

You Want

Me

to Lead

Devotions?!

Jeffrey E. Meinz



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Foreword

As a member of the 2007 LCMS Youth/Adult Gathering planning team, I was asked to lead devotions for a meeting of Gathering planners held in August 2006. The following is that devotion:

When I was asked if I would be willing to lead a devotion at our next meeting, the first thought that came to my mind was, "Why me? Why am I being asked to lead a devotion?" Was I being "chosen" to do this, or was my name simply drawn at random, or was this an example of the "Chosen" theme that I had heard so much about over the last year? Either way, all I could think was, "Why me?"

Perhaps it might help if I explained some things. You see, I have never given a devotion before. I'm not even sure what a devotion truly is, or should be. As many of you may know, I am not a DCE; I'm clearly not a pastor; and I'm not even a paid church worker. I am a layperson, an engineer by trade. I didn't grow up in the Lutheran Church. My parents were Catholic, and we rarely attended church.

I came to the Church through my son, so to speak. When I remarried about eleven years ago, I was looking for a school for my son, and my husband suggested that I check into the Lutheran schools. He had attended a Lutheran school through the sixth grade and recalled what a good education system they had. I enrolled Ryan in the fourth grade at Zion Lutheran School in Belleville, Illinois. I was amazed to see how quickly he took to the teachers, the students, and the religion classes. Our family joined the church a year later and I began my "second career" as a full-time volunteer.

By now, I'm sure some of you are thinking, "What's the big deal? It's only a devotion." Although part of me understood this, I also knew that there are so many others much more qualified to lead a great devotion. But after much prayer and reflection, I now understand that when I ask "Why me, Lord? Why are You calling on me?," I hear God's response when He says, "It's not about you, Sherrill." You see, through my faith journey, God has been kind enough to show me through His Word that I am not alone; He often calls the unlikely or even the unwilling, as He did with Moses, Jonah, Mary, and Paul. And so, the true question should be, "Why *not* me?"

Over this next year, as we continue in our planning, whenever doubt or fear or problems enter our path, we can always draw upon Paul's words to the Philippians when he wrote, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (4:13). Thanks be to God!

Sherrill Smith

Be imitators of **GOD**, therefore, as dearly loved children
of **LOVE**, just as Christ loved us and **GAVE** himself
a **fragrant offering** and sacrifice to God. (Ephesians 5:1-2)
I know the plans I have for you,"
so you may **prosper**

Introduction

I believe that everyone has the ability to lead group devotions. Devotions are those five-minute meditations conducted just prior to a meeting or event. Devotions set the framework by which we agree to meet: God is present in this place, and we will be Christlike to one another.

When setting out to write this book, I didn't want to write a traditional devotional booklet. You know the kind: You're attending a 7 p.m. meeting for which you've been assigned to lead devotions. At 6:59, you grab the first devotional book on the shelf you see and read the first devotion you open to. I call those "'just add water' devotions." They are as instant as some potatoes.

I wanted this devotional book to be different. I wanted the readers to gain a deeper understanding of who Jesus is. I wanted the devotion leader to plan efficiently and effectively, without spending hours planning for one simple, five-minute devotion.

The devotions in this book are broken up into smaller sections: Scripture Springboard, Activity, Commentary, Personal Story, Concordance, Meditation, and Prayer Springboard. Allow me to explain each section in more detail:

Scripture Springboard

These are the verses from God's Word, the Bible, that will catapult us into a higher place. Just like a diver uses a springboard to launch herself into a complicated dive, God's Word propels us into a greater understanding of Him and His love for us.

Activity

In recent years, we've learned that people learn most effectively by doing. The simple, inexpensive activities in this book enable the listener to gain a different perspective and deeper understanding of what the selected Scripture passage is communicating.

Commentary

These are the thoughts God brought to my mind while I was writing each devotion in this book. Most people think that these must be the "meat and potatoes" of this book. Nothing could be further from the truth. These sections, although the longest, pale in comparison to God's divine Word. The commentaries simply help bring context and insight into the inspired Word of God.

Personal Story

This section makes each devotion different, dynamic, and unique. This is the place where the leader gives a personal touch to the devotion.

I do want to caution you as the leader to take care not to make this devotion suddenly about you. Choose stories that give glory to God and to Him alone. If the most commonly used word in this section is *I*, then you probably want to choose a different story or devotion. Find one that magnifies what Christ did on the cross and in your life. I once heard that "A naked preacher can be very distracting." The point is this: If you expose yourself too much in your stories, the listeners tend to remember only the details of *your*

story, and not the pure message from Jesus Christ through His Word.

