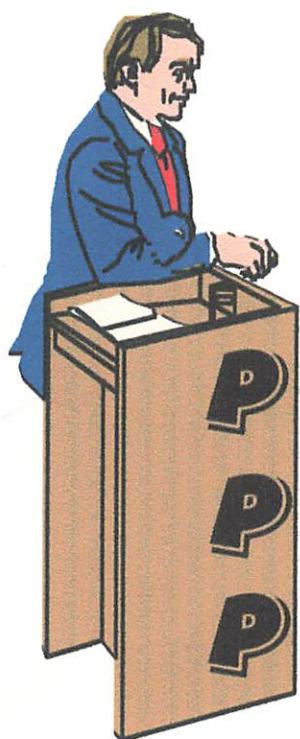


THREE "P'S"
FOR GIVING UPLIFTING
DEVOTIONALS



P Prayer
P Preparation
P Presentation

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Three "P's" For Giving Uplifting Devotionals

The majority of churches are in some way involved in giving devotionals. It may be during mid-week services, either before or after Bible classes, but most all churches have one. The mid-week devotionals serve three purposes.

(1) It provides a brief worship service to sing, pray, and teach a biblical lesson.

(2) It is an opportunity for any to respond for obedience to the gospel, or to request a prayer.

(3) It provides an opportunity for the men, young and older, to experience giving devotionals.

Youth Programs

Some churches conduct a weekly Young People's Meeting on Sunday afternoon at the building. This is a special time for devotionals to be given by the youth leaders as well as the young men who attend them. As I personally look back to the churches where I served, I can count at least eight fine gospel preachers who began their training to speak at our Youth Meetings.

Another excellent place for devotionals is during Sunday evenings after the regular worship service, in various homes of the congregation. The dad in the home, or another adult, can give the devotional, or one of the young men can be used. This is an excellent way to hold the youth of a congregation together and provide a spiritual uplift for them.

Many devotionals are given at Bible Chairs or Christian Student Centers near Universities. Many students, while away from home, can receive spiritual encouragement. The director, along with men from the congregation, can give devotionals, or some of the young Christian college students can give them. During the years that I served as minister for a congregation with a Christian

Student Center, I attended some outstanding devotionals given by the students.

Devotionals can be given over the radio. For four years, it was my privilege to give a three minute radio devotional that was aired three times daily. Each message would end with the title of the program: "And That's Something To Think About!"

Christian youth camps provide excellent opportunities to effectively give uplifting devotionals. While the campers are sitting under the stars around a campfire, it is an excellent time to think about God.

What Is A Devotional?

A devotional is a time of prayer, singing, and teaching principles from the word of God. It is a time of worship—a time to honor God. The speaking part of a devotional can be compared to a short sermon. Even though devotionals vary in length, as a general rule, the message is ten to fifteen minutes. However, outstanding truths can be presented during these short messages.

The Purpose Of This Study

The first purpose of this study is to consider important principles that can help those who have never given a devotional, to learn how, and those who already give devotionals, to help them improve. The second purpose is to remind all of us the importance of giving devotionals. Some may not consider the obligation and privilege involved in giving devotionals. However, those who have the ability to do so, but decline, are refusing to teach the word of God.

Sometimes when I'm asked to give a devotional, if it has not been long since the last one, those asking may say, "I'm sorry to impose on you by asking so often." The truth is, they are not imposing, but honoring me. They are giving me the opportunity to share eternal principles from God's word.

Three Important "P's"

Therefore, let us study together three important principles that begin with the letter "P" for giving devotionals.

1. PRAYERFUL (Pray for the guidance of God)

Since we are planning a devotional to honor God, we need to seek His help. No, we are not asking Him to perform a direct miracle, but rather to help us within His will. Since God is all powerful and all knowing, He will give us exactly what we need. Also, praying will have a positive effect on our purpose and preparation of the devotional. We will feel that we are not alone, but rather we are receiving help from the God of eternity!

The Apostles

The apostle Paul taught the importance of praying about everything we do as servants of God:

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6).

"pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:17-18).

The twelve apostles before Paul, taught the importance of prayer. When a complaint arose in the church against the Hebrews by the Hellenists because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution, the apostles set forth a plan to resolve their differences. They asked the disciples to choose from among them seven qualified men for them to appoint over the work. Why was this plan so important to the apostles?

Here is their answer: *"but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word"* (Acts 6:4). Please

observe, the apostles associated praying with the ministry of the word.

Seek God's Help

For many years of the last part of my ministry, it has been my practice to begin each sermon with a prayer. This was NOT just a ritual or pattern that I followed, but rather it served two purposes: (1) It helped me to know that God was helping me. (2) Hopefully, it helped the listeners to hear the sermons with a more spiritual attitude.

The apostle Paul and his workers sought the prayers of others for their ministry. They knew that any success in spreading the gospel to the world, would come from God. Therefore Paul wrote:

"Brethren, pray for us" (1 Thessalonians 5:25).

"Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you" (2 Thessalonians 3:1).

Please don't ever forget that we need God in planning and giving devotionals. Don't ever attempt to plan and give a devotional without God. Thus, this first "P" is very important!

2. PREPARATION

Once we have prayed, it is time to prepare the devotional. Keep in mind that there is no substitute for preparation when giving a devotional. As powerful as God is through prayer, He will not do the work for us. There is a divine rule of God: When He answers prayers, He does not do the work for us!

For example, He feeds the birds of the air, but He does not put the worms in their mouths. They must go out and find them. Here is a good rule for us to follow when preparing to give a devotional: "Do your best, and trust God to do the rest!"

This is also true in all walks of life as Christians—if we

don't prepare, we fail! Some of you may remember taking exams in college without preparation. What a time of torture! The theme of the hour was, "If I had only studied." In giving devotionals, we need to resolve to NEVER be guilty of having to think or speak the words, "If I had only studied, or if I had only prepared!"

Spaced Repetition

As we study and prepare to give a devotional, we need to remember that spaced repetition is very important. Go over your message, let some time pass, and do it again! Repeat even the things that you know. The more we go over even things that we know, the more we refresh our minds. The apostle Peter wrote:

"Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder" (2 Peter 3:1). This is spaced repetition! They had learned it before, but he wanted them to be reminded again.

Brain Groves

Someone has said that when we learn something, a tiny grove is made in our brains. If we don't repeat it, it will soon fade from our memory. However, if we continue to go over it during a period of time, the grove becomes deeper. This may or may not be a scientific fact, but it represents a principle that happens in learning. As you prepare for giving a devotional, please keep in mind that shallow study produces uncertainty and forgetfulness! Spaced repetition, produces certainty, confidence, and remembrance!

Television

To illustrate, why do so many people remember TV commercials? When you ask, "Have seen a particular current commercial, most of the time they will answer, "Yes!" Then a knowledgeable conversation follows. How do they know such minute details about the commercial? The answer, "Spaced repetition."

Learning Greek

Sometimes I am asked, "How did you ever pass Greek when in college?" You can be assured that it was NOT because the subject was easy or because I was that smart. I passed it by hours of spaced repetition. I would go many evenings to an empty classroom and fill every chalkboard in the room with one word. This was repeated with as many words as time would allow. The next day or so, I would repeat these words along with new ones. This was the only way I could learn them. Therefore, don't hesitate to go over your devotional many, many times! This will help you learn it well.

Prepare And Condense

It is important to have your mind filled with the subject even though you do not use all of it. Thus, prepare more material than you need, and then condense it to the time frame. A good example of this is the Reader's Digest. They condense the contents of a large book into a few pages. Their goal, evidently, is to give the essence of the story. This should also be our goal when preparing for a devotional. Fill your mind with the subject and then present it in a brief form.

Bible References

The most important way to build a complete background for your subject is to read and study the many Bible references relating to your subject. Remember, if you properly prepare, you will learn more than the audience you are teaching.

