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Canada's Christian conversation

July / August 2023

FAITH TODAY

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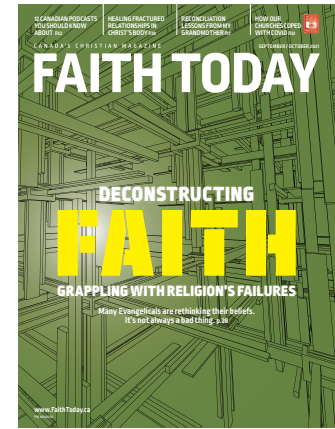
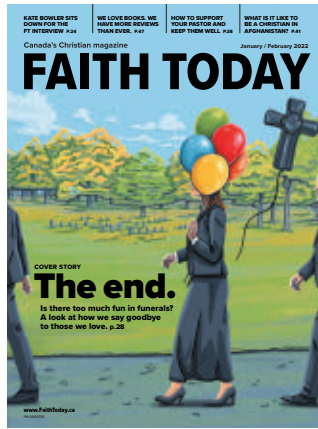
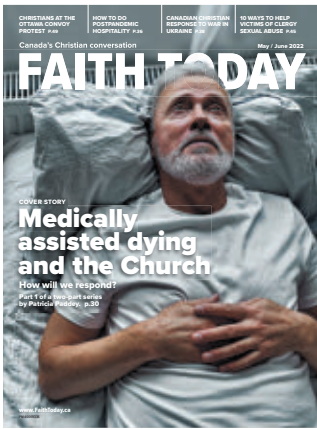
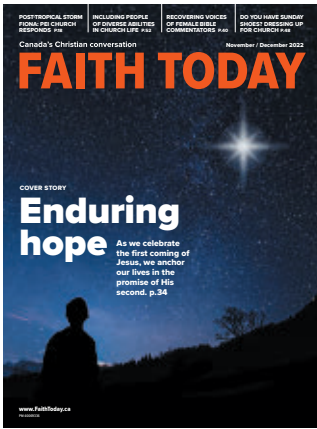
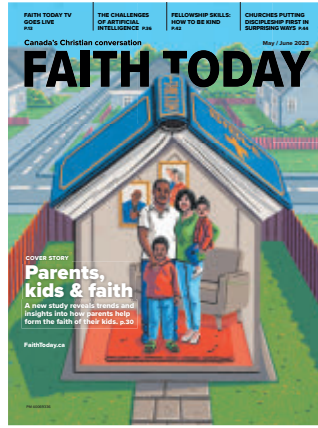
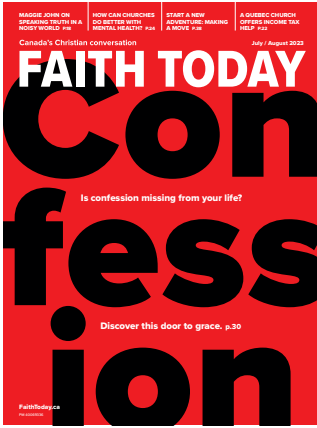
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KAREN STILLER & BILL FLEDDERUS

Behind the scenes



Turning 40

Thanks for joining us on this journey

F *aith Today* turns 40 this year, and what better way to celebrate than to learn the magazine has won eight first place awards from the Canadian Christian Communicators Association. To our memory it's our best performance at these national awards.

Our small team – Bill, Karen, Janice Van Eck our designer and the support staff from the EFC who help us move this work along – were all thrilled. So were the freelance writers we work with from coast to coast who provide the excellent Christian journalism and essays that make up each issue. All of us are motivated to help connect us as a Church living out a public witness in Canada.

The awards recognized the work of senior writer Patricia Paddey, who has written extensively for us on medical assistance in dying in Canada, as well as a piece Karen did on Christians at the Ottawa convoy. We highlight those two because they stand as obvious examples of what Christian journalism can do – fill in gaps in a national story, and add shading and nuance to issues where the Church might be either misrepresented or overlooked.

We extend a warm thank you to you, Dear Reader, for reading, subscribing, donating and maybe even sharing *Faith Today* with friends, family, neighbours and

fellow church members. We appreciate you so much. We take every letter to the editor seriously. We welcome and consider your feedback carefully. We do try to imagine ourselves as hosts of a particular kind of conversation, and you are an essential part of that dialogue.

So let the conversation continue! Our cover essay has book

We do try to imagine ourselves as hosts of a particular kind of conversation, and you are an essential part of that dialogue.

author Ken Shigematsu sharing with us an exhortation to the spiritual habit of confession. Patricia Paddey visits our pages again, sharing a personal essay on making a big life change. Sanctuary Mental Health Ministries' Daniel Whitehead presents a beautiful vision of what the Church could be, if we can straighten out our ideas around mental health.

We hope you can read this issue of *Faith Today* on a beach, in a hammock, on a bench under a tree or in your own backyard. If you feel like sending us a pic of yourself reading this issue in our Canadian summer somewhere, we'd love to see it. Send it to editor@FaithToday.ca.

Blessings to you and those you love this summer.

Karen Stiller of Ottawa, Ont., and Bill Fledderus of Hamilton, Ont., are senior editors of *Faith Today*.



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Podcast lineup

New in season six of the **Faith Today Podcast**:

-  **How to help people who are grieving**, with Susie Colby
-  **East Coast Theology: On the relevance of a seminary's local context**, with Anna Robbins

New from our sister podcasts:

-  **What do young Christians think about climate change?** with Philip Reilly (Faith Trends)
-  **Reconciliation in Rwanda**, with Joseph Nyamutera (All Things Reconciled)



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Readers write

Forcing religion on kids

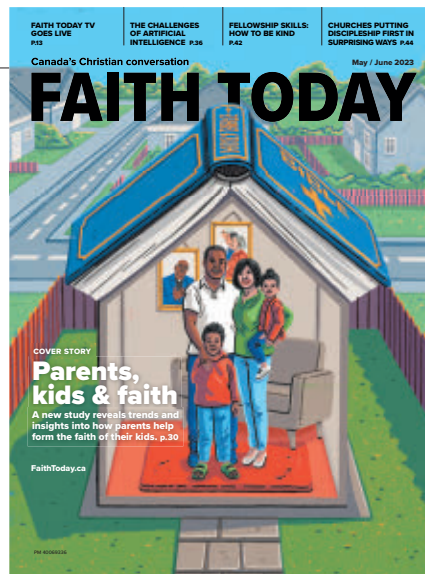
Re: Parents, kids & faith (May/June 2023)

THANK YOU for the article on parenting. It was very good.

The trend that "we don't want to force our religion on our children" concerns me. We don't have any trouble forcing them to learn math, and we strongly encourage them to go to school.

I have seen it modelled another way. The kids can miss school sometimes if they just feel too pressured, but not church! Only at church do we have the opportunity to encourage the family of God, and hear about God and what He says, and the amazing offer of salvation. Everything else is secondary.

Our pastor and his wife have modelled that, and although they had their usual teenage rebellions, the children were never allowed to miss church – it wasn't even thought of. They have all become enthusiastic young adults, and believers in and



lovers of Jesus, and put Him first in their lives – as they have seen their parents do.

Pat Schmidt, Burnaby, B.C.

Parental discipling steps

NOW THAT the parent survey has been done identifying needs, we need another

MILESTONES

APPOINTED



Leanne Friesen as executive minister of Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec, a

family of 330 churches. She has been the lead pastor of Mount Hamilton Baptist Church for almost 18 years. She succeeds Tim McCoy.

Wendy Lowe as director of Defend Dignity, a national organization working to end sexual exploitation. It recently submitted an application for charitable status, but currently remains under The Alliance Canada. Lowe has served as executive director at Calgary Pregnancy Care Centre for

26 years followed by work in resource development for Ambrose University in Calgary. She succeeds Glendyne Gerrard.



Matthew Delblanc as president of Pacific Life Bible College in Surrey, B.C.

Rev. Delblanc has 20 years of experience in various pastoral roles and churches, most recently at Gateway Foursquare Church in Campbell River, B.C. He succeeds Craig Millar.

Heather McCance as president of Atlantic School of Theology, effective Aug. 1. This ecumenical school was



founded in 1971 by local Anglican, United and

Roman Catholic institutions in Halifax. McCance is an Anglican who formerly directed pastoral studies at Montreal Diocesan Theological College and field education at the Montreal School of Theology.

RELOCATING

Mennonite Central Committee Canada is relocating its national office to 330 St. Mary Avenue, Winnipeg this summer. MCC is a global nonprofit that strives to share God's love and compassion through relief, development and peace building. MCC Canada and MCC Manitoba jointly owned

a property at 134 Plaza Drive that was sold in spring 2022.

As part of the relocation of **Eston College** (formerly Full Gospel Bible Institute, moving from Eston, Sask., to Regina) it has given its former rural campus to **Village of Hope**, a Christ-centred addictions charity. Village of Hope operates a ten-month residential program at a facility in New Brunswick and is run by an Eston College graduate. Eston College will start its first classes in the facility of Regina Apostolic Church in September.

ADDED

A new bachelor of communications and media studies

article on how to put into practice what the Bible says about teaching our children the ways of the Lord.


We start by praying for their conversion as soon as they are conceived (Psalm 139), we teach God's ways and commands to them diligently whether we are at home or along the way (Deuteronomy 6:1–9 and Psalm 78:1–8), especially before they are teenagers.

Yes, we can teach them about other religions when they are older, but always with a view that God's way for them is the best way. It is not a matter of which religion best suits them. All the while we are in prayer that God would give us wisdom as parents, asking Him to accompany His Word by the lifegiving work of His Holy Spirit, so that our children will understand how God has stooped toward

them in love by sending His Son to save them.

Our prayer should constantly be that our children will come to know Him in all His power, majesty and glory, love, mercy and grace. As we do this we live out our faith and joy in God before their very eyes. As the Apostle Paul said, "Be followers of me, even as I am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). May we as parents say that too.

Johanna Campbell, Abbotsford, B.C.

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(BCoMS) degree program will start this fall at **Redeemer University** in Ancaster, Ont. The new applied arts degree will be more concentrated on media production than the existing major in media and communications studies.

A new partnership between **Briercrest College and Seminary** in Saskatchewan and **Prairie College** in Alberta makes it possible for students to complete an integrated BA and MDiv degree program in five or six years rather than the typical seven.

AWARDED

Bruce Clemenger was given the 2023 Dr. Victor Goldbloom Award for Outstanding Interfaith Leadership last month by the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs. Clem-

enger (a *Faith Today* columnist) is senior ambassador and president emeritus of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, and has been involved in interfaith dialogue for several decades.

Faith Today recently won eight first-place awards from an annual contest held by the Canadian Christian Communicators Association. Work from 2022 won in categories such as feature, opinion and biographical profile articles, plus blog series, podcast series and the A.C. Forrest Memorial Award for socially conscious religious journalism. Details at FaithToday.ca/Awards2022.

 Do you have a milestone to share with the *Faith Today* community? Send your news to editor@FaithToday.ca.

Contributors

We asked . . .

What surprised you as you prepared your contribution to this issue?



MAGGIE JOHN

Story: Holding on to God's truth, p. 18

"As Christians, we continue to listen to the louder voices and the angrier tweets instead of doing what is, sometimes, the harder thing – digging into the Word of God, listening to the Holy Spirit and searching our hearts for what is the right way to respond to world issues. It's easy to get angry and echo a narrative that fits our feelings at the moment. It is harder still to take a step back and question our motives, and ask what is true."



SHANNEN POWELL

Story: Creating lasting connection online, p. 21

"How I use writing to create a sense of community is not something I've articulated before. I just do it. Once again I found it's not the writing that is the challenge, but the thinking that comes before it. I was surprised by how much I enjoyed putting my ideas, and effective habits and processes into words for the benefit of others."



KEN SHIGEMATSU


Story: Confession, p. 30

"When we feel shame because of something we've done or not done, confession is likely the last thing we feel like doing. But when we confess something to a trusted person – and they don't judge us and they say, "I'm not going anywhere" or "Welcome to the human race" – we find a portal to God's love, experience healing, and can live with greater joy and lightness of being."



SAM REIMER

Story: Why aren't Canadians listening to Christian leaders? p. 34

"Based on hundreds of interviews with Canadian, British and American Evangelicals over the years, I have been intrigued by the way they absorb, often unawares, the culture around them." 



Winnipeg's ICYA's Step Up program hires local youth to do construction projects, building their skills along the way.

Job training for Winnipeg youth

Church program focuses on practical skills

“It’s not just a job, but a chance to transform their lives.”

Building affordable housing and providing job training for at-risk youth is the goal of Step Up, a ministry of Winnipeg’s Inner City Youth Alive (ICYA.ca). The church-based organization is turning a derelict property in the city’s north end into a duplex for two lower-income families while helping former gang members learn construction skills.

“We want to try to meet the need for good, safe housing in the north end,” said ICYA general manager Andrew Braun, adding there is a strong need for good, safe housing in the area where 40 per cent of families in the north end live below the poverty line. Step Up, a social enterprise started by ICYA in 2021, hires local youth to do construction and repair projects in the north end, providing skills and employment training at the same time.

For Anthony Ho, who directs social enterprise efforts at ICYA, the duplex project is more than a way to provide better housing. It’s also a way for local youth to change their life trajectory. “It’s not just a job, but a chance to transform their lives,” he says, adding the organization mentors and offers role models for youth, some of whom were involved in gangs.

One of those former gang members is Terrence Melquist, 27. Now married and a father of two, he is an assistant to the director of Step Up. “I enjoy teaching the skills I have learned,” he says, adding he teaches things such as using power tools and how to properly use a measuring tape. It’s also about modelling good work behaviour such as “coming in each day on time and putting in your full effort.”

Melquist, who didn’t complete high school, gets a special lift from working in and helping the neighbourhood he grew up in. “Now I have a job and live a normal life.” Another Step Up participant is Charlie Chamakese, 24. “It feels really good to have a job and be learning new skills,” said the father of two. “I would like to start my own company one day.”

For Ho, Melquist and Chamakese are “representative of how lives can change through work, how they can become strong family men. They can hold their heads high.”

Braun says the project is “a win-win for families trapped in unsafe living conditions, and for young people who will be given a future-brightening job that will not only pay them a living wage, but also keep them out of gangs and out of jail.” **—JOHN LONGHURST**

PHOTO: ICYA / STEP UP CONSTRUCTION



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Recent study on worship music points to megachurches

Most music flows from one major source

Researchers released a new study in April showing the most popular worship songs we sing along to on the radio, through streaming apps and in church, can be traced back to a small group of megachurches.

The research group (Worship-LeaderResearch.com) cross-referenced data from two main worship song charts: Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) and Praise Charts (where churches purchase chord charts and arrangements), focusing on the years 2010 to 2020. They found that during that decade only 38 titles made both Top 25 charts. Of those 38 titles 33 could be traced to one of the Big 4 churches – Bethel Music, Hillsong, Elevation Worship and Passion – through direct association with or collaboration on the songs.

Of the remaining five songs (“King of My Heart” by John Mark and Sarah McMillan, “Tremble” by Mosaic MSC, “Great Are You Lord” by All Sons and Daughters,

The objective is to start a conversation about where our worship music comes from and what that means for local church musicians.



From 2010–2020 the Big 4 – Bethel Music, Hillsong (top), Elevation Worship and Passion – dominated the worship music charts.

“Good Good Father” by Housefires and “Way Maker” by Sinach), each saw one of the Big 4 release its own version of the song prior to its rise to the Top 25.

The research team’s objective is to start a conversation about where our music comes from. “Some say, ‘Yeah, the best music rises to the top,’” explains Mike Tapper, a researcher on the team. “On the flipside others say, ‘If we’re getting our theology and spiritual formation from a relatively small number of sources with potentially limited topics, what does that say about our spiritual formation and discipleship?’”

“What does that do for the local church musician that has a song and is trying to disseminate it across Canada? We’re encouraging people to consider the mechanisms that are at play.”

Tapper is based at Southern Wesleyan University, where he is chair of the school of religion and humanities, and professor of religion. The new study, he says, is “our attempt to ask questions like, ‘What do we think about these four large churches as being record labels and interfacing with the music industry?’ We’re inclined to associate the music we’re singing with anointing, but we’re not used to asking questions about how it’s coming to us.”

The researchers’ first goal was to look at the volume of worship songs and define where the music is coming from. With that complete their second goal is to examine the attitudes of worship leaders toward those songs and the people that produce them. The attitudinal findings will be released in the coming months.

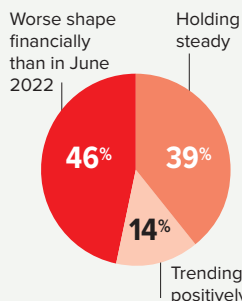
—JULIE FITZ-GERALD

By the numbers

Financial stress is up for many Canadians

54%

of renters and 45% of mortgage holders say they are finding their monthly payment for housing tough or very difficult.



DEBT LEVELS

Household debt

Canadians have the highest household debt levels of all G7 countries with 75% of it in mortgages. Among major Western nations only Australia has a higher household debt rate as a share of its GDP (119%).

1/4

of Canadians (26%) say their debt is a major source of stress while 42% say it's a minor worry.

62%

of Canadians rank inflation and cost of living among their top three concerns from a list of ten, far ahead of health care (47%), housing affordability (30%) and the environment (23%).

The pastoral search paradox

After 30 years in ministry leadership and over 100 hires, Steve Adams, principal of Adams & Co., has concluded there is a simple but manifold paradox in pastoral hiring. Here's the paradox – to get proficient at most tasks you need to be doing it regularly, *but* if you're hiring regularly enough to get good at it, you're doing something very wrong! This is where the experience and discernment of Adams and Co. really delivers.

Steve Adams has become a student of the Church. Having worked with hundreds of churches in Canada and the U.S. for more than three decades across many denominations, he understands the Church.

The critical element in a pastoral hire, humanly speaking, is *fit*. A godly pastor and a godly church can still have missed the mark on a good connection. One of Steve's goals in any hire is to dive deep – into a church's leadership style, into congregational culture, into staff chemistry. All this before he even begins the search.

Rev. Derek Bartlett, senior pastor at City Centre Church, has experienced this firsthand. "Steve's expertise in church consulting is the best you will find in Canada. I don't hesitate to call him an expert in matching the strongest candidates with the church's need. I enthusiastically and sincerely recommend Steve to your church."

Steve started Adams & Co. for one reason – to serve the Church. "Over the years while I was pastoring, I had pastors and boards coming to me to seek counsel about hiring. Church leaders were struggling to understand this wholly unique calling while



Steve Adams

pastors were struggling to make new relationships healthy and fruitful," says Adams.

This comes as no surprise to Adams. "When I meet with a new search team, they are usually wonderful people who love the Lord and their church. However, they have been tasked to hire for a role that they can't possibly fully understand because they've never done it. This turns out to be a daunting task that requires wise counsel and facilitation."

Richard Fleming, search chairman at Calvary Baptist Church in Guelph, Ont. offered, "Every meeting had purpose and moved us farther down the field. This role of middleman that he played was invaluable! We greatly sensed God's leading through Steve's direction."

To further complicate the landscape, we've seen a lot of staff shuffling

post-Covid. Not many pastors took on new positions during the pandemic, so we are now seeing many positions open. "One denomination I work with has more than 15 per cent of its churches looking for lead pastors," says Adams.

Both sides of this process really need to feel confidence in the transparency and safe ground involved in this pairing. "One of my non-negotiables when I take a search engagement," says Adams, "is to tell the church everything I understand about a candidate, and the prospect everything I know about the church. Both know the other isn't perfect, but confused expectations can bring about a lot of unnecessary pain."

Further, Adams & Co. is deeply involved in staff coaching and alignment. Every church staff hire changes the team culture. "No hire is done in isolation," says Adams. "Far too often, a misaligned hire does more harm than good to a pre-existing healthy and familial staff. Godliness is a non-negotiable, but you must also consider chemistry and staff team style."

If your church is hiring a pastor or staff member, connect with Adams and Co. today. Steve would love to have a conversation with you. There is no cost for the initial consultation and no obligation.

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Faith trends

Small church pastors in Canada: Averages in survey of evangelical clergy who lead fewer than 150 attendees



52

YEARS OF AGE

19

YEARS IN PASTORAL MINISTRY

3.6

MINISTRY POSITIONS SO FAR (INCLUDING CURRENT)

8

YEARS INTO CURRENT POSITION (MALES) OR 4.8 (FEMALES)

40%

PASTORING IS SECOND CAREER

26%

ARE CHURCH'S ONLY PAID STAFF

14%

HAVE SPOUSES WHO WORK IN PAID CHURCH POSITIONS (IF VOLUNTEERING IS INCLUDED RISES TO 52% FOR MALE PASTORS, 65% FOR FEMALE PASTORS)



32%

HAVE NONCHURCH SPOUSAL INCOME

62%

TAKE OFF ONE DAY OR LESS PER WEEK

35%

HAVE SWITCHED DENOMINATIONS IN THEIR PASTORAL CAREER



Listen to the latest **Faith Trends** podcast, hosted by the EFC's Rick Hiemstra and Lindsay Callaway, for conversations that connect research with ministry.

Community-focused property transformation

Charity helps churches refinance and welcome partners into their buildings

1/3

OF CANADA'S 12,000 PLACES OF WORSHIP ARE ESTIMATED TO CLOSE IN THE NEXT FIVE TO TEN YEARS

An estimated 4,000 of Canada's 12,000 places of worship will close in the next five to ten years, says Graham Singh, Montreal-based founder and CEO of Trinity Centres Foundation (TCF, TrinityCentres.org). TCF is a nonprofit whose mission is to transform faith properties for community impact. The vision of the organization is "lovingly preserving, restoring, and repurposing underutilized churches into community hubs and affordable housing," using a social business model.

Since launching in 2018 TCF has helped over 30 Christian, Jewish and Muslim congregations or dioceses to assemble, finance and operate projects that benefit their local communities. In one case, hundreds of housing units were developed behind a church which itself became an arts centre. At TCF's pilot site in Montreal, St. Jax's Anglican congregation now shares space with two evangelical churches and a circus company. "When community benefits, faith organizations benefit automatically, and we have the finances to repair heritage buildings," says Singh.

The board of St. Matthew's Lutheran Church in Kitchener wanted to create a community hub that included the art community, but board president Kim Schaner explains the group "just didn't know how to get there." Recognizing their shortage of

"Mission, evangelism and discipleship happen better when we are in shared spaces."



FEASIBILITY STUDY



PROPERTY AND LAND



FINANCING



DENOMINATIONS



ECOSYSTEM DEVELOPMENT



ONLINE COURSE

TCF offers a range of services to help churches transform faith properties for community impact.

ILLUSTRATIONS: PANDA VECTOR; SOURCE: SIGNIFICANT CHURCH: UNDERSTANDING THE VALUE OF THE SMALL EVANGELICAL CHURCH IN CANADA, SURVEY OF 569 SMALL CHURCH PASTORS FROM FEB. TO APRIL 2022. THEEFC.CA/SC; SCREENSHOT: TRINITY CENTRES FOUNDATION



With the help of Trinity Centres Foundation, St. Matthew's Lutheran Church in Kitchener, Ont., pivoted to sharing space with three other congregations and a nonprofit group.

resources, the board connected with TCF who helped them build partnerships in the community. Today St. Matthew's shares space with three other congregations and a nonprofit offering emergency food services. "It requires an open mind," Schaner advises. "And being open to change."

