Writing Realistic Christian Fiction



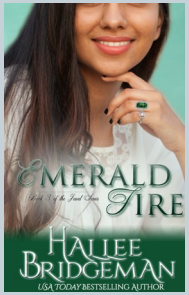
HALLIEE BRIDGEMAN

Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

- About Me
  - Started publishing March 2012
  - 29 fiction books published
  - 6 nonfiction books published
  - *USA Today* bestselling author
  - Entirely indie published

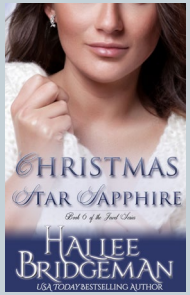

Sapphire Ice
Hallee Bridgeman
USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR


Greater Than Rubies
Hallee Bridgeman
USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

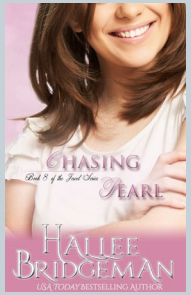

Emerald Fire
Hallee Bridgeman
USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

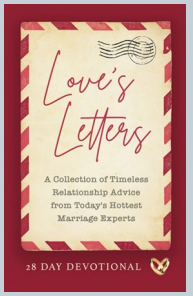

Topaz Heat
Hallee Bridgeman
USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

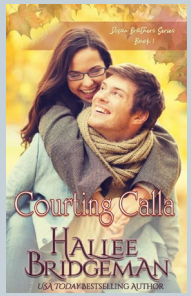

Christmas Diamond
Hallee Bridgeman
USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR


Christmas Star Sapphire
Hallee Bridgeman
USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

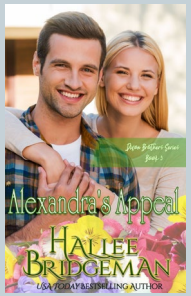

Jade Match
Hallee Bridgeman
USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

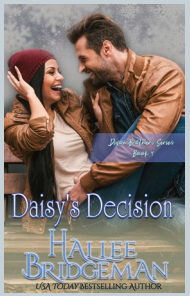

Chasing Pearl
Hallee Bridgeman
USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR


Love's Letters
A Collection of Timeless Relationship Advice from Today's Hottest Marriage Experts
28 DAY DEVOTIONAL


Courting Calla
Hallee Bridgeman
USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR


Valerie's Verdict
Hallee Bridgeman
USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

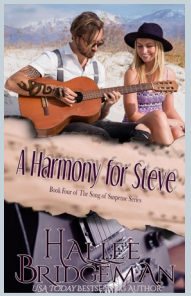

Alexandra's Appeal
Hallee Bridgeman
USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

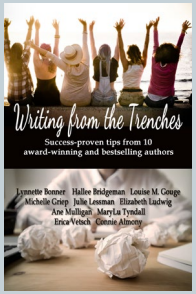

Daisy's Decision
Hallee Bridgeman
USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR


A Melody for James
Hallee Bridgeman
USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR


An Aria for Nick
Hallee Bridgeman
USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR


A Carol for Kent
Hallee Bridgeman
USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR


A Harmony for Steve
Hallee Bridgeman
USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR


Writing from the Trenches
Success-proven tips from 10 award-winning and bestselling authors
Lynnette Bonner
Hallee Bridgeman
Louise M. Gouge
Michelle Griep
Julie Lessman
Elizabeth Ludwig
Ane Mulligan
MaryLu Tyndall
Erica Vetsch
Connie Almony


Virtues and Valor Series - Book 1
Temperance's Trial
Hallee Bridgeman
USA Today Bestselling Author


Virtues and Valor Series - Book 2
Homeland's Hope
Hallee Bridgeman
USA Today Bestselling Author


Virtues and Valor Series - Book 3
Charity's Code
Hallee Bridgeman
USA Today Bestselling Author


Virtues and Valor Series - Book 4
A Parcel for Prudence
Hallee Bridgeman
USA Today Bestselling Author


Virtues and Valor Series - Book 5
Grace's Ground War
Hallee Bridgeman
USA Today Bestselling Author


Virtues and Valor Series - Book 6
Mission of Mercy
Hallee Bridgeman
USA Today Bestselling Author


Virtues and Valor Series - Book 7
Flight of Faith
Hallee Bridgeman
USA Today Bestselling Author


Virtues and Valor Series - Book 8
Valor's Vigil
Hallee Bridgeman
USA Today Bestselling Author

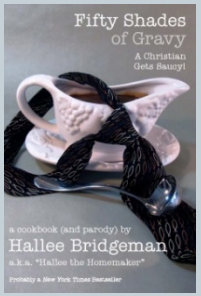

On the Ropes
USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR
Hallee Bridgeman

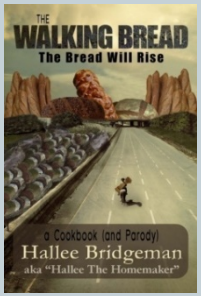

Black Belt, White Dress
Red Blood & Bluegrass
Hallee Bridgeman
USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

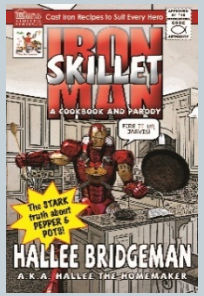

Blizzard in the Bluegrass
Red Blood & Bluegrass
Hallee Bridgeman
USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

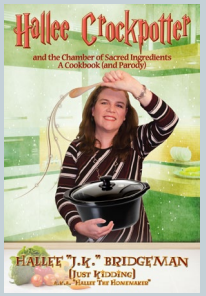

The Seven Year Glitch
Red Blood & Bluegrass
Hallee Bridgeman
USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR


A Change of a Dress
Red Blood & Bluegrass
Hallee Bridgeman
USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR


Fifty Shades of Gravy
A Christian Gets Saucy!
a cookbook (and parody) by
Hallee Bridgeman
a.k.a. "Hallee the Homemaker"


THE WALKING BREAD
The Bread Will Rise
a Cookbook (and Parody)
Hallee Bridgeman
aka "Hallee The Homemaker"

