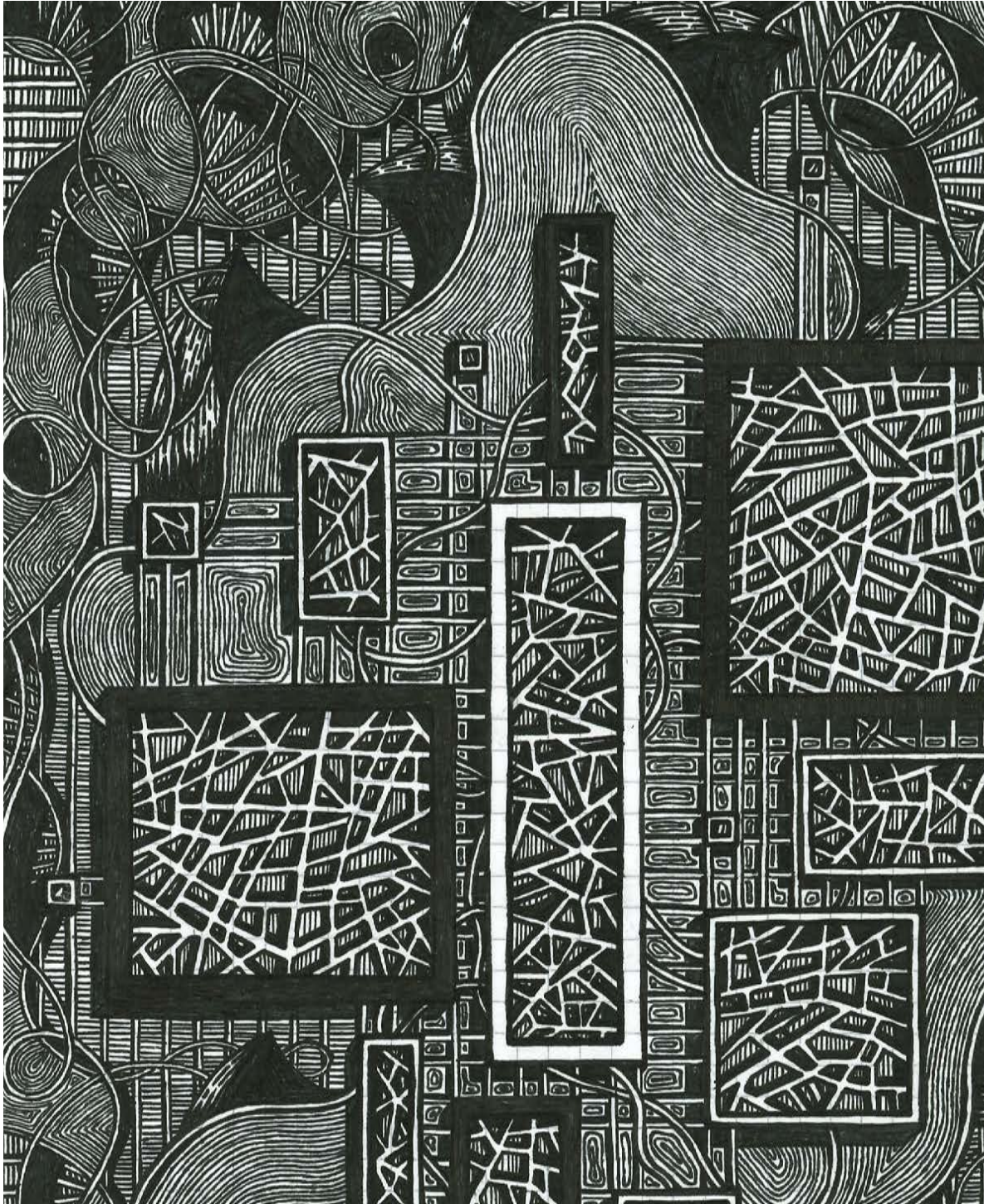


THE COMMON TABLE



ISSUE 6



# THE COMMON TABLE

COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY STUDENT MAGAZINE

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# Spring 2023 / Welcome

*“As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.  
For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.”*

*Psalm 103:13–14*

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The song I consider to be the best encapsulation of the human experience begins with the words, “Jacob, he loved Rachel, and Rachel, she loved him / And Leah was just there for dramatic effect.” Each chorus is a master class in poetry, but the true heart of the song—the *humanity* of it—is in the biblical stories Rich Mullins highlights. Mullins was of the opinion that anyone who thought the Bible was boring simply hadn’t read it closely enough. After all, Scripture contains loss and love, despair and hope, scandal and honor, defeat and victory. “Jacob and 2 Women” serves as a reminder that, as much as the world has changed in the past several thousand years, the fundamental experience of living in a fallen world has not. And God meets us in that experience through these stories that have been recorded for us.

We continue to recover from the effects of a pandemic. We feel the global impact of the war raging on in Ukraine. We grieve the devastating school shootings that have struck our physical community in St. Louis and our spiritual community in Nashville. Over and over, we cry out to God because we know *this is not how things are supposed to be*. And, over and over, we open his Word and find that he knows. He knows the devastating effects sin has on his good creation. He knows the pain, grief, anger, and loss we feel—and feels them more deeply himself. He has put on flesh and fully experienced what it is to be human. He knows *us*, and he has compassion on us. He remembers that we are dust.

One of the ways we see this is in his interaction with those who came before us. That is why we tell and teach these sto-

ries. In Sarah’s barrenness, the injustice Tamar experienced, or Mary’s faith and Zechariah’s lack of it, people recognize pieces of their own lives. Their place in God’s larger story is different than the biblical characters’ and they don’t know how their individual situations will unfold, but they are just as human, and God is just as involved in their lives. Through these stories, Scripture plumbs the depths of what it is to be human and, in doing so, gives us hope.

What strikes me about the pieces in this issue is how deeply and directly they engage the human experience. There are poems exploring what it means to have a child, words wrestling with unhealthy habits, and reflections on baseball and cantaloupe that actually have far more to do with the beauty of community and the difficult complexity of joy. Truly, I wish I could summarize each one, because they all cause me to ponder what it is to be human—and what it means to live as the image of God in a messed-up world. One of our team members suggested that this may be our best issue yet, and I agree, because the story these pieces tell echoes the greatest story ever told. May God use the contents of these pages to remind you of His story and your place in it, and may He encourage your heart with the knowledge that you are not alone.

We invite you to write to the editor in chief of *The Common Table* at [covstudentmagazine@gmail.com](mailto:covstudentmagazine@gmail.com) with your thoughts and reflections in response to the contributions contained in this issue.

Mary Schieferstein, MDiv '23

*Mary Schieferstein*

Editor-in-Chief

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From left to right: Caroline Agan, Paul Frederick, Mary Schieferstein, Rachel Vining, Bailey Preib

## Magazine Staff / *New Members*

Caroline Agan  
St. Louis, MO  
MDiv, Winter '24 (I in fact have no idea but that's what the math says currently)

*Favorite book of the Bible?*

Psalms - There is a dimension of God's character that can only be communicated to my heart through art, particularly poetry and music.

*What are some things on your bucket list?*

To visit the Precious Moments Sistine Chapel and eat at every major fast food chain in North America (sorry, Dr. Doriani).

Paul Frederick  
Norwalk, IA  
MDiv, Spring '24

*Favorite book of the Bible?*

Colossians - This is a small and simple book, but it provides a breathtaking view of Jesus as the agent of creation and recreation, the victor over sin and Satan, and the cornerstone of the Christian life.

*What are some things on your bucket list?*

To tend a vegetable garden and to be an amateur toy-maker.

# The Study Table

## JOY IN THE MIDST OF A CONCENTRATION CAMP: Lessons from the Life of Corrie ten Boom

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Laura Caponigro

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**S**UMMER SOMETIMES AFFORDS us a change of pace and opportunity to read for pleasure; such was my experience last year. My own spiritual formation over the past twenty years has been greatly shaped by Christian biographies and I made it a goal to read one this summer. Although I was familiar with the brief outline of her story, I had never read Corrie ten Boom's *The Hiding Place*, and I picked it up from the seminary library. It became fodder for rich conversations with friends and family and led to deeper resolve to live for Christ in my day-to-day activities.

For those who are unfamiliar with Corrie's story, she was a Dutch woman born around the turn of the twentieth century to a faithful Dutch Reformed Christian family. Single her whole life, she lived into her fifties with her sister and father, following in his footsteps in the family watchmaking business. When Holland was invaded by the Germans in 1940, she gradually became involved with the Dutch underground resistance, orchestrating the hiding of Jews throughout Holland, many of them in

her own home. In 1944 the Germans raided her home, and although the Jews were never found (their home had an exceptional hiding place), she and members of her family were sent to prison in Holland, where she spent 3 months in solitary confinement and was eventually transferred to Ravensbruck, a concentration camp for women in Germany. The war took a great toll on her family: her beloved sister Betsie died at Ravensbruck, her father died at the prison, and her brother eventually died of health complications from their early imprisonment.

Despite the evil Corrie experienced—betrayal, inhumane treatment and abuse, and loss of many people and things she loved—her life is marked not by tragedy but by joy. Here is a woman who lived life as a jar of clay: she was afflicted, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed (2 Cor. 4:7-9). She comes out of a truly traumatic experience not with wavering faith and a dour perspective on life, but full of joy in the Lord and ready to share that joy with others. Below are four

brief reflections on how Corrie found joy in the face of immense human cruelty and suffering during her internment at Ravensbruck and the years following.

The foundations for joy are built over a lifetime of faithfulness. Although Corrie is famous for the harrowing year of 1944 and the inhumane treatment she endured, she spends a significant amount of the book painting a picture of her family, her life growing up and into adulthood. She highlights the faithfulness of her parents in following the Lord Jesus and serving those in their city of Haarlem. When Corrie and Betsie change the atmosphere among their fellow suffering prisoners as they share a blanket or smuggled vitamin oil, it harkens back to constantly helping their mother cook and bring needed items to the poor in their city. Corrie's compassion toward the weak and disabled in the concentration camp was nothing new; she regularly led worship services for the mentally handicapped in Haarlem. When we see Corrie and Betsie leading evening prayer and worship services in their putrid barracks, it only seems natural. Their entire life had been spent with their father leading evening devotions and inviting the many house guests to join in. Corrie did not suddenly transform into a strong, committed Christian when her life was under such pressure. A fifty-year legacy of faith shone bright in the darkness.

Joy is only found in obedience. It is easy to feel entitled or justified when suffering. If ever it was okay to think of yourself, surely under immense suffering we ought to allow ourselves that so-called right. God's Spirit, however, convicted Corrie of selfishness even under the most deprived circumstances of Ravensbruck. She noticed her worship feeling dry and impeded and realized it was due to her lack of desire to share a blanket or the limited vitamin oil she had, or her rush to be in the middle of a marching formation during the bitter winter. Experiencing the blessing of Christ's presence required actively following in His footsteps, showing compassion, practicing radical generosity. When she did so, it changed the tenor of the fellow prisoners. Corrie noticed less infighting and a greater camaraderie among the diverse prisoners in her barracks. Here, where prisoners were treated like animals and many often acted like them, was a woman who showed the way of Christ, the way of life found in dying to self.

Joy is found in union with Jesus Christ, not in answers to the question of why. As I read, *The Hiding Place* uncomforably reminded me of how cruel humans can

be. I found myself asking age-old questions about suffering: how can a good God allow such injustice and agonizing death? Corrie is only describing one concentration camp; think of all the others, all the torture and experiments, the families ripped apart, the celebration of brutality. Interestingly, Corrie does not spend pages trying to answer any of these questions. While calling out the evil for what it was, she focuses on how Jesus Christ was with her in the experience. As she and Betsie stood naked before medical examiners, they found comfort remembering how Christ hung naked before spectators on the cross. While in the so-called 'infirmary' with edema, Corrie takes up the despised but desperately needed job of bringing the bedpan to many dying prisoners. The harder the suffering Corrie experienced, the greater she found the resources to endure through Jesus Christ. As Betsie died in the camp, she emphatically told Corrie that she had to share with others what they had learned: "that there is no pit so deep that He is not deeper still."

Lasting joy requires radical forgiveness. What Corrie experienced in World War II was traumatic. She got through it with God's help but quickly realized that any long-term healing would require costly forgiveness. The person hardest to forgive was the Dutch man who betrayed her family to the German soldiers. She wrote him a letter extending forgiveness and explaining the message of the cross of Jesus Christ. Later in her speaking ministry she was approached by a German guard who had been cruel to Betsie at Ravensbruck. He had become a Christian and asked to shake her hand in fellowship. In a crucial moment she realized that although she had no resources or desire in herself to forgive this man, through the indwelling of Christ's Spirit in her, she could extend her hand and offer Christ's forgiveness to this man. She gave the thirty-plus years of her post-war life to sharing the message of the power of forgiveness through the cross of Jesus Christ. In that forgiveness she experienced lasting joy in the Lord.

We live in a culture wrestling with what to do with victims of evil. In a desire to protect those suffering, we sometimes want to give them permission to be angry, to live defined by their suffering. Corrie Ten Boom's book *The Hiding Place* provides a radical alternative; she paints a picture of a full, joyous life in Christ. Yes, she would always be a concentration camp survivor, but even more so she lived a life marked by the healing, forgiving love of Jesus Christ. →

# THE CANTALOUPE HAS RULES

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Bailey Preib

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“**T**HE CANTALOUPE HAS RULES,” my sister said on our drive back to my parents’ house. We passed familiar pines and stores I frequented since birth, watching the sunlight cast shadows on earth I would know anywhere.

I hadn’t been home in months. Was I more anxious or excited?

My mom has many rules, some of which I adhere to better than others. “What?” I replied with a slight smile and skeptic brow.

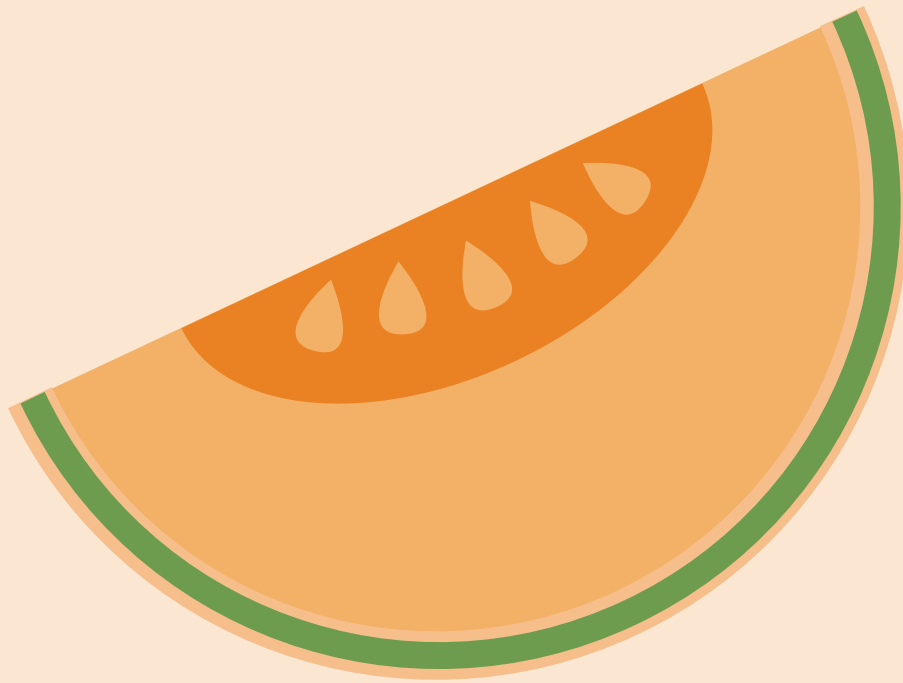
“Dad keeps poking holes in the bag,” she responded. “It’s my fault, I didn’t know to put it in a container after cutting it up.”

