

THE BANNER

OF SOVEREIGN GRACE TRUTH



SPECIAL THEME: Rest
Rest in Christ
Rest for Women
Digital Rest
Enjoying Eternal Rest

"The Lord Is Risen Indeed!"
An "Open Door"?
The Power of Jesus

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SPECIAL THEME: REST FOR SOUL AND BODY

Our prayer is that you will find rest in Christ as we contemplate His sufferings, death, and resurrection. This is where true rest alone for the soul is found. In addition to those meditations focusing on Christ's redemptive work, the theme of this issue is focused on rest. In a fast-paced culture, we need not only rest for our souls, but also for our bodies. There are several articles that look at this from a very practical perspective. And as our souls and bodies find rest in Christ we learn to anticipate the final rest that is to come in glory. Pick up, read, and rest!

Christ's Agony and Submission in Gethsemane

“And he... began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.... And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.... And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”

—Matthew 26:37–39 and Luke 22:44

When the time of His final sufferings had arrived, Christ entered the Garden of Gethsemane late at night to pray. This was a familiar place for Him; He would often pray there. However, this evening, it was quite a sensitive place for Him. He knew that Judas would betray Him to the authorities there that night and that He would then go from one brutal suffering to the next. Yet, He went to the garden anyway because of His love for His people.

The suffering in Gethsemane was more intense than we could ever fully comprehend. Here He suffered extreme agony in His human nature. When He arrived, Matthew 26:37 says that He “began to be sorrowful and very heavy.” He began to be painfully sad and deeply distressed. He was extremely weighed down, disturbed, stressed, troubled, burdened, fearful, and horrified. He then said, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.” He was so overwhelmed with sorrow and heaviness that it felt like He was ready to die.

Consequently, He then fell on His face and cried out, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (v. 39). Although He was submissive, He prayed for this cup of remaining sufferings to be taken away if another way was possible. He was not sinning in this request, but He prayed this petition because He was not only God the Son but also the Son of man. Even innocent humanity desires the removal of pain, especially extreme pain.

The intensity of His agony on this occasion is further revealed in Luke: “And being in an agony he prayed more

earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44). Jesus broke out into such a great sweat that wasn’t just getting into His eyes, but it was so noticeable that it was falling down to the ground and “was as it were great drops of blood” (Luke 22:44). Some hold the view that this saying is only metaphorical, that His sweat was only “like” drops of blood—still sweat, but much thicker like drops or clumps of blood as a result of His pores being opened much more than usual due to His emotional intensity. The other and more traditional view is that He perspired literal blood—a medical condition called hematomidrosis. This can be a real condition in which “capillary blood vessels that feed the sweat glands rupture, causing them to exude blood, occurring under conditions of extreme physical or emotional stress” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hematidrosis>). Christ was experiencing unspeakable agony!

However, in addition to anticipating all the brutal sufferings by men, the betrayal, denial, injustice, mocking, beatings, crown of thorns, and the crucifixion itself (all of which were significant), it is important to remember that there is also at least one other reason for His behavior. He was surely anticipating and beginning to experience the fullness of the wrath of His Father—being forsaken by and separated from His beloved Father and all His Father’s comforts. This would be the atonement for all the sins of His elect. This would be fully experienced in those three dreadful and dark hours on the cross, but here in Gethsemane Jesus tasted that cup. Oh, what a cup! His suffering would get so much worse, and yet, He willingly submitted to take and drink it, saying to His Father, “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39). Oh what a Savior! What incredible love! Do you need His love? Do you love His love?

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



“The Lord Is Risen Indeed!”

“The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared unto Simon.”

—Luke 24:34

In these words, the eleven apostles expressed their exuberant joy about the resurrection of their beloved Master to the travelers of Emmaus, who had returned to Jerusalem with burning hearts after the risen Jesus had manifested Himself to them in the breaking of bread.

In a simple and yet profound way, these words set before us the heart of the resurrection gospel. It does so by stating the wondrous fact of the resurrection itself, and by the fact that Simon was the beneficiary of Christ’s resurrection.

How exceedingly blessed are these words that the Lord is risen indeed! That precious reality constitutes the foundation of the Christian faith and of the hope of the individual believer. Paul articulates this when he writes, “If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain...but now is Christ risen” (1 Cor. 15:17, 20).

Why is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ of such foundational importance for the church of God, both corporately and individually? The resurrection of Christ is nothing less than the vindication of His substitutionary death on the cross. It confirms that the wages of sin have been paid in full and that the Father is well pleased with the sacrifice of His beloved Son. Had Christ not risen, His bitter agony in Gethsemane would have been in vain; His cruel scourging would have been in vain; His hanging on the accursed cross would have been in vain; His being forsaken by His Father would have been in vain; and the veil would have been rent in vain.

Thanks be to God: the inexpressible suffering of the Son of God was not in vain! He is risen indeed and has come forth out of the grave as the Conqueror of sin, death, hell, the grave, and Satan. Since He is risen, we may know that God’s wrath has been quenched, His justice has been satisfied, the demands of the law have been met, the penalty for sin has been paid in full, and the breach between God and sinners has been repaired.

In a risen Christ, God and sinners have been reconciled! The Lord’s resurrection is the divine warranty of that blessed reality. Having fully met all the demands of divine justice, the Father publicly justified the Mediator and placed His stamp of approval on His finished work on the cross.

What a comfort for all who, by the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, have believed on a Jesus who not only died on the cross, but who is also risen again! To believe on a risen Lord Jesus Christ, who in the resurrection was justified by His Father, yields the justification of our own guilty soul.

Thus, for true believers the resurrection of Christ is the warranty that their sins are fully and freely pardoned. Peter later affirmed this to be the over-arching witness of the Scriptures when he said, “To him [Christ] give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.” (Acts 10:43). Paul stated in like manner that “by him [Christ] all that believe are justified from all things” (Acts 13:39).

Dear believer, rejoice, for the Lord is risen indeed! The handwriting against you has been blotted out by the precious blood of your Savior; your sins are fully pardoned. You are reconciled with God and have become an heir of eternal life. Your complete redemption has been fully accomplished by your risen Savior. Indeed, He was delivered for our offenses *“and was raised again for our justification”* (Rom. 4:25)!

This blessed gospel truth so filled Paul with joy that he cried out, “What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again” (Rom. 8:31–34). Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift!

Believer, are you appropriating this blessed truth by faith? Do you believe that the God who delivered up His own Son for your sake also freely gives you all things because the Lord is risen indeed? Or do you live below your privileges? How we grieve the Spirit of Christ when we do so! Have you not, as a poor, needy, and guilty sinner, touched the hem of Christ’s garment by faith? Do you not hunger and thirst after His righteousness? Is He not precious to you? Then I may say to you that your faith has made you whole. According to the clear and repeated testimony of Scripture, that faith has brought you into a reconciled relationship with God (Rom. 5:1).

Perhaps you are so deeply conscious of your own unworthiness, vileness, and repeated unfaithfulness that you hesitate to appropriate the great benefit of justification for your own soul. If there is such hesitation in you, take comfort from the second half of the text: not only is the Lord risen indeed, *but He has also appeared unto Simon!* Here we see the immediate benefit of Christ’s resurrection for a man such as Simon. If there was one man who had reason to believe that he was excluded from the benefits of the resurrection of Christ, it was Simon Peter. How shamefully he had denied His Master!

