



SEVEN INGREDIENTS FOR AN ONGOING DEVOTIONAL LIFE

- ***TIME***
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- ***READING THROUGH the ENTIRE BIBLE***
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SEVEN INGREDIENTS NECESSARY FOR AN ONGOING DEVOTIONAL LIFE

“The Psalmist David said, “One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, And to inquire in His temple. For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion: In the secret place of His tabernacle, He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a Rock”. (*Psalm 27:4, 5, NKJV*)

INTRODUCTION

Darrell Royal, a very successful football coach for the University of Texas, of the late 20th century said, “Many football teams are as talented as others, yet they all do not win big games. Why is this so? This is because some teams are short on desire, while winning teams are propelled by desire.”

I have noticed many people often struggle with this thing that we call a “Devotional Life”. Most of us pray fervently for a while then somehow we become side tracked and stop praying, except when necessary. We all can get discouraged at times, regarding this thing called prayer.

How then, do you succeed and stay focused on devoting your affections toward God on an ongoing basis? What do you do to enrich your prayer life? Do you sometimes feel frustrated, guilty and often belittle yourself for not praying? I too have felt the same painful disappointments in my personal devotion to Jesus, my Lord. However, I slowly discovered that belittling myself only complicates and compounds the problem. Therefore, my advice to you is this; do not put yourself down for not praying. That will surely defeat your purpose.

Instead, encourage your heart regarding prayer, tell yourself that you can succeed, and ask the Holy Spirit to assist you in prayer. Then you can succeed, because Jesus Christ calls you to prayer and what He calls you to do, He empowers and equips you to do.

In 1980, I attended a Change the World School of Prayer at Bethel Friends Church, Poland, Ohio. Fifteen members of my church in Youngstown, Ohio attended the seminar with me. This was a life changing experience for me and I have never been the same since that event. I also attended two sessions of Larry Lea’s Prayer Seminar. Out of the seminars, plus the practical experience I have received through praying, I have developed my own plan of prayer strategy. As you pray, the Holy Spirit will guide you to develop a plan of your own.

As a follower of Jesus, you are called to a holy life; a holy life can only be kept by an ongoing prayer life. I pray that this teaching will prompt you to begin, or to expand your prayer ministry with Jesus.

Through experience, I have discovered **SEVEN INGREDIENTS NECESSARY FOR AN ONGOING DEVOTIONAL LIFE**. When practiced on a regular basis, these SEVEN INGREDIENTS will keep you active in prayer. Let us begin our study of this wonderful subject, with lesson or ingredient one.

FIRST INGREDIENT

TIME

You must set aside a specific time to pray every day. It can be morning, noon or evening, but it needs to be a set time that you plan to keep. After choosing the time, you must hold tenaciously to it, because many things will work against you to keep you from keeping this daily appointment. All sorts of good things will seek to take this time, but resist them all, with an emphatic “NO”. If, however, you should miss a day with the Lord in prayer, and surely this will happen, come right back to it the next day. Try not to allow more than one day go without your devotion time with Jesus. There will be disruptions in your schedule, friends will drop by, the telephone will ring, and often lack of desire will attack your prayer life. Through such circumstances, you will quickly learn that the enemy of our soul does not like to see us spending time with our Heavenly Father. Often the attacks will last for several days or sometimes even weeks, but do not become discouraged, keep praying in spite of opposition, in time you will have a breakthrough.

Allow your time with God to become a holy, sacred and joyous meeting; allow it to become a holy habit. Habits, we have been told are all bad, however; that is not so, for if a habit leads you to spend time with the Lord, daily, it then becomes a good habit. Look upon your time with God as a wonderful treasure that you share with the great God of the universe, who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We all have daily habits of sleep and rest, eating, exercise, work, family time, entertainment time, hygienic time, and leisure time. We would not think of giving these times up or of substituting them. Therefore, we should also make the habit of holy times; all time is sacred to the believer in Jesus. Daily time alone with him in His Word and in conversation with Him is exhilarating beyond words.

