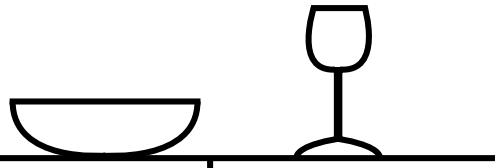


THE COMMON TABLE



ISSUE 3



# THE COMMON TABLE

COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY STUDENT MAGAZINE

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Ann Beverley Prideaux

*The views in this magazine do not necessarily reflect the views of Covenant Theological Seminary*

# Spring 2021 / Welcome

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.*

*Ecclesiastes 3:1 – 8*

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Every leader is an interim leader. These are the words of William Vanderbloemen, an expert in pastoral ‘succession planning,’ and founder and president of the Vanderbloemen Search Group. These words ring in my ears often; now more than ever. We’re all interim leaders, because we have all inherited something, and are tasked with stewarding it well with the hope of passing it on, better than we found it, to whomever comes after us. Every leader is an interim leader.

This magazine is still very much a new project, however, like any other leader, my role would only be temporary. As I step away from the position of Editor-in-chief, I have been reflecting on the past three issues of *The Common Table*, and the strange providence of their occurrence within the context of a global pandemic. *The Common Table* has provided a space for students to present reflective works to their peers, an opportunity to learn about the lives of other students, and for students to highlight the necessary place of art in our formation and engagement with the world. Above all, every single piece contributed to these last three issues of the magazine has been an abiding testimony to the faithfulness of God in the lives of his people that make up this wonderful seminary community. Indeed, my life has been made better by the words, artistic expressions, and insights from other students. I hope the same can be said by every reader of *The Common Table*.

My departure as the Editor-in-chief of *The*

*Common Table* also comes at a very significant time for the life of Covenant Seminary. At the beginning of this year, the new president of Covenant Seminary was announced – Rev. Dr. Tom Gibbs. Rev. Dr. Tom Gibbs will be succeeding Rev. Dr. Mark Dalbey. It goes without saying that even the thought experiment that preceded *The Common Table* would not have been possible were it not for the sustained and faithful leadership of Rev. Dr. Dalbey over the past eight years. In light of that, our Managing Editor, Brendan DeJong, sat down with Rev. Dr. Dalbey to reflect on those past eight years and put a spotlight on what God has done in and through Covenant Seminary. We hope you find the interview encouraging.

It isn’t only Rev. Dr. Dalbey and Rev. Dr. Gibbs who find themselves in transition, it seems the whole world finds itself in the same season. As we enter what seems to be the beginning of the end of the coronavirus pandemic, it is our prayer that the contributions of students in this issue will play a formative role in your life as you consider and think of life beyond social distancing, mask wearing, and vaccine shots. May this issue stir you to look back with lament and gratitude, and to look forward with humility and hope.

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.

Israel A. Kolade, MDiv ‘23



Editor-in-Chief

# The Study Table

---

6  
St. Augustine and a Life of Holy Longing

8  
A Case for Reparations in NWA

12  
The Goodness of Creation and the Pursuit of Justice

14  
Social Meat Eater

16  
The Expulsive Power of a New Technology

21  
The Voice of God to my Heart

22  
Indebtedness

# The Art Table

---

24  
Untitled

24  
There are No Lies

25  
My Voice

26  
A Love I Did Not Earn

27  
Turtle Poem

27  
A Response to the High Priestly Prayer (John 17)

28  
The Myth of Perfection and Julien Baker's Little Oblivions

30  
By Design

31  
God, You are Good

32  
Blind Spot

33  
While You Were Waiting

34  
Christmas in Chicago

36  
Advent Prayer

37  
Microbiology

# The Community Table

---

38  
Monday Meals

40  
Interview with President Dr. Dalbey

46  
Student Profile: Jamie Christen Chiles

49  
Singapore's Hawker Culture

50  
Student Profile: Jeb Ralston



## Advertise with us

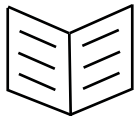
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# The Study Table

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## St. Augustine and a Life of Holy Longing

Jeb Ralston

A professor of mine once wrote, “We once assumed that a great man was one who controlled his desires. Today we assume that a great man is one who indulges his desires.”[1] We live in a world which consistently hounds us to find an end to our hungers and longings as quickly, efficiently, and authentically as possible in our pursuit of final happiness. Of course, as Don Draper in the show *Mad Men* said, “What is happiness? It’s a moment before you need more happiness.” Whether by sex, food, purchase, or endless entertainment, we always find ourselves longing for something to satiate us once more.

In his *Homilies on 1 John*, St. Augustine points out that one distinctive quality of Christian living is that we learn to live into our longing. As he says, “The whole life of the good Christian is a holy longing. What you long for, as yet you do not see; but longing makes in you room that shall be filled, when that which you are to see shall come.” Contrary to popular opinion, a life lived with open hands is not a life wasted. Augustine continues: “When you would fill a purse, knowing how large a present it is to hold, you stretch wide its cloth or leather: knowing how much you are to put in it, and seeing that the purse is small, you extend it to make more room. So by withholding the vision God extends the longing, through longing he makes the soul extend, by extending it he makes room in it.”

According to Augustine, in this time of waiting and hope, God is expanding the soul of the Christian. The withholding of the beatific vision from his people is in some way whetting our appetites for it. In this time of waiting for the consummation of all things, Augustine reminds us that, like in the

Beatitudes, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are the ones who shall be filled (Matt 5:6). Like the purse analogy, this time of eager expectation is a time that often feels like stretching.

Fundamentally, to long for something is to feel its absence. It is one thing to feel hunger and know that you can walk to your pantry to eat; it is wholly another to have to hold out your hands in utter dependence and with no immediate solution—no money, no pantry, and no backup plan. It is no easy thing to live a life of longing, but it is one to which we are called as Christians.

Augustine remarks on Paul’s words from *Philippians* 3:13: “He speaks of himself as stretching out, and following according to his purpose: he felt himself too small to take in that which eye hath not seen nor ear heard, nor hath come up into the heart of man. That is our life, to be trained by longing; and our training through the holy longing advances in the measure that our longings are severed from the love of this world.” We are to be trained by longing, but not by the sort of arbitrary longing for this or that, here or there, but by a holy longing: a longing for “the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:14). Yet, Augustine admonishes us and reminds us that these lesser longings can rob us of the training and stretching our souls need. How will our souls be stretched if we are constantly filling them with things we look to as ends in themselves rather than God himself? “Empty out that vessel that is to be filled; you are to be filled with good, pour away the evil. God would fill you, shall we say, with honey: where can you put it if you are full of vinegar? What your vessel held must be poured away...”

All of us, in one way or another, seek to alleviate the apparent emptiness of our souls with something other than God. And of course, this isn't to say food, romance, success, or entertainment are bad things. God has given these things to us as a gift to enjoy, yet these things were given so that we may know the Giver through them. They were never intended to wholly fulfill us, nor were they given so that we could forget the Giver. Perhaps this is why the gospel is often more easily accepted by those who feel their need (for food, for friendship, for forgiveness, etc.) all the more keenly. Like the sinful woman at the house of Simon the Pharisee, she knew that it was better to empty what she had so that she might be filled with the love of Christ. It is easier to pour out what you have when you are convinced that it will no longer satisfy you.

When we attempt to use our own goodness, wealth, relationships, or possessions to fill the purse of our souls, we rob God of what he desires to pour into us, and we rob ourselves of the only thing that can truly fill us. And what is that thing?

“Speak as we may of that which cannot be spoken, call it what we will, its proper name is—God. Even in this word, ‘God,’ what have we said? Is that single syllable the whole of that for which we wait? Nothing that we have power to name is high enough. Let us stretch ourselves toward him, that when he comes he may fill us full. For ‘we shall be like him; because we shall see him as he is.’” —



Photo by Mary Schieferstein

[1] [https://twitter.com/dandoriani/status/828633606734151682?\\_=20](https://twitter.com/dandoriani/status/828633606734151682?_=20)



<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/revisiting-sanitation-workers-strike-180967512/>

## A Case for Reparations in NWA

Joseph Lowell Taylor

*"Bear fruits in keeping with repentance."*

-Luke 3:8

### Introduction

The above picture was taken during the Memphis Sanitation Strike in 1968. I have included it because it shows the position I hope to take as a white person making a case for black reparations. Dr. King described this position in his last book *Where Do We Go From Here*. He wrote:

"The white liberal must see that the Negro needs not only love but also justice. It is not enough to say, 'We love Negroes, we have many Negro friends.' They must demand justice for Negroes. Love that does not satisfy justice is no love at all ... A society that has done something special against the Negro for hundreds of years must now do something special for him, in order to equip him to compete on a just and equal basis."

Dr. King also wrote:

"White liberals must be prepared to accept a transformation of their role. Whereas it was once a primary and spokesman role, it must now become a secondary and supportive role."

This is the position I hope to take as a white person making a case for black reparations.

We will first discuss reparations as understood by Duke Kwon and Gregory Thompson in their new book *Reparations: A Christian Call for Repentance and Repair*[i]. We will discuss the essence of racism, the essence and effect of white supremacy, the role and ethic of the church, and the essence and effect of reparations. We will then discuss The Witness Foundation Fellowship as an opportunity to practice reparations in Northwest Arkansas (NWA).

[Reparations As Understood By Kwon And Thompson](#)

## *The Essence of Racism*

We must correctly understand the problem of racism before we try to solve it. If we misunderstand the problem then we may not make it better but make it worse. Kwon and Thompson write that the essence of racism in America is best understood as cultural brokenness. Second, cultural brokenness is best understood as white supremacy. In America racism is an individual problem requiring repentance, an interpersonal problem requiring reconciliation, an institutional problem requiring reform, and a cultural problem requiring reparations.

As white Christians, we need to change our perspective: we need to understand that reconciliation is important but insufficient to get us to equality. In *The Color of Compromise*, Jemar Tisby writes that most white Christians misunderstand the problem of racism: they understand racism as an individual or interpersonal problem but not as an institutional or cultural problem. For Tisby, white Christians need to reconsider racial reconciliation: although claiming friendships and conversations is important, it is insufficient for changing the racial status quo.

The above statements are supported by Michael Emerson and Christian Smith's exhaustive analysis of white Christians in their book *Divided by Faith*. When asked to explain the black / white socioeconomic gap, most white Christians cited the motivation of black people. Emerson and Smith write that the explanations of white Christians for racial inequality have changed little in the last 100 years:

"Now, as then, the racial gap is not explained by unequal opportunity or discrimination or shortcomings of the society as a whole, but rather by the shortcomings of blacks. Now, as then, the types of explanations given have important implications for how the inequality is addressed."

When asked about solutions to racism, both white and black Christians agreed that getting to know people of another race is important; white Christians, however, were less likely to agree that more structural solutions – like racially integrating churches or neighborhoods – are also important. Emerson and Smith comment:

"Like their forebears during Jim Crow segrega-

tion, who prescribed kindness toward people of other races and getting to know people across races, but did not challenge the Jim Crow system, present day white evangelicals attempt to solve the race problem without shaking the foundations on which racialization is built. As long as they do not acknowledge the structures of racialization, they inadvertently contribute to them."

Emerson and Smith conclude that "white evangelicalism likely does more to perpetuate the racialized society than to reduce it." Emerson and Smith's analysis should alarm us: white Christians – while trying to solve the problem of racism – have misunderstood it. We have not made it better, but made it worse.[ii]

## *The Essence and Effect of White Supremacy*

Kwon and Thompson write that the essence of white supremacy is best understood as a belief – that white people and culture are normal and superior – used to justify a behavior: the exploitation of black people. The effect of white supremacy is best understood as the threefold theft of truth, wealth, and power.

Theft of truth is achieved by two forces: romanticization and erasure. By romanticization I mean that American history is told from white perspectives and that episodes honoring white people are emphasized. By erasure we mean that American history is not told from black perspectives and that episodes that dishonor white people are overlooked or excused. An effect of the theft of truth is the black / white monument gap. The Equal Justice Initiative reports that there are almost 2,000 confederate monuments in America and almost 50 in Arkansas today. While there are many monuments that honor the confederacy – a society founded on white supremacy and the exploitation of black people – there are relatively few monuments that honor the black people who were exploited.[iii]

Theft of wealth is achieved by two forces: extraction and obstruction. By extraction we mean that when black people have built wealth it has been taken from them by white supremacist systems. Slavery is the most obvious example. Enslaved black people not only created wealth that was taken from them by white people – they themselves were the wealth of white people. In The

Case for Reparations Ta-Nehisi Coates reports that in 1860 enslaved black people represented the single greatest asset in the American economy – worth more than all other assets combined. By obstruction we mean that assistance given to white people to build wealth – the Homestead Act and FHA backed mortgages for example – has not been given to black people, and that when black people have built wealth it has been met with white violence. The massacres of black people in Elaine, Arkansas in 1919 and Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1921 are examples. An effect of the theft of wealth is the black / white socioeconomic gap. As 2014 data shows, the average black household has 61% of the income and only 8% of the wealth of the average white household and black households are 29% less likely than white households to own a home. Coates thus comments: “When we think of white supremacy, we picture COLORED ONLY signs, but we should picture pirate flags.”

