



## Part 1: Ministry

### 1. Maintain a devotional life

The editor asked me to write about what a minister's devotional life should 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 *The Minister's Prayer Book*<sup>1</sup> and the Franciscan *Celebrating Common Prayer*,<sup>2</sup> but helpful as they are, I find the need to jump from one chapter 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 Today series. The drawback here is that much of the time is taken up with 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 popularized in Don Carson's *For the Love of God*,<sup>3</sup> 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 and New Testaments; 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 a 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.'<sup>4</sup>

### **Encourage your people to have a Quiet Time**

In response to a request from a member of my congregation, I spelled out in our church magazine eight simple steps as an aid for a Quiet Time:

1. Make time in your day when you can be quiet before God. For most people the early morning is best. True, we can speak to God as we walk down the street, as we drive along in the car, and even as we do the washing up. But those moments are bonuses and do not replace the need for a regular 'appointment' with God. That appointment doesn't have to be long – but it has to be there.

2. Find a space where you can spend time with God in a relaxed manner and without interruption. For young people their bedroom may be the only private place they have in their home. Others may

have a particular room or corner of a room or even a special chair where they like to be quiet. Some people make the place where they pray feel special by placing there a text or a small wooden cross or even a candle. Ideally, it should be a place where one can leave a Bible together with a notebook and a pen. If it is impossible to find any quiet at home, why not consider popping into a church on the way to work?

3. Then come to God, and begin your Quiet Time by asking that he will speak to you. With the psalmist say:

Open my eyes, so that I may behold  
wondrous things out of your law.  
(Psalm 119:18)

4. Allow God to speak when you open your Bible and read a passage from it. Don't, however, open your Bible at whim and read 'any old' passage. Adopt a system for reading the Bible. Although one can develop one's own system, it is much easier to use one of the many systems on offer. The advantage of a Bible-reading system is that it offers a balanced diet – to begin with Genesis and read right through to Revelation is asking for spiritual indigestion. Many like to use Bible reading notes, which along with the reading for the day offer some words of explanation and suggestions for application. These notes are usually very good, but if you do use them, make sure you read the Scripture and not just the notes!

5. Listen for what God is saying to you through that Scripture by reading through the passage slowly – take time to reflect on a verse, a phrase or perhaps even just a word. A hasty reading of the Bible does little good. We need to discipline ourselves to 'meditate' on God's Word – to chew it over as a cow chews the cud. I always have with me a ruler and pencil, so that I can underline whatever jumps out from the text. Alternatively, write down in a book the thoughts that come to mind. This is also a good way of dealing with distracting thoughts – as well as helping to remember what God may be saying. Indeed, those so-called 'distracting' thoughts may actually be a way of God speaking to you.

6. Reading the Scripture naturally leads into prayer. In a sense the praying has already begun. For as we listen to God speaking through

his Word, we are in fact already praying, whether or not our eyes are closed. Prayer is more than our speaking to God – it is also God speaking to us. Now, we respond to what God has said to us. Normally, this response involves praise, thanksgiving or perhaps confession. (Note the old mnemonic: ‘ACTS’ – Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication.) Reading the Bible before praying tends to give specificity to one’s adoration, confession and thanksgiving.

7. Now move into ‘supplication’, and pray for others – as also for yourself. Just as with Bible reading, so with praying, many Christians find it helpful to have a system, which may well involve making a prayer list.

8. Finally, before the day really gets going, take an opportunity to reflect on the priorities for the day. This is a time to make lists of things to do – or to review previous lists!

These eight steps make the daily Quiet Time seem a complicated operation, yet it is only as complicated as tying a shoelace (you try to describe all the steps involved in that daily habit). Once you have got into the rhythm, the discipline involved ceases to be a chore, and becomes simply a means of drawing upon God and his grace.

### **Scriptures to reflect on**

- ‘In all your ways acknowledge him, / and he will make straight your paths’ (Proverbs 3:6).
- ‘In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed’ (Mark 1:35).
- ‘I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing’ (John 15:5).
- ‘Your word is truth’ (John 17:17).
- ‘Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God’ (Philippians 4:6).



## 26. Make evangelism a necessity

Evangelism is not an option – it's a necessity. If a church doesn't engage in effective evangelism, then death beckons. In the words of Texan author William Easum:

Congregations whose membership has plateaued or is declining have much in common with dinosaurs. Both have great heritages. Both require enormous amounts of food . . . Both become endangered species . . . Like the dinosaur they have a voracious appetite. Much of their time, energy, and money is spent foraging for food (for themselves), so that little time is left to feed the unchurched . . . Either their pride or their nearsightedness keeps them from changing the ways they minister to people . . . All around are unchurched, hurting people . . . But many refuse to change their methods and structures to minister to people where they are in ways they can understand. Like the dinosaur, their necks are too stiff or their eyes too near-sighted. Clearly God doesn't care if these congregations survive; but God passionately cares if they meet the spiritual needs of those God sends their way.<sup>1</sup>

Sadly, there are many churches in our country who are living in the past and are in essence living only for themselves. These

churches are on the verge of extinction; indeed, almost certainly thousands of them will close their doors within the next ten or twenty years, as indeed thousands of them have already done. So for their self-preservation, let alone for the sake of the salvation of others, churches need to turn outwards and begin to engage in effective evangelism. How can this be done? The apostle Paul surely supplies the answer: ‘So that I might by any means save some’ (1 Corinthians 9:22).

