



*Seven Deadly Sins
for Writers*

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One Fish Two Fish Read Fish Blue Fish. It wasn't long after this stage of reading that you began dreaming of writing your own clever yarn. You found the place *Where the Sidewalk Ends* and could not wait to compose your own prose. Since those Berenstain Bears days, you've had the itch to craft a story, tell a tale, smith some words.

You've scribbled notes, started journals, maybe even typed a few pages. Perhaps you've shared a poem or two with the fam, or told some stories to your kids. Or, quite possibly, the dream never even got that far. You've simply loved the idea of writing and spent years dreaming of writing ideas.

The problem is, the ideas never left the mental attic. The dust there is as thick as a Michener tale. You've tucked them away with the blanket statement "maybe someday."

Why?

What is the roadblock on this journey to author status? What makes us stumble when we *do* venture onto the writer's path? What is it we must battle?

Seven. Seven roadblocks. Seven stumbling blocks. Seven monsters out to gobble up our pens and pages and spit them in our faces.

As writers, we face Seven Deadly Sins.

Each offers unique temptations, traumas, and terrors. Some you may have already encountered. Some await on the trail ahead. Some will sneak up from behind, no breadcrumbs needed to find you. None of them get us where we need to go.

Over the next few pages, I will define, dissect, and offer ways to destroy these Seven Deadlies.

We'll first tackle the one that seems most rampant. It stops us dead in our tracks. We never even shake the dust off those ideas, much less pursue the life of writing we've long desired.

Why? We're afraid.



#1 - Fear

If you asked me what it's like to finally pursue my dream of writing, the honest answer is: Terrifying.

Yes, there is excitement and delight, and many other things weighing in on the positive side, but, the scale is often tipped by the heavy burden of fear.

I can't remember a time when I didn't dream of being a writer some day.

"Some day."

A fellow writer recently told me that is a dangerous term. I agree. Part of what kept me in that Some Day mode was fear. A dream tucked away since kindergarten can be hard to finally pursue. As long as it's just a dream, it's still a possibility. It hasn't been taken out in the world, soiled, rejected, or broken. If I never let it live, it can't die.

As I reached my thirties, I finally came to the realization that I would have to take those risks. If I never let it live, it would not be alive. I decided to make the first steps down the writing path.

Step 1: Face It

We must stare straight into the mouth of this monster and see what lies there:

"Everyone will hate it. No one will ever publish my writing. I am not qualified to be a writer. No one will understand what I'm trying to say. My shining ideas will never be on paper what they were in my head. Everything I try to write will share the aroma of my cat's litter box. I'm destined to fail."

They're lies – all lies! These fears, laden with lies, blossom in our minds until we have an entire garden of ghoulish mental monsters that prevent us from pursuing our passion. We become paralyzed by fear. All the What Ifs keep us frozen in place, and we fail before we even start because we fail to start. After all, as long as it's just an idea, it can't fail. No one can reject it. It can't flop. It can't turn out poorly. It's this intangible brilliance that lies untainted in my mind. Untainted, but also untapped. Safe, but of what use?

Perhaps we do get started. Then perfectionism pops into play. We write, and rewrite, and rewrite again. We reread for the 42nd time, and it's still not quite right. It's just not perfect. We stall out. We never put our writing out there because it's not quite ready for others to see. It's not good enough to share with the world. Just a few more changes, then it will be ready. Our attempts to create perfection keep us in a dizzying loop of editing and nail-biting that results in frayed fingers but nothing shared. What If I could make it better still? What If I've missed something? In our efforts to make it worthy of the world's eyes, no one ever sees it. (Don't ask me how many times I reread and rewrote this paragraph.)

We keep telling ourselves these lies. They feed our fear and help it grow big, strong, and loud. The What If track blasts on repeat in our upstairs radio until we can hear nothing else. The

dances with Perfectionism and People Pleasing keep us spinning in circles. I suppose these two things have their place somewhere in our lives, but more often than not they are unhealthy. They become stumbling blocks in our path to be productive writers. They lead us to a litany of What If questions, and that track never stops playing:

What if I write something that just plain stinks? What if I think it's good but not everyone likes it? What if publisher after publisher rejects me? What if someone misinterprets my writing? There's plenty more along the same line of thinking, but this guide should only be so long. So, let's just get right down to finally answering those basic What If questions instead of just fretting over them. This is step two.

