



The ultimate guide to
WRITE + SELF-PUBLISH
that book on your heart!

BY ERIC ELDER + FRIENDS

Write With Me! The ultimate guide to
WRITE + SELF-PUBLISH that book on your heart!
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Special thanks to my writing friends who chose to
"Write With Me!" while I wrote this book. I appreciate your love, friendship, and support!

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"See what large
letters I use
as I write to you
with my own hand!"

*The Apostle Paul, writing to the Galatians**
(Galatians 6:11)

*I've written the headings in this book with my
own hand, too! I call it my "Eric Elder" font. :)

1. Write with me!

For years, I had a book on my heart I wanted to write. I didn't know how to start. I didn't know *where* to start. And I didn't know how to actually *write* it.

But then I was challenged to write a 50,000-word novel in 30 days. Unbelievable! Impossible! Or was it?

I found out it WAS possible! And I did it. (Well, I only wrote 30,000 words, and it took me 40 days. But at the end of those 40 days, I had finished the first draft of a fully fleshed-out, historical novel.)

And I've done it many times since. I've written over 30 books (35 if you count foreign translations and three books of piano music).

Now, I'd like to challenge you to write that book on *your* heart. Why? Because I believe when you share your experiences, your strengths, and your hope, others will be strengthened and find hope, too. And we could all use a little more HOPE, couldn't we?

Whether you're writing fiction or non-fiction, thrillers or sci-fi or mysteries, I believe your writing is worth it. People will read it. And many will be blessed by it.

Do you believe it?!? I hope you do! And throughout this book, I hope to give you more and more encouragement to FINALLY write and publish that book on your heart.

How did I do it?

I'll tell you!

I set aside one month, just 30 days, to get my thoughts out of my head and onto my computer.

First, I wrote down 30 scenes that came into my mind. I didn't have 30 scenes initially. But as I thought about all the things I wanted to include in my book, I thought about the day my main character lost his parents. I thought about the day he took a boat alone to the Holy Land. I thought about the night he threw a bag of coins through an open window to save a woman from destitution.

I jotted down each of these topics on one piece of paper. I kept going and going until I had over 30 topics that I might include in my book.

Then, I set aside an hour a day, more or less, to write a few paragraphs of what I knew and could remember of each of these scenes. I didn't look them up again. I didn't waste time going through old books and magazines and doing internet searches. I just wrote from what I remembered. This wasn't the time for editing or making sure every detail was perfect. This was the time to get the stories out of my head and onto my computer and to jot down the key points that were important and memorable to me.

I did this each day for 40 days because I started adding chapters along the way as they came to mind or helped the story flow.

At the end of 40 days, I had a finished first draft of a book that made me laugh and cry and inspired me all along the way.

Was it good? Or was it not so good? I didn't know. But what I did know was that it captured the heart—the essence—of the story I wanted to tell.

And that story, birthed during my quiet time for an hour a day in November of 2009, became the basis for what eventually became my bestselling book to date—

write with me!

one that's been turned into a ballet, a musical, and even an Italian "puppet opera."

How did that journey go? And what got me writing my next book and my next and my next for 35+ books? That's what I'll tell you in the rest of *this* book.

Eric Elder

2. The beauty of self-publishing

I'm still shocked when I read my own bio and see that "Eric Elder has written over 35 books." It sounds like I must be really famous, or really popular, or "someone must really believe in Eric's writing to publish 35 of his books!"

The truth is, someone DOES believe in my books. I DO! And I've found a way to get my message out to others, even if no one else ever believes in me or my work.

I also KNOW that God has called me to write, to share the messages I've shared, and my readers are confirming that. HE believes in me and my work, and THAT'S why I've published over 35 books.

And the beauty of it is, I've been able to do all of it for free (not counting, of course, the massive amount of time and effort it takes to write, edit, tweak, and get the book to look and feel and read just right). You might pay for others to do all of that for you, and that's okay. But for the actual process of "publishing" your book, all it takes is knowing how to export a PDF of your words and uploading it to Amazon... for free. And they'll do the rest. Within days, your book can be available for people to print and ship all over the world.

And from Day 1, Book 1, you can start making money, which has never been the case until now. That's one of the great beauties of self-publishing.

YOU can do it. YOU can be YOUR OWN publisher. And you can bless others and be blessed yourself from Book 1.

How does it work?

I want to tell you this right up front because you might be hesitant to write a book because you're not sure if anyone will read it. You're not sure if anyone will publish it. You're not sure what to do with it after you've written it. So you never start it. Or you never finish it.

I want to give you the confidence that YOU can publish it. You can get your book out to the world. And once you do, the sky's the limit. There's no longer any gatekeeper blocking your way from doing this. The only gatekeeper is YOU. And if you can get past THAT gatekeeper, in your heart and mind and emotions, you can be sure your book WILL be published.

I'll go into more details later about how to do this, but let me give you a few nuggets right now about how I do this and what you can expect.

1) Export a PDF file

Once I've written what's on my heart and gotten it into the shape I'd like readers to read it, I export a copy from my word processor in PDF format. That fixes all the words on the page to appear like they will appear in the print version of the book.

2) Upload that file to KDP

I upload that PDF file to a free account I've created on Amazon (currently at kdp.amazon.com, which is Amazon's official website for uploading self-published books. KDP stands for "Kindle Direct Publishing,"

because you can also upload your books for display on Amazon Kindle book readers).

3) Create a book cover

I create a cover for my book, either on my own computer or on a website like Canva.com, or using one of KDP's online tools to just choose some artwork from their offerings and add my title and name. Amazon figures out the rest to match the size and shape of the book I want.

4) Order a sample copy

I look over the sample version that is displayed on the screen, and if it looks good, I submit it for review. Amazon looks over the files to make sure they're printable, and if so, they'll approve the book for printing within a day or two. Then I order a sample copy (a proof copy) for myself and have it shipped to me within another few days.

5) Click "Approve"!

If I like what I see, I click "approve," and the book appears for sale on Amazon within a few hours! If I see errors or changes I want to make, I simply make my changes and upload a new copy of my interior pages and/or cover and order another sample. I'll sometimes do two or three or four or more samples like this until I get it just right. But when I love it, I click "approve," and it's live on Amazon for others to order and ship to their homes. Hallelujah!

Once someone orders a book, Amazon prints it, ships it, collects the money from the customer, and deposits a royalty in my account. (I can pick my own

selling price to adjust how much I'll receive per book. I usually pick a price that earns me \$5 per book—which is about \$4 more than most publishers will pay you per book. Amazon makes money, I make money, and the customer gets a great product within days! Everyone wins! I can also order copies of my own books at my “author” rate, which is about \$2.50 for 100 pages, \$3.50 for 200 pages, and so on, plus shipping—which is cheaper than I can print that many pages on my own printer or at a copy shop!

If this sounds too easy, it is! (Or if it sounds too hard, depending on your comfort with technology, don't worry! I'll walk you through how to do all of this, step by step, in this book.)

But I wanted to start with the *end in mind* right here *at the beginning* to assure you: if you can write it, you can publish it. And if you can publish it, others can read it and be blessed by your words.

And *that* is my end goal: *that your readers will be blessed by your story as much as you have been blessed by it!* I care about you and your writing because I care about the people you will reach *through* your writing. It is *their* hearts and souls that are my end goal, and I believe, God's end goal, too. If God has put a book on your heart, that means He cares about you *and* those He can touch *through* you.

So with that end goal in mind, let's start back at the beginning!

Let's start by clarifying exactly what book God has put on your heart to write *first*. Because you may be surprised there is more than one book inside you waiting to get out!

2. Think "books," not "book"

One day I met a man who had written many books. He was speaking at a retreat and had just stepped off stage to greet the guests.

I told him what an impact his talk had on me, then I told him about a book I was writing.

"I've been working on it for seven years and just can't seem to finish it," I said.

"Eric, stop right there," he said. "Here's the key to finishing that book. Think *books*, not book."

It was as simple as that.

He went on, "If you keep thinking about that one book, you'll never finish it in your lifetime. Is there another book on your heart you want to write after this one?"

I thought, then said, "Yes, I would like to write about... [and I filled in the blank]."

He said, "Now you'll be able to finish your first book."

I want to free you up with this: you don't have to put *everything* in *this* book. If you have one book inside you, I believe you have many more inside you, too. And if you start thinking about your *next* book, you'll quickly finish your first one to get on to that next one.

He was right! I began to think of the NEXT book I wanted to write, and suddenly I was ready and able to finish my first book.

Public speakers understand this. After giving a few talks, they know they'll never be able to say everything

they want in one message. But if they haven't spoken for a while or think this may be their one and only chance to speak, they'll pack everything into that one message, making it harder than it has to be on themselves *and* on their listeners.

When speakers have a regular outlet, they find they can more easily make one or two or three important points and leave it at that because they can say more the next time they get up to speak.

Your heart may be so full of words and stories and pictures that are bursting to get out that you're too overwhelmed to get *any* of them out.

But if you'll think *books*, not *book*, you'll find your words flowing much more easily and naturally, not having to cram every single thought into every page or sentence.

I already know you have a book on your heart. That's why you're reading this book.

But what *other* books do you have on your heart? What *other topics* do you want to write about? This book is important, very important, like mine was. But so is the next one, and the next, and the next. As much as I like my first book, I feel they keep getting better because I keep learning more and more every year.

So if there are many books on your heart, the first question is: What book do you want to write *first*?

3. Which book to write FIRST?

Here's a good place to start to help you decide *which* book you want to write first.

1) Write about what you KNOW

It's much easier to write about what you know rather than to create a book from what you don't know. I imagine there's already a book bubbling up inside you. Whether it's fiction or non-fiction, fantasy or sci-fi, I think you'll find it easier to base your book in something you know rather than something you're creating from scratch.

For me, my first book was a devotional book I wrote to go along with some songs I had written. I thought it would be helpful for my listeners to know the stories behind them: why I wrote them, how they impacted me, and how they might impact those who listened.

I had written twelve songs, so I spent a week away at a cabin and wrote twelve devotionals, plus an intro and conclusion, so there were enough messages for two weeks of reading and praying and listening to music. I called it *Two Weeks With God*.

I encouraged my readers/listeners to go through my devotional book and listen to one song a day during those two weeks and spend some quiet time with Him.

The messages were easy for me to write because I knew how the songs spoke to me. I just had to come up with a consistent length for each message, some

additional verses on each topic that could be helpful, and a question or two at the end of each devotional to spur their thinking about their own lives.

One song was about prayer and why it sometimes takes so long for God to answer them. Another was about following Jesus wherever He leads since He is “the Way.” Another was about clearing your mind when thoughts are overwhelming to you.

At the end of my week in the woods, I had written 14 devotions. This was in 1999, before the advent of self-publishing online, and I simply printed them on my desktop printer, trimmed and stapled them to fit inside a CD case, and shipped them out to people who ordered my CD.

It was a big step for me, but it was an “easy win” because the project was big enough to feel like I’d created something of value to others but small enough to finish in a relatively short amount of time.

For my second book, I took a different approach. It came in answer to the question, “What do people ask you about MOST?”

2) Write about what people ask you about MOST

Whenever I shared my testimony about how God helped me break the power of unhealthy attractions in my life, people would come up afterward and ask me how they could do it, too. They often asked the same questions over and over.

When I realized I was repeating myself, I thought, “Maybe I should write down their questions and my answers and share them in a book. Then I could give people the book and have them come back later with

any additional questions, or I could offer personal help.”

That became the book on my heart that took seven years for me to write! I called it, *What God Says About Sex*. The topic was so huge to me and to those asking the questions that I wanted to get everything just right. I wanted to be sure my answers were biblical, sound, and full of wit and wisdom to keep the reader reading and benefitting from whatever I could share.

This book also took a turn when I asked God who my readers would be. He said, “Write it for your children.”

My children? I thought!

Suddenly the enormity of the task weighed heavily on me. This wasn’t just for people across the globe who could take or leave my words as they wished. This was for my own precious children, the ones I cared most about in the world.

Then God spoke again to my heart: “That’s the same audience I’m trying to reach, Eric. My own precious children who I care most about in the world.”

So what was an idea on my heart became heavy on my heart then clear on my heart. God had people He wanted to reach through this message, and it really did matter.

