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God Is Speaking

A Christian Actor's Devotional

By Glynis M. Belec

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my good friends and drama team leaders, Yvonne Timmerman and Joan Reinders. Yvonne, your quiet demeanor and thoughtful direction is always there to calm me, focus me and massage my soul while you, Joan, motivate, inspire and encourage me to express myself dramatically. What a team we make! God has blessed me and equipped me for service by introducing you both into my life, and I believe He has wonderful things in store for us! Acts 1:8.

INTRODUCTION

"In the beginning ..." God created the canvas, prepared the stage and set the scene for the greatest drama ever. Jesus, the Master Storyteller, shared parables, provided object lessons, and used dramatic detail to teach, to encourage and to cause His followers to reflect upon the mighty power of God. Creativity is an attribute of God. Ministry in the form of the dramatic arts allows us the opportunity to be witnesses for Christ and to use our gifts to present the truth of God's Word in a dramatic way.

Drama is mobile, flexible, and can have an impact on participants and audiences alike, as long as the focus on Christ is maintained. Trying to keep this focus can be a challenge for directors and it is with this thought in mind that "God Is Speaking, A Christian Actor's Devotional," has been prepared.

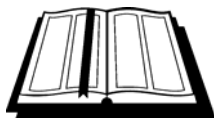
Although an appreciative and responsive audience is the culmination of much time, toil and effort, as directors of Christian drama we need to know that our cast and crew have also reaped rewards from their participation; rewards that go beyond the congratulatory remarks and fine applause. Was God truly speaking through our performance? Has a heart been stirred as a result of our presentation? Has *my* heart been stirred?

"God Is Speaking, A Christian Actor's Devotional" offers a unique "to be picked up at any time" type of book that can be used at meetings, at rehearsals, as a relaxation tool to calm the butterflies prior to a performance, or as a private devotional.

God has set the stage. Auditions are over. The cast has been selected. Where does everyone fit into the big picture? "God Is Speaking, A Christian Actor's Devotional" will shed some light for readers and hearers and doers and even dreamers as the focus is upon the Good News of Jesus Christ; a focus that will catch the attention of youth and adults who are interested in Christian dramatic arts.

May God bless your ministry dramatically!

Take 1: Did Adam and Eve Have Belly Buttons?



The Script: For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. *Psalm 139:13-14.*

Center Stage

Everyone loves a baby. They're cute (most of the time) and they do goofy things like burping in church during the sermon.

Maybe you recall from Biology 101 that, before you took your first breath, God had issued you a lifeline. That lifeline, or umbilical cord, connected you to your mom while you were in her womb. Through this incredible structure, you were nourished. Although the menu didn't include a triple deluxe burger with a side order of deep-fried zucchini sticks, the nutrients provided were perfect to help you grow into a cute little chubby-faced crumb crusher.

At birth, your umbilical cord was cut. Sure, you were tiny and dependent and all you did was eat and sleep and have your diapers changed, but

you were a unique individual on the road to independence. Soon you would stuff your own face and eventually choose the food you wanted to eat (like a triple deluxe burger and a side order of deep-fried zucchini sticks)!

God has offered you another lifeline. Rather than a physical connection, He offers you spiritual nutrition through His Word. It soon becomes clear that God has created you exactly to His own specification. You are not a result of some protoplasmic explosion but rather a carefully planned out creation with a particular purpose.

What better way is there to give praise to God than to tell others about His mighty works using the gifts and abilities that He has given you?

Curtain Call

Consider your belly button. Think about how long you would have lasted if your umbilical cord was obstructed. Think about the importance of maintaining a lifeline with your Creator. How can you show God today that you praise Him for creating you unique?

Hmmm ... Let Me Think: *(Jot your thoughts on separate paper.)*



Encore

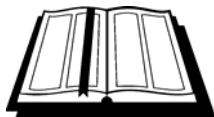
If you offer babysitting during your next production, take a quick peek in the nursery at the babies before you go onstage and remember that God has created us one of a kind. Thank God for your lifeline.



Prayer

Great Creator, You are an incredible artist. You have taken my small life and allowed me to express myself in a unique way. I thank you that You gave me breath. I too often forget that my abilities are because of You. Without my lifeline, I would not be effective for Your kingdom. I pray that I will always desire to serve and praise You, Lord. Amen.

Take 2: Beauty and the Beast Within



The Script: Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. *2 Corinthians 1:4.*

Center Stage

Jessica's piercing, sapphire-blue eyes twinkled when she laughed. Her peaches and cream complexion accented by roseblush cheeks bore a tiny scar just over her left eyebrow. "It's nothing; it happened a few years ago," she would tell the inquisitive. Nobody in the youth group knew much about Jessica.

Charlie said with a wink, "My premature gray hair is no longer premature!" Charlie liked to laugh now, and if he managed to give someone else a chuckle, he felt like a million dollars! It wasn't that many years ago that Charlie thought he would never laugh again. Isabelle loved working in the church nursery. She wanted to be where the babies were. Sometimes when Isabelle rocked a baby to sleep, she would shed a tear. Her friends would laugh and call her "hormonal."

She would smile and retreat into her thoughts.

In drama sometimes we use masks to create a different character. Used properly, the transformation can be an effective one because we cannot use facial expressions while wearing a mask; we rely upon body language and the delivery of lines to convey emotion and attitude.

Jessica, Charlie and Isabelle had a secret: they each wore a mask. Jessica had been physically and sexually abused by her father. Charlie was a reformed alcoholic. Isabelle was the product of a botched abortion attempt.

We do not have to travel far to arrive at the mission field. Often, God points to our own flock where many hearts are aching and struggling to grasp what it truly means to forgive or to be forgiven.

Curtain Call

Have you ever acted using a mask? Is your approach to acting different when you don't use a mask? What kind of "mask" do you wear in your everyday life? Can we ever help people remove their masks? Is this a wise thing to do?

Hmm Let Me Think: *(Jot your thoughts on separate paper.)*



Encore

If you are going to use a disguise in your production, consider the character that you want to portray. Think about your audience and remember the Jessicas and Charlies and Isabelles. Ask God to make you more sensitive to others.



Prayer

Heavenly and loving Father, may my direction always come from You. Help my focus shift from self to others. Allow me to discover the incredible mission field that needs to hear about the Truth of the Gospel and the Way to eternal peace. Let me never attempt to disguise my feelings about You. Amen.

Take 3: The Shirt Off My Back



The Script: In all things I have shown you that by so toiling one must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Acts 20:35.

Center Stage

It was coffee break. Trevor and his dad pulled up to the drive-thru speaker and asked for their usual "double-doubles." The bubbly, anonymous voice thanked the hardworking father-son duo for their order and asked them to drive to the first window to pay for their purchase.

As the grinning girl in the chocolate brown uniform cheerfully handed the steamy brew over, she noticed Trevor's red hooded sweater. "Where did you get your sweater?" the smiling coffee server boldly asked. "Uh ... I can't remember" came the puzzled reply. Trevor looked at the red sweater he was wearing, wracking his brain to recall where it came from. "I've been looking for one of those." She smiled and bid the father and his teenage son farewell and ceremoniously told them to enjoy the rest of their day.

Amused by the brief encounter, Trevor and his dad continued on their way, sipping their coffee.

