

# FamilyFiction

July 2020



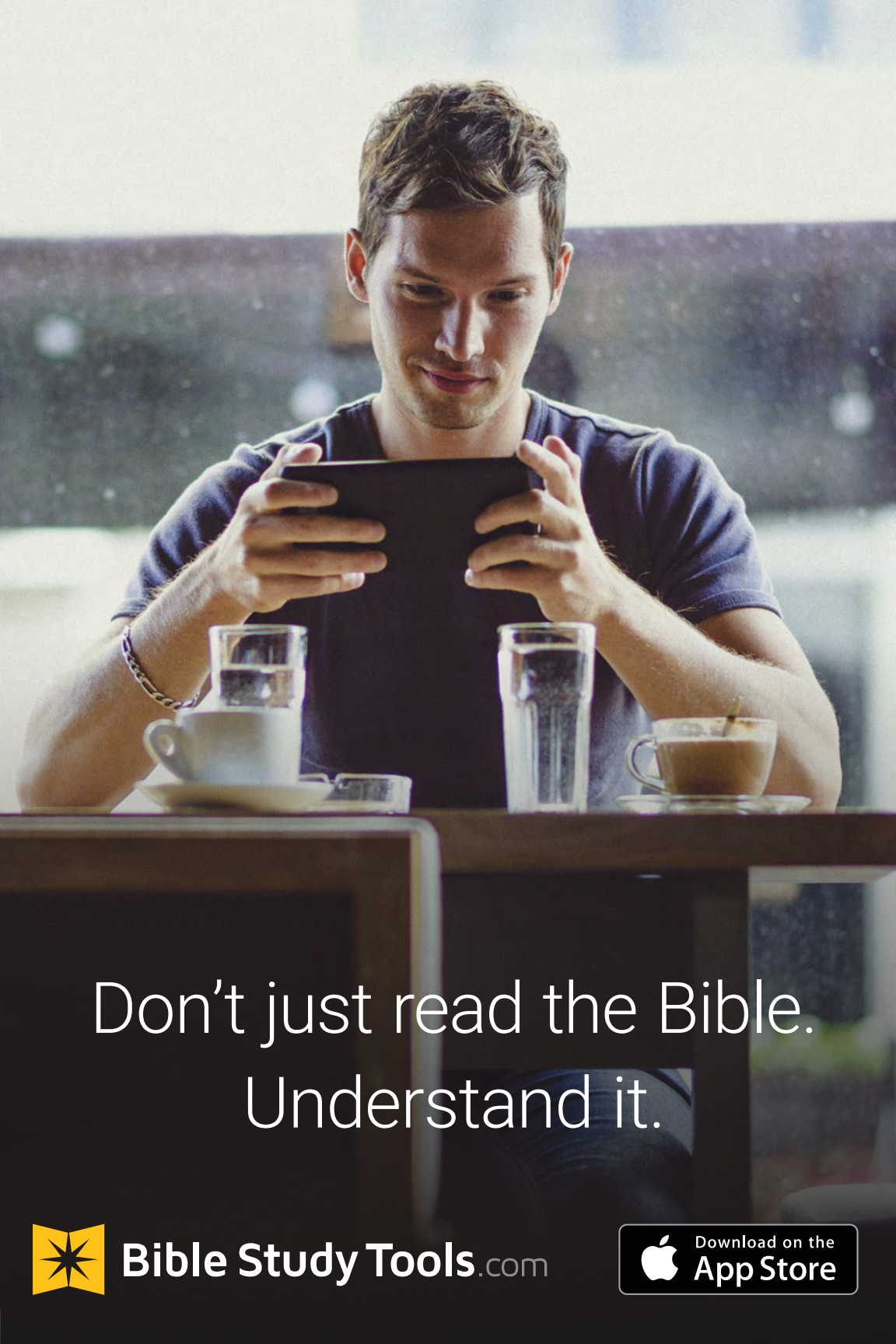
Amish Author  
**KELLY IRVIN**

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**Top 10 Christian Speculative Authors**



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FamilyFiction Publishing  
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Salem Publishing &  
Salem Media Group

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# NEWS ON THE WEBSITE

Check out these news articles, updates, and other bonus material online at [www.FamilyFiction.com](http://www.FamilyFiction.com)

## **Christian Author Roundup:**

### **“What’s Your Favorite Thing About Summer?”**

We asked a whole bunch of Christian authors to tell us their favorite things about summer. Find out what they told us!

#### **Read more here:**

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#### **Read more here:**

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## **VIDEO: Tamera Alexander | *Colors of Truth***

Historical author Tamera Alexander gives us a preview of her new novel *Colors of Truth*!

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<https://www.familyfiction.com/tamera-alexander-colors-truth>



# AMISH: KELLY IRVIN

## EXPLORING FRIENDSHIP'S RIPPLE EFFECTS

The author talks to *FamilyFiction* about how discovering a Native American tribe's history laid the groundwork for enlarging an Amish girl's outlook.

Best-selling Amish author **Kelly Irvin** sets her *Amish of Big Sky Country Series* in Montana and uses a common thread to set the trilogy into motion. Her second novel in the set is ***A Long Bridge Home*** (Zondervan): After her community in the awe-inspiring Montana mountains is suddenly consumed by a raging wildfire, one young Amish woman finds herself in a new town where she's introduced to the Native culture of the Kootenai people.

In our exclusive interview, Kelly shares the undergirding theme of the story, explains what goes into her research in preparing her novels, and touches on why she also writes romantic suspense.

### **What inspired the story in *A Long Bridge Home*?**

While doing research for the *Amish of Big Sky Country Series*, I learned that St. Ignatius, where this Amish community lives, is located on the Flathead Indian Reservation. The idea of such diverse belief systems co-existing in this region prompted me to visit The People's Center, a Kootenai tribe historical museum in Polson, Montana, during a research trip. There the education coordinator gave us an extensive tour and interview of the tribe's history and current day challenges.

I was floored and awed by what this tribe has experienced and overcome in its long, often tragic, history. This perspective on

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American and specifically Montana history formed the basis for *A Long Bridge Home*. I wanted to explore what happens when two people with such differing backgrounds and beliefs forge an unlikely friendship and how that friendship has ripple effects on the people close to them.

### **What spiritual themes play out through the novel?**

The over-arching theme is the importance of not only knowing what we believe and why but being able to articulate it to others. As I researched and wrote this story, I found myself being thankful for my church family of twenty-five years. I know what I believe, but I also respect and value people who hold different beliefs.

In her editorial letter, my editor Becky Monds drew out two small pieces she felt exemplified the theme of the struggle and the benefit of that struggle:



*"[Raymond's] view of the world bumped against hers and sent it spinning out of control. For the first time she had to justify—in her own mind—what she believed."*

*"Now [Christine] knew the world was bigger and more complicated. Threads of many colors made up the fabric of this world. Its brilliance drew her in. She wanted to touch this bright, worldly shawl and wear it around her shoulders."*

*"The exposure to a world and beliefs different than ours is ultimately good for us. It's a matter of internal balance, knowing where we stand, what we believe, but being open to letting others believe in and stand for something different. Leaving room for civilized, sometimes spirited, discourse."*

### **How does this book fit into the bigger picture of the *Amish of Big Sky Country Series*?**

All three books in the series begin at the same critical point in the lives of three women who are friends and have lived their entire lives in tiny West Kootenai, Montana. That critical point is the evacuation of the town as wildfire sparked by lightening in the Kootenai National Forest threatens to descend on the community. Families are forced to flee.

This is an event "ripped from the headlines," as they say. It really happened.

What comes next is all my imagination. For the first time each young woman is exposed to situations that forces her to reexamine her beliefs and her relationships—particularly with the man in her life.

### **What themes or characters tie the books together?**

The event described in the books—the Caribou Wildfire—is the springboard for all three stories. Mercy, Christine, and Nora are friends. All three evacuate with their families. From there the stories split.

*Mountains of Grace* includes the stories of three English characters also impacted by the fire. It's the tale of a community, both Amish and English, uniting to overcome adversity.

*A Long Bridge Home* and *Peace in the Valley* focus more on how Christine and Nora are exposed to beliefs different from their own. Starting all three stories from the same point in time was a challenge for me as a writer, but it allowed me to examine events from different perspectives for a deep dive into the impacts on the people involved.

### **What experience or research do you bring to writing about the Amish?**

My journey as an author of 15 Amish novels and eight Amish novellas has been packed with research. I have made research trips to each of the communities where my novels are set, including Jamesport, Missouri; Bee County, Texas; and West Kootenai, St. Ignatius, and Libby, Montana.

Writing Amish stories is challenging because each district has its own *Ordnung* or rules. There is no central church. Those rules affect what clothes they wear, whether they have phone shacks, what kind of buggies they drive, indoor plumbing, if computers or phones are allowed in their businesses, do they ride bicycles, what farm implements they used, and so many other aspects of their lives.

I try hard to create a fictional world that is based on what I know to be true in these communities. Tons of information is available on-line, but nothing beats visiting the community.

I was able to attend school auctions in Jamesport and Bee County. That is so helpful in seeing the many Amish folks who gather at auctions. Firsthand, non-intrusive observation helps fill in many details. I also rely on experts such as Donald Kraybill and his book *The Amish* for detailed explanations of beliefs, religious rituals, and other important facets of daily life.

### **How does your faith impact how you approach storytelling?**

My faith undergirds everything I write. Publishers often call it a “Christian worldview.” For me, it’s knowing that my words likely will influence the faith journey of those who read them. I want that influence to encourage them to think about story themes even after they’ve closed the book. What do they believe and why?

I pray that my stories move readers closer to God. Many of my stories deal with faith struggles in the midst of suffering, tragedy, and hurt. Because that’s the world in which we live. My own struggles are poured into my stories: as I am honed by the fire, so are my characters. My heartfelt desire is that the stories provide readers with comfort and hope as they are honed by their circumstances.

### **What is it about Amish fiction that draws so many non-Amish readers?**

The perennial question! We all have theories, but I’m not sure there’s one right answer. My first agent, who set me on this



path, told me she believed it's because readers are searching for a more idyllic, peaceful world. They long for simpler times.

The Amish often farm, garden, make quilts, and can food. They live their lives at a slower pace. Their faith seems unshakable. That's appealing in today's world of 24-hour news cycles, Internet, work pressures, and financial stress. That's a simplistic answer, but the best one I can produce!

**You write Amish romances, but you also write romantic suspense. How do you decide which type you want to write each time?**

I've been blessed with a publisher willing to support my efforts to branch into a second genre. I've always wanted to write romantic suspense (my first two published novels were in this genre). It's a bit of an experiment. Will my Amish readers jump over to the second genre? So far, so good.



Being able to write in two genres allows me to stretch as a writer. It keeps me fresh in Amish romances, while allowing me to research and write something completely different in my crime stories. I love both.

I'm finishing a romantic suspense story right now. From there I'll jump into writing an Amish novella.

The next romantic suspense novel, *Closer Than She Knows*, debuts in June. It's the best of both worlds. I'm truly living my lifelong dream.

**Are you writing for two different audiences?  
Or do you find that the same readers are reading both?**

A little of both, I think. Some Amish romance readers are purists. They enjoy reading stories with central characters who are Amish. However, other readers are open to the suspense stories as long as there is a strong romance involved.

The cross-over is important because publishers expend substantial resources to help authors build their audiences. Switching to another genre requires more resources to again build an audience. I recognize the leap of faith made by Thomas Nelson in publishing my romantic suspense stories. I hope to make them proud. In the meantime I'm having a blast!

**What do you hope readers take away after reading  
*A Long Bridge Home*?**

I hope Christine and Andy's story causes readers to think about what they believe and why long after they close the book. That they are open to gentle discourse with those who hold different beliefs.