Step 2: Embrace It

YES! The answer to most of those What Ifs is a resounding yes! Yes, those things are going to happen. At some point, each of these will come true to some degree. Guess what? That's ok. We aren't perfect. Our world is not perfect. As imperfect people, we are destined to imperfect writing. We have NO chance of pleasing everyone. If we write enough, and submit enough, we will surely be misunderstood, criticized, rejected, and more. Embrace the inevitable.

This doesn't mean we believe the lies. A rejected manuscript does not mean we are a reject. Failure to publish an article doesn't mean we are a failure. If not everyone likes our writing, it doesn't mean everyone hates us. If our path doesn't look like another writer's, it doesn't mean we aren't a writer, or aren't worthy of that title. Messing up doesn't mean we are a mess. If we produce a flop, we don't have to forever forfeit our writer's card.

Creative souls can be a bit overdramatic. Let's be realistic with ourselves. What really happens when these inevitabilities strike? Are we forced to wear an F on our shirts to let everyone know we have failed? Do we have to stop writing? Stop dreaming? Stop living? It's highly unlikely that any of the What Ifs we toy with are actually that serious. Ego-threatening, yes. Life-threatening, no.

What do we do?

Step 3: Chase It

Chase your dream. Chase your goals. Chase your passion. Chase away this monster. Chase away the sin of Fear. By running headlong into the fray, we sprint away from fear or mow it down in our path. Either way, this sin no longer blocks our way.

Once you've divulged your doubts and embraced the inevitabilities, Fear becomes fear and is easier to hurdle. You can acknowledge the risks, and run on this path anyway. Yes, you will get bruised, but at least you got off the park bench. Go ahead, stretch your muscles. Test your talents. Start feeding those instead of that What If monster. Who knows where it will take you? Maybe you won't come in first, but it's better than missing the race entirely.

Yes, you'll most likely hear the recurring classics: *Gonna Fail Now, Baby*; *Gotta Please the People*; and *Gettin' Almost Perfect*. They are catchy tunes that easily get stuck in our heads. But...it's time. Time to face the music. Turn off the tune. Starve the monsters. Fill our heads

with creative ideas, writing goals, feedback, research, contests, queries, blog posts. The fear will not simply dissipate one day. We have to DO something. Get something else playing, going, churning, burning, chasing our thoughts and spurring us into action. No more Some Day. Today.

The Fear chaser I keep in my mind is this truth:

*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, of love, and of a sound mind.
2 Timothy 1:7*

We are not alone as we stare down this sin. We do not have to let this Deadly Sin bind us. The Lord is with us as we pursue our dreams and feel pursued by fear. Chase? Yes. But also run – straight to a loving God who can chase away our fears and give us the desires of our heart.

My desire is to continue to write whatever God puts in my heart, that stirs my mind, that drives my hand to the page. He has instilled in me this passion that I no longer want to leave still. With God's help, I will continue to be more than a conqueror in this battle with Fear.



#2 - Sloth

An amazing thing happened last Tuesday. A representative from Random House showed up at my home to offer me a publishing contract. I hadn't written a single query, composed one proposal, or even researched publishing companies. She said one of their editors came across my blog the week before and simply fell in love with my writing. They could not wait to get me signed on before someone else snatched me up.

If you are having a hard time believing that, I don't blame you. It's not true. Sadly, this is just a fantasy. My slothful side dreams of writing success to come knocking at my door. In the window of reality, it doesn't really work that way.

Getting published is hard work. I suppose there may be some exceptional stories out there, but, for us regular folk, the blood, sweat, and tears must flow.

Here's the truth:

I've been researching publishers, writing queries, and submitting children's stories since the summer of 2012. I have a half-finished Christian nonfiction book I hope to begin submitting to publishers eventually. I have a lot of editing and rewrites to do on that before it's anywhere near ready. Plus, the proposal process for nonfiction looks daunting.

I have gotten some freelance work. There are several clients for whom I regularly complete projects. However, these few are the result of dozens and dozens of applications and registrations on writers' sites. (*See encouraging update on the last page.)

I say again – this writing stuff is a lot of work.

As I have begun to seriously pursue my writing goals, I have discovered this second deadly sin to be quite the obstacle. I have also discovered a three-step process to overcome it (and it's alliterated, so it must be good).

