

APRIL - MAY 2022

THE CHRISTIAN ^o writer



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and Book Cover Quiz*

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Rodney Hickman

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by Christine Platt

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Writing Competitions and more. . .

A magazine of NZ Christian Writers



Mission: *Connecting Christian writers in New Zealand.*

Vision: *To cultivate, encourage and inspire a vibrant community of Christian writers throughout New Zealand.*

Values: *Christian faith, God's Word, professionalism, quality and social outreach.*

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For magazine contributions, address changes, membership queries.

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Book Review Requests: (current members only)

Mail a copy of your book to our Book Reviewer, Julia Martin

286 Karapiro Road, RD4, Cambridge 3496 or email: reviews@nzchristianwriters.org

The Christian Writer is our bimonthly magazine published by NZ Christian Writers and distributed to all members. Contributions from members are always welcome. If you have some advice, encouragement, or an announcement of an event of interest to members, do send it to the editor for consideration by the 10th of the month before the next publication date. Submissions should be emailed as a word document attachment and be no more than 500 words long, except at the discretion of the editor.

The editor reserves the right to condense and/or edit any contributions for reason of space. Ideas and opinions will not be edited but editing of a technical nature may occur to maintain a high standard of writing. Views and opinions expressed do not necessarily state or reflect those of the editor.

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Website:

Our vibrant, user-friendly website is full of interesting information, such as details of seminars and copies of past magazines. It also gives each individual member an online presence. We encourage all members to reach out to other Christian writers. Feel free to share our website link with them so they can join us. As a member you are the best advocate for growing our collective of NZ Christian Writers.

www.nzchristianwriters.org

President's Report



I'm so encouraged to see many writers discovering NZ Christian Writers for the first time. Since January 2022, we've received several new membership applications helping us grow our

nationwide collective one writer at a time. I believe God has positioned us for further growth in 2022. We have diligent, proactive and passionate board members who are shining lights to guide the future direction of NZ Christian Writers. As we step into the future, we are reminded that our collective, NZ Christian Writers, belongs to the Lord and He orders our steps. So we continue to remain true to the mission He has given us for 'Connecting Christian writers in New Zealand.'

In our December 2014 – January 2015 magazine, I remember writing a brief article for *The Christian Writer* encouraging all members with a simple challenge for: 'Each One, Reach One'. Essentially, if every member just reached out to one other writer encouraging them to join our collective, we would easily double our membership within a year. That growth strategy worked and it's with the same heart for connection and growth that we continue to encourage our members to connect with another writer who may benefit and be blessed by being connected and involved with NZ Christian Writers. It's now easier than ever for new members to join us. Simply email or message them this link: www.nzchristianwriters.org/join/

A massive congratulations to our magazine editor, Kathryn Paul, who in March 2022 was the winner of the Cecil Murphey Scholarship! She will be receiving lifetime access to all current courses at the Christian Writers Institute. Kathryn entered the giveaway, with 919 contestants across 3,529 entries, to win this highly prestigious and valuable scholarship. What a blessing and confirmation from the Lord as it is clear that God has a good purpose in giving this incredible opportunity to Kathryn. I'm sure many of our members will be blessed by the insights and wisdom she will be able to share in our upcoming magazines.

Congratulations to this magazine's cover photo winner, Max Carr, whose photography has once again been selected.

All the best to each of our members as you enjoy reading our latest magazine.

Blessings

Justin St Vincent



Editorial: Your Writing is Important

by Kathryn Paul



During February we sent NZCW members an invitation from Christian Writers Institute to enter the draw for the Cecil Murphey Scholarship. This scholarship prize is lifetime access to all the courses on offer from Christian Writers Institute. There are over 100 online courses related to writing and publishing on their website, www.christianwritersinstitute.com

at a total cost value of over US\$2500. I feel incredibly stunned and blessed to share with you that the Lord allowed my name to be 'drawn out of the hat' and I won this year's Cecil Murphey Scholarship! Praise God and thank You, Jesus! In the future I will be able to use this fabulous resource and share some of my learning to encourage other Christian writers.



The Christian Writers Institute also produce the *Christian Writers Market Guide* annually. This resource contains information for writers such as lists of Christian book publishers and literary agents.

On pages 20 and 21 of the December 2021-January 2022 *The Christian Writer* magazine there is a writing game. A friend and I recently played it together and had a lot of fun and laughs. It was amazing how the time flew and how much productive content we each had at the end of the game! If you're needing some fresh writing inspiration, I encourage you to print the pages from your digital copy, if you don't already have a printed version, and give the writing game a go. You can play it on your own or with friends.

Today I want to encourage all of you as the Lord's writers that what you do is important. What you have in yourself to write and share is important. We are not to discount ourselves and think small of what we can write and bring out for others to read. Everyone's testimony is important. Everything we can write that helps point people to Jesus Christ is important. It's ideal to have Christian communication in every genre and on every communication platform. Are you pondering whether you are called to write something for the Lord? I encourage you to go for it! Together we can saturate the world with His message of hope and salvation!

With love in Jesus,
Kathryn Paul

I love to hear from our readers! Email: editor@nzchristianwriters.org

Letters to the Editor

Dear Kathryn

I did appreciate the two articles in the most recent issue of our magazine about personal pronoun use when referring to God. Thank you to both Lola and yourself for your input and considered opinions on this topic.

It is absolutely true that the preferred trend is to keep the pronouns in lower case. And in a post-modern culture, it probably does seem an odd thing to use capitals. Some time ago, when discussing work I had submitted to an editor, we had a very helpful discussion about these different points of view and the reasons behind them.

Like you I prefer to capitalise any pronoun referring to God and Jesus. I was brought up to believe that this was a way to help us honour our Lord. Over the years as I have come to understand more about who God really is, it makes me think it is important. We would not use capital pronouns for the deities of other faiths, but if we believe that God is above all other gods, then why would we not capitalise pronouns referring to Him? The Jewish people would not even write the full name of God because they did not feel worthy to do that. For Christian writers it would be a point of difference that could open up good conversation.

It is hard sometimes to find the balance between acknowledging the holiness, the purity and the blazing splendour of our God while at the same time experiencing the wonderful freedom of worshipping a God who is so approachable and so relational. I would be interested to know what other readers think about it. Well done on another great magazine and thank you for all the work you and the team put in to produce it.

Sincerely, Valmai Redhead.

Dear Kathryn,

In the February-March issue of *The Christian Writer* there were two excellent articles on the use of pronoun capitals for the Lord. Basically, both articles stated the use of capitals was up to the publisher or the author, because style guides differ. Fair enough.

Unfortunately, both articles missed a key point related to Christian writing; that is, the difference in writing for in-house church folk and for those outside the church walls – people on the fringes of Christianity, agnostics. I've edited and published both types of writing, and the debate on the use of deity pronouns has always popped up.

My conclusion is that if Christian writers are marketing their material for other Christians, such as a church bulletin, Christian magazine or devotional material, they might well feel comfortable using capitals for the Godhead. Spiritualising their writing this way could help to build up faith. Few, if any, would complain.

However, if Christians are aiming for the general market or to challenge non-Christians then using capitals for God is a definite no-no. It simply 'puts the reader off'. Sometimes it also has a negative effect on Christian readers, just as a heavy use of Christianese does, or overt preaching. While it's understandable that some Christian writers will want to spiritualise the Godhead they need to realise that capitals do tend to interrupt the flow – just like too many commas.

George Bryant

Editor: Thank you, Valmai and George for sharing your perspectives. It's appreciated.

