



Season 11: Episode 8 | June Hur | Faith and a Best Selling Author

Hello and welcome to Scripture Untangled, a podcast by the Canadian Bible Society. My name is Joanna la Fleur. I'm a friend of the Canadian Bible Society and I'm going to be your guide for today's episode.

Today I have the privilege to bring you a conversation with best-selling author June Hur. So, our guest June Hur is a New York Times best-selling and Edgar Award-winning author whose novels bring Korean history to life through mystery, courage, and rich storytelling. Born in South Korea and raised across the U.S., Canada, and South Korea, June studied history and literature at the University of Toronto before working at the city's public library.

Her young adult historical novels *The Silence of Bones*, transport a reader into the intrigue of an ancient Korean dynasty, blending meticulous research with deep empathy and suspense. *The Red Palace* earned the 2023 Edgar Award for Best Young Adult Novel. June's work has been featured in the New York Times, NPR, Forbes, CBC, and even Vogue Korea, and she continues to be one of the most compelling voices in young adult fiction today.

She lives in Toronto with her family and in our conversation, we'll talk about how June weaves faith, identity, and history into her stories and what draws her into this forgotten corner of the Korean past, and why she believes this kind of storytelling may be a bridge across cultures and generations. So, June Hur joins me now.

Scripture Untangled

Season 11: Episode 8 | June Hur | Faith and a Best Selling Author

Joanna la Fleur: June welcome to Scripture Untangled. I'm really glad to have you on the podcast today.

June Hur: Thank you so much for inviting me.

Joanna la Fleur: As we dive into this conversation with you, some people may be familiar with you already, and maybe that's why they're listening. They may be familiar with your work, but for those who don't, tell us in brief of what do you do?

June Hur: So, I pitch my work as basically historical K-dramas (Korean drama) in book form, but long story short there, I fell in love with Korean history and ever since then each of my books have been a form of a love letter to Korean history.

Joanna la Fleur: I love that. You're saying it's a love letter to Korean history, and you've often talked about your work too as this idea of this history and then building mysteries inside of it. So, what first drew you to this period in particular in history that you write about? Why did you want that to be the backdrop of your work?

June Hur: So, most of my life I didn't really grow up with an interest in Korean history.

I was a Jane Austen girl. I was into British history. I studied that in university, but in my late 20s, I decided to read a translation of a Korean historical fiction, and I fell so deeply in love with it. And so that's when I began actually studying Korea's past.

And for me, I realized that Korean history itself is such a mystery to me. And so, I was, oh, it would be such an interesting method to use the mystery genre as a vehicle to explore Korean history. Because I know oftentimes historical fiction, it feels when you think of it for a lot of people, they're, oh, it sounds so dull and boring. But I grew up finding historical fiction so fascinating. And so, I decided to take another genre that people really enjoyed and kind of use it as a bait to be, come, you know, give my book a try.

Joanna la Fleur: You mean, the mystery side of it? Classically, I love a good, maybe others will relate, a good British mystery.

Scripture Untangled

Season 11: Episode 8 | June Hur | Faith and a Best Selling Author

June Hur: Exactly. I love it.

Joanna la Fleur: You know, and there are a lot of oftentimes they are historic in their time, the time period of the show, but not everyone would be familiar just as you were not yourself with Korean history. So, did you stumble upon that history because you were forced to read it? Was this, your parents made you, or it was a school assignment and then you found out that you actually loved it? Or was it maybe investigating your own cultural background? How did you come to it?

June Hur: Yeah. So, I said, I was obsessed with British history.

And so, for around 10 years, I actually wrote British historical fiction, women's fiction. And I tried to get it published. And I received over 100 rejections. And it was just taking such a toll on me, spiritually and my identity and just entirely. And so, I decided to take a break from publishing. And I told myself, maybe I'll never get published.

And so, I thought I'd given up on writing. And so, I took a year off of pursuing the stream. I tried teaching and, oh my gosh, this is not any easier. But it was fun. It was really rewarding, but it was just so hard. And then towards the end of the year, that itch to write returned.

But I was still..., my heart was still so weighed down by all the rejections I received regarding my British historical. And so, I was, okay, let's look into a different history. And Korean history was actually the last thing on my mind because I didn't think Korean history would be interesting to me or relevant to me because I spent most of my life in Canada.

