

Proverbs 31 Ministries Devotion Standard

Hi there, devotion writer! This resource is a guide for how to write an excellent devotion, based on Proverbs 31 Ministries' devotion style. The P31 style is specific and can be difficult to master, but this guide will put you on the right path and show you the necessary components of a devotion.

You can use this guide while writing any kind of devotion, especially when crafting a devotion submission for COMPEL Training's Devotion Writing Challenges. Much of what is listed here is what we look for when choosing winners for the Devotion Writing Challenges.

Happy devotion writing!

1. What makes a good devotion?

A good devotion:

- Points you to the heart of God and makes you think intentionally about Him.
- Leaves the reader with an aroma of God's character or a biblical truth, rather than a memory of the story told. An aroma elicits a memory ... what is the memory the reader will have?
- Says something about God's character that the reader can meditate on.
- Is applicable to your life today — small enough to be applied in the next 24 hours, but big enough to have a lasting impact on your life.
- Is written in a contemplative tone.
- Does not use sensational, dramatic or graphic images and stories.

Fresh and relevant writing:

In order to keep your devotions current, consider being committed to ongoing personal training and improvement of your writing skills (such as COMPEL or other professional development). Watch out for "tired and typical" language. This can happen when writers stop pushing themselves to improve. Or it can happen when we settle for good writing rather than excellent writing.

To help keep writing fresh, write about what you are learning today based on the life situations you are currently facing. This helps you connect with your readers through what they are facing. This doesn't mean you can't occasionally go back and pull a story from earlier in your life, but that should be an exception rather than the rule.

A compelling topic:

- Address a felt need, everyday issues or common situations.
- Include an uncommon Scripture verse or story.

II. What hurts a devotion?

Graphic personal story:

You want to avoid imagery that will potentially trigger a reader emotionally or would leave a graphic image in her mind. This doesn't mean you can't address hard topics, but avoid specific words that conjure an image. This includes content that graphically describes any kind of abuse, accidents or trauma, including medical procedures and anatomy.

Stacie Stark, in her COMPEL blog post, "The Story I Never Should Have Told," says: "These details often leave the writer feeling overexposed and the reader feeling uncomfortable. We often justify our TMI moments by deeming them uniquely valuable in moving our readers to our main point. In that case, if the purpose for which you told the story doesn't pan out, would you regret telling it?"

Instead, Stacie says to "feed your central idea only": "Everything we write has a main point. Every story we tell should feed that main point. If you are telling the story for any other reason than to fuel your main point, you shouldn't use it." You can read Stacie's full blog post [here](#).

Uncompelling topic:

- An uncompelling topic is a topic that's overdone. Some common examples of overdone topics are body image, rest, the story of Hagar, and the story of Mary and Martha.
- An uncompelling topic does not feel like a topic readers care about. In other words, it doesn't meet a felt need.

III. Necessary elements of a devotion

Compelling title:

When adding a title to your devotion, ask "What's a title that will compel the reader to click on and read the devotion?"

For more helpful guidance on titles, check out these two COMPEL teachings below:

[Titles: Why are they so hard?](#) By Lysa TerKeurst and team

[Finding the Perfect Title](#) by Glynnis Whitwer

You can also use [this headline analyzer tool](#) to help you find a high-scoring title.

Key verse:

List your key verse at the top of the devotion, before the devotion body.

Consider choosing a lesser-known verse that is not commonly taught. This will help your devotion be fresh and insightful, and it will help your readers see Scripture in a new light. If you choose a verse that's well-known, please try to approach it from a unique angle without adding meaning or taking it out of context.

Your *key verse* and the *main point* of your devotion should be strongly connected.

In the body of your devotion, you can quote the key verse again in full, give context for it, and teach on it. Avoid cherry-picking a verse and placing it in the devotion without explaining at least some of the following:

1. The author of the book where the verse is found.
2. The audience the verse/book was written to.
3. Any cultural or historical context that is important for understanding the meaning of the verse.
4. Any Hebrew/Greek translations of words in the verse that might be helpful in better understanding the verse and the concept of what the verse teaches. Avoid including translations unless they add a fresh dimension of understanding.