(continued on page 55)

Confessing Christ

We are used to stressing that faith in Christ is of utmost importance, that without faith you will not be saved. Yet, *confessing* the Savior is something that will follow upon and proceed from true faith. As Romans 10:9 says, “If thou shalt *confess* with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt *believe* in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (emphasis added). In other words, in the life of faith, confessing Christ is not something optional. We either confess Him or we deny Him. There is no neutrality or middle ground. There is no safety apart from confessing Christ as Christ made clear to His disciples: “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 10:32–33).

THE WORD MUST GO OUT

The Savior had gone about all the cities and villages of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing countless who were sick. Matthew notes that He saw them fainting and scattered as “sheep having no shepherd” (9:36). What must be done? Christ called His twelve disciples and sent them two by two throughout the lost tribes of the house of Israel (Matt. 10:1–5). He gave them a message, as well as power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal, as He Himself had been doing (v. 1). Along with this, Christ also gave the disciples important and radical instruction.

First, He taught them to *go as people who mean business* (Matt. 10:9–15). Don’t take a lot along, He had said, or be weighed down by baggage. Don’t be concerned with the accumulation of money or clothes. Live simply and dependently. Go and bring the message of the kingdom. If people don’t receive it, shake the dust off your feet and go to others who need the message. In other words, don’t waste your time with people who won’t be instructed, who won’t obey, and who won’t heed your message. The disciples’ ministry was to be solemnly urgent in manner, demeanor, and message.

Second, He taught them to *go expecting persecution and hardship* (Matt. 10:16–25). The Savior made very clear to the disciples that things would not be easy. They were being sent as “sheep in the midst of wolves” (v. 16). They were to be watchful, gentle, prudent, and winsome. They were not to behave in ways that would beg for persecution, and yet, *they would be persecuted*.

Third, the Savior tells His disciples: *go fearing God and trusting Him to provide for you* (Matt. 10:26–31). In other words, don’t be afraid of people’s threats. Don’t be afraid of

what they can do to you. They can only kill the body, but beyond that they can’t do anything. Trust your heavenly Father for soul and body, for time and eternity. You are worth more than the birds of the air, which the Father in heaven cares about. Your hairs, which you don’t even care to count, are numbered by God. Cast yourself upon the providence of God and you will not need to fear people and things. In other words: “Shake off the chains of people’s opinions and your own worries, and live looking to and depending on Me.”

LIFE IS ALL ABOUT CHRIST

Having said these three things, Christ gets to the heart of everything our world needs to hear: *Those who confess Him before men, He will confess them before His Father in heaven, but those who deny Him before men, He will deny before His Father in heaven.*

This is an absolutely stunning statement, one that deserves to be unpacked first at the level of what it teaches us about Christ, who is to be confessed. First of all, it tells us that Christ *deserves to be confessed by all*. Christ is saying, “You either confess Me or you deny Me; that’s what life is all about at its most basic level. My name and fame should be the center of everything and everyone.” If Christ had said this and not been the Son of God, the Lord of heaven, the Firstborn of all creation, this would have been blasphemy. Because of who He is, this statement is not only appropriate but also absolutely necessary. He deserves not only that angels center on Him, but all people and all creatures.

Second, Christ *will confess His people before His Father in heaven*. As Christ spoke these words, He was in the state of His humiliation. The vast majority of people whom He encountered failed to recognize Him as the Son of God. Yet, Christ knew the glory that awaited Him once His work was finished. He knew that He would one day stand before His Father. He knew that *the Father is His Father* and that on that great day to come He would stand there as the great Son of God and speak the names of all His people to this Father. He is sure of it. There is not a tinge of doubt in His mind.

Third, *Christ will know all those who have confessed Him*. He will have perfect knowledge of every person. He won’t get a single name wrong. He won’t miss a single one of His people. He will also know each one that has denied Him. He infallibly knows what none of us knows. Isn’t this an astounding thought? Of all the billions of people who have lived on this earth, He knows each of His own, including what each has said, done, and thought in their homes, on the

street, in the field, or online; Christ knows it all. He knows each heart that has confessed His name with true faith.

FOUR ASPECTS OF THIS CONFESSION

Someone might ask: “Isn’t there some way to just be a Christian quietly and secretly to avoid all the conflict with others and the enmity of the world? After all, isn’t faith in Christ a matter of the heart? Do we need to put ourselves in the world’s crosshairs?”

Christ’s declaration makes clear that confession of His name before men is *not only important*, but also *absolutely essential*. This is what Christ demands and what He has a right to.

The word Christ uses here for confessing means to be *aligned, allied with, or agreed with Christ*. It means to be in close covenant with Christ, united to Him, and living out of Him in heart, word, and walk. The original literally says: “Whosoever shall confess *in me*.” This implies that we need to be united to Christ or bound to Him. It involves not only that you agree with Christ’s claims, but that you echo them with your lips and in your life. The Holy Spirit works this identification with Christ as He cuts us off of the old stock Adam, with whom we are identified by nature. He brings us to see that we lie under the guilt and power of sin and condemnation. He drives us outside of ourselves to lay hold of the refuge set before us in the gospel. Then we learn to confess our sin against God. We learn to confess that we have sinned away all rights. We confess that in us, that is in our flesh, dwells no good thing. We also learn to confess that Christ crucified is the only sufficient and satisfactory Savior and Surety as we rest on Him in the gospel.

Let’s unpack the statement further. To confess Christ means, first of all, that this will be a *heart* confession. Christ isn’t referring to a confession that is made only with words. That does no one any good. Jesus makes clear that there will be many who say in the last day, “Lord, Lord,” (Matt. 7:21–23). A true confession of Christ, this aligning with Christ, must be sincere. It must grow out of a true faith in Christ, worked by the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

Second, this confession needs to be a *public* confession. It is not enough to keep faith in Christ to yourself. It needs to be confessed. The church father Chrysostom said: “If it was sufficient simply to believe with the heart, God would not have given us a mouth.”

Third, it needs to be a *continual* confession. While Christ was on earth, there were some people who would follow Him for a while, but later turn aside from Him and leave Him. One of the apostles who was on this mission with the other eleven—Judas—stopped confessing Christ. A true confession of Christ embraces even the cross.

Last, we need a *consistent* confession of Christ, one in which our words and our lives match. Many people claim to believe in Christ with their lips, but their lives are anything but Christ-like. To confess Christ means to show what Christ says in our lives—to obey His Word and His commandments and to imitate His character. It also means that when our actions do not match our words, when we fail Christ, that we must turn back to Him and repent like Peter did after his denial of Christ (Luke 22:62). Those who confess Christ are not perfect in this life, but when they do deny Christ, then they are brought to repentance. They grieve over, hate, and forsake their denial. They desire to confess Christ again.

Perhaps someone says: “I’m no match for those early apostles. They were special men.” Actually, they were simple people, unimportant in the world, ordinary fishermen, despised publicans, and the like. Still, notice that Christ is not just addressing those early disciples. He says: “*Whosoever shall confess me*” (Matt. 10:32). In other words, anyone may and should confess me, no matter how young or old, poor or rich, bond or free. Christ issues the call widely: “*Who-soever*.” He takes all kinds into His service and is willing to broadcast Himself all through the world through them. Think of the little girl of Naaman, who spoke up for the God of Israel. Think of the Samaritan woman who ran into the village to confess Christ to her neighbors. Christ deserves your lips and your life, no matter how sinful. David says in his repentance to God: “Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee” (Ps. 51:13).

TWO COURTS

Perhaps it is helpful to picture two courts. There is the court on earth in which Jesus Christ is on trial before people. Then there is the court of heaven, where we all are on trial before God. The world is constantly asking us: “What do you say about Christ? Whom do you serve? Whom do you stand up for? Whose side are you on?” Christ promises that those who confess Him here on earth, He will confess in the second court, the court in heaven before the Father. He does that now already on the right hand of the Majesty on High, interceding for His people, but He will do that ultimately at the final judgment.

