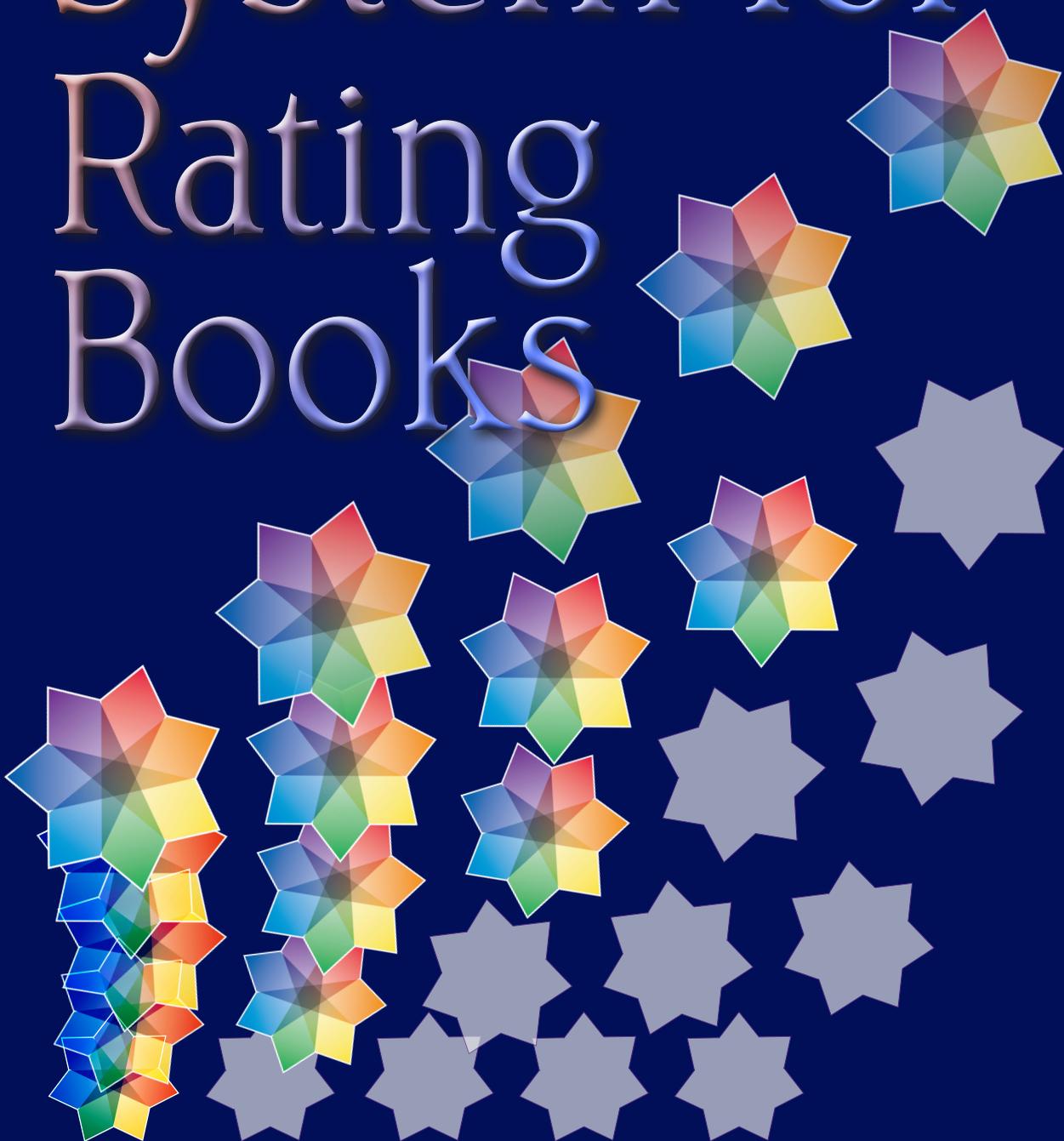


A Spiritual System for Rating Books



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This is a work of biblical & Christian opinion:

sharing the experiences of nearly forty years of serving
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the Spirit. All opinions should be examined and prayerfully
considered before they are blindly acted upon.

