

story craft

QUICKSTART GUIDE

to writing a devotional



www.storycraftnc.com



Hey friends!

Have you ever felt like God gave you a specific message you wanted to share with the world? Is there a topic you're passionate about helping people see from a biblical perspective?

In this guide, you'll find general tips and examples to help you craft a devotional of any length, whether written topically or focused specifically on one book of the Bible.

Some of what I cover here might seem pretty straightforward. Maybe you've heard some of it before or already knew some of the elements. That's great!

This isn't meant to be an extensive guide but to provide encouragement and tips to help you get on your way to writing.

If you want more specific help brainstorming and designing your idea, set up a free 15-minute consultation about my coaching services. I'd be happy to help you with tips and support tailored to your specific project.

Alrighty, friends. Let's dive in!

Your friendly neighborhood editor,

Stephanie



My Story

Devotionals are my bread and butter—they're how I got my start in editing and writing after all.

My first job in the editing world was an internship with Lifeway Kids publishing, specifically editing for their monthly devotional magazines **More**, **Adventure**, and **Bible Express**.

After that, I moved into a full-time role with Lifeway Students, managing their monthly devotional magazine, **Essential Connection**.

This included crafting a three-year scope and sequence plus planning out content flow for each month's devotional, hiring writers, tracking editing and design, creating outlines, and pulling everything together to publish.

When EC went out of print, I moved to the newly created **Lifeway Students Devotions** in 2020. For the first year, I managed the girls line of devotionals, and when we condensed into one line, I switched to assisting the managing editor with the planning and development as well as writing articles for each monthly issue—and I've written four full devotionals for them as well.

Since 2014, I've also written and edited devotions in collaboration with the Fedd Agency, indie authors, and various churches and non-profit organizations. Plus, I enjoy writing short daily devos here and there on my own just for fun.

Getting Started

THE LINGO

First things first, let's clarify the language I'll be using in this guide.

Application Questions: Optional questions or activity ideas designed to help readers think deeper and live out what they learn.

Devotional: The entire work, including all five, ten, thirty, or 360 days.

Devo/Devotion: A daily reading focusd on a passage or verse of Scripture.

Discovery Questions: Optional questions related to the content and context of the passage or verse.

Focal Passage: A section of verses that serves as the foundation for a daily devo.

Focus Verse: One specific verse that highlights that daily devo's main point. Often printed on the page.

TYPES OF DEVOTIONALS

Topical: The outline and/or book map is built out of the desire to write on a specific topic. For example, depression, anxiety, hope, love, etc.

Exegetical: The outline and/or book map is built from a specific book or passage of the Bible. Usually passages and/or verses are covered in order. You might also choose to do a section of books, like books of the Law, Poetry, Minor Prophets, or Letters.

Seasonal: The outline is built for a specific holiday or time of year. For example, Advent, Graduation, or Easter.

Getting Started

THE MAIN THING

Identify the book or topic you want to write on.

THE PURPOSE

Before you outline or brainstorm, determine your purpose. What message do you want to convey to readers? Did the book of Romans change your life? Explain why and how. Have you walked through an intense season of grief or anxiety and want to help others who might be struggling? Try writing out one sentence to help you nail down why you want to write about this book or topic.

THE BRAINSTORM

Now that you've got your main idea and purpose, start compiling passages, verses, commentaries, and websites with info on your book or topic. Then jot down questions you want to answer as you write as well as any specific points you want to make.

THE TIMELINE

Choose how long you want your devo to be. Are you planning devos to be sent out individually each day through a blog or newsletter? Or are you planning a compilation?

THE OUTLINE

Maybe you're typically a pantsier, like me. But I've found that just having a general idea of where I'm going helps.

Then I can pants my way through the daily devos.

Try identifying subtopics, and passages and ideas to go with those subtopics. It doesn't have to be super detailed.



The Works

- 01 Intro. This usually falls after the copyright info and Table of Contents (TOC).
- 02 Devotional body. This is the chunk of pages devoted to the set of daily devos. If you add sections for each week or month, you may want to include a page with a short sentence or paragraph to introduce the passages and ideas in that section..
- 03 Extras. This might include suggestions for further reading, related songs, podcast suggestions, ads for other books you've written, free downloads on your website, etc..
- 04 Back cover copy (BCC). Marketing style copy for the back cover of your book, often contains similar info to the intro. Sometimes introduced with a powerful standalone line.

Designing Devos

THE ELEMENTS

Think about what you want readers to experience during a daily devo. Here are some ideas:

- focal passage with a “read” instruction
- printed focus verse(s)
- devo text explaining the passage or key theme/idea for the day
- discovery questions
- application questions
- call to action
- prayer
- parting thought or key takeaway
- a related song or hymn
- a tip or relationship building activity for pairs or groups

THE WORDS

Word count and paragraph breaks matter. Line spacing matters. Devos tend to be 250-500 words, including questions. Too much text crammed into one page can overwhelm readers.

THE LOOK

Consider the age group you’re writing for and how much white space to include. I mostly write for teens, and we stick to designs with lots of white space and clean, simple elements.

THE STRUCTURE

Think about how you want the devo to flow. How many pages will it be? Will it have subheadings? Will each devo have a title or day number or date? Will it start with the Scripture or dive right in to devo text? Should questions fall at the end? The only rule is that it should make sense to the reader.

Don't Forget

01 Add a copyright page. Generally, this should include the year your devotional was written and your name or imprint, the copyright statements for any Scripture translations used, contact info, and credit for cover design, editing (optional), or photos used.

02 If you touch on sensitive topics, especially writing for kids or teens, consider including a content warning in the intro.

03 Give credit to everyone you quote. Though most people won't read through your sources page or footnotes, be sure to include all the pertinent information. If you struggle to put together footnotes or endnotes, try using citationmachine.net. As a note, most devotionals use a combination of in-house style guides, The Chicago Manual of Style, and The Christian Writer's Manual of Style.

It's also important to verify the wording of Scripture and quotes. Try to track down an original source for quotes. If you can't, try to find a reputable source. If you plan to send your manuscript to an editor and want them to double check your facts and sources, keep thorough documentation of where you found your information. If it's a book you had to buy, photograph the page where the info was found (with the page number visible), the copyright page, and the front cover or title page.

Sample Outline

Let's say you're writing a three day devo on grief. Here's a quick, simple outline example.

Grief

Purpose: When I lost my brother, I couldn't find a devo that was truly helpful. I want to write to encourage others that there's hope but it's also okay to be sad.

Day 1

Passage:

Main Idea:

Day 2

Passage:

Main Idea:

Day 3

Passage:

Main Idea:

Devo Template

Day 1

TITLE

READ . . .

Devo text.

Discovery Question 1:

Application Question 1:

Activity Suggestion:

Prayer Prompt:

Key Takeaway:

Helpful Resources

Check out these commentaries and websites to help you as you write.

Bibles

Online

- The Study Bible App
- Bible Gateway
- Bible Hub

In Print

- Spurgeon Study Bible
- Apologetics Study Bible
- CSB Study Bible

Commentaries

Online

- Logos.com
- BibleHub.com
- BlueLetterBible.com
- BibleStudyTools.com

In Print

- New American Commentaries
- Holman Bible Commentaries
- Expositor's Bible Commentaries
- Gospel-Centered Exposition Commentaries



WANT TO BOOK A FREE CONSULTATION?

Send me a message!



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