

## **Diving into Devotions: Help Readers Draw Water with Joy in Every Word You Write**

*"With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation."* Isaiah 12:3 NIV  
taught by Julie Lavender,  
contributor to *The Seven*, a Charisma Podcast Network podcast and  
author of *365 Ways To Love Your Child: Turning Little Moments Into Lasting Memories* (Revell)  
& *Children's Bible Stories for Bedtime* (Penguin Random House)

Nothing refreshes and nourishes the soul like the Word of God. The Bible keeps our bodies spiritually hydrated and reminds us that Jesus is the Living Water. With Him, we will thirst no more.

In addition to daily immersion in the Bible, many people use a devotional to deepen their walk with the Lord. You can help meet readers' needs with devotional writing. Use your written words to help readers draw from the wells of salvation for spiritual renewal and abiding joy.

Devotion definition: a devotion is a mini-lesson wrapped up in a clever package that includes word pictures to help us relate to the lesson personally and apply it to our own lives.

Devotions are: brief, succinct, and have one main point or focus

Devotion paint a picture that appeals to the readers' senses and helps them pull out a nugget of wisdom.

For today's discussion, we'll talk about these two topics specifically:

**\*Writing Devotions for an Established Publication:** writing and submitting devotions for a specific, established market or publication.

**\*Writing a Devotional:** writing your own devotional book to present to an editor.

### **I. Writing Devotions for an Established Publication**

PRAY first.

Check the *Christian Writers Market Guide* section for periodicals seeking devotions. Decide which publication you want to submit to. Study guidelines.

Most devotions have certain key components. The essentials of almost every devotion are these:

Title

Verse (just one verse)

Body

- includes an illustration that begins with a hook to draw the reader in, continues with an anecdote to elaborate, and ends with some sort of takeaway

Prayer

In addition, some devotions include an action step – something the writer hopes the reader will do or change after reading the devotion. Sometimes the action step is included in the body in a simple sentence or two. Or, sometimes the action step has its own heading.

Some devotions also include a suggestion to read additional, related Scripture, and other parts.

Each devotion has a specific point the writer hopes to convey to the reader. That may show up as the takeaway, but not exactly in those words. Keep in mind the purpose of your devotion as you craft each of the essential components.

Because devotions have such a small word count, every single word is important. Write such that the reader feels the story with every sense – sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch – but choose your words carefully.

Sight paints the scene in the reader's mind.

Sounds tune the reader's ears to the soundtrack of the event.

Touch defines the setting.

Smells invoke memories.

Taste summons past experiences.

Leave out unnecessary words. Use strong verbs and nouns and leave out the adjectives and adverbs. Make every word count.

Use active voice instead of passive, which you hear in almost every writing course!

Grab the reader! Evoke an emotion – make them laugh or cry or ponder.

Avoid clichés and stories that are way over-done.

Write with one focus, one purpose in mind. Present one eternal truth or message in the devotion.

Keep your audience in mind – are you writing for children? Adults? Women? Stay at home moms? Homeschooling moms? Pastors' wives? Use the lingo and jargon that would be appropriate for the audience.

When your thoughts are written on the paper and you've edited for word count, check for these details:

Is the title brief and to the point, matching the message the reader will get with the illustration?

Does the Bible verse match the illustration and takeaway?

Does the body of the devotion, the illustration flow well and fulfill the purpose you set out to write for this devo? Do you have strong verbs and concrete nouns and no extraneous words?

Does it grab the reader and evoke emotion? Will it hold their attention? Does it teach the lesson or impart the truth you set out to convey?

Does it have a strong ending with a takeaway for the reader?

Is the reader challenged to make a change because of the takeaway? Does it offer an example to live by? Does it encourage them to forgive, honor the Lord, be a good steward, help a neighbor?

Is the action step included? (Not all devos have an action step, but many of them do. Make sure the call to action relates to the topic and takeaway in the devo.)

Is the prayer sincere, heartfelt, reverent, and match the purpose of the devotion?

When you've checked and rechecked and triple-checked your devotion, put it aside for several days to "let it rest." Work on other devotions while that one rests a bit. Mostly because each publisher usually requests that you send in three to five devotions at a time. You'll want to be preparing other devotions to send as a group.

After a piece has "rested, pull it back out to read again. Check for punctuation and grammar and make sure the devotion delivers the point you planned.

Share the devo with a writing partner or critique group for their input. Make any changes you feel necessary after someone else reads the devo, then get ready to submit it.

Remember, you've targeted that devo to a specific magazine, so it should follow the guidelines to the letter. If it doesn't, the editor will toss it, no matter how great it is!

For example, if the guidelines ask for an "additional reading" suggestion for each devotion, make sure you include that in your devo.

Again, follow the guidelines to the letter, and send off your selection of devotions to that publisher!

Once you've sent off a selection of devotions to one publisher, then find another one and do the same!

And then, of course, be ready to celebrate with ice cream when you get an acceptance! In fact, I typically celebrate with ice cream when I send out a submission, because, by golly, that's hard work!!

