

## Crafting a life for His ends

Lawson Murray shares his passion for learning and God's Word

Patricia Paddey  
Special to ChristianWeek

The first time Lawson Murray's eldest child Christie brought home the man she would one day marry, Murray playfully put his daughter's suitor to a test, asking him if he knew the definition of "supralapsarianism."

Mercifully, the young man had a sense of humour. "Josiah thought it was hilarious," Christie, 25, now chuckles at the memory. "Fortunately he was staying all night in my dad's study, so he had access to all his books to find out what it actually meant."

"It was a silly thing," she says, her voice warm with affection. "But it was also to see what kind of man my [future] husband was."

Yet the anecdote reveals far more about what kind of man Lawson Murray is, for it demonstrates the value he places—not only on his children and their happiness—but on education, excellence, fullness of life and learning and understanding the things of God.

They are fitting priorities for a man who's been a pastor and church planter, and who currently leads both Scripture Union Canada as president and SGM Canada as national director, two distinct Bible agencies that encourage engagement with the Scriptures.

"Engagement is connecting with God's Word so that we encounter Jesus Christ," explains Murray, "and our lives are progressively transformed as a result."

If encountering Jesus ignites the fire of transformation, then for Murray, 52, education is a sustaining fuel; from the moment he determined to follow Christ as a first year university student—working toward a four-year bachelor of education degree—he's been committed to a life of study.

"He's been involved in education his whole life," says Christie. "My mom and him met at teacher's college. He's a lifelong learner. He loves to learn. And in his ministry as a pastor, he has a strong teaching mode in the way he preaches."

He has a strong teaching mode in general.

The first time I speak with Murray, it's by telephone. He is at home, scraping mud off his boots, having just come in from outdoors. It's pouring rain. In fact, it's been raining for days.

But Murray says he's been planting his garden. When I express surprise, he shares a memorable rhyme, one of countless practical lessons he's learned from years of growing good things in the earth.

"Plant in mud, they'll bloom and bud. Plant in dry, they'll wither and die," he recites, his voice light-hearted, infused with generosity and the South Africa that reared him. I've never heard the rhyme before, but it takes root in my mind. I resolve to try planting my own garden in the rain.

Murray began his working life as a high school teacher—teaching a range of subjects from geography and physical education to religious studies, woodwork and metalwork. But throughout the decade that he taught in South Africa, he says he became increasingly aware



Lawson Murray has worked as a high school teacher, church consultant, Bible college teacher and full-time pastor.

of God's call on his life to move into vocational ministry.

"My wife, Karen, and I looked all over the world for a suitable seminary," he recounts. "Eventually, I got information from Tyndale [Seminary, in Toronto], and it just seemed the right place for us."

*"I've been deeply concerned that I was observing what appeared to be an ongoing decline in Bible engagement in our nation, and Bible literacy within the Church."*

So in 1991 the couple, together with two young children (a third would be born some years later), came to Canada. And with characteristic enthusiasm, Murray immersed himself in his studies, taking only three years to earn both a master of divinity degree and a master of theological studies. He financed his seminary education almost entirely through bursaries and

scholarships, and when he graduated, he was recognized for outstanding scholastic achievement with a long list of awards.

"I loved my time at school here in Canada," he says. "Every class I took, every assignment I worked on, was totally absorbing. When you find your passion—your sweet spot—that makes all the difference. And that's what it was for me."

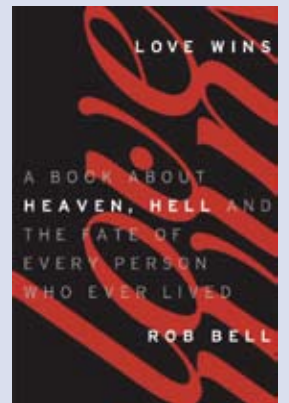
After seminary, Murray worked as a church consultant, itinerant preacher, writer and Bible college teacher, until 1997, when he

Please see **Murray** on page 5

## Heaven, hell and Rob Bell controversy

LOVE WINS: A BOOK ABOUT HEAVEN, HELL, AND THE FATE OF EVERY PERSON WHO EVER LIVED

BY ROB BELL  
NEW YORK: HARPER COLLINS, 2011  
CDN \$17.99, 202 PAGES, SOFTCOVER  
ISBN-978-0-06-208335-7  
REVIEWD BY R. WAYNE HAGERMAN



At first glance *Love Wins* looks like a book that may offer some answers to the age-old topics of heaven and hell. Rob Bell claims his controversial new book is "about the love of God for every single one of us. It is a stunning, beautiful, expansive love, and it is for everybody, everywhere." So far, so good.

Bell goes on to say, "There are a growing number of us who

Please see **Love Wins** on page 5

An advertisement for Redeemer University College. On the left, a woman with curly hair and a man are smiling. The text "You belong here." is written in a large, white, cursive font. On the right, there is a list of features and contact information.

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An advertisement for Canadian Mennonite University (CMU). It features a photograph of a woman smiling. The text "Shape your Journey at CMU" is written in white. At the bottom, there is a green box with white text.

