



Season 11: Episode 10 | Joni Sancken | How is Gen Z Discovering Scripture?

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's guest, Joni Sancken, will be interviewed by CBS Ambassador Reverend Dr. Andrew Stirling. Dr. Joni Sancken is one of North America's leading voices in the art and theology of preaching. Dr. Sancken holds the Butler Chair of Homiletics and Biblical Interpretation at the Vancouver School of Theology.

She previously taught at United Theological Seminary in Ohio and Eastern Mennonite Seminary in Virginia. Her interdisciplinary approach to preaching brings together theology, psychology, and the lived experience of faith. She's the author of several influential books, including most recently, *Getting to God, Preaching Good News in a Troubled World*.

An ordained minister in the Mennonite Church USA, Joni is deeply committed to peace, non-violence, and helping pastors preach with compassion and courage in difficult times. She now lives in Vancouver, British Columbia, with her husband, who's a Presbyterian pastor, they're two children and two dogs.

So, Joni now joins Andrew Stirling. Enjoy the conversation.

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Andrew Stirling: Joni, I'm so delighted that you're able to join us today for Scripture Untangled. And it's a real honor for us to have this conversation and for me to be able to talk to you personally on our behalf. Joni, can you tell us something about your background in the faith? And how is it that you became a believer? And who were the influences in the development of your life and faith?

Joni Sancken: I was so glad that you asked me this question.

I think, I have appreciated having a chance to think about it for a little bit. And to remember some of these people who have been so important to me. So, I had the benefit of growing up in a family that was Christian.

And so that was probably really the cradle where my faith was developed. When we would wake up in the morning, my dad would often be on the couch. He spent time in prayer and reading the Bible before he would go to work in the morning.

And so that's something that just was instilled in me that it was a foundation in my household. And then my congregation, which I'm now realizing since I work in theological education, that not every church is like this. But my home church was really just an incubator for potential ministers, a number of people.

My home church isn't that old, maybe 70 years old. And there are probably maybe 10 ordained clergy who have emerged out of my home church. Some of the people who have been called are serving there currently.

Like my home church, the two pastors who are leading there, both were called out of the congregation. Which being Mennonite, that's maybe not as unusual as in some other contexts. But I grew up in a setting where my gifts were recognized.

And it was made very clear to me that the church was a place where I could offer who I was and what I felt most passionate about. And I had Sunday school teachers. Joe Massenary was one of my Sunday school teachers, and he was such a nurturing figure.

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And then I had a pastor, Larry Wilson, who also really encouraged me. He came to our church when I was probably 13 or 14, so already a little bit older. He was the one who baptized me.

And he stayed at my home church for 18 years. And so had that experience of really seeing me through kind of my young adult years and then was present at my ordination service as well. So that was really a gift.

And very interestingly, my family, like my youngest brother is also ordained. He serves as a chaplain in Indianapolis, Indiana. So, I'm not the only pastor even in my own family.

So, I feel really blessed that that was my background.

Andrew Stirling: Joni, you are now, of course, a professor of preaching and a chair at the Vancouver School of Theology. Can you tell us something about the place of the Bible in preaching today? And do you have any advice for how preachers can move from the Scriptural text to creating a sermon? When I've done workshops with preachers, particularly amongst the diaspora community, this is one of their great sources of questioning and tension.

How do I take a Biblical text? And how do I move it into a sermon? What would you say to them?

Joni Sancken: Thanks for that question. This is something I've been thinking recently about how in the age that we're living in, where many people in our congregations may not have a lot of connection to Scripture, they may not be reading Scripture in their daily life. Some of them didn't grow up in the church.

They don't have a background at all. There's a man at my church. My husband is also a pastor.

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So, I am attending the church where he is serving right now. And he recently baptized a man who's an immigrant to Canada. And the way that he came to know Scripture and to have an interest in the church and to meet Jesus was that he found a copy of a New Testament on a park bench and opened it and began to flip through it and was taken with it.