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*This is dedicated to the many
Christian authors I count
as friends and acquaintances
online in the various forms
of social media.
You are an inspiration!*



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Acknowledgments

The past couple of years have been very satisfying to me. As I have met fellow pilgrims, it has become obvious that I am not alone in wanting a way to help readers understand what to expect in the books that they buy. It has not been all fun and games. I have inadvertently pushed some buttons and gotten some outraged responses. But that is all on me.

Many of the more stimulating interactions online have been in the closed FaceBook group, *Iron Sharpens Iron: Christian Speculative Fiction Authors*. David, Ben, Jeremy, Mary, Mirtika, Sean, Parker, Kessie, Annie, and I've know I've forgotten several more, have been a real joy and a serious reality check. It's been great fun.

Peter Younghusband, of *Christian Fiction Review* in Australia, has become a friend and an inspiration in my quest to become a decent, usable book reviewer myself. Michael and Mary Findley have also been an encouragement, an excellent source of information, and the source of many good books to read, both fiction and non-fiction.

Deborah Dunson has been a joy with her feedback and encouragement. To see a young woman so in love with the Lord is a real blessing.

Guy Stanton III has inspired me by his books and warmed me with digital conversations. This young man will be writing great books, even better than the couple dozen he's written so far.

The same capabilities are also found in Ralph Smith, Yvonne Anderson, David G. Johnson, Laurie Penner, and many more as I have become immersed in Christian speculative fiction.

Let it suffice to say that hundreds of the New Christian Authors are putting out wonderful books in service to the Lord Jesus and building the kingdom on Earth which is truly inspiring.

I am grateful to have met all of you...





Why is this needed?

A Christian rating system

For the past couple of years, it has become increasingly obvious that the state of Christian fiction is in a great deal of flux. The new self-published author is very important to the Body of the Messiah as this new capability enables us to publish Christian works which were unthinkable only a decade ago.

Until very recently, outside of romances, there was really little opportunity for truly transformative fiction to get past the gatekeepers at the few bastions of Christian Publishing. To make it into bookstores, you need one of these traditional publishers. Getting your book read and accepted by a traditional publisher is not easy. Plus, they tend to be so market-driven that excellence in Christian fiction is compromised by the need to increase sales.

In case it hasn't been noticed, powerful Christianity has a very hard time in the world. Unless you pastor a megachurch or head up a large parachurch organization, a writer's publishing options are extremely limited. This sad state of affairs is (or was) simply accepted as "the way it is".

By 2010, I had completely given up on Christian fiction. All I could find was Laodicean drek. Yes, I mean lukewarm pabulum—baby food with no real spiritual content. When I started doing book reviews back in 2009 on *The Skilled Workman*, it was a pleasant surprise to

find some actual Christian fiction within the speculative fiction genre. But it was still very frustrating. By the time I began reviewing seriously in 2011, the problem was already very obvious. Of course, there are obvious exceptions to every observation, like Litkin's *Chiveis Trilogy*. But that probably happened because of his academic creds. What I discovered was that virtually all the good Christian fiction was being self-published by individual believers.

This system does not grade worth

The main thing you need to understand is that this rating system is outside of the quality review system used by reviewers on Amazon, GoodReads, and the rest of the booksellers. When I say that, according to the rating system, the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy would be rated 1-star for Christian content and 1-star for evil content—it is saying nothing about quality of the story, characters, or anything like that. The actual books easily get the highest rating possible for book and story quality. They were a turning point in my life, but had nothing to do with my spiritual growth. I remained a heathen and only found out the some people consider them Christian books very recently. To say I am shocked by that is an understatement.

What we are developing at Radiqx Press is a rating system for spiritual content which could be accepted throughout the entire industry. Whether or not it is depends upon your support. If you agree with the ratings, you need to share them and use them when talking about, or reviewing Christian books. They are a way to communicate more clearly with each other. **They say nothing about the quality of the book.**

The clean read: no spiritual content

This whole concept is bogus. Of course, you say, “Clean reads are just good, moral books.” But then, as far as Jesus is concerned, good morals means very little. All that matters to the Lord is that you believe in Yeshua (Jesus) as messiah and savior. If you do that you will be born of God and your life will be transformed. But I began to see that all of this went much deeper than that.

