

# Caring Connections

An Inter-Lutheran Journal for Practitioners and Teachers of Pastoral Care and Counseling



*Books That Have Made a Difference*

## The Purpose of Caring Connections

*Caring Connections: An Inter-Lutheran Journal for Practitioners and Teachers of Pastoral Care and Counseling* is written primarily by and for Lutheran practitioners and educators in the fields of pastoral care, counseling, and education. Seeking to promote both breadth and depth of reflection on the theology and practice of ministry in the Lutheran tradition, *Caring Connections* intends to be academically informed, yet readable, solidly grounded in the practice of ministry, and theologically probing. *Caring Connections* seeks to reach a broad readership, including chaplains, pastoral counselors, seminary faculty and other teachers in academic settings, clinical educators, synod and district leaders, others in specialized ministries and concerned congregational pastors and laity.

*Caring Connections* also provides news and information about activities, events and opportunities of interest to diverse constituencies in specialized ministries.

## Help Support Caring Connections

Funding is an ongoing challenge, even for a small professional electronic journal like *Caring Connections*. Denominational (ELCA and LCMS) financial support continues to be reduced. No board member or either of the co-editors receives any financial recompense. Lutheran Services in America, our host site, receives no financial compensation for hosting. Our only expense is for the layout of the issue itself.

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## Scholarships

When the Inter Lutheran Coordinating Committee disbanded a few years ago, the money from the “Give Something Back” Scholarship Fund was divided between the ELCA and the LCMS. The ELCA has retained the name “Give Something Back” for their fund, and the LCMS calls theirs “The SPM Scholarship Endowment Fund.” These endowments make a limited number of financial awards available to individuals seeking ecclesiastical endorsement and certification/credentialing in ministries of chaplaincy, pastoral counseling, and clinical education.

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- not already be receiving funds from either the ELCA or LCMS national offices.
- submit an application, including costs of the program, for committee review.

Applicants must complete the Scholarship Application forms that are available from Christopher Otten [ELCA] or Bob Zagore [LCMS]. Consideration is given to scholarship requests after each application deadline. LCMS deadlines are April 1, July 1 and November 1, with awards generally made by the end of the month. ELCA deadline is December 31. Email items to Christopher Otten at [christopher.otten@elca.org](mailto:christopher.otten@elca.org) and to David Ficken [ESC@lcms.org](mailto:ESC@lcms.org).

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## Call for Articles

*Caring Connections* seeks to provide Lutheran Pastoral Care Providers the opportunity to share expertise and insight within the wider Lutheran community. We want to invite any Lutherans interested in writing an article or any readers responding to one to please contact one of the co-editors, Diane Greve at [dkgreve@gmail.com](mailto:dkgreve@gmail.com) or Bruce Hartung at [hartungb@csl.edu](mailto:hartungb@csl.edu). Please consider writing an article for us. We sincerely want to hear from you!

And, as always, if you haven't already done so, we hope you will subscribe online to *Caring Connections*. Remember, a subscription is free! By subscribing, you are assured that you will receive prompt notification when each issue of the journal appears on the *Caring Connections* website. This also helps the editors and the editorial board to get a sense of how much interest is being generated by each issue. We are delighted that our numbers are increasing. Please visit [lutheranservices.org/caring-connections-archive](http://lutheranservices.org/caring-connections-archive) and click on "Subscribe to our newsletter" to receive automatic notification of new issues.

# Editorial

**Bruce Hartung**

**CARING CONNECTIONS PUBLISHED ITS FIRST ISSUE IN 2004.** The journal began as a joint enterprise of the ELCA and the LCMS but, over the years, has transitioned into the Lutheran Services in America as its home. It continues to work to remain true to its founding purpose statement that includes, “Seeking to promote both breadth and depth of reflection on the theology and practice of ministry in the Lutheran tradition, *Caring Connections* intends to be academically informed, yet readable, solidly grounded in the practice of ministry, and theologically probing....”

This purpose fosters an openness of conversation and relies exclusively on the willingness of people who are “practitioners and educators in the fields of pastoral care, counseling and education” to write about their work and ministry. We both ask for volunteers and take the initiative to invite authors, and usually have a theme for the issue. Sometimes our issues take up controversial issues personally seen and experienced, and sometimes they are not so controversial, but all seek to give voice to the diversity of ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In all our issues, we work to have a broad range of ideas and practical, personal examples. That broad range, we believe, represents what is happening in the lives and ministries of “practitioners and educators in the fields of pastoral care, counseling and education.” For a balance of perspectives and clinical practice, we need and are, in fact, dependent upon, authors who submit articles. So—consider writing for us as topics and foci for issues are announced.

As to this “Books That Made a Difference” issue of *Caring Connections*, eleven of our colleagues in various non-parish ministries have joined this conversation by sharing a book that really made a difference in their lives. Both *Caring Connections* editors joined that conversation. Here was the invitation in the 2023.1 issue:

“What is one book that has made a difference in your life, your relationships, or your ministry (other than the Bible)? Tell your colleagues about

it, i.e., what it meant to you and why you think it would be helpful for others to read it.

Here is what I said in conversation with prospective authors: “I look for you to write about a book that influenced your vocational direction, life experience, or in some other way was deeply influential.”

In addition to the two *Caring Connections* co-editors, nine of your colleagues stepped up to write. Many of them are deeply personal stories. A number of these books are ones with which I am not familiar. I plan to order several of them. I think the reader will be moved by the effect a book can have on us, and how a book, often

.....  
What is one book that has made a difference in your life, your relationships, or your ministry (other than the Bible)?



in concert with a relationship or relationships, can support, challenge, influence or change us. Good reading! Thanks so much to our authors!

2024 is the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the inaugural issue of *Caring Connections*. In the next two issues we will be looking back to see from where we have come, and looking forward to envisioning where we are going. In some cases, we will be asking authors of previous articles to comment on how they now perceive that about which they have written. We look forward to some creative reading opportunities.

And a word about support and money: This journal is almost totally maintained by volunteers. Even so, there are expenses involved with each issue. For that donations are sought. Sponsorship of an entire issue is \$300, but donations of any kind are appreciated. There are two ways to donate to support *Caring Connections*:

- 1.** Go to the LSA website and click on the DONATE button on the top of the webpage [lutheranservices.org](http://lutheranservices.org) and indicate that your donation is a tribute for Caring Connections Acct 610.
- 2.** Mail a check to Lutheran Services of American (LSA) at 100 Maryland Ave. NE, Ste 500; Washington, DC 20002 with a clear notation or attached note indicating this is for Caring Connections Acct 610.



# Citizen: An American Lyric by Claudia Rankine

Travis Scholl

**AFTER FOUR YEARS AWAY**, my wife Jenny and I returned to our hometown of St. Louis, Missouri, to discover how much could change in four years. It was 2008, and we were expecting the first of our two sons. She was starting a new job as a pediatric nurse practitioner at Washington University, and I was entering my first call in ordained ministry at Concordia Seminary. We found a new rhythm of life in a place that retained old memories and even older histories.

Life settled into the pace any new family discovers for themselves. Our second son was born in 2011. Both of our careers grew. We lived in a neighborhood neither of us grew up in—the inner-ring, central corridor suburb of University City—that we enjoy to this day for its urbane, multicultural community. It is known best for its three-block stretch of eclectic restaurants and shops known as the Delmar Loop.

But then, on a sweltering Saturday, August 9, 2014, a teenager named Michael Brown was shot and killed by a police officer in another suburb, Ferguson, on the street of an apartment complex about six miles north of where we lived. The killing set off a national reckoning on race and racism that would be eclipsed by the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020.

But on the local level—of a city, and of my own soul—it set off something much more concrete and searing. At the time, I was writing an occasional op-ed column for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, and I found it incredibly difficult to find words for what I was feeling. The death of Michael Brown dredged up a history I had wished was no longer true in the present. Yes, *dredged*, like the deep layers of mud underneath the Mississippi River that gives St. Louis so much of its history and identity. This was a St. Louis I learned of in pieces as I grew up in it, a metropolitan area living with a divided legacy that went as far back as Dred Scott and as recent as the failed Pruitt-Igoe housing projects. I thought, perhaps naively, that the St. Louis I returned to was not *this* St. Louis, and I hoped, perhaps naively, that this was not the St. Louis in which we were now raising our boys.

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The death of Michael Brown dredged up a history I had wished was no longer true in the present.

I struggled for words, but nevertheless wrote a column in which I tried to write my way through the struggle. “As events in Ferguson turn from days to weeks, I have often found myself speechless, beyond words. Even the ordinary, everyday things weigh more heavily ... But I confess that I have found it exceedingly difficult to find any coherence in anything these days. Everything seems interrupted, on hold. All I

hear is the sound of a saxophone and the low tremble of piano keys.”<sup>1</sup> The sound of the saxophone was jazz legend John Coltrane’s “Alabama,” which he wrote as an elegy to the four African American girls killed in the 1963 bombing of 16th Avenue Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. I couldn’t stop listening to “Alabama” during those weeks.

