

Words for the Weary Writer

HOW TO KEEP GOING WHEN
YOU WANT TO GIVE UP





Introduction

Writing can be exhausting.

That's why so many aspiring storytellers fail to publish a book during their lifetimes.

When the path gets rough, quitting is tempting. But we want to prevent that outcome.

During the first year of Story Embers, staff members Mariposa Aristeo and Gabrielle Pollack published several articles aimed at struggling writers. Often, you can cure discouragement by adjusting your mindset—and Mariposa and Gabrielle offer fresh perspectives to help you persevere.

We've compiled their articles into this e-book and also included a toolbox our whole staff put together that describes practical tips and activities writers can use to rejuvenate their spirits.

We hope this e-book inspires you to press on in your journey as a storyteller.

-Josiah DeGraaf
Story Embers Editor-in-Chief



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Chapter One – Are You a Good Writer?

By Mariposa Aristeo, Public Relations Director

At intervals throughout your journey, you've probably wondered whether you're a good writer. Unfortunately, I can't sympathize because that thought hasn't occasionally crossed my mind.

It's crossed my mind dozens, hundreds, thousands of times. Yearly, weekly, daily, until doubts have frozen my keyboard and encased my creativity in the ice of fear. Anxiety sometimes arises when I see a bestseller and realize my book can't compare, after I receive a blistering critique, or while I'm banging my head on my desk.

But whenever and wherever the fear originates, the only way to melt it is by asking myself, *What is the definition of a good writer?* I used to have misconceptions about it, and if you read on, you may discover that you're not such a horrible writer after all.

Good Writers Are Conscious of Their Weaknesses

Before I go any further, I want you to know that bad writers do exist. But, contrary to what you might assume, a bad writer isn't someone who makes mistakes. A bad writer is someone who is unaware or (even worse) denies that his writing has flaws. His claim of perfection prevents him from growing in his craft. Try to critique or edit a bad writer's work, and he'll accuse you of proclaiming holy war.

In contrast, a good writer acknowledges that she has room to improve. She gobbles up constructive criticism (or she does for the most part, since the sight of red ink can be unnerving) and seriously considers advice. However, a good writer does more than recognize her faults. A bad writer bemoans his messy manuscript and dooms himself to hopelessness. A good writer, after shedding a few tears, wipes her cheeks and seeks to repair her story. Though she won't always succeed and might repeat the same errors, she is actively striving to overcome her weaknesses.

Ironically, being skilled at writing isn't entirely synonymous with being a good writer. I sound like I'm contradicting myself, don't I? The quality of your work and the depth of your knowledge determines whether you're skilled. But being a good writer involves fostering the mindset and habits that will *lead* you to become proficient at writing. Even if you're just beginning to learn the



ins and outs of story craft, pursuit of excellence will eventually sand out your rough edges, and in the meantime you're exhibiting the traits of a good writer.

Good Writers Persevere

During childhood, I'm sure you heard your parents say, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again." A good writer chips at obstacles until a crack forms. She keeps sending out queries after her fiftieth rejection, pounding the keyboard when the well of inspiration has run dry, and experimenting with marketing methods even when no one's buying books.

This doesn't mean a good writer is never tempted to give up. I've threatened to quit more times than I'd care to admit. I remember when I hit a low spot in my writing career. My dreams of publication seemed unattainable. No one was reading my blog. My WIP was a disaster waiting to be read. For a few days, I abandoned my aspirations. But those were some of the most unhappy days of my life. No matter how discouraged I felt, I *couldn't* quit, because telling stories is a part of me. A good writer may take a detour for a week or two, but ultimately she returns to the path and continues moving forward.

Good Writers Give Their All

One of the most obvious, and important, characteristics of a good writer is diligence, because it will transform a good writer into a great one. The passion and dedication of the rare people who go the extra mile often gets noticed.

What does this exertion look like? A frenzied attack on your keyboard? A marketing snowball you throw in people's faces? Nope. You need to rewrite your story. Then rewrite the story you rewrote. And rewrite the twice rewritten story. You get the idea.

