

Victory in the Spiritual Life

by Bobby Moore

Building a rich and healthy devotional life requires recognizing the importance of a daily devotional life, identifying and overcoming obstacles, and consistently seeking God through prayer and Bible study.

Scripture: Psalm 119:105, Proverbs 3:6, Isaiah 55:6, Matthew 6:6, Galatians 6:9, Philippians 4:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Hebrews 4:12, James 4:8

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Personal Devotion"

Description

Bobby Moore shares his personal journey of overcoming obstacles in his devotional life, including lack of discipline, lack of concentration, interruptions, hurry, dry periods, lack of application, and prayerlessness. He provides practical strategies such as personalizing God's promises, speaking aloud, making lists, asking God for help, praising God, prioritizing devotional time, and seeking God's presence diligently. Moore emphasizes the importance of consistency in prayer and the application of God's Word to experience a rich and healthy life with God.

Transcript

Once you make a commitment to spend time with God regularly in Scripture reading and prayer, you will likely face a variety of obstacles and frustrations. At least that has been my experience, and I don't think I'm alone in it.

I want to share with you seven of the obstacles I have encountered in my devotional life, along with some of the ways I have overcome these obstacles.

Lack of Discipline

Since coming to recognize the importance of having a daily devotional life and establishing one for myself, I have asked hundreds of Christians about their own devotional lives. A large percentage of those I have talked to said they did not have a consistent devotional life. It saddens me to see how many Christians are negligent and disobedient in this vital area. But I can understand it, because I was once the same way myself.

How did I overcome my lack of discipline in the vital matter of my personal devotional life? Simply by recognizing the importance of what I was overlooking. Of course, this insight is hardly original with me. Joseph Parker said, "If I really love my Savior, nothing will stand in my way of a personal meeting with

God every morning." Oswald Chambers said, "It is impossible for a believer, no matter what his experience, to keep right with God if he will not take the trouble to spend time with God. Spend plenty of time with Him; let other things go, but don't neglect Him."

Once I recognized the importance of the personal devotional life, I made the choice to discipline myself and give priority to starting and continuing daily devotions. Soon I was experiencing God in a more intimate manner in my devotional times.

Lack of Concentration

I have found that, when I have difficulty keeping my mind and heart focused on the Lord during my devotional time, one of several actions will help me.

I personalize the promises of God. For instance, I personalize Philippians 4:5: "The Lord is at hand." I repent of my lack of concentration and focus on the Lord's promised presence with me. Or I personalize Isaiah 26:3: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee." I ask the Lord to give me the ability to keep my mind from wandering and to keep it fixed on Him. Or I personalize 2 Corinthians 10:5. I ask the Lord to enable me to "[bring] into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

I speak aloud. Oswald Smith shared that wandering thoughts in his personal devotional life often plagued him. He got rid of the wandering thoughts by reading God's Word aloud and praying aloud. That same strategy has often worked for me, too.

I make a list. I remember hearing Del Fehsenfeld Jr. share that he kept a piece of paper and a pen next to him during his quiet time. As his mind would drift to things he needed to do that day, he would jot them down and then refocus on God. At the end of his devotional time with God, he would ask God to prioritize the list and organize his schedule for the day.

I ask God for help. Dr. Stephen Olford advised me to communicate with the Lord when my mind and heart are wandering. He counseled me to ask the Lord these questions: Lord, what are You saying to me? Is there a promise for me to claim? Is there an example I am to follow? Is there some sin I am to avoid? Is there a command for me to obey? Is there any new thought about God the Father, God the Son, or God the Holy Spirit I am to have? Is there a new thought about Satan? "Never leave a passage," Dr. Olford said, "until you can write down what God is saying to you in order that you can pray it back to God."

I praise God. Praise brings us into the presence of God. In Psalm 100:4 we are encouraged to "enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise." When my heart and mind are wandering, I make the choice to refocus on God by praising Him.

Interruptions

Disruptions of my regular routine and other interruptions are major obstacles to my personal devotional life. These have included vacations and extended periods of travel. But in fact, anything that causes me to miss a day of my personal devotional time with God is a problem, and anything that causes me to miss several days is a crisis.

I have met this obstacle by making my personal devotional time with God my highest priority. It is a matter of planning and being creative with my schedule. In taking practical steps to overcome interruptions, God

has helped me protect my devotional times as if there were nothing more important. In reality, there isn't anything more important.

Hurry

Samuel Chadwick said, "Hurry is the death of prayer." It is equally the death of the personal devotional life. Some of the major battles I fight in my personal devotional life are rushing into my time with God and rushing through my time with God.

