

SOLO

THE MESSAGE//REMIX: SOLO

AN UNCOMMON DEVOTIONAL

THE MESSAGE TEXT BY EUGENE H. PETERSON
DEVOTIONAL CONTENT BY JAN JOHNSON, J.R. BRIGGS,
AND KATIE PECKHAM

SOLO

NAVPRESS®

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INTRODUCTION TO SOLO

The devotional you hold is unique. It isn't designed to teach you to study the Bible but rather to develop a conversation between you and God. The devotions found in *Solo* are based on the classical method of lectio divina: reading, thinking, praying, and living Scripture with the intention of inviting an infinite, omniscient God into your life — as it is, no gloss, no vaneer. Lectio divina is more Bible basking than Bible study, as it teaches you to absorb and meditate on Scripture, to converse with God openly, and to live out what has become a part of you — his Word.

But it's not easy. Lectio divina takes practice, and lots of it. You will have to learn to be quiet, to silence the voices of responsibility, self, family, and even religion in order to hear what God has to say to you. Try not to view the elements of lectio divina as steps to be checked off your to-do list. Instead, allow them to meld together in the intentional process of listening to God, of focusing on him and learning what he would have from you and for you, his beloved. Don't worry if no lightning strikes or brilliant revelations come. Sometimes devotion means just sitting in the presence of God.

We know the four elements of lectio divina as Read, Think, Pray, and Live. Each element has a purpose, but don't be surprised if they overlap and weave into each other. Remember as you dive into this devotional that lectio divina is about wholeness: whole practice, whole Bible, whole God.

Read. Thoughtfully, leisurely, faithfully — read the epic love story that is the Bible. Yes, love story. The Bible is the chronicle of God's love for his people from the darkness before Eden to eternity with him in heaven. You are in it; I am in it. But most important, God is in it. Here you will meet him face-to-face.

Eugene Peterson called the Bible “a book that reads us even as we read it.” That's an uncommon sort of book, and it requires an uncommon sort of read. Knowing facts about God doesn't change your relationship with him, so take the time to splash around in the Word, to absorb it, to discover what God has to say to you each day.

In each *Solo* devotion, you will find a Scripture passage, but also a reference to an expanded passage. I encourage you to read them both, slowly, attentively, and repeatedly. As Peterson said, “The Bible is given to us in the first place simply to invite us to make ourselves at home in the world of God . . . and become familiar with the way God speaks and the ways in which we answer him with our lives.” No Scripture passage exists in a vacuum. Whenever you can, take the time to stretch beyond the passage put before you to understand the larger context in which it is found. The more you read, the more you will understand about yourself and this God who created you.

Think. Each subtle, significant, powerful word of Scripture is meant for you. One word may speak today and another tomorrow, but God sent each of them straight into your life. So listen. Go into your reading with a clean slate. Don’t bring what you think you need to hear, what others have said, or what you’ve been taught about a particular passage. Don’t bring fear that you’ll misinterpret the text. This is about what God has to say to you.

Our lives are full of static. Whether it’s our to-do list, our emotions, or just plain noise, it can be hard to sift God’s voice from all the racket. By meditating on each word, by turning it over and over in your mind, you will discover that, as God himself is infinitely complex, so his thoughts have subtle meaning beyond the rote. The more you think about what you read, the more familiar you will become with his voice.

Pray. God yearns to converse with you. And he wants far more than just “thanks for this, can I please have that” prayer. Respond to him in dialogue. That means it’s as much about listening as it is about speaking. Open your ears and your heart to hear his voice. Sing praises or laments; write your thoughts in a journal; dance or prostrate yourself before him. Pray.

Maybe God has challenged you. Tell him how you feel, but always remember that what he asks, he asks for your good. He is loving and merciful, not manipulative and harsh. If you come across something in your reading that you don’t understand, tell him about it. Ask him about it. Fill your prayers with Scripture. Using the words you have read helps you ensure that your prayers line up with God’s Word and intention for your life.

It’s easy for us in our culture of doing to want to skim over this part. Don’t. Even if you are quiet and he is quiet, you are learning to communicate with God.

