

Words, the Word and The Word Guild

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- [0 : 00] Um, I'm sorry for those of you who came to expect to hear about foot binding. When I was very, very young, I once saw a woman whose feet had been bound.
- And I was, as I said, very young, and I wanted to vomit. And then I went out of the room and I just cried and cried and cried because her feet were literally that small.
- And they were ugly and they were deformed and her toes were sort of pulled around her foot. And it was an awful sight.
- And it was obedience to decades-long custom on behalf of the family. And it made me despair. And it makes me despair now to think what we unknowingly do to our children, what we do in the name of tradition.
- Unperceived fashion. But rather than dwell on that horrible scene, I'm going to talk this morning about words, their importance, and the word, meaning the word of John 1, verse 1.
- [1 : 14] And after that, my friend Denise, the managing director of the Word Guild, my boss, will complete the presentation by doing her part, which is a picking up on the word, and then she's going to expand it onto the word guild.
- So, I fell hopelessly in love with words when I was about 14. Well, maybe before that. And two books, just two, were responsible for it.
- And the first is known to all of us. It's the Book of Common Prayer. I grew up in the Plymouth Brethren, in a church where set prayers were anathema.
- Every Sunday, men would get up and say to the Lord whatever their hearts dictated, and their limited vocabulary allowed.
- Consequently, my mind was intrigued by the concept of set prayers, of beautifully crafted prayers, of prayers with a cadence, and a flow of words that excited me beyond anything else in my life.
- [2 : 29] And words that I could think about and ponder. The Book of Common Prayer was so important for me intellectually, and so important to me in terms of words, that it's almost unfathomable.
- The means of grace and the hope of glory. I mean, it's a simple phrase. We use it a lot. But when you break it down, it's got a beautiful cadence. And for those of us who are not musicians, this is a phrase, the Book of Common Prayer has phrases that sing, that shout the glory of God.
- Now, in my family, the Book of Common Prayer was considered heretical. And so when my grandmother found out, I kept a very tattered copy hidden behind the toilet.
- I was flogged. I was nine years old, and I was flogged to my skin blood. Other teenagers have adventures with drugs, or...
- My teenage rebellion was being a heretic.
- [3 : 55] The second book experiences much, much difference. My family sort of gave up on me and dictated I leave school when I was 14, the equivalent of grade 9.

And my world's changed drastically. I got up and made an hour-long commute into Sydney and worked as a junior clerk in an office from 9 to 5.

Then I'd go home. And that was my future, or so it seemed. At church, it was quite bizarre as well, because I went from the equivalent, our St. John's equivalent of CTC, into ecclesia, because I was no longer a Sunday school person.

And I was up there. And so my youth group thing would consist of people with degrees, or those getting degrees.

And I was 14, grade 9. And so when we decided to have a treat, I thought, oh my goodness. I am going to stack up with books, and then I will run off into the bush, and I'll find myself a nice place, and I'll just read through Agatha Christie.

[5 : 12] And I got myself a great, brand-new Agatha Christie, and it was good. And I started it on the train going to work, read it during morning tea, during lunch, during afternoon tea, and then I discovered I had 10 pages left.

And I thought, I'm not going to get out through the weekend without books. So I asked my boss for early dismissal, and I raced to the nearest bookstore.

And the clerk was haughty, and he sort of sneered down his nose when he told me they didn't stop Mrs. Christie. And I was desperate, and I raced through the shelf.

I finally saw a title, Murder in the Cathedral. And I thought, ah. And it was hideously expensive, and very, very thin.

And it was only the next day when I'd snuck away from everybody else that I discovered it was a play, and not only a play, it was in verse.

[6 : 15] But I'd spent my entire discretionary money on this one book. So I was determined to get my money to it, so I started reading. And I got reading and reading, and I basically had to be hit, and was actually hit with a cricket ball by somebody to get my attention.

T.S. Eliot, the writer of this book, can speak for himself. And it was on page 44 that I had my second great experience with words.

Now is my way clear. Now is the meaning plain. Temptation shall not come in this way again. The last temptation is the greatest treason to do the right deed for the wrong reason.

Thirty years ago, this is Thomas Beckett speaking, Thirty years ago, I searched all the ways that lead to pleasure, advancement, and praise. Delight in sense, in learning and in thought, music and philosophy, curiosity.