Kelly Irvin

There's so much ugliness in the world right now. We can learn from each other. We can even be friends with folks who are different than we are. Be grounded in our faith while still loving each other. That's my hope. **FF**

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***A Long Bridge Home***  
*Amish of Big Sky Country*  
Kelly Irvin  
Zondervan

Buy Now 

When the Mast family is forced to evacuate their home, Christine chooses not to move with them to her father's childhood home in Kansas. Instead, she wants to stay closer to home and to her beau, Andy Lambright, who has yet to ask for her hand in marriage and who

seems to be holding tightly to secrets from his past.

Now, living with her aunt and uncle in St. Ignatius, Christine is on her own for the first time in her life. While working in her uncle's store Christine meets Raymond Old Fox, whom she befriends, and he introduces her to his rich native culture with strong ties to the earth and nature. Despite the warnings of her aunt and uncle, Christine is inexplicably drawn to Raymond, and her mind is opened to a history and heritage far different from her own.

With her newly expanding horizons, Christine wonders if she can return to the domestic life that is expected of her. Her heart still longs to be with Andy, but she isn't the same person she was before the fire, and she wonders if he can accept who she is becoming. Has too much distance grown between them? Or can they bridge the gap from past to present and find their way back together?





# SUSPENSE: ELIZABETH GODDARD

## AHEAD OF THE CURVE

The suspense author explains how the main character in her latest novel can stop crimes before they happen.

With more than one million books sold, **Elizabeth Goddard** is the bestselling, award-winning author of more than forty romance novels and counting—including the romantic mystery ***The Camera Never Lies***, which was a 2011 Carol Award winner. She plunges readers into a fast-paced, high-stakes story of honor, forgiveness, and justice with ***Don't Keep Silent*** (Revell), the latest volume in her ***Uncommon Justice Series***: Investigative reporter Rae Burke will do anything to find her missing sister-in-law, even if it means facing former DEA agent Liam McKade, a man who almost lost his life saving hers.

In this interview, Elizabeth talks about the overarching theme of the series, compares and contrasts the occupations of her main characters, and challenges readers to be a “voice of truth.”

**Elizabeth, *Don't Keep Silent* is the third novel in your *Uncommon Justice Series*. Is there an overarching theme or idea you were exploring in the set?**

Each of my characters in the series sets off on a journey of self-discovery as they try to find out what purpose they serve, where they fit in this world and—most importantly—what place to call home. This theme isn't overt for all the characters, but instead an internal struggle. As they work together, the heart of the series for my characters is to right the wrongs they

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see in the world, one issue at a time—delivering...Uncommon Justice. A few additional themes include forgiveness, second chances, and the belief that God is our rock.

**Your main characters hold jobs that involve procedure and precision: *In Never Let Go*, Willow is a forensic genealogist; in *Always Look Twice*, Harper is a crime scene photographer; and in *Don't Keep Silent*, Rae is an investigative reporter. During your research, did any of the details of the jobs surprise you? (Did you enjoy the research/what was it like?)**

I loved every moment of the research and found diving into each of these careers fascinating. For my research for *Never Let Go* I relied on family experience—years of visiting cemeteries and church archives in search of genealogical connections, and then supplemented that knowledge with research on forensic genealogy.

I loved reading about how some families are finding missing family members through the use of forensic genealogy. One method that surprised me was the use of age progression to learn if an ancestor as a child in a photograph was the same person as an older adult in another photograph.

In *Always Look Twice*, I hadn't known just how involved crime scene photography could be or all the tools required to map out the crime scene including the close shots and the wide shots. I couldn't include all of those details in my story, of course, because it would get too technical.

The biggest surprise for me was that crime scene photographers, like other first responders, can often suffer with PTSD, and that's how I portray my character. I completely understand

how that can happen because I struggle with the simple act of researching the dark side of crime.

In *Don't Keep Silent*, I knew that my character would be an investigative reporter but I wanted her to be special so I learned about war zone journalists going into the trenches. Some have been injured and others have died—shot or bombed—and from that exploration Rae's character was born.

Though it's not so much a surprise but rather just mind-boggling to learn the many avenues reporters use to find their data, and the use of knowledge bases to compile that data, as well as the enormous volume of information shifted through and fact-checked. I modeled one particular character (Rae's research assistant) after a National Geographic research assistant—so much more goes into well-written exposés than most of us know.

**Did any of these jobs seem particularly interesting or scary? (Did you have a favorite out of the three?)**

The scariest of the three jobs to me is Rae's job of investigative reporting. She is the kind of reporter to imbed herself in enemy territory in order to expose the injustice and free those held captive by criminals, putting others' lives before her own. I think this job is by far the most dangerous, but it's also my favorite job of the three, because it's a way to be the voice for the voiceless and make a real difference in the world.

An investigative reporter can potentially stop crime and death before it happens or at least prevent illegal or heinous activity from continuing. The title, *Don't Keep Silent*, is absolutely perfect for this theme.



**Please share with us a brief synopsis of *Don't Keep Silent*.**

Investigative Reporter Rae Burke wants nothing more than to follow in her award-winning journalist father's footsteps. He stood up for the voiceless by exposing the evils in the world—and that got him killed. Rae is willing to go into the darkest places to find and expose the truth.

Now she's in a race against time to find her missing sister-in-law, and she'll go anywhere, even if it means facing Liam McKade, a former DEA agent who almost lost his life to save hers, and asking for his help. As their search ramps up, the dangers of their shared past begin to close in on them.

**Was there a particular aspect to *Don't Keep Silent* that compelled you to tell Rae and Liam's story?  
(What drew you to their story?)**

I love reunion romances especially where betrayal must be



overcome with forgiveness. After the worst has happened—how do you build trust? How do you forgive and move forward? I was drawn to Rae and Liam's backstory and wanted to further explore their past work together to discover the truth about a particular crime organization.

I wanted to know more about how the investigation imploded and nearly killed Liam—that, due to Rae's betrayal. Rae and Liam are both passionate about their efforts to shine light in the darkness—and this is what connects them. They're both willing to sacrifice everything. Readers will see glimpses of their backstory as it's slowly revealed throughout *Don't Keep Silent*.

**Liam McKade is the third McKade brother to be featured in the *Uncommon Justice Series*. How is he similar to his brothers? How is he different?**

Like his brothers, Liam has a good heart. Also like his brothers, he escaped Wyoming for a while but finds himself drawn back to the home ranch just to get grounded again. He loves his brothers but at the same time needs his space.

He has a brooding demeanor and has experienced the darker side of life as an undercover DEA agent. He has come home, only to find that he can't feel at home anywhere.

**Rae and Liam have a complicated past. Without giving away spoilers, what can you tell us about their relationship?**

They are two of a kind—both on the same mission in life but using different methods. Liam had been attempting to shine light in the dark places in his undercover work, and Rae had been digging much too close to Liam's case, also wanting to

expose the truth. Their passion and determination to make a difference led them on a collision course, for which they are both recovering on many levels.

### **Which character was the most challenging to write?**

Liam was the biggest challenge for me. I've "known" him for a long time since he showed up—at least in thought—in *Never Let Go*, book one in the *Uncommon Justice Series*. Then he has his own POV in *Always Look Twice*, book two.

In *Don't Keep Silent*, he finally gets his own story. I wanted to stay true to the Liam I met as I got to know him better through the course of writing this story, and at the same time, Liam needed his own space to grow and be his own "person."

### **What do you hope readers take away from reading *Don't Keep Silent*?**

From experience, I know readers will often take away something I hadn't considered during the writing process, which is always wonderful to hear about. For me, the big points in this story are about going the extra lengths to expose evil and how we can do that if we speak up for those who can't speak for themselves. We should be a light in the darkness and the voice of truth in a world of lies. **FF**

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## ***Don't Keep Silent***

*Uncommon Justice #3*

Elizabeth Goddard

Revell



Investigative reporter Rae Burke will do anything to find her missing sister-in-law, even if it means facing Liam McKade, a man who almost lost his life saving hers. A former DEA agent, Liam thought he could find peace at his Wyoming ranch, but he just doesn't feel at home

anywhere anymore. When the reporter who blew his cover on an important investigation inserts herself back into his life, he's less than thrilled. But Rae's keen investigative skills have led her down the right path--and directly into the dragon's mouth—leaving Liam no choice but to protect her. As the danger increases, the past they both tried to flee catches up to them, along with the feelings they once had for each other.



# CONTEMPORARY: CYNTHIA RUCHTI

## LET THE LIGHT SHINE IN

The author talks about the importance of allowing the light of God to shine into the darkest corners of our lives.

**Cynthia Ruchti** tells stories of hope through novels, nonfiction, devotionals, and speaking events. Her latest novel is ***Afraid of the Light*** (Kregel Publications): Clinical psychologist Camille Brooks helps hoarders get organized and is famous for her creative coaching methods. But when a client raises long-dormant issues, can she face her fears, pull back the curtains, and let the light into her own life?

In this interview, Cynthia talks about the real-life issues fueling the novel, the research she went through to understand the mental health issues behind hoarding, and the importance of allowing the light of God to shine into the “secret corridors of our soul.”

**Cynthia, your novel, *Afraid of the Light*, has characters dealing with hoarding. Can you explain briefly what this is for readers who may be unfamiliar with the term?**

In *Afraid of the Light*, Camille Brooks is a clinical psychologist who specializes in hoarding compulsions and disorders. Many of us have a stash of old vinyl albums or a collection of lunchboxes or salt and pepper shakers or vintage Valentines.

But a compulsive hoarder collects and accumulates to the point of creating emotional, mental, and health dangers for themselves and anyone else living in the house. Their disorder causes them to attach irrational value onto what others would consider worthless—broken chairs, used fast food wrappers,

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outdated newspapers, rain-soaked magazines. Mountains of them. A hoarding disorder—which falls under the category of anxiety disorders—means that for many, those items have unexplained worth.

Very real to the hoarder. Ridiculous or frustrating to the hoarder's family members. The accumulation may make it impossible to navigate from room to room in the home. Rodents and insects find it a haven for them, which makes it a safety and health issue for the residents.

Like any addiction, hoarding takes over, making decisions for the addicted, destroying families, and turning some hoarders into hermits. They retreat from society and normal activities because they're ashamed of what they've become, but feel powerless to stop.

They sequester themselves behind heavily curtained windows and bolted doors, not letting anyone in. The most severe hoarders are in essence afraid of the light.

### **Hoarding is a pretty intense state of being for people to live in. What inspired this angle of the story?**

In recent years, I've been gripped by the reality that most of us shy away from or build walls between us and those whose mental health or grief issues are hard for us to understand. But Jesus took a different approach. Always. He plunged right in. He had conversations with hurting family members. He listened. And He offered hope.

Every novel I write takes me as the author on a personal journey of discovery. I knew there are stories behind the stacks

and piles of a hoarder's accumulation, and their attachment to those seemingly worthless objects. How could I grow in compassion and understanding if I walked with these characters through their healing journeys?

### **Did you do research? What was most challenging in preparing/writing the story?**

This was a topic with which I had no personal experience, if you don't count the half of my office that until recently was unnavigable. Shortly after starting the story, I began looking at everything with a "Do I really need this?" mentality.

But all of the hoarding disorder background came from intense research. I couldn't rely on the sensationalized versions that often make headlines or show up on reality TV.

I needed both the personal perspective (from hoarders and their families) and the professional perspective from those who work with them. Yes, a lot of research and listening to people I know who are affected by parents or friends who struggle with the disorder.

### **Did you have any pre-suppositions about hoarding as you began your research?**

Oh, the pre-suppositions! I had a level of compassion, I would have called it, assuming there's always a story behind every pain, distress, or curious behavior.

But true compassion is entering into someone's pain with them...and until writing *Afraid of the Light*, I viewed compulsive disorders and hoarding from a distance. A far distance. As it is with so many of us and so many topics, if we don't understand



it, we avoid it, or operate out of that false belief system, which helps no one and does nothing to strengthen our character.

