

Writing Devotions for the Classroom

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ABSTRACT: For faculty considering faith integration in the classroom, devotion time is one of the best opportunities to share and engage with the student about God and Scripture. There is a lack of literature on writing devotions for the classroom. This paper adds a possible structure for online and onsite business devotions. Preparing students with reflective questions for reading and absorbing devotional material is useful for their entire lives.

KEYWORDS: online, onsite, devotions, devotionals, discussion, kainos

INTRODUCTION

Devotions are popular today. *My Utmost for His Highest* is a book of daily devotions. Published in 1927 in England and 1935 in America, it has sold tens of millions of copies (Halford, n.d.) The fact that the book has been translated into 39 languages is a testament to its popularity. Well known personalities write devotional books. The Dalai Lama wrote *The Little Book of Inner Peace* in 2009 (Riess, 2015). A list of the top 100 devotionals are listed online (www.share-faith.com). The best-selling devotionals on Amazon, Inc. are listed and updated hourly (Devotionals, 2018). The top three devotional book authors have sold millions of copies according to their biographies on Amazon.

Growth of devotionals is also spurred on by pastors like John Hagee and Charles Stanley writing devotional books (Koonse & Garrett, 2016). Devotional books offer small snippets of learning and Scripture for use during any small amount of time of any day. Devotional books can be given as gifts and any denomination can participate in writing them. Writing devotions for books is different than writing devotions for a classroom setting. It has to do with the starting point being a subject to write about instead of having an inspirational or biblical theme. Complementing devotional books in print is the online digital content, which is another reason for devotion growth.

According to Jerry Jenkins (2018), author of the best-selling *Left Behind* series, a devotion writer must have a pure heart based on James 3:8-11, a focused mind based on Psalm 1:1-3 and Psalm 73:28, and a burning desire based on Jeremiah 20:9 (see Table 1). For a faculty member need-

ing to support faith integration in the classroom, these three characteristics are certainly true. Praying is a good way to start with a pure heart. Having a focused mind may mean different things to people. For this writer, it means immersing into the topic at hand, digging through resources, and spending time alone with God. The subject matter can be any topic, but it is critical for the writer to have a burning desire to help people.

Table 1: New International Version Bible verses in *How to Write a Devotional* by Jerry Jenkins

James 3:8-11	⁸ but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. ¹¹ Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?
Psalm 1:1-3	¹ Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, ² but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. ³ That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.
Psalm 73:28	But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the sovereign Lord my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.

Even if devotions are provided at some institutions, a faculty member can develop their own devotions, which can be more meaningful to students and more topical if intentionally written that way. Relating to students using personal stories and testimony is compelling. When faculty write a devotion, it can be similar to a Bible study and add to religious life for that faculty member. Forcing yourself to immerse into the Bible and other source materials provides new ways of thinking about important topics.

CONTENT

Devotion content can vary per person, publisher, or university guidelines. Content can also differ based on age group of the audience, whether a course is online or onsite, and if you start with a topic instead of a certain Scripture. For many courses, the topics will be established and then devotions are written. This makes the tie-in to Scripture the most difficult part of the devotion for the classroom. Having a transition that is not forced or having to stretch to make a point makes you use inspiration and creativity.

No matter what the topic, key things are expected in a devotion. Graham (2016) names 5 key items: 1) Bible verses, 2) a story or commentary, 3) a calendar, 4) a theme, and 5) an application area. Jenkins (2018) states that the makings of a good devotional is accomplished by using Scripture, having a style appropriate to your audience, using anecdotes and illustrations, presenting God's wisdom, and using grammar such as visual nouns and active voice. Devotions are short, so being concise and to the point means you may have to revise the writing several times to cut out extra content. A grammar checker facilitates writing with an active voice.

STRUCTURE

The structure of a devotion is important to evaluate also. Jenkins (2018) states the format should have a hook, book, look, and took. The hook is a lead or something compelling to grab the reader's attention. The book is the Bible. The look is the application of how the Bible relates. The took is the takeaway value. A classroom devotion has a more dedicated audience so the hook is not up front in the devotion in all cases. It can be in the middle during the transition or even at the end. Scripture is relevant in writing classroom devotions. A takeaway from the devotion is possibly more subtle in classroom devotions and oftentimes comes out in the discussions with reflective and open-ended questions.

