

7 small steps

**to help weary writers
get back on track**



by Joy Lenton

Introduction



Dear busy friend, are you feeling tired, worn out and weary? Struggling to hold your head up or even lift your heavy coffee cup? *Finding that words don't flow like they used to? Or you're blocked and stuck for ideas and inspiration?* Perhaps you've lost your spark and wonder if you'll ever get it back.

Recognising how exhausted we are is the first essential step in dealing with it. If the description above fits, then **the step by step tips I am sharing are definitely for you.** May they help revive, inspire, offer hope and feed your soul, as well helping you to see you are not alone.

These troughs of despond affect all of us from time to time, but the good news is that **we can find a way through our dry, drained and depleted spells.** I know from firsthand experience how stressful it can be when we are worn out and in desperate need of a break.

Yet we long to crack on with our work in progress. It's frustrating, isn't it? *How do we deal with it?* I believe it's by noticing the signs of our fatigue and remembering the simple things that help or hinder us from getting adequate recovery and rest.

We can all learn to recognise our own signs of saturation and overwhelm, and decide how to extricate ourselves from added stress and strain. And when we do, we're far less likely to return to the same behaviour that left us exhausted in the first place.

Though for many who suffer from M.E and chronic illness, fatigue is a permanent state that never leaves us, one which requires careful handling, discernment, pacing and rest Every. Single. Day. *Are you ready to make some small changes? Let's begin.* **Each small step builds on the next and can have a profound effect if we follow it faithfully.**

Step #1 -- Be alert for the way your mind and body signal their need for a break



Our need for a break is frequently signalled in the form of mounting anxiety and tension, maybe with accompanying neck and shoulder pain, coupled with other physical signs of weariness.

It may include an inability to think clearly or concentrate like you used to. Your mind feels like mud and trying to get inspired feels like looking for treasure in treacle. *Does this sound familiar to you?*

It's time to stop trying to fit everything in, to pause what can wait, not worry about trying to write, and seek those things that best replenish and relax your body and soul.

These can include gentle, low impact, stretching exercises, with an emphasis on breathing right, such as yoga provides. Writers are particularly prone to poor posture, stiffness or back problems, so anything that can relax our sore spines will be beneficial. It helps if we are eating and drinking healthily too.

Ways of unwinding include listening to music, going for walks, and taking naps. I believe that sometimes the most nurturing, holy and transforming thing we can do in a day is to take a nap. Or at least rest ourselves completely in bed, instead of staying busy and failing to switch off.

Self-help measures can be woven into our days, though prolonged, extreme fatigue may need medical attention if unrelieved by taking extra rest and sleep. Sitting in silence can also help calm our frazzled nerves.

Even if it might sound unnerving to sit in silence, because random thoughts tend to rise and our mind rarely stills itself, **peace can be gained by practicing mindful moments of silence and stillness.**

Meditative focusing on Scripture and pouring out our distress in prayer opens a door for God to work on our worries and concerns. It shifts our perspective and offers Him the chance to intervene where needed.

God already knows how depleted you are, and He wants you to lean on Him for everything. No concern is too big or too small to offload to God. As a loving Father, He simply wants us to come to Him just as we are.

Step #2 -- Whatever you do, don't panic or feel guilty



Exhaustion is usually a passing phase, requiring swift attention. Experience teaches us that **a depleted state is far more manageable if we take care of it straightaway.**

Stepping away from the tablet/laptop/macbook/PC for a while doesn't mean you are not a "proper" writer (*whatever that might mean*), or that you will never return.

The thought of being permanently stalled may cross our minds **but experience shows us that there are natural dips and flows in a writing life.**

And we often find we cannot make the progress we did before we became too worn out and weary to continue.

If we need to rest our words and rest ourselves, it is good self-care to do so, not a form of letting anyone down, least of all yourself. **Remember that rest is vital soul-care, not an indulgence we can do without.**

If you forget everything else, please remember that rest is vital for your recovery. **Don't let guilt derail you from resting when you need to.** It wastes valuable energy to have recriminations and regret.

Feelings of panic arise when we think we are falling behind. Either with our self-imposed schedule or a publishing deadline. Yet if we try to press on regardless, we will invariably fall sick. Then we are no good to ourselves or others.

Taking time out may seem like madness but it actually helps refill our creative well. Because overburdened, overloaded minds rarely have room for fresh, inspiring thoughts. They tend to struggle with ordinary, everyday concerns, never mind trying to come up with imaginative and coherent thinking.