So, there is still something that is arresting and attractive and powerful about that moment of encounter with Scripture. But for many people, when they get into the church, the sermon is where they are really coming to connect with Scripture in a deeper way. So it's really, I think, a profound responsibility for preachers because you're the one that is helping to open that door, to kind of lay out a path for people that this is accessible, that this is a Word of life, that this is something that you can wrestle with.

This is something you can question and challenge, just the fullness of what it is to be in relationship with a living Word. And so I think it's really important that preachers have that in their knowledge bank, but also not get too freaked out about it either, because I think sometimes people can get so worried about the responsibility of preaching that they have a hard time just living into it and just doing it. There's something that's so fantastic about certain Scripture texts.

I have to confess, having taught preaching, I think it's been 16 years now that I've been doing this, that there are certain texts that when a student preacher stands up and they read the text and the text is just amazing and the way they read it is just wonderful. There have been a few times where I think, oh, just sit down, anything else you say now...

Andrew Stirling: ... just let it speak.

Joni Sancken: ... is going to take away from it. So, there's also that dynamic as well.

But of course, I mean, people do need that person to help lead them into the text and to help them make those connections between Scripture and their lives. In my

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preaching classes, I tend to use Paul Wilson's, *Four Pages of the Sermon*, which is a really great guide in terms of helping us attend to the text in the sermon, but then also make sure that we're spending an equivalent amount of time attending to our world. And that world piece is often a difficult piece for people.

Like they may be able to see what Jesus did in the text. My preaching class right now, we're just starting a unit where they're going to be doing some exegesis next week. And then the next week, they're going to be preaching a mini sermon.

They're all working with the same text. We just had it in the lectionary. It's Luke 13:1-10.

It's the healing of the bent over woman. And that's such a rich text. There's a lot going on in that text.

There's a lot of places where you can connect it. But it's very easy. It's very obvious to see what Jesus is doing there.

Jesus healed a person who was formerly bent over. And also, Jesus is creating and stirring things up in this synagogue. I always tell my students, lest they get to be too hard on the synagogue leader, to just think, okay, if you were the pastor, and then you had a guest preacher who came into your church, like you invited them in, and they just started violating things that were just core and kind of upending everything, you would also be upset.

So, we have Jesus' sort of stirring up good trouble and also doing a really concrete healing. But when it goes to connect to our world, that's where it gets to be a challenge. And I think some of this also has to do with secularism and the different lenses that we use in other parts of our lives as well.

And I'm not sure what to do with it. It's simply an observation. It's not wrong.

Very often, something that Jesus does that's concrete in the text, like healing this woman, becomes something metaphorical that happens in our world. Like Jesus

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straightens out unjust systems, or Jesus restores a relationship that was bent over. It's not the actual kind of healing event.

We lose touch with that event that is beyond our understanding. We try to make it something that feels manageable for our listeners and our context. And I struggle with that.

I mean, in some ways, that's part of the kind of connections that people need to make to see how God is moving in their lives. But on the other hand, I do worry about it. Are we somehow draining God's power? Are we making God small and manageable because we're afraid that if we let God be wild and free, that somehow, we'll be disappointed or we'll be steered in a direction that we didn't want to go? Maybe we're like that synagogue leader.

Andrew Stirling: No, that's fascinating. Because, again, the experience of myself as a preacher, but also of my colleagues, is that we're sometimes confronted with a major issue in the world. And you get up there to preach, and you have a text over here.

And you go, okay, well, the text over here doesn't necessarily have bearing on the immediate issue that we're facing at the time. Where do we weigh this up? And I've always tried, and I haven't always succeeded, to put the text first, actually, and then say, if there is something that we can get or find within that text that has some relevance, then let's do it, and let's do it freely, but let the words speak. And that is, I think, a real challenge today.

Because sometimes, I think, Joni, people come to church on a Sunday morning expecting to hear something that is going to relate to the very real world that they're in, rather than starting with a Scriptural text and then finding how its application or its effect on that world can be. And it really is a challenge, isn't it?

Joni Sancken: Well, it is, and there's a place for that. I mean, people need leadership in terms of making moral decisions in our world.

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Like, people do need places where they can trust the wisdom that they're getting. But I think we also need to be clear about the sources of that wisdom. And one of the sources for Christian clergy is Scripture.

