



Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art

Madeleine L'Engle

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In this classic book, Madeleine L'Engle addresses the questions, What makes art Christian? What does it mean to be a Christian artist? What is the relationship between faith and art? Through L'Engle's beautiful and insightful essay, readers will find themselves called to what the author views as the prime tasks of an artist: to listen, to remain aware, and to respond to creation through one's own art.

Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art Details

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From Reader Review Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art for online ebook

Amberlee Bixler says

Is there a 5 star plus I can offer for a review? I ask, because this is the one book to warrant it. Ms. L'Engle beautifully presents several arguments for re-uniting the theological with the artistic, and how an artist (writer, performer, dancer, etc.) can not only bridge the gap between the two, but also clearly defines the reasons why one must. The quotes and arguments are simply stated, and honestly reasoned. This is the book I read when I question whether the pain is worth the thunder, and always, always find the answer is yes.

Jenny says

The rating says it for me this time--it was okay. It was repetitive if you've read other books by L'Engle, and the points she makes about art and artists are interesting but not particularly enlightening. My favorite thing about the book is that I identified with a few passages as a writer. It was nice to say, "Someone else felt this way or went through this too."

Otherwise, I'm disappointed. Usually, L'Engle's books leave me with much more than this one did. My dad said, "It's Madeleine--it wasn't bad." I agree, but it wasn't good either.

If you're looking for a book about advice for writers, this is not that book. If you're struggling to understand what being a Christian artist means, this may give you some insight. Otherwise, I would read almost any of L'Engle's nonfiction books over this one, especially The Crosswicks Journals.

Faith Hough says

Madeleine L'Engle was not only a brilliant story teller, she was a humble, beautiful and insightful woman who, in this book, wrote many of the wisest words I have ever read--about being a writer, and artist, a woman...a human being and child of God.

I couldn't stop quoting passages to my husband, family--okay, anyone who would listen--but this was a book that was best read slowly, page by page, with time for reflection. (So the constant pausing to quote ended up being a benefit for me!) It is certainly going to be one of the first books I think of if I am ever again asked the "desert island" question.

I highly, highly recommend this book to everyone--but especially to writers and artists...and any woman struggling with marrying the dual roles of writer and mother would do well to find some answers in these pages.

Kat Heckenbach says

A friend, who is an artist and Christian, loaned me her copy of this book because she thought I would enjoy it. Less than halfway through, I gave it back--because I'd bought my own copy.

I have always been a huge Madeleine L'Engle fan. A Wrinkle in Time was one of the first books I remember reading as a kid, one of the first books I truly loved. One of the first books that drove into me the love of

science fiction and fantasy. Of course, I was afraid that might make me biased about this book.

So, I'll start with the negative--which I did find. The book is wandery. I get that this is almost a collection of essays rather than something officially organized(there are no chapters, only divisions between essays), but even within essays I found the topics wandering. It sometimes bothered me and sometimes didn't, but overall I would have liked it better if there had been more cohesion and logical flow.

It also wasn't something I could read straight through. I have had it here on Goodreads in my "currently reading" list for what seems like months. I found I had to be in the mood to pick this up.

But--when I was in the mood and picked it up, I always--always--found something that struck a chord with me. Even it was just one sentence or one thought, there would be a connection, and generally one that applied to something I was struggling with regarding my art at that very time.

I also really appreciated L'Engle's honesty, the way she views art for art's sake, even as she sees it a means of worship.

So all in all, I am very glad I read this, and very glad I bought my own copy. I have a feeling it's something I'll turn to many times in my life as I follow my artistic journey.

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K.M. Weiland says

This book is an intuitive artist's dream. Incredibly beautiful, insightful, and inspiring. I listened to it on audio and before I was even halfway done, I ordered a hardcover so I could re-read it and underline it liberally.

