

Jump-start Your Devotional Life
A presentation by Larry Kirkpatrick
2010-06-19

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Location: Upper Columbia Conference of SDA 2010 Camp Meeting, WA, USA
Delivery: 2010-06-19
Publication: GreatControversy.org 2010-06-21 05:02Z
Type: Seminar presentation

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The scene is heroic—or so it seems. The year is 1510; a monk is engaged in earning a plenary indulgence to reduce his grandfather’s time in purgatory. The young man ascends the *scala sancta*, claimed to be Pilate’s staircase supernaturally transported to Rome. On bare knees he recites the Lord’s Prayer in Latin:

*Pater noster, qui es in caelis:
sanctificetur Nomen Tuum;
adveniat Regnum Tuum;
fiat voluntas Tua,
sicut in caelo, et in terra.
Panem nostrum cotidianum da nobis hodie;
et dimitte nobis debita nostra,
Sicut et nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris;
et ne nos inducas in tentationem;
sed libera nos a Malo.*

Bending low, he kisses the step, and ascends the next. A still Catholic Martin Luther is living out his faith, expressing his devotion by his deeds. The scene offers a caution; it testifies to the risk of being wrongly guided in one’s devotional exercises.

As Protestant Christians, our goal in our devotions is not to earn anything from God, but to strengthen our connection with Him, to engage in practices that will transform us and facilitate our becoming ever more like Jesus. To that end, I want to share with you some practical helps for your devotional life. God does not desire calloused knees as much as tender hearts in conversation with Him. He longs to communicate with His children.

Overview

Some just want to know how to begin to practice the devotional life; the goal of others is to engage not in a deformed but a transformed devotional life. First, we will define what we

mean by the devotional life. Then we will consider the model of Enoch, who walked with God and finally was translated. We will apply this model with the Bible and make application with practical suggestions. We warn against potential pitfalls and miss-steps, and lastly I will share my own very simple devotional practice.

What Do We Mean By “Devotional Life”?

Our first tool is a cluster of ideas that will form a loose definition of what we mean. How might we define “the devotional life”?

Daily food for the journey. Think Israel in the wilderness, leaving Egypt, trusting God to deliver, to bring them to the promised land—a vast throng heading across the desert with but scant provision. God fed them by giving manna from heaven for 40 years. He instructed them to gather sustenance on a daily basis (Exodus 16).

Disciplined discovery. Many of us realize that an appreciation for “discipline,” has not been effectively passed on to us. As a byproduct of life, we’ve developed some anyway. We recognize that we need more. And, we seek fresh insight from God; that is the “discovery” part. Remember, “If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know” (1 Corinthians 8:2) (Unless otherwise noted, all Bible references are to the English Standard Version). The Christian is called to continue to increase in spiritual growth.

Adventure. Adventure is composed to two words: “ad” meaning “with,” and “venture” meaning to “go forth.” Day by day we adventure—we go forth with God. Our exodus continues.

Hence our components: daily, food, journey, discipline, discovery, adventure. In these we find our meaning for “the devotional life.” It is about a finite being, created in God’s image, walking with an infinite being who is morally pure; the imaged creature walking with the Image

he is patterned after. God has come close to man, “Immanuel, God with us” (Matthew 1:21), has come. Jesus, the “express image” (Hebrews 1:3) of God, “became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14), and we beheld His glory, and in walking with Him, we are changed from glory to glory into the same image (2 Corinthians 3:18). We are pilgrims journeying to Zion; lost souls finding our Maker and ourselves; caricatures walking, being changed into true human beings.

The Enoch Model (Enoch Shares the Life)

The book store offers many suggestions on how to have the optimum devotional life. But one of our best examples might be the first person who was translated. His name was Enoch.

When Enoch had lived 65 years, he fathered Methuselah. Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years. Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him (Genesis 5:21-24).

By faith Enoch was taken up [“translated,” KJV] so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken [“translated,” KJV] him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God (Hebrews 11:5).

