

Speak Out!



Straining toward
what is ahead, I press on

(PHILIPPIANS 3:13-14)

Over Memorial Day weekend, Kelly and I were able to travel out of town to hike on the Ice Age Trail, on portions we had never visited in central Wisconsin. There are portions of the trail that do not seem that interesting, such as when connector routes overlap with country roads. There are other portions that take one into stunning woodlands and prairies that can truly take your breath away. What surprises me many times is that even after living in this state for more than twenty years, I can still find something new to me or beauty I have not seen before.



Our life with God can be like that as well. There are ups and downs, curves and straight lines, excitement and monotony, but newness and beauty from God can find us anywhere along the journey. This is, I believe, part of what the Apostle Paul meant when he wrote:

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12-14)

Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–c. 395) saw in these verses the reality that the spiritual life could be seen as a continual growth or straining ahead in pursuit of God. We continually climb to steps above us, always finding our desire increasing, hungry to attain what we have not yet experienced. In this way, we are both content in God yet also helpfully unsatisfied, longing to “taste and see that the LORD is good” (Psalm 34:8) in ways that surpass our current experience of God. One of the joys of the new heaven and the new earth, I believe, is that we will endlessly explore the wondrous treasures found in God.

In this issue of *Speak Out*, we explore the ongoing process of learning and growth in our faith. As we peruse the stories and articles here, I hope we are inspired with zeal to continue our discipleship journey with the Lord.

Matt Erickson

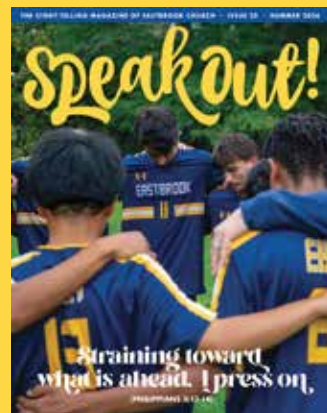
Matt Erickson
Senior Pastor, Eastbrook Church

NEW! Missions Podcast Now Available

Eastbrookers can already subscribe to listen to Sunday sermons, or go “Behind the Sermon” with our preaching team — now, you can also learn more about Missions at Eastbrook wherever you listen to podcasts!

“Eastbrook on Mission” explores what it really means to proclaim and embody the love of Jesus Christ in the city and in the world. Through conversations with people from our church and beyond, we tell stories of faith in action, ask honest and sometimes difficult questions, and listen for where God is already at work.

Curious about how the mission of Jesus takes shape in everyday lives and neighborhoods? Tune in now on the app of your choice, or find links at eastbrook.org/podcast.



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STORY

ADD TO THEIR LEARNING.

by Blaine and Maureen Gibson

In addition to traditional “God Stories” (tracing God’s hand throughout the life of an Eastbrooker), we also want to share smaller snapshots of His faithfulness and provision—“God Moments,” if you will, like the story you’ll hear below.

Blaine and Maureen Gibson have been believers since they were 22 and 18, respectively, and have been connected to Eastbrook for the past 25 years. They say Eastbrook has played a “tremendous role” in their walks with God—including the ways they connect, grow, serve, and continue to learn about His kingdom.

When Maureen first started attending Eastbrook, she was very uncertain as to how to connect with others. In an effort to tangibly connect and meet people, she started serving as a greeter on Sunday mornings.

Blaine was first spurred on to get actively involved in the fellowship by helping to plan a men’s retreat. It helped him to feel connected to the body in a meaningful way.

Since then, between the two of us, we have been part of teaching teams for Sunday Adult Classes and Men’s Ministry, served at the Bread of Healing Clinic and Food Pantry, participated in and helped lead Bible studies and prayer groups, and are part of a small group in our area.

While we have been believers for many years, we are of the conviction that learning and growth in Christ should never cease. As human beings, we never “arrive.” The Apostle Paul admonished the Philippians, we are to “*continue to work out our salvation with fear and trembling*” (Philippians 2:12). In the Christian learning community, we see that “*as iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another*” (Proverbs 27:17).