It took me many years, but when I met that man who had written many books, he got me moving again when he asked me to think “books,” not “book.” That freed me up, and I finished the book.

3) write about what you WANT to know

For my third book, I wrote about what I wanted to know. It didn't start as a book. It started as a personal study of the book of Exodus to learn leadership lessons from the life of Moses.

I was at a crossroads in my ministry, trying to decide how to move forward with the bigger things God was calling me to do, but struggling with keeping up with what He was already calling me to do.

How was I going to reach more people, help more people, with the limited resources and abilities of just one person?

I decided to look at the life of Moses as he was called from obscurity into leading over 600,000 men, not counting all the women and children, out of Egypt and into a new land. It was an insurmountable task! But God gave him the tools and people and ability to do it.

So I sat down with my Bible in hand for 40 days, determined to learn what I could from this great yet unwilling leader. It was that or quit my ministry, which was a real possibility.

I spent those 40 days fasting and praying and jotting down lessons from Exodus that I could put into practice in my life.

After about three days, I knew I was to continue in ministry. And at the end of 40 days, I had a plan in hand to move forward, step by step, which I implemented over the next two years.

When I saw the fruitfulness of it, I began sharing these lessons with other leaders... in our ministers'

association, in a men's group, and eventually in book form, called *Exodus: Lessons in Freedom: How to Get Free, Stay Free, and Set Others Free*.

It didn't start as a book, but it became one as I learned from God and put into practice what He shared with me.

What about you? What book is on your heart that might fall into one or more of these categories:

Write about what you know.

Write what people ask you about most.

Write about what you want to know.

Any of these are a good place to start, to get some early wins, and to create something that can greatly impact others.

4. What's your main theme?

My writing friend Kent Sanders asks these three questions before writing:

“After reading your book, what do you want readers to KNOW? What do you want readers to FEEL? And what do you want readers to DO?”

These three questions can help you know what to include—and not include—in your book.

When I wrote my personal memoir of how I fell in love with Lana and fell in love with Christ, I had these three goals in mind.

1) What do you want readers to KNOW?

I wanted readers to KNOW that change was possible through the power of Jesus Christ for any kind of unhealthy attractions in their lives.

Some people believe the struggles I've had could not be overcome, ever. So it was important for me to share that they can, and not just for me, but for anyone who loves Christ and wants His help to overcome.

2) What do you want readers to FEEL?

I wanted readers to FEEL that I understood their struggles, having been through them myself, and understood what it felt like to come through on the other side.

Some people don't feel they'll ever see "another side" to their struggle. They're so downtrodden that they don't believe change is possible, and they don't believe it's possible for them. I wanted to boost their faith that this was for them.

3) What do you want readers to DO?

I wanted readers to PUT THEIR FAITH IN CHRIST for everything in their lives, trusting that He is still in the life-changing business today.

I wanted to hold out the Hope and the Answer that I found and encourage them to put their hope in Christ, too, believing that He could not only do this, but could do anything in their lives. Nothing is impossible for Him.

What about you? After reading your book, what do you want readers to KNOW, FEEL, and DO?

Take some time with these three questions and see how they can bring focus to your writing.

5. Which stories support your theme?

Once you've narrowed your main theme and what you want readers to KNOW, FEEL, and DO after they've read your book, you can now start jotting down WHICH STORIES you want to share that will help drive that theme home.

For instance, when I was writing the book back in 2009 that I described in the introduction, my wife and I wanted to tell the story of the real-life St. Nicholas who lived back in the 3rd century. We wanted to give people hope that the same God who worked in and through his life could work in and through their lives, no matter what they might be facing.

We had been talking about the idea for years. We read books about St. Nicholas. We talked to scholars who knew about him. We traveled to the Holy Land, where he lived for a time, and I eventually went to his homeland in present-day Turkey to see where he was born, lived, and ministered.

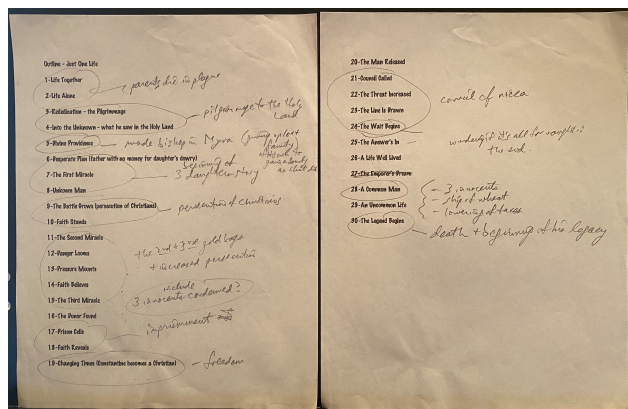
We had learned enough about his life. Now it was time to write the book.

But where to start?

We started where I'm suggesting you start... by jotting down each of the stories from his life that we wanted to include to support our main theme: encouraging readers to put their faith in Christ just like Nicholas had done.

We gave the story a working title and wrote 30 scenes we wanted to include, 30 snapshots from his life that we wanted to weave into his story.

It looked like this.



Here are a few of those snapshots:

- *His parents died in a plague*
- *He traveled to the Holy Land*
- *He became Bishop of Myra*
- *He saved three girls from devastation*
- *He was imprisoned for his faith*
- *He attended the Council of Nicaea*
- *He died, and his legacy began*

This became our outline for the story. Having an outline gave us a goal to shoot for, something to write about each day for 30 days.

We then spent the next 30 days fleshing out just one story a day. It usually took an hour or less just to write

down a few pages or paragraphs of what each scene would include.

We knew we might need to add or delete chapters or rearrange some chapters to tell the story in a compelling way. But having the outline gave us a plan, a way to move forward.

What about you? What scenes or images come to your mind that you could include to support your main theme? Maybe you only have a few right now. That's okay! Now's the time to "prime the pump" to get your ideas flowing.

Start your list and jot down just a few words for each story that supports your main theme. Don't edit, and don't worry about the order! Just jot them down!

I'll give you some tips for working out the order and pacing in the next chapter.

6. No scene that doesn't turn

I read a good book by Robert McKee called *Story*. In it, he analyzes all kinds of films and movies to look at how to tell a good story. McKee says:

"The storytelling standard of every fine writer is that every scene you write changes a character's outer world or inner self—or both, if possible. In other words, 'No scene that doesn't turn.'"

By this, he means that if the scene begins with a positive value, it should turn toward a negative value. If a scene starts with a negative value, it should turn toward a positive. This back-and-forth is what keeps the story moving forward.

I kept this in mind as I outlined my story of the life of St. Nicholas. There were many stories I wanted to thread together, but which ones to tell, and how to string them together?

I started by arranging his stories in chronological order, where I knew the order, and then flip-flopping stories where I didn't know the order, from positive to negative or negative to positive.

I began the story with his idyllic life growing up in his wealthy parents' home on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. They were Christians who had been impacted by the Apostle Paul on one of his missionary journeys to their hometown of Patara as mentioned in the Bible in the book of Acts.

But I included a cliffhanger at the end of chapter one that threatened to upset his idyllic life. A reader had to read chapter two to find out what was about to happen.

I won't tell you here. You can read the book! But I can say that chapter two starts out negative with some of the worst news their city could have heard. The chapter ends on a positive as his parents decide to take up a cause to help everyone around them. Chapter three takes another turn, as his parents are doing what was right and good, but the chapter ends on a negative that propels the reader forward again to find out what happens next.

Every scene turned like this throughout the book, with the positives and negatives getting higher and lower until the climax of his story. The last valley was the deepest of all: an unexpected twist that sent Nicholas into despair. It was a classic storytelling technique where it seems like "all is lost," that biggest drop before the final high that ends the story.

I didn't have to fabricate the stories. But I did have to line them up and tell them in a way that I had "no scene that doesn't turn." People have told me they couldn't put the book down. They just had to keep reading from chapter to chapter to find out what would happen next.

Was his life riveting? Yes! But has his story been told in *other* ways that were *less* than riveting? Also, yes! The difference between riveting and dull is understanding the basics of storytelling—a difference that keeps your readers engaged and moving forward to the end.

I did the same with my personal memoir of how I fell in love with my late wife, Lana, and with Christ,

called *Fifty Shades of Grace: Love Changes Everything* (under my pen name, Nicholas Deere). The two stories are interwoven, and each storyline is significant to the overall story and its outcome.

Once I knew the main story I wanted to tell... that “love changes everything,” I wrote down about 50 stories I wanted to tell from my relationship with Lana and God that would support that main theme. I then laid them out in a way that each scene would have a turning point in my quest to find love.

My love story with both Lana and God had a natural arc to it where the highs got higher and the lows got lower. I didn’t have to exaggerate. But I did have to tell the stories in a way that leaned into each of those turning points to keep the story moving.

An agent in New York who represents some of the biggest names on the *New York Times* best-selling list said she was given my book by one of her best-selling authors. The agent said, “It’s definitely a page-turner,” just like the author had told her. Success!

Once you decide on your main theme and have listed out the main stories you want to share in your book, look at each of the stories and see if they have a natural arc that will build on this idea: “no scene that doesn’t turn.”

This may not apply to every genre of writing, but it can help your writing in any genre!

What is the point you’re trying to drive home with your book? And what is the point you’re trying to drive home in each scene or chapter? Make sure that point is well-told and well-crafted. The difference will ensure your readers keep reading to the end.

7. Now write!

Once you've jotted down the main stories that you want to tell (or outline), now it's time to write!

You might feel intimidated to start, but don't be. You've already done much of the hard work, honestly. You've defined your main theme. You've jotted down your main stories. Now it's just a matter of getting those stories out of your head and onto paper or screen.

Let the stories flow. Pick one a day if you'd like. Write from what you know. Don't stop to edit. Don't stop to look up details. Don't stop to second-guess yourself. Just write! There will be time for all of those other things later.

Right now, the ideas are locked away inside your head. That's a great place for them to be! But it's not helpful to others until you bring them out into the world. Writing down your thoughts is a great way to do this... like pulling strands of memories from inside you and laying them out in front of you, so you can see them clearly.

You'll have time to tweak or change, add or delete, rework or reword later. Now's the time to just get the thoughts down so you'll have something to work with.

"A ship in harbor is safe," says John Shedd, "but that's not what ships are built for."

If God has put a story on your heart, now's the time to get it ready to sail! Take those thoughts out of the harbor of your mind. Get them ready to sail!

For me, it's enough to write down just a few paragraphs... maybe 500 or 700 or 1,500 words. Let me

share a story I wrote this week. It's about 550 words. Not much, but enough to tell the story. I called it "The Missing Psalm."

We can't go back again... or can we? Sometimes, the answer lies ahead of us.

A few months before my sweet Lana passed away, she recorded 31 Psalms for a project we were working on. We were writing a devotional about prayer to highlight 31 of the 150 Psalms in the Bible.

I asked Lana if I could record her reading them. Then my sister and my kids and I would record some piano music to go along with each.

It wasn't until after she passed away that I realized I had forgotten to ask her to record one of the Psalms that was most precious to me: Psalm 20. That was the Psalm I was reading when I was talking to God about marrying her. I especially loved verse 4:

"May He give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed."

I prayed that prayer over and over, that God would give me the desire of my heart... to marry Lana.

It was a long-shot prayer. In fact, I had read this Psalm just moments after Lana told me she was happy with her single life, wasn't ready to commit to anyone or anything, and walked away from the spot on the floor where we had been sitting and talking about our future.

That was 35 years ago.

But God eventually answered those prayers! Lana said, "Yes," and 23 years of marriage and six kids later, I still

write with me!

shake my head at how God encouraged me through that Psalm so many years ago.

How could I have forgotten to ask her to record that Psalm while she was still alive?

From time to time, I've looked back, wishing for a do-over. Maybe you've felt the same about something in your life.

Well, this week, I got one!

A friend posted a recording he had made using a new AI voice tool. He fed a sample of his own voice into the system, then asked it to read back to him something new he had just written.

In all my years of studying new technologies, including voice technologies like this one, I've never heard anything so lifelike. It sounded just like my friend... and it was! It was just brilliantly edited and rearranged so he could say something new.

Then I thought of my wish for a do-over.

