

THE BANNER

OF SOVEREIGN GRACE TRUTH

SPECIAL THEME: Children of the Bible
Timothy—Faith Unfeigned
Only a Boy Named David
Prayer Meeting and Revival in the Church
The Happy Fruits of a Digital Diet



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Dr. Joel R. Beeke, Editor
2965 Leonard Street NE
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49525
(616) 977-0599; fax (616) 285-3246
e-mail: joel.beeke@prts.edu

Rev. Maarten Kuivenhoven, Assistant Editor
Rev. David VanBrugge, Assistant Editor

Office of Publication
540 Crescent Street NE
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503-3402
(616) 977-4304; fax (616) 285-3246
e-mail: bsgt@hnr.org; website: bsgtonline.com

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Everything WAS VERY GOOD!

And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.
—Genesis 1:31a

When was the last time that you went outside, took a glance at the nature around you, felt the warm or cool air, and thought, “This is great! It’s beautiful; I love it”? It is thought-provoking to consider that when God glanced around near the end of the first week of the world, everything was infinitely more beautiful, since everything that God saw was “very good.” This appraisal was not subjective or relative; it indicated absolute perfection.

What did God see? What was very good? Although verse 31a is written in the context of the sixth day, with the second part of the verse saying, “And the evening and the morning were the sixth day,” the conclusion that everything was not only good but very good indicates that God was seeing all that He had made over the course of those six days, including mankind. Matthew Henry says, “Now all was made; every part was good, but all together very good.” It was all flawless, harmonious, and altogether splendid by God’s creative power, wisdom, and goodness.

When was this? This is important to consider. For one thing, it was “in the beginning” (v. 1) of the world. We believe it was about 6,000 years ago, thanks to the work of some scholars who worked through the chronologies as carefully as they could. Other evidence also supports a young earth. Many deny this and insist on an earth that is billions of years old, but they also wrongfully deny that God created with the appearance of age, that there was a literal universal flood in Noah’s day that significantly impacted everything, that Genesis is literal and true, that God’s Word is truth, and that the basic hermeneutical principle is to interpret Scripture literally.

Moreover, it is also important to remember that everything was very good before the fall of mankind, when Adam, the first human being and representative of mankind, rebelled, along with his wife. Everything now is the

polar opposite of “very good.” Everyone by nature is guilty by imputation and polluted by inheritance. We now deserve pain, sickness, death, grief, and hell, and desperately need Christ for eternal salvation.

Have we realized that our situation is no longer very good by nature? That we have entered this world in a state of guilt and a condition of pollution? Have we also realized therefore our desperate need for Jesus, who paid for the guilt of His elect and in whom there is eternal life and the guarantee that everything will be infinitely better, especially upon our death or at His return? Have we realized our need to repent and believe on Him for dear life? We were created to glorify and enjoy God forever, but we can only do that if we have been made right with our Creator first and have given our life to Him and depend on Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins and guilt against God, and to obtain eternal life. We cannot truly glorify and enjoy Him without that. May Jesus never say of you, “I never knew you, depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matt. 7:23).

Take time to consider five pictures. First, imagine what life was like when all was very good. What was it like for Adam and Eve, when life was so peaceful, there were no trials, and there was no sin? Second, recollect what life is like now in comparison. There are so many problems, so much crime, so much heartache. Third, think that life will get far worse for many in hell, the eternal place where we don’t want to be. Consider that. Fourth, imagine the opposite: heavenly glory and the life to come for true believers. What would that really be like? There life is and will be far better than it was when everything was very good and than it ever could be here even when everything seems most agreeable to us, because then there will no longer be the ability to sin. Fifth, contemplate the cross where Christ our Savior suffered the most, where He suffered hell, so that sinners like us who do deserve hell, can receive that best picture of all!

Rev. Martin Slingerland is a Heritage Reformed minister who serves as a prison pastor with the Redemption Prison Ministry in British Columbia.



PRAYER MEETINGS *and* REVIVAL IN THE CHURCH

“We shall never see much change for the better in our churches in general till the prayer meeting occupies a higher place in the esteem of Christians,” wrote Charles Haddon Spurgeon in his famous address, “Only a Prayer Meeting.”¹ By “the prayer meeting,” Spurgeon meant a formal meeting of members of a Christian congregation for the purpose of engaging in united prayer. I choose to use “corporate prayer” below to refer to these meetings in distinction from formal worship services.

Prayer meetings in America have fallen on hard times. Less than ten percent of members now meet for prayer in churches that once had vibrant, Spirit-led meetings. In many churches, prayer meetings have become cold and boring. Other churches have never developed the tradition of meeting regularly for corporate prayer.

Lewis Thompson rightly wrote, “If it is true that the active piety of a church rises no higher than it manifests itself in the prayer-meeting, so that here, as on a barometer, all changes in spiritual life are faithfully recorded, then certainly too much attention cannot be given by both pastor and people to the conducting of the prayer-meeting.”² It is time to reassess the importance of prayer meetings, for the church that does not earnestly pray together cannot hope to experience revival and renewal. Have we forgotten that the Reformation era churches often held daily morning and evening services for preaching and prayer? Is it surprising that the Reformed faith has experienced more revival in Korea than anywhere else in the world in the last century when Christians there gather 365 mornings a year for early morning prayer? So let’s take a closer look at the history of prayer meetings in conjunction with revival.

Prayer meetings were influential in times of revival. The 1620s revival in Ireland was spurred on by prayer meetings.³ So were awakenings in the 1740s. Two generations prior, Josiah Woodward had published *An Account of the Rise and Progress of the Religious Societies in the City of London*, which described forty distinct prayer groups in London.⁴ As the awakenings spread, prayer meetings multiplied. Thomas Houston writes in his *The Fellowship Prayer Meeting*, “The awakenings which took place in various parts of England, under the ministry of Wesley and Whitefield, led to the establishment of social prayer-meetings; and, at this period, when *within* the pale of the

National Establishment, and *without* it, all was under the torpor of spiritual death, this organization was a powerful means of exciting earnest minds to pursue after eternal concerns.”⁵

Prayer meetings were also influential in eighteenth-century revivals in Scotland. Prior to the awakening in 1742, numerous prayer societies had sprung up. One society was established in Kilsyth in 1721; it flourished for some years, then died out in the 1730s, but was resurrected in 1742 just before revival broke out. During the meetings, there were public prayers, psalm-singing, Scripture reading, and discussion based on questions from Thomas Vincent’s study of the Shorter Catechism.⁶

During the Great Awakening in Scotland, prayer meetings often began with children, then spread to adults. For example, a schoolteacher in the parish of Baldernock allowed four students to meet on their own for prayer and psalm singing. According to *The Parish of Baldernock*, “In the course of two weeks, ten or twelve more [children] were awakened and under deep convictions. Some of these were not more than eight or nine years of age, and others twelve or thirteen. And so much were they engrossed with the one thing needful as to meet thrice a day—in the morning, at mid-day, and at night.” Adults then began holding prayer meetings two or more times a week. There were many conversions at both the adult and the children’s meetings.

The fervor soon spread to other parishes. *The Parish of Kirkintilloch* reports: “In the month of April, 1742, about sixteen children in the town were observed to meet together in a barn for prayer. Mr. Burnside [their pastor] heard of it, had frequent meetings with them, and they continued to improve. And this being reported, many more were impressed. Soon after, about a hundred and twenty [children] were under a more than ordinary concern, and praying societies, as usual, were formed.” Johnston’s reaction to that awakening was to affirm and support the prayers of children. “Why not encourage children’s prayer-meetings? Why may not God still perfect praises to the glory of his grace, out of the mouth of babes?” he asked.⁷

Jonathan Edwards also encouraged children’s prayer. In answering objections some critics had raised to children’s prayer meetings, he wrote, “God, in this work, has shown a

remarkable regard to little children; never was there such a glorious work amongst persons in their childhood, as has been of late in New England. He has been pleased, in a wonderful manner, to perfect praise out of the mouths of babes and sucklings; and many of them have more of that knowledge and wisdom that please him, and render their religious worship acceptable, than many of the great and learned men of the world. I have seen many happy effects of children's religious meetings; and God has seemed often remarkably to own them in their meetings, and really descended from heaven to be amongst them. I have known several probable instances of children being converted at such meetings."⁸

In 1747, Edwards published *An Humble Attempt to promote an explicit agreement and visible union of God's people through the world, in extraordinary prayer, for the revival of religion and the advancement of Christ's kingdom on earth*. Usually referred to thereafter as *An Humble Attempt*, this book was reprinted by Christian Focus in 2003 as *A Call to United, Extraordinary Prayer*. Edwards said he was motivated to write on "a concert of prayer" for two reasons: first, he realized that the revivals of the mid-1730s and the early 1740s would not recur until God's people engaged in earnest prayer for revival. Second, he wanted to provide additional theological support for a document written by some Scottish pastors simply entitled *Memorial*.

David Bryant tells us the story of *Memorial*: "Rising out of scores of prayer societies already functioning in Scotland around 1740, especially among young people, by 1744 a committee of ministers determined it was time to do more. They decided to try a two-year 'experiment,' uniting all prayer groups and praying Christians in their nation into a common prayer strategy. They called for focused revival prayer on every Saturday evening and Sunday morning, as well as on the first Tuesday of each quarter. By 1746 they were so gratified by the impact of their experiment that they composed a call to prayer to the church worldwide, especially in the colonies (*Memorial*). However, this time the 'concert of prayer' was to be for *seven* years."⁹

Citing Zechariah 8:20–22, Edwards said that God's rich promises encourage us to expect great success from corporate prayer. He said: "That which God abundantly makes the subject of his *promises*, God's people should abundantly make the subject of their *prayers*." He concluded that when believers persevere in united, concerted prayer, God will grant a fresh revival, which "shall be propagated, till the awakening reaches those that are in the highest stations, and till whole nations be awakened."¹⁰

Edwards's book had a limited influence during his lifetime. Republished late in the eighteenth century in England, it influenced William Carey (1761–1834) and his prayer group. It also affected John Sutclif (1752–1814), a well-known Baptist pastor in Olney, who led weekly prayer meetings for revival in the Baptist churches of the Northamptonshire Association, to which his church belonged. Those prayer meetings spread

throughout the British Isles, particularly impacting eighteenth century revivals in Wales. Heman Humphrey writes in his *Revival Sketches*, "One of the most important revivals of religion, when the effects are considered, is that which occurred in the 'Principality of Wales' under Howell Harris and Daniel Rowlands; and this was carried forward and fostered by means of private societies for prayer and religious conference."¹¹ In the end, tens of thousands were converted throughout Britain from the 1790s to the 1840s.¹²

Edwards's treatise became a major manifesto for the Second Great Awakening around the beginning of the nineteenth century. It also fueled other awakenings in the late 1850s. Samuel Prime's *The Power of Prayer*, published by Banner of Truth Trust, explains how corporate prayer ushered in the famous 1857–1859 revival (sometimes called the Third Great Awakening) along the eastern coast of the United States, then spread west, resulting in the conversion of hundreds of thousands of people.

Beginning in the fall of 1857, six men gathered at noon every day for corporate prayer in the consistory room of a Reformed church in New York City. Prayer was the Spirit's means to germinate the seeds of revival. By early 1858, more than twenty prayer groups were meeting at noon in New York City. In Chicago, more than 2,000 people gathered daily for prayer at the Metropolitan Theatre. The movement spread to nearly all the major cities of America, then made its way to the British Isles and around the world. Prayer meetings sprang up everywhere: in churches, on college campuses, in hospitals, among sailors, on mission fields, and at orphanages and colleges. To mention only one example, at Hampden-Sydney College, one student found another student reading Joseph Alleine's *Alarm to the Unconverted*, and told him that there were two other students who were also in favor of such literature. The four students held a prayer meeting, while fellow students harassed them. When the president heard that the four young men were accused of holding a prayer meeting, he said with tears, "God has come near to us," and joined them himself at their next meeting. A remarkable revival swept through the college and into the surrounding area. Soon, more than half the college was attending prayer meetings.¹³ Scholars estimate that two million or more were converted in the revivals of the late 1850s, while hundreds of thousands of professed Christians were deeply affected.

In the 1860s, Charles Spurgeon organized prayer meetings at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. People met at 7 a.m. and 7:30 p.m. every day. More than 3,000 came to the meeting on Monday evenings. One evening a visitor asked Spurgeon what accounted for the success of these meetings. Spurgeon walked his visitor to the sanctuary, opened the door, and let him watch the participants. Nothing more needed to be said.

The great revivals of the twentieth century were likewise inspired by prayer. The Welsh revival of 1904–5, the revival

in Riga, Latvia, in 1934, and more recent revivals in Romania and Korea were all born and nurtured in prayer.¹⁴

Today, most evangelical churches hold weekly prayer meetings, but there seems to be so much lukewarmness in prayer. We desperately need churches to unite in the kind of prayer that the Spirit may use to produce worldwide revival.

Praying together is often the means God uses to initiate or increase revival and renewal in the church. Let us treasure prayer meetings. Let us engage in them with all our heart, remembering that revivals usually begin with prayer meetings. As one divine put it, "The Holy Spirit loves to answer petitions that are appended with many signatures." Let us keep praying. Let us pray without ceasing. God is able to do "exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). Who can tell what He will do?

1. Charles Spurgeon, *Only a Prayer Meeting* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2000), 9.

2. Lewis O. Thompson, *The Prayer-Meeting and Its Improvement* (Chicago: W. G. Holmes, 1878), 16.

3. J. B. Johnston, *The Prayer-Meeting, and Its History, as Identified with the Life and Power of Godliness, and the Revival of Religion* (Pittsburgh: United Presbyterian Board, 1870), 110, 145; cf. Thomas Houston, *The Fellowship Prayer-Meeting*, 80–84.

4. Cf. F. W. B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies, 1520–1799* (London, 1963).

5. Cited in Johnston, *The Prayer-Meeting, and Its History*, 154.

6. Arthur Fawcett, *The Cambuslang Revival* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1971), 71–72.

7. Johnston, *The Prayer-Meeting, and Its History*, 165–66.

8. Cited in Johnston, *The Prayer-Meeting, and Its History*, 173.

9. Jonathan Edwards, *A Call to United, Extraordinary Prayer* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2003), 16–17.

10. Edwards, *A Call to United, Extraordinary Prayer*, 18.

11. Heman Humphrey, *Revival Sketches and Manual* (New York: American Tract Society, 1859), 55.

12. Erroll Hulse, *Give Him No Rest: A Call to Prayer for Revival* (Durham: Evangelical Press, 1991), 78–79.

13. Johnston, *The Prayer-Meeting, and Its History*, 185–87.

14. Hulse, *Give Him No Rest*, 103–7.

Dr. Joel R. Beeke is president and professor of Systematic Theology and Homiletics at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary. Reprinted with permission from "The Gospel Coalition" blog by Ivan Mesa.

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Prof. Barrett Gritters

SATURDAY

8:30AM The Reformation's Recovery of Right Worship

Rev. Martyn McGeown

10:00AM The Reformation's Response to the 'Radical Reformation'

Prof. Russell Dykstra

11:15AM The Reformation's Progress in the Lowlands

Rev. Steven Key



Please join us at Faith Protestant Reformed Church or listen live at www.500thReformation.com.

Ten Lasting Effects of the Protestant Reformation

In its roots, the Reformation was a spiritual phenomenon as the Reformers applied the truth of God's Word to the life and mission of the church. But over time, the Reformed faith served as a dynamic motivation and catalyst for change and progress wherever its influence reached. The many lasting effects include the following:

1. Recognizing the Bible as God's written Word and the supreme rule of faith and life for the church and for the individual Christian.
2. Recovering the authentic gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith in Christ alone to the glory of God alone, and proclaiming it to the ends of the earth through zealous evangelism.
3. Preserving, expositing, and defending the Christian faith as the system of doctrine taught in God's Word, thereby affirming Trinitarian theology, which manifests itself soteriologically in what would later be called the five points of Calvinism: total depravity, unconditional election, definite atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints.
4. Reasserting the crown rights of Christ as King over the nations and the only Head of the church, which is His body. This resulted in reforming the church in her worship and preaching, so that all is done in subjection to God's Word and in relation to the triune God rather than in subjection to man's desires.
5. Enlivening the church worldwide with a deep conviction of the fatherly sovereignty of God through Christ, which results in a deep, warm, sanctifying, experiential piety that moves believers to commit their entire lives to His praise.
6. Establishing the freedom of Christians from tyranny in the church and the rights of citizens under the rule of law, curbing the powers of kings and nobles, and enabling the rise of representative democracy in the form of constitutional monarchies and republics.
7. Recasting the state as a commonwealth, promoting the dignity of labor, encouraging trade and commerce, and increasing wealth among all classes, while curbing the excesses of unregulated capitalism and providing for the care of the sick and the poor.
8. Establishing the Christian home on the principles of Scripture, in which marriage is understood as a reflection of the Christ-church relationship; where husband and wife covenant with each other to walk in God's ways; and parents rear their children, who are loaned to them by God, as He would have them reared: covenantally, ethically, and experientially.
9. Rekindling the spirit of inquiry, or "faith seeking understanding"; founding schools, academies, and universities; disseminating knowledge; encouraging research and exploration; enabling many discoveries; and producing many valuable inventions.
10. Inspiring creative endeavors in the form of literature, music, art, and architecture and great public works, consecrating the powers of man to the service and glory of God.

—DR. JOEL R. BEEKE



A STORY OF CONVERSION

Daniel 4

Daniel 4 records a striking transformation in the personal life of Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar was a head of state and therefore a public man. But even public figures are private souls who are individually accountable before God. My opinion is that Nebuchadnezzar's transformation was more than a mere behavioral reformation or attitude adjustment; it was, rather, a spiritual conversion of his soul.

The conversion of sinners is always up close and personal; God saves sinners individually, not corporately. Even though every conversion is unique, a common pattern does operate. Nothing is of more eternal consequence than personal conversion. Nebuchadnezzar's unique testimony suggests three things common to every genuine conversion: need, divine intervention, and profession.

Before highlighting some of the truths from this story, I need to offer a little explanation about the order of events in chapter 4. The sequence is potentially confusing unless we recognize that almost the whole chapter is Nebuchadnezzar's testimony after his conversion. The chapter begins with a doxology in retrospect of what God has done (4: 1–3). This is followed by a detailed account of the dream and Daniel's interpretation and warning to the king (4:4–27) which preceded his conversion. Daniel then interrupts to record the actualization of what was dreamed (4:28–33), and the chapter ends with Nebuchadnezzar's first-person profession of faith (4:34–37). With this in mind, we can discover the key lessons about conversion.

PRE-CONVERSION PRIDE

"Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" (4:30). The greatness of Babylon was undeniable. Modern archaeologists still marvel over the architectural genius and magnificence of the Babylon that Nebuchadnezzar had built. How much more its ancient residents and visitors would have been impressed with this queen of all cities. With its seemingly impregnable walls, the imposing Ishtar Gate, the grand temples, the lavish palace, and the wonder of the hanging gardens, Babylon's splendor was unrivaled. From the perspective of natural sight, Nebuchadnezzar had every reason to be proud of his accomplishments.

Nothing, however, can be concluded from natural sight alone. Daniel had made it explicitly clear to Nebuchadnezzar at the beginning of his reign that "the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory" (2:37). In his conceit, Nebuchadnezzar took credit for it all.

Although Nebuchadnezzar's manifestation of pride was unique, his self-absorbing pride is the common and fatal malady of all sinners, whether prosperous or poor, achievers or nonachievers. The unchanging spiritual law is that God "resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5). Nebuchadnezzar stood in need of grace. Unless the Lord intervened and changed his heart, Nebuchadnezzar was headed to a tragic eternity. So it is for every sinner: divine intervention is necessary to change the otherwise certain destination.

DIVINE INTERVENTION

Conversion is marked by faith toward God and repentance from sin: it is the first conscious response to the grace of God that irresistibly invades the heart, implanting spiritual life and enabling spiritual perception. The story of Nebuchadnezzar's conversion puts a face on Paul's theological propositions that "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17) and that "there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him" (Rom. 10:12). The Lord graciously gave the word and governed the circumstances that led the pagan king to salvation.