IN THE CHRISTIAN WALK, YOU EITHER KEEP GROWING OR YOU FALL BACK. WE CHOOSE TO KEEP GROWING.

One of the greatest lessons Blaine has learned has been that of humility. This past year, he team-taught classes on the miracles of Jesus, and on Holy Week. The classes were interactive in nature. He grew in humility by facilitating classes in which many of the participants knew more about the subject matter than He did.



The morning prayer group has had a profound impact on Maureen. She has learned so much over the course of the past six years through the examples of others, and listening to the prayers of brothers and sisters who are unwavering in faith has transformed the way that she prays.

THE MORE WE LEARN, THE MORE WE UNDERSTAND THAT WE HAVE SO MUCH MORE TO LEARN.

Learning with others, and listening to different ideas and perspectives, provides a wealth of opportunity to grow. In addition, attending classes and other activities opens the door to meeting people that we might not otherwise get to know.

Active participation at Eastbrook Church has helped us to develop relationships with other Christians, many times in the context of serving. Our involvement has caused us to grow in our knowledge and understanding of God, while also reflecting on our individual journeys with Him. With active participation, sometimes come challenges. As life is busy and, at times, messy, having the time to participate (and participate well) can be difficult. We encourage you: Find a way to get involved! You never know what God has in store for you. It could be new learning. It could be new friends in Christ. It could be an open door for service that you had never considered! ■

HAVE A GOD STORY THAT YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE IN A FUTURE ISSUE OF SPEAK OUT? KNOW SOMEBODY YOU'D LIKE TO NOMINATE? WE'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU! EMAIL RACHEL SHUSTER AT RSHUSTER@EASTBROOK.ORG.

SUMMER READING LIST

BY PASTOR JORAN WEITZER



HOLIER THAN THOU: *How God's Holiness Helps Us Trust Him* by Jackie Hill Perry

How would you define the word "holy?" Does that word drum up guilt and shame in you as you consider God's perfection and justice? Does that word evoke a God that is so "other" that He feels unreachable? Does that word sound just too churchy to mean anything in real life? Is it possible that we may use the word "holy" so casually in church that we have lost the biblical depth of it?

This book by the wonderful Jackie Hill Perry seeks to shake the dust off of "holy" as we've come to know it and revealing it for what it really is: good news. In these pages, we will see that God is not like us. He is different. He is holy. And that's exactly what makes Him trustworthy. As it turns out, God being "holier than thou" is actually the best news in the world, and it's the key to trusting Him. ■



ASKING BETTER QUESTIONS OF THE BIBLE: *A Guide for the Wounded, Wary & Longing for More* by Marty Solomon

What is the Bible? I'm wondering how you would answer. After posing that question to our middle school students, we embark on a series that reminds us that the Bible isn't written to us, but for us. As adults, I think we need to be reminded of this as well. Is it possible that we too often read Scripture through our modern individualized American lens in ways that misinterpret and misapply the text? Is it possible that there are other tools we can employ to introduce us to the world and lives of the original authors and audiences? Is it possible that Scripture invites us into deeper, more complex, and more beautiful conversations than we ever saw before?

These are the same questions investigated by Marty Solomon (President of Impact Campus ministries, and founder of the BEMA Discipleship Podcast). If you are hungry to get more out of the Word, and see God and the story He is writing more fully, this book is for you. ■



THE RUTHLESS ELIMINATION OF HURRY by John Mark Comer

What type of person are you becoming? I often pose this question to our middle school students, typically followed by a dialogue about cultural influences and technology, in order to help them see that we are all being disciplined by something, whether we realize it or not. Not every cultural movement or modern technology is destructive. However, study after study concludes that the vast majority of people are living increasingly faster and distracted lives than any other time in history. In the midst of apparent societal advancement, John Mark Comer dares to ask the question, "What type of people are we becoming in the midst of all of this?" "Is this good for our souls?"

