

Writing to Reflect the Heartbeat of God: A guide for Christian poets by Sherry Maxwell

Dictionary.com defines poetry as “the measured language of emotion.”

It goes on to say that Hebrew poetry, which is the most often read example of man’s earliest attempts at poetry, deals almost exclusively with the great question of man’s relationship to God.

The Books of Psalms are quoted more frequently in the New Testament than any other book except Isaiah. David was considered by the author of a large number of them.

As all good Bible students know, God anointed David because he judged his heart as a shepherd boy and found him pleasing. So if we use the example of David as our motivation as Christian poets, God shows us through the psalms that the heart of Christian poet should reflect the heartbeat of God.

According to this website, in the Hebrew scriptures there are found three distinct kinds of poetry, 1) that of the Book of Job and the Song of Solomon, which is dramatic; 2) that of the Book of Psalms, which is lyrical and 3) that of the Book of Ecclesiastes, which is didactic and sententious.

According to the Thompson Chain Reference Study Bible the Book of Psalms includes 150 spiritual songs and poems used by the church in all ages in worship and devotional exercises. The predominant themes in the psalms are prayer and praise.

Psalm 119-130 says “The unfolding of your words gives light,” assuring us that part our role as Christian poets is to be an encourager.

Colossians 3:16, 17 says “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether it be word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the father through him,” so we also know that praise is a key component in writing Christian poetry and that our motivation is to use our gifts to glorify God and accomplish His will here on earth. One of the most well-known Christian poets in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was Helen Steiner Rice. Mrs. Rice became known for her greeting card verse after some of her poems were read on the Lawrence Welk show including one called, “The Praying Hands,” which she had written for a

religious convention.

**The "PRAYING HANDS"  
are much, much more  
than just a work of art,  
They are the "soul's**

creation" of a deeply  
thankful heart  
They are a Priceless  
Masterpiece  
that love alone could paint.  
And they reveal the  
Selflessness of an unheralded  
saint  
These hands so scarred and  
toil worn, tell the story of a  
man  
Who sacrificed his talent in  
accordance with God's Plan  
For in God's Plan are many  
things man cannot  
understand,  
But we must trust God's  
judgment  
and be guided by His Hand  
Sometimes He asks us to give  
up our dreams of happiness,  
Sometimes we must forego  
our hopes of fortune and  
success,  
Not all of us can triumph or  
rise to heights of fame,  
And many times What  
should be Ours,  
goes to Another Name  
But he who makes a sacrifice,  
so another may succeed,  
Is indeed a true disciple of  
our blessed Savior's creed  
For when we "give ourselves  
away" in sacrifice and love,  
We are laying up rich  
treasures  
in God's kingdom up above  
And hidden in gnarled, toil  
worn hands  
is the truest Art of Living,

**Achieved alone by those  
who've learned  
the "Victory of Giving"  
For any sacrifice on earth,  
make in the Lord's name,  
Assures the Giver of a Place  
in Heavens Hall of Fame.  
And who can say with  
certainty  
Where the Greatest Talent  
Lies.  
Or Who Will Be the Greatest  
In Our Heavenly Father's  
Eyes!  
Helen Steiner Rice**

In the autobiographical work, "Ambassador of Sunshine," by Ronald Pollitt and Virginia Wiltse, the story is told of how Helen Steiner Rice became the family breadwinner when her father died in the flu epidemic of 1918 dashing her hopes of college in career. Then as a young bride, her husband committed suicide due to losses in the stock market crash of 1929. But using her gift anyway she could, Mrs. Rice, who was then a single mother, took a job at the Gibson Art Company to pay her husband's debts. She worked there for more than 40 years rising to the rank of editor. After a period of many years she became known locally for her inspirational verse and dedication to charitable causes and was given the nickname of "The Ambassador of Sunshine."

But what astonished me the most in reading about Mrs. Rice was that despite all her writing and successes, she was in her 60s before her work was read on the Lawrence Welk show thereby piloting her national success as a poet and author of greeting card verse. To me that itself is an encouragement that despite what we've gone through, God can begin using us at any age to glorify His name and further His kingdom.

If God is calling you to reflect His heartbeat through poetry, I would like to share a few suggestions which have helped me over the years.

Always keep a blank book or journal with you if you think of a word or phrase so you can easily jot it down and then go back to flesh out the actual poem at a later time.

Sometimes the Lord will just wake me up with a verse or line that becomes a poem. For Example, one day I woke up with the beginning lines of a poem in my head which I later wrote called "Creation Renewal".

### **Creation Renewal**

***Let love light upon your shoulder***

***Like the beauty of the spring***

***Don't let sorrows make you older***

***While the world around you sings***

***Lay down your heavy burden***

***Rescind the path you choose***

***In joyous praise be certain***

***Creation now renews***

***Consider fields and flowers***

***Displays of jeweled hue***

***Count each minute, not each hour***

***The hand of God ensues***

***Let the gentle rain of heaven***

***Wash away your tears***

***Let cool breezes bring you blessing***

***Watch your sadness disappear***

***Remember for each rainbow***

***A rain cloud once appeared***

***Surrender every shadow***

***Release now every fear***

***Let nature give you nurture***

***The hand of God abounds***

***His promises soon made sure***

***His splendor all surrounds***

***Erase the cares you've borrowed***

***Disappointments now cast down***

***Dream of daybreak and tomorrow***

***As the earth again spins 'round.***

You can also use writing prompts which you can find on writing websites like [writingfix.com](http://writingfix.com) or in books such as "A Creative Writer's Kit," by Judy Reeves.

To me, a poem is like a word sculpture. You start out with a lot of ideas and then try to sculpt it into a beautiful word picture.

When you start the actual writing of the poem it's important to identify the main idea of the poem and then use repetition, similes and metaphors to make your words lyrical. Become familiar with these and other poetic terms such as alliteration or assonance.

Most poets use a rhyming dictionary and I would recommend the "Capricorn Rhyming Dictionary," by Bessie Redfield.

When at all possible, use the active instead of passive voice to give your words vitality.

Write with a pen because poets tend to hold onto ideas for years and penciled in notebooks become faded and hard to read. I personally do better writing on paper and then doing editing later

on the computer. There just seems to be some sort of connection in the creative process between conceiving the ideas in your spirit, transferring them to your brain and then from pen to paper.

Develop a sense for the length of your poem and then use resources such as Sally Stuart's Christian Writers' Market Guide to see editor's guidelines.

To me a poem is long enough when it says what it has to say.

For example who is a shorter poem I wrote.

### That Life is Gone

She doesn't color her hair anymore.

She doesn't wear the ring that she wore. \

That life is gone and she wants it no more

Now the winter winds blow and she fastens the door.

To me these four lines have the perfect impact to convey a much more complex scenario.

If you desire to be a Christian poet, seek the inspiration of the Lord through prayer; praise any type of prayer language that you use. Let him know that you are willing to be a vessel to reflect his heartbeat, to allow Him to speak through you or to encourage others.

To me the purpose of Christian poetry is most often to encourage, offering thanks, to pray, to offer comfort, to unify the body or to embrace the creative process best exemplified through God's creation. Many of our greatest poets get their greatest inspiration from nature. Learn all you can about plants and animals in nature.

Be observant to detail and try to use common language readers will appreciate. Remind yourself it's not about you, but to glorify the creator.

Above all else, remember not to take yourself too seriously. Permit yourself to have fun with writing and to get the focus off yourself and the Lord will bring the fruit He desires.

Get busy using the gifts God has given you to His glory. Write a poem!