

FOREWORD BY TIMOTHY KELLER

BIBLICAL CRITICAL THEORY

How the Bible's Unfolding Story Makes Sense
of Modern Life and Culture



CHRISTOPHER
WATKIN

2023 Australian Christian Book of the Year

Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible's Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture

Christopher Watkin

Zondervan Academic

9780310128724

A philosopher uses the Bible to analyse and interpret contemporary Western culture. The task is ambitious and daunting but Watkin's confidence, curiosity and joy are contagious. No matter where you happen to open the book, the author's easy style, wide-ranging scholarship and generosity grab your attention and you are off, exploring the unfolding biblical narrative and how it cuts through assumptions and ideologies to speak to our times. An enlightening and absorbing read for anyone wanting to deepen their appreciation of how the Bible addresses our world here and now. To reframe debates and culture wars, you will return regularly to this resource.



Judging criteria

The **Australian Christian Book of the Year Award** is given annually to a book written by an Australian citizen normally resident in Australia. The award recognises and celebrates excellence in Australian Christian writing. A shortlist is announced in July and the award is presented during August. The award carries a prize of \$3,000. Supplementary awards may be made. Entries are judged with an eye to the following:

Original nature of the work.

Literary style, including suitability for the target audience.

Competence and expertise displayed by the author in writing the book and examining the underlying thesis.

Design, layout, cover, text and illustrations.

Contribution that the book makes in meeting a need for Christian writing for the Australian situation and in the Australian market.

Judges

Greg Clarke has a doctorate in modern literature and long experience in publishing, academia and Christian mission. He was Group CEO of Bible Society Australia from 2010 to 2019 and is the author of the 2014 Australian Christian Book of the Year, *The Great Bible Swindle*. Greg and his family are members of St Mark's Anglican Church in Darling Point, Sydney.

Meredith Lake is a writer and broadcaster interested in how

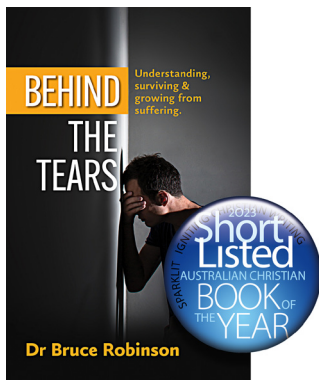
Australians understand the big questions of faith and meaning. She trained as an historian and currently hosts Soul Search on ABC Radio National, a weekly show about the experience of religion and spirituality. Her most recent book is the multi-award winning *The Bible in Australia: A Cultural History*.

Catherine Place started out as a secondary school teacher. Theological study added to the excitement of raising a family with her husband Dan. She has written for a Catholic

liturgical magazine, produced resources for teachers of Religious Education and Texts and Traditions in secondary schools and was a tutor at Corpus Christi Seminary and the Catholic Theological College in Melbourne.

Awards Coordinator
Bei-En Zou



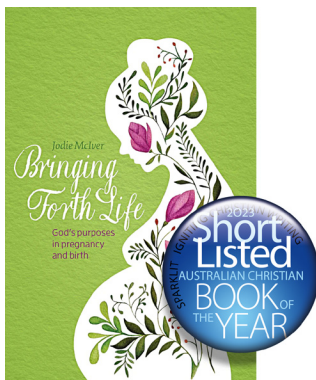


Shortlisted

Behind the Tears: Understanding, Surviving and Growing from Suffering

Bruce Robinson
Green Hill Publishing
97819222803191

Bruce Robinson doesn't waste time wondering why we suffer, but swiftly moves to suggest ways and means of coping, enduring and even growing through experiences of suffering. Central to this warm and wise book are the author's own faith and trials, and long professional experience in caring for others in the midst of suffering and in death. Empathetic and practical, Robinson provides sensitive and sensible advice both to those who are suffering and to those who support them. What to say? What not to say? A heartening and empowering source of comfort and hope.

