



Season 13: Episode 15 | TJ Syroteuk | How to Find Your Place in God's Story

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, TJ Syroteuk will be interviewed by seasoned journalist Lorna Dueck. TJ Syroteuk is the lead pastor of Rexdale Alliance Church in the diverse neighborhood of Rexdale, Toronto. Originally from the prairies, TJ grew up on a farm in Manitoba before completing degrees in pastoral studies and counseling in the United States.

He has been an itinerant speaker specializing in an overview of the Bible through four-hour seminars for churches and other audiences. And before moving into full-time pastoral ministry, TJ worked in a variety of industries including sales, the trades, and financial services. Those experiences continue to shape his practical and accessible approach to faith and Scripture.

TJ is passionate about helping people engage in the Bible through thoughtful, relevant, and meaningful ways and he wants to do that in connection to today's culture. He's also a speaker, hockey chaplain, outdoor cooking enthusiast, and long-suffering fan of the Toronto Maple Leafs and Toronto Blue Jays. Enjoy this conversation.

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Lorna Dueck: Well, TJ Syroteuk, we are delighted to have you at Scripture Untangled. And this is not your first rodeo. I hate to put a western thing on you, but you've come from a background of working in the marketplace. Tell us about that journey of marketplace over to ministry.

TJ Syroteuk: Yeah, it's an interesting and very weird, I don't know how I got here, but here's the story.

I grew up in a Christian home. My parents went into ministry while I was growing up and so moved from not being a pastor's kid to becoming a pastor's kid, and then just felt a passion for it and interest in it and potentially a calling to it. So, I did all my schooling in that.

I have an undergrad in pastoral studies, a master's in counseling from a Christian perspective, had started a doctorate. But the circles I was in at the time, there weren't jobs.

Lorna Dueck: And just back up a second there, where did you go to school? Where did you do that schooling?

TJ Syroteuk: So, it was a Christian university in the States.

It was called Northland International University. I say was because in 2014 or 2015, they were one of the many schools that due to economics just had to close. So, like when I was there in the mid 2000s, we had about 800 students.

By 2015, they were down to 140 and just not sustainable. And so, but supposedly, my degree is still legitimate. It all exists, even though.

Lorna Dueck: You know, that's sad to hear that because there has been a real decline in the ability of Christian schools, higher education schools. What do you think that's due to? Like, why have we seen so many, including your alma mater, have to shutter? Do you have any thoughts on that?

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TJ Syroteuk: I do. I think just the academic world is very small.

And so, your best teachers end up at the same schools because they can afford it, which can attract the students. So, then you've got a little bit of just the rich get rich or the poor get poor. You've got that going on.

You've got just across the board, everything from like room and board and teacher salaries and rent on the buildings that you're using, all of that is climbing. So, your tuition has to go up. And then, between a mix of, I don't think, at least in Canada, I don't think, again, where I am in Toronto, being a pastor is not viewed as the most honorable of callings.

So, it's not the most marketable skill set in education. So, you have fewer people going into it because it's expensive, and then it's not necessarily going to turn around. So, I think it's just this, you know, perfect storm of if there aren't jobs or many jobs, and the jobs that do exist don't pay that well to pay off student loans, etc., perhaps you're going to look somewhere else.

And then, if you're not attending those schools, those schools have to raise the prices of the students who are there to try to stay afloat. And they have to try to, you know, add programs to draw people, but that costs money. And so, it's just...

Lorna Dueck: It is the perfect storm.

And I know the Association of Christian Seminaries are very, it's frontline on the radar in Canada. And I deeply value my ability to have gotten higher Christian education. And yeah, because here you were a marketplace guy, but you get a theological degree.

What were you thinking? What were you that why a marketplace guy needed a theological degree?

TJ Syroteuk: Well, I'm actually going to edit what you said to say, I was a hopeful, hoping to be a ministry and theological guy who went and got that degree and

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couldn't get a job because of the circles I was in. There just weren't any very small circles. And so, then I went into the marketplace to pay bills.

And my evenings and weekends were always this Bible study and helping at that church and just that kind of stuff. And bounced around and then, you know, did sales, did financial advising, was in the trades for a bit, managing a drywall and insulation company. I know a crazy amount about concrete because that was a job for a little bit.

But the passion was always the ministry on the side. And then there came an opportunity where somebody offered to pay me to do it. And that has continued.