This incredible line, the purple bullfinch in the lilac tree. Now I was in Sydney, Australia, a land of vivid visual contrasts, yellow of the sand, the blue of the sea, the blue of the sky.

[7 : 40] The purple bullfinch, which I had no idea what a bullfinch was, but I thought it was a bird, in a lilac tree, and I could get through that one line, imagery.

Then he goes on, the tilt-yard skill, the strategy of chess, love in the garden. It was an interesting concept. Singing to the instrument were all things equally desirable.

Ambition comes when early force is spent, and sin grows with doing good. When I imposed the king's law in England and waged war against Toulouse, I beat the barons at their best game.

I could then despise the man who thought me most contemptible. The raw nobility, his manners matched their fingernails. And I thought to myself, go, man, go!

Go! Well, I ate out of the king's dash to become servant of God was never my wish.

[8 : 54] Servant of God has greater chance of sin and sorrow than the man who serves a king. And on that, I'll just tell you. But this was the second thing in my development and my love of words.

T.S. Eliot. And from then on, I used to pull him out and read and read the language. And I would learn.

I became irretrievably, evocably, impermanently in love with T.S. Eliot. I didn't know he was famous.

I didn't know I was supposed to wait to university to read him. I didn't know I would be forced to read, analyze, and learn to loathe him in an academic situation.

He was my friend. And it says volumes that at one of the lowest moments of my life, I pulled out that line whose manners matched their fingernails and I had the guts to use it to a very high-class lady who thought me beneath her.

[10 : 10] During the long years of my spiritual wilderness, I frequently read both my early loves. Sometimes it was the book of common prayer God used to keep me safe and sane.

And many times, it was Eliot, not the book of common prayer too, that I turned to for prayer. The next reading is from the eighth course of the Curse of the Rock.

And Eliot says, Remember the faith that took men of old to follow the call of the wandering preachers? Our age is an age of moderate virtue and moderate vice, when men will not lay down the cross because they will never assume it.

Yet nothing is impossible, nothing, to men of faith and conviction. Let us therefore make perfect our will. Oh God, help us.

And I used to read that and think about it and wonder what it would be like to be able to pray that truly and earnestly. You can see why I value words so much.

[11 : 30] And it's important that we remember that God not only gave us the word, but that he has a time and place.

At the beginning of the century, I was a respected legal scholar. I published, I specialized in legal history and then sub-specialized in the law of treason.

I published in law journals and my books were published by important houses like the University of Toronto Press. And then God, in the fullness of time, married that early beginning with who I was.

He brought me into the kingdom and at the same time that he gave me the gift of faith, he gave me the gift of words. And when you're given a gift of such immensity of my age, you know you're supposed to do something with it.

and I'm only slightly bemused, actually I'm big time bemused, that God's gift translated into me writing books for children 10 to 13 years old.

[12 : 43] And when I say that God gifted me in the last, in less than a decade I've published 14 books.

And at my age, breaking into a new writing genre, that's almost impossible. my God-given gift received recognition almost immediately.

My first book won the Word Guild's award for best adult book, best young adult book published in Canada. Other awards ensued, including that from the Council of the Arts.

Now I'm not telling you this to Skype, that's an Australian word, which means blowing your own horn, because I know and you know the credit for any success I have belongs only to God.

But I want, I've used that background so that you know that I can comment on a raging literary debate with some authority. In January alone this year, there were three major articles published on the plays of fiction in today's culture.

[13 : 56] Karen Swallow kicked it off with why novels of belief are the exception, not the rule. Seattle Pacific's Gregory Wolfe followed this up with an essay in the Wall Street Journal entitled Whispers of Faith in a Postmodern Word.

And David Griffin was incensed and fired up a response called Writing in an Age of Disbelief. The common gloomality there seems to be that Christian writers should embrace other media rather than fiction.

Swallow says, the disappearance of belief within the most contemporary form of, within the most relative form of contemporary culture is caused reflection.

And then it goes on to say, we should be writing non-fiction because that's where our voice can be most easily heard. Wolfe says, faith in today's literature is more whispered than shouted.

Now I want to reiterate, these are American writers, and I want to ask you a bunch of questions. You can put your hand up if you like, or you can keep it tucked, safely somewhere else.

[15 : 09] Have you heard of Margaret Atwood? Have you heard of David Adams Richards? A few. And then I'll ask the big question, which has more awards? Both are Canadian, both are still alive, which is the most awarded writer?

