



Season 13: Episode 13 | Sabrina Jordan | What Does God Say to Exhausted Caregivers?

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.

Reverend Dr. Sabrina Jordan has served as lead pastor of Wesley Chapel Free Methodist Church in Toronto since 2007. She completed her Master of Divinity at Wycliffe College and later earned her Doctor of Ministry from Northeastern Seminary at Roberts Wesleyan University, and her doctoral focus was on themes of exile, community, sacred place, spiritual renewal, and seasons of congregational disruption and change. Sabrina is passionate about walking alongside people at every stage of their faith journey, helping them encounter God in meaningful, life-shaping ways.

She's especially committed to investing in the next generation and a particular heart for new immigrant students who need someone to truly see, support, and care for them as they grow in faith and find their place. As a fitting connection to today's conversation, Sabrina also worked at the Canadian Bible Society bookstore as a teenager, an early experience that helped nurture both her love for Scripture and her sense of calling to ministry. Sabrina lives in Pickering with her husband, Terry, where they also lovingly care for her parents.

Their home is also shared with their sweet dog, Harley. Enjoy the conversation.

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Lorna Dueck: Hello, Reverend Sabrina Jordan in Toronto. I'm just delighted to visit with someone who has a Wesleyan background.

Sabrina Jordan: Well, it's lovely to be here with you, Lorna, today.

Thank you so much.

Lorna Dueck: It's a rather famous church you have in Toronto. Of course, 1700s John Wesley's work, even plants churches in the big city of Toronto, which wasn't the big city back then.

But tell us a little bit about your pastorate, where we find you at Wesley Chapel.

Sabrina Jordan: Sure, absolutely. If you don't mind, I'm going to go a little back into my history.

This church right here at the corner of Huntingwood and Warden Avenue in Scarborough. This is where I came to faith as a little girl during a midweek program at the age of 10.

Lorna Dueck: And now you're the pastor.

Sabrina Jordan: Full circle! I'm not a little girl anymore. But this is home. This is family.

These are my spiritual aunties and uncles that I grew up with, pastors who have loved me since I was a child. Now, albeit I was in Ottawa for 10 years at another Free Methodist church but came back in 2007. And I've been a lead pastor here.

Yeah.

Lorna Dueck: What was happening in your life at 10 years old when you were taken to a midweek service?

Sabrina Jordan: I was at McDonald's like my favorite place, Lorna. It was a treat after piano lesson, a little bribe.

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I mean, if you were to ask my dad, if I went to piano lessons, I got a filet of fish sandwich. And it's so interesting. There was a lady that was standing, Miss Dorothy, she's passed and gone on to glory, but she was standing there and she said, oh, you look like a little girl that would love to come out to our children's program on Tuesday nights.

And I looked at her and I thought, I'm not allowed to talk to strangers, let alone go somewhere else without my parents. But dad was with me. And I went on a Tuesday night, and I'm going to just say the rest is history.

That's what happened.

Lorna Dueck: Were your parents church going?

Sabrina Jordan: So, we were of a different denomination. And it's a great question because since I was very little, going to mass every morning with my grandpa, I so desperately wanted to be a part of what was taking place that morning before school and found out at that time that little girls, you know, ages seven years old, weren't allowed to be a part of the, you know, the ministry.

And I was so disappointed, especially after I saw Sound of Music. And Maria was like my hero. I want to do what she does.

Anyway, yes, we were definitely churchgoers, very faithful. But mom came to faith when she was nursing at Scarborough General Hospital. And then almost within that same month, I was invited to Wesley Chapel.

And as an aside, Lorna, the woman that brought my mom to faith attended this church. So, God wasn't kidding in terms of placing all the pieces together for our family. And it changed the trajectory of my home.

Lorna Dueck: And now you pastor that church that affected your home. Your mother came to Christ during nursing. You came to Christ in a new way as a 10-year-old going to midweek.

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My goodness.

Sabrina Jordan: And dad by osmosis was a part of it.

Lorna Dueck: And we're going to get to your parents in a moment.

