

Dr Patrick Oben



The
Devotional
Life

CULTIVATING AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD
THROUGH HIS WORD AND PRAYER



Copyright © 2023 by Patrick Oben.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other non-commercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, email the publisher at permissions@deshenpublishing.com.

Published in the United States by Deshen Publishing, LLC. For more information, please visit the Publisher's website at <https://deshenpublishing.com>.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright ©1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked KJV are from the King James Version of the Bible.

Although the author and publisher have made every effort to ensure that the information in this book was correct at press time, the author and publisher do not assume and hereby disclaim any liability to any party for any loss, damage, or disruption caused by errors or omissions, whether such errors or omissions result from negligence, accident, or any other cause.

ISBN: 978-1-961391-01-7

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication vii

Introduction 1

SECTION I: MINDSET 5

**Chapter 1: Blossoming by the River:
The Withered Tree Versus the Flourishing Tree..... 7**

 The Vital Link 7

 When the Practical Relationship Fails:
 The Origins of Spiritual Dryness 15

 When Practical Relationship Thrives:
 The Blessedness of Flourishing 22

 Takeaways 26

 Fun Quiz: How Well Do You Understand Spiritual Dryness? 27

 Feeling Spiritually Dry or Flourishing?..... 29

**Chapter 2: Revealing the Devotional Life:
Uncovering Its Deeper Meaning 30**

 Exploring the Deeper Meaning of Devotional..... 30

 The Devotional Today and in Biblical Times 35

 Why Should You Care? 38

 Takeaways 44

 Are You Ready for a Devotional Audit? 45

**Chapter 3: Fuel for the Devotional Flame:
Discovering How Intimacy with God Fulfills Our Deepest Yearnings... 47**

 The Interplay of Devotional Life and Spiritual Hunger 48

 Understanding Spiritual Hunger and Thirst..... 53

■ The Devotional Life

Satisfying Spiritual Hunger	58
Takeaways	64
The GodSeeker Pulse: A Scale for Your Spiritual Hunger	65
SECTION II: DEPTH	67
Chapter 4: The Divine Blueprint:	
Discovering God's Idea of the Devotional Life	69
God's Design, Not Human Creation	69
Deepening Our Relationship with God	74
Transformation and Flourishing from the Devotional Closet.....	78
Takeaways	83
Help a Fellow Christian!	84
Chapter 5: Devotionals in the Scriptures:	
Insights from Biblical Examples and Analogies	85
Biblical Examples.....	85
Everyday Analogies: Unraveling the Fabric of the Devotional Life	94
Takeaways	99
The Master's Way Quiz	100
Chapter 6: Digging Deeper into Devotionals:	
Unearthing Truths for a Solid Foundation	102
Deepening Your Devotional Roots:	
Preparing for Spiritual Longevity	102
The Time Factor.....	106
The Devotional Factor.....	111
God's Word as Spiritual Food.....	115
Fellowship.....	124
Takeaways	127
How Firm Is Your Devotional Foundation?	128
Chapter 7: Devotional Warfare:	
A Guide to Overcoming Obstacles in Your Devotional Life	131
The Battle for Your Devotional Life	131

Navigating Obstacles and Challenges in Our Devotional Lives.....	138
Takeaways	148
Assessing Your Spiritual Resilience: Are You Ready for Battle?	149
SECTION III: PRACTICE	151
Chapter 8: Devotional Bible Study Unveiled:	
From Routine Reading to Lively Devotions	153
What Is Devotional Bible Study?	153
How Devotional Bible Study Complements Other Methods.....	158
The Process of a Devotional Bible Study	162
Meditation in Devotional Study	170
Takeaways	176
From Springboard to Spirit: A Devotional Discovery Quiz!	177
Chapter 9: In His Embrace:	
The Power and Art of Devotional Prayer.....	179
Understanding Devotional Prayer	179
How to Pray During Our Devotions.....	183
The Power of Quiet Waiting	187
Takeaways	190
Reflect & Renew!.....	191
Chapter 10: Ignite the Flame:	
Your Journey to a Vibrant Devotional Life	192
Cultivating Your Devotional Life.....	193
Crafting Effective Devotionals.....	195
Putting Knowledge into Practice.....	199
Takeaways	207
Write Down the Vision!.....	208
Next Steps.....	210
A Personal Note from Dr. Oben	213
Free Powerful Mini E-books	215

■ The Devotional Life

About the Author	217
Answer Key to Chapter Quizzes	219

DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to the Holy Spirit, Who opens my eyes to see Jesus in the Scriptures and makes His presence and power tangibly felt in my cherished moments alone with Him.

