

Spring 2021 / Presbyterian Church of Victoria



FELLOW WORKERS

IF IT WALKS LIKE
A CHURCH AND
QUACKS LIKE A
CHURCH, IS IT A
CHURCH?



Fellow Workers

Quarterly Magazine of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria.

State News Committee: Stephen McDonald (Convenor), Phil Betts, Jo Craig, Luke Isham & Tony Zirngast.

Designed, sub-edited and distributed by Virtual Church Assist.

Address changes: <https://pcv.org.au/committees/fellow-workers/>

Submissions, 'Ministry Moves' and Letters to the Editor via Virtual Church Assist: info@virtualchurchassist.com

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FELLOW WORKERS

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MINISTRY MOVES

After 14 years at Frankston Presbyterian Church, Rev.

Bill Medley has taken up the role of Assistant to the Minister at Essendon-Clifton Hill, assisting Rev. Chris Duke, commencing on Sunday 12 September 2021.



EDITORIAL: EMBRACING THE GOSPEL

If it looks like a duck and walks like a duck, it is a duck. But what can you see about a church that shows it really is a church?

I was struck by a recent news story entitled, 'I Think I've Accidentally Joined a Cult' (ABC News 7/9/21). The tactics sounded strangely familiar: a group who approached strangers asking for their views on life and religion which turned into a friendly chat, then a catch up for coffee, and an invitation to join a Bible study. But even though they looked like sheep, this group turned out to be wolves (Matthew 7:15-16).

Simply claiming to be a church doesn't make an organisation a church. And as much as we'd like to think that having a particular denominational name on the sign outside or on the website, belonging to a particular organisation doesn't make a church a real church.

What does? Jesus says 'You will recognize them by their fruits' (Matthew 7:16). Some characteristics (or marks) are necessary.

WORSHIP

Our assessment of a church usually starts with how it worships. It's probably the most obvious expression of a church's life and doctrine. The temptation is to look for what we prefer in worship. "Is it a contemporary church?" "Is the worship traditional?"

As always, we need to remember what Jesus tells us: "But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and

truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:23-24) A real church determines how it worships based on who God is and what He says.

SACRAMENTS

A true church celebrates both of the sacraments Jesus instituted (Matthew 28:16-20, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34), and only those. We are not free to ignore baptism or the Lord's Supper, to create alternatives to them or to add our own ceremonies, traditions and practices.

WORD

In identifying those two marks, we are working our way back to the foundational mark: the faithful teaching and receiving of the word of God.

It is the Gospel that creates the church (Acts 2:40-41, Ezekiel 37:4-10)—it is impossible to have a church without the word of God. As Presbyterians, we can be thankful to God that the faithful proclamation of His word has been a mark of this denomination for many years—but that isn't the whole story.

When Jesus told the Parable of the Sower, He said, 'Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?' (Mark 4:13). At the heart of that parable is how we receive the Word of God (Mark 4:15, 16, 18, 20).

Not only must the trustworthy message be preached, it must be received: "And we also thank God con-

tinually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.’ (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

Dead orthodoxy should be a contradiction, but it’s a sad reality in many churches: We can say we believe the truth but not live it (James 1:22). So, reading the doctrinal statement on a church’s website doesn’t tell us everything we need to know. We have to ask whether the word is at work in the church, starting with us. Are we faithfully receiving it as the word of God?

NO DECOYS OR LAME DUCKS

The fact is, no church has this 100% right. Even where there is great care to order the church’s gathered life and worship according to the Bible, there will always be blind spots. Local churches always include people who are unconverted. And all people in all churches have not reached perfection yet.

As the Westminster Confession of Faith reminds us, “This catholic Church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible. And particular churches, which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them.” (WCF 25.4)

We should not be too surprised or disappointed to find that even ‘good’ and ‘Biblical’ churches are not as pure as we might have thought. That’s important when we’re considering what church to join, and also when the elders of a church assess its health.

Jesus requires discernment (Matthew 7:6), but not judgmentalism (Matthew 7:1-5). To find ways that the church needs to change, we only have to examine our own hearts in light of God’s word (as Groucho Marx once quipped, “I refuse to join any club that would have me as a member”).

But in that assessment, God gives us every reason for confidence because of what He is doing in us. As Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, ‘And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.’ (Philippians 1:6).

That’s the wonderful thing about Jesus’ church: It’s not for the righteous, but for sinners (Mark 2:17).

It’s easy to say that, and much harder to live it. Is there a gap between the doctrine we believe and the doctrine we practice? The Gospel gap is where we say, ‘Saved by faith’, but live ‘Saved by faithfulness’. But churches that embrace the Gospel are made up of people like us whose confidence is not in ourselves to complete the good work in us, but in God.

