



Season 14: Episode 2 | Justin Stratis | Can Scripture Give Us Hope in Divided Times?

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, Justin Stratis will be interviewed by CBS Ambassador, Reverend Dr. Andrew Stirling. Dr. Justin Stratis is the Vice Principal and Academic Dean and Professor of Systematic Theology at Wycliffe College at the University of Toronto. Raised in a Christian home in New Jersey, Justin first served the church as a musician before sensing a call to theology.

That journey took him from seminary in Chicago to doctoral studies at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland and then to Trinity College, Bristol, where he spent nine years teaching Christian doctrine and helping prepare people for vocational ministry. At the heart of Justin's work is a conviction that theology should serve the church and that Scripture must remain central to Christian ministry, witness, and formation. His teaching and research explore the doctrine of God and the work of influential theologians, including Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

In this conversation, Andrew and Justin explore Justin's journey, what it means to approach theology in service of the church, and how placing Scripture at the centre can shape our understanding of God and our witness in the world. Here is their conversation.

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Andrew Stirling: Justin, welcome to Scripture Untangled. I've looked forward to this conversation for quite a while, and I'm delighted that you're taking the time to be with us.

Justin Stratis: Thank you very much for having me, Andrew.

Andrew Stirling: Justin, you have a fascinating Christian journey that has roots in what seems like a myriad of places and sources, from orthodoxy to evangelicalism to Anglican episcopacy. Please tell us just briefly, how did these diverse backgrounds form your faith, and how, and I mean this is sort of a second part, did this lead you to eventually enter the ministry?

Justin Stratis: Yeah, well, first I should say I was never orthodox myself. My family was orthodox, and I'm not a bishop, so I am Anglican, but I didn't enter the Anglican episcopacy per se.

Yeah, so my whole family is Greek. Both my parents are Greek, and I come from Greek immigrant stock, and my parents were raised Greek Orthodox, but became evangelical Christians in the late 70s right around when I was born. So, they were kind of learning evangelicalism as I was growing up.

So, they started, I believe they had a conversion, born-again conversion experience in a Baptist church. So, we went to that church for a little bit when I was a youngster, and then they eventually moved to a Christian and Missionary Alliance Church, which is the church that I was raised in. I became a Christian as a teenager through the ministry of that church and then started working as a music minister in that church as a teenager, leading worship, which is how I got together with my wife Melissa through that ministry.

Then I got a job at a Baptist church, then I moved to Chicago and started going to a Swedish evangelical free church.

Andrew Stirling: I've clearly missed some links here already, haven't I, Justin?

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Justin Stratis: Yeah, yeah. Went to Scotland, tried the Church of Scotland for a little bit, then I went to a Methodist church for a little bit, and eventually wound up at the Scottish Episcopal Church, where I was eventually confirmed.

So that was the one where I actually planted down roots and said, you know, I can't sort of be wandering around forever, that's where I decided to stay put. And that led me to the Church of England, and now the Anglican Church of Canada. I suppose how it's formed me is that I have a lot of sympathy for a lot of different traditions, and I appreciate them, I guess, from the inside.

I've also had stints in sort of charismatic Pentecostal spaces, and in all of these places I've met people that are really pious, devoted followers of Christ. So that kind of got a lot of the tribalism out of my system that perhaps could have developed in other sorts of ways. And one of the reasons why I liked Anglicanism is because it's such a vast and broad tradition that it sort of had space for all of the parts of my religious upbringing.

I got into ministry through music ministry. So, I started playing music in church, I was handed the keys to a rather large church music ministry when I was around 19 years old in New Jersey. I did that for a while, and that's what kind of convinced me to go to seminary, because this thing happens when you're working in churches, where you find yourself on an elevated platform, and because of that reason, people think you know what you're talking about.

And I realized I didn't know what I was talking about. People twice my age were asking me questions about the faith, about Scripture, about Christian life, and they assumed I knew what I was doing, and I didn't. So, I went off to seminary in Chicago, and in seminary I kind of got bit by the bug of theology as a vocation in itself.

