

# The Writer's Notebook ~ Getting Some Ink on the Page...



My notebook is my field of dreams.

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A Teaching Topic for *Getting It Write*

By

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Getting Some Ink on the Page  
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# A Note from the Author...

Hello!

This Teaching Topic is both practical and personal. I hope you'll print it, highlight, underline, and take notes. Go ahead – respond!

My notebook is the place I try on new ideas.

It is the vehicle that moves my writing from the idea stage to “the end.”

It's also a record of my writing adventure – from the unknown to the certain.

## **My notebook anchors me to the writing.**

This is written to affirm those who are already notebook enthusiasts and to encourage writers not yet using this tool to at least consider it.

No matter where you are on the notebook spectrum, I hope you find this Teaching Topic interesting, comforting, and a little bit challenging.

Writing on...

Joy

# Introduction...The Reason

Welcome to The Writer's Notebook ~ Getting Some Ink on the Page!

**A writer's notebook is not an accessory – it is a tool box for words.**

Why keep one?

Good ideas come in flashes and like lightening they can be here one second and gone the next. Jotting down a brief note means you might have the opportunity to mine a gem out of an idea later.

Great ideas are multi-faceted. In a writer's notebook you can cut away the things that don't work and hang on to the parts that shine.

Writing is a composite of our external and internal lives. The writer's notebook is a place to record and track this connection. If you are brave, this notebook can be as real and vital to your writing as your heart beat is to life.

Opening a writer's journal you wrote in a year or more ago can be like opening a treasure chest and finding wealth you didn't know existed.

For example, you may find characters for your next novel. Or a newspaper clipping that intrigued you then...now inspires an article, book, character, or a poem. You might find a quote you considered wise and now it startles you into a response.

You might find facts that demand investigation, transforming truths, or miraculous moments. You might birth new ideas, face old fears (and conquer them!), let old wounds die, find the hope that heals, or blast the barbaric. At any time you can pull one of these assets out and use it to make a difference.

It's a place to discover, dream, debate, and dance...with words. It can be a place of revelation and revolution.

It's also a place to get some ink on the page. It counts as writing!

# Lesson 1...The Risk

## **What it costs us...**

Honest writing is expensive. My notebook is where I explore the cost to me if I share what I've lived and the price if I don't. I'm not talking about using ten dollar words...I mean the economy of the soul.

Sometimes I wish the writing didn't demand total truth from my heart and I try to avoid the risk. The result is drab, gutted, empty, and surface writing. These words will never reach into the heart of a reader and it leaves an empty legacy.

I do believe our notebooks can be valuable to others if we don't destroy them before another person or generation can benefit from them. So, this is part of the challenge...how real do we get on the pages? How honest should we be about our fears, failures, faith, dreams, discoveries, and desires?

If we are going to be powerful writers and leave a treasure chest full of priceless words behind, we must give ourselves permission to be authentic. No matter what it costs us.

## **This kind of writing is intentional and deep.**

Here's a brief look at what God wrote to us...

He required that the writers reveal the brutalities of war, consequences of disobedience, the penalties of sin, and the gruesome death of His Son. When He sent a flood of near total destruction, He wanted it recorded. When the earth burst open and swallowed up men, women, and children who opposed Him, He wanted it on the page. He inspired these men to write about the depths of despair, the heights of His love, and the fulfillment of His Promise in Jesus. He didn't allow for the spinning of truth or political correctness.

We might prefer to keep Jesus in the manger or risen and at the right hand of God the Father. While these are both eternal truths, they are only part of the story. God knew if He gave us bits and pieces, we'd conjure up the rest making His Truth a lie. The result: we'd all be eternally lost. He couldn't mislead us with so much at stake so He told us all we could possibly comprehend and some we can't.

He gave us the Good News wrapped in the brutality of the cross and the power of the resurrection. He didn't spare His Son and He didn't sugar-coat His Words. He offered us the opportunity to believe His Word. Or not.

Some of the testimonies He preserved in His Word asked why. Others shared grief, prayed for vengeance, and worshipped – sometimes all in the same Psalm!

He wrote about real women. One woman ate forbidden fruit, another carried the Christ in her womb, while another met Him at a stoning. A prostitute lied and saved a nation. One woman became a judge and led her nation into battle. A little girl died and rose again. Demons possessed one and He cast them out. One met Him at a well; another in a garden near an empty tomb.

No words were spared. They were spoken into the hearts of the writers by God and put down on the paper, for our benefit.

I hope you're not getting the impression I believe what I write is equal to the inspired Word of God. I don't. I do believe that my experiences shared in a written form, can make a difference. They can have eternal value as God uses them to reveal Himself through my life to another person. The most powerful words are God's – mine are a shadow I pray reflects Him and His truth.

My notebook is where it starts; the first glimmer of a project. I scribble, doodle, and don't get it right but I do get it written. The writing can be gross, whimsical, or mushy, but most of all – it's unfettered. It's me at my most honest.

My notebook is my planner and plotter. It's where I dream and scheme...and get real. I question me, the work, and my call. It's also where I confirm the work and my call. (I never seem to stop questioning me!) It's where I study His Word and see where it connects with me on a personal level.

Can God really use our junk? The suffering...the sin...the sorrow...the secrets...the shame?

He says yes in Romans 8:28. The tiny word "all" makes the difference. Do you think you've out sinned the men and women in the Bible? Think again. He used all kinds of sinners to reveal His truths. If we're willing, He'll use yours and mine.

### **The Cost to others...**

This does not give us license to leave damaging truths on the page to harm another person or destroy their reputation to get even. Vengeance is not ours.

We can however share an experience and its damaging effects on us. I do the best I can in my notebooks and writing not to risk someone else. The peril is usually mine.

Writing may demand you reveal an evil in someone else or working out harm done to you, but "why" it's written must be considered.

### **Motive matters!**

I do think there are times a believer can write the truth – even when it's ugly – and use real names, places, dates, etc. To get accurate news, a journalist should report the facts. To reveal truth, writers who love Jesus must write courageously. Sometimes this price tag seems beyond our means but without our investment the loss could be great.

