

TO KNOW CHRIST AND MAKE HIM KNOWN

SERVANT



THE JESUS REVOLUTION

HOW GOD TRANSFORMED
AN UNLIKELY GENERATION
HOW HE CAN DO IT AGAIN

**MARK
MAXWELL**

Following the
Ancient Way

**GUILLAUME
BIGNON**

Confessions of a
French Atheist

Issue 112 | Spring 2023

The ancient way

E laine and I recently watched *Jesus Revolution*, the account of God's Spirit working in and through the ones he's always used—the most unlikely. In it, Chuck Smith, a struggling pastor faces the dilemma of an influx of hippies and the rift it causes among his aging congregants. I was deeply moved when one of them crossed the aisle to sit with the misfits. "There is an entire generation right now searching for God," one of the hippies says. "I know we must seem a little strange. But if you look a little deeper, if you look with love, you'll see a bunch of kids that are searching for all the right things, just in all the wrong places." What ensued was a movement of the Spirit that continues to this day.

Good things happen when college-age people gather to sing, to pray, to confess, to turn to Elohim the Almighty...to worship the Lord! Recently, when Asbury University students did so, a two-week revival came upon them. Tens of thousands arrived to join this outpouring of the Holy Spirit which continues to spread.

It was unscripted, reverential, and marked by testimonies, confession, and transformed lives. Many of those lives are now on a completely new trajectory, one that will transform them and have ripple effects reaching into eternity.

Over the past few decades, universities and colleges have been relegated to the role of career preparation. Too often parents (perhaps more than students) measure the value of a college by the ability of graduates to get a job (preferably a good one) and a great career.

However, colleges are also one of society's primary conduits for transferring cultural values between generations.

This makes the case for building great Christian colleges. For the sake of our global well-being, we need schools that will provide a healthy environment for young people to gather, collaborate and learn together, and step into their 40-year working lives prepared for all that adult-



Crossroads: "What they need is a bath," says Pastor Chuck Smith (Kelsey Grammer), before remembering that what we all need is a Savior.

hood will bring, personally and professionally.

We believe the best platform we can provide for students is rooted in the ancient ways of our faith.

Jeremiah wrote, "This is what the Lord says: 'Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls'" (6:16).

"The impact of a gathering of college-age people who love Jesus should never be underestimated."

From its earliest days, Prairie has made the study of the whole canon of Scripture central to its classroom, which we accomplish through seven courses (four Old Testament and three New). This provides every degree-earning student with a full study of the Bible—all 66 books. We believe this is our created purpose. It provides students with a solid foundation in the ancient way, a way that predates politics, denominations, and the

pendulum of society's morals, a way that sets the course for scientific discovery, a way that provides the framework for a flourishing community.

For over twenty years we have seen a student-led weekly night of worship at Prairie throughout the academic year. The impact of a gathering of college-age people who love Jesus should never be underestimated.

The most ancient paths are the ways of the Lord, the Creator of the universe. It is our hope that we provide a campus environment where everyone who comes among us is drawn toward this God of love. It is at the centre of his will that he will be our God, and we will be his people! Let us turn to the ancient ways of the Lord. As the prophet Joel wrote, "Let us return to him with our whole hearts. Who knows? He may turn and relent and leave behind a blessing!"—similar perhaps to what we have recently witnessed at Asbury, and other campuses across our continent.

Even so, come Lord Jesus. ✠



Mark Maxwell
President of Prairie College



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As the dazzling idealism of the flower power decade fades, God uses the most unlikely. As he always has.

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Servant (ISSN 0848-1741) is published two times a year by Prairie Bible Institute, a non-profit educational organization founded in 1922. **Prairie Bible Institute serves the Church** by discipling Christians through biblically integrated post-secondary education. Its motto is "To Know Christ and Make Him Known." *Servant* is dependent on the gracious gifts of Prairie alumni, donors and friends. Its purpose is to edify, exhort and encourage today's Christian. Third class mail, return postage guaranteed. Change of address notices, undeliverable copies send to *Servant Magazine*, Box 4000, Three Hills, AB, T0M 2N0. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission is prohibited. Printed in Canada. Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.



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One man's quest to make sure inmates don't face life after lockup alone.



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Rumors about our resident humorist prove to be greatly exaggerated. Mostly.

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SEVEN QUESTIONS MEGAN ROBERTS

Megan Roberts is Professor of Old Testament at Prairie College. She spoke with *Servant* about open doors, chickens, and participating in the Spirit's work.



YOU GREW UP ON A SMALL COLORADO FARM AS THE YOUNGEST OF SEVEN. HOW DID YOU SURVIVE?

Barely! Just kidding. The farm was a great place to grow up. I learned the joy of hard work and the goodness of God's creation. My older siblings made mistakes that I wisely avoided. Mostly, I was milking my own goat when I was three and was the designated keeper of the chickens because I was the youngest and at the bottom of the pecking order—pun intended.

HOW AND WHEN DID YOU COME TO FAITH IN JESUS?

I grew up in a Christian home with a family who was deeply committed to fellowship and hospitality. I can't remember a time when I didn't know Jesus, and I can remember back to my third birthday. Several experiences were particularly formative and confirming: a history lesson on ancient Sumer when my mom commented that our God is so very different than the gods of the ancient peoples, and encounters with God in my lamenting prayers after my father's death when I was seven.