The story is told Susanna Wesley, mother of John and Charles, that as the mother of seventeen children, she took time to give each child one-hour of Christian instruction each week. In addition to this, she spent one hour each day in private devotion to hear her Lord. What makes the story so challenging is the fact that she raised all seventeen children in a very small house. There was virtually no privacy in the house, but Susanna was not deterred. When the hour arrived for her daily devotion time, she would instruct the children to be quiet, as she sat in a chair and pulled her apron over her face, and prayed to her Lord for one hour. Dare we say we have no time, place, or atmosphere in which to pray, I think not. Let us follow the example of Susanna Wesley in returning to private devotions to Jesus Christ.

Ralph Spaulding Cushman, the author of A Pocket Prayer Book, indicated that “if we want to know God through Jesus Christ, we must have the will to worship God.” He went on to say that we must develop holy habits of prayer, of times daily to meet with God, in order to know Him. Therefore, I challenge you to block out a time slot for prayer and keep our appointment with God each day. In a few weeks, months and years, you will be so glad that you learned to put God first in your life. You will begin to know, people around will begin to know, and even strangers will begin to sense God’s presence in your life, as you practice meeting with Him daily.

(Part one of a seven-part teaching)

SECOND INGREDIENT

SUCCESS

Set your will to succeed in daily devotions. You need to make a commitment to succeed in prayer. Begin to promise yourself that you will succeed in this adventure of prayer. Begin by believing that you will succeed, allow no defeatist thought to enter your mind. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a faithful heart regarding prayer. Ask Him for confidence to believe that you will become a successful and faithful devotee to Jesus.

You need to become as determined as the Olympians who rigorously trained for the summer Olympics in Sydney, Australia. They trained for hours on end daily, pushing themselves to succeed. They set their wills that they would place in the Sydney games.

Your will is the key to your success as a devotee to Jesus. You must will to succeed to Jesus, to know Jesus, to bless the lost and wayward and to advance the kingdom of God, in order to succeed in daily communion with God.

Jesus told his disciples, "I came to do my Father's will." He came to earth to do the will of His Father, not His own will. You must know that setting your will, to do God's will, is most important. Your will sets the course for your life, therefore, set your will to do His will.

Desiring to commune with our Father God is the natural development from your will to seeking His will. Did not our Lord say to the disciples, "But seek you first, the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you." (*Matthew 6:33 NKJV*)

In this familiar passage of scripture, our Lord is saying, that as we seek him, his will and his righteousness, everything that we need in life will be added to us. I challenge you to hear the testimony of great Christians from the past and the testimony of great Christians of our day. In so doing, you will find that they all made a definite commitment to devote to Jesus every day.

By setting your will to devote to do God's will, you have successfully begun your adventure of prayer. You have said to Jesus Christ, "I am committed to meet you daily, for spiritual food from your word, conversation with you through prayer, direction for my life, to receive your wisdom and guidance and to worship you." You have said, "My relationship with you is built upon commitment, not my emotions, or how I might feel about you on any given day." The reason commitment to success is so important is because many days you won't feel like devotions. Commitment will keep you on the job with Jesus, whereas emotion, many times, will let you down.

Make your commitment today to succeed in daily devotions to Jesus

(Part two of a seven-part teaching)

THIRD INGREDIENT

PLACE

As you study the Scripture concerning prayer, you will discover that people of prayer have special places of prayer. The more you pray in that special place, the more hallowed that place becomes. The story is told of John Wesley's horse being so anointed that stable hands would fall under the power of conviction just from leading the horse to his stall. Why was this so? Because Wesley was a man of prayer, a man who prayed constantly.

Scripture is replete with examples of Bible characters who had blessedly wonderful places of prayer. Let us look at some of these wonderful people of prayer to learn where they prayed and how these places became hallowed.

Our beautiful Lord Jesus had His own Garden of Gethsemane where He prayed when He was about to face the cross. I choose to believe that the Garden was our Lord's favorite place to pray. It was where He retreated when He wanted to spend time with His Father. Could Gethsemane be the place He went to? (referred to in *Mark 1:35*) Is it possible that Judas Iscariot knew where to find Jesus because He prayed so often in the Garden? I would say that it is plausible that Judas knew this because he had seen Jesus go into the Garden quite often to pray.

I used to lead my church during a 6:00 A.M., one-hour corporate time of prayer. After about one year of prayer at this time in the sanctuary where we met, I could open up the church sanctuary doors and sense the sacred presence of my Lord. I would do this each day, and it was a special moment, as if Jesus was standing there saying to me, "I'm here, come in and let us commune for a while!" Those were sacred moments, early in the morning, in the presence of my Lord. Such experiences with Jesus in prayer lifted my spirit, fed my soul, encouraged my heart, gave me direction for the day, empowered my witness, and tilled my life with the peace of God. Have you experienced the joy of a hallowed place of prayer, where you habitually encounter His presence? I pray that you will make such a discovery.

