2023 Annual Report

Yale Center for Faith & Culture
AT YALE DIVINITY SCHOOL
Friends,

“That is the magic of forgiveness: That deed no longer counts against you.” Last summer, I found myself speaking these words before a very influential audience as I reflected on the power of repentance and forgiveness. An unlikely topic for a conference on innovation, leadership, and influence. Or was it?

Hundreds of innovators and leaders from across sectors of politics, business, science, the arts, education (and beyond) had gathered in the Rocky Mountains for the Aspen Ideas Festival. Panel host Kelly Corrigan had convened the session around the core theme of Life Worth Living: A Guide to What Matters Most: What makes life good?

For all the power of forgiveness in our lives—the beauty of being released from a deed that cannot be undone, I am alarmed at our culture’s increasing tendency to unlearn how to forgive.

This moment expresses so much of my personal commitment to the mission of the Yale Center for Faith & Culture: to reveal the transformative potential of the core teachings of Jesus Christ for our world today, and to do that through both our theological research, teaching networks, and public engagement efforts.

2023 saw remarkable progress for YCFC—some of our most effective and extensive outreach in our 20-year history. But through it all, we are humbled to be accompanied by gracious and generous supporters who remind us why we do what we do.

Yours,

Miroslav Volf
Director, Yale Center for Faith & Culture
Henry B. Wright Professor of Systematic Theology, Yale Divinity School
With a significant amount of new teaching and research, the Christ & Flourishing initiative underwent significant growth and development in 2023. Working with both the Texas Methodist Foundation and the Stewardship Trust, our Christ & Being Human teaching programming supported 7 full-time faculty members at colleges and universities around the world, reaching over 470 students in classes centered on the questions that matter most about our lives and how Jesus might help us to answer them.

2023 also witnessed significant research developments, with the completion of Miroslav’s soon-to-be released work on human striving for superiority and its relationship to flourishing life, and lots of additional work on future publications exploring the place of suffering in a good life, the goodness of creation and our love for it, and more.

Finally, we’ve continued to develop our resources for churches, building on the small group curricula we created for 2022’s The Hunger for Home, introducing a study-guide for Matt Croasmun’s book, Let Me Ask You a Question and continuing work on additional church-centered resources in the future.
“The reason I’m a Christian is that I find that particular vision of life—the vision of life in which there is the pursuit of a relationship with God, the pursuit of justice in society, and pursuit of holiness. That actually demands something of me.

I realized, unfortunately, or maybe fortunately: Sainthood isn’t for me. I’ve seen and I’ve read the histories of the saints and I’m not one of them, but I see that light as something that is beautiful and I don’t see anything more beautiful.

I’m not a Christian merely because I’m convinced of all of these arguments in some kind of rationalistic sense. I am convinced of the beauty of Christianity in addition to this rationality, and Lent gives me a chance to say, ‘Where have you lost vision of that beauty?’

And how can you recover it again so you can run after it? Lent gives you the opportunity to take up the race again.”

Esau McCaulley
Associate Professor of New Testament, Wheaton College / Contributing opinion writer for The New York Times
Snapshots from some of Miroslav Volf’s 2023 Media Appearances

Throughout 2023, Miroslav appeared over 60 times in various media outlets—including television, podcasts, international lectures, museums, churches, and public lectures. Here are a few snapshots from his busy year promoting his most recent books.

The TODAY Show w/ Maria Shriver (Left, Below)

Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast (Above)

European Baptist Federation, Stavanger, Norway (Above)

Aspen Ideas Festival with Kelly Corrigan and Rainn Wilson (Above, Right)
My Top 3 Highlights from 2023

- Planning and attending the Life Worth Living Teacher Formation Intensive in Reykjavík, Iceland
- Participating in the Life Worth Living book launch event on March 28, 2023—publication day!
- Being behind the scenes for the Life Worth Living website build

"I often tell folks that Life Worth Living’s questions are profoundly personal—but they are not private. Life Worth Living “went public” in a big way in 2023.