"Should I?" Trevor asked. "Why not?" answered his smiling father. Dad stopped the car in the parking lot. Trevor pulled off his sweater and went into the coffee shop.

"Here you go," Trevor thrust the sweater into the hands of the surprised girl wearing the headset. "You might want to wash it before you wear it." He smiled and left. "I wish I had left a tract in the pocket," Trevor grinned as they headed back to work. "I should have told her that I gave her my sweater because that's what Jesus would want me to do. I hate it when I miss an opportunity to witness!"

His dad grinned. "I don't think you missed anything, Trev. Check out your T-shirt." Trevor looked at the picture on his shirt: Jesus with outstretched arms and nail-pierced hands and a caption reading, "I love you this much."

Curtain Call

The costumes we wear onstage are temporary coverings intended to create atmosphere and presence and to help us assume roles and enhance characterization. When the production is over and you remove your costume what sort of character emerges then?

Hmmm ... Let Me Think: *(Jot your thoughts on separate paper.)*



Encore

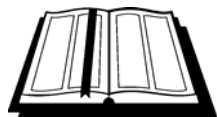
To truly give is to truly serve. Giving can take many forms, whether giving of your time, talents or material possessions. Jesus laid it out for us when He told us that it is better to give than to receive, and when we put it into practice it sure feels like the right thing to do. During rehearsals (while you are waiting for your entrance) take a moment to reflect upon who you really are underneath the costume.



Prayer

Gracious Father, You supply our every need. You clothe us and feed us and tend us as a shepherd cares for his flock. Make our motivations proper and pleasing to You. Allow us to find opportunities to give of ourselves whether it be through talent or treasure. Use us for Your purpose. Amen.

Take 4: The Bittersweet Taste of Freedom



The Script: Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey." *Exodus 24:7.*

Center Stage

Pavlov was missing. He made his great escape early one morning, slipping out when the back door wasn't closed properly. The determined pooch yearned to experience liberty and headed for the hills.

Pavlov wasn't a bad dog; just carefree. It seemed his desire for freedom monopolized his moments and he sought ways to escape. Something had to be done, for this was not the first time he had attempted to bolt, but it seemed opportunity had presented itself and Pavlov was taking advantage.

The solution? Obedience class. Once Pavlov learned to abide by instruction and was able to decipher commands, he was able to experience true freedom. No longer would he have to be tied up for he could be trusted to stay close and to respond appropriately.

At times we are like Pavlov and long to do things our way. We think we know what is best and we often complain about restrictions or direction. God gives assignments to people and sometimes we are to take the initiative and lead but other times we are to heed direction

Curtain Call

Imagine the resulting chaos if each actor felt he had the freedom to state his opinion every time the director spoke during rehearsals. Not much would be accomplished for the Kingdom. When is it most difficult to obey? Why?

Hmmm ... Let Me Think: *(Jot your thoughts on separate paper.)*



Encore

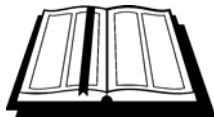
Think about all the different people who are involved in making a successful production and pray for each one individually over the next week. Think about the "script" God personally penned for your life. Try your best to stick to it.



Prayer

Lord, I know You hear my prayers and that Your will is always done. Help me to be obedient to You always. Forgive me for blunders and for the times I try to rewrite the "script." I desire to glorify You; thank you for the freedom I have in Jesus. Amen.

Take 5: Sin Stinks



The Script: Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord" - and you forgave the guilt of my sin. *Psalms 32:5.*

Center Stage

The smell was disgusting. Every time Sally walked through the door to the basement she gagged. "What stinks?" Sally asked her mother. Her mom, who was clutching a peculiar towel-clad bundle and making her way to the laundry room seemed just as puzzled. "I don't know," she answered dumping the dirty laundry beside the washing machine.

"Go get the carpet deodorizer and spread some around," Sally's mom said, reaching for the can of air freshener. Sally sprinkled the white powder around liberally on the carpet. Soon it smelled like a bouquet of fresh gardenias.

But later, the stink was back. "Gross!" Sally turned up her nose. Where was the smell coming from? She started looking under the chairs and in the corners of the room. Sally lifted up the globe and shrieked. There lay the source of the stench - a dead mouse. No wonder the air freshener and carpet deodorizer had not been able to get rid of the smell; the source was still present.

Sin is like that. Whenever we do something wrong, we feel bad. It's like having that dead mouse in our pocket. No matter how hard we try to conceal or cover up our sin, sooner or later it surfaces. It stinks.

Curtain Call

Have you ever played the part of Satan in a production or have you ever wanted to? Satan is a character that you could really ham up and have a lot of fun with. Should Satan or demons be characters that we fool with and make light of?

Hmmm ... Let Me Think: *(Jot your thoughts on separate paper.)*



Encore

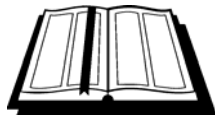
Sin, no matter how hard we try to conceal it, remains a consuming part of our lives. The repulsive odor of sin can only be eliminated by the shed blood of Jesus Christ. He bore our sins so that we can smell sweet as we bow before the throne of God. Remember, before your next production, to pray for everyone involved, and if someone is cast in the role of a demon or Satan, ask God to surround each of them with His angels.



Prayer

God of all creation, as we consider the atoning sacrifice that Jesus made for us, we ask for discernment. Help us to rebuke in Christ's name, the temptations that Satan so deviously sets before us. Thank you that we can confess our sins to You and help me to never try to cover up my offenses. Amen.

Take 6: If God is Dead, Then Who Did I Speak to This Morning?



The Script: Come to Him, to that Living Stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious. 1 Peter 2:4.

Center Stage

My goal was to select the perfect combination of words that would appeal to the people. I needed a snappy synopsis of my drama workshop for I was keen to show potential participants how Christian drama could be an effective ministry tool.

"Looking for fresh ideas and ways to present the Gospel message during the Sunday school year?" I began. "Perhaps you are baffled and bewildered trying to discover the most meaningful Christmas and Easter productions. Are you searching for a different form of outreach for your community? Step inside the curtain and learn through drama, mime, recitation and readings, unique ways to make the message of Jesus come to life!"

I was pleased with what I had prepared for the

pamphlet that was to be sent to teachers and leaders of children and youth. Yes, I was going to do my best to promote Christian drama as a way of bringing Scripture to life.

But something was not quite right. I read over what I had written. My stomach was starting to feel like I was on a roller coaster. I read my words again. It was the last statement that was causing my stomach to flip-flop "... to make the message of Jesus come to life." I suddenly realized why I was feeling uneasy about my choice of words. I was going to put life into the Scriptures? Isn't that God's job? The implication (although not the intention) was that the Word of God and the message portrayed through His precious Son, Jesus, was (gulp!) dead.

Curtain Call

Can you think of a Bible story that has been made into a movie? Was it accurate? Think about the most dramatic story in the Bible. What would it be like if the entire Bible was dramatized?

Hmmm ... Let Me Think: *(Jot your thoughts on separate paper.)*



Encore

If you are presenting a Bible story, make certain that the interpretation is accurate and that the glory is given to God for creating such meaningful and living examples for us to follow. Compress the message of your production into one sentence.

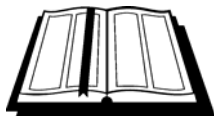


Prayer

Living Father, without Your Word we would have no direction and no obvious purpose.

