



Season 14: Episode 7 | Crystal Lavallee | How Can Christians Pursue Reconciliation?

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

Today I have the privilege of bringing you a conversation I had recently with Crystal Lavallee. Crystal Lavallee is the founder and national director of *I Am Compelled*, a charity passionate about empowering the next generation in remote Indigenous communities. She's a producer, storyteller, and adventurer who loves capturing stories of hope, healing, and resilience from Indigenous leaders across Canada.

So, when she's not behind the camera or on the road, you'll probably find Crystal swimming in a lake, out on the water, or maybe even wandering the aisles of a local winner's store. Apparently, a bit of an obsession for her. She recently also expanded into voice work, completing a project with the state of Minnesota.

Crystal is Métis and Greek with family roots in Manitoba. She loves the words of Métis leader Louis Riel, *"My people will sleep for 100 years, but when they wake, it will be the artists who give them their spirit back."* Her life is deeply shaped by her favorite Bible verse, Psalm 45, verse 7. Enjoy this conversation.

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Joanna la Fleur: Crystal, welcome to Scripture Untangled. We're really just so glad to get you on the podcast today.

Crystal Lavallee: So happy to be here and good to see you, my friend.

Joanna la Fleur: I know it has been a while we were saying so I'm glad to dive into this story with you and let's just jump right in. Because I know you've said your connection with Indigenous communities began before you discovered your own Métis heritage in 2010, but can you kind of take us back to that discovery? How did that change how you understood yourself?

Crystal Lavallee: Yes okay. So, 16 years ago now, my dad came home and nonchalantly said, "Your cousin got his Métis citizenship card." And I thought, I remember the moment going, what is a Métis, and then at the same time something inside went like, (explosion sound).

And I was compelled to go and do all the research to figure out my roots, because my dad's side is from Manitoba, which is the home of the Métis, and my mom's side is Greek. But we never really heard either side, so we just grew up thinking we were just a plain family, until that moment.

Joanna la Fleur: And then, so the DNA test or the heritage you know gets you back to realizing, oh, but you had already been involved with Indigenous communities before that.

Crystal Lavallee: A little bit. So, I had done my first northern missions' trip to Pangnirtung, Nunavut, when I was working for a national ministry, and being up there, arctic tundra, you know, walrus meat and seal brains, and the whale blubber.

Great experience but then when we sat with the people, the Inuit people, and we started hearing their hearts it was like explosions of realms of God I've never encountered before. And so that was an introduction to Inuit communities and culture, and I haven't really looked back since.

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Joanna la Fleur: And so, when you discovered this about yourself, did it feel like you were finding something new, or was it almost like recognizing something that God had kind of planted in you. I mean that had always been present, that God has sort of been planting this in you for a time before that?

Crystal Lavallee: Well, I laugh Joanna, because I remember calling the heads of the House of Prayer, Fran Parker, Rob Parker, and I remember calling them saying, you know like the National House of Prayer in Canada, and I said, what's up with this evangelical church? Like why do we always got to honor these people who have this regalia, like who are these people, and she explained part of the heritage before I even came to understand the fullness.

And so then fast forward when my dad came home and I started doing the research, I learned from a lot of my different family members, that for us on the Métis side, it was hidden and you did not admit any type of Indigenous blood in you.

Because if you did have it then you were mistreated, and so doing the research with a Métis historian, I found out that we Métis don't do blood quantum, so it's not like you are a percentage of the Métis, you're either Métis or you're not proven through your genealogy.

And so, on my creative wall at home, I have the trails of all the ancestry line that leads back to the root families of the Métis. And discovered that in my generational line there were advocates, Louis Riel's provisional government advocates, so government, we have the inventor of the ox cart, which is you know the thing that opened up the west in Canada. Discovered that the Métis were responsible for the economic engine of our nation with like the beaver pelts.

And so, I just think when you know that, when you know who you are, and where you come, from it definitely solidifies identity and value and contribution past, present and future. And so, just understanding how that side of the family works with the ancestry, it's your ancestors know, and you follow their trails, and then unknowing to

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me, I ended up following those trails that they did in 2017, going to a lot of the First Nation communities in northern Saskatchewan.

