

ENGAGE

MAGAZINE

2023-24

Denver Seminary

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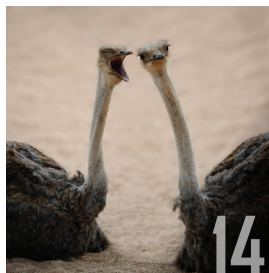
PREPARING FOR REDEEMPTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Dr. Michell Temple

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DENVER SEMINARY®

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Don't you just love redemption stories? You know how they typically unfold. Everything's great. Someone messes up, and everything's not so great. Their life falls apart, and it looks as if the consequences of their actions can't be fixed. But they resolve to make things right. And they do! Then everything's great again, and we all cheer and feel good about the end of the story. In the classic redemption story, the protagonist redeems themselves by doing something good to make everything great again.

The Bible is a different kind of redemption story. Everything's great. But then humanity messes up and everything falls apart. Our relationship with God, each other, and the creation is broken, and the consequences are severe. Death and evil enter the world. Sound familiar? At this point, however, the story of the Bible differs significantly from a typical redemption story. Humanity can't do anything to reverse the consequences of sin. Someone else has to step into our mess, rescue us from our sin, and restore our relationship with God, each other, and creation. In the Bible, God is the one who redeems. He rescues and restores us because we cannot do it ourselves.

Redemption always occurs in the context of a relationship. It restores bonds that have been broken and hopes that have been dashed. We've all driven our lives into a ditch at some point and needed someone to get down in the ditch with us and help us out. That is what Jesus did for us, and that's what we have the privilege of doing for others. Redemption is costly. It requires tenacious love, mercy, and grace. But it's always worth it.

At Denver Seminary, we believe that genuine life transformation occurs through redemptive relationships. Redemption, grace, and reconciliation are more than theological concepts for us—they are the breath of life that sustains us each and every moment of each and every day. We believe that redemption is made possible only through honesty with ourselves and others. Subsequently, we nurture interpersonal mentoring relationships that drag us out of our hiding places so that we can move into the light of Christ's searing gaze of love.

My prayer is that this issue of Engage magazine will draw you deeper into that gaze.





REDEEMED FROM DEATH
TO LIFE:
THE GOOD GIFTS
OF REDEMPTION

By Dr. Dave Buschart

REDEMPTION—OR AT LEAST THE TERM “REDEMPTION”—SEEMS TO BE AN APPEALING NOTION THESE DAYS. ONE FINDS THE TERM BEING USED TO BRAND AND PROMOTE EVERYTHING FROM VIDEO GAMES AND WOMEN’S CLOTHING TO CANNABIS AND WHISKEY. IN SOMEWHAT MORE SOBER ENDEAVORS, “REDEMPTION” IS A DESCRIPTOR FOR PARTICULAR KINDS OF FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS AND ADDICTION RECOVERY PROGRAMS.

Those of us who watch or listen to sports broadcasts have more than once heard about an athlete “redeeming” herself or himself. In these contexts, redemption often suggests someone triumphing after failure or doing something good after they have done something bad. One “redeems” oneself by following failure with success.

None of this is described in order to criticize these products and endeavors. Language is a public resource, and no supreme governing authority can dictate or prohibit the terms someone uses to describe their product or comment on an athlete’s performance. However, in a context where the language of redemption is so prevalent, those of us who claim Jesus Christ as our Redeemer need to be clear and correct in our understanding of what redemption is, in fact, all about. And those of us committed to a mission of preparing men and women to engage the needs of the world with the redemptive power of the gospel need to think, speak, and act very carefully with respect to redemption.

Here we will consider five questions about redemption. As will become evident, it is impossible to respond to any one of the questions without, at the same time, responding at least in part to one or more of the other questions. Our questions are these:

- What is “redemption”?
- Who redeems?
- How is redemption accomplished?
- Why is redemption needed?
- What are the results of redemption?

What is “redemption”? At its root, redemption is acquiring or purchasing something through payment. To redeem is to buy or purchase. Thus, it is understandable that the term would find a place in the language of finance and commerce. Here, our attention is focused on the biblical-theological vision of redemption—a biblical-

theological understanding of a key component of the divine economy.

In the Bible, one of the realities associated with redemption is sacrifice. An elaborate network of sacrifices is an integral element of God’s economy, as manifested in the Old Testament. From the detailed instructions for sacrifices in the first seven chapters of Leviticus to the psalmist’s cry, “Gather to me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!” (Psalm 50:5), to the prophets’ renunciation of sacrifices defiled by unworthy thoughts and actions, redemption entails sacrifice. This reality continues in the New Testament as well. For example, the apostle Paul exhorts the Christians at Ephesus to “live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph. 5:2). With this word from Paul, we have the answer to our second question.

However, in a context where the language of redemption is so prevalent, those of us who claim Jesus Christ as our Redeemer need to be clear and correct in our understanding of what redemption is, in fact, all about. And those of us committed to a mission of preparing men and women to engage the needs of the world with the redemptive power of the gospel need to think, speak, and act very carefully with respect to redemption.

Who redeems? Christian hymnody of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, among others, is replete with testimony to the one and only Redeemer. Pursuing “the Bread of Heaven,” the Welsh preacher and hymnist William Williams calls out, “Guide me, O my great Redeemer, pilgrim through this barren land; I am weak, but you are mighty; hold me with your powerful hand.”¹

¹William Williams, *Guide Me, Oh Thou Great Jehovah*, translated by Peter Williams.



Over a century later, Philip P. Bliss writes, “I will sing of my Redeemer and his wondrous love to me; on the cruel cross he suffered, from the curse to set me free. Sing, O sing of my Redeemer! With his blood he purchased me; on the cross he sealed my pardon, paid the debt, and made me free.”²

The Redeemer to whom these hymnists testify is, indeed, the same Redeemer whom the apostle Paul proclaimed in the letter to the Ephesians noted above. And in his letter to Titus, he teaches that “our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ . . . gave himself for us that he might redeem us” (Titus 2:13–14).