AFTER RECEIVING YOUR MA, YOU HOPED TO PURSUE BIBLE TRANSLATION WORK, BUT FOUND YOURSELF TEACHING HIGH SCHOOL IN PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA?

This was the classic God-knows-us-better-than-we-know-ourselves. A brother and his family were living there, and had children attending a K-12 Christian school. My sister-in-law told me the middle school needed a Bible teacher and that I should apply. I thought it was the most ridiculous suggestion! Then

I prayed about it, and found it was *the* door God was opening for me. I was terrified. But I had studied the prophets enough to know that disobedience is never a good idea. There I discovered that God gifted me to teach. I loved it.

about the power of God's living Word, but lack depth of knowledge. When I get to be a guide that opens Scripture to them in all its vast, profound, and life-giving array, it is the highest privilege and the deepest joy. I get to participate in the Spirit's work

"I was terrified. But I had studied the prophets enough to know that disobedience is never a good idea."

Several commented that I would be an excellent college-level professor, which I thought was also ridiculous. But I realized I needed to pay attention. So, I pursued my PhD and here I am—living my best teaching life [laughs].

WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE HELPED SHAPE WHO YOU ARE?

Ongoing chronic health challenges have taught me that God's grace is indeed sufficient. Terrifying spiritual warfare throughout my years in Cambodia taught me that Jesus' name really is powerful to save. Trauma during my PhD years is teaching me that the gospel is good news because resurrection life finds us in the place of death. Together these things remind me again and again that God is at work redeeming the world, and I'm invited to participate.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT TEACHING?

The majority of my students have inklings

as he speaks his true and beautiful Word into their hearts and minds. It's the best.

WHY IS IT SO VITAL THAT STUDENTS STUDY AND UNDERSTAND THE OLD TESTAMENT?

We cannot know and understand Jesus if we do not know and understand the Old Testament. The Gospels are soaked to overflowing with Old Testament concepts, theology, quotations, allusions, and memory framework. Do you want to know Jesus better and deeper? Study the Old Testament while reading the Gospels.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE YOUR STUDENTS TO SEE REFLECTED IN YOUR LIFE?

I would like them to see that our triune God is really, actually, the Source for all they need and could ever desire. I pray that I get better and better at modeling this for them. ❏

It was 1968. The dazzling idealism of the flower power decade was surrendering to reality. Boys were returning from Vietnam in body bags. LSD's promise of higher consciousness was delivering overdoses and despair. Free love was proving pricey with STDs and broken hearts. Like so many of his peers, Greg Laurie was fresh out of hope. At 15, he didn't know his father, just an endless parade of men who took what they wanted from his mother and left him to clean up the mess. Then one day, Greg listened as a "Jesus Freak" told him the Good News of a Savior who loved him to death. It blew his mind. Greg repented of his sin and came to Christ. It wasn't another drug-induced high; it was firmly rooted in the Word of God and in a healthy local church. He never dreamed that during almost 50 years of preaching the gospel, he would see more than a million pray with him to receive Christ. And he has never stopped being amazed that God's story included him. Here are Greg's thoughts on what happened back then and how God might wake us up and do it again.

RETURN TO YOUR FIRST LOVE

GREG LAURIE

What my generation called "The Jesus Movement," *Time Magazine* called "The Jesus Revolution." They were right. Revolution involves a dramatic change, a return. The same can be said of revival. Simply put, a Christian revival is a return to New Testament Christianity—the way we who follow Jesus should always live.

We need another Jesus Revolution, and I believe we will see one in our lifetime. But to experience revival, we must first wake from our sleep.

So many in the church today are spiritually asleep. They are settling for a watered-down form of the Christian faith. This is not the form of the Christian faith that changed the world in the first century—the faith that changed families, countries and cultures. As evangelist and Bible scholar G. Campbell Morgan once stated: "Organized Christianity that fails to make a disturbance is dead."

But God has laid out a plan for our redemption: "If my people who are called

by my name will humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14).

As someone who lived through the "The Jesus Movement" and came to faith

as a result of it, I can recall several earmarks of that time:

THERE WAS A SENSE OF EXPECTANCY AT EVERY GATHERING

No one was ever late for church. If you were, you wouldn't find a seat. We were





Greg and Cathe Laurie (played by Joel Courtney and Anna Grace Barlow): “We tried to navigate a profound emptiness. Our prayer is that God will be glorified in the telling of our story, and that others will find the fulfillment and meaning we so desperately searched for during the Jesus Revolution.”

there consistently and punctually, knowing that the Holy Spirit would show up.

THE WORD OF GOD WAS ALWAYS TAUGHT

This consistency and commitment to the Bible gave us stability as we learned from Scripture. Like sponges, we soaked up everything and looked forward to the teaching each week. Verse by verse and chapter by chapter, my mentor and friend, the late Pastor Chuck Smith, brought the pages of the Bible to life.

PEOPLE WERE OPEN TO THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

We used cutting-edge technology (i.e., cassette tapes!) to share our hope. We took chances—I preached for the first time at Pirate’s Cove. (This may mean

to tell me the truth about the hope I was searching for.

PEOPLE INVITED NON-BELIEVERS TO CHURCH AND TOLD THEM ABOUT JESUS

Because we believed Jesus could return at any time, we felt a sense of urgency in sharing his Good News. We invited people to church, and people came to know Jesus at every service. In Acts 2:47, we learn that “the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” New believers were and still are the lifeblood of the Church. The Christian Church today has a choice to either evangelize or fossilize. If a Church does not have a constant flow of new believers, it will grow stagnant.