2: Discerning Redemptive Fiction

The traditional books in my genre (speculation fiction: fantasy, science fiction, action/adventure, and political thrillers), almost never even earn the class of Christian. For how can you have a Christian book without a Savior?

I'm rating the enemy spiritual content also 

I found that even though Jesus was almost never mentioned (even in allegory), Lucifer, Satan, and the like were in a lot of the so-called clean reads. Several of the books were focused on warfare against demons with no spiritual help. What an abomination that is! In reality, these so-called clean reads are enemy books. The *Twilight* series has been described to me as a clean read. It is clearly enemy propaganda—largely for the Mormon doctrines and culture.

Several of the books I've read were 2-star Christian and minus-five-star occult. These are really dangerous. In several fantasies, I found worlds where demonic activity was accurately described, but the good guys had no spiritual power at all. They were trying to beat demons with their fleshly strength. How could anyone be so ignorant as to share that horror with the world? Only the enemy!

Why is this all necessary?

That seems to be the basic question. Many so-called Christian books available are so worldly, surely they couldn't be written by believers—or could they? As I started researching this years ago, sometimes I was surprised, sometimes I was appalled, often I was just puzzled. I mean, if you're going to write heathen books, why pretend they are something they are not?

Why call books Christian if they have no Christian content?

That is the real question. Our hope is that we can add some clarity to the debate. There is nothing wrong with a good book based on the Old Testament. But don't call it Christian unless you work in messianic prophecy—at least. **A clean read is not a Christian book!** If you add Jesus and church to your clean read, it becomes 3-star Christian content and it is no longer simply a clean read.



Rating not Grading

The five-star rating system for spiritual content

So, let's talk a little about the rating system. First, **this is rating, not grading**. We'll start with the ratings for Christian content. Surprisingly (to me), one area of controversy with book reviews on *Reality Calling* are these spiritual levels used for rating the books. Many authors become very defensive and dash off mammoth retaliatory responses explaining why what they write is really Christian fiction. In most cases, after a brief response I drop out of the conversation about their book. The rating (grading) for the book overall has little to do with the rating (discernment) of the spiritual content.

There is no Christian without a messiah

Part of the problem at first was my own use of denominational and doctrinal terminology which simply pushed buttons in people. For example (on a radical tangent), I've learned that a person cannot use the terms inerrancy, "once saved, always saved", "slain in the spirit", or even born-again without triggering large contentious arguments of worthless content.

The problem, of course, is that old work of the flesh "party spirit". Conservatives against liberals, democrats

against republicans, Baptists against Pentecostals, fundamentalists against nominal Christians, you know the drill. All of this stuff is of the flesh—at best. As Paul tells us in Galatians 5:17-18, the Spirit and the flesh are at war with each other.

I've had a bit of difficulty coming up with terminology which will not bind me to any denominational stance; and which will not offend readers of the blog. So, I've worked hard to come up with definitions to avoid that level of doctrine as much as possible. I now use Biblical terminology. At the present point, I use these five categories and they are working well. We need to understand them before we can discuss a definition for redemptive fiction.

There are three levels of spirituality which are common

But, they are not commonly useful. Books at these levels are often well-written, entertaining reads. Many of them are quite popular. This is where almost all traditionally published Christian fiction fits. Remember, I don't read much romance, mystery, or suspense. There is so much published in those areas that better spiritual content may be more available—even though the percentage remains small.

As an aside: I would love to add reviewers of romance, mystery, and thriller to the stable. If you feel the call to provide that to the Christian book industry, just email me and we'll talk about it. There's a contact link at the blog.

At *Reality Calling*, we presently read and review fantasy, science fiction, action/adventure, political thrillers, military thrillers, and even horror. Some call this edgy Christian fiction. We are looking for realistic walks of faith which build up the reader and lead them to truth. The first three levels of spirituality do not do this.

 **1 star—The clean read:** We've already talked about this a lot. Most so-called Christian fiction is not. It is the dreaded "clean read". This term needs some discernment. Clean means no cussing, no sex, and no violence. But it also means, in most cases, no spiritual

reality. There's commonly not even any reference to religion, let alone the reality of the spiritual world. Worse yet, many religious variations produce clean reads. We find books by Mormons, white witches, secular humanists, and many more groups. The basic misconception is that good morals are enough, and Biblical concepts help people. Of course, the truth is that good works never save anyone. In fact, this has become one of the major problems with the church in general in the United States.