How is redemption accomplished? Far from being a financial transaction, the redemption of which the Bible speaks is intimately personal. As already indicated in both the Scriptures and the hymn texts observed above, redemption is accomplished by nothing other than Jesus Christ sacrificing Himself.

Without being disrespectful to the long-standing priestly system of sacrifices, the author of Hebrews proclaims that Christ is the High Priest who “appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of *himself*” (Heb 9:26, emphasis mine). It is this realization about how God has provided redemption that led the twentieth century theologian and martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, to decry “cheap grace” and to challenge us with a clarifying vision of

“costly grace.” He writes, “Above all, it [grace] is costly because it cost God the life of his Son.”³ Redemption is accomplished by nothing other and nothing less than the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, giving Himself.

Why is redemption needed? One of the distinctive dimensions of redemption in contrast with other forms of purchase is that redemption entails buying *back*. That is, it is a reclaiming of something that has been lost or a recovery of something that has been taken away. Thus, redemption does not address a condition that originally was, but rather a condition into which something or someone has fallen. It rescues from a degraded, corrupted state.

In the case of the redemption of human beings accomplished by God, the condition from which rescue is effected is nothing less than death. Not just degradation or corruption (though it includes those), but death. That is why Jesus promises, “Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death” (John 8:51). If redemption is going to be and mean anything at all, it must respond, and respond comprehensively, to the condition that is, not some desired or imagined condition. God’s redemptive work does just that. It is far from sentimental. Rather, it is utterly realistic. Thus, the Apostle Paul, in a most personal way, declares, “The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the

²Philip P. Bliss, *I Will Sing of My Redeemer*, 1876.

³Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, rev. ed., trans. R. H. Fuller (New York, NY: MacMillan, 1963) 48, emphasis original.

foremost” (1 Tim 1:15). Redemption is the reason that Christ came. As He Himself said, “For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). What good news! Yet, there is more.

What are the results of redemption? The results of this good news are many—too many to describe here. Indeed, Jesus says, “A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be put into your lap” (Luke 6:38). Here we will briefly describe just some of the results, some of the good gifts, of redemption.

The first and most fundamental of these is life itself. We are redeemed from death to life. Historically, and at its best, the evangelical tradition of Christianity is associated with proclaiming and living the good news that through Christ we can be “born again” (see John 3:3–7 and 1 Pet. 1:23). This is because, as Paul writes, “God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ” (Eph. 2:4–5).

We are redeemed from slavery to sin into freedom in Christ (Rom. 6:6, 16–17, 20). The gracious power of God which brings us from death to life brings us into a particular form of life—a life of freedom. As Jesus says, “If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36).

We are redeemed from death to life. Historically, and at its best, the evangelical tradition of Christianity is associated with proclaiming and living the good news that through Christ we can be “born again”.

Because of the appeal and prevalence of the notion of “redemption,” we began this essay by observing the need to think carefully about redemption in a distinctively Christian way. The same is true of the notion of “freedom.” So, we conclude with two brief but important observations about the distinct kind of freedom into which redemption delivers us. It is freedom “for.”

Freedom in Christ is freedom for obedience. Bonhoeffer’s view of grace, noted above, did not end with the assertion that it is “costly.” He goes on to stress that “what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us.”⁴ The only genuine response that can be made to the redemption that cost the life of God’s Son is thanks made manifest in obedience to God. Indeed, a sometimes-neglected

instruction within what is often called Jesus’ “Great Commission” is the commission to teach followers of Christ to “obey everything” that He “commanded.” Prominent among His commands is the command to love others.

Freedom in Christ is freedom for others. Freed from the felt need and fruitless efforts to save ourselves, we are freed to give our time, our energies, our selves to serve others. Having vigorously called the Christians at Galatia to live in the freedom of redemption, Paul also calls them not to use this redemption-freedom for “self-indulgence,” but rather to “serve one another humbly in love” (Gal. 5:13 NIV). This is not “freedom” as the world gives it, but freedom as Christ gives it. Thanks be to God!

Freedom in Christ is freedom for others. Freed from the felt need and fruitless efforts to save ourselves, we are freed to give our time, our energies, our selves to serve others.



Dr. David Buschart

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⁴Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 48.

*Scripture verses are NRSVA, unless otherwise cited.

PREPARING FOR REDEEMPTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Dr. Michell Temple

THE CONCEPT OF REDEMPTIVE RELATIONSHIPS CAPTIVATED ME SHORTLY AFTER ARRIVING AT DENVER SEMINARY, WHERE REDEMPTIVE RELATIONSHIPS ARE FIRMLY ROOTED AS A CORE COMMITMENT. HERE, WE MOVE TOWARD OTHERS BELIEVING THEY THEMSELVES ARE NEW CREATURES IN CHRIST, ROUSING HUMBLeness, ACCEPTING BROKENNESS, AND GAINING A WILLINGNESS TO EVALUATE THEMSELVES HONESTLY BASED ON THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL. WE DELIBERATELY RELATE COMPASSIONATELY TOWARD THOSE DIFFERENT FROM OURSELVES.

The more I consider this core commitment, the more my Christian imagination becomes inspired to animate redemptive relationships as a viable option that helps people to live well within and across human difference. There is significant theological discourse and social science research that identifies strategies to transform destructive human relationship dynamics into constructive ones. The most prominent methods include cultural humility, inter-group and inter-faith dialogues, racial reconciliation, and diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging initiatives. Research has consistently shown that modifying destructive relationships and experiencing more constructive interactions includes an individual awareness of the plausibility of injustice and the probability that people can perpetuate social inequalities.¹ Yet, some people still appear resolute to benefit from power and privilege while other people are trapped in a cycle of exploitation and marginalization. I imagine that constructive relationships function as a core part of fostering redemptive relationships.