But then finally, I was, you know, I tried different histories and it's not resonating with me. And then one day I was like, I like historical K-dramas, even though I didn't realize it was actually based on history. I just thought it was fantasy or something.

So, I like historical K-dramas. Maybe there's books like it. And so, I tried looking online.

Scripture Untangled

Season 11: Episode 8 | June Hur | Faith and a Best Selling Author

There weren't too many, but there was this book called *Encounter* by Hahn Moo-Sook. And she's a Korean author of this, classic. It's considered a classic and it's a historical fiction.

And I was reading it, and this book was set during the first Catholic persecution. And this was because I'm a Christian and, you know, I've lived in Korea a few years. I've seen churches everywhere.

And I've always been, why are there so many churches here? But I was never really curious about the history of Christianity in Korea until I read this book. And so it wasn't, it was actually not just Korean history itself that really caught my attention, but it was, you know, seeing something that I valued in my personal life, my walk with God in characters in historical Korea. And that was just so, it was just two worlds colliding in that moment.

And I realized there's so much about Korea. I don't know so much. And so much of that is related to who I am today.

And so, I think that's what kind of launched my, the start of my journey into studying more about Korea.

Joanna la Fleur: Yeah. Well, and as you're sort of saying, you have split your upbringing between Canada and South Korea.

And so how has that cross-cultural experience shaped your lens as a storyteller?

June Hur: It's interesting because all of my books have also been translated into Korean. And so, readers will tell me when they read my book, it's a very strange experience because they're reading about a history, they're really familiar with, but it's told in a lens that feels almost foreign. So, it's, for them, it's a history that's familiar, but feels foreign.

And so, I think that living in both, growing up in both Korea and Canada has definitely shaped my lens. And I think it's in Canada, when I was at U of T (University of

Scripture Untangled

Season 11: Episode 8 | June Hur | Faith and a Best Selling Author

Toronto), I was, when we studied history and stuff, we focused a lot on the lives of women. And so, I think that naturally shaped what I'd be interested in when I was studying about Korean history.

So, when I was studying about Korea, I was just, Oh wow. I didn't know Korean women lived under such intense restrictions and stuff. So that is what I focus a lot on in my book, the lives of women, the challenges and how they overcome obstacles.

And a lot of these women aren't very independent. I'm not saying Koreans aren't independent, but it's a much more communal society. There's a lot of, things, yeah, it's, I think my characters aren't entirely shaped by Korean values, but also Western values. Yeah.

Joanna la Fleur: Yeah. It's interesting.

You're saying that the Korean audience feels they're reading their story from an outsider. But that's perhaps why they're intrigued by it. How is someone else viewing this work? But then also, I mean, you're known for writing with careful research.

It's not for lack of study and history. And then, as you've just said, you're centering female protagonists in your books. And as you've said, as you've discovered, they're navigating really patriarchal structures of how it was in their time.

So how are you balancing the realities of the history of your research with, the realism of that, but also the hope of a female character who might be able to come outside the system or break away or, you know, just sort of defy that in some way. How do you struggle between the balance of that, I guess, of the reality of women in history, what they were, what their lives were really versus, ... you want them to be a strong and hopeful character?

June Hur: I think the more I study history, not just Korean history, but world history in general, you realize that in many countries, women have lived under very patriarchal and oppressive systems, but they figure out a way to subvert the system and do what

Scripture Untangled

Season 11: Episode 8 | June Hur | Faith and a Best Selling Author

they want to do. And so even though I said, you know, my characters are very independent and insinuating that maybe Korea isn't as much, but they are and were very independent women, even in historical Korea.

I read the memoirs of Lady Hyegyŏng, and it's about this very just strong woman and it's one of the earliest, memoirs written in Korea. And just being able to take in the stories that women wrote back then, there weren't as many as I wished, but I think, that kind of made me realize my prejudice that, oh, women back then were very obedient and just did whatever they were told. And literature tells me, no, there, women were, knew how to subvert the system.