Live. You can read, think, and pray all day, but unless you live in God’s Word as well, you miss the point. The Bible says, “Isn’t it obvious that

God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense?” (James 2). If you have taken God’s Word to heart and truly made it part of you, it will by its very nature change you. And when it does, you will find yourself called to act. There will come a time when God takes you to the end of yourself then asks you to go further. He wants you to put yourself at his disposal, to go and do what he asks, even the impossible. When that time comes, you will need the Word he has scribed on your heart to give you comfort and strength. This is the “more and better life than they ever dreamed of” of which Jesus spoke (John 10).



Solo. One on one. Just you and God.

This book is designed to help you develop the habit of lectio divina. For those of you new to the discipline, several of the devotions are specifically intended to help you begin what may become a lifelong pursuit. You will find a list of these beginner devotions in the back of the book, and they are each marked with a 🎯. Also, though lectio divina emphasizes becoming familiar with God’s whole Word, rather than focusing on any particular part, there may be times when you need to hear God’s voice on a specific issue. For those times we have provided an index of topics that will guide you to a devotion that may be just what you need.

The *Solo* devotions are tailored to help you learn to listen to what God may want to say to you through his Word. You will find that every seventh day is marked as a day of reflection, a time to sit back and let God guide your thoughts and prayers back to themes and Scripture from the previous week. Don’t be afraid to reflect, and don’t be afraid to go back. Each time you read these devotions, you may find that God has something new to say, for though he is the same always, you change a little each day as he shapes you into the person he designed you to be.

And so begins the journey.

TO THE READER

If there is anything distinctive about *The Message*, perhaps it is because the text is shaped by the hand of a working pastor. For most of my adult life I have been given a primary responsibility for getting the message of the Bible into the lives of the men and women with whom I worked. I did it from pulpit and lectern, in home Bible studies and at mountain retreats, through conversations in hospitals and nursing homes, over coffee in kitchens and while strolling on an ocean beach. *The Message* grew from the soil of forty years of pastoral work.

As I worked at this task, this Word of God, which forms and transforms human lives, did form and transform human lives. Planted in the soil of my congregation and community, the seed words of the Bible germinated and grew and matured. When it came time to do the work that is now *The Message*, I often felt that I was walking through an orchard at harvest time, plucking fully formed apples and peaches and plums from laden branches. There's hardly a page in the Bible I did not see lived in some way or other by the men and women, saints and sinners, to whom I was pastor — and then verified in my nation and culture.

I didn't start out as a pastor. I began my vocational life as a teacher and for several years taught the biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek in a theological seminary. I expected to live the rest of my life as a professor and scholar, teaching and writing and studying. But then my life took a sudden vocational turn to pastoring in a congregation.

I was now plunged into quite a different world. The first noticeable difference was that nobody seemed to care much about the Bible, which so recently people had been paying me to teach them. Many of the people I worked with now knew virtually nothing about it, had never read it, and weren't interested in learning. Many others had spent years reading it but for them it had gone flat through familiarity, reduced to clichés. Bored, they dropped it. And there weren't many people in between. Very few were interested in what I considered my primary work, getting the words of the Bible into their heads and hearts, getting the message lived. They

found newspapers and magazines, videos and pulp fiction more to their taste.

Meanwhile I had taken on as my life work the responsibility of getting these very people to listen, really listen, to the message in this book. I knew I had my work cut out for me.

I lived in two language worlds, the world of the Bible and the world of Today. I had always assumed they were the same world. But these people didn't see it that way. So out of necessity I became a "translator" (although I wouldn't have called it that then), daily standing on the border between two worlds, getting the language of the Bible that God uses to create and save us, heal and bless us, judge and rule over us, into the language of Today that we use to gossip and tell stories, give directions and do business, sing songs and talk to our children.

And all the time those old biblical languages, those powerful and vivid Hebrew and Greek originals, kept working their way underground in my speech, giving energy and sharpness to words and phrases, expanding the imagination of the people with whom I was working to hear the language of the Bible in the language of Today and the language of Today in the language of the Bible.

I did that for thirty years in one congregation. And then one day (it was April 30, 1990) I got a letter from an editor asking me to work on a new version of the Bible along the lines of what I had been doing as a pastor. I agreed. The next ten years was harvest time. *The Message* is the result.

