

SEND

A COLLECTION OF ARTICLES
FOR THE GLORY OF GOD
AND FOR THE GOOD OF HIS
PEOPLE



JANUARY
2022

ISSUE
#1

SEND

JANUARY 2022

01

Adsum Try Ravenhill / Amber Theissen / Andrea Sanborn /
Wendy Willard / Kelly Ottaway / Daniel Seabaugh / Alistair
Chalmers / Timarie Friesen

- 
- 4** Editors Note - When Panic Strikes - *Adsum Try Ravenhill*
- 6** Honey - *Kelly Ottaway*
- 10** Into the Waves - *Andrea Sanborn*
- 14** Take Risks for Your Days are Numbered - *Daniel Seabaugh*
- 17** For Those Disheartened in Serving - *Amber Theissen*
- 20** 12 Daily Strategies to Focus on Truth - *Wendy Willard*
- 24** Why Read? - *Adsum Try Ravenhill*
- 28** How to Shout While Whispering - *Adsum Try Ravenhill*
- 31** “Pick up your suit, deny your hoodie and follow me”? - *Alistair Chalmers*
- 35** Bent - *Timarie Friesen*

SEND

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Editors Note

WHEN PANIC STRIKES

by Adsum Try Ravenhill

My father is an odd man. A kitchen fitter by trade, he's spent the whole of his working life working with his hands. Here's what makes him odd. He can't stop. When he arrives at a hotel room, a friend's house, or a room that contains anything which is even slightly broken, his Leatherman pops out and within the space of a few minutes, everything in the room is fixed. Memories of this natural propensity, to reset to his default settings no matter where he found himself, came back to me over the last two weeks while I edited this magazine. The first reason was that I'd had a severe panic attack, the worst I'd experienced in around half a decade. The second reason was the writers and the articles they'd entrusted to me.

The panic attack came after a particularly hard week, I'd been badly ill but still had a huge project to complete. In addition, I'd made several other commitments, all of which were vying for my attention. There was no specific instigating event, everything simply happened.

My heart raced, my breathing became hard to control and all of a sudden it began to feel like every surface had an equal gravitational pull. My wife, by my side, was trying to help, but because it's been a fair while since my last incident, she couldn't remember what to do.

Click.

Like my father, standing in a lousy hotel room, even in that state, I pulled out the mental leatherman which contained every tool I needed to get back to myself. I found the floor and grounded myself. Though I was shaking I didn't focus on that, I needed something to do with my hands so Anna ran to grab a spare keyboard switch I could click over and over and over. Finally, though sometime later, I began to recite prime numbers. I'd proven to myself what was real, I'd found a way to focus my body, and then my mind.

I've been in that situation many, many times before, and though it's been a while, having rehearsed these things, I was able to click back into fight mode. I knew what to do because I'd trained myself to do it.

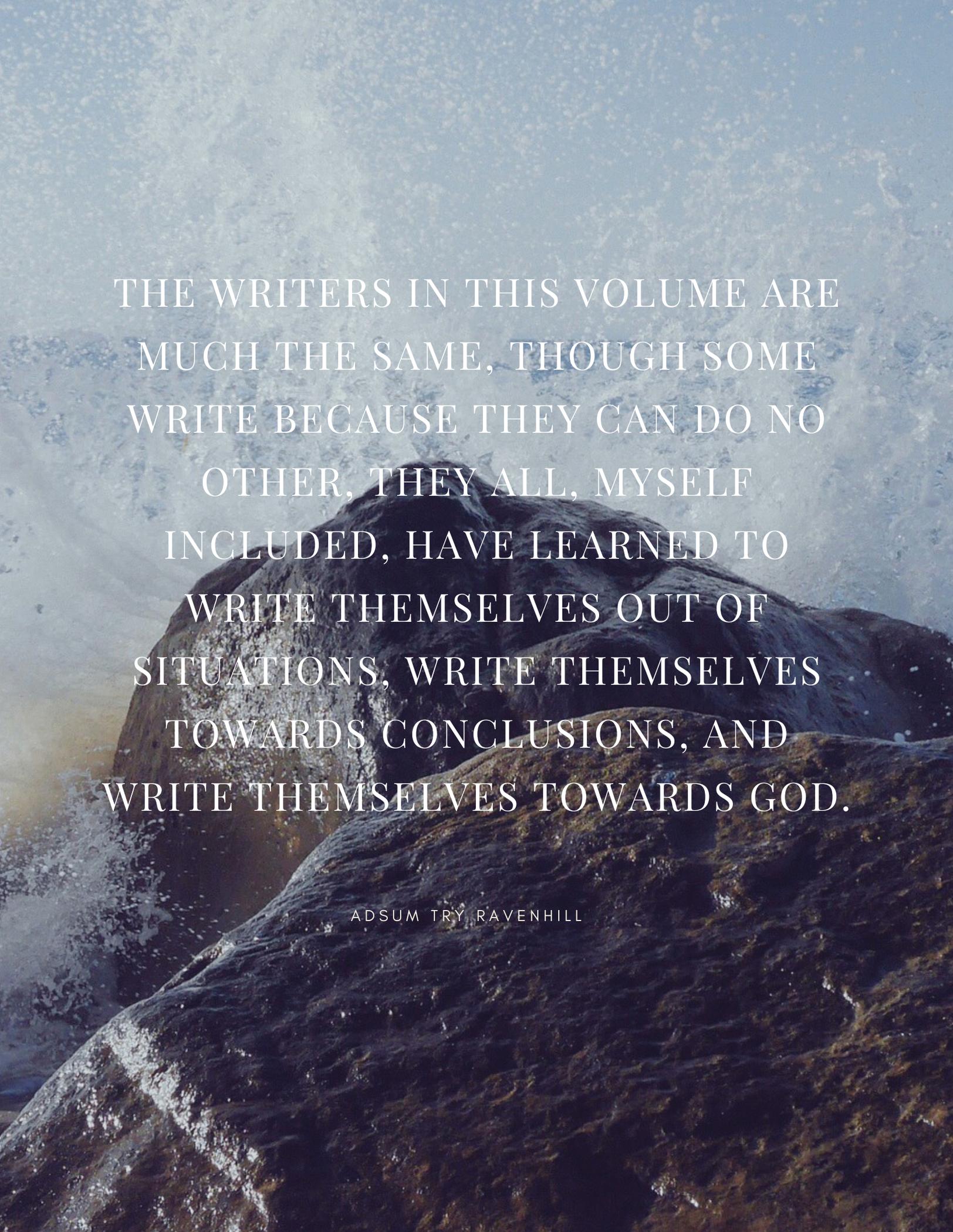
The writers in this volume are much the same, though some write because they can do no other, they all, myself included, have learned to write themselves out of situations, write themselves towards conclusions, and write themselves towards God.

