



daily time with God

the MINISTRY PAPERS

“bible facts...”

How are you on your Bible facts? You know, interesting facts about the Bible...

Did you know the Bible was the first book ever printed? In 1454 it was the first thing off Gutenberg's press. Did you know the first ever voice radio broadcast on December 24, 1906 was a reading from the Bible? Luke 2 on Christmas Eve was a nice choice.

You may know that the Bible's the best selling book of all time. But did you know that it's also the most stolen? You might know it's been translated into lots of languages but did you know the count's now over 1200? You might know that the Bible's divided into chapters but did you know that was only first done in 1228, and the verse divisions in 1551?

You might know it takes a while to read through the whole Bible, but did you know that about seventy hours does it? You might know that the Bible's got some long names in it, but did you know the longest is Maher-shalal-hashbaz?

There's all sorts of Bible facts you can reel off, and I reckon it's pretty interesting stuff. But the Bible fact I find most interesting of all, is this: lots of people believe the Bible is the Word of God, but don't actually read it all that much. You can throw alongside that a 'prayer' fact: lots of people believe prayer is powerful but rarely pray.

The reality is, lots of us struggle to spend a daily time with God in the Bible and prayer. The key thing isn't to wallow in guilt about it. This paper is about a fresh look at why a daily time with God is important. It also offers some practical ideas to get you started. Better still, it throws in some ideas about accountability to keep you going and keep you growing.

LEADERS:...before taking someone through this paper, review the two key introductory MINISTRY PAPERS: 'the ministry training church' and 'meeting one to one'.

Connect. Grow. Serve. After **connecting** to God through trusting in Christ, a vital way we can **grow** is through a growth group and a vital way we can **serve** is through a ministry team.

This MINISTRY PAPER is designed to help your growth group leader encourage you to spend a daily time with God in Bible reading and prayer.



key verse

“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”

Colossians 2:6-7



investigate

Stop and think. Read the verses again. What do they mean?

read **Colossians 1:28-2:15**

look at the verses in their context...
and answer the questions below:

1. What is Paul's goal for every Christian? (1:28)

2. What is a real danger for every Christian? (2:4)?

3. What will be the key to facing this danger? (2:6-7)

4. Why is Christ the key to knowing God? (2:9)

5. How does the cross mock any other way of knowing God? (2:15)

6. Paul's main concern for us is that we continue as we started: with a simple, total focus on Christ. Why are we tempted to make it more complicated?



think & apply

the bible: listening to God

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. **2 Timothy 3:15-17**



1. What is able to make us wise for salvation?

2. Where does Scripture come from?

3. What is Scripture useful for?

4. Does the Bible only *partially* equip us to live out our salvation? Why/why not?

5. Does the Bible only equip us for *some* good works? Why/why not?



6. What part, then, should the Bible play in our lives?

7. Given all that God promises here about his Word, the Bible, why do people go looking for other ways of listening to God?

8. What practical constraints are there to you reading the Bible each day? How can you overcome these?



family/household time with God...

Paul talks about Timothy's 'infancy' in the verses above. We gain insight into his infancy earlier in ch1 vs5. What a great thing when children grow up with the Scriptures! While the main focus of this paper is our own personal daily time with God, we should remember also the importance also of reading the Bible together at home. In your family/household situation, consider how the Bible can play more of a part in your life together.

communication is the key

Often when you hear people talking about a relationship problem, the real issue is a communication problem. We know it well: a healthy relationship grows through healthy communication. We probably don't think about this enough, but the same applies in our relationship with God. A healthy relationship with God means healthy communication. Growing in our relationship with him means growing in our communication with him.

Our relationship with God actually started with good communication. First, we heard the word of God, the gospel. God spoke to us: "I'm offering you forgiveness through my Son's death...". We listened to God speak in his Word (perhaps spoken through a friend or a preacher). Then we responded with our words, we prayed: "sorry, please forgive me, thank you, help me to now live with Jesus as Lord".

Problem is, if there hasn't been a lot of communication since then, there won't be much growing either. We were called in Col 2:6-7 to grow in Christ 'just as you received' him as Lord. That applies strongly to the idea of a daily time with God. It really calls for a regular pattern of reading the Bible and praying. It's not just some religious idea. It's a relationship. It's keeping the conversation going that we started when we first became a Christian.

But there's another important thing to remember. Since we received Christ Jesus 'as Lord', this is no mere chat. It's not a conversation between equals. He sets the agenda for our communication. That's why reading the Bible comes first. Listen to him. Listen expecting to be challenged: Jesus is Lord! Listen, then pray in response. Pray knowing that you're talking about the things God says matter most, rather than us dominating the conversation. He will listen to us, but first we should listen to him.



prayer: talking to God

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. **Philippians 4:4-7**

getting started

time and place

Morning might be best. It shows the priority of meeting with God, committing the day to him. Your mind is probably less cluttered. If morning is difficult (e.g. getting the kids off to school), try mid-morning or your lunchbreak. You might have to experiment, but find the time that works best and stick to it.

how long?

Be realistic: start with 15 minutes and let it grow. Be focused: don't watch the clock! Be expectant: you're meeting with God! Aim for quality not just quantity.

the right resources

A Bible: with good size print, and in an easy translation (e.g. NIV). A notebook: for insights and prayer points. A Bible reading plan: (see some suggestions over page).

a model to begin with:

Relax: slow down and focus on what you're doing & pray. Ask God to help you understand his Word and that his Spirit would help you respond in obedience and faith. Remember, this is unlike any other reading—you're listening to God! Read: read the Bible passage. Often it helps to re-read it, so don't aim to cover too much.

