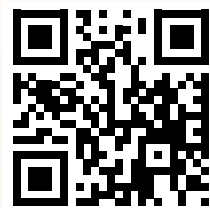


Put On Your Armour

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

Ephesians 2:4-7



milllakechurch.ca

June 2026 | Issue 57

BRANCHES

A Mill Lake Church
magazine

Blessed
are those who are
merciful

6 *The Mercy We Have Received and the Mercy We Must Give*

9 *Not Forgotten - A True Story Of Faith In Action*

14 *God, You Can't Be a Good God If...*



fathers

"As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him."

— Psalm 103:13

Fathers are storytellers, passing down truth from generation to generation, just as Scripture calls us to "Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children" (Joel 1:3). He is also a hand holder, steady and present through every uncertain season, walking as "a righteous man in his integrity" (Proverbs 20:7). Fathers are adventurers, leading their families forward in faith even when the road is unclear. And they are teachers, shaping young hearts and minds by bringing their children up in "the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

We celebrate the fathers among us — and are grateful for every story told, every hand held, and every lesson faithfully given.

day

MILL LAKE CHURCH

Dear Friends –

As I write this, I'm sitting by the Fraser River at Matsqui Trail Regional Park. After several sunny, hot days, today has swung the other way. It's chilly. Yet there's a warmth about this place that continues to draw me back. It's a place to be still—to reflect on the past and dream of the future. Precious conversations with good friends. Time to read and write. Time to pray and simply be.

I hope you, too, are able to step away from the busyness of life from time to time—to breathe fresh air and soak in the stillness of God's creation. To watch driftwood float down river or smile as a squirrel skitters across the grass and up a tree. To feel the breeze on your face as you linger in quiet contemplation or read a good book.

These moments refresh the body, soul, and mind. They replenish us so we can continue serving and caring for others. Perhaps they are even one small way we learn to receive mercy ourselves.

As we continue our series, "The Blessed Life: Following Jesus Through the Beatitudes," Pastor Randy walks us through what it means both to receive mercy and to show mercy to others.

In this issue, you'll also find the final installments of our two three-part series, "Starting Over in Canada" and "Mr. Bouchard's Violin." We'd love to hear your feedback on these series, along with any ideas you may have for future topics you'd enjoy seeing in *Branches*.

As always, you'll find invitations to connect through the ministries and activities of Mill Lake Church, along with stories and reflections meant to encourage one another and help us grow in our walk with Christ.

Thank you to you, our *Branches* readers, for journeying with us through these pages, and to those who faithfully contribute their writing. If there's a story or topic on your heart but you find yourself thinking, *I'm not a writer*, that's okay—we're here to help. We'd be glad to brainstorm with you, support your writing process, and provide editing along the way.

Know you are loved,

_____ ✨ _____

Ann Griffiths

Editor



EDITOR'S MESSAGE

BRANCHES

Issue 57

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WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Submit articles, comments & ideas to Ann Griffiths at ann@milllakechurch.ca

Submit photos and media to Leah Cobb at hello@milllakechurch.ca



To Make the Hope of Jesus Known

Join us on Facebook & Instagram
@MillLakeChurch

Office Hours: Tuesday-Friday 11 a.m. - 4 p.m.

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WORSHIP EVERY SUNDAY AT 10 A.M.

You can also stream the service at
www.youtube.com/@milllakechurch4620

Mill Lake Church is affiliated with the
Evangelical Free Church of Canada

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LET'S CONNECT!

ADULTS TOGETHER

Bible Study: Every Sunday, 9-9:45 a.m. at the church
Gospel Clarity (Mixed Bible Study): Seasonal break. See you all in the fall.

COMMUNITY GROUPS

Contact office@milllakechurch.ca.
Interested in joining a small group? Various groups meet throughout Abbotsford.

YOUTH—GRADES 6-12

Contact Jeff Rusu at jeffrusu4@gmail.com.
Mondays, 7 p.m. in the church gym.
Follow the Instagram youth page [@mlcyouth](https://www.instagram.com/mlcyouth).

MEN

Contact Dwayne Mitchell at dwaynemit@gmail.com.
Prayer Time: Tuesdays, 9:30 a.m. in the church lower lounge (except 2nd Tuesday of the month). This month: June 2, 16, 23, 30. Come for coffee and prayer.
Breakfast Break: Every 2nd Tuesday of the month at JoJo's, 10 a.m. This month: June 9.
Bible Study: The 2nd & 4th Saturday, 9-10:30 a.m. at the church. This month: June 13 & 27.
Ascent Discipleship: Meets monthly, 8-11 a.m. at the church in Room 102. This month: June 20.

WOMEN

Contact: Ann Griffiths at ann@anngriffiths.com
Come to the Well Games Night: Friday, July 17, 7-9 p.m. in the church lower auditorium
Summer Park Meet-up: July 8 & 22 and August 5 & 19, 2-3:30 p.m. at Mill Lake Park. Watch for details.

KIDS & TOTS

Every Sunday: During worship, newborn tots to age 5 are welcome in our nursery. Kindergarten to Grade 5 kids are dismissed part way through the service to go downstairs with their teachers. Sign in at the lobby table by the nursery for either program.
Family Sundays: On the 1st Sunday of each month, when our kids stay with us through the service, activity bags are available in the lobby.

PRAYER

Afternoon Prayer: Every Thursday, 1 p.m. with the Prayer & Care team in the church lower lounge.
Evening Prayer: Meets monthly on Wednesdays, 7 p.m. This month: June 17.

The Mercy We Have Received and the Mercy We Must Give

By Randy Lemke

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy" (Matthew 5:7).