I assumed hoarders possessed the power to stop hoarding, but didn't want to. I assumed if they saw their home clean and tidy, they'd feel free rather than empty. I assumed their obsessions could be abandoned if they applied logic. And I did not know that behind almost every hoarding compulsion is deep trauma that either served as a catalyst or fuel.

I'm probably not the only person needing to change my "Eww!" response to a health hazard hoarder scene into an "Oh!" response with my hand pressed to my heart, leaning in to listen to the heart of a hoarder.

## **After the deep dive, did anything change in your ideas/ attitude about this anxiety disorder?**

Story has always been a powerful “compassionator,” empathy-stirrer, and character-builder in my life. Whether reading or writing a story, I expect to emerge from the experience changed in some way. And I was.

For one thing, I hadn’t seen hoarding as an anxiety disorder before. Change in perspective. I hadn’t fully embraced the family impact. And it was a revelation to note we’re all holding tightly to something (or a pile of things) that can become hazards to us. They trip us up spiritually, emotionally, relationally, or physically.

We stockpile blessings that others need. We hear there may be a toilet paper shortage and go back through the checkout line at the store to purchase another “two per customer limit.” We collect worries, turning them over in our minds until we’ve memorized their nuances and, in a twisted way, treasure them. We believe what we’ve accumulated doesn’t count as a “hoard” because we may actually need those items someday. But we don’t. They pile up. A friend of mine often says, “Even cute piles up.”

When remodeling our 110-year-old farmhouse, everything in my 12x12 office had to be removed. Not just desk, printer, pens, envelopes, but EVERYTHING that had accumulated in the corners, behind the boxes where out-of-date but too-good-to-throw-away things went to die, and every single folder in the multiple filing cabinets.

What a task! What an eye-opener. I only let about 25 percent of it back into the office after the remodeling was complete. And

it's enough. More than enough. But for years, I'd assumed all that now was shredded, burned, given away, or discarded was vital. Or if not vital, at least of value.

Afraid of the Light wasn't inspired by the Marie Kondo minimalism or de-cluttering craze. In some ways, minimalism can become its own obsession, as readers will see within the pages. But as I wrote the book and dealt with my own questions about real value versus perceived value, something clicked into place in my thinking.

Walking in the footsteps of the characters in the book--on their good days, their bad days, and their horrible no good awful desperate pain-wracked days--deepened my compassion for those whom society (and even family members) find hard to understand and seemingly impossible to reach.

**Your main character, Camille Brooks, is a clinical psychologist. Did you go into the story knowing Camille was also going to be a hoarder?**

Readers who haven't opened the book yet may find that question startling, and wonder how she could help anyone. I believe all of us hoard something. If it isn't objects, it's grudges, or unforgiveness, or shame, or regret, or a toxic mix of all of the above. Camille's struggles surprised her, and surprised me. But they're very real, and they parallel her clients' pain, but show up in unexpected ways.



## **Did any of the characters surprise you as you wrote the novel?**

I didn't expect how much I would come to adore Eli Rand, the garbage truck driver. His personality was delightful to write. His heart won me over. I think it will win over readers, too.

## **What were your goals in shaping the book and sharing Camille's story?**

I began this book having no more than what I thought would be the first several paragraphs (now one of Camille's podcast episodes) and the very last lines of the book. All I needed were all the words in between.

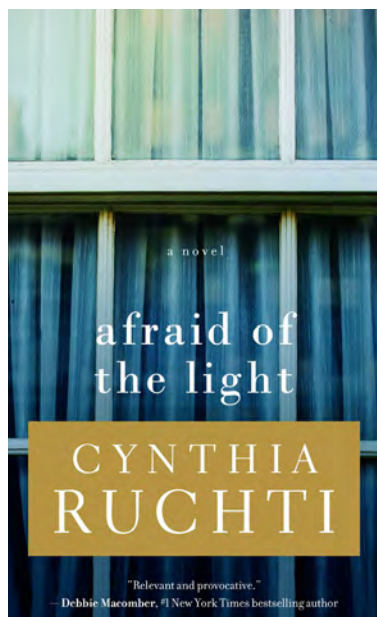
As the story emerged, I began to see how important it was to give the hoarders a genuine, authentic voice, to let the family members' reactions and reasons have their day in the sun, and to offer hope in what is often a hopeless situation. It was important for me that others would have an opportunity to consider not only an imaginative tale that would linger with them, but a fresh look at the stories behind the pain.

## **What would you like to be the readers' takeaway after reading *Afraid of the Light*?**

Even if we don't deal with a severe hoarding disorder, we all know what it means to resist letting the light into our relationships or impulses or the secret corridors of our soul. We're in many ways afraid of what the light will reveal. But the promise of God's Word is that God is Light, and "in Him is no darkness at all," 1 John 1:5 ESV. Fear loses its power to cripple us when it is exposed to His light. **FF**

**Visit Cynthia Ruchti's author page here:**

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## ***Afraid of the Light***

Cynthia Ruchti

Kregel Publications

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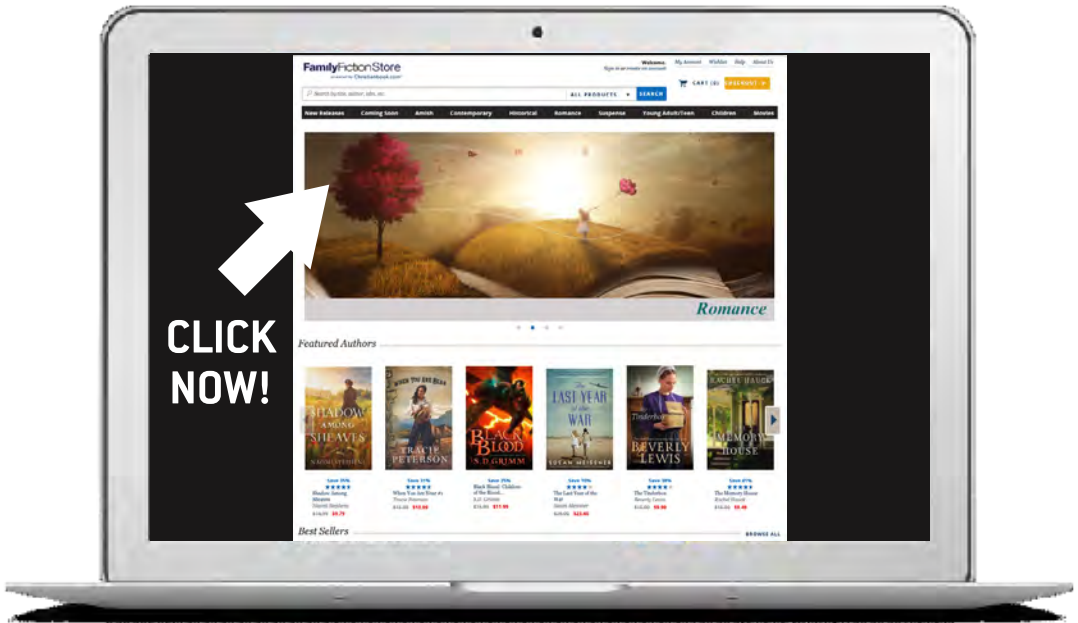
Clinical psychologist Camille Brooks isn't put off by the life-style of her hoarder clients and the distress of their families. She lost her mother to the crippling anxiety disorder--so she'll go a long way to help others avoid the same pain.

Despite Camille's expertise, her growing audience for her **Let in the Light** podcast, and the recognition she's gaining for her creative coaching methods, she's not prepared for the pushback. A client who looks uncannily like her mom catches her off guard and raises long-dormant issues. And the revelation that Camille has her own hoarding problem sends her spinning.

With the help of a cadre of unexpected friends, an enigma of a man who refuses to be discouraged, and the God who created and loves her, can she face her fears, pull back the curtains, and let the light into her own life?



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Before he became a Christy Award-winning novelist, Australian author **David Rawlings** spent 25 years writing everything but fiction—ranging from sports journalism to copywriting to corporate communication. His latest novel is ***Where the Road Bends*** (Thomas Nelson). In our exclusive interview, David shares why he set this story on his home continent, explains the challenge of presenting visual beauty in words, and makes a compelling case as to why we should all fall in love with Australia's Outback.



**David, *Where the Road Bends* is a story about a reunion between four friends—fifteen years after their college graduation. What inspired this story?**

One thing definitely inspired the location of the story: I wanted to write a novel that was based in my country. My first two novels—*The Baggage Handler* (that's the one that won the Christy Award in 2019) and *The Camera Never Lies*—were set in an Any City, and I've had feedback from readers around the world thanking me for writing a story that felt like it happened in their home town.

But this next one isn't set there. *Where the Road Bends* is firmly placed in my home, Outback Australia. I'm an Aussie writer and I wanted to transport readers to my home—places I've visited; places I'm proud of.



While the protagonists are American characters getting together fifteen years after graduation, the landscape is a character in itself. It's rough and rugged but it's beautiful and delicate. There is a big expanse of nothing, but it's so full of life.

**Did you go into this story wanting to explore a theme, or with a particular goal?**

All my stories have a central theme at their heart. I've written about dealing with your baggage and being honest in relationships. This one is about the direction we take in life.

I also started—like I always do—with a question. This time it was “how did you get to where you are on the road of life and where are you going from here?”

Each of the characters left college with a picture of how their lives would turn out. Fast-forward fifteen years and they are restless with where they are—some because success has left them empty; others because of unfulfilled dreams.



That's the theme I wanted to explore. If you were given a chance to re-evaluate your life and change direction ... would you? What's interesting is that *Where the Road Bends* is about being forced to take a pause in life to reflect on where you're at, and this is exactly what's happened with lockdowns and sheltering-in-place.

**You set the characters to explore the Australian Outback. Did you find any aspect of this especially challenging?**

My biggest challenge was to do justice to the landscape of Australia. I wrote passages to help paint a picture of what it's like, but most of the time I felt like I was battling the feeling of being an art student gripping a brush for the first time while taking on a Picasso painting.

So, I spent time over those passages, like this:

*A cramp seized Andy's shoulders as he pulled them in tight, hemmed in by a domestic flight cursed with the lack of the luxurious space of international business class. He had withdrawn into the view.*

*For two hours the ground had changed thirty thousand feet below as the crisscross suburban gray of the city gave way to deep green, which gave way to dusty brown, which gave way to an ochre orange. Now the earth was rich red. It was as if the lifeblood of the country was being cleansed as it flowed back to its heart.*

This is what it's like to fly into central Australia. We all pretty much live on the coast, so when you fly out of our capital cities and toward the Outback, for thirty minutes there are signs of life and then there's...nothing. But the thing you notice most is the change of color, and you know you're over the outback when everything below you is red.

Or this particular passage:

*The clouds slowly unveiled flecks of silver paint from an artist's wide brush swept across the heavens. A chill moved in as the darkness chased the daylight from the landscape that surrendered by hues—orange to pink, pink to gray, and gray sliding to black. The dried gum tree crackled as the dancing campfire flames consumed it. Shadows shimmered between the swags and the spinifex, and Lincoln was washed in a warm orange glow.*

*A silence draped over the crater as Eddie released another shower of sparks into the night air. "You will discover yourself being out here for a while." He swept an arm upward. "Sleeping under the stars. Disconnected from being bothered every five minutes by messages that don't really matter from people you aren't really with. Away from the barrage of overselling of stuff you don't need. Taking a moment to appreciate our world and your place in it."*

When you're in the Outback, you're in the middle of nowhere. You are, at times, hundreds of miles from the next person. And at night, the stars unroll until the heavens are filled. I've never seen anything like it. You feel so insignificant, yet so in wonder of the power of creation.

### **Did any of the characters surprise you while writing their stories?**

Of the four protagonists, probably Bree. She's a creative, introverted soul who was too scared to take on her dream of a musical career. But when she's forced to overcome crippling fear to survive, she's able to do it. She was always able to. I found myself cheering when writing those scenes and seeing what she could do.