Enoch walked with God. He lived before the flood. He is identified as “walking with God.” Three things have changed my life the most: (1) choosing to become a servant of God, (2) choosing to become a husband, and (3) choosing to become a parent. These decisions have certain things in common. All include the embrace of personal responsibility, and a life-long engagement in the spirit of other-serving. Enoch embraced the same. In his situation, the decisive point came at fatherhood. From then on, he walked with God. (God has ways of working with each of us individually; one need not become a parent in order to become translatable.)

Enoch was translated; God took Him. In Hebrews it is suggested that the primary agency in his being translated was his experience of faith. Comparing Genesis with Hebrews, we see that the way in which Enoch pleased God was in that he walked with Him. Others, the Bible reports, walked “before” God (Genesis 17:1; 1 Kings 9:4), but Enoch walked “with” Him.

The underlying word in Hebrews 11:5 in the King James version given as “translated,” has the meaning “to change the position of,” “to remove,” “to change the place” (also used in Acts 7:16; Galatians 1:6; Hebrews 7:12; Hebrews 11:5; Jude 4). The antediluvian world was swiftly ripening for obliteration; they rejected his witness. Henceforth, Enoch was wasted on them. When he had offered the testimony that was needed to those whom he could especially benefit, God afterward took Him to heaven to be with Himself.

Since our own desire is to be faithful servants of Jesus, and to be ready when He comes, and to be changed, altered, transformed, in the blink of an eye and to ascend to meet Him in the air and ever to be with Him (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18), we want to look into Enoch’s experience and see how it was that He lived. What kind of life is such that God will scoop you up and evacuate you from this sin-damaged earth to the courts of heaven?

Fortunately, we know something more of the life of Enoch, revealed to us through the prophetic ministry of Ellen G. White. There is help in a remarkable article she wrote in 1909, titled “Lessons From the Life of Enoch” (*Review and Herald*, April 15, 1909). Consider these selections:

Enoch’s walk with God was not in a trance or a vision, but in all the duties of his daily life. He did not become a hermit, shutting himself entirely from the world; for he had a work to do for God in the world. . .

. . . He was a light amid the moral darkness, a pattern man, a man who walked with God, being obedient to his law,—that law which Satan had refused to obey, which Adam had transgressed, which Abel obeyed, and because of his obedience was murdered. Now God would demonstrate to the universe the falsity of Satan's charge that men could not keep God's law. He would demonstrate that though man had sinned, he could so relate himself to God that he would have the mind and spirit of God. This holy man was selected to denounce the wickedness of the world, and to give evidence that man can keep the law.

. . . His piety, his purity, his unswerving integrity, were the result of his walking with God, while the wickedness of the world was the result of their walking with the deceiver of mankind.

Enoch was an active worker. He did not seek ease and comfort. Nor did he spend his time in idle meditation, or in striving to gain happiness for himself. He did not participate in the festivities and amusements that constantly engaged the attention of the pleasure-lovers of the antediluvian world. In his day the minds of many were absorbed in worldly pleasures,—pleasures that tempted them to go astray. But Enoch was terribly in earnest. With the sinful and with the workers of iniquity he mingled only as God's messenger, to warn them to turn with abhorrence from their evil ways, and to repent and seek God.

Enoch did not become polluted with the iniquities existing in his day. Why need we in our day? . . .

Christ cursed the fig-tree because it bore not fruit. Thus he would teach that God is not pleased with his human agencies if in their lives they utterly fail to fulfil the purposes for which they were created. Through the help provided, man, in his fallen nature, can do the very things God expects him to do. He can walk and work and live by faith in the Son of God. The Lord draws man close to his side, to walk with him, to work with him, and to teach him how to overcome temptation. With every temptation there is a way of escape, by walking humbly with God. . . .

Enoch meditated and prayed, and put on the armor of watchfulness, and he came forth from his pleadings with God to plead with his fellow men. He did not mask the truth to find favor with unbelievers. . . .

Those who teach the word must themselves live in hourly contact, in conscious, living communion, with God. The principles of truth and righteousness and mercy must be within them. They must draw from the fountain of all wisdom moral and intellectual power. Their hearts must be alive with the deep movings of the Spirit of God.