That’s not an invitation to be lazy or to give up growing in holiness. But it does allow us to be open and honest, and to ask for help from God and one another. That’s only possible when our confidence is not in ourselves but in Jesus.

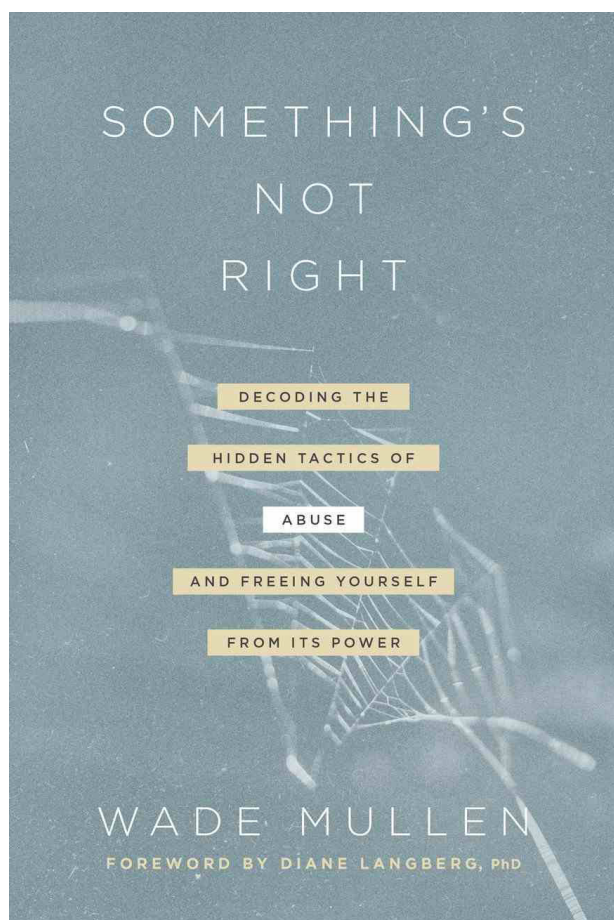
Fellow Workers, are we embracing the Gospel?

Stephen McDonald is Convener of the State News Committee

REVIEW:

SOMETHING'S NOT RIGHT

REVIEWED BY DAVID OULD



Something's Not Right: Decoding the Hidden Tactics of Abuse and Freeing Yourself from its Power

By Wade Mullen

Tyndale Momentum (2020).

ISBN 9781496444707

Wade Mullen's *Something's Not Right* is just the right book at just the right time for a broader evangelical church reeling with numerous revelations of abusive behaviour by those who should be caring for and shepherding the flock.

Mullen, himself a pastor, writes mostly about Christian environments but doesn't assume his readers need to be in such contexts – indeed one of the strengths of this book is that the principles that he shows us are quite obviously universal. Which is, perhaps, why it is all the more shocking to reflect upon them being used in Christian circles.

Mullen's method is to “decode the hidden tactics of abuse” so that the reader might “free yourself from its power” and the 9 chapters are successful in achieving their purpose. Mullen takes us through not only the different forms of abuse itself but then also (and this may be very relevant for our current circumstances) the various strategies employed by both abusers and those who to respond to allegations.

Each chapter ends with a helpful summary page that gathers together the key issues to allow for easy revision and absorption and I found it immensely useful to return to them as I progressed through the book to help me understand the overall trajectory of Mullen's argument.

And that argument is simple. Abuse almost always comes along with a system that contrives to prevent that abuse being properly dealt with, especially when the abuser is in what Mullen describes as a

“keystone” role. Chapter 1 sets out the basics of this dynamic. Chapter 2 then looks at “charms”, the various means that abusers use to groom their victims. Chapter 3 looks more deeply at the ways that an abuser will deconstruct their victim’s sense of self with chapter 4 the complementary examination of deconstruction of the external world including support from others. Chapter 5 then looks at the struggle, both internal and imposed by the abuser, to allow the victim to properly address the abuse.

The remaining chapters then turn to how abusers and their protectors respond to allegations. Chapter 6, “On the Defense” lays out the various personal methods used. Chapters 7 & 8 then turn to “Concessions” and “Demonstrations” and help the reader identify those methods used by abusers and their protectors to respond; methods that look like they’re positive movements but are actually simply more attempts to cover-up the seriousness of what is happening.

Chapter 9 closes with a simple question “What Now?” But by this stage the reader is clear, perhaps clearer than they’ve ever been before, about what the next steps should be.

Something’s Not Right is a must-read. It’s a must-read for those who have exactly that thought, that “something’s not right” about the situation they’re in and which they’re watching. But it’s also a must-read for the wider evangelical constituency as we get to grips with the frequency of allegations that we’re hearing concerning abuse by our very own leaders. And it’s especially a must-read for our leaders, for those who are in every danger of enabling and protecting abuse by simply not being self-aware enough of the traps that they’re falling into.

