

A LEADER'S DEVOTIONAL LIFE

THE RENEWAL OF DEVOTIONAL HABIT

A. DEVOTIONAL PRAYER— A DAILY HABIT

All church leaders understand and believe in the importance of prayer, and most could say they pray in some form almost daily. But one particular practice of prayer can become too easily neglected: that is our **daily devotional prayer**.

It is far too easy to allow busyness and other things to crowd out our daily quiet times alone with the Lord. That does not mean we stop praying. We might lead prayer in our church meetings, in small groups, or for individuals who come to us for spiritual help. We may even intercede for people around the world. We can teach on prayer, and even write articles about prayer. However, it is too easy to neglect a most important aspect of prayer – ***being alone in fellowship with the Lord***. Other things – even good things – can crowd out our time for **daily, private prayer**.

Daily private prayer – along with daily study of God's Word – provides time for receiving direction, correction and comfort from God. It is our opportunity to hear from God directly about the things that are meaningful to us personally. Let us look at some important lessons that will refresh us in our daily, devotional prayer life.

1. How Long Should I Pray?

Many people wonder how much time they should spend in morning prayer. It is best to **not set a specific time limit**. Otherwise, prayer can become a task or heavy burden rather than an opportunity to share in a loving relationship with your heavenly Father.

You probably talk with your spouse every day. But do you make a rigid plan to spend exactly 30 minutes each day talking to your spouse? Probably not. Some days, there are important matters to discuss, and it may take several hours of conversation to come to an agreement or a plan of action. Other days, there may not be as much to talk about.

Daily devotional time with God is similar. It is our opportunity to talk with Him about whatever needs to be talked about, for however long it might take that day. Sometimes we will do most of the talking; at other times we may do a lot more listening! But either way, we are in fellowship and communion with the Lord, talking to Him and hearing from Him.

- a. **Make The Time For Prayer.** If we are going to make more time available for prayer, it means we must spend less time doing something else. Therefore, we must decide what can be removed so that prayer can take its place.

Everyone most likely has something they could cut back on in the evening to allow an earlier bedtime. For instance, we might listen to the evening news or a weather report before going to bed. If we gave that up, we could go to bed a bit earlier at night and then arise earlier in the morning for a time of prayer and devotion to the Lord.

2. Prayer: Fellowship With The Lord

Daily devotional time with the Lord is meant to be *personal*. It is a time to come before the Lord in an open-hearted, honest way – to come humbly to Him in worship each day.

It is our opportunity to enjoy a one-to-one relationship with God our Father. We can experience the loving, searching, transforming work of God through the Holy Spirit that will impact our entire being – body, soul and spirit.

3. Prayer Prepares Us For The Day

We must press back the busyness and demands of this life in order to make time with the Lord a priority each day. We know of course that to miss a time of daily devotion with the Lord does not mean the rest of the day is doomed to failure. Our trust is in the One to Whom we pray, not just in our prayers. God is faithful to help us any time we turn to Him.

It is true, however, that some problems might be avoided and others more easily overcome when we have been fully prepared through our morning prayers.

While our times of personal devotion are a blessing to us, they also bring great pleasure to the Lord. **He really wants to be with us**, and cares for us very much.

What an honor and privilege is ours to greet the Lord each day, and to know that He desires to be involved in our lives. May we daily honor His presence by our conversations with Him in prayer.

B. A PATTERN FOR DAILY PRAYER

There are four important parts to daily devotions.

The following outline gives a brief description of each. They will be explained in more detail throughout the remainder of this article.

This outline is not intended as a formula to rigidly follow or a course to complete in a measured time. It is a guideline for you to follow at your own pace or adapt to your situation. The important thing is to ***begin your daily devotional journey with God***; the following will help you do that.

THANKSGIVING AND PRAISE –OFFERING UP YOURSELF

1. Daily purpose in praise.
2. Offer up your body to the Lord.
3. Sing a new song.
4. Worship in the Spirit.

CONFESSION AND CLEANSING –OFFERING UP YOUR HEART

1. Invite a search.
2. Don't be deceived.
3. Set a guard.
4. Keep the goal in view.

ORDER AND OBEDIENCE –OFFERING UP YOUR DAY

1. Surrender your day to God.
2. Show childlike need.
3. Ask for specific guidance.

4. Obey instructions.

FAMILY AND CHURCH –OFFERING UP THOSE NEAR AND DEAR

1. Name immediate family daily.
2. Open to your larger family.
3. Remember the Father’s family.
4. Include “the single.”

The remainder of this article will follow the above outline in our study together.

THANKSGIVING AND PRAISE: OFFERING UP YOURSELF

ENTERING HIS PRESENCE

God **wants** us to meet with Him daily. And He is waiting to come near to us with His presence. But is there something we can do to help welcome His presence into our lives?

Yes, there is. *“Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you”* (Jas 4:7,8a).

The scriptural condition for God to draw near to us with His presence is this: **We must draw near to Him first!** He is ready to respond, but He waits for us to first come near to Him.

In order to “draw near” to God, we are instructed to do two things: to **submit** and to **resist**. We must **submit** ourselves in humble worship and obedience before the Father.

And we must **resist** the distractions and discouragements that the devil tries to bring to keep us from God. We must do both in order to draw near to God, and for Him to then draw near to us.

A. DAILY PURPOSE IN PRAISE

The Bible says in Psalm 100:4, *“Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise.”* All approach to God involves worship.

In fact, praise invites the very presence of God to come and dwell: *“But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel”* (Ps 22:3 kjv).

God is worthy of all of our praise. There are two basic reasons for which we can praise God:

For Who He is – the truth about God’s nature and character.