The evangelistic task begins with building bridges of friendship with people outside the church. We have found that one very effective form of bridge-building is holding quiz evenings twice a year. These evenings are always extremely popular with ‘outsiders’, with the result that normally 50% of those present are non-churchgoers. Furthermore, they are so simple to organize – all one has to do is hire a quiz master and provide food (a ‘ploughmans’) and sell drink.

Then there is ‘Alpha’. We run three courses a year: two of an evening, and another of a lunchtime. We’ve kicked the videos into touch – we find a personal presentation much more effective. Surprising as it may seem, our experience is that just putting a large banner outside the church advertising the next course brings people in – there is something to be said for getting on to a nationwide bandwagon.

Evangelism too entails putting on special services. Like many churches we have experimented with ‘seeker-services’; indeed, we aim to put on one a term. However, there is no doubt that the most successful services in attracting non-church people are baptismal services. So, instead of directing the sermon to the candidates, I always ensure that the sermon is directed to their friends and relatives.

And so I could go on. In today’s climate effective evangelism is no easy task. But no evangelism today, no church tomorrow.<sup>2</sup>

### **Encourage people with passion**

What we need most of all are not the right programmes, but the right people.

The story is told of a newly employed American salesman, who stunned his boss with his first written report, for it demonstrated that

he was nearly illiterate. He wrote: 'I see this outfit who aint never bought ten cents worth of nothing from us and sole them some goods. I am now going to Checawgo.' Before his boss could fire him, a second report arrived and it read: 'I cam to Checawgo and sole them haff a million.' Hesitant to dismiss the man, yet afraid of what would happen if he didn't, the sales manager transferred the problem into the lap of the president of the company. The next day the staff were amazed to see the salesman's two reports on the notice board, with this memo from the company president: 'We ben spending two much time trying to spel instead of tryin to sel. I want everybody should read these letters from Good, who is doin a grate job, and you should do like he done!'

When it comes to evangelism, education (theological or otherwise) is not what counts – rather a passion to tell others about Jesus. In the words of a piece of Victorian verse:

When I enter that beautiful city,  
 And the saints all around me appear,  
 I hope that someone will tell me  
 It was YOU who invited me here.

There was a famous bishop of the Church of South India, Bishop Azariah, who after he had conducted a baptismal service, would make his baptismal candidates line up on the river bank, put their hand on their heads, and say after him: 'I am a baptized Christian; woe unto me if I preach not the gospel.' This same bishop once asked the members of a conference how many people they had brought to Christ since their baptism. One old woman got up with difficulty and said with sorrow, 'I have only brought five people to Christ since I was baptized.' Only! My church would be revolutionized if each member had 'only' brought five people to Christ! Not so long ago I was speaking to a church on the subject of evangelism – and afterwards a lady in her sixties remarked: 'I have never ever felt able to tell others about Jesus.' I felt very sad. She was a Christian of many years standing and in her own way had done much for the cause of Christ, but had never told anybody about Jesus.

There is an urgent need for every Christian to tell others about Jesus. Leaders need to encourage their people to take courage in their

hands and, when the time is opportune, tell their friends what a difference Jesus has made to our lives. It doesn't have to be a lengthy statement. It could be as short as 'Because I've found my faith has been such a help to me, I wondered if you might care to come along to a special service in our church.' But whether it be short or long, something needs to be said, for so much is at stake.

All this presumes that people have non-Christian friends to speak to. Sadly, the older people grow in the faith, the more likely they are to move into a Christian ghetto. This process need not be inevitable and could, with imagination and hard work, be reversed. What would happen if pastors suggested that all home groups were suspended for the autumn session and that instead members enrol in evening classes at the local college with a view to making friends with some of the happy pagans around?

We need to be passionate about sharing our faith. Faith without passion is worthless. In the words of St John Chrysostom, the fourth-century Bishop of Constantinople: 'Nothing is more useless than a Christian who does not try to save others . . . I cannot believe in the salvation of anyone who does not work for their neighbour's salvation.'

