

How to use ***Prayerandbiblestudy.org***

The devotions

At the heart of this site are the daily devotions.

THE VISION FOR THE SITE Everything on this website is freely available for you to use privately. The vision for this website came in 2005, and since its launch in August of that year, increasing numbers of people have used the site and its resources.

HOW IT WORKS At the heart of the site are the regular daily devotions. To access these from the front page, click on the 'Select Devotions' button, where you will see a list of dates and texts. **CLICK ON THE DATE TO START.** You will then find that you are on the main 'devotions' page for the day you have selected. All you need for brief devotions is found on this page, but if you follow the RED links, you will find other pages which give you more. These are the available pages:

- **DEVOTIONS:** At the top of the page are the prayers and meditations for the day. Scroll the page down and you face a choice. You may either read the Bible passage on this page and the accompanying 'brief' Bible study (around 600 words), or you may use a RED link to go straight to the full Bible Study (around 2,000 words).
- **BIBLE STUDY:** This is the main Bible study page with the Scripture passage for the day displayed alongside extensive study notes.
- **DISCIPLESHIP:** At any time you can use a RED link to go to the 'discipleship' page which has questions for Bible study groups, the author's comments on the text, a list of some suggested discipleship issues, and a final prayer.

WEEKENDS At the weekends (see below), the devotions follow a different series of Bible passages, and are 'brief', without the option for the full Bible studies. You will find these devotions are different in character from those during the week.

ALTERNATIVES Each day (weekday or weekend), there are alternative devotions, to give you some choice. The alternatives have the same prayers and meditations as the main devotions, but the Bible study is different. A 'brief' Bible study is provided as an alternative, not a full one.

DICTIONARY The site is written for the general reader, and a dictionary of Biblical and theological words is provided. Please click on any RED words in the study to obtain a pop-up window with a dictionary description of that word. You can use the dictionary to look up further words.

DOWNLOADING DAILY DEVOTIONS From the main selections page you can download each day's devotions and print it out from 'pdf' format. Click on 'DL' alongside each date, and then you should find that the devotions appear on your computer in a standard 'pdf' format (providing you have Adobe Reader installed on your computer. If you do not have the Adobe software to do this, it can be obtained free from www.adobe.com

RESOURCES - BACK COPIES OF DEVOTIONS - AND BIBLE STUDIES Devotions can be downloaded free and are held on the website for four weeks on the main 'selections' page. All the other completed devotions and Bible studies are stored elsewhere on the site and are available for you to download and use on the 'Bible Studies' page. This can be accessed from the 'Selections' page or from the 'Resources' page.

It is possible to select whatever devotions you wish from the great range of devotions available on the 'Bible Studies' page.

How to establish regular devotional disciplines

TIME TAKEN Each day's devotions should take between ½ and ¾ of an hour. The opening prayers and meditations are on one page, and the full Bible text for the day with full commentary notes are arranged so that the text remains on the page whilst you scroll through the notes. A final

page contains questions for discussion, comments and suggestions about Christian discipleship based on the text, and a final prayer.

DIFFERENT WAYS TO USE THE MATERIAL Some people find a daily discipline difficult, but there is no shame in using the time differently or flexibly. Find a pattern for using the site that suits you best, and prayerfully submitted this to God. It may be, for example, that weekdays are best, but not weekends. Another suggestion might be to use the 5 weekday studies but space them out over the 7 days of the week (ignoring the weekend material). I suggest you make this a matter of prayer, and select resources which are right for you.

ALTERNATIVES You will see from the selections page that there is an alternative study for each day, but it is only a 'brief' study. This is provided because people may appreciate the choice of something different when the main study is from a part of the Bible they have either studied before, or is a part of the Bible which may not be significant for them at the time. For example, when we come to study the Levitical Laws, some may feel they wish to read something different! However, it is essential for this project that the whole Bible is studied.