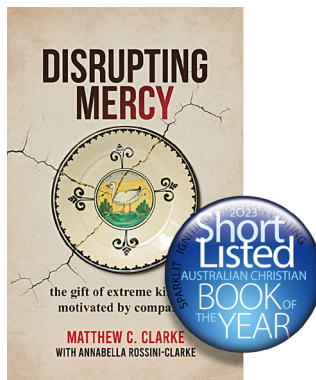


Shortlisted

Bringing Forth Life: God's Purposes in Pregnancy and Birth

Jodie Mclver
Youthworks Media
97819222866042

A unique and moving meditation on the eternal significance of pregnancy, birth, and life with a newborn child. Written by a mother, midwife and theologian, this book is a practical guide through the journey of childbirth, including the discomforts, difficulties and occasional heartbreaks. Each chapter is enriched by a personal reflection and prayer by a mother in response to her own experience. This is a rare invitation to understand how profoundly pregnancy and childbirth reveal God's desire to bring forth life. A book for everyone, but perfect for expecting mothers and fathers.

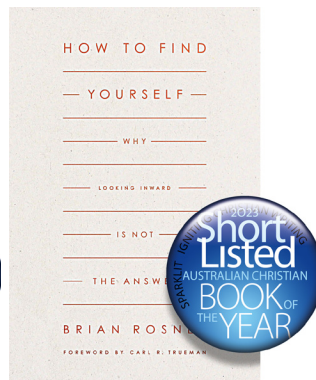


Shortlisted

Disrupting Mercy: The Gift of Extreme Kindness Motivated by Compassion

Matthew C Clarke with Annabella Rossini-Clarke
Turning Teardrops into Joy
9780648724827

What would happen if, like Zacchaeus, we allowed Jesus to change our hearts and turn us upside down? In *Disrupting Mercy* the Clarkes confront our anaemic understanding of God's mercy and urge us to allow God's extreme kindness and extravagant generosity to disrupt and transform our life and our world. When it comes to kindness, don't be reasonable; be reckless! The authors are gentle and big-hearted, but their message is radical and urgent. In a world where relationships are often transactional, suspicious, judgmental and unforgiving, mercy is badly needed.



Shortlisted

How to Find Yourself: Why Looking Inward Is Not the Answer

Brian Rosner
Crossway
9781433578151

Without discarding the importance of self-reflection, Rosner suggests that to truly find ourselves we need to look beyond ourselves to our relationships, our community, our history and, most fundamentally, God's Word. Our story is most at home in the story of Jesus. In a world preoccupied with personal autonomy and authenticity, this idea is profoundly countercultural and timely. Rosner is clear, candid and engaging. His book provides a thoughtful alternative to prevalent individualistic and egocentric pathways to self-knowledge, and it is a strong and accessible contribution to the identity quest.

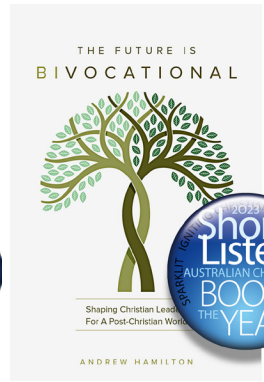
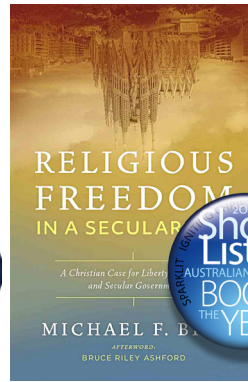
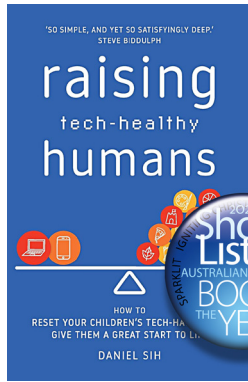
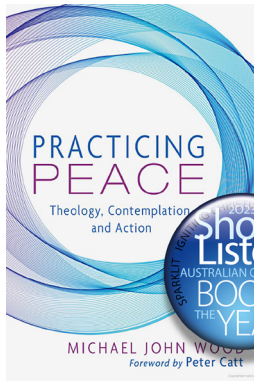


Shortlisted

Imagination in an Age of Crisis: Soundings in Arts and Theology

Edited by Jason Goff and Rod Patte
Pickwick Publications
9781666706888

This carefully curated treasury of essential creative works offers the strength and insight of the Christian imagination in Australia. The academics and artists who contribute critical images and reflections explore the way that imagination makes possible the articulation of meaning. Emerging from the pandemic, the book's context and subject matter that imagination is not a luxury; it is a practical necessity for survival, a necessary discipline and a necessary essential to faith.



