Developing a Devotional Life
By Harold Eastman

What’s the point of a devotion?

Having a devotional life means spending regular time with God while reading the Bible and praying. Each of us must learn to read the Bible so we can...

- Learn who God is
- Learn who we are
- Learn what he wants us to do in this life

According to research¹ personal reading and reflecting on what the Bible says is the most effective way a person can grow spiritually. This makes reading and reflecting the single most important skill we can develop as a Christian.

Although, Christians need to be mentored by mature Christians through a process called discipleship, we must eventually learn how to spend regular time alone with God to develop a devotional life. If we don’t, we will develop an unhealthy dependence upon others to feed us “spiritual meat”.

During this study, you will learn a simple devotional structure called S.O.A.P. to help you...

- **Read** the Bible – hear God’s voice
- **Reflect** on its truth – let the truth soak in
- **Apply** it to your life – decide to live what you learn

“Simple” does not mean easy. Simple means uncomplicated and straightforward. We still have to put forth effort to spend time with Christ.

Spending time with Christ can be intimidating and scary. You may fear what he will ask you to start or stop doing. You may wonder, “What if I can’t do what he is asking me to do?” You may fear what you will find out about yourself. The unknown scares us. This may cause you to create obstacles and excuses to avoid coming face to face with your creator.

Remember, God is a good God. He wants the very best for your well-being. He cares deeply for you and wants you to be the best version of yourself you can be. Fear and wrestling before God and yourself is a natural reaction, but don’t let it stop you. Great things are waiting for you. Keep pressing into this time with God and you’ll find great joy.

After you learn and begin using S.O.A.P., my hope and expectation is for you to pass this simple structure on to others who are trying to grow in Christ. The trick is for you to pass along S.O.A.P in its original form. You may find yourself tweaking the structure to fit your personality somewhat, but please only pass along the original S.O.A.P. structure and allow each person to decide if they want to add anything different to fit their personality.

As an example, think of Google’s home page. Every person starts with the same clean, simple, mostly white homepage. A person can choose to attach add-ons or leave it as it is. In the same way, please pass along this clean, simple S.O.A.P. structure as it is taught here.

¹The Reveal survey has been taken by over 600 churches representing various denominations, socioeconomic status, size, styles, methodologies and geographic locations.
S.O.A.P. is the most fruitful devotional tool I’ve used. Out of all my teachings, S.O.A.P. is the most applied teaching. Out of all my teachings, this is the teaching that has been passed on the most. However, S.O.A.P. is not the only way one can have a devotion. If you have a process that works for you then continue using your method, if not than try this method and see if God will use it to change your devotional life for the better.

The Ultimate Goal:
To help you develop a consistent devotional time with God. The goal is NOT to make you into a Bible scholar.

An overview
- Learn the S.O.A.P. structure
- Understand the value of journaling
- Learn how to track your progress
- Understand the difference between Bible Study and Devotions
- Learn ways to choose your devotional space
- Understand why we call it a devotion

The S. O. A. P. Structure

S = Scripture
Write the verse or phrase from your reading that jumps out to you. Write the words down. Don’t just write “verse 3 was really good.”

O = Observation
As you reflect on the verse or phrase you wrote down for “S”, write in your own words the truth God is trying to communicate in this verse. Do your best. The hope is that if the author of the book read what you wrote, he would say, “Yes that’s what I meant.”

A = Application
Write down how this applies to your life. Ask yourself, “What would my life look like if I lived out this truth?”

P = Pray
Write a prayer for God to transform your life around this truth.

Thursday       John
May 8          15:1-8

S  This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit showing yourselves to be my disciples.

O  Disciple is not a title you just get. A disciple is a person who is known by his or her actions. Actually, it’s not the action he is does, but it’s the results or fruit of his actions that make him a disciple. Not the flurry of activity. This fruit is a byproduct of a connection to God. It’s God’s activity through our work that produces fruit. Our job is to remain connected to his power and ability as we obey him.

A  I must stay close and connected to Christ so that as I follow his commands he might make my efforts fruitful.

P  Father, help me to be fruitful. Help me to see the fruitfulness of my life.

(If you run into a word or phrase you don’t understand write it down in this space to study later or ask someone about it.)
Practice S.O.A.P.

John 15:9-17

**9** As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. **10** If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. **11** I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. **12** My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. **13** Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. **14** You are my friends if you do what I command. **15** I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. **16** You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. **17** This is my command: Love each other.”

Journaling

1. Day, Month Date
2. Today's scripture reading
3. S - The verse or phrase that jumps out to you
4. O - The truth in your own words
5. A – How the truth applies to your life
6. P – Ask God to change your life to reflect this truth
Why do we Journal?

- When we write something down we have to reflect on it at a deeper level.
- When we write down how a passage applies to our life we have a record of what we think God is asking us to do.
- When we have a written record we can easily review our progress.

If we think the God of the universe has asked us to do something, it might be worth writing down so we don’t forget. From time to time we can read the application part of your journal entries. By doing this we can see if we are becoming followers of Christ or if we are merely believers.

When I first started journaling, I often found myself lost in the midst of my writing wondering what I was supposed to be writing down. Sometimes it would be a prayer. Sometimes it would be an idea for a talk. I wondered who I was writing to… an audience? God? Myself? I just felt lost.

I felt this way until I learned this simple S. O. A. P. structure. S. O. A. P. gave me enough direction to help me process the Bible in a way that began impacting my life. I began understanding what God was trying to teach me and it helped me keep track of what I needed to do to grow and obey God. This structure freed me up so I could focus on what God was saying and not feel like I was just going through the motions.

I hope you will push through any negative feelings you may have about journaling. Because I believe journaling is an essential part of reflecting on God’s word.

