

A Private Life with God: Planning Your Personal Devotion Time

This document was put together from several blog posts and other resources. It is meant to be a simple guide for anyone who is just beginning to think about developing their personal time with the Lord (which Christians often refer to as “devotions”)

People sometimes think it is unspiritual to actively plan out your methods for pursuing spiritual growth. But the truth is that without spending some time thinking about how you’ll meet with God (other than trying to think about it when the alarm’s going off and you’re warm in bed), you might never find yourself growing. So planning doesn’t have to quench spontaneous spirituality, it just needs to be submitted to the Lord, and He can use it to actually increase the depth of your time with him.

PART 1: A TIME, A PLACE, A PLAN

As many have said before, the three things you need to have for your devotional time are **a time** (“when am I going to do this?”), **a place** (“where will it happen?”) and **a plan** (“how should it go?”). Let’s look at each one, in order.

Establishing Your Set Time

Quite simply, you need to decide when you are going to spend time privately with the Lord. Otherwise, isn’t your life so pressing and filled with things you have to (and want to) do that it can be crowded out? If we don’t make a decision about when we’ll carve out time to be with God, we might find that it will never happen.

Two factors to consider:

1. When do you actually have time to do it? Or, when can you realistically make time?
2. When are you best able to read and actually think?

#1 means that you have to decide either when you naturally have time (for instance, if you have an hour every day after class or work when it is easy for you to get alone where you live). Or, if you have no easy time already built in to your schedule (which is most likely the case), when can you realistically create time? When can you carve time out of your schedule, by cutting out other things? This may be the key to increasing your time with God. It might help to make a list of how you spend a typical weekday and weekend. Add up how much “expendable time” you have (time left over after you do things you can’t avoid like work or school). Then note how you usually use it. How much time goes to entertainment like TV, movies or the internet? How much time goes to social life? Other hobbies or interests? The point is to honestly make ourselves look at our days (i.e. Psalm 91:12) and how much time God’s given us to do whatever we want with. Then we’ll know what we’re actually responsible to be stewards over. If you actually write out list and add it all up, you’ll end up with a number, visible on the page: this is how many hours you have to work with for creating time to spend in personal devotions. If your schedule is full of mostly essential things, it may be that sleep is the best thing for you to cut time out of. I can testify that I grow with the Lord more by regularly being with him for an hour in the morning rather than regularly sleeping for one more hour.

#2 (“When are you best able to read and actually think?”) reminds us that we need to consider how we personally operate. The obvious choices here are: “morning person” or “night person.” If you can’t help but fall asleep any time after 10 pm, don’t decide to make your time with the Lord start at 9:45 every night when you finish your day. If, however, you get charged up when it’s dark out, maybe you should plan your times before bed.

A word of caution here: One common mistake people fall into is to put themselves into a box when it comes to thinking about time. Just because you have trouble getting up in the morning doesn’t mean you were born “not a morning person” and therefore will never be able to read or pray in the morning. You will most likely surprise yourself with what you are able to do if you discipline yourself and establish different habits.

Lastly, realize that you may need to plan ahead to make sure that the time you pick actually happens. If you're planning to sit with the Lord from 9 to 10 pm, it may mean that you move earlier things around to make sure the time stays open. If you want to get up and read from 6 to 7 in the morning, it will most likely mean that you can't stay up as late as you did when you were just rolling out of bed to catch a bus. Sometimes we might find that it takes even more discipline to make ourselves go to bed early enough the night before, than it does to actually get out of bed.

Another thing to consider when thinking about the "time" part of all this is how long the time will be. If you have no habit established, a half hour is probably a good place to start, with almost equal parts given to prayer and reading. You should think about working up towards at least an hour, though, to give yourself plenty of time to both read and mull over God's word, as well as talking to and listening to the Lord. You will probably find that you will grow to want even longer when it's possible, to really let God's word work on you, and to really have time to be with Him in prayer.

This section is long because lack of time is such a common enemy we face. But we should think like this: What does it mean for me to "redeem" the time God has given me to live (Eph 5:15-16)? Has God really left me with not enough time to know Him, or is He calling me to re-prioritize my life and make my time serve His purposes?

