

The Biblical Counselor

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How to Make Your Bible Study/Devotions Meaningful

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Editor's Note: In our last issue, Bill Goode, NANC's Executive Director, addressed the question of why a person's "devotions" may not be "working." Because of the overwhelming response to that article, and because this is such an important issue in counseling, we have asked Steve Lopez to continue to develop this theme.

The time is 5:45 a.m. You have just finished your "devotions" for the morning. You check off your chart: reading, memory, prayer. You're ready to get on with the activities of the day--or are you? How can you be sure the exercise you just completed pleases God? You feel guilty when you don't have your devotions, but they don't seem to be having much of an impact in your day-to-day life either.

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The problem many times with devotions or Bible study is that we read with no purpose--reading words, marking our chart, but with no change in our lives for the glory of God. If our love for God is measured by our studied obedience to His commands, then we need to be studying to know and obey Him in areas we need to change.

The ultimate end of all Bible study must be twofold: to help us love God and love others properly. Can you imagine the airline pilot in flight picking up his maps and perusing them with no purpose? In much the same way, every time we pick up the Bible, we must consider the purposes for which it is

A daily time in the Word of God and prayer that does not involve submitting to His Lordship in areas of sinfulness in our lives cannot accurately be called "devotional."

declared "profitable": to connect truth to life, to help us get where He wants us, to become more like His Son in every area of life.

So, whether we are preparing a message for our congregation, getting ready to lead a Bible study, studying "Daniel and Revelation" in seminary, or reading the Bible before the day begins, our purpose must coincide with God's purpose: growth to Christlikeness, to know Him and obey Him. The Bible's role in sanctification is not a passive, "rub-up-against-it-every-day-and-it-will-rub-off-on-you" type process. The Scripture must exercise active control over our desires, thinking, and actions. All Bible input must have that purpose. God's Word is alive, powerful, and active (Heb. 4:12), and we must treat it as such.

"So, why does my Bible time tend to be cold and academic, or mystical and

spooky, or *anything and everything* but eminently practical and connected to change and growth?" Perhaps it is because you have not set out to systematically connect your "problems"--your need for change and growth in any particular area--with the answers in the Word of God.

For us to choose to investigate the intricacies of the prophecies of Daniel while never addressing in any way our own sinful habits of uncontrolled anger is hypocritical. It is also a waste of good study time.

In order to solve problems biblically we need all of the following:

1. **Bible Knowledge**--knowing either the location of, or how to find pertinent passages that deal with life's everyday problems.
2. **Proper Interpretation**--interpreting Scripture properly once we find it.
3. **Implementation**--knowing how to apply scriptural principles to our situation and how to implement change. This is prayerful meditation combined with action.

BIBLE KNOWLEDGE

Christians need to know how to find their way around the Bible. Knowing "where to find what" is as important as memorizing isolated Bible verses abstractly and out of context.

The next step is to group Bible verses and passages into categories corresponding to areas of life and particular problems faced in life. Many such lists are available to give a starting point including John Kruis' *Quick Scripture Reference for Counseling* and Jay Adam's *What to Do on Thursday*.

PROPER INTERPRETATION

After the hard work is done of locating the appropriate verses and passages that deal with the problem at hand, the

continued on page 3

Devotions, Cont.

next step is to interpret them properly. The two extremes of a) depending entirely on others' work and b) leaning totally on your own unaided understanding must be avoided. After judiciously using good Bible study aids, and keeping in mind the standard rules of Bible interpretation, interpret the words, the passage, and the purpose of each Bible portion. Keep in mind the unity principle: the interpretation of any one passage must agree with what the rest of Scripture says on the subject.

IMPLEMENTATION

Once the biblical categories and passages are chosen, and the words, passages, and purposes are interpreted properly and carefully, the next and crucial step is implementation. Ask yourself the questions: "Based on my study of this passage, in what specific way does God want me to change? Where do I start? How do I continue? What steps do I need to take? What will tend to hinder me?" Formulate a plan to obey God in the particulars of your situation. Give yourself a timetable; set goals, arrange for accountability if needed, and start working at change.

We must be careful not to elevate any "method" (unless specifically taught in Scripture) to the level of Scripture itself. But we must have a method, a plan of implementing the truth of the Word in our lives. Otherwise, our work at knowing and interpreting the Scripture will be worth little. We will be guilty of being "hearers of the Word and not doers" and we will miss the blessing that God intends for His Word to bring about in us: changing to Christlikeness.