Gen Z is the loneliest generation,

“The Christian Church today has a choice to either evangelize or fossilize.”

something to you if you’re from California. If you have no idea what I’m talking about, Google it.) We were careful to base all we did on the unshakable foundation of Scripture. In fact, my life was changed by the “Jesus Freaks” who took the time

even more, depressed and despondent after the lockdowns. In April 2020, incidents of self-harm among 13- to 18-year-olds rose 99.8%, overdoses rose 119%, generalized anxiety rose 94% and major depressive disorders rose 84%. Our

basic human desires, such as connection, love, acceptance, peace, and safety, never change. Thankfully, neither does Jesus (Hebrews 13:8). But as the Apostle Paul asks, “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” (Romans 10:14).

Despite all this, Millennials in the Church today tend to not share their faith with others. One study noted, “Almost half of Millennial Christians (47%) agree at least somewhat that it is wrong to share one’s personal beliefs with someone of a different faith in hopes that they will one day share the same faith.”

If we desire revival, then we need to encourage these younger generations to pick up the baton of the Gospel. We need to pray and prepare the ground for God to move by doing our part: teaching them, mentoring them, and loving them.

R.A. Torrey had a prescription for revival. He advised: “Let a few Christians (they need not be many) get thoroughly right with God. Let them commit themselves to pray for revival until God opens the windows of heaven and comes down. Let them put themselves at the disposal of God.”

The “Jesus Revolution” of my time followed this formula and changed the world. So, I pray: “Lord, do it again. Lord, may it begin with us.” ❏



Greg Laurie (pictured with his wife Cathe) is the Senior Pastor of Harvest Christian Fellowship and the founder of the Harvest Crusades.

© Greg Laurie. Used by permission.

Open Doors

Ellen Vaughn is author, with Greg Laurie, of *Jesus Revolution*. She speaks with *Servant* about the book and movie, and how God doesn't just use the perfect ones. Like us.

SERVANT: JESUS REVOLUTION JUST SURPASSED \$50 MILLION AT THE BOX OFFICE. IS YOUR HEAD SPINNING?

Ellen Vaughn: It was fascinating and fun attending the Hollywood premiere. The carpet was orange, not red, in keeping with the '70s colors. John Irwin, the producer, did a tremendous job of turning the book into a movie where people laugh and cry and come away moved.

WHAT ARE YOU HEARING FROM PEOPLE WHO SEE IT?

Young people see it rather differently than baby boomers, but both have a hunger for this to happen again. It's not a perfect narrative about victorious people. The character played by Jonathan Rumi shows cracks in his character and the filmmakers didn't gloss over them. God works in the middle of the mess.

SOME DIDN'T CONSIDER THIS A LEGITIMATE REVIVAL.

It's easy for our churches to become comfortable for those who attend, but intimidating for those who aren't part of the club. When Pastor Chuck Smith said, "I'm gonna open the doors," his parishioners said, "No! Their bare feet are staining the shag carpet." He lost some of the frozen chosen. But churches that opened their doors to these hippies experienced revival.

SOME SAW IT AS AN EMOTION-DRIVEN FLASH IN THE PAN.

I understand that concern. The movie is wise to show that dramatic seeking of experience can become an idol. Billy Graham noted that the Jesus movement was Bible-centric. In Chuck Smith's church

there was the expository preaching of the Word, and all these hippies had their Bibles in their hands, highlighted and underlined.

ARE THERE PARALLELS FOR TODAY?

Greg Laurie once asked Chuck Smith, "Do you think there'll be another Jesus Revolution in our time?" Chuck said, "I don't know that people are desperate enough." In the '60s kids tried it all and came up short. There was desperation; they sought the truth. In today's young adults there's a quiet desperation. You see it in the uptick of suicide rates and depression. If people are feeling desperate, maybe that's good. The people I'm more worried about are the ones who think they have it all together.

BOB COOK SAID, "IF YOU CAN EXPLAIN IT, GOD DIDN'T DO IT." DO YOU AGREE?

Evangelicalism has a tendency to intellectualize faith. That's a good thing. Our faith bears up under intellectual scrutiny. We need to know our theology and be able to give a reasonable defense for our faith. But there are things God does that don't fall within the parameters of our neat flow charts. In the '70s people were astounded to see what God was doing. And he is at work again. In Maclean Bible Church where we attend, people are inexplicably staying past the service. Yesterday the 11 o'clock service went 'til 4 PM. There have been impromptu midweek meetings. People are convicted by the Spirit to confess sin and bitterness, not in a sensational way. There is an atmosphere of love and of "Come on in." The Spirit is moving. People are coming to Jesus.



Ellen Vaughn: "There are things God does that don't fall within the parameters of our neat flow charts."

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO THOSE WHO DESPAIR OF OUR WORLD?

This is a time where people whose faith is hot are excited and those who are not are sidetracked bemoaning the fact. Today you have to make a choice either for Jesus or against him, you can't float along with the crowd.

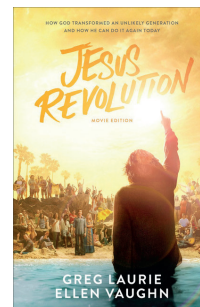
HOW CAN I BE PART OF WHAT JESUS IS UP TO RIGHT NOW?

