

# Maritime Messenger

Volume 63 No. 3 April 2025

## HONOURING CHRIST IN A DIVIDED WORLD

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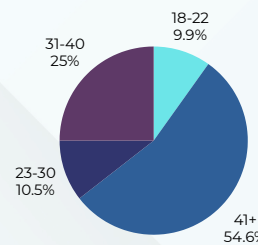




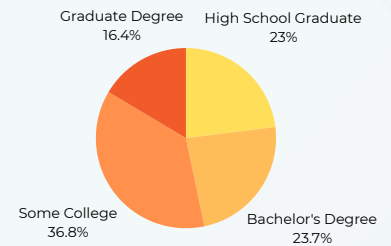
Katie Stevenson  
Director of Marketing

# CHRISTIAN LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT SURVEY

## Age Range:



## Education Level:



## Where they serve:



This winter, we conducted the **Christian Learning and Development Survey** to gain deeper insights into the current landscape of biblical education. The results reveal compelling trends—some expected, others thought-provoking—offering a valuable perspective on the needs and challenges facing Christian learning today. At Maritime Christian College, these findings will play a role in shaping our future initiatives as we strive to answer a crucial question: *How can we most effectively provide biblical education to the world?*

We've collected a brief overview of the survey results to share with you:



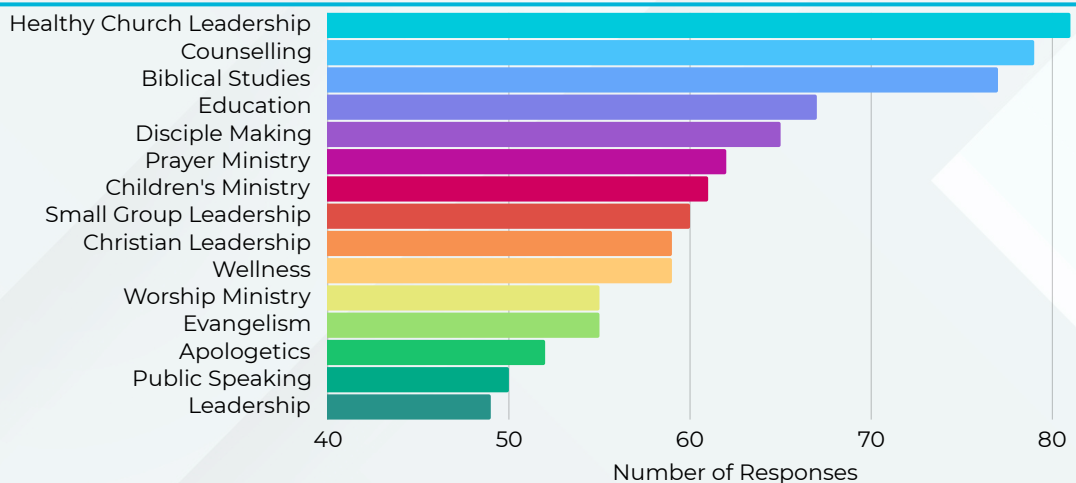
## How they grow their own faith:

- Bible Reading
- Podcasts
- Small Groups
- Networking
- Online Learning
- Discipleship Groups
- Recorded Sermons
- Fellowship
- Attended Bible College
- Memorizing Scripture
- Audio Visual Resources
- Specific Research Projects
- "The Chosen" Show Series
- YouVersion Bible App
- Informal Discussions
- Solitude and Nature
- Books
- Articles
- Blogs
- Taking Courses
- Attending Church
- Meditation
- Conferences

## Their concerns for the Church:

- Biblical Illiteracy
- Disconnect
- Isolation
- Unloving
- Out of Touch
- Lack of Knowledge
- Worldly
- Church Hurt
- "Tickling ears" Teaching
- Watered-down Gospel
- Faith isn't being Shared
- Weak Foundation
- Scandals and Low Morality
- Cold and Standoffish
- Leadership Training
- Lack of Obedience to God
- Declining
- Lost
- Too Focused on Performance

**We also asked participants to choose what courses and training they would be interested in or see a need for:**






Tom Marshall  
Academic Dean

## THE SURVEY RESPONSE SHOWS PEOPLE ARE SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS:

Likewise, people seek out fellowship opportunities in small groups and discuss questions with their peers. Some turn to online programs/podcasts to listen to sermons, or discussions about issues - and some turn to prayer.

