

5 Days of Writing Wisdom

By Kristen Hogrefe Parnell



Day 1: Hills & Valleys of the Writing Life



Day 2: Seasons for Writers



Day 3: Numbers Reality, Writer's Responsibility



Day 4: Besting the Box Jumps, Pt 1



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Day 1



Hills & Valleys of the Writing Life

Driving home during one of my Sunshine State's summer downpours, I heard Tauren Wells' "Hills and Valleys" on the radio. How well those lyrics fit the writer's life!

Our writing journeys are often a series of highs and lows. I love seeing the wide-eyed excitement when my writer friends post that they've signed with an agent or contracted with a publishing house.

However, valleys don't trail far behind. Maybe we receive a low review, or someone posts negative feedback that slices our heart in two. Sales may not peak the way we'd hoped. The deadline for the sequel weighs us down amid all the other demands of life.

If we get caught in the emotional yoyo of the writing process, we lose sight of our purpose and ride waves that crest and crash one after the other.

We know where our attention needs to be, but Wells' words provide a much-needed reminder.

On the mountains, we're to "bow" or recognize that we didn't get there on our own two feet. God "set" us there and allowed us to experience his blessing on our work.

In the valleys, we're to "lift" our eyes to the One who remains with us even in the dark places.

The contrast paints a beautiful picture of the proper perspective: Bow our heads when we're high. Lift our eyes when we're low. Both actions focus our attention on the Lord, our Constant through the journey.

Whether you're on the mountaintop or in the valley, keep these steady truths in mind:

1. God's help and grace have brought you to this place. (2 Corinthians 12:9, Philippians 4:13)
 2. Everything God allows is for your good and His glory. (Romans 8:28, I Corinthians 1:31)
 3. God is faithful to complete the work He's begun in you. (Philippians 1:6, I Thessalonians 5:24)
 4. When God is your guide, you never walk alone. (Psalm 23:4, Psalm 42:8)
- Yes, He's God of the hills and valleys.



Seasons for Writers

Rejection is part of the writer's life. How many of us can relate to one of the following?

- I like your premise, but our house isn't accepting any more titles in your genre.
- Your story wants to be there, but it isn't ready yet.
- I'd love to represent you. Call me back when you have 1,000s of subscribers.

Yes, we are told that to survive in this industry, we need to develop rhino skin. Maybe you feel like the skin transplant isn't taking, or your own epidermis remains painfully paper-thin.

Don't give up. This message is for you.

In Ecclesiastes 3:1, Solomon writes, "To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven..." (NKJV)

The wisest king who ever lived recognized that each season of life brings both good and less than desirable circumstances.

The same truth applies to writers. If Solomon had written a few lines just for us, perhaps they would have read something like this:

To everything there is a season,

A time for every writer under heaven;

A time to write,
And a time to wait;

A time for yes,
And a time for no;

A time to rejoice in personal success,

And a time to rejoice in others' achievements.

Of course, there are no such lines in Scripture, but the principle remains true. There's a time for everything.

If today is not the "time" of our choice, who are we to question His timing? Instead of asking God to run on our time, we should be willing to run on His.

Writing for God's Pleasure

One of my heroes is Eric Liddell, Christian and former Olympian. You may be familiar with his story, thanks to the 1981 movie Chariots of Fire.

Liddell qualified to run and compete in the 1924 Olympics. However, when the Paris games released the schedule for running heats, he learned that his favored events, including the 100 meters, were slated for Sunday.

Liddell refused to run on the day he believed was set apart for the Lord.

Instead, he ran as an underdog in the 400 meters, not held on Sunday. He beat all odds for gold.

Of course, he wanted to win, but he didn't run only to win. He's quoted as saying:

"I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run, I feel his pleasure."

In other words, he ran because God called him to run. He felt God's pleasure when he ran. (I love this idea!)

Liddell recognized God had a purpose for his life, that God has a time and purpose for everything under heaven.

If God has called you to write, write on even if you're in a season of rejection letters and closed doors.

If you feel God's pleasure when you pick up your pen or race your fingers across the keyboard, then don't quit.

Remember, there's a time for both yes and no.

Seasons for Writers

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ADAPTATION

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Day 3

The Numbers Reality & The Writer's Responsibility

My first solo lasted two whole verses. I was thirteen, and since I don't do math, that was a while ago. But I still remember the chorus by heart: "It was little by little, minute by minute, for little is much when the Lord is in it ..."

Those words well-describe God's work in my life and perhaps my whole career as a writer.

Small Beginnings

Like many of you, I started writing from scratch. When I was in middle school, my older brother had a creative assignment that morphed into a chapter book my siblings, friends, and I co-wrote. It was laugh-out-loud ridiculous, but that experience stirred my imagination.