Think of the difference between the two courts. Would you rather stand in this world and confess Christ or, in the world to come, before the holy God and the holy angels, have Christ *not* confess you? Think of the momentousness of the courtroom of heaven. Christ is anticipating that glorious moment when the nations will be gathered before His Father—all souls that ever lived. That will be the great judgment. That will be the judgment of all judgments.

What a day that will be when before the throne of God, Christ will know all of His people by name, stand up for all of them, and confess them before His Father. Words like these will be on His lips: “Father, here is one that confessed Me before men. Now, O holy Father, before Thee and before the world, I confess them as Mine. They belong to me. They can never perish. Father, accept them in My merits.”

Then all of us will wish that we had confessed Him before men, every day and all day. Human opinion of us is short-lived.

DON'T DENY HIM

The Savior draws the hearts of sinners to love Him. Such love might start in secret, but it can't stay there. A secret disciple cannot stay secret, especially when Christ says: “Deny me and I'll deny you.” If you love Him, you can't endure the thought that on that day, you would hear those crushing words: “I never knew you” (Matt. 7:23).

It is not enough simply to come to church, to read your Bible, to listen to sermons, or to attend a Christian school. It is not sufficient to vote conservatively or simply to embrace certain social or political issues. Unless you are confessing Christ, you are denying Him. If you are denying Him, you are denying the One who stood before the world and said: “Come unto me...and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). You are denying the One who was scourged before the tribunal of Pilate for sinners (John 19:1). You are denying the One who shed His precious blood for sinners. Deny anyone and anything, but don't deny this Son of God. There is no

greater crime, and there will be no greater punishment than He denying you.

Some may say: “I am too wicked. God wouldn't want the likes of me confessing Him.” My friend, you must repent of your sin, trust in Christ, leave your wickedness, and confess Christ, or you will meet Him at the judgment seat and have no excuse. He can save you from the wickedness and make you confess Him, but don't persist in pushing Him aside. Don't deny Him, the One who may never be denied.

Another might object: “Wouldn't it be better to not claim more than I am sure I can live up to?” This is not the kind of logic used in our text. Christ makes clear that confessing Him is not optional. Obey Him and beg His help to make your confession a consistent and true one. We are all unprofitable servants, but God gives the gospel for sinners. Through that gospel, sinners can confess Christ. He is so worthy to be confessed by all, even the most unworthy one here below.

Perhaps you are cast down because you have said so little before others of Christ. It grieves you to think Christ would disapprove of you. You want His approval most of all and you are restless till you know it. You are not now making excuses, but you are crying to Christ to help you to confess Him more often, more clearly, and more consistently. Christ will help you because this is His design in your life.

Whatever we do, may we confess the worthy Christ.

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

(continued from page 52)

How worthy he had made himself of being fully disowned by this risen Lord! Rightfully Christ could have excommunicated him from the fellowship of the apostles.

Instead, however, Jesus appears to him even before He appears to the others. Why? Because He had also risen indeed for Simon. For this Simon He had left His heavenly glory, suffered the bitter agony of the cross, was forsaken by His Father, and was obedient unto death. Therefore, He also was raised again for Simon's justification. Because of His finished work, vindicated by His resurrection, Christ could appear to a man so unworthy of such benefits. How the glory of Christ's onesided, sovereign, and unmerited love shines forth in these words: “And hath appeared unto Simon” (Luke 24:34)!

Let this encourage you, for this same Jesus has also appeared to you—not because of anything in you, but purely because He has found reasons within Himself and in the work He has accomplished for you. His death and

resurrection were the sole foundation for His appearance to an utterly unworthy Simon—and for His appearance to you. All boasting is forever excluded. Jesus is the risen Savior of a people utterly unworthy of being the beneficiaries of His resurrection. Therefore, if you have truly trusted in Christ for the salvation of your soul, you are, though utterly unworthy in yourself, the recipient of these benefits nevertheless.

You who love the risen Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, do not live below your privileges. Rather, rejoice in the fact that our precious Lord Jesus not only is risen indeed, but also that He has appeared unto Simon—and even unto you!

Dear reader, are you already a partaker of Christ and all the blessed benefits of His resurrection? If not, then “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things” (Acts 13:38–39).

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LEARNING TO PREACH *from the* Reformers

gospel,” he concludes.¹ In commenting on Isaiah 55:11, he says, “The Word goeth out of the mouth of God in such a manner that it likewise goeth out of the mouth of men; for God does not speak openly from heaven but employs men as his instruments.”²

This stress on preaching moved Calvin to be active on several fronts in Geneva, where he labored for twenty-six years. He preached from the New Testament on Sunday mornings, the Psalms on Sunday afternoons, and the Old Testament at 6 a.m. weekday services. Following this schedule during his last period of ministry in Geneva from 1541 to 1564, Calvin preached nearly four thousand sermons—more than one hundred and seventy a year. On his deathbed, he spoke of his preaching as more significant than his writings.³ Do you place such a high premium on the weekly task of preaching the Word?

Just as the gospel of justification by faith in Christ alone was the central message of the Reformation, so the preaching of the Word was central to the work of the Reformers. Like the Apostles, the Reformers gave themselves to the ministry of the Word. Preaching came to be recognized early in the Reformation as the primary task of the church’s ministers, dethroning the celebration of the Mass in the process. Reformed preachers and pastors were often designated simply as “minister of the Word” or “preacher of the gospel.” The entire office of the ministry came to be defined by the act of preaching.

The Reformation was born out of and gave birth to God-honoring, Scripture-rooted gospel proclamation. So what can we learn today from the Reformers on this vital subject of preaching?

A HIGH VIEW OF THE PREACHING OFFICE

First, the Reformers embraced a high view of preaching. John Calvin calls the preaching office “the most excellent of all things,” commended by God that it might be held in the highest esteem in the church. “There is nothing more notable or glorious in the church than the ministry of the

A PERVASIVE EXALTATION OF CHRIST

Second, the Reformers sought to lift up or exalt Christ in all of their preaching. The great Reformer of Basel, Johannes Oecolampadius, viewed preaching the Word as the proclamation of Christ. This arose from his view of the Scriptures. He wrote, “Because the Word of God is inspired by the Holy Spirit, I am unable not to affirm that in all places the Spirit of the Scriptures has regard for Christ Jesus in purpose, goal, and method.” Therefore, the first and fundamental act of the student and preacher of Scripture is to come to the Bible seeking Christ: “The sense of Scripture does not come to any, except to those who also seek Christ and to whom Christ reveals Himself.”⁴

The Reformers focused on God’s living Word, Jesus Christ, made known in God’s written Word, the Bible. The great theme and controlling contour of their preaching was Jesus Christ, for He is the supreme focus, substance, and purpose of God’s revelation. Therefore, like Paul, they determined as preachers “not to know anything...save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2).

AN EXPERIENTIAL, PASTORAL INTENTION

Third, the Reformers did not see the preacher as someone merely explaining theological concepts, but as a shepherd caring for his sheep. The preacher's aim was to apply biblical truth to the hearts and lives of people whom they loved. Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor, wrote: "But pastors must go further [than teaching doctrine]. For, in preaching, they apply the doctrine to the needs of the church, to teach, to rebuke, to console and [to] exhort in public and in private, according to the need.... They also make public prayer. In brief, they watch day and night over their flock whom they feed in public and in private with the Word of life (Acts 20:20)."⁵

These ministers loved their people and that love permeated all of their preaching. They sought the salvation, sanctification, and comfort of their people through the application of the Word to the heart. Preaching must flow from the heart of the preacher and must be applied to the hearts of the hearers. In this way, the Reformers teach us of the necessity of addressing the heart in true preaching.

