

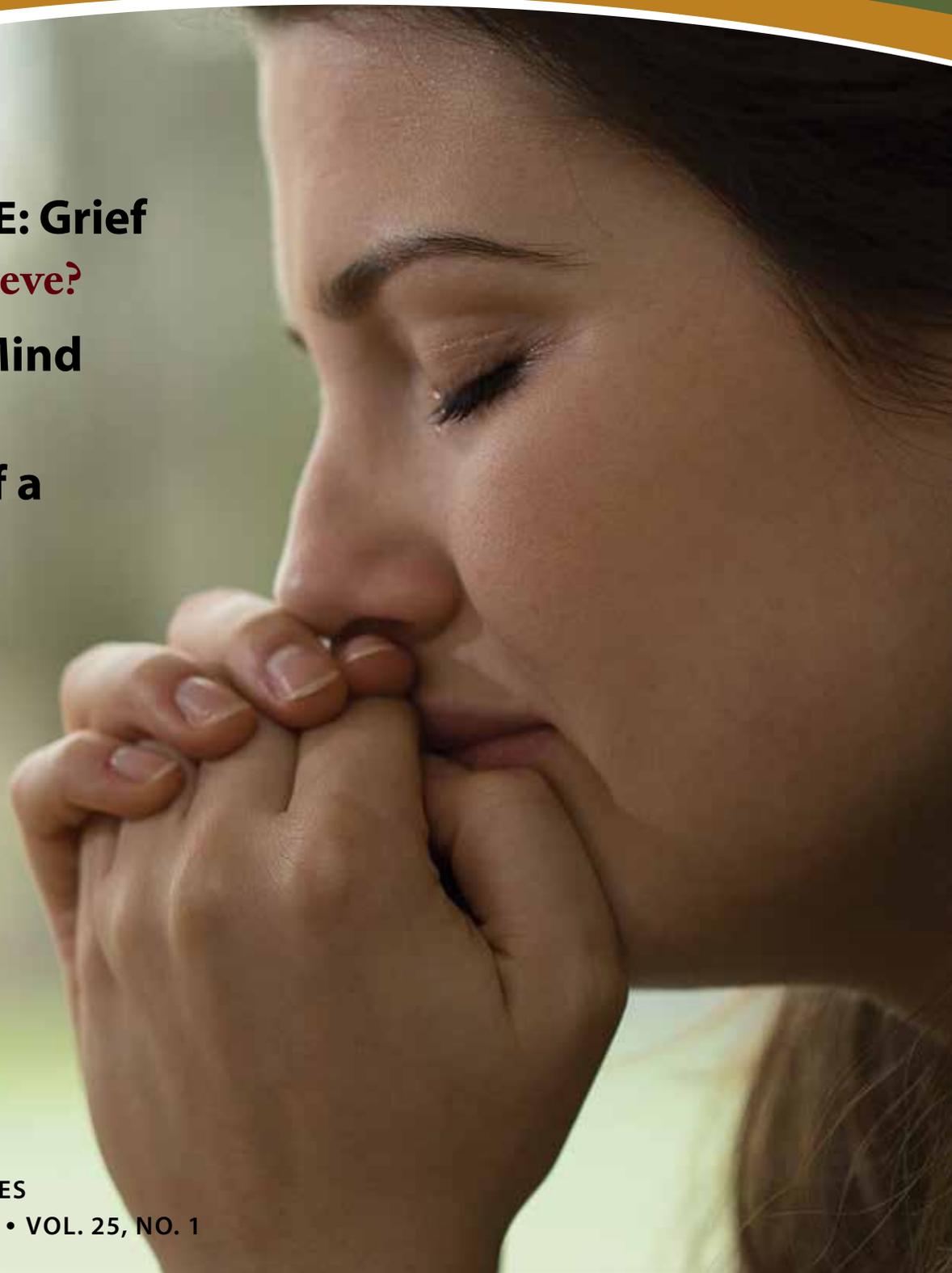
THE
BANNER
OF SOVEREIGN GRACE TRUTH

SPECIAL THEME: Grief
How Shall I Grieve?

Have Christ's Mind
in 2017

The Comfort of a
Triune God

A PERIODICAL FOR FAMILIES
JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2017 • VOL. 25, NO. 1



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Special Theme: Counseling the Grieving

Please read the 16-page section on counseling the grieving—there is a wealth of wisdom in these pages for all of us—the grieving and the non-grieving.

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Have Christ's Mind in 2017

For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16).

A SCRIPTURAL KNOWLEDGE

No one tells God what to do. He is sovereign and tells us. He alone knows what is going to happen in 2017. We may have our plans and expectations, but we don't know if they will take place. But we do know what He revealed to us in His Word!

If you are a believer, you may say with Paul, "But we have the mind of Christ." What does that mean for us as we enter 2017? It was in God's mind in eternity how He would save sinners: "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (v. 10). It was a mystery, but now it is revealed. So, "who hath known the mind of the Lord?" Christ! He came into the flesh to descend into the bottomless pit of our depravity and save us.

This knowledge cannot be discovered by human wisdom or by human efforts. It can only be received by faith as God's free gift: "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God" (v. 12). It was hidden even from prophets and angels but is now given to us by revelation.

How is it revealed and received? In the great gift of His Word. "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth" (v. 13). Not by man's words, but by God's Word. What great evidence of the verbal inspiration of the Bible! God Himself speaks with power. Quoting Moses (Deut. 8:3), Jesus resisted Satan in the wilderness by saying, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Did you enter 2017 having this mind of Christ?

A SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE

God's Word is a light shining in a dark place, but "the darkness comprehended it not" (John 1:5). Paul says it more emphatically: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (v. 14). We will not, therefore we cannot. We are unable, disabled, due to our rebellious self-will. "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7).

Dear friend, have you already accepted this truth, and do you live by it? If you're still an unbeliever, you're still in your natural or carnal mind. It's impossible to see His light because you're spiritually blind and dead. You neither know yourself nor God. If you are a believer, you know the Lord opened your

eyes to see all you need in Christ. Then you became spiritual: "But he that is spiritual judgeth all things" (v. 15). When you received God's mind as He revealed it in Christ, you began to know and see more and more as Christ; and you now can "judge," or understand and evaluate, "all things". If you're still an unbeliever, you cannot. It's like trying to explain to a single person what it is to be married and have children. You just don't know until you get there! Until you have seen Christ and surrendered to Him, you can't truly know God or yourself.

Though God's Word "liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Pet. 1:23), by nature we are "dead in sins and trespasses" (Eph. 2:1). We must be born again by Word and Spirit. This is not an obstacle to our salvation but rather God's wonderful provision. He not only gave His Son but also His Spirit at Pentecost; Luke 11:13 assures us that we shall have His Spirit if we but ask.

A SHARED KNOWLEDGE

To "have the mind of Christ" is to be submissive to God's Word, guided by the Holy Spirit. This means we're not only instructed ourselves, but we also will instruct others. Paul pleads in 1:10, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." And in verse 13, he asks, "Is Christ divided?" Be of one mind.

This means, first, to be with one voice. You'd expect it to be, coming from the same Word and by the same Spirit. If we claim faith in Christ, God's Word tells us that the Holy Spirit dwells in us. How confusing then for unbelievers if we don't agree. This not only is a gift and promise, but also a charge. It requires us all to search God's Word and to depend on the Holy Spirit—not on the spirit of the world. Its wisdom is but foolishness!

Second, being of one mind will focus on Jesus Christ. We will witness the Lord Jesus Christ by our words and deeds. This is the evidence of being truly spiritual and of the Spirit, for He wasn't sent to speak of Himself but to reveal Christ. If we're truly spiritual, we are no super saints with great gifts but humble believers, sinners trusting in Jesus Christ alone. We have no pretense of being anybody or knowing anything, except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

We have this great privilege and great responsibility, and we will be seen and heard by those around us. Let us not walk in 2017 as unbelievers but as "labourers together with God" (3:9).

Rev. Foppe VanderZwaag is pastor of Grace Reformed Christian Church (HRC) of Harrison, Arkansas.

GLOBAL REFORMED EVANGELICALISM

Today and Over the Past 50 Years

The editorial this month was written for the 50th anniversary of the Evangelical Times, the most popular conservative Reformed periodical circulated primarily in the United Kingdom. Since it also has relevance for us as we contemplate recent decades and enter the special year of 2017—the 500th anniversary year of the great sixteenth-century Reformation—it is reprinted here with permission.

It is fitting that in 2017, the *Evangelical Times* would celebrate and give thanks to God, for it is not only the fiftieth anniversary of this periodical, but also the five-hundredth anniversary of the start of the Reformation which gave birth to Evangelicalism, so called because of its emphasis on the gospel (Greek *euangelion*) of salvation by grace through faith in Christ apart from the merit of our good works. As we survey the state of Reformed Evangelicalism today, we have much for which to thank our Lord. Reformed theology and spirituality has blossomed through a revival of interest over the last few decades that touched not only ministers and academic theologians, but many church members and young people. We have seen God grant to many Christians a robust, biblical view of God's sovereignty over all things. The sovereignty of God is the doctrinal marrow of the Reformed faith; it is not a cold fatalism, but the personal reign of the triune God—the loving Father, merciful Savior, and comforting Spirit—over all that He created.

In the last fifty years, we have also seen God move many people to a Spirit-graced, joyful appropriation of the teaching that God saves depraved sinners by free grace alone through the effectual redemption of Christ. The so-called “five points” are integrally linked together as the scriptural testimony to man's utter ruin by sin and God's perfect remedy conceived in eternity, merited by Christ in history, and applied and preserved by the Spirit in the life of each elect sinner.

The renewed interest in Reformed theology during the last several decades has gone hand-in-hand with a return to the British Reformed orthodox writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the movement known as Puritanism. Eight hundred Puritan titles have been reprinted since the late 1950s and are being avidly read. We have also been blessed in recent years with the translation into English of a dozen books from the Dutch Further Reformation, a parallel movement in the Netherlands to Puritanism. While we should not import Puritan culture across three centuries and mimic it woodenly, Puritan sermons and treatises still call us to a well-balanced yet zealous Christian life. Studying the Puritans is teaching Reformed Evangelicals how to be more:

- *Biblical*, becoming Christians who search and relish God's Word;
- *Doctrinal*, because a mindless Christianity is a spineless Christianity;
- *Practical*, confronting our consciences to marry doctrine to action; and
- *Experiential*, engaging the heart to respond to Christ with affection.

God has seen fit to make Reformed Christianity, which has always been international in scope and ambition, into a movement more global than ever before. The center of gravity for Reformed Evangelicalism shifted in the last fifty years to the global South and East. We see this at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, where the nations of Africa, Asia, and South America are well represented in our student body and alumni. It is a great blessing to see how Christ's redeemed from every tribe are coming under the saving power of His gospel.

However, in the midst of blessings, we must also recognize the challenges that confront Reformed Evangelicalism. We face challenges to biblical sufficiency, moral purity, cultural flexibility, doctrinal fidelity, ecclesiastical simplicity, and experiential piety.

(1) *Biblical Sufficiency*. Though Reformed Evangelicalism successfully resisted the attempt by modernism a century ago to overthrow the authority of the Bible, the churches have faced a terrible battle in the last fifty years over the inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures. Even in circles that stand for inerrancy, the sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures has been quietly eroded among many Evangelicals. The Charismatic movement that penetrated Evangelical churches in the 1960s led many to think that the Bible is not enough for a full spirituality and personal relationship with Christ; we are said to need new revelations. However, we must not add to nor subtract from the fully authoritative, inspired, inerrant, and sufficient Word of God. Others have looked beyond Scripture to man's wisdom in how to grow the church, claiming that we can use any methods we please so long as the message is unchanged. On the contrary, the Bible teaches us both God's message and methods to build His kingdom. The weakness of Evangelicalism on the sufficiency of Scripture leaves it dangerously vulnerable to the ecumenism of the post-Vatican II Roman Catholic Church, which still teaches the antichristian heresies that provoked the Reformation. The principle of *sola Scriptura* must become our personal watchword, so that we, like Luther and Calvin, are captive in our consciences to the Word of God, and it alone.



(2) *Moral Purity.* The sexual revolution swept through mainstream culture in the 1960s and 1970s, casting aside moral standards for sex and the exclusivity of marriage between one man and one woman as God's ordained means of sexual blessing. Fornication, divorce without proper grounds in sexual immorality or abandonment, pornography, couples living together, bearing children out of wedlock, homosexuality, transgenderism, and a host of other sins were once hidden under a cloak of shame, but now are openly practiced and celebrated. Moral relativism has influenced the church more than we would like to think. The greatest threat to Reformed Evangelicalism is not persecution from those hostile to our moral stance, but the seduction of false teachers and personal temptations. We must compassionately, patiently, and persistently declare the Word of God to our dying, immoral culture. We must also fight the battle, beginning in our hearts, to die unto sin and live unto righteousness by Christ's death and resurrection.

(3) *Cultural Flexibility.* Tradition is a great blessing to the church when it passes down biblical truth and wise order. We must beware of traditionalism, though, which elevates the customs of our forefathers to divine authority. The challenges of biblical compromise and moral relativism may tempt us to make traditionalism our mighty fortress. However, the spread of the gospel to diverse peoples and cultures presses us to acknowledge that some of our traditions are not from the Bible, but from the cultures of previous generations. As our churches serve people of rising generations and various ethnic groups, we must demonstrate a humble flexibility in matters not defined by the Word of God, and not judge those who differ in matters indifferent. This too comes from a conviction that the Bible is sufficient to guide Christ's church.

(4) *Doctrinal Fidelity.* Although Evangelicalism rejected the modernist denial of fundamental truths like the virgin birth of Christ, Evangelicals have been strangely open to modernism's indifference or even hostility to doctrine. Our Lord taught us that knowing the truth sets us free. Doctrine liberates. Doctrine makes Christ known. Therefore, when people claim to speak for God, we must examine carefully what they say. The church is not defined by the credentials of its scholars or the celebrity of its preachers, but the truth of God's Word. We must love the truth and live the truth. Matters like justification by faith alone, the creation of the

world and a real and historical Adam, and eternal divine election are not trifles, but the lifeblood of the church. Here the classic Reformed confessions and catechisms play a crucial role in guarding our doctrine. Though they are not inerrant Scriptures from God, they do summarize the consensus of the Reformed churches on the doctrines of the Bible.

(5) *Ecclesiastical Simplicity.* Earlier I noted with gratitude the resurgence of Reformed theology and its recovery of the biblical view of God and salvation. However, those caught up in this movement have sometimes neglected the biblical teachings of the Reformers on the life of the church. Reformed Evangelicalism must therefore go further, and recover biblical simplicity of God's plan for the church. The Word of God should regulate how we worship and fill the content of our worship. We must follow the Bible's directions for church officers and structure. In evangelism, we should not depend upon man's methods to gather a crowd and manipulate decisions, but upon the power of God's Word proclaimed prayerfully in the Spirit by people who walk in holiness. By neither adding to nor subtracting from God's commands, we liberate the church to serve God in the simplicity of spirit and truth, not the burdens of man-made religion.

(6) *Experiential Piety.* In the life of God's people, there is no substitute for holiness. Yet confusion about salvation by grace has misled some Evangelicals to minimize holiness, or to distort it into a mere act of faith. Contrary to popular misconception, holiness is not legalism or haughty superiority, nor is it asceticism or mysticism. Holiness is bearing the image of God through the imitation of Christ by the influence of the Holy Spirit. It is godliness arising from that blessed mixture of love and reverence for God. It is practical love worked out in obedience to God's commandments. God calls us to holiness, and it is the main evidence of salvation. Holiness purifies, gives spiritual health, fosters assurance, empowers service, and glorifies God. Holiness is costly, won through blood, sweat, and tears—first those of the Savior, and then those of His pilgrim people. If fifty years from now, people could say of Reformed Evangelicals that *they are a holy people*, we would have great cause to thank our God.

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FORMULA FOR SECURITY

Psalm 91

These are scary times. Danger seems to lurk everywhere; there seems to be no safe place on earth. Fear and paranoia reign in most of society. It would be foolish to deny that the dangers and threats are real, and we must not—even in the exercise of our faith—presume that we are immune. Yet even in the places of danger through which we must walk with our eyes open to reality, we can and should enjoy a peace and confidence. The God who will keep us forever, keeps us now. He neither slumbers nor sleeps, and He is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we should not fear even if the earth should change (see Ps. 46).

Psalm 91 develops this theme of the present security believers have in the Lord. It reminds us that the saving, protecting, strengthening power of God is the personal experience of believers through all the trials, terrors, and temptations of life. Although anonymous, there is good tradition that attributes the Psalm to Moses, who in Deuteronomy 33 testified that the eternal God is our refuge and underneath are His everlasting arms. Throughout his career, Moses was in constant danger and distress, but God never left him without His presence, provision, and protection. This psalm is an expression of faith at its best. It is the poetic version of Paul's bold statement, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). To live in the spirit of this psalm is to be fearless in all the circumstances of life. This hope and confidence is not just a whistling in the dark; it is a real possibility as we focus on the Lord and not the surroundings. The psalmist sets before us three ways to experience and enjoy the security that is founded in the Lord.

HOW TO STAY SANE IN A CRAZY WORLD

The person of the Lord is the basis for our sanity in a world that in many ways makes no sense. The more of our attention that we focus on the Lord, the greater will be our confidence that He is in control and is trustworthy as our faithful God. In the first two verses, the psalmist directs attention to the Lord with four titles that declare significant propositional truths about who God is and what He is to us.

First, *He is the Most High; therefore, He owns us.* The first occurrence of this title links the statement of God's exalted status over all creation with the fact that He is the "possessor of heaven and earth" (Gen. 14:19). The Lord's ownership of the world is the corollary to His creating the world. He owns what He has created, and He has the right to rule what He

owns. Indeed, He owns the cattle on a thousand hills, the wealth in every mine; the fullness of all the earth is His. There is nothing that is outside the realm of His rule. God's people happily confess that the Lord has made them, and therefore by virtue of that creation they belong to Him (Ps. 100:3). But believers can also confess that God doubly owns them, both by creation and redemption. Consequently, they are His prized possession and the objects of His special care.

By faith, believers should take up their residence in the secret place of the Most High. The secret place refers to a hiding place, an asylum. What a place of safety that is! To dwell with the Most High God is to be out of the reach of those who would harm. Certainly, to be "in heavenly places in Christ" spiritually (Eph. 1:3) should translate into temporal confidence regardless of circumstances.

Second, *He is the Almighty; therefore, He sustains us.* The title "Almighty" is *Shaddai*, which reveals the Lord as the One who provides for and nourishes His people. He is the Keeper of every promise. He is sufficient to meet every need because He has the will, heart, and power to do so. By faith, believers should abide under His shadow. To abide literally means to keep on spending the night. In the Old Testament, the shadow was a common image of a host/guest relationship. The host assumed the responsibility for the complete welfare of his guest, including protection and provision. To "spend the night" with the Lord is not only to be secluded from danger but to be at rest knowing that God has assumed the responsibility for our care. *Shaddai* keeps His word and fulfills His obligations.

Third, *He is the LORD; therefore He saves us.* The title LORD is *Jehovah*, the very name of the covenant-keeping God. Because He is the covenant God, believers should have confidence in His saving faithfulness. Significantly, the psalmist expresses his personal faith: "I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress." The refuge refers to a shelter, and the fortress refers to a mountain stronghold—places of safety and deliverance. This is a truth about God to live by; it is not abstract theology. The fact that God is safety and deliverance means little if it is not true experientially. We must prove what we profess to believe by our actions. When in danger, flee to Him.

Fourth, *He is my God; therefore He is able.* God is the general term for deity and declares Him to be the transcendent Creator who is infinitely powerful. By faith, the psalmist claims a personal relationship with this transcendent God

and confesses his trust. To trust is to find safety in the object of trust, and the psalmist knows that his God is reliable and trustworthy. God would not let him down because under him were the everlasting arms of the omnipotent and eternal God.

HOW TO BE SAFE IN A DANGEROUS WORLD

Verses 3–13 detail God’s providence to accomplish the desired end of His glory and His people’s good. The psalmist highlights three thoughts about God’s protection.