Well, maybe we should do it right now. You care for them, don't you? Your mother, the nurse, now needs to be nursed.

Sabrina Jordan: I do.

Lorna Dueck: Tell us about this.

Sabrina Jordan: And Lorna, we have a similar story. While I was ministering in Ottawa, mom was diagnosed with Parkinson's at 60 years old, you know, active nurse, active in ministry at the church, you know, Bible studies, et cetera, et cetera. And I came home one weekend, and I saw how much she was struggling and deteriorating.

I'm also an only child. And as I was heading back to Ottawa, I said, I've got to come home. I've got to come home.

And I came home. Hard, right? When you've been independent since you were 19 years old and you're back home, not sure what to do. And of course, Wesley Chapel was here, but moving forward, I got married later in life. And one of the things, online, one of the things that I said, look, if you're looking for walks on the beach or a Hollywood romance, that's not this.

Someone needs to be in my life who knows my calling as a pastor, can co-minister with me as a pastor, and understands that mom and dad are going to live with me when they no longer can care for themselves. So just before COVID, mom and dad moved in with us.

Lorna Dueck: Wow.

And who did you marry? Tell me about this guy that can handle this.

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Sabrina Jordan: Oh, well, his name is Terry and we met online, and that was October. April, after meeting only twice, we got engaged.

And August of that year, we got married and we're going into our 12th year of marriage and ministry. And God knew what I needed.

Lorna Dueck: And so, your role now as a pastor also juggles caregiver because that's a 12-year journey and Parkinson's declines over that time.

How is your mom? How are you doing with managing that web of care that's needed?

Sabrina Jordan: There are days that are better than others. And this whole conversation that we're going to have today really rests on the fact that I've come to a place where I cannot do it on my own, whether it's ministry or whether it's, you know, taking care of my parents. She's deteriorating, but her faith in God and her spirit, the spark is still there.

Watching my dad take care of her is sad too.

Lorna Dueck: But it's a beautiful work that you're doing there. And so that kind of, thank you for giving us the family background of what it means to be a pastor, because we're going to talk about resiliency.

We're going to talk about rest, about why exhaustion follows the pastorate. How did you become a pastor?

Sabrina Jordan: Well, when I realized I could not do... I had hoped to be a lawyer. And very quickly, one of the pastors here at the church, I was 17, said, look, Sabrina, I think the Spirit, God is leading you towards something else.

And I'm like, what? And he says, why don't you go on a two-week mission stint on your own to South Central Los Angeles and work at a Free Methodist school there with families that are coming from, you know, drug sort of, you know, related issues

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and things like that. And I said, sure. And I went for two weeks and my life was changed.

You know, 17 and a half years old, I came back, finished my undergrad and felt God's call, jumped through all the hoops within the Free Methodist Church.

And next year makes 30 years of ordained ministry. And I've never looked back.

It's my greatest joy is being a pastor.

Lorna Dueck: Okay. So, for our listeners from the West and from the Far East, tell us about your parish.

Tell us about what's going on in the neighborhood that you pastor.

Sabrina Jordan: And I love that you say the word, use the word parish, because that's exactly what it is. So, growing up at Wesley Chapel, the makeup of this congregation was very different.

And it was a good thing. It's fine. That was what Scarborough looked like in the 80s.

That is not what Scarborough looks like right now. So, Wesley Chapel is filled with the people of God from every corner of the earth and socioeconomic as well. So, we have people from Nigeria and Ghana and Sierra Leone and Burundi and the Philippines and India and Sri Lanka and Bulgaria and Russia and the US and Germany.

I mean, you name it. Lorna, we have it. And we'll throw in some Canadians as well.

Lorna Dueck: And the challenges they face must be immense for you as the lead pastor. What do they bring into the pew when they come?

Sabrina Jordan: You know, without naming specific cultures, for example, we have many women who are working here as caregivers who have left their families.

Lorna Dueck: PSWs.

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Sabrina Jordan: Yes, we have so many PSWs.

Lorna Dueck: PSWs, nannies.

Sabrina Jordan: So many who work here.