First, the Lord gave the word through a dream, a common means of God's communication to sinners in that dispensation. Without spiritual life or perception, however, Nebuchadnezzar had no idea what the dream meant, only that it was troubling (4:5). God intended grace for Nebuchadnezzar, and He insured that everything would be in place for the temporal execution of that grace. Among the reasons God had sovereignly brought Daniel to Babylon was to position the necessary preacher for the conversion of the proud king. Again Paul's inspired theology explains the means God uses to save sinners: "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?" (Rom. 10:14–15a). Since God is both the Author and the Finisher of faith (Heb. 12:2), there is never any chance that some essential component of the means of grace will fail to achieve the end or purpose of grace. God controls and governs time with a view to His eternal purpose, including His purpose to save individuals, whose salvation is always to the praise of the glory of His grace (see Eph. 1:4–12).

Since God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble, He had to humble proud Nebuchadnezzar to awaken within him his need for grace. Only as sinners are brought to the

end of themselves are they moved to recognize the Lord. In the dream, the Lord revealed to the king the path of humiliation, and Daniel interpreted and applied the word. Here are the salient points of the dream and their relevance. He saw a flourishing tree, large and fruitful enough to provide sustenance for all the creatures of earth (4:10). But then the tree was chopped down to a stump (4:14–15). Strangely, the stump was fettered and abandoned to the elements of nature (4:15). And even more strangely, the stump was changed into a beast, destined to live off the grass of the field for a period of seven times (4:15–16). When Daniel learned the details of the dream, he knew it was going to be a hard message to deliver, but he faithfully delivered it. He told Nebuchadnezzar that the tree represented the rise of his empire and his personal majesty (4:22). The chopping down of the tree and the remaining of a stump represented God's intent to remove the exercise of sovereignty from Nebuchadnezzar personally, forcing him to live like an ox for a period of seven times, most likely seven years (4:23–25). Daniel made it clear that God was lowering him in order to bring him to his spiritual senses (4:24–26). Like any good preacher, Daniel gave the word and pressed his one-man congregation to repent while there was time: "Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity" (4:27).

Second, God governed the circumstances to achieve His purpose. A year passed after the dream with no evidence of repentance. But in His own time, the Lord in mercy intervened, and Daniel 4:28 effectively sums it up: "All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar." At the very moment the king was bragging, a voice from heaven interrupted, and the humiliation process began. To put it simply, Nebuchadnezzar lost his mind. God drove him crazy. It seems as though the once glorious monarch thought he was a cow, and all that his royal herdsmen could do was to tie him up in the backyard of the palace and let him do what cows do. We can only wonder how the court's "spin doctors" handled this situation for seven years. While the administration undoubtedly kept this a secret from the public, God secured the kingdom for the insane king (4:26), but more significantly He was having His way in Nebuchadnezzar's heart. At the appropriate moment, the king lifted his "cow" eyes to heaven and realized what he never had realized before in his previously rational state: *God rules* (4:34). The only feasible explanation for this transition from irrationality to spiritually rational understanding is the gracious intervention of God. Without such divine interference every sinner is doomed; with it sinners are wondrously converted.

Remember Daniel's representation of Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom as a winged lion whose wings were plucked and who received the heart of a man (7:4). I think what

Daniel visualized occurred in the event described in chapter 4. The irony is noteworthy. In vision, Daniel saw the beast humanized. In fact, the humanizing of the beast was accomplished by the bestializing of the human. The point to learn is this: when God has purposed to save a sinner, He does all that is necessary to save that sinner. In one way or another, He always works through conviction and circumstance to bring the sinner to his sense of spiritual need. His purpose never fails; God's plans always come together.

POST-CONVERSION PROFESSION

Daniel 4 is the last record we have of Nebuchadnezzar. Exactly when his conversion occurred is impossible to date, but very probably it was toward the end of his career. The Scripture does not preserve for us the details of how his life changed. It does, however, record for us his profession of faith. One of the evidences of saving grace is the ability to comprehend spiritual truth (1 Cor. 2:10–14). Again according to Paul in Romans 10, one of the conditions of salvation is confessing with the mouth that Jesus is Lord (v. 9). After his humiliation and spiritual awakening, Nebuchadnezzar uttered a mouth confession of unquestionable orthodoxy concerning the absolute Lordship of the God of heaven (4:34–35, 37). Daniel had expressed this truth to Nebuchadnezzar at the beginning (ch. 2), but the truth was without effect in an unresponsive heart. As a pagan and polytheist, Nebuchadnezzar was at times willing to salute Daniel's God for revealing secrets (2:47) or the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego for rescuing from fire (3:29). Polytheists were quite happy to say "uncle" when somebody else's god showed some superiority. But the confession in chapter 4 goes beyond saying "uncle." When God changed the heart, the truth took hold, and the mouth opened in humble praise and willing submission. Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the Most High God as the one true and living God whose sovereign authority both in heaven and on earth was eternal, incontestable and irresistible and whose works were always right and just. That is quite a creed.

Nebuchadnezzar's conversion illustrates another dimension of God's sovereign control over men, their circumstances, and their times. On one level, God used Nebuchadnezzar and his empire as an instrument in His own hand to accomplish His own purpose. Nebuchadnezzar was a key player in the big picture. On another level, God dealt with Nebuchadnezzar as an ordinary sinner in need of saving grace. God took one who was His servant in time and made him His child for eternity.

Dr. Michael P. V. Barrett is Academic Dean and professor of Old Testament at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan, and an ordained minister in the Heritage Reformed denomination.

Seeing the Lamb of God

John 19 has the fewest words of Christ of any chapter in John, and yet the Word of God made flesh shines in the darkness of the cross and the darkness cannot comprehend Him. Faith sees the glory of Christ lifted up on the cross. Though the rest have fled, John and the women are there at the foot of the cross. And through their testimony, through the Scriptures, believers are able to see clearly the sacrifice of Christ, taking away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

Often, what we see is more powerful than what we hear, and this seems true for this chapter as well. Quoting the prophet Zechariah (12:10), John writes: “They shall look on him whom they pierced” (v. 37). The eye of faith sees Christ suffering, the just for the unjust, giving His life as a ransom for many. We can see how God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes on Him will not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16). The sacrifice is real and it proves His words, for they are visible to all who witness.

When we look at the few statements Christ makes from the cross, we see what was on His heart in His death. It was first of all the honor of His Father, which He defends in verse 11. It was secondly to provide for His mother, whom He binds together with His disciple John (vv. 26–27), creating at Calvary true fellowship with all those who have loved His appearing, while He suffers alone to procure it. He also has on His heart the Scriptures, and acts and speaks so as to fulfill them (v. 28). And finally, as a Servant and Son of the Father, He reserves His last words to declare His work finished (v. 30). All of these statements are carefully chosen and full of meaning for the people of God of all times.

Though Christ speaks little, Scripture “speaks” loud and clear in this chapter. The verses John has chosen are very carefully selected. Two Psalms are quoted, which is appropriate if we think of the worshipful purpose of the Psalms. The cross is holy ground. The Son is worshipping the Father in this one sacrifice for sin. And so Psalm 69:21 is quoted in verse 24: “They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots.” Christ became poor that He might make many rich.

Second, Psalm 34:20 is quoted in v. 36: “A bone of him shall not be broken.” Scripture here draws attention to the fact that Christ was the perfect Passover sacrifice, for that is what God demanded in Exodus 12:46.

Third, and most remarkably, John 19:37, quotes from the prophet Zechariah 12:10: “They shall look on him whom they pierced.” Significantly, in the original, Zechariah

emphasizes “they shall look on *me* whom they have pierced,” speaking of the “LORD,” and goes on speaking of people “mourning as for an only son” (Zech. 12:10). Clearly, this fits what John has been wanting to say about Jesus from the beginning: He is the Son of God, but He is also the eternal Son of God Himself (John 1:1–2), and as He dies on the cross, He secures a salvation only God could effect (John 1:29).

Thus this chapter essentially gives us a tapestry with three parts, three successive views of the suffering Servant of the Lord: first on His way to the cross; second, as He hangs on the cross; and finally, as He was taken down from the cross and buried.

VIEW 1: ON HIS WAY TO THE CROSS

The first section of the tapestry of John 19 (vv. 1–15) presents to us Christ as the innocent Man condemned to death. Pilate, of course, is the one who speaks and acts as the earthly judge. Though Pilate scourges Christ and makes a mockery of Him, allowing Him to wear a crown of thorns and a purple robe, he does stand up for His innocence (vv. 4, 6) and he tries to set Jesus free. He also introduces Him to the people first as “the man” (v. 5) and then “your King” (v. 14). But face to face with the Truth, he will not submit to the claims of Christ.

Things change somewhat for Pilate when he hears the claim regarding the Son of God (vv. 8–10). In fear, Pilate infers that there may be more here than meets the eye. He asks for Christ’s provenance, but Christ did not answer him. Christ had made this abundantly clear in His ministry.

Pilate is caught in the web of his own sin and schemes, and the religious authorities strike the final blow to the conscience of Pilate, suggesting that Pilate would not be a friend of Caesar if he let this “king” go (v. 12). We are so vulnerable to the opinions of men. Will we have the courage to place God higher than men when it is required?

VIEW 2: HANGING FROM THE CROSS

The second part of John’s tapestry of the crucifixion is Christ on the cross (vv. 16–37). Though Pilate gave the orders to have Jesus crucified, we need to remember that Christ willingly laid down His life (John 10:18), as He had said. What a remarkable, impressive sight, to see Christ going forth bearing His cross to Golgotha, the place of the skull (v. 17); and in more ways than one, Jesus is crucified

“in the midst” (v. 18). He has placed Himself at the center of offenders or criminals. He is also in the center of world events, and He would be in the midst of our hearts and lives.

Pilate affixed a title above the cross: Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews, in three languages (v. 20). The whole world needs to be made aware of the kingship of this Son of God in His death. Even when the chief priests ask to have the superscription changed, this witness to Christ’s kingship is not stripped from Him (v. 22).

The centrality of Christ is made to bring people together, to connect them through Him. John draws attention to the disciples around the cross. Christ’s first words from the cross in John concern the bringing together of Mary and John (v. 27), and making them a family in Him. Christ always brought people together in His life, uniting them, making them one, like He prayed for in His prayer to the Father. He stopped isolation and built a community of love for those who sorely need it. Here He gives His mother Mary a new son, and His best friend, a new mother. He doesn’t leave His loved ones alone!

Everything Christ did was intentional, even while suffering on the cross. Quoting as he does from the Old Testament (vv. 28–34), John makes clear that not a word of God can be broken, and no human hand or human mind can change the course of history outside of God’s will. This is the hour of His glory (John 17:1). There is no loss for this King, for it is all part of His mighty plan of salvation.

VIEW 3: TAKEN DOWN FROM THE CROSS

Even after He has breathed His last breath and His body is dead, Christ continues to act in magnificent and powerful ways (vv. 38–42). One of these ways is that Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus, two secret disciples, come out of the shadows to provide their Lord with a burial. Clearly, Christ is behind this. After telling Nicodemus that the Son of Man would be lifted up on a pole to save many people, Christ had urged Nicodemus not to stay in the darkness, but to come to the light (John 3:19). And, miraculously, that is what happened. Nicodemus steps out of the shadows into the light (vv. 38–42), finally recognizing Christ as the Messiah who was promised.

That these men come out from hiding is not a coincidence, for Christ had said a few chapters back: “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me” (11:32). This is what happens here, in small ways and great ways, as Nicodemus and Joseph are examples of many who come out of the shadows into the light of Christ through His sacrifice.

As we view these three scenes, the question is whether we really see what is going on. We shouldn’t feel sorry for the Savior or feel pity. He wouldn’t want that (Luke 23:28). Here is a message of hope for the world, for sinners, for those in darkness. In this God-appointed way, He brings people out of darkness, disease, and death into light, liberty, and life. Do you see how you might have life through this Lamb, whom God has provided? Who else can give this to you? Who else can take your place? Is the darkness really better? What hope do you have that’s better than this? If you haven’t already, God calls you out of the darkness like Nicodemus to find everything in Him. Without a doubt, this crucified Savior is “the Life” (John 14:6).

QUESTIONS:

1. What do believers see in this chapter that is different from what unbelievers see? What does it mean to gaze on the crucified Savior as the sacrifice for the sin of the world (John 1:29)?
2. The people divided Jesus’s clothes. Can you find other accounts in the Bible that tell us about the clothes of Jesus? What is the message connected with the soldiers dividing His clothes? What does this say about their hearts? What does this say about His heart?
3. What does this passage tell us about the family of Christ? What does this say about His care for His loved ones?
4. The Old Testament Scripture has an important role in this chapter. What lessons can we learn about how we should value the details of the Scripture and see Christ in them?
5. Nicodemus shows up again in this passage. How was he changed by Jesus? Is there such a thing as a secret believer?

Dr. Gerald M. Bilkes is Professor of Old and New Testament at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary and an ordained minister in the Free Reformed churches of North America.

Isaac—Son of the Promise

Sometimes we say that children are filled with promise. In a certain sense, that was true of Isaac, as the child of promise. What are we told of him, and what can we learn from his young years for our lives?

Isaac brings joy.

His name means “laughter” (Genesis 21:6). There were times of laughter in anticipation of Isaac’s birth (Genesis 17:17; 18:12), and times when it seemed impossible that Sarah would have a child. But with the Lord nothing is impossible (Luke 1:37). The birth of Isaac proved He is the almighty God, who can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves, the God who can turn sorrow into joy (John 16:20). Are you ever sad, especially over your sins and lack of peace? The great Son of Isaac went to the cross to take sin away, and He brings joy and peace to sinners who take refuge in Him (Luke 2:29).

Isaac bears burdens.

The day came when Abraham was tested. He was sent to offer up his beloved son Isaac on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22:1–2). Abraham obeyed in faith, and Isaac went along. While Isaac did not know the specifics of what was to happen on top of Mount Moriah, he was willing to carry the wood up the mountain. It may not have been easy for Isaac, but he carried the burden that was given to him. So should we (Galatians 6:5; Lamentations 3:27). These yokes and burdens are meant to strengthen us and shape us, to teach us to serve, and lead us to resort to the Lord Jesus, the great Burden-Bearer (Matthew 11:28–30).

Isaac inquires about the Lamb.

As Isaac and Abraham are climbing Mount Moriah, Isaac turns to his father and asks him, “Where is the lamb?” (Genesis 22:7). It is good for children to have a bond with their fathers, to ask questions and talk about their problems with them. It is good when father and son can speak of the service of the Lord and, in this case, climb the mountain together to worship. And it is good when children can ask their parents about the Lamb: Who is He? Where is He? And what has He come to do?

Isaac follows by faith.

When Abraham answers Isaac’s question with the words:

“My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering,” Isaac does not say: “Is that all you can say, Dad?” You may have expected him to run back down the mountain. But he doesn’t. He follows in faith, just like the Lord Jesus would later say: “If any man will be my disciple, let him take up his cross, deny himself and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). Do we know such faith—the faith of a disciple who does not always understand the ways of the Lord, but willingly submits and follows, ready to give himself?

Isaac gives himself.

When they reach the top, Abraham builds an altar. Next, he arranges the wood on the altar, and then Isaac realized he would be the offering. Couldn’t he have resisted? Probably. He was a young man: he was stronger than his aged father. But Isaac gave himself; he let himself be bound, and he saw his father with the knife in his hands. Isaac knew his sin and that God would be just in condemning him to death. Would you give yourself over willingly? The Lord Jesus did and that filled Paul with amazement: “He loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

Isaac receives a substitute.

Isaac did not have to die. God did indeed provide a sacrifice. Isaac could be untied from the altar, and the substitute would take his place and die in his stead (Genesis 22:13). This points clearly to the substitutionary sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. While Isaac could be spared, Christ was not spared, but carried the sin of His people (Romans 8:32; Isaiah 53:6). He suffered, the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18). There was no angel to stop His death. The knife of God’s anger not only hung over Him, but fell upon Him and pierced Him—so that sinners like Isaac could go free. Don’t you think that Abraham and Isaac indeed worshipped there (Genesis 22:5)? Have you learned to worship by faith at the cross of Jesus, the great substitute?

Rev. Lawrence J. Bilkes is pastor of Ebenezer Free Reformed Church in Dundas, Ontario.

Ishmael—Child of the Flesh

The Bible speaks of children of the flesh and children of the promise. Abraham had one child of each. Let's talk about his child of the flesh, Ishmael. What are we told about Ishmael's life, and what can we learn from him?

Ishmael had a special name (Genesis 16:11). Even though the Lord had promised them a son, Abram and Sarah had to wait very long. They became impatient and took matters into their own hands. Abram took Hagar, a maidservant, in order to have a son. But sin always brings more sin, and this sin resulted in fighting and Hagar had to flee (Genesis 16:7). Still, the Lord met with Hagar. She was expecting a baby and she is told to call him Ishmael, which means "the LORD hath heard thy affliction" (Genesis 16:11). Some names don't say much or mean much, but the name "Ishmael" has a special meaning. It says God "hears the needy when they cry" (Psalter 420:5); He knows the suffering of His people and hears their cry (Exodus 3:7-8; Psalm 130:1). This name teaches us, then, that we need to cry out to the Lord for mercy and salvation.

Ishmael received a precious promise (Genesis 17:25). The Lord came to renew the covenant with Abram and promised again that He will be a God to Abram and to his seed after him (Genesis 17:7). It was a promise that said he didn't have to go through life alone, but would know the care and love of God. That covenant promise was followed by a covenant sign, circumcision (Genesis 17:10-11). It meant that the sinful nature must be put off (Colossians 2:10). Who received this sign? Every male in Abram's house, also Ishmael, who was 13 years old. The Lord came to Ishmael too, asking for him before he asked for the Lord. Isn't that what we also receive in baptism? Both circumcision and baptism are signs of the promises of God (Acts 2:39). Children, what promises do we grow excited about? Maybe a new bike or another special gift is exciting, but there is nothing like the promise of salvation that God makes in baptism.

Ishmael had a wicked heart (Genesis 21:9). Some years later Ishmael received a little brother, Isaac. The

day came when Isaac was weaned. Ishmael was by now sixteen or seventeen years old. But on that day, Ishmael began to mock his brother, to tease and taunt him. We might think, children do that all the time! But it is not right. Matthew Henry says: "God takes notice of what children say and do in their play and will reckon with them if they say or do amiss, though their parents do not." Ishmael should have honored his brother Isaac, for through his brother the promised Seed would be born. But Ishmael's heart was set against Isaac. There was enmity in his heart against the Promised Seed of Abraham and the free grace of God. How sad! It is also wrong for you when that wickedness to pester or mock someone rises in your heart. We need to take our hearts to the Lord Jesus and ask Him to change them (Ezekiel 36:26).

Ishmael enjoyed a cooled tongue (Genesis 21:19). Hagar and Ishmael were sent away into the desert. There they ran out of water. Hagar was afraid that Ishmael would die and set him under a shrub (Genesis 21:15). But the Lord showed Hagar a well not far off from where she sat. She must have hurried to fill the bottle and press it to Ishmael's lips. His thirst could be quenched, his lips could be cooled. But in hell, that cannot happen (Luke 16:24). What a reason for us to seek to escape the wrath to come! Let us remember that whenever we press a cold glass of water to our lips. Ask the Lord, today, for grace to drink from the fountain of living water (John 4:14).

Ishmael became a wild man (Genesis 16:12). That is a sad summary of a person's life, don't you think? To be rude, rebellious, and untamed. It is much better if the mercy of God takes hold of us, and changes us from being wild to being tamed by grace (Mark 5:15). Growing up in the tents of Abram didn't save Ishmael, and neither does going to church save us. If we are not born again by the Spirit, then we, too, must be cast out (Matthew 22:13). Why would we ignore the Lord Jesus who came and let Himself be cast out of the favor of His Father, so that sinners like Ishmael may cast themselves upon Christ and find mercy?

Joseph—God Meant It For Good

Parents are not perfect. Children are not perfect. Families are far from perfect. Many sad things and bad things can happen in families. Yet God's grace can shine so brightly through families as well. That is what we see in Joseph's early years.

Joseph was born as the eleventh son of Jacob and the first son of Rachel. When he was still young, he moved with his family away from his Uncle Laban's farm where he always lived. They moved to the strange land of Canaan. This was a big change for the young Joseph. He moved because God had told his father, "return unto the land of thy fathers...and I will be with thee" (Genesis 31:3). Sometimes God calls parents to move somewhere else and we have to go with them. But when God calls parents to move, He also knows what is best for the children.