Help us to realize that it is because of the living, breathing, Son of God that we are able to focus on serving and planting seeds for the Kingdom. We praise You that because You live ... we live! Amen.

Take 7: Dirty Money



The Script: And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost." Luke 19:9-10.

Center Stage

"Does anyone want this new \$20 bill?" Pastor Bob asked the youth group. Puzzled faces were suddenly obscured by a tidal wave of hands shooting up. Twenty bucks would easily cover a decent night out at the movies or bowling - or both.

After Pastor Bob got the excited group settled down he held the \$20 bill high in the air for everyone to see and then crumpled the fresh, crisp bill before their very eyes. There were a few groans of protest. "Does anyone still want this \$20?" the question was posed again.

Once more, hands shot up and there were a few lame attempts at begging. Pastor Bob winked at the offers to relieve him of the money. Then he took the \$20 bill and threw it on the floor and crushed it underneath his size twelve basketball shoe.

Complaints and wails of protest filled the air as the befuddled youth group watched the \$20 bill

being soiled and marred from its original immaculate condition. "Who wants the twenty now? It's all dirty and crumpled and it doesn't look very appealing. Any takers?"

There were a few hesitations, but soon everyone had their hands in the air again. "How come you still want the money?" Pastor Bob asked. "It's still worth \$20," someone said, "even though it's not in very good condition anymore."

Pastor Bob smiled. "In God's eyes, we are a lot like this \$20 bill," he said as he held up the crushed money. "Even though we may have been soiled by sin, crumpled by poor choices and crushed underfoot by worldly temptations, in the end, we are still worth the same to God. Our value as children of God never decreases."

Pastor waved the money in the air again. "Now," he said seriously, "does anyone wanna go out for pizza?" A sea of smiles appeared.

Curtain Call

Have you ever forgotten a line in a production? Do you recall the fear and panic that sets in when this happens? A prompter can be helpful or an experienced fellow actor can be instrumental in steering you back on course. Is it better to rely on a prompter or is it better to recover yourself?

Hmmm ... Let Me Think: *(Jot your thoughts on separate paper.)*



Encore

If you have a freewill collection for your next production, take a look at all the paper money collected and notice the condition of each. Look at the audience and think about the condition of each of their hearts and pray that Jesus will touch someone (even one) with the good news message of Salvation.



Prayer

Lord Jesus, You go to the heart of this troubled world and seek those who seem so soiled and lost. Help each of us be on Your list of employees and to toil for the Kingdom where the eternal reward is all we ever need. Your grace is sufficient. Amen.

Take 8: The Peacock Problem



The Script: Work happily together. Don't try to act big. Don't try to get into the good graces of important people, but enjoy the company of ordinary folks. And don't think you know it all. *Romans 12:16.* (TLB)

Center Stage

Jeremy was a good actor. He was an inspiration to other young players in the drama ministry at his church and he loved to serve Jesus in that capacity. His enthusiasm was contagious. For a young man, his liquid baritone voice was a compliment to his natural talent and it wasn't long before a local theater group heard about Jeremy. When the director of the group approached him and asked him to try out for a part in an upcoming production, Jeremy was flattered and immediately agreed to take the script home to prepare for the auditions. The eager young actor saw this as an opportunity to break away from the church drama ministry and to get a taste of "real" acting. Jeremy dreamed about when he would be "discovered" and how, one day, he would become a big-time movie star.

Jeremy read the play. He knew that it was going to be different from the Christian drama that he had been used to, but he didn't realize ... how

different. The 21-year-old character that he was supposed to portray had an affair with an older woman, an arrogant attitude toward life and loved to incite trouble wherever the scene took him. Jeremy was distressed. At first he tried to justify the content of the play. It was no use. His stomach was in knots. Jeremy felt trapped. He had thought that God had opened a door for him; a chance to break out and move up. He had been flattered by the offer from the theater group. His friends were impressed. They thought he was cool. Being cool was important to Jeremy. But more important than being cool was not being a fool. He knew others often looked to him as an example. Jeremy also knew that this did not fall into the category of serving Jesus. Was he prepared to compromise his faith for his pride? Jeremy gulped and picked up the telephone. He needed to make a call.

Curtain Call

When people congratulate us after a performance, we feel good. Is it okay to feel good? How can we give more glory to God than ourselves? Can pride be a problem for a Christian drama group?

Hmmm ... Let Me Think: *(Jot your thoughts on separate paper.)*



Encore

All of us struggle with pride. Our decisions need to be made not on what makes us feel good, but on what God says is the right thing to do. In Paul's letter to the Philippians it offers the following decision-making guidelines: "And, now, brothers, as I close this letter let me say this one more thing: Fix your thoughts on what is true and good and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely, and dwell on the fine, good things in others. Think about all you can praise God for and be glad about. Keep putting into practice all you learned from me and saw me doing, and the God's peace will be with you."



Prayer

Oh Lord, we sometimes get so full of ourselves that it seems we have no room for You. Help us to always put You first and to rejoice in our humility. As we strive to use our gifts and abilities that You have blessed us with, let us always remember Whom we serve. You are awesome, God. Amen.

Take 9: Big Mouth



The Script: How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth.
Psalms 119:103.

Center Stage

Brad was mad. When Brad got mad, he got loud. Everyone within earshot quickly learned about the argument he had with his parents. "My parents don't understand me," he said to a couple of the guys. "They always say they might need the car and I never get to drive to youth group."

"Hey, man," said Nick. "You're using some pretty harsh words. Two weeks ago you drove here, remember? You gave me a ride home."

"Yeah, so what?" Brad continued, "That was only once."

"Don't say 'never' then!" Nick punched Brad playfully in his arm.

Everyone mingled and talked as they waited for Pastor Jim to begin their meeting with his ever-famous icebreaker object lesson. Twenty minutes passed and no Pastor Jim.

"Man," Brad whined, "ain't that just like an adult? You just can't depend on them. Jerks to the end!" In his vain attempt at trying to be funny, Brad hadn't noticed Pastor Jim walk into the room. All the youth fell silent when they saw the look on Pastor's face.

"Can you come here a minute, Brad?" The downcast youth leader reached out for Brad's arm. At first Brad thought about resisting but felt

an urgency to do as he was told. He also felt like a loud-mouthed moron. "I just got a call from your dad," Pastor Jim said. "He's at the hospital."

Brad went pale. "What happened?" Brad gulped.

"When your dad got home from dropping you off here he heard your mom screaming. Jennifer fell down the basement steps and has a nasty cut on her head. Your dad said your little sister will need to undergo some tests and may have to be flown to another hospital. Apparently she took quite a fall, but the doctor said she arrived at the hospital in the nick of time. They are stitching her up right now." Pastor Jim put a gentle hand on Brad's shoulder. "Are you okay?" he asked.

"Huh? Uh ... I guess, I was just thinking about what would have happened if I'd have taken the car tonight." Brad paled at the thought.

"Take my car and drive carefully to the hospital, Brad."

"You trust me?" Brad noticed Pastor Jim's deep blue eyes were watering as he took the keys. "Sorry for shooting of my big mouth back there."

"Forgiven!" Pastor Jim said. "Now go, and drive carefully."