And I think, I mean, maybe some of us need to get more in touch with that. I always have this in my mind. Some years back when I was teaching at United, Dick Esslinger did a workshop for our student body, and he was talking about virtues of preaching. And I don't remember all the virtues, but one of the virtues was loving Scripture. And I just have always hung on to that, that it's a virtue that needs to be cultivated by the preacher. And you can tell when someone gets in the pulpit and they start to preach and that they are naming Scripture and kind of just touching it.

Like it's sort of just a touchstone and then they move on. You can tell when they don't love it. And you can tell when they do.

And sometimes a preacher's love of Scripture will make up for other, like, I hate to say inadequacies or things that could have been done better. Like growing edges in their sermons can be made up for by like a real genuine, passionate love for Scripture that just comes through in their preaching of the sermon. I always try to name that when I see it in student preaching, that I can tell that you love the Bible, that it's really important.

And I want to make sure that no matter what else they learn that they hold on to that as well.

Andrew Stirling: Yeah. Oh, that's great to hear.

It's interesting today. I mean, I'm timing this, dating this, because it's September the 11th. And I remember preaching a milestone sermon at Timothy Eaton right at that time on that very weekend.

And I'd just come back from the States the day before, actually, during 9-11. Yes. And then I preached the next day.

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And of course, everything was 9-11. And yet the Scriptural text, you know, I meditated on it day and night, got up early in the morning, and it just struck me. And it was the most powerful passage of Jesus and extending the love and healing, which I want to come to right now.

But it really was the power of the Word that spoke to the people and the passage from the Book of Romans. And it wasn't me, and it wasn't any particular insight I had into what had happened. It was that Scripture came first, and the power of that message touched people, and not me.

And that really, I found humbling, to be honest, Joni. You write extensively about the healing power of God and the trauma that human beings face. I love that in your work.

What are the sources of that healing? And where in the Bible do we find inspiration for the work of God in that healing?

Joni Sancken: Thanks for that question. And thanks also for noting September 11. It's part of my story of why I've written about trauma.

I started seminary about four days after September 11, and I was at Princeton Seminary, which, of course, the state of New Jersey was right there, and a state of emergency had been declared, and everything was just thrown in disarray. And I remember that that newspaper, the little local Princeton newspaper, ran obituaries of people who had died on September 11 for months afterwards. And it really shaped the world that I entered into, and a very strong sense from the faculty that this is the world that you are called to serve, and a real intentionality around not shying away from these difficult and most broken of experiences.

And so that's been a part of my journey for a while. In terms of looking at Scripture, I think the experience that you described yourself having is one that I think most clergy can rely on when something terrible happens. I think if you yourself do not have the words, allow Scripture to be those words for you.

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This is part of many of our traditions already, and like the funeral liturgies that we use, that they're very heavily reliant on Scripture. And I think there's nothing wrong with allowing Scripture to stand rather than trying to comment when you yourself may be at a loss. So, I think the first thing to know is that it's okay to just read a text and to say very little in addition to it.

Scripture really provides that language. And it's a deep language. It's a language that isn't just ours.

One of my friends always says that when we pray the Psalms, we're praying with like 200 generations of faith standing behind us. So, I think having those generations behind us are really powerful. But of course, one of the things that makes Scripture such a fantastic tool for engaging a broken world and for addressing trauma is the fact that it's all in Scripture.

There is so much broken experience that is borne witness to in our text. David Carr, who's written extensively about this, he has a book, *Holy Resilience*, which is just a wonderful resource. It's very accessible.

He talks about how a lot of other ancient traditions, that their Scriptures were mainly triumphant and only told the stories of glory, but that Christian and Jewish Scripture is honest about what it is to be a human and what it means to walk with God and to encounter God in these difficult moments. And that that in part is why Jewish and Christian Scripture has been so enduring because it is honest and because it does hit that spot where people need an encounter with saving love. And so, I think that's something also that we can pull from when we want to address brokenness in our world.

