

DECEMBER 2024 - JANUARY 2025

THE CHRISTIAN writer

SEE INSIDE FOR

Upcoming Events

• NZCW Retreat, 1-4 May 2025 Whitianga

Book Reviews:

Today in Paradise by Andrew Corin

The Journey of my Broken Soul
by Jemka Rogers

Award Winning Short Story:

God my Heavenly Husband and Father
by Verna McFelin

Articles including:

Songwriting DIY – New Column
by Felicity Logan

How to Structure a (Non-Fiction) Book
by Clive McKegg

Artificial Intelligence, it has to be Right!
by Errol Thompson

Poetry, Notices, Celebrations,
Competitions and more!

A magazine of NZ Christian Writers



Mission: *Connecting Christian writers in New Zealand.*

Vision: *To encourage and inspire Christian writers throughout New Zealand.*

Values: *Christian faith, God's Word, professionalism, quality and social outreach.*

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Editor and Membership Secretary: Kathryn Paul: editor@nzchristianwriters.org

For magazine contributions, address changes and membership queries.

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Book Review Requests: (current members only)

Mail a copy of your book to our Book Reviewer, Julia Martin

286 Karapiro Road, RD 4, Cambridge 3496 or email: reviews@nzchristianwriters.org

The Christian Writer is our bimonthly magazine published by NZ Christian Writers and distributed to all members. Contributions from members are always welcome. If you have some advice, encouragement, or an announcement of an event of interest to members, do send it to the editor for consideration by the 10th of the month before the next publication date. Submissions should be emailed as a word document attachment and be no more than 500 words long, except at the discretion of the editor.

The editor reserves the right to condense and/or edit any contributions for reason of space. Ideas and opinions will not be edited but editing of a technical nature may occur to maintain a high standard of writing. Views and opinions expressed do not necessarily state or reflect those of the editor.

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This issue printed locally by

BookPrint.
Making Bookshop Quality Easy

Contact David at
hello@bookprint.co.nz
09 443 1775
www.bookprint.co.nz

The Christian Writer

Dec 2024 – Jan 2025

ISSN 2537-8708 (Online)

VOL 41. No 6

ISSN 1171-0098 (Print)

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Website: Our user-friendly website is full of helpful information, such as details of seminars and copies of past magazines. It gives each member an online presence. Feel free to share our website link with other Christian writers so they can join us. Our members are the best advocates for growing our collective of NZ Christian Writers. www.nzchristianwriters.org

President's Report



Producing our Dec 2024-Jan 2025 magazine is an exciting time of year when we get to reflect on the year that has been and look forward to what is to come. It's a season of celebration and congratulations for many of our members, especially those who have progressed their creative writing from draft manuscript to published work. May each of you experience the rewarding feeling of honouring God with what He has called you to do. Our prayer at NZ Christian Writers is that your story will be used for His glory. May Jesus be glorified and honoured through the gift of writing He has given to each of our members.

We are now 20 per cent full for our Retreat 2025, and the retreat registrations keep coming in. If you've been considering whether you should attend, then this is the sign you've been waiting for! In our faith journey, we sometimes see signs and wonders. This is the **SIGN**, and it's made you wonder. We had a fully booked retreat in 2023 and we anticipate another packed out retreat for 1-4 May 2025. Our attendees often reflect back on the worthwhile connections, fellowship, and friendships fostered during our retreat experiences. Our Board has curated a wide variety of seminars and workshops all to be hosted at the stunning venue of Flaxmill Retreat Centre in Whitianga. I highly encourage you to secure your place, avoid any disappointment from booking too late, and give yourself the gift of a retreat experience with like-minded writers. View the registration details and online form available here: www.nzchristianwriters.org/retreat-2025/ and book today.



Congratulations to our end-of-year competition winners. Our brilliant Competition Coordinator, Debbie McDermott, has once again done an incredible role, together with our competition judges. I also want to thank our Magazine Editor, Kathryn Paul, who has done exceptionally well to ensure we prepare and publish a quality magazine for our members. Debbie and Kathryn, you truly serve the Lord with excellence and NZ Christian Writers is blessed by your involvement. Thanks to those who have also volunteered to help us go from strength to strength. We are grateful to have you as part of the team.

Thank you to member and photographer, Elaine Dixon, who has contributed the beautiful photo featured on the front cover of this edition of *The Christian Writer*. Elaine, it's a real blessing to be able to showcase your gift in photography.

On behalf of the Board of NZ Christian Writers, may you each have a fantastic Christmas together with family and friends, and anticipate a reflective and restful start to the New Year season.

Be blessed

Justin St Vincent

Editorial: Love Never Fails

by Kathryn Paul



I'm currently experiencing moments of sadness due to the passing of my 95-year-old father during October. But the sadness is covered by strong rejoicing because I had the amazing blessing of leading him in the salvation prayer during September. This felt quite surreal considering he had been a tough atheist. But his decision was the real deal. I had been his home carer for two months before he needed to be admitted into a rest home and I was standing on God's promise that 'love never fails'. I hope to publish my story of his testimony in the future.

I keep thanking the Lord for His amazing ability to strategise circumstances. Looking back I can see how many details of my life, particularly during the past two years, led up to the winning of my dad's soul to Jesus Christ. I'm grateful for the countless prayers of so many over the years for my dad. My son mentioned at the funeral how God demonstrated His great patience, waiting so long for his grandad to come to Him. My dad was a Christian for a month and then the Lord took him home.

For the past two years I've been working at the kumara farms to be close to where my dad was living. But I've now started a new job close to where I live in Maungaturoto. I'm still in agriculture and I'm learning all about flower bulbs, working for Bulbs Direct. If you order some flower bulbs online from Bulbs Direct in Northland, it's possible I may have lifted them from the fields for you.

I had a go at entering the Level Three writing competition for this edition. I didn't place but it was a good assignment as it motivated entrants to think about how to write to someone and share the gospel. I encourage you to read the placed entries and give this assignment a go yourself, just for the experience. You never know how it might help you when it's necessary to communicate with someone for real.

Keep reading and obeying God's Word, keep praying, keep writing, keep sharing God's love through words and actions. All the effort is worth it because He keeps His promise that His love never fails.

With love in Jesus,
from Kathryn

*I love to hear from our readers! Email:
editor@nzchristianwriters.org*



Notices

NZCW Christian Writers' Retreat at Whitianga 1-4 May 2025

The confirmed dates for our Retreat in Whitianga are: **Thursday 1 May to Sunday 4 May 2025**. Costs include accommodation, catering and workshops. Bookings are currently available at the same 'price-freeze' rates as Retreat 2023. Register your place at the Retreat now by clicking this link: <https://www.nzchristianwriters.org/retreat-2025/>

Local Writers Group Leaders Wanted

If you are willing to host a writers group in your area please get in touch. To find out more details email Justin at president@nzchristianwriters.org or Kathryn at editor@nzchristianwriters.org

Book Reviews Criteria

Members are welcome to request a book review of any of their published books, whether recently released or not. The main criterion is the book has to have some Christian relevancy. For more information on how to have your book reviewed in *The Christian Writer* please refer to page two.

Join the NZ Christian Writers Group on Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/newzealandchristianwriters>

Creative Writing/Article Writing Submissions Wanted Please

You are invited to send your relevant contributions for our magazines, *The Christian Writer* and *Young Christian Writer*. See page two for details and email to editor@nzchristianwriters.org.

South Island Christian Book Authors Network

Meetings are quarterly and are specifically offered to those interested in writing a Christian book or who have published a book. For meeting details contact facilitator: Verna McFelin at verna.mcfelin@gmail.com.

Raising Godly Mothers Magazine

If you are an older mother who would like to write an article for future issues of *Raising Godly Mothers* or if you are a young mother who is struggling, please contact Shing at rgm@rgm.co.nz. For information or to subscribe to the magazine visit: www.rgm.co.nz

Warning! Scammer Alert!

Please remember no one from NZ Christian Writers is authorised to email members asking for money or other forms of help. Check for fake email addresses as the scammers like to pretend to be one of us. Do not reply to the scammers' emails; simply ignore them.