So, it wasn't like I said, it wasn't necessarily charted. It was just that was the road that unfolded.

Lorna Dueck: And you made the big move into permanent full-time pastoral work during COVID, like crossed from Alberta to Ontario.

What happened? What happened?

TJ Syroteuk: It's not quite as God ordained as it might sound. What happened was, my wife has a, she's a very smart lady. She has a master's degree in worship and ethnomusicology, had a full career in music, was a music teacher, full studio, had a teacher under her, all this.

Man, we're getting into the weeds here already. But so, part of our story is multiple years, like 10 years of miscarriages and infertility and just tried multiple clinics. And everyone said, you're a when, not an if, this is going to work.

And nothing ever worked. She started seeing a naturopathic doctor and saw the most help in that area and was just fascinated by the different approach compared to allopathic medicine. And so, I actually encouraged her.

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I'm like, you should become a naturopathic doctor. And she's like, no, my degree is in the arts, blah, blah, blah. So, she started taking some science prerequisites, loved it and was really good at it.

And so, she finished and was qualified to go to medical school. The schools she wanted to go to for naturopathic medicine, there are two licensed and regulated in Canada, one in Vancouver, one in Toronto. She applied to both, got accepted to both.

So, I started looking for work in both because she was moving and I liked her, so I wanted to go with her. And she chose the Toronto school. And so, I started looking for work.

And I think I had also applied for a management position at Home Depot. But the ministry was where I wanted to be and found this posting. I was not Alliance at the time.

I found this posting for this church called the Rexdale Alliance Church. I had never heard of it. But apparently, if you're Alliance, it's...

Lorna Dueck: It's a big deal. I'm Alliance. I'm Alliance. And tell us, because like you, from moving from Alberta to the Rexdale neighborhood of Toronto is a change.

And Rexdale is a very dynamic. Tell us what you're learning about your neighborhood. Well, you've been there now for six years.

Tell us what Rexdale's fabric is like.

TJ Syroteuk: So, it's a mix of... There's just like very contrasting things happening simultaneously. So, there's those who have been here forever.

And like, I have a friend who he does urban gardening or urban farming. And he loves Rexdale because it has some of the oldest plots of land and still some of the

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original houses because it's a not as socioeconomically advanced area. So, it has the largest green spaces in like the whole city.

So, if you put a garden in Rexdale, you actually probably have the most land because we haven't torn everything down and built huge houses on the same land. So, there's this poor side where it hasn't climbed. But there's this other side of like, you've got this great agricultural potential.

There's those who have been here for 40 years. And then it's also one of the most transient neighborhoods as far as I can tell and what I've heard in the GTA or in like Toronto proper because we are technically Toronto. Because we're like, I'm 11 minutes, good traffic, I'm 11 minutes from the airport.

So, an immigrant lands in Toronto, they settle somewhere they can Uber to, they stay there for a year or two, and then they move out to one of the better neighborhoods. So, there's tons of influx. So, I feel like in the six-ish years I've been here, there's been like three different majority...

Like we had a huge Somali group for a while. Then there was a big influx of like the Nigerian and North African immigrants. And again, all of this is anecdotal just from my experience of being in Walmart and being around the stores and talking to people.

And then right now there's a huge Latino and Latin American and South American constituency. So, now I walk into a store, it used to be I would hear Hindi or I would hear something else. And now it's all Spanish that I'm overhearing.

And so, just very diverse, great opportunities for like being the hands and feet of Jesus, which is something our church is trying to lean into more, because there is legitimate food scarcity. There's legitimate housing insecurity. There is legitimate at-risk youth, like gangs are still a thing.

Like it's not all like, yeah, everybody has it. It's like, no, it's here.

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Lorna Dueck: And that is the neighborhood of Rexdale Church, a very well-known church.

And the need comes as it should into the church, right? Like you are looking out over your congregation and the stories that are held in the pew on those mornings. It's a hard life, isn't it, for many of them?

TJ Syroteuk: It is. I mean, just two little things that will paint a little bit of a picture.

So again, born in Saskatchewan, raised in Manitoba, obviously a white guy. My sister who lives in the States came and visited and she came to our church and her husband wasn't able to make the trip and he called and was like, how was church? She was like, well, I was a minority. And I was like, no, you were... oh yeah, actually, you probably were. Like it's just that's just our church. And then so that's kind of one side.