For what He has done – gifts, blessings, protection, answers to prayer, etc.

1. Praise Him For Who He Is

Praising God every day for Who He is will change your life! You will be daily reminded of the truth of Who God is; and that remembrance will build up your faith.

You might begin by simply saying: “Lord, I praise You today because You are my Savior. You have not only saved me from my sins of the past, but You are also my Savior right now. Your saving power will help me today. I thank You for being such a strong and faithful Savior.”

On another day you can think about a different side of God’s character: “Lord, I praise You because You are Almighty. You are infinitely stronger than anything that I might face today. Thank You that You will be with me and strengthen me no matter what may happen.”

Or you can thank the Lord for being the Truth: “Lord, I praise You for being so faithful and true. I can always trust the truth of Your Word – it will never fail. Your truth sets me free, and I am grateful for that today.”

Praise God for a different part or aspect of His nature every day. You could reflect upon one of the many biblical names for Jesus as well, such as *“the light of the world”* (John 8:12). As you spend each day recalling Who God is, and what a wonderful Savior Jesus is, your praise and worship will become fresh and meaningful. And you will have a much greater appreciation for Who God is every day!

2. Praise Him For What He Has Done

Take time to praise the Lord for what He has done.

There are some past blessings for which we just can't thank the Lord enough – such as our salvation. Thank Him also for more recent things He has done.

Choose something that God did in your life yesterday and praise Him for it today, as a fresh reminder of His faithfulness and goodness. *“Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Eph 5:20).

B. OFFER UP YOUR BODY TO THE LORD

Romans 12:1 tells us to offer our bodies to God. *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God...”*

“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's” (1 Cor 6:19,20).

It is both a scriptural and a practical expression to give ourselves to God, and to involve our body in worship to God. It can also help us stay focused on our prayer time, and not doze off or become distracted.

How do we offer our bodies in worship? One way is to kneel down. If you can't kneel, sit before the Lord with a humble heart. (They were all sitting when the Spirit first came on the Day of Pentecost.) It is not a religious form or ritual. It is an outward expression that we are bowing our hearts and submitting our lives in obedience to God.

You may feel particularly joyful or grateful to the Lord for His goodness. If so, you may want to dance before the Lord like David (2 Sam 6:14). Let God see your heart of praise and joy for Him and what He has done!

We can lift our faces toward the Lord (Job 22:26-28). The Bible also instructs us, *“Oh, **clap your hands**, all you peoples! Shout to God with the voice of triumph!”* (Ps 47:1). David exclaimed, *“I will lift up my hands in Your Name”* (Ps 63:4).

Offer your body in some way to the Lord at the beginning of the day. You will find it much easier to resist the temptations of the world for your body if you

do. Hands lifted to God in holy praise early in the morning will not so quickly give way to unholy acts of disobedience.

When our bodies are not offered and submitted to God, we are more open to temptations: overeating, laziness or unholy sex are all sins of the body (1 Cor 6:18; also read Romans 6). Giving praise to God with our words and our bodies is one way we can become strong in resisting the world, the flesh and the devil. Let us offer our bodies to God in praise every day!

C. SING A NEW SONG

Psalm 96:1 says: *“Oh, sing to the Lord a new song.”* We also read, *“I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love”* (Ps 59:16 niv). Singing to the Lord is an acceptable and powerful form of worship.

Singing praises can be intimidating when not done very often. We may feel uncomfortable singing alone, or we may think we do not sing well enough. But the point is not to give a performance; it is simply to express our love and worship to God through song. We can be sure of one thing. Whatever effort we make in singing praise to our God will be a sweet sound to His ear!

WHAT DO I SING?

One way to sing is *“with the understanding”* (1 Cor 14:15). We can sing choruses or hymns that are familiar to us. Or we can open our Bible and make up our own tune using the words of Scripture. This works especially well with the Psalms, since they were originally written as songs.

We can also sing *“with the Spirit”* (1 Cor 14:15), and sing *“spiritual songs”* (Col 3:16). Paul used the gifts of the Spirit to help him sing “new songs”. These are songs the Holy Spirit gives us. They are available to all Spirit-filled believers who will use the enablements provided by the Spirit.

D. WORSHIP IN THE SPIRIT

“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23,24).

Ephesians 5:18,19 says, *“Be filled with the Spirit...singing and making melody in your heart **to the Lord.**”*

Our prayer and singing may be *“with the Spirit”* (1 Cor 14:15). Singing and praying in the spirit has a special meaning. It means to sing and pray in a tongue or language which comes from the Holy Spirit.

The song or prayer is made up of sounds or words which have not been learned. This language is not understood by the mind of the one praying or singing. Nor is it usually understood by someone nearby who may be listening. It is, however, understood by God because it is by His Spirit. *“For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God...”* (1 Cor 14:2 kjv).

The Apostle Paul tells us that sometimes we don't know how to pray or what to pray for as we should (Rom 8:26,27). However, the Holy Spirit can pray to God through us with sounds or a language we don't understand. Paul assures us that such praying is always in line with the will of God.

After praying in the spirit, we might have a better understanding of how to pray in our native or learned language.

In 1 Corinthians 14:14-16, Paul makes mention of praying *“with the understanding”*. This can be the interpretation of what we prayed in other tongues.

Praying in tongues is a powerful tool and gracious gift of God's Holy Spirit. It should be an important part of our daily devotional life.

Singing in the spirit can have a similar purpose. Sometimes we just can't put into words how much we love the Lord Jesus. Again the Holy Spirit helps us by giving sounds and songs of praise in a language we don't understand with our minds.