It seems relevant to include another approach to help people relate well. Imagine the possibility of the more than two billion plus adult Christians inhabiting the globe practicing redemptive relationships. It may be difficult to envision us living well with people different from ourselves within the current social context. Thankfully, Scripture offers clarity and instruction to compensate for our limited imaginations.

A DAMASCUS AWAKENING

From Genesis to Revelation, the pathway to move

relationships beyond constructive to redemptive is illuminated in the lives of those such as Hannah, David, Zacchaeus, the Samaritan woman, and Saul. There are many other examples, but Saul of Tarsus' experience on the road to Damascus seems to make him an exemplar. Saul's encounter with the voice of Jesus re-routed his life's trajectory from persecutor of Christians to the Apostle Paul. Prior to his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, Saul was traveling to imprison and murder Christians. I imagine in the moment when Saul heard, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4), he was confronted with sin's impact on relationships. Saul became keenly aware of his capability of behaving and culpability for having behaved destructively. He came to know his need for salvation, the need for truthful evaluation of self as a sinner redeemed by Jesus the Christ.

After his transformation, Paul believed he was a new creature in Christ. He was equipped to preach the message of salvation through an embodiment of both humbleness and brokenness. Working to spread the good news of Jesus, Paul compassionately moved toward others different from himself.

I imagine that the relational content of Paul's writings offers clarity on how believers are to love one another as Jesus commanded. Our God knew that we needed instructions. Paul wrote to various groups concerning the attitudes and behaviors that believers need to enter into redeeming relationships on earth. In doing so, Paul consistently reminds us of three realities.

¹ Bennett, M. (1993). Towards ethno-relativism: A developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. In M. Paige (Ed.), *Education for intercultural experience* (pp. 21-71). Intercultural Press;

Hackett, C. & McClendon, D. (2015, April 5). *Christians remain world's largest religious group, but they are declining in Europe*.

Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/05/christians-remain-worlds-largest-religious-group-but-they-are-declining-in-europe/>;

Oyakawa, M. (2019). Racial reconciliation as a suppressive frame in evangelical multiracial churches. *Sociology of Religion: A Quarterly Review*, 80(4). doi:10.1093/socrel/srz003;

Sue, D., Capodilupo, C., Torino, G., Bucceri, J., Holder, A., Nadal, K., & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist*, 62(4), 271-286. doi:10.1037/0003-066x.62.4.171.



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First, he reminds believers that the presence of sin permeates humanity and manifests itself in behaviors. Second, he reminds us that sin results in death relationally, spiritually, and physically. Third, when believers are saved, we are justified by faith, which prepares us to obey God by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. God's inspired words penned by Paul introduce a pathway to redemptive relationships that we can journey along if we firmly believe that our proneness to disobey God yields lifeless relationships, spirituality, and living. Like Paul experienced and recorded in Scripture, we must admit that our sin makes it possible for us to persecute others, directly and indirectly. We must have a Damascus awakening to prepare ourselves for redemptive relationships.

Like Paul experienced and recorded in Scripture, we must admit that our sin makes it possible for us to persecute others, directly and indirectly. We must have a Damascus awakening to prepare ourselves for redemptive relationships.

In the present sociocultural context, increasing our awareness of the divisive and harmful patterns of relationships does not require the voice of Jesus to call us by name. The Holy Spirit lives in all believers. If we are open to being transformed by the renewing of our minds, the Holy Spirit will help us enlarge our

understanding of ourselves. We can ask the Holy Spirit to burden our hearts and allow us to recognize our judgmental and condemning thoughts about people who are different from us.

Difference can be identified with but not limited to religion/spirituality, gender or affectual identity, race/ethnicity, age, nationality, language, political ideology, or disability status. We can invite the Holy Spirit to help us notice our internal cues of disdain toward human difference, both conscious and unconscious.

CREATING OUR OWN DAMASCUS AWAKENING

One strategy we can use to create an opportunity for a Damascus awakening is taking a survey of the relationships we have with people different from us. We can use the contacts in our mobile devices to take mental note of how the people we are connected to are dissimilar from us. Starting from the top of the contact list with the list of generic human differences from above, we can reflect on the quality of our relationships (destructive, constructive, redemptive) with these people. We can notice patterns about the similarities between ourselves and others based on those perceived qualities. We can also use paper and pencil to gain insight by drawing four concentric circles and labeling them from the inside out by depth of relationship, e.g., closest, closer, close, acquaintance. Write a list of people, such as friends, family, and coworkers. Place each person in the appropriate circle. Once everyone is in a circle, reflect on how these people are different from you.



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The purpose of a Damascus awakening is to reveal the pathway to transformational obedience that can produce redemptive relationships. I consider a Damascus awakening as something that brings individual awareness of the reality of oppression within and across human difference. It is the believer's confession of having contributed to and maintained destructive relationship patterns. It is an acceptance that we must be liberated from our relational sin by the truth of the gospel and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. In our moment of awakening, we must guard our hearts from shame, self-depreciation, or condemnation because these feelings oppose the nature of God. Instead, we must open our hearts to being convicted of our rebellion. We must make way for the Holy Spirit to change us for God's glory. Once we experience a Damascus awakening, if we are willing, like Paul, we can move toward others redemptively, believing that we ourselves are new creatures in Christ.

Dr. Michell Temple

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RESTORED THROUGH TEARS

*For one Denver Seminary student,
one of the greatest lessons was
learning how to grieve.*

Written by Ashley Emmert
Edited by Matt Evans

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For Johneen Buffard, an MA Christian Formation student at Denver Seminary, the Training and Mentoring (TM) program became a healing, life-altering experience.