And I often say I just kept going, kept asking questions, and somehow ended up with a doctorate teaching in the Theological College. But it was really sort of an accident in lots of different ways. But that's the way providence works, I suppose.

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Andrew Stirling: You mentioned early on your spouse, your wife, and she was then part of that music ministry at the beginning, was it then? So, in other words, you've had a long association.

Justin Stratis: A long association with my wife, yes. Yeah, in fact we're having our 25th wedding anniversary in a couple of weeks.

Yeah, but we did know each other since we were, well, I was a teenager. She's a little older than me, but yeah, we've known each other for 30 something years, 35 years.

Andrew Stirling: Oh, that's lovely.

That's lovely. Justin, a major influence on your life has naturally been the work of the late Professor John Webster, your doctor father. And I corresponded with him on a number of occasions and held him in very high regard, and it was an untimely death, I felt.

I think it would be helpful to our listeners to look at three themes of his that resonate with your own work, because they deal with the centrality of the Bible in theology. And that is something that is very dear to my heart and dear to the heart of the Canadian Bible Society. The first of these is, and if I might just for a moment quote him from a book in which was published here in Canada, he says this,

"Coming to understand the nature of Holy Scripture and using Holy Scripture fittingly are not spontaneous operations of the intellect.

They're movements of the created mind, which if they're rightly to be formed, must be moved by God. These creaturely intellectual acts, that is, are not self-originating, or self-sustaining. They arise from a divine prompting, and they continue in the course as they are directed, sustained, and perfected by God."

What do you think of that? And how important is it? Divine prompting for the reading of Scripture?

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Justin Stratis: Yeah, so this is a bit of John's theology that I've been convinced by. I mean, the interesting thing about Webster's theology is I think I've never met someone so less interested in innovating as a theologian. He really sort of felt like the content of the Christian faith as it's been sort of traditionally passed down, the doctrines, the theological claims, the creeds, these were sufficient for dealing with contemporary questions.

And I think he, a lot of his theology can be read as kind of a protest movement against contemporary theologies, which felt like they needed to improve upon or supplement sort of the main subject matter of the Christian faith. So, in the quote that you just read for me, I think what he's saying is we don't need to come up with a theory of Scripture. We don't need to explain how it can be the case that Scripture can be the Word of God.

We don't need to come up with a model or a philosophy or a particular hermeneutical method in order to make sense of it. What we need to do is believe in faith that it is God's Word to us, which is a painfully cyclical argument. But, you know, that's what Christianity is oftentimes.

It kind of reminds me of John Calvin's famous quote from the Institutes when he says, we know that the Scripture is the Word of God because we can hear the voice of God Himself speaking in it, right? Which is not a proof. It's a claim. It's a confession.

So, what John is saying is something very similar. He's saying we don't even know what Scripture is, right? We can't even come up with a category that fits its nature were not God to speak to us directly through it, right? You don't establish the conditions of possibility for Scripture's authority prior to encountering it as authoritative. And similarly, you don't come up with a method of reading Scripture that will unlock its treasures prior to God taking you by the hand and leading you to its treasures. So, it's a very spiritual approach to Scripture. It's a confidence in God's ability to reach us through the Bible rather than saying we need to come up with an appropriate model or theory that unlocks its ability to do what it can do.

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Andrew Stirling: Yeah, yeah.

This is a beautiful concept, really, in a sense. And I say beautiful, because one of the things that I keep running into is a sort of a trendiness. Oh, we found the defense for the Bible.

We've got a reason for it. We've got an apologetic for it. And yet, it seems to me whenever I engage it, or when people of real faith engage it, they realize the power of it in the sense of letting the Word itself speak for itself to us, rather than us always having to defend or define it.

And that's where Webster and his divine prompting struck me. And I'm talking now as somebody in the sense who's a kindred spirit, Justin. It struck me.

