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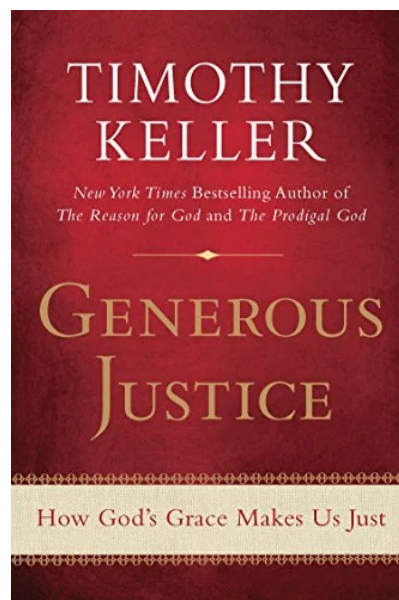
Common Grace

Stories from the Peltz family's ministry life Spring 2023

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Online Book Discussion

I'm experimenting with running quarterly online book discussions. This summer I would like to talk about Timothy Keller's *Generous Justice*. As I share below, Keller was a role model for me, and this book was particularly influential in my thinking about how social justice and faith fit together. The discussion will take place on Google Meet at 7 PM ET on Saturday, August 19th. Please [register here](#) if you want to receive the link via email. Everyone is responsible for acquiring their own copy of the book, although if you can't for any reason let me know and I'd be happy to help!



On Tim Keller and Grace

"The elder brother is not losing the father's love in spite of his goodness, but because of it. It is not his sins that create the barrier between him and his father, it's the pride he has in his moral record; it's not his wrongdoing but his righteousness that is keeping him from sharing in the feast of the father." -Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal God*, Chapter Three

On May 19th, Timothy Keller passed away after a long battle with cancer. When I found out, I posted on Facebook describing the role that Keller played in my spiritual growth and sense of vocation. I won't repeat most of that here; you can access the post [at this link](#) if you wish. Suffice to say, Keller modeled many of the attributes I aspire to as a pastor.

The thing I wanted to zoom in on in this space is the role that grace played in Keller's thinking. While a number of his books have influenced my theology, none had so

profound an effect on my relationship with God as *The Prodigal God*. In this short book, Keller argues that the famous parable of the Prodigal Son isn't really about the son who runs away. It's about the Father's abundant grace towards both of his sons, each of which is alienated from him. He notes that while we all know that the younger son's conscious rebellion against the Father estranges him, we often miss the fact that the older son ends the story outside of the Father's house, symbolizing the distance between the two brought on by the son's pride and self-righteousness. The story ends on a cliffhanger: will the older son cling to his legalism or return home and accept the Father's freely-given love? Not long after, I read Henri Nouwen's *Return of the Prodigal Son* (notably written before Keller's book). Nouwen shares Keller's interpretation of the parable, and goes into greater depth about the emotional journey away from and back to God. Keller's book provided me with the framework; Nouwen's drove the message into my heart. Together, they helped me heal from past hurt and embrace God's fatherly love for me.

My faith and theology have changed a lot since I first read *The Prodigal God*, but one thing that hasn't is my conviction that God's love is a gift, not something we have to earn. Keller wasn't the first person to teach me this, but his teaching helped me recognize how easy and deadly a trap legalism is to fall into. I can't imagine what my life today would look like had I not been freed from that trap. I can't imagine that my family or ministry would be nearly as joyful as they are. Of course, God may have gotten through to me in some other way, but as it is, I'm grateful that he used Tim Keller and *The Prodigal God* to do so.

First Nations Ministry Update



CLCA and CLUC hosting World Day of Prayer 2023



Our communion feast with the team from Heart to Heart Ministries

At Curve Lake Christian Assembly, we continued to work our way through church history together on Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights. During the spring we finished studies on Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages and are now learning about the Renaissance. Sometimes it has felt like a bit of a slog, but every time I wonder whether it's worth it we end up having a really good conversation about how a particular author or event helps people understand our faith better. Alongside this, we enjoyed a couple of special occasions. In March, we co-hosted a regional event called the World Day of Prayer alongside the Curve Lake United Church. We were the only church in the region to host it, so we ended up with people from nearly ten churches in attendance. Then we enjoyed our annual Good Friday service alongside the United Church. Their reverend suggested a liturgy based on the Stages of the Cross, which tied in well with the history study we've been doing. Finally, at the end of April, our friends from Heart to Heart Ministries came from Uxbridge for a weekend of ministry. We co-hosted some workshops on forgiveness and they did service projects at people's houses, among other things. My favourite moment was celebrating a communion feast together, since that's become an integral part of our church life!



Youth returning from a Winter Journey

After trying and failing to make my way to Nemaska in the fall and winter (due to minor vehicle issues and scheduling conflicts), I finally got to go north at the end of March. Much to my surprise, upon arrival Nellie asked me if I would like to visit some teenagers who were out on a Winter Journey. This is a coming of age ceremony among the James Bay Cree. Sometime between thirteen and thirty they're invited to live in the bush for a week or more with an elder teaching them how to survive. I hadn't planned on this, but we managed to pull together the resources necessary for me to go spend a night and a day with them. I got to walk and snowshoe for long stretches as well as witnessing how they get water from a lake and trap beavers and rabbits. Then I went back into Nemaska, led a Bible study at the church, and joined with the community in welcoming the youth home from their journey before driving Nellie and a friend to a conference and driving home overnight (which was an adventure in itself!) It was a whirlwind of a week but I learned a lot and enjoyed seeing so many of the people I love. It also gave me the chance to begin planning camps with them, which will be taking place this July for the first time since the pandemic started!