This book review was first published at davidould.net and is reprinted by permission. The review copy of Something’s Not Right was provided by The Wandering Bookseller.

David Ould is Senior Associate Minister at St John’s Anglican Cathedral, Parramatta

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SUSTAINED — ON THE ROAD 2021

MEREDITH ANGEL

“Have you heard about ‘Sustained’ in June?” a friend asked me at another Women’s conference earlier this year. “No” I replied, already considering how ‘spiritually fat’ I might get by going to another conference instead of applying what I’d learned. “Jan Martin’s speaking, it’s at NGPC (your old church), there will be useful electives for women’s ministry” she proceeded. My ears pricked.

A month later, I rang an experienced ESL worker to extract her wisdom. She asked the same question. “Have you heard of WMV On The Road? I’ll be running an elective which goes into detail on your questions”, she informed me. My decision was made!

I gained so much from that last conference, but I needed more of God’s word, more wisdom, more direction! Because our church had already agreed to widely promote only one women’s conference a year, I informally invited a few and prayed that God would bring those he wanted. He answered by stirring up a new friend who wanted to challenge herself by going to her first conference and another friend in paid ministry.

I’m not exaggerating—stepping into that building was a mini taste of heaven with the warm welcome, many familiar faces for the two of us and many new friendly faces for my friend. We sang praise to our Saviour as one. There were no impossible high notes to be matched—just an honest and identifiable introduction, “I struggle with glory seeking but let’s turn our hearts now to the one who deserves it all, All Glory be to Christ.”

The ministry spots showed how God is growing his Kingdom. If you’re confused by the countless committees within the Presbyterian church, Ros and Jenny blew our preconceived idea of PWMU out of the water. The courageous Ben Johnson also informed the room full of women about the necessity, value and recent development of tailored ministry to women through the WMV Committee.

If anyone was skeptical about the need for women’s ministry at this point, I’m sure they would have changed their minds when Jan Martin preached from 2 Peter 1. She helped us see the enormous privilege we have in obtaining faith of equal standing with the Apostle Peter, made possible through the righteousness of Christ. God’s power equips us for all godliness through knowledge of Him. Instead of making the all too familiar excuses like “it’ll be easier to delve into my Bible and pray deeply when the kids are older or once I get through this crazy season”, she urged us from verses 5-7 to make every effort to supplement our faith with virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly affection and love. Today.

Why? To stop us from being ineffective, so that we bear much fruit. How? Stop pretending we’re better than we are and invite a trustworthy friend in to pray with us as we fight embarrassing sin. Even more, be aware of our tendency to forget God’s truth and fight that with regular time in God’s word, meditating, memorising and praying it into our lives.

Now I’m a bit of a foodie and the lunch spread was diverse and delicious. But topping that were the honest chats over lunch where we could hear of new and old friends’ joys and struggles, speak God’s word into each other’s lives and pray.

Three electives were available after lunch which addressed specific needs for all three of us...

“I attended ‘Steady in the Storm’ and found it to be a great privilege to sit under the teaching of Sarah Weber once again. Sarah led us straight to the Bible where we explored passages on trials and suffering. These passages demonstrated how the Word of God speaks into any preconceived idea we may have and how Jesus is our source of hope. I found this faithful application uplifting, comforting and encouraging, not only for myself, but in the way that I can also apply this when caring for others. In general, the day was refreshing, encouraging and all because it was centred on God’s word. Thank you WMV!”

“My first conference and I was pleasantly surprised. Everyone was lovely and welcoming. The venue and food was fantastic. What I enjoyed most was the content of which Jan spoke on, 2 Peter 1. Her presentation was both biblical and applicable. The Parenting Workshop helped me see the differences between self-centred parenting and God-centred parenting, the importance of investing in our own relationship with God for our children’s benefit, strengthening our children’s relationship with God by praying, Bible reading, memorising together and the necessity of praying for our children’s salvation, help in our weakness and to fight the lie of being too busy.”

And through attending the “Communicating Cross-culturally” workshop, Ros Brown drew our attention to God’s desire for all nations to worship Jesus his Son, our Saviour, made known throughout scripture. We were encouraged to view our Western selves as servants, as we grow cross-cultural relationships; to be open, accepting, teachable, seeking to understand and patiently building trust with people different to us, yet made in God’s image. Her material gave great excitement about the opportunities to participate in the Great Commission, even while our borders remain predominantly closed.

So was it worth going to two women’s conference in one school term? Yes. While it’s important we don’t get puffed up with knowledge, as 2 Peter 1 points out—we have been saved to make every effort to keep growing in Christ, bearing fruit in this world until Jesus returns. What better way to get us back on track and accelerate this than with a day at a WMV conference?!

