

Staying Motivated – Seeing your book through to completion

Workshop Notes – Jo-Anne Berthelsen

Focus: How to maintain a positive mindset and stay spiritually and emotionally whole during the writing and publishing process – with some practical ideas to enable this to happen.

Outcome: All of you re-invigorated, inspired by God and totally motivated to see your work through to completion!

Content: Three main headings – the God factor, the others factor, the self factor

Introductory comments:

There have been times in my own writing journey when I have found it hard to stay motivated. Certainly this was the case at the beginning, when it took me a year to find a publisher for my first novel, then almost another eighteen months before the book was released. Now the struggle is more with trying to balance writing my current novel with preparing for speaking engagements.

Think about your own journey. What stops you from moving forward with your writing project?

The God factor in staying motivated and seeing your book through to completion

NB We **will** encounter obstacles in this writing journey for God – we are in a battle

- Jesus words re trouble in John 16:33 – **but** he is able to help us overcome by his Spirit!
 - God will lead, guide, protect every step of the way and bring blessing and fulfilment
- Read 23rd Psalm aloud** – hold your writing journey before God, and apply what you hear!

- To the best of your ability, check that your writing is what God has called you to do and hold onto this certainty – it is the **greatest motivator!** (However, remember this call is not for **our** glory! God’s call is for a **purpose** – to ultimately bring glory to him and to touch others’ lives.)

At the end of this workshop, consider completing the following personal writing agreement:

I believe God has called me to write. Today, relying on God’s help, I fully accept this call/recommit myself to this call. Signed _____

- Put time aside to receive challenge and encouragement from God’s Word – remember **Eph 6:17**
 - Keep a bible open nearby
 - Practise journal writing, recording how God speaks to you through Scripture
- Practise the presence of our loving, gracious God as you write
 - Allow God’s positive words to you to drown out any negative words in our mind
 - Consider lighting a candle when you write to signify the presence of God
- Cover yourselves and your writing in prayer
- Try to see obstacles and times of difficulty as ‘creative gifts’ ie opportunities for God to strengthen us and show us something deeper in our work
- Remember how God has helped you get as far as you have in your writing and cultivate a heart of thanksgiving for the unique opportunity you have been given to share God’s love with others
1 Chron 16: 8-13 *Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. ... Remember the wonders he has done...*

1 Thess 5:18: *Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances ...*

Write down one thing from this input so far that you feel God might want you to consider further.

To reflect on: *Remembering that God is my source, we are in the spiritual position of having an unlimited bank account.* ‘The Artist’s Way’ by Julia Cameron p 91

The 'others' factor in staying motivated and seeing your book through to completion

- Find a spiritual mentor who understands the creative process
 - **Testimony:** I would not have four published novels by now without the support of my mentor, a beautiful eighty-year-old Christian woman, who has always believed in me.
 - Even a mentor via a book can be helpful
 - Eg: *Walking On Water* (Reflections on faith and art) – Madeleine L'Engle (Bantam, 1980)
 - The Soul Tells A Story* – Vinita Hampton Wright (IVP 2005)
- Be an active part of a wider faith community
 - Helps us keep things in perspective and realise we are part of a bigger picture
 - Provides support
 - Gives us an avenue to serve others **but** we still need to keep our writing 'ministry' a priority
- Obtain prayer support for your writing journey and speaking engagements
 - Testimony:** I have a great email prayer team, but include regular feedback
- Consider finding a writing critique partner, joining a writers' group or doing a writing mentorship
 - Can 'meet' online or in person
 - Don't rush in – be careful!
- Try to undertake a seminar/course on some aspect of writing once a year
- Read about writing and how other writers approach their writing
 - Books eg those mentioned under 'spiritual mentor' section above plus:
 - Bird by Bird* – Anne Lamott (Scribe, 2008)
 - The Artist's Way* – Julia Cameron (Pan 1995)
 - The Writing Life* – Annie Dillard
 - Magazines from writers' centres, online sources such as American Christian Fiction Writers, Faithwriters, Omega Writers
 - Take what encourages you but don't be overwhelmed or allow yourself to be made to feel inadequate
- Learn to respond well to positive and negative feedback from critique partners, editors, readers and those who hear us speak
 - show grace
 - develop humility – listen carefully to editors/readers comments without getting too defensive, then take on board what you need to. We all have things to learn!
 - truly 'receive' encouragement as from the Lord – accept it with grace and thank God!
- Learn to handle rejections from potential publishers in a positive way
 - May be any number of reasons your book is rejected – does not necessarily mean it isn't well written
 - Many well-known authors were rejected many times by publishers eg John Grisham (first novel rejected 25 times!), Frederick Forsythe (*Day of the Jackal* rejection letter – 'has no reader interest!'), J C Rowling
- Learn to say no to others' demands and focus your energies on what God is calling you to do (Sometimes this means choosing the better over the good)

Write down one thing you plan to work on further as far as being motivated by others in your writing journey is concerned.

The 'self' factor in staying motivated and seeing your book through to completion

(Includes some suggestions from James Scott Bell's 'Ten Disciplines for Christian Fiction Writers')

- Practise self-care ie exercise, healthy eating, sufficient rest, helpful leisure pursuits, good conversation, life-giving relationships/friendships

Written exercise: Write down three ways you could be caring for yourself better right now. What is stopping you from attending to these areas of your life? Highlight one thing you can begin to work on immediately.
- Find objects, words, verses, experiences that motivate you as a writer and utilise them regularly
 - James Scott Bell's ideas: 'writer' coffee cup; browsing in bookstores and picturing own book on shelves; designing the cover of your book – complete with lavish critical praise on back!
 - My own ideas: pictures/texts on desk, walls, bookshelves eg *Let us be silent that we may hear the Whisper of God* (Emerson); *She who trims herself to suit everybody will soon whittle herself away* (Anonymous!); photo of myself writing at my computer!
- Find a comfortable space/place to write
 - Carve out some area as yours alone, but writing five novels at the kitchen table can be done!
 - Being able to glimpse some part of God's creativity in nature may help
- Consider having soft music on that you enjoy and is not too intrusive
- Put a writing morning or day aside each week when you can work uninterrupted and when you do not allow anything to distract you from the task at hand – even emails or Facebook!
- Set a quota of words for each day/week – smaller targets eg Bell's 'nifty 350' each morning
- Learn to forgive yourself and forget the past

Phil 3:13 *But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus*
- Celebrate small victories
 - finishing a chapter
 - resolving some conflict situation in the plot
 - some encouraging feedback from a reader
- Schedule a yearly writing retreat of at least one day's duration and write your writing goals and action steps for the coming year

Write down one thing from this section you plan to put in place to motivate you in your writing

Conclusion

These notes are shared with you along with my prayer that you will know the close presence of God around you and find great blessing and fulfilment as you continue your writing journey.

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For you to consider completing:

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Today, relying on God's help, I fully accept this call/recommit myself to this call.

Signed _____