And one of the characters is given the option to turn their lives around but doesn't. That didn't surprise me as much as sadden me. No spoilers as to which of the four characters it was...

**What would you like to be the readers' takeaway after reading *Where the Road Bends*?**

I write all of my novels so that once the back cover is closed and the final page is turned, that is the start of something: a conversation, a thought process, a prayer. It's my hope that a reader will finish *Where the Road Bends* and think about where they are on the road of life, and where they're going from here.

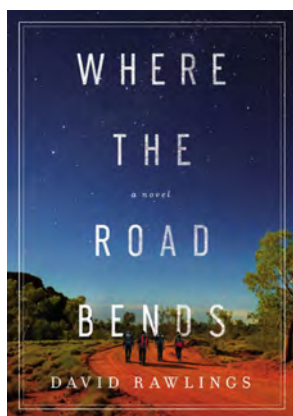
I would also love them to fall in love with the Australian Outback like we all have down here. It truly is a wonder of creation. **FF**

**Visit David Rawlings' author page here:**

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## David Rawlings — *Where the Road Ends*

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### ***Where the Road Bends***

David Rawlings  
Thomas Nelson



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# Historical David Harder

A graduate of Vineyard Institute in biblical studies and leadership, **David Harder**'s new book offers a closer look at the biblical personage of Nicodemus. In the historical novel ***Persuaded: The Story of Nicodemus*** (Ambassador International), Nicodemus has been entrusted by the imprisoned Apostle John with manuscripts for the Christian fellowships increasing throughout the Roman Empire. In our exclusive interview, David shares how he got intrigued with Nicodemus, expands on what he discovered during his extensive research and explains the challenge of writing historical fiction.



## **David, what provided the impetus for you to write *Persuaded: The Story of Nicodemus*?**

During my personal Bible studies, I was studying in the Gospel of John and reading about the night Nicodemus visited Jesus. Later in John's Gospel, I saw the name Nicodemus mentioned two more times. I then researched and noticed he is not mentioned anywhere else in the other Gospels or the New Testament books.

John's record of his interactions with Jesus was written years after Mark, Luke and Matthew. In fact, John felt there wasn't much he could add to the record about Jesus until he was encouraged by the seven churches of Asia to provide his story.

I was intrigued and wanted to know why John included Nicodemus in his account. The more I studied, the fewer answers I found, and I soon developed additional unanswered questions. I turned to extra-biblical documents as well as research papers to find further information.



I discovered that Nicodemus was not a Pharisee but served in the Sanhedrin council. Based upon John's second account of Nicodemus, we read that this curious man defended Jesus against his peers when they attempted to condemn Jesus without a trial.

The senior Pharisees and elders rebuked Nicodemus publicly and embarrassingly. Had he been an equal, they would have waited until they were in their chambers to argue. At the most, if they disagreed with Nicodemus and respected him on equal terms, they would have shaken their heads, thrown dirt in the air so it landed on their heads, or torn their robes. They did not see Nicodemus as an equal and I suspect he was young and learning to become a Pharisee.

The third account in John's Gospel is when Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea ask Pilate for the body of Jesus, and then prepare it for burial.

At a time when the relations between the Jews and the Romans was tenuous, how did a young upcoming Pharisee-in-training and a Jewish businessman get the authority to approach the powerful Roman Governor, and at the same time defy the strict orders of the Sanhedrin. Why would these men risk their lives, their reputations, and quite possibly their livelihoods for a man their religious leaders hated?

It was at that moment, I realized Nicodemus had a life-changing experience when he met Jesus. It wasn't an instantaneous change, but one that occurred over time. He came to believe that Jesus was the Messiah and his story needed to be told.

As I started to write this book, I would have dreams about whole chapters I was to write. I used material from all four Gospels and Acts to create the timeline.

Many times, I would awaken from my dreams at odd hours of the night and start writing. When I'd turn to the Bible for reference, I was amazed at the accuracy of what I had written when compared to the biblical texts.

### **Without spoilers, what can you tell us about the story?**

*Persuaded* drops into Jerusalem the moment the Romans are laying siege to the city. Chaos erupts everywhere and Nicodemus is trapped in the city. His prayers are answered when his friend, Joseph of Arimathea comes to rescue him and get him out safely. It's a nail-biting start and they almost don't make it.

Because Nicodemus is considered a traitor by the religious leaders, they pursue him even in Arimathea where he is living with his much older friend Joseph. Nicodemus changes his name and years later when Joseph is lying on his death bed, he gives Nicodemus a task and makes him promise to fulfill Joseph's wish. Nicodemus must find the Apostle John, whom he and Joseph met years earlier when Jesus was alive.

Nicodemus discovers John is on the Island of Patmos, a penal colony in the Mediterranean Sea. The dangerous journey there is nothing compared to the new mission he receives from the aged Apostle John. Christian writings are considered contraband, but John has entrusted Nicodemus with several hidden scrolls to secret back to the mainland and distribute among the seven churches of Asia.

If Nicodemus is caught, he could find himself imprisoned along with John. If he survives the harrowing journey home to Arimathea it will be a miracle. For an old man, Nicodemus's weak faith will be tested to its limits.

When Nicodemus recounts his tale to a neighbor, the man asks if Nicodemus actually met and knew Jesus. All through the night, they sit together and Nicodemus retells his accounts of his encounters with the charismatic leader and Messiah called Jesus.

It is then, that the two men read for the first time, the words written by the Apostle John. Filled with excitement, it is a moment neither man will forget for their hearts are set aflame concerning the return of Jesus.

### **Did you do a lot of research? Did any part of the process surprise you?**

Over two years of writing and research went into *Persuaded*. I wanted the story to stay true to the words in the Bible; and to provide a behind-the-scenes look at the characters found in the New Testament. In addition, I wanted to bring the words in the Bible to life. If the reader could relate and emote with the characters, there would be a deeper meaning in the words, and they would share a spiritual connection.

Historically, I wanted the information in the book to be accurate. Countless hours were spent on the internet reading about Israel, first-century Rome, clothing, traditions, customs, travels, distances, language, and more subjects than I care to remember.

I have a DVD full of downloaded information used for reference. Even with this much research, I still needed to know more and

that is when I turned to apocrypha writings, extra-biblical texts, oral/traditional history accounts and research papers to fill in the blanks.

The biggest surprise in the writing process occurred when I began to write about the burial of Jesus, on the day he was crucified. Normally, Romans liked to leave condemned bodies hanging until they fell apart. It was not only disgraceful, but it sent a message to others who would consider committing crimes.

In the case of Jesus, Pilate released his body to a Jewish businessman moments after his death. This means, Joseph had a good working relationship with the Romans and felt comfortable approaching the high-ranking Governor. According to the Scriptures, Jesus died around three in the afternoon on the day before Sabbath and the eve of the Passover—both would begin at sundown around six-thirty in the evening.

A burial is called a *Tahara* in Hebrew and involves a lengthy process and instructions requiring a half a day. When I went looking for first century *Tahara* instructions, I found none.

I had nearly exhausted my research when I ran across an article translated from Hebrew and written by a university student in the early 1900s. He described the methods of a modern *Tahara*, the requirements, the rules, but he also referenced the ancient historical records of when these practices began. His references came from the third century and surmised that *Tahara* were practically unchanged for centuries.

Once I understood the *Tahara* framework, I was then able to piece together what Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had

time for the day they buried Jesus. These two men had less than three hours to do a job that required at least six to eight.

The job required a minimum of four people and it was only the two men. Their *Tahara* would be rushed and for this reason why the women wanted to finish anointing Jesus' body on Sunday.

There are three basic types of burials in Israel, depending on a person's financial status. In the first category, the body is laid on the ground and covered with rocks. The second case involves rock walls which are built around the body and stone slabs are then placed over the walls.

The third and most expensive are stone tombs. A hollowed cave is carved from the rock with a hearth for the body. Along the wall are carved niches. When the body is placed on the bench it desiccates over time and later the bones are collected and placed into a stone ossuary, which is similar to a modern-day urn.

The ossuary is marked with a name and placed in one of the niches and then the tomb is available for another burial. Joseph's new tomb, which had never been used, was given to Jesus—another sign Joseph was wealthy.

Old Testament law prevented Hebrews from attending Sabbath, entering the Temple, or participating in Passover if they touched a corpse, unless they had performed a cleansing ritual and made a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple. When Joseph and Nicodemus performed the *Tahara* for Jesus, finishing it just as the sun set and Sabbath/Passover began, it meant they didn't have time to perform the cleansing ritual and would not be able to participate in the most important holiday for all Hebrews.

What would motivate these two men to do this? It is another reason why this story needed to be written.

### **What was the most challenging part of writing this book?**

Writing fiction seems easy for me. I come up with the idea for the story and create everything—the people, the places, the scenes, the events—it just has to be believable and interesting.

Historical fiction is quite different because as a writer, you must stay true to the events which occurred. When it involves biblical history, it gets even tougher, because Bible critics appear from nowhere and pick apart anything and everything written. Then there is the added challenge of making sure what is written does not misrepresent the Gospel or do harm to the message of Jesus.

The second most challenging part is telling the story itself. This book is told mostly from Nicodemus' point of view, but at certain steps of the timeline, the point of view needed to shift to Jesus or the Apostle John. It was important I break the rule about point of view in order to make this story feel cinematic (a term two different people have described the book after reading it) and flow.

### **What would you like to be the takeaway for readers of the novel?**

My goal when I wrote this story was to tell the behind-the-scenes story about Nicodemus. Apostle John included this man in his accounting of the Jesus chronicle, and there had to be a reason.

The scene with Nicodemus visiting Jesus at night is where we get one of the most quoted scriptures ever—John 3:16—and that is significant and impactful. Anyone who has become a believer has heard this verse.



It's terrible when we gloss over scriptures and read them strictly for the text, or only focus on the verses that mean something to us in our situation. By taking one character from one New Testament gospel, who is mentioned only three times in that Gospel, I hope that I have drawn the reader's attention to subtle details that could easily be missed and encouraged them to dig deeper into the Bible to find more hidden truths.

Nicodemus did not have an instantaneous conversion to become a believer. His conversion took time.

He was highly educated, had studied the Laws and the writings of Moses. He was not part of the working class but was probably middle-to-upper class financially. He was young, yet part of the powerful Sanhedrin council. He thought in logical terms and saw verified proof of miracles as being from God. He was an introvert and quiet but could speak his thoughts in a coherent manner.

I doubt he had many friends outside the Sanhedrin and Joseph of Arimathea befriended Nicodemus becoming his mentor.

Nicodemus' conversion from doubter to believer, then to servant took place in small steps. This should encourage some of us who have doubts about our own salvation. Not everyone meets Jesus, like Saul, has a road to Damascus experience, and then does a 180 degree turn and gets set on fire as an evangelist. Some of us slowly see the reality of Jesus as the room gets brighter. Each of us is called to a different purpose, but ALL of us are called to spread the Good News.

So, the biggest take away is this—it's never too late to make Jesus your friend, and you're never too old to start serving him in some capacity. Nicodemus is living proof.

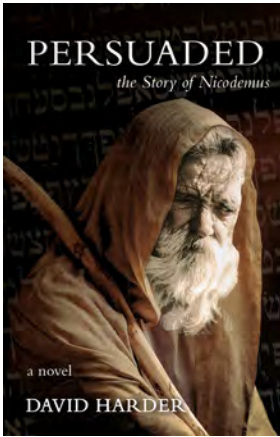
The second take away is the underlying message of *Persuaded*; God is always watching over us. Psalms 119:105 says it best. "Your word (Lord) is a lamp for my feet (so I don't stumble in the dark), and a light for my path (to light up the future so I know where You are taking me)." **FF**

**Visit David Harder's author page here:**

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David Harder — *Persuaded: The Story of Nicodemus*

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***Persuaded: The Story of Nicodemus***

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# Historical Tracie Peterson

**Tracie Peterson** is the bestselling, award-winning author of more than one hundred books. ***The Way of Love*** (Bethany House) is book two in her historical romance series, ***Willamette Brides***. Faith Kenner is pursuing her dream to become a doctor at medical college so she can use her gift for healing to help those in need—especially the native populations forced onto reservations and then neglected. When she's caught in the middle of a plot to push the local Indian tribes to rebel, can she and handsome riverboat captain Andrew Gratton trust that God has a way toward love for them? Or will her secret stand in the way of their one chance for true happiness? In our exclusive interview, Tracie explains how her series examines the prejudices and racism of the 1880s, sets the scene of the second story for us, and shares the sad surprises she found in her research.