All of us have places we write, newsletters, blogs, and we do so because God has given us a gift, but there's a very real sense of mission here too.

SEND exists to bring together writers who send, but who have also been sent. Writers who have been through hard times and decided to fight to write their way through, inviting others on that journey.

Within the pages of this magazine are many articles about water, or that reference the water. Water is necessary, water is dangerous, water is life-giving, water can kill. Water is water. We've sailed these waters and told the tale. We're still telling that tale.



The background of the image is a dramatic landscape featuring dark, jagged rock formations, possibly volcanic, under a cloudy, blue sky. The text is overlaid on this scene in a white, serif font.

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ADSUM TRY RAVENHILL

HONEY

by Kelly Ottaway

As the western world has become more conscious about healthy lifestyles, there's been a movement to replace refined sugar with natural sugars. Though not a calorie cutter, honey does provide more nutritional value than white sugar. As a hobby baker, my favourite application of sugar replacement is substituting honey for white sugar. It's a simple 1:1 ratio, and it still tastes delightfully sweet.

Psalm 19:7-11 describes God's law, or his word, as "sweeter than the drippings of honeycomb." And this description is echoed in Psalm 119, a psalm written all about God's Word. Psalm 119:103 says, "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!"

I don't know about you, but I feel some cognitive dissonance when I compare rules to something as delicious as honey. Can God's law really be sweeter than honeycomb?

As I pondered this, I landed on a few things we need to understand in order to truly echo the psalter. We need to know who God is, what is the intent of his law, and why honey? Nothing is an accident with God, so we know that the descriptor of sweetness like honey is intentional.

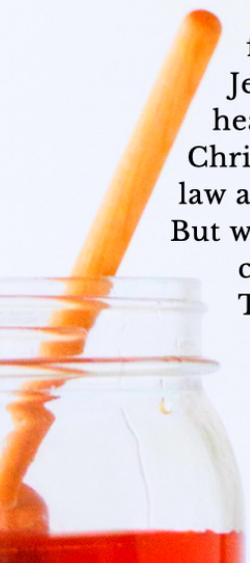
But first: Context (always!). Psalm 19 was written by David. In the first half of Psalm 19, David beautifully describes the revelation of God through creation. In the second half of the psalm, David turns to the special revelation of God's law. In his special revelation of himself, we learn about God's character and who he is. David proclaims that God's law revives the soul, makes wise the simple, rejoices the heart, enlightens the eyes, is righteous, endures forever, is a safeguard, is more desirable than gold, and is sweeter even than honeycomb. David failed miserably at keeping God's law, yet he is confident in all these claims about God's word.

Psalm 119 is written solely about God's law and how wonderful it is. While these psalms were focused on God's Law being the Torah (first five books of the OT), we can extend the term to include the whole counsel of Scripture (Luke 24:44).

So, who is this God that handed down the Law? God is the perfect, eternal creator of everything. He prepared the most beautiful garden for people to live in because he wanted to live in community with the most special objects of his creation. But the first humans chose to disobey God and with that choice, all were condemned to death and separation from God. Yet he promised to save us, restore the world, and make all things new (Gen. 3:15; Rev. 21:5). God desired to do whatever it took to bring His chosen people Israel and all nations back to him before we even desired reconciliation (Rom. 5:6-11).

Who God is informs the intent of his law. Paul says in Romans 7:11, "So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good." God gave us the law to help us live holy lives, acceptable and pleasing to Him because He wants us with Him. Yet, we could not keep the law, and instead, it convicted us of our sin. But God didn't leave us alone with a law we couldn't fulfil. The story gets so good here. We couldn't keep the law, so God rescued us by sending Jesus, his only son, to perfectly fulfil the law for us and make a way for us to live forever in heaven (Matt. 5:17; John 1:1-5). The law was and is a good thing because it paved the way for Christ to come and save us from our sins. We begin to see the richness and sweetness of God's law as it resulted in Christ fulfilling it for us.

But why honey? You know, I can use honey to make my young children eat almost anything. I can put it in plain yoghurt, in oatmeal, on fruit, and more. And they'll gobble it right up. They even asked me to put it on their eggs one time (gross, but it works). Honey is enticing, and it is a real problem-solver.



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When we look at ways “honey” is used in the Bible, one frequent experience comes to mind. When the Israelites were in captivity in Egypt, God promised to rescue them and take them to a land “flowing with milk and honey” (Ex. 3:8). Repeatedly, God describes the fulfilment of his promise to include a flourishing land, where honey is plentiful.

What was so wonderful about a land filled with honey? Perhaps because if the land was flowing with milk and honey, it also would have been abundant with animals that produced the milk and plants and bees that produce the honey. In this promise, we see a glimpse of the Garden, of the world in its original state. Flourishing, thriving, producing. We see the kindness of God in wanting his people to experience as much of the Garden experience as they could in a world tainted by sin.

Another way we see honey used is in the description of “manna,” the sustenance God provided for Israelites during their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness (Ex. 16:31). It doesn’t seem like an accident that the food he provided them with had a taste of what was to come in the promised land. This pleasing, fulfilling, and sustaining bread from heaven, a foreshadowing of the Promised Land, was also a foreshadowing of Christ—the true Bread of Life.

In Ezekiel, the prophet is told in a vision to eat a scroll—a word from God. And his description of it is “sweet as honey,” (Eze. 3:3). In Revelation John was commanded to eat a scroll and though it made his stomach bitter, it tasted sweet (Rev. 10:9-10).

Perhaps honey is a marker of God’s fulfilment of his promises, a symbol of his good word. Honey in Scripture contains a story. It’s a story of a God who promised good things to his people. And when they repeatedly failed, he still sustained them.

In his word, God promised a rescuer, a Messiah, eternal life, and all of that was fulfilled in Jesus. We can trust the words in God’s Word, after all, Jesus Himself is the Word (John 1:1).

So why is God’s word sweet to the taste, sweeter even than honey? Because God is trustworthy to follow through on his promises, and he promises that in striving to keep his word, we will be recipients of only good things. In his word we are refreshed, restored, rejuvenated, and refined. So receiving direction from God in his word is sweet. We will continue to fail often at keeping his word, but we will also continue to grow in sanctification as we keep trying and trusting.