Notices

Our 40th Anniversary Writers Retreat is Coming in 2023

Visit www.nzchristianwriters.org/retreat to book your space. Bookings are already filling so secure your spot today.



Writers Group Leaders Wanted

We need a leader in the North Auckland region due to high membership growth. Please email Justin at president@nzchristianwriters.org or Kathryn at editor@nzchristianwriters.org to find out more details. If there is no group in your area of New Zealand and you are willing to host one, please also get in touch. We'd love to hear from you!

Book Reviews Criteria

Members are welcome to request a book review of any of their published books, whether recently released or not. The main criteria is the book has some Christian relevancy. For more information on how to have your book reviewed in *The Christian Writer* please refer to page two.

Join the NZ Christian Writers Group on Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/newzealandchristianwriters>

Submissions Wanted

More content is needed for our magazines, *The Christian Writer* and *Young Christian Writer*. Send in your poetry, artwork, short stories, articles, cartoons, devotions and anything else you think may be suitable to share. It's great to have a variety of content from our readers. Send it by email to editor@nzchristianwriters.org



EXCEEDING JOY

by Max Carr

My effort and achievements will count for nought that day,
When I stand on Heaven's shoreline, in clean white robes arrayed,
For all that I had done on earth fell short of what was needed,
But by God's grace, I heard His word and willingly I yielded.

He called me from the cross beams, as He died on Calvary,
He offered me forgiveness, and not just sympathy,
His poured out blood was matched that day by never ending love,
And having paid that price for me, He welcomes me above.

The '*Presence of His Glory*' is a concept I do not understand,
But He shall there present me, and take me by the hand,
For I shall be a trophy, of His abounding grace,
And I shall bow before Him; of my sin there'll be no trace.

And I shall then be faultless, when I stand before His throne,
And the basis I shall be there, consists of nothing that I own,
My record it was sorely stained. It did not make the grade,
But by the righteousness of Christ, my debts have now been paid.

Yes, I shall stand in Heaven's Court for Christ has born my shame,
And He will know exceeding joy when He calls my name,
And that is what surprises me, For I know my sordid past,
So I revel in the blessed thrill that Christ has cleansed my heart.



Staci McLean's Seminar in Christchurch

by Verna McFelin, MNZM

It was a real privilege to have hosted Staci McLean at the Canterbury Branch of New Zealand Christian Writers. There was a shaky start to the lead-up to the seminar. Our venue at Dundee Place closed its doors due to Covid at the last minute and Living Waters Christian Centre stepped up to accommodate us.

Twenty-three people attended, including Sarah from Wellington and Shirley from Auckland. A table of published books by attendee authors was a great drawcard. There are now so many Christian authors out there we needed two trestle tables.

I introduced Staci and for the first part of the meeting she spoke meticulously on the topic of 'Social Media for Authors'. She talked about choosing a platform that depends on our audience, the time we are prepared to put in, what type of content we wish to create and social media's purpose. She took us through the practical aspects of an author's business page; thinking about our three core values, using photos, and sharing other people's content based on our values. She talked about paid advertising and promotion, Facebook Live and stories options, with consistency being the key. She covered all other areas of social media, including Instagram, blogging and keeping ourselves safe from scammers.

What spoke to me the most was that Staci said it's not about selling books; it's about building relationships. In the end it's God's book, and He will get it into the right hands. God can move so powerfully through social media – anywhere in the world. Staci shared a real-life story about a young man in India who had seen one of her posts, and it saved his life.

After a quick chat over a cup of tea, Staci shared the second part of her presentation on Public Speaking for Writers. Speaking sells books and creates opportunities.

Overall, Staci's presentations can only be described as, informative, stimulating and enlightening and the attendees left excited and motivated. Overall, a great night was had by all. We hope to have you back soon Staci.

Some feedback:

Wonderful evening. Staci's information was inspiring and informative. And Verna, what great organisation! **Sarah Richards**

We all learnt so much from Staci...such a generous relaxed and knowledgeable lady. **Christine Nathan**

The following word of encouragement was supplied to seminar attendees:

Write, Write, Write

by Verna McFelin, 29/12/2021

Did you know that God has a library in heaven? I had an encounter where God took me into His library. I thought it was a library because of all the books, but it may be the Records Room where every person's earthly journey is recorded from the beginning of time.

It was a grand-looking room stretching on for miles and miles further than the eye can see. It was an ornate room fit for royalty, walls lined with plush red velvet curtains adorning pure golden ties, and the ceiling was hand-carved exquisitely in acacia wood by the Lord's hand, giving the room a vibrant warmth. Between the curtains, I was looking at walls of books stretching from floor to ceiling about 30 cubits (45 feet) high that appeared backlit. The books seemed alive, sparkling in His presence, and divided into time annals. I heard a joyful, excited murmur as if the books were talking and dancing and the whole room was teeming with love.

A line of ornate tables with their tops so highly polished you could see your face in them were set down the centre of the room. Behind the tables, chairs matched the red velvet curtains, each with carved legs of gold. Each chair had a name etched into the backrest and in front of each chair there was crisp white paper and a loaded fountain pen laid out in readiness. The chairs sat empty.

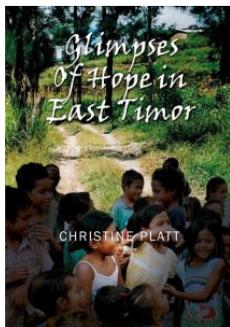
This was my first visit to the room and Jesus was my tour guide. Jesus said, "So you've noticed there is no one sitting on the chairs?" I said, "Yes, I did notice." He said, "They are reserved for my scribes. There is a place here for them and this is where they will get their inspiration from Me. Let them know that they are welcome any time, day or night, and I have dedicated them all to a seat reserved in their name. Every seat tells a story, their story, and it has to be told."

He then pointed to the books, all shelved upright, line upon line all in their place, all in pristine condition. My book was up about five stories high and to the left of where we were standing. The books in my annal were from the same era but had different plain coverings – red, blue, green and black. They appeared to be like the books I had read as a child, like the old classics with plain cloth covers, revealing nothing but where the stories came to life from inside the pages. I asked the Lord why they were all so old and he said, "It is because they were written by My hand at the beginning of time. They were written and printed in accordance with the time when each of my children were born." I didn't see the books in the other annals but I instinctively knew that those born in the time of Christ had their stories written on scrolls. I remembered that King Solomon had his own personal annal (1 Kings 11:41) and the Kings of Israel and Judah had their shared annals (1 Kings 14:19 and 1 Kings 15:31). I perceived that all the books would one day be opened in the Courts of Heaven attended by thousands and ten thousands in times to come (Daniel 7:10).

In an instant, Jesus had my book in his hand. It was a plain pinkish, reddish, cloth cover with my name on the front etched in gold, sparkling in the light of His presence. 'Verna Mary Allington McFelin Born 7th March 1952.' He held it like a treasured well-read classic, then fondly gave it to me. I looked at the cover with great trepidation. It was as if I was looking into my own soul. He said, "This is My living word for you. You are to bring your living word from heaven to earth."

Then he waved his arms toward all the books and said, "My scribes are the forerunners of the unveiling of My coming glory. They have been born for such a time as this. Speak to the scribes and let them know, you can come to this room any time. The volumes hold everything you need. Your stories and the stories of others are already written. You just have to download them. The record of your beginning to your future is already there. You just have to ask. I will speak to you in the quietness of your spirit, and you will listen to what I say, and I will show you what I have already written for what is to come. You will speak and reveal my divine strategy to bring healing and transformation to this lost world. The written word will pierce the hearts of many."