To locate and read past magazine issues visit www.nzchristianwriters.org/magazines and click on the relevant magazine cover.

MAY 1st-4th 2025

Flaxmill Retreat Centre | Whitianga


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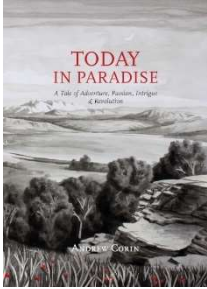


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Today in Paradise

By Andrew Corin

Review by Julia Martin

Published by Cornerstone Ventures NZ 2024

Written by a Tauranga medical doctor, this remarkable work of historical fiction is the result of intensive research, advice from experts, and visits to the Holy Land.

The author describes his book as ‘a story of human values which transcend borders – geographical, religious, gender and social.’

The protagonist, named Judah, starts out as a poor four-year-old Jewish boy in Bethlehem who witnesses the brutal murder of baby boys, including his one-year-old brother, Eli, by King Herod’s barbaric orders, attempting to eliminate the new baby king of the Jews.

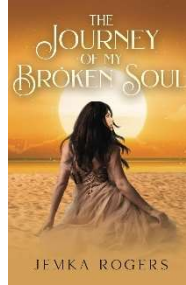
This horrendous event sets Judah on a path of bitterness, revenge and self-discovery.

Disillusioned with his life and circumstances, Judah joins a mixed terrorist group bent on punishing the Roman occupiers of his land.

During his traumatic wilderness journey his path intersects several times with the ‘revolutionary rabbi from Nazareth.’ Initially, Judah despises Jesus because he promotes peace and forgiveness rather than hatred and rebellion. But after observing some of his miracles and experiencing a personal encounter with the Messiah, Judah’s outlook on life changes and gradually leads to redemption, forgiveness and personal freedom.

The story comes to a stunning conclusion with a climax I was not expecting. It’s not easy reading, but with perseverance I was richly rewarded by an inspiring story that reveals the history, culture and customs of the times.

I thoroughly recommend this book to readers who enjoy well-researched historical fiction that seeks to explain the social, economic, political and religious tensions of ancient times while still remaining relevant to our contemporary society today.



The Journey of my Broken Soul

By Jemka Rogers

Review by Julia Martin

Self-Published with Amazon.co.au 2024

With honesty and transparency Jemka reveals the traumas and trials she has experienced in life, along with the lessons learned and wisdom gained which she desires to share with readers of her book.

Jemka’s journey of her ‘broken soul’ began as a five-year-old in Te Aroha when she and her two older siblings were abruptly snatched away from their Muslim father by their Catholic mother. Her life thereafter was often difficult and challenging with hardship, serious health issues, accidents, grief, broken relationships and business failures.

In her teens Jemka became a follower of Jesus Christ. Her spiritual journey over the years involved mountain top experiences involving miracles and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, followed by low times of disappointment, disillusionment, and despair.

She writes: ‘Looking over my journeys through the mountains and the valleys, I have concluded that the only stable thing in my life is God Himself. People come and go. Things are given and taken away. Life brings ups and downs but He is stable in all His ways. To trust Him ultimately above all else, is the wisest thing a man or woman can do.’

Jemka claims she felt compelled and inspired to write this book to encourage and activate people in their faith, love, hope and trust in the Lord. I believe she has achieved her goal.

Jemka chose to self-publish her manuscript with the aid of an online agency, and while self-publishing is a great option for writers, professional editing is most important.

The Pro-Lifers

by Julia Martin

According to God's Word, the Bible, every human being is a unique masterpiece made in the image and likeness of God and has the inviolable right to life, regardless of circumstances.

In the Old Testament book of Exodus, we read the account of five pro-life women who were willing to take extreme risks to preserve the sanctity of human life while living in a culture of death.

After dwelling in Egypt for hundreds of years as Hebrew foreigners, Jacob's family of 70 who had moved there from Canaan to avoid famine, had increased enormously and were now posing a potential threat to a new Pharaoh who knew nothing of their history and background.

In response to their burgeoning numbers, he turned them into slaves and ruthlessly oppressed them. Despite their harsh mistreatment, the Hebrews multiplied and grew stronger and more numerous. As a result, Pharaoh resorted to the horrific strategy of limiting their numbers by ordering the death of their baby boys.

Two of the Hebrew midwives named Shiphrah and Puah were summoned by Pharaoh and given the strict instructions to murder the baby boys at birth. These courageous women however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt ordered. A second time they were summoned for an explanation as to why they had disobeyed Pharaoh's command. At great personal risk they lied to the king because they chose to obey God's higher law of preserving human life. The midwives' brave action; however, only temporarily halted Pharaoh's extermination plans. He next instructed his people to throw the Hebrew baby boys into the river Nile.

During this dangerous time, baby Moses was born to God-fearing parents – Jochebed and Amram.

By faith his parents hid him for three months and then constructed a waterproof basket and placed Moses inside, floating among the reeds of the Nile. Older sister Miriam was entrusted with the task of playing nearby to keep guard over her baby brother.

As God is sovereign over circumstances, he had a plan for Moses. Not by random chance but by God's direction, Pharaoh's daughter came to bathe in the river and the baby in the basket was discovered. She recognised immediately that he was a Hebrew baby doomed to die, but she had pity on him and was determined to spare his life and rear him as her own son, regardless of her father's wicked intentions.

When young Miriam saw what had happened, she courageously approached the princess and suggested a nurse (her mother) who could feed and care for the baby. The deal was done and Jochebed was reunited with her child and given the paid privilege of rearing her precious son for the first few years of his life before handing him over to Pharaoh's daughter in the palace.

God rewarded these five pro-life women for believing in the sanctity of human life and showing incredible courage by defying the schemes of a wicked ruler. He gave the midwives families of their own, and the princess now had a son she longed for. Miriam later became her brother Moses's right-hand assistant in their wilderness journey, while Jochebed had the pleasure of nurturing her infant son and preparing him for the awesome role God had for him later in life.

As the Psalmist wrote: 'Children are a blessing and gift from the Lord.' Psalm 127:3.



RGM
Raising Godly Mothers

ISSUE 1 WINTER 2023

NEW ZEALAND CHRISTIAN MOTHERS MAGAZINE

RGM
Raising Godly Mothers

Inspired by Titus 2:3-5, RGM is dedicated to providing inspiring and insightful content that nourishes the hearts and minds of Christian homeschooling mothers in N.Z.

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NZ CHRISTIAN
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CATALOGUE

A massive thank you to Fiona and Alan Murray, who have, together, prepared the NZ Christian Writers Members' Books Catalogue 2024. Click the image above to view over 200 NZCW members' books available for sale.

Wonder

Prayer of Praise by Lesley Edgeler

Lord, we often wonder about things, people, places and the times we live in. You gave us the ability to wonder. We sing about Your wonderful name, the wonder of it all, You being our wonderful Saviour.

Yet do we stop to ponder about the contents of Your Word? Those who speak of the wonders You performed, are still performing and will ultimately perform as Your return draws near?

The psalmists: Asaph, David, Solomon and others all proclaim Your marvellous works.

You are the God who does wonders; You have declared Your strength among the peoples.

For You are great and do wondrous things; You alone are God.

Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only does wondrous things.

A rainbow reminds us of the promise You made to Noah; a spider can spin intricate webs; a chameleon can change colour. The list goes on...

Scientists discover wonderful things about the world; botanists about flora; naturalists about fauna.

Wonders on earth and below the sea, in the skies above; all around us.

Do we take time out to gaze upon these or take Your wonders for granted, going about our busy lives?

The light from the sun during the day, the moon at night; the night sky glittering with countless myriads of stars—all whom You have named and *not one of them is missing*.

Even Ethan, the Ezrahite in Psalm 89:5 wrote, *And the heavens will praise Your wonders, O LORD.*

The writers of Psalm 119 declare, *Open my eyes that I may see wondrous things from Your law (verse 18); Your testimonies are wonderful, therefore my soul keeps them (verse 129).*

David proclaimed, *Sing to Him, sing psalms to Him; talk of His wondrous works!* after the Ark of the Covenant was brought into the Tabernacle.

