



Writing Life Faith



The Staff Handbook: Devotion

"Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers. But they delight in the law of the LORD, meditating on it day and night." (Psalm 1:1-2)

Life at Camp, Part 3.

Quote of the Week

"Your actions are a better indicator than your words."

The camp season is well underway, with both High School camps finished. God did amazing work in the lives of over two hundred campers. They learned about Jesus' habits, prayer life, and why devotions and the Holy Spirit are crucial in a Christian's life. We also studied John the Baptist, looking at the example he set.

Plus there were cabin devotions, meal times, tons of skills (swim is the best), and hangout time. God used these camps to magnify His Name, and He gave me my first opportunity to lead a group of High School guys. That was an awesome experience.

As I spent a day at home between the two camps, I thought about everything we'd learned. Why are devotions important? Are they even worth our time? Shouldn't we be out doing better things? Why were the group devotional times at camp so powerful? What does God want me to know about being devoted to Him?

Today we're looking at...

Personal and Corporate Devotion

"We're all devoted to something," the camp speaker said. "It's just a question of who or what." He was completely right. Each of us has something that consumes our time, finances, and energy. These aren't always bad things (such as family, housing, food, etc.), but they can take the place of God.

Why does God want our time and attention? He made us; isn't it enough that we say thank you once or twice? Why does He ask for more than that? Let's look at what the Bible says.

Devotion in the Bible.

"Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do."
(Joshua 1:8)

In Scripture, we see men and women devoted to God in a multitude of ways. Joshua was told to read God's Law to the people. King Josiah did the same when he found God's Law in the Temple. David and the Psalmists were devoted to God through song, worship, and dancing. Many Israelites would memorize God's Word. The people would frequently fast. The Prophets regularly obeyed God's (sometimes incredulous) instructions, like Ezekiel lying on his side for 390 days. The Prophets also spent regular time in prayer.

Jesus, the ultimate example, should be our reference point. Our theme verse for High School camp was Luke 5:16, in the NASB translation: *"But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray."* Prayer, or communicating with God, may well be the primary spiritual discipline.

Through prayer, we access the heart of God. We also have the Scriptures, which are the infallible Words of God. However, I can't make light of the fact that Jesus often slipped away to *pray*, not to read *Scripture*. No, this isn't my way of undermining Scripture. When tempted by the devil, Jesus didn't respond by praying harder, but with the Words of God. (I wonder what would happen if we all used this approach to counteract temptation.)

Jesus prayed frequently, in addition to the other disciplines. He was devoted to His Father, and He introduced the world to new methods for knowing God. Now that Christ has come, we can communicate directly with God! We don't need a priest or a Temple; we have a direct connection with God. We can devote ourselves to Him.

Devotion at Camp.

"In the morning, LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly." (Psalm 5:3)

I wouldn't be a very good camp employee if I only tackled the work I thought needed to happen and never asked anyone for guidance or direction. Odds are high that I'd do a lot of stuff that might seem beneficial, while missing everything that was actually supposed to get done. I'd probably waste everyone's time and do useless things.

Thankfully, I don't do this. I ask the director, clean team leader, and production team what they want. I don't blaze my own path (usually) and complete or set up five hundred things they didn't ask for. That's being a poor employee. Likewise, I don't mindlessly serve God in my spiritual life. I intentionally seek to learn God's will through devotions.

Time for a quick side quest to make sure we're on the same playing field. Two common objections to devotions are as follows:

1. *I don't have time.*
2. *There are better things I could be doing.*

Both of these can be valid, but I'll explain why I don't think they are.

1. **I don't have time.** If we say we don't have time for God, our lives will wander. If I don't have time to listen to my boss at work, why am I working? Then I'm working for myself and my glory, not for my boss and the company's glory. If we aren't learning God's will, what role is God playing in our lives? Tragically, we've turned ourselves into God by presupposing that we know what He wants without asking.

