

At Grace we like to say that the most important habit that anyone can develop is waking up every day and spending time in God's word and time in prayer.

Why do we think this is true? For so many reasons! Too many to enumerate in this brief guide. But among the most compelling reasons is certainly the fact that our souls were created to commune with God. God wants to be with us – and He wants His children to want to be with Him! Daily devotions are one of the best ways to spend time with our God. Not only that, but through this daily habit, we can come to know the Bible. Not just the parts a pastor chooses to preach about or a small group chooses to discuss, but the entire Bible. We can come to know it for ourselves, to understand how it all fits together, and slowly begin to saturate our lives, thoughts, and speech with scripture. For those of us who are parents, learning the Bible for ourselves enables us to teach it to our children. Most importantly, it is impossible to mature in our Christian faith without becoming students of God's word.

It is also impossible to mature in our faith without being consistent in spending time in God's presence through prayer. Regular prayers remind us that God is big and we are small. When we pray, we are reminded that God is sovereign, that He loves us and cares about us, and even cares about what we care about. **A consistent prayer life fosters a sense of need for God that results in a deeper trust in God, which ultimately helps us find our peace in God.**

## WHAT AND HOW MUCH TO READ

How much scripture should you read every day? There's really no right answer to this. Sometimes reading one verse in the morning and meditating on it throughout the day is wonderful and life-giving. Sometimes we thrive when we read several chapters per day or more. Once reading the Bible becomes a lifelong habit, you'll have different seasons in which you read different amounts. The most important part is to simply remain consistent.

The bigger question is often what to read. The Bible is a big book and can be intimidating if we aren't sure where to start. The great news is there are tons of resources available to help you along the way. Here are just a few:

### Grace Raleigh's Reading Plan

These plans are available on our website as well as in the lobby on the information table. They tend to follow along with the current series.

### Youversion

This is an app you can add to any device. You can also simply visit bible.com and access it on your computer. Not only does the app contain a Bible for you, but that Bible is available in tons of different versions so you can pick the one that is best for you (if you aren't sure which version is best for you, ask your small group leader or a staff member for our translation guide). In addition to the Bible, the app has hundreds of reading plans you can search through that will tell you what to read every day. These plans can be sorted by topic (marriage, parenthood, anxiety, etc.), theological focus (names of God, the Holy Spirit, the early church, etc.), or sections or books of the Bible (the Gospels, read through the Bible, Paul's letter, etc.). If you've never been a consistent Bible reader before, this is a great place to start.

### Devotional Books

Many people prefer a written devotional. These offer a scripture for each day with an author's commentary or insight on the particular passage. There are so many of these that a simple Google search will render you thousands of options. But just a few to get you started could be:

- *Morning by Morning: The Devotions of Charles Spurgeon*, edited by Jim Reimann
- *A Year With C.S. Lewis: Daily Readings from His Classic Works*
- *Unshakeable* by Christine Caine
- *Live in Grace, Walk in Love* by Bob Goff

## WHAT ABOUT PRAYER? HOW DO I DO THAT?

Prayer is a deep well of a topic, about which countless words have been written, books have been printed, and sermons have been preached. We will, therefore, not be finding an exhaustive guide here! We will offer you, however, a few quick thoughts about prayer and then a brief guide on structuring prayers.

First of all, pray for as long or as little as you want. If your prayers are short, that's fine. Let them be short. The more we are in the habit of praying, the more natural it feels, the more we tend to have to pray about and the longer the prayers grow... sometimes. Sometimes the most ardent prayer warriors offer brief, efficient prayers too. The point here is the same as reading the Bible – consistency, not length, is the goal.

Prayer is listening too. Prayer isn't just talking to God, it's also being quiet, resting in His presence and allowing Him to speak to you. Sometimes it's best to just pray the simple prayer of young Samuel: "speak Lord for your servant hears" and then be still and listen. It will feel weird or funny at first, but you might be surprised at how quickly this becomes a meaningful time for you.

When you are talking to God, we recommend that you start by following the pattern Jesus laid out for the disciples when He taught them how to pray. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, He gave them this model:

*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.*

Matthew 6:9-13

You probably recognize this as "The Lord's Prayer", and it give us a pattern for prayer that follows the acronym ACTS: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication.

### Adoration

As Jesus began His prayer with praise for God, so should we. This tends to put us in a proper mindset as we approach, as well as properly orders our priorities, shifting our focus off of ourselves and onto the God to whom we are praying.

### Confession

Throughout scripture we are taught to regularly confess our sin. In 1 John, we are told that if we confess our sins, God will be faithful in forgiving our sins. This should, therefore, be a consistent habit. These confessions further promote a posture of gratitude and humility as we approach God.

### Thanksgiving

Before launching into what we want or think we need, it's good to first, like Jesus, express gratitude for what we have been given. Simply giving thanks for what we have can also serve as a wonderful reminder of the times God has answered our prayers or come through for us or been faithful to us.

### Supplication

Here we finally express to God what we need or make requests of Him. This is where we pour out our heart, our concerns, and our anxieties. Pouring these out allows us to rest in the peace of God as we begin our days.

A few final thoughts on daily devotions...

They don't have to look the same all the time! Sometimes you can have them on a walk or a hike. Sometimes on a morning commute. Sometimes they include praise and worship. Sometimes they are just prolonged times of prayer. They can be supplemented by a spiritually impactful book or listening to a sermon.

There's no assigned amount of time they should take. Quiet times can be 5 minutes or 50. This will ebb and flow over time. That's okay.

Make it something you look forward to. If you're not excited to do it, then you won't maintain the practice. Light a candle, brew some coffee, find a favorite spot, throw on a blanket...whatever you have to do to make yourself look forward to this time.

And finally, understand that not every daily devotion will make it feel like the heavens have parted and God's angels are singing down on you as you receive this wonderful spiritual truth. The efficacy of devotions are not evidenced in one or two days, but rather through a consistent and faithful practice over time.

Faithfully develop this habit and we promise your life will change forever.