Colossians 3:23 beautifully illustrates this principle: "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men."¹ A good writer (especially a Christian writer) creates a plot fit for a King. She pours effort into every facet of her story, from the small details like grammar to the bigger components like structure. This lengthens the writing process, but a good writer is willing to spend extensive amounts of time on her story so it will gleam like a star on a clear winter night.

¹ Colossians 3:23, NASB.



Good Writers Treat Their Work Seriously

Unlike the previous attributes, this one isn't a definite indication of a good writer. Many people write as a hobby or side job yet are no less sincere. However, professionalism is always an earmark of a *great* writer.

Firstly, a good writer is disciplined. She incorporates writing into her schedule and only interrupts these sessions if she has a heart attack, writer's block, or a craving for chocolate. Though she may not write daily (even people with regular jobs get the weekend off), she devotes as much time to it as possible, even if she has to shut off social media. The rigorous training of an ice skater competing in the Olympics is reminiscent of how a conscientious writer works.

Secondly, she doesn't sacrifice professionalism for the sake of creativity. She knows when to be a kooky superhero and when to remove the mask and don the suit. She studies and abides by the rules and recommended techniques. Before submitting a manuscript, she reads the guidelines thoroughly and notes the type of content the publication accepts. Following the guidelines to the letter will not guarantee acceptance, but it sets her apart. Even if her piece is rejected, the editor or agent will see that she isn't taking the task lightly, and that will pave the way for future acceptance.

Thirdly, a good writer realizes that advancing her skills requires monetary investment. Some writers decide to spend thousands on a college degree (don't worry, you can be a good writer without moving into the poorhouse) while others opt for the more affordable (and often better) route of purchasing writing craft books, enrolling in writing courses, attending writer's conferences, and/or paying for a tutor. Moreover, a good writer is willing to invest in her books by enlisting the best (not the cheapest) editors, cover designers, and formatters.

Good Writers Impact Others

All writers write for themselves. We write because we love it. We write because we long to become known. We write to torture ourselves. Writing is a career, so wanting to receive the fruits of our labor is not a sinful desire. Even occupations that focus on serving others, such as pastoring, doctoring, and firefighting, offer some form of compensation. However, the people who save the most lives (physically and spiritually) aren't motivated purely by money. And the writers who pen the most meaningful stories don't write *solely* for themselves.

A good writer desires to influence, educate, inspire, and/or entertain readers. No matter the story, a good writer cannot divorce her need to write for other people's benefit. I occasionally write short



stories that are illogical, random, and some might call them downright stupid. I write these stories because they help me to relax and break writer's block. But even then I find myself using the humor to bring a smile to someone's face.

Also, a good Christian writer focuses on glorifying God. The themes she chooses to address and how she handles them point to Him either explicitly or implicitly. Through the godly or ungodly behavior of her characters, she encourages other Christians to magnify God in their lives. Her stories provide a hearth to cold, dead hearts (without scorching them in a blaze of preachiness) and nudge them toward the One who can give them eternal life.

Although personal motives won't necessarily effect what kind of writers we are, the wrong ones can inhibit us from reaching our full potential. Stories crafted with self-centered motives will often be shallower and less compelling. We're supposed to do everything for God's glory, and that includes writing (1 Cor. 10:31). Edifying others may not be our primary goal with every project, but as Christians, I believe we should aim for that result, even if indirectly. Writing for pleasure, for instance, usually sharpens our skills, which in turn helps us produce stronger stories that will have a larger impact on others.

Misconceptions about Being a Good Writer

We've all developed a picture in our minds of what we think a "good writer" looks like. But several parts of that image are false, because a good writer isn't:

Someone who never needs their manuscript edited or critiqued. Every writer needs editing, regardless of their experience level. Even editors who are also authors hire other professionals to nitpick their manuscripts. Why? Because our books are like our children, and we overlook their faults because we love them. But those faults must be dealt with for the child's (or our story's) sake.