This summer TCF is launching a new online property course combining prerecorded sessions and live Zoom discussions. The course is aimed at board members of churches who recognize the impending need to make significant decisions about church property. The eight sessions cover topics such as vision casting, legal constraints, property valuation and development, and how to work with municipalities. Over a hundred churches registered for the course's April intake session.

As attendance declines across most faith traditions, Singh believes evangelical churches should prepare to confront possible challenges around property. For Singh it is about "figuring out the intelligent way to stay in a neighborhood. Listening to your neighborhood is about talking actively and professionally about what they need."

Even when reorganization of property arises from financial need, Singh believes such moves can open new doors. "Mission, evangelism and discipleship happen better when we are in shared spaces," says Singh. "As a church planter one of my key questions for the health of a church is, 'Is this a place where people want to invite their best non-Christian friends?'" Singh and Trinity Centres Foundation contend that when engaging community events happen inside a church building, it paves the way for deeper spiritual exploration down the road.

— AMY GABRIEL

Inspiring ideas

CONNECTED THROUGH PRAYER

When Covid restrictions began, Montreal's Livingstone Presbyterian Church found a way to connect through a daily online prayer group, praying at 7 p.m. for one hour. Once restrictions lifted the church kept the group going with about 10 per cent of the congregation praying together every weekday. ➤ [PCCWEB.CA/LIVINGSTONE](https://pccweb.ca/livingstone)

RESISTING THE FIRES

When wildfires burned over 150 homes on the outskirts of Halifax, N.S., churches across the area collaborated to support evacuees. New Horizon Baptist Church connected with several churches in evacuation zones to offer care and meals to those displaced. Using the facility of Rock Church (which was closer to the affected communities), they arranged for restaurants to bring in hot meals while volunteers connected with people, providing care, fellowship, personal care items and gift cards for those who needed clothes or other supplies. People were also able to use Rock Church's gym to relax or play pickup basketball. Grace Chapel and others made space available in sanctuaries and homes for people forced to evacuate. Grace Chapel also came together with Cornerstone Wesleyan for a prayer service, praying for the firefighters, those displaced and for rain. Churches are now working together to plan long-term care for those who lost their homes and belongings, or are dealing with grief and anxiety.

FIGHT CHURCH

Most churches try to prevent conflict among members, but not Fight Church. Pastor Mike Croteau of Community Life Church in Kanata, Ont., noticed people at the gym were very open to spiritual conversations. Inspired, he started teaching kickboxing classes at church. Lessons begin with a TED Talk-style Bible message followed by the fitness and kickboxing lesson. Afterward most participants stick around to hang out, talking about life and faith. Although some participants come from the church, many were previously unchurched. It gives people a chance to form relationships, hear about Jesus, and become comfortable in church and exploring faith. ➤ [SPUOTTAWA.COM](https://spuottawa.com)

KIDS' BIBLE MEMORIZATION

Learning and memorizing the Bible is really important, especially from an early age. Winnipeg's Bethesda Church makes this easy and practical. They always have two memory verses on the go, but they review each verse for at least three weeks, giving time for the verses to take root in kids' minds. In case a kid is away, the church lists the current and previous verses on their website.

➤ [BETHESDACHURCH.CA](https://bethesdachurch.ca)

—CRAIG MACARTNEY

➤ Visit FaithToday.ca/InspiringIdeas for more. Does your church or organization have great ideas to share? Send an email to editor@FaithToday.ca.



Eston College goes online

A biblical learning platform for everyone

“Whether you’re new to faith or have been in faith for years and years, ECO [Eston College Online] is for any age demographic and any ministry demographic,” says Kim Crowe, codirector of the program along with her husband Jeremy Crowe. The pair have dubbed

Noteworthy

Canadian prisoners dying by assisted suicide

Nine prisoners have died by assisted suicide in Canada’s federal prison system since assisted suicide became legal in 2016. That number is higher than any other country where euthanasia is allowed. Belgium, which has notoriously lax assisted suicide laws and first legalized it in 2002, only euthanized their first prisoner this year. One of the first offenders Canada euthanized was serving a two-year sentence for a nonviolent crime. He requested assisted suicide after learning he had a terminal illness and being denied parole. Another of the nine euthanized offenders lived with a mental illness and threatened to kill himself if he was not granted assisted suicide. ➔ [APTNEWS.CA](https://www.aptnnews.ca)

Young people more likely to believe in hell

Young people are more likely to believe in hell despite being less likely to identify as religious, according to a British study from King’s College London. Only 35 per cent of Baby Boomers reported believing in an afterlife and 18 per cent reported believing in hell. By contrast, more than half of respondents born since 1980 believe in an afterlife with 32 per cent

believing in hell. It’s a surprising revelation given 46 per cent of the pre-war generation and only 27 per cent of those born since 1980 see themselves as religious. ➔ [TELEGRAPH.CO.UK](https://www.telegraph.co.uk)

First ever in utero brain surgery

At 30 weeks pregnant a Louisiana woman learned her baby had a brain defect and a 1 per cent chance of survival. In cases like this abortion is almost the rule, but the mom and some innovative doctors found a different way. The mother flew to Boston where doctors performed the first-ever brain surgery on a baby in the mother’s womb. They blocked a vein that had attached in error to an artery and was flooding the baby’s brain with too much blood. Baby Denver was born early, but healthy, on March 17. ➔ [USNEWS.COM](https://www.usnews.com)

Only silent prayers allowed

Quebec’s education minister is moving to ban any prayer in public schools unless it is “discreet” and “silent.” While some Christians may disagree with public schools having prayer rooms for Muslims, Bernard Drainville’s stated goal is secularism. His move would also ban religious clubs from reserving classrooms and potentially even prohibit gathering for prayer in school

hallways during lunch. Arguing for state secularism, he said that if they allow students to gather, “It becomes jurisprudence and there will be requests everywhere.” ➔ [NATIONALPOST.COM](https://www.nationalpost.com)

Evangelicals most engaged with the Bible

Ninety-three percent of Canadian Evangelicals have a physical Bible in their home versus 72 per cent of mainline Protestants and 52 per cent of Catholics. These were among the findings of a Cardus study asking more than 4,000 Canadians about their engagement with sacred texts. Nearly two thirds (63 per cent) of Christians who have a Bible hardly ever or never read it, although 60 per cent of Evangelicals say they read it at least once a month. The survey also evaluated how well Christians know the Bible. While only 19 per cent of Catholics and 37 per cent of mainline Protestants correctly identified the first book of the New Testament, 75 per cent of Evangelicals answered correctly. Evangelicals were the only group with more than 50 per cent of respondents correctly answering any of these questions.

➔ [CHURCHFORVANCOVER.CA](https://www.churchforvancover.ca)

—CRAIG MACARTNEY

the online platform Netflix for Bible college.

Launched in 2021 during Covid, the vision for ECO (ECOonline.ca) was to provide “online Pentecostal education, spiritual formation, ministry skills and leadership development for church leaders, volunteers and disciple makers” in their local context.

ECO offers online courses presented in ten-minute video segments followed by discussion questions. Each course contains approximately 25 to 30 videos, representing four to five hours of class time. Lessons are taught by Eston faculty and other ministry leaders, including Sean Stevenson-Douglas, president of the college, who presents the Intimacy with Christ course; Nikolas Amodeo, lead pastor of Dryden Full Gospel Church, who teaches Intro to Pastoral Ministry; and motivational speaker Rob Parkman, who teaches Communications and Public Speaking.

Kim Crowe says ECO attendees range from church small groups, to individuals who simply want to deepen their walk with Christ, to students taking the courses for credit toward a college certificate or degree. She notes that since ECO is part of Eston College it is accredited.

The online platform offers a one-week free trial after which subscription fees are \$25 per month or \$275 per year. It's easy to see why the Crowes compare the program to Netflix for Bible college. Attendees can take whatever courses pique their interest, at their own pace, either for credit or their own personal pleasure, all from the comfort of their own homes.

“We want people to know that this is for everyone,” says Kim. “We have two classes that are denomination specific, but the rest are nondenominational. ECO is for everyone, for every stage of life you're in, wherever you're at.”

—JULIE FITZ-GERALD



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DAVID GURETZKI

Cross connections

On waiting

Dealing with uncertain futures

I've waited a lot lately.

I'm writing this column while waiting for a connecting flight on the way home from South Africa after some meetings with the World Evangelical Alliance's International Council. Getting to and from Johannesburg from Canada was the longest trip I've ever taken with 24 hours of layovers and almost 40 hours of flying over one week. Lots of waiting.

But that's just one kind of waiting – you more or less know how much time is in-between events, though with air travel these days even that is uncertain.

Other kinds of waiting can be significantly more anxiety inducing. Like waiting for that much-needed tax refund stuck in the system. Or waiting for the results of an exam or medical test. Or to hear if a loved one's surgery was successful.

Conceptually parallel to the concept of angst – general unspecified anxiety – is a type of unspecified time of waiting where you have no idea when, where or how the waiting will be over. Many spend years waiting for that special someone who hasn't yet shown up – and so they continue to wait. Others wait for clear answers to tragedy and loss: *Why me, Lord? Why them? Why now? Why not now?* Often, no answer comes.

Why do we have to wait so much?

We live in an instant gratification world. The faster things come to us, the more impatient we become. We can't imagine why the package we ordered today isn't on our doorstep tomorrow and we certainly can't fathom why it takes so



It is in suffering our ability to wait is most tested – and most needed.

long for the next Netflix episode to load.

It doesn't take a degree in theology to discern the relationship between waiting and the spiritual fruit called patience (Galatians 5:22). It's encapsulated in the old quip, "Be careful when you ask the Lord for patience because He may make you wait."

As I searched scripturally into why we have to wait, I was surprised the connection between waiting and patience wasn't as clearly delineated.

It didn't take long to return to the oft-quoted verse, "They that wait upon the Lord will renew their

strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall walk and not grow weary; they shall run and not grow faint" (Isaiah 40:31).

Shockingly, this verse doesn't connect waiting with the formation of patience at all. That's hard for those of us in a technique- and results-oriented society, who feel waiting must have some kind of necessary outcome or purpose. Surely waiting should yield patience!

The verse *doesn't* say those who wait on the Lord will eventually find out why they waited. It doesn't say waiting will produce patience. It doesn't say that whether walking or running they can rest in the fact

AT ISSUE

For prayer and action

they will eventually arrive.

What is clear is as we wait on the Lord, we'll gain the strength needed for the moment. In other words, "The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him" (Lamentations 3:25).

There is one place where waiting is demanded more than any other and that is in the midst of suffering. In the night leading to His death, Jesus was in Gethsemane, waiting on the Father. Indeed, He chastised His disciples that they could not even wait with Him for a short time and fell asleep at the watch.


I tend to be charitable toward the disciples because they didn't have a sense of the imminence of Jesus' death that He did. But here Christ modelled what the prophet promised – waiting on God strengthened Jesus even when the outcome was still somewhat unclear, even for Him. Jesus did, after all, ask God to take the cup from Him if possible.

And so it is in suffering our ability to wait is most tested – and most needed.

I'm a bit of a wimp when it comes to pain and quick to reach for the Tylenol. But what happens when the pills and therapies don't work? When the physical pain becomes chronic or terminal? When the mental anguish can't be calmed? When the answers we seek aren't forthcoming?

It is then we are called to wait on the Lord. Not that such waiting will necessarily resolve the presenting problem. It may not. But that in waiting on God in those difficult moments, we can experience a strengthening from the Lord that otherwise we may never experience.

And now, if you'll excuse me, I have to get in line to wait to board yet another delayed flight. **FI**

 David Guretzki is the EFC's president and CEO. Read more of these columns at FaithToday.ca/CrossConnections.

Forming relationships to move toward reconciliation

It's one thing to read a book about forming good relationships between First Nations people and newcomers to Canada. It's another thing to jump on a Zoom call or meet someone for coffee and have these conversations face to face.

Real interactions are a great way to make complex topics like reconciliation become tangible because they involve learning how to listen well and discovering different perspectives. Reconciliation Through Relationships (RightRelationship.ca), an initiative launched by The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, is designed to form these kinds of friendships.

Through funding from Bridgeway Foundation and Stronger Philanthropy, the program launched its first cohort with 20 participants earlier in 2023. The cohort was divided into pairs or groups of three. They had a series of meetings over a couple of months where they got to know one another. Together they discussed resources on Indigenous history and current issues such as justly sharing land, reconciliation within the Church, and lamenting racism shown in institutions such as residential schools.

The Council of Canadians estimates 73 per cent of First Nations' water systems are at medium or high risk of contamination, and some of the long-term water advisories on reserves have lasted nearly 30 years. An Indigenous person is more than twice as likely than a



Caucasian person to be killed by police in Canada.

These are pressing concerns that require compassion and action. Colonial thinking has led to paternalistic and harmful interactions in the past (and present). This history makes it even more important to create spaces where Indigenous and

"RTR is showing great promise in sparking reconciliation one friendship at a time."

–Joel Gordon, director of the EFC's Centre for Ministry Partnership and Innovation

non-Indigenous people can meet and work through these issues.

One practical way to form relationships is to get connected to local Indigenous contexts. Many Canadian cities have Friendship Centres which offer culturally based services to Indigenous people. They can also act as community hubs where Indigenous and non-Indigenous people share traditions and learn from each other. RTR is another such opportunity meant to cultivate ground for action to be made together in partnership. **FI**



The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada's Centre for Ministry Partnership and Innovation facilitates collaboration among affiliates and partners to support ministries and congregations across Canada. TheEFC.ca/CMPI



PASS THE MIC | **MAGGIE JOHN**

The gathering place

Holding on to God's truth

Even in a world of noise

Everyone wants to be heard. Do you ever think about how much noise is around us? The competition for your ear and your attention is loud and it is real.

Recently I had the honour of moderating a mayoral debate in Toronto. With the six top candidates in a race of 102, there are a lot of thoughts on how the city should be run, and as we saw that evening, when someone stormed the stage, it can get contentious.

But how do we wade through all the noise? How do we decipher what is true in a world of plurality?

It often seems the holy trinity of social media – Twitter, Instagram and TikTok – have the market cornered when it comes to our time, attention and effort. However, the Book of Daniel shows us how a man and his three friends were able to drown out the noise and stay focused on the mission.

There were no memes or hashtags when this book was written (around 164 BC). The attention-grabbing voice belonged to one man – King Nebuchadnezzar. But consider the awesome integrity, strength and quiet resolve shown by Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. Pulled into the king's fold, they were among many young Israelite men forced to serve the king – yet their story is not one of standing against a king, but instead standing with the King of Kings.

Forcibly renamed, tasked with interpreting dreams, thrown into a den of lions and a furnace filled with fire – always their eyes stayed focused on the God of Israel, not the man claiming to be god.



How do we decipher what is true in a world of plurality?

“They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God” (Daniel 4:28).

Can we say the same?

I have been a voice in media for more than 20 years. I am one of those voices vying for your attention every week. I have reported on some of the biggest events in recent history, on countries reeling from the aftermath of natural disasters and terrorist attacks. At night I've heard the creaking of buildings threatening to crumble due to seismic shifts – the rebar and cement threatening to let go, failing in the one task they are expected to perform.

I wonder if, like these buildings, we are caving to the pressure of the seismic shifts we see and hear around us. I fear that, with all the

noise, we are sometimes being swayed by the loud charismatic political and church leaders of our age, and neglecting to “study to show thyself approved unto God” (2 Timothy 2:15).

In the effort to keep standing, have we failed in the one task we are expected to perform, which is holding on to God's truth?

I have watched people navigate through pain and loss over these years. I have looked into the eyes of people left with nothing but the clothes on their backs. And yet what stands out to me is that in every aftermath the noise eventually dies down – or at least there is a clear differentiation of what is noise and what is truth. And truth always stays, always sticks. It never leaves and brings with it a sense of hope and resolve.

It's true for the woman in Haiti, nine months after the 2010 earthquake, living in a muddy tent with her two small children, nowhere else to turn, her eyes filled with pain and bewilderment, and yet clinging to hope because that's all she had left.

It's true for Joy McCabe, in Portapique, N.S., the site of Canada's deadliest mass shooting, although it took a year after the killings before she was able to see colour again.

There is always a thread of faith in every story, journey and experience. It is never loud, but like God showed Elijah in 1 Kings 19:11–12, He is always in the still, small voice. As we see in Daniel, God reveals Himself not in the bombastic approaches of the kings of the earth, but instead in the assurance He is King of the present. **T**


 Maggie John is host of the radio show *Toronto This Weekend* and has worked as a TV host and producer, most recently at *Context Beyond the Headlines*. She's also founder and executive director of The Baby Depot, a charity in Hamilton, Ont., that each year clothes 250 babies with a year's worth of free clothing.

PHOTO: JOEL MUNIZ

NEWS FROM THE EFC

Reverse hastened death for mental illness

The law allowing assisted dying for mental illness will take effect in March 2024. The EFC is asking for MAiD for mental illness to be stopped altogether and supports a private member's bill with that goal. Bill C-314 had its first hour of debate in the House of Commons in May. Please ask your MP to support Bill C-314. ➤ [THEEFC.CA/C-314](https://www.theefc.ca/c-314)

New brochures

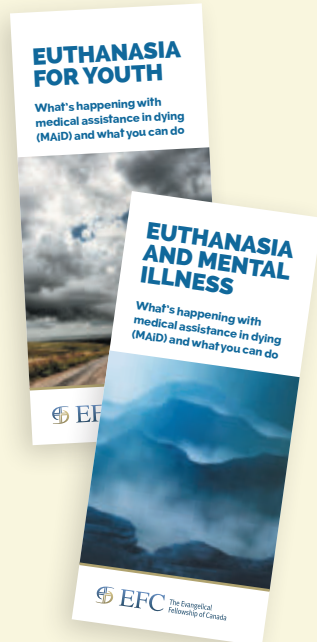
The EFC has created new brochures on *Euthanasia and Mental Illness*, and on *Euthanasia for Youth*. They briefly explain changes to the law, reasons to be concerned and what you can do. Share them with family, friends and your church community. Available in English and French. Print copies available on request. ➤ [THEEFC.CA/TAKEACTIONONMAID](https://www.theefc.ca/takeactiononmaid)

Congregational statement

More than 50 leaders of Christian organizations signed a statement this spring lamenting assisted death in Canada. The EFC encourages use of the Declare and Resolve statement in local congregations. ➤ [THEEFC.CA/DECLAREANDRESOLVE](https://www.theefc.ca/declareandresolve)

Advice to Parliament on human trafficking

The EFC sent a brief May 2 to a parliamentary committee studying human trafficking in Canada. The three-page brief recommends a permanent antitrafficking strategy and continued support for the



Free resources: The EFC has new brochures available in English and French which explain changes to the laws on MAiD in Canada.

existing prostitution laws along with other measures. It also notes prostitution is the most common end point for trafficking in Canada.

➤ [THEEFC.CA/GOVERNMENT](https://www.theefc.ca/government)

Increase protection for pregnant women

Bill C-311 would establish the abuse and harm of a pregnant woman as factors for judges to consider when sentencing criminals. Use the EFC's sample letter to ask your MP to support this private member's bill, initiated by MP Cathay Wagantall.

➤ [THEEFC.CA/C-311](https://www.theefc.ca/c-311)

Criminal records of prostituted persons

The EFC is asking the public safety minister to allow

prostituted persons to have their criminal records cleared for prostitution-related convictions incurred before the *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act*. The current law recognizes prostitution is inherently exploitative and harmful. It recognizes the vast majority of individuals in prostitution are not there by way of free and informed choice. A criminal record can be a barrier to exiting prostitution.

➤ [THEEFC.CA/LETTERS](https://www.theefc.ca/letters)

Peace & Reconciliation Network appoints Canadian

Joel Zantingh has been appointed co-ordinator for Canada at the Peace & Reconciliation Network (PRN), working with global director Phil Wagler of Kelowna, B.C. Zantingh, an ordained minister with the Evangelical Missionary Church in Canada, will work to inspire, equip and



synergize peacebuilding and reconciliation ministry in the Canadian Church. The PRN is a commission of the World Evangelical Alliance and supported by the EFC. Zantingh's appointment is part of a collaboration with Lausanne Movement Canada, an EFC affiliate, where he just became director of engagement. ➤ [THEEFC.CA/MEDIA](https://www.theefc.ca/media)



Event calendar

Deepening Understanding for Intercultural Ministry (FILL), Edmonton, July 10–14

Praying for Canada

(Canadian Missions Conference), online July 20

Stories of Transformation in Canada (TOWC), online July 25, Aug. 22

The Future of Science and Faith (CSCA),

Mississauga, July 28–31

World Day Against Trafficking in Persons (UN), July 30

Make Reconciliation

Possible (HHTN/PRN/CRC), Bowen Island, B.C., July 30–Aug. 3

Global Leadership

Summit (GLS), simulcast various sites, Aug. 3–4

Gospel Impact Conference (ShareWord Global), online Aug. 18–19

International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief (UN), Aug. 22

➤ Visit [TheEFC.ca/Calendar](https://www.theefc.ca/calendar) for the latest updates or to publicize your own event.



➤ Sign up for the EFC's weekly emails at [TheEFC.ca/Update](https://www.theefc.ca/update).



ADAM RUDY

History lesson

Christians preserving democracy

Mid-century Canadian Protestant views on democratic citizenship

When was the last time you heard a pastor urge their congregation to vote in the next election? If your experience has been anything like mine, politics and what it means for a Christian to live out their civic (as opposed to spiritual) citizenship have rarely, if ever, been addressed in churches. But this has not been the norm in Canada historically.

During the Second World War, when feelings of national pride were running high, Canadian Protestants had a great deal to say about how Christians should practise their national citizenship, though they did not necessarily agree on how this goal should be reached.

Some, like J. Morton Freeman, secretary of the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order, believed that “For the sake of Christ and the Gospel, the Christian citizen of today must relate his duties to ends, and those ends must include some definite and not too remote social objectives in keeping with the Spirit of the Gospel.”

A related perspective can be seen in the comments of Frank Haskins, a Western Baptist leader. He suggested Christians had “the obligation of seeking to establish the principles of righteousness and equity in the laws of our land.”

Likeminded Protestants agreed that sacrificial action, a determination to guard Canada’s heritage of democracy and a dedication to the cause of a more Christian society were all appropriate and necessary duties for a Christian to practise full democratic citizenship.

The country’s largest Protestant denominations had aimed through-

out the previous century to shape Canadian society around Christian values such as caring for the vulnerable and including the marginalized, and they had reached a remarkable degree of success in that work. Churches were involved, through money or personnel or both, in almost all social reform in Canada that occurred between 1850 and 1930. What link did they see between social reform and democratic citizenship?

