A DAILY COMPANION to
MY UTMOST for HIS HIGHEST

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INTRODUCTION

As a husband-wife writing team, creating *A Daily Companion to My Utmost for His Highest* was a labor of love for us in many ways. We love devotionals, and since Oswald Chambers’ classic has been our favorite, we wanted to help others experience this timeless and powerful masterpiece as never before. We also love the reward of working together as best friends and were especially drawn to *Utmost*, which is the loving creation of perhaps the greatest husband-wife writing team ever—Oswald and Biddy Chambers. As we juggle two careers (Jed is a physics professor and Cecilie is a family doctor) and raise five young children, the *Daily Companion* project brought us closer as a couple. Faced with a challenging goal—to make each *Utmost* reading come alive in a new way—we discovered that many of the daily readings ministered to us with an unexpected freshness. Neither of us knew how much it would take to be our utmost for God’s highest as we embarked on this project. If we did, we might never have started!

The same may be true for you. If God told you right now what will happen to you as you complete Oswald Chambers’ one-year spiritual expedition with *A Daily Companion* as your map, you might lose heart. Giving our utmost for God’s highest disrupts our whole lives, since our lives are not yet the highest God wants them to be. Despite this unsettling truth, let us be of good cheer. Each reading comes in its own time. There will be a time to plant new habits and a time to uproot old ones. There will be a time to tear down idols and a time to build altars to remember God’s provision. There will be a time to weep over sin and a time to laugh in the joy of God’s goodness. God will make each season of this one-year devotional beautiful in its time. And before you know it, you will be a changed person; you will be your utmost for our high and mighty King.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

The full 366 days of Oswald Chambers’ hard-hitting truths overwhelm, inspire, and transform. The key is to experience all 366 days. *A Daily Companion*’s most basic goal is to help you read the devotional of the day for an entire year. In doing that, you can achieve the far more important goal of living your utmost best for the sake of God’s highest glory. Thus, the best way to use *A Daily Companion* is whatever way helps you faithfully read each day’s Scripture portion and devotional thought.

The following guidelines may come in handy as you use *A Daily Companion*. Each page matches a reading in *Utmost* and displays the same title and date. First, the **BACKGROUND** introduces the topic that Oswald Chambers covers on that day and sets the scene to prepare you for what he will say. Along with the Background, there are occasionally cross-references (indicated by month and day, not by page number) to other parts of *A Daily Companion*, and there is always a short summary of the devotional set off from the text just below the title. These pithy summaries were the first piece of the *Daily Companion* that we wrote. For several years before we wrote the rest of the study guide, these summaries proved helpful keys to Chambers’ teaching.

After the Background, the **SCRIPTURAL CONTEXT** section points you to the Bible and helps you learn the context of the verse or verses that Chambers quotes. As you already know, or
will soon see, the structure of every reading in Utmost begins with the title and date, followed by a Scripture quote, followed by a devotional. Each Scripture quote is extremely short, and to fully grasp the meaning of the devotional it is essential that you know the context. If you have the whole Bible memorized, you can read the short quote and be on your way! If not, you will want to have three books (or reading devices) in front of you: the Bible, a copy of Utmost, and A Daily Companion.

Once you have found the context verses, you are ready to dive into the devotional. The section labeled WHAT’S THE DEVOTIONAL SAYING? is designed to help you explore the meaning of the devotional. There are questions to ask yourself about parts of the devotional that you might easily miss. Combined with the summary, this section will allow you to tighten your grip on the essence of each daily reading.

Finally, in the APPLICATION section A Daily Companion will help you apply what you have learned to your current situation. One of Oswald Chambers’ recurring themes is that we cannot learn anything new from God until we apply what He has already taught us (see, for example, the Utmost devotion on March 27). The Application section, then, is most important. Here is where you have space to write down a few notes to yourself about what you need to change in your life (if you like to write a lot, you may want to add a fourth book to your pile—a journal—or get the journaling version of Utmost). This section is also where you will be encouraged to finish a prayer that we have started for you about what you learned and what you plan to change. A devotional book will discourage you if you try to apply what it says by your own power. But when God’s power is let loose in your life by prayer, there is no telling what good things will happen!

Each of Oswald Chambers’ devotionals, as edited and presented by his wife, Biddy, is like an exquisite entrée or a rich dessert. Your spiritual taste buds thrill as you read it. To enjoy a full meal, however, you need the quoted Scripture with its full context. A Daily Companion, with its four place settings of Background, Scriptural Context, What’s the Devotional Saying? and Application, will help you connect each devotional to its quoted Scripture and then to specific applications in your life. Even the most sensuous meal is meant not just to please our palette, but also to nourish us, giving us energy to be who God wants us to be. So also, the purpose of Chambers’ masterpiece, My Utmost for His Highest, is to give us spiritual energy to be our best for God. A Daily Companion will help you better digest Chambers’ teaching on the Scriptures and will better aid the Holy Spirit as He uses these Bible passages to make radical changes in your life.
JANUARY 1
LET US KEEP TO THE POINT

Has God sent you a crisis?
Give Him what He’s asking for: your Utmost for His Highest!