To help other women find hope and healing we may have to write about incest, rape, abortion, divorce, infertility, death, illness, malpractice, child abuse, prostitution, pornography, war, depression, or murder and we may need to reveal names in spite of a person's power or position.

Before you jump to the conclusion I'm giving you permission to write about a person this way...I'm not. You must consider the cost to everyone involved and weigh your motives. Will the writing help more than harm? Try it out in your notebook first then read what you wrote out loud. What is the tone? If it tastes like "fillet of soul" on your tongue, your reason needs further examination.

Writing truth at gut-level and revealing facts about us, no matter how awful is a challenge to Christian thinking. We tend to want the world at large and our Christian sub-culture to believe that because we have Jesus everyday is victorious. We've fostered this lie for a long time. It's

changing as Christians drop the bogus front and get real. I am convinced teenagers in and out of the church see us as ineffective and out of touch because we've worn this mask too long.

Jesus is the victory and we have Him...so yes, we **have** the victory. But I don't always **live** victorious. Do you? At times it's a choice. Sometimes circumstances weigh us down. How can God use that? Well, in my down times, I haven't given up on God. I can *feel* overwhelmed, exhausted, depressed, afraid, sad, discouraged, and heart-sick. At the same time I *know* God loves me, has a plan, will use all my junk for His good, brings joy in the morning, and hears my every prayer. When I'm wiped out, I'm confident in Him. When I'm empty I know He will infuse me with renewed energy.

So here's the thing – we can share both halves (the gross and the glorifying) of the truth without shame! In fact, without both sides, we give the world and other believer's half-truths...and God calls those lies.

### **The truth – the whole truth – sets us free!**

I save these truths in my notebook so when it's time, the material is there to get me started and keep me going.

#### **Practical Moment:**

What's in your notebook?

If you don't have a notebook now is the time to get one. Think about what's important to you. Do you like writing in spiral notebooks? Or do you prefer thick, smooth paper in an attractive journal cover?

Suggestion: Barnes & Noble sometimes has great spiral notebooks with thick smooth paper. The covers are sometimes subtle and sometimes sassy. The smaller ones cost \$5.95 and the larger ones \$8.95.

What kind of pen do you want to use? My personal favorites are the uni-ball vision elites (they have super-fine tips). They now come in a pack with 8 different colors and since I love to write in color – they are an excellent choice for me. The set is around \$15. ([www.sandfordcorp.com](http://www.sandfordcorp.com))

Some people have two notebooks. One is large and kept at home; one is smaller and fits easily in a purse or pocket. I prefer a large notebook for my in depth writing. Instead of a second notebook, I carry index cards with me everywhere. When I jot something important down, I can tape the index card into my notebook. This eliminates having to rewrite anything. I carry the my cards in a plastic index card case put out by Mead. (the only place I've found them so far is at Office Depot)

Others suggest the writer's notebook and journal are two completely separate books. I disagree. It's far more efficient for me to have the two in one. The best of my writing comes from what some might consider journaling. When it's part of my writer's notebook I'm far more likely to find it and use it.

If I'm blocked I can take one notebook to my favorite coffee shop and "mine" for the gold hidden within the pages. If I have a brilliant writing idea or fill pages with actual writing for a specific project, I tab the pages by folding over the top corner or with a post-it flag.

Another tool I find handy is some kind of light by my bed. (I keep index cards and a pen beside the bed too!)

The most important thing here is this: pick the notebook/s and pens that work for you. Keep the things you will use for this part of your writing nearby. You are going to be spending a lot of time with these pages so you need to like them.

### Keep it simple.

Okay...now let's get writing!

Take a moment to consider each of the following questions and pick one or two to write about. Maybe there's something in the text you agree or disagree with. Grab a pen!

Write from your heart and your head. Release the real you onto the pages. Let go of fear and shame. Let words dance, vomit, sing, bleed, weep, skip, spit, run, pound, walk, cut, and twirl on to the pages.

~Are you afraid to put your gut-level emotions on the pages? Why?

~If someone finds your writers notebooks fifty years from now, will they know the real you – your real dreams – your real writing?

~Did anything the author shared in this Teaching Topic make you mad? What?

~Do you believe that most of us want to know the truth about people?

~When you found out a negative truth about a famous person you admired, did that change your view of that person? Did you come to dislike them? Or did you find them more human and therefore more likeable?

~Do you trust someone who is always good; even in the midst of harsh circumstances?

~What masks do you think we wear in church? In the world? Is the world better off if they think we never struggle or worse off when we aren't honest with them?

~What does your mask look like? (I'd like to think mine is beautiful with feathers and diamonds – Mardi Gras style but I know it's really steel armor)

~What books (fiction and nonfiction) have influenced you the most? Why?

~Who are the movie or book characters you remember the most? Why?

~Why do you think God chose to reveal Himself to us so fully in the Bible?

~Are there parts of the Bible you wish He'd left out? What parts? Why?

Below is a longer writing prompt...

~Consider the Psalms. What did David reveal about himself? About God?

Take several hours or days and do two searches of the 150 chapters. First list what you learn about David and the other writers and then make a list about what you learn about God.

If you choose to put yourself onto the pages of your notebook and ultimately into your writing, the first changed soul will be your own. Done right – with the right motives - even the roughest parts of our lives become win/win/ win situations. The writing blesses God, the reader, and you find healing along the way.

You may already be doing this in your writers notebook or journal. Good for you! Now...dive deeper. There's more treasure to uncover and it's inside you!

**Someone once said, "Nothing goes wrong for a writer; it's all material." I see the truth in this!**

## Lesson 2 – The Record

### On The Record...

I remember the writing of authors who put their hearts, faith, passions, and battles on the record. They dare to use their life experiences and imaginations to tell stories with lasting truths. Or they take Christianity out of the box and let it's mystery shine for the world to see and ponder and maybe believe. I've read a lot of fluff and can't remember a time the writing stopped me in my tracks and made me gasp, think, cry, laugh out loud, dream, or face a fear. A couple of my favorite writers can even make me want to barf. So why would I read them again? Emotions that raise a physical reaction in a reader's body make for good writing!