The answer is the same. Margaret Atwood has Order of Canada, she has two Governor Generals, and so has David Adams Richards.

David Adams Richards has the distinction moreover of having one Governor General in non-fiction and one in fiction. Hayes won the Gemini Prize twice, the Geller being short and long listed for those and other awards.

But there's one major difference between those two people. Richards is a Christian. He's from New Brunswick and he totally disdains the whisper that Gregory Wolfe talks about.

[16 : 25] David Richards shouts. He shouts so loud when he gives readings, I can safely remove my hearing aids and hear him perfectly. He definitely shouts his faith.

Just in 2009, he published a book, God Is, in which he asked the critics, how come my writing disintegrates and becomes so horrible when I write about my faith, yet if I don't write about my faith, you give me all these awards.

What happens? Is it me or is it you? And while you're absorbing this, ask yourself, why is Atwood a media darling?

Why is she known to everybody in this room and not a Christian? David Richards, David Adam Richards fame is very limited.

He's a magnificent writer, equally Canadian, equally talented, equally awarded, and yet we had something like three people who knew of him.

[17 : 36] I write for secular publishers. and maybe Gregory Wolfe would consider me a whisperer rather than a shouter. But when I write my novels, I want children to yearn for God.

Think C.S. Lewis, think Aslan. How many children do you know or do you think cried when Aslan's whiskers were pulled?

I think about Aslan when I write because I want the same effect. I want my readers to ache for God and for my characters to become their friend and their guide towards that point.

I want my books to stand the test of time, for their themes to be as relevant ten years from now as they are today. I want my books to have characters who may be the only friend lonely children have.

And more than anything, I want my readers to come along with me along that path of faith. Do I make money? Of course not. I don't write about vampires.

[18 : 53] I don't write about witches. I don't write about celebrities, kids in boarding schools. But with every word I write, I try to honour the living word, the source of my words, the one I love and adore.

I am so grateful for the cross of Christ, I can barely constrain myself, and it's only the fact I've got to give my boss time that we're going to stop with me telling you how grateful I am for Christ.

Christ. I have no words that can truly express my adoration. Like David Adams Richards, I can only do my best to shout God is while I sit at my computer and write.

God is. Let us never forget that, no matter what or where our culture goes. And in wrapping up, one last thing.

I'm rare. There are not many of me around. I'm a Canadian published writer, published by recognized secular presses.

[20 : 11] Much more rare, I'm a Canadian Christian writer. Should you care about me? Yes. Can you help me?

Yes. And let me introduce my boss. This is Denise Rumble. She lives in Ontario. She has been managing director of the Word Guild since something like 2005.

She runs an organization that's unique in one extraordinary way. One quarter of the Word Guild members are part of a prayer team that pray for the other members.

Think of St. John's. We're say a thousand. What would happen to us if we had 250 on our prayer team? We can't imagine it. Our minds literally cannot imagine that one quarter of our congregation would be in prayer for the rest of us.

Think of it. Think of it. Because that's what Word Guild is to me. It is where I go for prayer, where I go to solace, and now God is calling me to maybe help it along a bit, just a bit.

[21 : 24] Anyway, my friend Denise Rumble. Thank you very much. Thank you for this time to be with you this morning.

I do very much appreciate it. It's always wonderful when you go to different places to meet family, and in Christ we're all family. Wonderful to be here and worship with you this morning.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And when the co-founders decided that we needed an organization for writers, this is the verse they went to, because we are the Word guild.

We love the Word, scriptures, and we love Jesus. And he has given us talents in the ministry to write, and we give that back to him by writing for him, whether we're writing technical manuals, or blogs, or reporting from parliament, whether we're writing articles on dementia, or depression, or abuse, or whether we're writing fantasies for children, romances for adults, for mainstream secular audience, and for Christian audience.

Whatever we do, it's for the Lord, and with the light in us of Jesus, that light comes out, and people are drawn to our writing, and it's exciting. I'm going to give you a few facts.

[22 : 58] We're a growing team of more than 330 Canadian writers and editors, speakers, publishers, booksellers, librarians, and other interested individuals who are Christian.

from all parts of Canada and many denominational and cultural backgrounds, we are united in our common passion for the written word. Our vision is to positively influence individuals, and we don't think big here, and ultimately the Canadian culture and the world, through life-changing words that bring God's message of hope.