Theft of power is achieved on two fronts: personal and political. By personal we mean that the personal power of black people – their agency over their bodies – has been suppressed by white supremacist systems – such as slavery, lynchings, mass incarceration, and unaccountable police shootings. By political we mean that the political power of black people has also been suppressed by white supremacist systems – such as the suppression of the black vote. An effect of theft of power is the black / white leadership gap. As 2019 data shows, while black people represent 13% of the US population they are under-represented in government. Black people represent 12% of the house of representatives, 3% of the senate, and 0% of governors.

### *The Role and Ethic of the Church*

Kwon and Thompson write that the role of the American church has been complicit in white supremacy. By complicit we mean that – while there have been exceptions – as a rule the white American church has both actively and passively supported an American culture characterized by white supremacy. Tisby alludes to this fact in the title of his book *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism*. The first ethic of the church is restitution. The American church is culpable for the threefold theft of white supremacy. Like Zacchaeus in

Luke 19, we are called to return what we have stolen. The second ethic of the church is restoration. Like the Good Samaritan in Luke 10, we are called to restore to wholeness those who have been robbed.

### *The Essence and Effect of Reparations*

Kwon and Thompson write that the essence of reparations is simply the ethical Christian response to the theft of white supremacy. Said differently, reparations is the fruit that the American church must bear in keeping with repentance for the theft of white supremacy. The effect of reparations is best understood as the threefold repair of truth, wealth, and power.

Kwon and Thompson write that reparations must be rooted in repentance – a new way of being (people of repair) – that results in a new way of living (practices of repair). To begin practices of repair we must commit to name lies and tell truth (repair truth), enable black wealth and share white wealth (repair wealth), and enable and submit to black leadership (repair power).

I want to pause here to note that white Christians need to change our perspective: we need to understand that reparations is not a ministry of mercy but of justice. This means that we must renounce control. Our primary orientation toward black people is not to test them – to evaluate the return on our investment – but to trust them – to return what we have stolen. I am not suggesting that we stand on the corner of College and Dickson and hand out \$100 bills. I am suggesting that, humbled by the truth, we share white wealth and submit to black leadership. It is in this spirit that we ought to support black Christian leadership.

### *The Witness Foundation Fellowship As An Opportunity To Practice Reparations In NWA*

The mission of The Witness Foundation is to identify, train, and fund the next generation of black Christian leaders. Jemar Tisby – who lives in Helena, Arkansas – is the President of The Witness Inc and The Witness Foundation. He is a Christian historian, podcast host, and author of the New York Times bestselling *The Color of Compromise*. Tisby describes the birth of The Witness Foundation as based on “personal experience where as black Christians we have these visions, we have these passions, but what we don't have are the



Photo by Jake Gee

resources to make them a reality and specifically financial resources. What that translates into is a lack of resources to put our God-given visions into motion.” The Witness Foundation Fellowship is a two year program promoting black leadership in the church. Fellows must be black Christians who are working in one of three areas: spirituality, justice, or awareness. The Witness Foundation provides training in the ARC of racial justice – awareness of racial injustice, multi-racial relationships, and commitment to racial justice – and an invitation to an annual church partner forum.

### Conclusion

To make a case for reparations in NWA we have discussed reparations as understood by Kwon and Thompson in *Reparations* – the essence of racism, the essence and effect of white supremacy, the role and ethic of the church, and the essence and effect of reparations – and The Witness Foundation Fellowship as an opportunity to practice reparations in NWA. We have also noted two changes that white Christians must make. First, we must understand that reconciliation is import-

ant but insufficient to get us from here to equality – we must widen our view of racism. Second, we must understand that reparations is not a ministry of mercy but of justice – this means that we must renounce control. Please support The Witness Foundation and their mission through your prayers, and please consider financially supporting black Christian leadership in NWA, either individually or through church partnership.☞☞

*[i] Reparations is available in April 2021. To learn more please see Truth’s Table Reparations NOW podcast with Kwon*

*[ii] For further support of this statement please see White Too Long by Jones and Tisby’s New York Times review of White Too Long*

*[iii] To learn more about important work to honor black people who were lynched in Arkansas please see Washington County Community Remembrance Project and Arkansas Peace and Justice Memorial Movement*

*[iv] As of Feb 2021 we have raised the first \$50,000 and are raising the second \$50,000*



Photo by Bailey Preib

## The Goodness of Creation and the Pursuit of Justice

Israel Kolade

When we think about justice issues, we usually start with injustice. For Christians, we typically think of sin and its consequences. This starting point isn't entirely wrong—after all, that's the initial picture we see when we look around our world. If we're to frame our consideration of justice issues appropriately, however, we must start from the goodness of creation and discern the call of justice from the created order itself. The call for social justice from the goodness of creation is found in two touch stones: 1) the call for seeking justice starts with a world that is created personally and purposefully, and 2) the acknowledgement and defence of humanity as created in the Image of God.

Turning to Genesis 1, the first thing we learn is that God created the world. This has at least two implications: 1) creation is distinct from the creator, and 2) the world was not the result of random chance. The world, then, has been created personally and purposefully. The world is created personally because it is created by a person (specifically, a trinity of persons). Personal creation is further em-

phasised in the creation of humanity. With the rest of creation God speaks and it becomes, but with humanity God gets his hands dirty. And the world is created purposefully in that God has intentions for his creation. From his declarative 'Let there be' to Psalm 19 and Ephesians 3, which speak of God's creation existing to glorify God, God's creation is made with purpose, and for the ultimate purpose of glorifying his name. Purposeful creation by God means that creation is infused with meaning and value, and that personally (as humans) we are responsible, since we are accountable to a person. Understanding creation around these two points prevents us from either dismissing or deifying creation. Ancient near-eastern accounts of creation saw the world as derivative, an afterthought from primordial soup, which leads to the dismissal of creation and divests it of its purpose or value.

In contrast, modern secular accounts of creation that see the created order as an accident or purely as a case of random chance will lead to the deification of creation. This is because the world is all

that there is, and so if there is to be any meaning it is for us to infuse that meaning into the world. We are not responsible to a personal creator-being, and thus need not appeal to such a being for how we should understand the framing of the world. These contrasts help to get a grasp of the significance of a personal and purposeful creation. We cannot dismiss creation since God has created it with purpose and has infused meaning and value into the created order. Likewise, we cannot deify creation because there is a personal divine being that created the world (and who is distinct from creation).

The call for seeking justice is closely tied to our beginnings. When we begin with asking the question ‘what is the purpose of God’s good creation?’ we will be in a much better position to interact with our world and engage in a way that honours that purpose. Likewise, with a personal creation, beginning by asking ourselves who created this world and how is He distinct from the creation better enables us to consider the responsibility we have to the creator in pursuing justice.

Looking deeper into creation, we find the second touch stone for the call to seeking justice from the goodness of creation: humanity as created in the image of God. In Genesis 1:27 we read ‘So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.’ This is what separates humanity from the rest of creation and endows all of humanity with natural holiness (sacredness). The image of God in humanity means that humanity reflects and represents God in the created order. Humanity reflects God in the shared (communicable) attributes between humanity and God: we can love, show compassion, execute justice, know, and exercise wisdom (all of which are attributes that God himself exhibits). And humanity represents God in the created order because man was delegated dominion and authority over the rest of creation (to rule it, keep it, nurture it, and tend to it). This understanding of humanity means that humanity has intrinsic value and is worthy of dignity and respect; so when we speak of seeking justice we

are talking about affirming the dignity of every human being.

No one has done a better job in showing me this than Harvie Conn. In his book, *Evangelism: Doing Justice and Preaching Grace*, he recounts his experience of being a missionary in South Korea. Coming from a white middle-class evangelical context in America,

Conn goes to South Korea to do missions in the red light district. He goes there with the understanding that the prostitutes were sinners who needed to repent of their sin, and that is exactly what he intended to preach to them.

Conn had suffered from the Calvinist hangover on total depravity; the presumption that all there is to humanity is sin. This became evident when as he preached to these women, not only did he see little to no fruit but also his own misguided conceptions. His problem was not that he viewed the women as sinners, but that he viewed them *only* as sinners. These women were also *image bearers of God*. Therefore, they were not just sinners, they could also be sinned against. In light of this truth, Conn began to see the systems in their community that trampled on their dignity as the *imago Dei*. They did not enter into prostitution because they esteemed promiscuity, but they were trapped into a system where their economic and social vulnerability was exploited. Men who wanted nothing but sexual gratification were ready to deny these women the right to carry the dignity and respect that God had bestowed upon them.

This story is a powerful narrative that captures the implications of a thorough rooting of the call to seeking justice in the goodness of creation. Seeing humanity as created in the image of God means that in our seeking of justice, we are firstly seeking to honour, respect, protect, defend, and reverence the image of God in all human beings. If we stray from this, any attempt to seek justice will lead to injustice itself, because we will be rejecting the natural holiness that God has bestowed on his crown of creation: humanity. —

“With the rest of creation  
God speaks and it  
becomes, but with humanity  
God gets his hands dirty.”

# Social Meat Eater

## Bailey Preib

“Sometimes I forget you’re vegan,” my friend shifts mid conversation as I deliberately avoid the pancetta staring at me from the cheese board.

“Well, I guess I’m a vegetarian,” I say with an ambivalent conscience, trying to not sound pretentious. After deliberating internally if I want to further this conversation or not, I continue, “But I actually identify as a social meat eater.”

Eyebrows continually raise at my self-proclaimed dietary label. If you’re around me enough, you’ve undoubtedly heard this repeated verbal exchange. The term social meat eater was not my invention, though I sometimes like to delude myself that it is. After explaining my eating habits to a close friend, she exclaimed, “You’re a social meat eater!” It stuck.

I like meat. It tastes good. I can grill a pretty mean burger. I don’t think eating animals is wrong in itself, nor do I think raising and killing animals is inhumane. Sometimes I crave Chick-Fil-A, a good Korean bulgogi bowl, or some Japanese pork belly. Meat was included in nearly every meal I ate growing up in North Carolina. After all, we do have the best BBQ.

If you’re reading this and thinking I’m going to ask you to join me in my vegetarian quest, relax, I’m not (entirely). Most people don’t even know my eating stance. To the committed vegan, she will probably look down on me for this. To the daily beef eater, he will be waiting to refute me. One of the most unhelpful side effects of any movement or persuasion is taking a binary stance. We are seldom black and white creatures in reality.

It took roughly a year for me to become vegetarian. I didn’t start off with the goal of obliterating meat in my diet, I just wanted to lessen my consumption of it. The more I read authors like Wendell Berry, Joel Salatin, or Michael Pollan, the less I could plead ignorance. My qualms aren’t with the act of killing and eating animals, but with the industry. I’m not going to tell you in-depth what you likely already know. It’s a corrupt system that devalues the life of God’s creation:

both the eaten animal and the desensitized killer. There is near irreversible damage to the land these meat plants occupy, a devastating impact dealt to its nearby residents, significant contribution to global warming, and a lack of quality which threatens the health of the consumer.

My reaction is the peaceful protest of the meat industry. If there is less buying of meat, then there is less market for meat. Thus, the meat industry will not produce as much meat, and all the horrid effects will lessen. Or, so is my hope at least. But even if this is not the case, as some subsidized meat productions are not dependant on consumption, I can’t continue doing what I find to be a disregard for creation.

I don’t buy meat anymore, whether it is at a grocery store or restaurant. I began lessening my meat intake with certain days: Meatless Mondays or Tofu Tuesdays. It started small. I would give up meat for lent, and only eat meat one meal a day. Eventually my theological convictions and restriction of meat naturally flowed into vegetarianism. My conscience no longer lets me invest money in the meat industry despite my tastebuds’ protest. I cannot twist our current meat industry to reconcile with the God ordained command to have dominion over the animals. If the Christian life is to give to others, to glorify God through being his agents, then I no longer could see eating meat as anything but cruel and indifferent taking. It became a gluttony and an abuse or willful ignorance of power.