A VOW TO GOD In Old Testament times, making a discipline of devotion to God would be thought of as a 'Vow', something like a holy contract with the Lord. A vow to spend time with the Lord should not be allowed to become oppressive, however. If it all becomes difficult, prayerfully reconsider everything and change what you do. Talk to the Lord about it, not as a legalistic taskmaster, but as a friend, encourager and advisor. The discipline is for our benefit, not His, and He will help us sort out what is right.

Using devotions at the weekends

SHORTER STUDIES AT WEEKENDS Full devotional guides are provided for each day of the working week, Monday to Friday, and shorter studies are provided for Saturdays and Sundays. A lighter approach is taken for the weekends, particularly the Bible studies, to give variety to the whole scheme of devotions provided by the site, and also to allow you to focus on the twin aims of rest and the worship of God in church on Sundays. As with the weekdays, an alternative is provided.

DIFFERENT SCRIPTURES USED The main difference you will notice at the weekends is that if the weekday Bible studies have been in the New Testament, then the weekend ones will be Old Testament, and vice versa. The reason for this is to give users a balanced experience of Scripture. The weekend Bible study notes are not a substantial commentary, but more of a series of reflections on the scripture for the day.

SORT OUT YOUR LIFESTYLE CHALLENGES The weekends are also the time for reflecting on the 'Lifestyle Challenges' undertaken in the previous week. This may have important consequences for what decisions are taken about the programme during the following week. You will pick this up naturally if you use the suggested programme, as outline on the 'Lifestyle Challenge' page.

How to use the prayers

OPENING AND CLOSING PRAYERS The opening and closing prayers are all written by the author, but reflect different styles and cover a wide range of subjects. Mostly, they are not linked to the Bible study themes. Sometimes, prayers are suggested rather than directly written, or guidelines are given about how to pray or what to pray for by yourself.

All the prayers are either prayers of worship to God, prayers about others (intercession) or prayers about personal concerns (petition). These different categories are mixed up on a daily basis, so that together with the meditation and the 'suggestions for prayer' (see below), most aspects of prayer are covered in any one day.

SAYING YOUR OWN PRAYERS When there are suggestions about saying your own prayers, they may include:

- Suggestions about how you might pray for something

- Instructions on how to go about using a particular type of prayer
- Ideas about what to pray for by yourself.

It is important for each of us to grow and develop in how we pray. Unfortunately, praying has become a thing of fear for many Christians; people even say 'I can't do it'. However, we can all talk to God, and if we know Him as Saviour, He is our friend (John 15:15). Prayer is a great privilege of course, and the place to start is with words of normal conversation, and there is nothing to be afraid of. Your own prayers are very important to the Lord, as He really does want to know what comes from your heart.

'SUGGESTIONS FOR PRAYER' Each day there are suggestions for prayer based upon a weekly theme, and they are provided for your own use in intercession. You can take these prayers as far as you like. A brief prayer is helpful, but the topics may sometimes provoke you to research the subjects further before praying. In this way, you broaden your own understanding and experience of both prayer and the world in which we live.

Using meditations

USING YOUR MIND TO WORSHIP GOD Meditating is, for the Christian, nothing less than allowing our minds to dwell without distraction on our Lord and God. It is a way of using our minds to worship the God who made us, and to put thought, reason and reflection into our faith. A meditation is provided every day, sometimes in poetic form, to help you do this.

FILL YOUR MIND WITH WHAT IS GOOD Some think it is unchristian 'meditate' because other religions do it! Really, meditating just means 'thinking about', as in Philippians 4:18 *'whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable ... if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think (meditate) on such things'*. Indeed, Psalm 1 encourages us to meditate on the 'Law of the Lord'.

So then, Christian meditation should fill your mind with what is good and of God. Other religious practices use meditation to do other things with the mind; techniques used in some cults are rather like brainwashing, and others such Yoga focus on 'emptying' the mind. This is not the Lord's way. His way is to liberate us to think about and experience the world as free individuals, and the Scriptural model of meditation is based on 'wisdom', the art of reflecting upon what is right and wrong in the world. As we meditate and He fills our minds with what is good, and He blesses us.