If you have access to a computer with a Bible program on it, you have an excellent tool for study. For example, type in the subject that you are preparing such as "Faith," "The Faith," "Baptism," "Lord's Supper," "Worship." When all the verses on your subject appear, read them. This will help fill you mind with the subject.

If you don't have access to a computer, use books that display various subjects. An example would be the book that I recently published, "Selected Scriptures." Various subjects on salvation and the New Testament church are given. It is simple to find your subject and read the list of Scriptures.

You can also run the chain references found in most Bibles, or use a Concordance listing the many references on any given subject. For a complete list of tools available for Bible study, see my book, "How To Study The Bible."

Search For Illustrations

It is a proven fact that a picture (mental or visible) is worth a thousand words—if it's the right picture! Therefore, illustrate your message with good illustrations. You can even illustrate from your personal experiences, if you do so sparingly and discreetly! However, avoid turning your devotional into a bragging session!

When you begin your devotional with a short example or illustration, you capture the attention of your audience. Jesus, the teacher of all teachers, began most of His lessons with an example, illustration, or by referring to an object. We will take a close look at His visuals and objects further on in this study. For an example of beginning devotionals with illustrations, see my book: "Invitations For Mid-Week Services."

Talk With A Friend

If you know someone who knows and studies the Bible, talk with them about the subject you are preparing. You may even have questions about particular verses that you have studied. Those who love the word of God, enjoy discussing its powerful truths.

For example, Robert Johnson, my co-worker, and I discuss various Bible truths weekly. Questions that come up in the Bible classes that we teach are often reviewed. It helps to hear what others have learned from their study.

Prepare Visuals and Objects

There are two major ways by which we can teach while giving devotionals.

1. By The Way We Speak.

Those who hear our message can learn truths from the word of God. The words we speak from His eternal Book can produce faith in the hearts of the listeners. The apostle Paul verified this truth when he wrote: *"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"* (Romans 10:17).

Therefore, the words we speak and the way we speak them are very important. Remember, teaching and preaching represent the way God chose to spread His saving message to the world. *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age"* Amen. (Matthew 28:19-20).

2. By What We Show

Some of the most effective devotionals involve both "Show and Tell!" We know that both of these principles of teaching are important, because Jesus used them. Certainly, He did not have available the many visual aids that we have today, but He still used things that His audience could see.

Please consider some of the visuals that are available today to many who give devotionals:

* Chalk or Dry Erase Boards

When these boards are available, your major points can be featured. As you give your message, you may want to add Scrip-

ture references. If you have a talent for art, you can draw a picture on these boards to emphasize your message. When done properly, this kind of visuals can help make lasting impressions on those who see and hear. For example, I can still remember as a boy, a preacher who drew beautiful sermons on the chalkboard with colorful chalk.

*** Flash Cards**

If such boards are not available, you can use flash cards to illustrate. From poster boards, prepare a series of large cards illustrating your message. As you speak, use these cards to illustrate your points or Scriptures. This method is still used very effectively by Bible school teachers, and we can use them while giving devotionals.

This method is especially helpful when giving devotionals to smaller groups. When these are used, a special effort should be made to use large printing so that all can read them at a glance. A visual that is not seen, is NOT a visual!

As you use either chalk or dry erase boards, or flash cards, remember, you can add formatting as you teach. You may want to underline a point, add other Scripture references, or make a checkmark (✓) by each point or Scripture reference.

*** Overhead Projectors With Colorful Headers and Art**

The overhead projector is the best method of visuals if Power Point and video equipment are not available. You can draw directly onto the transparencies, or you can prepare material on the computer to be either printed out directly, or copied from a copier. If the Power Point program is available on your computer, you can make your slides for the overhead projector from the many templates provided.

For the name or title of your devotional, simply click on

the title text block and type your title. Immediately, your title will be formatted with the right size, font and color. Do the same to add the points, Scripture references, and graphics. If you want a picture to illustrate your message, double click the graphic box, and choose from many pictures. Once you have chosen the picture, click apply, and the graphic will be added to your slide.