1. Admission

I'm lazy. I just want to write. I want it to be easy. This should be fun, right? My passion is writing, not work. I want to simply write what I want and then sit back and wait for my amazing talent to surface one day and sell itself.

I have unrealistic expectations of how things should be – expectations motivated by sloth. I don't want to have to do all the leg work necessary to actually publish anything.

I procrastinate. I have a lot of ideas that I have not fleshed out. I have started stories and never finished them. I continue to put off the hard part of actually completing a thought.

There. I admitted it. Sloth has a residence in my heart.

Now that I have admitted its existence I can begin to battle it.

2. Action

As a whole, our goals can seem impossible to reach. Take the nonfiction book I am writing as an example. The task seems so daunting I don't even want to try to tackle any of it. Or, publishing a children's book. Or publishing anything. As I've been in this process, I repeatedly hear stories of how long it has taken other writers to get something in print, or become established. The tales include hundreds of rejections, years of waiting, and so on. Somehow, the point of those stories is supposed to be encouragement to not give up. What I hear is: I have years and years of rejection after rejection to look forward to. How motivating. Thanks.

This is not what my slothful side wants to hear. I want it to be easier than that. Maybe it will be. We'll see what God has planned for me. In the meantime...I need to act. Do the research. Send the query letters. Submit poetry to websites. Actually sit down and do the editing certain pieces need.

But there's so much to do!

In order to make these tasks less intimidating, we can create smaller goals. Don't think about the three dozen steps you will have to take before your book might get published. Focus on the first step. Break it down. Be satisfied with doing a little, today. Set aside just fifteen minutes. Get started. Stop procrastinating. It's ok if you don't finish the whole job right now. At least get the ball rolling. Maybe that means writing for seven minutes in the morning and seven again at night. Maybe it's researching one publisher this week. Maybe it's posting on your blog each week instead of once every month or so.

Whatever the goal, we should make it realistic. It may seem small, but it's a start in the fight against sloth. As we see victory in these little goals, we can move forward with bigger ones. Keep moving!

3. Accountability

Announce your sloth. It's not enough to admit it to myself. I need to bring others in to help me with this battle. Hey you guys! Sloth here! Help me stay on track, please!

It may not seem like a very powerful tool, but accountability works. If you have shared with others what you plan to do, and ask them to hold you accountable, you are simply more likely to do it. You are answering to someone other than yourself. This is very motivating. It is especially good to tell these accountability peeps that they should not accept any excuses. Lay it out there for them. This is my plan – remind me, nag me, beat me with a rubber hose – whatever it takes – don't let me stray, procrastinate, and slip into slothful slumber.

I have made it a goal to submit at least one piece of writing per week. This could be publishing a blog post, or submitting a children's story to a publisher, or finding an online Christian magazine to submit a devotional to, or a poetry site to send a poem to – just get something out there!

I have asked several of my friends to hold me accountable on this goal. As I type this I am thinking of two friends whom I will see tomorrow. They will ask me if I've met my writing goals for this week, and I want to be able to say yes. I have not submitted anything yet this week. This

fact spurred me to sit down and finally finish this section that I started a couple weeks ago. (Please take a moment here to appreciate with me the irony of having difficulty finishing a section on sloth.) Knowing they are going to ask me about it when I see them helped me overcome my laziness and procrastination.

If you struggle with sloth too, get some accountability. It could be just one person, or a group of people. Choose wisely though. If you pick someone more slothful than you, they may be too lazy to hold you accountable.



#3 - Envy

Osteoporosis and emerald iris pigmentation.

These are the conditions that await me if I embrace this third Deadly Sin for Writers.

A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot. Proverbs 14:30

O, beware, my lord, of jealousy; It is the green-ey'd monster, which doth mock the meat it feeds on. – Shakespeare's *Othello*

It's not that I welcome this trait into my repertoire, but it can easily move in and take up residence in my heart if I'm not careful. At first, it's a simple desire for something. "It would be so exciting to be a published author!" Then, it's something I see other people attain. "She got published. Good for her." Lastly, it becomes a bitter root of jealousy that I don't have what they have. "Why should she be published? I'm just as good – better, even! I want her success, her life, her connections. And I want it NOW!" At this point envy takes over and consumes. As we are gobbled up by this monster, all proper perspective of the blessings God has bestowed on us is lost, and we are left gazing on others with longing for what's on their side of the fence.

