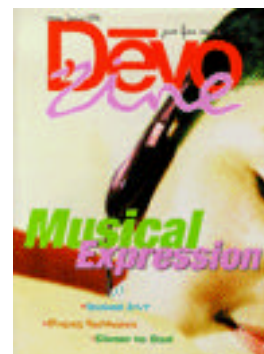


Workshop

Writing for Devo'Zine

Here is a workshop model that Devo'Zine staff have led a number of times. We've had good response to it, and we've received a number of good meditations from these workshops. You are welcome to use this workshop model in any number of settings where youth and/or adults who write for youth are present. You should allow about 1 1/2 hours for this workshop.

(Note: The workshop requires that you have upcoming themes for Devo'Zine. Visit the "Writers' Corner" at <http://www.devozine.org> to print the latest ones before you begin this workshop.)



1. Welcome

This workshop is for you whether you've written for publication or not. How many of you have had something that you've written published before? How many of you write in your journal at least occasionally?

We're going to talk about devotional writing -- what it is and how to do it well. Mostly though, today we are going to *write*.

There are themes for each week that the daily readings reflect on. Teenagers and adults write about their experiences in life and how their relationship with God has impacted their lives. I have the themes for the next issue with me today. [Note: Upcoming themes are always available in the Writers' Corner at <http://www.devozine.org>. Print these before the workshop.] We'll look at those together in a little while and try writing some meditations for the next issue of *Devo'Zine*.

2. Popcorn Discussion about "Devotional"

Let's talk for a minute about what our understanding of *devotional* is. Any ideas? What does it mean to you or your youth group? What are some different examples of devotions? [Youth group, quiet time individually, camp, meetings]

3. Pointers on Good Devotional Writing

Let's talk about what makes devotional writing good:

A. Devotional writing should *invite* people to come closer to God.

Have you ever been around someone who made you feel like you wanted to seek God more -- made you hungry for God? A good devotion can and should draw you closer to God and to others.

B. Devotional writing should tell about *real* experiences of *real* people who are struggling to apply their faith to daily life.

You don't have to have the answers to your questions and dilemmas to write a good devotional.

Sometimes just describing the struggle with questions and problems may help and encourage others who are struggling with the same issue.

We write best about what we've experienced, don't we? In 1 John 1:1, we read: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched -- this we proclaim concerning the word of life." John was writing about the things he had seen and experienced -- and this makes for powerful writing.

C. Devotional writing should express only *one* main idea. It should leave one memorable image with the reader.

This is an especially important point since devotional readings are usually brief anyway. Don't give in to the temptation to try to say a lot in one meditation. Just pick one point to make. Use simple concrete images -- these are the most powerful. Jesus described himself in these simple images that are easy to grasp and remember: "I am the light," "I am the door," and "I am the good shepherd." When you use one memorable image, readers can take that with them and remember it at other times during the day.

D. Devotional writing should lead persons into further conversation with God after they finish reading the meditation.

It should help readers to take time during the day to be aware of God's presence. Reading the devotion is not the end of what they need to do today. They need to go on being with God throughout the day. That's why a question or thought for reflection or prayer focus at the end of the meditation is good.

E. Your journal can be a great source of devotional writing because your journal records your real thoughts about your experiences. What we write from our heart very often will reach the hearts of others.

4. Free Write

Now that we know what devotional writing is, let's start writing. I don't know about you, but I sometimes have a hard time starting to write. That's why we are going to start with a free write. For 5 minutes we are going to write nonstop. Write about anything -- how you feel, something that happened today or yesterday -- anything -- just don't stop writing. Don't lift your pen off the paper until I say stop. If you get stuck, write "I don't know what to write" until you think of something.

[Start/stop]

How did that feel? Was it easy or hard? Would anyone like to read theirs aloud? This a good writing exercise to help get the juices flowing. You can do it by yourself at home.

5. Theme List Review

[Post the *Devo'Zine* theme list, preferably one with expanded questions under each theme]

OK, now that we've got our writing juices flowing, let's look over this list of themes for an idea to write about. As we go through these, pay attention to which one or ones gives you an idea or brings to mind a

memory or thought. Jot down a note to help you remember that thought for writing later.

[Go through list of themes]

Did one of these themes remind you of anything that's happened to you or of something you have strong feelings about? Maybe you would like your meditation to be in the form of a prayer or talk with God.

You don't have to pick one of these; you can write about anything -- an issue in your life now or something on your mind.

6. Writing a Meditation

Remember, be brief, to the point, and just deal with one thing. Don't try to cover too much ground. The meditations in *Devo'Zine* are only 150-250 words long. But don't stop and count now. We'll allow 20 minutes to write. If you need help or have a question, I'm here to help.

[20 minutes for writing]

Would anyone like to read what you wrote?

7. Writing a 5-Second Prayer

The last thing we will do is to write a 5-Second Prayer to go with your meditation. You can choose to write a prayer for your own meditation or for one that someone else read aloud. The 5-Second Prayer should be what you want God to know about what you just wrote -- in honest, conversational language. Or if you'd rather, write a question that would cause yourself or the reader to think more deeply about what you've written. Or, write a thought for the day that relates to your meditation.

[4 or 5 minutes for writing]

Would anyone like to read their prayer?

If you are willing to share your meditation with *Devo'Zine* for possible publication, write your name, age, address, email address, and phone number on your meditation and give it to me to send into *Devo'Zine*.

(If you are leader collecting these meditations, please send them to us at the address, e-mail address, or FAX number listed on our Writers' Guidelines, available online as mentioned above.)

8. Evaluation

The last thing I want to ask you to do is to take a note card and on one side write what you thought of the workshop today. What was good? What needs to be improved for next time?

This has been a great time to hear your thoughts and to experience your gifts and skills. I hope that this magazine will be an encouragement in your life. Thanks for sharing. Keep writing!