Meredith Angel attends Ebenezer Presbyterian Church in Ballarat

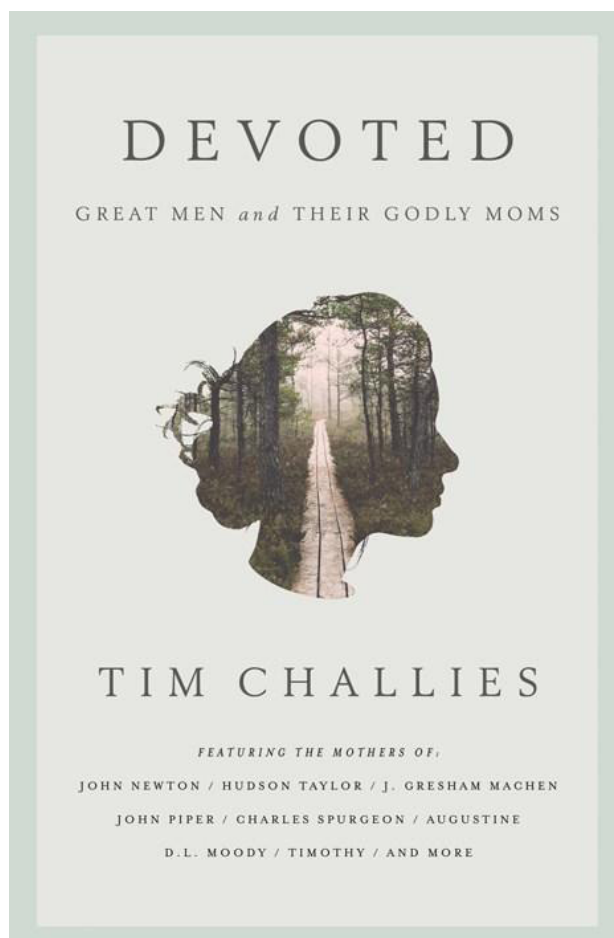


WMV On The Road in Shepparton has moved online and you’re welcome to join in by registering at wmv.org.au

REVIEW:

DEVOTED: GREAT MEN AND THEIR GODLY MOMS

REVIEWED BY FLEUR LETCHER



Devoted: Great Men and Their Godly Moms
By Tim Challies
Cruciform Press (2018)
ISBN: 9781941114643

‘Behind every great man there’s a great woman. Sometimes that great woman is not his wife, but his mother.’

There are many hats that women wear as mothers: mentor, coach, trainer, teacher, physician, counsellor, taxi driver. But what is our most important role? In *Devoted*, Tim Challies reminds us that our greatest and most important duty as mothers is to be spiritual influencers of our children. Challies sketches out of the lives of eleven godly mothers who had a profound influence on their sons, who then went on to greatly impact the world. He urges us not to get side-tracked by worldly things but to focus our work as mothers on things that have lifelong and eternal consequences: a commitment to nurturing our own faith and spiritual life and teaching and training children to know God.

All mothers are in different situations: some have loving husbands and others are unsupported; some are widows or single parents; some are rich and others are poor; some have great learning and others feel ordinary; some have obvious, up-front gifts while others have quieter, less-noticeable gifts; some have dutiful children and others have wayward ones. *Devoted* gives us examples of each to remind us that we can spiritually influence our children in whatever life circumstances we are in, with God’s strength.

It was clear from the examples that each mother played an integral part in the spiritual formation of her son. Some, like Minnie Machen, had great academic strengths and played active roles in training their children in theology. John Gresham Machan, a theological giant instrumental in countering theological liberalism, said that Minnie counselled him with the Word of God and he called her, 'the wisest and best human being I ever knew.'

Other women might have classed themselves as 'ordinary,' yet they had extraordinary influence. Famous pastor, author and speaker John Piper said of his mother Ruth that she was 'not very much of a theologian'; she did not read any book except for the Bible, nor did she quote anything except Proverbs. Yet her influence on Piper was profound and he concluded that, 'She stamped me more than anybody in the world—there's just no doubt about it.'

Impoverished Betsy Moody, mother of famous evangelist D.L. Moody, single-handedly raised nine children, using only a Bible, a catechism, and a small devotional. Yet Moody saw her as the epitome of the Proverbs 31 woman and said, 'She was true as sunlight; I never knew that woman to deceive me.'

Famous abolitionist preacher and former slave trader, John Newton, had a mother called Elizabeth who was sick much of her life and died aged twenty-seven. She only had seven years with Newton to instruct him in the things of God, but she was faithful in that duty and what she taught him never left him. 'The spiritual lessons the boy had learned at his mother's knees were never forgotten.'

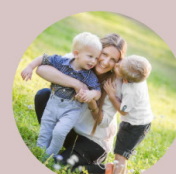
Devoted is an easy read and there are links to other biographical works if you want to delve more deeply into the lives of those mentioned. At the end of each chapter is 'a mother's reflection' and a list of helpful self-analysis questions that could be used individually or in a group.

