

FAN THE FLAME
Creative Christian Writing



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(Chapter 6 *Writing for the Supreme Editor*
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FAN THE FLAME

CREATIVE CHRISTIAN WRITING

It has always been a joy to write and be published myself, but an equal or greater joy for me to inspire new writers in whom God has put a spark and a seed-gift of writing. I love to help thrust them off their launching pad. I'm thrilled and thankful to God when a new book rolls off the press with a friend's name as the author—someone whom I've had the privilege to help along the way to write for the Supreme Editor.

After more than a decade of successfully having my writing published by well-known Christian publishers, I began to receive invitations from Christian Writers' Conferences to hold workshops and to speak in their meetings. The subjects for my workshops generally were in line with the topics I addressed in my books. When I spoke to the larger assembled group of already-writers and *wannabes*, my theme was often to stir up the gift of writing within them and motivate them toward fulfilling their writing dreams. I often helped them explore the distinctives and opportunities of writing that are Christian. I wrote this chapter along those latter lines starting with the basics.

In fact, what follows is an actual overview of the contents of my course *Introduction to Writing That is Christian* which I generally presented in five workshop sessions at a writers' conference. So fasten your seat belts for an accelerated take-off as I'll attempt to cover that workshop material in summary in one chapter!

What is Writing?

“What difference does it make to my writing whether I'm a Christian or not? Writing is writing, isn't it?” The question was not unusual in my writers' workshops. Let's understand what writing is. In a sense, writing is a projection or expression of your personality. It is speech in a more permanent form, a silent extension of oral communication. Writing is the essence of communication for civilized people. Any literate person is a writer in the most elementary sense, whatever implement of writing he uses: pencil, pen, typewriter, computer, or in earlier centuries a chisel against stone, stylus on papyrus or in clay, or in Jesus' case, writing on the ground. You are a writer when you write a letter to a friend, make out a grocery list, put a note on the refrigerator or any number of daily tasks.

The basic communication process consists of a *person* plus an *instrument* of communication plus a *message* through a *medium* to a *reader*. For example, when I pick up my ballpoint pen and write a birthday greeting on a card to my cousin. Or, when a writer sits down to a computer and writes a short story that an editor accepts for publication in *Better Homes and Gardens* magazine and it is read by my neighbor and hundreds of thousands of other subscribers.

A writer in terms of an occupation or sideline interest is one who creates a written composition usually with the intention of reaching a reader with his message. Whether or not he gets paid for doing so doesn't make him more or less a writer. When he writes, he is a writer.

However, not every writer is necessarily a communicator. I may write a poem and put it in my drawer. If no one else ever sees it, I'm a writer but not a communicator. Being a communicator implies someone reading what I have written, even if it is a friend to whom I send my poem. Probably most people reading these words are either writers in the generic sense or aspiring to be a writer as a hobby, spare-time activity, or in some career sense.

What it Takes to be a Christian Writer

Does my Christian faith have anything to do with my writing in the career sense? Writing is a

basic skill which can be acquired to a certain level by training and practice. On the skill level there must be some degree of aptitude because not everyone can achieve the same proficiency in writing. But everyone can improve his writing skill to the maximum of his natural potential. We can try to be the best we can be, given our natural endowments.

Can anyone become a doctor? An engineer? Accountant? Musician? I don't have the inherited aptitude or mental capacity for any of the above even if I had the best of education and specialized training. We must have some genetic predisposition in whatever career field we try to enter. The same applies to the field of writing.

Beyond inborn talent, we must apply ourselves to diligent study. Natural writing aptitude can go to waste if not exercised and trained. On the other hand, lack of some natural aptitude can still be compensated for by study, experience and opportunity. An academic degree is helpful but not necessary. In this day of an abundance of self-study opportunities we have no excuse not to improve our writing techniques. Books, conferences and online courses in writing are readily available. We should read widely and analyze good writing, using it as a model.

Writing as a Gift

For the writer who is a Christian, a third factor enters the picture. Writing can be exercised as a spiritual gift from God. All of the spiritual gifts are given at the discretion of the Holy Spirit of God to whomever He wishes for the purpose of edifying the church at large. (1 Cor. 12:11) The gifts of the Spirit are supernaturally given. They are not the result of academic training or practice. However, spiritual gifts can be exercised in conjunction with natural gifts, interacting with them. However, they may be given independent of natural aptitudes.

Although spiritual gifts are given at the discretion of the Holy Spirit, we are also told to “earnestly desire the greater gifts” (1 Cor. 12:31 and 14:1). That greater gift is singled out in chapter 14 as the gift of prophecy. The apostle Paul repeatedly encourages *all* believers to prophesy. He describes it as a normal, regular expression taking place in Christian gatherings. In the writings of the apostles, with notable exceptions like 2 Thess. chapter two and Revelation, prophecy was not generally defined in the *predictive* sense of foretelling the future. Paul clearly outlined its three facets in 1 Cor. 14:3, stripping off much mystery and misunderstanding.