Reflect: think about what it means. Look for a key verse. What's the flow of thought? What's the main idea, encouragement, challenge? What does it tell you about Christ and living with him as Lord?

Record: write notes about what you've learnt & how it applies to you. Don't rush this part of it. The more you think here, the more meaningful your prayer will be...

Request (pray): praise, confess, thank. Bring your requests to God.

praying Scripture

We need to pray the Bible. Turn what you've read in the Bible today and noted down as you reads into a prayer. Now you're having a conversation with God! You can be confident you're praying about what matters.



1. What are we to be anxious about?

2. What are we to pray about?

3. As we pray about everything, what attitude should we have?

4. What is (and isn't) promised as the answer to our prayers?

5. Why are prayer and anxiety opposites?

6. How might this help us understand why we often don't turn to God in prayer?

7. We are told to pray with thanksgiving. Outside of the worries of the day, what timeless truths can keep us thankful?

8. How might this thankfulness for Christ (and an eternal perspective on life) be the key to the peace that is promised?



pray for others, pray your day...

When we pray, it's easy to be dominated by our own concerns that flood our head. And Paul certainly encourages us to bring those things to God. However, what strikes you about Paul's own prayers in his letters is how he's always looking beyond himself, praying for others (e.g. Phil 1:9-11). That's a challenge for us. Try 'praying your day'. Think about the people you'll see today and watch for how you can be used by God in their lives through what you do and say.

useful resources

There are lots of useful resources around to help get you started and keep you going with your daily time with God. What's best for you can depend on your circumstances so it's worth trying some different approaches. Most importantly, as we'll see, one of the best resources God has given us is each other.



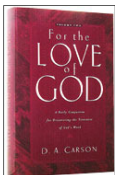
getting started

'Short steps for long gains' from Matthias Media is a great way to get started in a daily time with God. It consists of 26 short Bible studies (starting with A for Assurance and finishing with Z for zeal), each one based on a Bible verse, with half a dozen questions to stimulate encouraging conversation and prayer. It's designed to do with a friend but is excellent also for personal use. That said, if you're struggling to get going with a daily time with God, doing something simple like this with a friend (perhaps someone from your growth group), might be just the thing to help you get started. There's a family edition too.



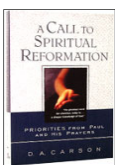
keeping going

The booklet mentioned above and other resources like it are great to get started. But there's a time to go a bit deeper. The problem with lots of daily bible notes commonly available is that they jump around the Bible a lot. They're helpful to a point, but to really get into the Bible it's best to work through whole books over time. Topical notes won't stretch you the way working through a book of the Bible does—both in knowing Christ better, and in the sustained personal challenge that also brings. The Briefing, also from Matthias Media, has a useful section called 'Bible Briefs' which gives you a few simple questions each day to help you work through a book of the Bible. The Briefing also has lots of useful articles to help you grow in thinking biblically about the issues going on in the world, our churches, and our lives.



digging deeper

When you're established in daily Bible reading patterns, it's worth taking on the challenge of reading through the whole Bible. Or if you've done that before, doing it again! In 'For the Love of God' Don Carson has reworked the classic Robert Murray McCheyne Bible reading system for easier use, guiding you through the New Testament and Psalms twice, and the Old Testament once in the course of 365 days. This excellent resource includes one-page expositions and devotional comments for each day.



praying the Bible

This paper has focused on the idea of 'praying the Bible' - striking up a conversation with God by listening to him in the Bible and praying in response to what you read. Taking this idea further, we can learn how to pray through studying the prayers we find in the Bible. That's what this book, also by Don Carson, 'A Call to Spiritual Reformation: priorities from Paul and his prayers' is all about. It's a call to a deeper prayer experience based on Scripture. From Paul's "school of prayer", he especially focuses on how Paul prays for others to know Christ better.



a prayer diary

for all the great resources out there... it's worth putting in some effort to bring together some resources of your own. Especially when it comes to prayer, and the people you want to pray for. Sometimes there are so many people to pray for we end up not praying regularly for any of them. A prayer diary can be a great help here:

1. make separate lists of prayer points under some major headings: Personal, Family, Church, Friends, Evangelistic Contacts, Missionary Work.
2. spread the points from each list across your prayer spots for the week. This will bring variety to each prayer time and consistency to your overall prayer life.
3. have a space on the page where you can add current points.
4. review the list every month.



through the Bible in a year

see the 'one year bible reading plan' ministry paper resource.

growth groups and accountability

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" Hebrews 10:24-25

The table below shows a number of key goals that our growth groups are aiming for as we seek to encourage each other. It's all about relationships. The growth group is a context in which we can be accountable for all the important relationships in our lives.

Of course, the one relationship that's key to all other relationships is our relationship with God. Yet in turn, it's our relationships in our growth group that encourage us in our relationship with God. Specifically, it's where we can keep each other accountable about growing a daily time with God. It should be an essential part of what we pray for and encourage each other in. This accountability might just make the difference to keep us going...



a growing relationship with God, especially through personal Bible reading and prayer
growing relationships with other believers, especially through the growth group
growing relationships with those in their family/household, as servants
growing relationships with unbelievers, especially through personal evangelism
growing relationships with the whole church in mission, serving in a ministry team