"Spending time with us, Father Son and Holy Spirit, is the key to accessing your book. You've read about us in the scriptures, but by building a closer relationship with Father, Me, and Holy Spirit, you'll learn how to access your story so that it can be brought to life now on earth. The words you bring are vital to what I have next for my people. Your stories will speak to the hearts of many. They will turn from their wicked ways and know Me. The time is now, so write, write, write."



Glimpses of Hope in East Timor

By Christine Platt

Review by Janette Busch

Published by Daystar Books 2020

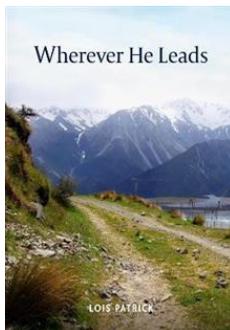
Christine Platt, author of *Glimpses of Hope in East Timor*, was born in England and worked as a secretary in Geneva before returning to train as a nurse. An encounter with a senior nurse led to her faith in Jesus. For 16 years she then spent periods working in French-speaking African countries as a missionary nurse.

In 2001, Christine emigrated to New Zealand to join family members despite not meeting the eligibility criteria because of her age (a miracle answer to her prayers allowed her to live here).

Coming from the Northern Hemisphere Christine had no idea where East Timor (known officially as Timor Este) was—a map would have been helpful. It's a country with a tragic history of devastation caused by fighting at different times over many years so is desperately poor.

Once in New Zealand Christine took short-term missions to East Timor through her church and as a long-standing member of the Navigators, (18 with a team and one alone). They repaired war-damaged houses, provided toilets and piped water and Christine wrote gospel study books for the locals. Doing this improved the health and wellbeing of the people, as Christine demonstrated love in action and modelled God's love to a hurting people.

Christine tells stories of the 'ordinary' people she met during her visits to East Timor and gives 'glimpses' (pun intended) of her life there and the people she meets. I couldn't put the book down once I started reading and have re-read it several times since.



Wherever He Leads

By Lois Patrick

Review by Julia Martin

Published by Castle Publishing Ltd 2021

Lois is married to a Baptist pastor and has served alongside Jim in various pastorates throughout New Zealand for some 50 years.

From her wide experience she has compiled this set of short devotionals which she hopes will be an encouragement for those facing the challenges of living in today's world.

Lois draws inspiration from her observations, life experiences and biblical characters; accompanied by relevant scriptures, poems and wise sayings.

The devotionals are not only practical and down-to-earth but are also uplifting and challenging in order to strengthen our faith in God.

She offers wise counsel such as:

'When God pushes you to the edge of difficulty, trust Him fully. Because two things can happen: either He'll catch you when you fall, or He'll teach you to fly!'

'Each day we are faced with tremendous opportunities, brilliantly disguised as impossible situations.'

This small book is superbly illustrated with the author's own colour photography which showcases the beauty of New Zealand's scenery.

If you're looking for a small gift with lasting value that will inspire and encourage someone, then I thoroughly recommend this delightful book.

THERE IS A SOUND.

by Rodney Hickman

Can you hear a sound as it flows
Through the hourglass of time
And once you hear it, it just gets
stronger

A beat, a melody, you can't dismiss

To one, it's the rattle of old dry bones
To another the tumult of a waterfall
Or the clash of sabres in a cry of war
I'm sure in history, we've heard that
before

Marching feet and moaning voices
The clash of cymbals and trumpets roar
What is it? It's the sound of change
And no-one knows where it will end

Now it has started and it just gets
stronger

Yearning to escape the chains of
'normal'

Do we fear or rise to challenge
And embrace what could be our future?

Yeshua Mountain Mover!

by Daniel Cook

Y'shua... Jesus... Why is it that
demons flee at this name? What is
it about this Man that makes
nations tremble in fear and causes
people to bow in awe?

It's for the fact that Jesus is the
same non-created Power of
Heaven speaking life into the soul
and into the vast cosmos that
makes up all the visible and
invisible realms.

To comprehend that the Speaker
through the prophets' lips,
Speaker of Life-to-be, Yah
Almighty-EI Shaddai would step
through time and space. To clothe
His Divinity in mere human
mortality, to step into our shoes as
it were, to die for ones who He
knew, as a majority, wouldn't
accept Him as their God!

Think on that great love He has
and had! How great is our God!

Don't Judge a Book by the Cover

by Lola Goulton



The Tauranga members of New Zealand Christian Writers recently asked me to talk to them about book marketing. I strongly believe that marketing starts with a great product, so part of the discussion was around the importance of making sure our writing is excellent, our editing is first-rate, and our covers are the same quality as other books in our genre, whether self-published or traditionally published.

To illustrate this point, I displayed a handful of books from my bookshelf and asked those present to guess which books were self-published, and which were from a traditional publisher.

I'll let you make your own assessment. Here are the covers I showed:

Book Cover Quiz *(Answers are on page 25)*



The discussion raised two interesting points.

First, the group quickly identified and agreed that one of the books was self-published, because the cover was so plain. While I take their point, it's the author's second book and both have the same minimalist covers. That's clear branding, which is a strength.

You can probably guess which cover they're talking about. For the record, the book self-published with the assistance of a pay-to-publish press.

One member of the group decided a cover was self-published because the cover was glossy, not matte and the pages were bright white, not cream (sorry, but you're not going to be able to see that in a magazine). However, she also said the cover image was compelling, and she would like to read the book.

Can you guess which book this was? This book was also self-published with the assistance of a pay-to-publish press, and the book looks like it's been printed by IngramSpark (an international company offering printing and distribution services to authors and small publishers).

One cover was dismissed by most of the group as boring, so they thought it must be self-published. This book was published by a major US publisher, but I do agree with the group's assessment. The cover isn't compelling, and I think the publisher missed an opportunity with the cover given that most of the book is set in New Zealand.

Can you guess which book this was?

One cover divided the group: some loved it and were interested in reading the book, while others didn't like the concept at all. Those who didn't like the cover decided the book was self-published, but those who liked the cover weren't so sure.

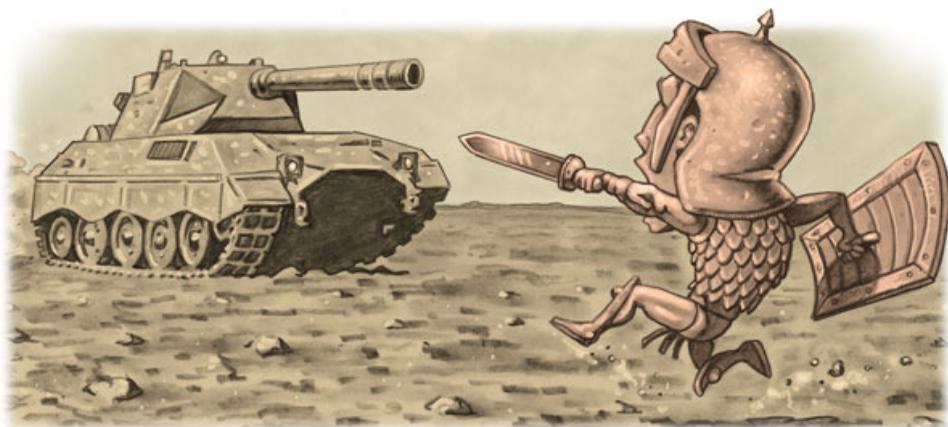
Can you guess which book this was? This book was self-published through Amazon and won a major US writing award.

One cover was universally admired, and the group all wanted to read the book. (I'm sure the fact the author was in the room had nothing to do with that!)

Can you guess which book this was? This book was published by a small Australian traditional publisher.

