

Tell all the stories

By [David Warkentin](#)

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We

work very hard at our faith; we agonize over it; we struggle with it; we grimly and determinedly set our jaws to make it through. The empty tomb is a monument against that. Persons active in religious leadership very often become patronizing to God, treating him as someone we must take care of. We think that what we do determines his effectiveness, and fail to see that that is the position of a pagan toward an idol, not a creature bowed before the Creator.

(Eugene Peterson, [Five Smooth Stones of Pastoral Ministry](#)).

When we reflect on our projects as Christians, we are good at telling positive stories: an [orphanage](#) built in Thailand; numerous [church plants](#) in British Columbia; fundraising to [support](#) a local Bible college. To repeat Peterson above, “we work very hard at our faith,” and many times, this is a good thing. So we rightly tell these stories. They bring a necessary inspiration to continue making a difference in the world. We need to know and be reminded, I believe, that change *is* possible.

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problem. These aren’t the only stories to tell. And in our enthusiastic cheers for success, I think Peterson offers a sobering reminder: Christians can make idols of their success. We forget that change *isn’t* always possible. Or at least not in the way we envision. And we don’t always tell these stories.

Which is why my attention was caught when I recently read this [news update](#) from my denomination ([Canadian Mennonite Brethren](#)):

[The Agora](#), a 13 year-old MB church located in Halifax, N.S., officially closed its doors on Sunday, Sept. 26...

How

do we process this type of news? The congregation's own response was mixed. Reflecting on their final gathering, the consensus was this:

We

do so with grief in our hearts for what is no longer, but also with thanksgiving for our history and hope and expectation for the future," said several long-time supporters in the congregation. "The formal institution is ending, but the mission of the church and the relationships that have been formed and cultivated live on in its people.

I was encouraged to read the peoples' reaction.

Their disappointment is clear, even if understated. But their 13 years weren't a waste either. Failure - if we even venture to call it that (I'm not sure closing a church has to be considered a failure) - isn't wasted.

I'll admit, I don't particularly like to hear the "unsuccessful" stories. Yet I need these stories. We all need these stories. In them we're reminded of our own frailty, our own inability to make everything work out for the best. I like how [John Stackhouse](#) puts it:

Most

of us live in a world that is grayer than these black-and-white options, and some of us earnestly want Biblical guidance for such living. Indeed, most of us make our way in a world in which success means asking for ten, hoping for eight, and settling for six. We experience compromise, disappointment, unexpected impediments, and unintended consequences ([Making the Best of It](#)).

By

being realistic about our experiences in the world, we are reminded that as followers of Jesus - the Church - we are exactly that: *followers*. We're not firstly creators of human institutions, but imitators of a creative, yet subversive God; a God who's highest point of victory (resurrection) came through a submission to failure (death).

So as Christians, let's keep telling our stories. Let's just make sure we tell all of them...

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