It is our privilege today to stand with the light of heaven upon us. It was thus that Enoch walked with God. It was not easier for Enoch to live a righteous life in his day than it is for us at the present time. The world at that time was no more favorable to growth in grace and holiness than it is now, but Enoch devoted time to prayer and communion with God, and this enabled him to escape the corruption that is in the world through lust. It was his devotion to God that fitted him for translation.

It was Enoch's devotion to God that fitted him for translation. It was not in a trance or a vision. He did shut himself away from the world—but not entirely. He lived as a God-follower in the particulars, the duties of his daily life. Again, he was “a pattern man” for those so desperately needing the benefit of the pattern. We are to be the same.

Remarkably, the statement is that he, Enoch, was a light. This too is our calling; we are to reflect Christ's light but to walk so closely with Him that the light begins to gather interiorly. Remember Moses and his glowing face and the necessity of veiling it? In some way, his walk with deity was so close that the light began to leak inside, while the evidence was seen on the outside. With Christ in us, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:26), our lives will give evidence that humans can keep God's law. Or, perhaps this is not so remarkable. After all, Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16 KJV).

Enoch's “piety, his purity, his unswerving integrity, were the result of his walking with God.” It makes a difference with whom we walk. Then there is the question of meditation. Enoch did not become engaged in “idle” meditation, but he did “meditate and pray.” He did not

participate in the pleasures and amusements of the lost, but he did mingle with them as God's messenger and give warning. These lines rebuke tendencies in the church today to compromise with worldly practices in order to try to generate for ourselves a soul-winning influence.

Engaging in such a compromise always means two steps forward and three back.

We are made for a purpose. "Through the help provided, man, in his fallen nature, can do the very things God expects him to do." How can we have "hourly contact, in conscious, living communion"? The answer is clear: "The principles of truth and righteousness and mercy must be *within* them" (all emphasis added unless otherwise noted). That is where we are going today. We want to discover a practical means of getting God's principles of truth and righteousness and mercy *in us*. How did Enoch do this? He invested time in prayer and communion with God. "It was his devotion to God that fitted him for translation." Not his *devotions* but his *devotion* did.

Right here is an interesting point for us about "translation." The word underneath "translated" in KJV Hebrews 11:5 is a Greek word (*metetethee*) meaning "to change the location of." It is not used in the New Testament to mean a change in the person, but a change of the location of the person. In 1 Corinthians 15:51, 52, when Paul is talking about our being changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, he uses a completely different Greek word (*allageesometha*). It means to alter the person, to change him, to glorify his body.

Yes, when Enoch was taken, his body was changed, it was altered, he did receive a glorified humanity. But in Hebrews 11:5 the talk is not about a body being changed by faith, it is about someone who so lives in a damaged body, in damaged dust, that, "in his fallen nature," he "can do the very things God expects him to do." It is, after all, our character that we take with us. That is what Enoch took in Hebrews 11:5.

This then, is the Enoch model: A life lived, here and now, walking with God, communing with Him, a character changed by Him, a life in the Spirit, an evangelistic life that is a consuming fire like the God we walk with who is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29).

Communion and its Substance: Bible Reading

The life of Enoch lays out two elements particularly in terms of Enoch's time spent with God: Prayer, and communion. Prayer is a form of communion, but communion in this Ellen White article also means something distinct from prayer itself. She says that those who "teach the word" (all last-day Christians) are to live in hourly contact with God. "The principles of truth and righteousness and mercy must be within them." So, what is the one unfailing, concrete, objective source we have for getting those values into us? It is the Bible.

Thousands of books have been written addressing the practice of prayer; little has been offered concerning the practice of Bible reading. Here, then, is the primary tool we will focus on for engaging in a fruitful devotional life. I do not mean Bible *study*, although that too is very important. Today, we are dealing particularly with the devotional life, and Bible *reading* will be the central tool. Bible reading is the persistent, daily, reading-through of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. In only a relatively brief period of time, one can read through the entirety of the Bible.

Bible reading gives God a means of communicating with us. It gives us a concrete means for gaining insight into His values. It comes to us unfiltered. It is not some presenter's sermon, some author's distillation, some committee's position paper. It is the raw, naked, undiluted, Word of God direct from Him to your own heart.