Devoted is a must-read for every Christian mother. I found it a timely exhortation to continue to take motherhood seriously and not to neglect the opportunities I have to spiritually influence my children. There is great encouragement here for every mother to persevere in the things which have eternal value.

Fleur Letcher attends Croydon Presbyterian Church



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#thisismotherhood



“I CAN’T STOP THINKING ABOUT WA...”

JOEL OTTEN

“I just can’t stop thinking about WA.” Those were the words I said to Steph in our many discussions leading up to my final year at PTC. Our college mission was sent to Mandurah in 2016 and then Fremantle in 2017. Yet, it wasn’t the beautiful beaches, stunning scenery and the relaxed pace of life that put WA in the forefront of my mind. It was an informal talk from an Albany elder. Chris Woonings talked about travelling 100s of kilometres every Sunday to preach and lead services in towns that had no churches. He would begin driving at 5am, preach to a group at 8am, drive another couple of hours to preach somewhere at 11, fellowship with some for lunch, back on the road for another few hours for an evening service at 5pm and then home by 10. That was his Sunday. It almost sounded like I was back in class with Rowland Ward talking about John Wesley and his Methodist circuit preachers. Chris basically said to us, “Guys, would you maybe consider WA as a place where you would come and serve Christ through serving His people?”

To cut a long story short, that’s why Steph and I fronted up to the exit committee saying, “We believe God is calling us to WA.” Due to helpful reconnaissance on the Fremantle 2017 trip, Mandurah was the most likely place that could support a minister. It was vacant and though not a full charge, it had the most potential for growth. To put it in Victorian terms, Mandurah is like the Geelong of WA. Though

nowhere as big as Geelong, Mandurah is a city in its own right. It is one of the fastest growing areas in WA with the population expected to reach 130,000 by 2030 (currently around 90,000). Due to cheap house prices, a 1-hour commute to Perth by train and family-friendly infrastructure in a beach location, there’s a lot to like about our city. What they don’t tell you on the brochure, however, is our high level of unemployment, homelessness and substance abuse.

Back to the exit committee. The exit committee graciously accepted our request and approved us being sent to WA. By God’s grace and His providence, Steph and I were appointed by the Presbytery of WA (PWA) to Mandurah. Due to the fact that Mandurah Presbyterian Church was not able to afford a full-time minister, the PWA ordained me and appointed me to Mandurah for 3 years, with the guarantee of financial support from the presbytery.

When Steph and I began at MPC two and a half years ago, there were about 20 in the congregation. Though we were small in number, I was struck by their warmth, love for Christ and spiritual maturity. They surrounded me as a young, inexperienced minister with love, support and encouragement. Yet, we all knew the challenges in front of us. Apart from one family, the congregation were mostly made up of the grey heads of proverbial wisdom. After a couple of Sundays, Steph and I looked at each other saying,

“Where will growth come from?” As a church and privately, we prayed. God answered more than we could ask for or imagine. We now have between 5-7 families each week and consistently around 16 kids. Currently, our congregation is made up of 40-50 people each week. How has this happened? I can’t claim any method. We didn’t do anything particularly different. As a church, we can only praise God for the work He has done in our midst. Due to our encouraging growth and our better financial position, the presbytery moved to initiate the call process which subsequently led to my induction in July.

Though we rejoice in God’s goodness toward us, the blessings attended by the proclamation of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit conforming us more into the Son’s image, we have significant challenges ahead of us at a local and state level. For us at MPC, our biggest obstacle is the lack of a building. We meet in an excellent senior’s center/community hall with wonderful views of the Mandurah estuary. Yet, we cannot use it for midweek ministries and it doesn’t have facilities for Sunday School or a cry room.

Perhaps the biggest challenges and concerns come at a state level, however. At a national level, a church planting task force was established to tackle the challenging situation in SA a number of years ago. Though we’re not in the same position as the PCSA, we’re approaching it. We have 10 churches. By God’s grace that is miraculous considering that after union we were left with one minister and a handful of congregations. Of particular concern, however, is our inability to resource ministers. Stuart Bonnington exited to a postcode in WA back in the 80’s. I exited to Mandurah in 2019. If you do the math, that means we will not expect another exit student until nearly 2060. Considering that over the next 10 years most of our ministers will retire, it’s hard to see who will continue the work. On top of this, our congregations are largely dwindling in size and coming under financial pressure. It’s also interesting to note that our brothers and sisters in the Christian Reformed Church are under similar



strain. Two CRC churches in WA—one that has over 200 members—simply cannot source pastors. At the current rate in WA, I envision standing up in the GAA in 2030 saying that we face the very real danger of losing a PCA witness in WA. I’m not trying to be a dooms-day prophet. I’m certainly not questioning the faithful and diligent service of our WA church. I don’t want to discount God’s providence or His intervention. I do think it’s important to be honest where we’re at as a church in WA.