I quickly signed up for an account (for \$1!) and uploaded five minutes of Lana reading another Psalm (Psalm 119... also one of my favorites). Then I typed in the text of Psalm 20.

I clicked the button, and within 30 seconds I began hearing Lana's sweet voice again, reading to me from Psalm 20... the missing Psalm that had meant so much to me 35 years ago.

I was in tears.

Yesterday, I decided to record some piano music to go along with it: the love theme from Titanic called "My Heart Will Go On."

Today, I'd like to share it with you.

No, we can't go back again. But sometimes, the answer lies ahead of us, in this case, in the form of a new technology that has brought back some very precious memories.

Keep pressing on. Keep moving forward. Keep trusting in God who can always make a way... even when there seems to be no way at all.

Click or visit this link to listen to Psalm 20, read by Lana Elder, with piano by Eric Elder:

<https://ericelder.com/wp-content/uploads/my-heart-with-lana-3-19-2023.mp3>

I include this as an example because it doesn't take much to write out one story. I spent about an hour writing, then went back through and spent another hour tweaking, adjusting a few words or ideas here and there, and adding a couple brief sentences to help the readers apply the story to their lives.

Then I asked a friend to read and edit it. With a few more changes here and there, it was ready to go.

But the initial writing, just getting the story out of my brain and onto my computer, was fairly simple. I knew the story I wanted to tell, and I told it! Just one story. Just one hour. After that, I could change it to my heart's content.

Writing a book is overwhelming. Writing one story, then another, then another... that's doable! Especially if you just write from your head the first time through. Don't edit. Don't stop to look up facts or details (I did that later to double-check if my dates and memories were correct!)

write with me!

Just write from your head... describe the scene as you lived it or as you envision it. Include your senses that others may not see or imagine: sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tears or smiles of joy.

Help your readers relive the story that's in your mind. Once you get it out, you'll be able to flesh out and fact-check your story, which we'll look at next.

8. Flesh out your stories

Once you've finished getting all your stories out of your head and onto paper or a screen, you can dive into fleshing out each chapter.

Now's the time to re-read the essence of what you've written, look up facts in journals or online, and check out old pictures, receipts or ticket stubs. You may be surprised at the details you find... and what you remember right or wrong!

Then you can incorporate these ideas into your writing, one story at a time.

If I stopped to do this along the way, I would never finish a book! I would always find *something else* to do other than to *write*. I would debate myself every step of the way whether or not to include a certain tidbit or idea.

So I prefer to wait till I've finished writing *all* my stories before I flesh them out.

I'd like to share here a "fleshed-out" version of a snippet I shared in the last chapter. It's based on the 2-3 paragraphs I quoted previously where I talked about Lana walking away from me after we had been sitting together on the floor and talking about our future.

This is from Chapter 19 from *Fifty Shades of Grace*, in which I used pseudonyms for myself, *Nick*, and for Lana, *Noël*. You'll notice this version contains a lot more detail, detail which I went back later and fleshed out to give it more color, background, and insight.

The story picks up about 18 months after we had broken up. I was living in Texas and she was living in Michigan. I had felt God wanted us to break up, and amazingly, both of us put our faith in Christ during that time apart. Unbeknownst to her, I felt God was calling us back together again, this time for good. I had been praying about it for three months by myself and felt I should broach the subject. But I had no idea how she would respond...

Chapter 19: Heart's Desire
(from Fifty Shades of Grace)

Noël couldn't believe it! She had always loved me and had always wanted to hear this from me! She had even prayed when we broke up that one day I would come to love her like this and ask her to become a permanent part of my life. When we broke up, she trusted that God would give her someone better than me. And now He had! I was *way* better than the old Nick, now that I had put God first in my life. Noël was amazed—amazed at God, amazed at me and amazed that God had answered her prayers, even her prayers from so long ago.

But Noël was also wisely cautious. After I broke up with her, she didn't know if she could *ever* marry me. While she had hoped this would happen, she wanted to be sure about it all before we actually got back together. She wanted to think and pray about it, but she was definitely excited at the thought of it.

I totally understood her caution, and I totally expected and appreciated it. I couldn't have asked for more. I was just so thankful that I was finally able to express to her all the love that had been building up inside my heart. Whatever happened, I knew God would speak to us if He really wanted us to be together.

Noël called again two days later and asked if I would come up to see her in Michigan the following weekend. She was going on a ski trip as a leader with the junior high youth group from her church, and she wanted me to come along.

I thought it was too soon. I wanted her to pray about it more before we saw each other again, so she could hear from God more clearly. But she wanted me to meet her new friends, to see what she was doing with her life and to make sure this was really what I wanted, too. She was worried that I might have idolized her while we were apart, and she wanted to make sure I really did want to get back together again. I knew nothing she would do that weekend would change my desires for her, so by the end of our conversation, I suggested that maybe we had better wait. Noël was hurt and disappointed.

I could tell this was really important to her—so that made it important to me. The more I thought about going to see her that weekend, the more I was able to see it through her eyes. She needed to see for herself that I was really serious about this. I had hurt her before, and I needed to do more than just talk to gain back her trust. I called her back and told her I'd love to come.

Noël said the very words that I had been thinking in my heart: “Thank you for seeing it through my eyes.” That was the confirmation I needed to go through with it, even if I felt like it was too soon.

I flew up to Michigan that weekend and fell deeper and deeper in love with Noël. She had always been cute, but that weekend she was gorgeous, both in body and in spirit.

I loved watching her as she laughed with her friends, did skits for the kids (dressing up as a dwarf with her ears poking out of her hoodie) and encouraged everyone she encountered in their faith. She was everything I had pictured and more.

On Saturday night, when we finally had a chance to talk on our own, we went upstairs in the old Victorian hotel where we were all staying. Noël and I sat down in the hallway to talk. She started telling me what she had been thinking about everything I had said.

She said that as much as she wanted to get back together with me, she felt like this was the first time in her life that she was getting to live life on her own. She liked her new life and her new independence. She was growing deeper in her faith, making great friends and loving working with the kids at the church. She said she was really sorry, but she wasn’t ready to give that all up.

I was sad—crestfallen, as much as anything. My bubble of excitement had burst, but I understood.

I felt like Jim Carey in the movie *Bruce Almighty*, when his character, Bruce, asked God:

“How do you make somebody love you without affecting their free will?”

“Welcome to My world, son,” God replied. “You come up with the answer for that, and we’ll talk.”

There was nothing more I could say to Noël. She thanked me for coming to see her, said goodnight and without a goodnight kiss or any indication that she ever wanted to get back together again, she stood up and walked away.

I sat on the floor and cried.

I had my Bible in my hands, so I opened it up and started reading through a few of the Psalms. When I read Psalm 20 and got to verses four and five, I cried again—but this time with joy. The Psalm said:

“May He give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed. We will shout for joy when you are victorious and will lift up our banners in the name of our God. May the LORD grant all your requests” (Psalm 20:4-5).

God had already given me more than I could possibly ask for from Him. He had forgiven me of my sins, He had given me a new life here on earth and He had given me the promise of eternal life with Him. I knew I had already gotten way more than I deserved, so how could I ask Him for more?

But when I read those words, I was encouraged and wanted to ask Him for one more thing. While I didn’t want to sound ungrateful on the one hand or extravagant on the other, I also knew that God still had more for me on this new path of life on which He had put me.

Not knowing if Noël would ever say, “Yes,” I underlined those verses from Psalm 20 in my Bible. I told God that night that if I could ask Him for just

one gift in my entire lifetime, it would be to marry Noël. I knew it may have sounded childish, but I was serious. I prayed with all my heart that night that God would give me Noël. Then all I could do was wait.

(end of chapter)

You'll note that this is a longer version of the story, 1,118 words, to be exact! But you can see how the extra details fill in the gaps, add "color" and interest, and give the reader more food for thought along the way.

And by waiting to flesh out my chapter till I got all of the stories out of my head, I was able to fill in the blanks for the readers, weave the stories together in a more compelling way, and add hooks at the beginning and end of each story to keep the reader turning pages.

Speaking of hooks, you might be tempted to hit "Publish" after doing all this work to flesh out your stories. But don't! There's something else I want you to hit... which I'll share in the next chapter. (See what I did there?)

9. Tips for self-editing

Once you've fleshed out each story, you may be tempted to press "Publish"!

But let me give you another tip: Don't hit "Publish"! Hit "Pause"!

Writing a book is a massive undertaking. Once you finish a rough draft, you might feel like you're ready to be done, already! But before you send any previews to anyone else, take a deep breath.

1) Take a short break

Let it rest. Let your brain rest. Then come back to your writing and read it afresh.

When you do, you'll notice things you love, things you want to change, and things that made sense when you were writing them, but now you have no idea what you were trying to say! That's okay! Now's the time to fix those things before others see it.

I was taking some meds one time that came with a warning not to drive or be up and active or send texts soon after taking the meds.

I had been thinking about sending a text to a friend who had invited me to a Christmas party, but I wasn't sure if I should go or not. The next morning, my friend texted to say, "Sure, come on over, I'd love to see you!"

I thought: "Did I say that with my out loud voice?" I honestly didn't remember sending a text, but I looked back and I did! About half hour after I had

taken the meds! The text was garbled, full of mistakes, and said what I was thinking, but not what I meant to say “out loud”! Gosh!

The same can happen with your writing if you send it to others without giving it a once over to make sure it said what you thought you said.

2) Read it aloud

After giving it a rest for a day or two or a week or two or a month or two, then you can use your “out loud” voice. Literally!

One of my favorite ways to self-edit is to read my writing aloud.

I find more mistakes that way than just scanning the text with my eyes. Phrases that may look okay might not sound okay. Gaps in logic become clearer. And missing words or reversed word order becomes apparent. You can also better identify which sentences are way too long.

Sometimes I'll even have my computer or phone read it back to me. Hearing it read by “someone else,” even an AI voice, can make it obvious when a word is skipped or mistyped. Our eyes sometimes fill in the gaps or autocorrect misspelled words, but when a computer reads it back to you, the error can be more glaring.

So just sit back and enjoy and listen to your book being read to you, making corrections along the way.

3) Write it for a real person

My final step in self-editing is to write it for a real person. By this, I mean having a real reader in mind

that I'm actually going to send it to as soon as I finish editing the chapter or book.

This really puts on the pressure to get it right! Knowing that a real person is going to read it makes me focus and think through what *that* reader might think as they read it.

I find this revealing whenever I read a reply from someone who responds to one of my weekly messages. I often know the person and what they're going through, and after I read their response, I reread what I wrote *through their eyes*.

It's quite a different experience to read what I've written through someone else's eyes who has been through something very similar or something very different.

I was speaking one day about how I prayed for a woman to be healed of cancer. I truly believed the person would be healed, but in the end, she died. She had an incredible spiritual experience after our prayer, but still, she died.

A woman came up to me after my talk to say she was so relieved when I got to the end and the woman with cancer had died. As I was telling the story, she was getting more and more angry. She was sure the woman was going to be healed. It turned out her husband had just died of cancer, and she was mad at God that he died. And if this woman was healed and her husband wasn't, she was going to be even more angry.

Here I thought the story would be depressing because the woman with cancer died, but this woman was so relieved!

We never quite know how our readers will respond. But if we know who is going to read our writing, or

hear our message, we can get a better idea of how it might sound to *that* person. Having a real reader in mind is key for making sure you're saying what you want to say... and *not* saying what you're *not* wanting to say.

"Do not write so that you can be understood, write so that you cannot be misunderstood." (Epictetus)

When you write for real readers, you can be more sure you're saying what you want to say. Then find a few trusted readers and get ready to push "Send," which we'll cover in the next chapter.

10. Send it to a few trusted readers

After you flesh out each chapter and do your self-editing, it's time to be bold and send it to a few trusted readers!

Who is a trusted reader? Someone you think might be interested in your book, willing to read your book, and able to give helpful feedback (encouragement primarily!)

I have some friends who are great “proofreaders.” They relish in finding mistakes and letting me know they found them. I don't usually send my writing to these friends first! What I'm looking for at this point is what do they think of the book? Is it hitting the right topics people would be interested in? Do they think it's worth publishing for more people at all? Or does it really need some major help?