Our need for rest is why God created the Sabbath. He knew we would just carry on until we drop if we didn't give ourselves permission to stop. But the wisdom of pausing and being thankful helps us gain a degree of perspective about our days, weeks and lives.

Then there is space to develop an awareness of our limitations, and to try to live well within them. This is especially important if you suffer from chronic illness or temporary poor health.

You are not lazy but are taking good care of yourself when you resist the lure of being busy, carefully noting how tired you feel and doing something positive about it. We will reap the full benefits if we persevere.

Making changes to our lives takes time **so give yourself grace, and a pat on the back for every positive step you take to improve your situation and yield to rest**. You're doing the best thing possible to aid your recovery and get yourself back to writing again.

Step #3 -- Trust God for fresh impetus and inspiration to come



Doubts and fears arise when we find it hard to write for a while. **Here's where faith steps in to calm our hearts.** Recalling God's faithfulness in the past is a great reminder to trust Him for this as well. Though we flag and falter, He will never run out of ideas or the strength and energy to see them through.

And God knows the perfect moment for us to receive or rest, when we need to wait patiently or move ahead. **Fresh inspiration will come. It always does,** though not necessarily on our preferred schedule!

It is said that God is rarely early. He isn't in a hurry but He is always on time. May that give us hope as we wait for our thoughts to be stirred again.

We need to be looking and listening for sacred whispers in our days to aid the creative process. **Inspiration can arise where and when we least expect it.** I'm often stirred by something I'm reading or when I reflect on photographs, am in tune with nature, listen to music or watch TV.

Sometimes we receive mere trickles of inspiration, tiny drip-feeds of thought, but that's okay, because before you know it, a fresh outpouring will arrive in due time.

As it says in *Embracing Hope: Soul Food to Help Chase Away the Blues*:
“Creativity cannot be rushed because it's a holy thing, made possible by grace and God's equipping. Patient listening is the key skill to have. To be able to tune into each potential word and see which ones are speaking to us.”

Trust is usually a challenge for us if we've become too self-sufficient and self-reliant, too dependent on our skills and energy. But if you and I can remember how God has provided for us in numerous ways in the past, then we are well placed to trust Him for this problem as well.

Keeping a written record will help jog our memories and make it easier to see how much God helps us in our everyday lives. This is a season when a diary or journal will come in useful and may well provide the impetus to release the hidden words within.

Step #4 -- Take as long as you need to recover



Now this is my personal stumbling block. *Maybe it's yours as well?* I tend to champ at the bit and want to rush back into things before I should. But experience has shown me that it is far from wise to act like this. More time is required to recover than anticipated.

Our impatience can cost us dear by derailing recovery and impairing the healing process we desperately need. It's counterproductive to cut short the period we require to become rested and refreshed, because that way leads to prolonged fatigue and needing another break.

Lots of people who have M.E have a boom or bust mentality whenever extra energy and strength are available to them. Sad to say, that's my modus operandi too. I'm learning to live differently but it's not easy when you've been this way for 30 years.

I've fallen at the fence of excessive busyness beyond my capacities many, many times, and still struggle to remember it when I have an overriding desire to press on with my work. Hmm... please learn from my mistakes! 😊

God isn't rushed or stressed. He knows how long it will take for us to become healed and whole, and what is needed to sustain and strengthen our weary souls. It's all about trust.

You are uniquely created to do what God intends you to. Your mind and body can only cope with so much. Knowing your personal limits will help you avoid getting burnout and lead to greater relaxation and rest.

Don't worry about what other people are doing or how long it's taking for you to feel energised, especially if you live with chronic illness. **God has a unique plan for your life and an intended audience for the words you write.** It will all come together when it needs to, even if it doesn't look like it yet.

Seek to stay in faith while you wait, and you will taste the rewards of listening and being obedient to Him. There is nothing better for calming our restless souls than to sit and still ourselves in God's presence.

As we allow His healing light and grace to nourish and restore us, we become rested and relaxed. If we can make it a daily practice, so much the better. **Though any time given to resting in God reaps great benefits for our minds and hearts.**

Step #5 -- Allow others to help lift the load



I've discovered to my detriment that trying to be fiercely independent is a recipe for disaster. While it might seem like an admirable trait for the fit and active, it's a swift route to soul and body depletion for the chronically sick.

