

# The Habit of Devotion

The Power of Spiritual Habits #1 - Pastor Stephen Combs - August 17, 2025 - Mark 1:35-38

**INTRO:** Good morning church! We're beginning a new 7-week sermon series called: "The Power of Spiritual Habits." It's a study of Christian disciplines passed down from the early church.

**Series Theme:** Ephesians 4:23-24 (NLT) <sup>23</sup> Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. <sup>24</sup> Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.

In this series, we hope to speak about and perhaps introduce some of the historic habits or disciplines of the Christian church. The habits themselves are good, but we will see that they are disciplines whose primary purpose is to connect us to the Holy Spirit. We want to allow the Spirit empower us to practice these habits, so those habits will empower us.

**Need:** Do you have bad habits? We all do. Do you bite your nails or pick your nose in traffic? Left to our natural state, we are going to develop habits. How many of them are good habits?

We can be passive with our faith, just waiting for the Holy Spirit to move while we sit on the couch. Sometimes, we need to get out of our comfort zone in order to let the Spirit change our thoughts and attitudes by practicing these habits. Then, the Spirit will empower us to make these habits more effective and will be life changing.

Hope doesn't change your life. Habits do. You don't drift into consistency; you decide into it. If you don't decide in advance, you'll likely default to the wrong things in the moment. Most people don't drift into spiritual maturity, financial stability, or leadership excellence. You pre-decide, define the specific habit, and schedule it. Pre-decide what matters most, then build your life and leadership around it. - Craig Groeschel

**Trans:** Devotion is foundational. During a time of devotion, you may pray, read the Bible, or practice solitude. It is during this time that you will be prepared by the Spirit to practice other ministries. A time of personal devotion, or "quiet time" is key to many of the other habits we will talk about and is important to our spiritual growth.

**BODY:** In the gospel of Mark, Jesus demonstrated His habit of devotion to His disciples. We too can practice Jesus' habit of deliberate, daily devotion. How can we practice the habit of devotion as Jesus did? The text will give us three ways to practice the habit of Christlike devotion.

**Read text:** Mark 1:35-38 (ESV) <sup>35</sup> And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. <sup>36</sup> And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, <sup>37</sup> and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." <sup>38</sup> And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out."

## We can practice the spiritual habit of Christlike devotion by:

### 1. Setting aside a consistent time.

**EXP:** (35) And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark...

Habits are important to our daily lives. Habits can be good or bad - Psychology Today tells us that habits are built through learning and repetition. A person develops a habit in the course of pursuing goals.

Tips for creating good habits:

1. Set a goal
2. Focus on making small changes
3. Establish a daily routine
4. Have an accountability partner

Let's not focus just on the habit - remember that they are disciplines whose primary purpose is to connect us to the Holy Spirit. The discipline is important, but far more important is the connection to the Lord.

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Look at Jesus' timing for His habit:

**Very early in the morning** (πρωί, prōi) - the fourth watch of the night, from 3 o'clock in the morning until 6 o'clock approximately. Keep in mind that He was part of an agrarian culture without electricity, and likely went to sleep not long after the sun went down. Getting up before the sun would still allow Him adequate rest.

"Daybreak is a never-ending glory; getting out of bed is a never-ending nuisance." G.K. Chesterton

**Dark** (ἔνυχος, ennychos) - before day, nocturnal

**ARG:** Jesus modeled his habit of consistent daily devotion.

Luke 22:39 (ESV) And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him.

**We should set enough time aside that it allows us to "abide".**

John 15:4 (NKJV) Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

**ILL:** (Stephen) Didn't practice much in school of music, until senior year.

**APP:** For some of you, merely starting a consistent devotion time sounds difficult. You may think you don't have time in your schedule. Start small. Pick a time and stick with it.

Remember Craig Groeschel's quote: "You don't drift into consistency; you decide into it."

Make decisions the night before that will set you up for success in the morning: Go to bed early enough, set out your clothes, prepare the coffee maker, lay your Bible and notebook out. Remove as many obstacles to the time you've set aside as possible.

## 2. Departing to a solitary place.

**EXP:** (35) ... he departed and went out to a desolate place...

(36) And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, <sup>37</sup> and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you."

**Desolate** (ἐρημος, erēmos) - solitary, lonely, desolate, uninhabited, a desert, wilderness, lonely regions, an uncultivated region fit for pasturage

Consider the events in context just prior to today's passage: Jesus had just taught in the synagogue in Capernaum (v.21); He had cast out an unclean spirit in that same synagogue (v.25); He healed Simon's mother-in-law (v.31); then He healed many in the town and cast out more demons (v.34). He had a full day of ministry, and after a short night's sleep, needed to get away and connect with His Father.