I save my “proofreaders” for the final edit. If I'm going to rearrange or delete or add entire sections or chapters, a proofreader's help would quickly be negated by all of my changes.

Who are some friends or family members who might be interested in reading what *you've* written? They may or may not have experience in your field. But if they believe in you, that's a great start!

Then decide how you want to send it to them. Would they like a printout? Would they like a PDF file? Would they just like a chapter at a time via email?

For me, I often just send an email with the text of one chapter in it. I send it to 2-3 people, once a week, as I finish fleshing out and self-editing my chapters. It can take several months at this rate, but this allows me to craft my chapters for real readers, and it allows the readers bite-sized pieces of my book to digest.

And the feedback they give you on the first few chapters can inform how you craft the next few chapters. Are there major missing elements? Are they lost already by Chapter 3? Is there something you need to insert or work on or fix before going through this process with the whole rest of your book? Even if you've written your whole book, sending a chapter at a time can be helpful for those reading it.

And, of course, you can ask them! See what works best for them. I have a friend who likes reading a whole book, not pieces and having to wait! So, I do what they prefer! But for all the reasons above, I usually offer the book piecemeal, and people are usually happy to receive it that way.

When you ask them to read it, just tell them what you're looking for in terms of feedback. Does it make sense? Do you like it? Are there any glaring errors or omissions? Is there any extraneous information?

Keep in mind, these readers might also make good reviewers of your work when you go to market your book. I don't usually ask this of them right away. But if they send me some gems of comments, I'll come back to them later and ask if I can use a quote from something they wrote to me before.

We'll talk about receiving feedback next!

11. Receiving feedback

Here are three rules to remember when receiving feedback:

1) Brace yourself!

People might actually *like* your writing!

It is, perhaps, one of the most surprising things when someone says they like what I write. Saying that probably says more about me and my insecurities than about my actual writing.

As I wrote my personal memoir, *Fifty Shades of Grace*, I kept thinking:

"I can never publish this. People won't like it. People won't want me to tell these stories. I'll be embarrassed for no reason at all. And worst of all: It probably won't make any difference in the end."

My fears and hesitations were over the top.

So I was totally surprised when the first two "trusted readers" I gave it to said they not only liked it, but loved it! They said they had never read anything like it and thought I should publish it far and wide. They said it was a story that needed to be told.

I truly wasn't prepared for that response. I was only prepared for anything BUT that response!

I have been similarly surprised when I've published other works. Not because the stories were so personal, but because they were so *simple*.

I wrote about a little snail that I prayed for one day. My daughter had asked me to take care of it while she was out of town for several months. At one point, I

thought it had died. It hadn't moved in almost 10 days. But then I watched an episode of *The Chosen* where Jesus prayed for the healing of a woman who had been bleeding for years and the resurrection of a young girl who had clearly died.

I was about to pull the bubble maker on the snail's water tank, but decided instead to pray for it to be healed or resurrected. The next day, I checked the tank and it was alive... clinging to the bubble maker, letting the refreshing bubbles wash over its shell!

I shared the story with my email subscribers and on social media, thinking it was such a simple story, and probably not very meaningful to anyone but me. I wasn't prepared for the response! People not only liked it, they loved it, shared it, and posted comment after comment about how it inspired them to have faith for their own situations that were dead or dying.

It was a simple story. But the impact was profound. I just wasn't prepared.

So #1, I want you to brace yourself. People might actually like... and truly love... what you have to say. Your stories are important. And if they're important to you, don't be surprised when you share them that others find them important to them as well.

2) Temper yourself!

According to Webster's, to *temper* something means "to mix" or "to keep within limits," specifically:

"When you temper something, you mix it with some balancing quality or substance so as to avoid anything extreme."

Some people might *not* like your writing. That's okay! You're not called to reach everyone. But you are called to reach those God wants you to reach. And sometimes, people who don't like what you write one day will come to like it another.

One person read the first chapter of my *Fifty Shades of Grace* and responded with a scathing email. She couldn't believe I would write about such things, things that should never be discussed publicly.

But three months later, she wrote to me again. She said, "I want to tell you something about myself that I've never told anyone." She confessed to me something that had happened to her at a party when she was younger. She was so embarrassed about it, she had never revealed it to anyone in her life. The event had impacted her still to this day, even though she was in her 70's. She told me that reading my story had helped her see that she didn't need to hold onto that memory and the trauma of it anymore. She said that because of what I shared, she finally felt comfortable sharing her story with me. And she said she felt healing come as she did.

This is the kind of writing I pray God works through me... writing that will touch people deep in their souls. But I have to remember that sometimes people don't want their souls touched! It can be hard to hear, hard to deal with, and hard to know what to do with what you hear.

In my book *Loving God & Loving Gays*, I had just one trusted reader read through the entire book before I sent it to anyone else. She had read much of my work before, carefully editing and commenting as she went along. We were in lockstep on so many topics, I was

shocked when one day she texted at 5 AM to let me know she had just read one of my chapters and she was emphatically not going to read any more. She was not going to endorse my book. And she was not going to read anything else I ever wrote.

I was, once again, shocked! This time for the opposite reason: someone completely hated and adamantly disagreed with what I had written.

I asked if we could meet and talk about it. She agreed. I asked if I could record the conversation, that if it upset her so much, it would probably upset others in my target audience, so I wanted to hear and work through what she had to say. She agreed to the recording.

She repeated her anger and frustration at what I had written to both me and to the recorder. I rewrote what I had written. I tried talking with her a few more times, but nothing I said or did changed her mind. Whatever happened had truly upset her to the core.

I doubted my writing. I doubted my thinking. I doubted that I should ever publish the book at all.

But then I remembered why I felt God wanted me to write the book. He wanted me to write it to help people like my friend change the way they viewed this topic. If it was an easy topic and everyone agreed with what I wrote, there would be no need to write the book! The reason I wrote it was to help people see it in a new way, having lived through decades of dealing with this issue myself.

I decided to pray. I asked God to reveal to her or reveal to me how I should proceed.

A few weeks later, I sent her one more draft of the entire book. Her response floored me. She said, “I

love the book, the whole book. Especially that one chapter” — the one that she had been so upset by.

I said, “Really?”

She said, “Yes, I love it.”

I said, “But you were so upset about that chapter!”

She said, “Oh no, I wasn’t. I totally agree with you on that chapter.”

I said, “I thought you hated that chapter.”

She said, “No, I didn’t. I thought it was great! You must have misheard me.”

I was stunned. I hung up the phone, went back and listened to the recording. Yep, she definitely hated it and was never going to read anything I ever wrote again!

I asked if we could meet. We did.

I asked her one more time what she thought of that chapter. “I loved it. I totally agree with you. I’ve always have felt that way about it.”

I asked if I could play a portion of the recording back for her. I did. She was stunned.

She said, “I can’t believe I ever thought anything differently. I thought I’ve always felt this way.”

At that moment, God gave me a profound revelation: what I had prayed for about my writing had come true. With my very first beta reader, God showed me that not only could my words impact and change other people’s hearts and minds, they could change in such a way that they felt they “had always thought that way,” that they “couldn’t believe they had ever thought anything different.”

Had I not tempered her comments with what God was doing in *her* heart, I might have given up on the project altogether.

As I'm writing this, just yesterday I heard from a mother and son who are reading that same book together, now five years later, who told me it was giving them both so much hope when they had all but given up. What a tragedy if I had taken that first beta reader's response at face value and not allowed for what God was doing in their heart... and could do in other people's hearts in the future.

3) *Be yourself!*

This is not to say we can't improve. That's why we're asking for the feedback in the first place. If our work needs fixing, attention, or to put on the brakes for some reason, we want people to be honest with us. Yet remember this, especially when writing very personal topics:

Books often read the readers as much as the readers read the books.

All of my writing is deeply personal. Whether it's praying for a snail or telling about my intimate thoughts, my writing is filled with *me*. Everything I say can and possibly will be used against me! I feel that pressure regularly.

But I also feel that my thoughts are probably more common than people may admit... to themselves or to me. I want their feedback because I want to put out the best, most helpful work I can. And when I hear a similar comment repeated, or hear it and God speaks to my heart to listen, I take note and try to correct what's wrong, address what's needing attention or set it aside completely. Feedback is good and necessary. And I want to sift through it carefully and prayerfully.

At some point, though, I have to commit publicly to what I am writing. And at that point, the best advice I can give is “Be yourself.”

After hearing the input, after making the changes, after adding or dropping or modifying what I’ve written, I have to commit to publishing my words so the public can read them.

Do *I* like it? Do *I* feel good about it? Am I willing to take the risk that others may love it, hate it or be challenged by it, whether they ever come to agree with my thoughts or not?

Again, just yesterday, someone told me they had read my *Fifty Shades of Grace*. Again, my jaw dropped and my mind went into a tailspin as I tried to think what this person thought of my book. I respected their input. I wanted to know what they honestly thought. But I also cowered in fear in my heart at what I might hear. Even after seven years of hearing feedback on that book, I am still hearing it as if it’s the first time anyone has ever read it.

Because for that reader, it is.

I asked what he thought and said, “I really do want your honest opinion.” What he said spoke to my heart, and to this point.

He said, “If it were me, I would probably pull back on some of the descriptions.” But then he added, “But it’s *not* me. It’s not my story. It’s your story. And I don’t think you should change a thing.”

He is used to giving me honest feedback. He doesn’t mind telling me what he thinks. But his best feedback was what he told me with those words. It’s your story. Don’t change a thing.

There comes a point where we truly have to be ourselves. Where we have to write honestly what's on our hearts, not being careless or flippant with our words, because words really do matter and are extremely important. But after taking care, after receiving feedback, after tempering the good with the bad, we need to push "publish," trusting that what God had put on our hearts can be used mightily in His hands.

12. Getting endorsements

Endorsements are words of encouragement from readers to recommend your book to others. You can include these quotes on your back book cover or on the first few pages to help nudge potential readers into reading your book!

It's one thing to hear from a car salesman how great their cars are, but it's another to hear from a "satisfied customer." Your endorsements are your "satisfied customers."

Where do you get them and how can you use them?

Here are a few starting points.

1) Use beta reader responses

When you give early copies of your books to others, they will often give you feedback you can use as reviews. Here are a few responses I got back from people who read my book *Fifty Shades of Grace*. I just took these short quotes from their email responses after they read my book:

"A gripping story—a page turner for sure!" R.E.

"Truthful and compelling. I wanted to cry and hold him and tell him everything would be all right (and sometimes box his little ears!)" J.T.

"It hooks you immediately." K.S.

"Engaging, interesting—and significant." G.P.

"Excellent! Not overly graphic, but very personal." D.M.

"A fascinating story—I think more than one wife will nudge her husband and say, 'Here. Read this.'" B.B.

"I don't think I could be so open and honest. That's probably why it is so riveting." J.L.

"A story that all of us can relate to." A.L.

I didn't ask them up front if they would write a review for me. I just let them read it and asked for their honest feedback. I later went through their email responses and found these short snippets that I thought would help others decide if this was a book they would want to read, too. I then went back to each of my readers and asked their permission to use the short quotes I wanted to use, in this case, with just their initials as the book was also written under my pen name.

All said "Yes"!

I put these quotes on the back of my book, underneath the book's description as well as on the book's website and on the Amazon description. I also used these quotes when I promoted my book to my email subscribers and to my family and friends on social media.

It's one thing for me to say "I've written a great book!" It's another to hear from others who have read the book and are willing to say "This is a great book! You should read it, too!"

2) Ask those you know

If you know people who are in your field and in your target audience, you can ask them if they would be willing to write an endorsement for you. I did this with my book *What God Says About Sex*, sending it to some people I knew who either had ministries related

to this topic or to those who were in my target audience. I sometimes shortened or edited what they said to make all of the quotes read nicely together.

Here are some of their replies.

"This book is every parent's new best friend." Dan Mountney, Campus Pastor, Kensington Community Church

"After only a few pages, I knew I could trust this book in the hands of my daughters." Bridgette Booth, homeschooling mother

"It's the kind of book I could read to my son and not be ashamed." Russell Pond, homeschooling father

"Eric Elder's approach is as refreshing as is his testimony." Tim Wilkins, Executive Director, Cross Ministry

"I won't give away the surprise ending, but guarantee it will rock your boat." Al Lowry, Founder of GIG, a music ministry at Saddleback Church

Again, I used these quotes on the back of my book, on my website and on Amazon, and in my emails to my subscribers and social media posts.

