
Look to Jesus



Keep your eyes on Jesus, our leader and instructor.

HEBREWS 12:2

We are literature missionaries! While we may never go more than a few hundred miles from our homes, our written words can go around the world and make a difference for all eternity.

The opportunities are great. The importance of looking to Jesus, “our leader and instructor” (Heb. 12:2), is even greater. It is his life and death and resurrection that inspires us to keep on keeping on. He provides the pattern we need to follow if we are to be effective communicators of his truth.

Spend time in prayer. While the Gospels give us only glimpses into Jesus’ prayer life, it is obvious his ministry was bathed in prayer. Prior to his first preaching tour, he got up long before day-break in order to go alone into the wilderness and pray (Mark 1:35). In the midst of a demanding ministry, he “often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer” (Luke 5:16). He even spent an entire night in prayer before choosing his twelve disciples (Luke 6:12).

Jesus’ example shows us that the place to begin all our writing is on our knees. It is essential that we seek the “mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16) if we hope to bring his answer to our hurting world. If we’re too busy to pray, we’re too busy. If we think we

can shirk this necessary first step, we'll find that our words and paragraphs, no matter how well composed, will lack power. Prayer was an essential part of Jesus' preparation for ministry. So, too, it must be for us.

Know what God's Word says and means. The Bible is silent about Jesus' childhood except for the story of his trip to Jerusalem and how he amazed the teachers of the Law with his understanding of the Scriptures (Luke 2:41-47). After his baptism, Jesus used the Scriptures to defeat Satan (Luke 4:1-12). Throughout his ministry, Jesus often referred to the Law and the Prophets. Unlike the religious people of that day, Jesus "spoke as one who knew the truth, instead of merely quoting the opinions of others as his authority" (Luke 4:32).

Unless we daily spend time in God's Word, our understanding of it will be shallow. Our manuscripts will be filled only with our opinions instead of God's truth. It is the Word of God that convicts and changes people as well as prepares them to face the problems and challenges of daily living (Heb. 4:12; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Unless we are hungry for God's Word and partake of it daily, we cannot hope to inspire our readers to take it seriously.

Have a vision. Jesus knew why he had come and what he was called to do. Every word he spoke and everything he did was aimed at bringing glory to the Father (John 17:4). He chose to become "obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Phil. 2:8, NIV).

"Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Prov. 29:18, KJV)—and so do we as writers. We need to wait before the Lord for him to give us direction for our lives and writing ministries. "It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for" (Eph. 1:12, *The Message*).

Don't cut yourself off from people and their needs. Jesus willingly "laid aside his mighty power and glory, taking the disguise of a slave and becoming like men" (Phil. 2:7). Once here, he did not cloister himself in the Holy of Holies. Instead, he walked and talked, laughed, ate, and wept with those around him. He knew their needs because he was one with them.

There is always a danger that the very nature of our work as writers will cause us to become hermits. It takes time to write, but sometimes we spend too much time writing. Our lives may get out

of balance. (See chapter 5.) We need to remember that our words will become glib and empty if we lose touch with people and their needs.

Know your audience and find ways to communicate effectively. Jesus used down-to-earth illustrations from everyday life—a man sowing in his field, a woman baking bread, a widow giving two small coins. He used these examples to bring home his points. Parables, or stories, became Jesus' vehicle for teaching truth on many levels. Even the youngest child could understand the story of the prodigal son or the good Samaritan, yet the depth of these stories and their application to our lives continue to be discovered.

We, too, must know our audience. Are our potential readers young or old? Male or female? Single or married? High school or college graduates? Will the illustrations we use have meaning for them? Are we training ourselves to observe what is happening around us and using these observations to make our points effectively? Are we learning to show instead of tell—in other words, to effectively use stories to present our message?

Jesus used everyday language. His listeners didn't have to be scholars to understand what he was saying. Are we addressing our readers at their level of understanding, being careful not to write down to them but neither to write above their heads? Is our language clear and easy to understand? Most important of all, are we trusting in the mighty power that is present "in the simple message of the cross of Christ" (1 Cor. 1:17); or have we been cluttering it up to impress our readers with our theological prowess and exegetical expertise?

Learn to persist. Some of our work, like that of the most gifted authors, will be rejected. Yet again, we need to look to the Lord and his example.

Jesus' very life's work was rejected by the people he came to save (John 1:10-11). Because it was no easier for Jesus than it is for us, he understands and "is wonderfully able to help us" (Heb. 2:18; cf. Heb. 2:17; 4:15). Beyond that, he has given us his promise that in and through him we will do even greater things than he did (John 14:12). As we ask him for help and seek to follow his example, our writing and our lives will be an inspiration to others.



RESPONDING TO GOD'S CALL TO WRITE

What priority do I give to prayer? (See Psalm 5:3; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17.)

What priority do I give to God's Word? (See Psalm 1:2; James 1:22-25.)

Have I sought the Lord for a vision for my writing? If so, am I walking in obedience to that vision? (See Psalm 25:4-5.)

How much am I in touch with people and their needs? (See Philippians 2:4.)

How often do I rewrite each manuscript until it is my very best work with no wasted words or weak phrases? (See 2 Timothy 2:15.)

Am I willing to persist, or do I expect the Lord to somehow make it easy? (See Hebrews 10:36.)