Prophecy has three aspects: *oikodome* (building), *paraklesis* (exhortation or encouragement) and *paramythia* (comfort and reassurance). No wonder Paul indicated the gift to be in the reach of any believer. It didn't require a super-holy saint to exercise that gift. It was simply the normal way of overflowing in the Spirit: sharing, helping, edifying and mutually building up the faith of another person or group of believers. No trance-like utterances with eyes closed, body swaying, and hands waving wildly!

In the New Testament, prophecy seemed to be both a general and a specific sharing of God's Word and insights. It was exercised by Christians toward individuals and toward the Body of Christ. Any believer seeking to walk in the Spirit has the experience of being impressed by the Lord to share something, to speak to someone, yes, to write something to another person. Evidently it is just that natural. And it is just that supernatural too, because the Holy Spirit is at work to initiate it, to shape it, to give it perfect timing, and to apply it where God wants it. All He needs is available channels. Christians are those channels.

For example, on a certain occasion the Lord impressed me to write a letter to a Christian friend who just received news that her illness was terminal. I was exercising the gift of prophecy because I was comforting and encouraging my friend to trust the Lord and assuring her of my prayers. I was “speak[ing] to men for edification and exhortation and consolation” (1 Cor. 14:3).

If I wrote those thoughts and encouragement in the form of an article for a magazine, I would be exercising the gift of prophecy on a wider scale. Likewise, if I were to write a blog post on that topic. If

I were to carefully craft my writing, choose appropriate words, develop my ideas clearly and biblically and send it off to an editor of a publication, I would be applying my trained skill to supplement my talent and communicate my spiritual gift in the best way I knew.

The gift of prophecy is for Kingdom building. By edification, we are saying in effect, "You can do it by God's strength." By exhortation, "Don't be weary in good works or be discouraged. Keep on serving." By comfort, "If you are going through rough times, count it all joy and trust God to work it out." A Christian can prophesy through his computer in the same way that a minister does from the pulpit.

A word of caution. I don't receive the gift of prophecy by being zapped suddenly by the Holy Spirit so that I can trot off to my computer and without effort, study, or training produce a meaningful manuscript. Hard work, instruction, experience in writing and rewriting are still the foundation of the writing craft and of the writing ministry. But the anointing of the Holy Spirit over all this process gives it the thrust to accomplish God's will through it.

What is *Christian* Writing?

Writing for God has a historical precedent. God did speak to men and they recorded it in the collection of writings which we now call the Bible. "God...spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways" (Heb.1:1, 2). Men spoke and then wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In latter days, God spoke through His Son, Jesus. Does God speak to people now? Some claim to have heard the audible voice of God. But it is rare and not provable, though not impossible. God can reveal Himself any way He chooses. Today God generally speaks to us through our hearts and minds by the Holy Spirit who is given to teach us and lead us into all truth. He impresses thoughts upon us. We are encouraged to "have the mind of Christ," to listen to the inner leading of the Lord. Specifically, He speaks to us through His written Word, the Bible, through its principles, historical experiences, teachings, and instructions.

The writer who is a Christian should not look for or expect new revelations of the kind given to the writers of Scripture. God doesn't speak today anything contrary to the Word He has already spoken in the Scriptures. We are commanded not to add to or to detract from it. (Rev. 22:19) Our mandate as writers who are Christians is to communicate what God has already revealed and do so with fresh approaches, contemporary applications and clear interpretations consistent with the whole of Scripture and the living history of the Church. We are to inspire, challenge to obedience, correct error and lead men into eternal life and the abundant life on earth. We should consider our writing as a high calling, yet be realistic in acknowledging the restricted nature of our task.

God communicates to us. We must listen carefully. We, in turn, communicate His Word to men. We speak orally. Every man is to be a witness. The receivers of our communication hear what we say. We write. That is a more permanent communication than speaking. We can do so in the course of everyday writing and also in a more structured form for publication. Readers read what we write. Both aspects are part of the same mandate of witnessing for our Lord.

Characteristics of Christian Writing

Christian writing is first of all distinctive in its nature. It is *Christ-centered*. We are writing for the Supreme Editor, our Lord, and we are responsible to Him for all we attempt to publish. Although we may write to meet some human need, correct a wrong, heal a hurt, or give information or encouragement, even entertainment, our writing should not be primarily human-centered. Christian writers are mediators between God's help and man's hurt. We begin with man's need, but we exalt Christ and give men a high view of His majesty.

Second, *content* distinguishes Christian writing from secular writing. It reflects your beliefs. It

is Bible-based. Our writing doesn't stand or fall on our personal opinions but on solid, unchanging principles from the Word of God. That doesn't mean that we must pepper our prose with Bible verses or that every story must end with "...and every one got saved and lived happily ever after." We must have basic biblical knowledge and keep studying. We must know how to research areas about which we are unclear and be accurate in our interpretation and application.

Third, Christian writing is *Spirit-directed*. It is anointed. We shouldn't try to do our own thing or advance our own agenda. As such, we can expect to express a mental competence beyond what we would normally possess.