How many people need that? Our mission statement is that the Word Guild's focus is on strengthening the Canadian Christian writing and publishing community, encouraging excellence in writing, and of impacting the Canadian culture through the words of writers, editors, and speakers with a Christian worldview.

We believe there is great power in both the written and the spoken word, and that Jesus is the ultimate word. We know the story of the world's beginnings, the story of the Israelites, the birth and nature of Jesus, the history of the early church, how God wants us to live, and a glimpse into eternity, because God deemed it important for us to know, and he delegated some of his people to write it down, so that we would have those stories that he wanted us to know about and to read.

Let me read you one from 2 Kings. chapter 1. The wife of the man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha, Your servant, my husband, is dead, and you know that he revered the Lord, but now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves.

[24 : 43] And Elisha replied, How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house? Your servant has nothing there at all, she said, except a little oil. Elisha said, go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars.

Don't ask for just a few. Can you imagine? Okay, you have no food in the house, and a man of God, maybe it's Dr. Pack, or maybe it's your minister comes to you and says, okay, I want you to gather all your Tupperware, and go to all your neighbors, and ask them for more Tupperware, and you know, yeah, easy, sure, get out your Tupperware.

I don't know, the man from God asked me to get it, real easy thing to do, right? Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons, pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side.

And you're thinking, okay, is he deaf? I just told him I have a little oil. She left him, and afterwards she shut the door behind her and her sons, and they brought the jars, and what did she have?

She had faith, or curiosity, and she kept pouring. pouring, and pouring, and pouring, and when the jars were all full, she said to her son, bring me another one.

[25 : 56] But they replied, there's not a jar left, and then the oil stopped flowing. Now, if she hadn't obeyed Elisha and just got two jars, or three jars, don't you think she wished she would have got more?

But she obeyed. She went and told the man of God, and he said, go sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left. I wonder why God wanted us to know that story.

Here's one from John. As Jesus went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?

Neither this man nor his parents sinned, said Jesus, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me.

Night is coming when no one can work, and while I am in the world, I am the light of the world. Having said this, he spit on the ground and made some mud with the saliva and put it on the man's eyes.

[26 : 58] Go, he told him, wash in the pool of Siloam. Siloam means sent. So the man went and washed and came home seeing. His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, isn't this the same man we used to see sitting and begging?

Some claimed that he was, and others said, no, it only looks like him. But he himself insisted, I am the man. How were your eyes then opened? They demanded, and he replied, the man they called Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes.

He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see. God wanted us to know the miracle of John the Baptist's birth. His parents were too old to have children, and his obedience to God to go to the desert and preach.

God wanted us to celebrate as his son was born to a virgin who listened to God. He wanted us to struggle along with Joseph as we read the story of a righteous and good man who struggled with what to do, who went against the norms and traditions of his day and his religion to obey God.

I'm sure God wanted us to smile as we read about Jesus gathering the children around him. And let's not forget the fish stories. One day, as Jesus was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, he saw at the water's edge two boats.

[28 : 22] They were left there by the fishermen who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

When he'd finished speaking, he said to Simon, put out into deep water and let down the nets for a catch. Simon answered, Master, we've worked hard all night and we haven't caught anything.

But because you say so, I will let down the nets. So when they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners to come from in the other boat and help them.

And they came and they filled both boats so full that they began to sink. And when Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, go away from me, Lord.

I am a sinful man. For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they'd taken. And so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, don't be afraid.

[29 : 25] From now on, you will catch men. So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him. God wants us to learn about the character of his son as we read about what angers him, what fills him with compassion, how he is so human and yet so God.

We cry at Jesus' torture and death. We celebrate it as resurrection and his victory over sin. We kneel in awe and disbelief that he did all this for us because he loves us.

Because it's the only way God can have a relationship with us and us with him. We could read and understand the beginnings of the body of Christ, the church. We read about the past, how we are expected to live in our present and get a glimpse into our future, our eternity in heaven for those of us who believe and hell for those who don't.

Psalms 66, 16 says, Come and listen, all you who fear God. Let me tell you what he has done for me. Since scripture, there have been innumerable God stories that have been told and written and passed down.

In the late 1600s, early 1700s, the youngest of 25 children, how many have that many children today? Susanna Wesley married at age 19.

[30 : 52] She gave birth to 19 children, including two sets of twins. Only 10 children survived to adulthood. At that time, it wasn't common for women to have an education, but her father taught her to read and to think for herself.