Finding Your Place

There are just a couple important elements in finding the right place for your personal time with the Lord. First, if at all possible, it is ideal to have a place where you can be alone. I'm sure there are some people who think no place is more sacred than the local Starbucks or Barnes & Noble, but, let's be honest, we think better when we're alone, for several reasons. First, we need to be able to control our environment so we aren't at the mercy of other people when we're trying to be with God. Second, as I read one time in a book on prayer, it is not that God is different when we're alone, it's that we are. Nothing helps you focus on God like not having to focus on what other people might be thinking about you. This is especially true because our times with the Lord do need to include prayer. And what if you just need to get out of your chair and get on your knees to work something out with your Lord? Suffice it to say that your neighborhood barista might be weirded out.

It is also essential to be able to ensure quiet. Our lives are so noisy. It takes discipline to create space for us to be able to listen to the Lord as we read and pray. Along that line, the place you choose should offer freedom from distraction. This too requires discipline, because nothing will ruin things like itchy fingers who have easy access to cell-phone facebook apps, etc. We simply must learn to disconnect...so that we can connect.

What about spending time with the Lord while you're driving? Of course, we should pray always, and there's certainly no better way to use the time in the car, but should it be your only time? No guilt here...but would you date someone or cultivate a marriage by only talking to them on the way to work? The road just doesn't seem to lend itself to the kind of focus, freedom, and heart-searching that being with the Lord usually requires.

Of course, the truth may be that at times you might find it literally impossible to find a place alone or quiet. The Lord will give you grace to know Him in whatever circumstances He places you in. But if we can be alone in quiet place, we'll typically find the most fruitful times there. And sometimes we just need to get creative. You may have heard the story of Susanna Wesley, who with more than a dozen children, used to sit in her chair and pull her apron up over her head to be alone to pray in the middle of a room crowded with kids. I have a friend who had her father clear a space in the basement and created a little haven in a house similarly crowded. Early in the morning, lounges are often empty on college campuses.

Having A Plan

It's a common issue: You've got your place, your coffee, your bible, you got up on time—you did it...Now what? Good plans for both bible reading and prayer can help you avoid wasting time figuring out what to read or pray. They can keep your times from becoming repetitive. And they can help you keep moving when any number of factors make it hard to continue.

As far as bible reading goes, you need a plan that helps you daily:

1. Receive strength for your faith
2. Know God better
3. Enjoy your relationship with Him more
4. Grow in understanding all of His word
5. Hear His voice, obey Him, and Trust Him throughout the day

There are several printable plans on the Young Adults resources page that you can easily put in your bible and start using. Most of them will get you through the whole bible in a year (<http://youngadults.ccphilly.org/resources>). You can choose a plan that takes you through in regular order, or others that take you on different paths through the word. This way you'll digest God's word in its totality, over the course of the whole plan. (If you've never read the whole bible, this would be a great way to start.)

Don't worry about finishing in a year or get pressured about "keeping" up with any plan. Personally, I have never completed a trip through the scriptures in under two years. Better to read and get it, then to hurry from chapter to chapter. Better to stop and pray over a verse when the Holy Spirit starts working in you than to move on just to keep up with the plan. (The plan is not God.)

And, while you're in the middle of it all, if you find that a plan isn't working, throw it out and find a new one! Better to be honest and seek God about how He wants to be sought than to soldier on with something that isn't helping you and isn't bearing fruit.

Whatever bible reading plan you use, when you sit down to read, and open your bible, a good habit to develop is to stop and pray before you start reading. I love to take a breath and say something to the Lord like, "I'm here Father. Speak to me. Help me understand what I'm about to read. Help me to hear what I need to today." I once read about someone who likes to pray these four verses before he begins to read: Psalm 119:36, Psalm 119:18, Psalm 86:11b, and Psalm 90:14.

Praying before we read God's word reminds us that we can't do any of this without the Spirit's help. So we should be praying: that we'll be able to understand it; that we'll be able to concentrate; that God will speak to our hearts while we read; that we'll see what He's saying, not just what we're looking for; that we'll love it and get excited about it.

PART 2: THOUGHTS ON BIBLE READING AND PRAYER

Bible Reading

If you struggle to stay awake, concentrate, or comprehend what you read (all common issues), here are some practical ways you might help yourself:

1. Involve other senses in your reading. Whether you start to fall asleep as soon as you open the bible, or you just can't read a sentence or two before you're thinking about something else, getting your other senses involved can be a great help. Here's a few ways to do it:

- a. Read out loud.
- b. Listen to audio scriptures.
- c. Hand write a copy of the scripture you're reading. This can be especially helpful in slowing down your thinking and helping you actually see what you're reading.
- d. Use maps and charts, especially for Old Testament Law or Narrative.
- e. Print out copy of the passage and use it to circle things, draw arrows, write notes, etc...