Just be with Jesus; listen for his voice. We don't orchestrate what the Spirit does. God calls us, "Come to me. Return to me. I will return to you." He'll do things we could not do on our own.

WHAT SHOULD CHARACTERIZE OUR CHURCHES?

What characterized the Church in the Book of Acts. Open doors to come together for the worship of God, prayer, the teaching of the Word, and the breaking of bread. The early church was shocked too. "You mean even the Gentiles are in? How weird is that!" But God has always been in the surprising business of loving everybody. Not just the perfect ones like us. ✚

For your copy of Ellen's book *Jesus Revolution* (the movie edition), see page 9.





CENTENNIAL CAMPAIGN PROGRESS

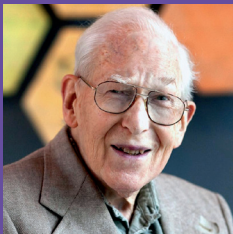
As we continue to move ahead with our **Expanding for Greater Impact** campaign, we are trusting God to supply the resources for our campus and program needs. The Lord has been faithful for 100 years and we know he will continue to be in Prairie's story and your story too.

Many of you have been impacted by learning God's Word at Prairie College, then living and sharing it around the world. We invite you to unite with us as we educate the next generation of students for their 40+ years in missional careers through bettering our campus facilities, technology and programs.

We desire that education at Prairie be affordable and not burdensome to students. You may have been encouraged by gifts to your education. Would you bless a student today and help them prepare for life and career?

The residences are key facilities for students and an important part of their lives in our community. We have nearly 40% of our \$1.4 million goal for the Residence boilers project and hope to cross the finish line this summer for our students' return this fall. This is truly a critical project for our campus and the impact on students' lives. Will you consider partnering with us to reach this goal?

“ QUOTEWORTHY ”



J.I. PACKER

"New Testament writers do not tell me why God chose to save me. They only tell me to be thankful that he did."



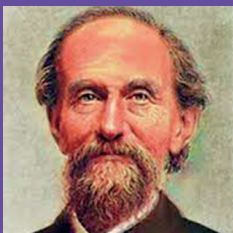
AN ANONYMOUS BISHOP

"Everywhere the Apostle Paul went there was either a revival or a riot. Everywhere I go they serve tea."



AMY CARMICHAEL

"It is a safe thing to trust him to fulfill the desires he creates."



ANDREW MURRAY

"A true revival means nothing less than a revolution, casting out the spirit of worldliness and selfishness, and making God and his love triumph in the heart and life."

! NOW YOU KNOW

The Chosen is the largest crowdfunded media project in Hollywood history, nearing 1/2 a billion views.

Today, 75 percent of American youth who grew up in Christian homes and churches are abandoning their faith as young adults.

Barna Group and USA Today

You hold about 100 quadrillion bacterial cells in your body. Together they weigh about four pounds.

Bill Bryson in At Home

10,064 Canadians died by MAID (Medical Assistance in Dying) in 2021.

Canada.ca (most recent statistic available)

During the Welsh Revival of the early 1900s, many policemen lost their jobs due to lack of crime.

revival-library.org

Projected number of Christians in China by 2050: 102 million. In the Philippines: 112 million. The conversion rate in China is estimated at two to eight times that of the population.

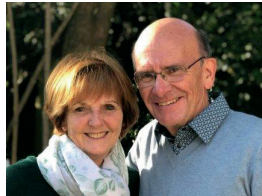
World Atlas

FAITHFUL SERVANTS

Each fall, Prairie College recognizes alumni in three categories to honor what God has done and is doing in their lives. Recently in chapel, these recipients shared the ways they have navigated the road of life and followed the Lord's direction to serve him faithfully to the best of their abilities. In 2022, the Distinguished Alumni recipients were:



Integration of Christian Faith and Professional Achievement: John (CEO, Pacific Life) and Arline Dixon, Matthews, North Carolina.



Lifelong Christian Ministry: Leigh and Irene Robinson, Ferndale Bible Chapel, Johannesburg, South Africa.



Early Career Excellence: Marijn Goud, serving in Angola with Mission Aviation Fellowship.

Save the date (Sept. 21-24) for our fall Alumni Reunion Weekend. We will celebrate the 50th Re-Graduation of the 1973 class.

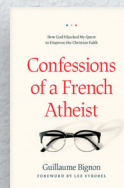
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JESUS REVOLUTION (MOVIE EDITION)
Ellen Vaughn and Greg Laurie

God has always been passionate about turning unlikely people into his most fervent followers. Prostitutes and pagans, tax collectors and tricksters. The '60s and '70s were full of young misfits whose longing for something more set the stage for a mass revival. Drawing inspiring stories from one of the most tumultuous times in modern history, Greg and Ellen show important parallels with our own time of spiritual apathy and overt hostility, offering a new vision for the next generation of unlikely believers—and hope for the next great revival. (Paperback book.)



CONFESSIONS OF A FRENCH ATHEIST
Guillaume Bignon

Guillaume Bignon was a French atheist. And perfectly happy. Yet a chance encounter with a beautiful woman changed his life forever. This is the compelling story of one man's struggle with morality, the relationship between science and faith, and the reliability of the Bible. With rigorous reasoning, remarkable authenticity, and a sense of humor, Guillaume tells his story. This is a journey through his questions and into God's surprising ways.