As you can see, what I thought was a simple exercise turned into a fascinating discussion with several lessons to be learned:

1. Not all group members liked the same covers ... which makes perfect sense, because a good cover indicates the genre of the book and not all readers like the same kinds of books.
2. Covers are important because readers do consider the book cover when deciding if they'd like to read a book or not (yes, they then read the back cover copy and a sample of the writing, but the cover is the all-important first impression). If the cover isn't right for the genre, the readers won't pick up the book.
3. Readers can't tell the difference between a book cover from a traditional publisher and a quality cover from a self-published author. But readers can tell the difference between a quality cover and a lacklustre cover ... and they often assume the lacklustre cover is self-published.



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A WORD ABOUT EDITING

I am a freelance editor having received a Diploma of Proofreading and Editing from NZIBS in 2012. I have edited a large range of documents including novels, biographies, magazine articles, websites, and university assignments.

In August 1968, while beginning teacher training, Jesus Christ changed my heart and the whole direction of my life. I am passionate about working with Christian writers, helping them polish their work until it shines.

I endeavour to read the writer's intentions, not just their words, helping them shape their writing into a more accurate, natural and pleasing form.

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CHRISTIAN EDITING

My name is Lola Goulton and I run Christian Editing Services.

I hold a Bachelor of Commerce Degree in marketing and have over twenty years' experience in human resources, including writing and editing a company newsletter, developing a government website, contributing to a textbook, and writing and proofreading more client reports than I can count.

I specialise in editing Christian fiction and advising pre-published and self-published authors on the business side of writing, publishing and marketing. Find out more at <https://christianediting.co.nz/resources/> or <https://christianediting.co.nz/blog/> and sign up for a free two-week course on revising and self-editing your novel.

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WRITING ANSWERS

I have over 20 years of experience as a copy editor and proof reader. I work on non-fiction books/articles/memoirs and also academic editing/proof reading.

I work with authors to prepare their work for self-publishing. I make sure their documents are print ready and, for example, I tell them that they do need to use mirror margins on their documents and no, the printer won't do that for you.

I have qualifications in technical and professional communication, editing and proof reading, science and laboratory technology.

I am in my happy place when editing and thoroughly enjoy turning people's prose into award winning documents.

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Spend it All

by Bob Hostetler

If you're anything like me (I extend my sympathies), the dawn of a new year brings with it a chance for reflection and re-vision. I like the hyphenated version of that word; I think it conveys the meaning a little better than *revision*. *Re-vision* suggests to me the casting of a new vision, new direction, new emphasis, new focus.

So, as I reflect and re-vision, I would like my 2022 to be a year in which I 'spend it all.' I borrow the phrase from one of my favourite writers, Annie Dillard, who wrote in *The Writing Life* (also one of my favourite books):

One of the few things I know about writing is this: spend it all, shoot it, play it, lose it, all, right away, every time. Do not hoard what seems good for a later place in the book, or for another book; give it, give it all, give now (Annie Dillard, The Writing Life).

Spend it all. I'm frugal by nature, but I see the wisdom in Dillard's words. I can think of three excellent reasons to spend it all every time you write, in everything you write:

We're not promised tomorrow. Remember Jesus' parable of the rich fool who built more and larger barns to hoard his surplus, only to hear God say to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" (Luke 12:20 NIV) As with crops, maybe with words. If we don't 'spend it all, shoot it, play it, lose it all', who knows whether we'll ever get to spend it at all?

We owe the reader our best. It is a grand privilege to be read, an honour and joy for any reader, even just one, to spend valuable time reading words we have written. How stingy would it be to take that for granted and fail to give readers our best? Not to mention (though I'm going to) it's also a great way to lose readers and keep them from coming back for more. And who among us can afford to do that?

Creativity is a muscle. Many times over the course of my writing ministry—which now spans more than four decades, fifty books, and hundreds of articles and blog posts—I have wondered just how many more ideas I can come up with and how much longer I can write such exquisite poetry and prose. ("Lord, forgive me and try me one more time.") But somehow God continues to bless me (and tolerate me); and creativity—like any muscle—gets stronger and better as it's used. To use a different metaphor, spending it all primes the pump and keeps the inspiration flowing.

For those reasons and more, I hope and plan to 'spend it all' in my writing efforts this year. How about you?

The post [Spend It All](#) appeared first on [The Steve Laube Agency](#).

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Good Words – Scripture Series

But The Lord

by Stephen Whitwell at www.goodwords.nz

But the LORD ... Habakkuk 2:20 NKJV.

Habakkuk was prophesying against the nation of Judah. They'd forgotten God. Things were dire. God's judgment and his woes were pronounced against the people. It was a huge burden for the prophet and he wonders how long this condition can continue.

As I was reading Habakkuk, these words arrested my attention: ***But the Lord***. Things may have been bad for Habakkuk and the people of Judah... but! They needn't be like that forever. A ***but*** stems the downward flow; it shakes us in our thinking that things can be different.

But the Lord. God is still God. There is always God. Prosperity, need, good times and bad times will come and go, nations will rise and fall but God always remains.

No matter what life does to us, there's always a ***but the Lord***.

- i. We may be a sinner, ***but the Lord*** is able to forgive and forget.
- ii. We may be too ashamed by our sin, ***but the Lord*** can cleanse and heal our emotions.
- iii. We may be rejected by loved ones, ***but the Lord*** can show us He forgives and accepts us.
- iv. We may have a wayward family member, ***but the Lord*** can rescue and tame them.
- v. We may be in strife, ***but the Lord*** promises He is with us.
- vi. We may be sick, ***but the Lord*** promises healing.
- vii. We may be in great need, ***but the Lord*** promises provision.
- viii. We may be lonely, ***but the Lord*** promises He will comfort us with His presence.
- ix. We may be facing a major decision, ***but the Lord*** promises to guide us.
- x. We may be facing terrible opposition, ***but the Lord*** promises to defeat our enemies.
- xi. We may be mourning a loved one, ***but the Lord*** promises He will heal our heart.

- xii. We may be in a tight business situation, **but the Lord** promises to guide and provide.
- xiii. We may be in a good place, **but the Lord** wants us even closer to Himself.
- xiv. We may be wondering where we fit, **but the Lord** wants to lead us and show us His will.
- xv. We may not hear from God much, **but the Lord** has more for us to hear/know of Him.
- xvi. We may not understand much of His Word, **but the Lord** has clear revelation for us.

I've had many **but the Lord** interventions in my life. We've faced some pretty difficult decisions, **but the Lord** spoke and made the way clear. For some decisions, the Word of the Lord was not forthcoming, but after the event His Word of reassurance came. There've been times of brokenness, **but the Lord** brought His healing to my heart. We've faced enormous challenges, and in some it seemed God was distant, at other times He was close at hand. **But the Lord** was always with us proving His Word and comforting us with His presence.

My health journey over the last seven years or so has been a little chequered, **but the Lord** has been with me and His healing reassuring hand has been upon me. Through many medical procedures God has been right there with me every time. His Word of comfort for my situation, and His confirmation of His call have been amazing.

The phrase **but the Lord** occurs 59 times in the NKJV Bible. Here are just a few:

- They confronted me in the day of my calamity, **But the LORD** was my support. Psalm 18:18 NKJV.
- Many are the afflictions of the righteous, **But the LORD** delivers him out of them all. Psalm 34:19 NKJV.
- **But the Lord** stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. 2 Timothy 4:17 NKJV.

David knew that God made a difference. Ananias wondered if he'd survive praying for the persecutor of Christians. Paul knew the presence and encouragement of God when he was faced with the challenge of telling his story. Many others also in the Scriptures have the same testimony.

