

# PERSONAL DEVOTIONS

WHILE WORKING THROUGH YOUR DEVOTIONS, BE THINKING ABOUT WHAT YOU CAN SHARE DURING YOUR SMALL GROUP TIME.

## 1.

Read **Five Ways to Jump Start Your Devotions** by Alasdair Groves.

## 2.

Using the article's recommendations, read Psalm 46 and write a response to the passage.

## 3.

Pray through Psalm 46. Make this Psalm your own words or re-state the Psalm in your own words. Pray through how the Psalm addresses your specific life situation.

Spend time reflecting on the Sessions and Breakout you attended.

## 4.

- Where do you see God at work in your heart?
  - How have you been tempted to doubt God's character?
  - What does the "non-still" version of you look like?
  - Where are you challenged to manage your emotions?
  - Where are you challenged to manage your relationships?
- What are some promises you want to remember?
- What sin might the Lord be convicting you of?
- What would you like to see different in your life for 2022 in your relationship with the Lord - emotionally, work, family, friendship, etc.?
- Who are other believers you can connect with about these things?

## 5.

- Think back to the worship songs from our sessions.
- Which ones were particularly impactful for you?
  - How might worship in song encourage your heart and your relationship with the Lord?
  - You may consider listening to/singing songs from our MR2022 Playlist.



MR2022 PLAYLIST

# 5 WAYS TO JUMPSTART YOUR DEVOTIONS

ALASDAIR GROVES

Spending meaningful time alone with God is one of the most important aspects of the Christian life, but it is also one of the most difficult to sustain. Failure in this area, real or perceived, is common and is guilt inducing for most Christians. We give many different reasons for our struggle: it bores us, it discourages us, it's work, we're busy with the things we really have to do, and so on. But I suspect the vast majority of our problem boils down to some version of a simple truth: it doesn't always feel good.

So, I'd like to recommend a few out-of-the-box ways to re-spark a struggling devotional life, but in light of what I've just said above, let me make two things crystal clear at the outset. First, my goal in encouraging devotions isn't to help you feel good. It's wonderful when you come away from time with God uplifted, encouraged, and re-energized. But in itself, how you feel about it isn't the point. (Which is good, because my own devotional time this morning was the emotional equivalent of drinking soda that's been sitting out all night.) Second, your hope can never be pinned on a specific devotional technique. There is no one way of having quiet times that, if you could just find and practice it, guarantees solid or faithful devotions. The sooner we accept that even benefitting from our Bibles is a gift of God, the better off we'll be.

And this brings me to my final introductory point. I've said that the goal of devotions isn't emotional experience (though we are right to rejoice when our feelings are touched). We could add that it isn't checking a box, or fulfilling a duty. Instead, the point of devotions is to engage with God personally. It's showing up as the person you are and actually interacting with the person he is. Here, then, are four suggestions of how you can do that.

## 1. WRITE A RESPONSE TO EVERY VERSE YOU READ.

There's nothing like writing to slow you down and make you actually think about what you're reading. If you force yourself to respond in some way, be it a comment, a question, a connection to another passage, a potential personal application or even a strong expression of frustration, writing your direct response to what you read makes it much harder to walk away from reading your Bible without engaging God personally. I've had many days where I didn't have a single thought about a particular verse, but forcing myself to write something back to God about it led my mind and heart to unexpected conviction, comfort, or worship. You could, of course, choose to write something about every paragraph, or every chapter instead of every verse. Whatever you pick, writing to the Lord can be a powerful help in bringing your heart into his presence.

## 2. PRAY A PSALM.

The Psalms are already prayers; why not pray them? To pray a psalm, as opposed to simply reading it, means to let its words become yours. This might mean reading a line slowly, out loud, to the Lord as your own words to him. Or take a verse like "The Lord is my light and my salvation,

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ALASDAIR GROVES

whom shall I fear?" These can be your words. I've found it often helps to add my own words, or to re-state the psalm in my own words, which might sound something like this:

"Yes. You really are the one who shows me where to go and rescues me from all the things from which I need to be saved. In you, I have good reasons not to be ruled by fear!"

It could even extend to a time of prayer focused on the themes of the verse or section you've read, praying through the details and wrestlings of your own life, as evoked by the passage.

## 3. USE YOUR BULLETIN FROM CHURCH.

Many times people feel adrift, not knowing what to read. You could try what one creative woman did. She took her bulletin home from church and used the Scriptures in it as her meditations for the week. Between the call to worship, any passages read during the service, the sermon, and the benediction, you'll likely have plenty of things to reflect on. These reflections will have the advantage of being verses you've already engaged on some level and they'll be that much easier to reflect on and speak to God about in relation to your hopes, fears, and concerns of the week.

## 4. USE SONGS.

Most songs we sing at church are based on particular scriptures, or draw on themes with fairly strong scriptural roots. Even if you're not sure where these words are in the Bible, it's fairly easy to take a favorite song and ask Google to help you identify the Bible passage(s) that gave rise to it. Once you've done that, read those passages. Reflect on them. Bring your own experiences to them and, as a response, sing the song back to God. It's amazing how different it can be to sing a song having spent even five minutes considering the Scripture it comes from and thinking about how your life intersects with the words. Even if the intersection is along the lines of "wow, that's not where my heart is today—I am not thirsting for you at all right now," it lays out a clear and hopeful path forward: "Lord help my heart move in this direction!"

A final thought: whatever way you choose to engage the Lord personally, don't let your devotions be the sum of it. Perhaps they are the main meal of the day, but they are not intended to be the only time you talk to God, as if you have "God time" and then the rest of your time. Instead, a healthy devotional life will simply be a more focused and extended time of engaging your closest companion, a friend to whom you speak in 4 second snippets and bursts throughout the rest of your day. The more you realize that all of life is about engaging him, the less you'll be tempted to see devotions as an irksome duty to perform and the more it will begin to taste like food that keeps you alive, even if you're still in the process of developing a taste for it.