Because he only wants good things for us, we can trust that it’s good and sweet to obey his word. Other pursuits may entice, but they will always prove to be sour and bitter.



One of my favourite hymns says this:

*"Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus,
Just to take Him at His word;
Just to rest upon His promise;
Just to know, Thus saith the Lord."*

Do you know why it's so sweet to obey God's law? It's because the law is God's word, which is fulfilled by Jesus Christ—the only one who sacrificed himself to save us from our sin. Jesus perfectly obeyed God's word, while living a human life on earth. And he obeyed it with joy, because of who the Father is. God's law is a promise fulfilled in Jesus Christ. God's word is good and perfect and sweeter than honey. Taste it today and see for yourself.

Kelly Ottaway is a wife and mother in southwestern Ontario and serves at her local church in various areas. Kelly practices as a Licensed Professional Counselor at a crisis pregnancy center in Ontario and a private practice in Jackson, Michigan. She writes for a Christian infertility organization—Waiting in Hope—as well as for her newsletter, Springs of Joy (kellyottaway.substack.com)

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KELLY OTTAWAY

INTO THE WAVES

Andrea Sanborn

I love the ocean. I love its vast, glittering expanse; the knowing that I stand on the edge of a continent, on the brink of a wilderness covered by the pulling, surging tide. I love the sharp, salty scent as it flows in and back, the soft hiss of waves leaving, depleted after their rush to conquer the shore. As children we raced the watery fingers over the sand or stood quiet as they swept over our feet, leaving us unbalanced on the hard knobs left beneath us in the undertow.

I live in lake country now, where the water is docile and to venture in doesn't require judging the power of the tidal forces threatening to pull you forever from shore. I love the gentle lake life, but sometimes I miss the wildness, the danger of a force that can steal my breath with its thunder. The lakes around me have been thoroughly mapped and explored. We know the depth, the underwater ridges, the beaver lodges and loon nests. But where the lake invites us, the ocean dares us. It is a power never fully quieted; to engage it always brings risk.

For those of us who take our Christian faith seriously, it feels like an ocean of change is sweeping over us, undermining the ground we stand on, leaving us uncomfortably balancing on the hard knobs of truths that look naive at best, and bigoted at worst, surrounded as we are by the powerful cultural tide.

All too frequently we are seen as an anachronism – and a hateful one, at that. Worse, we often bring on those accusations ourselves.



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We have watched some of our number be swept out to sea in their desire to fit in and follow the madding crowd as it gobbles up ever more land in its quest to claim the high ground – a place that moves daily, if not hourly.

It is tempting to shift our weight a little in an attempt to be more comfortable in the dominant culture. To build our house there, on the soft sands of acceptance. Since childhood, we have all struggled to fit in with the group holding power, whether that be the popular girls at the lunch table or the consensus at the board meeting. But when the storm comes, we will regret not building our lives on something more solid.

Popularity makes a poor life preserver.

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash. Matthew 7:24-27

Sometimes we go the other direction, retreating behind the affirming walls of our echo chambers as we peer with disgust on those clamoring outside. Instead of speaking the truth in love, we stack up peripheral issues like cordwood, lighting them with the kindling of our disdain. Then we warm ourselves by the fires of our self-righteousness.

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. James 3:9-10

Those who live by the sea are familiar with the rip tide. This is a strong current that drags you away and is impossible to escape. Your only hope for rescue lies in the lifeguard who is watching, and is strong enough to battle the waves to save you.

We have been rescued by One who is watching; One who gave His own life to save us from the deadly pull of the world. Now it is up to us to reach out and help others struggling in the churning waves.

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2022 presents us with a challenge. Will we capitulate to the forces of evil around us? Give in to those same forces within us? Or will we walk bravely into the surf to offer a hand to those sinking in the deep? The only way to disarm the powers of darkness is to love those caught in their undertow. It is far easier to criticize than to rescue. Which will it be for you this year? For me?

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.” – Jesus - Matthew 5:43-45

Andrea Sanborn You can find Andrea's writing on her blog, A View of the Lake (andreasanborn.com) where she posts twice a month about the breathtaking beauty of following God in a broken world.



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ANDREA SANBORN

TAKE RISKS FOR YOUR DAYS ARE NUMBERED

by Daniel Seabaugh

By and large, we live in a world that discourages risk-taking. Many of us, knowingly or unknowingly, have been conditioned to take the safe route through life's twists and turns. I sometimes wonder how many people have been dissuaded from doing risky, world-changing things simply because it wasn't "realistic" or in line with "the way the world works."

Not only have we been conditioned to avoid risk, many of us have bought into a narrative that promotes a one size fits all mentality to success. For instance, we're told if we want to have a successful career, we must train at the best universities. We're told if we want to live with financial security, we must invest while we're young and maximize our earning potential during our working years. We are sold youth at every turn through advertising and social media and then spend tons of money on anti-aging products to appear younger than we actually are.

Am I the only one, or does something about the success narrative seem off? Does anybody else feel like they're being lied to?

Maybe I'm being overly critical of the world's approach to life and success. After all, I believe education is a gift. My education is serving me well. I also think maximizing one's earning potential can allow for greater generosity, which is something Christians should take seriously.

Furthermore, when people care for their bodies, whether through exercise or anti-aging products, couldn't the case be made they are simply stewarding what God has placed in their care?

I'm not necessarily opposed to the success narrative. Some of it can be redemptive.

My real concern lies with fixating on the status-quo because it can be destructive to a person's God-given, God-glorifying mission in life.

It's not wise to avoid taking risks, especially kingdom risks, simply to maintain the success narrative. God has placed us on earth for a reason. We live where we live and during the time we live because God has stuff for us to do. Right now. In 2021.

It would be a regrettable thing to miss out on God's plan for our lives because we were more concerned about our own plan or the opinions of others.

Time is Ticking, Don't Waste It

One thing we often fail to consider is that we all have an expiration date. One day, likely sooner than we realize, our hearts will stop beating and we will gaze upon eternity. Regardless of how wealthy we are or how young we appear, death is coming for each and every one of us. Something beyond this world awaits even those with PhDs.

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The Bible says there is wisdom in learning to number our days (Psalm 90:12). After all, we are merely a mist that appears for a little while then vanishes (James 4:14). According to James, it's arrogant to assume we know what tomorrow will bring. We can't know. We should simply leave outcomes to God.

