

## Keeping God in the Writing Journey – Workshop Notes

### Introduction

**Focus:** How to ensure God remains at the centre of our writing/promotional activities and not us.

**Outcome:** All of you going home feeling positive about your writing, encouraged to persevere and challenged to keep God central in your writing journeys

**Spiritual self-assessment exercise – rating areas of struggle (see separate file)**

**Role-play – feedback re emotions/undercurrents noticed**

**Reasons for this workshop:** My experience at a writers' conference where people didn't seem to want to hear what others had written and were just bent on talking about their own books. Seemed jealous self-centred, with a striving attitude etc. **Also**, my struggle re my motives in seeking out more speaking engagements and my priorities when speaking.

**Letting God rule in our relationship with him (mention two other sections)**

**Be God-centred rather than self-centred**

- **Make sure it is God you are worshipping and not writing success**

Matt 6:24 *No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.*

**Illustration:** From Allen Arnold, Senior Vice-President/Fiction Publisher at Thomas Nelson

### **'Don't Let Your Novel Burn You'**

*Three stories.*

*First, there was a man in the forest who once cut down a tree. From half the wood, he created a fire to cook his meal. From the rest, however, he made an idol. Then bowed down and worshiped it, saying "Save me, you are my god." Read more in Isaiah 44.*

*Second, there once was an author in the city who wrote novels. Half his time, he created stories that honored God and warmed readers' souls. But half the time, he made the novel an idol. Spent more time thinking of it than God. Prayed for it to hit the NY Times bestseller list, saying "Save me, you are my identity."*

*Third is your story. May the gift of writing be a calling that doesn't consume you. An inspiration but never your idol. Live that story well.*

- **Check honestly what is 'driving' you** – is it 'selfish ambition'? Do you want that book to be published so you will be well known or so others will be blessed? (Probably a mixture)

Phil 2:3 *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.*

James 3:14-16 *But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ... For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.*

**Quote** from 'Rescuing Ambition' by Dave Harvey p 37 *'We grow small trying to be great.'*

**Honour God with your writing!**

- **Ask God what you are to write** – then do it!
- **Write content that uplifts, encourages and challenges** others to consider God in their lives
- **Write your best for God**  
Will involve things like growing in writing skills, listening to criticism, editing and re-editing
- **Receive praise graciously, but remember to give God the glory too**

John 5:44 *How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?*

### Take time to be spiritually nourished

- **Read Scripture** – can be in imaginative ways  
Eg 'Lectio divina' or some version of this; using different translations; characters/themes
- **Make time for fellowship with others in the body** – we need others in the body  
Rom 12:4 *Just as each one of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*  
1 Cor 12:21 *The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"*
- **Keep growing as a Christian** eg reading, ministering to others as you are gifted, retreats etc

### Practise the presence of God as you write

- **Allow God's positive words to drown out the negative words of the enemy**
- **Use something to remind you of God's presence** eg a verse, painting, flowers, candle
- **Pray as you write** and prepare for speaking engagements. Don't write in your own strength.

### Trust God when the going is tough and don't give up

- **Check whose voice are you listening to** – God's or the enemy's?
- **If this is the ministry God has called you to do, then there will be opposition** – but God will strengthen you to persevere.  
2 Cor 4:8 *We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down but not destroyed.*

### Find those who will pray for you and support you in your writing journey

- **One or two who will journey with you** in your actual writing
- **Email prayer team** for when you speak

**Application:** Time of quietness to give our writing and our writing ambitions over to God (Pray)

### Letting God rule in our relationships with others

#### Show grace to others on the same journey

- **Get rid of jealousy and envy**  
Gal 5:19-26 **Read** whole section (jealousy is an act of the sinful nature cf fruit of the Spirit)  
**Quotes from Anne Lamott 'Bird by Bird' on Jealousy** pages 122-129  
P 122 *Jealousy is such a direct attack on whatever measure of confidence you've been able to muster. But if you continue to write, you are probably going to have to deal with it, because some wonderful, dazzling successes are going to happen to some of the most awful, angry, undeserving writers you know – people who are, in other words, not you.*  
P 124 *Jealousy is one of the occupational hazards of being a writer, and the most degrading.'*  
[P 126ff Lamott seeks to deal with her jealousy and writes the following:]

P127 *Another piece of the solution came when a poem by Clive James, called “The Book of My Enemy Has Been Remaindered”, appeared in The New York Times Book Review. “The book of my enemy has been remaindered,” it begins, “And I am pleased.” It helped more than words can say. Oh, what blessed relief for someone to be as jealous and spiteful as me and to make those feelings funny. I called everyone whose advice I had sought and read it to them. Everybody howled with recognition. ...*

P 129 *Then I started to write about my envy. I got to look in some cold dark corners, see what was there, shine a little light on what we all have in common. Sometimes this human stuff is slimy and pathetic – jealousy especially so – but better to feel it and talk about it and walk through it than to spend a lifetime being silently poisoned.*

**SO how does she do it?** By learning to laugh at it, write about it and bring it out in the open!

- **Look to the interests of others**

Phil 2:4 *Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also the interests of others.*

**Application:** Ways we can help other authors – links on website/blog, emails, editing book, interviews on blog, comments on their blogs, going to book launches, buying books!