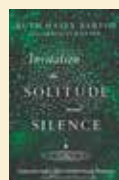
This book challenged me to step off the impossibly fast treadmill of digital overconsumption and trade in the "just grind it out all day every day" work ethic for a more biblically-based theology of rest, spiritual formation, and discipleship. Honestly, this has been one of the most transformative books I've read. ■



GARDEN CITY: *Work, Rest and the Art of Being Human* by John Mark Comer

This book is the other side of the coin to *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*. In *Ruthless*, Comer highlights the necessity for a proper theology of rest and spiritual formation in the midst of an increasingly exhausted and overwhelmed world. In *Garden City*, he puts forth a theology of work driven by a Genesis to Revelation perspective. God has created us to "garden" in this world in unique ways that all reflect Him. This book challenges you to run everything you do through this framework.

You are not a machine garnering value only from how much you produce in this world. You are a deeply loved human being, created to work and reflect our God to our world. So, what are you going to do about that? ■



INVITATION TO SOLITUDE AND SILENCE: *Experiencing God's Transforming Presence* by Ruth Haley Barton

One of my favorite truths Pastor Matt occasionally reminds us of is that "we can't hear what we aren't listening for." I desperately want to hear God. I desperately want to experience true communion with Him. I desperately want to live an integrated life with Him. Yet, I find myself so distracted by other voices, other tasks, and other priorities that my life does not often reflect my deep desire to hear from God. I'm wondering if you relate.

Ruth Haley Barton challenges us to study Scripture and church history for guidance in the midst of our information-overloaded, over-stimulated, "always-doing-something" culture. How can we pause, consider our lives, and prioritize seeking desperately to hear from the living God who calls us deeper still? ■



PRACTICING THE WAY: *Be with Jesus, Become like Him, Do as He Did* by John Mark Comer

If you had to summarize what it means to be a follower of Jesus in one sentence, what would you say? If you compared that answer to a snapshot of your life, would they align?

John Mark Comer urges us to return to a vision of Christian discipleship based on the life rhythms of Jesus, and challenges us to adopt them practically in pursuit of true Spirit-led transformation and "life to the full."

This book has brought me back to the essence of what it means to follow Jesus, and called me to reassess what I mean when I say "I am a Jesus follower." ■

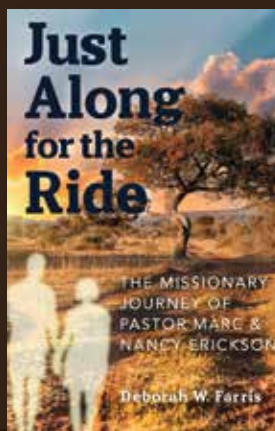
Pastor Joran Weitzer leads our Middle School Ministry here at Eastbrook. He also works with all of our students to help them develop their musical gifts in worship.



As Told By Eastbrookers!

CONSIDER ADDING A BOOK WRITTEN BY ONE OF YOUR FELLOW CHURCH FAMILY MEMBERS THIS SUMMER! MANY OF YOU HAVE WRITTEN AND/OR PUBLISHED YOUR OWN STORIES—FIND TITLES, DESCRIPTIONS, AND AVAILABILITY BELOW.

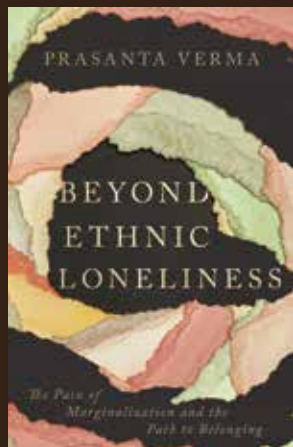
Please note: This is not an exhaustive list! We are sure there are more bookworms out there...



