

# UP & OUT

*Paying Attention and Attending to What God is  
Doing in the World that God Loves*



**THE MINISTRY**  
COLLABORATIVE

A Project of the  
Macedonian Ministry  
Foundation

We're pleased to provide for you resources from TMC [blogs](#), [podcasts](#), and other sources that serve as compelling prompts for discussion in your ministry contexts. Pastors and Layleaders frequently utilize these resources for conversations with their boards, small group contexts, and other engagements, so we wanted to organize some of them under headings that we think capture some of the most pressing issues. Feel free to use these resources in whatever way is most helpful and appropriate for your ministry. If you'd like to think through how to do so with a firmer grasp of effective group facilitation, coaching, group dynamics, and shifting a congregational culture, please let us know. We'd be happy to be a conversation partner or, in some cases, assist you and your congregation in a more comprehensive manner. We remain grateful for you all and committed to serving you.

February 2023

# Trust-building is **STILL** Not Optional, So Let's Participate in the Work of the Spirit.

*How will we steward this moment in our culture, when there is growing distrust of institutions but growing interest in spirituality, ideological polarization but a substantially large and dynamic “middle,” and rapidly increasing pace of life but also people pausing more often to ask the deepest, existential questions? God has and is reconciling all things through Christ, so what does this ministry of reconciliation look like in this moment?*

- **Are We Having a Good Time? A Round Table Conversation on Trust-Building** - The Ministry Collaborative program staff (Jennifer Watley Maxell, Mark Ramsey, and Adam Borneman) talk about how trust is being targeted, the problematic way our society views faith as a hobby, and the unique position of the church for building trust across differences.
- **Confidence in U.S. Institutions Down; Average at New Low** - Americans are less confident in major U.S. institutions than they were a year ago, with significant declines for 11 of the 16 institutions tested and no improvements for any.
- **The Growing Loneliness Epidemic 36% of all Americans**—including 61% of young adults and 51% of mothers with young children—feel “serious loneliness.” Not surprisingly, loneliness appears to have increased substantially since the outbreak of the global pandemic.

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**What we believe about God will tell us what we believe about people; and what we believe about people will tell us what kinds of communities and societies we believe we should strive to create.**

-- Brenda Salter McNeil



- **What's happening with religious faith after the pandemic?**
  - The COVID-19 pandemic precipitated an overall decline in religious attendance, although religious identity remained mostly stable.
  - The number of Americans who never attend religious services jumped over the past two years; roughly one in three Americans now report that they never attend religious services.
  - Young adults report the greatest change in religious attendance of any age group.
- **The largest demographic of nonverts, younger adults, will raise their children as "nones"** - people from nonreligious families. And while a tiny percentage of nonverts return to religion, nones rarely embrace religion at any point in their lives.
- **The coming religious divide** - As more moderately inclined religion-goers leave their faith, religious life becomes increasingly defined by the most ardent and committed believers. This then further alienates those on the fringe.
- **But we agree on a lot.** - Most people have similar attitudes toward politics and history, but we wrongly perceive large disagreements. Scientists call this a perception gap, and is driven by negative stereotypes. We should remind ourselves often that most people agree about most things.
- **So where are things headed?** - What if Christians keep leaving religion at the same rate observed in recent years? What if the pace of religious switching continues to accelerate? What if switching were to stop, but other demographic trends – such as migration, births and deaths – were to continue at current rates? To help answer such questions, Pew Research Center has modeled several hypothetical scenarios.
- **Notably, there's renewed spiritual openness** - In an October 2022 Barna survey of 2,000 U.S. adults, three out of four (74%) say they want to grow spiritually. Additionally, the same proportion (77%) say they believe in a higher power. Nearly half (44%) say they are more open to God today than before the pandemic.