THE PURSUIT OF HOLINESS

Fourth, the Reformers' goal in preaching was to see the people of God adorned with the beauty of holiness. From its earliest roots, the Reformed movement was a pursuit of godliness in personal, church, and national life. Building on the solid foundation of justification by faith alone, the Reformers labored together under the Spirit to construct a community of holiness by grace alone, for the glory of God alone. They were not mere orators and educators. Calvin wrote, "Indeed, we shall not say that, properly speaking, God is known where there is no religion or piety."⁶ The sole purpose for which he wrote his great work of theology, the *Institutes*, was that "those who are touched with any zeal for religion might be shaped to true godliness."⁷ Godliness or piety (Calvin's word, from the Latin *pietas*) is reverential love for God arising from God's grace and aiming to please him in all things.⁸

Preaching plays a crucial role in the growth of the church in godliness. Paul writes that the ascended Lord Jesus gives "pastors and teachers...for the edifying of the body of Christ" until every Christian reaches maturity, growing "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:11–13). Calvin observed that God desires His people "to grow up into manhood" through "the preaching of the heavenly doctrine" by "the pastors."⁹ For this reason, the cultivation of true piety in God's people ought to be one of the chief aims of all true preaching.

CONCLUSION

The preaching of the Reformers leads us who are preachers in the twenty-first century to ask ourselves: Is my preaching rooted in the glorious truths of Christ rediscovered in the Reformation? Do I know what those truths are? Do I faithfully make them known, even in the face of indifference and hostility? Furthermore, do I intend my preaching to be a sharp instrument by which the Lord shapes a holy people for His glory? Am I guiding the church to a robust and full-orbed spirituality? Or is my preaching aiming at something else?

Too often preachers aim at far less worthy goals, such as:

- attracting and entertaining a crowd of people;
- seeking superficial decisions for Christ to count as "conversions";
- promoting a social or political agenda without a heavenly focus;
- generating emotion but not touching the heart with the truth; and
- building a "brand" of one's own and securing influence.

Let us humble ourselves before the almighty God and seek by the blood of Jesus to have the sins of our preaching forgiven and our souls transformed. May God raise up an army of preachers whose consciences are captive to the Word of God, and whose lives are being transformed by the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

1. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill, Library of Christian Classics, vols. 20–21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 4.3.3, hereafter, *Institutes*. Parts of this article are adapted from my *Reformed Preaching: Preaching God's Word from the Heart of the Preacher to the Heart of His People* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2018).

2. John Calvin, *Commentaries of Calvin*, various translators and editors, 45 vols. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1846–1851; repr., 22 vols., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), Isa. 55:11.

3. William Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 29.

4. Quoted in Diane Poythress, *Reformer of Basel: The Life, Thought, and Influence of Johannes Oecolampadius* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), 121.

5. Theodore Beza, *The Christian Faith* (Lewes, U.K.: Focus Christian Ministries, 1992), 93.

6. *Institutes*, 1.2.1.

7. "Prefatory Address to King Francis I of France," in *Institutes*, 9.

8. *Institutes*, 1.2.1; see also "Calvin's Catechism (1538)," in James T. Dennison Jr., *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries in English Translation, Volume 1, 1523–1552* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 410.

9. *Institutes*, 4.1.5.

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FUNCTION OF THE PSALMS

A Paradigm for Worship (4)

There is no question that the Psalms teach us how to worship; the question is how we are to use the Psalms in worship. What should be their function? David's introduction of a psalm as part of the celebration occasioned by the ark's return illustrates the function of psalms in public worship (1 Chronicles 16). Interestingly, the psalm sung first on that day became in the Psalter, either in part or in whole, what we know as Psalms 96, 105, and 106. It was used more than once. Similarly, some of the superscriptions identify the liturgical use of particular psalms. Psalm 30, for instance, was for the dedication of David's house. Psalms 120–135 were designated as the songs of ascent, traditionally understood to have been part of the celebration of the pilgrimage feasts. Psalm 92 is marked as a song for the Sabbath. Additional instructions recorded in the Septuagint designate other Psalms for specific days of the week (1st day—Psalm 24; 2nd day—Psalm 48; 4th day—Psalm 94; 6th day—Psalm 93). First Corinthians 14:26, Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16, and James 5:13 confirm the place of the Psalms in New Testament worship as well.

Evidence is that the early church followed the biblical pattern and incorporated the Psalms into the services of public worship. Certainly, the Reformation with its revival of congregational singing relied heavily on the Psalms, even relying on the Psalms—some would argue—exclusively. The point to be taken is that there is both biblical and traditional precedent for using the Psalms in worship. It is not my concern here to enter into any of the debates or controversies that have arisen regarding exclusive psalmody or inclusive hymnody. I want simply to recommend four functions that the Psalms ought to have in worship.

First, *read the Psalms*. Every worship service must include the public reading of the Scripture. Although this public reading should not be restricted to the Psalms, the Psalms by their very nature accomplish much of what is desired in the public reading. With their commands to praise and give thanks, many of the psalms lend themselves to use at the beginning of the service to call the people to worship. In addition, the Psalms exhibit a theological completeness that will keep the whole course of God's redemptive operation in view if they are read systematically. Johnson offers an interesting array of quotations to this effect:

In his 1528 "Preface to the Psalter," Luther refers to the Psalter as a "little Bible." He says, "In it is comprehended most beautifully and briefly everything that

is in the entire Bible." He calls it a "short Bible," in which is provided an "entire summary" of the whole "comprised in one little book." Before him Athanasius (ca. 296–373) referred to the Psalter as an "epitome of the whole Scriptures." And Basil (ca. 330–70) called it a "compend of all divinity." All that the Bible teaches is found in summary form in the Book of Psalms (Terry Johnson and Ligon Duncan, *Give Praise to God: A Vision for Reforming Worship*, 262).

Second, *pray the Psalms*. Since so many of the Psalms are themselves prayers addressed directly to the Lord, following the paradigm requires praying—the specifics as well as the patterns. Although not a paragon of ministerial compassion or concern, Jonah teaches us something about the Psalms and praying. His prayer from the belly of the great fish is a casebook example of what it is to saturate prayer with scriptural language (Jonah 2). Almost every line of his prayer is either a direct quotation from or very close allusion to some line from the Psalter (just look at the cross references in your Bible). Though he repeated the words of Scripture, he adapted and applied the truths to his unique need and circumstance. Think what we will of Jonah, his knowledge of Scripture that surfaced in his most distressing and disgusting environment depicts a man who knew how to pray. His prayer was in a very private setting, but its pattern and example is appropriate for public praying as well. A key point to remember is that Jonah did not simply recite scriptural language; he really prayed using scriptural terms. There is hardly a better way to learn to pray than to pray through the Psalms, personalizing the inspired words. There is hardly a better way to insure that public praying is scripturally sound than to utilize the words of Scripture. Spontaneous praying does not preclude using the Psalms.

Third, *preach the Psalms*. It is significant to me that the first sermon preached on the day of Pentecost was based on a text from the Psalms. After Peter appealed to Joel's prophecy to explain what was happening on the eventful day, he began to preach Christ, taking Psalm 16 as his text, and he didn't finish before commenting on Psalm 110 as well (Acts 2:25–36). Acts refers to more than one apostolic sermon that used the Psalms (see, for instance, Acts 4:25 referring to Psalm 2). In light of the full compendium of theological truths and life issues addressed in the Psalms, any preacher ought to find abundant sermon material. Once you learn something about the structure and style of the

poetry, the Psalms almost outline themselves. They are eminently “preachable.”