And then the other side is now, you know, at the end of a sermon, I'll be giving typical application. You know, it's usually about, so this week in your job or this week in your family or this week in the classroom, I almost always have to, well, not have to, but I always choose to add something about immigration status while you wait for immigration status, while you try to secure residency. And I've had so many people come up and say, thank you for saying that.

That is exactly where I'm at right now is if it doesn't come in in the next three months, I'm deported. Like I've done all the paperwork. There's a backlog. This is my reality.

And so, when I'm talking about, you know, God is our sustainer or God is our hope or these things, that's such a real dynamic in my particular context. That is always very grounding for me to remember how blessed I am and the reality of where we are living.

Lorna Dueck: Yeah. Have you come up with any solutions for that, for how the church cares when we are, our neighbors are all like living in the dynamic that it might not be secure?

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TJ Syroteuk: No good solutions. I think some stepping stones towards a solution is I think where we, because there's so many dynamics, right? Like this is political and it's at the city level, it's at the provincial level, it's at the national level.

This is, we're in the most unstable and most mobile decade or half a century of human history. There's so much displacement for various reasons. Everybody is experiencing it.

There's political motivation to open borders and close borders. That is way beyond us as a church. But what we can do, I have found is we can be a, for however long they're here, we can be a very safe and caring landing spot and a community.

And, I think what has been something I'm in the process of learning, I'm definitely not there, but I think for so long, my default without even realizing it was like, oh, look at all these things we can be for them or do for them. Basically, we are the blessed and we, and they're lucky to have us if we do it right to much more of a, this is the Body of Christ and it's coming together here, and we can learn from each other.

And so, one of the most welcoming things I can do for one of my brothers and sisters who's in that reality is actually learn from them and give them a seat at the table to help us learn how, how they're doing it, wherever they're from, because the Spirit is working there too.

And so that's been a new shift that I've been trying to incorporate, is figure out how to elevate all members of the body of Christ so that, you know, Ephesians 4 talks about, we've all been given gifts for the edification of the body, but I feel so often what that really comes down to is those who have the pastoral staff positions, edify the body and the rest just, you know, service. And, instead, how do we all edify and learn from each other?

So that's something again, definitely haven't nailed it, but I feel like if we can improve at that, we are a safe place and a healing place in the process towards whatever the solution to these problems are.

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Lorna Dueck: You know, I'm going to just put a plug in here for the Bible Society's Refugee Bible.

They have done a beautiful job of collecting refugee testimonies and putting them alongside Scripture in one bound volume. And the great reminder that Jesus and his parents were refugees at one time, of course, launches that Bible. And while good on you for being a frontline in refugee care in that very challenging neighborhood of Rexdale, which leads me to ask, you have dug deep into the Old Testament to make it applicable for today.

I want to ask you about your passion for, you've got a whole series on holiness, which you draw deeply from the Old Testament in. Now, as we're recording this, you're in a series on first fruits, which is just fascinating on the feasts and festivals. Talk to us about why you have, let's start with holiness.

Why did you dive into that topic?

TJ Syroteuk: Again, a lot of these questions, these are great questions. And when I'm, if I'm honest, like I can give you the right answer as a pastor, but if I'm honest, the answers aren't that exciting, like, you know, I moved because I wanted to follow my wife like that. But in this case, one of the most frustrating verses my entire life growing up was in 1st Peter, where it says, "therefore be holy."

And I grew up with King James, therefore be holy as I am holy. And it was just like, this is so frustrating. Like, God is perfect. I am not. God is sinless. I am not.

And yet I'm supposed to be like Him. And if you read around it, there's consequences if I'm not, but I don't actually have that ability. And then it was like, well, then you rely on the Spirit.

Well, what does that mean? Because then like, is that the, you know, is that the fruit of the Spirit or the fruit of TJ's willpower to be nicer, you know. So it was this, is there a

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possible different definition of this word holy that would help? And so, I nerded out on that a little bit. And again, it's all context, right?

So compared to the average person, I've done some deep diving into the Old Testament compared to Old Testament scholars, I am swimming in the kiddie pool, but I read them and then try to translate it to the rest of us. And when we one of the real definitions and literal and very often use definitions or interpretations of the word holy is the idea of distinct or different or set apart.

