

# How to Succeed in Writing Non-Fiction for the Christian Market

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Writing non-fiction for the Christian market can seem fraught. We think we have a unique take on prayer, parenting, ageing, or fill-in-the-blank. But as we flip through the best-seller lists we notice the same big names that have dominated those lists for years. We despair. What's a writer to do?

The conventional wisdom is to build your platform. Gather your crowd. Find your people. I'm afraid I agree with this wisdom; if we have the best book on a particular topic but no one knows us, our work will fail. If we're seeking a traditional publisher, we won't secure one. Platform seems to be the new ruling monarch, and can feel a despot. How much is enough when it comes to social-media numbers? Always seemingly more than I have.

I have no quick fixes to offer you. No lists of what's hot for publishers – again, the conventional wisdom is a felt-need subject written by a well-known person. My advice instead is to pursue your passion and keep building your platform authentically. How? Keep deepening your credibility in your field so that you become one of its so-called experts or authorities. In your social-media engagement, blogs, and newsletters, give to those you meet – serve them by sharing from your wisdom and knowledge, gladly and willingly. And slowly you'll build your followers, to use the lingo. But you won't think of them as followers, for they'll become friends or people you don't know but for whom you have affection.

That's all I've got; I'm sorry if I've disappointed you. Perhaps if I share from my own journey you'll see the slow work of change.

I always wanted to write, but I didn't feel I could own my voice, and so became an editor. Note I'm resolutely *not* saying that all editors are wannabe writers. But this was true in my case. A painful loss of a significant editorial job fifteen years ago was the catalyst for me to pursue writing. I started with what I knew and wrote two monthly magazine features. For one I created the [Woman Alive book club](#), which has also turned into a lively [Facebook group](#), and the other was a column in the trade magazine for retailers and suppliers of Christian resources. These monthly features helped me to develop my voice and to adhere to deadlines.

But my breakthrough in pursuing what I love – prayer and the Bible – came when the editor of [New Daylight](#) asked me to write some Bible reading notes. She took a chance on me and helped me with that first set of notes, giving editorial feedback and shaping the way I presented my thoughts. The seeds were planted for my favourite kind of writing. Some thirteen years later I have over a thousand of these devotional articles published traditionally. I don't write them to increase my platform, but many of the people who know my name have found me because of them.

Writing my first book took me seven years. Are you're sighing now? You don't have to take that long! Part of my problem was that I knew so well from my publishing work what it takes

to write a great book and I expected that I would craft that fabulous first book from the get-go. I did secure an amazing US agent for what I hoped would be my first book – a memoir I entitled *Beloved of God*, in which I explored my identity in Christ. My agent shopped it around to sixteen publishers, of whom fifteen said no. And the one that said yes was willing to work with me because I was working for them. And they didn't want that book.

My publisher was Steve Mitchell, who was then the head of Authentic Media. Sitting in a bookshop in Birmingham, we talked about what book I should write. As a former retailer he considered my passions and interests and sought to connect them with potential readers. He said, "Tell us about who we are from your point of view as an American. Write a mixture of Bill Bryson meets Michele Guinness." And so emerged [Finding Myself in Britain](#), which won the 2016 Christian living book of the year from Christian Resources Together. Steve structured it as a through-the-year book, which meant I could engage with readers throughout the seasons – I even had a radio interview on the Fourth of July, months after publication. The lesson? Write what you know in a way that speaks to your reader.

That book launched me as an author, a moniker I had to step into. But still I wanted to write about prayer. I responded to the invitation of BRF and wrote a Lent book on forgiveness, [The Living Cross](#), but the criticism of a cranky reader made me pause. What credentials, she asked, do you have to be writing about the spiritual life? What further training?

I had none. My undergraduate degree is in political science, not theology. I decided to get an MA in Christian spirituality, a venture that pushed and prodded me. Through the MA I met fascinating people and learned about ways to pray that I hadn't encountered in depth before. The richness of the study fuelled my writing. For instance, one of my writing partners said she couldn't believe how fast I've written *7 Ways to Pray: Time-Tested Practices for Encountering God* (SPCK and NavPress, autumn 2021). The process seems speedy, I think, because I'd done so much of the groundwork not only with the MA but over the ten or so years of retreats that I've led.

I finally got to write a book about prayer – for me, the longed-for subject I wanted to address. But I had to wait and work and develop for fifteen years before I could. I had to deepen my understanding of the subject, engage with people as I honed the prayer practices, and develop my platform enough that my publishers would be willing to partner with me.

In summary, I can offer you no easy answers, but I pray that you will follow your passions to write and connect and share, all the while deepening in God and in your subject. May God work through you as he furthers his kingdom of love and light.

**Amy Boucher Pye** is an author, speaker, and retreat leader. She's the author of the forthcoming [7 Ways to Pray](#) (SPCK and NavPress, autumn 2021) and *Celebrating Christmas* (BRF, autumn 2021), a book of her reflections and her father's paintings. She runs the [Woman Alive book club](#) and writes devotional thoughts for the globally recognized [Our Daily Bread](#), among others. Find her at [amyboucherpye.com](http://amyboucherpye.com), where you can sign up for her [newsletter](#), which each month features a practice of prayer.