We do know that singing in the spirit is an overflow of love, joy and praise to God; and that it strengthens our spirit (1 Cor 14:2,4,17,18).

Paul is thankful to God that in his private devotions he prays in tongues (languages given by the Spirit) more than anyone else (1 Cor 14:18). What a powerful example for us to follow in our own daily life of devotion!

ORDER AND OBEDIENCE: OFFERING UP YOUR DAY

The Bible speaks to us of the value of each day, and points out the need for us to use each day wisely and profitably:

Each day is a gift from God; we need His **wisdom** to use it wisely. *“So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom”* (Ps 90:12).

Each day has its own particular joys and challenges. We are to set our minds and hands to **today’s duties** and avoid worrying about tomorrow’s. *“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble”* (Matt 6:34).

We must use **prayer and the Word of God each day** in order to receive what we need for the day. *“Give us this day our daily bread”* (Matt 6:11); *“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall **meditate in it day and night**, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success”* (Josh 1:8; see also Psalm 119:11,105; 2 Timothy 3:16,17).

It is clear that our days are to be used responsibly and not squandered (Eph 5:16). God has made us “stewards” of our days – our time – and we are accountable to Him for how we use them. When we **submit** each day to God, He will help order and direct our steps. The essential meaning of submission is “right order” in design and relationship. It is not about domination. It actually refers to things being in proper arrangement so as to work properly. Our days will “fit together” much better when they are first submitted to God for His guidance. *“But as for me, I trust in You, O Lord; I say, ‘You are my God.’ My times are in Your hand”* (Ps 31:14,15).

God will not force His way into our daily business. We must invite His Lordship over our day, and ask in prayer for His wisdom and provision for **all** that concerns us. *“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, Who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him”* (Jas 1:5).

We can take assurance in God's promises that He will help us, guide us, and be with us through each day (Ps 32:8; 48:14; Matt 28:20). We can begin each day with **joy**, thankful for the gift of another day to serve the Lord and others.

A. SURRENDER YOUR DAY TO GOD

“Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass... Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him” (Ps 37:5,7).

The two words, “commit” and “rest,” are of great importance.

By “committing” the things of our life to God and “resting” in the sure knowledge that He will work all things together for our good (Rom 8:28), we bring divine order to each day.

The original Hebrew word for “commit” is *galal*. It means “to roll, roll down, roll away, remove”. So we are to “roll our ways” – our burdens, concerns and works – off of ourselves and into God's care, trusting in Him (see also Proverbs 16:3). Just as a camel, burdened with a heavy load, will kneel down, tilt to one side and allow the load to roll off – so are we to kneel in prayer and “roll” our burdens into God's care. Jesus affirmed this when He spoke, *“For My yoke is easy and My burden is light”* (Matt 11:30).

When we try to carry our own burdens, we will be weighed down, discouraged and worn out. But when we give them to the Lord each day, and trust that He will work out His good purposes, we can have His peace and rest throughout our day (Phil 4:6,7).

Come before the Lord in prayer each day and tell Him what you are concerned about. Describe your day to Him point by point – people, places, events, decisions, etc. Then rest in His great ability to answer your requests in His timing and His way.

Some of our days may not end up the way we expected. It is encouraging to remember that God is never caught off guard by the “unexpected” events that may come our way.

Our plans and purposes may fail, but never His. Nothing will ever be a total waste or loss if we give our life and day to the Lord every morning, and obey Him throughout the day.

You may have days when you miss your devotional time with God. You may be so eager to get busy doing **work for the Lord** that you don't take the time to wait upon the **Lord of the work**.

When you prepare in **prayer**, you will have real spiritual strength for the day. To have ordered the day before God allows you to trust that He will wisely guide you through the unexpected problems that arise. It makes a great difference in the day – a very great difference!

It is never too late to **pray**, but offering your day to the Lord in the morning may spare you needless anxiety or problems. “Commit” your day to the Lord from the start – then “rest” in Him!

B. SHOW CHILDLIKE NEED

“In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil” (Prov 3:6,7).

As a child needs a father, so we need God. We are totally dependent upon Him. We need Him very much every day.

To be “wise in your own eyes” means to be proud and arrogant; to feel overly confident in ourselves and our own abilities; to think that we can do things without God's help. Our human nature wants independence. We may think we do not need to turn to God, except perhaps in times of crisis.

But this is not true. The truth is: We need the Lord's help for every moment in every day. We have been **made** by Him – and we must be **sustained** by Him. The success of our lives and ministries is dependent upon the power of God's Spirit. We must always – and in all ways – rely upon Him. This is the simple childlike dependence which we must maintain.

TRUE MATURITY

Being childlike and dependent upon God does not mean we are to never grow up. God also desires for us to mature as sons and daughters – to grow up spiritually and partner with Him in accomplishing His purposes (Eph 4:11-16).

David was a good example of a man who was a mature leader and yet remained dependent upon the Lord. David was a bold warrior and dynamic leader. But he uttered many prayers of childlike dependence on God, such

as: *“Bow down Your ear, O Lord, hear me; for I am poor and needy”* (Ps 86:1); *“Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with his mother”* (Ps 131:2).

David was a man of achievement, leadership skill, and accomplishment. Yet he readily acknowledged his need for God’s help and his full dependence upon the Lord. He understood the principle that God was his source for everything he needed – and that as one of God’s children, he could ask boldly for, and trust in, God’s help.

Let us remember the words of Jesus in this regard: *“I am the Vine, you are the branches... without Me you can do nothing... If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you... you [will] bear much fruit...”* (read John 15:1-8).