We are assured of His mercy, *To Him who alone does great wonders, for His mercy endures forever.*

You, Lord, assured Moses, *So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wonders (Exodus 3:20).*

In Deuteronomy Moses reminds the Israelites, *And the LORD showed signs and wonders before our eyes (Deuteronomy 6:22).*

Job is asked the question, *Do you know how the clouds are balanced, those wondrous works of Him who is perfect in knowledge?* and stated, *Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me which I did not know.*

Perhaps the most wonderful passage is found in Isaiah 9:6:

*For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be
Upon His shoulders.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father; Prince of Peace.*

Then we can agree with Isaiah's words in chapter 25:1,

*O Lord, You are my God,
I will exalt You, I will praise Your name;
for You have done wonderful things.*

All Scripture readings are from the New King James Version of the Bible. See: Psalm 77:14 (Asaph), Psalm 86:10 (David), Psalm 72:18 (Solomon), Isaiah 40:26, 1Chronicles 16:9, Psalm 136:4, Job 37:16, Job 42:3.



Pure Books

Recommendation by Julia Martin

We have just returned from a holiday in the South Island and while in Timaru I called into Andrew and Shing Stirling's bookshop and was most impressed. It's a great facility not just as a bookshop but it also can cater for meetings, book launches and many other functions.

They have transferred it from a shabby old workshop into an excellent building that is attractive, warm and inviting. Pure Books stock a wide range of homeschool material, shelves of second-hand books as well as a good choice of new ones which Andrew has vetted, along with cards, gifts, etc. Visit their website:

<https://purebooks.nz/>

Songwriting DIY

New Column by Felicity Logan

Part One: Getting Started

Want to write a song? Decide the **purpose**: A Christian song is for the purpose of magnifying God** (telling Him who He is for us); praising Him for his qualities; telling others who He is; confirming qualities we pursue; building enthusiasm in new or other believers; perhaps detailing personal struggles and victories in our own walk.

** e.g. *Immortal, Invisible, God only wise, You are the King of Glory, You are the Prince of Peace*, etc.

Decide from whose **point of view** (POV) you will write lyrics: is it you addressing God, God addressing us, us encouraging each other? Once decided, stick to this POV. Don't suddenly jump off your own shoulder onto God's or vice versa. Some choruses do so at the end, repeating the final line to address God. If so, I recommend making that clear, e.g. 'He is my strength and shield. *Lord you're* my strength and shield.'

Decide the **style**: quietly worshipful, reflective, toe-tapping, strongly militant, or starting one way and becoming another? Once lyrics are complete, reading these out using your voice dramatically will suggest a style—and the rise and fall of the melody you'll compose.

Establish a **rhyme scheme** if you want one. I take a lined page and write the alphabet letters one per line (plus common blends such as ch-, fl-, br-, pr- etc.), and create columns of rhymes. Write the lyrics as a poem with the syllables separated by hyphens. (*Part Two due out Feb-Mar 2025*).

Let's Celebrate!

Do you have a significant writing related moment to share that we can celebrate? Perhaps it's a goal you've reached or a writing challenge you've overcome. Tell us so we can celebrate with you.

Congratulations to Dion S Tan for his new book release *Challenge to Change*.

Congratulations to Phillip Donnell for his new book release *Eco-Incites*.

Congratulations to Verna McFelin for her winning short story, *God my Heavenly Husband and Father*.

Congratulations to Barbara Harry for her new book release *Oasis: Soul Refreshing*.



Relationship Anagram

by Ted Woudberg

This is based on the most important word in relationship building, i.e. 'COMMUNICATE'.

C - Care for each other.

O - Open your hearts to each other.

M - Make time together for each other.

M - Money matters. Talk about it.

U - Unity. Work as a team.

N - Never go to bed angry with each other.

I - Imitate Jesus.

C - Cast your cares on Him.

A - Act on your promises.

T - Treat each other well.

E - Enjoy each other's company.

How to Structure a (Non-Fiction) Book

by Clive McKegg

This is topical for me! My problem is that I have started writing my book somewhat back to front. Most people start with an idea, an outline, and then they write the content. I started with lots of material from journalling, articles, sermons, blog posts and assignments – but how to make it hang together?

Ingram Spark, a self-publishing company, lists on their website the following steps to structure a non-fiction book: ¹

1. Get clear on what you want to achieve with your nonfiction book
2. Understand the sub-genre of nonfiction you're going to write
3. Choose the structure for your book
4. Draft an outline
5. Choose your style guide
6. Write, write, write

Hmm... I've done step six. Mostly done step five. Sort of done step four. Then it gets fluffy. See what I mean about back to front? This could explain why I've been working on this for five years.

So, what is my purpose? I like to write, and I feel compelled to write by God, to help people in their faith journey – from pre-newborn to maturity. This is my passion.

What is the sub-genre? It's not a biography, although there are biographical elements. It's not a theology text, although it does have a very great amount of Bible content in it. It's not a work of apologetics, although it is my hope that some readers may come to faith. It's almost a devotional book, but it's also aimed at seekers. Of all the sub-genres listed by IngramSpark, the closest is 'Prescriptive Non-fiction (self-help)'. I cringe a bit at this. The last thing we need is more self-help, we need Jesus-help. Adam and Eve helped themselves in the garden! But let's go with that category.

Okay, so now we are at point three – the main point. Surprisingly, the article I read points out that good non-fiction, like fiction, tells a story. To engage the reader, we need a plot structure. This might be a traditional three-act structure, a flash-back structure, a circular structure, or a parallel structure, where two stories play out simultaneously then resolve together somehow.

I realise that I have adopted some aspects of a circular structure, where I tell a personal story that hints at a conflict, then mix in aspects of larger, global themes, which is more like a parallel structure. In my case I'm moving from the personal story to the big themes of scripture, illustrated by insights from other disciplines and broken down topically by chapter, but drawing back into parallel aspects of my personal story.

The website confirms: 'For expository nonfiction, you may find it makes more sense to divide your book into sections or chapters according to topic... The best way to do this is to tackle each step or principle separately. However, you can still build an overarching narrative by letting one step or principle lead on to the next.'

This I have tried to do, but I have been concerned that there is so much that overlaps between the chapters it could get muddy. Hopefully choosing a parallel personal narrative I will be able to keep the reader engaged and relating to the big topical themes.

Following the idea of dividing into sections, I have split my book into two parts to help the reader transition from the problems described in the first to the responses proposed in the second. In addition, I have tried to use the theme of 'streets' or 'paths' in the chapter headings to echo the overall title: '*The Good Way*.' The idea is that the reader feels like they are on a journey of discovery with me – kind of like this article, I hope.

1: <https://www.ingramspark.com/blog/how-to-write-a-nonfiction-book-guide-for-authors>

'Austria' Hymn Additional Words

by Felicity Logan

For any hymn with 8.7.8.7.D metre such as *Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken*.

Worship, honour, glory, blessing.
Lord we offer to Your name;
Young and old, their praise expressing,
Join Your goodness to proclaim.
As the saints in Heaven adore You,
We would bow before Your throne;
As Your angels serve before You.
So on earth Your will be done.

You are ever our Provider,
Shepherd and Emmanuel;
Be our Banner, Guide and Healer,
Comforter with us to dwell.
King of Kings, Almighty Counsellor,
Lord of Lords and Holy One;
Be our peace and be our blessing,
Father, Holy Spirit, Son.

Professional Writing Services

Are you a member who can offer a professional service related to writing or publishing? If so, you are welcome to advertise here for free! Send your advertisement of 100 words maximum to: editor@nzchristianwriters.org

A WORD ABOUT EDITING

I am a freelance editor having received a Diploma of Proofreading and Editing from NZIBS in 2012. I have edited a large range of documents including novels, biographies, magazine articles, websites, and university assignments.

In August 1968, while beginning teacher training, Jesus Christ changed my heart and the whole direction of my life. I am passionate about working with Christian writers, helping them polish their work until it shines.

I endeavour to read the writer's intentions, not just their words, helping them shape their writing into a more accurate, natural and pleasing form.