Think about the best thing anyone has ever done for you. Not a gift or a favour, but a moment when someone chose kindness when they really didn't have to. Maybe they gave you another chance after you let them down. Maybe they stayed when it would have been much easier to walk away. Maybe they said, "I forgive you" when you weren't sure you deserved to hear it. That experience of being on the receiving end of real, unearned kindness is the closest most of us will get to understanding what Jesus means in this Beatitude: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."

As we journey through the Beatitudes together, each one has been building on the last. We've seen that the blessed life begins with honesty about our need for God, grief over the things that break His heart, a quiet strength that doesn't need to push its way through, and a deep longing to see things made right. Now Jesus brings us to mercy. And it feels like the natural next step, because once we know how much we've received forgiveness, it changes how we treat everyone else.

Mercy, in the way Jesus uses it, is more than feeling sorry for someone. It's more than your sympathy. It's feeling the weight of what another person is carrying, and you actually do something about it. You don't look away. You don't just say, "I'll pray for you" and move on. You get involved. You show up. This is exactly how Jesus lived. When He saw hurting people, He didn't keep His distance. He went to them, healed them, sat with them, and spoke to people whom everyone else had written off. His whole life was an act of mercy.

There is a beautiful word in the Old Testament that describes how God relates to His people. The Hebrew word is *hesed*, and no single English word quite does it justice. It's often translated as 'loving-kindness,' 'mercy,' or 'faithfulness.' It describes the loyal love of God towards His people and the expected mutual kindness in relationships between individuals. This is the love of God who makes a promise and keeps it, even when His people don't hold up their end. Psalm 136 repeats the phrase "His *hesed* endures forever" twenty-six times — once for every verse. That repetition serves as a declaration that God's mercy is not a mood. It is not something He feels on good days and withdraws on bad ones. It is His nature, and it never runs out.

The heart of that love is what Jesus did for us on the cross, as the greatest act of mercy ever. We had turned away from God. We had gone our own way. We were, as Paul puts it in Ephesians 2, "dead in our sins." Not that we are just struggling, we are not just missing the mark, but we are spiritually dead apart from God. And God, rather than giving us what we deserved, came down. He took the punishment upon Himself. He made a way back for us. Not because we earned it or asked for it, but simply because He loved us.

What is striking is that this mercy was not an afterthought or a last resort. Peter tells us that Christ was "chosen before the creation of the world" (1 Peter 1:20) to be our rescuer. God's mercy toward us was planned before we ever took our first breath, before we ever had the chance to fail. We were loved before we were lost. This is not a God who forgives reluctantly; rather, a God whose entire heart has always turned toward us in grace.

Jesus told a story in Matthew 18 that brings clarity. A man owed an unimaginable amount of money to a king, more than he could ever repay in ten lifetimes. The king could have thrown him in prison and been completely within his rights to do so. Instead, he wiped the debt clean. Completely. But that same man walked away and grabbed a co-worker who owed him a small amount and had him thrown in prison when he couldn't pay. When the king heard what had happened, he was furious. The king expected this man to be as kind to his colleague as he had been to him. It's a story that's meant to make us uncomfortable. Because we can be that man. We can know God's forgiveness and still hold a grudge. We can receive grace and still refuse to give it to others.

In our everyday lives, mercy can simply look like choosing not to fire back when someone says something that stings. Or speaking kindly about someone who hasn't been kind to us. It's giving a person a second chance, or a third, when part of us wants to just be done with them. It's making space for someone who is hard to be around or listening properly to a person who always seems to need something. None of that is glamorous. Most of it goes unnoticed. But it is the stuff of a life shaped by the love of God.

It's also worth saying that mercy doesn't mean pretending nothing happened. It doesn't mean letting people walk all over you or acting as if your hurt isn't real. Forgiveness and trust are not the same thing. You can genuinely forgive someone and still need time before trust is rebuilt.

Mercy is honest; it refuses to let bitterness stop us from loving others. The cross is the best example of this. God didn't brush sin under the carpet. He dealt

with it fully and at enormous cost. Real mercy will usually cost us something.

One of the most remarkable things about how God works is that mercy and justice are not opposites in His hands. They meet at the cross. God did not simply overlook what was wrong with us and ignore it. That would not have been mercy; it would have been indifference. Instead, He took the full weight of justice upon Himself in Jesus, so that mercy could flow freely toward us with no compromise of what is right and true. This is why Paul can say in Romans 3:26 that God is both "just and the justifier" of those who believe. God is perfectly fair and perfectly forgiving at the same time. When we extend mercy to others, we are not ignoring wrongdoing. We are reflecting a God who holds love and truth together and invites us to do the same.

The prophet Micah, writing hundreds of years before Jesus, put it simply: "What does the Lord require of you but to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8). We are to love mercy. God wants mercy to be something we're drawn to, something that can come to feel natural, because we've been so thoroughly loved ourselves.

In Mill Lake Church, this should show itself in how we treat each other. Are we a place where

people feel safe to be honest about their struggles? Where someone who has made a mess of things doesn't feel like they're permanently labelled? Where we talk well about people when they're not in the room? That kind of community doesn't happen by accident. It grows when the people in it genuinely convince themselves that they have been shown great mercy and want to pass it on.

Continued on next page

Continued from last page

And it matters beyond our church family, too. There are people all around us who are carrying more than they're letting on. A simple, genuine act of kindness from one of us might be the first time in a long while that they've felt seen.

Like all the Beatitudes, Jesus adds a promise. The merciful will receive mercy. It's not as if we earn God's kindness by being kind to others. It's more like a description of how things work. When we close our hearts to others, we close them to God as well. When we live holding tight to grievances and refuse to let go, we find it harder to receive anything, including grace. But when we choose to live with open hands, giving mercy freely, we find ourselves much more able to receive it.