But I think what really helps me decide, balance the history with the story I want to tell is I just ask myself, if I lived in Joseon Dynasty Korea and, you know, my father went missing and he disappeared on the secret, secretive island of Jeju, what would I do? Would I just stay in my room and sew? No, I would want to go out and find him. And so, I think I just imagine history through my own personal lens. Um, so whatever challenges that happen, I'm just, what would I do in that situation? If I was brave, because in truth, I think I wouldn't actually chase after a serial killer.

But yeah, if that happened to me, what would I do? And so, I think being a woman myself, I try to imagine stories through, I try to make it intimate by imagining it through my own personal lens. And so yeah, I tried to do it, but also keep myself in check, remembering that, you know, this is set in a historical period with different kinds of rules in place.

Joanna la Fleur: Okay. I want to talk about that. What would I do if I was brave? I want to get to that later, but before we go there, I want to talk a little bit about mystery as well as genre, because I'm imagining a lot of our listeners might be the kinds of people me who love a good mystery show. We binge it, whether that's Netflix or Brit box or wherever we're getting, you know, these kinds of shows, but mystery as a plot, that sounds really difficult.

Scripture Untangled

Season 11: Episode 8 | June Hur | Faith and a Best Selling Author

It feels it could be a maze. So how do you, what's your method? How do you plant clues? Maybe there's red herring. How do you, have you ever had a near miss you had to go back and say, oh, that didn't make sense.

I had to fix that in the edits. How do you plot out the maze of a mystery novel? I think people would love to understand. that seems very difficult and super creative.

June Hur: Yeah. I most times when I'm writing my mystery, I'm, oh my gosh, why did I do this to myself? And I also I work with my editor at Macmillan and a lot of times she's June, this is too convoluted. And so, we go back and forth a lot.

So, there's that side to it. But I think when I'm trying to create a mystery, what I do is, I initially I keep it simple. There's a crime that occurs and I ask myself, who is most likely to commit this crime? And then in the first draft, I'll have a culprit and then I'll kind of put in some red herrings and some clues and work towards that reveal.

And then the next draft, I'll be, actually, I think this character is more of a culprit with more motives. And so, I'll ...,

Joanna la Fleur: Oh, you mean you changed who the culprit is?

June Hur: Yeah, it happened.

Joanna la Fleur: Fascinating.

June Hur: And so, in the end, it's almost, I don't actually even know who the culprit is. As I think that's my kind of the tool that I use. It's, I have to make sure that the culprit is never the first character that I think should be the character.

Because that's the character that readers might assume is also the culprit. So, I think I try to trick myself as well. And so that helps.

Joanna la Fleur: So you're saying you're not, I'm imagining maybe some people might start at the end and work backwards, you know, building in the trap doors, kind of a thing and the red herrings, but as you write the character, you're discovering who

Scripture Untangled

Season 11: Episode 8 | June Hur | Faith and a Best Selling Author

they are, what their motives might be. And so, as you write multiple drafts, how does your editor feel about that? That's so interesting.

June Hur: Oh my gosh.

I think that's why when I was working on my latest book, *Behind Five Willows*, it's, just a cozy romance with a very light touch of mystery. It was, it takes so much, coordinating and strategizing to get the mystery right.

And there's multiple readers in my publishing team who have to go through it. And, they'd be, but you know, the murder weapon was here, but the culprit is there. And it's just, yeah, it just takes a lot of work.

Yeah, it's, I think it's a headache, but we enjoy it. But it's nice to have a break from the mystery genre once in a while.

Joanna la Fleur: Yeah, for sure.

Well, and I'm thinking about people who may be dreaming of writing themselves and your debut book, *The Silence of Bones*. What made it click that told you; this story is ready. We've worked out the mystery, figured it out.

Where did you think? I think maybe somewhere along the way we thought, I think I have a story here in my mind or on the page that I want to share with the world.

June Hur: Yeah, that is hard. I think coming to that point, it required a journey of me, writing stories, sharing it.

I had; I used to share my stories on a platform called Fiction Press. It's kind of today's version of Wattpad. It's just, you just post your story online and there's online readers who read and comment.

And so, I think that kind of journey of being able to share my work, even when I wasn't too sure, is this perfect? I don't think it'll ever be perfect. But I'm, I've been revising it for months and months. And, there's literally nothing more that I think I can fix.