Bible Reading Not the Same as Bible Study

Bible reading and Bible study are not the same thing. Study has a narrow focus; as in looking at specific trees. Bible reading has a broad focus, as in looking at a whole forest. By engaging in Bible reading, one gains perspective on God's ways that is not gained via other means. Bible reading gives the big picture. Think how long it would take you to see all of the United States traveling by automobile; compare that with how long it would take you to accomplish this traveling by aircraft. Or, let Google maps or MapQuest illustrate. You can see right down to the level of individual streets, even lots. With the satellite view, you can see down to the cars in the driveways and the bushes in the yard. Or, you can zoom out, out, out and see the whole county, state, or continent.

When we read through the Bible in this way, we begin to pick up the general principles of God's dealings with men. We see the conflict between good and evil in its broader strokes. We see the principles of "truth and righteousness and mercy" in their wider application. We get to know the basic lay of the land; we learn where in the Scriptures we can go for more particular insight. We keep ourselves from focusing on only pet texts, favorite stories and themes, and "editing" out of God's Word particular parts that may disagree with our preferences. Bible reading in this way functions as a check and a balance, a help that prevents us from being selective, trapped in a mistaken understanding.

We do well to persist in Bible reading as Jesus showed on the road to Emmaus:

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24:27).

If Christ is found "in all the Scriptures," then we need to read, we want to read, all the Scriptures.

The counsel to Timothy instructs us: "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (KJV) or, "all

scripture is breathed out by God” (ESV). If all the Bible is breathed out to us by God, dare we let any of this precious breath escape us? Caught in a vast, planet-despoiling oil-spill of rebellion, God provides for us His life-giving breath.

The words that He speaks to us are spirit and they are life. The classic case is illustrated by our children, who go through phases of great pickyness in eating, and thus miss out on the broader variety of delicious and healthful foods that are provided. If we cling only to the familiar, we miss other parts of the adventure God has provided. We need all the Scriptures. The only way to breath in all the breath, to see Christ in all the Scriptures, is to go through all the Scriptures.

Nine Benefits of Bible Reading

Let’s list nine benefits of Bible reading.

1. Indexing. By reading the Bible through, one rapidly develops a basic idea of where, in general, certain themes, ideas, and stories are.

2. Inventorying. Likewise, one begins to understand what kind of stuff is in the Bible, and what is not. This is very helpful when you hear unbiblical ideas.

3. Getting the Big Picture. What does God’s interaction with man look like? Reading through the Bible, you get to see the overarching plan of redemption, the flow of the Great Controversy War from the beginning of time to the end-time. You take in in all the Scriptures—that which pertains to your personal salvation, and that which pertains to actual closure of the Great Controversy, the vindication of God’s character. This is a benefit simply unobtainable any other way. It is an overview of the war at Mach five.

4. Appreciation for Context. By reading through the whole of the Bible, one develops an appreciation for context. You are seeing whole blocks of text in their context—chapters, books, genres.

5. A Check and Balance Against Distorted Reading. Most believers in Judaism hold only the first five books of the Bible as ultimately authoritative; some Christians hold to the New Testament only, or even just a subset of the New Testament. In order to cause various understandings of what the Bible teaches make rational sense, the Bible is compartmentalized. By failing to take the Old Testament seriously, for example, many Christians overlook important truths about God and His sabbath. By reading through it all, you guard yourself against these kinds of distortion of your understanding.

6. Better Discernment of Present-Truth and Practical Reform. By reading through the whole of the Bible, you begin to develop a sense of what looms large and what does not in it. You gain a sense of proportion. You strengthen your ability to identify real issues and non-issues by the way Scripture treats these matters.

7. Bible Reading Brings More Unity to the Church. The better we all understand what is in God's Word, the more we will be able to unite in our focus, and as a people be available to God for additional reforms He may choose to bring to the front.

8. Change in Perception. Reading the Bible through gives one a sense of the unseen world. There are angels and armies of God in our midst, unseen. From time to time, God in Scripture pulls back the veil and we have a peek—into our own world—but behind the scenes. A popular movie some years ago has the hero trapped in a Matrix, a false world all around him, and given the choice to take a blue pill or a red pill. The blue pill is a return to the Matrix without

seeing the truth; taking the red pill was very dangerous but also his means of seeing the truth behind the Matrix. The Bible, all of the Bible, is your and my red pill!

