

Dr. John I Penn

An interview by James Daniel

I have always thought of being a writer and after a long career in business, I wanted something different. I want to be an inspirational writer. I choose this genre because of my love for people and a desire to be an inspirational force in their lives. I am a student at Kennesaw State University graduating in May of this year. As a part of an assignment in one of my writing classes, I choose to interview Dr. Penn because one of his books was an inspiration to me and I felt he had something to offer me and other aspiring writers. This was a telephone interview with Dr. Penn on a Friday evening a few days ago.

The Writer

Dr. John I
Penn, an
inspiration





al writer is a retired minister, he holds several degrees, a BS in music education from the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, a Master of Theology

from Oral Roberts University, a Master of Divinity from Eastern Baptist Seminary (now Palmer Theological Seminary), and a Doctor of Ministry from Wesley Theological Seminary. Dr. Penn has been writing since 1986 and is the author of eight books. He writes inspirational books for both children and adults. He and his wife Gloria are partners in John and Gloria Penn Ministry. In this interview with Dr. Penn where we discussed his writing career, I learned what I think is the most important thing "to write you have to have a passion".

Beginnings

He writes and teaches on the subjects found in his books. In our interview session, I asked him how he began his writing career, the answer surprised me. He related a story about a situation that took



place when he was an Associate Pastor of a large predominately white United Methodist Church. During a staff meeting, he made a suggestion that they should do a study on healing and wholeness that for some reason caused the pastor to take offense saying "there would be no healing in this church". Dr. Penn felt that he had been disrespected and offended because of his suggestion.

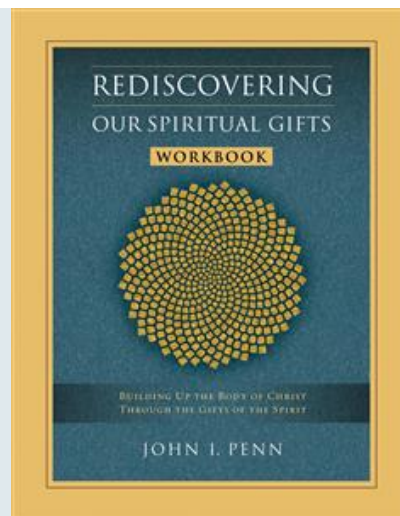
"We were in a church and you can't talk about healing"? After some contemplation, this drove him to take a leave of absence where he began researching the subject that he presented to that pastor. The result of that research was a booklet covering the subject of healing. Dr. Penn says that because of this incident, he started writing out of a purpose or challenge to show that healing is significant within the life of the church. The booklet was well-received after languishing for a while because of the attitudes about healing in the church at that time. That all changed and he believed that God began to use that little booklet in the furtherance of his gospel. In the conference of churches that his church belonged the booklet was given to all new pastors beginning their ministry. During that time he was chosen to go all over the United States and many parts of the world teaching the importance of healing and wholeness to the church.

What it Takes

When asked what it takes to be a writer in the inspiration niche Dr. Penn says, You have to have a passion for writing, for any field of writing but for this field, you also have to have inspiration from the Holy Spirit". The first full-fledged book he wrote



was "*Rediscovering Our Spiritual Gifts*". I asked him about the process of writing and getting that book published. He replied that the book was published by Upper Room and at that time he was working at that organization. He said further, "you know you have to be open to the Holy Spirit", and that the inspiration and the guidance needed for the writing of that book came from the Holy Spirit which made it a joy to write.



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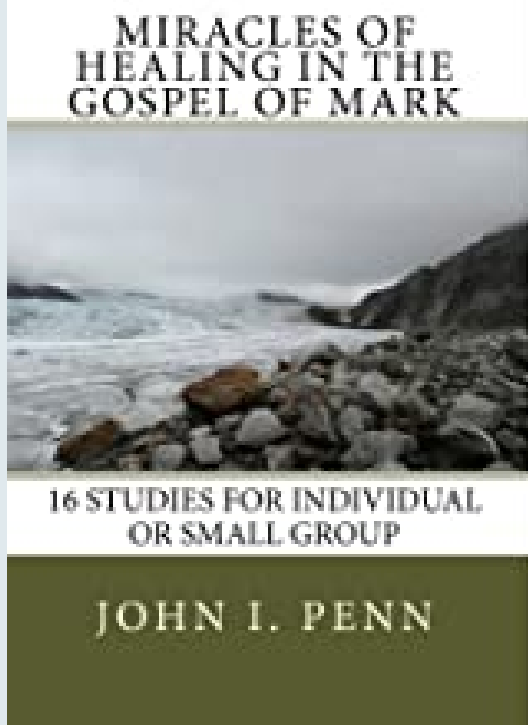
Dr. John I Penn

