

God Focused Devotions

*Being Dazzled by God in
Your Daily Bible Reading*

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Preface

“I know I need to have devotions,” the teenager told me, “but, Frank, they just don’t work for me! I don’t get anything out of them.”

I’ve heard this story often in my ministry with teens. But, I’ll let you in on a secret—*they haven’t always worked for me either!* Let’s be honest, devotions can be downright boring! I know. I’ve tried just about every type of devotions known to man over the last 30 years. I found that, for the most part, my devotions just left me cold. I sometimes got something out of them, but more often than not, I was just “going through the motions.”

Something was missing. I wasn’t being dazzled by my devotions. Yet, Psalm 1 speaks of being “blessed” by meditating in the law of God day and night. Furthermore, Joshua was promised that he would have “good success” if he meditated in the law of the Lord day and night (Joshua 1:8). Somehow I didn’t get that same “blessing” and “success” when I tried. Rather than being dazzled by my devotions, I was depressed, deflated, and defeated by them! Until.... I learned a secret right before my eyes!

All the time I had been having devotions, I had missed one major point. I was studying the Bible, learning facts, looking for a verse to help me live another day, when, instead, I was supposed to be enjoying God! I found that my devotions had been all about me—what *I* needed to learn, or what *I* needed to do, or where *I* had failed. My devotions were “me” centered.

But that wasn’t how David had devotions, nor was it how Asaph, David’s chief musician, had devotions. Their devotions were “God” focused. Psalm 27:4 was but one example. There David stated that he sought after one thing—that he might “behold” (literally, meditate on) the beauty of the Lord. In Psalm 63 David declared that he would remember God upon his bed and meditate on God in the

night. That, to me, was interesting. David looked at the Bible as a tool to reveal the glory of his God—and he read it that way, looking for God in every passage he read.

This focus changed my devotions forever. My devotions came alive and led to joy and praise as I learned how to look for the glory and majesty of God in His Word. I got my eyes off of self and onto Him. Paradoxically, the more I saw Him, the more I saw my own sinful self. As Isaiah of old, who saw the Lord “high and lifted up,” cried in response, “Woe is me,” so my life began to change as I became entranced with a biblical view of God’s person and works.

What about you? Perhaps you’re a new Christian, and this is your first attempt to learn how to have effective devotions. Or perhaps you, like me, have tried different devotional methods and found most of them leaving you flat, or bored. Maybe this is yet one more attempt to get something meaningful from your devotions. Whatever the case, this booklet is for you!

The first three chapters are very important. They show you what having devotions is all about, and they show you why devotions often don’t dazzle. But more importantly, they show you how to have exciting, thrilling devotions that make you hungry for more!

After these initial chapters, which teach you how to have great devotions, we have included twelve full weeks of devotions. During those twelve weeks you will begin with basic devotions and gradually move to more advanced devotions. In the beginning, you will simply learn how to read and discover truths about God in the Word. The later weeks will concentrate more and more on God’s glorious character and works. By the end of the twelve weeks, you will have learned how to have devotions that dazzle you with the glory and grace of your great God! After all, that’s the purpose of devotions—to be dazzled by an awesome view of the grandest spectacle the world has ever seen—the majesty of the Almighty God, the Creator of the Universe!

God's Overwhelming Mercies

Today's Devotional Passage—Romans 11:33-12:2

Paul's Pleading with Believers

Sometimes we overlook small but significant things in Scripture. One example is found in Romans 11:33-12:2. Read it in your own Bible.

Paul pleads that we do three things in this passage:

- Give our bodies to God as living sacrifices
- Not be “shaped” like the world
- Be transformed by the renewed mind

These three phrases can be reduced to three words: surrender, separation, and transformation.

Surrender Our Bodies

First, we are urged to surrender or give our bodies to the Lord. This is something that every believer should do. God's great love for us demands complete surrender to Him, and failure to do so will actually keep us from enjoying God! His command to surrender is part of His love. He wants us to surrender to Him because His way is best for us.