Fourth, it is characterized by its *purpose*: giving glory to God and expressing honest humility and thankfulness to God for any successes. Such gratitude surpasses pride of accomplishment and doesn't detract from His centrality. In the face of lack of success, we still give glory to God and seek to learn from our efforts instead of being discouraged and giving up.

Fifth, it is characterized by its *function*. It is prophetic, as we have seen, in the sense of speaking (or writing) to men on behalf of God for upbuilding, encouragement and comfort.

Purpose of Oral and Written Communication

The spiritual gifts also come into play in the type of writing we are most comfortable producing. Some writers who are Christian are clearly gifted for *pre-evangelism*. This is the foundation of witness. The writer is sowing the Word and he offers information that leads to understanding. He proclaims the revelation of God. This is a special gift that requires a certain kind of sensitive writing.

The second aspect of writing is *evangelism*, the entrance of the Word and the Spirit into the heart of man. This is the reaping stage. The writer persuades to the point of decision and action through the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, not man's human influence. The goal of such writing is regeneration.

The third aspect is *building* the superstructure after a person has become a Christian. Teaching, nurture, instruction leading to a holy life and service, discipleship—all these target the spiritual growth of the new believer.

Nearly all Christian writing can be categorized under one or the other of these divisions. It should be apparent to us what readership we are targeting with our article or story or book. We should narrow our target in order to zero in on who it is we are trying to reach. When we write for different age groups, the above still applies. For example, a Christian novel or other fiction would most likely still fit in the pre-evangelism category. Bible studies and how-to-do-it Christian living non-fiction articles would come under the building category. Writing for the secular readership might fit under the pre-evangelism aspect.

Advantages of Writing Over Speaking

There is no contest, of course, because writing and speaking are both important to communicate God and His Word to today's listeners and readers. But the writer who is a Christian has certain advantages over the speaker.

Writing is an equal opportunity medium. When a reader picks up an article or book, unless the author's picture is shown with the article or on the jacket of the book, pleasing physical attributes or the lack of them don't matter at all. You may have a pretty face or a common one, you may be unusually young or quite old; your race or nationality is not important. If you speak with an accent, your reader doesn't know that. Your educational credentials aren't usually listed unless your presentation warrants it. You may have written your story while still in your pajamas—it doesn't matter. Your gender isn't important—we might be surprised that some pen names are used because men are writing women's stories and vice versa. The reader doesn't know or care whether you are rich or poor, married, single,

widowed or what kind of car you drive.

Unless you conduct mass evangelistic meetings, you are usually able to reach more people by writing than by speaking. Writing for publication is still more permanent. An article in a magazine or a book or downloaded online can be around for years. It can be passed around to multiple others, it can be put into libraries and archived and enjoy a long life. I've been a blogger for ten years and currently I receive on average of two to three thousand views to my blog monthly. Then the post remains in my blog archives. Publications are repeatable. They can be read over and over, shared with others and possibly be picked up for reprint in other publications.

You may be handicapped and writing from a wheelchair. You may be blind and dictate your writing to others. You can still write during a bout with laryngitis, which is more than you can do if you are a speaker. You can write from any location and under any circumstances. You don't have to leave your home. You can write from prison, from a hospital bed, from the corner of your living room, on the kitchen table or in a modern writing studio. You may write while you are waiting in a dentist's office, on the beach during a vacation, during a coffee break or while giving a baby her 2 a.m. bottle.

If you are writing as a freelancer, you are your own boss. Best of all, you are writing for the Supreme Editor, God, and your assignment, should you choose to accept it, is to please Him.

Motives for Christian Writing

Fame and name are subconsciously, although probably not admitted, the primary motives even of many writers who are Christians. One's byline tends to stroke us like blinking lights around our name on a theater marquis. To have your name and bio and perhaps a photo on a book jacket is certainly a delicious feeling. For you to be on the faculty of a writers' conference and a frequent contributor to writing periodicals is certainly ego-building. What plugging-along writer wouldn't like to write a bestseller with all the perks that come with the prestige?

Be careful. Ambition can drive you and take over. You find yourself driven to be among those of whom it might be said, "He has written eighty books and his articles have appeared in 9,000 publications!" We push ourselves to keep adding more and more articles, more and more stories, more books to our resume like scalps on a belt. Normal pride in accomplishment is a legitimate byproduct of your writing. Pride in your workmanship is not evil. Just to see your writing out there in the marketplace gives you a sense of satisfaction in a job well done. But we must watch that it doesn't get out of hand.

Writing for money as a motive? There's surely nothing wrong with that. Writing is a profession in which the laborer is certainly worthy of his hire. Writing, in fact, might be the bread and butter job, the career of some Christians. It's their day job, so to speak.

Sometimes our motive can be to prove something either to oneself or to someone else. Perhaps you were told as a child that you wouldn't amount to anything. You want to show your family, friends, the world and yourself that you are worthwhile. You need the boost to your self-esteem that being a published author brings.