You can also use as many slides as needed. Perhaps you want to show some of the Scripture references that you are using. A special slide can be prepared. If you want all your points on one slide, you can cover the points with paper and uncover each point as it is used.

Remember, with an overhead projector, the lights can be left on, and you can use special colorful markers to write on the slide as you are teaching.

*** Power Point Presentation**

When equipment is available, this is the Cadillac of all visual aids. This presentation requires a lap top computer and a video projector. The Power Point presentation actually begins when colorful slides are prepared on the computer using the Power Point program. Many slides can be prepared for one devotional. The slides will appear on the screen one by one as points and Scriptures are used.

For example, the one giving the devotional simply touches the arrow key → on the keyboard and the title slide appears. Moments later, he touches the same key and the first point appears. If he wishes to display a Scripture, the same arrow key is touched, and the screen is filled with a Scripture. This same procedure is continued throughout the devotional. After the first point is considered, it can be made to turn grey as the second point appears. All kinds of graphics (pictures) can be used to illustrate.

Animation Effects

Some graphics can be used that display continual motion.

To illustrate, suppose your devotional is on the subject of the Bible, God's Eternal Book. An open Bible can be displayed just before the title, with its pages continually turning. Action is a powerful tool, but should be used sparingly. It might be distracting for the pages to be turning throughout the complete devotional. Therefore, select a special place for the pages to emphasize a point rather than throughout all the devotional.

There are all kinds of animated effects that can be used to help keep the minds of your listeners on your message. For example, as you discuss a Scripture, special words can be highlighted in color or underlined. Maps featured in full color with an arrow coming in to point to a specific city, river, or area can be used.

Means To An End

Obviously, there is no limit to the effects that can be chosen; however, there is one rule that all must follow. We must always let the visuals used be ONLY a tool to present our message. Thus, the Power Point presentation is a means to an end, and NOT a means within itself. Perhaps, a good rule to follow is to keep it simple!

I heard once of a missionary who met a young girl who had never received a birthday present. Feeling sorry for her, he and his wife presented her a gift that was beautifully wrapped with a colorful bow. When she received it, she was so excited about the colorful package that she ignored the gift.

Thus, the visuals that we use must not take away from the message, but should be a tool to strengthen it. Visuals must be an aid and NOT a show! Effectively relating the message in devotionals must have top priority.

*** Showing Objects**

Another important way to help us teach as we give devotionals is by showing objects. Who would deny that Jesus carried the effectiveness of objects to perfection? The record of His teach-

ing reveals that He used many common things in life to illustrate His lessons.

Objects Used By Jesus

When he taught about His Father being able to providently take care of the essential physical needs of His children in life, Jesus referred to the lilies of the field. It is easy to imagine Jesus pointing to some lilies growing nearby, blooming in all their beauty, when He said, *"So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these"* (Matthew 6:28-29).

A Roman Coin

On another occasion when the Pharisees tried to trap Him by asking, *"Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"* Jesus responded by saying, *"Show Me the tax money."* So they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, *"Whose image and inscription is this?"* They said to Him, *"Caesar's."* And He said to them, *"Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's"* (Matthew 22:19-21).

Therefore, with one small Roman coin, He taught a powerful lesson. He taught with words and by showing His message.

When the disciples of Jesus needed a special lesson on faith, Jesus caused a fruitless tree to wither, then He taught the lesson (Matthew 21:19-21). These men must have remembered what they saw and heard on this day.

Fragrant Oil

While visiting in the home of Simon the leper, *"a woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured it on His head as He sat at the table"* (Matthew 26:7). When His disciples saw this, they considered such a waste.

However, Jesus used this object in the hands of this woman to teach about His burial. He said, *"For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial"* (Matthew 26:12). Truly, this was another message that was taught with an object.

Fishing Nets

When Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James, and John to fish for men, He used a fishing net filled with many fish to convince them. While astonished over the large catch of fish, Jesus said to Simon, *"Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men"* (Luke 5:10). Jesus used an object to emphasize His call to bring salvation to others.