In the same year that we taught our 10th iteration of the course at Yale, we also published a New York Times bestseller that brings the program’s big questions—the central questions of our lives—to a global audience. We also launched our first cohort of Life Worth Living Network fellows: 20 faculty and 16 graduate fellows from 6 countries around the world. After just this first of three rounds of expansion, the Life Worth Living network now has 54 members in 7 countries. We are learning so much from these new colleagues as we continue to grow this international community and bring the question of flourishing life to a global audience!"
“Christians are called to collaborate without compromise and to critique without dualism.”

N. T. Wright
Research Professor Emeritus of New Testament and Early Christianity at St. Mary’s College in the University of St. Andrews / Senior Research Fellow at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford
• **A Guide to What Matters Most.** On March 28, 2023 Miroslav, Matt, and Ryan published their long-awaited book *Life Worth Living: A Guide to What Matters Most*, and within 24 hours it had topped the charts, reaching #1 on both Amazon and Barnes & Noble. It made the NYT bestseller list, was featured on *The Today Show* with Maria Shriver, and led to almost 100 combined media appearances for the authors throughout the following 9 months. To date, it has sold more than 65,000 copies.

• **Life Worth Living at Yale.** We taught 95 students in six seminar sections of Life Worth Living in the spring, and Matt taught 17 first-years in his Education & the Life Worth Living course in the fall. We also trained 5 new graduate instructors for the spring 2023 Life Worth Living course.

• **Growing Life Worth Living in Higher Education.** Throughout 2023, we expanded the work of scaling Life Worth Living around the world through our $4.3 million John Templeton Foundation grant. Read on to see more of the growth we saw last year.

• **Teacher Formation Intensive in Reykjavík, Iceland.** The Life Worth Living team traveled to Iceland in late June 2023 (yes, that means 24-hours of daylight!) to gather with 36 faculty and graduate students who received fellowships to develop their own Life Worth Living courses at their institutions.
Our Expanding Network of Course Implementations

As of the 2023-24 academic year, the following colleges and universities have implemented Life Worth Living-style courses.

**CURRENT**
1. Colby College, Waterville, ME
2. Duke University, Durham, NC
3. George Fox University, Newberg, OR
4. Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA
5. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA
6. University of Hong Kong
7. University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
8. University of La Verne, La Verne, CA
9. University of Sheffield, UK
10. University of South Florida, Tampa, FL
11. Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, IN
12. Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA
13. West Chester University of Pennsylvania
14. Yale College, New Haven, CT
15. Yale School of Medicine, New Haven, CT

**PAST**
16. Baylor University, Waco, TX
17. University of Sydney, Australia

**PLANNED (2024-27)**
18. Appalachian State University, Boone, NC
19. Baldwin Wallace University, Berea, OH
20. Fordham University, New York, NY
21. International Islamic University of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
22. New Bulgarian University, Sofia, Bulgaria
23. Royal Holloway, University of London, London, UK
24. UCSI University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
25. Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
26. University of California, Los Angeles
27. University of Iceland, Reykjavik, Iceland
What Students & Instructors Are Saying About Life Worth Living

Teaching students is at the heart of our mission—to help these young minds envision and pursue lives worthy of our humanity.

Over the past year, YCFC Humanities Education Evaluator Connie Steel has found that Life Worth Living students reported an increase in presence of meaning in their lives from the beginning to end of semester in responses to the Meaning in Life Questionnaire.

Students also indicated a significant increase in their comfort with talking about religion both in class and with family by the end of the course experience.

Student Anecdotes

“I valued this time carved out specifically for considering a purpose in my life that is beyond the traditional confines of a classroom that I am accustomed to.”

“I value the insightful opinions and thoughts from those around me, many of which I have never heard or thought of previously.”

“I believe my vision has come to take empathetic and caring practices more to heart.”

Instructor Anecdotes

“This is about exploring various sources of wisdom and knowledge in order to gain clarity on our own responses to the big questions.”

“The course is designed to purposefully address the questions that are most applicable to students and society about what makes life meaningful.”

Connie Steel
Humanities Education Evaluator

Our 2023 Life Worth Living Faculty and Graduate Student Fellows.
Your life is too important to be guided by anything less than what matters most.