And so, God's people were holy, not because they were perfect, because they weren't, we read the history, they were holy because God had set them apart. And so, then when we take that lens, which seems like the subtle shift, but now you're looking completely differently. Suddenly, we're seeing things like, oh, the dietary laws aren't actually about moral perfection. They're about distinctness.

Oh, the, you know, don't have fabrics made of mixed materials. That's about distinctness and about uniqueness.

Now these feasts and festivals, now these different elements are about distinctness and uniqueness. And that's actually much easier for me to understand. And it technically like I could attain that.

So now when I move into the New Testament and I see that, you know, we're talked about how we've been grafted into Abraham's family. And we talk about how, you know, this is the new royal priesthood of the believers. This is like all the different language throughout Paul and throughout the Gospels and the new covenant.

And there's so many things that say that we aren't Israel, but we are now God's chosen people, His chosen free guided people. That's what the Spirit is given. You know, He's given to us, not the law and the tablets of stone and not a pillar of fire at night and a pillar of cloud by day, but the Spirit inside of us.

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Now I'm called, I'm set apart, I'm distinct, I'm unique as a Jesus follower. So now holiness might just mean what's normal in society and what would be distinct. So, what's normal in society is power playing and greed and hoarding and anything to get ahead.

So suddenly hospitality and generosity are extremely unique. And I'm going to go ahead and take the risk of saying they're holy. And so, if a community of Jesus followers were to be hospitable and generous and unique and gracious and loving and kind, and instead of honking the horn, the minute or the second the light turns green and the person in front of you doesn't go, just giving them a second, you know, like let them figure it out.

Instead of running over somebody with your cart in Costco, instead of whatever is just normal, we, and you know, a big one, instead of getting into politics and online rage with anything and anyone who we disagree with, we start to post with the fruits of the Spirit. I think suddenly holiness becomes something that we can very reasonably attain, not to perfection level, but to something that stands out as different. And so suddenly, you know, the Old Testament becomes this potential gold mine of principles and ideas of what, like, what was the principle they were pursuing, which leads to this whole feast and festivals series I'm in right now.

What was the principle or the purpose behind that celebration or that requirement? What would that look like in the 21st century Toronto? Because the principle stays the same.

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Lorna Dueck: Wow, I want to just pause, before we jump into feasts and festivals, I'd like to pause on this holiness.

So, you're teaching that holiness is a symbol of being set apart.

TJ Syroteuk: I think in the context of 1 Peter's verse, I think there is definitely a part about, like, positional holiness and sinlessness. Like, Jesus was holy as He was perfectly sinless, but He was also distinct, and that's what, like, because He was sinless and nobody else that was. So, there's, it's like both end.

And so, I think when we come to Scripture and we have a definition and an interpretation that just is, impossible, it obviously first draws us to the need for the Gospel, the need for Jesus, but also it draws us to how else has this been interpreted throughout church history and Torah and stuff like that, because these were Spirit-led, smart people too.

So, and to see this idea that, you know, you are a chosen priesthood, a holy nation, it's like, well, we're not sinless, but what if we were distinct? What if we were known by 1 Corinthians 13 love? What if we were known by the fruit of the Spirit? What if we were known like that? Suddenly, we are salt and light.

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Suddenly, we are the hands and feet of Jesus. Suddenly, these analogies and these metaphors become much more realistic, and the church begins to be a bridge to grace and to salvation instead of a barrier as we try to hold up these standards that are unattainable. And if you have any kind of a past, sorry, you'll never reach it.

Suddenly, there's grace, there's forgiveness, the shame is removed, there's freedom, there's a calling to a new life and something that gives life instead of takes.

Lorna Dueck: There's a lot to think about there. There's a lot to think about.

How do you navigate the tension between your personal time with the Word and always needing to dive deeper in it to teach to such a dynamic and changing congregation? How do you or do you separate them? Maybe you don't need to. I don't know.

TJ Syroteuk: I know a lot of pastors who like, you know, this is devotional time and this is study time.

I do think I have both of those, but it is not rigid or structured. That's just not how my brain works or my schedule works. A lot of times I will find myself just... and a lot of how I interact with the Bible is asking questions of it, you know, like, what else could this mean? Or what's the opposite of that? And what might that look like? And then suddenly, like, I remember there was one time I was looking for an answer to a question.