First, *His protection is all encompassing* (vv. 3–4; 10–12). Verse 10 is the summary, all-inclusive statement: “There shall no evil befall thee.” Evil refers to danger, trouble, or calamity; nothing is exposed to the onslaughts against us (see the complete armor of Ephesians 6). Specifically, God provides safety against external threats (v. 3). The bird snare (a net to entangle and filled with bait to allure) and the noisome pestilence (literally, pit of destruction) refer to all the manmade or spiritual perils that can bombard the soul. For this reason, we should pray as Christ instructed: Deliver us from evil and lead us not into temptation. Also, God provides safety in His loving care (v. 4). With a beautiful image, the psalmist compares God’s protection of His people to feeble little chicks who are subject to the snare but who find safety under the safety of the mother hen’s wings, exposing herself to danger while sheltering her chicks. So Isaiah explained when he said of the Lord’s presence with the wilderness generation: “In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old” (63:9). The image shifts in the second part of verse 4, but the truth is the same. The Lord’s unfailing word is a shield (that which covers the body) and buckler (the round movable shield to ward off well-aimed assaults). Finally, the psalmist instructs that God provides safety through the operation of angels, those ministering spirits who are the agents of His providence (vv. 11–12). They guard like a shepherd watching over a flock and like a nurse who would lift up a child into the arms. These are spiritual beings operating beyond sight, but operating nonetheless.

Second, *His protection is personal* (vv. 7–9). Believers are special to God, and His care for them is discriminating. His people are restricted to the sidelines as spectators of the calamity that will befall the wicked. Trouble may be all around that threatens faith in the good providence of God, but the wonderful fact is that none who trust God will ultimately fall. His purpose stands, and no believer will ever be subject to the judgment of the wicked.

Third, *His protection demands a response* (vv. 5–6, 13). The demanded response is fearless boldness. With forceful

language, the psalmist commands, “you must not be afraid” (v. 5). Not fearing in scary situations (terrors, arrows, pestilence, and destruction) is walking by faith and not sight. Not to be afraid of the fearful things that can be seen requires consciousness of a greater power that is unseen but infinitely more real. The fear of God dispels fear of everything else (v. 9). Why should we fear the stuff of this crazy world if we believe that He owns and rules all that is? This kind of faith generates action and confidence to conquer the things that otherwise would cause the fear (lions, adders, and dragons). Resting in providence is active, not passive.

HOW TO BE SATISFIED IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD

In verses 14–16, the Lord interrupts the inspired poet and speaks for Himself concerning His own, thus reinforcing the guarantee of salvation both in time and for eternity. Knowing that nothing can separate the believer from God’s love is grounds for satisfaction.

First, *God promises mutual love* (v. 14). Love reciprocates. We love God because God first loved us, and as we love, He keeps evidencing His love for us. To set love literally has the idea of being attached to, referring to an intimate clinging or cleaving to the object of the love. Knowing God’s name refers to an intimate relationship to His person. God’s promise is to deliver and exalt those who love and know Him by bringing them near to Himself. As James said, “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you” (4:8). As we are brought near to Him, we can live in confident satisfaction even in the midst of turmoil.

Second, *God promises His presence* (v. 15). This is the key thought and foundational to contentment. God does not promise that there will not be trouble, but He does promise that He will be with His people in the midst of trouble. This is the Immanuel concept that is so precious to believers. Regardless of circumstances, God is with His people and He answers them in their distress (see Ps. 34:6).

Third, *God promises satisfaction* (v. 16). When God’s people rest in His love and presence, they will be content in whatever state they are in. God is never a disappointment, and He promises to satisfy with long life and salvation. Dying old or young is not the issue, but rather living out the measure of one’s allotted days with satisfaction and readiness to leave this life for the next. Satisfaction and security comes when we realize that our times are in His hands, and there is no better place to be.

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

The Comfort of a Triune God

In this chapter, Christ continues to pour forth comfort for His church. He doesn't hide the trouble and difficulty that awaits them; He doesn't want them to stumble because they are unprepared for what will happen (v. 1). He tells them how it will all work out for great good for them and the whole world, despite the anguish and travail that awaits. A new world is coming forth out of this pain and suffering, and that perspective will enable the disciples to endure. They will have all that they need in the triune God. The Spirit, who is the Comforter, will work in them, teach them, and be with them. The Father, to whom Christ is going, will give them what they ask for in Christ's name. And Christ Himself is Heir of all things. He is Victor over all. There is no comfort higher, deeper, or broader than the comfort of a triune God.

THE SPIRIT, THE COMFORTER

We need to be clear: suffering and persecution are part and parcel of what it means to follow Christ in this darkened world. It's not just persecution with words or angry looks; people will kill Christians, thinking they are honoring God while they are doing that (v. 2). We see this to be true throughout the ages, and still today, as many Christians lose their lives doing good or are being murdered by those who think they are serving God. Christ makes clear that we should pity the persecutors: they don't know the Father or the Son (v. 3).

In the midst of their suffering, the Comforter will come to the aid of the disciples. From their enemies there will be persecution; from the Spirit, will come persuasion. Notice that the Spirit will not use physical force in this battle that rages, but truth! "When he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (v. 8). That means that the Spirit will work in the hearts and in the consciences of people fights a battle in the mind—a force greater and more powerful than that of physical power.

Christ must leave the disciples now, for otherwise this Comforter can't come. Instead of Christ walking among them, He will be in their hearts, filling their minds, teaching in their hearts. It is Christ who tells His disciples: "I will be with you through My Spirit, and wherever you are, the Spirit will help you as you witness of Me." In a way, Christ never leaves, but He stays with them in a different way.

What Christ says to the disciples here is very important for us as well. Sometimes we can wish that Christ were with us physically like He was when He was on the earth. But things are actually much better now. If we are Christians, we don't just have Christ with us now, but Christ is in us

through His Spirit. He dwells in our hearts and teaches, comforts, and helps us whenever we need.

In the middle of this teaching we find a statement from Christ that looks strange on the surface. He says to the disciples: "None of you asketh me, Whither goest thou?" (v. 5). What is strange about this is that the disciples had asked this question in a way. For example, in John 13:36, Peter asked: "Whither goest thou?" And in John 14:5, Thomas had said: "We know not whither thou goest." So what does Christ mean? The best understanding of Christ's statement is that His disciples are looking at Christ's departure in a wrong way. They had asked this question concerned about what Christ's departure would mean *for them*, not what this would mean for Christ or the Father. The pain and loss they anticipated shaded their focus as they asked this question, whereas the way Christ tells them they should ask it puts all the emphasis on what it means for Christ and for His Father. In other words, the disciples are being selfish. They should be thrilled for the Father and the Son, that they will be together again because Jesus will accomplish His mission! Ironically, if they had asked it that way, they would have seen much benefit accruing to themselves.

The Spirit will benefit the church, but only because He glorifies the Father and the Son. He is named here as the Paraclete—the Comforter or Advocate. Literally, the word means: someone who stands next to you in a court of law and takes your side. So the Spirit is not a Comforter simply in the sense of bringing about nice feelings or emotions. He is a Revealer of the truth that sets us free (John 8:32). The Paraclete is a Prosecutor of the wayward and murderous world and a Defender of the people of God. He comes alongside them in a way that will truly help them and bring comfort, not simply with "quiet whispers" or "sweet nothings," but with truth. "He will guide you into all truth" (v. 13). This truth corrects, teaches, and guides, but most of all this truth comforts; it reassures believers of God's presence and His care even though He has physically left. What comfort lies in the Spirit of Christ!

CHRIST, THE HEIR

At the same time, the Spirit will disciple believers and lead them into the truth of Christ. He will show them how precious Christ is and how glorious a Savior He is. Christ anticipates this moment with great eagerness. "He shall glorify me" (v. 14). How happy Christ must have been at this prospect. He sees it already happening because His Father has promised it. His disciples will know God in their hearts and they will learn to live completely for Him. Their

hearts will be filled with happiness, and no one can take that happiness away. They will be healed from the life of sin they had been living. They will radiate with joy and love for others. None of this will be superficial in God's children; it will be a deep well of joy and love.

Another thing that makes Christ very happy is what He says in verse 15: "All things that the Father hath are mine." Here is Christ's shout of triumph. It's like an heir who looks on the testament that is left him, and finds a glorious estate that he will inherit. The Son, who will suffer greatly, sees all that He inherits and it is massive: everything will be His! All the people chosen by God will be His, as will the glory be that comes from His saving work. His triumph is sure and secure. The Father doesn't hold back anything; He gladly makes everything that is His belong to the Son. All the glory of the Father is the Son's. All the throne of the Father is the Son's. All the beauty of the Father is the Son's. All the designs of the Father are the Son's. All the angels of the Father are the Son's. All the men and women of the Father are the Son's. All the boasting of the Father is the Son's!

Christians need to remember this inheritance, especially in the midst of trials and tribulations. We can only be of good cheer and of good courage when we remember what Christ said: "I have overcome the world" (v. 33). It's not a question of whether He *will* overcome: He *has* overcome the world. Believers are not fighting towards triumph; they are fighting out of His triumph on the cross! The world is His, and therefore we know that all battles and all trials in this world are already won by Him. It makes us certain that the power of our God conquers forever. Victory is a certainty!

THE FATHER, WHO HIMSELF LOVES YOU

How easy it is to lose sight of victory in the midst of difficulty. Is it any wonder we need the Spirit to show us "the things to come" (v. 13)? The Spirit redirects our focus to the future when we lose perspective and are distracted by circumstances around us. He points our gaze to heaven, from where the Father rules this world.

Christians are not people who pretend that difficulties aren't real. But they also discover that difficulties are productive of future blessing for those who believe! The sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing to the glories which shall be (Rom. 8:18). Scripture compares it to what women experience as they experience labor pains in the birth of a child (see John 16:20–21; compare Isa. 26:17). The anguish comes in waves and the pain may seem unbearable at the time, but after the delivery there is great joy. So it is when Christ is formed in the hearts of untold numbers of people.

Praying directly to the Father is made possible only through Christ (v. 26). The Father sees His people through

His Son, and through His Son, they may see the Father. When Christ was on the earth, even the disciples didn't generally pray to the Father. Even though Christ taught the disciples to say: "Our Father, which art in heaven" (Matt. 6:9), we don't read them doing that much. They prayed to God and cried to Christ in their need, for He was physically present among them. But after Christ's ascension, we have many examples of praying to the Father (e.g., Eph. 1:22; 1:17; 3:14).

Christ says it so astonishingly: "At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God" (v. 27). That means that the Father Himself looks upon His people with the same love that He has towards Christ. He regards them as He does His Son. He answers them as He does His Son. As sons and daughters of God, they have direct access to the Father, and He loves them.

The Comforter is still here to comfort believers in the difficulties of life. Christians often struggle in their battle with them self, a fight against sin. We feel like strangers on earth—like we don't really belong, that people look down upon us for believing. But we know that we only suffer a short time, and that one day we will be with Christ, where all the struggles of this world will be forgotten as we receive and enjoy the inheritance promised to us.

QUESTIONS:

1. What forms of persecution can believers suffer? Can the comfort of this chapter be known in ways other than direct persecution?
2. How is the Holy Spirit a comforter? In what ways does He comfort? Name the three tasks of the Spirit in verses 7–14. Can you see the Spirit at work today?
3. How is verse 15 a shout of triumph? What significance should this truth have for the Christian (compare 1 Cor. 3:21–22)?
4. What roles does the Trinity have in prayer? Does this mean we address the Father, Son, and Spirit differently in prayer?
5. What is the importance of praying "in Jesus's name" (v. 26)?
6. In what way is verse 33 a summary of the whole chapter? In what ways do we experience this truth?

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Grief—The Impact of Sin

For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief (Eccl. 2:22–23a).

What an extraordinary and sweeping assessment Solomon gives us here of our brief journey on earth! It is remarkably similar to Moses’s assessment of life: “The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow” (Ps. 90:10). He too arrives at the sobering conclusion that the lives of men, even when they may reach the age of the very strong, are all filled with sorrow and grief.

In the days of Moses and Solomon, they would have been surrounded with abundant affirmation of their inspired conclusion. The preventive and interventional medical opportunities we take for granted today were non-existent. When people were ill or suffered from chronic afflictions, they lived with intense and debilitating pain. Furthermore, lives would often end prematurely because of illness. The prospect of death was a pervasive reality in every family. Men and women would die at an early age because of untreatable terminal illnesses; women would frequently die in childbirth; parents would bring children to the grave; and the loss of several spouses during one lifetime was not uncommon. When epidemics would strike, such as the infamous plague or lethal forms of influenza, staggering numbers of people would die and families would often be decimated.

What other conclusion could Solomon come to but that man’s days are indeed “sorrows, and his travail grief”? Because of the extraordinary advances in medical knowledge and practice, we now enjoy a measure of creature comfort unknown at any time during the history of our fallen world. Man in his foolishness dreams that our medical know-how will advance to such a level that illness and death can be eradicated and that a paradise here on earth will at last be within reach. In other words, fallen man dreams of eliminating all the consequences of sin so that he will be able to sin without consequences—and thus eliminate all sorrow and grief.

What an elusive dream this proves to be, however! Even in 2017, in spite of all the sophistication of our culture, illness, pain, suffering, sorrow, grief, misery, and

ultimately death continue to be an ever-present reality of our human existence.

This brings us to the inseparable connection between the pervasive grief experienced by the human race and the bitter reality of sin. All the misery in our world, and all the grief and sorrow it produces, have their origin in sin. As brief as this noun may be, the magnitude and ramifications of sin are staggering and beyond our ability to grasp. The Apostle Paul expresses it concisely when he writes, “For the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). So it has been since the dawn of history, when Adam and Eve committed the first sin and blatantly disobeyed the revealed will of their loving Creator and heavenly Father. God had graciously forewarned them that transgression of His law would culminate in death. Ever since that wretched day, the lives of men (Enoch and Elijah being the only exceptions!) have ended in death. All the sorrow and grief of this life, and all the misery and pain that are encountered by all men at some point during their brief earthly journey, are but preliminary to the ultimate wage men receive for their sins: death.

Why did God, who created a perfect world and a sinless couple, purpose that the ultimate penalty for sin must be death—a penalty that encompasses all the sorrow and grief that precede and culminate in death? To answer that question, a number of important things need to be considered.

The word death means “separation.” When death occurs, that which is meant to be united will be separated. Physical death is a graphic affirmation of this, for at that solemn moment two entities are separated that were created by God to be united eternally: body and soul. However, physical death is not the only wage of sin. The most bitter aspect of our sinfulness is that we are separated from a God who created us to have an everlasting love relationship with Himself. Not only did God create man in His image, but He also entered into a covenant relationship with man—into a binding love relationship. God told our first parents, however, that if they were to be disloyal to that covenant, and thus by disobedience would divorce themselves from Him, they would reap the bitter consequences of that spiritual divorce: a three-fold death or separation.

Death is thus the exact opposite of the idea of the covenant. In the original covenant relationship, God and man were bound together with the bond of love. Sin brought the dissolution of that intimate union, resulting in the separation of God and man, of body and soul, and ultimately (without divine intervention) in the radical, irreversible, and eternal separation of God and man. Since death is the opposite of a covenantal union, God imposed upon man a punishment that truly fits the crime!

We all recognize that the foremost reason why sorrow and grief are so prevalent in our lives is the inescapable specter of death. Sooner or later, we must deal with the painful loss of parents, children, family members, and/or beloved friends—often after serious illness, and sometimes suddenly. Considering that nearly two people die every second, our world is perpetually filled with sorrow and grief. The well-known expression that life is a “vale of tears” is thus an accurate summary of our text.

Why is God’s judgment upon sin so severe and pervasive? What is it about sin that renders it so ugly and obnoxious to a holy God, provoking His holy being to respond in wrath both in this life and the life to come? To answer that question, we must consider God’s character, a character most profoundly expressed in the fact that God the Father loves His eternal and only-begotten Son with an eternal and infinite love. That love relationship defines and motivates Him!

This explains why God the Father not only created the world by His Son, but also *for* His Son (Col. 1:16b). This is preeminently true for man whom He created in the image of His Son to live a life that would supremely honor His Son. To achieve that, God wrote upon man’s heart His law, consisting of two fundamental requirements: to love God with heart, soul, strength, and mind, and one’s neighbor as himself (Matt. 22:37–40). Specifically, this means that we were created to love God as He has revealed Himself in His Son (John 1:18), and that we must love our neighbor by virtue of having been created in the image of God’s Son. Thus the focal point of obedience to God’s law is His beloved Son! Consequently, the transgression of the law is nothing less than an act that supremely dishonors God’s Son—something that provokes the Father to infinite wrath.

Let us now make an important connection: Whenever we sin, we are dishonoring and transgressing the written

Word of God, and when we dishonor the written Word of God, we dishonor the Living Word of God—the Son of God’s love. Thus, because the Father loves His Son, sin is so exceedingly ugly and despicable to Him, for it supremely dishonors Him who is the Holy One of Israel. That makes the gospel so extraordinary, for the Father, whose Son we dishonor when we sin, so loved a fallen world of covenant breakers that He gave that Son as a sacrifice for sin, that whosoever believes in the Son of His love will not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). In the fullness of time, He became “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief...[who] hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows,” for “it pleased the LORD (His Father!) to bruise him; he hath put him to grief” (Isa. 53:3–4, 10). As a perfect Substitute, He thereby accomplished a perfect redemption for sinners who are worthy that all their days be filled with sorrow and that their travail should be filled with grief.

How blessed are they who by faith have embraced this precious Christ! They will have to journey through this vale of tears and experience the consequences of sin—with the significant difference that all their trials will be sanctified trials. Their journey will ultimately culminate in that day “when he shall appear, [and] we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2b). Then “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain” (Rev. 21:4).

How dreadful will that day be, however, for all who have died as they have lived—as unrepentant sinners! How fearful shall it then be to fall into the hands of the living God whose wrath will burn forever against all who have rejected His beloved Son in unbelief (John 3:36b)! The sorrows of this life will pale in comparison to the everlasting grief that awaits all who have refused to kiss the Son. Therefore, if you have not yet kissed God’s Son in faith (Ps. 2:12), fall at His feet while He still proffers peace and pardon, lest you should perish in the way and an eternity awaits you that will be filled with weeping and gnashing of teeth.

What future awaits you after a brief life marred by sorrow and grief?

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How Shall I Grieve?

When my wife died, I wrestled with a burning question: *How shall I grieve so as to bring maximum glory to God in the midst of my grief?* It became clear to me that there were several foundational biblical principles that I had to internalize afresh by means of renewed spiritual disciplines. These principles focus on our thoughts, emotions, and beliefs. After all, in Christ, I am no longer obligated to earthly thoughts and emotions, nor should I let them rule me; instead, I can be controlled and therefore contented by the truth of God.

OUR THOUGHTS ARE UNDER OUR CONTROL

God holds His children responsible for the control of their thoughts at all times. Two texts of Scripture clearly establish this first principle. “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Phil. 4:8). The verb rendered “think” means to consider, ponder, and force one’s mind to dwell upon the things identified in the text. In other words, you and I are responsible for the direction and focus of our thoughts, even in the midst of crushing grief precipitated by the death of a dearly loved one.

Secondly, Colossians 3:1–2 says, “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.” Once again, we see clearly that we are responsible for the things on which we set our minds. We are responsible to direct and focus our thoughts upon specifically identified truths, even in the midst of grief and sorrow. In this text those truths are “the things which are above, where Christ is.”

The idea here is not that if we truly obey these verses, we will not suffer the pain of loss. In my best efforts to fix my thoughts on the things above, I still felt the pain of my wife’s absence. Rather, in the midst of our grief—which can be painful, sorrowful, lengthy, and at times even debilitating—God is gloried nevertheless when our grief includes a grace-motivated determination, in obedience to these verses, to direct our thoughts to the things above. This both glorifies God and helps to ease—not eliminate—the pain and sorrow of our grief.

OUR EMOTIONS ARE NOT PARAMOUNT

When Adam and Eve were created in the image of God, their emotional constitution, along with all their other faculties and capacities, perfectly reflected that image. Before their fall into sin, all of their emotions were sinless, never moving in any direction that did not fully mirror those of God Himself. However, when sin entered the world, the entirety of the human person—including the emotions—was infected with that sin.

As fallen creatures, we all feel things we ought not to feel, while we feel other things to a degree that we ought not to feel them. Even when we are regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, our remaining sin influences the totality of our humanity, including our emotions. As new creatures in Christ, we need to have our emotions informed by the light of the Word of God, the pressure of gospel motives, and the dynamics of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Our emotions need objective truth to guide them, and the subjective power of the Holy Spirit must harness and channel them in a godly way. Our current cultural climate affords little help to think biblically about this, so consider three texts of Scripture that prove this point.

First, consider Ezekiel 24:15–18: “Also the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke: yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down. Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead, bind the tire of thine head upon thee, and put on thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of men. So I spake unto the people in the morning: and at even my wife died; and I did in the morning as I was commanded.” Second, 1 Thessalonians 4:13 says, “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.” And third, Romans 12:15 says, “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.”

Without question, if we will grieve to the glory of God, we must understand this second foundational principle from the Scriptures: Our emotions were not created by God to have ultimate authority over us. When we fail in this area, as in any other, our guilt and sin are covered by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Yet the difficulty of this command, and our frequent failure in seeking to obey

it, does not alter our calling. We must use the power of the indwelling Spirit to make an ongoing, scripturally directed effort to reign in our emotions.