Available for purchase on Amazon or at orangehatpublishing.com

JUST ALONG FOR THE RIDE: *The Missionary Journey of Pastor Marc and Nancy Erickson* by Deborah W. Farris

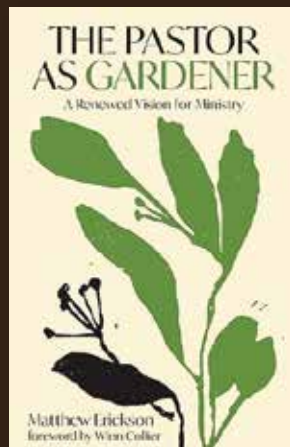
Just Along for the Ride tells the remarkable true story of Pastor Marc and Nancy Erickson, an ordinary couple who said “yes” to God’s call and found themselves on an extraordinary journey around the world. From serving in East Africa, China, and the Middle East to founding Eastbrook Church, they followed God’s leading through adventure, uncertainty, sacrifice, and joy.



Available for purchase on Amazon, at Barnes & Noble, Bookshop.org, or through your favorite local bookseller

BEYOND ETHNIC LONELINESS: *The Pain of Marginalization and the Path of Belonging* by Prasanta Verma Anumolu

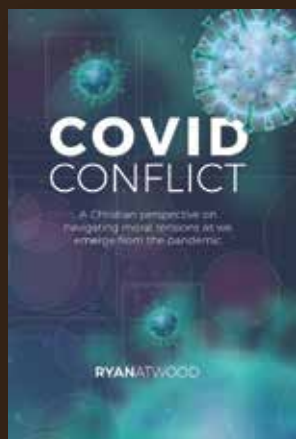
In *Beyond Ethnic Loneliness*, Prasanta examines the deep sense of isolation ethnic and racial minorities experience when they are othered and perceived as perpetual foreigners. Through narrative storytelling and research, Prasanta introduces “ethnic loneliness” as a form of disbelonging shaped by cultural fragmentation, identity erasure, invisibility, and the search for one’s sense of home. Grounded in a spiritual perspective, Verma frames belonging as something that can be rediscovered within oneself, with others, and with God.



Available for purchase on Amazon, at eerdmans.com, or wherever else you like to buy your books

THE PASTOR AS GARDENER: *A Renewed Vision for Ministry* by Matthew Erickson

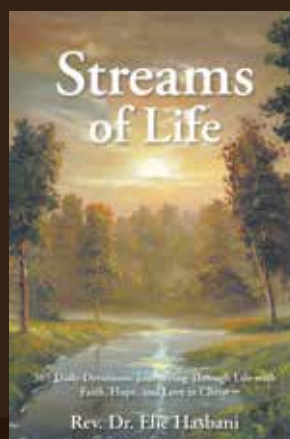
In times of confusion and chaos, people often find that their path to wholeness runs through a garden. Tending plants and tilling soil are timeless, restorative acts that can renew our sense of identity and purpose. In *The Pastor as Gardener*, Pastor Matt taps into this truth and applies it to the work of pastoral ministry.



Available for purchase on Amazon

COVID CONFLICT: A Christian Perspective on Navigating Moral Tensions as We Emerge from the Pandemic by Ryan Atwood

COVID-19 ended millions of lives worldwide, but that’s not the only thing it brought us. Conflict around COVID restrictions have infected our countries, cities, organizations, and even our families. This book explores these viewpoints, the various possible outcomes we face in 2021 and beyond, and what kind of conflict could arise from each.



Contact Elie Hasbani at 414.374.3457 for purchase

STREAMS OF LIFE: *365 Daily Devotions* by Elie Hasbani

“Journeying through life with faith, hope, and love in Christ” (1 Corinthians 13:13). Are you longing for deeper renewal, daily encouragement and a closer walk with Christ? *Streams of Life* is a powerful year-long devotional created to strengthen your faith, renew your hope, and ground your life in God’s unfailing love—every single day of the year.

GET TO KNOW AN EASTBROOKER: Kellie Kok

When someone references “Eastbrook,” it can be shorthand for our church as well as Eastbrook Academy. The two have a symbiotic relationship, rooted in a common mission—some might say the Academy is the biggest ministry arm of the Church, serving hundreds of students each year for the last quarter century.

