



FROM PREACHER TO PUBLISHED AUTHOR

**A step-by-step guide to seeing your messages
and other work on the printed page**

MONROE ROARK

MAKING THE DECISION

If you are a pastor, evangelist, or full-time Christian worker who wants to be a published author, it is now easier than ever. If you have ever thought about having a book with your own name on it, now is the time to make it happen.

There are plenty of good reasons to do it. Self-publishing is a straightforward process and more affordable than ever because of technology. On top of that, you can find someone to do most of the heavy lifting for you at a very reasonable cost.

Publishing your own book is not merely a vanity project. As a pastor, it can increase your visibility in the community you are serving, so that people are aware of your availability to help them. It can be a nice gift for visitors to your services, increasing the chance that they will remember who you are when a major life event leads them to find spiritual guidance and they do not have a church home. It can even be a witnessing tool for your congregation to distribute during various outreach initiatives.

Why not have something with your name and the name of your church to give out in your city or town? After all, it is your church that will have the best chance to minister to its residents when the need arises. A hurting person with nowhere else to turn might just see that book on a shelf, then remember that it was dropped off a few weeks earlier by the church around the corner.

For your regular congregation, there is always a need for good material that will help them spiritually. A solid church bookstore can have a good mix of outside material as well as publications that are produced by the church staff. Who knows what a particular church needs better than its pastors?

As for what material to use, it can be as simple as a particular sermon series that received a positive response in the last year or so, or even one specific message that was preached on a special occasion like Mother's Day. Since more than 90 percent of churches preserve those messages on audio or video, the raw material is readily available to be converted to the printed page.

Anyone who travels full-time in ministry, speaking to different churches every week and attending numerous conferences throughout the year, can benefit from one or more self-published works on his display table. Often a church member who is helped by a visiting speaker will appreciate the opportunity to take home something helpful and add it to his or her personal library.

Interested in making it happen? The next few pages will show you how to get started and see your project through to the end – when you are holding a copy of your book in your hands.

CHOOSING YOUR SUBJECT MATTER

For the purposes of this guide, we will assume that you have not written down a single word for the specific purpose of a published book.

Some preachers have a burden for a particular subject and spend hours writing it down, either longhand on paper or using a computer. But often a pastor simply does not have the time to do that. Also, the topic most suitable for print is frequently something he has already preached to his church.

A full-length book can contain 10-20 messages in a specific series. That will likely end up as 120-200 pages in a standard paperback size. Having worked with many preachers over the past 15 years, I can safely estimate that a typical Sunday sermon in its finished written form will add up to 2,500-3,000 words.

But a single message or two might be just what you need. If you want something special to share with visitors on Easter, Mother's Day, a patriotic special day or some other specific event, a message with that day's focus could be just the ticket – and you don't need to look any farther than last year's message to find your material.

If you've been in the pulpit for a number of years and your past sermons are cataloged, you could address a topic such as marriage and family life by pulling out several individual messages preached over a period of several years, perhaps around Valentine's Day or during a particular month with that focus.

The choices are plentiful. Once you decide the subject, you are ready to go.

GATHERING WHAT YOU NEED TO PROCEED

We will walk through this process by describing a hypothetical project that consists of 12 messages in a series. You really only need two items, or groups of items: an audio recording and your outline for each message.

The best recordings are audio only and are produced by a solid media team at your church. Videos can be used if the audio is clearly heard. A YouTube video can be downloaded and converted to produce an audio-only recording. A Facebook video is less flexible but doable – again, as long as you can hear everything clearly.

The outlines vary according to a pastor's individual style; some have only the basic points, while others are fleshed out with more detail. Either way, the person who puts the material together in finished written form will use both.

STARTING THE PROCESS

The next step will be undertaken by a transcriptionist, who listens to the audio and puts the words on paper (or, more likely, in a text file on a computer). This can be an arduous or fairly smooth task, depending upon the transcriptionist's skill set and experience. The person who handles this should be an exceptionally fast typist who also has a professional-level knowledge of grammar and punctuation; otherwise, there will be an editing job required after the transcription is complete.

I should note here that more organizations are taking advantage of AI (artificial intelligence) to convert oral presentations to written ones. This can be done with sermons, but the quality of such work depends upon the preacher's speaking style, accent, etc. Most AI-produced transcriptions do not have the correct punctuation, so they would require the attention of a transcriptionist anyway.

You can use someone to get the words down and then find a second person to review it as an editor, if you don't know someone who can efficiently do both. At some point during the process, the sermon outline's points are added at the appropriate spots. It is a good practice to display the main points in bold type and/or all caps. Italics are good for highlighting scripture quotations.

Because I have worked on 200-300 messages from more than a dozen different preachers, while also having two decades of experience as a newspaper editor, I have streamlined my own process so that I can handle the transcription and editing simultaneously. When I finish a sermon for a client, it is ready to print.

MAKING SURE IT'S RIGHT

Once a written file is completed, it needs to be reviewed by at least two sets of fresh eyes. This is not an indictment of the transcriptionist at all. A large newspaper will usually have 4-5 people look at every page before it goes to press, and all of them are trained professionals. The more, the better.

Obviously, you as the author need to read what has been written under your name. Hopefully, you will find it to be a smooth and clear retelling of what you originally presented from the pulpit – without the unnecessary parts. Repeating some words and phrases is a good practice in public speaking; when writing, not so much. The transcriptionist should have also removed “er” and “uh” while fusing broken sentences that may have resulted from you losing your train of thought while speaking.

If you are using skilled people to perform these tasks, **PAY THEM**. This is an investment. If it looks professional and contains helpful material, you will make your money back.