Lorna Dueck: They're the backbone of our health care system, aren't they?

Sabrina Jordan: And I'm thankful for them because I have people who help, you know, me with mom. But often you'll see them come forward in tears because they haven't seen their children in three or four years.

It's tough. Then we have other people who are coming from countries that have struggled, you know, with injustice and war. And they're coming.

And you almost feel like they're on the verge of a nervous breakdown because even though they are at peace here, they know back home their country's on the verge of whatever it may be. So, they carry burdens when they come to church.

Lorna Dueck: My goodness.

And you see in them a weariness. You also have been highlighting that it's hard for the pastorate to stay resilient.

Sabrina Jordan: Yeah.

Lorna Dueck: Tell us about that. Tell us about the role of a pastor, how they stay resilient when they look out over dozens of families that have deep needs.

Sabrina Jordan: That's a big question.

That's a really good question. I would say, Lorna, again, that I have, as I've matured as a woman and matured as a pastor, I've come to a place where I recognize I can't solve all the problems that I see or all the concerns that I see in my parish. But I can be someone who listens quietly, not always giving a solution, being present spiritually and as a friend, as a pastor.

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There was a time, Lorna, where I felt I had to fix everything, where I felt I had to meet every single need that a person came with. And I recognize that I can't, for obvious reasons, only God can, but I certainly can't. And I think the moment I let go of feeling the personal responsibility of fixing every situation, I was able then to just be present with that person and love on them spiritually, prayerfully, and as a pastor and as a friend.

And it's made a world of difference because you cannot, as a pastor, run after and care for everyone as well as you want to. It's impossible. Just impossible.

Lorna Dueck: So where do you ground yourself then, Scripturally, spiritually, as you make those kinds of shifts with confidence for the longevity of your life as a pastor?

Sabrina Jordan: You know, maybe some people will say, oh, Psalm 23, that's the go-to. But it really is the go-to for me. My undergraduate was in English, English literature.

I'm a very visual person, visual learner. So, I love the picture, the painting that is in front of me in Psalm 23. So, as I'm hustling as a pastor, as I'm trying to, you know, get things accomplished or this, whatever it may be for any given day or any given Sunday, I love the fact that what my Heavenly Father calls me to, is to take me by the hand and lead me to still waters. You know, to lie down in green pastures.

And what is He going to do there? He's not going to make me do anything except He invites me to allow Him to restore me. And however, that may look at that present moment. And I have to keep remembering that the Good Shepherd is not asking me to strive or to try harder or to do more or to be more.

He's inviting me to quieten myself, humble myself, repent of the things that I've been holding onto and to just be quietly faithful to Him in little ways, which sometimes are more important than the big ways. So, staying grounded in the Word, in worship, in prayer and in quietness.

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Lorna Dueck: And is that mornings, evenings, daily? What's, where's the green pasture?

Sabrina Jordan: I have made it a practice since I was in seminary. I went to an Anglican school to do the prayer book.

And so, there's morning prayer, there's midday prayer, there's evening, there's Compline. And it's not huge and long, but it's just these quiet moments of just slowing down, taking a breath, immersing myself in pieces of Scripture that are familiar, in words that were written many years ago that draw me to the Father and quieten my soul.

So, the book of prayer really does help me. And John Wesley kind of liked that too.

Lorna Dueck: You good Wesleyan pastor.

But I do want to remind our listeners, you're saying this in the context of church leadership and leadership in your home for an ailing mother with Parkinson's disease. And you are the caregiver; you're the coordinator of the help that's coming in and out of the house and just helping her adjust to suffering. And so that common book of prayer pausing three times a day to just center yourself in God is really your lifeline.

Sabrina Jordan: It is. Otherwise, Lorna, I'm going to burn out, simply put. And I won't be the nicest person to be around because I'm running on empty.

Lorna Dueck: Do you ever need to leave? Do you ever need to just walk away from the church or find a green pasture that's not your house or your neighborhood?

Sabrina Jordan: That is not easy at the moment. It is not easy at the moment. And people will say, oh, Pastor Sabrina, Sabrina, take a break.

