

<sup>i</sup>Adapted from “How to Write a Devotional” at <http://devotional.upperroom.org>. (1/15/2017)

<sup>ii</sup>Adapted from: “How to Write a Devotional: The Definitive Guide” at <http://www.beliefnet.com/faiths/christianity/articles/how-to-write-a-devotional.aspx> (1/15/2017)

<sup>iii</sup>These writing prompts are adapted from: Karen Hering, “Writing to Wake the Soul: Opening the Sacred Conversation Within” New York: Simon and Schuster. 2013. & from Elizabeth Andrews, “Writing the Sacred Journey: The Art and Practice of Spiritual Memoir” Boston: Skinner House, 2005.

# **Devotional Writing**

## ***Sharing Our Stories of Faith***

**By: Rev. Susan Beaumont**

***“Come and hear, all who fear God,  
and I will tell what he has done  
for my soul.”***  
**- Psalm 66:16 (NASB)**

## **What is a Devotional?**

A devotional is a written meditation composed by people just like you, people who are paying attention to the movement of God in their life, people who are trying to live in accordance with God's Word.

A devotional is a brief (usually 200-400 words) written reflection applying a passage of scripture. It often includes a suggested prayer, hymn, or life application tip.

In a devotional, we write about how God's care and presence have become real for us, through our prayer and in our interaction with scripture and others.

## **Why Write a Devotional?**

Our spiritual journeys are strengthened when we pause to reflect on where we have experienced God.

We often notice God's presence only in retrospect, when we consider how life has unfolded and where the Spirit has taken us. Reflecting and writing about these times is an important spiritual discipline.

Devotional writing is also an act of worship that expresses our reverence and awe. It pays homage to God.

Communities of faith are strengthened when they share stories of faith. We are inspired and comforted in hearing about the work of God in the life of another.

Our Scriptures are a compilation of the recorded testimony of others before us. When we write a devotional piece, we participate in this great tradition. We craft a written record of God's redeeming action in the world.

- Tell about a time in nature when God's presence became palpable.
- What is something startling or spiritually insightful that you learned from a TV show?
- What word, phrase or lyric has meant different things to you at different times in your life?
- When have you felt yourself in the presence of the Holy?
- What experience has taught you to slow down and pay attention?
- Write down a memory that you cherish. What role does it play in your journey with God?
- Write a story about a childhood memory that you are not particularly proud of? What have you learned from that experience?
- Write the story of a childhood first. How did this experience change you and your relationship with God?
- What confused you about God as a child? How have you come to understand God differently as an adult?
- Write about a significant person in your spiritual journey.
- Write about a moment of arrival or departure, small or large.
- Describe an object or souvenir that you acquired on a journey.
- Recall a moment of physical pain, grief or trauma. Describe how God met you in that experience.
- Describe a favorite family photo. How does that photo intersect with your faith journey?

## **Writing Prompts to Get You Started:<sup>iii</sup>**

These are some prompts to get you thinking about your own faith journey. Don't feel limited to these topics, but let them inspire you to begin writing.

- What wisdom stories, teaching, stories and traditions have been important in your life?
- What are some of the doubts that make it hard for you to have faith?
- What do you know for sure about God and a life of faith?
- How do you know sin when you see it?
- Describe an event that restored your faith in humankind.
- Describe an experience that opened you up to the suffering of others.
- Tell about a time when you offered yourself (skills, time, talent) in a way that made a difference to others.
- Where do you go to borrow hope when you are feeling hopeless?
- What is saving you right now?
- What have you put down, cleared out, or set aside, to make room for God?
- When did you receive a gift that you did not deserve?
- Who showed you what it means to be truly accepted?
- Tell about a time when you had the opportunity to communicate God's love to another?
- Tell about a time when a stranger showed up in your life with something to teach you.
- What is sacred space for you?

## **How Do I Get Started?**

You can start with either a situation or with a piece of Scripture.

Think about a situation you found yourself in where you began to consider, "That's how God is, too!" -or- "God was in this space and I only just realized it!" That can be the beginning of a devotional reflection.

Excellent ideas also come from reading or meditating on Scripture, looking for connections between Scripture and daily life.

When you make one of these connections, follow this simple formula for getting it down on paper.<sup>i</sup>

Select a scripture passage that connects with your experience.

In writing, retell the Bible teaching or summarize the passage briefly.

Describe the situation that you are linking to the Bible passage. Use as many concrete, sensory details of the situation as you can.

Tell how you can apply this spiritual truth in the days to come.

Put what you have written aside for a few days. Then come back and edit. Keep the details which best convey your message and delete what doesn't matter. Ask yourself whether this insight will be helpful in strengthening the faith journey of others.

## **Is There a Typical Devotional Pattern?**

Consider these five patterns commonly found in devotional literature:<sup>ii</sup>

### ***The Self-Examination***

This devotion focuses on personal experiences and uses colorful anecdotes to teach a spiritual lesson. The recollection always has a moral application that ties in with a selected piece of Scripture.

### ***An Outside Observer Reports***

Using this format, you are telling about what happened to someone else. Real names can be used if you have been given permission. Or you can change names, if the story itself is true.

### ***You Interact with Other People***

You can report on something you learned from a friend, coworker or family member.

### ***The Object Lesson***

Use a tangible object to illustrate an event or circumstance. Jesus often used this format, employing everyday objects like the mustard seed, a lamp and a bushel, or a missing coin.

### ***The Double Meaning Phrase***

Take a well-known line from everyday culture (such as an advertising slogan, a song, a poem, or a famous quote) and frame it differently to create a faith-based message.

## **What Should I Bear in Mind?**

Remember that others who read your work may come from different cultural backgrounds. Don't assume that others will understand your circumstances. Explain.

Don't preach. Avoid using phrases like, "you should... you need to... you must".

Appropriately cite any references you draw upon, but remember that devotionals are supposed to be about your personal experience. They are not research passages about what others have thought or said.

Indicate the version of the Bible quoted in your text. (NRSV, NIV, KJV, The Message, etc.)

Make one primary point. Simplify your idea and keep it brief.