C. ASK FOR SPECIFIC GUIDANCE

“Show me Your ways, O Lord; teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; on You I wait all the day” (Ps 25:4,5). *“Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left”* (Isa 30:21).

These words of Scripture help to teach us that: 1) We can ask God for specific direction; and 2) We can expect Him to give us instruction at crucial points if we remain open to Him and His leading – *“on you I wait all the day”*.

God does not want us to become mystical or superstitious in our daily duties. We do not need God to tell us every day what He has already told us in the Scriptures.

For example, we do not need Him to tell us whether or not we should go to work; the Scriptures already tell us that this is expected of us (2 Thess 3:10). Neither do we need God to tell us that we should love our wives or teach our children about Him – again, these are things God has already told us (Eph 5:25; Deut 6:7).

But the Lord **will** guide and direct our general paths in life, and help us when we need to make important decisions. He will help us to avoid serious mistakes or error as we obey and depend upon Him (Rom 8:14).

The Bible teaches us how to specifically receive God's direction in our lives: *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and depart from evil"* (Prov 3:5-7).

1. **Trust in the Lord.** This makes clear that we must first give our lives fully to God through Christ, and place our trust for salvation and life in the Lord alone.
2. **Lean not on your own understanding.** We must recognize that man's natural thoughts and ways are not the same as God's (Isa 55:8,9). So we must depend upon God and His Word for the wisdom and direction we need to live each day.
3. **In all your ways acknowledge Him.** Place your day before the Lord in prayer, and set your heart to obey His Word. "Acknowledging Him" means putting Him first in everything – doing His will and obeying His Word to the best of your ability, being swift to ask for forgiveness when you sin or fail.
4. **Do not be wise in your own eyes.** No matter how long you have walked with God or been in ministry, do not be fooled into believing that you know the answer to all of today's questions and problems. It is presumptuous to not pray, assuming you do not need God's help. Invite God's help into every part of your day.
5. **He shall direct your paths.** This is God's promise, and He will keep it! God is saying, "If you will acknowledge Me in all things, I will assist and guide you each day. You will know what to do; you will have what you need."

But remember: We must take time each day to **pray**, to humbly ask the Lord for specific guidance; then trust in Him to faithfully direct us in all the details that will come our way.

D. OBEY INSTRUCTIONS

Jesus clearly tells us that our heavenly Father will supply our needs:

"Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them... Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even

Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field... will He not much more clothe you? ...For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things” (read Matthew 6:25-33).

We are not to worry about what we will eat or wear. Just as our heavenly Father cares and provides for the birds and the flowers, even more does He care and provide for us.

But do we just sit and passively wait for His provision? Or is there something we are required to do in order to enjoy His supply? The Bible answers these questions for us. **God fulfills His promises when we do what He requires.** The Bible says, “*Ask, and it will be given to you...*”; “*Therefore, pray...*”; “*Give us this day our daily bread [food]...*” (Luke 11:9; Matt 6:9,11).

This is the simple thing God requires: “**Ask** and you will receive.” Do not waste time on worry; instead, take time to ask!

Is God saying that if we do not **pray** we will not receive? Yes, He is! “*Ye have not, because ye ask not*” (Jas 4:2 kjv).

HIS WILL – OUR DAILY BREAD

Jesus said, “*...My food is to do the will of Him Who sent Me, and to finish His work*” (John 4:34).

What does this mean? Just as the hunger of the body can be met only by eating a meal, the hunger of the heart and soul can be met only by doing the will of God. We can do God’s will only when we **know** His will.

Our Father has a plan and purpose for our lives which we discover as we pray, and as we study His Word. Knowing His will is part of the “daily bread” for which we pray.

The key to knowing God’s will is to ask for it – and ask for it every day. Then trust Him to lead you in it.

That is one way that God will work everything together for His good purpose in Christ Jesus. His primary will for each of us is to make us more like His Son. So nothing will be lost; nothing will be wasted (Rom 8:28,29).

You may not always realize what part of God's good purpose was fulfilled in a given day. It may have seemed like just an ordinary day. But give God time to bring forth His harvest. It may take a week, or a year – or even half a lifetime. However, there will come a day when we realize, “Jesus led me all the way; He was with me and sustained me. He has worked all things for good!”

Give each day – and your life – to God. Order each day before Him. Joyfully ask God for the daily bread of His will for you – and be at peace!

FAMILY AND CHURCH: OFFERING UP THOSE NEAR AND DEAR

A. NAME YOUR FAMILY MEMBERS DAILY

“He would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all... thus Job did regularly” (read Job 1:1-5).

The Bible records that Job was a righteous man. It was his practice to bring his family before the Lord in prayer. He was deeply concerned about their relationship with God.

This illustrates a key principle of your role as a follower of the Lord Jesus. **Each believer** has been called to important spiritual responsibilities – whether you are a church leader or not.

One of those responsibilities for every sincere Christian is to pray for those who are close to you – including family, friends, and the brothers and sisters in Christ with whom you fellowship.

SERVANT HEADSHIP THROUGH PRAYER

If, however, you are a husband and father, you have a God-given role as the spiritual head in your family under Christ's Lordship. This increases your responsibility to pray for your family.

In Ephesians 5:23-28, the husband's role is compared to Christ's. Within that passage we read, *"For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the Church..."*.

Christ is both the Head of the Church (v.23) and the Servant of the Church (Matt 20:28). He became the Head of the Church by willingly laying down His life at the Cross; therefore, God raised Him up and exalted Christ as the Head of the Body (Eph 1:22,23; Phil 2:5-11).