Fourth, *sing the Psalms*. Among other purposes, the Psalms were made for singing. That they were sung in their original settings and continued to be sung in both Jewish and Christian worship is indisputable. Psalm singing has a rich history, especially in Reformed worship traditions but particularly among the Scottish Covenanters. Singing the Psalms will help dispel what has become a common notion even among the most conservative that singing is preparatory for worship. Proper singing is not preparatory for worship; it is worship. Singing the Psalms, the divinely inspired hymnbook, is singing what God wants sung.

In his preface to the Psalter, Calvin comments on both the words and the tunes to be sung in worship:

Moreover, that which St. Augustine has said is true, that no one is able to sing things worthy of God except that which he has received from him. Therefore, when we have looked thoroughly, and searched here and there, we shall not find better songs nor more fitting for the purpose, than the Psalms of David, which the Holy Spirit spoke and made through him. And moreover, when we sing them, we are certain that God puts in our mouths these, as if he himself were singing in us to exalt his glory.

And then with reference to tunes, he says:

Care must always be taken that the song be neither light nor frivolous; but that it have weight and majesty (as St. Augustine says), and also, there is a great difference between music which one makes to entertain men at table and their houses, and the Psalms which are sung in the Church in the presence of God and his angels (quoted in *Give Praise to God*, 272–273).

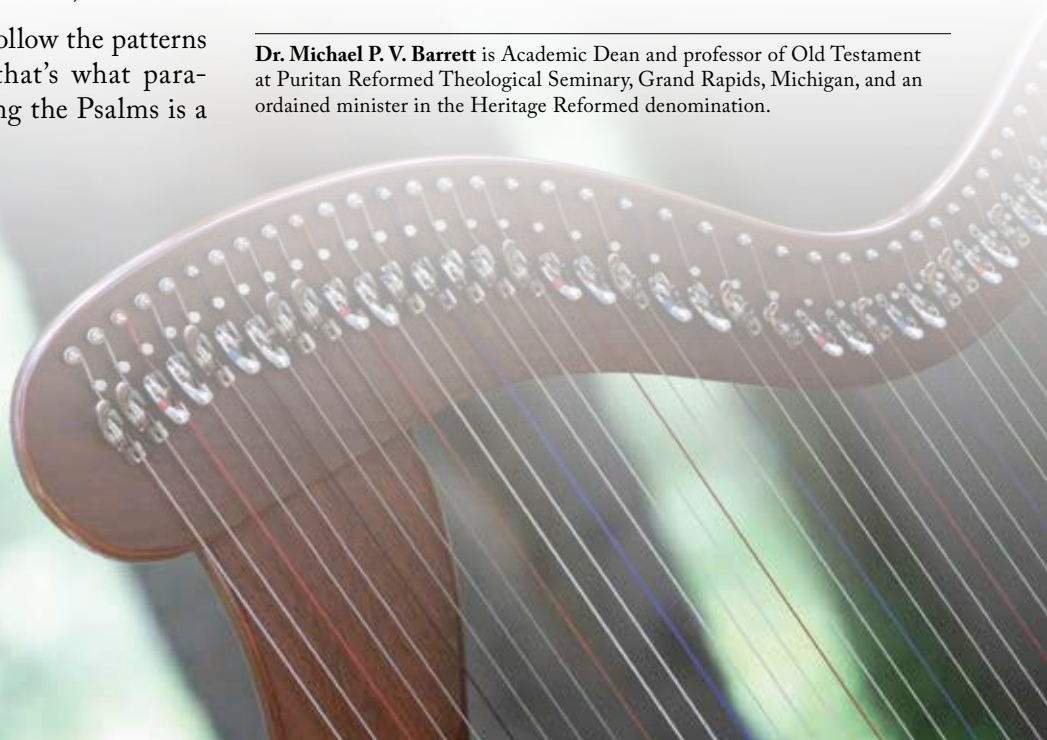
Even man-authored hymns ought to follow the patterns and themes suggested in the Psalms; that’s what paradigms are for. I would suggest that singing the Psalms is a

safeguard against singing inappropriate hymns and spiritual songs. Singing the Psalms and using them as a pattern for singing other things will insure the proper kind of words.

Since the tunes have not been preserved, and thus were not inspired, common and sanctified sense must operate. This is the notion expressed by the *Westminster Confession of Faith* when it says, “There are some circumstances concerning the worship of God...which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed” (WCF 1.6). I will not venture commentary beyond my competence about music style, but I will make a statement reflecting common and sanctified sense. The tunes ought to fit the words and be fit for the One to whom the songs are directed. Remembering that worship singing is not for personal entertainment but for service unto God will automatically exclude tunes and music styles that are associated with secular or worldly contexts. I’m not saying that contemporary tunes are inherently bad; the date of composition is not the issue. Something written yesterday might well be appropriate and honoring to God; something written centuries ago might well be spiritually disgusting. The melodies ought to match the words. Joyous Psalms ought to have joyous tunes. Praise Psalms ought to have majestic tunes. Penitential Psalms ought to have doleful tunes. Some things just make sense. Sing the Psalms.

The Psalms teach us that we are to meditate on God, His person, His works, and His Christ. The Psalms teach us to declare, to describe, to praise, to give thanks, to pray, to vow, and to sing. The Psalms not only teach us the paradigms or patterns for worship; they teach us to worship. God has given us a handbook and hymnbook all in one place. Let’s use it to His glory.

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RESTING IN CHRIST

I need to rest. How often we may feel that and say that. After a busy day or after a busy season, we may find ourselves weary and needing to lie down, or simply to sit in a chair and put up our feet and close our eyes. Maybe we seek a longer rest—a vacation somewhere and time off from our work. Sometimes we may long for rest but we don't get it—we can't sleep or there is too much going on, too much that demands our attention, and rest has to wait. Sometimes we need only physical rest. Other times we yearn for mental and emotional rest. Our greatest need, of course, is for spiritual and eternal rest.

In view of that, how great is the following: “I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28)! These are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. He speaks them to all who are weary and heavy laden. He invites and summons to Himself the weary and heavy laden: “Come unto me,” He says, “and I will give you rest.”

One thing that's true is how deeply restless we all are apart from Christ. We may not know it. We may not be aware of it. In fact, many people today seem utterly oblivious to it; that's part of the blinding power of sin. Still, the old statement of Augustine is always true for all: “Our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee.”

Why are we so restless apart from the Savior? Why do we labor in life apart from Him? Why are people by default so heavy laden, so bowed down, so oppressed, and so broken? The answer is that they—we all—are sinners. Yes, all people are sinners and thus guilty before our Creator and completely unable to resolve our guilt. Many times we can't even rightly identify our guilt, but it's there. We have original sin in Adam. Eve tried to hide in the garden, but her sin was still there. Then, we also have our many actual sins throughout our lives from our earliest days to now. Who of us doesn't have a large burden of sin? Sin by its very nature creates infinite unrest, anxiety, weariness, and more.