But I do eat meat (GASP). Yes, I consume meat on a monthly basis. Like I said, I’m a social meat eater. If someone has me over for dinner and serves me meat, guess what I eat? I value community over my dietary choices, which might make me weak in some eyes, but in a fallen world we are burdened with hard choices. For those who read this and feed me meat, fear not! I secretly love the indulgence. I knew going into this that I would not expect everyone to cater to my convictions. Lasting change occurs slowly and over time, not by demanding or guilt tripping.

If I came up to you and told you I was a



Photo by Bailey Preib

vegetarian, what assumptions would you make? I've witnessed people shut down after the topic comes up (usually not by my initiation) and can nearly feel the shift of tension in the room. I'm not judging you. If my lifestyle creates unease in yours, perhaps the fault is not mine. It is uncannily similar to how people judge Christians, and to be fair, I'm probably one of their biggest critics. But, if you know me and love or respect me before you are aware of my religious views, how much more open will you be to them? I take the same approach to both my religious and dietary camps.

The history of vegetarianism is rich within the Christian faith. Nearly all monasteries partook in fasting that included the abstinence of meat for a period of time or indefinitely, save for feast occasions. Animals were held in high regard as work partners or sustenance while still clearly maintaining a distinction from man. Even today, many do not eat meat during Lent or on Fridays. So why have we divorced our diet, an occurrence

three plus times a day, from our Christian worldview? Is food outside of God's purview?

The majority of those I know who abstain from meat are not Christian. This should not only convict us, but encourage us to engage with this viewpoint. Why do they care enough to change their lifestyle, yet we don't? Man does not live to eat, but eats to live, despite society telling us otherwise. If we are what we love, what does that imply about what we consume?

Consider one small weekly act of intentionally meatless meals. If we allow the gospel to transform all aspects of life, it will include our food. It will include the land the food is grown on, the lives of the animals on the farm, the farmer who owns the land, the workers who grow and gather it, the neighbors who live nearby, the drivers who transport it, and the person who ingests it. I'm not asking that you consider becoming a vegetarian. I'm asking that you consider allowing the gospel to transform all areas of your life. —



photo by Bailey Preib

## The Expulsive Power of a New Technology: *How Thomas Chalmers' Sermon on Affections Helps to Remedy Technological Addiction*

Austin A. Hess

Hand-held devices and their technological counterparts constitute an enormous part of twenty-first century life, to the degree that a lost phone feels like a national emergency. It seems society is aware that its relationship to technology is unhealthy. In order to remedy this relationship, they attempt a number of things, including social media fasts and 'dumbed-down' smartphones. These attempts, however, are rarely successful. What Christians need is to cultivate a love for God so great that when they are finally ready to purge their love for their devices, their affections will grow towards God. Thomas Chalmers's sermon, "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection," points to this solution. In this paper, I will exposit Chalmers's sermon, unpack the current state of affairs, and propose a way forward.

### I. Exposition of the Expulsive Power

Thomas Chalmers, a Presbyterian minister (1780-

1847), wrote a well-known sermon titled "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection." The main purposes of the sermon are to explain why certain forms of mortification did not work, as well as offer a better way to transform one's desires. The main problem, according to Chalmers, is humanity's innate desire to love someone or something. The solution is located in their love for God.

Chalmers argues that there are two ways one "may ... displace from the human heart its love of the world." First, one can note "the world's vanities" so that they are not inclined to love anything in the world any longer. This method, however, is "incompetent and ineffectual," for "the love of the world can not be expunged by a mere demonstration of the world's worthlessness." While it is good to recognize and understand the world, the mere understanding of the world's condition is not enough to cast off sin, habits, or temptations. He

calls this love “in possession.” By that he means it is readily accessible, even if it is not already in one’s grasp. The alternative is that one may love another object—in this case, God—more than the world. This method “will alone suffice for the rescue and recovery of the heart.” God is the one who can rightly order anybody’s hearts to properly love the right object since “God is love” (1 John 4:8). He is the foundation and source for all affections. However, whereas the first “love” is “in possession,” Chalmers calls this love “at a distance.” By that he means it is not accessible without work on the lover’s part. Since more work is necessary in order to obtain this new object, however, people turn back and follow the love they know they could easily obtain—“the world’s vanities.”

Chalmers’s solution to changing one’s love from “the world’s vanities” to God consists of two parts. Chalmers argues that “the way to disengage the heart from the positive love of one ... object [in this case, the one “in possession”] is to fasten it in positive love to another [that is, the love “at a distance”].” While it is proper to remove the wrong love from one’s life, this removal is not enough. Mere removal creates a void that a new love can fill. If this love is not properly aligned, it may be just as bad as the previous love. Or, the former affection can storm the lover’s heart and root more deeply into their being.

In order for one to properly align their loves, they need to fill that void with another proper love. Chalmers writes: “It is not by exposing the worthlessness of the former, but by addressing to the mental eye [that is, the mind] the worth and excellence of the latter, that all old things are to be done away, and all things are to become new.” While one needs to know the worthlessness of the old love, more positively that person needs to know the glory of the new love. In fact, this exchange is modeled in Jesus’ work on the cross. It was not enough for Jesus to merely die for his people’s sins. He had to transform, by the Holy Spirit, their whole being so that they could act on their new redemption—they are led out of their fallen love into their redeemed love.

## II. Current State of Affairs

Devices capture attention and thus, love. This is borne out in a number of ways. First, when someone gives their attention to something, they are

giving their love. For example, say two friends meet up at a coffee shop to catch up on life. However, the one friend, after sitting down with their coffee, participates in another conversation with someone else at another table for the whole time. While that individual was physically present, their attention was absent. Therefore, mutual love was absent in the relationship. In the same way, if someone gives their undivided attention to their devices, they are giving their love. Note that I am not saying that merely using devices is wrong. Some fields of study and work require extensive usage of them. Instead, when people use their devices and respond to them without considering how to use them and what it does to their communal environment, their love is being captured through attention.

Second, as devices capture someone’s attention, they reinforce the relationship through strategic dopamine releases. When someone receives a notification on their smart device, there is a little release of dopamine, or the “feel-good” hormone. Over time, resistance to dopamine builds, requiring more notifications to trigger this release. This leads to the constant checking of phones to see if an app delivered a notification. While this action may not be recognized as addiction, the inability for many to not look at their devices for an extended period of time suggests the power of addiction. In fact, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th edition) recently recognized smartphone addiction as an “impulse disorder” within the counseling realm.

Devices, though useful in many regards, are not inherently worth ultimate love. Though they can help push back the effects of the Fall, they cannot ultimately redeem humanity. They can push back against the Fall by connecting people. Now more than ever, the global community is connected. Christians can learn about where God’s Gospel is advancing in the world and where it is needed most. Additionally, the medical advances that are available on smart devices encourage good health. For instance, smart watches encourage good health practices through tracking movement and activity and sending reminders to move at certain times of the day. At the same time, however, devices can inhibit Christians’ relationship to God and their local church. While they can con-

nect people to each other, they may also inhibit the relationships they are already in.

Finally, ultimately, they cannot save humanity from death. 2020 has highlighted for everyone their obsession with health. While it is good to stay healthy, devices ultimately cannot push back death any more than before. In fact, devices use people (contrary to their original conception). As mentioned before, they are capturing people's attention. However, they are not capturing attention because they want a mutually beneficial relationship. Rather, the stronger grasp they have on attention, the more data points they can collect. This data can then be sold to companies so that they can market products and services more accurately.

Therefore, devices are capturing affections in order to push God out so that they can have everyone's all-consuming affection.

This obsession is why it is so difficult to break free from devices and why, if someone manages to break free, they almost inevitably come back to them. Using Chalmers's structure, their love is "in possession"—in their pocket, on their nightstand, on their wrist. What is needed is love that is "at a distance" to help remedy this technological addiction.

### III. Cultivating New Affections

In order to cultivate new affections, two components are needed. First, one needs to understand the worthlessness of their technological addictions. The first step to understanding this addiction is to understand the power of technological addiction. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:12 (ESV) that "'All things are lawful for me,' but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful for me,' but I will not be dominated by anything." While there is certainly nothing wrong with responding to devices (there is a place for strategic usage of notifications), the power they have to draw attention whenever it desires is not helpful.

The second step is to compare technological addiction to the love of God. As one reflects on their devices' powers, they will begin to realize that de-

vices have a strong power that cannot be overcome by their own volition. As Chalmers' mentioned, knowing its worthlessness is not enough, but it is helpful to frame the love one has "in possession" with the love that is "at a distance." This highlights the stark contrast between the nature of the two loves. This leads to the final step where one actively turns equally towards God and away from their addiction. As Chalmers argued, it is not enough to mortify the one desire, for it will come back or be replaced by a worse desire. Instead, one needs to mortify their addiction to their devices and replace that "hole" that will form with spiritual disciplines which orient their life to God.

“While one needs to know the worthlessness of the old love, more positively that person needs to know the glory of the new love.”

Second, one needs to understand the beauty of the Gospel. More specifically, they need to remember Jesus' work and what he accomplished for his people. God could have left humanity in its sinful state, letting creation destroy itself. How-

ever, he chose to redeem all things, and that includes his people and their desires. Therefore, he sent his Son to be incarnate and die for his people's sins. Jesus took on the punishment and bought redemption. Therefore, he enables his people, by the Spirit to overcome sin through his finished work. Not only that, but Jesus rose from the dead for his people. Jesus' resurrection affirms that he finished the work of redemption and has authority over all things, even technological addiction. Since he experienced temptations and yet did not sin, he is able to sympathize with his people in his mediation in heaven (Hebrews 4:15). Finally, Jesus will come again for God's people. In the meantime, they rely on his mediation in heaven until he comes again and removes every stain of sin, temptation, and addiction. The Spirit's help will carry God's people through this process of mortification and vivification. He will give them power to change affections. God's people need this power because "it [is impossible] for the heart, by any innate elasticity of its own, to cast the world away from it, and thus reduce itself to a wilderness." Additionally, this process is difficult because it is unnatural. Therefore, the Spirit will bestow grace on his people when they will fail.

This grace will remind God's people of the difficult spiritual war they are in and encourage them to persevere. Therefore, God's people need the power of the Gospel to rightly order their affections.

#### IV. Conclusion

First, I am not calling for a Luddite life (if you know me, I'm anything but a Luddite in my personal and professional life). What I am calling for is the recognition that devices have a real power over love that is detrimental to one's love of God and others. Second, while this paper addressed this thesis from an anthropological perspective, it can be further developed by validating this concept by examining it from a neuro-psychological per-

spective. Chalmers' thesis is especially apt for our cultural moment with technology. In this context, we have two loves: our love for technology and our love for God. Currently as a culture, our loves are more oriented to our devices. However, it is not enough merely to recognize this and "try" to cast off this addiction. Instead, as we mortify this addiction, we need to fill that void with God's Gospel. This bait-and-switch of affections will fill the void that our addiction currently takes up and replace it with a new affection for our Lord and Savior. May the Spirit, who works in God's people to conform them to the image of the Father's Son, stay with us as we mortify the wrong affections and vivify proper affections. —✝

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Oil Painting study by Hampton Watts

# The Voice of God to my Heart: What a friend we have in Jesus

Corrinne Watson

This is a question that screams to me in the dark. It's the question I hear in the doubts of my heart when I'm lonely and feel like I have no one to go to:

*Does Jesus really care about me?*

During the time of Covid-19 I've been struck by Jesus and the way He was a friend to people.

There is a scene in *The Chosen* TV Series where Jesus and the disciples are heading into the next town; it is a visual representation found from what you read in Matthew 8:1-4. A man who has leprosy appears out of nowhere. The disciples are quick to jump to conclusions to protect their friends (the other disciples, Mary and Jesus) and themselves from this man. In reality, the leprosy man takes a big risk being out and about, but the risk had a huge reward. I can't help but see this scene and think about the intimacy Jesus had with this man. In the scene the man walks up and falls to his knees. He pleads with Jesus by saying "Please. Please. Don't turn away from me." Jesus responds with, "I won't." The leper cries out, "If you are willing you can make me clean. Only if you want to." He doesn't make eye contact or look up from where he is; he barely gets out the words between his tears. He continues, "I know you can heal me, if you're willing." Jesus walks over and the man looks up. Jesus gets down to his level and says, "I am willing" and heals him. I remember the first time I watched the scene how powerful it was. I was in tears thinking about this man living alone with no physical touch. The outside world feared even getting close to him for fear of getting leprosy, and then Jesus does the unthinkable.