So, it just blows my mind how one generation seems to always kind of follow the familiarity of the past in previous generations. It's really awesome.

Joanna la Fleur: Wow, well and then of course, a few years later you founded “I Am Compelled” in 2014. Can you tell us why compelled what was that word, how did this all happen in your life that it was more than just sort of your own self-discovery, but you were doing something for others.

Crystal Lavallee: Okay, so you're taking me back, because that was a long time ago. Okay, so I've always had a passion for the next generation. I've always had a passion for media communications, and theatre and the arts, and so I can see the sequence of events looking back about how those pieces were threaded together.

But it was really faithfulness and serving different organizations, non-for-profits, where I got to see the ins and outs of different organization structures and how they work, and then had a moment when I was a contracted actress for a theatre show in downtown Toronto, where I was talking with my colleague afterward, and this little idea, it's like it floated from above. Dropped in my heart, and I couldn't stop saying the phrase, “I am compelled.”

And so, for two months I walked around saying, “I'm compelled, I'm compelled,” and people are like, to what? I'm like, I don't know. And you know it's one thing to get something deposited in your heart it's another thing to work it out and flesh it out and develop it and design it, and what could this concept be.

And so, I just naturally, we just set it up as an educational charity, and I said we're going to tell stories of past great Canadians passing the baton through the decades, and landing in this generation's hand, and asking them what are they compelled to do to help others.

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And so, it was a Canadian history show that we started with, but it was really a message of hope that students are part of a bigger picture, and they can live for something bigger than themselves. But within that 14 years ago it was really to bring the Indigenous stories to the forefront to restore the honour and the dignity of our people.

Joanna la Fleur: Wow I love that. Well and I'm hearing you talk about maybe this is my own words, but you're describing your connection to the past, your discovery of your connection to the past.

Your connection to the future, sort of this chain that I don't know if you would characterize it that way. But I'm hearing you, sort of awareness of where you are in relation to those coming after you, wanting to serve them but also about the past where you come from, that you're in the middle.

Crystal Lavallee: That's right, and I look at Inuit culture, like the Inuksuk was set up as a symbol to tell people, hey we were here and this is what we did, this is who we are. And it's just as simple as that, I think today I really have a heart for the next generation because they're struggling through identity, and they're struggling with purpose and meaning.

And you know we've got this ancestry in Canada, the "First Peoples" who set up things to ensure that the stories are passed forward. I know I remember sitting with an elder, they said we never usually tell kids what to do, we tell stories and the stories help the children identify the difference between good and bad.

So, for example, we talked about there's a wolf inside of all of us. And there there's two wolves inside of us, and one is kind and loving and gentle, and the other is mean and angry, and basically, you become the one you feed. And so, I remember adopting that concept into one of our first theatre shows, and we would have kids running at us you know running at the acting team after we're done saying, "feed the good wolf, feed the good wolf."

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But you can see the value of Indigenous storytelling upbringing and how it really gets to the heart of the student not just the mind.

Joanna la Fleur: Yeah, I love that. I mean I want to get to the question but about how this rediscovered or rediscovered Métis identity has helped you also rediscover your own faith or the Bible and how we tell those stories.

But I feel like maybe can we just back up a bit and tell us a little bit about when did your own faith become personal to you? I don't know if you can share a little bit of just like your context with that side of your story, or your family and your upbringing.

Crystal Lavallee: Yeah, I would love to. So, my mom was, she had a radical Jesus encounter when she first got married to my dad. So, he wasn't a Christian, she became one. My grandma, so her mom, was actually a psychic, and her mother was often looking for something different, and somebody told her that if you go to the land of Israel, you won't come back the same.

So, my grandma went, ended up encountering Jesus, got baptized in the Jordan River, came back, her whole life changed. She shut down her psychic practice or her clients, and then she just went gung-ho on following this man named Jesus. And so, she invited my mom to a meeting. My mom has a radical encounter with Jesus and her whole life changes.

So, then she starts taking my sister and I to you know Sunday school, and just different kid's events, and anything that would promote you know Jesus as your best friend, that is how my sister and I were raised. Jesus is with you, He's real, and so I remember these moments.

