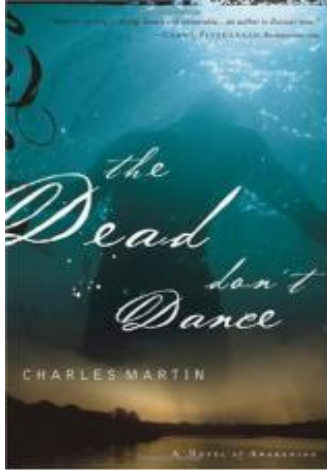


# The Dead Don't Dance: A Novel of Awakening

by Charles Martin

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## About the Book

*Last October, after the soybeans had peaked at four feet, the corn spiraled to almost double that, and the wisteria had shed its purple, a breeze picked up, pushed out the summer heat, and woke Maggie. She rolled over, tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Let's go swimming." We held hands down to the river where Maggie took a swan dive into the South Carolina moonlight.*

The deep and intimate relationship Dylan shared with his wife, Maggie, is shattered as Dylan stands helplessly by her in the delivery room. When Maggie lapses into a coma, Dylan's world crashes down around him. The previously self-assured Dylan finds that everything he has known and relied upon is suddenly thrown into doubt. In a desolate place, naked and powerless, questions beg to be answered. Is there a way to cope with this tragedy? Where is God? Why live?

## Discussion Guide

1. What is the meaning of the title? Discuss the theme of dancing and identify where it appears in the story.
2. Discuss Dylan's attitudes toward education and teaching in the novel. How and why do they change?
3. How is the South portrayed in this novel? What scenes best illuminate the setting?
4. After eating breakfast with Amos at Ira's Cafe, Dylan realizes that he has not thought about Maggie for forty-five minutes. Overwhelming guilt descends upon him. Why do you think he felt so guilty?
5. What role does Bryce Kai MacGregor --- the naked, bag-pipe playing, movie-loving millionaire --- play in this story?
6. What roles do Dylan's students play in his life? Why is it significant that Koy is such a poor communicator in person?

but such an articulate poet and letter-writer? How does the students' plagiarism mirror Dylan's inner conflict?

**7.** When Dylan tells Amos, "I see colors, not structure," how does this statement summarize the differences between the two men? How do their personalities complement each other?

**8.** Describe Dylan's faith. How do his interactions with Pastor John and the AME church, including communion and baptism, affect him? How does his faith journey compare to your own?

**9.** Dylan says, "I drive an old pickup because I understand it." How does this statement characterize Dylan? When he purchases a used truck from Jake's Jalopy Auto Center in Walterboro, why does he offer Jake more money than the truck is worth?

**10.** Dylan explains, "The Salkehatchie is mythical. Everybody knows the stories. . . . If you can think it, it's probably already been mythified." Why is it significant that the violent coon hunt takes place in "the Salk"? What impact does the hunt have on Dylan?

**11.** Though Maggie stays in a coma for most of the novel, how does her character generate a "presence of absence"? By the end of the novel, do you think the relationship between Dylan and Maggie has changed? If so, how?

**12.** After years of hard work, Dylan walked away from the tenure track of teaching due to disillusionment. Have you ever put years into something only to find it wasn't what you thought?

**13.** After catching Russell, Allen, Eugene, and Marvin cheating, Dylan decides to morph the situation into a life teaching moment. Have you had teachers do the same for you? How?

**14.** Dylan says, "I drive an old pickup because I understand it." Is your car a reflection of you? In what ways? If not, what car would be a reflection of you and why?

**15.** After eating five biscuits with Amos, Dylan realizes that he has not thought of Maggie for 45 minutes. Overwhelming guilt descends upon him. Why do you think he felt so guilty?

**16.** Dylan repeatedly tells us how much he misses the sound of Maggie's voice. If the love of your life, or someone you are extremely close to, were in a coma, what would you miss most? Why?

**17.** What purpose do you think Bryce Kai MacGregor (the naked, bag-pipe playing, movie-loving millionaire) plays to the story? Are there characters like him in your hometown?

**18.** How did you feel about Amanda and her pregnancy before you found out that it was a result of rape? How did you feel after?

## **Author Bio**

Charles Martin is a *New York Times* and *USA TODAY* bestselling author of 13 novels. He and his wife, Christy, live in Jacksonville, Florida.

## Critical Praise

"Charles Martin writes with the passion and delicacy of a Louisiana sunrise --- shades of shepherd's warning and a promise of thunderbolts before noon. Evoking a vivid picture of a young man's dance with dark and desperate moments of ordinary life, his story swirls like the river with drama, humour, and sense of hope. To many of us in England, the reality of America's deep south is as unknowable as the celestial kingdom of the orient in the days of sail, yet Charles has made it splendid and unforgettable. This is a lovely book that brims with heart and sensitivity, and most of all with a profound insight into what matters in our lives. I enjoyed it hugely."

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### **The Dead Don't Dance: A Novel of Awakening**

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