



Devotional Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups

Richard J. Foster (Editor) , James Bryan Smith (Editor)

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Fifty-two Christian devotional classics paired with biblical readings for individual study and group use—from Renovare, a movement committed to nurturing spiritual renewal.

Devotional Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups Details

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From Reader Review Devotional Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups for online ebook

Donna Gabbard says

This book of 52 weekly devotionals contains excerpts from the writings of a wide variety of people.....from solid theologians (Spurgeon) to "mystics" such as Julian of Norwich. At the beginning of each week, a brief personal description was given for that week's devotional writer.....which was interesting. I thoroughly enjoyed reading the devotionals by Spurgeon, C.S. Lewis, Dietrich Bonhoeffer....to name a few. The devotional by Dallas Willard (of whom I had never before read) on discipleship was exceptional. Spurgeon's devotional excerpt on revival was also one that will stick in my mind for days to come.

However there were numerous devotions that focused more on personal mystical experiences instead of focusing on the gospel of Jesus Christ....hence my three-star rating.

Ed Belding says

If you are looking for a devotional guide and you are not afraid to stray a little outside the boundaries of your own Christian tradition to be blessed by other brothers and sisters in Christ, then this is well worth reading.

This is arranged like a "greatest hits" collection from many of the great Christian writers, theologians, mystics, and preachers throughout the centuries. They include pre-Nicene writers such as Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom; Perhaps more familiar names from antiquity such as Augustine, Francis of Assisi; then reformation era writers such as John of the Cross, Calvin, and Luther; Then names such as John Bunyan, John Wesley, and Charles Spurgeon; and near contemporaries such as C.S. Lewis, Watchman Nee, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The list goes on and on.

The book is organized very well with five major sections as follows: Preparing for the Spiritual Life, The Prayer-Filled Life, The Virtuous Life, The Spirit-Empowered Life, The Compassionate Life, and The Word Centered Life. Each devotional begins with short biography of the person from whom the devotional is gleaned. Then a notable piece of their work is presented followed by reflective questions and suggested exercises based on the devotional. The book can be read from beginning to end or you can bounce around to different authors based on your mood or interested that day. Regardless you are sure to be blessed by writers from many different Christian traditions and you may find, in the process, that the things that separate us pale in comparison to what brings us together as fellow members of the Body of Christ - but that is just a side benefit. :)

Heidi says

An excellent resource for a year-long read. Gives good exposure to many great Christian heroes.

Brian says

Devotional Classics contains 52 readings from a large variety, (temporally, theologically, etc.) of authors/pastors/thinkers organized within different traditions (I.e. Contemplative, Holiness, Evangelical, Charismatic, etc.)

Designed to be used with a discussion group, note that discussion questions are included, I read it much more quickly and independently. It works well as a devotional reading guide and you'll come away with an extensive "to read" list. I see how this material would work very well as material for a community group / small group discussion.

Selections come from a "who's who" list authors including C.S. Lewis, Dallas Willard, Jonathan Edwards, Augustine, Thomas Merton, Henry Nouwen, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Blaise Pascal, Evelyn Underhill, Willi Law, John Bunyan, Hannah Whitall Smith, John Wesley, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, E. Stanley Jones, John Chrysostom, Charles Spurgeon, G.K. Chesterton, Annie Dillard, Soren Kierkegaard, and more.

Tremendous introduction to all these folks and a great way to see whose voice resonates with you.

Highly recommend!

Carla says

Ridiculously challenging... contains writings by a huge selection of spiritual giants, over centuries of Christian experience. It provides an amazing perspective of Christianity from a wide variety of walks of faith - monastic to scholarly, etc. It's an awesome book for self study or group study. It has very practical, non-cliche, non-cheezy ways to make each truth a focus and practice in ones own life, and you have a whole week to soak in the truths of each chapter. Definitely the best devo book I've ever found.

Delonna says

Originally, I didn't want to read this book because I thought it was a bunch of dull writings by a bunch of dead white guys (I was in my mid 20's when I read it). While part of that is true (I think they're all dead), I enjoyed it until towards the end. The last few selections aren't quite as interesting to me for some reason. Generally, this book is full of well selected spiritual writings. I encourage it to be read in a small group, but maybe that is because I like to talk!

As a Friend (Quaker), I found the reflections and study to be very congruous with my faith, while challenging me to deeper devotion and dedication. That isn't too much of a surprise since Foster attended George Fox U and has many Friends in his life.