Little Children

When Jesus taught a lesson on the nature of those in His kingdom, He used children to make His point. He was displeased with His disciples for rebuking those who brought the children to Him to be blessed. *"He took them up in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them"* (Mark 10:16). Thus, these little children were used to teach the way one should receive the kingdom of God. He said, *"Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it"* (Mark 10:14).

Temple Stones

Jesus referred to the stones in the temple to foretell the coming destruction of Jerusalem. Surely He pointed to the stones when He taught: *"These things which you see—the days will come in which not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down"* (Luke 21:6).

Towel and Basin of Water

The disciples of Jesus needed a lesson on humility. There-

fore, Jesus *"rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded"* (John 13:4,5).

Why did Jesus wash their feet? He answers this question: *"For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you"* (John 13:15). He used the towel, along with a basin of water, to teach a forceful lesson on humility!

Jesus also used many physical things in His parables to teach His lessons. Shouldn't we make every effort possible to make our messages more effective?

Objects We Can Use

Let us now consider some of the objects that we can use in our devotionals:

☛ A Small Rock

We can use a small rock to illustrate the truth that Jesus taught about His church. *"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it"* (Matthew 16:18).

☛ Ring of Keys

We can use a ring of keys when giving a lesson on the keys of the kingdom. Jesus said to Peter: *"And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven"* (Matthew 16:19).

☛ Postage Stamp

We can use a postage stamp to illustrate special spiritual lessons. For example: The stamp works wherever it is placed, the

stamp sticks to the job when given an assignment until finished, and the stamp has been given value just as God has given all value. You can use other lessons from the stamp, but these are given to get you thinking.

Medicine Bottles

We can use empty medicine bottles to teach about Jesus, the Great Physician (Mark 2:17). Each bottle can be labeled with a specific point such as "A perfect cure for sin;" "Use only as directed;" "Take until finished;" (complete obedience).

Flashlight and Candle

We can use a flashlight or lighted candle to illustrate the light of Jesus and the light of Christian influence. Study all the Scripture references on light and build your devotional around them. Examples: (Mt. 5:14-16; 6:22; John 1:4-9; 3:19-21; 8:12; 12:35,36).

Axe or Hatchet

We can use an axe or hatchet to illustrate John's lesson on fruit bearing "*And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire*" (Luke 3:9).

Bridle Bits

We can use bits from the bridle of a horse when teaching on the subject of controlling the tongue. Also when speaking on "The Power of Little Things." "*Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires*" (James 3:3,4).

☛ Box of Matches

We can use a box of matches and strike one to illustrate a burning forest and the power of the tongue used for evil. *"Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell"* (James 3:5,6).

☛ Toy Boat

We can use a toy boat to illustrate a lesson on the power of the little rudder and little things that are important in life. *"Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires"* (James 3:4).

☛ Large Dinner Roll

We can use a large dinner roll to illustrate the power of leaven and the kingdom. *"The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened"* (Matthew 13:33). Or when speaking on "The Power of Influence." *Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?"* (1 Corinthians 5:6; cf. Gal. 5:9).

Just use your imagination, and use appropriate objects to illustrate either an important point in the devotional, or the entire devotional.

☛ Prepare An Outline

Always keep in mind that giving a devotional is NOT a reading session. In fact, there are only a few exceptions. One exception would involve a Scripture/Song type devotional. After the

Scripture is read, songs relating to it are sung. Even in this type of devotional, the reading should not be extremely long.

As a general rule, reading a message can have a negative effect. It can isolate the speaker from his audience, and without the full attention of the audience, he will not be effective. So much communication between speaker and audience is lost when all they see is someone looking down at a piece of paper with only an occasional upward glance.

When a script is read, the listeners do not know whether you are reading your own prepared message, or simply an article you found in a book or magazine. Thus, the personality and heart of the speaker is missing! This can produce a canned or machine effect. Your audience can read articles at home. Remember, reading has its place, but must not be abused in giving devotionals.