Our independence might be furiously fought for but in doing so we could be depriving someone else of an opportunity to care and serve. There will be others who are stronger and less hard-pressed than you are in this season. Don't be afraid to ask for their help. One day, you may be able to do the same thing for them.

We need other people in our lives. We need hands willing to hold us up like Aaron and Hur did for Moses, whether physically or in prayer, as they support us to see a God-given task through to completion. **We need those who know us well enough to watch out for our welfare, and notice the warning signs of stress and overwhelm before we do.**

I've been grateful so many times for the way my husband sees those signs and lets me know it's happening again. Okay, a tad irritated at first, I must confess, but relieved once I can see the sense of what he says.

We could all use friends and family who can shake and take us out of our preoccupation with blog posts, articles and books, and remind us there is a life beyond the blank page. **Writers are apt to forget that a whole other world exists besides the ones in their head.**

We can live in our thoughts in such a way that it becomes unhealthy. Therefore it helps to consider our other roles in life and our humanity. **We are more than the words we write.** We are beloved children of God, with a unique place in this world, whether we write another word or not. We just need to accept and believe it.

And we are not the sum of our books and blogs, even if we invest a lot of ourselves in them. It pays to step away for a while to regain a fresh perspective on life. *To breathe and simply be.* That's easier to achieve if we have loving background support and a few encouraging writer friends who care about our souls.

Joining writing groups can lead to soul destroying comparisonitis but it can also be good for us to share our woes, and our wrestling matches with words, with an understanding, compassionate audience. Worth considering if you haven't joined one yet.

Step #6 -- Limit your involvement with social media



Did I hear you gasp as you saw the suggestion above? Depending on your perception of social media's potentially dark and detrimental side, and your current degree of engagement there, it was either a sigh of relief or a gasp of horror. Stick with me, friend.

Science supports the thought that the use of social media can be a huge drain on our energy, focus and concentration. We've all developed the attention span of a gnat or a butterfly, flitting here and there with a totally distracted mind.

Truth is, this wears us out like nothing else. **Our brains aren't meant to be so saturated in data that we barely know which day it is.** Unlike the machinery we use, we are not computers. If you and I want a simplified, less stressful life, then taking control over how we spend our time is critical and crucial to either fostering or damaging our well-being.

Save your oversaturated soul by retaining control. Maybe have a social media sabbatical, detox or fast, or consider limiting the way you use it now. If you need convincing, then check out these articles to help you weigh up the potential advantages and disadvantages:

<https://www.makeuseof.com/tag/negative-effects-social-media/>

<http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20180104-is-social-media-bad-for-you-the-evidence-and-the-unknowns>

<https://www.techmaish.com/advantages-and-disadvantages-of-social-media-for-society/>

<https://www.simplilearn.com/real-impact-social-media-article/>

When you are ready and willing to unplug, then make it easy on yourself by either deleting apps, exercising enormous self-restraint or ensuring your usual gadgets are not within reach. **It might feel scary, I know. Being disconnected feels strange.** Your fingers will itch and twitch as you withdraw. Old habits take a while to break.

And you might wonder if your online world and friends will still be there for you if you're not around. The answer is yes, they will. **All true friends will respect your choice and stick around to reconnect with you when you are ready to return.**

Trust me, I have had to unplug on numerous occasions and on a regular basis. **You will find that after the initial dismay and panic subside, it is actually quite freeing and relaxing to disengage for a while.** So much so that I have continued to limit and be selective about my online interaction since my last lengthy break.

You and I are valuable in and of ourselves, not because people follow us or like our posts. We can survive being in the seeming desert of disengagement. *We can even thrive* because we suddenly find we have room for more of life, real life that is, than we did before.

You won't regret a brief social media fast or a longer period of switching off. Not once you've had a chance to detox and found the liberty of extra time for the people in your life, and savoured doing other things instead.

Step #7 -- When you can't write, then relax and create in other ways



My favourite relaxing online pursuit is pinning to my boards on Pinterest. I hang out there when I need a quiet online place, without the draining distraction of engagement. It inspires and reignites a creative desire in me.

I love to source things and thoughts that appeal to me, without the risk of someone wanting to challenge my choices. Too many online places are noisy with conflict and confrontation, so you will want to avoid those at a time like this.

Photography and photo editing recharges me. It's a manageable creative endeavour which becomes useful to share at a later date. Reading and selective TV viewing are favoured pursuits, and I try my hand at arty things too.