THE INTERMEDIATE STATE IS REAL, YET TEMPORARY

That period of time between the death of one who dies in the Lord and the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in power and glory has been designated the intermediate state, but we do not know much about it. The Scriptures have much more to say concerning the final, glorified state of believers than they do the intermediate state. In fact, the Christian's "hope" is always used in reference to the ultimate state of glorification, when our souls will be joined permanently to new, deathless bodies.

Therefore, the third foundational principle essential to godly grieving is this: We must know and firmly believe what the Scriptures teach concerning the present place and condition of our loved ones who die in the Lord.

As I held in my arms the lifeless body of my wife, I asked myself this question: What has happened to her in the few moments since she breathed her last? The clear teaching of the Scriptures regarding that question profoundly influenced both the nature and the intensity of my subsequent grief. Scripture plainly teaches us four things about the present place and condition of our loved ones who die in the Lord.

Those four things are that those who die in Christ retain full consciousness of their existence and: 1) are immediately made perfect in total moral likeness to Christ; 2) are immediately ushered into the very presence of Christ; 3) are immediately brought into the company of all the blood-washed saints of Christ; and 4) are immediately ushered into the promised rest of Christ. Each of these things becomes the experience of the believer the moment

his or her spirit is separated from the body. There is not an instant of intervening time between death and the blessed experience of these four realities.

TO GLORIFY GOD

Throughout Marilyn's lengthy battle with cancer, she and I had hammered out before God some very clear guidelines concerning the point at which we would accept the inevitable (barring a direct miraculous intervention of God) and desist from any further medical treatments.

On one particular Tuesday, in March 2004, the pathology report contained both good and bad news. The good news was that the nodules in her lungs had not grown. The bad news was that there were now multiple metastases in her liver. Her reflexive response, couched in words I shall never forget, was this: "Well, dear, I am going home." There was no hand wringing. There was no string of questions concerning God's right to bring her to this place in her life's history. Was there sadness in facing the fact that most likely in a few months she would leave me in the condition of a grieving widower? Of course. Was there sadness at the thought of leaving children, grandchildren, and deep earthly friendships and relationships? Of course.

However, the overriding reality possessing the soul of that dear woman was the fact that God was going to use metastatic cancer in her liver as the rough door by which she would enter "home." Marilyn embraced the fact that as surely as it was true for Peter, God had chosen for her "by what kind of death [she] was to glorify God" (John 21:19).

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THE PLANK OF FREE GRACE

When Mr. M'Laren of Edinburgh was dying, Mr. Gustart, his associate pastor, paid him a visit, and inquired of him, "What are you now doing, my brother?" The strong and earnest response of the dying minister was, "I'll tell you what I am doing, brother; I am gathering together all my prayers, all my sermons, all my good deeds, all my ill deeds; and I am going to throw them all overboard, and swim to glory on the single plank of free grace."

— from "Death-bed Scenes: Or, Dying With and Without Religion,
Designed to Illustrate the Truth and Power of Christianity,"
edited by Davis Wasgatt Clark, 1851.

Grieving the Loss of a Spouse

Just as no two individuals are identical, no two grief experiences are identical. The path each person moves along while grieving the death of a spouse will be as unique as the DNA that makes up the one grieving. It is helpful for them, as well as their family and friends, to remember not to compare their grief experiences with those of others. God is a personal God, able to meet the needs of each of His grieving children in ways as unique as they are.

God's powerful work of joining a husband and wife together as one may be most strongly felt when death rends that joining apart. It is impossible to put into words how God makes two flesh into one. It is equally impossible to fully convey the pain that results when the consequences of the fall of Adam and Eve rend that one flesh apart. However, the truth is that at some point, every married couple will become separated. Death or divorce will forcefully shatter the marriage bond.

One thing that may be helpful in considering grief over the loss of a spouse is to stop comparing. There is no "easier" stage in life to lose a spouse. Sometimes people attempt to comfort a widow or widower with statements such as, "You're young. You'll get married again." Or conversely, "You enjoyed so many years and memories together. You lived a full life with her before she died." It does not matter if a couple has experienced one year of marriage, seventeen years, or six decades. The death of a spouse is like an amputation. A part of one's self is gone and the grief is immense. If a couple has been married for a shorter period, there will be grief over unfulfilled hopes and dreams. If a couple has been married for half of a century, there will be agony over the happy memories which will never be shared again.

Some specific griefs in my experience have been sorrowing over the fact that the person who shared my most precious moments of life was gone. I sorrow over the fact that my husband won't see his children as teenagers. He won't walk our daughters down the aisle or look at grandchildren with me and reminisce about the birth of our own children. I grieve over the fact that my boys won't have their earthly father to help guide them to manhood. I grieve because we won't be empty-nesters together. Someone who has been given sixty years of marriage will experience radically different but equally powerful grief touch-points. Grief is universal but never identical.

I've often heard the expression, "It takes time to get over the death of a loved one." I don't believe one ever "gets over" but rather "moves through" grief. Grieving is a process and a journey. The life of the deceased has ended but the remaining spouse needs to continue living. That can be a terrifying

notion at the start of the grieving journey; life can feel like a long, black tunnel. Grief can carry with it a physical weight and exhaustion. It is important to recognize, acknowledge, and experience the grief. As difficult as grieving is, it needs to be done and not denied. Physical, mental, and emotional health research repeatedly documents the serious, long-term effects which are caused by denying grief. Scripture has several references to our Lord Jesus grieving and we do well when we follow His example: He knew He would raise Lazarus, yet He mourned over the death of His friend as well as the consequences of sin.

Our lives are always changing. As new life experiences occur, new layers of grief will be uncovered and processed. I didn't grieve the fact that my husband would never get to tell his daughter how cute she looked in her new glasses until she needed those glasses. I didn't grieve my son not getting to hear his dad's encouragement during basketball games until the boy decided to play.

Another common expression is our hope and prayer that God will "fill the empty place" that is left by the death of a spouse. This well-intentioned expression is often resisted. The idea of having that empty place filled can feel like replacement. Grieving ones often cringe at the notion of replacing what they have lost, for it seems to diminish the value of the life that ended. Rational thought can reason through the concept; however, feelings and emotions are often in opposition to rational thought. We are still living in the here and now, governed by time and space.

I miss hearing my husband's voice, holding his hand in church, and simply being with him. I've wondered if I could expect God to so fill that empty place that I wouldn't (or shouldn't) miss those things. I've wondered at times why I didn't feel that emptiness being taken away. Was I doing something wrong? Was my faith weak? Was I not praying enough? Was I being too self-centered? Two and a half years into my journey with this grief, I have come to the belief that the empty place won't be filled on earth—and that is okay. There will be many things to be happy about and thankful for, but there will always be an empty place in my heart.

That empty place is a result of the fall. When Adam and Eve chose sin in the Garden of Eden, they lost the closeness of walking with God in the Garden. God still spoke to them, but there was painful distance of physical separation. That separation can still be felt today. I can hear God clearly in precious ways through His Word and evidences of His care, but I can't experience His presence fully. I can't physically walk with Him. And we earthbound humans are so very earthbound that we long for that physicality.



So, some emptiness remains. One believing widower described it as “being lonely but never alone.” God doesn’t remove all the pain; He is present, bearing us through it. Just as God forgives sins and gives new blessings while the sinner may still suffer consequences of sin, so the emptiness created by the loss of a spouse will not be erased until eternity. Even for those who God leads to a second spouse, the heart expands and makes new places, but the empty place of the first spouse does not disappear.

Instead of filling that empty place, God will hold us through it. Instead of taking away the empty place, He wants to show us how life can be rich and full despite the emptiness. He longs to sustain His grieving child through the aching of the empty place and use that emptiness to sharpen our focus on His character in unique ways. He will indeed fill that place in eternity, for then we will be fully sanctified, glorified, and basking in the fullness of Christ’s presence. Then there will be no empty places but fullness of joy and life everlasting. Until that day, our tender shepherd carries, comforts, and conforms us to His image through our grieving.

For those readers who are grieving, I encourage you to express your grief. This can look very different from person to person. It may involve attending Grief Share, meeting with a Christian counselor, writing, journaling, painting, or art expressions. Reading books authored by those who can testify of God’s grace through grief can also be encouraging. Recognize that how you are grieving at this point will not always be the way you grieve. Look for blessings which God works amid your grief. For a child of God, they will be present, for He has promised to work good out of all things, including grief. You, however, will need to be intentional about looking for those blessings and not let grief cloud your eyes to what He is doing. Live fully present, experiencing the pain, while fully fixed on what lies ahead.

God often uses grief to focus our minds and souls more thoroughly on heaven and eternity. What comfort, hope, and joy there is in reminding ourselves of the truths in God’s Word. “Grief may last for a night but joy comes in the morning” (Ps. 30:5). When the very hard days press in, there is God’s promise of renewed joy on another day. And when the night wandering of this present life dawns into

heavenly eternity, there will be indescribable, unceasing, abundant joy. Know that God cares about your grief. Write out notecards with His promises for grieving ones. Display them around your home, vehicle, and workplace. Memorize them. Pray them back to God. Claiming those promises of comfort testifies of your belief that He is a promise-keeping God, fully capable and willing of fulfilling His Word. Use what you have learned through your own grief journey to bless others. Empathy can be a blessing which grows out of grief. Look for those around you whom you can comfort through an email or a card; write out a specific prayer to include.

For those who know someone who is grieving, I encourage you to listen and be gracious. You may have grieved (or think you will grieve) differently than how you see your friend or loved one grieving. Unless they are involved in sin because of the way they are grieving, it is better to talk to God about how they are grieving instead of to them. You have not experienced an identical situation with an identical background and an identical personality. Support, care, listen, and only offer advice if you are asked for it. Any advice you offer should be bathed in prayer and based on God’s Word. For a very practical example: you may think that you will clean out your spouse’s side of the closet in the first two months if she were to die, so you may not understand why your friend has left the closet untouched for a year. Neither is right or wrong. Pray for God to guide your friend through the grief. Even details like closet cleaning timing can be trusted to His timing. To date, I have only watched the DVD of my husband’s funeral once. Others in the family view it every other month or so. We’re different people, grieving differently.

God created immense diversity in the world. There are over 900 species of orchids in one South American country alone. How much more isn’t that diversity demonstrated in the apex of His creation, mankind? It is bound to show up in our grief also. Praise be to God that He is a personal, caring God who is capable of tenderly caring for each of His children and their unique needs in grief.

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Grieving the Loss of a Parent

I write this article at the same time I am working on a sermon on the third petition of the Lord's Prayer—*"Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."* The Heidelberg Catechism, when answering what this means, states, "Grant that we and all men may renounce our own will, and without murmuring obey Thy will, which is only good." It was not my will to have my mother die of cancer when I was ten years old, but it was the good will of my heavenly Father. Permit me to tell you part of my story to allow you to enter into my grief and ultimately, into the journey of love I have been able to walk.

My mother was diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of 37; at that time, I was five years old. I understood very little of the reality of what was happening, but I did know my mother and father had to make frequent trips to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. I remember I was scared. Eventually it was obvious that my mother was quite sick and was slowly losing the battle against cancer. She lost her hair and was reduced to a shell of the woman she once was. After five years of being consumed by a slow cancer, she traded time for eternity and went home to be with her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

While her death brought her earthly journey to an end, it began my journey of a child dealing with the grief of losing a parent. As a grief-stricken, ten-year-old boy, I experienced a sorrow that seemed to hurt my very heart. Even though I had five years to try to understand and prepare for my mom's death, when the moment actually occurred, I realized death was uglier and harder than I had imagined. Those first days, weeks, and months following the funeral were hard, but that was merely the beginning of my grief. Little did I know that the death of my mother would be an ongoing, formative aspect of my life. For years I have thought of writing a book about my mother's death and the impact of her death on my life. The title of this yet unwritten book is *Always a Child*. This title captures the sense of what I read recently in *God's Light on Dark Clouds*. The author, Theodore Cuyler, writes that "there is something about deep sorrow that tends to wake up the child-feeling in all of us." Deep sorrow does not simply wake up the child-feeling at the moment of the loss, but the memories of the sorrow reawaken those same feelings. So, what does a child (even one who is now 44) do with the grief of losing a parent?

The first aspect of my grief is captured in the opening words of *A Grief Observed* by C. S. Lewis; he writes, "No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear." I feared losing my dad; I feared I would die young; I feared that somehow God

was angry at me or my family. I feared God was not as wise, powerful, or loving as I once thought. I never completely lost my bearings, but I think I know what the phrase "dark night of the soul" means and feels like. Jeremiah writes of this in Lamentations 3, "He has led me and made me walk in darkness and not in light...he has set me in dark places... he has made my chain heavy...my soul still remembers and sinks within me."

What is the answer to this heaviness—to the profound grief, fear, and doubts? Cuyler writes, "To my weak vision, dimmed with tears, the cloud is exceeding dark, but through it stream some rays from the infinite love that fills the throne with an exceeding and eternal brightness of glory." Jeremiah proclaims, "This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness" (Lam. 3:21–23). The answer is learning to trust God—to come to the point of surrender to the good and gracious will of God. The most significant way this happens is when it is modeled. I am so grateful for my parents who lived a true faith that wholly trusted God. During the five years my mother battled cancer, I never once heard her question God or speak an ill word against God or the cancer He had given. The same can be said of my father; to this day, I have never heard him raise an objection to God's dealings with him or our family. They both had a high view of God and truly believed Romans 8:28. This was not simply a verse to quote; it was a belief to hold onto and live out. Cuyler writes, "It is the easiest thing in the world to obey God when he commands us to do what we like, and to trust him when the path is all sunshine. The real victory of faith is to trust God in the dark and through the dark." My parents trusted God in the dark, and this trust was a gift to me—a gift that made trust in God contagious.

Second, submitting to the will of God is an ongoing process because the grief associated with the death of a parent continues. This grief is not simply about the initial loss but arises at significant moments of life. I felt the absence of my mother at my high school graduation, when I brought home my future wife, at my marriage, at the birth of my children, at my graduation from seminary and ordination into ministry. It is a longing to share the most important moments with my mother, but knowing I can't. It is mourning what will not be—the moments when my children do things that remind me of my mother and I catch myself thinking, "I wish Mom could meet them." The times I am telling stories

from my childhood that involve my mom, and my wife and kids will say, “I wish we knew her.” In this ongoing grief, I continue to learn to submit to my Father’s will. Part of the secret of submission is captured by Elizabeth Prentiss in *The Home at Greylock*. A mother in the novel who had lost a child at a young age quotes the following epitaph from a newspaper: “‘Oh,’ said the gardener, as he passed down the garden walk. ‘Who plucked that flower? Who gathered that plant?’ His fellow servants answered, ‘The Master!’ and the gardener held his peace.” This same truth is captured by Samuel Rutherford. He writes, “Ye are not to think of it a bad bargain for your beloved daughter that she died—she hath gold for copper and brass, eternity for time. All the knot must be that she died too soon, too young, in the morning of her life; but sovereignty must silence your thoughts.... The good Husbandman may pluck His roses and gather His lilies at midsummer...let our Lord pluck his own fruit at any season he pleaseth.”

Finally, even if I do not understand or see any reason for her death, it is necessary to come to the point of saying that God does all things well. One of the most difficult things in a trial is when we cannot see or understand the “why” behind it. The fact of the matter is God did not consult me about the trial He sent, nor does He need to explain Himself afterwards. The mysteries of providence can be perplexing. We must remember the truths articulated by Cuyler: “In Providence, divine wisdom is married to divine love. All things work together for good to them who love God and trust him. The skeptic jeers at this, but the trusting Christian knows it from actual experience. It is often a dear-bought experience, for some of God’s truths

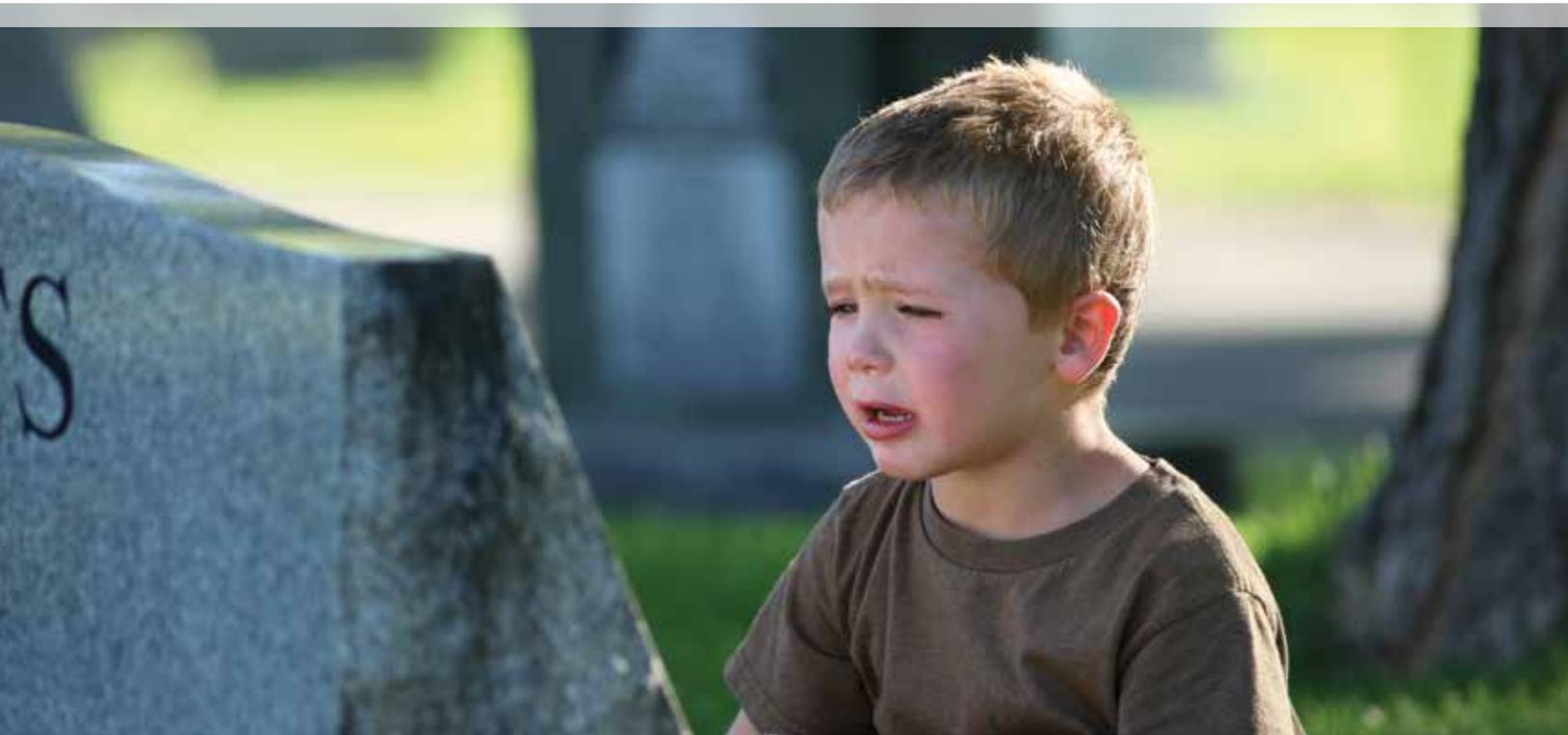
are knocked into us by hard blows, and some lessons are spelled out through eyes cleansed with tears. Our perverse mistake is that we demand that God shall explain himself at every step, instead of waiting for him to unfold his intricate purposes at his own time and in his own way.” You see, knowing God is sovereign does not take away the pain, but it does give me hope.

My hope is that darkness yields to light—that the dark moments open to vistas of His beauty that are revealed only as I emerge from the darkness. My hope is that “the eternal God is my refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deut. 33:27). My hope is that God keeps me and all those He loves in those everlasting arms. So I cling to what I know, not to what is kept from me. As a child of God, I come to my Father in my grief and crawl into His arms where I find refuge. My hope is that my mother, though lost to me for a time, is upheld by God’s everlasting arms and is safe until we meet again. My hope is that the truths of the song sung at my mother’s funeral remain true.