There will be times when mercy feels more than we can give. When the wound is too fresh, the betrayal too deep, the person too difficult. In those moments, the answer isn't to try harder. It's to look at the cross again. Jesus, in some of the worst pain a person can experience, looked at the people putting Him there and said, "Father, forgive them, they don't know what they're doing" (Luke 23:34). That's the standard. And it's honestly beyond most of us—unless God is the one producing it in us. The good news is that He will do exactly that, if we allow Him.

Jesus says the blessed life belongs to the merciful. Not the most talented or successful. Not the ones who have it all together. The merciful are ordinary people loved well by God and doing their best to love others the same way. The well of God's mercy never runs dry. There is always more to draw from, always more to give. So, let's ask ourselves the honest question: who in my life am I finding it hard to show mercy to right now? And then let's bring that to God, because He is far more ready to help us than we might think.



Pastor Randy is Lead Pastor at Mill Lake Church, where he and his wife, Allana, and their five children have served for the past 24 years. Randy enjoys movies, books, music, and hanging out with his family. You may also want to ask him about his interest in fountain pens.

MLC CELEBRATIONS IN JUNE

ANNIVERSARIES

Harry & Wanda Unger – June 14
Jim & Ann Griffiths – June 19, 1971
John & Tracey Tobin – June 24
Dave & Carolyn Twiest — June 30

BIRTHDAYS

Leah Cobb – June 2
Brody Patton – June 3
Noah Hackett – June 13
Rose Carleton – June 14
Annette Brandt — June 17
Barnabas Weststeijn – June 17
Naomi Kragh – June 19
Denise Ramsay — June 22
Phil Vike — June 22

2026 GRADS

Joshua Hwang
*Bachelor of Music in Jazz Studies -
Performance/Composition,
Concentration -Voice*

Miranda Moorhouse
High School

Not Forgotten

A True Story of Faith in Action

By Shannon Cranston

When I was a new Christian, I prayed, "God, if you have something for me, please put it right in my face so I won't miss it"—and He did.

A number of years ago, we had a 30-acre patch west of Hope, BC. We tended chickens, goats, cattle, turkeys, horses, dogs, and cats. By the time our daughters were both attending the University of Victoria, we thought we would retire and move from there. We put the farm up for sale, waited, and prayed. Then, every few months, we thought and prayed about taking the farm off the market, only to have more people show up to look at it.

Three years went by. In the meantime, I used my big utility trailer to help friends and neighbours move when their places sold. On my way home from hauling a load to Burnaby for a good friend, I struggled and cried out to the Lord, "God, I just need to know you haven't forgotten me."

That was 20+ years ago, when midweek and midday on the freeway meant you might not see another vehicle on your whole trip. Unbelievable, I know.

With nothing in front, nothing behind, and just west of Abbotsford, I drove along feeling dejected. Glancing in my mirror, I saw a small black car come up fast behind me. I tend to be a little heavy on the pedal, but they easily caught up to me. When they came up beside me, they matched my speed and stayed beside me. I looked over, saw the tinted windows going down, and guys in black toques leaning out the windows.

I guess I watch too many movies, so of course, I expected to see guns and figured that this was my day to die. Instead, they pointed to the sky, showed me praying hands, and "I love you" signs. They then blew kisses, pulled back into their car, rolled up the windows, and sped away. Just like that, they were gone.

Stunned and shaken, it took me a minute or two to realize God had answered my prayer. He put His answer right in my face so I wouldn't miss it. He really hadn't forgotten me.

I cried tears of joy all the way home. That encounter lifted my spirit and gave me strength, which was a good thing because it was another four years before the farm sold, and we moved to our new home in Victoria.

God's timing is always perfect. He never abandons us—or forgets us.



Shannon Cranston loves all things creative, as seen in her hobbies and businesses. She became a Christian at 40 years old, has attended MLC with her husband since 2018, and loves serving at women's Bible studies and events. She assists her youngest adult daughter, and feels blessed to look back at the amazing things God has done in her life.

STARTING OVER in Canada

PART 3 OF A 3-PART SERIES

By Elena Svet

God Will Add

In previous issues, I shared some challenges we faced after leaving the Caucasus and immigrating to Canada because of the war between Russia and Ukraine. So much changed at once: language, finances, climate, culture, relationships, and emotional stability.

Even deep faith does not make changes like that easy to absorb. It takes time before the new pieces of life settle and make sense, and before one can look back and see God quietly weaving something meaningful. In those seasons when you feel fragile and in need of help, it's hard to know how to keep your heart open to someone whose need is even greater.

To tell that story, I need to go back to 2012.

Rodion had worked in a Ukrainian orphanage for many years, where several teenagers had come to faith. When the government closed all the orphanages, the one where Rodion worked was among the first. He did everything he could to help the children find Christian families to take them in. He also made a personal, life-changing decision—he became guardian to a fifteen-year-old boy named Vadym.

Although Vadym did not live with us because of his studies, he became part of our family. In the winter of 2021, just before his wedding, he came to visit us in the Caucasus. It became one of the warmest

Christmas celebrations our family had ever known. Rodion's mother, his brother, his sister, and Vadym were all able to come. After the long isolation of COVID-19, our house was full again. What we did not know then was that in only a few months everything would change.

Soon after, the war began. Men over eighteen could no longer leave Ukraine, so we watched Vadym's wedding online that summer.

A little more than a year after the wedding, when our own family had been in Canada for about six months, Vadym called us with news. He and his wife, Yulia, were expecting a baby. We were already six months pregnant ourselves, so it felt especially joyful. But alongside that joy came fear.

One day, officials stopped Vadym on the street and checked his documents. They told him that once he turned twenty-seven, they could draft him, which would happen around the same time their baby was due.

Until then, they had planned to stay in Ukraine and wait for the war to end. But now everything felt different. Vadym couldn't imagine leaving Yulia and their baby alone in such uncertainty. He called us and asked for help.

