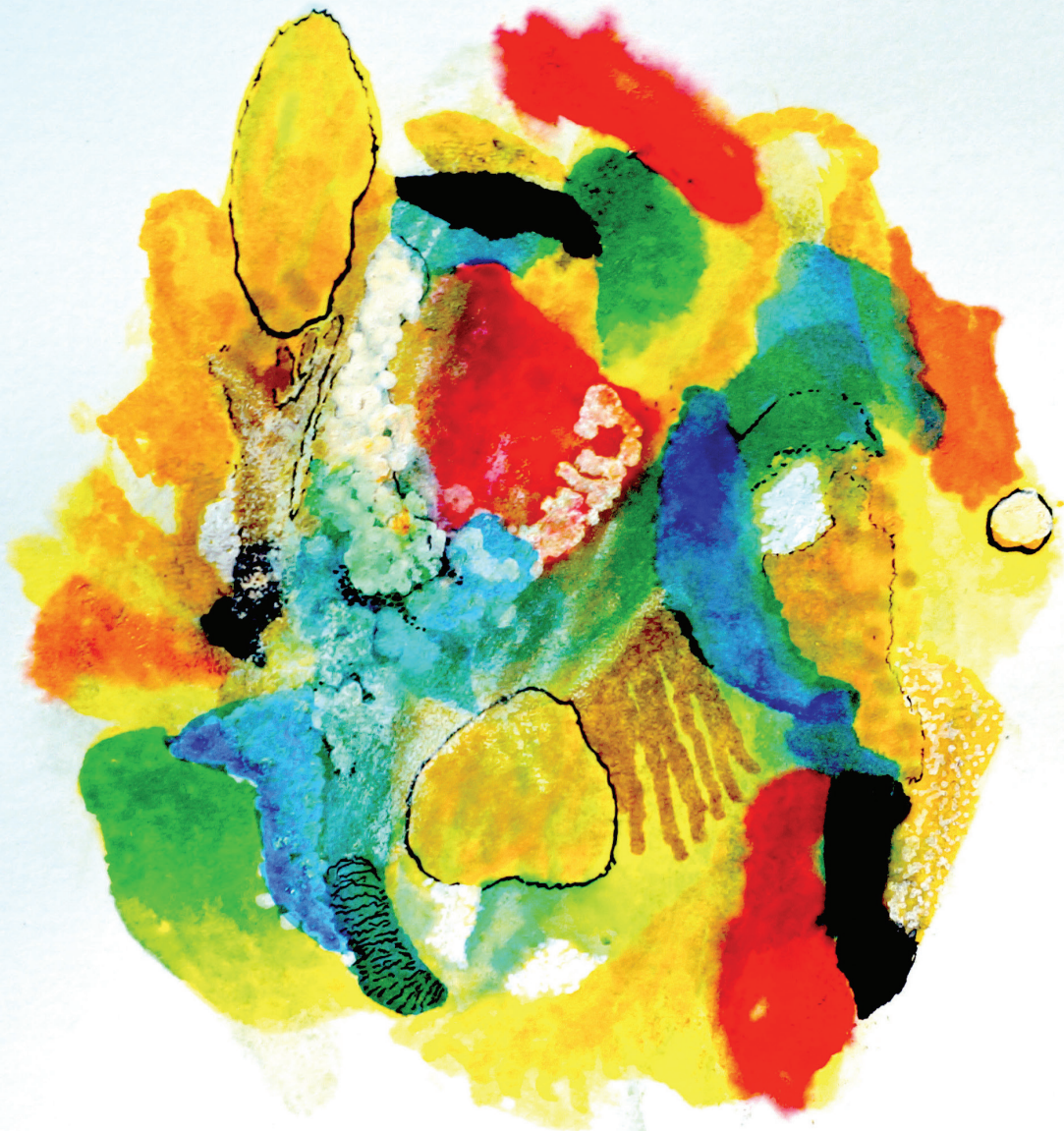


COLLOQUY

A CONVERSATION WITH GUTENBERG COLLEGE



Summer 2020

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From the Editor

Colloquy's cover painting is one of a series of small spheres painted by R. Wesley Hurd. The paintings reminded me of the ubiquitous COVID-19 sphere. I chose the painting on the cover because while reminding me of the virus graphic, it also conveys a sense of movement and joy and hope—something we all need these days. Wes says that much of the imagery of his spheres became visual analogies of how we experience the world—beauty and darkness, “worlds and wounds.” In “Virus, Futility, and Faith” on page 5, Wes points us to the true hope “seen through the lenses of faith.” Our first article, “Flammable Objects” by Brian Julian, would also have us look through lenses of faith. As we look at our present circumstances, may God give those lenses to us all.

