



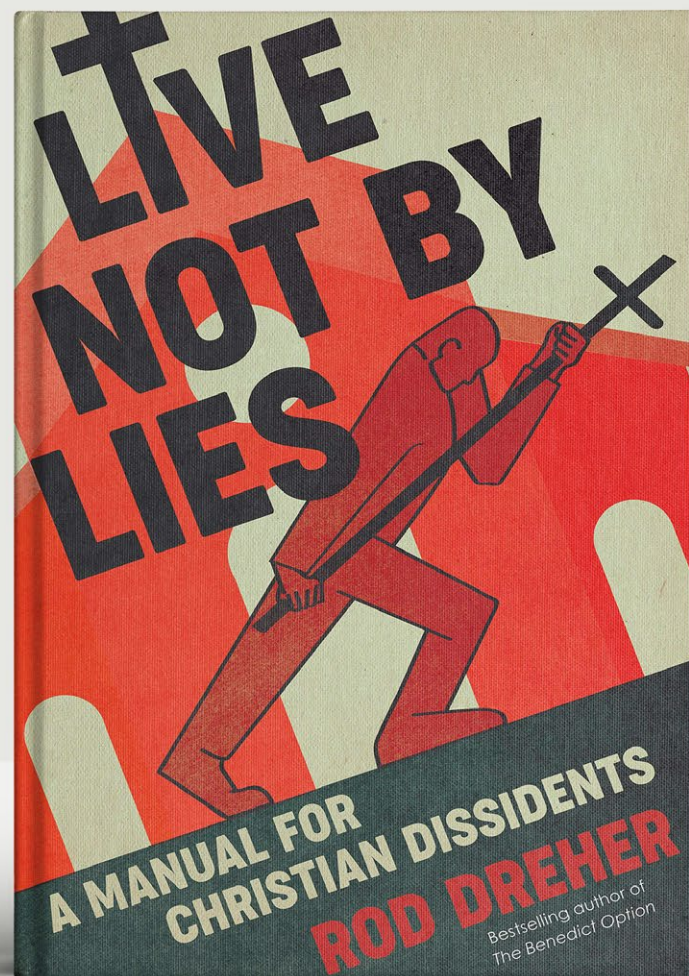
Beverly Heights
Presbyterian
Church

scattered seeds.

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2021





A recommendation by
**PASTOR NATE DEVLIN,
ART FLICKINGER & JEN TAN**

Over the years, Bill Mehafeey has served our congregation by serving its pastors, as he has taken upon himself the quiet responsibility of passing on helpful resources and information.

When I became Senior Pastor at the end of 2018, Bill approached me and offered the same service he'd extended to Rick for most of his career.

"I'd like to email you occasional items, Nate, that you might find interesting. No need to reply. If you find them helpful, great. If not, just disregard them."

I told Bill I'd be happy to hear from him, and soon thereafter the emails arrived in my inbox. Most of Bill's recommendations have been very interesting but early this spring he sent the best one yet. He suggested I look into Rod Dreher's new book, *Live Not By Lies*.

I had enjoyed Mr. Dreher's earlier work, *The Benedict Option*, so I decided to download this latest work on audiobook and started listening. I was immediately captivated by what he was writing. In fact, I was so impressed that after finishing the audiobook, I bought a hard copy and started reading it, too!

I'm very grateful to Bill for his service to our church and to me as he sifts through the stones to find and then recommend the gems.

The book is tremendous for many reasons, but I want to share just three for why it should make your reading list this summer.

First, Mr. Dreher offers a brief but compelling history lesson that Christians are in desperate need of learning.

Live Not By Lies is the author's ministry to the church by drawing our attention to the ever increasing encroachment of what he calls "soft totalitarianism."

He does an excellent job of defining soft totalitarianism, what it looks like in our country and its implications for the church. But he also helps the reader by tracing its history back to the hard totalitarianism of the Soviet Union and communist oppression.

Having grown up in the 1980s, the history of totalitarianism was something I was tangentially aware of, but it remained largely an abstraction; a distant and therefore benign historical artifact.

Mr. Dreher humanizes the history of totalitarianism by sharing the stories of the people of God who lived through its evil and resisted it.

After reading the author, I now see that totalitarianism was not just a political ideology but a corrupt, destabilizing and dehumanizing vision that threatened not only freedom but the gospel of

Jesus Christ and those who lived by its truth. It is a gripping history and one worthy of our attention.

Second, the book not only discerns the problems that are emerging under soft totalitarianism but offers strategies for how the church can resist its threats.

The book is dedicated to the memory of Father Tomislav Kolakovic, a Catholic priest. In 1943, he fled fascism in his native Croatia and settled in Czechoslovakia.

The priest knew that Soviet totalitarianism and the lies of communism would eventually make their way to Czechoslovakia. He also knew the people were not ready for the persecution that would follow.



Father Kolakovic began a campaign to prepare the churches by calling the people to a total life commitment to Christ that would enable them to withstand the coming trial. He also stressed that living to Christ meant living within the truth.

To hold fast to the truth, he taught that the church must: “See, Judge, Act.” To **see** meant to be awake to realities around you. **Judge** was a command to discern soberly the meaning of those realities in light of what a Christian knows to be true, especially from the teachings of the Christian faith. After you reach a conclusion, then you are to **act** to resist evil.

Father Kolakovic’s instruction had an astoundingly positive effect upon the church. To know just how much, I recommend you read the book.

Lastly, Mr. Dreher’s book inspires both courage and compassion.

The author interviews a number of communist dissidents whose survival stories are a witness to the tragedy of suffering but also to the power and beauty of faith.

Mr. Dreher takes considerable time to share the story of Baptist Pastor Yuri Sipko, whose challenge to the church I shared a number of weeks ago in a sermon.

He also retells the story of Alexandr Solzhenitsyn and the impact his moral vision had on the Soviet Union. Both stories are inspiring.

