

## Conquering the Deadly Ds



*He reached down from on high  
and took hold of me;  
he drew me out of deep waters.*

PSALM 18:16, NIV

Computer viruses are scary! “Do *not* open this file; or *everything* on your hard drive will be destroyed, and your drive will be corrupted. This is not a hoax but a deadly virus.”

I don’t know if these messages are hoaxes or not. I’ve been told it’s unwise to pass them along since a virus can be attached to the message. I quickly delete them and pray my virus protection software is doing its job. So far, thank the Lord, my computer is free of deadly viruses.

But what of the deadly viruses that attack my mind and heart? As a Christian who seeks to write his answer, I find I’m especially prone to the virus known as the Deadly Ds.

What are the Deadly Ds? Could you already be infected?

Probably. I don’t know any writers who have a natural immunity to the Deadly Ds of disappointment, discouragement, doubt, and despair.

It all starts when I’m exposed to disappointment. I may bring it on myself by unrealistic expectations. Although I’m certainly not a mathematical genius, even I can comprehend that my odds of acceptance are slim when the *Christian Writers’ Market Guide* says

a periodical is only one percent freelance written or they accept only one or two articles a year. That's why, in the seminar I teach, I emphasize the importance of learning which markets offer the best opportunities for publication. But even submitting to a market that is one hundred percent freelance written doesn't guarantee acceptance.

Someone has said you're not a professional writer until you've received one thousand rejection slips. One thousand! That's a lot of disappointments, especially if, like me, you've struggled all your life with feeling rejected.

Harry Edward Neal, the author of over thirty books, says, "View rejection slips as scout badges, evidence of perseverance and determination." Since I've received three to four thousand [I've stopped counting!], my scout sash is getting mighty heavy. I thank God I've also had over a thousand sales, so my rejection/acceptance ratio isn't bad. I've learned to call them returns, but they still hurt.

"Why, God? Why aren't you opening the doors?" It's a legitimate question; but if we listen closely, we may find the tone of our voice bordering on a whine. Diagnosis? Disappointments have made us vulnerable to discouragement. Left unchecked, doubts will get a stranglehold on us next. Then despair will follow as the Deadly Ds disable us. I know. I've been there.

In chapter 13, "Disappointed but Not Discouraged," we looked at how Jesus handled disappointments. And in chapter 23, "Crisis of Confidence," we learned from the apostle Paul that God-confidence is more important than self-confidence. But there's still more I believe God wants me to say about the third Deadly D, self-doubt.

Although many people in the Bible struggled with self-doubts, I think especially of the prophet Jeremiah. His ministry spanned forty-one years and five kings, but it almost never got off the ground. Known as the reluctant prophet, when God's call came to Jeremiah, he said, "I can't do that! I'm far too young! I'm only a youth!" (Jer. 1:6). Some of us may say, "I'm far too old!" Or "I'm not creative enough!" Or, and this has been the biggie in my life, "I don't have enough education!"

For years I battled, not very successfully, a crushing sense of inferiority because I am not a college graduate. Truth is, I've not had

even one day of college. That used to make me feel terribly ashamed. How presumptuous to think a high school graduate could write for the Lord, much less teach others to write! But then one day someone asked me, “Do you believe God is omnipotent and omniscient?”

“Yes, he is all powerful and all knowing,” I replied. (I have a hard time pronouncing the words she used.)

“And do you believe God has a perfect plan for your life?”

“Yes,” I replied again.

“Then if God, in his omnipotence and omniscience, chose for you not to have a college education, why are you grieving him by coveting what he chose not to give you?”

Never have I been so immediately convicted of sin. Right there in the restaurant, I bowed my head and sought his forgiveness.

A year later, God gave me the opportunity to keynote at a writers’ conference in New York. As I shared this story with my hostess, Jan Wise, it was obvious to her that I still struggled with a sense of lack. We began to pray, but suddenly she stopped. “God has just shown me—you’ve been homeschooled by the Father. And only special kids are homeschooled!”

Education, or lack thereof, may not be an issue for you. But more than likely, there’s something else that feeds your self-doubts. It may be voices from your childhood, the cutting words of a close friend, or perhaps even the put-downs of your spouse. One thing is certain, the Evil One knows where you’re most vulnerable. The more he sees you as a threat, the more fiercely he will attack.

Can we recover from the Deadly Ds? Of course, as long as we submit ourselves to the care of the Great Physician. But we must remember that the virus will always be latent. We need to faithfully follow the Doctor’s orders: “Be careful—watch out for attacks from Satan, your great enemy. He prowls around like a hungry, roaring lion, looking for some victim to tear apart. Stand firm when he attacks. Trust the Lord; and remember that other Christians all around the world [and other Christian writers] are going through these sufferings too. . . . God, who is full of kindness through Christ . . . personally will come and pick you up, and set you firmly in place, and make you stronger than ever” (1 Pet. 5:8-10).



## RESPONDING TO GOD'S CALL TO WRITE

“Do you want to get well?” Jesus asked the man who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years (John 5:6, NIV). “It was not so foolish a question as it may sound,” William Barclay says. “The man had waited for thirty-eight years and it might well have been that hope had died and left behind a passive and dull despair” (*The Gospel of John*, vol. 1, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1975, p. 179).

When we've got a bad case of the Deadly Ds, we may not have the strength or energy to get well. It may be easier just to give in, especially if we're not certain God is calling us to write. (See chapter 4.) But Barclay also says, “When we have intensity of desire and determination to make the effort, hopeless though it may seem, the power of Christ gets its opportunity, and with him we can conquer what for long has conquered us” (p. 180).

To get started on the road to recovery, or prevent a relapse, do a topical Bible study of the following subjects:

*Success vs. disappointment*

*Courage vs. discouragement*

*Faith vs. doubt*

*Hope vs. despair*