Christ served the Church (His Bride – Eph 5:25) by laying down His life; and Christ continues to serve the Church as Her exalted Lord! Let us read of one of the ways Christ now serves His Bride: *"Therefore He [Christ] is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to **make intercession** for them"* (Heb 7:25); *"It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also **makes intercession** for us"* (Rom 8:34).

Jesus, our great Savior and Lord, is also our great Intercessor! Though part of His intercession includes His role as the once-for-all Mediator between God and Man (1 Tim 2:5), He is also our great High Priest (Heb 2:17; 3:1; 4:14-16) Who even now brings the needs of the Church before our loving Heavenly Father.

Christ is the ultimate example to husbands of the servant role that is part of spiritual headship: *"Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus..."* (Phil 2:4,5).

The prime exercise for a husband of the servant-headship role is to pray for the members of his family.

PRAY FOR YOUR FAMILY

So husbands, you have the spiritual responsibility to pray daily for your wife and family. But **every** believer should also pray for their family members daily! You may be single or married; you may have children or not; you may have grandparents living in your home, or even grandchildren. Regardless of the circumstances, each of our living family members needs our prayers. Let's look at some practical ways this can be accomplished.

1. Pray For Your Spouse

Marriage partners are joined in a very significant way. The Bible says we are “one flesh” with our spouse (Gen 2:23,24). Paul affirms the same truth, and uses it also to illustrate the mystery of how Christians are joined to the body of Christ (Eph 5:28-33).

Paul instructed, “*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for Her*” (Eph 5:25). One of the ways to love our marriage partner, and to “give our life” (make sacrifices) for them, is to pray regularly for them. We usually know our spouse better than anyone else. We know their fears, dreams, weaknesses and desires. The best way to apply what we know about them is to pray for them every day.

You might pray something like this: “Lord, I ask You to bless my wife (or husband) today. Strengthen her, give her great grace, help her to be more like You. Give her wisdom in every decision. Bless her activities; surround her with Your presence and peace. Protect her and keep her in health today.”

If your spouse has an upcoming ministry assignment, pray about that, too. And take a few minutes to pray in the Spirit for your spouse. As you do, the Lord may give you insight about a specific need for which you should pray. Daily prayer for your spouse will strengthen your marriage before God and bless your spouse in a beautiful and powerful way.

2. Pray For Your Children

Raising children is a challenging job! Most parents do not feel properly qualified, and can sometimes become discouraged when their children are less than perfect.

Scripture exhorts parents to: “*bring them [your children] up in the training and admonition of the Lord*” (Eph 6:4); “*train up a child in the way he should go*” (Prov 22:6); “*teach them [God’s commandments] diligently to your children*” (Deut 6:7).

Our children do not belong to us; they belong to God. He entrusts them to our stewardship, to take care of them, to raise them in His ways – so that they will become faithful followers of Christ, and honor God with their talents and their lives.

This requires much time, commitment and effort – and especially a lot of prayer. As parents, we must be our children’s first and best intercessors!

You can pray for your children alone in your personal devotional time; but you and your spouse should pray together for your children as well. Prayer can be even more powerful when two are in agreement (Matt 18:19,20).

Some things for which parents can pray for their children are:

- For the work of the devil to be bound, so he cannot steal from and destroy your children; and for God's power and purpose to be realized in your children's lives (Matt 16:19).
- For them to receive Jesus Christ as Savior, and to grow into faithful disciples (Deut 6:4-7; John 3:16; Eph 6:4).
- For them to be open to God's instruction and correction (Ps 119:9-11; Matt 18:1-4).
- For them to know – and follow – the will of God for their lives, and to be obedient and submitted to their parents (Eph 6:1-3; Col 3:20)
- For God to provide a good and godly spouse for them; for them to remain sexually pure until they are married (2 Cor 6:14-7:1; 1 Tim 4:12).
- For God's blessing to be upon them and all that concerns them (Matt 19:13-15).
- For any other needs you know about, or that they have expressed to you.

B. OPEN TO YOUR LARGER FAMILY

Most of us have relatives beyond our immediate family members. They may be siblings, relatives by marriage, nieces or nephews, grandchildren, etc. They may not all live near you but, as part of your family, they should be included in your prayers.

God loves you; He loves all of your family, too! As a Christ-follower, you should especially pray for the salvation of your unsaved family members. You may be the **only** person praying for them at all – what a blessed privilege to bring them before God's throne!

Though it would be difficult to pray for them **all** every day, you could pray for several of them by name each day of the week. If you don't know the details of their needs, you can ask for God's blessing over them or pray for them in your spiritual language.

Let the love of Christ compel you to pray for your family members (2 Cor 5:14,15). You will then reap the rewards of God's saving power and blessings being shown to them!

C. REMEMBER THE FATHER'S FAMILY

"For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from Whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named" (Eph 3:14,15).

The Heavenly Father's family is the Church. The Church is made up of those people who have been redeemed by God *"out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation"* (Rev 5:9). These are the people who have received Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, who believe on Him and trust Him for salvation, and who follow Him as disciples. It makes no difference what denomination or church group people are part of; if Jesus Christ is truly their Savior and Lord, they belong to the family of God!

As members of one another (Rom 12:4,5), we need to pray for each other. The Bible gives us insight as to how God would have us pray for His family.

1. Jesus' Prayer

At the close of Christ's ministry, He prayed for all the generations who would be part of His living Body— the Church – on this earth (John 17:20-23). There are many things that Jesus could have prayed for at that moment. But He essentially prays for one single thing: that believers would *"be **one in us** [Jesus and the Father]"* (v.21). Jesus prayed for **unity among believers**. This prayer should signal two things to us:

- The importance of unity among churches and believers,
- The need for leaders to pray for and emphasize unity.