An Example

Over the years in attending college lectureships, I recall a few who simply read the message they turned in to be printed in the lectureship book. Only a glance at the audience showed some appearing sleepy and bored (including this author), and others following along in the Lectureship book. Even if the material is good and the speaker an expert in reading, there is still a difference between reading and talking. The ideal setting is to talk and occasionally read short Scriptures and poems.

Advantages For Using Outlines

Let us consider now some advantages for using an outline. As we all know, a train reaches its destination and fulfills its purpose, ONLY if it stays on the track. The same is true when giving a devotional. A good outline helps one stay on track in reaching the purpose and goal of the devotional. It allows a minimum amount of reading Scriptures, quotes, and poems. Since the outline is only a skeleton of the message, it leaves room for the speaker to relate what he has studied.

An Excellent Tool

The outline is also an excellent tool to be used when studying, reviewing, and practicing before giving the devotional. It is so quick and simple to review your points at a glance!

While giving the devotional, an outline frees you to have better eye contact with your audience. We don't ever want people to say of us, "He was glued to his notes." Therefore, know the material represented by the outline to the point that you can have a conversational effect, rather than a reading effect, with your audience.

The outline is also easier to prepare, giving you more time for research and study. However, we must remember that for an outline to be helpful, it must be properly prepared. To help you understand the principles of a workable outline, please consider the following example that I have used over the years:

Like A Family Tree

We can compare an outline to a "Family Tree" with its generations. Please observe a comparison:

1. Family name — **Subject**
2. Parents — **Main points**
3. Children — **First sub-points**
4. Grandchildren — **Second sub-points**

Now let us apply the example of a family tree to a devotional outline:

The Greatest Gift (Subject: compared to family name)

I. God gave His only begotten Son (A main point: compared to parents)

A. Supreme act of love: (First sub-point compared to children)

1. (John 3:16; 1 John 4:8,16): Second sub-point compared to grandchildren)

a. **The Father and Son demonstrated love**
(Third sub-point compared to great grandchildren)

i. (Rom. 5:8; John 15:13): (Fourth sub-point compared to great, great, grand children)

II. Christians should give their lives to God (A main point: compared to parents)

A. Must be crucified with Him (compared to children)

1. **Paul was:** *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me"* (Galatians 2:20). (sub-point compared to grandchildren)

a. Involves a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1,2) (great grandchildren)

i. Example: Song - "All to Jesus I surrender." great, great, grand children)

3. **Note:** These generations are repeated in every main point! (IV. - V. - VI. - VII. - VIII.).

Sources For Outlines

There are two main sources from which to make an outline.

(1) There are sermon and devotional books containing outlines that have been prepared. However, it is important to choose an author who is true to word of God. Keep in mind, that outlines can be prepared to teach truth or error.

(2) An outline can be prepared directly from the Bible.

There are hundreds of perfect outlines for both sermons and devotionals that can be taken directly from the Bible. They may come from selected verses or from the many stories and illustrations. For example, the books of Psalms and Proverbs are filled with devotional verses. I have a book, "Thinking With Solomon," that contains 100 devotionals from Proverbs.

Prophets

Verses from the books of the prophets can be chosen for devotionals. God spoke through these men to deal with the many problems arising from sin. These can be applied to the sinful age in which we live today!

Old Testament Stories

Likewise, the stories of both the Old and New Testaments represent an excellent source for spiritual messages. These stories are built around human examples as well as the way that God deals with the human race.

Life of Jesus

In the New Testament, just think of the many devotionals that can be prepared from the colorful and spiritual life of Jesus, God's Son! In fact, the sermon that He preached from the mountain found in Matthew chapters five through seven, is literally filled with the way of life taught by Jesus.

As Jesus carried out His ministry and mission to seek and save the lost (Lk. 19:10), He performed many powerful and exciting miracles. He demonstrated power over diseases, even raising some from the dead, along with power over nature. These miracles not only tell us who Jesus was, but also give us insight to His love, compassion, and feelings for those in trouble. Surely there are many devotionals that can be developed from these.