Well, many Canadian Protestants believed democracy was inextricably linked with Christianity. Not only did they assume Canada was a Christian country, but they believed its form of government, inherited from Britain, was ultimately rooted in Christianity. As professor and author John Braithwaite wrote, “Democracy, then, is a form of government which can be established and maintained only by those who have learned to govern themselves on a moral and spiritual basis.”

Braithwaite continued. “I like to think that democracy was born in the Garden of Gethsemane in that hour when the Master cried ‘Father. . . .’ In that moment the complete surrender of self-will and self-interest for the good of humanity was achieved.”

R. C. Granberry declared, “A vital Christianity and a genuine democracy are inseparable. The native air of Christianity is liberty. . . . Liberty and the Spirit of Jesus are one in the same.”

These statements might be startling or even seem outlandish to those of us in the 21st century. They illustrate why Canadian Protestants

held active Christian citizenship in such high esteem. If democracy was Christian and so was Canada, then anything that threatened those called for immediate action. Putting aside these views of Christian democracy, we can still learn from Canadian Protestants’ ideas about democratic citizenship.


If democracy is not ultimately rooted in Christianity, what is it built on? What compels you, if anything, to be an active citizen? Do Christians have any good reasons to do so?

During the Second World War, Norman Linton responded helpfully to these questions in his denomination’s newspaper. He believed democracy stood on two fundamental principles – the principle of freedom and the duty of considering others.

Regarding these two he wrote, “The privilege [freedom] we are all willing to accept, but are we so ready to carry out the duty? Can we come to see this duty not as something burdensome, but as a joyous privilege? The privilege of loving our neighbour as much that we want to help him in every way possible?”

Today we may still find the simple principle of loving your neighbour, set forth by Christ Himself, is our primary guide for practising an engaged citizenship. **✠**

Linton believed democracy stood on two fundamental principles – the principle of freedom and the duty of considering others.

 Adam Rudy of Hamilton, Ont., is an adjunct instructor at Carey Theological College, with a PhD in Church history from McMaster Divinity College. His research and teaching interests include Canadian church history, Early Church history, church and culture, and the history of Christian missions and imperialism. Read more at [FaithToday.ca/HistoryLesson](https://www.faithtoday.ca/HistoryLesson).



PASS THE MIC | SHANNEN POWELL

Thriving in digital

Creating lasting connection online

Commodification versus community

Over the last few years, I've had the joyful opportunity to contribute to a women's collective called The Well Practice aimed at helping women dive deeper into their faith through devotions, discussions and deep conversations.

It launched during the pandemic, and a vision that started as an in-person community quickly turned digital. This forced us to rethink how we saw community and participation. How would we create this digitally connected community of women?

It's a struggle most Canadians are now familiar with – how should we represent ourselves and our ministries online?

The problem is that social media and so many other online connecting tools frame human interaction as a consumer relationship. Our audience is both the item for sale and the purchaser. We're trying to buy attention and leverage interaction.

How can we avoid falling into the trap of treating our audience as consumers rather than a beloved community? It's tricky because we all want engagement. We want people to like what we spend so much time thinking about and creating.

These aren't bad desires so long as our priorities online reflect the priorities of our ministry in the real world. Community over commodification. Connection over superficial engagement. And most importantly, reaching people with the Good News of Jesus, and helping them see and feel His love for them.

So how?

● Conversation over engagement.

Every comment, like, save and share is a point of engagement – and whenever possible should be used to encourage conversation. Compose captions, emails and blogs as open-ended discussions. Demonstrate a willingness and desire for discussion. This even applies to simple save the dates. Make sure the reader feels you are personally inviting them. You want to see them there! Their presence is important.

● Be an approachable authority.

Your audience is there because you have information they need or want. You add value to their lives. You need to decide what that value is. Whether you share detailed information about an event or encourage them to dive deeper into their faith, do it from a place of authentic authority. With The Well much of what we share is short think pieces to encourage women in their faith. And while we speak from a place of authority in terms of having the knowledge and insight to share, we are also approachable. We welcome feedback. We share our personal experiences and struggles, hoping to encourage others to do the same.

● Be real.

None of us are perfect in the real world, so we shouldn't fake perfection online. That doesn't mean you shouldn't aim for excellence. It's still important to avoid mistakes, create great content and share material we're proud of. But within all that there needs to be a realness, a willingness to be raw, and an openness to share a more honest

side of ourselves and our organizations. If appropriate, introduce your audience to your team. If your goal is to create community, show them who they're connecting with. If you want to foster community among your audience, lead the charge in forming that community.

We've all found ourselves watching behind-the-scenes videos. Many of us love watching celebrity home tours or interviews (where are all my Hot One fans?). We enjoy getting a peak behind the curtains into these people's lives because we feel more connected to and invested in them when we know what colour their kitchen is or their spice tolerance. The same applies to our audience.

I previously worked for a church that had a vast digital presence. They drew in many people on a Sunday, but online is where they thrived. And although we produced a lot of great content, the most popular was a series of joke videos about what it was like to work in the office. With The Well the posts that perform best are ones where we openly share our struggles and ask for prayer.

The key when producing any content is to remember your goal. Is your audience a point of sale or a community? Are you looking to commodify their time or add value to their lives? Your community are real people who we want to know Jesus better. The way we engage and share should reflect God's love and demonstrate the open invitation to explore what it means to have a relationship with Him. **TI**



None of us are perfect in the real world, so we shouldn't fake perfection online.

 Shannen Powell is a freelance writer and the copywriter at Alpha Canada in New Westminster, B.C. Find more of these columns at FaithToday.ca/ThrivingInDigital.

CHURCH IN COMMUNITY

Creative ways to love our neighbours

A free community tax clinic



Renaissance Church in Quebec City offers an annual free tax clinic to help those in their community. This year they served 350 clients during March and April.

THE CHURCH

Renaissance Church, Quebec City

THE CHALLENGE

Offer free income tax services to the community

THE COST

Volunteer time and paper for the printer

Pastor Stéphane Couture explains:

For the last 13 years our Evangelical Baptist congregation has offered an annual free tax clinic for our community. Four volunteers, on average, complete and file tax returns for people with a modest income and a simple tax situation.

We offer this program through the Community Volunteer Income

Tax Program (CVITP) of the government. That Canada Revenue Agency program is set up to enable churches and other community groups to offer free clinics to help people who can't afford or access paid help to complete and file their income tax returns.

When we first started to offer this service, we had nine clients. We tripled that number the next year, and the next, and then it kept doubling. This year we served 350 clients during March and April, the two months of the tax season. For us, it is low-income people and in Quebec that means less than \$35,000 a year for an individual, and less than \$45,000 a year for a couple. Most of our clients are retired people, immigrants, students, people on welfare or very low-income individuals.

People who would never cross the threshold of a church feel welcomed and helped.

They are ordinary church people who want to help and understand the basic rules about income tax. You don't need to be an accountant or specialist. Our volunteers are people with free time who learn how it works. The government furnishes you with income tax software that you use, so it's a very professional preparation. The tax forms we complete are very simple ones and the government also provides online training. Every year we learn about any new tax credits or changes to the tax forms.

This is a very simple thing most people could offer through their churches. We estimate that, by offering this service, we are enabling people in our community to collectively save an estimated \$45,000 to \$60,000 in fees.

You can set it up in different ways, but we have a very simple routine. People call and make an appointment to come and meet with a volunteer. The volunteer takes basic information they need to complete the tax forms and the client fills out an authorization form. We meet again with them a week later to give them a copy of their declaration and we submit their forms online.

By meeting with the clients, we are given the opportunity to know our community better. People who would never cross the threshold of a church feel welcomed and helped. It gives us wonderful opportunities to have faith conversations with people of other faiths. For our volunteers it's been an eye-opening opportunity to see how blessed they are. To be able to just listen and have conversations and bless them is wonderful. **FT**

 Do you have a story to share about your church's community outreach? Contact our editors at editor@FaithToday.ca. Read more stories at FaithToday.ca/CIC.

GLOBAL VILLAGE

Lausanne Movement grows

Nearly 50 years ago John Stott and Billy Graham convened the First International Congress on World Evangelization known as the Lausanne 1. The fourth such gathering is now planned for Korea in 2024.

Today the Lausanne Movement for global mission is championed by a network of 300 scholars, practitioners and pastors committed to the gospel presented to every person, and a disciple-making church in every region.

Lausanne's "new season" is now represented by new branding, says Michael Oh, global executive director and CEO. "We wanted a brand that reflects our sustained values and represents our growth."

Lausanne encourages mission influencers passionate about and active in global mission. In today's world they can be seminary presidents and homemakers, church planters and prayer warriors.

Russ Martin, Lausanne's chief communications officer says, "Lausanne is signalling a greater intentionality of a comprehensive, co-ordinated and collaborative global mission." [LAUSANNE.ORG](https://www.lausanne.org)

Support for Christian education in Bethlehem

St. Aphrem's Christian School recently celebrated 20 years of offering Christian education in Bethlehem. The school caters to poor Christian children in a city where they are marginalized.

The school opened in 2003



A teacher helps her students at Hoya Primary School near Lundazi, in Eastern Zambia. The school is supported through its local church by EduDeo Ministries, an international development organization advancing Christ-centred education. EduDeo partners with locally led school groups in the majority world. It has offices in Hamilton, Ont. [EduDeo.com](https://www.edudeo.com)

in a quiet area of the city with 15 children in kindergarten against a backdrop of regional violence. Today it has an enrollment of 650, reports school director Amal Behnam.

Parents in the community struggle financially because their income is dependent on tourism, which has experienced a severe downturn since the pandemic.

The school is supported by Barnabas Aid, an international Christian agency founded 30 years ago. Its North American offices are in Lancaster, Penn.

The Barnabas support ensures all students who want to attend can gain a broad

understanding of the Bible and learn Aramaic.

[BARNABAS.AID.ORG](https://www.barnabasaid.org)

New global disciple-making movement

The mission of the newly launched Galilean Movement is "urgently multiplying disciple-making workers for God's harvest worldwide."

The new ministry is affiliated with the World Evangelical Alliance and has Bishop Efraim Tendero as its first executive director. Tendero is a former WEA leader from the Philippines.


"There have been numerous [missionary] movements,

but very few global ministries focused on disciple making," says Tendero. "The Galilean Movement was officially launched from the Victory Christian Fellowship, which became the role model for disciple-making ministry through campus ministry in the Philippines."

The church will serve as a hub, establishing a network conveying vision, knowledge, resources and practices to create intentional disciple making. It will arrange conferences and consultations at national and local levels to mobilize teams to lead local churches' disciple-making efforts.

The new initiative aims to train 2 million disciple makers to reach 2 billion people.

[WORLDDEA.ORG](https://www.worlddea.org)

 David Donaldson is interim pastor of Priory Park Baptist Church in Guelph, Ont. He also works with PACE Ministries in Kenya through MSCCanada.org.

"Death need not be shrouded in silence. Faith communities, by (re)integrating the role of religion in death, can facilitate more open, honest and life-giving understandings. We can strive to become a society that can die well and, in turn, live well."

—*Ashes to Ashes*, a recent report at [TheosThinkTank.co.uk](https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk)



THE FT INTERVIEW

DANIEL WHITEHEAD of Vancouver is chief executive officer at Sanctuary Mental Health Ministries. Sanctuary equips Christians to support mental health and well-being, including through *The Sanctuary Course*, developed especially for churches to raise awareness and start conversations about mental health. He spoke to *Faith Today's* Karen Stiller about his own journey through burnout, how churches can do better and what it might cost to be vulnerable.

Faith Today: Tell us first, Daniel, where churches might need to improve when it comes to mental health.

Daniel Whitehead: I was in pastoral ministry for about ten years before I had what felt like an enforced break, but it felt like it was a collaboration between me and God. But I was essentially a burnt-out pastor and didn't know it. I had no idea I was struggling.

My wife turned to me one day and said, "I can't remember the last time I saw you smile." And I realized in that moment, when I was confronted with that reality, that I didn't think I'd felt any emotion for the last year.

Now the scary part is that I was able to be a pastor for a year who was numb to what was happening. And that was really because my emotional resources had

been exhausted. I'm not here to blame anyone. Well-intended people do the best they can but, in hindsight, I realized there was a lot of implicit pressure that wasn't conducive to my well-being. When I reflect back on my experience of leading a church for a number of years as a young man, I would guess 80 per cent of pastoral issues I saw were directly relatable to mental health. There were many voices in that sort of church environment from people who were saying things like, "The answer is just prayer. We just need to pray and we just need to fast." People are looking for quick, simple answers to what are really complex issues. I think about individuals who were in the church I led who were crippled with various mental illnesses, and a well-intended church actually did a really lousy job of helping

people make sense of those experiences. **FT:** So you are saying that a spiritualizing of mental health and care that is limited to suggesting prayer, Bible study and quiet times is common and clumsy?

DW: Yeah, I think so. I mean, one of my good friends John Swinton, who's an ambassador for us, is a practical theologian and he talks about lazy theodicy that exists in the Church. Just lazy ways we try and frame why bad things are happening. And one particularly lazy theodicy that seems to come up again and again is to just read the Bible and pray more. That's the answer.

It's not like reading the Bible and praying is a bad thing. Those things can take place. Although I would say for someone in the midst of a mental health crisis, they may not be ready to read certain parts of



**“People are
looking for quick,
simple answers
to what are
really complex
issues.**

”

PHOTO CREDIT: [unreadable]

THE FT INTERVIEW

Scripture. So they probably need the community to help them work out what they're able to hold at that time. There are certain passages in the Old Testament that would be very hard for someone in the midst of depression or darkness to hold, and other parts would be more comforting.

So I think that's where the community has a role to play in curating, helping and discipling people in the midst of crisis. We reduce it to a purely spiritual issue, but we certainly wouldn't say it's not a spiritual issue. We would just say there's complexity to this, and God has made us to be this integrated, relational, holistic person with a biological self, a psychological self, a social self and a spiritual self. And all of those pieces intermingle, and that's how God's made us. So one-dimensional answers are not going to cut it for a lot of people.

FT: I think that's part of the problem. People struggle with not being able to fix things.

DW: Absolutely. And there's something very costly about being willing to sit with someone in those very dark places or in those very difficult places where there aren't any obvious answers. I had a revelation of this last summer when a good friend of ours died and our pastor was away, so she called on me. We went to a hospital bed and sat with our friend as she was grieving and lamenting the fact she wasn't going to see her nine-year-old daughter grow up.

That's a very difficult space to be in with someone you care about. As we left the room, just before she was sedated, two or three days before she died, I said, "Thank you for being my friend." I think spiritual

friendship has the ability to change the world. And we see that in John 15. Jesus says, "I no longer call you servants. I call you friends." But true friendship is costly. There is a cost to be counted if you really enter into that place with people. And some people can't do it. I kind of have some empathy for people who don't feel they can stay in that place because it's too painful for them. But some of us can, and we have to count the cost and be willing to do it, to offer hope to people even in the midst of their darkest hour.

FT: We've heard about a lot of burnout in pastors after the pandemic and ongoing. Can you speak to that and maybe reflect on what helped you when you were burnt out?

DW: Pastors need our encouragement. They need our support. They don't need us telling them what they're not doing. And many pastors are struggling to carry the burden of expectation and responsibility in a situation that was unprecedented. If we know anything about the human brain, and we've learned more about the brain in the last 20 years than in the rest of human history put together, we know about this organ that God has fearfully and wonderfully made, that in a sense is an organ that is like the centerpiece for many other organs. It connects our bodies and our spirits, and there's a ton of research on that. But that organ can be stressed and it can be damaged. And I think many people have been through incredibly stressful times and have been forced to a place of languishing, and there is an aftereffect to that.

We could need a raft of tools. It could be that we need certainly to talk to a

doctor and to talk to a psychologist or a therapist. And we will need possibly medicine, and nutrition and patterns of rest, Sabbath. These are all aspects. But one key aspect I needed was space. And I needed safe people. I needed people around me that I could really own the difficult parts of my story with.

For me, in the midst of that as a pastor, it was some friends of mine who weren't Christians, who weren't part of a church. I realized there was a vulnerability and trust in this group that used to meet in a pub every Sunday afternoon, that they would just talk about everything, the most difficult things, things I'd never heard people in the Church talk about. I thought to myself, *We can do better in the Church. The Church has so much to offer if we can find ways to have difficult conversations.* I think a key part of my own recovery was finding people I could talk to about it, and giving myself space and time to recover, which ultimately leads to healing. If we get too fixated on curing over recovery and healing – I think they're two slightly different things. So yeah, people and space are important for me.

FT: So do we still pretend too much? Are we still not being honest enough in the Church community?

DW: I hasten to add that I love the Church. I've done theological studies and I'm a pastor. My wife's a pastor. I preach regularly. I'm not here to bash the Church. With a subject like mental health, where do we even begin? It's really hard to even know how to start the conversation. Very often that starts with a leader being honest about their own struggles. The minute you do that, you are making yourself vulnerable. I think of [Texas social researcher] Brené Brown, who says vulnerability is good, it's good for us and it's good for the community. But, if you're vulnerable with the wrong people, they will use that as a weapon against you. I definitely know that pressure as a pastor, not that anyone implicitly did it, but just feeling like "I need to hold this together. I need to present this front." And of course, in doing that, I was disempowering people from owning their own real

“There's something very costly about being willing to sit with someone in those very dark places or in those very difficult places where there aren't any obvious answers.





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THE FT INTERVIEW

stories. And actually, if I could have found the ability to do that, maybe it would have invited others to do the same, instead of perpetuating this idea of just keep up appearances and keep going.

FT: Sometimes people might not actually want that level of vulnerability from

their pastors. Do you think that is true?

DW: I think it's true. I've been asked to write a book on some barriers that prevent people from talking about mental health. And I think there are some real clear, implicit barriers. And sometimes our theologies or our way of seeing the world



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Sometimes our theologies or our way of seeing the world are just too simplistic.”

are just too simplistic. It's not that we don't desire to have this simple faith, but this is a really complex subject. I feel the idea of vulnerability sounds great, but the reality of it is hard because it's very transitional and grey. There's a whole faith journey of literally stepping into something [aware that] I'm not sure where this goes, I'm not sure if I'll recover, and I'm not sure how long it will take me.

And that is a really scary subject for some people. In the pandemic, what I saw was a lot of people trying to make sense of a really difficult and complicated situation. And I'd have absolute empathy for where some people land in trying to make sense of it. But what I often heard behind the back of that was people just struggling with this idea of "How could a good God allow this? And if He can, what does that mean for me? And what does that mean for my own well-being?" So I saw a lot of what I thought was mental health languishing, which is language that Sanctuary gives the Church to talk about this.

It's important the Church understands that the Church can let doctors be doctors and therapists be therapists, and if we can do that, we'll actually potentially change the world. And we'll certainly, I think, show a lot of people what a loving, good God looks like, who walks with people in the midst of crisis, wherever they're at.

FT: So how can we be better? How can places like Sanctuary help us do better?

DW: The wonderful thing about Sanctuary is it's a 12-year-old nonprofit. I've been leading it for six years. I'm based in Vancouver. When it was founded it was founded by someone who had this real interdisciplinary approach to life. The Rev. Dr. Sharon Smith is one of our founders. Sharon was an occupational therapist for 20 years. She did two theology degrees.

She got ordained in the Church of England. She did a PhD on the intersection of spirituality and schizophrenia, and also about 15 years ago her husband Alex died by suicide. So Sharon brings this clinical, theological, priestly, research-based, lived experience piece, and all of these strands together help us hold the subject in a new way.

Sanctuary creates resources that help churches to have what seemed like very complicated and complex conversations, but in a really curated and safe way. We've designed *The Sanctuary Course*, which I like to say is like a mental health Alpha course. It's an eight-session course and it's film based. It's really all about how we integrate our faith and mental health. And at the end of that process of doing it, a community should have a shared framework and a shared language, and should understand what the role of the Church is and what [it isn't]. And to get a bigger vision for what the role of the Church is, which is to offer spiritual care and friendship. So *The Sanctuary Course* is the main thing we do. There's a bunch of other resources we've created, and we are creating and launching in the months ahead, including some pretty cool ones that we're doing in the next year with some other organizations. But really our role is to help the Church gain some confidence, gain the framework, gain the language to know what to do and what support to offer.


FT: Can you paint a word picture for us of what a healthy church would be for all of us in regard to mental health?

DW: I think a healthy church would look like a space where you can bring your whole self to the church all of the time. A space where a subject like mental health is talked about openly. A space where we have a regular way of talking about this. It's just an innate part of the culture. We talk about mental health and well-being in the same way that we talk about the weather. I think that's the ultimate dream. And ultimately that the Church would be famous for being the safest place to turn to at a point of crisis. Imagine if there was a day when people would say, if someone's going through a crisis, "Hey, you should go to that church because they really

know how to care for people and they really understand this, and they will offer you community and friendship in your darkest hour."

I think that's the ultimate outlandish goal and dream that we have, but I really believe the Church can do it. I genuinely

do. I think we have everything we need to do it.

FT: Thank you, Daniel. 

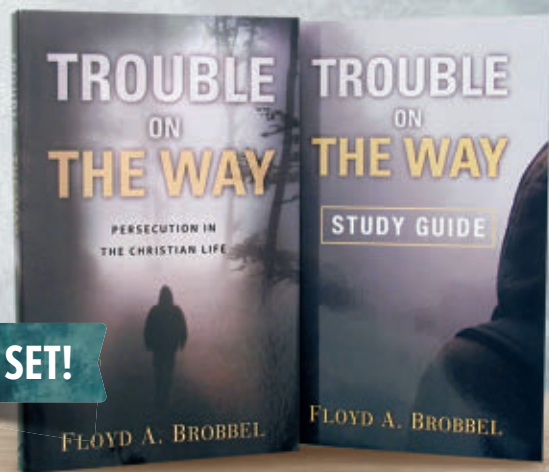


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Confession

A doorway to grace By Ken Shigematsu

My practice of confession with God and certain trusted people is one of the most powerful ongoing spiritual disciplines in my life.

For most of us the practice of confession is not easy. As a young adult I joined a small group and knew we were going to be invited to share transparently. I was with people I could trust, but I was still afraid and blurted out, “I recently went skydiving for the first time. Jumping out of the airplane was difficult, but relatively easy compared to baring my soul.” Sharing our innermost self is not easy, but it is the pathway to one of life’s greatest gifts – deep friendship.

Let me mention three of my trusted people. I am profoundly grateful for the safe space for confes-

sion created by my spiritual director Dan. I am also thankful for my longtime friendship with Elizabeth, with whom I’ve been able to open my heart and feel received (and, at times, necessarily rebuked). I deeply value my weekly Zoom conversation with my friend Mark where we mutually confess temptations, struggles and sins, and then pray for each other. This may sound heavy, but in practice feels truly uplifting.

James Pennebaker, a professor at the University of Texas, studied what happens when trauma survivors, especially rape and incest survivors, kept their experiences secret. The research team found the act of not discussing a traumatic event or confiding it to another person could be more damaging than the actual event. Conversely, when people shared their stories

and experiences, their physical health improved, their visits to the doctor decreased, and they showed significant declines in the activity of their stress hormones. (I read about this study in Brené Brown’s *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* [Avery, 2012].)

