

Books for the Soul: A Survey of Inspirational Fiction

What is Inspirational Fiction?

Deb's Definitions:

Inspirational Fiction: Acknowledging the role of divine guidance or influence, these books often pose religious questions and answers, emphasize a conversion or crisis of faith, and illustrate the role of faith in real life. In the last two decades the genre has expanded beyond the gentle read to follow the reading interests of the general public. Recent subgenres include thrillers, apocalyptic fiction, mysteries and romance. Often written in a series to show the growth of faith over time, family sagas may show conflicts with faith and morality.

The bulk of Inspirational Fiction is also called Christian Fiction and is characterized by explicit or implicit Christianity and little or nonexistent sex, violence or profanity. These elements may be present, but are often portrayed as unrewarded “sinful” behavior. “Gentle Reads” are books that also forgo these elements, but they may or may not have religious content.

Other Terms:

I believe “Inspirational Fiction” is a great umbrella term, but for clarity it can be useful to divide these books that fall under it into 3 major categories, all of which have unique characteristics but which may also overlap.

“Faith based Fiction” or “Religious Novels”: This is how I would refer to fiction that poses religious questions and answers or that shows how the religion of a character influences his or her choices. They often emphasize the role that religion, faith in God, a deity, a higher power or supernatural force has in working through life issues,

Christian Fiction and/or Evangelical Christian fiction: This term, as I will use it in this class, describes an easily recognizable and highly marketed subset of books that is labeled as “Christian Fiction” or “Evangelical Christian Fiction” by its publishers, authors, booksellers, and readers. “Evangelical Christian Fiction” dominates the genre that in the minds of many readers the two are synonymous. A writer working with these publishing houses operates under certain constraints, they must: accept the infallible authority of the Bible; address life’s dilemmas through faith in Jesus; and believe that Jesus is divine, died, and rose again for the sins of humankind and that he will return again as a judge and a warrior. There may also be certain “taboos” or offensive content that they are not allowed to write about.

Gentle Reads— Books that contain no strong language, explicit sex, or violence, reflect conventional values, and end happily. Often evocative of a gentler, less hurried time. May or may not have religious content.

Christian Fiction

Unique Characteristics and Appeal factors

- Parochialism—created for the safely defined boundaries of a certain community

- (Remarks from readers: Christian books leave me feeling hopeful, We wanted something wholesome and that we could learn from)
- Promote strong values
- Teach a lesson
- Happy Ending, Good prevails over evil
- Adhere to “CBA Code” of decency—though this is changing & some are getting edgier, there are still boundaries that won’t be crossed.
- Market Driven

TOOLS FOR FINDING CHRISTIAN FICTION

Catalogs and Newsletters: Favorites include the Christian Book Distributors catalog (1-800-247-4784), Crossings Book Club, Bookstore catalogs

Magazines—Today’s Christian Woman, Christianity Today, Publisher’s Weekly will have a special Religion Publishing issue about twice a year, Romantic Times has a section on Inspirational romance,.

Radio Stations: Your local Christian radio station may do author interviews

Websites

- [Christianbook.com](http://www.christianbook.com) www.christianbook.com
An online Christian bookstore where you can see the newest releases, get recommendations, browse by category, see what the bestsellers are and much more. It also has newsletters you can sign up for, I use to this help keep track of series.
- [Faithful Reader](http://www.faithfulreader.com) www.faithfulreader.com
This well designed site from the Book Report Network (BRN) includes author interviews and biographies, reading guides, excerpts, and reviews.
- [The Christian Fiction Site](http://www.dancingword.net/christianfiction/) <http://www.dancingword.net/christianfiction/>
One of my new favorites—because you can get a newsletter every month that highlights the new releases—even better for keeping track of series and new releases
- [Amazon.com’s Christian Books section](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/browse/-/12290/ref=br_ca_/102-7450617-0746510)
http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/browse/-/12290/ref=br_ca_/102-7450617-0746510
Browse through different types of Christian non-fiction and fiction, Amazon included both mainstream and Evangelical publishers. See how well books are selling and read comments from ordinary readers.
- [Crosswalk](http://www.crosswalk.com) www.crosswalk.com
Has a books section under “entertainment”, with reviews and author interviews.
- [Beliefnet’s Books page](http://www.beliefnet.com/index/index_501.html) http://www.beliefnet.com/index/index_501.html

Features reader perspectives on books from multiple faiths, both non-fiction and fiction.
Good lists and reader reviews.