John, the beloved disciple, had a special place of prayer: it was the island of Patmos. His was a forced place, as he was a prisoner there; nevertheless it was a hallowed place. On the island of Patmos, John received the Revelation of Saint John the Divine, all twenty-two chapters. There is something so wonderful about meeting Jesus daily, in a particular place. Why not seek out such a place for yourself? You will be so glad that you did.

The place becomes hallowed by the daily visits of Jesus with His people, who meet Him in prayer. When I was a child in Sunday School, I learned the children's chorus, "Every Day with Jesus is Sweeter than the Day Before." The more you pray in your special place, the sweeter and more sacred it becomes. Truly every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before.

John Bunyan prayed in Bedford Prison in England. He could have complained, become bitter, or gone into depression, but instead he sought a life of prayer. Out of his rich prayer life, came the classic book, "The Pilgrim's Progress", which will always be a Christian classic.

Moses prayed for forty days during a total fast, at the end of which God gave him the Ten Commandments. Can you imagine the sacredness of those forty days alone with no one but God? Praying people, praying in the same place over an extended period of time, have special encounters

with God. Moses encountered God face-to-face; this was his reward for spending time with the Father God.

Would you like special encounters with God? Then spend special time with Him in your special place over an extended period of time. Do this, and then watch as the Lord reveals Himself to you in wonderful and life-changing ways.

Hebrew Rabbis have a special place with God anywhere they go. As a matter of fact, they are able to carry their place with them: it is their prayer shawls. When a Rabbi wants to pray, he simply puts his shawl over his head and begins to pray. Now you might say, "But this is New Testament times. Such a thing is outdated since it goes back to a period before the coming of Christ." I remind you then that Christ would have used His prayer shawl to pray while He was here on earth on many occasions, as a good Jewish teacher would have done. And Jesus was the greatest person of prayer the world has ever known.

Dick Eastman, president of Every Home Crusade, has a Prayer House in his backyard in California. Every morning he spends two hours alone there with Jesus. Mr. Eastman has prayed, taught others to pray, led seminars on how to pray, and led conferences on prayer all over the world. All of this is possible because of his daily "Hour That Changes the World." Do you want to know God, share in His purposes in the world, worship Him, and bless others? Then find a place of prayer and frequent that Holy place. You will be amazed at the power that comes from such a sacred place as you daily encounter Jesus there.

Since attending Dick Eastman's School of Prayer while pastoring in Boardman, Ohio in 1980, I have had a consistent time with God every day. During these last twenty years, I have had several special places of prayer. In the late 1980's that place was the right end of a Duncan Fife sofa, in the library room of the basement in our home. It was also the sanctuary of the Market Street Baptist Church in Boardman. In the early 1980's it was the swing on the wrap-around porch of our beautiful farm in Jewett, Ohio. And from the mid 1990's to this present day, my sacred place has been my office at the back of my house in Houston, Texas.

I cannot tell you all the joys that have come to me as a result of finding and keeping a place of prayer with my Lord Jesus Christ each and every day. When I go into my office there is a wondrous peace that welcomes me there. It is as if Jesus is physically present and is inviting me to come in, saying, "Come, I have been expecting you."

Do you have a special place of prayer? Is the Holy Spirit prompting you to search for such a place? I challenge you to begin asking Jesus to show you where He would like to meet with you each day for Holy and Sacred Communion. He made you for fellowship with Himself, He loves you with and everlasting love, and He longs to commune with you. Will you allow yourself that wonderful privilege, accepting the call of the great God of heaven, our Lord Jesus Christ, to come apart and commune with Him daily, in a special rendezvous place? When you do, you will become more and more like Him daily, and in so doing, you will find your place with God.

(Part three of a seven-part teaching)

FOURTH INGREDIENT

TOOLS

The computer programmer would never go to his office without his computer. The football player would never enter the playing field without his pads, helmet, and uniform. The airline stewardess would never think of boarding her flight without her travel kit and travel bag. The carpenter would never leave home without his hammer, rule, saw, ladder, and plumb line.