9. To Know Jesus Better. The best reason of all to engage in Bible reading is to know Jesus better. In John 5:38-40 Jesus is in discussion with the Pharisees and He points out that they search the Scriptures because they think they find life in them, but, He says, “Look, I, Life, am here! And you refuse to come to Me!” Either the Bible was wrong or they were wrong. Clearly, they were reading the Bible through a very thick fog of human teachings and tradition. Jesus came to give a breakthrough for those who wanted to breakthrough. Those who were satisfied with their understanding crucified Him.

An Objection

In her extraordinary book, *Steps to Christ*, Mrs. White warns against reading the Bible too rapidly, or reading without a definite purpose. But the nine reasons presented above offer abundant purpose, if one is careful to avoid reading too rapidly. Actually, the whole of her comment supports the extraordinary importance of Bible reading:

There is nothing more calculated to strengthen the intellect than the study of the Scriptures. No other book is so potent to elevate the thoughts, to give vigor to the faculties, as the broad, ennobling truths of the Bible. If God’s word were studied as it should be, men would have a breadth of mind, a nobility of character, and a stability of purpose rarely seen in these times.

But there is but little benefit derived from a hasty reading of the Scriptures. One may read the whole Bible through and yet fail to see its beauty or comprehend its deep and hidden meaning. One passage studied until its significance is clear to the mind and its relation to the plan of salvation is evident, is of more value than the perusal of many chapters with no definite purpose in view and no positive instruction gained. Keep your Bible with you. As you have opportunity, read it; fix the texts in your memory. Even while you are walking the

streets you may read a passage and meditate upon it, thus fixing it in the mind (Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 90).

This shows why it is good also to have a pocket Bible or a pocket New Testament with you. Know the benefits of Bible reading, practice it, and obtain them! In a few short weeks, you will know your Bible as few around you do. Divine appointments will surely follow!

Which Bible Translation?

The next question, then, is what Bible translation to read. I have little to urge. If you love the KJV, then by all means, use that. I am not here to take away anyone's favorite Bible. There are three approaches to Bible translation: (1) literal, (2) dynamic equivalence, (3) paraphrase. My suggestion to you is to stay as close as possible to the literal translations. Paraphrases and even dynamic equivalence translations do a lot of mental pre-digesting for you. The search for truth is best conducted using the most literal translations. The most literal available translations include the King James, New American Standard, and English Standard Bible versions.

I find one of the most literal and most easily read translations to be the ESV. It is more literal than the King James version. In six months, with my reading Bible (an Allan's ESV), I have read through the Old Testament twice, and the New Testament four times.

Bible reading and Bible study offer different ways of discovery. A structured topical study explores particular parts of the Bible landscape, but reading through brings you across the entire landscape, giving unexpected views and unanticipated discoveries. Again and again, Jesus demonstrated His mastery of the Scriptures (e.g. Luke 4:18, 19; Matthew 4:1-11, etc.).

Jesus had come to teach the meaning of the worship of God, and He could not sanction the mingling of human requirements with the divine precepts. He did not attack the precepts or practices of the learned teachers; but when reproved for His own simple habits, He

presented the word of God in justification of His conduct. . . . They urged Him to receive the maxims and traditions that had been handed down from the ancient rabbis, but He asked for their authority in Holy Writ. He would hear every word that proceeds from the mouth of God; but He could not obey the inventions of men. Jesus seemed to know the Scriptures from beginning to end, and He presented them in their true import (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 85).

Jesus had sieved dogmas and traditions with the Scriptures. This is why He was both, wildly popular and wildly unpopular.

Obtain a Good Reading Bible

Another suggestion is that you entice yourself. Acquire the tools that make Bible reading a pleasure! This is important, this is central to your Christian experience. Some people spend more on cat food in a year than they will on a good Bible. Your tools should be a pleasure to use. It is worth it to spend more to have the best. This is your spiritual life we are talking about.