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Shortlisted

Practicing Peace: Theology, Contemplation and Action

Michael John Wood
Wipf and Stock
9781666735307

In *Practicing Peace*, Michael Wood explores the centrality of peacemaking to Christian thinking, feeling and living. First, he anchors our pursuit of peace in a *theology* that declares that we are forgiven by God in Christ and free to forgive others. He then commends *contemplation* as a way of moving from the head to the heart. Finally, he suggests *actions* which make goodwill and concord visible in everyday life. Wood's approach is rigorous, christo-centric and ecumenical. An important book for anyone involved in conflict resolution, mediation and reconciliation.

Shortlisted

Raising Tech-Healthy Humans: How to Reset Your Children's Tech-Habits and Give Them a Great Start to Life

Daniel Sih
Spacemakers
9781922764577

What to do about children and screens? Daniel Sih has written a positive and practical response to this pressing question. He offers a range of strategies to help families manage technology and social media to support rather than undermine human flourishing. Sih is friendly and well informed, and his writing is clear, concise and full of anecdotes. Rather than saying no to screens, let's say yes to life!

Shortlisted

Religious Freedom in a Secular Age: A Christian Case for Liberty, Equality and Secular Government

Michael F Bird
Zondervan Reflective
9780310538882

While secularism is routinely deplored by many Christians, Michael Bird makes a strong case for the secular state as the best way to ensure freedom of faith (and no faith) and to provide the optimal climate in which the church might thrive. Bird writes with panache and energy. Amidst the heated debate about religious plurality, he proposes a more Christ-like strategy to engage with culture. For anyone interested in the role of the church in public life—and that should include all Christians—this is essential reading.

Shortlisted

The Future Is Bivocational: Shaping Christian Leaders for a Post-Christian World

Andrew Hamilton
Ark House Press
9780645322095

Circumstance, then curiosity, drove Andrew Hamilton to consider alternative models of church leadership. What will sustainable ministry look like in an increasingly post-Christian society? How can we prevent professional Christian ministry from becoming introverted and self-serving rather than missional? He suggests that engaging in work apart from church leadership is not only an effective way of ministering to the world beyond the walls of the church but also an effective way of enriching ministry within. This book is a challenge for those in ministry, and for all Christians, to reconsider their role in building up the body of Christ and furthering God's kingdom in the world.