Yet many of us spiritual leaders show up at the place of prayer without thought of bringing tools with us. We glibly believe the Lord will suddenly drop down the tools from heaven that we need. Do you remember the apostle Paul admonished young Timothy to study in order to be approved of God? God has already done His part, now you need to do yours.

To become an effective prayer you must plan to use the tools of your trade. Christianity is thinking man's religion. Since it is, we need to put on our thinking cap and use it. Think, plan, prepare, and utilize the tools that the Holy Spirit gives you.

These are tools, which I have found to be useful in my daily prayer experience:

- The Holy Scriptures are indispensable for my devotional life. Eva, my wife, and I have read through the Bible annually for the past eighteen years. I cannot adequately tell you all that this discipline has meant to us. Always take the Word of God with you into your prayer chamber.
- Have a hymn book, CD, cassette or chorus book with you. As praise and worship arise in your soul, use your tools at hand to enhance this adoration of our Lord. Learn to sing unto the Lord and bow down before Him.
- I have also found prayer books helpful in focusing upon God. My favorite is "A Pocket Prayer Book" by Ralph Spaulding Cushman, published by The Upper Room. There are many good prayer books readily available at most Christian bookstores. These written prayers, poems, selected scriptures and inspirations, will only lead you along closer to your Lord and Savior. Use them, you will be glad that you did, and you will be blessed. (Other devotional books that have blessed my prayer experience are "Streams in the Desert", "My Utmost for His Highest", "Morning and Evening Devotions" by Charles Haddon Spurgeon, "God's Best Secrets", by Andrew Murray)
- A magic marker can be useful in underlining scripture, prayer items in magazines, or notes from devotional reading. So have one close by at all times.
- A prayer journal should be used to record what the Holy Spirit speaks to you in your prayer closet. I have been journaling since 1987. The messages that I receive become a pathway for me to follow my Lord. At the end of the year I do a resume' of the year's journal. It is both directional and inspirational to see how many times the Holy Spirit speaks regarding the same subject.

- Maps can be helpful in praying over the world, your country, state, county, city or precinct. I have found that the more specific I am in prayer, the more specific the answer will be. Maps keep your prayers specific.
- A list of the governmental leadership of your country is helpful when you pray. We should regularly be praying for national, state, county and city officials. Learn to pray for those in authority over you.

We should pray, by name, for those in spiritual authority over us. We should pray for our pastor, elders, deacons, worship team members, men's ministry leaders, ladies ministry leaders, youth workers, children's workers, nursery workers, and building and grounds workers as well as others the Holy Spirit inspires you to pray for.

We must pray for missionaries by name, unsaved friends by name, and other people, events, regions and needs as the Holy Spirit directs us.

Are you beginning to understand the tremendous value of using scriptural tools in your prayer closet experience? God has given us creative tools to use in sitting at His feet, let us use them to His glory and for our good.

(Part four of a seven-part teaching)

FIFTH INGREDIENT
DEVELOP A PLAN FOR READING THROUGH THE ENTIRE BIBLE

Develop a plan for reading through the entire Bible on a regular basis. It is pathetic the ignorance that is found among some Christians regarding basic fundamentals of the Holy Scriptures. What causes this void of Biblical knowledge? I believe that our ignorance is predicated upon our slothfulness in reading through the entire canon of scripture. Instead, we pick and choose our “sugar sticks” of truth to the exclusion of the vast reservoir of truth as revealed in all of scripture. Let us return to reading and studying the entire canon of scripture, not just the sections that we like.

I challenge you to ask the Holy Spirit to give you a plan of action that will lead you to read the entire Biblical record on a recurring basis. You will be amazed at what you learn and how it impacts your life and ministry. Here are some plans that have proven to be effective for many:

- The One-Year Bible, which arranges scripture readings for each day of the year, is one such plan. With this plan you read an Old Testament passage, a Psalm, a portion of the Proverbs and a New Testament passage. This divides the word of God into bite size pieces by which our mind can readily assimilate.
- Bible Pathways Ministries has a good plan by which the reader reads Holy Scripture from Genesis, chapter one, through Revelation, chapter 22. I have used this plan to great profit for many years and have been greatly blessed, challenged and enriched.
- The American Bible Society has a good plan of reading through the Word of God. The International Bible Society has a good plan also. Local Christian bookstores usually have plans available upon request. Groups like Campus Crusade for Christ, Promise Keepers, the Navigators, as well as most denominational headquarters have plans available upon request.