2. Journal. For many people journaling is one of the most effective ways to enrich their time in the word.

Here's a few ways you could use your journal:

- a. With each daily reading, you could write out certain things.
 - a study of the passage (Setting, Time, Place, Events, People, Teachings)
 - things you learn about God from the passage
 - for example: What He's like, How He works, What He's done in History...
 - lessons the characters learned
 - things you could apply to your life today
 - ways the passage helps you: trust God more, resist temptation, know or enjoy God more
 - questions you have about the passage
 - answers to questions, when you find them
- b. Keep running records of certain themes: (for example...)
 - how you see God taking care of Israel
 - commandments Jesus gives to His followers
 - times God miraculously came through
 - encounters people had with God
- how the big story is built as each part of the bible contributes to it

3. Memorize.

1. Memorize verses that help you.
 - on an index card or scrap of paper, write a verse from your daily reading and carry it around. Read it through the day when you have a second.
 - keep a list of helpful verses and work through them one at a time till you've got them all.
 - think through your struggles, find applicable verses, and memorize them to fight with.
2. Memorize larger sections of scripture
 - you can memorize more than you think
 - it is the best way to gain deeper understanding
- print out whole sections, break them down into manageable chunks, and give yourself plenty of time

Thoughts on Memorizing Scripture

Consider these four verses:

“Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.” (Psalm 119:97)

“When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches.” (Psalm 63:6)

“My eyes are awake through the [night] watches, That I may meditate on Your word.” (Psalm 119:148)

“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.” (John 15:7)

How do we actually do each of these things? For instance, how can we think about God’s word in the middle of the night, while it’s dark, without getting out of bed? For this and many other things, memorizing scripture is the answer. Having verses in your head ready to go can help you share the gospel, fight temptation, believe in the face of difficulty, and have the mind of Christ in all circumstances. It is also an excellent way to study and learn God’s word without using anything but the word itself. In short, memorizing is the best way I know to “meditate on His law day and night” (Psalm 1).

Everyone should have certain verses that most help them committed to memory. (Chances are you already do.) It is also possible (and very helpful) to memorize larger portions. Maybe you want all of Romans 8, the sermon on the mount, or the letter to the Philippians memorized (plans for all of these are on the resources page). The larger the portion you commit to memory, the more you’ll remember not just verses, but flow of thought and context as well. You can actually memorize some of God’s way of thinking. It may seem impossible, but give yourself enough time and you’ll be surprised how much you can remember (and how much you benefit from it).

On the Young Adults website (<http://youngadults.ccp Philly.org>), on the resources page, I’ve collecting things to help you figure out how to get started, or to continue down the road. There’s a bunch of different methods and ideas, so you can find something that works for you.

In short, get yourself involved in your reading. It is interesting to think about why God decided that we would have His revelation written in a book. But that’s what He did. What this means for us is that it requires that we learn to be good readers as part of our spiritual growth. And good reading is always active reading. Read with a pencil in your hand. Interact with God as you read His word. Write questions that pop up in your mind. Stop and make a chart of a difficult verse to see if you can figure out what’s being said. Copy a verse that jumps out at you, and then stop and pray over it. Underline, circle, etc. The best part is it’s all just between you and God, so you can be yourself.

Special Considerations for Reading Scripture:

Keeping your interest even in passages of scripture that seem more obscure or hard to understand:

1. Don’t expect the same kind of “meaning” from every part of scripture. Different parts of the Bible speak differently to us. There’s history, poetry, wisdom literature, letters, and prophecy, and they all represent different ways God communicates His truth to us. Then there’s the differences between the Testaments. Getting to know your bible front to back is the best help in all of this.
2. Whenever you’re reading, look first for what you learn about God in the passage, and then look for what you learn about your life. The bible is written to teach us about God and tell us the good news of His salvation. We’ll learn about ourselves in relation to Him and His message.
3. See all of scripture as telling the story of God’s activity in creation, and use your reading to see what He’s done and where your life fits into that picture.
4. Look for Jesus in all of scripture, and consider how Old Testament passages point to Him in prophecy, patterns, types, history leading up to Him, etc...

