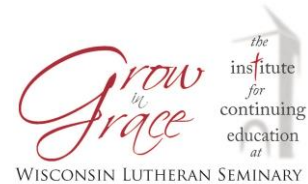


## RECLAIMING OUR CHRIST-CENTERED LUTHERAN DEVOTIONAL HERITAGE

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### 2014 Wisconsin Lutheran State Teachers' Conference

Thursday, October 30<sup>th</sup>  
Double Sectional  
1:30 PM – 3:45 PM  
Presenter: Rich Gurgel



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### INTRODUCTION

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Might this picture be worth far more than a 1000 words?

**Central thought of this whole workshop:** \_\_\_\_\_ devotion to you is always vastly greater than \_\_\_\_\_. Our devotional life is chiefly about the former, not the latter!

**Key perspective of this workshop:** I am addressing you as \_\_\_\_\_, not as \_\_\_\_\_.

Two key notes related to that key perspective:

- Your personal devotional life is not intended to focus on what you can use from it for ministry!
  - I pray what we ponder together in this hour might prove to be a blessing to many souls in you care, but that won't happen to the degree God intends unless it is first a blessing to **your** soul!
  
- Your "professional" study of the Word can be a rich blessing for your own soul **whenever** we remember that your heart is always intended to be the first one cut and healed.
  - Unfortunately, in the press of time, this can quickly become "professional" handling of the Word that can lead us to be merely producers of Biblical teaching rather than consumers of eternal truth.
  - That's the wisdom of the safeguard of maintaining a distinct personal devotional life.

## PART 1: THE GRACE OF OUR DEVOTIONAL LIFE AS A WHOLE

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Open and secret idolatry - open and secret work righteousness (among *Lutherans*?!?!?!?)

Martin Luther is a good teacher of receptive spirituality. He recognized that by our practice of piety we try to justify ourselves before God and before others. We all too readily regard the life of meditation and prayer as something that we have to do apart from Christ and His presence with us. We think of our devotions as our duty or work, our achievement and the product of our determination and self-discipline. And that assumption sets us up for failure and spiritual disillusionment. Luther devoted much of his energy to the teaching and practice of evangelical piety to prevent this failure. (John Kleinig, *Grace Upon Grace*, 12)

What happens when we begin to view our personal devotional life of Word and prayer from the point of view of something we must do for God?

The 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandments have plenty to say about my use (and my misuse!) of Word and prayer! But, here are two key gospel truths we must proclaim to ourselves every day:

Isaiah 50:4-5  
Luke 2:41-52  
Matthew 14:22-25  
Mark 1:11 (Mark 9:7)  
Galatians 3:26-27

**Key Gospel Truth #1:** Everything \_\_\_\_\_  
has been handed to you as **already accomplished** in Jesus' life for you.

There is nothing you can do to offer a higher standard of love and devotion for Word and prayer than what you **already possess** in Jesus' life! God is not looking for you to prove anything to him by your devotional life as you approach him in Word and prayer.

Isaiah 1:15, 18 (Matthew 27:46)  
Psalm 1 (John 19:28)

**Key Gospel Truth #2:** \_\_\_\_\_ every crimson and scarlet sin by which you have ever dishonored God's gifts of Word and prayer.

Remember: he dies as one dried up under God's judgment and swept away - dying as a despiser of Word and prayer. As you rest in the wounds of Jesus, your heavenly Father sees not a single spot remaining of any abuse of his gifts of Word and prayer! It is with such a record that you approach him in Word and prayer.

**But...if we have nothing to prove to God...nothing to make up to him...then what purpose does our devotional life of Word and prayer serve???**

**Galatians 5:16-26** explains the challenge we face every day until we arrive home in heaven.

In verses 16-18 Paul explains the battle raging within us!

In verses 19-21 he catalogs what our hearts produce left to themselves!

In verses 22-23 he shows us the beautiful fruit the Spirit works in us!

In verses 24-26 he urges us to remember what happened in our baptism so that we can “keep in step with the Spirit.”

Our devotional life is nothing more than our daily return to \_\_\_\_\_ so that we might daily die and rise anew with Christ.