Curtain Call

In a play the characters exchange dialogue or conversation. Dialogue and action reveal information about the setting, tone and mood of a play. Dialogue also reveals conflict or humor and the character and integrity of the speaker. What was your favorite part in a play? Why did you enjoy assuming this role? What particular character trait did you display?

Hmmm ... Let Me Think: *(Jot your thoughts on separate paper.)*



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Encore

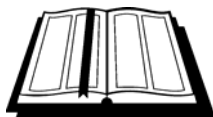
At your next rehearsal listen carefully to the dialogue in a particular scene. Assess what the characters are revealing about themselves as they converse. Determine that the next words you speak off-stage to someone will be as sweet as honey.



Prayer

Holy Father and Teacher, we thank you for giving us the ability to utter sounds and formulate words. As we consider the mere 26 letters of our alphabet we marvel at how we can combine words to express ourselves. Teach us to speak kindly to others and to let our words flow like sweet honey. Amen.

Take 10: To Die For



The Script: May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. *Romans 15: 5-6.*

Center Stage

Kayla was smacked in the side of the head and knocked to the ground. Her attackers roughed her up and ran off with her brand- name sneakers and matching baseball cap.

Jerome left the bowling alley and was no more than ten minutes from home. He came face-to-face with a gang of sewer-mouthed skinheads and the next thing Jerome remembered was waking up in the local emergency room. He'd been beaten up and robbed of his new black leather bomber jacket.

Some people just have a need for "stuff" and they will stop at nothing to get it. Robbery is not a new concept. Thieves and rip-off artists have been around for hundreds of years. What causes a person to knock another human being senseless for the sake of a leather jacket with a

label? Who, in their right mind, would pound the daylight out of a person because she's wearing designer sneakers? Where's the sense in it all? What does it say about a person when a label means more than a life? Is there a label that is worth dying for?

The disciples were first labeled "Christians" at Antioch. (See Acts 11:26) Some called these followers of Christ - Christian - out of admiration while others gave them this label as a form of mockery.

As the church expanded, the title Christian stuck. Believers discovered that it was a blessing to bear the name. Over the years many Christians have died for their faith. To them, the name Christian, was to die for.

Curtain Call

If you want your audience to look at a particular actor, one way to achieve this is to have all the other actors look at him or her. That way the person becomes the focus of attention. Do you like being the focus of attention onstage? Off-stage? How do people get attention in this world? Is it wrong to wear designer clothes?

Hmmm ... Let Me Think: *(Jot your thoughts on separate paper.)*



Encore

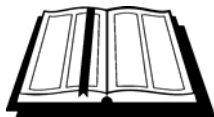
Look carefully at the roles of everyone in your next production. What characteristics contribute to the character? Think about how much more important it is to please God than people. Ask God to help you shift from doing what is popular to doing what is right.



Prayer

Lord and Father of Christianity, help me to never be ashamed to bear the title of Christian. Let me always be certain of my faith. I rejoice and am constantly in awe because of Your magnificence and might, Your constant presence and Your unconditional love. Amen.

Take 11: Paid to Laugh



The Script: There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh. *Ecclesiastes 3:1-4a.*

Center Stage

It was a haunting, fascinating sight. Some even declared it hideous, fearing for the faint of heart. The flamboyant and gaudy appearance of the half-man, half-machine in the glass box intrigued me. His flailing arms and spirited, contagious laughter compelled me to come closer. As if drawn by a mighty magnet I moved quietly toward the glass case and stood captivated by the mechanical clown. My previously pursed lips relaxed into a gentle smile until I could no longer suppress giggling spasms that were beginning to constrict my throat. Soon my sides ached. I felt a fool but I could not help participating in the merriment. Nor could I take my eyes off the cackling clown. Then the laughter ceased. The silence was an assault on my ears. I wanted more. My joy was not complete. I fished into my pocket for another quarter and quickly pushed it into the gaping jaws of the metal money box. The jester jiggled and gyrated for a moment until I heard the echoing sounds coming from deep inside his metal gut. Once again his giggles turned to hilarity and before I knew it, I was

consumed. One dollar and twenty-five cents later I started to wonder about my sanity and the foolishness of it all.

Most people like the feel of laughter. A good belly laugh now and again warms the cockles of a heart and can tickle from head to toe. Thank goodness we don't have to dole out the dollars every time we need cheering up, though. God said, "There is a time for laughter." (Ecclesiastes 3:4a) He ordained it and He gave each of us a sense of humor to receive it. Yet the mocking laughter of a mechanical clown will never make our joy complete no matter how many quarters we feed it.

When Jesus bled and died on the cross it was a time for weeping. He covered the cost with his life. When He rose from the grave, sorrow turned into joy, and laughter resounded in the hearts and souls of believers. I'm speculating that when I get to heaven I can put the quarters back in my pocket. Heavenly laughter - the sweetest, most contagious sound - joy, complete.

Curtain Call

Comedy is a type of drama which appeals to both audience and cast. What do you think about the use of comedy in church? What about portraying a biblical character as humorous? Do you think Jesus ever laughed? When is laughter inappropriate?

Hmmm ... Let Me Think: *(Jot your thoughts on separate paper.)*



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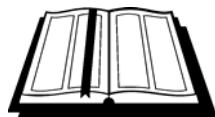
When the soldiers mocked and jeered Jesus their laughter was cruel and inappropriate. Make it your goal to be righteous in your laughter so scars of indignity and ridicule will not be the result. If you are presenting a comedy, consider how it effectively uses humor to deliver a message.



Prayer

Lord Jesus, when we think what it would be like to see Your radiant smile we feel warm inside. We know that when You came to this earth You were God with skin on, but You were also man who felt a range of emotion. Thank you for giving us reasons to rejoice. Teach us to touch the seekers, the hungry and the lost with a Christ-like smile from the heart. Amen.

Take 12: Out of the Zone



The Script: But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Acts 1:8.

Center Stage

"A detention center?" Julie's brown eyes opened wide as she considered the possibility. "Will it be safe?" she wanted to know. A collective hush fell upon the cast and crew as they waited for their drama ministry leader to answer.

"Perfectly safe, Julie," replied Becky. "There are certain rules and regulations that we must strictly adhere to, but these young offenders are hungering for love and attention and need to hear that God loves them."

"So what do you think, everybody? Shall we do it?" Becky asked, recalling the telephone conversation she had yesterday with Pastor Jim from Faith Manor. He had heard about their drama ministry and asked if they would be willing to do a presentation.

Barely a year had passed since the drama group made their debut, but they had already found fresh ways to present the message of Jesus and they were loving it. All their performances,

however, had taken place within the familiar walls of their home church. With a membership of twenty, the drama group now faced a new challenge.

"What if they don't like us?" Nathan broke the silence.

"What if they laugh at us?" Jeanette wondered. Soon the chatter began and discussion resumed.

Graham reminded everyone about the mission statement they had created a few months ago. "We said we wanted to shine for Jesus and be all we can be by sharing our faith through drama, remember?"

"Yeah!" Josh yelled, "drama is our form of service to God!" Everyone agreed and the enthusiasm grew. "Let's do it!" someone else called out. The decision was made. It was unanimous. They would follow through on their original goad, to share their faith and to be witnesses for Jesus.