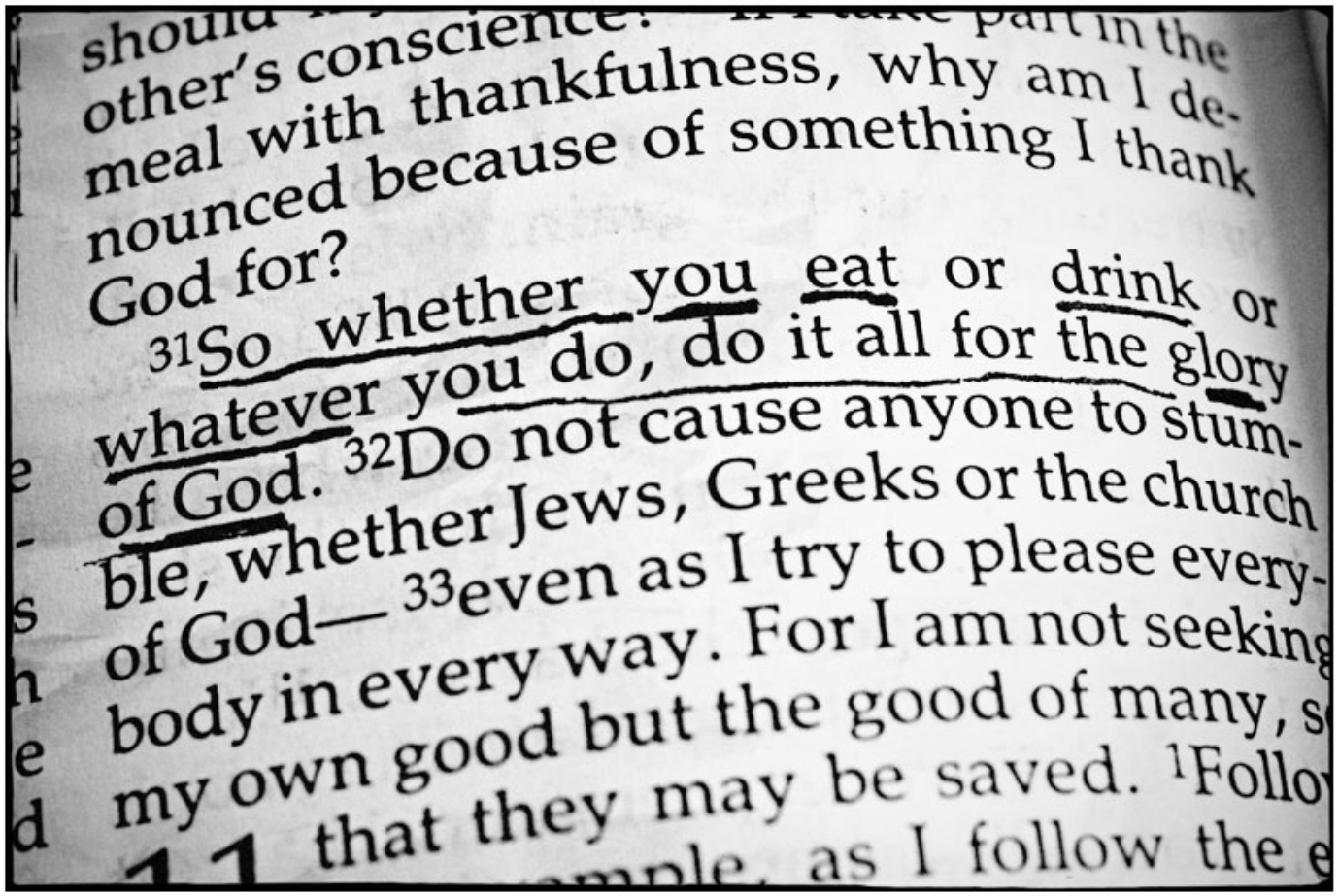

IRON SKILLET MAN
A COOKBOOK AND PARODY
The STARK truth about PEPPER & POTS
HALLEE BRIDGEMAN
A.K.A. HALLEE THE HOMEMAKER


Hallee Crockpotter
and the Chamber of Sacred Ingredients
A Cookbook (and Parody)
HALLEE "J.K." BRIDGEMAN

Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

- About Me
  - Started publishing March 2012
  - 30 fiction books published
  - 4 cookbooks
  - *USA Today* bestselling author
  - Entirely indie published
- I Used to Write Secular Fiction
  - Contemporary romance
  - Contemporary suspense

Writing Realistic Christian Fiction



other's conscience? ... part in the
meal with thankfulness, why am I de-
nounced because of something I thank
God for?
31So whether you eat or drink or
whatever you do, do it all for the glory
of God. 32Do not cause anyone to stum-
ble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church
of God— 33even as I try to please every-
body in every way. For I am not seeking
my own good but the good of many, s
that they may be saved. 1Follo
as I follow the e

1 Corinthians 10:31

NIV

Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

- I was never a reader of Christian fiction
  - No preconceived ideas of what was “right”
  - Didn’t try to emulate any known Christian fiction author
  - Just wrote from my heart
- I wrote without worrying about publication
- I wrote in a way that satisfied what I like to read in a style that I enjoy
- I found through reviews that I was ‘different’

Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

- The Christian market is filled with safe, clean books
  - This is a good thing
  - The readers in the traditional Christian market clearly enjoy safe, clean books
- I believe my calling is to minister to people outside of that typical Christian market
- Evil is real and touches the lives of Christians
- Real life involves danger and often violence
- Real life is messy and not always safe and clean

Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

The Jewel Series:

- 3 sisters – different dads, same heroin addict mom
- All of the baggage that comes with that life
  - Beaten
  - Raped
  - Starved
  - Abandoned



- Learn to trust not only men but God
  - Omniscient, all powerful, all knowing, yet still they suffered

Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

"Well written, plenty of action, good story line. This series is looks at the lives of real people, people with broken pasts, not the picture perfect though everything in life works picture perfect in the end which isn't totally realistic."

The characters are so true to life.

Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

"Really like this author's approach to real life situations."

"This series is very honest. The characters are real and don't make you feel like you are less than. The topics covered in the series cause you to look deeply into your own personal life and send you straight to the Father to have a one on one conversation with Him. Makes you deal with the issues we sometimes bury deep in our souls.."

Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

"It is so great to see quality Christian romance books that are clean, but also realistic to the face that people are sensual beings and that is ok within the way God intends it and these books really honor that."

"This is the kind of Christian romance I've been looking for. The characters are flawed. They have realistic responses. Life is not all sweetness and nice simply because they're Christian. Their Christian faith sees them through the trials in their lives, strengthening them in every aspect of their lives. In every story, I was able to face my own struggles with a new perspective."

Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

The author uncovers human longing, doesn't gloss over human response to create an unbelievable hero, and openly covers issues few romance authors would dare to bring into a plot. In truth, that is a good thing; very few authors have the gift to bring real life into a book and weave its elements into a tale that captivates both the mind and the heart. I like reading a book with people I can relate to, situations that I can understand. I also like reading a book and leaving it feeling as though I've discovered more about myself.

Writing Realistic Christian Fiction



"It is so great to see quality Christian romance books that are clean, but also realistic to the face that people are sensual beings and that is ok within the way God intends it and these books really honor that."

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- Having read several other stories from this author, I knew what to expect and was not disappointed. I like her style and her honest and redemptive approach to realistic struggles that her characters have. The characters have depth and reality, and their emotions, strengths, and foibles resonate well with readers.

Realistic Christian Fiction

Since I'm typically not a reader of Christian fiction, I took a poll to social media Christian fiction reader sites and asked this question:

What has changed in Christian fiction?

Polled Christian Readers
What has changed?

"I have been reading Christian fiction since the mid to late 80's I have seen a huge change in that time. Gone from the sweet reads to books now having a much stronger themes. Books now tackle issues and the hero and heroines now have flaws a reader can identify with. Depending on the line the books seem to have so much more substance than some of the earlier books."

What has changed?

"I have been reading Christian fiction since the mid to late 80's I have seen a huge change in that time. Gone from the sweet reads to books now having a much stronger themes. Books now tackle **issues** and the hero and heroines now have **flaws** a reader can identify with. Depending on the line the books seem to have so much more **substance** than some of the earlier books."

What has changed?

"…contemporary Christian fiction, personally, I think it has gotten **sharper**. I believe that challenges from the secular market have required that Christian fiction no longer just be a 'message'. **The plot and characters must be genuine**."

What has changed?



"The way I've seen some of the books change over the years has been good, **but there are some… more questionable**, to say the least. Those would be when the authors try **to get away with sneaking something bad into it. A curse word, a nude scene, etc. To me, Christian fiction is supposed to be clean**. You should be able to count on the authors under that title to produce good works without the worldly junk. That's the one complaint I have about the changes Christian fiction have gone through."

What has changed?

"If anything **I think this genre is better now**. "

"Well, the sweet Christian romances are still out there–some with **more vivid and believable characters**. There are still those that almost read like a gospel tract at times. And then there are **edgier romances that deal with real issues, emotions, and family situations**. I've seen definite improvement in quality over the past few years and a steering away from "formulaic" fiction."

Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

- My Process
  - Characterization

Writing Realistic Christian Fiction



Characterization

ONE HEARTBEAT FROM LOVE

Mother runs medical practice for leaders and families

CYNTHIA MEYERS

PACIFIST

MEDICAL MISSIONARY

Has to leave mission patients

High-risk pregnancies

Political family. She is detached from them still loves them. She longs to help them but story book life doesn't exist

Heading to embassy - escape route blocked. Have to go around. Hide in village full of women Cynthia has helped.

After River raft. Road Block. Bridge sentry.

TWO DAYS IN JUNGLE.

Her father is waiting on her. He worked with host nation to pull her visa.

to guide her to safety.

SHE RESENTS INTRUSION BUT COMPLIES.

VP taken as hostage in attack. Rich saves him.

RICK NORTON

CAREER SOLDIER

Doesn't want to leave Rick behind

father

US ARMY SPECIAL FORCES

Team Daddy. Would love to see an Army special ops team get to work with Cynthia's father. Loves God, his family & Army. Loves to see a soldier.

Close-knit family. They are his motivations for serving. Love of God, country. She knows she loves him when she sees him with his trail me-maw.

Rick has only ever wanted to be an SF Daddy. Cynthia asking him to quit gives him a stumble because it occurs to him that he might find a way to make a compromise that will keep them together. But what if that means she'll always control him with ultimatum? When he finally realizes that he loves her enough to give it up, she comes to him.

She has been firmly humiliated the trust. Little work is her Ironically escape.

He is a Career SF guy. No time + room for relationships. He is not good to loved ones. Better to remain alone.

Seeing her as she walks her compound

He stands up for her in front of the ex-fiancé and the people around her father. That impresses her. He's an aide.

She relies on him for protection. He relies on her to take care of his guys.

Killing is a sin. How can someone love God and Master war?

God has equipped him. He does not act out of hate or anger. God is always in the center of what he does. He loathes pacifists.

People are actively trying to kill them.

The jungle is almost a character.

Her father is a barrier.

Going with Rick to Kentucky humanizes him to her.

It is a dark moment when Cynthia realizes that Rich will let them go to keep serving. It takes some serious soul-searching for her to discover that he is vital to her but he is a soldier and that is the essence of who he is. She has to come to the point where sacrificing herself is worth staying with him. Part of her issue is that she had to give up her mission to facilitate her father's service.