It went right to my heart, actually. And in a sense, it corrected me, because there were times when I thought, oh, yes, I have to give a defense of the Scriptures, or I have to be able to say here are the reasons why, as opposed to letting the Scriptures speak for themselves. One of the key things that people talk about when they talk about what they find in Scripture, of course, is the nature of the God who is revealed in that Scripture.

And there's a lot of talk, a lot of language that we use about the love of God. And that seems to be kind of the central focus of a lot of people's thinking. But the question I have is, Justin, how do we know what this is? And is it through revelation? Or is it through speculation? In other words, we have a sense of what love is.

And then we look at the Bible and go, see, that's love. Or do we go the other way around?

Justin Stratis: Yeah. So, I wrote on this topic once for my doctoral thesis on the love of God, particularly the question, what does it mean to say that God is love? And I noticed the same phenomenon that you're describing, right? Depending on the era

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of history and the predominant understanding of love in that history, people tended to understand God's love through that lens.

Right? So, in contemporary terms, we think love is about vulnerability, about risk, about sometimes romanticism. In the past, you have love understood in terms of wishing the good for another or even wishing to possess the other as a good once it's recognized as such. So, in a lot of ways, and this goes with all areas of theology, theology is often in danger of being held captive by contemporary understandings of whatever concept is being applied to God.

And that's just the way language works, right? The native home of language is not God, it's created things. So, we're already in a position where we're stretching language beyond the bounds of what it naturally can do. And the same goes for divine love.

So obviously, I think that the key to understanding what a word like love or even a word like God could mean when applied to the protagonist of Scripture, is going to be dependent on how God Godself uses that word with respect to Godself. So that doesn't absolve us of the responsibility of trying to figure out, you know, what certain Greek words meant in their context and Hebrew words, etc. But when a word like love is applied to God, it's going to be stretched in unusual ways.

And you see this in first John chapter four, which is the famous passage in which the apostle says God is love. He also says this is how we know what love is not that we loved God, but that God loved us. Right? So that leads me to think, well, let me see how God loved us.

And how did God love us? God loved us in Christ. So that gives a particularly Christological shape to what I think divine love is. But again, it stretches the meaning of love.

Because God's love for us is not just the love of a creature for another creature. It's the love of the Creator for a creature, even in the form of the Incarnate Son. So, to me,

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it makes me pay attention to the similarities that I see in those acts of love in which God loved us in Christ, but it also makes me pay attention to the dissimilarities.

You know, when God loves us, God isn't doing it for God's sake. Right? God doesn't get things out of the way that I do. And I love another human being.

God when God loves us, gives purely. That's a different kind of love that's possible on the creaturely side. So, a lot of my book is dealing with sort of those tensions of what does it mean for God to be fully God self, that is a God that does not need us, whilst also giving Himself to us fully in Christ.

Andrew Stirling: Yes, yes, exactly.

That's beautifully put. It's beautifully put. In terms of another issue that arises for people, and I'm sensing it today, perhaps, Justin, more than at any other time in my years in ministry.

And there have been crises, there have been difficult times, and there's been wars and rumors of wars, and there's been COVID, and there's been, you know, so many things. But particularly with young people, I'm sensing that the word hope is something that is desperately needed. How does the reading of Scripture engender hope? What is its source, Justin?

Justin Stratis: Yeah, it's funny.

I'm like a miserable person, in general. These are my years living in Britain.

Andrew Stirling: Thank you. (laughing)

Justin Stratis: That means I'm generally cynical about most things. The one thing that, you know, and I've studied theology for quite a long time now, right? I've seen behind the curtain, both of church and of the theological academy, and it's not always the most pleasant thing to see. But the one thing that has remained new and vital to me has been the Bible.

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Like, I find it very difficult to be cynical about Scripture, because it doesn't reduce to things that I can understand in ways that other Christian phenomena do, right? When I look at the church, I'm like, okay, I can understand that. That's just another organization with its internal politics and goals and strategic plans and budgets and all of that.

And the same with theology, you know, a theology department can look a lot like a sociology department, like a math department and all of that stuff.

