

ASNA Creative Writing Workshop

With Karen Holford

And never let ugly or hateful words come from your mouth, but instead let your words become beautiful gifts that encourage others; do this by speaking words of grace to help them. Ephesians 4:29 The Passion Translation

So may the words of my mouth, my meditation-thoughts, and every movement of my heart be always pure and pleasing, acceptable before your eyes, Yahweh, my only Redeemer, my Protector. Psalm 19:14 The Passion Translation

Choosing an inspirational word

Choose a word for yourself that you would like to make your theme for the year, or for a month, or just a week – you can change it whenever you like!

Flourish, survive, growth, peace, kindness, compassion, hope, release, etc

- Don't think too hard.
- Write it big in the middle of your sheet of paper.
- The look at it and reflect on it...
- Around your word write or draw other words and things.
- What feelings does the work evoke in you?
- What pictures does it bring to your mind?
- What memories do you have of this word?
- How might this word help you when you face a challenge?
- Scatter similar or related words around the page.
- Use this project to create a word picture or inspirational poster that you can look at regularly.

Using your own name

- K – kind
- A – appreciative
- R – reflective, relational
- E – enabling, enthusiastic
- N – nurturing
- Use words to describe what you like about yourself or create a mission statement based on the letters.

Gratitude List

- Writing a gratitude list is a good way to document each day.
- When we experience gratitude, we can't experience anxiety – they are opposite emotional experiences.
- 30 things I'm thankful for today.
- Or just write 3 things a day in a simple diary – photograph them too.
- Or go through the alphabet and write one thing for each letter.
- Or buy an address book and add items of gratitude to the lettered pages.
- Write down for yourself three things that you are grateful for.
- What can you see, hear, smell, touch and taste right now?

- Listen to “10,000 reasons” by Matt Redman to inspire you.
- Be more creative – I am thankful for this because...
- Or turn each gratitude into a verse of a psalm.

What Went Well?

Another quick journaling concept is the What Went Well? Task.

- Use a small diary, or even index cards, to note down what went well today before you go to bed.
- Add one thing you learned and one thing that surprised you.
- This is a simple structure to help you remember what did go well – which is usually most of your day and go to sleep feeling more positive. Do this with others in your home, too.
- It is good for your wellbeing to focus on what went well (Phil 4:8) rather than to catalogue your catastrophes.

Take your paper and write down three things that went well today:

- 1
- 2
- 3

One thing you learned:

- 4

One thing that surprised you:

- 5

100 things that bring me joy

This is a really good project to work on when you are feeling down.

- Take a pack of 100 index cards or a notebook with 100 pages. Write down each joy on a different card or page. What you like to see, hear, taste, smell, touch, activities that bring you joy, favourite books, films, songs, Bible stories, Bible verses, clothes, places, memories, people... Write as many cards as you can – you can add more later.
- Pick one card a day and try to experience that joy in some way. Write a few sentences about your joy experience on the back of the card, with the date. Add illustrations, stickers and doodles to the card too.

Write down 3 things that have brought you joy in the past week.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- For added creativity, write a very short story about your joy experience. Try limiting yourself to 50 words. Add a photo too if you like.

Creating a Haiku

Haikus follow a 5-7-5 syllable structure. The entire poem only has three lines, with 17 syllables in total.

- The first line is 5 syllables. The second line is 7 syllables. The third is 5 syllables.

- They are short and simple, and you can be creative quite quickly. Here are a couple I wrote in a few minutes. Try writing one about something you saw today.

The blossom opens
Its fragrant heart to the sun
Delicate and pure

The birds gather moss
Gently building sheltered nests
To cradle new life

My life in bullet points – or a mind map – or a time-line

- Autobiographies can feel overwhelming.
- Capture the key points in bullet points or a mind map.
- Or create a time-line with sticky notes.
- Fill in more detail as you remember them and as you have time.
- Tell your faith/ life story by looking for all the places where God was at work in your life.
- How He guided, helped and supported you all through the years.
- He has always been with you.
- How would God tell the story of His loving relationship with you?
- How has He grown you closer into His likeness over the years?
- “To Be Told” – by Dan Allender – a book designed to help you tell the story of your life with God.

Creative writing using the Bible

- Retell Bible stories from the perspective of minor characters. Such as the story of Jesus birth from the perspective of the innkeeper's wife, or Mary's mother, or the story of someone healed by Jesus, etc,
- Rewrite Psalm 23 from the perspective of a carer, parent, truck driver, or any other profession.
- Write the story of Ruth by writing her journal.
- Imagine the routine of a day on Noah's ark.
- Rewrite a parable from a modern perspective.

My Best Self – character stories

Jennifer Fox Eades, a Christian educator who focuses on character development, says that who we are is what we are capable of at our best – not necessarily how we function under heavy pressure.

- Write your story from the perspective of a loving friend, who knows who you are at your best, and describe your strengths.
- Visit www.letitriple.org to learn about character strengths and www.viacharacter.org to take a character test. Write a story about a time when you used one of your key character strengths.

Love letter from God

- Go to www.fathersloveletter.com and download the Father's Love Letter in your language.
- This is a letter from God to you, taken from lots of Bible verses.
- Read it and let it soak into your heart.
- Write your letter back to Him.
- Create your own love letter from God, personalised for your needs, or for other people's needs.