Robby

Congratulations!



Congratulations to **Connor Clark** who received the 2020 David W. Crabtree Scholarship. Although tutors consider both academic performance and diligence when awarding the scholarship, their primary consideration is the student's response to his or her education. The scholarship goes to that student whom the tutors deem to have taken the content of the curriculum most profoundly to heart. Such a student takes seriously the issues raised, thinks about them, and allows the truth to change the way he or she thinks about life and how to live.



Flammable Objects

Brian Julian

Brian Julian (Gutenberg Class of 2003) received his Ph.D. in philosophy from Boston University in 2015. He lives in Massachusetts with his wife, Melanie (Gutenberg Class of 2003), and their two sons, Owen and Lucas. Brian currently teaches at Boston University and Boston College. His website is thinkinginthelight.com.

In early March, our apartment had a fire. The fire did not endanger our lives, and since we were in the middle of moving, it did not leave us homeless. We were—thankfully—unharmed, but the fire damaged our belongings. It burned, melted, and covered in soot the objects that were still in the apartment, about half of what we owned. In the weeks following, we spent day after day in the sooty apartment salvaging, cataloging, and photographing those objects.

So I have found myself thinking a lot about material things. This includes the mundane tasks of replacing items and listing them for the insurance, but I have especially been thinking about *how* I should think about them. There are two easy answers to this question, two default reactions to the destruction of physical objects: devastation and apathy. To put these reactions in terms of worldviews, one can adopt an outlook of materialism or of stoicism. My purpose here is to argue that neither outlook is satisfactory. Instead, when God is brought into the picture a middle way comes into view, one that is simultaneously harder and better. We must have faith.

Materialism is deceptively easy to address. Everyone knows you are not supposed to be a materialist in the sense of having your life revolve around possessions. Those who violate this principle are the villain of the movie or the character who learns at the end that money can't buy love. At the same time, however, materialism is incredibly attractive and often seeps into our hearts unnoticed. So why do we amass things and invest such value in them?

A major attraction is control. When I have things, I can do what I want, when I want: I can control my abilities. Additionally, when I have X, I can be seen by others (or just think of myself) as the sort of person who has X: I can control my image. The attractions of control for me can be illustrated with my book collection. A Great Books college naturally stokes a love of books, so as a graduate of Gutenberg I have not shied away from collecting them. I take great pride in the variety of my books, and it is nice to have whatever I want at my fingertips.

The fire, however, removed my control. All but two of my books were still in our old apartment. No books burned, but they all got bathed in smoke and covered in oily soot. As I write this, we are having them professionally cleaned, but we don't know which are salvageable. In the time since the fire, I have thought of many ways I would like to use the books, but I have not been able to start these projects. There is also a sense in which I don't know how to think about myself. Am I still someone who has a good book collection? The damage to the books is one of the aspects of the fire that hit me the hardest. I am tempted to be devastated.

The Bible is clear about a relationship to objects that focuses on image and control. Not only is it unwise, but it is idolatry.

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. . . . No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Money. (Matthew 6:19-21, 24)¹

It is foolish to find our worth in things or count on our ability to control them, since they are inherently perishable. They rust. They are stolen. They burn. But here Jesus is doing more than giving practical advice. He is also warning that loving things is hating God, that our hearts follow our treasure. Materialism is idolatry. So whether we consider materialism as simply unwise or as a rejection of God, it is not the way to view objects.

Recognizing this, it is easy to swing to the other extreme. Immediately after the fire, I told myself, “Oh well, the books are just things. I can live without them.” I was deciding not to care about them. Or, better, I was *trying* not to care about them. Why would I try to convince myself that I don’t care when I actually do? Because the opposite of materialism—stoicism—is also highly attractive. When compared to materialism its problems may not be as obvious, but as a way of thinking about objects it can also be problematic.

