

## Creative Nonfiction



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### Reshaping the Wineskins

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*“And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins. Mark 2:22 NIV*

Over the past couple of years, we’ve seen many wineskins torn apart, unable to carry the weight of the coming new wine in all its measures and forms. The modern church is being transformed today at a quickening pace because of global circumstances. The wars, conflicts, technological developments, changing world orders, diseases, crises and growth of wickedness we are facing today affect our universal morality and values. Some of those have exposed how, in some ways, the church has been more prepared for talk than action.

We, as a community, have been challenged to live out our preaching and the message we’ve been proclaiming for decades. We got the chance to sharpen our faith and experience God’s goodness and faithfulness in new ways. Our ‘wineskins’ have stretched and cracked as we acknowledge the patches that need removing to make way for the new skins. Still, not all of them should be tossed aside.

Interestingly, old wineskins can be massaged with oils to become malleable again. And through the last years, I have seen this happen in both my personal and global communities. I have seen God pour out so much oil in places I was sure needed replacing and I have seen ends to things some of us were desperately holding on to, not trusting our Lord’s ways enough to let them go.

I remember how our church services changed in the first three months of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine over two years ago. All of a sudden, the time we had been spending on organizing meetings became less important. We simplified our church language and reminded ourselves that we are not called to be separated from the world, but to be “all in.” We realized that the church is not supposed to “stay out” of politics. Rather, WE ARE a politic, the salt of the world.

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Our congregations became about 10 percent believers or church members. The rest were people who lived in the church and were encountering hope for the first time. The Gospel became startlingly real and relevant and not just through the statement “Jesus loves you.” Rather, the Gospel felt complete as we were reminded that Jesus is coming back and that the Kingdom of God carries hope and answers. Its presence is something we should all be prepared for because that is the message of Jesus, who was born and crucified over two thousand years ago and fulfilled promises given from the beginning of time. We finally saw the Body of Christ going INTO the world instead of just waiting for the world to come to our churches.

Personally, the war in the physical world opened my eyes to what is endlessly happening in the spiritual realm. Through pain, tears, and a heart broken by watching the world fall apart in so many places, the promise of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, coming back became so vivid that I could not unsee it anymore, even when I tried to become numb because of tiredness and desperation.

Yet, this is where something beautiful happens. This is where the *Ekklesia* is not performing, but grabs a towel, ready to wash feet. It no longer fears the dirt and chooses against judging who is better and holier. After all, we were all bought at the same price and united through the same Spirit, regardless of nationality, historical conflicts, mistakes, and prejudices. I am not trying to make God’s love “tolerant” because it is not. Doing our best to be holy requires living in the Spirit and renewing our minds through Scripture. But we need both truth *and* love, as truth *without* love injures so many, causing damage and division.

We desperately need to look to Jesus as we did at first, no matter how long we have followed him or what status we have. We can start by asking ourselves what he meant by what he said, why he did what he did and how we can both be changed and create change today. As we see, Jesus asked more questions than he gave answers, and he dug right to the core of our hearts and motives.

In difficult moments, when we do not have answers and we feel like we are hitting a wall, my heart turns to John 14:26: “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (ESV). What a comforting promise for us, that even amid change and reshaping, we can still be sure of the Holy Ghost who dwells both in us and on us. He is working in our hearts and minds as we journey along, so we can be fruitful and hear those longed-after words when we reach the Promised Land: “Well done, good and faithful servant.” Let it be so. Amen.