

Winterfest 2014 Devotional Ideas for Friday Night Group Time-2

Friday Night Devotional

Note to group leader: Resist the urge to try to do **too** much during this devotional session on Friday night. Often times, the travel and the strain and stress of simply getting to the event are enough to wear the teens (and the adults) out. Don't force it. Pace yourself.

You know your group. You know what they can handle. Ask yourself the question: Are they primed and pumped and ready for more right now? Or, are they too tired to hear more at this moment? You may be pouring good water into a glass that is already full. Or they might be anxious to follow up with more. Either way, determine the status of your group as the devotional begins and give them what they can handle...not too much, not too little.

Following are discussion questions based upon Chris Seidman's Friday night message. These will serve as a good basis for follow-up. You'll also see five illustrations provided for you that fit the theme of the weekend. Use the ones you like the best. Don't feel like you need to use all of them. All five are excerpted/adapted from Hot Illustrations for Youth Talks by Wayne Rice.

Discussion Questions

1. What was one big idea you heard Chris saying?
2. What do we really mean when we use phrases like, "I'm going to church." Or "Let's go eat after church." Is there any harm in using phrases like these?
3. How would things be different if we understood and practiced the truth that the church is a *people* not a *place*?

The Insurance Claim

A man injured on the job filed an insurance claim. The insurance company requested more information, so the man wrote the insurance company the following letter of explanation:

Dear Sirs:

I am writing in response to your request concerning clarification of the information I supplied in block #11 on the insurance form, which asked for the cause of the injury. I answered, "Trying to do the job alone." I trust that the following explanation will be sufficient.

I am a bricklayer by trade. On the date of the injury, I was working alone, laying brick around the top of a three-story building. When I finished the job, I had about five hundred pounds of brick left over. Rather than carry the bricks down by hand, I decided to put them into a barrel and lower them by a pulley that was fastened to the top of the building.

I secured the end of the rope at ground level, went back up to the top of the building, loaded the bricks into the barrel, and pushed it over the side. I then went back down to the ground and untied the rope, holding it securely to insure the slow descent of the barrel. As you will note in block #6 of the insurance form, I weigh 145 pounds. At the shock of being jerked off the ground so swiftly by the five hundred pounds of bricks in the barrel, I lost my presence of mind and forgot to let go of the rope.

Between the second and third floors I met the barrel. This accounts for the bruises and lacerations on my upper body. Fortunately, I retained enough presence of mind to maintain my tight hold on the rope and proceeded rapidly up the side of the building, not stopping until my right hand was jammed in the pulley. This accounts for my broken thumb (see block #4). Despite the pain, I continued to hold tightly to the rope. Unfortunately, at approximately the same time, the barrel hit the ground and the bottom fell out of the barrel. Devoid of the weight of the bricks, the barrel now weighed about fifty pounds. I again refer you to block #6, where my weight is listed. I began a rapid descent.

In the vicinity of the second floor, I met the barrel coming up. This explains the injury to my legs and lower body. Slowed only slightly, I continued my descent, landing on the pile of bricks. Fortunately, my back was only sprained. I am sorry to report, however, that at this point I again lost my presence of mind—and let go of the rope.

I trust that this answers your concern. Please note that I am finished trying to do the job alone.

The Christian life is not easy to live “on your own.” You need people who stand beside you to support you and help you to succeed. That’s why God created the church. There are no Lone Rangers in the family of God. We really do need each other. We are a community, a family of faith, and when we all work together, we can accomplish great things for Christ. (See 1 Corinthians 12.)

Are You God?

Shortly after World War II came to a close, Europe began picking up the pieces. Much of the Old Country had been ravaged by war and was in ruins. Perhaps the saddest sight of all was that of little orphaned children starving in the streets of those war-torn cities.

Early one chilly morning an American soldier was making his way back to the barracks in London. As he turned the corner in his jeep, he spotted a little boy with his nose pressed to the window of a pastry shop. Inside, the cook was kneading dough for a fresh batch of doughnuts. The hungry boy stared in silence, with his nose pressed against the window, drooling and watching the cook’s every move. The soldier pulled his jeep to the curb, stopped, and got out.