- **The ongoing trend of “spiritual but not religious”** - In the latest **Gallup Poll**, the American belief in an omnipotent, omnipresent deity dipped to 81%, down six percentage points from 2017. A **2020 survey** done before the pandemic of 15,278 U.S. religious congregations by Faith Communities Today found that half of the country’s estimated 350,000 religious congregations had 65 or fewer people in attendance on any given weekend. That’s a drop of more than half from a median attendance level of 137 people in 2000. But amid these falling poll numbers, additional studies have uncovered an emerging trend: those who regard themselves as “spiritual,” but not necessarily “religious.” These are people who believe that there is Something or Someone Eternal either Up Above or Deep Inside, but who choose to employ avenues besides congregational worship to connect with that immortal element.
- **What families are really dealing with** - Amid **soaring inflation rates** and signs that the economy is **approaching a recession**, one-in-four U.S. parents say there have been times in the past year when they could not afford food their family needed or to pay their rent or mortgage. A similar share (24%) say they have struggled to pay for health care their family needed, and 20% of those who needed child care say they haven’t always had enough money to pay for it, according to a recent Pew Research Center survey.
- **Mental health tops the list of parent’s concerns**
- **So let's talk about it:**
  - **The Sound of the Genuine: A Conversation with Patrick Clayborn** - Program Curator Jennifer Watley Maxell talks with the Rev. Patrick Clayborn (Bethel AME Church, Baltimore) about Howard Thurman, interdependence, and the search for common ground.
  - **Trust-Building Is Not Optional: A Conversation with Amy Valdez Barker** - Program Director Adam Borneman speaks with the Rev. Dr. Amy Valdez Barker (Candler School of Theology, Citizen Exchange Art Collective) about the declining confidence in institutions, speaking the truth in love, and the importance of doing what we say we’re going to do.

- **Can I Get a Witness** - "Who we are as a people, and a world power seems to be shifting at a rate that is outpacing our ability to process and determine who we are as a collective. The moral, ethical and institutional foundations that have historically held us together as a democracy are quickly being torn asunder leading to more divisiveness, chaos, and confusion than many of us can remember." - Jennifer Watley Maxell

## Entering the Spiral, Inhabiting Joy

*What if we embraced the givenness of disorientation and persevered by divine, unconditional grace?*

- **Where You Enter the Spiral: A Round Table Conversation on Disorientation** - In part one of this round table conversation, the Ministry Collaborative program staff (Adam Mixon, Ryan Bonfiglio, Jennifer Watley Maxell, Adam Borneman, and Mark Ramsey) talk about orientation, disorientation, and reorientation, and the critical role that they have in different areas of life and ministry.
- **Gorging on Comfort: A Second Round Table Conversation on Disorientation** - In part two of this round table conversation, the Ministry Collaborative program staff (Adam Mixon, Ryan Bonfiglio, Jennifer Watley Maxell, Adam Borneman, and Mark Ramsey) talk about the importance of wilderness, the problem of making assumptions, and puncturing our bubbles of invincibility.

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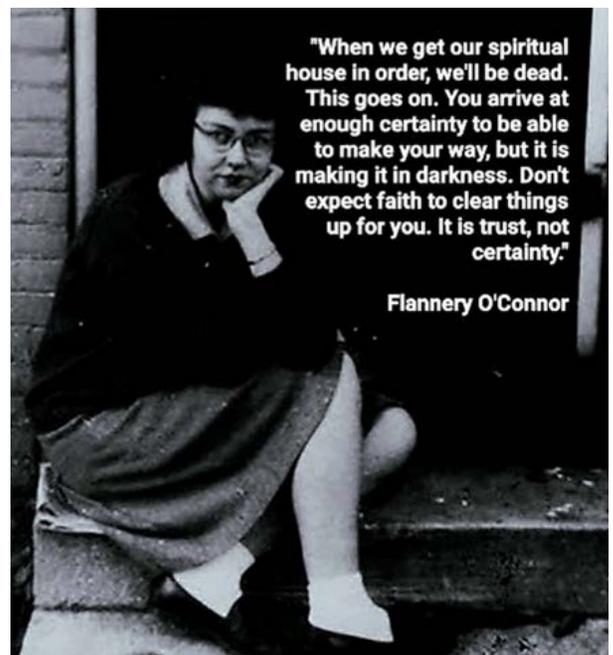
Joy is the rarest and most infrequent thing in the world. We already have enough fanatical seriousness, enthusiasm, and humorless zeal in the world. But joy? This shows us that the perception of the living God is rare. When we have found God our Saviour – or when he has found us – we will rejoice in him.