Do you write for the sheer joy of creative expression? Writing is one of the creative arts along with music, painting, sculpture and the like. The writer is an artist. As a painter, he paints with words. He sculpts a piece of writing. As a musician, he sings a poem. As a tailor, he cuts pieces of experience and knowledge and sews them together with research to fit the style of a story. In fact, as a gourmet chef, the writer takes raw ingredients, follows a recipe, and creates a tasteful printed dish.

Do you love words? Are you excited when they flow? Do you work with them, hone them, tweak them and polish them, select them carefully and then enjoy the result? Do your thoughts just want to jump onto a page? That urge runs deep in true writers. There is a rush of exhilaration in the creative process that surpasses the "highs" the world seeks in the wrong places.

Do you write for ministry? Oh, you might think that's a given for the writer who is a Christian.

Perhaps that motive is more rare than we think. But that is the cornerstone on which all of our writing motivation rests. We are not judging the motives listed above. Most of us probably have mixed motives. Nevertheless, there is an overriding compulsion from God, a divine urge, a call to write that gives us a greater spiritual reward than any of the motives listed above.

You need to have something to say that you believe God wants said. You are compelled to write it. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (Matt. 12:34-37) and the writer writes. You are energized to write a message. It is burning in your soul. You want to help change lives, to make a difference with what you write. The apostles Peter and John declared about speaking: "For we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:29). Applying it to writing, we are roused and inspired by the Spirit of God to write about our wonderful Lord to men and women who don't know Him, who need Him for their problems, whose eternal souls hang in the balance.

If our motive is anything other than the glory of God, it might be better not to write in the Christian field at all. We can do too much damage to the cause of Christ if a byline simply feeds our ego. However, if we are willing to pay the high price for the unique calling of being writers who are Christians, to be God's instruments, then the rewards will be greater than we could dream. Yet they are only byproducts of our obedience to write to please the Supreme Editor.

Writing as an Honest "High"

Does writing give me enthusiastic enjoyment? That is one of the confirmations of whether I am called by God to write. When the words finally come together, when the sweat and prayer and labor pay off, when my training helps me polish a current "masterpiece," it is a high moment. I described my own feelings in an article published in a writers' periodical which I titled, "Sometimes I Clap in Secret."

"After the last sentence, the last period, I typed -30- at the end and swung back in my swivel writing chair. 'Hallelujah! Praise God!' I stomped around the room rousing Lady, my collie, who had been snoozing under my desk.

"I flagged the manuscript in the air as a *wave offering* to the Lord while Lady barked at my antics. Then I laid the papers on my desk as if it were an altar and clapped, laughing aloud and repeating, 'Praise You, Jesus!'

"I had just finished a seven page, double-spaced article that I had not initially intended to write. When I sat down at my computer, it had been only a wisp of an idea. But as I kept typing, ideas developed and words hung together easily. The lead was a natural, dialogue was there for me and flowing, and the conclusion seemed to be waiting for me before I got to it.

"Writers who are Christians already know that most manuscripts are not produced that easily. More often it is after painstaking research, organizing, agonizing, pacing, sighing, praying, polishing. Then it's rewrite, rewrite, rewrite! After writing a story or a chapter in that difficult way, my reaction is still the same: after the first long sigh and stretching my aching back, I feel the need for an audible, ecstatic exultation that the battle is over—until I start the next story or the next chapter."

I believe that God is in those *high* moments and is pleased when the writer who is a Christian acknowledges the source of his inspiration and to whom the glory should be given. To God, of course!

Qualifications of Christian Writers

Talent, we have already seen, enters into the picture for writers who are Christians. Training is essential and can be acquired. Trying is the practical outworking of both of the above. It has been said that good writing is ninety percent perspiration and ten percent inspiration. You may acquire a mountain of training, be endowed with natural talent, but there is no substitute for actual writing. We need to write a lot in the sense of quantity. We need to write often. Frequency and regularity help to

hone our skill. We need to discipline ourselves to keep working diligently.

Writing is only the launching pad. Repeated rewriting is the indispensable refining process. Hemingway's *Farewell to Arms* was said to have been rewritten thirty-nine times! We do well to submit our writing to more experienced writers for evaluation and help. That may be painful for our ego but it certainly will be rewarding. We should not be sensitive or allow ourselves to be either discouraged or overly elated with someone's response to our "masterpiece." There is simply no short cut to rewriting and editing our own work over and over.

Our writing needs to leave our desk eventually after the discipline of rewriting. If we are writing for publication as a freelance writer, we must submit it or it will never accomplish God's purpose to reach the readers. Marketing is generally the least appealing part of the process for the writer, Christian or not. It seems like such a hassle to study the markets for their specific requirements. But there is no other way unless you are writing on direct assignment or self-publishing. Having determined possible markets and slanted your manuscript to their particular requirements, continue to submit it repeatedly to other markets if it hasn't been accepted. Of course you will receive rejection slips. I've never met a serious freelance writer who hasn't a drawer full of them. Accept rejections without quitting or getting depressed. Rewrite again. If necessary, study the markets further, keep sending out the manuscript, keep improving, keep pressing on. Remember, you are working for the Supreme Editor.