Rodion and I looked at each other with a look we knew well. We had been in Canada for less than a year and were expecting our own child. Our life still felt unsettled. How could we help when we felt so vulnerable? And almost immediately, the answer

came: *We do not know how. But we know it is the right thing to do.*

We invited them to come. Yulia could legally cross the border, but Vadym could not and would need another plan.

That night, Vadym and two other men crossed the border on foot through forests, rivers, and ditches, while thick fog made them less visible. At the same time, Yulia was on a train and suffering from severe morning sickness. She didn't know whether she would see Vadym on the other side.

Meanwhile, in Canada, we watched a moving dot on a map—and prayed. Each time the dot moved, we knew Vadym was making progress, and we thanked God. For hours we watched, hoped, and waited—until he made it across.

A few weeks later, Vadym and Yulia arrived in Canada. Yulia was three months pregnant, but her nausea had not eased, perhaps because of the stress she had been carrying. She had not yet seen a doctor. Because of my pregnancy, I had learned about resources available for expectant mothers in British Columbia that could help her while I helped her with English.

A month after Vadym and Yulia arrived, our daughter Emma was born into a home where seven pairs of loving arms were ready to hold her. Six months later, it was time for their son to be born. Yulia asked if I would be with her during labour to help with English and support her. It became one of the most moving moments of my life.

When little Joseph was born, I cried.

I don't remember crying like that with my own children. I cried because he was here. Because he was safe. Because after everything they had walked through, I had the privilege of witnessing a miracle.

Now, when I watch Emma and Joseph growing up together, my heart fills with gratitude. It feels especially meaningful that in Hebrew, the name Joseph means "God will add."

That is exactly what I saw.

When we decided to help, all we could see was what we lacked. We did not feel settled, strong,

or ready. Our resources seemed small. But when we chose what was right, God added what we needed. And then He added more.

He gave safety. He gave community. He gave our children the gift of growing up together. Today, we can say that in Canada we have family.

Sometimes faith is simply taking the next right step, even when our hands feel empty. And then discovering that God was already holding what we lacked, and even more.



Elena Svet is a mother of three and serves with Wycliffe Bible Translators alongside her husband, Rodion, supporting Scripture translation for a language community in Eurasia. She is also a trauma-informed counselor and coach, helping individuals navigate transition, identity, and personal growth. Her family moved to Canada in 2023.



FROM THE DESK OF DENISE RAMSAY

WHEN THE DAY COMES
By Gabrielle Meyer



Get the book!



Funny how time can be tricky. One minute I feel there is ample time to get my list accomplished, and then before I know it, time has run out and I'm scrambling to finish last-minute details. Thinking about the passage of time brings me to a series of books that have captured my attention.

As a book-buyer, I see hundreds of titles and covers each year. Sometimes they intrigue me; other times they do not. I have to admit that The Timeless Series by Gabriel Meyer had a nice enough cover, but I had no interest in reading it. The reviews were excellent; blogs and book sites boasted about how fantastic it was, and you just HAD to read it. Still, I resisted. By the time Book 5 hit the shelves and the reviews had increased, I decided I had best pick one up and see what all the hype was about. It did not disappoint.

In Book 1, *When the Day Comes*, we follow Libby, a time-crossing woman who lives in two time periods at once—1774 as the American Revolution begins, and 1914, before the start of WW1. On her 21st birthday, she needs to choose a path in which to continue living. Two identical bodies, one conscious mind. It wasn't the kind of time travel I thought it might be, but I was hooked.

Faith permeates this beautifully crafted, well-researched book, extending through both lives and time periods. The historical facts add a rich layer to the stories and circumstances that Libby faces as she navigates the two worlds. Living in colonial Williamsburg in 1776, when Americans desperately wanted to be free of England, and comparing that to the elite New York of 1914, when people coveted the lure of an English title, created fascinating circumstances and difficult decisions.

I enjoyed every aspect of Meyer's writing. The characters felt real, as if I were walking alongside them. When I read the second (and third) book, the same richness followed the characters through different time periods. I very much appreciated the author's note at the end of the book explaining which characters were based on real people and where some of the research had come from. If you like light romance and history, I think you will love these books. They keep you guessing until the end and hook you into wanting more.



Review by **Denise Ramsay**.
Denise is an avid reader with a busy family life. She serves on our MLC Women's Leadership Team and works as Book Manager at House of James.

KIDS

Kids (Kindergarten through grade 5) are invited downstairs during our worship service time to have their own special Bible lesson! We are always learning. Here's what we're up to for the month of June:

JUNE 7 FAMILY SUNDAY

Worship with our church family
(student activity packs available at Connect).

JUNE 14 JOSHUA LED THE PEOPLE

Numbers 27:12–23 + Deut. 34:5
People can develop and use their abilities and talents in ways that please and honour God.

JUNE 21 DANIEL OBEYED GOD'S LAW

Daniel 1:1–20
God asks me to honour Him by choosing to do what is right and reject what is wrong.

JUNE 28 MOSES AND THE BURNING BUSH

Exodus 3:1–4:17
God is faithful and just.



MEMORY VERSE

"Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.'"

Isaiah 44:6 ESV

TOTS

God has blessed our Mill Lake Church family with sweet little ones to care for while their parents worship together in the service. It's a joy to serve His littlest ones each week!

YOUTH

Come on out to Youth Night every Monday @ 7 p.m., in the gym.

Bring your Bibles and a great attitude, ready to learn and have fun together!

@mlcyouth



God, You Can't Be a GOOD GOD If...

by David Janke

rate monitor hovering over her stomach to catch any movement in Poppy's heartbeat. We learned Poppy was suffering from "reverse diastolic flow."

