



Season 12: Episode 12 | Jason Ballard | Is God Calling You to the Ministry?

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'm grateful to share with you a conversation I recently had with Jason Ballard. Jason Ballard is a pastor and church planter based in Vancouver, BC. He leads The Way Church, which is a young church community with a heart for its city.

He helps shape The Way College, which is the church's leadership and pastoral development arm, and also serves as the executive director of the Pastorate, which is a ministry dedicated to strengthening pastors for the renewal of the church in Canada. We're going to talk about all of that in today's episode. Before launching the Way and the Pastorate, Jason served on the pastoral team at Christian Life Assembly in Langley, BC and helped develop the Alpha Youth series and other resources used by churches around the world.

He is passionate about helping pastors live and lead with courage, about fostering relationships and partnerships that see both new church plants and historic congregations renewed in their witness to Jesus. He and his wife Rachel are raising their three children in Vancouver.

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Joanna la Fleur: Jason Ballard, welcome to Scripture Untangled. It's really fun to have you on the podcast today.

Jason Ballard: I'm glad to be here with you. Thanks for including me.

Joanna la Fleur: So, we've preambled you before, you know, before this conversation, we make sure to do an intro, but the next layer of intro I would love is like a little bit of context of an introduction of your faith story. Like, have you always been in church? Is this something that you came to later in life? Some context on how you got introduced to Christianity, church, the Bible, where did that come from?

Jason Ballard: My story would be like high exposure to the Bible and to faith.

I grew up listening to *Adventures in Odyssey*. So, Mr. Whittaker is like my mentor and grew up with parents that love Jesus and in a beautiful, holistic way. You know, every morning I wake up, my dad's reading his Bible.

And, but for me as like a preteen, I made a very conscious decision that faith and spirituality, following Jesus was not for me. And, really just like, there's so much going on internally, you know, all the stuff that a preteen is experiencing. And I just thought everything I heard up to that point through the years, felt really far away and irrelevant to my preteen problems.

And then there's a really defining season with some specific moments where God grabbed hold of my heart and Jesus became real, experienced the opposite of what I thought that He was irrelevant to being the most relevant thing for me. And that moment or that season was a really radical shift. It changed me as a person.

It changed the way I related to people. And I got caught up in the, God life really fast, in the sense that I had the privilege of having seen what life with God looked like. So, the idea of Scripture being involved with my life, mission, service to others,

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meaningful involvement with local church, those weren't like skills or even practices I had to learn on the other side of choosing to follow Jesus.

There are things that I've seen modeled. And so, once Christ became alive to me through the Spirit of God, I found myself giving myself wholly to it. And, then all the learning that came on the other side of that.

Joanna la Fleur: It's like you had; I don't know if this is a helpful metaphor. I often think of metaphors, it's like you had a roadmap, but you had no motivation to drive it. Like you knew that you knew those checkpoints.

It sounds like it was modeled and lived in front of you, but you just weren't interested in going on the ride for a while.

Jason Ballard: Yeah, very much so.

And I think it's a helpful frame, even as you're saying that that sometimes when people come alive in Christ, the work is actually for them to rediscover those things that were familiar. If they grew up around Christianity, or maybe they grew up around a version of Christianity that was of a particular brand or style. And so there might be some unlearning to do, but then sometimes, and this is really fun as a pastor right now, increasingly more people are coming alive to the with God life with no handles, with no roadmap.

And that's where we're not always at our best as the church of like, if somebody has no Biblical worldview, if someone has no understanding of the story of Scripture, no experience, like we say things like, and we should pray. What does that mean? What does it (mean) to spend 10 minutes with God? And I think about the early church. One of the things that was really interesting is early on followers of Jesus were primarily converting from Judaism.

And so, if you think about it, they had a handle on the story of Scripture. They had a good understanding of the Old Testament, even spiritual practices, but really quickly,

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all of a sudden there was increasingly Gentile converts. And then what you see in church history is the formation process got very rigorous, very fast, that all of a sudden they introduced things like the catechumenate, which were like a two year, as far as I understand, not just like class, but mentorship practice journey that was laid out so that we don't expect that people would make this decision and then just stumble into a whole new way of living.

But there was this intentional pathway that was rigorous. And I think about probably to the degree now that we think about how our churches have been formed, maybe in what appeared to be a Christendom, we can debate whether that's the Canadian story or not. But I think we have a lot to learn from the early church and how rigorous that onboarding was to help people build a whole new set of patterns.