Several months later, after the turn of the year, I came across an online article in which the author, Katy Waldman, discussed the ways in which a book published in the summer of 2014 was being revised in light of current events.<sup>2</sup> The book was Claudia Rankine’s *Citizen: An American Lyric*. The article cited a change in the most recent third printing (November 2014) on page 134, where Michael Brown’s name was the latest addition to a list of “In Memory Of.”

I immediately picked up the book and read it cover the cover almost as immediately.

Citizen is what in literary circles we call a “hybrid” work, something in between poetry and nonfiction that also incorporates in its pages visual artwork and multimedia. But its organizing structure is blocks of text that layer a catalogue of tensions, conflicts, and aggressions—many seemingly everyday events—stitched together into a patchwork collage that recreates the experience of race and racism in 21st-century America. Some of the incidents are presented as slights that could happen in any given interaction. Some teeter on the edge of becoming a violent encounter. Each narrated event is heightened by the fact that Rankine has insisted that each one actually happened to her or to someone she knows. I could choose virtually any of them as an example. I randomly pick the block of text on page 48:

Each narrated event is heightened by the fact that Rankine has insisted that each one actually happened to her or to someone she knows.

Someone in the audience asks the man promoting his new book on humor what makes something funny. His answer is what you expect—context. After a pause he adds that if someone said something, like about someone, and you were with your friends you would probably laugh, but if they said it out in public where black people could hear what was said, you might not, probably would not. Only then do you realize you are among “the others out in public” and not among “friends.”<sup>3</sup>

1 Travis Scholl, “Trying to See Clearly in #Ferguson’s Haze,” *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 19, 2014, [https://www.stltoday.com/life-entertainment/local/faith-values/trying-to-see-clearly-in-ferguson-s-haze/article\\_30526ea8-27d6-11e4-8249-0017a43b2370.html](https://www.stltoday.com/life-entertainment/local/faith-values/trying-to-see-clearly-in-ferguson-s-haze/article_30526ea8-27d6-11e4-8249-0017a43b2370.html).

2 Katy Waldman, “The New Printing of *Citizen* Adds a Haunting Message About Police Brutality,” *Slate.com*, January 7, 2015, <https://slate.com/culture/2015/01/claudia-rankines-citizen-new-printing-mourns-michael-brown-eric-garner-black-victims-of-police-brutality.html>.

3 Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2014), 48. I preserved the line breaks as they appear on the page.

Notice how mundanely Rankine presents the event, and yet, the fact that the “something funny” is left unsaid makes it all the more ominous. Living in the aftermath of Ferguson, the effect of reading all these incidents piled one on top of the other crushed me.

The effect is intensified by the way Rankine uses “you”—the second-person pronoun—throughout the book. Rankine uses “you” incessantly to refer to the unnamed characters in *Citizen*, much like any of us would use “you” in an ordinary conversation, but its effect is unsettling. The referent of the “you” shifts throughout, implicating its reader—me or us—as alternately victim, culprit, or bystander, sometimes shifting from one to another in the same passage. “His answer is what *you* expect. ... Only then do *you* realize *you* ...” As a reader, I become this *you*, wherever it appears.

On page 134, Michael Brown is the fourth name on the list. If you would go to the bookstore today, take a copy of *Citizen* off the shelf, and break open the book to that same page, the list is tragically longer. With each printing more names, more tombstones of black on white. Each name a life taken. And even so, there are still blanks to fill as the list “In Memory Of” fades into the blank spaces still left on the page.

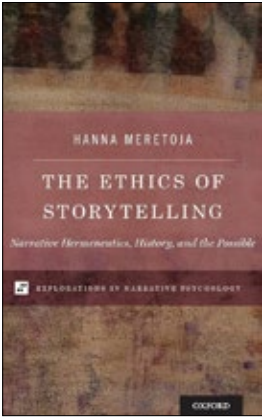
In the middle of the last page (page 159), Rankine writes, “I don’t know how to end what doesn’t have an ending.” *Citizen* has no happy ending, so it is impossible for me to give you one. Except to say that there is a kind of catharsis in reading it, a radical (as in, to the “root”) sense of empathy that emerges from reading it. Reading *Citizen* commands of its reader a new kind of citizenship, one that requires more of you than perhaps you are first willing to give. It requires you to see in its blocks of text a reflection of a self not yourself. And then to see in that self a new humanity between yourself and the other that could become, indeed, “friends.” By the end, what you make of the encounter, and what it makes of you, is, as they say, an open book.

In the fall of 2014, the central image, the nexus, of the local news reported day after day about the events of Ferguson was a burned-out QuikTrip gas station on West Florissant Avenue. In the months that followed, its lot was quickly cleared, and after three years of planning and construction, a new community empowerment center has opened there. It was built to be a symbol of hope in the aftermath of a troubling past brought back to light. And yet, now nearly ten years later, in this jigsaw-puzzle map of municipalities we call Saint Louis, only a handful of proposals from the much-lauded Ferguson Commission have been put into action.



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# *The Ethics of Storytelling: Narrative Hermeneutics, History, and the Possible* by Hanna Meretoja

Paul Galchutt

**I AM A RESEARCH CHAPLAIN.** Offering brief ecclesiastic and vocational histories leading to my current role will help illustrate why I have selected, *The Ethics of Storytelling: Narrative Hermeneutics, History, and the Possible* (2018) by Hanna Meretoja, as my favorite book.

## Earlier Years

My Lutheran heritage begins with growing up as part of a Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) congregation. I was active in the youth ministry components of my local church, including enjoying three years as a confirmand. This confirmation program was steeped in scripture. Oh, I loved turning the pages in that old Revised Standard Version! Certain Bible readers may find that the books of Leviticus or Revelation serve as sources of animation. Not me. I was drawn to the Gospel stories, especially those narrated as parables or the those describing the events of Jesus' life and ministry.

These stories took on new meaning as I learned biblical Greek and Hebrew at my LCMS college. While attending Luther Seminary, my understanding of these narratives continued to evolve and be enriched while also learning different hermeneutical methods. I left seminary with a heightened recognition that each person and community bring an interpretive lens to these stories that shape and guide our lives.

## Congregational Service

Thankfully, these Gospel stories are not mine but ours. They wove their way not only into my preaching during my congregational years of service, but into my “talks” every other week with the approximately 60 middle school students participating in the confirmation program.

In my seminary preaching class, I was taught in and evaluated toward becoming a manuscript preacher delivered behind a pulpit. When preaching in this way, however, I thrived in proclamatory mediocrity. These Gospel stories deserved a better delivery style because I found myself bored with my own preaching. I realized that I needed to change, to find a way to improve that which was more fitting for me.

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I did not enter my first call expecting that my most valued preaching teachers would be middle school students. Unlike their older congregational member counterparts, these middle school students would let me know that I needed to improve my preaching (“talks” during confirmation) by simply ignoring me. They were not being rude. They were just being who they were, naturally appraising me without intent. In other words, I either “brought it” for these talks or I did not have it.

As my preaching style evolved from the pulpit to shifting closer to the pews and from manuscript to a message without notes, I learned that the Gospel stories came alive when I preached through the stories of our own lives. When integrating and illustrating with real-life narratives, the depth and salience of the scripture reading became more relevant as people put their bulletins down and engaged with their eyes. My takeaway was the understanding that preaching for me with a narrative approach woven with stories was effectively relevant and emotionally engaging.

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## Clinical Pastoral Education Residency

As I transitioned from the congregational setting to my year of a chaplain residency, this understanding that a narrative approach woven with stories could not have been truer when supporting people amid serious and critical illness experiences. Except, instead of crafting a sermon mixed with stories for a worshipping congregation, I heard stories as people made sense of their experience of illness and what it means for their existence as they were thrust into a future that was often not desired. I quickly learned that people I supported with serious illness did not offer me lists of their values for that which was most important or categories of their emotional experiences. They told stories. Because stories are the “source of all values” (Frank, 2014, p. 69), as more stories were shared, I learned more about the people within my care and the values that guided them through the rigors of uncertainty and unpredictability.

It was during my chaplain residency that I was also first introduced to the need for conducting a spiritual assessment with patients to be reported in chaplaincy documentation. I do not recall the content of this spiritual assessment didactic, only that the subject matter felt comparatively more alluring to me as contrasted with other propositional knowledge offered.