For online courses an example of structure is a title, introduction, resources, background, Scripture, and reflective questions. Appendix A shows an example of an online devotion. For onsite courses, an example of structure is a title, paragraphs explaining the topic, the transition that relates Scripture to the topic, sources, and questions. Appendix B shows an example of an onsite devotion with sources. Questions may already be given. If not, use two standard questions of "What two things did you take away from this devotion?" and "How would you apply this to your work or life?"

TOP SOURCES

When writing devotions, source material is very useful and provides background and context to the Scripture or subject matter being written about. Musts are a good study Bible, a topical reference guide, and a concordance plus dictionary. A Bible atlas is also useful since it provides geographical context. Basic reference books include the Stewardship Study Bible, the topical reference called "What Does the Bible Say About..." and the Strong's Concordance plus Vine's Dictionary. Having a topical index for instance allows you to look up Scripture based on current topics. For instance, if you are writing about current topics like ethics of corporations, you might look up "ethics" or "stewardship" or "honesty." A thesaurus will be your friend in these cases.

Besides reference books, there are books about why bad things happen to good people, idioms used in the Bible (like slang today), a Christian classic by C. S. Lewis called *Mere Christianity*, wisdom from Mother Teresa, and simple outlines of the Bible to gather your thoughts and perspective of the books and chapters of Scripture. Here are two examples. Clive Staples Lewis said in *Mere Christianity*, "A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you." In the preface of Mother Teresa's book, *Meditations from a Simple Path*, it states "The fruit of silence is prayer. The fruit of prayer is faith. The fruit of faith is love. The fruit of love is service. The fruit of service is peace." These truly were two wise people to learn from.

Many of these titles below you can pick up on auction Web sites or book retail websites for a small amount of money. The DVD collections were found on eBay. The websites are free to use. This author uses these key sources of 11 books in print, 2 DVD collections, and websites:

- *The Stewardship Bible*
- *What Does the Bible Say About... The Ultimate A to Z Resource*

- *Strong's Concordance*
- *Vines Concise Dictionary of the Bible*
- *Idioms of the Bible Explained*
- *An Outline of the Bible Book by Book*
- *Mere Christianity*
- *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*
- *Reasons Bad Things Happen to Good People*
- *Know Your Bible*
- *Mother Teresa Meditations of a Simple Path*
- DVD collection of John Wesley
- DVD Tozer Electronic Library
- www.OpenBible.info
- www.biblegateway.com
- www.christianbiblereference.org

SUMMARY

Writing devotions is a personal experience. No two people will write devotions exactly the same way. It takes practice and willingness to learn. This paper discussed one way but not the only way to write devotions for a course. The main thing is to pray and then write. Have the Holy Spirit enter the writing through prayer and the Word of God.

Students benefit from learning how to absorb devotional content and create a deeper understanding of the material through thoughtful and reflective questions. They must be trained since many do not read devotional material on a regular basis. If a student reads a devotion and then ask themselves two simple questions of “What two things did you take away from this devotion?” and “How would you apply this to your work or life?” then the devotion will be a learning experience that lasts.

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APPENDIX A — ONLINE EXAMPLE**Course PROJ-660: Workshop 5.1 Devotion****Post Project Review***Introduction and Alignment*

Before you close a project, there needs to be a lessons-learned session just after most of the project is completed. Some typical lessons learned are how to avoid making mistakes in the future. Some lessons might be “deal with technical issues up front in a project and the remainder will be smoother” or “always have the total budget commitment in the front end of a project.” Having a charter and referring back to the charter throughout the project can help you avoid many pitfalls. The lessons-learned session is not optional.

Upon completion of this assignment, you should be able to:

- Apply a biblical perspective to post project review.

Resources

- Bible (English Standard Version (ESV) is used for all Scripture quotations in this course unless otherwise specified.)

Background Information

No project runs perfectly. If it did, a project manager would have nothing to manage. There are always lessons to learn on projects, and a session dedicated to that is humbling but necessary. Having humility and civility during a lessons-learned session is a must. Having a facilitator that is not the project manager can be an advantage. The project manager has valuable input to this session and having them lead the meeting is difficult.