Epictetus, a Roman stoic, gives one of the most helpful presentations of stoicism in his *Enchiridion* (or *Handbook*). In it he holds out the benefits of stoicism as being “equanimity, freedom, and tranquility” (29).² We can be at peace within our own minds. This tranquility is such a great benefit because life often disturbs us with its pandemics, wars, and fires. However, as Epictetus would like us to understand, the real problem is that we *find* life disturbing, not that it actually is:

Men are disturbed, not by things, but by the principles and notions which they form concerning things. Death, for instance, is not terrible, else it would have appeared so to Socrates. But the terror consists in our notion of death that it is terrible. (5)

Events in themselves are not bad, he is counseling. Instead, they are bad if we think them so. When it comes to my books, then, I was proceeding in the correct manner. I was thinking about them as things I can live without, and in doing so I was bringing calm to my mind, rather than being upset by the effects of the fire. This can sound like good advice, particularly in comparison with materialism. Rather than overvaluing material things, I simply say that they don’t matter. I am apathetic. While there are times where this can be a helpful way to think (such as when I get a spaghetti sauce stain on my new white shirt), the stoic outlook arises out of a deeper, more problematic commitment.

Epictetus makes this cornerstone of stoicism clear right at the beginning, when he explains the most important distinction to recognize:

Some things are in our control and others not. Things in our control are opinion, pursuit, desire, aversion, and, in a word, whatever are our own actions. Things not in our control are body, property, reputation, command, and, in one word, whatever are not our own actions. (1)

We can control how we think about things, what we pursue, what we want, and what we avoid. That is, we can control our minds. Everything outside our minds is also outside our control. This includes ephemeral things, such as what others think of us, but also every physical object we see and even our own bodies. Acknowledging this distinction is the way to tranquility.

Flammable Objects, continued on p. 4

¹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Epictetus, *Enchiridion*, translated by Elizabeth Carter. <http://classics.mit.edu/Epictetus/epicench.html>



COLLOQUY

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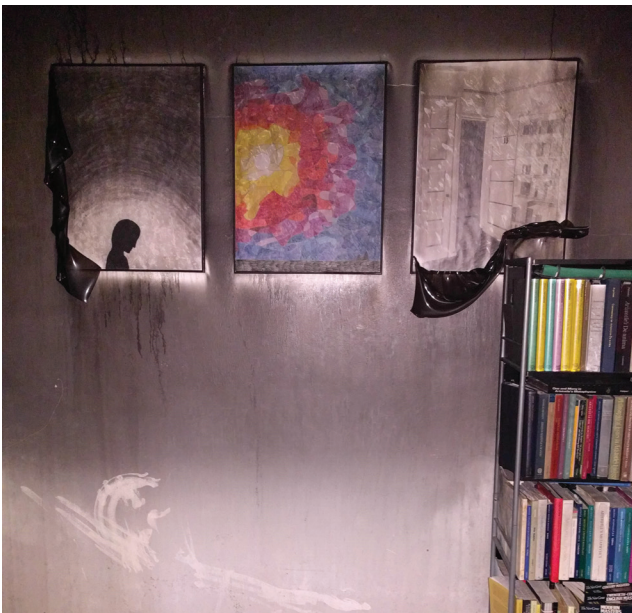
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My artwork post-fire. The pictures on the left and the right were drawn for an art practicum at Gutenberg. The picture on the right was my room at Gutenberg. The frames melted.

Flammable Objects

Continued from page 3

[Examine every event as to] whether it concerns the things which are in our own control, or those which are not; and, if it concerns anything not in our control, be prepared to say that it is nothing to you. (1)

Stoicism, then, just as with materialism, is about control. With materialism, I try to control my image or ability by acquiring things, and one problem is that these things, in turn, are out of my control. So I fail. Stoicism embraces this fact so that I can remain in control. I just need to avoid caring about anything I cannot control, and this leaves everything that matters to me firmly in my hands.

One could question whether this method achieves the tranquility stoicism promises, but I will not do so here. Instead, I will simply point out that stoicism is a lie. Events are not neutral; some are genuinely good, while others are bad. This is vividly illustrated in a passage where Epictetus tries to advise the opposite:

If, for example, you are fond of a specific ceramic cup, remind yourself that it is only ceramic cups in general of which you are fond. Then, if it breaks, you will not be disturbed. If you kiss your child, or your wife, say that you only kiss things which are human, and thus

you will not be disturbed if either of them dies. (3)

If my favorite mug breaks, then I can tell myself, “There are plenty of other mugs.” Similarly, if my family member dies, I can tell myself that there are plenty of other humans. Upon reading this, my students invariably declare it to be horrible. *Of course* it is a bad thing when someone I love dies. Epictetus recognizes that this common response is natural. He just argues it is one we must overcome. However, it is better to see this natural response as instead pointing at the truth—not only with regard to the human being but even when it comes to the mug.