And next thing I know, I had accidentally or unintentionally, I should say, read like seven chapters in a row of like 2nd Chronicles and was just fascinated. And I'm like, when was the last time I read seven chapters of any book, let alone and not first study? And then wouldn't you know it, six months later, that reading showed up in a sermon. I wasn't studying at the time, but at the same time, it was integrating and starting to ferment and percolate a little bit and start showing up somewhere else.

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So, I don't, I see the delineation. I have both. I don't delineate super clearly and personally.

Lorna Dueck: So, what has led you to now explore for 2026 to teach about the feasts and festivals of the Old Testament? What do we need to learn from that, those ancient practices?

TJ Syroteuk: So, it was a series, again, a series of steps. I was reading a book several years ago that the author, kind of the big epiphany for him was, obviously, we all know Jesus was Jewish, but he was like, whoa, Jesus was a Jew. So, I have to read this entire Gospel account, all of them.

Like, what was a Jew thinking? What was a Jew doing? And things start to come alive. So, when I did that, you start to see subtle things that growing up in the North American church was just like a detail. Now it becomes really influential.

And the story goes from like, I grew up, like we've talked about a farm in Manitoba. First talking in Canada, I can remember, on a 13-inch black and white TV. It's the same game, but man, on a 72-inch high-definition TV with full color, there's a lot more going on.

And so, I feel like these cultural things... So, one thing that stood out to me was so often, you'll be reading in the Gospels, and I'll say something like, and it was the Feast of Tabernacles. And Jesus came into the city and or, Jesus was in the temple, and it was the Festival of Lights, and Jesus did this.

And like, okay, so I've always thought of that as like, almost a timestamp. But when I go back, and if I look at what was going on in that culture, and especially around that celebration, whatever He does next is very often really profound. And it made Jesus more extreme.

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And I think Jesus might be the most extreme person. You either loved Him or you hated Him, and you either were willing to die for Him or willing to kill Him. There wasn't any really like, I'll take him or I'll leave him.

He was very polarizing. And so like, for example, it's best to understand the story in John, when Jesus says, I'm the Light of the World. Suddenly, you see that He has just opened a blind man's eyes.

And He's saying, I'm the Light of the World. So, He's got the "I Am" statement. So, He's claiming to be God.

He's saying, I'm the Light of the World after helping somebody see light for the first time. And then calendar wise, as best I can understand, this is during Hanukkah, He's in the temple courtyard, and or at least He's very close to it. And in the temple courtyard for eight days, there's a 70-foot menorah that is lit up all of Jerusalem sees this massive light.

And Jesus says, I am the Light of the World. And suddenly, that's such a more profound statement than just this metaphor of like, I'm the door, I'm the bread, I'm the light. It's He's saying something right then.

Lorna Dueck: Into the festival, which was so ripe with image, like you say, 70-foot lights in the temple.

And He's saying, I'm the Light.

TJ Syroteuk: Yeah. So, then it was like, I should really go study the festivals because Jesus will make more sense.

But then as I got into it, instead of looking at these historical things, I'm trying to remember what book I was reading. But some author talked about them as identity statements. This is, you know, if you look at, so they're in Egypt, Passover lamb, death angel, they come out, they go across the Red Sea, and they come to Mount Sinai, and God gives them the Law.

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And then they build the tabernacle, and they're given the whole Torah and everything. So, within the first year of freedom, after 430 years of slavery, they have no identity, no freedom, they have no idea how to live with each other. As free people how to live with God, it's just I was a slave, do I now make that person a slave, they have no idea.

And so suddenly, God says, you're my chosen people, you're my covenant people, here's the Law. And here's how you're going to remember, you're going to have Passover, you're going to have first fruits, you're going to have unleavened bread, you're going to have this week, right now, I'm prepping for the Festival of Weeks or Shavuot. And it's this whole thing of like, so Passover is about remembering redemption.

And Feast of Unleavened Bread is about removing sin. And then first fruits is about releasing control and giving back to God the first fruits. And if you think about it, they haven't moved into their new homes yet.

They haven't had a garden or a crop. And He's saying, before any of that happens, before that becomes your reality, I want you to establish this rhythm. And so, you then you study ancient Near East history, and every culture had some version of the gods control the crops and all this.