Graham Pedersen: 027 440 5851

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JEFFS EDITING SERVICES

My name is Christel Jeffs and I'm a freelance editor/proofreader based in Northland. I have been editing since 2018 and hold a Diploma in Editing from NZIBS.

Services I offer:

- Manuscript Assessment
- Copy-editing
- Proofreading

I have edited 14 books to date, including numerous assignments, documents, and creative pieces.

If you need help with a piece of work – be it spelling, sentences or structure – I'm able to help. I will always honour your writing voice and the heart you've poured into your work.

Christel Jeffs (MCW, Dip Ed):

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WRITING ANSWERS

I have over 20 years of experience as a copy editor and proofreader. I work on non-fiction books/articles/memoirs as well as academic editing/proof reading.

I work with authors to prepare their work for self-publishing. I make sure their documents are print ready.

I have qualifications in technical and professional communication, editing and proofreading, science and laboratory technology. I am in my happy place when editing and thoroughly enjoy turning people's prose into award winning documents.

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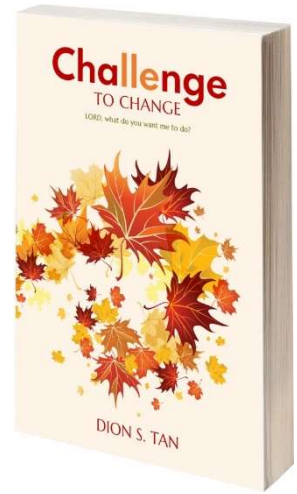
Any Questions?





Dion's Publishing Journey

by Dion S Tan



I would like to take this opportunity to thank and praise God, to be an instrument for His message and His love. This book is testimony, an altar, and a witness to His handiwork in my life. When I felt the prompting of the Holy Spirit to start writing, I asked these questions: Do I need a calling to write a book? And, is it a gift of the Holy Spirit to write the content of this manuscript? For me, to start and persevere in this journey of faith was a definite YES.

I am Dion, and my professional life is in Information Technology (IT). My career is around Change Management: Change Analyst, Training Analyst and Business Analyst. My talent is not in writing and my high school teacher can profess to that. But when I faced a challenging era in my career, I prayed earnestly to the Lord, "What do you want me to do?" And He answered me, "Learn from me, and write it down." Every day when I carved my thoughts, I prayed for the Holy Spirit to fill me with the ideas and the lessons of His wisdom. When I came to a blank wall while inscribing, I wrestled in prayer, not what to type down, but what I needed to *learn*. Every key that I pressed on my keyboard, I felt His leading. I closed my eyes as I let the flow of the meditation of His precious Word flow through the pages of the script. But before I even typed the first steps of this journey, I knew I needed His assurance. Habakkuk 3:17-19 is the promise He gave to me on this project.

This two-year journey was not without its challenges, both economically and emotionally. And it is the promises He gave, that were the 'deposit' I have in His bank account, that I draw out whenever my faith needs it most. When challenges and doubts arose concerning my ability to finish and the validity of my content, I kept myself secure in His Words and the promises He gave to His children.

Our Heavenly Father showed me the NZ Christian Writers group to encourage me that there *IS* an active group that is faith-based to be a support. Here I met brothers and sisters in Christ who helped me on my journey, both professionally and in charity. I truly thank the Lord Jesus for these wonderful people who helped me in the completion of this commission.

In the latter part of this project, where funding was the biggest factor, God gave me a permanent job! Just in the right timing. God provided the finance for this mission! Praise be to our Jehovah Jireh!

My wife Debbie and my three kids are my inspiration and love as they witness this journey, day in and day out.

Thank you for your love and fellowship.

Born Again

by Lorraine Dittrich

Yesterday I loved the world
and all it offered.
Yesterday I was a mocker
and an unrepentant scoffer.
Yesterday I was self-centered,
angry and bad tempered
Yesterday I went to church.
Admitting, I still do search.
For what? I was asked.
No answer, too big a task.
But now God found me.
I became new, restored,
forgiven by the Lord.
He showed how lost I was.
My life, like shattered glass.
His death on the cross,
saved me, O I was so lost.
Only Christ knew the cost.
His pain became my gain.
Praises to Him!
I became born again.

Here are some helpful writer/reader websites:

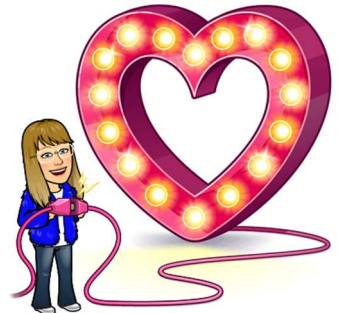
NZ Society of Authors: <https://authors.org.nz/>

Storylines NZ: <https://www.storylines.org.nz/>

Read NZ Te Pou Muramura: <https://www.read-nz.org/>

Christian Writers Institute (USA):
<https://christianwritersinstitute.com/>

Omega Christian Writers (Australia and NZ):
<https://omegawriters.com.au/>



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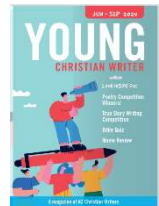
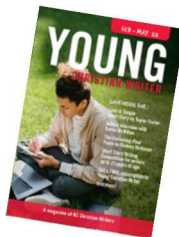
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Artificial Intelligence, it has to be Right!

by Errol Thompson

Artificial Intelligence (AI), especially tools like ChatGPT, are often seen as highly reliable, but this perception can be misleading. A simple experiment during the U.S. presidential elections illustrates this. If asked to provide reasons for voting for or against a candidate, AI can summarise the key arguments. However, if you ask who to vote for, it cannot make a recommendation unless I tell it my bias.

From the earliest days of computing, the principle of 'garbage in, garbage out' (GIGO) has applied. The quality of the data fed into the system directly influences the quality of the output. While traditional systems might have validation rules to clean up data, AI systems rely heavily on the data they are trained on and the continuous learning they undergo.

Artificial intelligence systems rely on being trained by their implementors or users. A simple example of this is a spam filter for email. Many of these now come pre-trained as to what is spam and what is not, but often individual users have slight variations in what they will treat as acceptable emails. Consequentially, most spam filters train on the job. That is, they monitor what the user identifies as spam or not spam and use that to improve their filtering operations. This is a simple form of machine learning and the spam filter is endeavouring to identify a probability that the email received is good or is spam.

Social media platforms like Facebook and X take this further, attempting to predict user preferences based on interactions such as likes, shares, and reposts. However, this can also lead to the promotion of misinformation if the system is not trained to distinguish between valid news and fake news. The AI assigns equal value to all content unless specifically taught otherwise.

The definition of intelligence goes beyond knowing facts; it also involves the ability to reason, evaluate, and create solutions. AI systems can analyse large amounts of data and make predictions, but their effectiveness depends on the accuracy of their data and training. They are not conscious entities and cannot evaluate the validity of their own predictions without human input.

When training an AI system, we are trying to help the system learn what aspects of a phenomenon to use in order for it to accurately identify that phenomenon and then to use that understanding to make predictions. How well an AI performs at this task will depend on how accurately it has identified the aspects that we want it to learn.

My real concern with computer systems is that we take them as being accurate instead of realising they are human created and therefore fallible. So, AI should not be treated as 'it has to be right' but 'it could be wrong.'

I'm beyond thrilled to share that I'm now an international award-winning author! My short story, 'God, My Heavenly Husband and Father', will be featured in the upcoming Christian Writers for Life anthology: The Miracle of Prayer.

God My Heavenly Husband and Father

by Verna McFelin

Raising four children alone was never part of the plan. Yet, when my husband was sent to prison, the life I had envisioned dissolved like mist in the morning sun. Each day brought its own trials—a constant reminder of the empty chair at the dinner table and the absence of a partner who once shared the weight of our responsibilities.

The stigma that followed us was heavy, casting long shadows over our lives. The daily burdens felt almost unbearable. I had to learn to navigate challenges I had never anticipated facing alone—fixing leaks, managing emergencies, and making decisions that had once been shared. I grew more independent, but some moments still brought me to my knees.