Success seldom knocks at your door. You must go out and earn it. Write, rewrite, and submit repeatedly...and again I say rewrite.

You need never be shy about your writing or apologize that it is not good enough. There is no intrinsically good or bad writing. There is only writing that can be improved. Your style will eventually develop. It will become *your* writing style. But you must first pay the disciplined price to master the basics. Only then are you free to branch out and be creative. Perhaps you think you have nothing original to write. The author Madeline L'Engle addressed that in her book *Circle of Quiet* page 28:

"It's all been said before. If I had to say it better than anybody else, I'd never start. Better or worse is immaterial. The thing is, that it has to be said by me....We each have to say it and in our own way. Not of our own *will*, but as it comes out through us. Good or bad, great or little—that isn't what creation is about. It is that we have to try; to put down in pigment or words or musical notations, or we die!"

We are writers because we can't help writing. We are Christian writers because God has called us to write what perhaps has been written before, but with our fresh insights and for our contemporary world. As writers who are Christians we have something important to say. Let's be courageous in our craft. Be prepared for a solitary life if you aspire to be a serious freelancer. Some by temperament or emotional makeup can't take it. Solitude to them means loneliness. No matter to what degree, you will need time alone to do your writing.

One writer friend picks up her manuscript and heads to MacDonald's. With a cup of coffee, she sits in a booth for several hours at a time usually editing work she has already done on a computer. The noise of people in a public place doesn't distract her, she claims, but provides her with isolation within the activity going on around her. That stimulates her and keeps her from any tendency to be lonely.

Being a Writer: Goal or a Process?

When do you cross over the line between a "wannabe" and "Iamma" writer? Does it take one published byline? One book published? One of your poems appearing in an anthology? Or your feature articles published in fifty periodicals? Is it when you cash your first check for a piece of writing? When someone asks for your autograph? Does a book signing party finally make you a writer? Or does being invited to lead a workshop at a writers' seminar?

A critical question to ask yourself is, do I really want to write or do I want to be known as a writer?

A lady I met at a workshop handed me her newly designed business card. It declared “Writer” under her name. She hadn't sold her first piece yet, but she was seriously writing, sending out manuscripts, studying and trying. I considered her a “becoming writer.” She perceived herself as a writer. I applaud that affirmation. You are a writer whenever you write, whatever you write, however long or short a time you have been writing. Publication doesn't propel you over the great divide. A wishful “wannabe” who is not even trying is definitely not a writer yet.

Publication, or at least someone reading what you write makes you a communicator. Writing is the launching pad; your written product is the shuttle craft; sending your product out is the blast-off launch and publication is your aim. Keep at it!

“Oh, I don't write to be published. It's my hobby. I just write for myself, for the fun of it,” a friend confided. She was a writer since she did write. And she was a Christian. A hobby is fine, that's a personal choice. But she would not be considered a Christian writer in the sense that she was not communicating to anyone. Christian writing is not only fun, although there is great joy in it. It is a calling, a trust from God for which you should be a faithful steward. You may be wrapping your one talent in a napkin and hiding it away. It will never gain interest or make a profit for the Lord or bring Him His intended glory unless you invest it.

Late Blooming Writers

“Someday I'd like to write. Maybe when I retire. I have so many ideas....” Famous last words. “Wannabes” are too often unrealistic dreamers. Not very many people become “Grandma Moses” artists or writers. Grandma Moses waited until she was in her seventies to pick up a paint brush.

However, nothing is impossible. Some people are forced by circumstances to wait until later in life to try what they have always dreamed of. One notable example is former President George W. Bush. Since leaving office he has published two books. He had no experience in writing. Nor had he ever picked up a paint brush, by his own admission, except to paint a wall. He began by painting pictures of his pet animals, then still life, landscapes, and before long he discovered that he had some artistic inclination. He advanced to painting portraits of world leaders whom he had met while in the course of his presidential duties. In recent years he has been painting a large wall-size mural, a collage of war heroes and wounded war veterans of wars in which this country was involved—all of whom he knew personally. There are latent and late bloomers in any artistic field. More often, those who love reading, who scribbled in verse or wrote little stories when they were children, who kept journals, who are observers of life, who sense stories in situations, do eventually try writing at some point in their lives.

I wrote poems secretly when I was a child. I couldn't help writing. It was just an urge deep inside. Elsewhere in this book I described my discouragement when in a literature class as a teen the teacher persuaded me to read aloud one of my poems and some classmates snickered at my efforts. That embarrassment turned me off from sharing anything I wrote for many years. We all need encouragement. There are already enough people around to rain on our parade.

Some of the most avid and productive writers I know meet every Wednesday in the Senior Center in my Iowa hometown as a writers' group. Dozens of retirees, men and women, turn out, tell what they have written that week, compare notes, exchange marketing tips, read aloud from their stories and affirm one another. The majority never wrote for publication until their retirement. Now they are published writers not only in local or church newsletters, but some in major magazines, secular and Christian. On my last visit, the group was celebrating a ninety-two year old lady's first book release!