Book club Websites

- Chapter a Day www.dearreader.com
The “Good News” book club features excerpts from Inspirational books that are e-mailed to subscribers Monday-Friday. Each week subscribers preview a different book in just 5 minutes a day!
- Crossings Book Club www.crossings.com
This popular mail-order book club has monthly featured selections and catalogs.
- Good Girl Book Club (For Today’s Aspiring Christian Woman)
www.goodgirlbookclubonline.com
From Walk Worthy Press, which specializes in African American Christian fiction.

Publishers and Associations

Note: One way to search for Christian books in some library catalogs is to search by Publisher. Many publishers have newsletters you can sign up for.

- **Christian Bookselling Association**
website, includes Christian Bestseller lists.
<http://www.cbaonline.org/home.html>
- **Evangelical Christian Publishing Association**
www.ecpa.org
Every year this association publishes a list their “gold medallion” award winners in recognition of the best books released by Christian publishers. You can also get a list of which publishing houses belong to the association.
- **Barbour Publishing, Inc.**
www.barbourbooks.com
Among their offerings is the romance imprint “Heartsong”
<http://www.heartsongpresents.com/>
- **Bethany House Publishers**
www.bethanyhouse.com
Bethany is the largest publisher of Christian fiction. The site includes listings of their series.
- **Broadman and Holman**
<http://www.broadmanholman.com/>
- **Cook Communications (RiverOak is their fiction imprint)**
www.cookministries.com/books/river/
- **Covenant Communications**
www.covenant-lds.com/
A Mormon publishing house, click on “online store” to browse their selections.
- **Deseret**
<http://deseretbook.com/store/>
A Mormon publishing company that has lots of selections.
- **Harlequin:Steeple Hill**
www.steeplehill.com
The website includes author profiles and upcoming releases. It includes Steeple Hill Love Inspired, Steeple Hill Café (Chick-Lit), Steeple Hill Women’s Fiction and the new Steeple Hill Love Inspired Suspense line.

- **Harvest House**
www.harvesthousepublishers.com/
- **Herald Press**
<http://www.mph.org/hp/>
A Mennonite publishing company, features the popular “Ellie’s People” series.
- **Ignatius Press**
<http://www.ignatius.com/>
Catholic books, including fiction
- **Moody Publishers**
www.moodypublishers.com/
- **Multnomah Publishers**
www.multnomahbooks.com
Find out what’s coming soon, read about their authors and more. Also check out
<http://www.letstalkfiction.com/>
which is an online version of their flyer highlighting their new releases.
- **Oasis Audio**
<http://www.oasisaudio.com/>
Specializes in offering inspirational recordings of books. Has many popular Christian Fiction authors.
- **Paraclete Press**
<http://www.paracletepress.com/>
A non-denominational Christian press that features books from Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant points of view. They are also starting an annual book award.
- **Thomas Nelson**
www.thomasnelson.com
Their fiction division is called “WestBow Press” so
www.westbowpress.com takes you directly to the fiction page.
- **Tyndale House Publishers**
<http://www.tyndalefiction.com/>
- **Warner Faith** (Time Warner’s Christian imprint)
www.twbookmark.com/christian/
- **Waterbrook Press** (The Christian imprint from Random House)
www.randomhouse.com/waterbrook/
- **Zondervan**
<http://www.zondervan.com/book>

AWARDS

- **Christy Awards**
www.christyawards.com
Named in honor of Catherine Marshall’s novel “Christy”, these awards focus on the best in Evangelical Christian fiction and include several categories like romance, historical, futuristic, western, new novel, etc.
- **Evangelical Christian Publishing Association’s Gold Medallion Awards**
<http://www.ecpa.org/awards.php>
This publishing association has given out these awards since 1978, looking at the winners in the “Fiction” category gives you a glimpse of the history of the genre.

RESOURCES TO BACK YOU UP

Christian Fiction: A Guide to the Genre by John Mort—The best “what do I read next” type resource for doing R.A. work with patrons.

Novelist has some articles on Christian Fiction in its “articles and features” section. This fiction database is also searchable by keywords and subject headings (i.e. Christian love stories).

Christian Bookstores: Visiting one of them can be useful to see how they display and market their books as well as to see what they are promoting. Also they are very useful as a resource to refer people too. Mainstream bookstores often have a “Christian” section as well.

