

Winterfest 2014

Group Devotional Ideas for Saturday Night – 3

The best devotional you can lead for your group is one that is tailor-made for them by you. Listen to the sermons and lessons and as you absorb what is being said at Winterfest, ask yourself, “What question can I ask in our devotional that will allow my teens to process, unpack, and apply all this?” One well-worded, relevant question can take a long time for your group to work through.

You can always ask the question, “What have you seen or heard at Winterfest that really hit you?” Listen attentively as each student shares their response. Make appropriate follow-up comments. Follow where it leads.

There are some discussion questions provided for you below. These questions are based on David Skidmore’s Saturday night lesson and will provide good follow-up opportunities.

1. "What was the point of the three images/illustrations David used? (Puzzle, Table and Trumpet)
2. How would the church be better if we understood and practiced this truth?
3. One is one thing you can do to go home and BE the church?

Also included are four illustrations that may serve to “prime the pump” for your group discussion. Each has an application that fits with the weekend’s theme. These stories can be found in *More Hot Illustrations for Youth Talks* by Wayne Rice.

Wildebeests and Brotherhood

Wildebeests, a type of African antelopes also known as gnus, migrate yearly in huge herds to the plains of Tanzania's Serengeti to mate and to birth their young. Also on the Serengeti Plain roam vicious predators, including the hyena. In this hostile setting, a newborn wildebeest has about 15 minutes to get up and run with the adult herd. Slow starters risk becoming hyena lunch.

Discovery Channel showed film of a wildebeest giving birth on the Serengeti. Her baby barely had time to get used to breathing when the mother nudged it to get it standing. Picture the newborn on wobbly hind legs with its forelegs still bent underneath its bobbing head. Between the mother's nudging the baby's inexperience, the newborn is worn out after five minutes of repeated attempts to stand.

Then the camera picks up a hyena approaching stiff-legged with lowered head and slightly bared teeth. The mother wildebeest bravely steps between the hyena and the baby, but another hyena appears, followed closely by a third. The mother lunges at the newcomer. Although it backs away, another skulks in closer to the helpless infant. Before long a circle of hyenas occupies the mother wildebeest while other hyenas eat the baby.

Meanwhile, spread out nearby, literally thousands of other wildebeest graze, now and then lifting their heads to watch the desperate mother attempt to fight off the hyenas. Any of them could easily help save the newborn, but not a single one does.

Satan, like the hyena, is on the prowl. He also has lots of help. If you try to stand up to him alone, you're almost guaranteed defeat—just like that mother wildebeest.

You can't survive spiritually without other Christians to support you, encourage you, pray for you, and help you grow into a strong follower of Jesus Christ. That's why, when you become a Christian, you are adopted into the family of God. (Romans 8:15) That's why God created the church.

Our habit in today's world is to live our lives alone. To stay out of each other's affairs. To keep our distance. That's not God's way, though. He asks us to love each other and to care for each other, as brothers and sisters in Christ. We weren't made to be like all those wildebeest in the herd that stood off to the side watching one of their own get eaten alive by hyenas.

Pull, Buddy!

A man from the big city was enjoying a relaxing drive in the country when a dog ran in front of his car. He swerved to miss it but lost control of his car and ended up in a ditch. After a few unsuccessful attempts to get his car out, the man sat on his bumper and waited for help to arrive.

He didn't have to wait long. A farmer who lived just down the road came to his aid with a big, powerful-looking horse.

The man watched as the farmer hitched the horse to the car's bumper. When the rope was secure, the farmer yelled, "Pull, Nellie, pull!" But the horse didn't move.

Then the farmer yelled, "Pull, Buster, pull!" But the horse didn't move.

Next the farmer yelled, "Pull, Coco, pull!" But the horse still didn't move.

Finally, the farmer said, "Pull, Buddy, pull!" And the horse dragged the car from the ditch with very little effort.

The motorist was appreciative—and a little curious. "Why did you call out four names when your horse only responded to one?" he asked.

