



**HOW GOD IS USING A DAILY DEVOTIONAL
BY A NORMAL, FLAWED PASTOR
TO HELP PEOPLE LIVE OUT THEIR FAITH
IN PRACTICAL WAYS TODAY**

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PRESENTATION DESCRIPTION

The “Up!” Daily Devotional – How God is using a daily devotional by a normal, flawed pastor to help people live out their faith in practical ways today.”

In April 2015 Matthew started “Up!” – a daily devotional designed to be read in a minute or less. It is published five days a week and is biblical helium meant to help people live out their faith in practical ways today. It now has a daily readership of 600... and counting, and includes devout Christians, those new to the faith, and even people who are just curious. This talk will not only tell the story of “Up!” but give you ideas to help you help those you serve as they seek their own personal renewal. The official home of “Up!” is www.TheUpDevo.com.

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

(See previous presentation)

TWO EXPERIENCES

Let me start by sharing two experiences that I hope will get our heads into the right brain space to talk about the “Up!” daily devotional.

Here’s the first.

Fred Craddock tells the story about when he was young attending a church service, wearing his Sunday best. He was sitting in a pew with his feet dangling over the edge. He remembers hearing a preacher gives examples of what it looked like to live as a Christian. He talked about Mother Teresa and The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr and Albert Schweitzer. As he sat there listening to these impressive people Craddock thought to himself, “It’s a shame you can’t be a Christian in this little town.”

The second experience comes from a conversation I had not too long ago at the church. During a gathering of new members, one woman talked about some of her frustration in attending another church in a different town. She said, “I remember listening to one preacher and it always sounded like a history lesson on the Bible, but that he hadn’t actually talked to Jesus in a really long time.”

The first story about Fred Craddock highlights how, to many people, to be a Christian involves a kind of life that is so extraordinary that it is inaccessible to “normal” everyday people like you and me who are paying bills, changing diapers, studying for biology or caring for parents. The second story of what the woman said to me at a gathering of new members highlights how many people become frustrated in their journey of faith because the teaching they receive seems too theoretical, impersonal and disconnected from their daily lives. Jesus comes across as an idea instead of as a real person and Saviour.

That is where the “Up!” daily devotional comes in. It’s to help people live out their faith in practical ways today. People like you and me. People who are navigating modern life and who need the day-to-day wisdom of God in the process.

HOW CAN A DEVOTIONAL HELP?

Personally, I have a conviction that if you have a life-changing faith your faith should be changing your life. So if you belong to Jesus every day, you should be changed by Jesus every day.

What we do on a daily basis, therefore, help us in that endeavour.

How I help myself in that process is to nurture daily habits. I truly believe that your godly habits are God’s hands working in your daily life. This includes worship, family practices, prayer, Bible reading, acts of kindness...

And it also includes the use of *devotionals*. Devotionals can impact your daily journey in life because many of them are just that—daily.

WHAT IS A DAILY DEVOTIONAL?

A devotional is something you receive on a daily basis to help you grow your faith. Some examples are the Daily Bread or PresbyCan. Ministries like Focus on the Family have devotionals, as do individuals like Charles Stanley or Rick Warren. These are all easily accessible if you have a computer and internet connection.

Speaking about being easily accessible, consider this. In 1st century, by the time of Jesus, Alexander the Great had conquered many parts of the known world. He had brought aspects of Greek culture to the lands that we encounter in the New Testament. Because of his conquests, by the time of Jesus there was a common language that made the spread of the gospel message more readily possible.

To me, the internet is a kind of common language that allows us to spread information quickly. This includes information and inspiration about faith. And it is readily accessible to many people. Like no other time in history, you can share information and inspiration instantly with people all over the world. This can be an incredible opportunity for sharing Jesus' message and biblical ideas.

So as we consider the internet, why not leverage that for God? And why not leverage it to help people live in a way that honours him?'

THE UP! DAILY DEVOTIONAL

In April 2015 I decided to start the "Up!" daily devotional. The idea was for people to "get up, look up and be up," and to start their day focussed on God. It was and is designed to be short—read in about a minute or less.

People can sign up and access the devotional in three ways.

