

Called to Write

*“Write my answer on a billboard,
large and clear, so that anyone can read it
at a glance and rush to tell the others.”*

HABAKKUK 2:2

Our neighborhood was no longer quiet or safe. A group of rowdy teens had claimed it. After a night of their partying, empty beer cans littered our manicured lawns. It was not at all uncommon to find paint sprayed on cars, flat tires, and smashed lawn furniture. The targets for their vandalism were those who dared to suggest that they quiet down or go someplace else.

“What next?” we wondered and worried, especially when it became evident that drugs were involved. We knew we should do something, but what? The police regularly patrolled, but they seemed as helpless as we felt.

One night the kid brother of a gang member climbed a pole by the trolley stop and was electrocuted by the wires above the tracks. He was only thirteen! “Oh God,” I cried, “was there something I could have done that might have saved his life?”

I’ve asked similar questions when I’ve viewed documentaries on world hunger, homelessness, alcohol and drug addiction, AIDS, child abuse, the aging. But the problems are so big, so beyond my control. And I feel so helpless.

The family—the most basic and important unit of society—is under attack. Christian homes are far from immune. Divorce, adultery, the battering of women and children, incest, and teen suicide devastate *our* homes too. Immorality is rampant. Violent crime, especially in our schools and crimes committed by girls, is increasing. Our environment is being destroyed. And our children, both before and after birth, are at risk.

Where is God? What is he doing about it? I believe he's calling people like you and like me to "write my answer on a billboard, large and clear, so that anyone can read it at a glance and rush to tell the others" (Hab. 2:2).

When the Lord first brought this verse to my attention in 1979, I was not at all certain he was speaking to me. I knew Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I knew he is the answer to man's deepest needs, but I doubted my ability to write that answer in a compelling and effective way. I had never gone to college or taken a course in creative writing. And I had never shaken the enormous inferiority complex I'd been carrying since childhood. It didn't take me long to conclude that he must have meant that verse for someone else.

Then I recalled a familiar Scripture: "If anyone publicly acknowledges me as his friend, I will openly acknowledge him as my friend before my Father in heaven. But if anyone publicly denies me, I will openly deny him before my Father in heaven" (Matt. 10:32-33).

Certainly my refusal to write was not a denial of him, or was it? "Lord," I prayed, "you know I don't ever want to deny you, but I don't see how I . . ."

"It's not a question of your ability," I felt him assure me. "You really can do everything I ask you to do with the help of Christ who will give you the strength and power" (Phil. 4:13).

I tried a whole bunch of "but Lord" excuses. They all sounded hollow next to his promise to help me. "But," I persisted, "I don't even know *what* you want me to write. I know you are the answer, but how do I say that in a way that someone will publish it?"

"Write out of your life experiences," he said to me. "Make yourself transparent and vulnerable so others can see what I have done, and am doing, in your life."

The choice was clear. The Lord had given me my instructions. To refuse would be an act of disobedience. Yet, it wasn't easy to admit on paper, for the world to read, that I often failed to handle problems in a Christlike way. I didn't want people to know that I'm not a model Christian, that my faith falters, and that some days I feel overwhelmed and inadequate. But I also knew the Lord had taught me many things through my struggles—lessons that could perhaps help someone else.

I swallowed my pride and began to write about “Battling and Defeating Depression,” “Coping with Ingratitude,” and “Praying About Everything.” I discovered the answers he’d given me could be a source of help and reassurance to others who also asked: “What’s the Matter with Me?” or “How Much Longer, Lord?”

Making myself more vulnerable, I began to write about my life as a wife and mother. I admitted that “It Takes Two to Tangle” and that sometimes I’m guilty of “Taking It Out On the Ones I Love.” I sensed that the most difficult things for me to share could be the very words someone else needed to read. Yet, the more prolific I became, the more my mailbox was stuffed with returned manuscripts. Sometimes they came back faster than I thought the U.S. Postal Service could deliver them! Others, like my first book manuscript, sat on an editor’s desk for five months only to be returned with a form rejection slip.

“Do you think it was easy for me to go to the cross?” the Lord asked me one day when I grumbled about the mail. Stung by the truth of his words, I immediately apologized for forgetting how much he had suffered for my salvation.

“Neither is it easy for you to follow in my footsteps,” he said gently. “But what I ask you to do, and what I will enable you to do, is to ‘put aside your own pleasures and shoulder your cross, and follow me closely. If you insist on saving your life, you will lose it. Only those who throw away their lives for my sake and for the sake of the Good News will ever know what it means to really live’” (Mark 8:34-35).

Real living. From the world’s standpoint, the life of a Christian writer hardly measures up. Few of us will achieve fame or fortune, or even earn a minimum wage for the hours we sit before our computers. But God sends me reminders when I need them most, often in the form of a thank you from someone who has read something I’ve written. In light of eternity, low pay and rejection slips mean nothing if even one life is touched.

The needs are urgent and, I believe, the time is short. We dare not assume that we will always have the freedom to print and distribute Christian literature. “All of us,” Jesus said, “must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us by the one who sent me, for there is little time left before the night falls and all work comes to an end” (John 9:4).

I still struggle with feelings of inadequacy and self-doubts, but I do not doubt the One who has called me. I am choosing to keep my eyes on him and to write his answer. “This is my life work: helping people understand and respond to this Message. It came as a sheer gift to me, a real surprise, God handling all the details. . . . God saw to it that I was equipped, but you can be sure that it had nothing to do with my natural abilities. And so here I am, preaching and writing about things that are way over my head, the inexhaustible riches and generosity of Christ” (Eph. 3:7-8, *The Message*).

RESPONDING TO GOD’S CALL TO WRITE

God has provided guidelines for writers in Habakkuk 2:2 and related Scriptures. (See Appendix I, p. 147.) Before moving on to the next chapter, take time to read and meditate on these verses, to allow the Lord to speak to you, and to answer the following questions.

Do I believe God has called me to write his answer? Why or why not?

What issue most deeply concerns me? Is there something God may want to say through me?

What verse in Appendix I spoke most powerfully to me? Write it below, and then commit it to memory.

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For Appendix I, “Called to Write His Answer,” click on Bible Studies at www.writehisanswer.com and scroll to the bottom.