INTRODUCTION

Augustine, one of the greatest of the early Christian theologians, once said, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in You.” This inner restlessness takes on a perplexing form for the child of God—a deep yearning for a close relationship with the Father, an intimate walk with Him.

Picture two trees representing the spiritual lives of believers. One tree is vibrant and fruitful, deeply rooted in God’s presence. The other is withering, struggling for survival with unrealized potential. Like these trees, our spiritual lives can blossom or remain parched depending on whether or not we prioritize intimacy with God.

Despite our deepest desires, the symptoms of a tree struggling with access to water are too common. Many of God’s precious children wage an internal struggle, grappling daily with one or more symptoms of a faltering relationship with the Lord, like a tree planted in dry land. Countless believers thirst for an enriching relationship with God yet are stuck in a seemingly endless cycle of spiritual dryness and unfulfillment.

Adding to this complexity are numerous failed attempts to improve this relationship, leading to discouragement, inadequacy, and stagnancy. Those who persevere in seeking God in prayer and Scripture often face overwhelming challenges—time constraints, competing responsibilities, or the lack of a systematic approach to nurturing their devotional life.

■ The Devotional Life

On the bright side, by way of contrast, there is an abundant daily life, like a flourishing tree planted by streams of water, always available to all of God's children. And the secret of this rich, fruitful, and satisfying relationship is to remain planted by the rivers of living water—daily communion with God.

The exciting news is that this club is not exclusive. Every Christian can adopt this practice and reap its benefits regardless of their role in the Church.

The major challenge is to make the shift, to cross the line, to move from one end to the other, from daily battles with a withering spiritual life to the daily enjoyment of an abundant and full life. This book aims to help you make that spiritual shift. After reading this book, you'll know how to deepen your relationship with God and experience new dimensions of your walk with Him. It will lead you into a deeper insight into what the Bible says about the devotional life and God's purposes for it. You'll be able to develop a practical, systematic approach to establishing a devotional routine tailored to your lifestyle and schedule.

Additionally, you'll break free from setbacks that hold you back from establishing a devotional routine. With this liberation you'll achieve balance and harmony by integrating work, family, and devotional time, thereby reducing stress and spiritual exhaustion.

This book has been designed to serve believers, whatever their stage of spiritual journey, whether new converts, seasoned Christians, or any level in between. Its contents will guide you, step by step, in understanding the biblical essence of a devotional life and in establishing a devotional habit that works for you.

I wrote this book with two goals in mind. First, to equip you with the knowledge required to comprehend what a devotional life is and

why it's vital. Second, to offer a straightforward, easy-to-follow guide to conducting effective devotions. The book's two initial sections focus on cultivating the correct mindset for a sustained devotional habit. Having the right mindset often outweighs knowing the right steps. Ten years from now, your continual pursuit of God will be motivated not by your mastery of steps but also by your deep understanding—your mindset—of the role of your quiet time with God.

To reap the most benefit from this book, I recommend first grasping its insights and then mastering the steps. If you prefer, you may go directly to the section that reviews the steps.

My dual roles as a minister and a medical doctor have shaped my interest and experience in devotion. Just as I'm eager to understand the factors that affect people's physical health, I've always been curious about the spiritual health of their hearts. Beyond my professional life, my Christian journey has taught me the indispensable role of Scripture and prayer in spiritual well-being. My discovery as a teenager of Robert A. Traina's 1952 *Methodical Bible Study*¹ ignited in me a passion for God's Word; I've read through it at least ten times since then. Over the years, my life and the lives of countless others have been transformed by God's living and powerful Word.

I pray that the Lord will use this book to guide you on a transformative journey. Indeed, a robust devotional life can revolutionize your relationship with the Lord. Are you ready for this revolution? If so, turn the page and take the first step of this journey.

¹ Robert A. Traina, *Methodical Bible Study* (Zondervan, 1952)

SECTION I

MINDSET

The Bible is often likened to a manual for life, a guide that illuminates our path and helps us navigate our earthly walk. This understanding is a foundational truth that has shaped many believers' lives, including my own during my early years in the faith. Over time, however, I have discovered that God's Word is more than a manual—it is a life source, an indispensable element for our spiritual survival and growth.

This deeper understanding shapes the way we approach our devotionals. If we view the Word of God as a manual, we may turn to it selectively, that is, only when searching for answers or needing guidance. In this approach, we treat the Bible as though it were a medicine cabinet, accessing it only when we're not feeling well. When we view His Word as our life source, however, we immerse ourselves in it daily, regardless of circumstances, as we would food and water.