## Staff and Palliative Care Chaplain

Not surprisingly, this interest in spiritual assessment only grew in my first chaplain job in the Milwaukee area. It has endured with increasing passion throughout my almost twenty years as a health care chaplain. When working as the palliative care chaplain at the University of Minnesota Medical Center, I was drawn to part of a

spiritual assessment definition in the palliative spirituality white paper, *Improving the Quality of Spiritual Care as a Dimension of Palliative Care: The Report of the Consensus Conference*, that spiritual assessment is “a more extensive process of active listening to a patient’s story” (Puchalski et al., 2009, p. 893). In other words, a spiritual assessment does not occur without attending to a patient’s (or their loved one’s) story and their sense of the narrative concerning the illness experience.

This realization has led me down two paths of understanding. One path was to continue to learn more about story or narrative. I became enthralled with the works of scholars like Rita Charon, Arthur W. Frank, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Paul Ricoeur, with their expertise in the realm of narrative. The other related path was in the area of hermeneutics or interpretation. Two scholars have been my guides in this hermeneutics space. One of these guides is Rick Anthony Furtak, a philosopher who writes that it is “through our emotions that we perceive meaning in life” (2018, p.197). Emotions are the fuel for stories. Rhetorically speaking, why else is a story being told other than to express what is perceived to be significant? The second part of this hermeneutics space is that these emotions animate stories that are interpretively told and perceived by another person (or more). My hermeneutics guide is the German philosopher, Hans Georg Gadamer and his seminal volume, *Truth and Method* (2004). Concerning interpretation, Gadamer writes, “To try to escape from one’s own concepts in interpretation is not only impossible but manifestly absurd. To interpret means precisely to bring one’s own preconceptions into play so that the text’s meaning can really be made to speak for us” (2004, p. 398). This text also implies the people within in our care.

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Emotions are the fuel for stories.

## Current Role – Research Chaplain

As a research chaplain, I am trained to use both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. For the relevance of this article, however, I will only refer to qualitative work and its connection with chaplaincy care.

Before doing so, however, I will summarize the path leading to my current work. What began in my youth in being drawn to the Gospel stories led to a deepening of their meanings interpreted within those stories as I learned biblical languages (college) and then hermeneutical methods (seminary). The people within the congregation I served enriched the perceptive meanings of these scriptural narratives as they were contextualized within our setting. Additionally, the people I have supported as a health care chaplain further widened the power of story as they interpretively made sense of their lives amid illness. It has been my work as a chaplain, specifically through the work of documenting a spiritual assessment, that I integrated the essential aspects of a patient’s interpreted emotions as the facilitators of the stories shared and the values they revealed.

Chaplains, inaccurately I believe, often state that we bring both a non-judgmental presence and no agenda to the care we provide. This is “manifestly absurd” applying Gadamer’s words noted above. Clinical Pastoral Education formation teaches that we are full of interpretive bias and unexplored meanings that are with us as we walk into each care encounter engaged. Qualitative researchers seek to acknowledge their interpretive bias (reflexivity) in making sense of that which is being investigated throughout the entire hermeneutic process. We do so from the words and stories shared by participants to the data that are interpretively analyzed, and to what is disseminated in a manuscript.

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## The Book Selected

Because of the book I selected, *The Ethics of Storytelling* (2018), I identify my work as a chaplain and researcher through the lens of being a narrative hermeneuticist. Dr. Meretoja offers an in-depth treatment leading to why it is important for any of us to consider our approach to our lives and our communities as narrative hermeneuticists with the following quote:

...hermeneutics is...about acknowledging that true understanding unsettles us and shows us that we do not actually know what we thought we knew...Narrative hermeneutics suggests that in order to be ethical, narrative knowing should be aware of its own interpretative nature, of being only one version, always contestable, limited, incomplete, and unfinalizable (2018, p. 244).

Because purchasing a new copy of this book could be financially out of reach, some of the core components to this text are available through the article, *Understanding Narrative Hermeneutics* (2014), in which Dr. Meretoja is a co-author along with Jens Brockmeier.

Reading blessings.

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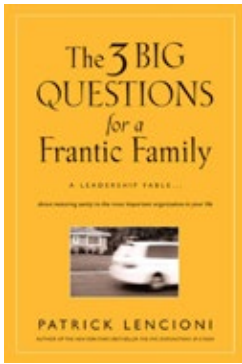
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## The 3 Big Questions for a Frantic Family by Patrick Lencioni

Erik Neider

I CAN'T RECALL THE EXACT YEAR in which this book entered my life, but the lessons stuck quickly and deeply. Our answers to its questions have resided in a prominent place in our home, guiding lights to our family and objects of intrigue to our guests. *The 3 Big Questions for a Frantic Family* helps me, my wife, and our three children focus on living out God's blessings in service to others around the world while making sure the garbage gets taken out and we take time to enjoy the people and places to which God sends us.

Sometime in my first five years of ordained ministry I was introduced to Patrick Lencioni, a leadership author and speaker known for creative and to-the-point business fables. His titles include *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, *3 Signs of a Miserable Job*, and *The Advantage Principles*. In those years I was an Associate Pastor at a suburban church and school, and these titles helped me manage the complexities my work teams faced. Sometime in that leg of my journey, I also read *The 3 Big Questions*, written for managing the complexities my home team faced.

The fable relates the journey of a couple trying to navigate suburban life with several young children while trying to grow a business consulting firm. It weaves around the husband's realizations that "If my clients ran their companies the way we run this family, they'd be out of business." With that stark assessment, a deep love for each other, and an earnest desire to make it better, the couple works to implement key components of a successful business team: knowing your purpose, discovering values, defining your business, devising a strategy, setting goals, and identifying roles and responsibilities. Quickly they realize a lot of these business decisions are largely settled through the process of two people coupling and deciding to grow a family. Things like purpose and values are built into a household, be that of a person living alone or a bustling home filled with children. The 3 big questions that they — and any household seeking more peace in its life — would benefit from answering are: 1) What makes your family unique? 2) What's your family's top priority—rallying cry—right now? 3) How do you talk about and use the answers to these questions?

The answer to the first question provides context. It briefly reminds a household of its core values and the key behaviors that lead it to live differently than their neighbors. The answer to this question is fairly static from season to season and year to year. The answer to the second question acknowledges that from year to year or

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[The fable] weaves around the husband's realizations that "If my clients ran their companies the way we run this family, they'd be out of business."

even from season to season, there will be some things that will rise to a greater level of import. And the more specific a household can be in setting its top priority, the greater chance of success in that endeavor. Lencioni maintains that the answer to this question should span two to six months “because anything longer than six months can seem so far into the future that it’s tempting to procrastinate...Anything shorter than two months is not enough time to make progress.” Answering the third question ensures that the efforts of the household remain a living thing; they don’t sit on a shelf and decay into insignificance.

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The more specific a household can be in setting its top priority, the greater chance of success in that endeavor.

When I first stumbled on *The 3 Big Questions* my wife and I were on the path of a frantic family chasing the suburban dream, trying to do more and be better in service to God and the church. We had three elementary-aged children, each involved in several activities. My wife was in two Bible studies, leading the Cub Scouts, tending a garden, and engaged in half a dozen other projects. I was struggling to do all the job requirements of a growing church and school while volunteering with the American Legion and kids’ baseball teams. We were within driving distance of family and spent many holidays shuttling to and from the grandparents’ homes. It was hard for us to deconflict the family calendar and harder still to make decisions without worrying about being second-guessed about the commitment of time, talents, or resources to which we had committed in the name of the household.

It took a few discussions before my wife and I were able to agree to a statement that comfortably answered question #1 What makes your family unique? And over the intervening years, it continues to slowly evolve. In the first years of using the model, we would sequester ourselves for an hour or two every six to eight weeks and emerge with a whiteboard revealing to our children the answer to question #2 What’s your family’s top priority-rallying cry—right now? Under this goal we listed defining objectives, those relating to accomplishment of the top priority, and standard objectives, those related to the day-to-day operation of the household. Both sets of objectives could be graded: green=good to go, yellow=could improve, or red=needs immediate attention. Over the years, this process has evolved to something more democratic where our teenagers are invited to weigh in on the top priority and grading as the whiteboard is updated. The answer to question #3 How do you talk about and use the answers to these questions? was and remains a 30-90 minute family meeting Sunday evening where we gather to reiterate the top priority, discuss progress towards its accomplishment, grade our performance on the behavioral objectives, review the family calendar for the next 7-14 days, dispense allowance, and engage in a family prayer.