When I think about the way Jesus loves me I think about John 15:13-15 which says,

*"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer*

*do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you."* (ESV)

*The Gospel Transformation Bible* explains these verses by saying, "The radical grace of the gospel transforms servanthood into friendship. Only grace can free us to obey Jesus out of friendship and worship, and no longer out of fear or self-interest." Jesus calls us friends. What a joyful reality!

Jesus is full of grace, ready to heal and meet us in our need. But he will not force himself on us, giving us what we need without waiting for us to ask. We have to make a move, like the leprosy man, owning our need for him. If you want Jesus' friendship, are you seeking him? Are you diligently searching for his grace and help? The first step to seek him is to say to him: "Don't turn away from me. Help me know that you are near." Or as David in the Psalm prays, "O LORD, I call to you; my Rock, do not be deaf to my cry..." (Psalm 28:1). Do you need help calling out to him? Then ask someone else to pray for you! Are you hesitant to seek Jesus out of shame or fear? Then take another look at Jesus as he really is, by reading about him. John 13:1-20 shows us how He truly loves us by washing the disciples' feet. One thing that strikes me from the passage is His willingness to wash even the feet of the one who will betray him. I often choose a path like the betrayer. In Luke 8:43-49 you see Jesus have compassion and heal a woman suffering, for many years, from blood loss. The woman desperately needed Jesus to heal her. He couldn't see who touched him but knew power had gone out of Him. When Jesus heals he shows God's heart. God cares for us when we are hurting and chose to intervene on our behalf by sending us His perfect son.

*Jesus really loves me and calls me friend!* —✝



Photo by Bailey Preib

## ***Indebtedness: a personal reflection on Chinese culture and Christianity***

**Karen Chen Kallberg**

I shivered as dusk fell. I hadn't expected Shanghai to be this chilly. I wrapped my scarf and jacket tightly to shield myself from the cold autumn air.

*"Biao Jiu Jiu! Uncle!"*

Dad and I turned to see a round middle-aged woman and a petite girl wave and rush up to us. The woman turned out to be my grandmother's niece. The girl was her niece and my second cousin. I gave her the English name Raina. Sixteen-year-old Raina had short-cropped hair, rosy cheeks, and dark eyes that sparkled when she spoke. They led us down a dark street into a crowded shotgun apartment filled with more relatives and cigarette smoke. Dad quickly assessed the situation and offered to treat the family to dinner. We didn't linger, but the bare walls, sparse furnishings, and the awkward silence of things left unsaid made a deep impression on my heart.

Raina and I chatted easily through dinner. She was learning English, and I was trying to pick up more Shanghainese, so we practiced over a feast of curled cucumber, jellyfish, deep-fried breaded toad, fried breaded corn, sesame cakes, and much more. Two hours later with bellies full, my father briefly shared the Gospel with these relatives. This was, after all, why we had come to vis-

it them. They listened in polite silence. We took some family photos and then went our separate ways.

In Chinese culture, there is a sense of indebtedness that governs relationships. There are many facets to this idea, but on the surface level, indebtedness manifests as a sense of obligation. That night, my relatives realized that because we had treated them to dinner, they were indebted to us. By listening to my father share his faith, they fulfilled their sense of obligation. In American culture, acting out of obligation can be construed as inauthentic, but in Chinese culture, it is an act of courtesy. It is a way we show deference to one another. It can also be a way that we maintain a polite distance in our relationships.

When I was growing up, this courteous reciprocity was woven into the fabric of my life. It meant that we never went to someone else's home empty-handed. And sometimes my parents would decide *not* to do something to avoid making someone else feel indebted to us. When I was 8 or 9, I begged my parents for a birthday party. My parents agreed on the condition that I ask my guests not to bring gifts. In their minds, inviting friends to a birthday party could feel like a presumptuous

solicitation of gifts, and they wanted to release our guests from any unnecessary feeling of obligation to us. This came up again when I got married; we left some of my parents' friends off the guest list so they wouldn't feel obligated to give me a wedding gift (which in Chinese culture is usually cash).

While my parents were reluctant to obligate others, they were generous and hospitable, particularly with those who were not in a position to repay their debt. Many of those guests were Chinese students attending local universities. My mom became a favorite cook as she whipped up huge batches of Chinese dishes that reminded them of home. My father sat with them for hours, swapping stories and songs. My sisters and I were busy entertaining the children, often having to practice Mandarin as we shared our toys with them. When visiting speakers came to preach at our local Chinese church, they often stayed in our home and gave a short talk at some of these meals. Because my parents were the hosts, the scale of indebtedness tipped in their favor. Our guests listened politely; this was their obligation. Some of them visited our church and eventually gave their lives to Christ. For my parents, that was the greatest form of "repayment."


What most of our guests didn't understand was that my parents were also operating from a sense of indebtedness, but their response was not motivated by obligation but gratitude and love. Both of my parents traveled across the Pacific to attend graduate school in America during the 1960's. Here they met Christians who befriended them, helped them navigate this new culture, invited them into their homes, and shared the Gospel with them through Bible studies. My parents initially attended out of a sense of obligation, but through these new friends they met their Savior. He was not what they had been seeking, but He answered all of their questions. In Him they finally found meaning to their lives. And for that, they became eternally indebted to Him. As they began serving Jesus, they stopped keeping track of the favors other people owed them. All of their kindness and hospitality stemmed from a deep sense of gratitude to and love for their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

It was that same sense of indebtedness that struck me during my first trip to Shanghai. I had only ever known China through history textbooks, family stories, and Chinese sitcoms. I couldn't help but feel haunted by the stark contrast between my relatives' apartment and my comfortable five-bedroom house in upstate New York. Unlike Raina who grew up under the one-child policy, I enjoyed life with three younger siblings. As I visited schools decked with portraits of Engel, Marx, Lenin, and Mao, I thought of my small Christian school back home. When we dined in local restaurants, I wondered whether I could bow my head to pray or whether I should keep my eyes open.

Back in our hotel room, my questions spilled over into prayer: "*Why—of all my relatives—did You place me in America? Why did You save my parents so that I could grow up in a Christian family? Why was I born in a democracy rather than under Communism? What in the world would life have been like without my siblings? Why was I born Karen Chen instead of Raina Tsa?*"

Having grown up in a Christian home, it was easy to take Christianity for granted—it was all I ever knew. I was often guilty of attending church, teaching Sunday school, reading my Bible, and reaching out to visitors out of a sense of obligation. I figured that was what it meant to live the Christian life. When I visited China, however, God opened my eyes to some of the priceless gifts He had given me that I had always taken for granted. I had no explanation for why Raina and I had landed in such vastly different worlds. For the first time, I began to realize how the many blessings I enjoyed were not earned but freely given.

How do we repay Someone to whom we owe everything? Why would an infinite, transcendent God go to such great lengths to make us His? How can we possibly wrap our minds around the enormity of our debt to Him? Friends, we must never lose sight of this sacred sense of indebtedness as we approach our studies and pursue the purposes for which He called us into His kingdom. Together, let us echo the psalmist,

*"What shall we render to the Lord for all His benefits toward us?"* (Psalm 116:12) 

# The Art Table

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## Untitled Elias Ferenczy

I used to believe  
Sinners cried their way to hell.  
In truth, they laugh it.

## There are no Lies David Augustine

There are no lies.  
Only truths no one meant to tell,  
And truths someone did.  
In this is wisdom born.

For truth lies in all things,  
Where false scales speak truth,  
And a bribe gives honesty.  
If the heart can listen well.

We can find the stories,  
They didn't mean to tell  
Amidst their meaningless words,  
Which themselves hold no truth.

Still, there are no lies.  
To this the simple nod,  
For to their accepting ears,  
All words appear as gospel.

Still, there are no lies.  
To this the fool and scoffer laugh,  
For in their mouths,  
Truth is mist burnt by the sun.

Still, there are no lies.  
To this the wise will nod,  
For they see truth where it lies,  
Sitting in the bramble, waiting to be found.



**My Voice**  
**Brittney DeHart**  
Mixed media, pencil and acrylic  
10" x 8"

## A Love I Did Not Earn

Mary Schieferstein

I have been a fly  
Caught in your web,  
Shrinking to stay small,  
Existing to placate,  
Seeking not to send  
Even a tremor of upset  
That might prompt you  
To tighten the strings.

Yet you come upon me  
Like a storm cloud,  
Dark and engulfing.  
I'm surrounded by you,  
A vapor that I cannot breathe,  
And you don't hear me wheezing,  
Suffocating.

If I were a well,  
You would draw without asking,  
Take all I could give you  
'Til you drained me dry,  
Toss coins into the mud  
As though that could repay me,  
As though that could ever fill the void.

Where did I learn  
That love is pain,  
That only martyrs are worthy,  
That hard workers earn grace?  
I learned it at your feet,  
As you learned from those before,  
Going back through the ages  
To the first on the earth,  
The first who believed  
The lie that Love  
Was ever anything  
Other than everything  
They ever needed.



Photo by Bailey Preib

It's hard to speak a word against you,  
You who I love in spite of the harm.  
We are all of us both good and bad,  
Beautiful and broken—  
Masterpieces that have been vandalized,  
And vandals ourselves.  
But it does no good to hide the dark,  
For only the light can chase it away.  
Righteousness requires anger at wrong,  
And grief demands those wrongs be named.

I curl up beneath its blanket,  
Under its weight,  
Feeling the cries my body longs to release,  
Unable to make them come.

A friend cocoons me in her arms,  
The way I wish you had  
(I know you didn't know how),  
And the lies wrapped  
Like barbed wire around my heart  
Loosen a little more—  
Tears running like blood,  
Like life,  
Like healing,  
At the embrace of a love  
I did not earn.

# Turtle Poem

Emma Cooper

Perhaps  
A poem is like a turtle —  
That hard-patterned casing  
Which  
(When you let be)  
Pokes out its nose, stretches its toes  
And, sighing relief,  
Begins  
Methodically moving.

## A Response To The High Priestly Prayer (John 17)

Kath Crane

Jesus Christ, our King:  
Thank You for Your glory,  
Glory from before the world existed.

Jesus Christ, our Shepherd:  
Thank You for Your words,  
Given by the Father that we might believe  
He sent You.

Jesus Christ, our Intercessor:  
Thank You for Your prayers,  
Not only for Your apostles,  
But for us.

Jesus Christ, our Broken Bread:  
Thank You for Your church,  
One as You and the Father  
Are One.

O LORD Jesus Christ:  
May we together follow Your voice and Shepherd's staff  
Ever deeper into Your unifying embrace,  
That the world may see Your love,  
Love from before the world existed.



## The Myth of Perfection and Julien Baker's Little Oblivions

Bailey Preib

If I could describe Julien Baker in one word, it would be ambivalent. Her latest album, *Little Oblivions*, is oozing with vulnerable self-examination that would make a therapist blush. Julien lures her listeners in with dreamy synths and siren vocals that crescendo into ballads. She seems convinced her repeated failures will leave more than herself behind in the wake. On "Ringside" Julien croons, "So you could either watch me drown / or try to save me while I drag you down."

Such candid lyricism might shock new listeners unfamiliar with Julien's previous work, like looking at a stranger in a mirror. Unlike her first two albums, *Little Oblivions* displays a wide range of instruments, almost all played by Julien on the record. Instead of overpowering her, they add emotional depth and intrigue. "Relative Fiction" and "Repeat" are near dance-inducing, while "Song in E" feels like seeing a beloved friend after a long time apart (who happens to be Julien Baker). Julien is near methodical about her lyrics, a master

poet with instrumental accompaniment. At times, her voice cascades in and out, almost creating a wave of indecipherability. Freedom. The lyrics are more than worth reading but no longer seem to chain Julien to the way her minimal instrumentation previously did. Performing this album live with bandmates will be a major growth in letting go of control.

The young Tennessee artist doesn't deceive herself on "Relative Fiction" announcing, "I won't bother telling you I'm sorry for something that I'm gonna do again." On "Crying Wolf" Julien is giving in to her vices: "I'm not crying wolf, I'm out here looking for them." Baker has struggled with substance addiction and became sober at a young age. After holding herself up to an inhuman ideal of piousness, Julien relapsed in 2018 after touring with supergroup Boygenius.

This album is a rebirth of the 25-year old coming to terms with not living up to her own standards and, ultimately, realizing that is all right. In "Rel-

ative Fiction” she deconstructs her unattainable ideologies, “Now I can finally be okay in not the way I thought I should.” It brings to mind a recent post by Tim Keller, “Your future self will always see your present self as unwise and immature. That means you are currently a fool right now.” But Julien is just wise enough to realize it and gives herself some grace along the way.