3) Use feedback from the public

After my books come out, when someone posts or emails a positive response, I continue to collect and use those quotes in the additional promotion of my book.

Your book will live forever, and people will continue commenting forever! When I go back and re-market a book, maybe to give it another boost or because it's seasonal like my Christmas books and movies, I'll use

these public responses to “freshen up” the endorsements.

For instance, here are a few comments I received from people who watched a Christmas ballet based on my St. Nicholas book called *One Life: A Christmas Story Ballet*. I used these on some promotional materials for the show the following Christmas.

“Beautiful work. Love the music! I hope you can take it far and wide!” BRIAN BIRD, co-producer of *Touched By An Angel* and co-creator of Hallmark’s #1 original series, *When Calls the Heart*.

“Truly Christian, in the best sense of the word, with universal appeal.” JIM ROSENTHAL, former Communications Director for the Archbishop of Canterbury and founder of The St. Nicholas Society.

In these cases, the people happened to have titles and credentials that were significant to my project, so I used those in their bylines as well, with their permission.

It was as simple as asking, “I saw you posted this review. Would I be able to use it in promoting my project to others?” They said “Yes”! One even wrote a dozen more snippets for me to choose from, as he knew the value of marketing.

You might feel uncomfortable asking people for endorsements, but again, you might be pleasantly surprised when you do! People are often happy to help, happy to lend their name to your project, and sometimes happy to see their own name in print! You honor them by valuing their feedback.

And it will truly help others when trying to decide if they should read your book or not.

So... ask!

13. Formatting your book

When it's finished, what do you want your book to look like?

Now's the time to start finding some samples of books that are similar to what you have in mind, whether they're lying around your house or at the library or online or at a bookstore.

What do other books look like that are similar to yours? What books have you loved that you'd like to imitate (imitation is form of flattery).

In the next few chapters I'm going to walk you through everything you need to know to format the interior and exterior of your book. Why? Because if you're interested and motivated, you can do it all yourself! Even if you're not interested or if you're only interested in doing part of it yourself and asking others to do what they do best, these are still good ideas to have in mind.

For instance, when I was writing *What God Says About Sex*, I thought of a book format that I really loved. It was Bruce Wilkinson's *The Prayer of Jabez*. Not only was it an international bestseller, but I loved the way he wrote it and the design and layout of the book. It was short and easy to read. The cover was tasteful, and the fonts and layout on the inside were welcoming.

So I took a copy off my shelf and started designing my own book in a similar way.

I measured the outer book dimensions. I measured the margins at the top and bottom and sides of several pages. I looked closely at the fonts used for the body text, the chapter headings, and the pull-out quotes that appeared occasionally. I even liked the “drop caps” at the beginning of each chapter, which are large initial letters of the first word that drop down 2-3 lines below the first few lines of text.

Then I set about learning how to apply each of these elements to my own book.

Is there a book that comes to mind when you picture your own book? For my friend Cammie Quinn, she wrote an epic Civil War novel about sheep farming in Illinois called *Follow the Wind Home*. The war is just a backdrop for the story. The central theme is love of the land, love of home, and finding healing for those who love too much.

I asked if there was a similar book in style or form that she liked. She said she loved Willa Cather’s book, *O Pioneers!* She said she had read it probably a hundred times.

So we took a look at the book and used that as a starting point. Do you like the painting on the cover? She did, so I suggested an artist who paints in that style—Mark Hill, who also happened to be in our writing group! Do you like the font on the cover? Not necessarily, she said, so I created a new font for her. Do you like the size and shape and feel of the book or do you want it different in certain ways? What about the text on the interior? What about the fonts for the body and the headings? Do you want your name and title of the book at the top of every other page? How do you like the indents and margins?

It's surprising how many decisions go into making a book look just right! But when you break it down into each element, you can get a feel for what you like and don't like, then pursue what you *really* want. I find that most authors have some idea of what they think their book will look like, even if they don't think they do. They do! They just might not realize it yet. Most people have read enough books and have seen glimpses of their preferences, which start to emerge after looking carefully at each detail. And that's great! It's *your* book, so I love finding ways to bring it to life that convey the dreams in your head, just as your words have conveyed them.

My friend Debbie Macomber said before she wrote her first book that she could already see it on a bookstore shelf with her name in large letters across the top. And hundreds of bestselling books later, that's still what I see whenever I look at a book rack at a grocery store: several books on the latest bestsellers list with her name emblazoned across the top!

So what does your book look like, feel like, talk about? What do you want your readers to know, feel or do? How does what you're saying with your words translate into the book that you envision in your readers' hands?

If you don't have an idea, take a look at the world of books around you! Then we'll dive into bringing that vision to life next.

14. Interior design

Once you've found a sample book you'd like as a pattern for your book, you can start designing the look of the interior of your book. The interior includes everything *inside* the book, not the front, back or spine of the book. Everything else is in the interior, from the title page, copyright page, acknowledgments, and table of contents to the main chapters, section pages, and anything you want to include at the end: epilogue, notes, author bio, or website links.

This can be as simple or as complex as you'd like! I have one friend who simply typed his story on a full-size screen and exported a PDF file of it just as it was. He uploaded it to Amazon to print on an 8.5"x11" paperback book just as if it came out of his printer, except with a cover and paperback binding. I have other friends who have carefully selected every font, every element, added headings and footers and page numbers and section dividers, resulting in perfectly-bound bookstore-ready books.

I say this so you can relax! The main thing is to get your story out there, even if you post it freely online. But if you're like me, you might also like to have your story printed like any other book you'd find on your shelf. It's a huge accomplishment to write a book, so taking the time to polish it off is often worth any effort it takes. And it helps for marketing too. Aside from the conventional wisdom that you can't judge a book by its cover, I'd still rather have the best-looking book I can have!

So, what are the elements to consider when designing the interior?

1) Choose your fonts

The font I'm using for the body of this book is called Garamond. It's a very standard font for the main body of many books because it's easy to read, and it has "serifs" on most letters... those "little feet" at the bottoms of the l's and i's and t's, etc. Those little feet (which is what serif means in Latin) help pull the reader's eye from left to right along each line of text.

I also like to use Times New Roman (like this) or Sabon (like this) or a similar serif font that is not too fancy but has those little feet to help the reader along.

Traditional printing rules suggested using serifs for body text and something stronger for headings, usually fonts without the little feet, or in Latin "sans serif." Now you know some Latin, too. :)

Traditional "sans serif" fonts include **Helvetica** or **Arial**. Headings are meant to be bolder and attention-grabbing, so they don't need the serifs to pull the reader along. For this book, I decided to use *my own handwriting*, which provides both boldness and personalization, because the book itself is very personal: *Write With Me!* I created the font using an online app from Calligraphr.com. (Yes, that's spelled right!)

Try some fonts on a paragraph or two, or a heading or two, in your own book and see what you think!

BUT... don't format your entire document in these fonts directly. There's a better way.

2) Setup your styles

The better way is to define your preferred fonts as Styles. For instance, in this book, I've defined the style of the paragraphs to be called "Body" style and I've adjusted the settings to my liking: Garamond, 11 point, justified, with 1.1 points of spacing between lines.

Once I've defined a style, I apply it to the whole document. If I want to adjust the style later, I just change the definition of the "Style," for instance to increase or decrease the font size or to switch to another font. Now when I make a change to one paragraph, I simply click "Update to Match" on the Style, and the change is applied to every paragraph in the book instantly, without having to go back and highlight and change every paragraph in the book manually.

I also create a style for "Chapter Titles," and I define that style. If I want to change something later, I just modify the style once, and every Chapter Title in the book changes automatically.

Not only does this make changes easier, but it also helps for formatting other things, like the Table of Contents. Once I've applied the Chapter Title style to every chapter title in the book, I can insert a "Table of Contents" element at the beginning of the book and it will automatically create the table and page numbers from every Chapter Title because I've already told it what words should be considered Chapter Titles.

So you can see the value of defining styles right up front. It will make the rest of the process much easier!

I've recorded some tutorials for how to create these styles in Word or Pages and posted them to my "How To" playlist on my YouTube channel at youtube.com/@ericelder. Most word processing programs have this capability, and help screens and online videos can also walk you through the process.

3) Define your page size

If you've taken measurements of the sample book you'd like to mimic, you can adjust your document to be exactly that size. I like to save a new copy of my manuscript and work from that for the rest of the steps. Keeping the old copy helps in case I make a mistake or accidentally delete something while experimenting, but I don't go back to that old copy any more. I make any new edits on the newly formatted copy.

I define the page size by simply changing the size of the entire document. For this book, I've defined the page size to be 4.375"x7." I also like using 5.5"x8.5" 5.01"x8.71" or 6"x9." It really depends on what you want *your* book to look like! Check out beforehand to see which sizes are available and most popular.

4) Set your margins

If you have an option, define your pages to be "facing pages" or "mirrored pages" so you can set your margins to be different on the left and right of your book.

You want them to be different because a book has a "gutter" in the middle when it's opened, and you'll need a little more margin on the inside of each page so you don't lose words in the gutter.

For this book, in my margin setting, I chose “facing pages” and defined the inner margin to be .75” and the outer margin to be .375.” I defined my top margin to be .5” and the bottom to be .375.” How did I get these numbers? I found a book I liked, I measured its margins, and I plugged them in! Easy peasy.

5) Choose your headers and footers

Is there some text you’d like to appear on every page of your book? For instance, the title of your book and/or your name? Just tap the top area of your document and a “header” area should appear so you can type in some text.

For this book, I’ve put the title of my book on the right pages, and my name on the left. I like to do this so if someone copies a page from my book, they’ll remember where they got it, or others can tell where they got it and get a copy, too!

Most word processors will let you define a “different left and right” page. Once you type something into the right or left header, it will appear throughout your book. The same goes for footers. Just insert a field called “Page Number.” You don’t have to number each page manually. In fact, you shouldn’t. Let the software do the work, and if you make a change in your text that changes the number of pages, the software will change the page numbers for you.

Other tidbits

To see a sample of other info you might include in your book, just look around this book or the book you’d like to emulate.

For instance, I usually include a title page on the first right-hand page of a book, with a copyright statement on the back of that page, on a left-hand page. I like to sign my books on the title page near my name!

It's weird signing your own book, believe me! One day I met Jeanette Oke who wrote *When Calls the Heart* and other famous novels about the Canadian frontier. I was telling her about my St. Nicholas book, and she asked if she could have a copy for her grandkids. I pulled out a copy from my backpack and asked if she'd like me to sign it. She said, "Yes, please do!" Odd as it seemed, there I was, signing one of *my* books for Jeanette Oke! Crazy! And I signed it where I sign all my books... on that title page.

Books sometimes start new chapters on right-hand pages, something you can define in your styles for "New Sections." Every time I start a new chapter, I simply insert a "Section Break" and it defaults to how I like new sections to start. Note this is different than a "Page Break," which simply starts a new page immediately following the previous one. A Section Break includes those special instructions for making sure the page starts on the right. I don't always do this, as you can tell from this book. I wanted it to keep this one short and sweet and didn't want any extra blank pages.

I love layout and design as much as I love writing, so all of this is fun for me. If you do, too, great! You can dive as deep as you want into getting things just right. But if you don't, don't worry. You can reach out to me or others who do! There are people who will be glad to help you add all the window-dressing you want to make your book look its best.

15. Cover design

Whether you design your cover yourself or have someone else do it, the best graphic design phrase I've followed over the years is this:

One dominant theme

It might be a striking image, a bold typestyle, a particular color scheme. But whatever it is, make it something that draws the eye.

I've created most of my own covers. It's something I love doing, and it's a fun challenge for me to get it "just right." If you want to try, I'll give you the specifics in this chapter for how to create a cover for your own book so you can upload it to Amazon or wherever you decide to print it.

And if you don't want to try, there are some simple ways to create a cover on most publishing services. For instance, on KDP on Amazon, once you upload your interior and title information, you can simply click "Launch Cover Creator" and Amazon will give you a few templates to choose from, with the title of your book and your name already on the cover in appropriate places on the front, spine, and back.