But the Lord makes the difference. No situation is beyond a **but the Lord**. There's always a **but the Lord**. We may not at first see God's hand and feel His influence in our situation, but we will!

The Middle Child

by Frances Hall

I'm in the middle, Lord, and it's 4am. I often wonder why writing inspiration turns up with such clarity in the early hours of the morning. Maybe it's because even a few hours slumber rids our minds of clutter and creates space for new thoughts, feelings and words... so many words.

This time my heart is ripped to shreds. I want to dance in denial although I rail at reality over what's happening in our broken world. I am deeply gutted at the breaking of relationships. My oldest daughter has found me wanting, an unfit mother who ruined her life with my passive-aggressiveness and bad decision-making. No contact with her or my grandchildren for years. I have been erased from her life and must now understand *her* pain at this divorce. Love and bewilderment flood my soul. My baby, so sweet and laid back but with a rod of iron in her backbone. She is suffering for her truth but is it the truth? Then again perhaps there is an element of truth in all lies, a seductive possibility of rightness that will only be reflected in history. She could be right but is rightness the only goal? As Dr Phil says, 'Do we choose being right over being happy?'

I admire principled people who wreak havoc on those closest while they obey their conscience, their inner voice, their faith or their selfishness. Or is it their fear? I have been subject to the results of misguided insecurity masked in doctrinal insistence. I could sacrifice for my convictions but I couldn't make you.

I'm captivated by the Canadian truckers convoying in freezing conditions relentlessly towards freedom from frustrating policy, voyeuristic on the purity and passion of their cause. If I were there I would feed them hot soup and home-made muffins. Yet I would also want the unvaccinated to be vaccinated, to get this nonsense over and done with, to operate under lesser freedoms because the resistance is exhausting.

I admire the scientists, operating with ever changing knowledge of a virus that has become a pandemic and is ever mutating, the advisers, the politicians who must make decisions and rule and restrict. My heart breaks for the criticism and vilification that they must endure as they assess truth and translate it into law. It takes courage to stand up to a demanding whinging population.

I admire the unconventional, the eccentric because I am not one of them. I am a middle child always campaigning for peace on earth and goodwill towards men (well, most men). I will placate and jolly and listen and offer support before I tell you to pull your head in and not be such an idiot. I just want you to like me and be my friend. I so want to be an ostrich with a head-in-sand mentality with no antenna scanning for truth and reaction to truth. Sometimes I know a lot and other times I know nothing. Sometimes I love well and others I want to wring your neck and mine and shake us all into common sense. Yet, what would I know, Lord, of what You are up to in this?

While others speak of apocalypse, end times, food rations, I refuse fear. It is not even on my radar. Perhaps because I do not fear I am also deluded, lost in a sea of hope and possibility that you, Lord, know what is happening; are present in our world although we don't always see it. I know you hold my right hand, limp though mine is in Yours at times. But in the end, Lord, I will choose faith, hope and love because without it we are all truly lost. It's 5:21am and I hope to sleep for a while and in my slumber may these disparate thoughts and feelings dissipate into a hopeful new day. Amen.

The Funniest Thing

by Janette G Barclay

As I sat in the shade of the Star Oak tree,
Gypsy cat wandered over to sit with me,
When she got restless and wanted to play,
I saw monarch butterflies coming our way!

Previously I've seen her jump, bite, and eat,
Left the beautiful creatures dead, at my feet,
I didn't want her to kill any butterflies today,
Just home from church, so I started to pray.

"Please Lord, I want no deaths in my garden,
Gypsy can't pray so I'm 'begging her pardon',
There are other ways to keep her amused,
Please find one for us 'cos I am confused."

The funniest thing happened before my eyes,
Gypsy ran around playing, to my surprise,
The butterflies hovered well within reach,
I was on tenterhooks, swallowed a screech.

She didn't look up, but was chasing around,
Toes spread out, pouncing, thudding sound!
Butterfly shadows, the 'toys' for this hour,
Gladdened my heart - amazed at the power.

Thank you Jesus, for answering my prayer,
Gave the little cat a great game over
there,
Delighted, I sat, watched the whole
thing,
Played out before me on butterfly wings!



FEB - MAY 22

YOUNG CHRISTIAN WRITER

Look INSIDE For :

Love is Simple
Short Story by Taylor Foster

Author Interview with
Karen McMillan

The Swimming Pool
Poem by Rodney Hickman

Short Story Writing
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Answers to the Book Cover Quiz from page 14

- Sunny by Stacey Pyne
- Close to You by Kara Isaac
- Then There Was You by Kara Isaac
- Nellie's Child by Carolyn Tonkin
- Heidi's October by Penelope McCowen
- The Silk Merchant of Sychar by Cindy Williams

*God didn't call me to succeed He called
me to serve. I serve through writing.
Cecil Murphey*

Writing Competitions Points Board

Welcome to our writing competitions! In each magazine, place-getters receive points: 15 points for first, 12 points for second and 9 points for third. At the end of May and November, the highest points in Levels One and Two are awarded monetary prizes for first, second and third. Level Three points are tallied at the end of November.

Prizes up for grabs are: **\$60 for First Place**, **\$50 for Second Place**, **\$40 for Third place**. These are now awarded as Manna Christian Store e-vouchers via email. Our next prize-winners will be published in the June-July 2022 magazine edition.

All new members begin on Level One. To be promoted to Level Two or Three, contestants need to receive points at least three times on their current level. Our judges also require regular entries and improved writing. Entrants receive constructive feedback via email from the judge.

Level One		Level Two		Level Three	
Sue Shelton	30	Ruth Jamieson	27	Jean Crane	27
Clive McKegg	21	Susan Flanagan	15	Jean Shewan	18
Lorraine Dietrich	12	Pam Driver	12	Pat Kerr	15
Lauren Allan	9	Ricolene Gounden	9	Heather Vincent	12
Rodney Hickman	9	Kathryn Paul	9	Janet Fleming	9

Competition Results

Level One

Judge: Debbie McDermott

Requirement: John 13 describes how Jesus washed the feet of the twelve disciples during the Last Supper. Study this passage of Scripture, then write an article on what the foot washing means and how you think it is relevant to us today. A bibliography is not required but you may include one if you wish. (450 words, excluding the bibliography if one is included.)

General Comments

This topic proved to be popular, which meant I had lots of marking, judging and deciding to do in order to award the top three places in the competition. This was not an easy task as all 12 entries received are highly commendable in terms of providing insights into what it means to serve and be served. Well done to everyone for making such a great effort.

The standard of writing was also high, but minor issues with grammar, punctuation and spelling resulted in some entrants losing valuable marks and narrowly missing out on being placed. Most of these errors could have been avoided if contestants had used Word's inbuilt grammar and spelling checker to identify mistakes. Apart from being a proofreader, the grammar and spelling checker also serves as a mini tutorial so I do encourage you to use it. After all, you would not hesitate to use a textbook or online resource on how to write better, so you should not hesitate to use the grammar and spelling checker either. The important thing is to take onboard and remember what you learn so you can apply it and improve your literary/wordsmithing skills.

Deciding on the top three winners was also based on how well contestants met the key requirements of the competition. A couple of the entrants provided wonderful testimonies on what the foot washing means to them but did not give enough detail on the origin of it as detailed in John 13, nor how to practically apply the principles Jesus taught his disciples through his wonderful act of service. One entrant lost significant marks for being almost 100 words (20%) below the stipulated wordcount of 450, which is far too low. We only allow a leeway of ~5% above or below the wordcount requirement. However this rule will vary if the stipulated wordcount is so many words 'maximum' OR 'exactly'. 'Maximum' means you can be ~5% under the wordcount but not over, whereas 'exactly' means you must have the exact number of words stipulated in the wordcount requirement.