But it was when in grade nine I was 14, and I went to *Acquire the Fire* in Hamilton, which is a massive youth movement at the time. And my little heart, you know went with youth group just to have some fun, maybe look at the cute boys, and then their program started. And it was theatre, and it was music, and it was media, and they were talking about the cross, and this explosion goes off in my heart.

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And I call my mom and I'm like I need \$40 for a Bible and a t-shirt, and she thought what, and I'm like I need a Bible; I need a Bible. And so, they didn't have a lot back then, so they scraped together 40 bucks they gave it to me and I bought a t-shirt, and I bought a Bible.

And I read that thing as a teenager all through the summers, through the year, just because I wanted to figure out Who this person of Jesus was, and if He was real and what was His character, and I just wanted to know more because love had exploded.

Joanna la Fleur: Wow you said, "love had exploded?"

Crystal Lavallee: Yeah, it was a love. It was like you know, it was like when you have heaviness on your shoulders because everyone's going through something, so our family dynamic was going through a lot. And when you encounter it's like all this pressure, all the weight, all the sadness, just kind of blasted off and you are left with this incredible love that I could not find anywhere else.

And that love transformed me, and then later it was later in life that I discovered the different Scripture verses you know, "For God so loved the world that He gave..." (John 3:16).

But just deep diving into some of those verses is you know, just having the Bible just reading it, not even doing a course, or following a YouTube channel, it was just literally opening this hard copy and starting to read it.

A lot of things I didn't understand, but I remember words popping out of the page and the best way I could describe it, is like it felt like little candies or things that would be ministering straight to my heart. Like it was speaking and I remember highlighting the ones that would speak to me, and then I remember just writing them down and posting them on my wall.

Joanna la Fleur: And do you know, can you name any of them like is there one that you think of from those early days? You know, it still carries with you?

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Crystal Lavallee: Oh yeah, like there is there's a verse in Psalms that says, I translated it as this; "Love what's good, hate evil, and God will give you more joy than anyone else." (Psalms 45:7)

And so, in high school I was like okay, so when everybody else was going out to party or going out to watch like an R-rated movie, I just remember being like you know what, I'm going to choose to not go that way to see what happens.

And you know when I graduated high school everyone wrote in my yearbook, you are the happiest person we have ever met, and you are the most joyful person we have ever met. And I thought whoa, wait a second, so I remember that one very vividly.

Joanna la Fleur: Well and I wonder if, this is really cool, just I see like your enthusiasm, your engagement even now as we talk around Scripture, is meaningful that this book has made a meaningful impact in your life. But I was curious with as you're learning Indigenous stories, you're listening to these stories, you're discovering this, has that also helped you rediscover the Bible in some sense?

Like maybe there were some assumptions you had to unlearn or something, I'd love to see if that has changed how you engage the book?

Crystal Lavallee: Actually, I remember when we were about to launch our theatre show, and in our theatre show we had put Sir John A. Macdonald, the very first prime minister of Canada, we put him as a hero because his goal was for our land to become one great nation commanding the respect of the world.

So, to me, our former leaders were heroes, and we had worked with a first nation girl who was in our theatre show, and that was right when things were starting to unravel for the First Peoples.

So, the mom actually said you can't move forward with your theatre show because we don't agree with what you're saying about Sir John A. Macdonald. He called the Indigenous people savages, he was the one responsible for the Indian residential

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schools, and she said I'm sorry, but you cannot use our daughter's voiceover for your project.

And we were literally just about to step out, and Joanna, I remember we had two options; to just push that mom's opinion aside and say forget it, we've got a great show. Or really look at the reality of what was these skeletons in the closet coming to the forefront of our national landscape, and saying what are we going to do about it?

And so, I chose not to push that mom aside, but I said, wait what really happened in our land? And it was a friend who invited me to their northern Quebec community, 17 hours north, where I brought a camera and just started recording survivors of Indian residential schools.

And I wasn't familiar with that at the time, and I hit record on this camera that I barely knew how to use back then. And this, oh yeah, I was like is the audio even on, I don't know.

But this sweet man, he starts sharing his experiences, and you can hear me crying in the background, and my friend was behind, she put her hand on my back she started praying. And when he was done, we just sat there, and then I cried for probably like another five-hour drive, because I didn't know. And I kept saying, how did we not know? Like how do we not know?

