

## Writers write

by [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

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About three times a week, pastors ask me 1) how to get on the speaking circuit or 2) how to get published. The questions go together, because the answer to how to get on the speaking circuit is usually to get published. Sometimes they are just starting out in the ministry, and other times they are retired. Either way, my answer is the same, no matter what stage of life you're in: Writers write.

I can usually tell who is going to succeed within a couple of months. It rarely has to do with talent, intelligence, or how cool a person looks. It doesn't matter that much how charismatic, young, or old a person is. Instead, it has a lot to do with the fact that writers write. It's that simple. And that difficult.

Of course, there are exceptions. I know two *New York Times* bestsellers who have told me that they don't write every day. They only write when they have a book contract waiting. But until I get to their level, I don't know how else to do it, other than to write.

I love hearing the magical ways that writers get their inspiration. The muse under the dusty staircase visits some artists. [Others](#) can catch the tail of ghostly literary vision that blows through their rooms. Some [writers](#) only write for their spouses. Others binge-write, hiding out in a cabin, creating for three weeks straight until they complete their manuscript. I've heard many writers take Hemingway's advice to write drunk.

I have not found my muse and I've never caught a ghost blowing through my room. As a Christian, I like to think that the Spirit has something to do with my writing. But then I can imagine the Spirit, shaking her head, saying, "Please don't blame me for that." My spouse is an infinite inspiration while I'm composing, constantly feeding me ideas, conversations, and articles, but he doesn't always read my words in print, so I don't write them for him. As a parent, I can't fathom being away from my family for three weeks straight. The lack of time and money would certainly keep me from

ever publishing. Alcohol just makes me want to nap, and I'm hardly productive when sleepy. Since perfectionism turns me into a procrastinator, I try to write quantity and not to stress over quality.

Because of all of this, the only way I know how to write is to write. Greedily carve out three hours every day of solitude. If you can't get that, start with 27 minutes (I've heard [MaryAnn McKibben Dana](#) and [Walter Brueggemann](#) get a great deal done in short intervals). I'm lucky to have support from my family. I basically took on a 21-hour a week job, without any remuneration for two years. But if you don't have your family backing you, get up when they're still sleeping or stay awake after they've gone to bed.

You have to swallow your guilt when your child wakes up early, you settle her in front of the television, and she doesn't want a piece of fruit and cereal. She wants you to cook her an omelet for breakfast. The dog pees in the bathroom and you have to close the door and instruct the household to use the other bathroom instead of cleaning it right away. You have to ignore the sink brimming dishes, closet full of laundry, inbox bulging with email, comments on your blog, and all of the other things that will woo you from your writing.

But you still do it. Close Facebook and Twitter. Write in a notebook. Write a blog. Write for a denominational newsletter. Write for free. Write your book. You're not too young. You're not too old. You're not too boring or irrelevant. None of the writing will go to waste. Even if you don't publish it, it will become a part of the compost in your mind—that rich soil that allows you to produce more. These are wonderful days for writers, because even if you can't get your words in the hands of a traditional magazine or publishers, there are a thousand inexpensive ways to self-publish. Someday, you'll have to figure out your brand, your social media strategy, your book jacket design, and what you're going to say to [Time](#) when they want to put you on their cover. But, until then, you can just have fun and write.