I remember reading a book in college called *Don't Waste Your Life*. It has had a lasting impact on me. The author is John Piper. If you're familiar with Piper, it won't surprise you that he wrote these words in the book, "It is better to lose your life than to waste it. If you live gladly to make others glad in God, your life will be hard, your risks will be high, and your joy will be full." He also says, "God calls us to pray and think and dream and plan and work not to be made much of, but to make much of him in every part of our lives." How's that for a calling? Instead of living as if our days have no end—pursuing our own glory without a passion for the supremacy of God—maybe it's time to take crazy risks for His glory. Instead of seeking comfort and avoiding pain, maybe the better way is to count it all loss and do something for God's kingdom. We will waste our life and lose it if we seek our own agendas through it. I believe taking risks glorifies God and will produce in us a joy unmatched by playing it safe.

God's Glory and Your Joy

Risk takes faith. For the Christian, the outcome of endeavours that require risk is entirely in God's hands. We can pursue giants because we know God has slayed them through His people before. When we have faith in God's goodness, when we have faith in His ability to accomplish difficult things, and we act out of such faith, God is glorified. What father doesn't find joy in seeing his children do scary things because they know dad is nearby?

When we take risks, particularly ones that advance the kingdom in some way, God is glorified; but we also experience joy. Have you ever done something you knew you were made for? Maybe it was having children or starting a business. Perhaps it was pursuing a creative outlet or serving overseas as a missionary. When we engage in activities that advance the kingdom of God, we will experience joy while glorifying our Creator. Things won't always be easy, but they will always be purposeful. We will not waste our lives.

For lots of Christians, it's time to give up the success narrative and take some risks. Remember, your days are numbered. Life is too short to play it safe.

Daniel Seabaugh lives in Cape Girardeau, MO with his wife, Rachel, and their six daughters. He's a graduate of College of the Ozarks and Denver Seminary. You can follow his blog at jesusmusings.com.

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DANIEL SEABAUGH

FOR THOSE DISHEARTENED IN SERVING

Amber Thiessen

It's a curious thing, telling your family you feel called to missions, that you've been accepted to join a church planting team in Africa. You're bursting with excitement and anticipation of what the Lord is doing, while your family, though incredibly supportive, radiates a sense of sorrow—the kind that's so proud of you, but sees what you're giving up, that agrees with God's call on your lives to go, but wishes for you to stay, that knows God's faithfulness, yet tingles with fear of the dangers. Weighing the pros and cons didn't cross our minds. The Lord had pressed on our hearts a strong nudge, had affirmed it through our church leaders, and opened a way to go. Like a Plinko chip, we dropped ourselves on the board, to keep following the path He laid before us.

As I look back on those days of preparing, I marvel at the trust we had in God's plan for us. Knowing things could (and would) become difficult didn't get in the way of obediently pursuing this path to cross-cultural ministry overseas. The conviction clung to us like a wet t-shirt and we just kept taking that next step. Ministry leaders often begin with momentum and excitement. The moment arrives when all you've been preparing for is right in front of you. You jump in with both feet, plunging into the waters of ministry, carefree and motivated. God told Abram to leave his country and he responded by packing up and going, travelling on the promise that God would bless him. He arrives in the land of Canaan and God appears to him, telling him this is the spot his descendants will live. *There's a sense of peace in the affirmation when you're standing on land he calls you to.* But, even in the place of promise, hardships come. A famine arrives and Abram has to move to Egypt to survive. Our calling to ministry, the journey to get there, watching God lead us, answer prayers, and provide for us along the way, gave us the courage to both begin and to keep going. When we first arrived on African soil, we felt like we were living a dream, everything new felt wonderful..

Then, it wasn't so wonderful.

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Learning language was hard. Living in the bush was challenging. Teammates had differing points of view. Malaria, rashes, digestive problems were relentless. Reality began to set in. Ministry isn't as easy as it sounds.

It's easy to become disheartened in our serving when we face seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Leaders become weary and exhausted amidst changes and forceful pushback. More than one are asking the question, "Why keep doing this?" Whether it's a volunteer or paid position, they question their calling and their ability to persevere, wondering if they can keep doing this. Hebrews 10:32-39 help us navigate the murky waters of discouragement, imploring us to turn our heads backwards, to "recall the former days" on how God brought us to where we are, how He called us, how He used others to affirm our calling and our joy-filled hearts to love others. We reflect on the journey we've travelled, recognizing the Lord's hand in all of it. Though that same joy may not be bubbling to the surface, it was there once and it can return again, "for you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised" (Heb 10:36). We keep going because people matter. Relationships are important. Because the gospel - by the grace of God - goes forth out of our faithful service.

We don't throw away our confidence, though we're weary, frustrated and spent because there is a heavenly treasure being stored up for us as we persevere, as our faith deepens and wafts like a pleasant aroma to those around us. Abram lived his nomadic life with many ups and downs before he saw the promise of God, and even then, he didn't get to see them all. As we encounter discouragement, wherever we are serving others, may we not be ones who shrink back but those who have faith and persevere.

Amber Theissen You can find Amber's writing on her blog, In The Vine (www.amberthiessen.com), where she posts articles, book reviews, and her free ebook, *Expect Great Things: 10 Days Praying For Those We've Sent*.



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Amber Theissen

12 DAILY STRATEGIES TO FOCUS ON TRUTH

by *Wendy Willard*

When our world darkens, as it sometimes does, fear and pain can feel overwhelming. In such times, we must make sure our perspective is aligned with the Light of the World (John 8:12). Make the strategies outlined here a part of your daily practice, to build your identity on the truth of Jesus Christ, instead of anything else.

1) ORIENT YOURSELF

Look around and notice
5 things you can see,
4 things you can feel,
3 things you can hear,
2 things you can smell,
and 1 thing you can taste.

Supporting Scripture: Deuteronomy 30:19; Isaiah 26:3; John 14:27, 16:33

2) RELAX YOUR BODY

Follow a progressive relaxation technique where you tighten and then relax each muscle group in succession, from feet to head, considering Psalm 46:10 along the way: “Be still and know that I am God.”

Supporting Scripture: Matthew 6:25-26; Romans 12:1; Psalm 46; 1 Cor. 6:19-20; Phil. 4:6, Col. 3:15

3) APPRECIATE CREATION

Go or look outside. Notice the biggest and smallest things around. Pay attention to the details of creation.

As you explore, practice deeply breathing in the truth of the Creator and breathing out the lies of the enemy.

