

Famous Devotional Literature

There are modern daily Bible notes and devotional guides, like *Every Day with Jesus*, CWR, which are available as e-Books and bimonthly hard copy prints. But long before these emerged, there were authors active in producing material for believers. St Augustine's *Confessions*, is one of the earliest. Wesley's Journals have served as devotional daily readers in times past too. Some devotionals are quality literature and inspired communication. The three listed below have sold millions of copies and influenced countless Christians across the years.

Three well-known classics, which are quite accessible in modern translations, are introduced below:

- 1 Imitation of Christ
- 3 Practicing the Presence of God
- 2 My Utmost for His Highest

1. The Imitation of Christ by Thomas a Kempis 1380-1471

The author was born in Germany but lived most of his life in Holland. The devotionals are written with the thoughts and prayers of the protagonist put to God first, and then a divine response is given. The dialogue is Bible based and insightful. In the book Jesus is portrayed as one who understands human frailty. Spiritual dryness, sin, adversity and dealing with the trails of everyday life make up some of the major themes. The book can be opened at any point to sample the lovely writing and profound dialogue.



“Be not angry that you cannot make others as you wish them to be, since you cannot make yourself as you wish to be.

Leave off that excessive desire of knowing; therein is found much distraction. There are many things the knowledge of which is of little or no profit to the soul.

Everyone desires peace, but very few desire those things that make for peace.

Love feels no burden, thinks nothing of its trouble, attempts what is above its strength, pleads no excuse for impossibility, for it thinks all things are lawful for itself and all things are possible”



2. The Practice of the Presence of God by Brother Lawrence 1605-1691

The author had been a soldier in war and spent time as a prisoner. He wrote this when he was a cook in a monastery in Paris. The author shows that spiritual life is not at its zenith in church or in private devotional times. He states the importance of encounters with God in the everyday working life, and that devotion to Jesus in humble situations can affect great results. This small book is inspiring, speaking of the falsehood of the sacred-secular divide we experience too much in the Christian world. It speaks of the simplicity and humble grace of the author whose quiet presence impressed all involved in everyday affairs. More than any other of his day, Brother Lawrence understood the holiness available within the common business of life.

"Nor is it needful that we should have great things to do. . . We can do little things for God; I turn the cake that is frying on the pan for love of him, and that done, if there is nothing else to call me, I prostrate myself in worship before him, who has given me grace to work; afterwards I rise happier than a king. It is enough for me to pick up but a straw from the ground for the love of God”



3. My Utmost for His Highest by Oswald Chambers 1874-1914

The book is the result of the notes taken and assembled by his loyal wife, published after his death. There is one devotional message for each day of the year. The devotionals are written for soldiers of World War 1 and students of the Bible at his college in Clapham, London. A scripture starts each passage. Chambers died in Egypt while ministering to the soldiers. His passages are precise, vivid and loaded with insights on the way to life with Jesus.

“Faith never knows where it is being led, but it loves and knows the One who is leading.

We tend to use prayer as a last resort, but God wants it to be our first line of defence. We pray when there's nothing else we can do, but God wants us to pray before we do anything at all.

Most of us would prefer, however, to spend our time doing something that will get immediate results. We don't want to wait for God to resolve matters in His good time because His idea of 'good time' is seldom in sync with ours.”

Questions

1. Which of the three authors would you most like to explore further and learn from most?
2. What makes for a “classic” spiritual book that lasts across the generations?
3. What devotional writing have you read which has an author in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, the Pacific or Latin America? How might their perceptions and insights be different to those of Europe-USA?
4. Can you pick the gender of a devotional author if their name is not immediately evident? If so, in what ways do female authors address spiritual matters and lifestyle issues differently to males?

References:

<http://www.cwr.org.uk/store/c-16-every-day-with-jesus.aspx>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MY2l5DrXC7g&feature=related>

Attractive photo slide show with excerpts of The Imitation of Christ

<http://www.freechristianaudiobooks.com/audiobooks/Presence/mp3/>

Free digital download of a reading of the book

<http://thepracticeofthepresenceofgod.com/onlinetext/>

Free on line text of the book

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=crTLPWqTT2Y>

Video introduction to his lifestyle of prayer and humility

<http://utmost.org/>

Site based on promotion of Oswald Chamber's work

<http://www.filestube.com/m/my+utmost+for+his+highest>

Free download of his entire book

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MEkTjzX4gQg>

Slide show of history of Chambers and his famous book