Curtain Call

It is easier to minister in a "church" environment where the name of Jesus is familiar but discipleship also needs to happen where souls are lost, people are without purpose and where the Gospel of Jesus Christ is rarely heard. Jesus did not tell his disciples to stick close to home where they would more than likely be appreciated, encouraged and not rejected. Have you ever considered presenting a drama in a place where you may not be received with open arms, such as a jail? Do you shudder at the thought of performing outside your comfort zone?

Hmmm ... Let Me Think: *(Jot your thoughts on separate paper.)*



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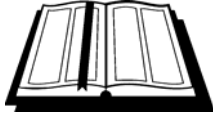
Decide now to s-t-r-e-t-c-h yourself for the sake of Jesus. As an infant fears taking that first crucial step, a Christian stepping out of his or her comfort zone, too, finds it difficult at first, but the journey does get easier.



Prayer

Heavenly Father, may our motives always be pure and honest and worthy of You gazing upon our endeavors as we use our gifts to serve You. We want to feel safe and productive but we also know there will be times when it seems our efforts are in vain. Help us to always be encouraged by Your unfailing love and the knowledge that God has set the perfect stage. Amen.

Take 13: Backs to the Future



The Script: Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? *James 2:2-4.*

Center Stage

"What's a squeegee kid, Mom?" eight-year-old Brandon asked. His Mom had just tossed a quarter out the car window at a young lad clad in tattered army fatigues. His nose stud fascinated Brandon. "And how come he has an earring in his nose?"

Mrs. Sketchly was in a hurry and was annoyed at herself for taking this road in the first place. She knew the squeegee kids hung out on that particular corner and she hated it when she was forced to stop there at a red light. Even though the scruffy young men always asked if a driver wanted his windshield washed, she felt intimidated by their presence and gave in.

"They're just a bunch of freeloading panhandlers, Brandon, and I don't even want you to look at them," Mrs. Sketchly answered.

"What's a panhandler?" Brandon wanted to know.

"People who don't have a job and pester good people for money!"

Brandon recognized the tone of his mother's

voice and decided not to pursue the matter any further.

The next day during church Brandon sat with his mother and listened to the pastor preach about the attributes of Christ.

"Christ always welcomed the downcast and the derelict," he said. "Our Lord never judged a person by their position, clothing or outward appearance. He treated all equally." The pastor challenged the congregation to assess their own criteria for judging others. "Do we see others through the eyes of Christ or do we sometimes consider ourselves a little better than others?"

Brandon noticed that his mother stopped taking sermon notes and was covering her face with her hand. He heard her snifle. "Mommy, are you okay?" he whispered. She took Brandon's hand and squeezed it gently.

"I'll be fine," she said. Brandon wondered if his mom was thinking about the squeegee kid. Maybe he would ask her later.

Curtain Call

It is important to remember not to turn our backs to the audience when we are onstage delivering lines unless it is a required part of the presentation. When we turn away from the audience our voices are not clear and the message may be distorted. When we sit in church on Sundays dressed in all our finery, we are sitting with our backs to the world. How do we spend the rest of the week? What are some ways that we can come face-to-face with the lost and the lonely?

Hmmm ... Let Me Think: *(Jot your thoughts on separate paper.)*



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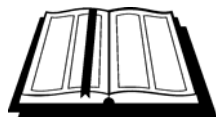
Food banks and homeless shelters are often in need of donations or volunteers. Maybe a portion of a freewill collection for one of your performances can go there. Consider how you could help in other ways. What would it be like to work in a soup kitchen?



Prayer

God of mercy and compassion, why do we sometimes have a self-righteous attitude? Forgive us for any thoughts we may entertain that elevate us. Only You are deserving. When You were lifted on the cross You chose to die in our place. Help us to show the same love and compassion that You showed. As we step out of our church building let us feel refreshed and ready to face the world. We love You, Lord of all. Amen.

Take 14: Hopeful Homer



The Script: And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. *Ephesians 6:18.*

Center Stage

This is a parable about a frog called Homer. Homer rose early one morning and stretched his lazy, long legs on his lily pad bed and with one giant leap, he landed on the riverbank. Homer was hungry. "Breakfast is always better in the barn," he thought. The flies were juicier and the beetles were bigger.

The sun winked at Homer from behind the fluffy, cotton wool clouds. But Homer didn't notice. He was too busy thinking about breakfast and hopped off towards the barn. As he approached the great red door he heard the familiar clang of a metal bucket. "Perfect timing," he smiled as he watched the farmer finish up in the milk room.

The cows mooed contentedly and munched on fresh, sweet hay. But Homer wasn't interested in hay. He wanted breakfast. He spotted the wagging cows' tails and smiled, for he knew if the tails were wagging, there would be flies.

Homer took a few giant hops and headed for the center aisle. Flies and bugs buzzed everywhere. He wanted to get into a good position before he selected his breakfast. Homer took one more giant leap and ... KERPLOSH! Homer had not noticed the big bucket of creamy liquid sitting on the concrete floor.

Thank goodness Homer knew how to swim. But that was all he could do. Try as he might, he could not grasp the sides of the bucket to pull himself out nor could he jump for once he stopped

swimming he started to sink. So Homer swam and he thought and he swam. He was getting tired. His once strong back legs were heavy and before long, Homer felt as if he could swim no further. He gave up and quickly disappeared under the white liquid. "Pthooie!" Homer popped his head up and started to swim again. He couldn't give up hope. He knew he would surely drown if he stopped concentrating on what he was doing so he kept swimming and thinking, and swimming and thinking.

As Homer swam he spotted something floating in the milk. Something he hadn't seen before. He tried to swim over to it but it became increasingly difficult to move in the milk. "What's happening?" wondered Homer. He turned his head and saw more. Homer stopped swimming. "That's odd," thought Homer, "I'm not sinking." Homer looked down to see what he was sitting on. Pale, yellow blobs had formed in the pail. Butter! Homer was sitting on a blob of butter. He had been swimming so long in the pail of cream that he had turned it into butter.

Homer took one big leap from the blob of floating butter and landed on the concrete floor. Now, Homer was really hungry. He lashed out with his long tongue and seized a fat, juicy fly. "Mmmm ..." Homer smiled, "I'm glad I did not give up hope ... besides," he grinned, "... bugs taste better with a bit of butter."

Curtain Call

Actors use different techniques for memorizing lines. One effective way is to use a tape recorder. How do you learn lines? Is memorization an easy task for you? It is important to become completely familiar with the nature and purpose of the character you are portraying. Have you ever felt like quitting in the middle of a rehearsal?

Hmmm ... Let Me Think: *(Jot your thoughts on separate paper.)*



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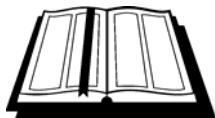
Persevere at learning your lines. Make it a goal to put away your script as soon as possible at rehearsals. You need to stretch and grow in your role and the sooner you put aside your script, the sooner your character will blossom onstage. Persevere in prayer. Make it a goal to put aside the frustrations of the day. You need to stretch and grow as a Christian, and the sooner you set aside worldly concerns and focus on the almighty work of God, the sooner you will blossom in your faith.



Prayer

Almighty Father and giver of life, too soon we give up and think that You do not hear our faint voices and earnest prayers. It is beyond our comprehension how You discern our needs before we even ask it but that is why You are called God. Thank you for giving us direction and purpose and for never giving up on us. May we show the same desire to persevere in all that You set before us. Amen.