Someone who rarely receives rejections. Many writers have the mistaken notion that their books will be accepted on the first attempt, but that is as likely as opening a can with a toothpick. You are neither the first nor the last to be rejected. Dr. Seuss was rejected twenty-seven times and C. S. Lewis eight hundred times.²

² "How Dr. Seuss Got His Start 'On Mulberry Street'," NPR, January 24, 2012, accessed March 24, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2012/01/24/145471724/how-dr-seuss-got-his-start-on-mulberry-street>; "9 Famous Authors Rejected by Publishers," accessed March 24, 2019, <https://writerscircle.com/manuscript-completed-a-young-british-writer-dashed-off-his-first-novel-for-review-by-a-publishing-house-the-premise-of-his-b/>.



Someone who is traditionally published. If you've landed a book contract, you're probably a good writer. The market is overflowing, and publishers typically choose only the best. However, many good writers are not traditionally published. Some prefer self-publishing because they want more control over their books and/or a larger percentage of the sales. Others may be seeking publication but haven't hit the right agent or publisher yet. Remember, every good writer was once unpublished.

Someone who never struggles with writing. First of all, *ha, ha, ha.* "Every writer I know has trouble writing" says Joseph Heller. This includes me. This includes you. This even includes our own editor-in-chief, Josiah DeGraaf. In fact, the writers who never struggle are usually the bad ones, because nobody ever has difficulty not thinking (which is what bad writers do when they start typing).

What You're Really Asking

When you question whether you're a good writer, that's actually not what you're asking. Rather, you're asking, *Am I a perfect writer?*

Well, you're not. And if you keep asking yourself that, you'll avalanche a pile of unproductiveness. Yes, your story has flaws. But those are symptoms of your humanity, not determiners of your talent.

The true test is whether you let your mistakes hold you back.



Chapter Two – Don't Let Pressure Kill Your Joy in Writing

By Gabrielle Pollack, Staff Writer

It is a generally acknowledged fact that writing takes forever.

We wish we could skip the blood, sweat, and ink part of the process to get to the shiny published product. Publication becomes a higher priority as we grow older and college, job, and life choices loom before us. Holding a copy of a book and a royalty check seems much more important when bills need paying.

Many of us, yours truly included, feel this tension. A little urging can be good, but when we can't handle it correctly, it can steal the joy from our writing and lead to two types of dissatisfaction that breed bad habits.

Dissatisfaction with Unachieved Goals

Sometimes we feel like everyone is getting a big break except us. Instead of being happy for the friend who began writing as a four-year-old and is signing with an agent at seventeen, we become jealous. We start comparing instead of rejoicing in the success of our brothers and sisters. We stress about reaching the point where we can place a book in the hands of the masses like them.

Setting goals is great, but when we obsessively pursue them, failure can cause crushing disappointment that will zap our enthusiasm faster than writer's block, and we'll miss the in-between moments that make writing a book worthwhile.

The next time you're tempted to mope over unfulfilled goals, try these tips:

1. Remember God's goodness. Yes, the mountains before us are daunting, but we shouldn't concentrate on them so much that we forget past victories. God has already opened doors for us, and our skills have progressed since we wrote our first novel. We need to be grateful for what we have.
2. Remember that no matter when our stories get published or what opportunities arise, God is in control. He has a bird's-eye view that we don't. A missed deadline, botched



opportunity, or mistake won't dismantle everything He's building. We can stop worrying about circumstances beyond our control because they are in His. We can let go of our failures, for He knew we would fall short when He wrote our story, and He won't give up on us.

3. Remember that we're writers—we are unique. We aren't writing identical stories, so our paths will be different. How and when we accomplish a certain goal won't be the same as other writers.

Dissatisfaction with Skills

When we focus on future success, seeing polished manuscripts and flowing prose can leave us discouraged about our own abilities. We've written for so long and so hard that we think we should have conquered issues like telling or bland dialogue. If our skill isn't at the right level yet, we can't produce results. And when our momentum slows because we have more to learn, we feel like failures and the pressure hits us all over again.