Authors who have held my heart in their hands as I read their work include Max Lucado, Leonard Sweet, Ken Gire, Steve Turner, Madeline L'Engle, Erwin Raphael McManis, McNair Wilson, Bret Lott, Robert Winslow, Stacie Elderidge, Lisa Samson, Ted DeKker, Francine Rivers, Jesse Graham, Hadley Hoover, Gayle Roper, Lief Enger, Marilynne Robinson, Dean Koontz, Charles Martin, Angela Hunt, and most recently, Robin Parrish and Claudia Mair Burney.

These writers don't lull me into a comfortable place or provide an escape from my reality (although that's nice now and then). Instead, they challenge me, stretch me, and are part of God changing me. They reveal a new vantage point for me to experience God, life, love, and society (both in the church and out).

One of my favorite notebook facts is this:

## Notebooks are edit-free zones!!!!

My own notebook entries sometimes start out with mundane facts like the weather, where I walked, what book I'm reading, a personal review of a movie I watched, or a list of who came for dinner and what we ate. Or I might make a list of things I want to do...need to do...or should do. Other days I focus on God or prayer needs. Many times I write about a writing project and work out kinks, glitches, and blocks. This is a sure cure for a grumpy writer!

When I run out of real words, I'll paste in some photos and write about them...from my heart. If I'm sad, I can bawl on the pages. I confess, I also whine really well in the written word. I can write in color and change my handwriting style from various forms of printing to other forms of cursive. When there are no words, I doodle, draw flowers, swirls, or bold harsh lines at angles while I wait for something to write about to come tumbling out of me. These are not time wasters. Each artistic endeavor reveals as much about me as the actual writing.

My writing notebook is chock-full of Joy. It's where I save my writing process, my challenges, my emotions, my struggles, and my faith. It's a record of me.

### **God went on the record when He put Himself on the pages of the Bible.**

He didn't just give us historical facts. He revealed His character and His will. He told us His names and what His plans are for us and the future. Through His Word we know personal things about the people who followed Him. On the pages of the Bible, He told us how much He loves us and what that love cost Him.

When I read the Bible I feel a special connection to God. It's my tangible in a faith of things unseen. In generations to come, your notebook can be the first hand testimony of your life.

In order for journalists to share the information they gather, the people they interview must go "on the record." In trials a court reporter enters every question asked and answered so there is a written account to bear witness.

Maybe your notebook is the place you save the hours spent working, the number of pages written, or the word counts. Perhaps it is where you track what you sent, who you sent it to, and their response. It comes in handy at tax time and helps you keep your business interests current. As limited as that is, it's still a record and those brief entries reveal more about you than you might realize. Where you submit your work, how often you write, the topics that hold your focus, the time you spend doing your work, your financial investment in your writing, and the titles and types of writing you do all tell something about you. Of course the articles, poems, devotionals, short stories, novels, curriculum, Bible studies, journals, and/or non-fiction books you write are also part of your writing history.

I'm convinced if we're brave and write down the blood and guts (as well as the rewards and joys) of our writing process we will help and delight more people than we can imagine. These pages with our hopes, dreams, damage, and heart splashed all over them bear witness of a life lived.

### **Off the Record...**

#### **Not all the writers who have made a difference in my life have published works.**

Joy Johnson used her date book, receipt book, her ledger, and her address book as journals. She recorded her business, visits from her family, prayer lists, the height of her son-in-laws tomato plants (over six feet one productive summer!), and poetry she wrote about her faith in God. She kept newspaper clippings, death notices, birth announcements, and favorite hymns taped inside these various record books. She also wrote poetry for the nursing home newsletter when she was a resident. She shared her talent in these small ways so God could use them to bless others in a big way.

Charlie Pater kept a ledger of his garden, chickens, and expenditures. In between the financial records he wrote about his trip to the United States from Holland at age nine. He wrote about how they changed his name from Klaus to Charlie at Ellis Island.

Without the writings of these two people, some interesting facts, surprising truths, and words of worship would be lost forever. I'd never know this stoic Norwegian grandmother found salvation rapturous or that Charlie had another name.

Neither of them became famous writers. But their written records are treasured by their granddaughter – me!

A woman I know has her mother's notebook. In it she wrote only about the weather, the work she did for the day, her income and expenses. From those short entries we learn she was a hard worker and savvy business woman. The weather influenced her health and therefore, her output so was an important part of tracking income and expenses.

The days she didn't work, she still recorded the weather and then left the lines blank. One might get the impression she was completely focused on work but her daughter disagrees. On

her mother's days off, there were picnics, visits with family and friends. They enjoyed long movies, books, and naps. Her mother lavished love on her family. She worked hard but kept her work notes succinct. She wrote down only the things that impacted her bottom line, which is both a gain and a loss for her family. They wonder...was her work more important than a chronicle of her walk with God, romantic moments with her husband, or tender moments with her children? Did she struggle with temptations? What about anger, fear, or depression? What did she believe about war, politics, or women's rights? Because these things were not discussed nor written down, her family will never know.

As far as I know, my sister-in-law and I only journal-keepers in my family. I wish my husband, parents, brother, parents-in-law, and the kids I love would write their hearts out onto the pages. They think that's for "writers" only. I keep letters, emails, cards, and a few special post-it notes from them tucked away in my journals and memory boxes. Besides the emotional value they hold for me, these words are a brief disclosure of them.

I recently asked my grandniece Gracie to write a few lines in one of my notebooks. She spent some concentrated effort writing a few squiggly lines. Since she's four, I needed to ask her what she wrote. She pointed to the "words" and said, "Auntie, it says I love you so much!" The wonderful thing about child writing is I think they actually see the words they meant to write in the scribbles!

I keep post-it notes from my husband in my date book, Bible, billfold, notebooks, and in my office. He doesn't write very many but I want to keep these treasures where I can see and enjoy them. I tend to wear out the sticky backing moving them from place to place. My mom wrote a few pages in a small notebook to me for my birthday about the day she gave birth to me. Her words make the tears gush from my eyes and I love reading them.