And so, I, you know, I have to appease the gods. And so, I give the sacrifice, they send the rains, the crops come, it worked, let's do it again, and it becomes a perpetuating thing. We switch that and we start to see Israel saying, God has already acted, and we're responding to that.

I'm not trying to control Him. God has already acted, He's brought us out of Egypt, He's made us His called, freed, guided people, I will then respond in these ways. And so, then I take that principle, because I'm not an agricultural nomad in following the wilderness or moving into, I'm not a, you know, I'm not a blood Jew or national Jew or anything like that.

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So, is there anything there for me? Well, what's the principle, the principle is that God has already acted. And through Jesus, I am now a called, freed, guided, I have the Spirit guiding me. So, what is the principle that they were doing? What does that look like? And so like, take first fruits, or take unleavened bread, we encouraged a seven day fast of removing something, probably not sin, you know, yes, if you're cheating on your taxes, stop if you're breaking the law, stop.

But what about all the things that instead of going to God, we've started to go to it. So when we need comfort, instead of going to God, we started to go to our phone or to our social media, what if we just, you know, turn off notifications for one week, just like for the seven days of unleavened bread, our own little, and it's not about legalism or about earning favor with God, it's about creating rhythms and systems in our own mind to remind ourselves because we forget that we are freed, chosen, guided.

Lorna Dueck: It's a gentle alarm to use the... Interesting, so to use the festival calendar to reconnect to God's call on your life.

Make room for it.

TJ Syroteuk: That is how I'm looking at again, I am definitely not the smartest person on this topic. But it's been revelatory for me.

And so, I'm hoping somebody else is benefiting as well.

Lorna Dueck: I think how you got drawn into professional full-time ministry, was you love the story of the Bible, don't you? You love it.

TJ Syroteuk: I do.

Lorna Dueck: And you figured out how to do it.

Tell us about this. I think you figured out how to do it in four seminars. Genesis to Revelation.

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Yeah, what started there for you? Because you had a before you came to Rexdale, you had a preaching work, where we came to listen to how to unpack the understanding of the whole Bible.

TJ Syroteuk: Yeah, so a quick story on that. So, you know, went to Christian youth group and all that was at our church had like Sunday school, Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night, you know, like, we're really spiritual, a lot of education there.

Undergrad masters in Christianity, theology, stuff like that. I was taking my first doctorate class, and it was on the Old Testament. And the teacher talked about how Genesis 3:15 frames the Bible as a plot line.

And that's the, it's right after the fall, Adam and Eve have eaten the fruit because Satan had the question God's goodness, God comes, and He says, I'm going to put strife or enmity or war conflict between your seed and her seed, you're going to bruise his heel, he's going to crush your head. And so, we are looking, we understand because we've read the rest of the Bible that we're looking for, you know, that Satan is our big enemy, because he brings death, death is the thing that none of us can beat. So, we need the offspring of the woman.

And he used this analogy that stuck with me. I'm sure there's an exception, I can't think of one, think of any movie you've ever watched, they pretty much all structure the same way. There's two or three minutes of an opening scene, then the credits roll.

And whatever happens right before the credits roll, that is the plot line you're following for the rest of the story. You know, this guy, you kill my father, prepare to die.

Lorna Dueck: Page 10, it's called.

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TJ Syroteuk: Yeah. And so, page three, Genesis 3:15, we get the plot line, strife or enmity or war, and the rest of the story is us trying to find the offspring of the woman, the Son, who will come and crush the serpent's head.

And it's also the story of the serpent trying to pre-emptively eliminate the line. And so suddenly, Noah and his sons on a boat in the desert is much more interesting, because if they die, I die. If Abraham actually kills his son, it's not just first-degree murder and this horrible thing.

Selfishly, as I read this, like, I need him to live. Because that's the line. I've already been told it's not Ishmael, it's Isaac, right.

And so, and then when Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers, he's the one who ends up saving the family. And we need Judah, we find out. And so, Joseph or David fighting Goliath isn't now suddenly it's not about me facing the giant of my Monday or my boss, it's suddenly about if David dies on a field fighting a professional fighter, we're in trouble... and you keep going.

And so then suddenly for the 2nd Kings 11, you know, story, the crazy story of Athaliah killing everybody, but they stole a kid out of the nursery and seven years later, like, you know, I know, I'm kind of relying on some Bible knowledge. But suddenly, these stories become so much more interesting. And then when you get to Jesus, and He's the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, He's from the family of David, He's from the house of Judah, He's, you know, all these things.