I first began to see the value of confession when I was single. During my student years, one summer break while travelling, I had a romantic fling. Neither I nor the woman involved could imagine ourselves with each other for long – she was in a relationship with someone else and I was intending to initiate an exclusive dating relationship with someone back home. But that summer we found ourselves powerfully attracted to each other

ILLUSTRATION: JANICE VAN ECK



When a person knows our shame, and then loves us and receives us, the shame can't survive.

and one night we crossed some lines. We were in a public space, so there was a natural restraint in place, but we ended up engaged in some prolonged kissing and making out.

You might think it's not a big deal, but I knew I had violated my conscience and was feeling guilt and shame. Not long after this I confessed what I had done to a close friend and mentor. He was disappointed and teared up, but also expressed his love for me and I felt his profound care. Having confessed and been received with love, I felt an enormous burden lifting from my shoulders.

When we can express our feelings and faults honestly with a safe person, something inside us lifts and straightens.

Dan Siegel, a researcher and professor of psychiatry at UCLA, has pointed out that when we confess something weighing on our heart in the presence of an empathetic person, the neurotransmitter GABA squirts onto our brain, creating a calming effect.

Brené Brown has also published research that suggests one of the



most effective strategies for shame resilience is to cultivate friendships with trusted people who can become sources of empathy.

When we share a painful or shameful experience with someone we trust, we can begin to *reframe* our shame.

Sometime after my summer fling I shared my experience with another wise friend. After listening pensively he said, "I know you feel like you made a bad decision, but I also see that you demonstrated integrity in that situation by setting

certain boundaries when you were given the opportunity to become even more physically intimate. A failure at this level may actually be beneficial for you. It may help you avoid something much more serious in the future."

Although I had still felt some residual guilt and shame over the experience, having the experience reframed for me caused the burden to lift even further and gave me a sense of deep gratitude.

Sharing our experiences of shame, pain or grief can help us reframe our story. When we see it in a new light, we can even begin to view it as something redemptive and beautiful in the larger tapestry of our lives. This will certainly be true for those who believe in the God who redeems *all things* and makes *all things* in our life work together for our ultimate good – and His greater glory as we are transformed into the image of Christ.

In his classic *Spiritual Friendship*, 12th-century English abbot Aelred of Rievaulx writes that we should "bare our souls" only to those we are certain want the best for us and would never betray us. Cultivating spiritual friendships with people who will not judge us and instead offer wisdom and empathy – and maintain confidentiality – takes time and effort. Initiating a conver-

PRAYER EXERCISE

Here is a prayer exercise that can help make the way for a time of vulnerability and feeling loved by God.

- Take several deep breaths, breathing in and out of your nose.
- When you feel still and peaceful, meditate on the words God the Father says to Jesus at His baptism, imagining God is speaking these words to you: "_____, you are my *daughter/son*, whom I love. I am so pleased with you. I delight that you are on the earth" (Luke 3:22).
- After listening to these words of love, practise holding a loving gaze with God by listening for any other affirmations God might want to speak into your heart. Breathe deeply, inhaling *you are my daughter/son*, and exhaling, *whom I love*. After listening take a moment to write down any affirmations you may want to remember.
- Now invite God to expand your capacity to receive affirmations from others by bringing to your mind the names and faces of people who have blessed you and loved you into being. After breathing and listening quietly, give thanks for each of these people. Then write down any words of affirmation you may have received from them.



sation with a pastor, spiritual director or counsellor involves discernment and may require courage. But these relationships can be a lifeline and make us whole.

I know an upstanding and committed Christian truly respected for his integrity. Though he grew up in a conservative Christian home, and his parents never drank a drop of alcohol, my friend occasionally enjoys a glass of wine with dinner or a beer with a friend. One night he was downtown with a buddy, and they had a few beers at a bar. They eventually left, but as they were walking past another bar his friend said, “How about another beer?”

“Sure,” my friend replied.

“I don’t remember what happened next,” he told me. “But my next memory, I’m lying on my back on a sidewalk in a drug-infested


part of town, and my friend is trying to prevent someone else from beating me up. My friend pulls me onto a bus and I end up vomiting. The bus driver pulls over and says, ‘You need to get out.’ The next thing I remember, I’m lying in a hospital bed, hooked up to a machine and my wife is looking at me.”

Sometime thereafter he felt compelled to share his story with two people with whom he had cultivated a trusted friendship. Overcome by shame he was unable to speak at first, but after considerable silence, stammering and with tears in his eyes, he recounted the incident. His friends wept with him, prayed for him and offered what felt like a visceral wave of love, without conditions.

Shame had reared its ferocious head, but their love proved strong-

er yet, breaking the power of shame and freeing him from his heavy burden. When he told the truth and entrusted his story to these friends, he discovered an unconditional love – a love that did not run away from his shame, but vanquished it.

When a person knows our shame, and then loves us and receives us, the shame can’t survive. In the sacred space of unconditional love, we become our true, made-in-the-image-of-God self, and the shimmering diamond of who we really are gleams brighter. **FT**

 This article is adapted from the new book *Now I Become Myself: How Deep Grace Heals Our Shame and Restores Our True Self* (Zondervan, 2023). Ken Shigematsu is senior pastor of Tenth Church in Vancouver, B.C., a diverse city-centre church. His previous books include *God in My Everything* (Zondervan, 2013) and *Survival Guide for the Soul* (Zondervan, 2018).

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WHY AREN'T CANADIANS LISTENING TO CHRISTIAN LEADERS?

The changing cultural current By Sam Reimer



An Anglican bishop – I’ll call him Frank Smith – was telling me about his experience talking with a young clerk at a hotel.

I said, “Room for Franklin Smith?” and eventually she said, “No.” And I said, “Oh?” And she said, “Well, hang on a minute. Was your first name Bishop?” I said, “Yeah, well, no.” She said, “Well, we’ve got a room for a Bishop Franklin Smith.” And I said, “Well, that’s me.” And she said, “Well, how can it be? You said your first name wasn’t Bishop.” And I said, “It’s my title.” She said, “Well, what sort of a title is that?” And I said, “It just means I can move diagonally on a chess board.”

The experience brought home to him how many Canadians, particularly younger ones, are increasingly ignorant of the basics of Christianity. Statistics suggest only one in ten Canadians attend a congregation weekly and fewer read their Bibles.

Worse, Christianity and church leaders are viewed negatively by many Canadians. According to a conservative Presbyterian pastor in the Maritimes, “If you are clergy in Canada, up until fairly recently, I think, there’s a certain cultural acceptability or credibility. . . . But [now] . . . if I tell someone I’m an evangelical pastor, it’s almost like telling them I’m in the Klan.”

In my recent research interviewing 125 evangelical clergy and active laity in Canada and Britain, most agreed the culture is not friendly to Christians nor conducive to Christian discipleship. Christian clergy used to be respected in Canada, and Canadians listened when they spoke. Not anymore. Why? What changed?

A lot. Sixty years ago the anti-establishment sentiments of the 1960s and ’70s undermined the

legitimacy of religious, economic and political leaders, and those sentiments continue today. More recently Christianity’s image has been marred by clergy scandals and sexual abuse that have come to light. The role Christian denominations played in Indigenous residential schools means Christianity is often viewed as colonial and oppressive. Conservative views on same-sex marriage and sexuality lead to accusations of homo- and transphobia, as the prominence of sexual and gender identities grows and the prominence of religious identities declines.

In the words of the Anglican bishop, Christians who hold conservative positions on issues like same-sex marriage are thought to have “rocks for brains.”

A shift to internal authority

Yet I think much of what causes handwringing among Christian leaders – declining attendance and Bible reading, liberal ethics, distrust of clergy – are surface symptoms of a much deeper, glacial shift in Western culture. I call this the

CHRISTIANS WHO HOLD CONSERVATIVE POSITIONS ON ISSUES LIKE SAME-SEX MARRIAGE ARE THOUGHT TO HAVE “ROCKS FOR BRAINS.”

shift from an external locus (or site) of authority to an internal one.

Prior to the boomer generation and the 1960s, most Canadians deferred to external authorities. They believed what their clergy told them theologically and they generally adhered to the expectations of their religious group. They deferred to political leaders (and even went to war) because they saw governmental authority as legitimate. They did what their boss at work told them. And while rebellious teens exist across generations, pre-Boomers generally accepted the guidance of their parents and schoolteachers.

Among more recent generations, however, external authority is increasingly suspect. No longer are parents, priests, pastors and politicians assumed to have the right to

tell me who I am, what I should believe or what I should do. I am expected to find my own truth, to discover who I am, to find my own path. I am my own authority. The locus of authority is now inside me, not outside.

To be clear, this shift is not because younger generations are resisting conformity to the world, nor are they necessarily more discerning. Rather they are conforming to a cultural message that tells them they are an original, so no one can tell them what they should do or be. They have to follow what their own heart tells them. Their journey is unique to them.

The culture says each person must find their true self. And society presents them with more options than ever. Their religious affiliation, schooling and occupation, political party, gender identity, sexual orientation, geographic location, configurations of partnering and parenting – all are increasingly open. Those who blindly follow the expectations of external authorities are failing in their responsibility to find their own path.

Implications for the Church

Let's unpack what this move toward internal authority means for churches and Christian leaders. First, clergy and parents often find their voices drowned out by the myriad of messages youth and young adults are internalizing – from teachers, professors, friends and others – often messages incompatible with what the Church is saying.

Increasingly the majority of messages are mediated through a screen. Social media, YouTube, blogs, music, movies, TV shows and other media promote diverse values, piped via wireless internet into the command centre of the youth's bedroom, away from the prying eyes of parents.

A few clergy I interviewed noted an hour on Sunday does not inoculate parishioners against absorbing unbiblical influences from dozens of hours on secular media. Even churchgoing youth (and their parents!) have secular world views. For some reason, the algorithmic authority on which these online

THEY ARE CONFORMING TO A CULTURAL MESSAGE THAT TELLS THEM THEY ARE AN ORIGINAL, SO NO ONE CAN TELL THEM WHAT THEY SHOULD DO OR BE.



messages are based is not viewed as external authority, as youth seem to think they are somehow making up their own mind about what they believe and do.

Second, if the people in the pew have bought into the culturally scripted internal authority paradigm, they will feel free to deviate from orthodoxy and orthopraxy (right belief and right behaviour) as defined by denominational authorities. After all, they are responsible for finding out what they believe for themselves based on what they sense internally.

Preachers, working from an external authority paradigm, can't understand why laity do not follow the clear teachings of the Bible, the very words of God. To laypersons with internal authority, such expectations do not register. *Of course, they say to themselves, preachers are supposed to say things like that. But I have to find my own truth. Let them be them and believe what they want, but I have to be me.*

Clergy can faithfully teach and preach the Word of God, but it does not stick unless it resonates with the person's intuitive sense of what is right for them.

Third, it's hard to pass on the faith to those with internal authority. If each person has to discover for themselves what they believe and value – and who they are – and if following the path of another is abdicating responsibility, then youth assume they should not be pressured to toe the party line.

In fact, since discovering your authentic self is difficult – a journey filled with obstacles and naysayers – then it is unkind to the extreme for others to be nonaffirming of the beliefs, values and identities you discover and internalize.

Fourth and finally, if internal authority is based on what each of us senses in our heart, then how each one feels has inflated author-

THE GREATEST OBSTACLE TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP IN CANADA TODAY IS THIS MOVE FROM EXTERNAL TO INTERNAL AUTHORITY.

ity. People are paying attention to their intuitive sense of whether a situation feels right or a person makes them feel good. Friends, partners, and even church communities will be measured partly by their therapeutic value.

Those with internal authority believe they can sense whether or not someone is a good person. Morality is based increasingly on an inner sense of right and wrong. *Churches (or any other voluntary organization) are useful to the degree that they add to my personal sense of well-being. When that is no longer the case, I should leave. After all, I am on my own private journey toward wholeness. We should expect ecclesial loyalty to be low.*

Still hope for Christianity

The greatest obstacle to Christian discipleship in Canada today is this move from external to internal authority. It's hard for Canadians to accept the lordship of Christ – an external authority – if they embrace internal authority. However, there is still hope, even if the culture is not always supportive of Christian goals.

First, not all laity have embraced an internal locus of authority. In reality, the polar opposites of fully embracing external or internal authority have always existed along a continuum with most people in-between these extremes. Those actively involved in a church probably have more external authority and those who rarely attend or are younger probably lean toward more internal authority. (Still,

about three-quarters of the regularly attending evangelical laypeople I interviewed showed evidence of internal authority.)

The key for Christian leaders is to realize society around us is not neutral. It's like a great river whose current is pulling everyone in the direction of internal authority.

Second, forming stable, warm relationships with laity (or youth or students) still works to increase the influence of pastors, parents and teachers. If Canadians are increasingly listening to what they sense in their heart, then warm relationships are the key to their hearts.

If we communicate authenticity, caring and a desire to help others flourish, then our voices can rise above the cacophony of other messages. Even if our time with others is dwarfed by their time online, our words can have added weight. And let's not forget the Holy Spirit helps when we pray.

Yes, fewer Canadians are listening to Christian leaders, not only because they are distracted by online stimuli, but also because they are less likely to enter a church. Most feel it can't help them in their private journey toward inner peace.

Increasingly they look to counsellors and online influencers to help them find wholeness. Yet even a private journey can benefit from some guidance along the way, and people still sense they have spiritual needs and desire community support. This is where pastors and other Christians can step in. **FT**



Sam Reimer also discusses these ideas in a podcast with Rick Hiemstra and Lindsay Callaway at TheEFC.ca/FaithTrends.

Sam Reimer is professor of sociology at Crandall University in Moncton, N.B. His new book *Caught in the Current: British and Canadian Evangelicals in an Age of Self-Spirituality* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023) develops the ideas presented here.

Learning to “number our days” leads to new adventures

By Patricia Paddey | Illustration by Jenna Brooks

Our home of 31 years no longer feels like home. The walls are mostly bare. The bookshelves mostly empty. Hidden away for now is any trace of the myriad personal effects, books and family photos that once graced those spaces, including the framed 11 X 14 Sears Portrait Studio images of three cherub-cheeked babies – each captured at six months old – that once lined our front hall.

Like those portraits the babies too are gone, having grown into young adults who moved across the country in pursuit of job opportunities and more affordable housing – our son to Yellowknife, our two daughters to Winnipeg with their husbands.

We have reached the moment that is so hard to imagine when kids are young and the house is full. Our nest is empty. But my husband Doug and I are now also Winnipeg-bound, and so our hearts are full. Boxes are labelled in red permanent marker – “BEDROOM,” “OFFICE,” “KITCHEN,” “BATHROOM” and taped shut. Patio furniture – power washed during the unexpected gift of a summer’s week in early April – sits in the centre of our living room, staying clean until the movers arrive.

It’s all been months in the planning, and yet the reality that we’ve sold our home and are moving to a seventh-floor condo in a new city in a new province is still disorienting for my husband and me.

We’ve lived our entire existences in Southern Ontario. My husband is an only child, and his parents are both gone, but we’ll be leaving my 90-year-old mother, my siblings, their families and our friends. Those friends represent virtually every stage of our lives – some dating as far back as elementary school, up through high school and postsecondary, former work colleagues, our church, our neighbours.

Our community is all here.

We wonder: Will we make new friends? Where will we find a new church home? Will we be able to sign on with a new doctor in a province experiencing severe physician shortages?

We don’t know exactly what we are moving toward, but we do see clearly what we are leaving behind – the only lives we’ve ever known.

We will leave the backyard in which we raised vegetables and herbs, flowers and children with its seasons of sandbox and tire swing, swimming pool and friends gathered in the glow of solar lights. We will leave the gorgeous trembling aspen that

came up from a wind-carried seed in a patio pot one summer – to be enthusiastically transplanted into the soil by our kids – now towering over 40 feet high, the rhubarb growing at the side of the house taken from a cutting in my parents’ garden, and the forget-me-nots planted from seeds I trace back to flowers at my grandparents’ home.

How did we get here?

This change in our lives began with longing. Longing for my far-away children and grandbabies. Longing to be near enough to provide support and help, which intensified during the pandemic years when our kids found themselves newly transplanted with a newborn and without social supports.

The longing increased when one of our sons-in-law suggested casually, “You guys should move here.” I remember being quick to respond, “I could never leave my mom,” to which he replied, “Bring Nana too!”

But I also knew I couldn’t ask that of her, almost 90 at the time, and with a life and community of her own that she loved where she lives a ten-minute drive from both my sister and me, and an hour’s drive from our two brothers. I dismissed the suggestion.

But a Winnipeg seed had been planted in my heart. And as the months went by, that seed sprouted, watered by wistful

We don’t know exactly what we are moving toward, but we do see clearly what we are leaving behind.



focus. I realized I want to live whatever years I have left with intentionality, and to meaningfully invest in the lives of my children and grandchildren.

I was nervous about sharing our decision with my siblings, but each one in turn was understanding and supportive, promising to fill in any gaps in caring for our mother my leaving might open. And when I shared the news with my mother, she too responded with love and grace. It felt like God had gone before us.

Our home sold in two days to a young Christian couple. They wrote us a letter saying they wanted to have and raise their babies here. We had been praying God would send good people who might have hearts to bless our aging neighbours.


As we sold our home, found a new one and sorted through a lifetime of accumulation, I've been struck by how much stuff we had, hidden in every nook and cranny of this house, stuff once desired and needed, but also long since stowed away and largely forgotten.

Boxes of our children's memories with artwork, school photos, report cards and old journals – from nursery school up through high school graduation – have been sorted through and shipped off to them. My son's hockey card collection, all neatly tucked in plastic pages with rows of card-sized pockets between the rigid covers of a bright yellow binder. My eldest daughter's collection of china-faced dolls clothed in Austen-era finery. My youngest daughter's old leather art portfolio stuffed with pencil drawings and pastels

Each item surfaced tender memories prompting texted photos or FaceTime calls to my kids to ask, "What do you want us to do with *this*?"

It is a good and useful question, one that always yields an answer. And as we prepare to

take up our new lives in Winnipeg, asking God, "What do you want us to do with us now?" we are trusting He will continue to lead the way. **✠**

 Patricia Paddey is a senior writer at *Faith Today*. She recently relocated to Winnipeg.

conversations with my husband and warmed by Zoom calls with a spiritual director whom I'd reached out to for help in discerning God's will for the next stage of life.

Contrary to my expectations the spiritual director did not really *direct* me at all. Rather, each time we met, she invited me into God's presence and helped me linger there, encouraging me to be comfortable with stillness and silence. And it was in stillness and silence one morning – after weeks of praying and wrestling, compiling lists of pros and cons, and listening to the advice of others whom we respected – that I sensed God say, "It's okay to want to invest in the future, in the *next* generation."

With both my retirement and my husband's 70th birthday looming, I began to meditate on Psalm 90:12, and

to pray that verse in a personal way. "God, teach me to number my days, to understand their limit, so I can use the time that I'm given wisely."

My dad died at 70 and both of his siblings passed away in their late 60s, all of cancer. My father-in-law died at 76 after battling Alzheimer's for the last several years of his life. I am keenly aware this life has limits and that Doug and I could well be approaching ours.

When we are young we try to live in conscious pursuit of our goals. But at a certain age the realization we've logged more days behind us than remain ahead becomes clear. Friends start to die, the dawn of each new day becomes more precious, and our dreams come into laser

"God, teach me to number my days, to understand their limit, so I can use the time that I'm given wisely."

HOW TO USE HOLY CURIOSITY

By Ron Pagé

How good are we at forgiving, rebuking, saying sorry and the like? Let's reflect together in this new series.

Have you ever come away from a conversation feeling seen, believed in? Feeling freer, more alive and grounded?

I call these unwrapping conversations because they remind me of the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus had been wrapped in layers of cloth and spices, as was the custom. Jesus, after calling Lazarus back from the tomb, turned to Mary and Martha and said, "Unwrap him." New life was there, but trapped under death clothes.

I can't think of a better metaphor to capture the high calling of community and fellowship.

Unwrapping starts with visionary compassion or holy curiosity. When Michelangelo was asked how he sculpted his statue of David, his reply was that he imagined a David within waiting to be released.

Visionary compassion is the ability to see what is hidden. Four things can help us do that.

- **Be attentive to expressions of the new life of Christ.**

Let's say a friend shares how distant or depressed she feels. Yet you notice an act of kindness, even a small one. Vision-



- **Connection creates a place of safety and trust where our own vulnerability often draws the other to vulnerably meet us.**

ary compassion might say, "Given what you're feeling, where did the love you just showed come from?" or "You know what I find amazing? You got out of bed, showered, got dressed and showed up for coffee. How did you do that, given how strong the urge was to stay in bed?"

- **Be attentive to discrepancies with the new life of Christ.**

For instance, a friend shares a struggle that leaves him feeling guilty and ashamed. Rather than try to fix what is wrong, visionary compassion would seek to set free what is deepest and most true. Visionary compassion might say, "I love your guilt and shame! It's proof there's something deeper in

you that knows you're a better person than this. Any thoughts on what's causing what is most true to be stuck?"

- **Be attentive to your own death clothes.**

Intense, out of proportion, emotional reactions are a sign our death clothes are hindering our freedom and growth. We can't think straight when anger or anxiety overwhelm us. We need time out to flush out the stress hormones and restore a sense of being grounded in Someone bigger than the person who hurt us.

Once we do that, anger and anxiety become friends, calling us back home to our true selves in Christ. Getting there often requires we pray for

mercy – to be set free from what robs us of our freedom in Christ to love.

- **Replace the word confront with connect.**

Confrontation is adversarial and provokes a who's-wrong-who's-right logjam where everyone loses. Connection creates a place of safety and trust where our own vulnerability often draws the other to vulnerably meet us.


Connection might say, "When you did or said XYZ, here's the impact it had on me. Is that what you intended?"

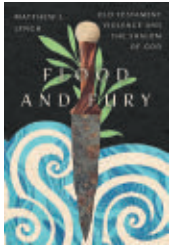
If it was intentional, we can say, "I know you're a better person than that. What made you want to hurt me? Did I offend you? If so, I'd love to hear about it."

If the person refuses to talk and repeatedly offends, it's time to place boundaries not to protect ourselves, but to fight for our friend. For instance saying, "Treating me this way again and again suggests you don't want a relationship with me. I'll respect your choice."

Hopefully the pain of the loss of relationship will move the person to engage with us about what is going on.

Unwrapping one another is taking our fellowship skills to a new and life-giving level. **FI**

 Ron Pagé is a psychotherapist in Ottawa. He explains more in a one-hour presentation called "Walking Deep: Experts Please Abstain" at [youtube.com/watch?v=tMMN01JKNI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMMN01JKNI).



**Flood & Fury
Old Testament
Violence and
the Shalom of
God**

By Matthew J. Lynch

IVP Academic, 2023. 256 pages. \$34 (ebook \$30)

Violence is terribly common in our world today, from school shootings to child abuse, to nation against nation. So who would want to write a book on violence in the Bible?

Matthew Lynch is a professor of Old Testament at Regent College in Vancouver. This book seems to have been generated after a series of conversations with a new neighbour who had deep faith issues because of his encounters with violence in the Bible. Those conversations did not resolve his neighbour's faith issues and sadly he left the faith.