One of the most challenging moments occurred during a major crisis. We had just relocated from the South Island, over 1,000 kilometres away, to a new house closer to the prison where my husband was incarcerated. The move had left us in disarray—without a phone, a car, or a local doctor. Then, in the dead of night at 3:00 a.m., my daughter Kate fell severely ill with a chest infection. Panic overwhelmed me as I realised I was completely unprepared, with no knowledge of where to find a doctor or the nearest hospital.

In that desperate hour, I turned to God. I had read about miraculous healings in the Bible, tales of apostles healing the sick, but I wasn't sure if such miracles occurred today. With nothing to lose, I placed my hands on Kate's chest and prayed, "Be healed in Jesus' name." Immediately, I felt a surge of power flow through her. Her tiny chest seemed to glow as if touched by unseen fire, and then, just as suddenly, the power left, leaving her healed. That moment was a momentous revelation of God's power, filling me with awe.

Kate, even as a toddler, possessed an extraordinary knack for escaping our property. No matter how vigilant I was, she always found a way to break free. On several occasions, I had to call on neighbours to help find her, but each time, God kept her safe.

One day, as a heavy rainstorm lashed our neighbourhood, Kate escaped again. Laughing, she dashed across the road and into the park across from our house. Her tiny feet moved faster than I could keep up with, and my skirt dragged in the mud weighing me down as I pursued her. My heart raced with fear as a busy road loomed ahead. I knew I had to reach her before she reached it.

Desperation clawed at my heart, and I screamed out to God, "Help!" In that desperate moment, a miracle erupted before my eyes. Five seagulls in unison swooped up from the nearby beach, like fighter bombers summoned to war. They encircled Kate with a flurry of wings, perching on her head and creating a mesmerising spectacle. Their unexpected presence stopped her in her tracks, buying me precious seconds. I lunged forward, grabbing her tightly. As soon as I secured her safely, the seagulls soared away, their mission complete, leaving behind a sense of wonder and relief.

Through every trial and tribulation, God's presence has been my guiding light of unwavering strength and protection. In my darkest hours, when shadows seemed impenetrable, He never faltered. His constant love has been my refuge, a never-ending reassurance that I am never alone. His divine support, ever-present and unyielding, has illuminated my path through life's fiercest storms, a testament to His eternal faithfulness and the deep depth of His never ending love.

Reflection: Going to Church every Sunday

by Mel Wood

In every celebration of the Holy Mass, we gather to hear the words of God and express our faith in Jesus. For us Catholics, it is our way of giving thanks to God for the gift of life and all the blessings we receive every day of our life. It is also another chance for us to kneel and converse with God. When facing great problems, we lie prostrated to voice our lamentations for the troubles in life we always encounter.

However, in the year 2020, a pandemic (Covid-19) struck the whole world and killed millions of people. To keep safe from the deadly virus, everyone was compelled to be in isolation – no physical contact even with family and friends who caught the virus. That was a harsh situation, physically and emotionally. To add more anguish to that suffering, church doors were closed and we were deprived of the comfort of solitude while listening to God's voice inside the adoration chapel. Even just kneeling on church pews in times of trials was forbidden.

However, God is good all the time and nothing is impossible with Him. To console and reach out to followers of Jesus, the online mass was introduced via social media. It was indeed a big relief from that agony. We experienced the convenience of sitting on a couch facing the digital television screen and listening to the words of God from readers and the good news from the priests' homilies. For over a year, we patiently watched online masses without receiving the Holy Communion and persistently prayed the Spiritual Communion as instructed, believing that this can replace physically receiving the Bread of Life.

Somehow, attending online masses was convenient because we did not have to get up early, prepare properly, then travel or walk the long way to church. What's more amazing was the conveniences of choosing times and parish churches from different parts of the world and experiencing the differences in how various priests officiate the Holy Eucharist. We even felt satisfied just sitting in front of the television set to attend the Holy Mass. Then a not-so-good habit developed in us—having a cup of coffee while the priest was expressing his homily.

Fortunately, when the pandemic was under control, the church doors were opened again with conditions of wearing a facial mask to keep safe or staying home when not feeling well. Those orders from the church gave us the complacency to choose to attend or not to attend the Sunday mass. We thought that reciting the Spiritual Communion was enough to fulfill our desire to get united with Jesus.

Thank You, God, we were enlightened by online priests' words, persuading us to attend the Sunday mass in the church and physically receive the body and blood of Jesus. Once again, our yearning to be united with Jesus gave us the courage to face life's challenges and bear the consequences of walking the right path to reach out to God hoping not to be hungry nor thirsty forever.

W E L C O M E New and Returning Members:

Colin Scott

Hamilton

Jemka Rogers

Ohope

Tania

O’Meagher

Nelson



All NZCW members are invited to share a Writer Profile and Book Feature(s) on our website. For details email our NZCW president, Justin St Vincent here: president@nzchristianwriters.org

How to Format your Competition Entry

by Kathryn Paul

Contestants for all levels please take note of this article. As magazine editor I copy and paste your competition entries into the magazine. When you haven't formatted your document by following the instructions on the competitions page—I then have to make the adjustments. Judges are scoring you on meeting these criteria, so it's important to know how to do it. I hope the following instructions will be helpful to you. If you follow them it will also be helpful to me, and you will benefit from expanding your skills.

I am referring to using Microsoft Office Word as I explain the competition instructions. There is a toolbar along the top of your document under the 'HOME' tab. This is where you will locate your tools to format your document or text. You can set these format rules at the beginning of your text and then type. Or you can highlight a block of text and then change the format rules for what you have highlighted.

- 1. Word count:** Along the top of your toolbar is the tab 'Review'. Click on it and you will see 'Word Count'. Click on it and a box will open telling you what your word count is. Close it and return to the 'Home' tab.
- 2. Font Arial 10pt:** Under the tab 'Home' is a drop-down menu offering a long list of font style options. Click on the little down arrow and the alphabetical list will open up. Scroll up or down and locate 'Arial'. Select it. Then next to that box is the font size drop down menu. Click on the little down arrow and select size 10. You have now set the typing style and size of your font.
- 3. Heading Bold Title Case 18pt:** The heading should be in Arial type font:

Heading

Highlight it and make it bold 18pt as per the font instructions in No. 2 above.

- 4. The next four instructions** are all found under 'Home' and 'Paragraph'.

5. **Line spacing Multiple 1.2:** Under 'Paragraph' locate the drop-down menu for line spacing. Select the word 'multiple'. Next to it is the measurement for it, select or type in 1.2.
6. **Spacing Between Paragraphs 6 pt:** Under 'Paragraph' locate the 'spacing' 'before' and 'after' boxes. Mine is usually set by default to 'before' 0 pt and 'after' 10 pt. Change it to 'before' 6 pt and 'after' 0 pt. This changes the measurement of the space between the previous paragraph and your first sentence, and the space after the last sentence before the next paragraph.
7. **Paragraph Indentation None:** Under 'Paragraph' by default it's usually already set at 'none'.
8. **Alignment Justified:** This is where you can change your text to align on the left margin, or be centered, or align against the right margin or be spread evenly against the left and right margins (justified). This option is found in icons above 'Paragraph' and it's also found under 'Paragraph' in a drop-down menu.

Fifteen percent of your entry score is marked on meeting the above requirements. I encourage you to have a play around with the text and your toolbar until you see it is doing what you want it to. This is the guideline for most of the magazine content, so if you practise doing it with competition entries, you will then be able to do the same when sending in a contribution for the magazine.

Writing Competitions Points Board Results

Level One		Level Two		Level Three	
Denise Gunn	30	Sandy Miller	42	Elaine Dixon	30
Kerryn Levy	24			Jean Shewan	24
Debbie Bennett	21			Jill Clarke	21

Congratulations to the end-of-year prize winners on the points board above. Also congratulations to the following people who are moving up to the next level: **Denise Gunn, Debbie Bennett, Robert Prins, Robyn Wylie and Sandy Miller**. Well done to **Felicity Logan** who has been promoted from Level Three to the Honours List. Thank you to **everyone** who has entered a competition this year – you're all amazing, keep the entries coming in.