After writing through high school and college, I started taking my ideas seriously.

While juggling a full-time job, I queried and began receiving those necessary rejection letters.

Yes, necessary. I wasn't ready for publication yet.

After polishing some more, I tackled the world of self-publishing. I'm not saying this was the right or wrong decision, but back then, I didn't know much about the industry or where to turn.

On the plus side, the process gave me a crash-course in publication and cemented my desire to keep going.

It also fueled my interest in website building, blogging, and social media. Looking back, I can see how that "hands-on" experience has allowed me to help other writers trouble-shoot their own platform building.

Maybe your beginnings are small, too, but don't despise them.

Multiplied Potential

One of my favorite New Testament stories is the feeding of the five thousand, maybe because I love seeing God turn impossible things into reality—and break the rules of math. Five loaves plus two fish shouldn't equal thousands fed with twelve baskets leftover, now should they?

But they did, despite the disciples' doubts. In his gospel, John records their skeptical report to Jesus. "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?" (John 6:9 NKJV)

We probably would have doubted too, because the supply didn't match the demand.

Maybe that's how we feel about our platform numbers. They aren't high enough to attract a publisher or agent, and our efforts to grow them are slow-going.

But that doesn't mean they're worthless. We have to start somewhere, with something. Instead of focusing on scarcity, focus on potential.

After all, the demand is a justified one. There were five thousand (or more) people to feed! In the writing world, publishers are like any other business, needing a return on their investment (ROI). They'd like to sell thousands of books, and truth is, so would we.

That said, what is our responsibility as writers?

1. Bring what we have to Jesus. That's what the Lord commanded his disciples to do. (Matthew 14:18)

2. Commit our writing and results to God. When the disciples gave Jesus the little boy's lunch, Jesus looked "up to heaven." (Matthew 14:19)

3. Thank and trust God for what He's going to do in advance. As Jesus fixed his gaze skyward, He "blessed" the five loaves and two fish. (Matthew 14:19)

4. Get busy spreading what we have. After blessing the food, Jesus broke it and gave the portions to the disciples to distribute.

Parting Encouragement

I think back to my first solo and the song's last lines, which said, "A little with the Lord goes a long, long way." Think on that truth when you get discouraged. Don't quit. Keep pressing on. Find ways to connect with your audience. Attend conferences and take workshops to help you develop your craft and network. Plug into writing groups like Word Weavers for support.

Maybe the process will take years, but if we stretch our comfort zones and flex our writing muscles, we can grow—and so can those numbers.

Day 4

Box Jumps in the Writing Life



When my husband and I joined a gym together, he introduced me to the box jump.

In theory, it's simple, a metal platform that you jump on with both feet at the same time. You can move to higher levels as you advance in ability. At least, that's how it's supposed to work.

In theory, publishing is simple too. You have a great idea. You write it down on paper. You publish it, and it becomes a New York Times' best seller.

And you laugh. Of course, publishing doesn't work that way. Mastering the box jump isn't so easy either. In fact, it has many parallels with the writing life.

Mental Hurdle: Fear

When I first step up to the box jump, all I can envision is catching my foot on the bottom and losing my front teeth.

So, I stretch, procrastinate, and then finally step toward it. Deep breath. Swing arms. Grit teeth. And ... freeze.

James gently reminds me, "It's all in your head, you know."

Mostly, he's right. There are my physical limitations, but what's really holding me back is my fear of getting hurt.

We writers have our share of fears, don't we? Sometimes, we call them "writer's block" where try as we might, we can't find the next word of our project. We stress that we'll never be able to finish, and our paralysis freezes up the wheels of our imaginations.

Other times, we face the fear of rejection from agents and editors. Although refusals are a realistic part of the writer's life, that doesn't mean they sting any less. Perhaps even more unnerving is the day we do publish something, and we fear no one will read or like it.

However, as Scripture reminds us, fear is not supposed to be our focus. 2 Timothy 1:7 states, "For God has not given us spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (NKJV).

Although this truth doesn't discount our very real fears, it does redirect our attention to think on what is true and what we can do through the power of Christ.

Physical Hurdle: Failure

Usually, what happens on my first box jump attempt is that I chicken out and jump just one foot onto the platform with the other available to stop my fall if I miss. By the third or fourth try, I often do make the third level.

But James has been challenging me to hit level 4. Oh, I hit it all right. Like a mental brick wall and also with my shin, which you're not supposed to do. Ouch!

We writers hit failure too. I don't even need to spell out what that looks like, because you already know.

Perhaps you're tempted to throw in the towel after a recent disappointment. My friend, may I encourage you to do just the opposite?

Persist like the widow in Luke 18. Despite the many times the judge turned her down, she kept going to visit him. One day, she got her request.