***The Way of Love* is the second book in your Willamette Brides Series. Can you give us an overview of what you wanted to explore through this series?**

It seems especially relevant because of what we're going through now in our country, but I wanted to share a series that exposed the prejudices of the 1880s. I had visited a museum in Oregon and came to learn that at one time it was illegal for blacks to come to Oregon and take up residence.

In one situation, a family brought a former slave who had been with them all her life. They built a hidden box under the wagon



where she rode all the way to Oregon. She could only get out at night, and then only if it was safe from others seeing her. I knew I wanted to include that in a story.

In *The Way of Love* there is a lot going on with racial injustice and besides the situation of it being illegal for African Americans to be in Oregon (although a lot wasn't done to enforce it once they were there) there was also the issue of dealing with the Native Americans and the horrible conditions they lived under. I wanted to draw on these things throughout the series and show there truly is nothing new under the sun.

**Tell us a little about Faith and the period the story is set.**

Faith first appeared in the *Heart of The Frontier Series*. Her mother was violated during the Whitman Mission Massacre. Her mother was a fictional character, but the history and research showed that many of the women who survived the Whitman event were “forced to become wives to the Indian attackers.”

Faith is given to friends to raise but ends up back with her real mother after their death. Now in *The Way of Love*, Faith is thirty and has been a healer and midwife all of her life. When the college allows for women to study medicine, she jumps at the chance to attend and get a certificate that she believes will earn her the right to practice medicine and surgery alongside men.

She has hidden her Native American heritage all of her life and wrestled with the truth. Is she lying by only being open about her white ancestry? Faith has always wanted to be a wife and mother, but she knows the law that will keep her from marrying anyone white, and as a white woman she'd be shamed and ostracized if she married a Native American man. So her entire life is a dichotomy.

**Faith is studying to be a doctor. Did you discover any particular challenges for women studying medicine at this time?**

There were so many conflicts and challenges for women in the 1880s. There was still a strong feeling that women were too delicate and dim-witted to be able to focus on medical knowledge.

The men figured they'd faint at the first sight of injuries and fatal situations. Never mind that it was usually the womenfolk in the family who helped each other deliver babies, sewed up gashes their men got while working, and treated terminally ill family members.

Women were already doing many of the surgeries and healing treatments in their family, and now they were finally being allowed to take it one step further by getting a degree or certification. They had a real battle, however, getting others to accept



them and often weren't ever accepted and went into research instead.

**Faith is concerned about using her new skills to help the native populations living in the nearby reservations. What inspired this angle of the story? Did you base any parts of the novel on actual events?**

I had read various stories about the poor conditions of the reservations as a whole. The government seemed less concerned about the health of the Native Americans and often hired uneducated men who called themselves doctors to treat the people living on the reservations.

I truly believe given the attitude of the day, they hoped the native people would die off and no longer be a concern. There was a negative attitude toward any white woman being allowed to even live near the reservation, much less on it.

As a time of awakening to the injustices of what was actually happening to the Native American in the 1880s, many women like Helen Hunt Jackson and others took to lecturing about the problems. Helen Hunt Jackson even wrote a book titled, *A Century of Dishonor* which she sent to each and every congressman of the day. It dealt with seven different native tribes and how poorly they had been treated and what she believed needed to be done about it.

People who wanted to help the Native Americans were labeled "Indian lovers" and often shunned by their own families and neighbors. My fictional character, Faith, has to live daily with being white and Indian and the problems the world has for her related to both sides.

**As you wrote this novel, was there any part that surprised you?**

I think the thing that surprised me the most were some of the laws that were on the books and verbiage of such laws that didn't get changed until the twenty-first century. I share information at the back of books two and three regarding those laws because I want to reader to understand how truly biased men and women could be at that time and the power those laws had when fear was injected into the situation.

For example, the Fifteenth Amendment, passed in 1870, granted all U.S. citizens the right to vote regardless of race, yet many states still refused that privilege to Native Americans and complicated it for the black man. The Snyder Act (passed in 1924) admitted Native Americans born in the U.S. to full U.S. citizenship.

However, the Constitution left it up to individual states as to who had the right to vote. It took over forty years for all fifty states to allow Native Americans the right to vote. Utah was the last state to legalize voting for the Native American in 1962. That surprised me in a very sad way. It just wasn't that long ago.

I hope the series will give the reader pause for thought and as always draw them closer to God. Thanks for the opportunity to share my thoughts behind the story. **FF**

**Visit Tracie Peterson's author page here:**

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## Tracie Peterson — *The Way of Love*

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### ***The Way of Love*** *Willamette Brides #2* Tracie Peterson Bethany House



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**Carla Laureano's** latest romance, ***Under Scottish Stars*** (Tyndale House), is the third and final novel in her ***MacDonald Family Trilogy***. Recently widowed Serena MacDonald Stewart focuses on her children to the exclusion of her career, her art, and her sanity. Malcolm Blake gave up everything to return to Skye and raise his late sister's teenage daughter. Before long, Serena and Malcolm have to admit the spark between them is more than mere irritation—but will their commitment to family be the thing that draws them together or the only thing that could keep them apart? In this interview, Carla shares the ideas she was exploring within the series, identifies the most challenging aspect of protagonist Serena's story, and offers a peek into why she thought this was going to be her first Romance without a happy ending.



***Under Scottish Stars* is the third in your MacDonald Family Series. Share with us a little about the series, and did you know going in that the third book would be Serena's story?**

Serena played a small part in the first two books in the *MacDonald Family Series*, and even as I wrote them, I knew there was far more to her than the harried mum that she appears to be. I wrote this book a couple of short years after I was getting started in my writing career after several years away from full-time work, and I was struggling with many of the ideas that I explore in the book: finding an identity away from the needs of my children and justifying my desire for a creative life when it sometimes took me away from domestic duties.

All the books in this series in some way have to do with being hurt by people we trust, whether it be a family member, a romantic partner, or the church. Subsequently, all the books explore how those hurts impact the way we relate to God. In Serena's case, she has to come to grips with the question of why God allowed so many painful experiences into her life when she had done everything "right."

**What was the most challenging part of writing this story?**

Not being a single parent myself, I had to delve deep into what it would feel like if something happened to my husband and how I would deal with the idea of starting over in a new relationship. How would my kids react?

Not necessarily topics I wanted to dwell on, but Serena's uncertainty and concern for her children became very real to me. Single-parent romances where the kids' feelings feel like an afterthought never ring true to me; to someone who has lost their partner and their children's parent, they're of primary importance. That concern colors the entire dating and falling-in-love experience.

**How do you hope this book encourages single parents?**

This book was a love letter to my single parent friends who work so hard to put their children's needs first, often at the expense of their own dreams and desires. We see you struggle and admire your strength and love for your kids. Your needs are important, too!

**What did you enjoy most about developing Serena and Malcolm's characters?**

Serena and Malcolm are such interesting people, with colorful backgrounds and varied interests. Their relationship starts out



antagonistic, changes to flirtatious, and eventually melts into a really sweet, heartwarming romance. I had so much fun any time the two of them were on the page together.

Honestly, the hardest part of the story was coming up with the thing that threatens to keep them apart. They were so well-suited and so open with each other that I didn't want it to be a simple misunderstanding or fear of moving forward in a relationship.

I knew it had to be a real, solid, insurmountable obstacle—which of course makes it a challenge to figure out how they're going to overcome it! I honestly didn't know how the book was going to end until I wrote it. I started to wonder if this was going to be my first romance without a happy ending.



## What would you like your readers to take away from *Under Scottish Stars*?

This story is about faith in the face of seemingly impossible obstacles and painful events. Both Serena and Malcolm suffer loss, upheaval, and doubt.

But in the end, they realize that they were unable to see the entire picture and how God was moving behind the scenes for their best interests. The epilogue to this book, and this entire series, was so incredibly satisfying to write, because it's the glimpse of wholeness coming out of brokenness that can be waiting on the other side of trials. **FF**

**Visit Carla Laureano's author page here:**

<https://www.familyfiction.com/authors/carla-laureano>

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***Under Scottish Stars***  
*MacDonald Family Trilogy #3*  
Carla Laureano  
Tyndale House



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Science fiction author **Kathy Tyers** is known for her *Firebird Series* and the Christy Award-winning *Shivering World*, not to mention her *Star Wars Expanded Universe* novels. Her classic Christian SF novel ***Crystal Witness*** has been brought back into print by Enclave Publishing. In our exclusive interview, Kathy talks to FamilyFiction about *Crystal Witness*, gives us an overview of her leading lady, shares her initial inspiration for the novel, and explains how her faith intertwines with her writing of speculative fiction.



## **Kathy, what was your inspiration for *Crystal Witness*?**

The plot is loosely based on the plot of a book I enjoyed in my early teens: *Mara, Daughter of the Nile*, by Eloise Jarvis McGraw. McGraw's heroine is caught in a palace intrigue in ancient Egypt, a slave girl trapped between two warring factions, recruited by both sides with threats and promises. One side holds power. The other side wants to take over.

Eventually, she has to decide which side to support. In *Crystal Witness*, Ming faces a similar predicament in a far-future setting and plays an even more decisive role at the book's climax.

## **What can you tell us about your main character, Ming Dalamani?**

Ming, an artist, is caught up in her clan's attempt to smuggle "sunstone" jewels across interstellar space. Legal shipping is controlled by a giant commercial enterprise, the Renaissance Shielding Corporation (Renasco), and when the clan is caught red-handed, Ming is memory-wiped and enslaved.



**Ming is intriguingly described as a “Renasco-trained calligrapher in three dimensions.” Can you unpack for us what that means?**

Her Renasco captors sentence her to an artist’s version of hard labor: exacting, laborious, un-original work. They train her in ribbon calligraphy, using broad-nibbed injection pens to create ribbons inside a gel medium that eventually hardens. She must move the pen’s nib at precisely the right speed, from exactly the right angle, to create various alphabet fonts.

Renasco guarantees that she will hate the work—but she will excel at it. Ming manages to find ways to turn this work into creative endeavors, and eventually, she finds a way to turn it against Renasco.

### **What especially draws you to write speculative fiction?**

I have always enjoyed trying to come up with answers to the big “what if?” questions that drive speculative fiction. I enjoyed reading outer space stories as a pre-teen and discovered J.R.R. Tolkien as a young teenager, so I was shaped by that intersection of science fiction and fantasy.

Finally, as C.S. Lewis wrote, what a writer is will come out in the work, whether or not he or she tries to put it there. I hope that my love of God and His people shines through all I have written.

### **What’s been your biggest challenge in writing speculative fiction from a Christian worldview?**

Actually, I don’t see it as a challenge. Like all that I do, I try to keep it God-honoring. That call is just part of life as I know it, in every aspect of life.

