

A black and white photograph showing the silhouette of a person standing on a large rock in the ocean. The person's arms are outstretched horizontally. The background shows the ocean with waves breaking. The entire image is framed by a thick blue border.

# *How to Have An Effective Devotional Life*

*by Jason Peebles*

I want to give you a simple but powerful plan for having an effective devotional life. I've used this plan for over 30 years. This plan will help you grow spiritually, hear the voice of God, and follow His guidance. But before I give you the plan, I want to dedicate most of this Study Guide to the "whys" behind having devotions. You see, devotions are not something that you are "obligated" to do. Regular devotions should flow from your spiritual hunger and love for Christ.

## **Spiritual Hunger**

Christianity is not about rules and regulations. In fact, you can be a Christian without ever having your first devotional time. Salvation is a gift from God that comes by faith in Christ alone and not by works (Eph 2:8,9). However, when a person truly comes to Christ, the Holy Spirit puts a "spiritual hunger" in their heart for more of God's life. Romans 8:15 says, *"For you did not receive the spirit of bondage to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'"* The Holy Spirit puts a yearning in your heart to know the Heavenly Father more and more. Ephesians 3:18 says that we are called to *"fully know the love of Christ, that we might be filled with all the fullness of God."*

In Matthew 4:4 Jesus referred to this spiritual hunger: *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."* Jesus makes a powerful comparison in this verse. Just as your physical body requires food in

order to function properly, so your mind and heart need spiritual food. You need God's Word every bit as much as you need physical food. Think about it. If you go without food or water, you will grow weak and ultimately faint. The same is true spiritually. I dare say that many ailments that people suffer are due to an unmet spiritual hunger in their hearts. Stress, worry, and a lack of purpose can produce all sorts of mental and physical disorders. Many people suffer mentally simply because they need spiritual food.

## Divine Exchange

So why have devotions? The habit of regular devotions will "position you" to get the spiritual food that you need. Devotions will help you grow in the fullness of Christ. You will experience what I call a **DIVINE EXCHANGE**. Call it your daily devotional time, quiet time, or whatever – spending focused time with Christ helps this **EXCHANGE** take place. His strength will be exchanged for your weakness. His faith will be exchanged for your fears. His peace will replace your stress. **In a very real sense, just like going to a bank, a spiritual transaction takes place when you spend time with Christ. There are deposits and withdrawals.** I never cease to be amazed at how weak I can feel at times from all the stresses of life. And then, with just a short devotion, I can feel like someone injected me with God's vitamins. It's like going from Clark Kent to Superman! My strength returns. The truth is, when you spend focused time in prayer and the Word, your life will be infused with His strength. A divine exchange takes place.

## Seven Benefits of Devotions

I think it's critical that you truly understand the "whys" for developing the habit of regular devotions. Understanding the benefits will hopefully move you from the realm of "I ought to have" devotions to "I WANT to have" devotions. We've already looked at some of this, but here are seven major benefits of regular devotions -

**1. Fellowship and Exchange** - As we've just outlined, devotions will help you experience an ongo-

ing "divine exchange." Isaiah 40:28-31 describes this exchange in more detail. It says that even the youths shall faint and be weary. In other words, your strength will fall short at times. Yet, it goes on to say that those who wait upon the Lord (fellowship with Him) "*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.*" What a beautiful picture of the divine exchange! Devotions will help you soar like an eagle above the battle.

**2. Multiplied Grace** – This is a HUGE reason to have regular devotions. It's been said that less than 5% of all Christians see grace as "*enabling power.*" Most only think of grace in terms of their initial salvation experience. **But grace is God's ability and enabling power that can fuel you on a daily basis, if you learn to yield to it.** Did you know that it's possible to be weak in grace or strong in grace (2 Tim 2:1)? You can also frustrate God's grace. The apostle Paul said, "*I do not frustrate the grace of God*" (Gal 2:21). He had learned to let grace work through him. In 1 Corinthians 15:10 Paul said, "*But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, BUT THE GRACE OF GOD which was with me.*" Paul said, "*not I, but the grace of God.*" God's grace is what made him so powerful! Paul's ability to endure shipwrecks, beatings, stonings, and all sorts of horrible adversities was the result of *enabling grace at work within him.* **It's important that you understand that grace is the very LIFE FORCE of God (Zoe) -- and it can decrease, increase, or be multiplied in your life.** 2 Peter 1:2 says, "*Grace and peace BE MULTIPLIED unto you in the knowl-*



edge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” **When you spend time with Christ (through prayer, worship, and the Bible) more of His grace can be imparted to you.** James 4:5,6 says, *“The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously. But He gives MORE GRACE. Therefore He says, ‘God resists the proud, but GIVES GRACE to the humble.’”* The Holy Spirit is jealous in the sense that He wants you to depend solely on Christ. He doesn’t like competition! But, too often, we get more excited about a project or another person than we do about our Lord. We trust in “self.” 1 Peter 5:5 says, *“God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.”* Regular devotions will help you stay in a place of dependency on Christ and His enabling grace.

**3. God’s Wisdom for Decisions** – Regular devotions will also help you tap into God’s wisdom. This area involves making right choices. When faced with decisions, you must learn to apply the principles of God’s Word. All the lessons and stories in the Bible are full of God’s wisdom. **And what is wisdom? Wisdom is God’s approach to a situation and His way of doing things.** Romans 15:4 says, *“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through perseverance and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”* If you have regular devotions (where you pray and study) then you are more apt to learn the ways of God. Thus, when it’s time for a decision, you will analyze it and respond according to God’s principles.