Johneen's journey at Denver Seminary began after her mother passed away. "She was an influential person in my life, and I had worked for twenty-five years to provide for her," Johneen said. "When she passed away, I lost my motivation."

The company she worked for offered her a sabbatical, and Johnneen took that time to travel. During her travels, she felt a yearning for God in a way she hadn't in a long time. Eventually, Johnneen moved to Denver to be closer to family, and as her desire for the Lord continued to grow, a longing to pursue seminary education blossomed. Her uncle encouraged her to find an institution grounded in God's work and the mission of Christ. Denver Seminary popped to the top of her list, and she began her seminary journey.

Johnneen has pursued her degree at Denver Seminary part time while continuing her full-time job in the tech industry. Although the TM program is an integral part of every student's experience, designed to develop them as life-long learners with a greater ability to discern, develop, manage, and reflect on their experiences, it can often be overlooked amid the many classes.

"I didn't begin Training and Mentoring until several years into my studies," Johnneen explained. "Once I started, it really did anchor some things for me."

Johnneen's first step was to find a mentor. She engaged with Richard Powell, the pastor of spiritual formation at Colorado Community Church. "He was a patient, caring, loving man who could hold me accountable," she said. "It was a beautiful experience."

Her next step was to identify a character trait or discipline she wanted to grow in. She chose joy. Joy was a difficult area for her to seek growth, she acknowledged, as she was grieving the losses of her mother, her son, and her brother over the years.

"I didn't know how to grieve or express my emotions," Johnneen said. Yet, discovering that her focus on joy coincided with a course on grief and loss marked the beginning of her healing. "While I was working through my assignments, I got stuck. The class was preparing us for counseling work, but I needed to work through my grief as a patient first," she said.

Pastor Powell helped Johnneen see the connection between why she was stuck in her coursework and her grief and loss. "I needed to experience and process my deep grief that I didn't realize was still there and celebrate the lives that were lost. As I processed my grief, I was able to work on joy," she said.

Johnneen experienced an unexpected gift as well—the gift of tears. "Before, I rarely cried. I now realize that it's okay to grieve openly," adding that there are times she cries with no obvious explanation as to why. "But it's in the tears that God is restoring me," she said. "I may not understand what He is restoring, but I no longer shy away from the tears. And this all started with Training and Mentoring."

Johnneen's experience with TM also became its own lesson on grief. During her last semester of TM, Pastor Powell was diagnosed with cancer and passed away, leaving Johnneen to experience this grief as well.

"It was devastating, but what I learned about grief, loss, and joy from Pastor Powell helped me grieve for him in a healthy way," she said.

Johnneen hopes Denver Seminary students will put effort into their Training and Mentoring courses. "I am a better lover of God because of Denver Seminary. If we allow God to do transformational character work in us, we can truly meet the mission to engage the needs of the world with the gospel."



Johnneen Buffard, student, MA in Christian Formation





IS CONVERSATION TOO RISKY?

By Debra Anderson

After teaching a class on mentored formation, my colleague relayed to me a student's question, "What if my mentor asks me to reveal my deeper thoughts?" They had been in discussion about how to identify a mentor who can observe and companion their experiences and questions in the context of their lives. His question revealed that he was weighing the risk of honest conversation.

As I led the same course in a different semester, one of my learners in her fifties looked doubtful as she asked me, "What do I talk about with a mentor?" Other students nodded, anticipating my response. All understood the benefit of a mentor but expressed a lack of skill in holding suitable conversations.

Mentoring is a reflective relationship expressed in conversation and commitment as well as in silence and subtle nonverbals. My colleagues and I have long taught that mentoring is a mutual relationship for the purpose of growth. Mentoring, in our learning context, allows each person to grow, to be seen, to see one another, and to see themselves more clearly in light of who Christ is. Mentoring that informs can be helpful at times, such as teacher to student or master to apprentice. But, in our courses, we invite students to engage in mentoring conversations that transform.

There have always been skeptics. From time to time, learners have asked me, "Do we have data that shows that this works?" We do. But concerns are now shifting from skepticism toward anxiety—beyond needing proof to needing peace about the process. For some, the shift has been swift from, "I wish I had a mentor," to, "I cannot conceive of trusting someone to mentor me."

Much has been written elsewhere about the ways the pandemic era changed how we connect. Our collective move back toward fully-engaged, redemptive relationships feels sluggish. Though we longed to be back together, many of us had conversations that wounded us in the meantime. The act of talking transformatively, face to face, according to another student, is now "implausible."

Henri Nouwen once journaled, "It always strikes me how grateful people are for a good spiritual conversation, but also how hard it is to make such a conversation happen."¹ Why is such conversation so difficult to have?

WHAT ARE WE TURNING FROM?

In the digital age of online conversation,

discussion dominates our talk-style. This form of conversation analyzes an idea or draws a conclusion. Discussions can be laced with competition. We often engage it at the expense of the other.

But we have not shifted away from discussion. What we've turned from is dialogue.

Dialogue takes place between people who seek to draw out one another's voices. It nurtures a goal of understanding. Each speaker is a listener who can be heard and known. Thus, dialogue feels risky. It requires us to open ourselves to new knowledge, to see new needs, and even to change our minds. Among the forms of communication, dialogue has retreated like a turtle hibernating in the mud of a frozen pond. The colder the conversation's temperature gets, the lower our energy.

Communication experts talk about the enemies to deeper conversation, detractors that we have nurtured during this pandemic era. First, prior to the pandemic, Christopher C. Smith wrote about conversation in Christian communities and noted that "anonymity and disengagement" are "antithetical to conversation."² Anonymity and disengagement were well-used tactics during lockdown. Many grew accustomed to relational distance, both physically and emotionally. As social conversation turned to debate and diatribe, some disengaged or avoided associations. Confidence in conversational skills diminished when people couldn't find a way around dissention.

