

FIELD GUIDE

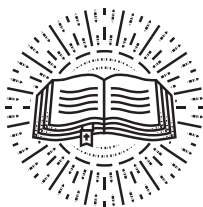
Personal Devotion



CHRIST COVENANT

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Personal Devotion

INTRODUCTION

One of the most important disciplines for growth in Christlikeness and Godliness is spending personal time with the Lord. At Christ Covenant, personal devotion is one of our covenantal agreements because we believe it is essential for the life of a disciple. Throughout Christian history, the church has held to the idea of abiding with—or being intentional to stay connected to—the Lord. On the night He was betrayed and arrested, Jesus told His disciples, “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:4–5). Jesus teaches here that if you want a fruitful Christian life marked by the fruit of the Spirit, then you must seek to be a branch that is connected to the Vine; you must seek to be a Christian that is connected to Christ.

In light of this, we encourage every member to create space in their life for personal devotion. As one who abides in Christ, this should be a priority, which means spending at least 10–15 minutes alone with the Lord several times a week, and ideally daily. We hope that

as you make this a discipline in your life, the time will grow longer, but the most important aspect of personal devotion is consistency.

You may be asking, *How do I get started? What am I supposed to do?* This field guide answers those questions by giving you practical steps to take to develop the discipline of personal devotion.

PRACTICAL STEPS

1. Choose a time

The first step to having an effective personal devotion is choosing a consistent time that works for you. For some, this is in the evening before bed, and for others, it's at some point in the middle of the day (during a lunch break, etc.). However, the most typical time for personal devotion is in the morning. This appears to have been Jesus' practice, as we are told He woke early in the morning while it was still dark to go and pray (Mark 1:35). But the psalmist speaks of meditating on God in the watches of the night (Ps. 63:6), so personal devotion certainly does not have to be restricted to the morning. The most important thing is choosing a time when you can be consistent.

2. Choose a place

Choosing a consistent place is another important step in developing the discipline of personal devotion. If you have a place where you consistently seek and meet with the Lord, that space will begin to develop a certain gravity. Coming into that familiar place will help you quickly focus and make the most of your time. Daniel, for example, goes to an upper chamber next to a window open toward Jerusalem three times a day to pray (Dan. 6:10). Your place should be somewhere that's quiet and free from distractions where you can be alone. In Scripture we see Jesus go to "a desolate place" (Mark 1:35), and elsewhere it says He goes up on a mountain by Himself to pray (Matt. 14:23). We recommend having your personal devotion at a desk, sitting up in a chair, or even while walking. This will keep you alert and engaged in your study of God's Word and prayer.

RECOMMENDED DEVOTIONALS

1. *New Morning Mercies* by Paul David Tripp
2. *Morning and Evening* by Charles Spurgeon
3. *Through the Bible Through the Year* by John Stott
4. *Voices from the Past* by Richard Rushing
5. *Walking with God Day by Day* by Martyn Lloyd-Jones
6. *For the Love of God (Volume 1 & Volume 2)* by D. A. Carson
7. *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers & Devotions* compiled by Arthur Bennett
8. *My Utmost for His Highest* by Oswald Chambers
9. *Holiness Day by Day: Transformational Thoughts for Your Spiritual Journey* by Jerry Bridges
10. *Be Thou My Vision* by Jonathan Gibson
11. *Psalms By The Day* by Alec Motyer

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3. Choose a Scripture reading plan

In keeping with the theme of consistency, it's important that you choose a consistent Scripture reading plan. You don't want to spend time every day trying to find a passage to read, and you want your Bible intake to be robust and orderly—robust in that it involves reading through the whole Bible and orderly in that you have a plan for how much Scripture you read each day. Of course, the Lord could redirect your plans and you could end up reading more, or you could end up spending the entire time meditating on one verse. However, we all do well to have a plan. Devotionals are another great resource that many Christians enjoy. The key to success with devotionals is to make sure that you use a devotional that is full of the Scriptures.

4. Use a plan for your prayer time

One of the things that we often talk about at Christ Covenant is praying through Scripture. This one simple tool can help your prayer life come alive. It can transform a person who struggles to pray for more than a minute or two into a person who enjoys extended periods of God-centered prayer.

How to pray through Scripture

Read a verse of Scripture, use the words to guide your prayers, and once you can't think of anything else to pray, continue to the

next verse and so on, letting the words that God inspired in His Holy Bible guide the words that you are praying back to Him. The Psalms, Jesus' prayer in John 17, and Paul's prayers (Rom. 15:5-6, 13; Eph. 1:15-23; 3:14-21; Phil. 1:9-11; 1 Thess. 3:9-13; 2 Thess. 1:3-12; Philem. 4-7) are great resources for getting started with this since they are already prayers, but any passage of Scripture can inspire prayer. (For more, see the appendix on Praying Through Scripture.)

Christians have also followed a basic fourfold approach to prayer for centuries: Praise, Thanksgiving, Confession, and Supplication.

Praise is the act of meditating on the goodness and glory of God and expressing gladness to Him.

Thanksgiving is the act of thanking God for the particular goodness that He has shown in your life.

Confession is the act of confessing particular sins before the Lord as you repent of those sins.

Supplication is the act of asking the Lord for His blessing, care, and guidance.