My dad has a slew of health problems; he has bad days more often than not. His rent check is far overdue. One of the side effects of his condition has deteriorated his eyesight. With coke-bottle glasses on, he can manage to see the large sticky notes my mother has strewn across our gadgets indicating the start button and other small pushables we take for granted. He speaks his text messages to Siri, rarely making lucid sentences, sometimes to my confusion, but more regularly to my

delight. The most recent: “He’s such a good boy. She’s late in Kohl’s she’s shivering cover up with a blanket. Love you.”

That beautiful bright orange cantaloupe was distinguishable enough for my dad to decipher among the fridge components. After taking out the bag and opening it, he would use a fork to transfer the juicy fruit to a plate. The catch? He would often miss the sliced melon and puncture four small holes in the bag each time he landed an unsuccessful hit. But of course he couldn’t see the pen sized punctures he was inflicting. So he would return the bag to the fridge where it left a trail of sweet blood on the counter and across the floor, before the liquid finally pooled in the fridge.

“So if he wants cantaloupe, you have to get it for him. He isn’t allowed to do it,” my sister continued. We burst out laughing. Our mom is the cleanest person we know and the horror of such a sticky mess would certainly unglue her. I can picture my dad with his six eyes (sometimes he wears two pairs of glasses or uses a magnifying glass in addition to a pair of glasses) slightly frustrated but entirely oblivious to his cantaloupe catastrophe, murmuring to himself, “come on you slippery little ‘loupes.”



“Mom said she came home from work one day,” my sister said after loosely composing herself, “and found a line of uncooked instant ramen noodles going from the pantry to the kitchen. He must’ve accidentally torn open the packet trying to get it out of the bundle. When she asked him if he had ramen noodles for lunch that day he said, ‘Yeah I did. But you know what? It wasn’t very much and I was so hungry I had to get another packet. I don’t usually need more than one.’ Mom said she had to try hard to stifle a laugh, choosing not to reveal the mystery, and picked up the noodle remains.”

It’s so sad. But dang is it funny. Joy is not something I often feel. As one musician recently said of her life, “I live in the minor key.” Joy is not laughter nor happiness; it is much more complex. Yet there is something to be said about the moments of a hearty noise in the midst of suffering that demands acknowledgment. Humor is a gift God has given us to fight the dark parts of life. My dad’s closeness to death has brought many tears. But, every now and then, sometimes those same tears are from laughing too hard. —



# JOY & BASEBALL

Caroline Agan

**LOVE SPORTS.** They bring me joy.

I've been a baseball fan since I moved to St. Louis in 2007, a year after the Cardinals won their 13th World Series. In the summers, my siblings and I would race each other out to the driveway to get the Post-Dispatch every morning. We'd tear it open with one question in mind: *Did the Cardinals score six?* If they did, our mom would drive us to On The Run so that we could get 25¢ slushies.

## My case for baseball

If you don't like baseball, it's okay. You don't have to. People say it's slow, and boring, and for people who live in the past. They say it's all numbers, and if you don't know the numbers, you won't care about what happens on the field.

I think those people are wrong. Sometimes baseball is slow, sure, but that makes it a conversational sport. You can talk to your friends while you watch. And you don't have to know the intricacies of baseball to follow the rhythm of it.

More importantly, I think there is something special

about it being the biggest game in town. All sports give us something that's largely missing from U.S. culture: a place where people go from being individuals to a united whole. There aren't many cultural places where we can have something in common with a large number of strangers for a couple hours.

("Did you see the Pujols signing?" "Where'd you watch Game Six?" "Will Arenado stick around?")

Life has become an exercise in individuality. You do your thing, I do mine. You find your Spotify radio station, I find mine. You stream your genre of movie, I stream mine. The monoculture has collapsed; we can tailor our intake to our tastes. That doesn't have to be bad! But there are times when talking about my favorite music feels like explaining a complex web that no one but me has ever spun together before. It means my tastes match more closely to a dozen people I'm connected to on Twitter than to anyone else I've ever met.

I'm not saying that because I want you all to think I have special, unique tastes. I'm saying it because I feel isolated in an area which used to feel communal, and I think others feel the same.

Cheering for the local sports team is a way to connect with people. You can go to a game and you can float on the feeling of it. You don't need to understand the Buster Posey rule, or the difference between a curveball and a slider, or even know who Paul Goldschmidt is. You know you like the guys with the birds on the bat across their chests, and you know a home run is a big deal.

And that really can be enough. If you were at Cardinals games last season, you could have felt the joy of the returning hall-of-famer hitting a grand slam. You could have felt the simmering frustration of games that slipped through the Cardinals' fingers at the last minute. And yeah, sometimes, you could have felt the intense boredom of watching runner after runner get stranded on base.

But you'd be feeling it with tens of thousands of people. And if you went to the next game, you would have felt completely different feelings along with another crowd.

### What brought me joy last season

Look, I went to a lot of games last year. I refuse to count because I don't want to be convicted of bad stewardship. Weekday tickets at the gate are almost always \$10, although you can find them for less if you know how. You can ride the train for \$5 round-trip per person; you can also ask about my secret parking spot, which is only \$8.75.

My justification for going to so many games:

This was the final season for the greatest player of his generation, Albert Pujols, who was returning to the Cardinals after eleven years away.

This was the final season for one of the smartest catchers to ever play the game, Yadier Molina, who played his entire 18-year career for the Cardinals.

This could have been a disaster, of course. Between these two and pitcher Adam Wainwright, the Cardinals had three of the oldest players in the major leagues in their dugout.

But it wasn't a disaster. Pujols looked like the same guy who left in 2011. It didn't hurt that the Cardinals have two of the best players in baseball, third baseman Nolan Arenado and first baseman Paul Goldschmidt, and because management got some much-needed pitching at the deadline.

So I would go to a game on a Tuesday, do my Hebrew homework, go to class Wednesday, and go right back to the ballpark. And whether I was with friends, explaining how a ball went foul along the third base line, or there on my own, filling out a scoresheet, I was part of something bigger than myself.

### A heavy-handed comparison to the second coming

The Cardinals won the World Series again in 2011. Until then, I hadn't imagined I would ever get to see a team win like that. I thought that winning was something that was possible for other people often, and for my team maybe every 30 years. I missed the win in 2006, so I missed my chance.

But a shocking win in Game 6 and a confident Game 7 meant I got to go to a championship parade with hundreds of thousands of St. Louisans to see the team, triumphant, roll through town.

The 2022 season didn't end that way. The journey was great; the destination was a letdown. But that's baseball. Either your team wins, and you get to see a glimpse of another great victory, where a city has one voice, each person now a brother or sister, united in mutual joy and celebration.

Or they don't.

And you just watch the St. Louis Blues instead. →



# CHURCH POTATOES: Os Guinness and Anti-Intellectualism in the Church

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Anna Ochoa

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“**F Y’AIN’T CAREFUL,**” the preacher at our church conference paused dramatically, “you’re liable to freeze by degrees.” This scornful stance towards an academic study of Scripture was not unique to our charismatic speaker—throughout my evangelical youth, such disapproval of formal Biblical scholarship was so ingrained in my milieu as to go unquestioned. We were certainly encouraged to study our Bibles, but always by the unfettered light of the indwelling Spirit, never in the starched and frozen halls of higher learning. Accumulating degrees, as our preacher intimated, may be fitting for technical fields like medicine or astrophysics; but pursuing God in a classroom was pure folly, wholly inimical to a heartfelt, authentic faith. Wasn’t the very essence of knowing God a blind and childlike leap into the dark, a pious refusal to peer too finely into the mystery? And wasn’t the quest for doctrinal precision the death of devotion? The fret over such “Pharisaical” nitpicking of Scripture or any specialized scrutiny of the faith could be mirrored in a quote by Mark Twain on analyzing humor: “Explaining humor is a lot like dissecting a frog: you learn a lot in the process, but in the end you kill it.”<sup>1</sup>

Os Guinness, on the other hand, asserts that it is not formal study that has flattened our faith, but rather a long-growing anti-intellectualism in the American church. In *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don’t Think and What to Do About It*, he confronts the church’s stunning refusal to engage intellectually with its own faith, at times even glorying in her doctrinal ignorance. This has not always been the case. Some of the first American colonies were settled by rigorous Christian thinkers, the Puritans, and both clergy

and laymen were conversant in the Bible and wider literature. However, this formerly learned and literate laity has since embraced a populist, anti-clerical, and anti-academic approach to faith, spurred on in part by the revivalism of two Great Awakenings and a necessarily informal ministry on the vast and spacious frontier. This democratic impulse toward religion has been vivifying in ways, encouraging a hearty personal piety and active charity, and challenging an at times elitist superiority in the formally educated.

Unfortunately, the movement overcorrected as it made way for a mental sluggishness that has weakened the competence of the church. Its focus on pietism prompted a devaluing of academic training and embraced an unstudied ignorance of doctrine and theology—even promoting this approach to faith as more “natural” and “authentic.” Some of the movement’s most high-profile ministers promoted this scorn of scholarship. Revivalist Dwight L. Moody was quoted as declaiming, “My theology! I didn’t know I had any,” while charismatic evangelist Billy Sunday claimed not to know “any more about theology than a jack-rabbit [knew] about ping pong.”<sup>2</sup> These bold assertions fit well the rising evangelical Zeitgeist—the pitting of an educated, authoritative clerical hierarchy against a democratic, practical, grassroots “faith of the people,” which boasted in individual interpretation, service over scholarship, and “deed over creed.”

Such exulting in anti-intellectualism is not only unfortunate, Guinness declares, it is actually a sin and a shame. The Greatest Commandment itself directs us to love God with our whole heart, soul, and *mind*; and the false choice between the head and the heart has

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/179642-explaining-humor-is-a-lot-like-dissecting-a-frog-you>

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don’t Think and What to Do About It* (Grand Rapids, MI: Hourglass Books, 1994), 38.



had devastating effects on the church's health and vigor. As it began to retreat inward with a more personal and private faith, the church lost ground in serious engagement with the wider cultural conversation; and this anti-intellectual bias has led to "superficial or bad theology, the lack of a serious apology for the faith, the lack of a constructive public philosophy, and the continued defections of thinking evangelicals in the direction of Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy."<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the artistic and creative branches of the church have likewise been stifled and isolated,<sup>4</sup> left in many cases to sheepishly follow secular culture's lead rather than setting the bar of excellence.

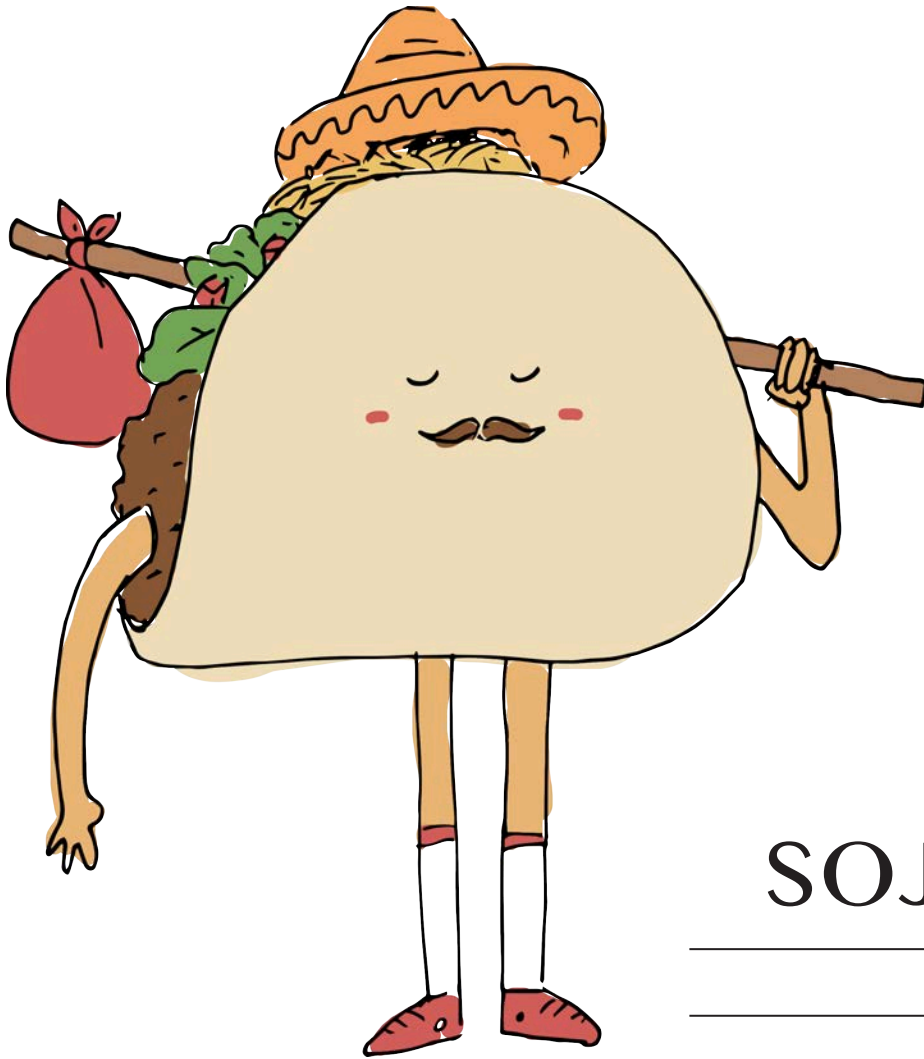
Guinness's *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds* is a taut and lively layout of the problem. Part One is arranged into alliterative P's, tracing our retreat from Puritan scholarship through such societal trends as "Populism," "Pluralism," and "Pragmatism." Part Two then maps the post-Civil War era rise of what he terms "An Idiot Culture," the dumbing down of the American mind through various factors such as TV, advertising, the push for style over substance, and a mass popular culture that feeds the basest of our appetites. Without a deep engagement with Biblical truth, we find faint tools to fight this pervasive materialism and flattening of the American soul. Yet the church must not fear that precise exegesis must turn up a dead frog on the table of faith. *Fat Minds* exposed this false belief of my past, that to study faith and doctrine closely was necessarily to court a quenching of the Spirit—although this might have been plausible pushback to the liberal higher criticism of the Enlightenment, which often did turn up a dead letter and an emptied faith.

However, this history does not render academic study of the Word wholly dispensable; and in fact, Christian scholars have long been working to strengthen the understanding of the church. As I realized ruefully, I (and my pastors) use a Study Bible with archaeological, historical, and theological commentary, Greek and Hebrew glosses and painstaking cross references. Where did I think such notes that have shaped my Scriptural comprehension came from? We should be grateful for the faithful in academia who have worked to preserve and enrich our understanding of the faith handed down to us by the first to believe. Moreover, we should urge those with intellectual gifts to pursue such scholarship and wisdom and strengthen what is weak and dying. There is no time to lose.

If indeed Christians are commanded to love God with our minds, it would be a mistake to bury our heads and refuse to grow in studying his precious Word. The author of Hebrews had similarly strong words for his immature hearers who "no longer try to understand"—"Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again" (5:12). The NT sees no glory in ignorance and slackness in our spiritual understanding. Perhaps evangelicals, by misreading the Pharisees' arrogance as a purely academic one, have sincerely but misguidedly reacted by shutting the doors of scholarship in the faces of hungry sheep, atrophying a vital and much-needed part of the body. Before seminary and authors like Guinness, I didn't know what I didn't know about this lapse. Because of the feast laid out before me in seminary and Scripture, I now know that it is commendable—and even commanded of us—to know and to grow. —□—

<sup>3</sup> Guinness, *Fit Bodies*, 15.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.