You know, go away for a weekend. You know, do this or that. And I appreciate it.

Go on sabbatical. Do all these things. It's not that easy.

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There will be time, Lorna, where I am going to be able to do that. But right now, the need that mom has in my life is just too great. I'm it.

I'm it. But, you know, there are things, hobbies, interests I have that, you know, can give me a breather. I have a cute dog, you know, going for a walk in the neighborhood.

But in terms of these wonderful opportunities of R&R, not right now.

Lorna Dueck: Well, you know, there's a lot of people listening. That is reality.

That is real. That was my reality for, you know, the six years that Parkinson's needed extensive care. So good on you.

And the Lord gives us strength, right? The Lord gives us what we need. And like you say, it is a community. It's a community care thing, too, that you let other people come into your home.

You let the help go on. So, when you're thinking about this shift that we've got to figure out how to stay and keep the tank fueled, tell me a little bit about practices that make that possible for you.

Sabrina Jordan: Well, I don't know if this is a practice, but I'm trying to make it a practice, is asking people for help.

You know, asking our governance board or the pastoral team that I work with or just regular people in my church. I need some help today. You know, I this is how I'm feeling.

You know, I've been here long enough that this church, they love to take care of me. You know whether it's, I don't know how many times, you know, I get a cooked meal or I get a little gift card under the table, you know, under the door or things like that. They show real ways of caring for me.

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But I really do think that asking, I am a very driven person, and I unfortunately sort of have had the mentality of, I'll do it myself. And, you know, I can't anymore. It's impossible.

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Lorna Dueck: Yeah, it's beautiful that you can ask for help, that the church responds.

But you and I talked earlier about offline when we were thinking about this conversation. There are triggers that a pastor, any of us know that when we've become performative, when it's not really ministry, we're just doing it. Because tell me about that.

Sabrina Jordan: Yes. Performative ministry is a dangerous one. And it's one that I think is becoming all too familiar amongst many of my colleagues, no fault of their own.

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Because social media, hearing about other big churches, whatnot, no critique, no criticism there, Lorna. But when you are going into your pastoral week or ministry or whatever you want to call it, and you're asking the question of, what does my congregation need right now? And instead of, you know, thinking about in the most basic spiritual terms, you're thinking, I need to curate an experience for Sunday morning. Otherwise, I'm going to lose them and they're going to go somewhere else.

That is a trigger that's dangerous, dangerous, because then it becomes putting together a product for the church. And that's a trigger for me, because there is a tendency, I think, as a woman, even though I've been in ministry for many years, to think that I need to make Sunday morning or whatever exciting. And social media doesn't help with that.

Lorna Dueck: Yes, it's such a different landscape. So, so you're, you're speaking to me about a quiet faithfulness, a simplicity, perhaps. What does that look like in a culture that always wants faster, quicker scroll to the next distraction?

Sabrina Jordan: Yeah, I love simplicity.

And I, or I've grown to love it. I no longer feel compelled to read every new book that comes out or wink, wink, listen to every podcast or to, you know, hear what the next best solution is. I just no longer feel compelled or even interested in doing that anymore as a pastor.

What I'm interested in, and I think my co-ministers here at Wesley Chapel, we're interested in unleashing God's Word to people. We want them to feel engaged.

Lorna Dueck: The Bible?

Sabrina Jordan: Yes, yes.

We want them from children to seniors, we want them to feel engaged in the Word of God and feel the power and tap into the power that comes from knowing God's Word and being in it and also prayer. So, you know, every year we sort of have a

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tendency, I think, as leaders to, oh, what is my strategic plan for this year? And I was with a group of pastors and they asked that question. And I was one of the last to answer.

And I said, I don't have a strategic plan this year, nor am I going to put one together. This year, we're putting all the projects and the plans and benchmarks to the side. They're not bad, Lorna, but I'm putting them to the side.

And through my own example, I want to show my church, my parish, the people I love, what it means just to quietly walk in faithfulness. Not even ask them to join the next thing. Oh, you have to come out to this. You have to come out to that. Invite a friend. No, let's just, let's be together.