Me presenting at *Thinking Shrewdly* 2023

Finally, at the end of April I was invited to speak on indigenous issues at a young leaders' conference for Vision Ministries of Canada. I would guess that around 130 people were present, the majority of whom were under 40. I was one of a number of speakers who shared on theological and cultural issues the church is facing today. It was wonderful to be there alongside so many other young leaders who are thinking seriously about these issues. Aside from my classes at Tyndale, I don't know if I've ever felt so at home as I did at that event!

Campus Ministry Update



The second half of the school year finished off well with InterVarsity at Trent. A couple of leaders graduated and selected potential replacements, who were then confirmed by their peers as the Executive Team for 2023-2024. Alongside this, a new regional representative was assigned to the group and came from Ottawa to lead an inductive Bible study during the last week of classes. The students enjoyed this, and a handful of them attended Scripture Camp at the beginning of May. They joined peers from Quebec and Ontario for a full week at Circle Square Ranch, where they studied the first eight chapters of Mark using inductive methods. Those who went had a good time, and have expressed an interest in doing more of this kind of study at Trent in the new year. I wasn't involved in Scripture Camp, but I have been collaborating with the InterVarsity reps so we can work together to equip the student leaders even more effectively. Alongside this, I continued to meet with many students for one-to-one spiritual care and participated in some Trent Spiritual Affairs meetings, even after the school semester ended.

Family Update



Austin and his furniture in the back of our truck

Those of you who have tracked with our ministry for a while now might recognize Austin, pictured above. He got involved in the Trent campus ministry soon after I rebooted it in 2013. At the time he was taking his Master's in Psychology, and he quickly became a good friend and integral part of our ministry. He never held an official leadership position with the student group because the student union insists on those positions going to undergraduates, but he regularly attended events and encouraged his fellow students. In 2017 he pioneered a ministry to international students that involved weekly meals prepared in collaboration with local churches and international groups. These were so well received that he won an award that year as the student who most contributed to international student life at Trent. He also led a young adults' ministry at his church that many Trent students attended, helped me move a number of students over the years, and helped with camps and building trips in Nemaska many consecutive years. In short, Austin was a vital part of my work over the past decade.

"That's great Ben," you might be thinking, "but I don't understand why all of this is being shared as part of your family update. Austin's not a part of your family, is he?" Given how intertwined with us he is, we could probably count him as such, but no, that's not the reason I'm sharing this here. The reason is that Austin is getting married on June 10th... *in Germany*. He met his fiancée when she was here on an exchange and has now moved there to be with her. And I'm doing the wedding. And Shoshanna and Aliyah are coming with me. In fact, we will be flying to France this Sunday night! We'll be there from June 5th-16th, then returning to spend a couple of weeks getting ready for camps in Nemaska.

This won't come as a surprise to some of you, since I've been sharing it in personal conversations for a while now. However, the only reference I've made to it in our public communications so far was the exciting opportunity that I mentioned at the end of my last newsletter. This is partly because we wanted to be really, really sure that it was happening before we announced it this way. I've known since December that I was going to make the trip, because I could never turn down a request to do Austin's wedding. By January we knew there was a good chance that we could turn it into a family vacation because we got a larger amount of Christmas donations than we expected. Even with that in mind, however, Shoshanna has been working hard to plan out our spending to make this possible, and God has provided many more surprising gifts along the way to help her out in that endeavour.

We're sad to say goodbye to Austin for the time being, but glad that we get to join him at his wedding in Germany. And, we're incredibly grateful to God and all those who have generously supported our work over the past few months. This will be Shoshanna's second time in Europe, and the first time for Aliyah and myself. Most of our time will be spent in Paris, Cologne, and Bielefeld, where the wedding is taking place. I'm sure we'll have lots of stories and photos to share when we get back!

Obviously this is the biggest thing on our radar right now, but it's worth mentioning that we've had fun studying German and French together on Duolingo, and Shoshanna and Aliyah worked extra diligently to wrap up her homeschooling for the year so we could go without that lingering. Danielle and Gerrit were supposed to come for a visit recently but illness and busyness got in the way. She recently transitioned from lifeguarding to working with kids with disabilities, which she's doing very well at, from the sounds of it!

Other Updates



Gabrielle (middle) with me, Dr. Michael Krauss (the director of the DMin Ministry Leadership program), and Dr. Lisa Pak (Gabrielle's friend and academic mentor)

Congratulations to Gabrielle, my first DMin Advisee to graduate with my support! I'm advising two other students currently, both of whom are hoping to finish their research portfolios this summer and graduate in the fall. I'm also TAing a course on Leadership and Systems Theory again. This is the third time I've been a Teaching Assistant with this course and professor and I always enjoy the experience!

Financial Update

Our work is supported by donations from local churches and individuals. Thank you to everyone who supports our work, including those who gave a little extra over the past few months and made it possible for us to go to France and Germany! For more information on our ministry, including how to receive this newsletter via email or contribute financially, send me an email at benkeltz@gmail.com or visit www.benkeltz.ca. All donations are processed through Vision Ministries of Canada.

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