

Christian Writing Seminar with Larry Sparks on 16 Nov 2019 at HopeUC West Gosford

This seminar with [Larry Sparks](#) from [Destiny Image Publishing](#) on 16 Nov 2019 contained a lot of good content, since it is rare to hear a publisher tell us not only what he is looking for - but also why those criteria are so important.

While he was talking about non-fiction Christian publishing in the Christian Living genre, the same principles are largely applicable to secular publishing as well.

If you are considering submitting a manuscript or a book proposal to Destiny Image Publishing, make sure that your work fits their mission statement, viz.

Destiny Image has been called to publish biblically sound, prophetic words to the Body of Christ. To that end, we seek to create a community founded on content that has an anointing to direct, encourage and strengthen the church as a whole

These notes are only edited summaries of this seminar. The way the day went, Larry gave us introductory comments on why writers write and publishers publish, and then went on to talk about the 7 non-negotiable things he looks for when signing up a new author. As he spoke about those 7 green flags he is looking for, he often digressed. Those digressions I have put at the end under General Writing Tips.

Around Jan-Feb 2020 Larry is releasing a course that goes into far more detail than a seminar can accomplish. <https://larrysparksministries.com/> or <https://www.facebook.com/LarrySparksMinistries/> will soon have information about how to access that new course.

Introduction

When people are looking for a book they are seeking a tangible solution to a problem. Your written testimony about how you partnered with God and saw His power to bring breakthrough into your circumstances is valuable because:

- it reveals that God is a good father
- it releases hope to people who previously had no hope
- it contributes to filling the earth with His glory.

Books rarely become key revenue generators, but they are an opening up of a funnel that has the capacity to launch careers and brands.

Readers will want to know what the next step is to take after reading a book. They want to be on the journey with the author.

You must have a clear idea what your book is for and who it is for. Some books deliver nations from evils, some books redeem family bloodlines. Be OK with that, if God's purpose in calling you to write a book, is primarily to help a descendant of yours learn how to partner with God at some point in the future.

Psalm 101 (102):18 *'Put this on record for the next generation, so that a race still to be born can praise God.'*

Do not be afraid of niches, because you need to know what audience your book is written for. Your niche can be far bigger than you think it is.

There are 7 green flags that a publisher needs before committing to publishing a Christian book.

1st Flag: The message has God's burning fire upon it.

It has to be in a subject area that you have authority in, that you come alive in, which contains the core message God is speaking through your life. It has to be a message that you have finished the journey on, and can show someone else the path to the same results. You only have permission to share the process if you also share the solution.

How do you know you have a burning message?

- It may be in your gifts, talents and expertise.
- It may be where you are experiencing a holy irritation as a catalyst/motivator.
- It may be something God has been speaking to you for some time but you are unaware of.

To find it, take some unscheduled time with the Holy Spirit, several hours, a weekend, no longer than that, (because if it is a burning message from God it will carry some urgency) and intentionally ask Him to walk through your history with Him, your journals, your writings, your experiences of Him. Ask Him, what are the 4 most common themes? Pay attention to the memories that have a fire/weightiness upon them. As you ponder them, let the Holy Spirit renew those past encounters with Him in you, and lead you into deeper encounters with Him.

Also ask Him, 'What is the problem I am seeking through writing to solve'? Write down the answers that come to mind and get feedback on them from truth tellers you trust.

2nd Flag: You have identified your core message.

This is what you are most called to write about. Be very true to what God has called you to do, and stick with it. There is grace in your lane. If God decides to open up additional lanes, that is His job, not yours.

Consider what you talk about the most, what you blog about the most, and what most resonates with your readers as expressed through likes and comments.

It is possible to express the one message in many ways e.g. Renew your mind: in family, in business: in relationships.

Even if there are many books on your topic, there is only one you, and how you dealt with that topic is unique to you. However you must study the others in your market, and demonstrate that you present a unique angle and perspective on this topic.

Don't try to be someone else. God gives unique assignments and messages.

3rd Flag: Know your audience.

Learn to be content with the audience God gives you, and let Him grow it.

Visualise in as much detail as possible the type of people who will read your book. Is it primarily for Christians? Is it primarily for non-Christians.

Does it go on the Christian shelf in the bookstore or on the Self Help shelf?

If you try to write for 2 different audiences in the same book, you lose both of them.

If you are on social media or blogging, study what types of people are already in your audience. Ask others you trust to give you feedback on who they think is the best audience

for your writing.

Do not despise the day of small beginnings nor the small niche. Often you will find that small niche is bigger than you expect.

Write for the benefit of your audience and be clear about what the features, advantages and benefits of your book are. Eg Features: This book has 25 chapters on prayer and reflection questions at the end of each chapter. Advantages: What will this book help the end user to do, eg pray with specificity. Benefits: Where this book connects with the reader's life: what it promises to add to the reader's life.

Your blurb must clearly articulate the benefits to potential readers. If you read this book will it change your family? Will it give you a new vision for the possible? What new way of living the Christian life will it give you?

Believe it or not, the primary reason a person picks up a book is not to seek God.

In order of importance, these are the reasons a person picks up a book:

- Does it speak to their current predicament, the immediate problem in their lives (marriage, teens, dieting...)?
- Does it connect with something bigger, more transcendent, reveal the bigger picture?
- Is it concretely applicable? Does it give me the next step/show me how to change the world?

A book like ['The Purpose Driven Life'](#) by Rick Warren covers all three reasons.

Remember: Some books solve the problem of 'I want to learn more about,', and that could be the life of Winston Churchill or how to be a better gardener.

Avoid 2 common ditches:

- The desire to make your book into an autobiography
- To give all teaching and no story or case studies.

