

The Christian Communicator Newsletter (March 1994)

A Seasoned Writer's Counsel to a New Writer... An Interview with Max Lucado

At the Praise Gathering hosted by Bill and Gloria Gaither in Indianapolis, Max Lucado wove together biblical threads to teach about the tenderness of Christ. He demonstrated not only a God-given sensitivity to emotional and spiritual needs, but also a deep personal intimacy with the Good Shepherd.

After his teaching, I got to interview him!

I asked about his success as a writer, referring to the *Christianity Today* magazine poll that named him one of the most admired Christian authors in their 1992.

He said, "I was grateful and surprised. There are other people who can communicate more effectively. I am grateful my writing connects with people."

My second question was why it was important for him to be a writer. He said, "Writing often reaches people at a vulnerable time in their lives. If somebody comes to a church to hear me speak, he may be there because he wants to be, or he may be there because someone talked him into coming. But if an individual reads a book of mine, he has gone through the necessary steps to either purchase the book or borrow it. He has paid a price for this kind of communication. This person is tuned in. That's why writing is such a powerful medium—because it's personal."

Lucado continued, "When I speak in front of a large audience of 800-1000 people, I try to make it personal. However, I can't make it as personal as writing. The letter's I've received from readers often begin with the phrase, 'I feel like I know you.' That's not because of me. That's because writing is a very personal medium.

“Every leader, whom I have ever known, is a reader. Not every reader is a leader, but every leader is a reader. So, if you want to speak to leaders, how do you do it since it’s hard to get busy leaders together? The best way is through writing books.”

“Can you think of other ways your books help people?” I asked.

“The effect of the book doesn’t depend on the author’s mood that day. Let me explain. Last night, I arrived in the Indianapolis Airport feeling tired and cranky after a long day. If somebody had sat down by me and asked for help, I’d probably felt like kicking him! However, somewhere last night, someone may have sat down and read one of my books. I am at my best in print and that person would have been touched and encouraged.”

“Has writing broadened your opportunities for ministry?” I asked, rather in awe.

He affirmed with an enthusiastic, “Yes!”

Then I asked if writing was easy for him. “It’s tough. There’s nothing easy about it. It’s enjoyable when it’s done, but like Tim Kimmel says, ‘The process is like giving birth to barbed wire.’ If someone comes up and says, ‘Max, writing is easy for me; I immediately suspect the quality of the writing. Writing is easy, but GOOD writing is tough.’”

As a new writer, I was curious about the process he goes through to bring a piece of writing from the beginning stages to publication. I asked if his descriptions flowed freely as he creates, or does he need to go back, hammering out every detail.

“Twelve or thirteen edits are done before sending it to the publisher and after that, well....!”

But was this famous writer ever rejected? If so, how did he handle it?

His first book, *On the Anvil: Thoughts on Being Shaped in God’s Image* (Tyndale, 1995), is a compilation of articles written for his church newsletter. When several people

encouraged him to get them published, he sent out eighteen query letters. Seventeen were rejects but the eighteenth was the open door that launched his writing career. Reflecting on his first book, he said, “Hmm. This could use some work.”

Since that time, ten books and numerous articles have been published. His favorite thus far is his second book *No Wonder they Call Him Savior*. It was his favorite because it proved to him that he was not a one-book author.

When asked how he comes up with topics for his books, he said, “I am a preacher before I am a writer. My writing comes out of sermons. If I write a book on a topic, it’s because I thought my church needed to hear it.”

The turning point in his life came during his second year at Abilene Christian University. “I realized...if God is the God he claims to be, he must be able to forgive all my past. There aren’t any gray areas when it comes to God’s grace. Either you know grace, or you don’t.”

“Please tell me about this quote,” I said. “Control your gift of writing. Don’t let your gift control you.”

Without hesitation, he shared that the past year has been the most stressful year of his life. He pastors Oak Hills Church of Christ in San Antonio, Texas, meets publishing deadlines, speaks nationally, and hosts a fifteen minute daily radio program called “UP Words,” aired in over 100 stations. Because of the high stress, he struggles with insomnia and has had to cut back considerably on speaking engagements.

Relationships and accountability within his home church are vital to him. “It’s easy to come to places like this, where people look to you as a celebrity, rather than who you really are.”

Max shared that he spends more of his time in prayer now than ever before. His deepened prayer life began in 1983 when he was a church planting missionary to Brazil. “When you’re on

the mission field, there's often no one else to talk to but the Lord. One's prayer life is bound to deepen there."

To Max Lucado, writing is a tool from the hand of God to reach the lost and hurting for Christ.