I finally awarded Sue Shelton First Place for her impeccable writing and insights into the principles of the foot washing and how she applies them. Lorraine Dietrich's excellent article and suggestions on how to practically serve others earned her Second Place. Rod Hickman's keen understanding of the topic and personal application earned him Third Place Equal along with Clive McKegg, whose well-written article highlights the contrast between Peter and Judas and challenges us to be still and allow the King to serve us.

First Place



Sue
Shelton
of Hastings,
Hawkes Bay

A Demonstration of Love

Imagine this situation. You are sharing a meal with friends in the company of a person held in very high esteem by the group such as a pastor, a professor, a community leader. All of a sudden this person takes off their jacket, rolls up their sleeves and begins to wash each person's feet.

This isn't right, you think, I can't allow this to happen!

This is exactly what Peter thought when Jesus, at the Last Supper, began to wash the disciples' feet taking on the role normally performed by the lowliest servant in the household (John 13:1-17). This was astonishing because Jesus was so much more than a highly esteemed person. He was their Lord and Master and he knew that he came from the Father and the Father gave everything into his hands.

Jesus was so good at making a point. By this action he showed great love for his disciples being willing to humble himself and serve them in this way, imperfect as they were. For instance, Jesus realised that Judas would betray him and that Peter would deny him but he humbly washed all their feet. This story can also be read as a parable in action revealing the servant nature of Jesus in a deeper way. It points us to the crucifixion when Jesus laid his life down for us and poured out his blood for our purification.

Jesus made this reply when Peter objected "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." (John 13:8 NIV) Peter impulsively offers his hands and his head for washing also but Jesus tells him that he is clean. Only his feet in contact with the dusty road needed washing. I know that through my relationship with Jesus I am cleansed. However, as I imperfectly handle the events of each day, as the dust clings to my feet from daily failures, I need to come to the Lord for the regular washing of his grace and mercy.

Finally, Jesus said that he was setting an example and instructed the disciples to wash one another's feet. Mother Theresa and her nuns have demonstrated such great love in their care of the dying. I don't have similar challenges in my life but I am tasked to live alongside others applying the same principles of love and self-sacrifice that Jesus demonstrated. This is not easy when my own desires and comfort get in the way! However, Jesus reassures us that he will help us and enable us to do these things. Not only that, he promises us a reward – "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." (John 13:17 NIV)

Second Place



Lorraine
Dietrich
of Mosgiel,
Dunedin

Washing Another's Feet is to Serve

Today, the word 'servant' is not acceptable. But during his ministry, Jesus brought an entirely new meaning to the term 'serve.' Not only was his servanthood taken to the highest level when he served us as the Son of God, dying for our sins on the cross, but he also expressed his servanthood throughout his ministry.

One of Jesus' last actions that profoundly affected his disciples was when he kneeled before them and started to wash their feet during the Last Supper. He was their Master, and they were supposed to serve him, but Jesus showed them a new way of serving. While they were still recovering from their surprise, he commanded them: "You also should do just as I have done to you." (John 13:14 ESV)

That command is still just as valid today as it was then. But is it possible to follow Jesus' example today? What does it require?

It is possible to answer two main requirements, namely love and humbleness. Sincere love for our neighbour as we love ourselves fills us with compassion for others' needs. Humility comes from knowing that the Lord loved us first. This knowledge makes us aware of our own needs and the needs of those around us.

Suppose the above is the foundation we rest our servanthood upon. In that case, the following aspects will not affect our serving or rather our 'washing of another's feet, such as how much or how little time we have, how much or little money we have, how much we like the person(s) in need. Or even how much we would be acknowledged and rewarded.

If there is any doubt about how to wash another's feet today, we could go to Matthew 25:35-36 (ESV). There are the hungry to feed through contributing to food banks, strangers to be welcomed, visiting the sick, and prisoners. If we cannot wash another person's feet in person, the option of donating to charity organisations makes it possible to serve those in need without leaving the comfort of our own homes.

Above all, we wash each other's feet through prayer. Interceding on behalf of another for their needs to be met is a costless gift but the most precious gift we could bring on behalf of those suffering.

May our heavenly Master say to each of us on that day: "Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." (Matthew 25:40 ESV)

Bibliography

1 John 4:19

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Third Place Equal



Rodney
Hickman
of Palmerston
North

Washing the Feet

In John chapter 13 we can read in about a minute an act which Jesus performed near the end of his life.

He washed his disciples feet.

This is something we rarely see or do in the times we live today. I wonder, what did it signify? And what did it mean then and now?

All down through history a person's beauty was captured in the head and especially the face. The feet, while furthest from the head are rarely considered a beauty point, especially in biblical times as the footwear was the sandal and the ground always dusty. Yet Jesus saw beauty in the least of humanity and as the heavenly king he willingly bent his knees to perform this lowly task of washing the feet of his disciples. Surely in any kingdom honour is given to the highest person. Do we see what Jesus sees? There is virtue and honour in the lowest of persons. Are we prepared to follow in the commands of our Saviour and Lord? Jesus said in verse 17, "if you know these things, blessed are you if you do them." For the disciples this would have been embarrassing but it showed the upside down nature of the Kingdom of God. Jesus exemplified the principle, "it's more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35)

Do we need this today? In our world today we applaud those who climb to the top of their profession. Those who amass the most money, prestige or glory. Its all about me, myself and I. Selfishness is the newest evil. There is little room for those who take second place or even esteem others more than themselves. Yet here in Christendom, the opposite is the norm. Humility and honouring should be the norm, but it isn't. John the Baptist made this observation, "he must increase but I must decrease." (John 3:30)

I was eighteen years old when I experienced my first foot washing. The young woman was beautiful, she was gracious and tears rolled down her cheeks and in a matter of moments tears splashed down my face too. I will never forget that. I was humbled and honoured at the same time. Words are hard to find in these moments but the memories linger a lifetime.

So, how do I apply this principle today? I do that by giving you the right of way, by allowing you to 'go first', by assisting you in your endeavours, whatever they may be and whatever it may cost me. Our rewards might not come this side of heaven but they will come.

Jesus said these words, "I am the way, the truth and the life, follow me" (John 14:6)

Third Place Equal



Clive
McKegg
of Whangarei

The Servant King

In the 13th chapter of the gospel of John, Jesus is holding his final team meeting. What will his lesson be?

John first emphasises that Jesus loves his disciples *"to the end"* (v1). This includes the troubled Judas, known to Jesus as the betrayer. Then John records that during the meal Jesus swaps his outer garments for a towel and begins to wash their feet. In 'good society' only a menial servant would do this; not the master. Especially this master! Has Jesus forgotten who he is? No. John explicitly tells us that Jesus acts *"...knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God..."* (v3).

The disciples seem dumfounded, until Peter brainlessly blurts: *"you shall never wash my feet!"* (v8). Peter's assumptions about power are deeply challenged. He is very uncomfortable with this. When Jesus insists, he tries to soften the lesson: *"...not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"* (v9). But Jesus is simply doing what any servant would do for guests who had washed to go out, then soiled their feet walking the dusty path. Finally Peter submits.

Jesus explains that this is the model he want them to imitate: *"...a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him"* (v16). No ambitious big-shots permitted in this team! Judas retreats into darkness.

What does John want us to learn from this? First, that betrayal is bitter, but Jesus, holding firmly to his identity, responds with sweetness, extending dignity even to his enemy. He can let go of an unhealthy relationship.