Letter from future self

- Imagine that you can be "beamed up" into the future.
- What wisdom and guidance would you share, from the position of the future, to encourage you today?
- Write yourself a letter of encouragement and comfort from your future self. Include any of the following ideas that seem useful to your situation or thinking of other ideas.
- What does your future self appreciate about your present self and the choices you are making?
- What is your future self most concerned about your present self? What warnings might be suggested?
- Which relationships does your future self want you to strengthen and what ideas does your future self have about how you could do that?
- What does your future self think you need to let go of because he or she sees that is not going to be in your best interests in the future?
- What Biblical wisdom and comfort would your future self share with you?

The gold box and the bin

If something is troubling you, write down all the thoughts that come into your head on separate pieces of paper. Then evaluate each of your thoughts. Is it true, lovely, helpful, and uplifting, or is it critical, destructive, and depressing?

- Where does the thought come from?
- Is it still relevant for today, or is it a message that was useful for a specific time, such as when you were a child?
- Are they messages from people who love and care for you, or people that didn't have your best interests at heart?
- Is this a message that is helpful in your life, or one that prevents you from experiencing happiness, love and peace?
- Separate the thoughts into two piles: The ones that you want to retain and the ones that you want to release.
- Then decide what you will do with the ones that need to be released – bury, burn (safely!), shred, compost, or whatever you feel suits your needs.
- Find a gold box or an attractive book, and journal your useful thoughts on the pages. When you have other positive thoughts and ideas, write them down and add them to your treasure box or book. Add poems, quotes, positive thoughts, photos and other reflections. Regularly 'audit' your thoughts so that your mind is filled with healthy messages about yourself and others.

Sitting in God's lap

- Imagine you are sitting in God's lap and He is giving you a big hug.
- He smiles at you, holds you close, and tells you what He knows your tired heart most needs to hear.
- Write down your conversation with your most loving Father God.

Using metaphors

Metaphors are useful ways of communicating complex experiences. We can explore our metaphors in all kinds of ways, for new ideas and inspiration. We often use metaphors to describe our lives and relationships –

- I feel like I keep going round in circles.
- I can see the light at the end of the tunnel.
- My life is as predictable as a traffic jam on the M25.

What metaphors could you use to describe the way you see your life right now? List two or three if possible:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

- Choose one metaphor to work with. Be playful and see where it takes you.
- Imagine the metaphor is your reality, and then explore it.
- For example - If you feel as if you are locked inside a castle...
- What kind of castle is it? Describe the castle as accurately as you can.
- What is your room like? How did you get there?
- Draw your castle, if you like, and explore it visually too.
- Do you feel safe or imprisoned, or do you have other feelings when you think of your castle?
- What is guarding you, or stopping you from escaping? Do you want to escape, or are you happy in your tower?
- How could you try to escape or leave? What would happen if you did get out? Where would you rather be?
- Is anyone trying to reach you, or fight you, or guard you, or release you? What could he or she do to help you?
- Is there someone outside the castle who needs to be let in? How can you help them to get in so they can be with you?
- Is there something you would like to leave in the castle, or take with you from the castle?
- Would you want to go back to the castle at some time? Or would you like to destroy it? Or watch it crumble? Etc, etc.
- How has the castle been useful in your life?

What have you learned about yourself by exploring your metaphor in a different way?

The power of appreciation, positive questions, and our use of words

Try to word the questions you wonder about in ways that help you to focus on what you appreciate about yourself, or someone else, however small that detail might be. Appreciation changes people in highly aesthetic ways, and it is much more effective than pointing out faults or nagging.

- When am I happiest with my life, health, relationships, spiritual development etc?
- What is happening in those times when things feel good and I feel content and happy?
- What are the things that make me strong/resilient/my best self/etc?
- How did I learn those skills?
- What are the good and healthy things that are happening in a specific situation?
- Look hard for the good. Think about the things in your life that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, etc and focus on them, rather than the negative aspects of your life. Remember - you see (and become like) what you are looking at, so look at something good!

We often tell and live the story we tell ourselves about ourself, or the story others have tried to tell about us. Look for the healthy stories in your life and live and tell them.

Externalising

Externalising is a way of exploring a hard-to-describe or elusive emotion. When we externalise, we imagine that the emotion is an object or creature outside of ourselves. It may help to draw it or to shape it out of clay. Here are some questions externalising fear, but it can be sadness, frustration, conflict, etc. Whatever you want to explore more deeply.

- What is your fear like? What shape is it?
- What colour is it, what texture is it?
- How does it move, and what does it eat?
- What name would you like to give it?
- What invites the fear into your life and what sends it away?
- When does the fear feel weak, or strong? How can you weaken it further?
- Who helps you to keep fear out of your life?
- What would your life be like if fear left and never came back? What would you miss the most? What would you be most glad about?
- When is your fear afraid of you?
- Where does it hide? What games does it play with you?
- Do other people see your fear too? What does it look like to them?

Or try:

- Externalising a positive emotion such as hope, peace, love, joy and explore it as much as you can.

- Writing a description of the emotion as if it were a character in your life story. You can try externalising troubling experiences too, but start with simpler ones first and make sure you get help from a counsellor if something is disturbing you in a troublesome way.

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