Paul's Writings

Continuing in the New Testament, just think of the many subjects for devotionals that can be found in the apostle Paul's teaching and journeys! His life was filled with exciting experiences as he traveled from city to city. Added to his traveling experiences are the letters that he wrote to churches located throughout the world. Therefore, the epistles of Paul and the other writers make a powerful source for preparing and giving devotionals. Think for a moment of the many subjects that can be chosen on the subject of the church that Jesus purchased with His blood (Acts 20:28), and on the beautiful life for Christian living.

Obviously, the list for devotional subjects can go on and on! Therefore, in your daily Bible reading and study, continually look for outlines that can be lifted from various verses that can be used for giving devotionals.

3. PRESENTATION

We come now in this study to the third "P" for giving uplifting devotionals. When we have sincerely prayed for God's guidance and properly prepared, the time comes for presentation. There are several guidelines involved in presenting a devotional. These guidelines should be considered as a road map for success.

Illustration

All of us have followed a road map on a trip, and know that to reach our destination, we must seek the roads that lead to where we are going. Other roads may seem more appealing as we travel, but these are ignored because they lead us away from where we want to go. Therefore, we want our devotionals to be successful, and should be willing to seek the guidelines that will help us succeed. Therefore, please consider carefully the following five guidelines:

* Five Important Guidelines *

1. Present A Well Balanced Devotional

For a devotional to be well balanced, it is important for it to contain Scriptures, Illustrations, Applications, and Visuals. There are special times when reading Scriptures along with related songs is effective, but as a general rule, a well balanced devotional with Scriptures, illustrations, and visuals is very effective.

This is the rule that Jesus followed! He quoted Scriptures, but almost always He applied and illustrated them. For example, when He visited a synagogue, He read a Scripture and then discussed it (Lk. 16:22).

Application Important

Remember, it is not enough just to read a Scripture, but the principles in it need to be applied and lived. I knew a young man who could memorize Scriptures more than anyone I had ever known. While in college, he preached at a congregation in driving distance every Sunday. He came back one Sunday all discouraged because his audience was not responding to his preaching. Then he made a statement that gave me a clue to what was happening. He spent the whole sermon in quoting Scriptures.

The Solution

I told him that being able to quote Scriptures is a great blessing, but the quoted Scriptures needed to be applied. He tried this in his next sermon, and returned all excited. His audience had been very responsive to his sermon. This man needed balance!

Remember, if our devotionals consist of reading Scriptures only, our audience can do this at home. Therefore, fortify your message with Scriptures, for a message is out of balance without Scriptures. However, balance requires that the Scriptures be illustrated and applied!

2. Present Your Message To Be Heard

Always keep in mind, a well planned and balanced devotional will fail if it is not heard! To illustrate, I have had people say to me after hearing someone give a devotional: "I'm sure this fellow did a good job, but I couldn't hear anything he said." Almost all audiences have those who do not hear well, and even those who have perfect hearing do not need to strain their ears trying to hear.

A Good Rule

In my first speech class, the professor gave us a rule to follow when speaking: "STAND UP to be seen, SPEAK UP to be heard, and SIT DOWN to be appreciated!"

Jesus placed great emphasis on both the speaker and the listeners. "Then He said to them, 'Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given'" (Mark 4:24). Learning involves two special components: (1) Good teaching. (2) Good listening. When either one of these is missing, there will be failure.

3. Present Your Message With Love

Did you know that a devotional may have the right balance and be clearly heard, but will completely fail without love. Paul taught this same truth about other important principles:

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me noth-

ing" (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

Truth In Love

Yes, God's truth is very powerful, but it **MUST** be presented with love. In the words of Paul: "*but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—*" (Ephesians 4:15).

An Example

Without love, we can be guilty of blocking the effectiveness of truth. For example, a man once decided to teach his lost neighbor the gospel. He stormed into his neighbor's house and declared: "You're on your way to hell, and I've come to stop you!" The neighbor showed him the door, and all future opportunities for teaching this man the truth were lost. He had the truth to share, but lacked the proper compassion to present it in love.