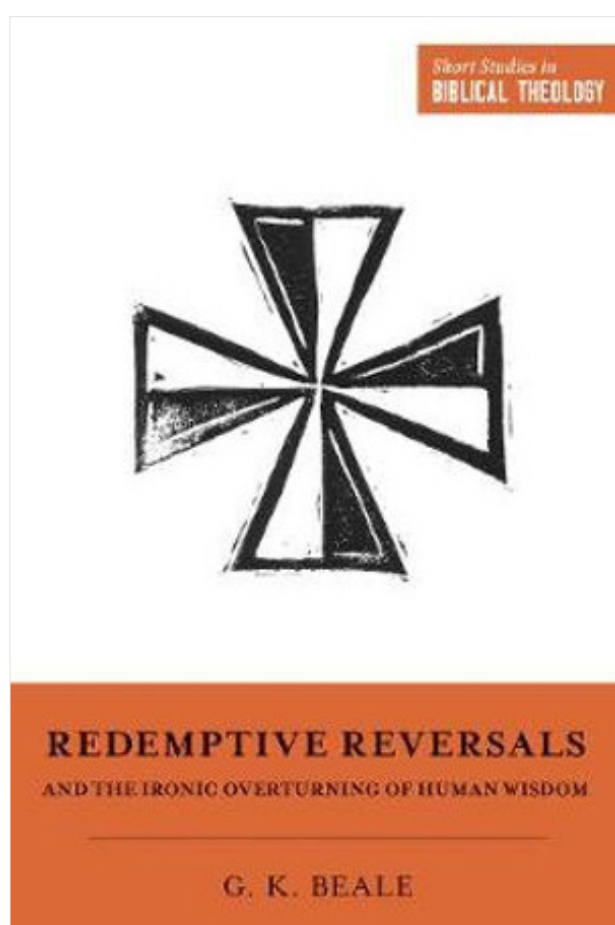
So, maybe I should finish this article where I started—I *can’t stop thinking about WA*. Could I ask you to start thinking about WA? Would you consider praying for us? I would also humbly ask that the wider Presbyterian church perhaps consider what further things could be done to support our little church in WA. We praise God particularly for the wonderful relationship we have with the PCV. This played a major part in my appointment in WA. However, there is much more to be done. So, again, I ask, will you start thinking about WA?

Joel Otten is the minister of Mandurah Presbyterian Church

REVIEW:

REDEMPTIVE REVERSALS AND THE IRONIC OVERTURNING OF HUMAN WISDOM

REVIEWED BY BRUCE RONALDS



Redemptive Reversals and the Ironic Overturning of Human Wisdom
By G. K. Beale
Crossway (2019)
ISBN: 9781433563287

What is Biblical theology? In a nutshell, it is to see the whole Bible as a unified story culminating in Jesus Christ. This book does this very well and Greg Beale demonstrates this in the light of ironies he highlights throughout the Bible. Who is Greg Beale? He is a scholar who has written various comprehensive commentaries, but this book is not one of those. In this book, he doesn't get too deep and what I like about him is he is eminently practical. This is not a difficult read.

What is irony? Beale's definition is this: "we can define irony generally as doing or saying of something that implies its opposite. What is done and said is the reverse of what at first appears to be the case". He goes on to say: "God frequently deals with humanity in an ironic way . . . irony is one of the major thematic threads tying together the whole of Scripture. God repeatedly drives events of history in the reverse direction from which they first appear to be moving". He says Proverbs 16:25 sums it up. "There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end is the way of death".

Beale covers two types of what he calls retributive irony. The first is that God judges people by their own sin. The examples he gives are Haman and Mordecai in the book of Esther, also Pharaoh of Egypt who claimed deity. There is an insightful explanation regarding Pharaoh's hardness of heart in light of the Egyptian beliefs on the judgement after death. There are Daniel's accusers who were thrown into the lion's den themselves, suffering the fate meant for Daniel. Beale says this type of judgment is

applicable to nations (eg Babylon) and individuals and he gives practical advice for Christians who can avoid this ironic pitfall by clinging to God's Word by faith and daily prayer of confession. Romans 12:2 is a key text "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..."

Secondly, in retributive irony, Beale says people resemble idols they worship. We become what we worship. To explain this type of irony, Beale opens up that difficult passage in Isaiah 6:9-13. This passage highlights the principle that what you revere, you resemble for ruin or restoration. Why did God command Isaiah to make the people blind through his preaching? In the end, God gave them what they wanted in their idolatry. Like their idols, they couldn't see or hear. The application of this is profound. Take this quote with an eternal perspective on the day of judgement. "You didn't want to spend your life in fellowship with me and my people on this earth. All right, I will give you what you wanted on this earth for eternity – separation from God". Beale gives clear applications in this passage in Isaiah for us as God's people. What Isaiah revered he revered for his restoration. What do we resemble for our restoration? (see 2 Cor. 3:18). We all imitate something.