Many times, sadly, as a result of all this restlessness, we can become busy trying to resolve our situation. We can be so restless in seeking rest for our unrest. If, for instance, we aim to make up for our sin and guilt through our own efforts, if we aim still somehow to be reconciled to God and to enjoy His favor through our own good works or by doing our very best, what an endless treadmill run that is. How intensely wearisome it becomes! Seeking peace with God through religious performance, checking off the boxes one after another, hoping that finally some

day it will be enough when we've read the Bible enough, said enough prayers, attended enough services, conquered enough sins, and given enough money. These are all good things in themselves, but we think that surely then in some way the Lord will be satisfied some day. We think that the Lord will say, “You're good now. You can rest.” Yet, we never hear it. Instead we are always doing, working, running, and striving. We are never resting. Which self-aware sinner hasn't wrestled with these things?

Therefore, how liberating and even breathtaking it is to hear the Lord Jesus say so clearly, so simply, so profoundly, “Come unto me...and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). When He says that, He is addressing those who “labour and are heavy laden.” To all such—indeed, what a rich word, “all”—to any and every sinner bowed down ever so little or much under the weight of sin and the impossibility of ridding ourselves of our guilt through self-effort, law-keeping, good works or whatever else, to “all ye that labour and are heavy laden,” Christ says, “come and I will give you rest.”

What is the rest that Jesus gives? What else can it be but the rest that comes through peace with God on account of the finished work of the Savior? What other rest could He mean than the rest of a conscience no longer troubled by our sin but at ease and at peace because all the guilt of sin has been fully and forever covered by the shed blood and righteousness of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ? The living Christ calls all those who labor and are heavy laden into the rest of everlasting salvation from sin and death. He gives this ultimate rest to all who look to Him in faith, all who trust in Him.

How does He give this rest? He gives it through uniting sinners to Himself. That's why He says, not simply, “Go here or there,” or “Do this or that.” He doesn't even say, “Ask me, and I will give you rest.” No, He says, “Come unto me...and I will give you rest.” The rest that the Lord Jesus gives, He gives through a personal relationship. He gives it through sinners entering into union with Himself by the power of the Holy Spirit. It's in Jesus Christ that we may rest. It's in believing in Him that we may receive all the blessings of His rest, including forgiveness of sins, peace with God, everlasting righteousness, and the hope of heaven. All this comes through being joined to Him. This is made clear in the verse that follows, when Jesus says, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me” (Matt. 11:29). Taking Christ's yoke is a picture of coming under the

command and instruction of Christ. The result of taking Christ's yoke is: "Ye shall find rest unto your souls" (v. 29).

This point is so important. We can never find true rest apart from Christ. He gives us rest. He makes us to enjoy that rest. He enables us to rest in His rest. He says, "I will give you rest...and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

Isn't it most humbling to us and most glorifying of the Lord Jesus that, in His promising and granting this rest to all who come to Him, He Himself had to go through infinite unrest? He had to labor so intensely in life among sinners and in service to His Father. In all His life and work, He became so heavy laden, so oppressed, and so bowed down. We might think here of His ministry on earth and the fact that He spent Himself in preaching, teaching, serving, and blessing so many. In addition, what suffering He endured in one night with His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, during His night-long trial in the presence of the Jewish leaders, in the courts of Pilate and Herod, on the cross where He was made to hang there in all agony and shame, and above all, as the sin-bearing Son of God suffering all the judgment and wrath that our sin deserves. In all that, He was altogether alone,

forsaken by all—even by His own Father. He endured all that unspeakable unrest so as to give to sinners like us infinite, all-glorious rest.

Are you resting in this Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you gone to Him? Are you someone who has learned, and is learning still, to trust in Him? What a gift of grace when we may say that we have heard the Savior's call and responded to Him in faith. We have gone to Him; He ultimately has brought us to Himself. In Him we have found our rest. To all the weary, He says as it were, "Stay close." Don't leave the rest that's in Him. Stay very close.

If you're not resting, if you're still running, if you're delighting in sin, if you're trying to make amends, if you're trying to find atonement through your own efforts, or if you're slaving away under a burden of man-made laws and traditions, listen to Jesus Christ. He speaks to you so simply, so richly: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (v. 28).

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VALUING SABBATH REST

“And he said to them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: therefore the Son of man is also Lord of the sabbath.”

—Mark 2:27–28

John Newton once penned these wonderfully memorable words:

*Safely through another week
God has brought us on our way;
Let us now a blessing seek,
On th’approaching Sabbath day;
Day of all the week the best,
Emblem of eternal rest.*

Do you love the Lord’s Day? Do you see it as the best day of the week? We value so many things in this life, but do you value the rest of the Sabbath day?

Work is a wonderful thing. It was commanded in Adam’s original mandate (Gen. 2:15). Faithful work is commended by the Lord with joy (Matt. 25:21). Jesus labored to complete the work of His Father’s business (Luke 2:49; John 4:34). Paul worked harder than anyone else (1 Cor. 15:10). Work can also be therapeutic. Work is a blessing.

Rest from our regular labor is also a great blessing. The Lord in His abundant mercy and wisdom created a day of rest. We know from Scripture’s record that over a six day period He created all things, including mankind. He then rested on the seventh day (Gen. 2:2). He created the day itself and then rested from His labor on this day. He did not rest because He was tired. The Lord cannot grow tired or weary (Isa. 40:28). He rested to set a pattern for mankind whom He had created in His own image. Moreover, in His abiding moral law He commands us to *remember* the Sabbath day because of our tendency to forget it (Ex. 20:8). He also exhorts us to *keep*, or *observe* the Sabbath day because of our inclination to neglect it (Deut. 5:12).

The Sabbath day, or the Lord’s Day, and the rest it provides should be highly valued by the Christian church. Do you highly value this day in a proper way? Throughout history many have not. During Jesus’s earthly ministry, the Pharisees thought they were both observing and valuing the Sabbath day rightly. However, they had it all wrong. In Mark 2, we find a record of Jesus’s disciples picking a few handfuls of grain for their lunch on the Sabbath day. The Pharisees believed they were violating their very strict—and thus honorable—observance of this day of rest. So, after Jesus gives scriptural legitimacy to their Sabbath activities, He says, “The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath: therefore the Son of man is also Lord of the

sabbath” (Mark 2:27–28). Jesus, the source of all and ultimate truth, is making three important related statements.

First, the Sabbath day was made for man. It was made for our spiritual good. It is good to go to the house of God on the Lord’s Day and hear the word of the good gospel preached. It is the eternal word blessed by the Spirit that causes sinners to be born again (1 Peter 1:23). It is the preaching of the gospel that is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Rom. 1:16). It is the sown Word that yields faith (Rom. 10:14–17). It is good for Christians to hear the Word and to worship around it because it is the Word that washes us spiritually and sanctifies us, Paul writes (Eph. 5:26). The Sabbath was made for the spiritual good of mankind. It is good to gather together on the day of rest and prayerfully seek to rest by faith in the Savior whom we hear preached. This wonderful day of rest is intimately tied together with the life and work of Christ. Without His perfect life and atoning death, there would be no gospel message and no reason to worship each Lord’s Day. We desperately need this day of rest whether we realize it or not. Life can be so busy and chaotic, but when we enter into the doors of God’s house with His people on His day and open His Word, our hearts should rest in the Christ of the gospel. Each Sunday morning I pray we would sing with the psalmist, “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD” (Ps. 122:1).

The Sabbath was made for man and also for our physical good. It is to be a day of physical rest—to recharge our physical and emotional batteries. It is not good to work seven days a week. We need a day to rest also for our bodies. God set the pattern. Let us never be so arrogant to think we have a better plan for this day than He who is perfect (Matt. 5:48).

