

Seven minutes with God

January 9, 2022 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

It being the new year, a lot of people are thinking about New Year's resolutions. And I know I'm a little late to the game here, but I'd like to propose to you this morning a resolution for the upcoming year that will not only make a big difference in your life, it will even improve the well-being of our church too. Sounds good right?

Are you ready for it? Read your Bible every day.

That's it. Nothing big or grandiose. Just spend time with God, every day.

Now, experts say that the best resolutions are measurable, quantifiable ones, so let's put some numbers on this. If you don't already have a daily habit of prayer and Bible time, I want to encourage you to spend seven minutes with God, every day. If you already do that, if you already do more than that, great, keep it up, but if prayer and Bible reading is not part of your daily routine, then I want to encourage you to set aside seven minutes with God, every day.

This 'seven minutes' idea comes from the Navigators, a little pamphlet by Bob Foster.¹ I want to spend this morning unpacking this little pamphlet laying out HOW to spend seven minutes with God every day and then we'll stop to think about why it's important to intentionally spend time with God every day.

So first, the HOW. Foster lays out a really simple, straightforward, and I would say comprehensive way to structure our daily time with God. I think that if I had written this pamphlet, this is probably the pamphlet I would have written. Because it just makes sense.

Foster gives us an outline for daily devotional time and it looks like this -

30 sec to pray for guidance, 4 minutes to read the Bible, 2:30 for prayer. That's it. 30 sec to pray for guidance, 4 minutes to read the Bible, 2:30 for prayer.

So the first step is to pray for guidance. When we sit down to read God's Word, we want to hear from Him and so we open our devotional time by asking Him to speak to us, to guide us in our reading.

Back in the Gospel of John, John 14:26, Jesus says that:

26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (Joh 14:26 NIV).

The Spirit is sent to the children of God to help them to remember and understand everything that God has said, and so it makes sense that when we sit down to read God's Word, we would ask the Holy Spirit in us – God Himself – to teach us as we read. To help us to understand and make sense of what we are reading, given our everyday realities.

It doesn't have to be fancy, just 'Help me, Lord, to understand what I am about to read. Keep my mind from drifting and help me to understand how this passage affects my life.'

Bob Foster suggests something like this - "Lord, cleanse my heart so You can speak to me through the Scriptures. Open my heart. Fill my heart. Make my mind alert, my soul active, and my heart responsive. Lord, surround me with Your presence during this time. Amen."

Just invite the Holy Spirit to teach you all things and draw you nearer to Jesus in your devotional time.

So that's 30 seconds and then we dig into God's Word for four minutes.

Open up the Bible and let God speak. This is unlike any other book that you will ever read, because unlike any other book you've ever read, this book's author is actively working in you as you read it, to teach you and to shape you and to feed your soul.

Does it matter what book of the Bible you read from? No, not really. The fact that you are reading the Bible is the most important thing, because God will speak through any and every portion of the Bible. He inspired it all.

In practical terms, if you've never had a daily devotional time, I'd suggest one of the NT letters. I'm pretty sure that the first books that I read when I started reading my Bible were Colossians, Philippians, maybe the Gospel of John because that's what the preface to my little children's Bible suggested. The only thing I would say, which is what the pamphlet says, is to read consecutively. Don't just open up the Bible at random, read for four minutes, shut it and then come back to another random passage the next day. Start at verse 1 of a book and read verse by verse through it.

And I like the way that Foster describes that reading - "Don't race, but avoid stopping to do a Bible study on some word, thought, or theological problem which presents itself. [Take your time but don't get entangled in it GG]. Read for the pure joy of reading and allowing God to speak - perhaps just twenty verses, or maybe a complete chapter."

That's good advice. I think when I started reading the Bible, I read a chapter at a time. It's a good chunk to work with. But I really appreciate Foster's encouragement just to enjoy it. This is the one authoritative place where we can learn who God is and hear from Him; we should read His Word like we would a letter from a friend or a parent, a treasured word from our Creator, Redeemer and Friend.

Now once we've heard from God in that four minutes of reading, it's time to respond. And that, by the way, is the basic dynamic between us and God - God speaks, we respond. That's why on Sundays, I unpack God's Word for you and then we respond in song, a sung prayer I've chosen as a way to help us to respond to what God has said in that day's Scripture passage.

Same here - read the Bible for four minutes, hear God's Word to us and then respond. Foster suggests the ACTS model for prayer time - Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication - but frankly, a lot of the time, I think that you will find that your time in the Bible will raise things that you'll want to talk about with God. Like some aspect of God's character you can pray thanking Him for being like that. Like some attitude that the text encourages us to have but we don't have - you can pray that God will nurture that in you. I know that my Bible is full of little notes where I've read something and thought 'I don't live up to that, but I want to' and so I've prayed that God would help me to grow in that area. I think that in a lot of cases, reading God's Word is going to give you things that you need to talk about with Him, so I would suggest using that last 2:30 to engage with Him.

