

Christian Bend: A Novel

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Focusing on the significance of relationships, the novel resonates with truth and clarity.

A breezy read full of quirky names and subtle charm, *Christian Bend* is an intriguing story with complex characters whose lives contain a few secrets and a lot of truth.

One in a series of books with the same characters, this story can stand alone through its quiet wisdom, beauty of place, and graceful writing. It's a story of longing, hope, and ultimately redemption.

Set in Tennessee in the small town of Christian Bend, the catalyst for much of the action is a shooting, after which the search for the shooter reveals hard truths about life in modern Appalachia. The wise, elderly healer Burdy Luttrell is injured by the crime. Struggling with survivor's guilt, Burdy's life is enmeshed with the complex characters of her close community.

There is much history among and between all of them, as the story deftly reveals. The cast includes a WWII veteran whose experiences in the war shattered his life, a deaf man with questions about his parents who died young, a rugged detective, a divorcée looking to open her heart after abuse, and Burdy's secret life outside Christian Bend.

Zacharias's writing is efficient and elegant, though the lightness of the writing belies the complexity of the story. The author skillfully weaves short stories about the supporting characters into her overarching tale, lending the novel depth and color. She carries the action forward smoothly, maintaining interest in the story's culmination.

This satisfying read would only be enhanced by knowing the backstories of characters briefly mentioned in *Christian Bend*, who are more fully revealed in previous books in the series.

A contemporary story with a vintage tone, the novel is elevated by its evident love of place and of the simple life. Focusing on the significance of relationships, it resonates with truth and clarity.

FELICIA TOPP (University Press 2017)

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