

# Church history professor takes a journey of spiritual formation in ‘From Eden to Heaven’

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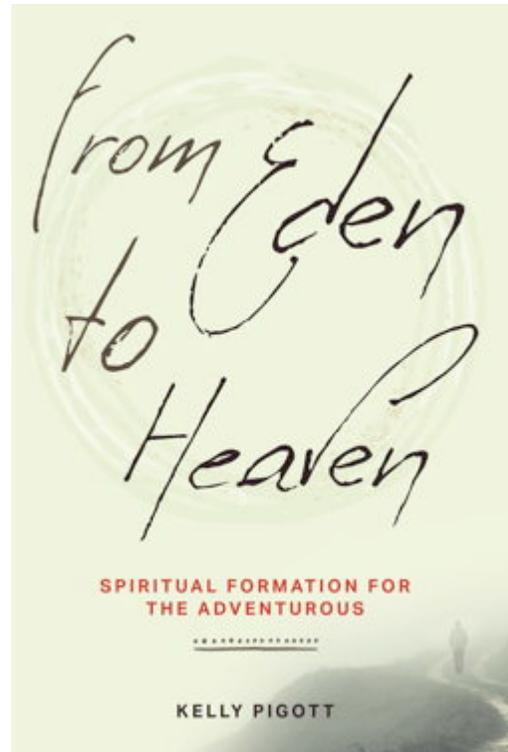
Eighty-seven percent of youth who grow up in Baptist churches drop out by age 30, said Kelly Pigott, associate professor of church history at Hardin-Simmons University.

This startling statistic and a desire to find some way to help was part of Pigott’s inspiration for writing [\*From Eden to Heaven: Spiritual Formation for the Adventurous\*](#), published by Smyth & Helwys.

Another source of inspiration came when John Hunt, instructor of ministry at Hardin-Simmons, proposed taking a pilgrimage to Ireland, with the goal of providing an experience to deepen the faith of those on the journey. In a similar way, Pigott wanted to guide people—through what he calls a “hero’s journey”—to different places and stages of faith through this book.

## Journeying between two endpoints

The book's title refers to the two endpoints of life—Eden and heaven. “We start out in Eden, but we get that pebble in the shoe feeling, and we have to venture,” said Pigott.



This is the start of the journey, which eventually ends with the final place, heaven. Between these two points, Pigott urges readers to find their “resurrection place,” or the place where a person is called to “come alive.”

Pigott uses *peregrination*—the concept of a faith journey taken “for the love of God”—as an outline for the book.

“Salvation is not a status ... faith is an ongoing process,” said Pigott. “Each day of your life you have to wake up and ask, ‘What must I do to be saved today?’”

His goal for the book is that it be “a tool to help equip people to make faith their own and to do their own homework,” because “until you do your own homework you don’t have your own faith.”

The book takes readers on a journey through six stages of finding their own faith: departure, initiation, transubstantiation, struggle, victory and return.

Journaling is an important part of the book. Readers are encouraged to journal as they read. “You really have to journal through this book,” Pigott said. “Journaling is a spiritual formation discipline ... it forces you to wrestle with the hard questions.”

Journal prompts are available on Pigott’s [website](#).

## **Pigott’s personal journey of faith**

*From Eden to Heaven* is deeply personal to Pigott. When he found himself in a dark place after completing school, he realized no one had talked about being a believer and going through dark times in life.

“No one told me [doubt] was necessary ... it was always, ‘If you doubt, you lack faith,’” Pigott said.

He believes it is important—even crucial—to have doubts and to ask hard questions while trying to navigate one’s faith walk. He made it a priority to make that point in the book.

“[The book] was born out of a deep and personal struggle,” Pigott said. It is the book he wishes he could have had while going through school and being in a tough place in his journey.

## **The journey of faith in the classroom**

*From Eden to Heaven* is being implemented in two of Pigott’s classes.

One class is reading, discussing and responding to prompts in the book in preparation for a journey to Ireland during spring break. The other class is studying religion and how it pertains to all aspects of life. This class is reading Pigott’s book as a way to step back and look at the place of spirituality in their lives.

Students from both classes noted several points of discussion that have resonated with them in their reading so far, such as the idea of *peregrinatio*—or faith journey.

Students also appreciate the format and readability of the book. “[Pigott] puts it into terms that are practical examples throughout life,” said Maranda Westbrook, a student in Pigott’s religion class.

Students have noticed Pigott’s gentle approach to teaching and leading discussions is communicated effectively through his writing.

“Dr. Pigott’s personal connections and anecdotes bring the book to life, and his personality shines through the pages,” said Westbrook.

“It’s like his lectures are captured in this book that you can read time and time again,” said Avery Gowens, also one of Pigott’s religion students.

“He doesn’t want to form your opinion for you ... he lays it out there and lets you decide,” said Amanda Ramsey, another student headed to Ireland in a few weeks.

One of Pigott’s main hopes for the book is that it conveys the normality of dark times during a Christian’s faith walk and that it breaks through the social stigma surrounding those dark times. His hope has been successful with his students.

Cheyenne Hamilton, a student in Pigott’s Ireland group, picked up on and has benefitted from this message saying, “Sometimes we feel like we can’t talk to other Christians about our faith, so we feel alone. [The book] acknowledges we are all on our own journey and reminds you and that you are not alone.”

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