*The sands of time are sinking, The dawn of heaven breaks;
The summer morn I’ve sighed for— The fair, sweet morn awakes.
Dark, dark hath been the midnight, But dayspring is at hand,
And glory, glory dwelleth in Immanuel’s land.*

*O Christ, He is the fountain, The deep, sweet well of love;
The streams on earth I’ve tasted, More deep I’ll drink above.
There to an ocean fullness His mercy doth expand
And glory, glory dwelleth in Immanuel’s land.*

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Learning to Grieve a Miscarriage

In trying to emphasize the unbreakable love and faithfulness God has to His people, the prophet Isaiah contrasts it to the strongest human affection he can find: “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee” (Isa. 49:15). The contrast is so powerful precisely because of the strength of the mother-child bond. Therefore, what could be more unnatural and painful than that this bond should be intruded upon by death? Words fail to adequately express the aching loss a mother and a father experience in the death of “the son of her womb.” These are difficult questions: How do we learn to grieve a miscarriage? What comfort is there for those who have experienced the pain of miscarriage?

The answer to these questions is found in the Word of God. The loss of miscarriage throws up many hard questions in the minds of grieving parents. Why did this happen? Why now? It seems that most of the time the Lord answers these questions in a way similar to the way Jesus once replied to Peter: “What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter” (John 13:7). Yet the Lord repeatedly reminds His people in Scripture: “My dear child, what I am doing is good, it is for the best, and even when you do not understand why, understand that behind everything I do is infinite wisdom coupled with covenant love.” This is how believing parents are able to say, even from the depth and confusion of miscarriage grief, “In the multitude of my thoughts (anxieties) within me thy comforts delight my soul” (Ps. 94:19).

There is perhaps one question above all others to which the aching heart of the mother and father crave an answer: Is my child in heaven? The Bible says, “Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17); “Hear and your soul shall live” (Isa. 55:3). The parent might reason: “But my child never heard the gospel. He or she never had the capacity to hear the word and exercise faith. Is it not just wishful thinking therefore to say my child is in heaven?” What comforts does the Word of God give to parents concerning the salvation of their child?

A first comfort to remember is that our children are conceived in sin. At first glance, this seems entirely paradoxical. How is this any comfort? Well, every comfort in the Word of God is based in truth. It is no comfort to say, “Your child is in heaven because they are innocent; they never committed any sin.” This is not true and so is no real comfort. Remember

David; he was a child of the covenant, born in the tribe of Judah, born in the very line from which Christ would come, the man after God’s own heart, the sweet psalmist of Israel, and yet he confesses in Psalm 51:5, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” Before we receive any gospel comfort, we must acknowledge this hard, hard truth: even our unborn children deserve everlasting death.

A second comfort is to remember the sovereignty of God. Because you believe your child is guilty of sin and deserves to die, and yet will never actually hear and respond to the gospel, you might well ask, How then can they be saved? But remember that, because God is sovereign, He works “when, and where, and how He pleases” (WCF 10:3). The great proof text for this is John 3:8: “The wind bloweth where it [wishes], and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.” This truth reminds us that while God’s *ordinary* way of saving sinners is through using the means of grace, yet He is able to save sinners without these means as well. In the case of elect infants therefore, God works regeneration “by the immediate agency of the Holy Spirit on their souls.”¹

A third comfort is to remember that salvation is by grace. Salvation does not depend on our effort or performance. No one is even saved because God realized they *would* believe. It is just as impossible for a sinner to believe God by his own strength and effort in his 40s or 50s as it is for a baby in the womb. But here is the great gospel truth that applies equally to elect infants as to the whole election of grace: “[God] hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2 Tim. 1:9). The principle of salvation by grace alone is one of the most wonderful and undervalued doctrines in the whole Bible, and it is of immense comfort to grieving parents. God does not save us because of our good works; He saves us by the free gift of grace alone in Christ alone.

A fourth comfort to remember is that God is the covenant God. God’s covenant arrangement provides for the children of believers. His covenant promise is that “I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in



their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee” (Gen. 17:7). Of course, children of believing parents must be born again (John 3:3, 7). But we have already seen that God is able to work regeneration in the womb. When you take this truth alongside God’s covenantal commitment to be a God to believers and to their children after them, we find the strongest encouragement to believe that when the ordinary means of grace are denied to these children, God will work in an extraordinary and immediate way to save these children.

A fifth comfort is to remember the conception of Jesus Christ. The early church father Irenaeus said that Jesus Christ passed through every stage that He might sanctify sinners of every stage. Jesus needed no regeneration, but He is still the one who comes to sing to His heavenly Father, “I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou *art* my God from my mother’s belly” (Ps. 22:10). No matter the age or the stage of life we are considering, it can still be said of Jesus, “Therefore, in all things He had to be made like his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:17). We can say even of our precious children who die in the womb, “These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God” (Rev. 14:4b–5).

When we combine all these comforting biblical truths, we conclude that the children of believers are not without God. In the case of children of believers, it must be true that before death intrudes into this child’s tender life, our

faithful covenant God first interposes the precious blood of Jesus Christ, which washes the child’s sins away as far as the east is distant from the west (Ps. 103:12) and clothes him or her with the perfect righteousness of the Holy Child Jesus. Then, in a wave of sanctifying grace that makes the child perfect in holiness, his or her soul immediately passes into glory, and the little body, still united to Christ, rests in the grave until the resurrection (WSC 37). “Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes” (Rev. 7:15–17).

In conclusion, all the doctrines of covenant love and grace combine to give the strongest encouragement for believing parents to believe that their children who die in infancy are saved by grace in Christ. This is a most marvelous exhibition of the redeeming covenant love and grace in Christ that saves sinners before they are conscious of existence. Believing parents who have lost precious children in the womb or in infancy can take great comfort and strong consolation. Indeed, as Vance Havner said, “When you know where something is, you haven’t lost it.”² “In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul” (Ps. 94:19).

1. John Dick, *Lectures on Theology* (Philadelphia: Greenough, 1840), 3:265.

2. Quoted in Warren Wiersbe, *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the Old Testament* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1993); 2 Sam. 12.

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The Loss of Dreams

“I dreamed a dream in times gone by/when hope was high and life worth living/I had a dream my life would be/so different from this misery I’m living/so different now from what it seemed. Now life has killed the dream I dreamed.” These are the famous haunting words of Fantine, a character in the classic novel, *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo. The story behind the song is one of lost dreams: Fantine, a mother, wanting to provide for her child but, at every turn, her life unwinding into poverty and spiraling into ruin. The song has one theme: bitterness. Bitterness at what could have been but wasn’t; bitterness about the sting of her present circumstances and bitterness about facing a future she didn’t want. In short: bitterness at the loss of her dream of what life would be like.

Very few of us will stand on the street corner and belt out a song of anguish like Fantina, but the sentiments she expressed may be alive and well in our hearts. Who hasn’t experienced the bitterness of hopes dashed and dreams unrealized? Many of us could say, “I had a dream of what life would be like, and this isn’t it.”

There is nothing wrong with dreams or hoping for good things in life. In fact, we are told to make plans, prepare, hope: in essence, “dream.” We can have good and godly dreams: the building up of the church, a healthy family, a life of usefulness, a loving marriage, financial security, and meaningful relationships and work. But since the fall has dashed our purity and communion with God, we and our dreams (our hopes and plans) are broken, both in essence and their fulfillment. Sometimes it’s in the big things of life: churches can flounder in strife or error, babies are miscarried or born with life-threatening conditions, spouses become ill and die, or financial disaster comes.

Even if we haven’t had major disappointments, we often have smaller dreams unfulfilled, such as struggling with loneliness while longing for relationship or the perceived lack of meaningful and fruitful work.

With the loss of any dream, we realize grief and disappointment with an intimacy we never desired. But within every lost dream there is a beckoning, a divine opportunity, even in the midst of our grief and brokenness.

A DIVINE OPPORTUNITY FOR UNBELIEVERS

For unbelievers, the loss of dreams is a divine opportunity sent to awaken us from the stupor of comfort and the futility of life without Christ. It’s a wild wake-up call from the

God of the cosmos to take our eyes off of our little dreams and set our eyes on Him.

Our “little” dreams matter, to us and God, but when we are missing Him, they all amount to nothing. And because sin dwells at our core, our dreams are hopelessly bent to serving only ourselves. But God is gracious and uses disappointments as a call to wake up from the mirage of *perceived* success and happiness here, and to drink of the Living Water, Jesus, in order to bring you to true happiness and success only found in Him.

Look over the past years of your life. Are there areas of loss, disappointment, and frustration? They are divine opportunities to come and drink. They are invitations to place your bitter and frustrated heart into the hands of a capable and complete satisfier: the Christ.

A DIVINE OPPORTUNITY FOR BELIEVERS

But what about the loss of dreams for believers? Many of us have had good dreams slip from our grasp and crash into a thousand pieces. And these aren’t hypotheticals; they are real situations that create a painful daily reality for many of us. In my immediate relationships, I can think of at least ten families dealing with the serious loss of dreams. One has lost a husband, a young couple grieves infertility, a father deals with a disabling illness, a marriage broken by sin, and on it goes.

Providence woven with the fallen world frustrates the life we dreamed of. No matter how much we intellectually understand that God will work things for our good, when we actually endure the loss of dreams, we grieve. And that is not a lack of faith; it is the natural response to the pain of living in a broken world as broken people.

Grief can make us physically nauseous, emotionally depressed, and spiritually dry. It can numb us to the realities of God’s comfort and goodness. Surrounding ourselves with the people of God, immersing ourselves in the preaching of the Word and continuously crying out to God in broken confession and trust are often the remedies for healing the deep wound we feel. In short: commit our broken dreams and grief to Him.

This is the divine opportunity. Even in our losses, He makes us gain in Christ. Here are three ways:

Communion. We’re very short-sighted; it often takes pain for us to lift our eyes off of our little lives and actively seek the Lord in prayer—not only because we have more need, but



because we desire Him more. When our dreams are ripped from our hands, the earth and all it holds becomes small and He becomes everything.

Some Christians are afraid to be transparent about feelings of disappointment, grief, and perplexity in these times. But God doesn't need us to bolster up a false cheerfulness or an it's-all-for-the-best attitude. Instead, He comes near and compels us to turn to Him in our grief.

We can confess our wrong attitudes, ask for forgiveness, grace, and help. He is not a distant, uninvolved Father. He takes your tears and puts them in a bottle, and invites you to take refuge in Him. He reminds you of His everlasting arms when it feels like the loss has struck you so low you can scarcely face another day. He doesn't gloss over your grief but rather binds you to Himself as you walk through valleys.

Sanctification. Holiness is not a boring state of being, it is a life of new obedience to Christ. In that there is a growing intensity and closeness with the triune God. By His power, He actually transforms us into His likeness and into the fellowship of His love. This isn't usually accomplished in gentle or comfortable ways. There is pain involved as our desires, our pride, and our entitlements are chipped away. The dreams we thought we deserved are stripped from us. A surrender to follow Christ no matter what, without reserve or contingencies, grows strong.

New Dreams. Nothing will replace the dreams we've lost. There is no "get-out-of-grief" card when you suffer great loss. But we are not left without hope for the future. We are offered a "new and living hope": Jesus. Even when our dreams may have been good dreams, He gives us better and richer dreams. He takes our dreams for a comfortable, normal life and gives us dreams for an increasing life with Christ. He trades our dreams of pleasing ourselves into dreams of living for Him.

Losing our dreams can free our hearts to embrace Him and a kingdom dream. Just recently, I witnessed an older lady come to faith and a life of service after being converted during a valley of grief. Out of the wastelands of our lives He can grow such beauty, hope, and life.

ASHES OR HIM

Grief and loss are murky and often unpredictable experiences. But no matter how we are affected, we all face similar temptations in them. Our grief can turn us from God instead of towards Him. We can nurse the incredible pain and let it fester into lifelong bitterness and anger. We can settle for ashes and miss the divine opportunity extended to us in grief: come to Him and live.

C. S. Lewis said this about our favorite dreams: "Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favorite wishes every day and death to your whole body in the end: submit with every fibre of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have given away will be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in" (*Mere Christianity*, pp. 226–27).

The story of Fantine's life is not a happy one. She was without Christ and laid low by broken dreams and had no living hope. She died a miserable, painful death, holding only the ashes of dreams and a bitter heart. Your circumstances are different, but maybe your life is also at a point so low that every dream has been lost. Don't settle for clinging to ashes. Turn with your lost dreams to Jesus, for the first time or as your lifelong posture. He is holding more than a dream; He is offering the reality of a life in Him that can never be lost.

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Grieving a Friend

My daughter's big blue eyes look up at me.
 Innocence.
 She's two years old.
 She's holding my finger
 As she's sitting on my lap.
 "Who's that, Mom?"
 Pure innocence.
 She blinks waiting for an answer.
 She has no idea
 That she just shattered my heart.
 I feel a tear trickle down my cheek.
 How do I answer that question?

*We were 14 and 15.
 It was 10:30 p.m., the night was cold.
 Our winter coats on, our boots wet with snow.
 The moon shone bright;
 It's reflection off the white fields seemed almost surreal.
 "I can't wait to grow up," I said, as I looked up into the stars.
 "Be done with school, get married. Become a mom."
 She giggled at me.
 We kept walking.
 The wind whistled past our ears.
 "It's so quiet out," I said, as we crunched through the snow.
 "You know, I can wait."
 She finally replied,
 "I can wait to grow up. It'd be fun to stay young for a while."
 I stopped walking. I looked at her.
 "You're weird," I said.
 I gave her a little shove,
 And together, laughing, we landed in the snow.*

My two-year-old asks again
 "Who is that, Mama?"
 I'm brought back to the present.
 I look at the picture in front of us.
 I take a deep breath.
 "That, my dear child, is Mama's special friend."
 I feel my hands quiver.
 "She's gone. She died."
 "Like Goliath, Mama?"
 Oh, dear God.
 This is so hard.
 "Help me," I pray.
 Suddenly she jumps off my lap.
 She sees her brother, and all questions are forgotten.
 I just sit in my chair.

*"How many kids do you want?" I asked.
 "I dunno. You?"
 I shrugged.
 "Oh, probably four. Or five."
 She laughs at me.
 "You're such a dreamer!"*

Here I sit.
 Married. Mother of two.
 And yet,
 When my little girl asks me
 Who that girl on the picture is,
 I am 14 again.
 The pain of losing someone dear, someone close,
 someone special,
 The pain, it never goes away.
 It's like chronic back pain.
 Some days are better than others.
 But the ache is always there.
 When you're busy, you forget.
 But only for a moment.
 Life happens.
 Time flies.

And yet, whenever I think of her,
 I'm 14 again.
 And she's clear in my mind:
 15, short, big feet, long hair, beautiful eyes,
 Bubbly handwriting,
 Always giggling.
 Competitive and smart.
 Organized, but messy.
 Bossy, but sweet.
 Chipped tooth.
 Young.

"Who's that?" my daughter asked again.
 I cannot answer her.
 She's too young.
 Too fragile.
 She wouldn't understand it.
 Or maybe it's me.
 Maybe I'm too fragile.
 And maybe
 I still don't understand it.



The Inseparability of God's Love

ROMANS 8:38–39

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul declares that nothing can separate him—or any believer—from the love of God. He makes this declaration in answer to the question he posed in verse 35: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” The answer: nothing.

This is quite a statement. Experience teaches us that there are all kinds of things that can separate us from what we love. Paul lists some of them here: death, life, angels, principalities and powers, things present and things to come, height and depth, and—as if to close any potential loophole—any other creature. But absolutely nothing can separate him from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is a great comfort. The fact that nothing can separate the believer from the love of God means that he can never lose his salvation. There are some sincere and well-meaning Christians who deny this by teaching that it is possible for a Christian to fall from grace and to perish in

the end. But that contradicts the words of our text (as well as other passages of Scripture). If nothing can separate the believer from the love of God, then the believer will most certainly be saved.

How is this possible? Only because of Christ. When Christ hung on the cross, He was separated from the love of God. He cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” He was forsaken so that we sinners could be accepted. He was cut off so that we sinners could draw near. He descended into hell so that we sinners could ascend up into heaven. He became the object of God’s wrath so that we sinners could become the objects of His love.

Paul acknowledges this when he writes that this love is “in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The reason why the believer can never be separated from the love of God is because he is united to Christ, the supreme object of God’s love. How necessary it is, therefore, to be in Christ! Apart from Christ, we are not the object of His love, but of His wrath; but in Christ, we become the objects of His inseparable love.

—REV. JACK SCHOEMAN

INTERVIEW *with Dr. Stephen Myers*

I was born and reared in a Christian family in Concord, North Carolina. When I was a student at the University of North Carolina, the Lord called me to seminary and, while at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi, I realized that He was calling me specifically to the pastoral ministry. While I was certain that the Lord intended me for the pastorate, I was encouraged by a few of my seminary professors to pursue a doctorate once I completed my M.Div, so in September 2004, my wife, Lisa, and I (we had gotten married that July) headed to Edinburgh, Scotland, to begin my studies. Three years later, we returned to the United States with a daughter and another child on the way.

Shortly after, I was called to serve as pastor of Pressly Memorial Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church in Statesville, North Carolina. A few years later, the Lord began giving me opportunities to teach three courses a year at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, and one course a year at International Biblical Seminary in Kiev, Ukraine. Throughout both my preaching and my teaching, I found myself drawn to issues of Christology, the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of Scripture, and Covenant Theology.



I now realize that these pastoral and academic experiences were used by the Lord to prepare me to serve Him here at PRTS. As I begin my work here, I have a controlling desire to see biblical doctrine taught in a way that strengthens the church worldwide. Because of that desire, I find the new PhD program here at PRTS enormously exciting. Lord willing, PRTS can become an international center for Reformed scholarship as well as a training ground to equip men to teach the Reformed faith to others all over the world. It is my hope that the combination of academic rigor and spirituality that drew me to PRTS in the first place will be replicated in many nations. I am praying the Lord will do marvelous things through this new program, and I look forward to seeing what the coming years hold.

In the Spring 2017 semester, I will be teaching a course on Reformed Covenant Theology; in the Fall 2017 semester, I will be teaching on Reformed Spirituality and Piety. Outside of these and other teaching duties, I will be working on a few writing projects. I will be writing the chapter on “The Theology of the *Marrow* Controversy” for the upcoming *History of Scottish Theology* project by Oxford University Press, and I also hope to write a book-length account of piety in the midst of persecution and suffering. My prayer is that the Lord will use both of these projects to bless His church in various ways!

Presently, Lisa and I have four children ranging in age from 10 years to 5 months. All of us are excited in different ways about what the Lord is doing here at PRTS, and we look forward to finding our place in the seminary community.

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We have a (short!) list of more expensive books on our wish list. If you can help purchase one or more of these titles, please contact Laura Ladwig (laura.ladwig@prts.edu). She would love to hear from you!

The Reception of Erasmus in the Early Modern Period / Enenkel, Karl A. E. (Brill, 2013) \$180

The Early Reformation in Germany: Between Secular Impact and Radical Vision / Scott, Tom (Ashgate, 2013) \$120

Richard Hooker, of the Laws of ecclesiastical Polity: A critical edition with modern spelling / Hooker, Richard (Oxford, 2013) \$350

Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East / Kitchen, Kenneth and Paul J. N. Lawrence (3 volumes; Verlag, 2012) \$425

The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine / Pollmann, Karla (3 volumes; Oxford, 2013) \$900

Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Archaeology / Masters, Daniel M. (Oxford, 2013) \$200

Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine / Hazser, Catherine (Oxford, 2010) \$150

DR. MICHAEL BARRETT | Itinerary

February 26: Pittsburgh: Bible Baptist
 February 27–28: Pittsburgh: ATS Conference
 March 26: Jordan, Ontario: HRC

Writing Projects

A Radical, Comprehensive Call to Holiness, with Dr. Beeke
Here's Life: The Message of Ecclesiastes
 Revision of *Beginning at Moses*

DR. JOEL BEEKE | Itinerary

February 17: Grand Rapids: HRC Conference for Teachers
 March 3–4: Norfolk, Virginia: Conference on Spiritual Disciplines
 March 14–15: Greenville, South Carolina: Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary Conference
 March 28–30: Bogota, Columbia: Conference for Pastors and Church Leaders—“Celebrating 500 Years of the Glorious Reformation”
 March 31–April 2: Stuart, Florida: Conference for Grace Presbyterian Church
 April 21: Lansing, Michigan: Conference on Biblical Preaching
 April 28: Orlando, Florida: Speaker on 500th Anniversary of the Reformation for Gospel to Colombia Annual Banquet

Recent Publications:

Revelation. The Lectio Continua Expository Commentary of the NT. Grand Rapids: RHB.
Puritan Evangelism: A Biblical Approach (in Indonesian). Penerjemah: Paulus Sulaeman.
 “The Puritans on Marital Love.” *The Banner of Truth* (U.K.), no. 635–636 (Aug–Sept).
 Edit, Octavius Winslow, *Morning Thoughts*. Grand Rapids: RHB.
Living for the Glory of God: An Introduction to Calvinism (in Russian). Evangelical Press.
How Can I Practice Christian Meditation? Grand Rapids: RHB.
Teologia Puritana: Doutrina Para a Vida (A Puritan Theology in Portuguese.) With Mark Jones. Brazil: Vida Nova.
 “Teach All Nations: The Use of the Heidelberg Catechism in North America and Throughout the Non-European World,” with Eric D. Bristley. *Westminster Theological Journal* 78 (2016).
 “John Owen: His Writings and Views on Assurance of Faith.” *Reformation Today* (Sept–Oct).

