

Of God and Gladiator



I HAD MET THE YOUNG MAN MONTHS BEFORE, and we talked often, though I was a grandmother and he in his 20s. He went by the nickname “Gladiator,” and it seemed intrusive to ask his real name. I was careful not to push but to be there in case he wanted to talk more. Now and then something would slip into the mostly light conversation that hinted at his real suffering. He might mention “some difficulties” or tell me suddenly that he had to be gone for a few days. I waited, praying for him and wondering when God would open his heart to the help I so wanted to give and he so needed.

The day finally came when Gladiator told me of the painful depression eating at his life. And then I knew why God had wanted me to wait and earn his trust before we talked together. It was not just his story that needed to be told, but my own too. And so when he asked for my faith testimony, I gave it to him with tears in my eyes. He heard the truth of it, recognized our common experiences, and let trust and friendship open doors that would have stayed shut under other circumstances.

Perhaps you are wondering where a young man and a baby boomer would

meet every day, learn to trust each other, and finally cry together as healing began. No, it was not in a coffee shop or a therapy session or part of an organized group or program. While playing an online game, we found ourselves talking of faith and God’s love as earnestly as if we had been sitting across the table with cups of coffee between us. Perhaps more so, as our age difference mattered little, our geographical and cultural differences were of no importance, and our common interest gave us an easy arena for conversation.

I want to suggest the gaming world as a mission field like any other in your life. If gaming is something you already love, it could also be a way to reach people you would be unlikely to encounter otherwise, and sometimes it results in a surprising depth of conversation.

There was the day that I received an in-game message that one of our team players had died suddenly. Having no idea of his age or the circumstances, I decided anyway to attempt a small note of condolence in a chat window to a player I knew had been his friend. I could not have guessed that, after an hour of talking with him about prayer, sorrow,

our common love of music, and his love for his young friend, I would log off thanking God for opening this avenue of ministry. I still play with this saddened young gamer, and he knows I continue to pray for him.

Gaming as ministry may seem an odd thing to consider. Then again, maybe not. There are real people, often hurting ones, on the other side of those screen names. And as in any ministry, the opportunity to make a difference through your words will be uncovered through gentle listening and caring. ■



Jennifer Harrington recently retired from a career in computer technology and enjoys freelance writing, computer games, and movie nights with her husband and four children. She is a Presbyterian elder serving at Centerpoint Community Church in Roseville, Calif.

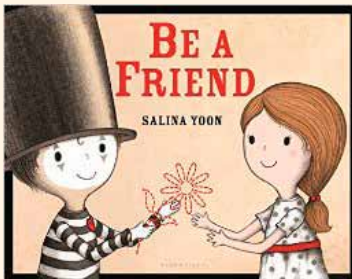
There are real people on the other side of those screen names.

God Don't Never Change: The Songs of Blind Willie Johnson

by various artists
reviewed by Robert N. Hosack



Blind Willie Johnson was a gospel blues singer and guitarist who recorded only thirty songs between 1927 and 1930, but his music was covered by artists like Bob Dylan, Led Zeppelin, and Bruce Cockburn. His growling bark and masterful slide guitar were designed to attract the lost on city street corners. This new collection honors the bluesman with eleven hand-clapping, soul-stirring interpretations of his original songs. From start to finish, the musical pastiche is held together by a gritty simplicity, infectious energy, and spiritual urgency that made Johnson's music so influential. (Alligator)



Be a Friend

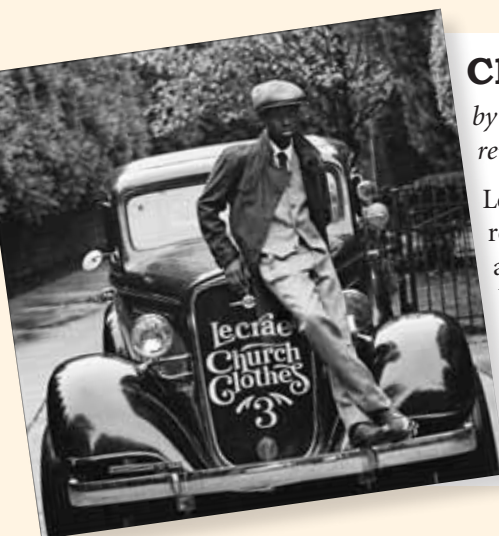
by Salina Yoon
reviewed by Jenny deGroot

Meet Dennis, an “ordinary boy” who is anything but ordinary. Dennis's hero is Marcel Marceau; he mimes all day long. At school, everyone calls him Mime Boy. Being different is not easy, and Dennis feels a deep loneliness—until he meets a girl named Joy. Their friendship grows, and Dennis discovers the joy of having and being a friend. Yoon's predominantly black-and-white illustrations are subtly highlighted with red, and they complement the simplicity of the text. This is a picture book to be read over and over. Ages 3 and up. (Bloomsbury)

Church Clothes 3

by Lecrae
reviewed by Jordan Petersen

Lecrae's latest mixtape continues the hip-hop artist's earnest reflections on justice and reconciliation. Righteous in its anger and precise in its delivery, *Church Clothes 3*, at its best, serves as a call to action for the church. Lecrae offers education on racism and its manifestations today, and he calls out complacency and the selective hearing the church has when it comes to social issues, all while maintaining a gospel-centric worldview. (Reach Records)



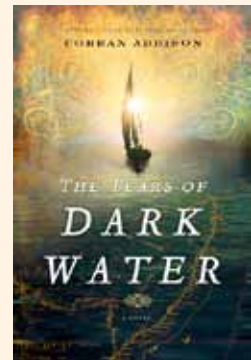
Life's too short to pretend you're not religious

David Dark

Life's Too Short to Pretend You're Not Religious

by David Dark
reviewed by Phil Christman

Religion is one of the most-abused words in the lexicon. Cultural critic David Dark restores it to its true complexity in this smart and warm little book. Your religion, argues Dark, is simply the set of non-provable stories and ideas that you love—what he calls your “attention collection.” This is the book to give to those friends who love hard, fight for lost causes, and practice “mindfulness” but think you're weird for going to church. (InterVarsity)



The Tears of Dark Water

by Corban Addison
reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

This lengthy, complex novel tackles a timely issue: piracy in the Indian Ocean. Two Americans are captured on their boat by Ismail and six other disillusioned Somali youth. They despise the U.S. for its intervention in their nation. When the U.S. government sends in the Navy and top negotiator Paul Derrick, tragedy results. Derrick's sister Megan, a lawyer, agrees to defend Ismail when he is brought to trial in the U.S. This is Addison's third novel to deal with challenging, at times uncomfortable, issues that present readers with the choice of seeing or ignoring the humanity of all people, including their enemies. (HarperCollins)

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