We start fearing critiques because we view them as condemnation, not correction. We avoid people who say our writing could improve and convince ourselves that we're closer to publishing, but the opposite is true.

We then negatively judge the work of others. We nitpick their stories, hoping to find a flaw that will reassure us we have talent. This prevents us from enjoying and celebrating good books.

But the situation isn't about us, is it? God created that writer just like He created you. Both of you have unique gifts and flaws, all of which are in His plan. Learning at a slower pace than others doesn't mean we are failures. Our paths were never intended to be the same, nor our strengths and weaknesses. Our journey is shaped by the individual position God decided to place us in. As I stated before, He designed us to be unique. That not only applies to our timetable for reaching goals but also gaining skill.

Remember the Creator

Trust me. I'm guilty of all this and more. Sinking into these habits feels natural, but it's harmful—and a struggle I'm just beginning to understand. Reversing these habits requires time and effort. Remembering and believing the truth isn't easy.



First and foremost, we must look to God for our identity. Our value dwells in Him, not in our writing, skill level, or visible accomplishments. He knows where we are and what we need, and He has a plan broader than our own. He gives and withholds opportunities because He sees the big picture. Trusting His master plan shifts the pressure off our shoulders and onto His.

We must also praise and worship God in all we do, whether public or private. Man may not understand our work, but God does. Man's ability to notice the beauty in something does not make it valuable. We too often forget this basic fact.

Lastly, extend yourself grace. *We* may be the ones putting the most pressure on ourselves. We love our craft and want our efforts to succeed so much that we end up extinguishing our joy. But once we involve our Creator and acknowledge the pressure we face as writers, we can deal with it in a way that keeps our joy alive and glorifies God.



Chapter Three – Four Types of Patience Every Writer Needs to Unlock Success

By Mariposa Aristeo, Public Relations Director

You've undoubtedly read an article titled "365 Ways to Set Yourself up for Success" or something like that. The internet is loaded with information on self-promotion and increasing the zeros in one's bank account. However, success is dependent on much more than marketing techniques and get-rich-quick schemes. Ask any author and they'll tell you the key to success lies in a single word:

Patience.

This is an attribute few of us have, and the ones who manage to obtain it haven't the sense to know what to do with it. We need to pick up patience and jam it into the keyhole before we lose it again. But once that door opens, we think:

Oh darn, another door.

Don't worry; patience has four different keys that are guaranteed to unlock any bolt on any door.

Key #1: Patience with Yourself

"The doorstep to the temple of wisdom is a knowledge of our own ignorance" wrote Charles Spurgeon, and this is true for everything—practical and spiritual.³ Whoever thinks their writing is perfect has so little wisdom that they could engrave it on the back of a cashew shell and still have ample room to spare. The only way to become a master is by acknowledging weaknesses.

Your stories lack depth, your characters are devoid of personality, and you haven't the faintest idea where to place those troublesome em dashes. Instead of moaning over your poor skills, use your energy to identify your problem(s), gather the information to correct the issue, and then apply that knowledge to your work. If you lose patience with yourself and quit because you can't measure up to your self-imposed standards, you will never get anywhere.

³ C.H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Sermons, Volume Three* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2016), 94.



Also, you must be patient with your growth. Don't lose heart if you aren't progressing as rapidly as your peers or your writing isn't as good as others who have less experience. Watching others speed past the finish line is discouraging, but remember that each person is different. You shouldn't expect to grasp a concept as quickly as someone else, because you aren't them. That person doesn't think exactly like you or learn at the same pace, and maybe they've had more opportunities to mature in that area than you have. Dwelling on other people's accomplishments will only stunt your growth. Children do not all grow at an identical rate, and neither do we. God makes you grow only as fast as you need to and no faster. But sometimes, by learning slowly, you may become more knowledgeable in the end than the sharpest learner.