Take 15: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly



The Script: The Lord does not look at things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. *1 Samuel 16:7b.*

Center Stage

Nelson never wanted to move to the seniors' home, but after the accident his family had talked him into it. As he peered into the fluorescent-lit bathroom mirror he cringed, again, at the ugly scars on his face.

"You'd think at my age," Nelson mumbled to himself, "people wouldn't care what I look like." Since he arrived at the home two weeks ago, the other residents seemed to be avoiding him. Many offered social graces but hurried on their way. Others simply stared at Nelson as he passed them in the hallway. No one stopped to chat. Nelson longed to share a tale or two; to play a game of checkers or chess. Melinda loved to play chess. How he wished his Melinda were still alive. She wouldn't give a hoot what he looked like. "You might be a little crusty on the outside, but you're as soft as fluff on the inside," he could just imagine her words.

Nelson missed his wife of fifty-two years. She had died eight months ago and still, not a day would go by that Nelson didn't get a lump in his gizzard just thinking about her. She would not have left a pot of grease on the stove. How could he have been so foolish? He almost burned the house down and killed himself in the process.

Nelson brushed his gray hair and got ready to do what he had done every day for the past two weeks. He would sit in his chair and wait. He would wait for meals. He would wait for his pills.

He would wait for visitors.

Later in the afternoon, Nelson had dozed off in his chair but he was awakened by a familiar voice. "Gran'pa! Gran'pa! Wake up ... it's me," a little voice begged for recognition.

Becky, his four-year-old granddaughter, hugged him tenderly as he opened his tired eyes. "What happened to your face, Gran'pa?" Becky cocked her head in wonderment. She had not seen Grandpa since the accident. Nelson suddenly felt nauseated. His one and only ray of sunshine was about to reject him, too. Becky got off his knee and moved closer to her mother.

"Hello, Dad," Annette said, feeling sorry for her disfigured father. "Grandpa had an accident and his face got badly burnt, Becky. Remember?" Alyssa put a comforting arm on Becky's shoulder.

Becky was quiet for a moment as she stared at Nelson. "It looks like a giant butterfly!" Becky giggled, running toward Nelson. "An' I love, love, love butterflies, Gran'pa ... just like I love, love, love you!" She ran to her grandfather and hugged him with a mighty four-year-old hug. "I don't care if you have a butterfly on your face, Gran'pa. I love you from the inside."

Nelson's tears trickled like a spring rain as he held his precious granddaughter close and whispered, "Do you want ol' Grandpa to teach you how to play chess, honey?"

Curtain Call

As you read through a script think about each word and how the character you are portraying would express excitement, sadness, sympathy, joy, fear, anxiety. Assuming a role and creating a credible character requires focus and concentration as you try to "get inside" somebody else's skin. Have you seen a stage play or production recently that demonstrated effective characterization? What was it about the character that you were drawn to? Was it an external attribute or part of the inner character?

Hmmm ... Let Me Think: *(Jot your thoughts on separate paper.)*



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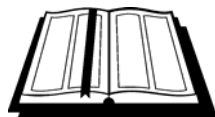
Decide how the characters in a play can influence an audience. Think about a person who is special to you. Why is he or she unique? Have you talked to them lately and told them how they have influenced your life? Maybe you should.



Prayer

Holy Father, Precious Lord, You created us in Your image but we too often, let You down by judging others superficially. Why is it so difficult for us to see beyond the surface? Help us to lift the earthly covers and be sensitive to the needs of others. Teach us to love and laugh and live for You. Amen.

Take 16: The Writing on the Wall



The Script: For by the grace given to me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. *Romans 12:3a.*

Center Stage

The baggy-panted boy couldn't have been any more than 14 years old. Another boy, Juan, with the glistening gold earring, slouched next to him on the rickety old sofa and readjusted his red bandanna.

"Check it out," said Bailey. Juan gawked at the wall where Bailey pointed. "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers." The scripture, 2 Cor. 6:14, was printed in bold, block capitals on the poster and attractively decorated with delicate green ivy.

"What's that mean?" asked Juan.

Bailey sneered and loudly announced to all within earshot, "That means we're trash and God said that nobody who goes to this here church is s'posed to hang around with us, ya' know?"

Pastor John Drummond had overheard the conversation. "Hey, you guys. What are you talking about?" Pastor John was one of the leaders on duty at the youth drop-in center. He had offered the use of the church basement until the new building could be completed.

"Hey, Bailey, my man," Pastor John pushed himself between the two boys on the sofa. "You are not trash! God loves you. He loves us all, you know." Pastor John told the boys that the words on the poster were actually a warning.

"Yeah," Juan scoffed, "keep away from the Christians, or else!" Bailey did a high-five with Juan.

Pastor John tried to explain the verse to the boys. He told how the Apostle Paul was cautioning the Corinthians not to listen or adhere to the teachings of the false leaders of the day and how the people needed to be more aware of their charm and persuasive ways. "It's got nothing to do with anyone being any better than anyone else," he said.

"So what's a Corinthian?" Bailey asked. "Yeah, and who's the 'postle Paul?" Juan said. "Before I answer, I want you to see another poster," Pastor John pointed to another wall: "For by the grace given to me I say to every one of you: 'Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought.'" (Romans 12:3a) "Do you ever think about God?" Pastor John asked. Bailey was suddenly silent. "We did once - at the funeral," Juan quietly looked away. "Funeral?" Pastor John looked puzzled. "Our parents were killed last year in a car accident." Bailey took a deep breath, although the tears welling in his eyes showed his vulnerability. "We're in a foster home right now." Pastor John had no idea Bailey and Juan were brothers. No wonder they seemed protective of each other.

"Hey, you two," Pastor John smiled. "I wouldn't mind grabbing a pizza and hearing the whole story. Are you up to it?" The hurt was now apparent on the faces of the two boys. They needed to talk. The three headed into the kitchen for pizza.

Curtain Call

Street ministry is a great way to reach the un-saved and the un-churched. People are attracted to dramatics, particularly if performed in a non-threatening environment like on a street corner or in a mall. Outreach presentations need to be glorifying to God and also captivating to a non-Christian. Is this possible? How would you handle a heckler in your midst?

Hmmm ... Let Me Think: *(Jot your thoughts on separate paper.)*



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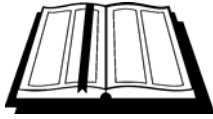
The next time you have an opportunity to perform in a street ministry, or when you are doing any form of outreach, look at your audience and consider their vulnerability. Pray for them and try to speak with someone from the audience after the performance.



Prayer

Jesus, You are the most worthy and You deserve to be honored and glorified with our every breath. Too often we focus too much on our own accomplishments and not enough on your almighty grace. Help us to not be led astray by false teachers and false promises but help us to tenderly shepherd your lambs into the flock. Amen.

Take 17: Tug of War



Script: When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.” *Luke 19:5-7.*

Center Stage

“I am so confused,” Kathleen said, chewing on another thin fingernail. “Sshh,” Megan smiled in response but kept her eyes on the pastor. Megan was glad they had chosen to sit in the balcony this morning. Kathleen wriggled in her seat and her furrowed brow suggested to Megan that her best friend was having trouble understanding the sermon. By the end of the morning service it was obvious that Kathleen wanted to vent.