Dialogue takes place between people who seek to draw out one another's voices. It nurtures a goal of understanding. Each speaker is a listener who can be heard and known. Thus, dialogue feels risky. It requires us to open ourselves to new knowledge, to see new needs, and even to change our minds. Among the forms of communication, dialogue has retreated like a turtle hibernating in the mud of a frozen pond. The colder the conversation's temperature gets, the lower our energy.

A second enemy was noted by a team of authors exploring formational mentoring communities in higher education. They wrote, "In a highly

¹Henri Nouwen and Robert Durbach, "Unpublished Journal" in *Seeds of Hope: A Henri Nouwen Reader* (New York: Image Books, 1997), 115.

²C. Christopher Smith, *The Virtue of Dialogue: Conversation as a Hopeful Practice of Church Communities*. (Englewood, CO: Patheos Press, 2012), loc 463, Kindle.

competitive and judgmental culture, investment in relationships requires courage.”³ We have all watched the past few years fertilize postures of competition and judgment. Disputes and denunciations have germinated in our relational soil. If we couldn’t tolerate pushing against judgment and competition, we likely chose anonymity and disengagement.

Neither of these enemies takes us toward mutuality. Is the path to cooperative, two-way dialogue really too risky?

THE RISK OF CONVERSATION

Deeper conversations can feel demanding. Dialogue is not superficial, brief, or convenient. It’s still kind to savor long talks. It’s generous to go out of our way to have them. Our nearness to one another is an act of goodness. We lose some character development when we lose dialogue.

Long before the pandemic developed, Sherry Turkle’s research claimed that we were in a “flight from conversation” due to our technological dependency. Her work prophetically notes, “At first we speak through machines and forget how essential face-to-face conversation is to our relationships, our creativity, and our capacity for empathy.”⁴ Relying on texts and emails full of emojis—fragments of conversations—rather than words maintains networks at the cost of formation.

In quarantine, our desire for deeper, mutual conversation may have grown drowsy, but it didn’t disappear. Video conference platforms helped us achieve tasks, but made us restless for human presence, particularly when we Zoomed with counselors, mentors, and loved ones. Writing about the use of video platforms for the practice of conference, Joanne Jung asserts, “Though offline meetings are sporadic, as members grow closer through the video conferences, the desire to meet more often in person also grows.”⁵ Reanimating this desire to converse in person again is challenged by our belief that our adaptations during isolation were entirely positive.⁶

Jung adds that our electronic modalities haven’t provided the level of connection we long for. “The addictive quality of our devices has caused



people to be uncomfortable around each other and incapable of meaningful conversation.”⁷ One student commented that in this technological age, meeting a mentor in person feels restrictive. I wonder: Does it just feel too vulnerable?

Turkle’s research answers this sentiment. “We fear the risks and disappointments of relationships with our fellow humans. We expect more from technology and less from each other.”⁸ Connection doesn’t equal relationship, but conversation can cultivate relationship if we’ll take the risk of messiness. In spite of our big jumps away from dialogue, what we need to learn is how to stay put.

TURNING TOWARD CONVERSATION

If we are going to invest in transformative

³Peter Felten, H-Dirksen L. Bauman, Aaron Kheriaty, and Edward Taylor, *Transformative Conversations: A Guide to Mentoring Communities Among Colleagues in Higher Education* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2013), 39.

⁴Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: A Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 16–17.

⁵Joanne J. Jung, *The Lost Discipline of Conversation: Surprising Lessons in Spiritual Formation Drawn from the English Puritans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 149.

⁶Salvador Rodriguez, “As the pandemic fades, some Americans are anxious about a return to normal,” CNBC.com, March 20, 2021, <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/03/20/why-some-are-averse-to-return-to-normal-post-covid.html>.

⁷Jung, 152.

⁸Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 13.

conversations with mentors as well as loved ones, we can begin by examining our assumptions. Jim Knight suggests that our dialogue will take a more beneficial turn if we explore our beliefs. Do we see conversation partners as equals? Do we believe the other has something to say that we want to hear? Do we believe others should have autonomy in their thought life? Is our ability to judge others threatened by conversation? Is conversation a monologue, or a back-and-forth experience? Should conversation be life-giving, or something else?⁹

Connection doesn't equal relationship, but conversation can cultivate relationship if we'll take the risk of messiness. In spite of our big jumps away from dialogue, what we need to learn is how to stay put.

With our beliefs clarified, faithful dialogue can follow suit and tend to more than our need for sense-making, but to our very souls. Jung offers some helpful advice:

- Eliminate competing distractions, such as all devices.
- Make time for conversation at your best time of day.
- Look at the speaker's eyes.
- Listen and do not worry about your response.
- Let the conversation inform your prayers.¹⁰

If we are persuaded—or worse, manipulated—we are not partners in a dialogue. We have suffered many losses in the preceding years. Should mutually transformative conversations be one of them?

Debra Anderson is an assistant professor of Training and Mentoring, and chair of the Training and Mentoring Curriculum. She holds an MA in Christian Education from Gateway Seminary and draws from over thirty years of ministry experience to equip students to understand and pursue character formation and professional development.



⁹Jim Knight, *Better Conversations: Coaching Ourselves and Each Other to be More Credible, Caring, and Connected* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2016), 21–40.

¹⁰Jung, 55.



Twenty-Five Years of Training and Mentoring

In 1998, Denver Seminary dedicated itself to integrating mentored, contextualized learning into its core curriculum. This desire for students to be formed wholistically during their academic endeavors led to the creation of the novel Training and Mentoring (TM) department.

Of this new venture, a student wrote, “For years I have set goals for ‘knowing’ and ‘doing,’ and I have enjoyed the growth I’ve experienced. But it has been here at Seminary that I have learned the importance of my ‘being.’”