Scripture Untangled

Season 11: Episode 8 | June Hur | Faith and a Best Selling Author

I think I learned when that kind of point is. And it takes, I think, not years, it could be years or just months of learning how to write the story and let go of it. Yeah, I don't think a story can ever be perfect.

And so, with *The Silence of Bones*, I worked on it for over a year. And I had several beta readers and beta readers for some audience who might not know, they're basically, trial readers, I think they read your work and they give you feedback. And then I also ran it through critique partners.

So, they'd, you know, edit it for me and give me critiques on how to improve it. And yeah, at the point where I got, so just tired of the book, I was just, I don't want to touch it anymore. I think that's when I'm, okay, I think I'm ready to send it off into the world.

Joanna la Fleur: Yeah, yeah. Well, and then another one of your books, *A Crane Among Wolves*. And then I mean, that one was around power and resistance and moral questions, you're wrestling with these big topics.

But then I mentioned that you're wrestling with these big topics, because you also wrote a book, *The Red Palace*, which won an Edgar, which is, I'm curious about how winning an award, I mean, in a book that, how do you ever get it perfect? How do you ever know if you've done it right, if you've done this big topic justice, but did winning an Edgar change your confidence or your writing process? Did it change how you view your ability to trust your writing?

June Hur: That's a good question. Because I think I've never been too confident in my ability to write a mystery. So, when I won the Edgar, I was just, oh, okay.

I think I've come to embrace that just yes; there are skills required to craft a really good mystery. But at the end of the day, I think there's life itself is a mystery. And I recognize that.

Scripture Untangled

Season 11: Episode 8 | June Hur | Faith and a Best Selling

Author

And I'm trying to kind of capture the mystery that, you know, isn't the everyday. And so, it didn't really give me confidence in my mystery ability, but just more, just learning to have more confidence in the fact that being able to tell a story that I really love, maybe is enough. So, I don't think, I'm an amazing mystery writer.

But receiving the award was kind of a pat on the back saying, you know, you told a good story. People enjoyed the mystery. And, you know, whether or not, I'm going to become an excellent mystery writer one day, I don't know about that.

But, yeah, it was just kind of validating.

Joanna la Fleur: Yeah. Well, and I'd to spend some time here, obviously, on a podcast called Scripture Untangled, which you're talking about the broad story of this podcast is investigating how Scripture is untangled in our lives, how whether we're talking to a Bible theologian, an author, a musician, an artist, whatever it may be, you know, where does it intersect? And I know you don't always or you haven't always talked publicly about faith, but you've started sharing about it more and how it informs some of your writing process or how you think about this.

What prompted that shift? Why did you decide to share a little bit more about that?

June Hur: So, when I first began writing, I felt it was a struggle trying to get to build a readership, because I feel my book, it is in the more niche genre. But then ever since the *Red Palace* and *A Crane Among Wolves*, my readership has really, really grown. And for the first time in my career, I started to feel, oh, I think this, obviously, I'm not a mega bestselling author, but I'm, oh, I think this, my success, my career is successful in the sense that, you know, I hit the New York Times, I have readers, they're very supportive and excited.

And I had this feeling that there were eyes on me, people were watching my career, people are picking up my book reading, people are very curious about my opinion. And I was raised in a Christian household where, where there was an emphasis on you know, suffering is not bad, suffering brings you closer to God. But I was never

Scripture Untangled

Season 11: Episode 8 | June Hur | Faith and a Best Selling

Author

taught, what do you do when things are going well in your career? When you have, you know, quote, unquote, success, whatever that means, what do you do with that? So, I think I was really wrestling with, you know, how do I, as a Christian, you know, steward this season well, because I'm not, you know, I've seen people rise and fall so fast.

And I know that success can be a very brief season. So, it's, in this season, how do I steward this hope? It's we're taught, we're told, you know, taught how to steward money and how to steward our time. But it's, how do we steward success? But success in a sense is money.

And so, I think I was really wrestling with that. And I really felt God was telling me, you know, to, in this moment where people are looking at me, if I really deeply care about my readers and the people around me, don't I want to tell the Good News, share the Good News. And I remember tensing up and, oh my gosh, if I share my faith, if I share the Gospel, and not even with the intention to evangelize or anything, but just to share who I am and what inspires my work.