So, realizing that there are these stories and these experiences. And of course, when you're thinking about brokenness in the world, you bring those lenses to every text as you did on that Sunday after September 11th, that you were aching with the pain that the world was experiencing and that you brought that pain and that you saw in the

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text a word that spoke to that pain. And so, the lenses that we bring impact how we read Scripture.

And I think we are living in an era where awareness of trauma and language of trauma is in the midst of profoundly shaping how this generation of preachers reads the Bible. And I think we are still living into what that looks like. There's been a real just expansion, I think, of perspectives and resources that are being written right now.

In Biblical studies, there is so much that is unfolding right now. And these are things, that weren't here like 10 years ago when I first started writing about preaching and trauma, like there weren't all these resources. And in some ways, like it's great.

And another way is you're kind of like, oh, like, where do I look? What do I pick? It's an embarrassment of riches in some ways. But I think knowing that you can fall back on Scripture if you don't have the language, relying on the cloud of witnesses who have been part of the Scriptural tradition over time, and then trusting your own lenses that you will bring what needs to be brought and that the Spirit will reveal what you need to say in that moment. And that you can be super honest about the brokenness in our world because it's here in the text already.

There are so many broken experiences that are just there. We don't have a Bible that is rated G. It's not a Disney movie. Like all the difficult things are not filtered out of it.

So, we can turn to that. It's a resource for us.

The Bible Course: I want to take a moment here out of the conversation to tell you about The Bible Course, because whether you're a seasoned Bible reader or you're just starting on the journey, The Bible Course offers a superb overview of the world's best-selling book.

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That's Bible course . ca . And as always, the link will be down in the show notes.

Andrew Stirling: It's fascinating that you should say that because the distinction between Scripture and indeed many of the other, as you were saying, historical, mystical or philosophical works that are being done, which tend to be triumphalist. I mean, Martin Luther was the one who really pointed out, wasn't he? You know, "Crux probat omnia, the Cross is the test of everything."

And it really is. We have a suffering One that we actually turn to, who is our inspiration in the midst of all of this. And your work on healing was ahead of the game a bit, Joni, but others have come along.

But it doesn't mean that what you have written and said is not very relevant today. I believe it really is. And at the Bible Society, we have a trauma healing program.

And, you know, it's very real. You also authored a book, *Getting to God, Good News in a Troubled World*, which sort of relates back to what we've just been talking about, with Luke Powery and my friend Jon Rotman. How do people today hear that good news in the midst of the clamor of all the bad news that they're bombarded with?

Joni Sancken: Yes, if you pick up that book, it becomes obvious pretty quickly that we wrote this book in the middle of the pandemic.

So, we were writing it in just a dark time, where it just felt like every day there was just another thing, another thing, another thing. And so, we were writing it in a time when

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we really needed to hear some good news. And this book was written in honor of Paul Scott Wilson, who was our mentor and our teacher.

And we were working explicitly with his approach to preaching, which starts with God's action, but also engages with our world and with what God is doing in our world today. So, starting with God's action in Scripture and then moving to God's good work in our world. And what we have all experienced as teachers of preaching is this challenge when it gets to page four, which is God's gracious action in our world that is resonant with God's gracious action in a Scripture text.

And we felt that there were a number of discrete situations and contexts in which we were serving that created barriers for preachers, and that it would be worthwhile to explore how do you work within these confines, within the brokenness or the challenges that your specific context faces, recognizing that preaching opens up an opportunity. One of the metaphors that became really powerful for us was to think of the sermon as a thin place. So, this is a concept in Celtic Christianity that there are certain places that are more infused with the power and presence of God.

And when you come into one of those places that you are, you're moved by that, that it's something beyond, beyond the natural world. And so, we began to explore that metaphor. And can the sermon be one of those thin places that is opened up in these situations of intense human need? And that element of need also really emerged as important, that a part of how you come to be open to a thin place is that you recognize your own limits, your own finitude, your own inadequacy.

And that opens you up to something beyond yourself where you might have an encounter with the Holy Spirit. The section that I worked at, I was so jealous because Luke and John very early on in the process had these very concrete things that they wanted to work with. And I was living in Ohio, in what now that I'm in Vancouver, I look at Ohio and I'm like, well, that was Christendom because there was still like churches on most corners.