There are three ways that blood flows to the uterus when the mother's heart beats. The normal way is that when the heart beats, the blood flows faster. On the offbeat, it flows slower. If there's a problem with the uterus, one can experience "pulsatile flow," where the blood flows to the uterus on the heartbeat and then stands still on the offbeat. One step further from that is the most dangerous: "reverse diastolic flow." This is when blood flows to the uterus on the heartbeat, but on the offbeat, the blood actually flows backwards. This can cause the baby's heartbeat to drop drastically, and sometimes can cause the baby's heart to stop working altogether, resulting in the child's death.

The doctors told us the big question was, "When does it become safer to take the baby out than to leave it in?" Of course, my questions surrounded statistics and percentages. How likely is a baby to survive if delivered at 26 weeks and five days? The answer to that question wasn't comforting. And even if Poppy survived, there could be a whole host of medical complications/surgeries that could change a person's life forever.

And so, with Allie on strict bed rest, we waited, hoping to keep the "bun in the oven" for as long as possible. Every time Poppy's heart rate dropped from 150 beats per minute to the 80s or 90s, five or six medical personnel rushed into the room and stared at the heart-rate monitor, waiting to see if they needed to perform an emergency C-section. This went on for five days.

Then the evening came, 27 weeks and two days gestation. Poppy's heart rate dropped to a mere 50 beats per minute, and the doctor told us that if it dropped again, it was time to deliver. The fear was that if the heart rate dropped too low, it might not come back up, and we would lose Poppy. This is the point at which I faced a test that I had never envisioned.

I pulled a chair up next to Allie's bed and held her hand. I was going to pray. Obviously, that's what every Christian husband who has studied to

be a pastor would do at a time like this. Up to this point in my life, I had never doubted God. I had never questioned the Bible, the Gospel, or God's goodness. So, as I prayed out loud, the words flowed easily. "God, I know you're good and that your plan is perfect. I know everything that happens is for our good and for your glory."

And then it happened. Like a multiple personality, as I prayed out loud, I began to talk to God in my head, where Allie couldn't hear. No, God, you can't be a good God if you take our baby. There is no way you can be good if you take our innocent child. The anger seethed from my heart as I "prayed," lashing out at God and threatening His goodness if He didn't give me what I wanted. I must admit that my actions shocked me. I didn't know where that emotion came from. But I knew I was angry. I finished praying and went to sleep.

Allie and I had barely fallen asleep when the heart monitor began beeping at 11:30 p.m. The doctor came in calmly and told us it was time. By 12:27 a.m. on March 6, 2014, Poppy was delivered by emergency C-section after having spent just 27 weeks and two days in the womb. She measured 32 cm (12.5 inches) long and weighed a mere 707 grams (1 pound, 9 ounces).

It was a surreal moment, mixed with overwhelming joy and fear. Allie held Poppy for just a moment before they whisked her away to the Neo-natal intensive care unit in Pod F, where they cared for what hospital staff referred to as "million-dollar babies." It was not uncommon for the medical costs of a baby born this early to total a million dollars. Hospital staff placed our baby inside an "isolette"—a clear plastic bassinet containing warm, humidified air. The road ahead was uncertain, with the terrifying feeling of death looming in the air.

After the nurses wheeled Allie to a recovery room, I took her by wheelchair to see Poppy. But Allie could stay in the room for only a few minutes because

the grief and tears overtook her already worn-out body. We went back to the recovery room, and I sat next to her on her hospital bed. My mind raced as I continued to be angry at God, having not made peace with Him since my internal prayer.

I then had this thought: *Am I a fraud? Am I a true Christian?* I had never faced such a test in my life. I had never thought I could tell God to His face that He was anything but good. And that's when it occurred to me. I wasn't allowed to wait until I knew if Poppy would survive before I trusted God. If I waited to repent until Poppy survived, I would always wonder if my faith was fake. Did I simply trust God in the good times, but not in the bad? How difficult was that? How REAL was that?

I can count on one hand the number of times I have wept as an adult. I've teared up countless times, but to really weep and sob is rare for me. But that day, I poured out my heart to God. I told Him I believed He was good, no matter what He decided with our baby's life. I said I was sorry for being angry at Him, for doubting Him. I told Him that even if He takes my daughter, He is still good. The tears came like a flood. I couldn't control the sobbing. It was a great release as I humbled my heart before the all-wise, ever-present God and placed myself and my daughter into His sovereign hands. The anger left. The fear subsided. And just as Philippians 4:7 says, the "peace that passes all understanding" guarded my heart and mind.

The doctor asked if we had a name picked out. How could we have? Who picks a name at 27 weeks? It took us two days to decide, and we finally settled on "Eden." The name Eden means "pleasure" or "delight." Eden was the paradise of God's people before the fall. And as Christians, one day, we are going to return to that Paradise. I told Allie that whether Eden lives or dies, we will "return to Eden."

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It was a normal day at the bank. I wore a tie, worked in Rochester Hills, Michigan, and was well into a typical workday. My wife, Allie, and I had been married for three and a half years and were excitedly expecting our first child. Allie was 26 weeks pregnant and, because at four weeks her pregnancy app said our child was the size of a poppy seed, we affectionately nicknamed our unborn human, "Poppy."

Before I go further, let me remind you that emergencies are never announced. You don't get a heads-up when a life crisis hits. And you almost never expect them. Sometimes our minds dwell on morbid hypotheticals known as "intrusive thoughts." But no amount of dwelling on would-be emergencies will ever prepare you for a real one.

I answered the phone. My wife's voice was calm but concerned. "They're admitting me to the hospital, and they might want to deliver the baby today," she said. Nothing about that made sense to me. Allie had simply gone in for a routine ultrasound at 26 weeks and five days. I told her I would come to the hospital right away and grabbed my things. I informed my branch manager that Allie had been admitted to the hospital, that there was a problem with the baby, and that she might have to deliver today. My manager's face fell, and she told me to go.