And really, like, as it relates to the conversations we're having here, even just having this basic understanding the narrative of Scripture and how it all works together, we can't take that for granted. And so, then all of a sudden, the instructions of just starting to read your Bible might not be the best instruction if it's not coupled with a guide, a person, and somebody can help you understand the overarching story. I was very fortunate though in my story that I had a thousand episodes of *Adventures in Odyssey* in my imagination to help give me a handle on the story of God, the ethics of the Kingdom of God.

For me, it was a matter of will and the transforming power of the Spirit to motivate me and empower me. But I get really excited thinking about how do we as followers of Jesus, take an 18-year-old, a 28-year-old, a 58-year-old who didn't grow up living into this story or hearing this story actually find their way into it.

Joanna la Fleur: I totally hear what you're saying.

It's almost like some people have, whether they've made a decision or not for Christ, they have it as a first language. And then there's other people who are learning it as a

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foreign language and they can learn it. But it takes a little, there's a lot of things like, oh, of course you couldn't have assumed like the grammar tenses of that.

You wouldn't have possibly known how that worked unless you like were born into it. It's not intuitive to you. I think of a friend who was asking me about were Moses and Jesus compatriots, like of the same time period.

And Jesus wrote the Bible was her assumption. What I mean by that is I'm agreeing with you that there's not a lot of a content, Christendom context for her to hang her hat on, grab onto. We have to start further back.

So, for her to read the Bible, just go read would not be helpful without that guide.

Jason Ballard: Yeah.

Or maybe I'm sure what you and I are trying to say more accurately is it would be all the more, more helpful as he or she goes to read to have people around them that are helping them understand the larger story, how it fits together. And I just think that's really fun.

Like that's what we're all praying for, isn't it? People have no idea how good the whole story is discovering it. And then it's like one thing after another, there's more, there's more good news. There's more.

There's actually like good news that God made us, good news that He's coming back again. Like all this stuff is like really good news that we don't take for granted.

Joanna la Fleur: Right.

Well, and we can forget if it's just part of our upbringing, how good it sounds if you didn't know before. Like, I don't know, I think of Jesus loves you bumper sticker.

And if you have never thought that this Deity might love you, it's absolutely the best news you've ever heard. You're doing this, what you're describing is like the work of local church pastoring, discipling, leading. Uh, and of course you also, I shouldn't say

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of course, but for those who are listening that you're also leading the Pastorate, which is a ministry for pastors, specifically, pastors.

So tell us a little bit about, you know which came first or did they naturally come out together? Like, how did this become the way you could do a lot of other things. Like, how are these the things that you've decided to focus on?

Jason Ballard: So yeah, my world, at least professionally includes pastor in a church, The Way Church and helping lead a ministry called the Pastorate.

And I should say that my world also includes being a dad and being a husband and neighbor and a friend. And those are the most precious parts of my world. But I give like a lot of my working hours to these two ministries, and they really were born at the same time.

So, for years I was working for a wonderful organization called Alpha and I got to help build resources that local churches could use to reach people far from God, to make environments of hospitality and community for the Gospel to be shared. And I spent probably if I was to, I'm really bad with dates, but let me do the math, like somewhere between 2010 ish to 2020 ish, I was with Alpha. And the whole time there's this like quiet desire in my heart.

I'm sometimes not so quiet, to be with some friends leading a local church. And all my years with Alpha, I was always working at a local church. So, I always had a role as like a youth pastor or something like that.

So, there's always this like in the church and in the parachurch, for lack of better words, or in the ministry space, not for profit. Um, but some friends and I really started gathering around, uh, some shared convictions, a love for the local church. I really believe with my whole heart that one of the best shots we've got, or the best shot we've got for Canada to be a better place for everyone to live, for it to be a flourishing country, is for it to be filled with life giving churches in every nook and cranny of our country.

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And that's always been the deep desire of my heart to see Canada transformed and see the local church flourish towards that end to glorify God and to transform the nation. And as I was traveling with Alpha and spending time with churches, one particular need kept grabbing hold of my heart. And it was the health and vitality of pastors.

And this kind of working theory of change began to emerge. If we need healthy local churches to see healthy cities across our country and communities, one of the things we need is the healthy men and women who are leading those churches, and teams of healthy men and women that are leading those churches. And so, when we, some friends and I think about my good friend Jeremy and Chris and a few others began to dream up how we might respond.

There's always these like three things that were in our heart to do together. One was to plant a life-giving church. How we landed at Vancouver was a different story.