# SOJOURNER

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Chris Lee

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**W**HEN I BECAME A CHRISTIAN, I often pondered how to connect my faith to my vocation. This concern has magnified as I move away from my vocation in the marketplace and towards full-time ministry. Recent books (Dan Doriani's *Work: Its Purpose, Dignity, and Transformation*; Darrell Cosden's *The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work*; and Steven Garber's *Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good*) demonstrate that this is not an isolated concern.

My unique job sometimes pulls me from my studies but never from my calling. I drive the food truck for Taco Bell. You may wonder how faith and fast-food fare intertwine. I invite you to bear with me. I chose "Sojourner" as the title for this article because that is what I am when I travel for Taco Bell. The gist of my job is to travel to a determined location in the U.S., meet the truck, and transport it to an event.

To most of the employees at Taco Bell, I do not have a name; I am "the driver." On the surface, it would

be easy to dismiss how being a Christian has any bearing on this work. First, consider the apparent insignificance of my title, "driver," and compare it with the supposed significance of being a Christian. Often I hear, "I am a Christian," stated with pride, and don't get me wrong: one should be proud of following Jesus and bearing the image of the Creator. My point is that stating that you are a Christian carries much more significance than saying "I am an American" or "I identify with \_\_\_\_." The idea here is that, as Christians, we rightly frame what we claim. My job in the marketplace requires certain actions and responsibilities. It is on me to figure out where I am going, what the best route is, how much fuel I have, and the weather conditions as I travel. Similarly, being a Christian requires us to take action and accept responsibility. How do I walk with Jesus? How do I love my neighbor? How do I show my love for God? These are but a few examples of the outworking of our faith. In the marketplace, the onus falls on me. Fortunately, as a Christian, the course for my walk is laid out in the Bible.

In every town I work in, I am at the mercy of the local Lyft and Uber drivers to shuttle me to and fro. Most often, I have little or no idea about the roads, weather, customs, and overall lay of the land. These drivers are often moonlighting to make ends meet. I have met professional deep-sea fishers, IT designers, CEOs, teachers, third-generation watchmakers, Vietnamese heavy metal guitarists, and so many more. Seldom, if ever, does time allow me to evangelize. Some may disagree with my reluctance, but I feel you should know a little more about a person's story before making assumptions. I remember one ride where the driver asked if I had children, and when I shared that my wife and I could not have kids, he told me that I did not have enough faith, or maybe I didn't pray hard enough. If the conversation allows, I do what I can to get to know the person, if only their name, and pray for them. Lately, I have been carrying a small notebook, and I will write down their name and any info I learn and incorporate that into my evening prayers (Eph. 6:18).

When I arrive at the yard or the location where the truck is kept, I often engage with others whose first language is not English. It would be easy to assume that because we are in America and English is my first

language, everyone must speak it fluently. There are some who expect others to understand our language and customs, and when that expectation is not met, there are accusations and finger-pointing. It would be challenging to do my job if I had not taken the time to learn some degree of Spanish: people's names, and, at the very least, how to say "please" and "thank you." For the sake of efficiency and faithfulness, seeking to understand and relate to those we hope to serve rather than forcing them to shift to our way of thinking seems more aligned with what Scripture teaches. Intentional relationship seems to be the bridge Jesus used to reach others. My favorite example

is John 4, the story of the woman at the well.

Before each event, I am provided with an itinerary. It tells me people, time, and location. My job is to travel to the event's location and figure out the logistics. Sometimes the truck will need to be washed; this means finding a place to accommodate a vehicle that is as high and almost as long as a semi truck. Travel time from lodging to event needs to be considered, as well as food pick-up and drop-off, and local traffic must be accounted for amid all of this. Driving a 33-foot 20- to 25-ton food truck cross-country is not very cost effective and sometimes a courier-type hauler is

“Seldom will we get it perfect, but habitual diligence can account for many hiccups along the way.”





used, which adds another layer to effective communication and problem-solving. Operating a truck does not happen in a vacuum; I must account for others all along the way. There seems to be a liturgical aspect to life that we must consider, a flow that accounts for transitions, bottlenecks, and hiccups. There have been opportunities where I was in the right to assert myself and instead remained non-anxious, never considering who was watching. Today, I am requested to work events where there might be difficult situations to alleviate. As ministry leaders, looking past immediate reward and focusing on delayed gratification allows God to work in the lives of others and us. More so, it seems when we are stretched, that's when others pay attention, waiting for your reaction. Seldom will we get it perfect, but habitual diligence can account for many hiccups along the way (Heb. 6:10-12).

Can you imagine owning a business with the resources to engage with culture and society at a level that everyone who sees you knows who you are, what you do, and what you represent? For Taco Bell, that means providing a taco for a price. Now imagine giving away that product free of charge. Nearly every event I have done for Taco Bell has been free to the consumer. It would be easy to assume these events are written off

as advertisements. But I have learned that many of the events I do come with a hefty price tag, including my travel and lodging. I have witnessed generous donations to STEM programs during the height of the pandemic. There are also community events that raise money for young entrepreneurs who lack the resources for education, providing a platform for them to share their ideas with business professionals. These opportunities usually happen without media presence, fanfare, or a spotlight. I have not asked if Taco Bell is a Christian organization; it does not matter. As a Christian, I have the opportunity and privilege to help an organization in its philanthropy. Looking at this from a pastoral perspective, we could learn many things. God, in his sovereignty, is using a for-profit institution to provide flourishing to others. Serving others is taking our resources, no matter how trivial they seem, and lending them to serve the kingdom. Equipping the next generation from Taco Bell's model looks like including young people in the conversation and providing the necessary resources for them to flourish in their future. How might we do this as pastors? I think, in part, it begins with leaving the safety of the church and entering the marketplace. Sometimes, as Christians, our assumptions of others are influenced by media or hearsay. I used to think Californians ate sprouts and

didn't know the Lord. I have discovered in my travels that they are people much like those at home who love tacos and Jesus. It seems the thing to recognize is that the marketplace is full of people who live for the Lord. They may not have seminary training or spend much time in the Bible, but they are doing their best to witness to others in the spaces they live and work in. What does it look like to listen to, train, and equip those in the marketplace to be stronger in their witness? Perhaps one way is to start with a conversation and ask those in your congregation to share what they do in the marketplace. Look for bridges as you navigate the world, ask others about their hopes and dreams, and work that into your sermons. I have discovered that most folks today are doing their best with what they have, seldom, if ever, lifting their eyes from their daily tasks.

Work is very much a significant part of the gospel. We tend to forget the shepherds, politicians, doctors, tax collectors, fishermen, housekeepers, tent-makers, and carpenters present in the Bible. It's marvelous to think that Jesus spent much of his life working in the marketplace, laboring, sharing a meal, and marveling at a job well done with others. Jesus, the God-man, provided the bridge that tied the marketplace to the kingdom, taking those fishermen, tax collectors, and

doctors and shaping them into disciples. It seems reasonable to suggest that the disciples never forgot their origin. John speaks like a man who has worked with his hands, and, conversely, Paul writes like a man trained in rhetoric; each of them brings their unique worldview as they share the gospel. I believe our primary focus should be on the kingdom of God. I also think we would do well to remember that we all have a worldview deeply influenced by what we do or have done for a living. As pastors and those who will go on to do ministry full-time, it is our responsibility to go out into the world and see it from the perspective of those we serve, to embrace Jesus' words, "Come and follow me; today I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19).

As Christians, we are all sojourners. We are all travelers, and each of us has the potential to be "drivers," leaders in the spaces God has given us, to help give shape and direction to the good news we profess. Not everyone we meet will need to know our name, title, or history, nor will they care. Our motivation as Christians is not self-focused in a world that seeks recognition and affirmation. Our first vocation is to love God with all our hearts, love our neighbor, and sometimes share a taco in the process (Matt. 22:37-40). —□□





# INTEGRATION OF FAITH AND SUFFERING

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Meredith Woodell

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**INTEGRATING FAITH WITH SUFFERING** is one of the most profound and complicated problems that we face as Christians. The suffering in our lives, in the lives of those around us, and in the world can feel overwhelming. It is hard to know where God is in the midst of such suffering. There are many verses and passages in Scripture that help us understand how God and suffering can co-exist. Job is a whole book dedicated to the topic of suffering. The Psalms show us how to lament and grieve our suffering by crying out to God. Jesus assures us that we will suffer, but that he is still in control: “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”<sup>1</sup> Jesus’ own suffering on the cross that led to salvation shows us that good can come out of evil.

Yet there is often a disconnect between these known truths and our lived experience. Keller relates the story of John S. Feinberg, a theologian who goes through his own bout of suffering when his wife is diagnosed with a devastating degenerative disease.<sup>2</sup> Feinberg wrote, “I thought that as long as one had intellectual answers that explained why God allowed evil ... the sufferer would be satisfied ... I felt God had somehow misled me, even tricked me.”<sup>3</sup> Knowing all of the “right answers” about God and suffering does not make it okay when we go through it ourselves. There is a visceral, bodily, experiential orientation to suffering that all of the intellectual and theological understanding in the world cannot solve. It is like the difference between cognitively knowing the steps to a dance or the procedure of a surgery, and then actually doing the dance or going through the surgery. Knowing about those things does not affect your body or your emotions, but participating in them does.

Indeed, many people have become aware of this tension between the knowing and the experiencing. They question how a good God could allow suffering at all. One of my family members cannot imagine a good God when children in the world suffer. Similarly, a friend’s brother has distanced himself from the faith he grew up in because of the problem of evil. There is too much suffering in the world for him to believe in God.

In addition, there is a confusing reality where the Church and Christians are the perpetrators of suffering. This is a historical and present-day reality evident in wars, colonization, slavery and racism, abuse of all kinds, manipulation, and much more. I understand how a former co-worker of mine has no interest in Christianity (or any organized religion) because of the havoc it has caused. Jesus himself said, “Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me.”<sup>4</sup>

Many devoted Christians, myself included, struggle with these questions regarding suffering, and also have experienced suffering at the hands of people who said they loved God. This brings doubts and questions. Why *does* God allow suffering, especially to the most vulnerable? Why do some people have normal, safe, predictable lives, while others face round after round of trials and hardships? Why is the Church active and complicit in perpetuating suffering? There are times when, at best, it seems like the Lord is silent on these matters, and at worst, he causes the suffering, or at least agrees with the mockers who say that people deserve their suffering. And finally, why does our head knowledge feel inadequate for our lived experiences?

We may never know the answers to the why questions

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<sup>1</sup> Jn 16:33 (ESV)

<sup>2</sup> Timothy Keller, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*, 200.

<sup>3</sup> Keller, 200.

<sup>4</sup> Jn 16:2b-3

behind our suffering, but God does give us a glimpse of his heart through his word and the Word made flesh. If we can see through the fog of the lenses we have been given by our well-meaning (or not) churches, and the Western theology that has given us an individualistic, pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps mentality of Christianity, we may be able to rewire our understanding and integrate our suffering and faith. I believe it truly is a rewiring. There is a distinct way that we read Scripture in the Western context, and perhaps the first step in having a more integrated understanding of faith and suffering is to undo some of the things we take for granted in our theology.

Susan Eastman does a wonderful job of starting us off in this direction in her work *Paul and the Person: Reframing Paul's Anthropology*. She reads Paul from a fresh perspective. In passages such as Galatians 2:19-20 and Romans 7:15-18, 20, Paul writes, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me," and "I no longer am doing it, but sin dwelling in me."<sup>5</sup> Susan interprets this through a relational lens: "In both cases the self is a self-in-relation-to-another, suggesting that it is not only 'in Christ,' but also in the realm of sin and death, that a person is shaped in relationship to a separate entity that is both external and indwelling."<sup>6</sup> She goes on to compare Paul's anthropology to modern psychological studies of human development in relationship.

Through modern psychological research, it has been confirmed that people develop in relation to others. A person develops an understanding of themselves as a self through their relationships with their caregivers before they are ever able to articulate a meaning for their existence.<sup>7</sup> This is why Bessel Van Der Kolk, in *Body Keeps the Score*, describes an extremely traumatized individual as lacking "a continuous sense of self" such that this person could not even recognize herself in the mirror.<sup>8</sup> Brutalization, suffering and the absence of an attuned, validating presence cost this woman her sense of self. Eastman writes, "Sin ultimately is a fleeting falsehood, whereas Christ's rule endures forever; nonetheless, as history abundantly demonstrates, a

lie may have tremendous power to do harm, precisely because it operates and spreads through interpersonal systems."<sup>9</sup> Eastman gives a radical suggestion, "Rather than talking about change in individuals in a substantial or linear sense, perhaps it is more accurate and closer to Paul's thought to describe change rendered effective and visible through the quality of relationships".<sup>10</sup>

As we in the West contemplate suffering, it is often in individualistic terms. This gives rise to isolation, blame, judgments, and shame. In reality, we are all more connected than we realize. As Eastman writes, we are "embodied and socially embedded" creatures.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the relational and bodily experience of suffering cannot be overlooked in favor of cognitive explanations. God never answers Job's questions; he does not often give us reasons or glimpses into the behind-the-scenes of why events unfold in terrible ways. He is not in the business of meeting our intellectual demands to "show [us] a sign," as the Pharisees and Sadducees ask of Jesus to satisfy their minds but distance their hearts.<sup>12</sup>

The point of what I am suggesting may seem vague, but I think it bears consideration. Just as we can plumb the depths of our thinking and meaning-making and find the philosophies of our culture, so too our theological framework of reading Scripture undergirds how we embody our faith and integrate with our suffering. When suffering is an intellectual problem to be rationalized away, it distances us from ourselves, others, and God. Instead, what would it look like for the Church to move toward an "embodied and socially embedded" view of suffering? It would not be for a single individual to carry the weight of their troubles or to find answers from God on their own. It would be for the community to "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."<sup>13</sup> The goal is not so much an answer to suffering, but a togetherness through it. This seems like a simple idea, and yet it could give birth to connection and selfhood, possibly the "life abundant" that Jesus had in mind.<sup>14</sup> —✠—

<sup>5</sup> Susanne Grove Eastman, *Paul and the Person: Reframing Paul's Anthropology* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), 6.

<sup>6</sup> Eastman, 7

<sup>7</sup> Eastman, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Bessel Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (Penguin Books, 2014), 319.

<sup>9</sup> Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 181.

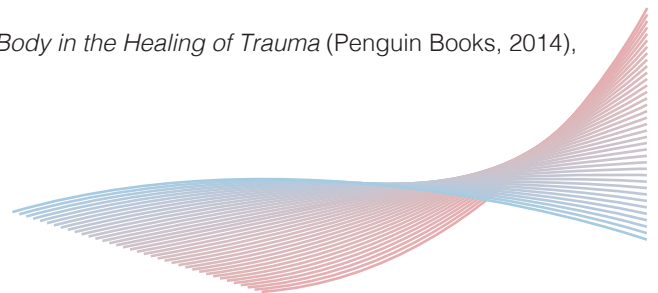
<sup>10</sup> Eastman, 181-182.

<sup>11</sup> Eastman, 184.

<sup>12</sup> Mt 16:1

<sup>13</sup> Gal 6:2

<sup>14</sup> Jn 10:10



# SHOULD CHRISTIANS SUPPORT BASIC INCOME PROGRAMS?

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Kale Uzzle

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“**T**HERE’S WATER DRIPPING through our bedroom ceiling.”