Key #2: Patience with Your Work

Masters need patience as much as beginners—perhaps even more so, because they realize they're talented, yet their work isn't always up to par with their ability as soon as they'd like. Our ideas cannot be expected to shine brilliantly overnight. Or in a week. Or in a month. Sometimes not even in a year. The story burning in your heart is worth all the time in the world—don't rush it. To quote Spurgeon once again, "Rome was not built in a day, nor much else, unless it be a dog kennel."⁴

I originally planned to release my first book by December 2016. Don't bother searching for me on Amazon, because I still haven't published that book. Why? The main reason was that I wanted my book to be the best it could possibly be. That meant more rewriting, more studying the writing craft, and more time spent staring at a blank screen. What was I getting out of it? Certainly no money or rave reviews. But I had the satisfaction of knowing I was crafting a quality work for future readers, and that was ten times better than earning a few dollars now for another less-than-spectacular novel.

To achieve your greatest dream, sometimes you must be willing to sacrifice your current desires and pour more time, effort, and money into your work for your own benefit and that of readers. Joanna Penn noted this in *How to Market a Book* when she quoted Hugh Howey: "The biggest barrier to releasing quality material is probably impatience."⁵

The other reason I postponed my book launch was for my happiness. By hurrying, I was hurting *myself*. Writing was no longer fun and became a chore. I took a step back so I could enjoy life—and writing—again. We miss so many little things when our heads are buried in plots. Writing

⁴ C.H. Spurgeon, *The Complete John Ploughman: Combined Edition of John Ploughman's Talk and John Ploughman's Pictures* (Christian Focus Publications, 2007), 286.

⁵ Joanna Penn, *How to Market a Book* (Curl Up Press), 45.



at your own leisure may seem selfish, but it's not. When you write simply to get it done, your work will be lackluster. A quote on Pinterest by Joseph Joubert says, "Never write anything that does not give you great pleasure. Emotion is easily transferred from the writer to the reader."

Key #3: Patience with Your Platform

The door to public exposure is stiff even with the keys of patience. We've already unlocked two doors, and we just want to break down this one—but that's not how you gain entry. Your platform, like your book, requires time to construct.

Some of the greatest authors weren't famous until after their deaths. Thankfully, you shouldn't have to wait that long, but you must be willing to start small and resist the temptation to take leaping bounds. Every writer begins with nothing, but that shouldn't discourage you from working hard even if you don't receive an instant return on your investment. Joanna Penn says, "Building a platform is cumulative, but a little every day adds up over time. The trick is not to go into it looking for direct results within the first few weeks or months, but to enter with a spirit of service and generosity for your community and the people you hope to attract."⁶

Also, platforming often involves rerouting your path. *New York Times* best-selling author, Joanna Penn, created two unsuccessful websites before launching The Creative Penn, which later was voted as one of the top blogs for writers. I found this true for myself as well. After creating two unsuccessful blogs, I wondered if I should give up blogging. I decided to build yet another site, using all that I'd learned from my past experiences. Some might consider those past blogs a failure, but I don't, because they directed me to the right path. So be patient with dusty detours, because they'll land you right where you need to be in the end.

Key #4: Patience with God's Plans

"Commit your way to the Lord" is the most important key.⁷ Being patient with yourself, your work, and your platform is pointless if you're impatient with God. All your plans, goals, and dreams are in His hands, so the number of marketing techniques you've tried doesn't matter. I have a friend who loathes networking, but she doubted she could get anywhere without it. A year later, God placed an opportunity in her hands to advance her career, without the slightest bit of marketing on her part.

⁶ Penn, 129.

⁷ Psalm 37:5, NASB.



I'm not advising anyone to abandon marketing. After all, God helps those who help themselves. But our success is ultimately dependent on what God does—not us—and He will bring it about in *His* timing. Those of us who are still under thirty have trouble remembering this. Our eyes twinkle at the prospect of becoming famous in our youth. But haven't you noticed that God prefers to grant success to the aged? Look at Jacob, for instance. He worked for Laban over fourteen years before he received any monetary compensation. Or consider David. As a teenager, he was a mere shepherd, and he spent the remainder of his youth fleeing in the wilderness. He wasn't crowned king until he reached thirty (2 Samuel 5:4).