DR. JERRY BILKES | Itinerary

March 14–17, 2017: FRC Spring Committee Meetings
 April 2, 2017: Bradenton, Florida: Bradenton Reformed Fellowship
 April 30, 2017: Mitchell, Ontario: Bethel FRC

Research/Writing projects:

Hermeneutics of Hope
Christ's Discourses in Matthew

REV. MARK KELDERMAN | Itinerary

February 16–17: Teachers conference for Plymouth Christian Schools.
 Preaching at various PRTS supporting churches.
 Presentations on sexual sin at several churches.

Writing Project:

DMin in counseling from Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

DR. DAVID MURRAY

Projects

PhD on Matthew Henry with Free University of Amsterdam
 Three books with Crossway

DR. ADRIAAN NEELE | Itinerary

January 23–24: Phoenix, Arizona: Grand Canyon University
 March 6–10: Netherlands (TUA, VU)
 March 20–24: Yale University
 April 21–28: Poland: Jagiellonian University
 June 12–16: Yale University

Projects: (Books & Article)

Before Edwards: Sources of New England Theology (Oxford University Press)
Jonathan Edwards: The Sermons on Galatians (Yale University Press)
 The Dutch Translator of Petrus van Mastricht *Theoretico-practica theologia*

GREG SALAZAR | Itinerary

May 19–20: Cambridge, UK: “Conviction, Conformity, and Conscience: William Perkins’s Dual Allegiance and the Dilemma of the Moderate Puritan Tradition in Elizabethan Cambridge,” for the William Perkins Conference

Writing projects:

“Daniel Featley and Calvinist Conformity in Early Stuart England,” PhD Dissertation, The University of Cambridge.
 Co-Editor, *The Works of William Perkins—Volume Six: Doctrinal Works on Predestination*. Grand Rapids: RHB.

DR. WILLIAM VANDOODEWAARD | Itinerary

January 14–16: Cambridge, Nova Scotia: Covenanters ARP Church

Writing project:

1 & 2 Peter, Evangelical Press

Research projects:

The History and Theology of Seceder Presbyterians in Ireland
 Divine Revelation and the Discovery of Ancient Worlds: Genesis Interpretation and Ancient Historical Contexts



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For period 8/1/2016–12/31/2016

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Donations	1,178,214	2,123,500	(945,286)	55%
Tuition Income	229,890	520,000	(290,110)	44%
Scholarship Donations	202,120	285,000	(82,880)	71%
Other Income	71,902	152,500	(80,598)	47%
Total Income	\$ 1,682,126	\$ 3,081,000	\$(1,398,874)	55%
Expenses				
Instruction	\$ 202,293	586,775	(384,482)	34%
Scholarships	159,650	310,000	(150,350)	51%
Administrative	967,145	2,179,225	(1,212,080)	44%
Total Expenses	\$ 1,329,087	\$ 3,076,000	\$(1,746,913)	43%
Net Income	\$ 353,039			

On behalf of the PRTS faculty, staff, and student body, I want to thank our partners for praying and for helping us to end 2016 strong.

—CHRIS HANNA

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As You Grieve, Consider What Jesus Gained

If truth will disciple us even in our grieving (Phil. 4:8), we must think more of what Jesus has gained by this death than upon what we have lost. At the moment the soul of a Christian is separated from the body, the divine purpose of His own sacrifice is fulfilled, the desire of God's heart is satisfied, and holy joy is accomplished.

FULFILLMENT OF DIVINE PURPOSE

According to the Scriptures, God the Father chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world “that we should be holy and without blame before him in love” (Eph. 1:4). In other words, God set His free, sovereign, electing love upon us in eternity past to this end: that by virtue of His redemptive grace and power we should eventually become holy.

The Lord Jesus took on the full responsibility of procuring this salvation for His people by His obedient life and sacrificial death. The Father's purpose became the Son's passionate goal. Ephesians 5:27 clearly affirms that the Christ who loved the church and gave Himself up for her did so for one clear purpose: “That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”

As the heavenly Bridegroom, Jesus has always had a marvelous purpose and vision for His redemptive activity—nothing less than seeing His blood-bought Bride cleansed from every vestige of sin and fully endowed with every Christ-like grace and virtue. When any true child of God dies, part of that purpose is wondrously fulfilled.

Because this is true, we can say in our grief, Yes, I have lost my loved one, but my Lord Jesus Christ has seen fulfilled another precious portion of the reward of His sufferings. In the midst of my grief, shall I not rejoice in His satisfaction?

GOD'S HEART'S DESIRE

Some of the most wonderful promises in the Word of God concern the fact that Christ is always with us. Who can measure the ocean of comfort given to the people of God throughout the centuries from those precious words of Psalm 23:4: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

However, as our Lord was about to leave His disciples by way of His death, resurrection, and ascension back to

heaven, He reveals that His will is for His people to be with Him where He is going (John 17:24). Prior to His return in power and glory, the only way for that prayer to be answered is for the believer to die and go to be with Christ, which is far better.

My heart breaks when I lose a loved one. But if that loved one belonged to Jesus, then death serves as the means for Jesus to receive the desire of His heart. In the midst of my grief, shall I not rejoice that His prayer has seen a further incremental fulfillment?

ADDED JOY

In the death of one united to Christ, Jesus receives a new dimension of joy. We read in Hebrews 12:2 that “for the joy that was set before him [Jesus] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” What is the joy that was set before Him? Ultimately, it must be the joy that will be His when, at the marriage supper of the Lamb, He finally sees His heart's desire fulfilled and He sits down to feast with His perfected and glorified Bride, the church (Rev. 19:6–9).

Whatever we lose in the death of dearly loved ones, remember this. We did not leave the privileges, the glories, and the joys of heaven itself in order to save our loved ones from eternal damnation. We did not undergo the agony of Gethsemane with its bloody sweat, nor did we endure the buffeting, the scourge-shredded back, the torturous act of crucifixion, the darkened face of God the Father, or the pain of hell itself.

Jesus has much more claim on our loved ones than we do. Let us not dare to entertain any secret thoughts—manifestations of unmortified self-will—that God is unfair in taking them from us. Instead, when our loved one has become our loss, we must consciously and deliberately direct our thoughts to the joy that our loss has become Jesus's gain. Remember this clear and stirring declaration: “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints” (Ps. 116:15).

Rev. Al Martin pastored Trinity Baptist Church in Montville, N.J. for 46 years. His wife Marilyn died at age 73, after nearly 50 years of marriage. This article was adapted from chapter 7 of his book, “Grieving, Hope and Solace: When a Loved One Dies in Christ,” published by Cruciform Press, 2011. Used with permission.

What to Say (and What Not to Say) to Those Grieving

It was just two months after our daughter, Hope, died. My husband, David, and I found ourselves attending two funerals in one day: one for a baby who had died at birth, and another for a child who had died of the same syndrome our daughter had. I was waiting in line to greet the parents at the first funeral, when it hit me: I have no idea what to say. Of all people, I should know what to say to these friends. But I didn't. I had no great wisdom that would answer the questions, no soothing truths that would take away the hurt.

Let's face it—it's awkward. We want to say something personal, something meaningful, beautiful, helpful, sensitive. Something that demonstrates that we have a sense of what they're going through. And what we don't want is to be that person who says the insensitive thing.

Over many years now of interacting with grieving people—most of whom emerge from their experience of sorrow bent on setting the world straight on what to say and what not to say to people like themselves—I've learned a thing or two that people going through grief wish people understood.

The first and most important thing I have to tell you is this: It matters less what you say than that you say something. The second thing I have to tell you about your desire to know what to say, before we dive into ideas about what to say, is this: even if you come up with the perfect thing to say (as if there is such a thing), it simply won't fix the hurt or solve the problem of the people who are grieving.

So how do you begin to formulate what you might say when the time comes? It depends on the nature of your relationship with the person. It depends on where that person is in the process of grief. Let's begin with the basics.

LET THE GRIEVING PERSON TAKE THE LEAD

Some people go through the visitation, funeral, or memorial service and the days immediately following with a great sense of strength, and they relish the interaction with people who have come around them at this difficult time. Others are worn out, overcome, and can barely converse with those who have come to express sympathy. Determine in advance and discipline yourself in the moment to listen more than you talk. Let the grieving ones be the first to state their feelings or conclusions, and then follow their lead.

DON'T ASSUME

We tend to assume a lot of things that we probably shouldn't. Don't assume that those you are comforting are confident that the deceased is now in heaven. Don't assume they are relieved to be free of the heavy burden of care for someone

who was sick a long time. Don't assume they want to feel better anytime soon. Don't assume they want to get married again. Don't assume that because they are in the throes of loss, they have questions that aren't being answered or that they feel abandoned by God. Maybe they have much more Scripture-saturated, Holy Spirit-given clarity than you do. Don't assume.

DON'T COMPARE

I'm not sure why, but we tend to compare pain: This is harder than that. That would be worse than this. You can't really compare pain. It all just hurts. So when someone has lost a parent to natural causes, don't suggest that such a loss is so much easier than losing that parent to some other cause of death. When a couple loses an unborn child, don't say that it would be so much harder to lose a child who had lived with them.

DON'T FEEL THE NEED TO FIX

We hate loose ends. We want to end every conversation with everyone smiling and assured that everything will be just fine. But that's not always reality, and sometimes what people need is to wrestle for a while with the ugliness and uncertainties rather than feel better and move on. Offering real comfort to those who are grieving is not about leaving them with a happy thought, but more about accepting where they are, whether that be happy or sad, confident or confused.

DON'T BE IN A HURRY

There might be lots of things you hope to talk about with a grieving person. But don't be in a hurry. Think of it as more like a marathon than a sprint. The day of the tragedy or the day of the visitation or funeral is not the time for talking through everything that will make sense of the loss and get that person on the road toward recovery. It is the time for simply coming alongside and being a companion in the sadness and questions.

DON'T MAKE IT ABOUT YOU

To be honest, I have a hard time believing some of the stories I've been told about people who, in the midst of the most difficult days of grief, added to the pain of those grieving by getting offended or complaining about not being included or consulted, by needing credit for all they were doing to help, or by seeking attention through their previous involvement with the deceased. But the only story that needs to be told is theirs—at least until you are invited to share yours.



LISTEN MORE THAN YOU TALK

I know it's awkward. And many of us tend to want to fill up the awkward silence with many words. Yes, there will probably be an interaction requiring words in the receiving line. But if you hang around a little more, don't be afraid to simply be with the grieving person—sitting on a park bench or porch swing, going fishing, taking a drive, working in the garden, folding the laundry, baking some cookies—growing in your comfort with silence, giving the gift of quiet and unassuming companionship.

DON'T TELL THEM WHAT TO DO

When we interact with those thrust into the unknowns of grief and we want to help, we can sometimes assume a parental tone, telling them what they need to do or not do. Some people become instant preachers, experts, spiritualists, mothers, and advice dispensers in situations of grief. They tell the grieving person what he must remember, what he must do, what he must read, what he must avoid, what grief is going to be like, the counselor he needs to see, the medication he needs to take, the trip he needs to go on, the way he should think, act, and feel.

And here's the rub: you may be exactly right! But rather than talk down to him like a parent to a child, come alongside him to figure things out. Instead of giving an instruction as an authority, you might float a "I wonder if..." idea as a friend and see if it is taken hold of.

ESTEEM THEIR GRIEF

When we're grieving, we want to sense that the person we're talking to recognizes how significant our loss is, and what we really don't want is to sense that our loss is being minimized or dismissed as somehow *less than*. We minimize others' loss when we talk about what could be worse, implying that they should be grateful instead of sad, or when we seem to assume that because the deceased had lived a long life or had been sick for a long time or was not that close of a relation, the grieving one should not be quite so sad.

Even if you have experienced a very similar loss to that of the person you're talking to, make the choice to diminish your experience and esteem their loss.

DON'T BE PUT OFF BY TEARS

While tears can be awkward for everyone, tears are really such

a gift. Tears have a way of washing away or carrying away the toxicity of the pain or grief. To shed tears is to release the tension and get the pain out in the open where it can be dealt with. When someone cries in your presence, don't be afraid that you made her cry. You don't have to apologize. You did not make her cry; you simply brought to the surface what was there anyway and needed to be released.

Along with this, don't assume that what they really need is to be cheered up. It is a great gift to grieving people if those around them can be comfortable with their sadness, to not assume their sadness is a problem but rather that the deceased was of such value that their absence justifies great sorrow.

DON'T ASK POTENTIALLY PAINFUL QUESTIONS OUT OF CURIOSITY

Unless someone tells you that the deceased died by taking his or her own life, even when you may suspect it, don't ask. And if you are told, yet without details, don't ask. If he wanted to talk about it, he would. The same principle applies for deaths of all kinds. When someone dies, don't ask if he was wearing a seatbelt. Don't ask if she was a smoker. If the grieving person initiates a conversation about the spiritual condition of the deceased, then feel free to engage, sharing his sense of relief or his disappointment as the case may be. But don't ask.

Remember that when you're talking to those who witnessed the death or the dead body of someone they love, they have vivid mental pictures that come to mind when they talk about it. Their memories may include grimaces of pain, cries of agony, struggling for breath. Their mental pictures may be very bloody or very bleak and evoke feelings of regret and helplessness. Don't force them to relive those painful scenes in order to satisfy your curiosity.

But—and this is very important—be the kind of friend who is willing to listen when and if they do want to talk about those hard moments or the gruesome scene or the feelings of regret. Hopefully they will be able to do so at some point with somebody. If it is you, listen and let your heart be broken with theirs, and then keep the details to yourself. Such personal sharing is too sacred to be shared.

Adapted from Chapter 1: "What to Say (and What Not to Say)" from *What Grieving People Wish You Knew* by Nancy Guthrie, © 2016, pp. 19-37. Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, Ill., 60187, www.crossway.org.

WILLIAM MASON (1719–1791) AND HIS *A Spiritual Treasury*

Reading through a classic daily devotional of rich, spiritual, biblical substance each year can be a great boon for our souls. Recently, Reformation Heritage Books published William Mason's classic A Spiritual Treasury for the Children of God which, in its unabridged version, contains 730 daily devotions—one for each morning and each evening of the year. So who was William Mason?

William Mason (1719–1791) was born at Rotherhithe, on the Thames in Southwark.¹ The family moved a short distance to Bermondsey when he was ten. As a child, William received a basic education in Latin and was apprenticed to his father, a clock-maker. When his father died in Mason's twenty-first year, he inherited the business and cared for his mother until her death. The next year, he married "Miss Cox," with whom he spent the next five decades until his death. Later in life, he served as a justice of the peace in the county of Surrey.

As a young man, Mason lived a moral life and devoted himself to public services of the Church of England and to private prayer. However, he found no peace of conscience in good works. He began attending a Methodist chapel, and under the influence of John Wesley (1703–1791) became a leader of a class. His newfound faith and association with the Methodists brought persecution—some cursed at him and others said he had gone mad—and economic hardship. Reflecting back on these events more than twenty years later, he remembered the trial of friends becoming enemies, the pressure of providing for his family, and the temptations of his own flesh, but confessed that he had proven God's faithfulness, and lacked nothing.²

Though he gained much from his association with the Wesleyan Methodists, he soon found his conscience troubled with fears that he would fall away to damnation. Finding peace in the promises of divine preservation such as Romans 5:10, he left his former Wesleyan connection and became an associate of George Whitefield (1714–1770) and a close friend of William Romaine (1714–1795). Continuing in the Church of England, he attended the ministry of Thomas Jones (1729–1762), the fervent evangelical chaplain of St. Saviour's, Southwark.³

Mason was a man of the Word but did not believe he was called to preach. Instead, he served the church well as an author. His writings asserted evangelical Calvinism in contrast to moralism, Arminianism, enthusiasm (an eighteenth-century term for mystical fanaticism), and

antinomianism. He wrote several little books for children and an excellent set of notes on John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, which were frequently reprinted. Mason also evidently had a sense of humor; he gathered from Wesley's *Christian Library* various selections that taught the doctrine of Christ's imputed righteousness—which somehow missed Wesley's editorial excising—and then had the courage to publish them under the title, *The Scripture Doctrine of Imputed Righteousness, Asserted and Maintained by the Rev. Mr. J. Wesley* (1763), much to the latter's chagrin!

Mason was best known for his works of evangelical piety. As a result of his own spiritual combat against his quick temper, he published *An Affectionate Address to Passionate Professors* (1774). He also wrote *The Christian Communicant* (1769) to promote the spiritual use of the Lord's Supper, and *The Believer's Pocket Companion: Or, The One Thing Needful, To Make Poor Sinners Rich and Miserable Sinners Happy* (1775). He briefly served as the editor of the *Gospel Magazine* in the 1770s, being succeeded by Augustus Toplady and Erasmus Middleton.⁴

In the midst of many labors in Christian publication, Mason never forgot his responsibilities as a Christian father, businessman, and citizen. He was remembered often to have said, "By the grace of God I am what I am."⁵ He retired from business in 1788, and became an acting magistrate. He suffered from a series of strokes in the last years of his life and died on September 29, 1791.⁶ He was buried at the churchyard of St. Mary Magdalen, Bermondsey, the parish where he had lived for over six decades. During his last twelve years, he sat under the ministry of his son, Henry Cox Mason (d. 1804), the author of a study Bible, editor of his father's works, and founder of a school for the deaf.

Mason's *magnum opus* was his series of daily meditations for morning and evening, published as *A Spiritual Treasury for the Children of God*. It was printed in 1765,⁷ and reprinted in 1771, 1785, and 1798. It is said of his composition of this book that Mason rose at four o'clock in the morning to meditate and write each day. So intense was his concentration on the Word that one morning, when a man visited him on a matter of business, Mason intended to write down the man's name and address on a piece of paper, but later discovered that the slip of paper said nothing but "Acts 2:8," the Scripture on which he was meditating!

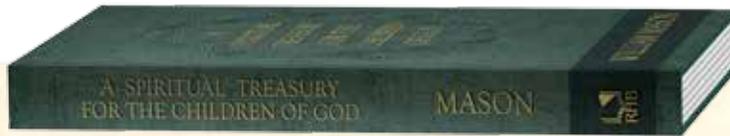
The *Spiritual Treasury* is thoroughly biblical, warmly experiential, and eminently practical. Mason's exegesis and presentation of doctrine are remarkably good, despite having

never gone to seminary nor ever becoming a minister. His daily devotionals have encouraged, convicted, and instructed thousands of God's people throughout the centuries since first published. More recently, reprintings of the *Spiritual Treasury* have only included half of the original work. In this photolithographed reprint, we include both his morning and evening devotions for each day of the year. It is our prayer that you will benefit greatly from this clock-maker's experience of communion with God which he poured into these daily meditations in the early morning hours.

1. On William Mason's biography, see *The Evangelical Magazine* (January, 1794): 3–11; Erasmus Middleton, *Evangelical Biography* (London: J. Stratford, 1807), 3:311–18; Edwin F. Hatfield, *The Poets of the Church: A Series of Biographical Sketches of Hymn Writers with Notes on Their Hymns* (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph and Co., 1884), 412–14.

2. See the meditation for the evening of June 23, page 352 below.
 3. A. Skevington Wood, "Thomas Jones of Southwark," *Evangelical Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (1974): 174–82. Wood notes, "For several years Thomas Jones was the only beneficed Evangelical clergyman in the entire London area," and he was "a burning and a shining light in the city" (p. 178). When Jones died at age 33, Romaine preached, *The Blessedness of Living and Dying in the Lord* (London: Worrall, 1762).
 4. John Gadsby, *Memoirs of the Principal Hymn-writers and Compilers of the Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and Nineteenth Centuries*, 4th ed. (London: John Gadsby, 1870), 62.
 5. *Evangelical Magazine* (January 1794): 8.
 6. *Evangelical Magazine* (January 1794): 10; *Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Chronicle* 61, pt. 2 (October 1791): 971. Middleton gives the date as September 20 in *Evangelical Biography*, 3:317.
 7. William Mason, *A Spiritual Treasury for the Children of God* (London: M. Lewis, E. and E. Dilly, 1765).

This article is drawn from the publisher's preface. See page 34 of this issue for ordering this book.



