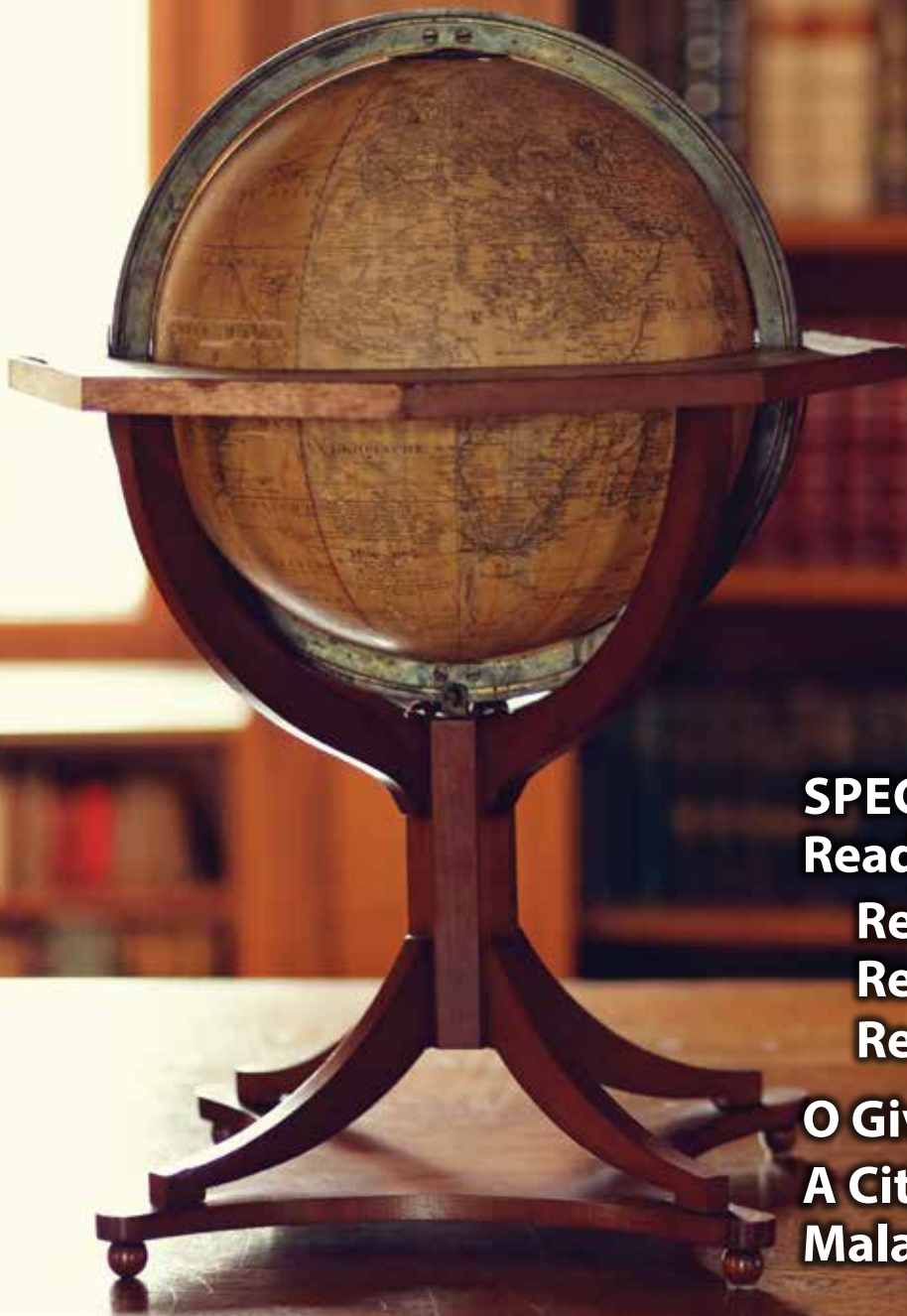


THE  
**BANNER**  
OF SOVEREIGN GRACE TRUTH



**SPECIAL THEME:**  
**Reading for Worldview**  
**Reading for Vocation**  
**Reading for Hospitality**  
**Reading for Parenting**  
**O Give Thanks Unto the Lord**  
**A City Set on a Hill**  
**Malachi's Advent**

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## THE BANNER OF SOVEREIGN GRACE TRUTH

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### MID-TERM ELECTIONS: NOVEMBER 6, 2018

Please pray for our nation that those who support biblical morality and who embrace the "culture of life" rather than the "culture of death" will be elected to various political offices, and for our readers in America, be sure to fulfil your civil obligation and privilege as citizens to vote in this election which certainly appears to be the most important mid-term election that we have ever witnessed in our lifetime. And while you are praying, pray earnestly that God would send reformation and revival to our needy land, and subdue those who are sending out threatening messages and taking threatening actions to destroy those who do not agree with them. Finally, we also wish you every blessing in the born Babe-King of Bethlehem as we commemorate Christ's advent and Incarnation.

—JRB

# O GIVE THANKS UNTO THE LORD

*“O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.”*  
—PSALM 136:1

Psalm 136 is a song. It was sung when the ark of the covenant was returned to its rightful place in the Temple (1 Chron. 16:34) as well as when the Temple was filled with God’s glory (2 Chron. 7:3).

In verses 1–3 as well as the final verse we are exhorted to “give thanks unto the LORD.” The understood implication is that in each of the twenty-six verses, the psalmist expresses thanks to God. We can never express enough thanks to Him. In so doing the psalmist sets an example for us. What does he thank God for? For four things: for who God is, for His creative hand, for delivering, and for leading and remembering.

## *Give Thanks for Who God Is*

This song begins by reminding us that the Lord is good (v. 1). The Lord has been good toward us in life. He has blessed us with physical provisions in a multitude of ways. Add to that all the spiritual blessings He grants: a place to worship, His Word, the gospel of salvation, and His Holy Spirit to bring it into the soul. All this is good because it comes from a good God. He is God of gods and Lord of lords—the great, mighty, and exclusive God (vv. 2–3). We are to give thanks to God for who He is. That is the best place to begin, also on Thanksgiving Day.

## *Give Thanks for God’s Creation*

In verses 4–9 the psalmist reflects upon the mighty wonders of creation. The Lord made the heavens, the earth, the sun, the moon, and the stars. It all exists because of His mighty, wise, and creative hand.

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder,  
Consider all the works Thy hands have made,  
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,  
Thy power throughout the universe displayed;  
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee:  
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!  
Then sings my soul, My Savior God, to Thee:  
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!

Is your heart overwhelmed with gratitude when you survey the wondrous mercy of God in creation? Does your heart burst with gratitude to think of the wisdom, power, and might of our great, creating God? This earth is where redemption took place in time and history! The psalmist was not just overwhelmed with the grandeur of nature the same way an atheist stands in awe at the edge of the Grand Canyon, but the psalmist was overwhelmed with gratitude admiring creation because of what transpired here.

## *Give Thanks for God’s Deliverance*

In verses 10–15 the psalmist recounts with gratitude how the

Lord delivered His people by Moses’s leadership from the bondage of Egypt through the Red Sea. That deliverance points to redemption through the work of the greater Moses, Jesus Christ. This redeeming deliverance should overwhelm our hearts with gratitude each day, and especially on Thanksgiving Day. Our mighty Lord overthrows the enemy (v. 15) and delivers us safely through the sea of death. Our great Savior delivers His people!

And when I think that God, His Son not sparing,  
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in;  
That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,  
He bled and died to take away my sin.

Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee:  
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!  
Then sings my soul, My Savior God, to Thee:  
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!

## *Give Thanks for God’s Leading and Remembering*

In verses 16–22 the psalmist reflects upon the Lord’s leading mercies. After Israel’s deliverance the Lord led them “through the wilderness” (v. 16). For this, the psalmist is thankful. Are we thankful that the Lord doesn’t always lead us in the ways of tranquility and that sometimes He leads in the way of the wilderness? In Israel’s time, the Lord led them this way for their good. He still does the same today. We should give thanks to the Lord that He knows the best way for us and that *He* leads us and does not call us to lead ourselves.

In verses 23–26 the psalmist is overwhelmed with gratitude that the Lord had not forgotten them, particularly in a low and forgotten place (v. 23). Maybe there were those who looked down upon small, despised Israel, but God had not forgotten His people. How our hearts should sing with gratitude,

When Zion in her low estate  
Was brought from bondage by the Lord,  
In ecstasy we sang for joy,  
By grace and wondrous love restored. (Psalter 357:1)

Lastly, note that every verse repeats, “for His mercy endures for ever” (Ps. 136). The psalmist understood that God is mercy, that He created the earth in mercy, that He delivers His people in mercy, and that He leads and remembers us in mercy. It is an everlasting mercy of tender lovingkindness that endures forever. How and why does God show mercy? Only because Christ’s blood was shed can this holy God have mercy on sinners. Therefore, as we gather on Thanksgiving Day may we not only be grateful for untold blessings, but may we also echo with Paul as he exalted Jesus Christ, “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift” (2 Cor. 9:15)!

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# MALACHI'S ADVENT: *The Day Is Coming!*

*For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.*

—MALACHI 4:1–2

Malachi lived in days of spiritual decline. He was sent to be a prophet to God's people in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, days in which the restoration of the temple was finished and the rebuilding of Jerusalem took place. Although the Lord sent a glorious revival (Nehemiah 8), the high hopes of the people were fading in light of economic failures. Moreover, the moral state of the people of Israel had not improved after their return from exile. For that reason, the Lord sent the prophet Malachi to confront God's people with their sins. Malachi's message is one of disputes in which the Lord confronts the sin of the people and in which the people respond with blame toward God.

In these verses of our text, which are found at the end of the book, the Lord shows Malachi and the people that, despite low expectations, there will be a glorious time ahead—a time in which both God's judgment and salvation will come in full force! Malachi is expecting this glorious day with eagerness despite the response of the people around him, who, like many in our day, were saying that serving the Lord was of no benefit whatsoever (Mal. 3:14). People complained that things were turned on their head. The people said that the proud are called happy and the wicked are prospering (Mal. 3:15). On top of that, the "church" of Malachi's day was in a lamentable state. The Lord blames the priests, the spiritual leaders, for unfaithfulness.

In this environment, Malachi looks with eager anticipation for the wicked to be punished with judgement and for the righteous to be rewarded with salvation. In fact, Malachi is looking for the coming Messiah. In Malachi 3:1, he speaks about what the coming Savior will do: "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall

suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts." Malachi prophesies that the Messiah, who is called here the Messenger of the Covenant, will suddenly come to His temple. This is what the people looked forward to with delight. Zerubbabel's temple had never been filled with God's glory cloud like the previous temple, but Malachi says that the Lord, who is the Messenger of the Covenant, will come to this temple suddenly! This temple where so much corruption took place (Mal. 1:6–14). In light of corrupted religion, it is no surprise that Malachi 3:2 says, "But who may abide the day of his coming?... For he is like a refiner's fire."

Like Peter, Malachi expects a thorough cleansing of God's house when the Savior comes. The apostle Peter says, "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? (1 Peter 4:17). Malachi, considering what was happening in his day, was grieved. He saw that many were not concerned about holiness, so he expected Christ's coming to be one of judgment and refining (that is, cleansing) power. He expected that day to begin at the house of God. That was Malachi's advent expectation about the coming Christ.

Malachi 4:1 shows very clearly that when the Christ would come, it would be a terrible day of destruction. That day will be a day that burns like an oven, in other words, a day in which the wicked and the proud experience that our God is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29). On that day, the supposed importance and happiness of proud and wicked people will be licked up by the fire just as easily as stubble is reduced to ashes. Nothing of them will survive in the end. Normally, roots will survive the rage of the fire, but this fire kindled by the Lord will consume both root and branch. The entire tree will be consumed in God's judgment. What a warning for those who continue in the way of wickedness! Truly, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31). God's judgment will come, not just outside the church, but it will start inside the church. That is Malachi's advent! Why? Because he deeply longed for a world full of God-glorifying holiness. Do you long for such a world as well?

Then, God's coming judgments, though fearful, can actually bring hope—the hope of a holy world!

You might wonder, “Is that what happened when Christ came? Did Christ come with judgment during His first coming?” Yes and no. No, judgment did not come because, on the one hand, Christ Himself said that He had not come to condemn the world but that, through Him, the world might be saved (John 3:17). Yes, judgment did come because, on the other hand, the very next verse, John 3:18, shows that everyone that does not believe in the Son is condemned and under judgment already. Also, didn't Christ actually cleanse the temple by exposing the greediness of the sacrificial-animal business and money-changers (Matt. 21:12–17)? Wasn't it the Lord Jesus who spoke his fiercest condemnations on the Pharisees, who knew the way but hindered others by their unbelieving and hypocritical lifestyle (Matt. 23:1–29)?

So, on the one hand, the day of judgment came with Christ's first coming, but we still expect the full extent of Malachi's prophecy to be fulfilled. Dear reader, in light of this coming day and His impending judgment, what do you trust in? Do you share the same wicked and proud desires as this world? Do you share the greed of this world? If so, sooner than you think, Christ will come, and the flames of His judgment will lick up everything that you once treasured so much. For you, the advent will be an advent of threatening and consuming fire.

However, if holiness has become dear to your heart, and if you desire Christ to come and bring His Word in which righteousness dwells, take courage! In Malachi 4:2, he shows that the day of Christ will also be a day of great glory and joyful deliverance: “But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.” What a glorious advent this will be! God-fearers should expect a far more glorious future in that day. They should expect the Sun of righteousness to shine upon them! For them, the Sun will not have consuming influences, burning up everything that comes close. For them, the Sun sheds its light and its warming influence upon the earth, prospering God's creation.

Malachi expects such a day—a day in which the Sun gloriously rises with light and warmth. The rays of the sun (the wings) will bring healing and restoration, not destruction. Malachi compares and pictures God's children to joyful calves leaving their stall. These calves “shall go forth and grow up” (Mal. 4:2). This last word means “leap” or “spring out.” The picture is well known to those who have grown up close to a farm. Malachi's

advent of Christ is described in terms of those beautiful days for a farmer, when calves exchange the stall for the pasture. The calves are full of excitement, they leap, play, skip, and jump. They fully enjoy the freedom, the sunshine, the grass, and everything that the new pasture brings. In the safety of the pasture, with the restoring rays of the sun to warm them, they will fully prosper.

The day of Christ was indeed such a day. When Christ came in His first advent, He said of Himself: “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12). He came to bring healing and restoration. He came to bring righteousness. Paul writes about the fact that Christ brings the righteousness of God without the law: “Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe” (Rom. 3:22). Christ as the Light of the World shines His restoring grace in our dark and sinful hearts. He came to set captives and prisoners free. He came so that we can enjoy green pastures. He came so that we might have life! He came that we might experience true freedom, the freedom from the slavery of sin. That should make us rejoice and leap like those calves, shouldn't it?

As we read our Bibles, we learn that just as the fullness of God's judgment is still to come, so the fullness of God's salvation is still to come. What a day God's people anticipate! There will be a world in which righteousness dwells. Are we ready for that glorious day? Has God's refining and healing “judgment” begun in your life? Do you have a deep hunger for holiness? That is what our hearts are supposed to do, as we see the day approaching. The apostle Peter brings these things together, showing that he must have been familiar with Malachi:

Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. (2 Peter 3:11–14)

Is your advent-longing like Malachi's? Even more importantly, are you ready for that day?

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## WHERE IS HE THAT IS BORN KING OF THE JEWS?

Jesus is King! Though He was born a babe in a manger, though He willingly took upon Himself flesh and blood, and though He remains despised and rejected by so many, He alone is King. Rather than a helpless, innocent infant, He reigns at all times over all things.

From Matthew 2, we will meditate on the identity of this King and His mission in this world. It is my prayer that these considerations guide your Christmas celebration and your life.

Who is this King? He is called the King of the Jews. This specific truth brings the wise men to Jerusalem and stirs Herod the king's wrath. Yet, as with so much of the Gospel of Matthew, while there is a Jewish backdrop to this story, the glorious universality of the King shines forth brilliantly. This gospel begins with reference to Jesus as son of David and son of Abraham. Both David and Abraham were objects of Jewish ancestral pride. Still, both point to a greater, more glorious King than one isolated merely to Israel. To Abraham it was promised in Genesis 17:6, "I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee." This would be ultimately fulfilled in the Son of Abraham, King of the Jews, King over all. David, too, points beyond himself and his descendants to his Son who would have the everlasting throne (2 Sam. 7:13).

This King has the proper lineage, and He receives His proper due—the worship of His people. Here the Lord Jesus, King of the Jews, receives the worship of the Gentile wise men. This is in stark contrast to the sinister ambition of national king Herod. The subjects of King Jesus are those who see Him as He is, worship Him for His great salvation (Matt. 1:21), and serve Him lovingly, even at the risk of their lives. He preserves them and advances His church in the hostile world against all who oppose (Matt. 16:18).

Reader, whom would the Lord classify you among—the true worshippers of Him like the wise men or seemingly threatening opponents like king Herod? Do you find in

the identity of the King all the grace to lay down your own "rule" to bow under His easy yoke (Matt. 11:28–30), or is He your rival?

What is the mission of this One who is born King of the Jews? There is a Jewish starting point to the mission as we can read in Matthew 10:6–7, but now the fullness of the gospel ushers in the Great Commission, which flows from the kingship of Christ to His church to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19–20). The need for this mission is acutely shown at Christmas time when so many people serve themselves and fall prey to the gods of this world. The star drew the wise men to the King. How can we be encouraged to draw our family, friends, close acquaintances, and others to the King?

First, driven by worship and love from the heart, take the initiative while relying on the King's power and the Spirit's wisdom. We may enjoy ourselves and our families, but we must not ignore others who are in spiritual darkness and lost in sin. Pray for opportunities, take interest in those around you, immerse yourself in the Word, and follow the Spirit's leading.

Second, don't be discouraged by opposition. Where the King is working, the adversary will be present. It was the seeking of the wise men which led to Herod's interest. The very fact of opposition should be reason to press forward, entrusting the cause to the One who said, "All power is given unto me" (Matt. 28:18).

Third, rest in the success of the King. Jesus didn't stay a baby. He grew up, fulfilled all righteousness, suffered and died, and rose again. Where is He now? He is reigning on high in heaven while, at the same time, He is with all His people. The cause is sure! Christmas isn't about cozy feelings but brings with it a commission for believers to live in light of the highly anticipated, near-at-hand return of their King.

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# Ten Lasting Fruits of the Reformation (2)

*In the last issue, we considered six ways that the sixteenth-century Reformation blessed our world—ways that still impact us today for good. This article considers four more Reformation blessings bequeathed to us.*

## 7. VOCATIONS FOR THE COMMON GOOD

The Reformers recast the state as a commonwealth, promoting the dignity of labor, encouraging 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. In the view of the Reformers, a well-regulated state ought to provide for the common good. All should thrive together, walking agreeably in decency and good order. Everyone has a stake in the life and well-being of the nation. No man is granted freedom to do as he pleases without regard to the laws of God and the state. Such is the idea of the state as a commonwealth.

Reformed Christianity played a major role in the eradication of serfdom and the abolition of slavery, though for some Reformed Christians these measures seemed too radical to be endorsed. Sadly, historians today delight to recall such resistance to change and fail to record the work done by many Calvinists to achieve these reforms at home and abroad in the world.

According to the Reformed idea of vocation or calling, the common laborer came into his own as an image-bearing servant of God. Reformed doctrine sanctifies all of life and resists both ancient and modern attempts to draw a line between the sacred and the secular. Men of wealth are called to use their wealth for the good of others and for the cause of Christ. The restoration of the office of deacon meant that measures were taken in hand to care for the sick and lighten the burden of poverty on the poor. The communion of saints, each one employing his gifts for the advantage and salvation of the others, welded Reformed communities together as forces for benevolence, civic improvement, and social progress.

