

You are asked to spend an hour each day doing your devotions and reflections, breaking it down like this. The course session takes one evening per week, so there are no devotions for that day. You are asked to give one hour on five following days, leaving one day free, perhaps Sunday. You will choose how to fit this into your life routines.

On each occasion, you should use the Devotions and Reflections Form available on the website for the relevant week. Use this form as a general guide linking your devotion and reflection time with the course material, and as a place to respond by writing down your considered thoughts and reflections.

What are 'Devotions' and 'Reflections'

Devotions

Spend roughly half an hour doing your devotions, preferably just before the reflections. Devotions are spiritual exercises focussed on worshipping God, praying, reading the Bible, and listening. Whatever their form, they are primarily directed to God, and they should be done not for what they give us but for what we give to God.

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength' (Deut. 6:5).

Because of this, we do not insist you use the devotions provided; they are offered together with options. Pray about which devotions you use (see below). Certainly, if you use devotions other than those provided, we hope you will be blessed by using them, and how they prove to link with the course.

Reflections

Spend roughly half an hour doing your reflections, just after your devotions. Much has been written about reflection and 'reflective practice' and its value to almost every profession; reflection is expected of those attempting to improve work practice, respond to critical events, or develop their careers.

On this course, the purpose of daily reflections is to help you think more deeply about what you have learned in the sessions, and aid your spiritual growth. You will be asked a brief series of questions like these below; the first will be 'compulsory' and marked **C**, and the rest are for your use if you wish to respond to them:

- *Make a note of anything arising from your devotions, and whether it connects with the course themes*
- **C** *Write down what you believe to be the most significant thing you heard someone else say during the last session. How did this make you feel, and why did you think it important?*
- *Have you changed your opinion about anything discussed at the last session, and if so, why?*

As you write down your reflections, they become a record of your thoughts and your spiritual growth. Hopefully, as your notes accumulate they will contain everything from useful information to interesting references, and also a record of other spiritual experiences such as visions and dreams. All this can be used for immense good within your life.

It is important that you do not merely record things as you think of them, but 'reflect' and record your wider thoughts, feelings, ideas, reactions, personal challenges and conclusions (see models below).

Further advice about devotions

Using the website

On the website www.life-course.uk you will find daily devotions written specifically for course users, accessed by clicking 'student' on the navigation tab. The website contains other general purpose devotions, click 'devotions' on the navigation tab. In addition, you will find there more than a thousand daily devotions downloadable as pdf's, each based on a passage of Scripture (click on 'devotions' on the navigation tab, then 'go to back list').

The devotions for the course have these elements; use them as you wish, but 1 and 3 are the most important:

1. some suggestions for prayer, to be used in whatever way is helpful
2. a meditation about some aspect of faith or the Christian life;
3. a passage of Scripture to read along with a review;
4. application notes, together with questions and ideas about discipleship, and a final prayer.

You may wish to continue to use the material you currently use; but please use it in a disciplined manner. Do whatever devotions are right for you, but I strongly recommend they contain an even mix of prayer and Bible study.

Further suggestions for prayers

- A. Use a formal book of prayer, e.g.
 - the Methodist Worship Book order of morning or evening prayer, or the older Methodist Service Book

- Celtic Daily Prayer (Northumbria Community) (Collins)
 - Daily Light (a traditional resource)
- B. Use the Internet to follow any number of on-line guides; but check them out carefully and seek advice
- Assemblies of God 'Ways to pray' prayer guides 'prayer.ag.org'
 - Christian Renewal Ministries prayer guides; '<http://www.crmin.org>'
 - Various prayers <http://www.thoughts-about-god.com/reflecting/sample-prayers.htm>
- C. Use smartphone, laptop or tablet apps, for example,
- 'Daily Light on the Daily Path'
 - 'Pray God's will'
 - 'Divine Office'
- D. Other potential resources or patterns for prayer
- spend time in extempore prayer / speaking in tongues / silence
 - or looking around you to see what God is saying to you through your surroundings
 - Use the pattern: J - Jesus; O - Others; Y - Yourself
 - Use the pattern: A - Adoration; C - Confession; T - Thanksgiving; S - Supplication (asking prayers)

Further suggestions for Bible study

- A. Use a formal scheme of reading through the Bible
- As found in various Bible editions
 - The Intervarsity website Bible reading: cms.intervarsity.org/studentsoul/item/start-reading-bible
 - The 'daily Bible Guide' (Google it, you'll find it), or many more similar
- B. Get hold of one of a number of Bible study aids, which can point you quickly in the right direction when studying by yourself. Today, most are available in book form, as an app or for Kindle
- Get hold of a **Bible Commentary**. Although African in origin and ethos, I recommend '*The African Bible Commentary*' as a breath of fresh air. The '*NIV Bible Commentary*' is also good.
 - Get hold of a **Bible dictionary**. This will quickly explain Bible themes, names, origins of words etc. and give you maps and time-charts.
 - Get some Bible apps for your smartphone or tablet. I know 'Olive Tree' and 'NIV lite', but share with each other what you have found useful.
- C. Read the Bible one chapter at a time; it takes 5-10 mins to read a chapter, which is just right for our time-scale, and you will read through the Bible in 3 years. To read the Bible in a year read 3 chapters a day!

Further suggestions for Reflections

Here are some simple models for reflection, reminding us of the varied angles from which we can view things. Some of these come from secular sources, but they are remarkably similar to how Jesus worked with the disciples.

If you find it helpful, use these models to help you write down your thoughts about the things we will be studying, or what happens in our sessions. They are similar, but each will be logical for a different situation or set of thoughts.

Model A (for reflecting on an event or incident)

1. What are the facts?
2. What does this make you feel?
3. What is negative about it?
4. What is positive about it?
5. What new ideas do you have?
6. What can be done as a consequence of it?
7. Is there anything you would do differently if the same situation were to arise?

Model B (for thinking 'theologically')

1. What do you know about this?
2. What do you think about it?
3. What is difficult or easy about it?
4. How does this connect with Scripture?
5. What can you contribute to these ideas?
6. What does all this mean for today, and how may God's people act on it?
7. How can you act on your conclusions?

Model C (for thinking about how to get something done)

Write down what you know / evaluate it, good and bad / assess your feelings / plan / communicate / evaluate

Model D (for working out what to do when you find something difficult)

Write what happened, then pray about it / think about it again and see if your thoughts have changed / assess the consequences of what you intend to do / is what you intend good, kind, Godly, and in keeping with Scripture? / make a plan with care, write it down, and resolve to act.