After being in Canaan some years, Joseph's mother, Rachel, died while giving birth to Benjamin. It must have been hard for young Joseph to see them carry the body of his dead mother to the grave. She was gone. If you still have a mother, do you thank God for her? Do you pray for those who do not?

Rachel appears to have been a selfish person who was never content. She also took idols along with her from her father Laban. She was not a good example for Joseph in those ways. Sometimes we see wrong things in our parents. We need to be patient with their weaknesses, but we should never go along with their sins.

We should also not go along with the sins of brothers and sisters. Imagine having ten older brothers, like Joseph did! Often younger ones look up to their older brothers and sisters. But sadly, these brothers did a lot of sinful things. They were also not good examples. When Joseph was seventeen years old, he was with his brothers caring for his father's flocks. But he came home to tell his father about the bad things they did (Genesis 37:2).

We need to be careful not to be tattletales. Sometimes we tell about when others do wrong because we want to see them get in trouble or want people to think bad of them and good about us. But Joseph was troubled about the sins of his brothers. He also

felt he could share his trouble with his father, Jacob, because he knew his father also did not like sin.

Joseph had a special bond with his father. We read that "Israel" (the name God gave to Jacob when He gave him grace) loved Joseph more than his other children. Parents must be careful about showing favoritism. His father giving him a special coat of many colors led to trouble. But the bond of love was special because it was a spiritual bond. God had shown saving mercy both to Jacob and to Joseph. We know that because God showed Joseph things through dreams. Later, in Potiphar's house in Egypt, Joseph was very afraid to sin against God. Later still, he trusted the Lord in prison. Jacob must have felt a special bond with his son Joseph, unlike some of his other sons who went in sinful ways. The best bond is when you are not only part of the same earthly family but also the same spiritual family of God.

Loving God can also lead other people to hate you. When you don't go along with them in their sin but tell them not to do what is wrong, they can become upset. Joseph's brothers also "hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him" (Genesis 37:4). Later they even threw him into a pit and sold him as a slave. This hatred was partly Jacob and Joseph's fault, but also because these brothers did not want to listen to rebukes or to what God revealed to Joseph. When you want to follow the Lord, you can expect some people to be mean to you. But it is better to have God with you and people against you than people with you and God against you.

Young Joseph was a sinner as we all are. He went through many difficulties: moving to strange places, losing his mother, being hated by his brothers, and seeing the poor example of a mother and brothers. Yet, God was merciful to Joseph and kept him from going along with sin. Instead, He made him want to fear Him and serve him. God blessed Joseph and later Joseph would see God had led all these things for good. Whatever difficulties you go through, pray to God for His grace. He is a help and refuge.

Rev. David Kranendonk is pastor of the Free Reformed Church of Oxford County, Ontario.

Moses—Choosing Pleasure or Pain

Imagine having the chance to be a prince in a great kingdom! You could live in a palace. You could have many things to enjoy and servants to serve you. Other people would bow in respect for you. You would be famous. Many dream of being a prince. Long ago, Moses was a prince—for a while. But he learned that being a child of God was even more special. Let us learn from this young boy, Moses.

Moses was born into a family of slaves. His parents lived in Egypt. The Egyptian king or Pharaoh ordered the Israelites to work hard by building great buildings for him. His dad was whipped if he did not work hard enough. Worse yet, Pharaoh was afraid of the Israelites becoming too powerful, so he ordered that all their baby boys be thrown into the Nile river. When Moses's mother was expecting a baby, she must have wondered: will this baby be a boy or a girl? Will he have to be thrown into the river or will she be able to live? Then the baby was born. It was a boy! His parents called him Moses and hid him from the Egyptians.

How different your life may be. No one may have wanted to kill you when you were born. Your dad may not be a slave. You may not be living in poverty. Shouldn't you be so thankful to God for those gifts?

Moses also had reason to be thankful for something very special. He had parents who trusted, feared, and loved the Lord. Having parents like that is better than having parents who give you many things but do not care about your soul. Hebrews 11:23 tells us "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment." They knew that God had not given them their child to deliver him up to be killed by those evil Egyptians. He was born to be raised in the fear of God. God had promised the Israelites would not be destroyed in Egypt but go back to the promised land.

When Moses was still very young his mother realized it was dangerous to keep him at home, so she put him in a basket of reeds and let it float on the river. In doing so, she placed him in God's hand to care for him. God did care for him. You know the story of how the princess found him and wanted to keep him. Then

Miriam, his sister, said she knew someone who could care for him until he could go to the palace. That was his own mother! That teaches us we are safe when we are in God's hand. He cares for those who trust in Him.

Moses could then spend his early years with his parents. What did they do for him? They cared for him, fed him, and clothed him, but especially taught him about the Lord. They taught him that He is the only living God and the gods of Egypt were man-made. They taught him about his sinfulness and about God's cleansing from sin and saving from judgment. They taught him how worthy God was to be sought, trusted, and loved. That was so special.

When he was still young, he had to leave his simple little home and go to the princess's big palace. Everything looked nicer there. But there he no longer heard about the Lord God of Israel. People did not fear God there. They lived in sin. What a difference! Would he forget what his parents taught him? No, he could not forget the Lord.

You can be so thankful to be taught about the Lord in your home, but you also will go to places and meet people who do not care about God. That is very sad. Will you then go along with them? Will you talk like them and act like them, and forget about God? Or will you always remember what you have been taught? Do you just do good things because your parents are there to tell you to do them? Or would you want to pray to God and walk in His way, even if no one around you did so?

When Moses grew older he no longer wanted to be a prince in a heathen palace and enjoy the pleasures of sin. He chose to belong to a slave people—because they were God's people. He knew they were blessed and truly happy because they had God to save them, care for them, and bless them. Children, let your song be:

O Lord, remember me in grace,
Let me salvation see;
The grace Thou showest to Thy saints,
That grace reveal to me.

Let me behold Thy people's good
And in their joy rejoice.
(Psalm 106; Psalter no. 290:5)

Samuel—Servant of the LORD

What do you like to do for fun? Maybe you enjoy a game of tag on the playground or hide-and-go-seek in your basement. Maybe you would rather play board games or color a picture, or play a game on an electronic device. Still others might enjoy peek-a-boo or “thumb-wars.” All children enjoy playing in some way, although the activities they choose may be different. Play is an important part of growing up, and we can learn many lessons through playing: lessons about winning and losing, treating others kindly, and serving the Lord with our whole heart.

I wonder what you would think about a boy who went right to work? Nothing is written about this boy playing or joining with his friends for fun and games. Instead, he worked for the Lord in the tabernacle. This boy’s name was Samuel, and we read about him in the Bible books that are named after him.

This doesn’t mean that Samuel never played the childhood games that other kids did. But the Bible focuses on Samuel’s calling to serve the Lord from his youth. You can ask what this means for you. “How can I serve the Lord now? Am I too young?” “What do I have that God would use? There are older people who can do everything.” “Why do I have to serve the Lord now? Can’t I just have fun and serve Him later?” None of these or any other questions kept Samuel from serving the Lord, and they do not need to keep you from doing so either.

God calls us to not seek popularity or the most fun we can have, but to serve Him. The service of God was not “cool” or popular in the days of Eli, the high priest. His sons were ungodly, doing bad things right in front of the place of worship (1 Samuel 2:12, 22–25; 3:13–14). It was a spiritually dead time in Israel (the church of those days). Yet, suddenly, this young boy, Samuel, was called to serve God faithfully. This heart of service is evident in how he listened for Eli’s voice and answered it when he thought it came.

You have many opportunities to serve the Lord *now*. Just because these opportunities may be small, that doesn’t mean they are unimportant. How can you serve the Lord in what you desire? Often, children think they absolutely need certain electronics, games, clothes, or toys. It is easy to want things because our friends have them or want them. We want them, too! But do you desire what God wants you to have? How do we know what God wants us

to have? Often it is what our wise parents know is good for us, which usually means not giving you everything you ask for. Instead of wishing we had more things, God would like us to focus more on how we can serve Him, like Samuel did.

You can serve the Lord by being careful in how you spend your time. It is easy to think about fun, to play computer games, to listen to music or watch sports or movies. These can be relaxing and fill our time when we are bored. But do they satisfy you? Were you made for these things? Instead, you can use your time by playing wholesomely with others. Or you could make a craft or card for someone who is suffering or lonely; you could bring it to them and talk with them. You could also read a good book that can teach you an important lesson and motivate you to serve the Lord. Think about someone from your class who is lonely or excluded. Can you think of ways to be a friend to them? Take the time to visit with someone who may look or talk differently than you, or has a wheelchair or walking device. How can you use your time to learn a useful skill with which you can serve others? Your relationships give you opportunities to serve. Do you ever ask your parents how you can help? Do you ever spend time with a younger brother or sister, even if your friends are asking you to come over to play? Are you willing to stop a conversation when it turns negative about someone? Do you stand up for someone who is different or bullied?

The most important thing here is not about Samuel, but about the Lord. Samuel could not deal with the sin of Israel or even the sin of his own heart. The Holy Spirit gave him a willing heart to listen to the Lord and to be eager to bring God’s message and do His work. We also need the Lord Jesus, who served God faithfully throughout His life and in His death. He has provided everything for us to truly serve God! This service begins in hearts when they are made new and alive by the Holy Spirit. It continues in the lives of children and adults when they seek forgiveness and follow in Christ’s way of service to God. Speak, Lord, thy young servants are listening (1 Samuel 3:10)!

Rev. Don Overbeek is pastor of the Heritage Reformed Congregation of Bradford, Ontario.

Only a Boy Named David

You probably know the song, “Only a boy named David, only a little sling. Only a boy named David, but he could pray and sing...” This is the song with the easy-to-remember refrain leading to the high point in the song, “and...round and round and round and round and round and round and round!” The story of David and Goliath is in every Bible story book that my family owns and is one of the most familiar events of the Old Testament (along with Daniel in the Lion’s Den).

Because David was very young, you can probably understand how fighting Goliath was a great act of faith. But you may have a harder time relating his life to yours. After all, we don’t fight against real Philistines today, and we have never seen giants even close to the height of Goliath (not even I am that tall!). I’m sure you have never tried on armor like David did and probably your slingshot aim isn’t that good.

But you can probably understand how it felt to be a boy surrounded by men. Have you ever felt that you were the smallest or the weakest? If you were working with your dad in his shop, or your mom and a few other ladies in the kitchen, you would probably be there watching and wondering what they were doing. You would never be allowed to be in charge, but would be expected to follow everyone else’s orders and know your place. At most, your dad would ask you to get a hammer out of the tool box or your mom might ask you to get the cinnamon out of the cupboard (if you can reach it). You certainly wouldn’t tell your dad how to fix the thing and most certainly you wouldn’t grab a wrench and screwdriver and do it yourself and leave them watching. In the Bible’s story, David was just a boy surrounded by strong warriors, but these men were scared stiff every time they saw the fierce, towering giant Goliath and heard his mean, threatening shouts. David knew this was wrong and stood up for what was right. He was laughed at. People thought he was proud. But he still did it! God calls you to stand up for Him, regardless of what others think or say. God honors those who honor Him (1 Samuel 2:30).

We could wonder why David would risk himself against such a hostile and strong enemy. Our parents often say, “Be careful!” or “Stay safe!” But David seemed to not worry about his safety. David knew the Lord would deliver him, and he knew that because God had delivered him from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear (1 Samuel 17:37) when rescuing one of his father’s sheep. This experience showed that God was faithful to David when he acted in simple obedience. He was doing what he had to do, honoring God as he worked for his father. David now trusted that God would help him again as he stood up to Goliath, God’s enemy. We do not need to wait to grow up before we can see what happens when we “trust and obey.” Children who believe and obey God today will find that God will send His great help and blessing to them—encouraging their obedience tomorrow, the next day, and every day.

My son always liked the part when David cuts off Goliath’s head (my daughters...not so much). This is violent and gruesome, but it tells us that David won! In this, David shows us what Jesus is like—especially that He won the battle over God’s enemies. At the cross, Christ won the battle! In the resurrection, victory is enjoyed! You, children, just like your parents, still have to fight against sin. The battle belongs to the Lord, but He clothes His children with armor (Ephesians 6:10–18). The Bible guides God’s people in their lifelong struggle. When you fight with your brother or say something mean to your classmate, remember you need God to help you see your sins, be sorry for them, and stop them and please God instead. May the Holy Spirit give you a heart that loves God and seeks to please Him, encouraging you even when your sins seem to be as big as Goliath.

You know the end of the children’s song: “And the giant came tumbling down!” What a happy ending (and many great joys along the way) is in store for children, adults, and older ones who live by faith and seek God’s glory however they can!

The Widow's Son— Starvation to Salvation

In the days of the prophet Elijah, there was a very poor widow in a place called Zarephath. There had been no rain for a long time in Zarephath, so there was hardly any food anywhere. This lady was so poor that she only had one more meal left. She knew that once it was finished, she and her son would die. This is very hard for us to imagine because of all the large stores of food we have. Sometimes our idea of “starving” is having no food at 4:00 in the afternoon—in between a good lunch and dinner. This is not starvation! Maybe you have seen pictures of children from around the world who have had no food for days. Try to imagine how you would feel if, next Monday, you knew you would have no breakfast. Lunchtime comes along and you say, “I’m starving.” But then there is no lunch. No afternoon snack. No dinner. No snack after dinner. You go to sleep saying, “I’m so hungry!” You wake up. Still no food. No breakfast. No lunch. No snack. Do you get the idea? This is terrible! How thankful we should be for living in a part of the world where the Lord has provided so richly for us. Let us make sure we really do “give thanks” before and after each meal.

The Lord, through His prophet Elijah, performed a wonderful miracle for this poor widow and her son. Right before they finished their last few scraps of food, the Lord supplied a daily provision of food for them. Can you imagine how incredibly thankful this mother and her son would be as they gave thanks before each meal?

However, something really sad happened next. The widow’s son became very sick, and then he died. We are never too young to die. God can wonderfully save your life one day (like He did when He provided them food), but then allow you to die the next. You must be ready to die. The only way to be ready to die is to confess that we are great sinners and to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ who is the great Savior. Pray that the Holy Spirit would help you turn in true faith to Jesus Christ.

What happened next gives us a wonderful picture of the saving work of Jesus Christ. The mother went to Elijah and told him the terrible news. Elijah went to her home, took the boy upstairs, and laid him on his own bed. He then did what we must all do: he cried to the Lord to give life back to the little boy. Then Elijah did something very interesting: he stretched himself out on the boy, probably putting his mouth on the boy’s mouth, his hands on the boy’s hands, his feet on the boy’s feet (see 2 Kings 4:34). He did this three times. And after the third time, the little boy opened his eyes and began breathing again. He was alive! Elijah brought him to his grateful mother.

This teaches us several important lessons about salvation. First, no one can save himself or herself. Someone else must do the saving. Second, salvation is not an easy thing. Third, to save a dead sinner, someone who is alive must come and take our death. We see all these lessons very clearly in the saving work of Jesus Christ. First, Jesus Christ came to “seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). We are not sick people needing to get better; we are dead people who need to be given life. Second, it was not easy for Jesus to save a sinner. He came to this world of sin and sorrow and lived here for over thirty years. He prayed earnestly night and day, He was tempted by Satan, people mocked Him and tried to kill Him. Eventually, they crucified Him. In comparison to salvation, the creation of the world was easy. Third, Jesus died on the cross for the sins of His people. In a greater way than Elijah, Jesus was coming to our place of death so that He could give us life. He took our sins so that He could give us salvation. Jesus was taking the hell we deserve on the cross, so that if we believe on Him, we will have eternal life. So here is the really important truth for us: “Believe in the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31).

Rev. Ian Macleod is pastor of the Free Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Naaman's Maid—Not Too Young to Witness

In the New Testament, we read of children being brought to Jesus. We also read of how willing Jesus was to receive children. Among other things, this teaches us that Jesus is willing to receive sinners of any age. You are never too young to come to Jesus Christ. And not only are you never too young to come to Jesus Christ, but you are never too young to speak to others about Him, either.

In 2 Kings 5, we read about how the Lord used “a little maid” to bring Naaman, the mighty military captain of Syria, to salvation. Naaman was the national hero in Syria. The young boys probably ran around the streets pretending to be the mighty Naaman. However, one day something terrible happened. Naaman found a spot on himself, and he soon realized that he had the terrible disease of leprosy. Now everything changed. Naaman went from being the person everybody wanted to be to suddenly being the person absolutely nobody wanted to be. He had lots of money, lots of fancy clothes, lots of medals from war, lots of popularity with king and people, but now he was a leper. Naaman would have given everything he had if only he could get rid of this disease. But everyone in Syria knew that there was no cure for leprosy.

However, the little maid in Naaman's house had an idea! We don't even know the girl's name. We can guess that she was probably about ten years old. We also know that she was from the land of Israel. This poor little girl had been through a terrible experience herself—she had been kidnapped. Naaman and his army had attacked Israel and had stolen her away from her parents. How terrible! Most likely, she would never see her friends or parents again.

How do you think this girl felt when she heard that Naaman had leprosy? How would you feel? Perhaps something like this: “Serves him right!” “He is getting what he deserves!” “This is what happens to wicked people.” Yet, she thinks the exact opposite. In fact, probably as she is sweeping the floor, or doing some other housework, she says to Naaman's wife: “Oh, I so wish

that Naaman was in Israel, because then the prophet Elisha would heal him from his leprosy.”

This wonderful statement shows us several things about this little girl's faith. It shows us that she loved her enemies and did good to those who had mistreated her. She really wanted Naaman to be healed. But notice also her confidence that Naaman would be healed if he simply met with Elisha. Remember again, in these days, everybody knew that there was no cure for leprosy. Everybody, that is, except for those who worshiped the God of Israel!

Most likely, this little maid remembered her parents telling her about Elijah and Elisha and all the wonderful miracles they performed. And so, she was thinking, “I serve a God who raises the dead to life; who sends fire down from heaven. He is certainly able to heal my master's leprosy!” And this is exactly what happened. Amazingly, all because of the simple wish of this little captive girl who worked in his house, Naaman found out what she said and told his king, and the king sent him to Israel because of what she said, and eventually he comes to Elisha and is healed—all because of what she said.

Faith like this little girl's is the faith we need, too. We also must believe that the Lord can and will heal us of our greatest disease: sin! We must believe that if we go to the great Prophet, Jesus Christ, and beg Him for mercy, He will abundantly pardon! And we must believe that He is able to save anyone who comes to Him. In other words, we must believe that “the blood of Jesus Christ, [God's] Son, cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

We don't know what happened to this little maid. However, as Naaman goes to meet Elisha, I can imagine her sweeping Naaman's floors with a smile on her face, and singing one of the songs she would have learned from her parents: “O my soul, bless thou Jehovah, all within me bless His name; bless Jehovah and forget not, all His mercies to proclaim. He forgives all thy transgressions, heals thy sicknesses and pains; He redeems thee from destruction, and His love thy life sustains” (Psalter 280:1). May you all be able to sing this song by faith, too!

Josiah—A Tender Heart for God

Scripture: 2 Kings 22:1–23:30 and
2 Chronicles 34–35

Imagine you hear noise that sounds like someone is building. What are they doing? Let's come a bit closer.... It looks like they are working on the temple! In fact, they are taking all kinds of things out of the temple and they are repairing the house of God. Why are they doing that?

Josiah is a young and godly king. He ordered the builders to repair and cleanse the temple because he loves the Lord. He did not learn this from his father. His father was a very ungodly king who did not love the Lord. But Josiah does! While yet young, he sought to serve the God of Israel, the God of King David.

This was not easy because his parents did not teach him. A lot of the people around him loved idols. Since Josiah loved the Lord, he did not want other people to serve fake gods. So as king, Josiah broke down the places where the people would kneel for their idols. He even ground them to powder. He took the powder to the graves of idol worshippers and scattered it.

And now he ordered Shaphan to repair the house of the Lord. King Josiah knows he can trust his workers. There is Hilkiah the priest; he is throwing away bad things from the temple. But suddenly, he stops. What has he found? A scroll! He looks at it closely and discovers that it is a roll of one of the books of Moses! The Law of the Lord! Quickly he goes to show the king. The Word of God is very important to serve the Lord; through it, we know the will of the Lord. It is very sad when we don't want to listen to God's Word or when we forget the Word of God.