Serve God according to your gifts, calling, and providential circumstances. Although the calling of the gospel ministry is a noble work, it is by no means the only way to glorify God in the world. Whether you are an electrician, a government official, or a stay-at-home mom, never see yourself as second-class or your calling as unspiritual. Instead, take up your calling as a service that you render

directly to Jesus Christ for the sake of His name. “Whatever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men” (Col. 3:23). Be a person of integrity and justice. He will judge us all for our faithfulness where He put us, and He will reward obedience wherever He finds it.

## 8. MARRIAGE AND CHILD-REARING

The Reformers established 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 are to rear their children, who are loaned to them by God, as He would have them reared covenantally, ethically, and experientially.

Casting out the medieval cult of celibacy, the Reformers embraced and exalted marriage in the Lord as the norm for the Christian life. The Christian family is counted as the basic unit of the church and the foundation of society. In no better way can the mystery of Christ and His church be honored and enacted before the world. The children of believers once more became the heritage of the Lord, loved and nurtured, called to faith and repentance, confronted with Christ’s claims upon their faith and obedience, and schooled in the “true and perfect doctrine of salvation” taught in the Reformed churches.

This view of marriage is rooted in the idea of covenant that pervades all of Scripture and unites all of its doctrines, promises, commandments, and warnings into one systematic whole. God and His people, Christ and His church, are bound together in the covenant of grace. “From Him His saints’ redemption came; His covenant sure no change can know; Let all revere His holy Name in heaven above and earth below” (Psalm 111, *Psalter* 304 v. 6).

While no one should rush irresponsibly into marriage without being duly prepared for the role of husband-father or wife-mother and receiving godly counsel, we should not be skittish about marriage. Many people today put off marriage and family too long, sometimes out of fear or selfish desires to avoid inconvenience. Marriage is what you and your spouse make it. Enter the marital state with a God-fearing spouse and you will find the Christian household to be a workshop of the Holy Spirit where He fulfills his covenantal purposes.

The ethics we teach to our children are the ethics of the covenant, as revealed or summarized in the Ten

Commandments. “Sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4). Good works are “only those which proceed from a true faith, are performed according to the law of God, and to His glory; and not such as are founded on our imaginations or the institutions of men” (HC Q. 91).

We also teach our children about Christian experience—how the Holy Spirit saves sinners through a way of personal acquaintance with our sins and miseries, our deliverance in Christ, and our yearning to exercise gratitude to God and man with our entire way of life. We need to teach them about how the Christian should walk in an ideal sense, as Paul does in Romans 8, even as we acknowledge to them what Christian experience is like in a real sense in our battles with indwelling, as Paul does in Romans 7. We must teach them with words and show them with our lives that our Christian experience is the outworking and fulfillment of God’s gracious, saving, covenant work in our hearts and lives.

## 9. ARTS AND SCIENCES

The Reformers rekindled the spirit of inquiry by founding schools, academies, and universities; disseminating knowledge; encouraging research and exploration; enabling many discoveries; and producing many valuable inventions.

Exalting God as Maker of heaven and earth, believing that man was created in God’s image, and valuing the creation as God’s handiwork, Reformed Christians have been stirred to seek out the laws of the universe and to realize much of the great potential built into the world as God created it. Believing that knowledge is essential to life and happiness, Reformed Christianity fostered the development of universal education. The local schoolmaster labored alongside the local minister and the local catechist.

A large chapter in the history of Reformed Christianity in the United States is the history of the founding of schools, school systems, and institutions of higher learning wherever Presbyterian and Reformed immigrants and settlers established their new homes and churches. The need for a well-educated ministry lay at the heart of this enterprise, but beside this concern, lay the concern for an educated laity that all might profit from the ministry of the Word.

The Reformers inspired creative endeavors in the form of literature, music, art, and architecture, consecrating the powers of man to the service and glory of God. The Reformation was a catalyst for cultural development and improvement in every land where it took root. One has only to mention the music of J. S. Bach, the poems of John Donne, or the paintings of Rembrandt, to name only a few

examples. These creative geniuses flourished in a milieu that owed much to the Reformation.

The concern to provide education for all promoted learning, research, exploration, discovery, and invention. Much of the basic research and many important tools of discovery that enabled the great nineteenth- and twentieth-century forward strides in medicine, astronomy, navigation, communication, transportation, and many other arts and sciences were given to the world by Reformed Christians.

All these developments sprang from the Reformed conviction that God is to be loved and served with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength; likewise, as the Westminster divines declared, “The two great pillars upon which the kingdom of Satan is erected, and by which it is upheld, are ignorance and error” (“To the Christian Reader,” Preface to the Westminster Standards).

Value good Christian education. If you are a student, view your schooling not just as a requirement to get a job, but a calling to glorify God in your studies. Be a life-long learner. Whether your interests are in theology, politics, visual arts, mechanics, engineering, science, medicine, philosophy, history, music, languages, or some other field of study, keep reading, practicing, and learning throughout your life. Seek a good education for your children, remembering that the worldview and personal character of their teachers will profoundly shape their future. As God blesses you, support Christian schools and seminaries with your money, time, and prayers. Christian education is the cultivation of the image of God.

## 10. THE TRUE WORSHIP OF GOD

Perhaps, above all, the Reformation promoted true worship. For the Reformers, to worship God, whether privately or publicly, was to bow down before His majestic glory and, in spirit and in truth, to bring Him, in and through Jesus Christ and in accordance with Scripture, the honor and praise that belong to Him alone.

Calvin said that the Christian faith turns on two main hinges: how we are saved and how we should worship God. Worship is central to both; in a word, it is biblical Christianity. The Reformers invested massive efforts into the restoration of Christian worship from manmade idolatry to the glorification of God according to the will of God. Medieval worship services were a feast for the senses but a famine for the soul, especially for the common people who did not understand Latin.

Reformation worship turns away from the saints as heavenly mediators and encourages people to draw near to God the Father through the sole mediation of God the Son by the power of God the Holy Spirit. It simplifies the sacraments (from seven to two), purges the service



of unbiblical rituals and imagined sacred objects, and restores the people to their function as a holy priesthood. It makes the Holy Scriptures both the rule and the content of worship as the church reads the Word, prays the Word, sings the Word, preaches the Word, and sees the Word in baptism and the Lord's Supper. What a joy it is to worship in spirit and truth!

As heirs of the Reformation in the modern world, we must carry on this legacy of the worship of God alone through Christ alone by Scripture alone. This calls us, especially those who are pastors and elders, to a watchful zeal for purity of worship. However, the worship of God must be more to us than a matter of outward purity, or we will be Pharisees who damage Christ's church. Our zeal for worship must begin with an inward fear of God, brokenness over our sins, meekness toward others, and love for His glory. Is your heart tender for the glory of God? Do you worship Him with gladness and holy fear?

The most insidious challenge to worship in the present day is secularism. Modern secularism is just as worshipful as any world religion, but it directs its worship and obedience to humanity. To say the least, the fruits of secular humanism are bittersweet at best. Humanism and materialism have produced hordes of consumers—gadget-crazed and self-indulgent to a fault, prizing personal liberty and self-expression above the common good, and calling evil good and deriding goodness as evil. We are beset with goods and services, but have nothing better to do with them than spend and be spent. Modernity has bred self-worshippers. As to God, it ignores Him, belittles him, is embarrassed to mention Him in the public square, and deems Him irrelevant to real life. People with this mindset find a worship service boring unless it tickles their senses, which is the broad road to idol-worship.

How about you? Are you a true worshipper of God? Are you spiritually acquainted with what real worship is in a personal way, namely, to worship God by bowing down before His majestic glory and, in spirit and in truth, to bring Him, in and through Jesus Christ and in accordance with Scripture, the honor and praise that belong to Him alone?

## **CONCLUSION: SOLI DEO GLORIA**

Here then, we have ten crucial ways that the Reformation—contra Roman Catholicism—has blessed our world over the last five hundred years: the Word of God, the gospel of grace, experiential piety, old paths, Christ, the head of the church, Christian freedom, vocations for the common good, marriage and child-rearing, arts and sciences, and the true worship of God. They are like ten sparkling facets on a single diamond. But I want you to do more

than look at the facets. I want you to take the diamond. What is that? What is the one great reality that all these things reflect? The diamond of the Reformation is the glory of God. The Reformation was about the centrality of God—the supremacy, sovereignty, holiness, goodness, and mercy of God in His triune being. The spirit of the Reformation, if you boil it down to its distilled essence, is to love God by faith in the grace of Christ as He is revealed in the Scriptures.

The word “glory” in Hebrew derives from a word that means “weighty.” The idea of God's glory is that God's inherent worth is weighty. His glory is the beauty of His manifold perfections. His weighty moral excellence shines forth in greatness and worth in His acts of creation, providence, and redemption (Isa. 44:23; John 12:28; 13:31–32).

It is easy to say the words of the Westminster Shorter Catechism: “Man's chief end [or great purpose] is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” It is far harder to live those words. How can we glorify God? By confessing our sins to Him and fleeing to Christ for forgiveness and for having God's nature restored to us. By praising, worshiping, and delighting in the triune God as Creator, Provider, and Redeemer. By trusting God and surrendering all things into His hands. By being fervently zealous for the triune God's glory. By walking humbly, thankfully, and cheerfully before God and becoming increasingly conformed to the image of His Son. By knowing, loving, and living the commands of God's Word. By being heavenly minded and cherishing the desire to be with God forever.

Thomas Watson said that to glorify God means four things: (1) Appreciation: Do you admire God's attributes—His infinite, eternal, and unchangeable power, wisdom, and love? (2) Adoration: Do you worship God, reverently bringing to Him the honor that He commands? (3) Affection: Do you delight in God, desiring Him as your portion and life and treasuring Him with an intense and ardent love? (4) Subjection: Do you obey God with self-renunciation, holy action, and eager service?

The Reformation is now more than five hundred years old. So what? The bottom line is this: God's grace in Jesus Christ brings us to God (1 Peter 3:18). The triune God is the diamond. Will you receive him as your God and be His child forever? Will you embrace the glory of God as your highest goal, purpose, and joy in life?

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# FOCUS OF THE PSALMS

## *A Paradigm for Worship (2)*

The principal focus of the Psalms is God. Given that God is the sole object of true worship, it should not be surprising that He would be the focal point in a worship manual. One of the preeminent precepts of true and spiritual worship is that it must be theocentric (God-centered) and not anthropocentric (man-centered). The Psalter highlights this precept both by what it says and by what it doesn't say. It says volumes about God, but, conspicuous by comparison, absent are references to men and their achievements—even of those who rendered great and notable service to the Lord. Indeed, references to specific individuals are incidental, and none celebrate what these individuals did for God, but rather, what God had done for them. For instance, Abraham is mentioned only twice (Pss. 47, 105), Moses only eight times (Pss. 77, 90, 99, 103, 105, three times in Ps. 106), David only thirteen times apart from the superscriptions. That itself gives a clear directive for worship: worship is about God and not about man. Far too frequently, modern “worship” directs attention to man's accomplishments, motivating the congregation to imitate some biblical character's traits or behavior, or modern “worship” attempts to make the people either feel good or, sometimes, even feel bad (the old guilt motivation) about themselves. God receives only the incidental reference.

The divinely inspired paradigms elevate the Lord to His rightful place, ascribing to Him the infinite worth of His person and the glory of His works (praise) and appealing to Him for His necessary mercies (prayer). Even a cursory reading of the Psalms reveals how consistently the Lord is in view. It is impossible not to notice how frequently the name and various appellations of God occur throughout the collection, directing attention, praise, and prayer to His person. For instance, the covenant name of God that is so wonderfully linked to His gracious redemption and faithfulness, Jehovah (usually LORD in the KJV), occurs almost seven hundred times scattered throughout the 150 Psalms. In addition, the hundreds of other direct references to God in the Psalms by His many other titles, each of which declares some self-revealed truth about God, support the claim that God is central in biblical worship. He is the Most High (Pss. 7:17; 46:4; 78:35), the Holy One of Israel (Ps. 78:41), the Mighty God of Jacob (Ps. 132:5); the God of righteousness (Ps. 4:1), and the list goes on. There is little wonder that David declares, “O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!” (Ps. 8:1, 9).

Praise, however, is to be offered not only because God is who He is, but also because He is like He is and because He does what He does. Therefore, following the inspired paradigm for worship requires giving attention to the divine perfections and works. In regard to His perfections, the bottom line is that there is no God like our God, and a whole lot of worship can occur just by reflecting on and recounting His infinite, eternal, and unchangeable virtues. The greatness of God and His glory are indisputable facts (see Pss. 135:5 and 138:5 for forthright declarations). Let me suggest a little exercise. Here is the description of God in the Westminster Larger Catechism Q&A 7:

God is a Spirit, in and of himself infinite in being, glory, blessedness, and perfection; all-sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible, every where present, almighty, knowing all things, most wise, most holy, most just, most merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.

As you read through the Psalms, mark how the Psalms could provide the biblical support or proof of each of the statements. I dare say that it will be virtually impossible to select any Psalm without finding some reference to or evidence of one or more of God's attributes.

Similarly, in regard to God's works, there is plenty to worship about. In one place, David announced his worship agenda in terms of God's acts: “I will praise thee, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will shew forth all thy marvelous works” (Ps. 9:1). A key exercise of worship is to reflect on what God has done, is doing, and will do. The Psalms address each of these perspectives—particularly in terms of creation (for example, Ps. 104), providence (for example, Pss. 65; 78), and redemption (for example, Ps. 68)—with all the respective implications and applications for both the righteous and the wicked. The association of creation and redemption is a thoroughly biblical link. Read these passages for illustrations of this theological connection: Isaiah 42:5–9; 43:1–7; 45:12–17; John 1:1–18; 2 Corinthians 4:6; Colossians 1:13–20. Significantly, the fourth commandment that defines the Sabbath mandate connects the two together as necessary themes for worship. Remember how Exodus 20 links the sabbath day to creation whereas Deuteronomy 5 links it to redemption. Throughout the Psalms, the psalmists illustrate how these uniquely divine works are reasons for praise and motives for prayer.

I cannot finish this section concerning the Psalms' focus without reference to Christ. No true worship is possible apart from Jesus Christ, the only way, truth, and life. He is the only Mediator between God and men. It should not be surprising, then, that the inspired "how to" book of worship includes so much about Christ. In His post-resurrection, heart-enflaming conversation with the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, the Lord started with Moses and expounded the whole of what the Old Testament Scriptures said about Him (Luke 24:27). And then to the gathered disciples He said specifically, "These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me" (Luke 24:44). Therefore, to miss finding Christ in the Old Testament is to miss the essential message of that book, including the Psalms. Indeed, finding Christ in the Psalms is a sure thing. It follows that if Christ is in the Psalms, and the Psalms are about worship, then worship is in some way about Christ. The Psalms were an effective means of keeping the messianic hope before a worshipping people. Not every Psalm is specifically messianic, but the messianic theme runs through the entire Psalter and is not difficult to discover. Messianic clues include four key principles: (1) The analogy of Scripture involves comparing Scripture with Scripture. If the Psalm parallels other texts that are clearly messianic, the Psalm will be messianic. (2) The uniqueness principle consists of statements that could not refer to any other but Christ. (3) The type-antitype connection refers to historical figures that prophetically point to Christ. (4) The authority of New Testament confirmations removes any doubt. When the New Testament applies or interprets a Psalm as referring to Christ, that settles it. Although the Psalms do not speak of Christ in historical terms since the eternal Son had not yet become man, there is hardly a truth about Christ's person, nature, or work that does not find expression—all of which have implications for worship. His humanity and deity, His death and resurrection, His mediatorial offices (prophet, priest, and king), His first and second advents are all part of the Psalms' messianic theology. The Israelites knew what it meant to sing of their Redeemer.

Although I would love at this point to start at the beginning of the Psalter and expound every messianic text, space does not permit, but here is just a sample. Psalm 2 reveals Christ as the object of saving faith. Psalm 8 reveals Him as the ideal man. Psalm 16 reveals Him as the resolute Servant whose view of His God, His people, and His mission fueled His determination to endure the suffering for the glory that was certain to follow. Psalm 22, one of the places in Scripture that demand the removal of our shoes because we are on holy ground, reveals Christ as the suffering and successful

Savior. Psalm 110, revealing Christ as the King and Priest, is a compendium of theological truths concerning the person and mediatorial operation of Christ from His place in the Trinity to His Royal Priesthood to His final triumph over every enemy.

A whole set or category of Psalms designated as Royal Psalms spotlights the person of the king and always points in some way to Jesus Christ, the ideal King (for example, Ps. 45). Many more Psalms either in part or in whole, in fact or in type, direct attention to Christ. When you find Christ in the Psalms, remember that you have found Him in the book of worship and song. That is essential. Any biblical paradigm for worship will have Christ as a principal part. The Psalms make it unmistakably clear that kissing the Son—that is, paying homage to Him—is foundational to true religion and to true worship (Ps. 2:12). Acceptance before God is always in reference to Christ. That was true then; it is true now.

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# A City Set on a Hill

Think of your favorite city in our world, if you have one. What are some of the things that make it your favorite city? The location, perhaps, or the climate. The things you can do or the history of the place. The people or how beautifully it has been maintained. There are many reasons we can enjoy the great cities of our world.

The Savior once compared His people to “a city that is set on a hill” (Matt. 5:14), a bright, radiant community—a picture that is well worth unpacking in its context to see how it guides the church of all times and places in terms of its identity and purpose in our world.

## CHARTER OF THE KINGDOM

The Sermon on the Mount remains one of the most-well-known parts of the Bible, inspiring many with the glorious language of what has been called Christ’s Charter of the kingdom of heaven. The Savior speaks these words near the beginning of His ministry in Galilee to His disciples, whom He has just called (Matt. 4:18–5:1). There are crowds gathered that listen in as well (Matt. 5:1). He has already described their character in eight beatitudes, which we know so well (Matt. 5:3–10): blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, etc. The kingdom of heaven does not belong to the rich or proud and complacent, but to needy, broken ones in whose lives God’s grace is at work to ready them for His blessings.

Such people will not be well liked by people around them. In fact, they will be persecuted, yet they have cause for joy and rejoicing. Like the prophets, who were before them, they partake of the cross now but will gain heavenly crowns in the future (Matt. 5:11–12).

## SALT AND LIGHT

The Savior compares them to “salt” and “light” (5:13–16). In ancient times, salt was important to prevent and halt the process of decay in food. It did what preservatives do for us today. By calling His disciples salt, Christ is saying that those who have the character described in the Beatitudes will halt the process of decay and destruction in the circles in which they live. We know that this is true, don’t we? God can use one upright person in a classroom, a work environment, a neighborhood, or a political position to stem the tide of wickedness around him or her. “You are salt,” Christ says to His disciples in the midst of a corrupt world. We don’t hear the word as much anymore, but this is what people used to call the “antithesis.” Believers are to be different, contrasting with the world around them.

But Christ’s disciples are also light. Here Christ uses the picture of a candle in a room or a picture of a bright city on a hill, acting as a beacon to those in the darkness all around. Christ’s judgment of the world here is not positive; He implies that the world is corrupting, requiring salt; and dark, requiring light. Our world is indeed dark because of sin. Sin has darkened our minds by nature. Ephesians 4:18 describes people this way: “Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.”

## CHRIST’S GLORY

Believers are not independent lights. We were created to reflect the glory of God, but by our fall, we are all like candles that have gone out. Wherever there has been light since then, it is because of Him who “lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9). He came into the darkness of our world, into one of the darkest places of our world, Galilee. Matthew writes in chapter 4:16, quoting Isaiah 9: “The people that sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.”

In the Old Testament, Jerusalem was to be an example of what a shining city God’s people would be. Situated on seven hills, it was a beacon of hope to many for many generations. However, the shining city Christ speaks about is not a physical city, but a spiritual one, as Isaiah prophesied: “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee” (Isa. 60:1). Because the Son of God has come into our world and has taken our flesh and blood, there is a city on a hill. God’s people are inhabitants of His city. He is their Immanuel—God with them—and He shines upon them and through them. Because of Him, they are, as it were, a theater of light, a refuge and shelter to needy ones, and a beacon of hope in a hopeless world. Paul says in Ephesians 5:8: “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord.”