5. See your reading time as a chance to spend time with God and hear from Him.
6. Disconnect yourself from over-stimulating media. The less time you spend consuming modern media, with all its over-stimulating images and sounds, the more your mind will be able to handle sitting and looking at the pages of a book (which will never offer special effects to keep your interest). This is a life-style choice: how do you want your mind to work? Let's allow God to give us focused, stilled minds when it comes to sitting with His word.

Praying and reading after failure in sin.

1. Understand how you are righteous before God, by virtue of being in Christ.
2. Let conviction drive you to God. As Pastor Joe says, don't let condemnation drive you away.
3. Understand that the longer you stay away from private communion with God the weaker you'll become.

Prayer

First, I should say right away that I do not consider myself an authority on prayer. I am constantly seeking growth in this area. In fact, I regularly pray for growth in prayer. With that clear, here are a few things I've collected which may help someone who realizes they need to begin having regular times of private prayer.

To start with, we should be clear that every Christian needs a prayer life that is:

1. Regular, not just during crisis
2. Private, not only public or "during the day"
3. Talking and listening, not just repeating lists
4. Comprehensive, not narrow
5. Shaped by scripture, not just our own thoughts

Suggestions for Prayer:

1. **Make a prayer list.** Write out a prayer list that includes everything you should be normally praying for.

One suggestion: In writing this list, start with your own soul and Christian walk, and then work outward from yourself in expanding "circles". For example, your list might include the following topics, with specifics under each one:

1. Your Own Soul (walk with God, victory over sin, growth)
2. Immediate Family (parents, brothers and sisters)
3. Close Saved Friends (their walks with God, strength, more faith, those who need healing)
4. Unsaved friends and family (their salvation)
5. Your community (Neighbors, your city, schools near you)
6. Your school/work (the gospel to be spoken and believed, sin to be suppressed, learning to happen)
7. Your Country (peace, boldness for Christians, government to submit to God's laws)
8. Missions and Missionaries
9. Specific Nations around the world (for help: www.global-prayer-digest.org; Operation World)
10. Special request that come up daily (have a way to keep track of them...)

2. Divide topics by days. Pick certain Days of the week to concentrate on praying for certain things.

For example, you might make a list that looks like this:

Monday: Family

Tuesday: Friends

Wednesday: Unsaved People I Know

Thursday: Missions/Missionaries

Friday: Future Plans

Saturday: My own walk

Sunday: Church

3. Make prayer cards. If a prayer list doesn't work for you, you might try prayer cards instead. I read about this and started doing it this past year and it has helped me immensely. At the top of an index card write the name of the person you're praying for. Then write a verse to pray for them under their name (pray about what verse to pick!). Under that you write a few pressing needs. You end up with one card each for all the people you want to pray for. I also have "group" cards (one for our church, one for the Young Adults group, one for the church elders...etc.). Then, as you pray, you just see one card at a time at the top of the stack. You pray for that person, and then move on to the next card.

4. Listen. Leave time for the Holy Spirit to move or speak to you as you pray. Let yourself sit in silence, speak to the Lord (since He's near) and allow Him to speak to you. Open your Bible again and linger over a verse you read, or a Psalm, as part of your listening to God.

5. Pray the word of God. Take scriptures and turn them into your personal prayers. Many Psalms are ready made for this. You might also pray thoughtfully through the prayers in scripture like those of Paul (Eph 1:15-23, 3:14-21) or Daniel (Daniel 9:1-19) Commandments and exhortations are great to pray over too, that God would give you strength to obey them or act them out.

6. Study prayer. Read the prayers of great men of God. Not to copy them, but for instruction. Books like The Valley Of Vision can help with this.

Conclusion:

A Sample Quiet Time Schedule:

1. Talk to the Lord. Ask Him to help you wake up spiritually and understand what you read
2. Work on memorizing a portion of Scripture
3. Read the scripture
4. Write about what you've read, think it over.
5. Write down a verse you liked from the passage and take it with you.
6. Pray over passage of scripture
7. Pray through prayer list

PART 3: MISCELLANEOUS THOUGHTS TO HELP YOU

George Muller on rising and being with God.