Hilkiah and other leaders stand before King Josiah and read him the scroll. Josiah listens to it. He realizes how he and his people have sinned against God. King Josiah is very sad; he breaks down and cries, fearing the worst. Too long the people have not listened to God! Too long they have served other gods. He rends his clothes to show how upset he is.

Josiah sends his servants to a prophetess named Huldah. They ask her what they need to do now. "The

Lord will bring disaster upon Jerusalem," Huldah says—but not while Josiah is king. Josiah's heart was tender and soft toward the Lord; he humbled himself before the Lord and wanted to serve Him. Because of this, the Lord's judgment will be delayed. King Josiah hears this and is relieved. "My people also need to know the word of the Lord," he says. He calls the people together and the law is read. Together they make a covenant, a promise, to serve the Lord alone.

Children, King Josiah had a humble and tender heart. He loved to listen to and obey the Lord. You need such a heart, too. By nature, we only have a hard heart. We don't want to listen to God and obey Him. We cannot make our hearts soft. But the Lord can!

Josiah studied the Word of God faithfully. One day, he read that Israel was supposed to celebrate the Passover. They had not done so for a long time...since the days of Samuel! In the Passover, the people of Israel remembered that the Lord saved them from Egypt and set them free from slavery. They remembered this by eating a lamb, which reminded them of the lamb that was needed so that the firstborn sons would not die. This lamb points us to the real Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. Because He died on the cross, He can give us the forgiveness of sins. He can make our hearts tender and soft so that we become obedient. Children, you need the Lord Jesus Christ. Josiah knew He needed to serve the Lord, and he did so by listening to the Word of God and by celebrating the Passover, which pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ. Are you serving the Lord by trusting in and obeying the Lord Jesus Christ?

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How do we know that Josiah loved the Lord?
2. What does it mean to have a tender heart? Who can make your heart soft?
3. Why did Josiah want to celebrate the Passover? What did the Passover lamb point to?

Rev. Pieter VanderHoek is a pastor of the Heritage Reformed Congregation in Burgessville, Ontario.

Joash—A Good Beginning, a Sad Ending

Scripture: 2 Kings 11–12 and 2 Chronicles 22–24

“Treason! Treason!” Queen Athalia shouts. But it is too late; soldiers surround her and she is taken out of the temple. Outside the temple, she is killed. Why did this happen? When Queen Athalia took the throne as queen, she had taken a role that was only for the line of King David. Do you know what she did with the line of David? She killed all of them.... At least, that is what she thought.

But God protected the line of David, the line through which the Messiah would be born. If Athalia, this evil assistant of the devil, would have had her wish, the Lord Jesus could never have been born! But our mighty Lord was in control. Our mighty God rules over all things—in your life, too. We can trust Him. Let’s see how He is in control in Joash’s life.

A lady rushes by; she seems in a hurry. Where is she going? She is going to the children’s room of the palace. This lady is Jehosheba, and she is married to Jehoiada, the high priest. She talks to the nurse of a little prince. Joash is his name. He is one year old. Jehosheba and the nurse with Joash rush out of the palace. They go to the temple. There Jehosheba hides little Joash and his nurse in a special bedroom. They close the Lord’s temple, and Joash is safe, protected by the Lord.

For seven years, Joash grows up in secret. Queen Athalia doesn’t know he lives. Now, seven years later, Jehoiadah the high priest is crowning the little king. What a special celebration! He has instructed the temple guards to protect the king. When Athalia hears the shouts for joy, she comes to the temple. And what she sees makes her very upset. She calls out: “Treason! Treason!” She knows that she cannot be queen anymore; she knows she stole the throne. But the Lord gives it back to the line of David—and to the line of King Jesus.

The people and the king make a covenant with the Lord: they promise to serve him alone. The people are relieved. The first thing they do is to take away the idols of queen Athalia. “Away with them! We have a

king from the line of David, as the Lord promised. Therefore, the Lord must be served!”

The young king fears the Lord. Jehoiadah the high priest is a wise father-figure to him. Joash wants to repair the temple because during Athalia’s reign the temple was not kept up. Joash talks to the priests about it, but they do not listen. The priests are not honest. They want the money for themselves. After a long time, Joash asks what has happened to the temple repairs. He makes a big collection box, in which the people can put their money so that the temple still can be repaired.

Joash feared the Lord, but not all his life. Jehoiadah the high priest grew old—130 years old—and was close to dying. He did much good for Joash and the people of Judah. No doubt he said to Joash: “King Joash, keep serving the Lord!” But years passed and Joash forgot the Lord. He started serving idols. How sad! He began so well! Zechariah, the son of Jehoiadah the high priest, went to the king. “Your Majesty, you need to serve the Lord.” But Joash doesn’t want to listen. Instead, he told some servants to stone him.

What began so well, ended so sadly. The Lord spared Joash’s life. He helped Joash repair the temple. Yet, Joash turned his heart from the Lord. He died a sad death.

What a warning, children, to serve the Lord alone! He is God; He protected the line of King Jesus! And if Jesus was not born, you could never be saved. But Jesus did come, and He is the only Savior from sin. Through His Holy Spirit, He can give you a desire to serve Him—and keep you serving Him to the end!

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Joash was seven years old when he became king and served the Lord. How old are you? Are you serving the Lord?
2. Why was it so important that Joash was kept alive?
3. What did Joash do at the end of his life? Who do we need to serve the Lord?

Children Playing—A Sign of God’s Blessing

And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof. (Zechariah 8:5)

Everyone agrees: playing is fun. However, not everyone thinks playing is a good thing. People sometimes think if you play, you must be lazy. Others think if you play, it must be because you are immature. However, the Bible speaks very highly of play. The Word of God associates joy, safety, salvation, and covenant with play. Playing is a great sign of God’s blessing.

Zechariah 8:1–8 is a prophecy about the Lord’s great deliverance and restoration of His people. The prophecy uses the imagery of children playing in the streets to express the great blessedness of His work. The first way this blessedness is seen is in joy. When children play, there are smiles, songs, games, and happiness.

The second way God’s blessing is seen in play is in safety. In Zechariah 8:5, the children are playing “in the streets.” Parents can allow their children to play without fear for their safety. No one will harm the children. No one will take the children. There is nothing to threaten them. The imagery of safety is further confirmed by the presence of the very elderly in large numbers, and without fear (Zechariah 8:4). However, most striking is the safety of being in the very presence of the Lord: “Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain” (Zechariah 8:3).

Third, God’s blessing is seen in play in His salvation. In Zechariah’s prophecy, the children play in joy and safety because God is present in His saving grace. He has desired His people for Himself and He has returned to restore her to His presence. “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury. Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain” (8:2–3).

Without God’s initiative, the children would be scattered with their families among the heathen. There the oppression and idolatry around them endangered them physically and spiritually. Because of God’s salvation, the children play with joy and safety.

Lastly, we see the blessing of the Lord in playing through His covenant. In Zechariah 8:8, the Lord says, “And they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness” (Zechariah 8:8). The phrases “be my people” and “be their God” found here in Zechariah 8:8 are used throughout Scripture to refer to God’s gracious covenantal relationship with His people. God saves and comforts His people by faithfully and tenderly fulfilling His covenant.

In summary, we can say that the imagery of play used in Zechariah 8:5 expresses the blessing of God through joy, safety, salvation, and His special saving relationship with His children: covenant. Seeing that play is a sign of God’s blessing in Scripture, we will consider three brief applications.

First, when you play, enjoy it. God gave us play for relaxation, strengthening, enjoyment, and celebration. Play is a sign of God’s blessing in His Word, and we should not despise it.

Second, as you enjoy times of play, do so remembering that play should direct us back to the Lord. We can play because of His sovereign salvation as a fruit of His gracious covenant. It would not be right if we rejoiced in times of play without being thankful for Him and what He has done. The joys of play should always, ultimately, be about Him and not us.

Third, there is a great danger in lack of play. Physically, emotionally, and mentally, we need times of play for rejuvenation. If we do not play from time to time, we cannot continue serving the Lord at our very best and eventually we may even burn out from overwork and stress.

Our Lord Jesus uses the imagery of play in Matthew 11:16–19, to demonstrate the foolishness of the people refusing to believe His Word. The imagery of play denotes blessing from God manifested in joy, safety, salvation, and covenant. The imagery of refusing to play does not manifest diligence or maturity but rather a denial of blessing and a rejection of joy, safety, salvation, covenant, and ultimately, Christ Himself. So let us always play with joy, remembering we may do so because of the safety that comes through salvation because of Christ’s covenant faithfulness.

Rev. Terreth Klaver is pastor of the Heritage Reformed Congregation of Chilliwack, British Columbia.

Jesus—His Childhood and Yours

Learning about the Lord Jesus is the greatest joy for a child of God. When we prayerfully search the Bible, it reveals a lot about who the Lord is and what He does. However, the Scriptures do not reveal much about the childhood of the Lord Jesus on earth. What we do read should humble us, encourage us, and fill us with awe as we see the childhood of the eternal Son of God in the flesh so closely parallels our own childhoods.

First, Jesus had to obey His mother and earthly father. Galatians 4:4 tells us that, “when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.” Our Lord Jesus was born a baby like we were. But He did more than just become one of us: He came under the law. It would have been possible for the eternal Son to take to Himself our nature and be one of us without this humiliation, but to save us He had to come “under the law.” Since he had to come under the law, He followed the fifth commandment, “Honour thy father and thy mother” (Exodus 20:12).

Jesus the eternal Son, who made the worlds and knows everything, had to “obey his parents in all things” (Colossians 2:20). Have you had to stop doing something that you really wanted to keep doing because your parents asked you to stop? So did Jesus. Jesus knew what it was like to say no to playing, spending time with His friends, or spending time by Himself when His earthly mother and father needed Him to do something.

Second, He knew what it was like to work. From an early age, children have simple daily chores. As you get older, you have more complex and challenging things to do, such as helping mom and dad with work projects and helping care for younger siblings. You work hard at school and then get your first job.

Our Lord knew what it was like to work as a child. He was the oldest boy in His family and He would have helped at home. He would have done His chores, taken care of His younger siblings, and assisted Joseph in his work as a carpenter (Matthew 13:55, Mark 6:3). Working as a carpenter today is not easy work. Being a carpenter in New Testament times would have been even more difficult. There were no trucks. No trailers. No power tools. Further, in New Testament times, a carpenter did a wide variety of work. They made farm tools such as plows, yokes, carts, wheels, winnowing forks, and threshing boards, as well as house

parts, doors, frames, locks, window lattices, beds, tables, lampstands, boxes, cabinets, and chests. Jesus may have even repaired boats.

He understood long hours, sore muscles, and not being able to play when work needed to be done. He understood what it was like to deal with difficult, unreasonable, cheap, and overly critical customers. He knew the priority of sacrifice and self-denial to earn a wage and please an employer.

However, the Lord Jesus loved to serve His heavenly Father. When His earthly parents questioned Him as to why He stayed behind in the Temple rather than keeping up with the rest of the family on their travel, He responded, “How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” (Luke 2:49). The Lord Jesus was willing to work and work hard, and He did it in service to His Father.

Are you willing to work hard? But most importantly, are you willing to work to serve the Lord?

Third, Jesus grew. He knew what it is like to grow up. Luke 2:40 says, “and the child grew.” Just a couple verses later, Luke introduces a passage with the phrase, “And when he was twelve years old” (Luke 2:42). Twelve years of His life are jumped over in the history recorded in Luke. We are further told in Luke 2:52 that the Lord Jesus increased in “stature.” He not only got older and bigger, but He emotionally, mentally, and spiritually matured into a young man. He went through the physical and emotional changes of puberty. He became more responsible and independent. At some point, His earthly father died, and He inherited the responsibilities of the household.

Do you sometimes feel like your life is changing? Like you’re not quite a kid anymore but not an adult yet? Do you feel the weight of responsibility? You are not alone. He knew what it was like to grow up, too.

In the midst of any and every struggle, go to our Lord Jesus. Boy and girls, you can go to Him because He understands your questions and frustrations. Teenagers and young adults, you can go to Him because He understands your temptations and struggles, and will always lead you in the way you should go (Psalm 23:3, John 14:6). Even you, adults and elderly ones, can go to Him. He understands your mistakes, sins, regrets, sorrows, and pains. Regardless of your age or place in life, seek the Lord today.

Jairus's Daughter— Little Girl, Get Up!

If you would ask a boy or a girl if they would ever want to die, the answer would be, “No.” And if you asked them, “Are you sure?” they would answer you with an even louder, “No way!” Even boys and girls know that death is unpleasant. And sad.

But the problem is, everybody dies. We might not think of this on a beautiful summer day as we run through the grass as fast as the wind and jump into the air as high as a deer, but we are born—each of us—with a sickness. And this sickness, one day, will take away our fast running. It will stop us from leaping and jumping. This is something that happens to most of us that we often call, “old age.”

But if these boys and girls would ask their parents or their pastor why old people can't run and jump anymore like they can, the answer would be, “Because of sin.” Every person has sin in them. And that sin is the greatest problem in all the world because sin led to us growing old and dying.

Thinking about this makes us feel sad, but there is a wonderful Bible story to give us hope. One day, a little girl became very sick. The Bible doesn't tell us her name but it does tell us that she was about twelve years old. The Bible also tells us the name of her dad—Jairus (pronounced, “J-eye-russ”). Not only did this little girl become sick, but she became so sick that she died. She wasn't old at all; she was just a kid. But sometimes kids get sick, too. And sometimes they can become so sick that they die.

But that's only the beginning of this Bible story. There is a happy ending: this little girl's father runs to the Lord Jesus. He falls at Jesus's feet and pleads with Him to come heal his daughter. And

wonderfully, the Lord Jesus comes! Even though she has died, Jesus says to Jairus, “Be not afraid, only believe.” He goes into their home and up to this little girl who is dead, and He takes her by the hand and says, “Maid, arise.” She came alive again! She gets up out of bed, and she walks!

This is what this story tells us: it tells us that sin is not only something that older people have, but children, too. Children—because of that sin—can also die. Many of us will grow old, but all of us one day will die. But the good news for all of us (even boys and girls!) is that this story shows us that the Lord Jesus can take away all the sad and terrible things that sin does to us—like sickness. When we die, He can raise us from the dead!

Boys and girls, how wonderful it is to have a father who loves you enough—like this little girl's father did—to run to the Lord Jesus and plead with Him to heal you and save you. But how much more wonderful it is that the Lord Jesus is a Savior who loves to heal. If we ask Him, He will forgive our sins today, and—one day, when He returns—He will take sin completely away from us forever. We will never have to worry about dying anymore. Do you believe in Him? Remember what He said to this girl's father, “Be not afraid, only believe.”

You can ask your parents to read this Bible story to you. You can find it in Matthew 9:18–26, Mark 5:21–43, and in Luke 8:41–56.

Rev. Tim Bergsma is pastor of Living Hope Free Reformed Church in Chatham, Ontario.

How wonderful it is to have a father who loves you enough—like this little girl's father did—to run to the Lord Jesus and plead with Him to heal you and save you. But how much more wonderful it is that the Lord Jesus is a Savior who loves to heal.

Timothy—Faith Unfeigned

Do you know the apostle Paul? He was the man God used to write many of the books in the New Testament. He was also the one who started many of the churches that we read about in the New Testament. But the apostle Paul did not work alone. God gave him friends who helped and worked with him. “Labourers together with God,” Paul liked to call them. And one of these friends was a young man named Timothy. Timothy actually wrote some of the Bible books along with Paul! (Here’s a challenge: Go and read the first verse in every Bible book that the apostle Paul wrote, and see how many of them Timothy helped him write! How many can you count?).

How did Timothy become the apostle Paul’s friend and work together with him in the gospel? One big reason is that Timothy had a very special childhood.

When Timothy was still a young man, he became a Christian. He had saving faith (Paul was convinced of this; you can read about it in 2 Timothy 1:5). We know that whenever someone is saved, they are only saved because God sovereignly chooses to save them. But we also know that when God saves people, He often uses other people who speak and teach the gospel to them. And this is why Timothy had a very special childhood. He had three treasures: he had a Christian family, he had a Christian church, and he had Christian preaching. Now you may scratch your head and think, “That’s not so special because that’s exactly what I have.” But I assure you, it *is* special. And if you have what Timothy had as a child then you too have a treasure that God has given to you. Let’s look at these three gifts more closely.

Timothy had a Christian family. His grandmother and mother believed. God likes to work in families and it often happens that when a mother or a father believes, then many or all of their children will become believers, too. This doesn’t happen automatically—Timothy wasn’t saved simply because his grandmother and mother were Christians. He had to put his faith himself in Jesus Christ to be saved. But a believing grandmother and mother meant that Timothy grew up at home, being taught about God the Father, Jesus

Christ, and the Holy Spirit. And he would have been taught about his sin, and how God planned and brought about salvation for sinners just like him. Do you have this at home? Many children do not, and they grow up never hearing about the Lord Jesus Christ. If you do in your home, it’s a great gift from God. You should thank God for your special home.

Timothy had a Christian church. When Paul first met Timothy, it was because the churches near where Timothy lived spoke well about Timothy to Paul (you can read this in Acts 16:1–5). They let Paul know that Timothy would be a good young man to work alongside him. It means they must have been watching out for young Timothy and caring for him, and teaching him also what his grandmother and mother were already teaching him at home. Do you have a church like this? A church that cares for you and teaches you from God’s Word? Being able to grow up in a church that loves God’s Word is a great treasure and also a gift from God.

Timothy had Christian preaching. We know that he did, because Timothy heard the apostle Paul preach sermons. And we know from reading Paul’s letters just what these sermons would have sounded like. They would have been sermons that told Timothy that he was a sinner who fell short of the glory of God. But also that told him about how God has revealed a way for our sins to be forgiven and righteousness gained. And that this was all available through faith in Jesus Christ, for all who believe. What wonderful words Timothy would have heard! These words are the best words because these words bring life—new spiritual life now, and then after, eternal life. And they bring life because they direct us to the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you hear words like that from your minister? Do you hear sermons preached that tell you things like that? Then you too know how you can receive eternal life!

How wonderful God was to Timothy by giving him these three special gifts. And how wonderful God is to us, too!

Children Praising Jesus— From the Lips of Little Ones

Jesus loves children. He has time for children. He enjoys the voices of children, especially when they are singing the praises of God! Children, your parents and grandparents love to hear you sing in the school or church programs. They love to hear you sing even more than they enjoy hearing adults sing. To understand why, we need to think about one time when some angry Pharisees wanted to stop children from singing. They even asked Jesus to stop them. Jesus had just ridden into town on a donkey, and the crowds of people were praising Him. They were singing Psalm 118, especially these words: “Hosanna, blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.” Psalm 118 is all about the Lord Jesus; it tells us of His suffering on the cross and of His resurrection. It teaches us to sing about Jesus’s salvation with great joy. The word Hosanna means “save us, O Lord!” It is a call for the Lord to take the salvation Jesus Christ has come into this world to earn, and to give it to His people.

When Jesus rode into town on that donkey, the adults were not the only people there. There were whole families traveling to Jerusalem together for the great Passover feast. Children were walking with their parents, and they were caught up in the excitement. When they reached the city, Jesus emptied out the temple courtyard from the deceitful sellers who were cheating people. He said to them, “This is supposed to be a house of prayer, not a place for thieves.” Jesus healed the lame and blind people who came to Him in the temple.

The children had come into town watching with excitement as their parents sang hosannas to Jesus, and now they have their turn. They make the stones ring as they keep on singing, “Hosanna to the son of David! Hosanna to the son of David!” When the Pharisees angrily protest and tell Jesus to stop the children, Jesus answers them by quoting Psalm 8. Children, you have sung this one, too, haven’t you? Psalter 15 sings it like this: “Infant lips Thou dost ordain, wrath and vengeance to restrain, weakest means fulfill Thy will, mighty enemies to still!”

Jesus is saying to the Pharisees that the voices of children singing are mightier in the kingdom of God than any enemy! Do you think you could arm wrestle or race your dad and win? Usually not. So how can the words that come from the mouth of a child be mightier than the fiercest enemy of God? These children are praising God for salvation and asking that it be applied to them. “Save us, O Lord!” Such people who learn to become like little children and ask God for their whole salvation, and praise God for what He has done, are the proof that Jesus really is the saving Son of David!