This battle is certainly not new with me, you, or the New York Times Best Seller authors. Cain and Abel were the first to demonstrate how deadly this sin can be. Fast forward from fruit-and-fat offerings to possessions, popularity, or publications, and we find ourselves still fighting the same green-eyed ghoul.

While I've read that green eyes are rather rare and considered very attractive, I don't believe the view through them is as alluring. We see a world of things we want and can't have. We see people who have the things we want. We see ourselves as deprived, get distressed over what others have, and become depressed as our envy sucks away the joy we could otherwise know.

Travel down this road far enough, and our actions can spiral out of control.

For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. James 3:16

I'm a bit more passive aggressive than Cain. This means, while my sister does not need to fear for her life, a friend who gets her name in print might be in danger of my unjustified judgment: "What's so great about *her* writing?" Or, she may experience a lack of enthusiasm that I should have for her success but simply can't muster because I'm too wrapped up in "What about me?" My envy may manifest as frustration, "I've been trying for years and a book deal just lands in his lap? How is *that* right?" Or, my jealousy that another writer has produced more than me will encourage negative thoughts about myself. "Look what he accomplished this week. Why can't I do that? I'm a failure."

Why is it disturbing to see others receive what we want? Why can't we be happy for them instead of jealous? A few words come to mind: pride, insecurity, competitiveness, fear, comparison, discontentment, lies. These swarm around us and through us until we are enveloped

in envy. Never content with what we have, we constantly look to what others possess. The good news is we don't have to surrender to this swarm. There are truths we can remind ourselves of that will loosen the lies and snuff the sin.

◆ **If someone else experiences success, it doesn't mean I'm not a good writer too.**

I am so quick to come down hard on myself if I see another writer craft an incredible piece. I begin to entertain such thoughts as "I could never write something like that." "What I have to offer doesn't compare to what others can do." "I will never get published." Lies. The truth: Their ability does not diminish mine.

◆ **If someone else gets published, it doesn't mean I can't get published too.**

They didn't just take the last slot, print the last paper, fill the very last shelf. God's world of blessings and plans for us is greater than I can imagine. There's room for both of us. We are not sharing some small slice of pie with a worry there might not be enough to go around. That other writer did not take the last piece. The world of writing is a growing library, not a consumable dessert. Like the sweet analogy? Here's another: I don't have to worry if another writer gets her hand in the cookie jar before me. God just keeps baking more cookies.

◆ **If someone else has a life that I envy, I can trust that God has my life in His hands.**

He will provide for me – where I am, what I need, what is best for me – which may look different than someone else's path, blessings, abilities, and results. I don't need to worry about what others have, or seem to have. God has me. God loves me. His love for me is not diminished by His love for others. It's ok – celebrate with them, rejoice for them, knowing we are only adding to our joy by doing so, rather than removing joy with jealousy.

◆ **If someone else seems to have more than me, I can look at myself as God sees me.**

Forgiven, beloved,
Hidden in Christ,
Made in the image of the Giver of Life,
Righteous and holy,
Reborn and remade,
Accepted and worthy,
this is our new name.

– [Jason Gray's *I Am New*](#).

In Christ, we lack nothing. There is no need to be concerned we are lacking anything, that we are being cheated, short-changed, or slighted, or that some other wordsmith is smithing more words than we are. We are whole. We are His child. This is how He sees us. This can fill us to the brim to allow no room for envy. We can shake it off as we put on our identity in the Lord.

We can lose Jealous as we choose Jesus.



#4 - Lust

I want it so bad I can taste it. I'm not sure exactly what getting a book published will taste like, but my dreams of that day are as sweet as chocolate, so I'm guessing something like a Milky Way.

The road there has not been rich, creamy, and smooth. It's actually been more like a pile of nasty 'shrooms covered in buttermilk, or like that stubborn bottle of ketchup that just won't deliver (despite the promise of the best things coming to those who wait.)

As I do the daunting amount of work it apparently takes to get that contract, I have accumulated a collection of rejection letters, a sent-box with too many emails which never received a reply, and a never-ending task list. No, those ingredients don't taste like any candy bar I've ever enjoyed.