I encourage you to get a plan in place and then work the plan. Plan your devotional reading of the Word of God; do not just aimlessly and randomly read. Now that you have selected a plan, use it. As you read, read with the purpose of meeting God afresh, not just to fulfill an obligation. Never read just to find sermons or Bible studies, but read to find God, through Christ our Lord.

Do you have a plan of Bible reading? Do not live without one, you will not accomplish much without a plan of reading through the entire Bible. I CHALLENGE YOU TO READ, DEVOTIONALLY, THE ENTIRE CANNON OF SCRIPTURE, ON A REGULAR BASIS. You will be glad that you did.

(Part five of a seven-part teaching)

SIXTH INGREDIENT

VARIETY

THIS IS A MUST IN A ONGOING DEVOTIONAL LIFE

Any activity done by rote with never a change soon becomes boring. Therefore, many Christians start out well in a Devotional Life, yet after getting started they become bored with the process. Why is this the outcome? Many times people become bored with the process because they have no variation in their time with the Lord.

I have found the following to be very helpful in providing variety in my devotional life. I find that singing unto the Lord is very beneficial. Try reading the word of God as a prayer, either back to Him or for someone you know. Learn the power, peace and refreshment of quietness before God. Learn to listen for the voice of God by talking less and listening more. Prayer is a two-way experience, not merely a monologue.

Try kneeling when you pray. Try standing when you pray. Learn to walk and pray. Try dancing unto the Lord as you pray. Fast and pray. Walk a beach and pray. Walk a mountain trail and pray. Walk in a park and pray. Go on a prayer retreat from time to time. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a variety in your prayer life. Try fasting from time to time to enrich your prayer life. Learn the value of having a prayer partner. Discover the power of corporate prayer.

Prayer is a discipline to be learned but please do not allow prayer to become routine, mundane, trite or boring. Prayer after all is talking with our great God from heaven. Do we not all think that this is a privilege to be enjoyed constantly? Do not allow Satan to rob you of this joy by causing prayer time to become entrenched in tradition. Instead, allow prayer to rise from your heart in variety, multiplicity and enthusiasm.

Allow variety in prayer to be the norm, not the exception. As you do this, you will find God meeting you in infinite and manifold expressions. Prayer can be down-right exhilarating. Try variety, you will like it.

(Part six of a seven-part teaching)

SEVENTH INGREDIENT
KEEPING GOOD RECORDS OF YOUR PRAYER LIFE

Keeping good records of your prayer life keeps your prayers focused. It also reduces ambiguity in prayer. I learned many years ago to make a prayer journal. I cannot over emphasize how this has enriched prayer for me. I can go back as far as 1987 and reread what God showed me through prayer. How rich this has been to me. Never destroy your prayer journals. After you are finished with them move them to a data base to keep permanently. Someday your journal will become a treasured possession of your children, grandchildren and friends.

At the end of each year I review my journal, highlight recurring words and gain rich insight into the Holy Spirit's work in my life, family, marriage, ministry and the world. Has not our God said, "Ask of me and I will give you the nations for your inheritance?" (*Psalm 2:8 NKJV*) When you ask Him for the nations you are asking for specific people, language groups, races, ethnic groups and religious groups. The more specific your prayer request, the more specific will be God's answer to you.

Scripture commands us to know the condition of our flocks and herds at all times. (*Proverbs 27:23 NKJV*) Why then are we so nebulous in our prayer life? Keeping prayer records keeps prayer on track.

Since 1980 prayer has been the joy and rejoicing of my heart. I have not prayed every day. There have been circumstances and emergencies that have kept me from my prayer chamber. But just as soon as I could, I returned to prayer without condemning myself.

My life has been enriched, widened, deepened, expanded and lifted through prayer. I have seen thousands of answers to prayer. Martin Luther said, "Prayer is the breath of the soul." Every born again person longs to commune with his Lord and Savior. Yet few enjoy an ongoing successful prayer life. I pray that because of this study your life will be strengthened. May the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ bless you as you press into Him seeking His face daily in prayer; this is my prayer for you today and every day.

(Part seven of a seven-part teaching)