Be a practitioner not just a theorist. Aim for a story per chapter, but the story must illustrate the transferable teaching of that chapter.

4th flag: Alignment (Character)

You can't be a lone ranger, and you do need to learn how to activate your endorsements in a healthy way. Identify 3-5 people who will stand with you, and help you get your message out to others, and vice versa.

At all costs protect your heart from opportunism, from relationships for the sake of gain.

I want to publish works from people who have vouch-able characters, subject mastery and theological protection.

There are 4 levels of alignment that I look for, in order of importance:

- Spiritual accountability to mothers and fathers in faith which includes ministry covering.
- The ministry networks with whom you are affiliated.
- Who your spiritual peers are, the people you do life and ministry with, and
- Endorsements from well-known names.

If you are in the right lane, blessing and favour from God will be upon it.

5th flag: Marketing and Building a Platform.

Find the 3 areas where people are currently engaging with you, and build there.

Use your social media accounts to funnel people to those online places you have control over (email list, website, podcast).

Make sure where you build is where your audience is.

Consistency in content builds a voice.

Find out how your audience likes to engage with you: do they prefer audio, video, visual, written? Start with online media where you feel most comfortable first.

Ask for feedback on your social media effectiveness from truth tellers.

Read the 3 star reviews of books in your field of expertise. They will give you very good ideas and help you avoid many pitfalls.

Some messages create demand where previously there was none e.g. James Goll and ['The Seer'](#). It called many people with the prophetic seer gifting 'out of the cave' and gave them and others language to talk about that gifting and realise that they weren't alone.

God may want you to write for the 3% who are early adopters. It won't sell as well as one written for the 70% adopters. Do it anyway. It may be God's plan for your work to open a breach for others to come through after you.

6th flag: Teachability

This has 2 dimensions:

- The ability to receive open and honest correction.
- The ability to be open to co-operation.

Being immovable on things like title and subtitle (eg 'God told me the title has to be') prevents you from getting the best solutions through the collaboration of a team of experts. Make it your goal to produce the best book possible, even if that means relinquishing control over the parts that currently matter most to you or having to re-write your favourite chapter from a different angle.

7th flag: Clear vision of a product funnel

Do you have a vision of the end result of someone reading your book?

What is the journey that you want to take them on?

These days a book functions a lot like a business card, as a way of introducing people to you, your message and your ministry.

Even if you don't yet have a vision for a product funnel, keep communication channels open about it.

A funnel can be broken down into price points:

The entry point is a freebie, something useful to your audience in exchange for their contact details.

The 2nd level is your book, with a price \$9.99-\$26.99.

The 3rd level is a course, an e-course, a coaching programme, anything to keep the conversation and engagement going, at a higher price, at least double the book price.

The 4th level is one-on-one consultations, at the highest price.

General Writing Tips

Become familiar with the traditional and the self-publishing processes.

If you self-publish go as excellent as you can on book cover and editing.

Avoid generic words in your title (e.g. faith, hope, love).

Your first book is often your experimental book, expect to improve in your subsequent books.

Covers need to be visible and clear at thumbnail level.

Traditional publishing normally takes 9-12 months. If you have a shorter than book length message that needs quick release, consider self-publishing, especially if you are a pastor or have a ministry. A 60-70 page message on a single topic that is currently relevant lends itself very well to self-publishing.

•Highly recommended reading:

[Building a Story Brand](#) by Don Miller

[Platform](#) by Michael Hyatt

and [Tribes](#) by Seth Godin

Complexity is the enemy of execution.

Seek to get your elevator pitch down to 90 seconds or less.

Study the top 50 books on Amazon and their subject matter, it will give you valuable insight in to what problems people are seeking solutions for: metrics like that don't lie.

On social media people want to feel like they connect with you.

Research until you find a publisher's mandate that matches your message: and send your manuscript/ book proposal there.

Embed links to your e-books for your website and freebies that feed your email list.

Keep your Introduction short.

Chapter 1 lays out the vision for your book.

Chapter 2 lays out the mission for your book.

Each chapter should have a problem-solution blue-print; even consider treating each chapter like a keynote speech.

Don't let your voice be edited out of the book, keep its unique parts intact.

Pique curiosity in your title.

Check with others that your title does not confuse about its content e.g. Happy Strife has connotations of marriage and wife about it, if that isn't your message, get a more effective title.

Be open to the possibility that you have only been given 1/4 of the book and that you might need to seek testimonies and case studies from others to compile into the book.

Ask God for whether His strategy for the book is just to produce that book, or whether He wants it to be stewarded into a brand.

Ask God to release the discernment you need.

Do not shy away from doing due diligence research, it is part of being faithful to your calling.

Ask Him to release graces of fresh presentation and fresh language for ancient revelation.

God is raising up people who will evangelise through writing; 'writing evangelists'.

'If you want to get published with Destiny Image' Tips

My publishing speciality is in Christian Living books, the kind you find at Cornerstone bookstores. Books I publish must have both testimony/stories of grace AND transferable teaching.

Harrison House is an imprint of Destiny Image that publishes rarer niche messages and shorter ones especially in the charismatic/pentecostal genre.

If your book doesn't fit our publishing mandate, and I believe it will do much better with a different publisher, I will refer your book to them.

Conclusion

Every assignment from God carries with it significance.

If you want to break writer's block, know that the times you write under obedience and cannot feel the flow of grace are just as sacred and blessed as when you do feel that anointed flow.

Be faithful; write the 1st chapter if that is all you have, the other chapters will come.

The outcome of a book is God's business; our task is to be faithful to the assignment He gives us.

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