Today, TM empowers students to direct and participate in their personal and professional formation for the sake of Christ and others. Our graduates often cite their TM experience as a catalyst for honing life-long learning skills.

“When my supervisor commented on how central my goals had been, I smiled as different memories from my TM experience came to mind,” said a Denver Seminary alum. “I felt confident and excited to continue forming my goals through cognitive, relational, and experiential lenses, which was the framework deeply ingrained in TM.”

Over these twenty-five years, a mentoring culture has deeply woven its way through our students’ communities as their own mentors have grown: “Mentoring has been a learning time for me as well. It helped me to address the stagnant areas in my own personal journey with the Lord. I have turned to mentors myself now!”

Nathan Scherrer, MA, assistant professor of Training and Mentoring

NOTABLE

News from the
Denver Seminary community.



F.Y.I.

Grieving the Loss of a Friend

On Thursday, April 6, Board of Trustees member Sarah Johnson passed into the presence of Jesus. After a long journey with cancer, she passed at home with her husband, Roger, and their three children and five grandchildren at her side. Sarah lived with courage, faith, and grace, never allowing the cancer to define her final years. Her warmth and insight touched us all. We miss her dearly and grieve her passing.



Dr. Jan McCormack Receives Distinguished Service Award

Dr. Jan McCormack, associate professor and chair of the Chaplaincy and Pastoral Counseling programs, received the Distinguished Service Award by the Association of Professional Chaplains at their national conference in Houston in June. The award celebrates Jan's contributions for promoting the standard of professional chaplaincy in an exemplary manner.

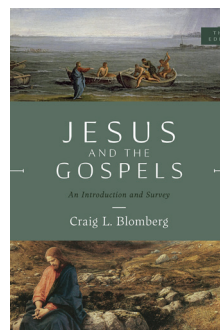


Dr. Doug Moo Guides the Shannon Preaching Lectureship

Fifty ministry leaders, students, and alumni studied the book of Hebrews in June under the guidance of Dr. Doug Moo, professor of New Testament emeritus at Wheaton College, during the Shannon Preaching Lectureship. Drs. Scott Wenig, the Haddon W. Robinson chair of Biblical Preaching, and Steve Mathewson, director of the Doctor of Ministry program at Western Seminary, facilitated group discussion. Participants left with the foundation of a sermon series on Hebrews.



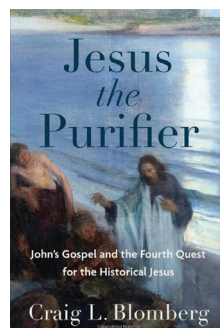
Faculty Publications



Dr. Craig Blomberg
PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF NEW TESTAMENT

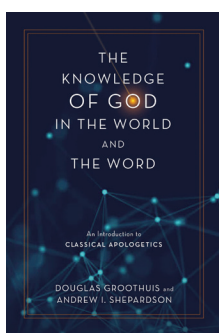
*Jesus and the Gospels,
Third Edition*

This revised third edition of *Jesus and the Gospels* prepares readers for an in-depth exploration of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. New Testament scholar Dr. Craig Blomberg considers the Gospels' historical context while examining fresh scholarship, critical methods, and contemporary applications for today.



*Jesus the Purifier: John's Gospel
and the Fourth Quest for the
Historical Jesus*

Dr. Craig Blomberg advances the idea that the Gospel of John is a viable and valuable source for studying the historical Jesus. Blomberg writes that the data from John should be integrated with that of the Synoptics, which will yield additional insights into Jesus' emphases and ministry. Blomberg also explores the practical and contemporary applications of Jesus the purifier.

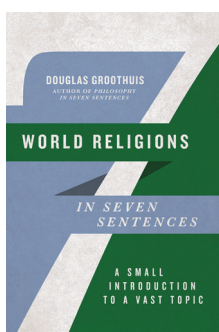


Dr. Douglas Groothuis
PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Dr. Andrew “Ike” Shephardson
ADJUNCT FACULTY, CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

The Knowledge of God in the World and the Word: An Introduction to Classical Apologetics

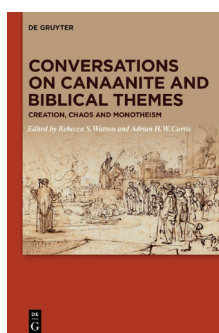
This introduction to classical apologetics addresses the most common objections to natural theology. Readers will discover an easy point of entry into understanding why Christian beliefs about Jesus are true and rational. Further, the authors apply the power of classical apologetics to Christian ministry.



Dr. Douglas Groothuis
PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY

World Religions in Seven Sentences

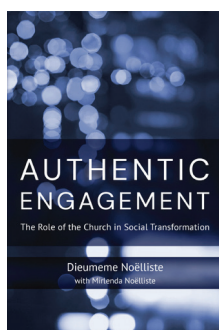
Understanding the beliefs and practices of other faiths is essential not just to the task of interreligious dialogue, but also to grasping one's own faith. In this brief volume in IVP Academic's Introductions in Seven Sentences, Dr. Groothuis uses a single sentence representing each of several world religions as a way to open readers to their depth and complexity.



Dr. Richard Hess (Contributor)
DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR OF OLD TESTAMENT AND SEMITIC LANGUAGES

Conversations on Canaanite and Biblical Themes: Creation, Chaos and Monotheism

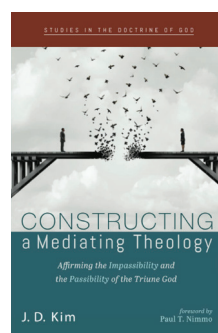
Arguments over the relationship between Canaanite and Israelite religion often derive from fundamental differences in presupposition, methodology, and definition, yet debate typically focuses on details and encourages polarization between opposing views, inhibiting progress. This volume seeks to initiate a cultural change in scholarly practice by setting up dialogues between pairs of experts in the field who hold contrasting views.



