

EXPLORING CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

Part 2: Learning from the Evangelical Tradition

Craig R. Higgins, Spring 2008

The Evangelical Tradition

- The evangelical tradition is deeply *Word-centered*. Consequently, this tradition has developed a number of practices focused on the Scriptures. Evangelicals have focused on Bible intake as part of one's daily devotions, often called one's "quiet time."
- Various Bible-reading schemes have been used down through the years.
 1. One is simply reading the Bible in its canonical order—start in Genesis and finish in Revelation. Some evangelicals try to read the Bible all the way through each year, which takes reading 3-4 chapters (or psalms in the Psalter) each day.
 2. Other plans have been popular, especially the one developed by Robert Murray M'Cheyne, a 19th century minister.¹ This plan takes you through the Old Testament once—and the New Testament twice—each year. The Navigators, an evangelical ministry, have several other plans.²
 3. However, evangelicals have often stressed reading the Bible in much smaller portions and taking the time to think and meditate upon each word or phrase.
 4. Many evangelicals have stressed Scripture memorization. The Navigators have for years produced the very popular "Topical Memory System."
 5. Evangelicals have also stressed Bible study. More than any other tradition, evangelicals have produced study Bibles, concordances, commentaries, books of study questions, Bible translations, etc. Mastering the content of the Bible is a hallmark of the evangelical tradition, and in the more Reformed branch of evangelicalism this would include a major emphasis on theological study as well.
 6. Extra Credit Questions: Has anyone here ever participated in a "sword drill"? Can anyone here repeat the Pledge of Allegiance to the Bible?
- Evangelicals also have a very strong tradition regarding *prayer*.
 1. Evangelicals have often stressed *intercessory* prayer—praying for the church, the world, for individuals, for everyone! In the evangelical tradition it is a great compliment to be called a "prayer warrior."
 2. That's why *prayer lists* are an important part of evangelical spirituality. And these can be quite complex. This is one of my practices: I have a daily prayer list, a "hot list" of special concerns, and then a list for each weekday.
 3. There is more to prayer than intercession, however, and to remind us that fact, evangelicals have developed various ways of keeping the balance. One of the most historic is to use the Lord's Prayer as a model, or outline, of prayer. Simply use each line of the Lord's Prayer and expand on it.

¹ The scheme can be found at <http://hippocampusextensions.com/mcheyneplan.html>.

² <http://www.navpress.com/Magazines/DJ/BibleReadingPlans.asp>

4. Another method common in evangelical circles is the “ACTS method.” This is an acronym for the four parts of a holistic prayer life: **A**doration (praising God for who he is), **C**onfession (honestly admitting our sins and asking for forgiveness), **T**hanksgiving (thanking God, “counting our blessings”—as the popular evangelical hymn says), and **S**upplication (asking God for things needed by us and others).
 5. Speaking of hymns, singing hymns in private worship, is encouraging by many evangelicals.
- The “Quiet Time”
 1. Evangelicals have emphasized setting apart time for prayer and Scripture reading every day, usually referring to this as “daily devotions” or one’s “quiet time.” They have also stressed the importance of family devotions.
 2. This is a *discipline*—to set aside time every day. Most times, evangelicals have encouraged people, as much as possible, to have their quiet times in the same place at the same time every day. Usually, the advice is to do this early in the morning. Some have encouraged beginning by setting apart “seven minutes with God.”
 3. The 19th century evangelical George Mueller spoke of how his first task in his devotional life was to get himself “happy in the Lord.” In other words, the devotional life is not simply going through the motions. The *discipline* must be set ablaze by the *dynamic* of the gospel.
 4. How can you do this? Begin your devotions by concentrating on the good news of what God has done for you in Christ. For example, use the “prayer of belief” that we print in the bulletin, or praise God in the words of 1 Peter 1:3.³ (Personally, I often use the “mystery of faith” from the eucharistic liturgy, but that would be from the liturgical tradition!)
 - Putting It Into Practice
 1. What do you need to learn from the evangelical tradition? It was said of 19th century Baptist pastor Charles Spurgeon that if he pricked his finger his blood was “*Bibline*.” Can this be said of you? What practices do you need to adopt to make the Scriptures more and more a part of your life?
 2. How’s your prayer life? Is it balanced? Are you learning to be a prayer warrior?
 3. Do you have a set time for daily devotions? Is this a priority? Is it merely a routine or are you growing closer to Christ?

³ “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (NIV).