If God handed us immediate success, we'd be tempted to magnify ourselves and our accomplishments. In addition, He knows that we'll be better equipped to handle the responsibilities associated with success when we're older. Perhaps God also does this for our joy since the waiting, working, and dreaming makes triumph so satisfying.

Success Unlocked

All creatives will benefit from exerting patience—even non-Christians. It's the one virtue that will guide us to success. And when I mention success, I mean much more than adding seven hundred new subscribers to our email lists. Patience can indeed pay off that way and often does—but it pays us with something more valuable than popularity. It furnishes our manuscripts with quality, depth, and meaning. Even if our admirers are few, they will be dedicated ones, because we took the time to give them a book worth the admiration.



Chapter Four – Three Blessings of Waiting for Publication

By Gabrielle Pollack, Staff Writer

Have you ever wished you could skip to publication?

Waiting can be discouraging, especially when a dream is involved. Writers at all stages have felt that their stories would never appear in a bookstore.

But being forced to let years pass between writing our first story and publication isn't a curse. God hides many blessings in the intervening time that can shape us into stronger writers if we're patient and observant.

Blessing #1: Time to Learn

As we mature, we'll look back and realize we weren't as smart as we thought. Life was teaching us lessons we didn't know we needed.

Like it or not, our experiences affect how and what we write. Through research, we can portray struggles we haven't undergone, but personal development can't be rivaled. Sometimes we need firsthand understanding to create depth in our writing. As we wait to show the world our work, we have space to grow as people.

We also have an opportunity to refine our craft. A writer never starts as an expert. Even the gifted among us need to improve, and published authors never stop learning. Now is the time to expand our knowledge so we can fine-tune our work before sharing it.

Yes, publishing early has perks. But launching a story *well* requires more than pitching to a publisher or throwing an e-book on Amazon. Authors must manage their public presence, promote their books, and interact with readers. The ability to put a book in print doesn't guarantee we'll be adept at marketing it. Publishing later in our writing careers allows us to increase our platforming and marketing skills, instead of scrambling to get up to speed after publication.



Blessing #2: Time to Make Mistakes

Trial and error are the best tutors. As we study both the craft of fiction and marketing/platforming strategies, we'll mess up. A bunch.

But, as unpublished writers, we get to blunder in front of a small audience instead of hundreds of readers. Authors can embarrass themselves with errors as minor as a few typos and inaccuracies to as massive as gaping plot holes. Josh Harris, who published *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* at twenty-one, ultimately apologized for some of the opinions in his book. In the statement he posted on his website, he writes, "I have made it [his response] public because I think my reevaluation should be commensurate to the public reach of my book."⁸ Because countless people read his work, he wanted his change of heart to have the same reach.

His expression of regret was a brave move and showed that the stories of others had impacted him. We're not promised we won't uncover similar mistakes after our stories are read. Moments will arise when we must reconsider our actions and beliefs because we're imperfect humans.

Having a teachable spirit in this situation is incredibly important. If we don't learn from our oversights when the stakes are low, we will repeat them. Our mistakes offer wisdom that we'll benefit from applying now and can carry over to our published careers.

Blessing #3: Time to Discover Who We Are

Nobody has life figured out, and trying to make sense of it is a messy process. We'll rarely feel we have a sufficient handle on our existence.

But without the pressure of publishing, we have a chance to cement our beliefs before sharing our creations. When we encounter criticism, the solid foundation we've built will prevent us from falling apart.

"Since my novella was published, I've received lots of positive reviews but a couple negative," Maddie Morrow, Rooglewood writing contest winner, told me. "A few years ago that would have killed me. Now I can look at it honestly, and whether I agree with their interpretation or not, I know I did the best I could with the story and didn't cut corners. So I don't have to worry about the negatives." If Maddie had published years before, these critiques may have caused her to doubt

⁸ "A Statement on *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*," Josh Harris, accessed March 24, 2019, <https://joshharris.com/statement/>.



herself and her story. But through her journey as a writer, she learned to stand by her choices even when others disapprove.