Jesus is never mentioned and the presence of God (if there at all) is meaningless to the lives of the characters. It's on the level of "the man upstairs".

 **2 star—The legal level:** Another large section of "Christian fiction" consists of Old Testament tales, or stories on an Old Testament level. In this case, we find following the law is depicted as spiritual truth. There may or may not be a written record. Possibly, a prophet is present where the Spirit comes upon him or her and often leaves the reluctant prophet reeling. There may or may not be a priesthood, monasteries, "divine right" king or queen, or any of a number of religious people.

The focus is usually on obscure ancient writings and prophecies while mankind is left guessing about meaning. Often, it's a godless society until a book is found. Commonly, the book or law is given almost magic powers, which are obtained by using exact quotations from "the book". (Sorry, but this is how the occult works.) Salvation comes from rigid obedience.

There is certainly no savior, often not even a hint that one might be necessary. So, by definition, without Christ it cannot be a Christian book. The best we can hope for is something like a good Mormon or Jewish book.

Here we have a god, but no redemption. God may be active, but He is not within the believer. He is an external concept residing "above the fray".

 **3 star—The religious level:** This level of Christian book is already uncommon. In it, the Christian walk is carried out by human effort, in most cases. Even if grace is understood, it is always in the

context of people sharing what they think should be done in the light of the scriptures, tradition, or reason. These three have equal weight and authority. The focus is the church, and that's where salvation is found. Christianity has little to do with their lives on a day to day, hour by hour basis.

Believers are often left to figure things out. Although the false Bible verse, "God helps those who help themselves" is rarely mentioned—it is often assumed. It is closely followed by that other horror, "It's all about love. A loving God wouldn't do that..." That's the core of the Great Delusion found in the Great Falling Away which is being experienced by most of the American church today.

Yet another huge area of problems is un-Biblical depictions of angels and demons. I am so sick of stories where a demon tries to repent and get saved by marrying a godly human girl. Sorry, folks, but it doesn't work like that. We'll talk about this entire area later.

Spiritual warfare: This is very rare in 3-star books. Commonly, there is no real knowledge of our spiritual enemies. Victory over these spiritual forces of evil is accomplished by God working in "His mysterious ways". If spiritual power is available to humans, it is only available to clergy. Spiritual help is obtained through religious events, services, sacraments, blessed objects, and the like. Or, angels handle all of this stuff.

A savior may be mentioned, but it's only in the context of religious observance or going to church. A personal relationship with that savior is outside the paradigm of this level of Christian book.

These three levels are not Christian, in most cases

Even 3-star books only show a religious Christianity devoid of power. The believing characters show no real difference in their lives from the heathen which surround them. They are commonly holding on by brute will power. It would be laughable if it were not so sad.

In these first three levels there are no transformed lives. The believer shows no power. God is not really active in the world or culture shared in this type of book.

8: Discerning Redemptive Fiction

Next we have two levels where Truth is found and lives are transformed

There may or may not be any evidence of religious behavior. The transformed characters are often at odds with, shunned by, or expelled from religious organizations. Regardless, religion does not provide salvation or deliverance. The characters may find solace or ministry within such a group. But, they are outsiders or considered strange by the religious in many cases. The focus is on a personal relationship with a messiah. True believers are rare in almost every church.

I had a pastor of a spirit-filled megachurch answer my question about how many people he had who were sold out to Jesus in his church. “A dozen, maybe 17” he said. That’s out of about a thousand members at the time. Some churches have quite a few people who really love the Lord. If you are in one of them consider yourself blessed. In most churches in America today, just talking about Jesus all the time can get you shunned or worse. I’ve got stories I could tell.

However, even these 4-star and 5-star levels can have characters who are mainly religious: It’s not cut and dried. It takes prayer and discernment.

 **4 star—redemptive fiction:** The basic redeeming portion of these books are characters who have been born of God, born from above, or reborn [JOHN 3]. This can be done well or poorly. But lives are transformed when they encounter and believe in a Savior.