You could try choosing one or more gentle activities that help relax your brain and soothe your mood. We're not looking to be great artists, only less stressed-out, weary writers, okay? Perfection is not the goal, fun is.

It's also rumoured that pursuit of a neglected or different creative field actually enlivens and enhances the ones we are already engaged in. *Why not act like a kid and let yourself get messy again?*

A toddler or small child can help us to let loose with them. Creative hobbies can aid relaxation when we take the competitive elements out of them and create purely for our own enjoyment and fun.

You can rekindle your creative fire by redirecting it. Maybe take up scrapbooking, painting, drawing or any form of artistic expression that appeals to you, or try gardening, sewing, woodwork or cooking. Or go for leisurely walks, if you are able to, purely for pleasure, of course, and as an opportunity to let creation speak to you and recharge your batteries.

Each one of us has the soul of an artist. If you don't think you do, then you might be honing in on comparison or setting yourself the goal of perfection in all things. Just for once, do something different because you enjoy it.

The gift of time set aside for other activities will help stir your creative thoughts with no effort on your part. I've been surprised by what comes when I'm not struggling to write at all. If random thoughts occur, simply jot them down and save them somewhere for when you get back on your feet again. You'll be glad you did.

Extra resources to help lift you when you're feeling weary or discouraged



As we close, I am offering you a few selected resources I have used myself or believe will be useful to you. We'll start with books because we are writers, after all. And in order to be a good writer we need to read widely too.

Bonnie Gray's beautiful book, [Whispers of Rest: 40 Days of God's Love to Revitalize Your Soul](#), is a fantastic resource for all who are feeling burdened, overwhelmed or exhausted. As you work through each section there are excellent suggestions for resting better, and methods for noticing the stalling blocks that are preventing you from being rested and revitalised.

Shelly Miller's lovely insightful book, [Rhythms of Rest: Finding the Spirit of Sabbath in a Busy World](#), provides biblical wisdom for taking the weekly break we need, and offers suggestions for making rest a top priority when the world seeks to lure you into 24/7 productivity.

Christine Valters Paintner, online Abbess for Abbey of the Arts, offers inspiration and wisdom to unearth the artist within in [The Artist's Rule: Nurturing Your Creative Soul with Monastic Wisdom](#), as she shares how to give your artistic soul room to be and breathe. It includes alternative creative suggestions to help unlock your potential, and an invitation to learn how to embrace monastic practices in your daily life.

This article is really helpful as it has various resources in one place:

<https://designbyinsight.net/encouragement-for-tired-bloggers-discouraged-writers/>

Here are confessions from a weary writer as she wrestles with her calling and seeks ways to improve her lot:

<https://writerunboxed.com/2018/08/27/five-true-life-confessions-from-a-weary-writer/>

These are thoughts about creativity and why we needn't fear barren seasons:

<https://joylenton.com/2018/11/12/creativity-why-we-neednt-fear-barren-seasons/>

A recap graphic to help you remember what we have covered



Step #1 -- Be alert for the way your mind and body signal their need for a break



Step #2 -- Whatever you do, don't panic or feel guilty



Step #3 -- Trust God for fresh impetus and inspiration to come



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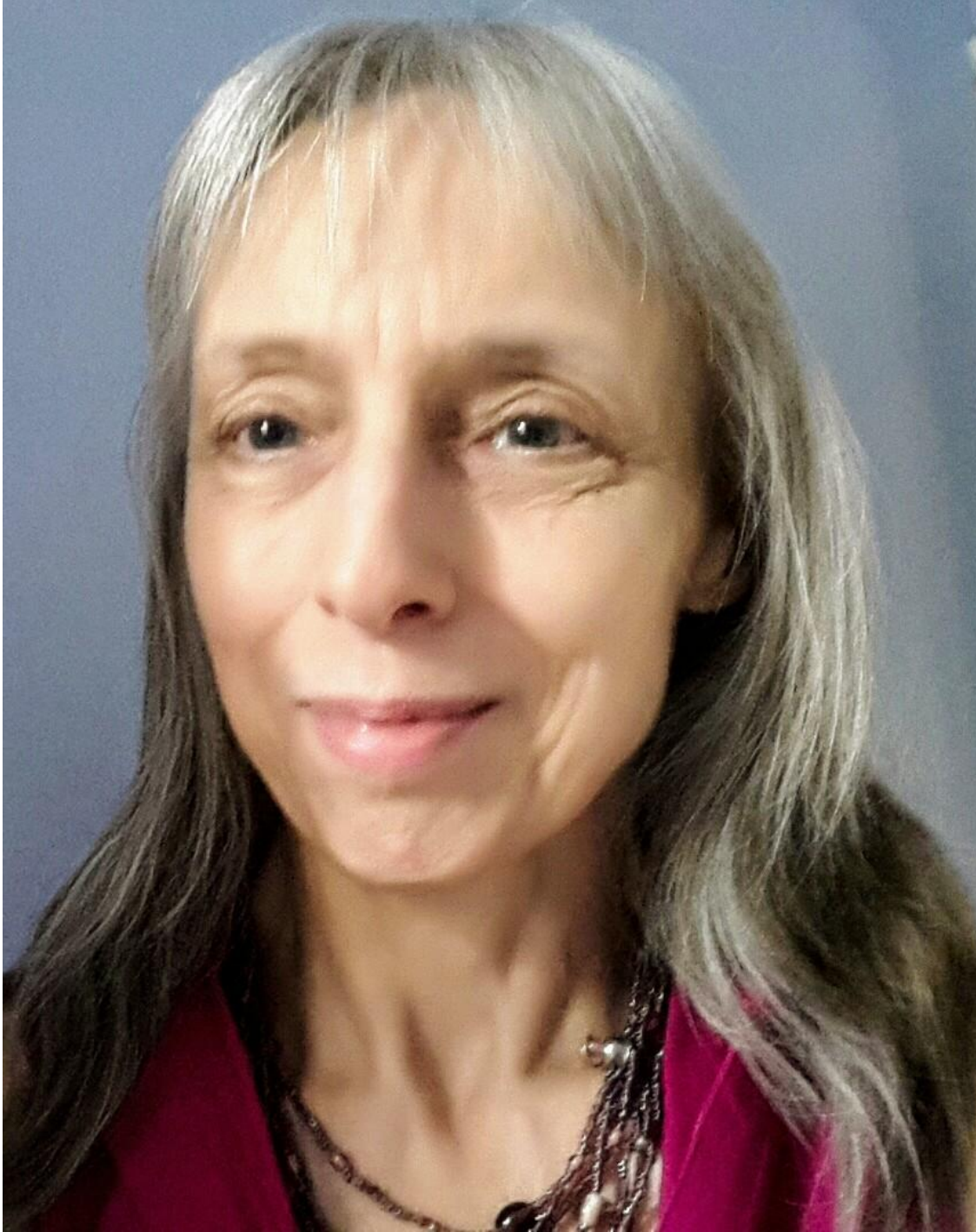


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About the author



Joy Lenton is a contemplative Christian writer, poet and blogger, who loves books, dark chocolate, coffee, and great conversations about life, faith and everything in-between. As a grateful grace embracer, with a special affinity with those recovering from a painful past, life's lost and broken ones, her mission is to bless and encourage others by sharing the hope and joy we have in Jesus.

She's the author of [Seeking Solace: Discovering Grace in Life's Hard Places](#), [Embracing Hope: Soul Food to Help Chase Away the Blues](#), [Soul Shots: 31 Days of Pocket Wisdom for Your Hurting Heart](#), and [Experiencing Lent: Sensing the Sacred in Our Midst](#).

Joy is also a contributing author to [Mosaic of Grace: God's Beautiful Reshaping of Our Broken Lives](#) by James Prescott, [Taking off The Mask: Daring To Be the Person God created you To Be](#) by Claire Musters, and [Finding Purpose: Rediscovering Meaning in a Life with Chronic Illness](#) by Cindee Snider Re.

As an M.E, arthritis, Ehlers Danlos and fibromyalgia sufferer, she writes with a desire to support and encourage those who live with chronic illness and pain, or who might be going through challenging circumstances.

You can find her sharing reflections, poetry and prayers at her [Words of Joy](#) blog and mostly poetry at [Poetry Joy](#), as well as contributing to the [Godspacelight blog](#).

Her work has been published in several poetry anthologies, including [Celebrations - 15 Years Of the People's Poetry](#), and she has acted as a guest poet for Jenneth Graser's summer 2018 [Poetry As Therapy Online Retreat](#).

You will find other articles on writing and creativity in the "writing" category at [joylenton.com](#), and info on Joy's writing life on a dedicated page (called "My Writing Life") on her Words of Joy blog.

PS: If you've found this e-book helpful, do spread the word among your friends so they can benefit from the information shared here. Thanks! 😊💜

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