And then as the layers unfold, because there's always layers, it's like the church did this to us it was Christian people. It was people who said that God was, you know in charge. It was multi denominations, and we've come to this place currently in 2026 where we have a national crisis, and if you're a Christian like this should bother you.

Where we've got thousands upon thousands of First Peoples who have been scarred by the black book, the Bible, and they don't want anything to do with Jesus, because Jesus in residential school was harsh and strict and mean. And it destroyed their lives, it destroyed their ability to have family, and so we've got a major challenge on our hands, and so what do you do?

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And so, with the stories that we've told, over 100 stories, I've sat with Christian First Nation Métis Inuit, and I've sat with traditional First Nation Métis Inuit, and it's mind-blowing what I've discovered. But I'll just pause there just to see if you have any thoughts or questions so far.

Joanna la Fleur: Well yeah, I mean there are people who this is, I think we all know them, people who have left their faith because of either harm done to them or harm done in the name of Jesus, that they've observed or critiqued, rightly so, they've critiqued it, I mean.

But how do you hold those together I mean did you have a faith crisis in this or maybe you're still saying, I'm still in maybe crisis isn't the word. I don't want to define that for you but how do you hold this like the goodness of Jesus and then the harm done in His name how do you carry those things?

Crystal Lavallee: Right, beautiful. So, I had a crisis.

I definitely had a crisis, because I was raised to be, "Canada is a Christian nation," and we were founded on Judeo-Christian values, and we were..., but we have a black mark.

And it took me a long time to wrestle through, when unmarked graves hit the news in 2021, which is also controversial now, which maybe could be a conversation for another day, or if somebody wants to know more, they can just reach out we'll have a chat. But when that happened it was the first time in 10 years where I really saw Canadians care. The first time they actually gave a rip about First Nation, Métis and Inuit, because it was children, and it was families, and everyone could identify.

And so, those stories moved it, did so much for our land. I don't think people understand what it did, it allowed survivors of Indian Residential School to get the pain out by telling their stories, because for years they suppressed it, for decades they suppressed it, because Canadians didn't believe them, they didn't believe them.

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Every time they spoke up, they didn't believe them. And so, I find a couple of things interesting, is that when the TRC, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission launched, it wasn't because the government of the day said we have done wrong, it's because 13,000 survivors of Indian Residential School spoke up, continued to speak up, and overwhelmed the court system. And the court looked at the government and said you need to do something about this.

And so, I look at those brave survivors, some of them are Christian today, some of them love Jesus, and some of them follow their traditional practices, but the common observation that I have concluded, Joanna, is that they all know who the Creator is.

And He has a name in everyone's different language, He has His own name, or other names for the Creator, and when you ask them to describe who the Creator is, they say, He's loving, He's kind, He's a healer.

When I started doing the research on a First Nations chief who is Christian, he tells the story, sorry he wasn't Christian, he tells the story about how their community was plagued by famine; so, we did a fast.

Day one, "Creator help us." No response. Day two, "Creator help us." No response. Day three, "Creator help us." No response. Day four, he has a vision going through a long tunnel towards a man on a cross bleeding, "Creator who is that?" Creator said, "That's My Son." Chief says, "What's your son's name?" Creator says to him, "Bright and Morning Star," and the chief goes, "Thank you for telling me His Name."

Because there's an importance in the name, so a lot of First Peoples knows a Creator, they know His character, but they've never been introduced to His Son. And so, when I look at Indian residential school, and the harms that were done, one elder told me that Jesus I met in a residential school was a fake, he's a fake, but the Jesus who set me free, He's the real Jesus. He's the loving Jesus.

And so, I find there's no right or wrong answer, like most people in Christendom they want, "well Jesus is the only..., Jesus is... Christianity..." But I feel like what God is

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doing for the First Peoples is very deep, and very, it's not, you can't fit them into a box, because it's big, and it's bigger than I will ever comprehend. And until you go there, which you should totally come with us on the trip. I think that would be amazing, they would love you because you're so cute and kind, and you can feel your heart, and that's what they're looking for.