Both of them realize they need to be together and any sacrifice is understands what it is. She can be used that her skills can She knows wherever they live he is best with his team.

Both of them take something out of the jungle. He realizes that he is not as good alone as he thought. She realizes that she can't just stick a stereotype on someone and be done with it. Her anger is at her ex-fiance. Not Rick.



Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

- My Process
  - Characterization
  - Action/dialogue
    - What is she saying?
    - What is he saying?
    - Never contrived.
    - Always natural.
    - Use dialect and jargon.
    - Use inflection.

Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

- My Process
  - Characterization
  - Action/dialogue
  - Setting

Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

- My Process
  - Characterization
  - Action/dialogue
  - Setting
  - Explore Emotions
    - Never shy away from the darker emotions
    - Let the character experience/struggle with feelings that a real life person feels

Darker Emotions

- Anger
  - Irritation
  - Vexation
  - Wrath
  - Fury



Darker Emotions

- Anger
- Sadness
  - Grief
  - Woe
  - Sorrow
  - Gloom
  - Despair
  - Melancholy
  - Dejection



Darker Emotions

- Anger
- Sadness
- Fear
  - Alarm
  - Trepidation
  - Terror
  - Anxiety
  - Dismay
  - Dread
  - Fright
  - Horror



Darker Emotions

- Anger
- Sadness
- Fear
- Desire
  - Want
  - Lust
  - Urge
  - Passion
  - Crave



Darker Emotions

- Anger
- Sadness
- Fear
- Desire
- Impatience
  - Restlessness
  - Agitation
  - Nervousness
  - Frustration



Darker Emotions

- Anger
- Sadness
- Fear
- Desire
- Impatience
- Guilt
  - Self-condemnation
  - Self-reproach
  - Culpability
  - Shame



Darker Emotions

- Anger
- Sadness
- Fear
- Desire
- Impatience
- Guilt
- Envy
  - Jealousy
  - Covetousness
  - Pridefulness



Darker Emotions

- Anger
- Sadness
- Fear
- Desire
- Impatience
- Guilt
- Envy
- Doubt
  - Uncertainty
  - Indecision

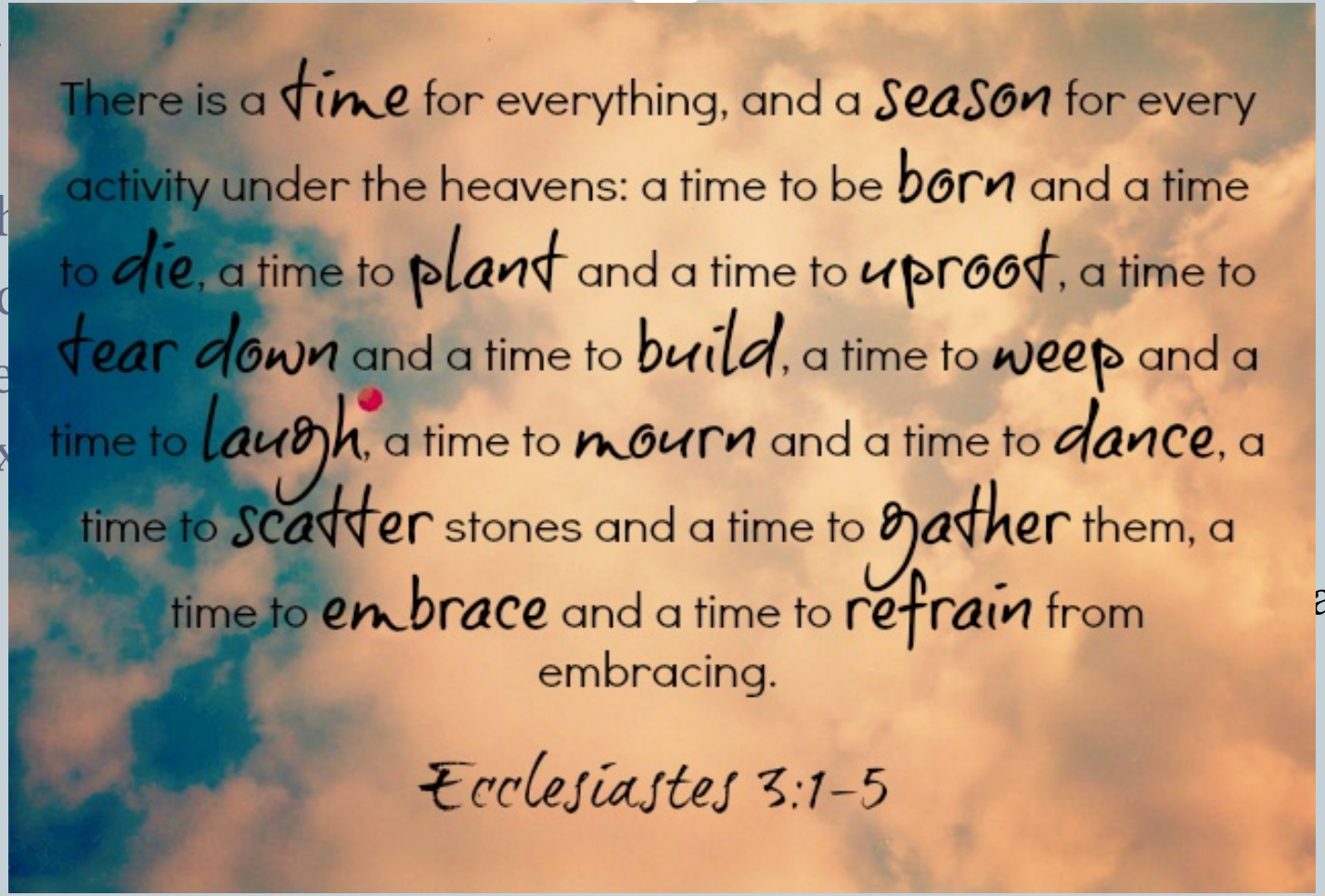


Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

- My Process
  - Characterization
  - Action/dialogue
  - Setting
  - Explore Emotions
    - Never shy away from the darker emotions
    - Let the character experience/struggle with feelings that a real life person feels
    - Actions should fit the emotions

Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

- My
  - Ch
  - Ac
  - Se
  - Ex
    -
    - al life
    -



Violence



- The Bible is rife with violence
- Violence is challenging in Christian writing
- Can be as gratuitous as sexual situations in secular writing. Don't be gratuitous.
- Sometimes, situations require a violent reaction because it is realistic human behavior that fits with our design from God
- Never glorify sin
- Violence has consequences for victim and perpetrator – that's realistic

Violence



“One way to find out,” Rick mumbled. He pulled the bandanna that covered his mouth down and, in French, yelled, “Let her go!”

Duong screamed back. “I will kill her!”

In English, Rick quietly asked, “You got him?”

Bill focused, aimed, and calmly brought Duong into his sights. Rick knew the hostage considerably complicated his odds of another clean shot. “Not so much,” he drawled. “Maybe keep him entertained until Maguire can show him the money?”

“Help me help you,” Rick murmured.

Violence

Bill dropped his left hand from his rifle stock, keeping his right hand on the pistol grip of his M-4 carbine and his finger on the trigger. With his left hand, he surreptitiously hand signaled for the sniper team to take the shot as soon as they safely could.

Rick yelled, “Sure you will, Duong. You’re a killer. So you kill her, then I’ll kill you. Where will you be then?”

“Laughing because your doctor would be dead. And we both know you need her.” Rick felt his blood freeze as he watched Duong cock the pistol. He knew that Doctor Myers wasn’t getting out of this situation alive if Duong got his way. He needed to stall.

Violence



“Let’s play this out without any more bluffing, Duong. You kill her, then I kill you slowly. See, I’m a killer, too. Trained by the very best.”

“No shot,” Bill whispered behind his bandanna.

Rick made no sign that he had heard. “There’s medical supplies here. We’ll revive you just to kill you some more. I promise you, Duong, it will hurt the entire time you’re dying. For days. Understand? Or, you let her go, right now, then maybe you live. Or maybe I make it quick and painless.”

Violence



In truth, Rick would never torture anyone. Torture was beneath him and he detested it. He had seen the kinds of things trained interrogators did to extract information from captives. They always got the needed intel and always without resorting to actions that would sully the good name of the US Military. None of it qualified as torture. However, he had also seen what these men in this warlord militia would do to entire villages. He needed this man to hesitate, so he needed him to feel some fear. Right now, he needed to inspire that fear.

Violence



“No shot,” Bill whispered beside him.

Rick nodded and shouted, “So think it through and make your choice.”