Books Mentioned in My Presentation

WHAT’S HOT:

Christ the Lord by Ann Rice

C.S. Lewis

Light From Heaven by Jan Karon

House by Frank Peretti and Ted Dekker

CURRENT TRENDS:

Humor—see the humor category below

More Edgy, Unsanitized Books

Crystal Lies by Melody Carlson

Tiger Lillie by Lisa Samson (also writes “Diary of a Teenage Girl” and “True Colors” series for YA girls)

Seeking a More Literary Voice

Life With Strings Attached by Minnie Lambreth

The Dead Don’t Dance and **Wrapped in Rain** by Charles Martin

Bad Ground and Levi’s Will by W. Dale Cramer

Seeking to Appeal more to Men

Song of Redemption series by Lynn Austin

Levi’s Will by W. Dale Cramer

Starting to include more multicultural viewpoints

Choose Me by Xenia Ruiz

An emphasis on more subgenres

FAVORITES BY CATEGORY:

HUMOR:

Invisible (and sequels) by Lorena McCourtney

The **Bugman** novels by Tim Downs (**Shoofly Pie**, **Chop Shop**)

The **Sisterchicks** books by Robin Jones Gunn

The **Yada Yada Prayer Group** books by Neta Jackson

The Potluck Club by Linda Evans Shepherd and Eva Marie Everson

Welcome to Fred by Brad Whittington

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES:

Tiger Lillie by Lisa Sampson

Karen Kingsbury's "Redemption" and "Firstborn" series

Crystal Lies by Melody Carlson

A Place Called Wiregrass by Michael Morris

All She Ever Wanted by Lynn Austin

LITERARY:

Life with Strings Attached by Minnie Lambreth

The Dead Don't Dance by Charles Martin

Sutter's Cross by W. Dale Cramer

Grace at Low Tide by Beth Webb Hart

MULTICULTURAL:

Cover Girls by T.D. Jakes

Passing By Samaria by Sharon Ewell Foster

Choose Me by Xenia Ruiz

The current offerings from **Walk Worthy Press**, www.walkworthypress.net

And the new Imprint from Harlequin: **Harlequin/Kimani Press: New Spirit**

APOCALYPTIC:

LaHaye & Jenkins, Left Behind and spin-offs, new series

In His Image (#1 in the Christ Clone Trilogy) by James Beauseignor

Bill Myer's Blood of Heaven Trilogy

SCIENCE FICTION/FANTASY:

Randall Ingermanson

Karen Hancock: Arena and **The Legends of the Guardian King** series

Donita K. Paul's Dragon series (**DragonSpell**, **DragonQuest**)

HISTORICAL:

Jack Cavanaugh: His Watchful Eye trilogy, **Dear Enemy**

All the Way Home by Ann Tatlock

Favorite Authors: **Lynn Austin**, **T. Davis & Isabella Bunn's "Heirs of**

Acadia" series, **Judith Miller's "Freedom's Path"**, **Bodie & Brock**

Thoene, **Francine Rivers** and **Walter Wangerin's** books

ROMANCE:

Ray Blackston's Flabbergasted trilogy

Heavens to Betsy by Beth Patillo

Favorite Authors: **Robin Lee Hatcher**, **Beverly Lewis**, **Francine Rivers**

WESTERN:

Chuck Norris is starting a new series called "**Justice Riders**"

SUSPENSE:

Ted Dekker's Circle trilogy—**Black**, **Red**, and **White**. His latest is **Showdown**, and **House** co-written with Frank Peretti comes out in April

Brandilyn Collins' Hidden Faces series, starts with **Brink of Death**

Steal Away by Linda Hall, **Chat Room** is the sequel

Favorite Authors: **Terri Blackstock**, **Davis Bunn**, **Dee Henderson**, **Frank Peretti**

Steeple Hill has a new imprint called "**Love Inspired: Suspense**"

NONFICTION:

To Fly Again and **In the Presence of My Enemies** by Gracia Burnham

Popular Inspirational Fiction Authors

Amish / Mennonite

Carrie Bender
Paul L. Gaus (Mystery)
Ervin Stutzman
Ted Wojtasik

African American

Angela Benson
Michele Andrea Bowen
Sharon Ewell Foster
Victoria Christopher Murray
Jacquelin Thomas

Biblical Fiction:

Gene Edwards
Gerald Lund
Francine Rivers
James Shott
Walter Wangerin

Catholic:

Andrew Greeley
William Kienzle
Ralph McInerney

Contemporary Romance

Robin Jones Gunn
Robin L. Hatcher
Kristen Heitzmann
Karen Kingsbury
Beverly Lewis

End Time Thrillers

Ken Abraham & Daniel Hart
James Beausignor
Bill Myers
Tim Lahaye & Jerry B. Jenkins