It is appropriate for you to pray before you lead devotions. I encourage you to ask God to reveal to you whether this devotion is about you or Him. If it's about you, start over.

Concordance

This section is for those who need help finding other verses in Scripture that apply to the devotion being read. The truth is, in today's society, even Christians are far too unfamiliar with God's Word. This fact became more and more evident when I began speaking more in public. At these speaking engagements, I would say, "Turn your Bibles to Genesis." Then I would watch as many in the group opened their Bibles in Revelation and start shuffling through the entire book, all the way to Genesis. It is because of such unfamiliarity with God's Word that I included this simple section.

A concordance is typically in the back of your Bible, or in a separate book. It helps you find a specific verse in Scripture by using key words.

In addition, each Concordance section provides at least one preselected verse that may be used for the Meditation portion of the devotion.

Meditation

Meditation is too often misunderstood in our society. Many associate meditation with sitting in a yoga position while humming some New Age tune and emptying the mind of all thought. Nothing could be further from the truth when it comes to meditating on God's Holy Word.

Meditating on Scripture involves reading the Word; spending time in silence, thinking about the words that have been read; and spending time in prayer. Rather than emptying the mind, the goal of meditating on the Scriptures is to *fill* the mind with the very Word of God.

I am a firm believer in meditating on God's Word. God speaks to you through His Word. Joshua 1:8 says, "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success." To those who study His Word, God promises spiritual blessings. The Spirit of God works through that Word to strengthen our faith and prepare us to face the challenges of living in the world today.

Prayer Springboard

Here is one more opportunity to make the devotion personal. The Prayer Springboard simply begins the prayer for you. You or your entire group can finish it, according to the Spirit's leading. You can gather prayer requests from the group and insert those petitions here. Bottom line: This is your chance to speak to the Creator of the universe from the depths of your heart. Prayer . . . what a privilege and a blessing!

That's it! My prayer for you as the leader is that the group would see God through you and hear His voice. My prayer for you as the listener is that you would receive His Word and apply it to your life by the Spirit's strength.

Date used

Used for

1

Straightening Out

Scripture Springboard

A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken." A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field" (Isaiah 40:3-6 NIV).

Activity

Give each person a standard metal paper clip. Instruct everyone to unbend their paper clips as straight as possible. You could even declare a winner for the straightest paper clip.

Personal Story

Many of us are familiar with motion sickness. Whether traveling by plane, boat, train, or automobile, we have experienced the discomfort of a queasy stomach. Share a story about a time when you had motion sickness. What happened? When did you feel better? Did you try any remedies from "old wives' tales" to ease your discomfort?

Commentary

Sometimes the only true remedy for motion sickness is solid ground or a straight stretch of smooth highway. Today's Scripture reading encourages us to make straight paths for

a different purpose than settling our stomachs. In ancient days, workers were sent ahead of important people to prepare the roads for their arrival. Removing large rocks and filling deep potholes ensured a smooth ride for the honored guest. Jesus is the most honored guest in the life of a Christian. But how prepared are we for His second coming? Is the road littered with sin and sadness? Is it time to "adopt the highway" of our heart and ask God to do a spring cleaning? Psalm 51:10 says, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (NIV). Ask God to reveal to you the slimy pits and places of pride where you dwell. He will lift you up and set your feet upon His rock (Psalm 40:2 NIV).

In His Word, God promises not only to set us upon the right path, but also to forgive our sinfulness and renew us through His Holy Spirit. As we gather for worship, we confess our sins and hear the blessed words of absolution spoken by our pastor. In the Lord's Supper we are forgiven and re-energized to live for, and serve, Christ.

Concordance

Find one more verse that applies to this devotion. Possible key words include *Path*, *Road*, *Straight*, and *Prepare*. Or read:

"See, I will send My messenger, who will prepare the way before Me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to His temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty (Malachi 3:1 NIV).

Meditate

Ask participants to listen closely to the final verse and meditate on its meaning. After a couple of moments, close with prayer.

Prayer Springboard

Lord, we admit that we have not fully prepared for Your second arrival. We've been more concerned with our daily lives than the eternity You provide. Forgive us through the death and resurrection of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Renew us by the power of Your Holy Spirit in the Word and Sacraments. . . .