A while back I was flying from New Jersey to Michigan. It was about dusk, and we were flying towards the setting sun. At one point, I looked down from the window of the plane as the sun glowed and reflected off of the buildings below. It was a beautiful, reddish-orange light. It was as if the sun had kissed these buildings and they glowed with delight. That’s what the Christian church is called to do in this world!

## HIS SHINING FACE

Have you been lit by God? You have if you are poor in spirit and if you mourn. You have if you are meek and if you hunger after righteousness. Then God has begun to make room for Himself in your life. Then you burn for Him. You don't have the light from yourself; it's from God. You have been lit by Him, and you spend and are being spent for Him. John the Baptist spent and was spent as a light for God (John 5:35). Mary, who poured an alabaster box of ointment on Christ, gave herself up for the Lord, as radiant light in the Lord (Matt. 26:10–13).

If you are reflecting the Lord's light, you will want to stay close to the Lord, who is the source of your light. When you do stray from Him and your light grows dim, you say something like what Psalm 80 says: "Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved" (v. 7).

Light, in the Bible, is closely connected to God's Word, His truth. "Send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me...unto thy holy hill" (Ps. 43:3). When the light of the knowledge of God shines in our lives by the Holy Spirit, the truth of God will flow through us and be visible in us, and the benefits of this truth will radiate in our lives *solī Deo gloria*.

## A CHURCH UNDER THE CROSS

When Christ spoke these words at the beginning of His ministry, He was on a hill. That's why it is called "The Sermon on the Mount." However, at the end of His ministry,

He would shine like never before—on the Hill of Calvary. He spoke of His crucifixion this way in John 12: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (v. 32). It was then that the Father glorified the Son before the world (John 17:1). Even the light of the sun dimmed to pay respects to this Light of lights, who was suffering to redeem a church to Himself, a people lost in darkness. On the cross, He suffered outer darkness that He might conquer sin, death, and the grave.

It is that hill that explains why there is a city on a hill, not America<sup>1</sup> or any earthly nation, but a church, chosen unto everlasting life. The closer we live to that hill, the brighter we will shine. Many advocate that the church loosen itself from the gospel in order to really shine here below. That is a sure recipe to lose our saltiness and to dim our light. The shining church is not a triumphant church here, but a church under the cross—poor, mourning, meek—yet, through Christ, salt and light, even a city of light. This is my favorite city. This is my favorite hill.

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1. Many U.S. presidents and politicians (including John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama) have used the phrase "city on a hill" in their political speeches. They are harking back to John Winthrop, who in 1630 preached a sermon from the ship *Arbella* to the future Massachusetts Bay colonists entitled, "A Model of Christian Charity," in which he appropriated the picture of a city on a hill for what he envisioned the New America to be.

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# Reading for Vocation

READING FOR WORLDVIEW

## INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS WORLDVIEW?

The word *worldview* is a term that captures the way a person views reality. The roots of this term are found in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), who first coined the German term *weltanschauung* or worldview. Everyone operates with a worldview that encompasses every area of life: politics, ethics, art, culture, education, leisure, marriage, family, vocation, and a host of other areas. Every single person operates with a worldview informed by his culture, education, family background, religion, nationality, and circumstances. It is important to remember that a worldview is not necessarily static—worldview changes, and sometimes radically. An atheist who is converted to Christianity will have his worldview undergo a life-altering transformation because of his conversion. Conversely and sadly, a Christian young person who may have a very weak Christian worldview can face pressures in today's world that cause his worldview to undergo a life-altering transformation as well, but one that tends towards a secular worldview.

Building and instilling a Christian worldview in children and young people is vital in the day and age in which we live. Parents are faced with this enormous task. Where do we begin? Educators are faced with this task. How do we equip ourselves and our students to stay abreast of all the developments in the world today? Pastors and leaders in the church face this difficult task. How do we cultivate a

biblical worldview in the upcoming generation and sharpen the worldview of those in front of us as we preach?

Let's first define a Christian worldview. Some theologians argue that the term *worldview* is problematic because of its philosophical roots and that the term *worldview* ignores the deposit of biblical wisdom we have in the Scriptures. Others argue that it is a helpful way of understanding the world in which we live, while a third group argues that the term worldview is insufficient in addressing the basic desires of our hearts as well as what and how we worship. They argue that we are fundamentally worshippers and that what and how we worship often shapes us more than our worldview. Taken altogether, we can incorporate these thoughts and fill out the definition of worldview. A distinctly Christian worldview uses scriptural wisdom to inform our beliefs and to help us view the world God's way in order that we might be able to respond to other, opposing worldviews with God's grace and gospel.

As we define worldview in this way, this issue of the *Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth* will help Christians think through particular issues and offer suggestions for further reading to expand their worldview on these issues. There are articles on vocation, sexuality, hospitality, marriage, parenting, leadership, retirement, and dying.

## READING FOR VOCATION

What is a Christian worldview of work and vocation? If we follow the wisdom found in the Scriptures, there is a robust way in which a Christian must understand the work we do and the callings in which we engage. The Christian's worldview regarding work begins in the very opening verses of Genesis—God works. God creates. God rests. These are three vital theological pointers that help us understand how we are to view and engage in work. Since we are created in God's image, we are called to work. We are called to make things, be creative, and even consider notions of beauty and purpose in things we make and do. Next, God instructs Adam to work—to till the ground, to subdue the earth, to care for the earth. This informs us that work is God-ordained and was part of a world without sin. Work is affirmed in its goodness; our work should not be drudgery. Work should be viewed from the biblical perspective as something that is inherently good and that is a remnant

from the original creation. Work should also be viewed as God's calling in our lives. It is a divine calling and not something we do based on a whim or what we feel like doing. From the Genesis perspective, our work should also not be viewed as mere rapacious use of the earth's resources, but we are called to be stewards of God's creation.

Do you ever wonder why you might be tired and grumpy after a hard day's work? As we continue reading in Scripture, we find that vocation and work takes on a new dynamic—sweat, difficulty, and sin mixed with our labor. The introduction of sin and the curse upon Adam's work goes a long way in helping us to understand why work is difficult and why there are tensions with our employer or fellow employees. On the other hand, there are numerous occasions in Scripture where we read of the care, zeal, and delight taken in the work that God has given to people to do. Think of Solomon's temple and the industry, level of

detail, and beauty that went into that project. Pay attention to the ant of Proverbs, known for its hard-working nature, or the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31, known for her care, work, and industry. Think of Paul's exhortation to the Colossians, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3:17).

All this goes without saying that the Bible is the starting point for building a Christian worldview of vocation. Pick up your Bible and start reading. See where God addresses work and vocation, and you can begin to piece together the pieces. Work is good. Work is divinely ordained. Work is a calling from God. Work is stewardship. Work focuses on industry, beauty, and stewardship—not just a paycheck. Work is fraught with sin and the curse. Work is done for God's glory.

Why is such a worldview helpful? It is helpful to help guide young people in searching out a calling in which they can best exercise the gifts that God has given them. It is helpful to restore dignity and worth to a career or vocation that might have lost its initial sheen. The Christian worldview of vocation can act as an antidote to laziness and the living-for-the-weekend mentality with which so many in the world live. It also helps establish vital balance between work and rest, which is also a divine pattern. It can reinvigorate those who have retired, that their calling in life is not over when their career officially ends at the age of 65.

There are many resources, besides the Scriptures, that help flesh out these principles regarding work and vocation,

but I am only highlighting what I consider two of the most helpful books for the common reader as a starting point:

- Gene Veith, *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life* (Crossway, 2011). This book is a basic introduction to view work as God's calling. It gives a historical introduction to the Reformation recovery of this concept that all of work is sacred through the priesthood of all believers. The author portrays a realistic view of work, but also seeks to elevate work and vocation to its biblical status. He also makes the doctrine of vocation relevant to life in the twenty-first century with practical applications.
- Cornelis VanDam, ed. *Work and Leisure in the Life of a Christian* (Burlington Reformed Study Centre, 2004). This short book is the published version of lectures, responses, and discussions centered around work and leisure from a Reformed perspective. Ray Pennings gives a worthwhile address on the biblical principles governing Christian vocation. Gideon Strauss also gives a helpful address on the balance between work and leisure. There are also other resources highlighted in this booklet for further reading and sharpening the Christian worldview of vocation.

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# Reading for Biblical Sexuality

## READING FOR WORLDVIEW

It goes without saying that this article addressing the worldview of biblical sexuality is but a small contribution to the cacophony of voices in our public arena. With so many voices addressing the issue today, one hardly knows what to believe. We have the #MeToo movement, the hearings regarding Judge Kavanaugh, same sex marriage and attraction, gender identity, and more. How are we as Christians to find our way among these voices? The challenge brings us back to the authority of Scripture. In Genesis, we read that God created us in His image, male and female, with a highlight of the positive nature of sexuality itself. In some sense, the debate in our culture is a defining one. The question is, “Will we as God’s image bearers acknowledge or disavow ourselves as created beings accountable to God?”

It is hardly possible to list all the various views that people hold when it comes to sexuality, but when you condense it down to the lowest common factors, there are only two: those who hold to the Word of God and those who don’t. These two views are directly opposed to one another; one holds that morality is based alone on the Word of God, and the other holds that there is no morality or that morality is determined by the consensus of people. Part of the challenge we are facing is trying to find our way—being influenced so greatly by our culture—by a firmly held personal conviction from the Word. Too often we are subtly impacted by our culture, and we begin to merge distorted views of the world with the Word of God. This can happen because the issues we must deal with seem irreconcilable or not directly addressed by the Bible, and we begin to listen to the voice of human reason over the Scriptures.

The Scriptures clearly teach that we are created in the image of God and that everything we do should display the glory of God in our lives. This would include our sexuality. However, one of these distorted beliefs that even some Christians hold is that sexuality should not be spoken about openly since they view sexuality to be dirty. This, however, is contrary to the teaching of God. Rather, our view and practice of our sexuality is a good indicator of whether or not we understand God and the gospel. Have you ever wondered why God says He hates sexual sin so much? It is not because this sin is primarily a violation of one of the commandments, but it is an assault on the very character of God as the triune God. Imagine for a moment that the living and true God would join Himself with any other god. To even consider this borders on blasphemy. This is what we need to realize when we talk about our sexuality. God created us after His

image and to reflect Him; this reflection of Him includes our sexuality.

As God in His triune being has a beauty and intimacy between the three persons, marriage should reflect this intimacy. One expression of that intimacy is the actual act of sex in the marriage bond, which involves us not only physically but also in every part of our existence. This, of course, is not to imply that sexuality is engaged in any way by or with God. Rather, this part of our created existence is simply a picture of the joy, intimacy, delight, and union that is to be found at the heart of the Trinity and also at the heart of our union with Christ if we are believers.

Marriage, therefore, is not about sex but about covenant union. It includes all the dimensions of relationship such as love and communication, which are far beyond the physical, and all these things come together when the actual physical act takes place. Marriage is the expression of the oneness of these two in union. Our culture has sexualized everything to the point that sex is no longer sacred, but animalistic and fleshly. Biblical sexuality is not first about fleshly pleasure, but about union in covenant relationship.

There is also the glory of the gospel as it relates to our sexuality. We have a created desire for reality. People are groaning inwardly for this, and they do not even realize what they are seeking after. They pursue it in the acts of their sexuality, but they will forever be disappointed. It is only the new life which is found in Christ that can answer this yearning call in our hearts and which will ultimately take place in glory. As long as people continue to reject what God says as truth and to refuse to accept who God’s Word says they are, they will never live in the joy of this glory.

Those who have found their life in Christ through the gospel are truly alive, and in all their brokenness are seeking to live out a life in Christ in complete dependence on Him and for His glory. They repent of their own inclinations and desires, even the predispositions they may have been born with, and choose by grace to live for Him. Paul highlights this in his letter to Corinth, “Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not



your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:15–20).

What glory this is! In Christ, we have been united to God Himself, we are one in spirit. What this means very practically is that, when we enjoy the bond of a biblical marriage in the marriage bed, we are witnessing this unity and the glory of this unity. God rejoices over us in that moment as two, in deepest expressions of love and unity, are joined in one spirit. Does it not become immediately apparent how empty and self-satisfying any other sexual relationship becomes? That is not glory but degradation. Let's not live that way any longer, but in all we do, live for the glory of Him who bought us body and soul. This is the wonder of the gospel that those who have even indulged in sexual sins can be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. Such were some of you, but you have been bought with a price.

Thankfully, there are a number of books that can help move us toward a more biblical worldview of our sexuality. There are many good books and articles that address current sexual issues such as pornography, homosexuality, and gender identity, but I have only listed those which treat biblical sexuality in a more general way.

- Burk, Denny. *What Is the Meaning of Sex?* (Crossway, 2013). Dr. Denny Burk, a professor at Boyce College (SBTS), is well respected when it comes to issues of sexuality and our present culture. He edits *The Journal for Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*. This book is a biblical goldmine when it comes to addressing the biblical meaning of our sexuality. As Wayne Grudem put it, "This is a readable, enjoyable, practical, encouraging, wholesome, balanced, wise, refreshing, and deeply biblical approach to the ethics of human sexuality."
- LaHaye, Tim F. and Beverly. *The Act of Marriage: The Beauty of Sexual Love* (Zondervan, 1998). Dr. LaHaye and his wife wrote this book decades ago and have updated it to reflect current medicine and sociology practices. This book should only be read by married, or very-soon-to-be-married, couples as it deals very frankly and practically with sexual issues. This book is very helpful and basic for

married couples on the issue of sex in marriage and has been enlarged to also include how to rekindle marriages in later life.

- R. Albert Mohler, Jr. *We Cannot be Silent* (Thomas Nelson, 2015). Al Mohler very clearly shows how the decline of the biblical view of sexual morality has so quickly changed in the last decades. He describes what are the underlying issues of our culture today, how we got there, how Christians are to respond, and how to build our own personal, family, and church lives on a biblical understanding.
- Reformed Church in the United States. *Promoting a Biblical Sexual Morality* (2013). The Reformed Church in the United States at their 2013 synod approved this biblical summary of teaching regarding sexual morality in light of our present culture. They address human sexuality in creation, after the fall, and after redemption. Then they critique several presuppositions of the homosexual movement biblically.
- Wheat, Ed, and Gaye Wheat. *Intended for Pleasure* (Revell, 2010). Dr. Wheat, a family physician, and his wife, for decades have been an authority on premarital and marital counseling. This book has been a classic for thirty years and is an easy-to-read book that combines biblical teaching with medical information on human sexuality in marriage. It should only be read by married, or very-soon-to-be-married, couples as it also deals very frankly and practically with sexual issues.
- Younts, John A. with David Younts. *Everyday Talk About Sex & Marriage* (Shepherd Press, 2017). This book is intended for parents of teens or soon-to-be teens written by a dad and his son. There are six conversations along with other important helpful information to guide parents in this most important discussion with their children. Younts serves as ruling elder in an Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church.

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# Reading for Hospitality

## READING FOR WORLDVIEW

Hospitality is a topic that strikes me with conviction. Oh, I have hosted many people—for meals, for weekends, for weeks even—but not always in the right frame of mind. That sounds worse than it is—as if I resented the guests. I didn't. I've almost always truly enjoyed getting to know new people and getting to know friends and acquaintances better through hosting, but the Lord knows, as does my husband, how I often have to overcome resistance to having guests over. Part of my reluctance is that I love to be by myself, but a big part is just plain selfishness.

Even as a busy mom caring for nine much loved blessings, I read a lot. It was my way to find some time alone; physically, I was present, but mentally, I was in a different world altogether. One book drew me deep into the world of Jonathan and Sarah Edwards: *Marriage To a Difficult Man—The Uncommon Union of Jonathan Edwards & Sarah Edwards*, by Elisabeth D. Dodds.

Sarah Edwards was a remarkable woman. She was a truly godly, well-educated, lovingly respectful wife and an amazing mother of eleven children—besides being a sweet, gracious hostess! That all her eleven babies survived into adulthood was extraordinary in itself. Infant mortality in the 1700s was very high. I always thought the Proverbs 31 woman could not be a real woman, until I read about Sarah. In those times, the home of a minister was often the safe place for travelers to stop and stay a while. If your husband was given the task to prepare other men for the ministry, the students did not just come to the house for classes, but often *lived* at the house as well—sometimes for years. Samuel Hopkins was one of those men who had his seminary training at the Edwards's home. Thanks to his writings we know so much about Sarah's housekeeping. George Whitefield had the pleasure to visit with the Edwards family as well, and he wrote that after witnessing the lovely Sarah, he renewed his prayers for the Lord to bless him with such a suitable wife.

Even though this book wasn't actually a book on hospitality it did teach me that I have no excuse not to be “given to hospitality” (Rom. 12:13).

So, what is the biblical worldview for hospitality? The best little book that answers this question that I know of is Rebecca VanDoodewaard's *How Should I Exercise Hospitality?* from the “Cultivating Biblical Godliness” series. This is what she writes in the first chapter:

You may know that hospitality literally translates as “love of strangers” (Heb. 13:2). It is us reaching out to people whom we do not know and opening our homes and lives to them. Fellowship is having friends and family over for visits. Everybody does that. Hospitality is having strangers over to serve them, especially strangers who cannot return the deed. Christians do that. Christians must do it because it is a reflection of God's character and the gospel.

As she writes a little further:

Salvation is divine hospitality to strangers—to us. From Genesis to Revelation and into eternity, God shows hospitality to former enemies. This gives perspective to the command, doesn't it? Hospitality is not just something we do. If we are Christians, it is an act that reflects the reality of salvation.

She then follows up with seven ways that can help us think practically about how to follow our Lord's command in this area.

This little book is indeed very practical, but in an almost clinical way. I think that is mostly due to the fact that it is written for a booklet format and needed to be short and concise. Still, it helps us understand the godly mandate of practicing hospitality.

The next book I highly recommend is based on the same biblical worldview of hospitality, but is written more from the perspective of a friend coming alongside. By sharing her experiences, the author gently encourages us to practice hospitality. The book, *Just Open the Door—How One Invitation Can Change a Generation*, is written by Jen Schmidt.

Jen is frank about her imperfections and failings as well as very helpful in sharing good ideas to make hospitality less daunting. Many of us struggle with notions that our homes have to be flawless, our meal repertoire worthy of Martha Stewart, and our children perfect angels before we can ask people over. Hospitality isn't about any of those things. It is about sharing your life, your grace-filled, God-centered life with others. How could our lives be grace-filled if they were perfect? Here is a sample of her encouraging way of addressing readers and hospitality:

Sweet friend, I know hospitality takes a bold kind of courage, but you can do this. Pursue it with the knowledge that Christ is enough. Whenever you feel, “I can’t do this,” hear Him remind you, “You’re right. You can’t. But I can.” Hospitality is where He can teach you bold new lessons about trust, humility, faith, and love.... You and I will be doing some heart business over the next few chapters.... Baby steps, sweet sister....

Besides a certain kind of boldness, hospitality thrives in the soil of vulnerability. Jen explains how being honest and open about our own struggles in the Christian walk helps our guests to open up and be receptive to the gospel.

The last book I want to recommend is a book I actually did not want to read, but ended up loving after all. It is *The Gospel Comes with a House Key—Practicing Radically Ordinary Hospitality in Our Post-Christian World*, by Rosaria Butterfield. Why was I reluctant to read it? Mainly because of the title. In the preface, Rosaria uses the phrase “radically ordinary hospitality” more than twenty times. Remember, the topic of hospitality has always been convicting to me. I have to admit that her way of practicing hospitality is radical. But ordinary? In the following chapters, she unpacks all the statements she makes in the preface, and she does so in a way that makes her book read like a biography. She promises as much:

In the pages that follow, you are invited into my home, into my childhood, into my Bible reading, into my repentance, and into my homeschool schedules, shopping lists, simple meals, and daily, messy table fellowship. You will meet my family, my parents, my children, my neighbors, my enemies, and my friends.