I've imagined the phone call. The email. The letter. The news. You know, the moment when a publisher actually says "yes!" I've pictured it in myriad variations. They all include fairly loud, joyous noises from me, a bit of dancing for my feet, and a Cheshire Cat expression on my face.

While some of this may be accurate, based on past experience with my imaginings of other events, I am pretty sure it will turn out to be almost nothing like I envision.

I don't think that's the important thing though. The aspect to focus on is to ensure that my dreaming doesn't become my everything. A desire so strong can easily consume us, dominate our thinking, overtake our minds, and consume our time and our passion, until we are left lusting after something our hearts want so much there is no room left for anything else. Wanting this above all, we are not open to God's plan, his timing, or his will. We become blind to all other things. We can miss out on other (maybe even better) opportunities God has for us. It can become a lust that, left unquenched and unchecked, makes us impossible to please, forever feeling unsatisfied, and completely off track from the path God would have us walk.

Letting lust lead us will take us nowhere good.

Instead, we can guard our hearts and minds as we pursue our passions. If it's a healthy desire, as I believe my desire to publish is, we can surrender it to God, remaining in frequent (or constant?) prayer about it.

Part of that prayer will need to be: "Lord, if this is what you would have for me, help it happen. If you have other plans for me, help me accept that and praise you wherever this path leads. Satisfy me with your unfailing love. Help me to be fulfilled in you, even as I pursue the passions I believe you have laid on my heart."

As I pray this and similar prayers, I sincerely hope to accept whatever God has for me on this writer's path. He is already teaching me on this journey, and using it to help me grow. I suppose it's possible that this journey is the destination, and not a book contract (or two, or three, or...) Right now, I hope that the path includes seeing my books on the shelves at Barnes and Noble, the Christian Bookstore, and the local library. That would be amazingly awesome! My mouth is

watering just typing about it. Where's the danger? It lies in letting that drooling get out of control, until I'm a slobbering mess, lost in the deadly sin of writer's lust.



#5 - Pride

God opposes it. It comes before a fall.

*Pride goes before destruction,
a haughty spirit before a fall.
Proverbs 16:18*

This is the deadly sin that set us in opposition to God, reigns in our hearts, fills us with sin, and takes us over the cliff.

Pride can interfere and take us off track in every area of our lives. How does pride bring about the fall of a writer?

“I’m pretty smart. I can do this. I don’t need their advice. They can’t help me. I couldn’t possibly learn something from them.”

“Why would I want feedback? I know what I should write, and I know how to write it. I don’t need anyone to review my work.”

“Just because they have two decades of experience doesn’t mean they know more than I do. I have fresh ideas and talent. They should be listening to me.”

“I shouldn’t have to go through all this work. Can’t they just accept my writing as the brilliance that it is and print it?”

“Ask for help? That’s ridiculous. Everyone is busy with their own stuff. I don’t want to be a bother.”

“Offer help? My time is too precious. They will figure it out or find someone else who has more time to spare.”

“Here is my plan. I am determined to carry it out. I don’t care what it takes. I don’t care what else God might have planned. I can do it, and I will.”

Perhaps some of these thoughts are exaggerated. Perhaps not much. Do any of them sound familiar? I must admit they do. They couldn’t have flowed from my fingertips if they hadn’t crossed my mind at some point.

Since pride traces its roots all the way back to Lucifer, I doubt I’m the only one who has experienced these prideful ponderings.

We think we can do it on our own. We won’t listen, seek counsel, learn from others, or humble ourselves and ask for the help we won’t admit we need. For the perfectionistic pride-filled people like me, it means not wanting to admit we couldn’t figure it out on our own, or that we tried and failed and now need help to get back on track. Or, we do only that which we feel is profitable for us. Time, effort, finances, editing skills – all are focused on our own agendas and never spent on

others' needs, for we are pridefully convinced we are somehow more important than others. We make ourselves God. Such hubris.

Why can't we simply admit our imperfections, our need for others, and our need for God? It is because we are standing on a mountain of pride, unaware we are teetering on the edge.

What can we do to step away from that ledge? How do we get off this prideful path? We have to head in a different direction and look for a different location to set up residence.