As a leader, you should pray for unity in your church. You can also help encourage unity by teaching the people in your church to pray for each other. As they do, they will have greater love for one another.

As a leader, you should also be praying for other ministers and churches in your area, and teaching your congregation to do the same. Make time in your meetings to pray for each other, and for the believers in other churches as well.

These two points of prayer will not only please the Lord, but will also build strong spiritual unity in your church and community.

But why is unity so important? Jesus told us the reason: **So that the world would believe that Jesus is the true Savior of mankind, sent from God the Father** (John 17:21-23). Unity among believers is a powerful witness of the Gospel to unbelievers, and can spark revival!

2. The Apostle Paul And Prayer

The man through whom the Holy Spirit breathed (2 Tim 3:16) more than one-third of the New Testament– the Apostle Paul – was a man of great prayer. He prayed *“night and day”* for the Church (1 Thess 3:10). He tells the Corinthians of his *“deep concern for all the churches”* (2 Cor 11:28) – a concern that was surely born in prayer. Paul prayed for those he had trained and raised up in ministry: *“without ceasing I remember you in my prayers...”* (2 Tim 1:3). When describing how he labored in prayer for the Galatian church, Paul compared it to the travail of a mother giving birth to a child (Gal 4:19). Paul was a man of intense prayer!

Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote down some of his prayers for the churches. Take the time to read and study the following scriptures in which Paul describes some of the things he prayed for: Romans 1:9-12; 2 Corinthians 13:7-9; Ephesians 1:15-19 and 3:14-21; Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9-12; 2 Thessalonians 1:11,12.

As you study these prayers, notice several important things:

Paul prayed with sincerity and passion. Paul believed in the importance of prayer. He put great time and effort into his prayers, often praying over extended periods. He trusted that God heard his prayers and would move according to His wisdom and will.

Though prayer does not “earn” blessing, it does bring a release of God’s work and power. As leaders, You should pray for other ministers, and teach the people in your church to pray for each other we must spend much time in prayer for those people and situations God has put into our lives.

Paul had a correct focus. Paul did not pray for successful church programs or for entertaining sermons. Paul did pray for **people**. He prayed both for their

specific needs (1 Tim 3:14) and for the eternal, transforming work of God in their lives (Eph 1:15-19).

As leaders, we should pray for the immediate needs of people. But we should also pray:

- For their spiritual maturity.
- For the character of Christ to be formed in them.
- For them to truly know Christ, and to experience the power and full measure of God's love for them.
- For God's will for their lives and ministries to be revealed to them.
- For them to be filled with every spiritual blessing. There are many more ways to pray for people. Be encouraged to study the prayers of Paul in order to gain more insight into how and what to pray for your flock.

3. Leaders Need Prayer

As a church leader, it is important that you teach your congregation to pray for you during their devotional prayer times. Your role of spiritual leadership is vital, and you need God's grace and help in order to lead effectively. You are also a target for the devil; a common strategy of the adversary is to attempt to strike the shepherd so that he can scatter the sheep (Matt 26:31).

Many leaders mistakenly believe that it is a sign of weakness to ask for prayer. But it is actually the wisest thing a leader can do!

Jesus, at the end of His ministry, prayed a very important prayer (John 17) for His closest disciples – those who would lead the Church after Jesus' death and resurrection.

Studying His prayer will teach you some important things that you, too, can ask your congregation to pray for you:

- To be “kept” from the evil in the world and from the attacks of Satan (vs.11,15)
- To live, work and minister with fellow believers in unity (v.11)
- To be “sanctified” (set apart) for the ministry of the Word (vs.17,19)
- To be “sent” into the world as Christ was with the Good News of salvation by faith in Christ (v.18).

The Apostle Paul asked others to pray for him many times. He understood that fruitful, life-changing ministry could be done only by the power of the Holy

Spirit (Zech 4:6; 1 Cor 2:4; 4:19,20; 2 Cor 4:7). Paul admitted that he was weak and dependent upon God (2 Cor 12:9,10). Yet Paul believed that God's power would be released by prayer, and knew that it would make a vital difference in his ministry if others were praying for him.

Paul did not ask others to pray for his comfort or prosperity. He asked them to pray: that God would open doors for the Word, so he could boldly speak of Christ; that he would be more effective in more places for the sake of the Gospel; that his life would be spared when he was being persecuted (2 Cor 1:11; Eph 6:18-20; Phil 1:19; Col 4:2-4; 2 Thess 3:1,2).

One way to teach your congregation how to pray is to exhort them to pray for you, just as Paul did. *“Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us...”* (Col 4:2,3). Ask them to pray that you will walk in holiness, be freshly anointed by the Holy Spirit for every good work, receive fresh revelation and insight into God's Holy Word, and grow in your ability to teach and lead effectively (2 Cor 7:1; Eph 1:17,18; 4:11,12; 5:18). Your congregation will gladly “amen” such a request!

D. INCLUDE THE SINGLE

“A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation. God sets the solitary in families...” (Ps 68:5,6).

All of us need healthy, wholesome relationships with others. We need people who will share in our joys and trials, and pray for us. These needs are often met by a spouse or other family members.

But there are those who are unmarried, and may be without other family nearby. They may be young and orphaned, or older and living alone.

God wants all of us to know what it is like to be loved, cared for, and prayed for by our family in the Lord. And He wants to release ministry through us in service to, and prayer for, the many single or lonely ones whom He will bring across our path. God wants to place them into our families; that can be our church family, or maybe even our home.