While Mr. Dreher is an accessible writer, *Live Not By Lies* is not an “easy, breezy” summer read. However, I can think of few books that are as prescient, instructive, timely and worthy of your attention as this one.

I hope you get a copy and find it as rewarding as I did. Thanks again, Bill!

Pastor Nate Devlin

In this riveting read, the author draws parallels between the ideological oppression that began with the “Red Terror” of the Bolsheviks in 1918 and today’s “soft totalitarianism,” which he defines as the rise of social-justice ideology along with the widespread use of voluntary surveillance technology.

At the same time, Mr. Dreher informs the reader that while the old totalitarianism “conquered societies through fear of pain, the new one will conquer primarily through manipulating people’s love of pleasure and fear of discomfort.”

In order to combat the subversion of our Christian orthopraxy, the author lays out a clear blueprint of necessary steps, which include:

Clarity – This comes from prioritizing the centrality of Christ and the reading of His Word, and creating communities of like-minded individuals.

Cross-cultural alliances – Mr. Dreher encourages seeking solidarity with people within the resistance, but outside the walls of our churches.

Conquering the great lie – The author maintains that “if we have accepted the great lie of our culture, that personal happiness is the greatest good of all, then we will surrender at the first sign of trouble.”

Courage – He speaks to the necessity of courage, because “in the end, those who are afraid always end up worse than the courageous.”

Counting the cost – He exhorts Christians to decide whether to be an admirer of Christ, who simply wants the comforts and advantages that come with being a Christian, or whether to be a disciple, who recognizes the cost of discipleship and is willing to pay it.

In conclusion, I cannot recommend this book enough. Completely pertinent to all that is unfolding in real time in today’s world, it is an extremely eye-opening, useful and practical read.

Jen Tan

The genesis of this book sprung from a random phone call conservative Rod Dreher received in 2015.

Physician John Schirger had called the author to relate the concerns of his mother, Milada Kloubkova Schirger, a former prisoner of conscience under the communist regime in her native Czechoslovakia.

Mrs. Schirger warned her son that the United States was on a dark path. The things she was seeing in America reminded her of Czechoslovakia under communism. It was only upon his mother’s death, in 2019, that Dr. Schirger granted the author permission to use their names publicly.

The title of the book, *Live Not By Lies*, was taken from the last address by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn to the Russian people on the eve of his expulsion from the Soviet Union. In it, he reminded the people that the foundation of any totalitarian state was built on lies.

The whole system’s very existence depended on maintaining fear and convincing people of the dire consequences of exposing the regime’s lies with the truth. Mr. Dreher lays out the case for what it meant to not live by lies, during Cold War-era U.S.S.R., and what it would mean for us today.

The book is divided into two parts. Part one traces the cultural, philosophical, political and spiritual upheavals in American society. As senior editor and blogger at the *American Conservative*, where Mr. Dreher writes on social issues and religion in the public square, it is terrain he knows well.

The author exposes startling parallels between the 20th century’s descent into totalitarianism, and our own decline into what he calls a “soft” totalitarianism.

Part two examines the methods and sources necessary to combat the lies of soft totalitarianism, reflecting the book’s subtitle, *A Manual for Christian Dissidents*.

Two important core pillars of resistance are the hope provided by a strong faith and the willingness to suffer for the truth. The importance of the family unit as the main unit of resistance, along with the fellowship of believers, are lessons learned from dissidents who survived with their faith and dignity intact.

This book is a must read for all Christians today. It is a clarion call for believers to heed the coming storm.

Mr. Dreher’s writing is clear, well thought out and compelling. His use of interviews and vignettes straight from the mouths of

survivors and witnesses who suffered under the persecutions – and the minute-by-minute fear of those living under the boot heel of communist oppression – is very powerful.

I’ll tell you what this book is not. It is not a right-wing conspiracy theory ginned up by an ideologue meant to garner political support for one party or another.

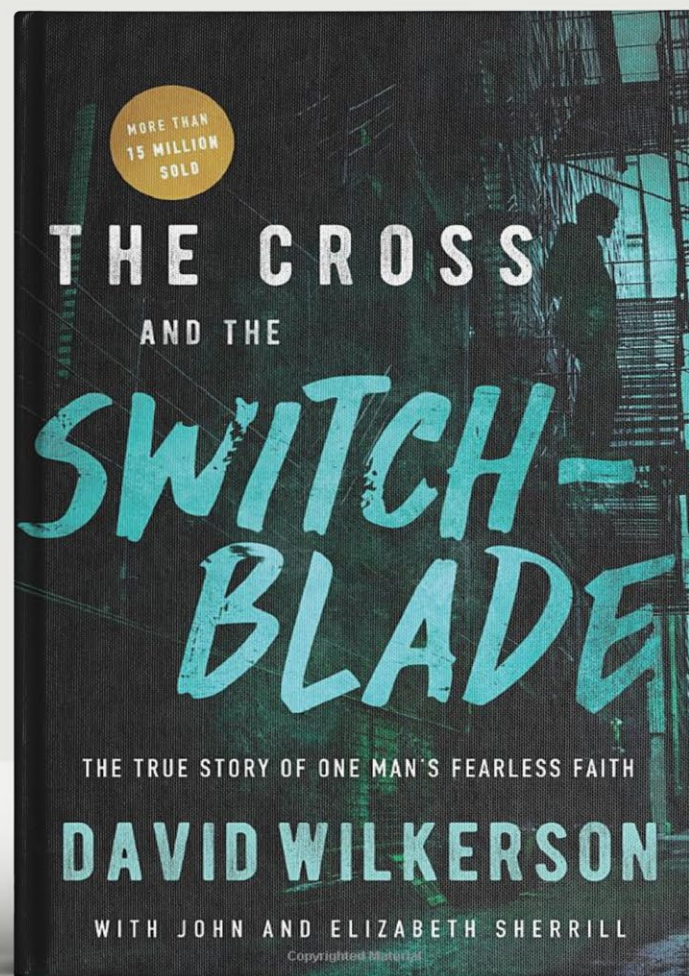
No, it is a sober look at the lessons of history and current events unfolding before us.