These gifts of words are priceless to me. Without them, I might not know it, but the loss would be great and the gains far fewer.

### **Practical Moment:**

Get your favorite beverage, your pens, and your writer's notebook. It might help to have a highlighter or way of flagging a good idea or two. Read through some of your recent notes. Highlight a particular spiritual lesson. Is there are market out there looking for an article or a devotional on that topic? Is there something in your writing that can be used to share an eternal truth with readers in a non-Christian format? Don't use our lingo...use theirs. Surprise them with your honesty, bravery, and faith.

Or maybe you need to spend some time brainstorming your novel. Interview your main character. You be Dianne Sawyer or Oprah and get her talking. Or ask her (or him) to write a letter to you introducing herself (himself) or ask her to send you her resume. (sounds weird but it works!) You could also interview a minor character or the antagonist about your main character.

Have you started writing about something deep and hard? Write out a prayer and give it to God. Seek His healing. If you sense Him answering, write what you hear with your heart down. Ask God to use it to bring Him honor and glory.

Are you also writing about what delights you? When God blesses you? Answered prayers? Sweet dreams?

## **For the Record...**

Your life and your words matter! So take a risk and go on the record and put all you are onto the pages...heart and soul.

~Are there some things you wish your grandparents, parents, or other person in your life left unsaid and/or unwritten? What do you wish they'd said? Then...don't be like them...use your words to grace the pages of your notebook and to leave them as a legacy of love.

~Is there something you long to tell someone but it's too late? Write about the missed opportunity...and what you wish you'd said.

~Look up the day you were born. Learn all you can about what happened in the world, this country, your state, and your city that day. How does it make you feel to be part of God's plan for that day?

~Get out pictures of you. Select a few and get copies made. Paste them in your notebook and write about what you remember; who you were then; who you are now.

~Magazines like People like to show the flashy side of the famous. Is there something you'd like to know about an actor, musician, or author? How does what you want to know differ from what's reported?

~Make a list of your favorite things. Don't worry about the order – just write.

~Listen to some old music. What memories do the songs bring back?

~Take a look at your list of favorite things. Pick two or three that might make a good article or devotional.

~What's your favorite Bible story? Why? Write about it.

~What do you find fulfilling in your life?

~What do you find lacking in your life?

Now...take a look at your notes from lessons 1 and 2. Do any writing ideas pop out at you? Highlight them or take time to briefly outline the ideas that are brewing. What is the potential you are seeing in the things you've lived and recorded?

**My notebook is where I take my ideas for a test drive.**

## Lesson 3...The Right

### The Right...

Is your writing a secret from most people who know you?

You may hesitate to take your notebook with you for fear someone will know you like to write. You may instead be scrambling for a napkin, receipt, or any handy scrap of paper so you can "jot a quick note" and keep your real motive to yourself. Even index cards are a give-away...if you carry writing supplies it implies you plan on writing.

Sometimes a person who loves putting words on the page has to give herself permission to say, "I'm a writer!" These can be difficult words to say out loud. For some, being unpublished makes them feel "unofficial." The response from people can be, "Are you published?" If our answer is no, it seems to confirm the nagging thought that only published writers are writers. We come to dread telling anyone and sometimes don't.

Years ago, a man I went to church with asked me why I wasn't published yet. "Certainly there are enough Christian publications out there," he huffed at me.

I'd decided I didn't need to defend my writing so I didn't. I just smiled at him.

"Well, are you even trying?" he asked.

"Yep," I answered still smiling but it was getting harder to keep that going.

"Well, not hard enough I guess," was his closing comment.

Years later, I got to tell him a publisher had just released my first book. He didn't care. He never had.

Truth splashed across my heart when I realized this; I was no less a writer when he asked me if I was published and my answer was no than the day I told him I was published. I'd been a writer all a long!

I cringe when a writer seems apologetic or reluctant when they respond the question, "What do you do?" There's no shame in admitting you write. There's nothing wrong with not being published. The general public does not understand the markets and stiff competition.

You don't ever have to justify your writing. While most writers want to see their work in print, publication doesn't define you. Neither does the title "writer." All your responsibilities and privileges carry a title with them. Writer is part of the wonderful eclectic mix that is you.

Your writing and commitment to the process are not represented by non-writing people's opinions. Neither is your success.

A woman told me, "I only dream of writing so I can't really call myself a writer."

She's right.

I used to dream about being a mother. I've never been able to have children and we didn't adopt, so can never call myself a mother. I'm not being overly harsh here. This is my reality. And if you aren't putting a single word on the page, you are a dreamer. The difference between me not being mother and you not being a writer is that you can commit to the process and be a writer. Your writing dream can come true.

If someone responds to your lack of publishing credits like the man I know did, you have nothing to defend. If you are writing, you are a writer. It is your truth. Acceptance and publication don't change the fact that: writer's write. We make a very simple truth complicated by heaping on doubt.

Or maybe we don't want to talk about it because people really don't know what to do with writers or people involved in any of the arts.

There's the risk your family and friends will misunderstand. I'm not sure why but non-writing people don't have a clear picture of what we do or who we are. Some see us as mysterious with the potential of being famous and want to know us. Others assume we think we're "special" and for some undefined reason, resent us.

Real friends may not understand but they accept what you do as part of you. They are not impressed with "potential fame" nor are they offended by your talent. Trust and treasure these people!

**Go ahead...write in your notebook, *I'm a writer!* Write it as many times as it takes for you to believe it.**

### **The Right to Say No...**

When you do tell people you're a writer, a new dimension of stress can enter your life (besides them asking constantly about if you're published or not!). There is often the assumption that if you are a writer, you're willing to write anything.

I used to feel compelled to write whatever I was asked to in order to prove myself. Sometimes I wrote for others to show them I loved them or to gain their approval. I accepted writing I hated and my output was mediocre at best. Sometimes I sat and cried while forcing the words on to the paper, with my jaws clenched and my shoulders hunched up around my ear lobes, There were times the writing made me physically sick.