BACKGROUND
Wouldn’t it have been amazing to listen to Mr. Chambers speak at the weekly Devotional Hour in the Bible Training College? From 1911 to 1915, Chambers taught in the Clapham district of south-central London. Biddy, Oswald Chambers’ wife, said these devotionals “marked an epoch” in students’ lives. Chambers’ words transformed souls back then; how will they change your life today?

My Utmost for His Highest, the title Biddy chose, comes straight from today’s devotional. Thus, it’s absolutely crucial for us to grasp Chambers’ point. A short summary of the main idea can be found, as always for this study guide, at the top of the page.

SCRIPTURAL CONTEXT
Chambers based this reading on Philippians 1:20, which he took from James Moffatt’s 1913 translation (see the Classic Edition of Utmost). Chambers usually quoted from the King James Version, so the differences between Moffatt (“that now as ever I may do honour to Christ in my own person by fearless courage”) and the King James (“that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body”) must be significant. Which version puts greater emphasis on Paul’s responsibility to magnify Christ’s glory?

Read the full context of this quote (Philippians 1:1–26 and 4:2–3). What crisis did God send to Paul? What crisis did He send to the Philippians?

WHAT’S THE DEVOTIONAL SAYING?
The first part of the devotional tells us that we have a choice. We can either give our all to God (which is the point of today’s message), or we can be ashamed. The choice can’t be made merely by debating the pros and cons. It has to be made as an act of will, a commitment to give our all to God no matter what the cost. Chambers warns us that when we say we are worried about what it costs others, we are really thinking about ourselves. Don’t be fooled!

In the end, what could giving your all to God cost you? Death? The second part of the devotional says that not even that ultimate cost deterred Paul. But how can mere mortals like us have that kind of courage?

Chambers explains that we gain courage when God sends us a crisis. When does He send it? Right as we are debating and reasoning ourselves out of whatever it is He wants us to do! Our God-given crisis is what compels us to finally cast off our comfortable-but-worldly state of affairs and to surrender to our bridegroom Jesus, no matter what the cost. Will you keep to this all-important point today?

APPLICATION
What is stopping you from being your utmost for His highest?
What crises are causing you to decide for or against God?
Finish this prayer: “Today, Lord, I will keep myself before you by . . .”
BACKGROUND  When was the last time you did something for God that was “crazy”? Oswald Chambers’ students at the Bible Training College were people preparing for a life of ministry at a small, recently opened school. Surely their parents asked them, “But what do you expect to do with the training you are getting?”

To prepare his students for these and other challenges, Chambers taught them to trust God even when all else was crashing down around them. It wasn’t enough just to feel close to God in London. How would they fare near a brutal World War I battlefield? Today’s summary at the top of the page reminds us that our strength in the trenches comes from clinging as closely to God there as we do in quieter moments. Circumstances may change, but He never does!

SCRIPTURAL CONTEXT  Can you guess which Bible character in Hebrews 11 went out “not knowing where”? Are you surprised to see Barak, Samson, and Jephthah also mentioned, despite their many flaws? Even Abraham had just as many downs as ups in his spiritual journey. So what makes him an example we should follow? How was Abraham’s going out similar to what Chambers’ students did?

Chambers also quotes Luke 12:22. Read the context of this quote (verses 13–53). How would you feel reading this passage if you were in Chambers’ college training to be a missionary? How do you feel about this passage in your current situation?

WHAT’S THE DEVOTIONAL SAYING?  In the process of compiling Utmost, Biddy rearranged her husband’s devotional talks into an order that made sense to her. Consequently, today’s devotional follows fast on yesterday’s heels; if we are going to live our utmost for God’s highest, it will often mean we must go out without knowing. Chambers helps us “go out” in our daily lives by clearing the air of our biggest smokescreen—asking to know God’s will.

We need not ask His will, because He never tells us (at least not when we use this smokescreen). Instead, He shows us that He is still the mysterious, miracle-working God we knew that time when we felt closest to Him. Chambers wants us to have the sublime charm that God loves to see in His children. This winsome quality comes from complete trust in Him—like Abraham had in his journey to Canaan and like Chambers demonstrated when he left for Egypt in 1915. Chambers was a man who practiced what he preached!