This shift in perspective is pivotal and forms the foundation for a healthy devotional practice. Establishing this mindset is the focus of this book's first section.

Chapter 1

Blossoming by the River: The Withered Tree Versus the Flourishing Tree

Two trees, two destinies—one dry and withering, the other flourishing and fruitful. What if this analogy holds the secret to your spiritual life? Contrary to the common belief that the Christian life oscillates between spiritual highs and lows, the actual state of our spiritual wellness is connected to our daily practical communion with God—our commitment to immersing ourselves in His Word and conversing with Him through prayer.

In this chapter, we'll explore the profound and direct correlation between your Christian life and your choices concerning prayer and immersion in God's Word. You'll discover the effects of maintaining a steadfast and purposeful devotional life and gain insight into the consequences of when that practice wavers.

THE VITAL LINK

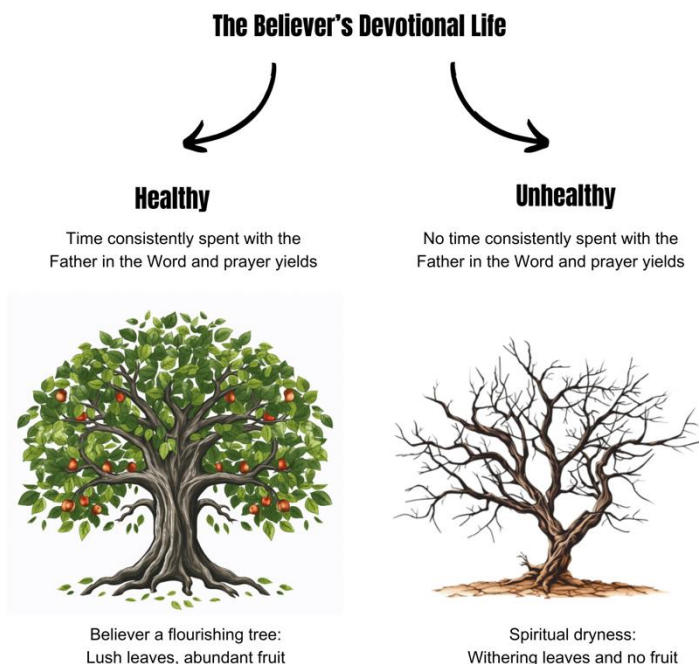
"I just don't feel close to God these days," a church member confided to his pastor. "How often do you spend time reading your Bible and praying?" The man's silence spoke volumes.

Devotional Life and the Christian Experience

A truth of utmost importance is that a direct relationship exists between your devotional life and your Christian experience. The consistency of your time spent with God determines the closeness of this relationship. It impacts your spiritual growth, maturity in character, and the fruit you bear, such as joy, peace, righteousness, and love. It determines whether you will struggle with sin or walk in the victory of God's wisdom and power.

Jesus offers abundant life, but it can overflow for some and barely trickle for others. To help explain the dichotomy of success and failure in the Christian life, we turn to the imagery of trees—one planted by water and the other in the desert as seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1:
The Devotional Life and Our Daily Christian Experience



The Imagery of Two Trees

God often uses concrete, earthly imagery to illustrate abstract spiritual truths. If He were to explain what a successful Christian life means in purely spiritual terminology, many of His listeners would struggle to follow along. When He employs the symbolism of concrete and familiar things like trees, we can readily connect with His message.

Throughout the Scriptures, people are depicted as trees—leaf- and fruit-bearing plants, firmly rooted in the soil (e.g., Isaiah 61:3, Psalm 1:3, Jeremiah 17:7–8). In your relationship with the Lord, you are a tree. Your leaves are your well-being and vitality—the state of your body and heart. Your fruit is the work of your character and hands. Your roots are your level of stability and connection to the source of nutrients. The ground is your heart (Mark 4:14–15).

In God’s House there are two types of trees—two categories of true Christians. The first is a flourishing tree, luxuriant in leaves, abundant in fruit, and planted by the river. The second is a dry tree struggling for life in the desert. Some trees occupy the narrow space between flourishing and withering, but the extremes highlight the crucial distinction.

Why do trees planted by the same heavenly Farmer turn out so differently? The answer lies not in the Farmer but in the trees. That is, the disparity in question arises from the relationship between the trees and their water source. The key word is *relationship*.

All Christians have in common a Father-child relationship with God but diverge significantly in how we practically experience this relationship. This practical aspect is a matter of spiritual life or death on Earth.

