

# *Spiritual Disciplines*

## Spiritual Disciplines

by Carolyn Mahaney

For today, Kathy emailed us and asked, "what do your times with the Lord look like, particularly since you each represent different seasons of life?"

Over the next few days each of us will post our personal practice of the spiritual disciplines. However we thought it might be helpful to first post some helpful, practical thoughts about the spiritual disciplines from one of our favorite authors, John Piper.

Dr. Piper says: "Many good things do not happen in our lives for the simple lack of planning.... Most Christians neglect their Bibles not out of conscious disloyalty to Jesus, but because of failure to plan a *time* and *place* and *method* to read it" (emphasis added).

### **Regarding *time*:**

"I earnestly recommend that it be in the early morning, unless there are some extenuating circumstances. Entering the day without a serious meeting with God, over his Word and in prayer, is like entering the battle without tending to your weapons. It's like taking a trip without filling the tires with air or the tank with gas. The human heart does not replenish itself with sleep. The body does, but not the heart. The spiritual air leaks from our tires, and the gas is consumed in the day. We replenish our hearts not with sleep, but with the Word of God and prayer."

### **Regarding *place*:**

"Pick a place of seclusion.... It needs to be secluded so that you are not distracted, and so that you can speak out loud and sing and cry. If your family situation or home does not have such a place, then create it, not by space, but by rule.... One saintly mother with a large brood of children would use her apron to make a tent for her head and her Bible at the kitchen table and the children were taught, when mother is in her tent, make no noise."

### **Regarding *method*:**

"There are many ways to read the Bible. Any is better than none. Coming to the appointed place and time with no plan for how to read the Bible usually results in a hit-and-miss approach that leave you feeling weak, unreal, and discouraged. For many years I have read through the Bible once each year following 'The Discipleship Journal Bible Reading Plan'.... The design is to read daily from two Old Testament and two New Testament books. I find this variety helpful. Others don't, and would rather use some other approach. That's fine."

As Dr. Piper indicated, there are many methods for prayer and Bible reading, and so please keep this in mind as we post for the next several days. There is no one "right" way to do the spiritual disciplines, and we certainly don't think our way is the best. However, our hope is that you are freshly inspired to pursue the spiritual disciplines on a daily basis.

All quotes taken from John Piper, *When I Don't Desire God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 115-117.

## Our First Great Business

by Nicole Whitacre

Here's one of my favorite quotes about the spiritual disciplines to go with your morning cup of coffee:

"I saw more clearly than ever, that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord. The first thing to be concerned about was not, how much I might serve the Lord, how I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man may be nourished . . . I saw that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the Word of God and to meditation on it." --*George Mueller*

*George Mueller, A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealing with George Muller, Written by Himself, Jehovah Magnified. Addresses by George Muller Complete and Unabridged, 2 Vols. (Muskegon, Mich.: Dust and Ashes, 2003), 1:271-1:272.*

May this morning find your soul happy in God!

# Janelle's Devotions

by Janelle Bradshaw

My devotions are usually the first thing I do upon prying my eyes open in the morning. (I used to fix myself a cup of hot tea first, but since becoming pregnant the stuff makes me sick!) Therefore, I'm not much to look at during that early hour. Despite my hair sticking out in every direction it is a cherished time in my day. The Lord is so kind and gracious to allow me to meet with Him.

I am currently reading a number of wonderful books. In the Bible, I am working through the book of Isaiah with my new *Reformation Study Bible* (a must buy item!). Charles Spurgeon's, *Morning and Evening* is next. These short daily readings never fail to encourage and challenge me in some way. And I'm nearing the end of R.C. Sproul's, *The Holiness of God*. I couldn't recommend this book more highly! It's easy to read and so insightful. For my prayer time, I often visit a Psalm and use *The Valley of Vision*.

Throughout my devotions, my journal is open nearby with my pen. I love to jot down verses, quotes and prayers as I go along. My favorite verse from my time with the Lord this morning comes from Psalm 103:11: "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him."

## Quote

by Janelle Bradshaw

This verse and quote need to be taped to my alarm clock...