Writing as an Act of Worship

Let's look at *writing without marketing* in another way. Suppose a piece of your writing doesn't go anywhere. You aren't really trying to market it anymore. Is it a valid piece of Christian writing? You write a prayer poem. It is meant for God. You extol God, you tell Him how you feel about Him. You praise Him. Perhaps you describe the natural world He has created. You reflect on His goodness. You read it to God. No one else reads it at this point.

Yes, you are a Christian writer. Your poem is a sweet smelling fragrance to God, like incense. You are validated. You have worshiped God through your writing. Don't disparage your efforts, if you don't market them. "And whatever you do in *word* [writing] or deed [writing], do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father" (Col. 3:17). First Corinthians 10:31 makes it even more specific: "eat or drink or *whatever* you do." Surely that includes our writing.

You have written for God's glory, to please the Supreme Editor. You have communicated to God. If He wants your piece of writing to go further, He will let you know and open a door. If He has a market out there for your prayer-poem so it would help others communicate with Him, He will lead you to discover it through diligently studying the market guide. How far your writing goes is up to God.

Categories of Christian Writing

There are (1) Salaried writing jobs done as part of one's livelihood, (2) Freelance writing, where the writer is writing seriously, markets wherever he wishes, receives, hopefully, some compensation for his efforts, but he doesn't depend on sales of his writing for his living. He may support himself by "a day job" or through a spouse. (3) Hobby writers, writing as an avocation, pastime, or for pleasure. Such people write in the time and opportunity frame the Lord gives them. This is often the entry level at which many professional writers began. No disgrace to stay at that level, if that's what God has called you to. Don't overlook just blessing yourself through a piece of writing. That isn't selfish. The creative process has its intrinsic satisfaction. (4) Writing for hire is a category which may be combined with freelancing. It means writing on assignment from an editor, perhaps a regular column in a newspaper or other periodical. Even collaborating with someone else to write a book. This may come as the result of a query from you, or because you have established a contact with an editor who knows your work. This is a very legitimate category that possibly carries with it more substantial income than the freelancer.

As you gain experience freelancing, gain publishing credits, prove to editors that you can produce quality writing and can meet deadlines, you are in a good position to ask for assignments. This is how some writing careers begin. If you receive an assignment, the pressure is on. Give priority to meeting the editor's deadline, even having the piece on his desk before the deadline. He will remember you, and the slightly open door may open wider when another assignment comes up.

Am I Called to Write?

The non-Christian doesn't ask this question. He writes if he feels like it, he writes as a career or avocation without considering any ministry aspect. He is not responsible to anyone but himself for his talent or lack of it. He is not writing for the Supreme Editor.

As Christians, we should ask this question. We are not our own, we are bought with a price that Jesus paid on Calvary. God has a purpose for each of our lives and desires to lead us in a specific direction. You need to find out if God called you to one or more of the above categories of writing. Don't expect an audible voice out of a burning bush in your front yard. Be aware of gradual inward assurance from God that "this is the way, walk in it."

The more you write, the more you build relationships with other writers by attending writers' conferences, the more clearly you will know whether God has called you to write for the marketplace. You will recognize affirmations or negations of your call. When you speak with other writers and

editors at writers' conferences, God may affirm your writing gift through them. Don't feel guilty if, through all this honest initial process, you find that God is not calling you to be a vocational writer. One calling is not above another. The Holy Spirit is the one who calls to ministries and gives the enabling gifts. Don't insist on a particular gift or persist and pursue it, if God seems to be leading you in another direction. Don't feel ashamed or feel that you have failed Him.

Your interest in writing may mean that it should be an adjunct pursuit for you, a supplement to a main call from the Lord to something else. The training you do receive in the writing field is all to the good. Transferable concepts are many and never wasted.

Eric is a musician but he also writes. He composes songs, writes dramas, poems and devotional articles. In fact, the job for which he receives his paycheck is working in a lumber mill. Sam is a chiropractor by vocation who writes similar things combining health, music, writing and speaking in an effective adjunct ministry. By receiving training in writing your enjoyment of reading will be enhanced. You will appreciate good literature. You will have learned to communicate better with others, to express yourself more clearly. You will be enriched by your friendship with writers and they will be richer for knowing you. You will be a better writer in whatever vocational field you pursue. On your secular job you may have the opportunity to do public relations writing, news releases, brochures, newsletters, advertising copy or produce organizational literature.

Writing Opportunities in Related Fields

Rather than freelance writing, God may be calling you into a vocational field directly involved in writing. There are jobs in offices of book and magazine publishing houses as editors, proofreaders, copy editors, sales representatives and advertising. Also positions as publicists, booksellers and in marketing, public relations and actual printing. You may find various job opportunities as writers for newspapers and journalists in other media. You may sense God's call to teach English, creative writing, journalism or literature at various levels in institutions and in continuing education. There are numerous jobs related to the library field, in research and in social media.