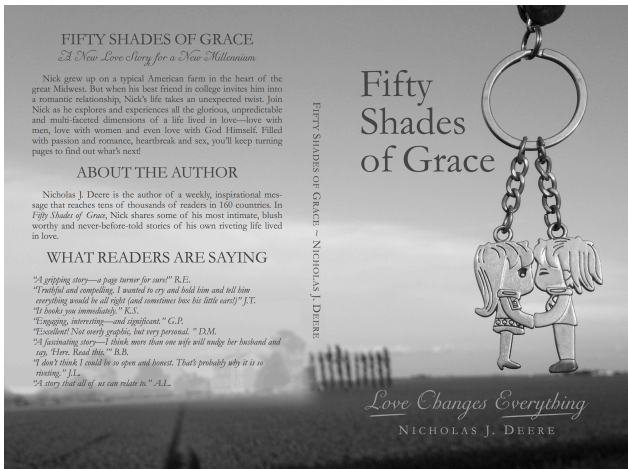
You can then choose a different background image, change the color scheme, type over their dummy text with your own text, or upload your author photo. They make it easy!

But if you want to get more creative and build your cover from scratch, here's how.

1) Determine your dimensions

When building your cover, it's good to know up front that you'll be creating one large graphic that will include your front cover (on the right of the graphic), your back cover (on the left of the graphic), and your spine (down the side of the book), all in one file. This cover will then wrap around the pages of your book and be trimmed to fit the size you've chosen.

Here's an example of a complete cover file:



You'll notice the "one dominant theme" on the front cover (the couple on the right), with the picture wrapping around the spine and onto the back. I like designing covers that blend from front to back to give it a continuous look. The title is in a graceful font, and the subtitle is in a different color, in yet another graceful font. I try not to go crazy combining too many

fonts, but one or two that compliment each other is pleasant.

To determine your dimensions, you can simply upload your interior file to KDP and it will tell you specifically how wide and tall your graphic needs to be! They calculate the size by taking into account the width and height of the paper size you've chosen, in this case, 5.5"x8.5."

So to determine the overall height, it's just a matter of adding a little extra (.125") to the top and bottom of the page to account for that being "trimmed" off when they cut the paper after printing the graphic. The graphic "bleeds" off the edge of the paper like this to account for the trimming. So the height would be 8.5" + .125" for the top bleed and .125" for the bottom bleed for a total height of 8.75." After trimming, it will be only 8.5" tall, just like you planned for it to be.

To determine the overall width, add a little extra to the far left and far right of the image (.125"), then add enough for the width of the spine. KDP will calculate this for you, or tell you how to calculate it based on the number of pages in your book. The more pages, the thicker the spine. The fewer pages, the thinner the spine. In this case, the book is 220 pages.

For white paper on KDP, they say to multiply the page count by 0.002252." So 220 pages x 0.002252" is .495," or basically 1/2 an inch. So the total width of the graphic needs to be 5.5" + 5.5" + .125" + .125" + .5" = 11.75." (Cream paper is thicker so they give you a different multiplier for that.)

So now you know the full dimensions: 8.75" x 11.75."

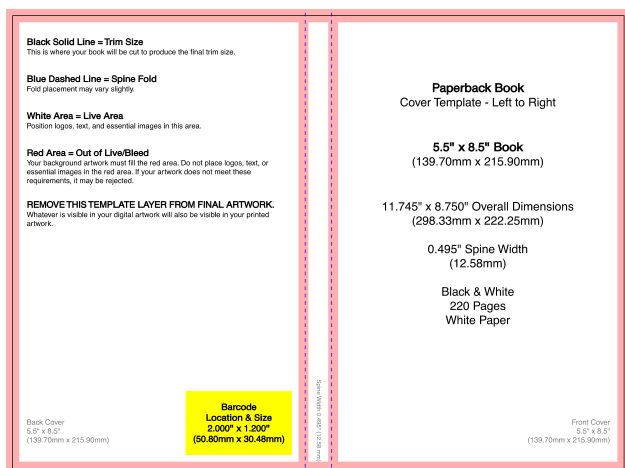
Again, they'll do all the calculations for you! But now you know what they're doing.

2) Design Your cover

Taking your full dimensions, you can create a graphic that is that exact size. For instance, when I use Canva.com, I simply choose "Create A Design," then "Custom Size," then I enter my dimensions: 8.75" x 11.75."

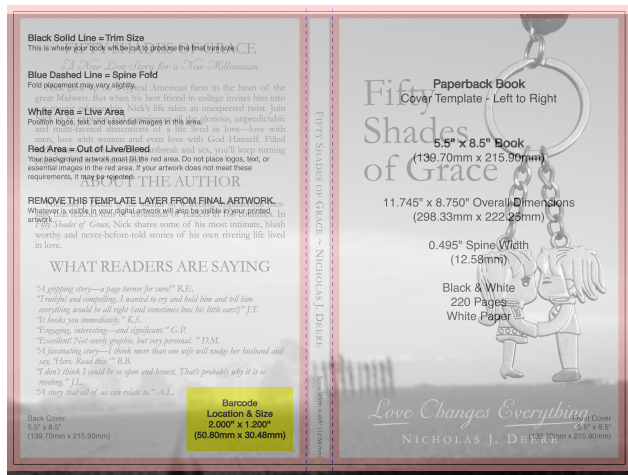
From there I start adding elements and moving them around, the background image, the title text, subtitle text, back cover text, and spine text turned sideways.

KDP will also give you a design template so you can see the exact dimensions, including trim lines, spine width, and safety zones to be sure anything important doesn't get accidentally cut off due to slight variations in printing and trimming. Here's a sample of the design template:



The pink zone is for safety. Don't have any important words or graphics there. The black solid line is where the book will be trimmed. The dotted lines in the middle show the spine. Make sure your spine text is rotated in a way that when the book is sitting on a table with the cover showing, the spine text is right-side-up! The yellow area is set aside for a barcode, which KDP will add to the graphic in a white box. You do not need to create the white box or barcode; they'll do it.

I'll often import the design template into my design, then choose 50% opacity on the template so I can "see through" it and make sure my text and images are within the safety zones. Then I delete the template before saving the file.



3) Save Your graphic

When you're done designing your graphic, you can save it in a PDF file for printing. If you're using Canva, you can choose to download the image at high resolution for printing (300 dots per inch or higher). You can also choose between color formats (such as CMYK or RGB). Each publisher is different, so choose whichever format they prefer. KDP prefers CMYK, but can accept either.

Once you have your graphic saved, you can upload it to KDP under the option "Upload a cover you already have."

After your interior and cover files are uploaded, you'll have a chance to preview your whole book online, from cover to cover! Exciting!

16. Uploading your book

Let's upload your book!

Now that you have your interior and cover PDF files, you can upload them to a book printing company like KDP from Amazon or Lulu or IngramSpark.

Let's start by creating a free account on KDP. As of this writing, just go to kdp.amazon.com and click "Sign Up."

If you already have an Amazon account for buying things, you can use that same account to upload and sell your books. If you don't have an Amazon account, just fill out the information to create one. I use my same Amazon account for everything.

You'll be asked for your name and contact info, your banking info for direct deposits of your royalties, and your tax info if you want Amazon to withhold certain taxes on your behalf.

Once your account is created, you'll be able to upload your book! Just go to the "Bookshelf" and click "Create" to create a new title.

1) Paperback details

Now you can enter your title, subtitle, author's name, description, keywords, and categories.

Some of these fields can be changed even after your book is published, like your description, keywords and categories. But you want to get your title, subtitle, and author's name right the first time around!

For your description, be sure to include words that your target audience might be searching for, including other titles or authors who might be similar.

Bonus Tip: For help in choosing words that people are searching for, you can go to trends.google.com and type in some words or phrases that come to mind when you think of your book. You'll see which of those words or phrases other people are searching for too!

Do the same for your keywords. These are the most important words you want your book to be known by. They can be individual words or phrases.

For categories, you can choose up to three. Think of these like the section of a bookstore where your book would be found, such as Christian Inspiration or Historical Fiction. You'll want a category that is specific enough so people wandering through that "section" of the bookstore (even if only online) can find what they're looking for. The category you choose will also be used for determining the ranking of your book on Amazon. You could be #12 in Christian Mental Health, but #245,928 in General Christianity.

2) Paperback content

On the Content screens, you can enter your ISBN, choose your publication date, paper type, and trim size, then upload your interior and cover PDF files.

For the ISBN, Amazon can provide a free one or you can buy one or more from companies like bowker.com. A free one is fine and is tied specifically to Amazon, but some people like to have their own ISBN to tie it to their own identity. I've done both for

my own books, and I often use the free ones for my clients to save them money.

For the publication date, you can leave it blank so it will go live as soon as you complete the steps, or you can choose a specific date in the future that you can announce to your target readers so they can all buy it on the same day. Choosing a day can help boost your rankings in terms of sales for that day, which can, if the sales are enough, help boost your book higher on the sales list and put it in front of more people. I usually leave it blank so it will go live as soon as I'm finished.

You may have already decided on your paper type and trim size when you initially formatted your book, so enter these options. You can still change these options before you publish your book, but not after you publish your book. So there's still time to experiment and print some sample copies and see what you really like. Just don't push "Publish" if you're not sure yet.

Upload your interior file when prompted. Amazon will do some automatic checks to make sure your text and graphics are within the printable margins, your fonts are readable, and your layout is printable.

They'll also check to see that your ISBN you've entered matches the ISBN you've included on the copyright page within your book. If you haven't added it there, do it now, then save a new PDF version to upload.

Once the interior passes the checks, upload your cover file. Amazon will also check this file for any printing issues, then it will allow you to launch a Preview window so you can flip through your whole

book, from cover to cover, to check the margins, fonts, and overall layout.

If Amazon sees any potential issues, they will flag them and note the page numbers so you can fix and upload a new file. If everything passes their inspection and yours, you can go on to set the rights and pricing.

3) Paperback rights and pricing

Here you can choose all countries where you want to publish your book (I choose All), the primary marketplace where you want to sell your book (I choose Amazon.com for US sales, but you might want to sell your book in your own country primarily if you're not from the US), then choose a price for your book.

For pricing, I like to set it so I make about \$5 per book, whether it's a paperback, ebook, hard cover, or audiobook. That way I get \$5 no matter what format the reader chooses. They get various advantages from any format, but I don't lose or make more from any of the formats. But I do like to get about \$5 per sale! For me, it just feels like the right price, both for me and for the buyer. You can choose different prices for different countries, but I just take the defaults that Amazon provides.

Note: Expanded distribution allows you to sell your book on other websites outside of Amazon. You'll get less of a royalty, but could increase your overall sales. I like expanded distribution if your book size and territories allow for it. You may need to adjust your book size to a more common size if you want expanded distribution. If so, this option will let you know what to change.

Lastly, you can request a proof copy of your book. I definitely suggest choosing this option if you want to see it in your hands before making it available on Amazon. Don't hit "Publish"! Just choose "Request Proof Copy." You'll have an option to order one or a few copies at cost plus shipping. These proof copies will also be marked as such so they're not designed to be resold.

Order your proof copies, then wait to receive your first copy in the mail!

If you don't like it, you can fix it. If you love it, press "Publish"! Amazon will verify all of your book info and within 72 hours, it will be live on Amazon!

17. Creating your eBook + hard cover

About 80% of the books I sell are paperbacks, 15% ebooks, 5% audiobooks, and only a handful of hard covers. That's why I start by formatting the paperback first, then move on to the ebook and a hardcover, if I do one at all. Finally, I work on an audiobook, as that's a different type of project.

Now that we've done our paperback, we can work on the ebook and hardcover.

Creating your eBook

Creating your eBook is fairly straightforward, unless you start adding bells and whistles. Then it gets complicated quickly, as an eBook follows different rules.

But for a normal eBook, it can be almost as simple as exporting your paperback book into an EPUB format. Most word processors will have an export function for an eBook. In Pages on a Mac, simply use "File" then "Export as EPUB."