APPLICATION  What stops you from daily going out and placing your confidence in God?
How has God responded to your questions and worries about what He is going to do?
Finish this prayer: “God, I’m learning to go out, trusting you, in the area of . . .”
**JANUARY 3**

**CLOUDS AND DARKNESS**

*Do you think you know God?*

*He’s utterly incomprehensible, but the Spirit reveals Him to us.*

**BACKGROUND** Oswald Chambers experienced a four-year period of clouds and darkness starting when he was twenty-three years old. Though distressing, this darkness ushered in a spiritual renewal in his life, which began when he read Luke 11:13. This verse promises the good gift of the Holy Spirit, not because we deserve Him in our lives but because of Christ’s righteousness credited to us. As Chambers put it, “I had to claim the gift from God on the authority of Jesus Christ.”

In today’s devotional, Chambers urges us not to assume we know God but to recognize that He is shrouded in mystery. Yet despite God’s unfathomability, we can still know Him through the Word by the Holy Spirit, as the summary above reminds us.

**SCRIPTURAL CONTEXT** Psalm 97 gives us an amazing picture of God’s power, righteousness, and justice. Based on this Psalm, how does C. S. Lewis’ quote about Aslan in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*—“He isn’t safe. But he’s good”—apply to God? How might this quote help you when you’re experiencing clouds and darkness?

Now read Exodus 3. How would you feel if God said to you what He said to Moses in verse 5? Finally, read Luke 11:11–13. How could this passage help someone who, like Chambers did, struggles to experience true Christianity?

**WHAT’S THE DEVOTIONAL SAYING?** Interestingly, Chambers begins this devotional by explaining that clouds and darkness are signs that we are baptized in the Spirit. So even though these dark times distress us, they give testimony to the Spirit’s important work. His work is to throw off the casual, earthly reasons we follow Jesus, just as He did in John 6. People were following Jesus to see if He would make more earthly bread appear—ignoring that He himself was the true bread from heaven.

Chambers quotes John 6:63 to show us that after clouds and darkness, Jesus speaks words of spirit and life. Darkness is lifted from our hearts as we realize that who God is and what He will do (as we saw yesterday) will remain wonderfully impenetrable this side of heaven.

**APPLICATION**

How does knowing Jesus differ from knowing what He does?

In what ways have you, now or in the past, experienced clouds and darkness about who Jesus is?

Finish this prayer: “After meditating on your Word today, Lord Jesus, I better understand that...”
**JANUARY 4**

**WHY CAN I NOT FOLLOW YOU NOW?**

_Do you see a trial looming? The real test will surprise you. Look to God before you leap!_

**BACKGROUND** Oswald Chambers freely admitted it when he had misunderstood God’s voice. For example, he was sure, as sure as any of his “intuitions born in communion with God,” that World War I would end by the close of 1916. On December 9 of that year he wrote that his error was “just another indication of how little we dare trust anything but our Lord himself.”

Today’s devotional advises humility when we sense that God wants us to do something. God’s tests require not only “going out without knowing” (*Utmost*, January 2), but also waiting for God’s timing. If we don’t wait, we will be surprised by these tests, just as Peter was surprised by a test on the night he denied Jesus.

**SCRIPTURAL CONTEXT** What could be more tragic than a betrayal? Peter thought he understood what Christ was saying in John 13:38. He probably figured that since he had followed Christ when others turned away (as we read yesterday in John 6), he was sure to pass the test. Poor Peter! In many ways, his denial was more heartbreaking than Judas’ betrayal of Christ. Peter wanted so badly to pass his test, but he didn’t think to wait on God—even when Jesus asked him to do exactly that (Mark 14:34)!

**WHAT’S THE DEVOTIONAL SAYING?**

Based on the number of copies in print, we’ve always known that *Utmost* connects with people as no other devotional book does. But now, thanks to the digital age, we can pinpoint the exact parts that people find most helpful. If you have *Utmost* on Kindle, you can turn on Popular Highlights and see that today’s reading contains one of the most frequently highlighted lines in the whole book: “Never run before God’s guidance. If there is the slightest doubt, then He is not guiding. Whenever there is doubt—don’t.” Think how many people would be spared broken hearts and disappointment if they were to follow these three sentences!

Chambers says there are two parts to every test: the decision to obey God (*Utmost*, January 1) and the wisdom to know when to act (today’s topic). When we pass the first part of a test, our “natural devotion” to Jesus makes us want to leap forward to obey. But true devotion, which is supernatural, helps us wisely wait and pass the second part of the test.

Should we always wait before we obey? Not at all! If you think Chambers is saying that, you may have missed the last sentence of the second paragraph. The “providential will of God” is quite different from His moral will. If you are tested on a moral issue, obey at once!

**APPLICATION**

What is God providentially (through circumstances) calling you to do?

What could you wait to see before you take the next steps?

Finish this prayer: “In my natural devotion to you, Jesus, I’ve made rash decisions that . . .”
BACKGROUND  The “kea” symbol at the top of this page shows that this devotional continues yesterday’s theme. Yesterday we learned that Peter had “natural devotion” for Christ but that this caused him to jump the gun.