A sample of William Mason's daily meditations:

JUNE 23

Lacked ye anything? And they said, nothing.
 —Luke 22:35

EVENING

Precious words to me. One is unwilling to speak of oneself; there is danger of pride and self-seeking in it: yet, with a view to our Lord's glory, a sincere desire to exalt His grace and goodness, and to encourage fellow Christians' confidence therein, a poor sinner may speak of his experience. With tears of thankfulness, I record the goodness of my Lord, to the chief of sinners. Upwards of twenty years ago, when it pleased Him to call me by His grace, and make me happy in His love, my name was cast out as evil—friends became foes—their hands were against me—they withdrew their favors from me, and derided me. Under narrow circumstances—tender feelings for a large family—carnal reasonings of my corrupt nature—and strong temptations from the enemy, I was often distressed. But my Lord was gracious. Many and many a time did He bring this text to my mind; and, as it were, with all love and tenderness, asked me, "Lackedst thou any thing?" I was constrained with gratitude to reply, "Nothing, Lord." Christ is a most precious master to serve! I have proved it. Oh, trust the Lord, ye His saints: for they who trust Him lack nothing. So these disciples found it, though sent out in want of every thing.

The hearts of all men are in the Lord's hands; He will open them, with a love to Him, and more ardent desires to please Him. We have here a reproof, against all that care and anxiety about the things of this life, which so sadly distress our minds. What shall we say to the spirit and conduct of many professors? They have all the same anxious cares, and solicitous concerns, about the world, which the men of it have: but Christ charges us, "Take no thought for your life, neither be of doubtful mind," etc. (Luke 12:22–29). Do they act as if they ever heard, or gave the least credit to Christ? Oh, say they, we must do our duty, and provide for our families. God forbid any Christian should neglect this: but must we therefore act, like those who know not God? Plainly, such will be rich: they are anxious to get a fortune: they want to be independent! Of whom? Of God. Start not! This spirit works in us all; over some it prevails. They do not like to live so dependent on God, as every day to come to Him with, "Give us this day our daily bread." Oh, there is more atheism and infidelity in the pursuits of such, than they are aware of. How many have forsaken Christ for the love of the world! "They who will be rich fall into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition (1 Tim. 6:9). "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul" (Lam. 3:24).

PSALTER REVISION

The Governing Principles (1): Format

As you may be aware, the Synod of the Heritage Reformed Churches has approved working with the Free Reformed Churches and the Protestant Reformed Churches toward a possible Psalter revision. The Psalter Revision Committee consists of three men from each denomination. This article was written by Rev. Doug Kuiper, one of the men from the Protestant Reformed Churches. It is the first of a series of three explaining the principles that govern the committee. These articles will demonstrate that, if the project gets approved, there will be only small changes, and the Psalter will still be very recognizable. It is the express desire of the committee that The Psalter reflect the Psalms as closely as possible. In that way, while this article explains some formatting changes, be assured that the proposed revisions are more conservative than the current Psalter.

I would like to explain the principles which the interdenominational Psalter Revision Committee is using to evaluate the musical selections in our Psalter, and on the basis of which it decides whether to recommend changes. The committee reported these principles to the respective synods, and each synod expressly approved them.¹

THE IMPORTANCE OF THESE GOVERNING PRINCIPLES

My purpose in this and following articles is to demonstrate that the revision committee is consciously asking the right questions and striving to find good answers. Evaluating music and poetry is inherently subjective; one likes this better, and another likes that. It follows that deciding whether any tune or set of lyrics should be revised is also at least partly subjective. I won't pretend that the nine men on the interdenominational committee don't come to the table with nine different minds and wills. However, the minds and wills of these nine are not the ultimate explanation for the proposed revisions. The nine are focusing and directing their minds and wills to ask good questions, and to find good answers. The objective standard on the basis of which nine different men approach our work is set forth in these governing principles.

I hope every reader can appreciate this. Why can the members of our denominations be confident that the proposed revision will improve our Psalter in certain areas? Because the committee is being governed by certain principles, and because our respective Synods have approved or adopted these principles.

So what are these principles? And how is the committee actually being governed by them? I will explain the principles and give examples of how the committee is applying them in particular instances. Our "particular instance" today is Psalter 203.

THREE CATEGORIES OF PRINCIPLES

The principles fall into three categories: text, music, and format. By "format" we mean the appearance, presentation, or layout of the songs and music in the book.

The committee placed "format" last in the list, recognizing that it is the least weighty of the three. Scripture itself regulates the *text* of our songbook—we sing the Psalms, and certain other Scripture passages which are appropriate for song. So important is this point that Reformed churches have expressed it in our Church Order, Article 69. The *music* of our songbook is not regulated as closely by Scripture (there are no inspired tunes), but this principle of worship is still relevant: "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40). The music of our songbook must be conducive to orderly, God-glorifying worship. But to the *format* of a songbook, neither Scripture nor any principle of worship speaks explicitly or implicitly.

Why begin with format, the least weighty of the three? First, because this matter can be treated rather briefly. Second, because a concern that some raise is: "What will the revision look like? Psalter number 203 will still be Psalter number 203, won't it? If not, how will we know how to find our beloved 'In Sweet Communion'?"

The interdenominational Psalter revision committee informed the Synods of the FRC, HRC, and PRC that it would consider the following six matters regarding format:

- 1) The Psalters must be numbered in such a way that the selection is determined by the Psalm number. For example: 1A and 1B for Psalm 1; 10A, 10B, 10C for Psalm 10, etc.
- 2) The Genevan Psalms are to be placed under the appropriate Psalm.
- 3) Each Psalter should have its own page when possible.
- 4) Unhelpful musical notations and editorial comments should be eliminated.
- 5) Tune and authorial information should be placed on the page.
- 6) Biblical Psalm titles could be adapted for inclusion.

The third point speaks for itself. I'll comment on the other five.

#1 AND #2: ORGANIZE ACCORDING TO PSALMS

The committee desires that the revised Psalter be familiar. It also desires that we know which portion of God's Word we are singing in any given song. In our singing, God's people must show that the word of Christ dwells in us richly (Col. 3:16). Let me repeat what must dwell in us richly and be manifest in our singing: not a favorite *tune* nor familiar *words* set to English poetry, but the *word of our Savior* to us.

The Psalter's current format helps us do this by identifying the Psalm on which the Psalter number is based. For example, under Psalter 203 we find the words "Psalm 73." The proposed format of the revision will make this connection between Psalm and song even more explicit by directly identifying the selection with the Psalm on which it is based. Psalter 201 will become Psalm 73A, Psalter 202 will become Psalm 73B, and Psalter 203 will become Psalm 73C. We will grow not just in knowing our Psalter, but God's Psalms.

Another result of numbering our Psalter this way will be that all of the selections from any one Psalm will be grouped together. On this point, our current Psalter could use improvement. Glancing through our current Psalter, you notice that to find all of the selections from a particular Psalm, you must look in several different places—*three* places, if you use the PRC Psalter (which ends with 434), and four, if you use the FRC and HRC version (which ends with 450). The first 413 numbers cover the 150 Psalms in order. Next, numbers 414–430 are based on 17 different Psalms. Then comes 431 (Ps. 81) and 432 (Ps. 99). In the version of the Psalter used by the FRC and HRC, you find a selection from Psalm 134, then 12 more selections based on as many Psalms. Interspersed in these are the Lord's Prayer (433, 434), the 10 Commandments (435), a version of the Song of Zacharias (448), and a version of the Song of Simeon (450).

God providentially governed the compilation and order of the 150 Psalms; it is reasonable to organize our Psalter in

the same order, grouping all the selections from one Psalm together in one place.

Back to the concern: how will you know how to find what we now know as Psalter 203? In one of several ways. First, when you know that Psalter 203 is based on Psalm 73, you simply turn to the selections from Psalm 73. They are all in one place. Second, the committee proposes a number be placed in the lower right hand corner of each page,² corresponding to the current Psalter number (in this case, look for "203"). Finally, an index of previous Psalter numbers will be included.

#4: FEWER MUSICAL NOTATIONS

The committee is reviewing every Psalter number with the goal of having fewer musical notations and editorial comments in the Psalter. These include instructions on how to sing the song, like "slowly" (Psalter 216), "rit[ard]" (Psalter 202, 220), and "organ, voices in unison, voices in harmony" (Psalter 219, 226). This also includes fermatas—those marks over a note that tell us to lengthen the note by some undetermined length, such as you find twice in Psalter 202, once in the main part of the song and once in the chorus.

Most of these will be removed. Our accompanists can study the music and words to determine how to play the music in a way appropriate for their own congregation. A few fermatas might still be found in the revision, in cases in which the committee agrees they are necessary. For example, the fermata in the chorus (but not in the main section) of 202 would likely remain.

#5 AND #6: MORE INFORMATION

The last two matters regard what information, in addition to the music and lyrics, is found on the page. Copyright notices will not usually be necessary. They were necessary in 1912, when our Psalter was first made, but now the music of our Psalter is in the public domain. When we include tunes or selections not currently found in our Psalter, we will provide notice of copyright when necessary, as required by law.

Above the music and lyrics of every Psalter number, but below the number and title, one finds the meter of the tune, the name of the tune, and the author of the tune. These will still appear, but will be moved to the lower left hand corner of the page, in this order: author name, tune name, meter.

Currently, below Psalter 203 one finds the words "[Selected Stanzas]." Possibly these words refer to a previous versification of the Psalm, but that is not certain. In the revision, we propose informing the singer which verses of the Psalm are covered; so under "73C" you find "vv. 23–28." Also, the small subscripted numbers at the beginning of various lines will indicate that the Psalter lyrics correspond with that particular verse.

The committee began to implement the sixth matter mentioned above: "Biblical Psalm titles could be adapted

Guidance and Glory

CHORUS

My God, I will ex - tol Thee And ev - er bless Thy Name;

Each day will I give thanks to Thee And all Thy praise pro - claim.

[Stanzas 8-10]

203

Life With God

PSALM 73 C. M.

PRAYER

William U. Butcher

1. In sweet com-mun - ion, Lord, with Thee I con-stant-ly a - bide;
 2. Thy coun - sel through my earth-ly way Shall guide me and con - trol,
 3. Whom have I, Lord, in heav'n but Thee, To Whom my tho'ts as - pire?
 4. Tho' flesh and heart should faint and fail, The Lord will ev - er be
 5. To live a - part from God is death. 'Tis good His face to seek;

My hand Thou hold - est in Thy own To keep me near Thy side.
 And then to glo - ry aft - er - ward Thou wilt re - ceive my soul.
 And, hav - ing Thee, on earth is nought That I can yet de - sire.
 The strength and por - tion of my heart, My God e - ter - nal - ly.
 My ref - uge is the liv - ing God, His praise I long to speak.

Used by arrangement with Oliver Ditson Co. [Selected Stanzas]

171

73C In Sweet Communion

vs. 23-28

1. ²³In sweet com - mun - ion, Lord, with Thee I
 2. ²⁴Thy coun - sel through my earth - ly way Shall
 3. ²⁵Whom have I, Lord, in heav'n but Thee, To
 4. ²⁶Tho' flesh and heart should faint and fail, The
 5. ²⁷To live a - part from God is death, ²⁸'Tis

con - stant - ly a - bide; My hand Thou hold - est
 guide me and con - trol, ²⁵And then to glo - ry
 Whom my tho'ts as - pire? And hav - ing Thee, on
 Lord will ev - er be The strength and por - tion
 good His face to seek; My re - fuge is the

in Thy own To keep me near Thy side.
 aft - er - ward Thou wilt re - ceive my soul.
 earth is nought That I can yet de - sire.
 of my heart, My God e - ter - nal - ly.
 liv - ing God, His praise I long to speak.

William U. Butcher
 Prayer
 C. M.

203

for inclusion.” The current song titles are general; they do not clearly capture the essence of the Psalter in distinction from other Psalters. For example, Psalter 203 speaks of “Life With God.” But that title could be used also for Psalter 204 (also from Psalm 73), or even for a selection from Psalters 31 or 32. Our initial plan was to replace the current titles with the title of the Psalm. In the case of Psalm 73, that would be “A Psalm of Asaph.” But then Psalters 73A, B, C, and D (201–204) would have the same title. And does knowing that Asaph wrote the Psalm help us understand the song as we sing it? Perhaps one could argue some benefit to that. But then one comes to Psalm 75, the heading of which is: “To the chief musician. Al-taschith. A Psalm or Song of Asaph.” Does all that help? And if “Al-taschith” is correctly translated to mean, “to the tune of ‘Do Not Destroy,’” is that any more helpful?

In the end, the committee decided to use the first words of each song as its heading. Psalter 203 would now be called “In Sweet Communion.” Children often refer to the Psalters by the first words already. One of my children once asked to sing the “Hallelujah” number. We had to ask if he meant

409 or 413, but at least we narrowed it down quickly to those two.

If in the matter of *format*, a matter less weighty than those of text and music, the committee is being governed by principles, the reader may be sure that the same is true in weightier considerations. God willing, I will address the principles regarding text in the next article.

1. Although this article was written primarily for the *Standard Bearer*, it is being shared with the FRC and HRC for use as they see fit. Because of this, I quote the relevant decision of each denomination’s synod. The 2016 Synod of the FRCNA decided: “1. To adopt the principles for revision that have been developed by the committee and outlined in the report” (Article 32). The Synod of the HRC “granted...approval of the principles as laid out in the report” (Article XI.4, motion 160607-12). The PRCA Synod’s approval of these guidelines is implied in its instruction to its committee to continue participating in this project. Synod’s third ground for taking this decision was “Acceptable guidelines presented to Synod 2015; *the principles presented in the Psalter Revision Committee report* [italics mine, DJK]; and the committee’s preliminary report” (Article 49 B. 3, ground c).

2. Whether this will always be in the lower right hand corner or whether it will alternate from left to right so that it is always on the *outside* corner, the committee has not yet determined.

CREATED MALE AND FEMALE

Is it okay or wrong to think or talk about sex?

Suggested Reading: Genesis 1:26–31 and Genesis 2:21–25

God created us male and female (1:27) and brought Eve to Adam to be his wife (2:22). He instituted marriage and stated that a husband and wife should be one (2:24–25). God commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful and to multiply (1:28). Human sexuality and marriage are gifts from God. Sexual intimacy within the safe and God-given, loving boundary of marriage is God-ordained. Marriage is an institution of God established in Paradise, even before sin entered into the world. The Bible speaks a great deal about human sexuality and marriage. Therefore, it is not wrong to think or talk about human sexuality in God-honoring and appropriate ways.

When we misuse God’s gift of human sexuality, however, and think and talk about, or engage in sex outside of marriage, then it is wrong. Sexual jokes and lewd comments, sexual advertising and pornography, provocative dress and flirting—in short, all sexual stimulation and activity outside of marriage is clearly forbidden by God. When we think and/or talk about sex in these ungodly ways, then we sin.

Many young women have been deceived and seriously hurt by thinking that a young man was attracted to them and loved them, but the truth was he was interested in her for his own pleasure. Many young men have been deceived and seriously harmed by pornography. They thought that pornography was fun and exciting,

but painful memories and destructive habits plague their future lives and marriages.

God knows that we have sinful minds and hearts. To protect us, our Creator placed all expressions of sexual intimacies within the loving bounds of lifelong commitment in marriage. God’s plan is that the gift of sexual intimacy be reserved for the one, special wife or husband God has provided, who has vowed before God, family, and community to love through all of life, including both health and sickness, until death separates us. Sex is beautiful and special within marriage. But sexual intimacy outside this loving bond of marriage is sinful and destructive.

Allowing transgender identities also contradicts God’s Word and is sinful. God has created us male or female. One’s gender is not a person’s choice. Same-gender sexual relationships contradict God’s Word as well, and such acts are also sinful. God instituted marriage as a special union of one man and one woman and stated that therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife, and these two shall be one flesh.

Do you know the story about the goldfish who thought he wanted to enjoy the “freedom” of swimming outside of the fish tank that his owner had prepared for him? He tried to jump out many times, and finally one day he succeeded, but died on the floor.

Good laws and biblical truths can protect freedom and keep us from harm and chaos. Imagine what would happen to our freedom to drive safely if no one obeyed speed limits and everyone could choose whether they wanted to stop for stop lights or not. How does this and the goldfish example relate to sexual intimacy? Why is this an important principle and not just a lifestyle choice?

ARE YOU ONE OF THE LAST OF THE PURITANS?

A certain vainglorious party of Pretenders to intellect and culture tell us now that the old Puritanic faith is nearly extinct; there are only a few of us ignorant people who now hold the same truths as John Owen, John Bunyan, Goodwin, and Charnock; but all the elite of the world, those who have all the “sweetness and light” to themselves, the thinkers, the mental gentility have all been sensible enough to give their votes for something more suitable to the times.

In the name of God, we shall show them the difference yet, and by His Spirit He will din their ears with the gospel ram’s horn till they and their Jericho come down in a common ruin. The evangelical doctrine which shook Europe will shake it yet again, and England shall yet know that the self-same truth, for which her martyrs died and for which her Puritans fought on many a well-contested field, shall break the rationalism and ritualism of this land in pieces yet, and all else that standeth in the way of the true gospel of the living God. We are not afraid nor discouraged, but we cry mightily unto the King that we may once more lift up a shout because of His presence.

—CHARLES SPURGEON

FATHER *and* SON AGREE

That there is a covenant between the Father and the Son concerning our salvation, I willingly grant and shall open and confirm by Scripture. The whole business of our salvation was first transacted between the Father and Christ before it was revealed to us. Hence, we are said to be given unto Christ (John 17:6, 10), as if the Father should say to the Son, “These I take to be vessels of mercy, and these Thou shalt bring unto Me; for they will destroy themselves, but Thou shalt save them out of their lost estate.” And then the Son taketh them at His Father’s hand; and looking at His Father’s will (John 6:37–39), He taketh care that none be lost of them that His Father hath given Him.

This covenant is expressed in Scripture, first, on the *Father’s* part:

1. *There is a designation and appointment of Christ the Son to the office of Mediator to be a means of bringing us back to God and into a covenant with Him.* Hence, Christ is said to be sealed by the Father (John 6:27), as marked out for such a purpose (1 Peter 1:18). He was ordained in the counsel of the Father, before the foundation of the world. Hence, He is also said to be chosen of the Father (Isa. 42:1), noting out His designation to this work.

2. *There is a commandment from the Father to the Son, which He must submit unto and obey, thereby to effect the salvation of His people.* As the Prophet of the church, He had a commandment of what to teach and instruct them in (John 12:49). He had a commandment to enlighten the elect with the knowledge of the truth (Isa. 42:6–7), to be a light to the Gentiles, to open their eyes, etc. He also had a commandment to lay down His life for those that are given unto Him (John 10:18), and to be tender over the lambs, carrying them in His bosom (Isa. 40:11).

3. *There is a promise from the Father to the Son, i.e., the Father covenants with Him:*

(1) He will give Him the Spirit in an abundant measure. “The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him” (Isa. 42:1, 11:1–2).

(2) He gives a promise of assistance and help in this great work of our redemption. “I will hold thy hand” (Isa. 42:6). What is the meaning of that? God saith of Cyrus, “Whose right hand I have holden,” that is, I have strengthened him to conquer the nations (see Isa. 45:1). So God promised that He would hold the hand of Christ: though He met with strong oppositions, yet the Father would so strengthen Him with His power that He should not be discouraged (Isa. 42:4).

(3) He gives a promise of blessed success that He shall not labor in vain. He shall see His seed (Isa. 53:10). The sufferings of Christ were as a woman with child; though she

suffers many pains, yet she sees her child at last. So shall Christ see many believing on His name (Isa. 55:5). They are the words of promise made by the Father to the Son that nations that know Him not should run unto Him.

(4) He gives a promise of rule and dominion that He shall have dominion over all those saved by Him. This sovereignty and rule is promised to Him in Isaiah 40:10: the Lord Christ shall come with power “and his arm shall rule for him.” And Isaiah 42:4: “He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgement in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law,” to submit themselves unto it. Thence, it is said in Micah 4:3, “And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations,” that is, rule, order, command, and direct as Judge and Ruler among His people; the which promise is now accomplished, all judgment being committed to the Son (John 5:22).

(5) He gives a promise of glory to follow, and that first to Christ Himself and then to the members of Christ. To Christ Himself: “Nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee” (Isa. 55:5). They are the words of God the Father to Christ the Son, promising to Him glory—such glory as should make the nations of the world run unto Him! So also to the members of Christ: there is a promise of glory unto them, which promise was made known to Christ from the beginning. Christ brings out that secret, out of the bosom of the Father and reveals it to His disciples. “It is,” saith He, “your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). Christ knew the Father’s will by the covenant passing between the Father and Him, and this will of the Father, concerning the glory promised to them, Christ brings forth to light. Thus we see there is a covenant on the Father’s part.