These selections are taken from his autobiography, *The Life of Trust*

It has recently pleased the Lord to teach me a truth...the benefit of which I have not lost, though now ...more than fourteen years have since passed away. The [truth] is this: 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 might be nourished. For I might seek to set the truth before the unconverted, I might seek to benefit believers, I might seek to relieve the distressed, I might in other ways seek to behave myself as it becomes a child of God in this world; and yet, not being happy in the Lord, and not being nourished and strengthened in my inner man day by day, all this might not be attended to in a right spirit. Before this time my practice had been, at least for ten years previously, as an habitual thing to give myself to prayer, after having dressed myself in the morning. Now, 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, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reprov'd, instructed; and that thus, by means of the word of God, whilst meditating on it, my heart might be brought into experimental communion with the Lord.

I began therefore to meditate on the New Testament from the beginning, early in the morning. The first thing I did, after having asked in a few words the Lord's blessing upon his precious word, was, to begin to meditate on the word of God, searching as it were into every verse, to get blessing out of it; not for the sake of the public ministry of the word, not for the sake of preaching on what I had meditated upon, but for the sake of obtaining food for my own soul. The result I have found to be almost invariably this, that after a very few minutes my soul has been led to confession, or to thanksgiving, or to intercession, or to supplication; so that, though I did not, as it were, give myself to prayer, but to meditation, yet it turned almost immediately more or less into prayer. When thus I have been for a while making confession, or intercession, or supplication, or have given thanks, I go on to the next words or verse, turning all, as I go on, into prayer for myself or others, as the word may lead to it, but still continually keeping before me that food for my own soul is the object of my meditation. The result of this is, that there is always a good deal of confession, thanksgiving, supplication, or intercession mingled with my meditation, and that my inner man almost invariably is even sensibly nourished and strengthened, and that by breakfast time, with rare exceptions, I am in a peaceful if not happy state of heart. Thus also the Lord is pleased to communicate unto me that which, either very soon after or at a later time, I have found to become food for other believers, though it was not for the sake of the public ministry of the word that I gave myself to meditation, but for the profit of my own inner man.

With this mode I have likewise combined the being out in the open air for an hour, an hour and a half, or two hours, before breakfast, walking about in the fields, and in the summer sitting for a little on the stiles, if I find it too much to walk all the time. I find it very beneficial to my health to walk thus for meditation before breakfast, and am now so in the habit of using the time for that purpose, that when I get into the open air I generally take out a New Testament of good-sized type, which I carry with me for that purpose, besides my Bible; and I find that I can profitably spend my time in the open air, which formerly was not the case, for want of habit. I used to consider the time spent in walking a loss, but now I find it very profitable, not only to my body, but also to my soul. The walking out before breakfast is of course not necessarily connected with this matter, and every one has to judge according to his strength and other circumstances.

The difference, then, between my former practice and my present one is this: Formerly, when I rose, I began to pray as soon as possible, and generally spent all my time till breakfast in prayer, or almost all the time. At all events I almost invariably began with prayer, except when I felt my soul to be more than usually barren, in which case I read the word of God for food, or for refreshment, or for a revival and renewal of my inner man, before I gave myself to prayer. But what was the result? I often spent a

quarter of an hour, or half an hour, or even an hour, on my knees, before being conscious to myself of having derived comfort, encouragement, humbling of soul, etc.; and often, after having suffered much from wandering of mind for the first ten minutes, or a quarter of an hour, or even half an hour, I only then began really to pray. I scarcely ever suffer now in this way. For my heart being nourished by the truth, being brought into experimental fellowship with God, I speak to my Father and to my Friend (vile though I am, and unworthy of it) about the things that he has brought before me in his precious word. It often now astonishes me that I did not sooner see this point. In no book did I ever read about it. No public ministry ever brought the matter before me. No private intercourse with a brother stirred me up to this matter. And yet now, since God has taught me this point, it is as plain to me as anything, that the first thing the child of God has to do morning by morning is, to obtain food for his inner man. As the outward man is not fit for work for any length of time except we take food, and as this is one of the first things we do in the morning, so it should be with the inner man. We should take food for that, as every one must allow. Now what is the food for the inner man? Not prayer, but the word of God; and here again, not the simple reading of the word of God, so that it only passes through our minds, just as water runs through a pipe, but considering what we read, pondering over it, and applying it to our hearts. When we pray, we speak to God. Now, prayer, in order to be continued for any length of time in any other than a formal manner, requires, generally speaking, a measure of strength or godly desire, and the season, therefore, when this exercise of the soul can be most effectually performed is after the inner man has been nourished by meditation on the word of God, where we find our Father speaking to us, to encourage us, to comfort us, to instruct us, to humble us, to reprove us. We may therefore profitably meditate, with God's blessing, though we are ever so weak spiritually; nay, the weaker we are, the more we need meditation for the strengthening of our inner man. There is thus far less to be feared from wandering of mind than if we give ourselves to prayer without having had previously time for meditation. I dwell so particularly on this point because of the immense spiritual profit and refreshment I am conscious of having derived from it myself, and I affectionately and solemnly beseech all my fellow-believers to ponder this matter. By the blessing of God I ascribe to this mode the help and strength which I have had from God to pass in peace through deeper trials, in various ways, than I had ever had before; and after having now above fourteen years tried this way, I can most fully, in the fear of God, commend it. In addition to this I generally read, after family prayer, larger portions of the word of God, when I still pursue my practice of reading regularly onward in the Holy Scriptures, sometimes in the New Testament and sometimes in the Old, and for more than twenty-six years I have proved the blessedness of it. I take, also, either then or at other parts of the day, time more especially for prayer.