How we landed on September of 2020 is a bigger story, but we got, we felt called together to plant a life-giving church and through that church to form pastors, to start a college that would be devoted to forming pastors. So, we started The Way College, and a ministry that would be dedicated to supporting and strengthening the health of pastors across Canada. So pastoral formation, but also that ongoing support community and care, and that we would be a church in Vancouver with a heart for the church in Canada.

And so, our church functions that way on paper and in practicality that looks like, you know, distinct organizations with separate governance and all those sorts of things. But behind those organizations is one group of friends that have a shared vision and a church that wants to be a blessing to churches across Canada.

Joanna la Fleur: Well, and not just a blessing, but even maybe a place people are coming to check out, a place to learn from, to see what is this model and can we

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glean something from it? Each community needs to connect with the needs of their own local community.

But what is the, not the formula in the right sense of the word. What is the thing that you've created here as a model that can be adapted and learned from? I know myself, people who've come out to learn with you and from you. This pastor thing is a huge conversation if we open it up.

I'm like, I don't even know what, there's so many things to go into, but man, it is the data on it that I see is, of course, we're talking about a leadership crisis. There are not enough people coming up who want the job. Can you, and then there's also the other side where at least for a few years, the pastors who were saying, I want out, I don't know if I can keep doing this.

And I think we've seen that decrease now. The intensity of that COVID period was so difficult. And I think people are feeling a little bit more positive now, but what are some of those patterns that you're hearing? Because you've got your ear to it all the time.

You're here, you see the trends and the patterns of like, why does a pastor stay? What makes them want to leave or actually why do they leave?

Jason Ballard: Not everyone will agree with me on this, but I believe it's my whole heart. I think that we need pastors. It's an essential service.

I don't expect the government to believe that, but in the church, I believe with my whole heart, like it's an essential piece of the puzzle. That doesn't mean it's always paid. It can be lay, it can be all these different things, but it's an essential service.

We need men and women who say yes to the call of God to shepherd under Him. And when you mentioned this idea of not enough, there's real data that shows this, super practically, we over the last five years are a growing country. So, we need church planting, we need churches to grow in their ability to care for more people as

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our population grows, as people from all over the world come and make Canada their home.

It's a really beautiful thing. But even if we took that aside, like population growth aside, just to support the existing churches in our country, as one generation of baby boomers, their retirement has begun and continues. The question is for every one of those ministry posts, is there a called, equipped, ready men or women to take that spot? And it's not just that we don't quite have enough, it's that like it's by multiples, there's not enough.

And there are different denominations have done different studies on this. This is increasingly one of the main issues that denominations are flagging. And you hear something to the effect of, you know, for every 10 retiring, 10 pastors retiring next 10 years, there's a fraction, maybe two or three pastors ready to fill that spot.

So that's a real challenge. So, there's this kind of like you call it a pipeline issue. But then this other piece you're mentioning, I think is really important is not only is it a necessary, essential service, it's a high liability job.

You know, I can't remember what they call it, like, my friend was like an underwater diver. And like people that have like dangerous professions will sometimes get like, what is it called? Like, not is a danger pay or something like there's a different...

Joanna la Fleur: Yeah, I know what you mean.

Or the people who go way up north, Northwest Territory, there's like there's isolation pay.

Jason Ballard: Yeah.

And like, it's just there's some jobs that are either more rare or harder to find people to say yes to because they're costly in different ways, or they're just actually dangerous. And pastoring for the most part in Canada, thankfully, is not physically dangerous, although there's parts of the world, which I try to keep in my imagination

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that is physically dangerous. So, I don't take that for granted that it's very safe for me and my family physically to do this in Canada.

And I just admire with my whole heart pastors who that's not the case. But it is an emotionally, spiritually and relationally dangerous job. And so, and other jobs like this, we don't feel special, but I just am most familiar with this vocation.

And pastors are prone to isolation, to overwhelm, to burnout. It's a job that never feels complete. It's a job that feels overwhelming.

I'll give you one example. I was sitting down with a friend recently, and they were talking about, we're talking all sorts of like, tragedies around us, you know, and they're saying, yeah, like, and how that affects them, you know, and they said, one of my friends is sick. One of my friends are experiencing divorce because infidelity.

And just as the conversation was going, and, you know, I'm sharing a bit, it just was so clear to me, like, oh, I'm proximate to so much pain. By nature of my job, I am constantly sitting with it surrounded by people who are hurting, who have experienced relational pain, physically lost. And that's just one piece of the puzzle.

But the very nature of the job puts you in a space that's so proximate to the worst of how sin can destroy a family, the worst of how our broken bodies and frailty can cause pain and all this kind of suffering. And we could go on and on, and I'm happy to speak more. But essentially, the point is this, is that if it is a high liability job, what does a pastor need in his or her life, that will be able to offset or support those challenges.