*Humble yourselves before the Lord,
and he will lift you up. James 4:10*

We can't do it on our own. In fact, we can do nothing without the Lord. We may think we have it all together. Everything is perfectly in place, and we think we look stunning as we catapult blindly into the ravine.

It is when we are willing to admit we are imperfect, we don't know everything, we aren't capable of doing it all, and that we need God to do anything, that we have climbed down off that mountain and humbled ourselves before the Lord. It is when we can see others as not *less* important than us, but *more*. It is when we value them as we should.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. Philippians 2:3-4

As Jesus modeled:

*In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:
Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!
Philippians 2:5-8*

We know that we will be blessed when we follow this example.

God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble. 1 Peter 5:5

He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. Psalm 25:9

For the Lord takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with salvation. Psalm 149:4

When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom. Proverbs 11:2

How can we follow these commands, receive these blessings, and practice humility as writers?

- Admit our need for the Lord in all things.

- Acknowledge our need for others.
- Put others before ourselves.
- Pray for God to make the following words true in our hearts, as David prayed:

*My heart is not proud, Lord,
my eyes are not haughty;
I do not concern myself with great matters
or things too wonderful for me.
But I have calmed and quieted myself,
I am like a weaned child with its mother;
like a weaned child I am content.*

*Israel, put your hope in the Lord
both now and forevermore.*

Psalm 131

As we place our hope in the Lord...as we quiet ourselves to humbly accept our child-like state of fragility and need...as we admit we do not and will never know all...as we model Christ's love for others...we can put off pride and put on humility.



#6 - Gluttony

Some people eat to live. Some people live to eat. I'm a card-carrying member of the latter crowd. Yes, as I sit here with the seven extra pounds I packed on over the holidays I recently ate my way through, I have no doubt about which of these people I am.

My pastor recently said "Nothing tastes as good as being thin feels." I believe that's a good point. But, has he met my life-long pal Little Debbie?

I admit the thought of continuous consumption of every sweet treat I can get my taste buds on has its appeal. What also sounds appealing is fitting through the front door of my townhome.

Fortunately, I also enjoy exercise. This wasn't always true. I remember a time in my life when I referred to that demon as the "e" word. Now, aerobics and I have buddied up, and I enjoy a good sweat-inducing workout and the physical benefits I reap from it.

The result is a fairly healthy balance of input and output. I don't look like Denise Austin, but I can live with that. The time I devote to early-morning workouts keeps me healthy and balances out the occasional unhealthy snack or party-binge on junk food. I think I do ok. Without the output though, I could see the scales tipping, so to speak.

The same goes for writing. I doubt I'll get much argument from a statement about the unhealthiness of overeating. Gluttony is bad. Got it. Why should gluttonous consumption in the area of writing be any healthier? If we can see that gorging ourselves on every meaty morsel will not end well for us, we should be able to see the same application for our craft.

Writer's Gluttony shows up in three forms.

Stuffing. Starvation. Stagnation.

Interwoven like the latticework of Mom's apple pie, these three create a pattern of gluttony that will leave a bad taste in your life.

Stuffing

How many times have we been told to read, read, read? If you're going to be a writer, you must first be a reader. Ok. We read. Then we are told we must study our craft, learn from the successful writers around us, and research our market. Ok. We study. We read articles. We listen to webinars. We join the ranks of followers reading Michael Hyatt's tips. We get our hands on a copy of the most recent *Writer's Market*. We set up camp at Barnes & Noble, perusing every title in our niche. We research our next topic until we're blue in the face. We gobble up everything we can about writing. We spend every spare moment consuming all we can, from literary classics to the latest John Grisham. We stuff ourselves so full of knowledge and resources that success should ooze from us like the juices of a well-basted Thanksgiving turkey.

The problem: Now our stomachs hurt. We are bloated beyond belief. We munched on tales and tips, consumed columns and critiques, and swallowed more self-help than we care to admit. And

now we're sick on it. Why? All we did was consume. We never exercised to balance out the consumption. All input. No output.

As we take in from other wordsmiths, we should spin out some yarns of our own. What that looks like will be different for every writer. Maybe you start a blog. Maybe you write the short story that's been nibbling at your brain for eight months. Maybe you compose and send that query letter. Maybe you stop procrastinating and start producing. Whatever the step, you end the gluttony by getting into a healthier cycle of consumption and production.