None of these reasons worked for me. In fact, I began to hate what I'd once loved. I no longer dove into a project with excitement. I was so tired I didn't want to wake up no matter how many hours I'd slept. In my dreams I'd be slaving away at a giant typewriter sobbing. I'd wake up with my face and pillow wet from my real tears.

Then I learned to say no. It took concentrated effort to get those two tiny letters out of my throat, onto my tongue, and through my lips. Sometimes I had to say no after I'd said yes. That was the worst.

I use my notebook to practice what I'm going to say if I know I have to turn down a project. I write my reasons on the pages and all the words that defend my decision valiantly. This works because I get the need to voice my reasons out of my system and never have to say them out loud. Then I can practice my "lines" – the words I will say in a professional response.

I've said no to family...friends...pastors...and strangers (who thought a writer would jump at the opportunity to tell their story for them!). My notebooks are full of the anguish involved in the use of the word no. The pages are scored with guilt and even grief when my answer was taken as a personal rejection.

On the pages of your notebook, you can create boundaries. I list the writing I will do and the writing I won't. If someone asks me to do a project I know isn't right for me, I can see these pages in my mind and with greater confidence say a gentle no thank you. My "will dos" and "won't dos" listed here help me say a much stronger no if the person persists. "Thank you again for asking but the project you mentioned doesn't fit my talents, goals, or calling." Because I wrote that sentence down first, I'm better able to say it out loud when the need arises.

You can say no. Sometimes is not just a good thing to do – it's the right thing to do.

You can also take out your frustrations and battle your regrets in your notebook. If you do say yes when you should have said no, you can say in written words what you can't and shouldn't say to someone. I'm not talking about curse words. This is an excellent place to worry, whine, and complain. Here I can wrestle with the words and find solutions. I can fill pages up with guilt and sadness over an unwise writing decision. Sometimes I'm surprised when an idea is gleaned from all this messy writing, but it happens. I think in part because this writing is so blunt and honest. I don't put up guards and I take my own blinders off. This kind of writing helps me work out the kinks and blocks in my life.

The pages also record sorrow when a single no impacts a relationship in a negative way. It's happened and the memories make me sad even now. I may have said no for all the right reasons in all the right ways and still a friendship is damaged or changed. As I let the grief pour onto the pages, while it doesn't heal the relationship, it can ease my burden. I let go of it a word at a time. The sharp edge of the hurt is softened as I purge it onto the pages. When I revisit these entries, I find some emotion packed writing I can use for articles, devotionals, and characters in my novels.

### **Getting It Write...**

Writer's need to focus on what they are called to write and that is often different from what they are asked to write.

In my notebook, I have a copy of two statements I find keep me focused. My mission statement is brief. (To write for God. To write real. To write to change my heart and impact the hearts of others.)

My vision statement is a little longer. It involves how I see my writing life when I'm daydreaming big. These are not step by step goals. My vision statement is often adapted as I move ahead as a writer.

These statements and my goals, take me from frazzled and unsure to free and secure.

I also do some workouts in my notebook. With my focus defined, I am able to know what I'm going to say ahead of time which is important when I need to say no. These statements and goals are my rescue line from the guilt that sometimes lingers.

Don't take on guilt that's not yours. Yes, you will disappoint people and people will disappoint you. That's life. You may be very sorry you can't help someone out writing-wise but you are

not responsible for their writing. Saying yes when you should say no is a rotten place to be. Saying no when you should say no is freeing even if the other person doesn't think so! Please remember this: you are not a failure if you don't live up to the expectations of other people!

**Guilt is only effective if it comes from God; and He only uses it to bring us to forgiveness.**

**Practical Moment...**

- Pray about the following exercises then try to do them all.
- Make a "will do" list and a "won't do" list.
- Write how you will respond when someone asks you to do something you have to say no to. Think of three "levels" of the same response just in case someone won't let you go with a simple no.

Mine are:

1. Thank you, but I have to say no; my current schedule doesn't allow for a new project.
  2. Thank you again, but this project doesn't fit my talents, goals, or calling. (you will gain respect with this answer – even though it's hard)
  3. I appreciate your confidence in me, but my answer is still no.
- Define your call, your mission, and your vision. Take your time. This often takes several writing sessions.
  - Make a list of your favorite Bible verses to read when you get discouraged. Saying no is hard work. Be prepared to stay on track with God's Word. Don't use it out of context but do rely on it for your strength, comfort, joy, and freedom.

## Lesson 4...The Route

### The Map

My notebook is where I explore goals. The goals I set are my unique hopes and expectations for my writing and life.

Because life demands flexibility, I have to agree with Jon Bon Jovi when he says, "Map out your future, but do it in pencil."

My goals clarify where I'm going and how I'm going to get there. My short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals help me decide if a writing assignment I could be good at and might enjoy fits the plan. If the opportunity will take me off track, I have learned to say no. A fun project that gets me off goal quickly turns into a frustration.

As I set my basic writing goals, I also define them in my notebook. It's in this process my writing life is improved. If I'm asked to write something, I can hold it up to my goals and ask, "Does this fit with my short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals?" If not, I need to either take another look at those goals, or turn it down.

I may decide to write a specific number of words or pages a week. My notebook is where I work out my schedule before I set it into place in my date book. For example, my writing goals right now include two Christian Writer's Guild assignments per month, this Teaching Topic, the writing for our website, updating my personal site, and at least thinking about a novel and two non-fiction books that won't leave me alone.

Many times when I'm asked to consider a new project, the person asking urges me to pray assuring me the Lord brought me to mind when they asked Him for the right person to do the job. Wanting to respond wisely, I will agree to pray and ask God to clarify the situation. I may sense a different message. This can make the other person uncomfortable. In this case, I might be tempted to explain and defend my decision. Instead, I use answers 1 -3. These may not win me a popularity contest but they convey the message with a firm dignity and confidence that I'm on track with God and my goals.