Body of the devotion:

The eight elements below are all parts of a good devotion.

1. “In the field” tone: This type of tone is relatable, honest, encouraging, and vulnerable (“me too”). The tone of your devotion must be honoring to others and not point fingers. Your tone should be more positive than negative.

Avoid the other two types of tone:

“From the doorway”: more of a teaching tone; the author is removed; “you should.”

“From the tower”: preaching, condemning tone.

2. Hook: A hook comes at the beginning of a devotion, and this is what makes the reader want to keep reading. If your hook is “tired and typical,” the reader will move on to something else. You only have a couple of sentences to hook your reader. The average human attention span is eight seconds — that's the amount of time you have to hook your reader.

A good hook...

- Draws you in right away. It doesn't give everything away from the beginning; the reader has to keep reading to figure out what's going on and what's going to happen.
- Keeps you reading even if you don't know who the author is or what the rest of the devotion is about.
- Might ask an intriguing, specific question.
- Is part of a short paragraph. Readers are more likely to keep reading if your paragraphs are short — long paragraphs feel burdensome to read and will more likely lose a reader.

3. Pain point or felt need: The pain point or felt need that you're addressing should be obvious within the first few paragraphs of your devotion. It should be a) something you've experienced yourself and can discuss in a "me too" fashion, and b) something the reader can relate to or may have experienced. Consider common struggles that your audience has.

4. Anchor story: This is an opening story that comes at the beginning of your devotion. It can make up anywhere from $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ of the devotion. In the anchor story, be vulnerably honest about whatever struggle or pain point you're addressing. You must be willing to do the following in the anchor story:

1. Provide details. Don't tell a story you can't share details about.
2. Be vulnerable in how you've struggled with the pain point.
 - a. Readers connect with authors through authors' vulnerability. The reader won't trust you or what you have to say if you don't openly and honestly share your own struggle. Remember the "me too" style of devotions.
 - b. Vulnerability can be accomplished when you share what Lysa TerKeurst refers to as the "subconscious narrative." It's when you help the reader voice thoughts she hasn't found words for.
 - c. Vulnerability is not saying a phrase like, "I've been afraid before ... have you?" But it is an attempt to open your heart and share your struggles.

5. Key verse: Don't just reference your key verse; quoted it in full and teach on it. The key verse should appear about halfway through the devotion — not at the end of the devotion.

When interpreting the meaning of the key verse, OR when explaining other parts of Scripture, be careful not to take liberties with Scripture. Don't assume things that aren't in Scripture.

6. Real-life application for the reader: Don't present a topic or struggle without offering application. Provide real-life application for the reader that she/he can put into practice today (it should be simple enough to implement in the next 24-hours). If you were talking with a friend, how would you encourage her in something she can do about her struggle today?

7. Closing prayer: A great way to end a devotion is with a guided prayer for the reader. An ideal closing prayer is about 3 sentences long. You might write the prayer in first person plural (we/us).

8. Sticky Statements: These are short, quippy, quotable truths that can be posted on social media or placed on a beautiful graphic. These make your devotion memorable and easily shareable. For more on how to write sticky statements, watch this COMPEL Training teaching by Lysa TerKeurst, "[Developing Sticky Statements](#)."

****Remember** ... this is a devotion. When you're writing, ask yourself, "Is this devotional? Is this something I might read in a devotion book? Is this something I would want to read in my quiet time?"

For more guidance, listen to "The Three S's of Connectivity" COMPEL Training series by Lysa TerKeurst:

Watch time: 1 hr. (All 3 parts)

Part 1: <https://compeltraining.com/lesson/3-ss-of-connectivity-part-1/>

Part 2: <https://compeltraining.com/lesson/3-ss-of-connectivity-part-2/>

Part 3: <https://compeltraining.com/lesson/3-ss-of-connectivity-part-3-3/>

Example devotion: “You Deserve to Stop Suffering”

by Lysa TerKeurst

“When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, ‘Do you want to get well?’” John 5:6 (NIV)

I walked into my appointment with my counselor, Jim, wishing I’d canceled. I just didn’t feel up to tackling the topic of forgiveness that day.