This probably won't be easy. A habit of eating is a lot easier to form than a habit of exercising. It's work. Work can be hard (although enjoyable, too). Take this Saturday afternoon I am currently enjoying for example. The easier thing is to cozy myself up on the couch and devour a book. The harder thing is to crack open the laptop and bang out an article. I decided to devote a chunk of the day to exercising my own writing skills. My balance? While consuming a turkey sandwich and some cantaloupe around noon, I read a few pages of Stephen King's *On Writing*.

Other deadly sins may try to jump in this battle. As you struggle to produce, gluttony's pal fear may float to the surface. The key is to do it anyway. Keep putting things in and pouring things out. Lots of it. If it's not all good, that's ok. Think of it this way. If you vomit out enough stuff eventually you might discover something worth cleaning up and keeping.

The key is to break the cycle of gluttony. Stop cramming it all in your little notebook and start filling someone else's.

With this last thought in mind, we can avoid gluttony's second shape.

Starvation

If we are consumed with gluttony, we take, take, take. We are selfish. We never give. While we gobble up everything we can, we leave others starving.

We are busy meeting our needs (or what we think our needs are) and forget the hunger of others. Where would we be if the writers from whom we are consuming never gave? We need to put some morsels out there for others to sustain themselves. This could take the form of writing that book or blog or pouring into someone on a more personal level. It is likely God has put something in you that no one else could give, based on your unique talents and experiences as a writer. Don't deny the world of what you have to offer.

Maybe it's helping a friend with a cover letter for a dream job. Maybe it's composing a pro bono article for your church website or local nonprofit organization. Maybe it's reading a book to a child, or teaching someone how to read. Maybe it's offering to edit your neighbor's book. Maybe it's publishing a book that will have a great impact on its readers. The opportunities are endless. The point is to not be consumed with our own input and instead focus some time, talent, and energy on the input of others.

The formats vary, but the results are the same. We fight off gluttony in ourselves and fill others in the process. Starvation stopped.

As we produce in addition to consume, we not only avoid stuffing ourselves and prevent the starvation of others, we also avert gluttony's third shape – stagnation.

Stagnation

Mosquitoes, malaria, and the mata mata turtle.

These thrive in stagnant water.

While I've come across many small cute turtles, and others so large they were awe-inspiring, the mata mata falls into neither of these categories. In fact, I have read (as part of my healthy consumption-production cycle) that South Americans call unattractive women mata matas.



My point? Stagnation produces some fairly ugly and unpleasant things, and gluttony produces stagnation.

If we don't get away from gluttony and move toward a healthier pattern of production, we become stagnant in our writing. Never stretching ourselves to create something new, we only continue to pour into our puddle of knowledge, with no outlet to drain out some of our own thoughts. The result? The rain keeps adding ideas to our little pond but no one ever drinks from it. We find ourselves with a cess-pool of ideas that never flow anywhere. They arrive at stagnation station and stay there.

We need to create some drainage. Stir the waters. Create a culvert. Start pouring words out of our pond. Pour into others. Establish a flow of ideas. Write.

If we never do, we end up bloated and miserable, with a case of malaria, surrounded by mosquitoes and mata matas.



#7 - Greed

In the classic movie, *Wall Street*, financial king Gordon Gekko claims that greed is good.

Do you agree? Is it true? Is greed good?

Spoiler alert!

Things don't turn out great for Mr. Gekko. I doubt Michael Douglas's character would be a good role model.

In fact, another wealthy man, richer even than Gekko, offers a different philosophy:

One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty.
Proverbs 11:24

But, King Solomon's words probably won't make it to Hollywood. Oscar winners won't likely be quoting it on YouTube. So, which do we believe?

Tangled up with pride, with a bit of gluttony mixed in, this deadly sin is a fistful of temptation. Its methods of pulling us in can be fairly sneaky. When we get sucked into 'Greed is Good' thinking, rejecting the wisdom of Proverbs, its deadliness appears in three modes:

- My Praise
- My Pennies
- My Price

My Praise

We want more than our fifteen minutes of fame. We want every literate person alive to read our works. "Let everyone see my name in print and be amazed at my talent!" our hearts cry. Our esteem soars when we receive compliments on our writing. We can't wait to get that positive feedback on our latest piece. Of course, joy in a job well done is not all bad. Excitement over success is not either. It's when the scales tip, and our personal praise is lifted higher than God's, that things have gotten deadly. (Or maybe that's just my heart, and I'm projecting. Don't leave me alone out here. Am I the only one whose heart struggles with this? The only one who enjoys the personal praise?)