You do not have the luxury of tucking this away in your mind and worrying about whether this could happen or not, because it is here!

On the first page from the book’s introduction, Mr. Dreher offers this chilling warning, a quote from Mr. Solzhenitsyn’s most famous work, *The Gulag Archipelago*: “***There is always this fallacious belief: ‘It would not be the same here; here such things are impossible.’ Alas, all the evil of the 20th century is possible anywhere on earth.***”

Art Flickinger

This book is a must read for all Christians today. It is a clarion call for believers to heed the coming storm.



A recommendation by
BOB JAMISON

The year is 1957. A Pentecostal pastor from a small town in Pennsylvania gives up his late-night TV viewing – his way of destressing before bedtime – to devote that time to prayer.

Soon he found himself powerfully moved by a *Life Magazine* article about senseless violence and depravity in a land of tribal warfare and hatred.

I am speaking about turf wars between rival gangs in New York City. The Rev. David Wilkerson, more surprised than anybody by this calling from God, risks his life to reach out to black and Puerto Rican gang members.

I read this book as a teenager growing up in Johnstown, much closer to Rev. Wilkerson's hometown than the Big Apple's mean streets.

I grew up not in a gang but in a Sunday school class.

I carried not a switchblade but a pencil to doodle on the back of the church bulletin during the sermon.

I heard stories of Jesus, who seemed like such a nice fellow and a fine moral philosopher.

I believed in God, believed that He was “up there” and probably checked in once in a while to see what was happening in our world.

But I observed a discrepancy between what I read in the Bible and what I saw around me. I read Wilkinson's narrative of amazing answers to prayer, his stories of God transforming the lives of teenagers like me, stories of the Good Shepherd redeeming lost and unlovable sheep.

These stories were like the Bible stories I had heard all my life, nice stories I did not fully believe. They told of a hands-on God,

not a distant deity who disdained getting His hands dirty by mucking around in the messiness of human lives.

This was a God who answered prayers, opened and closed doors, and a God who was worth my giving my life to.

So I did.

I knelt beside my bed (fretting that maybe I wasn't doing this the right way) and gave myself to Jesus the best way I knew how.

I wondered if I should be hearing angelic voices singing, but there was no extraordinary experience to report.

Yet, looking back, that simple act changed the trajectory of my life and, I believe, my eternal destination.

Reading how Christ forgave and changed the lives of t-shirted teens who murdered a wheelchair-bound boy with polio is simply the mid-20th century version of the Apostle Paul being

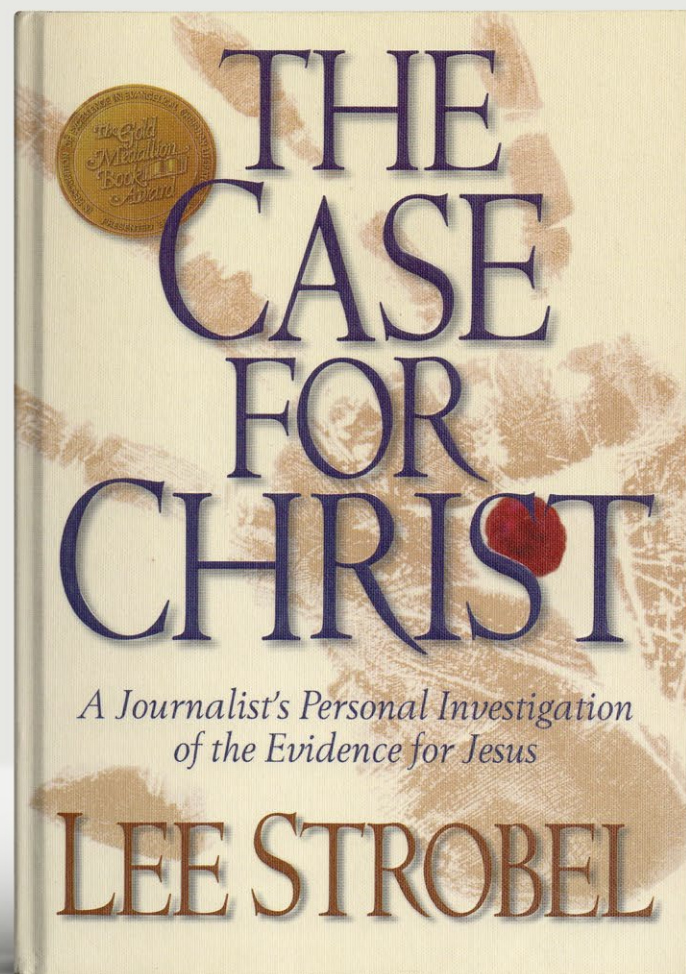
knocked off his horse on his way to Damascus.

The book has a way of swatting the cobwebs out of the rooms of your faith and reminding you that Jesus is still in the soul-saving business, and He's really good at it.

The book will challenge you to examine your own heart to see if you've tamed the Lion of Judah by believing in a safe, comfortable, check-the-box Christianity. Or whether you would be willing to pick up and undertake a seemingly impossible mission you've been called to.

The Cross and the Switchblade will humble you, then call out the hero of the faith in you.

The book has a way of reminding you that Jesus is still in the soul-saving business, and He's really good at it.



A recommendation by
C A R A W E B S T E R

In this book, Lee Strobel, a former atheist legal reporter for the Chicago Tribune, retraces his spiritual journey to Christian faith.

Prompted by his wife's conversion and personal transformation, the author "launched an all-out investigation into the facts surrounding the case for Christianity."

Over a two-year period, he traveled the country interviewing leading scholars and authorities and challenging them with his objections.

Mr. Strobel examines who Jesus was, who He claimed to be, and the evidence to back up His assertions. Along the way, believers and seekers alike will be exposed to the rational foundation of the Christian faith.

Like the author, the type of
mind God has given me hinges
on analytical arguments and
undeniable logic.