The Message is a reading Bible. It is not intended to replace the excellent study Bibles that are available. My intent here (as it was earlier in my congregation and community) is simply to get people reading it who don't know that the Bible is read-able at all, at least by them, and to get people who long ago lost interest in the Bible to read it again. But I haven't tried to make it easy—there is much in the Bible that is hard to understand. So at some point along the way, soon or late, it will be important to get a standard study Bible to facilitate further study. Meanwhile, read in order to live, praying as you read, "God, let it be with me just as you say."

— EUGENE H. PETERSON



DESIRE FOR RECONCILIATION

GENESIS 3:1-10

1 The serpent was clever, more clever than any wild animal God had made. He spoke to the Woman: “Do I understand that God told you not to eat from any tree in the garden?”

2-3 The Woman said to the serpent, “Not at all. We can eat from the trees in the garden. It’s only about the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, ‘Don’t eat from it; don’t even touch it or you’ll die.’”

4-5 The serpent told the Woman, “You won’t die. God knows that the moment you eat from that tree, you’ll see what’s really going on. You’ll be just like God, knowing everything, ranging all the way from good to evil.”

6 When the Woman saw that the tree looked like good eating and realized what she would get out of it—she’d know everything!—she took and ate the fruit and then gave some to her husband, and he ate.

7 Immediately the two of them did “see what’s really going on” — saw themselves naked! They sewed fig leaves together as makeshift clothes for themselves.

8 When they heard the sound of God strolling in the garden in the evening breeze, the Man and his Wife hid in the trees of the garden, hid from God.

9 God called to the Man: “Where are you?”

10 He said, “I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked. And I hid.”

READ

Read the passage, Genesis 3:1-10, carefully.

THINK

For many of us, these are familiar verses. The first two chapters of Genesis speak of God's amazing Creation. Chapter 3 speaks of the rebellion of humankind. And the remainder of the Message details God's intricate and loving plan to redeem, restore, and reconcile creation back to himself after what happened in Genesis 3. God's plan hinges on what happened in the garden. How does this passage speak to your situation today?

PRAY

There is no better way to begin to understand God's Message than to grasp our separation from him because of sin and our desperate need for him to reconcile our relationship. Take some time to confess those areas where you have deliberately rebelled against God.

FIVE

Knowing that you and everyone else on earth have rebelled against God, what do you feel? In what ways does this knowledge affect the way you live your life?

Reread verse 9. If God knows everything, why did he call out to Adam asking, "Where are you?"

In verse 10, Adam responds to God's question by saying, "I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked. And I hid." When are you most tempted to hide?

DAY 2

EXPANDED PASSAGE: GENESIS 32

WRESTLING IN THE NIGHT

GENESIS 32:22-32

22-23 But during the night he got up and took his two wives, his two maid-servants, and his eleven children and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He got them safely across the brook along with all his possessions.

24-25 But Jacob stayed behind by himself, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he couldn't get the best of Jacob as they wrestled, he deliberately threw Jacob's hip out of joint.

26 The man said, "Let me go; it's daybreak."

Jacob said, "I'm not letting you go 'til you bless me."

27 The man said, "What's your name?"

He answered, "Jacob."

28 The man said, "But no longer. Your name is no longer Jacob. From now on it's Israel (God-Wrestler); you've wrestled with God and you've come through."

29 Jacob asked, "And what's your name?"

The man said, "Why do you want to know my name?" And then, right then and there, he blessed him.

30 Jacob named the place Peniel (God's Face) because, he said, "I saw God face-to-face and lived to tell the story!"

31-32 The sun came up as he left Peniel, limping because of his hip. (This is why Israelites to this day don't eat the hip muscle; because Jacob's hip was thrown out of joint.)

READ

Read the passage slowly. (To find out about Jacob's fear of meeting his brother, Esau, whom he had tricked many years before, read the expanded passage.)

THINK

Read the passage aloud this time and pause after each of the three questions in the text (verses 27,29). Jacob, whose name means "manipulator," had made elaborate plans to reconcile with Esau in a generous, peaceful way. Then he stayed behind, which was uncharacteristic of such a quintessential deal maker. There with the night sounds and the smell of the brook, Jacob encountered "a man." Was this man an angel, a God-man, Jesus? (It's okay that we don't know for sure.)

1. Picture yourself in this passage. Are you Jacob? Are you an invisible bystander watching it all?
2. What moment in this passage resonates with you most?
 - wanting desperately to be blessed
 - wanting desperately to know more of God
 - other:

PRAY

Depending on what resonated with you, pray about what you desperately want from God. To avoid letting your mind wander, try writing down your prayer, listening for words from God in response.