Over the years our commitment to *The 3 Big Questions* model for household management has grown and borne fruit. In the early years I was struggling to find

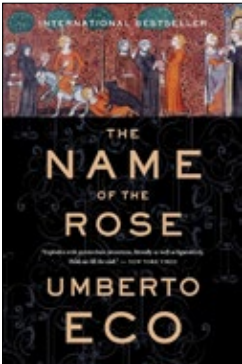
direction for ministry and peace with our place in suburbia. Having intentional discussions about how our family best invests the gifts God has given us, led me away from parish ministry and to a fulltime CPE residency and part-time Navy Reserve chaplaincy. While this added two hours of commuting to my day and several nights of in-hospital coverage, the family was able to manage the transition together because we knew how the changes were leading to better alignment of who God was inviting us to be. As the residency concluded, we found new clarity around becoming an active-duty Navy chaplain and moving away from the community that had been our home of over six years. In these last six years of active-duty service our family has kept asking, discussing, and answering *The 3 Big Questions* as I have been sent to serve the US Coast Guard in California, the US Navy in Japan, and the US Marine Corps back in California. Updated answers have helped us focus while transitioning our three children in and out of schools, churches, and communities. The collaborative process has aided discernment of when to take on or drop activities and enabled decisions of how to save, spend, and give money. *The 3 Big Questions* have helped our family and have helped bring more peace to other frantic families.

The whiteboard with the answers to our 3 Big Questions has sat in a prominent place in the kitchen in each of our last four homes. It's hard not to notice when visitors enter our home. It has spurred many conversations about how a family like ours functions, and how visitors might begin their own journey to more intentional living. As a chaplain with over 22 years of active and reserve service, I am frequently asked, "How do you and your wife make it work?" Many times, my answer includes a discussion of *The 3 Big Questions*, and, if they are lucky, a copy of the book.

Whether your household is five persons or one, growing or shrinking, transitioning or stagnant, I believe that answering *The 3 Big Questions* will increase your clarity and capacity to serve God and others.



*Chaplain Erik Neider and Joelle, his wife, were born in Wisconsin and raised in the Midwest. They lived in the Northeast from 2000–2005 while he served in the Navy's Submarine Service. He attended Concordia Seminary St. Louis from 2005–2010, taking a one year sabbatical in 2007 to deploy to Kuwait. From 2010–2015 he was Associate Pastor of Immanuel Ev. Lutheran Church in Crystal Lake, IL. In 2017 Erik returned to active-duty service as a Navy Chaplain with the US Coast Guard in Northern California. From 2020–2022 the Neiders lived in Sasebo, Japan, while Erik served on USS AMERICA. Since August 2022 they have lived in San Clemente, CA where Erik serves the Marines and Sailors of 1st Marine Division.*



# The Name of the Rose by Umberto Eco

Cory Wielert

**THERE I SAT WAITING IN LINE**, holding a spot really, in 1999, for the highly anticipated Episode I of the then new Star Wars movie. As I sat, I read a book assigned to me for a class I was to begin taking in England that summer. The professor told me, “The first 100 pages are rough, but if you can get through those, you will love the book.”

Now, I have never been an avid reader of much, so this was asking a lot of me, especially to read a book that topped out at 535 pages. But I read it. I sat there waiting for my friend to come and relieve me in line—I was not even in line for myself—just helping my friends get the tickets, but I had the best ticket, a ticket to the “dazzling bestseller,” Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose*.

At the time of reading the book I was nineteen, had blond polka dots in my hair, wore really baggy pants, and had earrings in my left ear and tattoos on my body. I say this to give you a picture of what defined me in the 90’s. Most of what people knew about me was what they could see, while very few people knew the real me—someone searching for answers, travelling the time given to me grasping for more out of life. This book gave me more. In fact, at the close of the book where Eco writes, “Moral: there exist obsessive ideas, they are never personal; books talk among themselves, and any true detection should prove that we are the guilty party.”

He wrote this with the notion that there had at the time not been a book written where “the murderer is the reader.” Yet is that not precisely in some ways what we are when we read the Bible? Our sin killed Jesus, while at the same time Jesus is dying for our sin. For me, *The Name of the Rose* evoked this wrestling with faith and science, the known and the unknown. Throughout the entirety of the book there is an intertwining of faith and reason and the struggle with which one to follow and when. As a young nineteen-year-old, reading this book and studying it more as I went to study in England gave me the perfect backdrop for change.

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The change came simply by seeing the other side of the coin, to at least realize not everyone sees the world the way I do, let alone situations, God, a book, or really anything. Take the number of people in the world and that is how many different views there are of it all. Sure, there are commonalities, there are agreements, likenesses and more—but it also gives us reason to pause and think—to say, “Hey, maybe there is another way to see this.” What this book taught me is just that, “There are other views.” It seems simple and common sensical, but it also taught me to be respectful, lest a whole library of books burn to ground. We may

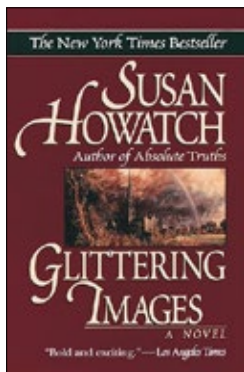
not burn a library today, but instead quiet a voice needing to be heard or ideas which need to be and ought to be shared. “Books did indeed talk among themselves,” but they cannot talk if they are silenced.

In the end there may still be differences, or the old, “let’s agree to disagree,” but that can be done respectfully, with dignity and honor. Perhaps this is something we should all push to get back to in life — being able to talk and even in disagreement find ways to still be cordial—maybe even close friends. This is what *The Name of the Rose* forged into my being back in 1999, which now seems so long ago. As for Star Wars Episode I? The wait was only worth the opportunity to sit and read a really good book, which ended up being more than formative, and was, indeed, a foundation for much of my future.



*Cory A. Wielert is a 2006 graduate of Concordia Seminary St. Louis and currently serves as the Corporate Director of Spiritual Care for Lutheran Life Communities, where he oversees pastoral care for five communities. He has written for Hope-Full Living and been published in other various publications such as the American Geriatrics Society annual. He resides in Crown Point, Indiana with his wife Kristin and four boys, Liam, Silas, Tobias and Atticus, where they all enjoy a variety of sports the boys play.*





## Glittering Images by Susan Howatch

Diane Greve

**ONE OF THE BOOKS** that have made a major difference in my life is *Glittering Images* by Susan Howatch<sup>1</sup>. At the time I first read it, I was in the process of pursuing certification as an ACPE educator, a.k.a. CPE supervisor. I was in the process of writing the three required 5-page theory papers that

were to demonstrate my pastoral theology, education/learning theory and theory of personality development. I had hit a wall. I did not know what I could claim. How to integrate my Lutheran theology with how I supervised students' learning was not at all clear to me. So, I ended up taking a year off from writing them to read this 6-book series, beginning with the first in the series: *Glittering Images*.

It must have been in about 1996 when I was introduced to the Starbridge series that is set in the context of the Church of England, beginning in 1937 and after the abdication of King Edward VIII. Divorce was controversial in the Church of England and King Edward VIII had wanted to marry a twice divorced woman.

In this fictionalized historic novel, Charles Ashworth, a priest, is sent by the Archbishop of Canterbury to determine whether the Bishop of Starbridge had committed "domestic indiscretions." Charles goes to visit the bishop's home under the guise that he is researching a book but he is, in actuality, a spy for the archbishop. As the story unfolds, he has to face his own "demons," his life challenges and self-deceit. The glittering image he wanted to portray not only became tarnished but shattered, and he is left humbled and broken. Through spiritual direction, confession, and introspection, he is led to face his own truths and finally is able to find his future again.

Throughout the book, there are quotes from *More Letters of Herbert Hensley Henson*, ed. E.F. Braley. Henson had been a chaplain at an ancient hospice in 1895. He was later a bishop. One such quote speaks to the sexual indiscretions of clergy.

"I am grieved that you also have to sustain the shock and shame of clerical scandals... how much clerical failure and scandals I have witnessed. I am sure our way is far more difficult than most men realize: that of all men we have most need to remember: 'Let he that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.'"<sup>2</sup>

The book is filled with mystery, deceit, temptation, sex, religion, emotional collapse and renewal. It lives out 1 John 1:8-9, "If we deceive ourselves the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and

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1 Howatch, Susan *Glittering Images*. New York, Ballantine Books, 1987.

2 Howatch, p 151

cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” It points to death and resurrection in the course of the human life. It enlivened the theology of the cross in a fresh way.

As I reflected on the narrative, I saw that we enact the death and resurrection story throughout our lives. I had gone through a painful divorce. It was a “little death” and having allowed that chapter of my life to die, I could see a new chapter unfold. My glittering image needed to be crushed before a new, more authentic person could emerge. It was my own “little resurrection.”

I realized that my understanding of the Theology of the Cross was grounded in facing the truth of our lives in a way that allowed for transformation. As a CPE supervisor I helped students face their own truths, and also walk with their care recipients in facing painful truths that could open them to a vision of a new future. My theory papers, integrated around this general theme, were approved by my readers the first time.