Great as a small group or individual study (depending on the person).

Susanne says

This book has been perhaps the most influential book, aside from the Scriptures, that I have ever read. The selections opened my eyes to so many of the great thinkers and mystic believers of the Christian faith--most of whom I had never heard of before.

I read this book as my Lenten devotion first in 2003 when I was first exploring the idea of the catholic (small "c" catholic, as in universal) church, and again for Lent 2007.

In this large paperback, now completely dog-eared and with copious underlinings throughout the text (in two different colors from my two different readings) and even occasional notes in the margins, I met John of the Cross, Bernard of Clairvaux, Brother Lawrence, Saint Benedict, John Chrysostom, Thomas a' Kempis, Julian of Norwich, Thomas Merton, Teresa of Avila, Watchman Nee, and so many others. And I also became reacquainted with C.S. Lewis, John Bunyan, Saint Augustine, Kierkegaard, Martin Luther, John Wesley, and many more people of faith whose works I had read at Point Loma Nazarene University or since in my evangelical faith.

Each short reading (generally two to five pages) is followed by reflection questions and suggested exercises, taking these works of the Christian faith beyond the theological into the practical.

I cannot recommend this book highly enough for every Christian, whether Catholic, Eastern Orthodox (even though it rests almost exclusively in Western Christianity), or Protestant, and especially to evangelicals who may not be aware of the depth and breadth of Christian thought through the two millennia of the Church.

A brilliant book. If I could give it ten stars, I would. :)

Michelle Butlig says

This is one of my all time favorite devotional books. It is comprised of the classic great Authors! C.S. Lewis, Jonathan Edwards, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Teresa of Avila, Francis de Sales, Thomas a Kempis, among others. It highlights selections from their greater works and moves through seven "streams" or traditions within Christianity: Preparing for the Spiritual Life, The Prayer-Filled Life (The Contemplative Tradition), The Virtuous Life (The Holiness Tradition), the Spirit-Empowered Life (The Charismatic Tradition), The Compassionate Life (The Social Justice Tradition), The Word-Centered Life (The Evangelical Tradition), and the Sacramental Life (The Incarnational Tradition). Took my time reading, meditating with the Word and praying through this devotional - loved it!

Kyle Johnson says

This is the best devotional resource I have encountered, period. 52 primary source selections from Christian women and men over the span of nineteen centuries and from many streams of the Church. To get too wrapped up in our own present-day reflections on Christianity is to neglect the ancient composite of wisdom from an Athanasius to a Teresa of Avila and many more between and beyond.

Will says

Foster and Smith collect devotional classics and organize them around the topic of preparing for spiritual life and then six traditions from which we all can learn and grow: the prayer-filled life (the contemplative tradition); the virtuous life (the holiness tradition); the spirit-empowered life (the charismatic tradition); the compassionate life (the social justice tradition); the word-centered life (the evangelical tradition); and the sacramental life (the incarnational tradition). I found myself jotting down authors I want to revisit, and I also found myself particularly drawn to the incarnational tradition. Nice collection of devotions. The only weakness to me was that some selections were really cut to fit small doses, so it seemed very choppy at times and disjointed.

Neil Coulter says

How to summarize a book that I've spent nearly two years with, looking at one reading each week? I can't imagine how much this collection of readings has shaped my life in the months that I've been reading through it. Especially as I've been through the ups and downs of administrative work, these readings have encouraged me and kept my thoughts and attitudes properly aligned. I've previously enjoyed other books by Richard J. Foster (*Celebration Of Discipline, Freedom of Simplicity*), and I continue to be grateful for his example in bringing a fuller range of Christian writings to the attention of the Church.

Reading through a selection like this, of writings from the years 297 to 1947, I am amazed at the variety of perspectives contained within orthodox Christianity. Rather than being overwhelming or confusing, I find it an encouragement--to know that there is room within this faith for all of the experiences and stages of life, all the cultural perspectives, all the responses to God's invitation to know him better. A small number of writings didn't resonate with me at all (including Julian of Norwich, Catherine of Genoa, and Madame Guyon), but I assume that on a subsequent read-through at a different time of life, they likely will. Others were so immediately striking and powerful for me that I ordered the full book as soon as I'd read the excerpt in *Devotional Classics*. These included Frank Laubach, John Baillie, Jeremy Taylor, and Søren Kierkegaard. And several authors are on my to-read list, and I look forward to returning to them for further devotional reading: Thomas Merton, Richard Rolle, Thomas Kelly, Elizabeth O'Connor, Dag Hammarskjöld, Kathleen Norris. I love having so much to look forward to!