LIVE

Sit quietly before God, imagining the night sounds and the smell of running water. Try to be comfortable with God in this wild atmosphere. What does it feel like to trust and to reveal the desires of your heart? Be honest if you feel uncomfortable. What would you like it to feel like? Rest in that.

DAY 3

EXPANDED PASSAGE: GENESIS 37; 42; 45; 50

A PICTURE OF FORGIVENESS

GENESIS 50:15-21

15 After the funeral, Joseph’s brothers talked among themselves: “What if Joseph is carrying a grudge and decides to pay us back for all the wrong we did him?”

16-17 So they sent Joseph a message, “Before his death, your father gave this command: Tell Joseph, ‘Forgive your brothers’ sin — all that wrongdoing. They did treat you very badly.’ Will you do it? Will you forgive the sins of the servants of your father’s God?”

When Joseph received their message, he wept.

18 Then the brothers went in person to him, threw themselves on the ground before him and said, “We’ll be your slaves.”

19-21 Joseph replied, “Don’t be afraid. Do I act for God? Don’t you see, you planned evil against me but God used those same plans for my good, as you see all around you right now — life for many people. Easy now, you have nothing to fear; I’ll take care of you and your children.” He reassured them, speaking with them heart-to-heart.

READ

Take some time before you begin to rest in silence. Let your mind settle. Silently read the passage.

THINK

Read the passage again, this time aloud, listening specifically for a word or phrase that touches your heart. When you finish, close your eyes. Recall the word or phrase, taking it in and mulling it over. After a few moments, write it down. Don't write anything else.

PRAY

Read the passage aloud again, searching for how forgiveness is illustrated in the text. Think about what it feels like to be the forgiver, as well as what it feels like to be the forgiven. How is this expression of love meaningful to you? Briefly note your thoughts.

Read the text one last time, then stop and listen for what God is inviting you to do or become this week. Perhaps his invitation will have to do with a new perspective on who you are in his eyes, or maybe you sense an action he is calling you to take. After your prayer, write down what you feel invited to do.

FIVE

Take time to meditate on the following quote from the *Book of Common Prayer* (1979), and let it become your own: "Let not the needy, O Lord, be forgotten; nor the hope of the poor be taken away."¹



LEARNING TO PAY ATTENTION

EXODUS 3:1-6

1-2 Moses was shepherding the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. He led the flock to the west end of the wilderness and came to the mountain of God, Horeb. The angel of GOD appeared to him in flames of fire blazing out of the middle of a bush. He looked. The bush was blazing away but it didn't burn up.

3 Moses said, "What's going on here? I can't believe this! Amazing! Why doesn't the bush burn up?"

4 GOD saw that he had stopped to look. God called to him from out of the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

He said, "Yes? I'm right here!"

5 God said, "Don't come any closer. Remove your sandals from your feet. You're standing on holy ground."

6 Then he said, "I am the God of your father: The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob."

Moses hid his face, afraid to look at God.

READ

Read the passage aloud.

THINK

Moses is shepherding his father-in-law's sheep. In the distance he sees a bush in flames, but the bush mysteriously doesn't burn up. He walks closer, perhaps expecting a miracle, only to have a more unique encounter than he ever imagined. He interacts with the living God.

When have you experienced a unique encounter with the living God? What was your burning bush like?

What do you think God meant when he said, "Remove your sandals from your feet. You're standing on holy ground"?

God is holy. What difference does that make in your life?

PRAY

Ask God to reveal himself to you today in a fresh way, a way that he has never revealed himself before.

FIVE

Moses heard from God when he paid attention. Like Moses, we often encounter God when we pay attention to what's going on around us. Find a quiet place and spend a few moments in utter silence, paying attention to those aspects of your life that you often neglect: people, situations, quiet moments, creation, and so on. As you do this, look for God waiting there to interact with you.

THE BREAD GOD HAS GIVEN

EXODUS 16:9-16

9 Moses instructed Aaron: “Tell the whole company of Israel: ‘Come near to GOD. He’s heard your complaints.’”

10 When Aaron gave out the instructions to the whole company of Israel, they turned to face the wilderness. And there it was: the Glory of GOD visible in the Cloud.