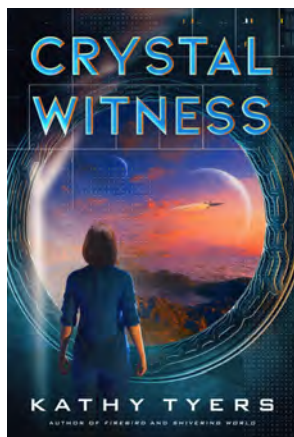
Although *Crystal Witness* takes place at the end of an era during which God seems forgotten, [my perspective is] that His memory lingers on many worlds. I’m currently writing a sequel series, in which He makes His presence known again. Overwhelmingly. **FF**

**Visit Kathy Tyer's author page here:**

<https://www.familyfiction.com/authors/kathy-tyers>

## Kathy Tyers — *Crystal Witness*

<https://familyfiction.christianbook.com/crystal-witness-kathy-tyers/9781621841241/pd/841244?event=ESRCG>



### ***Crystal Witness***

Kathy Tyers

Enclave Publishing



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**A.S. Mackey** has written multiple children's stories, and has authored several non-fiction ESL books for young children with a Norwegian ESL app designer. Her debut children's novel is ***The Edge of Everywhen*** (B&H Publishing). Written for Middle Grade readers, *The Edge of Everywhen* bridges the chasm between faith-based and fantasy kid-lit genres.



In our exclusive interview, the author shares with us her multi-faceted inspirations for her story, unpacks why including a protagonist on the Autism Spectrum was so important, and explains why the appearance of one of her characters surprised her the most.

### **What inspired you to write *The Edge of Everywhen*?**

It all started with a social media post! I saw a random post early in 2015 in which someone wished that there was such a thing as “The Book of Requirement.” I decided to craft a story about a magic book that knows what story each reader needs to hear. As a Christian, I believe that the story we need to hear is the one God is telling us about who we were meant to be, so that’s the path I took.

### **Phoenix is autistic—does this aspect play into the story? Was it challenging?**

I’ve learned so much about Autism Spectrum Disorder while researching the character of Phoenix! My nephew has autism, and I have several friends with children on the spectrum. I wanted to be sure not to assert that a magic book could heal a child of autism, because that would be callous and insensitive. I reached out to my friends with kids on the spectrum, and one very special beta reader spent a great deal of time with me



discussing Phoenix's character, and she told me what worked and what didn't. (Thank you, Talitha!)

As far as how the autism aspect plays into the story, I wanted to show the incredible bond that siblings of special needs children often share, and Piper truly loves her little brother. Another reason to include Phoenix is that young readers will likely know a classmate with autism or other special needs.

My hope is that Phoenix's character may encourage kids to reach out and befriend other children who are vastly different from themselves.

**Did any of the characters surprise you as you wrote the story? What was the most challenging part to write?**

Novus Fabula surprised me! He is the omniscient narrator, but he is also a character of sorts. When I first drafted the novel, it was written from the third person point of view, primarily focusing on Piper, and it just lacked that "oomph" that the manuscript needed to set it apart. Once I had the basic story complete, I took some time off from editing to read every book I could find about libraries and books, bookstores and all things literary. I found my way to one of the most charming children's books I've ever read called *The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore* by William Joyce. (Have you read that book? Have you seen the animated version? It won an Oscar in 2012, and it's simply stunning.)

William Joyce did an incredible job giving the books in his story thoughts and feelings and emotions. I love personification as a literary device, so I decided that my magic book would benefit from becoming sentient. It was so fun, trying to imagine how the book might feel when it was being read.



The most challenging part for me wasn't a character or a specific scene; it was the prose. I adore beautifully written prose, such as that found in *Life of Pi*, *The Book Thief*, or *The Tale of Despereaux*, and I wanted my book to consist of prose that was (I hope!) on par with those award-winners. I read oodles of incredible fiction, and I spent many hours revising and tinkering with the prose so that I could offer readers something that was well-written.

### **What are the spiritual themes within the story?**

The key themes are grace, hope, and reconciliation. We are all faced with difficult people or difficult situations at times in our lives, and grace is what enables us to be kind, to offer forgiveness, and to keep from falling into bitterness when we're in the midst of trying circumstances.

Hope is the evidence of things unseen. Hope dispels fear. And holding onto hope, even in the face of confusion and pain, is an act of faith that better days are coming. Reconciliation is the heart of God, and He longs to see broken families restored, and many of us today have estranged family members with whom we long to be reconciled. All of these themes are present in one way or another in readers' lives.

*The Edge of Everywhen* doesn't answer every deep question or offer pat answers to questions of trauma. But we're all on a journey, and I think that Piper's journey will resonate with readers of all ages.

### **What would you like your readers to take with them after reading *The Edge of Everywhen*?**

I hope they think deeply about their families; the good parts, the confusing parts, and the broken parts in which they may have a role in mending. I also hope that readers will see that faith is for everyone. Piper is a normal girl with normal fears and big questions, just like every other middle-school kid. I hope readers will begin to ask those big questions of God, because I know He will answer them. We serve a mysterious, supernatural, living God, who was a pillar of fire by night and a cloud by day for an entire generation of people. He spoke through a donkey; He walked on water; He healed the blind; He raised the dead.

I hope that readers will embrace the truth that God is limitless, and that He can make His presence known however and whenever and wherever He chooses. **FF**

### **Visit A.S. Mackey's author page here:**

<https://www.familyfiction.com/authors/a-s-mackey>

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### ***The Edge of Everywhen***

A.S. Mackey

B&H Kids



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# TOP 10 CHRISTIAN SPECULATIVE AUTHORS—2020 READERS POLL

From day one, **FamilyFiction** has been a champion of Christian authors who write speculative fiction—whether they're imagining dragons or spaceships, speculating how prophecies might play out in the world of today, or envisioning the unseen spiritual warfare around us.

These are authors who exercise their imaginations with the understanding that Jesus is Lord of all that is, all that might be, and all that can be.

We recently asked in a number of surveys who **FamilyFiction** readers' favorite authors are—and these are the top Christian authors who write supernatural fiction, science fiction, fantasy, and any other types of fiction where they speculate and ask "What if...?"



## #1 Ted Dekker

<https://www.familyfiction.com/authors/ted-dekker>

Ted Dekker is the multiple award-winning, *New York Times* and international bestselling author of more than 40 novels. His work has reached tens of millions worldwide and has been translated into numerous languages and adapted into motion pictures. In 2013, NPR listeners nationwide named him as one of the top suspense writers of all time. His latest novel, co-written with daughter Rachelle Dekker, is *The Girl Behind the Red Rope* (Revell).

*"The Bible is packed to the gills with fantastical, supernatural events, so much so that the supernatural becomes natural. The question that remains for us is how to interpret those many fantastical elements."*

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**INTERVIEW: Ted and Rachelle Dekker — *Sea of Fears***

<https://www.familyfiction.com/speculative-author-interview-ted-rachelle-dekker-sea-fears>



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***The Girl behind the Red Rope***

Ted Dekker and Rachelle Dekker  
Revell

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<https://familyfiction.christianbook.com/the-girl-behind-the-red-rope/ted-dekker/9780800736538/pd/736531?event=ESRCG>

Ten years ago, Grace saw something that would forever change the course of history. When evil in its purest form is unleashed on the world, she and others from their religious community are already hidden deep in the hills of Tennessee, abiding by every rule that will keep them safe, pure--and alive. As long as they stay there, behind the red perimeter.

Her older brother's questions and the arrival of the first outsiders she's seen in a decade set in motion events that will question everything Grace has built her life on. Enemies rise on all sides--but who is the real enemy? And what will it cost her to uncover the truth?

For the first time, bestselling authors Ted Dekker and Rachelle Dekker team up and deliver an intense, tightly focused ride through the most treacherous world of all.



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## #2 Frank Peretti

<https://www.familyfiction.com/authors/frank-peretti>

One of Christian publishing's best-known authors, Frank Peretti's novels have sold more than 12 million copies. His blockbuster supernatural thriller *This Present Darkness* was named by PBS as one of "America's 100 Favorite Novels." His novel *The Oath* has sold more than a million copies and was awarded the 1996 ECPA Gold Medallion Award for best fiction.

*"What's art for? It's to communicate ideas on an aesthetic level. The best way to understand the human experience is through a Judeo-Christian worldview, because that's where everything falls together and makes sense. I'm a storyteller. My role is to tell a story because a story can give a whole other dimension to a thought."*

### INTERVIEW: Frank Peretti — *Sleight of Hand*

<https://www.familyfiction.com/frank-peretti-sleight-of-hand>



### **Probing**

#### *Harbingers #3*

Bill Myers, Frank Peretti,  
Angela Hunt, Alton Gansky  
Bethany House

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The stakes are high as Bill Myers, Frank Peretti, Angela Hunt, and Alton Gansky return again to the universe of Harbingers for four more stories set in a world on the brink of destruction.

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Frank Peretti's "The Mind Pirates" centers on an earring with mysterious powers that just might hold the key to solving a murder. When two members of the team are kidnapped by seventeenth-century pirates, the team must overcome the ruthless scheming of an evil, hidden nemesis.



### #3 Ronie Kendig

<https://www.familyfiction.com/authors/ronie-kendig>

Ronie Kendig is a bestselling, award-winning author whose work spans more than one genre—from romantic suspense to military thrillers to epic fantasy. She often draws on her degree in psychology to pen novels of intense, raw characters.

*"One of my favorite parts of speculative fiction is growing its world and laws, as well as how the characters move/fit into that unique backdrop. In my stories I always try to write hope. No matter what you are dealing with there is hope in Christ. That is what I want to share ultimately with my readers."*

#### INTERVIEW: The Two Worlds of Ronie Kendig

<https://www.familyfiction.com/two-worlds-ronie-kendig>



### **Brand of Light**


*Droseran Saga #1*

Ronie Kendig

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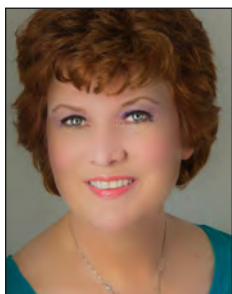
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There's a price on her head, and it has everything to do with the brand on her arm.

Tertian Space Coalition has blessed every planet in the quadrants with high technology, save one: Drosero. But in spite of their tenuous treaty with the ruling clans, TSC has plans for the backward planet. And they're not alone.

After a catastrophic explosion, Kersei Dragoumis awakens in a derelict shuttle, alone, injured, and ignorant of the forbidden technology that has swept her into a nightmare. The brand she's borne since childhood burns mysteriously, but the pain is nothing compared to that when she learns her family is dead and she is accused of their murders.

Across the quadrants, Marco Dusan responds to the call of a holy order—not to join them, but to seek a bounty. Gifted—or cursed—with abilities that mark him a Kynigos, a tracker sworn to bring interplanetary fugitives to justice, Marco discovers this particular bounty has nothing to do with justice and everything to do with prophecy. One that involves the hunter as much as the hunted.



#### **#4 Angela Hunt**

<https://www.familyfiction.com/authors/angela-hunt>

Angela Hunt is the author of more than 100 published books and with nearly 5 million copies of her books sold worldwide. In 2008, Angela completed her PhD in biblical studies in theology. She joined with authors

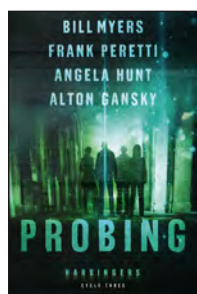
Bill Myers, Frank Peretti, and Alton Gansky for the multi-author speculative Christian series *Harbingers*.

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*"The biggest challenge—and I think this would apply to any series with multiple authors—is keeping the details straight. When you're writing alone, all you have to remember are your details. When you're writing with a team, you have to remember all the little details that everyone else tossed into the mix."*

**INTERVIEW: The Harbingers Series — Taking a Light Into the Darkness**

<https://www.familyfiction.com/harbingers-series-taking-light-darkness>



**Probing**

**Harbingers #3**

Bill Myers, Frank Peretti,  
Angela Hunt, Alton Gansky  
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As evil lurks around every corner, this misfit team must work together if anyone wants to make it out alive. This is Harbingers.

The stakes are higher than ever as Bill Myers, Frank Peretti, Angela Hunt, and Alton Gansky return again to the universe of Harbingers for four more stories set in a world on the brink of destruction.

In “Hybrids” from Angela Hunt, the arrival of two mysterious black-eyed children and a baby’s disappearance are no coincidence. Instead of finding the rest they need, the four friends must stay on their guard as they search for answers--and for a missing child.