Children, when you need help, you ask for it, don’t you? Yes, you want to do everything yourself when you can. You want to try it first, even when you can’t. But once you know you can’t do it, then you go ask someone who can. People who know they can’t save themselves are the most blessed people in the world when they ask God to save them. And they will praise God wholeheartedly for saving them.

Those stern Pharisees hated Jesus. They could not stand it if even one person was praising Jesus as the Son of David, the Savior sent by God. They ground their teeth and demanded that Jesus stop them. But those same people did not stop the greedy moneychangers from cheating people in the very temple, the house of prayer of the living God. Those same people could not heal the blind or the lame. But Jesus could. He who can do all these things says that those who can’t save themselves but cry out to Me and praise Me are displaying the strength and salvation of the Lord!

Children, you may sing with all your hearts to the Lord. The Lord loves to hear the voice of children, for they reminded Jesus at that moment that His salvation, and His cross, is going to do what God wants it to do. It is going to save! But it is important to learn to sing not just with excitement, but trusting in this same Jesus to save you.

Rev. Eric Moerdyk is pastor of the Free Reformed Church of Monarch, Alberta.

Children—You Belong to the Kingdom of God!

The Bible shows us Jesus watching children play and using them as examples for His preaching (Luke 7:32; 9:47). Jesus also sometimes took children in His arms or on His lap. One of the most beautiful descriptions of Jesus and children happens when parents are bringing young children to Jesus. He was actually teaching His disciples about marriage, but these parents want Jesus's blessing on their children. They want Jesus to pray for their children. So a group entered the house where Jesus is resting. The disciples think that Jesus is too important and busy to bother with children. We know something the disciples didn't understand: Jesus was going to Jerusalem to suffer and die on the cross. He talked about it constantly. Do you think Jesus needed peace and quiet? It would have been nice.

Children, you may have learned the song that goes with this—"when mothers of Salem their children brought to Jesus..." The disciples tell the parents to go away. But Jesus is very displeased with His disciples. Jesus was always ready to be patient with His disciples. When they could not stay up and pray with Him in Gethsemane, Jesus said, "You want to, but you are still weak." But this time, Jesus thinks the disciples are doing something very wrong, and He can't let them chase these parents and children away. Remember singing it? "But Jesus saw them ere they fled and sweetly smiled and kindly said, suffer little children to come unto me. For I will receive them...I'll be a shepherd to these lambs, O drive them not away."

Why does Jesus love little children? He teaches us two things about you, children. First, He says of such is the kingdom of God. This means that children of believing parents are covenant children. You belong to the Lord and that is why you were baptized while you were still too small to remember it. God claims you and says you are children of the kingdom already.

This means you can go to the Lord Jesus to ask Him to forgive your sins. It means that He will gladly receive you. Does your conscience speak when you sin? Your conscience is God's watchdog in your heart to bark when you do wrong, and to wag its tail when you do what is right. When your conscience barks, take it to the Lord Jesus! You belong to Him. He will not send you away. He will rebuke anyone who tries to keep you away from Him.

Second, Jesus says, "Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein." This does not mean you can only be saved while you are still a child. It also does not mean all kingdom children are already saved. When Jesus says you can only enter the kingdom of God as a little child, you should hear it like this: like a little child. Children, especially babies, are helpless. They come into this world naked, hungry, helpless, and crying. They can't do anything for themselves. It means that you need a new heart, a heart that loves God and wants to do what is right. Even children of the kingdom must receive this spiritual life. You can't give this to yourself. You can only cry to God for it. It is through Jesus Christ that God gives such hearts. Have you asked for and received such a heart already?

Once he said these two important beautiful things, Jesus takes these children in His arms. He holds them and blesses them. You can't climb on Jesus's lap now, but when you sit on your mother or father's lap and listen to a Bible story, or when you kneel beside your bed to pray, then you are still coming to the Lord Jesus. When the pastor in church prays for the children, and raises his hands to speak the blessing on the congregation, Jesus is blessing you, too. Jesus is the great High Priest in heaven who also prays for kingdom children.

The Last Dutch Further Reformation Divine



Theodorus VanderGroe (1705–1784) is the last notable representative of the Dutch Further Reformation (*Nadere Reformatie*), a seventeenth- and eighteenth-century pietistic movement that paralleled English Puritanism in many ways. The movement included such divines as Willem Teellinck (1579–1629), Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676), Jodocus Lodesteyn (1620–1677), Jacobus Koelman (1631–1695), Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635–1711), and Alexander Comrie (1706–1774). These men pursued a deeper form of piety and higher standard of practice than that which prevailed in the Reformed churches of their time and place, while maintaining the Reformed orthodoxy of the “Three Forms of Unity”: the Belgic Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort. VanderGroe is often called the *hekkensluiter* (“the one who closes the gate”), for after his death, the historic Reformed Church of the Netherlands declined further in both doctrine and spiritual life due to the influence of theological modernism and the Enlightenment, which prompted increasing secularization in Western Europe.

CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION

Theodorus VanderGroe was born March 9, 1705, in the Dutch city of Zwammerdam. He was the second child of Ludovicus VanderGroe and Johanna Laats. Johanna came from a line of preachers, while Ludovicus was the first minister of a large family of contract lawyers or “notaries.” God blessed this marriage with three children, of whom two sons entered the gospel ministry. Theodore’s father passed away July 23, 1711 after suffering a long, debilitating illness, when Theodore was six years old.¹

Baptized as “Dirk,” VanderGroe adopted the Latinized Greek name Theodorus (“given by God”) after his theological studies at Leiden University, and would be known as such for the remainder of his life. He received a Latin education in his home town and enrolled in Leiden University at age nineteen, in 1724. The family moved to Leiden, where Theodorus attended the lectures of Johannes à Marck (1656–1731; Church History); Taco Hajo van den Honert (1666–1740; Jewish Antiquity and Reformed

Dogmatics), who was a Cartesian follower of Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669);² and Albert Schultens (1686–1750; Hebrew). Theodorus especially loved the teaching of van den Honert. In his textbook, van den Honert reflected the influence of Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669), who argued for the strict interpretation of each part of Scripture according to its context in Scripture as a whole, pioneering the approach which today is called “biblical theology.” Later on, VanderGroe studied literature, church polity, and the creeds of the ancient church.³

MINISTRY

Having completed his theological education in January 1729, VanderGroe underwent his candidacy examination before the classis of Leiden, which he passed *cum laude*.⁴ This exam involved questions on Reformed dogmatics as well as knowledge of biblical languages, but particularly addressed the doctrinal soundness of a sermon preached by the student. VanderGroe ably expounded Deuteronomy 18:15, “The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken,” and was approved as a candidate for the ministry.

On August 14, 1729, VanderGroe received a pastoral call to Rijnsaterwoude, a small village in South Holland. He sustained his ordination or *peremptoir* examination in Alphen aan den Rijn, speaking on John 1:29, “Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.” VanderGroe commenced his ministry on March 19, 1730, and was ordained by J. Oosterland of Katwijk aan den Rijn, who had previously served as pastor of the church in Rijnsaterwoude. Oosterland preached on Titus 2:7–8, followed by the newly ordained VanderGroe, who preached on 1 Thessalonians 2:8.

Three years later, Theodorus’s brother, Simon Lodewijk VanderGroe, also entered the ministry in Soeterwoude. He was ordained by Theodorus, who preached on Acts 20:28.⁵ In 1740 Theodorus accepted a pastoral call to Kralingen, to succeed Cornelis Blom (1712–1780). VanderGroe himself wrote in Kralingen’s church minutes:

On July 10, 1740, I, Theodorus VanderGroe, have been installed here in Kralingen as minister of the gospel by Rev. Hermannus van Loo, pastor of Bergschenhoek, with the words of Revelation 2:10, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." In the afternoon I preached my inaugural sermon based on 2 Corinthians 2:16, "And who is sufficient for these things?"⁶

VanderGroe preached for forty-four years until his death in Kralingen, all the while enjoying a good relationship with his church and consistory.⁷ VanderGroe's ministry consisted of preaching and teaching, writing treatises and letters, and, of course, making pastoral visits to the members of his congregation.

Remarkably, during his first years in ministry, Theodorus did not know the Lord personally.⁸ He came to saving faith in Christ only at the age of thirty during his first pastorate in 1735. His sister Eva wrote in her conversion account (*Bekeringsweg*) about a godly woman, Geertje Raaphorst, who had a life-changing effect on the lives of both Eva and Theodorus VanderGroe. Pressing upon VanderGroe the need for conversion, Geertje became an instrument of God to bring her pastor to the Lord.⁹ Upon his conversion, VanderGroe's preaching and writing changed so remarkably that he confessed that prior to that time he had been "intellectually engaged with an imaginary Christ without having any [saving] knowledge of the Lord Jesus."¹⁰ After his conversion, "death in Adam, man's total depravity, and life [only] in Christ" became his primary themes.¹¹

PERSONAL LIFE AND DEATH

Theodorus VanderGroe was married at age forty-nine in 1754 to Johanna Bichon, whom he spoke of as "my beloved and faithful spouse."¹² Johanna was the daughter of Claes Bichon, who was a significant leader in the East India Trading Company. As a married man, VanderGroe was often sick and had to lean heavily on God's strength. In letters from his sickbed to friends, he wrote such outpourings of heart as these: "I feel I am merely a dead dog before God, but I lean on Christ and am carried by Him. All my guilt lies reconciled and satisfied through Christ. I cannot bring two words together to form a true prayer, but Christ is my all."¹³

VanderGroe's mother, Johanna Laats, passed away at age eighty-five in 1760 in Kralingen. Ten years later, his

sister Eva passed away, followed two years later by Maria Schuytemakers, who had been the VanderGroes' faithful housekeeper for over forty years. VanderGroe himself began to fail early in 1784 and died on June 24, 1784, after sustaining two weeks of intense illness. Six days after he died, he was buried in Kralingen. On July 4, Rev. Hoogstad of Bergschenhoek preached a memorial sermon for the Kralingen flock from Isaiah 57:2, "He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness."¹⁴

VanderGroe left behind a legacy of sermons, letters, and dogmatical and polemical writings, many of which were published long after his death. His wife, Johanna, died three months after him.

1. T. Brienens, "Theodorus van der Groe (1705–1784)," in *De Nadere Reformatie: schrijving van haar voornaamste vertegenwoordigers*, ed. T. Brienens, K. Exalto, J. van Genderen, C. Graafland, and W. van 't Spijker ('s-Gravenhage: Boekencentrum, 1986), 277.

2. The Cartesian movement strongly emphasized the rationality of faith, and did not appreciate Reformed experiential preaching.

3. Brienens, "Theodorus van der Groe (1705–1784)," 277.

4. VanderGroe chose Leiden rather than Woerden, where he was a *filius classis* (son of the classis). He now became a candidate in sacred theology, becoming eligible to be called by the Reformed churches.

5. Brienens, "Theodorus van der Groe (1705–1784)," 278.

6. Van Lieburg, "Een letterschat voor vromen: Het leven van Theodorus VanderGroe," 18.

7. A. W. C. van Dijk, *Die des nachts Zijn huis bewaakt: Theodorus van der Groe in zijn Leven en Werken* (Dordrecht: J. P. van den Tol, 1972), 50.

8. Brienens, "Theodorus van der Groe (1705–1784)," 278.

9. Van Dijk, *Theodorus van der Groe*, 23–24.

10. Van Lieburg, "Een letterschat voor vromen: Het leven van Theodorus VanderGroe," 14.

11. Van Dijk, *Theodorus van der Groe*, 26.

12. Brienens, "Theodorus van der Groe (1705–1784)," 279.

13. Willem Westerbeke, *Theodorus VanderGroe: Leven en Leer* (Middelburg: Stichting de Gihonbron, 2016), 45.

14. Van Lieburg, "Een letterschat voor vromen: Het leven van Theodorus VanderGroe," 39.

Marjoleine de Blois is a PhD student of Biblical Studies at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary.

You can now purchase in English Theodorus VanderGroe's excellent exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism: *The Christian's Only Comfort in Life and Death*, 2 vols. (1,100 pages; Reformation Heritage Books), Retail: \$60.00; RHB price: \$45.00 (you can fill out your order on page 169 of this issue).

A Letter of Rev. G. H. Kersten to Westzaan

A letter written by Rev. G. H. Kersten (1882–1948) has been preserved by a group of his friends in Westzaan. It may very well have been the last letter written by Rev. Kersten; on September 6, 1948, the Lord took him to Himself. Given the historical significance of this letter and the rich testimony to God’s grace expressed by Rev. Kersten, we thought it worthy of publication. To facilitate understanding its context, some explanatory comments are included.

Waarde, September 1, 1948

Beloved Friends,

I wish to thank you wholeheartedly for the tokens of your love I have received from you. As you know, my two youngest daughters were recently married, and one of them has departed to America. In the meantime I became ill, and I desired of the Lord that I would be privileged to officiate at the wedding of my youngest daughter. Though I could not be present at city hall, I did receive the strength to confirm this marriage in the church. And now I am ill, and cannot leave my bed. Last night I suffered such a serious heart attack that I was very discouraged. However, I was greatly comforted by the words of Psalm 16:6, “The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage,” as well as by the words, “Whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s” (Rom. 14:8b). He has overcome, and has the keys of hell and death. Oh, this is my strength and my joy! May all of God’s beloved people keep courage! Greet them all, and especially the consistory. I cannot write more, for I am too tired. Remember me in your prayers. May the Lord remember you and your loved ones. Receive the warmest greetings from us all, and once more a special thanks from my wife as well.

Rev. G. H. Kersten

A FEW HISTORICAL FACTS

Following the confirmation of the marriage of his youngest daughter on August 26, 1948, in Rotterdam, Rev. Kersten travelled to the family farm “De Puthoek” in Waarde

(Zeeland). He frequently visited there with his son, W. J. Kersten, to get some rest and relaxation. Here he entered into the eternal rest that remains for the people of God.

The “tokens of your love” received by Rev. Kersten from this group of friends in Westzaan were deeply appreciated because, following the war, there was a great shortage of basic supplies. Even after 1945, the government continued to issue coupons to facilitate the fair and equal distribution of basic supplies among the population. In 1948, this coupon system was finally terminated—coffee being the only temporary exception.

As to who belonged to this circle of friends in Westzaan, a few names are found in the book *We Have Thought of Thy Lovingkindnesses* (1988)—a book commemorating the history of the Westzaan congregation. Elder G. Tanger, his two unmarried sisters (Aunt Ma and Aunt Geertje), and a widow, Mrs. M. A. Stuurman are all mentioned. Rev. Kersten and his wife would often be present in the home of these two sisters where the local conventicle would convene. This was also the residence where ministers and students lodged.

CHRIST AND HIS PEOPLE

Rev. Kersten concludes his letter by referring to three passages of Holy Scripture. “The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage” (Psa. 16:6). This liberty was also expressed in the title of a publication that contained the addresses given at his funeral: “The Lines are Fallen in Pleasant Places.” The lines referred to were used when one would divide an inheritance that consisted of farm acreage. Rev. Kersten connected the idea of a proprietary inheritance with the words of Romans 14:8b, “Whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s.” Christ has purchased a full and complete redemption for His people.

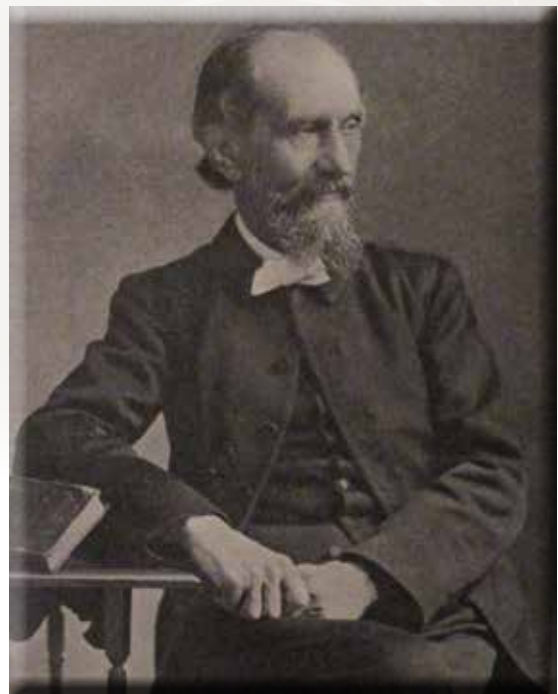
He also references Revelation 1:18b, “I...have the keys of hell and of death” to testify of the strength and joy that pervaded his soul as death was approaching. All God’s children shall be partakers of that salvation through the ministry of the Prince of Life. “Then will I to God’s altar go, to God, my boundless joy” (Psalter 119:4/Ps. 43).

Dr. M. Golverdingen is an emeritus minister of the gospel of the Reformed Congregations (Gereformeerde Gemeenten) in the Netherlands, and the author of Rev. G. H. Kersten’s biography.

A Heart on Fire

The Life of Andrew Murray (1828–1917)

The name Andrew Murray is often more admired in broader evangelical circles than in our own. But possibly no single individual left a bigger spiritual footprint on the subcontinent of Southern Africa than this nineteenth-century pastor, author, and tireless prayer-warrior, who died one hundred years ago. Murray served his own denomination, the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa, for over fifty years.



He wrote more than 240 books and tracts, some of which have been translated into more than a dozen languages. One of his many books was a commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism. His books touched the hearts as far and wide as true Christianity is found.¹ He also received two honorary doctorates, from the Universities of Aberdeen and Cape Town respectively.

Andrew Murray was born as the second of eight children on May 9, 1828. The old manse of Andrew and Maria Murray (née Stegmann) stood close to the Dutch Reformed Church of Graaff Reinet, on what was then the frontier of the Cape Colony. It served as a happy haven to many a weary traveler, missionaries especially, making their way by ox wagon from the coast to the interior.² Robert Moffat and David Livingstone found free room and board here. Years later, one of the Murray children would recall that their parental home was above all a place of reverence and respect by everyone and for everyone.

Lord Charles Somerset, British governor at the Cape from 1814–1826, imported several Scottish ministers in an effort to Anglicize the Dutch–Huguenot colonists.³ Rev. Andrew Murray Sr. was one of them and arrived in the 1820s. He hailed from Aberdeenshire and was an ardent follower of the Marrow Men. His wife, Maria, was from Huguenot and Lutheran descent.

When the young Andrew was only nine, he was sent back to Aberdeen in Scotland for his education, along with his older brother John.⁴ It was while there that their paths crossed with the famed Scottish preacher Rev. William Burns. The latter's person and ministry left a deep impact on the two lads. In a letter to John in 1843, he kindly warned the brothers not to linger in their unconverted state too long.⁵

After both earned their MA degrees, they made their way to Utrecht in the Netherlands to learn Dutch and to

train for the ministry. It was here that they formed a small prayer group in the spirit of *Het Réveil*, a nineteenth-century revival movement that blew over from Switzerland at a time when the Dutch state church was firmly caught in the grip of Enlightenment sentiments. It was from Utrecht in November 1845 that Andrew wrote to his parents: "It is with great joy that I can tell you...your son has been born again." He told them in the words of the blind man of John 9, who received his sight from Jesus Christ: "I once was blind, but now I see!"⁶

Arriving back in the Cape, he was immediately sent out beyond the Great River to a small rural village called Bloemfontein to become its first pastor. He served an area of more than 50,000 square miles at a time when lions were still roaming the open veld.⁷ Constant travelling over vast distances soon affected his health to such an extent that he had to visit England to recover. Being the only pastor of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Free State at the time, he planted several churches and labored tirelessly in evangelizing and catechizing these scattered descendants of seventeenth-century Dutch–Huguenot settlers. During this period, he visited Boer⁸ settlers beyond the Vaal River on nine occasions. He had to suffer a fair bit of Anglophobic suspicion from a segment of the Boers, but persevered in loyalty and love and eventually won their trust.

Murray also played a key role in the negotiations of the Sand River Convention of 1852, whereby the British Government formally recognized the South African Republic. Years later, in 1913 he would be the guest speaker at the inauguration of the Women's Memorial near Bloemfontein, dedicated to the 27,000 Boer women and children who died in British camps. The key line of his speech illustrates his larger than life impact on South African history: "We have gathered for a celebration of love...suffering love, praying



Dr. Murray and his colleague in Wellington



Where the revival broke out in 1860

love, conquering love. The monument to be unveiled will be a monument of love....”⁹ One can only thank God for the huge impact Murray had to temper anti-British sentiments among the Afrikaners after the devastation caused by the Anglo Boer war.