I was so afraid that I'd lose readers, that I would be criticized. And you know that I'd be, yeah, because I think there's a lot of prejudice towards Christianity these days. And so, I didn't want to be boxed in.

And so, I was, no, I don't want to, I don't, I want to keep this private, I could keep this private. But then I felt God constantly pushing me to be, you know, be more open about your faith. And then in that moment, the Canadian Bible Society, they reached out and they're, do you want to have an event with us? And I was just, oh my gosh.

It's Canadian Bible Society. It's the most obvious way to, you know, share my faith. And I remember really hesitating, really struggling with that.

But, you know, at the end of the day, I realized, you know, reputation, success, all of that really doesn't matter. What matters the most is who I am in Christ and what God has called us to do, which is to share the Good News. That's what matters the most.

Scripture Untangled

Season 11: Episode 8 | June Hur | Faith and a Best Selling Author

And I knew that deep in my heart. I've been holding onto this dream of being published and doing well for so long that it was so hard to let go of it. But I felt called to hold onto it a bit looser and not rather than clinging onto it.

And so, I was just, okay, no God, if people, if I lose readers because of this, you know, I'll just hold onto this a bit more loosely. Now it's, I'm ready to surrender. And so, I think it was my first, accepting the invitation to speak at the event was my way of really surrendering this worldly ambition of mine before Christ.

But then the struggle remained. I remember Canadian Bible Society would send a collaboration request on my Instagram. I'd be, oh no, if I accept this, everyone's going to know I'm a Christian.

But, you know, constantly God is, was deciphering, just accept it. I shouldn't be ashamed of the gospel. And I'm, no, I'm not ashamed of the gospel.

So, I accepted it. And so, I think these little steps, it really, yeah, taught me to be more brave about my faith. And I think what was the most validating though, was after this event, after being much more public about it all, I was doing another book event at Indigo and a Muslim reader came up to me and she was, I'm so glad that you shared about your faith because it's, she didn't, for her, she doesn't see her religion as something to be ashamed of and private about.

And I was, why am I as a Christian who believes that Jesus died for me? Why am I so scared and ashamed of the Good News? And so, I think in that moment, something really shifted in me and, and it's still a constant struggle. But I think, all these events kind of, just amalgamated into this moment where I was just, you know what, I'm just gonna share the Gospel. I'm gonna be on this podcast.

I'm going to try not to be ashamed because I shouldn't be ashamed. This is Good News, amazing news. And so it's a constant struggle, but I'm, I feel God is discipling me in this moment.

Scripture Untangled

Season 11: Episode 8 | June Hur | Faith and a Best Selling Author

And so, I'm grateful. I'm so grateful for that time when Canadian Bible Society reached out to me. So, I think that was a turning point for me.

The Bible Course: Pausing our conversation here just for a moment to tell you about The Bible Course, because whether you're a seasoned Bible reader or you're just starting on the journey, The Bible Course offers a superb overview of the world's best-selling book. This eight-session course will help you grow in your understanding of the Bible. So, using a unique storyline, The Bible Course shows you how key events, books, and characters all fit together.

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Joanna la Fleur: Ah, well, and I'm just struck by this idea that you brought up earlier of a woman in a patriarchal historic society, her father goes missing.

Is she going to just sit? What would you do in this situation? You're probably not going to just quietly sit sewing in your room. You might go look for your father. And what I mean by that is you're describing a woman choosing to be brave. And do you feel writing about other people being brave? Does that make you reflect? Do you want to have a brave life or maybe even just frankly, a more interesting life? Like, "do it for the story, June, do it for the story."

June Hur: Yes.

Joanna la Fleur: Is that how it's come out? I'd love to hear more about that.

Scripture Untangled

Season 11: Episode 8 | June Hur | Faith and a Best Selling

Author

June Hur: Yeah. So I definitely use writing as a form of not just escapism, but to live the life that I don't even know if I want to live it, but I think there's something in me that, I think there's something in all humans that craves that adventure, doing living life for the greater good and for a bigger cause. And as Christians, it's, we want to live for the Kingdom, to do good works, to sow into the Kingdom.

And I think that is an innate desire, a yearning. But it's, you know, at the end of the day, I have kids, I'm a stay-at-home mom. It's, I can't just leave them and go, oh, let's chase after bad guys and stuff that.