Second, that leadership is not about one-upmanship and competition. Rather, it's about 'one-downmanship' and service. Jesus is a strong leader; so secure in his identity and calling that he can let go all trappings of power and trust his Father.

Third, this act demonstrates the wonder of Jesus' gift. The apostle Paul writes: "...though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, ... he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:6-8). Jesus lets go of the robes of deity, humbles himself as a menial servant of humanity and dies to free us from our self-inflicted calamity.

So will you be like Peter, too busy and opinionated to accept Jesus' love? Or will you be like Judas, so hard of heart that you betray the one who loves you most? Or will you sit down, be still and just let the King serve you?

Level Two

Judge: Ruth Linton

Requirement: Write a 20-30 line poem about a place or theme of nature that is meaningful to you – then write a haiku poem summarising the longer poem. Both versions of your poem should be included in your entry.

General Comments

God's creation always provides many wonderful themes to write about and I received five delightful entries. Thank you to all the entrants for the work they put into their entries.

The requirements did not ask for the more-formal approach to poetry emphasising rhythm and rhyme but several entrants opted to use it. If they did so it was important that they used both well. Generally, the rhymes were good, some rhyming alternate lines and one rhyming the first and last lines of the stanza with lines two and three also rhyming. (i.e. a, b,b,a pattern). It is important to realise that rhyming words almost always end with an accented word or syllable. (e.g. beach and teach) Technically it is not correct to rhyme a single syllable word with a two-syllable word (e.g. hand and understand) and adding 's' to one of the rhymes (e.g. hands and understand) is even worse!

Another error of rhyming, usually with two-syllable words, is when the final syllable is not accented. This is called a feminine rhyme and is very rarely used and then only to create a special effect. (eg. swiftly and loudly where the first syllable carries the accent making it a feminine rhyme.)

Rhythm was not strong in the entries and some were in free verse though in regular stanzas (as opposed to blank verse which normally has five feet of iambic pentameter giving a gentle rhythm. See Level Three in the Jan-Feb Christian Writer for more details). As a result, the underlying rhythms were generally not strong. The careful choice of words created a good effect for most of the poems but without a sense of rhythm poetry tends to sound more like prose just split into short lines for looks!

All entrants tackled the Haiku well. Haiku is a traditional form of Japanese poetry having only three lines. The first and third lines contain five syllables only and the middle line has seven syllables. (NB. It is syllables not words we count. Traditionally the Japanese counted 'breaths'.)

Often there are two thoughts written in juxtaposition and separated by punctuation. (This is not unlike Hebrew poetry, often written in couplets with the first line making a statement and the second line stating the opposite or restating the first line in a completely different manner. A good example of these couplets can be found in the book of Proverbs.) The final line normally contains a deep or unusual comparison of the two subjects. Nature or the natural world are favourite topics for Haiku so the competition lent itself to it. Below is a sample by a Japanese master, Murakami Kijo (1865-1938 <https://haiku-poetry.org/what-is-haiku.html>)

First autumn morning:
the mirror I stare into
shows my father's face.

I trust you will enjoy these winning entries as much as I did.

First Place



Susan
Flanagan
of Northland

My Local Beach

Calm, gentle, inviting,
The tranquil beach calls to me.
To swim, to relax, to paddle,
To beachcomb, to simply be.

Wild, windy, wet,
The stormy beach calls to me.
To move, to stride, find shelter,
To brace, to breathe deeply.

Jesus meets me there,
At my local beach.
Whatever the weather,
He has something to teach.

I offer up my prayers,
Unwind, soak up His peace.
I recharge, lay stuff down,
Bless, forgive, release.

The beauty of His creation,
Is in everything I see.
The shells, the shore, the sky,
The seaweed, the birds, the sea.

I pick up a broken shell,
See in it, the Creator's hand.
Give my brokenness to God,
And know He understands.

Haiku

Calm, still, windy, wild
My local beach calls to me
Jesus meets me there

Second Place



Ruth
Jamieson
of Whakatane

Creation Speaks

Oh, for an artist's palette full
to capture the amazing sunrise
to paint the sea and more beside
in awe of my Creator's skill.

Oh, to join in the morning call
to rise and welcome each new day
to be assured, He knows the way
to praise the Creator of all.

Oh, to have wings to soar above
to feel the freedom that it brings
to lift my heart and voice to sing
in thanks for my Creator's love.

Oh, to catch the warmer sea airs
to glide gracefully through the sky
to leave behind all earthly sighs
and rest in my Creator's care.

Oh, for the faith to trust His plan
to take a stand upon the Word
to echo with the evening birds
I'm safe in my Creator's hand.

Haiku

Sunrise colours awe
Capturing the seeking soul
Creation's glory.

Third Place



Kathryn
Paul
of Northland

God's Unique Tree

It's a secret place
Where I go and sit
Private, undisturbed
Yet exposed, wide open.

A bridge to nowhere
Wooden, flat, no sides
Extra tall, extra short
Pine plantation.

Birds, pastures, trees, hills, sky
I sit, pat the dog, ponder
I pray, filling with His peace
Now plugged in, spiritual charger.

A unique tree is beside me
I gaze at it gaining comfort
One base stump, three trunks
Hollow space in the middle.

I consider sliding inside
Thoughts of bugs put me off
Still, it's a picture of wonder
God as one and yet three.

An old willow so gnarly, twisted
God's unity yet individuals to hold
Space where I fit safe inside love
In my special Trinity tree.

Haiku

One base stump, three trunks
Hollow, loving space for me
God's Trinity tree.

Level Three

Judge: Julia Martin

Requirement: 'Covid 19 has changed the world.' Write an opinion piece for the newspaper giving your viewpoint on the subject, including a subtle spiritual message. (400 words)

General Comments

When I chose this topic earlier last year for our 2022 competitions, I rather hoped Covid-19 would be a bygone issue and we would be writing about it in hindsight. Sadly, that's not the case!

Countless articles, expert views, editorials and opinion pieces have been written about the effect the pandemic has had on our lives and the world in general. We've all been affected in varying ways, so we all have opinions on the subject. As we know, the written word has widespread power and influence and an opinion well-argued and expressed can influence the thinking and attitudes of readers.

This assignment asked for an opinion piece suitable for a newspaper giving your personal viewpoint on the subject. It did not have to be a balanced article giving other sides of the argument. With reader fatigue on the subject, the article needed to be fresh and unusual with an arresting start and title. The first sentence or paragraph in any writing acts as a teaser, enticing the reader to continue reading

Arguments need to be compelling and structured. Writing out a clear statement or plan before proceeding with the article can help to maintain focus and keep ideas and arguments on track. With a limit of 400 words, every word must count.

Finally, the article needs a strong conclusion that challenges the reader and gives them something to ponder further.

I received six excellent entries and all were worthy of a placing. I awarded first place to Pat Kerr for her novel approach to the subject. Her first paragraph is intriguing and is followed by powerful descriptive scenes from the daily newspaper she's reading concerning Covid. Pat uses questions effectively to engage the readers and make them think before giving her opinions on the subject.

Second place went to Jean Crane for her well-argued and well-written piece and third place went to Jean Shewan who focused particularly on the effect of the virus on our young ones.

Not all the entries included a subtle spiritual message, but those that did managed it effectively.

I hope all the entrants will be encouraged and emboldened to voice their opinions and convictions in the public arena, especially from a Christian point of view.

First Place



Pat
Kerr
of Roxburgh

Under Sentence

This morning the stars forgot to go to bed, the half moon rested on its side and Venus was sparkling in the east. It looked like someone dropped their jewels on some black velvet. How wonderful to be privy to such majesty and beauty. The sun came up into a cloudless blue sky.