It's All About the Roots

Like the trees in God's House (Psalm 92:13), our roots have two main roles: anchoring and absorbing.

Anchoring

Roots anchor a tree to the ground, stabilizing it. This mirrors a secure, established Christian life that flourishes when God's Word fills our hearts:

Rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.
(Colossians 2:7)

Strengthening our spiritual roots comes from immersing ourselves in God's Word and faithfully obeying it. Jesus highlighted the instability of a Christian life lacking spiritual roots in the Parable of the Sower:

As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. **(Matthew 13:20–21)**

Absorbing

Roots also absorb water and nutrients from the soil, which are essential for the tree's growth and survival. They symbolize the aspect of our Christian lives that keeps us spiritually nourished. The daily practice of reading and meditating on God's Word is such a powerful root. David puts it well:

But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams

of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. (**Psalm 1:2–3**)

While the Bible uses the root metaphor to discuss elements like obedience and commitment, we focus here on the root’s function as a lifeline connecting the tree to its nutrients. These “devotional roots,” formed by consistent scripture meditation and prayer, keep us spiritually hydrated and grounded in our relationship with the Lord.

Planting—Spiritual Positioning for Fruitfulness

As God’s cherished trees, Christians are already rooted in God’s House, solidly positioned in a Father-child relationship with Him. Yet, having God’s presence and power within us doesn’t guarantee we’ll experience these blessings daily. For instance, although all Christians have access to God’s joy and peace, not everyone feels them daily. The difference lies in our daily relationship with God. The concept of “planting” now becomes pivotal.

God has planted us in His House but also calls us to root ourselves daily near the rivers of His presence and power. If devotional roots symbolize our consistently nourishing through the Word and prayer, then planting ourselves by the river stands for cultivating, nurturing, or establishing that habit. He wants our roots to reach deep in His river:

They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit. (**Jeremiah 17:8, NLT**)

■ The Devotional Life

To experience the fullness of spiritual life, akin to a tree being nourished by a river, we must position ourselves to tap into the River of God's blessings. We access this flow of joy, victory, peace, love, power, and wisdom through our daily choices about surrender, faith, obedience, love for God, and a devotional life.

Believers who spend time in God's Word and prayer consistently are planting themselves near life-giving streams. Conversely, those who neglect these spiritual disciplines are planting themselves in barren land. It is therefore crucial to prioritize this practical relationship with God if you seek a fulfilling Christian life.

Metaphors of Practical Relationship

The devotional life enhances our practical relationship to God—a relationship centered around a person, not practices. When we relate to God, we relate to *Him*, not to the Bible or prayer. In Scripture, we find fascinating metaphors that depict God in this practical relationship to us. Let's explore three: water, sap, and oil.

God as Water

Water serves as a powerful emblem of the Holy Spirit (John 7:37–38). Scripture often portrays the Spirit as living water—alive and life-giving. Consider the role water plays in the life of trees and vegetation, which flourish when rain falls but wither in times of drought. In the same way, God's presence and power are our spirit's life. Without a vibrant, practical relationship with Him, our spiritual lives wither and perish.

The Holy Spirit is God's River that makes God's Trees (His people) flourish and be glad:

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High. **(Psalm 46:4)**

Spending time with God through His Word and prayer regularly increases the “water level” in our lives. The devotional life renders the water of the Spirit’s power and presence readily available to us to meet our needs. Our water level should concern us more than the drought should worry us.

God as Sap

As branches attached to Jesus the Tree, we rely on the sap flowing to us from the trunk (John 15:1–6). Sap represents God’s vivifying power and presence. The Psalmist images God’s vivifying sap this way:

The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the Lord; they flourish in the courts of our God. They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green.
(Psalm 92:12–14)

The righteous are full of sap; consequently, they are ever green and flourishing!

A branch detaching from the trunk is doomed to wither and dry up. Similarly, when we continuously feed on God’s Word and engage in prayerful fellowship with Him, we receive the life-giving sap that lets us flourish and bear fruit:

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. **(John 15:5)**

God as Oil

Like water, Scripture also pictures the Spirit as anointing oil (1 Samuel 16:13, Isaiah 61:1, Acts 10:38). Believers are like lamps that shine when fueled by oil (Zechariah 4:16). No oil, no light. It may seem obvious that a lamp without oil cannot emit light, but many believers continue to try to shine for God without the oil of the Holy Spirit. They lack oil:

Then he said to me, “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts. (**Zechariah 4:6**)

Consequently, without oil in our lamps, we will struggle to believe the Word, walk with authority, and achieve victory over sin, fear, anxiety, depression, satanic oppressions, and so forth. The devotional life replenishes our oil tank daily, ensuring that we’re equipped to face the increasing darkness around us. It is worth all the time and energy we invest in it.