Susan Howatch was born in Leatherhead, Surrey, England. Her father died in World War II. She completed a degree in law at King’s College and moved to the US where she lived in New York City, married and had one child. Upon separating from her husband, she returned to the UK. While she had the financial resources to live a life among the affluent, she also became aware of and drawn to the study of Anglican Christianity. It was here she had a spiritual epiphany. And, after having written other books of pure fiction, she began to write the Starbridge Series in which she integrated her newly discovered Christian faith with the life of her characters. At some level, these books reveal her own journey to wholeness.

They are well written, engrossing, and may be spiritually transformative for the reader. I recommend you take the time to read *Glittering Images* and you may also find yourself engrossed in the other books in the series as well.



*Diane Greve is a retired ACPE educator, an LDA deaconess and a retired ELCA Word and Sacrament minister. She lives in Minneapolis alongside the Mississippi River, near her two adult children and 5 grandchildren. For several years, she has been the ELCA co-editor of Caring Connections.*



# Don't Sing Songs to a Heavy Heart: How to Relate to Those Who Are Suffering by Kenneth Haugk

Nanette Dost

**THIS SUMMER**, I celebrated four decades of diaconal ministry. I spent the first 20 of those years as a teacher at primary and secondary schools and the second 20 on staff at Stephen Ministries in St. Louis. Along with celebrating this 40-year milestone, I've also been doing a lot of reflecting on meaningful moments from these years of ministry.

In my reflections, I recalled one of the first major projects I worked on at Stephen Ministries: participating in the development of the book *Don't Sing Songs to a Heavy Heart: How to Relate to Those Who Are Suffering*. I had the opportunity to work closely with the author and editorial team and shared in the excitement of seeing the book released into the world. On a professional level, *Don't Sing Songs to a Heavy Heart* will always hold a special place in my heart.

As rewarding as it was to work on the book, though, the ways *Don't Sing Songs to a Heavy Heart* has influenced my life extend way beyond just professional satisfaction.

The idea for the book began with author and Stephen Ministries founder Dr. Kenneth Haugk, with whom I worked closely throughout the book's writing and editing. Drawing on experiences he and his wife, Joan, had during her 3 1/2 year cancer journey, Dr. Haugk wanted to create a resource that would help equip people to know how to relate with those who are hurting.

Equipping the saints for using their spiritual gifts in ministry and caring for the hurting have always been the twin goals of my personal ministry, and in many ways *Don't Sing Songs to a Heavy Heart* has put into words who I am as a deaconess. It was a foundational part of my master's thesis, "Congregational Caring for Those Experiencing Pain and Suffering," at Concordia Seminary. I've led multiple studies of the book at my home congregation, Timothy Lutheran Church in Saint Louis, both for continuing education of our Stephen Ministers and with members of the church at large. I've also conducted hundreds of workshops and training courses across the United States introducing new churches to Stephen Ministry in which I shared about the book and its lessons with thousands of people. It's been a joy

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through it all to see how this book has impacted and helped people in real, tangible ways.

Most significantly and most personally, it's a resource that I've returned to time and time again for guidance, wisdom, and practical ideas for the best ways to care for hurting people I encounter. Even today, almost twenty years after the book's publishing, there are three chapters I often go back to: "What Do You Do After You Say Hello?," "Words that Hurt, Not Heal," and "Creating a Safe Place."

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As a naturally quiet person, I learned to ask a few open-ended questions to understand what's going on with someone and then listen.

**Chapter 5—"What Do You Do After You Say Hello?"**—discusses how to connect meaningfully with a hurting person, starting right at the beginning of an interaction. It provides valuable principles for when to listen and when to talk. As a naturally quiet person, I learned to ask a few open-ended questions to understand what's going on with someone and then listen. The chapter also gave me many practical words and phrases that have helped me know what to say in countless situations where I would have otherwise been at a loss for words. This had not only been a relief to me, but it's helped my caring be much more effective—whether I'm relating to my husband, my children, someone from church, or a person I've met through my ministry.

**Chapter 9—"Words that Hurt, Not Heal"**—was an eye-opener the first time I read it. Before reading it, I'd never thought much about the words I said at a funeral, at a visitation, or in the hospital. After reading the chapter, I realized that much of what I said was commonly used by others and out of habit, but they were words that could be hurtful instead of consoling.

Reading this chapter transformed the way I spoke to people who were grieving, going through a difficult time, or otherwise suffering. For example, I have stopped offering words like "At least he's no longer suffering," that try to find the silver lining in someone's pain.

The insights I learned from the chapter motivated me to find other, better ways to offer comfort. And even almost twenty years after I first read a draft of this chapter, I'm still applying what I learned.

**Finally, chapter 11—"Creating a Safe Place"**—taught me how to take the time and create a space to find out how a person is really doing. We all ask the question, "How are you?" in passing, and we've all responded to that question by saying, "Fine," no matter how we're really feeling. The chapter gave principles for letting others know that I'm willing to take the time to truly listen to them, and it strengthened my ability to meet people where they are and offer empathy.

These are my favorite chapters, but every chapter in *Don't Sing Songs to a Heavy Heart* has had a part in transforming how I care for those who are hurting, while also allowing me to equip others to do the same.

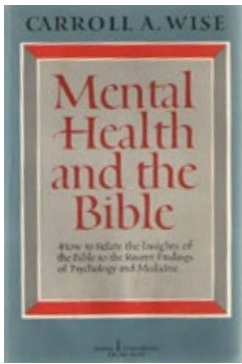
Ultimately, that's why I view *Don't Sing Songs to a Heavy Heart: How to Relate to Those Who Are Suffering* as one of the most influential books in my life. From the first time I read draft copies of the book as a new member of the Stephen Ministries staff, it's been teaching me lessons that add up in a significant way. It's helped me take the compassion I have for people who are hurting and apply it into tangible, effective caring actions, making me a better caregiver, better deaconess, and better person along the way.

For me, it truly was—and still is—a book that makes a difference.



*Nanette Dost, a Lutheran deaconess, leads consultation services at Stephen Ministries and has overseen her congregation's Stephen Ministry for 19 years. For the first 20 years of her diaconal ministry she served at various Lutheran schools—preschool through secondary.*





## *Mental Health And The Bible* by Carroll A. Wise

**Bruce Hartung**

**IT WAS THE LATE SPRING OF 1966.** I was three-quarters through my vicarage (internship) year in Chicago at Jehovah Lutheran Church, a then-bustling parish near the Fullerton-Pulaski intersection on the North Side of Chicago. My parish supervisor was the Second Vice-President of the LCMS, and he was away from the parish quite often during the year. My schedule was intense and full and mostly everyone was satisfied that my internship was going well. I used that to my advantage when I asked Dr. Theodore Nickel if, because it had been such a busy year and I had worked hard, would it be possible for me to take a course in pastoral care and counseling at one of the seminaries in Chicago. I was thinking specifically about the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.

He thought it was a great idea! I began to look around for an available course to be offered that summer. Much to my disappointment, there was nothing of interest to me being offered among the cluster of seminaries on the South Side of Chicago, the cluster including LSTC. I had given up until someone, in a casual side comment, said that he thought there were a couple of seminaries over in Evanston, an immediate suburban Chicago neighbor. I checked, and there were two: Seabury-Western, an Episcopal Seminary, and Garrett Theological (now Garrett Evangelical), a Methodist seminary.

To my amazement and joy, out of the listing of summer courses at Garrett “Religion and Health” taught by Dr. Carroll Wise caught my eye. I jumped at the chance and began the class with five other students, including Larry Holst, then the head of the Department of Pastoral Care at Lutheran General Hospital (and eventually my boss five years hence).

To say that I was not well-integrated in my life at that time would be an understatement. While I was moving forward in my seminary education and was looking forward to marriage later in that summer, much of my intellectual and emotional life was full of disconnected pieces. As it turned out, and as I think the Spirit of God works, people come together in the Body of Christ and, at key moments, change and even movement forward occurs. This class at this pivotal point in my life changed my whole life trajectory. Central to all this was Carroll Wise, a man who, I learned, was one of the principle leaders in the rise of the pastoral counseling movement in the United States. And central to all that was his book *Mental Health and the Bible: How to Relate the Insights of the Bible to the*

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This class at this pivotal point in my life changed my whole life trajectory. Central to all this was Carroll Wise, a man who, I learned, was one of the principle leaders in the rise of the pastoral counseling movement in the United States.

*Recent Findings of Psychology and Medicine*, Harper ChapelBooks, Harper and Row, 1956. The book itself was a popularized and updated version of his *Religion in Illness and Health*, published in 1942 and was originally published under the title *Psychiatry and the Bible*.

The radical trajectory change: I found something of an intellectual, spiritual, and vocational home and wanted to live in it. Still unsure of my own instincts, I returned to Concordia Seminary with the prayerful plea to God: “It is Your choice. There is one graduate school to which I will apply and hope to enroll in but, if I am not accepted, I will go ahead and take a call into the parish ministry.” I still look at this as an arrogant prayer on my part, but it was where I was emotionally at the time.