Separate from the World

Second, Paul commands us to not be shaped like this world. Someone has paraphrased this command as “don’t be pressed into the world’s mold.”

But what is “the world”? Briefly, “the world” or “worldliness” refers to living for the here-and-now. It is living as though this life (this world) is all there is to life. It is living as though there was no heaven and no existence beyond this life. This defines the lifestyle of the unsaved. They live for riches, wealth, fame, attention, and earthly power, with little regard for death. But believers are not to live like that. We are to live with eternity in view. We are to live as though this life is only the beginning, not the end!

Be Transformed by the Renewed Mind

Last, Paul encourages us to be transformed by the renewed mind. “Transformed” comes from the Greek word for “metamorphosis.” We use this word to describe the changing of a caterpillar into a beautiful butterfly. “Transformation” then, speaks of a metamorphosis that takes place in a believer that changes (transforms) him or her from an ungodly person into a godly individual reflecting the very image of God!

Though that much is clear, a closer examination of the passage reveals an often-overlooked truth.

Surrender and separation to Him are natural reactions to being dazzled by His mercy and grace!

Because of God’s Mercies

Paul pleads with us to do these three things because of the “mercies” (compassions) of the Lord. This is very important. We shouldn’t do these three things simply because we are supposed to do them. We should do them because something compels us to do them. We should do them because we have an overwhelming desire to do them! But where does that overwhelming desire come from? The answer is seen in the little word *mercies*.

Paul's "therefore" in Romans 12 points backwards to God's mercies described in the first 11 chapters of Romans, and in particular to chapter 11. In other words, Paul bases his plea in Romans 12:1 on what the believer has learned about the mercies of God in chapters 1-11. Surrender, separation, and transformation find their motivation in the mercies of the Lord.

In the first 11 chapters we see that all men, at their very best, are sinners before a holy God (Rom. 3:23). Our sins have condemned us to die—for "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). Yet, God provided a way out! He sent His precious Son to die for us on a cross that we might be saved (Rom. 5:6-8). Those who place their faith in Christ are "justified" (made innocent of their sin) and are "declared righteous" by God. Thus, believers have been graciously and mercifully saved from death and hell, and they have been given a home in heaven. Had God not done this, we would be hopelessly doomed to emptiness in this life and hell for all eternity.

Further, God gives believers, through the Holy Spirit, all they need to live a godly life (Rom. 6-8). He gives them power for service; He keeps them saved; and He will not let anything keep them from His love and eternal salvation (Rom. 8).

Paul concludes his review of God's mercies with these words of praise: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable (untraceable) are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be the glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11:33, 36). These words reveal Paul's own amazement with God's mercy.

Based on this awesome view of God and His mercies, Paul urges us to present our bodies to God, to turn from the distractions of this world, and to be transformed into His very image.

The problem is that we often think we should yield ourselves to the Lord and not be conformed to the world because "the Bible commands it." Actually, the Bible doesn't command us to "present/offer our bodies" to Him. Instead, Paul *begs* us to do so based on what we know of the mercies of God. In other words, we shouldn't surrender

Weeks 1–2

Introduction

You are beginning a twelve-week adventure of discovery. You won't be discovering mere facts as you read your Bible. Instead, you will be discovering God. He gave us the Bible so that we can know and love Him. The first two weeks begin with very simple devotions. As you read the assigned passage, you will be looking for the answer to the question for that day. Don't be satisfied with just copying words onto a page. Think about the question and the Bible passage. What can you discover about the God who loves you and wants you to know Him? Each week you will have five passages assigned (Monday-Friday). Use the weekends to meditate on what you have learned or to catch up if you miss a day.

These devotions are a selection from *Manna 1*, a 12-month devotional published by Positive Action For Christ.