**4. The Holy Spirit’s Guidance** - Following closely with God’s wisdom is the area of God’s guidance. Too often “hearing God” is viewed as some kind of weird experience. But the truth is, most of what we need to “hear God” about is as simple as applying what the Word teaches. Certainly God can speak through the still small voice and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. I make it a habit in my own life to yield to the gifts of the Spirit. However, it is safe to say that the primary way that God uses is His Word. Often, the very answer that I need is a scripture that the Holy Spirit reminds me of. This is why it’s important for you to make a few notes when you have your devotions.

**5. Increased Faith and Love** - An important part of the Divine Exchange is the impartation of faith

and love. **When you have regular devotions, faith will increase in your life.** Why? Romans 10:17 says, *“So then, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”* The Word of God will “generate” faith in your heart. And, closely aligned with faith is God’s love. Galatians 5:6 says, *“faith works by love.”* You can’t have strong faith if you’re full of anger, bitterness, judgment, and unforgiveness. God is love and He will ALWAYS lead you to love others (1 Jn 4:16). He wants you to treat others kindly and give them second chances just like God gives you. If you don’t, it will short-circuit your faith. Jesus makes It clear that before you stand before God expecting answers to your prayers, you must first forgive others (Mt 5:24). Regular devotions will help you guard your heart and stay in the love of God so that your faith can work (Jude 20,21).

**6. Prayers that Avail Much** – Philippians 4:6 says, *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”* Wow! We have an open invitation to pray about everything! God is never “too busy” for your needs. He made you righteous by the blood of Christ and invites you into His throne room (Heb 10:19). Thus, when you have devotions, tell God your needs. Pray for yourself and pray for others. James 5:16 says, *“The effectual fervent prayers of a righteous man avails much.”* Things happen when we pray.

**7. Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs** - One of the greatest keys that propelled my Christian walk forward is the habit of worship throughout the day - with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Worship is a key to staying filled with the Spirit. Ephesians 5:18,19 says, *“But be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”* I’ve found that regular devotions help me maintain this habit. Learn to worship under your breath, or if you are alone, lift your voice! Not only is God glorified, but your own heart will be better “tuned” to His voice and guidance. Developing a lifestyle of worship will help you walk in the Spirit, hear His voice, and follow His guidance.

## The A-C-T-S-S Plan!

OK, we've identified many of the major benefits of devotions. Now let's look at a very simple, but effective plan. **I call it the *ACTSS Devotional Plan* (*ACTS with a double "S"*).** The name of the plan comes from the book of *ACTS* in the Bible, which tells us about God's power in the early Church. **Likewise, the *ACTSS Devotional Plan* will help you have a powerful walk with Christ. It's a simple 15-minute plan by design. Of course, you can extend it by increasing the time allotted in each category.**

I started using this plan when I worked in an oil refinery in Oklahoma while attending college. I designed it to be quick and "doable" because I only had 30 minutes for lunch. I carried a small Bible and a pocket-sized notebook in my lunch box. In my opinion, it's better to have regular 15-minute devotions than occasional marathon devotions. It's like eating food. It's healthier to eat small meals each day than to gorge yourself once a week! As you start having devotions, find a time that best fits your daily schedule. And, if you miss a day, don't get under condemnation. Remember, God's love is not based on your "performance" or a system of works. **Here's a brief description of the *ACTSS Devotional Plan*. My prayer is that this plan will bless your life too . . .**

**1. ADORATION – (1 minute).** Adoration is worship and praise. You will start your devotion by taking a moment to worship the Lord. No one need know. When I was working in the oil refinery, I did not have the freedom to sing aloud or lift my voice in worship (as I might do when I'm alone). But, I would always take a moment to commune with our heavenly Father and tell Him that I love Him. If you are alone, then you can lift your voice and sing a song or sing verses from one of the Psalms.

**2. CONFESSION – (1 minute).** All of us need to confess our sins to God on a daily basis. It's like bathing -- we need to stay clean! Take a moment to confess any wrong attitudes or actions that you've had. Then, claim 1 John 1:9 that says, "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*"

**3. THANKSGIVING – (1 minute).** It's easy to move from confession to thanksgiving when you have an appreciation for the forgiveness you have in Christ. Spend a moment thanking Him for His love, forgiveness, and all the many blessings you have. If you are facing seemingly impossible circumstances, then thank God in faith for His help and solution.

**4. SUPPLICATION – (2 minutes).** You get two minutes for this one! Most of us have a lot to pray for, so you get more time in this step. Supplication is when you present all your requests to the Lord. Philippians 4:6,7 says to "*pray about everything.*" Pray for yourself, your family, friends, job, and needs. Present your requests and thank God for answers.

**5. SCRIPTURE – (10 minutes).** Here is where you'll spend most of your time. Believe it or not, you can read one or two chapters in the Bible in 10 minutes. Of course, you can also take your time as you mark key verses. As you do, **MAKE SURE** that you write a few short-hand notes in your notebook. Writing down key points or thoughts will be important as you learn to follow His guidance in your life.

**APPLICATION:** *OK, that's it! Once you've read this Study Guide, I want you to have your first devotion using the *ACTSS PLAN*! Start with Adoration and work your way through the 15-minute plan. When you get to the Scripture portion, make a few notes. Then Voila! You've done it! Now make *ACTSS* a lifelong habit.*

Dear friend, I pray that you will develop the habit of devotions and cherish your focused times with our Lord. ■ -- **Jason Peebles**



## Key Memory Verse:

*“Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.”*

*Jeremiah 33:3*

## Prayer for Devotions

*“Father, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for my sins. I accept His sacrifice and commit my life to Him. Draw me by the Holy Spirit into your presence. Teach me to spend time with you and have an effective devotional life. Thank you for your great love. In Jesus Name – Amen.”*

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