This book appeals to the skeptic in me: the part of me that needs good, hard evidence for my beliefs. Reason coupled with doubt has played an integral role in my walk since my return to the faith as an adult.

I grew up in the church – this church, primarily – but exposed to new ideas and worldviews, my faith suffered in college.

Even still, I longed for God to change my heart, to recover the

confidence that marked my faith as a child.

It was not until years later in grad school that I understood that longing and even praying for a change was not sufficient: it required action on my part.

Like the author, the type of mind God has given me hinges on analytical arguments and undeniable logic.

I embarked on a smaller scale quest. I sought out books and lectures of prominent apologists and philosophers to draw my own conclusion based on the evidence.

During MLK week, in 2012, the city of Seattle shut down due to a snow storm.

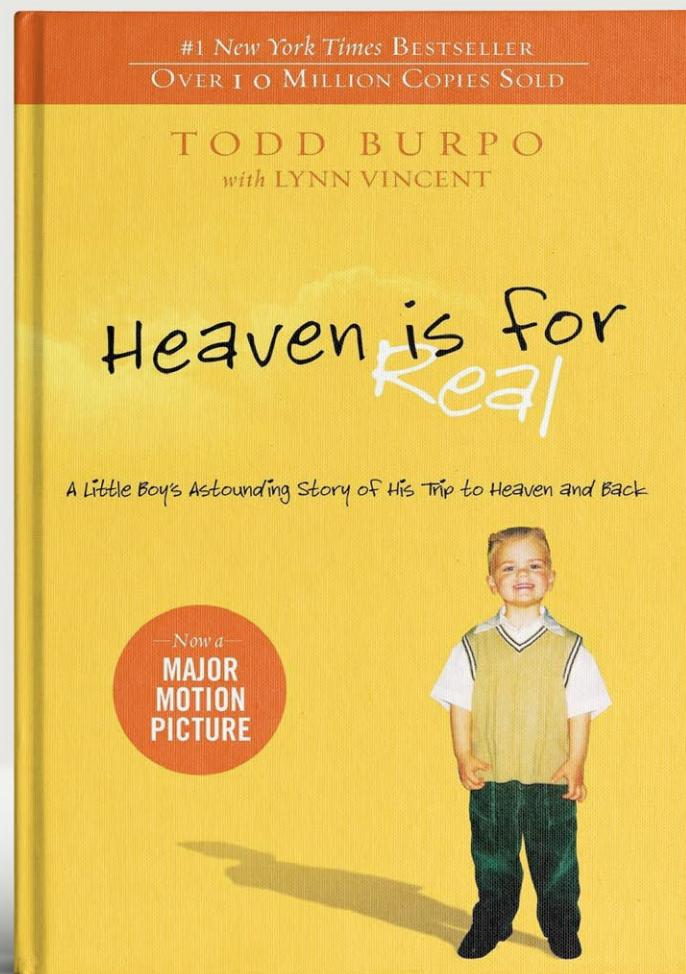
Curled up in my apartment, reading *Mere Christianity* and *The Question of God* among others, my heart warmed once again to the message of Christ.

Sound reasoning is what I needed to return to the faith and what I find myself continually seeking out even now.

It is no one argument that Mr. Strobel presents that speaks to me, but rather the preponderance of evidence he lays out before the reader – much as a juror in a legal case might weigh a verdict. The case for Christ is conclusive: Christianity is grounded in facts and reason.

From the reliability of the gospels, to the character and claims of Jesus, to the evidence for the resurrection, it all stands up to scrutiny.

As Mr. Strobel concludes, "In the face of this overwhelming avalanche of evidence in the case for Christ, the great irony was this: It would require much more faith for me to maintain my atheism than to trust in Jesus of Nazareth!"



A recommendation by
LOUISE O'BOYLE

Before I write about this book, I need to confess that I have read a number of books that tell the story of people's experiences in heaven.

In fact, in college, I read a *Reader's Digest* condensed book called *Life after Death*, which was pivotal in turning my heart and mind back to Jesus.

You see, I needed proof. Some find it in scholarly manuscripts, some in the example of saints. But me, I found the first hint of hope in reading that people had experienced some kind of life when they were clinically dead.

Fast forward many years and I was now a preschool teacher in the Beverly Heights Christian Preschool.

God had pulled me into His Kingdom and I was teaching children about Him!! Although it was not my plan, I found myself loving the interaction with children!

I loved playing with the children, teaching them about the world and especially teaching children about how much their Lord and Savior loves them!

I didn't need to use the words expiation, propitiation, or apologetics.

I was able to teach children the simple facts – God made them, God loves them and He wants to bring each of them into His family – forever!

Simple, I know. But that's my kind of faith!

When I read the book *Heaven is for Real*, it touched a spot in my faith that said TRUE and SIMPLE and REAL!

The true story is about a boy, Colton Burpo, just 3 months shy of 4, who lived in Nebraska in 2003 with his parents and sister.

Todd Burpo, Colton's dad, was pastor of a small church in the small town of Imperial.

While on a trip to Denver, Colton became very sick. His appendix had ruptured, but the doctors did not diagnose his illness quickly and he was close to death.

His parents were told he probably would not survive.

He did survive. And over the next few years, Colton related the story of what he experienced while on the verge of death. What

he said was not linear or in answer to direct questions.

What he said was how a 4-year-old would tell of his past experiences.

Colton spent three minutes in heaven and experienced quite a lot.

He saw Jesus, God, the Holy Spirit, Mary, animals, his grandfather and even a sister he hadn't known about. He describes all of it in the language of a child.

But his father found that it agreed with scripture (and he points that out throughout the book).

The part of his experience I love most is that Colton came back with a message for his parents that spoke to their hearts and their work in the church and community where they serve.

He said over and over, "Jesus REALLY loves children!"

It was a message I loved to hear and that my heart agreed with completely!

I loved it so much that I gave the book to each of the other preschool teachers at Beverly Heights Christian Preschool.