Building Practical Relationships through the Devotional Life

The devotional life improves our practical relationship to God which, in turn, manifests as water, allowing us to flourish like a tree, and as sap, keeping us connected as branches, and as oil, enabling us to shine brightly as a lamp.

We *can* improve our practical relationship with God—it’s doable. He does not play favorites: anyone who surrenders to His will, obeys His voice, loves Him, believes His Word, and abides in Him becomes His favored child, enjoying the abundance of eternal life. God does not ask the impossible of us. Whatever He does ask is achievable. You, too, can draw closer to your Father. Every child of God has that potential.

However, I must caution you: a healthy devotional life does not come cheap. It requires hard work and will cost you—not money but time, devotion, and sacrifice. Anything you gain in Christ that costs you nothing will prove to be worth little or nothing. Yet, if you pay the price—even losing your life to find it—the joys of overflowing water, sap, and oil will overshadow your troubles.

Moreover, your spiritual life intertwines with that of other Christians. It forms what I often refer to as a threefold cord of spiritual growth: Bible study, prayer, and fellowship. We need all three, but the first two belong to the personal realm and form the core of your devotional life. In fact, a strong church is made up of Christians who have solid, personal relationships with God.

The presence or absence of a vital, daily connection with God determines whether we succeed or fail in our Christian life. When this link is weakened or disrupted, we encounter spiritual dryness.

WHEN THE PRACTICAL RELATIONSHIP FAILS: THE ORIGINS OF SPIRITUAL DRYNESS

There are signs of spiritual dryness you're likely overlooking. Scripture uncovers them.

The Dry Tree

Consider the well-nourished tree: it bears fruit; its leaves are lush and vibrant. Now contrast it with a tree far removed from a water source and so lacking the nourishment it needs to thrive. This tree, barren and withered, is a vivid metaphor for spiritual dryness.

Isaiah describes a man who perceives himself as a dry tree:

■ The Devotional Life

Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, “The Lord will surely separate me from his people”; and let not the eunuch say, “Behold, I am a dry tree.” (**Isaiah 56:3**)

While not directly related to devotional life, the metaphor of the eunuch as a dry tree captures the concept of lack: when we lack fruit—be it physical or spiritual—we are like a dry tree.

This analogy depicts our spiritual condition when our relationship with the Lord becomes dysfunctional. Before we delve into its significance, however, let’s review key aspects of a tree’s literal dryness.

- **Position:** The positioning of a tree is of paramount importance for its ability to flourish. Regardless of other external conditions, a tree with access to an abundant supply of water thrives.
- **Withered Leaves:** Green leaves are a visible indication of a tree’s well-being. When they turn yellow or brown, it signals distress and dryness.
- **Fruitlessness:** In a drought, a distressed tree will either fail to bear fruit or bear it inconsistently. Its potential for fruitful growth takes a back seat to sheer survival.

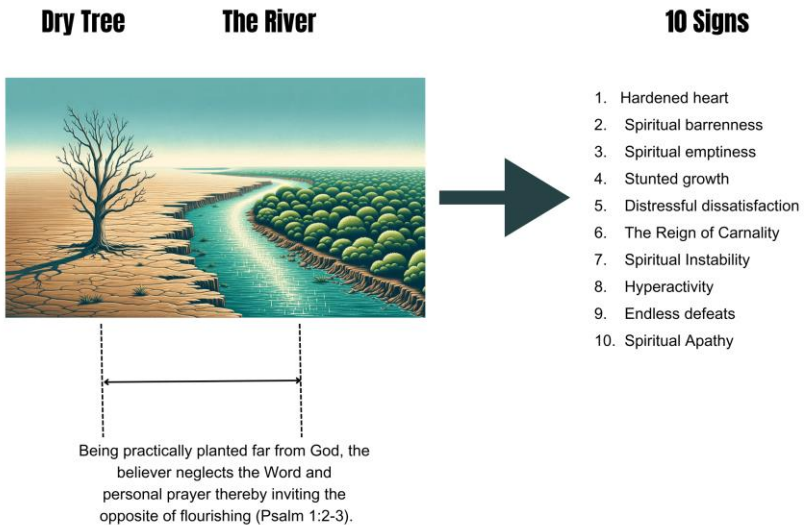
We must exercise caution in interpreting the metaphor of the tree, ensuring that we center on its main message rather than analyzing every detail. For example, the trees in the metaphor are described as being planted by the river. This should not be construed to imply that the Holy Spirit is external to us. Such an interpretation would stretch the metaphor beyond its intended purpose.