Supporting Scripture: Genesis 1:27; Job 12:7-9; Ecclesiastes 3:11; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 11:3

4) PRACTICE GRATITUDE

As much as you can, tune out distractions, focus your thoughts on these words, and thank God for this moment. Then, identify five other things you can be grateful for. Write or draw them in a journal so you can remember God’s provision.

Supporting Scripture: Psalm 107:1, 118:24; Ephesians 1:16; Colossians 3:17; 1 Thes. 5:18; James 1:17

5) OFFER PRAISE

Play a worship song with the lyrics visible on screen. But don’t just watch—sing! Singing is referenced over 400 times in the Bible, with at least 50 of those being commands. It’s no wonder: singing helps regulate our breathing and worship lyrics help reorient our minds to the Father. Keep going until you’ve been singing for at least 15 minutes.

Wondering where to start? Try this playlist: tinyurl.com/strategyfive

Supporting Scripture: Hebrews 13:15; Psalm 69:30, 71:8, 100, 139:14; Ephesians 5:19

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6) QUENCH YOUR THIRST

First, drink a glass of water (at least four ounces). Drinking plenty of water each day has been shown to decrease anxiety and increase a sense of calm.

As you quench your physical thirst, read or listen to a Bible passage to quench your spiritual thirst. Reflect on what God is saying, then read/listen again. Write (or record yourself reading) all or part in a place you can refer to later. Talk with God about it. You might consider some of these

or check your favourite Bible app:
Psalm 23 Psalm 33
Psalm 63 Psalm 34:17-18
Proverbs 3:5-6 1 Peter 5:6-7
Matthew 11:28-30 John 8:1-38
Philippians 4:5-8 Ephesians 2:1-10

Supporting scripture: Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:18, 9:16; 2 Timothy 3:16, 4:2

7) ANCHOR YOUR BREATH.

Find a comfortable place to sit or lay. Breathe in deeply and hold, then breathe out slowly and hold, making each step last at three or four seconds. Say “In Christ I am” in your mind as you inhale and use words like these (all of which come from Scripture) to finish the statement on the exhale:

| | |
|----------|-----------|
| accepted | beautiful |
| blessed | brave |
| created | confident |
| content | enough |
| free | hopeful |
| loved | protected |
| purposed | redeemed |
| rescued | strong |
| talented | worthy |

Supporting scripture: Jeremiah 1:5; Galatians 2:20; Eph. 2:10; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 Peter 2:9

8) WALK IN LOVE

When you are physically able, take a walk (even if just around your room). As you walk, go through the alphabet to see who God brings to mind for each letter (such as: A for Adam, B for Beth, and so on). Pray for them. Maybe send them a message of encouragement, or ask how you can best pray.

Next, consider who God brings in your path today. Ask him to make you aware of ways to care for them. Is there someone who needs a hug or a listening ear? A hot meal or a warm bed? Some compassion or gratitude? A few strategies or ideas?

Supporting scripture: Matthew 5:43-48; John 13:34; Philippians 2:3-4; 1 Peter 4:8; 1 John 4:7-21

9) ADJUST PRIORITIES

Identify all the places where the world enters your mind. Social media? TV? Games? Music? News? Podcasts? Books? Certain relationships? Consider how much brings truth and how much spews lies you have to navigate. In which direction are the scales tipped? Take steps ensure more truth comes into your mind every day to counter the lies that inevitably creep in. If you have a smartphone: Adjust your settings to limit the amount of time spent in apps that don't prioritize God's truth. (Tips: iPhone or Android) If you frequently wake in the middle of the night, adjust your settings so the only app available then is one that speaks truth. (Need a Bible app? Consider these: Dwell, The Bible App, ESV Bible, The Bible Project App.)

Supporting scripture: Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 10:5; Philippians 4:8; 2 Timothy 1:7

SEND

10) RECEIVE FORGIVENESS

Acknowledge where you've sinned against God. Consider and confess what motivated you to this sin. Then, receive God's faithful forgiveness. (Remember, Jesus already paid the price for all of your sins, past, present, and future! Forgiveness is promised for those who follow Christ.) Avoid the temptation to think you can fix yourself. Rather, seek and rely on the Holy Spirit to equip you to turn away from sin.

Supporting scripture: Psalm 51; Luke 6:45; Acts 3:19-20; 2 Corinthians 7:10; 1 John 1:9

11) FORGIVE OTHERS

First, remember that forgiving those who harm you isn't possible until you are living in the light of God's forgiveness yourself. (Go back to "Receive forgiveness," if needed.)

Who do you need to forgive? Think about someone whose behavior you ruminate over, someone you've walked away from, or someone who brings up feelings of bitterness or irritation. Suppose they were standing in front of you, requesting you to release them from their debt. What conditions do you want to place on them before you forgive them?

Now consider standing in front of God requesting the same release from your own debt, only just before the judge finds you guilty Jesus takes your place and accepts your debt on himself... forgiving you completely. Ask God to help you offer this same forgiveness to the person(s) you identified.*

Supporting scripture: Matt. 5:23-24, 6:14-15, 18:21-22; 2 Cor. 5:19-20; Eph. 4:32; Heb. 12:14

**As noted by Christian counselor Dan Allender, "Forgiveness involves a heart that cancels the debt but does not lend new money until repentance occurs." The other person's repentance and reconciliation with God is on them, although we can, and should, pray for that.*

12) TRUST GOD

Imagine holding a backpack of all your fears. How big does the backpack need to be to hold them? How much does it weigh? Now imagine the God of the universe holding your entire backpack with just a pinky finger (because he's that big). He holds it gently, compassionately, to signify how much he cares. Tell God you want him to carry your burdens and fears because you know he works all things for your good and his glory. Then, decide today to practice believing and trusting God more.

Supporting scripture: Psalm 18:30; Prov. 3:5-6; John 11:40; Romans 8:28; 1 John 4:18

Wendy Willard has spent the past two decades deep in the trenches of child welfare, initially as a mom to two daughters, then also as a foster parent and adoption advocate across three US states and Nicaragua. Wendy is a team-building consultant serving mission-driven organizations and families throughout the US. Her previous literary works include glimpses into her design and technical background (including *HTML: A Beginner's Guide* and *Web Design: A Beginner's Guide*, both from McGraw-Hill) as well as her passion for serving families, such as *Adopted for Daily Life: A Devotional for Adopting Moms* and pieces included in *Daily Guideposts*, *Faith, Hope, & Connection: A 30-Day Devotional for Adoptive and Foster Parents*, *Mom's Devotional Bible* (Zondervan), and *(in)courage*. You can follow her on Instagram.