A self-professed Christian, Julien alludes to her faith in all her albums. She doesn’t shy away from the doubt and pain it brings, yet also feels the tension and expectation of that label. Julien recently stated her distance with organized religion and the immense harm it has done. Has Baker lost her faith? Again, in “Relative Fiction” it might appear so: “I’ve got no business praying, I’m finished being good.” But I’d argue otherwise.

The album cover depicts an oil painting of Baker on a chair with a wolf stalking behind her and the words “There is no glory in love, only the gore of our hearts” sprawled in handwritten script. Love can be painful, a kind of fragility sometimes unwillingly given. At times, it’s hard to decipher if Julien is singing about relationships or addictions. I’m not sure we need to know. Baker doesn’t seem interested in giving answers or pithy sayings to ease our grief. If anything, she wants us to look at it. She tells us her knowledge, her lived experience, in vivid detail and leaves the rest for us to wade through.

What are these little oblivions? The album opens with the track “Hardline” and the lyrics, “Blacked out on a weekday; is there something I’m trying to avoid?” The third track “Faith Healer” goes on, “I miss the high, how it dulled the terror and the beauty / Now I see everything in startling intensity”

The spectrum limits have been defined: Love, beauty, vulnerability and pain on one end, and numbness, shallowness, and oblivion on the other. Like a pendulum stuck in an endless repeat, Baker swings between the two. When the emotions are too raw, best to dull them a little so long as you don’t fall completely into the void.

Sometimes the gore wins out. We look for escape, release. We spend an hour or two scrolling mindlessly or binge watching something with little substance. We put our headphones in and tune out reality. We look to the “faith healer”, the “snake

oil dealer,” then finally to poison when it doesn’t work. We wake up ashamed, destined to repeat the same events despite our intentions, until we realize we do what we don’t want to do.

Julien knows she doesn’t deserve it: love, forgiveness, redemption. In Ringside she sings, “Nobody deserves a second chance, but honey I keep getting them.” The devastation cuts deep in Song in E, “I wish that I drank because of you and not only because of me... ‘Give me no sympathy.’ / It’s the mercy I can’t take.” Only someone truly aware of their state, their brokenness and weakness, could speak with such clarity. She knows the burden of mercy.

But those three things are exactly what Julien gets. Her friends haven’t deserted her as evident in the song “Favor.” She hasn’t kicked the chair out. Heck, Julien has even put the bottle down since 2019 and been in recovery. She doesn’t seem able to escape God’s good grace. Julien may fall back into relapse. She will hurt someone and be hurt by someone again. She will fail and disappoint herself. There will be terror with the beauty, gore with the love.

But Julien doesn’t have to be perfect; she can’t be. There is an ease of her tension, a step-by-step acceptance of this truth. This knowledge doesn’t excuse our culpability or efforts to improve, it just helps us to be picked up again and stand when we knock ourselves down. We must learn to hold the contradiction of aiming for perfection yet knowing we will not achieve it in our hands. There is an innate whisper in us all that we were made to be more, that something is off. We can choose to ignore it and figure out a way to drown out the whisper when it seems unachievable by our own efforts. Or, we can keep reaching for it with the hope it will one day be handed to us. Either way we will fail, but it is the beauty of grace that makes the difference.

The last words of the album appear in “Ziptie”: “Good God, when’re you gonna call it off, climb down off the cross / and change your mind?” He won’t. Julien knows he won’t despite our repeated failures. And this small hope might just be what keeps us from falling, or staying, in our own daily little oblivions.

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# By Design

Abigayle Miller

*"You will never be good enough on your own."*  
A harsh, twisted voice I hear,  
Condemnation hanging upon each word.

Still,  
A soft, gentle whisper  
Comes into this dark and shame-filled silence:  
*"You were never meant to do this on your own"*—  
An invitation,  
By design.

We were made for union,  
We were made for connection.  
We were made to walk with God in the cool of the garden.  
We were made to be taught,  
To wander and wonder  
Into his presence  
By invitation,  
By design.  
It is our destiny.

*Hush*  
That condemning voice,  
Silence the shame  
Of failure.  
For your Father speaks tenderly to you  
As he speaks to your design,  
To your destiny  
And he invites you  
Into the place he has always held for you.

It is your destiny, dear one,  
To fail and fall  
Into the safety of his presence,  
Into the reassurance of his love,  
His teaching,  
His wisdom,  
His communion.

*Come*  
By invitation,  
And by design.



Photo by Hilary McSheehy

# God, You Are Good

Caridad C. Kraus

You are so good.  
Even when I can't see tomorrow,  
I know that You are good.

God, You are faithful.  
Even in these uncertain times,  
You are making a way for those who are struggling and lacking.

God, You are Trustworthy.  
Even when our nation's leaders lie or deceive,  
You are our Truth-teller.  
You know no lies.  
You are the foundation and source of Truth.

God, You are love.  
You love us enough to not leave us in our ways of sin.  
You want us to walk in the ways of life and not death.

God, You are good.  
Many of us were disconnected from our families  
Because of the busyness of  
Life,  
Work,  
TV,  
Activities,  
Social media—  
All that distracted us from the people we love.  
But You are using this time to bring us back together  
So that we connect to those things that matter to You.

I know that You are good,  
Even when normal life is not normal anymore.  
You are constant and unfailing.

You use everything around us,  
Our trials,  
Our struggles,  
Even our mistakes to transform us.  
We become our true selves in the process.

O LORD, even as I praise You,  
I can feel the tug of fear that is creeping up inside of me.  
I see all around me, a society that dances in rebellion,  
Looking for instant gratification.  
But I must remember who You are.

Thank You Lord.  
For You are good.

# Blind Spot

## Mary Schieferstein

### *Verse 1*

I don't know what's true anymore.  
Does God talk to you and not to me?  
I awake to a nightmare each day.  
You say I'm poisoning our dreams.

### *Chorus*

I've cried into napkins  
Branded with logos  
From half the chains  
In Northeast Ohio.  
I think there's more  
In my blind spot  
Than you say.  
You're in my blind spot.  
I didn't see you  
'Til it was too late.

### *Verse 2*

Is there danger I can't understand?  
Does it haunt me like a ghost?  
With each step I take, you're behind,  
Pushing me where you want to go.

### *Chorus*

I've cried into napkins  
Branded with logos  
From half the chains  
In Northeast Ohio.

I think there's more  
In my blind spot  
Than you say.  
You're in my blind spot.  
I didn't see you  
'Til it was too late.

### *Bridge*

The words you say ricochet through my head,  
Telling me you're the only hope I have  
While they leave me a wounded, bleeding mess.  
I'm sorry, but  
I'm done with that.

### *Chorus*

I've cried into napkins  
Branded with logos  
From half the chains  
In Northeast Ohio.  
I let you hold me  
Closer than I wanted  
While you tried to dry  
My tears by talking  
I think there's more  
In my blind spot  
Than you say.  
You're in my blind spot.  
I didn't see you  
'Til it was too late.

Listen to "Blind Spot" by Mary Schieferstein Here:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhdidLvKKk8>



Photo by Jake Gee

## While You Were Waiting

Caridad C. Kraus

I know you thought that I didn't hear you.  
I know you thought that I may have forgotten about you.  
I know you thought you were not important to Me.  
I know you thought that I was too busy to help you.  
I know you were upset that I wasn't quick to answer you.  
I also know that you were about to quit.

But while you were waiting, I was preparing a way for you.  
While you were waiting, I sent angels to keep you company.  
While you were waiting, I sent the sun to shine on your face.  
While you were waiting, I sent you flowers in the spring.  
While you were waiting, I sent rain to wash the dirt out of your soul.  
While you were waiting, I sent snow to bury the weeds that were growing around you.

You see, My beloved, I did hear you. I do care.  
I always have time for you.  
I do remember everything about  
You because I made you.  
You are precious to Me.

That is why I died for you.

I made you wait because I had to prepare you.  
All that you asked for was not good enough for you.  
I wanted to give you the best of all that I have.  
So while you were waiting, I was preparing you.



Photo by Bailey Preib

## Christmas In Chicago

Brendan Dejong

They drove up I-55 toward the family reunion awaiting them. “How is your grandfather doing, anyway?” Macy asked.

Logan was silent, hesitating. “I don’t know exactly. It’s been some time since I saw him. When Mom called to talk about Christmas, she said he was pretty rough. I’m not sure what he’ll be like this weekend.” Another pause. “He and Nan are at Eden now. I think they get good care there, but Mom and Dad don’t visit them too often. The last time I saw him was the Fourth of July, when he called me by my dad’s name, do you remember?”

“Yeah I remember— I thought maybe he was a little drunk.”

“My mom said he hadn’t had anything to drink.”

“Oh.”

Logan looked at her.

“I can’t imagine what it might be like inside his head— the confusion would be terrifying. Death is scary enough, but helplessness—total inability—I don’t want to know what that’s like.

\* \* \*

Logan sat in the living room. His parents had left to pick up Nan and Pop; he and Macy had enjoyed a quiet morning, featuring bacon, eggs, and slowly falling snow. Macy was leaning over a crossword, and he was taking advantage of a rare opportunity for leisure reading. The sound of a car pulling up broke his reverie, pulling him out of his novel; he realized that his senses would shortly be assaulted with the sights and sounds of other people, and he would have to make greetings and small talk, and he felt anxious—not about the small talk, but be-

cause in a matter of moments his Pop would walk through that door, and he had no idea what degree of recognition would meet him.

The car doors closed in a broken staccato, and footsteps sounded their way to the door. Logan was still; his eyes were on the page of his book, but he didn’t comprehend a word. The door opened and his parents stepped in, slowly guiding his grandparents, being careful to keep the snow on the mat. Logan looked up and smiled.

“Hi, Nan! Hi, Pop!” He got up from his chair and moved toward them, Macy a step behind him.

“Hi, Logan, good to see you,” said his Nan, teetering toward him, her walker a first line of defense against gravity. He embraced her with a careful hug.

“Merry Christmas. How are you doing?”

“Merry Christmas, how are you? You know, we are managing, Earl needs more help these days, but we’re managing. It’s good to see you,” she repeated.

“That’s good. We’re doing well; keeping busy. Hi Pop, Merry Christmas!” He looked at his grandfather, who looked back, his face expressionless, studying his grandson’s features, looking for a clue.

“MERRY CHRISTMAS,” he yelled, in order to hear his own voice. He leaned forward, slowly making his way to the kitchen. “WHAT’S YOUR NAME?”

Logan smiled. “I’m Logan—I’m your grandson—Ben’s son.”

“BEN? I HAVE A SON NAMED BEN, HE’S A HANDSOME BOY, GOING TO PHILLY FOR

COLLEGE—”

“No, Dad, I’m right here.” Logan’s father took Pop by the arm, smiling. “Let’s get you sitting down, OK? I’ll get you a cup of coffee.” Pop righted the ship and continued on.

“BEN! THERE YOU ARE. MAKE SURE IT’S NOT TOO FULL, MY—MY HANDS—THEY GET SHAKY, GRACE ALWAYS TELLS ME, ‘DON’T SPILL,’ BUT—”

Logan sat down beside his Pop, who didn’t seem to notice him. Macy was engaged with Nan, who was chattering about the many shortcomings of the nursing home: the nurses, food, and annoying neighbors. Logan’s mother, Irene, brought pie out of the kitchen. “Amanda and Justin should be here with Ian any minute,” she said, setting down the tray. Ben brought his father a coffee; he had put it in a thermos to reduce spillage.

“WHAT’S THIS?”

“It’s coffee, Dad. Careful, it’s hot.”

Just then, the door opened and a dark-haired boy raced in, stopping abruptly when he realized more than the usual number of bodies were present. He was eager to survey his audience, but erred on the side of caution—too much attention could compromise his freedom. Uncertain, he turned back toward his parents, wondering if they knew that all those people were going to be here, but they just laughed at him. “Go say hi!” they encouraged. He turned back to the living room, settling for the safe space that was Nan’s side. She, however, promptly betrayed him. “Hi, Ian, look who’s here! It’s your Grandma and Grandpa! Do you know what that means?” He stared, mystified. He never knew people could be so old. The one called Grandma was smiling at him, beckoning; the one called Grandpa was fiddling with cups. Ian’s fingers slowly found their way to his nostrils.

“Grandma and grandpa are my mommy and daddy! Give them a hug, go on.”

He reluctantly obliged, allowing Grandma to squeeze him before shimmying back down to ground level and turning back in the direction of safety. “Don’t forget Grandpa, give him a hug, too!” His Nan was persistent. Thankfully, Ben intervened. “Hey, Dad, what are you doing? Let me help you with that.”

