

In Dry Times



*But O my soul, don't be discouraged.
Don't be upset. Expect God to act!
For I know that I shall again have plenty of reason
to praise him for all that he will do.*

PSALM 42:11

“I’ll never run out of ideas,” I’ve often said. With a file drawer full of notes and manuscripts in various stages of completion, I felt certain that periods of dryness, or writer’s block, which I heard other writers complain about, would not affect me. But then something happened that was far worse. I felt empty inside!

The Evil One began to fill me with doubts. “You so often fail to live as a Christian,” he whispered in my ear. “How can you expect to help others? You’re nothing but a hypocrite. You have no business trying to be a writer.”

Every time I sat down at my desk, I got a tension headache. Increasingly I began to dread facing the work I had always loved to do. “Maybe it is time to quit,” I said to my husband one evening. “I’m willing to work hard and face rejection, but if I don’t have anything to share. . .”

Paul put his arms around me. “You’ll feel inspired again. I know you will.”

“But what if God doesn’t want me to write anymore?”

The phone rang. It was an editor asking me to write a series of

devotionals. My heart pounded with excitement. An assignment on a Sunday evening from an editor, right after I had questioned my call. It couldn't be a coincidence! I thanked God for showing me that my writing ministry wasn't over.

With new enthusiasm I sat down at my typewriter the next morning, but still I felt empty. Ideas wouldn't flow. I turned to the discouraging task of resubmitting manuscripts. As I plodded along, the whispers grew more intense. "You're a failure. You don't have what it takes. God can't use you."

I couldn't get to sleep that night. I tried praying, but God seemed distant. Suddenly I remembered something Lee Roddy told me when I was struggling to complete my first book. "You're listening to the wrong voice, Marlene," he said.

The burden began to lift as I thought of Lee's words and the Scriptures that point to Satan as the father of lies. He is the Christian writer's great adversary. He is intent on destroying our writing ministries, our homes, our lives.

"But God," I prayed, "it's sometimes so hard to discern your voice. The enemy's whispers seem so true. I *do* fail to respond to situations in Christlike ways—to practice what I preach. It's easy to believe those failures make me unworthy to share your Word."

"Condemnation is the work of the Evil One," God reminded me. "My Spirit brings conviction of sin and the strength to overcome him. I know you're not perfect. None of the people I use are perfect. They are willing people. Are you still willing, Child?"

"Oh yes, Lord," I said as I fervently prayed I would again experience the anointing of his Spirit. "Please speak to me so that I can write the words you want me to write."

The next day my writer's block lifted. Sentences began to flow—not in perfect form or structure—but then that never has been my experience. I always spend a lot of time rewriting and editing. But, praise God, I again had words to rewrite and edit!

Since then I've experienced other times of dryness. They seem almost cyclical, like the droughts that periodically occur in nature. I know God allows these times in my life to teach me valuable lessons about the importance of letting my roots grow down into him (Col. 2:7). And so, I endeavor to follow his drought emergency instructions in James 4:6-10:

1. Humble yourself before the Lord and ask him to remove any false pride (v. 6). Affirm anew that he is the Source of your creativity.
2. “Submit yourselves, then, to God” (v. 7, NIV). *The NIV Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* reads: “Be ye subject therefore to God.” The Greek word for “subject,” *hupotasso*, is “primarily a military term, to rank under” according to *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. We need to remember that God is not our buddy or our errand boy. Rather, “all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church” (Col. 1:16-18, NIV).
3. “Resist the devil” (v. 7, NIV). Put on the helmet of salvation (Eph. 6:17) to protect your mind from the Evil One’s accusations. Pick up the shield of faith to “extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one” (Eph. 6:16, NIV).
4. “Come near to God” (v. 8, NIV). Whether you feel his presence or not, spend an increased amount of time in prayer and in his Word. To stop your mind from wandering, pray aloud or write down your prayers. You might also want to read Scripture aloud. Grab hold of the promise: “Forever, O Lord, your Word stands firm in heaven. Your faithfulness extends to every generation, like the earth you created; it endures by your decree, for everything serves your plans” (Ps. 119:89-91).
5. “Grieve, mourn and wail” (v. 9, NIV) over the ways you fail the Lord. Ask him to make you a cleansed vessel through which his power can flow.
6. “Realize your worthlessness before the Lord” and allow him to “lift you up, encourage and help you” (v. 10).

I praise God for the way “he lifted me out of the pit of despair, out from the bog and the mire, and set my feet on a hard, firm path and steadied me as I walked along. He has given me a new song to sing, of praises to our God. Now many will hear of the glorious things he did for me, and stand in awe before the Lord, and put their trust in him” (Ps. 40:2-3).



RESPONDING TO GOD'S CALL TO WRITE

Expand on the drought emergency instructions by using a concordance to find additional Scriptures for these key words and phrases:

Humility

Submission

Resist the Evil One

Draw near to God

Repentance

Forgiveness