Kellie Kok currently serves as Head of School at Eastbrook Academy. Prior to her work in administration, she taught third and fourth grade for 16 years. Her two sons were students here—one went on to teach here himself, alongside his wife, and the other became an Eastbrook-supported field worker leading people to Christ. The entire family is a longtime part of our church. Long story short, Eastbrook has been a major part of Kellie’s life! Let’s get to know Kellie and how she has seen God move during her time in our faith community.

As we learned in the intro, your family is very embedded here! When and how did you first come to Eastbrook?

It was 1981 and my parents had just become saved and baptized. They chose Eastbrook as their church when it was at Hartford Avenue School. I think I was in 7th or 8th grade when we first came, then I was in the youth group, and I was baptized here at Eastbrook during high school. My mom, Sue Haeuser, is still a longtime volunteer in the Nursery! My dad, Roland, was also big in the ushering ministry, as well as serving on Church Council.

After college, I got married and lived in Chicago until my husband Gary and I moved back to Milwaukee in 1995 and started going to Eastbrook again. And it was 1996 when the church moved to this campus! [My son] Josh started school at Eastbrook Academy the second year the school was open. Five years later, when my younger son Zach was in first grade, I started teaching here. Our whole life was here.

In all that time, what has Eastbrook meant to you?

It has been my own and my family’s

faith-builder. At graduation this year I was thinking about the fact that my kids graduated on that stage...they were dedicated on that stage, Josh got married on that stage, my dad’s funeral was on that stage. And now I get to help impact all of these kids who are students here.

How are you connected at Eastbrook now? In what ways are you involved?

I’ve been a teacher, a principal, and now the Head of School. I sort of “ended up” in administration, and in each different role I always thought, ‘that’s all I’m going to do!’ And now, here I sit—but I am also transitioning out. [Eastbrook Academy is currently searching for its next Head of School.]

I feel like it’s time. The school is in a wonderful place, and God has allowed me to use my gifts here in the sense of being known, being at Eastbrook for so long, and providing security in that way. I prayed that God would make sure I didn’t leave too early, but also that I wouldn’t overstay, and that He would allow it to be a transition. He’s honored all of those prayers.

How do you see God at work in your work? What do you hope He accomplishes through Eastbrook Academy?

Raising the leaders. It’s a beautiful thing to see kids come in and watch where they go. In my role now, I’m able to help influence the whole picture of building Christ-like leaders in our students and also in our faculty.

We have a lot of former students coming back to teach and work here. Eastbrook Church has a lot of long-term people, people who stay; the school is a bit different. There are committed families—the families here at the church started the school—but there are fewer Eastbrook Church families whose kids attend school here now than there were in the beginning. Now, we’ve expanded to multiple churches and even multiple faith backgrounds represented among our students. It’s actually very representative of the diversity of Eastbrook Church.

Watching this school has grown my faith because it has lasted through the grace of God and His provision. I feel strongly it will continue no matter what comes.



From left to right: Gloria, Josh, Zach, Kellie, and Gary Kok

What do you wish more people knew about Eastbrook Academy?

What a close-knit community it is. There is a lot of intentionality in the education we provide. The relationships are special, and the students are really known here. I think when people leave here having had a positive experience, it's because they have felt seen and known.

In some ways, we're like any school—we've had some turnover, schools always do. But we have been and still are strong. We endure and continue to grow, thanks to God. We are still the same school Eastbrookers started, but we have changed and grown—just like a child!



High School Students at 'Senior Sunrise'

We were just named a state and national School of Character. God is blessing the Academy, and we pray that that continues. [Read more about this honor and what it means below.]

In what ways do you find God pouring into you, as you are being asked to pour into others?

I feel Him showing me that He is faithful. He always shows up. As much as we can try to control things, we just have to release it to Him. This position I'm in can be hard, but I continue to learn that I need to release things to God. I can plan, but I can't control the future.

What prayers do you have for the Academy that you'd like to share with our Eastbrook family?

Please pray for protection over the Academy and the Church, for continued growth and investment into our mission.

I'd encourage people to pray for church leaders, because there's so much behind the scenes that people don't see—I didn't either! Not being in leadership, you don't

realize the weight that is carried.

