

TRANSCRIPT: WEBINAR 2A

RESEARCHING YOUR TOPIC MAKES YOU AN EXPERT

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Hello. Welcome back to It's Time for You to Write that Book 2.0

I hope you have enjoyed your journey so far.

Today we are going to talk about the research you need for your book.

I can just hear someone saying, "Research? Oh no!" But hang on, you're going to like this.

Let me tell you a story. Andy, the 5th grader got caught chewing gum in class. His teacher scolded him and ordered him to write a 100-word essay explaining why he shouldn't do that.

So Andy sat down and quickly wrote. "I shouldn't chew gum in class because it goes smack, smack, smack, smack, smack...and you get the rest. His paper smacked all the way to 100 words.

That, my friends, is one of the main reasons we need research.

When we start writing our book, we are excited about our theme and the ideas we want to convey.

That's great!

But usually when we write, something else happens. We put down our great ideas, and then hit a wall. We can't think of what else to say.

We look at our project and start thinking, *I don't have enough for a book.*

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In the last webinar we put the bones in place with our outline.

Now it's time to add meat to the bones, so to speak. We know the particular ideas we want to express, but we want to say more. We want our writing to be full and complete.

Now for some, research sounds like a dirty word. It brings back memories of sitting up late laboring over a term paper.

But this research I'm talking about shouldn't be that way. Think of it more as "investigating." We are investigating what others are saying about our subject. Some facts and figures, maybe. Also new perspectives and different angles on our message.

When we investigate properly, we'll benefit lots personally. Adding to our storehouse of knowledge about our subject.

What are we looking for?

Others have written or recorded information which can help us ‘flesh out’ our bare bones. Sometimes we can find ideas we can use. Other times, we find ourselves sparked by someone else’s writing and we grab a new idea of our own.

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. Prov. 27:17 NIV That’s the concept here.

So again, what are we looking for?

Historical Background. Putting our thoughts into perspective on the timeline will enhance what we are saying. How has history influenced our subject? Where has our message fit into the chronological scheme? What has happened in history which could shed light on our ideas?

New Perspectives are significant also. We want to look at our subject with fresh eyes. Others may have insights which have eluded us. Almost any problem we are trying to solve has more than one approach.

When we listen to what others are saying about a subject, we understand it better.

We want to get the facts straight – even the details. In our book we may refer to an historical event. We want to be certain that we have the correct years, location , and characters.

If our reference is to a Bible passage, let’s be sure we have the correct book and chapter. And proper background. If our story refers to David and Goliath, it would be important to note the attitude of the Israeli army, the size of the giant, and the details about their weapons. (Shield and Spear versus a slingshot with 5 smooth stones).

If we are referencing a specific location, let’s be certain to understand the characteristics of the area. For instance, suppose we were going to include an account of Maidan (The Ukrainian student uprising which led to the absolute overthrow and exile of the pro-communist president).

We would need to know and include that this happened in the dead of winter. Sub-zero weather, snow and thick ice didn’t deter the students and others from standing out in the square with their candles and flashlights. Singing and chanting their songs of freedom. And they won!

If our book includes a certain place, we will want to know the surroundings of that place. How does it look? (The landscape and vegetation). What’s the weather like? Hot and muggy? Cold and brisk? What are the attitudes of the people? What is their lifestyle?

As I think about this, I am reminded of my book featuring Bishop Hardy Coleman. Part of the power of the story is the fact that he grew up in the hot, muggy south. Mississippi, to be exact. He lived in a two room log cabin on a cotton farm on a winding, dusty road. Several miles from the nearest village.

Like the other young boys in his neighborhood, Bishop Coleman never went to school. He had to work on the farm.

So the greatness of his ability to read and assimilate the teachings of the Bible was even more profound.

As you begin to acquire more of the facts concerning an area, you can insert your readers into that location. They will begin to see and feel the atmosphere. Almost as if they were there. They'll identify with you and the characters in your book. They'll begin to like them – or not. Depending on how you portray them.

If you are giving your own testimony, the more details you can insert about your surroundings during each phase of your story, the more success you will have in captivating the attention of your readers.