This truth can be seen in the Bible. While it certainly does not condone materialism, neither does it take the position that material things are nothing. Abraham was blessed by God, and this resulted in Abraham being “very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold” (Genesis 13:2). When the Israelites are instructed by God to build the tent of meeting and its furnishings, they are told to have it made by a man filled with “the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft” (Exodus 31:3-5). God wants these things to be made well and beautifully.

Even Jesus, right after the exhortation not to lay up treasures on earth, tells us that material things matter:

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. . . . And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. . . . Therefore do not be anxious, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. (Matthew 6:25-32)

On a first reading, it may look like Jesus is endorsing a form of stoicism: life is more than food and clothing, so don’t let these things be of any concern to you. But this is not his point, for he also makes the very un-stoic statement that “your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.” God knows that we *need* these things. We are physical creations who live in a world of physical objects, and we can’t pretend like they don’t matter. This passage tells us the key to thinking about the objects around us, but let me approach this message by way of the fire again.

Being in the old apartment after the fire was one of the strangest and most disturbing experiences of my life. Everything felt at the same time incredibly familiar and utterly foreign. In trying to put my finger on what was so disturbing about seeing the ruined things, I was struck by my reaction to a blackened water pitcher on the kitchen counter. This pitcher was nothing special. We have already replaced it. Nevertheless, it was disturbing to see it lying on the counter, coated in soot. I realized the unsettling feeling arose from two conflicting thoughts that came simultaneously: 1) this is an item that I used and *planned to continue using*, and 2) this is an unusable object. The thing that disturbed me was my lack of control.


This is what Jesus is asking us to focus on when he turns our attention to the

birds and the lilies, because the anxiety he cautions against arises from desiring control I don't have. Instead, he is asking us to recognize that the one in control is God, and in light of this, we need to trust Him. We need to have faith.

There is nothing wrong with having a pitcher or valuing books. If we avoid investing our identity in these things or using them to conform life to our specifications—if we avoid the dangers of materialism—then having them is a good thing. We should enthusiastically affirm their goodness, rather than—like the stoic—pretend that they are inherently nothing. This leaves us in the uncomfortable position, however, of acknowledging that the good things in the world, the things that we want and need, are out of our control. This is why materialism and stoicism draw us: faith is hard. But if we listen to the message of the Bible, we know God's character and know that we can trust Him, even when doing so is difficult. He knows what we need and is committed to us.

Why does God bring fires to destroy things that are good? Ultimately, that knowledge is God's alone. At the same time, the Bible does speak of God's flames not only in terms of destruction but also in terms of purification:

But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord.
(Malachi 3:2-3)

I can say that God has used the trials of my life—including the literal fire—to refine my faith. I need to trust that the sovereign God knows what I need, even when what I need is to lose what I want. I am surrounded by flammable objects, and when they burn it is a purifying fire that leads me to place my trust in God, preparing me for residence in a kingdom without moth, rust, or fire, a kingdom where the things around me will still be out of my hands but where I will have complete peace even without having control. 

Virus, Futility, and Faith

R. Wesley Hurd

Artist R. Wesley Hurd, Ph.D., was a tutor and board member at Gutenberg College until he retired in 2019. The cover painting on this issue of *Colloquy* is his work.




We all find ourselves sharing a very unexpected world and community circumstance. We've all struggled at many levels of wonderment with how this tangle of physical threat and social menaces has congealed into what is a frightening stranglehold for millions. I will not here wade into the deep waters of opinion and controversy. Instead, I find myself asking a spiritually intimate question of myself. As I, loved ones, and communities face this bewildering threat, where are my heart and mind?

A darkness pervades today. Uncertainties abound. These uncertainties are felt in our bones—believers and unbelievers alike. It occurred to me that the writer of Ecclesiastes, Solomon (Keholet), has grasped the uncertainties of the world in a spirit not unlike those forced upon us today by a deadly contagion.

Solomon's deeply pessimistic vision of life can be disturbing. Some would argue that the picture of human existence Solomon paints is unnecessarily dark. They would argue that the redemptive promise and provision of God that the New Testament presents offers us much more than does Solomon's picture. I agree that Christ's promise ultimately and gloriously overcomes Solomon's incomplete and pessimistic picture. Clearly, however, the New Testament pictures struggle, pain, suffering, and only fleeting kinds of fulfillment this side of the resurrection. Believers today just have a clearer picture of God's solution to the futility Solomon poetically described.