Even in the broad field of communications, the printed page is not the only medium for writing. In this generation of the explosion of knowledge and information through electronics, new avenues of communication are continually opening. Most were unheard of a generation or two ago. The audio field of radio, recordings, and mobile information and entertainment is expanding incredibly. Script writing, research and production for each of those categories is needed. Writers are needed in the visual field of the theater, movies, videos, drama, photography, and the information network of computer technology. Writing commercials and speech writing are increasing opportunities. Ministry is possible for the writer who is a Christian both in the secular and Christian fields of all of the above.

God calls us to what we love to do. He is not a hard taskmaster who forces us into jobs that are distasteful to us. Our love of writing may be the main confirmation of our call. Writing is an art, a craft, and a business. It can be a ministry for you as a Christian pursuing any of those aspects of writing. Pray, explore, experiment. God will show you where He wants you and whether it might be in a writing related field.

Write From Where You Are

Whatever stage of life you are in, you have an ideal platform for writing. Generate ideas from your own experience at that level. A mother of small children can generate ideas for other parents. A single can ideate for other singles, a senior citizen knows the problems and opportunities of mature readership, a student can write for the student world. Specialized markets are available for every age and interest level. Through the years I found that if I wrote for my peer group, it was a natural. I wrote for whatever age group my children were at the time, and for parents of that age group. I did the same

when they were teens, when they went through the dating and marriage stage, when divorce came into the picture. When we became grandparents, I targeted that wide open category.

In later years when I had lung cancer surgery, I wrote for fellow sufferers. Now that I've become a widow, I'm writing books for widows. Since I've advanced in years, I'm writing for the senior-agers. Who better can empathize with the struggles and joys of any age group than the one who is currently on the same level? I practice the same principle as a blogger.

Keeping Up the Pace

For some who are just starting to take their writing seriously, every word may be an uphill struggle. For some, the flow of words may come like a torrent. Most of us alternate between the two experiences. If you wait for inspiration to write, your writing will be too spasmodic. You need to write when you feel like it and also when you don't. It's part of the discipline of writing.

Don't feel guilty if you can't keep up the pace of some other writers who work best when they set goals like writing so many thousand words each day. I've never written that way, and I don't think I could. None of us can run or write at top speed all the time. There is an ebb and flow in any creative work. Sometimes we will produce better writing than at other times. Feelings do enter in, but hard work and sheer determination is the bedrock of successful writing.

In the long haul that's what counts. Many of us are like hares in the hare and tortoise fable. We rush home highly motivated after a writers' conference and dive right in to inspired writing. But we can't maintain that all-out pace. Inevitable and legitimate interruptions cancel our good intentions. Family matters, household responsibilities, both routine and unexpected, school cancellations, our own health and energy levels—all are variables. We live and write in the real world. I've never visited that proverbial “ivory tower” some people claim that writers spend their time in. It's probably in “Never-Never Land.”

One of my writer friends is a physically challenged writer. She lives with almost constant chronic pain and is under medication all the time. But she is a writer, has been one for years. She realizes that she must accept her lack of robust health and write at the level of her energy. She can't let herself feel guilty for not producing more or more often, or measure herself against other writers

Most of us write with yo-yo energy and the push-pull of outward circumstances. We need to roll with the punches. Most of all, we need to bounce right back from our interrupted schedules and low times to resume our disciplined plan again. We will probably have times when we are “on a roll” and the writing is going well. I know that my own roll will not last, so I have learned in my writing life to ride the waves for all they are worth.

The high waves are exhilarating and productive. During those times I push myself. I tend to overwrite. If I have to pause in my writing, I try to do so at an exciting point so I can pick it up again with enthusiasm. This transition trick is important to me in my forward reach. When my roll recedes, I have also learned that my on a roll times will come again. I can't wait for them in idleness, sitting on my surf board on the sandy beach. I must keep writing between rolls, something every day, if I can. Perhaps just jotting something down in my idea notebook, in my devotional journal, or editing what I have already written. That stirs me up to write again. If not writing, then reading and research which often triggers a roll. I'm not sure that I've ever had “writers' block.” My handicap is an abundance of ideas and only one lifetime to develop them. That's why I must look to the Lord, my Supreme Editor, for His priorities.

Each of us has a different temperament and way of working and writing. Our metabolism is distinct as are our habit patterns. If we begin writing later in life, we need to take into consideration those ingrained patterns and go with them or try to change them to fit in with our writing aspirations.

Aspiration and inspiration without perspiration will never result in much publication. Long-range perseverance will pay off. The tortoise reached the finish line before the capricious hare.

Heart and Mind Writing

Be concerned with quality and not quantity in your writing for the Supreme Editor. Write with both your heart and mind. If you write only with your mind, writing is apt to be cold and lifeless, even if logical and well-researched. If you write only with your heart, it may tend to be over-emotional, too subjective, not substantial enough to truly help others. Clear thinking and presentation is needed in balance.

