

# Spiritual Rhythm

by Marsha Boyd-Mitchell

I lift up my eyes to the mountains—  
where does my help come from?

My help comes from the LORD,  
the Maker of heaven and earth.

*Psalm 121:1–2, NIV*

As we start to move around the world again because COVID restrictions are eased, I consider every opportunity to travel a gift. Recently, I was able to travel to Quebec to visit a roommate from Bible college whom I hadn't seen in

almost 18 years. Travelling home to New Brunswick with my husband, we stopped in Quebec City. While walking around the old city, the bells from the Notre Dame Basilica rang out. The tourists, shopkeepers, and residents continued working, shopping, and having lunch. No one noticed: it was just part of the day that would mark time for those who lived or worked within the old city walls. It got me thinking how this might have been different in a previous era of history.

“A church bell in Christian architecture is a bell which is rung in a church for a variety of religious purposes, and can be heard outside the building. Traditionally they are used to call worshippers to the church for a communal service, and to announce the fixed times of daily Christian prayer, called the canonical hours.... They are also rung on special occasions such as a wedding, or a funeral service. In some religious traditions they are used within the liturgy of the church service to signify to people that a particular part of the service has been reached.... Before modern communications, church bells were a common way to call the community together for all purposes, both sacred and secular” (Wikipedia).

As I dug into the history of church bells a bit, I was inspired by their meaning. They were traditionally intended to set a spiritual rhythm in the community. Bells are housed in a church steeple or belfry, and this architecture was intentional about pointing people to God. While this all seems to bring on waves of historical spiritual nostalgia, we do not want spiritual rhythms and formation to be something from the past. I don't suppose bells matter as much as steady spiritual formation does, as part of our lives.

My Bible college roommate and I had a fantastic time reconnecting. We talked over a bygone era and recalled people we knew from those days. There were no bells on our college campus, but there were so many opportunities to develop spiritual patterns: times of prayer, classes to study Scripture, worship services, and small groups. The friendships that came out of that time in our lives were the bells that sounded and echoed faith throughout the campus.

I have the YouVersion Bible App on my phone, and it is set to remind me throughout the day to stop and pray. I smiled seeing the app's notification in Quebec City, thinking how, in a small way, that sound from my phone is a bell of today's culture, setting a rhythmic reminder to take time out of my busy day to pray and read a word of Scripture. I love the grandeur of the big cathedrals, the architecture, the large presence in the community, and the sound of those bells. However, the Bible is full of advice on spiritual rhythms being slow, steady, peaceful, small, and quiet.

With the youth in our care, the important thing is that we are intentional about developing these patterns with our daily activities. While bells signify spiritual history, these days we can use them to remind us that spiritual habits need to be daily and intentional. During the reunion with my friend, we shared a lot of laughs and also expressed many thoughts about God's faithfulness to carry us, even 25 years after our Bible college days. We are responsible to have the next generation connected to communities of Christian faith that will echo the chorus of trust in Christ in their lives. Let's teach them to look up and see where their help comes from—the Maker of heaven and earth.

*Marsha Boyd-Mitchell is the executive director of Christian Action Federation of NB Inc. and the principal of Sussex Christian School, New Brunswick.*

Photo: M. Boyd-Mitchell