So, the Olympics are going on right now and when this episode is going to be shared. But you better believe that the nutrition and the athletic regimen and the sleep patterns of these athletes are proportionally organized in light of their vocation.

In the same way, a pastor cannot just take the same physical, spiritual, emotional pattern of life and expect it to provide the substructure and support needed.

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But life doesn't hand you those rules or those patterns or those tools. They have to be cultivated. And I think that for a lot of pastors, it's hard to cultivate those.

And so that's why you see whether it's burnout or apathy setting in or disillusionment or just there's got to be another career I can do that makes a difference. Like I totally get it why a pastor would be like, can I just be a counselor? Can I just do coaching? Can I just be a teacher? And I love those vocations.

Joanna la Fleur: That's where a lot of people have gone.

Jason Ballard: Yeah. And I love those vocations. We need those.

I admire those. But I can see why many are drawn because like, I feel like I could do a lot of what I'm called to without having to deal with the weighty matters of a dynamic community trying to figure out how to follow Jesus together in a city. But we need pastors.

We need pastors that say yes. And thankfully, there's tens of thousands of them in Canada have said yes. The Pastorate exists to try to provide some support for some of them so that they can continue to say yes.

I always think about like, we want to help see pastors go the distance with fruitfulness, like fruitful the whole way through and with joy. Joy doesn't mean happy. It doesn't mean easy.

But I believe that like joy is possible, even in a vocation that makes you proximate to so much pain. And then through The Way College we're trying to raise up a new generation of them. So, we're trying to ask the question, what is the first four to 10 years look like in the formation of a pastor that could set them on trajectories that lead to flourishing for a long time?

Joanna la Fleur: That's good.

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Just today, I mean, at the time of our recording, we just had this horrible tragedy in BC Tumbler Ridge Secondary. And this morning, I was listening to the CBC radio, I just happened to have it on, and they were interviewing a pastor. So, when you say the idea of an essential pastors as an essential service, they're interviewing a Baptist pastor, and he was talking about what he's doing to care for this community.

And the CBC journalist asked him, and what about you? Who's caring for you? Which I thought was such an insightful question for a journalist to acknowledge, like, hey, are you okay, bud to like, you're dealing with a community, and you are an essential service for this community now. But who's caring for you? And he had, you know, he had an appropriate response for where he gets some of that support. But, it's exactly as you say, like, just like an athlete, if you live the same as everyone else, you're not going to get to the Olympics, or you're not going to endure as an athlete, you're going to tear your ACL. I mean, you still can even doing the right thing.

But that idea for the pastor too have, of like, you're going to have to have a different kind of a path, and perhaps no one set that out for you. So that's where you're talking about when you think of things like The Way College, do you think of it as is this kind of like your training pastor Olympics? Because it's the Olympics now, maybe that's the good theme, you know, Olympic athletes of the church. You're at the very least, you're giving them again, that roadmap of like, what is a way to go? Tell us more about the college and how you're how you're developing people there.

Jason Ballard: I like the metaphor. I don't think about Olympic athletes, only because we're not trying to form elite pastors, like the biggest churches or anything like that, but faithful pastors. So, if the gold medal is faithfulness, then 100%.

That's what we're trying to do is Olympic athlete pastors, if the gold medal is faithful, if the gold medal is a big church or whatever, that's not, I mean, we'd love for some of them to be off, you know, whatever, but you know what I mean? But yeah, that's exactly what we're thinking is what are the trajectories of a holistic pastoral formation.

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So traditionally, a lot of the models have indexed primarily on theological formation, which is very important. I think pastors are Word workers. We need to deeply live out of the Word, teach the Word, invite other people to live into the Word of God, navigate cultures questions about it, live from the ethics and the vision to let our mission flow from a Biblical worldview.

But Biblical formation isn't the whole formative journey. There's the person's own character formation, their intimacy with God. There's the craft, everything from preaching all the way to organizational, like how do you do communications? How do you lead staff? How do you stay within the CRA's requirements of a charity in Canada? So, there's all these craft things.

How do you have crucial conversations? How do you pastor people in pain? And then there's other dynamics like the spiritual realities of how do you do spiritual warfare? And how do you minister in spiritual gifts? How do you deploy other people into spiritual gifts? And then there's other things like what's the lifestyle, the relational, the life with God and communal life of the pastor, because the pastor doesn't also have the same experience of church as the average congregant. And so, they have to build a relational life intentionally. So, we think about, you know, a variety of formation areas.