I fed the wild birds. Breakfast time. A new dawn, a new day.

The newspapers arrived. Harrowing pictures of plastic wrapped medics in overcrowded wards, of paddocks of hastily dug open graves, of jammed juggernauts at international borders, of empty streets in mega-sized cities around the globe, of aeroplanes parked in backblock Australia. Is this science fiction, fairy tales or our brave new world, thanks to an invidious invisible new virus named Covid 19?

My, how the world has changed for every living soul, even us lucky enough to be living on an island. We blissfully took for granted that we could buy anything from anywhere off the supermarket shelves anytime.

Now we have to queue up, sign in, wash hands, wear masks and be served by masked assistants behind plastic shields. We wait, standing behind a line. We put our goods on the counter...this has to be a 2nd rate movie script surely? But no.

We cannot travel, firstly outside our homes, region or country. We must be tested, quarantined...and tickets are scarce and expensive. Staying home was bliss, till the dust was too scared to settle, and the spouse niggling was turning serious. How could something unseen affect us so quickly, seriously and seemingly long-term, and, for some, permanently?

We choked as we swallowed the daily statistics and pictures until the media was banned. We binged on Netflix movies.

This is a temporary situation, and we are overreacting here in New Zealand except for closing the borders to incomers. Right? Wrong! Two years down the track, many divorces, suicides and bankruptcies later, we have the pesky perpetrator, Omicron, in our population, which is 94% doubled jabbed, and mostly boosted, and we are running scared.

Contacts overseas report that this variant is, at worst, a flu, to those who are not frail, super old or immunocompromised, and, at best, asymptomatic. Their new norm is freedom to live as adults in a complex world, making wise choices carefully about hygiene and crowds.

Covid has changed the world. Temporarily or permanently? It depends...

Second Place



Jean
Crane
of Tauranga

Covid-19 has Changed the World

It is clear from the evidence around us, that Covid-19 has significantly changed the way people throughout the world now live their lives. We are not only suffering health wise, but also from regulations being imposed on us by those in power, with many of these rules appearing to do more harm than good. 'Governments have both ignored the scientific evidence and have done the opposite of following the precautionary principle.' Professor Denis G Rancourt.

One of the many rules imposed on us are lockdowns, which are depriving people of contact with extended family, friends, and even neighbours. These lockdowns have resulted in students being schooled via on-line learning and a substantial number of adults now working from home. In my opinion, this is having a devastating impact on the population with an increase in both mental health issues and abuse.

With regards to the wearing of masks, these are now compulsory in most countries and I am inclined to believe that masks are giving people a false sense of security. 'Research is revealing that there is no known benefit arising from wearing a mask in a viral respiratory illness epidemic.' Professor Denis G Rancourt.

The biggest change I see, is the world's agenda of forcing vaccinations on everyone, with vaccines being mandated for many workplaces in spite of the acknowledged fact that, vaccinated people are still contracting and spreading the virus. I strongly question the ethics of these mandates and feel that those participating in these trials are being misinformed about the long term impact on their health and well-being.

It is clear that those refusing to be vaccinated are being ostracised and this is creating intolerance and segregation within society. Using discrimination such as vaccine passports, governments are trying to coerce people into giving up their freedom of choice. In my view, when people want control over others, they do so by forcing them to obey unjust laws. 'One has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws.' Dr. Martin Luther King.

In conclusion, Covid-19 has certainly changed the way we now live. This is due primarily to the imposition of government regulations and mandates such as lockdowns, masks, vaccines and vaccine passports. However, regardless of what is happening around us, I personally believe God is in control and is more than able to guide us through this season of uncertainty.

References. Rancourt, Professor Denis G. (2020) A review of Science Relevant to Covid-19 Social policy.

King, Doctor Martin Luther (1963) Letter from a Birmingham Jail.

Third Place



Jean Shewan
of Christchurch

Our World Post Covid

Over the last 120 years or so, and certainly since World War 2, we have become accustomed to many things. Freedom to travel when and where we want, visual and audio communication with the rest of the world, despite the language barrier, and the exchange of ideas and discoveries.

The Covid pandemic has changed all that. Travel and face to face communication are no longer possible. We are bombarded with information and news, but it is difficult to distinguish truth from opinions or lies. Underlying this is the uncertainty of life and our lack of control of events. We no longer know who to trust.

My concern is the effect of this will have on the younger generation. Babies learn by copying the expressions and lip movements of those around them. But if all adults are wearing masks how will these little ones develop language and communication skills. The voices and faces on screens will become their main reference point.

As well, all children need face to face interactions with their peers and adults to progress their speech and social skills. I noticed recently that my grandchildren in Auckland, after months of lock down, were reluctant to engage in and maintain a conversation. They had also lost interest in the other activities because they could only be done on-line. Dependence on screens leads to a loss of interest or need to speak and share ideas with real people. As with learning to walk, these skills are harder to learn second time around. What is being lost from society will not be easy to regain.

We have seen from passed events (the Christchurch earthquake in particular) the effects on children's social and emotional development in the long term. The number suffering lack of self-esteem, depression and loss of hope increases after major events.

What can we do to help? While working through our own fears and uncertainties, we need to keep the channels of communication open and show them how much they are loved. We must do our best to remove all obstacles from their path,s so that each child can achieve the potential our creator has given each one. The gifts of our love and out time will be needed to ensure that our children and grandchildren grow in social skills, communications, knowledge, and discernment so that they can become the leaders of our community and nation in the future.

Competitions for June 2022

Due by May 1st 2022

EMAIL ENTRY AS AN ATTACHMENT, COMPLETE WITH WORD COUNT AND YOUR NAME.

Font: Arial, 10 pt **Heading:** Bold Title Case, 18 pt **Line spacing:** Multiple 1.2

Spacing between Paragraphs: 6 pt **Paragraph Indentation:** None

Alignment: Justified. **Send a photo** of yourself for publishing purposes.

NB: If you are not sure which level you're on, email Debbie McDermott at: level1@nzchristianwriters.org

Entries are judged on: Entering, format and layout 15%, Topic requirements 25%, Creativity, flow and impact 25%, Grammar and punctuation 25%, Spelling 10%.

Level One—for members 16 years old and over

Requirement: Read Daniel 3:8-30, then write a true or fictional story about how you, or someone else, moved from the fearful 'What if' mindset to the 'Even if' faith-in-God mindset described in Daniel 3:18 and achieved a positive outcome as a result. (500 words)

Email entry to Debbie McDermott at level1@nzchristianwriters.org



Debbie

Level Two—for members 16 years old and over

Requirement: Write a letter expressing praise or appreciation for something done well, using appropriate Bible verses. (150-200 words)

Email entry to Pamela Lowrey at level2@nzchristianwriters.org



Pamela

Level Three—for members 16 years old and over

Requirement: Précis writing is an important skill for writers, enabling them to reduce the length of their work and avoid verbosity. Write a précis of Genesis 22:1-14 in 150 words maximum, making sure you retain accuracy and the essential details.

Email entry to Julia Martin at level3@nzchristianwriters.org



Julia



NZ CHRISTIAN WRITERS is a nationwide collective of authors, bloggers, editors, lyricists, poets, publishers, songwriters, storytellers and writers throughout New Zealand. Along with our bi-monthly magazines and competitions we offer inspiring seminars and writers retreats to encourage, inspire and upskill people in their writing.

NZ Christian Writers' vision is to cultivate a vibrant community of Christian writers by connecting them to other like-minded writers in New Zealand. We welcome both beginner and experienced writers.