The Process

Talking about another book *["The Miracles of Healing in the Gospel of Mark"](#)*, "it took me nine months to write that book and I was standing up the whole time I was writing, using one of those adjustable desks and it was pure joy". He said that he was inspired to write that book, that he was inspired to go in a certain direction because he wanted to write a book about healing for about two years and couldn't come up with the inspiration on his own. He took a course in healing and started doing research discovering that a lot about healing was found in the Gospel of Mark.

Continuing about his writing process, he begins with research and he stresses that it is important. He does the research and gathers the bibliographical information and places that on cards. He told me that in the last few years he's collected books that he knows will give him a lot of information on the subjects he writes about. He has





perfected the process of researching and writing at the same time. He encourages new writers to do research first because it might lead to realizing that it's not taking you in the direction you want to go. He says, "if the research supports what you want to do then go ahead". However, he doesn't think that researching and writing simultaneously is for every writer.

Talking about his books he stated that his books have grown out of each other that one leads to another. When asked about how long it takes to write a book he stated that his longest time was that nine months spending eight to twelve hours a day. "Writing energizes me and the beauty of it is following the inspiration of the Holy Spirit".

In my next question, I wanted to know if going through the process of writing and publishing his first book change his writing process. He says it didn't but that at times the publishing process can be a nightmare. He stressed that publishers will often take a long time to decide to publish a work or not but, as a writer, if you really feel passionate about your work and want it published, self-publishing may be a route to take, which he has done a few times. He feels that publishers try to play it safe at times, especially when the world is in a situation like now.



He talked about editing and how tedious the process is and how sometimes the editors want to cut out parts of your manuscript that you think are vital to the work, that you should fight to keep it. When submitting a manuscript you only submit maybe the first two chapters and a table of contents along with a sort of "pitch" telling why "this book" should be published, how it will be received by the public, and the demographics of the potential reading audience, these questions when answered helps the publisher decide if the book should be published. Dr. Penn's least favorite part of the publishing process is the length of time it takes before your work is finally published. Once the publisher decides to publish he submits the entire manuscript which goes to an editor. The times that publishers decline to publish, he has paid for an editor to edit and then self-published, but under normal circumstances, he says you wouldn't do that. Dr. Penn stresses that you should always have someone that you can call on to read your manuscript critically, don't just write to please yourself if you don't go through the publishing process.

The "Proverbial Question"

When asked about writer's block Dr. Penn laughed, he says he's never experienced it but said that at some point in the writing process you feel as if you are not going in the right direction and have to change directions even after you've written two or three chapters you may have to change and start all over again following the right inspiration.



“Never let anyone discourage you or tell you that you can’t write”

Dr. John I Penn

The Message

Asked about his message to beginning writers he said to get a publisher if you think the work has merit and is a significant piece for an audience, don't just let it sit around publish it if a publisher won't do it, do it yourself but getting a publisher should be your first choice. Look at what a publisher is publishing before approaching make sure it's a good fit. Then he says to find your niche, your passion, pray about it, find what you want to convey, and find your audience. Lastly he says, "don't let anybody tell you that you can't write" while in seminary one minister told him he could write, "never let anyone discourage you, continue writing, it's a process and over time you will find your voice, just keep writing, you will keep getting better".

Conclusions



Being a professional writer is not easy but it can be rewarding. Remember to choose your niche, follow your inspiration, have a passion, and “don’t let anyone tell you you can’t write.” This has been a most rewarding experience, the entire process of the interview and the process of developing it into an article.

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