How different, when the soul is refreshed and made happy early in the morning, from what it is when, without spiritual preparation, the service, the trials, and the temptations of the day come upon one!

...

During my stay at Plymouth, I was stirred up afresh to early rising, a blessing, the results of which I have not lost since. That which led me to it was the example of the brother in whose house I was staying, and a remark which he made in speaking on the sacrifices in Leviticus, "that as not the refuse of the animals was to be offered up, so the best part of our time should be especially given to communion with the Lord." I had been, on the whole, rather an early riser during former years. But since the nerves of my head had been so weak, I thought that, as the day was long enough for my strength, it would be best for me not to rise early, in order that thus the nerves of my head might have the longer quiet. On this account I rose only between six and seven, and sometimes after seven. For the same reason also I brought myself purposely into the habit of sleeping a quarter of an hour, or half an hour, after dinner: as I thought I found benefit from it, in quieting the nerves of my head. In this way, however, my soul had suffered more or less every day, and sometimes considerably, as now and then unavoidable work came upon me before I had had sufficient time for prayer and reading the word. After I had heard the remark to which I have alluded, I determined that, whatever my body might suffer, I would no longer let the most precious part of the day pass away while I was in bed. By the grace of God I was enabled to begin the very next day to rise earlier; and have continued to rise early since that time. I allow myself now about seven hours' sleep, which, though I am far from being

strong, and have much to tire me mentally, I find is quite sufficient to refresh me. In addition to this I gave up the sleeping after dinner. The result has been that I have thus been able to procure long and precious seasons for prayer and meditation before breakfast; and as to my body, and the state of the nervous system in particular, I have been much better since. Indeed, I believe that the very worst thing I could have done for my weak nerves was to have lain an hour or more longer in bed than I used to do before my illness; for it was the very way to keep them weak. As this may fall into the hands of some children of God who are not in the habit of rising early, I make a few more remarks on the subject.

I. It might be asked, How much time shall I allow myself for rest? The answer is, that no rule of universal application can be given, as all persons do not require the same measure of sleep, and also the same persons, at different times, according to the strength or weakness of their body, may require more or less... But my decided advice, at the same time, is, that children of God would be careful not to allow themselves too little sleep, as there are few men who can do with less than six hours' sleep, and yet be well in body and mind, and few females who can do with less than seven hours. Certain it is that for a long time, as a young man, before I went to the university, I went to bed regularly at ten and rose at four, studied hard, and was in good health; and certain also, that since I have allowed myself only about seven hours, from the time of my visit at Plymouth in Oct. 1839, I have been much better in body, and in my nerves in particular, than when I was eight or eight hours and a half in bed.

II. If it be asked, But why should I rise early? The reply is, "To remain too long in bed" is, 1. Waste of time, which is unbecoming a saint, who is bought by the precious blood of Jesus, with his time and all he has, to be used for the Lord. If we sleep more than is needful for the refreshment of the body, it is wasting the time with which the Lord has intrusted us as a talent, to be used for his glory, for our own benefit, and the benefit of the saints and the unbelievers around us. 2. To remain too long in bed injures the body. Just as when we take too much food, we are injured thereby, so as it regards sleep. Medical persons would readily allow that the lying longer in bed than is needful for the strengthening of the body does weaken it. 3. It injures the soul. The lying too long in bed not merely keeps us from giving the most precious part of the day to prayer and meditation, but this sloth leads also to many other evils. Any one need but make the experiment of spending one, two, or three hours in prayer and meditation before breakfast, either in his room, or with his Bible in his hand in the fields, and he will soon find out the beneficial effect which early rising has upon the outward and inward man. I beseech all my brethren and sisters into whose hands this may fall, and who are not in the habit of rising early, to make the trial, and they will praise the Lord for having done so.