Dr. Dieumeme Noëlste
PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGICAL ETHICS; VERNON GROUNDS CHAIR OF PASTORAL MINISTRY AND SOCIAL ETHICS

Authentic Engagement: The Role of the Church in Social Transformation

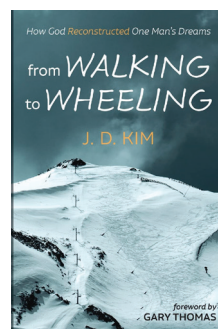
Arguing that the Church has a mandate to see the world transformed, the authors suggest a model of engagement that would that would empower believers to act as agents of transformation, while remaining deeply rooted in their calling as ambassadors of a heavenly kingdom.



Dr. J.D. Kim
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, DMIN KOREAN GLOBAL CAMPUS; ADJUNCT FACULTY, THEOLOGY

Constructing a Mediating Theology: Affirming the Impassibility and the Passibility of the Triune God

Two major views have been advanced in the history of Christian theology to describe God's response to the suffering of the world: divine impassibility and divine passibility. A third, mediating position affirms both the impassibility and the passibility of God. This book sets out its own constructive understanding of a mediating position.



From Walking to Wheeling: How God Reconstructed One Man's Dreams

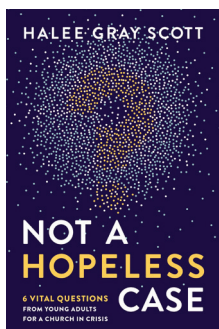
In this memoir, Dr. Kim details his search for healing from God after a snowboarding accident permanently altered his hopes and dreams. Dr. Kim provides glimpses into his prodigal-son past, offers an unvarnished account of living with a spinal cord injury, and shares the redemptive story that unfolded as his brokenness led him to pursue God and reconstruct new dreams for his life.



Dr. Don Payne (Contributor)
VICE PRESIDENT OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS;
ACADEMIC DEAN; PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY

Divine Suffering: Theology, History, and Church Mission

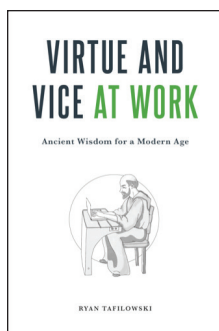
In addition to covering topics like the suffering of the Father in the Son and God's cruciform vulnerability, this book explores how divine suffering animates the Christian gospel and resonates in the ongoing persecution of believers. Both scholars and seekers will find ample opportunity for theological challenge, biblical insight, and missional hope.



Dr. Halee Scott
DIRECTOR OF THE YOUNG ADULT INITIATIVE

Not a Hopeless Case: 6 Vital Questions from Young Adults for a Church in Crisis

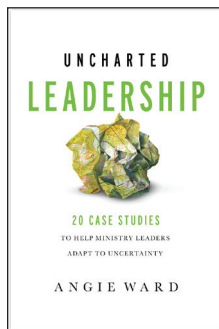
This book tells the story of the questions of young adults about faith and spirituality and the questions of pastors who seek to find them.



Dr. Ryan Tafilowski
CHAIR OF THE THEOLOGY DEPARTMENT;
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY

Virtue and Vice at Work: Ancient Wisdom for a Modern Age

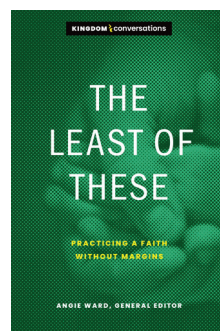
Dr. Ryan Tafilowski explores five classical vices—lust, acedia, gluttony, greed, and vainglory—and examines how they distort our everyday work. Each chapter outlines practices to support the cultivation of virtue and transform the way we see our work, our colleagues, and our organizations.



Dr. Angie Ward
DIRECTOR OF THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY PROGRAM; ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF LEADERSHIP AND MINISTRY

Uncharted Leadership: 20 Case Studies to Help Ministry Leaders Adapt to Uncertainty

Real life ministry is complicated. Dr. Angie Ward brings the classroom to the reader, using thought-provoking questions, commentary, and recommended resources to expand the leader's empathy, understanding, awareness, and skill, helping leaders move beyond simple answers to deep individual and organizational understanding and transformation.



Dr. Angie Ward (Editor)
DIRECTOR OF THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY PROGRAM; ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF LEADERSHIP AND MINISTRY
Dr. David Hionides (Contributor)
DIRECTOR OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH AND EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS; ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY

The Least of These: Practicing a Faith without Margins

What is our responsibility to alleviate human suffering this side of eternity? Our response to the least of these, Jesus tells us, impacts not only those in need but also our own hearts and potentially even our salvation. This third book in the Kingdom Conversations series brings together a collection of respected Christian thought leaders to provide a multifaceted look at the body of Christ's relationship and responsibility to the marginalized of our society.

Dr. David Hionides, Director of Institutional Research and Educational Systems and Assistant Professor of Theology

Dr. David Hionides, Denver Seminary's director of Institutional Research and Educational Systems and assistant professor of Theology, has a heart for theological higher education. In his role, he provides data, analysis, and evaluation for the continuous improvement of Denver Seminary and for leadership's decision making. His team also reports to accreditation entities at the state and national level.

With over twelve years of experience in institutional research, David sees the value in deep examinations of an institution, as well as the negative impacts that can result from neglecting to properly examine themselves and act upon those findings. "Institutional Research and Educational Systems provide a mirror to the Seminary," David said. "Our work enables the fulfillment of our important and beautiful mission at Denver Seminary and improves our effectiveness in living it out. I pray God uses me to help us better carry out our mission in service to Him."

David holds a BA in Communications, a ThM in Historical Theology and Systematic Theology, and a PhD in Theological Studies. He's a West Bromwich Albion fan and has been married to his wife Heather for twelve years. They enjoy hiking and caring for their rescue dog Walter, five saltwater fish, and some coral.