So, I think when you look at the First Peoples, they carry the heart of God and I feel like they are more like the Creator, more like Jesus, than a lot of us down in the south in the cities in the hustle and bustle can connect with.

So, my faith was restored by the elders who spoke of a Jesus that healed them, that's how I reconciled. And I see the church capital "C" in Canada needing to do reconciliation the way that it is for the First Peoples, which is, come and eat with us, come and sit with us, and come and love us.

God's Book: The Series: Before we return to today's conversation, I wanted to give you a first look at an exciting new small group video series from the Canadian Bible Society. *God's Book: The Series*. What does the Bible really say about science, miracles, violence, and suffering.

God's Book: The Series, is tackling the Bible's toughest questions in an eight-part video series created for young adults and others who are asking honest questions about the Bible. Featuring Bible scholar, Dr. Andrew Ollerton, and three Canadian young adult hosts, *God's Book* explores some of the most challenging questions surrounding the Bible through thoughtful accessible conversations. The series is about to launch, and you can be the first to know when it arrives. Preview the trailer and download the free launch kit at godsbooktheseries.com, that's Gods book the series . com

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Joanna la Fleur: Well, you started early on in our conversation, you talked about the two wolves you know inside us, and it reminds me of that idea, of like Jesus' warning of there are wolves amongst the sheep, but like My sheep know My voice, they know Me, they will recognize Me.

And as you said there was a Jesus, or a false gospel, it wasn't good news it was very bad news that they were offered, so I'm really touched by what you're sharing. And there's more, there's so much more, so let's keep going.

I know you've listened to so many stories, and because you're a listener, I think you have the privilege then of holding them and maybe sharing them. But what is some of these stories? I think you have more than 100, I would say maybe it could be more than 500. But what have some of those stories taught you about God, and what have you learned from them that you couldn't have learned another way?

Crystal Lavallee: So, I'm going to go back, I remember sitting with an elder, knowledge keeper, traditional, and he gave me my traditional native name, and this is always really important in First Nations culture especially.

So, he looked at me, and he said your name translated in from Cree into English means, "Shining Rock Woman." Then he looked at me and he said your job is to speak on behalf of those who cannot.

And you know there's moments where people say things to you, and there's moments where they say things and you can feel them deeply resonating on the inside, and I it's like he confirmed what I had done up until that point and then he propelled me to continue with the work that we're doing.

So, I've had some beautiful opportunities to tell a lot of survivor stories of Indian residential school, not every person that I've interviewed or told their story for would

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be considered you know like a Jesus follower, but it's been blowing my mind, because the last person that I was with up in northern BC.

We were chatting in the car on the way to the longhouse, and he said you're reminding me of what the old ones used to speak about. And they don't use elders in their community they call them old ones. I said oh okay. He said yeah, the old ones they would speak about a man dressed in white, and He would come to our community.

I said man dressed in white huh? I was like who's that guy like who's that? He said, oh it's Jesus. And I thought, okay do you believe in Jesus? And he said, yes of course. And I said okay, are you a Christian.

He said well the labels, he's like I don't like the labels, he said, but the old ones used to speak of a man dressed in white coming into their community smiling at them, sitting with them, sharing a meal with them. And He would say it's good what's happening here, and then He would go on His way.

And so, stories like that, pretty powerful they mess with your theology a little bit, they mess with your upbringing, and the things that you've kind of established as core beliefs. So, you're like wait a second, and a lot of the elders have said, you know our ancestors received Christianity because it was so similar to how we were already living in our lives, so it wasn't a big dramatic change, but then because of the introduction of all of the systematic policies to really destroy the First Peoples, they've been trying to get back up on their feet.

And so, then I sit with like other you know First Nation pastors who start telling stories about how they weren't in a church, they didn't go to a service, but they were walking down the side of the road drunk. And as they were walking a bright light intervened and called their name. And then they said you know bright light, who is that, they call their name "Martin," and then that recognition of a name does something, and then they all say the same thing, like liquid love was poured out from the top of their head

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all throughout their body, and it's this love that compelled them to go back into their communities, and start telling other people about this love.

