

WHAT TO WRITE?

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How does a book come into being? Before it ends up on your shelf, it has been penned, polished, proofed, printed, packaged, ported, and publicized. But before the first letter was written (or typed), it began as an idea in the mind of an author. A book is a creation born of passion. Writing the manuscript and making thousands of corrections is hard work no doubt, but it doesn't seem that way when your subject interests you and you believe it will bless those who read it. Giving up some evening television or weekend recreation is not burdensome when a vision takes hold of your heart.

The best writing is an outgrowth of a compelling idea. When a topic grabs you and will not let you go, there is a good chance you are on the right track. The right subject will captivate you. When you write with passion, time flies by unnoticed. Meals go uneaten, bedtimes are missed, and hours seem like minutes. If your topic does not intrigue you, it is unlikely to charm your readers or change their lives.

To borrow from a parable of Jesus, every book begins as a seed. That is to say, the finished product is the fruit of a well-cultivated dream. Ideas are seeds as real and powerful as anything ever planted in a garden. They are spiritual rather than material, but they generate life and motivate action. The idea for a book is planted in a writer's heart like seed sown in the rich earth of a farmer's field. And those who hear and understand those words also bring forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. High character and healthy choices are the fruit of noble ideas planted in good hearts by godly writers.

WHY WRITE?

Knowing why you write is a giant step toward knowing what to write. Is it to get rich, entertain, or help someone? The goal of my writing is to demonstrate the beauty and benefits of New Testament Christianity. I pray it will help those disengaged from Christ's teaching to reconnect with His eternal truths. To accomplish this aim, I stress the link between biblical faith and relevant living (John 10:10). I want readers to learn His words so they will love His body and live His dream.

My desire is that each book and article will

- Reveal the joy that comes from putting Jesus first in your life
- Show how Jesus' teaching makes your life better
- Prove you really can understand your Bible and confidently apply its truths
- Help you appreciate Jesus' church and its place in your spiritual growth
- Challenge you to make your life count by living more responsibly

My aim is to demonstrate that relevant living is the result of faithfulness to God's word.

- Devotion to truth produces abundant life, not legalism
- Discernment of truth produces courageous faith, not arrogance
- Dedication to truth produces loving churches, not institutionalism
- Defending truth produces spiritual integrity, not negativity

SIX EXAMPLES

My earliest writing centered around music in worship and studies in the Pentateuch (Genesis and Deuteronomy). As time passed, I began writing more about the New Testament and topical

themes such as encouragement, love, success, and leadership. Taking an in-depth look at short selections of Scripture like the Great Commandment and the Parable of the Sower provided immense joy. I never cease to be amazed at the information waiting to be mined from passages I thought I understood. The inexhaustible depth of Scripture sets it apart from all other sources of knowledge.

Music Matters in the Lord's Church

My first published book, *Music Matters*, was released by 21st Century Christian in 1995. It grew out of my desire to see younger Christians understand the biblical principles that guide the use of sacred music in worship. My hope was that a thirteen week class on the subject would provoke more thought than a passing sermon. I also believed that a better understanding of the restoration plea would strengthen their commitment to the Bible's authority in every area of life.

The Barnabas Factor: Realize Your Encouragement Potential

The idea for *The Barnabas Factor* grew out of a Bible class I taught in Springfield, Tennessee called The Encouragement Class. Three experiences prepared me to teach the class and write the book. It began when my earliest mentor gave me a copy of David Dunn's *Try Giving Yourself Away*, an inspirational little book challenging readers to make a hobby of doing good deeds. Another defining moment was when I attended my first self-improvement seminar with my father-in-law, Gale Hearn. Then I came across the *The Encouragement Book* which introduced me to the psychology of encouragement and skills for helping people feel more confident, hopeful, and determined. I wanted Christians to understand that encouraging others is a biblical ministry and not just pop psychology. *The Barnabas Factor* was designed to provide churches

with practical tools as well as inspiration. I sent the manuscript to several publishers on two occasions. Getting it turned down was a blessing because it gave me time to improve it. About a year after the second round of submissions, I got a phone call from Dr. Dennis Loyd, Assistant Editor of the Gospel Advocate, saying they might have an interest in the book. Soon it was in print and a special bond was formed that continues to this day.

Renewing Your Spiritual Life: 13 Steps for Maximum Spiritual Growth

When taking a graduate class on Deuteronomy, I wrote a paper for Dr. Rodney Cloud that became the basis of *Renewing Your Spiritual Life*. Teaching the Old Testament is a passion of mine. I love to distill Old Testament principles and make them accessible to modern minds. This book was written prior to *The Barnabas Factor* but was rejected because of the limited sales potential of Old Testament books and Deuteronomy in particular. I felt so strong about the project that I rewrote the book as a topical study. Framing it as a book on renewal enlarged its appeal to publishers and readers.

Spiritual Patriots: Jude's Call to Arms

In my opinion, Jude is the most timely book for churches of Christ in our generation. It shows that confronting false teaching is a spiritual obligation rather than a petty obsession. It also highlights the firm but caring spirit that Christians should display when contending for the faith. It is not only essential to fight the good fight but to fight the good fight right. Opposing error in a godly manner is crucial to winning hearts and minds. The spirits of men like Batsell Baxter, Cecil May, Billy Smith, and Mack Lyon exemplify this gracious but determined attitude.

Love More Sin Less: Developing a God-Shaped Heart

Love More, Sin Less book grew out of a paper I wrote for my DMin in Christian Leadership. My thesis was that if elders and deacons understood the centrality of love to the church's mission, it would increase their confidence and effectiveness as leaders. And if such an insight could energize leaders, would it not do the same for the church as a whole? The central idea was that love is not just one virtue among many, but the preeminent virtue from which all others derive their essence. In efforts to restore New Testament Christianity, love must be elevated to the pinnacle of our priorities. When I began to notice the dynamic connection between love and the individual parts of the Christian system, it provided the final outline for the book. The day I approached the Advocate about publishing this work, I also brought along my manuscript on *Spiritual Patriots* to let them know what was in the pipeline. As it turned out, the Jude book went to market first, and I am thankful because it allowed me to make major improvements to *Love More, Sin Less*. Going to press too early is a great temptation, and I am thankful God's providence delayed several of my books that would not have been very good otherwise. Rewriting is the key to good writing.

The Seed Principle: Sowing the Life of Your Dreams

My newest book grew out of a deep conviction that the Bible was written not only to save souls but to help people live fruitful lives. Drawing from The Parable of the Sower, *The Seed Principle* unearths eight secrets for successful living. These unbreakable laws provide readers with effective tools for growing spiritually and accomplishing worthwhile goals. Originally, the book was based on Genesis 1:11 and it had not occurred to me to use Jesus' parable as the basis of the study. The earliest outline focused on ways to apply the principle of cause and effect (the seed

principle) to various life situations. It soon became clear that I needed to spend more time explaining the law of sowing and reaping and the deeper meaning of the four soils (hard, rocky, thorny, and good). I went from using The Parable of the Sower as an illustration in a single chapter to making it the focal point of the book. *The Seed Principle* shows readers how they can sow the life of their dreams.

CONCLUSION

The key to successful writing is filling a human need. When you look for opportunities to help others, there is no shortage of compelling topics to address. At 53, it becomes increasingly clear that I will never be able to write all the books I have in mind. That list includes four leadership books, a sequel to *Barnabas*, a series of children's books called Sower Stories, a book on spiritual formation, one on prayer, and a doctrinal study called *The Church Jesus Built*. For me, the problem not deciding what to write. It is finding more time to write.