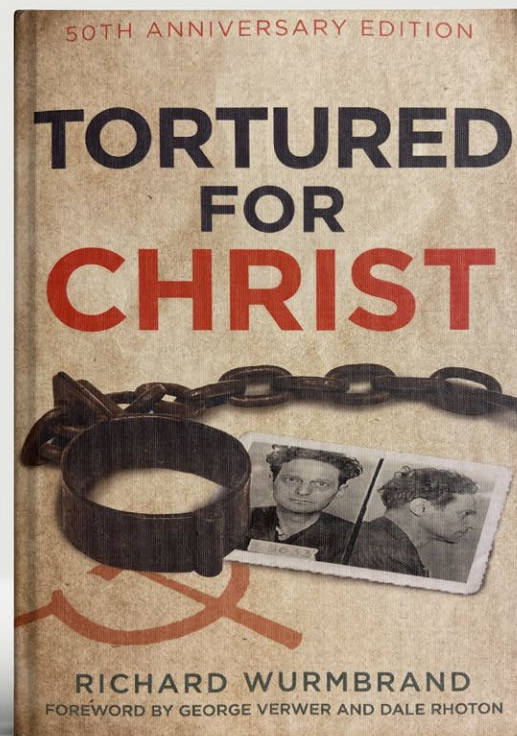
You should know that I do read books that have more adult-like teaching and scripture.

**When I read the book, it touched
a spot in my faith that said *true*
and *simple* and *real*!**

But this book appeals to the child in me.

It makes me yearn for the time I will be in heaven and I will be with Jesus!

There is a movie that tells the story, but I urge you to read the book first and decide for yourself if it is worthy of your time! It's fun! Enjoy!



A recommendation by
LAURITA KUZKO

My father made me read this book before he would answer my questions about his new life-changing faith.

Being born again had transformed my dad from the toughest SOB into a tender-hearted, dignified gentleman. He had found the reality that I knew must exist, but I never saw before, and I wanted it, too. But my dad never made anything easy.

“Count the cost first,” he told me after I had read it.

If I still wanted to give my life to Christ, knowing that it could mean martyrdom, then he would tell me all about his life-changing encounter with the living Lord Jesus.

The book is a serious and heartbreaking testimony of the lives and sufferings of Christians behind the Iron Curtain.

It did more than grow my faith, or help me on my faith journey. It made me consider my life, my death,

the Cross, and whether what Jesus did was worth me sacrificing my life for. It is. And I said yes.

I have read it a few times since. It still is heart wrenching, but also beautiful.

God was there in the prison. He was there through the unthinkable inhumanity of torture.

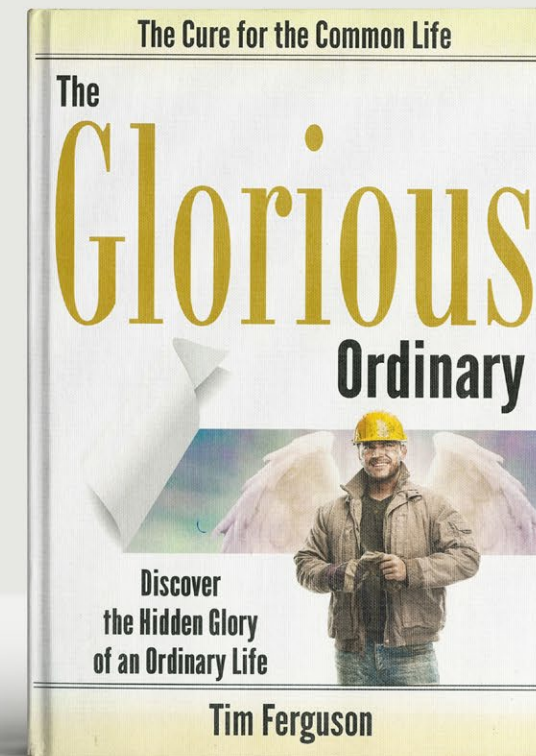
He is still good, when nothing makes sense or seems just or right. He is still good, and He has a plan.

It is always for His kingdom. It is always to redeem souls. It all makes sense when it is seen from the viewpoint of Eternity.

But I am mentioning this because it isn’t a very “nice” book. It isn’t pleasant reading.

It makes your heart know the hardships our brothers in hostile nations have faced, and still face.

It will make you weep. And it makes you think of the possibility of a future when we, too, may face persecution, imprisonment and martyrdom.



A recommendation by
KAREN SOURBEER

In the Kingdom of God, there is no such thing as an ordinary life,” writes author Tim Ferguson.

This book is refreshing and clear among Christian books. It is written in a language that doesn’t send a reader searching for a dictionary to figure out what he is trying to say.

I also like it because I know the author personally. Tim is a writer and pastor who seeks to serve God in his daily life. He and his wife Megan are the parents of Levi, Marcus and Lucas, past and current students in Beverly Heights Christian Preschool.

Tim writes that many Christians are burdened by feelings of guilt. They believe their life’s work is not big enough or important enough to be worthy of God’s Kingdom. They feel they should “do more,” “give more” or “be more.”

They cannot shake the feeling they have let God down by not being a pastor, or a missionary or by teaching a theology class. Tim dispels this idea. He encourages readers to view their life and its mission from God’s perspective.

Tim tells his story of when his plans to serve the Lord in a big way hit a wall. He had to say goodbye to his former

dreams of doing what he thought was important work for the Lord, and settle for the “curse” of an ordinary life. His plan was to slink into heaven and apologize to the Lord for wasting the only life God had given him.