A large part of the book relates to redemptive irony which is he says is the flipside of the retributive irony above. "The faithful who try to pursue godliness and justice seem only to be cursed in this life". He takes a good look at the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden. "The fall . . . ironically prophesied how the disobedience condemnation and death set in motion by the first Adam would be reversed into obedience justification and life through the work of the last Adam".

The cross-work of Jesus brought about this amazing reversal. He provides enlightening insights into Psalm 8 and Daniel 7 relating to Jesus's approach to enthronement through suffering. Towards the end of the book, he relates this to the irony of Christ's end-time kingdom, a kingdom not recognised by the world.

Our experience is similar to our Lord's in respect to suffering. The irony is that we find our greatest strength in our profound weakness. He gives practical suggestions as to how we can understand this in our own life. He goes on to talk about unseen realities, how they contradict superficial appearances. He uses Abraham, Moses, and Daniel as examples and others in Hebrews 11. In these examples, there are two categories of ironic redemption that he calls 'natural providence' and 'supernatural providence'.

Beale, we find in this book, is a very lucid scholar. He also engages with other scholars to make his point. Many things could be said about this book. I have omitted some explanations for you to explore when you read the book! This includes his explanation of Revelation 13, the beasts, and the number 666 he discusses in his conclusion. He leaves much food for thought to ponder regarding our own lives. I think a big thing from this book is the coming to grips with the importance of believing God's Word in all circumstances. This can mean believing the opposite of what seems to face us. What are our issues presently? What ironies are being played out in our lives? What kind of suffering are we experiencing that God will turn around for good? The devil is defeated. A final quote: "the very way by which the devil designed to defeat Christ was the very way which the devil himself was defeated".

Bruce Ronalds attends Warragul Presbyterian Church

ADVANCE CHURCH PLANTING CONFERENCE

RICHARD WILSON

9/11 AND GOSPEL GROWTH

In 1990, just 1% of New Yorkers attended an evangelical church. Then September 11 hit and many in New York began to rethink their lives. By 2011, 3% of New Yorkers were attending an evangelical church and by 2016 it was 5%. 40% of New York's Evangelical churches were planted after 9/11 and for one two-month period in 2009 a new church was planted every single week according to a recent podcast by the Gospel Coalition.

We often think of New York as a very secular city—and it is—and yet by God's grace the gospel is growing there. We often think that Melbourne is a very secular city as well and the growth in the no religion category in the census figures bears that out.

However, when I began doorknocking in Mernda and Doreen to establish Valley Presbyterian Church, I was constantly surprised at how positive people received me at the door. The overwhelming majority told me they thought that Christianity was a good thing, and they welcomed a new church in the community, but they just thought it was not for them personally. However, a significant minority told me that it was for them and some of them joined our new church.



BEYOND THE PANDEMIC

Lord-willing, by the end of this year the worst of the pandemic will be over and the doors to Australia will be reopened. I expect that we will see a huge surge of new immigrants wanting to settle in Australia. I think we will also see a resurgence in Australians looking for meaning in life that is beyond the material world which just hasn't delivered for them over the last two years.

It is a good time to be planning a new generation of churches. We need them in the many Greenfield suburbs, we need them even more in regenerating brownfields suburbs and there are regional cities that need new churches as well.

Advance Church Planting is a conference for all those who want to see new churches planted across the state of Victoria.

It is for those who want to lead a church plant, for those who want to be part of a church plant core team, it is for those who want to pray for and support the planting of the new generation of churches across our state and nation.

Keynote speakers will be David Jones, who has been involved in church planting in Hobart, and Derek Hannah from Geneva Push. We will also hear presentations from Dr Murray Capill, Adam Ch'ng, Richard Wilson, Aaron Boyd, & Russell Grinter.

Breakout rooms will provide space to talk through the next steps for those wanting to lead a plant, be part of a team, get assessed as a planter or for those wanting to know more about the whole project.

If you or your Christians friends are excited by the possibilities, please register for this online conference to be held on Friday evening 19 & Saturday morning 20 November on Zoom.

Register at: <https://www.trybooking.com/BUHRO>

Richard Wilson is the pastor of Valley Presbyterian Church.



PRAY THE LORD OF THE HARVEST



Alan & Faye Canavan, serving with APWM and Wycliffe for over 35 years

Last year, as the world went into lockdown, and human plans began to unravel, Australian mission agencies wondered how the pandemic would affect cross-cultural mission around the world. Would those ready to go ever get to the field? Would some come home, never to return? Would churches struggle to raise up new mission candidates in the face of such uncertainty? What was God doing here?