Now, see it on Christ’s part:

1. *There is an acceptance of the office to which He was designed by the Father.* He did not take the office of Mediator upon Himself, but first the Father called Him unto it; then the Son accepted it and saith, “Lo; I come” (Ps. 40:7–8; Heb. 10:7).

2. *There is a promise on Christ’s part to depend and trust upon the Father for help, according to the promise made by the Father.* Thus, in Hebrews 2:13, the apostle brings in Christ, promising confidence and affiance in the Father: “I will put my trust in him.” And Isaiah brings Him in as looking for help from God: “For the Lord GOD will help me”; “Though I have many against me”—men and devils—“yet the Lord will help me” (Isa. 50:7–9). He promises to wait upon His Father for support and strength, whereto He also agrees in Isaiah 49:5, “My God shall be my strength.”

3. *A promise of submission to His Father's will, in bearing the reproaches and injuries that should be done unto Him, and to lay down His life for those that were given to Him by the Father (Isa. 50: 5–6; John 10:17–18).* And according to all this that Christ thus covenanted with the Father, He was careful to discharge the same (John 17:4–6; 12:49–50).

4. *According to all this covenant passed between the Father and Christ, Christ expects the glory that was promised to Him and to His members.* To Himself: “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was” (John 17:5). And to His members: “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast

given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24). He expects the accomplishment of both from the Father.

Thus far then, I grant a covenant between God the Father and Christ. Hence it is that God is called “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 1:3), which is by reason of the covenant between them.

Peter Bulkeley (1583–1659) was an early Puritan minister, who left England for the American colony of Massachusetts. He was born in Odell, Bedfordshire, England. Taken from *The Gospel-Covenant, or The Covenant of Grace Opened*.

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY | DR. DAVID MURRAY

8 Reasons Why We Should Want to Change

Am I wrong to want more than justification? Am I wrong to want more than forgiveness of sins? Am I wrong to want more than deliverance from hell and the guarantee of heaven? Am I wrong to want more than adoption?

Because I do.

I want to be changed. I want to be saved—not just from the penalty of sin, but from the power of it. I want a clean heart, mind, eyes, mouth, and everything else. And I don't mean just “cleaner,” but “clean.” I don't mean just external behavioral change; I mean real heart change. I want radical transformation.

Why do I want such transformation, and why should every Christian want the same?

1. *To demonstrate the power of the gospel* (Rom. 1:16; Matt. 1:21). If the gospel is only about the grace of forgiveness, then no one will ever know about it. Oh yes, we can personally enjoy the wonderful assurance of justification by faith. We can talk all we like about it with tremendous joy. But no one can ever see it. There's no proof; there's no evidence.

But when someone is metamorphosed, when an ugly life and character becomes beautiful, then the power of the gospel isn't just an idea, a truth, an emotion, or all talk. It's concrete, it's undeniable, it's impactful. It draws attention to the power of God in the gospel. It truly is the power of God to salvation.

2. *To gain a hearing for the gospel* (John 4:39–42). When a person is transformed by the gospel, people want to know why. They want to find out what's behind it. What explains this? Change opens ears and shuts mouths. It wins arguments and silences objections.

3. *To become more like Christ* (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18). Isn't that the whole point of the gospel? To re-create us in God's image and conform us to the image of His Son? Do we have to wait until heaven for that?

Most of it will happen when we are totally and perfectly changed in the blink of an eye and made like Him. But it

begins here. And we want it to do more than just begin. We want to be image-bearers of Christ in this world. If we have seen His beauty, we want the world to see it, too, and we have the privilege and responsibility of showing Him forth.

4. *To shine light in a dark world* (Matt. 5:14; Phil. 2:15). The more we become like the Light of the world, the more light there will be in the world. We don't want to be just fireflies, do we? We want to be lighthouses.

5. *To please God* (1 John 3:22; Heb. 13:16). We want to please our children, our parents, our wife, our husband, our boss, our neighbor, and many others. Do we not then want to please God? Of course we do. But how do we do that? Has God left us in the dark about how to please Him? Not at all; He's provided innumerable verses to guide us in how to put a smile on His face.

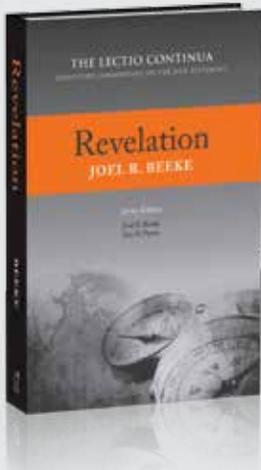
6. *To enjoy a sense of progress* (2 Pet. 3:18; 1 Pet. 2:2). Whatever area of life we look at, few people want to stagnate. Whether it's a sport, our weight, our education, our jobs, our homes, we have an inbuilt desire to grow, to develop, to progress. Although it's never as fast as we want, with honest self-examination we can detect spiritual changes that encourage us that we are heading in the right direction by the indwelling power and work of the Holy Spirit.

7. *To enjoy communion with God* (John 14:16, 21). Growth draws God to the soul. He loves to make Himself known and felt to His growing children.

8. *To get assurance of faith* (James 2:14ff; Heb. 12:14). No holiness, no heaven. If no one can see any change in my life, or if the change is negative and backwards for a sustained period of time, I have good reason to question and doubt my salvation. But if the old ways are weakening and new ways are strengthening, I have good reason to conclude that my salvation is of the Lord.

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

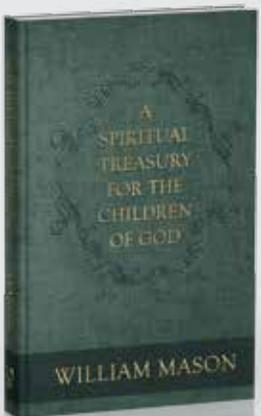
NEW RHB BOOKS



Revelation (Lectio Continua Series) — Joel R. Beeke

Are you confused by the great variety of interpretations of the book of Revelation, such as the preterist, the historicist, the futurist, the idealist, and an eclectic approach that embraces the strengths of all these? Would you like a clear understanding of various millennial approaches related to the last times? In this book of sermons on Revelation, Joel Beeke gives you all this and much more as he preaches through Revelation in a thoroughly biblical, doctrinal, experiential, and practical way intended to comfort and mature believers, to warn the unsaved to flee to Christ for salvation, and to exalt Christ as the King of kings and only Head of His church.

(HC, 624 pgs) \$40.00|\$30.00

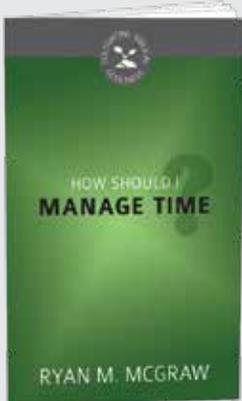


A Spiritual Treasury for the Children of God

William Mason

In this classic of devotional literature, readers will find two heart-warming, biblical reflections for every day of the year. William Mason's aim for each meditation was to "exalt the Lord Jesus, the perfection of His atonement and righteousness, and the glory of His salvation." Christians who are eager to cultivate godly zeal will cherish this book, as each page revels in the abundant riches we find in Christ.

(HC, 752 pgs) \$30.00|\$22.00

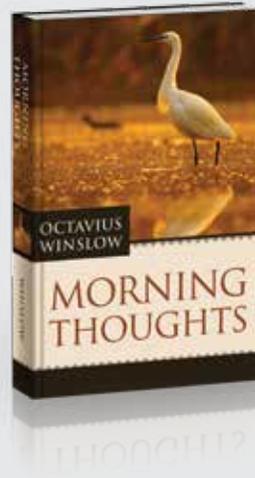


How Should I Manage Time? (Cultivating Biblical Godliness Series) — Ryan M. McGraw

In Ephesians 5:16, the apostle Paul instructs Christians to redeem "the time, because the days are evil." Author Ryan McGraw says that "how you use your time measures the quality of your life." But how can you manage your time in order to serve the Lord and the church well? In this pamphlet, you will learn what the Bible says about the gospel foundation for time management and how to apply its instruction so that you redeem the time in a God-honoring way.

(PB, 32 pgs) \$3.00|\$2.25

The titles below are recently published or reprinted. The first price is retail, and the second is our discounted price. PB = paperback, HC = hard cover.



Morning Thoughts (Reprint)

Octavius Winslow, edited by Joel R. Beeke

The selections in this daily devotional are deep, heart-warming, and inspirational—just what is needed to promote a Christ-centered beginning to each day. This daily devotional engages the heart as it transforms the will and sure-footedly guides us in the good fight of faith on the way to glory.

(HC, 550 pgs) \$30.00|\$23.00

OTHER BOOKS

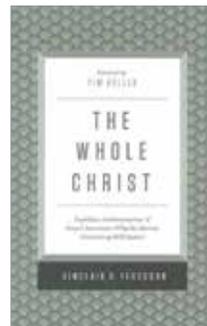


Spurgeon's Sorrows: Realistic Hope for those who Suffer from Depression

Zack Eswine

Depression affects many of us either personally or through the ones we love. Even C. H. Spurgeon, the "Prince of Preachers," struggled with depression and talked openly about it. Here, Eswine draws from Spurgeon's experiences to encourage us. What Spurgeon found in his darkness can serve as a light in our own darkness.

(Christian Focus, PB, 143 pgs) \$9.99|\$7.00

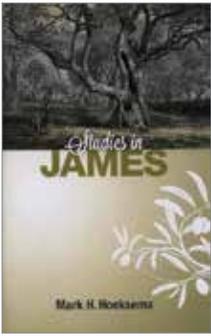


The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, & Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters

—Sinclair B. Ferguson

Since the days of the early church, Christians have wrestled with the relationship between the law and gospel. If, as the apostle Paul says, salvation is by grace and the law cannot save, what relevance does the law have for Christians today? By revisiting the Marrow Controversy—a famous but largely forgotten eighteenth-century debate related to the proper relationship between God's grace and our works—Sinclair Ferguson sheds light on this central issue and why it still matters today. In doing so, he explains how our understanding of the relationship between law and gospel determines our approach to evangelism, our pursuit of sanctification, and even our understanding of God Himself. He shows us that the antidote to the poison of legalism on the one hand and antinomianism on the other is one and the same: the life-giving gospel of Jesus Christ, in whom we are simultaneously justified by faith, freed for good works, and assured of salvation.

(Crossway, HC, 256 pgs) \$24.99|\$15.00

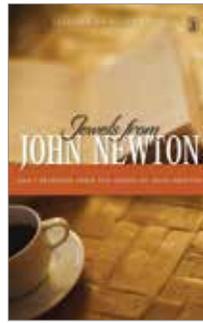


Studies in James

Mark H. Hoeksema

While teaching justification by faith, the book of James also instructs that the works of the law are the fruit of a living faith. This study guide is written in question form, which is intended to help God's people define James's concepts and their relation to each other. Answering these questions will lead to an understanding of the book.

(Reformed Free Publishing, PB, 72 pgs) \$6.95|\$5.75

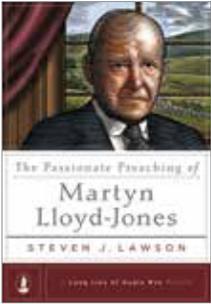


Jewels from John Newton: Daily Readings from the Works of John Newton

Selected by Miller Ferrie

John Newton's transformation from blasphemous slave trader to much loved minister of the gospel is a testimony to the powerful, life-changing grace of God in Jesus Christ. His hymns, letters, and other writings have provided strength and comfort to Christian believers for centuries and are the source for this volume of daily devotional readings.

(Banner of Truth, HC, 384 pgs) \$27.00|\$19.50



The Passionate Preaching of Martyn Lloyd-Jones (A Long Line of Godly Men Series)

Steven J. Lawson

From the pulpit at Westminster Chapel in London, Dr. Lloyd-Jones set a new standard for faithful and passionate preaching—a standard that continues to be relevant today. Lloyd-Jones was a physician by training and had begun a promising career in medicine before sensing an irresistible call to preach.

Surrounded by theological liberalism, he began a pulpit ministry that would exert profound influence on both sides of the Atlantic.

(Reformation Trust, HC, 200 pgs) \$16.00|\$12.00

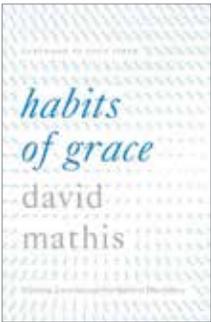


As You See the Day Approaching: Reformed Perspectives on the Last Things

Theodore G. VanRaalte

These essays on the end times will answer your questions about heaven, the soul, hell, the new earth, what believers in the Old Testament thought of these things, and how God brought redemptive progress by the resurrection of Christ. Readers will be encouraged by the practical and realistic chapters about the Christian's calling in social and political matters.

(Wipf & Stock, PB, 172 pgs) \$21.00|\$18.75

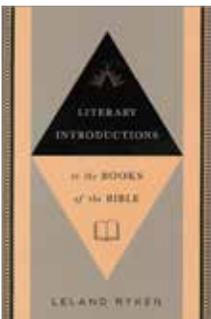


Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus through the Spiritual Disciplines

David Mathis

Three seemingly unremarkable principles shape and strengthen the Christian life: listening to God's voice, speaking to Him in prayer, and joining together with His people as the church. Though seemingly normal and routine, the everyday "habits of grace" we cultivate give us access to these God-designed channels through which His love and power flow—including the greatest joy of all: knowing and enjoying Jesus.

(Crossway, HC, 227 pgs) \$14.99|\$10.50



Literary Introduction to the Books of the Bible

Leland Ryken

In this comprehensive and systematic volume, renowned literary expert Leland Ryken introduces readers to the specific themes, patterns, and techniques used by the biblical authors. A companion to Ryken's *A Complete Handbook of Literary Forms in the Bible*, this practical guidebook will equip you to interpret each book of the Bible through the lens of its literary forms and features—helping you faithfully read, understand, and teach the Bible with greater insight.

(Crossway, PB, 567 pgs) \$35.00|\$26.25

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DONUTS!

(and why you should
think twice about
following your heart)



Have you ever thought, “If I could just have what I wanted, I’d be happy!” If you have, you’re not the only one; in fact, you’re just like every other human on the planet. But is it true? Would it make you happy to have whatever your heart wishes for? Let’s think about it.

Imagine if your mom let *you* do the grocery shopping for one week: you were free to get whatever you wanted. What would you choose?

Some of you would probably think: “Awesome! I can get all the ‘good’ stuff Mom will never buy.” You might take that cart and load it full of your favorite sugary cereals. Then you’d make a beeline over to the bakery to add donuts. You’ve always wanted to eat donuts for breakfast, so why not lunch and dinner, too? You can feel your mouth watering as you stare at the sprinkles, cinnamon swirls, crème, and frosting. After loading up enough donuts to serve an army you head to the checkout; at this moment your mom is nearly fainting!

What would happen at home?

The first few hours (or even day) it may seem like a dream come true. But, after your mom serves you another gooey delight for dinner, you would find yourself not enjoying it as much. Each day would pass and with every sweet thing you’d feel a little worse. Soon you’d be holding your belly, begging for anything but more junk food and dreaming of vegetable soup!

This is a little example that shows our cravings (desires) are not to be trusted. The things we *think* we want so badly and the freedom to do whatever we want never fill us the way we thought they could, and they often bring disaster!

This is not only true of our taste buds, but our hearts even more so. There’s nothing sinful about choosing donuts, but there *is* something sinful when we are ruled by the desires of our hearts. In fact, when we depend on anything but Jesus to fill our hearts, it always leads to disaster.

Is it really that bad? What could be wrong about following the desires of our hearts? James tells us that our desires are sinful, and when we follow them, we sin. And then sin leads to death. (see James 1:14–15). How do I know my heart is sinful? God tells us; He says our hearts are deceitful (they trick us!) and are sick from sin (see Jeremiah 17:9).

What do I need to do so I can have a good heart? The bad news is that our hearts are so sick, we can’t make them good. The good news is there is someone who can and wants to: Jesus. He gives us a new heart when we ask Him in truth. And out of that heart come new desires—good ones!—that bring life and goodness to our hearts because they are focused on Jesus, not ourselves. When Jesus gives us a new heart, we follow Him. Not our heart. Not our desires. And this is exactly what’s needed to cure our sick hearts. We were never made to follow our own hearts. We were made to follow God!

What about you?

Are you living to get all the desires of your heart? The result will be a sick heart that never ever gets better and leads to death. Or are you following Jesus? He will give you a new heart and lead you into life and truth by His Spirit. Then your heart will be happy.

For your devotions this week:

- What person in the Bible followed the desire of his own heart? What happened? Draw a picture of the story.
- Can you list at least three people who faithfully followed after Jesus, not the desires of their hearts?
- The Bible describes someone as a “man after God’s own heart.” Who was that?

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

This is the first Bible puzzle of the New Year. It made me think of texts that speak of things made *new*, or being *renewed*. Look up the given text to find the words in the blanks. And try to understand the promises of these Bible passages. There is so much hope and comfort promised for the children of God who put their trust in Him. I wish you a happy, God-focused 2017!

1. In Ezekiel 36:26 the Lord speaks of taking away something, but in its place He will give you a new _____ and put within you a new _____.
2. In Isaiah 65:17 the Lord makes a promise of two things that will be created new: new _____ and a new _____.
3. The psalmist in Psalm 40:3 sings about the Lord having put a new _____ in his mouth. This will make many fear and trust the Lord.
4. Isaiah 40:31: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their _____."
5. In Matthew 26:28 the Lord Jesus speaks about the new _____.
6. In John 30:34 we read that we have to love one another as the Lord Jesus loved His disciples. He calls this "a new _____."
7. John 19:41: The Lord Jesus was buried in a new _____.
8. In Romans 12:2 you are warned not to be like the world, but "be transformed by the renewing of your _____."
9. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 we learn that if we are in Christ we are a new _____.
10. Even when we suffer harm, our body gets sick or old, "the _____ is renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16)
11. And finally at the end of time, God promises to "make _____ new"!

The image shows the year '2017' written in large, thick, blue brushstrokes. A young boy in a yellow shirt is seen from behind, holding a paintbrush and painting the number '7'. The background is white with light blue snowflake patterns.

ANSWERS TO LAST MONTH'S PUZZLE

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. will of God | 7. magnify |
| 2. everything | 8. glorify |
| 3. God | 9. prayer, supplication |
| 4. praise, bless | 10. abounding |
| 5. tell, wondrous works | 11. ever, ever |
| 6. lovingkindness, faithfulness | |

It Comes from Above

And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? (Daniel 4:35)

“It comes from above,” Peter quietly said over and over.

Even as a tear slipped down Peter’s cheek, the words that his father had told him before he had died kept ringing in his mind: “My dear Peter, I will be leaving you soon and you will be alone in this world. Many troubles will come your way and life will not be easy. But whenever you are discouraged, remember that it comes from above. This thought will make it easy for you to carry every burden in life.”

Peter had carefully listened to his father’s words, and even though he hadn’t understood them completely, he had whispered them over and over to himself. As the months and years slipped by, those words never left Peter, and slowly he began to understand what his father had meant.

“Yes,” Peter began to realize, “God, in His good providence, is ruling and guiding everything in this world, which also means that whatever happens to me, whether good or bad, it all comes from His fatherly hand.” And so Peter went about his life day by day with the thought always in front of him that “it comes from above.”

One day, Peter was walking through town when a big gust of wind cracked off a branch from a tree that Peter was under. The branch smashed against Peter’s shoulder and knocked him down to the sidewalk. The first words that he spoke were, “It comes from above.” The people who were near him couldn’t help but laugh, thinking that his words were foolish. Of course the branch had come from above!

Just moments later, a horrible accident happened at an intersection that Peter was about to cross. Many people were seriously injured, but Peter, who had been stopped by the branch, was not one of them. That branch had certainly “come from above,” and Peter rejoiced in God’s hand of providence!

On another day, a businessman hired Peter to take an important package to another businessman. He told Peter that it was very important that it was delivered that day, so Peter rushed off to deliver it. He decided to cut across some

fields in order to get to his destination more quickly, but soon he ran into trouble. There were several ditches that he had to cross and while he jumped across the first two, the final ditch presented quite the challenge. It was very wide, and Peter wasn’t sure that he would be able to jump across it. But to turn back would mean that the package wouldn’t be delivered in time! And so he jumped. He was right—the ditch was too wide and he landed right in the middle of it. Mud oozed up over his shoes and he had difficulty pulling himself out of the ditch.

Scrambling up the side, Peter suddenly realized that he no longer had the package! He looked behind him in the ditch, but no package could be seen. Up and down the sides of the ditch he looked, but finally he had to give up. He walked slowly back to the businessman who had hired him to tell him what had happened.

The businessman was furious, especially when Peter ended his story with “it all comes from above.” He jumped up from behind his desk and chased Peter out of the room.

