



12 Steps to Turn Your Idea into a Book

I receive an email from a friend who says, “I have an idea for a book . . . now what?” So I meet my friend for lunch at our favorite bakery and talk all things books. Writing and publishing. Editors and agents. I’ve had several of these kinds of conversations lately. So I thought I’d share with you what I’ve been sharing with friends over a steaming bowl of potato soup with shredded cheddar on top.

You have an idea, and you wonder if your idea can be turned into a book. Here are 12 tips for doing just that:

1. Turn your idea into a one-sentence message.

Write lots of one-sentence messages until you hone in on your core message. Then craft one sentence to communicate your message. Just one sentence. One clear, concise sentence.

This is the one-sentence message I wrote to communicate my Bible studies called *Word Writers*:

As we write God’s truth on paper, He writes His truth on our hearts.

2. Name your audience.

Who is your message for? Men? Women? What age? What season of life? New believers? Veteran believers? Always keep your reader in mind when you’re writing.

3. Do your homework.

What other books have a similar message? What can you offer that’s not available on bookshelves right now? What is your unique angle on the topic? What does the Bible say about your topic? Read books that are similar and determine how you will position your message in a unique way.

4. Grow your one-sentence message into a one-paragraph message and a one-page message.

Let’s say you’ve been given a 60-second radio interview. What would you say in 60 seconds to communicate your message? Do the same thing with 5 minutes. If you’ve got 5 minutes to deliver your message, what would you say?

5. Build relationships with like-minded people.

Once you find a few authors who share a similar passion, follow them on social media and read their blogs. Chances are, communities that share a similar passion are already gathering in online places. Find those places and join the fun!

Better still, see if there are any conferences or retreats where these online communities are meeting. Go to a conference and meet people. Build relationships. Then rinse, lather, and repeat. I’ve yet to meet an author who refrained from building relationships.



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6. Establish your online presence.

If you don't have a website or blog, you might consider starting one. While lots of social engagement happens on other media platforms — like Facebook or Twitter or Instagram — your website is your home base in the online world. This is the best place for people to visit so they can learn more about you and your message. Build a community. You don't need to be on every form of social media either. Pick the one or two forms of social media that work best for you and go for it.

7. Turn your one-page message into a 45-minute talk.

I could tell you to create an outline — the kind that would make your high school English teacher proud. And it wouldn't hurt. If that's your thing. But an outline is a static, two-dimensional document; whereas, a 45-minute talk means you need to imagine human beings in the audience. When you write a 45-minute talk, you're building your core message with key points. And you're adding stories that make those "key points" come alive with heart-felt meaning. (So the "outline" emerges anyway.)

This may seem counter-intuitive, but the fastest way to lose your focus is to focus on "the book" as the goal-of-all-goals. But writing a 45-minute talk keeps your focus on a message that's intended for real people.

8. Share your 45-minute talk with an audience.

Okay. The stakes have just been raised. Until now, you've read books, researched websites, and written some words. You may have even formed a few friendships with some like-minded folks. But standing in front of a real audience to deliver your message? This is where "the rubber meets the road" and "the writer meets the reader."

Acquiring speaking gigs is a topic for a whole other post. But delivering your message to a real audience can yield some amazing fruit. Reflect on everything. When did the audience laugh or lean in? Identify the parts of your message that clearly connected with your listeners. And be willing to edit out the parts that seemed to echo awkwardly in the room.

9. Learn the landscape of publishing.

More homework. I know. But it's necessary. It might even be fun, or at the very least informative. Think of it this way: publishing is a world of its own. Christian publishing too. So if this is a world you want to be a part of, then it makes sense to get to know how that world works.

10. Write a book proposal and share it through appropriate channels.

Take that 45-minute talk and expand, expand, e x p a n d. A book proposal is a substantial document that communicates key information to publishers. Lots of resources are available on how to do this. But each agency or publishing house may have its own distinct set of guidelines. Be sure to follow those guidelines! By simply following directions you'll stand out. I promise.



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11. Be open to new ideas and directions.

Perhaps something in your proposal caught an editor's eye. Maybe it's your idea. Maybe it's your style of writing. Maybe it's your story. Whatever it is, they're interested in more. But they know some things you don't. They have a strong sense of what's happening in the marketplace. Maybe they already have a book with a similar theme under contract, so it wouldn't make sense for them to do another one so soon, but they like you and want to work with you.

If an editor or an agent suggests a new idea or another possible direction, listen to them. Most publishers want to work with authors who have the potential for a long-term career. So maybe your idea was the thing that opened the door, but maybe your idea is supposed to be Book #2 or #3 or not-at-all. Be willing to consider all the possibilities.

12. Pray.

Seriously. This is actually something that should be happening from the very start. Pray. In the beginning. In the middle. In the end. Always pray.

When it comes to publishing, I keep the story of Abraham and Sarah close at heart. They received a promise. Not your everyday, ordinary sort of promise. But a promise from God. Then the years erased all logical hope. So they thought they'd "help God out a little" and bring the promise to fruition in their own human wisdom and human strength. Meet Hagar. You can read their story in Genesis. In the end, their human efforts resulted in a lot of pain. for everyone involved.

As a writer, I've never wanted to "make things happen" in my own human effort. So I pray. A lot. I want God's leading in everything I do.

And you know what?

God answers prayer. Sometimes in the most unlikely ways. He's like that, you know.