Barring that though, you can always use the ACTS model – Adoration – a time to worship Him for who He is; confession – a time to admit where we’ve strayed from His good ways; thanksgiving – a time to appreciate what He has already done; and supplication – a time to make requests of God, asking Him to intervene in our lives, in our circumstances, in the world. 2:30 to pray in response.

And that closes out our devotional time. Seven minutes with God. 30 sec opening prayer, 4 minutes in the Word and 2 and a half responding. That time will fly.

And I agree with the pamphlet that this is just the beginning of the journey. Foster writes: “This is simply a guide. Very soon you will discover that it is impossible to spend only seven minutes with the Lord. An amazing thing happens — seven minutes become twenty, and it’s not long before you’re spending thirty precious minutes with Him.”

This is a good place to start and for sure, quality over quantity here. And you’ll find too that this is stretch and shrink through seasons of life. Sometimes you’ll be half an hour, sometimes seven minutes is all you’ll get, but the most important thing is that you are setting aside time every day to have quality time with the Lord.

(Now just a quick aside – where do other devotional materials like ‘Our Daily Bread’ fit in? I would say this – start with that – let that first one page reading prepare your mind for prayer and then start into this seven minute outline. Don’t replace Bible reading with devotional book reading; that would be like trading fast food in for a home cooked meal. Make the Bible your main course and treat other devotionals as an appetizer).

So that’s a method for having daily devotional time with God; why is it important? We’re busy people, we do a lot of important things; why is it important for us to carve out time to spend with God on a daily basis?

Let me give you two answers – one personal and one corporate.

The first one is personal. Why should I carve out time to spend with God? It’s the only way you’ll grow in relationship with Him. Bob Foster is right – “To know God, it is necessary to spend consistent time with Him.”

Now it’s true that we can see God in Creation, we can see Him in our circumstances, but unless we’re learning what He’s like through His Word, we’re not going to recognize Him there. We need to learn who God is in the Word so that we can see Him at work in the world. We need to have our mind shaped by the details of Scripture so that we can walk in good and God-honouring ways. It does no good to say ‘I believe God is like *this*’ without reference to who He’s told us He is in the Bible; do that and you’re just going to build your own little god that suits your needs and fancies, who is not the real God and is no real help in the end.

If we want to grow in relationship with God, whose love is unending and goodness relentless, then we need to spend time with Him daily, listening to Him, becoming more like Him. His way leads to life and He intends to work through us to make a difference in the world; that only happens as we grow in our knowledge of Him and His purposes. And so time spent with Him is vital. Even if it’s seven minutes. Invest that time because He is worth it.

So first, have daily devotional time for your own spiritual wellbeing, but second, have daily devotional time for the well-being of the church.

I truly believe that the spiritual health of a church is dependent upon the spiritual health of its people. A lot of churches have this attitude that ‘the pastor is the holy one and he reads the Bible and we just show up on Sundays’ but that’s not the Church in the Bible. The Church in the Bible is a group of believers actively pursuing the Lord in their daily lives coming together to pursue the Lord on a Sunday.

And it’s as you’re listening to God speak through His Word and responding in prayer and obedience that we will grow as a church. Churches don’t grow because the pastor came up with a great program; churches grow because people are listening to God and learning from God and being moved by God to play their part in the Kingdom of God, whether it be praying for someone, inviting them to church, sharing the Gospel or even beginning a new ministry.

As you spend time growing in relationship with God and in the knowledge of His good purposes for you, we as a church benefit from your growth. We get better because *you* are getting better. And when we all do that together, we grow more and more into the church that God has made us to be, accomplishing the purposes that God has for us to accomplish. A church that wants the pastor to do all the spiritual stuff only has one person advancing the mission; a church where everyone is actively pursuing God, there’s no stopping a church like that.

So spend time with God for your own spiritual health and for the wellbeing of the church.

In closing, I want to quote this pamphlet one last time, because it captures in a really meaningful way the importance of daily time spent with God. It says – “The intimacy of communion with Christ must be recaptured in the morning quiet time. Call it what you want — the quiet time, personal devotions, the morning watch, or individual worship — these holy minutes at the start of each day explain the inner secret of Christianity. It’s the golden thread that ties every great man and woman of God together — from Moses to Corrie Ten Boom, the prophet Amos to Billy Graham — rich and poor, business people and military personnel. Every person who ever became somebody for God has this at the core of their priorities: time alone with God!”

Let that be your resolution in the year ahead – to spend time alone with the Lord. Let’s join with the great crowd of witnesses to invest in our relationships with God.

BENEDICTION

Col. 3:16-17 - Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

ⁱ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from Robert Foster’s *Seven minutes with God*, https://www.usna.edu/Navigators/_files/documents/7minwithgod.pdf.