And so, I think there's that yearning in me. And so, for me, that yearning is expressed through writing. And yeah, all my characters are very brave.

They will risk their lives to do what is right. And honestly, I don't know, if I wouldn't consider, I've never been placed into that kind of extreme, but a part of me, that voice in my heart is just, I don't think you'd, you know, pursue justice to that degree.

But, you know, God has called us to be that friend who's willing to die for your neighbors, you know, Jesus dying on the cross for our sins. It's that heroism.

I think we know that is the right way to live. But there's that fear and the cost that comes with it. And so, storytelling is my way of just being kind of shedding all that burden and just being, this is how we should live as women, boldly and without being timid and held down.

So yeah, I think the women in my story, they're flawed in their own ways too, but that is, for me, the ideal life I want to live one day.

Joanna la Fleur: Well, and I wonder, how does Scripture shape that when you're using words justice and courage, mercy, truth? I mean, you're trying to solve, I mean, certainly with mystery, you're trying to solve a crime or an injustice or make right what is wrong. How did this, your Christian background consciously or even unconsciously,

Scripture Untangled

Season 11: Episode 8 | June Hur | Faith and a Best Selling Author

do you think that it's shaping your understanding of those values as the characters are working this out, to fight for justice?

June Hur: See, this, I've always written with the mindset of being a Christian.

And so, I don't know, if you read non-Christian books, novels, there are also books about people chasing after justice and doing what is right. And so, I don't know, I can't say, oh, because I'm a Christian, I'm writing about justice and so on. But for me, that's what I care a lot about.

And so even when I'm drafting a story, when I'm at church and listening to a sermon, the sermon shapes my work. So, I know I read a lot of Tim Keller books. And so, before I became a mom, now I don't, I have no time to read.

But before I had kids, I read a lot of Tim Keller books, and I'd be highlighting his lines, and I would use that to shape my writing. And so, I remember thinking, oh, my books aren't actually really Christian because I'm just writing about history and justice. And I can't say it's intrinsically Christian, but then I had a Christian friend read my book and she was just pointing out phrases.

She's, oh, this is this passage in the Bible. And she's, oh, this line is from Tim Keller, and this line is from C.S. Lewis. And she recognized all the things about my faith that inspired my work that I didn't see because it was just so close to me.

Joanna la Fleur: I love that. It's that idea maybe of hide God's Word in your heart and it's coming out of you in a very natural way, which I think then makes it less preachy. You're not, here is the secret Christian moral of the story, wink, wink, which always feels forced.

But, you know, when you open your Bible, just in your own life as a believer, maybe also as a person who writes stories, are there stories or passages that keep bringing you back? Are there, when you think of your own upbringing or how you were taught the Bible, however long you've been exposed to it, are there characters or stories that

Scripture Untangled

Season 11: Episode 8 | June Hur | Faith and a Best Selling Author

you love? You know, I don't know if there's books or people that you keep going back to, just even as you imagine, not necessarily for your writing, but just as your life's inspiration.

June Hur: I think for me, it's the verse about how God will walk with us through the valley of darkness. And it's just this, and I think when I write books as well, it's that idea that I want my books to be that companion for people who perhaps don't know Christ.

But through my work, I could maybe be that friend who will walk with them through the valley of darkness. And I think Jesus, and the book of *Romans* and books on how we ought to live, but how it's so hard to live because of our flesh. And so, there's that constant wrestling.

I think that's something that is always a theme in my books, that wrestling of knowing what is good, knowing what is right, but we're held back by worldly ambitions and the things of this world. And so, for example, in the *Red Palace*, there's the heroine, she just got recruited to join the palace as a nurse. And it's one of the best positions for a woman of her status to have.

And she wants to hold on to that position. And yet throughout the book, she realizes that in order to do what is right, she has to possibly give up this lifetime dream of hers that she's been working towards. And so, it's that constant wrestling, that tension.

I think that's what I try to embody in my work. And it was definitely inspired by the tension we see in the Bible.

Joanna la Fleur: Yeah.