THEMES There is no structure to the themes provided by the meditations. As with the prayers, the variety provided by the authors own spontaneous selection of subjects from a wide variety of sources enables different people with different interests or concerns to connect with the devotions.

How to use the Bible studies

STUDYING THE BIBLE Studying the Bible is the privilege and duty of all Christians. Through it we broaden our own faith and understanding as God reveals His truth to us. For this reason, the passage of scripture provided each weekday has a substantial commentary. Please do not be put off by this, for they can easily be read in 10 minutes, and the aim is to give the reader a good understanding of all the main features of the text.

Careful study is like giving yourself permission to allow God's Word to dwell in your mind, so that you can engage in some serious thought. You should feel free to make connections with the life of Faith, as people have done for centuries, and the Holy Spirit will work in your mind to bring a focus to your thoughts if you have submitted your study to Him.

BIBLE TRANSLATION USED The Bible study page has the relevant passage of scripture in the author's own translation. In each full (weekday) study, there is a section in the main Bible study called '**NOTES ON TEXT AND TRANSLATION**' and this explains the way in which difficult parts of the text have been translated.

Some might feel that this is not necessary, but you will find that most modern versions of the Bible vary considerably, and ordinary Christians have the right to know why scholars translate the Bible in such different ways. Uniquely amongst modern Bible study notes for everyday people, these

devotions offer a justification for the translation and explain the complexities in ordinary English. It is crucial for people to know what the words of the Bible actually mean, if we are to believe that it is the 'Word of God'.

A PATTERN OF STUDY NOTES The notes follow a pattern. They begin with a section entitled '**REVIEW**' which summarises the message of the text and gives a brief message. It can be used for those who only have a short time. A short paragraph at the end of this entitled 'going deeper' explains the issues to be dealt with later in the main Bible study page, if the user wishes to use the full study.

The Bible study on the main Bible study page begins with the '**REVIEW**' and continues with '**NOTES ON TEXT AND TRANSLATION**' as explained above. The bulk of the remaining study continues under the heading '**GOING DEEPER**' and has secondary headings to help you follow the study, The study ends with a section headed '**APPLICATION**' in which issues are discussed which arise from the text and are relevant for today.

PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE Since the website began in 2005 many books of the Bible have been studied, and the author is gradually adding all his work to the '**BIBLE STUDIES**' page where you can access all the work done to date in the project. At present, roughly one quarter of the Bible has been completed, including just under one half of the New Testament. The whole project should be completed in 2018.

Taking notes and using the questions provided

TAKING NOTES At the end of each set of study notes, you are encouraged to write down a few notes by way of reflection on the scripture you have read. I suggest that a few notes written regularly will provide a helpful summary of your thoughts that can easily be accessed at a later date. I suggest you create a file on your computer for this purpose.

If you make even simple brief notes over a period of a few months, your daily notes will build up to a considerable store of personal theological reflection. This can be a source of great interest for you, later on, for they are a record of our growth in understanding the Lord and His Word. If you are preacher, you will find these noted invaluable.

USING THE QUESTIONS PROVIDED On the final 'Discipleship' page, you will find a set of questions which relate to the text and the study for the day. They are designed to do one of two things; either to assist you as you reflect upon the passage you have studied, or to be used by Bible study groups. It is not the primary purpose of the website to assist Bible study groups, so you will not find that the questions cover all the necessary ground for exploring a given text. It is hoped they will be a useful starting point for Bible study group leaders as they prepare for guiding discussions.

If you use the questions to prompt your own thoughts, please do be careful. They can assist you if you do not find that your first reading is fruitful; however, do try to respond to what the Holy Spirit is saying to you directly through the Scripture text, rather than through study and the questions. These are written with the intention of helping you find what the Lord is saying to you through the text, not to dominate what you think of it.