So much felt unsettled in my life. Not only were my husband Art and I separated, but there were also layers of complicated realities that prevented us from being able to sit down and process the fallout after his betrayal. I was devastated. Shattered. And so caught off guard that this nightmare was my real life. I couldn’t even open my mouth without a flood of emotion rushing out.

As I sat in Jim’s office, I felt utterly unmotivated to talk and overly motivated to cry.

“Lysa, do you have the desire to heal from this?”

I nodded my head yes. I did want to heal. From the marital devastation. From the shock of all the unpredictable ways people had reacted to what happened.

But how could I possibly start healing when there was no resolution or restitution or reconciliation with Art or others who had hurt me?

I thought those who did wrong things would realize they were wrong. And then surely they would say they were sorry and seek to make things right between us. Then, I would consider forgiveness. And then I could possibly heal.

As Jim kept talking, I started to realize I might never feel like things were fair. Even if the people who hurt me suddenly became repentant and owned all they’d done, that wouldn’t undo what happened. That wouldn’t instantly heal me or make any of this feel right.

And based on their reactions so far, they weren’t going to apologize any time soon.

Therefore, I had to separate my healing from their choices. My ability to heal cannot depend on anyone’s choices but my own.

It reminded me of something I learned during a trip to the Holy Land when my guide taught about the only two healing miracles recorded in the book of John that Jesus performed in Jerusalem. Only two!

The first was a healing at the pool of Bethesda.

In John 5, we read about a lame man who thought he needed the cooperation of other people to help him get to the water when the angels stirred it, according to the superstition believed by many. So, when Jesus came and asked him the question we find in our key verse, “Do you want to be healed?” the man’s response was surprising. He gave Jesus an excuse based on the fact that no one would help him into the water.

Isn’t it amazing that the man was so focused on what others needed to do that he almost missed what Jesus could do?

Without one word about the other people, Jesus instructed him to get up, pick up his mat and walk. The Bible then says, “At once the man was cured ...” (John 5:9a, NIV). The healing didn’t involve anyone but the paralyzed man and Jesus.

The other healing miracle is found in John 9 with a blind man. In this story, we find the disciples wanting to know whose actions caused this man’s blindness. Surely someone was at fault. But Jesus blew that assumption apart. He didn’t place blame or shame on anyone. He said this man’s blindness “... happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him” (John 9:3, NIV). Jesus then spat onto the ground, mixed up some mud and rubbed it onto the blind man’s eyes, instructing him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. Notice that Jesus didn’t make healing contingent on other people doing or owning anything.

Jesus gave the instruction. The blind man obeyed. Jesus healed. The blind man moved forward. My guide in Jerusalem that day said “one of these miracles showed us a new way to walk, and the other showed us a new way to see.”

I couldn’t grab my journal to record this revelation fast enough. I wrote, “For me to move forward, for me to see beyond this current darkness, is between me and the Lord. I don’t need to wait on others to do anything. I must simply obey what God is asking of me right now. God has given me a new way to walk. And God has given me a new way to see. It’s forgiveness. And it is beautiful.”

Oh, friend, what if we stopped waiting for things to feel right and fair and placed our healing in the hands of Jesus instead?



Our ability to heal cannot depend on others wanting our forgiveness, but only on our willingness to give it.

Our ability to heal also cannot depend on them receiving adequate consequences for their disobedience, but only on our obedience to trust God's justice whether we ever see it or not. We can trust sin has built-in consequences. We don't have to see it to know that the other person will eventually have to face what they've done. My healing is my choice. And your healing? It's with the utmost compassion that I say your healing is your choice too.

I know how incredibly hard all of this is. But I'm finding what I learned both in Israel and in my counselor's office to be true.

We can heal. We can forgive. We can trust God. And none of those beautiful realities can be held hostage by another person.

You deserve to stop suffering because of what other people have done to you, sweet friend. And today's a good day to let that process start.

Lord, I confess that forgiveness and healing feel incredibly hard to choose sometimes, but I know You will give me the strength to walk through these processes. Thank You for inviting me to see and walk in a new, healed way today. Thank You for making me more like You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.