And then our conviction with The Way College is, if we can bring the formation, whether that's theological formation, craft formation, character formation, awareness of gifts and callings, as close to the life of the church as possible, then we, because like, I think that pastoring is less like becoming a professor and is more like becoming a tradesman or a tradeswoman, in the sense that there's an apprenticeship aspect to it. Like you need to, yes, go deep in the Word, but you also need to see how this plays out in real life. Because as much as we can write our discipleship pathways in real life, you've got human beings who are not going to be cogs in the machine.

And we're building this living community of people at various different stages in the walk with God. And so, our heart was to go, how do we bring the formation of the

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pastor into the heart of a church? So approximate to the ministries of the church. So, as they're thinking about philosophy of ministry, they're actually witnessing it play out, but then also into the heart of the city.

You know, one of the things I love is the classroom that our students meet in, it faces Thurlow and Davey. And so, it's in the heart of the city of Vancouver. And so, at no point in time, can we idealize or miss who are we actually talking about this impacting.

And so that's the work we're doing through the college. And then through the Pastorate, we're just actually trying to get pastors from all over Canada into different environments together where maybe they're done that initial formation, the college really trying to get that starting point. But what's that ongoing support, care, re-envisioning, enhancing the toolkit along the way.

So, it's really meeting different stages of it and different needs at different stages and journeys, for sure.

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Joanna la Fleur: When you think of what you're trying to do, again, like this connection of developing and connection of pastors across the country, what has been easier than you expected it to be? There's things that are hard, but what's something that has been easier on the journey? Maybe that's by God's grace, or people's readiness, or whatever the reason. I'd love to know what has been lighter than you thought.

Jason Ballard: Yeah, I think that when we first started, so we have a couple of different expressions of ministry at the Pastorate.

We do some things as simple as retreat, or release a podcast, and but the most kind of labor-intensive things we do are these like 12-month or 18-month like cohorts. So, we have two of those going on, one for young pastors and one for lead pastors. And so, people sign up for these 18-month journeys.

And I think what's been encouraging, I don't know if easier is the right word, but is there such a felt need for this? Like, we're not going around convincing people. Sometimes people, it's hard for someone to decide to make that investment because real time and resource. But there's such a felt need for pastors to find community with other pastors and to be in environments that can support their growth.

Like we just had our kickoff retreat last week for a new round of the Lead Pastors Fellowship. So, this is like 16 lead pastors from all across Canada, men and women, different denominations, different provinces. It's so fun.

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And so, they come together and the amount of, this is the common refrain, I'm looking for friends to run with who understand what it feels like to be a pastor. And I'm looking to be in an environment that I'm not leading. What a gift for someone to lead me.

And so, in some ways, a lot of what we do is set the table and the journey towards vulnerability, the journey towards sharing where they're really at is coming a lot faster when we create a safe place. And for us, that safe place is like, put them in a room with people who understand what they're going through, put them in an environment where they know they're being served. And literally, I feel like we're often just setting the table and they're just saying, so how are you doing? Now there's more to it, but ultimately, it's like, how's it going? And as soon as there's enough of that, like there's cues that say, this is a place where you can be totally honest.

There's something incredibly powerful just about letting somebody in.

Joanna la Fleur: I know you, I'm not asking you to be the statistician expert on this question. So, it's maybe more anecdotal, but in all the pressures today, I don't know what you need today, it's unique to this sort of past few years is the economic pressure.

Churches that would love to hire, but the person can't afford to move to that town and even rent, let alone buy a house for the price or things like that. I'm curious, again, without more anecdotal, are you seeing the financial piece and the pressures of inflation and housing and those kinds of crises in the country? Are you seeing that affect pastors or is that really like a third issue for them? There's other things that seem to be the top ones or does that come quickly into the conversation?

Jason Ballard: That's a really good question. When we go around the circle, we say, what's the biggest challenges you're facing? That's not the top ones that are coming up.

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However, it is 100% a challenge. So, it's like, it might not be this week's pressing need, but I know that it's a challenge on at least two fronts or I'll say three fronts that finances are real challenge. One is for a church that hasn't been around for over 30 to 50 years to actually acquire a space to do ministry is just increasingly feels impossible in a city context, just because the absolute cost of it, it's so important.

I've gone full circle on like, hey, we don't need facility to like, we are multi-site and there's one location where we own our facility and then everywhere else we rent and the amount of more ministry that we're able to do the way that we can play our part in the city now. I'm not discouraged. I'm like, we're going to make the most of whatever we can.

