



Devotional Aids Enrich Lives

Devotional literature is an important resource for the church, but many publishers fail to appreciate its power.

by Isaac Phiri

Did you have your devotion this morning? This question often stirs guilt among Christians because, truth be told, making time for Bible reading and prayer on a regular basis is not easy. Christians agree these disciplines enriches their spiritual lives, and if all were to be honest, many would agree they need help in practicing them regularly. Devotional aids are an important resource for Christians seeking to develop intimacy with God, but sometimes, publishers do not fully appreciate their power.

Recently, I was surprised to learn by accident that one publisher we are very familiar with produces a quarterly devotional. The publisher's staff did not seem very proud of this product. "It is something we do on the side," explained the publisher, looking somewhat embarrassed.

Later, I understood why this publishing team was not enthusiastic about the devotional quarterly. Most of their books are well-researched studies on critical subjects in theology. Their authors were mostly Ph.D.s. The publishing staff was confident those books "contribute to the maturity of the church in our country." The small devotional with its 60 to 100 word "thoughts for the day" did not seem important. The publishers did not feel such a product could "contribute" to creating a more mature Christian community in the country.

Is this not a misconception? Is it true that such literature does not "contribute substantively" to the edification of the Church? Publishers need to awaken to the fact that devotional aids are an important resource for believers. Christians can be powerfully transformed by the word of God during times of reflection. What other genre would be most likely to be used by Christians when they are seeking God?

Perhaps the publisher I talked about above should be less embarrassed about

putting out a devotional book and demonstrate more concern about the quality of its content and presentation. Inexperienced writers, editors and designers are often given the assignments to write, edit and layout devotionals while the most experienced writers, editors and designers focus on "important" Bible commentaries. Is the assumption that a book containing short thoughts for a day has (or should have) less substance than a 500-page treatise? Jesus challenges this assumption. He said so much in so few words.

Devotional books need as much attention as any other books Christians publish. Full editorial attention is needed for each thought however short. Each thought must help readers grasp something important in their relationship with God.

Attention must be given to design so that the feel of the resource contributes to a positive devotional experience. Attention must also be given to manufacturing. Such aids must be printed on suitable paper and bound in an appropriate manner.

In addition, devotionals require effective marketing. The publisher who was embarrassed of publishing a quarterly devotional later admitted the product was not doing very well on the market. This came as no surprise. Little effort was made to communicate the availability of this resource or to explain its benefits. Without marketing, a good resource cannot reach the public.

Publishing personal devotional aids does not sound as serious as publishing theological texts, scholarly Bible commentaries or books on social issues. However, we should never underestimate the value of these aids in helping Christians develop a closer relationship with God.

The discipline to pray and read God's word daily enriches Christian lives. Did you have your devotion this morning?❖