She does exactly that. In Chapter 2, you find her definition of hospitality:

Radically ordinary hospitality is this: using your Christian home in a daily way that seeks to make strangers neighbors, and neighbors family of God. It brings glory to God, serves others, and lives out the gospel in word and deed.

The Lord used that kind of hospitality practiced by an older minister and his wife to completely change Rosaria’s life from being a tenured English professor active in the LGBT lifestyle into a new creation in Christ and a supportive pastor’s wife. Now her life is an eye-opening testimony of how we can be ambassadors of Christ right from our home, without pretense, with hearts wide open to receive the stranger.

You understand how these books were very convicting to read. I needed that. We need that. We need to be more welcoming to the stranger, and less tight-fisted with our time and possessions. But let us not fall in the trap of works righteousness, of doing this in our own strength. Each of these women has made the point that we cannot do this by ourselves. We need the Lord’s love, strength, and grace to do this *with* Him. Your way of practicing hospitality may not be Sarah’s way, or Rebecca’s, or Jen’s, or Rosaria’s, but let it be *His* way. Remember the story of Martha and Mary. When we find ourselves agitated and stressed, let us learn from Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet. An elaborate meal is not what our world-weary guests need; it is your ear, your heart, and God’s grace flowing through you. For that, dear reader, you need to meet with Jesus often.

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# Reading for Marriage

## READING FOR WORLDVIEW

### WHAT IS A BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW OF MARRIAGE?

At the core of secular humanism and all unbiblical worldviews is the belief that marriage, like everything else, is of man, by man, and for man's glory. Therefore, in contrast, at the core of a biblical worldview of marriage is the Bible's teaching that marriage is an institution *of* God, *by* God, and *for* God's glory.

First of all, marriage is *of* God. He thought of it. He designed it. It's His institution and His alone. He decided that it should be and that it should be between one man and one woman (Gen. 2:22–23). The obvious consequence of this is that marriage is neither up for redefinition nor open for autonomous expression. God has sole proprietorship of the institution and, therefore, the absolute and incontestable right to define it (which He has, Gen. 2:24), to prescribe the duties that should find expression within it (which He has, Eph. 5:22–33), to bless it (which He does, Heb. 13:4), and to utilize it for His glory (which He does, Eph. 5:32). The happiest marriage in the world is the one which understands this truth and lives in light of it, looking to God for definition, direction, and purpose. Marriage is of God. To try to “do marriage” our own way is to cut across the grain of God's design, which will be to miss the fullness of God's blessing.

Secondly, marriage is *by* God. Every marriage ceremony involves (or at least it should) some measure of commitment and promise on the part of both husband and wife. It's this commitment that's at the core of what it means to “get married” in the eyes of men. Likewise, every marriage ceremony involves someone with the recognized authority to perform it. However, even if the couple doesn't realize or acknowledge it, it's God who actually marries them (Mal. 2:15), and it's God who does the real work behind the ceremony to unite the two together as one flesh (Gen. 2:24). It's what's done by God in that ceremony that actually constitutes the union and relationship, in the context of which all aspects of marital intimacy are not only undefiled (Heb. 13:4) but commanded (1 Cor. 7:3–4). Beginning with the marriage of our first parents (Gen. 2:22–23) and continuing, upon His blessing, with every marriage since, God is the real Matchmaker. Marriage is by God. On the one hand, this means we're accountable to God to honor Him in our marriages because the covenant itself was made before His eyes (Mal. 2:14). On the other hand, it means we're dependent upon God for His guidance and blessing.

Finally, marriage is *for* God's glory. This not only pertains to individual marriages lived out each day in this world but also to marriage as an institution. God didn't create

marriage as an afterthought when He realized that Adam was alone (Gen. 2:18). Marriage was in the eye of God from the very beginning—or rather, from before the beginning (Rev. 13:8; 19:9). God established marriage in the Garden of Eden when He created a woman for the man, in order that they might best serve Him as one flesh (Gen. 1:28) and that He might give to the world something of an illustration of Christ's relationship with His church established in their election (Eph. 1:4; 5:22–23, 31–32). In truth, marriage was established by God on earth between one man and one woman, in an ultimate sense, to bear witness to the marriage already established by God in His eternal counsels between Christ and His elect (Rev. 19:6–9; 21:9). Marriage is therefore to be lived every day—not with an eye to what pleases us, but with an eye to what pleases God; not driven by how we want it to look or what we can get out of it, but driven by how God has designed it to look and the glory that He seeks to get out of it. The blessing of living in our marriages for God's glory is that it rescues them from being destructively twisted and tweaked to serve our own ends. Marriage is for God's glory, and it's only when we live in them to that end that He graciously allows us to enjoy it as fully as two sinners in a fallen world possibly can.

### HOW CAN WE BEST CULTIVATE A RIGHT UNDERSTANDING AND EXPRESSION OF WHAT GOD DESIGNED MARRIAGE TO BE?

There are many good books that can help us live out a biblical, God-honoring marriage. I'll suggest six.

- *A Biblical Guide to Love, Sex, and Marriage* by Derek and Rosemary Thomas. This book uses Song of Solomon to trace the several stages of a relationship from love's beginnings to love's climax. Hence it offers many insightful and practical lessons, wrestling honestly with such things as temptations to premarital sex faced during dating to difficulties faced in communication in the marriage itself. Notable quote: “Strong marriages are built on secure foundations and respect for the boundaries God has set. Committing to be a biblical spouse...takes daily effort and focus. But the goal is breathtaking: to create a marriage in which our children might say, ‘The love of Jesus is like the love my father has for my mother’” (p. 102).
- *Friends and Lovers* by Joel Beeke. This quick read addresses two vital elements of marriage: the friendship which should exist and thrive between husband and wife and the sexual

intimacy that should be marked by both purity and delight. It offers a high, biblical view of marriage in a very down-to-earth manner. Notable quote: “Sex does not *make* a good marriage; it is the *fruit* of a good marriage” (p. 50).

- *This Momentary Marriage* by John Piper. This book was written by John Piper upon his fortieth anniversary to his wife Noël. This brings into it the wisdom of both years and experience. The basic premise is that our momentary marriages were designed by God for so much more than our own pleasure and companionship. They were designed to be a picture to the world of the covenant-keeping love between Christ and His people. Notable quote: “Keeping first things first makes second things better. Staying in love isn’t the first task of marriage. It is a happy overflow of covenant-keeping for Christ’s sake” (p. 74).
- *What did you expect?* by Paul David Tripp. This very helpful book is written to a marriage in trouble, a marriage in which the dreams of a pie in the sky were dashed by the reality of a mud pie in the backyard. Covering six daily commitments to a reconciliation lifestyle, Tripp seeks to help such a couple have a marriage that’s mutually satisfying while being honorable to God. Notable quote: “God is never surprised at the obstacles you encounter as you live with your husband or wife. He planned for you to be married to a flawed person and for you to live in a fallen world together. He intended marital hardship to drive you to his grace and, as it does, to cause you to grow and mature together” (p. 237).
- *Marriage and the Mystery of the Gospel* by Ray Ortlund. This little book is part of the *Short Studies in Biblical Theology* series. Hence, it seeks to offer a theology of marriage covering all of Scripture. It covers its beginnings in Genesis, its development through the Old and into the New Testament, and, finally, its consummation in eternity with the

marriage of the Lamb and His Bride. That said, Ortlund does an excellent job of showing how this theology impacts our marriages practically. I highly recommend this book. It will serve the reader very well to read it several times. Notable quote: “The Bible unfolds as a complex but coherent narrative of God gathering a bride for his Son—and he found her on the wrong side of town, too. What a story!” (p. 13).

- *Living in a Godly Marriage* by Joel Beeke and James La Belle. In truth, this book is a treasure trove on how to honor and glorify God in marriage. It leans heavily on our Puritan forebears both in depth and breadth. The result is one of the most exhaustive and comprehensive treatments of marriage available. After laying the foundation for marriage in Scripture it extensively and practically addresses the duties of marriage. Notable quote: “While so many people today decry marriage and consider it to be the sepulcher of pleasure, a yoke of bondage, or, at best, a necessary evil, we must remember that God declared marriage to be ‘very good’ (Gen. 1:31) and places an honor upon it which no human cynicism can remove and no broken marriage can disprove (Heb. 13:4)” (p. 5).

Surrounded as we are by a culture that believes marriage is just another arena for my self-expression, it’s not only easy to lose sight of the truth, but it’s also very easy to be so swept away and caught up in the flood of unbelieving and atheistic worldviews that we’re subtly desensitized to the errors and compromised in our own thinking. The remedy and safeguard for this is to be well informed in regard to the biblical worldview of marriage and to cultivate, by God’s grace, a right expression in our own marriages of the gospel of love it was designed to illustrate.

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# Reading for Parenting

## READING FOR WORLDVIEW

As we consider the overall theme of this *Banner* issue, reading for worldview, we recognize that reading alone does not make a worldview happen. One's worldview, from a Christian perspective, involves the work of God the Holy Spirit taking what we read and what we observe and weaving it into the way we think and the way we process and interpret the world around us and what is inside of us. Having said that, we do readily recognize that worldviews can be and frequently are shaped by what we read. For a Christian, this is especially true of how much or little, how carefully or cursorily, how prayerfully or mechanically one reads the Word of God.

This particular article centers on the theme, reading for parenting. Particularly, we want to first ask what a biblical worldview for parenting looks like and, secondly, what particular resources might prove helpful in pursuit of such a worldview.

With respect to a biblical worldview for parenting, we begin with the basic biblical premise that our children are conceived and born in sin. This itself has enormous ramifications. In most Western nations, people are fond of saying that we are innocent until proven guilty. That may be true in matters of criminality, but it is certainly not so with regard to how we ought to view our children as they are by nature. God Himself, who alone knows the hearts of all men (2 Chron. 6:30), has already rendered a verdict about all mankind by nature, including our children. There are four verses of Scripture that categorically state that, "There is none that doeth good," two of them adding, "no not one."<sup>1</sup> Lest we suppose this applies only to those who have reached the age of accountability, Scripture supplies two additional verses assuring us that this verdict includes our children.<sup>2</sup> Our problem as parents is that we don't always readily see evidences of this innate wickedness openly developed in our younger children's behavior and attitude. But upon careful inspection, one *can* observe the first signs in the demanding infant and soon-to-be-defiant toddler. Such indices of evil cross all cultural and socio-economic categories so that the maxim of Prov. 29:15 proves invariably true: "a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame." Of course, outward behavior is not the sole indicator of the state of the natural heart. We tend to judge by outward appearances, but God ponders the heart (1 Sam. 16:7; Prov. 24:12). So, the first layer in a biblical worldview of parenting has to be the realization that our children, as they are conceived and born, are in grave danger and need a radical remedy.

We would be woefully naïve if we did not realize that we as parents are subject to the same fatal malady and that we are in need of the same miraculous remedy. We need a change of heart just as much as our children do. When they are too young

to cry to God for grace, we ought to be crying out for them and for ourselves if we have not yet experienced the life-changing mercy of God in Christ.

One more cautionary note on this aspect of parenting is needful; we must not confuse maturity with godliness. Children can mature rapidly but lack grace. Others might be truly wrought upon by God's Spirit but somewhat lacking in maturity. A responsible graceless child might look, in many respects, similar to an immature gracious child. We need discernment from God to distinguish the difference. Godliness, even in a child, will be evidenced by an interest in spiritual things, a tender conscience, frequent instances of conviction of sin, and a desire for the company of the godly. Godliness does not necessarily translate into a longer-than-normal attention span, a lack of all childish or immature behavior, or disappearance of all bouts of ill temper or even rebellion. We should, however, judge these matters over time and not by momentary episodes.

The form for the administration of baptism, used for centuries in Reformed churches, begins with the stark reality of our children's need for regeneration, the new birth,<sup>3</sup> but it continues by reciting, with encouraging optimism, the great things the Lord promises to His church and their seed. Let's consider that as we continue building our "parenting worldview."

Throughout the history of the church, both in the Old and New Testament times, God has distinguished His people and their children from others. The operative word describing this unique relationship is "covenant." Hence, God established a covenant relationship with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and the entire nation of Israel as the Old Testament church and with the New Testament Christian church.<sup>4</sup> This special relationship does not *ensure* that children raised in Christian homes and churches will all be saved, but there are plenty of indications in Scripture to encourage us that the Lord *most often* works with His Spirit among His people and their seed.<sup>5</sup> What does this mean for parenting, particularly *Christian* parenting?

We need to be honest with our children about their dreadful condition by nature and their great need of God's saving grace in their lives. Outward conformity to certain "Christian" standards is insufficient. But we also ought to unashamedly and unhesitatingly point them to *their* God, the *living* God, our *gracious* God, who is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy" (Ps. 103:8) and who is "good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon" Him (Ps. 86:5). Our children certainly ought to grow up much better acquainted with the history of the fall and the gospel of Jesus Christ than any fanciful nursery rhyme or fictitious children's classic. This

is why one of the solemn promises exacted of parents baptizing their children is, “Whether you promise and intend to see these children, when come to the years of discretion...instructed and brought up in the aforesaid doctrine, or help or cause them to be instructed therein, to the utmost of your power?”<sup>6</sup> We cannot save our children, nor ought we to assume their salvation without good evidences of God’s gracious influences in their lives, but we must do our utmost, with God’s help, to not only teach them but also exemplify before them their need and ours, and God’s salvation, in which we also ought to trust.

A Christian worldview of parenting, however, would be incomplete without a proper emphasis on holiness in our younger and older children’s lives. It is significant that God dedicates considerably more instruction in Scripture to how He would have His people live than He does to regeneration, repentance, faith, and salvation combined. Our parenting worldview ought to reflect this proportionality. We are not speaking here of legalism or sub-cultural codes of conduct but instead, of those precepts and principles found throughout God’s Word that ought to be reinforced regularly in our children’s thinking, of course, in age-appropriate ways (Deut. 6:7; 11:19). Consider only the many “my son” passages in Proverbs to get a sense of how regular and emphatic our instruction in righteousness ought to be. We ought to afford no opportunity to our children to get the impression that, depending on whether or not they are regenerate, these demands of holiness may or may not be obligatory. God certainly never does that in Scripture with His people and so may not we with our children.

We as parents need to embrace the full reality that our children are really not ours. As Christians, we confess that they belong to the Lord. That means that our role is that of steward, not owner. Even when Israel had reached the depths of depravity and idolatry, to the point where they literally sacrificed the lives of their little ones on the altars of idols, God accused them of killing His children, not theirs (Ezek. 16:21). That means that we have no option but to rear our children for the Lord, according to His Word and for His purposes. So, instead of asking them, “What would you like to be when you grow up?,” we should teach them to ask the Lord the question of the newly converted Saul of Tarsus, “What wilt thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:6). Our children’s abilities, however hard they labored to hone them, are gifts from God (1 Cor. 4:7). Our time is His. Our strength is from Him. So, our lives ought to reflect these realities, and our parenting emphasize them.

Finally, we have been considering in so many ways our dependence on the Lord. Any parenting worldview would be incomplete without a strong emphasis on prayer. Praying for our children and with our children is a non-negotiable. Children are not looking for eloquence; they crave authenticity. This stands to reason and stands with Scripture. Ignorance may have slain its thousands, but hypocrisy slays its ten thousands. There is no substitute for earnest and sincere prayer in private, as couples, and in the family setting. Prayer without practice will ring

hollow. We pray because we need God. We also pray because our children need to know they need God and live accordingly.

As to parenting resources that assist us in developing a proper Christian parenting worldview, we live in a most opportune time. Helpful books, blogs, podcasts, and other media have proliferated in recent years. In addition, some of the best resources from our Reformed Christian heritage have also become available through reprints and by others means. Taken as a whole, we can divide these resources into two broad categories—those that take a more modern behavior-modification approach and those that aim for the heart through the power of God’s grace and the gospel. The former, as you can imagine, we would not recommend. They read like food recipes with predictable results. They might be helpful in training animals to obey, but they often do not come close to reaching the corrupt core we considered at the beginning of this article. So, without getting into specific titles, we would caution against some of the parenting guidance given by Dr. James Dobson and by Michael and Debi Pearl. This is not intended to reflect on the often-helpful organization Dr. Dobson founded, Focus on the Family. But as to his approach to parenting and that of the Pearls, if you have found benefit from them, thank God, but realize that you can do much better. Without mentioning more resources by name, be on the lookout for any parenting advice that focuses only on behavior but does not address the need for the Holy Spirit’s work or our engaging our children at the heart level.

Among recommended resources, consider the classic for parenting young children, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart* by Tedd Tripp, and for older children, *Instructing a Child’s Heart* by the same author, or *Age of Opportunity* by Tedd’s brother Paul. Consider also *Give Them Grace* by Fitzpatrick and Thomson, *Disciplines of a Godly Young Man* by Hughes, *The Effective Father* by MacDonald, or the helpful categorization of Proverbs found in *Proverbs for Parenting*. This list is not to overlook the many classics that have been reprinted or republished in modern English. Recent reprints include *Building a Godly Home* and *Of Domestic Duties* by Gouge, as well as a massive work entitled *A Theology of the Family*, edited by Pollard and Brown. Shorter but helpful classics include Ryle’s *Duties of Parents* and John Angell James’s *Helps to Domestic Happiness*. So many more titles could be mentioned but suffice it to say that any work of value will focus on the need for the Holy Spirit’s work, the need for saving grace, and will address the heart of our children, younger or older, not just their behavior.

1. Pss. 14:1, 3; 53:3; Rom. 3:12.

2. Pss. 51:5; 58:3.

3. *The Psalter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 126–28. This form, originally composed by Petrus Dathenus in the 1500s, is a derivation of that which was used by Calvin in Geneva.

4. With Adam by implication (Cf. Gen. 2:16, 17 with 3:22), Gen. 6:18; 17:7, 21; Ex. 2:24; 34:27; Luke 1:72; Acts 3:25; Gal. 3:17; Heb. 12:24.

5. Consider, for example, Acts 2:39; 3:25, and 1 Cor. 7:14.

6. *The Psalter*, p. 127.

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# Reading for Leadership

## READING FOR WORLDVIEW

“But it shall not be so among you.” So Jesus rebuked James and John’s request for personal greatness in His kingdom (Matt. 20:20–28; Mark 10:35–45). Still today, many desire leadership for power to do what they want—“to be as gods” (Gen. 3:5). Especially now, amid the burgeoning information on leadership, we need to hear Christ’s words regarding leadership in His kingdom.

Please don’t disengage with the expression, “I’m not a leader.” Nearly all of us have been or will be called to lead—maybe a business, a church, a classroom, or a two-year-old child. How then should we learn about leadership?

### LEADERSHIP AND PAGAN WORLDVIEWS

Because the Lord gave us His Word, we know we are to learn by reading. Paul knew the value of reading secular works (Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12). We too have much to learn from today’s works on leadership.

Yet, Christ teaches us to not lead as the Gentiles (Mark 10:42). We are to read secular leadership works with discernment. To do so, we must be familiar with the idols of our time. These anti-biblical worldviews include secularism, materialism, relativism, pragmatism, and feminism. They are not ivory tower concepts but everyday idols influencing today’s leaders.

We must recognize how authors’ worldviews often assume leadership is a venue for man to actualize and serve himself. While all literature is not Christian literature, all literature has a theology. Our question must always be: Is its theology biblical? The following books equip us to sort the wheat from the chaff:

- *All God’s Children and Blue Suede Shoes: Christians & Popular Culture* by Kenneth A. Myers
- “Knowing the Enemy,” Part 2.1 of *With a Shepherd’s Heart: Reclaiming the Pastoral Office of Elder* by John R. Sittema.