Now, the Bible is interesting, because you'd think it can be just like any other book, and it certainly is patient of approaches which encounter it that way. But in my experience, the Bible, every time I try to make it fit with my preconceived notions of theology or Christianity, or anything of human design, it just doesn't fit. Karl Barth, one of my favorite theologians, wrote a great essay early on in his career called *The Strange World Within the Bible*, where he says, you know, if you go to the Bible looking for history, you can find history.

If you go to the Bible looking for morality, you can find morality. If you go to the Bible looking for religion, you can find religion. But then when you look closer, it doesn't fit any of those categories.

You can, I mean, ask any Biblical scholar trying to find out what really happened through the pages of Scripture, and it sort of messes with even one's understanding of history. You go to morality, and you find, you know, dads who are commanded by God to kill their children on a pyre, as in the case of Abraham and Isaac. You know, you look for religion, and you find all these anti-religion kinds of comments in Paul's writings where he's going toe-to-toe with the Areopagus in Athens.

It doesn't fit, right? And to me, the not-fittingness of Scripture, with all of my other experiences, is the source of its hope. It paints, it lets me know that there's something beyond all of this junk that's surrounding me, all of the corruption, all of the sort of political machinations. There's another world, and Scripture is trying to sort of get me

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to peer into that world, and to believe that that world is even more real than the world that I encounter on a day-to-day basis.

That's how Scripture gives me hope. It's untameable-ness, it's mysteriousness, it's otherness. It makes me feel like there is something beyond the desperation of whatever time we happen to be living in.

Andrew Stirling: Yeah, absolutely true. And, you know, it's fascinating, I find, Justin, in talking to students. And, you know, when everything around them is sort of collapsing, or they've had an insult on social media, or they've, you know, there's something really gross that's presented to them as being good.

You know, they, somehow, when I ask them to go and read the Scripture, and to get themselves into the Word, that totally otherness that you're talking about is so powerful that it sort of transcends all of that. It puts them into a different place. It's the hope of the reign of God.

I mean, it's the hope of things to come as well as things that are. One of the things that I know, too, though, and this is, in a sense, moving away a little bit now from John Webster, Justin, is that, you know, Christians throughout the world and here in Canada find themselves living in a highly pluralistic world. And I think one of the questions that I have, and a lot of people have, is how do Christians give witness to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, and yet live in respect and peace with our neighbors of other faiths and on? Because that seems to be a collision that continually occurs and is a source of stress within the world.

How do we hold on to the uniqueness and the witness to that Jesus in such a world?

Justin Stratis: Yeah, that's a great question. I think another muse of mine is Dietrich Bonhoeffer. And late in his life from prison, in Tegel prison, he wrote these letters to his friend Eberhard Bethge, where he kind of tries to imagine what life will be like after World War II.

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And this is where he uses his famous reference to religion-less Christianity. But a little-known other bit of one of the points he makes in those letters is he refers to something called the arcane discipline of Christianity. The hidden discipline of Christianity.

Andrew Stirling: Yes. Discipline of the secret.

Justin Stratis: Yes. And it's a reference to an old patristic concept, kind of almost in a pre-Christendom era where you had to do things like celebrate the Eucharist in secret, right? And he recommends this in kind of our modern contemporary context because he says Christianity is very liable to be misunderstood otherwise. Christianity will be viewed as yet another religious option.

Right. And if we sort of lead our public witness with our religious stuff, he says we are liable to profane Christianity or make Christianity liable to profanation because people will see us singing hymns and doing sacraments and doing rituals. And he says they'll think to themselves, oh, I know what that is.

That's what I do in my religion. Right. Christianity must be of the sort that I've experienced before.

And then Christians often fall into this mistake as well. And they fall into, therefore, this idea of different religions competing for the scarce resource of human beings and their faith. Right.

And that's, I believe, what leads to conflict all the time. Right. Because people are saying, you know, if I'm going to be a Christian, that means the Muslims lose.