Now, let us explore how this analogy applies to our spiritual lives.

Understanding Spiritual Dryness

Spiritual dryness is a state in which the believer lacks practical access to the life-giving waters of God's presence and power, which impairs their spiritual vitality and ability to bear spiritual fruit. This state can be likened to that of a barren and parched tree in a desert (Figure 2).

Figure 2:
Understanding Spiritual Dryness



As we delve more deeply, we will list the signs and symptoms of spiritual dryness, each representing the real-life manifestations of the dry leaves and withered fruit of our lives.

Contrary to what you might expect, spiritual dryness does not arise solely from harsh environmental conditions. Scriptures teach that a

The Devotional Life

well-built house remains unaffected by external circumstances, just as a well-planted tree thrives despite the surrounding drought:

“He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.” (**Jeremiah 17:8**)

Instead of environmental drought, the cause of spiritual dryness is disconnection from the water source, that is, a poor practical relationship with God. An important contributor to this unhealthy relationship is a consistent failure to spend time to feed regularly on God’s Word and commune with Him in prayer. Few things starve our hearts and cause dryness in our lives more than the neglect of spiritual nourishment.

Unlike a tree that cannot choose where it is planted, believers can choose to spend time feasting on God’s Word and engaging in prayer. Every Christian must make this crucial choice daily, even if it comes at a cost.

Ten Signs of Spiritual Dryness

Dryness manifests in various ways. One does not need to be a diagnostician to recognize the signs of spiritual dryness. Instead, the indications are often clear, even if the terminology that accurately refers to them may be unfamiliar. For our purposes, we will highlight ten signs that accompany a parched spiritual landscape:

1. A Hardened Heart

God’s River softens the soil of our hearts:

You visit the earth and water it; you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water. You water its furrows

abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth. (**Psalm 65:9–10**)

Without water, our hearts harden like a rock. Three manifestations of this hardness are disobedience, lack of spiritual understanding, and difficulty believing God’s Word (Mark 8:17, Hebrews 3:15, 4:1–7).

A hardened heart is often an early indicator of spiritual drift. It should be an urgent warning that we’re venturing into dangerous spiritual territory.

2. Spiritual Barrenness

An unfailing trait of a withered tree is the absence of fruit which, for Christians, represents a life of love, joy, peace, righteousness, kindness, forgiveness, and souls won for God or believers affected by our lives. Few things manifest the abundance of the water of God’s presence as much as His peace or joy in our hearts.

Perpetual anxiety, fear, or depression are telltale signs that our hearts are screaming for the river of God’s presence, battling against spiritual dryness. The same is true if any of the character traits of the fruit of the Spirit are lacking.

3. Spiritual Emptiness

As God’s palm trees, we thrive, filled with divine sap (His presence and power), ensuring our flourishing and fruitfulness (Psalm 92:12–14). When we neglect His Word and prayer, however, nourishment diminishes, which renders us empty, barren branches. Many believers grapple with this sense of inner void—empty of power, joy, sense of identity, assurance of His presence, and so forth. This emptiness isn’t a sign that one is not genuinely saved or not being

■ The Devotional Life

God's child. Rather, it points to their journey through spiritual dryness.

4. Stunted Growth

Trees in arid regions merely survive rather than thrive. Similarly, a Christian in a spiritual dry place finds it challenging to deepen their knowledge of God, grow in their love for God and fellow believers, overcome recurring sins, or flourish in wisdom and power. If a believer battles the same sins or sees no transformation in character despite years of being in the faith, it indicates that they're in such a dry place. Spiritual growth requires nourishment just as a tree needs sap. And just as sap relies on ample water, our spiritual nourishment is stunted in a parched environment.

5. Distressful Dissatisfaction

Many Christians suffer profound unease in their spiritual life and an intense yearning for a peace that eludes them. While spiritual hunger is a sign of a receptive heart, in a spiritual drought it becomes agonizing. In this parched state, believers feel their bond with the Lord has weakened. Instead of a close, intimate relationship with Him, they sense a vast distance, as if they and God are worlds apart.

6. The Reign of Carnality

Our carnal nature, the flesh, reigns in a spiritual drought. As our hearts lack the refreshing streams symbolizing the Holy Spirit's influence, the flesh asserts dominance. Consequently, the unsavory traits of the flesh emerge:

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions.
(Galatians 5:19–20)

Moreover, the flesh doesn't just manifest through these sinful tendencies; it also reveals itself when we rely on our wisdom and strength in serving God, as opposed to relying on the Spirit (2 Chronicles 32:8, 1 Corinthians 2:1–4, 3:1–3).