### TOWARD A BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW FOR LEADERSHIP

Thankfully, Jesus tells us we are to lead as servants, following His example (Mark 10:43–45). As leaders entrusted with the safety, minds, careers, and/or souls of others, we must be servants of those we are called to lead. Since we will be held accountable for our leadership (Heb. 13:17; James 3:1), it is essential to understand at least four key aspects of servant leadership: character, conviction, love, and stewardship. Each aspect helps us lead for God’s glory alone (1 Peter 4:10–11).

#### *Servant Leadership and Character*

Leadership is “*character* in action, and leadership and character development are one” (Hunter, *The World’s Most Powerful*

*Leadership Principle*, p. 49). Character is our commitment to doing what is right regardless of the personal costs, as Jesus did (Ps. 15; Matt. 20:28; Matt. 26:39, 42).

So important is character development for leaders, that studying God’s law is Scripture’s basis for instructing Israel’s kings (Deut. 17:18–20) and for giving leaders wisdom and encouragement to lead courageously (Josh. 1:7–8). God’s guidance accompanies such leadership (Josh. 1:9), and the godly celebrate it (2 Kings 23:25; 2 Chron. 34:2).

#### *Servant Leadership and Conviction*

Christian leadership is inseparable from passionately held beliefs founded on the nonnegotiable truths of Scripture. For example, our view of man, this world, and Christ’s coming kingdom shape how we lead and what direction we set. Such convictions drive a leader’s decisions and positions in the face of adversity and opposition. So Martin Luther, threatened with death at the Diet of Worms, stood on his conviction of biblical authority: “Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me.” Luther also followed his Master’s conviction in temptation: “It is written” (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10).

#### *Servant Leadership and Love*

Israel’s kings were to be shepherds (1 Kings 22:17) who led and cared for their people in love (Pss. 23:1; 78:70–71). Jesus fulfilled the Davidic covenant as the shepherd-king in David’s line (Ezek. 34:23–24) by laying down His life for the sheep (John 10:11, 14) and by appointing leaders to function as under-shepherds. Given this mandate, how are we to selflessly love those we lead?

First, leaders must recognize *what* love is. The fruit of love is warm, passionate feelings. But that is not what love is. Love is cheerfully doing our scriptural duty to others by being attentive to their legitimate needs, interests, and welfare regardless of how we feel or how they respond. When we do so, feelings of love often follow.

Second, leaders strive to *live* the qualities of love beautifully represented in 1 Corinthians 13:4–8. Read your favorite commentaries on this passage to better understand love’s qualities of patience, kindness, not envious (contentment), not arrogant or bragging (humility), decorum (respect), selflessness, slow to anger, forgiveness, finding good in others, covering bad in others, and commitment.

#### *Servant Leadership and Stewardship*

All people are to steward their resources—actually God’s resources—for the LORD, whether it be money, land, or time (Gen. 1:26–30). Leaders are stewards of multiple resources



because they direct others in using their own resources. Read the story of Joseph being an example of this (Gen. 39:1–41:57). Jesus teaches the same principle in the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14–30). As leaders, we are entrusted with people who bear the image of God and are His creatures, not ours.

These aspects of biblical leadership give context for learning the many other principles and skills of leadership. They provide a basis for leadership that is pleasing to the Lord as king David taught us in his last words in 2 Samuel 23:3–4.

## LEADERSHIP AND READING

Al Mohler states, “Leaders are readers.” To read and lead well, we must learn to read with discernment. As with non-Christian books, we must critically consider how Christian leadership works.

Here are a few cautionary notes. First, leadership authors sometimes externalize morality, forgetting Christ’s teaching on the Sermon on the Mount. Second, some Christian authors have an overly optimistic view of man, considering man basically good and self-actualizing. Third, Christian authors can overemphasize Scripture’s teachings on leadership. For example, so much can be made of Christ’s servant leadership in washing His disciples’ feet that we forget the passage’s teaching about cleansing from sin after conversion (John 13:1–17).

That said, here is some suggested secular and Christian literature for leadership development:

*News*—“Understanding of the times, to know what [we] ought to do” (1 Chron. 12:32). Al Mohler advises staying abreast of current events by reading the *Wall Street Journal* (conservative), *New York Times* (liberal), *USA Today* (quick summary articles), and your local newspaper. Another option is *World Magazine* which provides helpful, Christian, bi-monthly analysis of the news.

### Helpful Literature on Leadership.<sup>1</sup>

- *The Conviction to Lead: 25 Principles for Leadership That Matters* by Al Mohler. The title speaks for itself. Start with this solid Christian author.
- *The World’s Most Powerful Leadership Principle: How to Become a Servant Leader* by James C. Hunter. This book is an excellent primer on servant leadership.
- *The Heart of a Servant Leader: Letters from Jack Miller* by C. John Miller. The former Westminster Theological Seminary professor challenges leaders to find their primary motivation in God’s glory alone. He counsels on ministry issues, overcoming sin, spiritual warfare, physical suffering, and learning to forgive.
- *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You* by John C. Maxwell. An easy to read introduction by an evangelical who is usually successful in connecting leadership principles with biblical truths. Dr. Maxwell’s views on church growth will not resonate with the Reformed believer.
- *The Leadership Bible: Contemporary Leadership Principles from*

*God’s Word*, Dr. Sid Buzzell, ed. The editors provide a helpful 52 week, daily devotional on scriptural leadership principles in three areas: personal development, skills, and relationships. Note: quoted theologians range from Rick Warren to Richard Baxter.

- *The Leadership Pipeline: How to Build the Leadership Powered Company* by Ram Charan, Steve Drotter, and Jim Noel. The authors help leaders steward their skills, time application, and work values through progressive leadership transitions from “individual contributor” all the way to “enterprise manager.”
- *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don’t* by Jim Collins. The “Level 5 Leadership” chapter addresses humility in leadership. It alone is worth the price of the book.
- *The Leadership Challenge, 3rd ed.* by James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner. A secular work that helpfully describes ten commitments of leadership and emphasizes actions and relationships.
- *Business Leadership: A Jossey-Bass Reader*. Authors share on a wide range of leadership subjects Christian leaders should be aware of.
- *Harvard Business Review’s* blog at [www.hbr.org](http://www.hbr.org) provides current, daily thought on leadership.
- *The Bible*. Abraham Hellenbroek reminds us: “Keep in mind as you read other books, however, that we should not read many books, but should read *the* Book many times.” This is also true for leadership reading. Consider the following approaches:
  1. *Books on Godly Character*. Ask the Holy Spirit to enable you to grow in biblical character by blessing the study of Leviticus, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Romans 12–16.
  2. *Biblical Leadership Themes*. Dr. Buzzell’s work (referenced above) is a helpful guide.
  3. *Historical Bible Books*. Many are full of leadership lessons.

As you read, ask the Lord to teach you to lead as a servant. John learned Jesus’s lesson in leadership. Before the powerful leaders of his day, John, now unconcerned about himself, risks his life to boldly defend preaching his LORD’s gospel: “For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). By grace, we too can learn to become servant leaders in His kingdom.

1. The referenced authors have written other helpful books or maintain blogs on leadership. Search their works on the Internet along with those of the following authors: Warren Bennis, Max De Pree, Robert K. Greenleaf, Patrick Lencioni, and Michael Hyatt.

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# Reading for Retirement

## READING FOR WORLDVIEW

Between 1891 and 1900, the average life expectancy of a female at birth was 52. If you made it to age 10, your life expectancy increased to 59 years. If you managed to make it to your 40th birthday, your chances of seeing your golden years rose a whopping 50%. Male life expectancy was only a point or two lower at each milestone (a difference of 2.5 to 3.5 years). Still, all things considered, the life expectancy around the turn of the twentieth century was 55 for women and 47 for men. Not much time to retire. The bottom line was that retirement was an alien concept. If you were alive, you worked.

Things changed somewhere around the mid-1920s. People started living longer—not by a large margin, but long enough to impact the marginal utility of the workforce. In Europe, the idea of mandatory retirement was invented by a German socialist, Otto von Bismark (*The Iron Chancellor*), along with the idea of social security. From Europe, it spread to North America and beyond. In 1950, the age of retirement roughly corresponded to the age of life expectancy. A large percentage of retirees died a few years after they left the workforce (between 60–65 years young).

Today, however, our practice lags well behind the arc of reality. We are working with a twentieth-century model in a day where, in the developed world, a large majority routinely lives into their eighties and beyond. What should we do with all that extra time? Sit on the beach? Take up a hobby? Learn a new language? Work on a lower golf handicap? Does the Word of God have anything at all to say about retirement or are we free to float like a leaf in the autumn breeze?

### RETIREMENT THEOLOGY

Is there a theology of retirement? Sort of. If we ask the Scriptures to speak directly to the subject, all we can really point to is Numbers 8:23–25, where the Levites were to retire when they turned fifty. That’s it! The “threescore and ten” principle of Psalm 90 was experimentally understood all too well for most in biblical times. However, that is not to say that the Bible has nothing more to add on the subject. We do no injustice to the subject if we look at retirement as an extrapolation of personal time and if we look at the godly use of time in general, albeit from a senior’s perspective.

The principle then holds true for the venerable as well as the young; God has given us only a certain, fixed amount of days on earth, so we had better incline our hearts unto wisdom (Ps. 90:12). The child of God is not an island. We are many members of one body, and as such, we need each other. There is a pool of untapped wisdom and experience in those who are retired. In a culture that does not have the same

respect or honor for our elders as previous generations, we are the more impoverished for it. The hoary-headed among us are not rightly cherished in the life of our society or, sadly, in the body of Christ. What these dear souls may lack in stamina and vigor, they more than compensate for in wisdom and experience. What a missed opportunity for those of us who are in the spring or summer of our lives when we fail to notice the deeply creased wisdom of those in the autumn or winter of their lives. For this, we need to rethink retirement and redeem the time.

### RETIRING RETIREMENT?

In his book *Finishing Our Course with Joy: Guidance from God for Engaging with Our Aging*, J. I. Packer asks an important question: “How should we view the onset of old age and retirement?” In asking this question, Packer, a retiree himself, challenges the status quo. In effect, he undercuts the self-centered subject that Western retirement has become and opens up the idea of ending life on a fruitful, godly note. Retirement should not be riding off into the sunset, but meaningfully contributing to our local church, family, and neighborhood. The book is a short work but really comes to grips with the trials of our waning years.

When we look at *post-career life*, what do we see? Is it 25 years of “me time” or is it a mixture of kingdom usefulness and kingdom rest? “Retiring Retirement” is a wonderful banner to display when we realize that we are not defined by what we did as an occupation but by our life in Christ. This is hard to do in our world. However, when the believer understands that, in the eyes of God, you were not a carpenter, a teacher, a salesman, or an accountant, but a person who used these things as a vehicle through life, then retirement is not retirement at all. It is a resignation from one calling to pursue another. It is understanding that we are to be as useful in a new sphere as we were in our old. Let us not be defined by the world, but by the Word. Find something you love to do in your retirement that is useful to the kingdom of God. Give your time, not only your treasure, to the life of the church as much as you are able. Church leaders should be on the lookout for these retirees and fit their skills to the life of the congregation. Volunteer in missions, evangelism, music, Vacation Bible School, and even youth and young adult societies. Volunteer in a worthwhile Christian organization or become a board member for a local nonprofit like a Bible Society of Pregnancy Crisis Center. Spend outrageous amounts of time pouring wisdom into your children and lavishing love

on grandchildren. With every opportunity, speak in each of these new spheres of the preciousness of Christ to your soul.

### PERSONAL SPIRITUAL RETIREMENT

Retirement, if you have been blessed with it, is a remarkable thing. Not all can retire, so we should take advantage of this new benefit. Beneath all the activity that we will engage in, there is nothing as important as remembering that the final leg of the race has begun. To become as busy in retirement as we were in the workforce would be to squander a great privilege and defeat the purpose. Now, more than any other time in life, there ought to be a laser-like focus on *spiritual retirement*. More than ever we need to remember that our lives are as a tale that has been told. Psalm 246 comes to mind,

O teach Thou us to count our days  
And set our hearts on wisdom's ways;  
Turn, Lord, to us in our distress,  
In pity now Thy servants bless;  
Let mercy's dawn dispel our night,  
And all our day with joy be bright,  
And all our day with joy be bright.

There are some remarkable devotional books that can be a tremendous help in feeding the aged heart. Books that remind us that we are creatures of eternity, not only creatures of time. Take up and read! While some are tremendously helped devotionally by sinking their teeth into a meaty work of theology or an old commentary, most will find they need softer food. The mind does not absorb like it used to. That's okay. Thankfully, there are some wonderful aids to spiritual retirement for us all.

First and foremost, is the Word of God. Never let one text at the top of a daily devotional be all of your daily bread. Read the Word, page by page. Take M'Cheyne's *Daily Bible Reading Plan* and forget the one or two-year timeline; just read. Or pick up a copy of *The Spurgeon Devotional Bible*, an all-but-forgotten work which has some wonderful short nuggets of insight peppered in the text. Then, meditate on your reading. Pray the Holy Spirit will open your heart and mind to

truths you have not yet seen before or to see them in a deeper way. Spend time in prayerful meditation with an open Bible.

If you read a daily devotional, cut out the "stuff-and-fluff" that most (not all!) modern devotionals offer. Pick up William Jay's two-volume *Morning and Evening Exercises*, Ryle's *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (4 vol.), *Voices From The Past Volume 1 & 2*, Spurgeon's *Morning and Evening, Daily Prayer and Praise* by Henry Law, *Jewels From John Newton*, *Seasons of the Heart*, or *Grace In Winter*, which is Rutherford in verse. Ask your pastor or a mother or father in the church what speaks most to their hearts. Good recommendations will come from many places. No devotional work is more precious to many than *The Valley of Vision*, a book of daily Puritan prayers that plumbs the depths and scales the heights of souls who knew how mortal they were and how much they need Christ's guidance, forgiveness, and strength.

For the best work for the armchair or lake, read all of Wilhelmus à Brakel's *The Christian's Reasonable Service*. No author, dead or living, can compare with the theological and devotional depth of this tenderhearted pastor. If you can't muster the strength to read the doctrinal portions, skip to his uses, questions, and applications at the end of each chapter. In doing this, we will soon become aware why our Dutch forebears read him around family hearths for so many generations. Pick up biographies, too many to list, but remember *Grace Abounding* by Bunyan, *Life of John Newton* by Elizabeth Prentiss, *More Love to Thee*, *Robert Murray M'Cheyne* by Andrew Bonar, Mary Winslow's *Life in Jesus*, Frances Ridley Havergal's *Golden Thoughts*, or any number of the Puritan Paperbacks/Puritan Treasures for Today.

### CONCLUSION

All this to say those in retirement have a unique opportunity to prepare for eternity which those in the world of employment do not. Use your rest from worldly occupations to be engaged in service to your church, family, and community. Above all, prepare for your eternal resting place, and may the bright glories of heaven receive you.

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# Preparing and Reading for Death

## READING FOR WORLDVIEW

Dying, death, and judgment are the great levelers of the human race, to which we are all appointed: “it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). Dying and death are profound, hostile, even terrifying. We all must experience an unspeakable, radical separation of our soul and body in which our soul will enter a realm fitting to its spiritual state at the moment of its final separation—that is, either heaven or hell.

We do not know exactly how or when we will die and enter into judgment with God, but we do know that, of all the things we think and plan about in our futures, these are “the inevitables.” No wonder the Puritans used to call death, judgment, heaven, and hell, “the four last things.”<sup>1</sup>

Intellectually we know that dying, death, judgment, and eternity are real and certain, but emotionally and spiritually we are often not able to face it. We postpone making our wills and preparing for our funerals. We find it challenging to stand beside a casket for any length of time to let the reality of death sink deep into us. Even our language betrays us: we speak of passing away or expiring rather than death. We speak of memorial parks rather than graveyards. Have you ever tried to meditate for even ten minutes on the fact that you are dying and on your inevitable death and afterlife? By nature that is nearly impossible to do. Even as Christians, it can be difficult. We can spend scores of hours planning a two-week vacation on another continent, but can scarcely spend one hour planning for our never-ending eternity.

But meditating on dying and death, and reading about it, is actually profitable, even necessary, for us. We must be personally prepared to die—spiritually, ethically, and physically—so that our death will be “gain” (Phil. 1:21). To that end, Martin Luther (1483–1546) said, “Every man must do two things alone; he must do his own believing, and his own dying.”<sup>2</sup>

Death comes for all of us—sooner than we think. It does not ask if we are useful members of society, loving spouses and parents, obedient children, or pillars in God’s church, imbued with large doses of godly piety. Death takes no bribes; it knows no denials. The appointment book is in God’s hand. Your name and ours and the time and circumstances of our dying and death are all known to God (Job 14:5). He does not consult us about when we would like this appointment. Our appointment with death is unilateral, not bilateral. We cannot wish this appointment away. We cannot postpone it like we can a doctor’s visit. Scheduling conflicts do not figure in God’s record book. In fact, we never know when it will happen.

God has a right to be in charge of your appointment with death for two simple reasons: first, because He is God; and

second, because we are sinners who deserve to die. God has a right to send death our way at any moment, like a lightning bolt striking you or a thief coming to your home at night (1 Thess. 5:2). When we are young we may die; when we are old we must die. Whatever our situation at present may be, we need, therefore, to be always ready to die.

All of this begs the ancient question: “If a man die, shall he live again?” (Job 14:14). The answer to Job’s question is of great importance. The evidence of the Bible is that death is not the end of existence. Let’s consider for a moment, first, what death is; second, the believer’s hope in death; third, how to prepare to die; fourth, how death can be our gain; and finally, in addition to the Bible, what are some good reading resources to help us prepare for death?<sup>3</sup>

### DEATH: PHYSICAL, SPIRITUAL, AND ETERNAL

Death is ultimately undefinable. The reality of felt separation that it conveys when we lose our loved ones goes far beyond words. The word “separation,” therefore, must lie at the heart of our feeble attempts to define death. Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body. But that is not all there is to death; the Bible also speaks of two kinds of death that are far worse: spiritual death and eternal death.

Spiritual death is the separation of the soul from God’s favor. That happened instantaneously to Adam in Paradise when he fell into sin. That is how we are born by nature as fallen sons and daughters of sin, separated from God in our soul though receiving benefits from God for our bodies. David put it this way: “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Ps. 51:5). And Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). That is why Jesus said of everyone who is born into this world: “Ye must be born again” (John 3:7).

Eternal death is the separation of a person’s soul and body from God forever in hell. Hell is a final and irreversible state (Luke 16:25–26) of punishment (Matt. 25:46), torment (Mark 9:44), destruction (2 Thess. 1:9), imprisonment (Jude 6), as well as darkness, grief, and pain (Matt. 8:12). In eternal death, those justly condemned to hell do not even experience the common mercies of God that the unbeliever experiences in this life; the wrath of God is poured out without mixture upon the damned forever (Rev. 14:10–11). In hell, the damned are ever dying but never fully physically dead even as they remain under spiritual and eternal death—without intermission, without second chance, without annihilation, and without end (Isa. 33:14; Matt. 25:41; Jude 8). Truly, “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23)—physical death, spiritual death, eternal death.

## THE BELIEVER'S HOPE IN DEATH

Thank God that Romans 6:23 goes on to say, “but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Astonishingly, Jesus Christ bore the essence of this threefold death on Calvary’s cross as a substitute for sinners such as we are: on the cross, He underwent physical death when he “bowed his head, and gave up the ghost” (John 19:30); He bore the essence of spiritual death when He cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46); and He bore the essence of eternal death when “He descended into hell” (Apostles’ Creed, art. 4) “by His inexpressible anguish, pains, terrors, and hellish agonies, in which He was plunged during all His sufferings, but especially on the cross, [by which He] has delivered me from the anguish and torments of hell” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 44).