*To request one of these books, make sure your order is postmarked no later than June 30, 2023. Offer limited to SERVANT subscribers at North American addresses. Please allow 4-6 weeks for delivery.

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You can also **DONATE** online at www.prairie.edu/donate or call **1-403-443-5511**
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Jesus Revolution by Ellen Vaughn & Greg Laurie
OR
 Confessions of a French Atheist by Guillaume Bignon
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Please Cut Here

INNERVIEW

Surprised By Faith

GUILLAUME BIGNON

Katherine and Guillaume with the five, ages 2-10: "How popular I am with these five little people!"

Born and raised in France, Guillaume Bignon was happy. His family was nominally Catholic, attending Mass each Sunday, but not mentioning God outside church. Faith in God had no impact on his life. He soon called himself an atheist, believing, "Christians were either steeped in tradition or simply refused to think logically." He excelled at sports, music, and relationships, seeking knowledge in rational pursuits such as math and physics. But after breaking his share of "the mysterious code of a man's moral duty toward women," Guillaume began to question the meaning of life. In this "Innerview" from his home in New York City, he talks of his quest for truth, family, and a chance encounter that hijacked his journey to disprove the Christian faith.

AS A BOY, YOU WENT TO MASS AND CATECHISM CLASS, BUT DIDN'T GIVE GOD A SECOND THOUGHT. YOU EMBRACED ATHEISM, THEN WENT ON TO STUDY PHILOSOPHY. WHAT DID YOU THINK OF CHRISTIANS?

I had a very scornful view of believers generally and embraced the paradigm of my generation in France that says belief in God is like superstition and people do it as a kind of hobby or tradition. To me, Christianity meant intellectual suicide. I hadn't really deeply considered the question at the time but I just figured that the idea of God was sort of a crazy hypothesis. There was probably no reason at all to

believe it; people did it because they were just fearful or superstitious and I was neither of those things.

YOU TELL HOW AN ENCOUNTER WITH A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN CHANGED YOU. HOW DID THAT HAPPEN?

God worked in all sorts of improbable circumstances for me to hear the gospel and to come to faith later on. A big part of my search for happiness consisted of finding fulfillment in volleyball, music and women. On a vacation to the Caribbean a random hitchhiking put me in touch with an American woman from New York who claimed to be a Christian. She also

expected abstinence before marriage. We began a relationship, but religion and her views of morality were two big barriers. I wanted to disprove her faith so we could be happy together. So I began reading the Gospels in order to understand what I was trying to attack. I thought it would be boring like the church of my childhood. But reading as an adult I discovered that Jesus was actually a fascinating character. People were always trying to trap him and he would turn around and expose the secrets of their hearts. So I was captivated by the person of Jesus and began to raise a number of questions about the truth of Christianity.

YOU WENT TO A CHURCH TO INVESTIGATE WHAT CHRISTIANS DO WHEN THEY GET TOGETHER. WHAT WAS THAT LIKE?

As an adult starting to consider the claims of Christianity, I went but felt as if my mere presence in the building was already an intellectual crime. I thought that if any of my family or friends saw me there in a church, I would die of shame. This was one of the first steps that led me to actually embrace the faith, but I found it very awkward.

THERE WAS A PASTOR WHO TOOK AN INTEREST IN YOU. WHAT DID YOU THINK OF HIM?

It fascinated me to see that he didn't seem to be the prototype that I had envisioned. Robert wasn't the emotionally unstable, superstitious person that I thought Christians were; he seemed to be smart and intelligent. He had studied and was a pastor and he believed that God existed and that Jesus was raised from the dead. He walked the fine line between challenging me and my own ethical lifestyle, not accepting what I was doing, but at the same time making it clear that our friendship was not dependent on me changing my lifestyle. I felt I was in a safe place to discuss and raise ideas. He was kind and loving and non-judgmental but at the same time non-compromising.

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER YOU BECAME INTELLECTUALLY SATISFIED THAT THE GOSPEL WAS TRUE?

The pastor gave me a book that helped me work through the first steps of Christian-

ity, directing me to the Bible to find the answers for myself. One question kept resurfacing: Why did Jesus have to die? It made no sense. I didn't see the connection between Jesus dying on the cross 2,000 years ago and my life as a Christian if I were to become one. But in the process of answering my intellectual questions, God reactivated my conscience and I realized that I was in need of forgiveness. That's when the gospel finally clicked and I understood. That's why he had to die on the cross for me. Trust in Jesus, I read, repent of your sin, believe and you will be saved. And this is what I ended up doing.

“I wanted to disprove her faith so we could be happy together. So I began reading the Gospels in order to understand what I was trying to attack.”

WHAT IS SOMETHING YOU HAVE FOUND IN JESUS THAT YOU NEVER FOUND IN ATHEISM?

What I found in Jesus was forgiveness. My coming to faith was not just intellectual understanding. There are good reasons to believe that God exists and that Jesus was raised from the dead. But the gospel means understanding that I needed forgiveness for my own sins. As an atheist, I didn't call them sins, but I certainly was aware of my wrongdoing and when I finally embraced Christ, I was liberated and totally free. There was none of that in atheism.

HOW WOULD YOU COMPARE YOUR LIFE AS AN ATHEIST AND NOW AS A BELIEVER IN JESUS?

There are new ways in Christ to find joy. Much of what I considered to be the goal of my life as an atheist consisted in finding happiness. Being in Christ now doesn't mean that I no longer seek things that are fulfilling to me, it means that my primary goal is to glorify God and be faithful to the plans that he has. So it changes my perspective. I'm seeking obedience and faithfulness rather than the fulfillment of my own desires.