Only a few responses declared they wanted nothing to do with the Bible or Church.

**Overall, we feel confident that there is an interest in the Bible for answers, and a variety of means to tap into it.**

With this data in mind, we look forward even more to this year's KT Norris Lectures - and we hope to see you there! 

Where did I come from? Who am I? Why am I here? How should I live?  
What's my purpose? Where am I going?

### Where do they go to find these answers?

When asked "How do you engage in learning about your faith?"  
The top three answers were: **Bible reading/study, church attendance  
and books and reading.**

## KT NORRIS LECTURES

**MAY 6-8, 2025**

9 LILAC AVENUE  
CHARLOTTETOWN PE



**MARITIME**  
CHRISTIAN COLLEGE



## WITH SPEAKER **DR. JOHN WHITTAKER**

Founder of Bible in Life and Creator  
of The Listener's Commentary

*Boise, Idaho*



### TUESDAY:

*May 6*

#### Morning

#### **Dual Citizenship**

Philippians 3:20; 1:26ff

#### **The Gospel of the Kingdom**

Mark 1; Romans 1:1-6

#### Evening

#### **Submitting to the King**

Luke 9:18-27, 57-62

### WEDNESDAY:

*May 7*

#### Morning

#### **Foreigners and Exiles**

1 Peter

#### **Kingdom of Priests**

Exodus 19; Revelation 5:1-10

#### Evening

#### **Living as Sojourners**

Hebrews 11; 1 John 2:15ff

### THURSDAY:

*May 8*

#### Morning

#### **Beautiful and Good**

Matthew 5-7

#### **Resocializing**

Various scriptures

#### Evening

#### **Making Disciples**

Matthew 28:18-20

**Morning Sessions:** 9:30 am - 12:00 pm

Refreshments provided

**Evening Sessions:** 7:30 pm - 9:00 pm

With worship time



**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**  
[mccpei.com/kt-norris-lectures](http://mccpei.com/kt-norris-lectures)  
902.628.8887

**No Registration Required / Free Will Offering**

# MEET THE SPEAKER FOR THE KT NORRIS LECTURES



*Dr. John Whittaker has spent 30 years as a pastor and Bible college professor, helping thousands of people follow Jesus by learning to hear what the Bible actually says.*

## Why do you believe in God?

This is such a huge question, and I could answer it in a number of ways! There is the apologetics reason: Jesus is risen! When wrestling through my own season of doubt, that was the solid bedrock I landed on. The tomb is empty. Jesus is alive. That's the best explanation of all the evidence. So while there's plenty of things I may not understand, I can't deny Jesus and his resurrection.

But there's also the daily, existential reasons. I would be lost without Jesus. I would have no clue what life was about. I wouldn't know how to live. I wouldn't know why I was here. I wouldn't know how to face death. I wouldn't know how to face difficult days. Jesus is life and apart from him, I truly could do nothing!

## Can you share a bit about your background?

Over the course of my life, I've been a college professor at a small Bible college, I've planted and pastored a church, I've been a teaching pastor in a larger church, but currently much of my time is spent creating a bunch of online Bible teaching resources. **There's some online courses, a weekly podcast, but the main one is a free Commentary on the New Testament that you listen to - The Listener's Commentary.**

Two things led me to this. First, I was looking for ways to teach and train all the new Christians in my previous ministry. Since everyone spent their days online, why not go online to help people live as disciples of Jesus. And second, the massive amount of biblical illiteracy among Christians today compelled me to help people learn and live the Bible.

## Is there a topic you're dying to teach on that you haven't had the opportunity yet?

A topic that has been on my mind a lot lately has been Paul's approach to ministry that is laid out most fully in 2 Corinthians: lowliness, weakness, and how **embodying the cross is just as necessary as preaching the cross.** I feel like the Lord is still growing my understanding of this, so I'm probably not ready to teach it yet. But I think this is crucial to our life and ministry.

## What's one thing you wish more people understood about living in a divided world?

Here's one key thing: what if instead of focusing on the problems and divisions of the world, we the church sought to become the kind of community that offers the world a concrete example of a better way to be human and live together as humans? What if we offered an alternative kind of human society, one learned from Jesus, that's full of love and peace?

