

Writing a Devotional

Introduction

A devotional is a genre of writing that links an anecdote with a motivating principle. Ideally it finds some appropriate scriptural reference. A short engaging anecdote is more memorable than a precept, it is no happenstance that the Bible is a metanarrative containing numerous stories. With the advent of the internet there is now easy access to thousands of devotional publications and texts. Some are directed at the middle of the road-to everyone, others to specific people, like mothers. Look at the teacher devotionals on the Beacon Media website.

<http://www.beaconmedia.com.au>

Technique

You will be working through some stages to platform your ability to author your own devotional writing which may well bless and encourage hundreds of people.

As an author you need to gain your reader's attention quickly. By the close of the second sentence you should have them wanting to continue. Be sparing with details and don't load up sentences with too many adjectives and adverbs. If sentences can be kept short the eye processes the text more easily. So use lots of full stops.

It can help to imagine your audience so you don't write to a vacuum. Imagine that someone is sitting across the desk from you waiting to receive your output, or poised at their computer expectant that your email will arrive soon. Is the reader to be a peer, or someone older or younger than you? This might determine the style of language you choose to frame the thoughts in.

Because a devotional is short, the story needs to be concise and one key scripture referred to in the application. You don't have space to say the same thing in two different ways.

While most devotionals are read in silence and "heard" in the mind of the reader, it is a good practice to read out loud your final draft. This might reveal breathing spots where you need to include punctuation or sentences that are too long.

A relevant or interesting photo, diagram or drawing might enhance your presentation and draw in the reader's eye.

Check the overall visual shape of your written piece, do paragraphs divide up the main frames of the writing? White space is as important as the black text. Is the font easy to process and not too decorative?

Beginning

Read some of the short devotionals of Selwyn Hughes, or look at the more ancient Thomas a Kempis writing, where the devotion has an imaginary response from Jesus in a dialogue with the reader. You might be more drawn to devotionals with a teenage target audience.

www.cwr.org.uk

<http://www.leaderu.com/cyber/books/imitation/imitation.html>

From these devotionals you research, select just one that you like. Edit out all the complex words, and put in simple ones. Now begin to modify the story, change the setting or the name/gender of the protagonist, alter the historical time period where it is set. Place it in another culture.

Rewrite the opening sentence and the closing two sentences into language you are comfortable with.

Change versions of the Bible used, try *The Message Bible* or *The Amplified Bible*.

Now print out your final edited copy. It is a synthesis of your work and the original of the author. Many great writers and composers drew from the work of others and elaborated it, creating a masterpiece and a classic.

You now own a template from which you can create your own, original devotional for publishing.

Step One

Commit your mind and spirit to God; ask that intruding voices and distracters are bound from your mind.

Step Two

Choose a scripture and write a short story to illustrate the principle it conveys.

Perhaps you have an anecdote or story from a sermon heard in times past that you can write out now. Just get the story down in rough form. Don't do any editing which will hamper your flow. Your focus is on the whole—not the details.

The Gingerbread Man is a fairy story that is much loved. This biscuit comes magically to life, and runs away from all manner of people and animals who want to consume him. The fox is crafty and is his undoing.

Can this serve as a devotional springboard?

What do you make of a carnivore who speaks like a charming gentleman? Are those teeth of his really for only eating grass?

You can't do a deal with the devil and expect him to keep his side of it! A little pornography, a little too much alcohol, a small indiscretion with money or the truth..... and what is the consequence? All this is like climbing on to the fox's back as did the gingerbread man, and then up and on to his snout. Selfishness is such a powerful force, and indulging it is like walking into a dungeon. It might be a gilded dungeon with plush furnishings, but it is no less a stronghold that denies you release at will.

Matthew 7:15 records Jesus as saying be wary of vicious wolves that advance on you in disguise. Charm and externals are deceptive.

Step Three

Create the map

- 1) The opening
- 2) The body of the written piece
- 3) The conclusion
- 4) The scripture

Step Four

Create the first draft; don't focus on spelling or grammar, length or shape. Just let the total emerge and present for shaping and pruning.

Step Five

Edit, and be sure to check spelling and grammar. Use of a Thesaurus might reveal a word that is more precise and evocative than what you have used. Can you make the story more lucid without expanding the length too much? Are there any details that you can cull? What details have you included that are not essential to the whole?

Step Six

Cut. Remove every extraneous word or minor idea that detracts from the whole. Strip it down to the basics. You can always add back in what you remove, but how does it read in a minimal shape and form?

Step Seven

Change desks, print it out off the screen, and look at the writing in a different environment and in a different medium if possible. Ask a critical friend to read it and get a reaction. Ask the critic, "What can be cut out?" And "Is there a detail or bit of information missing that would help the whole piece?"

Put it away and read it afresh the next day.

Step Eight

Add in a photo or diagram to add interest. Email it to some friends. Add it to your MySpace or submit it to websites that might publish and include work like yours. Print it out and put it up on a notice board as an outreach piece. Ask God to reveal new ideas to you for future devotions, and read devotions written by others to study their technique as well as be edified yourself.

Reminder

We don't like to be preached at ourselves. Humility means that use of the third person is often more attractive to the reader.

"You should not tell lies then." Is one way to conclude

An alternative is," We must make every effort, no matter what the cost, to tell the truth".