Nonetheless, Lynch's book is a masterly investigation and detailed

exegesis of those difficult passages of Scripture like the Genesis flood and the Joshua destruction of Jericho.

As Lynch indicates this book is for churches who need help dealing with violence in Scripture; those who disciple individuals with the same concerns; and those who have friends on the fringe of the faith who can't seem to get past the problem of violence and a God who either initiates or condones it.

The book, though not lengthy (mainly 225 pages), is both very readable and also scholarly. I deeply appreciated his candour, honesty and unrelenting commitment to detail, as well as his exegeting of the Genesis and Joshua passages where it seems evil, violence and God's actions and inactions dwell so heavily.

Lynch's goal, he writes, is to "leave you saying things like, *There's far more good in these troublesome texts than I thought!* . . . Or, *The Old Testament critiques our violence!* I

. . . hope the book helps you discover a God full of tender mercy and compassion at the heart of the hardest texts."

I highly recommend this book to all who seek answers to these tough, challenging questions.

—R. WAYNE HAGERMAN

This book is for those who need help dealing with violence in Scripture.



**Next Level Church
Leading a
Congregation to
a New Stage of
Healthy Impact
By Stephen D. Elliott**

Wesleyan Publishing, 2021. 228 pages. \$15 (e-book \$10)

Stephen Elliot is superintendent of The Wesleyan Church of Canada and program director of pastoral ministries and church planting degree programs at Kingswood University in New Brunswick.

As a hands-on academic, he has written a handbook relevant to lay

Q + A

Philosopher Calvin Seerveld on art and Bible translation

You publish on such a mix of topics, from art theory to translations of the Bible's wisdom literature. What's the point of your latest book *God Picks Up the Pieces: Ecclesiastes as a Chorus of Voices* (Dordt Press, 2023)?

The Bible, I believe, is God-speaking literature. You will only understand Ecclesiastes if you realize it has a back-and-forth character like Job. My fresh literary translation catches the blunt, colloquial colour of the original Hebrew that Luther wanted Bible translation to have. The Older Testament can give Newer Testament Christians and unbelievers



something vigorous and penetrating to chew on.

You taught philosophical aesthetics in Toronto at the Institute for Christian Studies for decades, past usual retirement age. What is that and why teach it?

Aesthetics, as I understand it, is theoretical examination of the nuances afoot in God's world, especially the human capability to be imaginative. Teaching aesthetics with Christian antennae provides students with insurance against becoming a dogmatic sourpuss. Probing the

meaning of instrumental music, laments, watercolour or oil artistry, and literature, enriches a person with insights hidden to mere passersby.

What advice would you, as a nonagenarian, give to young Canadian Christians interested in making art?

Writing short stories, composing tunes and engraving woodcuts are great hobbies which complement being a parent, office worker, farmer, businessperson or whatever. But making art your professional vocation is a tough choice prone to financial trouble, unless you can do it employed by an institution. Freelance artists need advocates to encourage people to pay for poems for birthdays, portraits for anniversaries, sculptures for our homes, and new psalms for our congregations. **FT**

Calvin Seerveld is professor emeritus of aesthetics at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto.

and ordained leaders in all church denominations.

In the introduction he talks about his personal background and the mistakes he made as he attempted to grow a congregation in Kanata, Ont., from two to several thousand. He realized quickly he had to delegate to succeed as the congregation grew.

The book is set up as a practical guide for church leaders with plenty of practical examples and references to other resources. One of its main points is laid out in the introduction: “A large church operates differently than a small church.” The way the pastor approaches church changes with size.

The book is divided into seven chapters, each with a page of small group discussion questions.

The second chapter “Controversy and Struggle” digs into the reality of change while the third focuses on challenge. He quotes his former professor Dale Galloway, an ex-megachurch pastor. “Four out of every five churches will be gone or remain irrelevant if they don’t transition.”

Chapter four makes comparisons between churches of fewer than 125, 200, 400, 800 to 1,000–2,000. There is discussion about what is hoped to achieve and what we do achieve.

Overall the book is a great resource for anyone who wants to learn how to grow a church in the present day. **—HILDA YOUNG**

He realized quickly he had to delegate to succeed as the congregation grew.

wasn’t an easy one for Love & The Outcome. Singer-songwriter Jodi King left her solo career to start this duo with her husband Chris Rade-maker. Before recording their first album, they sold their house and undertook a gruelling touring schedule. They eventually left Canada for Nashville, landed a record deal and released their first album in 2013.

Now they’re back with another full-length project *Only Ever Always*. Ten of the 13 songs are brand new.

As they prepared to record them, Nashville experienced severe flooding that made their home unlivable. They also lost almost all their music gear and many personal belongings. That trial informed and inspired many of the songs, leading to lyrics like, “There’s always something to be stressing about / It’s gonna work itself out / At the end of the day / The sun still sets in the colours of a thousand promises / . . . Nothing’s gonna change a word You’ve said . . . / We’re all gonna be okay.”

The theme of choosing hope in the face of hardship is loud and clear in both upbeat tracks like “Start From There” and “Need U On Repeat,” as well as in ballads like “I’ll Find You” and “Moving On.”

Fans of Francesca Battistelli, Mandisa or Natalie Grant will thoroughly appreciate the keyboard-centric pop sound of this album. **—KRISTEN MCNULTY**

MUSIC REVIEWS



Only Ever Always

By Love & The Outcome
Curb / Word
Entertainment,

2022. \$20 (MP3 \$10)

The road to a record deal and the widespread reach of their music



Into the Wild

By Dan Bremnes
Curb / Word
Entertainment,

2022. \$41 (MP3 \$8)

Into the Wild is the fifth album for Dan Bremnes, a Canadian-born, Nashville-based singer, guitarist and drummer. Although it’s only 31 minutes long, the album packs a lot into that time.

Bremnes’ catchy, mostly upbeat songs seem simple, yet they are quite thought provoking. His strong, mature faith is not blatant, but it comes through in the lyrics.

The title track is an invitation to come along on a trip, not knowing exactly where you’re going, but trusting you’ll find your new home. It’s vaguely Celtic sounding with multilayered vocals over crisp acoustic guitar.


“Hold You Tight,” the lead single, reminds me of the pop-oriented songs by Genesis in the 1980s. I can imagine Phil Collins singing it. Although the song is radio-friendly, the message belies the beat.

“I wrote this song for a few friends who were dealing with deep depression and anxiety,” says Bremnes. “I wanted to speak to the lie that says, ‘It’s over. Give up.’ This is for anyone who’s ‘in the middle of it.’ You are loved, you are amazing, you are held.”

In the jaunty “Wouldn’t Change a Thing,” which has a funny and witty supporting music video, Bremnes pokes fun at life.

The slower, more sombre “Lover of My Soul” switches gears and goes straight for the heart. Strings and dreamy angelic voices drive home the faith expressed in the chorus: “Even if I fall a thousand times / You won’t let go / You won’t let go / Even if I run and try to hide / You hold me close / You’re the lover of my soul.”

There are other radio-friendly pop songs and funky piano grooves. It adds up to an interesting and deceptively challenging album. It can also be streamed free with accompanying music videos on YouTube Music. **—TERRY BURMAN**

 We love our reviewers, but we don’t always agree. You won’t either. Let us know what you think. More detailed versions of most reviews are available at FaithToday.ca/Books. Sample chapters of most books can be viewed at Books.Google.ca and Amazon.ca.

Canadian creatives

“Every day I come across moments that intrigue me, and I feel the need to capture them on canvas and share them with everyone else. When I paint I am able to express my thoughts and feelings in a unique and universal way. I use vibrant colours and bold brushstrokes. In painting wet on wet, I create new hues and colours I wouldn’t otherwise achieve, adding life to the paintings.”



Hello Spring (30" x 40", oil on canvas) by Hoda Nicholas; HodaNicholasArt.com.

NEW BOOKS ROUNDUP

- **From Anvil to Pulpit: The Spiritual Journey of P. W. Philpott, His Family and His Struggles for Ethical Integrity** by David R. Elliott (Theological Resources, 2023). Biography of a travelling evangelist who broke from the Salvation Army in 1892 and created a new denomination based in Hamilton, Ont. He and his wife raised 13 children.
- **Cuckoos in Our Nest: Truth and Lies About Being Human** by Iain Provan (Cascade Books, 2023). Our current theological crisis is not asking, “Who is Jesus?” (as in the 4th century) nor “How can we be saved?” (as in the 16th). Now it is, “What is a human being?” Discussion-starting cultural reflections by a recently retired prof from Regent College (IainProvan.ca).
- **Your Calling Here and Now: Making Sense of Vocation** by Gordon T. Smith (IVP, 2022). A wise, clear, practical 176-page guide by the prolific president of

Ambrose University and Seminary in Calgary (GordonTSmith.com).

- **Christian Peace Principles: War, Capital Punishment, Property Disputes Between Christians, Abortion, Euthanasia, Violence in Sports, and Turning the Other Cheek Before the Middle of the Third Century AD** by David W. T. Brattston (Wipf and Stock, 2023). Short 68-page collection of reworked articles by a prolific author in Lunenburg, N.S.
- **The Lies That Bind: Exposing the Lies Keeping You From a Rich & Meaningful Life** by Chris Quiring (self published, 2023). By pastor at Dresden Community Church in Ontario (ChrisQuiring.com).
- **Anything but Ordinary: Finding Faith That Works When Life Doesn’t** by Stephanie Morales-Beaulieu (Word Alive, 2023). First book by a daughter remembering the ALS death of her

Filipino immigrant father and how a divine encounter changed everything (AnythingButOrdinaryBook.ca). Inspiring.

- **Pursuing God’s Presence: A Practical Guide to Daily Renewal and Joy**



by Roger Helland (Chosen Books, 2023). Alberta author of seven books, professor, former pastor and

is now prayer ambassador at The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (PursuingGodsPresenceBook.com).

- **Iron Sharpens Iron: Friendship and the Grace of God** by Michael A. G. Haykin (Union Publishing, 2022). Prolific Baptist professor of church history and biblical spirituality finds inspiration from three pastor friendships in the 1700s. [📖](#)

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➔ TeenChallenge.ca



Catch *Faith Today's* **KAREN STILLER** and **BILL FLEDDERUS** as they host regular podcasts, interviewing key Canadian evangelical leaders, pastors and organizational heads, sorting through pressing issues and probing the tough questions of faith and living for Christ in contemporary society.

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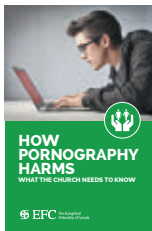
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Christ & culture in Canada

Dancing and Bible study

How this girl met God

As I stood in line to receive my university student ID card, I felt out of place. My tan was shades darker than everyone else's, I didn't dress like the other girls and I did not listen to country music. It took me a while to realize I was experiencing the culture shock of moving from Toronto's east end where I was born and raised to Antigonish, N.S.

Still, I was convinced St. Francis Xavier University was where I was supposed to be and surely I would make friends.

I did make many acquaintances in my chemistry classes. But the dancing group Lady Step was where I met my friends – whom to this day I affectionately refer to as Root, Indy, Juda, Bdot, Tito and Bre.

There was something about these women I had never seen before. They loved people who were very different from themselves. They shared all things with each other. And even in difficult circumstances, they seemed secure. These ladies were Christians.

I was definitely not a Christian. My parents were universalists and my siblings were atheists. I had seen movies about Jesus and I was aware that consumerism's mascot, Santa Claus, had hijacked Christmas. But that basically summed up my knowledge of Christianity. And when these friends shared their faith with me, I was not receptive.

The R.I.P. T-shirts were the catalyst.

I remember hearing the news that Ace, a 16-year-old from my

high school, had been gunned down just a few blocks from my parents' place. When I saw the memorial T-shirts, all of my existential assumptions crumbled.



A few friends from my Lady Step days: (l-r) Tito, me, Indy, and Root.

There were no snacks, games or gimmicks. It was just a group of students who gathered to – well, study the Bible.

The campus around me was filled with vain pursuits. Some lived for the weekend, others for the grade. Some for status, others for a wage. At the age of 18, I suddenly knew all these quests were ultimately meaningless.

It was then Indy invited me to Rob's Bible study. This group had no organizational affiliation. There were no snacks, games or gimmicks. It was just a group of students who gathered to – well, study the Bible. Good Bible-studying Protestants at a Catholic university.

So there I was faithfully attending a Bible study without being Protestant or Catholic. I asked controversial questions, but Rob always had an answer and his answer was always based on God's Word.

As I studied the Bible, it was like pieces of a puzzle being fit together. I was beginning to see Jesus as the centre of it all. He was drawing me to a decision.

Prior to that decision, however, I had to solve a pressing dilemma. What to wear to church?

At that time I understood God's presence to be associated with the church building. So my deliberations on what to wear were espe-

cially careful for my first visit.

I sorted through every outfit I owned, but had nothing fit for entering His presence.

For the first time I felt the conviction of sin in my life. I knew I was not worthy to be in God's company, but at the same time knew I needed Him desperately. I settled on a pink shirt that, alas, had a low neckline at the back. I hoped God would understand.

Indy picked me up but, to my dismay, she sat us right at the front where my exposed back would be visible to everyone behind me. My wish for different clothing was just a fraction of my wish for God's forgiveness.

Tears streamed down my face as we sang and they continued as Pastor Bob preached a gospel message. My thoughts were confirmed – I am a sinner and I deserve death.

But God showered grace and mercy on me.

I understood the life, death and resurrection of Jesus for the very first time. He lived the perfect life I could not, He died in my place and rose again in power. I had purpose and hope.

After the service I prayed with Pastor Bob. I confessed my sins to God and asked for His forgiveness. I placed my faith in Jesus as my Lord and Saviour, and felt as if a weight had been lifted off my shoulders.

In hindsight I see His fingerprints over all of it. Hallelujah!

Diandra Singh is assistant professor of education at Crandall University in Moncton, N.B. Find more of these columns at FaithToday.ca/ChristAndCulture.



The groundbreaking ceremony for **Ray of Hope Village** was held earlier this year.

BE A “RAY OF HOPE” IN TAIWAN



財團法人基督教希望之光會
Ray of Hope Christian Registered Charitable Organization

Missionary wives (2 Canadian and an American) saw a desperate need in Taiwan to instill hope, support and love to women in crisis pregnancies. Ray of Hope Christian Charitable Organization was born in 1999.

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Please prayerfully consider giving financially to this ministry. In a wealthy, shame-based culture that refuses to see Ray of Hope as necessary and encourages abortion, your gift will provide hope for these pregnant clients during and through giving birth.

MEA is the Canadian representative for this unique Taiwan ministry.

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The Maranatha Evangelistic Association
MEA Worldwide
e: john.lucas@meaworldwide.org
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Ray of Hope Village is a planned four-storey apartment building for mothers and their babies. The adjacent chapel will hold services and a location for weddings.

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- Baby training
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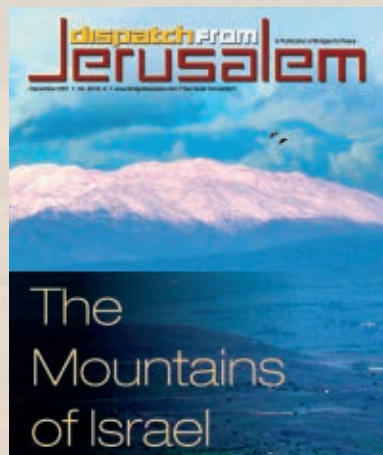
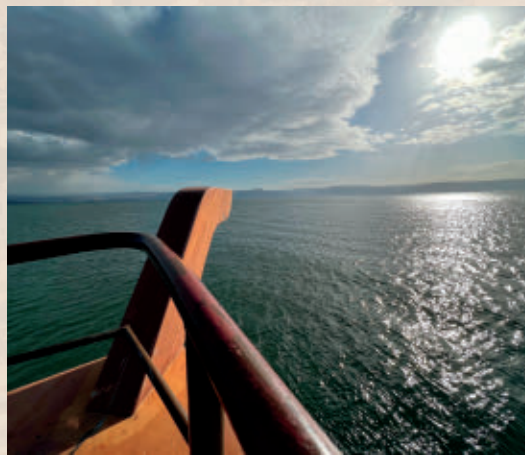


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ISSUE 53
SUMMER 2023

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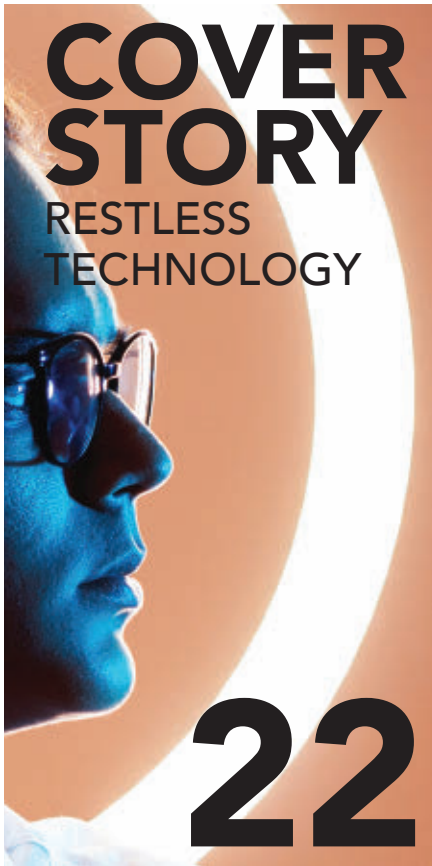
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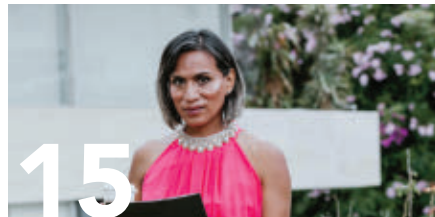
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The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC) is the publisher of *Love Is Moving* magazine. The EFC unites Evangelicals to bless Canada in the name of Jesus. An expression of this unity is evident through the diverse community of writers and artists who contribute their gifts and perspectives to *Love Is Moving*. This magazine is produced by young adult creatives and leaders. Join us in thanking and praying for our contributors across Canada.

If you have an encouraging note for one or more of our writers, they would appreciate your feedback and affirmation. Please email us at info@loveismoving.ca. The EFC is committed to providing a platform for our writers and readers to bless each other. As you reflect on this issue, allow God to remind you that His love is moving.



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

In *Agents of Flourishing*, Amy L. Sherman highlights the four foundational relationships Scripture tells us we're made for: relationships with God, ourselves, each other, and creation. She says that shalom "captures the notion of peace in these four relationships. Shalom signifies spiritual, psychological, social, and physical wholeness."

The Christian life is about both our present friendship with God and each other and a future promise of restoration. What does God's kingdom mean for us now? And what vision does it offer for the future?

This issue highlights stories of churches, communities, and individual Jesus followers who are both building shalom here and now and cultivating a hopeful imagination for what's to come.

The issue begins with K.A.R.'s poem, "Image of infinity" which reflects on God's expansive presence and our own tininess. Then Elizabeth Duarte takes us into digital deep space where she has connected with other Christians in an online gaming community. In "Peace is in our hands" Leah Reimer reflects on the lessons of communication and reconciliation she learned working at a daycare and how they apply to larger conflicts.

Our interview for this issue features Conor Sweetman, previous editor of *Love Is Moving* and founder of *Ekstasis* magazine. Sweetman shares his vision of creating sustainable platforms for artists of faith and the essential role the arts play in shaping us.

We hope this issue is both a call to pray and act and a reminder that—though we can't see the full picture yet—all will be well. The Spirit is with us, reinvigorating our hope and sustaining us as we simultaneously participate in and wait for the coming kingdom.

Grace and peace,
Ilana Reimer

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Image of infinity

Words by K. A. R.

God is so big.

Full in might, mercy, and justice,
ever-renewed, and ever-renewing.

Enormous in humility,
for the maker of molecules
became made up of them,
and consented to die.

Humongous in divinity,
for death could not hold God
even when He followed it obediently.
(The significance of this grand reversal
enlarges every time I close my eyes.)

You are so big, God.

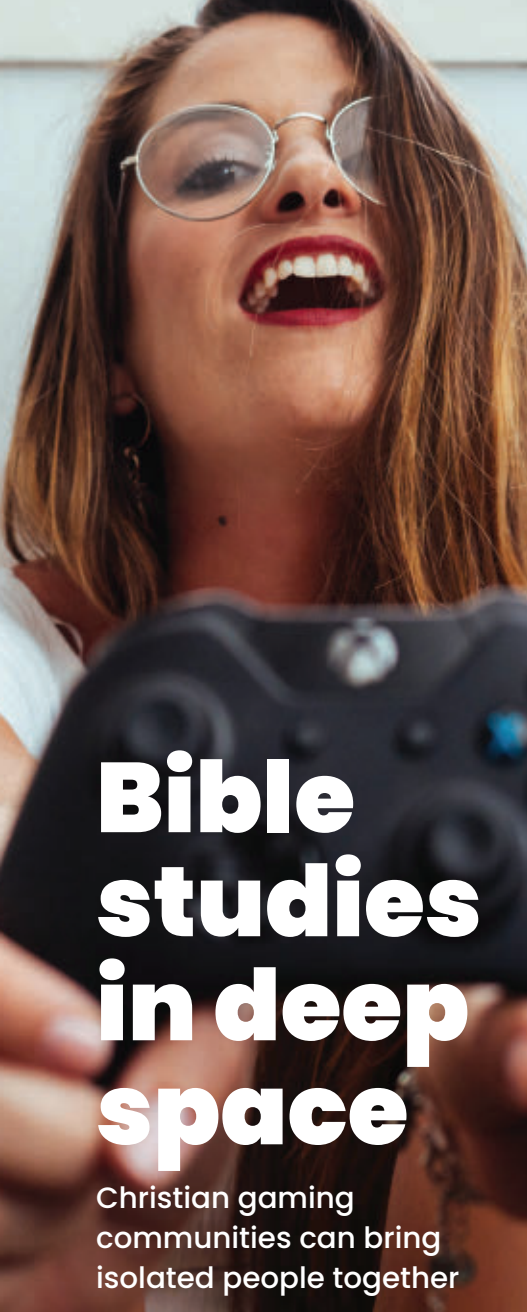
Full of sorrow and gladness,
energy and stillness,
weeping and laughter,
rest, and business.

Terrible, jealous anger co-existing
with a love that surpasses
any and all tenderness.

Inexpressibly holy.

Encompassing the full realm of nature,
the galaxies of human minds,
the heights of heaven,
the vast stretch of eternity,
and the entire set
of my insignificant details.

Thank you for holding my smallness so gently.



Bible studies in deep space

Christian gaming communities can bring isolated people together

Written by Elizabeth Duarte

After college graduation, I was preparing for a six-month missionary trip to Europe when the floor fell out from under me. Over the next years, I discovered the names and faces of the enemies harming my body—Lyme Disease and five other major vector-borne diseases, all in late, severe stages. It was a miracle I was alive.

I could no longer travel—even car trips were too exhausting for a body in the fight of its life. Not only was I unable to do ministry, but even going to church was entirely out of the question. Too many colds and flus would make their rounds, and one never knew when *they* were in attendance.