The other part of my heart, that which yields to the Holy Spirit's prompting, knows it's not all about me. Like everything else, our writing should be about God's glory, not ours.

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.
1 Corinthians 10:31

My Pennies

Not only could we be famous, we could be rich. Write that bestseller and watch the royalty checks roll in. What a life. Think of the house, the boat, the car, the clothes, and the mound of Little Debbie Snack Cakes we could buy with our author earnings. So much could be ours.

Honestly, the material possessions have never been too much of a temptation for me (other than the snack cakes). But, a life of leisure – that’s a different story. I dream of having enough money that I can do whatever I want with my time. No more commuting. No more mortgage. I can spend my days at play, enjoying nice weather, writing whenever and whatever I want, sleeping when I’m tired. It’s not gimme, gimme, gimme stuff. It’s gimme, gimme, gimme time and freedom.

Let me do whatever I want, for my own pleasure. I doubt this is any less selfish. It’s still a less-than-biblical motive for money.

You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. James 4:3

I have been praying for God’s guidance and assistance as I pursue writing goals. I have to frequently do a heart check. What is motivating me to write? Do I only want to satisfy my own passions? Am I writing for God’s glory, or mine? Ouch. That one hits home. I do pray for Godly motives. Searching my heart, I see the desire to share the Lord with others and glorify Him through writing. But, is this always the case? My score is less than 100% on that test.

My Price

The danger here is two-directional. We can either think we are too valuable for certain work, or we can believe our value is based on our work and what it earns us.

The first direction is paved with pride. “I’m worth more than what that job pays.” “I deserve better than this.” “I shouldn’t have to work my way up.” Thoughts like these keep us from opportunities to learn and grow and from opportunities to serve others. Falsely thinking we cannot afford to do anything “below” us, we hold out for the big breaks, even though these may never come if we don’t ride the smaller waves first. We don’t offer services for free to help someone because our time is too valuable. No pay, no way. In either situation, we are afraid we won’t be paid what we are worth.

I realize there are circumstances that call for discernment, and times when we do need to say no. It’s not unreasonable to desire fair pay, and everything we write does not have to be volunteer work in order to try to serve others.

The problem occurs when we base our personal value on the monetary value of our writing. If I don’t earn much, I’m not worth much. We mistakenly think our value goes up with our net worth.

In truth, our value with God is constant and based on nothing we have done or can do:

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. Matthew 10:29-31

God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:8-10

When we base our value in anything other than the Lord, we are believing the lies we are either telling ourselves or believing from the world.

Retraining

We must steer our hearts a different way. 2 Peter 2:14 states “They have hearts trained in greed.” What does this training get us? Immediately following this statement, Peter describes them as accursed children.

What can our hearts seek instead of Praise, Pennies, and Price?

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Matthew 6:33

Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Psalm 37:4

I hope and pray I do this. I don’t want to seek my own glory. I want to base my worth in the Lord. I want to be humble, and generous, and a good writer, and successful in my pursuits – all at the same time, all while accepting God’s will for my life. To accomplish this, I must be ok with never publishing a book if it never happens, accept the value I have in God’s love, and reflect Him to others rather than spotlighting my own glory.

I hope I can sing Francesca Battistelli’s words in a spirit of worship and truth, and honestly say:

*I don’t need my name in lights
I’m famous in my Father’s eyes
Make no mistake
He knows my name
I’m not living for applause
I’m already so adored
It’s all His stage
He knows my name*

*He Knows My Name, Francesca Battistelli,
If We’re Honest, 2014*

None of this is possible with greed guiding my way.



Update

Praise the Lord for blessing these efforts! Since my original writing of these Deadlies (posted on my blog in 2014), I have become a full-time freelance writer, making more money than I have at any previous job I've held. I've also self-published two books, *24 Ways to Pray Through Your Day*, and *24 Ways To Serve Through Your Day*, which are available on Amazon.

Plus, I love what I do!

I pray for your success as you face down these deadly sins and pursue your own dream.

Go for it!