

Shaken Awake: The Complete Trilogy

Allen Madding

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Shaken Awake is a heartwarming Christian novel about a church waking up to change the world in necessary ways.

Allen Madding's gripping Christian novel, *Shaken Awake*, imagines what might happen if a local church really tried to help with homelessness.

One cold night, a homeless man dies on the steps of Peachtree Street Church in downtown Atlanta. The church's pastor, Reverend Samuel Matthews, takes this as a sign that the church ought to consider what they are really doing; more personally, it seems that is time for him to retire. Then, a huge snowstorm blows into Atlanta, stranding travelers on gridlocked roads, trapping kids at school, and, with the shelters full, meaning a death sentence for many of the city's homeless. The pastor decides to take a stand and open the church building up as a temporary shelter, and it is soon overflowing with people and their needs.

Three interconnected narratives suggest the powerful change that one church can effect, functioning as a parable about how important it is for people to address the problem of homelessness in society. The book's plot hinges on miraculous, perhaps divinely inspired, coincidences, as when a man seated next to the pastor on his flight home from Austin just happens to design communities and have a piece of land to donate to the church. The book brings a lot of inherent drama, too, as its large cast is forced into situations such as navigating streets clogged with snow to find their loved ones, or to deal with trips to the hospital.

Central to all is Matthews, whose struggles with faith are appealing and genuine. His faith and thinking do evolve over the course of the novel; he proves willing to learn about homelessness and search for new solutions, including developing a community of tiny homes to house the city's homeless. Other characters function more as set pieces to drive home the point that homeless people matter. They reflect a utopian view of the world: most have hearts of gold and lives absent complications.

Short sentences and limited descriptions drive the book's compelling drama. The text's few visual details, as of the pastor's "wire-rimmed bifocals," are delivered with journalistic clarity. One shelter visitor describes waking up to the smell of fresh bacon and eggs, which reminds her of happier times: "just the memory put her in a good mood." Such moments reflect the greater human need for home and belonging. However, frequent emphasis on prosaic actions, like washing dishes or cleaning out cars, impede focus on the grander parts of God's plan.

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JEREMIAH ROOD (May 1, 2020)

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