In the process, I've learned to plan for fun as well as work. I need time with God, my husband, family, and close friends. I love time on our deck (the chipmunk is getting very trusting these days...he comes close if a prize acorn is near my feet and the nuthatch has decided I'm no threat at all), listening to music with my eyes shut (really – I'm just resting them!), or reading a novel. There is also exercise, our home, and my flower gardens that must be scheduled in.

**Everyone needs to build flex-time into their schedules for the unexpected.**

Working hard is not wrong but working long can be. If what I do takes away from the people I love, I need to reconsider the task.

There are times, I don't get a clear sense of direction from prayer or my notebook debates. At these times I ask my husband to pray. When I'm just not seeing the plan, I sit down with my notebook again and do what is often called a "Ben Franklin close" in the selling world. I divide a page into two sides – pros and cons. When I see the two side by side, the answer is often very clear. There might be more cons than pros but that isn't always the deciding factor. If I see pros like; I'd grow artistically or spiritually or maybe this would honor God in a subtle but powerful way...I may see the pros outweighing the cons. I've come to wonder why I wait so long to get to this part of the process! After seeing them together and praying again, if I can

write the word “peace” on either side, it’s decided. Even if the bigger (more important) things might be accomplished, if I don’t have peace, it’s not for me to do.

I’m not talking about taking the easy way out. In fact often the peace comes when I say yes to doing the uncomfortable things. This can be writing the piece that has to come from the heart first or saying not to something I’d really like to do.

Sometimes in these prayerful moments, as I search my goals, I can clearly see how an additional request fits into the goal and can also see a time slot that will work. If I have a sense of quiet in my heart at this point, I can say yes.

To get my objectives met, I must focus on the work I know is mine. My purpose is to get words on the paper. The words that matter...to God...to me...and hold the potential of mattering to readers.

### **My notebook helps me keep a clear focus and guilt-free conscience!**

#### **Practical Moment:**

Pray and ask God to help you see your goals and define them.

Set some goals. I read about an author who set a serious goal to write fifteen minutes each day. Within a year she completed her first novel.

One double-spaced page is about 250 words. You could chose either a word count goal or a number of pages you want to complete. Maybe you prefer to schedule a time of 15 minutes of pure writing a day. Go for it! Make your goal sensible, possible, and measurable. Set yourself up for success by committing to goals that fit the rhythm of your life.

Once I’ve got a few goals figured out, I refine them – briefly. It’s easy to get caught up in the planning and not get to the work.

I’m a list maker so underneath each goal is a list of things I need to do to see that goal accomplished.

Here’s how I structure my goal time lines...

Short-term goals = 90 days

Mid-term goals = 1 year

Long-term goals = 2 years

Here are some things you need to consider doing...

-Find a date book system that YOU like.

-Develop a record keeping system that is easy...complicated means we won’t do it!

### **Have some fun with the planning process...**

-Set aside time to enjoy writing. These “pit-stops” can rev you up when you’re worn down by the work. This can be time spent with writing friends (no one speaks our language the way another writer does!), a writer’s date (where it’s just you, your notebook and a favorite book – and maybe a good meal you don’t have to fix!)

-Retreats are where you can “re-fuel” and get “tuned up.” These can be as simple watching movies and reading books for the sheer joy of it! You can retreat with your work...or from it!  
-Re-charging your batteries can include going to conferences and/or reading books on writing. Studying the craft is essential to nurturing our talent. Some conferences sell cds – this year I wanted to go to the Write to the Soul Conference but couldn’t so I ordered several of their cds. This was a wonderful investment in my work and in me.

Suggestion: When you buy a book you really want to study, you can take it to Office Max and have it bound in plastic spiral binding and laminated. This makes study so much easier!

We will talk about some of these things in time at *Getting It Write* meetings...but you may want to develop the following ways to track your work.

**Time Tracker**...I don’t look at this like I’m putting in my time. I love tallying up the numbers at the end of a week or a month. Seeing the proof that I have spent some time doing what I love is rewarding.

**Submission Tracker**...you need to know where you sent your work, when, and what response you got. If you don’t take time to do this, you will forget what you sent to who, when, and how they responded. This can result in lost sales and a lack of credibility in the publishing community.

Share the dream with your family. Show them your goals. Ask for their moral support and help. Let them know you’re asking for a limited amount of time. Children seem to grasp this better than adults. Dreaming is still part of their reality. The adults in your life might have a harder time. It will help as pages or word counts stack up.

If you get no support, do it anyway. I’m not advocating direct disobedience to your spouse or that you neglect you family or household. Ask for their cooperation as you experiment with balancing loving them and loving what you do. Pick a time to write that won’t change their lives.

I am encouraging you to find specific times to write and then to pour yourself into it. I think it’s sort of like the Navy Seals. They are trained to power sleep – to fall into a deep sleep on command and wake up ready for the next stage in their mission. We may need to train ourselves to power write...to fall into the writing immediately and get as much done as we can before we need to move on. Again, you’re not going to get it all right in your first or second drafts. That’s okay. You’re meeting the goal of getting something written.

Life will interrupt you. Emergencies come at you out of nowhere...babies cry, toddlers need a nap in your arms, girl friends need to laugh, husbands need intimacy, and teenagers need a listening ear. Aging parents need a loving child to walk with them in the shadow years. Siblings need a friend and friends need an advocate. Build in that flex-time – if you have to give your writing time away to one of these VIPs, you can get to the writing at another time. This takes the frustration out of setting aside one important part of your life for another.

And the truth is this: you are called to be there for family and friends as well as to put words on the page. Sometimes the words get delayed. If your goals are waiting for you, you can come back to them, make adjustments, and get back onto the page. I am comforted in times away from the writing with the knowledge I can change my goals as I need to.

**Written goals are hard to ignore. When they are reasonable and life cooperates, I’m often surprised by my accomplishments.**

## **The Trip...**

Take the scenic route!