By 1859, Murray received a call to Worcester,¹⁰ nestled among the Hex River Mountains, some 200 miles north of Cape Town. His father had been praying for revival as long as Andrew could remember. It was here in Worcester that the Lord rent the heavens and came down, so that Andrew senior could say like old Simeon: “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.” Dominee¹¹ Murray (as Worcester’s minister was called) had already left the prayer meeting when a girl stood up offering a verse to sing from the hymnbook. This was unprecedented at the time, but she was granted permission. It was when she suggested: “Come everyone, come to Him. Oh sinners come, why would you hesitate...” and followed it up with a moving prayer that a strange sound like a rumbling noise was heard. Within minutes, everyone was crying out for mercy.¹² When Rev. Murray arrived at the scene he tried to put a stop to it, saying that God is a God of order, for everyone was praying simultaneously. He was soon convinced, though, that this was a sovereign work of God’s grace, the outpouring of His Holy Spirit upon a dry and thirsty land.

The revival spread to surrounding towns as far as Cape Town and Swellendam and even as far as Bloemfontein. Its impact was so profound that many could clearly recall it half a century later. Sinners were swept into the Kingdom in large numbers and saints were filled with new sense of God’s awesome glory and their holy calling. In fact, these events gave rise to the custom of annual Pentecost prayer meetings, observed in all Dutch Reformed congregations for well over a century.¹³ These annual meetings, taking place every night from Ascension to Pentecost, provided an

opportunity for multiple prayers from the congregants, after the minister delivered a meditation on the need for Christ to renew His church. They were also the secret behind a godly and mission-minded core preserved by God in this church federation, long after neo-orthodox and then liberal sentiments made their inroads during the twentieth century.

Rev. Murray accepted a call to Cape Town in 1864, where he served alongside two colleagues. By this time he was regularly chosen as moderator of the DRC’s national synod.¹⁴ As moderator, Rev. Murray was known to stand up from his chair in respect every time his aging father was addressing the floor. It was also here in Cape Town that Murray became famous for his courageous stand against the liberal theology that threatened to infiltrate his beloved church federation. Rev. Murray had to defend the DRC’s confessional Reformed commitment in a court case, when their attorney fell unexpectedly ill. He delivered a speech of over four hours and won the case!¹⁵

From Cape Town, Andrew Murray was called to the scenic town of Wellington where he labored from 1871 until his retirement in 1906. It was during this period that he also labored tirelessly for Christian education and missions. He founded the Wellington Institute and the Huguenot Seminary for the training of teachers and missionaries, and even travelled to America to find young Christian teachers for the burgeoning Christian church in South Africa. It was also due to his expansive domestic travels trumpeting the cause of missions that South Africa became the fifth largest missionary sending country in the world by 1900.¹⁶ It was, in fact, at a mission village near Lake Malawi, started by Murray’s own relatives, that I stumbled upon a pile of throwaway books containing several Andrew Murray titles in Afrikaans.¹⁷ In retirement, Rev. Murray spent most of his time writing by the ocean at his cottage called *Patmos*. He died peacefully at the age of 88, in a posture of prayer.

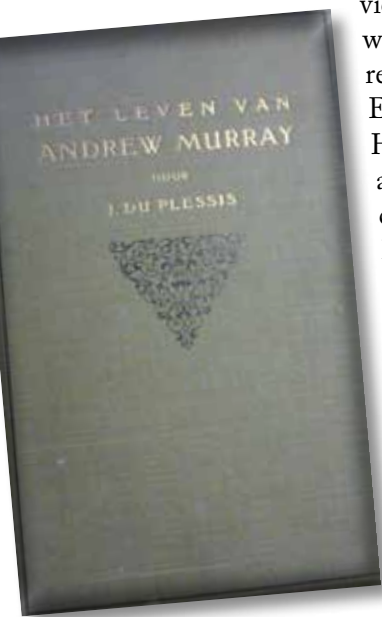
Andrew Murray had his theological flaws. Reformed critics would point to his faith-healing sentiments when he lost his speech due to laryngitis in 1879, his affinity for the Keswick deeper-life movement, and his lack of a robust Calvinistic emphasis on election as a Reformed author. In his earlier years, he was so animated in preaching that he resembled Scotland's fiery reformer John Knox, who was said to "ding the pulpit into blades."¹⁸ His signature gift to Christianity, though, was his ability to draw the ordinary believer into the heavenly presence of a merciful High Priest, almost as soon as you begin to read.

The abiding value of his writings also lies in its ability to make themes like surrendering to Christ, communion with Him, intercessory prayer, humility, brotherly love, and a passion for missions, attractive to the common believer. His first book was published in 1858 and dealt with Jesus's love for children.¹⁹ One of his last books was published after he visited the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910.²⁰ He made a strong case that the spiritual life of the local church was at low ebb, and made an urgent call for a new kind of revival wherein the lives of God's people would be wholly consecrated to Christ in holiness and service.

In no other way, argued Murray, would the global church be able to reach the world with the gospel as Edinburgh 1910 had envisioned. His words proved to be prophetic and are crucially relevant for the church of today. Though some of his writings lack exegetical depth, his unique devotional commentary on Hebrews—*The Holiest of All*—is a book worthwhile consulting for all serious expository preachers.

The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy that a man of God must be well spoken of, even by outsiders.²¹ It is noteworthy that a man of the caliber of Mohandas Gandhi once recalled a visit to a prayer meeting in Wellington in his autobiography as follows: "It was an assemblage of devout Christians. I was delighted at their faith. I met the Rev. Murray. I saw that many were praying for me. I liked some of their hymns, they were very sweet."²²

A century later, a visitor to the stately old Graaff Reinet manse, now a museum, wrote in the visitor's book: "Where is the Lord God, the God of Andrew Murray?" In a time of lackluster, fragmented, and receding Christianity in the West, we can only pray that Almighty God would raise up a host of prayer warriors again of the likes of Andrew Murray. To God be the glory!



1. Having being invited by Egyptian friends to attend a Coptic service in Toronto, I was surprised to notice several Andrew Murray titles on their book table.

2. Ben Conradie, *Andrew Murray na Honderd Jaar* (Stellenbosch: CSV Boekhandel, 1951), 8.

3. His policy backfired. These pastors and their descendants became loyal Afrikaners, leaving a rich spiritual heritage behind them. Several towns in the Colony were named after them.

4. John Murray and Nicholas Hofmeyr became the first two professors of the first Theological Seminary of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa that opened in Stellenbosch in 1857.

5. J. du Plessis, *Het Leven van Andrew Murray* (Cape Town: Zuid Afrikaanse Bijbel Vereniging, 1920), 48.

6. *Het Leven van Andrew Murray*, 70.

7. *Andrew Murray na Honderd Jaar*, 20.

8. Boer is the Dutch for "farmer." It was the common name given to these rugged Dutch-Huguenot farmers who trekked into the interior to escape British rule in the Colony.

9. *Andrew Murray na Honderd Jaar*, 106.

10. That was three years after he married Emma Rutherford. The Lord blessed them with nine children.

11. Dutch for "Reverend."

12. For a comprehensive account of the revival see *Het Leven van Andrew Murray*, 204–10.

13. The Dutch Reformed Church co-pastored by the author in the 1990's still observed this practice every year.

14. Six times he was chosen as moderator of the Synod.

15. The Judge commented to Rev. Murray: "Few attorneys could have surpassed you." *Andrew Murray na Honderd Jaar*, 48.

16. See Patrick Johnstone, *The Future of the Global Church* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2011), 233. This was mainly due to DRC mission work, and in spite of the fact that its members were greatly impoverished by the Anglo-Boer War.

17. The Mvera Mission was situated in what was then called Nyasaland, near today's village of Nkhoma.

18. Douglas MacMillan, *John Knox and the Cleansing of a Nation*, Cassette recording of a message delivered at the Skogheim Conference in South Africa, 1991.

19. Andrew Murray, *Jezus de Kinder vriend* (Cape Town, 1858).

20. Andrew Murray, *The State of the Church—An Urgent Call for Repentance and Prayer*.

21. See 1 Timothy 3:7.

22. Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Gandhi: An Autobiography* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 136. Gandhi also commented on several less favorable exposures to Christianity. He went on to explain why he rejected Christianity, right after commenting on the Wellington visit.

Christo Heiberg was ordained into the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa in 1989, and has been serving a United Reformed congregation in Ontario for the last sixteen years.



THE HAPPY FRUITS OF A DIGITAL DIET

Here's Jake's testimony to the positive power of a digital detox in his life. I hope it inspires you in similar ways.

A year and a half ago I visited Pastor Martin. My visit bore two fruits: one, he lovingly admonished me about the weight I had gained since he last saw me. Since then I've put off that weight. The second is that he recommended the book by Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*. I purchased the book from Amazon and began reading it on my flight home back to Texas (yes, on my Kindle app). It changed how I viewed the internet and the impact of technology on the mind. Quotes such as this one stuck with me: "I can't read War and Peace anymore. I've lost the ability to do that. Even a blog post of more than three or four paragraphs is too much to absorb. I skim it."

It alarmed me that the untrained use and unrestricted allowance of the interference of technology in my life may have impaired my capacity to think and reason. I could relate to these words. Somehow reading had become difficult and focus elusive. Rarely did I ever enter into a state of deep concentration. When I made the attempt it was more frustrating than fruitful. My natural memory was quite poor, although it had been good when I was a child.

TWO-PHASE RECOVERY

After I finished the book, the germ of resolution was planted in my heart to not let technology rule my ability to reason, think, remember, or concentrate. My "recovery" took two phases: one was to rediscover how it is the mind should work (i.e., how it should have been working without the impairment of untrained use of electronic devices), and I did this by reading and listening to what I could find on memory, concentration, attention, and improvement of the mind. The second phase was a more aggressive digital detox.

My digital detox meant seeking out the unwanted intrusions of technology in my daily life, and disabling them. I turned off e-mail notifications on my phone. I silenced all text and WhatsApp alerts except for messages that I get from Lydia. I had a weakness for browsing Facebook, and so I set a near-impossible password which I would have to cut and paste from an Excel document to log in. It was the only way I could keep myself from mindlessly logging on for amusement and wasting a daily half hour on trivialities.

I took some aggressive steps at my job, too. I disabled e-mail pop-up notifications in Microsoft Outlook, and I disabled the sound alert my computer makes when I receive a message. Now I do not know that I've received any e-mails unless I make the effort to check. I work long hours this time of year because I am a CPA, so I come into the office quite early (6:00 a.m.) and I shut my door so I cannot be

interrupted. As for the rest of the day, when it wouldn't be appropriate to have the door shut all the time, I put in ear-plugs. The response wasn't so negative as I feared, and a few seemed to think it was wise. I also stopped listening to podcasts and sermons while I work.

ROBBED BY MULTI-TASKING

Before the digital detox, if a problem came up I would get frustrated and struggle to fix it because I could not keep my thoughts together. My work rarely felt satisfying, and I would check my phone as a "quick escape" from whatever bothered me at the moment. I also did not realize that listening to sermons or lectures or music was robbing me of much-needed energy for focus, attention, and memory. I spent much time answering distractions (texts or e-mails) and spent precious time trying to get my bearings and to refocus again.

I saw and experienced real, tangible changes. After detoxing, problems did not frustrate me so badly anymore, and I could get into a mindset to diagnose the problem and confidently resolve it. I found great satisfaction in my work. I bought myself hours of time where nobody and nothing would distract me from my work, and I could enter that state of deep focus and concentration. I began to enjoy a world of silence, even absent of the roar of traffic on the tollway outside my window. This is where I found myself doing my best and happiest work. In the midst of a heavy busy season, I could keep a cool head and tackle issues confidently and effectively. I also found I could no longer listen to sermons or podcasts while working, even for the most rote of tasks. It demanded a portion of my mental energies which I had now learned to wholly use on the job, and a divided attention was a fast drain on my mental capacity.

It's made a difference outside of work. I remember coming to an appreciation of a world where the phone did not always interrupt, and where conversations with my wife were not disturbed by a text alert.

SPIRITUAL FRUIT

I believe it may have also produced spiritual changes. I had noticeably less difficulty getting myself into a focused state for devotions, and the fruitfulness of my meditations increased. My mind wanders less when I pray. I can focus better during sermons, even with a two-year-old at my side. The frustration that I would experience thinking through hard spiritual matters wasn't there anymore, or at least not to the same degree. The most wonderful fruit of digital detox is the enlarged capacity to be a happier, more joyful Christian.

Dr. David P. Murray is Professor of Old Testament and Practical Theology at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, and a pastor of the Free Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

MARRIAGE PARTNER

Should I pray for a marriage partner in the future? What traits should I look for?

Suggested Reading: Genesis 24:1–27

We should pray for God’s guidance in all aspects of our lives, especially for such important decisions as a marriage partner. While God calls some to single life, such as the Apostle Paul, His general plan is that we marry (Gen. 2:21–25). Marriage is the most intimate, influential, and important of all human friendships; therefore, it is one of the most important decisions we make in life.

When praying and looking for a future spouse, look for a person of whom you could answer positively to the following questions, if a relationship developed.

1. *Religious convictions* – Do you both love God? Agree on establishing the Bible as your guide for life? Do you talk about spiritual matters? Pray together? Agree on basic principles of how to raise children? In short, are you agreed to base your decision-making on a common set of biblical beliefs and practices?

2. *Love and esteem* – Do you cherish each other? Are you both willing to sacrifice for the other? Do you value one another’s thoughts and feelings? Do you love and trust each other? Would this be the person that you would want to be the father or mother of your future children?

How does the recommended Scripture reading (Genesis 24) illustrate the importance of praying and searching for a fitting marriage partner? Why is it important to know the biblical traits of a desirable marriage partner before entering into a relationship? How can the principles of God’s Word guide our thoughts and feelings in this important matter?

3. *Communication* – Do you both enjoy talking about things together? Are you comfortable to talk about deep issues? Share spiritual needs? Do you freely discuss a wide range of subjects and practical issues together? Do you agree on most items you discuss? Do you really listen and try to understand each other, especially when you disagree on something?

4. *Biblical traits* – Key traits for a future marriage partner include:

a. For a husband: loves deeply (Gen. 2:24), spends time with you (Deut. 24:5), is content and happy (Prov. 5:18), is kindly affectionate (1 Cor. 7:3), treasures and honors (1 Pet. 3:7), lovingly leads (Eph. 5:23), self-sacrificial (Eph. 5:25), provides (1 Tim. 5:8), and prays for his wife (1 Pet. 3:7).

b. For a wife: loves deeply and helps (Gen. 2:18), virtuous (Prov. 12:4), non-contentious (Prov. 19:13), trustworthy (Prov. 31:11–12), shows wisdom and kindness (Prov. 31:26), displays inward beauty (1 Pet. 3:3–4), self-sacrificial (1 Cor. 7:4), and lovingly submissive to leadership (Eph. 5:22–23).

DRESS AND APPEARANCE

Everybody seems to have different ideas about how we should and should not dress. What does the Bible really teach about this?

Suggested Reading: 1 Peter 3:1–9

The Bible does not state specific rules for dress and adornment. God does, however, provide guiding principles in His Word, which we need to use and apply when making our decisions regarding dress and appearance today in our culture. Fashions may change and cultures are different, but the same biblical, overarching principles apply to everyone at all times, in all places.

The following are six guiding biblical principles regarding our dress and appearance:

1. *Maintain a proper perspective* – Inward beauty is more important than outward (1 Pet. 3:3–4).

2. *Avoid Anxiety* – Do not worry and become anxious about physical dress and appearance (Matt. 6:28–30).

3. *Show due care for cleanliness and neatness* – Avoid sloppiness, dirtiness, and other evidences of not caring (Eccl. 9:8 and Prov. 31:21–22).

4. *Demonstrate modesty* – Avoid dressing provocatively, spending large amounts of money on clothes, or wearing things that purposefully draw attention to yourself (1 Tim. 2:9).

5. *Dress fitting for the occasion* – Appropriate dress differs with the activity planned and occasion to be attended (Ex. 3:22 and 33:4).

6. *Reflect distinctiveness between male and female* – Girls should not dress to look masculine and guys should not dress to appear feminine (Deut. 22:5).

A business advertises according to the type of customers they wish to attract. The ads to sell Mercedes-Benz cars are designed differently from those to sell Jeeps. Why? Because each wants to attract a specific type of buyer. Similarly, a girl who chooses to dress immodestly will attract attention from guys, but not the type of guy who is genuinely interested in her or who cares about her as a person. Why not? Because she advertised herself differently and attracted guys who were interested in what she was advertising.

While our inward motives, desires, feelings, and thoughts are most important, they are not all that counts. Our dress and appearance are also important, as they reflect our inner beings and our values.

How could the above biblical principles affect how we shop? What does your outward appearance say about you?

NEW RHB BOOKS

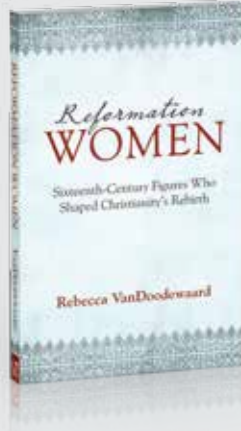


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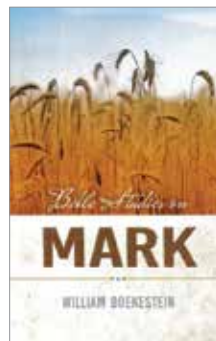


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This booklet opens up to the reader the meaning, graciousness, richness, and power of the biblical doctrine of justification by faith. With simple language, apt illustrations, and clear application, the author pastorally instructs us, opens our minds, and warms our hearts as we come to a better understanding of this vital Reformation doctrine—a doctrine that leads us to rejoice in Christ.

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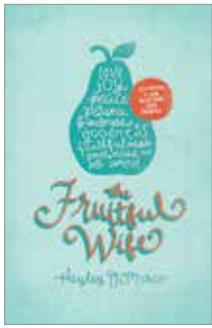


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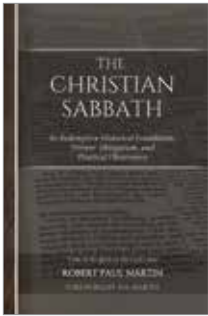
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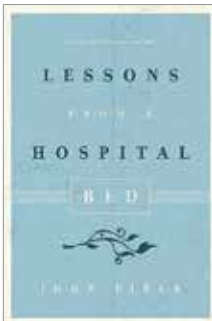


The Christian Sabbath: Its Redemptive-Historical Foundation, Present Obligation, and Practical Observance — *Robert Paul Martin*

Christian history has shown that in each generation the issue of the role of God's law in the Christian life always resolves itself into a crucial question, especially for those who wish to affirm the integrity and on-going authority of the Ten Commandments as a God-given ethical norm for Christian behavior. The question: what about the fourth commandment? Most believers have no

doubt concerning the other nine commandments of the Decalogue. But under the terms of the New Covenant, does God require his people to keep holy a Sabbath day? This question never proves simple, but the answer given in some cases defines a group of Christians as much as their answers on other disputed points, such as church order, baptism, or spiritual gifts. Here is an honest attempt to answer this question biblically.

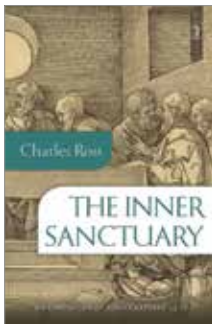
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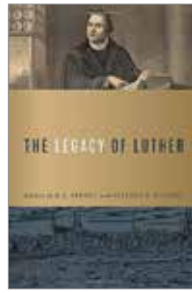


The Inner Sanctuary: An Exposition of John 13-17 — *Charles Ross*

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The Legacy of Luther — *R. C. Sproul & Stephen I. Nichols, editors*
He was the most influential man of his day. The movement that began with his posting of the Ninety-Five Theses reshaped Europe, redi-



rected Christian history, and recovered the truth of God's Word. Five hundred years later, what is Luther's legacy? In this volume, R. C. Sproul, Stephen J. Nichols, Joel Beeke, and twelve other scholars and pastors examine his life, teaching, and enduring influence. Meet Martin Luther, the mercurial Reformer who, out of love for the truth and the desire to bring it to light, set the world ablaze.