When you are physically able, take a walk (*even if just around your room*). As you walk, go through the alphabet to see who God brings to mind for each letter (*such as: A for Adam, B for Beth, and so on*). Pray for them. Maybe send them a message of encouragement, or ask how you can best pray.

WENDY WILLARD

WHY READ?

by Adsum Try Ravenhill

In September last year, shortly after starting this newsletter, I wrote a piece called, “Why do I Write?” in which I discussed my particular concerns which lead me to the writing desk, namely; to love God and love people. In the past couple of weeks, we released the first two episodes of the Consider the Ravens Podcast. Part of the tagline reads, we “believe that the main way that discipleship has been bolstered throughout Church History has been through literature. Whether fiction or non-fiction, short epistles to huge four-volume tomes of systematic theology, we’ll be looking at it all.” I’m helping to launch a magazine, I’m writing an eBook and last year I (unsuccessfully) sent off my first book proposal.

Here’s the issue though.

I can be completely sure about why I write, but why on earth should anyone read it? In point of fact, the question goes yet further.

Why Read... at all?

This question struck me the other day whilst writing the article “Approaching Waterfalls” during which time I realised I had no idea how to write a book review. I don’t mean to say that I will stop writing book reviews or that I don’t have the capacity to, but that the form my reviews take seems to be far different from the ones I read online and in magazines or newspapers. I downloaded three magazines, The London Review of Books, The New York Review of Books, and The NYT Book Review and read through some of the entries and found that the general jist went something like this:

- Tell half a story, get the reader hooked so they want to hear more
- Critique elements of the book so the reader views you as nuanced and unbiased, but choose elements that will not insult the author or their capabilities
- Write as though the reader really should be interested in this book and if they’re not, they’re on the outside



SEND

To that last point, one review read, “American readers have long been enthralled by Dante’s name and his work...” AKA. If you’re an American and a reader, you really should hold this opinion too.

I’m currently listening (yes, listening) to the book *Anna Karenina* by Tolstoy, in which we’re introduced to a character named Stepan Arkadyevich. We’re told that every morning, “*Stepan Arkadyevitch took in and read a liberal paper, not an extreme one, but one advocating the views held by the majority. And in spite of the fact that science, art, and politics had no special interest for him, he firmly held those views on all these subjects which were held by the majority and by his paper, and he only changed them when the majority changed them—or, more strictly speaking, he did not change them, but they imperceptibly changed of themselves within him.*” It seems to me that at some point book reviews became tailored to Stepan, telling him what to read, that he should read them, and that everyone else thinks the same.

This is, of course, ridiculous.

The truth of the matter is that though Dante (*who I am sure most American Readers, and indeed Earthlings in general, have not read*) was no doubt a wonderful writer and that I do believe I would like to read his work one day, I was convinced not by people telling me that I should read Dante, but by a recent podcast guest telling me why I should read his work. I was thoroughly enthralled by his account of the effect Dante had wrought upon his imagination and was excited to one day have a similar experience. I’ve been subject on many an occasion to the common phrase, “What? you’ve never read [insert name here]” meant, of course, to shame me into believing that I am somehow lesser for having not read, for example, the Hungry Caterpillar.

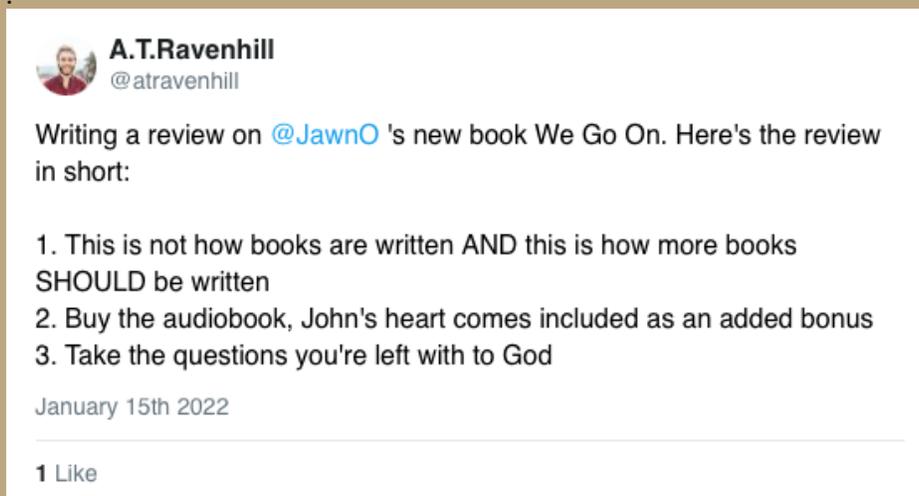
I don’t mean to knock anyone for writing reviews like this, or of course, picking up books because of reviews like this, I’m sure there are many nuances I am missing in the form. I cannot, however, conform to the format.

My reviews generally take this shape:

- What is different about this book? How does this book bring ideas, arguments, stories, subjects to the fore in a way which is either unique or distinct?
- Why I loved/didn’t love the book and why I either commend it to you or don’t commend it to you.
- How do I recommend you read this book? The reality is that we live in a world that is increasingly illiterate and I cannot assume, we cannot assume, that recommending a book will automatically give readers all the tools they require to absorb and/or implement the lessons and stories found within.

SEND

Take for example this short version of the review I've also included in this magazine, it's my initial outline shall we say:



I'll go into more detail in my review, but here's how that fits within the format:

1. What is different about this book?

a. It's written in a far more personal and personable way than 99% of the books I've read, at least non-fiction books, it takes a difficult subject, takes the reader by the hand, and talks them through it. It's not preachy, it's not overly self-deprecating, it's just a man under God, talking to a reader. I loved it.

2. Why I loved the book and why I commend it to you.

a. I actually don't recommend you read this book, I recommend that you listen to it. I bought this book on Audible and I don't regret it. John reads the book himself and John has a voice that cannot disguise or hide emotion. The best example of this is at the end of the book, I'm fairly certain that John closed the recording, turned off the mic, and cried. John doesn't just know what he's talking about John feels what he's talking about.

3. How do I recommend you read this book?

a. There are prayers laced through the seams of this book, this isn't just so John can pray for you, but so that you can pray, and be given an example of how to pray in certain circumstances. We learn to pray primarily by hearing others do so. John recommends saying grace AFTER meals are finished, I recommend this is a practice you extend to all forms of consumption, whether it be reading, social media, arguments, television (those still exist right?) bring it all before the Lord.