Hurtful comments are inevitable, so we'll have to cope with them whether we're ready or not. Playwright Irwin Shaw writes, "An absolutely necessary part of a writer's equipment... is the ability to stand up under punishment, both the punishment the world hands out and the punishment he inflicts upon himself." The best way to brace yourself for stinging reviews is to solidify the reasons behind your work and beliefs now, not after publication.

How Do We Know Our Story Is Ready?

When the time to publish comes, how do we determine whether our story is good enough?

Writers seeking traditional publishing must overcome obstacles before signing a contract. Agents and publishers have no intention of supporting inferior books; they have reputations to uphold. A writer must prove herself to convince a professional to accept her story. A skilled writer usually has higher odds of achieving this than a green one.

What about self-publishing? Writers can turn manuscripts into e-books without gaining the approval of experts and run a greater risk of releasing their work prematurely. But, even though most of us don't have editors and publishers peering down at our manuscript, we have friends who can warn us that our work isn't ready. We need to seek feedback from honest people who can spot a quality story and are interested in our genre. Yes, hearing that we need to improve can be disheartening, but when we finally publish our first story, we'll be grateful for the truthful men and women who didn't let us down.

Use This Time Wisely

We will never be perfectly prepared for publication, and we shouldn't hesitate to pursue our ambitions because we haven't mastered every aspect of our personal lives. But waiting is a natural part of the process and, in a way, the dream. Yes, it's hard, but that delay doesn't have to be wasted. We have the opportunity to grow, gain insight, and enjoy the moment. The Lord understands what He's doing by letting our dreams stay out of reach. Take the time He's given and use it well.



Chapter Five – Ten Methods for Surviving the Writing Slog

By the Story Embers Team

Many people write stories—but few achieve the uphill climb to publication. Aspiring writers look at how far they need to travel and start feeling so dismal that they're tempted to quit. They worry that their work is poor and question their calling to authorship.

If you're stranded on a ledge between retrogression and progression, we want to help you persevere. Each of us on the Story Embers staff have battled discouragement and burnout, and we've compiled advice from our shared experiences.

These tips are meant to be used like a Swiss Army knife—apply the parts you need and stow the tool on your computer for whenever a moment of desperation arises.

Tip #1: Pray

At times, prayer can seem like a clichéd ritual in Christian circles, but it shouldn't. If you believe you've been saved by the Creator of the Universe who listens to your every plea, why *wouldn't* you approach His throne when you're struggling?

How do you expect to write fiction that glorifies God if you don't seek His support and guidance? Whether you're frustrated by stubborn characters, aren't sure how to fix a plot riddled with holes, or simply lack the energy to keep writing, turning to God should be your first recourse.

Tip #2: Prepare a Mission Statement

You probably began your writing career with visions of touching readers' souls and changing the world for Christ. But as months lapsed into years, maybe you lost sight of that goal.

To avoid slipping into apathy, craft a mission statement for yourself as an author. Think and pray about the literary feats you hope to accomplish. How can you channel the passions God has given you to influence and uplift others? Don't be afraid to dream big. Your mission statement should



drive you forward no matter where you are in your journey. Perhaps our Christian Storytellers Manifesto can serve as a reference point!⁹

Once you hold a mission statement in your hands, store it in a prominent place—perhaps in a frame on the wall or your desk—and reread it the next time your purpose becomes foggy. If you believe in the ideals you wrote down, they'll fuel your resolve.

Tip #3: Recruit an Accountability Partner

Writing can be a lonely business if your only companion is a computer. Man isn't meant to be alone (Gen. 2:18), and writers shouldn't have to pursue their ambitions in solitude either.

Look for another writer (preferably close to your skill level) who enjoys your work and can act as an accountability partner. Few vocations are as prone to mood swings as writing—one day you believe your book is the next classic, and the following day you're convinced that same book is garbage.

An accountability partner will keep you humble when you're proud of your writing and remind you of your strengths when you feel like a failure.