All of us know people in our neighborhood, church, school or place of work who may be lonely. They may want to relate to others and be warmly accepted, but they aren't sure what to do. We should be on the watch for

those whom God would have us begin to pray for and include in our church activities and other events.

This may or may not mean that God wants you to become a special friend to them. But you can begin by praying for them; then be sensitive as to how else you can include them and help them to grow spiritually.

Ask God to put into your heart the love that is in His heart for those who are alone. His love will help you reach out and encourage people who may be lonely and hurting, to help them draw closer to God.

This was clearly seen in the life of Jesus when He was here on earth (Matt 9:36; Mark 1:40,41). Now, through the grace and power of His Spirit, our hands can become His hands. We can become the family into which the Father sets His “solitary” ones.

FINAL DEVOTIONAL NOTE:

*“Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, **intercessions**, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority...”*
(1 Tim 2:1,2).

Intercessory prayer should have an important place in your daily devotions. Take time to intercede for the world; for specific nations; for tribes and peoples that have not yet had the Gospel proclaimed to them; for missionaries and evangelists who are laboring in the Lord’s harvest; and for the Lord to send out **more** “*laborers into His harvest*” (Matt 9:38). Such daily intercessory prayer will be time well spent – and will gather “*fruit for eternal life*” (John 4:36).

CONFESSION AND CLEANSING: OFFERING UP YOUR HEART

A. INVITE A SEARCH

Along with our bodies, we need to offer our hearts to God. David is a man who experienced both great victories and great failures before God. Yet through it

all, he is an unsurpassed example of one who desired earnestly to walk before God **with his whole heart.** (Deut. 6:5)

David prayed these words: “**Search me, O God, and know my heart; try [test] me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting**” (Ps. 139:23,24).

This Psalm is a picture of a man living in close fellowship with God. Yet he is asking God to search his heart, and test his thoughts for anything wicked that he might not know about.

This Psalm also tells us that God knows us better than we know ourselves. **The purpose of having God search our hearts is to discover sin:** to allow Him to point out anything He sees as danger areas in our lives that might bring hurt or harm to ourselves or others. We must accept His dealings with us – without excuses – and freely confess our sins to God that we might be set free.

GUARD YOUR CHRISTIAN WALK

There are many believers who are caught up in unworthy practices or sinful habits that they may not recognize as such. These might involve relationships, employment, entertainment, or practices carried forward from a time before knowing Christ.

Usually such conduct is acceptable to the world, but the searching eyes of the Lord will reveal it as unworthy of His sons and daughters. The Lord wants to free us from all sin or bondage – because if it is not dealt with, it will eventually result in a harvest of pain and destruction in our lives and the lives of others.

Very few people just decide one day to turn their back on God, and live a sinful life. Most of the time, we make lots of small compromises over time, and participate in more and more worldly behavior. Eventually, we end up far away from God and His ways.

We must learn – **and teach others also** – to invite the Lord’s daily searching of our heart and thoughts. We must learn to wait in His presence, to hear His voice, and to respond to what He tells us. If we ask the Lord to show us our hidden sins, He will help us to see them.

As we listen for His voice, and seek to obey His Word, we will learn to follow His directions to freedom! *“Show me Your ways, O Lord; teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me”* (Ps 25:4,5).

B. DON'T BE DECEIVED

Deception means to believe that something is right when it is wrong. The prophet Jeremiah warned us how easily the human heart is deceived: *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?”* (Jer 17:9).

It is possible for anyone to be deceived – even a Christian. *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins [to God], He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:8,9).

1. Three Areas For Deception

The Apostle John shows us three possible ways a person can be deceived:

- Thinking that we don't need to confess – that if we do sin, we aren't required to do anything about it; that God will either overlook it, or forgive us even if we don't face it or tell Him about it.
- Thinking that we have no sin – and thus do not need God's forgiveness.
- Thinking that we won't be forgiven – that God will not really forgive us even when we do confess our sin.

2. Deception Spoils Fellowship

If we are deceived in any one of these three areas, our fellowship with God will be spoiled. We will find it hard to pray, praise or worship the Lord. We will not be able to find joy and peace in God's Word. It will be hard for us to turn our hearts completely toward the Lord.

- Those who believe they never sin at all will keep having problems caused by their sin. But they won't know why they have the problems – or why their lives are in constant turmoil.
- Those who sin but do not repent or confess their sin to God – thinking He will forgive them without repentance – can become hard of heart (Heb 3:13). Their sin is never dealt with, even though the Holy Spirit may be convicting them (John 16:8). They will, in time, no longer hear

the Lord warning them. To walk so far away from God's ways is very dangerous.

- Some people believe that even though they tell God their sins, He will not really forgive them. The burden of this deception will give them a heavy heart. They may live under a dark cloud of shame, guilt and condemnation.

The Bible tells us the truth: *"If we confess our sins [to God], He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:8,9). How good it is to be open and honest and confess to God that we are sinners, and to repent before Him of our specific sins. God is ever ready, then, to forgive, restore and strengthen us.

We can avoid future sin by coming to God when we feel tempted – before we sin – and asking Him for help and strength to resist. It is better to come to Him beforehand for help, rather than afterwards for forgiveness.

3. Be Sensitive To The Spirit

We should ask God daily to make us very sensitive to His Holy Spirit, to warn us when we are in danger. We must humbly acknowledge our need for His teaching, correction and forgiveness. When we are sensitive, He will let us know very quickly if we sin against His love or truth. We will receive more than just comfort – we will receive His wise instruction and direction.