Instructions

For the next two weeks, your devotions will consist of two sections:

- The daily Probe section in which you will find a passage to be read and a question for each day that you are to answer
- A daily devotional form where you will record your daily devotional responses

Each day you will probe (read the question and the passage assigned). You will then ponder the passage (meditate) and record your answer to the probe. Finally, you will apply the truth learned by writing out how you plan to personalize it in your walk with the Lord that day. See the next page for an example.

Example

Monday, Date **September 9th**

Probe: **What is my duty? Ecclesiastes 12:13-14**

Ponder: **How does the passage answer the question? I am to fear God and to obey Him, for God knows everything I think and do and will judge me for it.**

Personalize: **How can I apply this passage to my life? I must learn to stand in awe of my God. I'm afraid I don't fear Him enough. In fact, I need to fill my mind with Him so I will think of His all-seeing eye when I am tempted to sin. I must also realize He sees what I do and will reward me when I do right.**

Tuesday, Date _____

Probe: _____

Ponder: _____

Personalize: _____

Weeks 7–8

Introduction

After finishing the last two weeks of devotions, you may have noticed that there is much more to a Bible passage than first meets the eye. Most of us read on a factual level. That is, we merely gather facts from whatever we are reading. This is important, but when reading the Bible, there is much more for us to see. In addition to the factual information, there are theological and doctrinal truths to be grasped and digested. As we learned in the introductory chapters, the theological truths (truths about the Person and work of God) are actually at the heart of what is written. Of course, all these truths will have a profound effect on you individually as you meditate on God and apply the truths of His Word.

These devotions are taken from *Manna 4*, a 12-month devotional published by Positive Action For Christ.

Instructions

The next two weeks will help you further refine the way you read your Bible. Each day you will read a short passage four times, each time looking for something different.

- **Factual:** The first reading we call Factual. You should read the passage fast in order to get a quick overview of exactly what happens in the passage (what it is about) and then record the basic idea of the passage (i.e., Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath and was criticized for it).
- **Theological:** The second reading we call Theological. Read the passage again, this time more slowly, and look for every truth you can find about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Record everything you see about His

character and attributes, how He works and thinks, His purposes and plans, what He does, etc.

- **Doctrinal:** The third reading we call Doctrinal. Read the passage again to discover other truths that are there—perhaps something about salvation, spiritual growth, sin, Satan, the Church, prayer, the gospel, witnessing, etc.
- **Practical:** After the fourth reading, consider how the theology and doctrine in the passage should impact your life today. List some specific ways you can apply the principles you have learned to your life.

After each reading, record your thoughts and insights in the appropriate section. The following page provides an example of what to look for in God's Word and how to use the forms. Be God-focused in your approach to His revelation of Himself. Don't study the Word of God; study the God of the Word!

Example

Passage: **Ephesians 2:1-10**

Date: **March 17**

FACTUAL (what the Bible states/what happens in this passage):

All of us are born spiritually dead in our sins with no hope for salvation apart from God's grace.

THEOLOGICAL (what I learn about the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit):

Verse 4: God is rich in mercy and grace.

Verse 4: God loves us even before we love Him.

Verse 5: God is the giver of spiritual life.

Verse 7: God saves us to bring attention to Himself.

Verse 8: God offers salvation as a gift.

Verse 10: God created us.

DOCTRINAL (truths I see about salvation, spiritual growth, sin, Satan, the Church, prayer, the gospel, witnessing, etc.):

Verse 2: I was born a sinner, it is part of my nature, and it causes me to be spiritually dead.

Verse 3: Satan is now working in the world all around us.

Verse 3: All people are born sinners and are, by nature, "children of wrath."

Verse 5: Salvation is a work of God through which He literally makes me alive.

Verse 6: When we are saved we are placed "in Christ Jesus."

PRACTICAL (lessons I should apply to how I live today):

Verses 2-3: I need to make sure, through God's power, that my life no longer resembles the characteristics of the unsaved person.

Verses 5-6: I need to meditate often on the power, love, and grace of God, which I have experienced firsthand as a child of God.