I was accepted into the interdisciplinary Ph.D. program, Northwestern University and Garrett Seminary, and, in the Summer of 1967 off I went to be a part-time Assistant Pastor at Redeemer Lutheran in Waukegan, IL and a full-time graduate student in the Garrett-Northwestern program.

What was in the book and incarnated in my emerging professor-student relationship with Carroll Wise, a man about whom I was totally unaware before the summer of 1966? Here are samples, using the actual language and remembering that this is 1966:

“In each of these aspects of man’s being he can become sick. Physical sickness due to the invasion of disease germs is familiar to all of us, and illustrates how our environment may make us ill. One may also be sick in his relation to himself, as in the person who constantly feels guilty about his need for love. Or one may have a sick relationship with others, an illustration of which is the fear that stimulates constant withdrawal from them. Or a person’s relationship with God may be sick, as illustrated by the one who constantly feels that God is condemning him. As a matter of fact, a man who is sick in one of these relationships is likely to be sick in all of them. No matter where the origin may be when a person becomes ill in one area his total personality is likely to suffer. By sickness we mean a condition in which an individual cannot function as he was meant to function; in which his energies are consumed in a destructive struggle rather than being freed for creative, positive experiences.” (pp. 2-3)

“To be healthy is to be a living whole. To be healthy is to experience all of our parts functioning in such a way that each of them makes their particular contribution to the welfare of the whole.” (pp. 29-30)

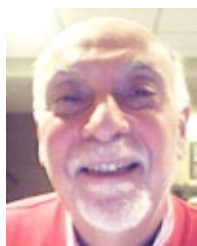
In discussing Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12: “There are two dimensions in this experience of Christian community. One expresses their relationship with Christ;

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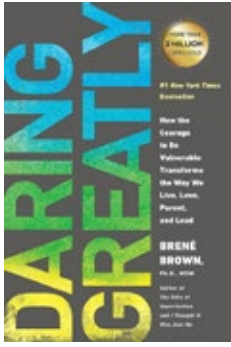
What was in the book and incarnated in my emerging professor-student relationship with Carroll Wise, a man about whom I was totally unaware before the summer of 1966?

in Christ all share a common good, and this is redemption. No man redeems himself; he is redeemed by Christ. His followers participate in this common life, they partake of a common Cup, they are empowered by the same spirit, they have a common hope. The emphasis is on an active relationship with Christ as the Head, from whom they have all received. The other dimension expresses the relationship they bear with one another through sharing in the redemptive work of Christ. Participants in a common salvation makes them brothers. Apostles, prophets, teachers, healers – each in his own way and with whatever gifts he has received makes his contribution to the community of Christians. Each has a responsibility to the others, but this responsibility is not motivated by legalistic requirements, but by freedom in the kind of love which creates mutual helpfulness. These dimensions of the Christian experience are organically related.” (p. 127)

For a young man in need of integration and community, this kind of intellectual and emotional emphasis and centeredness was life-giving. But it was life-direction-changing as well. The notion of wholeness, connectedness, and love at the foot of the cross and in the power of the resurrection and the gifts of the Spirit took hold. And, in the late Summer of 1967 Judy (now my spouse) and I moved North from Saint Louis to Waukegan, IL and began that part of life’s journey. I doubt if reading the book alone would have had this impact. In many ways we lived what he taught as the book came to life. So, together with my colleagues in study, the action of the Holy Spirit and the mentorship of Carroll (and eventually others) life moved on. I received my Ph.D. in 1971 and began work at the Community Pastoral Counseling and Consultation Center of Lutheran General Hospital, Park Ridge, Illinois. But all that is another story.

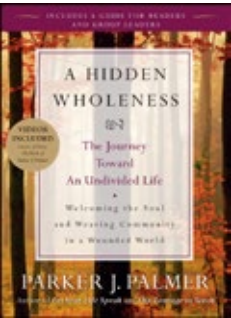


*Bruce is co-editor of this journal. In his retirement he maintains an active consulting practice, is on the Leadership Team of the Wellspring Center for Leadership and Health and was recently elected as the President of the Maryland Continuing Care Residents Association. Prior to his retirement he was on the Practical Theology faculty at Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, and way prior to that he was the President of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors*



# *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward An Undivided Life* by Parker Palmer and *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* by Brené Brown

**Karen Cherwien**



**I COULD COMMEND ANY NUMBER OF BOOKS** to you as ones that have influenced me in ministry. The ones I will share with you in this context, however, are ones I find myself returning to again and again: Parker Palmer's *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward An Undivided Life*, and Brené Brown's *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*.

Working with diverse patient and family populations throughout my career thus far, I continue to learn from authors who speak well to both the vulnerabilities we face as human beings, and to discerning and embracing our authentic selves amid these vulnerabilities. I also regularly work with teenage mental health patients, including those experiencing anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. One common theme I have noticed with many of these patients is their struggle to be able to clearly identify a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives, which has a significant impact on their sense of identity/sense of self.

In his book, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward An Undivided Life*, Parker Palmer describes the concept of the “authentic self,” and creating a “circle of trust” with others (like patients and families), which have become central concepts for me in spiritual care. The more authentic I can be, the more rooted in my own sense of identity and purpose I become (while also recognizing that mystery and ambiguity are ever-present, and that I continue to grow and change over time), the better I can create safe spaces for others when they feel most vulnerable and meet them where they are at. Palmer writes, “As *our listening* becomes more open—and speakers start to trust that they are being heard by people whose only desire is to make it safe for everyone to tell the truth—*their speaking* becomes more open as well” (p. 120).

Truthfully, fear and vulnerability are present in most patients and families with whom we work, given the nature of clinical spiritual care. Brené Brown's book, *Daring Greatly*, significantly increased my understanding of the nature of fear and

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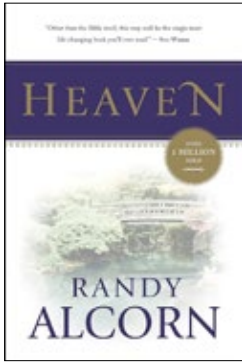
vulnerability, and how they can sometimes keep us spiritually stuck. Other times, they can be transformed into the energy we may need to address the issues we face. As spiritual care providers, we have the opportunity to help others transform and rewire their fear and vulnerability, as they share their stories and work to embody their authentic selves.

In ministry and in everyday life, these books continue to be influential for me, and I encourage you to consider them as well.



*Karen Cherwien is a Staff Chaplain at the Arkansas Children's Hospital in Little Rock, Arkansas.*





# Heaven by Randy Alcorn

David Edwards

**TRAVEL BACK IN TIME WITH ME** for a moment. Back to 1999. Picture yourself in a classic high school youth room of the time. There is a big, old, used couch crowded with kids. The walls are painted in various bright colors and a stereo is pumping out some Christian rock. While there is a whole CD

stand full of options like Newsboys, Audio Adrenaline and DC Talk, the song which plays out across the room, mixing with the noise of rambunctious youth, is from an up-and-coming band, called Mercy Me. In fact, this song will soon become what is arguably the band's biggest hit. It is called "I Can Only Imagine." Can you hear the powerful, yet warm voice of Bart Millard, bursting with joy at imagining what it will be like to stand before God in paradise? Can you imagine the scene? Can you imagine the song? Can you imagine heaven like he did? Have you ever tried?

If you are anything like most modern Christians, including myself, your answer may be something like, "Yes...but it has been a while." In a world where so many things are so good, and with so many plans for improving it, it only makes sense that the promise of heaven seems relatively abstract and inconsequential. That is one of the lessons I took to heart from my time at the seminary. By and large, Christians don't really look forward to heaven anymore. At least not in any meaningful way. The consequences of this loss can be seen and felt in preaching, in evangelism, and even in our daily lives. I, myself, have felt this deflated sense of enthusiasm for the Resurrection. In his book, *Heaven*, Randy Alcorn sets out to do something about this trend. Over the course of 400+ pages (or just under 12 hours on Audible) Alcorn reinvigorates the long dormant Christian imagination, through scripture itself, as he inspires a desire to experience the fulfilled promise of heaven and the new creation.

This book first came into my life through my administrative assistant at my first call. She had been navigating the pain of loss following her husband's death when *Heaven* was recommended to her. She was told it might be a good resource during her time of grief. When she recommended the book to me, she explained that it had enriched her view of heaven and the promised new creation. Since I was talking to her about how it is important for Christians to look forward to those things, she thought the book could help me do the same for my listeners. So, I gave *Heaven* a try. After having gone through the book I can say, without question, that my passion for evangelism has been reinvigorated, my preaching and praying has changed, and my source of hope has moved far beyond general optimism. Alcorn does this by building

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on the simple premise that scripture depicts heaven and the new creation in concrete, tangible, and experiential ways, so, we should too. Doing this, he asserts, helps to strengthen our desire for the very thing God teaches us to hope for. I hope and pray that you will consider adding this book to your list for listening or reading and that it impacts you like it did me. Before you go out and get it yourself, however, let me tell you a little more about how it has impacted me, starting with evangelism.