A few years back, I was washing dishes when I received this terrifying news from my wife. We had lived in our home for just over a year and had two small children sleeping soundly down the hall. Our years in non-profit work had led to only a small amount of savings and no clue how to fix a hole in the roof. We put down a bucket, prayed for help, and slept very little that night.

Like many Americans, we had enough to get by but were one crisis away from significant financial stress. It has often been reported that 6 in 10 Americans do not have enough in savings to handle a \$500 unplanned expense.<sup>1</sup> After covering their basic expenses, many families simply cannot afford to put money away for the future.

The creation of margin is one of the core principles behind the proposal for a guaranteed basic income (GBI) policy here in the United States. Certain households would receive a direct cash transfer from the government with no stipulations regarding how or where it is spent. Some iterations suggest a more generous amount (Andrew Yang’s \$1000/month Freedom Dividend) that replaces other social welfare programs (SNAP benefits, housing assistance, etc.). Others suggest a lower amount that would work in tandem with these programs.

Saint Louis is set to begin its own experiment with the policy. Back in December, Mayor Tishaura Jones signed the Working Families Bill (BB116) which, among other things, set aside \$5 million in American Rescue Plan funds to provide monthly \$500 payments to over 400 Saint Louis households for 18 months.<sup>2</sup> Recipients must meet three basic criteria: having a child enrolled in Saint Louis Public Schools; demonstrating a negative impact from the COVID-19 pandemic; and having a household income at or below 170% of the federal poverty level, which is around \$47,000 for a family of four.<sup>3</sup>

Saint Louis is one of more than twenty American cities that have committed to such pilot projects over the past few years.<sup>4</sup> It is safe to assume that this conversation will only grow more mainstream as a policy proposal over the next decade.

As Christians, we are called to fully submit our lives to Jesus, including how we process and respond to the policies of our government. In this essay, I want to suggest three reasons why Christians might support a GBI program and two reasons why we might oppose it, providing responses to that opposition along the way. I believe a GBI policy in the U.S. is the single best way to reduce poverty, create an environment hospitable to a Christian vision of the home, and incentivize entrepreneurship, all without diminishing a biblical view of work.

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<sup>1</sup> Aimee Picchi, “A \$500 Surprise Expense Would Put Most Americans Into Debt,” CBS News, January 12, 2017, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/most-americans-cant-afford-a-500-emergency-expense>.

<sup>2</sup> Rachel Lippman, “St. Louis Aldermen Pass Basic Income Program For City Residents. Here’s How It Will Work,” St. Louis Public Radio, December 13, 2022, <https://news.stlpublicradio.org/government-politics-issues/2022-12-13/st-louis-aldermen-ok-cash-help-for-residents-heres-how-the-basic-income-program-will-work>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Holder, “For More Than 20 Guaranteed Income Projects, the Data Is In,” Bloomberg, September 28, 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-09-28/for-more-than-20-guaranteed-income-projects-the-data-is-in>.

I begin with the reasons for support:

**Reason #1 - It reduces poverty in the most marginalized demographics.**

Along with its many devastating effects, the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent response efforts have given us compelling data regarding the potential of supplemental income programs.

In 2021, the American Rescue Plan Act increased the Child Tax Credit from \$2000 to \$3600 per child and implemented a transfer program whereby families received half of the credit in monthly installments of up to \$300 per child from July through December.<sup>5</sup>

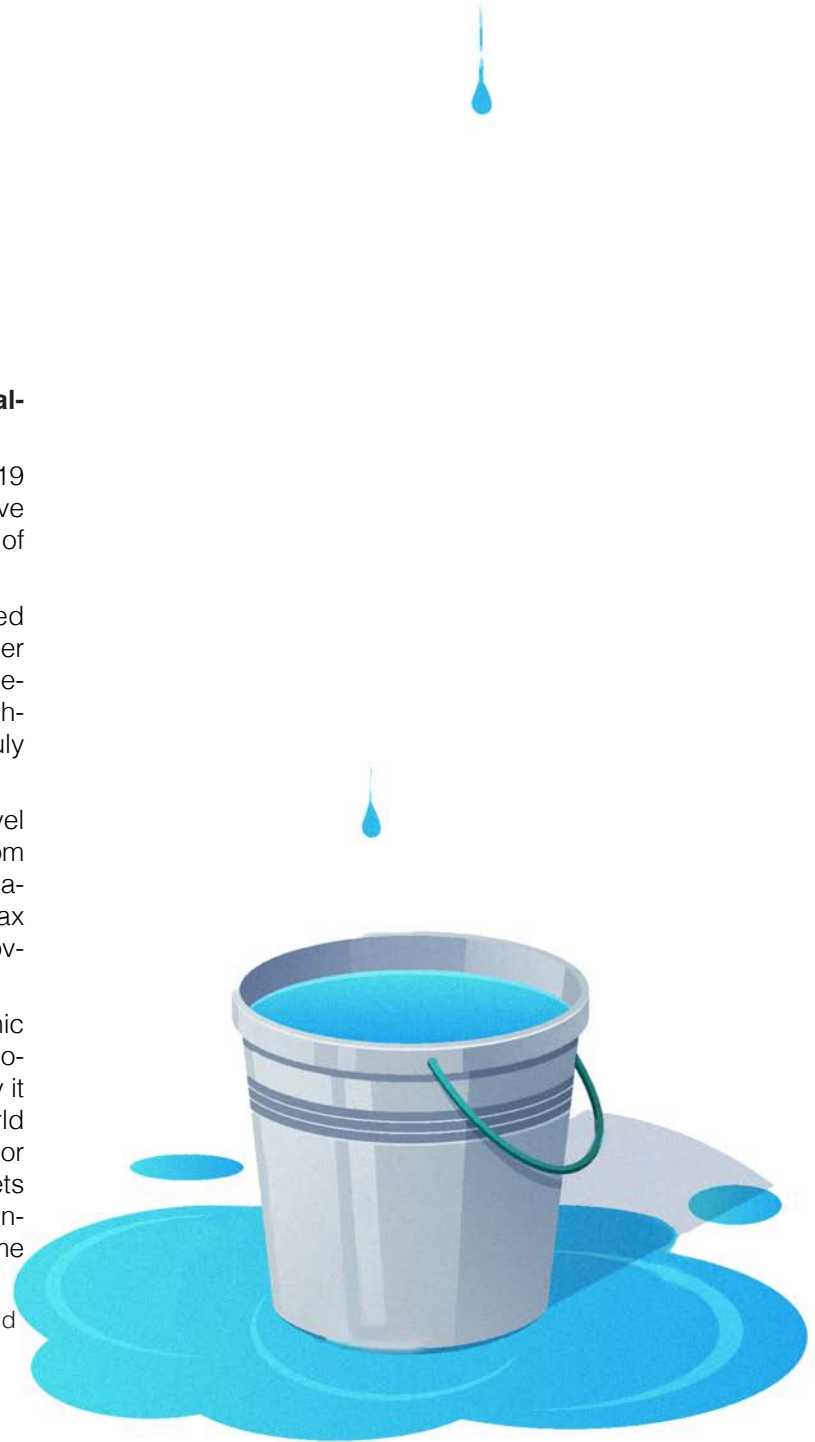
As a result, child poverty fell to its lowest recorded level in 2021, declining 46 percent from 2020 to 2021 from 9.7 percent to 5.2 percent.<sup>6</sup> Even a fiscally simple measure, such as directing the IRS to pre-pay families a tax credit they already qualify to receive, can cut child poverty almost in half.

One of the scandalous realities that the pandemic exposed is that ending poverty is more a matter of political will than available capital. The amount of money it would take to lift every person on earth across the World Bank's extreme poverty line is only about \$66 billion, or around the amount Americans spend on lottery tickets every year.<sup>7</sup> The U.S., often touted as the "richest country in the history of the world," has roughly the same

<sup>5</sup> Kalee Burns et al., *The Impact of the 2021 Expanded Child Tax Credit on Child Poverty*, SEHSD-WP2022-24 (Washington, D.C.: United States Census Bureau, 2022), 4, <https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/2022/demo/SEHSD-wp2022-24.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Annie Lowrey, *Give People Money: How a Universal Basic Income Would End Poverty, Revolutionize Work, and Remake the World* (New York: Crown, 2018), 66.



proportion of citizens in extreme poverty as Thailand and Albania.<sup>8</sup>

We tend to believe giving people cash directly is an ineffective way of ending poverty. We assume people are poor largely because of bad personal choices and, therefore, lack of money is not the real issue. The data, however, largely refutes our biases:

In more than 20 US cities that launched basic income programs during the pandemic, the average person receiving monthly support was a woman making just enough money to put her over the federal poverty line. Most beneficiaries were single, most had kids, and most were people of color.

Recipients received up to \$1,000 a month, usually for about a year, and overall spent the largest share of the money at superstores and smaller retailers. A quarter of the funds across projects went to food, and under 6% went to travel and leisure.<sup>9</sup>

Despite our prejudices, cash-payment recipients tend to spend most of their benefits on basic needs (groceries, rent, etc.) and childcare expenses.<sup>10</sup>

Christians have long advocated for the family as the fundamental unit of a society. We need to trust that families are in the best place to determine their own needs. While no program will be fully free from abuse, a GBI puts families in the driver's seat of their own financial well-being.

### **Reason #2 - It creates a society more hospitable to a Christian vision of the home.**

Every child is made in the image of God and has worth and dignity as an image-bearer. Christians see the ideal home as one in which a mother and father provide a stable environment for children to grow and flourish while learning to follow Jesus. The fall has distorted this experience in many ways, not least being that it is increasingly difficult to provide a home in which one or both parents can be as present with children as they need in their most formative years.

Toward the end of greater stability, GBI studies report that recipients were more likely to buy a home and spend more time with their children overall.<sup>11</sup> People

tend to leave unstable housing situations when they know they have a baseline-level income arriving each month. They also have the time to find jobs that afford them more time with their children when the urgency is even slightly decreased.

This tension also exists in ministry families. I would guess that many spouses of seminary students and church leaders might choose to stay home with kids or work fewer hours if the ever-growing cost of health insurance premiums could be covered by GBI. Beyond increasing family agency, these programs also significantly increase the freedom of a family to shape their lives around their convictions.

### **Reason #3 - It incentivizes entrepreneurship.**

I grew up in a family of entrepreneurs. My dad ran a flooring business in my hometown for decades. My older brother and I opened a bakery together in the garage of our parents' house during my senior year of high school. I have seen what it takes to move an idea from brainstorming to ribbon-cutting.

Both of those businesses eventually folded, despite their significant talent and effort. The flooring company was successful until Home Depot moved to town with much lower prices. My dad eventually closed the shop and sold the building to pay off his debts.

Like most restaurants, the bakery struggled to make a

profit initially and my brother did not have the capital in hand to live without a paycheck. We shut down after the first year and he went back to working in traditional kitchens.

Again, one of the key hurdles in a society allergic to social welfare is margin; unless you come from a wealthy family, it is hard to find the space to breathe and plan when the bills need to be paid every month.

How many would-be entrepreneurs exist in our city alone who can't quite take the leap because they live paycheck-to-paycheck?

A guaranteed basic income would grant its recipients an increased degree of the flexibility needed to say yes to the entrepreneurial dreams latent within them.

“One of the key hurdles in a society allergic to social welfare is margin.”

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 116-117.

<sup>9</sup> Holder, “For More Than 20 Guaranteed Income Projects, The Data Is In.”

<sup>10</sup> “Working Families Bill Establishes Guaranteed Basic Income Pilot,” Saint Louis Board of Aldermen, 2022, <https://www.stlouis-mo.gov/government/departments/aldermen/president/news/workingfamilies.cfm>.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 175.

### **But what about...**

With the core reasons for supporting GBI on the table, it is necessary to answer some of the key objections to such a program.

### **Opposing Reason #1 - Guaranteeing income disincentivizes work.**

The historically conservative theory behind opposing GBI is that it disincentivizes working for pay. If people know that they have money coming in each month, won't they simply choose to work less and negate the benefits provided by the policy? Why would we divert our tax revenues to reward this type of behavior, especially given Paul's admonition to the church at Thessalonica: "The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat" (2 Thess 3:10)?

The answer to whether people react to such policies by decreasing their workload is yes and no, both of which should be a source of encouragement to Christians.

Pilot program data reveal that some people respond to these programs by actually working more. In the two-year Stockton, California pilot, participants who received \$500 per month ended up securing full-time employment at higher rates than the control group.<sup>12</sup> A similar 2010 experiment in Iran found that many recipients worked more hours because they used the cash infusion to expand and grow their small businesses.<sup>13</sup>

Some people do choose to work less and for excellent reasons. In most basic income experiments, the reduction of overall work hours was concentrated among mothers and teenage boys.<sup>14</sup> Mothers who began to receive monthly payments chose to reduce their hours in order to care for children while more young men chose to attend school or spend more time looking for quality employment instead of accepting low-paid work.<sup>15</sup>

No basic income program is designed to completely replace work. These policies simply cover the bottom levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, like

food and shelter.<sup>16</sup> The data illustrate both increase and decrease in segments of the labor market, largely to an effect that most followers of Jesus would support.

### **Opposing Reason #2 - But how would we pay for it?**

All of this leads to the final and possibly most pressing question—how would we pay for it?

A plan to give every American citizen an additional \$1000/month would cost around \$4 trillion annually, or about 1/5 of the entire American economy.<sup>17</sup> For context, we currently spend about \$3 trillion on all social insurance programs.<sup>18</sup> A more targeted approach could bring the bill down below \$1 trillion, while still lifting the poorest Americans above the poverty line.

There are as many different potential funding scenarios as there are policy papers, but some mix of increased taxation from higher income brackets, carbon taxing, and financial transaction fees has been widely suggested. Redirecting funds from some existing social programs would also bring down costs.

Regardless of how the bill is paid, the data from our own Child Tax Credit experiment in 2021 and similar experiments around the world over the past decade seem to suggest that child poverty and extreme poverty could be eliminated en masse, self-employment rates could rise, and broader inequality could shrink in the wake of such bold action.

As tempting as it might be to shut down such a suggestion as utopian social engineering, it is worthwhile to take a second look and recognize how broken the current system is for so many Americans. If the United States really is the most prosperous nation in world history, how might Christians in our time lead the way toward both spending themselves on behalf of the poor and advocating that our officials better organize our collective purse toward their agency and flourishing as God's image bearers? It is time to find out. —<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Holder, "For More Than 20 Guaranteed Income Projects, The Data Is In."

<sup>13</sup> Lowrey, *Give People Money*, 65.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>17</sup> Robert B. Reich, "What if the Government Gave Everyone a Paycheck?," *New York Times*, July 9, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/09/books/review/annie-lowrey-give-people-money-andrew-yang-war-on-normal-people.html>.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

# The Art Table



## **The Gift of Rising Early**

JENNIFER ASP

Acrylic

# Discomfort in Pain

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JENNIFER ASP

This Mississippi River is low  
    historically low  
    dismally low  
It is still a river—  
    You can see it and touch it  
But it's the kind of low that makes your heart hurt  
    It is not the way it ought to be  
Some people drive past and feel pity  
    Bless its heart  
Some people feel revulsion  
    Ugliness is exposed  
Some people are curious  
    Could it get worse?  
Some people are aggravated  
    Work is disrupted, money is lost, time is wasted  
Some people are worried  
    What happens to communities? Ecosystems?  
Some people are brokenhearted  
    Maybe it's changed forever  
What is the right way to be?  
    It is, after all, just a river  
I went to the river twice this week  
    Once to show a child the joy of a  
    river he had never seen  
    He skipped rocks and giggled  
The second time I read a book  
    About rare friends and their books  
My heart felt full being with the river  
    I am not going anywhere  
    I don't mind a sandy shore

# Change

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MARY SCHIEFERSTEIN

Change is a robber,  
Creeping in the dead of night.  
You wake in the morning  
To an unexpected emptiness  
Punching a hole in your gut,  
Setting your head spinning.

