

Miracle at Angels Bend: A Contemporary Tale of Finding Joy through Jesus Christ

R. Christian Bohlen

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Hard moments in the lives of four friends become less insurmountable thanks to the mysterious addition of a book about Jesus to their group in the novel Miracle at Angels Bend.

In R. Christian Bohlen's allegorical novel *Miracle at Angels Bend*, four people find solace in a religious book during the most tumultuous periods of their lives.

The book—a historical and biblical overview of Jesus's life with a focus on his teachings—crosses Dave's desk accompanied by a request that he gather a diverse group of people together to read through it and review it if they find its message effective. Dave, whose social circle is limited, calls upon Josh, Hannah, and Larina to join him. Each contends with a personal tragedy; they face issues including the losses of family members, drug addiction, and mental health struggles. Hannah, who is addicted to opioids, lost her father and brother in a car accident, and has a strained relationship with her mother, deals with more than the rest.

The group spends one night a week going over a chapter of the book; in turn, each chapter of the novel follows one book club member in tandem with the club's chapter of focus. The book within the book is quoted throughout, and its lines are interspersed with the characters' reflections. Chapter by chapter, the members recognize either their emotional parallels to Jesus's teachings or messages that can be interpreted as potential solutions to their immediate issues.

As the weeks pass, the group's faith deepens. Their connections to each other and to their community are enriched as well. And as the story progresses, each of the four is seen confronting their personal demons in turn. There's satisfaction to be had in how they find the best ways forward; if the novel remains short on surprises, the characters' individual evolutions are tidy.

As the book switches between the quoted chapters of the book and the friends' narrative, its prose also varies in style and persuasiveness. The book within the book is lively, blending scholarship with biblical commentary, but also distant, whereas the friends' stories are more sensory and emotive. The town around them is vivified via historical details and community insights that play into how the book club members respond to the material they read.

In the allegorical novel *Miracle at Angels Bend*, flawed people form connections based on the teachings of Jesus.

JOHN M. MURRAY (May 29, 2024)

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