“I DON’T NEED THIS CUP, I WANT IT IN THE MUG—I CAN’T SEE WHAT’S IN IT—”

Coffee had spilled onto the carpet. Macy moved for some paper towels while Ben emptied the thermos into an open mug. He set it down and brought Ian forward.

“Hey, buddy. How’s it going? This is your Grandpa.” Ian felt himself being lifted toward the old man, whose eyes were largely vacant. Saliva ran on his chin in toddler fashion. Ben steadied him on his Grandpa’s lap. Grandpa moved to touch him, but Ian recoiled. Ben spoke in consoling tones, and Ian realized he wasn’t speaking to him.

“Hey, dad, this is your great-grandson, Ian. My girl Amanda’s baby boy. He’s just two.”

Grandpa’s expression softened, and he slowly beheld Ian, studying his features. His eyes abruptly pulled into focus, and he was suddenly still.

“Ian. You’re Amanda’s boy,” he said softly. “My little Amanda? Really? You’re beautiful.”

Tears fell from his eyes as he hugged his great-grandson. He allowed him to drop back down to the floor, and Ian hightailed it to Mom.

\* \* \*

Logan and Macy were heading south on I-55, enjoying the absence of sound which filled the car in the wake of goodbyes. The business of the holiday season had passed its climax, and they now experienced the falling action, the inverse of anticipation.

“Ian’s getting big,” said Macy.

“Mm-hmm,” murmured Logan. “He’s a firecracker.”

The silence returned, complementing the waning afternoon light, which was an omen foretelling the shortness of the day. Macy glanced sidelong at her husband, then looked in her lap. His eyes remained on the road.

“You know,” she said slowly, “for a moment, at least, it seemed—seemed like he really knew what was going on.” She let this sentence hang in the air, not asking for a reply, nor knowing what else to say. The sentence occupied the space between them, so close that she felt she could touch it. Within it was some sort of implicit imperative, which required that this moment stretch on, so that it might find a permanent home in their consciousness. It demanded their attention and their respect, and they both felt that, at least for the time being, there was nothing else worth saying. —x—

# An Advent Prayer

Kath Crane

You came.

You actually came.

You probably developed like any baby—  
Your own design.

What was it like for you to have cells, rapidly dividing?

You were a zygote, embryo, fetus.  
You had a yolk sac, amniotic sac, umbilical cord,  
The weird downy coating.

What was it like for you to live in a uterus?

Thank you for coming.  
Thank you for being a zygote  
For us.



Photo by Meredith Woodell

## Microbiology

### David Augustine

Every inch has life.  
Nowhere without the drive  
Of breath to breathe.  
And it was good.

Without legs they run,  
Without wings they fly,  
And without them we die.  
And it was good

They speak languages unknown  
To be concertedly coordinated,  
Challenging what it means to be one.  
And it was good

From them we learn the simple facts of life,  
Make the food we eat,  
And use it to give us life.  
And it was good.

Yet one who once was friend is now enemy,  
Bringing a total war  
Of scorched earth and salted land.  
And we ask, is it still good?

But it comes as no surprise,  
That blessings whisper curses.  
So never shall I say of life searching breath,  
That it is not first good.



Photo by Rachel Vining

# The Community Table

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## Monday Meals

Emily Dahlquist

Throughout the pandemic, as organizations have adjusted their operations, they have also found new ways to serve their communities. The leaders at New City Fellowship in South City found themselves serving meals outside their church almost as soon as the city shut down. I had a chance to talk to Pastor Roy Hubbard and volunteer Devin Tressler to learn how this came about and how it has grown into a fruitful experience.

When St. Louis public schools shifted to virtual learning in the spring, the church's after-school tutoring ministry shifted alongside the students. Devin explained that around the same time, Umetulisha, a nonprofit food ministry connected to New City, asked the church if it would serve as a meal distribution site. Umetulisha would provide food and supplies, and people from the church would serve meals to anyone who might need them during this time. Many students in the church's area rely on their schools for meals, and the church was glad for the opportunity to serve in the gap that had formed. Since the tutoring program had been operating in the building most weekdays, the program director was able to pivot and take the lead on meal serving, with some tutors volunteering as well.

New City's church building is close to South Grand, a busy street with lots of foot traffic. To serve the meals, they simply set up outside the church, hoping to catch people walking by on the sidewalk. Soon, the same people began coming regularly. Many people who stopped for a meal had seen the building before without knowing it

was a church. Last spring, New City South was giving out 75-100 meals every weekday. After schools were able to provide meals again on a regular basis, the church adjusted to serving meals once a week on Mondays. Now, they can continue to serve the people most vulnerable to going hungry—whether due to the pandemic or other circumstances. This mealtime has also given people from different backgrounds who live in the same community the chance finally to meet each other.

The church's presence in their neighborhood is important, and they have had the chance to get to know people who might not have felt comfortable coming to the church otherwise. Another bright spot they shared was the ability to make connections with neighbors who also wanted to support the community. The neighbor next door to the church (who does not attend New City) often comes to serve meals alongside them and to share the Gospel with the people she meets. A family who lives on the corner opposite the church noticed what was going on, too. One day, while everyone was standing outside the church, a family member brought over some canned goods that they wanted to give to anyone who might need them. Building a relationship with the community around a church can be a daunting task, but it might not be as hard as we sometimes think.

Roy and Devin both shared stories that illustrate the messiness they have seen as they've formed specific relationships with a few people who come regularly. But this is the nature of life in community,

no matter what walk of life we come from. There is one man they know well and see often. When they met him, he was recovering from an addiction and trying to make huge changes in his life, including distancing himself from people that had an unhealthy influence on him. He began working at a fast food restaurant near the church, and it was a joy to see him doing well. They helped him get some things he needed in order to start that job, and they have prayed with him about the struggle of changing his life. The restaurant manager who hired him is also well-known to the church, and he is looking out for his employee. Recently, this man has been struggling with his addiction. Yet with the resources of supportive relationships and people praying for him, he does not have to struggle alone.

Handing out meals on the corner sounds like a simple task, and it can be. Many people have been coming to Monday meals because they need just that: a meal. According to its web page, "Umetulisha seeks to provide opportunities for the Church to share their food with the hungry (Isaiah 58:10) by mobilizing volunteers to help prepare and serve healthy meals, and in this way manifest the provisional love of Christ to those in need." People express every week how thankful they are for the provision of this food. The story does not have to end with professions of faith and new members for us to see and know that God is at work through this time. Roy and Devin's hope is to be a faithful community presence that knows the

neighborhood and its people.

Devin explained his philosophy of creating conditions for community evangelism. It is not programmatic or forced. It is based on forming relationships without an agenda, with the desire to know and love others. With that comes the ability to share one's own story and the reason for having hope in Jesus. Monday meals didn't begin as an "outreach" of the church. It started as an emergency response. Now, the church has the opportunity to get creative and imagine what this new habit could mean for their community.

I asked about Roy and Devin's vision for this meal service in the future. They hope to see people from both inside and outside the church community building new relationships. Right now, the meal time is limited by the need to maintain physical distance. Both men expressed the desire eventually to see this become a community meal inside the building—where people from the church and people stopping by could sit down and get to know each other. When you have good conversations over food, you learn each other's stories. In some ways, this has already been true of "Monday meals," with people sharing about their lives and sometimes asking to pray together. Yet it is exciting to picture the time when the church doors might be opened, the tables set, and the inviting love of Jesus extended through the simple act of eating together. —

[1] <https://restorestlouis.org/umetulisha/>



## Interview with President Dr. Dalbey

Covenant Theological Seminary President, 2012-2021

**Brendan DeJong:** Hi, I'm joined by Dr. Mark Dalbey, the president of Covenant Theological Seminary, and we're here today to reflect on his tenure as president, what brought him to this role, and the future of Covenant Seminary under the leadership of Tom Gibbs. Dr. Dalbey, you were the lead pastor at two PCA churches over fifteen years prior to coming to CTS in 1999 as Dean of Student and assistant professor, and then you ended up becoming interim president in 2012 and full president in 2013. Can you talk to us a little bit about that transition from pastor to professor to president?

**Mark Dalbey:** Sure—after seminary I served for about seven years at Geneva College, where I taught and was a chaplain, so I already had an interest in higher education, but felt called to the pastorate. From there I served as a solo pastor for eight years at a church in Cincinnati, and then again as a solo pastor for seven years at a church in another PCA church in Indiana. I wasn't real-

ly looking to leave pastoral ministry, but my wife and I had thought that after our kids had moved out, we'd love to be involved in the training of future ministry leaders; so that was already on our hearts when I got a phone call from Dr. Chapell saying "I've got a job I think you'd be good for, can I send you the information?"

My wife Beth and I really loved the idea of being at CTS, but the timing didn't seem quite right, since the associate pastor where I was senior pastor had just left. I shared it with the elders, and I said, "I want you all to be a part of this decision with me—I'm one of three finalists, and before I have my final interview, I want you to speak into it." And they went all around the room, and every one of them said: "We don't want you to leave, but we see you doing something like this when you're finished here, so maybe God's timing is different than ours." That allowed me to finish the interview process and pray about the decision for the next few weeks, and Beth and I decided this was where we wanted to invest.

The factor I appreciate about Covenant Seminary is that it's a multiplying context. The first or second summer I was here, someone asked, "Do you miss being a pastor?", and I said, "Yes, I do miss it," and I thought that was something I needed to get over. But this student said, "That's good—we don't want a Dean of Students who's glad to be out of the pastorate." That was almost a word from the Lord, saying—we want you to be a pastor while you're serving as Dean of Students and on faculty. That's one of the blessings of this place—I'm not anybody's actual pastor, but I'm on a team that is training future pastors and ministry leaders who will impact many people. The multiplying feature of the place of a seminary is very fulfilling.

We moved here in 1999, and I served as Dean of Students for ten years, and then VP of Academics for four, the last of which was when I was interim president. And then president—I never imagined myself in this role. When they made me interim, they asked if I would be a candidate, and I said, "I don't think I can be a good interim and be a candidate, and I don't know if I want the job, so you do your work, and I'll do mine, and if you get stuck at the end we can talk then." So they came back to me at the end of the process, and I ended up becoming president. It will be nine years coming up in June, including the interim year.

**BD:** It's awesome to hear how you talk about God's hand both in the decision-making process and after you get here; how did that continue for you and your family as your vocation and role at Covenant Seminary shifted?

**MD:** Covenant Seminary has really shaped our family. My wife Beth decided that one of the ways she could get to know students and professors was to do a degree here, so she did an MATS and then also an MAC. The seminary has really shaped my wife, and it was like we were in it together more since she was on campus and part of the community. It's been really formative in our lives to understand deeply that the gospel is a gospel of grace and truth—being deeply rooted in the truth of the scripture and intimately related with Christ as the source of the life-changing grace in our lives. I think my initial vision of being in a place where we're equipping and sending out pastors and ministry leaders is really something that gave me an openness to different kinds

of roles here. The vision didn't change, but the way I was utilizing my gifts differed. I went from primarily focused on students being the Dean of Students, to focused on faculty as the Dean of Faculty, and then being president, which is a role where I'm serving multiple constituencies both internally and externally. The Lord led me to a place that I both deeply believe in and was willing to invest the rest of my ministry and life to, which has made me open to the needs of the seminary and shift into different roles.

**BD:** How has the seminary grown during your time as president?

**MD:** In 2010, after lots of discussion with the faculty, we revised the purpose statement: "to glorify the triune God by training his servants to walk in God's grace, administer God's word, equip God's people—all for God's mission." Although we tweaked parts of it, the biggest change was the last part: "all for God's mission." It's both an aspirational statement—these are things we hope to be doing, and also directional: taking a statement that was somewhat static and turning it into a dynamic one. Sometimes we look at the Bible and systematic theology as an end in themselves, but we know from God and his Word that all Scripture is inspired so that the people of God would be thoroughly equipped for every good work. I picked up a phrase from John Calvin where he says, "We do deep biblical and theological study and work for the sake of the church and its mission in God's world." We exist as a seminary for the sake of the church and its mission in God's world. At CTS we equip student through rich theological study in a way that forms them into Christ-likeness for God's missional call on their lives.

At Covenant we've valued the transformational character of theological education. This has fleshed itself out in a variety of ways, including the first-year cohort groups, assignments which ask students to reflect on their weakness, and the prominence and involvement of the Francis Schaeffer Institute. We have tried to teach an uncompromising commitment to both grace and truth: not only communicating the truth, but communicating it relationally and winsomely, which reflects the way we love people. How do we bring gospel truths to the issues of our day? This includes the emphasis that Zack Eswine has

brought to homiletics —that it's Christ-centered preaching, but also Christ-centered preaching with apologetic sensitivity. Further, without being a threat to only qualified men being elders, how do we draw out and utilize the gifts of women in the church? At the seminary, one of the blessings was to have the board do a two-year study and decide that, with the exception of Bible and theology, we can have qualified women teach in their areas of expertise as regular faculty members. We've been blessed to see some of the female faculty who were not full voting members of faculty become full members of faculty, like Tasha Chapman in Educational Foundations and Suzanne Bates in Counseling. That was such an affirmation of the giftedness of the women we already had at the seminary and has been a blessing to both our female and male students.