And I would say the common denominator on those stories would be not just like a mental choice of choosing Jesus, but a deep transformation that would be undeniable. So, you were once known in your community as a drunk, because everyone else is labeled the same, but then this love transforms you and it causes everybody to turn their neck and go what happened to him?

So, it is pretty powerful the testimonies that are coming out of the First People's communities, and such a privilege to hear, and then the wisdom coming from the elders.

And you know there's been so many stereotypes usually when I go and speak in different places, people often say you know their stereotypes is often the same, drunk, lazy, living off the system, and then I start telling these stories and it completely transforms their perspectives.

And then everybody wants to sign up and go on a trip, because reconciliation to the First Peoples is; come and eat with us, come and sit with us. And yes, it's important to change policy, and yes, it's important we have the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, Orange Shirt Day, you know. The National Indigenous Peoples Day, those are incredible markers to restore the dignity of a people group who are the gatekeepers of our land.

Those are incredibly important, but to not just, we always say to do a land acknowledgement without really having a friend who's First Nation, Métis, Inuit, is kind of irrelevant, it just defeats the whole purpose. But if you have a friend who lives on the land that you are on, then it's way more meaningful because you know them and its friendship, versus having to do something because you're told to do it. And so that's kind of where we're at now, is a lot of parents, students, and schools don't want to do the land acknowledgement because they feel like it's forced upon them.

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But the First Peoples are like yeah, we don't really want that, we want right relationship.

Joanna la Fleur: You talk about this friendship or relationship, and I think that plays out in how you do storytelling or how storytelling itself is relational, and it's about friendship.

So, what do you think that means or how would, you know, I'm thinking of all the people listening, to receive someone's story well, how do you listen like a friend?

Crystal Lavallee: Yeah, how I receive their stories is, I go in with no agenda, I have no preconceived idea. I mean I may understand a little bit of the economy or budget but I'm not going to go in there being like, well you know this is my preconceived...

You just got to go in with an open heart and when you go in with an open heart, and you listen to people's stories, you'll find that you've made friends for life. Like it's unfortunate that you know, all my friends span across the country and you're like multiple communities, and I can't get there all the time, but it's something that I carry in my heart.

And I say this all the time, my conviction is that First Nations youth will change the dynamic in the landscape of our land, because of their hearts. Their hearts are gold. I've never met, I mean kids are still kids, but their hearts are different and they're open, and I don't know if it's because of the brokenness, but the First Peoples of Canada carry a part of God's heart that the rest of us need.

They're not performance, it's not about platform, it's not about getting your name out there, it's about being who you were created to be, and be content in that.

Going you know at the beginning of the year, I went to Mistissini Cree Nation, where there was a revival that just poured out, Joanna, we drove 17 hours to get there. Took us two days, we're packed minus 35-degree weather, we're packed in this church

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hundreds of people, former drug addicts, former gang members, looks like life has worn them down, at the front crying and nobody asked them to go to the front.

And they're there crying out to God, and they're receiving this liquid love, and there was no religiosity in that room. I couldn't even, I was trying to find, who's in charge here, who's in charge, because I was trying to do stories.

Nobody, nobody, they said we want Jesus to get the glory. They had healings, hundreds into the thousands of people were getting ministered to and touched by the Lord in a renewal moment. And they said the police had reported we've never seen this before in our lifetime, we've received basically no calls for crime, like whatever you're doing, keep it up that prayer.

So, I feel like they chose the First People's first, because their hearts are not, it's not performance. I can't, I'm trying to articulate, I was like help me Lord to articulate differently what does that mean, because you know and sometimes in our regular settings, we have an agenda and a flow. But there the flow is like the river, you follow the river you don't follow an agenda, and it's beautiful, and it's family, and it's together.

Joanna la Fleur: And this is one of my questions as I'm hearing you speak is, I mean you tell stories and if you're creating a story for television or a book, or even just to tell someone else, tell me, or tell someone anywhere, we are naturally inclined to I think, you have there's a structure, there's a beginning, a middle, and end.

You want to tie it up with a bow, or like you know the quote-unquote, they lived happily ever after, but most stories and faith stories authentic, are not like that.

So how do you tell these stories authentically and maybe with some hope, but knowing we're not trying to force it into a very tidy narrative? Because people are... you're talking about... there's unresolved things to these stories. How do you work with that?

