

**PREPARING A STIMULATING
DEVOTIONAL TALK**

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Carole enjoys doing speaking appointments around the world and has been awarded Alumna of the Year for the Class of 1963 at the 20th Anniversary, Avondale College. She is also a member of standing committees such as Family Ministries, (South Pacific Division), Divorce and Remarriage, (North N.S.W. Conference) and so many more. Carole has dedicated her life to the Lord and tries to spread His word to as many people as possible. She has also written articles that have been published in many of our magazines.

Carole was born in England and now lives in Australia. She is the proud mother of two children.

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Preparing A Stimulating Devotional Talk

I. THE DEVOTIONAL SPEAKER

The most important credential of the devotional speaker is her credibility. How believable is she? Does she testify to the truth of her message because she believes it herself? Does she practice what she is recommending to others? The answers to these questions will determine the impact of her message.

Organization

When invited to speak, raise a number of questions with the organizer:

- a. Will there be a microphone? What are its idiosyncrasies and how far away should you stand from it?
- b. Will there be a desk or podium available?
- c. How long are you expected to speak?

Notes

Make a set of unobtrusive notes on single unattached A5 sheets. Have no more than essential information on them. Leave any full notes at home. Always slip your notes into the front of your Bible. Avoid having more than one place where you keep them.

Dress

The dress code for speakers ranges from:

- a. *More formal* - suit in a solid color with matching stockings and shoes. The darker the color, the more formal the occasion. For example: navy suit, navy stockings, navy shoes; grey suit, grey stockings, grey shoes; black suit, black stockings, black shoes.
- b. *Less formal* - mix and match jacket and skirt, or dress, or skirt and blouse. Checks, stripes, spots, florals, or color mixtures may be worn.
- c. *Least formal* - neat casual wear, e.g., skirt and jumper (sweater), slacks and pullover or blouse, pant-suit.

A Rule of Thumb - always dress a little more formally than the listeners.

Presentation

It is important to stand tall, about half a step back from the desk and cast your eyes over the whole audience. While speaking, maintain as much eye contact as possible with as many listeners as possible.

Technique

When speaking:

- a. Emphasize the important words in your sentences, e.g., the boy hung from the rope like a spider on a thread. De-emphasize the unimportant words, the boy hung from the rope like a spider on a thread.
- b. It is important to use correct grammatical constructs in the expression of your language.
- c. Speak on a lower register than what you use in normal conversation.
- d. Speak from the diaphragm not from the throat.
- e. There is no substitute for practice. The more you speak, the better your delivery.
- f. Develop fluency so as to avoid filler sounds like “um” and “ah”.

II. PREPARATION

The Need to Pray

The first preparation for a devotional talk takes place in the heart of the speaker. It is essential to pray for:

- personal forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God (Is. 6:6-8)
- the choice of the topic, if one has not already been assigned
- God’s help in the preparation of the material
- the presence of the Holy Spirit in the delivery of the talk

Consider the Group

- What kind of people make up the group?
- What are their backgrounds (culture, education, socio-economic status)
- How diverse are they?
- What issues do they face in life?
- What are their spiritual needs?

The listener must:

- be able to identify with the content of the talk.
- be affirmed or challenged in some aspect of her relationship with God.
- see practical ways in which the talk helps her.

General Aim of a Devotional

- To focus attention on God and His relationship to us.
- To provide opportunity for the listener to strengthen her connection with God
- To encourage commitment and faithfulness to God.

Specific Aim

Set a specific aim for the talk and write it down. For example, my aim is to show that:

- God can be trusted, or
- God loves us completely, or
- God walks with us daily, or
- Faith is not a feeling, or
- Forgiveness heals us, or
- Love makes us free.

Choose a Topic for this Devotional Talk

For example: *God walks with me—based on specific aim no. 3

Develop the Main Body of the Talk

For example, God walks with me when:

- I face temptation
- I face danger
- I face doubt
- I find delight

Tools

Study relevant Bible passages for each of the parts of the main body of the talk. There are several tools that can help with this task:

- A concordance to help locate Bible verses.
- Various versions and translations to compare different readings of the text.
- Bible dictionaries and Bible encyclopedias to help give the context, historical background, cultural and literary characteristics of the text.
- Bible commentaries to assist in interpreting the text. Thus, God walks with me when:
 - a. I face temptation (Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8; Rom. 5:20)
 - b. I face danger (Rom. 8:38; Eph. 6:12)
 - c. I face doubt (Ps. 9:10; 13:5; Prov. 3:5)
 - d. In find delight (Ps. 16:5, 6, 9, 11).

As relevant ideas, thoughts, quotations and illustrations come to mind, it is important to write these down immediately on cards, paper slips or on computer. The next task is to organize these in a logical sequence and **link them together with bridge ideas**.

The Beginning

It is vital to gain the attention of the listener with your beginning. A statement, question, anecdote, analogy, story or poem can be used.

The Ending

The effective ending summarizes the specific aim of the talk and finishes on a climax. It is better that a talk be too short than too long. Avoid weakening your ending by talking past the climax.

Illustration

“A talk should be not only clear but also interesting. The one who hears you speak is like a man who sits down to eat. He wants nourishment, of course. But he wants flavor, too. Starch and protein are essential, but the flavors that nature and culinary art combine with these add to their attractiveness. Variety give flavor to sentences. You might, of course, be able to communicate most of what you want to say by using simple declarative sentences. But you would sound like a first-grade reader. There is a more excellent way!”