After Jesus says, “the sabbath was made for man” He continues to tell the Pharisees, “and not man for the sabbath” (Mark 2:27). This part of Christ’s statement is a bit more obscure. He is saying the Pharisees had it all backward. “The sabbath was made for man, *and not* man for the sabbath” (Mark 2:27, emphasis added). They missed the core purpose of the Sabbath. It was to be a day of rest, not a day of extra burdens. Man was not made to keep endless rules on the Sabbath as the Pharisees were accustomed to do. They would also require rigorous and detailed observance by others (Matt. 23:4). The Sabbath was not made to be a day to demonstrate our levels of so-called righteousness

by what we do or do not do. The focus of this day of rest is not to be upon us or on our diligence! The right focus of this day is to be on Jesus Christ. The reason why the Pharisees were such unpleasant and restless souls even with all their external morality was because they had not found spiritual, peaceful rest in Christ alone. The same holds true today. When we don't have Christ as Savior and Lord, all we are left with are rules. The natural fallen heart reasons that the more rules we can keep (also for the Lord's Day) the better off we will be in God's eyes. However, this is not the message of the true gospel proclaimed on the Lord's Day. Let us always be careful not to turn the purpose of the Sabbath into a man-focused day of our external obedience only. Let us seek grace to worship the Lord's Christ in the "beauty of holiness" (Ps. 29:2).

Finally, Christ says, "Therefore the Son of man is also Lord of the sabbath" (Mark 2:28). Christ is Lord, that is, Master of the Sabbath. He is the One in charge! Therefore, He and He alone has the authority to define the parameters of this day of rest. It is only when we by gracious faith embrace Jesus Christ and follow His guidelines in His Word for His day that we will ever rightly value this special day.

The world sees the Lord's Day as part of "the weekend." The ungodly businessman sees this day as another day of income opportunity. The kind family man sees it as "family day." The Pharisee desperately uses this day to display his so-called righteousness. The healthy Christian, however,

rightly understands this day as the Lord's Day. It is the soul's market day. It is a day when we are privileged to rest from our regular labor and to gather for worship with like-minded individuals to hear the voice of Christ through the preaching of His Word (Rom. 10:14). It is the day that the conscientious Christian looks forward to all week. When the sun sets each Sunday, he looks forward with anticipation to doing it all over again the following Lord's Day.

Do you value the spiritual and physical rest of the Lord's Day? Could you live long without this blessed day? A spiritually healthy Christian hungers for Christ's righteousness as the gospel is proclaimed (Matt. 5:6). A prolonged absence of hunger signals sickness. This is also true spiritually. May we not forsake "the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more as you see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:25). May we by God's grace love the Lord Jesus Christ. May we remember and observe the fourth command He has mercifully given to His church for our good. Let us call the Sabbath a delight (Isa. 58:13). Because of His gracious redemption, He exhorts us to observe this special day (Deut. 5:15).

The Lord of the Sabbath commends to us in His Word to value the Sabbath day. May you value this day by not only resting from your regular labor, but most importantly by resting in Jesus Christ alone who is the Lord of the Sabbath.

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CONSEQUENCES FOR NEGLECTING REST

*“It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows:
for so he giveth his beloved sleep.”*

—Psalm 127:2

Rest! Who of us does not cherish and long for rest? In our media-driven culture, constantly bombarding us with an endless stream of visual and audio stimuli, genuine rest that restores both soul and body appears to become almost elusive. Add to that the relentless pressure exerted by a performance-focused and outcome-driven 24/7 economy, and we should not be surprised that experiencing genuine rest is becoming increasingly difficult in such a restless environment.

How sad it is that an increasing number of teenagers are suffering from serious sleep disorders due to their addiction to the social media! Instead of turning off their smartphones when retiring for the night, they will place them on their night stand so that they are within reach in case a text or a snapchat is received during the night. After all, how could they afford not to respond instantly to any incoming communication? To not respond immediately would negatively impact their coveted social media status. Thus, many young (and older) people are robbed of the precious commodity of a restful night of sleep our Creator intended us to have to maintain our mental, emotional, and physical health.

When God created man, He created him in such a way that optimum functionality and productivity can only be achieved when the daily cycle of life includes a sufficient amount of mental, emotional, and physical rest. In fact, when God, on the first day, created light, He simultaneously created the night. In Genesis 1:4–5, we read, “God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.” During the five days preceding the creation of man, His masterpiece, God brought forth an environment that was designed to be supremely favorable to man’s spiritual and physical well-being. That included the creation of the day/night cycle so that a day of blessed activity would be followed by a night of blessed rest.

God’s design was such that, had man not fallen, he could have lived forever with a mind and body that would have been perfectly sustained in his daily activity by enjoying a divinely prescribed period of refreshing and restoring

sleep. That is to say, God not only created us to work, but He also created us to rest. Without such consistent rest, both mind and body would ultimately fail.

The functioning of our physical heart is a primary example of the Creator’s divinely embedded rest in the functioning of the human body. The contraction of the heart muscle is of shorter duration than its rest period. God thus designed the human heart in such a way that in an unfallen world it could have beaten forever without ever wearing out. Such is the wisdom of the Creator!

Due to our tragic fall in Adam, man now foolishly and sinfully defies God’s wisdom at every level of his existence—with equally tragic consequences. Though our minds and bodies are now subject to the curse of sin, resulting in our ultimate return to the dust from which we were made, our minds and bodies still need to observe the divinely ordained work/rest cycle in order to function. Failure to do so will be most detrimental to our mental and physical well-being.

This is particularly true following the global flood during the days of Noah. That flood damaged the earth and its atmosphere in a way from which it has never fully recovered. Although the pre-world flood was profoundly impacted by man’s fall, living conditions were far superior to what they are today. We now live on a globe with a broken and unstable crust, as well as with a compromised and unstable atmosphere. Consequently, the ages of men plummeted dramatically following the flood.

Since we now live in a compromised atmosphere, our bodies will tire and wear out far more quickly than they would have prior to the flood. That makes the observance of proper rest for our minds and bodies all the more essential. To put it differently, we simply cannot afford to neglect proper and timely rest! Therefore, to ignore and/or neglect the required rest for our minds and bodies is a transgression of God’s creation ordinance, and is, thus, as sinful as a refusal to work.

Even in our fallen world, a proper balance between work and rest is essential for our sustained well-being. God not only created us to function vertically (on our feet), but also horizontally (on our beds). When we are

engaged more vertically than horizontally or when we are engaged more horizontally than vertically, our mental and physical health will be impacted negatively. That is to say, work without appropriate rest, as well as excessive rest without appropriately engaging in work, are a violation of God's design.

However, in our intensely driven and relentlessly demanding culture, far more people are guilty of not honoring the divinely ordained rest cycle. Not only is this evident in people depriving themselves of an appropriate amount of sleep, but also in the fact that so many in our culture violate the divine ordinance of resting one day after six days of labor. The violation of that precept also has a long-term detrimental effect on one's mental and physical health. As is true for all God's precepts, when we break God's law, God's law will break us.

It should come as no surprise that the ungodly will routinely transgress God's precepts, and that they will therefore also transgress God's precepts mandating nightly and weekly rest. Our culture passionately worships Mammon—the idol of materialism. In their mad pursuit of possessions, pleasure, and power, men will sacrifice everything on Mammon's altar—their health, their marriages, their families, and their spiritual well-being. Paul addresses this: "But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:9–10).

How foolish it therefore is when believers also permit themselves to be swept along by the relentless tide of materialism, entertainment, and media indulgence! Though we are called to be in this world and to fulfill our God-given calling, we are emphatically exhorted not to be of this world. Our lifestyle and our priorities ought to be distinctly different from the ungodly. Christ articulates this clearly, saying, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24).