Pray that our school can be known in the community, that we can draw in staff who want to serve our kids and see the next generation grow. Pray that our students can continue to be seen and loved. ■

Curious to learn more about Eastbrook Academy? Contact Terri Carlson, Senior Admissions Specialist, at tcarlson@eastbrookacademy.org to request more information or set up a tour.



Lower School Students learn about plants from Mrs. Gilmore

Eastbrook Academy Honored as a NATIONAL SCHOOL OF CHARACTER

Adapted from a story published by TMJ4, by Gideon Verdin

Eastbrook Academy has been named a state and national School of Character—one of just three schools in Wisconsin to earn the honor this year and only the 17th in state history.

The recognition goes beyond academics, highlighting the school's commitment to shaping students through values like leadership, responsibility, and community.

Gloria Kok, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, says the school has been intentional about putting its values into practice.

"We've really honed in on what our core values are and been more intentional on teaching those core values and giving students opportunities for leadership," Kok said.

She adds that the award is not a finish line.

"Character doesn't just stop when we get the award. We're still developing our character every day."



Growing in Attentiveness: A Reflection

by Grace

I finished my internship with Eastbrook's missions staff in the summer of 2024, feeling like God had more for me to discover, specifically in this community. I went back to Wheaton College to finish my senior year and then returned to Eastbrook last August as a year-long ministry resident in missions. Over the past year, the residency has been a journey of growing attentiveness with the Lord as He has opened my eyes to see Him and the world more deeply.

Among the variety of contexts I have been able to learn in this year, my main focus area, Eastbrook's International Community Center, stands out as a place that God has used to meet me, challenge me, and clarify aspects of His direction for my life. As I think about my time teaching English classes, tutoring families, and visiting with students in their homes, I am struck by how God has opened my eyes to see Him in places and ways that I couldn't before.



Perhaps surprisingly, He has done this in part by using the language barrier that naturally exists as an open door and not as a barrier at all. When words are not the first point of connection, our attention shifts elsewhere and in a way, we see with new eyes. Through the experience of teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) this year, God has led me into seeking to know

and extend mutual trust to people based on who they are on a deeper level. This environment has grown my curiosity and solidified my belief that questions are one of the most tangible expressions of love and an active way to move toward understanding when there are natural gaps in communication. When I share about my friendships with students and their families, I mention joy, humor, gentleness, resilience, focus, intentionality, curiosity, and more.



These are not qualities of achievement or other external measures of value, but deep qualities of heart revealed in response to a question's invitation or without speaking at all.

Several of the deepest friendships that have formed through my residency experience have been with the family of an ICC student whose English is very limited. As I spend time with this multi-generational family each week, we eat, cook, play games, and have good conversations that take place in their native language (which I do not speak).

My lack of understanding has not been a disruption to friendship, but a foundation for a deeper attentiveness to God's movement in relationships beyond my limitations.

Operating within a language barrier is a continually humbling experience as impressive words are quickly

overshadowed by the need to simply make a point. I have seen God's grace countless times this year as He has formed one-time conversations and long-term friendships that can only be explained by His Spirit speaking over human words.

The constant insufficiency of my efforts reminds me that I was made for close relationship with my Creator and that His success is not dependent on mine.

Through this year, He has kept me in wonder at His kindness and strength by drawing me into attentiveness to the miracles of ordinary days.

I am finishing the ministry residency full of gratitude for the many people who have poured into me this year and for the Lord's endless grace that He has allowed me to see with fresh eyes. What a gift to learn and grow with Him! As I prepare for my next step, I look forward to the continued journey of discovering that our God is always more than we can ever prepare ourselves for. ■



"Days pass and the years vanish, and we walk sightless among miracles. Lord, fill our eyes with seeing and our minds with knowing; let there be moments when Your Presence, like lightning, illumines the darkness in which we walk. Help us to see, wherever we gaze, that the bush burns unconsumed. And we, clay touched by God, will reach out for holiness, and exclaim in wonder: How filled with awe is this place, and we did not know it!" - Jewish Sabbath Prayer