In each magazine, place getters receive points: 15 points for first, 12 points for second and 9 points for third. At the end of May and November, those with the highest points in Levels One, Two and Three will be awarded monetary prizes for first, second and third. Prizes up for grabs are: **\$60 for First Place, \$50 for Second Place, \$40 for Third place**. These are usually awarded as Manna Christian Store vouchers. Our next prize winners will be published in the Jun–Jul 2025 magazine edition.

All new members begin by entering in Level One. To be promoted to Levels Two or Three, contestants need to receive points at least three times on their current level. Our judges also require regular entries and improved writing. All entrants receive helpful constructive feedback via email from the judges. It's like a mentoring system and competition all in one!

Please note published competition entries have not been edited.

Competition Results

Level One

Judge: Debbie McDermott

Requirement: Using Luke 14:13 as your key point of reference, write a true or fictional story on inviting the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind to a Christmas banquet and describe what effect it has on them. Use fictional names if the story is based on fact. (450 words)

General Comments

A warm thank you to the six contestants who entered this competition. Ending the competition year with a Christmas theme not only gets us thinking about the first Advent of Jesus ahead of time, but the published winning entries add a nice touch to the December/January issue of The Christian Writer magazine and hopefully encourage all our members to also enter into the true spirit of Christmas.

The key requirement of the competition was to describe what effect a Christmas banquet had upon the poor and needy attendees. What I was looking for here was not just an observation from the banquet host on how their guests responded. I also wanted the story to include—in their own words or thoughts—the personal response of the guests and how they had been impacted by such kindness and generosity. This was an important aspect because an observer may see what is happening on the surface of things, but only the key players can fully express what is going on in their hearts.

First and Second Place Equal winners (Denise Gunn, Debbie Bennett and first-time entrant Peter Willson) met this key requirement particularly well. Kerryn Levy, who focused more on how ‘a spontaneous Christmas banquet blossomed into a community-driven initiative that provided long-term solutions to homelessness’, earned a well-deserved Third Place for her excellent standard of writing and the compassion displayed throughout her story.

I need, once again, to point out the importance of optimising the very limited wordcount of our competitions by keeping unnecessary detail to a bare minimum and not having too many characters or focal points as these can result in loose ends and unsatisfactory conclusions for your reader. Also, if you are writing in a parabolic or allegoric style, you need to briefly explain the meaning of your parable or allegory (like Jesus did), or ensure its meaning is clearly woven into the story.

Another reminder to also carefully proofread your work and correct errors with grammar, punctuation and spelling before submitting your entry.

First Place



Denise
Gunn
of Manawatū

Making a Difference

It was raining again as Kate stepped out of her car onto the wet footpath. She had so much to do in the week leading up to Christmas Day.

The city was jam-packed with traffic and pedestrians. People were everywhere clambering to buy last minute gifts and food. Kate had the mammoth task of finding everything on her list required to cook Christmas dinner for her family.

Kate rushed into the supermarket, grabbed a grocery trolley and started walking aisle by aisle, ticking items off her list as she found them. With the last item ticked, Kate quickly pushed her trolley to join one of the fast-growing checkout queues. She was looking forward to getting out of the supermarket, back to her home and starting food preparations.

Waiting in the queue in front of her was a group of people receiving help from a couple of assistants. Kate noticed most of these people had some type of physical impairment. Some of them were using walkers and a couple of them had guide dogs.

When the checkout operator scanned the group's final item the total cost appeared on the screen. One member of the group attempted to pay with his EFTPOS card. Kate could hear the checkout operator inform them that payment had been declined. Some of the group looked at each other and began emptying their pockets for extra cash. They all looked very upset.

Kate walked up to the counter and offered to pay the balance.

"Thank you so much," said one of the young men. "We can only afford the basic food items this week."

"No problem," said Kate.

Back at her car, Kate unloaded her groceries and noticed the same group standing at the taxi stand in the pouring rain. She walked over to them, offering a couple of umbrellas.

"Thank you," said the same young man she had briefly spoken to earlier. "I'm Bill."

Kate introduced herself and after some discussion, soon found the group had nowhere to go for Christmas dinner.

She thought of all the Christmas cooking ahead of her.

“You are all welcome to have Christmas dinner with my family,” said Kate.

As the group’s taxi van pulled up, Kate gave Bill her address.

When Christmas Day arrived, along with Kate’s family, she explained that a few other people were hopefully turning up.

A knock at the door announced the group’s arrival and Kate soon had everyone seated around the table.

“Thank you so much for inviting us,” said Bill. “Most people tend to ignore us. It means so much to feel included.”

As Kate looked around the table at all the happy faces, she thought how a simple invitation made such a difference in all their lives.

Second Place Equal



Debbie
Bennett
of Auckland

The Christmas Invitation

Let me tell you how eighteen-year-old Suzie McQueen would never have known what impact her kind deed would have on a homeless woman.

It was December 2, 1999. After attending a church she was visiting, Suzie felt compelled to act on its message from Luke 14:13 (NIV). “But when you give a feast, invite the poor... and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you.” She’d then taken an invitation card for the Church’s Christmas banquet. As she was walking to her car in Auckland’s CBD. She silently prayed, “God, please direct me to who you want me to give this card to.” As she took the card out of her pocket, the Holy Spirit whispered “Jane...never known Christmas.”

Meanwhile a few meters ahead sat an unbearably thin 44-year-old Māori lady, wearing an oversized jacket and badly stained jeans. Suzie crouched down to eye-level with Jane. Suzie simply said, “Hi I’m Suzie, would you like to come to church for a Christmas banquet? It’s a free lunch where anyone can come.”

“Oh” Jane said, almost in shock. Suzie handed the card. She had an instant thought to seek ‘Holy Spirit confirmation’: “Sorry, I didn’t get your name.”

“It’s Jane.” Jane smiled back, eyes twinkling.

Only a few minutes ago, Jane was reflecting on her younger days, how her family was never able to sit down for dinner – let alone Christmas.

Whenever Mum would have money for kai, she'd go to the pokies to avoid Dad. Whenever her older brothers collected food parcels, they'd take it to their friends. Whenever Dad came home, there was rage. Sounds of shattering glass beer bottles in Jane's mind made her shiver...

Suddenly booming rap music from a passing car brought Jane back to thinking about the invitation. Tears came, blurring her vision. She'd been praying to God that very day, with just a mustard seed of hope, "Oh God, if I could just have *one* Christmas dinner."

When The Day came, she stepped into the church auditorium, aware of how rugged she was dressed. The feeling didn't last because Jane was welcomed by two 'door ladies' and people surrounding her.

Jane soon started attending an Alpha course at church and became a church member. With prayer support she invited family members to church (who she could still contact): Dad and brother Johnny. One day Dad had chest pains from gastritis due to alcohol. Believing he was on his way out; he gave his heart to Jesus. Johnny eventually surrendered his life to Jesus and served in the church-funded soup kitchen.

Jane went to live in a sleepout from the house of one lady from church. She never saw Suzie McQueen again, but her divine invitation blessed countless generations.

Second Place Equal



Peter
Wilson
of New
Plymouth

A Christmas Banquet

Among the guests invited the second time around were:

Jason: The gathering was going to be a great time for all, except him; his recent desire to change his gender had left him feeling isolated, lonely and different. He was not looking forward to the occasion.

Benjamin: was also invited to the banquet but as a confirmed atheist how would he be able to celebrate. He couldn't believe such nonsense? He knew anyone with any scientific belief in the natural world would know that there is no God.

Christina: Ever since she had come to understand the effect of climate change and the unwillingness of world leaders to do anything constructive, life had become agonizingly uncertain. She was fearful that catastrophic events were about to devastate the world around us.

Lucy: Wondered why anyone would invite her to a Christmas banquet. She had never felt safe, she was depressed, felt useless, felt she was never wanted anywhere; couldn't understand why anyone would want a loser like her at their banquet but the messenger was insistent she come.

On the occasion of the banquet these most unlikely guests, hesitatingly gathered. They experienced an incredible sense of peace as they were received. There was light that penetrated their being, warmth that permeated right through them.

They described their response:

Jason: "I suddenly had a real assurance I had been made in the right body and I would be able to enjoy all the feelings and emotions that were coursing through me".