In evangelistic conversations and considerations my mind often seemed to settle on what Jesus came to save us from, more than what he came to save us for. That looming specter of hell would often halt, or at least hinder the conversations. I knew that at some point I was going to have to tell someone about hell. I was going to have to tell them the hard truth that the consequences of their sin, of their rebellion against God, is eternal damnation in hell. But Jesus came to save them. Sprinkle in a little sanctified living and some abstract references to heaven and that was about it. In your own, honest evangelistic conversations you might have had a similar experience. In fact, I would wager that many Christians struggle with evangelism for those same reasons.

Jesus' life, death, and resurrection gives us so much more than deliverance from hell, but for some reason hell is what sits at the forefront of our minds when we talk to unbelievers. What *Heaven* helped me do was devote more time and attention to where scripture does, namely on heaven and the new creation. The more time I spent meditating on it, reading about it described as something real, tangible, and extraordinary, the more telling people about that promise became natural and desirable. We have something so extraordinary, so awe inspiring, so wonderful to tell people about, that keeping it to ourselves does not even make sense. The more I experienced *Heaven's* impact, the more I recognized the absurdity of limiting our focus to avoiding hell or only on life now. This impact especially comes through in my preaching.

Not more than a year into my ministry one of my members unknowingly paid me a huge compliment. She said "Pastor, you sure do talk about Jesus coming back a lot." I responded with a big smile and an enthusiastic "Yes!" Almost every single sermon I preach now concludes with some form of, "as we look forward to the promised return of our Lord, when all things will be made new." Coming out of seminary, I had a good theological framework for understanding the importance of emphasizing heaven and the new creation. However, it was not until reading *Heaven* that the framework took on flesh for me.

All the brokenness of the world, all the sin and shame, all the sadness and suffering will be done and gone. The almighty God will tenderly wipe every tear from your eye and death will be no more! The place where Jesus goes to prepare a room

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in his Father's house is a place we look forward to enjoying with him. All the saints from all the generations will be able to gather together forever. We will get to meet saints from our own lifetime and saints from centuries before. Sit and talk with Peter, observe the beauty of creation with Augustine, hear the harrowing stories of martyrs in our own time. At the pinnacle of it all we will be fully restored to the peaceful presence of God forever. Rather than emphasizing heaven and the new creation as the aim for our desires because I knew that was the correct thing to do, I did so because I was looking forward to it as well. It also began to more fully form the center of my hope.

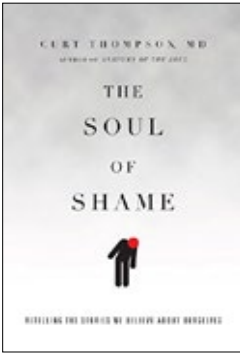
By virtue of my personal disposition, I tend to err on the side of optimism, but optimism is not hope. Hope clings to something real, even when we cannot yet see it. After *Heaven*, I find myself remembering more frequently than ever before that one day I get to live in the beauty of the new creation. Everything that is good, truly good, *will be better*, and everything that is bad, truly bad, *will be gone forever*. Seeing this, believing this, and regularly returning to this truth puts things in perspective. It is easier to see the gifts of God as just that, gifts. Rather than making them into idols, I enjoy them as a foretaste of what is to come in the new creation. When things are bad, and the brokenness of the world is unavoidable, I can say with absolute confidence: it is all going to work out. If life ever feels aimless, I know there is a clear direction to go. Being confident in the promise of heaven and new creation is exciting and invigorating. It is a source of real hope.

I will be grateful, for the rest of my life, to my assistant who shared *Heaven* with me. I hope that this glimpse of the impact it had in my life will encourage you to consider making it part of yours. Whether you do or do not, please know that as beloved baptized children of God, the hope of heaven and new creation, after resurrection, is yours. Rejoice and give thanks!

“One day soon you will be home — for the first time. Until then I encourage you to meditate on the Bible's truth about Heaven. May your imagination soar and your heart rejoice.” – Randy Alcorn



*David Edwards is an Active-Duty Air Force Chaplain, serving at Patrick Space Force Base in Florida. He and his wife were married in the June of 2023 at his alma mater and their meeting place, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. While David is out galivanting with Airmen and Guardians at Patrick, his wife Esther is teaching the next generation in fourth grade at St. Luke's Lutheran School in Oveido.*



# The Soul of Shame by Curt Thompson

Gillian Bond

**LUTHERANS GENERALLY HAVE** a pretty good idea of guilt and, in association with that, the sense of “being ashamed of oneself” when one knows that one has done something wrong. We know that we are forgiven in Christ, and most of us also realize that our Lord’s atoning death covers

the shame associated with our sins. As someone who did not grow up Lutheran, was minimally catechized, and had been away from the church for several years, hearing the Gospel in a way I understood, from a Lutheran pastor back in the 1980’s, was truly life-changing and I am forever grateful. However, I still bore a burden of shame of a different kind – the burden of feeling inadequate in a variety of ways – and my pastor had no idea of this problem since I never talked about it. My own experience of this burden and the long struggle to overcome it have perhaps in turn helped me to recognize this burden in others.

My earlier working life was in engineering, and, as a faculty member, many students would come and talk with me. Many times, they would come with engineering-related questions, but often also with more general life-related questions. Through this, I developed a better understanding of the kind of shame that is not the result of an individual’s own sin, of how common it is, of the difficulty in talking about it, and of how destructive it can be. The person may have been shamed by another either deliberately (as, for example, in abuse), or unintentionally (for example, by someone who lacks the empathy to realize what they are doing), or by themselves (as a result, for example, of unrealistic expectations rooted in societal or cultural expectations), but it is always damaging.

During my time first as a deaconess intern and then as a deaconess, the Lord continued to place people struggling with this kind of burden, sometimes to the brink of suicide, in my path, and to call me to give spiritual care. This in turn led me to give a good deal of thought to the question of shame, and to the realization that absolution for the kind of shame that is not the result of the person’s own sin only compounds the problem by solidifying the idea that that shame is indeed their fault. Nevertheless, the solution still lies in Christ. Yes, our Lord died as the Bearer of our sins, assuring us of forgiveness of our sins and covering the shame we feel as a result of them. Thanks be to God! However, we tend to overlook the significance of the fact that He was also the spotless Lamb of God. The only truly innocent Man also bore the shame that was not the result of one’s own sin,

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as He was mocked and spat upon, and died the most shaming death that the world could invent.

I was first introduced to *The Soul of Shame* by Curt Thompson<sup>1</sup> when I was preparing a presentation to give at Best Practices last year.<sup>2</sup> As soon as I read it, I wished that it could have been in my hands much earlier in my life, (something that would not have been possible since the book was only published in 2015). Curt Thompson is a Christian psychiatrist. His book provides a good understandable account of how shame works in the brain and in relation to neural pathways, in addition to being written from a Christian perspective.

As a child, I struggled with what I now recognize as shame issues from the time I started school and was not accepted by the other students. Through much of my childhood, I struggled with feelings of not being interesting enough for the other children to want to know me. Even as I worked through that, I was left with a tendency to assume that other things that went wrong in my life or the lives of others around me or in relationships were my fault because I was inadequate in one way or another. If I had known then what Thompson shares in his book when I was much younger, it would have helped me to address these issues much earlier and not to default to feelings of, as Thompson puts it beginning on page 27, not being ...[fill in the blank]... enough; [this might be good enough, smart enough, talented enough, fun enough, attractive enough, athletic enough, etc.]

Shame is not just a response to information; it includes a painful feeling or emotional state. Thompson explains in Chapter 2 how shame disrupts the integration of our mental processes and disrupts our ability to form healthy attachments and relationships, and shows that: “In the same manner that God intends our minds grow in maturity and connection, just as we do with each other, *it is one of shame’s primary features to disrupt and dis-integrate that very process, functionally leading to either rigid or chaotic states of mind and behavior, lived out intra- and interpersonally*” (p. 46).

Worse yet, repeated shaming makes it more entrenched, and so we cannot just turn it straight off when we hear something different. Neuroplasticity entails adaptation and regeneration of brain cells, which allows for the connection of the brain’s different domains and functional components. Hence, following Hebb’s Axiom: “Those neurons that fire together wire together. In essence, the more we practice activating particular neural networks, the more easily [sic] they are to activate, and the more permanent they become in the brain” (see page 47). Repeated

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1 *The Soul of Shame*, Curt Thompson, MD, (IVP Books, Downers Grove, IL), 2015.