Granted, you shouldn't pester agents and editors until they shut down. That approach won't work.

However, you can ask if there's an opportunity for you to resubmit after you make changes to your project. If not, then you can research other agents and publishing houses.

There are opportunities out there. You just have to be willing to work hard and find the right fit.

If you've bruised your writing dream on a figurative box jump, get back up and keep going.



“If you want to change the world, pick up your pen and write.”

~ Martin Luther

Day 5



How to Best the Box Jumps in Your Writing

Last time, we saw how the "box jumps" of fear and failure can prevent us from reaching our writing goals, and today, we're going to learn how to combat them. Yes, these obstacles present challenges, but the good news is that we can overcome them with some help and tenacity.

You need a cheerleader.

This person is not our editor or agent, although those people play vital roles in our writing career and can also provide encouragement. Instead, a cheerleader is someone who is going to encourage us regardless and will be biased for us. They love us, even in the form of tough love when necessary.

Cheerleaders are the ones who say, "You've got this" when you really don't.

James is one of my cheerleaders at the box jump and in my writing.

The other day, he told me, "I think you have a four [box jump level] in you today." I definitely did not have a four in me that day, and even though I resented his sunshine optimism at the time, I also secretly appreciated it. I knew it meant he will keep cheering me on, regardless if I hit the four or not.

As writers, we need sounding boards, and cheerleaders are willing to listen. Sometimes, just talking out our thoughts and ideas helps make them clearer or makes clear to us we need more practice.

I'll never forget the time James asked me to explain one of my story concepts. I strangled that pitch badly, but at the end, he said, "I still don't quite get what it's about, but I'm sure I'll love it."

His honesty told me I had some serious work to do, and his loving confidence provided the motivation.

You need practice.

In other words, our cheerleaders give us the affirmation we need to press on and keep practicing our craft.

Recently, I took a blogging class by Thomas Umstattd through the Christian Writer's Institute. I've been blogging for many years now, but even still, I'm always learning.

One fact he shared struck me in particular. He said that in almost every case, before a person writes a viral post, that writer must first publish at least 100 posts. That's a lot of posts! That's a lot of practice.

When my students ask me what tips I can share from my publishing journey, I don't share any glamorous truisms. I tell them to practice and keep practicing. It's probably not what they want to hear, but it's the truth.

You need the right mindset.

Last but not least, we need the right attitude. I constantly fight this challenge.

Once when James and I finished our box jump practice, he told me, "You killed it in there."

"What??" I asked. "I did not."

"Well, after you freaked out the first few tries, you nailed it."

In box jumps or in writing, we have to fight "freak out" moments.

Do any of these thoughts sound familiar? I can't do this. I'm not good enough. It's too hard. I'll just get another rejection.

Fight those lies with truth! You can do all things through Christ who is your strength (Philippians 4:13 paraphrase).

Sure, we're going to fail, but that doesn't make us failures. It makes us fighters.



“Don’t judge each day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds that you plant.”

~ Robert Louis Stevenson

About the Author

Kristen Hogrefe Parnell is an award-winning author and life-long learner who enjoys starting her day with Jesus and coffee. She shares her writing journey and troubleshooting tactics with fellow writers at writer's conferences and through her courses on Serious Writer Academy.

She and her husband live in Florida, the perfect setting for their many outdoor adventures. Join her at KristenHogrefeParnell.com where she challenges her readers to find faith in life's everyday adventures. Her books are available on Amazon.

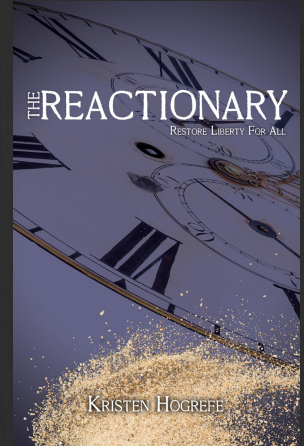
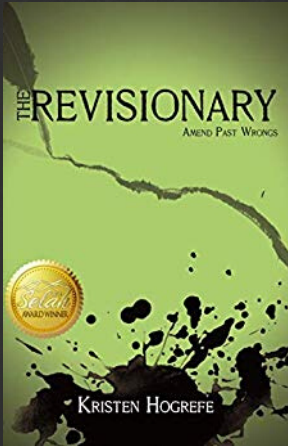


Books by Kristen



THE ROGUES TRILOGY

"This series is a definite YA must read for anyone who loves books placed in the dystopian time period, but is looking for a faith based twist to that genre." - Amazon Reviewer



WINGS OF THE DAWN TRILOGY

"The overarching themes of forgiveness, reliance on God, and the importance of loving relationships among family and friends show young people that anything is possible." - Amazon Reviewer