Titles submitted for the 2023 Australian Christian Book of the Year Award

Acorn Press

Breathe, Katherine Thompson

Keeping Faith, Stephen Judd, John Swinton & Kara Martin

Still, Katherine Thompson

Andrew Hamilton

Yanched Beaches 365, Andrew Hamilton

Anglican Board of Mission

The Imaginary Doorway, Stephen Daughtry

Ark House Press

Crazy Praises, Christine Bourne

Diamonds from the King, Christine Bullock

Long Road to Zaire, Graham Toulmin

Making Sense of Faith, John West

Navigating Community Conflict, Alan Kelshaw

No Turning Back, Keren Masters

Pastoral Care, David Pettett

Tell Me Another, Paul Roe

The Benwerren Story, Douglas McDonald

The Future Is Bivocational, Andrew Hamilton

The Simple Joy of Seeing God, A. J. Spurr

Views from Down Under, Philip Weeks

Waiting In His Courts, Cecilia Lopyy

Zechariah, Marc Wheway

Arrow Leadership

Hire Right, First Time, Peter Corney & Ken Byrne

Australian Heart Publishing

Great Southland Revival, Kurt Mahlbung & Warwick Marsh

Baylor University Press

Jesus Among the Gods, Michael Bird

Besorah Press

In His Words, Helen Bishop

Blue Gum Publishing

Windows on Nature, Bob McDonald & Evelyn McDonald

Cascade Books

Community Engagement after Christendom, Douglas Hynd

Grey Spaces, Jeffrey Driver

Cenwest Environmental Services

It Makes One Smile and It Makes One Weep, David Goldney

Christian Focus Publications

Imperfect Reflections, Kirsten Birkett

Proving Ground, Graham Hooper

Christianity Explained Ministry

The Call of God Explained, Michael Bennett

Worship Explained, Michael Bennett

Connor Court Publishing

Silencing of the Lambs, Greg Bondar

Core Media Group

The Gospel Unadorned, John Unadorned

Crossway

Glorification, Graham Cole

How to Find Yourself, Brian Rosner

The Doctrine of Scripture, Mark Thompson

Darren Bennett

The Classroom Called Life 2, Darren Bennett

Erica Grace

Restoring the Family Foundation, Erica Grace

Fountain Springs Ministries

A Spiritual Foundation for Christians, Michael McKeon

Christmas, Michael McKeon

Garratt Publishing

An Indigenous Voice to Parliament, Frank Brennan

Ecological Spirituality, Trish Hindmarsh

Hard Questions Born of Love, John Warhurst

Prodigal Pilgrim, Peter Breen

Towards the End of My Days, Geoffrey Robinson

Garry Philpott

Saint Francis Way Boot Camp, Garry Philpott

Geneva Press

The High Kingdom, Philip Weeks

Grace and Peace Books

All You Need Is Good News, Doug Rowston

Green Hill Publishing

Behind the Tears, Bruce Robinson

Journey Publishing

Meat Pots, Manna and a Merciful God, Katie Meadows

Kimbrada Publishers

Notes on Grieving, Kath Henry

Kirsten Birkett

Living without Fear, Kirsten Birkett

Leaders Unlimited

The Heart of Leadership, Tim Hawkins

Locke Press

Defending Conscience, Matthew Littlefield & Tim Grant

Matthias Media

Busy, Ian Carmichael

Christian Essentials, Ken Noakes

Eager to Serve, Ray Galea

Gathered Together, Karl Deenick

The Coming of the Holy Spirit, Phillip Jensen

The Manual, Al Stewart
When the Noise Won't Stop, Paul Grimmond

Neil Johnson

Public Christians in a Secular Age, Neil Johnson

Olive Tree Media

Faith Runs Deep Anthology, Karl Faase

Pan Macmillan Australia

A Caring Life, Keith Cox

Pickwick Publications

Frozen Institutions, Bruce Kaye

Fulfilling the Law and the Prophets, Matthew Anslow

Imagination in an Age of Crisis, Ed. Jason Goroncy & Rod Pattenden

Poetica Christi Press

Surprised by Jack, Peter Stiles

Resource Publications

Faith and Fashion, Julie Cole & Graham Cole

Sermons from a Potato Field, Edgar Stubbersfield

Rhiza Press

Certain Concerns for the Christian Life, Andrew Lansdown

Spacemakers

Raising Tech-Healthy Humans, Daniel Sih

Star Label Publishing

Brave in the Making, Travis Barnes

De-Activate Anxiety, Larissa de Michiel

Death, Dying & Donuts, Colin Dicks

Extravagant Life to Extravagant Love, Angela Williams

Hunting Angels, Noleen Sanderson

In the Cool of the Day, Nicole Zoch

The Good Book Company

Truly, Truly, I Say to You, Adam Ramsey

Thomas Nelson

Resilient Hope, Christine Caine

Turning Teardrops into Joy

Disrupting Mercy, Matthew Clarke & Annabella Rossini-Clarke

Ultimate World Publishing

The Resilient Leader, Amanda Nickson

Vanessa Chappell

Who Is God? Vanessa Chappell

Vivien Wilson

Overcoming Trauma, Vivien Wilson

WestBow Press

The Life of Jesus, Geoffrey Waugh

Wipf and Stock

Before You Were Born, I Anointed You, Anna Beresford

Finding Peace Through Prayer, Mitch Everingham

Flourishing in Tensions, Michael Bräutigam

Honoring the Wise, Jill Firth & Paul Barker

How Christians Grow, Andrew Prince

Practicing Peace, Michael Wood

Sydney's One Special Evangelist, Baden Stace

Women in Ministry, Edgar Stubbersfield

Word Alive Press

You Are Never Alone, Joseph Swan

Yoël Frank

The Barefoot Disciple, Yoël Frank

Youthworks Media

A Godparent's Handbook, Alice Warren

Bringing Forth Life, Jodie McIver

You & Me by the Book, Patricia Weerakoon

Zondervan

A Doubter's Guide to World Religions, John Dickson

Biblical Critical Theory, Christopher Watkin

Jesus v. Evangelicals, Constantine Campbell

Religious Freedom in a Secular Age, Michael Bird



2023 Australian Christian Teen Writer Award

Winner



Caleb MacLaren *The Journey*

In a modern twist on the Noah's Ark story, this script follows four companions as they navigate an empty

world devastated by an alien attack. The plot is complex, the characters compelling and the dialogue natural. Neither preachy nor syrupy, the story is permeated by a subtle redemptive edge and a clear message of hope when all seems lost. When performed, this ambitious and exciting play will be a hit among teenagers.

