

## ***A Theology of Platform***

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Discussions of authors' platform are often limited to whether the author has a "big name" or ministry, speaks at lots of conferences or is networked to organizations or constituencies that would buy the book. This discussion tends to be overly simplistic and utilitarian, and it lacks grounding in any distinctively Christian concept of mission, vocation or calling. So this is my attempt to sketch out a Christian understanding of what an author's platform is or should be.

We begin by acknowledging that *the Christian faith is a kerygma to be proclaimed*. Christians are heralds of a gospel and "publish good news," as the King James puts it. Missionally, Christians in general and Christian authors in particular are to be about making public the message of Jesus Christ, his incarnation, work, death and resurrection, and the implications thereof, anchored in the larger story of Israel and the cosmic narrative of creation, fall and redemption. Thus authors ought to see themselves as public heralds who are to maximize the breadth and impact of their books' messages.

Secondly, *Scripture provides multiple models and examples of such heralds*. Jesus himself was an itinerant preacher who took his message to whomever had ears to hear. His teaching was accompanied by demonstrations of truth and power, events that created a critical mass of potential hearers as well as on-the-street buzz in local communities. Likewise, the apostle Paul and other New Testament witnesses invested in significant travel, networking and letter writing to expand the potential reach of their messages. Such an intentional, missional approach to book promotion and publicity should likewise be encouraged amongst our authors.

Third, *different heralds had particular callings to specific audiences*. The four gospel writers each had a specific audience in mind; we might imagine that Luke had a significant "platform" and credibility among Gentiles but not among Jews, while Matthew may have had the reverse situation, based on their distinctly different backgrounds and identities. Paul's self-understanding of himself as a Jew with a call to minister to Gentiles opened up certain opportunities and avenues; his standing as a Roman citizen afforded him the opportunity to preach in Rome. Similarly, we would encourage our authors to have keen self-understanding and probe their own unique vocational identities. Each author has particular affiliations and openings among particular audiences, whether via church or parachurch, in print or broadcast, or amongst other networks, constituencies or affinity groups.

Fourth, we note what could be called the *kairos principle of making the most of every opportunity* (Eph 5:16, Col 4:5). Christian witnesses and heralds are proactive and seek to maximize opportunities they have to share their message. Scripture provides

examples of unlikely, seemingly unqualified heralds (Moses, Esther, Timothy) who were exhorted and encouraged, stepped up and made the most of the opportunities they were given. Authors must be intentional about working toward promoting themselves and their books. Internal motivation is often needed to generate opportunities for book and message promotion.

Practical implications:

1. Platform is a combination of both *credibility* and *visibility*. See Nehemiah 8. We are entrusted with a message, and we are to bring that message to others. An author needs both the qualifications/expertise to speak to a given topic as well as opportunities to present that message (in print, in person, online or via broadcast) to a ready audience.
2. Platform is also a function of one's *community*. Authors have particular formal and informal connections and networks where their credibility and visibility are maximized, whether through professional associations, conferences, denominations, etc. Authors tend to have platform in certain communities but not others.
3. Platforms must grow out of an author's own sense of vocation, calling and identity. Authors should have a sense that God has entrusted them with a particular message and equipped and deployed them to bring that message to their audience. If the author's message or ministry does not line up with who God has called and shaped them to be, the platform is less likely to be effective for that particular book.
4. Platforms will look different for different authors, depending on their sphere of influence, genre of writing, topics of expertise and the like. Different criteria will be needed for different people; what may be a significant platform for an academic author may be inadequate for a pop culture author, and vice versa.
5. Platforms consist of both *external* structures and *internal* expertise and motivation. Some authors have organizational support to help them get a book to an intended audience, but this is not necessarily a slam-dunk if the book's message does not match the author's expertise, or if the author is not motivated about promoting the book and message.
6. Platforms can be built. Authors need to discern the opportunities that God has presented to them and be encouraged to make the most of any prospects or openings for book promotion. As one opportunity likely will lead to others, authors should have a stance of openness toward accepting invitations to speak and write, with a bias toward doing more rather than less, at least in early stages of building a platform. As a platform grows, an author may well need to discern whether one is taking on too much and which opportunities to decline.

7. If a platform does not seem to be materializing, authors may need to readjust their expectations and discern whether they are truly called to a particular writing ministry. Counsel and discernment from trusted Christian community will help authors sense whether a particular book project or ministry involvement lines up with their vocation and calling.