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## PART 2: THE GRACE OF MEDITATING ON GOD’S WORD

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The greatest possible curse this side of heaven? Amos 8:11-12

The greatest possible blessing this side of heaven? Romans 10:5-10

Kleinig’s Three Truths on Which *Christian* Meditation Is Based:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**One way** to meditate on the Word:

There is no one right way of approaching devotional reading of the Word. Every useful “method” for meditating on the Scriptures tends to have one thing in common: it seeks to slow the reader down long enough to ponder the words being read. Over the years, Luther’s own method of weaving a wreath of four strands has proved useful to many.

The four strands are a series of four questions to ask of the words we are reading. They help us to “pray through” the Scripture (many who speak about personal devotions simply call it “prayer”). The questions spark conversation between the Lord (through his Word) and us (as we pray). This pondering of the Word gives the Spirit who lives in that Word ample room to work. It seeks to make sure that the Word being read does not become like seed plucked off the hard ground of our hearts (Matthew 13:18).

This pondering of the Word also seeks to lead us to grasp that not only is the Word a pure gift of God’s grace, so is prayer...including the words to pray!

Here are the four questions Luther urges us to use to ponder the Word:

1. **What is God** \_\_\_\_\_ ?



Read Hebrews 5:7-10.

Prayer is a gift of God's grace because

Read Romans 8:34.

Prayer is a gift of God's grace because

Read Daniel 9:1-3 and Ephesians 1:15-19a.

Prayer is a gift of God's grace because

Furthermore, we should be encouraged and drawn to pray because, in addition to this commandment and promise, God takes the initiative and puts into our mouths the very words and approach we are to use. In this way we see how deeply concerned he is about our needs, and we should never doubt that such prayer pleases him and will assuredly be heard. So this prayer is far superior to all others that we might devise ourselves. For in that case our conscience would always be in doubt, saying, "I have prayed, but who knows whether it pleases him or whether I have hit upon the right form and mode?" Thus there is no nobler prayer to be found on earth, for it has the powerful testimony that God loves to hear it. This we should not trade for all the riches in the world. (Large Catechism, Lord's Prayer, Kolb-Wengert, 443)

Other ways prayer is a gift of grace?

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#### PART 4: SUGGESTIONS AND DEVOTIONAL LIFE Q&A

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Please do not feel bound by these suggestions. They are simply aspects of devotional life that have proven a blessing to some others.

- Set aside the same time every day for personal Word and prayer. Possible advantages?
- Set aside the same place as your devotional spot. Possible advantages?
- Add music and hymnody to your devotional pattern. Possible advantages?
  - Note pages 64-77 in the front of ***Christian Worship Supplement (CWS)***
  - ***Treasury of Daily Prayer***
- Surround yourself with symbolic elements of worship. Possible advantages?

- Get away from (or don't turn on) all digital devices (unless used in devotions). Possible advantages?
- Develop a personal prayer calendar. Possible advantages?
  - You will find one such pattern listed in **CWS 78-79**
  - Here's one example of a calendar (OK...it's mine):
    - Monday
      - immediate family (five generations including potential spouses and children) including families of daughters-in-law.
    - Tuesday
      - called workers/lay leaders of all congregations/schools that have blessed my family, synod leaders (COP, SC, CMM personnel, circuit pastors, home/world missionaries), federal/state/local government
    - Wednesday
      - my extended family (potential spouses and children)
    - Thursday
      - my wife's extended family (potential spouses and children)
    - Friday
      - all current/former advisees and families, God children and families, mentors/mentees and families (potential spouses and children),
    - Saturday
      - Bible study with Sue and prayer based off that
    - Sunday
      - prayer as part of corporate worship/Bible study with the family of faith
  - All prayers based off Luther's fourth question from that day's reading

**What are your questions?**

**Take five minutes right now to contemplate these two questions:**

- What two or three ideas or insights from what was shared in this workshop could help strengthen your personal devotional life of Word and prayer?
- If you do not currently have someone who serves as a regular encourager for you in your devotional life, whom could you ask (and perhaps partner with)?

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**CONCLUSION**

Another picture worth 1000 words?