7. Instability

When rooted in Christ, believers find stability in their faith (Colossians 2:7). Conversely, a tree with dried roots signifies spiritual instability:

His roots dry up beneath, and his branches wither above.
(Job 18:16)

Such roots render a tree vulnerable, easily swayed by every wind—of doctrines, movements, and more. In this state of spiritual dryness, believers often struggle with doubt, question their salvation or calling, and frequently remain uncertain of God's plan for them.

8. Hyperactivity

Closely tied to instability is spiritual hyperactivity. As Jesus emphasized, being in a spiritual wilderness or dry place can make one easily swayed:

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?" **(Matthew 11:7)**

Ironically, one manifestation of spiritual dryness is heightened spiritual activity. In their thirst for God, believers may mistakenly amplify their spiritual efforts—laboring to please God, increasing their service in the church to gain God's favor, attending many conferences, or continuously seeking what remains elusive. Rather

than offering rest, these dead works only further weary the soul. In a dry place, true spiritual rest remains absent.

9. Endless Series of Defeats

There is no victory over sin, bondage, or demonic oppression in a dry place. It's crucial to understand that these signs highlight challenges to a genuine Christian's relationship with the Lord. They don't imply a loss of salvation or the authenticity of one's faith. If any of these signs show up in your spiritual life, they may reveal the depth of your spiritual dryness.

10. Spiritual Apathy

Spiritual apathy refers to a lack of interest or indifference toward spiritual matters. For example, a spiritually apathetic child of God may not pray or read the Bible, even when they have the time. Furthermore, during spiritual dry spells, one may increasingly distance themselves from Christian fellowship—be it skipping church services, withdrawing from small groups, or steering clear of conversations about God.

These signs might clarify feelings or struggles you've experienced but can't quite define. We can be thankful that there's a remedy for spiritual dryness: planting yourself practically by God's River by devoting yourself to feeding on His Word and heartfelt prayer.

WHEN PRACTICAL RELATIONSHIP THRIVES: THE BLESSEDNESS OF FLOURISHING

Spiritual dryness and flourishing are like night and day: They may appear similar at dusk and dawn, yet they are completely opposite.

Understanding Spiritual Flourishing

Flourishing is the state of a tree that thrives because it enjoys uninterrupted access to water and essential nutrients. It is marked by lush growth, vibrant green leaves, and abundant fruit. Similarly, spiritual flourishing is the condition of the believer planted practically by the River of God's presence and power, leading to progressive spiritual transformation, perpetual fruitfulness, and incessant victory.

The psalmist beautifully captures the essence of flourishing:

But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. **(Psalm 1:2–3)**

In Psalm 92, the psalmist goes further to detail the blessed state of flourishing:

The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the Lord; they flourish in the courts of our God. They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green.
(Psalm 92:12–14)

Flourishing follows from being strategically positioned by the rivers of living water. Through our daily devotion and intimate relationship with the Father, we invest in our spiritual positioning, akin to Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus (Luke 10:39). As we flourish, the blessings of the Spirit saturate our hearts. We know God personally and deeply, recognizing His voice and aligning our will with His. This intimacy overflows into our walk and ministry and bears abundant fruit—even in old age (Psalm 92:14).

Transitioning from Dryness to Flourishing

As trees burst into vibrant colors during spring and parched lawns revive with water, we can transition from spiritual dryness to flourishing. This spiritual rejuvenation demands deepening our communion with the Lord through His Word and prayer.

Here's the heart of this book's message: Every believer can rejuvenate their spiritual life, much the way trees do in spring. If you feel spiritually parched, don't be discouraged. By deciding to read this book, you've demonstrated a desire to draw closer to God. He doesn't play favorites. All of His children in this dispensation of the Spirit can be filled with His presence, depending on the depth of their longing.

Committing to this book means investing precious time to gain something invaluable. Similarly, a vibrant devotional life requires dedicating time to sit at Jesus' feet—immersing oneself in His Word and speaking with Him in prayer. You'll soon find your relationship with Him deepening. His presence will become experientially real, and His voice unmistakably clear. The power, authority, and anointing you'll witness in your life will astound you.