WHAT LED YOU INTO THE FIELD OF APOLOGETICS?

My family and friends were very surprised by my turn of heart and mind so I received many questions about what had happened to me. That started me on the path of trying to provide answers and to let people see that I had not lost my mind but had actually found my mind and the truth in Jesus. This was the initial step that led me to become an apologist.

HOW WOULD YOU ENCOURAGE SOMEONE WHO DOESN'T FEEL THEY HAVE THE INTELLECT OR THE WORDS TO ANSWER THESE KINDS OF QUESTIONS?

I don't believe you need to be extremely advanced in the field of apologetics in order to provide a basic defense of your Christian faith. There are plenty of very accessible materials available today on things like evidence of God's existence and the reliability of the New Testament, so you don't have to be a philosopher, debating every fine point in order to provide a clear explanation of the gospel. God blesses the proclamation of his Word so there are plenty of powerful and practical things that can be done without having to get a PhD.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO SOMEONE WHO HAS AN ATHEIST OR UNBELIEVER IN THEIR LIFE?

If nothing else, my story should tell you that God can save anyone whose heart is hardened against religion. God changed my heart and he can find a way. Something that really helped me was when the

“As an atheist... I certainly was aware of my wrongdoing and when I finally embraced Christ, I was liberated and totally free. There was none of that in atheism.”

pastor simply pointed me to the Bible for the answers to what Christianity was about, just sharing what the message of the gospel actually is, completely aside from arguing for its truth. Once someone truly understands that there is salvation and forgiveness not by good works, but by faith in Jesus, then you can take them further.

YOU'VE BEEN HAPPILY MARRIED FOR TWELVE YEARS. HOW DO YOU ACCOUNT FOR THAT?

Katherine's patience, I suppose. I would be a terrible marriage counsellor because we hardly ever fight, so I can't really tell people how to get over their difficulties. My life is very different from what I would have imagined in my younger years and more beautiful than I could have dreamed. My wife is amazing and we're having a wonderful time raising five adorable kids together.

WHAT IS THE BEST THING ABOUT BEING A DAD?

How popular I am with these five little people! I walk in the door and they just run to me calling "Daddy, Daddy!" I've never been this popular in real life, so it feels very good.

WHAT IS YOUR HOPE FOR THIS BOOK?

My hope is to make the beauty of the gospel shine in the real story of the redemption of a sinner who finds forgiveness in Christ. I wrote the book in French as well because I wanted to give a basic defense of the Christian faith in the French language. Here in North America you have many good apologists, but that is fairly rare in my home country. I wanted to provide a good introduction to the defense of the Christian faith.

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE REMEMBERED?

If what I've written touches people, that would be great. But if I'm remembered as a theologian and philosopher while my own

family doesn't like the person that I am, that would be a total failure. I hope my children will remember me as someone who gave them good memories to hold onto. 📖

You will love Gillaume's fascinating book. Request a copy on page 9.



The Walk

Serving God on the margins

SNOWY NOBLE
WITH PAT MASSEY



The day had finally come. Doors that had slammed shut when Carl went to jail for his crimes were now opening. Sweet freedom beckoned, ending the long years of confinement. But while it seemed like a dream-come-true, the prospect of release brought with it a myriad of uncertainties and fears about what lay ahead. Prison was prison, but at least it meant a bed and three square meals a day, friends and some helpful supports, and a structure that didn't require much decision-making. But how would he find a job or a community that would accept him? Could he stay clean or would old habits surface again, proving too hard to break? Life after lock-up was a minefield not everyone navigated successfully. Little did he know that help was coming in the person of a caring and well-trained chaplain, well-acquainted with the needs and pitfalls facing former inmates trying to adjust to the expectations of freedom. Carl would not have to walk the minefield alone.

Born and raised in Zimbabwe, Ramon “Snowy” Noble had come to Christ as a teenager and arrived in Canada in 1990 with his wife Karen and two young children. His plan was to train for the ministry at Prairie Bible College, then return home to serve. But that was before God led them on an unexpected and extraordinary journey.

A course in *Field Education* required students to sign up for a practical community ministry and Snowy unintentionally

found himself on a prison visitation team. Recollections of his first visit are still vivid: “The fenced enclosure that met us held many reminders that we were entering a federal correctional facility, as did the initial security checks at the entrance and the long, cold walk down the breezeway to the chapel. I remember the unnerving sound of the locking mechanisms on the gates that allowed entry and clamped shut behind us as we went through. Once in the

chapel, we arranged the chairs in a circle as we were expecting about fifteen men to be in attendance. If the setting itself wasn't intimidating enough, I still had to meet the residents of this dark place, who, I assumed, would be rough, tattooed, menacing and impatient with probably a low tolerance for us ‘religious types.’ I was extremely apprehensive and nervous as the prisoners walked in.”

Though a few were indeed tattooed and rough-hewn, something soon told the young Bible college student that these were just men who had been caught on the wrong side of the law and were now paying a price for it. They were, he realized, people badly in need of good news. After a few conversations and repeated visits his apprehension dissipated and was gradually replaced by a deep concern and a conviction that he wanted to contribute in some positive way to their journey toward a better life.