Change is an hourglass,  
Sand slipping silently through your hands  
Until time runs out,  
Nothing left to grasp,  
Just a tremor in your fingers  
And a pounding in your chest.

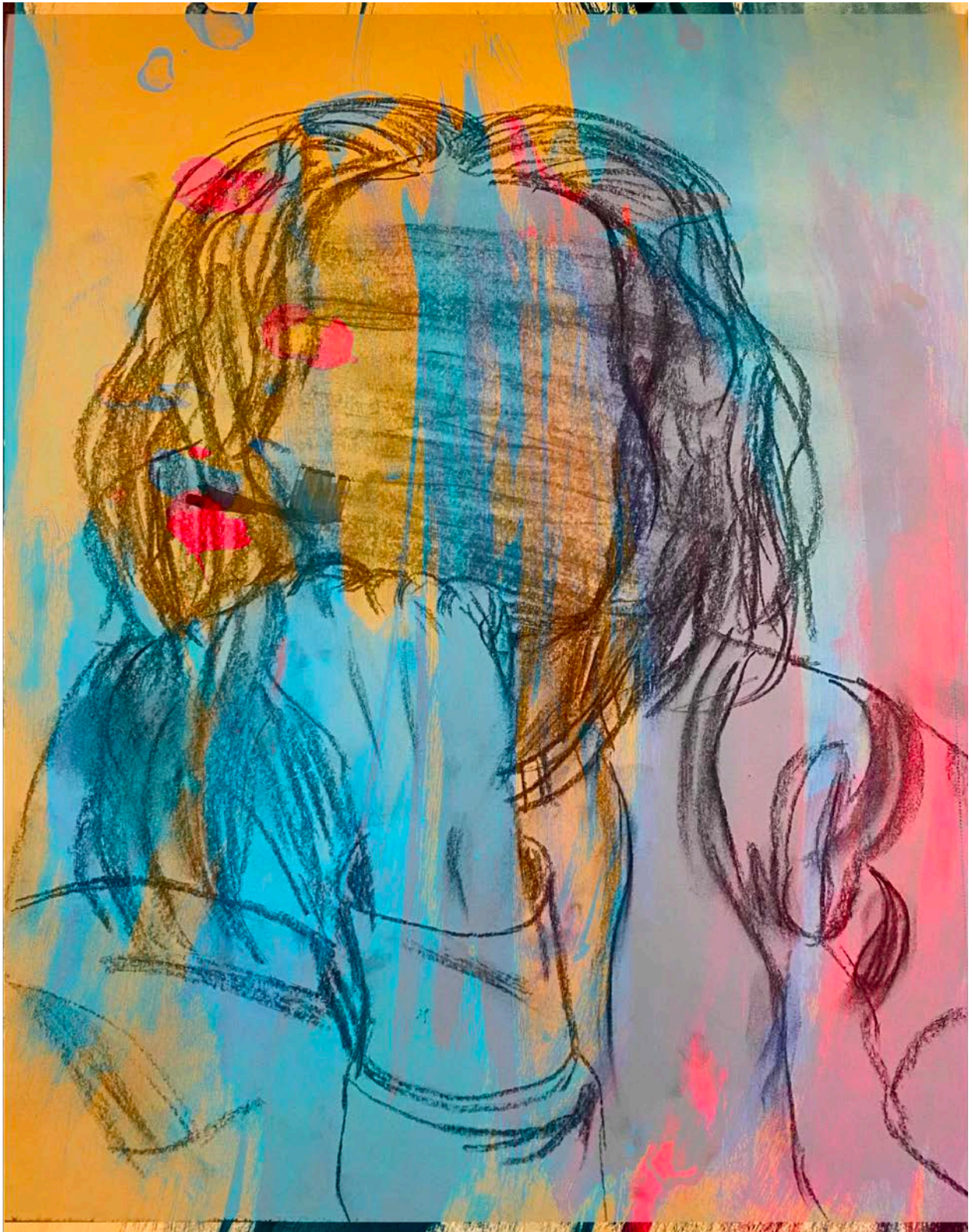
Change is a ship  
That loses its anchor,  
Thrown by waves, pulled by currents,  
Unable to tether to anything stable  
Or safe,  
A deck that never stops moving  
From under your feet.

Change is a burial,  
A realization that you've closed in a coffin  
A piece of your heart you'll never get back,  
That all you can do is lay it in the dirt,  
Let time and tears stem the bleeding,  
Until one day you return  
And wonder at the fact  
That grass could grow in such a place.

You see, change is not so much  
The lily in full bloom  
As the slow, steady unfurling  
From bulb to bud to leaf,  
The way you feel the world is ending  
Each time that you realize  
Things will never be the same again,  
Only to find that spring is dependable  
And each death has a way of bringing  
A better life than you could have known before.

Change is loss.

But when we drop a little of what we're holding,  
It always makes room for more.



# Untitled

BRITTNEY DEHART

Charcoal & Acrylic



# Horizon

ABIGAIL FROST

Photography

# What I Prefer

---

JOEL HATHAWAY

I prefer long shadows of afternoon  
when busied insects wing about  
in search of one another or  
a drop of early, evening dew.

I prefer the field mowed yesterday  
where severed stalks of blue grass lie  
abandoned on the ground,  
fade to gray and brown.

I prefer the wooded edge beyond  
the reach of manmade sound,  
where distant human voices die  
with every gentle breeze.

And if a little path runs near—  
more for rabbit, fox, and deer—  
and if a field of golden wheat  
is threaded with a quiet stream,  
I wouldn't mind.

In this poor age, where want and worry  
make every thought a blur,  
these are the riches I prefer.

# My Body

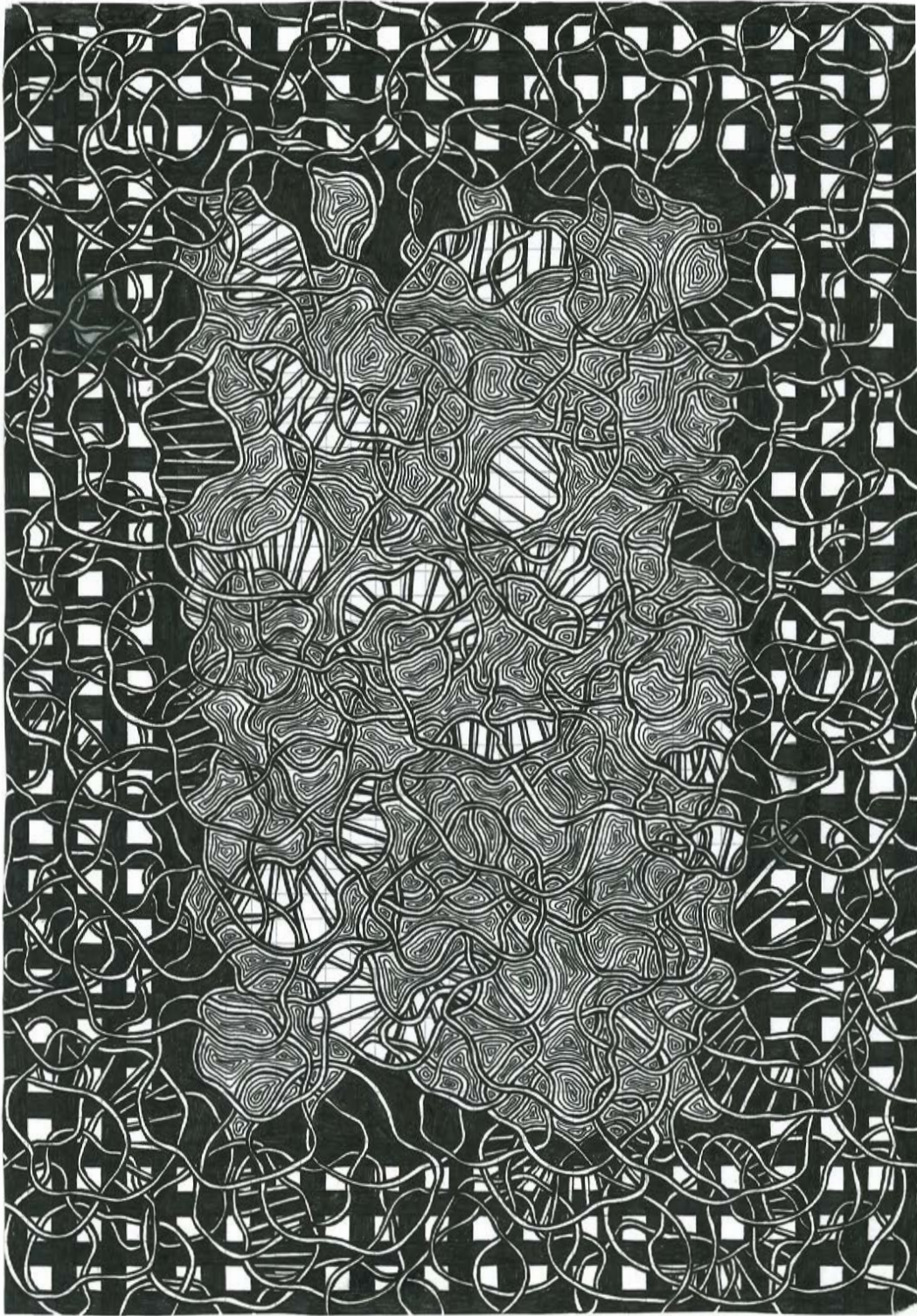
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KELSEY PARK

my body grew another human  
and organ.

yet I stand here on the scale,  
looking in the mirror  
at an unknown woman,

wondering when  
the former body,  
with no new human  
or disposed-of organ,  
will reappear.



## **Serenity**

MASHA LANSKA

Pen



## **Long-Awaited**

LAURA ANDREWS

Photography

# Kept

---

MARY SCHIEFERSTEIN

I have kept  
You in a box,  
Told you to take  
Everything welling up  
Large and looming inside you  
And shove it down,  
Keep it small,  
Keep a lid on it.

I have kept  
You to a clock,  
Told you to wait  
Ten minutes,  
An hour,  
A week—  
Just long enough  
So that we  
Could be alone  
And you could tell me  
Everything that you're feeling,  
So we could weep together,  
Laugh together,  
Cry out to God together.

I have kept  
You tucked away,  
Hidden behind a brain  
And a smile,  
Always ready  
With a four-letter word  
For how I'm doing  
And a bag stuffed full  
Of deep thoughts  
To deflect the conversation,  
Keep it away from you.

I have kept  
You for the best,  
For those closest to see,  
The beating, bleeding heart  
That spills out  
In tears,  
In hugs,  
In giggles and snorts,  
Messy and beautiful,  
My first language  
Spoken only to those  
Who understand it.

But I didn't know  
How you felt  
Being kept like that,  
A second-class citizen  
In the country you founded,  
You who were there  
Long before my defenses,  
Trapped inside these walls I built.

I'm sorry.  
I am so, so sorry.

My heart breaks  
To know I have broken yours.

This is no excuse,  
I know—  
But I didn't keep  
You here because  
I didn't want you.  
I have kept  
You here to keep  
You safe,  
Because I saw how you were hurt  
And I couldn't bear to see you hurt again,  
Because I saw how you weren't wanted  
And I desperately wanted you,  
Because I saw how others couldn't live with you  
While I couldn't live without you.

I have kept  
You safe,  
But now  
I want to keep  
You close.  
Close to the surface,  
Close to the rest of me,  
The heart of me showing through,  
Not something I have to control,  
But something that is part of the whole,  
Even if it is a little messier.

I don't know how to do that.  
Will you help?  
I need you  
To keep me.

# Caffeine Free Diet Coke

WILL NABHOLZ

You'd think it'd be terrible,  
And it is,  
Yet I'd choose it over others  
On the off chance someone brought it.

It tastes like carbonated aspartame water,  
Yet I crave it.  
Because it was there, the only  
Place you could find that terrible drink,

That I'd be with Grandma Edwards.

Watching Jeopardy and Wheel of Fortune  
We laughed  
We talked about John Wayne  
She remembered her favorite Westerns

She got me into Football  
Dan Marino  
The Dolphins and the Florida Gators  
A Florida woman through and through

She let me be myself—  
Just me—  
And never asked for anything more.  
I was enough for her to celebrate.

For someone who needed a walker  
She was spry  
With a wit and energy that few could match...

I miss her.  
I need a Caffeine Free Diet Coke.

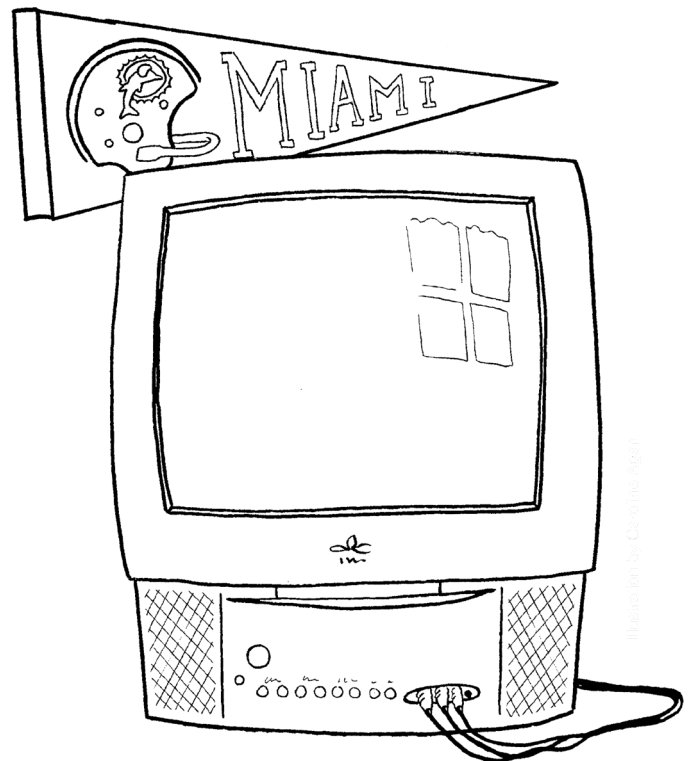
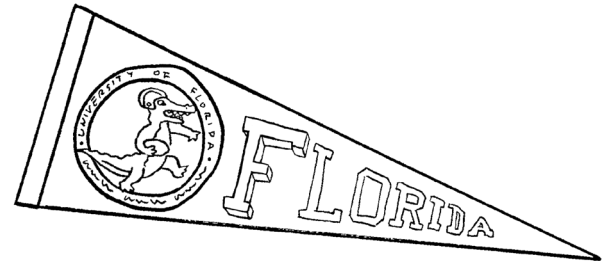
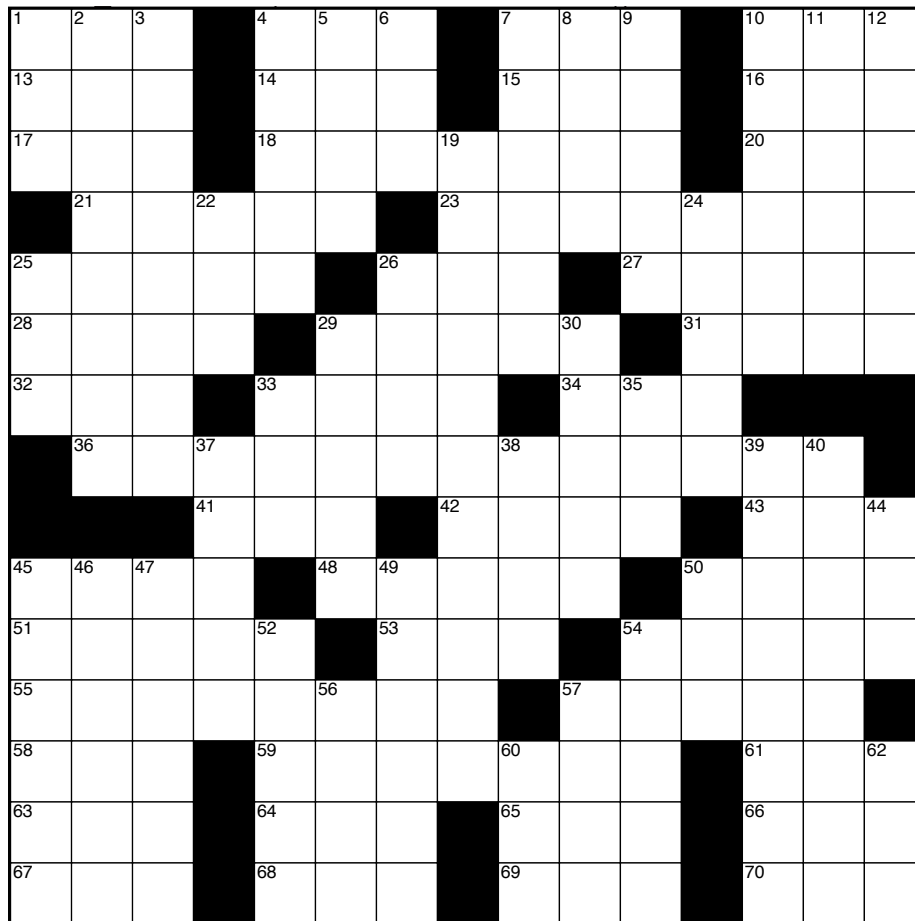