As a denominational seminary, we want to serve the PCA, to shape the PCA, and be a seminary of choice for others outside of the PCA who are looking for quality theological education. Our emphases on servant leadership, emotional intelligence, and cultural intelligence have risen not because I've been president, but I've been privileged to be in a seat to help the seminary grow in what we always have aspired to in our core values and to help bring it forward in these ways.

**BD:** Is there something in your courses that you aim to communicate to your students each semester?

**MD:** I've taught the worship course in a variety of ways and with different co teachers, including Jack Collins and Jerram Barrs, but one of the things I emphasize each time is that corporate public worship is to be gospel shaped. We come into the presence of God who is holy, as sinners who need to take hold in a fresh way of God's grace in the gospel. We highlight the person and work of Christ and then say, "How should I live in the light of the gospel?" People should leave worship services with a greater sense of the greatness and holiness of God and a deeper sense of their own need for Him, and an amazing sense of praise to God for what He's provided that we don't deserve. This leads into a life of worship. Between the worship service and daily life, there's a connection, a one-in-seven movement: we meet together, are strengthened, praise God, and ask

His forgiveness, so that we can live out our callings in the whole of life and offer our lives as living sacrifices to God. And these aren't opposed: it's not all of life as worship versus corporate worship, but each informs the other.

I've also taught classes on leadership, in which I emphasize servant leadership. An effective leader is a Christ-like leader, so that you take on His character and the fruit of the Spirit. It doesn't mean you don't lead with strength—strength is not oppositional to humility; rather, the strength that God supplies only comes as the fruit of walking humbly with Him.

**BD:** Can you talk a little bit more about the kind of transformation you want to see in Covenant students during their time here?

**MD:** Sure—years ago, the faculty did an exercise where we reflected on graduation when someone walks across the stage. The faculty has this question: "Did that student 'get it'?" We sort of knew intuitively what we meant by that, but whoever was leading the meeting at that time said, "Let's put as many things on the whiteboard as we can that would contribute to 'getting it'." It's a number of things: they get an understanding in the Bible of the way God has revealed himself; they get that they've not arrived with everything they need as they leave seminary and go into ministry, but they realize they must be lifelong learners and grow themselves in grace and truth in the gospel; they show humility in the way they interact with others; they love other people; they have a grasp of their ongoing deep need for the gospel; they have ministry skills that have been honed (not perfected), so that they're able to enter into various kinds of appropriate ministries; they invite people into their lives, they are the kind of people you want to be around—there's a relational connection, whether they are an introvert or an extrovert. It's both a deep knowledge and a lived faith—did we see these things taking shape in their lives? We hope to send students out not as finished products, but as servants of Christ, aware of their own need, ready to go and serve Him, the people in their ministry, and take the gospel to people who don't know Him. At the same time, they're not trying to be somebody other than who God has made them to be. Overall, they're rooted in the gospel of grace and truth that's being embodied in



the person.

**BD:** I've learned a lot in this conversation about how your approach to leading Covenant Seminary has been informed by your years as a pastor. You've dealt with more than your fair share of controversy during your time here. Is there something that has helped you in dealing with controversy that you would pass on to future ministry leaders?

**MD:** God prepared me for that in lots of things in my life and ministry even before coming to Covenant Seminary. It's important to take a strong stand on Scripture and what you believe it says, and at the same time maintain a winsome manner. In other words, it's the capacity to be a calm leader. A calm leader doesn't mean a weak leader, but a strong leader has to remain calm. Good leadership is both collaborative and service oriented. You need to have people around you that help you process your immediate frustration and anger with so that it's not what you post and pod-

cast about. Strong leaders also have to enter into the messiness of life. Remaining calm when things get tense is probably one of the most important qualities necessary in order to be able to engage people who disagree with you, because that will happen with people near to you as well as with critics.

We have a meeting each year at the General Assembly called the Committee of Commissioners, where each presbytery elects a person to be on a committee that reviews the work of Mission of the World, Mission in North America, Covenant College, and Covenant Seminary as well as other committees and agencies. Sometimes people want to be on that in order to challenge Covenant Seminary for things they disagree with. I knew every year that when I went into that three-hour meeting there would be difficult questions to answer. A number of issues converged two years ago, related to Revoice, biblical social justice,



and whether we should be the denominational seminary. That year (and many previous years as well) the evening before the morning meeting, I went into the room where the meeting was to be held, and I spent about fifteen minutes in there walking around the room imagining people sitting in the chairs and praying for the people that were coming, and for myself, that I would be able to calmly handle anything that comes. The Lord has answered that prayer year after year. And even if others bring their concerns disrespectfully, I'm prayed up, ready to hear that God may have something for me to hear from this person who's not making the comment very well, so that I can engage with it in a healthy way.

Finally, you also have to discern what's worthy of a

response. If it's just out there in the blogosphere, that's when you need people around you to help discern whether or not to respond. I've read some unbelievable things about me from people whom I've never met. In every ministry setting there will be people who push back against you, and you have to ask, "How do I love those people well?", and part of it is asking them questions and listening to them.

**BD:** I'm going to switch gears and ask you about your recent contribution to a book on racial reconciliation and worship. Can you tell us a bit about that, and how your chapter functions in it?

**MD:** The book is called *Hear us Emmanuel: Another Call for Racial Reconciliation, Representation, and Unity in the Church*, (General Editor

Doug Serven, White Blackbird Books, 2020). I feel like the Lord has been taking my wife and me on a journey to see and hear marginalized people. One of the passages that really opened my eyes was Psalm 146 where the psalmist talks about God setting the prisoners free, opening the eyes of the blind, and upholding the widows and the fatherless. This is what our God is about, and I asked myself, “Is this what I’m about?”. I began to see people who, previously, I often didn’t have eyes to see: those on the margins, whether they’re non-white, international students, female students, or those outside the PCA. Part of it is looking at American history and seeing how native Americans, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans were treated. I made a comment—I’m not sure if it’s in the chapter—but it’s that if Christians had rightly understood the importance and value of women, we would never have had to have an amendment in 1920 that allowed women to vote in the U.S. election—it would have been there from the start. White Anglo-Saxon Protestant men have often been in places of power and leadership through the history of our country and in our churches. The gospel is not about desperately holding onto that kind of power—rather, it’s about stewarding the power God gives us, not for the sake of holding onto power by marginalizing and mistreating others, but by contrast in order to lift others up. As Mike Higgins has said, “Don’t feel guilty about having white privilege, use it to love and care for others.” It’s been a gradual growing, seeing, and understanding people’s stories and recognizing the generational pain that’s there and asking ourselves what we need to do as a church for God to speak to us in ways that we, in a serving, loving, gospel centred way, listen to other people, elevate them, and let their voices be heard. It’s part of what this book and the first volume *Heal Us Emmanuel* are meant to reflect on in the PCA specifically. We’re asking important questions and listening to people who have answers without assuming that we have the answer already.

**BD:** What’s next for you and your family?

**MD:** July 1st I hand the baton to Tom Gibbs. The board has asked me to continue one more year full time, and my only job is to help with anything Tom asks me. I think the transition is going well; he is already asking questions, desiring to learn, and he will bring good leadership to take the seminary places I can’t. For the first six months I’ll be in an office down the hall, and for the second six months, on my fourth try, I get a sabbatical, so I will be off-site but on-call if Tom needs me. I have some things that I would like to write about worship and leadership.

In June our twelfth grandchild is due, so grandparenting will be an important part of our calling in retirement. I also had some wise counsel that you don’t decide a year before retirement what you’re going to do for the first five years of your retirement while in the most stressful job you’ve ever had. So we will be discerning what is next during the sabbatical time as well.

**BD:** Finally, I have to ask about this because it’s on your CV: you received an award for being a scholar-athlete. What sport did you play?

**MD:** I decided in the 5th grade that I wanted to be a college basketball player, and I practiced for at least two hours every day for twelve months of the year from 5th grade through to the end of college. I was a shooting guard—my average would have gone up today, because most of my shots were from three-point range but there was no three-point line. I played small college basketball all four years, and then played on a Christian basketball team called Sports Ambassadors. The highlight of my basketball days was when we played 48 games in 34 days in west Africa in the summer of 1974. We got to lead so many people to Christ because we would give testimonies, talk to people after the game, and clarify the message of the gospel. When we would ask if anyone wanted to pray to receive Christ, often eight or ten people would raise their hand and several would come to Christ all at once.

**BD:** Thank you so much for your time today and your service at Covenant Seminary. —



## Student Profile: Jamie Christen Chiles MAC '21

If you haven't met Christen, formerly known as Jamie, you probably have seen her shooting hoops, baking delicious goodies for neighbors, or just engaging with God's creation. She is an MAC student graduating this Spring semester. As her time at Covenant comes to an end, I got the joy of sitting with her and reflecting on her time and listening to the dreams that the Lord has placed on her heart. Below is a transcript of our time and I hope that you enjoy getting to know her a bit more and can share in the excitement of her graduation and future!

**Hilary McSheehy:** When you first enrolled as an MAC student what were your first dreams with a

counseling degree?

**Christen Chiles:** I thought that I wanted to be in private practice counseling in North Carolina, which I still desire, but my dreams have shifted a little.

**HM:** On your journey, what classes have shaped you the most in preparing you for becoming a counselor?

**CC:** Honestly, the systematic classes, Sin, Christ and Salvation and Spirit, Church and Last Things, have helped me understand myself. They helped me understand what I believed. You need a firm foundation to grow off of and these classes were

fundamental in giving me that foundation. And then, my internship was very impactful. It has helped me put to practice the things I have learned as I try to figure out how I think as a counselor and what I go towards as a counselor. It helped me to see how best to help people that come my way - recognizing how I, as a counselor, do things. It helped me shape questions and see things that I haven't seen before. For example, when I see and examine a behavior, I want to also hear and understand the thoughts and the emotions that come with it, and then together, with the client, we would be able to talk about, and talk through, those thoughts and emotions towards a place of greater clarity regarding the behavior.

**HM:** So how has the counseling program shaped you personally?

**CC:** The program is really big on working through your own story. I don't even remember my first semester, because there was so much going on and I was recognizing just how broken and messed up things are. I brought in a mess and through the classes, and the Lord's work, He has helped me see the unhealth in my life. Though I'm not fully healthy, I am growing towards it, and this program provides the language and space to work through your stuff. As a result, I've been challenged to learn who I want to be, not who I have to be. It's been healing.

**HM:** This sounds like a lot, what kept you going and working through your stuff?

**CC:** Honestly, I got mad that I kept having to deal with my story. I just wanted it to stop. But I am stubborn, so it was stubbornness essentially. It kind of reminds me of Romans 5:1-5:

*Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.*

**HM:** So as a counselor, having gone through these things, what do you want your clients to feel

in your counseling space?

**CC:** I want clients to feel comfortable. I'm pretty goofy and awkward, and I want them to feel comfortable being goofy and awkward or sad or angry or whatever they are at the time. I want it to be a productive time, but I want them to feel loved and strong and brave and heard. Covenant has helped prepare me by helping me find my voice and feel comfortable being goofy. I want to bring that into my counseling session as my clients bring all of who they are, and where they are, at that time.

**HM:** So, you mentioned that your dream has changed, coming to the end of your program how has your dream changed?

**CC:** I still want to be licensed and I want to work in Community Mental Health, but my long term goal is now working overseas as a counselor. There is definitely a need in the US, but in other countries there is a need and not as many equipped to meet that need. I want to help meet that need with the gifts the Lord has given me.

In *Every Moment Holy*, there is liturgy for the Death of a Dream, and as I began pursuing this desire in November 2020, the Lord used this to comfort me and to help me understand the process of dying to my dreams. The most poignant section of the liturgy, to me, says,

*...I have seen so oft in retrospect, how you had not neglected me, but had, with a master's care, flared my desire like a silver in a crucible to burn away some lesser longing, and bring about your better vision...*

**HM:** Do you have a particular place that you would like to go?

**CC:** It honestly depends. So this all began on a Youtube splurge. I was enjoying looking up things about England and I wondered what counseling is like there. Youtube led to a conversation with Paul Loosemore, a professor here at Covenant, which led to a conversation with Charity, a counselor with Serge in the UK. She made a statement that there is a big need for counselors outside the US, and since I like to travel and I am a dreamer, why not consider the possibility? Depending on how things go once I am licensed, it seems like Prague could be a good fit.