Tip #4: Create a Series Bible

Are you stumped or disenchanted with a particular story? Consider piecing together a series bible. This is a notebook or file where you brainstorm and organize pertinent information, such as character sketches, cultural systems, setting descriptions, and forms of religion. Whether you directly disclose all the facts to readers or not, you need to maintain consistency throughout your story. If a character's personality changes, or unexplained scientific phenomena occurs, that can throw you off track.

With all the components in front of you, you'll better understand how your story functions and be able to detect shortcomings that need repaired. And the more you develop your story world, the more likely you'll regain interest in it.

⁹ "Christian Storytellers Manifesto," Story Embers, October 9, 2018, accessed March 24, 2019, <https://storyembers.org/manifesto/>.



Tip #5: Remember Your Identity in Christ

Discouragement might cause you to overlook blessings and forget who you are—a *human being lovingly designed in God's image*. Creation and redemption both reveal God's compassion for His people. Including you.

When you're overwhelmed with doubts about your writing, pause and reset your focus. Your identity is in Christ, not in how many words you crank out each day or the number of books you sell. Study Isaiah 43, Psalm 139, John 17, Romans 8, and Ephesians 2 to reassure yourself of your worth in God's eyes and who He created you to be.

Tip #6: Exercise

Sometimes the problem is that you've been sitting and staring at a blinking cursor for hours. If you sporadically wrestle with short-term writer's block, jogging or taking a walk might clear your mind and ease tension.

Tip #7: Build Pinterest Boards

Normally we don't recommend solving writing crises with social media. But if you leverage Pinterest wisely, it can rescue you when you're stuck.

Spend an hour or two scrolling through the colorful pictures, thought-provoking quotes, and heartrending prompts. After the content has taunted you with more ideas than you could write in a lifetime, stockpile the inspiration. Don't stop until you have a storyboard for each book and hundreds of pins scattered across a dozen prompt boards. When you need a visual representation of a character or want to make a fan-art collage of your work, you'll know where to search.

Tip #8: Create a Spotify Playlist

Maybe all you need to revitalize yourself is epic music blasting in the background. Create your own Spotify playlist for each novel, or utilize the playlists Kingdom Pen assembled and sorted according to different themes and emotions.¹⁰

¹⁰ "Kingdom Pen," Spotify, accessed March 24, 2019, <https://open.spotify.com/user/kingdompen>.



Tip #9: Take a Break

Working on the same project for too long can result in burnout. Set your manuscript aside temporarily and concentrate on other tasks. You'll return with a fresh perspective that'll enable you to refine your story to a deeper degree. Several best-selling authors practice this tactic to ensure that they produce the highest quality books possible.

Tip #10: Venture Outside Your Comfort Zone

Writers tend to favor genres they enjoy reading. However, that can limit your potential—or even extinguish your spark. If you're bored by the eighth fantasy story you've drafted, that may be a sign you need to break the monotony.

If you always write sci-fi, try your hand at comedy. If you write romance, experiment with historical fiction. If you're partial to dark, brooding heroes, write one who has trouble treating life seriously. By switching up your style, you'll explore new realms of thought and hone skills that are currently dormant.

Pressing Onward

The path to publication is grueling and holds many obstacles. It's not for the faint of heart! Figuring out which techniques help you persevere is a challenge. Since every writer is different, not all of the methods we've described will be effective for you. However, as you grow and learn how to keep yourself motivated, you'll be able to inch closer and closer to publication.

Sometimes all you need is the determination to scale one more rock.



Conclusion

In Paul's epistle to the Galatians, he exhorts readers to "not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up."

He is of course talking about deeds that benefit "the household of faith," and when you're an unpublished author, how can your stories impact the world? During periods of waiting, seeing the purpose in your writing can be difficult.

However, all good things take time to reach fruition. Well-written stories not only glorify God but also edify readers. If you're striving to accomplish this vision, even if the seeds are slow to sprout, this promise applies to you.

As Mariposa and Gabrielle point out, sometimes all you need is a change of perspective.

In due season, we shall reap. Let's not become weary while the crops are still growing.