Solomon's vision of life and human experience in this world is a universal and overarching picture of the futility to which we are ultimately bound in this present life. We share the same world with Solomon, where the peril of something like COVID-19 derives its energy and existence, where plagues have their permission to exist within the inscrutable will of the transcendent Creator. God does not withhold tragedy, failure, and complex dilemmas from the lives of believers today. God does not guarantee believers a kind of health and success in this world that can be compared to the existence that awaits us. This world, the Bible makes clear from Genesis through the New Testament, is "subjected to futility" (Romans 8:18-25). And this futility—"wired into" a fallen, rebellious creation—results in an uncanny void of deep and lasting fulfillment in all human relationships, things, and accomplishments. Elements within this creation grant us fleeting tastes of beauty and good things, but the lasting things—things that stand the test of eternity—will not be ours in this world. For those who look to God for ultimate peace, we must live with the antinomies of death and God's love and promise of eternal life.

Seen through the lenses of faith though, futility (and pandemics) can become my spiritual tutor. The impact and our experience of the existential-spiritual pain from COVID-19 can remind me that living in this world—even as a believer—offers only a pale fulfillment when compared to the kind awaiting me.

Solomon's cry, "Futility of futility, all is futility," exudes the pain of uncertain meaning when it rides the waves of what may be an unstoppable threat. In these conditions, we all tend to look beyond ourselves for safety and hope. In today's world, that search for comfort takes many forms. For those of faith formed from the truth of the Scriptures, we desire that hope to be in our God and Christ our savior. So let it be. 

Congratulations, Graduates!

Gutenberg celebrated graduating seniors **Jordan Whiting** and **Trisha Yeager** at a commencement ceremony on June 12. Jordan and Trisha came to Gutenberg when the college was in transition. Several long-time faculty had retired, and a new president and board of governors had just been seated. In addition, during their four years, classmates who began the journey with them left the college for various reasons. Jordan and Trisha persevered through some rocky times, each completing her studies at Gutenberg by writing a senior thesis that tutors passed with distinction.

Jordan, in her thesis, “The Divine Imperative: An Examination of the Intrinsic Dialectic between Existential Reality and Eternal Implications,” explored the nature of how one’s choices truly reflect the reality of one’s existential commitments, wherein the difference between faith that saves and faith that does not save becomes explicitly discernible.

Trisha, in her thesis, “To Raise His Face to Heaven: An Apology for Seeking Purpose,” discusses how modern thought makes human purpose so individual as to obscure it and how, in her own search for purpose, she chose to return to the medievals, to see if their ideas about human purpose are truly outdated—or only forgotten.



Exhortation to the Class of 2020

Ron Julian

This exhortation was given at the Gutenberg commencement ceremony on June 12, 2020.

Ron Julian has been a tutor at Gutenberg College since 1994. He is the author of *Righteous Sinners* and a co-author of *The Language of God: A Commonsense Approach to Understanding and Applying the Bible*.

I have spoken at a number of graduations. But I have never had to ask myself, “Would it be better for the audience if I wear a mask?” I hope that in previous years the audience has not been *wishing* I would wear a mask. But these days I am thinking about safety, for you and me, so I am keeping the mask on.

When Jordan and Trisha asked me to speak briefly on something from the Bible, I thought of Jesus’ words from John 8:31:

If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.

A disciple is a student. Jesus is speaking as a rabbi, a teacher, talking to his students. He is saying, “I am a teacher, and those who are truly my students will stick with my teaching, will hang in there with me. Those who do will come to know the truth, and it will make them free.”

There are several reasons why I thought this passage was very fitting for us today. As students at Gutenberg, Jordan and Trisha have talked a lot about truth. Can we know it? How can we live in it? Western culture has experienced a long, slow decline in confidence that truth can be known. And yet, here is Jesus saying that there *is* a truth, and it can be known. He, the teacher, can bring his students to an understanding of that truth.

The teachers at Gutenberg have talked a lot with Trisha and Jordan about truth, but we have tried to make it clear that we make no guarantees. We cannot claim that being our students will infallibly lead to truth. In one sense, we are teachers. But in a deeper sense we are students just as the Gutenberg students are. We have confidence, though, that our teacher, the Lord Jesus, *does* know the truth and *can* ultimately lead us to it. So on the one hand, what Jesus says here is incredibly comforting. Jesus, our teacher, knows the truth that leads to freedom, and he can make us know that truth as well.