-- Karl Barth



- **Pastoring on Black Ice: A Conversation about Broken Connections** - Executive Director Mark Ramsey and Program Curator Jennifer Watley Maxell talk about pandemic's disruption to congregational relationships, the challenge of prioritizing, and what practices of reintroduction might offer us moving forward.
- **From Sunday to Monday: A Conversation with Jack Fortin** - Executive Director Mark Ramsey speaks with the Rev. Dr. Jack Fortin (Charity to Change, Christensen Center for Vocation at Augsburg University) about the dangers of self-absorption, God's surprising love for institutions, and Peter the businessman.

- **What is the Spirit Doing with Ministry Systems and Structures?** - "Seth Godin wrote just a few months ago: 'In a crisis, there's maximum attention. And in a crisis, we often discard any pretense of caring about systems and resilience and focus only on how to get back to normal. This is precisely why normal is what normal, is because we fight to get back to it. Changing the system changes everything. And it might be even less work than pouring water on today's tactical emergency.'" Adam Borneman



- **Experiment Your Way into a Future: A Conversation with Dwight Zscheile** - Program Director Adam Borneman speaks with the Rev. Dr. Dwight J. Zscheile (Luther Seminary) about church agility, faithful innovation, and how the massive shifts around institutional identity are affecting congregations.
- **Low Anthropology: A Conversation with David Zahl** - Program Director Adam Borneman speaks with David Zahl (Mockingbird Ministries; Christ Episcopal Church, Charlottesville) about finding a gracious view of others and self, the limitations of self-progress, and his latest book.

- **A Change in the Weather** - So many congregations right now are awash in uncertainty, haunted by loss, and longing for normalcy or a way back. It is imperative that church boards find ways to talk honestly, truthfully, with sensitivity and with tenderness, about where we are.

## Proclaiming Belonging and Becoming

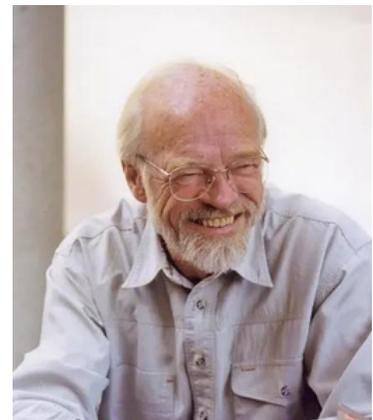
*What and who are we actually giving witness to, and what sort of transformation is at stake? Paul told his fellow disciples at Corinth, “I did not come proclaiming the testimony[ of God to you with superior speech or wisdom. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. 4 My speech and my proclamation were made not with persuasive words of wisdom[b] but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.”*

- **Conquering the Kingdom of Despair: A Conversation with Tyshawn Gardner and Tom Long**- Content Curator Adam Mixon speaks with the Rev. Dr. Tyshawn Gardner (Samford University) and and the Rev. Dr. Tom Long (Candler School of Theology) about the art of preaching, speaking truth to both the powerful and the powerless, and mining hope out of mountains of despair.
- **Love and Church Boards** - What do you love that keeps you in church leadership?
- **You Will Be My Witnesses: A Conversation with Gabby Cudjoe Wilkes** - Program Curator Jennifer Watley Maxell and Content Curator Adam Mixon talk with the Rev. Dr. Gabby Cudjoe Wilkes (Double Love Experience, Brooklyn) about Pentecost, the challenge of online and in- person community, and the vitality of being together.

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**There is no way that I can preach the gospel to these people if I don't know how they are living, what they are thinking and talking about. Preaching is proclamation, God's word revealed in Jesus, but only when it gets embedded in conversation, in a listening ear and responding tongue, does it become gospel.**

-- Eugene Peterson



- **If Being In A Community of the Spirit Means Anything to You** - "What are the sources of division and ideological purity that we need to critique or abandon for the sake of life-giving love? What are the inch-deep social, economic, political narratives that are shaping your faith more than the Spirit of Jesus is?" - Adam Borneman
- **Fences and Wells** - "What does the church have that culture shows absolutely no interest in having? Jesus Christ. The fullness of the gospel in its challenge and invitation. Unmerited, unearned, un-worked for grace. If that is true, then why do our church boards so little time talking about, discussing, sharing, about Jesus?" Mark Ramsey

- **Homiletical Magic Wand: A Conversation with Jared Alcantára** -Executive Director Mark Ramsey speaks with Dr. Jared Alcantára (George W. Truett Theological Seminary) about the importance of addressing trauma in the Body of Christ, his book *The Practices of Preaching*, and what we can learn from first century preachers about thinking strategically.