## How do you stay inspired and continue to invest in your own spiritual development?

A couple thoughts on this one. Primarily, **my fundamental identity is that I'm a child of God** (not a preacher or teacher or anything else) ... that means my life is found in him and I'm utterly dependent on him for everything. So drawing near to him is just what a child of his needs to do and wants to do.

Now the reality is, like most of us, I'm easily distracted or I get busy and there's a number of things that can get in the way of drawing near to him. So I don't think in terms of staying inspired to do it. I think more in terms of disciplining myself, so that some things are just scheduled into my life's patterns. As Paul said, *"Discipline yourself for the sake of godliness..."* (1 Timothy 4:7-8). That way, whether I feel inspired or not, I live in partnership with God. 📧

# TWO KEY REASONS FOR OUR DISCIPLESHIP PROBLEM

Dr. John Whittaker

Can I be honest? I've sat through too many church leadership meetings that spent way too much time wrestling with this question: What is the mission of the church?

I think the motivation was good. They wanted to write out their mission statement so they could be effective in their ministry. But the answer to this question is no mystery. And churches actually aren't free to come up with their own mission.

Jesus already gave us a mission and made it perfectly clear: *"Go and make disciples..."* (Matt. 28:19-20).

He even told us how to do it. According to Jesus, making disciples entails two things - baptizing people into Christ and teaching them to obey everything he commanded.

This is our mission.

*Discipleship isn't something we do; it's everything we do!*

Since the mission of the church is to make disciples, disciple making and discipleship cannot be one program among many in the church. Instead, every program, ministry, and activity ought to in some way help people become disciples of Jesus or grow as disciples of Jesus.



## SO, WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?...

For Jesus and his first disciples, the answer to that question was clear and grew out of their cultural context. Young Jewish men would attach themselves to a particular rabbi as his talmid (disciple) **with the expressed goal of becoming like the rabbi**. They would learn what the rabbi knew, and they would do what the rabbi did. This is what it meant to be a disciple.

**A DISCIPLE OF JESUS IS SOMEONE WHO ARRANGES THEIR LIFE TO BE WITH JESUS IN ORDER TO BECOME LIKE JESUS.**

The work of making disciples entails **two parts**, both seen in Matthew 28:19-20: *“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to follow all that I commanded you.”* **First, we call people to attach themselves to Jesus.** This is what is usually called evangelism and it is embodied in baptism. **Second, we help people become like Jesus by teaching them to do what Jesus taught.**

Now here's the thing...there's a growing awareness among church leaders that we have a discipleship problem in the church today. We've done better at making converts and making church members rather than making disciples. Why is that?

There's probably a handful of factors, but I'd like to focus on **two reasons that I think are the heart of the issue**.

## 1. OUR DISCIPLESHIP PROBLEM IS A GOSPEL PROBLEM



Disciple making and the gospel go hand-in-hand. That is, **the gospel you preach determines the disciples you make**. And we have been preaching something other than the gospel the apostles preached, and that's one of the major reasons we're not making disciples like they did.

**Let me show you what I mean.**

→ **What is the gospel?** Most of the ways the gospel has been summarized in the modern church sounds something like this: *“You’ve sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But God sent Jesus to die for your sins. If you believe in Jesus, he’ll forgive your sins and you can go to heaven when you die.”*



Whether it's the “Roman Road” or the “Four Spiritual Laws” or something else, typically the gospel we've been taught is something like that, some sort of plan of salvation.

When you pay attention to what the apostles preached in the book of Acts, however, **it stands in stark contrast to that version of the gospel**. Just to be clear, it's not that the gospel doesn't offer salvation; it does. It's that in the preaching of the apostles, **things like forgiveness and eternal life are benefits of the gospel, not the heart of it**.

When the apostles preach the gospel in the book of Acts, the message they declare is that **Jesus is King, risen from the dead. And the call to action is to repent and believe that gospel**.

