

How to Get Started in Writing and Publishing

BY CINDI MCMENAMIN

1. Pray about God’s direction, leading and timing for your book.

We all want to write our story. But what is the story *God* wants you to write? I believed my first book would be called *Pathway to a Prince* about how to find the perfect husband and be fulfilled in life. Instead, the book God had me write was called *Letting God Meet Your Emotional Needs*, about how God – not a husband – is the Only One who can meet our deepest needs. God had a little different perspective on my topic, didn’t He? I also wanted to write my book as soon as my daughter was born and I was home full time. But God wanted to do some work in my heart for a couple years while I was home raising a child, so I would be prepared, and a little older and wiser, to write that book. Take to God your ideas and questions and have Him refine your book by impressing on your heart what HE wants you to write. If He is in it and behind it, He will go before you into it, as well.

2. Start speaking on the message of your book.

Would people come to hear you talk on the subject of your book? If not, they won’t buy a book on it. So shape your book topic into something that will benefit others when they hear you talk on it. Then tell everyone you know that you have a message to speak on. Start small. Share at your women’s Bible study. Volunteer to be a guest speaker at a local Moms gathering. Eventually, people will tell other people that you speak and through word of mouth, you will begin to develop an audience. Have a newsletter for your audience to sign up and receive so you can begin to collect a database on your future book’s target audience. As you craft your talk, make sure you include interesting stories, grabbing illustrations, practical applications, and action points. A speaking outline, if written effectively, often resembles the first draft of a book outline.

3. Know how to write a book proposal.

Few publishers today will accept a complete manuscript. Most will only want to see a proposal first, which is a summary of your book’s idea and marketing analysis. Download a copy of Cindi’s “Sample Book Proposal” from her website (www.strengthforthesoul.com). You can also purchase a pamphlet called “How to Write a Book Proposal” from Sally Stuart at www.stuart-market.com. (There are many other resources at this site to help you write your book and learn the publishing industry.)

4. Do your homework by investigating the Publishing Industry.

It’s important to know which publishers publish your type of book and what the requirements

are for contacting those publishers and submitting your proposal. Order an updated copy of the *Christian Writers' Market Guide* by Sally Stuart (www.stuartmarket.com or find it less expensive at www.amazon.com). This book, published annually, contains a wealth of resources and lists every publisher of books and magazines in the Christian market, as well as their denominational affiliation, which types of books they publish by topic/subject, how much they pay, and more. Find a Christian Writer's Conference in your area and a local writers' critique group, as well, which are both essential for any serious writer.

5. Attend a Christian Writers' Conference in your area.

Once you have been speaking on your topic, and you have a viable proposal in your hands, it's time to attend a Christian Writer's Conference. (For a listing of these, by location, see the *Christian Writers' Market Guide*). These conferences are your opportunities to meet face to face with acquisitions editors of Christian publishing houses and actually show them your proposal and pitch your idea. Many editors attend these conferences specifically to find new faces and new material. That could be you and yours. But just make sure you've done your homework before you attend. I attended the Mount Hermon Christian Writers' Conference in Northern California, one of the premier writers' conferences on the West Coast, which is well attended by editors of publishing houses across the country. If they don't take your manuscript with them, they will often suggest ways you can improve your proposal or idea, which is very valuable information for you in order to move forward. These conferences also have top-quality instruction courses for you on writing, working with publishers, coming up with great ideas for books, marketing your books, and so on.

6. Trust the Process.

This is probably the most difficult step. Once you've done everything you can do, it's time to wait on God for His best for your situation. Sometimes it's a matter of waiting on Him for the best publisher for your particular book. Other times He's still wanting to refine some things in you, the author. It could be, too, that He has one more chapter for you to write that you don't yet know about. That's why I say "trust the process" that He allows you to go through. Some writers, after going through all these steps and still not finding a publisher, will opt for self-publishing, which does require a monetary investment by you, but could be the direction you are to go. There are many self-publishing houses that will also work with you to market your book. Self-publishing today is far better than it was years ago when I started out. Pray about it. If that's the direction God has for you, He'll provide the funds. (Self- or "subsidy-publishers" are also listed in the *Christian Writers' Market Guide*.) Above all, don't get discouraged and give up. Few people publish books because few people stick with the process. Remember... if God is the One who is impressing it upon your heart to write, He will be the One to make it happen. Do it all for Him, and He will lead the way.

Three Questions To Ask Yourself Before You Begin Writing Your Book:

1) What is the main point of my book? (You should be able to summarize this in one sentence or a slogan. Another way to ask this question is: How will my book help the reader? What is the 'take-home value' in what I am writing?)

2) Who am I writing to, specifically? (Women? Single Moms? Teens? Although we'd like every person on earth to read our book, we should have a specific audience in mind that we are writing to.)

3) How is my book different than any other book on this topic? (Don't know? Then this is where you need to do some research. Visit a Christian book store or search bookstores on line for books that are already published on your subject. How will YOURS be unique?)