The Scripture below explains cooperation and humility and how those improve our lives by learning from our lives and work. A cooperative spirit and ground rules in a lessons learned meeting can be the difference between success and failure of the meeting.

- Proverbs 22:4: “The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life.”
- Psalm 147:6: “The Lord lifts up the humble; he casts the wicked to the ground.”
- Philippians 2:4: “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”
- Proverbs 18:15: “An intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.”

Instructions

1. Read the Introduction and Alignment and the Background Information sections above.
2. Navigate to the discussion thread below and answer the following:
 - a. Discuss a project where it could have been better planned or executed.
 - b. Think of an influential person in forming your character or spirituality. What main life lessons can you remember from that critical person in your life?
3. Your initial post is due by the end of the fourth day of the workshop.
4. Read and respond to at least two of your classmate’s postings, as well as all follow-up instructor questions directed to you, by the end of the workshop.
5. Use headings to organize your answers so that it is clear to which question(s) you are replying and to facilitate your classmates’ responses and any questions from your instructor.

APPENDIX B — ONSITE EXAMPLE

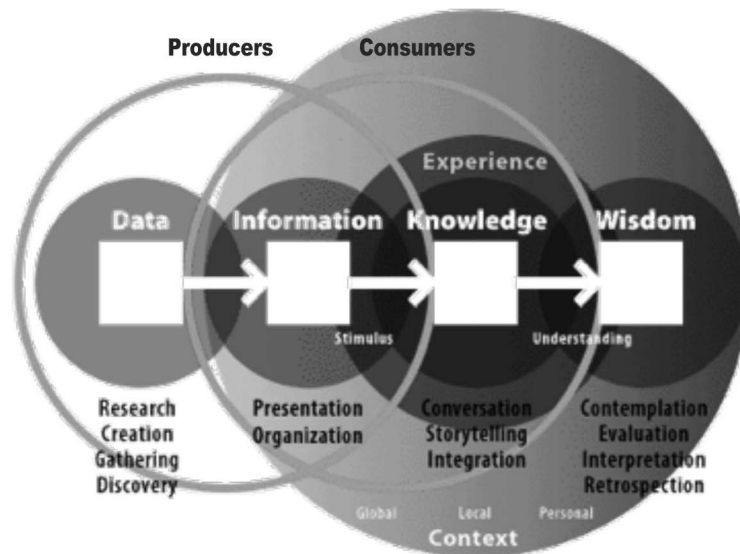
Descriptive Statistics and Wisdom

Every day we can see descriptive statistics in television and newspaper reporting. Annual reports show business graphics. Internal company financial analyses use descriptive statistics. It is not difficult to produce these types of graphics, but it is the interpretation, judgment, and actions on the information that counts. Listening may be our greatest skill in attaining wisdom with regard to descriptive statistics. “Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end” (Proverbs 19:20, KJV). Moses heard the counsel of Jethro and was wise when he delegated authority to the judges during the Exodus.

Businesses require workers and managers capable of critical thinking, analysis of real-world data, and the ability to communicate findings from business analyses. In 2005, the American Statistical Association endorsed the Guidelines for Assessment and Instruction in Statistics Education (GAISE) college report (College Report, 2010), outlining ways to improve statistical literacy. Descriptive statistics turns data into information, but falls short of a person gaining wisdom. It takes experience and good judgment to show wisdom. Business ethics and accurate reporting come into play.

There is a difference between data, information, knowledge, and ultimately wisdom in using information. Wisdom implies more qualities and work involved. “He giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding” (Daniel 2:21, KJV). This passage states there is a difference between knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. The DIKW model shows how data transitions to wisdom. One thing missing from this model is that we must also use a moral compass and ask God for wisdom in all things. “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy” (James 3:17, KJV).

Figure 1: DIKW Model (Data->Information->Knowledge->Wisdom)



Credit: Nathan Shredroff - <http://www.nathan.com/thoughts/unified/3.html>

Will you consult with the Lord on your worldly matters? It may be wise.
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CBAR