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And there, even if people weren't attending church, someone in their family attended church. There was still kind of a broad sort of understanding and expectation that church was something that good people did. Whereas in Vancouver, I no longer have that.

But even in my context in Ohio, I was starting to see some sense of secularism and how that was changing how we thought of ourselves in the world in relationship to who God was. So, John was able to write about his experiences of ministering in prison. And Luke was writing about his experiences of encountering intense racism at Duke University.

Of course, the legacy of the South and all of that. And he, as the first African American dean of the chapel at Duke. So, they had these very concrete things.

And mine was a sort of fuzzy secularism, which is like everywhere and everything. And so, I went ahead and followed that through. And I think we put my essay first thinking that it might kind of color some of what followed in the rest of the book.

But I've already talked about some of the things that emerged in that study of reading Charles Taylor and putting it alongside the experience of preaching and saying, how does much of what we are doing in the new homiletic actually reflect an encounter with secularism? Like the whole turn to the listener that's part of what it is to preach today. An expectation that listeners will want to have a share in interpreting the Scripture. Not that listeners are just this kind of empty vessel waiting to be filled with knowledge from the pulpit.

And what we talked about before, about how we maybe shrink God and God's activity so that it's something that feels manageable, that feels like something that could naturally be seen in our world and not something supernatural. I'm not sure if I talked about it in the chapter or if I've talked about it in lectures. But one of the examples I often use is the story of Jesus calming the storm.

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Like I used to have this as like a text that was on rotation because it's a fairly easy one for beginning preachers because Jesus's action is so clear. Like there's a storm, now Jesus calms it. So, there's something very clear there.

But they would always make the storm like in the text, it's a real storm, like wind is blowing, it's raining, there's lightning, like the boat is in literal peril. In our world, it is always like a finance storm or a relationship storm, or a political storm. Like it's always like one of these metaphorical storms and those are real and they need help.

And like they need the power and presence of Jesus to calm them. Like those are real, like I don't want to minimize it. But again, there's this shift between what is happening in the text and there's this shrinking down of Jesus and Jesus's power to make it something that we can talk about in polite society.

And I think preachers need to think about that. Like we really need to grapple with that because Christianity is not part of polite society. I think the wane of Christendom is an invitation for us to own the weirdness of who we are and the awkwardness of what it is to be a Christian.

Where we are attending to things that are unseemly perhaps. We need to get in touch with the kind of shock value of a Savior who was crucified. Like this reality, like we need to kind of bring ourselves back into that and see how that can infuse our preaching.

So that's some of where I was going. I'm not sure if I got all the way there in getting to God when I was writing that. I've continued to think and process on these things since then.

Andrew Stirling: But it was, as you said though, it was a traumatic time and bringing the Word of God in the midst of that traumatic time was an important thing. Even in its time. And I think we sometimes underestimate the ministry of the church during that period.

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And I remember saying to, I tell all my friends, my very last sermon at Timothy Memorial Church was preached to an entirely empty building. And you preach your farewell sermon to nobody. And yet, I think it was Billy Graham who said, it's okay, you can preach to an empty church because you know you're ultimately preaching to God.

And so, I had an image of them. But yes, it was a traumatic time, and Good News was important. You also teach a course, and this, I think, for a lot of our people, clergy or non, Joni, is sort of an interesting issue.

And that is you teach a course on the parables of Jesus. And you talk about, the complexity of trying to sometimes figure out Jesus and what He's saying through the parables. I mean, without going into great detail, because I'm sure you could give a whole course on it, just some general advice to people and to our listeners.

How do you read the parables? And for the preachers, how do you preach them?

Joni Sancken: Yes, this is something that I am still leaning into. Like I still have quite a lot of energy for the reason why I wanted to do a course on preaching parables is because I was tired of hearing really boring sermons on the parables, Andrew. People would preach a parable on the Good Samaritan, and then the point of the sermon would be, well, we should be like the Good Samaritan.

And I thought, well, ho-hum. I mean, that's just not...