1. Through a sign-up form at my blog at www.MatthewRuttan.com/Up
2. Through a website called www.TheUpDevo.com
3. Or through Facebook at www.Facebook.com/MatthewRuttanUp

Today there are 600 daily subscribers and growing. Most of them are in North America, but some are elsewhere. Many are devout Christians, many are new Christians, and some are simply curious seekers.

HOW IS GOD USING THIS TO HELP PEOPLE LIVE OUT THEIR FAITH IN A PRACTICAL WAY TODAY?

As I tried to answer this question, I thought I should simply ask people. According to the people who read "Up!", how would they answer?

Here are a few examples of what people told me:

*Every morning your devotional is the first one I read while having my coffee. What I find most helpful in your Up Devotionals is that you make it relate to everyday life.
-Joanne*

UP's daily challenge is succinct in message and duration; the goal of the padre before the battle. -Barry

UP! Is a great way for me to reconnect with my faith every day. I read it with breakfast before "plugging" in to social media every day. I feel that it contextualizes my day and makes it more faith and Christ-centered. -Matt

The word of God is explained with clarity, simplicity and positivity giving the ability to trust and hope. -Linda

I like its brevity and also its consistent application to everyday encounters and relationships. -Bill

I like that you, Matthew are a real human being with challenges and struggles. -Laurel

I like that the scripture is precise and your examples for practical use are so easily understood with clear ideas for how to focus now. -Kelta

Up helps me to focus on doing the right thing about life's struggles. -Pearl

What I find helpful is the practical application to your day to day life of each day's focus. -Kim

Every day practical tips, and reminders, for living the Christian walk. -Gezina

Up daily devotional gets me focused on a scriptural truth that can help me be more effective for Jesus today than I was yesterday. Kind of like a clearer view from Mount Perspective! –David

I look forward to your daily devotion everyday as it always seems to be just the message I need to help me through the new day. -Myrna

Connecting the bible to daily life reminds me that God is aware of everything that is happening then, now and forever.-Catherine

The thing I love most about Up! is that the stories and scripture applications are so down-to-earth and relevant! -Kitty

In response to your request to share what I find most helpful about the "Up" daily devotional, your daily devotional is a unique, practical, down to earth and relevant interpretation and application of scripture that is infused with humor and humility...-Kevin

The UP Daily Devotional has encouraging words that frequently hit that spot that needs attention in my life; it charges up my day.-Caroline

The Up devotional brings my thoughts back to what is important, and I can jettison the unhelpful baggage. -Lesley

The messages that I receive each day are so insightful and down to earth.-Gail

The UP devotional is so meaningful to me, keeping me focused on Jesus, and trying to help others in His name. -Joan

The UP devotional provides me with a moment to reflect on my life and grounds me in my faith, helping me to be a better person each day. -Karen

"Up!" is a spiritual catalyst, daily converting our fresh potential into faithful practice. -Jeff

As I look through those responses, I see four common themes:

First, "Up!" is down-to-earth. People consistently respond to what they can understand and apply to their daily lives.

Second, it is helpful. As people try to live out their lives and understand their faith, they are encouraged by what helps them in a practical way.

Third, it is hopeful. Life is hard. It can get you down. So people appreciate the positive, hope-filled nature of the devotional. This isn't a naïve, look-the-other-way optimism. It is taking seriously the overarching and unceasing Christian hope we find in the Bible.

Lastly, there is an element of timing. As I write the devotional, I pray the Lord will use it for his glory and to help grow people's faith on a daily basis. Something I often hear is that a devotional is "perfect timing" and intersects with someone's life at just the right moment. God can use these tools for good and according to his purposes.

One example has really stuck with me. One man had subscribed to the devotional and read it faithfully. But his life got difficult and he started to turn away from his faith. As a part of that, he stopped reading the "Up!" devotional. But one day he was feeling incredibly low and even contemplating suicide. "On a whim" he opened that day's devotional. "It saved my life," he said. "I took it as a word of hope from God."

God can take the flawed words of broken imperfect people, and use them for his healing purposes in our world.

THE MOST ENCOURAGING THING

But more specifically, the most encouraging thing for me personally is this: People are using it to make their faith their own on a day-to-day basis. I once heard someone say that you can't inherit faith. What they meant was that you can inherit genes and a family history and even money. But at some point, you need to make your faith your own. It's uninheritable. It needs to be personal. So when I see people "owning" their faith, and living differently because of their faith on a day-to-day basis, I become wonderfully encouraged.