These books may offer only stereotypical rebirth scenarios where a person prays the Sinner’s Prayer, accepts Jesus as their Savior. But there is no mention of Jesus as their Lord. Again, this is religion. Often these books have a strong denominational slant. They can be very preachy: filled with complete sermons and long scripture quotes. I normally rate them 3.5 to 3.9 stars.

In the more realistic scenarios, the new believers give their life to serve the Lord. [ROMANS 12:1-3] They can offer a realistic look at the daily walk of faith for a new believer. There is a clear Messiah who died for our sins. Through repentance and

baptism, a person is forgiven and cleansed, beginning a new life in the Kingdom of God.

The truly excellent books on this level share these truths easily, without pretension, in common human relationships. They recognize that most people do not carry on conversations by quoting scriptures at each other. They cover the arguments pro and con in natural dialog—exchanged in the way we actually talk with one another.

They leave it to the person to decide about Jesus, recognizing that you cannot talk anyone into salvation. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. The only source of guidance is scripture, with occasional visits from angels and the like. God speaks though the Bible primarily.

Though the presence of the Lord is visible in these books, He may not be the center of the story. Characters are benefited and blessed by His presence in their lives. But salvation is the goal and result. Discipleship and spiritual growth are secondary as salvation provides everything needed by the characters. Growth is found in reading the scripture and memorizing key verses.

The better 4th level books have mature elders. There may be pastors, evangelists, and so on. These men and women disciple the new believers.

Spiritual warfare: This is not commonly found in 4-star books. If it is, enemy attacks are thwarted by standing on the promises of scripture—often by strong quotations of scripture verses (possibly repeated, with increasing volume and desperation). This is how wielding the Sword of the Spirit is portrayed. The Word of God is scripture, at this level.

The lives of believers are transformed. The focus is evangelistic. The Bible is often seen as the source of salvation. Commonly, Biblical quotes are the only source of Godly power—or spiritual growth comes from increased Biblical knowledge.



5 star—spirit-filled fiction: These books are extremely rare. Not only have believers accepted

Jesus, or a messiah, they experience the power of the Lord and His Holy Spirit in their lives.

Many of the characters were deeply flawed individuals living lives sold out to sin and depravity. They are aware of how much their lives have changed, are deeply grateful, and obviously thankful for the Lord's presence in their lives to save, heal, deliver, and transform.

They are focused upon characters with (or who develop) an intimate relationship with the Lord. They talk with Him all the time, day in and day out, hour by hour, minute by minute. And He responds with emotional cleansing, answered prayer, and direct guidance throughout the daily life they lead.

The characters may or may not be religious in church attendance. They all love reading the scriptures and gain a great deal through their reading and increased knowledge of the Bible or sacred book.

More than that, the presence of the Lord in their lives produces fruit in their character [GAL 5:22-24], causes radical changes in thought patterns and understanding [EPH 4:17+], and manifests in healings, miracles, supernatural knowledge, direct guidance, and so on [1 COR 12].

They show by example how God talks and communicates with His People. They walk in the works which God has prepared for them. They have supernatural power and authority of which they are commonly unaware. These spiritual acts or events are not under the characters' control, and usually without any foreknowledge—other than direct or indirect prophetic guidance.

Spiritual warfare: At this level, spiritual warfare is a normal part of daily living. They can defeat the enemy with prayer, words given by the Spirit, a *rhema*—which is the specific, focused word of God talked about as the Sword of the Spirit in Ephesians 6. They can easily clean up buildings, objects, people, whatever the Spirit leads them to do, because the power is in the name of Jesus by His Spirit.

There's no fear—except for the fear the enemy tries to get them to accept. The enemy is nasty, but God is good and much more powerful.

At this level, believers walk much as Peter and Paul walked in the Acts of the Apostles. They hear the Lord and act on His guidance. This is the normal Christian life—rarely seen, but oh so wonderful! The Spirit recalls Bible verses as necessary, but they are free to speak whatever the Lord gives them to say. The Bible is the foundation, but they've come to realize the truth of 1 John 2:27

“But the anointing which you have received from Him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. For as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and just as it has taught you, remain in Him.” [MEV](#)

Though the focus remains on evangelism, there is often a strong portion of discipleship also.