We'll meet in different spaces and homes and there's all kinds of, but that's one challenge is just actually just spaces. The second is paying staff. And so, as a lead pastor, it's a real challenge for me to look at my team members who I love and ask the question, are they able to live in a city like Vancouver or wherever they are on what we're paying them? So that's a real challenge.

And then for the pastor themselves, can I raise a family with this resource? Can I be in this city? And I think it's really, really challenging. There's a few denominations that are doing this really, really well. But for the most part, and I think that the average pastor wouldn't want to ask.

They don't want to make a scene. They're not doing this for the money, but it's not an easy thing to talk about. It can fill you with layers of going like, you know, people are sacrificing to give.

I understand that. I have a salary at my church because of generosity of our people. I don't take that for granted.

So just layers to it. I think that for some people, it's a barrier to entry. For others, it is a quiet offering they make to the Lord.

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And I think every one of us makes these quiet offerings to the Lord where we lay some sort of perfume at His feet. And for some pastors, it might be not being able to buy that, live in that house or pay for their kids' college. And that's a bummer.

But I do, in some cases, it might be a quiet offering. So, for the pastor, I would say, don't be afraid to have tough conversations. And for boards, I would say, hey, really revisit this on a regular basis and do everything you can to have a healthy kind of conversation.

But on the flip side, I'd also say that if, you know, at some point you take all of the stuff that maybe we've been talking about that's negative. And for me as a pastor, I have to just quietly go, OK, Lord, this is my offering at Your feet. And every human, every disciple has to do that.

Like every parent, everyone caring for a neighbor, everyone trying to respond with love is costing them stuff that goes unseen. And that can be really precious to the Lord and precious, but it can become a source of pain or bitterness if it's not something you can talk about with people honestly, or if you can't offer up to the Lord and say, God, can You receive this as worship?

Joanna la Fleur: Yeah, that's really good. I mean, for those who are listening who are not in that leadership role, it's sort of like a look under the hood.

In some ways, this conversation, I feel like what is your pastor, what might your pastor be thinking, feeling, going through? Certainly, the younger ones, if you know, if you were able to buy a house 20 years ago, maybe you don't feel the pressure in the way as a younger person coming into the ministry and how to make it work. But again, it's not, I hope that also it's not being heard of poor me, the way you're framing it is not a poor me. This is not a victim story.

This is about just the culture of Canada, and the challenges that everyday Canadians are also facing.

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Jason Ballard: Yeah, and that's the reality right now. It's like, we're in, there's a lot of fear of where we are economically.

And so, it's a real challenge. But it also just humanizes it. Like, one of the things, if I could ask anything of my congregation, just to remember that I'm a human.

And I have a church that I feel like consistently remembers that I'm so thankful. But like, I have only so many hours in a day.

Sometimes I'm sad. Sometimes I'm happy. Sometimes I'm sick. Sometimes I'm healthy.

And sometimes I'm trusting in God and other times I feel anxious. And sometimes I think too much about my future and sometimes not enough. I'm just a human.

And I think the healthiest churches embrace the humanity of the people in leadership. Now Scripture invites us to have a high expectation for the spiritual and ethical life of a pastor. I think that's wise and prudent for anyone in leadership.

But all of that is the context of like humans. And I think when congregations allow their pastor to be human and when pastors allow themselves to be human, like one of my favorite songs by Coldplay has that bit, like, I don't know if you know, it goes "human heart. I've only got a human heart. I wish it didn't run away. I wish it didn't fall apart."

I often sing that course or bridge or whatever it is in prayer.

God, here's my human heart. I wish it didn't run away. I wish it didn't fall apart.

But here's my human heart. And there's a great author and podcaster called Steve Cuss. And he talks about becoming human sized.

And so much of the temptation for people in lots of vocations, including pastors is to be Superman, to be larger than you are. And just to like, allow yourself to be human sized is a real journey of maturity. But it's a place of deep love and freedom.

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Like that's where you experience the love of God. Like, He loves the human Jason, not the Superman Jason. And that just, it heals me.

Joanna la Fleur: The human Jason, not the Superman Jason. What are some of those, again, knowing that it's imperfect? What are some of those practices that you do? Whether that daily, weekly, monthly rhythms, what are some of those things that anyone like, you don't have to be a pastor to do some of these, give some examples of how do you, to be fully human and a child of God? As you're learning to do that, like, what are some of those things that you're, again, if the Olympics is the right analogy, you know, you're building those muscles, eating that nutrition. What are some of those things that you're trying to do?