There are three differences you'll want to note from a paperback to an eBook. First, you'll want to include an auto-generated Table of Contents if you don't already have one in your paperback. This table will be used in the eBook reader to help readers navigate by simply clicking on chapter titles.

The second difference is to create a simple front cover for your eBook. KDP recommends a graphic in .JPG format that is at least 1,000 pixels high by 625 pixels wide, with a resolution of 72 dots per inch. You

won't have a back cover or spine... just this little "chicklet" of an image for people to click on to browse or buy your book.

Once you export your EPUB file, you can upload it to KDP by clicking on the "Create Kindle eBook" option on your already existing paperback book. (Don't create a whole new title. When you add an eBook to your existing paperback title, many of the fields will be automatically imported and your paperback and eBook will be automatically linked on your Amazon page.)

The third difference is you don't need an ISBN at all. So you can delete that from the copyright page of your book, or if you have bought a block of ISBN's you can use one on your eBook. But since it's not necessary, you don't need to waste one on the eBook.

Creating your hard cover

I sell hardly any hardcovers, but you might want some for your own collection or special friends or family, or you might just want to make it available since you never know who might prefer that format. For instance, I've written a 365-day devotional that people may want to read every day. So I've created a hard cover version for extra durability, but I can say I've only sold a handful.

Still, it's easy to convert your book for the hard cover format, with a few changes.

First, you may have to change the dimensions of your book, as Amazon or other printers only do a few sizes of hard covers. It's easy enough to go into your word processor, choose the Document settings, and

change the page size and margins to fit whatever dimensions are needed.

Second, your cover will have to be modified to accommodate wrapping the cover image around the hard cover. KDP will offer you a template for the exact size of your book, showing how much extra room is needed at the edges to wrap around your book.

Third, you'll need a different ISBN than for your paperback. Again, you can get a free one from KDP or use one you've purchased, but every printed format needs a different ISBN so when people order your book they can be sure they're getting the right printed copy. You'll want to change the ISBN on the copyright page of your manuscript before exporting it as a PDF file.

And yes, I realize I used three acronyms in that last paragraph and you might feel it's all a jumble! But when you go to upload your eBook or hard cover on Amazon, the screens will walk you through everything you need. Don't despair... be thankful you don't have to use Gutenberg's printer and place every letter on every page and run ink over it! Comparatively, this is still pretty amazingly EASY! You can do it!

18. Turning your writing into speaking

Don't be surprised if, as soon as you finish writing your book, God invites you to talk about it!

One of the best things writing has done for me is to help improve my speaking. By writing down my thoughts, I'm able to choose my words carefully and tell my stories compellingly.

After finishing the first draft of my book, *Loving God & Loving Gays*, my pastor heard about the book and wanted to read an advance copy. Before he was even finished with it, he invited me to lunch to talk about the book and an interview he wanted to do with me on stage at our megachurch. He said, "If your book is ready by that date, I'd like to order 300 copies to have available in our bookstore as a resource for our people." I was stunned.

He said he wanted the interview to be extemporaneous, with a few seed questions to get started, but with enough spontaneity that it would feel fresh and unrehearsed. Keep in mind, this was the largest audience I would ever speak to, both in person and online, on a topic where words really matter. Plus, the interview was to last just five minutes. My answers would have to be very, very concise.

I was nervous, but because I had written the book, I was prepared. I was ready for whatever kind of question he might ask in the moment.

In the end, what sounded like a casual, off-the-cuff conversation between friends was really the result of

30 years of life and ministry and nine months of crafting sentences on every aspect of the topic. I was able to condense a 230-page book into a five-minute talk that people still tell me impacted them over five years later.

I don't know that I would have been able to do it, certainly not as well, had I not spent so much time thinking through and writing down my thoughts beforehand.

All of this is to say that your words matter. The time you spend choosing your words and crafting your sentences matter. For me, it's like playing a song on the piano. It takes hours and hours of work to learn a three-minute song. But that repetition, that figuring out the notes, that detailed work to get the dynamics just right, all pay off in the end and make your playing look effortless.

As anyone who makes something look effortless knows, it's not effortless in the preparation! Michelangelo said:

"If you knew how much work went into it, you wouldn't call it genius."

Having said that, there are still certain things you can do to prepare to turn your writing into speaking.

1) What do you want them to know, feel, and do?

I usually start with the same steps that I start a book, asking myself, "What do I want the listener to know? What do I want them to feel? What do I want them to do?"

I was recently asked to speak at a memorial service for a dear aunt and uncle who had passed away on separate occasions. There was a lot I could have said, but I was given exactly three minutes. Many stories flashed through my mind of my interactions with them. Too many to share in that short time. When I thought of my audience, I tried to think what would be most important for them. What could I say that others couldn't or wouldn't say, as there were a few different speakers?

I decided to focus on three stories that centered on three significant decisions I had made while staying with my aunt and uncle at their house... and what it meant to me for them to host me and give me a place to think clearly and hear deeply from God.

I wanted the audience to know these stories of how their lives influenced mine. I wanted them to feel closer to God as they listened to the stories. I also wanted them to consider a significant decision that might be on their hearts and to make a commitment to Him. That's what I wanted them to know, feel, and do.

Then I had to come up with the thread that would tie them all together. Each was a significant decision tied to a specific date. So as I told each story, I mentioned the decision, the date, and how my aunt and uncle played a role.

Finally, I wanted to end with a call to action: to invite them to make a commitment to something that may be on their hearts, too.

The talk went well, and one person said afterward: "I think you are at your best when you are sharing your testimony freely like that. It's powerful."

By “freely,” he meant extemporaneously, as if it just sprang out of my heart in that moment. In a sense, it did. I had to rely on the Holy Spirit to give me the words and witness to the importance of their lives to me.

But my “spontaneous” three stories were actually three stories I had written about at length in a couple of my books. I condensed whole chapters into single sentences so I could fit all three stories into my tight timeframe. I was able to do it more effectively because I had already thought through those stories deeply. I had come up with words and phrases to capture the essence of the stories. Then I told them in a way that drove home what I wanted this particular audience to know, feel, and do.

Two other things helped me deliver that message.

2) Write and memorize your opening and closing words

My childhood dance teacher taught us to always nail the opening and closing of our numbers. She said people won’t notice if you mess up in the middle, just be sure to nail your opening and closing!

The same is true for speeches. I usually try to write out and memorize my opening and closing lines. This assures I have something to say when I stand up and something to say when I wrap up. Here’s my intro from this talk:

“My name is Eric Elder, and Rowland and Martha were my uncle and aunt. When I think of them, three pictures come to my mind. The three pictures I see are three of the most significant decisions I’ve ever made in my life.”

I also had a closing statement, a call to action, that I had written and memorized:

"I think they are providing a backdrop for each of us today, including me. If there's a significant decision on your heart, I think we could do nothing better to honor them, and to honor God, than by making a commitment today to follow the God of Rowland and Martha and the God of Joan and Ted and Glen and their descendants."

Then I invited people to pray a prayer of commitment with me.

I do this for almost all of my talks, following this same simple outline, and I write it down on one sheet of paper.

- What do I want people to know, feel, and do?
- Write and memorize an intro and closing.
- Write my main three points that support my theme, often describing three pictures in my mind.

3) What's in it for me?

Third, I try to remember that everyone, everywhere, at all times, has needs. I try to ask myself what the audience is asking: "What's in it for me?"

My three stories I shared that day may have been meaningful to me as the speaker, but my goal was to also inspire the those in attendance, so I tried to make it relatable to them as well. A simple way I did this was to include a few statements that might touch something going on in their lives. I didn't memorize these for my opening, but that's where I included them. I said:

"If there's a significant decision that's on your heart—whether it's to put your faith in Christ for the first time,

whether it's about your marriage, whether it's about your kids or your job or your future or your finances or your health—I think we could do nothing better to honor them and honor God than by making a commitment today.”

By listing several ways my words might apply to their personal situations, I was able to help answer the question: “What’s in it for me?” I also opened a door for the Holy Spirit to turn *one* message into *hundreds* of messages, speaking directly to the situations they may have been facing. I wanted my message to be more than just how wonderful my aunt and uncle were when they were alive, which was very important, but also about how their lives could *still* have an impact on each one of us today.

Afterward, a woman came up to me and said: “Thanks so much, Eric. I wanted you to know I made a significant decision today.” Touchdown! Hallelujah!

3) *Using nervous energy*

The last thought about speaking that I’d like to share here to do with the common fear of public speaking. I’m told speaking in public one of the top fears of most people, and I can see why!

I get nervous *every* time I have to get up to speak. *Every time. Every. Time.*

One of the things I often do when I speak, *almost* every time, is cry. As I tell stories of how God has worked in my life, I cry. I believe it’s a sign of the Holy Spirit working through me. But I also believe it’s a release of the nervous energy that builds up in me over several days or hours of preparation. When I get up to speak, I have to fix my words, give them their final

form, and that pressure, in front of a live audience, is immense. My brain is working overtime, my spirit is working overtime, and my heart is full of emotion. And I cry.

And my audience cries. Almost every time.

I have learned not to try to suppress it, but to lean into it. I am full of emotion, and as long as it doesn't debilitate me, it can help me deliver a message that is full of emotion, too. Full of all the care and prayer and thought that I've put into it.

How are you wired? How might you use your nervous energy to lean into the emotions God has given you? Maybe you get overexcited and you talk fast. Maybe you get stage fright and very few words come out at all. Maybe you laugh when you're nervous, or cry, like me. Instead of fighting those feelings, how could you lean into them and let God use them for good?

See what I did there? I just answered the question "WIIFM?" and made this applicable to each of you! You can do the same whenever you speak.

19. Seven touches

Your book's done and uploaded! Hooray!

Now you have two choices. You can just enjoy the victory of writing and publishing a book. Or you have to gear up for the next phase: marketing your book. If you pick option one, you're done! But if you want to get your work into the hands of more readers, you'll want to roll up your sleeves again.

Here's one tried and true marketing concept that will help you as you go forward. It usually takes "seven touches" to convert a potential reader into an actual reader. By that I mean, you will want to expose potential readers to your book at least seven times, often in multiple ways, before they will commit to buying and reading your book.

People don't just buy a Coke because they saw it once on a shelf at a store. They buy it because they saw an ad on TV, heard a jingle on the radio, saw a pop-up ad on Google, watched a sporting match with the company's logo throughout the event, saw a truck on the highway with the logo emblazoned on the side, walked past a promotional display at the grocery store, then saw a sale price on the bottles on the shelf. Finally, they decided, "I'd like a Coke today" and put a case in their cart.

And that's with an international product that has been advertising to you your whole life.

So how do we get our book in front of people seven times? That's what we'll explore next.

20. To market, to market

Here are seven ways to tell the world about your story.

1) *Tell the story behind the story*

You've just spent a good chunk of your life writing your story. People want to hear about that. They're enthralled by the process. They have seldom, if ever, met a "book writer."

I was writing on my laptop at a local Steak & Shake when my server looked at what I was doing. "Are you a book writer?" he asked. "I've never met a book writer." He was enthralled.

I chuckled at his description. I could type. I could string sentences together. I could tell a story. But somehow, in that moment, I felt like JK Rowling writing her first book in the *Harry Potter* series in a coffee shop in London. Can you imagine waiting on JK Rowling while she sipped coffee and worked on her forthcoming novel?

That's what I felt like in the eyes of my server. And to much of the world, that's what you'll look like in the eyes of those who find out you're a "book writer."

Own it!

"Yes," I said. "I am a book writer."

For some reason, I liked his description even better than "author"! Being an author intimidates me. In my mind, it implies a certain lifestyle, probably more pic-

turesque and more romantic than it actually is. If I tell people I'm an author, I sometimes feel like an imposter! But I *am* a book writer. That's totally true.

So when I introduce a book to the world, I like to tell the story behind the story: why I wrote it, what it was like writing it, how it felt to have written it, why I'm thankful I took the time to tell it—and why I think they'll enjoy reading it.

Tell your story. People *want* to hear it!

2) Post reader reviews

As I said earlier, it's one thing to hear from a car salesman how great their cars are. It's another thing to hear it from a “satisfied customer.”

Collect reader comments all throughout your process. If someone is intrigued by the idea of your book and tells you so, write it down.