In 1918 Max Plank won the Nobel Prize for physics. So, as was sometimes customary at the time, he went on a speaking tour. He travelled Germany with his chauffeur giving lectures on Quantum Mechanics. Every night he gave the same lecture. His chauffeur commented that it had become very boring, and very predictable. In fact, the material had become so familiar to him that he suggested a special project to Professor Plank. How about at the next stop in Munich, *he* deliver the lecture instead of the professor? He would put on the lab coat, and Professor Plank would sit in the front row wearing the chauffeur's cap? Plank liked the idea so they went for it.

It actually went very well... Until the question and answer period! During that time someone got up and asked a question. So the Chauffeur responded like this: "Never would I have thought that someone from such an advanced city as Munich would ask such a simple question! My chauffeur will answer it." (Taken from Rolf Dobelli, *The Art of Thinking Clearly*, p. 46).

I love that story. But I love it mostly because it highlights two different kinds of knowledge. First, there is *chauffeur* knowledge. This is the kind of knowledge we overhear. We can even repeat smart-sounding things and quote Bible verses. But it's not personal; we're just repeating what someone else has discovered.

But second, and more importantly, there is *rea*/knowledge. This is the knowledge we have come to learn through personal experience and the decisions we make about how to live.

The "Up!" daily devotional is helping people convert chauffeur knowledge about God and faith into *rea*/knowledge. I see evidence of so many people starting to more fully understand their faith, make it their own, relate it to their everyday lives, and live differently because of it. And to me, that is wonderfully life-giving.

HOW CAN ANY OF THIS HELP YOU HELP THOSE YOU SERVE?

But how can any of this help you help those you serve? As I've thought about my own experience, I want to share four things I've tried to do, which may be helpful to you as you seek to flex your own gifts for God's glory:

1. BE GODLY DAILY

The "Up!" daily devotional keeps me on track on a daily basis. Not only do I work at the discipline of prayer and writing day by day, but I do my best to live out the things I write about. It has helped me be more godly on a daily basis. And I think that when we commit to our own personal spiritual growth, the Lord takes our fractured sinful lives and uses them for his glory. Be godly daily. When you do, the Lord will work through you in ways beyond your imagining. Don't overestimate what you can do; but don't underestimate what God can do through you.

2. STUDY PEOPLE'S LIVES

You serve God. But when you serve God you also end up serving people. They have jobs and families and joys and problems. Study them. When you do, the way you serve them will become more personal and powerful to where they are at. What I've noticed is that certain themes continue to resonate—and this is because these are the issues that people struggle with. They are things like prayer, forgiveness, control, judgmentalism, humility, and not fitting in with others because of their faith. Studying the contours of people's lives help us be more effective because we can offer godly teaching in a way that is direct.

3. CREATIVELY SHARE YOUR GIFTS INTO THEIR LIVES (AND BE AWARE OF THE SPECTRUM)

Everyone has gifts that they can share. So ask how you can bring help, hope and consistency to their lives with your teaching and presence. Think outside the box. Perhaps it's through a technology. Perhaps it's with a kind of ministry no one has

tried before. Stretch yourself, and reorganize your time to make it happen. As you do so, I would encourage you to be aware of the theological spectrum. Not everyone knows what “salvation” is supposed to mean. Some people are very mature in their faith, and some are new, and some are just curious. Honour the complexity of life, that we are all on a journey, and that none of us have all the perfect answers. When that happens we start to move together in the direction of grace and truth.

4. GIVE IT TO GOD

It’s easy to measure the success of what we do on what other people say. This includes both compliments and criticisms. That’s why it’s important to continue to check our motives and give our work over to God. It’s for his glory, not our own. The most effective leaders lead from their knees. And this helps ensure that we are open to the Holy Spirit’s movement and direction in our lives, and that the most important thing keeps being the most important thing.

BIBLICAL HELIUM

The “Up!” daily devotional isn’t rocket science. But it is biblical helium to help you live out your faith today. If you have a life-changing faith your faith should be changing your life. And my hope is that the “Up!” helps other people do that.

But perhaps most importantly, it helps me do it too.