My prayer is that you experience a life of ever-increasing spiritual sap, water, and oil. As you continue, may the “water level” of the Spirit in your life continually rise to an overflow as Ezekiel witnessed:

Going on eastward with a measuring line in his hand, the man measured a thousand cubits, and then led me through the water, and it was ankle-deep. Again, he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was knee-deep. Again, he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was waist-deep. Again, he measured a

thousand, and it was a river that I could not pass through, for the water had risen. It was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be passed through. And he said to me, “Son of man, have you seen this?” Then he led me back to the bank of the river. **(Ezekiel 47:3–6)**

Each time you commune with the Father, the River rises—first covering the ankles, then the knees, and eventually reaching the waist until it overflows. A devotional life doesn’t bring instant transformation but rather fosters a steady and consistent intimacy with the Lord. If you begin prioritizing time with Him today, you’ve taken the first step—the “ankle level,” if you will.

As days turn into weeks, months, and years, you’ll find the living waters of intimate communion with the Spirit rising higher. These waters won’t just elevate your spiritual state: they’ll overflow, enriching every aspect of your life—your home, relationships, finances, health, and community.

TAKEAWAYS

- The devotional life is a vital link between our relationship with God and our Christian experience.
- Spending time with God directly impacts our day-to-day relationship, allowing us to flourish, grow luxuriantly, and bear fruit.
- A practical relationship with God leads to flourishing, while a dysfunctional relationship results in spiritual dryness.
- Any believer can transition from dryness to flourishing by committing to daily time with the Father.

Despite our common Christian experience of ups and downs and wide variation in the spiritual experiences of Christians, God always wants us to thrive spiritually. His abundant life is available to all His children.

In this book, I aim to show that every Christian can enjoy a rich and fruitful relationship with God, whether in ministry or not. A healthy devotional life serves as a bridge to the close relationship with God, one that your heart yearns for. It's crucial to understanding the true biblical meaning of the devotional life as God sees it. The next chapter will shed light on this perspective.

FUN QUIZ: HOW WELL DO YOU UNDERSTAND SPIRITUAL DRYNESS?

Instructions: Answer the questions below to test your understanding of spiritual dryness. Once you've completed the quiz, you'll find the answer key at the end of this book to see how well you did!

Question 1: What best describes the state of spiritual dryness?

- a) It is a state where the believer is always happy and fruitful.
 - b) It is a state of lacking practical access to God's presence and power, impairing spiritual vitality and fruitfulness.
 - c) It is a state of perfect balance between spiritual and worldly matters.
 - d) It is a state where one is disconnected from family and friends, but deeply connected with God.
-

Question 2: True or False. A true Christian can never experience or struggle with spiritual dryness.

- True
 - False
-

Question 3: What is a primary cause of spiritual dryness in a believer's life?

- a) Harsh environmental conditions around the believer.

The Devotional Life

- b) A poor practical relationship with God, often due to neglect of spiritual nourishment from God's Word or fellowship with God in prayer.
- c) It's purely random, and there's no particular cause.
- d) One's inability to attend church regularly.

Question 4: Which of the following is true about the manifestations of spiritual dryness?

- a) More than one sign of dryness might be present.
- b) The manifestation of spiritual dryness does not mean loss of salvation.
- c) Our hearts harden progressively as we move practically away from God.
- d) Our roots dry up, our leaves fade, and we bear no fruit when we are spiritually dry.

Question 5: Spiritual dryness is not permanent and can be reversed or changed by improving our practical relationship with the Lord.

- True
- False

FEELING SPIRITUALLY DRY OR FLOURISHING?

Don't guess—find out now with our free, quick online quiz! Receive an instant color-coded scorecard and tailored advice. Take the quiz here or scan the QR code below:

https://patrickoben.com/?ff_landing=54



**How well are you
doing spiritually?**

Scan the QR code to
complete the brief quiz and
get immediate feedback

SCAN ME

Chapter 2

Revealing the Devotional Life: Uncovering Its Deeper Meaning

One of our readers asks, “Is the daily devotional biblical?” The answer will reveal the challenges in understanding the contemporary biblical context of devotionals.

It is regrettable that the growing popularity of written devotionals has led many believers to equate “devotional” solely with brief Christian writings or podcasts from favored authors. From a biblical perspective, however, a devotional is time dedicated to feeding on God’s Word and communing with Him in prayer.

In this chapter, we’ll delve into the biblical perspective on the devotional life. When you learn what God thinks and says about your quiet time, you’ll never see your time with Him the same again.

EXPLORING THE DEEPER MEANING OF DEVOTIONAL

Let’s dive into the multifaceted meaning of the term “devotional.” We’ll unpack three common meanings and their crucial biblical significance—the most important for us.

[Click Here to Continue Reading...](#)