Andrew Stirling: Motherhood and apple pie.

Joni Sancken: I know, that's not the Jesus I know.

The Jesus I know doesn't just kind of confirm everything that we already thought. There's something that's disruptive about parables, and there's something that's different about parables. So, I think the first thing that people need to note is when there's a parable, that they need to think, oh, okay, like this is a different genre.

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I was just talking to a friend about this who does a lot of work with Godly play. And I don't know whether you've covered this in your podcast, but it's a way of working with kids, although I think it's beneficial for adults too, that makes Scripture really concrete. Like they have these little figures, and they have these very simple storytelling techniques.

And the goal is to invite questions of the Biblical content. And for parables, they're a very discreet item. Like they're in a little gift box.

It's gold. It's like a little present. And so, when you come to the parable, the child goes to the shelf and gets this little gold box and brings it out and then unpacks it.

And it's a separate story within a story. So, I think the first thing for people who are reading the Bible to note is that, OK, like this is its own little thing. Like this is a different genre here.

This is not just a continuation of the narrative flow. I mean, you'd be shocked how many people think that the event of the Good Samaritan is an event that happened on the road and would want to go maybe try to find that spot and aren't always clued in. Oh, this is a story that Jesus told.

So that's the first thing. The second thing I think is to be looking for kind of some hallmarks and signals that the different Gospel writers use. I'm actually working on a sermon right now on Luke 16:1-8, which is the parable of the, I don't know what, the shady manager, I guess.

And that is such a challenging parable. It's one of these ones where I'm like, Jesus, why did you tell this parable? Like, here's a small-time crook that like everything works out for and he's praised at the end. And then there's all these sayings about wealth.

But I think Jesus is trying to make a commentary. Like this is Luke and all of these things having to do with money. Like that is not the Kingdom of God.

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When you have a parable, you're taking something that, a story that Jesus is telling and you're putting it smack up against the Kingdom of God. And I think here it's an example of contrast. This is the world that's passing away.

This world of like shrewd managers and like needing to lie and needing to provide for our own well-being. Like Jesus blesses the poor in Luke. I think that that is something that we need to kind of hold in contrast.

There's an awareness of the way that this world works. And there's an awareness that this way of this world working is passing away. It's not the eternal way.

So, for those who are the children of light, there needs to be a way of understanding and living and surviving in this world. But not giving it the power that it doesn't deserve in terms of what's eternal and what's lasting. At least that's potentially where I may go.

I had a wonderful student at United Theological Seminary who had an extremely challenging background. He's a kind of a well-known pastor now, Rudy Rasmus. And like, if you look online, like he's very open about his story, but he grew up in a really difficult context.

And when I met him as a d-min student, he would always introduce himself. He's like, you know what? I've always been a hustler, but now I'm a hustler for Jesus. And I thought, yeah, OK.

Like there's something about him and his journey and his story that resonates with me in this text. And so I may tell a little bit of his story that he's been public about in terms of what this looks like in our world in relationship to this parable, where you have Jesus's admonition to kind of, for children of light, to kind of look at this and to take something from it, but to not take everything from it, right? So, there's an example. I'm not sure if that's speaking broadly enough, but I think my encouragement to preachers would be to not be boring with parables.

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Like, please don't be boring with parables. Try to get in touch with the way that this is upending things, with the way that this would have frustrated people. I mean, often there'll be a parable and then it'll be, and those Pharisees were very upset.

And so, I think if your people don't feel a little upset or if you don't feel a little bit affronted, there's something about the way that you're reading it. Tom Long has this wonderful line in his new book on proclaiming parables. Like, when you're reading the parable and you're laboring over it for your sermon, if whatever you come up with at the end would have gotten Jesus' tenure, then no.

Like, that's not going to happen. Jesus was executed. Like, He was killed.

So, we have to be in touch with that always, always. And not like sift that out of the text.

Andrew Stirling: And a lot of the parables are disquieting.

I mean, you know, and you read them as a preacher and you go, oh, I don't really want to do this. You know, I don't want to go down that road because A, I'm confused by it myself. But secondly, I'm not sure this is going to get everyone to love me as the preacher, to be honest.