When Oswald Chambers was in his twenties, he thought God was calling him to evangelize artists by being an artist himself. He didn’t fail any tests by going down that road, but there was still a sense that in his heart he had gotten ahead of God’s plan.

Thankfully, God uses the times when our hearts get ahead of Him to draw us closer. Indeed, our natural devotion for Jesus makes us take action; and as we move forward, God can cause us to stumble, thereby showing us that we are not yet held tightly in the Spirit’s grip.

SCRIPTURAL CONTEXT Although the quoted text is again from John 13, today’s message is equally based on Matthew 4:18–22 and John 21:15–19. After reading these two passages, how would you describe Peter’s change between his two callings? What do John 13:36, 20:22, and Matthew 26:69–75 have to do with this change? How did Jesus move Peter from natural devotion to Holy Spirit invasion?

WHAT’S THE DEVOTIONAL SAYING? The main point today is that God uses our failures to give us the Spirit’s power, which often comes to us only after we fail. Additionally, Chambers points out the difference between why we first follow Jesus (because He amazes us) and why we keep following Him (because the Holy Spirit invades us). Invasion by the Spirit happens only when we get to the end of ourselves, and, if we are like Peter, that happens through our spectacular failures.

What do you think Chambers meant when he said, “There is no figure in front now saving the Lord Jesus Christ.”? (The Updated Edition of Utmost renders this sentence, “Now no one is in front of Peter except the Lord Jesus Christ.”) Certainly, Peter needed to get himself out of the way so he could properly follow Jesus. But he also needed to get his “figure” of Jesus out of the way. Is our “figure” of Jesus built more on our amazement of Him than on who He really is and on the Spirit He gives?

Chambers compares this attitude of trusting Christ alone to having a single navigation star. Nowadays it would be like having a GPS system with only one destination. Are you willing to set your coordinates on Jesus and on nothing or no one else?

APPLICATION

How can you move from an external devotion for Jesus to an internal martyrdom and yielding to Him?

How does it make you feel to know that you cannot accomplish this move yourself?

Finish this prayer: “Holy Spirit, I’ll come to the end of my self-sufficiency by . . .”

THE LIFE OF POWER TO FOLLOW

We follow Christ, amazed.
We continue on, invaded by the Holy Spirit!

APPLICATION

How can you move from an external devotion for Jesus to an internal martyrdom and yielding to Him?

How does it make you feel to know that you cannot accomplish this move yourself?

Finish this prayer: “Holy Spirit, I’ll come to the end of my self-sufficiency by . . .”

BACKGROUND  The “kea” symbol at the top
APPLICATION

What are some of the blessings God has given you, and how have you given them back?

Why is your public activity for God dependent on your private communion with Him?

Finish this prayer: “God, when it comes to worship, waiting, and work, I’ve been learning . . .”
BACKGROUND  Oswald and Biddy Chambers married in 1910, just before Oswald began the Bible Training College and the devotional sessions we read in Utmost. So when he talks about friendship in today’s reading, he is speaking with the knowledge of his intimacy with Biddy.

Chambers’ closeness to Biddy reflected his deep intimacy with Jesus. He spent his whole life striving to know his Savior, and his close relationships with others flowed out of this deep oneness (as it does for any true follower of Jesus!).

SCRIPTURAL CONTEXT  How would you compare the disciples’ fruit—before and after Pentecost? Before, they were able to “conquer demons and to bring about a revival.” But after, they brought the gospel to the whole world! This greater fruit came from a deeper intimacy, which Jesus gave them when He departed and sent His Spirit.

Read as much of John 14–16 as you can right now, paying special attention to the verses Chambers quotes (John 14:9, 15:1–4, 15, and 16:7). Next, read Luke 10:18–20, which shows the fruit the disciples already had reaped before they were given even greater intimacy with Jesus.

WHAT’S THE DEVOTIONAL SAYING?  Today’s reading helps us better understand Jesus’ tone in John 14:9. The same encouraging, gentle tone Jesus used with Philip extends to us two thousand years later. He wants us to be intimate with Him, identifying with Him in thought, heart, and spirit. He uses all of life’s experiences, especially the discipline of difficult circumstances, to draw us closer to Him. As a result of this intimacy, we will “never draw attention to [ourselves] but will only show the evidence of a life where Jesus is completely in control.” We all desire lives that point to Jesus and not ourselves, yet we are so tempted to do anything and everything that draws attention to ourselves. We need to let Jesus satisfy every area of life—down to our deepest, darkest depths.

APPLICATION  What makes true friendship so rare, and is this the same obstacle that prevents your intimacy with Jesus?

What is the purpose of the whole “experience” [or “discipline”—Utmost Classic Edition] of life?

Finish this prayer: “Jesus, I want to be satisfied by you in every area of my life, so today I will...”