### **Choose to be inspired.**

For me, the writing life is full of detours, lunch breaks, potty calls, and moments so full of beauty my heart can barely stand it. You know the moments that matter. They're like Mount Rushmore moments. You wonder how in the world the Artist of your heart did what He did in the fragrance of a blossom, the buzz of a bee, the laughter of a child, the song of the bird (okay...sometimes it's in the voice of Elvis – but he sang How Great Thou Art like he meant it!), the touch of the breeze, or the first bite of hot buttered popcorn? Or maybe it's when you're so thankful you can't get to your knees fast enough or you've read His Word out loud and realize, "Oh man – God so gets me!" It all comes from Him.

You may not believe this, but all the chipmunks that visit our deck are different. (You may be thinking I've spent too much time out there and not enough time writing!) I love knowing they are unique and watching their habits. They come at different times and respond to me or the fresh acorns in their own way. One loves to eat sitting nearby peeling the hull of the nut before eating – he doesn't have stripes all the way to his tail like the others. (now maybe you're thinking my stripes don't go all the way either!) Or maybe chipmunks aren't your thing.

### **Whatever captivates you is worth noting.**

Start writing about what...

...Stops you in your tracks...

...Makes you laugh out loud...

...Causes you to wonder, feel awe, or worship...

Do you remember a time in your life when pretend, twirling, and dress up were expected of you? It's what little girls did.

Or maybe not. Perhaps your life was filled with things intended for little girls.

Well...today you can twirl (literally) for Him! Writing fiction can bring Him honor and glory. Dressing in a way that states your personality expresses His unique creation – you! (for me this means I wear cowboy boots whenever I can and no...I'm not from Texas!)

### **Inspiration is everywhere!**

**It's found when we take time to see art instead  
in the ordinary.**

You've heard it sang and said...life is hard but God is good. It is and He is. Because we're human, there are days it takes effort to see the beauty – the things that spark creativity in your heart...you know the things that make you grab a piece of anything to write on so you can save it and later savor the moment?

Live seeing. Write with abandon. Make the effort your norm.

### **Make creativity a way of life!**

## **A Practical Moment...**

Grab your notebook and find beauty in the corner of the world you are in right now. Write fast. Write slow. Just write. Maybe you'll get a list built and go back and add description and emotion to it later. And...maybe in these moments of beauty you'll find something much bigger to write about.

Do this often.

## **The Destination...**

Most writers want readers. This means we set out to be published in one or more of the many forms available to us today.

Is publication the ultimate destination for a writer? That depends on the writer. I believe we need to find joy in the process to sustain an ongoing writing career because most of us don't stop with one by-line. There is rejection along the path to seeing your work in print and there can be rejection of the published writing by readers. If we don't find something a long the way to enjoy, we'll quit.

Most of us admit to an inner drive that compels us to write. One of my favorite pastors told us he loves to preach so much he'd do it even if he didn't get paid. We need to feel the same way about our writing. Publication and payment are good but if we don't enjoy the process, we could be in the wrong profession.

Each of us needs to write our own definition of success. This will decide our destination in the publishing industry.

You'll need to answer questions like...

Do I have to be paid for my writing?

Am I willing to give some of it away for free?

Who are my readers and where do I find them?

What kind of writing do I enjoy doing the most and what markets are there for me?

Is traditional publishing the only acceptable route for me or am I open to becoming independently published via self-publishing, print-on-demand, electronic books, or internet publishing (on your website or ezines)?

Am I willing to write from my heart first and then see what the market demands or will I write only for the market?

There are no wrong answers! Your answers are the right ones.

As you respond to these and many other questions you'll encounter, your place in the world of writing will be decided.

## **Practical Moment...**

Instead of explaining the many forms of publishing available to us as writers today I'm going to encourage you to research them for yourself.

Here are a few to get you started:

Traditional

Self

Print on demand

E – publishing

Internet publishing (including your own website, blogs, and ezines)

Try to learn about the positive and negative aspects of all these avenues. The publishing world is in some ways more closed than ever before and more open.

As you gather a list of resources you trust, forward them to me ([joywriter@charter.net](mailto:joywriter@charter.net)) so you can share your knowledge with the group or write and submit an article to the newsletter on this topic.

My publishing experience continues to delight me...I'll share it with you as we continue journey together.

For now...define your own...it's your time.

## Lesson 5 ... The Reward

### The Treasure Chest

Inside each of us is a treasure waiting to be unlocked. What jewels are buried inside you?

In order for gemstones to sparkle and shine they have to be cut because only when faceted do they catch the light. They must also be polished. Diamonds are coal first. Silver and gold must be refined through fire before they can be formed into anything shiny or useful.

We know all of these facts...but we hesitate to apply these truths to our writing. Stone cutting, polishing, and refining fire sounds painful.

Some of our stuff hurts us and we fear it could bring condemnation down on us. And it could. So we keep the suffering hidden in the deepest recesses of your heart. We feel tarnished and bound. Fear keeps the garbage secure (but rotting and stinking up our lives) and holds us in its unforgiving clutches. Whatever we bury, creeps on us at the most unexpected times and steals our hope, joy, and confidence. Unspoken judgment reigns down on us from the enemy of our souls as he tries to convince us we're no good. We live in the shadow of our secrets and the regret eats destruction into our souls. Think about the photos of POWs you've seen. They are gaunt and haunted shadows of themselves. Those POWs can be physically freed but until they *live* as freed men, their minds and spirits can remain captive. It's the same with us if we don't live in Christ's freedom.

God says the truth set us free...His Truth is Jesus. However, the truth about ourselves is also freeing to us and can be used to set other captives free as well. It's in freedom of God's forgiveness that we shine.

When we live in forgiveness, we are free to share the truth – the whole truth – about God and about ourselves...when the time is right. Not every one is called to share the details of their hurts and/or horrors. But everyone is free to write what God gives them to write. Along the way He will bind us up in His strength. We don't work or walk alone.

### Share the joy!

Sometimes we even hold back our triumphs and joys. The agent of fear works diligently to keep our victories under wraps as well. If people knew how we rejoiced at the true focus of Easter...which is the resurrection...they might call us fanatics and we'd rather they reserved that title for the real radicals out there. I wonder how different my view of the Christian faith might have been if the women I knew had released their joy in my presence. So many kept that part tucked away as if ashamed or afraid they'd get carried away.