Discipleship challenges

A PLAN FOR CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP The material provided in this website is a new approach to the disciplines of Christian living. At the end of every study, I offer some thoughts about how the text might effect Christian lifestyle and discipleship. It would be impossible for anyone to take up all the issues that are raised, so please read them out of interest, but do the following in order to follow a plan for developing your Christian discipleship.

LIFESTYLE CHALLENGES Firstly, please read the website page devoted to 'lifestyle challenges' and download the guidelines for your own reference. To begin with, it is best if you choose one of the subjects mentioned on this page to get going with your lifestyle challenges. These include such things as fasting, giving practical help to neighbours or praying for friends. The lists of

suggestions on the Lifestyle Challenge page are suggestions, and are certainly not exhaustive. Decide what is right for you, and adapt them as you wish.

When you are used to the programme, then you will be able to read the discipleship comments at the end of each study and spot issues that you can make into challenges yourself; things you feel that the Lord is asking you to follow through. The worksheet available on the 'resources' page are useful for all such challenges, whether selected from the published list or chosen by you from the daily devotions.

The idea behind this is that we hold together the two great challenges of the Christian faith, our relationship with God and our relationship with others. Day by day, you respond to the issues of discipleship that the Holy Spirit brings to your attention. This can be spiritual and practical hard work!

FAILURE? It is almost impossible to take on any challenge and not have to deal with failure. Sometimes what we plan does not work out or is not well received. We should expect these problems sometimes. Think about why things have gone wrong, and come prayerfully before the Lord to try and sort it out. We often learn more from our mistakes than from our successes!

SUCCESS! Taking on lifestyle challenges will certainly help you to live out your Christian faith with fresh vigour. It may seem daunting at first, but it is not hard to follow. Those who have done this programme testify to its life-changing effects; problems overcome, new relationships established, and a new sense of God's presence in the ordinary things of life.

Other comments

CHOOSE TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE If you have not had regular devotional times before, this website is essentially an invitation to change your life. When people decide to change their lives and do God's call whatever it is, then revival happens in the life of one person. Taking up the challenge of regular devotions that are focussed on the traditional truths of Prayer and Bible study is life changing.

THE WEBSITE MATERIAL IS FREE FOR YOU TO USE AS YOU WISH The material available on this website is free. It has been written for committed, daily use, and the author hopes that however much or little of it you use, you will strive to use it regularly. It is designed to help you uncover the inner strength and guidance God offers you through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, not just when you feel like it, but regularly.

PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR HANDLING REAL LIFE The author does not pretend to offer simplistic solutions for your own troubles or those of the world, society, your church, or your family. He hopes that if you take up the challenge of this website, you will have the tools to deal with the ups and downs of real life in a practical way, confident in the ever present Holy Spirit to guide you.

CHOOSE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE As you use this website, pray that by the power of God's Holy Spirit you will find the vigour, calling, insight, self-control, maturity, honesty and humility to make a positive difference in this world. Pray also that any evil that prevents you pursuing a Godly life be defeated in the name of Jesus Christ.

RENEWAL and REVIVAL The author is convinced that the evidence points to prayer, Bible study and disciplined Christian living as the beginning, the means, and the end of Renewal and Revival, whatever the culture or time (in history). He seeks to live what he preaches.

'COMMON' ENGLISH IS USED Technical theological or 'churchy' words are avoided, but sometimes they are an indispensable shorthand for ideas which cannot be expressed any other way. There is a 'Dictionary' page on this website where such words are explained. The dictionary is a feature of the site that will grow with time and will be added to as the author is able so to do.

ADDRESSING GOD I use the expressions 'God' and 'the Lord' interchangeably, as do the Psalms. In commenting on individual texts I use whichever term is used most in the verse or psalm I am describing. The pronouns referring to God ('You', 'Your' etc.) are capitalised. This implies a sense of the awesomeness of God, similar to the praise of God in the Psalms.

My hope is that these guides will be an aid to your spiritual journey. I expect that you will sometimes agree with what I write, and sometimes disagree. If you think I am wrong, then explore further by yourself and see where it leads. God has much more to say than one person can write. I hope your journey will be fruitful.