She homeschooled all her children. It was a busy and full family and house. And when she wanted a few quiet minutes, she didn't have a spare room or an office to go sit in.

So she sat in the main room, pulled her apron over her head, and the children knew mother wanted to be alone. That was the signal. And she would pray.

And she prayed for each of her children. Despite the Wesley's poor financial condition, all three sons earned MAs from Oxford.

All three were ordained in the Church of England. The eldest, Samuel Jr., became a teacher at Westminster in London. And you've probably heard about Charles Wesley and John Wesley.

[31 : 56] John was a Church of England cleric and a Christian theologian. And John Wesley is largely credited, along with his brother Charles, as founding the Methodist movement. Nearly all of the Wesleyan hymns, even those founding volumes issued jointly by the two brothers, are commonly accredited to Charles Wesley.

But John Wesley states that he and his brother agreed among themselves not to distinguish between their hymns. So it can't be definitely known who wrote them, John or Charles.

So I kind of think they're a kind of humble men, didn't matter who was first, who got the most credit. How many hymns, you may wonder? In the course of his career, Charles Wesley published the words of over 6,000 hymns.

And wrote the words for a further 2,000, many of which are still popular. Do any of these? I'm not going to read the whole 6,000, by the way. Christ the Lord is risen today.

Come, thou long-expected Jesus. Hark! The herald angels sing. Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing. Rejoice! The Lord is King. Something interesting.

[33 : 07] Are you familiar with the phrase, agree to disagree? John Wesley was the first to put that phrase in print. And I bet you thought it was a common modern-day phrase.

Another prolific hymn writer from the 1700s is John Henry Newton. As a matter of fact, in 2006, a movie was released about John. Starting his career at sea at a young age, he became involved with the slave trade for a few years.

But after experiencing a religious conversion, he became a minister, hymn writer, and later a prominent supporter of the abolition of slavery. Newton became an ally of his friend William Wilberforce, leader of the parliamentary campaign to abolish the slave trade.

He lived to see the passage of the Slave Trade Act in 1807. They named the movie after his most well-known and best-loved hymn.

Published in 1779, it has been sung across continents and down through the ages. The impact of this song so clear in its Christian message is immeasurable.

[34 : 14] And for some reason, could it be God? Even today, it is still an acceptable song wherever you go. And as a matter of fact, in 2007, I sang this song in an Irish pub.

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. Have you heard that one before?

So clear in its Christian message. Another movie you might have seen is Chariots of Fire, released in 1981. It tells the story of Eric Liddell. He was born in 1902 in China of Scottish missionary parents.

His devout sister, Jenny, disapproved of Liddell's plans to pursue competitive running. But Liddell sees running as a way of glorifying God before returning to China to work as a missionary.

When Eric accidentally misses a church prayer meeting because of his running, his sister, Jenny, upbraids him and accuses him of no longer caring about God. Eric tells her that though he intends to eventually return to the China mission, he feels divinely inspired when running and that not to run would be to dishonor God.

[35 : 32] He said, I believe that God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run, I feel God's pleasure. When we're made to do what God asks us to do, we feel God's pleasure.

When do you feel that? In spite of long and vigorous training for the 1924 Summer Olympics, and specifically the 100-meter race, Liddell did not compete in it because the race was held on a Sunday.

And he stuck to his beliefs, even though he was under immense pressure to run from the British Olympic Committee and the Prince of Wales, and he was favored to win. However, later in the week, he ran the 400-meter race. He was not expected to win.

Guess what? He won. Do you think God was blessing him? Are you encouraged by these stories of what God has done?

That we read, we hear, we watch on TV. The legacy of how God has worked through his people down through the ages. I know I am. Since the beginning of time, people, God's people have recognized his voice.

[36 : 44] They've listened and obeyed. First, they recognized his voice. God tells us in Psalm 46, 10, Be still and know that I am God.

I will be exalted among the nations, and I will be exalted in the earth. And as we spend time with God, talking, just being, listening, we get to know him.

And then when he asks, leads, guides, prompts, presses us to do or say something, we know it's God, because we know him. We know his voice.

We've spent time with him. We've read the stories that he's given us, and we recognize him. And when you do that, and listen and obey, you're adding your stories to the book of what God has done.

Tell of what God has done in your life, and through your life, in your workplace, in your conversation, in the way you treat others, the way you spend your money, the way you spend your time, your life is telling a story.