The farmer smiled. "Oh, Buddy is blind," he explained, "and if he thought he was the only one pulling he wouldn't even try!"

Just like Buddy, we need other people to bring out the best in us. As the Scripture says, "Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly

broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:12). That’s why God created us to be part of a community, part of a family, part of the church.

It’s very difficult to live the Christian life alone. It can be done, but like the verse says, one can be overpowered. The devil will find you easy prey. When you have others who are standing with you—even though they are not physically present—you can draw strength and encouragement from their prayers and support. We all really need each other.

The Keeper of the Spring

This story has been attributed to the late Peter Marshall, former chaplain of the U.S. Senate.

There was once an old man who lived high above an Austrian village along the eastern slopes of the Alps. He had been hired by the village council many years ago to clear away the debris from the pools of water up in the mountain crevices that fed the lovely stream flowing through their village. With faithful, silent regularity, he patrolled the hills, removed the leaves and branches, and wiped away the silt that would otherwise choke and contaminate the fresh flow of water. By and by, the village became a popular attraction for visitors. Graceful swans floated along the crystal clear stream; picnickers gathered along its banks; and the view of the water from local shops and cafes was picturesque beyond description.

Years passed. One evening the council met for its semiannual meeting. As they reviewed the budget, they noticed a small amount that was being paid to the “keeper of the spring.” The village treasurer asked, “Who is this ‘keeper of the spring’? Why do we keep him on the payroll year after year? No one ever sees him. Have any of you ever met this man? For all we know, he is simply taking our money and doing us no good whatsoever. In my opinion, this person is no longer necessary.”

Everyone agreed with the treasurer and the council voted unanimously to dismiss the old man.

For several weeks, nothing much changed. The village went about with its business as usual. But by autumn, the trees began to shed their leaves. Small branches snapped off and fell into the pools that fed the stream, hindering the rushing flow of sparkling water. One afternoon, someone noticed a slight yellowish-brown tint in the water. A couple days later the water was much darker. Within another week or two, a slimy film covered sections of the water along the banks and a foul odor was soon detected. The swans left the village, as did the tourists. The economy of the village was in serious peril. Likewise was the health of the village, as many were getting sick from drinking the water.

An emergency meeting of the village council was held. After much discussion, they realized their error in judgment and they hired back the old “keeper of the spring.” And within a few weeks, the beautiful stream came back to life. The swans and visitors gradually returned, as did the vitality and well being of the little village in the Alps. (From *Improving Your Serve* by Charles Swindoll, [Dallas: Word, 1981])

What the “keeper of the spring” meant to the little village, we Christians mean to the world. Jesus called us “salt,” which is to say that we are “preservers” of what is good and true in the world. Like the old man in the mountains, we are called to serve—and to be faithful. We may not get a lot of recognition or appreciation for our efforts, but we have the power to change the world. That’s what Jesus wants us to do. He put us here to serve, and in a very real sense, the well being of the whole world is dependent upon us. We do make a difference!

The “keeper of the spring” had a job which seemed to the village council very insignificant. Yet, when he was no longer around, the entire village suffered. In the same way, we are all important to the church, which is the body of Christ: “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’ On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable—and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor” (1 Corinthians 12:21-23).

Oil Refinery

Once upon a time some visitors took a tour of an oil refinery. The tour guide showed them all the intricacies of the refining process. The vast catalyst chambers, the pipes, the heating vats—everything that went into the refining of oil. As the tour ended, one of the visitors asked the tour guide a simple question. “Sir, you showed us everything except the shipping department. This size oil refinery processes a huge amount of petroleum, turning it into gasoline and lubricants. But you haven’t showed us where it’s all put into containers and shipped out to the world.”

“Well, you see,” said the tour guide, “we don’t have a shipping department. Everything that is produced in this refinery is used up as energy to keep the refinery going.”

The church has to understand that what it does is for the world, not just to keep itself going. Too many programs that churches run exist for no other purpose than to keep the church going. The purpose of the church is not to sustain itself, but to give what it has away to the world. (See Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:15.)