Verse 9: I did nothing to earn my salvation so my spirit and attitude should be one of humility.

Because God has chosen to save me, I need to share this wonderful message of salvation with others.

Weeks 11–12

Introduction

As you draw to the end of your twelve-week adventure, you have learned much about both the Word of God and the God of the Word. Whether you have been reading your Bible for years or you have just made a decision to give serious attention to daily study of the Word of God, this book has been developed to help you spend time with your Lord. For the past 10 weeks you have been progressively learning how to focus on God in your daily devotions. You are now reaching “graduate level!”

The next two weeks we turn our attention to a key element in understanding God’s Word. The Bible is not a collection of books. It is one book, written by one Author with one story. Second Timothy 3:16 tells us that the Bible was “God-breathed” (written by God), and God has written His Book with a single overriding story. That story we call *The Story of His Glory*. Everything God does is for His glory (Romans 11:36). He made the earth for His glory. He made mankind for His glory. And He wrote the Bible to reveal His glory. The Bible is not about us but about Him! As we read it, therefore, we should look for Him rather than for us! We should ask, “What does this passage teach about God’s glory and about His grace?”

The following devotions are part of *Manna 6*, a 12-month devotional produced by Positive Action For Christ.

Instructions

The forms you will use for the next two weeks are designed to help you focus on *The Story of His Glory*. Each week you will begin with a background reading designed to help you see the aspects of *The*

Story of His Glory. You will then read the assigned passage once daily recording your thoughts in the following areas:

- **What God Does:** First, record in a few words what God does in the passage you just read. Look carefully as you read so that you can list all the things you see God do in the passage, even when His name is not specifically mentioned. Summarize what God does in a sentence or two.
- **His Glory:** Under “His Glory,” record the various ways you see God’s attributes, works, and ways displayed in the passage. For example, you might see God’s sovereignty in calling Moses to free His people from Egypt, His omnipotence in parting the Red Sea, etc.
- **His Grace:** Under “His Grace,” record how you see the following:
 - God’s gracious works (doing for man what he doesn’t deserve)
 - God’s grace in salvation, the cross, God’s plan of redemption, and Christ. Naturally, if you are reading this from the Old Testament, you will have to see “pictures” of His salvation, of Christ, of the cross, and of the Gospel. For example, you might see God’s saving grace in the ark, or in the Old Testament offerings and sacrifices, or in Abraham offering up his son Isaac.
- **Other Thoughts:** Under “Other Thoughts,” note any thoughts that don’t seem to fit into the other categories.

The following background stories and devotional forms are taken from *Manna 6*, a 12-month devotional produced by Positive Action For Christ. A sample is provided on the next page.

Example

The Story of His Glory • The Plan of Redemption	
Passage: Exodus 9:1-7	Date: July 11 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Background read
What God does in this passage	
Spoke to Moses - vs. 1 Told him where to go and what to say - vs. 1 Warned Pharaoh of the consequences of disobedience - vss. 2-3 Set a definite time for Pharaoh to act - vs. 5 Kept His word (promise) - vs. 6 Killed Egypt's livestock, but kept Israel's cattle alive - vs 6	
His Glory: What you learned about the character and attributes of God in this passage	
Sovereign - controls what lives and what dies Faithful - kept His promise Involved in our lives Source of Life - God is "Life" as He gives life and takes life as He desires Omnipotent - had the power to destroy the livestock of one nation while preserving the livestock of another nation Omniscient - knew what would happen and when it would happen	
His Grace: What you learned about God's grace, Christ, the cross, and the Gospel in this passage	
God was gracious to warn Pharaoh, despite Pharaoh's sinfulness (likewise, God faithfully warns unbelievers today of their need of Christ) God gave Pharaoh time to respond - God has given sinners 2,000 years to repent because He is not willing that any should perish	
Other Thoughts	
Pharaoh's unbelief is amazing. In spite of all he has seen God do, He still hardens his heart - Am I like this? Do I listen to God's warnings?	