I don't remember the drive there, but after I found the labour and delivery unit, I walked into the room and saw Allie lying on a hospital bed with a heart

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There is much more to tell, but the rest of the story is for another time. Eden Pavot Janke spent the next 87 days in the Royal Oak Beaumont Hospital NICU, receiving incredible care. Doctors discharged her on June 1, 2014, and she spent the first year of her life on home oxygen. God could have made the end of this story very different. However, one year after her hospital stay, she no longer had to see any of the seven specialists; she had not undergone even one surgery, and had zero lasting medical conditions. Her final hospital bill totaled just over \$500,000, making her a “half-million-dollar baby.” Eden turned twelve this past March, and you would never guess she had been the size of a Barbie doll.

Rabbi Harold Kushner, the author of *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, had a 16-year-old son diagnosed with a premature aging disease called Progeria. When Kushner's son passed away, Kushner concluded that one of two things must be true about God. Option one was that God is malicious, a bad God. Option two was that God isn't in control of everything; that God was incapable of stopping human suffering. Since Kushner didn't like option one, he chose the second. But Harold Kushner missed a third option.

God is both good AND fully capable of stopping human suffering. He upholds all things by the Word of His power and has our days recorded before they happen (Hebrews 1:3 and Psalm 139:16). But since we are sinners, we all must face the effects of sin. And when we do, it is for our good and for God's glory.

So, don't be like me. And don't be like Rabbi Kushner. Don't question the goodness of God when your crisis hits you out of nowhere. And don't question the power of God when you can't believe He could let something like this happen to you. Instead, believe that God is good and cares for you. Cast all your cares on Him, and He will sustain you with His peace.

May we walk in hope until we all return to Eden.



David Janke is pastor of Gospel Fellowship Baptist Church in Abbotsford, BC. He grew up in Abbotsford, attended Valley Christian School, and studied for the ministry in South Carolina. He obtained a B.A. in Bible in 2006 and then attended seminary in South Carolina and Michigan. David and his wife, Allie, have three children: Eden, David III, and Judah.



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Mr. Bouchard's Violin

Part 3 of a 3-Part Short Story

By Katherine Charlton

The lights were on when I arrived and picked up the tall stack of newspapers left on the porch. Mr. Bouchard's house was still dusty, but by then it had grown disorganized as well. I had thought him old when I was a child, but he had truly aged now, and the housework had become too much for him.

Mr. Bouchard called for me to come in when I knocked, just as he'd begun doing a year before when getting up to go to the door had become too strenuous. I found him sitting in the low green chair, his eyes half open as if he were about to fall asleep.

I stood awkwardly in the doorway for a moment. “Mom said you wanted to see me?” My words sounded strange in the heavy silence of the room; they sounded oddly small, even childish.

He nodded, a sad smile on his face. “Come, sit down.”

I took a seat on the stool beside him, my face growing redder by the moment. He did not speak for a long time, his eyes somewhere else, in some faded memory. I waited as long as I could, but after a couple of minutes, I spoke. “Mr. Bouchard?”

He looked up at me, as though remembering I was there. “Oh, yes.” He paused and folded his hands. “I don't think I ever told you about how I started playing the violin.”

I stared at him, not understanding why he wanted to share this now. “I was about your age when I first played.” He paused to look about the room with a long sigh, finding his place in the story. “My mother wanted me to learn. I had no interest at the time. I'd wanted to be a baseball player and saw no sense

in anything so frivolous as a violin. But with a foot like mine, she knew I'd never be much for sports.”

I stared silently, unsure why he was telling me this.

He smiled, his gaze somewhere far away. “My mother wasn't the kind of woman you could say no to, so I took my lessons, and I played, but I had no love for it. I always rushed away the moment the lesson ended. But my mother insisted I continue. I had a talent, she told me. So, I played right through school, never really interested.” His eyes crinkled with an emotion I did not know. “You're very young, and I imagine, like most young boys, you quietly hope for some great fight by which to prove yourself.”

I shook my head, but he continued, “No, no, it's alright. Natural, even. All young men do it. But for an old man, those times hardly ever come as you imagine. For me, they came in a manner that I physically could not face. My foot.” He gestured to the twisted limp that I had almost forgotten about. It was jarring, the sudden remembering of it.

He frowned. “It kept me home while my friends were all sent overseas. Those were dark days for me. I spent a lot of time, too much time really, wallowing in my misfortune. I didn't understand and thought I'd been made half-whole. I was angry at being made unfit for the role I thought I had. What right did I have to sit, to go about my life, when my friends...”

He paused as his eyes landed on me, maybe seeing the wide-eyed look on my face. “Well, maybe I shouldn't be telling you all of that. My point is,

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that's when I got to playing. Playing for real, that is. At first, because there was nothing else to do, but that changed when they started sending musicians over to entertain the troops."

"You went over?"

Mr. Bouchard nodded with a small smile.

"But you didn't fight?" I asked, my interest piqued by this new information. I'd never imagined Mr. Bouchard had ventured out of our town, let alone the country.

He shook his head. "As I said, I was not made for fighting, but I could play and offer some distraction for those who could. It was my small part, not big or particularly glorious, but it was the task given me. I believe now that it was one of the tasks I was made for; I was not half-formed, but given only what was necessary."

I did not understand. Years of television had trained me to expect that any underdog story must have some victorious conclusion. "So that's it? You played for the troops and went home?"

His lips drooped into a small frown, maybe seeing that I had not understood. "That's it. We are not all given the same tasks in life, but each of us has a role to play." He leaned forward in the chair ever so slightly, his arms quivering lightly with the strain of pushing up his aging body. "I hope that you should find yours, Danny. You were made for a purpose, and you are bright and young. There is so much good that you can do in this world. Don't waste it searching for what you are not called to."