Tracking your progress

Having a consistent devotional time may be a new habit you’re trying to develop. I’ve read it takes roughly 21 – 30 days of consistency to create a new habit. I’ve also read that it takes approximately 90 days for this new habit to become apart of who you are.

Accountability and honest feedback will help you successfully develop a devotional life. One way to give yourself honest feedback is to track your consistency. This is not designed to produce guilt, but rather to give you an accurate picture of your progress. You can choose a basic chart to track your consistency or you can choose a more advanced deluxe chart to make your journal information more accessible for reviewing or study.
Create a chart page for your journal:

### The Basic version
- List the five days a week
- Write in their corresponding dates
- Simply mark which days you did a devotion

### The Deluxe version
- Create a title to sum up the point of that day’s reading
- Write in that days scripture reading
- Indicate if it was an inspired devotional time (*)
- Indicate if there was something to be studied later (study)
- Leave blank the days you missed
- Pick up your reading where you left off

#### The progress chart gives a visual representation of your progress. Blank lines represent devotional times I intended on having, but missed.

The goal is to have a devotional time 5 out of 7 days a week. By leaving Saturdays and Sundays out, I get a better visual representation of my progress towards my intended devotional faithfulness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic / summary</th>
<th>script</th>
<th>study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>9/6</td>
<td>Gal.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>9/7</td>
<td>Into the unknown</td>
<td>4:8-9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>9/8</td>
<td>Rely on the promise not deeds</td>
<td>4:20-31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>9/9</td>
<td>Rules or Christ choose Christ</td>
<td>5:1-11</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>9/10</td>
<td>Freedom to serve and love</td>
<td>5:12-15</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>9/13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>9/14</td>
<td>Spirit makes sinful nature obvious</td>
<td>5:16-26</td>
<td>study</td>
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<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>9/15</td>
<td>Restore people with gentleness</td>
<td>6:1-5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>9/16</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>9/17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>9/20</td>
<td>Do good to all</td>
<td>6:6-10</td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>9/21</td>
<td>Don’t sweat religious acts of faith</td>
<td>6:11-18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>9/22</td>
<td>Do courageous acts of love</td>
<td>Col. 1:1-8</td>
<td>study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>9/23</td>
<td>Pray for believers to grow</td>
<td>1:9-14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>9/24</td>
<td>Christ’s death our cleansing</td>
<td>1:15-23</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>9/27</td>
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<td>9/28</td>
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<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>9/29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>9/30</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>10/1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Why did Saturday and Sunday get left off the chart page?

- The progress chart gives a visual representation of your progress. Blank lines represent devotional times I intended on having, but missed.
Choosing your devotional space

The space you choose for your devotional time needs to reflect the reality of your situation and your personal spiritual pathway to God.

The reality of your situation takes into consideration if you’re a morning person or night person or is the middle of the day the best time for you? Do you need to get up before your kids in the morning? Do you need to wait until nap time or throw a video on to occupy them? Do you need your IPod on or your ear plugs in? Do you need people moving around you or minimal distractions?

Don’t over spiritualize what a devotional space is supposed to look like or try to create the perfect environment. One of my favorite spaces to have a devotional time is at McDonalds. Some other places I like are Coffee Shops, at Heartland next to the light box or in a park next to moving water.

Some of my favorite spots reflect my personal spiritual pathway to God. You can read about spiritual pathways in a book by John Ortberg and Ruth Haley Barton called An Ordinary Day with Jesus. Spiritual pathways are the environments or activities that make you feel especially close to God or sense his presence more readily. If you know your pathway it can help to inform where you will best enjoy or be motivated to spend time with God. You can print off a spiritual pathway assessment pdf by Googling “spiritual pathways assessment”

Examples of Spiritual Pathways:

- **Relational** – find a public setting
- **Intellectual** – be sure to make it personal
- **Worship** – use your IPod
- **Activist / Serving** – we only accomplish great things if we spend time alone with God
- **Contemplative** – Use earplugs or be in an isolated place
- **Creation** – be in or around nature

Experiment with what works for you without going for perfection. Begin to create **consistency** to help you draw into a devotional readiness quicker.

What’s the difference between Bible Study and doing devotions?

A Bible Study usually:

- Large blocks of time
- More academic fun facts
- Leads to head knowledge vs. life transformation

A devotion is:

- Short
- Simple
- Consistent
- Personally applied to your life
- Cumulative in its affect
- Informing your Bible study time

God calls us to be followers of Christ not to be walking Bible encyclopedias.
Here’s the Biblical connection:

“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.” James 1:22-25

Why do we call this time a “Devotion”? 

The word devotion can be traced to a Hebrew word which is translated as utterly destroy, annihilate, set apart, dedicate or devote. So when we do a “devotion” we are totally destroying some of our personal time so God can speak into our lives instead of using that time to get ahead in life like: getting more sleep or folding an extra load of laundry or making an extra business call.

We destroy this time so we can give God our undivided attention. Having a devotional time is spending quality time with God. God wants and deserves our time and attention.

Having a devotional time is an act of trust on our part. We trust him to take care of whatever else we normally would be doing with that time. We sacrifice this time so God can speak into our lives:

- Who he is
- Who we are
- What he wants for us to do in this life

If we consistently trust him with this time then we will be better equipped to live in a manner that pleases him.

Now what?

- Begin using The Journey: Beautiful Fight
- Discuss your devotional entries in your small group (next three weeks)
  - How many? 5 out of 7 is the goal
  - What worked and didn’t?
  - What were your obstacles to overcome?
  - What was helpful to your devotional success?
  - Take turns reading through your journal entries
- Share S.O.A.P. with others
- At the end of the Beautiful Fight Journey Devotional, continue using The Journey online OR begin reading and reflecting your way through the Books of the Bible using online reading plans