"The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul." Psalm 19:7

"Even on days when every cinder in our soul feels cold, if we crawl to the Word of God and cry out for ears to hear, the cold ashes will be lifted and the tiny spark of life will be fanned. For 'the law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.'" --John Piper

John Piper, *Desiring God* (Multnomah; Portland, Oregon 1986) p.118

# Kristin's Devotions

by Kristin Chesemore

My day begins with a phone call; a phone call from mom who has graciously agreed to give Brian and me a wakeup call each morning. I have found that if I am going to have a *quiet* time, it has to happen *before* the boys wake up in the morning.

For my devotions I have just started a new plan. Growing up, Dad always encouraged us that the goal of the spiritual disciplines is to "make your soul happy in God" and to preach the gospel to yourself--*not* to finish a book. He wanted to make sure we didn't feel obligated to complete a book we had begun if it was not feeding our soul.

So for this reason I stopped reading the commentary I had been using to study a particular book of the Bible and have begun a "read through the Bible" plan along with Brian. By reading through the Bible together, we hope we will experience even deeper fellowship in our marriage.

We are using the books *For the Love of God Volume 1* and *Volume 2* by D.A. Carson. This plan takes you through the entire Bible and then the New Testament and Psalm twice in one year. To accomplish this, you read four chapters of the Bible a day. However, I am only attempting two chapters per day and going at my own pace!

Like Janelle, I read *Morning and Evening* each day, as well as *The Valley of Vision* during my prayer time. And I am also currently reading *Christ our Mediator* by my dad, because I always need to be reminded of what Christ accomplished on the cross in my place. Today, this particular selection affected me:

"As we watch Jesus pray in agony in Gethsemane, He has every right to turn His tearful eyes toward you and me and shout, 'This is *your* cup. *You're* responsible for this. It's *your* sin! *You* drink it.' This cup should rightfully be thrust into my hand and yours.

Instead, Jesus freely takes it Himself...so that from the cross He can look down at you and me, whisper our names, and say, 'I drain this cup for you--for you who have lived in defiance of Me, who have hated Me, who have opposed Me. I drink it all...for *you*.'

This is what our sin makes necessary. This is what is required by your pride and my pride, by your selfishness and my selfishness, by your disobedience and my disobedience. Behold Him...behold His suffering...and recognize His love."

C.J. Mahaney, *Christ our Mediator* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2004), 57-58.

## The Moment You Awake

by Carolyn Mahaney

No doubt we can all identify with C.S. Lewis' observation that: "The moment you wake up each morning, all your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals."

But we must respond in kind: "The first job each morning consists in shoving it all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other, larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in."

C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 2001), 198.

## Nicole's Devotions

by Nicole Whitacre

After a couple of sips of Starbucks Columbian coffee with three scoops of sugar and toasted almond non-dairy creamer, I'm awake and ready to start my quiet time. If you've read Kristin's and Janelle's posts it probably won't shock you that I begin by reading a meditation from *Morning and Evening*. Charles Spurgeon's grasp of the gospel, passion for holiness, and beautiful prose make him, I think, my favorite author of all time.

Currently, I am studying the joyful book of Philippians. After several years of read-through-the-Bible plans (I was always on my own unique two-year plan), I wanted to spend time digging more deeply into a specific part of Scripture. For my study I am using commentaries by J.A. Motyer, James Montgomery Boice, and my favorite, D.A. Carson.

This morning I read the following comments on Philippians 1:9-11:

"And this is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God."

"Our obedience, discipline and hard graft are not insignificant or optional. On the contrary, they are the God-intended context for

growth. But something else energizes the growth till the fruit is ready for harvest: all is done through Jesus Christ, *to the glory and praise of God* (verse 11)...In this setting the daily task of obedience remains hard, but not fruitless. We are often neglectful, frequently failing, ever inadequate; yet the end is secure, for God is at work."

--J.A. Motyer

J.A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians*, (Downers Grover, Ill: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), 60-61.

I have much need to grow in prayer, however, I try to collect prayers from others and use verses of Scripture to help me pray in a more God-centered way. Hebrews 13:20-21 is a favorite that I used today.

Also, I've been journaling differently the past six months or so. Instead of hand-writing the verses, quotes, thoughts, and prayers from my quiet time into an actual journal, I've been entering them in a WORD file on my Mac under specific categories (e.g. The Gospel, Unbelief, Self-Righteousness, etc.). So, for example, if I am tempted to fear in a particular situation, I type all the verses and quotes I read under the "fear" category. That way, the truths that provided me conviction and encouragement are easy to find the next time that I am tempted. This method may not be as artistic as using a felt-tip pen to write in a leather-bound volume, but it is intensely practical.