That's the beauty of our faith. It says that standing over against the tragic dimensions of man's sin is the glorious dimensions of God's grace.

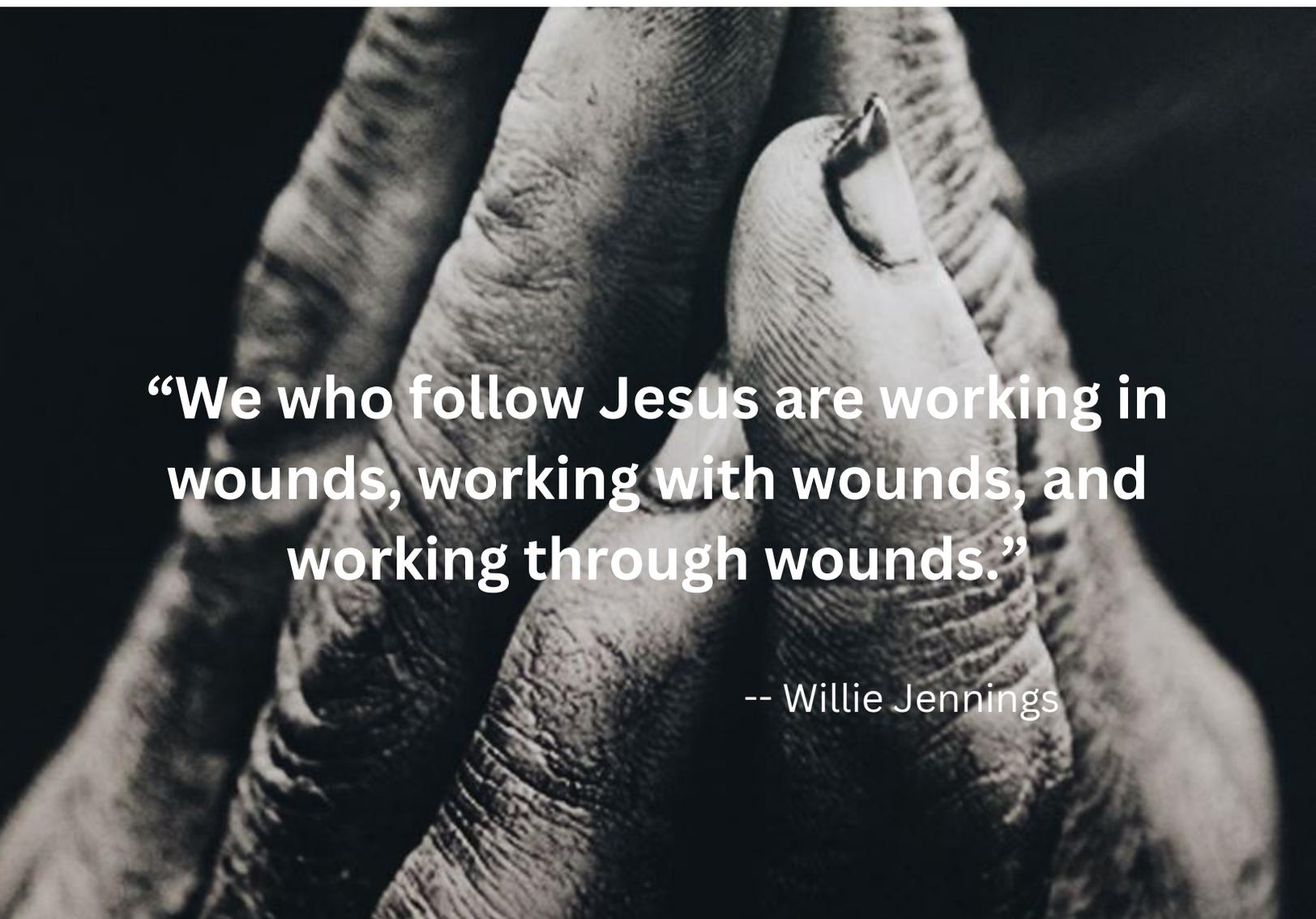
– Martin Luther King Jr.