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# FOCUS ON LEADERS AND LEARNING

## Murray

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During the decade that followed, he worked in pastoral ministry, and also stepped into a leadership role with SGM Lifewords, where he recognized a need for research into the status of cultural engagement with the Bible.

"I've been deeply concerned that I was observing what appeared to be an ongoing decline in Bible engagement in our nation, and Bible literacy within the Church," Murray explains.

So from 2005 to 2010, while completing a doctor of ministry degree with Northern Baptist Seminary, he wrote his thesis, *An Exploratory Project to Assist Canadians to Connect with the Bible*.

"The goal of education is so that I might know God and live for Him," says Murray. "I place myself in a position of learning so that God can inform, direct, mold and craft my life to be used by Him, for His ends."

You might imagine that all this academic study has made Murray a serious sort. But nothing could be further from the truth. He is a man who works hard, but also plays hard. "He danced with a tie around his head at our wedding," Christie laughs.

He seems a man determined to prove his "guiding text" John 10:10, that Christ has come to give us life and to give us life to the full.

"We have been given the greatest story ever,"

became full-time pastor of a church in Orillia, Ontario.



Lawson Murray has been committed to a life of study.

he says, "God's story—which is truth. Should we not—with all our might and energy—commit ourselves, and discipline ourselves to study the Word, until we go home to be with Him? That's an essential for me. I can't picture being Christian without being a student and a teacher."

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And just in case you're still wondering what "supralapsarianism" means, go look it up. Lawson would want you to.

## Love Wins

Continued from page 4

have become acutely aware that Jesus' story has been hijacked by a number of other stories, stories Jesus isn't interested in telling, because they have nothing to do with what he came to do. The plot has been lost, and it's time to reclaim it."

"What is the plot that has been lost?" I asked myself.

"I've written this book for all those, everywhere, who have heard some version of the Jesus story that caused their pulse to rise, their stomach to churn, and their heart to utter those resolute words, 'I would never be part of that,'" writes Bell. The "that" is the traditional, classic, accepted (so I thought), Christian doctrines of heaven and hell.

The thesis of this book is that for several millennia now, the Christian Church has gotten it all wrong, betrayed the message of Jesus, God and the Bible, and condemned people to a hell that does not exist while promising the others heaven. After

the preface of the book, *Love Wins* lost me, and I thought I was fairly intelligent and biblically literate, well trained in biblical exegesis and interpretation. This is heresy, impossible to defend theologically, intellectually, spiritually and biblically. *Love Wins* is 202 pages of wasted paper and ink.

*"Bell tells a good story in places, one that sounds so loving and appealing, and yet his theology is so very wrong."*

Bell's thesis simply does not hold. Contrary to his bad philosophical arguments, Christianity teaches that not everyone goes to heaven, that hell is real and that some people are going there. Bell tells a good story in places, one that sounds so loving and appealing, and yet his theology is so very wrong. It just does not match up with Jesus' teaching or the biblical truth on these tough matters.

It makes me quite sad to think that Rob Bell, who has a large following and to whom so many look to for solid Christian advice and truth, could swing so far away from biblical truth. I don't think he knows just how much damage he has done in writing this book. My hope is that faithful biblical theologians in the Christian Church will respond wisely, kindly, and firmly to this heresy.

Rob Bell, you've dropped the ball so badly this time!

*R. Wayne Hagerman is a Baptist minister and clergy coach, in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Labrador.*



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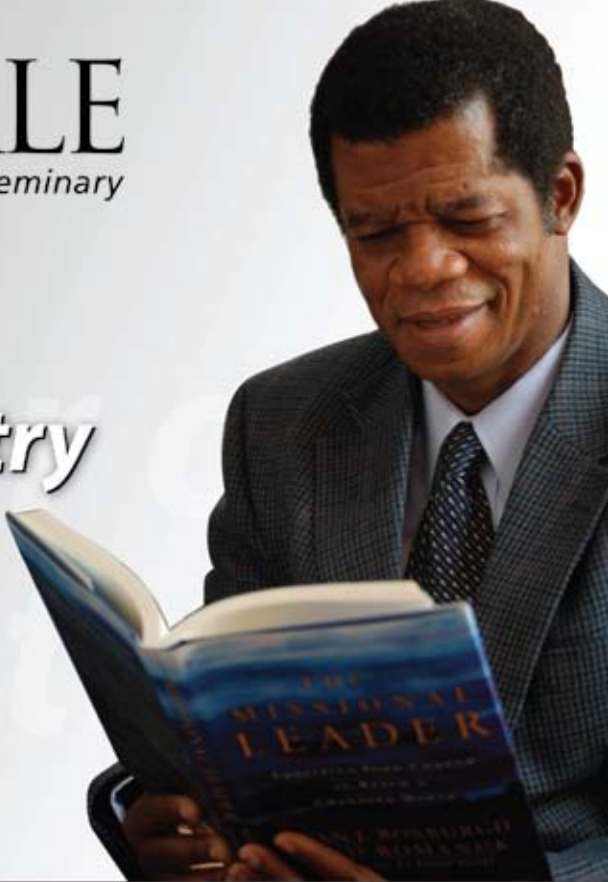
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