- In the first gospel sermon in Acts 2, Peter builds up to the announcement that God raised Jesus from the dead and seated him at his right hand (2:31-33) and then proclaims, *“Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified”* (2:36). And then after he calls people to repent and be baptized.
- In Acts 3, Peter quickly points out that God raised Jesus from the dead (3:15) and calls them to repent (3:19), showing how Jesus is the fulfillment of all their Old Testament hopes.
- When sharing the gospel with Cornelius and his relatives and close friends, the first gentile converts in Acts 10, Peter recounts the life of Jesus, how the Jews put him to death, but *“God raised Him up on the third day”* (10:40). He ends by telling Cornelius and the others gathered *“that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins”* (10:43).
- The apostle Paul's gospel message is the same. In Acts 13, his message culminates in Jesus risen from the dead (13:30-37) referring to it as *“good news”* (gospel, v. 32).
- Even when preaching the gospel to Greeks in Athens, Paul proclaimed that God raised Jesus from the dead (Acts 17:30-31).



You see, for the apostles and first followers of Jesus, the gospel was actually what the word means: **good news!** Not good advice. Not a new religion or even a plan of salvation, per se. It was news about what God had done through Jesus. **It was announcing that God had installed his King on the throne by raising him from the dead.**

The apostles actually learned the heart of the gospel from Jesus himself. When the gospel writers summarized the message Jesus preached, they did it like this: *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel"* (Mark 1:15). Notice that the gospel Jesus preached is that God's kingdom is at hand. He is ushering in God's reign and rule, his kingdom. That's the gospel Jesus preached, and it's what needs to be believed!

**And the only appropriate response to both Jesus' preaching of the gospel and the apostles' preaching of it was to repent and submit to this King.**

So, we see that there are three different components we need to distinguish clearly:

- A. THE CONTENT OF THE GOSPEL: JESUS IS KING, RISEN FROM THE DEAD**
- B. THE RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL: REPENT AND BELIEVE**
- C. THE BENEFITS OF THE GOSPEL: FORGIVENESS AND ETERNAL LIFE**

But here's the important thing for the sake of making disciples: the gospel we have typically taught focuses on people getting their sins forgiven and going to heaven. **The gospel the apostles preached focuses on Jesus and his kingship, and that gospel calls people to submit to him.**

Submitting to Jesus' royal authority leads directly to discipleship to Jesus.

It seems to me that if we want to fix our discipleship problem one key place to start would be **correcting our gospel problem.**

## 2. OUR DISCIPLESHIP PROBLEM IS A CHURCH PROBLEM

One of the things I've observed is that in our churches we have not made being a disciple who is becoming like Jesus crystal clear in the way we have communicated the goal of placing faith in Jesus. I had a young woman tell me recently that even though **she'd been a Christian for almost a decade she never heard she was supposed to become like Jesus until recently.**

And sometimes - maybe often times - one result of this is that we've made good church members more than good disciples.

Good church members attend, serve, and give, but are not necessarily becoming like Jesus from the inside out in their character and the mission of their life. I was preaching on these themes once and put on the screen a discipleship path that moved from new faith to mature faith. After service, a man stopped me and said, *"John, I've been a Christian for 10 years now but I'd put myself still in the new or young faith stage. All I knew I was supposed to do was go to church, serve, and give. So, I've been doing that faithfully. But I haven't really become like Jesus!"*

He was a great church member. He was faithful, involved, giving. All the things most pastors want from church members.

But he was stunted in his growth as a disciple, and when I asked him why, he said, *"No one told me where I was supposed to go and how to get there."*

I don't think he's alone. I think a lot of our ways of thinking about and doing church have (unintentionally) made good church members rather than growing disciples.

So, a few thoughts from what I read in the New Testament:

### **Churches are communities of the King.**

They are gatherings of people who have believed the gospel that Jesus is the King risen from the dead and have pledged their allegiance to him.



Because of this, churches are colonies of heaven on earth in whatever city or town they are in. This is Paul's point in Philippians 3:20. Christians are citizens of a new kingdom that embodies a new culture.

Becoming part of the church leads to **re-socializing: teaching, modeling, and training people in new ways of doing life.** People are called out of their former way of doing life into a new kingdom with a new set of values, priorities, ambitions, and practices.

**It's a whole new culture...and learning a new culture is hard and takes time. But it only happens with intentionality; it doesn't happen by accident.**

I really do wonder what would happen if as churches we focused everything we do on the key task Jesus gave us — making disciples.

