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January 19, 2011

Devotional How-to's
Taking the Mystery out of Preparing a Devotional

1. What is a devotional?

What is a devotional? We know it's dreadfully important to know what it is because everyone always asks the pastor's wife to give one at baby showers or at a tea. But most of us live in fear of the *phantom* devotional–the devotional everyone else does the right way and somehow we missed out on how to prepare one correctly.

Donna's definition of a devotional:
A previously digested thought/idea/principle you have prepared in a concise, consolidated manner to draw or focus the audience's mind from the temporal upward to the eternal. Col. 3:2 "Setting our minds on things above."

Lisa's definition of a devotional:
A short talk with one main point or a few points that briefly touch on different aspects of the subject.

> "There isn't one set way to prepare or give a devotional. The constraints of the event, your personality and gifts will all determine what your devotional is like."
> ~Lisa

2. How to Prepare a Devotional

Donna's process

- Choose your theme/main point/goal. What is the one thing you want your audience to take away? State it clearly or ask a question to bring it out.
- Develop your point. Explain why you're saying what you're saying and why it is so. Hinge your point on Scripture.
- Apply your point to the audience's lives today. Show how you applied it to yourself.

Lisa's process

- Start with an opener–an illustration, a question, an example or story. This should be short. It's the springboard into your main point.
- Read your verse or text.
- Make comments or observations about the text.
- This would be the time to explain or interpret any difficult phrases in the text.
- Now begin to make application.
- Then close with an encouragement, hymn or poem, or a verse that sums up what you just said.

3. Practical Helps and Things to Remember

Donna's ideas

Don't make a lot of apologies.

Be prepared to give a copy of your devotion away. Sometimes people want a copy of your devotion as a keepsake (especially if it's a baby or wedding shower).

> "Often your devotion can be a springboard for later talks (or vice versa)." ~Donna

Don't think your idea is silly. If you have been thinking about it, so has everyone else. It's the perfect topic for a devotion.

You'll probably end up using some of your devotions over and over again.

Our entire life truly is a devotional! Just as our husband's are to be prepared in and out of season to teach we whether in a pastor's wife or not need to be prepared to give a reason for the hope within us and help others - promote God's Kingdom.

I have tried to train my thinking so that when I read/study the Word, I work at condensing it into a main thought by putting it in one sentence and then reducing that down, if I can, to a shorter phrase. That helps me remember what I've read and allows me to use it to help someone else, either informally along the way or in a devotional type setting–after all we are slaves of Christ and we need to equip ourselves to promote His Kingdom.

Lisa's ideas

Try to make one point really well (think magnifying glass–you will be able to examine details). Or skim over the material and make general overview comments (think of flying at 30,000 feet over your subject–you will focus on principles).

Choose something you're interested in or your passionate about. This helps you communicate in a more lively manner.

If you're nervous, write out your devotion manuscript style. Use larger font than you normally need because the podium may be farther away than you normally hold a book or the lighting may be really dim.

Keep paragraphs small and put a space in between each paragraph. It will be easier for you to find your spot again after looking up to make eye contact with your audience (and yes, you have to look at them, you can't just read it!).

Try to smile and have fun.

Try to stick within the time limits given to you. Be a good steward of the time allotted to you.

Sometimes people view a devotional as a means to "tack on" the Word to an event already planned. This is a prime time for you to turn people's hearts to the Lord and His Word. They may be just "tacking on" the Word, but you can turn it into a time of spiritual blessing. Take advantage of the opportunity!

When giving a devotional, remember this isn't the time to exegete the passage in extreme detail or to provide a lot of background data. *This is the time to quickly and efficiently put God's Word on display*.

4. Closing Thoughts

Donna

Leave your pride at the cross. Don't worry what people think in the sense of not doing it just right or for the purpose of being thought well of. Your job is to give God glory in all you do and you can leave the results to Him.

Lisa

Never minimize the effectiveness of a devotional to motivate and encourage. Think of how Charles Spurgeon's *Morning and Evening* writings have been an encouragement to thousands. His writings are, in effect, devotionals on a verse or a nugget of thought taken from a verse. This small opportunity may leave a lasting impact for the Kingdom.

For Practice

Try this simple exercise during your quiet time.

1. Open to either Ps. 127, 128, or 131. Read through it as if you were preparing to give a devotional for a baby shower.
2. Think about and jot down notes answering the following questions:
   a. What is the psalm about?
   b. What are some key points the author is making?
   c. What principles can you draw out for us today?
   d. Think of one point of application or encouragement you can leave with the women from your devotional?
3. Now you have the beginnings of a devotional. Commit to working on it until it's finished.

4. Have your group leader hold you accountable to finish your devotional and then share it with your group.