We've been observing a downward trend, especially over the last couple of years, in the number of missionaries in the APWM family. Is it COVID, or something else? Is it more, or less, than in the past? We did some numbercrunching to find some answers.

We learned that, over the last seven years, 30% of missionaries who had ended their service had done so within five years of going out. This isn't as high as the figure often quoted from *Too Valuable to Lose*, a book published by the World Evangelical Fellowship two decades ago. But still, it represents more than 20 families. On the other hand, APWM has 13 missionaries who have been on the field for more than 20 years, and six of them for more than 35 years! And they are still serving, most of them in Bible translation and Bible language recording.

Over that seven years, the number of missionaries 'coming home' has gone up and down, with no

clear trend. Anecdotally, the pandemic has been just one factor for people returning home in the last two years. Schooling for children, political unrest in certain countries, the need to care for ageing parents, and personal health issues are among the many reasons that missionaries have returned home in slightly higher numbers than previous years.

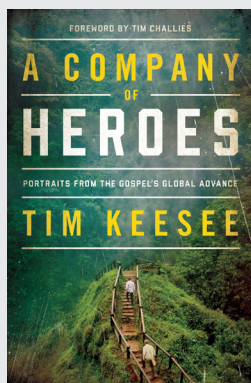
The trend that seems more closely correlated with the decrease in missionary numbers is the decrease in the number of people coming forward to partner with APWM and other agencies. The reasons for this are not entirely clear, but there's a renewed conversation in mission circles about how to mobilise for mission in the 21st century so that the gospel continues to go out around the world.

Recently, The Gospel Coalition published a great article¹ about mobilising for mission when we can't travel. The article reminds us that Great Commission work is for all believers, and it always involves cross-cultural sacrifice. "The bottleneck is not with God, government, or restrictions. The problem might be squarely on us for failing to think outside the box. Thinking outside the box should lead us back to the Bible." Even if we can't travel, we can pray. We can give. We can welcome. We can mobilise, transforming the hearts of others who may one day go. The article links to a free book (in pdf) with 101 ideas to help you do these things.

Pray with us that the Lord of the harvest will send out more workers, for the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. (Matthew 9:37-38)

¹ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/mobilizing-missions-cannot-travel>

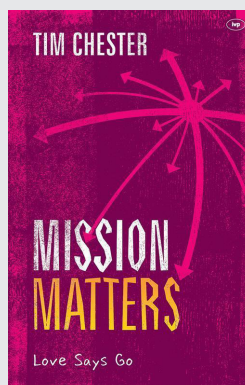
RECOMMENDED BOOKS ON MISSION



A COMPANY OF HEROES: PORTRAITS FROM THE GOSPEL'S GLOBAL ADVANCE

TIM KEESEE

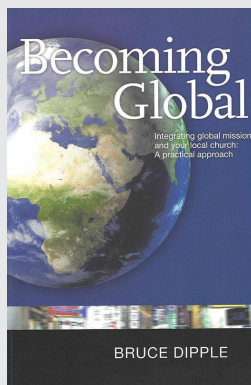
Well written, easy to read with extremely encouraging accounts of God's work from a bigger picture perspective. One of the best books in recent years!



MISSION MATTERS: LOVE SAYS GO

TIM CHESTER

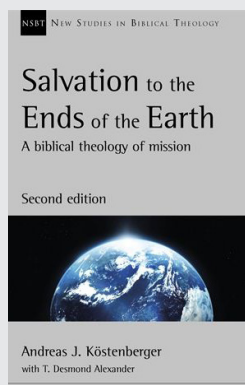
A practical book surveying the Bible's teaching on mission from Genesis to Revelation. See the Bible's bigger picture for global mission.



BECOMING GLOBAL: INTEGRATING GLOBAL MISSION AND YOUR LOCAL CHURCH: A PRACTICAL APPROACH

BRUCE DIPPLE

A terrific handbook on how to help your congregation think through how to integrate global mission into its ministry.



SALVATION TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH (2ND EDITION)

ANDREAS KOSTENBERGER
& T.D. ALEXANDER

Starts with a brief survey on the Old Testament and then develops into a more in-depth look at the New Testament's teaching on global mission.

KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH GLOBAL MISSION

At APWM we continue to be encouraged by the service of our missionaries. If you would like to know more about the ministry of our missionaries and the countries in which they serve there are two ways you can be better informed.

APWM PARTNERSHIP NEWS

APWM National is now sending out a weekly newsletter via email. If you'd like to receive this newsletter then please sign up here: <https://www.apwm.org.au/resources/newsletter/>

PRAYER UPDATE

We produce a bi-monthly prayer update with prayer-points for each day for our missionaries. To sign up, send an email to office@apwm.org.au and provide the name of your church and contact details (phone number or email address) for your minister.

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