Behold, the mystery of the gospel is our hope—our only and more-than-sufficient hope! The sinless Son of God bore “the wages of sin” so that you, dear believer, could be set free when you, by grace, repent before Him and believe in Him alone for salvation. He bore your sin through suffering the essence of this dreadful threefold death so that you could live forever for the sake of Christ’s righteousness. Paul captures this wondrous gospel in a nutshell in 2 Corinthians 5:21: “For he [God the Father] hath made him [Jesus Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” Reflecting on this, the Puritan Elisha Coles (c. 1608–1688) wrote, “Sin could not die, unless Christ died; Christ could not die, without being made sin; nor could he die, but sin must die with him.”<sup>4</sup>

Through this substitutionary obedience of Christ, you not only can be saved, but you can have eternal life: “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). In Christ you can find deliverance from spiritual and eternal death, and even your physical death will serve ultimately only as a passageway into eternal life. The prolific Puritan Thomas Watson (c. 1620–1686) wrote, “Death breaks the union between the body and the soul but perfects the union between Christ and the soul.”<sup>5</sup> In Christ you will receive a life of joy, abundance, peace, purpose, and fulfilment. By bearing “the wages of sin” for you, He turns death into life—forever!

## PREPARING TO DIE

How can we as true Christians wisely prepare ourselves for death so that we actually look forward to it while living in the midst of a world that is rampant with materialism and stuff?

### *Being Prepared Spiritually*

Are you ready to die? Or, even more importantly: are you truly spiritually alive? If you are living in Christ, you are ready to die; though there are practical things that ought to be done, your house is set essentially in order. If you are not living in Christ, you are not ready to die.

Dear friend, you must be ready; you must be born again. There is no other way to enter the kingdom of God than faith in Christ alone for salvation. The Puritans used to say that the way

to get ready to die is to practice dying while you are still physically alive—dying to yourself, dying to everything that would draw you away from Jesus Christ. You are not ready to die if you are still clinging to the empty toys and trinkets of this world. Perhaps you find your life in your friendships, your work, your possessions, your wealth, or your legalism; maybe, God forbid, some of you even live for sin. Whatever you live for, if Christ is not supreme, you are living for idols because you are putting those things above Him. You are not ready to die. In fact, you are not really living—but you could die at any moment! You are in an incredibly precarious and dangerous position. Meditate on the honest words of Robert Murray M’Cheyne, “If you die wrong the first time you cannot come back to die better a second time.”<sup>6</sup>

Spurgeon minces no words: “He who does not prepare for death is more than an ordinary fool. He is a madman.”<sup>7</sup> Seek grace to live, therefore, as one prepared to die temporally, and to die as one prepared to live eternally.

The way to live is to die daily to yourself, to your own righteousness, and to this world; live daily to Christ, and out of His righteousness. Do not rest until you can say, “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21).

### *Being Prepared Practically*

Practically, it is important to communicate our desires for medical care to an appointed legal representative in case we become incapacitated. We do not want to burden others with futile care; neither do we want to cause our own murder! Written or verbal medical directives communicated to a legal representative will help to prevent such predicaments. Every Christian should “put his house in order” practically by making a “will and testament” that provides for the disposition of our temporal goods or estate after death and does so in a manner that glorifies God.

It is wise to consult a lawyer to insure that your will meets the requirements of the law. Financial planners can help you with advice on how to conserve the value of your estate, avoid unnecessary duties or taxes, and provide for the payment of your debts, since we are required to “owe no man anything” (Rom. 13:8). Finally, with the help of your pastor, make plans for your funeral and burial. In practical terms, it makes good financial sense to pre-pay for such things as embalming, coffins, vaults, and cemetery lots, since that will make the costs much lower. A written record of such plans makes it much easier for those who must put them into effect. Best of all, you can have a hand in making your funeral a special occasion for preaching the gospel to others, especially to those you love most in this life. The Christian’s funeral and coffin are a persuasive pulpit. The funeral is an excellent opportunity for a powerful exhortation to unbelieving family members and friends to flee to Christ for salvation, even as it provides comfort for grieving believers to rest in Christ’s promises.

## TO DIE IS GAIN

Paul declared that since Christ was life to him, death would be *gain* (Phil. 1:21). How is that possible? Every true Christian gains

immediately by death (1) perfect freedom from all inclinations to sin and from all actual sins (Eph. 5:27; Rev. 14:5; (2) perfect freedom from all temptations to sin (Eph. 6:16; 1 Cor. 10:2; 2 Cor. 13:1); (3) perfect freedom from all the sorrows and miseries of this life (Job 14:14:1ff.; Prov. 23:5; Rev. 21:4); (4) perfect freedom from the hindrances of one's body (2 Cor. 15:43, 44, 49; Phil. 3:21); and (5) perfect freedom from all spiritual ignorance, being made perfect in the knowledge of God (Job 37:19; 1 Cor. 13:8–12). But there is more: the true Christian gains a perfect vision of God with all the joy and blessedness that vision gives (Matt. 5:8; John 17:24; 1 John 3:2). He gains access to the most blessed and delightful fellowship possible (Heb. 12:22, 23) and gains inconceivable joy (Ps. 16:11; Rev. 19:1). And all of these advantages will be eternal and everlasting (1 Pet. 1:3, 5).

In short, death will be gain because of what we leave behind and because of what we receive. Dear believer, imagine leaving behind your body of sin and death. Imagine no more having to confess, “Evil is present with me” (Rom. 7:21). No more sin—what a glorious thought! And then, no more buffeting Satan, no more enticing world—no more problems with the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, or the pride of life. No more unanswered prayers; no more vexing riddles. No more old nature to contend with! No more tears, no more pain, no more night, no more death, no more curse!

But death is also gain because of what I receive. Dying brings us into communion with Christ's sufferings. Dying gives us a unique experience of Christ's all-sufficient grace. Dying transforms us into Christ's image. Dying is our last and perhaps greatest opportunity to witness for Christ's glory. Dying brings us into Christ's presence—into intimate communion with Him, yes, into perfect eternal life with Him and perfect and yet cumulative knowledge of Him, ever knowing Him more fully to all eternity. Dying initiates us into heaven's perfect activities. We will worship and serve God perfectly. We will have perfect fellowship with the saints and angels in glory.

## READING FOR DEATH

### Where to Start

Joel R. Beeke and Christopher W. Bogosh, *Dying and Death: Preparing for the Inevitable*

Christopher W. Bogosh, *Healing Hope: Restoring the Superiority of the Christian Hope*

Christopher W. Bogosh, *The Golden Years: Healthy Aging and the Older Adult*

Christopher W. Bogosh, *Going to Jesus: What to Expect when Facing Death*

Ligon Duncan, *Fear Not! Death and the Afterlife from a Christian Perspective*

Paul Helm, *The Last Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell*

John R. Ling, *Responding to the Culture of Death—A Primer of Bioethical Issues*

Al Martin, *Grieving, Hope and Solace: When a Loved One Dies in Christ*

Gary P. Stewart, et al. *Basic Questions on End of Life Decisions: How Do We Know What's Right?*

Joni Tada, *When Is It Right to Die? Suicide, Euthanasia, Suffering, Mercy*

### In More Detail

Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*

Christopher W. Bogosh, *Biblical Medicine: Developing a Christian Worldview for Medical Science*

Christopher W. Bogosh, *The Puritans on How to Care for the Sick and Dying: A Contemporary Guide for Pastors and Counselors*

Christopher W. Bogosh, *Compassionate Jesus: Rethinking the Christian's Approach to Modern Medicine*

Zacharie Boyd, *The Last Battle of the Soul in Death*

George Burgess, *The Last Enemy: Conquering and Conquered*

Bill Davis, *Departing in Peace: Biblical Decision-Making at the End of Life*

William Dodd, *Reflections on Death*

Charles Drelicourt, *The Christian's Defence against the Fears of Death: With Seasonable Directions How to Prepare Ourselves to Die Well*

John F. Kilner, Arlene B. Miller, and Edmund D. Pellegrino, eds., *Dignity and Dying: A Christian Appraisal*

John R. Ling, *The Edge of Life: Dying, Death and Euthanasia*

Rob Moll, *The Art of Dying: Living Fully into the Life to Come*

William Sherlock, *A Practical Discourse Concerning Death*

### The Bigger Picture

Christopher W. Bogosh, *Modern Medicine's Definition of Death: Ethical Implications for Christians*

Robert Bolton, *The Four Last Things: Death, Judgment, Hell, and Heaven*

John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism–Dualism Debate*

John Frame, *Medical Ethics: Principles, Persons, and Problems*

David Clyde Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics*

Terrence Nichols, *Death and Afterlife: A Theological Introduction*

Sherwin B. Nutland, *How We Die: Reflections on Life's Final Chapter*

Robert D. Orr, *Medical Ethics and the Faith Factor: A Handbook for Clergy and Health-Care Professionals*

David E. Stannard, *The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture, and Social Change*

Elizabeth C. Tingle and Jonathan Willis, eds., *Dying, Death, Burial and Commemoration in Reformation Europe*

David VanDrunen, *Bioethics and the Christian Life: A Guide to Making Difficult Decisions*

Christopher P. Vogt, *Patience, Compassion, Hope, and the Christian Art of Dying Well*

1. E.g., Robert Bolton, *The Four Last Things: Death, Judgment, Hell, and Heaven* (1632; reprint, Pittsburgh: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994).

2. John Blanchard, comp., *The Complete Gathered Gold* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2006), 135.

3. Parts of this article are adapted from a new book, Joel R. Beeke and Christopher W. Bogosh, *Dying and Death: Preparing for the Inevitable* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1918).

4. H. J. Horn, comp., *The Puritans Day by Day* (1928; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2016), 173.

5. Horn, *The Puritans Day by Day*, 132.

6. Blanchard, *Complete Gathered Gold*, 137.

7. Blanchard, *Complete Gathered Gold*, 139.

**Rev. Christopher W. Bogosh** is the Dean of Education for the Reformed Anglican Church in St. Augustine, Florida, a registered nurse with more than twenty-five years of medical experience, and the founder of Good Samaritan Books, a publishing ministry dedicated to engaging modern medicine with a biblical and Christ-centered worldview.



## CHRIST'S LIVING MINISTRY THROUGH HIS LIVING MINISTERS

Christ speaks through His ministers—something we must remember as our seminary trains future preachers and teachers. Although Jesus Christ is no longer physically among us as He is exalted to the right hand of God, Christ's ministry continues by the Word and the Spirit (Luke 21:15; Acts 2:33). John Calvin said, "He received anointing, not only for himself that he might carry out the office of teaching, but for his whole body that the power of the Spirit might be present in the continuing preaching of the gospel."

Paul grounds the present ministry of the Word upon Christ's ascension. Ephesians 4:10–12 says, "(He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." William Perkins explained, "Christ is ascended to this end to teach the ignorant, to give knowledge and wisdom unto the simple, and to give gifts... unto his ministers, that they may teach his people."

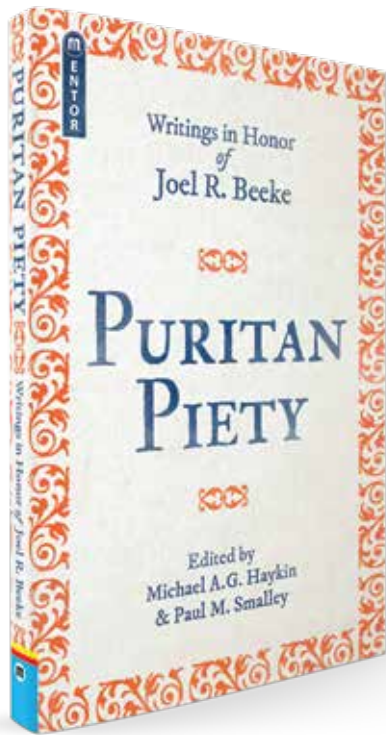
As the Shepherd of His people, Jesus leads them by His voice (John 10:16). Jesus said in John 10:26–28, "But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said

unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." If you are saved by Christ's death, it is because you have heard the voice of your Shepherd—not speaking in a still small voice in your imagination, but speaking in the words of the Bible.

Christ is preaching still. What a glorious thought! Whenever we hear the preaching of the Word, we should look past the human preacher and humbly hear the divine Preacher. Calvin wrote, "When the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached, it is just as if he himself spoke to us," for "God himself visits us and comes to us" in the Word. Pray for the unction of the Holy Spirit upon God's preachers—present and future—that the sovereign voice of Jesus would ring out from our pulpits. On the other hand, pray that pastors and theological students would remember that they are authorized to teach only what Christ revealed in His Word. Men are but "ministers," which means "servants"—servants of Christ called by Christ to preach Christ's Word by Christ's Spirit to the glory of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

—Paul M. Smalley

# Puritan Piety: Writings in Honor of Joel R. Beeke



August 23–25 marked the tenth anniversary of the Puritan Reformed Conference. This year's event included a second and very special moment: the presentation of a festschrift in honor of Dr. Joel Beeke and his efforts over the last several decades to promote and publish the writings of seventeenth century American, English, and Dutch Puritan authors. Dr. Beeke was very surprised, humbled, and grateful.

*Puritan Piety: Writings in Honor of Joel R. Beeke* was co-edited by Dr. Michael Haykin, Professor of Church History and Biblical Spirituality and Director of The Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; and Mr. Paul Smalley, teaching assistant to Joel R. Beeke at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary and Pastor at Grace Immanuel Reformed Baptist Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Contributors to this well-written and profitable work include Chad Van Dixhoorn, Sinclair Ferguson, W. Robert Godfrey, Michael Haykin, Mark Jones, Ryan McGraw, Richard Muller, Robert Oliver, Randall J. Pederson, Joseph Pipa, Leland Ryken, Paul Smalley, and J. Stephen Yuille.

The book's contents include the following:

Preface: On Piety and Puritans – Past and Contemporary  
*Michael A. G. Haykin*

1. Introduction: The Puritan Piety of Joel Beeke  
*Paul M. Smalley*

### **Part 1: Reformed Theology and Puritan Piety**

2. What is Theology? A Puritan and Reformed Vision of Living to God, through Christ, by the Spirit  
*Ryan M. McGraw*
3. Christology and Piety in Puritan Thought...*Mark Jones*
4. The Kingdom of God in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards...*Paul M. Smalley*

### **Part 2: Means of Grace and Puritan Piety**

5. Calvin the Preacher and the Puritans...*Joseph Pipa*
6. The Highway of Holiness: Puritan Moral Reform in the English Revolution...*Chad Van Dixhoorn*
7. John Cotton and the Spiritual Value of Psalm-singing  
*W. Robert Godfrey*
8. John Owen and the Lord's Supper...*Sinclair B. Ferguson*
9. Principles and Practice for the Household: Thomas Gouge's Catechesis "with Practical Application" (1679)  
*Richard A. Muller*

### **Part 3: Individual Snapshots of Puritan Piety**

10. Daniel Dyke and The Mystery of Self-deceiving  
*Randall J. Pederson*
11. Milton's Sonnet on His Blindness and the Puritan Soul  
*Leland Ryken*
12. A String of Pearls (Psalm 119): The Biblical Piety of Thomas Manton...*J. Stephen Yuille*

### **Part 4: Later Heirs of Puritan Piety**

13. J. C. Philpot and Experimental Calvinism  
*Robert W. Oliver*
14. Eminent Spirituality and Eminent Usefulness: True Spirituality According to Andrew Fuller  
*Michael A. G. Haykin*

Chronological Bibliography of Dr. Beeke's Writing.

To listen to the 2018 Puritan Reformed Conference sessions, visit the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary page at [www.sermonaudio.com](http://www.sermonaudio.com). To purchase a copy of *Puritan Piety*, visit Reformation Heritage Books at [www.heritagebooks.org](http://www.heritagebooks.org).

—Chris Hanna

*"It is a pleasure to commend this series of essays in Reformed theology and piety. The theological, historical, and pastoral scope of the essays, and the range of the contributors, from younger scholars Ryan McGraw and Chad Van Dixhoorn, to older scholars Sinclair Ferguson and Robert Godfrey, give this Festschrift a compelling attractiveness. Each of the essays focuses on an area of Reformed doctrine and practice dear to Joel Beeke's heart and dear to Christians who prize experiential divinity. It is to be hoped that this collection of essays will be read widely and digested deeply."*

—DR. IAN HAMILTON



# Interview with MDiv student, Cagdas Coskun



*Please tell me a bit about yourself. Where did you grow up? Anything you want to share about your family? Are you married? Do you have children?*

I grew up in Izmir (Symrna), Turkey, in an Alevi Muslim home as an only child. My lovely wife, Gulden, was raised in Kazakhstan and worked with Campus Crusade for Christ before we married. We have a four-year-old daughter named Mevsim. The Lord has richly blessed me with a godly wife and a wonderful daughter. I am truly a blessed man.

*Could you describe what a typical day looks like for someone from Turkey?*

Turkey is a Muslim country, yet it is, in many ways, a secular nation. However, because of its rich and ancient heritage, Turkish people spend most of their time, outside of work and/or school, with family and friends. For Turks, relationships are first and foremost. This is one factor why reading rates are low in Turkey. People would rather spend time together than to broaden their minds through reading.

*As a child, what did you want to be “when you grew up?”*

Like most little boys everywhere, when I was a child, I wanted to be a firefighter when I grew up. However, the Lord had different plans for me. When I was eight years old, I had an uncle who received a New Testament from a Christian while studying at university. After having brought it home, my mother began to read it as well. It was through that precious gift from an unknown Christian that led to the conversion of my uncle, my mother, and eventually, me. At the age of fourteen, I began questioning my Muslim faith and upbringing. It was the gospel that led me

to see my true nature as a sinner and my true need of a Savior. The works-based righteousness of Islam that I was taught from an early age crumbled away in the light of the gospel of Christ.

*Are there any favorite pastimes, holidays, or foods from Turkey that the average North American person may not be aware of? Please feel free to describe one or two.*

All Islamic holidays are celebrated every year in Turkey, the two biggest ones are Ramadan and Sacrificial Feast—the latter being a four-day event that honors Abraham’s willingness to slay his son at God’s request. Participants bring animals to be sacrificed. For the majority of Muslims, the annual sacrifice is an important reaffirmation of their faith in Allah.

*How did you hear about PRTS and what drew you to this seminary? Also, how did the Lord impress on you your call to gospel ministry?*

My pastor in Turkey knew Dr. Beeke before I decided to apply to PRTS. The main reason I was drawn to the seminary is its emphasis on preaching and pastoral ministry. I sensed a call to pastoral ministry almost ten years ago. It was after receiving news of the martyrdom of three Christian church planters east of Izmir, in a region close to Kurdistan. One of the three men was a convert to Christianity from radical Islam and someone that my family and I knew very well. God used these three men to bring the good news to many people who had never heard the true gospel. This event made a powerful impression on my heart and mind and confirmed my internal call to the ministry.

*What has been the most rewarding thing since relocating to Grand Rapids? What has been the most challenging?*

The most rewarding thing for me in coming to the States has been the privilege to attend PRTS. My family and I have been blessed abundantly from the seminary and Walker United Reformed Church (URC), our newly “adopted” family. From the moment we stepped off the airplane in Grand Rapids, we were warmly welcomed and cared for by Rev. Cory Dykstra and the congregation of Walker URC.

The most challenging thing that I have found while being a student at PRTS is time management. Life moves quickly in America. My classes are rich in theological and practical truth from God’s Word. The assignments from my professors are rigorous yet rewarding. I am working on finding a healthy balance between my responsibilities to the seminary, my family, and our church.

*You’ve been here in Grand Rapids for several months now. Is there one piece of advice you would share with somebody newly relocating?*

One of the biggest challenges we faced in the first month or two was transportation; the second was accessing the internet. Once the new student apartments are completed, I don’t think that either of these two challenges will be issues for new students living on campus. However, for those students living off campus, they will need to learn the area quickly and obtain a driver’s license as soon as possible. If they can study for a driver’s license even before they move to the States that would help. If possible, they should also try to obtain an international driver’s license. This would allow them to drive in the US for a couple months before applying for a Michigan driver’s license.

I would also encourage new students to try and connect with foreign students who have already been studying

at PRTS for several months or more. Much can be learned from their experiences.