[37 : 46] God knows our story, our whole story, the beginning, the middle, the detours, the missteps, and the end. Psalm 139 says, All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

And we discover our story as we recognize and listens to God's voice, as we obey, as we live it. For each of us, our story unfolds, furrows bit by bit. Do we hear our voices calling out the ancient words, echoing through the tunnel of time?

Come and listen, all you who fear God. Let me tell you what he has done for me. Is it boasting to tell our stories? No.

We're telling the stories of what God has done. So folks that don't know Jesus can learn about him. To encourage, to edify one another.

To help lift one another up. To comfort. We share our stories with each other as a way of linking arms of support. To help one another as we won this race of life for Jesus.

[38 : 54] To share the stories with our children. We're living proof that God is at work in their families. Our stories show our children how.

And our stories show our children that God is real and active today. Our stories also remind us that God is with us, is working in our lives.

During the times where we feel God is silent or far away, we can remember how and when God was very present in our lives. We can remember his love, his provision, protection, grace.

And we know he is still with us. He is still working in us and through us. But most of all, we tell our stories so that God will be given the credit and will be glorified.

To God be the glory, great things he has done. Lady by the name of Angela Fastflower, about 13 years ago, was told she had fourth stage cancer and she wasn't going to make it.

[40 : 02] So she got a journal and she started writing. And she took her treatments and she prayed and she wrote. When she was given a clean bill of health, cancer-free, her friends told her, you should write about that.

So she pulled out her journals and she went through it all again as she wrote about it. That book won an award. It was published. It won an award.

Many people, thousands and thousands of people have been helped by that book. It's helped to encourage them. It's helped them find God. She then began being asked to speak.

She has a website where people come there for ministry. And two years ago, the foreword was updated.

And it was the 10th anniversary. And she's still living and speaking and ministering today. She's a Canadian. She's from St. Catherine's, Ontario. And the book is called The Valley of Cancer.

[41 : 05] There's a fellow named Michael. And he lived in the West. He ran with gangs. He was one of the big drug lords. He was the guy that you do not want to say a bad word to.

Very big man. Big in height. Big this way. Big in anger. Big in anger. And not someone you're going to want to meet if you're walking alone.

And one day, God threw him on the floor in a hotel and held him there and said, What are you going to do with me? Since then, he left that province because he was wanted.

He wrote a book called The Heart of a Beast. By the time he submitted that book and it won an award, it was sold out.

It was out of print. And he was rewriting it. He came to our gala. Writer friend of mine phoned me up and said, I've been helping this fellow edit his book.

[42 : 14] And he's coming to the gala. This is a black tie gala we have in celebration of our awards. And so prizes are given. Bev told you about a prize she won. And she said, He's worried when he comes that he's going to scare people.

He has tattoos from head to toe. All over his face. His main one is a Nazi insignia on his head. He doesn't want to scare people.

He's afraid to come. He doesn't think he should come. I said, Yes, he should come. He's welcome here. We hold our awards at World Vision headquarters in Mississauga.

And at 5 o'clock, after all the employees leave, the doors are locked. And we have to be there to open the doors for people coming. And we have a security guard watching it all. So I went and I had a little chat with the security guard.

And then I had a little chat with the person who welcomes everybody in. And my admin assistant, our admin assistant, who takes care of the tickets. And I said, This fellow's coming.

[43 : 17] We know he's coming. It's fine. This is a place that sometimes, you know, the buildings evacuated because of bomb threats and so on. So, you know, you have to take these precautions. And he came.

And now he is a poor man. He's not a drug lord anymore. He had on worn and ratty sweatsuit and running shoes. And he seemed very timid.

Totally opposite to what he had been in his life. After the awards, he told his friend. He didn't know what to expect, but it wasn't that.

He had visions of people screaming and running away from him. And he said, I have never felt love like I felt there. Acceptance like I felt there.

He said, I've never been loved. A year later, he came again. His book had been shortlisted in two categories.

[44 : 23] And this time he came with friends. And he was confident. And, you know, he walks like this. And he came in and he had a black suit and a white shirt and a red tie and a hat to cover his tattoos.

He didn't want to offend. And I had the privilege of presenting him with his award. And so he's walking like this and he's coming up. And his friends are cheering.

And he doesn't wear glasses. And he's coming up and he's going. Tender heart of a beast. He has a ministry now.

And he won two awards, by the way. Blow him away. He has a ministry to young people in schools. He tells them about drugs in prison. He has a ministry on the prison newsletter.