So get the facts about your setting. You'll be glad you did.

Besides location and the atmosphere of the setting - dates, customs and attitudes, and who was involved are a few of the details you'll want to research. The more accurate you are, the better.

And don't forget Data and Statistics. These can lend perspective also.

Stories and anecdotes will enhance our writing.

Sometimes even a funny joke can grab the audience. When we paint pictures, people grab hold of what we are saying. The pictures can even stay with them a long time.

You think of stories you have heard before, but your research will allow you to find new ones.

There are websites and blogs which contain stories and even jokes about your subject. Books too. A trip to your library could be very beneficial here.

We'll talk more about stories and anecdotes later. Now we are talking mostly about why and how to do research.

So how do we do this research?

Search engines are a great place to start for research.

Take a look at your outline, and see which areas you feel are skimpy. There will be certain topics which you need to enlarge. So you can place those in the search query and you'll be amazed at what pops up. Thousands of blogs, articles, and websites which contain your keywords.

Usually the first few items on a search page are advertisements. They aren't necessarily the best choices, because they probably are biased. By definition, an ad is biased toward the product it's advertising.

When you scroll below the advertisements, you will be able to spot some interesting titles. Just start clicking and see what you find.

As you know, Google.com and Bing.com are full of information on almost every subject imaginable. If you want to keep up with your topic, you can sign up for updates.

Go to Google.com/alerts. You will find an opportunity to sign up for alerts in any area.

If your subject is Bible, prophecy, missions, homeschooling, finance, golfing, cooking, fishing or whatever.. you will receive an email every time new information shows up with that keyword. In fact, your inbox may start loading faster than you'd like.

When you enter your search words, you'll find blogs, articles, websites, and YouTube recordings show up. So filter through the topics and see what strikes you as important.

Now when you insert a topic, the search engine screens for that word, so you will receive many items which have nothing to do with your topic. The keyword has caused it to pop up.

For instance, say your word is coach. If Coach is found in the title of a movie, anything published concerning that movie will show up. You will also probably get some articles about Coach purses. And the queen's coach. Football coaches, etc. You know how Google works. It's based on keywords, and your word might not always hit right on your subject.

Now much of your search engine information will be rather surface in nature.

As one writer put it, "Once I was a scuba diver in the sea of words. Now I just zip along the surface like a guy on a jet ski." Nicholas Carr, Atlantic, 2008

That's what search engines have done for us. Our searches can be like that. Surface, surface, surface.

Now there are a couple of sites I want to discuss a little. The first of these is Blueletterbible.org. This is an amazing site which contains the Bible and Bible references in many different translations. You can look up passages and compare the translations.

In addition, this site contains a number of concordances, dictionaries and Lexicons.

When you look up at the top, you see a search bar. You can insert verses, words, or topics. Then the scroll down allows you to choose the translation you want.

Just for an example, I am going to insert Psalm 23:1-3. Then I can choose the translation I want. If you insert a word you want to search in the Bible, you can click advanced options and scroll down to the exact Book or series of books.

In this example, I am going to leave it at King James Version.

When you click the search, it takes you to the verses and they are itemized. That is so that you can now click on a particular verse, and you will be able to drill down to the exact original wording.

If you want to know the original Hebrew or Greek word, you will find it listed here. You can click on each word and find exactly what the original text said. You can even click on the sound icon, and it will sound the original word.

For instance, if you look at the third word down, “the Lord,” you will see that in Strong’s concordance that is word number H (for Hebrew) 3068. It is Yehovah. And even the Hebrew letters are included.

Across the top are the different colored tabs. You will be able to click on those and find Lexicons, dictionaries, different translations of the verse – and much more.

This is truly an amazing site. Absolutely free for anyone to use.

It’s a website I use very often, because I love digging down to see what the original languages really meant. That helps me gain perspective on what was being said.

Then in a totally different vein, Wikipedia.com is very useful.

You probably have already been on this site. This is a collaborative encyclopedia and contains information on almost anything. But when I say, “collaborative,” I mean that you or I could add some information. There is a committee which agrees to publish what we add, but all of the information has been included by this method.