## #5 R.J. Anderson

<https://www.familyfiction.com/authors/r-j-anderson>

The daughter of a Bible teacher who read Tolkien and Lewis aloud to his children, she grew up daydreaming about Narnia and Middle-Earth, watching *Doctor Who* from behind the sofa, and hanging out in her brothers' comic book shop. Now she writes novels about knife-wielding faeries, weird science, and the numinous in the modern world.

*"As an author in the general market I don't 'preach the gospel' in a four-points-and-an-altar-call sense, but my books consistently reflect my belief that in even the worst of circumstances and the lowest of places, God is there. And I pray that my Christian moral and spiritual worldview comes through, in a positive and meaningful way, in everything I write."*

### INTERVIEW: Q&A with R.J. Anderson

<https://www.familyfiction.com/q-a-r-j-anderson>



## Swift

### Flight and Flame #1

R.J. Anderson

Enclave

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To save her people, a wingless girl must learn to fly. As a piskey girl born without wings and raised underground, Ivy yearns for flight almost as much as she misses her long-lost mother. But the world outside the Delve is

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full of danger, and her dreams seem hopeless until she meets a mysterious faery who makes her an enticing offer: If Ivy helps him escape the Delve's dungeon, he'll teach her how to fly.

Freeing Richard could cost Ivy her reputation, perhaps even her life. But when her fellow piskeys start to disappear and her beloved little sister goes missing, Ivy has no choice but to take the risk.

Deadly threats and shocking revelations await Ivy as she ventures into a strange new world, uncovers long-buried secrets about her family's past, and finds that no one—not even herself—is entirely what they seem.



### **#6 Steven James**

<https://www.familyfiction.com/authors/steven-james>

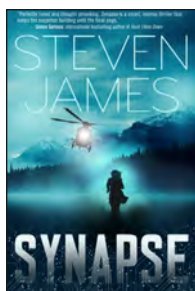
The author of the acclaimed crime series starring FBI Special Agent Patrick Bowers, Steven James' pulse-pounding, award-winning thrillers are known for their intricate storylines and insightful explorations of good and evil. His latest novel is *Synapse* (Thomas Nelson): Thirty years in the future, when AI is so advanced that humans live side by side with cognizant robots called Artificials, Kestrel Hathaway must come to terms not just with what machines know, but with what they believe.

*"For years I've been interested in AI and the implications of it—not just artificial intelligence but also artificial belief. In other words, once machines have free will, what will they choose to believe?"*

*Will they believe in God or are we to assume that all machines will be atheists? I think that if God is real, and robots can apprehend the truth, then some robots at least will certainly believe in God. What will happen then?"*

**INTERVIEW: Steven James — *Even the Robots Will Cry Out***

<https://www.familyfiction.com/speculative-author-interview-steven-james-even-robots-will-cry>



**Synapse**

Steven James

Thomas Nelson

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Thirty years in the future, when AI is so advanced that humans live side by side with cognizant robots called Artificials, Kestrel Hathaway must come to terms not just with what machines know, but with what they believe.

Soon after experiencing a personal tragedy, Kestrel witnesses a terrorist attack and is drawn into a world of conspiracies and lies that she and Jordan, her Artificial, have to untangle. With a second, more brutal attack looming on the horizon, their best chance of stopping it is teaming up with federal counterterrorism agent Nick Vernon. But the clock is ticking—and all the while, Jordan is asking questions Artificials were never meant to ask.



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## #7 Lisa T. Bergren

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Lisa T. Bergren has published more than sixty books—in multiple genres—with combined sales of more than three million copies. Her historical speculative series *The Gifted* is coming back in brand-new editions from Stonewater Books this fall.

*"God. Seriously. But mostly, it is things that move me. I wrote the River of Time Series because I wanted to give my teen daughters and their friends a fast-paced romance without paranormal creatures like vampires and werewolves—and because I've always wanted to time travel myself. I wrote the Remnants series because I loved Hunger Games, but I was disappointed in the end—because there was no hope. So, I'm constantly thinking the 'What if...' question that gives all writers their next idea."*

### INTERVIEW: Lisa T. Bergren — *Remnants*

<https://www.familyfiction.com/q-a-lisa-t-bergren-remnants>



## **Begotten**

### *The Gifted #1*

Lisa T. Bergren

Stonewater Books

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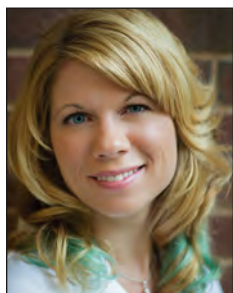
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The year is 1339, the height of the Inquisition, and a secret half a millennium old is on the brink of being exposed. Centuries before, the Church compiled the letters written by St. Paul with other texts to form the

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foundation of the Christian canon. But what the world doesn't know is that Paul wrote another letter—a letter speaking of men and women who, though begotten of men, possess mysterious spiritual gifts. Now the time has come for the Gifted to gather—The beautiful healer; the wise priest; the slave with the gift of prophecy; the knight with faith enough to leave the Church. As their gifting grows more powerful, so do those who wish to destroy them and uncover the secret of the letter that will determine the fate of the Church...and the world.



### **#8 Morgan L. Busse**

<https://www.familyfiction.com/authors/morgan-l-busse>

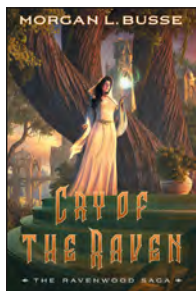
A writer by day and a mother by night, Morgan L. Busse is the author of the *Follower of the Word Series* and the steampunk series, *The Soul Chronicles*. The first novel in her fantasy series, *The Ravenwood*

*Saga*, *Mark of the Raven*, won the 2019 Carol Award and the 2019 INSPY Award.

*"I'm always drawing inspiration from history, cultures, and civilizations. As a world-builder, I find it helpful to look at how our own world came to be, and then use that as inspiration for my novels. For example, in my Ravenwood Series, I based the Dominia Empire on Genghis Khan and the Mongol Empire. I studied how he led his people, how he inspired his people to fight, and how he went about conquering the lands. In my steampunk novels, I use a lot of pieces from the Victorian era to shape my worlds—from the rise of science during that time period, to the clothing styles, to modes of transportation (both real and made up). I find combining something familiar and my own imagination helps ease the reader into my worlds."*

**INTERVIEW: Morgan L. Busse — *Only God Can Heal The Brokenness***

<https://www.familyfiction.com/speculative-interview-morgan-l-busse-god-can-heal-brokenness>



***Cry of the Raven***

*The Ravenwood Saga #3*

Morgan L. Busse

Bethany House

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Wife. Warrior. Lady of two worlds. As war looms, will her power be enough to save the ones she loves? Lady Selene Ravenwood has come into her full power as a dreamwalker—a power greater than any in history. She embraces her new role as Nightwatcher, able to intercede for her people in the dream world, but the dark shadow of war draws ever closer.

Working together, the Great Houses come up with a plan to secure the borders from the approaching Dominia Empire. But dissension, conflict, and suspicion threaten to destroy their tenuous treaty, and as the empire burns a path across their lands, Damien Maris starts to lose his ability to raise the waters, leaving the lands vulnerable to the empire's attacks.

The only one who can keep the Great Houses unified and restore her husband's power is Selene. But it will require that she venture deep into the dream world to confront the enemies of her past who will do anything to stop her power. Will it be enough, or will both worlds fall under the empire's might?

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## #9 Bryan Davis

<https://www.familyfiction.com/authors/bryan-davis>

The winner of the Clive Staples Award, Bryan Davis writes “fantasy, adventure, and mystery suitable for your entire family.” He’s the author of several speculative fiction series, including *Dragons in Our Midst*, *Oracles of Fire*, *Children of the Bard*, *The Reapers Trilogy*, *The Time Echoes Trilogy*, *Tales of Starlight*, and *Dragons of Starlight*.

*“The books are about people—their struggles, their victories, their defeats, their courage and their faith.”*

### INTERVIEW: Bryan Davis — *Faith and Dragons*

<http://www.familyfiction.com/bryan-davis-faith-and-dragons>



### **Let the Ghosts Speak**

Bryan Davis

Mountain Brook Ink

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Let the ghosts speak—but will the sane heed their counsel? In 19th century Paris, Justin Trotter, an immigrant from England, is making his way as a book translator while paying for his blind twin sister’s care. One evening, Marc Noël, Justin’s well-to-do friend and fellow thespian, invites him to a masquerade party at an abandoned schoolhouse. Justin hopes this will be an opportunity to get to know Marc’s lovely though sharp-tongued sister, Francine.

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At the event, Justin meets four ghostly strangers—two adults and two children—who warn him that the party guests are in danger, and they must leave at once. True to their prediction, a murder takes place, and Justin is the prime suspect. He escapes and becomes a fugitive, hiding in the Paris catacombs.

Mystery and intrigue swirl as the ghost of Joan of Arc and other martyrs guide Justin on a lonely journey to prove his innocence and protect his sister from an abusive caretaker. Who really committed the crime? Marc? Francine? A ghost? And does seeing these ghosts mean he is going insane? Maybe he really is the murderer after all.

There is only one way to find out, to let the ghosts speak as they reveal the mysteries within Justin's mind



### **#10 Jerry B. Jenkins**

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Jerry B. Jenkins's books have sold more than 70 million copies. Twenty-one of his titles have reached the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Publisher's Weekly*, and *Wall Street Journal* bestseller lists. With co-author

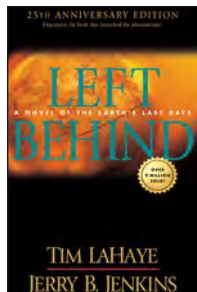
Tim LaHaye, Jenkins wrote the blockbuster *Left Behind Series*. The first book was named by PBS as "America's 100 Favorite Novels," and inspired a movie starring Nicolas Cage.

*"I answered a teenage call to full-time Christian work and assumed it would mean I should abandon my writing to pursue training as a pastor or missionary. But a wise counselor told me that "God often equips us before He calls us," and suggested my writing might be the vehicle I would use to follow my call."*

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**INTERVIEW: Jerry B. Jenkins — *Obedient to the Word***

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Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins

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Twenty-five years ago . . .

As the world approached a new millennium, Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins released a novel that became a cultural phenomenon.

On a Boeing 747 headed to London, passengers instantaneously disappear from their seats, resulting in terror and chaos for those left behind—not only throughout the plane, but also worldwide as the apocalypse begins.

Included in this 25th anniversary edition is an essay by Jerry B. Jenkins, exploring cultural and spiritual changes over the last quarter century through the lens of this groundbreaking work of fiction.

Read it for the first time or enjoy it again to be reminded of *Left Behind's* incredible impact.