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Crystal Lavallee: Right okay, so my last story I did in BC Kamloops Indian residential school survivor. Joanna, I did my storyboard. I was like, this is how I want the story to go, here's how I'm going to add the graphics, and it's gonna be like Hollywood, and then we get there and everything that I had planned was just...

It just did not work out and that's okay, so I had to come home and go, okay. How are we going to tell this story, of a man who was in Indian residential school for 11 years, and he was hit on the mouth, lip split, bleeding, goes and gets addicted to alcohol, drugs, everything just pretty much destroys his life.

Until one day he discovers that he's got a spirit and a talent, and he becomes the word warrior. And then he wrote poems and his poems have now gone global, because of the poetry. And when you ask him, because he was abused, sexually abused, and I said to him, I asked the hard question you know, do you still struggle with suicide today?

And he said, no, because every time something tries to come against me, he's like my ancestors are like a shield, they say no, I say no, he said and I remember who I am. And I remember who I come from. And then I said, do you still what would you say to the person who violated you, when you're a kid? Because I got to ask those questions, like what would you, what's your message to him? He said, well, in order for myself to keep moving I have to forgive and I forgive because it's good for me.

And so even words like forgiveness, it's universal it's not just specific to Christian people, like forgiveness is a God concept, right? So how do you forgive when you don't have Jesus? Or maybe you do have Jesus, but we just don't know if you've... like it doesn't look like how we've known it to be.

Joanna la Fleur: Yeah, the stories are unfinished they're unpolished, and you're not trying to force them to be what they're not, but yeah, you're trying to find of course you're trying to find a way to tell it in the midst of its honest reality. I think maybe it's the same you know truth and reconciliation, truth and forgiveness, there's historic

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harm, but then there's also things that are still producing consequences today, things that are continuing to harm.

I mean that forgiveness is not just, I forgive the thing you did in the past but there are ongoing harms or wounds, so what does forgiveness mean in this context as you say maybe the Christian view? What is your sort of your Christian description of forgiveness, how do we get to this Christian forgiveness in it being historic but also in some ways current ongoing?

Crystal Lavallee: I always go back to my elders like. We had an opportunity last fall to go to take a delegation of Indigenous leaders to Israel, sponsored by the government of Israel, and you know everybody was unsure. So, we all thought okay let's pray, and we all felt peace. And so, we're thinking like are we crazy, and you know I was hired to tell the story, *The Lands Between Us*, is what it's called, you can watch it everywhere it's on online. There thelandsbetweenus.ca.

But it was these First Nation Metis and Inuit leaders who left Canada to go across the land to learn about the injustices of the minority groups in the land of Israel. And watching the connections walking through Yad Vashem, which is the World Holocaust Museum, with two survivors of Indian residential school. Man, I had my camera on this one lady, who's my elder, and she just sat there weeping because she saw all the shoes and it reminded her of all the moccasins.

And she said I didn't know that six million Jews were exterminated. And she said there's a history here and there's stories here much like the land and the stories that we have in Canada. And I remember sitting with Dr Wilton Littlechild, who, he was the one of the first lawyers, 'aboriginal lawyers in Canada. And he said when they did the TRC, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, he consulted Holocaust survivors, because he said how do we do this?

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And the Holocaust survivors said, don't let the stories die, keep them going. Holocaust survivors told our Indigenous leaders, forgive, find forgiveness, find it in your heart to forgive, release it, because if you don't, it'll eat you alive.

And so, I mean, I think I'm still working out that answer to that question, because I used to think it was this way, $a + b = c$, but now I can see it's not. And it's a journey, and you know right now, who is it that guy, that preacher he used to talk about, how never judge a man without first looking at the totality of his life because you may be looking at somebody here, but they still have all this to do. They still have all that to journey. And so, I think it's having grace for each other and having love in our hearts that comes from somewhere.

I feel like I have love in my heart for humanity because that comes from the Creator who loves humanity. And the more I release forgiveness the better I can love, this is a deep question, but I would say bring it back to what Jesus said. *"Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself."* (Matthew 22:37-39)

And if you don't love yourself, get the healing that you need because you're going to be a force on the earth if you love, versus if you're bitter.