Illustration by Christine Ricci



- 4 "Let him deny himself and take up his \_\_\_ and follow me"
- 5 "So" in KJV
- 6 Habitual drunk
- 7 Third person of the Trinity
- 8 Play opener
- 9 Covert call
- 10 Parmesan cousin
- 11 Notable dog conditioner
- 12 Like a Pharisee but denying the resurrection of the body
- 19 "And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the \_\_\_ of the Spirit, groan inwardly"
- 22 "Hast thou not seen how thy desires \_\_\_ have been granted in what he ordaineth?"
- 24 Cut in two
- 25 Tribe of Israel numbering 45,650
- 26 Middling
- 29 Creve \_\_\_
- 30 "\_\_\_, shine, for your light has come!"
- 33 Honorary law deg.
- 35 Ballpark fig.
- 37 This from God surpasses all understanding
- 38 Jabba the \_\_\_ of "Star Wars"
- 39 Campaign line of 2008
- 40 "Apollo 13" co-star
- 44 "One trespass led to condemnation for all \_\_\_"
- 45 Strategic maneuver
- 46 Neither good nor evil
- 47 One of God's invisible attributes: his \_\_\_ nature
- 49 Renter's dream, maybe
- 50 "Sorta" suffix
- 52 The start of an OT saying about justice that Jesus quotes
- 54 Plant \_\_\_ of doubt
- 56 Eat like \_\_\_
- 57 Voice below soprano
- 60 The number of lost tribes of Israel
- 62 Miley Cyrus hit "Party in the \_\_\_"

**ACROSS**

- 1 \_\_\_-letter Bible
- 4 Initialism for a beloved seminary
- 7 Tree juice
- 10 Gorilla
- 13 Chinese "way"
- 14 Greek letter that looks like "p"
- 15 Mac alternatives
- 16 Scandinavia Airlines abbr
- 17 Ted La\_\_\_
- 18 Closet collection
- 20 Medical drips
- 21 Lock of hair
- 23 Patrick's Day libation
- 25 Rightmost column in the periodic table
- 26 \_\_\_ Lanka
- 27 Append
- 28 What the magi studied, abbr
- 29 \_\_\_ Rica
- 31 First of the fruit of the Spirit
- 32 "Wash me, Savior, or I \_\_\_"
- 33 I once was \_\_\_

- 34 John's eschatological book, abbr
- 36 Phrase coined in Deut. 32:10
- 41 Covenant email suffix
- 42 Tin Man's worry
- 43 An initialism pushed to rebrand American rave culture
- 45 "I did it!"
- 48 The wise men returned to their country by another \_\_\_
- 50 \_\_\_ worthy? (a liturgical query)
- 51 Lady friend in Italy
- 53 "Brevity is the soul of \_\_\_"
- 54 Fortress in Ezek. 29:10
- 55 A word used almost 300 times in the Bible to describe God's grace to his people and his people's response
- 57 Brother of 25-Down by Zilpah
- 58 Numerical prefix of the Godhead
- 59 Pauline work

- 61 Campus ministry with a mission to win, build and send Christ-centered multiplying disciples
- 63 Christ\_\_\_
- 64 Yang's counterpart
- 65 Paul says, "This is why I left you in Cr\_\_\_, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders"
- 66 "\_\_\_ for apple" (start of an alphabet book)
- 67 Taberna\_\_\_
- 68 First-year cohorts create a life \_\_\_
- 69 Cain's exile location
- 70 Intel org.

**DOWN**

- 1 Initialism for a beloved sister seminary
- 2 Area including China, Korea and Japan
- 3 House threshold

# The Gardener

---

PAUL FREDERICK

Underneath the furrows of his nail-deep wounds,  
The blood of resurrection flows.  
The drought of ancient ages, the winter's cold persistence,  
Born and bearer of tragedy,  
Death upon death, death upon death,  
Corpse upon corpse,  
The interminable silence has ended.  
The ground has thawed, the rains have fallen,  
Life, sealed within the lifeless dirt,  
Rises with him.  
His smiles washing down like beams of sunlight,  
Like a mother's pleasure,  
The gardener slowly walks his garden, the sower his field,  
Waiting and watching,  
Seeing and saying, It is good.

# Breath

---

JENNIFER ASP

This morning, gray and inhospitable,  
    tilting just over the edge of a new-born year,  
I drove down a road hemmed-in with trees  
    that were plainly jostling, nudging,  
    pressing-in toward me to be admired.  
During the night, or maybe the dark dawn,  
    Heaven came down and kissed them.  
No twig was unworthy of attention.  
The Shekinah glory must have taken the  
    form of a cloud—it's happened before.  
And isn't that just like Heaven, coming  
    down to the barren, the desolate,  
    the poor-in-spirit,  
To brush us with His breath—  
    breathing life into us  
    breathing life with us:  
The incarnation in ten million tiny crystals.



## **Meditation**

ABIGAIL FROST

Photography

# A Bedtime Prayer

---

WILL MCKEE

As we lay ourselves to bed  
We remember what we've read:  
The Bible says you sent Your Son  
To live like we could not have done  
Then he died, rose from the dead  
Took the blame for us instead  
Defeated death so we may live  
And be so moved to freely give  
Our love to you above all others  
And to our sisters and brothers.  
For all these things we say, "Thank you."  
We are glad for your love and truth.  
Your Word says that you give us all  
May I know you as All in All  
Your Word says your love is not earned  
May I love others in return  
Your Word says that we rest in you  
Please give our bodies good rest, too.  
  
In Jesus' name, Amen.



## Lullaby

---

WILL NABHOLZ

Look outside the window  
Out there, lo, the wind blows  
Don't let the noise confuse you  
Just like you, it's scared, too.  
  
The wind has his mood swings  
Like feelings they're fleeting  
Think of it as breathing  
You take in and release.  
  
No matter how the wind feels  
And breathes out, you're safe here  
For in this bed you're free now  
To feel in and breathe out.

# UNTITLED

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Raven Alade

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**I T'S OVER.** We're breaking up. You're not working for me. We've been together for a while, but we're just not working out. I've tried hard to make it work. I thought you would provide what I needed. Man, you've been there since I was a kid. Every step of the way, I've felt like you supported and helped me through hard times. No matter if it was good or bad, you were there. You were there when nobody else was. I truly appreciate all of your support. This breakup is one of the hardest things I've had to do in my life. It's hard to let you go because I don't want to. I feel disloyal. I feel like I'm not going to be able to move forward. I feel like I'll have to come back to you.

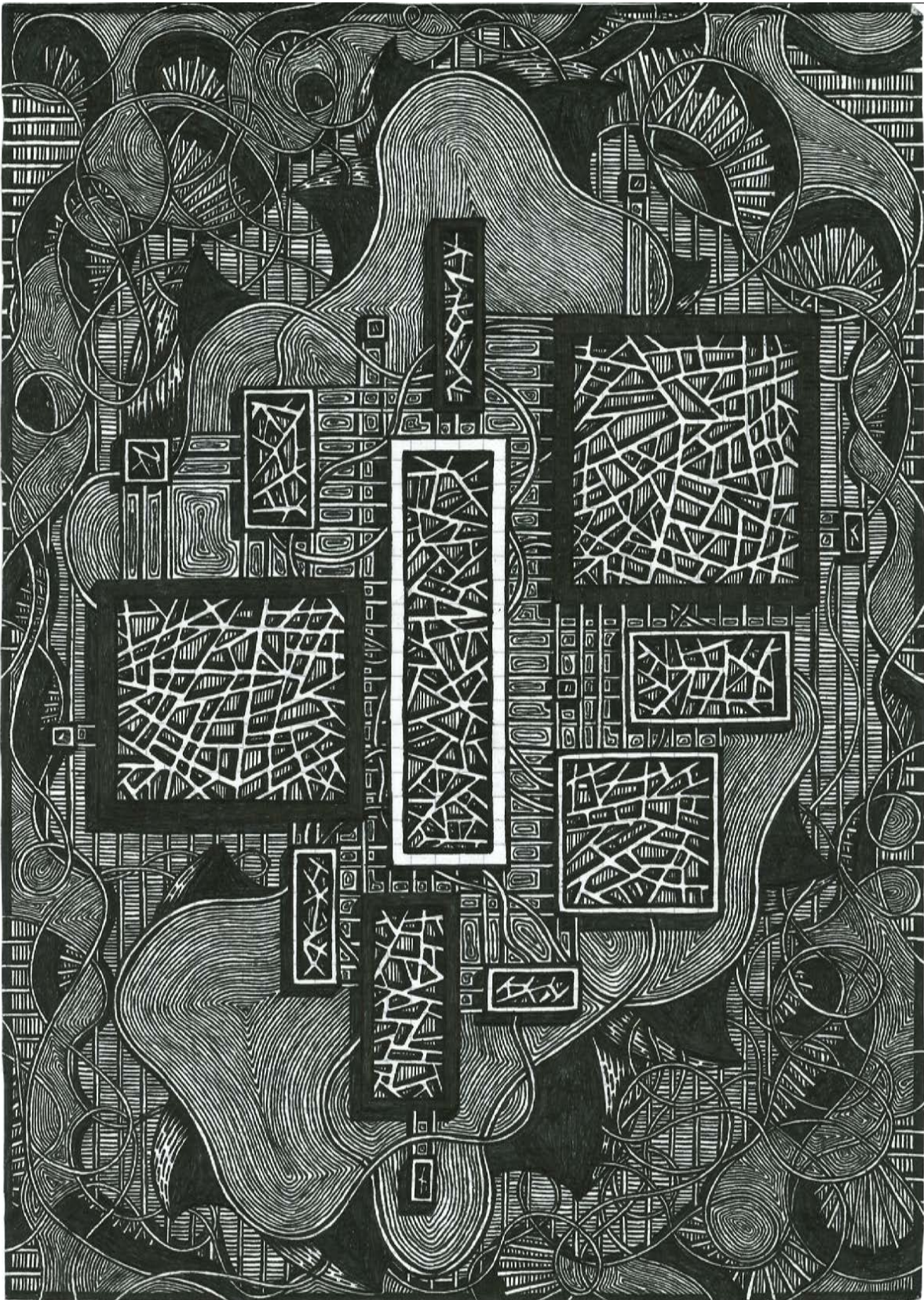
But you know what ... I realized something about you.

I've used you as a crutch. I thought you helped me, but all you've ever done was provide a false sense of security. More of you has caused confusion, depression, and a cycle of deep despair. My desire to gain comfort in you has always caused me short-term gratification, long-term disillusionment, and overall weakness. You're a stumbling block. Bro, you don't do anything for me because forreal forreal our relationship is outside of the will of God. And anything detached from Him is also detached from peace. So every time you and I link up, my peace and joy are depleted.

So goodbye,

overeating. You've sucked me dry to the point I can't compromise my longing to please God and be kind to the temple He loaned me. My relationship with food will not involve a dance with you any longer. The way that God intended me to eat for nourishment is what I'm getting back to. Not perfection. Not rules. Not planning my own way, but rather committing to the strength He gives me to lean on Him rather than you. You will never be able to do what he does. Food in excess leads to an uncomfortable fullness and shame. Contrarily, God in excess leads to Holy fullness. I can be addicted to God. I can keep thinking about God. I can meditate on God. I don't have to stop "eating" on His word or being with Him because He will meet the need that you never could.

So again, goodbye. It was a good ride while it ... actually, no, it was not. Don't wait up because I'm gone for good. 🙌



## Постоянство (Permanence)

MASHA LANSKA

Pen

# Oh Child

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## KELSEY PARK

Oh child,  
I hope you know love;  
I hope you remember the warmth of my hug  
soft kiss on your cheek,  
as I wrap my arms around your frame,  
squeezing your body.

Oh child,  
I hope you recall the days  
of light, laughter,  
even of grace.

There may be dark days ahead;  
but rest your head  
in the knowledge  
and memories  
of my love.

It is bigger than I can grasp  
and intimately for you.

Your giggles,  
Creativity,  
Emotions wild—  
All of you.

Oh child,  
I hope your sweet mind  
remembers the days  
when my face  
held yours  
and your hands held mine  
and your delight was the delight of all things.

I want to protect you from pain,  
I want to keep your mind  
in the best of times.

Will that prepare you for days to come  
When you run  
and can't find home?

Will you stop, turn, and see  
Me,  
after you,  
picking you up in my arms  
to carry you home,  
showing you the signs  
to guide your feet back?

You are safe here  
now,  
you'll always be safe with me.

So when the days come—  
as they do—  
look to me,  
I'll be here for you.

# The Community Table



# WHY NOT TO PUBLISH A STUDENT MAGAZINE

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Paul Frederick

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**A**S WE LAID out refreshments and arranged table decorations in the community center, I was feeling nervous. The previous summer I had excitedly agreed to join the student magazine team, and it was a great disappointment to learn that we didn't have enough submissions to put together a magazine for the fall semester. Thankfully, through the persistence and creativity of our team members, we planned our first ever Open Mic Night. Our hope was that, in person if not in print, The Common Table would be able fulfill its mission of amplifying student voices and serving the Covenant community.

But as our start time drew near, I wasn't sure what to expect. A good number of students had signed up in advance, and we were all looking forward to hearing from them. But would anybody else come? On that dark November night, the community center felt too big, too cold, too far away from the world.

I was blown away. One or two at a time, students crept in through one door or the other—some were my friends, some were acquaintances, and some I'd never met at all. Pretty soon, the room was full of warmth and energy and life.