Anna says

Trying to encompass all my thoughts and feelings about this book would take...well, a book. Or some approximation thereof. This is my second time reading it and I find that once again it reaches and touches me on so many levels. I find joy here, and inspiration; the book *makes* me want to write. It gives me fuel, or refuels me, if you will. I am reminded of the adventures that unfold in both life and art when we take the time to simply *listen* to the story, to the vision, the photograph, the art, the still small voice. I am reminded that we live mostly on the tip of the iceberg while the larger part of ourselves, of life, the part we cannot really control, lies below the surface -- and when we listen, when we let go of fear of the unknown, we find ourselves, we find true freedom. We are more than we know.

And this is how I want to live, how I want to write -- in truth, and hearing that roar on the other side of silence.

Read it. And follow your art.

D.M. Dutcher says

This book is like listening to your erudite upper-class grandmother wax poetic about faith in relatively bland, indefinite terms while she sips chamomile tea on a rattan chair in an immaculately kept garden. This means some of you absolutely will love this book, and others will squirm and fidget because they hate tea. I'm the latter.

It isn't a bad book by any means, and it's good to see L'Engle engage faith, albeit elliptically. It's more about intuition and sentiment than a hard look at the Christian and art. It's not that correct either; bad religion has made plenty of good art; the gnostic William Blake is one example. I also think if you can see the Incarnation in secular and Christian works, it might just be you seeing something the author didn't intend. But this isn't a work really for those of us who want nuts and bolts; it's feeling, sentiment, and poetry, and for people who enjoy such, it's fine at doing that.

I tend to not connect with L'Engle, but this book, like all her rest, seem tailor made for sensitive, intelligent young women with a religious, non-dogmatic bent, and you'll probably enjoy it far better if you are one. Men would probably connect better with someone like G.K. Chesterton; "The Ethics of Elfland" in Orthodoxy makes a good contrast in styles between the two.

Rebecca says

It is not a perfect book and I certainly don't agree with everything but oh it is wonderful. Such insight and presence and goodness. Thank you L'Engle for this book. My mind and heart are larger for reading it. My ears more open. Familiarity to some of her fiction will help but is not mandatory, however regardless if you read this you should read Wrinkle simply because it is A Wrinkle in Time and that book in itself is close to the heart of life and God.

Poiema says

I've read at least one book by Madeleine L'Engle every decade of my life, starting with *A Wrinkle in Time* when I was a child. Madeleine's theology does not always match my own, but I deeply respect her thoughtfulness and depth. This book is about the arts. I love that Madeleine does not encourage Christians to stay with "safe" art (Thomas Kinkade comes to mind). Truth can be captured by some very unlikely artists and humanity is the richer for it. Come to think of it, I believe Madeleine L'Engle has earned a place in that club! Highly recommended.

Amy Neftzger says

This book is one of the best I've read for artists who also happen to have a strong religious faith. L'Engle approaches creativity as a natural response to being created in the image of The Creator. In fact, she explains that most children start out creative, but wander (or are trained) away from these activities. Unlike many Christian "artists" she defines the individual as an artist who happens to be Christian, rather than a Christian who is obligated to produce art as an evangelism tool. What I respected most was her assertion that art designed to evangelize tends to be come across as forced, and is often lower quality because of this.

The book is also filled with some great concepts for helping the artist to reconnect or remain connected to creativity. I strongly recommend this to Christian artists of all genres: music, visual, literary, dance, etc. Well worth the read for those interested in becoming the person you were created to be, rather than the one that the Church tells you to be.

Adrienna says

This author had many valid points and able to reflect on Christianity and art. I loved some of the statements in the book as an artists/creativity with writing.

"If a reader cannot create a book along with the writer, the book will never come to life. He must become a creator, imagining the setting of the story, visualizing the characters, seeing facial expressions, hearing the inflection of voices. The author and the reader "know" each other; they meet on the bridge of words (L'Engle, Madeline, p. 34)."

Loved this passage too: page 62, "Moses wasn't qualified. He was past middle age when God called him to lead his children out of Egypt and he stuttered. He was reluctant and unwilling and he couldn't control his temper. He saw the bush that didn't consume by the fire. He spoke with God on Mt. Sinai, face glowed with such brilliant light that people could not bear look at him. Therefore, God continually chooses the most unqualified to do his work, to bear His glory. If we are qualified, we tend to think we did the jobs ourselves. We will confuse God's work with our own, or God's glory with our own." (paraphrased).