III. It may lastly be said, But how shall I set about rising early? My advice is, 1. Commence at once, delay it not. To-morrow begin to rise. 2. But do not depend upon your own strength. This may be the reason why before this you may have begun to rise early, but have given it up. As surely as you depend upon your own strength in this matter, it will come to nothing. In every good work we depend upon the Lord, and in this thing we shall feel especially how weak we are. If any one rises that he may give the time which he takes from sleep to prayer and meditation, let him be sure that Satan will try to put obstacles into the way. 3. Do trust in the Lord for help. You will honor him if you expect help from him in this matter. Give yourself to prayer for help, expect help, and you will have it. 4. Use, however, in addition to this, the following means: a. Go early to bed. If you stay up late, you cannot rise early. Let no society and no pressure of engagements keep you from going habitually early to bed. If you fail in this, you neither can nor ought to get up early, as your body requires rest. Keep also particularly in mind, that neither for the body nor soul is it the same thing whether you go to bed late and rise late, or whether you go to bed early and rise early. Even medical persons will tell you how injurious it is to sit up late, and to spend the morning hours in bed; but how much more important still is it to retire early and to rise early, in order to make sure of time for prayer and meditation before the business of the day commences, and to devote to those exercises that part of our time when the mind and the body are most fresh, in order thus to obtain spiritual strength for the conflict, the trials, and the work of the day. b. Let some one call you, if possible, at the time which you have determined before God that you will rise; or procure, what is still better, an alarum, by which you may regulate almost to a minute the time when you wish to rise. For about twelve shillings a little German clock with an alarum may be

bought almost in every town. Though I have very many times been awakened by the Lord, in answer to prayer, almost to the minute when I desired to rise; yet I thought it well to procure an alarum to assist me in my purpose of rising early: not indeed as if it could give the least help, without the Lord's blessing, for I should remain in bed notwithstanding the noise of the alarum, were he not to give me grace to rise; but simply looking upon it as a means. c. Rise at once when you are awake. Remain not a minute longer in bed, else you are likely to fall asleep again. d. Be not discouraged by feeling drowsy and tired in consequence of your rising early. This will soon wear off. You will after a few days feel yourself stronger and fresher than when you used to lie an hour or two longer than you needed. e. Allow yourself always the same hours for sleep. Make no change except sickness oblige you.

Here's how D.A. Carson organizes his prayer life:

Apart from any printed guides I may use, I keep a manila folder in my study, where I pray, and usually I take it with me when I am traveling. The first sheet in that folder is a list of people for whom I ought to pray regularly: they are bound up with me, with who I am. My wife heads the list, followed by my children and a number of relatives, followed in turn by a number of close friends in various parts of the world. . . .

The second sheet in my folder lists short-range and intermediate-range concerns that will not remain there indefinitely. They include forthcoming responsibilities in ministry and various crises or opportunities that I have heard about, often among Christians I scarcely know. Either they are the sort of thing that will soon pass into history (like the project of writing this book!), or they concern people or situations too remote for me to remember indefinitely. In other words, the first sheet focuses on people for whom I pray constantly; the second includes people and situations for whom I may pray for a short or an extended period of time, but probably not indefinitely. . . .

The next item in my manila folder is the list of my advisees — the students for whom I am particularly responsible. This list includes some notes on their background, academic program, families, personal concerns and the like, and of course this list changes from year to year.

The rest of the folder is filled with letters — prayer letters, personal letters, occasionally independent notes with someone's name at the top. These are filed in alphabetical order. When a new letter comes in, I highlight any matters in it that ought to be the subject of prayer, and then file it in the appropriate place in the folder. The letter it replaces is pulled out at the same time, with the result that the prayer folder is always up to date. I try to set aside time to intercede with God on behalf of the people and situations represented by these letters, taking the one on the top, then the next one, and the next one, and so forth, putting the top ones, as I finish with them, on the bottom of the pile. Thus although the list is alphabetized, on any day a different letter of the alphabet may confront me.

— From D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, (Baker Books, 1992), 27-29.