Gentle Reads

Joseph Girzone
Phillip Gulley
Jan Karon

Fantasy & Science Fiction

Randall Ingermanson
C.S. Lewis
Karen Hancock
J. R. R. Tolkien
George MacDonald

Historical

Jack Cavanaugh
Alan, Gilbert & Lynn Morris
Bodie & Brock Thoene

Historical Romance:

Lynn Austin
Janette Oke
Jane Peart
Judith Pella
Traci Peterson
Laurine Snelling
Lori Wick

Mystery:

Wally Davis
Patricia Rushford
Patricia Sprinkle
Jim Walker

Spiritual Warfare:

Frank Peretti
Ted Dekker

Suspense/Thriller:

Randy Alcorn
Terri Blackstock
Davis Bunn (or T. Davis Bunn)
Ted Dekker
Dee Henderson

Western:

Stephen Bly
Al Lacy

Inspirational Fiction

Inspirational fiction novels often pose religious questions and answers, emphasize a conversion or crisis of faith, and illustrate the role of God in real life.

AFRICAN AMERICAN

Passing by Samaria by Sharon Ewell Foster

Alena is forced to confront the realities of an African American living in 1919, both in rural Mississippi and Chicago, when a friend is murdered.

Other African American authors include **Angela Benson, Michele Andrea Bowen, Victoria Christopher Murray,** and **Jacquelin Thomas**

BIBLICAL NOVELIZATIONS

Paul: A Novel by Walter Wangerin

The church founder's story is told in a style that reveals his character through each stage of his life, ending with the apostle's voyage to Rome.

Other authors that write Biblical Fiction include **Gene Edwards, Gerald Lund,** and **Francine Rivers**

CATHOLIC

A Midwinters Tale by Andrew Greeley

The first in the saga of the O'Malley family, this episode features Chucky. All this young man wants is to go to Notre Dame and become an accountant, but God has other plans.

Other Catholic authors include **James Carroll, Graham Greene, Ralph McInerney,** and **Suzanne Shea**

END TIME THRILLERS

In His Image by James BeauSeigneur

Decker is part of a scientific expedition that examines the Shroud of Turin. Cells stuck to the shroud are cloned, and the resulting baby changes the course of history.

Other Apocalyptic thriller authors include: **Ken Abraham & Daniel Hart, Peter & Paul LaLonde, Bill Myers,** and **Tim Lahaye & Jerry B. Jenkins.**

FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION

Arena by Karen Hancock

Callie becomes trapped in an alien world after volunteering for a science experiment. As she struggles to escape she learns a spiritual lesson.

Other fantasy and science fiction authors include **Orson Card, John Olson & Randall Ingermanson, C.S. Lewis, George Macdonald** and **J. R. R. Tolkien.**

Inspirational Fiction

HISTORICAL FICTION

While Mortals Sleep by Jack Cavanaugh

Pastor Schumacher is responsible for a group of youth during 1930's Germany—youth that are also being trained in the ways of the Third Reich

Other historical fiction authors include **Susan Howatch, Alan, Gilbert & Lynn Morris** and **Bodie & Brock Thoene**

MYSTERY

Friday the Rabbi Slept Late by Harry Kemelman

Rabbi David Small turns out to be a solver of mysteries in this first of a series. He is also the leader of Barnard's Crossing's Jewish community.

Other mystery authors include **G.K. Chesterton, Rochelle Krich, Eliot Pattison, Patricia Rushford,** and **Patricia Sprinkle**

RELIGIOUS FICTION

My Name is Red by Orhan Pamuk

In Istanbul, in the 1590s, the Sultan secretly commissions a book, but any work of art--an affront to Islam--is dangerous.

For more perspectives try **Hermann Hesse** (Buddhist), **Tony Hillerman** (Navajo), **Chiam Potok** (Jewish), **Manil Suri** (Hindu), and **Kate Wheeler** (Buddhist).

ROMANCE

The Guardian by Dee Henderson

A federal judge has been murdered. U.S. Marshal Marcus O'Malley has a case to solve, an assassin to stop, and a lady to convince he's right for her future.

Other romance authors include **Lynn Austin, Robin Gunn, Kristen Heitzmann, Karen Kingsbury, Janette Oke, Judith Pella** and **Traci Peterson**

SUSPENSE

The Great Divide by T. Davis Bunn

Lawyer Marcus Glenwood takes on a formidable foe in a case involving a missing woman who was investigating prison camps in China.

Other suspense authors include **Randi Alcorn, Terri Blackstock, Ted Dekker,** and **Frank Peretti**