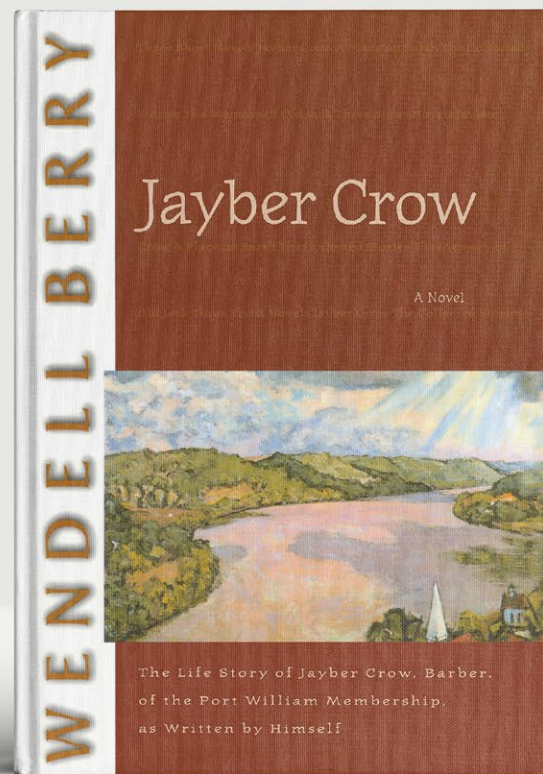
But then he found hope in the 1 Thessalonians 4:11 (NLT): “Make it your goal to live a quiet life, minding your own business and working with your hands, just as we instructed you before.”

This was surprising and good news to Tim. Here, God commands his people to lead what looks like a very ordinary life! This led God to transform Tim’s perspective from seeing his life as miserably ordinary to a life full of joyful significance. God opened his eyes and he perceived God’s glory all around! Glory that had been there all along!!

Tim encourages Christians to use the gifts God has blessed them with to do their best daily.

It is a practical book that shows others how Jesus brings purpose to everything: “He brings bigness to the littleness; he brings glory to your ordinary.”

Remarkably, Tim’s writing fits perfectly into our church creed, “Gathered by His love for us, Scattered by our love for Him.”



A recommendation by
KATIE DOYLE

Wendell Berry’s fictional town of Port William is rural, surrounded by small farms. A sleepy backwater village?

Through the eyes of its barber Jayber Crow (yes, he goes by “Jayber”), it’s a place of hard work and love and hopes and dashed hopes and faith and resilience and despair. Port William folk embed their lives firmly in faith. Jayber’s interactions with his fellow townsfolk rarely delve into life’s great questions.

But on page 251, the author lets us into Jayber’s thoughts:

“If God loved the world even before the event at Bethlehem, that meant He loved it as it was, with all its faults. That would be Hell itself, in part. He would be like a father with a wayward child, whom He can’t help and can’t forget. But it would be even worse than that, for He

would also know the wayward child and the course of its waywardness and suffering. That His love contains all the world does not show that the world does not matter, or that He and we do not suffer it unto death; it shows that the world is Hell only in part. But His love can contain it only by compassion and mercy, which, if not Hell entirely, would be at least a crucifixion.”

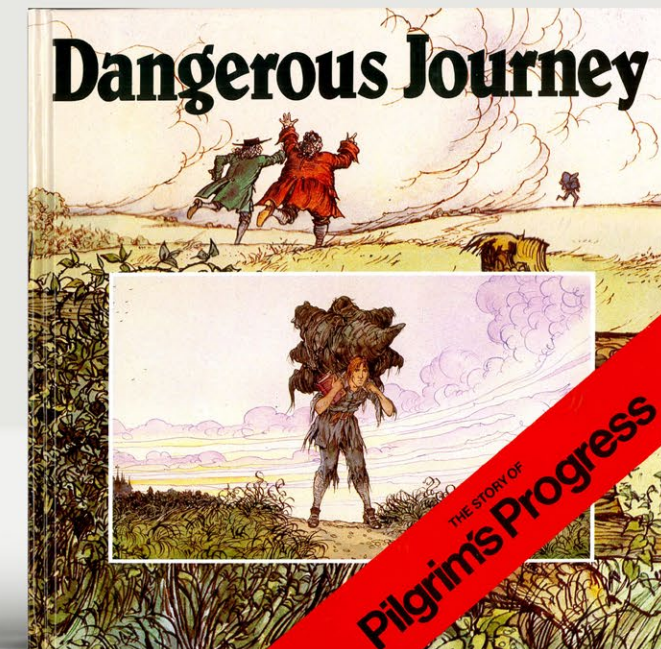
And on page 252:

“What answer can human intelligence make to God’s love for the world? What answer, for that matter, can it make to our own love for the world? If a person loved the world – really loved it and forgave its wrongs and so might have his own wrongs forgiven – what would be next?”

A very good book!

I enjoyed the audiobook version, masterfully read by Paul Michael.

Written by Oliver Hunkin



A recommendation by
SALLY SKILLEN

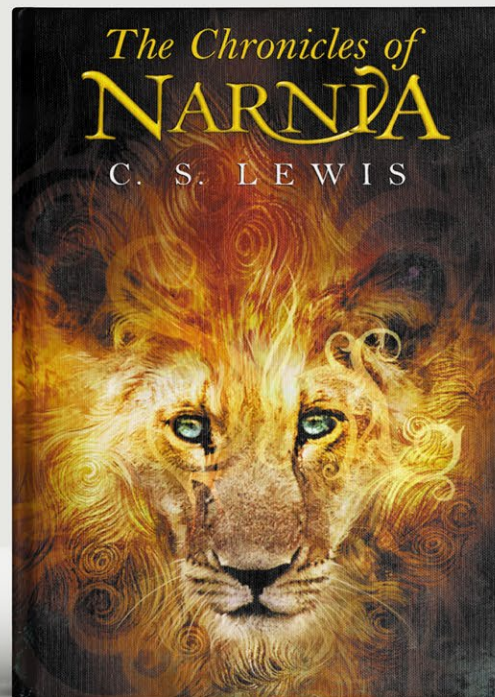
After attending Rick Wolling’s phenomenal virtual class on *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in the spring of 2020, I thought I would reread it again after almost 60 years! And, perhaps, I will.

However, in the meantime, I continue to enjoy rereading the beautifully illustrated copy of *Dangerous Journey* published by the William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company of Grand Rapids, Mich.