Jason Ballard: The main goal of my life is to be a disciple and not to be a pastor.

So, I'll tell you three practices in my life that are right now core to my discipleship, my growing with God life-ness. So daily practice, it's pretty uneventful, is I've got three kids. So, some mornings they're right here in the mess of it, or the day shoots off, but lots of days it's to find some quiet.

And I try to start my day and remind myself; I woke up in the world God made. This is, this is our Father's world. And to say, God, You made this world.

And though there's tons of brokenness, You made it with intention and beauty and design. You made me and You made this world. And then connected to that is that I woke up in a world that God made and that He's very present within.

So, I try to look out the window or hold my day and go, because we do live in a materialistic age. And what I mean by that is philosophically, we're primarily wired from like a cultural wiring to think that we live in a world that's not enchanted with the very presence of God in others who we see at work around us.

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So, my morning is like, "God, You made this world. You're at work in this world, and You're inviting me to walk with You through this world." And then I pray a psalm. If there's more time, I have a Bible reading plan, all those good things.

I try to pray a psalm and simple pattern of praying for different issues and things I care about. So daily trying to tether myself to that. And then one thing that's been really helpful for me recently is at lunchtime praying the Lord's Prayer.

And so, I have a little bracelet I wear that reminds me to do that. And sometimes I just pray it as many words as it is, takes a minute. Other times it's five or 10 or 15 minutes using each stanza to be a place.

And even just something as simple as daily praying, give me this day, your daily bread has really helped me. Every day offers a lot of worries. And so just a point in the middle of my day where I can retether myself to this is the Father's world.

He's with me in it. He's my Father. You know, it's been a great gift.

And then weekly practices that have really been anchoring me in this season. About every other week, I do a practice of confession with a friend. And it's just been so transformative and healing to be with someone and for us to pause and say, God, search our hearts.

Are there any anxious ways within me and lead me in the path everlasting to pause and then whatever comes up to confess that and then to hear, in this case, my brother in the faith speak the words of Jesus over me and then pray for my healing. So that and then another one is just there's some neighbors who live right beside us who we have dinner together on Friday nights. And that helps me at the end of a work week go, OK, phones off, light a candle, make some good food.

And it's been so helpful because for me as an introvert and even social stuff can feel like work. But this is not like that. It's like there's we're not like hosting to impress.

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We don't have to make it fancy. We don't have to be included. It's like, hey, we have the stable rhythm where we gather together, and we do with my family.

Some people would call something like that a Sabbath community. I don't know if that's exactly what this is, but it's just a pattern. And that's helped me be human that I need to stop working.

I need to enjoy good food with friends. I need to be surrounded by people who know me in a deep way. And there's other ones.

But those are those are some patterns that I've just found. So, I'm so thankful for them right now. And every season of our lives, we have to kind of renegotiate our habits and our patterns.

And so, these are some of the ones that are feeling me in this season.

Joanna la Fleur: Yeah, that's good. I feel led to ask this question about people who are listening, listening in on this conversation about the need for pastors, how you're training and they're wondering, is that me? Am I the one like, I'm starting my vocational life.

I'm a younger person or I'm in my career and I'm wondering if I need to redirect myself. Do you have any questions or what would you say to this person who's saying, I wonder if it's me. And I think of someone recently who I went through a journey with this.

I think the answer I believe the answer for them was no. They were discerning it, but it was not for them to move into a different career. But what would you question or where would you send them or what would they do if they're listening right now and saying, I wonder if I'm one of those people who's supposed to do this essential service?

Jason Ballard: That's cool. I think it's in first or second Timothy, Paul's writing to Timothy and he says, the one who aspires to be an overseer, an elder, I think it's

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something, forgive me if I misquote it, but, you know, it's a noble task and he's saying it's okay to aspire to be an elder.

So, I love that and it's a good thing. And then I think the implication there is he says, so give your life over to it. And it's also Paul to Timothy that says like, watch your life and doctrine closely.

It's going to help. It's going to save you and your hearers. Like this is what he's encouraging Timothy.

All that to say, I hope that the majority of Christians that are on fire for Jesus and in love with Jesus are on for just don't become pastors. My hope is that for every one on fire, courageous, deep life with God Christian that says yes to being a pastor, another 99 say yes to being a nurse, a teacher, a stay-at-home parent, a neighbor, all those things, because that's how the city changes. However, also hopefully at least one in a hundred or whatever the ratio is, I don't know, say a big yes to it.

