

SAMPLE: MEMOIR WRITING

Portfolio Context: The sample demonstrates narrative vulnerable non-fiction (Memoir). It establishes immediate thematic tension and showcases the author's voice through high-quality reflective rhythm.

Project Title: Coming Home Slowly

Subtitle: A Pastor's Memoir of Burnout, Doubt, and the Long Walk Back

Introduction

The night I knew I was finished was a Tuesday.

I had preached on Sunday — three services, the same sermon — and I had handled the elders' meeting on Monday, and on Tuesday afternoon I sat in my office and stared at the wall behind my desk for forty-five minutes without moving.

There was a sermon outline on the screen in front of me.

The cursor blinked in the white space beneath the title. I did not have a single thing to say.

That had never happened to me before. In twenty-one years of pastoral ministry, I had always had something to say.

I had said it well, and I had said it on time, and I had said it with what I believed, at least most of the time, was the help of the Spirit.

But on that Tuesday afternoon the well was simply empty. Not dry. Empty. There is a difference.

A dry well still has the shape of a well.

An empty well, the kind I am talking about, no longer remembers what it was for.

I closed the laptop. I drove home. I did not tell my wife what had happened, because I did not yet have words for it, and pastors who do not have words for their own state of soul are very dangerous men.

I went to bed at eight in the evening. I did not get out of bed for most of the next two days.

That was the beginning of the season this book is about.

I have hesitated for almost four years to write any of this down.

There is a kind of pastor's memoir that exists to make the pastor look heroic, and I did not want to write that book.

There is another kind that exists to settle scores, and I did not want to write that book either.

What I wanted to write — what I think I am finally ready to write — is a quieter book than either of those.

A book about what it is actually like when the things you have been telling other people for two decades stop being able to hold you up.

I am not going to tell you that I never doubted. I doubted.

I doubted in ways that would have ended my ministry if I had said any of it out loud at the time.

I doubted whether the gospel I had preached for so long was true in the way I had preached it.

I doubted whether God was even paying attention to the small congregation I had given my life to.

I doubted whether I had been called or whether I had simply been ambitious.

There were nights I prayed and there were nights I did not pray, and toward the end there were many more of the second kind than the first.

And then, slowly — and I do mean slowly, in a way that does not make for a dramatic chapter — God brought me home.

Not to the same ministry. Not to the same certainties. But home. Back to Himself.

Back to a faith that had room in it for the kind of weather I had walked through.

This book is the long version of that walk. It is for the pastor who has stopped sleeping.

It is for the elder who is starting to wonder.

It is for the lay leader who has been pretending too long.

And it is, mostly, for the part of you that has not yet given up on the possibility that the long walk back is real, and that the One who is waiting at the end of it is the same One you first followed all those years ago.

Take your time with these pages. I am.