While it is a “Cliff Notes” version of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, it captures the totality and majesty of John Bunyan’s epic work.

Because it is so well suited to read to the youngest of children – and for children of all ages – I commend it to your 2021 summer reading no matter how old or young you are!

The eternal message of our salvation through faith will touch each reader and listener.



A recommendation by BOB THOMSON

“If you are thirsty, you may drink.” The voice was not like a man’s. It was deeper, wilder, and stronger; a sort of heavy golden voice. “Are you not thirsty?” said the Lion. “I’m *dying* of thirst,” said Jill. “Then drink,” said the Lion. “May I – could I – would you mind going away while I do?” said Jill. The Lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl. “Will you promise not to – do anything to me, if I do come?” said Jill. “I make no promise,” said the Lion. “Do you eat girls?” she said. “I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms,” said the Lion. “I daren’t come and drink,” said Jill. “Then you will die of thirst,” said the Lion. “Oh dear!” said Jill. “I suppose I must go and look for another stream then.” “There is no other stream,” said the Lion. It was the worst thing she ever had to do but she went forward to the stream, knelt down, and began scooping up water in her hand. It was the coldest, most refreshing water she had ever tasted.

This excerpt, from *The Silver Chair*, illustrates that Jesus gives us living water and that He is the only way. It is just one example of how the Narnia series teaches children biblical truths.

It really does teach everything from God speaking

the world into existence, to the reason for evil, to the conversion process, to our Christian walk. The youngest children won’t see these truths at first. The older children (and adults) will see more.

This is exactly what C.S. Lewis intended. He said:

I thought I saw how stories of this kind could steal past a certain inhibition which had paralyzed much of my own religion in childhood. Why did one find it so hard to feel as one was told how one ought to feel about God or the sufferings of Christ? I thought the chief reason was that one was told one ought to. An obligation to feel can freeze feelings. The whole subject was associated with lowered voices; almost as if it were something medicinal. But supposing by casting all these things into an imaginary world, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency? Could one not thus steal past those watchful dragons? I thought one could.

Imagination was very important to C.S. Lewis. He said his purpose in writing the Narnia stories was “to make it easier for children to accept Christianity when they met it later in life. I am aiming at a sort of pre-baptism of the imagination.”

Elsewhere Mr. Lewis said, “Reason is the natural organ of truth, but imagination is the organ of meaning.”

In other words, imagination does not tell you what is true, but it shows the real significance and profound implications of truth.

We want to form the imagination of our children to help them counter the culture. Their imagination controls what they think the world is like. It grows them a map to plot a course; a vision of the world. It helps them to not only analyze rightly, but react rightly because they see the world rightly.

Good books and stories are the best way to form the imagination. Television, movies and videos leave nothing for the imagination. Formed imagination will not make them good, but it will help them understand goodness. It makes doing good a little easier by making it normal.

I read this whole series to my children three times. It is one of their fondest memories and now they are reading it to their children.

There is a reason that these books, written in the 1950s, are still very popular, have sold over 100 million copies, and been translated into 41 languages.

Here is a tip. Begin with the *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* and not *The Magician’s Nephew* and thereby preserve all the surprise and suspense of the original.



A recommendation by CHRIS FISHER

In 2005, Brian “Head” Welch was one of the most successful guitarists of the time as part of the nu-metal band Korn.

Fame, money, drugs and alcohol ruled his rock-star life. After having multiple albums go platinum, along with millions of dollars in the bank, he left it all behind after devoting his life to Christ.

In his book, Mr. Welch brings the rock-star life down to earth as he describes the struggles he went through as a new Christian and as a single father, but never losing faith in God.

Eventually, in 2012, he would rejoin Korn. He felt God’s calling to reach out to audiences who would never get the chance to hear God’s word.

Sometimes we feel ourselves in situations that we don’t fully understand. We question why God put us there or what His plan has for us. Mr. Welch saw opportunities to plunge himself headfirst back into a sinful world in order to spread the love of God.

With My Eyes Wide Open is a book about struggle, pain, frustration, and hopelessness, but more importantly, it is a book about allowing God to work through you so that His love can reach those around you.

Bible smuggling under communism

BY SANDA TOMULETIU

Editor’s note: Sanda regularly attended Beverly Heights when she lived in Mt. Lebanon, while working on her doctorate at Duquesne University.

SIBIU, Romania – I have chosen to share a few significant moments from my life under Nicolae Ceausescu’s totalitarian regime. It was only when I lived in the States (2004-2014), and reflected on how Prosperity shapes the human heart, that I became grateful for the ways in which Adversity shaped my heart.

One of the most powerful experiences of my life under communism was going caroling on Christmas.

The youth of my church would walk the streets of my hometown for three nights, singing. For many of our non-Christian peers, colleagues and neighbors, these nights of Christmas caroling were the only occasion they had to hear the gospel (in their homes!), especially those who were (or had a family member who was) a member of the Communist Party.

December 17, 1989: definitely the most impactful Christmas of my life.

The mayor of my hometown (Sibiu) was Ceausescu’s son. The soldiers were still shooting in Sibiu, when the army had already surrendered in the rest of the country.

Our youth choir was scheduled to give our annual Christmas concert that night. I remember my mom talking on the phone with the choir conductor, who asked her to let us go to church that night. (He convinced every parent to let their children go.)

To my surprise, mom agreed. I remember the excitement, blended with fear, of walking to church, aware of the danger of being shot and then of singing about God’s Incarnation, thinking it may be the last time I did that.

December 24, 1989. Two images are still with me from the day the Ceausescu couple was captured and executed.

The first one is sitting up in bed with my mom, watching the “trial” of the presidential couple, and not believing our eyes: could this be really happening? We never thought it possible. The prospect of freedom was intoxicating.

I also distinctly remember walking down the street, coming

across a passerby and exchanging a look and a smile. We would both know what the look and the smile meant: we no longer need to be suspicious of one another. We could speak freely about our shared political reality, if we wanted to. What a feeling!