**HM:** This is awesome, so to wrap things up, what are some things you are thankful for from your time in the MAC program?

**CC:** My time in the MAC program has felt like it's been a type of sanctuary in the sense of it being a space and a place to come into my unhealth and learn what it looks like to be healthy, and then to begin to become who the Lord has made me to be, and in that sense who I want to be. If it wasn't for being a part of this program and the community here, I don't think I would be who I am today. I am more healthy and more able to say who I am and what I want. Before I was always so anxious about everyone else, and this place was

a space for me to grow in my own shoes. It's been a place of support, affirmation, and healing. It's a place where I can confidently leave knowing that these people affirm my future and understand how it makes sense for me.

**HM:** My time with Christen only lasted an hour, but what a beautiful time it was to listen to her. There were so many jokes and stories throughout our time that truly portray her in a way that a transcript of an interview cannot. As she graduates and we celebrate the class of 2021, it will be amazing to see how the Lord continues to guide and unfold her story. Congratulations Christen! 🎉



Holland Drive Market and Food Centre in Buona Vista, Singapore. By Joseph Tee

## Singapore's Hawker Culture

Joseph Tee

Singapore is one of only three modern independent city-states in the world (the others being Monaco and the Vatican). Singapore is an island nation 31 miles wide (from east to west) and 17 miles long (from north to south). Also, we have more than 5.5 million people living here so it can get pretty “squeezy” most of the time!

Even though there are lots to say about Singapore, I would like to wet your taste buds for one aspect of Singapore society: Hawker Culture!

Officially, Hawker Culture in Singapore can be defined as “a living heritage shared by those who prepare hawker food and those who dine and mingle over hawker food in community dining spaces called hawker centres.” These hawker centres reflect Singapore's multicultural society with stalls selling Chinese, Malay, Indian and many other types of dishes. On 16 Dec 2020, Hawker Culture became Singapore's first inscription on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

While staying on campus, hawker culture was a

feature that I missed about Singapore life. Not only could you get a variety of food for a low price at a hawker centre (e.g. a rice dish and drink for \$4!), but it brings together people from all walks of life. In this sense, it provides a snapshot of how the Gospel can continue to make an impact in this multicultural country.

From a cursory glance of a hawker centre, we can see people from across all races and socioeconomic backgrounds gathered in one place. This echoes the image in the Book of Revelation when people from every nation, tribe and language are standing before the throne (Rev 7:9). This is a reminder that people in Singapore need the LORD and need to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

If you ever get a chance to visit Singapore, I encourage you to check out a hawker centre. Perhaps God will fill your heart with a burden for Singaporeans as He fills your tummies with the delicious local cuisine! ﷻ

[1]<https://www.nhb.gov.sg/what-we-do/our-work/sector-development/unesco/hawker-culture-in-singapore>



## Student Profile: Jeb Ralston

MDiv '21

**Israel Kolade:** How did God lead you to Covenant Seminary?

**Jeb Ralston:** I became a Christian as an undergraduate at the University of Central Florida through the RUF campus ministry RUF and through RUF I got connected to a local church in the area, Covenant Presbyterian Church, and I met a pastor there, Randy Greenwald – a graduate of Covenant Seminary. During my time at Covenant Presbyterian Church, I was interacting with him along with a few other pastors in the area, who were all Covenant Seminary graduates, and they were all encouraging into deeper ministry involvement as they saw my gifts develop in ministry. In the midst of that, they also encouraged

me to consider Covenant Seminary if I wanted to go into full-time vocational ministry. They're reason was simple: Covenant will teach you how to be a really good pastor and how to do so for the long-haul. After graduating from college, I moved to New-England to serve as an RUF Intern at the University of Connecticut for three years. On the whole, it was an enjoyable experience despite the difficulty that can come with doing ministry in New England. By the end of my time as an intern, even though I found the work to be fulfilling, I was exhausted. In the midst of my exhaustion, I started to realise that what I need in a seminary education is not so much just knowledge and information but a training in healthy ministry practices that can sus-

tain that kind of work for a long time. During that time my campus minister, Lucas Dourado, who is also a Covenant Seminary graduate, encouraged me to see seminary as an opportunity to work on my weaknesses and not just my strengths. So, in many ways I went to Covenant Seminary because of the mentors I've had who I dearly look up to, who are doing good work, and have clearly been blessed by their time at Covenant.

**IK:** In what ways has God been working in your life through your time at Covenant Seminary?

**JR:** I think I came into Covenant almost with a weary heart of sorts. Mostly because I was really exhausted from ministry and consequently wrestling with a great deal of self-doubt. Over these past three years, God has been working in my heart to move into deeper sense of confidence with the calling he has placed on my life. I'm not quite where I hope to be just yet—but it'd pretty drastic what these three years have done for my soul. In some ways I've been encouraged in the last three years to trust that this is a good decision for my life. Much of this has been because of the people who have surrounded me, including friends and mentors – those who've been able to see the giftings I have and who have said “keep going, keep doing this.” God has worked through them to make me more confident about the direction in which I'm heading even though it still feels blurry in some respects.

**IK:** What did you experience at Covenant Seminary that you didn't expect to encounter and how did that shape you?

**JR:** My first semester at Covenant Seminary I remember some previous graduates (whose names are Tim Price and Jacob Virtue) who were playing this strange soccer game on the lawn. They coerced me into playing this bizarre game which they called, “B.U.M.S.” I won't go into all the details of the game, but if you are curious, I'm pretty sure created a formal constitution and set of by-laws for this game! Completely absurd. I mention this moment to say that I didn't expect that I was going to have a genuinely fun time at Covenant. I thought it would be simply me learning in this sort of formalised setting. And it certainly is that, but it was a whole lot more! I've had so much fun at Covenant. I made so many good friends and I've laughed so hard at Covenant. I feel like I've just

become a more joyful person at Covenant.

**IK:** I love that story! On top of all these experiences at Covenant, you've also had the privilege of serving the seminary student community as the president of the Student Council. What has it been like to serve as president, and to do so in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic?

**JR:** It's been pretty challenging due to the restrictions in response to the pandemic. This has made it difficult to figure out creative ways to get people involved on campus. However, a lot of the student representatives, and other student officers—who I've had the joy of working with—have been able to create a new set of goals for this year as to what Student Council should be doing given the weirdness of this year. And each person has been steadily working behind the scenes to restore some resemblance of normalcy to campus. One of the main things that we're trying to do is to set up student council well for those taking on student council leadership after us as Covid restrictions lessen—and for years to come. We've also been trying to think of creative ways to keep people connected even when there are such strict regulations in place. We're thinking through contactless forms of connection that can encourage community. In the Fall we solicited feedback from a sample of the student body to understand what the student experience has been like on the whole. One of the things that the Student Council recognised was the amount of gratitude on campus – much more than we were expecting! So, we gathered a collection of statements from students of things that students were thankful for this academic year. Things such as the faculty, student life, the seminary administration, and the online infrastructure that allowed the seminary to transition smoothly when lockdown began. We presented those statements to the faculty and seminary administration on behalf of the student body. It was really well received! Our goal has been to ensure that the thoughts and needs of the student body are being known and communicated.

**IK:** As you been spearheading these initiatives, what has the experience taught you about leadership in general? And what has it taught you about the people that make up the seminary community?

**JR:** So much of good leadership is being a good

servant to the people that you are working alongside. Those who have had the privilege to see Dr. Dalbey's leadership over the past few years (as I have) have seen a clear example of that servant leadership.

**IK:** What I've seen of Dr. Dalbey's leadership certainly embodies your statement well – a noble example of servant leadership! Following from that, what have been some grace-filled anchors for you? Not just personally in the midst of the pandemic, but also more broadly through your involvement with student council.

**JR:** This probably sounds mundane, but I love baking. During the initial months of the pandemic, I did so much baking. I love bread, probably too much. I think part of that love has to do with the tactile element of it, and also the fact that you come out of that labor of love with a final product. As a student who is constantly on the computer, or reading a book, and thus is constantly living in their head, the pivot to working on a physical item that is right in front of you (and not like an assignment paper!) has been very cathartic for me. Another thing about baking bread which I enjoy is that whenever I bake bread, I try to bake it in bulk so I can also give it away to people. Someone recently called me the breadboy of campus – somehow it is both humiliating and endearing (haha). Another anchor would be John Webster's writings and particularly Christ our Salvation. It's a collection of homilies which has been an excellent read – especially as a morning devotional read.

When I think of the student council, the first person that comes to mind is Hannah Moon. Hannah is the bright light and anchor of student council. She is one of the hardest working, most faithful people I have ever had the privilege of getting to work with. I worked with her during my time at RUF UCONN and she is one of the steadiest and most committed people you will ever meet. I'm so glad that she is our student council secretary. She's so good at it! She cares not only for the health of the student council but the whole student body.

**IK:** As students are applying to Covenant to start classes this summer and fall semesters, what's one piece of advice you'd share with them? What advice would you give to new incoming students?

**JR:** The first thing would be: get to know the fac-

ulty. During my time in undergrad, I didn't talk to a single professor. However, at Covenant I have learnt that the faculty really care about the students. You don't have to have a perfectly formulated question to just book a time to speak with them. The best learning experiences have been in those office hours sessions with professors. I would also say get involved on campus with a student organisation/fellowship. It's a great way to get out of your comfort zone a little bit as well as being a way to build relationships with other students that you might not normally interact with. Additionally, don't feel the need to rush through seminary! There are things that will benefit you here if you can slow down enough to experience it. While I'm aware that not everyone is given the privilege to be able to slow down their pace through seminary like this, but if you can then I'd highly recommend it. Taking 11 credit hours a semester instead of 15 will allow you to really soak it up – and even add an independent study here and there. It'll expand your learning experience and preserve your sanity. Taking less credits per semester also will help give you more space to spend time with the Lord on a daily basis while also allowing you to give more time to service in your local church. Lastly, if you are an incoming student looking to joining a local church and complete an internship with them, I would highly recommend you look for a local church that would really benefit from your presence. There are a lot of churches that could really use a seminary student to come in and help lead liturgy, or preach here and there, or teach Sunday school every so often. They might not be the flashiest churches, but they need someone like you to step in and help serve.

**IK:** On the topic of service in the church, how has your time at Old Orchard Church been for you?

**JR:** Well, my time at Old Orchard was kind of interesting because I came in after Ron Lutjens had left. I joined the church in a time of transition and had the opportunity to be mentored by their interim pastor (Craig Doctor) for about a year to a year and a half. It was an awesome experience. He put me in positions to lead liturgy once a month and really helped me find opportunities to get experience in various aspects of ministry. I learned a lot under him. After about a year and a half, Ryan Sparks became the senior pastor of the church.

I've also been able to learn a lot under Ryan Sparks. Old Orchard has just been a dear church to me, and a sweet place for me to recover after a hard time in New England. It was also a joy to be able to use my gifts to serve there when they were going through a season of transition.

**IK:** Lastly, what is next for Jeb Ralson?

**JR:** Lord willing I will be starting a PhD in Historical Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Chicago, IL this year. The hope is to be able to serve in the church as a pastor-theologian/pastor-scholar. The hope for me is to end up in a post-Christian environment and serve in a parish type church. With that being said, I am open to going to various geographic contexts. Having a military background certainly helped with that. What is sure is that I want to be somewhere where there is a great need. My time in Connecticut was a helpful time of exposure to a post-Christian environment which has informed that desire.

**IK:** Thanks so much for taking the time to speak with me, and I'm sure all who read this interview will be blessed by your wise words!

**JR:** And thank you, it's been a pleasure! —

# Contributors

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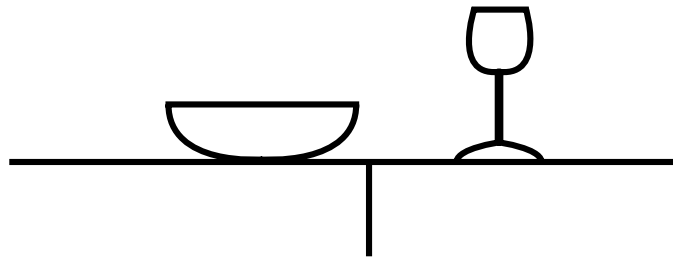
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*Thank you to each and every one of you who helped make this magazine possible!*



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.



*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.*

*Ecclesiastes 3:1 – 8*