2 *Finding Acceptance Through Christ: Coping with Shame in Today’s World*, Gillian M. Bond, presented at Best Practices in Ministry, Phoenix, AZ, February 2022.



shaming by others or oneself results in more entrenched corresponding neural networks; thus, healing of the shame has a physical neurobiological aspect and it takes time and support.

On page 22 Thompson asserts that shame is “our system’s way of warning of possible impending abandonment” whether we realize it or not — but that it often has the unfortunate effect of leading us to distance ourselves relationally from others rather than moving towards them. The emotions of guilt and shame are different in that guilt is centered on the recognition that *one has done* something bad, plus empathy to regret hurting another, whereas shame is closely associated with sense of self, and *seeing oneself as being* bad or inadequate or the problem. Hence Thompson notes that “guilt tends to draw my attention to another and is often accompanied by being closer to him or her [admitting a wrongdoing, seeking and being offered forgiveness].” Shame on the other hand relates to a sense of identity, particularly the perception of oneself as worthless or unlovable; it feeds a tendency to hide from anything that might lead to possible intensification of the emotion and from rejection, and ultimately it “separates me from others, as my awareness of what I feel is virtually consumed with my own internal sensations” (pp. 29-30, 62-63). He helpfully distinguishes (pp. 76-77) between useful shame that enables us to develop appropriate self-regulatory behavior and harmful shame. The focus of the book is on the latter.

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It is important for the spiritual caregiver to be aware of these aspects of shame and how it affects the brain, as well the range of possible responses by one who is shamed.

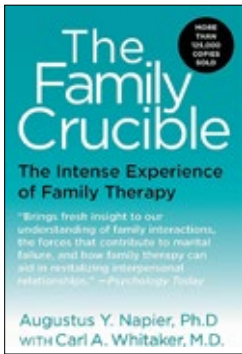
It is important for the spiritual caregiver to be aware of these aspects of shame and how it affects the brain, as well the range of possible responses by one who is shamed. Shame anticipates being alone: scorned, forgotten, dismissed, or ostracized. It generates a flight-or-fight response. The flight response can result in withdrawal, turning away, and turning inward, as well as, at times, pre-emptive self-shaming or self-abasement. The fight response can result in pre-emptive attacks that may involve aggression, shaming, etc. In either case, shame is both associated with, and a cause of, fractured relationships. In addition to the insights that Thompson brings as a psychiatrist, he also brings a helpful Christian perspective, from the absence of shame prior to the Fall (see pages 98 and 99 and Genesis 2:25), to Jesus scorning the shame of the cross for the joy set before Him (see page 142 and Hebrews 12:2), and makes helpful suggestions regarding the role of Christians in providing a helpful healing and nurturing environment.

It would have helped me immensely to understand my own responses to being shamed earlier in my life if I had been aware of these basic aspects of how shame works. It would also have helped me understand sooner and better how to respond to victims of shaming in the context of spiritual care. As it is, I now introduce students to this book as a useful resource and plan to make it a required text for

the course I teach next semester. The challenge of shaming is pervasive and only growing more severe in our culture today. It has many manifestations, including, for example, cyberbullying, body shaming, and abuse. It is a serious problem that can destroy lives, and so I believe it is essential for the Church in general and providers of spiritual care in particular to address it. This book is a helpful tool and, I pray, for others.



*Gillian Bond is the Director of Deaconess Studies at Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, MO.*



# *The Family Crucible* by Carl Whitaker and David Keith

David Wurster

**"A BOOK AT ONE OF LIFE'S TURNING POINTS"** — so came the challenge from an editor of *Caring Connections*. *The Family Crucible* by Carl Whitaker and David

Keith kept rolling up in my mind.

The book has been on the shelf for about forty years now. I had the unusually good fortune of finding the book and by grace and by chance having Carl himself as a mentor during the years of change. The book is a story of a family in the journey of generational life change involving three generations. It reads more like a novel than a case study, which says a lot. Carl led us into discovering life as an unfolding story in ministry, therapy, and our own belief system—our theology and life. A significant interpretative fact in that regard: Carl did not write scripts. He was an MD psychiatrist in a medical faculty. He said if you needed medications, he would send you down the hall to another doc. He said once if he became the magic man with pills his power to heal was gone. He also did family therapy, not believing in autonomous selves as most psychology texts did. He helped me see the meaning of stories like the one where Jesus tells the paralytic that his sins were forgiven and receiving flak from the religious. He was showing the heart change in the forgiveness of sins is the harder thing to do and more powerful than the mobility issue then or now. I was learning that being is more powerful than doing.

Change: I was raised as an the eldest of two brothers. I was educated, in both psychology and theology, to believe in the autonomous individual or self and simple reason and applied will as the way to health and salvation. If a parent had a child with suicidal thoughts, for example, I'd be ready to see the child. Then and now in the turning I'd not be ready to see the child. I would see the family and talk about what was going on in life. I also learned about co-therapy and a whole new dimension of relationships and collegiality. In one example, a suicidal 16-year-old girl was checked in at ER at our local hospital. I got a call from the hospital asking if I would consult with the staff, the girl, her family, and the pastor. After we got started, I simply asked the girl if there was anyone who would like to see her dead (typical Carl question). She barked, "My mother! She never wanted me!" As her mother was beginning to float upward, she shouted out, "My mother never wanted me either!" Grandma just sat there. Lots of relational stuff surfaced in an hour including relational dimensions typical in suicide. I left and the girl was discharged. Later I asked the pastor how things were going—we were

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I had the unusually good fortune of finding the book and by grace and by chance having Carl himself as a mentor during the years of change.

in a very rural area with lots of family dysfunction, including wife-swapping clubs in churches. The pastor said the girl was fine; grandma was depressed. No surprise and at least a better balance than before. This kind of scenario was repeated in a congregation where I was pastor. I would not have been able to think or talk this way before the turning in my own life.

Not only did I learn to think differently, but to see and hear differently. I thought I was the oldest child in the family. In the shadows of my mind, I knew I had an older sister who died when

I was two years old. I did not know the power that shadow cast in the family. That, in combination with my parents' previous divorces before the present marriage, meant family cutoff and the rule: "we don't talk about it." My older brother and I broke the rule when I was in my 20's and recently married. I had a brother who was a US marine on Iwo Jima in 1945. I had an older sister also. For 46 years we never saw each other. We broke the rule and opened up a whole new and expanded view of life and family.

I was graced at this turning point having good life experience, theological colleagues, and Carl as a mentor. I'd also have to mention Pete Steinke, Rabbi Ed Friedman, a strong pastor and others as blessings at this period, including Ed Schroeder in doctoral studies and Oswald Hoffman among others.

At the core we were rightly taught that life revolves around the first commandment—or as Ozzie Hoffman would say, "it's Christ." Carl would say, "Your belief defines you." All creation is in relationship, from chemistry to astronomy and with the triune/relationship God. For humans the core relationship is the complementarity of man and woman in marriage—the three entities are husband, wife and the marriage. Marriage is not a social construct, but a relational order of creation; at the heart I could hear Carl and Luther echoing each other. Carl said, "All's fair in love and war, and marriage is both." I add, faith and life too are both. This reflects Luther's sayings that we are "same time saints and sinners," and "sin boldly but trust more boldly." These kinds of words are difficult, or make no sense, for individualists like I was.

There is a story about the epileptic boy present as Jesus came down from the transfiguration. The disciples tried and failed to heal him. You can see and hear Jesus in the text hitting his forehead and saying, "Oh my God, how long do I have to put up with this?" He healed the boy. The disciples asked why they could not. He said prayer and fasting were necessary. I think part of what he meant to say to the disciples was, "There was too much of you in the room—you were too busy doing and trying—you left no room for the Spirit. Less doing and more being, gentlemen." Carl, the psychiatrist, taught deep theology.

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I used some material from *The Family Crucible* when I was invited to spend a month in India with pastors and seminarians. I wrote to tell Carl that I used some of his material in India and that he now had some “grandchildren” in south India. I got a letter back from his wife, Muriel, saying Carl had a stroke but appreciated knowing. Life turned; I haven’t been the same since.



*David F. C. Wurster has served as a parish pastor and a pastoral counselor in a dual style ministry for 40 years. He has been retired from the parish for eight years. He has served as an adjunct faculty member at seminaries, universities and colleges as teacher and supervisor for students in graduate programs. He has also served as a consultant in conflicted congregations. He is married to Ruth, a professional musician and teacher. They have two married daughters and four grandchildren. In retirement he serves as board member and staff consultant for the Samaritan Counseling Center of Western New York. He also plays banjo and guitar with a jam group. He and Ruth travel extensively.*