Around the world and across human history, the same questions have challenged us:

What should we hope for?
How should we live?
How do we respond to suffering?
How do we flourish?

Miroslav Volf, Matthew Croasmun, and Ryan McAnnally-Linz have gathered responses to these and other questions and reflected on the different answers that have informed various faiths and cultures. They have led students through these findings in one of Yale University’s most popular courses. Now, they have written this book to help you respond to these questions in your own life.

What readers are saying...

“This book is worth rolling up your sleeves, saying your prayers, and diving into what could be quite possibly the most important work you ever do … make this book a priority.”

The Most Rev. Michael B. Curry
Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church
Author of Love Is the Way and The Power of Love

“An essential roadmap for anyone who’s ever wondered how to live the good life. It’s the accessible crash course we all need.”

Laurie Santos
Professor of Psychology at Yale University
Host of The Happiness Lab podcast

Order your copy via LifeWorthLivingBook.com or wherever books are sold.
“Usually people think of a telos as an endpoint, but what if we think of telos as a dynamic process that sustains a thriving trajectory for the individual and the world around them?

The *imago Dei*, which is deeply and inherently relational and social—we image God by being our unique selves in unity. So there is the particularity of personhood and the relatedness with other persons, God, and all of creation. ... ‘How do I grow as a fully differentiated person in relationship and increasing intimacy, increasing contribution with the world around me?’

To thrive then is to pursue that fullness of self in the context of intimacy and accountability and relationships—not just with those closest to me ... that’s essential. But also in contribution to the world beyond the self.

How does our faith, how does our devotion, fuel us to want to continue to reciprocate when life is hard? When there’s a pandemic? We need something beyond ourselves, a power beyond ourselves, an orientation beyond ourselves to fuel that interrelatedness between our particularity and the greater good.”

*Pamela Ebstyne King*

Peter L. Benson Professor of Applied Developmental Science, Fuller School of Psychology / Director, Thrive Center
New Video Based Study Guides & Curriculum

New study guides to accompany our team’s books are now available via our website at faith.yale.edu. In 2023, we produced two curriculum series for community groups, bible studies, families, and book clubs: *The Hunger for Home* and *Let Me Ask You A Question*.

*The Hunger for Home* small-group study is designed to guide your community in exploring new questions about nourishing mutual encounter, the bread that feeds us, who we welcome to our tables, and much more. Features six videos and a PDF discussion guide for group leaders.

Disarmingly honest questions. Sign up now and immediately receive a 7-part video curriculum designed to lead you through Matthew Croasmun’s book, *Let Me Ask You a Question*. Explore the questions Jesus asks in the Gospels and uses them as conversation starters for dialogues with Jesus—for yourself and your community.

Coming Soon in 2024 & 2025: Christian Public Witness, Forgiveness, and What Matters Most

We’ll be back this year and next with two more curriculum series funded by the Stewardship Foundation, featuring Miroslav Volf’s books, *Public Faith* and *Free of Charge*. We’re also developing a curriculum for *Life Worth Living: A Guide to What Matters Most!*
Public Engagement

Highlights

• We published 32 episodes of our podcast, *For the Life of the World*, which had 112,938 total downloads for the year. Fun fact: After four years of production, our podcast has been downloaded in 181 countries—that’s 93% of all countries!

• Miroslav made over 60 total public appearances, including speaking engagements, Zoom talks, invited lectures, and interviews, including the following highlights:
  — The TODAY Show Feature
  — The Tamron Hall Show
  — Aspen Ideas Festival
  — Faith Angle Podcast w/ Tim Alberta
  — Everything Happens, with Kate Bowler
  — The Simon Sinek Podcast, A Bit of Optimism
  — The James Altucher Podcast
  — Maria Shriver’s Sunday Paper
  — *Christianity Today*’s The Bulletin
  — MoMA Salon: “The Good,” New York, NY (see slides at right)
  — And many more!
We're grateful for your friendship and support. As we look forward we're hopeful and resolved to remain faithful to our founding purpose of helping people envision and pursue lives worthy of our humanity.

faith.yale.edu/give

Above: Vincent Van Gogh, “The Red Vineyard” (1888)