Finally, I must make a worship recommendation. For some time I have been listening to "Redemption Songs" by Jars of Clay in my quiet time. The words to this collection of hymns have lifted my gaze to Christ. So I'll close with some of my favorite lines:

"O love of God O sin of man  
In this dread act your strength is tried  
And victory remains with love  
Jesus our Lord is crucified."

# Opposition

by Kristin Chesemore

Here is one final quote for our concluding day of posting on the spiritual disciplines:

"There is no duty we perform for God that sin does not oppose. And the more spirituality or holiness there is in what we do, the greater its enmity to it. Thus those who seek most for God experience the strongest opposition."

John Owen, *Sin and Temptation*, edited by James Houston (Minneapolis, Minn: Bethany House Publications, 1996), 18.

Each and every morning when Mom calls to wake me up, I experience opposition. Sometimes I give in and turn over and go back to sleep. But this quote reminds me of the source of that opposition--it's my sin. This truth also inspires me, by the grace of God, to seek Him more diligently.

# Carolyn's Devotions

by Carolyn Mahaney

I have discovered two secrets that help me wake up early in the morning. The first is positioning my alarm clock across the room so I am forced to get out of bed when it rings (no return to bed allowed). The second is realizing that if I press through about 10 minutes of feeling dog-tired, then I'll feel awake and I'll be glad I got up early for the whole rest of the day.

The first order of business after stumbling out of bed and downstairs is to make a pot of hazelnut coffee. I then set up my fan (I love both the sound and the breeze that a fan provides), gather my devotional materials, make my wakeup calls to Nicole and Kristin (Janelle has opted out of a wakeup call right now, due to pregnancy sickness) and by this time I'm alert enough and ready to begin my quiet time.

For the past few years I have followed Brian and Kristin's new plan (see Kristin's post)—reading through the Bible using *For the Love of God* commentaries by D.A. Carson. I found it to be very beneficial. However this year, I wanted to study certain books of the Bible more in-depth. I have chosen an Old Testament book (Genesis), one of the gospels (Mark), and an epistle (Philippians). My husband helped me select commentaries for

each book to supplement my study: *Genesis*, by Bruce K. Waltke; *The Gospel According to Mark*, by James R. Edwards; *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, by Gordon D. Fee.

Along with my book study (I'm presently in Philippians), I also read one Psalm per day using Charles Spurgeon's *2-volume commentary on Psalms*, and follow it up by reading the designated day's meditation in Charles Spurgeon's, *Morning and Evening*. (I guess you can tell we are big fans of Spurgeon!)

Like Nicole, I keep my journal in a computer document. This allows me to copy and paste verses and quotes from my journal to include in an encouragement email or use in other documents as desired.

For my prayer time I use the Lord's Prayer (Mt. 6:9-13) as my guide. Recently the pastors of my church did a teaching series on the Lord's Prayer which has proven to be a huge help in my prayer life.

After praying, I take a few minutes to create my "to-do" list for the day. I then copy and paste from my journal and add to the top of my "to-do" list what I want to take in to the day for mediation. I keep this list folded in my pocket and refer to it throughout the day. This verse and quote heads up my "to-do" list for today:

"Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name." Ps. 29:2

"The actions which flow from His character are glorious; but while He intends that they should manifest to His creatures His goodness, and mercy, and justice, He is equally concerned that the glory associated with them should be given only to Himself. Nor is there ought in ourselves in which we may glory; for who maketh us to differ from another: and what have we that we did not receive from the God of all grace? Then how careful ought we to be to walk humbly before the Lord! The moment we glorify ourselves, since there is room for one glory only in the universe, we set ourselves up as rivals to the Most High."

--Charles Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening*, p.458.

Finally, while getting ready for the day, I worship with the help of a music tape. My present favorite is "Upward: The Bob Kauflin Hymns Project" by Sovereign Grace Music.

In concluding this little series on the spiritual disciplines I want to emphasize once again that we don't think we are the standard for godly quiet times. We are struggling along, striving to glorify God just like each one of you. Our purpose in this series was not to highlight our own accomplishments, but to hopefully give you new ideas and fresh encouragement to seek God each and every morning!\*

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