And last year he said, I have to face what I've done. I have to pay whatever debt the courts did. And twice now he's gone before the court and they've put it off again.

[45 : 24] And it sounds like they are not going to send him to jail. But he did say, if they do my ministry, well, there I won't stop. And he has found, they've talked about her gift with words.

He has found he has a gift with paints. And he has started painting. And he's had a couple. People have said, you've got to have art shows. And the money that he receives for that, he puts into his ministry.

And he is still poor compared to the millions he used to have. But he's excited for God. And God is using him for great things. Have you heard these stories? These Canadian stories, these Canadian books of what God is doing here in Canada.

A couple of years ago, this anthology came out. And all contributors are members of the Word Guild. There's some fiction, some non-fiction, some poetry in each. Compared to Chicken Soup for the Soul but with More Meat.

This is the second one. Both books are bestsellers. But when this came out, a reviewer who writes for secular newspapers was asked to review the book. So she took it and this is what she wrote in her review.

[46 : 30] She looked at it. Yeah, yeah, okay. I'm going to read the first chapter. The last chapter, I'll pick one in the middle and I'll write my review. So she opened it that night and she started reading.

And she kept reading and reading. She said, I couldn't put it down. She said, and there were three stories that impacted me personally. This is a, she is not a Christian.

She writes for secular newspaper. And one of the ones that impacted her has this in it. Psalm 139 says in part, O Lord, you have searched me and you know me.

You are familiar with all my ways. For you created my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother's womb. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

And I wish I could, I hope I run across her one day and can ask her, how has that book impacted your life? How are those words that were written by Canadians who are Christian, how did that impact you?

[47 : 36] We have people who write novels about what's going on in our society today.

Sex trafficking, physical abuse in the church, abortion, mental illness, and other very real issues in today's society. We have song lyricists and playwrights that talk about the issues of the day.

You may have heard of Brian Stewart. He was a foreign correspondent for CBC News. He's now retired. And he said CBC was determined they would be the first boots on the ground whenever there was a tragedy, disaster, war.

They wanted the news first. And they said, and we were the first media on the ground. But we were never the first there. The Christian organizations were there first, offering food and water and aid and help in whatever way they could.

But we couldn't report on that. Did you hear about these on the news? There's a city much in the news these days, has been for months.

[48 : 48] But what we don't hear is the persecution and murder of Christians, some stories of which are extremely gruesome. But the one story that encouraged me, that is one we'll never hear.

Christians were meeting in a church. And the soldiers were going to burn the church down. You know, bar the doors, burn it down.

There's a bunch of Christians, we're going to get them. Do you know that Muslims made a physical barrier around the church to protect the Christians? Because they felt that Christians should have every right to worship just like they do.

Did you know that many Muslims today in places like Turkey and Pakistan are becoming Christians? And it's not because of the white man missionary that's coming to see them.

It's because of the man in glowing white that they have visions of. We don't hear those stories.

[49 : 55] A church in my town is celebrating their 150th anniversary this year. And I don't know how long has St. John's been here? The people.

When was it established? Okay, 60 years? Think of all the people that have come to know the Lord in that time.

All the people that have done things for the Lord. Their influence there. Do we hear about that in the news? Yeah, we hear about when people fall, when they sin. Anything that can be controversial.

Anything that will sell newspapers. But do we hear the stories of what God is doing? I know a few years ago St. John's was in the news big time. And you did have some sad things happening here.

But the great thing is that God is still working. The church is the people and God works through his people. And he will continue to do that. I came here in September.

[50 : 59] And several of us were sitting around and we were sharing our writing as part of what we were doing. And this one woman said there was a proposal process.

And I submitted this and it was accepted. And I'd like to read it for you. And I'm thinking, oh, that's nice. You know, she's had something published she's going to read for us. And she started reading.

I've heard those words before. I know where I heard those words. And then she mentioned the line in O'Canada that talks about God.

And all I could do was think. A Christian wrote those words. She has God's light living in her.

Light goes out in what we do to the world. In 2010, there was a little thing held here called the Vancouver Olympics. I was in Ontario.

[52 : 05] All I heard on the news and from people around was there's something different about these Olympics. And nobody could put their finger on it. I heard the fellows on TV from CBC and CTV.