But the next day, the businessman found Peter. He smiled in a friendly way at Peter and said, “Here, take this money. It’s a bonus for losing my package. Things have changed so much in the last 24 hours that my business would have suffered if that package had been delivered. I’m glad that you lost it.”

Peter could only stare at the man with amazement and say, “It comes from above.”

Many more stories could be told of Peter’s life, and readers might be interested to know that through hard work, Peter himself eventually became a wealthy businessman. Yet even in his prosperity, he never forgot the words of his dear father, “it comes from above.” He remained a humble man all his life.

Do you recognize God’s providence in your life? Has your heart been changed so that when bad things happen, you are able to submit to His plan, and when things go well, you see it as a gift from His fatherly hand?

Andrea Scholten is a school teacher, a writer for children, and a member of the HRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan. This article is adapted from *Religious Stories for Young and Old*, General Fund Committee of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations: reprinted 1992.





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.

40TH ANNIVERSARY

With thankfulness to the Lord,
we rejoice with our parents and grandparents

Pastor & Gayle Neels

as they celebrate 40 years of marriage on March 16, 2017.

“For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations” (Psalm 100:5).

Children: Gerrit & Julia Sinke, Gary & Rebecca Neels, Michael & Immaculate Neels, Mitchell & Jenni-Lee Evertse, Richard & Tonia Neels, and Matt & Lizzi Stam.

Grandchildren: Nathan, Lukas, Abby & Whitney Sinke; Kerra, Kami & Spencer Neels; Malachi & Ivana Neels; Micah, Gideon & Meadow Evertse; and Rylie Stam.

Mailing Address: #13 Laurie Street, St. Catharines, ON L2S 2V9

OBITUARIES

KARELSE, Thomas R., age 75, Caledonia, Michigan, passed away on Sunday, December 18, 2016. He was preceded in death by his parents, and two brothers. Tom will be lovingly remembered by his wife, Effie; his children, Margaret (Tom) Talbot, Shirley (Jonathan) Van Dalen, Karen (Tom) Westrate, Michelle (Daniel) Roelofs; his sister-in-law, Marge (Rev. Peter) Bazen; 15 grandchildren. (Dr. Joel R. Beeke, Psalm 31:1; Revelation 19:6-8).

VAN DYKE, Carol Lee, age 78, passed away on Saturday, December 24, 2016. She was predeceased by her parents, Isaac and Kathryn Van Dyke. She will be lovingly missed by Connie Dunham, her dear friend of many years; David and Vickie Kwekel, who lovingly cared for her in various ways; several cousins. (Dr. J. R. Beeke, Luke 2:25-32; Philippians 1:21b).

TEACHERS NEEDED

HERITAGE REFORMED CHRISTIAN SCHOOL is accepting teaching applications for possible openings for the 2016–2017 school year. Interested K–6 applicants should contact Mr. John Zomer at (605) 359-7206 or email (johnz@zomertrucks.com). HRCS is a multi-grade classroom setting that is located in Rock Valley, Iowa. You may also visit the school’s website at heritagereformedschool.com.

JORDAN CHRISTIAN SCHOOL is a learning community that embraces the God-glorifying calling of educating students for Christian service. Located in the heart of Niagara wine country near St. Catharines, JCS provides a JK-12 program that is actively taught from a solidly Reformed perspective, while preparing students with the fundamental skills for further learning. We are currently accepting applications for a teaching position in grade 1/2 from highly motivated, dynamic, and committed Christian school teachers who will complement our present teaching team. Please include with your application your philosophy of education and statement of faith and send it to the attention of Mr. Paul Wagenaar at principal@ourjcs.ca.

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

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

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

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

PLYMOUTH CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS HRC TEACHERS' CONFERENCE

Educators and others who are interested are invited to attend the HRC Teachers' Conference at Plymouth Christian High School scheduled for February 16–17, 2017.

The theme of the conference is “What Doth the LORD Require of Thee?” with a variety of topics to help equip teachers to train children in the biblical worldview, including:

The Task: *What doth the LORD require of thee?*

The Need: *How can we help our students maintain a compassionate biblical worldview in the face of an abandoned culture?*

The Preparation: *Tools for Bible study*

The Students: *Who are we teaching?*

The Challenge: *How do we ensure that what we teach is important?*

Breakout sessions include: Biblical Worldview Tools, Biblical Worldview Discussion, and Banish Bullying/Cultivate Kindness.

For further information, please see the school website: plymouthchristianschools.org (choose “Information” then “Teachers’ Conference” tabs) or use this link: <http://www.plymouthchristianschools.org/teachers-conference>.

FLORIDA REFORMED FELLOWSHIP

Florida Reformed Fellowship services are being held in the First Baptist Church of Bradenton’s Memorial Chapel located at 1305 Manatee Ave. and will continue through March. Service times are at 9:30 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. Ministers have been scheduled for each Lord’s Day. Entrance is on the 13th St. side of the building.

YOUTH CAMP 2017

The upcoming youth camp is scheduled for July 11–14, 2017, Lord willing. We warmly encourage those ages 15–25 to come! Please contact Roger and Joan Vroegindewey with any questions at 616-956-1960 or rroeg@yahoo.com.

NAPARC 2016

Since the HRC is a member of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC), we wish to share with you the annual press release regarding the recent meeting of NAPARC. NAPARC is a confederation of thirteen conservative Reformed and Presbyterian denominations. One of its primary functions is to foster fellowship between member denominations, and to encourage them to remain faithful to Scripture and the Reformed confessions.

—Rev. Bartel Elshout, Chairman, NAPARC

The 42nd annual meeting of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) was held November 8th–10th, at the Free Reformed Church in Pompton Plains, NJ. The meeting was

hosted by the Free Reformed Churches of North America. NAPARC is comprised of thirteen member churches from the United States and Canada. All thirteen churches had delegates present for this meeting. In addition two Presbyterian/Reformed churches sent observers to this meeting.

Member churches of NAPARC are the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC); the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC): the Église réformée du Québec (ERQ); the Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA); the Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC); the Korean American Presbyterian Church (KAPC); the Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Kosin) (KPCA-Kosin); the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC); the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA); the Presbyterian Reformed Church (PRC); the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS); the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA); and the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA). These churches were represented by a total of thirty eight delegates.

Delegates from the Bible Presbyterian Church (BPC) and the Protestant Reformed Churches in North America (PRCNA) attended as invited observers. A total of six observer delegates were present from these two churches.

The Council was called to order by Rev. Bart Elshout (HRC) the vice chairman acting in the stead of Dr. L.W. Bilkes (FRCNA) the chairman, who was unable to attend because of health issues. Following the election of officers Rev. Elshout assumed the chair. Rev. Maynard Koerner and Rev. Ron Potter, both from the RCUS, were re-elected as treasurer and secretary respectively. The Rev. James Kim of the KAPC was elected vice-chairman. Each session of the Council was opened with the singing of a Psalm, devotions, and prayer.

The Basis of the Council is set forth in its Constitution as follows: "Confessing Jesus Christ as the only Savior and Sovereign Lord over all of life, we affirm the basis of the fellowship of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches to be full commitment to the Bible in its entirety as the Word of God written, without error in all its parts, and to its teaching as set forth in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms."

The Purpose of the Council is: "We regard this basis of fellowship as warrant for the establishment of a formal relationship of the nature of a council, that is, a fellowship that enables the Member Churches to advise, counsel, and cooperate in various matters with one another."

The Function of the Council is to:

- Facilitate discussion, consultation, and the sharing of insights among Member Churches on those issues and problems which divide them as well as on those which they face in common.
- Encourage the Member Churches to pursue closer ecclesiastical relations, as appropriate, among the regional and major assemblies.
- Promote the appointment of committees to study matters of common interest and concern and, when appropriate, make recommendations to the Council with respect to them.
- Exercise mutual concern in the perpetuation, retention, and propagation of the Reformed faith.
- Promote local, regional, and general assembly/synodical-wide cooperation wherever possible and feasible in such areas as missions, relief efforts, training of men for the

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- Operate a website to facilitate the exchange of information and to foster increased cooperation and fellowship among the Member Churches.

In fulfillment of the Basis, the Purpose, and the Function of NAPARC each of the member churches brought reports to the Council table. The presentation of each of these reports was followed by a period of questioning by delegates and by prayer for the reporting church by a designated member church. Each of the reports revealed the upholding of the three marks of the true Church (Belgic Confession of Faith article 29) as well as the labors of the churches in proclaiming the unsearchable riches of Christ to a lost and perishing world in a variety of regional and ethnic venues.

Discussion on several topics took place. NAPARC also approved the following statement to be forwarded to the Churches for their action: "That NAPARC urge its member denominations and federations to urge their respective congregations to make a regular part of the information they publish in weekly bulletins, church newsletters, church websites and other informational publications, their affiliation with NAPARC, providing also a web address to encourage their members to learn about NAPARC and to help foster an awareness of the biblical ecumenical mandate to seek ever greater unity with those of like faith and practice. Just as the local church makes known its affiliation with its denomination or federation, so it should make known its broader fraternal bonds."

Reports were also brought on the World Missions Consultation which met earlier in the year, from the Web Site Committee and from the Treasurer. A budget was also approved.

On the evening of November 8th, a devotional service under the oversight of the host Church was held. Rev. Carl Schouls (FRCNA) preached a sermon from Habakkuk 3:17-19 entitled "A Thanksgiving Hymn of Faith."

On the evening of November 9th, following a banquet hosted by the Pompton Plains Free Reformed Church, the Rev. Jerrold Lewis (FRCNA) Pastor of the host Church, presented a lecture entitled: "English Latent Antinomianism."

The annual NAPARC Council meeting provides a venue for bi-lateral meetings between Interchurch Relations Committees of the member churches to take place. Time is provided on the NAPARC Docket to enable this and all delegations took advantage of this.

The next meeting of the Council is scheduled for November 14th-16th at the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, MI. It will be hosted by the Heritage Reformed Congregations.

—Rev. Ron Potter, Secretary, NAPARC

INTERNATIONAL PLOWING MATCH IN ONTARIO



The Evangelical Outreach Committee had a very good week at the International Plowing Match in Ontario a few months ago. Comfortable seasonal weather brought over 96,300 through the gates! Only two other times in IPM history of 100 years did attendance reach 90,000.

The "tented" city streets were crowded—also with many school children from Wellington County close to Harriston—which kept the nine workers in our EOC tent busy giving out hundreds of Bibles and thousands of various tracts, calendars, and booklets—mostly to children. We were encouraged by how many children do have their own Bible, and thankful that those who did not reached out with willing hands to receive one. Our prayer is that God may be pleased to bless the Word of God to children of Ontario for Jesus's sake.

A variety of Christian books—including Bibles, devotionals, doctrinal books, commentaries, sermons—were also sold. Many discussions, questions, and conversations regarding Christian books, true faith, and what it means to be Reformed, etc., occurred throughout the week.

The Evangelical Outreach Committee thanks all volunteers, donors, and churches who have supported this outreach with prayer and financial assistance.

—Gerald (Jed) Schuit

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NATIONAL NEWS

CHRISTIAN HOSPITALS OPT OUT OF CANADA'S EUTHANASIA LAW

Two Christian hospitals in Winnipeg, Manitoba, have opted out of the assisted suicide law passed by Canada's liberal government in June. Concordia Hospital, a Mennonite institution, and St. Boniface Hospital, a Catholic facility, announced they will not kill patients but agreed to refer those seeking assisted suicide to other groups that will.

"We are committed to providing respect and dignity in care to every person throughout his or her life from conception to natural death. Concordia believes that providing healthcare is a ministry assigned to us by Christ and is expressive of our faith, values, and ethics."

When Bill C-14 became law this summer, it legalized assisted suicide in two ways: a physician or nurse practitioner can administer a lethal injection, or they can prescribe pills a patient can self-administer. Those seeking either method must be at least 18 years old, have "a grievous or irremediable medical condition," and must consent to die.

In California, a situation similar to the one in Manitoba arose when medical centers opted out of the End of Life Option Act that went into effect in June.

Five U.S. states—Oregon, Washington, Vermont, California, and Colorado—currently have laws legalizing assisted suicide. (Samantha Gobba, *WORLD News Service*)

ATHEISTS FORCE CONNECTICUT TEACHER TO REMOVE BIBLE VERSE DISPLAY

A Connecticut public charter school asked one of its employees to remove the display of a Bible verse on her profile outside a classroom after the nation's largest atheist group, the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), complained to the school's board of directors about it.

Jumoke Academy Charter School in Hartford, Connecticut, told an academic assistant to remove the verse, Philippians 4:13, which reads, "I can do all things through Christ Jesus who strengthens me," after FFRF wrote a complaint letter to the school's board of directors, claiming the display outside one of the school's classrooms was "unconstitutional," "Public schools may not advance, prefer or promote religion," FFRF Managing Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote to James Michel, the chair of the board. "Courts have continually held that school districts may not display religious messages or iconography in public schools."

FFRF called the display "quite inappropriate," on the claim that "nearly 30 percent of Americans and 44 percent of millennials are non-Christian, either practicing a minority religion or no religion."

"The display alienates those nonreligious students, families, teachers, and members of the public whose religious beliefs are inconsistent with the messages being promoted by the school," the letter said. (*The Christian Post*)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

SOCIALIST FRANCE CRIMINALIZES PRO-LIFE WEBSITES—JIHADIST WEBSITES OK

The socialist government of France passed a bill after one day's debate that criminalizes websites that might dissuade women from abortion.

The "digital interference" bill is aimed at cracking down on French websites that would, in the words of the bill, "deliberately mislead, intimidate and/or exert psychological or moral pressure to discourage recourse to abortion." Convicted website owners could face two years in prison and fines up to 30,000 euros (\$31,799 USD).

The majority left voted in a block for the bill while the minority right formed a block against it.

Bruno Retailleau, who heads the Republicans party group in the Senate, told French radio Thursday that the bill "is totally against freedom of expression," adding that it contradicts the 1975 law that legalized abortion and called for women to be informed of alternatives.

Christian Democratic Party member Jean-Frederic Poisson also blasted the bill on Twitter for what he saw as the government's double standard in banning sites that propose "alternatives" to abortion but not "jihadist websites."

Two of the country's leading prelates have strongly condemned the bill, with Cardinal André Vingt-Trois of Paris criticizing the French government for its "obsession" with abortion, while Archbishop Georges Pontier of Marseille has slammed the bill as a "very serious attack on the principles of democracy."

France, where abortion is 100 percent state-funded during the first 12 weeks of gestation, has a long history of criminalizing activities aimed at convincing pregnant women to keep their preborn babies.

The Neiertz law first adopted the crime of "obstructing" the functioning of an abortion clinic in 1993. This was widened in 2001 to include exercising "moral and psychological pressures" on women that might convince them against abortion. Finally, in 2014, the government made it a crime to "obstruct access to information" on abortion while expanding the scope of the offense of "obstruct[ing] the voluntary termination of pregnancy." (*Life Site News*).

IRAN: CHRISTIAN REVIVAL SWEEPING COUNTRY DESPITE PERSECUTION

Iran is experiencing a Christian revival despite the Christian persecution that exists there, reports ChristianToday.com. Gathering together to worship the Lord is prohibited in Iran, but that isn't stopping God from working. Many believers are connecting with a Christian community online. "The main church is my house, and through the Internet I connect to everybody," said one believer named Reza. "That's why it's become like an Internet church." Through the internet, believers connect to churches in the United States, Canada, Germany, and Malaysia via Skype.

In 1994, there were about 100,000 believers in Iran. Currently, the number of Christians in the country has risen to about 3,000,000, despite the fact that persecution against Christians has also increased, and Iran is ranked ninth on Open Doors World Watch List for Christian persecution. Reza urged Christians around the world to pray for believers in Iran. "I'm just begging, really, from the other believers, from other sisters and brothers from all over the world, to pray for Iran and for all the people of Iran to find God and be familiar with God, [and] with Jesus Christ," he said. (*ChristianHeadlines.com*)



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CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY? (6)

HOW SHOULD I LIVE?

Does it matter how I live? This is the philosophical question of ethics, which is said to be “the search for the meaning and standards of good in general, and or well-being, right conduct, moral character, and justice in particular.”¹

What Paul Says

In Colossians, Paul lays out nine principles for the Colossians to understand.

The first principle is that the people must be reconciled to Christ. While the people used to be alienated from God, the purpose of reconciliation through Christ is that they may be presented as “holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight” (1:21–22).

Secondly, be pleasing to God. The Colossians are to be filled with the knowledge of God’s will “in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing” (1:9–10). This is never to be selfish for, “whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men” (3:24).

Third, be obedient and holy. This is obedience to the headship and authority of Christ (2:10). All sexual sins, character sins, and speaking sins have no place (3:5–11). What must be developed are personal attributes of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Christians must develop spiritual disciplines, living Word-rich lives in community with other believers, to the glory of God (3:12–17).

Fourth, be fruitful. Paul rejoices that the word of truth is bearing fruit and growing in the Colossians (1:6). Later he uses the picture of stewardship to stir the Colossians on to equal fruitfulness (1:25). As examples they were to encourage others to “take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it” (4:17).

Fifth, a Christo-centric ethic demands good works. These include being stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the



gospel (1:23). Doing good is seeking those things above—a greater relationship with Christ (3:1). It is praying for others; it is using the time and walking in wisdom and graciousness with outsiders (4:5–6).

Sixth, Christians are to be discerning. They need to be discerning about their own lives (2:6–7) and about others, to ensure that they are not taken captive by wrong ideas (2:8). They need to be discerning as they speak to those outside their community: “Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt” (4:5–6).

Seventh, be loving. Paul’s love for the Colossians not only is expressed, but serves as a model for the Colossians’ love. While always pointing to Christ, Paul writes, “For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you.... That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love” (2:1–2).

Eighth, be thankful. Christians are to live thankfully (2:7) for their inheritance, thankful for their redemption (1:12–14). They are to be thankful for God’s kingdom coming and His will being done, for the faith of others, and for the love of others (1:3). They are to express this thankfulness continually in prayer (4:1).

Finally, be persevering. A Christo-centric ethic requires a continual increasing in knowledge. Warfield writes that for Paul, “the pathway to a right life lay through a right knowledge.”² But Christians are also to live with “patience and longsuffering with joyfulness” (1:11).

What Paul is Responding To

Paul is responding to the false teachers who had failed to recognize God’s good gifts and His intention that these things should be properly used and enjoyed. Instead they had made rule upon rule, not realizing that human inventions were but perishable objects of a temporary nature.

In listening to these false ideas, the Colossians were neglecting required Christo-centric ethics. Christians need to live by faith. In other words, faith is having a new heart so that the ruling center of one’s personality is changed. To live in faith is to be whole-hearted for God; this will result in new activities.

The Implication for Christian Philosophy

The implications for Christian philosophy are enormous. Ethics should keep an eternal focus. The way to live is not material, yet is very practical. As Warfield comments, “External service—eye service—is not enough; our thoughts must run ahead of the command and all our lives be suffused with this principle—that we may be well pleasing to Christ.”³ The glory of God and the love of others, through Christ, is what should motivate us.

1. Raziel Abelson and Kai Neilson, “History of Ethics,” in Edwards, *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 3:82.

2. B. B. Warfield, “The Heritage of the Saints in Light,” in *Faith and Life* (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth Trust, 1990), 341.

3. Warfield, “The Heritage of the Saints in Light,” 341.

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THOU KNOWEST, LORD, THE WEARINESS AND SORROW

Thou knowest, Lord, the weariness and sorrow
Of the sad heart that comes to Thee for rest;
Cares of today, and burdens for tomorrow,
Blessings implored, and sins to be confessed;
I come before Thee at Thy gracious word,
And lay them at Thy feet: Thou knowest, Lord.

Thou knowest all the present: each temptation,
Each toilsome duty, each foreboding fear;
All to myself assigned of tribulation,
Or to beloved ones than self more dear;
All pensive memories, as I journey on,
Longings for vanished smiles and voices gone.

Thou knowest all the future: gleams of gladness
By stormy clouds too quickly overcast;
Hours of sweet fellowship, and parting sadness,
And the dark river to be crossed at last;

O what could confidence and hope afford
To tread that path, but this, Thou knowest, Lord!

Thou knowest, not alone as God, all knowing;
As man, our mortal weakness Thou hast proved:
On earth, with purest sympathies o'erflowing,
O Savior, Thou hast wept, and Thou hast loved;
And love and sorrow still to Thee may come,
And find a hiding place, a rest, a home.

Therefore I come, Thy gentle call obeying,
And lay my sins and sorrows at Thy feet;
On everlasting Strength my weakness staying,
Clothed in Thy robe of righteousness complete:
Then rising and refreshed I leave Thy throne,
And follow on to know as I am known.

—JANE L. BORTHWICK

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