

Dear Friends in Christ,

How's that devotional life coming along?

The key to devotions is that they're routine and good. Routine means pick the same time(s) of day to read God's Word and pray. Morning and/or evening works well. Always look to do more. Praying is like weight lifting. The more you do it, the more you're able to lift.

Good can be manifested in lots of ways, but I'd like to focus on hymnody as a part of devotional (and congregational) life. Hymns are particularly glorious because they mirror God's creative work.

God creates in two ways; humans are unable to create in the first way, but we are able to create in the second way. The first way God creates is out of nothing, or *ex nihilo* for you nerds who like Latin. Humans can't do this. **"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1).** That's God creating something out of nothing.

But after this point, God creates in the second way. He takes what's already there and forms it into something better. He takes an earth that's without form, and forms it. It's the potter with the clay. He takes dirt, and makes humans.

We create like God in the second way. We take what's already there, and make it better. We take trees and make endless kinds of furniture. (It is no wonder that our Lord was a carpenter.) We take ore from the ground and melt it down to make gold jewelry.

This is what hymnody is - it takes what's already there, God's Word, and makes something beautiful. Of course God's Word is already beautiful and can't be made better. But God does want us to play in His Word and to create new things. We're not writing new Scriptures. We're taking the Scriptures to make beautiful jewelry. We're taking the Word to form new words. You can do this by keeping a notebook and commenting on parts of the Bible you're reading! The words don't have to rhyme or be that insightful at first, but the more you reflect on Scripture, the better you will become at reflecting on Scripture.

I'm not a hymn writer. But I enjoy memorizing hymns. If I get the time during the week, I try to memorize a little bit from an upcoming communion hymn. I can't look at the hymnal constantly during distribution, but if I have it memorized, I can sing along with you. My weeks are better when I chew on hymns. I'd encourage you to start singing at home. Start with something easy ("Amazing Grace", "Beautiful Savior", "We All Believe in One, True God", etc. Okay, don't start with that last one.) Every night, my daughter hears "Now Rest Beneath Night's Shadow". Sing to your kids. The best way to become a better singer is to sing. Sing in the shower. Sing in

the car. Sing at church. I look forward to hearing your beautiful voices. God looks forward to it, too. Our prayers ascend before him like incense, and that incense is that much sweeter if set to music.

In Christ,

Pastor