I nodded listlessly. I'd heard speeches like this before—from teachers, my mother, and coaches. They always harped on the same handful of points, and I'd become bored with them.

Mr. Bouchard sighed raspingly back into the chair. "Well, that's all I wanted to say. You'd best be getting home now." There was a note of disappointment in his voice that I tried not to hear.

I wish that I'd understood sooner what he was trying to tell me that night. Instead, my time at Mr. Bouchard's continued to dwindle through high school. There were better, more exciting things to do. We grew so distant that I hardly stopped to tell

him goodbye before driving myself off to university in my second-hand car.

Months passed. I heard nothing of Mr. Bouchard and thought little of him as well. I'd left the violin at home. I was at school for a business degree and was enjoying the first tastes of real freedom, leaving no time to play music. The university buzzed with life and movement. The trees were bursting into those brilliant early autumn colours, and the people I met were of an interesting variety. I could hardly think of anything but the kaleidoscope of experiences in front of me.

It came as a shock to me, though it shouldn't have, when my mother called to tell me he had passed. It happened quietly; a neighbour had found him in the low green chair, so peaceful that at first she'd thought he'd only been sleeping, the violin still sitting on the stool.

I drove home for the funeral, feeling strangely numb. It was not my first encounter with death. My grandmother passed when I was ten, but Mr. Bouchard had been significant to me despite the last couple of years. In fact, this silence amplified the grief I felt, as it came laden with a guilt that ate away at my heart. What had been my final words to him? A hasty goodbye? I only then thought of how I'd neglected him in those final years, and a small but terrified portion of my heart wondered if he'd resented me for it.

After attending the small funeral that Saturday, I spent several days at home with my parents, sometimes talking about Mr. Bouchard in a passive and quiet way. Neither of them seemed to know how to speak to me about him, and I did not know the words to express what I felt. My terror that he may have resented my abandonment festered in the silence.

The day I was meant to return to the university, there was a knock at our door. I opened it and recognized Mr. Bouchard's oldest daughter from the funeral. She was tall and thin, her blonde hair tied back tightly on her head and wrinkles around her sagging lips that reminded me painfully of Mr. Bouchard.

"Are you Danny?"

"Dan," I said. I'd changed my name several years before, feeling that it made me sound older, more respectable.

"Sorry to bother you, but..." She looked down. In her hands, I finally noticed the violin case.

"Well, he left this to you," she said quietly, a small, tight smile on her face.

I stared. My ears felt oddly numb, and I could not understand what was happening. "Me?"

She nodded slowly, looking me over as though she were trying to piece together who I was. "He left a note about it in his will." She laughed weakly. "I always thought he'd be buried with the thing but..." She paused. "Who were you to him?"

I heard my mother come down the hallway to stand behind me, gazing curiously through the doorway.

"He uh," I tried not to choke up, embarrassed by the confused emotion swelling in my throat. "He used to give me lessons. I haven't played for a bit, so I don't know why..." I trailed off. I couldn't understand. Having spent the last several days with the growing terror that he had died feeling betrayed by my disinterest, I could not reconcile the gift of his violin, the object he had prized most in life.

The woman looked down at the violin case again, a wisp of graying blonde hair falling out of its tight band. "It's a nice violin, could be worth something if you sell it." She handed it to me. It felt heavier in my hands than I remembered.

"Yeah, maybe," I said.

She looked over her shoulder at the street, maybe so we would not see the mist of tears that had gathered there. "Well, it was nice meeting you both."

She almost turned to leave when a strange urge suddenly loosened my tongue. "Wait."

Her eyes snapped back to mine. I blushed. "Wait, could I come over to the house? I want to play it there one last time." I held up the violin in both hands. "I could play it for you."

She looked at me strangely, with heavy grief in her clear blue eyes. "That might be nice."

The dust no longer sat stagnant in the house. It was almost odd to see everything so bare, as though the

very character of the house had changed. Several blonde children ran about the house playing, almost knocking into the banister as they rushed by. "Jason. Nicole." The woman called after two of them. "Don't run in the house."

In the sitting room were several tired-looking adults. I had trouble looking at them. In each face, I saw different pieces of Mr. Bouchard. His nose on the man sitting in the green chair. His sloping eyes on a woman seated on the unused piano bench. They all looked at me with vague anticipation as I took my seat on the stool. Only then did I feel nervous.

Who was I to come into this house of grief, to bring out their father's violin? I almost felt ashamed of my presumption. My mouth twitched in the way it did when I was uncomfortable, and I tried to keep my hands from shaking as I unzipped the case.

Glancing up, my eyes met with the man in the low green chair, and he gave me a smile so painfully reminiscent of Mr. Bouchard's that it would have been easier to look into the sun. He leaned back into the seat with a wistful sigh.

"It's been years since I've heard him play. I'd give just about anything." His voice choked. "It's kind of you to come over here."

I stared at him wide-eyed for a moment. There was nothing I could really do for this man, nothing substantial. But he was looking at me with so much gratitude in his eyes, for the one small thing I knew how to do.

Somewhere far off, maybe still echoing off the floorboards of the halls, I could hear the thin and silver strain of Mr. Bouchard's violin. I raised the bow, hovering still in the air for a moment. My eyes closed, and I began to play.



Katherine Charlton is an English teacher living abroad in Busan, South Korea. She serves on the Ulsan Journey English Church leadership team and grew up attending Mill Lake Church. When she isn't working, she can be found hiking, reading, or playing with her cat. Katherine and her husband, Jarrod Hong, currently live in South Korea.