Conclusion

Why then... should you read? That's the question we started with, I've used the medium of books, or a book, to explain why you might read something specific, but what about more broadly. Why read newsletters, novels, papers?

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There's something different about long-form content which we are sorely missing in our discourse today, we're far more likely to trust a headline, an Instagram story, or a tweet to give us all the information we need on a subject even though we know deep down that there must be so much more to learn on a particular issue. One way you can learn to discern that is by reading longer-form content like newsletters, articles, and yes even books. When I write on a particular subject with a 1500-word limit, I find that it's almost impossible to get even a fraction of what I want to say, or could say, into that space. As readers, you'll become even more aware of that as you go through, for instance, more academic works like the one I recommended earlier this week. That is a book that has entailed thousands of hours of research and writing, has been peer-reviewed and edited. On any given page you'll find footnotes galore, even the shortest of points has been informed by so many other works, is critical of so many other works, is arguing for/against so many other works that it would be impossible to take the time to read them all yourself. You may, still, disagree with the author by the end of the work.

Why then trust four lines on an infographic with no footnotes on an Instagram post of dubious convictions? I'm not saying they are necessarily wrong, but that reading more prolifically, or at least more broadly, can help us not to assume they aren't wrong.

I love reading, it slows me down, it helps me to step off of the bullet train that is 21st-century life and ground myself for a bit. It's a reminder that not everything needs to be quick, or concise, and that brevity rarely evokes clarity (better said, saying something at length is often far better than saying something quickly, we've all been burned by being misunderstood because of a tweet, a message we sent off too quickly, not to mention the dreaded mistress that is autocorrect.)

Read critically. Ask the page what its argument is and why it believes what it believes. Don't let it off the hook because it's on a computer screen or a piece of paper. We're happy to throw a book in a rucksack and let get beaten within an inch of its life, why not do the same with its contents? Make notes, take time to dwell, pray through the things that bother you, provoke you, or delight you. Get to know the world, get to know God. Read with a smile. Read with a scowl. Read with your heart and with your mind. Read knowing the Holy Spirit is within you. I mean to say read with your whole self, not just your eyes.

Why read?

Why not?

HOW TO SHOUT WHILE WHISPERING

*A Review of We Go On by John Onwuchekwa
by Adsum Try Ravenhill*

Lean in

John Onwuchekwa is no ordinary writer. I imagine him as a man who, upon taking up painting for the first time, somehow stumbled upon an entirely novel way of doing so and has continued to be the leader in that style ever since. This is not, in and of itself, a compliment, after all, one could invent a new way of painting that has only eluded being discovered before because of how truly awful it is.

Such is not the case with John.

In the previous article, I recommended that you read with your whole self, what makes John unique is that his style consists entirely of writing with his whole self. It begins with his heart, which had been broken not too long ago and is still, it seems, in the process of repair. He then forgoes the use of his hands, which could lead to mechanical writing, but instead opts to use his voice. I will go on to explain why you should listen to the book but this is not what I mean. I try as best as I can to write how I speak, to be conversational and to welcome you to join in, John doesn't try to do this, he just does it. Then, his identity as a son of the Most High takes centre stage and won't budge. This is all of immense importance not simply because this is a wonderfully written book, but because of the subject at hand.

Suffering.

You don't want a stiff, callous tome to help you through hard times, but someone who has been there themselves and wants to be in your situation with you.

In summary, he encourages the reader to do the following:

Learn to lean into God at all times, in all circumstances, in all places, no matter what the cost. Don't lean into yourself, you'll just fall over.

Listen in

Don't read this book, listen to it, or read and listen to it. Most of the time when I see that an author has read their own book I roll my eyes, I almost didn't buy this book for that very reason. Narrators are artists in their own right, most of the time it's far better to let them do the work. This is not one of those times. John has a voice that cannot disguise or hide emotion. The best example of this is at the end of the book, I'm fairly certain that John closed the recording, turned off the mic, and cried. John doesn't just know what he's talking about John feels what he's talking about. Go and listen.

SEND

Let's Pray

"Take a moment to pray with me"

"Let's pray"

"Why don't you pause and pray?"

"Read through the passage and pray"

If this book has a chorus it is this:

Pray

Pray

Pray

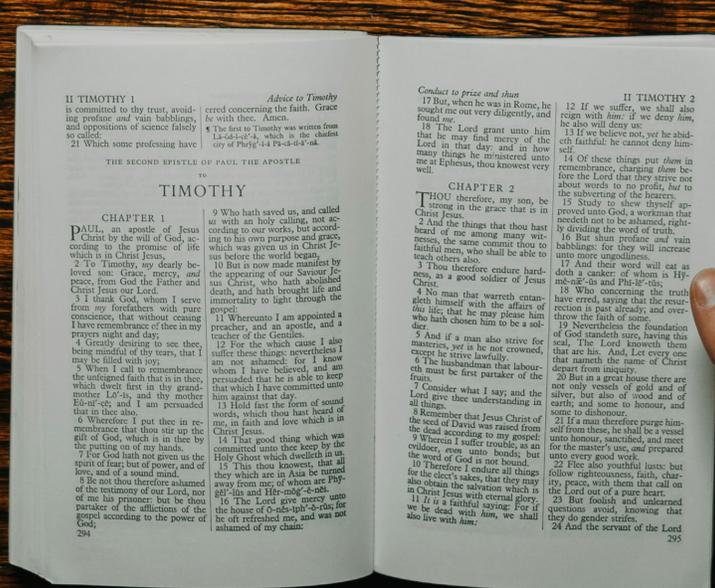
Pray again.

The book will likely leave you with more questions than when you began, but the questions will be better ones. John doesn't have all the answers, no one does. The truth is that we can't know all that will happen or all that should happen, we can ask though. Take the questions you have straight to God. Learn to do that well. I'm certainly going to listen to this book again, I pray that it will help me pray more, and I pray that it would do the same for you.

Grace and Peace,

Adsum Try Ravenhill

Adsum Ravenhill is married to Anna and together they are passionate about seeing young men and women discipled within the context of the local church. You can find Adsum through his writing at The Raven's Writing Desk and alongside Anna as the co-host of the Consider the Ravens Podcast.



Read critically. Ask the page what its argument is and why it believes what it believes. Don't let it off the hook because it's on a computer screen or a piece of paper. We're happy to throw a book in a rucksack and let get beaten within an inch of its life, why not do the same with its contents?

