Devotions: Gifts of Wisdom

By Karen Whiting

A devotion gives readers a precious gift of wisdom carefully packaged with love. Short and tightly written, a short inspirational piece reveals one Biblical principal. Readers seek out devotions, in snatches of time, to fill their minds with uplifting thoughts and to be inspired by how God works in the lives of people.

The average daily devotional is 250-400 words and pays a $10-$25. They are widely read and so your thoughts and words can touch many lives. A devotional in *Upper Room* is read by millions of people on more than forty countries. Read and study many devotionals before writing one. They provide exercise in learning to write tight.

To write devotions, learn to use few words to convey an image that illustrates a message. I discovered the key to writing devotions in proverbs 25:11, “Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word fitly spoken.” The simple words form a beautiful picture that appeals to the senses while conveying insightful thoughts.

To prepare an apple, a seed is planted and cultivated. The tree grows, and the beautiful ripe apple is chosen and picked. When a devotional idea comes to mind, plant it in your heart. Cultivate it with prayer then carefully choose the best words to use. Reflect on the one point you want readers to remember and build your devotion around that basic theme or the apple.

The apple shines when someone polishes it. Polish the focus sentence with editing. Don’t rush to serve the words before taking time to make them shine. Use active verbs but avoid commanding readers with words that sound peachy such as *must* or *do*.

The setting of silver is the serving plate that conveys love and care for the other person. An apple on a paper plate would provide the same nourishment but not the same message of love. It is the backdrop that holds the apple and should show off the apple to its best advantage. Consider the reader in choosing the appropriate setting of words. Readers can be young children, teens, men, or women, each requiring a different approach, a different setting though the message may be the same.

Devotions for young children are usually written in story form, such as found in *Keys for Kids*, or church take-home papers. Youngsters identify with a main character and understand the message through the character.

*Live Wire* appeals to older children. Targeted at 10-12 year old boys and girls, their devotionals reaches out to curious minds and use fascinating facts and God’s amazing ability to show solutions to problems kids face.

*Devo’zine* uses language, graphics, poetry, and current topics that teenagers of the computer generation relate to easily. Catchy devotional titles, such as, ‘Getting Into The Heart Of It,” grab the teen reader’s attention.

In contrast, devotions in *The Upper Room*, intended for an international adult audience, must

contain illustrations with universal appeal. Readers in developing countries may not understand fax machines or waffle grills, so the writer needs to use nature, people, and universal images in the illustrations.

To polish the devotional ask questions. Does the title match the focus and grab the reader’s attention? Is it a play on words such as “A Stitch in Time,” a piece I wrote about my daughter’s need for an oral surgeon to stitch her tongue? Does it relate to universal problems, or create an image, such as, “The Lost Pen,” in an issue of *The Upper Room*?

Ask if the reader could easily find the focus or is it buried in a maze of words? Will the reader be able to picture the illustration and remember the message? In the future will something that touches the reader’s senses remind them again of the devotion and its message?

Is it tightly written? Check every word to see if it belongs. Read the devotion out loud to see how the words flow. Is it paced for the audience? Is it full of active verbs with a high energy level for teens, or a gentler pace for older readers?

Look at the conclusion. Did the devotion end with a take away for the reader to apply in daily life? Some devotions need a matching prayer or thought for the day after the conclusion. These should re-emphasize the message. The take away can be turned into the prayer to assist the reader in applying the message. As an apple provides sweetness to the lips and energy to the body, the devotion should provide joy and energy to the soul.

The following checklists may help you evaluate devotions. These are tools to pinpoint strengths and weaknesses. Each devotion will not have every item checked. For example, some may contain humor, while others may evoke tears, or a thoughtful reflection.

Devotion’s Strengths

\_\_ Title matches focus

\_\_ Title grabs attention

\_\_ Focuses on a single idea

\_\_ Fresh, creative approach with strong lead

\_\_ Presents an eternal truth

\_\_ Universal theme for reader identification

\_\_ Contains humor

\_\_ Insightful application/ take-away

\_\_ Appeals to one or more senses

\_\_ sight \_\_ hearing \_\_ taste \_\_ touch \_\_ smell

\_\_ Evokes an emotion

\_\_ Creates a word-image

\_\_ Good read-aloud-ability

\_\_ Appropriate for specific audience

\_\_ Bible verse, or quote, matches the message

\_\_ Closes with a bang/ah-hah moment

Short-comings

\_\_ Title vague or plain

\_\_ Overused or trite theme (or urban legends)

\_\_ Not well-focused

\_\_ No sensory appeal

\_\_ Poor transitions

\_\_ Lacks flow

\_\_ Passive, inactive verbs

\_\_ Too wordy, needs tightening

\_\_ Clichés

\_\_ No specific reader benefit/ take-away

\_\_ First person that makes you and not God the star

\_\_ Christian jargon (sounds preachy and many new Christans don’t understand)

Bio: Karen H Whiting has written devotions for numerous publications, blogs, and a radio network plus the following devotional books:

*Family Devotional Builder*

*God’s Girls 1 and 2*

*Stories of Faith and Courage from the Home Front*

*The One Year My Princess Devotions*

*One Year Devotions for Active Boys*

*The 365 Most Important Bible Passages for Women*

*365 Devotions for Hope*

*Christmas is Coming, Waiting is Hard*

*Girl Talk Guy Talk ( Teens)*

*The Gift of Bread (combo recipe/dev/Christian living)*

*52 Devotions for Busy Families*

Sensory appeal-why it is important

Sight creates the scene

Sound is the movie sound track

Aroma taps into memories

Touch connects to experiences

Taste adds to experience and evoking memories