And the performers—they were incredible. From rag-time piano (Emika) to crossword puzzles (Garrett), we saw all kinds of talent from the Covenant community. We heard songs and poetry of all kinds. We heard from visual artists and explored their work. Together we pondered the depths of the human condition and the depths of the grace of God.

From the people up front and from the people scrunched around the tables, I saw a side of Covenant Seminary that I hadn't quite seen before. It might not be as clear-cut and definite as our theology classes. It was messy. But it was real; it was human.

Although I'm glad we're back in print this semester, in God's providence I learned something about this magazine last semester that I might not have learned otherwise. We don't write mainly to have something to publish, and we don't publish mainly to have something to read. The goal of The Common Table is to capture something of the magic of that night, to crystallize that sense of community, and thereby to nourish it in the small ways we can. So here's to more magazines, to more conversations, and to many more Open Mic Nights. —P

# STUDENT PROFILE: ASAFE & SARA CRISTINO

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MDiv 2025

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**Bailey Preib:** What brought you two to Covenant? How did you find out about Covenant?

**Asafe Cristino:** I met a couple in 2018 who studied here. They are missionaries in Portugal. I was at a lecture, and the lecturer was Os Guinness, and he talked about Schaeffer. At the end of the lecture I was talking with a friend and asked him if he knew Schaeffer. He said no, but a guy behind me said “Did you say Schaeffer?” and I said yes. And he said, “There is someone here who studied at [the] Francis Schaeffer Institute, so let me introduce you to him.” And then this Portuguese man introduced me to Luciano and it was love at first sight. We had a really good conversation, and for the first time I saw someone that understood my questions about vocation and calling, you know. And then Luciano became a mentor when I came back to Brazil. We stayed in touch. We call each other every other week. And when I was finishing my undergrad, I didn’t want to be a nutritionist. And I decided to go to the seminary. And Covenant was always the only option for

me because of the Francis Schaeffer Institute, but also because of the community that I heard about. I also talked with [Covenant alum] Paulo Caproni and his wife. They told us about the community here and I was really interested in being embraced by the community. Of course, I realized that the seminary could help me learn a lot about the Bible, but more so, it could teach me how to engage with culture at the same time. And Sara, she came here because she married me.

**BP:** What did you think about coming here, Sara?

**AC:** When we started to date, I told Sara about my desire to come here since the first day, so she knew about that.

**Sara Cristino** (translated by Asafe): One thing is to know; another thing is to leave.

**BP:** Amen.

**AC:** So our relationship was intense and short. Because I met Sara on May 21, 2021. We got married on May 21, 2022. We came here on August 1, 2022.





**SC:** During our time dating, I did not have time to digest all the information and change of what it would mean to come here.

**AC:** I went to Portugal for a season but Sara had never left Brazil before, so she did not know what it would mean to be outside of her culture and far from her family. But Sara is a woman of her word. So she told me that she would come and she came.

**BP:** Wow.

**AC:** Our first semester here was very hard for Sara because she was digesting the idea of being away from home while she was away from home. She did not have time to think about it before.

**SC:** Is it still hard? Yes. But one of the reasons is because of the pregnancy. It was not expected, it's important to say that. It's a blessing, yes, but not expected. But we have had the opportunity to see how the gospel shapes and impacts people all around the world and how God's family, the Christian family, embraces us everywhere. It made our time here a little bit easier and bearable to know that we can have family here.

**AC:** Sometimes she looks at the community and she thinks like, "I'm living in heaven." You know, like, everyone's Christian. Everyone helps each other. There is blessing upon blessing, grace upon grace. So yes, it's like a heavenly environment, with the fall and brokenness still.

**BP:** You're brave.

**SC:** Thank you.

**BP:** Thanks for letting me in on your life. It sounds like it has been change on top of change. I'm really thankful that you guys are here. Honestly, you bring a beautiful perspective.

**AC:** My pleasure.

**SC:** Well... sometimes (laughs).

**BP:** What has changed since you've come to Covenant as far as your mission, where you see yourself going from Covenant, or what you want to do with life? Have you noticed anything that has shaped you thus far? I know you haven't even been here a full year yet.

**AC:** Okay, I will go first and then Sara can answer. Well, now I'm a parent, so that's something. But be-



sides that, for our vision of calling, I understand this moment for our lives is very important. I had many views of calling and vocation and dreams, but after coming here and being married, I think that all these views are less clear than before. Now I need to embrace Sara's skills, gifts, desires, and dreams in that. So I believe that while we are here at Covenant, this is a moment to listen to God and open our hearts to God's guidance to our family ministry—not my ministry, not Sara's ministry, but our ministry as a family. This is a challenge. Besides that, it's funny because, after coming here, I feel more and more incapable of doing ministry. And I don't know if this is because of all the changes or if this is something that God is working on my heart. Each day I ask, "Am I the right person to do these things?" My idea for the future is less clear than when I came here. This is good. Because one thing

is what we dream about, our vision of the good life or telos. Another thing is what God wants from us. So I believe that we want to—we as a family—want to go back to Brazil after seminary. We want to have a ministry of students. We want to live close to a college university in Brazil and to host students at our home. We want to have a home-based ministry focusing on hospitality and apologetics and cultural engagement. We want to serve the church, maybe not as a main pastor, but we want to serve the church. This is what we want. We are learning here that things can change (laughs). And we are trying to learn how to approach this change of direction that God makes.

**BP:** You guys have the hospitality part down already. [Guava Juice, tea, and water alongside homemade Brazilian carrot cake greeted me in their ambient apartment.]

**SC:** We did not come here thinking about being a pastoral family in the church. During our first semester, we realized that the goal of every Christian work is for the growth of our culture, of the church, God's church. So now, we know that anything that we will do, we will be serving the church and helping proclaim the gospel and see the church flourishing.

**AC:** It is hard to talk about it for Sara, because she doesn't know the language and it makes her more introverted. She doesn't know if she's more introverted here because of the language barrier or because she's changing. She doesn't know if she's not liking something because she's changing or because of the cultural barrier. So it's hard to realize what is a change. It is difficult because she knows that the language is something very big in the culture. So she knows that she will not be able to access things here in a meaningful way because of that, you know. It's hard for Sara to enjoy.

**BP:** I can't imagine how hard that is for you.

**SC:** Yeah... that was a very honest answer.

**BP:** Thank you. I feel honored to be let into your lives a little bit. What would make you guys feel more welcomed or loved or known from Covenant? Or from the campus? It's okay if you don't know.

**SC:** When people invite me to do things knowing that it will be a challenge because of the language. So sometimes people invite me to do something and I think it will be a disaster and the person knows it might. But they invite me anyways, and this is how I feel loved and seen.

**AC:** For me, it is very important the way that the Covenant community looked into our eyes during our time here, because we came as newly-married. We discovered Sara's pregnancy in our first week here. So we came here without knowing Sara was pregnant and Sara and I struggled a lot with so many new things. We received people here at home to listen to us, to be with us, to talk with us, to give food to us, to invite us to do things. In Brazil we had a big community of friends in really good churches. And here we did not know anyone, so it was hard. But being part of a community that is ready to serve was helpful and important. I had talks with professors and friends where I was able to share what I was feeling and they listened. They tried to engage and provide comfort and that was very important.

**BP:** Thanks for sharing that. I hope anyone who reads this will see themselves as part of the community that is ready to serve and has some tangible ways to do so now. There is so much I want to ask you, but I will limit myself to one more question. Are you guys involved with any groups through Covenant?

**AC:** Sara is part of the women's fellowship group. I have cohort. I am part of the soccer team even though I only showed up for one game.

**BP:** As captain, I say it counts.

**AC:** Yes, okay, it counts, I was part of the team.

**BP:** How has the International Women's Fellowship been for you?

**SC:** It's very important.

**AC:** She says that the International Women's group is important because she found a place where many women are gathered together missing home. They can miss home together. They can feel this, this homesickness, together, and this is important. She's not alone. —ᄇᄀ

\*Sara and Asafe welcomed baby Ruth in March. Meals are appreciated.



# THE GYM IS A REFUGE FOR THE ROCK BADGERS

Isaiah Sohn

**WHEN I GOT** to Covenant, I didn't expect to be running a multitude of athletic activities, but I was excited to bring back some fellowship that was robbed by COVID. If you know who I am, then you'll know that I'm not the most athletically-gifted specimen. I don't have abnormal body proportions like the Greek Freak, nor the athletic prowess of Air Jordan. You won't find me flying down the pitch with the speed and stamina of Mbappé. However, you will see me on the sidelines barking orders to my classmates on the hardwood at our basketball games, which is something that probably suits me best.

Assembling a basketball team is deceptively easy. There are plenty of folks who are willing to participate and the talent pool here is rich. We have former collegiate athletes as well as savvy ballers. Yet there are some who have only played pick-up and not organized basketball. And that is where the difficulties come in. Not everyone has the same level of basketball IQ or skill. Some have the innate ability to look and see open passing or cutting lanes. Others don't see them or have the awareness to give proper spacing on the basketball court. We had to get players up to speed on certain terminologies, explain spacing and movement, and craft simplified plays so that they could grasp what we wanted to achieve. Organized chaos.

The first year of my coaching career was frustrating. We had the better players, but our opponents were better coached. Thus, our games usually ended with us just woefully short of tasting sweet victory. But there was a reason why. We never gathered to discuss and practice our strategy. I basically told them to play freely and play hard with a 5-out offensive system. To their credit, that's what my classmates did, but the structure wasn't there for them to truly succeed. Though there was great freedom, it devolved into a one-man offensive show rather than team basketball.

I need help from my players to curate the offense toward a delicate balance of freedom and order. There are things that my players can teach better than I can, and I need to have the humility to accept that. Even my fiancé was instrumental in helping the team grow with her very pointed (and needed) criticisms and tips on how we could improve. But because we were able to recognize our strengths and weaknesses, the team in year two became more cohesive. The chemistry improved because we were intentional in spending time in our practices to get to know one another. Everyone worked hard around the goal of winning, even sacrificing some of their playstyle so that the team could succeed.

The church is a weird entity. Its pastors, elders, deacons, and volunteers are people with a variety of contrasting people skills. We all want to proclaim Christ to the world, but it can be difficult to present the message of grace and justice without a good strategy. Our professors have warned us, as leaders, to not be the sole focus and catalyst of the church. A coach cannot make it about themselves. One of the traps that many coaches can fall into is the obsession to control everything, and I can fall into that as well.

I remember listening to a podcast interview of Mike D'Antoni in which he said that a great coach needs to be able to adapt their game plan to their personnel. Insisting that Shaq should be the point guard when he's clearly a bully-ball center is not going to help you win. However, Shaq can make the right reads in the post and is quite willing to pass. If you go back to his prime, you'll see how coaches helped Shaq by providing a system that allowed cutters the freedom to cut to the basket and the shooters to take advantage of the spacing when Shaq is double-teamed.

When I met with the team captains to discuss basketball strategy, I couldn't help but laugh because three people with three different philosophical styles needed to come together and find a way to make the team work. We had plenty of constructive arguments to help our team win games, arguments that are similar to church session and presbytery meetings (if you know, you know). There are times where we need to play

team basketball, where the offensive load is shared by everyone and the game becomes a beautiful thing to watch. However, in the crunch time, you do need that one person to step up and make that clutch shot. Even in those rare hero-ball moments, the other players on the court are placing themselves in a position to help if he needs it.

In the championship game, I kept anxiously glancing at the clock as we slowly built and maintained a sizable lead over Concordia STL. In the last minute, with the game assured in our favor, I turned to the three "benchwarmers" and told them to get in. Everyone yelled in delight as they jogged to the score table to check in, getting recognition for their hard work. Despite the frustrations, despite the anxiousness of trusting others to help build the team, it was all worth it to see the community come together, overcoming differences in talent, skill, and philosophy to work toward a common goal: to create a strong, winning team. All of the players on the team worked hard and responded well to my and the captains' criticisms and suggestions. Despite our "benchwarmers" not playing much in the championship, they earned their spots by being faithful and diligent in their work.

It is a pleasure to be able to coach the men this year and bond with them and the other seminaries on the hardwood. I hope the time on the basketball team will help teach us how to work together in the common goal of proclaiming Christ from the pulpit, in the classroom, or in a counseling session. —✝—

# PROFESSOR PROFILE: DR. DREW MARTIN

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Associate Professor of Systematic Theology

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**Drew Martin:** I'll try not to bore you.

**Caroline Agan:** That's not my fear! I'll save my hardest hitting questions for last. Let's start with a softball: What are you reading right now? And what are you learning from it?

**DM:** Oh! That's a great question. I'm reading a bunch of things. I'm reading a lot of Francis Grimké because I'm working on a book about him. I'm reading his works, both those that are collected in volumes, and also some manuscripts that I got sent to me from Howard University, to work on that project. Francis Grimké was a pastor in Washington, D.C. for fifty years. He grew up as a slave on the plantation outside of Charleston, and after the Civil War, he was freed. It was quickly apparent to everyone that he was around that he was brilliant, so he went to Princeton Theological Seminary eventually and became a minister. And that church that he served at in Washington, D.C. was an incredibly influential church. Now, I say that with a caveat, because I'm always nervous about saying any church was an influential church. But, by God's providence, it was just a church that was placed in Washington, D.C. during a very tumultuous and significant time for Black people in this country. And so he had an opportunity to use his voice in all kinds of important and significant ways and took advantage of that. It's really fun to read him and see how he was wrestling through issues related to pastoring and also social and cultural issues during the early civil rights movement.

**CA:** Is there anything that's really surprised you?

**DM:** Yes, many things! One of the things that I love most about him is that he was willing to follow God's word where it went. It makes it really hard to put him in one of those nice, neat boxes that historians love to use. Was this person a fundamentalist? Or was he a social gospeler? It's really difficult to categorize him because he will say things about the doctrine of Scripture that make him sound one way—you know, he helped

to found the NAACP. And he also would say things that sound like the spirituality of the church! How do you make sense of a person that can do all of that? You could say it's not coherent, and it's contradictory, but I actually don't think that's the case. I think he had a very sophisticated way of putting this together. So I am challenged by him, and inspired by him, to allow God's word to speak in the complicated ways it does, and to cut across some of these issues that divide cultural conservatives and cultural progressives. I love talking about him! I could answer more questions, but I'll try to use self-restraint!

**CA:** Maybe in a different piece!

**DM:** I'm also reading a good bit of secondary literature right now about the period so I can better understand how to situate him. I've really enjoyed reading Barbara Savage's *Their Spirits Walked Beside Us*, which has to do with religion and politics in the Black church. And I've been reading Curtis Evans, *The Burden of Black Religion*, and learning a lot from that. There's a book that just came out by Daniel Bair called *Black Fundamentalism*, which is a very interesting book! Until recently, people would have said that's not a thing; he's arguing that it is. There's another book by Mary Beth Sweatman Mathews called *Doctrine and Race* that tries to unpack these very controversial words, "fundamentalist evangelical," and how that relates to Black Christians in America. One of the things I appreciate about all these authors, diverse as they are, one thing that ties them together, is pushing back on some of these boxes that people want to put people into in these conversations.

**CA:** Very cool! Getting a little into your background, I wondered how you first began to sense God's call into ministry?

**DM:** I think the first time that I started to question whether God may be calling me to full-time vocational Christian ministry was as a college student in my



senior year at UNC. At that time, there were many Christians on campus, and there were Christian professors that we were aware of, but I didn't have any that I knew of in my immediate circles in the fields that I was studying, and I started to wonder whether the Lord may be calling me to be a Christian who teaches in a university setting.