- **Treat others as you want to be treated**

Luke 6:31 *Do to others as you would have them do to you.*

**Learn to receive criticism with grace**

- **There is always more to learn** – none of us has arrived yet, so get rid of pride

Prov 16:18 *Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.*

1 Pet 5:5b *All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”*

- **If you don’t agree and the criticism is unwarranted, state your point of view with grace** and don’t be defensive

- **Don’t let the criticism ‘floor’ you** or de-motivate you – we often remember the one negative comment and forget the other nineteen positive comments!

- **Keep a file of positive comments** about your writing and read it when you need to.

**Application:** Time of quietness for confession and forgiveness – pray

**Letting God rule in our relationship with ourselves**

**Expect personal change and growth during the writing process**

- **Possible positive changes:** More relaxed and at peace as we express ourselves creatively and become more of who God has called us to be; more patient and aware of the ‘flow’ of life; viewing people and situations differently and perhaps with more grace
- **Possible ‘negative’ changes:** Less tolerant of superficiality, triteness, pretence as we write with more and more integrity out of our ‘true selves’; more introvert – too much going on in your head!; perhaps lonely and a little misunderstood
- **Allow God to guide, teach and comfort through these changes**

Ps 139:1-2 *Oh Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. God sees what is happening to us.*

Ps 139:5 *You hem me in behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. God protects.*

### Be honest with yourself and in your writing

- **Listen to God and know when to call a halt** to a writing project
- **Don't write things you aren't prepared to back up** when you speak – we need integrity
- **Be honest and 'real' in the way you portray your characters** (in novels).

**Quotes** from Anne Lamott 'Bird by Bird' (re novelists):

P 52 *A writer paradoxically seeks the truth and tells lies every step of the way. It's a lie if you make something up. ... You make up your characters, partly from experience, partly out of the thin air of the subconscious, and you need to feel committed to telling the exact truth about them, even though you are making them up. I suppose the basic moral reason for doing this is the Golden Rule. I don't want to be lied to; I want you to tell me the truth, and I will try to tell it to you.*

P 53 *Just don't pretend you know more about your characters than they do, because you don't. Stay open to them. It's teatime and all the dolls are at the table. Listen. It's that simple.*

### Take the long view!

- **We can't all be overnight successes.** It often takes time to find our voice, fine hone our skills and build a 'fan base'.

Rom 12:12 *Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.*

- **Observe the work of God over time in this world**

**Read poem 'Take the long view' Our writing/ministry is just one part of the whole**

*It helps now and then to step back  
And take the long view  
The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,  
It is even beyond our vision.*

*We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction  
Of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work (Read to here only)  
Nothing we do is complete,  
Which is another way of saying  
That the kingdom always lies beyond us.*

*No statement says all that could be said,  
No prayer fully expresses our faith.  
No confession brings perfection,  
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.*

*No program accomplishes the Church's mission.  
No set of goals and objectives includes everything.*

*This is what we are about.  
We plant the seeds that one day will grow.  
We water seeds already planted,  
Knowing that they hold further development.*

*We provide yeast that produces effects  
Far beyond our capabilities.*

*We cannot do everything,  
 And there is a sense of liberation in realising that.  
 This enables us to do something,  
 And to do it well.  
 It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning,  
 A step along the way,  
 An opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter  
 And to do the rest.  
 We may never see the results,  
 But that is the difference between  
 The master builder and the worker.  
 We are workers, not master builders,  
 Ministers, not messiahs.  
 We are prophets of a future not our own.*

Archbishop Oscar Romero, 1917 – 1980, El Salvador

### **Be kind to yourself**

- **Learn to see yourself as God sees you**

**You are God's beloved child**

1 Jn 3:1 *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!*

**You are totally forgiven and accepted**

Eph 1:7 *In him [Jesus] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ...*

**You are uniquely gifted to do what God has called you to do**

Rom 12:6 *We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.*

- **Show the same grace to yourselves that God has shown to us**

We will fail, but just as God forgives us, so we need to forgive ourselves

We can rest in God's love, as we do our best to honour God and reach out for the kingdom

### **Conclusion**

**Share 'God is with me now' meditation and pray for the reality of God's love for each person:**

*God is with me now  
 Closer than breathing  
 And nearer than hands and feet  
 God has made me for himself  
 I come from God  
 I belong to God  
 I go to God  
 God knows me  
 God loves me  
 God has a use for me  
 Now and forever  
 Amen*