ADSUM TRY RAVENHILL

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“PICK UP YOUR SUIT, DENY YOUR HOODIE AND FOLLOW ME”?

by Alistair Chalmers

Can a church have such a thing as an unbiblical culture? It sure can! Look around the world, both past and present, and you'll find churches whose doors are only opened to you if you're a certain colour, social class, background or if you're sticking to a certain dress code. Sure, it isn't true of every middle class church, but there can be an unbiblical culture that is alive in middle-class churches.

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I live in Edinburgh, and there are a good number of middle and upper-class people here and there are many good, middle-class churches too. Being middle class isn't a sin or a bad thing at all, but there can be unhelpful and unbiblical cultures that creep into such churches. Many of those kinds of churches have food banks and are involved in ministries like feeding the homeless, etc. But the question I always find myself asking is, how welcome would those 'clients' be in a Sunday service? I should say that I serve in a middle-class church myself who I love dearly and who serves Jesus wholeheartedly. Obviously, not every middle-class church is like this and I'm not writing this with one specific church in mind.

I wouldn't say I'm middle class, but there some people probably would say that I am. I didn't grow up with money, my family aren't well off. When growing up we moved to Romania to work with the homeless population there, so I have seen what it means to be poor. Poverty can be hidden, even in the most unlikely of places. There are plenty of churches in affluent areas, which I guess is understandable considering that is where the money was in years gone by that enabled churches to be built or bought and staff to be paid.

But what can an unbiblical culture look like in a middle-class church?

Suspicion of the 'different'

It is more evident in middle-class churches, than in say for example a working-class church, when someone 'different' comes in. You might see shuffling of seats as people move away from the suspicious person who doesn't seem to quite fit the 'Sunday best' vibe. One of the common misconceptions among the middle class is that the working class are not intelligent, which simply isn't true. When I was at bible college and we went evangelising I had more intellectually stimulating conversations around faith, the world and current events with people from the scheme (housing estate) close by than I did with students in the city centre.

Churches might be suspicious of 'different people' because they are unpredictable. They maybe don't know the rhythm of stand to sing, sit to pray and shake the minister's hand at the door. But our churches should not be sausage factories of one type of person. Arguably, if our churches are all of the same race, same class, same social and economical background, are we really being the diverse church that the Bible calls us to be? I don't think we are.

Dress code

Another unbiblical point of culture in middle-class churches could be the unspoken rules around the dress code. A good number of years ago my older brother and I were kicked out of a church because of the way we were dressed, "how dare you wear shorts to church?!?!?"

I don't recall the verse in the Bible where Jesus says "Pick up your suit, deny your hoodie and follow me". Whilst there are people who will feel comfortable wearing a suit to church, and if they do great, people shouldn't be judged if they don't fit that picture.

Lingo

This is probably one of the biggest 'turn offs' that I've come across in conversations with people, they say "I don't fit in because I don't speak the Christian lingo that everyone uses". This also applies to people who aren't Christian, and leads to people feeling embarrassed to speak, embarrassed to pray and unable to chip into conversations or Bible studies because of the language/jargon barrier.

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This doesn't mean that we need to dumb things down, but really how many people actually understand the jargon, or is it just part of the Christian Sunday vocabulary that they've heard their whole lives. The language we use is important, If you wouldn't use it in the pub, don't use it in the pulpit or the pew.

Our language, especially in prayer, is not to be flowery and lofty but it is to be real and what we're actually thinking. For some that will mean that they use big theological words but we also need to know that for others that could mean they pray as they would talk with a mate on the street. We also need to make sure that the language we use is understandable for people, so as not to unintentionally shut them out and make them feel unwelcome. Hand new Christians a Bible not a 2022 volume of a Christian dictionary.

Conformity

One of the most unbiblical things that I've seen is when a middle-class church expect a new Christian to become one of them. The person is expected to leave their entire background behind and become like every other member in the church, to adopt the dress code and to walk and talk like the rest of the church. This promotes the idea that the person's background is wrong and sinful. Sure, there may be things and maybe even people, that they need to be cautious of for a while depending on their background and the temptation to revert to their pre-Christ lives. But the answer to that is a work of the Spirit not a call to conform to the middle-class cultural norm in a church. By God's grace people are saved and then called to go to the people around them and share the gospel, that means they still need to have people in their lives.

We should be excited to walk into a church and see someone in a 3-piece suit belting out 'Amazing Grace' next to someone in shorts and a hoodie. We should be overjoyed to hear different languages spoken at church, to see different cultures from around the world meeting to worship God together. The culture of every church should be one that points people to Jesus, not to a set of unwritten rules that must be followed to keep up with the culture of a certain standard of social or economic class.

Alistair Chalmers is the Assistant Pastor of Bruntsfield Church Edinburgh, a blogger, broken man but made whole through Christ. You can find him on Twitter (@ASChalmers) or on his blog (<https://achalmersblog.com>)

I don't recall the verse in the Bible where Jesus says "Pick up your suit, deny your hoodie and follow me"... How would people in your church react if someone who is visibly going through a rough time rocks up to your church, will they talk about the person over lunch in a bewildered way or will they be intentional to go and say hello and have a chat?

ALISTAIR CHALMERS

BENT

BY TIMARIE FRIESEN

Timarie Friesen writes fiction and blogs (<https://www.timariefriesen.com>) mostly short stories for a local audience. She lives in Iowa and serves with her husband in youth and missions ministries

I wrote the poem as I thought
The words should sound to those who sought
Depth, spiritual maturity,
Adjectives wrought with purity.
But as I looked at all the lines
I wondered, which of these should rhyme?
And do the syllables contain
Enough to give myself a name?
As writer, one whose wisdom shows
So eloquently, yes, she knows.

Then the pen dimmed its ink,
Suspended letters failed to link.
Another cursive loop, a smear;
Glory positioned far not near.
I reached next for a clean, new page,
Pencil sharp, eraser engaged.
Fresh words arranged, glossy and keen,
Readers applaud, let me be seen.
But when the pencil tip then bent.
It taunted, "You're not innocent."

Paper crumpled, I'd never write
Dejected like a windless kite.
In front of me, the farce, the lie,
That in my power, I could try
To earn greatness and carve a path,
When I'm deserving of God's wrath.
But no, despair can't hem, can't win,
For Jesus broke the power of sin.
In repentance, I turned from pride
And wrote this time with grace in mind.

IN REPENTANCE
I TURNED FROM
PRIDE
AND WROTE THIS
TIME WITH
GRACE IN MIND

Timarie Friesen