The Nobles were still in school when they were invited to pastor a nearby country church where they would serve for the next twelve years. But Snowy's growing interest in the lives of inmates also kept him visiting the prison even after his graduation from Prairie in 1995. This eventually led to an invitation to become an official chaplain for

the Correctional Service of Canada. It was a world of its own and the learning curve was steep. Some lives seemed to offer hope of redemption while others seemed damaged beyond repair. And as always, prison politics often appeared to work against, rather than for, the inmates.

In that harsh environment, lessons were often learned through tragedy and disappointment. Early in his career, Snowy met Mike, a young man who was serving time in a central Alberta institution. He

just a disease or an individual moral failure, but might also result from childhood abuse, neglect and abandonment.

The matter of recruiting effective volunteers from the Christian community was another challenge that needed to be addressed. It was encouraging to discover that many prisoners either came from Christian backgrounds or had met Christ while incarcerated. But Snowy soon realized that chapel attendance and Bible study were often not enough to keep their faith strong

"I remember the unnerving sound of the locking mechanisms on the gates that clamped shut behind us as we went through."

clearly loved the Lord and had made a personal commitment to Jesus prior to incarceration. A model inmate, Mike could be trusted and he and Snowy had many opportunities to share their experiences of faith. In spite of this, he was never able to be successful in society.

After several releases and returns on breaches to his conditions, it became apparent that Mike's church community had a particular standard of "holiness" that he could neither attain nor uphold. This ate away at his conscience and fueled his return to drug behavior. Tragically, upon his final release, Mike succumbed to an overdose and his heart-broken friend was asked to officiate at his funeral.

It became clear to the young chaplain that the Christian community was often ill-equipped to walk with someone like Mike and that the power of the drugs used to bring relief for emotional and spiritual pain was pervasive and relentless. "I have heard accounts," he says, "of everything from being wrongfully accused to cold-blooded murder. Each person has their story of why they acted the way they did and I have found that drug behavior can be a factor in about 80% of convictions."

Snowy knew he needed to be better prepared to come alongside other offenders who were walking similar paths. Determined that history would not repeat itself on his watch, he decided to learn all he could about the nature of addiction and people's relationship to drugs. Programs like *Alcoholics Anonymous* and *Narcotics Anonymous* were good and helpful but still missed some addicts who were averse to group accountability. He found intriguing the possible explanation that addiction was not

when they re-entered society.

"There's a desperate need," he firmly believes, "for genuine discipleship where people become vulnerable enough to share their struggles and successes. That helps to strengthen an inmate's commitment and prepare them for a new life." Sadly, however, he would find a dearth of Christian volunteers engaging effectively with the spiritual formations people undergo in prison but are unable to maintain on the outside. Knowing how invaluable these volunteers could be, Snowy learned to equip people to serve in areas where they were best suited in ways that enabled them to genuinely impact the lives of individuals preparing to re-enter society. This was a great help in reducing the amount of anxiety experienced by inmates as they anticipated the end of prison life.

Over the years, Snowy would find his passion growing as he worked with other men and women on the outskirts of society through different missions. But the majority

"To any believer wanting to discover their calling I would say, be available to be used by God in the least expected ways."

of his ministry has continued to be with the Correctional Service in Canadian prisons. Along with a personal ministry of counseling and encouragement, in his present role as a full-time Liaison Officer, he often helps inmates prepare for all the facets of a parole hearing, hoping to demystify the process and enable them to make a good presentation before the Board.

As he gets to know the individuals and learns about their families and cultural requirements, Snowy is also better able to advise Institute and community parole officers



Snowy and Karen Noble: Equipping those who are badly in need of good news.

in how to address those needs and prepare the staff of a Halfway House for their new resident. For inmates like Carl, not only will he search out community resources that will enable a smooth transition, he will do the hard work of identifying barriers in the system and personal biases that may stand in the way of success. It will take time to see whether Carl can embrace the opportunity to start again with a new life perspective, but wherever the journey leads, he does not have to walk alone.

Since Snowy is also a part-time pastor, he has a unique opportunity to challenge the church to become more aware of things they can do now with family and acquaintances to stem the tide of men and women joining the throng of the incarcerated.

He would advise any believer wanting to discover their calling to "be available to be used by God in the least expected ways. For a time I was disappointed that I did not return home to fulfill my original vision. The Bible tells us, however, that when we

take delight in the Lord, we can trust him to shape and fulfill the desires of our heart (Psalm 37:4). When I surrendered my life to God, he led me in ways that prepared me for the work he had always purposed for me to do. My passion now is to serve forgotten people and those who are on the margins or have become lost in transition. In order to do that, I hope to equip the church to consider what Jesus meant when he said that when we reach out to the broken-hearted, the captive and the bruised, that is when we are truly serving him (Matt. 25: 31-46)." ❧

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MEET THE STUDENTS STAN'S GRADUATION DAY

Since 2016, when Prairie College began teaching the Bible in several federal penitentiaries, “student” has taken on a whole new meaning.

As with many of the men, Stan hadn’t seen a classroom for years. His greying mullet spoke to his mature status, and he proved a very capable and intelligent student. Two years ago, Stan first experienced numbness and swelling in his legs. His condition worsened. The numbness spread. Eventually Stan was diagnosed with ALS.