What if we preached the gospel the way the apostles did in Acts, announcing the news that Jesus is King and calling people to loyal submission to him?

What if rather than trying to manage or grow a religious organization known as a "church" we gave our best thinking, time, and energy into forming people who embody Christ? This is what changed the ancient Roman world. It might just change ours too.





Richard Jones  
President

## FAITH IN THE FUTURE

We're excited that Dr. John Whittaker has accepted our invitation to come to Prince Edward Island as our keynote speaker for the 2025 KT Norris Lectures.

John will be speaking on the theme of "**Honouring Christ in a Divided World**". Our modern society has become deeply divided over every issue you can imagine. There are several factors driving this. Technological advancements and social media play a role by feeding us viewpoints we tend to align with, which then amplifies our existing views and further polarizes opinions. This seems to be especially true in the political arena. **Global trade issues, economic inequality, identity politics, and many other factors are deepening the divide. All these elements collectively have fostered an environment where people are more likely to align with like-minded individuals and dismiss opposing perspectives.**

Even for Christians, it is easy to be drawn into negativity and divisiveness unless we adopt and prioritize a kingdom perspective to honour Christ in all our relationships with people inside and outside the church.


As citizens of God's kingdom, how should we think about ourselves, our neighbors, our communities, and how will that shape what we do and don't do?

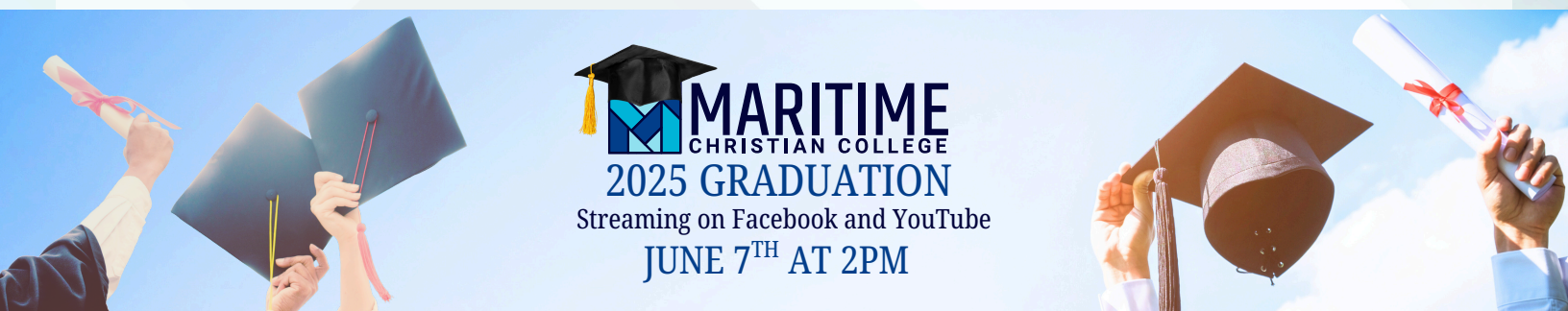
We need to understand and put into practice what it means to honour Christ in a divided world, and to **ensure we are a voice for positivity due to the message of the gospel and the hope we have in Jesus**. John is going to help us do that at the 2025 KT Norris Lectures.

Maritime Christian College also faces these same challenges of operating in a deeply divided world. It was the fall of 2020 - five years ago! - that MCC launched its first programs in a fully online format. Since that time MCC has continued to evaluate and adjust the degrees and certificates it offers, in order to better address the rapidly changing landscape of Christian higher education.

As you read on page 2, over the past few months MCC has been collecting feedback from a wide variety of churches, partnering organizations, supporters, and former and current students about the challenges they are facing as a Christian today, and how MCC could support them in responding to these challenges.

We were fortunate to have 18 students recently complete the first course in the Disciple Maker's Path Certificate program, and many of them gave us strong positive feedback about the impact this course had on their life as a follower of Jesus.

In response to this input, Maritime Christian College will be launching new courses and programs for the Fall 2025 semester. Stay tuned for more information on this in the coming months as MCC seeks to deliver resources to help followers of Jesus become more confident disciple makers! 



### MARITIME CHRISTIAN COLLEGE 2025 GRADUATION Streaming on Facebook and YouTube JUNE 7<sup>TH</sup> AT 2PM



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