I think we all understand that if we fail God, we don't lose our **salvation**. The littlest sin, however, can quickly spoil our **fellowship** with God (our walk and talk with Him).

We should be quick to ask Him for His forgiveness, because we do not want our fellowship with Him to be broken. We want to please the Lord in all things, and grieve Him in none!

C. SET A GUARD OVER YOUR HEART AND MOUTH

David wrote, *"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation [thoughts] of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer"* (Ps 19:14).

1. Guarding Your Mind

- **Three Main Sources Of Thoughts.** There are three main sources for thoughts and temptations to come to our minds:

- **The World** — from what we see and hear.
- **The Flesh** — from human, ungodly desires.
- **The Devil** — from the spirit world.

Just because a thought comes to our mind does not mean we have to dwell on it. However, if we do allow unholy thoughts to remain, they will eventually lead to unholy words and deeds. We need therefore to stop them quickly, and replace them with holy thoughts.

- **Make Jesus Lord Of Your Mind.** When we begin each day with prayer and thanksgiving to God, we are given His peace. This peace acts as a guard over our heart and mind (Phil 4: 6,7) and helps us to be more sensitive to the Holy Spirit's conviction.

When a wrong thought arises, talk to the Lord about it. Prayer will quickly put a stop to wrong thoughts! Every Christian will have wrong thoughts at one time or another, but Jesus can be the Lord of our minds as well as of our hearts.

- **Fill Your Mind With The Truth.** Decide to no longer watch or listen to things that feed improper thoughts in your mind. A sure way to purify your thoughts is to refuse to watch or listen to unholy things!

Then, fill your mind with the Word of God. It contains cleansing, purifying and life-giving words that will fill your heart and mind with truth and holiness (Ps 119:11,105; Prov 6:23; 2 Tim 3:16; Heb 4:12).

2. Guarding Your Mouth

The words that we speak have power, and must be carefully guarded: *“Death and life are in the power of the tongue...”* (Prov 18:21). But it is from the fullness of the heart that our words come: *“For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks”* (Matt 12:34). So what we say truly reflects the condition of our heart.

The Bible teaches us that there are important links between the mouth and the heart:

For Good –

1. **In our salvation:** *“...if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved”* (Rom 10:9).
2. **In our faith:** *“So Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, “Be removed and be cast into the sea,” and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says”* (Mark 11:22,23).

For Evil –

1. **In our character:** *“Fervent lips with a wicked heart are like earthenware covered with silver dross”* (Prov 26:23).
2. **In our attitude:** *“But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic”* (Jas 3:14,15).

It is clear that there is a connection between the words of our mouth and our heart. From the heart can flow words of salvation, healing and blessing; or words of destruction, injury and cursing. We see now the wisdom in the Psalmist’s prayer: *“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer”* (Ps 19:14).

How can we best apply this wisdom each day in devotional prayer?

First, review with the Lord the prior day. Did you say anything that needs confession or apology? Were there attitudes of your heart that were embittered, proud or angry? Life and power flow from our heart, and words for either good or evil; so invite the Lord’s search and conviction each day. Then quickly respond with repentance and sincere apology to those whom you might have offended with your words.

Second, give your words and deeds for the coming day to the Lord ahead of time. Ask Him to help you speak words of life and blessing, and to choose to keep a right heart before Him. You can even pray, “Lord, place a guard in my heart and over my mouth. I invite Your Spirit to signal or correct me when I am

about to say something that would not please You. Give me the grace and strength to honor and obey Your promptings.”

There is a bright hope you can confess in this regard in Psalm 49:3: *“My mouth **shall** speak wisdom, and the meditation of my heart **shall** give understanding.”* Hallelujah!

D. KEEP THE GOAL IN VIEW

God does call us to purity. He teaches us to examine our hearts, confess our sins, and be cleansed. But why is this so important? What is the goal?

There is the **outward** goal of our attention to holy living. We strive to have a right heart, wise actions and godly speech **so that our lives will be fruitful and effective for God every day**. Living worthwhile days is a worthy goal indeed (Ps 90:12).

But there is an important **inward** purpose God has for us as well. *“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called **according to His purpose**. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren”* (Rom 8:28,29).

There is a deep purpose that God has for **every** believer’s life. **His desire is that we “be conformed to the image of His Son”**. His goal for us is to make us more like Jesus!

So as we come to the Lord each day in prayer, asking Him to search our hearts, He will do His shaping, purifying work in our life:

- He will cleanse us, getting rid of the things that keep us from being like Jesus.
- He will show us where we are deceived, so that we can better know and become like Him – the Truth!
- He will purify our hearts, minds and words, so that we can be wiser and more sensitive – and in turn offer His hope, life and truth to others!

DO NOT GIVE UP!

In Philippians 3:13,14, the Apostle Paul speaks of pressing forward each day: *“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do,*

*forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I **press toward the goal** for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*

Larger goals are reached by completing a series of daily smaller goals. During our personal prayers, God may bring several things to our mind that He wants us to do – things that will be a part of His plan for our day. (We will discuss this in more detail in our next section.) When we complete these smaller tasks in faith and obedience, we will have “pressed on” toward God’s greater, larger goal (or purpose) for our lives. Each small decision of obedience and righteousness leads to the release of even more of God’s purpose for our lives!

Give your life – and each day of your life – to God. Pray that you will “press on” in Him and obey Him no matter what may come against you. Do not give up in your effort to do God’s will.

You **can** reach your goals in God. You **will** win your heavenly prize as you press on. And God **will** be faithful to use everything to shape you more and more into the image of Jesus! What a blessed hope and promise!