Let's be quiet. Let's pray. Let's praise.

Let's read worship. Let's just hear the Word. Let's be encouraged by that.

You don't have to perform for me or for God as much as I don't need to perform for you.

Lorna Dueck: But as you look over your congregation, you know, they are weary. They're tired, right? They've, you see the push and pull of trying to make a living as an immigrant Canadian.

Yeah. And how's that going across? Are they, are you feeling that that's going to be a walking alongside that they value?

Sabrina Jordan: Yes. It's May the 13th, and I have already seen such a difference in the tone of this church.

I see people smiling a bit more, relaxed a bit more. And I'm not talking about attendance, but the truth is more coming out on a regular basis. We have newer people that are coming as well.

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And I think there's just a relief that Pastor Sabrina doesn't expect more from me, because I am desperately juggling everything else at home and at work and with my children or, you know, aging parents or whatever. And I think when I tell them, just relax, it's okay. Let's just worship and love on each other and be together.

I think I'm; they see the change in me a little bit. And I think that's making a difference. Lorna.

Lorna Dueck: That's beautiful. That's beautiful. There are also schools of thought that say celebration and play is a good part of staying resilient, of a church family staying resilient, of an individual.

How do you feel about that?

Sabrina Jordan: Yeah, that's a good one. I mean, I don't want to sound like a Debbie Downer, but I'm celebrating right now the little things, right? You wake up in the morning. I have to tell you a funny story.

The other day I came down and I thought the Lord's taken my mom, like her color, everything, you know, she was lying so very still. And I thought this is it. This is it.

This was just last week. And so, I went down. I didn't know what to do.

I was panicking. And so, I just put my hand underneath her nose to see if she was breathing. She opened her eye and she says, I'm still here, Sabrina.

I celebrate that, right? I celebrate that. I celebrate, you know, when a young person at the church, you know, is getting married this week. You know, the church celebrates those moments or something as simple as one of our little ones are crawling.

We celebrate that as a church.

Lorna Dueck: Yeah. What I hear you saying is you can't check out of life.

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You just can't. Stop caring for your mom who has Parkinson's and lives with you. You can't stop celebrating kids crawling in church.

You just got to. And God provides. God provides.

There's only so many hours in the day. Relax and let the Lord provide.

Sabrina Jordan: That's right.

And I tell the church that as well, right? As much as I need to, you know, show that as an example, it's to give them the invitation to allow their Good Shepherd to take them to quiet places.

Lorna Dueck: There's a humility that I hear that you're reaching for. It's not the big glamour, right? It is just life.

Sit deep in it.

Sabrina Jordan: And Lorna, I think it's my mother's health journey that has taught me that. Because before mom was diagnosed with Parkinson's, it was very hard to pin me down, you know, very hard to pin me down.

I was on the go, whether it was in ministry or, you know, going back to school to get another degree or being a part of every committee and board and saying, yes, yes, yes. I think the only way the Lord could potentially or could, you know, was able to get my attention. I mean, I know it's two different things, but to say, look right now, I need you to serve Me by taking care of my daughter, who's your mother.

Lorna Dueck: And she had been the nurse. She had been the health worker.

Sabrina Jordan: It's hard for her to ask for help, but we both learned together, my mom and I, how important it is to ask for help.

She needs me. I need her. And it's taught me big ministry lessons.

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Lorna Dueck: You have worked very conscientiously at the strength of family and putting that web, not only around yourself. So, talk to us about your determination, about when it was time you went online. I'm just going to make family happen here.

Married later, but made family happen. Tell me why that was important.

Sabrina Jordan: I think it's a very practical thing.

I'm an only child. I'm of Indian background. It's in our culture to take care of our elderly.

I really came to a place where I had no choice, but to make it a priority. My father also has health issues, not as serious as my mom. He's 91.

And as I looked at him, I thought he's not going to be able to manage to take care of my mom. Um, and I could see the exhaustion in him a few years ago. And my husband, Terry said, that's it, Sabrina, they're coming home. They're coming home.