And if I'm going to be a Muslim, that means the Christians lose.

Andrew Stirling: Yes. It's us or them.

Justin Stratis: Yeah.

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And so, Bonhoeffer says, you know, rather than competing in the marketplace of religion by sort of foregrounding all our religious stuff, he says, what if we do what Jesus did and we are known not as purveyors of religious goods and services, but as people who die for our neighbors?

Right. That the exclusivity of Christianity is not an exclusivity of belief of zero-sum game dominance of the religious marketplace, the exclusivity of Christianity is best witnessed to through our service and love in the world.

Right.

And then through that, people get drawn into the arcane discipline, the secret practices of Christians. But our public face is always Christians are the ones who don't live for themselves but live for others. And that's the thing I wish Christians were known for today.

I feel like a lot of churches in a lot of contexts have gotten caught up in this kind of competitive model. Right. Where is this country going to be Christian? Is it going to be something else? Is it going to be non-Christian? That's not what we ought to worry about.

Right. Jesus walked through the world, and he didn't enter into those kinds of calculations. Right.

They say, should we pay taxes to Caesar? And he's like, I don't care. Whatever. Sure.

Give it to him. Whatever. What I'm going to go do is march down to Jerusalem and die for you people.

And that's how Christians ought to be known. That's how we exist in a pluralistic world, not in terms of competition, not in terms of lowest common denominator, but the Christians are the ones who love you in the name of Christ.

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The Bible Course | New Edition: Before we continue with today's conversation, I want to take a moment to tell you about a resource that can help you better understand the Bible. Do you want to learn how the Bible stories, books, and characters all fit together?

The Bible Course | New Edition can help you across eight engaging sessions. You'll trace the Bible's big story and gain practical tools for reading and applying it in everyday life.

This new edition features refreshed videos, three new presenters and insights from Bible experts, as well as an eight-week daily reading plan and practical exercises. And also, if you're leading a group, new coaching videos will help you host each session with confidence. So, whether you're opening the Bible for the first time or have been reading it for years, The Bible Course is for you.

Watch the first session for free at BibleCourse.ca. That's Bible course . ca. And the link for that will be down in the show notes. So now let's return to today's conversation.

Andrew Stirling: Yes. That is beautifully put. Oh my, I agree completely.

And it seems there's another realm too, Justin. We're being thrown into the vortex now of sort of competing nationalistic movements. And sometimes the webbing or the webbing of faith and national identity seem to be thrown together.

The reason I'm reading Bonhoeffer again is for that very reason. In such a world, I think the question is how can believers find their ultimate allegiance to the kingdom of God as revealed in Jesus Christ? And again, not to a nation. You've alluded to it in terms of religion, but now I'm talking about it at sort of the nationalistic realm.

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Justin Stratis: Yeah. I think so. I gave a talk at something here at the University of Toronto back in January on politics and Christianity.

And it was for a bunch of university students. So, people that are heading, they're Christian students that are heading potentially into international relations or politics or political science. And they were worried that if you take a strong stance against nationalism, you end up being kind of a quietist and saying, well, we shouldn't be involved in politics at all.

I don't think that's the case. I think this kind of, Karl Barth calls it Jesus's passive conservatism. And I don't mean conservatism like Toryism or anything, but the idea that He'll let you pay taxes to Caesar, right? Almost sort of demoting the importance of Caesar by kind of relativizing what his role is in the disciple's life, right? He's not the be and end all of everything. He's just the guy who happens to be Caesar right now. So, pay your taxes. He'll come and go like everyone else.

So that does sound like quietism, but I also think it frees you to be creative in the political space. If you don't think that everything is at stake at all times, you can serve freely. You can adapt.

You can work with people. Nationalists are people that think if our nation does not rise to the top, then all is lost. It's a fear-based approach.

It's a fear-based worldview, right? So, Christians don't live in fear. We live in hope and we live in faith and we live in love, right? So, for Christians to get caught up in this stuff is kind of like the least faithful thing we can do almost. It blunts our witness to the ultimacy of the kingdom of God, right? It doesn't elevate the kingdom of God in people's imaginations.