So what does that mean?

Sometimes the info isn’t very reliable.

Recently I was searching for information about an event in the news. I happened to hit upon the Wikipedia article, and it was total spin. I knew basically what had happened, but I was just

trying to get details. In this article the event had been politicized (surprise, surprise) and the facts were misrepresented.

So you do need to be careful.

At the bottom of each article, there should be the sources which contributed to the writing. If you aren't sure, you can check some of the sources and see if they are reliable.

Yet there is some great information here.

You can see at the top of the page that you can acquire information in lots of different languages.

Then at the bottom – as emphasized here, you can see lots of categories.

You can download free photos, stories, and much more.

Let's explore a little to get some ideas.

We mentioned Maidan earlier, so as an example let's look that up. Actually the word Maidan is the Square where the demonstrations occurred. The official word for the uprising is Euromaidan. So you can see this article about the event.

And you can even view pictures which portray the scene and the demonstrations.

In any of these Wikipedia postings, you may dive deeper by reading some of the source writings at the bottom of the page. Those writings can also allow you to be more certain of the article.

For your deeper dive You will also want to read Books on your subject.

Your Library will be a great place for the books you need. Or Amazon.com.

You may already have books in your library which contain the information you want.

Sometimes when we are writing on Biblical topics, the library won't suffice. In those cases, we will need to rely on our own books or those of our friends. Church bookstores sometimes have what we are looking for.

Another way to do research is to interview people.

While I was writing the biography of Bishop Coleman, my husband and I spent hours sitting with him and his wife in their living room.

He was 92 when I started.

This man had spent his youth on a farm back on dirt roads in rural Mississippi – during segregation. From there he went on to lead such an inspirational life that in 2001 Ripley, Mississippi proclaimed a Hardy Lee Coleman, Sr Day. He was given the Key to the City and honored for the difference his life had made to the region. He was one of only a handful of people who had ever received such an honor.

Now you can imagine the stories he and his wife had to tell. And the insights about all the cultural changes which had come about during his lifetime.

When I left his house after each session, I felt that I had personally lived through the scenes he shared.

Understanding applicable moments in our history, gives us greater perspective and makes our books more meaningful.

What was it like being there in the moment when revivals, or earthquakes, or volcanos, or first space expeditions took place?

And on a smaller scale, what was it like when someone first experienced a birth or death in the family? A divorce. A marriage. A new baby. The discovery of a child on drugs. A business startup.

When we tap into the emotions and just plain facts of what people have gone through, we are better prepared to help them. We feel that we can see through their eyes, and our ability to make an impact is enhanced.

Another means of Research: Visit the site.

Obviously we can't always travel to the locations of our subjects, but sometimes we can.

When we walk down a bustling street in New York and almost get run over by the hurried, sometimes agitated crowd, we certainly catch a glimpse of that culture.

Or when we visit a farm town and get into a conversation with some local farm workers, we see more of that perspective.

Or when we are able to stand on historical sites and hear or read about the events signified there, we gain understanding.

It's not to say that we understand every culture, but at least we recognize the differences. Once again we gain greater perspective. Greater empathy. Greater ability to accurately address the issues in our writing.

So do your research, but let me warn you of a danger.

Sometimes writers are tempted to continue research as a means of delaying their writing. Maybe subliminally, but this is a common tendency with writers or artists of any kind. Research can be used as a justification for procrastination.

I'm reminded of a writers' joke:

Why did the writer cross the road?

To run to the gym, do a little shopping, and visit a friend.

Because he had a deadline due.

When we are facing a big project like writing a book, our human nature will sometimes sabotage us and put things off. That's when research can become a delaying tactic.

We are in the process of writing a book, and we will not allow ourselves to get distracted from our real mission.

There are accounts of people spending years and years researching a book which never gets written.

That's not us.

We will never know everything there is to know about our subject. We will never interview every person, visit every historical site, read every book, or check out every search item.

Enough is enough.

We finally come to the moment when we realize that we have a fairly good grasp of our subject.

It's time to write.

So let's do it!