

To the members of the Stone-Campbell Dialogue and to all who work for Christian unity

INTRODUCTION

“O the quiet holy joy of the silent hour, when the soul is alone with God! Have you learned to love it, dear reader? If not, you have yet to attain to one of the purest and sweetest pleasures possible to the Christian in this life” (J.H. Garrison, *Alone with God*, 21).

If this quotation has appeal to you, you are not alone. Many of us long to spend time alone with a God. But an hour? In our busy lives? Perhaps, like me, you have desired and intended for years to have a regular quiet time with God, but did not know how to begin. If so, then this volume provides a starting point, a daily five-minute devotional that can begin your time with God. Or perhaps, like me, you have recently by God’s grace developed a habit of setting time aside each day for prayer, reflection, and meditation. If so, this book can be used as a helpful way to structure that time. There is no deeper joy and greater privilege than to be alone with the God who made us, who loves us, and who calls himself our Father. There is no greater friendship than the one we have with our brother, Jesus, who for our sake became one of us. There is no more intimate relationship than the one we enjoy with the Holy Spirit, God himself living in us. This marvelous life with God is a free gift. But as with all relationships, we must make time to cultivate that fellowship with God. Jesus himself felt the need to make time to be alone with God. So must we. Of course, a few minutes each day are not enough to spend alone with God. But they are a start. God will bless such efforts by meeting us in that quiet time.

How to Use This Devotional Guide

This devotional guide is based on two firm convictions. First, that God is at work within us and among us. Secondly, that we are not the first God has worked within and among. Each daily devotional here begins with a theme, a direction for the day, a signpost of how God is working in us. It continues with an invitation to hear God’s voice from a biblical Psalm. Each of the 150 Psalms is used throughout the year. For thousands of years, God’s people have used these precious words to express their joy, frustration, and trust in God. For a few moments each day, we can make these deeply honest words to God our own. Each devotion also has a scripture reading on the day’s theme. Every book in the Bible is represented during the year. This allows us to hear God’s voice in his word, the Bible, and to let Him shape our day and our lives. The Psalm and scripture are meant to be read slowly, meditated upon, and taken as our “to be” and “to do” list for the day. A brief prayer thought ends each devotional. These are prayer starters that should lead you into a longer and deeper period of prayer.

Meditating With the Stone-Campbell Movement

What is unique about this daily devotional is the opportunity it presents to interact with a particular group of Christians who have gone before us. Each day provides a spiritual quotation from a leader in what historians call the Stone-Campbell Movement, a movement that gave birth to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Churches of Christ, and the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ. Today there are over 4 million members of these churches in the United States, and millions in other parts of the world. Why listen to the voices of these Christian leaders of an earlier time? Perhaps because you are a member of one of these churches and want to discover your spiritual heritage. More importantly, because they were faithful to God in their age. Even if you have no direct ties to these churches, it is helpful to pray with those who have seen God at work in their time. It can help open our eyes and hearts to what he is doing among us now. In selecting these quotations, I have concentrated on a few writers in the period before the division of the Stone-Campbell Movement into three major groups. In that time they were both unified and a movement for unity among all Christians. In making these spiritual thoughts available to a new audience, I have modernized some spelling and vocabulary (although one can still experience the nineteenth century

flavor of the language). I have also modified the male-oriented language of the quotations, but have retained traditional language for God.

The Authors of the Quotations

These brief descriptions will introduce you to the eight writers most often quoted in the daily devotional guides. If you want to read more about them, consult their biographical articles in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (Eerdmans, 2004).

Barton W. Stone (1722-1844) was a preacher and editor widely known for the saintliness of his character. Even his theological opponents had to admit the genuineness of his walk with God. Stone often wrote on the importance of life in the Spirit in his monthly paper, the *Christian Messenger*.

As a preacher, debater, educator, and editor, Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) was the most influential early leader of the movement. Although Campbell's mind was trained for rational thought, he had a warm piety, evident in the quotations here from his books and religious journals.

Closely associated with Campbell was Robert Richardson (1806-1876), who worked to guard the movement from reliance on a strict rationalism. Instead, he emphasized the influence of God on the heart, writing the first devotional classic of the movement, *Communings in the Sanctuary*.

Walter Scott (1796-1861), was the great evangelist of the early movement, along with being an educator and writer. He penned some of the earliest theological works of the movement, including *The Gospel Restored* and *The Messiahship*. Scott's devotion was centered on Jesus as the promised Messiah.

Named for his famous great-uncle, Benjamin Franklin (1812-1878) edited the most popular religious paper of his time, the *American Christian Review*. His influence as a preacher was extended by printed volumes of his sermons, many of which are rich in emotional exhortations to holiness and obedience.

Robert Milligan (1814-1875) was a noted educator and scholar. His book, *Scheme of Redemption*, was an influential theology for the movement and is still used in some schools today. After his death, one of his students founded Milligan College in Johnson City, Tennessee in his honor.

Johnson Bible College in Kimberlin Heights, Tennessee (near Knoxville) was begun by Ashley S. Johnson (1857-1925) in 1893 as the School of the Evangelists. In addition to being an educator, he was a popular writer. J.H. Garrison (1842-1931) was a tireless advocate for Christian unity in his preaching and publishing. He wrote extensively on the devotional life and the experience of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers.

A Word of Encouragement

There are no short-cuts in the life of the Spirit. Five to ten minutes a day alone with God will not automatically make one spiritual. However, it is a start. God will honor our intentions and work in ways beyond our imaginations if we make the time daily to be with him. If you do not make that time now, I encourage you to begin. I believe your experience will be the same as mine in compiling this book. At first, it was a thrill and a joy to reflect on the Bible and to hear the voices of Christians now with God. However, after a while it became so daily. But it is in sticking to our pledge to be alone with God each day, particularly when we are busy or we don't feel like it, that we receive a greater blessing. God calls us his beloved children. He wants to spend time with us. My prayer is that this book can be a tool to help you enjoy quiet, holy moments with Him.