Combining the Praise, Thanksgiving, Confession, and Supplication method with praying through Scripture is a great way to energize and bring consistency to your prayer life.

Other things to consider are prayer walking, using a prayer journal, or using a prayer board with written prayer items.

5. Consider journaling

Journaling is a tool that Christians have often used in personal devotion. Journaling is not a biblical discipline, but it's a very practical idea that will help you do at least three important things. First, use a journal to keep track of your prayers. A record of things you are praying about is a helpful tool for looking back on how the Lord has answered those prayers. Second, use a journal to express your thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Sometimes it's hard to pray or even put things into words, so the act of writing something out can be helpful and healing in the journey of seeking to understand your own soul. Third, use a journal to stay focused. A journal is

a great tool to keep you focused on your prayers and can help you meditate on and memorize Scripture. For instance, suppose that during your devotion time a to-do list item for the day pops into your head. Having a way to simply jot it down can alleviate a distraction and help you to refocus on the Lord.

6. Create goals and seek accountability

Creating goals can motivate you in your journey of developing the discipline of personal devotion. Here are a couple of examples:

- What sin do you want to be killing in your life?
- What fruit of the Spirit do you want to see more clearly?

Writing down goals like this and making them a point of prayer can be powerful as you work your way through Scripture, seeking to discern how the truth of Scripture applies to your written goals. It's also helpful and good to find a trusted friend and share these goals with them. Invite them to ask you regularly about your consistency in personal devotion and the goals that you are working to achieve. Accountability is a great tool for this discipline and any discipline.

7. Be flexible

If you decide that a plan isn't working well for you, try another plan. If you have been using a plan for a while and it's getting a little stale, feel free to try something new. The key is consistently creating space to meet with the Lord; however, this does not mean that you always do the same thing. That being said, it's important to remember that your personal devotion will likely not be a perpetual mountaintop experience. The value of a regular time of personal devotion is the small and consistent gains you make over a long period of time.

Our hope is that this field guide is helpful in getting you started down the path of having a consistent and meaningful time of personal devotion.

If you have any questions about personal devotion, please reach out to your parish elder or a member of our pastoral staff.





Appendix: Praying Through Scripture

If you are like most Christians, your prayer life could be better. You find yourself too busy to pray, or not knowing how to pray, or worse yet—bored in your prayers. The common sentiment from Christians is something like, “I find myself just praying the same old things about the same old things: ‘God, be with my family, protect my children, and help me have a good day.’” If that’s the extent of your prayer life, then it can indeed be boring and lifeless. Any attempt at communing with God in prayer is a good thing, of course, but you are right to want your prayer life to be richer and more exciting. The good news is that God has given you an amazing tool that you already have and that anyone can use to totally revolutionize your prayer life. What is this tool, you may be wondering? Your Bible! The practice of praying through Scripture has energized and vitalized the prayer life of Christians like nothing else, and it’s something that anyone can do.

Praying through Scripture is as simple as it sounds. You simply use the Scripture to guide, shape, and give language to your

prayers. When you begin to pray through Scripture, you may notice that the subject matter of your prayers won't change very much. You may still find yourself praying for your faith, your family, your work, your church, your community, and the crises and victories of your life and others' lives—and that is a good thing. The reason you spend so much time praying about these things is that they dominate and define most of your life. Praying through Scripture won't greatly change the basic subject matter of your prayers—Jesus instructs us to bring all our needs to Him (Matt. 7:7–11)—but it will likely expand it to include more of the concerns of Scripture, including the glory of God and the spread of His kingdom, as we see in the introduction to the Lord's Prayer: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:9–10). In addition to expanding your efforts in prayer, it will ease and enrich them, making them more enjoyable and encouraging you to spend more time before God. More time in prayer will lead to a more effective prayer life and a deeper knowledge of the Lord.

So how do you pray through Scripture? As you might have guessed, it begins with the Scripture, and a great place to start is with the Psalms. Once you find a text to pray through, read one or two verses of the Scripture and begin to pray, letting the words that God inspired in His Holy Bible guide the words that you are praying back to Him. Continue like this through the passage. Here is an example of what praying through Scripture looks like using verses from a very popular psalm, Psalm 23.

Scripture: The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

Prayer: Father, you have given me a great shepherd in Jesus, the Good Shepherd who has taken on all my sins and who has called me to Himself. What more could I ask for than the privilege and honor of knowing you through Him? Please shepherd my life and my family today.

Scripture: He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

Prayer: Father, I know that you have good plans for me, and even though sometimes I may not understand a situation that you have put me in, I can trust that you are good and your plans are right. Father, I want to be in your pastures, and I want to drink from your waters. I love you, Lord, and I pray that you would continue to guard my soul as you have always done.

You can use this technique with any passage of Scripture. The Psalms are a great place to start, as are Paul's prayers in his letters (Rom. 15:5-6, 13; Eph. 1:15-23; 3:14-21; Phil. 1:9-11; 1 Thess. 3:9-13; 2 Thess. 1:3-12; Philem. 4-7). Try praying through the Scriptures today and see how God can use this simple tool to ease, expand, and enrich the way you pray.

If you are interested in learning more about this, Donald Whitney's book, *Praying the Bible*, is an excellent resource. You can also visit his website, biblicalspirituality.org.