“Son, would you like some of those?”

The boy was startled. “Oh yes...I would.”

The American stepped inside and bought a dozen, put them in a bag and walked back to where the lad was standing in the foggy cold of the London morning. He smiled, held out the bag and said simply, “Here you are.”

As he turned to walk away, he felt a tug on his coat. He looked back and heard the child ask quietly, “Mister...are you God?”

When we love people with no strings attached, we are doing something quite godly. We are demonstrating in a very real way what God is like. God loves us with an unconditional, agape, love which is gracious and kind and rare.

Many people find it hard to believe in a God they can't see. They want a God “with skin on.” That's why God sent his Son, Jesus—and that's also why he established his church. We are God's agents in the world—and when we are serving others, and loving them with a godly love, we are showing people what God is like. We are helping them to understand that God loves them like we do—only even more so.

Someone once said, “You may be the only Jesus a person ever sees.” That's true. As Christians, it is an honor to be able to represent Christ to the world. Let's make sure we represent him accurately.

The Seagull

Imagine this scene: You are on the Florida coast. The sun is setting like a gigantic orange ball. It's the cool evening on a vacant, isolated stretch of beach. The water is lapping at the shore, the breeze is blowing slightly. There are one or two joggers and a couple of fishermen. Most people have gone home for the day.

You look up and you see an old man with curved shoulders, bushy eyebrows, and bony features hobbling down the beach carrying a bucket. He carries the bucket up to the pier, a dock that goes out into the water. He stands on the dock and you notice he is looking up into the sky and all of a sudden you see a mass of dancing dots. You soon recognize that they are seagulls. They are coming out of nowhere. The man takes out of his bucket handfuls of shrimp and begins to throw them on the dock. The seagulls come and land all around him. Some land on his shoulders, some land on his hat, and they eat the shrimp. Long after the shrimp are gone his feathered friends linger. The old man and the birds.

What is going on here? Why is this man feeding seagulls? What could compel him to do this—as he does week after week?

The man in that scene was Eddie Rickenbacher, a famous World War II pilot. His plane, The Flying Fortress, went down in 1942 and no one thought he would be rescued. Perhaps you have read or heard how he and his eight passengers escaped death by climbing into two rafts for thirty days. They fought thirst, the sun, and sharks. Some of the sharks were nine feet long. The boats were only eight feet long. But what nearly killed them was starvation. Their rations were gone within eight days and they didn't have anything left.

Rickenbacher wrote that even on those rafts, every day they would have a daily afternoon devotional and prayer time. One day after the devotional, Rickenbacher leaned back and put his hat over his eyes and tried to get some sleep. Within a few moments he felt something on his head. He knew in an instant that it was a seagull that had perched on his raft. But he knew that they were hundreds of miles out to sea. Where did this seagull come from? He was also certain that if he didn't get that seagull he would die. Soon all the others on the two boats noticed the seagull. No one spoke, no one moved. Rickenbacher quickly grabbed the seagull and with thanksgiving, they ate the flesh of the bird. They used the intestines for fish bait and survived.

Rickenbacher never forgot that visitor who came from a foreign place. That sacrificial guest. Every week, he went out on the pier with a bucket of shrimp and said thank you, thank you, thank you.

The apostle Paul wrote, "For Christ's love compels us..." (2 Corinthians 5:14). The word "compels" means literally, "leaves me no choice." Paul is saying, "I have no choice but to respond to the love of Christ with my whole being—to say thank you, thank you, thank you!"

When we serve Christ, when we share God's love with others, when we assemble together as a church each week to worship him, we don't do it begrudgingly. We do it with thankful hearts because we really have no choice. It's how we say thank you!