We faculty were granted special phone access to incarcerated students during Covid, but Stan’s calls related little to studies, and much to the struggles of

Though it became harder for him to eat and breathe, we were unprepared for the call just days after Christmas.

his terminal illness. The link to his Prairie community became a vital lifeline. Staff and student prayer times included Stan’s situation and soon there came a genuine outpouring of love and concern from Prairie’s broader community, without thought of the seriousness of his offences. Isolated and estranged from his own family, he became part of ours.

As Stan’s condition weakened and more medical care was needed, he was transferred to a prison hospital where faculty faithfully made the five-hour trip to visit him. Quite immobile now, Stan’s speech was affected. Praying he would be paroled on compassionate grounds, we rejoiced in November as he was trans-

ferred to a care facility within easy driving distance.

Caring friends brought books and treats and did his laundry. With money donated by the Prairie community, the walls of Stan’s new home were adorned with pictures and his closet outfitted with warm and comfortable clothing. Chocolate and plants brightened the room, speaking of those who loved and prayed for him.

With the holidays approaching, plans were made to ensure that Stan wouldn’t be alone. Those who had been his teachers now entered his room as brothers and sisters in Christ to join him in a quiet celebration of faith and acceptance as he shared Christmas with his new family.

Though it became harder for him to eat and breathe, we were unprepared for the call just days after Christmas. “Stan passed away in the night.” Amid our grief, there was mercy. Stan did not suffer a painful death as we had expected. He was never put on a respirator and was lucid to the end, able to have meaningful conversations with his Prairie friends and pray with them until the last night of his life on earth.

When he enrolled, we hoped to help a broken man reconnect with God and earn a Certificate in Bible. But he had much to teach us. And Stan’s graduation ceremony was far more glorious than any diploma, earning him a seal of approval from no less than the Savior of his soul.

—Gord Allert

Prairie’s Prison Bible Encounter Program has been bringing biblical higher education to correctional facilities since 2016. To partner with us, see the enclosed envelope.

Rumors of my death

Recently I received notification that I was dead. According to a fourth grader I was born in 1996 and died at the age of ten. She wrote a book report which her mother graciously sent me. Here are a few highlights: "I am writing Phil Callaway because he are a great writer. He can always make me laugh no matter. I especially like *Laughing Matters*. It am very funny. He write humorous writing because he like to be funny. He is a dad with two of his kids. They are both girls."

Well, I certify her report entirely Fact-Free, much like the bulk of my own school assignments. Still, it made me consider my own mortality, which is seldom a bad thing. Moses advised it in Psalm 91: "Teach us to number our days, so that we may be wise." It's something I do more of as the years zing by. In grade four time couldn't move fast enough. But no one my age says, "Good grief, it's just gone so slow."

"I think we could all use a keen sense of humor, not a keen sense of rumor."

In 2010, Canadian folk legend Gordon Lightfoot was off to see his dentist. Perhaps he had a tooth-hurty appointment; I don't know. But suddenly the radio informed him that he was dead. Sundown was creeping 'round his back stairs, to use Gordon's own lyrics. So he called the station to say, "I'm fine. It seems like a bit of a hoax or something. I was quite surprised to hear it myself."

Still, the reports of Lightfoot's death spread like wildfire on blogs and Twitter.



"It sure is sweet of you to help me with this perm, Honey! I was afraid you might be mad about me criticizing your husband's preaching last week."

Tabloids survive on rumor and hearsay. But, despite headlines to the contrary, Nicholas Cage is not a time traveling vampire, George Washington never wore wooden teeth, nor will downing Pop Rocks with Coca Cola cause your stomach to explode, though it likely should.

Karen is a friend of ours. One recent Sunday before church she rushed up to my wife and me in the lobby and said, "I'm so glad to see you...together."

"How come?" we asked in unison.

"I heard you were divorced," she said.

"Someone called to tell me."

"Woah! Seriously?"

"Yes, seriously."

"Well," I said, "we did have a pretty decent argument this week about where we were gonna spend our 41st anniversary, and about where Ramona put the cars keys. Other than that we're doing pretty well. Tell the 'someone' that."

"I already did," said Karen. Now that's a true friend.

For a small muscle, the tongue can do a world of damage. I'm guilty. This muscle helps us taste and eat and swallow,

but it can also be party to some nasty attacks. With the tongue we flatter, which is saying something to someone's face that we wouldn't say behind their back. With the tongue we gossip, which is saying something behind someone's back that we wouldn't say to their face.

Perhaps we point out flaws in others to make us feel better about those we tolerate in ourselves. Perhaps we think we can build ourselves up by tearing others down. My godly mama once told me, "Remember, he who gossips to you gossips about you." She was right. I think we could all use a keen sense of humor, not a keen sense of rumor.

The tongue can criticize and complain, fault-find and judge. But, when given over to God and controlled by his Spirit, it can build and shape and inspire. A spouse. A colleague. A hurting or searching friend. "My tongue will proclaim your righteousness," wrote David, "your praises all day long" (Psalm 35:28). Colossians says, "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt" (4:6).

God made our tongues. With his help, we can use them to spread life, grace, healing, and hope in the days he gives us.

By the way, my wife did find those car keys. They were in my pocket. ❏

Phil Callaway speaks and writes books.
Visit him at philcallaway.com.





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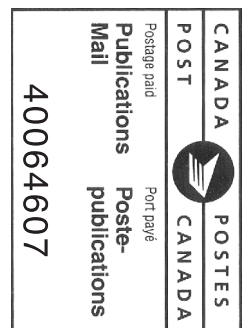
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