Again, it convinces people that Christianity is just another political thing, right? So, I do think Christians should take a stand against nationalism, absolutely, but we also have to show another way, right? We have to de-ultimatize politics and de-ultimatize whatever nation we happen to be in in order to break the logjam there. Show a

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different way, right? Show that I can serve my neighbor who's of a different political tribe than me. Show that I can serve my neighbor who's an immigrant.

Show that I can serve my neighbor who's a citizen. And all of these things do it in hope. I got another question from one of the students in that talk I gave.

I'm not a Christian. How do I do this, because everything seemed very Christological. My answer was the same.

I mean, I think Christianity is the right way, but the key to getting out of this kind of political stalemate we're in, is you got to find some kind of hope. Hope is the thing that demotes everything from ultimate, urgent, everything is at stake. Hope defers things and says we are working towards something beyond what we can achieve in ourselves.

But if you think everything rests on your shoulders, you know, that's when you start saying we need more Lebensraum.

Andrew Stirling: Yeah, I mean, one of the things that I encountered in South Africa, of course, was the notion of Die Volk and the people and the nation and the faith were wedded in a rather unusual and strange way. And it was only in a sense to the movement of the Spirit working amongst the church and amongst the people, that this sense of Christianity being dependent on, you know, the supremacy of Die Volk and that they were the ones who are going to guarantee that Christianity would continue.

It took a long time in a sense for all that to end, but it did end. I mean, that came to a close, that kind of nationalism ended. They come and they go.

When we as Christians gather, and or when we are alone, one of the key things that we have, that God has given us is prayer. Christ commanded it. Do you have any sort of practical guidance to help people pray in this world with these competing things?

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How, you know, what are the underpinnings of prayer? Because I think prayer is essential.

Justin Stratis: Yeah. I mean, prayer is an admission of everything I've been saying, that it's not on our shoulders, right? That pursuing the good is not a matter of making all the right moves and using the right strategies and applying the right methods, whether they be political or religious or anything. It's about throwing ourselves to God and asking for mercy.

So, it's a declaration of dependence and it's a declaration of ignorance as to what we ought to do. I mean, it says right in Romans chapter eight, we don't know what we're supposed to pray for. We don't know.

So, you pray to pray, right? It's something that God does in us. It's also, so it's a response. It's an act of obedience.

It's an act of admission and confession of dependence, our need of grace, et cetera. But again, it's also a sort of, it's an admission of saying we can't find the resources and the know-how in our current context to fix things. We got to look elsewhere, right? It's kind of like, you know, when the government realizes it's beyond its ability to deal with the alien invasion, you call in the Avengers, right? When we realize I can't fix my life, I can't fix my relationships, I can't fix my nation, my community, I call in the only One who can.

Andrew Stirling: Yes, exactly. It's interesting too that when I look again, and I know you deal with students at Wycliffe College and beyond that, what are the issues that they're facing and they're wrestling with? And sort of a second question, sort of a part B really, Justin, you know, what is the Holy Spirit saying to the church today?

Justin Stratis: Right, yeah. So, I can perhaps write an encyclical about that.

Yeah, my students, I love my students at all the places I've taught. They're very earnest, right? Because they're all doing something patently absurd, which is

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deciding to go into vocational ministry. You and I live in clergy world, and it seems normal to us.

I often like to step back and be like, nobody does this. Nobody becomes a priest or a pastor today in post-Christian contexts, maybe in Kentucky or something, but definitely not in Toronto. So, they really care.

Like they feel a sense of calling and they want to sort of serve their communities and offer something real to people. I think the thing that worries them is, well, the thing that's really sad that I see sometimes is when they come in all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. This happened more in the Church of England.

And they just want to plant churches and preach the Word and love people. And then they get sort of absorbed into the system. And then all of a sudden, their goal is not preaching the Gospel, it's becoming an archdeacon or something.