## **II. Writing a Devotional**

If you plan to write an entire book of devotions, again, the first step is always PRAYER! Ask God to guide your thoughts and words that will become a devotional book that will change hearts for Him.

Then the next thing you'll want to do is

### **Decide on a Theme**

- \*What are you passionate about?
- \*What's your current interest?
- \*What's your expertise?
- \*What felt-need do you see missing from the devotional market?
- \*What holes do you see on the devotional shelf?

Once you've established your theme or focus, you'll need to

### **Choose the Length**

Do you plan a year-long devotional? 365 Days?

52 Weeks? 100 Day? 40 Day? 31 Day?

### **Write 5 to 10 Devotions that fit the Theme**

If you're writing your own devotional, you can decide which elements you want to include. But, again, most devotions contain these elements:

#### **\*Scripture**

Choose a scripture that best suits the story or anecdote or lesson that you plan to include as the main body of the devotion. Be careful to quote the scripture accurately and give the version, too.

### **\*Body**

Share an anecdote, brief story, powerful lesson, or piece of historical information that relates to the chosen Scripture, as well as the overarching theme of the book. Word count for this can vary in a book, from 100 words to 250 words to 300 to perhaps even 500. Write tight. Be brief and to the point. Think succinct. Pack a powerful punch in as few words as possible.

### **\*Reflection**

This could be in the form of a question or two, to help the reader reflect on what they just read. Or, it could be in the form of a sentence or two summary of the body of the devotion.

### **\*Important Truth or Takeaway**

Not all devos include this part, but the Important Truth or Important Thought or Key Point could be as simple as a phrase or very brief sentence that spotlights the main idea of the devotion. It's the "take-away" you want the reader to stamp on their heart from reading your particular passage for the day.

### **\*Prayer**

The prayer can be the actual words you encourage the reader to pray aloud, related to the message you intended to convey in the story. Or, you can guide the reader with suggested words and have the reader author their own prayer.

### **\*Call to Action**

Not all devos explicitly list a call to action, but you could suggest an activity to further personalize the devotion.

And, some longer devotionals might have a craft to go with each day. Or a recipe. Or a "This moment in history" sidebar.

If you're writing your own devotional, you can get as creative as you want!

Decide exactly which components you want to include with each devotion. Write five to ten samples. Read. Polish. Edit. Read again. Polish. Edit. Share with a critique group. Put it aside for several days or a week. Edit again. Pray again. And then craft a query letter and proposal for your devotional manuscript to send off, or, craft a one-sheet to go with the samples and take the package with you to a conference to speak with an editor.

And, while you're waiting for a response, it goes without saying, keep reading other devotionals as mentor texts to keep learning more and more about writing devotionals.

Devotions are a great way to encourage readers to wade out into the deeper waters of spiritual growth. Help others strengthen their relationship with the Lord with poignant stories and messages. Instill a desire in readers to crave more time in God's Word with your words in the form of a powerful, but brief devotion. Drive home a point in a short, succinct passage. Encourage readers to draw water from the wells of salvation, water that nourishes and sustains and brings great joy!

Dive into Devotion writing and may God bless each word you write!

### **CONNECT WITH ME!**

**I have a couple of favors, and then I want to ask you to share your devotion successes with me!**

\*I'm one of seven contributors to a new podcast. Michelle Medlock Adams, Andy Clapp, Del Duduit, Bethany Jett, Britt Mooney, Cyle Young, and I talk about "life" and share tips on various topics that we hope ignites the faith of our listeners. I am blessed by every episode we record, and I feel certain others will be, too. My favor – will you go to the Charisma Podcast Network (or your favorite podcast platform) and subscribe to and follow our group? Will you download and listen to our episodes and share them with your friends? MANY thanks in advance!!

\*Next favor: I had the pleasure of being a guest on the Focus on the Family Broadcast back in January. I'd be so very honored if you'd listen to the broadcast, because each "view" encourages more opportunities for writers like me/us to be part of their show! Here's that link:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ti\\_1-eOtcjA&t=951s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ti_1-eOtcjA&t=951s)

\*And last favor: Would you please consider checking out my books to give as a gift to yourself or someone special? And if you do, would you consider writing a brief, honest review on Amazon?

*365 Ways to Love Your Child: Turning Little Moments into Lasting Memories* (Revell)

<https://www.amazon.com/365-Ways-Love-Your-Child/dp/0800738845>

*Children's Bible Stories for Bedtime* (Penguin Random House)

<https://www.amazon.com/Childrens-Bible-Stories-Bedtime-Faith/dp/0593436164>

I'd love to hear about your devotion successes!!! Please connect with me at [julielavenderwrites.com](http://julielavenderwrites.com) and on social media to tell me about ANY of your writing successes! I love talking about writing with fellow writers! It's my joy to pray for writer friends and encourage them, too! Let's connect!

<https://www.facebook.com/JulieLavenderAuthor>

<https://twitter.com/JLavenderwrites>

<https://www.instagram.com/julielavenderwrites/lavenders@bulloch.net>