“Let’s go back to my place for a cup of coffee!” suggested Megan.

“Sounds like a plan. Hook me up!” Kathleen stuffed some papers into her Bible and zipped up the well-worn, rose-colored cover. “Let’s go.”

Megan found the sweetener she knew her calorie-conscious friend liked. They took their cups of coffee and sat in the sunshine on the balcony. “Isn’t it a gorgeous day?” Megan said. Kathleen didn’t really notice the orange sherbet sunshine that smiled warmly on them. She had already opened her Bible and had her nose in the pages.

“Fire away,” Megan grinned. “I know you’re frustrated. I can tell.” She waited for a reply. Kathleen grunted. Megan smiled sipping her black coffee.

“I didn’t share this yet, Meg, but you know those girls at work that I was telling you about - Candace and Melony?” Megan nodded. “Well, they asked me to go out with them next Saturday to the sports bar in Lincoln.”

“So what did you say?” Megan leaned forward.

“For a while I really felt the Lord telling me I should befriend Candace and Melony and I have tried to do that.” Kathleen stirred her coffee and licked the stainless steel teaspoon. “But I don’t feel going to the bar next week is the right thing to do.”

Kathleen told Megan that she declined the girls’ offer to go out. “But the pastor said, in his sermon, that we need to follow the example of Jesus. Jesus shared a meal with a known, unscrupulous tax collector, Zacchaeus, didn’t he? And He talked to prostitutes and other partakers of sinful lifestyles.” Kathleen looked into her half-empty coffee cup.

“You’re right, Kath,” said Megan, “But I don’t think that is the same as going to a bar. Besides, Zacchaeus and the others were anxious to hear what Jesus had to say.” Megan gently touched the hand of her friend. “Do you think Candace and Melony invited you to the bar to hear what you have to say about the kingdom of God?”

“I doubt it,” Kathleen answered.

Megan replied, “You have to be really careful because as Christians we walk on a clearly defined Divine path.”

Kathleen slurped the last of her coffee and looked at her friend. “Yeah?”

Megan continued, “As we journey along the path we are not expected to always walk down the center. Sometimes we have to walk very close to the edge in order to reach those on the other side. But we should never so much as put a foot outside the path. If we do, we could be pulled off the Divine pathway.”

“I think I am getting your drift,” Kathleen smiled. “God doesn’t want me to give up on Candace and Melony but He doesn’t want me to compromise my values, either, huh?”

Megan nodded, “You’re getting it, girl.”

Kathleen had an idea. “How would you like to go to a movie next Friday evening, Meg ... and you don’t mind if I ask a couple of friends along, too, do you?”

Continued next page.

Curtain Call

Improvisation or improv is a theatrical exercise where one or more participants make up words and actions in a scene. For successful improv, you need to be able to react quickly, to listen and cooperate with others and to build upon scenarios. Does improvisation make you nervous? Why? Is it impossible to improvise as we journey through life? How?

Hmmm ... Let Me Think: *(Jot your thoughts on separate paper.)*



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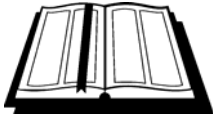
When you do your next performance, personally invite someone who is not saved. Pray for them and make an effort to show the love of Jesus to him or her at every opportunity.



Prayer

Lord Jesus, You know all about being tempted. Help us to stick to the path of righteousness that you have shown us. May we never falter or fail as we journey toward eternity and may we be effective in leading others along that pathway, too. Open our eyes and allow us to see the enormity of a wrong turn. Amen.

Take 18: Born To Be Mild



The Script: The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." *Galatians 5:14*.

Center Stage

Eddie had a big smile, a big brain and big ears. Most people didn't care about Eddie's oversize listening organs, though. They knew their friend had genius capacity, plus he was a nice guy and didn't brag about his intelligence. Eddie could shoot out answers to trivia questions faster than Derek could zap Megatroids into cyberspace. Derek did not like Eddie.

"Hey there, Eddie the Elephant, wanna peanut?" teased Derek one day. Eddie didn't answer. He tried his best to ignore the crass remarks. Some of Derek's tagalong buddies playfully, punched each other in the arm and circled around Eddie.

When Eddie was only ten years old he accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior. He heard stories about how Jesus was mocked and ridiculed. He read how Jesus was silent in the presence of scoffers. Eddie knew he should do the same. But it was hard.

Derek cuffed Eddie in the head and tried to pull his ears as the other boys jeered and laughed. Eddie winced and made a dash for it. Nobody followed him, much to his relief. As he hurried home, Eddie shivered in the cold and wondered if he should tell his parents about what had been happening lately. He tried to think what Jesus might do. The troubled young man prayed for direction. "Tomorrow," he decided, "I will give it one more day and then I will talk to Dad if Derek doesn't back off."

After supper, it started to snow. Eddie stared through the window at the white blanket that was beginning to cover the crusty brown leaves. The cold, winter wind sang her mournful song.

Eddie didn't sleep well. All night long he kept dreaming about Derek and his thugs. Once he dreamed they were shoving him into a garbage can in a back alley. Eddie didn't want to go to school the next day but he knew Jesus would

have faced Derek. If Jesus could - then Eddie would try to follow His example. He prayed and rolled out of bed.

Eddie looked into the mirror and sighed gazing at his ears. "No wonder Derek laughs at me," he thought, and squeezed some peppermint-smelling, pink and white paste onto his toothbrush. "Do I have to really love my enemy?" Eddie mumbled looking again in the mirror. "Okay, God ... I'll try again today." His prayer was short, but sincere.

At school that day it was a relief for Eddie to find out that Derek was absent. Nobody knew where he was and, it seemed, nobody cared. Eddie relaxed a little and was actually looking forward to sitting in the cafeteria with his friends at noon. Derek wasn't going to be there to annoy him.

No sooner had Eddie silently rejoiced in Derek's absence, a gentle tap was heard. Mrs. Adams looked irritated but walked immediately to the classroom door. She stepped into the hallway and muffled voices piqued the curiosity of the students. A few moments later Mrs. Adams reentered the class followed by a slightly embarrassed Derek.

Everyone stared. Eddie couldn't believe his eyes. "Derek has had a bit of an accident," Mrs. Adams began. Eddie wanted to laugh at first but he, all at once, felt pity for the young man who had been making life miserable for him lately.

Derek had been blowing snow out of driveways last evening and had neglected to wear a hat. Frostbite was a painful affliction. Derek's swollen, red ears would heal in time, the doctor had said, but it would be a slow process.

Derek went to his desk and just before he sat down he looked directly at Eddie. Eddie wished he could read Derek's mind right about then but, somehow, he had a feeling he was going to enjoy a peaceful lunch in the cafeteria today.

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Curtain Call

In acting, the quality, pitch, volume and rate of the voice are essential elements to consider. In order to improve in all these areas it is important to practice and exercise the lips, tongue, throat and jaw. Exercises work the muscles necessary for good delivery of lines. How do you deliver your lines in everyday life? Do some of the words that roll off your tongue hurt others? How should we respond to someone who ridicules and derides another with words?