Now, as you, you do, as we've said, great research into Korean history for your books. But I think of things other ideas, Confucianism, maybe colonial pressures, I think of Christianity's expansion and contraction, expansion, contraction in Korea over

Scripture Untangled

Season 11: Episode 8 | June Hur | Faith and a Best Selling Author

centuries. Has that changed the way you read the Bible or simply just follow Jesus today?

June Hur: When I read the, because I recently did a book club with women at the church, and ours was on, it was this book called *Worthy*.

And it's about women, mostly in ministry and stuff and the hurt they experienced and the oppression. But how, and in the end, it just shows that, you know, Jesus was not this, Jesus uplifted women. And so, it's weird.

It's when I was at U of T, we learned about feminism, patriarchy, and I see it in history. And yet, when I read the Bible, I feel almost God is protecting my heart and mind. Because I can totally see how I might stumble on a line and be, oh, you know, why does, why is it talking about women this? Or, oh, you know, why did this happen to this group of people? I know I could get stuck on that.

And at times I do pause and I'm, oh, you know, this feels off. But at the end of the day, I have, there's something that has such faith in God and His goodness. And I remember I did come, I did have a moment of crisis in my faith once when, you know, I gave up writing.

And I was just, oh my gosh, I thought this was what God has called me to, is this not what He's called me to? Or maybe, God isn't even real. And everything I grew up thinking, maybe it's just, I've been brainwashed. And I was really wrestling with it.

But then I read C.S. Lewis's book on grief. I think it's something he wrote after the death of his wife. And he was talking about how a lot of times with faith; Christianity doesn't really make sense until you take that leap of faith.

And then you look back and everything makes sense in retrospect. And I think that's kind of what I hold on to while I read the Bible that sometimes there are passages that don't make sense to me. But I have faith that God is good at the end of the day.

Scripture Untangled

Season 11: Episode 8 | June Hur | Faith and a Best Selling

Author

He's not a liar. He is who He says He is. And that kind of reshapes, puts into check, all that doubt and the voices in my head.

But I do try to wrestle with it. But not in the sense that I'm trying to prove God wrong or anything that.

Joanna la Fleur: Sure.

And do you have any, you know, outside of the Bible itself, other influence? I mean, you've mentioned, people are reading your work and saying, that sounds Tim Keller, or something. So maybe you've already mentioned it, but I'm thinking, are there historians, other novelists? Are there theologians? Is there your favorite British history, mystery, whatever it is? What has been shaping your imagination? And knowing you're a busy woman, as you've already confessed, you know, you have much less time to read now. We're not looking for some perfect answer, but is there something that you think is influencing your work? Maybe, and maybe it's something from University of Toronto, as you said, at U of T.

June Hur: So, it's not so much her work, but one of the statements she made, there's this author named Flannery O'Connor, I think.

And then she mentioned this one line that my professor shared at U of T that really stayed with me, but she shared that she's a Christian or a Catholic first before she's a writer. And I think that kind of mindset is what has shaped just how I approach storytelling in general.

So, when I'm writing stories, I always tell myself, I'm a Christian first before I'm a writer. And so, when I write about, for example, Shamanism, I don't just write about shamans and glorify them. So as a Christian, I tell myself, you know, I have to be very responsible with how I represent some things that maybe clash with my own beliefs.

And so, things, there was a shaman in one of my books, *The Force of Stolen Girls*. And one of the main characters is a shaman. And so, I'd wrestle with that.

Scripture Untangled

Season 11: Episode 8 | June Hur | Faith and a Best Selling Author

And I'd be, you know, how do I depict Shamanism in a way that, points to Christ? Because everything I want to write, everything I write, I want it to somehow point to Christ. And so, I realized, even in the Bible, it talks about, that girl who is possessed, demon possession and stuff. And so, the idea that a spiritual worth, that spiritual worth exists, I wanted to acknowledge that, that there is more to this world than just what we can see.

But I always made it so that you never really know, is this shaman actually able to prophesy? Or is it just all imagination? But still acknowledging that a spiritual realm does exist. And so, I think that one thing I learned about Flannery O'Connor in university has really affected and shaped who I am as an author.

Joanna la Fleur: And maybe as we're coming to a close, just a couple more questions for you.