When I told people my wife and I were writing a book about the real St. Nicholas and the great faith he had in Christ, we would share a few tidbits about his life. People would say, “I'd love to read that. I didn't know he was a real person.” Or they'd say, “I'd love to read that to my kids. I don't want to take away the fun of Santa, but I still want to point them to Christ.”

Our book was perfect for just those scenarios. We had researched the story, we had found it compelling, and we took time to write it down for others to enjoy. That initial intrigue provided fodder for telling others why they might like to read it.

I also captured quotes when advance readers read chapters or the whole book. And then I captured quotes after the book came out to share those with others, too.

Pick one or two quotes and share them online! The next week, do the same! As readers continue to write, continue to post from time to time what they're saying.

People love hearing from satisfied customers.

Bonus: ask you readers to take a picture of themselves holding your book, maybe when they pull it from the mailbox, or in a location where they're reading it—maybe in their favorite chair or on a beach or by a fireplace. Include their pictures with their quotes for greater impact!

3) Offer a book reading

My local library loved that I had written a book about St. Nicholas. They asked if I would be willing to do a reading one day at the library to raise awareness about it. Of course I would!

It would be an easy win for me and for those who would come.

When the time came for me to do the reading, I was also introducing a new musical I had written based on the book, so I created a whole 45-minute presentation. I talked about the book and why we wrote it. I talked about my high school English teacher who impacted me (and who I invited to the presentation). I talked about the upcoming musical and played some of the music from the show.

The local newspaper decided to feature the story and put me and my book on the front page (it was a 12-page paper and my friend was the editor!)

The library felt the audience would be bigger if they combined it with a big open house they were having around the same time. So instead of a small reading with a few children, which is where they slotted me at

first, it turned into a bigger event with people already wanting to come to the library.

I say all this to say you never know what kind of buzz you might create by offering to share your book with the world, starting with your own local community.

4) Create a video

As much as we want people to read our books, the truth is they like to watch videos even more! You can use your phone or have a friend record you on their phone or camera talking about your book. It doesn't have to be long, but it can be!

Share things you've already thought through when writing your book, such as "When the reader finishes the book, what do I want them to know, feel, and do?" Just talk about those things for a few minutes and post it online!

You can upload the video to your social media accounts. You can upload it to YouTube with just a few clicks. Then share those links with everyone you can!

I've created short clips... one or two or three minutes long, talking about my books, holding the books, reading portions from the books.

I've also created entire podcast series around my books. For my book, "My Stories of Faith," I launched it just after COVID began when people were staying at home and more than a little fearful. I simply turned on my camera in my living room and went live every night for a month, reading one story each night from my book, playing a song on my piano, and praying for those who were watching. I called it *Bedtime Stories of Faith*. People still talk about that series and how grate-

ful they were for those faith boosters every night during that tumultuous time.

I wrote the stories to share, so I wasn't worried about selling books. I wanted people to have the information, to have the encouragement. Several people ordered books as a result for themselves and for their friends. Plus, all of those videos are still online and people can watch me read through my entire book, anytime they need a boost in their faith. It's on my YouTube channel at:

[youtube.com/@ericelder](https://www.youtube.com/@ericelder)

Don't limit your book to paper and ink. Set it free whenever you can!

5) offer giveaways

People love free stuff. And offering a book or two online is an easy way to promote your book without looking like you're promoting it. You're giving something away! But it also helps people to learn about your book in a non-threatening way.

When I was promoting my St. Nicholas book and musical, I contacted a couple places that seemed like natural fits.

The first was an international health-sharing ministry I belong to that has a monthly newsletter which featured a "member story" each month and how their ministry helps them. I told them about how they helped me through a rough patch in my health when I was trying to stage a ballet version of my book and was almost derailed, permanently. But thanks to their help with my medical situation, I was able to complete the project. They set up an interview, asked for some

photos of me, my book, and my upcoming event, and they slated it to appear in their November edition, right before Christmas.

It was a win-win for me and the ministry. They got to share with their members how their ministry impacted another member, and I got to share about a project that was on my heart.

They offered two free books to their readers, so people could email to win them. Others could buy them if they didn't win.

A second organization I contacted was a local radio station. I reached out to the morning show host and told them about my upcoming St. Nicholas musical and asked if they'd like to do an interview about the show and the book and the process that led up to it. They actually declined that offer, but said if I would just call into the morning show the next day and offer two free tickets to the show, I could talk about the show and the book and whatever I wanted for 2-3 minutes!

That was perfect! I called at the designated time, the host took my call, let me speak for 2-3 minutes, and had listeners call in for the tickets.

Call me naive, but I never realized as a kid, or even most of my adult life, that people weren't giving free stuff away, they were wanting me to buy their stuff! The free stuff was just to get our attention long enough hear about what they were offering.

But now that I know what's happening, I can help make it a win-win all around.

When I speak, I often pass around a sign up sheet to get on my newsletter to give people a boost in their faith anytime. Or even better, I'll ask them to take out

their phones and pull up my website so they can see it for themselves, bookmark it to visit later, and sign up for my newsletter right then.

Some people do a drawing for a free book if the audience will sign up or put their business cards in a bowl. Others hand out “idea sheets” they can take home that highlight some things they might get out of the book. Some people might not be ready to buy now, but when they are ready, they’ll know how to find it!

There are so many ways to give your readers something of value both while you’re speaking to them and when they eventually read your book, which, if you’re like me, is probably your ultimate goal!

You took the time to write it. Now take the time to get it into their hands and hearts.

6) Ask others to share

I have friends who do podcasts who also happen to like my books! So from time to time, I’ll ask if they’d like to do an interview about one on their show.

We chat on zoom for an hour about the book and the book writing and making process or whatever direction the host wants to take. They publish it on their podcast, and I point people to it, too. Again, it’s a win-win all around.

If you have friends who love, love, love your book, ask if they’ll share it on their social media along with a few thoughts on the book, and maybe why someone would want to read it. What they share doesn’t have to be long, or it can be, but even 2-3 sentences can be enough to expose your book one more time to people you know, and expose your book to people you don’t know!

When I was starting to record my piano music, I was talking to a musician friend who has worked with some really big name bands. At that time, when ordering CDs, you had to order 500 or 1,000. You couldn't just print one, and there was no streaming or YouTube. But my friend said, "You can probably sell 200-300 to your family or friends, but if you don't have another way to get the word out, you'll have a closet full of most of your CDs."

Thankfully, that's no longer the model! I can upload a song today and people can start listening to it immediately. But the same principle holds true for books. You might be able to sell dozens or even a few hundred books to family and friends. If you want to reach a broader audience, though, you'll need to enlist your current fans to share your book with their family and friends, too.

Sometimes it's as simple as asking. So ask!

7) Throw a launch party

I saved this one for last, but I would do this one first.

I saved it for last because this can also serve as your own celebration of having written and published a book! Make it a party! And it's all about you... and of course, your book.

You might feel uncomfortable throwing yourself a party. But please do! Let others help you plan it. You'll find your biggest fans are also your biggest cheerleaders and happy to see you succeed at reaching this HUGE GOAL.

When I launched one of my books, a friend had also finished one of his so we held a joint launch par-

ty. He asked a coffee shop on campus at the college where he taught if we could do it there. They said, Yes! We invited friends and faculty and students and promoted it on social media.

I met him there on our launch night with a case of my books, and he had a case of his. We set up a book table in the hallway and made a spot to stand during our talks in the coffeeshop.

The interesting thing to me was that even though we didn't have a big crowd, we had a big celebration in our hearts! We enjoyed being together and celebrating this milestone. We each talked a bit about why we wrote the books, then we each read a chapter aloud.

We had only 15-20 people at most, and we each sold a couple copies of our books. But what happened on social media was an entirely different thing!

We posted announcements leading up to the launch which generated tremendous coverage, then posted pictures from the event, with us and our books at the book table, which generated even more coverage! People celebrated with us from all over, sending congratulations and attaboys for our success.

Again, people were thrilled to see they had friends who were "book writers." And in truth, it's no small feat. It's something definitely to be celebrated!

I'm working with two authors right now who are launching their books next month. They both chose local libraries as their venues, deciding on a time and date for their launches.

They've made a few posters to put around town and they'll be promoting them on social media. The buzz is already significant. I can't wait to party with them

write with me!

and celebrate all they've done... and all their books
will do for others out in the world.

And I hope the same for you, too!

21. Start writing your NEXT book!

What?!? Yes, I mean it! What book has God put on your heart to write NEXT?

Maybe it feels like you just gave birth to this baby, and I'm asking you right away if you want to have another! But if you jotted down a few book ideas at the beginning of this book, you may already have some ideas for your next book... or books! Now that you know the process, you can start writing the next one, and the next, and the next!

Don't jump into it so fast that you forget to raise and nurture the baby to which you just gave birth! And be sure to enjoy a toast with some friends to celebrate the *great accomplishment* of publishing a book!

But if some ideas have been percolating about your next book, go ahead and jot them down! Re-read this book, starting with Chapter 1.

Writing can be addictive. But what a great addiction! This is one addiction where you bless yourself *and* bless others, too.

I never knew I had more than one book in me. But I did! 35 books later, you'd think I'd be out of ideas for books. But even as I write this closing chapter, I already have two or three more books in mind to write!

Want to join me... again?!? I'd love to have you! Why not? And this time, bring some friends!

God and I are *both* inviting you: *Write With Me!*

I love hearing from my readers!
For questions, comments or help with *your book*, visit:

ericelder.com

Endorsements!

Here are a few comments from others I've helped with their writing or publishing. I'd love to help you!

"Eric's help made all the difference!"

Greg Potzer, *Our Favorite Christian Quotations*

"He was with me every step of the way."

Brent Knapton, *Testimonies of Grace*

"Eric gave warm fellowship, encouragement, and expertise."

Clayt Irmejer, *Not to be Lived Single-Handedly*

"His expertise was just what I needed."

Karen Neal, *Bella Bella Cinderella*

"Eric has an uncanny ability to motivate people to write."

Tim Wilkins, *More Than Words*

"He helped me self-publish in an easy, economical way."

Larry Booze, *Say it to Stick*

"His passion for writing is contagious."

Mary Felkins, *This I Promise You*

"He provided practical guidance with genuine interest."

Aaron Chan, *book forthcoming*

"Eric was the bridge to help fulfill my life-long dream."

Cammie Quinn, *Follow the Wind Home*

"I've seen him help others, and he's now helping me."

Al Lowry, *365 Daily Bible Readings*

"Without him, I would not have completed my book."

Sandy Egle, *Ministering to the Least of These*

"I know of no one better-equipped to guide writers."

Kent Saunders, *The Faith of Elvis*

"He never doubted I would bring my idea to completion."

Laurie Bliese, *Will the Lights Go Out?*

write with me!

"He believed in my writing before I was sure myself."

Caleb Dossett, *They Call Me Mr*

"He helped me finally finish my 10-year project."

Jeanette Smith, *book forthcoming*

"Eric held my hand the whole way."

Melanie Lisa Davidson, *Loved. I. AM!*

"I don't think I could have done it without him!"

Elizabeth Giger, *Beyond the Front Door*

"Eric gave me confidence when I had almost given up."

Steven Lomske, *On the Bank of the Chippewa*

You can do this! I'm glad to show you how!

More by Eric!

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- *Psalms: Lessons In Prayer*
- *The Top 20 Passages In The Bible*
- *Israel: Lessons From The Holy Land*
- *Israel For Kids! Lessons From The Holy Land*
- *The Inspiring Thoughts Collection*
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- *A Personal Journal With 101 Quotes On Faith*
- *A Personal Journal With 101 Quotes On Love*

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- *Fifty Shades of Grace (under pen name, Nicholas Deere)*
- *Loving God & Loving Gays*
- *Cómo amar a Dios y a los gays (Spanish Edition)*
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- *Loving Thoughts (with Greg Potzner)*
- *Making The Most Of The Darkness*

WRITING & PUBLISHING

- *Write With Me!*
- *Reach The World With Me!*

ALBUMS

- *Clear My Mind*
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- *My Favorite Classics (with Eric's sister and kids)*
- *His Name Was Nicholas EP (with Matt Ludwig)*

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- *One Life (a ballet with Cynthia Dewar and Erin Morton)*
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