*After you graduate, Lord willing, what then?*

When I graduate, Lord willing, we will return to our home in Izmir, Turkey. We are prayerfully seeking the Lord’s direction in hopes of planting a new church in Izmir. We hope to do this with the help of our home church. The plan is to stay on at our home church for a few years before setting off to plant what will be the second Reformed church in Izmir. Our city has a population of five million people and yet, we currently have only one truly Reformed congregation in the whole city. In fact, ninety percent of the Christians living in Turkey claim to be Charismatic. We want to be used of the Lord to plant biblical, Reformed, experiential churches throughout our city and across our country.

*If you had the opportunity to speak with supporters of PRTS, what would you say to them?*

PRTS provides opportunities to Christians like me who do not have access to sound Reformed theological education in our home country. The seminary, through its faculty, staff, and supporters, is equipping me to carry the torch of Reformed, experiential theology back to Turkey. By God’s grace, the light of the gospel will shine forth through our efforts. It is my prayer and hope that God will use me and my family to make a permanent impact in Izmir and across Turkey, not just for our generation, but for generations to come. Should the Lord choose to bless our work, PRTS and the education I received there will have played a significant role in all of it. May the Lord Jesus be glorified in and through all of it.

## *From the* President’s Desk

Dear friends,

As I write, students are already taking their mid-term exams for this semester. They are working hard. Many more students are applying to attend PRTS as well in our various programs. We are greatly blessed even as we are in considerable financial need at this time. It is not easy to raise funds for both a \$2.75 million Housing Project and a \$3.6 million annual budget for the Operating Fund at the same time in the same year. We are hoping and praying that by year end, God will grant the \$850,000 remaining for the Housing Project and \$1.2 million for the Operating Fund so that we can enter the New Year debt free on the former and with a two month balance for the latter. Please consider prayerfully giving a generous year-end gift to one of these two funds, as the Lord enables. Your help is needed at this time. Every donation is deeply appreciated, no matter what the amount. Please partner with us again by filling out page 8 of this Update, and thanks so much for partnering with us until now. And please continue to pray for and with us that God would continue to use this institution to the furtherance of His gospel truth all around the world.

Warmly, Joel Beeke



**Q: Isn't cash the best gift to make to charity?**

**A:** While most charitable gifts are in the form of cash because this is so familiar, this is not always the most cost-effective way for you to give. You may be able to increase your potential impact—and experience significant tax benefits—by giving non-cash assets such as:

- Stock or marketable securities
- Real estate
- Business interests
- Farm commodities
- Life insurance
- Retirement benefits
- Tangible personal property

*To learn more about giving non-cash assets or other smart and powerful giving options, contact Chris Hanna at 616-432-3407 or [chris.hanna@prts.edu](mailto:chris.hanna@prts.edu)*

**Q: Should I consider giving from my IRA?**

**A:** If you are 70½ or older, the now-permanent IRA charitable rollover is a smart and powerful way to give to Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary (PRTS).

This special provision allows you to make tax-free distributions from your individual retirement accounts to charity, up to a maximum of \$100,000 per year. Gifts made through the IRA charitable rollover count toward your annual required minimum distribution, and none of the IRA distribution will be included in your adjusted gross income.

**Q: I am interested in making a gift of real estate. Do I have to give all of it, or can I give just a portion?**

**A:** There are many options and benefits when gifting real

estate. You can give all of it or a portion, and there are ways to give real estate that will generate an ongoing income stream for your lifetime. Additionally, you can realize a double tax benefit by receiving a charitable deduction and reducing or eliminating capital gains tax.

There are even options that allow you to give real estate, but still make use of it during your lifetime. This arrangement is referred to as a gift “subject to a reserved life estate.” You can receive a charitable deduction for a portion of the value of your home, and at your death, the property will be sold. The proceeds from this sale are then distributed to PRTS and your other favorite kingdom causes.

**Q: When does it make sense to give stock to charity?**

**A:** If you have appreciated public stock that you've owned for at least a year, you can receive a double tax benefit by donating this stock to charity. Not only will you receive a tax deduction for the fair market value of the stock, but you'll also avoid paying capital gains tax. This makes giving appreciated stock a much more cost-effective option than giving cash.

If, however, the current value of the stock is less than what you paid for it, giving it to charity is not a good idea. You would be better served to sell the stock, recognize the loss of the sale on your income taxes, and make a cash gift to charity with the proceeds.

*To learn more about gifting stock to charity and other smart and powerful giving options, contact Chris Hanna, Director of Development and Marketing at PRTS at 616-432-3407 or [chris.hanna@prts.edu](mailto:chris.hanna@prts.edu). You may also speak to one of our partner representatives at the Barnabas Foundation at 888-448-3040.*

## QUOTABLES ABOUT JESUS CHRIST'S DEITY AND HUMANITY

“He who does not perceive Christ to be God is blind amidst the brightness of noon-day.” (John Calvin)

“Anything that one imagines of God apart from Christ is only useless thinking and vain idolatry. I have had so many experiences of Christ's divinity, that I must say: either there is no God, or He is God. If Christ is divested of His deity, there remains no help against God's wrath and no rescue from His judgment.” (Martin Luther)

“He suffered not as God, but He suffered who was God.” (John Owen)

“Remember, Christ was not a deified man, neither was he a humanized God. He was perfectly God and at the same time perfectly man.” (Charles Spurgeon)

“A cloud over the sun makes no change in the body of the sun; so, though the divine nature of Christ be covered with the human, it makes no change in the divine nature.” (Thomas Watson)

# Brick by Brick ♦ Student Housing Project



The Lord has blessed the construction of our sixteen-unit student housing project, and we are anticipating occupancy late November. Today, September 27, the construction site is very busy with trades working inside and outside. Cabinets and trim are going into some of the units. Painting and heating/cooling installations are going on in others. Curbs and sidewalks, driveway preparation, and landscaping are progressing outside.

Watching the progress has been a personal delight. I walk over and scan the scene every morning when I arrive, getting an update from the contractor. Often, before I leave, I check inside one or two units to get the latest impression. Students and their families are getting excited. Fourteen of the sixteen apartments have been reserved by tenants coming in over the next three months. It will be a joy to see the apartments filled with students and their families forming an on-campus community. By January



2019, forty-seven individuals will have taken up residence if all goes well with their plans.

Each apartment is close to one thousand square feet. They each have two bedrooms, a kitchen/dining area, and a family/living area. Each has a laundry



room with a washer and dryer, a utility closet with the heating/cooling unit and hot water system, and a balcony with a storage closet. The pictures may give you some impression

of the appearance and space. We are impressed and deeply grateful.

We have a financial challenge. We always try to operate and build without incurring debt. The Lord has blessed us to this point so that we have not had to borrow money. The housing project, however, currently has no-interest and low-interest loans totaling \$260,000. As of today we need another \$850,000 USD to complete the project without borrowing. Thank you for your interest and prayerful support. We see this investment generating returns of approximately \$144,000 per year to our operating budget if we don't have to carry debt.

May God do as He has done in the past and provide the needed funds prior to occupancy. We trust in His provisions through His people.

—Henk Kleyn VP for Operations

## FACULTY ITINERARIES & PUBLICATIONS

### **MICHAEL BARRETT** | *Itinerary*

January 27: Lakeland, Florida: Covenant Presbyterian Church

#### *Recent Publication*

*How Can We Live Our Faith from the Inside Out?* (RHB)

### **JOEL BEEKE** | *Itinerary*

November 2–5: Sacramento, California: conference for Robert Briggs

November 9–11: Cape Cod, Massachusetts: conference for James La Belle (OPC)

November 15–17: Denver, Colorado: “Canons of Dort” (ETS)

December 1–2: Raleigh, North Carolina: Reformation of the Family Conference for Shiloh Presbyterian Church

December 12: Grand Rapids: Churchman’s Luncheon Group at New Community Church

January 13: Wyoming, Michigan: Maplelawn Baptist Church

February 28–March 3: Minden, Nevada: Grace Community Church

#### *Recent Publications*

*Puritan Heroes* (with Glenda Mathes) (RHB)

*Dying and Death: Getting Rightly Prepared for the Inevitable* (with Christopher Bogosh) (RHB)

*Biblia de Estudo Heranca Reformada* (Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible in Portuguese), gen. ed. (Sao Paulo, Brazil)

*Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible in Spanish*, gen. ed. (RHB)

### **JERRY BILKES** | *Itinerary*

November 4: St. Thomas, Ontario: St. Thomas Free Reformed Church

November 18: Kansas City, Missouri: Covenant Reformed Church

#### *Recent Publication*

*How Can I Stop Worrying?* (RHB)

### **DAVID MURRAY** | *Itinerary*

November 30–December 2: Lansing, Michigan: University Reformed Church Magnify Conference

December 13–16: Greenville, Michigan: Second Presbyterian Church

January 8–9: Atlanta, Georgia: Depression Conference

January 14–18: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Teaching DMin Course at Westminster Seminary

January 28–30: Minneapolis, Minnesota: Desiring God Conference

### **ADRIAAN NEELE** | *Itinerary*

November 8–16: South Korea: Hapdong Theological Seminary

January 14: Los Angeles, California: Gateway Seminary

### **GREG SALAZAR** | *Itinerary*

#### *Recent Publication*

*The Works of William Perkins, Volume 6*, ed. with Joel R. Beeke (RHB)

Chad B. Van Dixhoorn, ed., *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly, 1643–1653*, 5 volumes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Reviewed in the *Puritan Reformed Journal*.

### **DANIEL TIMMER** | *Itinerary*

November 13–15: Denver, Colorado: ETS

November 16: Denver, Colorado: Institute for Biblical Research

November 17–20: Denver, Colorado: Society of Biblical Literature

December 2018: Repentigny, Quebec: teaching 2 adult Christian education courses at Église réformée St-Paul

January–April: Montreal: teaching at the Faculté de théologie évangélique

#### *Recent Publications*

A review of Michael P. Maier, *Völkerwallfahrt im Jesajabuch*. BZAW 474. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016, in the January 2019 issue of the *Puritan Reformed Journal*

A review of Bibleworks LLC, *Bibleworks 10*. 2017 in the January 2019 issue of the *Puritan Reformed Journal*

“The Church in the Old Testament” in the November issue of the *Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth*

“Reading the Old Testament as Part of a Two-Testament Witness to Christ,” pages 95–108 in *Reading the Old Testament Theologically* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018).

### **WILLIAM VANDOODEWAARD** | *Itinerary*

November 1–3: Louisville, Kentucky: Commonweal Project Colloquium, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

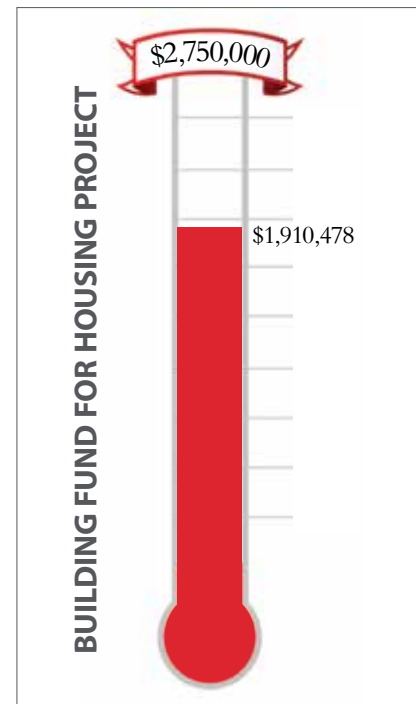
# FINANCIAL REPORT

For period 8/1/2018–9/30/2018

	Year to Date Actual	Annual Budget	Variance	Percent of Annual Budget
<b>Income</b>				
Donations	317,102	2,541,100	(2,223,998)	12%
Tuition Income	338,752	530,000	(191,248)	64%
Scholarship Donations	31,835	385,000	(353,165)	8%
Other Income	<u>22,241</u>	<u>38,900</u>	<u>(16,659)</u>	<u>57%</u>
<b>Total Income</b>	\$709,930	\$3,495,000	\$(2,785,070)	20%
<b>Expenses</b>				
Instruction	\$339,701	970,652	(630,951)	35%
Scholarships	214,041	385,000	(170,959)	56%
Administrative	<u>235,061</u>	<u>2,139,348</u>	<u>(1,904,287)</u>	<u>11%</u>
<b>Total Expenses</b>	\$788,802	\$3,495,000	\$(2,706,198)	23%
<b>Net Income</b>	\$(78,872)			

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—CHRIS HANNA



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## MUSIC

*How can I determine what music is good to listen to? Everyone seems to have a different opinion.*

Suggested Reading: Psalm 150

Music is a gift of God. Scripture frequently speaks of praising God with musical instruments (Ps. 150:3–5) and by singing (Ps. 95:1), privately (Eph. 5:19) and in public worship (1 Chron. 15:16). As with all gifts from the Lord, however, Satan will strive to use God’s good gifts for evil purposes.

Choosing the music we listen to or do not listen to is similar with other choices we make in life. We are to choose that which honors God and His Word, and we are to avoid that which dishonors the Lord and promotes self-exaltation and sinful lusts (Eccl. 12:13–14, Phil. 4:8, Gal. 6:7–8, Prov. 3:1–8, 1 Thess. 5:21–23).

Music choices are important. Music not only impacts our minds, but it also stirs our emotions. It touches our hearts. For example, if I asked you to quote some sentences that your kindergarten teacher spoke, most of us would not be able to do so, but if I asked you to sing a song that you learned in kindergarten, most of us could. Music is powerful.

Satan knows the power of music. God gave music to motivate us to good, but the devil uses music to influence us to evil. A world-wide music war is raging; each side striving to capture the minds and hearts of people. The following guidelines can help us to make good music choices:

1. *Lyrics*—Do the words of the song promote the praise of God, His works, and care for others? Or love of self and selfish lusts?
2. *Beat*—Does the rhythm promote the positive fruits of the Spirit or stir evil lusts?
3. *Singers*—Are the lifestyles of the singers God-honoring and moral, or are they self-honoring and immoral? Is their dress and appearance God-pleasing or man-pleasing?
4. *Concerts*—Are the fans who attend the singers’ concerts stirred to praise God and to walk in His ways? Or are the fans prone to praise the singers and to engage in sinful thoughts, words, and actions?
5. *Graphics*—Does the artwork displayed on their music promote biblically healthy images or sinful ones?
6. *Goal*—Is the purpose of the music to glorify and end in God, or is it to glorify man and end in self-fixation?

If the music is “Christian,” ask yourself questions such as: Are the lyrics biblically sound? Do they end more in God or more in my own feelings? Is the beat fitting and edifying? Do the singers aim to honor God or themselves?

Pray and use these guidelines when making music choices. The music you choose to listen to will influence you—for good or for evil.

*Why are your choices of music important? Why is Satan very interested in music? Why does he actively promote it? There is a wide range of “Christian” music available today. Why is it important that we are discerning and not simply accepting of all because it is “Christian?”*



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*“He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord”*  
Proverbs 19:17a

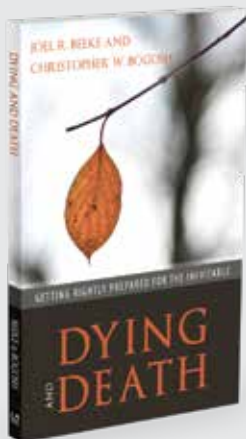


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(Reformation Heritage Books, PB, 120 pgs.)  
\$12.00|\$9.00

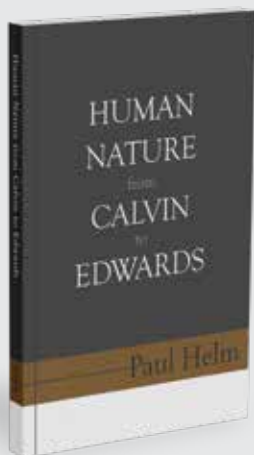


### A Practical Exposition of the Ten Commandments — James Durham

Of the works of James Durham, this exposition of the Ten Commandments was reprinted most often. As with his sermons, it is filled with perspicuous opening of the Word, practical application, and the clearing of "several momentous questions and cases of conscience." The only regret is that because he was preaching similar material at the time, the coverage of these lectures on the first table is lengthier than the coverage of the second table. Nevertheless, the work has always been held in high regard, and the in-depth treatments of the second, third, and fourth commandments commend it and make it particularly useful today when the Lord's

name, worship, and day of worship are much abused. Gilfillan observes on the last that "the *Law Unsealed* of the eminent James Durham, published in 1675 by his widow, contains a very full and able discussion of Sabbath doctrine and duty, and discovers the learning and deep piety which are evident in his other writings. It received the warm commendation of Dr. Owen, and its numerous editions attest the large measure of popular favour which it has won." Indeed, Walker observes, Durham's "thorough, searching, cumbrous intellect, reminds you not seldom of John Owen."

(Reformation Heritage Books, HC, 432 pgs.) \$40.00|\$30.00



### Human Nature from Calvin to Edwards

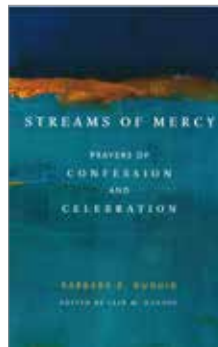
Paul Helm

Paul Helm breaks fertile ground in this survey of theological anthropology in the Reformed tradition. Acknowledging the rich patristic and medieval heritage available to Reformed theologians, Helm works through a representative range of authors and materials during the period 1550 to 1750 in order to identify certain ways of thinking as well as elements of development and change. Addressing topics like the relation of body and soul, faculty psychology, and moral agency, Helm develops a compelling picture of Reformed thought on human nature that is sure to encourage more studies on this topic for years to come.

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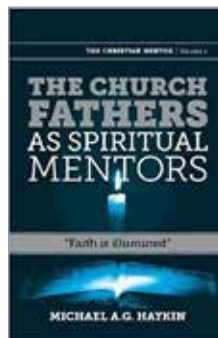
### Streams of Mercy: Prayers of Confession and Celebration

Barbara Duguid

Have you taken time lately to consciously taste of God's mercy? This can be difficult, because in order to seek God's mercy we must admit that we need it—and we don't like to admit that we need anything, much less forgiveness! But exposing the specifics of our struggles with sin regularly points us back to

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(P&R, PB, 240 pgs.) \$14.99|\$11.25

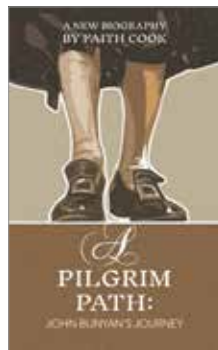


### The Church Fathers as Spiritual Mentors

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Examining the pivotal work done by the early church fathers and the development of early church ecclesiastical structure, historian Michael A. G. Haykin provides a succinct and thorough look at the foundational acts, creeds, and events in church history. Designed to aid pastors in becoming astute to the theological challenges of the day, he also considers the influence of the Emperor Constantine and the development of the papacy, as well as modern issues such as abortion and the millennium.

(Joshua Press, PB, 212 pgs.) \$21.99|\$17.75



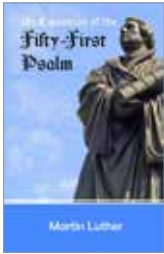
### A Pilgrim Path: John Bunyan's Journey — Faith Cook

Faith Cook has been a lover of John Bunyan's work for many years, first encountering him through *Pilgrim's Progress* in her preschool years. Later, through his *Complete Works*, she discovered his many other books and wrote *Fearless Pilgrim*, a detailed biography of Bunyan. Now she has taken up her pen again to write this well-paced and accessible biography that will

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Kent Hughes and Doug O'Donnell is packed full of biblical wisdom and practical guidance related to the reality of pastoral ministry in the trenches. From officiating weddings to conducting funerals to visiting the sick, this book will equip pastors and church leaders with the knowledge they need to effectively minister to their flocks, both within the walls of the church and beyond.