And that's what the elders teach which is a beautiful thing. So, I always go back to the elders, the elders are some of the kindest, sweetest, wisest people I've ever met, and they've got those life experiences that really add to the journey.

We often talk about bundles, in different contexts so with The National Center for Truth and Reconciliation, we talk about carrying your bundle, which is the life that you've lived. And some of the things in your bundle are good, and some of them are not. But you got to lay them down at some point, because you can only have good in your bundle, and it's not good to carry the bitterness.

Joanna la Fleur: I mean, you use the word bitterness, I'm struck also maybe by the word grief. I think much of your work carries grief, but also there's joy, where does

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that joy come from? I don't mean just the Sunday school answer, down in my heart, but like you're also describing an overflowing of joy in the midst of great pain. Is joy part of that resistance and resilience?

Crystal Lavallee: Yeah, an elder told me, you know if you want to get over your sadness quickly, start laughing. And so, you get into a community where there's a lot of pain and you know you'll just start joking around. Like I don't know how many times I call my First Nation friends who are up in the north, and they'll say, "come on Lavallee, like you're so serious, like loosen up." And it's what they're trying to say is, hey remember that life's too short to carry that, you gotta laugh. And if you got a good sense of humor, and you get into those northern communities, you're just going to laugh because, it's they always say humor is one tool that the First Peoples use to get over the pain. But man, it's so fun, it is so fun, you'll be laughing, so I think that joy comes from being together.

You know they separated, the history is they separated and they isolated, and they divided, but when you're together, when you're together it's better.

Joanna la Fleur: So, I'm thinking about people who are listening, many would call themselves a Christian, and they may recognize today or just as they've heard the news as they've been more educated in the last years, that perhaps the version of history they got and they inherited was maybe not complete. I would say that it's been, it was an incomplete story at the very least.

So, what might you say to them who are listening as they're saying I don't know what to do with that, this is a much bigger issue than I as one person can know what to do. Where does that relationship, listening, reconciliation begin at sort of the individual level as people are listening to our conversation today?

Crystal Lavallee: All right I'm going to echo the words of my friend Carmen Jones who's from Neyaashiinigmiing, which is north of Owens Sound. He said, "We are not a problem to be solved, but a relationship to be had."

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And so, if you have an opportunity to go, if you have an opportunity to read a book at the library, like pick up a story. If you have an opportunity to listen to a podcast like this one, or if you go to imcompelled.ca, you can go and find some stories on our YouTube channel, not a lot, but we're building it.

But it's just having that posture to say, hey I understand that the First Peoples of Canada, the First Nations, the Métis, and the Inuit, they've been here since time immemorial. Their ancestors. Like, Waskaganish is 350 years old. Canada is not that old.

So, just remember that this land is incredibly diverse, and you know as much as it was established by confederation, before that, there was a people that lived here, that lived off the land, that loved the land, that loved the Creator, that loved their families, that loved the generation. And they didn't struggle.

So just remembering who they are as a people, and who they are today, they need our encouragement, they need our love, they need our prayers, they need our gifts sent to the north, and they would say that they need us.

So, understanding that relationship, two-way street, that they would give you the shirt off their back. And if you see, you know struggling on the streets, if you see them struggling you know downtown Edmonton, downtown Winnipeg, you know you've got urban Indigenous reserves is what they call them. It's a byproduct of intergenerational pain, and not knowing who they are.

And they need someone to shake their hand and say; hey you matter and you're loved. And if we can do that, we are we are making Canada a better place, we are making this Kanata, this village, a better place.

Joanna la Fleur: Crystal, thank you for your time there's so much more than we have time for today. I feel like every answer to your question could lead to a whole podcast uh in and of itself.

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But we're going to link people in the show notes to where to get all kinds of resources and some of the things you've referenced as well. But thank you so much for your work. I think we listening today are challenged and moved by what you're saying, and maybe also encouraged as God works in ways beyond our own understanding.

His ways of working amongst people and bringing His loved people are breaking our own understandings. Just as He did in the New Testament, constantly breaking what we thought it was supposed to look like.

So, we're reminded of that today. Thanks so much for being with us.