Hmmm ... Let Me Think: *(Jot your thoughts on separate paper.)*



Encore

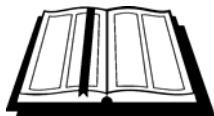
As you learn your lines for the next production employ different techniques to improve your voice, and as you do, think about how we need to be aware of how and what we say on or off the stage. In a drama ministry we have a special task to do that goes beyond the glitter of the lights and the applause of the crowd; we need to perform out of a desire to share the living, breathing, everlasting love of Jesus Christ.



Prayer

Living and Holy God, we want to do Your will alone. Remind me often why I am a part of this ministry and keep me focused on the true purpose of performance. Teach me to be meek and mild when I would rather be arrogant and aggressive. Press upon my heart to lean on You when I feel unloved, lost and lonely. Help me to be kind and to show and share the love of Christ with whomever I may encounter along the path. Amen.

Take 19: Bit Parts



The Script: The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:9.

Center Stage

Adele was delighted a drama ministry was active at the church where she would be worshipping. Since relocating across the country, Adele was beginning to miss her companions and colleagues in the Celebration Players drama team.

Acting coursed through Adele's veins. She could hardly wait to talk with the drama leader and sign up for the next performance. When she finally had an opportunity to speak with one of the leaders, she shared, with zeal, her love of acting and the many ways she had contributed to the Celebration Players.

When Adele learned there were going to be auditions for the Easter production, she was silent. In her twelve years of drama involvement at her last church she had never once auditioned for a part. Her command of the English language and natural expression had made a her a likely choice for many lead roles.

After the auditions were completed and a cast selected, Adele was devastated to discover the part she would do was a bit part consisting of twelve lines, two entrances and two exits. She thought about turning down the part. How wasted her talent would be on such a minor role. But she did want to make friends and she felt God had called her to act so she agreed to attend

rehearsals.

Playing the part of Salome was boring at first for Adele but after two, three, four rehearsals, Adele started to enjoy her role. As one of the women who attended at the tomb of Jesus on Easter morning, Salome was the one who declared and rejoiced with the others that Jesus was alive! What a privilege it was to portray this blessed character.

The Lord was opening Adele's eyes and soon she was feeling remorseful about her past arrogant attitude. Although she had never verbalized her feelings to her fellow actors, she knew that her selfish thoughts had not glorified the Master Director and she needed to make amends.

For the next rehearsal Adele volunteered to bring the refreshments. She also asked permission to lead the devotional time. Adele, busy in the kitchen, baked two mouthwatering apple pies. She thought how she would divide them equally and give each drama ministry participant a "bit part" of the pie. She laughed at her own joke and thought about the scripture she would use for devotions: "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work ..." (Ephesians 4:16)

Curtain Call

Before auditioning for a part it is essential to get to know the character you are trying out for. Make sure you read the script in its entirety so that you are familiar with the story. Use your imagination and do your best, keeping in mind that you are part of a ministry, and the Lord will use you wherever He needs you. Have you ever tried out for a part in a play and not got the part you wanted? How did you feel? Do you think it is a good idea to have auditions in a drama ministry?

Hmmm ... Let Me Think: *(Jot your thoughts on separate paper.)*



Continued next page.

Encore

In your next production think about the parts everyone has, including the director, producer and technical staff. Give thanks to God for all the different gifts that are used to present a message to an audience. Slip little notes of encouragement to each other.



Prayer

Father and God of Creation, You have called us to be Your people. In Your Word You have told us that You do not want anyone to perish and that each of our lives count. It's good to know we do not have to audition to get into heaven. Thank you for making us feel loved and part of Your kingdom. May we discover ways to show that same unconditional love to others and may our ministry always be an honorable vessel for spreading Your Word. Amen.

Take 20: Paying the Price



The Script: He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. *Titus 3:5b-7.*

Center Stage

Cecile had been diagnosed with terminal cancer and was told radiation would not be effective. No physician had dared pronounce yet another time frame for her imminent earthly departure. The last time a doctor informed Cecile that she had only six months to live her fragile, ninety-eight pound frame shook in defiance. "No city doctor is going to tell me when I am gonna up and quit living! It isn't up to you!" the feisty little lady wiggled her finger under the nose of the diagnosing doctor. That was a year and a half ago.

Lately, Cecile had been in and out of the hospital undergoing tests. She was getting weaker and most of her days were spent in a drug-induced slumber. Cecile's daughter, Lily, was with her mother day in and day out and was growing more concerned.

Cecile wasn't afraid of dying, though. "I'm ready, if He is," she would say. "I'm looking forward to meeting my Lord. Don't you go an' start worrying about me, my sweet Lily." Lily loved her mother and she would miss her. But she was grateful her mother had such a love for her Savior.

As Lily thought back to her childhood she recalled the hot summer days when they would work in the garden together. She remembered how her mother would give God the glory for every fat, juicy tomato and every single tiny pea in the pod.

When Cecile's husband of fifty-two years was crushed and killed by a runaway tractor, Lily wanted to die, too. She couldn't imagine life without her daddy. But with the example of a godly mother, she gained strength. She heard her mother call out to God for comfort. She saw her

lean on Him for every decision. She learned that complete faith meant total reliance on Jesus Christ.

Even during periods of intense pain, it was obvious to Lily that her mother was still depending on God. "Don't dope me up so much that I can't sing," Cecile would smile as she watched Lily inject another dose of pain reliever into the port. As she drifted off, Lily would hear her mother hum some of her favorite hymns between groans of pain. Lily sat beside the bed of her mother and held her hand. It had been at least half an hour since her last dose of medication. Suddenly, Cecile opened her eyes and asked Lily to help her sit up. "Read me the Bible," she smiled at her daughter.

"Wha ... Mom ... are you okay?" Lily propped her mother into a sitting position using the soft, feather pillows that she loved so much. "What do you mean, Mom? I can't read you the whole Bible?" Lily didn't know whether to laugh or make her mother lie down again.

"Read Matthew 11:28-30," she said. Lily dutifully turned to the passage. "Come to me, all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Lily looked at her mother. Her eyes were closed.

"Mom?" Lily gently touched her mother's hand. Cecile opened her eyes and whispered, "I love you, my daughter. Night has come and the curtains are drawn." Lily helped her to lie down again. "I will see you in the morning, my sweet Lily." Cecile breathed her last.

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Curtain Call

Many church drama ministries struggle about whether or not to charge admission to a special performance. Some use the freewill offering approach while others either charge a set ticket price or absorb all the costs of a production using their budget. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each of these? Is it acceptable and advisable to sell tickets for a production with the goal of community outreach?

Hmmm ... Let Me Think: *(Jot your thoughts on separate paper.)*



Encore

When the final curtain closes on the last night of production emotions range from relief to a desire to do it one more time. How is success measured in a Christian drama ministry? Is it by the number of people who occupied the seats? The applause? If you do a curtain call, try to focus on individual faces and see if there is any outward evidence of a stirred heart. Pray that this very night someone may lie in their bed reflecting upon the performance. Pray that it will be a Divine doorway to the Kingdom.



Prayer

Almighty King of Creation, when You orchestrated life on this earth, You set the perfect scene. How blessed it is to know that we are created in Your image. Our finite minds and sinful nature, though, make us so different from You. Is it any wonder we, too often, think of ourselves before considering You? Forgive us. Thank you that through Your grace and through the shed blood of Jesus Christ we can spend eternity with You. We look forward to that day. Amen.

The End