I have discovered that nothing is so important to my spiritual growth and welfare as my personal devotional life. Because of its importance, I cannot afford to hurry my time with God. When I hurry through my personal devotional time, I will without fail feel that I have missed God and feel ill prepared for the trials, tests, temptations, and tasks I face throughout the day.

Several Scripture verses have given me guidance in conquering the "hurry up" obstacle in my personal devotional life. In Isaiah 40:31, God promises, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." Another helpful verse is Psalm 46:10, which exhorts us to "be still, and know that [He is] God."

It takes time to still your heart and mind to commune with God. I start my devotional time by praying, "Lord, I want to meet with You. I need You. I cannot and will not face this day until I get through to You. So, however long it takes, I am here to meet with You." Seeking God is not a "hurry up" matter. It is a heart matter, and heart matters take time.

Dry Periods

All of us struggle with discouragement due to dry periods in our personal devotional life. I have faced these dry times in a variety of ways.

I personalize the promises of God by inserting my name into them. For example, I personalize 2 Timothy 1:7 in this way: "God, You have not given me, Bobby, the spirit of fear, but of love and power and a sound mind." And I personalize Psalm 84:11 like this: "No good thing will You, God, withhold from me, Bobby, when I am walking uprightly."

I pray Psalm 139: 23-24: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." After I have prayed this, I write down every sin that God reveals to me. I then confess every sin, as 1 John 1:9 instructs me. Dealing with my sins clears the slate with God and gives me water for my dry periods.

I read a different translation of the Bible. Reading a new translation or comparing different ones, I've found, can stimulate new insights into Scripture. The unfamiliar wording is helpful, of course, because it gives different slants to the meaning of the passages. But so is the very cleanness of the pages. Because my eyes are not drawn to notes and highlighted passages from previous study, the Scriptures feel as beautiful and inviting as a fresh snowfall on a crisp winter morning.

I record encouraging words. As I read God's Word and pray, I write down the promises that relate to my situation and the solutions God gives for dealing with the hurts and needs in my life. This comforts me with a sense of God's great care for me.

I fast. This can be fasting from food, from TV, or from a hobby. But whatever it is that I'm giving up, the purpose is to spend more time with God while sharpening my sense of neediness before Him.

Lack of Application

The personal devotional life is not an end in itself; it is a means to meet with God and apply what God says to my life. Truth is to be lived and not just learned. Yet sometimes I'm tempted not to apply or personalize what I've learned. At times like these I turn to verses that remind me of the importance of applying God's Word to my life. One of the verses that helps is Hebrews 4:2: "The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith." Faith is a personal and active response to the promises of God to meet needs in my life.

As I personalize and apply God's Word in my life, I am refreshed and live in communion with God and victory over sin, self, and Satan. Personalizing God's Word has become the goal and joy of my life.

Prayerlessness

I know that I should pray because it is the only way for me to communicate with God. I know that I should pray because God has commanded it. I know that I should pray because Jesus and the saints of old prayed. I know all these things, and yet sometimes I am tempted to omit or assign an insignificant place to the prayer aspect of my personal devotional life.

Prayer is not easy; it is a spiritual battleground. As Charles Finney said, "Nothing in the whole Christian religion is so difficult and rarely attained as a praying heart." He's echoed by Samuel Chadwick: "The one concern the devil has is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless ministries. He laughs at our toil, mocks our wisdom, but trembles when we pray."

When I don't pray, I'm only hurting myself. Graham Scroggie said, "A prayerful life is a powerful life. A prayerless life is always a powerless life." When I am prayerless, I must confess it and forsake it.

Dr. Stephen Olford gave me his formula for overcoming prayerlessness: "Pray when you feel like it. Pray when you don't feel like it. Pray till you do feel like it."

And consistency in prayer is an attainable goal. George Mueller said, "I have known my Lord for 57 years, and there has never been a single day that I have failed to gain an audience with the King."

Building a Devotional Life

If you've been struggling in your personal devotional life, I hope the obstacles I've identified in my own devotional life comfort you with the knowledge that you are not alone. But equally, I hope that the strategies I've outlined to overcome those obstacles encourage you to believe that you can break through to a rich and healthy life with God.

As one last encouragement, let me share with you a prayer that has never failed to help me when I've faced obstacles and frustrations in my personal devotional life:

"Almighty God, in this quiet time I seek communion with Thee. From the fret and fever of the day's business, from the world's discordant noises, from the praise and blame of men, from the confused thoughts and vain imaginations of my own heart, I now turn aside and seek the quietness of Thy

presence."

Building a devotional life is like building a house: you start with the foundation and work upward. You don't expect to build a complete house on the first day, and neither does a rich devotional life happen immediately just because you want it to. Your personal devotional life will grow as you face obstacles and frustrations in the spirit of Galatians 6:9: "Let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap if we faint not."

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