Keep in mind that both Jesus and Paul taught the truth in love, even to those who refused it.

Thus, in our devotionals, show your audience that you love their souls, and that you want them to walk with God in obedience and service. In short, we must reflect the love of God in our teaching.



4. Present It With Zeal and Enthusiasm

Always remember, if you are dead as you speak, your message will be dead and rejected. We have earlier discussed the importance of using visuals and objects with our message—a show and tell presentation. However, there is another way that we show and tell. The audience also sees our attitude and disposition as we speak. If we are not excited about the message we are delivering, neither will they be excited.

Negative Approach

For example, a man knocked on a door and said to the woman who opened it, "You don't want to study the Bible with me, do you?" She said, "No I don't!" and shut the door. With enthusiasm, and with a negative attitude, she didn't feel that he had anything that he really wanted to share. We don't want to buy products from those selling them if they do not use them, and if they are not sold on their value!

Jesus was fully devoted to carrying out His mission on earth and in doing the will of His Father. He knew that His Father loved Him, *"Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again"* (John 10:17), and with zeal and enthusiasm, He wanted to do His Father's will. When His disciples were concerned about His lack of food, He let them know that He was too busy to eat: He responded: *"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work"* (John 4:34).

Zeal Demonstrated

The zeal of Jesus became evident when He saw the temple being used by evil merchants. These evil ones had desecrated the purpose of God's house. Before driving them out, He said, *"It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves'"* (Matthew 21:13). What did the disciples see in the actions of Jesus? *"Then His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up'"* (John 2:17).

Zeal Passed On

This same zeal of Jesus can also be seen in the actions of His apostles as they went forth preaching the gospel. Even the authorities of that day could not discourage or destroy their enthusiasm! Peter and John disobeyed the authorities to preach Jesus. When *"they called them and commanded them not to speak at all*

nor teach in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:18), how did Peter and John respond? "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

When Paul traveled to the idolatrous city of Athens, Greece, he first planned to wait for the arrival of Silas and Timothy. However, his love and enthusiasm for the true Father and the Son could not wait. Therefore, Luke records that *"Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols" (Acts 17:16).* With enthusiasm, Paul delivered a powerful message against their idolatry as he taught them about the true God who was unknown to them.

An Illustration

The late Ira North told of an Insurance Company owner who would meet with his salesmen to motivate them. Among other things, he would say: "You can leave your brains at home, but if you ever come to work without enthusiasm, you are fired!" This man knew the importance of zeal and enthusiasm.

Therefore, be excited and enthusiastic about your message, because your enthusiasm will be contagious to your audience.



5. Present Your Devotional On Time

Do you remember the last part of the rule for speaking, mentioned earlier? "Sit down to be appreciated." Both sermons and shorter devotionals have an allotted time, because other things are planned around them.

For example, if the devotional is given on Wednesday before Bible classes, there is usually an allotted time of fifteen minutes. Therefore, those who go over the time limit, take away from the Bible class period. You may be tempted to say, "But my message is more important!" But the teachers who have studied all

week may feel the same about their lessons. The truth is, both are important and need to be presented in harmony and on time.

Our Biggest Challenge

Our biggest challenge is to present our message to the point. This is not easy! In fact, many preachers have stated that it is more difficult to present a ten minute devotional than a thirty minute sermon. However, we can be on time if we are fully convinced of its importance.

When I had programs on television and radio, I didn't have a choice. Therefore, I planned to close on the exact minute specified. This became the natural thing to do.

Will a time limit take away from your message? No, in fact, you might be shocked to see how many pages can be spoken in ten minutes. Therefore, let us plan our devotionals within the time limits set and this will help us in our preparation as well as the presentation.

Conclusion

Finally, it is hoped that as you get involved in giving devotionals that you will remember these three important "P's." Prayer, Preparation, and Presentation. May God help all of us to give the best devotionals that we can give.

Remember, when we do our best with God's help, we will achieve our goals!

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