Record your emotions either while you are experiencing them or as soon afterward as possible. Express your five senses while they are active. Don't trust your memory too long. It tends to cobwebs. Then step back and craft the initial material with your mind, skill, training, and do your best to communicate something that will have meaning to the reader. Effective Christian writing is only possible as we write on the level of our potential readers. If we write down to them, we come across as preachy. We give the impression that we have arrived.

Illustrations are so important. By giving examples, either of our own or that of our friends, or plausible examples, we maintain the interest of readers in the point we are trying to make. By our admission of struggle or weakness or temptation or failure, we touch the hearts of readers and gain acceptance for what we want to share. Let's develop servant hearts in our writing. Let's not come across as lording it over our reader by telling him what he must do. Let's allow him to come to his own conclusion. Give him credit for enough intelligence to do that.

What is Writing Success?

“You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:5-7). In this powerful admonition lie keys for success in Christian writing as well. The field of Christian writing and publishing has its own set of occupational hazards. The temptations are the same in secular writing and, unfortunately, human nature is the same although we are redeemed children of God.

There is temptation to pride, temptation to step on others to get higher up the success ladder, temptation to think you know it all and don't need help from others, temptation to disrespect other writers and at least secretly to belittle their efforts, and temptation to premature success. There are temptations to be anxious about the whole process of writing and marketing, temptation to be money-oriented, temptations to neglect family and friends in the frantic pursuit of fame. And temptations to be so totally consumed by ambition to the exclusion of one's own spiritual growth and quiet reflection—enough? We have barely scratched the surface of the sneaky tempter's wiles as he focuses on ways to trip up Christian writers.

Both the beginner and the published writer should humble himself to seek help and critique from those who are wiser or more experienced in the field. We need to listen to their counsel, to be open to their constructive corrections, to accept their suggestions if valid, respect their seasoned years and follow their model, if it fits. I have already written with appreciation about the secular group of university women who critiqued my early efforts and guided me to market my novice writing until I began to experience the delicious taste of success when I was a young mother of three toddlers.

The world's definition of success is visible achievement and progress. Nothing wrong with that, unless those things become our primary focus. As writers who are Christians we are in danger of losing perspective of the fact that we are writing for the Supreme Editor not making a name for ourselves. We are God's reporters not the editor-in-chief. We take orders from Him. Whether we ever become known in the Christian writing field is irrelevant. That you have made Him known is primary. Success in

human terms, the number of manuscripts or books published, is beside the point. God will make you successful as you focus your attention on remaining faithful. As soon as our focus is on success as the world sees it rather than faithfulness, we begin working against God. God insists on prospering us at His pace not ours.

Ambition is not un-Christian. Repeatedly we are told in Scripture, “make it your aim,” “desire earnestly,” “strive,” “run to win,” and “press on for the prize.” We should always do the best we can and seek to do even better for the Lord. There is a difference between trying to be the best and trying to be the best *you* can be. The first is hard, competitive, driving, selfish. You may be obsessed with getting to the top of the ladder, to be the most sought-after speaker, with the greatest roster of publications to your credit, on the best seller list, receiving the greatest royalty advance on a book you haven't written yet, even being known in the secular marketplace. But you are setting yourself up for disappointment. You are striving for the wrong goal.

To have as your ambition to be the best *you* can be is an entirely different positive aspiration. We should all try to maximize our God-given potential. How many talents (writing aptitude and opportunity coins) has God given us? Have we invested them well? Have we multiplied them or hidden them? Let's not compare ourselves with others. Let's measure our own progress against our potential for the Lord and accept His anointing gift on top of that.

Divine Collaborated Writing

A basic difference between the writer who is a Christian and the one who is not is that the Christian writer always writes with a collaborator. The Collaborator is God to whom he is joined by sacred contract. The word *collaborate* comes from *co-labor*. The writer who is a Christian is God's coworker in the world's harvest field. We don't write by ourselves. We don't write *for* God as much as we write *with* God. If we write in our own strength, with our own ideas, and set our own goals, we may be writers, but we are not on the same page with God. A sign could well be posted on our desk:

Danger! Men at work!

In a practical way this means that the results are in His hands, not up to me. Wisdom and power are imparted by Him. He prefers to open the doors for me. I shouldn't try to pry them open. Ideation comes from Him as I open myself to receive His gift of discernment. Rejections are God's teaching aids, His polishing and chipping tools. Marketing is God prodding, nudging me in the right direction while I do my part by studying the markets.

The folk song, “He's got [God has] the whole world in His hands” can be applied to Christian writing: He's got the editor and his acquisitions committee in His hands. He's got the local critique group's comments in His hands. He's got your family responsibilities and your time in His hands. Andrew Murray, a spiritual giant of yesteryear, is credited with the statement, “God is ready to assume full responsibility for the life wholly yielded to Him.” A solid biblical truth. For the writer who is a Christian: *God is ready to assume full responsibility for the writer wholly yielded to Him—and for the success of his writings.*