### **Scriptures to reflect on**

- 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people' (Mark 1:17).
- 'Go . . . to your friends [literally, "your own"; i.e. your own family, your own friends, your own circle of acquaintances], and tell them how much the Lord has done for you' (Mark 5:19).
- 'Woe betide me if I do not proclaim the gospel!' (1 Corinthians 9:16).
- 'We are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God' (2 Corinthians 5:20).
- 'Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence' (1 Peter 3:15-16).



## 39. Build teams

As churches grow, ministry teams of one kind or another come into being. Not all the members of these teams may be paid, nor are they necessarily all full-time. But one thing is for sure: they form a team. Indeed, it has been said: 'two's a company, three's a team, and more than fifteen's a crowd'.

For the sake of good relationships it is important that the members of the team adopt a set of team values. In our church we have adopted the following guidelines to help us move forward in our life together:

- *Mutual care.* We will model the kinds of relationships that ideally should characterize the life of the church in general. We will love one another, pray for one another, honour one another, care for one another, encourage one another, and speak the truth in love to one another. We will be there for one another, come hell or high water.
- *Communication.* We will keep one another informed of what we are doing – and of what we are hoping to do. We will therefore come to our team meetings ready to share.

- *Openness.* We will be open with one another. There may be times when the ministers will not be free to be open with the rest of the team; however, there is no place for ministers to keep secrets from one another. A confidence does not necessarily mean that we cannot share information with one another.
- *Honesty.* In our thoughts and our feelings we will be honest with one another. If something has upset us, then we will surface it, recognizing that ‘today’s niggle could be tomorrow’s resentment, and next week’s breakdown’.
- *Loyalty.* Outside our team meeting, we will always stand up for one another. While none of us is perfect, and there will be times when we make a mess of things, we will resist the temptation of criticizing one another to other members. The place for criticism is either one to one or in the team meeting.
- *Positivity.* In our relationships with one another (and indeed with the rest of the church) we will always exude a positive spirit. We will shun negative talking and thinking. We will instead affirm one another and will speak well of one another.
- *Excellence.* We will never be satisfied with the second best. In our desire for excellence we will foster a healthy dissatisfaction with the way things are and will always strive for better.
- *Faith.* We will strengthen one another’s hope and faith in God, and we will foster each other’s passion for Christ. We will be bold in the way we develop our various ministries – and where there are failures, we will help one another to learn and then to use the failure as a stepping board for fresh advances.<sup>1</sup>

### **Work more generally at creating teams**

Our church is big on teams. In addition to the ‘ministry team’ composed of the ministers and others working for the church, which meets together on a formal basis once a week, there is also the leadership team, composed of the ministers and deacons, which meets monthly and oversees the church’s mission and ministry.

Then there are ten task-oriented teams, normally led by deacons and accountable to the leadership team (and ultimately to the church meeting). These teams tend to meet every six to eight weeks. They have responsibility for overseeing and developing clearly defined areas of the church’s mission and ministry; namely, social action,

evangelism, nurture and development, pastoral, youth and children's ministry, ministry to seniors, mission beyond Chelmsford, worship, fabric, finance and media. The teams themselves are small in size and do not normally number more than seven members. The mandate of the team members is not to do all the work themselves, but to empower and encourage others in the church to get behind whatever may be their particular project.

The church itself may also be likened to a team. True, it is a challenge to ensure that every member is engaged in appropriate ministry. In a large church it is more easily possible for members to behave like passengers rather than active members of the crew. But where a church is broken down into small groups, then 'every-member-ministry' becomes feasible. One of the key tasks of a pastor in this context is that of welding together what may appear initially to be a motley crew, each doing his or her own thing, into a team, working together to fulfil the mission of the church. Such a welding together is not easy. Furthermore, the larger a church, the more difficult the welding together becomes. And yet it can be done – through the Sunday services, the monthly church meetings, and written forms of communication such as the monthly church magazine.

Whether or not we are justified in calling all these different groups 'teams' is debatable. Indeed, it is said that any group of over twelve members is no longer a group, but a meeting. Certainly, the larger a group, the more relationships need to be formed. It has been estimated that 'members of a group of six have 15 relationships with which they must deal to interact as a group. A group of eight persons has 28 potential relationships; a group of 10 has 45; a group of 15 has 105; and a group of 20 has the staggering possibility of 190 relationships.'<sup>2</sup> Research in group dynamics suggests that eight members may in fact be the optimum figure for the size of a team. If this is true, then those churches that have modelled their leadership teams on the number of so-called 'deacons' (seven!) found in Acts 6 are in fact on to a good thing.

### **Scriptures to reflect on**

- 'He [Jesus] appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him ...' (Mark 3:14).

- ‘They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus . . .’ (Acts 6:5).
- ‘Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons’ (Philippians 1:1).
- ‘Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others’ (Philippians 2:4).
- ‘May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all’ (1 Thessalonians 3:12).