

A photograph of a person's hands clasped in prayer over an open Bible. The hands are positioned in the center, with fingers interlaced. The Bible is open, showing two pages of text. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue and white pattern, possibly a shirt or a wall. The overall mood is serene and focused.

Studying the Bible for Yourself

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Don't Settle For a Second-Hand Relationship

You and I must not and cannot settle, for second-hand relationships. Sometimes we get the feeling that because we are so busy that we will let a Pastor spend time with God and then we can benefit from his or her experiences. We think we ought to let our pastor tell us what God is saying. After all, isn't that why we pay preachers? Isn't that why we read Christian books? Those folks are good at daily devotions. My youth pastor, my mom, that preacher guy on tv! I'll just learn from them.

If that is your approach, your spiritual experiences are secondhand and not firsthand. Allow me to challenge you with this thought: Would you do that with other parts of your life? I don't think so.

You wouldn't do that with vacations or summer breaks. You wouldn't say, "Vacations are such a hassle, packing bags and traveling. I'm going to send someone on vacation for me because I am so busy at home. When he returns, I'll hear all about it and be spared all the inconvenience of packing my bags, going through security checks at the airport, and sitting on the airplane."

Would you do that? No! Of course not! If you would, please email me and I'll be happy to help you out (just kidding)! That would be crazy! With vacations, you want the experience firsthand. You want to see the sights firsthand, and you want to enjoy the rest and relaxation firsthand. There are certain things no one can do for you.

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You wouldn't do that with romance. You would never say, "I'm so in love with that cool guy or that hot chick, but romance is such a hassle. I'm going to hire someone else to enjoy the romance in my place. I'll hear all about it and be spared all of the inconveniences." Who would do that? Not a chance! You want to enjoy the romance firsthand. You would not want to hire someone else to go to the prom for you. You wouldn't want to miss a word or a date, and you certainly don't want to miss the kiss, right? Again, there are certain things no one else can do for you.

Lastly, you wouldn't let someone eat on your behalf, would you? You would never say, "Chewing is such a hassle. My jaws grow so tired, and the tastes are so overwhelming. I'm going to hire someone to chew my food, and I'll just swallow whatever he gives me." Would you do that? Yuck! Of course not!

The point is that there are certain things no one can do for you.

And one of those is a relationship with God. When Jesus asks for you to go on a retreat or getaway with Him, He doesn't want you to send a substitute. When God calls YOU to a relationship with Him, He does not want someone else in your place. When God calls you to feast in His Word, He doesn't want you to send someone else for you! He wants you to have a relationship with Him in such a way that you would truly see and touch Him.

So how do you connect with God in His Word? Is there a way to experience Him personally in the Bible? Yes there is!

Learning to Use S.O.A.P.

Presently I use a method for devotions called SOAP I learned from [Pastor Wayne Cordiero](#) at [New Hope Oahu](#). Let me explain, as this has been the most important key in my own spiritual growth over the years.

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Here is what you need.

A Bible (or mobile device with a Bible on it)

A Bible reading plan (for the Bible reading plan I recommend, you can click here for "[Today's Life Journal Reading](#)")

A Pen

A Journal to write in (or a computer to type on)

An open heart - only you can provide that one.

Here is how to do it

1. Find the bible reading that corresponds to today's date from the Bible reading plan. Turn to the chapter in your Bible asking the Holy Spirit to teach you, and to reveal Jesus to you. Mark off each daily reading as you complete it to keep yourself accountable.
2. Read the passages. As you are reading, underline or highlight the passages that the Lord impresses on you as a personal word to be applied. When you read with an open heart, the Lord will give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.
3. When God reveals a special life lesson to you, turn to a fresh page in your journal and record what God has just shown you (or type it onto your computer). When we go to school, we take notes so that we could be prepared for exams. We should write down what God teaches us, because this is how He prepares us for the challenges in our lives ahead. Use the following method...

S – Scripture – What verse or verses is God speaking to you from? Write it in your journal.

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O – Observation – What do you observe the Scripture saying? What is the context?

A – Application – How do the verse apply to you? How will you be different today, because of what you have just read?

P – Prayer – Record a short prayer asking for God's help as you step out in obedience to what He has revealed to you.

Remember that the SOAP method of devotion is a tool designed to help you grow in your relationship with Jesus. You can be flexible in using it, but be sure to develop a healthy habit of spending daily time with the Lord.

Most of the writings on [this site](#) are my personal devotions. Press [here](#) for a sample from my daily devotions.

Here are some questions and answers on doing our daily devotions:

I am busy. When am I supposed to do I do my devotions?

I have heard people ask, “When is the best time to do devotions, in the morning or at night?”

The best answer I can give is to do your devotions when you are at your best. If you are a morning person, do it in the morning. If, like me, you cannot function in the morning, don't do it in the morning! If you are attentive in the evening, do it in the evening. I tend to do my devotions during my lunch break at work. It is when I am most attentive.

The main point is to do it when you are at your best. Jesus Christ deserves your best and mine, so let's give it to Him.

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Some Common Questions

Here are some questions and answers on doing our daily devotions:

What if I fall behind on the Bible reading plan? I missed a few days and there is too much to catch up on.

While reading through the whole bible in a year is not a bad goal to have, the real goal of doing our devotions is to connect with God and to allow Him to speak to us. Don't worry about going back and making up all of the bible reading. You don't want to rush through the verses and miss the gems that God wants to reveal to you because you are just trying to get through them.

Read the bible reading for the day and journal on what you have read and what you understand.

Each day has about 3-5 chapters to read. Sometimes I can't finish it all.

Again, don't get caught in the trap of just trying to read lots of verses. Doing your daily devotions is not about just reading your bible, it is about letting the bible read and correct you.

More important than reading all of the verses listed each day, is letting God speak to you through what you do read.

I don't understand what most of the verses mean. What should I do?

Journal on what you do understand. As you continue to do your devotions, you will begin to understand more, but for now, don't stress over what you don't understand. Be blessed and encouraged by what you do understand.

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If you want to take your devotions a step deeper, click here for a free [Online Bible Commentary](#). You can look up the chapter and verses that of the Bible that you want to understand more. This commentary has helped me understand and navigate the Scriptures a lot and I think it will help you too.

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Ty Tamasaka holds a Master of Arts Degree in Christian Ministry from Pacific Rim Christian University in addition to Bachelor Degrees in both Psychology and Religious Studies from the University of Hawaii at Hilo. He authored of two books including, [Starting Fresh: Following Jesus on the Adventure of a Lifetime](#), and [More than a Conqueror: 5 Pathways to Personal Revival](#) both of which can be found on his website tytamasaka.com along with life-devotions, leadership articles, and a teaching podcast. Ty has served as a Lead Pastor, Youth Pastor, and Teaching Pastor, in Hilo and Honolulu, and serves on the faculty at the Bible Institute of Hawaii. Ty also serves on the teaching faculty at Pacific Rim Christian University with a heart to bring Biblical encouragement for life, love, and leadership.