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Homosexuality: How Should Christians Respond?

In seeking to be attractive, shrewd and relevant in the public sphere, Christians face many difficulties. Nowhere is this more clearly illustrated than in present contentions over the issue of same-sex marriages, with the possibility of a plebiscite looming here in Australia. A free-for-all is a danger, but so is too timid a response, even from those who claim to be evangelical Christians. Three points need to be made in order to re-frame the Christian response.

1. We ought to work with behavior, not identity

In the Bible, homosexual acts are sinful (Lev. 18:22). To that extent, they are comparable to acts of adultery (Lev. 18:20) or bestiality (Lev. 18:23). In the last few decades, homosexuality has been made a matter of identity. Homosexuals are treated like short or tall people, or Chinese or African—that is their identity, and it is wrong to call it into question, let alone criticize it. Hence any rejection of homosexuality is treated as a new kind of racism. The focus has shifted from the morality or otherwise of the sexual act to the identity of the actor. If the debate—or what is left of it—is conducted in modern terms of identity, Christians must lose, and appear to be dreadful bigots in so losing. Christians need to raise the issue of sexual morality again. It is not okay to be homosexual if this means to sanction homosexual behavior. The Bible condemns the homosexual act in the strongest terms.

2. We ought to distinguish homosexual sin and heterosexual sin

Christians often say that homosexual sin is no worse than heterosexual sin. We need to be careful here, for it is clear from Scripture and common sense that not all sins are equal (e.g., John 19:11). Homosexuals can be redeemed (1 Cor. 6:9–11), but homosexual unions cannot. If an unmarried man and an unmarried woman are living together, and repent of this, they can be married and their relationship can be redeemed. That is not so with homosexual unions. They can only be repented of and broken up.

Furthermore, God's wrath against the Canaanites was in a sense unique in that the complete iniquity of the Amorites (Gen. 15:16) called forth the ban (the *herem*) which meant the complete destruction of Canaanite persons and culture. There could be no compromise for it had become dreadfully debased (cf. Lev. 18). The homosexual act is specifically said to be an *abomination* (Lev. 18:22). Similarly, in the New Testament, the onset of homosexual sin seems to come when God *gives up* or *gives over* a people into idolatry, foolishness, and sin (Rom. 1:18–32; cf. verses 24, 26, 28). It is said to

be *unnatural* in that it goes against the God who created us. Whereas heterosexual acts within marriage bear all the evidence of design, that is not so for homosexual and lesbian acts. As such, same-sex sexual activity appears when civilizations are going into serious decline, not when there are winds of revival.

3. We ought to be aware that to be winsome is not the same as being loving

Again, one needs to be careful, but one can be winsome for selfish or cowardly reasons. It is difficult to portray Amos and John the Baptist, for example, as winsome personalities with winsome messages. The “brood of vipers” language employed by John the Baptist would be regarded as hate speech today, and he would run afoul of an Anti-Discrimination Board as surely as he ran afoul of the adulterous Herod Antipas. Jesus's condemnations of the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23 is another case in point. Jesus was hardly trying to be winsome, yet He was always loving.

We are obliged to answer, if at all possible, with gentleness (1 Pet. 3:15), but also to remember that “better is open rebuke than love that is concealed” (Prov. 27:5). Gospel preaching aims to arouse a conviction of sin, and so does any presentation of God's law.

The world has set the parameters for this debate, and at least some of the ground needs to be reclaimed. This is first and foremost an issue which concerns the morality or otherwise of homosexual activity. Love is obligatory at all times, but mildness is inappropriate when the house is on fire. In all things and at all times, we need to be burning and shining lights.

Pastor Peter Barnes is a Presbyterian pastor of the Nambucca River charge, who lives in Sydney, Australia. He also lectures in Church History at the Presbyterian Theological Centre in Sydney and has written many articles and reviews for the Banner of Truth (U.K.).



Faith IN CHRIST (18)

DOCTRINAL CHRISTIANITY | GEORGE LAWSON

These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. —JOHN 20:31

Dr. George Lawson (1749–1820), who studied under John Brown of Haddington, became pastor of the Associate Synod church in Selkirk, Scotland in 1771. In 1787, he succeeded Brown as professor of theology in the Divinity Hall, which was then moved to Selkirk so that he could continue serving as pastor there. As a professor of theology he trained scores of men for the ministry for more than three decades and was loved by all the people of God. He became best known for his sermons and commentaries, particularly for his commentary on Proverbs and his books on Ruth, Joseph, Esther, and David. Less known is his scarce work, Helps to A Devout Life, being a Treatise on Religious Duties. This remarkable little book is a summary of how Christians ought to live. It is divided into a Trinitarian structure: the duties we owe to Christ, the duties we owe to the Father, and the duties we owe to the Holy Spirit. The entire book is full of practical, savory truth. As space allows, we hope to print this book in short articles in this periodical. The article below is the eighteenth part of the second chapter.

MOTIVES AND ENCOURAGEMENTS TO FAITH IN CHRIST (CONT.)

Practical Directions

Fifth, we should endeavor to grow in faith, as well as in every other Christian grace (continued).

All the directions given for the establishment of faith might be repeated for the strengthening of it. But the following hints may suffice. That we may grow in faith, let us labor to increase in the knowledge of Christ. Our souls are invigorated by the clear and intelligent contemplation of His character, and of those important truths in which His character is displayed. We must see the Son that we may believe in Him; and the clearer our vision, the deeper shall be our conviction of the sin and folly of unbelief.

The truths of the Gospel are the nourishment of faith, and that we may abound in it more and more, we must study and appropriate all the promises and encouragements given us in the Word of God (Ps. 119:98–99).

The institutions of divine grace are designed for the strengthening of faith, and must be improved for this end. God hath given to the Church pastors and teachers, for the work of the ministry, till we all come, in the unity of the faith, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13).

Sixth, we must endeavor to live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us, and gave Himself for us.

In this world Christians walk by faith, and not by sight; in the next world they shall walk by sight, and not by faith. “The just shall live by his faith,” said Habakkuk. Paul makes great use of this statement of the prophet; he proves from it, in his Epistles to the Romans and Galatians, that we must seek justification by faith without the works of the law; and in his epistle to the Hebrews he proves that if we would endure unto the end, we must encounter all the trials of life in the spirit of faith (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38).

How can the Christian live except by faith? Whilst in this world we are absent from the Lord, and yet the Lord is our life and our strength and our salvation. By faith we rejoice in an unseen Saviour. By faith He dwells in our hearts. By faith we receive out of His fullness. By faith in

Christ we do everything, in a manner at once acceptable to God and useful to ourselves. We are to live by faith upon Christ as our righteousness, and to derive from His atonement, intercession, and grace all those joys and consolations which arise from pardon of sin and reconciliation with God.

We are to live by faith in Christ for our sanctification. He died not only to deliver us from the condemnation due to our sins, but also from the power of iniquity; and therefore, when engaged in spiritual conflicts with the world, the devil, and the flesh, we must draw strength and courage from the cross of Christ. There the victory has been already gained for us, in the person of our Redeemer. He has already subdued all our iniquities, He has finished transgressions and made an end of sin. Our sin was condemned in His flesh, and it is at present under an irreversible sentence of destruction. Nor are we left to execute the sentence as we are able; He who once died to subvert the foundations of the empire of sin, still lives and reigns to accomplish the designs of His death.

We ought to live by faith in Christ for the communication of heavenly influence to nourish and improve all our spiritual graces. The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. In these holy qualities we are called to abound to the honor of our profession, to the comfort of our own souls, and to the glory of God. But how shall we abound in them? All hope of success in the use of the appointed means lies in Christ our life. It hath pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell, and out of His fullness we receive grace for grace. Of every grace that was in Christ, the ancient believers received a portion according to this measure; and He is still the channel through which God conveys grace into the hearts of men; for by Him the whole body of Christians, being knit together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, maketh increase of the body to the edifying of itself in love, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part.



HUNTING FOR TREASURE

Wouldn't it be thrilling to find a secret map—one that left you clues that lead to hidden treasure? Maybe it would be a treasure full of sparkly gold coins, or filled with things from the past that have been hidden for thousands of years.

I know a girl who loves mysteries and hidden treasures. One year for her birthday, I created a big mystery full of secrets, clues, and maps; and at the very end, it led to a real treasure chest. Quickly, they moved from clue to clue until at last they discovered where the treasure was buried.

Shovels started moving, dirt started flying, and excitement was in the air. Soon the shovels hit something; they bent down and, with a giant whoop of delight, they brushed off the dirt from the top of an old chest. Treasure! Inside were golden coins filled with chocolate. Everyone was jumping and hollering, trading coins and recounting tales from the hunt.

What if I told you that there really is a treasure for you to find? Not the kind involving pirates, gold, or even chocolate. It's better. It's a treasure that never gets old, boring, out of date, or used up. It's a treasure that gives everlasting life, joy, and peace. It's not a treasure that you put on a shelf to look at but a treasure that actually changes you from the inside out!

Listen to this clue in Proverbs 3: "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her."

The writer is telling us that when we find wisdom and understanding it's worth more than silver, better than gold,

and more precious than shining rubies. In fact, nothing in the world that you desire can compare to this treasure of wisdom and understanding.

The Bible gives us another clue about how to find this wisdom. It tells us that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are actually hidden in a person—Jesus Christ. It's impossible to have the treasure of wisdom without knowing the greatest treasure, Jesus! (Read Colossians 2:2–3.)

If you're like most people on the planet, this might not sound like a treasure at all. The problem is that our hearts are blinded by sin and we usually mistake fake treasure (like chocolates) or worldly treasure (like gold and silver) as the real thing. And sadly, when we think of Jesus, our sinful hearts don't see the treasure at all.

What can we do?

Here's another clue from Matthew 7: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." We can come to the Lord, asking Him to give us the real treasure: new life in Christ. There are no tricks in this treasure hunt; instead, God gives us promises that will never fail and a treasure that will never fade away.

Tonight, as you do your devotions, read about treasure in Matthew 6:19–21. Think about which sort of treasure-seeker you are and ask God to lead you to the greatest treasure of all, Jesus Christ.

Kara Dedert is a homemaker, mother of five children, and a member of the Grand Rapids HRC.

BIBLE QUIZ for children

Elina VanderZwaag

Find these texts that all speak of summer or things to do with summer, and fill in the missing words. They are all found in the Old Testament.

1. Genesis 8:22: While the earth _____, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not _____.
2. Judges 3:20: And Ehud came unto him; and he was sitting in a summer _____, which he had for himself alone.
3. 2 Samuel 16:1: And when David was a little past the top of the hill, behold, Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth met him, with a couple of asses saddled, and upon them two hundred loaves of bread, and an hundred bunches of raisins, and an hundred of summer _____, and a bottle of wine.
4. Psalm 32:4: For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my _____ is turned into the _____ of summer. Selah.
5. Psalm 74:17: Thou hast set all the _____ of the earth: thou hast made summer and _____.
6. Proverbs 10:5: He that _____ in summer is a wise son: but he that _____ in harvest is a son that causeth shame.
7. Proverbs 26:1: As _____ in summer, and as _____ in harvest, so honour is not seemly for a fool.
8. Proverbs 30:25: The _____ are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer.
9. Isaiah 18:6: (Note: Summer is here a verb!) They shall be left together unto the fowls of the mountains, and to the beasts of the earth: and the _____ shall summer upon them, and all the _____ of the earth shall winter upon them.
10. Jeremiah 8:20: The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not _____.
11. Amos 3:15: And I will smite the winter _____ with the summer _____; and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end, saith the Lord.
12. Zechariah 14:8: And it shall be in that day, that _____ shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be.

ANSWERS TO LAST MONTH'S PUZZLE

- | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Adam, Eve | 8. Joash |
| 2. Noah | 9. Manoh |
| 3. Abraham, Sarah | 10. Hannah, Elkanah |
| 4. Isaac, Rebekah | 11. Kish |
| 5. Joseph, Asenath | 12. Jesse |
| 6. Amram, Jochebed | 13. Zacharias, Elisabeth |
| 7. Jephunneh, Joshua | 14. Joseph, Mary |

An Answered Prayer



The sky was growing dark. Even the blades of the windmill were swallowed up by the coming night. Shadows filled the space between the tall brick houses as Johanna ran along the dike; her heart beat faster as her skinny legs flashed along. Here a newspaper was delivered, and there another. Up and down the steps, her load became lighter and lighter until she finally reached the end of the lighted street. But she still had a dozen more newspapers to deliver. Johanna slowed to a walk and then stopped as she reached the last streetlamp. She had raced the setting sun, but the darkness had won.

The gray lane crossed the canal and disappeared into the shadowy countryside. *“Quickly!”* Johanna told herself. *“Just run down the lane and then you’ll be back by the streetlights again!”* And run she did! But her fear raced along with her, squeezing the inside of her chest. A newspaper here, a newspaper there, and she was done. Hurray! The warm glow of town was just ahead.

The door to the house banged open, and Johanna burst in. What a relief to be home! “Oh dear, you are all hot and out of breath!” Mama fretted from the stove where she was frying meatballs. She didn’t like it that Johanna had to deliver newspapers in the dark anymore than Johanna did, but they needed the money. And Johanna had once more safely made it home.

But morning came too soon, which was quickly followed by school and then the newspaper route again. Every day it became harder and harder to run down the dark lane. No matter how Johanna rushed, the darkness always won. Johanna began to linger longer and longer at the last streetlight before dashing down the lane. Each day it was the same, except for the fear. *That* grew larger....

But not today! Today was Sunday. Johanna woke up with a smile. There would be no papers to deliver today, and there would be Sunday School!

“Wake up, Corrie!” she whispered to her sister. “It’s Sunday!”

Corrie jumped out of bed and the two girls quickly got dressed. Their family was not a church-going family, but in the afternoon, since there were no newspapers to deliver, Mama let the two girls go to the Sunday School at the nearby church.

“Why not?” Papa had said. “Sunday School is free and the girls can walk there by themselves.”

It was warm in the church that afternoon. Not as warm as the kitchen at home, perhaps, but warm with voices, eyes that smiled, and lessons about God—not just *a* god, but a Father-God, a God who was near, One who could walk beside you and hear your fears. As Johanna listened to the Sunday School

teachers, her heart yearned for such a God. Yes, He was real! She was sure. These teachers, they believed what they were teaching; she could tell. And if it was true, why then....

It was Monday. School was over and Johanna had already delivered the first half of her newspapers. She clutched her bag tightly as she thought about the lane at the edge of town. As the fear began to rise inside of her again, her heart rose in a cry—a cry to the God who always hears and is near. Two more newspapers and Johanna was at the edge of the lane. But what was that sitting so patiently under the last streetlamp? It was so big and so dark! It must be a dog! And dogs were almost as bad as the dark.

Johanna had never seen this dog on her newspaper route before. Where had he come from? She slowed down and began to walk in a big circle around the streetlamp. She wasn’t thinking about the dark lane anymore, now she was thinking about that dog. He was so big and what if he jumped on her?

But he didn’t jump. His tail swished in a friendly greeting and he walked over to her. He pushed his nose against her sleeve and then began walking down the dark lane. Johanna watched in surprise and then waited for him to disappear. But the dog paused and seemed to be waiting for her.

Johanna shivered and took a few steps forward. As the dog began to walk again, she followed. The dog stayed with her as she went to the first and then second house. Which home was the dog’s home? But he went on with her all the way down the dark lane and all the way back to town with its warm streetlamps. There he stopped as she hurried off home.

The next day, Johanna couldn’t help but wonder, would the dog be there again? Sure enough, at the beginning of the dark lane, the big dog was patiently waiting for her. He greeted her and then walked with her down the lane. This happened the next day, and the next, and for the rest of that winter.

Now Johanna didn’t hold her breath as she came to the edge of town. Instead of the fear rushing over her, Johanna could walk bravely down the lane with the soft padding of the big dog beside her. His very presence gave her courage. And although Johanna still had much to learn, yet she knew that the dog was an answer to her prayer. She had cried out to the God who hears, and He had sent her a protector.

Andrea Scholten is a school teacher, a writer for children, and a member of the HRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Adapted by Andrea; first told by Doreen Tamminga. A true story from Johanna Keuning’s childhood.



and announcements

Obituary notices, church events, and marriage and anniversary notices will be printed free of charge and under no obligation of a gift received. Other announcements and/or requests will be approved by the editorial committee on an individual basis as received.

SYNOPSIS OF HRC SYNOD 2017

June 5-7, 2017

Once again, the HRC and FRC held a concurrent Synod, this year at the St. George FRC facility. A concurrent synod means that the prayer service, meditations, breaks, and meals were enjoyed together while the actual synodical meetings were held independent from each other. Advisory delegates were seated at each other's Synods. The mutual edification derived from the fellowship, and the cooperation that exists whenever possible, are much appreciated.

Rev. Joel Overduin led a combined pre-synodical prayer service, focusing on 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 under the theme "Fainting Not." Rev. Martin Slingerland led the liturgy of the service, including prayer. Dr. Jerry Bilkes led a combined Synodical opening meditation based on Isaiah 52, highlighting the skill and success of the anticipated ministry of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Since last Synod we noted, with thanksgiving to the Lord, the installation of Rev. Bartel Elshout as pastor of the Hull, Iowa HRC and the ordination and installation of Rev. Pieter van der Hoek as pastor of the Burgessville, Ontario HRC. Rev. and Mrs. Maarten Kuivenhoven received a son, Silas, for whom we give thanks, but who needs ongoing prayer for his ongoing physical needs.

The spiritual welfare reports, in general, evidenced a gradual maturing and establishing of the churches. Several reports referenced encouragements, particularly among young families. But as the gospel continues to make inroads, there continue to be those who refuse submission to Christ through the sin of unbelief. There were a few cases that show God's institution of marriage continues to be under particular assault. Nevertheless, it is evident that our Lord and Savior continues to uphold our denomination from year to year. Let us beseech the Lord for a genuine revival wrought by His Spirit.

Synod was addressed by representatives of the Bible Presbyterian, Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), Free Reformed, Reformed Presbyterian, Orthodox Presbyterian, and United Reformed churches. The CGKN sent greetings by letter while

the Presbyterian Reformed sent their regrets as their meeting dates coincided with ours. Synod approved entry-level correspondence relationships with several Reformed and Presbyterian denominations in order to get to know them better.

With regard to our seminary (PRTS), Synod was presented with an update on the development and implementation of the PhD program, approved student housing pending necessary zoning permissions and sufficient funding, and interviewed and approved Dr. Daniel Timmer to be professor of Biblical Studies in the PhD program. We have so much for which to be thankful to the Lord!

Mission reports were discussed with interest. There is so much spiritual need in those areas of Africa in which our missionaries labor. May the Lord sustain and bless them.

The Psalter review committee, which consists of representatives from the HRC, FRC, and Protestant Reformed denominations, was given encouragement to continue its worthy efforts. Samples of the work done so far met with widespread approval.

A report developed by the confession of faith study committee was approved, the desire being that our congregations would view this important aspect of Reformed church life with consistency and uniformity.

An update was provided on the development of an elder-training program for our churches.

The labors of many committees, which work hard and submit yearly reports, were discussed and greatly appreciated by Synod.

Synod recommended that October 31, 2017 (the 500th anniversary of the Reformation) be set aside by our churches as a day of prayer and fasting for reformation, repentance, and revival in North America.

The peace and harmony of this year's Synod were noted by many delegates, with heartening unity of mind in decision after decision. Praise be to the God of heaven and earth who condescends to look upon and help our little part of His vast kingdom. We pray He may give all of us to know His mercy, favor, and nearness, and to endow us with that measure of faithfulness of which He is most worthy.

—DL, clerk

Christian MINISTRY to Israel
www.cmisrael.org

A MISSIONS ORGANIZATION THAT IS SEEKING TO SPEAK TO THE JEWS ABOUT THE MESSIAH
JESUS CHRIST
"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved"
Romans 10:1

OBITUARIES

VANDER BOON, Laurena E., age 88, passed away on May 12, 2017 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She was preceded in death by her son Bob, son-in-law Ed Falk, grandson Joshua VanderBoon, as well as eight brothers and sisters. Laurena is survived by her husband, Orie; Children—Lois and Pete VanderStel, Janice and Ralph Van Ens, Jim and Gwen, Ronald, David, Susan and Dale Mulder, John and Kathy, Don and Ellen; Daughter-in-law—Coral and Mark Hoffmann; Brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law—Frances Quist, John and Margaret Vander Boon, Pauline Groen, Ann and Fred Vlastuin, Connie and Ed Brown, Abe and Sandi Vander Boon, Marie and Gerritt Rozeboom, Lena VanRavenswaay; 50 grandchildren, 63 great-grandchildren; many nieces and nephews. (Rev. David VanBrugge, Psalm 61:2; Rev. Maarten Kuivenhoven, John 6:53-58).