That kind of institutionalization that can happen when one goes into full-time ministry. So, I think what I want to give my students and what I think they are going to need for their ministry is just like a rock-solid belief that this stuff is real. Like that it's not a veneer Victorian institution that somehow stumbles along into the 21st century.

Like that there's a real God who really loves people. And then when you stand up in a pulpit and proclaim what God says, God will reach people through your words. When you serve people the sacrament, something actually is happening.

This is not just going through the motions. When people lose that spark, that's when they leave ministry or even worse, they stay in ministry and just become cogs in the machine. So, I think what we do as professors here is we just, I guess we just try to reassure them, guys, this is for real.

There really is a God. Even when you're learning about ancient Near Eastern stele, which mentioned random things and you're learning Hebrew and Greek, it does not

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dilute the mystery and power of what you've gotten yourself into here. And don't lose that.

If I had to guess what the Holy Spirit is saying today, it's the same thing that He's saying, or that the Spirit is saying throughout all time, which is like, trust Me, you know, trust Me, you don't need to do this on your own. You know, one of my favorite verses is from John 14. I kind of did an audit of a lot of my preaching recently.

I don't know if you ever do that.

Andrew Stirling: Sometimes, if not, other people will do it for me. So, one or the other, Justin.

Justin Stratis: Yes. I was like, what do I talk about all the time? You know, and it's always John 14, where Jesus is like, I'm not going to leave you like orphans. Like I quote that more than any other verse in my sermons.

Yes, because that's the hardest thing to believe. It really feels like when Jesus ascended into heaven, He handed the baton to us and said, all right, now let's see what you guys can do.

Andrew Stirling: Right.

Justin Stratis: But that is not what happened. Right.

He's still with us. I didn't leave you alone. I am coming to you.

And if we could just get that in our heads, I feel like we'd be so much more joyful and confident as Christians and far less anxious and fearful.

Andrew Stirling: That's beautifully put.

Yes, absolutely. I mean, I sometimes have a little devil voice in my head, which is the little voice of deism, you know, God created and left us to our own devices. Right.

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And then I go, oh, look at the mess we're in. And then there is the other one. The other one is the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Lo, I will be with you always. And, you know, this power I will give to you come to Jerusalem and then, you know, the world. And so, you know, the Holy Spirit is so important, isn't it, in grounding us in in that sense of God's activity and God's strength for us.

Finally, and I ask this of all my guests, because I want you to know that we take what you're doing seriously. And our audience loves to feel that they are doing something for you. And the one thing that they can do for you is to pray for you.

And in terms of your own self, but also in terms of your work and ministry, what, Justin, would you like us to pray for you?

Justin Stratis: I would really appreciate prayer for knowing what, or understanding what God wants of theological educators today. It's a changing landscape. There's a lot of challenges out there.

And again, I think the temptation is to want to figure out what the skeleton key is for having a successful theological college. But that's a temptation for a couple of reasons. A, I don't want to do it on my own strength.

And B, the point of theological education is not the preservation of theological colleges. It's actually serving the church. So, we just need prayer.

I need prayer as the vice principal to hear what God is telling us to do and then to have the faith and the courage to do that, I suppose, and not chase quick fixes, but buckle down, bear down where we need to and be adaptive where we need to. And hopefully that we don't burn out in the process.

Andrew Stirling: Yeah, exactly. Well, it's a huge responsibility. I think at times people who are not necessarily involved in the theological academy don't realize the sense of responsibility of often taking lives that have committed themselves to serve Christ

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and giving them the tools, the inspiration, the love, the care, the instruction that they need.

And so, I want to thank you, Justin, for being someone who does that. And on behalf of the Canadian Bible Society, to let you know of our continued and sustained support of what you're trying to do, because a big part of our ministry is to help with engagement with the Word. And that means also engaging with those who engage others with the Word.

So, our prayers are with you and our thanks and my thanks for you spending time with us today. May God continue to bless your work.

Justin Stratis: Well, you're very welcome. And thanks for having me, Andrew.