Lashed to the Mast

The Odyssey, an epic Greek poem, tells the story of King Odysseus and his heroic struggle against the gods. The tale begins when the ship of Odysseus is blown off course on the way home from the Trojan Wars. In his effort to get home, Odysseus lands on an island where he encounters one-eyed monsters known as Cyclops.

One of the Cyclops, Polyphemus, captures the humans and begins devouring them. Odysseus, in order to save himself and his crew, blinds the eye of the giant and manages to escape from the island.

What Odysseus doesn't know is that Polyphemus, the Cyclops he blinded, is the son of the Greek god Poseidon. In retaliation, Poseidon tries to prevent Odysseus from ever reaching home.

To accomplish his goal, Poseidon places Odysseus's ship in the path of the Island of Sirens. The island is inhabited by beautiful women (sirens) who sing out to sailors on the sea, enticing them to steer their ships to destruction on the jagged reefs that surround the island. The sirens' songs could be heard for great distances.

As Odysseus sails for home, he can hear the songs of the sirens. He's also well aware of his vulnerability to their seductive power. His solution is to lash himself to his ship's mast so he can listen to their songs but not respond to them. The rest of the crew stuffs their ears to block the sound.

In agony, Odysseus remains lashed to the mast until his ship makes it safely past the island. As a result, he manages to stay on course until he arrives home safely.

As we sail the sea of life, we encounter many temptations that will threaten to take us off course and destroy us. The Bible tells us that Satan "prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8)—not unlike Poseidon in *The Odyssey*.

Our best strategy for defeating Satan is not necessarily to withdraw from the world so that we can't hear his songs. Instead, we must remain "lashed to the mast"—the cross of Jesus Christ. Our calling as Christians is to be "in the world, but not of it." We should be involved in the world without allowing its seductive power to undermine our integrity. We must remain faithful to who we are as Christians and to resist temptation.

We do this by intentionally tying ourselves to the church, to other Christians, to the Word of God, and to the disciplines of the Christian life. So if you don't take steps to insure your survival, you will always be in grave danger. "If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

The Animal School

A group of animals got together in the forest one day and decided to start a school. There was a rabbit, a bird, a squirrel, a fish, and an eel. They formed a board of education and tried to create a curriculum.

The rabbit insisted that burrowing in the ground be in the curriculum. The fish insisted on swimming. The squirrel insisted that perpendicular tree climbing be included, and the bird wanted flying.

They put all these courses together and wrote a curriculum guide. Then they insisted that all of the animals take all of the subjects.

Although the rabbit was getting an A in burrowing, perpendicular tree climbing was a real problem for him; he kept falling over backwards. Pretty soon he became brain damaged from

these falls, and he couldn't burrow well any more. He found that instead of making an A in burrowing, he was making a C. And, of course, he always made an F in perpendicular climbing.

The bird was really beautiful at flying, but when it came to burrowing in the ground, he couldn't do it so well. He kept breaking his beak and wings. Pretty soon he was making a C in flying as well as an F in burrowing. And he had a very bad time with perpendicular tree climbing.

The squirrel was terrific at perpendicular tree climbing, but was so afraid of the water that he failed swimming altogether.

The fish was easily the best in swimming class, but he wouldn't get out of the water to come to any of the other classes.

The valedictorian of the class was a mentally retarded eel who did everything in a halfway fashion. But the teachers were happy because everybody was taking all the subjects in their broad-based educational curriculum.

(From Everything You've Heard is Wrong by Tony Campolo, Dallas: Word, 1992, pg. 130)

Have you ever felt like the animals in that school? Have you ever been in situation where you are supposed to do things that you are not equipped to do?

The Body of Christ, the church, was designed by God to include everyone, but God never intended for everyone to do everything. You don't have to be like your pastor, or like your youth minister, or like anyone else. God gave you specific abilities—called spiritual gifts—which are to be used in the church and in the world by you and you alone. No one else is gifted quite the way you are, and there are many jobs that only you can do. (1 Corinthians 12)

The call to follow Christ is the call to discover our unique giftedness and then to use our God-given gifts and abilities to bring glory and honor to him.