And then He comes in, then the temptations, this is the first time in our story, where the serpent and the serpent crusher are face to face. And, and He tempts him with things that aren't necessarily bad, you know, like turn this bread or the stone into bread, well, later, He's gonna make feed 5000 people from five loaves and two fishes, that's food, that's making food out of nothing. So, He can do that.

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All the, you know, the angels will catch You, all the angels will worship Him, you know, and so on and so forth. And we get to this place where we see this continuing story. And then we see what God is doing.

God is on a mission, according to Ephesians 3, to reconcile all people to Himself through the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ, Colossians 1:20. So that one day, there'll be worshipers from every kindred and tribe and tongue and nation, Revelation 7:9, gather around the throne of King Jesus. So, Genesis 3:15 is about that.

God is on this mission. And He's reconciling people from everywhere, including Jonah going to Nineveh, and Daniel going to Babylon. And so, my story suddenly is just simply joining His story.

And in my little context in Toronto, I'm just living out the next chapter of the Bible of God's reconciling work.

Lorna Dueck: And TJ, how has living out your story worked? You've already referenced at the top that it was hard being an infertile couple. You did get the miracle of a child; you have a wonderful son.

How has reconciling God's story, seeing that big picture, you're so adept at teaching, worked for you personally, when the door is shut, and it's quiet, and you're looking at heartbreak of infertility?

TJ Syroteuk: Good question. I guess there's some comfort. At the same time, there's a little bit of a proverbial slap in the face.

But there's some comfort, like I look at Hebrews 11, where it says, you know, all these other ones that we don't have time to talk about, these heroes of the faith who saw their dead raised back to life, they're this, and others were cut in half, and others were wandered around in sheep's clothing's, and others were, you know, murdered and

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ostracized. And it's like, wait a minute. So, did faith work or did faith not work? And the principle there, I think, is that we're looking at the wrong timeline.

God is operating outside of time; He's writing a really big story. And as the Author, not that we're puppets, but He gets to determine, does the happily ever after come in my little part of this story, or later? And so that was, you know, which, like I said, there's a little bit of a slap in the face there of like, so what you serve God, it doesn't work. But that's the wrong question.

And so, there was also comfort in the fact that even if this isn't part of our story, that doesn't mean the story isn't good. That doesn't mean we can't play a story apart in His story. And that doesn't mean we can't bring goodness to other people's story, even if our story isn't going the way I would like.

And so that there was there was something helpful in there for me.

Lorna Dueck: The reality that pain is part of our story, disappointment, loss. Yeah, Hebrews 11 is a great...

And so, as you look forward, what word have you got for those of us who, who deeply want to keep the Bible part of our life, feel the pressures of, it's just too crazy to keep up with it. What advice have you got for how to keep the Bible part of our life?

TJ Syroteuk: When I began to see it as a story, and less about like, a library of 66 books or a guide to life, it just got really interesting. And interesting things have a way of you find time for interesting things.

It gave purpose and meaning. So suddenly that, it helped that way. That's a good question.

I think it's when we, I feel like so often, we look at the spiritual disciplines. So, in this case, reading the Bible, and I think we accidentally often make them kind of the end, we do the spiritual disciplines, and instead, they are simply a means to an end, the

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end is to know and love God, we are in a relationship with Him. And so, we read the Bible, because it helps us know God.

And we pray because it helps us know God. And we listen to worship music, and we take a Sabbath, and we do these things. We don't do them because they're the necessarily the right thing to do, although you may have to, like, discipline yourself to do them.

But when we remember that the purpose is a loving relationship where we are enough, where we are accepted, suddenly, finding time to engage that person makes sense, takes a bit more priority becomes a little bit more interesting than one more show or one more episode on Netflix. And we find ourselves being drawn to the written Word, so that we can know the Living Word.

Lorna Dueck: Beautiful, beautiful.

TJ, I hope our audience tunes into the podcast at Rexdale or the sermon series at Rexdale. I'm finding it fascinating on feasts and festivals and your deep love for the Bible. Thank you for sharing it with Scripture Untangled today.

TJ Syroteuk: Well, thank you so much. This was a lot of fun and a privilege to be a part of.