Duong yelled back, “I’m dead either way. At least I take her with—”

Even knowing it was coming, Rick failed to hear the suppressed subsonic sniper round when McBride fired. Duong went down mid-sentence, and the lady Doctor came through it with nothing worse than a stain on her shirt.

Violence



“Jerry, you had me at hello,” Bill muttered as they rose from their crouch.

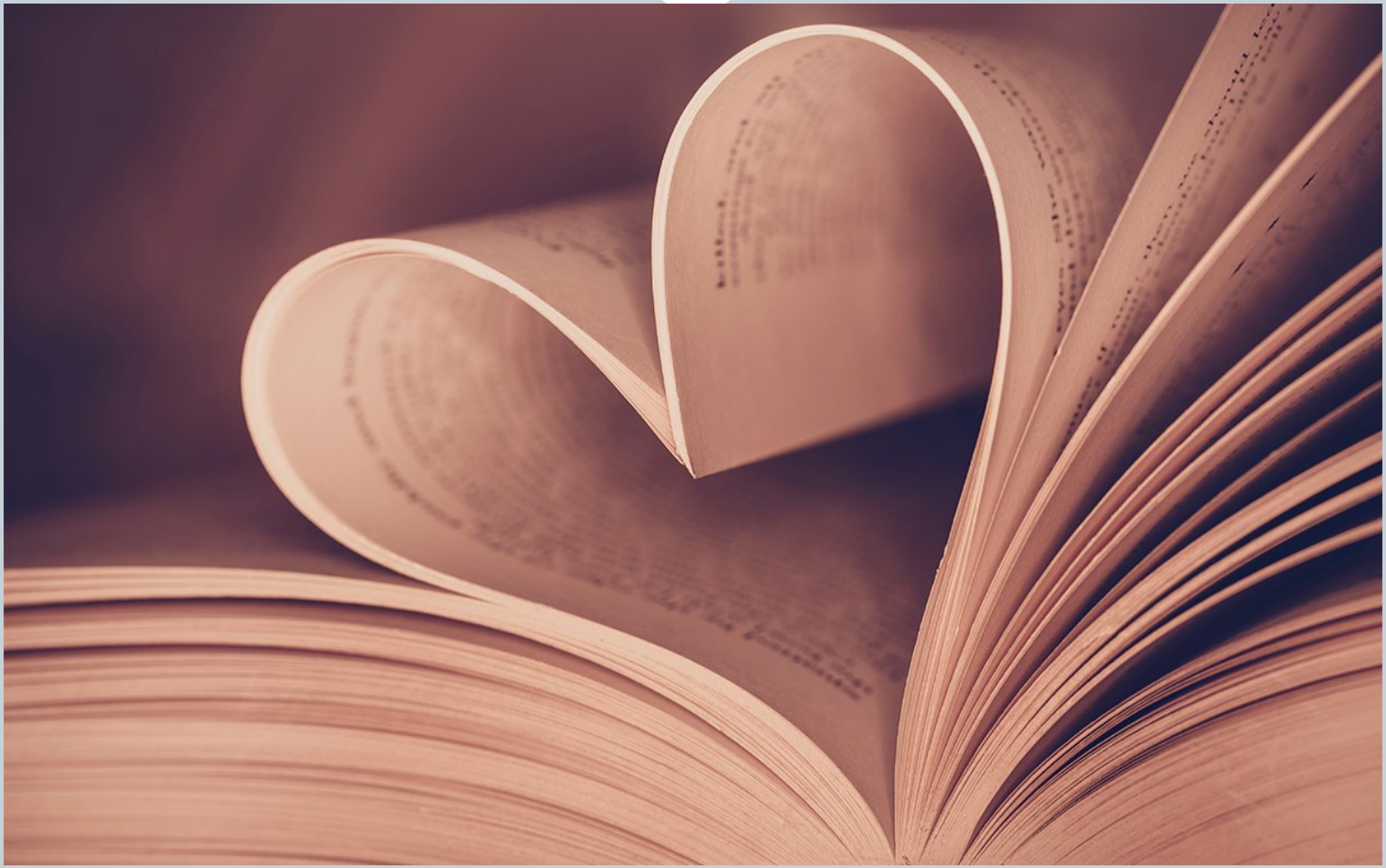
Rick and Bill immediately moved forward, weapons still at the ready, head and eyes moving everywhere, peering into every corner and shadow, moving at a fast walk with knees bent to absorb any uneven ground beneath their feet, almost a crouching run, prepared for unknown attacks coming from any direction. The doctor stood, shocked, with two dead Chukuwereije soldiers at her feet, Duong’s blood spattered on the side of her face and a little in her eye.

Violence



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- Violence is challenging in Christian writing
- Can be as gratuitous as sexual situations in secular writing. Don't be gratuitous.
- Sometimes, situations require a violent reaction because it is realistic human behavior that fits with our design from God
- Never glorify sin
- Violence has consequences for victim and perpetrator – that's realistic

Romance



Romance

- The Bible is rife with romantic situations and explicit sexuality
- Kissing, touching, flirting
- Reaction, temptation, desire
  - Convey passion without explicit sexual terms

Romance



It was hard to say which one moved first. Derrick slid his hand from her cheek to the back of her neck about the same time Sarah stood on her toes and wrapped an arm around his neck. Before either one knew the decision had been made, their lips met. Derrick pulled her closer as Sarah stepped closer, and he lost himself in the perfect feel of her against him, of her lips on his.

Her body pressed against him felt so wonderful, so right. Her lips moved against his as if they had been designed for him. A buzzing started in his ears. Heat rushed through his body. He wanted to get closer to her, even closer, feel her skin against his.

Even as he deepened the kiss, he knew he needed to back off a little bit before he lost control all together.

Romance

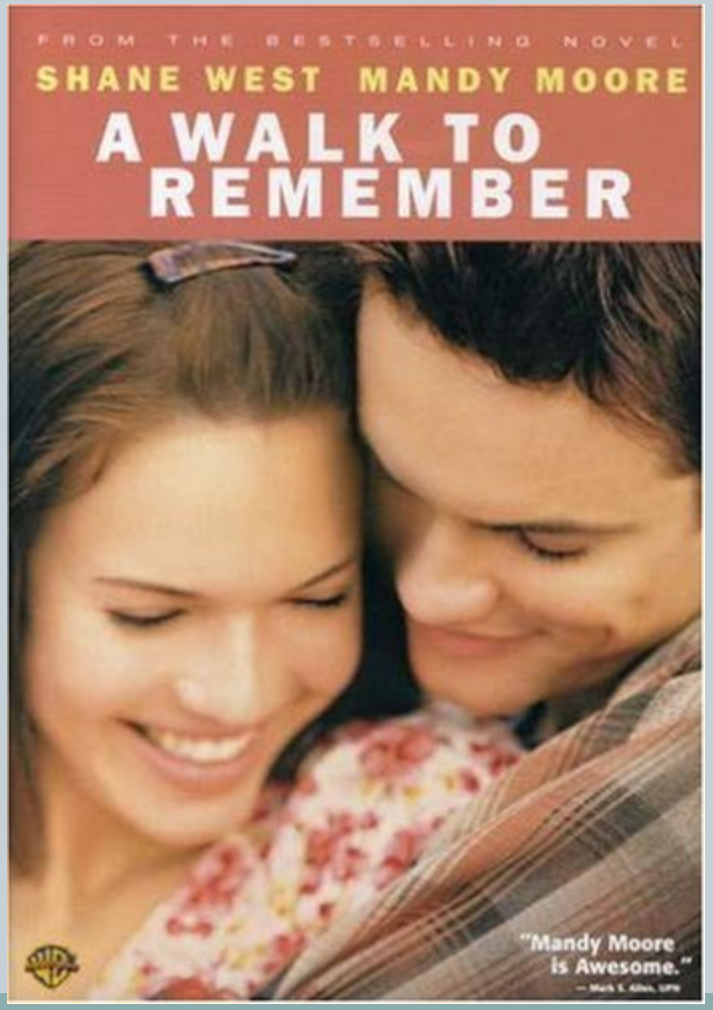
- Kissing, touching, flirting
- Reaction, temptation, desire
  - Convey passion without explicit sexual terms
- Always closed door