Illustration is the artwork that dresses up the basic outline. It can be used as freely as you wish and must always be apt. Illustrations must be familiar or readily understood and can be in one of a number of forms. Here are some examples:

FACT

Luke 3:1,2 *“In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother, Philip, tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene--during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, son of Zechariah, in the desert.”*

Harry Emerson Fosdick argues the dubious point that babies are more decisive than battles: “The year prior to 1809, for example, was one of the most discouraging in Europe’s history. Napoleon was dominant, as Hitler is now. His battles and victories were the absorbing news and evil, as our times are. I suspect that to those who lived then, 1809 seemed as bad or worse. But think of what was going on in that year Charles Darwin was born. In that year Gladstone was born, and Tennyson, and Edgar Allen Poe and Oliver Wendell Homes, and Cyrus McCormick, the inventor of the harvester, and Mendelsohn. At the very least, one must say that the world was not as hopeless as it looked.

SIMILE

- Ps. 42:1 *“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, o God.”*
- Ps. 103:13 *“As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him.”*
- Matt. 23:37 *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.”*
1. Pet. 1:24 *“For ‘all men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall.”*

Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen:

“As a baby’s cry would be meaningless in a universe without a mother’s love, so our restlessness with the way we are would be meaningless without the love of God.”

METAPHOR

Ps. 23 *“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”*

“He exchanged the rags of self-righteousness for the robe of Christ’s righteousness.”

“She drew the curtain on her past life.”

“Faith can be eroded by the acids of indecision.”

PARABLE

Matt. 13:3-8 *Then He told them many things in parables, saying: ‘A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop--a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.’”*

One day a boy was sent into the field to sow a bucket of pumpkin seeds. He had been given careful instructions to plant them in threes and fours in small hillocks about two meters apart. The boy began diligently, but the sun grew hot and he longed for cool relief by swimming in the nearby river. He looked about him and saw no one was watching, so he dug a large sized hole and tipped the rest of the bucket of seed in, covering it with the soil. "There", he said, "Now I have finished I can go and swim." After a few weeks when the small plants began to sprout, his misdeed became apparent. His sin had found him out.

ANALOGY

Jer. 18:1-6 *"This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 'Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message.' So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him. Then the word of the Lord came to me: 'O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?' declares the Lord. 'Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.'"*

Eduard Schweizer:

"Many times we have to suffer very acutely until we finally quit being like a crustacean that sits in its hard shell and is always alone with its own self, caring for nothing going on around it. Isn't there a special kind of religious hard shell? Some have never observed that God is always God for all others and that He is not nearly so interested in the life of our individual souls as in the birth of a community in which individuals think about others and practice this concern continually in intercession and thanksgiving. God is incomparably interested in that."

PERSONIFICATION

Prov. 1:20 *"Wisdom calls aloud in the street, she raises her voice in the public squares."* "Death is the unseen and uninvited guest when a child is born, when a marriage takes place, when a vocation is chosen, and most obviously when the days of our years have run their course. Death is the devourer. But this pale companion is present also when every decision between right and wrong is made, so that death may be defeated in dying or may triumph when life is bought with dishonor."

HYPOTHESIS

Luke 11:5-9 *“Then He said to them, ‘Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, >Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.< Then the one inside answers, >Don’t bother me. The door is already locked and my children are with me in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.< I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man’s boldness, he will get up and give him as much as he needs.”*

Helmut Thielicke:

“Perhaps I am a young person who doesn’t even know where to begin with Jesus. All I have is a great hunger and thirst and many questions in my heart. And because I’m very helpless, I poke around in Nietzsche, repeat a couple of verses by Gottfried Benn, nibble a bit at Satre and even crib a little (and why not) from the New Testament. Let’s see if something strikes my fancy, if something speaks to me. What else should I do in my helplessness except let everything pass in review before me? And while I do that, and while everything is still cloudy and confused, Jesus stands there opposite me, beholds me and loves me. Everything that I do, (even if it is utterly false) and even though I persist in pushing the wrong buttons; everything is surrounded, lifted up, and carried by this love. I never escape from the gravitational field of this loving glance.”

ANECDOTE

Luke 21:1-4 *“As He looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. ‘I tell you the truth’, He said, ‘this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.’”*

Harry Emerson Fosdick:

“When Lincoln’s body was brought from Washington to Illinois, it passed through Albany, and, as it was carried through the street, they say a colored woman stood upon the curb and lifted her little son as far as she could reach above the heads of the crowd and was heard to say to him, ‘Take a long look, honey. He died for you.’ So, if I could, I would lift up your spirit to see Calvary. Take a long look. He died for you.”

III. TWO MODEL DEVOTIONALS

A. Inductive Model

The inductive model unfolds as it is presented. Example - “**The Road Much Traveled**”

<i>Beginning</i>	A poem about an old road
<i>Bridge</i>	The road I walked daily as a child
<i>Main Body</i>	The road I walk through life where: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. I face temptation (Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8; Rom. 5:20)2. I face danger (Rom. 8:38; Eph. 6:12)3. I face doubt (Ps. 9:10; 13:5; Prov. 3:5)4. I find delight (Ps. 16:5, 6, 9, 11)

Ending The rest of the poem about the old road

B. Deductive Model

The deductive model uses rational argument and logical progression. It clearly states its direction from the beginning. Example - “**Window on a Woman’s World**”

<i>Beginning</i>	Life for the Australian woman in the 1990s with a brief look back to the past and projections for the future.
<i>Bridge</i>	Introduction of the Adventist woman of the 1990s
<i>Main Body</i>	The hope of the Adventist woman of the 1990s—a hope that she can share in: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. eternal life (Matt. 6:19)2. whole health in body and soul (Matt. 6:25)3. having the key to lasting relationships (Eph. 4:25, 26, 29, 31; 5:1,2a)4. having a solid identity (Eph. 1: 5,6)5. being fully secure (Rom. 8:38, 39)

Ending The privileged position of the Adventist woman and her opportunity to share all this with the other women of Australia.

What was the specific aim of this talk?