We believe in and serve a risen Savior – it's Easter everyday in our hearts! That's news worth sharing...that's the Good News! That's something to live for!

What's wrong with extravagant delight in God? I wonder what would happen in our world if we let loose and wrote with untamed enthusiasm about Jesus?

I'm convinced that because we hesitate to show (in writing) the depth of our love for God...our joy in Him...and our expectant confidence He is going to do all He said...the enemy laughs as he gathers unbelievers into his lies.

Our notebooks are again a healthy place to communicate our love and passion for Jesus. I sometimes write Him a love note there. I'm pretty sure He's delighted...not by my talent (that comes from Him) but that I'm not holding back. When my cup runs over with love for Him – I want to spill it out on the pages. So I do. Then I might email it to a friend or three, share it with a suffering stranger, or write an article.

Could the world be waiting for us to write with rich fervor, lavish warmth, limitless joy, or extreme gladness? In the Webster's dictionary I used for writing this, one of the definitions of delight is "manna". I leave you to contemplate the full meaning of this definition in your notebooks! 😊

I ask you...what if the world saw us thrilled with who our God is? Would this make a difference?

I love the way most puppies enjoy being alive. In our neighborhood lives a young golden retriever named Barney. I want to be outside when he is, so I can watch his smiling tail. He's thrilled to be able to sniff every nook and cranny within reach of his twitching nose. Barney takes joy wherever he can find it without shame.

What would our unbridled joy bring to a world striving to find happiness without faith in God?

The word jubilee feels delicious on my tongue. I love how it sounds and the surge of excitement that rises within me when I hear it. Even in the tough days of my life, I want to live and write jubilant. Then, maybe my neighbors and readers will see Jesus in my life and want Him too.

### **Practical Moment...**

If you've put off writing about the yuck in your life, at least take a few minutes to list some of it. Code what you don't want anyone else to read yet if you need to.

Do some praying. Ask God to combine your writing talent, your desire to honor Him, and your life's junk into masterful writing.

If your stuff is really messy and painful, get your friends praying for you.

If your stuff is so messy you need help, consider getting a trustworthy counselor.

Whatever you decide to do...ask God for the wisdom and discernment to use it for Him...ask Him to give it eternal value.

Now list some things you find amazing about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. Go ahead...let loose in your notebook with the truth about Him. Rejoice! Worship!

What things bring you pleasure? Joy? What makes you laugh out loud? Define what you see as the truest freedom there is.

## **The Key**

I love the way keys look. With all the notches that fit only certain locks. Each writer is different and so is their writing key.

There is a key that will unlock your treasure chest. It will be uniquely ground out with the right combination of determination, commitment, perseverance, and intentional writing. Only the Master Locksmith knows the distinctions of the ridges on your key. As you walk the writing path with Him, He'll show you.

He may use your notebook, writing friends, or He may disclose it to you in a private moment of prayer.

He who has begun a good work in you...will complete it. Do you believe it? Why? Why not?

## **The Treasure**

If you're published in any form, you know there are unexpected bounties out there!

Your story is unique. It is filled with mystery and monotony as well as adventure and adversity. In other words – material!

I hope we can all eventually share the rewards you've experienced either in the newsletter or on the website.

For now...I'll share mine briefly. Not to brag but to give honor to the one and only Talent-giver...God.

At first I couldn't see a positive thing about infertility. The empty wasteland of my womb was not a place I expected God to use. How could I know an editor at a writer's conference was looking for an article titled: Infertility; The Death of a Dream? I cannot tell you how I felt when he accepted it and Decision Magazine printed it. God used it...all over the world.

When an editor mentioned if anyone had bird stories they could send them to her there was no way I could know from that suggestion a book would be born titled: Under His Wings – What I Learned From God While Watching the Birds. Honestly, who knew that some notebook entries would eventually become a devotional book and sell nearly 25,000 copies?

Then I wrote Rain Dance. There is no way I could have guessed the number of women who would embrace the message of a novel published by me via print-on-demand. I was told "issue" books don't sell and I wrote about infertility and abortion. God used it to stir and engage readers. The letters are still coming.

Only God knew how He was going to use these life experiences to shimmer His truth into the hearts of women (and some men!) all over the world.

It's with awe I realize...

God used the death of a dream to make my writing dream come true.

He showed me He could use a world full of hurt to fill hearts up with healing.

He turned my infertility and hopelessness into a story fertile with hope.

Your life is valuable – with all it's wonder, beauty, wandering, and blemishes.

**Write what you're given...including the forgiveness for everything part...and let  
the Giver of all good gifts reward you.**

## Conclusion...

This Teaching Topic went beyond the technical to the transparent. I wanted to penetrate both your head and your heart. If you're not writing in a notebook, I want to be part of the jump-start.

If you are writing, I want to inspire you to go deeper.

The writing life is full of irony...

It's both free and restricted (take a look at all the writer's guidelines out there – including ours!)...art and production... illusive and concrete... fact and fiction...innocence and knowing...showing and telling...spontaneity and planning...mystery and revelation...peace and revolution (you must be willing to start one!)...tension and release...adventure and mundane.

It takes... courage and vulnerability... skill and instinct...talent and handicap (without it we'd never be vulnerable)...strength and weakness...wisdom and wit...confidence and doubt...risk and calculation.

It demands our attention and drives us to distraction!

It requires...

Toughness tempered by tenderness.

Hard work activated by hope.

Determination driven by a dream.

My notebooks record the writing places I've been, where I am right now, and where I hope to go with it. On these pages, I catch and weave dreams.

No matter what you're facing, today is a good writing day. If you have time for a brief notation...good! If you're putting words on the page – it's writing!

Did you find a notebook format that works well for you? Did you find some treasure you didn't know lay buried within you? Was there a moment you were glad to have your notebook or index cards with you so you could preserve a it in time to use later? Did you come up with some writing ideas you see potential in?

I would love to hear from you! Please send your comments to me at: [joywriter@charter.net](mailto:joywriter@charter.net)