Romance

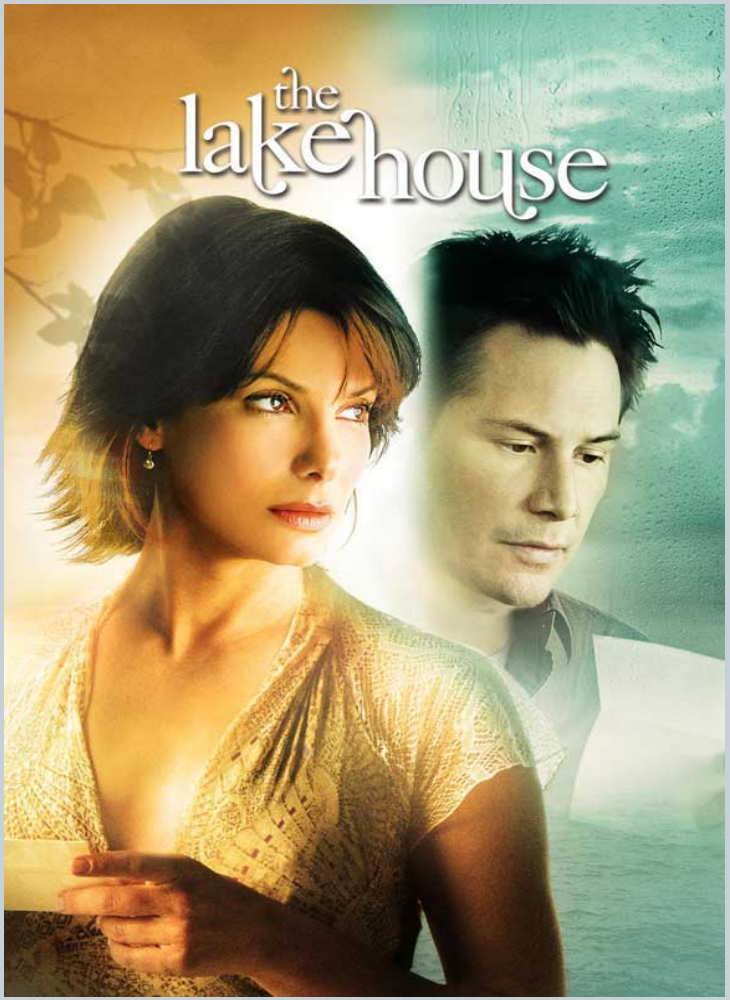
- Kissing, touching, flirting
- Reaction, temptation, desire
  - Convey passion without explicit sexual terms
- Always closed door
- But always real

The Most Romantic Movies Ever





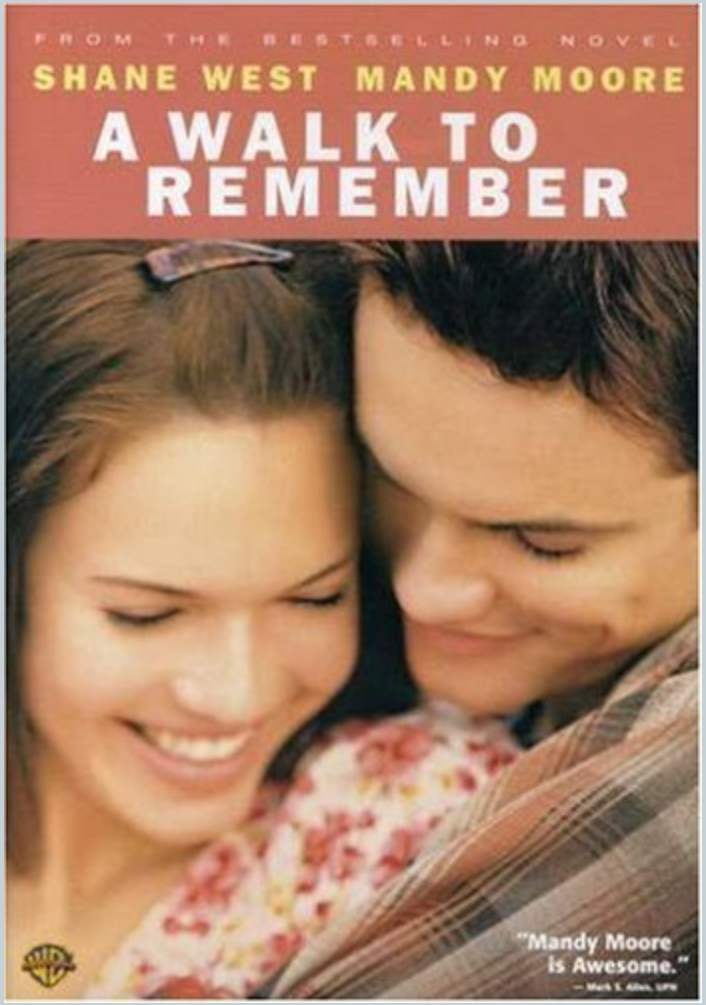
The Most Romantic Movie Ever



A brief scene shows Kate wearing a low-cut top. We see various couples kissing, once quite passionately. It is suggested that Kate and her boyfriend have shared an apartment for over a year. Alex's co-worker eyes him lustfully.

The Most Romantic Movie Ever

One of Landon's friends cracks several crude jokes about sex, most of them targeting Jamie. "[She'll] put it on a brother like a pop tart," he laughs. Later, he makes suggestive sexual motions with his body while mocking a scene from the school play. "Booty shaking" comes up once. Jamie silences her critics, however, with her unimpeachable purity.



Recent Romantic Movie I've Seen



Cage slyly talks to Rita about somehow transferring the alien DNA (the time-looping substance that found its way into his bloodstream) from one human to another through bodily fluids. She catches on that he's suggesting they have sex … and quickly shuts him down, letting him know that she's tried it before and it *doesn't* work.

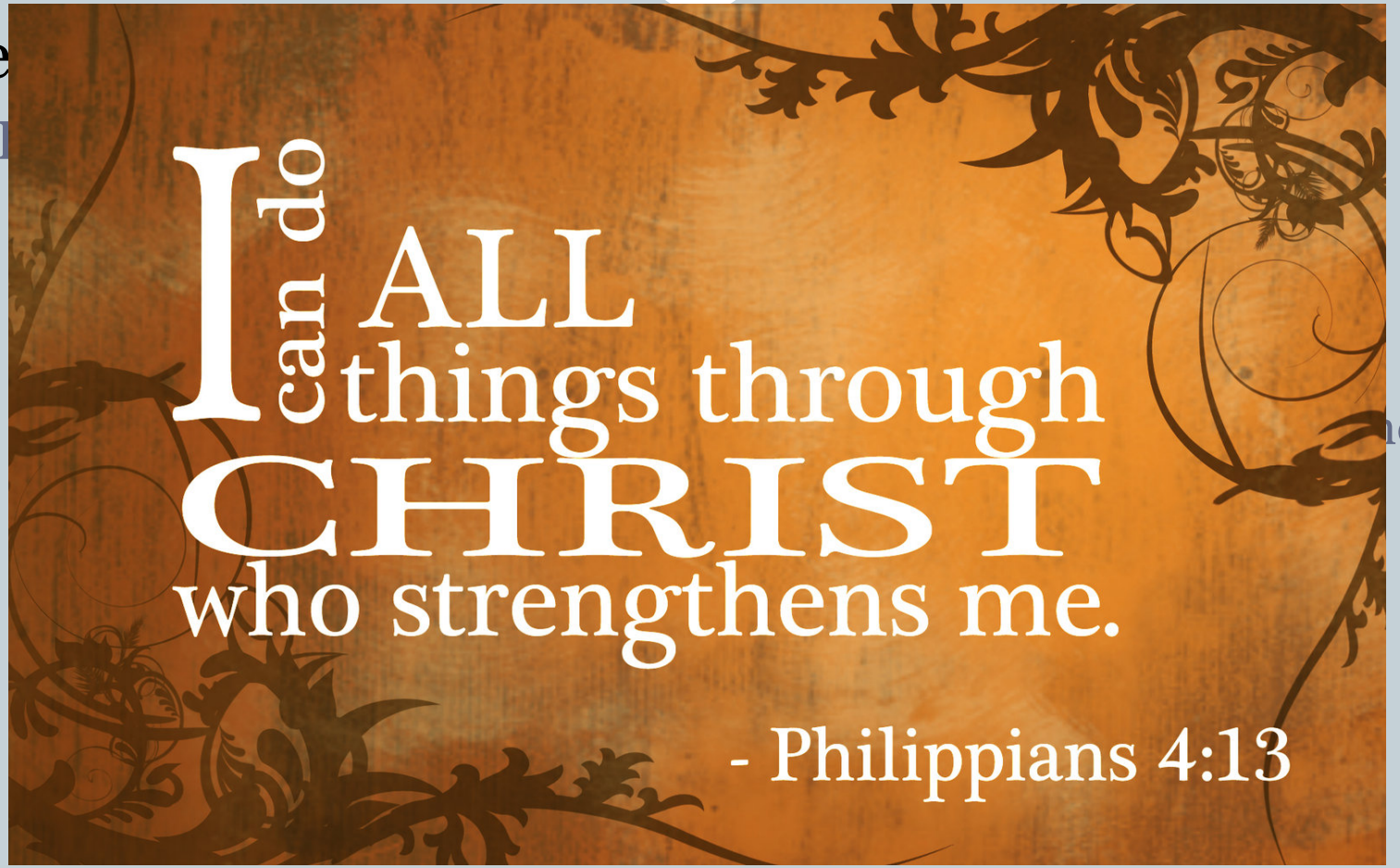
Somebody makes a coarse crack about hooking up with two girls at once. Rita wears a flak vest that reveals quite a bit of her bare back. A soldier suits up in his mech armor without his uniform, allowing the camera to catch a glimpse of his bare backside. Several guys are seen shirtless in their barracks.

Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

- Secondary and background characters
  - Bad guys/foes/antagonists
    - Not always going to be good people
    - Sometimes downright evil
    - There's evil in the world – if your book needs it, write it
      - It's possible to allude to most evil – the reader will never know the difference if it's done right

Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

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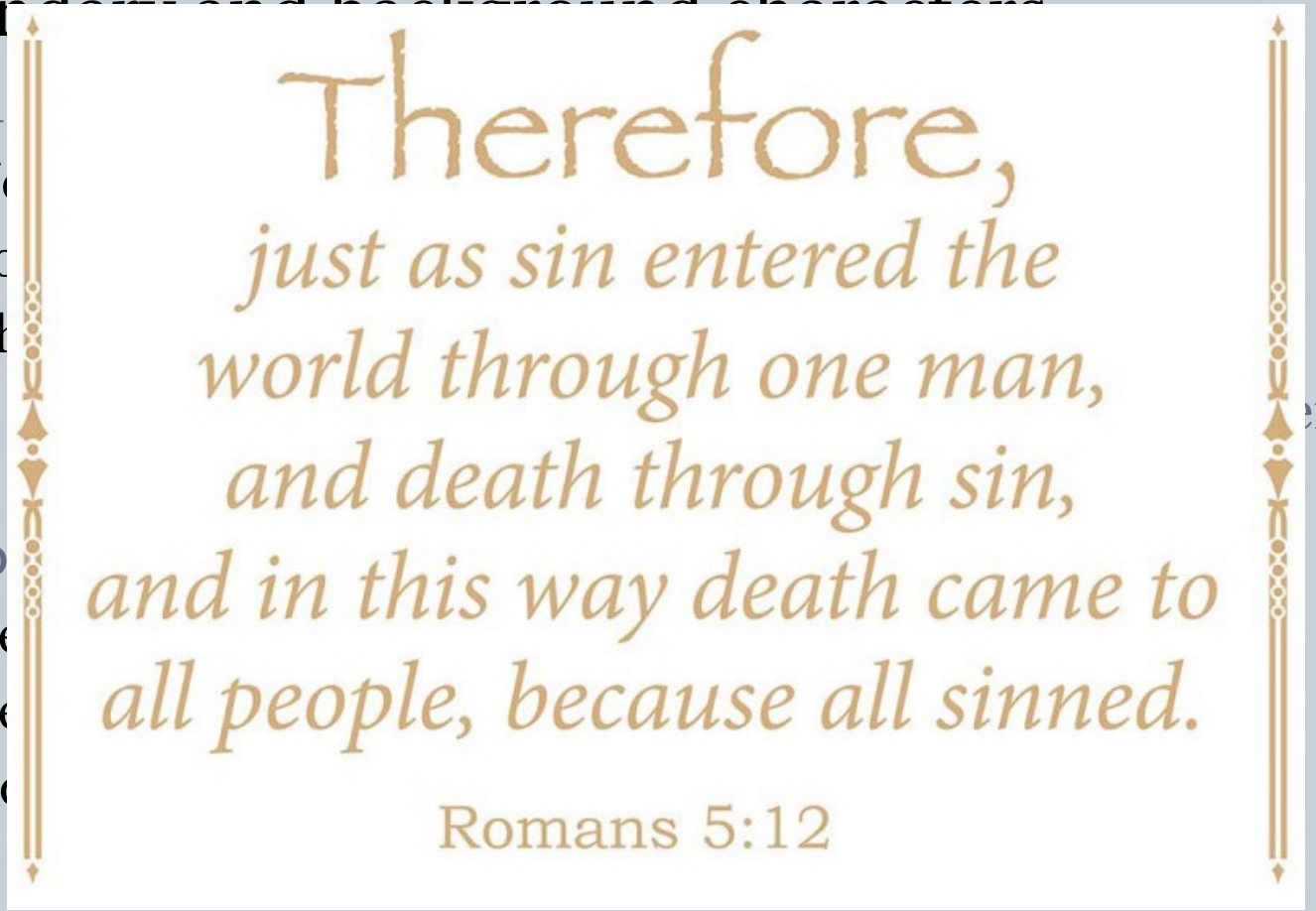
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    - Sometimes downright evil
    - There's evil in the world – if your book needs it, write it
      - It's possible to allude to most evil – the reader will never know the difference if it's done right
  - Good guys/friends/secondary characters
    - Real life people have flaws
    - Real life people do really amazing things
    - God is love, and His love is all powerful.

Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

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Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

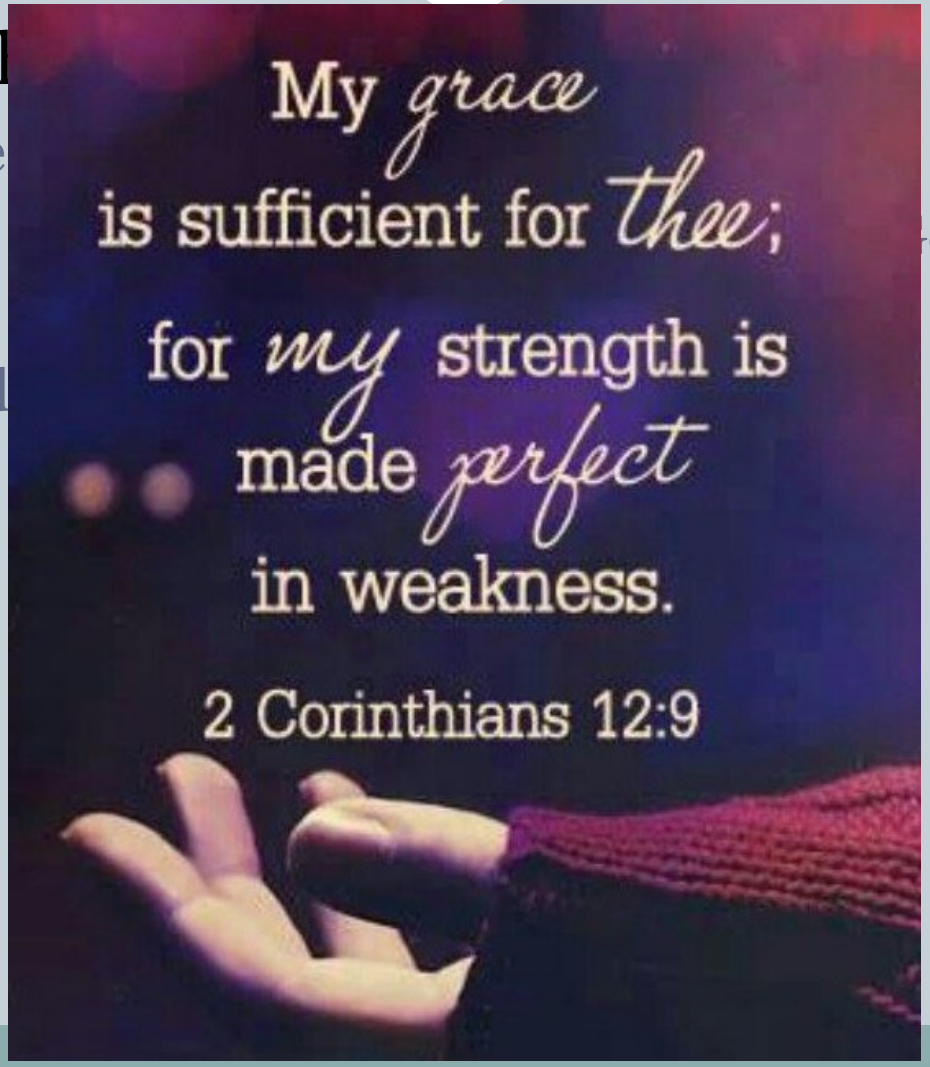
- My Main Characters
  - MUST have a faith arc
    - Coming to know Christ
    - Crisis of faith
    - Strengthening of faith
    - Confirmation of faith
    - Reinforcing/encouraging faith in others

Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

- My Main Characters
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  - Will always have a personal relationship with God by the end of the book
  - Understand what grace really means

Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

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Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

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  - Understand what grace really means
  - Are flawed sinners
    - Tony Viscolli
    - Carol and Bobby
    - Steve Slater
    - Victor Kovalev
    - Davis Elliott

Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

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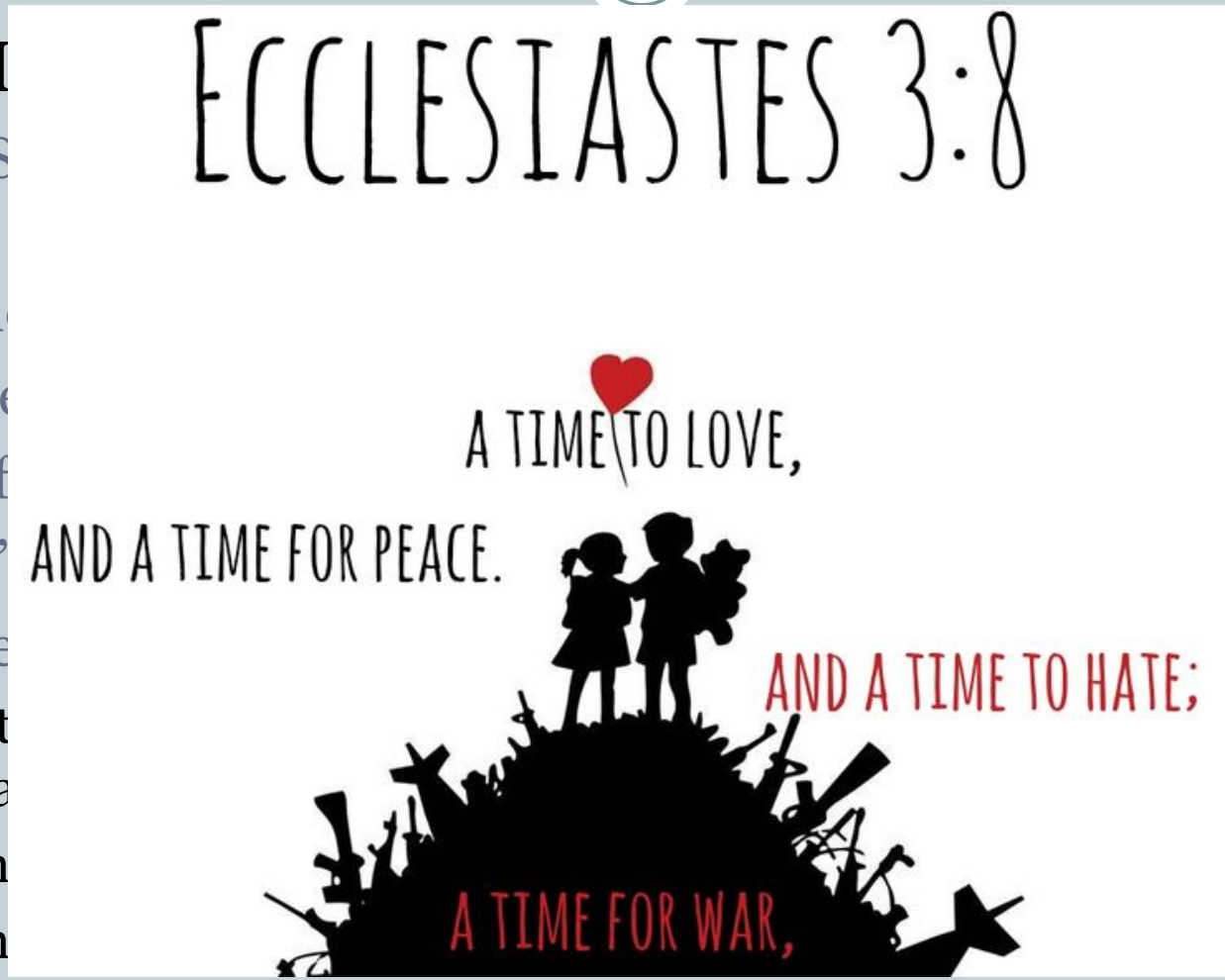
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Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

- My Main Characters
  - MUST have a faith arc
  - Will always have a personal relationship with God by the end of the book
  - Understand what grace really means
  - Are flawed sinners
  - Don't shy away from real life situations
  - Never, ever, glorify evil
    - Although I do have an assassin as a main character
    - And a band of covert female spies
    - And a recovered drug addict whose band was a front for a Satanic cult

Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

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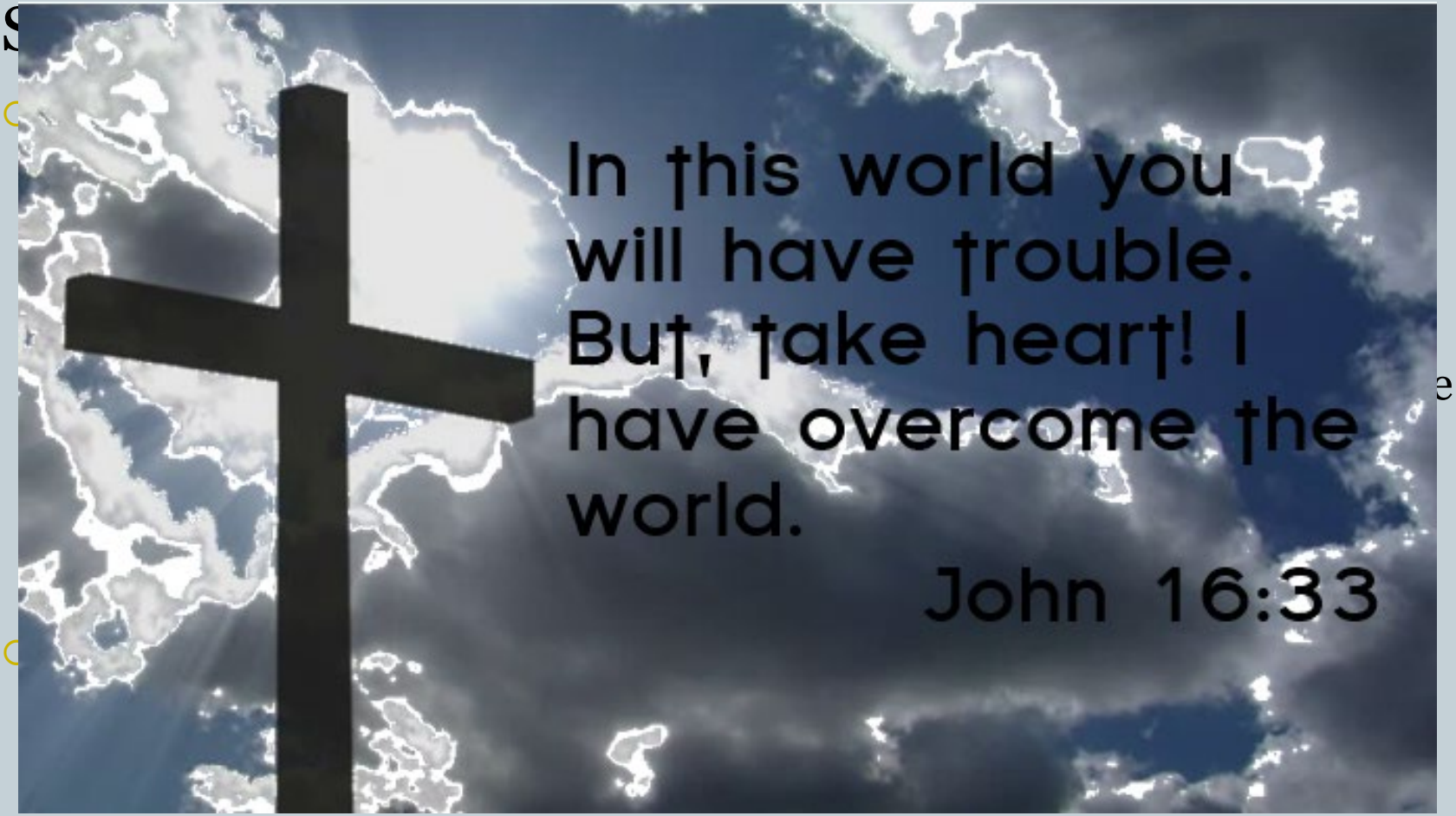
Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

- Situations
  - Are often not ideal
    - War
    - Espionage
    - Prisoner of war
    - Murder
    - Stalker
    - Loss of loved one
    - PTSD
    - Rape
    - Adultery
    - Poverty
    - Abuse
    - Infidelity
    - Sex trade
    - Greed
    - Satanic cults
    - Drug & alcohol abuse
    - Prostitution
    - Organized crime