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(Free Grace Press, PB, 119 pgs.) \$7.99|\$5.00

**C. H. Spurgeon's Forgotten College Addresses**

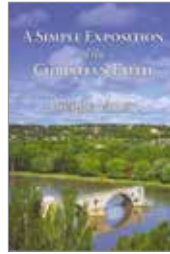
*Charles Haddon Spurgeon*

Spurgeon's magazine, *The Sword and the Trowel*, provided the material for various collections of his addresses and writings compiled after his death in 1892. The present volume consists of conference, college, and



Communion addresses that previously appeared only in *The Sword and the Trowel* in later years. Also included is a corrected and expanded version of the chronological index to Spurgeon's sermons, which originally appeared in the fourth volume of *365 Days with Spurgeon*. There are several new entries in the notes on the dating of sermons that originally appeared undated.

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# Waiting

Most of us are not very good at waiting, yet it seems that there is always something to wait for. Sometimes, it's little things like waiting for a package or watching the clock tick so slowly as you wait for your friend to arrive. You've probably waited for big things too—waiting for a brother or sister to be born, waiting to get to the next grade, or waiting for vacation to finally come.

Just like you, the Israelites in the Old Testament knew all about waiting, but they were waiting for something far more precious than a package, a present, or a vacation. They were waiting for a person—and not just any ordinary boy or girl, but someone who God said would rescue them!

If you think way back to the Garden of Eden, already there you can find the promise that a Rescuer would come. Adam and Eve had disobeyed God, and sin had entered their hearts and all of creation. God sent them out of the garden, but at the same time, He promised to send a Rescuer to save them from sin and restore them.

Ever since God gave that promise, every single Israelite was waiting eagerly for the Rescuer to arrive. With every baby, they held hope; maybe this was the one! But the Rescuer didn't come and so they kept waiting and waiting. They waited through years of wandering in the wilderness. They waited in their new homeland. They waited as they were taken captive by their enemies. They waited, and sometimes they were tired of waiting! They wondered if God had forgotten His promise, but God never forgets a promise. God spoke to the prophets and reminded them that His promise was true, and they reminded the people—the Rescuer was coming!

And finally, after years and years and years of waiting, something happened! All that time of waiting turned into a

glorious moment of praise, glory, and happiness that spilled over the hillsides near Bethlehem. An angel told the (very shocked) shepherds: “Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger” (Luke 2:10–12). Then angels filled the sky, “praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:13–14).

The joy and wonder that overflowed their hearts was hard to even put into words. This news meant peace to His people. Now, I'm guessing that you aren't a shepherd on the hillsides (at least I don't *think* you are), but this news is delivered to you too! This news is better than anything else you could possibly hope for. John 3:17 tells us why: “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.” The Rescuer, Jesus Christ, has come to save—not just for the shepherds and Israelites long ago, but to set His people free in every age and place. He is the joy of every longing heart.

Come, Thou long expected Jesus,  
Born to set thy people free;  
From our fears and sins release us,  
Let us find our rest in Thee.  
Israel's strength and consolation,  
Hope of all the earth Thou art;  
Dear desire of every nation,  
Joy of every longing heart.

---

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

# BIBLE QUIZ

## for children

### GOD'S PROMISED SAVIOR

Even before the world began, God knew that His people would need a Savior who would once and for all save His people from the problem of sin and death. All through the Old Testament, God gave promises about the Savior that was coming. They were like hints and clues for God's people as they waited and watched for the Savior that God had promised. Let's look up some of these clues in the Old Testament and see how God kept each promise (because He always does!) when Jesus was finally born!

1. In Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah told God's people about the Savior who was coming. "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name \_\_\_\_\_."
2. Turn to Matthew 1:21-23 and read how Jesus is that promised Son! Verse 23 tells us what the name Emmanuel means: "And they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, \_\_\_\_\_."
3. In Micah 5:2, God gave a clue about where the Savior would be born: "But thou, \_\_\_\_\_ Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel."
4. Which verse in Matthew 2 tells us that this is the city Jesus was actually born in? Verse \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Isaiah 60:3 tells us that Gentiles will come to be blessed by the Savior. "And the Gentiles shall come to thy \_\_\_\_\_, and kings to the brightness of thy rising."
6. In Matthew 2:1, we can read which Gentiles did come seeking Jesus after his birth: "Behold, there came \_\_\_\_\_ from the east to Jerusalem."
7. Look in the next verse to find out why they came: "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to \_\_\_\_\_ him."
8. If you turn back to Isaiah 60 and read verse 6, what two things does Isaiah say they will bring? \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
9. In Matthew 2:11, we read what these wise men brought as gifts: "And when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_."
10. What does Matthew 2:10 tell us about the wise men's response to the birth of the promised Savior? "When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding \_\_\_\_\_."

In Luke 2, we read that the wise men weren't the only ones rejoicing at the birth of Jesus: The angels sang "Glory to God!" the shepherds praised God, Simeon blessed Him, and Anna thanked the Lord! Praise God for always keeping His promises and for sending us a Savior to rescue us from sin. Does the birth of Jesus make you rejoice and thank the Lord?

### ANSWERS TO LAST MONTH'S PUZZLE

1. door
2. good shepherd
3. bread of life
4. way, truth, life
5. light of the world
6. vine
7. resurrection, life
8. Alpha, Omega



# Telling the Truth

*“Lying lips are abomination to the LORD: but they that deal truly are his delight” (Proverbs 12:22).*

Beep, beep, beep! Harry rolled over and turned off his alarm. He was tempted to hit snooze but knew that he had to get going. Today was Saturday, and that meant that he had to get his fruits and vegetables to the farmer’s market. Yawning, he stood up, got dressed, ate a quick breakfast, and started loading his truck.

When he pulled into the market area, Harry was glad that he could get a stand next to his friend Ben. The next hour was spent getting ready for the customers. Vegetables and fruits had to be attractively displayed. Some were placed in baskets, some were bunched together with twine, and some were heaped up into colorful mountains of produce. Harry was busy! Ben’s job was much easier because he didn’t sell produce. Instead, he supplied his customers with fish.

Soon the market opened, and customers arrived. The next busy hours passed along quickly, and Harry and Ben were both happy to see their items disappear into the bags of customers. Finally, the last melon lay on Harry’s stand when a business man came by. Placing his hand on the melon, he commented, “What a beautiful, large melon. What are you asking for it?”

“The melon is the last I have,” Harry replied. “And although it looks great and can be eaten, there is a soft spot on one side.” Harry turned the melon over to show the man.

“Hmmm,” said the business man. “You’re right. Thanks, but I don’t think I’ll take it.” Looking at Harry’s honest face, he continued, “I do have a question for you, however. Do you think it’s good for your business to point out the problems of your fruit to your customers?”

“Well, it’s better than being dishonest,” Harry answered.

“You’re right,” the business man said thoughtfully. “Always remember that principle, and you will find favor with God and man. I shall remember your stand in the future.”

The business man then took a few steps to Ben’s stand. “Are those fish fresh?” he asked Ben.

“Yes, sir. Fresh this morning; I caught them myself,” was Ben’s reply. The business man purchased some fish and walked away.

Ben smiled at Harry. “Harry,” he exclaimed, “*that’s* how you do business. Why did you show that spot on your melon? Now you’ll have to take it home and chuck it out. Does it really matter to him that those fish I sold him were caught yesterday? I sold them for the same price as I did the fresh ones and no one will be able to taste the difference. You’ve got a lot to learn.”

“Really, Ben, I think you forgot something,” Harry said patiently. “First, I’m not about to lie to my customers, no matter what money I can get. Second, I will be better off in the end. He said he’d come back, which means I gained a customer. On the other hand, after he tastes your fish, you may very well have lost a customer.”

That’s the way it actually turned out. The next Saturday, the business man arrived and bought nearly all of Harry’s fruit and vegetables, but he didn’t spend a penny at Ben’s fish stand. In this way, the rest of the season passed. The business man knew that he could always get quality produce at Harry’s stand, so he always purchased there. Once in a while, he would casually talk to Harry about his plans for the future. Harry loved his job but hoped to be able to work for a company some day. At the same time, the business man wanted a reliable man to take charge of one of his warehouses. And so he decided to hire Harry. Slowly and steadily, Harry advanced in the company, and the business man began to trust him more and more. In the end, Harry eventually became an honored partner of the company...and it all started when he decided to tell the truth!

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Andrea Scholten is a school teacher, a writer for children, and a member of the HRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Adapted from *Children’s Story Hour*.





# 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.

## RENEWAL AND GIFT SUBSCRIPTIONS

Most subscriptions to *The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth* expire with the November/December 2018 issue. Please forward your renewal in the envelope provided prior to January 15 to avoid missing future issues (unless your church provides payment).

Subscription rates for 2019 have remained unchanged. As the rates fall below costs incurred, donations remain indispensable. As in former years, we are trusting that many of you will be able to assist with smaller or larger gifts to enable us to continue keeping our subscription rates low.

Our appreciation is also extended to those of you who have donated generously for free subscriptions to seminaries, pastors, and prisoners. Please consider doing so again this year. If we had more donations for this purpose, we would be able to reach many more church leaders and prisoners with Reformed, experiential truth.

Please also prayerfully consider providing your friends with a gift subscription to the *BSGT*. That would be an excellent way to spread the Reformed faith and at the same time assist us in keeping our subscription prices as low as they are.

Finally, heartfelt gratitude to all who have assisted in providing material for *The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth*: our ministerial brothers, assistant editor, and others for their timely contributions; our subscription manager; our typesetters, secretaries, and printer; and our *Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth* Committee. Without you, this task would not be completed each issue. Above all, may God command His blessing upon this work to many hearts—saving the lost, edifying His people, and glorifying His worthy name. For this, we are totally dependent on His free and sovereign grace.

—JRB

## OBITUARY

**JOHNSON**, Dr. Robert D., age 97, passed away Wednesday, September 12, 2018, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Dr. Johnson is survived by his dear wife, Priscilla; his children, Mark Johnson, Claudia (Dominic) Benvegnu, Tim (Karen La Mere) Johnson; grandchildren, Flora (Marc Beaudreau) McEachern, Alec Johnson, Paul Johnson; great-grandchildren, Henry and Louisa Beaudreau. (Dr. Joel R. Beeke, Hebrews 9:27-28; Psalm 17:15).

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## NATIONAL NEWS

### ARMY CHAPLAIN FACES SIX MONTHS IN PRISON AFTER NOT AFFIRMING SAME-SEX COUPLE

A U.S. Army chaplain is facing a dereliction of duty charge, and potentially six months in a military prison, after not accepting a same-sex couple in a marriage retreat, even though he ensured the two women they could take part in the next scheduled retreat with a different chaplain, according to his attorney.

U.S. Army Chaplain Major Scott Squires—who is Southern Baptist—faces the charge on a technicality. The Army report says the lesbian soldier who requested attendance at the Strong Bonds marriage retreat was “denied a service due to her sexual orientation,” but the same Army report says the charge is not for denying her a service but instead for not following Army policy in accommodating her until after a complaint was filed.

Squires, though, said he followed Army policy. As a chaplain endorsed by the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, he is prohibited from endorsing same-sex relationships. His chaplain assistant, SSG Kacie Griffin, faces a similar charge by the Army.

Rep. Doug Collins (R-Ga.), who also is a military chaplain, spoke out in favor of Squires: “The case of Chaplain Scott Squires highlights how imperative it is that we protect freedom of conscience for every individual in the U.S. military—including the chaplains who minister to them as they carry out the military’s mission together. The process surrounding this investigation remains extremely concerning, and Army officials now have the opportunity to deliver a swift, fair resolution after months of prolonging the case.” (*ChristianHeadlines.com*)

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS

### EUROPEAN SURVEY: SAME-SEX MARRIAGE AND ABORTION WIDELY ACCEPTED BY NON-PRACTICING CHRISTIANS

Vast majorities of non-practicing Christians and religiously unaffiliated adults across Western Europe favor legal abortion and same-sex marriage. In some countries, there is not much difference on these questions between the attitudes of Christians who rarely attend church and the attitudes of adults who do not affiliate with any religion.

In every country surveyed, on the other hand, church-attending Christians are considerably more conservative than both non-practicing Christians and religiously unaffiliated adults on questions about abortion and same-sex marriage.

Education has a strong influence on attitudes on both issues: college-educated respondents are considerably more likely than those with less education to favor legal abortion and same-sex marriage. Women are also more likely than men to favor legal gay marriage, but attitudes of men and women are largely similar on abortion. (*2018 Pew Research Survey*)

### STOP CALLING GOD “HE,” SOME CHURCH OF ENGLAND BISHOPS SAY

The Church of England should stop using male language in reference to God in order to attract non-Christians and to better communicate the biblical message to a younger generation, several bishops told The Telegraph newspaper. “I don’t want young girls or young boys to hear us constantly refer to God as he,” said Rachel Treweek, the Church of England’s first female diocesan bishop. “For me particularly in a bigger context, in all things, whether it’s that you go to a website and you see pictures of all white people or whether you go to a website and see the use of ‘he’ when we could use ‘God,’ all of those things are giving subconscious messages to people,” Treweek said.

A YouGov poll of self-identified Christians in Britain found that 41 percent believed God does not have a gender, 36 percent said God is male and 19 percent didn’t know.

Reverend Sally Hitchener, an Anglican chaplain at Brunel University, said that there was a movement within the Church of England to

“emphasize the feminine nature of God.” She called it “heretical” to say God is only male.

The debate over God’s identity is not new. In 2004, when the issue was impacting Bible translations, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association posted a question and answer about the issue on its website.

“The answer to the question about why God is referred to in masculine terms in the Bible really has only one answer: This is the way God has chosen to reveal Himself to us,” the answer said. “God is never described with sexual characteristics in the Scriptures, but He does consistently describe Himself in the masculine gender.

“While God contains all the qualities of both male and female genders, He has chosen to present Himself with an emphasis on masculine qualities of fatherhood, protection, direction, strength, etc. Metaphors used to describe Him in the Bible include: King, Father, Judge, Husband, Master, and the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association concluded: “It is very dangerous to tamper with the way God has chosen to reveal Himself. He most certainly does not intend to minimize women since men and women are revealed as being made in His image and are of equal value to Him. However, it remains that He is Father, not Mother, and even in the Incarnation, He chose to come to us as a man, Jesus Christ.” (*Michael Foust | a freelance writer*)

## ITEMS FOR PRAYER

### U.S. CONGRESSIONAL MIDTERM ELECTIONS – NOVEMBER 6, 2018

As 1 Timothy 2:1–2 teaches us, let’s pray for our leaders: “first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.” The retirements of Representatives Charlie Dent and Rodney Frelinghuysen mark the end of the line for abortion rights supporters in the Republican Conference. There are no GOP nominees in a competitive race who back abortion rights this year, according to abortion interest groups and party officials. In contrast, all but three of the Democrat members of Congress favor abortion. According to a 2017 Pew survey, 22 percent of self-identified Democrat voters believe abortion should be illegal in all or most cases, while 66 percent of Republicans believe abortion should be illegal in all or most cases. Pray and vote.

## TEACHERS NEEDED

The Board of [OXFORD REFORMED CHRISTIAN SCHOOL](#) invites applications for elementary and high-school teaching positions.

Oxford Reformed Christian school is a vibrant, unified, parent-run Christian school that has been serving the educational needs of several local Reformed communities for the past 13 years. We have been blessed with a new facility located in Mount Elgin, a rural village in south-western Ontario. Our enrolment has grown to over 340 students and we offer a Kindergarten to grade 12 Christ-centered education. Visit our website for more information: [orcschool.ca](#).

Qualified, passionate, motivated *High School teachers* and *Elementary School teachers* committed to the Reformed faith and to Christian education are encouraged to join our staff team.

- High-School Math/Science Teacher needed starting in January 2019.
- High-School Teachers needed for the 2019–2020 school year. (Math, Sciences, Humanities).
- Elementary school teacher(s) needed for the 2019–2020 school year.

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](mailto:principal@orcschool.ca). Phone: 519-485-1142.



# INTRODUCTION

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The opportunity to start driving is one of the milestones of the teenage years. I remember well the day I could get the first stage of my license. Depending on where you live, you would call it your permit or your beginners. I pored over the little book that prepared me for the first written test. That little book contained every road sign imaginable. Road signs are vital to driving. They point you in the right direction and prevent you from getting lost. They prevent chaos and disorder on the roads. Road signs mean life or death. If you misunderstand the road signs, you put yourself and others around you in peril.

This truth about road signs is no less true for spiritual life. Without clear signs to point us in the right direction, we are and will remain lost. Navigating out of the mess of sin requires signs that point us away from sin and ourselves to Jesus, who is the Way to eternal life (John 14:6). Navigating life without those clear signposts is spiritually suicidal. What “road signs” must you look for? Jesus gives several of those signs in the Gospel of John. The next few articles will examine each sign and we will see how they point us to Jesus again and again in His sufficiency and grace to be the Savior of young people and to deal with every challenge you face.

John introduces us to those signs in John 20:30–31: “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but 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.” Typically, you never read the back of a book first unless you want to spoil the story. That is not true of beginning at the back of the Gospel of John. These verses are the thesis statement, as it were, of John’s entire Gospel.

In other words, the entire contents of the Gospel of John are signposts to Jesus. The word for signs in these verses is also the word for miracles. The word *signs* gives you an important clue in how to read and interpret the Gospel of John. Each miracle, of which there are seven, is a signpost that points you to Jesus as the all-sufficient Savior.

The purpose of these signs, as John writes, is so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Let’s break that down for a moment. These signs are recorded in the Gospel of John so that you might believe that Jesus is the Anointed One, the King of kings and Lord of lords. Is He Lord of your life? Is He at the center of every decision you make? Is He your life? These signs are also recorded so that you might believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the One who is perfectly God and man in one person. Do you see in Him the power to save your soul from sin and death? By our believing in Him as the One who came to make atonement for sins and obey the law, He gives eternal life. Here are road signs that mean life or death. Will you pay attention to them in order to find Christ?

Achieving your license and an understanding of road signs is a major milestone in your life. But becoming an heir of eternal life is much more important. Understanding the road signs that point to Jesus is more crucial to avoid death and destruction than understanding road signs on the highway. Getting your license might elevate your standing with your friends, but believing in Jesus gains you a solid standing with God. Let’s follow these signs to Christ.

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**Rev. Maarten Kuivenhoven** is a pastor of the Heritage Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids, Michigan, and a PhD candidate at Calvin Theological Seminary.

## CORRECTIONS

In the articles on “Church Membership” a concern was raised regarding the statement “joining the Church.” The author seeks to clarify this statement by saying that young people who have grown up in the church are already members by virtue of birth and baptism. By making Confession of Faith they become full professing members of the visible church and they assume full responsibility for a membership that God already initiated since birth. This also emphasizes an individual’s need for repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, especially for young people who have grown up under the means of grace.

Also, on pages 198–99 of the September/October 2018 BSGT, “R. B. Kuyper” should have been spelled as it is spelled in the footnote: “R. B. Kuiper.” We regret these errors.

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## AT THE BIRTH OF CHRIST OUR KING

At the birth of Christ our king,  
Angels made the heavens ring,  
Singing with a solemn joy,  
Glory to the Lord on high.

In angelic heights of bliss,  
They His majesty confess;  
Ravished with so grand a scene,  
They renew their songs to Him.

Glory in the highest height,  
Blazing with majestic light,  
Shine in David's root and rod,  
The incarnate Son of God.

Nature in its brightest glow,  
Never can such glory show;  
Here alone, the great Three-One,  
Put Their brightest glories on.

O the wonders of God's ways,  
Here I AM, Himself displays;  
And in spite of hell and sin,  
Here His honors He'll maintain.

Sinners here by faith may view,  
What Omnipotence can do;  
And in measures sweetly trace,  
The rich treasures of this grace.

Come, ye mourning souls, rejoice,  
Look, and with a cheerful voice,  
Sing the honors of your God,  
Blazing in th'incarnate word.

Soon the whole elect shall know  
"All the glory God can show";  
And in bliss immortal sing,  
Hallelujahs to their king.

—WILLIAM GADSBY

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