JOHNSON, Teressa A., age 94, passed away on May 31, 2017 in Kalamazoo, Michigan. She is survived by her children, Patricia (Thomas) Glerum, Marilyn (Richard) DeVisser and Linda (Rick) Graf, daughter-in-law, Peggy (Bill Currier) Johnson; 12 grandchildren; 27 great-grandchildren; two great-great-grandchildren; sister, Betty (Andy) Smith and brother, Don (Dena) Corstange. On October 24, 1941, Teressa was united in marriage to Garrett J. Johnson, who preceded her in death on March 10, 2004. She was also preceded in death by a son, John Johnson; great-grandchildren, Mikayla Glerum and Kailea DeVisser; five brothers and four sisters. (Dr. Joel R. Beeke, Phil. 1:21; Elder John Vergunst, committal.)

FAASSE, Adrian, age 97, passed away on July 1, 2017. He was preceded in death by his wife of 66 years, Ruth A. Faasse; his parents, Martin and Johanna Faasse; sisters and brothers-in-law, Wilma and Richard LaBotz; Tina and Jack Pyp; Ada and Anthony Boshoven; Jeanne and Cornelius Karelse; Anne and Sieger Kloostra; brother and sisters-in-law, John and Margaret Faasse; Geraldine Faasse; brothers-in-law/sisters-in-law, John DeVries, Nellie and Adrian Kaan, Marianne VanDyke, Lois Wheland, and Clinton Peck. Surviving are his son and daughter-in-law, Dr. Martin and Roelie Faasse; grandchildren, Drs. Mark and Ranya Faasse, Jonathan and Kristin Faasse, and Dr. Sarah Faasse; great-grandchildren, Carolyn Faasse, Andrew Faasse; sisters-in-law, Jane Peck, Nellie Kaan, Josephine Brandt, Laura and Dan

Breuker; brother-in-law, John VanDyke; many nieces and nephews. (Dr. Joel R. Beeke, Hebrews 2:3; 1 Timothy 1:15; Revelation 21:4).

TEACHERS NEEDED

PLYMOUTH CHRISTIAN ELEMENTARY AND HIGH SCHOOL are accepting teaching applications for the 2017-2018 school year for at least one opening in the elementary and possible openings in the high school. There is also the possibility of open aiding positions at the Elementary School. Interested K-6 applicants can request an Elementary School application and email their resumés and/or questions to Mr. Nathan Bleeker (nbleeker@plymouthchristian.us). Interested 7-12 applicants can request a High School application and email their resumés and/or questions to Mr. James Bazen (jbazen@plymouthchristian.us).

THE REFORMED CHRISTIAN SCHOOL ASSOCIATION in Upper Hutt, New Zealand is seeking a teacher to teach upper primary at our Christian School. Our aim is to develop a biblically consistent world and life view in our students based on the Reformed faith.

Applicants should be committed to the Reformed faith and to Christian education. This is an exciting opportunity to be part of a small covenant school, and we look forward to your application. If you have any questions or would like more information please do not hesitate to contact us. Short-term contracts will be considered. Please forward your C.V. or any questions you may have to: board@silverstreamchristian.school.nz

The Board of **OXFORD REFORMED CHRISTIAN SCHOOL** invites applications for high-school teaching position(s) and elementary teaching position(s) for the 2017/2018 school year.

Oxford Reformed Christian school is a parent-run school serving the needs of several local Reformed communities and has been operating for over eleven years. We have been blessed with a new facility located in Mount Elgin, a rural village in south-western Ontario. Our present enrolment is over 300 students and we offer a Kindergarten to grade 12 program.

We have a need for qualified, passionate, elementary and high-school teacher(s) to join our staff team. Teachers committed to the Reformed faith and to Christian education are encouraged to apply before March 1, 2017.

Applications must include a resumé, statement of faith, philosophy of Christian education, and references. Promptly send to: Oxford Reformed Christian School, c/o Mr. W. Van Brugge (principal), 333182 Plank Line, PO Box 87, Mount Elgin, ON, N0J 1N0. E-mail: principal@orcschool.ca. Phone: 519-485-1142.

PONATAHI CHRISTIAN SCHOOL, a conservative Reformed school in New Zealand, is seeking a K to Grade 1 teacher to begin in September or October, the Lord willing. We are a tight-knit school committed to providing a consistent Christian education, with staff members from all over the world. For more information please email the principal, Peter Bertram, at principal@ponatahi.school.nz and look at <http://www.ponatahi.school.nz/>.

save the date

2017 FRC Women's Retreat

guest speaker Inge DeVisser

"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."
1 John 1:11

Thursday, October 26 pm to
Saturday, October 28 @ noon

more info to come at
www.FRCwomen.ca

Hosted by Bethel FRC at
Southern Alberta Bible Camp

NATIONAL NEWS

PROMINENT TRUMP CABINET MEMBERS MEET FOR WEEKLY PRAYER

Several prominent members of President Trump's cabinet reportedly meet for prayer sessions every week. Charisma News reports that Christians can be encouraged that many of America's top government officials are committed to turning to the Lord in prayer for the country.

Vice President Mike Pence is one of the sponsors of the weekly prayer meetings. Eight other cabinet members also sponsor and attend the meetings. These include Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson, Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue, Secretary of Energy Rick Perry, Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price, Attorney General Jeff Sessions, Environment Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt, and CIA Director Mike Pompeo. Capitol Ministries Founder Ralph Drollinger is also one of the leaders behind the prayer meetings, reports CBN News. Capitol Ministries also hosts weekly Bible studies in the House and Senate.

"In terms of a country's health and direction, when its leaders are seeking God, the nation is in a position to be blessed by God in ways that are 'far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think,'" stated Drollinger, referencing Ephesians 3:20.

Leaders of the events say President Trump is always welcome to join the prayer meetings and Bible studies.

Many in the Trump administration have been vocal about their faith and President Trump often received prayer during his campaign. (Veronica Neffinger, *Editor, ChristianHeadlines.com*)

PERSECUTION FOCUS

RELIGION IN NORTH KOREA

Traditionally, religion in North Korea primarily consists of Buddhism and Confucianism and to a lesser extent Korean shamanism and syncretic Chondogyo. Since the arrival of Europeans in the eighteenth century, there is also a Christian minority. According to the Central Intelligence Agency, since the rise of Stalinism, free religious activities no longer exist as the government sponsors religious groups only to create an illusion of religious freedom. North Korea sees organized religious activity as a potential challenge to the leadership. Religion is practiced privately in secret.

The government deals harshly with all opponents, and those engaged in religious activities often face the harshest of treatment. In particular, those of Christian faith are persecuted the most, and North Korea is ranked by watchdog group Open Doors as the worst country in the world in terms of Christian persecution.

An estimated 150,000 to 200,000 people were believed to be held in political prison camps in remote areas, many for religious and political reasons. The number of Christians in prison camps is estimated at tens of thousands. Family members of believers are considered guilty by association and sent to labor camps or prisons, too. Punishable religious activities include propagating religion, possessing religious items, praying, singing hymns, and having contact with religious people. A South Korean newspaper reported 80 people were publicly executed in North Korea in November 2013, some for possessing a Bible, while a crowd was herded into a stadium in one city and forced to watch the deaths from machine gun fire. JoongAng Ilbo reported the executions were carried out in seven cities on November 3, 2013. (Wikipedia)

FOCUS ON CHRISTIANITY

TEN REASONS MILLENNIALS ARE BACKING AWAY FROM GOD AND CHRISTIANITY, BY DR. ALEX MCFARLAND

College-aged millennials today are far more likely than the general population to be religiously unaffiliated. This is true when they are compared

to previous generations as well. In fact, the Pew Research Center documents that millennials are the least religious American generation, where "one in four are unaffiliated with any religion, far more than the share of older adults when they were ages 18 to 29."

Just over 60 percent of millennials say that Christianity is "judgmental," and 64 percent say that "anti-gay" best describes most churches today. In ministry circles, it has long been reported that of youth raised in homes that were to some degree "Christian," roughly three-quarters will jettison that faith after high school. Just under half of this number will return to some level of church involvement in their late 20s or early 30s.

Why is this? Our most recent research, which includes dozens of interviews with teens, twentysomethings, professed ex-Christians, and religion and culture experts, points to factors like these:

1. Mindset of "digital natives" is very much separate from other generations. Millennials are eclectic on all fronts—economically, spiritually, artistically. There is little or no "brand loyalty" in most areas of life.
2. Breakdown of the family. "The fortunes of religion rise or fall with the state of the family."
3. Militant secularism: Embraced by media and enforced in schools, secular education approaches learning through the lens of "methodological naturalism." It is presupposed that all faith claims are merely expressions of subjective preference.
4. Lack of spiritual authenticity among adults. Many youth have had no—or very limited—exposure to adult role models who know what they believe, why they believe it, and are committed to consistently living it out.
5. The church's cultural influence has diminished. The little neighborhood church is often assumed to be irrelevant, and there is no cultural guilt anymore for those who abandon involvement.
6. Pervasive cultural abandonment of morality. The idea of objective moral truth—ethical norms that really are binding on all people—is unknown to most and is rejected by the rest.
7. Intellectual skepticism. College students are encouraged to question everything, and not accept dogmatic answers
8. The rise of a fad called "atheism." Many millennials, though mostly 20-something Caucasian males, are enamored by books and blogs run by God-hating "thinkers."
9. Our new God: Tolerance be Thy name. "Tolerance" today has become so ingrained that it is now impossible to rationally critique any belief or behavior without a backlash of criticism.
10. The commonly defiant posture of young adulthood. As we leave adolescence and morph into adulthood, we all can be susceptible to an inflated sense of our own intelligence and giftedness. The cultural trend toward rejection of God—and other loci of authority—resonates strongly with the desire for autonomy felt in young adulthood.

Finally, is it really any wonder that kids raised in the churches of twenty-first-century America aren't often stirred to lifelong commitment? Most churches are so occupied with marketing themselves to prospective attendees that they wouldn't dream of risking their "brand" by speaking tough-as-nails truth. It is true that our culture has grown visibly antithetical to God and Christian commitment. But in addressing the spiritual attrition rate of young America, it must be admitted that a prayerless, powerless church peddling versions of "Christianity Lite" share in the blame. God only knows the degree of our complicity, and also the time when we'll be concerned enough to change direction.

(Dr. Alex McFarland, *Director for Christian Worldview and Apologetics at North Greenville University.*)



PICTURES of REDEMPTION (3) The Fool

The third picture of redemption in Psalm 107:17–22 is that of the fool. So who is a fool? Let's look it up. The fool says there is no God (Ps. 14:1). He does not understand the ways of God (Ps. 92:6). He despises wisdom and instruction (Prov. 1:7). Fools hate spiritual, life-giving knowledge (Prov. 1:22). The fool cannot control his tongue (Prov. 10:18). The fool ignores God's standards and does what is right in his own eyes (Prov. 12:15). He mocks sin and minimizes it (Prov. 14:9). He is full of pride (Prov. 14:3); he is also full of anger and he loves to fight (Prov. 14:17; 18:6). The fool cannot bear correction (Prov. 17:10). The fool is self-reliant (Prov. 28:26). Who is a fool by God's standards? If we are honest, something of the fool lives within each of us. That's a sobering thought because, as we read God's assessment, we realize that there's not much hope of redemption for the fool, is there?

But even the fool is not beyond the reach of God. See how God corners the fool and brings him out of his foolishness: "Fools, because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted" (Ps. 107:17). The foolish life is a difficult life. Sin boomerangs right back with alarming accuracy. Everything about his life becomes extremely difficult. His foolish decisions catch up with him. His foolish tongue brings him into all kinds of trouble. His foolish anger stirs up strife. His prideful heart earns him no friends. He mocks sin but then realizes the troubling consequences of sin. The way that he thought was right becomes incredibly difficult—so much so, that he loses his appetite and comes near to death. The difficulty that the fool experiences comes as a bitter result of his sin.

The Lord in His mercy brings the fool into difficulty to bring him to the end of himself and into Christ. Are you experiencing difficulty because of your own foolishness? Don't discount that difficulty; rather, let that affliction bring you to the Lord for His mercy and redemption.

The Lord is able to transform the mouth of the fool from crying out foul things to crying out for mercy. In verse 19, we read the transformed cry of the fool: "Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble." Are you in trouble through your own foolishness? Do you understand that your own foolishness has led you down to death and that your foolishness deserves death? There is no other direction to go than to the Lord. Do not despair! Cry out in your distress and death! The Lord hears such cries from the lips of the foolish.

This is the testimony of the salvation of the fool: "And he saveth them out of their distresses. He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions." Isn't this a beautiful picture of redemption? God saves the fool out of his self-made distress. He sends His word of wisdom and trains the heart of the fool. He heals the heart of the fool that has been wounded through his own foolishness. He delivers the fool from his self-inflicted destructions.

Where are you spiritually as you read this article? Are you regretting foolish decisions? Are you living in the destruction of your own foolishness? Don't despair; there is mercy to be found in the Lord, who has sent His Wisdom to redeem fools.

Are you a redeemed fool as you read about this picture of redemption? Then see the beautiful goodness of the Lord in rescuing you from the life and lot of the fool—death and destruction. Praise Him for it with a renewed focus on living for God in sacrificing your life to Him (Ps. 107:22; Rom. 12:1–2). Use your mouth that once spouted foolishness to now declare the works of God with joy (Ps. 107:22). This is the life of the redeemed fool—made wise through the grace of God!

Rev. Maarten Kuivenhoven is a pastor of the Heritage Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Feel free to email him: kuivenhoven.maarten@gmail.com.

BANNER OF SOVEREIGN GRACE TRUTH

FROM SOME FRIENDS IN PRISON:

While taking a Bible course, a fellow student gave me a copy of your magazine. After reading it cover to cover, I was richly blessed by each and every article. The Holy Spirit opened my eyes to some truths that although they had been in front of me for years, it was through these articles I received some important truths about the Bible. I want to thank you for your magazine and your ministry to the truths of the Bible. Our country truly needs a revival of the truth before God removes His blessings to our nation. I have added your ministry to my prayer list. May God continue to bless your ministry.

Thank you for another year of your wonderful magazine. I pray you can renew my subscription once more that I and the brethren with me can continue to receive spiritual nourishment and edification. You have been such a blessing to us all. Godspeed.

I'm one of the many inmates that have been blessed in the past with your magazine covering Reformed doctrine and experiential truth. Thanks to all the donors that generously make available free subscriptions to inmates such as myself. Psalm 142:7.

I'm greatly inspired by your words in rightly dividing Scripture. I have much appreciation for your faithfulness in sending the Banner. They are always encouraging and challenging, each article that I read. We all need to hear the truth in these perilous times in which we live. Only time and eternity can tell the tremendous impact the Banner has made in my life and those around me. I can stand boldly and renounce false doctrine and the Banner has given me a clear view of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. May God continue to cause His face to shine on you and supply every resource needed to do His work.

I would like to thank *The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth* for the many years of service to me through the gift subscription. I have been receiving the gift subscription as a prisoner for more than 15 years and edified with every new issue. Reflecting on the number of years I have been receiving it reminds me of just how the Lord requires of me real patience whenever He Himself puts on my heart the desire to study a particular doctrine in depth.... I use *The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth*, and all of the theological material I can find to both evangelize the unbelievers on the yard and to lead Bible studies with the believers.

I would like to start off by thanking you for the free *Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth* magazine. It has not only been an extremely great blessing to me but to several inmates because I make sure it gets passed around for others to read. I have been a Christian for almost 5 years now and am a Calvinistic Baptist. Shortly after I became a Christian, I started taking courses through correspondence from a ministry called "Mount Zion." They introduced me to Charles Spurgeon, A.W. Pink, Jonathan Edwards, John Calvin, J.C. Ryle and many others. They were the ones who blessed me with your address and a KJV Reformation Heritage Study Bible which you have advertised in your magazine. It has been a great blessing. I love the thoughts for personal/family worship at the end of each

chapter and all the articles, creeds, and confessions of faith. I am very appreciative of all the work and effort you put into producing that Bible. Most ministries that assist inmates are extremely charismatic, word of faith, and Arminian. Your ministry, along with Mount Zion, is one of the few that teach good solid theology in a way that is applicable. And I am extremely grateful for not only the free magazines but also the weekly sermons from the Heritage Reformed Congregation on the Heidelberg Catechism. Often times it is the only good sermon available to me during the week.

REFORMATION HERITAGE BOOKS

FROM A PHYSICIAN AND ELDER IN THE PCA:

The Reformation Heritage Study Bible has meant so much to me and my family. I am very grateful for it and heartily commend it for several reasons:

1. It has trained me to become a more deliberate student of Scripture. I'm learning to search its depths more intentionally, marvel more in its continuity, remember its truths more diligently so that I may obey and rejoice in divine mercy discovered even in the shadows of Old Testament ceremony and prophetic judgments.

2. It trains experimentally. On every page Christ is revealed, and on every page there is an exhortation to apply that grace more faithfully in worship and work.

3. Its usefulness in the training of covenant children is proven by the good fruit it bears.

Many thanks to all those who have worked on this treasured Study Bible.

FROM A CANADIAN PASTOR:

My wife and I want to thank RHB for the audio book, *Fighting Satan*. We listened to it on our drive back from the south. It was truly an edifying time and a timely subject for me as I have been under the devil's attacks lately. I was able to identify some of his wiles and to implement some of the strategies for battling him. I especially appreciate the focus on *sola Scriptura*. Be encouraged that your labor is not in vain. This poor sinner was again shown an unspeakably rich Christ!

I've refrained on several occasions from emailing you regarding *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*. Anyway I've now read the final chapter and know it wouldn't be right not to email. I've spent many blessed hours reading and meditating whilst working my way through this book. I've been encouraged and challenged in equal measure! I really just wanted to thank you all at Reformation Heritage Books for such a feast!

FROM AN EMAIL FRIEND:

In the last six months, I have given the Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible to:

- A Muslim from Lebanon;
- A co-worker from Romania;
- A missionary friend in Nepal;
- A good friend from Australia;
- A Roman Catholic co-worker; and
- My daughter.

What a blessing this work is and will be!

From *The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth*
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PERIODICAL
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THE GOD OF OUR SALVATION HEARS

The God of our salvation hears
The groans of Zion mixed with tears;
Yet when He comes with kind designs,
Through all the way His terror shines.

Whole kingdoms, shaken by the storm,
He settles in a peaceful form;
Mountains, established by His hand,
Firm on their old foundations stand.

'Tis from His watery stores on high
He gives the thirsty ground supply;
He walks upon the clouds, and thence
Doth His enriching drops dispense.

On Him the race of man depends,
Far as the earth's remotest ends,
Where the Creator's Name is known
By nature's feeble light alone.

Behold His ensigns sweep the sky,
New comets blaze, and lightnings fly;
The heathen lands, with swift surprise,
From the bright horrors turn their eyes.

The desert grows a fruitful field,
Abundant food the valleys yield;
The valleys shout with cheerful voice,
And neighboring hills repeat their joys.

Sailors, that travel o'er the flood,
Address their frightened souls to God,
When tempests rage and billows roar
At dreadful distance from the shore.

At His command the morning ray
Smiles in the east, and leads the day;
He guides the sun's declining wheels
Over the tops of western hills.

The pastures smile in green array;
There lambs and larger cattle play;
The larger cattle and the lamb
Each in his language speaks Thy Name.

He bids the noisy tempests cease;
He calms the raging crowd to peace,
When a tumultuous nation raves
Wild as the winds, and loud as waves.

Seasons and times obey His voice;
The evening and the morn rejoice
To see the earth made soft with showers,
Laden with fruit, and dressed in flowers.

Thy works pronounce Thy power divine;
O'er every field Thy glories shine;
Through every month Thy gifts appear;
Great God, Thy goodness crowns the
year!

—ISAAC WATTS

the **Banner** of Sovereign Grace Truth

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A PERIODICAL FOR FAMILIES