Of course, there are endless variations 

No rating system can cover all the possibilities. I've read 2-star books which had more truth and power than some of the 4-star books I've read. What do you do with something like *Lord of the Rings* which is 1-star spiritual content? You talk about it and how it gives so much more than the lack of direct spiritual content would indicate. On the other hand, I would never call LOTR redemptive Christian fiction, great as it is.

However, before we can talk about redemptive fiction we need to talk about a couple of other areas first.

Enemy spiritual levels

Here we have similar problems as we found in trying to rate the Christian level of a book. I'll frankly admit that I don't have nearly as good a handle on this yet. That may change by the time the beta readers, editors, and all of that get done with the manuscript.



1 star—the clean read: This is just as vapid as the Christian level. There are good guys and bad guys, but there is no spiritual level at all. The

entire spectrum of living may be in full display, but spirituality is simply not mentioned.

 **2 star—false gods:** it may be the Greek or Roman gods. There are temples and priests of these gods. They are capricious, fickle beings who may or may not interact with humans. There is a god for every purpose.

It may just be idols like materialism, progressivism, patriotism, and almost all the other “ism”s. At best, these are works of the flesh. But a strong case can be made that capitalism and materialism are the modern variant of Mammon.

The true problem is that these “gods” in reality are demons masquerading as “gods”. The 2-star books gloss right over that.

These false gods are horror fodder, but with no spiritual content they are not very powerful.

 **3 star—the presence of evil:** At this level, evil is there but not explained. There is really no way to deal with it, and there is no moral code.

People accept that some are evil. There is a lot of fear. There may well be religious attempts at controlling such evil. But it is just an accepted thing in society.

Some evil comes from outside of human society and seems to prey on humans. If this is coupled with a 3-star Christian book, there may well be exorcisms, the use of crosses, and so on. But there will be no real spiritual truth.

Spiritual warfare: These are the battles of superheroes and super-villains. This warfare is often presented in a Hollywood, comic book, over-the-top style. OOF! BAM

A lot of horror is found here. Without true spiritual power to combat evil, it really is terrifying. This is evil run amok with no way to stop it, except good thoughts.

 **4 star—demons:** here we begin to actually see true spiritual evil. These demons are not often explained as fallen angels. Satan is not necessarily mentioned. They’re usually just Hollywood-nasty—which has little to do with reality.

Spiritual warfare: Occasionally, books on this level have some realistic spiritual warfare with characters in a 4-star Christian book. But that's very rare. Normally, it is angels fighting demons with humans filling in the gaps supernaturally—often with weapons or objects of spiritual power.

Some horror is found here. But warfare and the reactions of soldiers in this war is very different than the civilian horror found in level-three writing.



5 star—the battle of the mind and spirit: at this point, the spiritual battles are often internal to the characters. The enemy plays the kind of mind games many of us fight all the time. Doubt, fear, indifference, lethargy, depression can assail the heroes and heroines. Demonic possession and oppression are used to attack the believers. The Holy Spirit is deeply active in these battles.

The reality of the spiritual war in which we battle: This level of book is extremely rare and takes a 5-star Christian character to pull it off. There is no horror here, for the foe is already defeated. All the believer has to do is tell the demons what to do in the name of Jesus. Often the Holy spirit has to reveal what is really going on so the believer will know what to fight.

This is the daily walk of the ones John calls “young men” in I John 2. Once you mature into eldership, this warfare becomes reflexive—and no big deal. The mature help train the young ones and protect the children.

These books are powerful witnesses to the true walk of the Holy Spirit, and the reality of the Kingdom of God.

Are all authors called to 5-star books?

Probably not... But as an author, you need to ask the Lord and be sure. Calls from the Lord are about ministry. You are called to serve. He will tell you what your call is and who your sheep are.

For me, I'm called to serve the ones He sends. I trust Him for the discernment. I rely on Him for the power to serve, the will to persevere, and the wisdom to help. It's all about Jesus. Yeshua is the Messiah, and I serve Him. If you are a Christian author, you need to seek Him to clarify your vision and to delineate the call.

He tells us to ask Him about these things...



One final note: If you are not called to write Christian books, why do you call your books Christian?