My only complaint about *Devotional Classics* is that the editors have modernized the language of some of the writings. This makes their collection simpler to read, but it makes going back to the original sources a little frustrating. The excerpt from Jeremy Taylor, for example, was so astounding, that I read parts of it in a graduation address I was giving; but in preparing the address I looked at the original text and found that the language is quite different! I then had to decide whether to use the modernized edit (which I did), or the original language. The same was true, strangely, of the selected prayers from John Baillie--which were written relatively recently, but cast in a slightly archaic style. I don't know that the collection editors needed to update his language, since he was being careful in his word choice to an audience that was already removed from the kind of language he was using. But this is a relatively small complaint. I am so glad for this collection, sad to be finished with it, but richer for the experience of reading it, week by week.

And finally, a comment that is not really a complaint. But I did sometimes find it (unintentionally) amusing

to have the "Pop-Up Richard Foster" appear at the end of a selection to tell us what he likes (or sometimes doesn't understand) about that reading. It's not a feature that I minded, but occasionally it made me chuckle.

Pamela Tucker says

Why I bought this book was to keep the names of all the authors, even though they are just excerpts from their original books, from the books I read from the Library over the years.

Such as C.S. Lewis as I have read several of his stories. I read a lot of St. Augustine, Thomas Merton on meditation, John Calvin, Thomas a Kempis, George Fox and many of their sermons, including Ignatius of Loyola, John Bunyan is embedded in the book, John Wesley, Francis of Assisi which I have modeled my life after, John Chrysostom, Charles Spurgeon, Watchman Nee, Soren Kierkegaard, as I studied some of these in history and especially about the reformation era. There are a lot more in this book who express giving your all to God with a great devotional love which takes a certain amount of discipline.

Andrew says

Well, it only took me 14 years since I first purchased this book to read it - this year I cracked into it - working my way through the 52 readings over the course of a few months.

I encountered some old friends: C.S. Lewis, St Augustine, Brother Lawrence, Henri Nouwen, Kierkegaard, Pascal, Thomas a Kempis, Mdm Guyon etc. But I've also marked a few others I was taken by: Lancelot Andrews (1555-1626), George A Buttrick (1892-1980), John Baillie (1886-1960), Thomas Kelly (1893-1941), Hannah Whitall Smith (1832-1911)...

The book's greatest value for me was for dipping into the wealth of accumulated Christian thought and wisdom that stretches back over the millennia, and participating in that. I also enjoyed Richard Foster's thoughts at the end of each section.

Joan says

Devotional Classics is an excellent collection of classic Christian thought by great writers and thinkers of the past. Each of the 52 chapters includes carefully-selected excerpts from some work of a famous philosopher/writer. The editors simplify the heavy reading by organizing the classic literature into digestible parts and including commentary and questions at the ends of each selection. The book was designed to be read one chapter per week for a year. Since I am retired and have more time for reading than full-time workers have, I read and digested two, and sometimes even three, chapters a week. I found the mental and spiritual thought that each selection provoked to be stimulating and worthwhile reading.

Russell Hayes says

At last I am finished with this book. This is an excellent compilation of portions of (mostly) classic Christian works throughout the ages, in devotional format. The authors range from Athanasius to Augustine to Bernard of Clairvaux to C.S. Lewis. The readings are not designed to be read hastily, but in a contemplative and thoughtful manner. The book is designed for one reading per week for a year, or 52 total. The selections include discussion questions and exercises for the week designed to put in practice the week's reading.

Overall, the selections are deep, compelling, and masterful. While it is some hit and miss, and Quakers and mystics are slightly overrepresented, most of the readings are fully worthy of in-depth reading (lectio divina, as the introduction points out). The first three portions, comprised of an introduction to the devout life, prayer, and virtuous living, really shine.

The author's writing is also very moving. He expounds upon each selection by providing background information and personal reflections on the texts. The reflections often rival the texts themselves in profundity.

Each selection also has information on some of the authors' other works and biographies about the authors. This makes the book a great starting point for someone who is eager to start along an intellectual, meaningful Christian journey, yet it is also useful for someone further along who wants to be introduced to the classics and to the full spectrum of Christian thinkers.