See to it that the print is large enough for you to read comfortably. Consider the various typefaces. Then there is the cover. Avoid “genuine leather.” That means it is leather fragments glued and pressed together, and with any regular use it will soon fall to pieces. Consider purchasing a Bible that has a calf-skin or a goat-skin leather cover.

If you have a choice, purchase a Bible with multiple wide ribbons to keep your place as you read through. Look at serious Bible manufacturers like Oxford and Cambridge and Allan’s, among others. Look for the text to be printed on whiter shades of paper in the text block. Allan’s Bibles and some others are double-stitched, making them much more durable. You might buy a used Bible online very cheaply if you want to experiment with different Bible translations before you buy a serious Bible. Look for one with paragraphing, the text presented in paragraph-like blocks, rather than the all-verses-alike list format you usually see in the King James Version.

There are King James Bibles available now from Thomas Nelson Publishers with paragraphing. Two websites that have been a help to me are <http://www.bibledesignblog.com/> and <http://www.bibles-direct.co.uk/>.

Create an Ideal Location

Make sure that you have a comfortable chair set up with good lighting in the location where you will do your reading. If possible, this can be a place especially located so as to limit distraction. For some of us, this will mean a location away from television, computer, telephone, or stereo. Do what you can to make Bible reading a delight, and this will help you change your practice.

How to Begin—Practical Hints

If reading through the Bible seems daunting, let me surprise you. It is not difficult! You can read the gospel of Mark in 45 minutes—with understanding. You can read the 14 chapters of Zephaniah in 28 minutes and the four chapters of Malachi in eight. At a fast pace, you read the New Testament through in a week (it often takes me 13 days). Here is my record for the past six months. Read through the whole Bible from December 22 - January 17. Read through the New Testament only three times in a row: January 18 - 30; January 31 - February 15; February 16 - March 31; read through Old Testament only, April 1 - June 19.

You probably see my pattern: One time through the whole Bible, and then three times through the New Testament only; repeat, repeat, repeat. If you have never read through the Bible, then for your first time through read just the New Testament. You will soon see that it can be done! The key is disciplining yourself so that you engage in the practice starting first thing each

day. I read through the entire Old Testament in less than three months by reading *only* about eleven chapters a day. To keep things interesting, I read ten chapters out of the main book I am reading and one Psalm or Proverb. My Bible has two ribbons and one goes in at Genesis one when I start and one at Psalm one. Then away I go. If I finish the last seven chapters of a book, then I add three more Psalms to total ten. The next day, I start reading a new Bible book fresh.

When I am reading longer New Testament books, I may break them into multiple parts. For example, when I read Matthew I will read it in four sittings, chapters 1-7, then 8-14, then 15-21, and last 22-28.

One more suggestion: prepare the night before. Always leave your reading Bible and hymnal in the same place. When you get up in the morning, get a tall glass of pure water and set it near your chair. And begin! When you complete a reading (the whole of the New Testament or the whole of the Old), mark the date in the front of your Bible.

Seventh-day Adventist Devotional Emphases

Here is another question. What would a Seventh-day Adventist perspective on the devotional life offer? Would it differ from that of a serious Christian of some other faith in any respect? Of course. Every particular Christian emphasis comes with its own set of glasses through which the Bible is read. Ours too. The question is, Are we aware of the glasses? And do we take any steps to correct for them? Letting God speak to us through His entire Bible is a strong potential corrective.

When you have come to a more sound understanding of a matter, there is no turning back from it. For example, once a Roman Catholic learns that God's grace is not communicated to him through official church sacraments, then as he reads through the Bible he will not be inclined to

return to that understanding; rather, he has inoculated himself against it. Doctrine matters. The distinctives of a church's understanding matter—erroneous ones and correct ones. What would be particular distinctive Seventh-day Adventist elements?

We can subdivide the themes according to our name: Seventh-day Adventist. Under “seventh-day” we have the theme of “Sabbath,” with its subthemes of rest, and creation/transformation. Under “Advent” we have the subthemes of Jesus and eschatology (end-time events). As we read, because of our theological perspective, we will notice these themes. While our goal is rapidly but with understanding to read through from Genesis to Revelation, as we cross such themes along the way we should seek to profit from them by making practical application of them.