- **You want to be “prophetic”? Let's try this.** - "The way is the way of humility, of bearing a cross, not the way of domination or winning. Truth is a person, not a weapon. And life is more abundant and beautifully complex than we dare admit. True koinonia is messy as hell; let's give it a shot anyway."
- **Sacred Anthropology: A Conversation with Tyshawn Gardner** - Content Curator Adam Mixon speaks with the Rev. Dr. Tyshawn Gardner (Samford University) about his new book for pulpit and pew, prophetic radicalism, and unbiblical nature of colorblindness.

## The Holy Spirit Heals & Empowers

Jesus said, "...the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." What is the Spirit doing to simultaneously heal our communities and also empower them with God's love for the whole world?

- **The Next Global Pandemic: Mental Health**
- **On Grief & Mourning: A Reflection from Adam Mixon** - Content Curator Adam Mixon shares his reflection on the difference between grief and mourning, the wisdom of John P. Kees and Frederick Buechner, and his own vacillation between joy and sorrow. This reflection originally appeared on our blog.

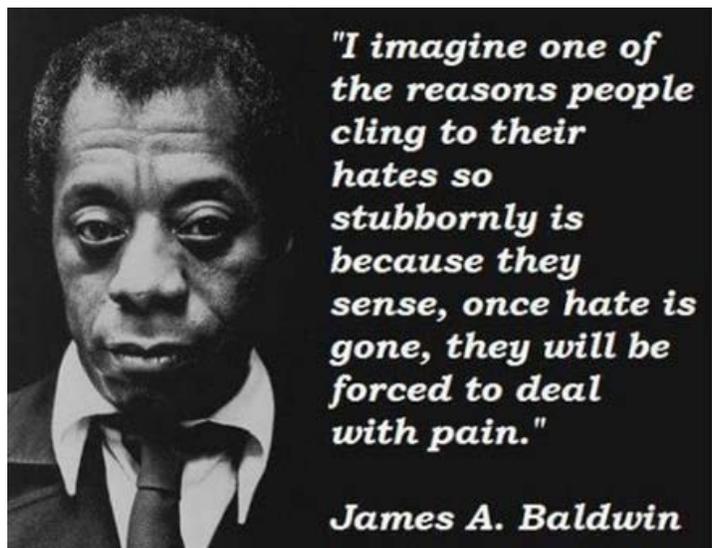


**“We who follow Jesus are working in wounds, working with wounds, and working through wounds.”**

-- Willie Jennings

- **Medication or Sedative? A Round Table Conversation on Facing Exhaustion** - The Ministry Collaborative program staff (Mark Ramsey, Adam Mixon, Ryan Bonfiglio, Adam Borneman, and Jennifer Watley Maxell) talk about the latest report on anxiety and depression within the U.S. population, how worshipping communities are experiencing this, and what the Spirit might be saying at this...
- **Physical Salvation: A Conversation with Lydell Lettsome** - Program Curator Jennifer Watley Maxell talks with the Rev. Dr. Lydell Lettsome (Vanbert Health Equity Project) about Jesus' role as a healer, the centrality of health care in Christian formation, and the importance of clergy embracing their role as moral leaders.

- **Preaching and Trauma: A Conversation with Kimberly Wagner** - Executive Director Mark Ramsey speaks with the Rev. Dr. Kimberly Wagner (Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago) about the subjective nature of trauma, its disorienting capacity, and what it means to preach faithfully into the moment.



- **Forgiveness As a Radical Act: A Conversation with James Goodlet** - Program Curator Jennifer Watley Maxell talks with the Rev. James Goodlet (First Presbyterian, LaGrange, GA) about vulnerability, contrition, Mother Emanuel, and the city of LaGrange's 2016 public apology for a 1940 lynching.
- **Marshaling Hope: A Conversation with Brady Radford** - Program Director Adam Borneman and Program Curator Jennifer Watley Maxell speak with the Rev. Brady Radford (Trinity Presbyterian, Decatur; Lovewell Collective) about resilience, resets, and the strengthening power of community.

