

How to Get the Most Out of Your Devotional Book

660 Words

I have mixed feelings about using a daily devotional as the basis for our regular time with God. Printed devotionals and daily online devotions are wonderful supplemental tools, but some of us use them as our primary - and often only - source for time with God. If we choose to use a daily devotional, there are some things we can do to get the most out of them.

What is a devotional and what is it not?

A "devotional" writing - whether print or digital - uses story, commentary, or illustration to help the reader reflect on selected Scripture from God's Word. They can include elements like Scripture, thoughts for reflection, and prayer prompts. There is a wide-range of devotional writing with various purposes. Some devotionals focus on a specific topic and are designed to help the reader through a particular period of life (parenting, grief, marriage, etc). Some devotionals seek simply to inspire and encourage. Sadly, sometimes, these are no more than "feel good" thoughts that barely touch on Scripture. Others, like Oswald Chamber's classic ["My Utmost for His Highest,"](#) seek to guide the reader into thinking on and responding to the deep truths of God's Word.

No matter the quality of the devotional and its purpose, it is still based on someone else's encounter with God and His Word. It is a middleman. So why do we settle for the human intermediary when we have access to God Himself? Every Christian has the indwelling Holy Spirit that enables us to understand and apply God's Word for ourselves. (If you need structure, check out the [Bible Reading Plans on my Free Resources page.](#))

Please don't get me wrong. I love good devotional books. I've even written four. But let's remember what daily devotionals are and what they are not. And when we do use them, let's use them as tool to guide us into interacting with God and His Word and not as a substitute for the real thing. The following tips and suggestions will help us get the most out of your devotional books.

4 Tips to Help You Get the Most out of Your Daily Devotional

1. **Read the daily Scripture from your Bible** - Many devotionals have the day's verses printed out in the book or on the web page. But, if we open our Bible and read it there, it gives the Holy Spirit opportunity to guide us to read further, to interact more fully with the actual text. And there's an added dimension about sitting with an open copy of God's Word that can't be replicated any other way.
2. **Read the selected passage in its greater context** - Unfortunately, many devotional books ask you to read just a few verses - sometimes even one! Often, we miss the big picture. And sometimes we even misunderstand what the biblical author intended because we read the verses out of context. When you read the selected passage, back up. Read at least the paragraph so you don't mishandle God's Word. (Read this [post for more on biblical context.](#))

3. **Listen to God first** - Read the Scripture passage and give the Holy Spirit time to help you understand and apply God's Word before you read the comments by the human author. The spiritual insight from someone else can be very helpful, but don't let it get in the way of anything God wants to show you Himself.
4. **Journal your own thoughts** - Some devotionals give you space to write. If yours doesn't, keep a notebook or bound journal with your Bible so you can record any insights, direction, and application God gives you. For help on reading and studying a passage for yourself, see "[4 R Method for Everyday Bible Study](#)."

I would love to hear your thoughts on how you use devotionals and how you work to keep them in the proper perspective.

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A former “cultural Christian,” Kathy Howard now has a passion for God’s Word that’s contagious. With more than 30 years of experience, Kathy has taught in dozens of states, internationally, and in a wide range of venues including multi-church conferences and large online events. She has a Masters of Christian Education from the Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary. Kathy is the author of 10 books, including the new “meaty” devotional *Deep-Rooted: Growing through the Gospel of Mark*. She writes for multiple online magazines and devotional sites. Kathy and her husband live in the Dallas/Ft Worth area near family. They have three married children, five grandchildren, and two accidental dogs. Kathy provides free discipleship resources and blogs regularly at www.KathyHoward.org. She also connects with women at [Facebook](#), [Pinterest](#), and [Instagram](#).

Deep-Rooted: Growing through the Gospel of Mark

Want to foster a delight for God’s Word that keeps you rooted and growing? *Deep-Rooted*, a 40-day devotional through the Gospel of Mark will help you get in, delight in, and apply God’s Word. Learn how to interact with and respond to Scripture, not simply read it. These meaty, daily devotionals will increase your hunger for God’s Word, encourage spiritual growth and stability, and lay the groundwork for a life-long, spiritually-healthy habit.