On the other hand, what Jesus says here is also incredibly challenging. It all hinges on his opening phrase, “If you continue in my word...” Other translations have “abide” or “remain.” The reality is that many of Jesus’ disciples, students, did *not* continue in His teaching. They heard what he taught, and then they walked away.

That can be seen in this very passage. When Jesus said this, his Jewish listeners did not respond by saying, “That is fantastic! You can show us the truth! We can find freedom!” Instead, they thought, “Wait a minute. What do you mean ‘make us free?’ Are you implying we are some sort of slaves or something?” John tells us what they said to Jesus in John 8:33:

We are Abraham’s descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, “You will become free?”

As potential students, they are already thinking, “Hey, we are not sure we buy this.” Jesus answered them:

Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

Now Jesus is getting very personal. The freedom that you need is freedom from your own evil. When Jesus speaks of freedom, that sounds great. But in fact it is only good news if we accept his diagnosis of our desperate condition. There is something wrong with us. We are slaves of sin. By ourselves we can *never* break free of our slavery to sin. And as Jesus makes clear, sin leads to judgment. And judgment leads to death.

To be a student of Jesus means persevering when Jesus confronts us with truths that we may not like, truths such as these: We need to change the way we relate to God. We need to change the way we relate to other people. We need to change our view of what is really valuable in this world. And we really need to change how we think about ourselves. Jesus is a hard teacher. Being students at Gutenberg is a piece of cake compared to being students of Jesus.

Today we are congratulating Jordan and Trisha for staying the course. They completed the curriculum at Gutenberg under difficult circumstances. We are very proud of their accomplishment. But even though they are done being Gutenberg students, they will never be done being students of Jesus. For them, as for all of us, there is the challenge of finishing the greatest and most challenging curriculum. The news Jesus brings is great. We are not left on our own to stumble toward truth. Ultimately, in the

end, Jesus is a teacher who can and will lead us to that truth. And the result will be freedom and life. But as a teacher, Jesus makes great demands. We have to stick with the curriculum, even when it gets tough. We will never find freedom and life if we drop this class.

So I want to praise how Trisha and Jordan hung in there as Gutenberg students. Their perseverance is a model and reminder for us all. Because we all face the challenge of persevering in the school of Jesus.



COLLOQUY SUMMER 2020



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Board Matching Campaign & Gutenberg Giving Day • August 8

Gutenberg will award over \$75,000 in grants for student financial aid this year. The Board of Governors, as part of their annual summer Matching Campaign, has pledged \$12,900 for student financial aid. Our goal is to match that amount by Gutenberg Giving Day on August 8. You can help give students an excellent education by making a contribution here: gutenberg.edu/get-involved/give

SUMMER INSTITUTE 2020

Struggle and Hope

AUGUST 6-8

GUTENBERG.EDU/SI

Life is hard. Most literature and art produced by human beings over the centuries is about suffering, troubles, and struggle. We all experience such troubles in our own lives. And of course, this is one of the major themes explored in the Bible. “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14: 22). And yet Paul tells us that we also exult in those tribulations (Romans 5:3). The struggle of faith is in part a struggle to hold on to meaning and hope in the face of the sufferings brought upon us by the world, by each other, and by ourselves. Join us at this year’s Summer Institute to explore the challenge of growing in hope as we face the struggles of life.

Because of the uncertainties of COVID-19, Gutenberg is offering a Zoom option for participants. They will be able to see the lectures and participate in Zoom-only discussions. See the website for details.

EDUCATION CONFERENCE 2020

The Art of Learning

SEPTEMBER 3-5

GUTENBERG.EDU/EDCON

In the predominant view of education, the student’s primary job is to consume and store information, much like a computer. But such a view misses the true nature of learning. Learning is a dynamic process in which a student, like an apprentice, slowly builds skills and knowledge, constantly self-correcting toward mastery and a sound worldview. A key component of the process—frequently overlooked in modern education—is a student’s moral orientation toward truth. In this conference, we will explore the art of learning through talks and workshops in order to become better learners and better teachers.

The conference will feature nationally recognized speakers: Nancy Pearcey, author of *Total Truth*; Andrew Pudewa, founder of the Institute for Excellence in Writing; Leigh Bortins, founder of Classical Conversations; and John Seel, author of *The New Copernicans*.

If Gutenberg must cancel due to COVID-19 restrictions, participants will be refunded their full registration fee.