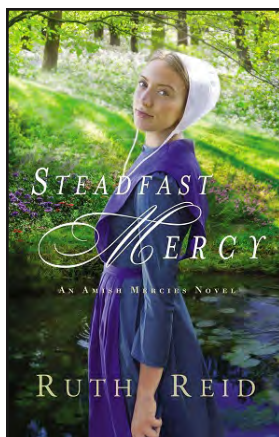
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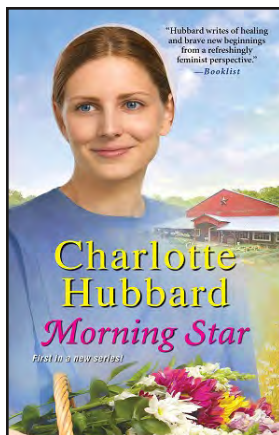
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Kensington Publishing

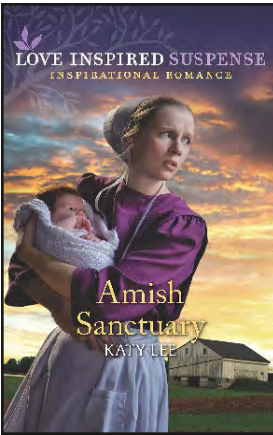
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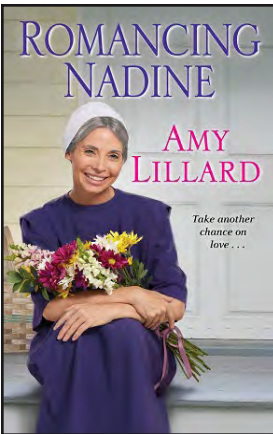
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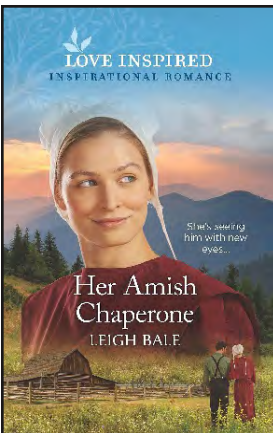
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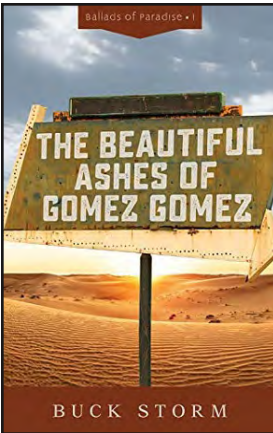
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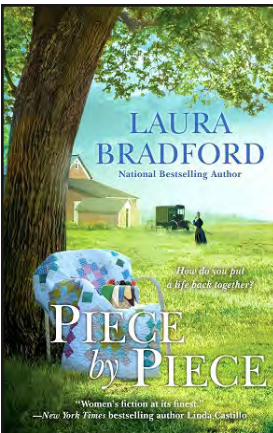
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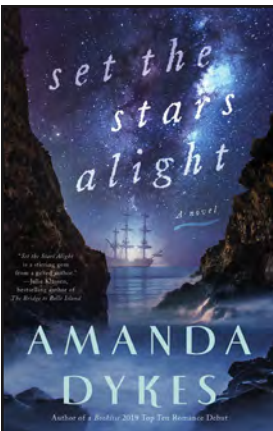
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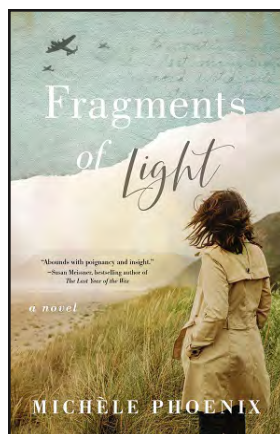
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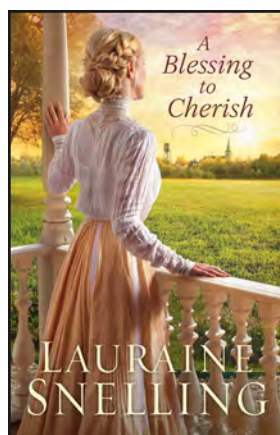
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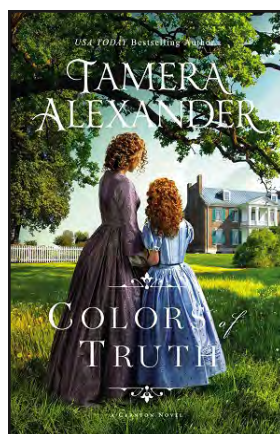
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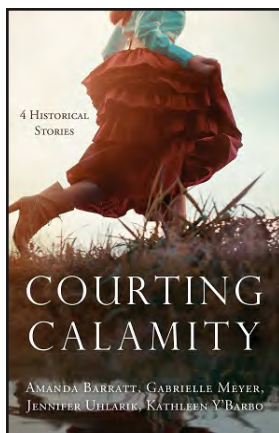
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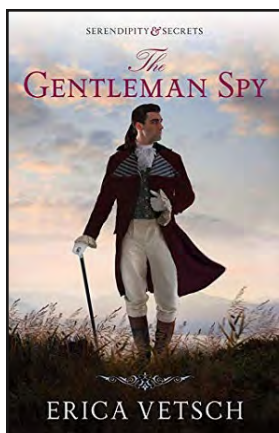
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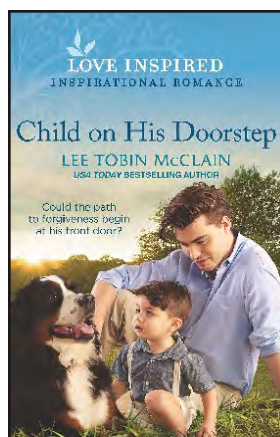
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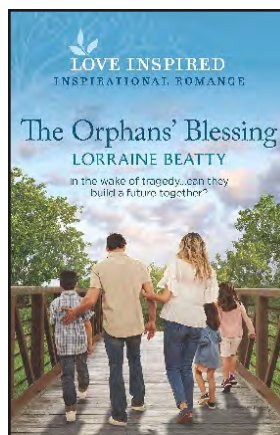
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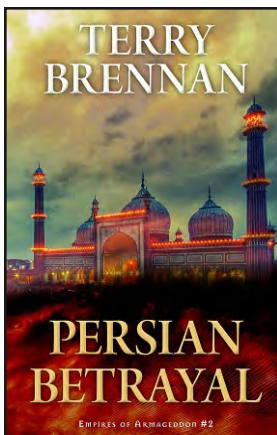
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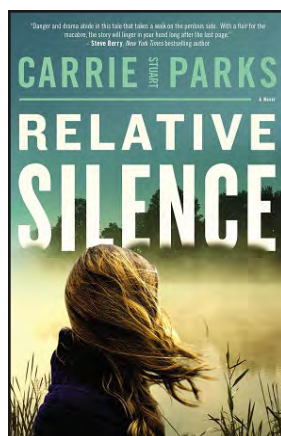
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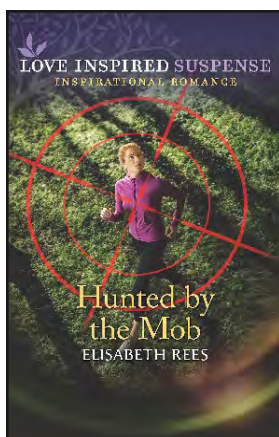
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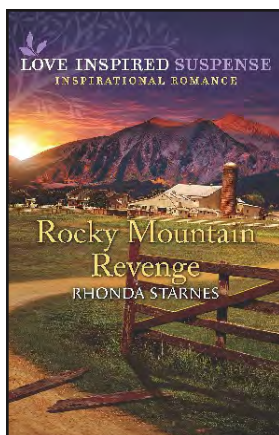
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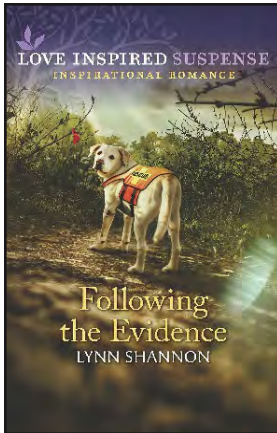
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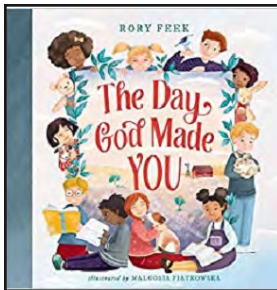
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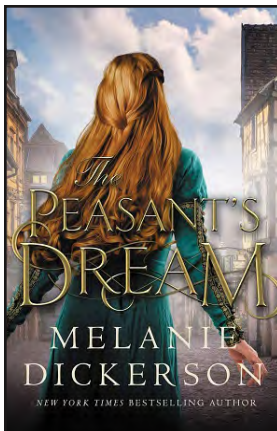
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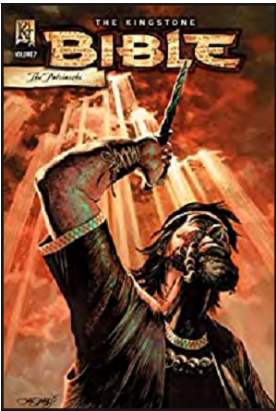
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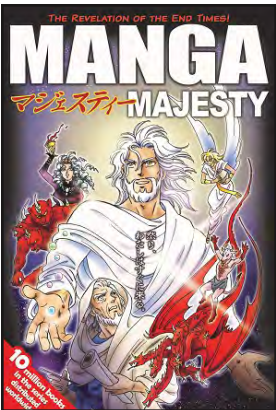
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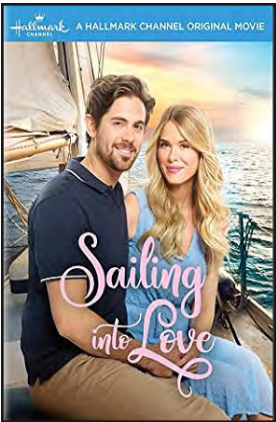
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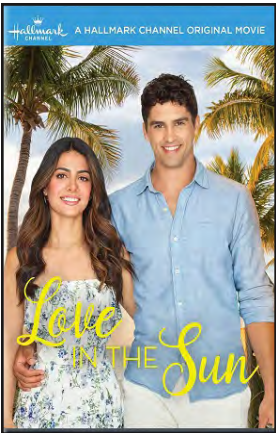
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**Love on Iceland**  
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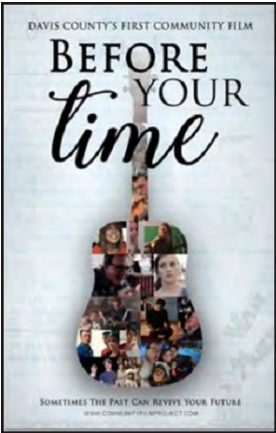
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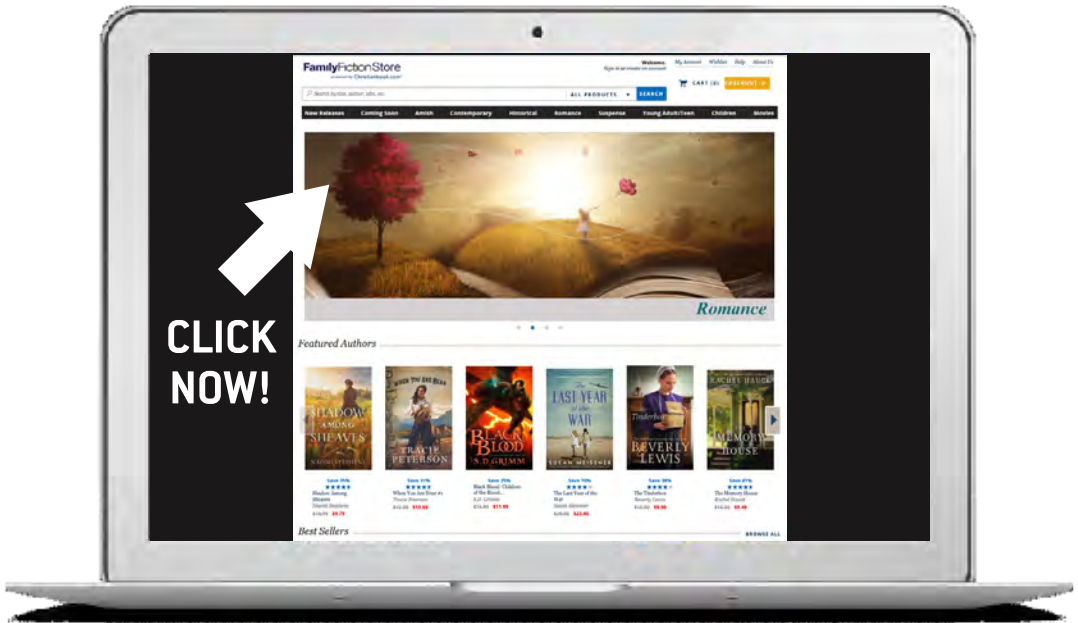


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