This was the icing on the cake for me as a writer, "an artist is someone who cannot rest, who can never rest as long as there is one suffering creature in the world...artist cannot manage this normalcy. Vision keeps breaking through and must find means of expression (p. 143)."

Now I truly understand why I have those restless, insomnia nights when YHWH calls me to write or a story lives in my dreams/visions and need to be released on paper (manuscript). There is a living soul that needs this story! Thank you Madeleine for helping me understand the gift of a creative soul as a lyrical-miracle artist (writer, poet/past rapper, past artists, actress, etc.)

*Father gave me this book as a gift (he read it first I'm quite sure and sent it to me, signed in love). Thanks Dad.

3.75/4 stars.

Laura Baugh says

This book was recommended to me and I ordered it from the library promptly; I'd liked reading Madeleine L'Engle, and I've often discoursed on the relation of faith and art.

I was a bit disconcerted when the book arrived, however; it was a smaller volume than I'd expected, and when I started reading, it seemed rambling, disorganized, and not terribly helpful. Had I found the low point of L'Engle's work?

As a writer and a Christian, I have of course been challenged -- internally and externally -- by the unfortunately common, "But you should do Christian art!" Trouble is, I really dislike most modern "Christian art," which is almost entirely knock-off sellout schlock. (The art of previous eras has been filtered by time so that better examples are preserved, which helps.) My own arguments that all Truth is of God, and real art is Christian, even if it shows only a part of the story, were valid to me but incomplete.

As I got further into this book, however, I began to find it more and more relevant. L'Engle takes risks in telling us of her own journey in discovering truths of art, and she takes some potentially unpopular stands on the nature of art and its audiences. She defends "art" as something just as vital or more so than science (while simultaneously emphasizing the glorious art and truth of science), she points out the differences between fact and truth, she talks about the artist's experience of losing control of both oneself and one's story, including the (oh so familiar!) disconcerting sensation of having the characters take over and do something wholly unplanned and incontrovertible.

She also challenges both artists of all varieties and the complacent Christian community in fulfilling our roles as co-creators in the image of God, honoring truth and story, and allowing ourselves to serve the story.

I found myself pausing at periods to ruminate on what I'd just read, and I suspect I'll be buying a copy of this to keep for myself. It's for Christian artists, yes, but it's also for Christians, for artists, for anyone who enjoys art of any form, and for any open-minded person seeking truth in the world.

BookishStitcher says

I loved this book so much that I want to reread it till I have it memorized and it has been etched on my soul.

I almost can't even review this because it struck me on such a deep level that it feels too personal to talk about why this book impacted me the way it did. Struggles and doubts that I have had suddenly took on new light when she talked about her path. Basically, any review that I give this will be inadequate for how it made me feel.

Dale Harcombe says

I remember the first time I read Walking on Water, Reflections on Faith and Art. It was an eye-opener for me -- and a book I became completely absorbed in. Since then it has been read numerous times. It is one book of mine that has multiple paragraphs and sentences highlighted or underlined as well as pages turned down at the corners. Yes that's shocking I know to some people but that's what I do when a book is a useful tool. This book certainly was for me.

Some of the pages are so highlighted, it is mostly all blue or yellow or whatever colour highlighter was to hand at the time. Much of the yellow highlighter has faded over the years but the message of the book has not faded.

This book, as the title suggests, is not specifically about writing as it deals with various forms of art. In it Madeleine L'Engle, one of my favourite writers, talks about the need of the artist to be 'obedient to the work.' That means not being prescriptive about being in control and trying to make the work go the way we want it to but being open to let the work dictate the story and form.

At a conference a woman said to Madeleine L'Engle about her Newbery winning *A Wrinkle in Time*. 'I read *A Wrinkle in Time* when I was eight or nine. I didn't understand it, but knew what it was about' Madeline L'Engle goes on to say, 'As long as we know what it's about, then can have the courage to go wherever we are asked to go, even if we fear the road may take us through danger and pain.' For some of us that may mean drawing on memories we would rather not dredge up or being ready to take a risk in our writing or trusting that the work knows what is needed better sometimes than our rational mind does.