One of the hardest things to swallow was the Christmases spent apart from family. Every year, the tradition was to bring all of the siblings together with their families to celebrate and play board games. This had always been the highlight of my year.

Then one Christmas, when pre-season concerts brought one illness too many, my brother Jesse and I were both saddened that this year would be spent apart. To make up for the separation, he had the idea to play a video game.

We set a time, logged into the same game, and chatted on the phone while we explored a galaxy, conquered giant monsters, and simply hung out.

This became a new tradition. One Christmas, it was my turn to pick. He'd always been a fan of Star Trek, and since I was a fan of my brother, I liked it too. Hence, Star Trek Online was the logical choice.

Four years later, I'm still playing.

But the years spent isolated from people had made me shy. When avatars occasionally waved hello to me from across the promenade, I'd freeze in fear, staying motionless and praying desperately they'd think I was AFK (away from keyboard) and walk away.

The loneliness was terrible.

One night, I sat in the conference room of my fleet star base and looked out the window at the brilliant, sparkling vista of space, the moon glowing softly through the gentle blackness. It may be just a game, but the beauty can still take your breath away.

My character sat there gazing and I thought to myself, I wish there was a human I could share this with. To converse with, to experience this new world with, even just to sit and think with. I dreamed of using this virtual space to meet and share experiences with people I loved and even wondered if this might even be a good spot for a bible study.

I decided that here, in-game, was a chance to make connections.

It started slowly. First one friend, then

a few more. Before I knew it, I had pals I could chat with about life, how our days went, and which warp core was best to get maximum slipstream through sector space.

Then my boyfriend, now husband, came bounding through my front door one afternoon.

"Babe, you should check this out! There is a Christian Gamer Community in Star Trek Online!"

It seemed too good to be true.

I was thrilled to discover, not only did they play, but also held weekly prayer meetings on Deep Space Nine (voice hosted on Discord) with Bible readings.

It was unbelievable. For years I'd been out of church and had given up on having any kind of fellowship until my body finally gave me clearance to engage.

Over time, this group became more than just my gaming buddies. We've talked together, prayed together, and studied the Bible.

"Just remember you are Christians first, and gamers second...go into the gaming universe, and have fun!"

Sandy's words echoed into the discord channel like they did every week, signaling the end of the prayer meeting.

These friends prayed with me when my father had his heart attack, as he lay alone in the hospital where we couldn't visit him. They prayed for me when I battled seizures from an unknown health complication. Later that same year, they rejoiced with me at my virtual wedding, officiated by my father.

Open to anyone willing to abide by the rules of respect and love, the Christian Gaming Community creates an environment welcoming to people from a variety of denominations and beliefs. There's no pastor, but the group contains pastors, teachers, mission workers, laypeople, and families. It's not a church, and yet, there are moments when it feels like one of the best I've attended.

Elizabeth Duarte
@elizabeth.m.duarte
■ NICOLAS GRAS

NEIGHBOURING

EDMONTON COMMUNITY INITIATIVES ARE BRIDGING GAPS



Words by Jesse Kane

Moving into a city has been the most isolating, alienating experience of my life. I grew up in the countryside where people lived far away, but when you did see them there was always hot coffee and warm conversation. Since moving to Edmonton, I feel like I've exchanged the yellow canola fields that used to separate people with psychological distance.

Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of John 1:14, "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood" highlights the significance of the Incarnation, when God took on a human body. This is the God we follow, one who loves His neighbours and moves in next to them, breaking through barriers to be close, no matter the obstacles.

I felt those obstacles even more intensely when I got married and bought a small condo. My neighbours are all crowded together, and there's tension. A lot of horn-honking, too. Neighbours in the secular cityscape are aliens we guard ourselves from rather than people to love. How do I follow Jesus by loving my neighbours when we all have our guards up?

I was walking around my church

neighbourhood one afternoon when God drew my attention to a humble brick building set back in a park with the title Community League. I was not the only one who saw a sea of disconnected people and longed for better.

Edmonton's Community Leagues are unique organizations that encourage neighbours to engage, develop, and connect with one another, creating healthy neighbourhoods. I joined as a board member and invested in several committees. I also became involved with Abundant Communities Edmonton (ACE), an organization dedicated to fostering a culture of care, connection, and belonging.

As a block connector for ACE, I reached out to my condo board to organize a block party. To my surprise, others eagerly joined me, including two fellow Christians. We went door-to-door inviting our neighbours and prayed for the neighbourhood together afterward.

These simple gestures have been interwoven with much more. Through the League and ACE, we've thrown parties for the whole neighbourhood. We've fought human trafficking when

larger institutions didn't show up for a neighbour from Chile. We've made the neighbourhood safer by watching out for one another and connecting with the police. We've advocated for immigrants and for the development of low-income housing.

God is at work in my neighbourhood, and He is in yours too. God has provided a social garden for us to enjoy, dwell in, and tend as witnesses to His goodness. I used to think witnessing meant door-to-door evangelism like a salesman. What I am finding is that it looks a lot more like embracing the neighbours around me and loving them well.

Organizations like the League and ACE provide tools and frameworks

for neighbour-love, but the essence of Christian witness in the neighbourhood is Christ-in-you dwelling next to people and loving them well.

Practically, getting involved in your neighbourhood is simple: Wave to your neighbours. Learn their names. Ask them how their experience in the neighbourhood has been. Plan a block social with others. Develop ways to keep track of people's names and stories (I can't be the only

God is at work in my neighbourhood, and He is in yours too.



one who immediately forgets someone's name?). When someone needs help, draw people into God's work by inviting the neighbourhood to embody Jesus and show up for that person.

Getting involved in these civic organizations has transformed my experience of Edmonton from a concrete tundra to a warm community, inhabited by friends to invite in for a coffee or tea. And it hasn't been one-directional. These neighbourhood friends have been a gift to me. I am not cut off from the people around me. Much to my surprise, my neighbourhood hasn't been a problem to fix and my neighbours haven't been dehumanized targets for evangelism—they are fellow image-bearers who tell me a story about God's goodness and love too.

Neighbouring is more than a fad or a quick-fix to the political division that's touched even our beloved churches. Evangelicalism was born as a local church movement, and its grassroots nature was what initially made it so effective. Neighbouring takes us back to the heart of Jesus, loving our neighbours!

Jesse Kane
Kenny Eliason

Families and forming kids' faith

New study explores how parents approach cultivating their children's faith

Words by *Love Is Moving* Staff

One of the most striking discoveries of a new study called *Parenting Faith* was the heavy emphasis Christian parents place on giving their children unbiased choices about what they believe. The study, produced by The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada and 15 partner organizations, found parents don't want to favour Christianity when introducing their children to different worldviews.

"It becomes an option on the buffet rather than passing down a valued treasure," says Lindsay Callaway, one of the researchers on the project. Instead, she says parents see it as a virtue to expose their children to different religions they could choose from.

A key takeaway from this study is the importance of forming children to make good choices. Parents can teach their kids "how to learn and value what is good, forming virtuous choosers rather than our culture's vision of the virtue of choice."

The study noted a few themes that boded well for faith transmission, a key one being when both parents attend church regularly and are engaged in volunteering or participating in the church community. If one parent doesn't attend (especially the father), this leads to the children's decreased church engagement.

Not only is it important for both parents to be engaged in church, but also that they "do what they say and say what they're doing," says Callaway. The survey found that many parents lean toward either modelling without teaching or teaching without modelling.

This is something Callaway is learning herself as a young mother. Her third child was born while she was in the middle of the research. "If my daughter comes up to me while I'm working, I want to think of that not as an annoyance or disruption but as an opportunity," she says. "And this research really helped me embrace that."

The *Parenting Faith* report is available for free as a resource for both parents and ministries focused on children and youth. It can be used to bridge the divide between families and churches, providing a window into families' lives and offering greater clarity on their needs.

The report was released in April 2023 and can be downloaded for free at the link below.

parentingfaith.ca

ENCOUNTERING REVELATION

A kingdom imagination reframes how we live now

Words by Caleb Unrau

My wife and I have taken on the daunting task of teaching the book of Revelation to the youth at our church. When we asked what they thought Revelation is about, many had only a vague idea that it had something to do with the end of the world and the devil being destroyed. Some thought the book mainly had to do with the future and the strange last days, with things like the antichrist and the rapture.

Most admitted Revelation is too confusing to even take a guess at. But then one student piped up and asked the brilliant question, “It’s in the Bible, so it must have something to do with Jesus... right?”

The classic answer to every Sunday school question—Jesus—somehow feels more profound when attached to the book of Revelation. And the very first verse confirms the student’s suspicion: “The revelation of Jesus Christ.” So a fresh encounter with Revelation must not stray too far away from the cliché Sunday school answer. It is truly all about Jesus.

Revelation is a letter about Jesus written to churches struggling to follow Jesus. Threatened with persecution and tempted with compromise, these Jesus communities lived under the shadow of the Roman empire. John, the author of Revelation, wrote this prophetic tale to both challenge and comfort these Jesus communities.

The students in our group may not be threatened by the Roman empire, but between consumerism, social media, and a culture that is becoming more and more suspicious of Jesus-followers, we all experience the temptation to compromise to fit in. The challenge Revelation offers us is learning to

discern between the stories the world tells us and the story Revelation tells us.

In Revelation, Babylon is a place that represents the values of the world. From John’s time to today, we must discern the ways our cultures acts as Babylon and learn to resist those influences by remaining faithful to the way of Jesus. This is what John means when he writes of “overcoming.”

The main story running throughout Revelation is a fantastic retelling of the gospel. It recounts Jesus’s liberating death, resurrection, and His current reign as Lord. It highlights the empowering effects the Spirit has on believers, enabling them to live out that same story in their own lives by resisting the culture, dying to self, and finding life empowered in the slain lamb who redeemed us by His blood and brought us back to God (Revelation 5:9-10).

John tells us to “be faithful even to the point of death” (Revelation 2:10)—a challenge for all of us to take Jesus seriously. Keen listeners will allow their imaginations to be formed by the kingdom images central in Revelation, learning to live out the story it tells through embodied acts of faithfulness to King Jesus.

A kingdom imagination sees the world through the lens of Jesus, the slain lamb

who conquers through self-sacrificial love. The students in our group may go online and hear stories of hate, stories that tell them they are not good enough, and stories that tempt them to live a life of sin. Revelation offers a different story—one that tells of the beautiful world God has in store for them and that calls them to embody that world right now by following Jesus.

Revelation is a fantastic retelling of the gospel.

Caleb Unrau
@Clebunrau
■ MARK NEAL



PEACE IS IN OUR HANDS

What daycare can teach us about creating harmony

Words by Leah Reimer

Throughout university, I worked in a daycare. It was an extraordinarily challenging, entertaining, and rewarding job. During my first few months, I felt like I was constantly putting out fires, running around separating kids, telling them no, putting someone in timeout. It was exhausting and demoralizing. But as I grew into my role, I learned how to prevent conflict and proactively build peace instead.

One day, I discovered a beautifully written children's book at the library, *I Call My Hands Gentle* by Amanda Haan. I wanted my kids to internalize the message of this book, so I did what any good preschool teacher would do. I turned it into a messy and engaging art project.

I traced each child's hands on a piece of paper and provided them with as many sparkly, colourful, and ridiculous art supplies as I could find so that each child could decorate their paper hands to their hearts' content. While they painted, glued, and sprinkled, we brainstormed all the wonderful things we could do with our hands.

We could play with our friends, eat, colour, ride bikes, help our parents, give hugs, and more!

In the spirit of the book, and with all these ideas in our heads, each child carefully chose what they would call

their hands. The result was a series of beautiful, unique, slightly chaotic and wrinkly art pieces titled "I call my hands helpful," "I call my hands kind," or "I call my hands loving."

I have no doubt that this art project, like many other lessons I taught over the years, had a *far* greater impact on me than on these three- and four-year-olds. But I think it holds a powerful and practical example of proactive peacebuilding and peace education.

Today I work at Mennonite Central Committee, an international nongovernmental organization that works for relief, development, and peace around the world. In this role I spend a lot of time thinking about conflict and peace, and how we can support peace globally through things like climate action and food security. While the work I do every day is distinctly different from taking care of kids, there is a surprising overlap between these two worlds.

Peacebuilding isn't something that only happens far away, by experts, or in complex or violent contexts. It is something we can all participate in here and now, in our own lives, schools, families, and workplaces. It

also isn't just about conflict resolution; peacebuilding is also about building positive relationships and attitudes of cooperation, care, and honesty.

Peacebuilding isn't just about conflict resolution; it is also about building positive relationships and attitudes of cooperation, care, and honesty.

Peacebuilding involves changing our narratives and habits around conflict. My supervisor at the daycare used to tell our kids "Hands don't talk" as a useful way of redirecting physical expressions of anger or frustration. This critically simple message was a powerful tool that helped them realize that they were

trying to communicate something through their actions.

Imagine what this preschool lesson could mean on a world stage: *Guns don't talk, fighter jets don't talk.*

If we paused more often to think about all the beautiful things our hands, words, thoughts, and actions can accomplish, we might be slower to turn those tools against each other.

PERICARDIUM



Words by Ray Rink

In our grief we want to know
where souls go when heaven calls.
Some say somewhere, over the rainbow,
others, beyond the farthest star.

But there is no farthest star
and no place in between
for that house of many mansions
we've looked and haven't seen.

If space is but our grave, what more
can be? What hope of heaven
survives our physics, does the angel say?
Must earth be our only destiny?

Or could it be that space is but a brane,
a thin membrane that covers
a heart beyond dimension, not a place,
a source, all wisdom and creating. All.

And could these cold lips here with us
even now be tingling in that warm
and throbbing heart of love,
beside this membrane of lament?

Why does failure have to be part of leadership?

Recently, I was having a conversation with a friend I used to mentor. Our discussion veered toward leadership. One of the issues concerning him was failure.

As I reflected back after our conversation, my head was flooded with my many leadership failures. As just one example, there have been many people I've mentored and hoped great things for, and yet under my leadership those things did not manifest.

Did I not say the right things? Was I not available enough? Why would God put this person in my path if failure was inevitable? It's easy to internalize blame for the poor results of our own actions when they may be part of God's plan.

I'm not saying this so we can abdicate from poor decision making but to bring us to the idea that failure is a part of leadership and is often the place where God needs to and will intervene. Because God is the perfecter. As Romans 8:28 professes, He is putting everything together for those He has called!

As we chatted that day, the young leader told me about a person he'd helped. Initially, it had seemed like this person was trending in the right direction. But then things fell apart, and to make the matter worse, the person spoke terribly about my friend.

I counselled him to consider the criticisms and see if there is anything he could learn. I also suggested that sometimes God uses us as agents for others to learn the lesson they need to learn. We might not be a part of the epiphanic moment—we may also be one of many participants God is using to guide someone.

God is patient and will allow us time and give us opportunities to learn what it is we need to learn. Not everyone we do our best to disciple will follow through on that guidance, and this doesn't necessarily reflect negatively on our leadership capabilities or calling. In fact, the Bible is full of leaders who

fail—David, Saul, Solomon, Moses, Elijah, Peter, Paul, and Noah to name a few.

Failure is part of the path, but victory is inevitable. As 1 Peter 5:10 says, "And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast."

One of the most complex gifts for us to understand is that God gave us freedom to choose. When God asks us to do something, the result is not up to us. Our obedience is just one ingredient in what God is putting together.

Our responsibility as leaders is to trust what we hear from God, implement what we perceive God has said, and let Him deal with

results. Otherwise, we become overburdened, tired, overextended, and unconnected to our source of hope and strength—God.

If we believe God is in absolute control, that His ways are higher than ours, and that He has a plan for our good, this means that at many times we will not understand what God is doing. It will feel out of our hands, even though

we have the opportunity to be involved in small ways.

Our job is not to be successful, but to be faithful. Concern for people in our care for their own sake demonstrates our love for them and our attentiveness to God's callings on our lives. And sometimes, what we perceive as failure in leadership God sees as us getting one step closer to fulfilling that calling.

Not everyone we disciple will follow through on that guidance. This doesn't necessarily reflect our leadership capabilities or calling.

Shawn Naylor
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■ RENDY NOVANTINO

WISDOM IN A TECHNOCRATIC AGE

Staying grounded in an expanding digital world

Words by Josh Tiessen

Two Christmases ago, I purchased a virtual reality headset and entered the metaverse as an experiment. I watched VR films, played games, painted in three dimensions, interacted with human avatars in social worlds, and even attended a VR church service.

However, my foray was short-lived as I quickly experienced intense motion sickness. Virtual paintball was the last straw, causing me to toss my not-so-virtual cookies!

As a society we must grapple with our virtual ecospheres, whether that be the addictive social networks we frequent, augmented reality, or the all-immersive metaverse. Pandora's box has been opened and hyperreality is shaping most of us whether we like it or not.

I began thinking more seriously about virtual reality after listening to Father John Misty's song, "Total Entertainment Forever." The final verse reads: "When the historians find us we'll be in our homes / Plugged into our hubs / Skin and bones / A frozen smile on every face / As the stories replay / This must have been a wonderful place."

In the words of media theorist Neil Postman, will we be "amused to death" via the mountain of infinite content? My painting *Nirvana 5G* (pictured here) raises similar probing questions.

The composition radiates from the 5G cell tower, which represents a modern tree of knowledge. Like the Buddha who sat cross-legged beneath the Bodhi tree of enlightenment,



Nirvana 5G by Josh Tiessen



Qohelet (inspired by the Solomon-like figure in Ecclesiastes) levitates under the “tree” that promises omniscience. Ironically, the painting shows this hope of becoming trans-human turning on us. The very technology that promised us freedom becomes an instrument of mass surveillance, an inevitable panopticon of power.

The abandoned cityscape in my painting is reminiscent of a popular apocalyptic motif in video games and film. As our world accelerates toward urbanization and the obliteration of the natural world, will we desire to escape to a virtual world?

While Qohelet sits mesmerized, the encircling turkey vultures and famished black jaguar serve as the only signs of life. Perhaps they will jolt Qohelet back to the real world he was called to inhabit and steward.

As an artist who paints with traditional media—oil paint on Baltic birch panel—I belong to a movement that has been described as “slow art.” However, I also use technological tools that enhance my artistic practice. I use a digital SLR camera to capture my subject matter, then Adobe Photoshop and 3D modelling software to create mock-ups for my paintings, enabling me to paint surrealistic worlds.

Our devices improve our lives in many ways—connecting us to long-distance family and friends,

providing educational opportunities, and the simple pleasures of media entertainment.

But as religion professor Carl Trueman asserts, “technology defines ontology” (in his 2020 book *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*). In other words, tech can dictate the nature of existence. If we are not careful, virtual reality will become our true reality, the only world we care to live in.

Brett McCracken, an editor at The Gospel Coalition, proposes a way to deal with this problem in his 2021 book titled *The Wisdom Pyramid*. He borrows the concept of the food pyramid, but he switches out food groups with activities

ordered in the proper quantities for maximum human flourishing.

He places the internet and social media at the top of the pyramid, as they should make up the tiniest portion of our lives, whereas he argues activities like beauty (arts and culture), books, and nature should be allotted greater time.

He dedicates the bottom of the pyramid

to the Church—Spirit-filled local communities, which help increase our wisdom by orienting our lives around God. At the very bottom is the Bible, our only infallible source of truth that reveals God, the ultimate standard of wisdom.

In McCracken’s view, embodied activities like art, nature hikes, church, and board games with friends remind

us that physical reality, lived out face-to-face with people and in creation, is our true home.

The repeated refrain throughout Proverbs is “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10). Naturally, having a “fear” (reverence) for God means prioritizing activities that are aligned with the Creator’s design for our lives in the bodies and communities we inhabit, instead of chasing after self-centred media “fantasies” (Proverbs 28:19).

By putting technology in its proper place, through small practices like daily app limits, tech-less meals and tech Sabbaths, we can experience a sense of freedom, recognizing the power we have to live countercultural lives within our technocratic age.

Josh Tiessen is a fine artist, speaker, and writer based in Stoney Creek, Ont. His painting *Nirvana 5G* is one of 23 works in his new series *Vanitas and Viriditas*, which recently debuted as a solo exhibition at Rehs Contemporary Gallery in New York City. Read more of his columns at loveismoving.ca/finerstrokes.

Tech can dictate the nature of existence. If we are not careful, virtual reality will become our true reality, the only world we care to live in.

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Peace for women and girls

In the face of grim statistics, the Church needs to offer something better

Earlier this year *Time* magazine released an article titled, “Teen Girls are Facing a Mental Health Epidemic. We’re Doing Nothing About It.” The Center for Disease Control reported that nearly one in three high school girls considered suicide in 2021, which is a 60 per cent increase in a decade.

I’ve seen these statistics playing out in my own circles too. Just last summer, a friend of mine was preaching at a youth camp for girls and came home with harrowing tales of 11 and 12 year olds who were confessing suicidal ideation and debilitating levels of depression and anxiety.

In the book of Jeremiah, the young prophet calls out to his people, confronting anyone who called out “peace, peace” when there really was no peace. He prefaces the rebuke by saying, “They heal the brokenness of the daughter of my people superficially” (Jeremiah 6:14, MEV).

Essentially he was saying, “They’re pretending that everything is fine, but everything is *not* fine!” The wounds of the daughters of Canada go deep;

research, stats, and anecdotes make this evident. Sure, girls are going to university, awing the crowd with sports achievements, and showing up in new professional territory, but they are also struggling to fall asleep without medication, struggling to wake up without stimulants, and struggling to tell their friends or parents how they’re really doing.

Femicides are rising steeply according to a recent study, with a woman or girl being murdered every 48 hours in Canada. Physiological differences between men and women are part of what leaves women vulnerable to violence. (Males make up over 80 per cent of those accused of the crimes.) According to a 2021 Statistics Canada report, women are five times more likely to experience sexual assault.

The question we must ask is, *What will actually bring peace to these women and girls?*

At least two aspects of that answer are having a more holistic view of women’s sexuality and better protecting their physical safety.

The culture we swim in wants us to believe that a woman’s primary identity is her sexuality, and this messaging is picked up even when girls start wearing makeup, branded with taglines like “Nude Obsessions” and “Kitty Likes to Scratch.”

Cosmopolitan magazines boast that they can teach her “40 New Tricks to Keep Him Satisfied.” TikTok reminds her constantly about thigh gaps and exercises to grow her glutes. Trending songs announce that “Spilling secrets to the stranger in my bed, I remember nothing, so there’s nothing to regret.”

The underlying expectation is: *You will have to participate in this if you don’t want to be left behind, if you don’t want to be alone.*

Yes, women have sexual desires, but they more freely and joyfully express that part of themselves in relational contexts. Covenant relationships are meant to create environments where

Go deeper with a longer version of this article at loveismoving.ca/lovematters.

women are embraced in the fullness of who they are rather than be grasped only when they perform.

If we want girls to experience peace, we must emphasize the value of their entire personhood—body, soul, and spirit—and teach them the life-giving context for their sexuality.