Extract from *The Journey*

They make eye contact. Again a moment of tension. IONA is scared of this, and remembers something.

IONA

Oh yeah, I saw this, it fell out of your bag. I think it's yours.

IONA sits up and pulls something out of her pocket: a Lego Superman keyring. It has lost an arm and is a bit roughed up. ARLO notices it, sits up and impulsively snatches it from IONA. This shocks IONA. ARLO feels bad.

ARLO

Sorry, I ...

He catches himself. He decides to tell IONA about his past, something that has been hurting him.

ARLO

Continued.

It was my ... our ... brother's.

IONA is intrigued. Beat.

ARLO

Continued.

Me and Max were out ... when it happened. We came home to the TV still on, our ... family, gone. My brother had this in his hand.

ARLO starts tearing up and pauses.

IONA

Somewhat comforting.

What was his name?

ARLO

Isaac. Isaac was his name. He never got to live his life. He could have done so many great things!

IONA gives ARLO a hug to comfort him.

IONA's own confidence surprises her.

ARLO is delighted. They pull away from the hug and sit next to each other, both facing the water. ARLO refers to the 'S' on the figure's chest.

ARLO

Continued.

The 'S' means hope. I like to remind myself, every time I have those thoughts, every time I doubt who I'm fighting for. To have hope and faith, that this did have a purpose.

ARLO and IONA share a smile.

Second Prize



Elodie Chiha *The Room We Used to Sit In*

How do we grieve the loss of those who have hurt us? This poem exposes the raw and confusing paradox of painful presence becoming painful absence. *The Room We Used to Sit In* is gritty, mature and realistic about God's healing.

Extract from *The Room We Used to Sit In*

The room we would sit in is now repainted, reconditioned but they kept the carpet we would sit on. Like the room, you've changed. You're more blue and spite-ridden too but now I will live without your taboo. If we were in a series this would be the end but maybe it will be renewed. Then I could still have hope knowing when one episode ends, another will begin In the room we used to sit in.

Now I'll sit in it with someone else And hold my faith in a God that heals. But I'll still remember the lyrics we sang with the windows open and I'll too remember every promise that was broken.

The alcohol soaked tears, The feuds and your beers. I won't forget every insult and scream but as I pass your controller to someone else I'll think of you, and hope that one day you'll come back to the room we used to sit in.

Honourable mention



Caitlin Talbot *A Place to Call Home*

Written with passion and enthusiasm, this fast-paced farm adventure has a warm heart.

Beautiful relationships between father and son, and brother and brother, and a slowly developing love story present the power of God's presence in suffering. An impressive effort for a young author.

Extract from *A Place to Call Home*

Sensing his master's pain, Timble nobly rose and limped to the boy and nuzzled him. Sandy raised his head and looked up at Timble through misty eyes. "It's not your fault, mate," he sobbed barely above a whisper and threw his arms around Timble's neck.

An eagle soared, crying pitifully far above the two forms; boy and pony. Sandy looked up. "Where are you Mum? I need you! God, why did you take her?"

A few seconds passed and suddenly Sandy gazed out to the open country before him, as if only now realising the many miles between him and home. In pure desperation Sandy cried out, "Help me Lord, Mum believed and so do I."

He stood up gingerly and unbuckled Timble's saddle. Then, with saddle and stock whip in one hand and Timble's bridle in the other, he slowly led Timble back the way they had so recently come.

Judging criteria

The **Australian Christian Teen Writer Award** carries a prize of \$1,000 and is offered annually for the best unpublished manuscript written by an Australian citizen under 18 years of age.

The **Young Australian Christian Writer Award** carries a prize of \$2,500 and is given annually for the best unpublished manuscript written by an Australian citizen under 30 years of age. This award was withheld in 2023.

Supplementary awards may be made.

The winning works will explore a Christian perspective or theme and incorporate, explain or encourage Christian life and values. Entries are judged with an eye to the following:

Original nature and content of the work.

Literary style, including suitability for the target audience.

Contribution that the work makes in meeting a need for Christian writing in Australia.

The 2023 Australian Christian Literature Awards were announced and prizes presented on Thursday 31 August 2023.

The Australian Christian Literature Awards are administered by SparkLit (The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge Australia Incorporated and the Australian Christian Literature Society).



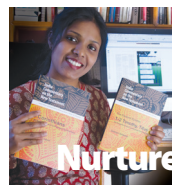
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