So, it wasn't just me. It was dad as well. Um, asking for help. Yeah. He asked for help.

Lorna Dueck: I'd like you to go back and maybe it's two decades.

Then when you say I Sabrina need a partner, you went looking online. I find that very interesting that you had your own critical self-care. Uh-huh.

I got to do this. Right. Tell me about that.

Sabrina Jordan: I was working on my doctorate. I was sitting on the bed, typing out something, living in the basement of my parents' home back, you know, since I was 19. And now I'm back, and thinking, um, Lord God, I need help.

And then a commercial came on TV and I won't name the online dating service, but it was "Find God's match for you." And I thought, I am not looking for what the world is looking for in a partner.

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I was quite happy being on my own. I was 45 when I got married. Um, but I said, Lord, I need someone who's going to help me in ministry and to help me take care of my parents.

And in that moment, I also realized, I have to make some really big decisions about my independence and doing it on my own and just striving for whatever's next and say that I, I need help. I need a partner. And Terry has made my life so much better.

Uh, he's fun, he's quirky, he's a big kid at heart, you know, and my parents adore him.

And so yeah, God, God brought him. He was the right match for me, for sure.

Lorna Dueck: But you, I just find it interesting.

You were not passive about this. You decided this is a shift I'm going to make. Yeah.

And the Lord led you, and the Lord led you.

Sabrina Jordan: Absolutely. And he, and he brought a man who, you know, I had said, here's my criteria.

You know, they ask you to, to put things down, you know, to get people's attention or whatnot. And mine was, I'm a pastor. I'm not leaving my ministry.

I have aging parents they're going to live with us. And I'm not leaving Canada. And here I find someone from Seattle, Washington, who is willing to give up everything to come and be with me.

Lorna Dueck: Excellent. Tell him, thank you. Tell him, it's a great story to hear.

I want to close us, on the role of us in the pew, the rest, the people in the pew on caring for our pastors. We don't think of that. We don't think that that's my job too, is to just love on that person in the pulpit and in the leadership roles.

There's, you know, depending on the size of your church. So, what can we do to care, to care for our pastoral team, as people in the pews?

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Sabrina Jordan: Obviously to pray, right? I mean, that's very, very important. And I know one thing for sure, Lorna, I have a praying church, uh, during many moments at night where I'm like, God, how am I going to get through this? I have felt the prayers of the people surrounding me.

And I know from the little ones to the older ones, they pray for pastor Sabrina and the situation I'm currently in. I think the other thing is just to lower the expectations. Um, I know there was a time in my life when I was on my own and there weren't all these responsibilities. If someone called me at 2:30 in the morning and needed me, I was gone at 2:35. You know, I'm may not be looking my best in the morning, but I'm coming to your home or to the hospital or wherever it may be. And, you know, sometimes, you know, the more you give, the more they expect.

And sometimes Lorna, it's never enough. It's just humans too, right? They, in their moment of crisis or whatever need, they want you. Um, but I think my church has now realized, in the past two years, especially, Pastor Sabrina is praying for me. I'm praying for her. And when she can, she'll be there for me, physically anyway.

So, I find even now these days, Lorna, not many in my congregation have that expectation that I'm going to drop everything and come because they don't even ask anymore.

I would have to call. Can I come over? Remember me? I'd love to see you. I'd love to visit.

So, I think lower the expectations. And my church is a small church, you know, um, they're not looking for mega church results and, they're not looking for entertainment on Sunday anymore. And so, they're quite, encouraged with Scripture and prayer and worship and just creating community, and a sense of belonging and mission.

And those are the things that we're focusing on. And so, I feel like I have given my church the permission to relax. They've given me the permission to relax too, in very tangible ways.

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And I think the other way is, "hey, I'm always happy for a meal."

Lorna Dueck: Well, thank you. Thank you so much for sharing those practices of staying resilient, despite incredible challenge, and on the home front, on the church front, we all learned today how better to walk by green pastures. Thank you.

Sabrina Jordan: Thank you, Lorna

Lorna Dueck: Reverend Dr. Sabrina Jordan. Thank you.