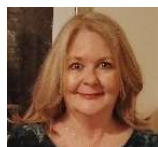
Benjamin: "The light of reason ingeniously exposed my futile thinking that something as intricate as I am could develop by pure chance; I saw, I heard, I felt, I could smell the wisdom of Him as He exposed the futility of my thinking".

Christina: "Yes, the world is changing but in the light of His presence I realised that we are not at the mercy of uncontrolled events, He knows the day and the hour that all things will become new; He knows and controls the waves, the wind, and the storms. I no longer fear the unknown for it is all in His hands".

Lucy: "I tried to shrivel into the crowd but He saw me, His smile of welcome seemed just for me. I knew that I was really wanted and I was suddenly ten feet tall, oh! How wonderful it felt to be so wanted, so loved".

As they looked at their host they became aware of His scars and realised He had gone through far more suffering than they ever had to make it possible for them, the miss-gendered, the arrogant, the fearful, the unloved – the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind, to find such welcome at His Christmas Banquet.

Third Place



Kerry
Levy
of Auckland

ECHOES OF ETHEL

Jane could hardly believe her ears. The woman at the solicitor's office was adamant—her twice-removed great-aunt Ethel had left her an enormous inheritance. Yet, rather than feeling elated, a tidal wave of shock and confusion washed over her. What was she supposed to do with such a vast sum? Jane lived comfortably; her house and car were fully paid off, and she had no family members in desperate need. The prospect of sudden wealth felt more like a burden than a blessing, leaving her wrestling with questions about how to honour her great-aunt's memory while navigating this unexpected twist of fate.

As Jane processed the news, a transformative idea began to take shape in her mind. With Christmas approaching, she thought, why not collaborate with her local homeless shelter to host a special holiday event for those in need? The more she envisioned it, the more excited she became about the possibilities. She could personally deliver invitations, inviting the homeless community to a festive banquet filled with warmth, laughter, and holiday cheer.

The thought warmed her heart—this could be her opportunity to share her newfound blessing in a truly meaningful way. She imagined the joy on their faces as they enjoyed a delicious meal, surrounded by the spirit of community and compassion. Christmas, to Jane, symbolised the birth of Jesus, the ultimate gift of love and hope. She envisioned a large Nativity scene as the centrepiece, bringing the story of Jesus' humble birth to life.

Throughout the evening, the focus would be on more than just food—it would be on the message of hope and salvation that Christ's birth symbolised. Jane hoped her guests would feel not only welcomed but spiritually uplifted, reminded of their worth in God's eyes.

The connections she had made with the homeless guests lingered in her thoughts, and she couldn't shake the feeling that her newfound wealth could be used for something more lasting. Jane started volunteering regularly at the shelter, where she got to know many of the people on a more personal level.

What began as a spontaneous Christmas banquet blossomed into a community-driven initiative that provided long-term solutions to homelessness in her city. Word spread quickly, and soon more volunteers, churches, and businesses were stepping in to help, each eager to broaden the reach of her projects.

Jane observed lives being rebuilt around her, and with each success story, her faith deepened. As she reflected on the journey that had brought her to this point, she realised she had been given an extraordinary opportunity—not only to enrich the lives of others but also to transform her own in ways she had never imagined, and it profoundly lifted her spirits.

Level Two

Judge: Shirley Jamieson

Requirement: Write an article by one of the shepherds in Luke 2:8-20 for the imaginary Bethlehem Times. Include fictional names for the shepherds and tell of their reaction to seeing baby Jesus, but be factual to the Biblical account itself. (350 words)

General Comments

Writing an article for a newspaper needs to have several components to hold the attention of the readers to continue reading until the end. A punchy short headline draws them in, past their initial glance.

The first sentence or two brings in the main points, to show who and what it is about and when it happened. If readers are interested at this point, they will be curious to find out more.

The main body of the article fills readers in with more details about the points above. To include a quote supports authenticity of the facts.

Use language that is easy to follow, and sentences flowing from one to the next.

This competition, for a Christian magazine, has a readership who most, if not all, believe in the miraculous events of Jesus' birth, but the principles of writing an article for a secular paper are the same.

Good journalism isn't biased, but unfortunately these days it often is.

An impact at the end of the article is more likely to encourage readers to think about what they have read and talk about it to others.

Regarding punctuation, speech marks apply in writing an article, the same way they do in prose.

British (& NZ) rules for speech marks.

At the beginning of direct speech, use a single speech mark, and one at the end.

If the speaker continues for more than one paragraph use a single speech mark at the beginning of the paragraph but not at the end of it. But put a single speech mark at the beginning of the following paragraph to show readers the speaker is continuing on.

Put a final speech mark at the end of the speech.

A quote within someone's direct speech

For quote within direct speech, use double speech marks at the beginning and end of the quote to differentiate it from the main speaker.

I hope this explanation is helpful. To complicate things, the Americans do the opposite. They use double speech marks for the main speaker and single speech marks for an inserted quote.

There was only one entry in this month's competition. I awarded Sandy second place for a well-written article taken from the shepherds' point of view, experiencing the amazing encounter with the angels.

Sandy chose an impactful title, and began showing readers important information on who, where and when the extraordinary event was about.

She included a quote from the angel which validated that the article included an important announcement from God.

At the end of the article, the way Sandy told of the amazement of the townsfolk, and how they wanted to know more about the Saviour created a warm touch. It encourages readers to find out more.

The impact of what had happened to the shepherds would be a life-changing experience for them. The birth of the Saviour was a fulfilment of the prophecy for the town of Bethlehem in Micah 5:2. Reading about it could be a life-changing experience too.

Second Place



Sandy
Miller
of Auckland

An Extraordinary Encounter

BETHLEHEM TIMES

A group of local shepherds reported an extraordinary encounter two nights ago. Eliaz recalls what happened that night while he watched his flock with Micah, Abijah, and Abel.

We were out in the fields when an angel appeared to us in the night sky as a bright and shining light. When we saw the angel, we were terrified. But the angel's first words were, "Do not be afraid; for I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Christ the Lord, your Savior, was born today in the town of David. You will find a baby lying in a manger wrapped in swaddling, and this will be a sign for you."

Then suddenly, there appeared with the angel heavenly hosts that were praising God. We felt honoured that God had chosen us to be the first to hear the news about a Savior being born. We immediately went to Bethlehem to see the child. As we gazed upon the child in the manger, we thought about what the angel had said to us.

Praising God about what we had seen, we reported the encounter to the Pharisees. We thought they would be excited about the news. Instead, they were very sceptical about the incident and questioned why God would choose uneducated shepherds to be told the good news. We tried to convince them that the encounter was real, but their response was, "If what you say is true, we will wait until God tells us about this Savior, then we will believe you." We shook our heads in sadness as we left the synagogue that night and headed towards the town square to tell the townspeople about our encounter. When we shared the angel's message about the child born in Bethlehem with the townspeople, they were completely amazed and wanted to learn more about this Savior.

What we witnessed that night will be something we will never forget. Who would have thought that ordinary people like us would experience an extraordinary encounter that would have a life-changing effect on our lives.

Level Three

Judge: Julia Martin

Requirement: You are concerned about the eternal destination of some of your non-Christian friends and family members. Compose an email to send to each of them outlining the good news of the gospel and their need of a Saviour. Use simple language and a gracious approach. (300 words)

General Comments

If we truly believe the teachings of Jesus Christ, we'll be aware there are only two destinations beyond this life – heaven or hell. While many people believe there are many ways to God and a variety of ways to earn their place in heaven, such as doing good works, living a moral life, loving their neighbours, or even belonging to a church, sadly, they are tragically mistaken.

The Bible teaches there is only one way to heaven and that is through faith in Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the cross to bring us salvation.

This is the good news we need to share with our friends and families. This isn't always easy and sometimes those closest to us are the hardest to reach.

This assignment involved writing a letter or email to such people, outlining the good news of the gospel and their need of a Saviour.

After reading the eight entries received, I believe this assignment is the most important topic I've ever set, because it's more than a writing exercise or a chance to win a placing—the letter could have eternal consequences.