But one of them that leads me to say, I'm thinking, of someone listening who wants to write or is aspiring or starting on the journey of writing, and they also are a Christian, is either a Christian first or their faith, that they can't separate themselves from it in their writing. But do you have any, maybe just a simple advice? And you've been, it's been sprinkled throughout this, but something to encourage them. And particularly, how do you write as a Christian without it going to preachy? I mean, unless you're writing a Christian novel, if you're writing a novel, but you are also a Christian, any advice for someone, especially a young person who is passionate, and how do they do it without making art into preaching?

June Hur: Yeah, I used to struggle with being, oh, I need to add more God into my book, blah, blah.

But I think I realized, whatever we fill ourselves with, it just naturally pours out. It's, if you really, really love someone, you just can't help telling everybody, oh my gosh, this person is so fantastic, he's so sweet. And he did this for me and that for me.

Scripture Untangled

Season 11: Episode 8 | June Hur | Faith and a Best Selling

Author

And so, I think the more you fill yourself with the love of Christ and even quotes and passages from Bible that you love and from books written by other Christian theologians and stuff, it just shapes you and it just ends up overflowing. And so, I think it doesn't work when you're trying to write a book and maybe you're not reading the Bible, you're not filling yourself with the Word of God, or the love of God.

And then you're suddenly, I need to make this Christian to write a Christian book. And then you're just, forcing it in. I think that's when readers can tell, oh, this person is trying to force it in.

Joanna la Fleur: But I think when it's very natural and personal to you, it just comes out. So, I'd say, fill yourself. Well, and even that, I love that you're describing it that way.

Because in this, in this moment of your own life, you're a bit busy. Lots going on in your work, your life, your home life, family life. You know, it's probably not going to look like, let me sit and meditate on Scripture quietly by this window, this comfy chair for an hour a day, that you're just real, but there's ways that you're talking about integrating it, little verses, Scriptures, how do you put that little passage somewhere where you might see it when you pass by, I'm hearing you describe these things that are keeping you grounded.

Okay, so, you know, as we enter into this with you, people may not have read your work, who are listening, they may discover you here on this podcast for the first time, where should listeners start with your books? What's the best way for them if they're, you know, you have a number of books, it's not necessarily, doesn't have to be your favorite. Maybe you can't choose your favorite child. But where would you recommend someone start if they want to get introduced to your work?

June Hur: So, my most well-loved book is the *Red Palace*.

And that one's about a palace nurse and a police investigator. They team up to solve a series of grisly murders. That one's my most well-loved.

Scripture Untangled

Season 11: Episode 8 | June Hur | Faith and a Best Selling Author

And it's a quick, fast read. And then for those who want something um, darker and about tyranny and oppression, I would recommend *A Crane Among Wolves*. And if you want absolutely no romance in your books, then my other two books, *The Silence of Bones* or *The Forest of Stolen Girls*.

Joanna la Fleur: And my last question for you, because of course, we're going to link in the show notes to you, to your work to these will make sure that people can find it very easily here in the show notes. How can we pray for you as listeners as we think of you? Um, this is, you're not doing this in a Christian environment. You're in a regular world.

How can we pray for you in this season of your life as we listen?

June Hur: I think my prayer is always to really root my identity in Christ, because it's so easy to, compare myself to other writers, maybe who are doing better than me, or, if I'm not doing well in my career to, let that shake me but to be really firm in who I am. And the other prayer request would be, you know, to fill that well up with Scripture, because I think it's so easy to be, I need to work, and I need to live my life. And it's so busy to just meditate on God's Word, even if it's for a short time a day.

But just to have that kind of to carve that time out for God.

Joanna la Fleur: Yeah, June, when is your next book coming out? Can you tell us?

June Hur: It's coming out next year, May 2026.

Joanna la Fleur: Okay, we're going to follow you. We're going to watch this space. As you said, we're going to link in the show notes so people can find you. Maybe they want to follow you on social media.

They want to go buy one of your books and dive in. June, thank you so much for sharing. And as you said, for having the courage and creativity to write and to do that well, you know, all things can be done for God's glory. But that also, you know,

Scripture Untangled

Season 11: Episode 8 | June Hur | Faith and a Best Selling Author

sharing a little glimpse into how your faith is part of that journey and imperfect and brave journey as you follow Jesus. So, thanks so much for being with us.

June Hur: Thank you. Thank you for this conversation.