For example, rest. Sabbath helps us remember our need of resting, investing time that God has given in order to be with Him in our devotional life. The Adventist who is living out his faith should demonstrate to others a more balanced life, a clearer sense of proportion, a firmer sense of trust in God. He will spend more time praying and absorbing Scripture into himself than he does worrying about the latest political wranglings of senator this and president that.

We should also have a clarity about God as Creator and Transformation-bringer. The Adventist wants to be changed. When he comes short, his plea to God will be “O, wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from the body of this death?” (Romans 7:24 KJV). But with this he knows that through Jesus he is able to serve God. He will not be satisfied with an experience that comes short. He aims to follow the Lamb wherever He goes (Revelation 14:4). This means following Jesus fully into the intensity of the end-times. We stand by, ready to hear, ready to reform, and everything in the lifestyle is available for surrender as God calls for it.

Advent puts Jesus front and center; it is His Second Advent for which we wait. We want to know more about Jesus. Love for Him is the spring of our interest and energy. We are always seeking to know more about Jesus, only we stand closely by His Word; it is the ultimate source of insight concerning Him. We see the Bible as Christ-centered, and so we put every idea about Him to the test of that infallible Word.

Then there is eschatology. We are a movement of prophecy. Instead of seeing each new development in the Middle-east as an omen of the end, we read the Bible's prophecy through a Christ-centered lens. This has saved our reputation and kept us back from proclaiming ill-founded ideas. The understanding of the end-times which God has blessed us with is designed to keep us careful and preserve our credibility for when it especially is needed. We have help in the challenging place of prophecy.

Another place where we need to be ready to reform (and the devotional life is a good starting place), is in the recovery of solitude. The world around us is moving too fast. Life leaves us but little time to think, to reflect. A personal commitment to the investment of time for seeking for God needs to be reestablished. It is not enough to grab a few paragraphs of sermon here and a few minutes reading some Christian blog there; that is just trying to understand Jesus' story by reading random snippets. We are called to more than an abridged faith. We need it all. For

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire (2 Peter 1:3, 4).

All things are ready for us (Matthew 22:4; Luke 14:17). But they may only be obtained by waiting until we are ready to receive (Acts 1:4).

Pitfalls and Cautions

Unwillingness to Invest in God

Let's spend a few minutes on the issue of pitfalls to the devotional life. The first is unwillingness to invest in God. We want to give to God only a very limited portion of our time. We cheat in our devotions. It is a modern variation on the practice of *korban*. In the time of Christ, a gift could be made to the temple. It was considered a most pious act to allocate your riches so that upon your death a substantial portion was given into the temple treasury. Unfortunately, this meant that your other relatives, even close family, was not able to benefit. The gift was given to God but the giver retained the use of it while he lived.

This was a distortion. God gets the gift (in effect) after I die. David better understood how to give to God. Giving is done by the living. And so David points out in 2 Samuel 24:24 that he will not give to the Lord offerings which have cost him nothing. We look for shortcuts to serving Jesus. This is our own pitiful version of *korban*. Don't try to take shortcuts with your devotional life. God is not mocked (Galatians 6:7).

Distractions

Another pitfall is our struggle with distractions. We try to spend quiet time getting close to God, but we are surrounded by bleeping, blinking, twittering distractions. Everything has a glowing LED on it. There is usually something blaring in the background. In our society, the absence of noise makes some people nervous. But hear me. Turn everything off, or go away into a solitary place (Mark 1:35) where you will not be distracted.

Take care of your bathroom needs. Address unavoidable distractions quickly so that you may give your yourself to God with all your heart and soul and strength and mind. When you rise, wait to check your email or your cell phone. Live life in the right proportions.

Bible Words Are Magic

A more subtle problem is the vague notion that somehow, Bible words are magic. Jesus said that “the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (John 6:63), and that His Word “will not return to” Him void (Isaiah 55:11 KJV). But what do such phrases mean?

The Word in itself—when we speak with reference to matters in which the human will is involved—is impotent unless there is something added. Such was the unnecessary experience of Israel in the wilderness.

