



LESSON ESSENTIALS

LEADERSHIP LIFESTYLE

LESSON 2: PERSONAL DEVOTIONAL LIFE AND WORSHIP

When you work in a ministry position, it may feel like you are doing devotions all day long. After all, so much of your job involves reading, praying, studying, sermon writing, and participating in worship services. However, after time these activities can become too much like 'work' and not enough of true, satisfying devotion.

How do you foster the intimacy of your first love -- that satisfying, renewing, energizing time in the Word and with the Lord? How do you differentiate the 'work' activities from the 'personal' activities?

As you set aside time for personal reading of the Word of God you will find that in your daily interactions with others, your love for the Lord, your intimate relationship with Him, will spill over into the teaching making you that much more useful to the Lord and to His kingdom.

He will refresh you and will attend to your needs as you so faithfully pour out into the lives of others. But you must keep yourself in a position of receiving that rest and refreshment, through a stubborn insistence on making time for personal devotions.

A common trait of many people involved in Christian ministry is that they have a personality and a heart that drives them to care for others at their own expense. From long hours spent preparing sermons, to emotional counselling conversations, to time investing in the spiritual health of the small group or congregation, you, as a ministry leader, have made sure to feed your flock. But how do you make sure that as the “feeder of the flock” you are also getting fed?

The enemy would love for you to think that your ‘work study’ is enough to feed you. Surely it seems like it should be. The Word of God always impacts a soul, no matter their purpose for reading it. However, taking time to sit quiet with the Lord and engaging in ‘soul renewal’ through your personal devotional life is crucial! While you may feel like you are praying and studying the Word all day long, a shift can come when this could turn into doing ministry in the ‘strength’ of your own work ethic instead of the strength of the Holy Spirit at work within you.

Knowing a lot about what the Bible says is critically important for teachers of the Word. Clearly you need to spend time reading and studying so that you know what to teach. However, your soul needs the touch of a personal revelation of the Word and a specific application of the His truth in your own heart and mind. If you are hesitant to allow yourself the time to be in the Word on a personal level, you may find that you ‘burn out’ or exhaust yourself from service. You may find that your advice, counsel, and teaching no longer carries the weight it once did, even if it is still scripturally sound. Suddenly, your words are more man-centered and less God-centered. People may praise you for your wisdom instead of seeing it as coming from the Lord. This may feel flattering for a while, but it is an exhausting burden to carry over time. The onus falls on you to be right and discerning in every situation, and this is too much for a mere human to carry.

However, when you take time out of your busy schedule to ensure that you are getting fruitful devotional time, then the Bible knowledge you possess will be amplified with the persuasiveness of a changed heart and mind. Your love for the Lord, your intimate relationship with Him, will spill over into the teaching making you that much more useful to the Lord and to His kingdom.

Proverbs 11:25 speaks of the generous person who refreshes others. The Word promises that that generous person will be refreshed by the Lord in return. This is the promise of the Lord to you. He will refresh you and will attend to your needs as you so faithfully pour out into the lives of others. But you must keep yourself in a position of receiving that rest and refreshment, through a stubborn insistence on making time for personal devotions.

But how do you rest when your ‘Sabbath’ is spent working? With your job or serving role most likely falling on the same day as your church

services, it may be difficult for you to truly rest with your church family on that Sabbath day. You will likely need to pick a secondary day of the week to function as your 'Sabbath'. Setting aside the day after the church services as your day for rest, reflection, and devotion is a great idea, and it is a sacrifice worth making. Insist on having no work commitments that day. Keep that day set apart for time in the Word and time with family, as your family most likely did not rest while you were working either.

It may feel like carving out this personal devotional time is selfish or is limiting your time available to influence your congregation. What you need to see instead is that when you pursue your first love – when you make the time to be in the Word and developing that personal relationship with Christ – you are not only taking care of your soul, you are also setting a wonderful example for your church family. They need to see a mentor or a role model demonstrating how to step aside from the busyness of life and to make time in personal devotions the first priority. Every other business in our day must come as less important than our time with God. Without that time to renew covenant with Him, the rest of our lives are meaningless.

For the health of your ministry, for the health of your people, for the health of your family, and, of course, for the health of your own spirit, take the time to pursue your first love: make time to participate in personal devotions. You need this. The Lord will reward it. His grace is available to you. Spend time in His presence so that you are in a position to receive it.

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IN REVIEW

- Reading and studying the Word for your work is not the same as treasuring the Word in personal devotions.
- You can know a lot of truth and teach it consistently, but if it isn't backed up with a genuine love for, and active relationship with, the Lord, then it will not be as effective as the Lord intends.
- Not only do you need the benefit that personal devotions holds, your congregation needs to have the example set for them of making time with the Lord the priority of a day.

HAVE YOUR SAY

- Don't think about the success level of your ministry right now. Instead, consider the health of your relationship to the Lord. Is He your first love? Have other pressing items on your to-do list in ministry squeezed the Lord out? Take time now to pray for that first love to return and to desire that time in the Word again.
- Do you have a mentor or an accountability partner? So often ministry leaders act as one for the people in their church but do not have someone to stand with them. Pray and find a person who you can pray with and be accountable to as you pursue greater time with the Lord.
- One way that you can enhance your personal devotions time is to apply your own teaching to your life. If you've preached a sermon, led a Bible study, or counselled a friend lately, consider the application points that you gave and see if you are living up to what you are teaching. If not, seek the Lord and ask Him to transform your heart and mind and soul, and to give you a passion for Him in and above all things.

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