2. **There are better things I could be doing.** It's true that you could find more "productive" things to do in place of spending time building a relationship with God. There are even godly things you could do instead of devotions. Yes, in some seasons, God will call us to alter our devotional lives so we can do the work He's called us to do. Camp is a good example. That said, when we start telling ourselves that devotions are a waste of time, we've crossed a dangerous line. As I said before, Christianity cannot be an "all-work-no-guidance" religion. Furthermore, the above statement typically comes as a subtle whisper from the devil, which quickly morphs from "There are better things I could be doing than devotions" to "There are better things than faith."

Let's circle back to my point. **To serve God, we need to know His will.** It's the same when working at a worldly job. You need to know what the boss wants. When you're working in ministry, this is vastly more important. It frightens me to think that you could spend an entire summer at camp and get nothing out of it because you were leading yourself instead of letting God lead you.

I'm not here to enforce legalism in devotions. Nobody can force you to spend time with your friends or family either. If it matters, you'll do it regularly. Here's what it looks like for me when I'm at camp...

It's early in the morning. The sun is barely up, light is spilling through the gaps in the curtains, and my watch is vibrating, telling me to start another seventeen-hour day. I get up and quietly throw on pants and a sweater (so as not to wake the other guys in my room). I then step into the bathroom, blind myself with the motion-sensor fluorescents, and brush my teeth.

Now that I'm ready, I grab my WLF-branded bag and walk down the crunchy gravel path towards the lodge. Mist blankets the grass, and birds gently call each other from across the camp. I get to the lodge, head to my "spot", and spend time with God. To avoid distractions, I grab my laptop instead of a phone, and throw on quiet worship music.

I listen in prayer, asking God what He wants for me that day. I surrender my agenda, ask for His grace, and pray that His Spirit would work through me. I'll read Scripture, perhaps review a few verses I've memorized, and pull up my handy Excel sheet with camp prayer requests.

You won't find this specific pattern anywhere in the Bible, but it works for me. My challenge for you this summer is to establish a routine for devotions. And I haven't even touched on corporate devotions, like the camp worship nights, prayer summit, or small group times. If you want to experience Jesus on another level, get plugged in with a church or Christian organization. We were created to worship God together. That's the secret behind the power of camp worship times and chapels. God works through us when we work together.

Devotions don't make up the whole of Christianity. Just like an instruction manual or a one-on-one meeting with your boss doesn't make up the entirety of your job. The purpose of these things is to make sure you know who you're working for and why you're working for them. They give you clarity, wisdom, and direction. I couldn't imagine life without them, in my relationship with God and my life at work.

Practical Application.

I'll conclude with three suggestions for building a great devotional life. The best suggestion (by far) is to ask God what He wants you to do. Devotions aren't a game or a competition. Devotions are a means of connecting with God. We need to ask Him to give us the right motives for devotions. If we're trying to showboat our spirituality or compare ourselves with others who are "more mature", we've missed the point.

1. Get up (a little) earlier.

Surely there's a reason why nearly every spiritual leader you hear or read about gets up early to spend time with God. Meeting Him first thing sets the groundwork for everything to come. It won't be easy to retrain your body to enjoy getting up sooner, but I promise it pays off. Even if it docks a few points on your sleep score.

2. Pray before you begin.

I'm building a habit of beginning everything with prayer, even before I touch God's Word. I surrender my plans before Him, ask for His mercy to work in my life, and pray that I would know Him better through this time we have together.

3. Study God's Word.

I read God's Word daily. It's incredible. If you need inspiration on what a great devotional life looks like, read about the great men and women in Scripture. All of them were devoted to God in some way, and most spent regular time with Him.

Next week, we'll switch from an inner topic (devotions) to an outer topic (leadership). Leaders are shaped by their inner character more than their outer circumstances. Spiritual leaders are born through consistent time with the LORD. Devotions are the foundation upon which the house is built. Everything else comes from there.

Until next week, I'll leave you with Psalm 46:10... *"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."*



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