

## THE MINISTER'S DEVOTIONAL LIFE

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The Editor asked me to write on 'What should a minister's devotional life be like', but there is no way in which I would wish to dictate the shape of another minister's devotional life. The precise nature of a minister's walk with God varies from minister to minister, and from one season to another in the life of a minister. So, instead of writing about others, let me write about my own devotional life. I confess that I do so with some reluctance, for I am still a learner on the Way – but then, aren't we all? The traditional evangelical morning 'Quiet Time' is at the heart of my devotional life. The first thing I do at the beginning of my working day is to read the Scriptures and to pray. Over the years my pattern has varied. Like many others, I have experimented using such tools as the North American *Minister's Prayer Guide* and the Franciscan *Celebrating Common Prayer* but helpful as they are, I find the need to jump from one section of the book to another distracting. At other times I have read through particular books of the Bible with the aid of a commentary – some of the best such commentaries for devotional use are found in the IVP *Bible Speaks For Today* series. The drawback here is that much of the time is devoted to the thoughts of the commentator rather than to the Word of God itself. I know that some ministers follow the Robert Murray M'Cheyne Bible-reading plan, recently popularised in Don Carson's *For the Love of God*, which takes the reader through the New Testament and Psalms twice and the Old Testament once – but that involves reading a lot of Scripture every day. My own preferred option now is to use the Anglican *Common Worship* lectionary: sometimes I read the set 'offices' of the day, with its two readings from the Old & New Testament; but normally I stay with the three shorter passages set for 'Holy Communion' and which always include part of a Psalm. I find that the lectionary gives me a balanced 'diet', yet it does not over-face me in terms of the amount. As I read, whenever a phrase or a verse jumps out at me, I mark my Bible – and then, for shorter or longer period, I seek to 'chew over' what God may be saying to me. From Scripture I turn to prayer. Again, as with Bible-reading, so too with praying, I find the need for a system. I have devised a simple plan for the week, with eight main categories for each day: my family, my colleagues, my deacons (I split their names over the week), church activities, life beyond the local church (this includes such sub-categories as regional ministers and members of my local Baptist ministers' fellowship), 'Yesterday', 'Today', and 'Special Needs'. To some this may seem over-structured, but for me the words of Henri Nouwen ring true: "A spiritual life without discipline is impossible. Discipline is the other side of discipleship".

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