And, you know, that's why sometimes, and I confess, I've probably been guilty of it. I've gone the dry, boring route because the other alternative is persecution.

Joni Sancken: We all have, Andrew.

No shame. We've all been there.

Andrew Stirling: Joni, our time's coming to a close a little bit, but there's just one other thing that's really on my mind.

And that is next generation. I mean, you're teaching students. And there seems to be two trends happening now at the same time.

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On the one hand, there is certainly decline within certain traditions and in certain parts of the world. I mean, you're in a very secular city, an unchurched city, as Ross Lockhart calls it in his book on *Cascadia*. I mean, it really isn't sort of a hotbed of tradition in terms of the church.

But I'm also seeing renewed signs of hope within Gen Z, in terms of spiritual renewal and certainly reports out to the UK showing that this is becoming very real. And even the service I attended not long ago in Toronto, which was a traditional prayer book service, there were quite a few young people there. And I was amazed that wouldn't have happened 15 or 10 or even five years ago.

What do you see as trends at the moment within your, say, your own student body?

Joni Sancken: There is definitely a spiritual hunger among younger folks. I think there's a desire for that. That's something that is beyond themselves.

I think there's also a real desire to bring their experiences into the arena of God's love and God's care and to know that there is a God who loves and cares. So, I think that this generation has been through a lot. They've grown up in this very public way by having their lives broadcast on social media.

They're very kind of digitally aware. They're very connected to each other. And I think even just this medium that you and I are working with, where our images are there on the podcast while we're talking, like I think they've lived their whole lives that way.

Like they're so aware of themselves. And I think there's a desire to connect with something that might be beyond themselves. I've also noticed a lot of our student body here, especially the younger folks, are neurodiverse.

And I think that that is a space of growth for the church to think how does the different ways that our brains function impact the work of ministry, the way that we read the Bible, the way that we relate to one another. I think it's a frontier that the

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church is yet to fully lead into. But I think that this generation will lead the way with that.

Just because I see their own self-awareness at a level that a lot of the older students don't have. Like they don't have that sense of insight into themselves that these younger students bring. And I think it's a real gift.

I'm curious to see where it goes. I'm remembering when I was still in Ohio that there was this revival that unfolded at Asbury Seminary. And I remember everybody was going down to Asbury to see this.

And there was almost this kind of sense of spectacle of young people worshipping. And I thought, well, that doesn't seem quite right to have this sense of spectacle. But to honor what happened and to honor the hunger that's behind it.

And I think to look at some of the discourse that is in the world that they're engaging with and to say, okay, how do we thoughtfully look and see? What is attractive about this? And how is this making its way also into the church?

Andrew Stirling: It's fascinating, Joni, that we live in a world where the perennially new is vaulted to the new technology, the new insights and so on. And young people I talk to more and more talk about something that has roots, that has some tradition to it, that has some intergenerational staying power. And they're looking at Christianity and Christ again through another lens entirely than I looked at it, because I'm very much a product of the baby boomer age.

And so, you know, I grew up just assuming secularism was triumphant and science reigned. And they're not thinking in that way at the moment. And it's different.

Joni, you have an important role to play and your husband too, both of you. What can we pray for you? What would you like us and those who are listening to you today to pray for Joni Sancken and her family?

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Joni Sancken: I would really covet a sense of prayer around our new lives in Vancouver. I, we're still fairly new here.

We've been here about 18, 19 months. And so, I think some sense of what God is calling us to in this space. I'm quite free and flexible on a weekend other than supporting my spouse, but I've also been reticent to kind of jump on that guest preaching train where you're just kind of cycling around.

I want to leave myself open to where God is calling us here. So, I would welcome prayer on that front.

Andrew Stirling: Well, be assured of that and be assured of our gratitude at The Bible Society for you taking the time to do this for your candor and for your openness and for your insights, Joni.

I know that it will mean a lot to people who've listened and to me personally. So, thank you very much. And may God continue to bless your important work in ministry.

Take care.

Joni Sancken: Yes, thank you.