'The artist must be obedient to the body of the work, knowing that this involves long hours of research, of throwing out a month's work, of going back to the beginning, or, sometimes scrapping the whole thing.' Or how about this one a few sentences later, 'when the words mean even more than the writer knew they meant, then the writer has been listening.' How often have you had someone see something in your work that you were unaware of yourself? Or that you didn't know you felt until or remembered or held that view until after the words were written down?

I don't feel I can give an adequate review of this book. It's one each of us needs to read for ourselves. I wrote most of this review for another blog but once I had the book out from the bookcase, I couldn't help but re-read it. It's still an absorbing book that has a lot to say about the writing craft, particularly when combined with a stance of faith.

One last quote to leave you with - 'When the work takes over, then the artist is enabled to get out of the way, not to interfere.

But before he can listen, paradoxically he must work. Getting out of the way and listening is not something that comes easily, either in art or in prayer.' These words are worth thinking seriously about.

As in any Madeleine L'Engle book I find there are lines that will challenge thinking and some aspects I will disagree with. That doesn't matter because at least it has challenged me and got me thinking about the question enough to formulate my own response.

First published in 1980, this book is still as relevant, insightful and encouraging or challenging, today as it was when I first read it. I hope I've convinced some of you who haven't read it, to give it a go and I'd love to hear your responses to it.

Schuyler says

Madeleine's book is full of food for inspiration, moments that resonate, and encouragement for Christian artists. Writing about Christian art was difficult for her. She found Christianity in art by Christians and by secular people, regardless of their faith. I think I would agree. Some songs both Christian and secular move me very deeply, books both Christian and classic resonate with my soul. That is simply because they are good and full of truth about the world.

This book is full of thoughts that are hard to summarize but rich to read about: thoughts on political correctness, God's healing through art, and the sense of wonder that the Christian art requires. Madeleine told herself stories to heal the pain of things she did not understand. I deeply resonated with that as well, but I'll save more thoughts on that for a stand alone article, hopefully next week. She gives anecdotes about her life and different writers she met, and books she worked on, all fascinating to consider. Her words have a warm, friendly, deep thinking style.

Along with the inspiring paragraphs, there are sections that are confusing. Sometimes there were thoughts about communion I downright disagreed with. Sometimes I didn't understand what she meant or how a particular thought connected. She writes in a very personal, conversational style that would probably take me more than one reading to wrap my mind around. But in spite of that, I often found myself giving a resounding yes to things I did understand. Madeleine is Catholic and I am not, but I didn't find her Catholicism overwhelming to the content. Her mind is one it would be intimidating to converse with, though she seems very kind.

My favorite chapter by far was Chapter 11. In this chapter she is talking about the idea of being a servant of the stories, and how the stories know more about how they are to be written and what should be in them than the author does. For instance, the story will tell her what it needs, if it's a knowledge of physics or cellular biology, and she will study that thing. She doesn't take what she knows and pour it into a book. She takes what the book needs and learns it.

In chapter 11, Madeleine told several anecdotes about unexpected characters that popped onto her page and made her work so much more vibrant and complete than her original idea without them. She also told a beautiful story about making an unlikely situation in her book, and finding out that something like it had actually occurred in history. "Miracles" as she calls them, of fiction matching up with true life can indeed take place. I have happy first-hand accounts in my own stories of those things happening without my prior planning.

Walking on Water will give you much to ponder about Christian art. Some of it will be confusing, but all of it will be deep and worthy of consideration. I enjoyed it, and it's an easy read, so I recommend all Christian artists give it a try. Perhaps this statement of hers summarizes the book best:

"I have often been asked if my Christianity affects my stories, and surely it is the other way around; my stories affect my Christianity...." Madeleine L'Engle (2016) *Walking on Water*, pg. 96. Convergent Books.

I received this book from Blogging for Books for this review.