In verse 36, Mark reports that His disciples searched for Him. We can't really know their motivation, but this is early in Jesus' ministry. Perhaps they wanted to take advantage of His growing popularity and perform more miracles. There is no indication at this point that the people of Capernaum had any interest in coming under Jesus' reign, but rather wanted more miracles. (Brooks, New American Commentary)

Christian solitude is an ancient practice - Scriptural solitude is the practice of temporarily withdrawing to privacy for spiritual purposes. Jesus demonstrated this many times: In Matthew 4:1-11, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, and He was alone there for 40 days. In Matthew 14:23, He had dismissed the crowds, and He went up on the mountain by himself to pray. Jesus exhorted us to do the same: "But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret." (Matthew 6:6).

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We need to silence the distractions in order to hear from the Spirit. This gives us an excellent occasion for focused thinking/meditation about gospel truths and reflecting on the blessings and hopes that are ours through the gospel. Solitude is an ideal setting for journaling and for reading good books. Solitude can be a context for practicing other personal disciplines like Bible reading, study, fasting, prayer, and meditation.

**ARG:** Jesus had a regular habit of getting alone.

Luke 5:16 (NIV) But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

**Jesus had a go-to place.**

Luke 22:39 (ESV) And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives...

**ILL:** Jesus knew when to retreat. In Matthew 14, Jesus models this. Just after His cousin John the Baptist was killed, He attempted to go to a desolate place alone, but the crowds followed Him. He responded by feeding the 5000. *Matthew 14:22-23 (ESV) “<sup>22</sup> Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. <sup>23</sup> After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.”* After that meal, Jesus finally had his “quiet time”. What happened after His quiet time? He walked on water, and Peter did too!

**APP:** We can’t always get alone in the desert like Jesus did. Many of us have a hard time just getting some alone time. Even if we have a house full of family, we can pick a time or a place that can maximize our chances of being alone with God. From time to time, try a prayer walk in your neighborhood, or go to a state park, or even take time to go on an overnight retreat.

If there isn’t a place in your house that allows you to get alone with God (maybe because you’ve got kids who are always into everything), then your answer for how to find solace might be tied to the time of day you select.

## 3. Cultivating a relationship with God.

**EXP:** (35) ...and there he prayed.

Here we get to the heart of why Jesus got up early and removed himself from others. He went to spend time with His Father. We need the same.

How do you build a human relationship? You spend time with that person - talk to them and listen to them.

**Pray** (προσεύχομαι, proseuchomai) - to offer prayers, to pray, supplicate, worship, pray earnestly; (TDNT) almost always denotes asking, [proseuchesthai] refers to calling on God.

Prayer in the world of the 1st Century Jew was a bit different than we are used to. They were expected to pray the Shema (Deut 6:4) each morning and evening. Prayers before each meal were required, and were different depending on the type of food to be eaten. Jews were expected to pray the Tefillah (18 Benedictions) three times a day, at prescribed times. They would pray Scripture back to God, reading His Word back to Him. This is one of the ways God speaks back to us.

Jesus certainly was familiar with these practices, but we also get insight into other types of prayer that He demonstrated in the gospels. His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane shows an anguished, non-scripted prayer. He prayed all night before choosing his disciples in Luke 6. He prayed to be glorified in front of His disciples in John 12.

Why did Jesus need time with God? He needed to connect with Him in order to continue His ministry.

SOAP as a quiet time technique - Scripture Observation Application Prayer

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(38) And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out."

**ARG:** Prayer is two-way communication.

Jeremiah 33:3 (NIV) <sup>3</sup> 'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.'

Philippians 4:6 (ESV) do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

**God speaks to us through His Word.**

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV) <sup>16</sup> All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

**God speaks to us through His creation.**

Psalms 19:1 (ESV) The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

**ILL:** Cultivate a relationship with your spouse.

**APP:** Talk to God and be honest and vulnerable about what you are thinking and feeling. Keep a prayer journal, to focus your thoughts and to keep track of what God has done. Talk to God like you would on a cellphone; stand up, pace the floor, sit still, etc. Pray yourself empty, taking every thought captive and laying it before God. Read the Psalms aloud as a prayer.

Find a Bible-reading plan that gives you direction for where to start with your reading. Read until God speaks. Highlight your Bible. Capture the scriptures that spoke to you in a journal.

Listen to a worship song and either sing along or meditate on its meaning in your life.

Sit in silence and enjoy peace and rest in God's presence. Go outside and look up; ponder His vast glory.

**CONCLUSION:** The spiritual habit of daily devotion is simple, but very powerful, and lays the groundwork for your day, your spiritual walk, and your life. Many of you know that if I haven't spoken to you in a while, rather than a typical greeting, I like to sometimes ask, "how's your walk with the Lord?" We can lay the foundation for a better walk with Him by improving (or starting) a habit of devotion, like Jesus did. We can do this by setting aside a consistent time, departing to a solitary place, and cultivating our relationship with Him.

Let's pray