And, you know, they sit around and they're talking. And they kept saying, well, it's patriotism. But there's something more. And they couldn't put their finger up. But they knew it was something more. This writer wrote the opening ceremony words for the Olympics that went out across Canada and the world.

That flame that was being lit in Vancouver was not only the flame for the Olympics. God knew that his flame would go out in those words. And somehow, although people cannot identify what it is, there was something different about those Olympics.

What will that search lead to? How is God going to use that so people can come to know him? That's exciting to me.

God uses us in all these ways. Together, you and your people, God's people, the church, the body of Christ, we need to be this light in this world.

[53 : 18] Did you know in Vancouver, 2% go to church? But as that number increases, as more people discover the grace of God and accept Christ's forgiveness, the stories of what God has done will need to be told, not only by mouth, but in words, so future generations can read what God has done.

Words are powerful. And wordsmiths use those words to shed light on injustice, move people to think, to change, to action.

Words telling the stories of what God has done and is now doing in the world, in his church, your church, your organization, in people's lives, even yours and mine, encourages all to carry on.

And even more than that, they move us to praise God and to give him the glory. But if we don't record the stories for future generations, who will? Writers are people.

They're human. They're trying to use the gifts and talents God has given them to the best of their ability. But they have their weaknesses like everyone else. Many are not full of confidence, but they struggle with what God is asking them to do.

[54 : 35] On the one hand, we feel, oh, I need to write this. People need to read it. And then we get going. We think, oh, who do I think I am? Somebody wants to read my words. But God has given us our gifts and talents to use, just like he's given you your gifts and talents to use.

There is a real influx of American books in Canada, which makes sense. Their population is ten times more than ours, and they have good things to say. But who is going to record the Canadian stories?

Who knows a Canadian mind like a Canadian does? As with many creative types, writers often march to the beat of a different drummer and are different and are treated as such and often misunderstood.

Many writers are loners and have been since they were children. Many have been bullied. Many are not understood because of what they do. But writers need you.

They need their church family to accept them and all their differences. Fiction writers can easily, can sometimes be found walking down the street, talking and arguing to their characters.

[55 : 52] We need people to accept us for who we are, to pray for us, to encourage us, and to value us. Did you know that most writers are poor?

Unless you're someone like, you know, John Grisham or Margaret Atwood, Jeanette Oak, you're going to be, you're going to be having trouble making ends meet.

You can. Depending what kind of writing you do, but often that kind is not creative writing. Everything you read, of course, has been written. So advertisements and copywriting, donor letters, that type of thing.

You can make money at some of that, but for creative writing, very hard to make a living. And so we do other things and then we write in our spare time. So we're poor.

And we want to go to writers' conferences to be with other writers and to learn and to hone our craft and we don't have the money to go.

[56 : 55] I have a friend who writes fiction. Well, and the Bible, of course, is full of all sorts of writing, isn't it? We've got history and biography, poetry, song lyrics.

There's even romance in there. There's mystery. There's contemporary stories. They were contemporary in their time and they still are contemporary today. There's drama. And Jesus used fiction.

They're called parables. I have a friend who writes fiction who's received emails from people whose lives have been changed, who have come to know the Lord. And her pastor told her that fiction is not of God.

It is not a ministry. He cannot use it. You're wasting your time. Go do something that God would value. Is it any wonder that writers don't feel valued or respected, that they don't feel comfortable going to their church?

to ask for prayer or financial help? Do you know that there are writers like that in your congregation? Writers are on the front lines in this battle for souls.

[58 : 08] We are in a spiritual battle. There's a reason we have a prayer team. It is ministry. They need prayer, support, and encouragement.

What if there were no writers that were Christian? Would we hear the news, all the news, the real news that's going on without the political slants of government or of media?

Media controls what we hear. There's a lot we don't hear. Would we know that there is a thriving, large church underground in China where many, many people are coming to know the Lord?

In times of political unrest and war, it's the writers who are imprisoned first. Why? Well, governments know words are powerful.

As the body of Christ, we are made to need and depend on one another. We need one another. The Bible is full of words, God's words, for instruction, gratification, stories to learn from, to be encouraged by.

[59 : 23] Oral stories change and fade with the telling. We need them written down. So today, let the stories continue. Seek out the writers.

Tell them the stories. Value the writers. Pray for them. Write down your own stories. Get writers to write your stories. Because after all, we are all in this together with God, for God, to God be the glory.

Thank you. If you would like more information about the Word Guild, it's thewordguild.com on the...

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.