MEN'S WING NIGHT EVENT



Our Mill Lake Men gathered for an evening of good food, meaningful conversations, and encouragement. After enjoying wings, salads, and desserts, we were challenged and inspired by Pastor Randy's message on biblical adoption and a meaningful four-man panel discussion on fatherhood. The room was filled with laughter and the strength that comes from growing together in faith and friendship.

WOMEN'S SWEET CONNECTIONS EVENT

Our Mill Lake Women gathered for an evening of Sweet Connections in a beautifully transformed room, complete with delicate dishes and elegant silver and gold cutlery. We savoured decadent cheesecake, enjoyed the sweet melodies of Miranda Moorhouse, and were deeply encouraged by the soul-refreshing words of Sarah Griffiths Hu. The room was alive with laughter, meaningful conversation, and the joy of rich friendship.



Volunteer Appreciation Night

THANK YOU FOR MAKING A DIFFERENCE!

SUNDAY, JUNE 14TH

6:30 PM

Together, we build a stronger community.

SHARE your STORIES⁺

TALENTS + PHOTOS + THOUGHTS

Send them to: ann@milllakechurch.ca



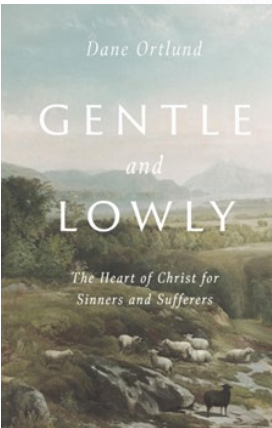
Here's your opportunity to read through the Bible in 2026. This M'Cheyne Bible Reading Plan will enable you to read through the OT once and NT twice in the year.

- 1. ☐ Dt 5; Ps 88; Is 33; Rev 3
- 2. ☐ Dt 6; Ps 89; Is 34; Rev 4
- 3. ☐ Dt 7; Ps 90; Is 35; Rev 5
- 4. ☐ Dt 8; Ps 91; Is 36; Rev 6
- 5. ☐ Dt 9; Ps 92-93; Is 37; Rev 7
- 6. ☐ Dt 10; Ps 94; Is 38; Rev 8
- 7. ☐ Dt 11; Ps 95-96; Is 39; Rev 9
- 8. ☐ Dt 12; Ps 97-98; Is 40; Rev 10
- 9. ☐ Dt 13-14; Ps 99-101; Is 41; Rev 11
- 10. ☐ Dt 15; Ps 102; Is 42; Rev 12
- 11. ☐ Dt 16; Ps 103; Is 43; Rev 13
- 12. ☐ Dt 17; Ps 104; Is 44; Rev 14
- 13. ☐ Dt 18; Ps 105; Is 45; Rev 15
- 14. ☐ Dt 19; Ps 106; Is 46; Rev 16
- 15. ☐ Dt 20; Ps 107; Is 47; Rev 17
- 16. ☐ Dt 21; Ps 108-109; Is 48; Rev 18
- 17. ☐ Dt 22; Ps 110-111; Is 49; Rev 19
- 18. ☐ Dt 23; Ps 112-113; Is 50; Rev 20
- 19. ☐ Dt 24; Ps 114-115; Is 51; Rev 21
- 20. ☐ Dt 25; Ps 116; Is 52; Rev 22
- 21. ☐ Dt 26; Ps 117-118; Is 53; Mt 1
- 22. ☐ Dt 27:1-28:19; Ps 119:1-24; Is 54; Mt 2
- 23. ☐ Dt 28:20-68; Ps 119:25-48; Is 55; Mt 3
- 24. ☐ Dt 29; Ps 119:49-72; Is 56; Mt 4
- 25. ☐ Dt 30; Ps 119:73-96; Is 57; Mt 5
- 26. ☐ Dt 31; Ps 119:97-120; Is 58; Mt 6
- 27. ☐ Dt 32; Ps 119:121-144; Is 59; Mt 7
- 28. ☐ Dt 33-34; Ps 119:145-176; Is 60; 3 Mt 8
- 29. ☐ Jos 1; Ps 120-122; Is 61; Mt 9
- 30. ☐ Jos 2; Ps 123-125; Is 62; Mt 10

PASTOR RANDY'S RECOMMENDED READING

GENTLE AND LOWLY: THE HEART OF CHRIST FOR SINNERS AND SUFFERERS

By Dane Ortlund



What does Jesus actually feel toward us—not just in our best moments, but in our failures, our sin, and our suffering? That is the question Dane Ortlund sets out to answer in this remarkable book, and the answer he finds in Scripture is both surprising and deeply comforting.

Drawing on Matthew 11:29, where Jesus describes himself as “gentle and lowly in heart,” Ortlund leads readers through the Gospels and the Puritan writers to show that Christ’s heart is not reluctant toward sinners, but tenderly and irresistibly drawn to them. This is not a book about what we must do for God; it is a book about what God in Christ has already done and continues to feel toward His people. *Gentle and Lowly* is accessible to new believers, yet rich enough to nourish long-time Christians. The book especially suits people who are weary, struggle with doubt, or feel burdened by shame. Many readers have described it as one of the most spiritually refreshing books they’ve ever read.

For our Mill Lake family, this book offers reassurance and challenge: God is not finished with us. The years we are living right now matter profoundly for eternity. I recommend you read this book for some thoughtful, prayerful reflection.

This book not only helps you understand what happened, but why it matters—deepening both theological insight and personal devotion. Ideal for pastors, teachers, and church members alike, it invites you to slow down and behold the glory of Christ in His suffering, death, and resurrection. A deeply edifying resource.

MUSIC Moment

ALL BECAUSE OF MERCY

By Casting Crowns

Scan the QR code with your phone camera and savour some time with God through music. Alternatively, you can find this song by searching on youtube.com.

LISTEN HERE

