds” he referred to. God himself was narrating the mighty works of God. He was doing it for me. He was doing it with words that were resounding in my own mind.

There settled over me a wonderful reverence. A palpable peace came down. This was a holy moment and a holy corner of the world in northern Minnesota. God Almighty had come down and was giving me the stillness and the openness and the willingness to hear his very voice. As I marveled at his power to dry the sea and the river, he spoke again. “I keep watch over the nations—let not the rebellious exalt themselves.”

This was breathtaking. It was very serious. It was almost a rebuke. At least a warning. He may as well have taken me by the collar of my shirt, lifted me off the ground with one hand, and said, with an incomparable mixture of fierceness and love, “Never, never, never exalt yourself. Never rebel against me.”

I sat staring at nothing. My mind was full of the global glory of God. “I keep watch over the nations.” He had said this to me. It was not just that he had said it. Yes, that is glorious. But he had said this to me. The very words of God were in my head. They were there in my head just as much as the words that I am writing at this moment are in my head. They were heard as clearly as if at this moment I recalled that my wife said, “Come down for supper whenever you are ready.” I know those are the words of my wife. And I know these are the words of God.

Think of it. Marvel at this. Stand in awe of this. The God who keeps watch over the nations, like some people keep watch over cattle or stock markets or construction sites—this God still speaks in the twenty-first century. I heard his very words. He spoke personally to me.

What effect did this have on me? It filled me with a fresh sense of God’s reality. It assured me more deeply that he acts in history and in our

time. It strengthened my faith that he is for me and cares about me and will use his global power to watch over me. Why else would he come and tell me these things?

It has increased my love for the Bible as God’s very word, because it was through the Bible that I heard these divine words, and through the Bible I have experiences like this almost every day. The very God of the universe speaks on every page into my mind—and your mind. We hear his very words. God himself has multiplied his wondrous deeds and thoughts toward us; none can compare with him! I will proclaim and tell of them, yet they are more than can be told (Psalm 40:5).

And best of all, they are available to all. If you would like to hear the very same words I heard on the couch in northern Minnesota, read Psalm 66:5-7. That is where I heard them. O how precious is the Bible. It is the very word of God. In it God speaks in the twenty-first century. This is the very voice of God. By this voice, he speaks with absolute truth and personal force. By this voice, he reveals his all-surpassing beauty. By this voice, he reveals the deepest secrets of our hearts. No voice anywhere anytime can reach as deep or lift as high or carry as far as the voice of God that we hear in the Bible.

It is a great wonder that God still speaks today through the Bible with greater force and greater glory and greater assurance and greater sweetness and greater hope and greater guidance and greater transforming power and greater Christ-exalting truth than can be heard through any voice in any human soul on the planet from outside the Bible.