

Inside Story



Author leads double life as pastor

"I more and more see writing as prayer, as worship."

Award-winning Canadian author Mark Buchanan has two distinct callings on his life. At age 12, he was captured by the thrill of creating his own stories. Eighteen years later, God called him to become a pastor.

He found a way to do both.

As an author, he will soon have three books in print. As senior pastor of the New Life Community Church in Duncan, B.C., he is in the midst of a major building project.

While it is tough to juggle both roles, Buchanan says being a pastor actually helps his writing. "It keeps me freshly engaged with God and people in a way that lends authenticity, and often poignancy, to my writing.

"The discipline required for each is remarkably similar," he adds, "so the two vocations tend to reinforce each other as much as conflict."

He wouldn't change a thing—not even the in-between time when he could barely get anything published.

Buchanan's family was living in northern B.C. when his Grade 5 teacher asked his students to keep a journal containing, not a litany of daily events, but poetry and stories. Until then, Buchanan had no interest in writing; afterwards, he could do nothing else.

Buchanan eventually headed to the University of British Columbia, found God and enrolled at Regent College. During this time, he kept writing. His first published piece, at age 25, was a short story that took third place in a Vancouver Sun contest.

But it led nowhere. For 12 long years his writing appeared only in "small newspapers, obscure journals and those magazines that are free at ferry terminals and street corners."

He feels no regret. "I deepened my roots," he says. "I worked my craft, fed my mind, nurtured my spirit. I made sure I had something worth saying and that I could say it well."

He had graduated from Regent College and was planning to teach literature and writing at a local college when God unexpectedly called him to become a pastor. He kept writing simply because he couldn't not write. "Writing is so much a part of who God made me," he says. "I can't stay away from it too long. I'm branded. I'm in its clutches."

Buchanan was 36 when, at the urging of his wife Cheryl, he entered an article in a contest sponsored by Christianity Today.

He won.

"That cracked everything open," he says. Suddenly, editors and agents were knocking at his door.



His first book and several of his articles (published in such places as Christianity Today, Books and Culture, and ChristianWeek) have won awards. Both books have received rave reviews. The floodgates have opened.

His next project will be a novel.

"I began as a fiction writer," he muses, "and fiction seems—mysteriously—to be my truest calling. I also think that fiction's concreteness and yet indirectness allows you to do things you cannot do with non-fiction."

But he will no doubt continue writing non-fiction as well, weaving personal stories and illustrations with Bible stories and the lessons God has taught him into a delightful pastiche that encourages and challenges the reader, carrying out the direction in Hebrews to spur one another on in a unique, God-given way.

Ten years from now, Buchanan sees himself still being a pastor and still writing. He hopes to write a new book every 18 to 24 months.

"I write for an hour or so most mornings before I go to the church, and about three to five hours on my day off [Friday]. I write sometimes on my holidays." Recently, to meet a deadline, he "spent a week in a seaside cabin and wrote 12 hours a day. "Most satisfying," he says, eyes twinkling.

Asked what advice he would give an aspiring writer, he says, "Work your craft. Don't be in too much of a hurry to publish—but don't drag your feet, either. Make writing something you do for God and with God—part of how you pray, how you seek His face."

"As a young writer," he says, "my dream was to be published—anywhere, by anyone. To do this is not nearly as gratifying as we think it will be. I more and more see writing as prayer, as worship—a way of coming near to God and enjoying Him. I write to feel God's pleasure."

More information about Buchanan's church and books is available at www.newlifechurch.bc.ca

N. J. Lindquist is a versatile writer, whose work includes four novels for teens. If you would like to see some Canadian authors' bookmarks (or enough for your church) contact her at njlindquist@rogers.com or phone toll-free: 1-877-842-8754.

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