

Shoot a Little Higher

Writing from a Biblical Worldview ... Without Getting Preachy

By Tim Shoemaker

Four Problems with Christian Fiction ... Making General Market Crossover Hard

A. PREDICTABLE

Often Christian fiction can be downright hokey.

- *Stories seem forced, unrealistic*
- *Agenda driven* ... abortion, salvation, racial reconciliation, human trafficking
- *Things too conveniently get all worked out* with a simple prayer
- *Sacrificial death scene* ... Don't rely on a tragic death to pull emotion.

Our writing, the *EXCELLENCE OF IT*, the way it *SEEMS REAL*, the way it *RELATES TO PEOPLE, THAT should relate to people and pull emotion*. *Don't rely on killing someone off to do that.*

WE want to give truth, but not so obvious that is bores, turns off, or appears fake to Christian readers ... especially kids.

B. PLAUSIBILITY and FICTION

As you polish your writing, continually ask yourself ...

- *Would it really happen this way?*
- *Would a conversation like this really take place?*

It's hard to take Christian Fiction seriously. *That is what we're up against ... a BAD REPUTATION that many, many writers have earned ... and we INHERIT THAT LABEL.*

WE NEED OUR STORIES to be BELIEVABLE. Anybody can write something that doesn't seem believable. It takes a skilled writer to take something that is not real, is not true, and make it seem both real and true. Unless we write so our work is believable, the deeper lessons you hoped to convey with your story will be lost ... at least to them.

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS TO WATCH FOR?

- A. **Timelines** -Could this really happen given that amount of time? **It must feel believable.**
- B. **Reactions** -In romance, situations where a man would never act that way.
- C. **Non-reactions** -How could he not react to that? (Interior thought/verbal comment/action)
- D. **Impossibilities** -They could not physically do that.
- E. **The Christian Element** -Sometimes we try to shoe-horn it in. It doesn't feel natural.

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS to OVERCOME ISSUES of UNBELIEVABILITY?

1. Let a character in the story question the things that might seem unbelievable ... and your reader won't have to.

"This is crazy. This is insane. This kind of stuff doesn't happen in real life."

2. Anticipate the areas that will be harder for a reader to swallow, and give subtle explanations—very brief and not obvious—that will help them over those hurdles.
3. Ask yourself if a real live person would really do this ... and would they do it this way?
4. Given what I know of my CHARACTER, would they react this way?
5. TRUST YOUR GUT. If you think an area may be off, trust that. Find a way to make it believable.
6. Ask yourself... are you putting this “Christian Element” to be a witness, or because your story naturally goes there? Be careful ... it is very easy to write to an agenda.
7. As always ... make your writing EXCELLENT.

C. PREACHY

1. *Don't think you must have a Jesus figure.*
2. *Don't think you need a conversion scene for the book to be an effective tool for the Lord. Conversion scenes have been abused and poorly handled by Christian writers ... Consider a note from the author at the end of the book if you think you must have it. OR ... HAVE A PLAN OF SALVATION on your WEBSITE and put the LOCATION in the book.*
3. *A CHARACTER RECOUNTING a SERMON -This comes across as FORCED and FAKE ...*

D. PHILOSOPHY Behind How Some Write for Crossover ... & My Philosophy

1. The QUESTION of LANGUAGE and SEX

Some Christian fiction authors seem intoxicated with a sense that they are being real. Edgy. Gritty. *So they add language. They add sex.* You don't need either to be real.

As a Christian ... we don't have “Foul LANGUAGE options” in our tool belt.

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” Eph. 4:29

As a Christian ... we must be very careful about how we use SEX in our writing.

“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk, or coarse joking which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.”

Ephesians 5:3-4

SHOEMAKER/Shoot a Little Higher

“Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do secret.” Ephesians 5:11-12

If we’re to have nothing to do this in our life ... can we build it into our characters?

“IT IS SHAMEFUL TO EVEN MENTION what the DISOBEDIENT DO ...”

We don’t have the freedom to use LANGUAGE and SEX in our FICTION the way NON-CHRISTIANS DO. But that’s okay ... we must work harder ... but our work can be better.

What about using language for “BAD CHARACTERS”?

Is someone who uses a lot of PROFANITY, FOUL LANGUAGE, one who we think of as being really INTELLIGENT ... or is bad language sometimes a sign of a LIMITED VOCABULARY?

We tend to think of people who use foul language as not being smart.

What is scarier? -A dumb bad guy or a smart bad guy?

WE DON’T SEE DUMB AS MUCH OF A THREAT. Avoid the stereotypes. Using a lot of foul language is limited vocabulary, AKA dumb.

I fully believe that a Christian praying ... asking God to help them make the story REAL or a CHARACTER LOOK BAD can do a BETTER job of conveying both than someone who uses language and isn’t relying on the creativity God can give.

I BELIEVE YOU CAN CROSS OVER to the GENERAL MARKET WONDERFULLY with GREAT WRITING that is REAL ... YET NOT HAVE SEX or LANGUAGE.

2. FOR CHARACTERS OPPOSING CHRISTIANITY or CHRISTIAN STANDS, MAKE THEIR ARGUMENTS STRONG and COMPELLING.

It will identify with skeptics more. Argue both sides of the issue to the best of your ability, and the truth will likely win out as the story plays out.

3. SHARE TRUTH ... NOT SERMONS

Dozens and dozens of times in the Gospels we read a verse with JESUS saying . . . “I tell you the truth . . .” One of Jesus’ express purposes was to teach truth. Scripture records JESUS ...

-STRAIGHTENING OUT MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT GOD

-STRAIGHTENING OUT MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT SCRIPTURE

-IF WE GET READERS TO UNDERSTAND THE TRUTH ... MIGHT THAT NOT LEAD THEM TO CHRIST?

We must be about TELLING THE TRUTH—ESPECIALLY in FICTION

REMEMBER ... THE WORLD is NOT TELLING THE TRUTH.

THE WORLD WANTS TO SUPPRESS TRUTH (MATT. 14:5)

BE TRUTHFUL ABOUT the CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE/LIFE

WE LIVE IN A WORLD OF LIES AND DECEPTION . . . HELP THEM FILTER THE LIES FROM THE TRUTH. The TRUTH IS NOT NEW... but ANCIENT.

“Jesus answered, ‘My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him.’”
John 7:16-18

We want to speak HIS TRUTH ... not just spew OUR OPINIONS.

“The words of the wicked lie in wait for blood, but the speech of the upright rescues them.”
Proverbs 12:6

4. My Philosophy ... IF YOU WRITE A “CHRISTIAN STORY” it will likely NOT CROSS OVER

Are you writing a great Christian story? It will likely be agenda-driven.

Are you writing a great story, and one or more of the characters are Christians? Likely it will be real and powerful. Do you see the difference?

We can make it real. But we need to work on our craft of writing. We must WRITE WELL

IF OUR WORK is WELL WRITTEN.

IF WE DON'T WRITE to an AGENDA

IF WE DON'T GET HOKEY, PREACHY, PREDICTABLE as CHRISTIAN WRITERS ...

CAN WE CROSS OVER? YES.

WILL WE MAKE AN IMPACT? I BELIEVE THAT WITH ALL MY HEART.

PRAY TOWARD THAT END ...

IF YOU WANT TO WRITE TO CROSS-OVER ... REMEMBER ... Be the real deal, not a counterfeit.

Thanks for attending! -Tim Shoemaker