And I think that one of the things that I'm most excited about right now is seeing people later on in their career life, make a decision either professionally or as an intentional way to steward their extra time outside of work to pastoral work. And the reason why that's so exciting is because they bring other skills and experiences that God strategically brought into their life to be able to give to the work of helping the local church. How would you discern that? I say lots of conversation with trusted friends.

I would also say that like, it's strange to want to be a pastor. So, pay attention. If you find, I remember when I was discerning, I asked a pastor friend, I said like, I couldn't work out if I wanted to be a pastor or not.

I was doing some ministry stuff, but I was also starting businesses and doing different things. And he's like, just so you know, how did he put it like this? He goes, you should only do it if you can't not do it, which was his way of saying, like, no one wants

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to do this, but if you can't not do it, so like pay attention to that part of you that's drawn. And then I'd also just add this one thing.

I hear a lot of people say, I can't be a pastor because I don't see myself as a preacher or I'm not a dude or I'm not full of vision.

Joanna la Fleur: Or I've not gone to Bible seminary. I don't know all the theology or there's all these reasons.

Yeah.

Jason Ballard: Yeah. And I think essentially what they're saying is, I'm not like the primary examples of pastors that I've seen.

And I think it's just really important to know that pastors come in all shapes and sizes. Some of them are incredible orators and some of them are not very good speakers and that's okay. Some of them are overflowing with dynamic vision and some of them wake up every day just to be present to the people around them.

It comes in all different shapes and sizes. So, I've met with a number of people that have like, yeah, I want to be in ministry, but I can't be a pastor. And then they fill in the blank with something they've assumed every pastor needs to be.

And I just think there's tons of expressions for it. And we're seeing more and more of that, which is fun. But I think pastoring is a calling that doesn't have a particular like Myers-Briggs profile.

It's like, there's lots of ways to do it. Now, you might find a particular type of church or stream or city or whatever it might be like you might, if you don't see yourself as an organizational leader, maybe you don't lead a church with 75 staff, you know, that's okay.

But there's lots of different shapes and sizes churches. There's lots of different ways to say yes. And if someone else was feeling a tug, like for every one staff pastor, we

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need 10 or 15 households in the church that live into that elder and deacon responsibilities and life that are going, I don't need to be paid.

I don't need to go to staff meetings. I just want to organize my life to make room at my table to disciple young families and all these different things. And so, I think that I love that you asked that question.

I think once upon a time, it was normal at youth conferences to go, do you want to give your life to Jesus? Do you want to recommit your life to Jesus? And there's all somewhere along the line, like, is God calling you to ministry? Now, somewhere along the line, we gave that up. And maybe there's some wisdom to how much we talk about that. I don't know.

But I feel like we need to boldly invite people to consider, is God calling you to organize, the lots of hours of your day around serving His church, because that's a noble thing to want to do. And so may the Lord give you wisdom, if you're listening, if He's tugging on your heart, and give you friends to process with. And I hope some of you say yes, we need your help.

Joanna la Fleur: Jason, there's so much more. We've just scratched the surface. Maybe we'll have to have you back here.

If you'd allow more time, maybe next year, we'll have you back. There's lots going on. And I want to stay in touch really around, you have this pulse on the church in Canada, pastors in Canada, and where we're going and how God's working.

So, thanks for joining us.

Jason Ballard: I have a lot of hope right now. God's on the move.

It's a great season for the church in Canada, real challenges we've talked about. But the winds of the Spirit are blowing in our time. People are open to conversations about faith.

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God is pulling people into deeper life with Him. And this is a wonderful season for everyone who's a follower of Jesus to go, God, I don't want to just do this halfway. I want to join You in what You're doing.

He's moving in such a special way in Canada, and around the world as well. But I think He's calling the church to re-surrender, rediscover the joy of following Him, the delight of participating in His work in the world. And to crack open through hospitality invitation doors to people who might not know Him that you might think wouldn't have any interest in church or God.

I think that this is a season we'll be really surprised by how many people find themselves open to the things of God. And so, it's a good time. I'm full of hope.

I'm very optimistic.

Joanna la Fleur: We hear it in in this whole conversation, we were hearing how you see it, because you're actually like, in it, it's not you're not from the spectator, you're right in the midst of the mess. And you're seeing the hopefulness in it for individuals for communities for leaders.

We're going to as I said, we're going to link to all this stuff you've referenced, we'll link it in the show notes, we always do. So, people can follow up and find more of all this stuff we've just said.

We want pastors connected. We want leaders and just normal everyday humans; we want to train them up and love these resources you're offering. Thanks, Jason. It's good to be together today.