- **The Great Resignation** - "Imagine the power and influence our great resignation would have if we resigned ourselves to Jesus and Jesus alone." Jennifer Watley Maxell
- **A Path to Belonging: A Conversation with Mary Kay DuChene** - Program Director Adam Borneman speaks with Mary Kay DuChene (Co-Director, LeaderWise) about the epidemic of isolation, the church's promise of community, and her co-authored book on clergy loneliness.

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TRUE SELF-CARE IS NOT SALT BATHS  
AND CHOCOLATE CAKE, IT IS  
MAKING THE CHOICE TO BUILD A  
LIFE YOU DON'T NEED TO  
REGULARLY ESCAPE FROM.

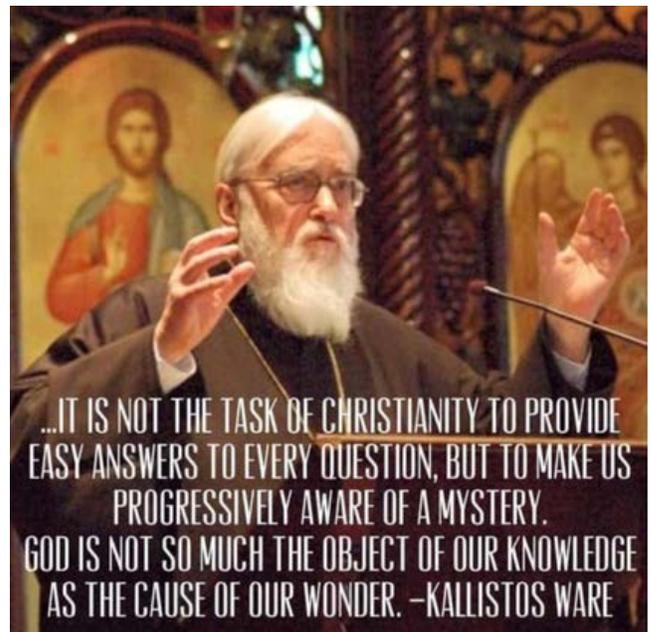
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Brianna Weist

# Keep Doing Less & Going Deeper

*Let's keep the main thing the main thing and provide for people's deepest longings: Jesus.  
Healing. Wisdom. Belonging.*

- **Tend Your Own Garden: A Conversation with Carla Jones Brown** - Program Director Adam Borneman speaks with the Rev. Carla Jones Brown (Arch Street Presbyterian, Philadelphia) about the importance of doing what needs to be done today, the practice of contemplative activism, and how being old and cranky can lead to patience.
- **The Tablespoon** - "I'm going to go out on a limb and say that no one – absolutely no one – is sitting around right now wondering about joining a new church so that they can become part of that church's struggle to survive in a post-modern, post-denominational, post-Christian culture. No one." Ben Johnston-Krase



- **The Work Is All Divine But Can We Sustain It?** - "Our pursuit of our best life will not save us. Nor will it satisfy the deep longings of our soul. That is the lie of culture, satisfaction by pursuit. Salvation based upon production. Only by returning to God and resting in the Almighty, quietly, confidently trusting bit by bit, we grow in grace and knowledge. We grow in wisdom and strength. We grow spiritually, faithfully, counterintuitively, counter culturally. We grow deeper and more authentic becoming abundant wells of life, love, capacity and Divine energy. We grow into who we were created to be." Jennifer Watley Maxell

- **The Great Opt Out** - Take a peek at the data. Yes, people are opting out of “church.” No surprise there. But what are they actually opting out of? And what does this say about what matters, what doesn’t, and what we might more intentionally move toward?
- **Really. No One Cares.** - "Ironically, we’d often like for a few more people to join our churches so that they can become solutions to the problems they already don’t care about." Ben Johnston-Krase
- **Depth And Specificity: A Conversation with Carrie Graham** - Executive Director Mark Ramsey speaks with the Rev. Carrie Graham (The Church Lab) about the growing sentiment against dialogue, her work with people who don’t like church, and the emerging post-COVID yearning for something beyond ourselves.

Wisdom is clearly more than mere intelligence, knowledge of facts, or information. Wisdom is more synthesis than analysis, more paradoxical than linear, more a dance than a march... As Cynthia Bourgeault puts it: “Wisdom is not knowing more, but knowing with more of you, knowing deeper.”

- Richard Rohr