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  - In real life, Christians exude the beautiful love of God even in dark, ugly situations
    - Let your characters do the same

Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

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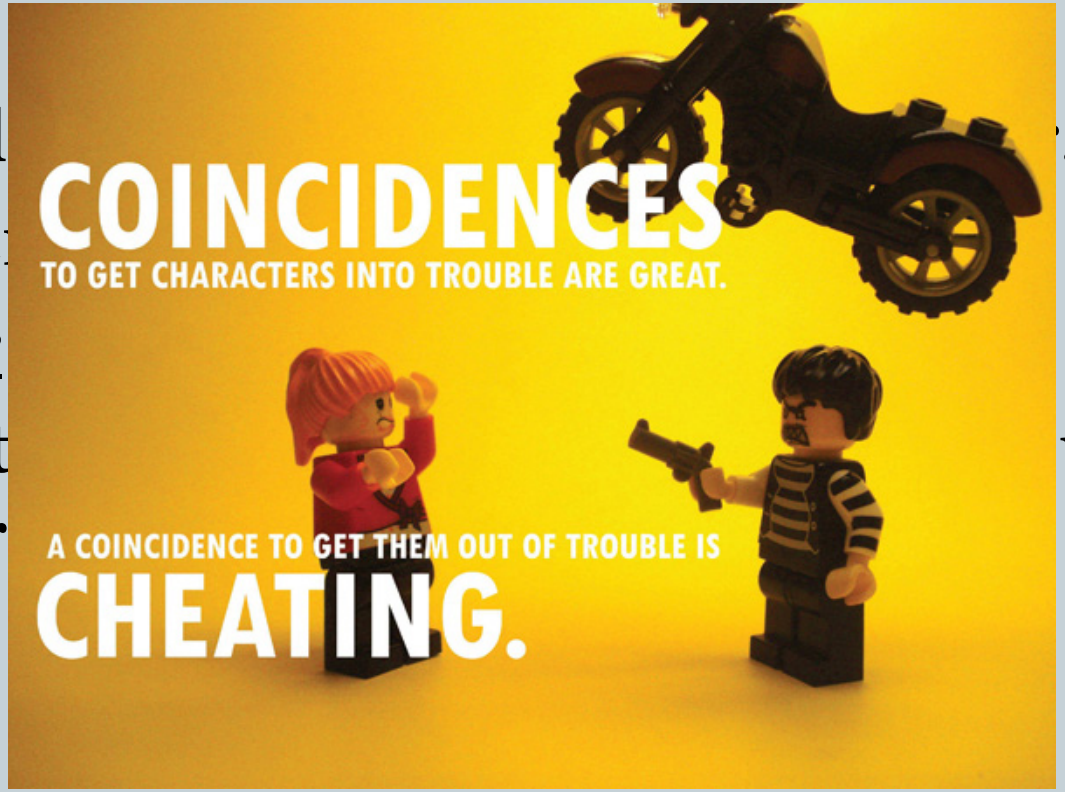
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Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

- In light of this, don't just create horrible situations for the sake of it.
- Never let things just magically get better.
- Let there be consequence for sin.
- **Never** glorify evil.
- Never toe a line or push an envelope (or use a cliché) just for the sake of it.

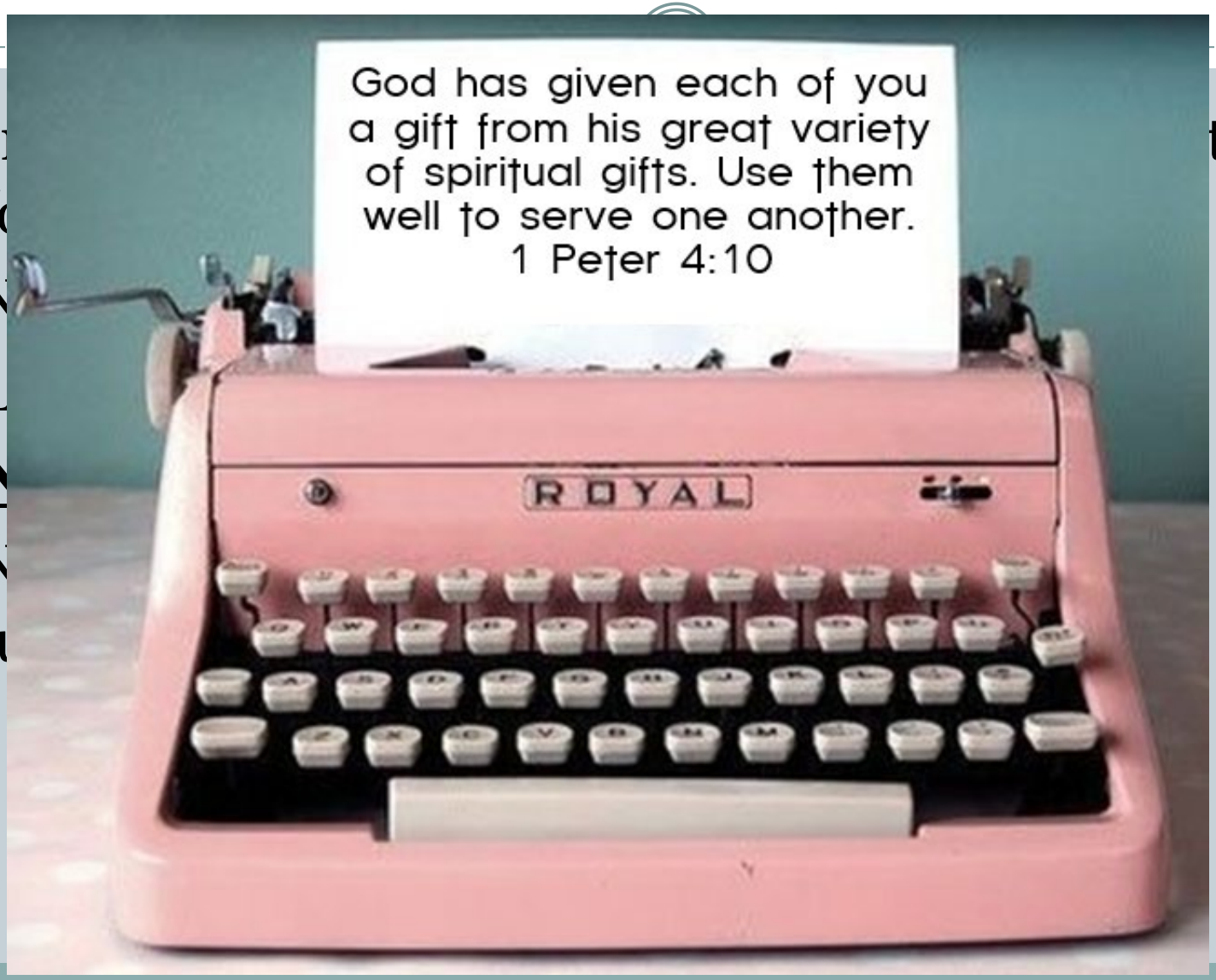
Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

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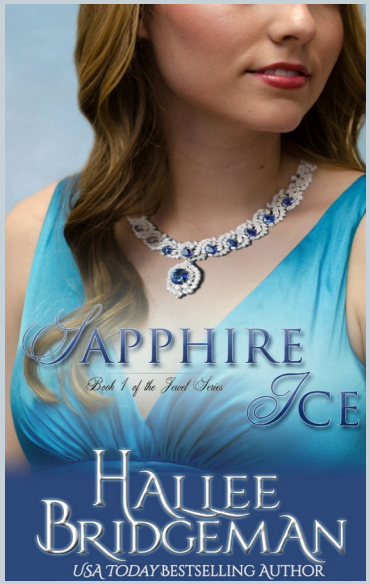


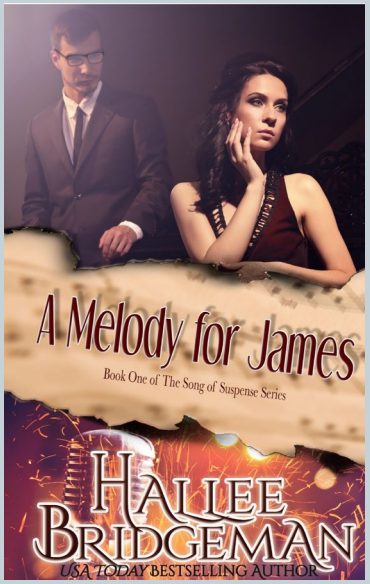
Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

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An Example of How I Do It









www.halleebridgeman.com

Writing Realistic Christian Fiction