For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it (Hebrews 4:2 KJV).

Somehow, some have thought that just spending devotional time with God will solve all things; just give it time. This is not true. Spending time with God does not generate a magic salvation transaction. He must have our heart for His Word to enter and change us.

Who has the heart? With whom are our thoughts? Of whom do we love to converse? Who has our warmest affections and our best energies? If we are Christ’s, our thoughts are with Him, and our sweetest thoughts are of Him. All we have and are is consecrated to Him. We long to bear His image, breathe His spirit, do His will, and please Him in all things (Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 58).

To eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ is to receive Him as a personal Saviour, believing that He forgives our sins, and that we are complete in Him. It is by beholding His love, by dwelling upon it, by drinking it in, that we are to become partakers of His nature. What food is to the body, Christ must be to the soul. Food cannot benefit us unless we eat it, unless it becomes a part of our being. So Christ is of no value to us if we do not know

Him as a personal Saviour. A theoretical knowledge will do us no good. We must feed upon Him, receive Him into the heart, so that His life becomes our life. His love, His grace, must be assimilated (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 389).

His Word must be mixed with faith in us for us to be changed by it. If this is not true, that would suggest that, actually, we only need to speak certain words to get a certain effect. Or, that the key thing is uttering “inspired” words—not engaging in what you promise by them. It is not the quantity of words that matters (Matthew 6:7), but the readiness of heart to hear and receive that nourishment by faith and do what His Word says.

We do not read to score works-points with God. We read to be transformed, to get God’s values into head and heart.

Spiritual Guidance/Directorship

Wherever there is a vacuum, the devil will fill it. As a people, we tend to be much too individualistic. In this setting, a Roman Catholic practice from the middle centuries has been gaining new ground. It is called spiritual guidance, or spiritual directorship. Its essence is for one finite being to be guided or mentored by another finite being in the shaping of a virtuous Christian life.

We benefit from mentors, but a good mentor should be more or less on the same page with you spiritually. If he does not understand the first thing about the Third Angel’s Message, he cannot guide you with reference to living it out. Seventh-day Adventists tend to mentor each other informally. But the trend today is to make more formal arrangements, to defer to other men, and to set them in a place in our experience that places them in close quarters with our own

conscience, with the work of the Holy Spirit for us, and sometimes even in a place almost like that of the Scriptures for us.

All this is a very dangerous—and a very Roman Catholic—trend. My recommendation to you is, read your Bible. Be careful not to add mediators other than Christ and His Spirit into your experience. Get to know your Bible. This will dramatically increase your understanding of how God works. Be a disciple of Jesus. Let Him be your spiritual Director.

My Devotional Practice

My own devotional practice is very simple. I start with a miniature version of the Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal. I flip through and prayerfully sing three or four hymns. As I sing I consider the meaning. I find that this helps prepare my heart for more prayer and more Bible reading. After I have sung I mingle prayer and Bible reading. I usually read a minimum of 11 chapters of Scripture a day. I like to read whole books when that is possible.

Conclusion

I hope that you have been provoked to a renewed interest in communing with God—in your devotional experience, especially via your Bible. Nothing is as potent as the Bible to jump-start your devotions. We don't need the latest books off the press by the uninspired author; those are just pre-chewed and often pre-digested food. They will never nourish your soul as the Bible itself. A substantial reading of the Bible will make the words we used to describe the devotional life true for you—personally. It will become the daily acquisition of spiritual food for your journey, a source for the development of the missing element of discipline, a fresh start of your daily discovery of adventure. Then you can walk through your day as Enoch. You will have in

you God's word of life. His values will become yours. Then you will know Jesus as you have not known Him before. Experience the voltage. Share the life!

Biographical note: Larry Kirkpatrick has served in the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church since 1994. He is a pastor of the American West, having led churches in Nevada, Utah, California, and Idaho. His writings include the books *Real Grace for Real People*, and *Cleanse and Close*. Larry and wife Pamela presently serve in the Upper Columbia Conference, ministering to the [Bonners Ferry](#) and Clark Fork churches in the incomparable beauty of Northern Idaho.