At the same time, I was also serving as a YoungLife leader at this high school in northern Durham, North Carolina, that had this cross-section of students from a variety of different socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. Somehow, we had a cross-section of the students who came to our YoungLife club. In some ways that seemed unusual to me, but in other ways, it seemed normal to me. And I think one of the things that I realized is that a lot of the Christian spaces I was in didn't look like that. And it was weird.

So I think, in some ways, I've always been wrestling with both of those pieces. One, how does the Christian faith relate to an academic setting, whether it's in a university or thinking well about faith in the church? And two, how do you communicate the gospel in such

a way that people from a wide range of backgrounds can hear, understand, and also relate to one another? And one of the things I've experienced is that it sometimes can be the case that you'll have one circle of people that gets really excited about one set of questions and another set of people that gets really excited about the other set of questions. But to me, they seem actually like quite related questions!

**CA:** What makes you excited about training men and women to be ministry leaders?

**DM:** One of the things I'm just so deeply appreciative of is this long list of people who took an interest in me and wanted to walk with me, and I'm just so grateful for them, and in some ways I'm just trying to live up to what they did for me. I'm just really grateful. I had a few pastors in college who really cared and poured into me, some people on YoungLife teams, really important seminary professors who poured into me. I'm just really grateful for that and feel like that's what we should be doing for one another.

**CA:** Thinking about Covenant, is there anything you've

been encouraged by so far pursuing your calling to raise up other leaders?

**DM:** One of the things that I love most among the many things that I love at Covenant is that this is a place that seems to be committed to scriptural teaching and also to honoring a tradition that's grown up around scriptural teaching, as in the Presbyterian Church in America, and to take that identity very seriously. And at the same time, also—not “but”—also to take seriously living and breathing in this world, engaging with social and cultural issues in a way that is humble and thoughtful. We don't always live up to that. But we try, and we aspire to it. It seems like it's hard to put all these things together. And this is a place that's trying to do that. So I'm very encouraged to be in a place of strength.

**CA:** How have you seen God work in you and your family even in the short time you've been here so far?

**DM:** It has been a major transition to move from the church setting where we were in Charlotte, teaching with family around us and friends, to a completely different place in St. Louis where we don't know anyone very well. That has been both disorienting and displacing in some ways, but also an opportunity for us to think through what our priorities are and what it looks like to live in this place where we believe the Lord has called us. It's an opportunity to think through what it means to be a pilgrim, if you will, but also to try our best to live into this space, given who we are. So it feels a little disorienting, but it's been an opportunity for us to ask what we really care about and what our purpose is. What does it look like for our family to be faithful during this new phase that we're going into? Yeah, so we're still in process.

**CA:** I imagine your answer to that may be different further down the line.

**DM:** I think we're just learning how to miss a place and love a new place, how to be ourselves in this new place and also to change the way that God's going to change us in any place.

**CA:** Okay, I saved my hardest question for last: I have an inside source who says there's a rumor going around the South City youth group that you climbed Mount Everest. Can you address this?

**DM:** That's fantastic. Yeah, I see how telephone works. So there is a true story behind that, but it does not have to do with Mount Everest. When I was eight years old, I participated in an exchange program. At the time, I lived in Okinawa, Japan, and participated in an ex-

change program with a family that lived in Tokyo. I went and I stayed with them for a week, and then during another week, we also went on various excursions. One of those excursions was to climb Mount Fuji. Which is not Mount Everest! Though I suppose you could make the case in some very loose way that they're on the same continent? Just on the other end. It was during a typhoon, okay. And I don't know why we were allowed to do that, because there's no reason that an eight-year-old should be on the side of a dormant volcano during a typhoon! But that is a true story. We spent the night in a typhoon on the side of Mount Fuji when I was eight.

**CA:** That's crazy!

**DM:** It was the most terrifying experience that I've ever had to this day.

**CA:** There was more truth to it than I thought.

**DM:** There was some truth to it, I suppose. I often use that one for two truths and a lie. I include that one in there because it just seems outrageous. But I've never been to Mount Everest, not even to base camp.

**CA:** Oh, man. Well, is there anything else? Anything you wish I asked you?

**DM:** I feel like I should say something about my job! One of the reasons that I was called here is that my primary area of historical expertise relates to the post-Reformation period and the years of the Westminster Confession. I'm very passionate about understanding those documents and allowing them to be a frame for our ministry, and also understanding the social and cultural context in which they were written. One of the things I'm always very passionate to make sure that people know is that those documents were actually written during the years of the English Civil Wars, and they were a document that developed in a really complicated and difficult—at times even despairing—cultural-social context. And yet God has used them to bring an incredible amount of unity to a lot of different people in a lot of different churches over the years both within and outside of Presbyterianism. So I just think that's interesting, and I should probably say something about my work at Covenant!

**CA:** Very good. Well, thank you very much! —





# STUDENT PROFILE: JESSE & GARRETT NEWMAN

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MAC 2024; MDiv 2025

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**Caroline Agan:** So you're both from the Pacific Northwest. [pause] Right?

**Garrett Newman:** Sort of. I am from the Pacific Northwest.

**Jesse Newman:** We both call Seattle home; I grew up in the PNW. But I also grew up on the East Coast, from ages one through twelve. And then I was born in China. So all over the place.

**GN:** You have a lot of memories from Maine and Vermont.

**CA:** And you were in Boston right before coming here. What was the journey like, coming to Covenant? What were the main factors that led you here?

**GN:** I really enjoy software engineering. I enjoy the process of writing code, building systems, and things like that. But I've always had in the back of my mind that

I'd like to be a teacher or pastor or writer, something language- and people-oriented. I started to take small steps in that direction. I moved to Boston in 2018 after undergrad, so we were long distance for about a year after I moved while Jesse was in pharmacy school. And then when we got married in 2019, Jesse moved in with me in Boston. And I think shortly thereafter, I became more involved at the church—it was like March of 2020. Right before the pandemic really became a big deal.

**CA:** Perfect timing.

**GN:** Yeah, I just remember feeling a strong tug on my heart to live with a stronger posture towards the good of non-Christians in the city. And part of that was precipitated by our church spending time going through what we call a vision-casting. We would talk about our context, which was Somerville, a city right outside of Boston.

That was the first time I had been exposed to the mentality of church planting. The church we were in was just five years old, and the pastor there was the one who planted it previously. So that helped me to look at people who are outside of the church in a much more humanizing way. Growing up, my private Christian school view of the culture was that we were against the culture, and the culture was out to attack and dismantle your families. To be equipped to go to war with the culture, learn how to do apologetics: be the best arguer to pursue holiness in the church.

I'd never been led to a more loving perspective of my non-believing neighbors until we'd really done the vision-casting at the church in Somerville. So I talked to my pastor, like, "Caring about people in the city is something I really vibe with. I wonder if I should pursue being a pastor or seminary." That's when he brought me on as an intern. I got more involved in church leadership stuff and we were trying to test out that sense of calling and evaluate spiritual, emotional signs and then also whether I have aptitude for these things. So that's what led us to eventually move towards going to seminary. Covenant was easily the top choice for us. That pastor had gone to Covenant and a few other pastors we knew went to Covenant, as well.

We were really sold. Covenant seemed very focused on the formation of the whole person and not just their intellect. That was something that came out in Covenant's promotional materials, in talking with Stuart over the phone, and in talking with other Covenant grads, who were like, "Yeah, you go here, like, they're going to really invest in you as a couple, as individuals, as the image of God." We were super attracted to that. We're like, "Okay, this feels like a place we need to go." ... What was the question?

**JN:** I think it was your favorite color? Like blue, and the reason why.

**CA:** I asked what led you to Covenant.

**JN:** We came to Covenant for Garrett to get the MDiv. On my side, I always said I was going to pharmacy school, and I thought that would just be the rest of my life. But I had received counseling in various forms, formal counseling as well as mentorship from pastors' wives and women who graduated from the Covenant MAC program. I always thought of it as a pipe dream that if I had another life, I could be in ministry and attend the counseling program, because it had helped me a lot. It was outside the realm of possibility to me, but then when he started saying, "Hey, I think I want to go to seminary, and I think I want to go to Covenant," I was like, "Well, I know they have a good spouse scholarship." I could enroll in the counseling program, so it very much came together.

**CA:** How has God been developing your sense of calling since you arrived?

**JN:** I think that's a good question for you, Garrett.

**GN:** Covenant's given me challenging experiences and the means to process them afterwards. Like this last summer, when we were at the church in Colorado Springs, I was interning there and Jesse was an honorary intern, for sure. Invited to basically everything except to write the ten-page essay that I had to. That was kind of a trial run for us to ask, "Do I thrive in this context, when I'm devoting my time to church ministry?"

I think that experience challenged my anxieties about my vocation, feeling like I need to prove something to God by being a pastor. Feeling like that's the thing that spiritually mature people do, like it might be wrong for me not to. I was in counseling at the time and was finding over the summer that this experience that happened over and over in my upbringing made me extremely averse to vocation shifts, and made me really dedicated to picking a vocation and sticking to it forever. I thought that that's the best way that I can love Jesse, that's the best way I can honor God.

I preached there—my first time preaching in front of an actual church where people didn't have clipboards to grade me. That was nice. But that experience both confirmed for me that God was with me and confirmed for me that I don't really like preaching.

**JN:** His sermon was wonderful, by the way, just in case that was in doubt.

**GN:** I was so nervous in my preaching labs—it really became looking at myself as I'm preaching, and trying to look like I'm preaching, which doesn't produce a good preacher. The week leading up to my sermon at the church, I just kept reminding myself, "Jesus loves me, and Jesus loves these people." I wanted the outcome of this sermon to be that people think God is awesome and they think 2 John is amazing and they want to go and read 2 John in their spare time. After the sermon, I did have a sense of peace, with some nerves, but nothing like what I experienced before.

A couple of guys came up afterwards and they were, like, really excited about 2 John. So in terms of calling, like, through this summer experience, and Jesse and I having had lots of time to reflect and evaluate coming out of that, I've felt much less bound to this notion that I have to be a pastor to please God and to not harm Jesse—and not harming Jesse is pleasing to God in general.

**JN:** We both took God and Humanity last semester, and something that I've been thinking about is Dr. Griggs saying that, in America, we're often accustomed to thinking of our sense of call as, "What job

or what role does God want me to fulfill for him?" You know, "Where will I end up? What's my trajectory?" He was saying maybe our sense of call is to be a good friend and a good neighbor. Maybe it doesn't have to be this concrete thing that you're doing. When we started going to seminary, our call was, "Garrett is going to be a pastor, I'm going to be a pastor's wife, and we're going to live out our sense of call through that very specific form of ministry." I think I'm starting to let go of that and starting to ask, "How is God calling me to love those around me, to minister in the ways that he has given us to minister?" It's not concrete anymore. It's like, "What are we doing?" "I don't know!"

**GN:** Yeah. Right answer.

**CA:** Jesse, you are the president of the Asian American Student Fellowship. What is the most valuable way that God is growing you through that role?

**JN:** That's a good question. I think it feels weightier now because I am just starting Social and Cultural Diversity. Garrett and I were talking about this last night, coming off of the heels of the AASF chapel. I love everyone involved in AASF, and it's been really wonderful to see the diversity of people even within AASF. We have people from Korea, from China, Asian Americans or Asians. Because I'm adopted, I've struggled to figure out what my cultural identity is as I've grown up. Like, "Am I Asian?" Because I was born in China, but I don't share the language. I don't share the customs.



But I'm also not white and I'm reminded of not being white, even though I grew up in a white family. So when Jason first invited me to come [to AASF], I was just like, you don't understand, I don't really belong in that group. But we both ended up going because [Garrett] was invited to come with me. And I found that I was able to hear from people who had very similar experiences, things I've never known how to put words to. It's been really wonderful for Garrett to be a part of it, too, to be able to share that learning process with him.

Transitioning into leadership, it's been really wonderful to recognize that Asian and Asian American identity is not one specific identity, that you're either in or you're out. There is diversity. And hearing the particular, unique stories of every person, being able to celebrate those stories, as well as my own—I don't feel anymore like I have to be some standard model of what it means to be Asian, or what it means to be Asian American.

**CA:** Do you have a hope or vision for either that group or for the school that's changed over the past year?

**JN:** Yeah, I definitely have a hope for Covenant—it's one of the first places I've really been able to feel like I have a space to think about these things. It can be easy when you're in Christian settings to be like, "We're all Christians; isn't that all there is?" Something that I've been encouraged by is both the faculty and the students, their willingness to celebrate cultural differences, to have Asian American student chapel, or BSF chapel, or the CELA group lead. I have hope that those cross-cultural conversations can continue—on the student level, on the faculty level, and even the diversity meetings we've been having with the board. There's room for improvement, and I've also been really encouraged that the posture is one of grace and openness, wanting to lean into those opportunities.

**CA:** This will be my last question and then I'll let you go. What class do you feel like you've grown the most in?

**GN:** Greek 2.

**JN:** You cried the most in it.

**CA:** That's extremely true.

**JN:** So many. Which aspect of growth? Anything taught by Dr. Zink. But Old Testament was surprising. I've been growing a lot in my counseling classes, but approaching theology in this very graceful way is hard to come by, I think. I've grown being able to experience that there is another side to teaching theology, that I don't have to be scared of theology and doctrine because it's not just a way to divide people or to put some people above others. To see that grace can permeate that, too ... that's been really beneficial for my personal growth.



**GN:** For me, it's Foundations of Apologetics and Outreach. I see that growth just in how I think about and interact with my coworkers. I've been in the same place and known a lot of the same people for the past five years. And five years ago, I was just not very interested in other peoples' personal lives, didn't want to go to company parties, just wanted to come in, do my work, be nice to people, have good coworker relationships, and just go home, and not think about them or reach out to them at all.

**JN:** We're introverts, so it was an easy decision.

**GN:** But now reflecting on it, some of the things I'm looking forward to the most in my job right now are when I have one-on-ones with my coworkers. I remember Mark Ryan asked a question in that class: "What do you think of when you hear apologetics?" And my mind

was immediately on debating Richard Dawkins and a feeling of guilt. That class laid the foundations for transforming that for me. Now I don't feel guilty for not saying the name "Jesus" in a conversation with a nonbeliever. But I can also talk about Jesus with a nonbeliever! It's freed me up to love building deeper relationships with people who have a very different worldview than me, and to learn a lot from them, as well. There's a certain kind of humility that causes the sense of debate and guilt to go away, that frees me up to be a person. That was a big reason I didn't think I could be a software engineer long-term, because I didn't know how you could build real relationships with your coworkers. And now I'm really looking forward to building relationships with my coworkers every week.

**CA:** Thank you so much for doing this.

**JN:** Of course! ㄴㄹ

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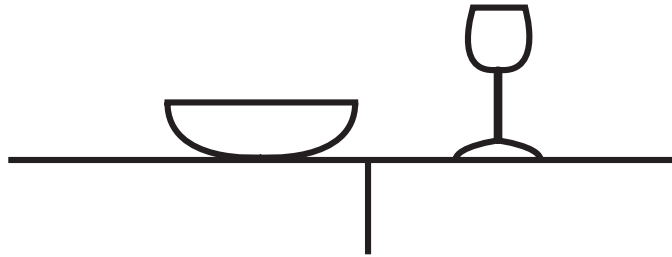
*Thank you to each and every one of you who helped make this magazine possible!*



# THE COMMON TABLE

The vision of the Common Table is to see student voices amplified, student skills developed, and student life improved, for the purpose of promoting the common good of Covenant Theological Seminary. In order to see this vision realized, the Common Table will work to promote critical reflection and dialogue on faith, theology, culture, and life through the semi-annual publishing of an online and print magazine —all for God’s mission.

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*“As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.”*

*Psalm 103:13–14*