GETTING IT READY FOR THE PRINTER

This step can go a few different ways according to your own computer ability and the skills of people you may know. I will address a few options and then share my recommendations.

Once you have a completed text file and all corrections have been made, it needs to be formatted for the printed page. If you have a printing ministry in your church, you might already have someone with the skill set and the appropriate software.

There are a number of possibilities; I use Adobe InDesign, which I began using as a newspaper editor and which is extremely popular for books, magazines and newspapers. This document you are reading was created using that program.

Another option is to use the book creator app devised by Amazon for those who wish to publish their work on its platform. I am not too familiar with this app because I have not needed it.

(Spoiler alert: I use Amazon to print all of my books, which I will cover in more detail later.)

At this point you need to decide what size your book will be. A common size that I use almost exclusively is 5.5 by 8.5 inches per page. There are several other size options on Amazon.

Of course, if you are using your own printing operation or that of a printing ministry with which you are already familiar, you should consult with the key people who will be involved with your project to get their input.

The first thing a prospective reader will see is the cover, so you do not want to skimp on that. Amazon has a built-in cover creator app that is adequate, but your best bet is to find a graphic artist that can design an original cover for you. If you don't know one already, it shouldn't be difficult to find one who can do it at a reasonable price.

Make sure your designer is familiar with all size guidelines, including how to size the spine according to the number of pages in the book.

FIRING UP THE PRESSES

This section is for those who do not have a printing ministry or a local printer in their town that they plan to retain for the completion of the project.

Amazon has a division called Kindle Direct Publishing, which was created initially for the publication of ebooks that could be read on a Kindle or some other electronic device. For the past several years, Amazon has provided print-on-demand services to complement its ebooks.

Because of the company's sheer size, it has made the process more affordable than ever. In the past, printers of all sizes would require a customer to purchase a few hundred copies up front because of the startup costs associated with any print job. Once you have a title listed on Amazon, you can order one copy or one hundred copies at the same price per unit.

Go to **kdp.amazon.com** to get started. It costs you nothing to create an account and then to upload your book.

It is actually a very user-friendly process. If it seems confusing on its own, there are numerous YouTube videos produced by Amazon and others that will walk you through it.

Among the questions you will be asked are whether your book is suitable for all ages, what size the pages will be, and how much you will charge for retail purchases. You will upload the file for the inside pages and the file for the cover at specific times when prompted.

A special Previewer feature will let you see a rough estimation of what the pages will look like and whether everything is sized properly.

Before completing the entire process, you have the option of ordering one or more proofs – actual paperback copies purchased by you at cost. Once you are satisfied that your book is ready for circulation, you complete the online process and wait for notification from Amazon when it goes “live” in a day or two.

PUTTING IT OUT THERE

At any time after initial publication, you will have the option of purchasing “author copies” at a special author rate. For a paperback of 150 or so pages, that can be just over \$3 plus shipping.

For a book of that approximate size that is sold on Amazon at a retail price of \$15, you can count on a royalty of about \$6. These are all estimates based on my own experience (like anything else, prices can vary based on inflation and other factors).

If you want to make your book available to your own church members and those at other churches with whom you are familiar, buy a big batch of author copies. Put some in your church bookstore and sell them wholesale to other churches.

Don't tell your congregation to order it from Amazon; cut out the middleman and make a few extra dollars. Unless your book has some unexpected kind of mass appeal, you will have the most success by selling it yourself in this way.

An extra step you can take that does not cost a dime is to list your publication as an ebook as well as a paperback. (Amazon now does hardcover books also.) Creating an ebook is a fairly simple process even if you are not a graphic designer. Major word processing programs such as Microsoft Word for PC and Pages for Mac have built-in features that allow a file to be easily converted to an ebook.

HAVING THE LAST WORD

You have read enough in these pages to allow you to make an informed decision regarding how to reach your publishing goals.

Can it get any easier? Actually, it can.

I can handle the entire process for you. I have done it repeatedly for myself as well as for my ministry clients.

Interested? Send an email to **mroark@mroark.com** with “publish my book” in the subject line.

While you're at it, check out **mroark.com** where I've listed seven missionary biographies I have written. You may know one or more of the subjects I've written about.

Thank you for your time. May the Lord bless your future endeavors.

LISTENING TO OTHER AUTHORS

Monroe Roark has been a personal friend going back almost 40 years to our teenage years. After a few moves across the country and many years later I have been privileged to be Monroe's pastor for the past decade.

His 30-plus years of experience as a newspaper reporter and writer are now being used to help pastors, missionaries, and laymen to get their stories told in book form. He has dozens of books now in print that he has helped bring from the idea stage to finished project.

Just in our ministry alone, there are almost a dozen books that we have worked on together. I myself have worked with Monroe on a half-dozen or more projects over the past decade. I do not know anyone who makes the process easier or more affordable to get your material published.

Several years ago we decided if we were going to spend money to give books to guests each week in our welcome bags, it would be books from our church written by our people. Do yourself a favor and let him help you get your idea to print.

**John W. (Brent) Stancil, Community Bible Baptist Church
Pinellas Park, Fla.**

I have worked with Monroe for more than 15 years on a number of projects. He has always done a great job for me.

**Charles Keen, FirstBible International/First Baptist Church
Milford, Ohio**

I have been blessed to have Brother Monroe Roark's assistance on several of my books and other projects down through the years. If you are an aspiring author and need some experienced guidance, I recommend Bro. Roark.

**Stacey Shiflett, Calvary Baptist Church
Dundalk, Md.**