

# Book Signings: Blessing or Curse?

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Book signings. The very idea of sitting at a table in a bookstore and waiting for readers to buy their books makes some authors extremely uncomfortable. However, like them or not, book signings are a necessary evil in the publishing industry. Why? Because readers love to meet authors. Readers feel a sort of kinship with authors after being part of their stories for two hundred pages or more, and to get the author's autograph is worth future sales...to the author. And to the bookstore owner or manager, those sales are important.

As Christian writers, even if writing is a ministry, we need to honor the Lord by acting as good stewards with our time and talents. Royalty checks will be marginal if book signings aren't part of our marketing strategy. Is "marginal" the blessing God really wants to bestow on His children? The Bible says God is able to do "exceeding, abundantly and above all we ask or think" (Eph 3:20). That hardly sounds "marginal" to me; however, we have to be willing to do our part. What manuscript will bless others if it sits in a filing cabinet and isn't solicited at writers' conferences and/or submitted to publishers? Likewise, what author will build loyalty among her readers if she's unwilling to do book signings?

This is not to say that each book signing will be a smashing success. What's more, lesser-known authors have to work harder at promoting their signings than those whose names frequent the best seller's list. My first book signing left me feeling embarrassed because I didn't autograph a single one of my titles. Since then, I've become selective about my signings. I either do a group signing because it relieves my anxiety over whether any readers will show up, or I sign at local Christian bookstores and send out invitations to friends and family members. First and foremost, I have learned to pray weeks in advance, asking God to bless my endeavors. He is always faithful to reply.

So what do other authors think about book signings?

James Scott Bell says, "Book signings are tough marketing because they require a lot of the writer's time, for probably a minimal return. I read a statistic that claimed the average number of books sold at a signing is four - unless your name is Grisham or Jenkins. I hold one book signing at my local Christian store, so I can invite all my church friends to come. Thus, a good crowd; people who will buy my books...the store manager is happy." (For a listing of Jim's books, please see his web site at: [www.jamesscottbell.com](http://www.jamesscottbell.com))

Gail Gaymer Martin offers some tips for promoting book signings. "I send out my signing dates in my newsletter and sometimes send reminder postcards to local readers. I have giveaways like ballpoint pens, bookmarks, candy, and other promotional material. I make brochures of my upcoming books and speaking topics to share with passersby." (For more about Gail's novels, please see her web site at: [www.gailmartin.com](http://www.gailmartin.com))

Colleen Reece offers this advice. "Don't just lurk behind a table and wait for customers to come by. It's fine to either sit or stand, but make sure readers can see you well. I greet all who come past with, 'Hi, I'm Colleen, a local author and these are some of my books. If you see something you like, I'll be happy to autograph it for you.'" (To find out more about Colleen's books, see Barnes & Noble's web site or Amazon.com)

Robin Lee Hatcher has this to say about book signings. "With thirty-nine books under my belt, I've done plenty of book signings, and like the majority of authors, I dread them. The reason: chain store booksellers, for the most part, don't advertise. They depend upon walk-in traffic, and that rarely spells success. When I began writing, most booksellers were independents. They made their own advertising dollar decisions. My local independent bookseller always put a good size ad in the paper before I would be in his store. I usually sold between fifty and one hundred copies in a two-hour signing. But without advertising, most authors feel pretty good about selling five copies." (For more about Robin and her books, please see her web site at: [www.robinleehatcher.com](http://www.robinleehatcher.com))

So there you have it. Book signings. They're basically what authors make of them, blessing or curse.