



Dipping the Quill

Writing News from Author J.D. Winger

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At the risk of repeating myself, “Who hit the Pause button?” In all honesty, this year feels more like someone pressed the Reset button. This time last year, I was focusing on a potential publishing contract with a small traditional publishing house, printing of a new compilation Bible Study, and moving my career forward. 2020 instead brought a rejection in the final selection, a few articles, no in-person networking or writer’s conferences, and lots of self-doubt. Not that my Christian writing came to a halt, but it took a sabbatical.

The mixture of agony and frustration from coming “so close” to a traditional publishing contract took more wind from my sails than I realized. And even though I attempted to write more new material, my confidence was waning. With that realization, I took a few months off from writing over the summer and focused on myself, my family, and our little world here at the Cross-Dubya ranch. There are always plenty of chores, repairs, and new projects that need my attention, so it wasn’t hard. I maintained my weekly blogging commitment, but I sat other writing plans aside.

Between projects, I worked to improve my writing. Not developing new manuscripts, but in seeking God’s guidance for where He wanted me to go and what He wanted me to do. I read more, investigated different genres to see what I might learn from them, and improved my writing skill. Learning rather than doing paid dividends. My storytelling has improved; and also

my manuscript organization and planning abilities. Grammar? I suspect it will always be a work in progress.

I have made progress on two writing goals. One is finding a literary agent to represent me; the other is growing my author platform. I've not signed with an agent or agency, but I have done enough investigation, soul-searching, and praying to eliminate several who others recommended or appeared inviting. Something I discovered about myself in the process is what's most important to my Christian writing efforts. It isn't to see my name on the cover of a book at Barnes & Noble, but help someone find or develop a closer relationship with God.

While writing and publishing is a business, I've recognized that my rewards should not be financial but eternal. What's most important to me is honoring God's calling to be a Christian writer and helping me and others grow in Christ. It's not about the number of books I sell, but the number of lives I impact. This may not be the most effective sales pitch to a prospective agent, but it's important to me. I continue praying for an agent who understands this and can help me achieve our common goals through my Christian writing career.

Even though industry pundits seem to keep moving the goal posts on how you define author platform, efforts to increase my platform's reach are working. Despite all the challenges of 2020, I've seen a 48 percent increase in the number of monthly visitors to my author website this year. I've also maintained an 87 percent blog penetration rate (the number of viewers to my website who read my blog). I'm most grateful for the 34 percent year-to-date increase in subscribers to my site. The number that humbles me is how I continue to see over 20 percent of my subscribers respond to my blog by leaving comments each week; with many others sharing it via social media.

Author platform numbers are important in deciding who gets represented, published, etc. Agents and publishers key on this data. I don't think the quantity is what should matter most. My platform is less about how many email addresses I've collected via my website, and more about the relationship I'm building with each one of you. Naïve perhaps, but having a 1.8 percent Twitter™ and 85 percent Facebook™ engagement rate averages show how what I have to say is worth the time it takes my friends and followers to read it. Social media sites continue to restrict and sometimes censor the information they allow; and they're making constant changes in how they measure it. For all its challenges, this medium gives Christian authors the ability to reach more people with God's salt and light than we have without it. With all its negatives, social media gives authors another way for prospective followers and readers to learn about them as persons.

I'll end with my sincere thanks for your willingness to engage, encourage, and share in this wonderful journey to become a Christian author. I pray God continues to bless you, your families, and our nation. Please reach out with any comments, suggestions, or prayer requests; that's what friends are for. I would appreciate your inviting family and friends to subscribe to my website (blog, newsletter, or both) so I can continue increasing those platform numbers to the point I can attract interest from the publishing world.

God's blessings...



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