Each entrant has given careful thought as to how to approach a non-Christian friend or family member with the challenge of the gospel in a non-threatening manner. We are warned in scripture to 'do this with gentleness and respect' 1 Peter 3:16.

Dealing with a sensitive matter such as this one, requires an angle or lead-in.

Several of the entrants used the death of a loved one or the state of the world as a starting point and this was effective.

I sincerely hope these letters will be used to reach non-believers and that their content may be used by other readers as an incentive to write similar letters which they may have desired to do but haven't found the words or approach needed.

Never underestimate the power and influence of the written word. While the spoken word can be effective, the written word has permanence.

I awarded first place to Elaine Dixon, second place to Keith Willis, and third place equal to Taylor Foster and Jean Shewan. I am disappointed that I cannot include several more of the entries in the magazine as they were all worthy of attention.

First Place



Elaine
Dixon
of Tauranga

A Heartfelt Plea

My dear friend,

Thank you so much for coming to the recent funeral of my husband (and your friend), which showed so clearly the hope he had in the resurrection of Jesus and of meeting him in heaven. Even though I am still grieving his death it is also a time of joy in the knowledge that I will see him again one day. I trust that as your own time on earth is getting shorter, you may be thinking more deeply about life beyond the grave.

You have seen your friend's unwavering faith in God for more than fifty years, in which time he and I have experienced his love and care for us in remarkable ways. Jesus suffered and died for us to pay the debt we owe for the wrongs we have done. He wants us to have an intimate daily relationship with him, just as Adam and Eve had in the Garden of Eden, before they disobeyed and turned away from God. By turning back and acknowledging our need of him we can experience an enriched life, which begins the moment we put our trust in him and never ends. When we know we have been forgiven, it enables us to forgive others for the wrongs they have done to us, giving us peace and hope.

I would love you to experience that same sense of freedom from guilt, sense of purpose and change in thinking that happened to us. You can then face a future which lasts forever in God's presence. You only need to ask him in humility and sincerity. He is waiting to answer your prayer...and your friend will be waiting to welcome you joyfully when it is your time to leave this earth.

Second Place



Keith
Willis
of
Kaukapakapa

Hi

I am worried!

As you know, I'm well passed my supposedly allotted three score years and ten. Also my health is rapidly deteriorating. But that isn't what I'm worried about. Actually, I'm quite looking forward to my departure because I know heaven will be wonderful.

Maybe you are thinking "I might not get to heaven. I might end up in the other place." I'm not worried about that either. My actions and thoughts during my long life may not be good enough to deserve a place in heaven, but fortunately, Jesus promised entry for anyone who believed in him and accepted his sacrifice on the cross as payment for all their sins. It's a bit like the judge who, having condemned you for all your traffic infringements, then comes down and pays the total fine on your behalf.

So no, I'm not worried about my destination. Despite the knowledge that I, like everyone else, am not sin free, I am assured of entry into heaven.

What worries me is the question of whether you will, in due course, be joining me there. The thought of the people I love so much not ever being united with me is very disconcerting.

I know you lead a good law abiding life and are considerate of others, but the Bible says that is not enough. No doubt you have attended funerals of friends who have lived a good life and the mourners have talked of them now being in heaven. Actually that may not be true. If the deceased has never repented and accepted Jesus as their saviour, they won't be in heaven.

So, please allay my worries by not delaying. Read what Jesus has to say in your Bibles and act on those instructions.

Don't get left behind!

Loving always

Keith

Third Place Equal



Taylor
Foster
of Tauranga

A Short Message from Me

Hi everyone,

I can't believe how near Christmas we are. I'm sure you're excited by the extra family coming – it will be great to see them.

In the last couple of years, our family has faced unprecedented hardships (some of which you know). I just wanted to tell you that the only reason we've got through is Jesus. The fact that he came to earth to live with us, die for us, and then be raised to life again means that all the pain and suffering we've gone through isn't the end. He's made a way that we can be with him and each other for eternity.

On top of physical hardships, I've also journeyed through letting go of my past and the mistakes I've made. I wouldn't be standing today if it wasn't for Jesus. He saved me from everything. When I called to him, he came; he welcomed me home with open arms. He never condemned me but forgave me.

We all need a saviour, a best friend and a father. This broken world just doesn't provide. I know it can seem scary to let God in because you're afraid to be let down. But it's ok. God will walk with us through all the troubles of this life because he's already overcome it. He can see the new dawn, the new life, awaiting us.

The good news of the gospel is that God loves you more than you dare to believe. When he was on the cross, he was thinking of **you**. He was dying for **you**. All so that you and him could be together forever because all he's ever wanted is **you**.

I hope that you can see Jesus extending his arms to you, wanting to wrap you up in them. Just so that you can be free and loved.

Love from Taylor.

Third Place Equal



Jean Shewan
of Christchurch

The Here After

Hi George,

I thought you might enjoy this story I heard the other day:

'The Vicar went to visit an elderly parishioner and asked her, "Do you ever think about the future – you know – the hereafter?"

Ah, Vicar," she replied, "every day, when I go into another room, I ask myself, 'What am I here after?'"

I hope this made you laugh even if you do identify with the lady.

On a more serious note, have you ever thought about life after death or what will happen when you die. I know it may seem a long way in the future, but if like me you have been to an increasing number of funerals of late, it's worth thinking about. At one of those funerals, I think you will have heard Jesus' words from John's Gospel.

'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.' (John 3:16).

Jesus makes many other references to eternal life - not the form of it – but what a wonderful place of security, safety, and unconditional love it will be for us. It really is something to look forward to, isn't it. And the best thing about it is that it is free! A gift, by God's Grace, to all who believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and by His crucifixion and resurrection, brought light into the world to overcome darkness. It is a promise we can hold onto even in the most trying times. I hope that you will find some time to think about this matter. If you have any questions, we can talk about it by email or in person soon.

Meanwhile I hope you and the family are well and not having too many 'what am I here after' moments.

Hope to see you soon.

Regards

Ben.



Competitions for February 2025

Due by 1 January 2025

EMAIL ENTRY AS AN ATTACHMENT, COMPLETE WITH WORD COUNT AND YOUR NAME.

Font: Arial, 10 pt **Heading:** Bold Title Case, 18 pt **Line spacing:** Multiple 1.2

Spacing between Paragraphs: 6 pt **Paragraph Indentation:** None

Alignment: Justified. **Send a photo** of yourself for publishing purposes.

NB: If you are not sure which level you're on, email Debbie McDermott at: level1@nzchristianwriters.org

Entries are judged on: Entering, format and layout 15%, Topic requirements 25%, Creativity, flow and impact 25%, Grammar and punctuation 25%, Spelling 10%. Stipulated wordcounts have a 5% leeway under or above the required wordcount. A maximum wordcount has a 5% leeway under the wordcount.

Level One—for members 16 years old and over

Requirement: Write a comical story with a Christian takeaway message using the following homonyms (words that sound the same but have different meanings) at least once—week | weak: find | fined: foul | fowl: bawled | bald: bare | bear: sight | site: here | hear (500 words).

Email entry to Debbie McDermott at level1@nzchristianwriters.org



Debbie

Level Two—for members 16 years old and over

Requirement: Write a poem with a rhythm to show the natural beauty of New Zealand's coast, bush or mountains. Describe how it draws you to the Creator. (Maximum 20 lines)

Email entry to Shirley Jamieson at level2@nzchristianwriters.org

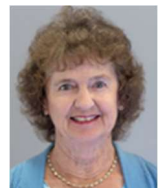


Shirley

Level Three—for members 16 years old and over

Requirement: Write a review (suitable for *The Christian Writer* magazine) of a Christian book or film produced within the past three years. (300 words)

Email entry to Julia Martin at level3@nzchristianwriters.org



Julia



NZ CHRISTIAN WRITERS is a nationwide collective of authors, bloggers, editors, lyricists, poets, publishers, songwriters, storytellers and writers throughout New Zealand. Along with our bi-monthly magazines and competitions we offer inspiring seminars and writers retreats to encourage, inspire and upskill people in their writing.

NZ Christian Writers' vision is to create a vibrant community of Christian writers by connecting them to other like-minded writers in New Zealand. We welcome both beginner and experienced writers.