

## **Give us this day our daily bread.**

This is a year by year reading of the Bible scheme which was originally prepared for the overseas students of the Earley Christian Fellowship 'Church Life School'. Students were encouraged to spend a regular time before the busyness of the day to read and pray; this was called the 'daily devotional time'. I have left the text of this leaflet pretty much as it was. The 6 months course began in February. You may find this will serve you better if you adapt the idea to your own schedule; don't become legalistic about this but do be disciplined.

## **Daily Devotional Times?**

One important aspect of your time in the Church Life School will be the daily devotional time. Each morning before the formal lessons begin you will have been expected to spend an hour in your daily devotional time. The purpose of this leaflet is to give some explanation as to what is meant by the 'daily devotional time'.

## **What does the word "devotional" mean?**

In Old Testament times to "devote" something to God meant that the thing was given up to God completely. Often it was "devoted" to God by fire to show that the giver had no intention of taking his gift back again. The English have a phrase "burning your bridges behind you" which means you make a decision which cannot be reversed. Once something was devoted to God it was to be God's alone.

In Old Testament times the nation of Israel offered a whole burnt offering of a lamb, twice each day, evening and morning. It was a way of symbolically giving themselves completely to God, day by day.

So our "devotional" time is a time given up completely to God. Although all our life belongs to God, this is a way of reminding ourselves day by day that we really do belong completely to Him.

## **When do I have my "devotional" time?**

Each day before the teaching sessions, and at week-ends before the business of the day. For most people this will mean before breakfast. In some homes where breakfast is taken early, it may be easier to have the devotional time afterwards.

## **How long do I spend in my "devotional time"?**

At least one hour. It is much better if this hour can be unbroken, and unhurried.

## **How shall I spend the "devoted" hour?**

In Waiting on God, Bible Reading, and Prayer.

## **What does "Waiting on God" mean?**

This is Bible language and describes our attitude. Servants used to "wait on" their masters. The main purpose of this time is not to get something **from** God, but to give something **to** God. We are at His service; available to Him. In the Bible "waiting on God" always has a sense of expectancy. It is not just sitting waiting for something that might happen, but being alert in God's presence, ready to act. It is not passive, but very active. Psalm 123:2 gives a wonderful picture of "waiting on God".

"Waiting on God" is the "listening" part of prayer.

## Is there a reason for the order in which I am reading the Bible?

There are several reasons. The books have been linked together in a way which it is hoped will reveal the progress and the distinctive message of the New Testament.

The four gospels have been separated so that the earthly life of Our Lord Jesus continually mixes with New Testament truth. We shall see the New Covenant (or Testament) revealed in the life of Jesus Christ.

- We begin by reading the books that have more of a Jewish background.
- Matthew's is the gospel of the King of Israel, the Messiah. It refers often to the Old Testament, and so makes a perfect link between the two Testaments.
- James' letter was one of the earliest writings in the New Testament. It was written to Christian Jews who were still meeting in synagogues.
- Hebrews shows the "better" Covenant to Jewish Christians who were in danger of slipping back towards the "imperfect" Covenant of Judaism.
- Mark's gospel is thought by many to be Peter's eye-witness account through the pen of John Mark. It certainly has all the urgency of Peter's character. This leads us into Peter's letters.
- Peter's letters move from the eye-witness account of Jesus of Nazareth and His sufferings to the glories that He has now received. His people share His suffering and His glory.
- Jude is read next because of its obvious links with Peter's second letter.
- Luke, the Gentile, made the greatest (in terms of pages) contribution to the New Testament. His Gospel and The Acts are a two volume biography of Jesus Christ.
  - Volume 1: the things that Jesus **began** to do and teach
  - Volume 2: the things that Jesus **continued** to do and teach
- Luke's emphasis on the Spirit provides the living background for the letters of Paul who was the Apostle to the Gentiles (non-Jews).
- Galatians was the earliest of Paul's letters and was almost certainly written during the time of Acts 14:26-28 and before the Jerusalem Conference in Acts 15.
- The Corinthian letters speak particularly to the local church
  - 1st Corinthians concentrates on the dangers of self-centred Christianity and emphasises the fact that we belong to one another in one body.
  - 2nd Corinthians highlights the purpose of a servant of God to bear the likeness of Jesus Christ here on earth.
- Romans is the nearest thing to a Systematic Theology in the Bible. It has been called the Gospel according to Paul.
- Paul's other letters follow. These were often written from prison, or while he was under house-arrest.
  - Ephesians is sometimes looked on as the summit of New Testament revelation. We read it a little more slowly than some of the others. Paul's "pastoral" letters we read last. They were his last writings.
- John's letters were almost certainly written before his gospel, so we read them first, as the early Christians would have done. Then we read the Revelation. John's Gospel and the Revelation were the last parts of the Bible to be written.
- Finally we gather together important chapters from all through the Bible. We see how the Bible moves step to step to the full revelation of God in Our Lord Jesus Christ.

## How shall I read my Bible portion?

Slowly. Prayerfully. Thoughtfully. Keeping in mind, not only the Bible context, but also your own personal context. Has God been speaking to you in the meetings, or

through your contacts with others? Not looking for coincidences, but with the heart open to hear what God's word to you is at this present time. Not to prepare a topic for preaching later, but with these points mind.

As I read this passage is there...  
A truth which speaks to my heart.  
An attitude of mine which needs to be changed.  
A choice for me to make.  
A sin to avoid or confess.  
A promise that I can make my own.  
A command for me to obey.  
A victory or a defeat that I can learn from.  
A glimpse of God's character that I can feed on.

### **Finally...**

Trust the Lord to make this daily devotional time a life-long pattern. There may be times and circumstances when it is not possible, but whenever it is possible make it a priority. Mark's gospel tells us that Jesus chose twelve

**that they might be with Him,**

and that He might send them forth. Spending time with Him is not an optional extra for the Christian life, but a vital foretaste of eternity. This **is** eternal life that we might know the Father and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.

Originally prepared for the overseas students of the Church Life School.