Amy says

A great overview of writings about the Christian faith from authors over the centuries (from early church fathers all the way up to current writers). I really loved the variety of viewpoints that you get from writers coming from all different denominations, vocations, and time periods. From St. Augustine, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Martin Luther, Madame Guyon, C.S. Lewis...the list goes on.

The book is set up as 52 different readings, so that you can use it in a small group or individually and read one each week for a year. I just read it personally, gradually over a period of 6 months or so. It was really helpful for my own personal devotional time, and it really encouraged and challenged me. And since each reading is just an excerpt of that particular authors writings, they include a list of further reading from that author. Now I feel like I've barely skimmed the surface and have so much more reading to do! (which is a good thing)

Leslie says

This is one of my all time favorite devotional books. It's all-star cast of "Greats" keeps me coming back year after year. This book is a wonderful introduction to renown Christian writers like C.S. Lewis, Jonathan Edwards, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Teresa of Avila, Francis de Sales, Thomas a Kempis, among others. It highlights selections from their greater works and moves through seven "streams" or traditions within Christianity: Preparing for the Spiritual Life, The Prayer-Filled Life (The Contemplative Tradition), The Virtuous Life (The Holiness Tradition), the Spirit-Empowered Life (The Charismatic Tradition), The Compassionate Life (The Social Justice Tradition), The Word-Centered Life (The Evangelical Tradition),

and the Sacramental Life (The Incarnational Tradition).

This devotional book is full; it's a complete overview of all sides of devotional life. A great companion to the Scriptures as it has biblical references and study questions as part of each reading. *Devotional Classics* is designed to take the reader through all readings in one year. Great book!

Alumine Andrew says

This book explores many Christian writers, spanning history to contemporary. Each chapter gives us an excerpt and some thought provoking comments by Foster as well as exercises we can do between studies. It has made us think and rethink, discuss and disagree and overall grown in our spiritual journey.

I enjoy reading this book every few years to regain perspective and be challenged in what can sometimes be an apathetic attitude to my faith. There is a good bibliography following each person so if one takes your fancy you can then read in full all they have written.

The book is divided into sections which have a practical theme. Within each selection there are extracts from authors on those themes. The first section is 'Preparing for the Spiritual Journey' and in it we hear from some like CS Lewis, Dallas Willard, Jonathan Edwards, Bernard of Clairvaux. The second section is 'The Prayer-filled Life' and in it Thomas Merton, Julian of Norwich, Henri Nouwen, Evelyn Underhill....then 'The Virtuous Life', 'The Spirit Filled Life', 'The Compassionate Life', 'The World-Centered Life'....There are many inspiring authors and a great book to read when exploring our faith.

Ray Schneider says

So far this is a very interesting book which I would recommend for any book club. It is designed for a personal devotional reading program with 52 readings, with related scriptures, reflection questions and author assessment/reflection after each reading. The readings are drawn from a great variety of Catholic and Protestant writers mostly well known to everyone. The book has an ecumenical intent and might be particularly well suited for mixed denominational reading groups.

Now some months later (we've only been doing one section a month) I'm on the next to the last section and can definitely recommend the book especially in a mixed group of denominational group it has the virtue of bringing out the devotional differences among the various Christian groups ranging from Calvinists, Catholics, Quakers and a range of others. All the major denominations are represented with readings, correlated scripture readings, and meditations. So it can be used in quite a wide variety of settings from prayer groups to scripture groups.

The update to complete the review is that I enjoyed the book a lot on almost every level. The mix of religious backgrounds made it particularly interesting since it confirmed C.S. Lewis's point that Christians share much more than they disagree about.

L.A. says

I thought this book was an excellent introduction to the classic writings of Christians from many different times, places, and traditions--writings dear to my heart (Tozer, Bonhoeffer, Thomas R. Kelly, C.S. Lewis) and also many to which I had not been exposed before (St. Francis de Sales, Thomas a' Kempis, Fenelon, Merton, etc.) . Reading and comparing the experiences of other Christians from other traditions was a breath of fresh air to me.

The readings were long enough to catch the writer's rhythm and message without being overwhelming. Each reading has first an introduction to the author and his or her place and time. After each reading there is a scripture passage, some reflection questions, suggested exercises, and a personal reflection by Foster, all to help to digest the principles from the reading. Best of all, for each reading there is a section called "Going Deeper" that gives a short list of works by the writer, and Foster takes the time to describe those works.

It is well done and I would highly recommend this book to anyone interested in a deeper investigation into the Christian faith.