Another unforgettable experience of my life under communism is linked to Bible smuggling. I will never forget the first night it happened, when we were awakened by a knock at the door and young people addressed us in English.

Nor can I forget the excitement of walking down the streets to the place where they left their van (in order to protect us) and helping them carry the bags with Christian literature back to our house. I was so thrilled to be able to do that! (To this day I am amazed at how God protected us from a search by the secret

One last memory to share from my life under communism is a sweet memory.

The summer I graduated from high school and the year after that, my church received the visits of a group of students from Wheaton College in Illinois.

As religious meetings were allowed only inside a church, when we met outside the church, we had to be careful. We met for Bible study in the forest at the edge of town and, whenever someone passed by, we picked up a ball as if we were playing.

I remember how much I wished back then to be able to study at a Bible college. I felt trapped inside a country with closed borders.

How could I have known in 1986 that 26 years later I would be teaching at Wheaton? In 2012, when Wheaton hired me as a communications instructor on its faculty, I smiled at God’s sense of humor.

More importantly, it was those visits by Wheaton students that marked the beginning of my journey with God from Legalism to Holiness, from Guilt to Grace. They left not only their peanut butter jars and shampoo bottles with us, but also their books.

After Wheaton, I taught at a Christian international university in Lithuania, and in May 2018, I returned to Romania.

The political turmoil caused by the socialist government at the time stirred my heart so deeply that I could no longer stay away. I also needed a break from the fast pace of academia. I currently live in a small village near Sibiu, with a pine-tree forest as my favorite neighbor, learning more deeply what it really means to be Jesus’ disciple.



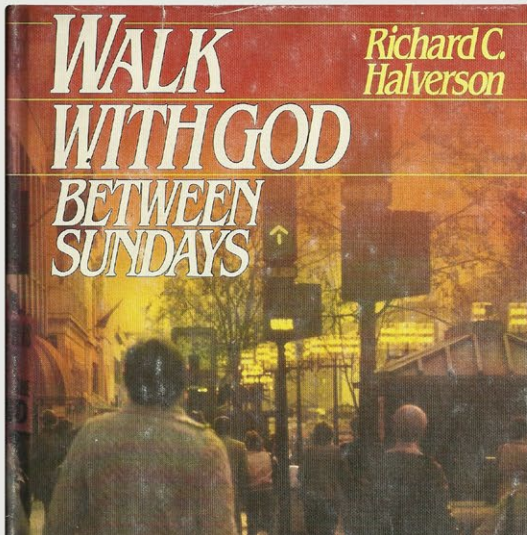
Me with my dad, taken last October on his 92nd birthday.

police; they would have easily found the books, as we did not have a secret place to hide them.)

My first trip outside Romania in the summer of 1990 was in response to a wedding invitation: two of the young Germans who brought us Bibles at night were getting married. When my sister and I reached the border with Hungary, we had to get out of the car and cross it on foot. My body experienced that moment of freedom as literally having too much air to breathe.

BETWEEN | SUNDAYS

BY RICK WOLLING



My most memorable book

Of the 3,000+ books in my library, most of which I gave away when I left Beverly Heights, there is one that stands out.

It is the one book (except for the Bible) I would take with me on a desert island. It is a book that was given to me as a gift, by a very special person, on a memorable occasion.

In the 1990s, Rev. Dr. Richard Halverson was the Chaplain of the United States Senate and former pastor of Bethesda's great Fourth Presbyterian Church.

"Dr. Halverson, in his kind and gentle manner, was always able to provide the individual counsel and insight that helped us reach decisions," Sen. Chris Dodd said on the floor of the Senate, upon the passing of Rev. Halverson in 1995.

Kind and gentle, able to provide individual counsel and insight – a good description of my one encounter with him.

I had written Rev. Halverson at the suggestion of Bob Slocum, a Texas high-tech entrepreneur and follower of Christ. Rev. Halverson was the guy to talk to about my growing interest in discipleship lived out in the world between Sundays, Bob had said.

Much to my amazement, Rev. Halverson wrote me back with an invitation to come to his

Washington, D.C., office in the Dirksen Senate Office Building so we could talk.

When I arrived, the chaplain's secretary told me that our meeting was scheduled for 20 minutes as Dr. Halverson had to get to the airport to fly to a speaking engagement. I took that information to mean: *Don't expect too much from this chat.*

She couldn't have been more wrong.

For well over an hour, Dr. Halverson and I talked. Our conversation that day was a significant turning point for me and our church. It helped plant the theology of this church as both gathered and scattered – men and women living lives of faithful discipleship in their jobs as welders, bankers, carpenters, homemakers, whatever their vocation.

At the 15-minute mark of our conversation, the secretary began buzzing Rev. Halverson every five minutes. She said my time was over, but the chaplain was unfazed. He pushed on.

At about the one-hour mark, risking the ire of the secretary, I asked two closing questions. "Where can I read more about this view of the church?"

He said he knew of only one book on the subject. He'd written it, *Walk With God Between Sundays*.

This became my desert island book.

My second question was, "Where is this theology being worked out in local churches?" He said, "I don't know of any place. I wrote the book, Rick, but I guess it's up to you to put it into practice."

He then called his wife asking her to check their home for any of the aforementioned books. Finding 10, I said, "I'd like to buy them all."

He replied, "I'll give them to you."

As the secretary was walking toward him with hat, coat and briefcase in hand, he interrupted her once more. "Let me pray for you, Rick. This is pretty important stuff, I think, and I think you think so, too."

After he prayed, he reached into his desk drawer. "I want to give you something as a memento of our visit."

He pulled out a little book of his invocation prayers that he prayed at the start of each Senate session. He had inscribed a copy of it to his beloved sister as a gift. She had died just months prior to my visit.

And then, off he ran, police escort in the lead. I was left to catch my breath and quiet my heart.

Rick Wolling is pastor emeritus of Beverly Heights.