

Writing Christian Fiction

Defining Christian Fiction

There are several ways of defining Christian fiction. Here are five ways the term can be interpreted:

1. A novel that is written by a Christian, which contains no overt reference to Christianity but nevertheless adheres to Christian values and beliefs.
2. An allegory which portrays a character to represent Christ in a story with maybe a sacrifice and atonement, for example the Narnia stories by C.S.Lewis
3. A novel where one or more characters are Christians and some aspects of Christianity are introduced into the novel. This may be obliquely, but will be clear to a Christian reader and may open up the idea of Christianity to a non-Christian.
4. As 3, but Christianity is overtly discussed and the characters may undergo some form of enrichment of their spiritual lives.
5. Biblical fiction, i.e. a retelling of a story from scripture that creates a realistic background and characters thus filling out the story, turning it into an easy-to-read fictional rendering of a Bible story, eg fiction by Francine Rivers.
6. A modern-day tale that is based on something from the Bible, perhaps a parable.

Tips for writing Christian fiction

It is a great responsibility to write novels that could open up people's understanding of Christianity or even bring them to faith. It is only too easy to be preachy and push the reader away. Therefore undertake it prayerfully and consider the effect on the reader at all times. The following guidelines may assist with the practical task of creating a readable and powerful story that could be called Christian fiction.

1. Choose which type of Christian fiction you are writing. If you know this from the beginning and can make it clear enough for the blurb on the back of the book, then you are less likely to ambush the unsuspecting reader with verses and references to faith in writing if your story so far has been category 1, 2 or 3 above.
2. Always ensure that any Bible verses or other quotes are absolutely essential to the story you are telling. If spoken by one of the characters, would they really say that? If the verses don't slide easily into the text, the reader will gloss over them or might view the writing as a tract and stop reading.
3. When writing your story, if you want to introduce Christianity, then drop hints right from the beginning. If carefully done it will prevent your reader from feeling thrown into the kind of book they were not expecting.
4. If your characters struggle with faith, make those struggles authentic, perhaps basing them on your own experience.
5. If you are writing about a biblical story set at the time of the original, do your research. Find out whether Romans wore the type of clothes you describe, or walked the roads in the directions you indicate, for example. Look up the type of bread Jesus would have broken and what utensils were used in a meal plus many, many tiny details that will take your reader right into the setting.
6. Similarly, when writing a historical Christian novel, find out what people thought about God and how relevant faith was at that time, as well as all the other details pertinent to the period covered.
7. Never put words into a Biblical character's mouth that are contrary to the Bible or lessen the meaning of the words.
8. Remember that many of your readers will be Christians so some things to leave out are swearing, sex scenes and horrific gory scenes.

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