11-12 GOD spoke to Moses, “I’ve listened to the complaints of the Israelites. Now tell them: ‘At dusk you will eat meat and at dawn you’ll eat your fill of bread; and you’ll realize that I am GOD, *your* God.’”

13-15 That evening quail flew in and covered the camp and in the morning there was a layer of dew all over the camp. When the layer of dew had lifted, there on the wilderness ground was a fine flaky something, fine as frost on the ground. The Israelites took one look and said to one another, *man-hu* (What is it?). They had no idea what it was.

15-16 So Moses told them, “It’s the bread GOD has given you to eat. And these are GOD’s instructions: ‘Gather enough for each person, about two quarts per person; gather enough for everyone in your tent.’”

READ

Read the passage aloud. Have fun pronouncing *man-hu* in different ways. If you'd like, read the expanded passage to get a picture of the complaining that came before this and the obsessive hoarding that came after. Both give us a picture of the neediness of the Israelites at this time.

THINK

Read the passage again slowly, pausing to feel each emotion of the Israelites:

- the deep neediness of complaining
- the excitement of seeing the glory of God visible in the Cloud
- the perplexity of seeing this strange bread from heaven
- the satisfaction of having enough

Then consider: If you were to complain to God right now, what would your complaint be? (Don't choose this yourself; wait and let it come to you.) In what ways, if any, have you been perplexed by God's response to your complaining? How might God have truly provided enough but you didn't recognize it as God's bread from heaven — exactly what you needed?

PRAY

If you haven't formally complained to God about this matter, do so. Ask God to show you how he has provided you with enough, even though you still might wonder.

LIVE

Sit in the quiet and feel God's "enoughness" in your body. Where do you feel it? In arms that are full? In a quiet mind? In a stomach that feels full? In muscles that work well? If you can really mean it, try delighting in this enoughness.

DAY 6

EXPANDED PASSAGE: EXODUS 33:12–34:10

GOD REVEALS HIMSELF

EXODUS 33:21–34:7

- 21-23 GOD said, “Look, here is a place right beside me. Put yourself on this rock. When my Glory passes by, I’ll put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with my hand until I’ve passed by. Then I’ll take my hand away and you’ll see my back. But you won’t see my face.”
- 1-3 GOD spoke to Moses: “Cut out two tablets of stone just like the originals and engrave on them the words that were on the original tablets you smashed. Be ready in the morning to climb Mount Sinai and get set to meet me on top of the mountain. Not a soul is to go with you; the whole mountain must be clear of people, even animals — not even sheep or oxen can be grazing in front of the mountain.”
- 4-7 So Moses cut two tablets of stone just like the originals. He got up early in the morning and climbed Mount Sinai as GOD had commanded him, carrying the two tablets of stone. GOD descended in the cloud and took up his position there beside him and called out the name, GOD. GOD passed in front of him and called out, “GOD, GOD, a God of mercy and grace, endlessly patient — so much love, so deeply true — loyal in love for a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin. Still, he doesn’t ignore sin. He holds sons and grandsons responsible for a father’s sins to the third and even fourth generation.”

READ

Read the passage slowly. To get a broader feel for what's happening, quickly read the expanded passage.

THINK

During a second read, explore the nooks and crannies of God's communication with Moses, noticing words that embellish your mental picture of who God is or of the situation at hand. The third time, listen for one or two of God's words that especially impress you. Choose one word or phrase, then take time to repeat it to yourself, letting it interact with your thoughts, feelings, and desires.

PRAY

Deeply ponder the quality of God that the word or phrase portrays. Share with him what's striking to you about this aspect of his character. Explore what makes you desirous of someone with this trait. If more thoughts, feelings, or desires come to the surface, open up to them and ask God to clarify how they expand or even alter your understanding of this part of his personality. End your prayer by letting the word or words drift through your mind and heart again.

FIVE

Envision the ways God is present to you right now. What posture does he have (for example, standing tall, sitting near)? What expression is on his face? If he speaks to you, what tones does his voice hold? Ask him to enhance — and correct, if necessary — in the coming months this picture of how you see him, through the Bible passages you read and through your experiences.

DAY 7**GOD ENCOUNTERS**

On this seventh day, review and reflect on all you have read this week. Take the time to revel in the ways you've encountered God in the past six days.