SNAPSHOT

Dr. David Hionides



SERVE



Denver Seminary Resources

If you are looking for more ways to engage with Denver Seminary, here are a few additional resources for you.

Listen to "Engage360"

Engage360, Denver Seminary's podcast invites listeners in to a variety of conversations about issues affecting the Church. Explore theological and biblical discussions, and hear from a variety of voices. Among our alumni who have been on the podcast are:

Justin Reddick, MDiv: Prison, Art, and the Gospel

Dr. Liz Selzer, MDiv: Building a Career from Training and Mentoring

Brandon Washington, MA: A Rallying Call to Evangelicalism, A Burning House.

[DenverSeminary.edu/Podcast](https://denverseminary.edu/podcast)

Explore "In Perspective" Panels

Seminary faculty are joined by authors, pastors, scholars, and alumni for these conversations that cover a wide range of topics and theological viewpoints. Recent panels include:

The Place and Power of Liturgy

Faith, Work, and Rest

Old Testament God vs. New Testament God

[DenverSeminary.edu/Panel-Discussions](https://denverseminary.edu/Panel-Discussions)



The Gospel Initiative Update



The Gospel Initiative continues to grow as a voice for conversations around how the Church can provide a compelling and credible gospel witness. In 2022-23, through in-person and livestreamed events, participants engaged topics including abortion, immigration, and climate change. Compelling and Credible Witness conferences included the following:

October 2022

THE CHURCH AND ABORTION

Dr. Julie Hanlon Rubio, associate dean and professor of Christian social ethics, Santa Clara University

Dr. Andrew Walker, professor of Christian ethics and public theology, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

January 2023

THE CHURCH AND IMMIGRATION

Dr. Danny Carroll, professor of biblical studies and pedagogy, Wheaton College

Professor Michelle Ferrigno Warren, advocate, author, and speaker; co-founder of Open Door Ministries

Dr. Alexia Salvatierra, academic dean of the Centro Latino at Fuller Theological Seminary

May 2023

THE CHURCH AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Dr. Rachel Lamb, Board member for A Rocha USA and Tearfund USA, and founder of and senior advisor for the Young Evangelicals for Climate Action

Dr. Jessica Moerman, president and CEO, Evangelical Environmental Network

Additionally, Michael Bird, author of thirty books, and academic postgraduate coordinator and lecturer in theology at Ridley College, spoke on *Living as a Christian in a Secular Age*. Dr. Sandra Richter, the Robert H. Gundry Chair of Biblical Studies at Westmont College, spoke on *Should a Christian Be an Environmentalist?*

2023-24 COMPELLING AND CREDIBLE WITNESS CONFERENCES

October 13, 2023

THE CHURCH AND CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

Dr. Samuel Perry, professor of sociology, University of Oklahoma

Rev. David Ritchie, lead pastor, Redeemer Christian Church in Amarillo, TX; author, *Why Do the Nations Rage? The Demonic Origin of Nationalism*

Dr. Ryan Tafilewski, assistant professor of theology and chair of Denver Seminary's Theology Department.

TGI topics for the winter and spring include Youth Mental Health and The Church and Gun Violence and The Church

To watch recordings of past TGI events or to find additional resources, visit [DenverSeminary.edu/TGI](https://denverseminary.edu/TGI).



Dr. Patty Pell named Executive Director of The Gospel Initiative

On July 1, Dr. Patty Pell assumed the role of executive director of The Gospel Initiative at Denver Seminary. She joins Jason Woodman, director of public engagement, in designing and executing TGI programming to help God's people create a more credible and compelling witness for the gospel in their contexts. Alongside her role with The Gospel Initiative, Dr. Pell will continue as a full-time faculty member and director of the MA program in Theology, Justice, and Social Advocacy.



Lasting Friendship Leads to an Endowed Scholarship

By Andrea Weyand

For every donor-funded scholarship at Denver Seminary, there is a story to be told about its inception. For George and June Kalemkarian, the story behind the Biblical Studies Endowed Scholarship, which they created in 2006, began with a friendship. That friendship with Dr. Craig Blomberg, professor emeritus of the New Testament at Denver Seminary, has now spanned over fifty years.

George and June met Craig at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois in the 1970s, where June and Craig were students, and George served on staff for Campus Crusade for Christ, now Cru. It was here that a decades-long friendship was born.

Long after graduation, after George moved on from Campus Crusade, after careers changed and children were born, June and George stayed in touch with Craig and his wife Fran. "Craig became an international New Testament scholar. But that wasn't the most important thing," said George. "The most important thing was our friendship."

In addition to following Craig's writing and teaching career at Denver Seminary, the Kalemkarians followed the Seminary closely as well, regularly reading the Seminary's publications. George also experienced Denver Seminary education firsthand through auditing courses.

Together, June and George discussed and prayed about their relationship with Denver Seminary. "We decided to set up a scholarship in honor of Craig and as a legacy for what Christ

has done for us," said George. That scholarship is the Biblical Studies Endowed Scholarship, which supports students pursuing an MA or MDiv in Old Testament or New Testament Biblical Studies.

"We need solid seminary education in order to have solid churches," June said. "We need good leaders formed by solid doctrinal education. That's the undergirding, and everything else flows out of that."

"Students need to wrestle with the issues. They need to learn the languages as best they can," added George. "They need the formal years of seminary training, however long it takes, in order to be a person who can expound the Scriptures and lead others. We need ministers in the pulpit preaching the Bible, believing it's the infallible word of God."

"Funding a scholarship really has an impact on individual lives ... It helps someone go forward in the call that Christ has put on their life. And it's a blessing to have a part in that," added June.

June and George Kalemkarian live in Moline, Illinois. They have two daughters and eight grandsons.



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MEDIA