Many people see something good in the efforts of feminism to ensure women are treated as autonomous and capable, yet they shy away from the importance of protecting women or teaching young men to show women different treatment.

In recent years I’ve watched young women reject and flee from their femininity, I suspect in part because they intuitively understand that to be female is to be at risk. If we want our girls to be at peace, we need better protections for women, including men who will rise up with the firm conviction that women will be safe in their presence.

The heart of God towards the daughters of earth has always been the same. His will and desire is that each woman would know she is not alone, that she is delighted in, that she is more than her sexuality, and that she is safe.

God gave His laws to enforce these values. He suffered a brutal execution and overcame the grave to redeem the broken, and He sent His Spirit to dwell in our hearts and remind us of these truths. When we really see girls as He does, it will inform our daily interactions and transform how we reach out to the oppressed.

Bonnie Pue is co-founder of the Union Movement and a mother of six living in Mission, B.C. Read more of her columns at loveismoving.ca/lovematters

If we want girls to experience peace, we must emphasize the value of their entire personhood.



Rethinking definitions of intelligence

Do our understandings of wisdom and foolishness align with God’s values? How are those with disabilities included within those understandings? These are good questions to consider alongside a passage like 1 Corinthians 3:18-19 which says that “the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight.”

Theologian Amos Yong challenges us on this question in *The Bible, Disability and the Church*: “If people with intellectual disabilities represent the foolishness of the world, what hinders our viewing them as embodying the wisdom of God?”

This is not to say our human tendencies to measure and define intelligence are always wrong, but rather that anything apart from complete submission to God will always end in ruin.

We are incapable of meeting our souls’ thirst for meaning and value apart from Him. Could recognizing this be the intelligence God is interested in? What if the inability to trust in one’s own intellect can deepen trust and dependence on God?

This knowledge is where the wisdom to ask for His help grows, and through unwavering trust in Him, the fruits of His spirit—like peace, joy, and unconditional love—are nurtured into full bloom.

By our standards, not possessing certain intelligence capacities is seen as a problem. But those labelled by this world as intellectually disabled are often the most shining exemplars for what it means to depend on God, not our strength.

Philosophy and ethics teacher Ros Bayes writes that “the strong, the clever, the ones the world regards as ‘gifted’ find that on a spiritual level we can be severely disabled compared to our brothers and sisters who lack those intellectual giftings, but whose spiritual life can be marked by abilities and giftings we never suspected.”

Disability in the Christian Tradition is a 2012 book which brings together the teachings of 14 renowned theologians including Augustine, Bonhoeffer, and Calvin. Its editors Brian Bock and John Swinton state that “no intellectual impairment can diminish or remove the imago Dei in any human ... and that the imago Dei is present whether a person is able to use their reason to full capacity or not. The Spirit of our Maker is present in every soul unless the ability to choose otherwise is present.”

When did we decide that the Holy Spirit can’t move through teaching from inside a soul labelled as less than able?

We’re mistaken if, in our own learning, we only pursue teachers who possess the kind of intellect humans have historically valued. “Misconceptions surrounding disability [can] cause nondisabled people to reject, ignore, dismiss, or abandon those who do not quite fit ‘the norm,’” writes disability rights activist Taylor Hyatt in *Life Together: Disability and Belonging in the Church* (TheEFC.ca/LifeTogether).

Hyatt lives with neurodivergence, with a brain that learns, processes and/or behaves differently from what is typical. And although some may see her disability as negative, through her experiences she has learned God “is the One who most accepts us in our mess, our littleness, our brokenness

... Jesus did not come for those who have it all together and want to rescue themselves. He desires to come close to us because of our need.”

Cynthia Tam, coordinator for disability ministry for The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada, says “a common misunderstanding among churches is that people with disabilities are people with needs, and that Christian ministry is an act of charity.”

This mindset creates a division in the Church between who is worthy of serving and who is worthy (only) of receiving. What a terrible disservice this is! In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul teaches us to see the Body of Christ as a united Body with different members, bearing different gifts of the same Spirit and bringing glory to His kingdom. There is no “us and them” in this equation; we are all equally unified as God’s image bearers.

People with intellectual disabilities have been purposefully designed to emulate the Holy Spirit and minister to others in unique ways. They are not charity projects or meant to provide perspective regarding the range of struggles some of us are called to face in this life. It is *not* the job of others to decide how the Holy Spirit will bloom through those with disabilities.

God’s intelligence is glorious. And we, His workmanship, have each been woven together to reflect Him. We are the *imago Dei*, the image of God, and He is equally delighted by every one of us.

We haven’t learned all aspects of God’s intelligence yet, but perhaps accepting our limited knowledge marks the beginning of grasping what heavenly intelligence looks like.

J.M. Bergman is an author and poet living in Morden, Man. Read a longer version of this column at loveismoving.ca/bodyandsoul

God is the One who accepts us in our mess, our littleness, and our brokenness.

ON FEELING STUCK

Are low points a sign of growth or decay?



I used to think when I felt stuck in my relationship with God it was because I was doing something wrong. I often responded to this feeling by doing a self-audit. I'd begin by looking at my outward actions or inactions, and then I'd examine my attention, affection, and desires. This self-audit was essentially my attempt at seeing how I was living up to my claim of following Jesus.

I do believe sometimes we can get stuck in our relationship with God due to our own disobedience. The irony is, feeling stuck can be the conduit for us to become more aware of our relationship with God. Without this prompt, some of us would never even begin the journey of self-examination.

If you resonate with feeling stuck, it might be helpful to set apart some time with God to reflect and to create your own version of self-audit.

But be encouraged that God never shames us. Conviction and shame are very different things. Shame leads us to fear, despair, disappointment, and distraction and leaves us feeling worthless.

Conviction leads us to repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, and wholeness—all pointing to a deeper experience of God's mercy. What if feeling stuck is a grace from God and a sign that Holy Spirit is calling you to a deeper place in your relationship with God?

Yet for many of us, being stuck can actually be a sign of our obedience to God, not disobedience. Many saints before us have described different stages of faith experienced by those choosing to follow Jesus.

Despite there being a variety of opinions of the phases of that journey, the teachers such as John of the Cross, Dallas Willard, Henry Nouwen, and Janet O. Hagberg all describe the necessary experience of feeling stuck in

our relationship with Jesus.

You may be familiar with some of the descriptions for these periods—a wall, barrier, dark night, chasm, desert, wilderness, etc. A variety of Christian traditions and interpretations see these experiences as essential to growing deeper with God. They do not see this as an experience as being caused by disobedience but as a deeper sign of obedience.

Many of us have been praying desperately to God to go deeper in our relationship with Him. We have been seeking God with all our devotion. We long to go deeper, we seek it, we pray for it, we want to live it. Yet as we pray for more, the less we seem to have.

On the surface, this experience is completely counterintuitive. And yet below the surface, God is inviting us to deepen our faith in Him. It comes through the mystery of presence. It's daily manna, daily bread that we become dependent upon. This is where our relationship with God is not dependent upon our sensational experiences of God but something much more subtle, deep, and mysterious.

Feeling stuck turns into an opportunity to rest not in our feelings of God nor in our actions toward Him, but in a sweet and subtle assurance of the mercy found only in His Son. This is where disciplines such as silence, solitude, and contemplation become companions in our journey of faith. The total opposite of decay, being stuck can be a sign of an invitation to grow right where we are.

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■ HANNA POSTOVA



Hope and healing in the face of racial trauma

I have a collection saved on Instagram titled Black Joy. It contains videos of men frolicking, babies dancing, women laughing and families harmonizing around the dinner table. There are pictures of couples celebrating anniversaries and graduates gliding across convocation stages.

It is healing to see joy exuding from Black bodies, because far too often we see Black bodies subjected to violence and harm. I started this collection because my near-constant consumption of Black pain was taking a toll on my mental health.

My desire to be informed about what was happening in the world gave way to an obsession with reading, seeing, and hearing about as many incidences of racism as I could find. The consequences of my overconsumption of injustice included a heightened awareness of the world's dangers and a growing sense of anger and anxiety.

Our brains and bodies were not designed to carry this level of rage. Several studies in the United States have identified clear links between experiences of racism and poor health outcomes. It is more difficult to determine whether the same connections exist in Canada because most Canadian healthcare institutions do not collect race-based data.

However, trauma functions in the same way regardless of nationality. When we experience a traumatic event, our sense of safety and security is disrupted. In response, the brain initiates the fight-flight-or-freeze response. When

we are unable to hide, run, or fight our way back to safety or when danger repeatedly threatens us, our physical and mental health suffers.

In her paper “The Traumatizing Impact of Racism in Canadians of Colour,” psychologist and University of Ottawa professor Monnica Williams explains that racial trauma “consists of reactions to direct or vicarious exposure to real or perceived threats, experiences of humiliation and shame, and racial discrimination towards people of colour. Racial trauma is associated with phenomena such as anxiety, depression, despair, suicidal ideation, and poor physical health.”

BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Colour) Canadians are consistently confronted with reminders that the world is not as safe for them as it may be for others. In the past three years, Indigenous communities have grieved the discovery of unmarked graves at the site of former residential schools, Asian Canadians have grappled with the rise in anti-Asian hate crimes triggered by prejudice during Covid-19, and Black Canadians have wrestled with long overdue reports of anti-Black racism and systemic inequality in numerous Canadian institutions, including education and policing.

Racial trauma also carries significant spiritual implications. When trauma triggers initiate the fight-flight-or-freeze response, we may be tempted to fight God with accusations against His character or to run from His presence and hide under the weight of our shame.

As Michelle T. Sanchez writes in her book *Color-Courageous Discipleship*, “Obviously, our God does not traumatize us, but it sure can seem that

way. Why, for instance, does God allow racism and oppression to thrive, bullies to taunt, inequity to be perpetuated? Why has God allowed slavery and other racial atrocities to flourish for so long [...]? Questions like these weaken the faith of some and cause others to reject Christianity outright.”

But for others, questions like these lead to a deeper experience of God's love. The intentions and expectations behind our questioning are more consequential than the questions themselves. If we come to God expecting simplistic or clear-cut answers, we will likely leave unsatisfied.

While I have found it empowering to equip myself with more knowledge about racial injustice and inequality, information has not healed the wounds of these realities in my own life. It is only when I have sought God's presence amid my questioning that the burdens of anger and anxiety have lifted.

God invites me to run to Him when the dangers of the world overwhelm me, to hide under the shadow of His wing and to fight against evil through the power of His Spirit. I do not have to keep my defenses up with Him because there is safety in His presence.

My relationship with God has not erased the pain of racism, but it has given me the assurance there is meaning behind the pain. Of all people groups in the world, Jesus took on the flesh of a despised and oppressed race. Jesus came to save both the oppressed and the oppressor, but He intentionally aligned himself with the experiences of those who are rejected and marginalized. I am convinced there is a special blessing awaiting those who persist in faith despite these obstacles. On this side of heaven, that blessing has come to me in the sweetness of Black joy that has not and cannot be overcome.

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LAWRENCECRAYTON

CREATING A DIGITAL CATHEDRAL

Conor Sweetman, former editor of *Love Is Moving*, is special projects editor at Christianity Today and the founder and editor of *Ekstasis* magazine. He lives in Toronto with his wife, Hannah, and enjoys thinking about artistic and literary things. He studied English literature and has a Bachelor of Arts from Tyndale University and a Master of Arts from York University. He was interviewed by current *Love Is Moving* editor Ilana Reimer.

***Ekstasis* describes itself as a digital cathedral, language that mixes an older tradition with a newer one. Why do we need a space like that?**

I think people are longing for a digital space that goes a lot deeper than what's [offered] algorithmically, so I see it as kind of a bridge between them and the thoughtful, spiritual, and literary work people have been creating in niche cloistered areas for many years. A goal of mine is to create a gallery of this work that's being created in workshops and bedrooms and give it a platform.

And so with the idea of a cathedral, so much work is put into building this elegant, beautiful, spacious atmosphere where you can encounter the more ethereal and kind of lofty concepts and works of God. It's trying to create a home for [art and literature] that can otherwise feel like it's floating in the wind. We want to capture it in a place that's easy to engage with but also lifts your eyes up to the majesty of God.

How *Ekstasis* magazine supports Christian artmaking





So it's curation, but then also a way of presenting it, similar to how a cathedral brings people together to worship.

Yeah, the digital world is very individualized, atomized. You're scrolling on your own feed. You can be intentional with those communities, but in our hearts we want to be with people—worshiping, talking about the same things, and getting that creative spark going. So I think that image of a physical space bringing people together—even if they're not gathering in one place—they are gathering of one mind and worshipping together in a way.

Given how noisy and anxiety-inducing the digital world often can be, what are some ways *Ekstasis* goes about creating that space?

When we were first acquired by CT [*Christianity Today*], we were showing it online to an art director for a major firm in the fashion industry. He made a comment that's really stuck with me ever since; he essentially said that the imagery and the atmosphere of *Ekstasis* doesn't put the visual or emotional burden onto the viewer. It adds a spaciousness and a peacefulness inherent to the design of sparse letters, a little bit of elegance around the font. And then it's the grand photography that captures the starkness and beauty—whether it's landscape or interiors or architecture or whatever.

I think that graphic design element as actually a big part of creating that refuge where we're so visually bombarded, it allows you to kind of take a visual breath when you see it. I love imagining someone, [after reading a piece] taking a deep breath and feeling like, *Wow, that was surprising and delightful in a way I don't usually encounter on digital platforms.*

And so allowing engagement through using graphic design principles, but then walking people into a deeper reflective experience. In my experience, it stills my soul a little bit.

That emphasis on the beauty of images, the design, the physical magazine, is a striking element. Why is beauty important?

On a metaphorical level, I think beauty is the avenue that stories are formed in. And I think beauty is a thing that creates an emotional climate that then allows narratives to be threaded within that climate.

Beauty is used by Netflix every day, and by your podcast app. Beauty is used in very "secular" ways because it draws us into an experience, whether it's negative or positive. Beauty on its own is not good, but it is an avenue to turn our attention. And hopefully *Ekstasis* turns us toward the good, the true, and the beautiful intertwined.

Reviving imagination within Christians seems to be another important theme. Is imagination something that's diminished or that we've lost?

I don't think it's something we've lost, because we are imaginative creatures. The expectation of something happening tomorrow, the anticipation for it, is based on our faculty of imagination. And that's uniquely human. Animals can't foresee a reality that hasn't happened yet. But in our current cultural moment,

the general perception is that we can let our imaginations be lazy. We don't have to work that hard at cultivating it. We don't have to direct it towards craftsmanship. We've gotten lazy in our storytelling capabilities, opting for something that is propaganda. The message is the only point, and that message is aggressive and simplified.

So for reviving the imagination, I really hope to bring people into a recognition that nuance and the development of the imagination are possible and

that we're invited into that. But in our kind of hypercommercialized world, we can forget that the imagination can be vivified—that it can cast a new vision for what it means to be a faithful follower of Christ.

There are so many people doing the slow, hidden work of creative revival that is really high level, really skilled, but often there's no economic structures

around them to let [their work] actually reach the light of day. So I would love for *Ekstasis* to be a part of bringing this work to more people, because it is happening. We can't just lament the loss of it all the time.

What are some obstacles that you're seeing as you're identifying this good work and helping bringing it to the light?

Most of us aren't taking the time and effort required for really good and life-changing art and books and conversations and gatherings. That requires us to be uncomfortable, it requires us to have patience, it requires us to have nuance.



In our social media age, it's very hard to have all of that because our brains are rewired toward instant gratification and always thinking about the new thing. Whereas truly the things that change your life, both aesthetically and spiritually, are long and slow and intentional. And while I'm not saying most people aren't intentional, they don't have it on their radar that they can go to these depths that are available to them because we're so used to swimming in the shallow end all the time.

There's a lot of polarization and sharp disagreement between Christians, and we see a lot of that online, especially. Do you think places like *Ekstasis*, which uses the lens of art to reflect on faith, can help us get better at talking to each other?

Definitely. Because we're so drawn to beautiful narratives and storytelling, we can go straight to the storytelling and talk about the complexity of

our human experience and both the triumphs and trials. We get to bypass a lot of the buzzwords and trigger words that are going to automatically set up walls against each other.

As the editor, I see who is submitting, I see who's engaging with the magazine. Maybe this is a bold claim, but I think certain people who are drawn together through the beauty of this work might not—at a political rally or even on a university campus—might not want to be in the same room because they disagree with each other so strongly and don't have the charity or the willingness to talk about it. But I think because *Ekstasis* is trying to elevate the complexity and the beauty of stories and humanity and poetry, it allows people to enter into a space of listening rather than telling.

There's a kind of hopeful resistance in choosing to create art in the midst of the tensions you just mentioned. Can you speak a bit to the role of art in cultivating hope?

I think it goes back to the faculty of imagination. I'm going to butcher it, but there's a C.S. Lewis quote (or it might have been [G.K.] Chesterton I don't know), but essentially he says, the organ of imagination is necessary to our own knowledge and wisdom just as much as information.

The hope in developing the imagination, engaging with the arts, and creating art is that it speaks to all not being lost. That there is inherent goodness that can be seen. It shows that there's something worth doing and there's something worth working towards.

The small steps of creating art speak to that hope that things can be different, but not only different, but that even in the now, even in this moment, there is beauty to be found.

What's your dream for the next generation of Christian artists?

Again a bold statement, but I would love for the general conversation to be steered away from supporting the arts and move towards recognizing the essential role of the arts, creativity, and imagination in our day-to-day life and as shaping agents of our souls.

People tend to talk about the arts as being a tangential thing: *Oh, that's nice that they're doing that. Maybe I'll donate something or go to a gallery or whatever.* But I go back to the reality that we are so shaped by what we listen to, what we watch, what we engage with in our online environment. And all of those things are using the same tools that Christian artists and Christian writers use, but they're directed toward different ends.

And so, it's not about supporting the arts, it's about this need to build economically safe structures and rewards so that people can actually make a living off of devoting themselves to the arts, and so that beautiful work that shapes our hearts and souls can continue to be created. Not just as an afterthought—once we do the important stuff like politics, we'll get to the arts—but recognizing that politics are shaped by the imagination.

This interview was edited for brevity and clarity.

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P18. ELIZABETH JOY SANDERS
P19. COLLINS LESULIE
P20. HANNAH SWEETMAN

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Restless technology and eternal rest

**Human innovation is
transformed within
God's grander story**

Words by Andrew Noble

Technology can seem to create more problems than it solves—always connected means *always* connected, never at rest. Chris Martin, author of *The Wolf in Their Pockets*, calls it the “hallway effect”—the pressure of being judged while walking down a hallway between classes—except now we feel the gaze of our peers everywhere, all the time.

Social media does not just correlate with anxiety, it causes it, according to researcher Jonathan Haidt. After reviewing thousands of studies, his team found the more you use a social app the more likely you are to experience a restlessness that cannot easily be put to rest.

The mental health decline did not begin with the pandemic but with the introduction of smartphones. In the decade before 2010, mental health levels remained relatively constant. They have dropped off a cliff since then, especially in women, who have seen a drop from 75 per cent saying they have excellent or good mental health to just 54 per cent in 2019.

Technology connects us in amazing ways, just as papyrus and ink once did for the Apostle John and his readers. But we need to do a better job of keeping technology in a restricted space. When there are endless pages to scroll, or for John, “much to write,” we should agree with his words in 2 John 12 that “our joy will be complete” only when we “see each other face-to-face.”

In heaven, we will be face to face with God and other believers. We will see loved ones and experience the absence

There is no technology in all of creation that God cannot rightly claim, “mine.”

of disease and pain (see 1 Thessalonians 4:17 and Revelation 21:4).

Most of all, when we think of life everlasting we ought to think of Jesus.

No lightbulbs or LED screens will be needed, not even the sun or the moon, because as John says in Revelation 21:23, “The glory of God illuminates the city, and the Lamb is its lamp.” The one who told us to be a city on a hill and a light to this world will light all things in the city of heaven.

While electrified filaments of tungsten won’t be needed, there will be technology. Perhaps this is an underdeveloped aspect of Christian doctrine; perhaps we’re too afraid of talking or preaching about tech in heaven in fear of the idolatry it might lead to.

Yet God tells us of technology in heaven. According to Revelation, there will be walls, gates, streets, buildings, and ships. Though life everlasting will resemble the Garden of Eden in many ways, it also will display the grand result of God’s plan.

God wants to dwell with us. The story of Scripture shows this in progressive development—from garden to tabernacle to temple to incarnation to the new heavens and new earth. Each place, except the initial garden, resembles human creativity.

There will be streets, which are described as “pure gold, like transparent glass.” The Apostle John describes a wall built with jasper, with foundations adorned “with every kind of jewel,” listing twelve kinds, alluding to the prior visions of ancient prophets recorded in Revelation 21:18-19,

Ezekiel 28:13, and Isaiah 54:12-12.

And there will be Tarshish ships—large sea vessels that were instruments of pagan commercial power but will appear in the heavenly city as yet another means to bring glory to God (see Isaiah 60:9). Israel never had a navy; they associated water with fear and chaos. The foreign ships are significant because it is a way of God saying that every work of human hands, even the big scary ones built by non-Christians, exists to serve God’s purposes.

In other words, our Father in Heaven is not surprised by social media. He is not huddled together with the Holy Spirit and Jesus figuring out how to draft a new plan for His people. To borrow a phrase from the theologian Abraham Kuyper, there is no technology in all of creation that God cannot rightly claim, “mine.”

When God molded silicon and lithium into the earth, He knew the good it would bring in what Derek Schuurman calls, “latent potentiality.” Likewise, God knew the harm that would result from His cursing of those same elements in response to Adam’s sin (Genesis 3:17).

Technology is both good and bad, a mixture of Creation and Fall, until one day when Jesus Christ will “reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things on heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Colossians 1:20).

The cross itself, an invention to display death and the grandeur of Rome, was

subverted, redeemed, and transformed into a symbol of hope. No matter how hard life is, what pressure we

face, how restless or anxious, the cross says even the worst wrong can be made right, the most despairing sinner can be saved, and everything sad can become untrue.

A theology of technology puts it in its place and puts us in ours. Being made in the image of God is about having creativity, moral agency, and responding to the task of filling the earth and subduing it. We must take our responsibility seriously. We were made to be the masters of technology, just as God is the master of us.

We shouldn’t expect to control all aspects of creation and technology as God does—we ought to release our desire for omnipotence. We can take comfort in the knowledge that in the future, we shall rest not in the light of our own inventions but in the light of Jesus.

Andrew Noble serves in pastoral ministry at Grandview Church in Kitchener, Ont., and co-hosts a podcast called *What Would Jesus Tech*.

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FABIO LUCAS

Deconstruction, art, and Evangelicals

Words by Ruth Chan

I'm deconstructing.” These are some of the most vulnerable, honest, and frightening words of young people in our churches today. Some have called our era the Age of Deconstruction, as so many young adults are leaving evangelical churches.

The term deconstruction has gained traction in recent years as a new name for the critical questioning of one's faith. Of course, asking questions has always been intrinsic to the human experience. However, deconstructing faith within the North American context seems to be a uniquely challenging experience.

According to Canadian philosopher James K. A. Smith in his 2014 book *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor*, people in the secular West currently “live in a cross-pressured space, where both [their] agnosticism and [their] devotion are mutually haunted and haunting.”

Strong belief proves extremely difficult in a society of competing worldviews. In this cross-pressured space, belief is constantly aware of the option of unbelief and vice versa. Add the complexities of a generation immersed in the online sphere and its endless worldviews, and suddenly deconstruction is not such a surprising phenomenon.

In one of my earliest seasons of questioning, I spent hours online researching different religions, worldviews, and cultures. Since then, online information has only grown

**Becoming better
friends to those
with questions**

exponentially. A quick scroll through any social media platform reveals varying worldviews about identity, happiness, politics, and religion. I've often found myself asking, along with others in my generation, "How can I know anything when I cannot know everything?"

Embracing the tension

Naturally, the deconstructing process is filled with discomfort and fear for both the individual and the Church. The journey is one of tension, and Evangelicals, generally speaking, have not been primed to inhabit tension well. Consider mainstream evangelical culture, often imported to Canada from the United States. Worship songs focus on victory, goodness, and love. Radio stations feature positive and uplifting programs. Churches tell stories that have clear redemptive endings.

These themes are not inherently wrong, but in over-emphasising them, little room has been left for lament, defeat, and unbelief. What of the stories of the messy and broken sides of life?

It is time to embrace tension. A church's comforts, perspectives, and convictions will be challenged whenever someone in the community deconstructs. If the church is unable to hold tension well, they will be unable to hold those deconstructing well.

They will fail to lend a listening ear—responding instead with argument, forceful correction, even rejection. They will make an already difficult journey

even more painful. Those dismantling their religious frameworks are often hurting. The constant unsettledness of asking, "What if none of this is true?" can be vulnerable, disorienting, and exhausting.

To deconstruct is to risk loss of friendship, community, and even relationship with God. This journey requires churches to tread gently. Perhaps the greatest need for those deconstructing is not deliverance or conversion, but friendship. Anyone who's been a Christian for a while will

attest that salvation doesn't mean finding all the definitive, final answers. Following Jesus is about presence, relationship, and falling in love with God.

God does not promise everything will be resolved within us as we live on this earth, whether physically, emotionally, or intellectually. Indeed, Jesus speaks as if He expects us to walk the path of faith with doubt and struggle. What God promises is a deeper, more basic need than answered questions—it's the promise of presence. Even amid doubt and fear, He will never leave nor forsake us.

Keeping company with the arts

Much like the person deconstructing, the artist lives in the cycle of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation. As a creative, I often find myself squirming in art galleries, concerts, and movie theatres. I find my own prejudices, self-deceptions, and questions challenged when creating and receiving art. I feel the invitation to enter the cycle.

Artists have long been tasked with inhabiting places of doubt, mystery, and beauty. It is the work of creatives to approach life with honesty regardless

of the cost to personal comfort or convenience. A quick look at history reveals artists wrestling with life and with God. They wrestle, not with a physical force as Jacob did, but with the defying and

stubborn strokes of oil, graphite, with the deafening dissonance of orchestras. They wrestle to find cosmos within the chaos, as American author Madeleine L'Engle put it in her 1980 book *Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art*.

By *cosmos within the chaos* she meant a way of making sense of it all, or at least making peace with it all.

For those who have become lonely in their search for God, the arts can provide solidarity and solace. The artist is a fellow pilgrim, a friend who

understands how the process feels. The arts can also create space for tension within evangelical churches. Art by nature will challenge one's perspectives. It will inevitably make us uncomfortable, especially if it is unflinchingly honest about what it means to be a human being living with God. By embracing that discomfort, evangelical churches can become a safer place for those deconstructing to do so within the Body of Christ.

Art and belief

The arts also offer a way to make sense of faith amid a flurry of conflicting and competing views. Julian Barnes, a renowned agnostic, remarks that he is tempted by religion when he encounters art. In *How (Not) to Be Secular*, Smith quotes him wondering if "religion might just be true simply because it is beautiful." He says, "missing God is focused for me by missing the underlying sense of purpose and belief when confronted with religious art."

Here, Barnes is moved not by clever arguments, but rather by art. In engaging with the arts, human beings understand more of life. They understand more of truth. Perhaps not always in the explicit sense of the word, but in the subtle shifts and turns of the soul, they begin to somehow understand that they understand.

In embracing tension, mystery, and paradox, the arts present a faith with enough elasticity to hold the strain of pluralistic beliefs, counter-beliefs, and unanswered questions. Perhaps it is time once again to grace the walls of churches not merely with logos and branding, but with art. Art that teaches evangelical Christians different ways of inhabiting tension, presence, and belief. Art that rejoices, laments, and tells the hard stories of life, so that we may better extend hands of friendship to those who ask big questions.

Ruth Chan is a multidisciplinary artist living in Ottawa, Ont. She primarily focuses on music and works with photography and design on the side.

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■ NATHAN MCDINE



UNEXPECTED STORIES OF ADOPTION

I'll See You Later documents families' stories

Words by Preston Pouteaux

When I was handed my daughter, Scotia, for the first time, I froze. Like a gift wrapped up in a bundle with some kind of sterile hospital towel, I held my pink and fresh-to-the-world daughter. I'd spent months, days, and hours waiting for this moment and now I just stood there in the middle of a hot hospital room.

Open adoption is a way to create a family that involves a number of deeply loving people

I looked down, then back up at the nurse. I said the one thing that could bubble up through my feelings, "What do I do with her?" Ah, the first words of a new dad. The nurse met my eyes, knowingly amused, and nodded at a chair in the corner. "Maybe you should sit down with her, she's yours now, you know." Before the car seats, diapers, and family photos, I was

simply a dazed new dad looking at my favourite new little human.

No two stories are alike, but all families begin with a kind of unpredictable suddenness. In spite of plans and dreams,

families come together unexpectedly, wrapped as a surprise. This is part of the wonder of it all. Human life, even and perhaps especially at the start, bursts forth with a proclamation: people are not a commodity but a gift.

Each of us from the beginning are fully given, and glow with wonder—even if we also freeze at first sight of it all unfolding. Often we don't know what we're really beholding when we first encounter a new parent and their child. But if we look closely, we'll find ourselves staring right into a story of God's providence. Each family is a miracle tended and embraced with joy by their Creator.

A few years ago, I found myself participating in an unlikely project that put me face-to-face with these sacred and surprising stories. My neighbours, who had adopted a child, asked my friend and fellow film producer Bruce McAllister if we could help tell the untold stories of adoption in Alberta.

We learned that adoption stories are complex. In some places adoptive parents wait years to be considered for placement, while some infants will live out their childhood in the foster system. Meanwhile some birth mothers who face big decisions



I'll See You Later is an internationally awarded Canadian film that explores the beautiful stories of open adoption. You can watch and share the film by visiting illseeyoulater.com.

about their child's future review misinformation about what adoption could mean for them.

We decided we had to tell these stories, and so we enlisted our filmmaking friend Jesse Nakano to help us. Together we started out, and we were astonished by what we filmed. We heard from mothers who wrestled with the surprising news of their pregnancy,

child moving between one parent and another, but a kind of openhanded love. Storytelling is a strange and wonderful thing because our stories do not come to us neatly packaged. They don't begin with a convenient cue that the movie is about to begin. No opening sequence, just a realization somewhere along the way that life is rolling along. We are often well into it before we know

adoption in a way that captured the beauty of shared love that emerges in unexpected ways. Open adoption is a way to create a family that involves a number of deeply loving people. In simplest terms, the birth mother stays in the life of, and is known by, her baby and her child's adoptive family. The mother is not secret, mysterious, or left behind but rather loved, embraced, and included in a number of ways.

Every story is different, as every family is unique, but open adoption is a way to see everyone in an adoption story as vital, valued, and beloved.

One mother, as she passed her baby to her new adoptive family, whispered into her baby's little ears, "I'll see you later." That redemptive phrase, spoken during filming, became the name of the documentary. These surprising and expectant words of love spoke volumes because love shared is what makes a family, no matter how the story began or how it unfolds.

One night, after we screened the film at a movie theatre in downtown Calgary, a man walked up to me and shook my hand. "I came here tonight wondering if I could ever be a good enough dad to

Adoption stories were not a transaction of a child moving between one parent and another, but a kind of openhanded love.

from not-yet-parents who wondered if they could be, and from the children who are loved by all of them.

Emerging from these three groups—birth-parents, adoptive parents, and children—were stories that echoed with expectancy, surprise, hope, heartache, and redemption. Adoption stories were not a transaction of a

what it's all about. Love emerges in the swirling conditions of our one surprising and beautiful life. Love brings us together, and before we know it we may be holding a baby, shocked and in awe, at newfound life wrapped in a bundle.

This was the heart for the film we created, to tell the stories of open

adopt,” he said. “We have our name on a list, but I’ve been so uncertain, so I came here tonight and sat in the back. I want to tell you that I’ve made up my mind, I’m going to adopt. Thank you.”

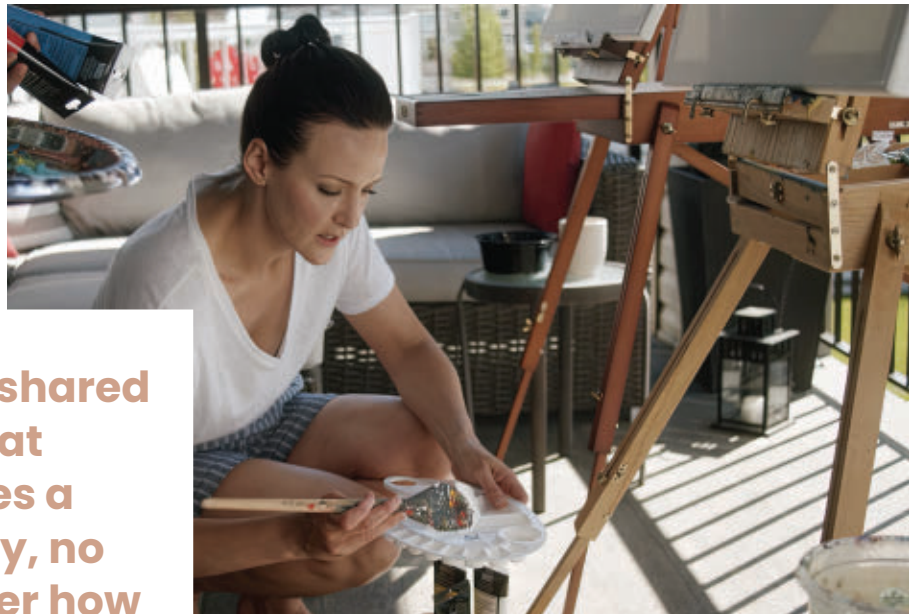
These stories have had a growing impact. *I’ll See You Later* has been shown at more than a dozen international film festivals, winning several awards. It has been screened in living rooms, adoption agencies, and among those who believe in the beauty of adoption. I recently heard of a soon-to-be mom who decided to give birth and then find a home for her child because of the film.

The film continues to be passed along, and we hope it will continue to find a home in the imaginations of many more people in the coming months.

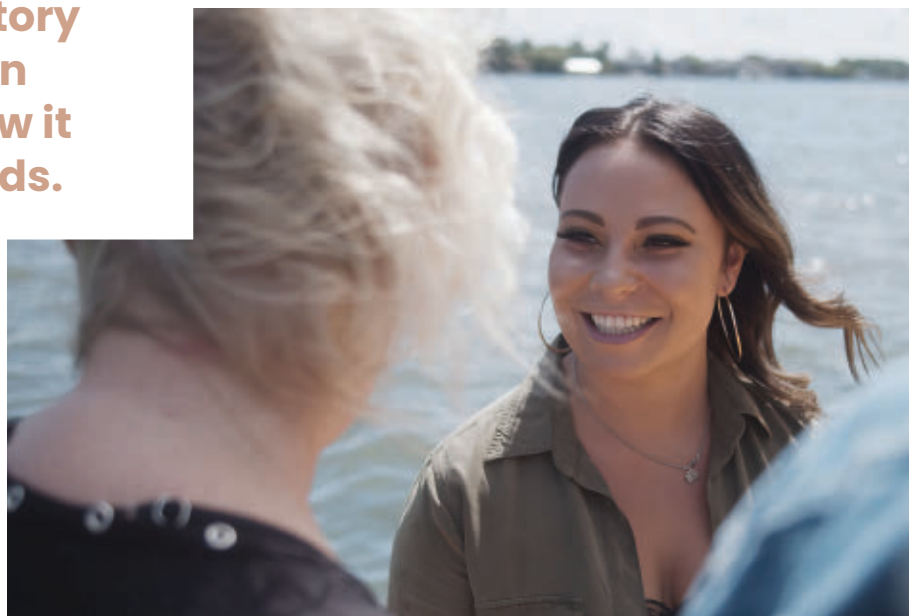
Our unexpected moments may be the very story of love unfolding in our lives. Jesus calls God His father, referring to a personal and interconnected relationship of love. It was perhaps the best language He could use to help us know just how profound the Father’s love would be for us, too. We are—perhaps unexpectedly and even before we know it—found, embraced, and adopted as God’s own.

Preston Pouteaux is a film producer, author, and pastor in Chestermere, Alta.

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POUTEAUX; I’LL
SEE YOU LATER FILM



**Love shared
is what
makes a
family, no
matter how
the story
began
or how it
unfolds.**





Show, don't (just) tell

Stories that demonstrate love but skip the sermon

Have a problem with faith-based films.

That may not be what you'd expect me to say in a faith-based magazine but it's true. Historically, most faith-based films simply lack quality. While good films try to subtly show what impacts their characters, faith-based movies usually become preachy—with Bible studies that shape the action and conversions that feel forced.

Like sermons on a Sunday morning, Christians see the Big Screen as a way to communicate the gospel and help them reach both people who are not yet believers and those who already are. When done well, these films can be a powerful mode of storytelling that helps bring God's truth to the masses.

And there have been a few successful examples in the past. Tyler Perry's *Madea* franchise, a comedic series of movies and plays with deeper moral messages, is arguably one of the most successful franchises in history. *The Chosen*, a fictional series on the life of Jesus, and the *Jesus Film* both became global phenomena.

If we really believe that we know the best Story, we should be amazing storytellers! But, too often, faith-based films feed us Scripture in overly simplistic or even offensive ways. (For example, I once saw a film where the main character was told that she suffered a miscarriage because she didn't pray hard enough.)

But maybe things are starting to change.

In 2023 alone, *Jesus Revolution* and *Big George Foreman* are both major releases that have made some waves in the faith-based market. Both historical stories, these films have tried to reshape the way our faith looks onscreen.

Jesus Revolution follows the American spiritual revival of the 1960s and 70s and *Big George Foreman* unravels the fascinating life and career of the former Heavyweight Champion of the World. There's a number of similarities between the two films. Both stories focus on a person whose life seems to crash and burn—and then shows the transformational impact that faith can have in a person's life.

These pieces fit very neatly into the "faith-based mold," but then they do something different. They are more honest.

First, let's look at *Big George Foreman*. Directed and co-written by George Tillman Jr., the film focuses on the rise and fall of one of boxing's greatest legends. George Foreman was a man who climbed the highest of heights in the ring, dropped into obscurity as a pastor and then, later in life, had to begin the climb all over again. (And yes, he sold a lot of grills as well.)

Instead of forcing awkward messages or "altar calls" into the narrative, Tillman Jr. highlights the ways Foreman's faith gives him strength in the midst of trials. Hope and spiritual belief affects every aspect of his story, yet somehow Foreman's beliefs feel more authentic and less forced. In short, the film "shows" faith, not just "tells" about it.

At the same time, *Jesus Revolution* delves into some themes that other faith-based stories usually neglect. Directed by Jon Erwin and Brent McCorkle, the film tracks the journey of American evangelist Greg Laurie as he finds renewal in the Jesus Movement among hippies. The story shows the

power of the Church when it truly welcomes the broken like Christ did.

Jesus Revolution also begins to delve into issues of toxicity within church leadership. For a genre that traditionally likes to show how great the Church can be, it's rare for films to show that this holy refuge is just as broken as anywhere else. Coming at a time when church scandals have become horrifyingly common, *Jesus Revolution* at least feels like it's being more honest about church culture than other films from the faith-based world.

Admittedly, both films have moments that don't work. A scene of hippies praying for Laurie's car to start so that he can go on a date seems unintentionally silly, whether it really happened or not. (And Greg Laurie's

post-credits message feels forced.) Although brief, Foreman's conversion scene feels awkward in its portrayal.

But both films are definitely a step in the right direction. Each story conveys that faith doesn't always require a sermon. The very best films show God's love and

power onscreen through action, not merely word. After all, if Christ has truly impacted our lives, it changes everything about our stories. So, let's get better at telling them.

Steve Norton is a writer and podcaster based in Toronto; he's also an editor at *ScreenFish*. Read more from "Behind the screens" column at loveismoving.ca/behindthescreens

Each story conveys that faith doesn't always require a sermon.

Steve Norton
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 ■ MOLLIE SIVARAM

SORROW'S GOT A HOLD ON ME

ALBUM BY **PAUL ZACH**
(2022, INTEGRITY MUSIC)

Words by Robbie Down

“Here are thirteen ‘sad church songs’ for those who need them,” Paul Zach writes satirically in a blog post. An embrace of lament is something that sets apart this worship pastor and Christian songwriter (from Virginia, now in Tennessee).

Healthy lament is a key practice for Jesus followers; it is both a form of prayer and act of faith. Lament is “a way of living between the poles of a hard life’s difficulties and its glories,” as theologian Tim Keller says in his book *Walking With God Through Pain and Suffering*.

Zach’s music focuses on rich and difficult areas of the Christian faith. *Sorrow’s Got a Hold On Me* demonstrates both the individual and communal lament that the book of Psalms models for us. The album itself offers individual listenability and communal singability, making it more versatile for a variety of listeners.

MUSIC REVIEW

“Best I Can” is a more individually focussed lament song about wrestling with God when it feels like He’s turning away from us. “We Bring You All Our Sorrows” encourages us to walk together in community in our tears. One poignant line, “in your hands, our grief is hallowed,” reminds us that our pains are sacredly held in the pierced hands of Christ.

Robbie Down is a recording artist from Vancouver, B.C.

THE FORGOTTEN MEMORIES OF VERA GLASS

ANNA PRIEMAZA
(AMULET BOOKS, 2021)

Words by Regina Peters

In this magical-realist young adult novel, everyone has an “aptitude.” For protagonist Vera Glass, it’s the ability to open locks. But there isn’t an aptitude powerful enough to make people disappear, or is there? One moment Vera has three siblings and the next she has two. She knows something is missing, but she can’t remember what it is.

As a daughter of scientists and a player of logic puzzles, she’s sure there must be a rational explanation. As a Christian, she also believes in something beyond scientific measurements. To learn why the world feels broken, she will need to rely on both reason and faith. But is she ready for the sacrifice it will take to restore the brokenness?

Author Anna Priemaza is an Edmonton-based lawyer specializing in family and immigration law. *The Forgotten Memories of Vera Glass* is her third contemporary YA novel.

This book reads like a *Doctor Who* episode (fittingly, since Vera is a fan). The pace is slow, but it pays off as we get to know the characters before they disappear. Vera’s lively debates with her atheist friend Riven are a highlight. The suburban high school setting is generic—it could be anywhere in

BOOK REVIEW

North America if the author didn’t mention Edmonton by name—but the aptitudes, from flicking on lights to warping reality, add an uncanny twist that makes this world unique.

The novel is a story about hope: that grief doesn’t last forever and that what has been forgotten can be remembered. I would recommend it to readers of genre-blending YA fiction like Madeleine L’Engle’s *Murry-O’Keefe* series.

Staff Picks

WOMEN TALKING

Ilana **Women Talking**

A film adapted from Miriam Toews' novel by Canadian director Sarah Polley, *Women Talking* is inspired by the true story of ongoing abuse in a conservative Mennonite community in Bolivia. The film imagines what conversations might have taken place as the women decided how to respond. In organically flowing dialogue, they explore their options: Should we leave? Stay and do nothing? Stay and fight? With brilliant acting and nuanced, powerful writing, the film offers profound insight into the nature of justice, forgiveness, and love. The film stays clear of sensationalism and is judicious in its portrayal of violence. However, due to its heavy subject matter, viewer discretion is advised.

The Best of You PODCAST

Mark **The Best of You Podcast** by Dr. Alison Cook Episode 54: Can I Pray My Anxiety Away?

Hosted by author and therapist Alison Cook, *The Best of You Podcast* is all about breaking free from painful patterns, mending our pasts, and discovering our true selves in God. I'd especially recommend Episode 54: Can I Pray My Anxiety Away? The episode features a conversation with Curtis Chang, author of a brand new book, *The Anxiety Opportunity*. Cook and Chang dive into the way secular culture and Christianity can intersect, offering us a new perspective on anxiety. The interview is full of heart-warming personal stories and illuminating moments of, "Oh wow! I've never thought of it that way before." I hope this conversation fills you with hope like it has me, and leads to conversations of learning and understanding.

Orbiting the Giant Hairball

Nadine **Orbiting the Giant Hairball: A Corporate Fool's Guide to Surviving with Grace** by Gordon Mackenzie

Orbiting the Giant Hairball is a thought-provoking book written that explores the challenges of creativity and innovation within environments that only promote normalcy. With wit and insight, Gordon Mackenzie shares his personal experiences as a former creative director at Hallmark Cards. The book emphasizes the importance of breaking free from conformity, encouraging individuals to embrace their unique talents and ideas. It offers practical advice on navigating the corporate world while maintaining authenticity and creative freedom. The book serves as a guide for individuals seeking to unleash their creative potential in an environment that often stifles innovation.

THE ADVANTAGE

Joel **The Advantage** by Patrick Lencioni

In this book, Patrick Lencioni argues that creating a successful company has little to do with what you know and how smart you are and more to do with how healthy the company is. His practical and actionable approach to leadership served me well as I planned a recent staff retreat. Lencioni breaks down complex concepts into simple, understandable terms, providing practical advice that can be implemented immediately. With case studies and an easy-to-read format, this book emphasizes the importance of building a healthy organization through trust, creating clarity, over-communicating, and reinforcing clarity.

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FAITH TODAY PODCAST

Discover what Christian culture shapers, leaders and ministry specialists have to say about living out faith in today's society. With a warm, down-to-earth style, this podcast connects big ideas to everyday conversations. Recent episodes include conversations on supporting women in the Canadian church, what makes a good work environment, and why we need more Christians in the arts and entertainment industries.



ALL THINGS RECONCILED

How do Christians join God in His peacemaking and reconciliation work around the world? Two Canadian cohosts from the Peace and Reconciliation Network draw out practical tips and insights from community peacemakers working amid conflicts big and small, old and new.



FAITH TRENDS

Want to know what younger Christians think about climate change? Or how second-generation Chinese Evangelicals navigate ethnic, cultural, and faith identities? Or why so many millennials are becoming secular? This podcast is all about telling the stories behind research findings, helping Christians understand who we are as the Canadian Church.

Share your podcast recommendations with us!

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