Thus, when the treasure we pursue is a heavenly one, when our life perspective is a biblical one (a single eye), and when Christ is our Master (Matt. 6:19–24), we will begin to understand the truth expressed in the text placed above this meditation. We will then not sacrifice our mental and physical well-being on Mammon's altar by depriving ourselves of the rest our Creator and heavenly Father has prescribed for us. We will then be able to retire for the night knowing that while we are sleeping our heavenly Father will continue to provide for us. While we are

sleeping, the amazing wheels of providence will continue to turn, and in ways beyond our comprehension God will see to it that our needs will be met with divinely arranged precision. And thus "it is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows" (Ps. 127:2).

There is also an alternate reading for the second half of our text—the reading found in the Dutch translation. There we read, "For so He giveth *it to* His beloved *in* their sleep." Though the Dutch rendering probably better expresses the intent of the original, both readings communicate the theology of sleep. Sleep is a fatherly gift of God, and while we are sleeping the God who never sleeps or slumbers is providing for our needs. Jesus, therefore, exhorted His disciples, saying: "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?...for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things" (Matt. 6:31–32).

It has been rightly observed that only believers can rest and sleep peacefully. Only they who may know themselves to be reconciled with God in Christ can close their eyes at night being assured of their Father's never failing love and care. Believers may confess, "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety" (Ps. 4:8).

Christians, therefore, have every reason to observe the divinely ordained rest cycle. Consistent compromise in this area will ultimately prove to be detrimental to our mental and physical well-being. We find a remarkable affirmation of this in 2 Chronicles 36:21, where we read that Judah would be in exile in Babylon "until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years." The consistent transgression of the agricultural rest cycle resulted in seventy years of exile! In other words, ignoring the divine rest ordinance will have detrimental consequences and may ultimately lead to burn-out and other health issues. We will then be compelled to make up for lost time—for having squandered precious and needed time of rest.

May God therefore give us the wisdom as frail human beings to observe the divinely instituted ordinance of rest, for "it is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth [it to] his beloved [in their] sleep" (Ps. 127:2). Also in this regard, we must order our lives biblically in the midst of our restless and increasingly pagan culture. What a blessing it therefore is to be able to say with David, "I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the LORD sustained me!" (Ps. 3:5).

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REST FOR MEN

In a BBC article headlined “‘Arrogance’ of Ignoring Need for Sleep,”¹ leading scientists warned of the supreme arrogance of trying to do without sufficient sleep. They discovered that we are sleeping between one and two hours less per night than people did sixty or so years ago and two and a half hours less than a hundred years ago. Less sleep is having devastating impact upon every part of our lives. Consider some of the devastating consequences of reduced sleep or, to put it more positively, here are multiple good reasons to sleep longer.

PHYSICAL CONSEQUENCES

Numerous studies have warned about the long-term results of chronic sleep deprivation (averaging less than six hours a night). Just one week of sleeping fewer than six hours a night results in damaging changes to more than seven hundred genes, coronary narrowing, and signs of brain tissue loss.² The latter is partly because sleep activates the brain’s garbage disposal system, cleaning out toxins and waste products.³ Chronic sleep deprivation is associated with increased risk of infection, stroke, cancer, high blood pressure, heart disease, and infertility. Sleep loss increases hunger, desire for larger portion sizes, and preference for high-calorie, high-carb foods, with the resulting risk of obesity.⁴ In short, sleeping is not a useless waste of time, but an essential biological need that prevents infection and helps us maintain healthy body weight.

SPORTING CONSEQUENCES

The physical consequences of too little sleep can be even better understood and appreciated when we examine sports science and learn why more and more elite athletes are increasing sleep and even hiring sleep coaches in order to improve their performance. Two days of sleep reduction lead to a more than 20 percent reduction in attention spans, reaction times, strength, stamina, accuracy, and speed. It is little wonder that the average sleep time of top athletes is well above average.

INTELLECTUAL CONSEQUENCES

Sleep is equally important for knowledge workers. In “Sleep Is More Important than Food,” Tony Schwartz says the research is unanimous—the better you sleep, the more you learn:

Even small amounts of sleep deprivation take a significant toll on our health, our mood, our cognitive capacity and our productivity.... Many of the effects we suffer are invisible. Insufficient sleep, for example, deeply impairs our ability to consolidate and stabilize learning that occurs during the waking day. In other words, it wreaks havoc on our memory.⁵

A study from Luebeck University in Germany found that twice as many of those who slept for eight hours solved a problem compared to those whose sleep was interrupted.⁶ The researchers concluded that it wasn’t just that they were better rested, but that their brains had been physically renewed overnight, making new neural connections so they could achieve more in less time.

EMOTIONAL CONSEQUENCES

By sleeping less and working more, the *quantity* of our work may increase in the short term, but the *quality* definitely decreases, and so does our enjoyment of what we do. That’s because sleep loss disrupts the brain’s flow of epinephrine, dopamine, and serotonin, chemicals closely associated with mood and behavior. Thus, people with insomnia are ten times as likely to develop depression and seventeen times as likely to have significant anxiety. Studies led by Torbjorn Akerstedt of Stockholm University found that less sleep reduces empathy levels but increases fear levels.⁷ In *Play It Away*, Charlie Hoehn writes:

Every anxious person I’ve met has either been in denial about how little sleep they get, or they’re overlooking the fact that they’re going to bed at random hours every night. One of my readers wrote this message to me after reviewing an early draft of this chapter: “When I began forcing myself to sleep eight hours a night my physical health problems cleared up, my emotions balanced out, and my anxiety disappeared. My mind could function and that tight feeling around my eyes vanished. Eight hours of sleep is a miracle pill.”⁸

SOCIETAL CONSEQUENCES

Question: Which of the Ten Commandments can you keep in your sleep? Answer: The sixth commandment, “You shall not murder” (Ex. 20:13), because, as the following statistics demonstrate, getting enough sleep is an act of loving your neighbor.

The cognitive impairment that results from being awake for twenty-four hours is higher than the drunken-driving limit in all states. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, falling asleep while driving is responsible for at least 100,000 crashes, 71,000 injuries, and 1,550 deaths each year in the United States.⁹ Disasters such as the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill, the *Challenger* space shuttle explosion, and the Metro North train crash in New York were all linked to sleep deprivation.

On a more mundane level, I notice (and so does my family) that I am much more irritable, bad-tempered, and likely to

end up in conflict when I've skimped on sleep. No amount of productivity is worth that damage to precious relationships.

FINANCIAL CONSEQUENCES

Because it undermines safety, creativity, problem-solving ability, and productivity, too little sleep is estimated to cost American businesses sixty-three billion dollars a year. Studies have shown that customers and clients are likely to register a sleep-deprived salesperson as unhealthy and lacking energy, which reduces sales.

Also, despite caricatures to the contrary, many entrepreneurs have built their success on sleep. Jeff Bezos of Amazon said: "I'm more alert and I think more clearly. I just feel so much better all day long if I've had eight hours." Although Newscape co-founder Mark Andressen used to skimp on sleep, he learned: "Seven [hours] and I start to degrade. Six is sub-optimal. Five is a big problem. Four means I'm a zombie."¹⁰

MORAL CONSEQUENCES

Studies show that a lack of sleep depletes and weakens the brain's self-control center, leading to higher levels of unethical behavior. In one study of whether people would cheat or not given identical temptations, those in the group that did not cheat were found to have slept on average about twenty-two minutes more than those who cheated. Former U.S. President Bill Clinton once said that every major mistake he had ever made coincided with sleep deprivation. If that doesn't make you sleep longer, nothing will.

One man who came to me for counseling after being convicted of driving under the influence of alcohol admitted that he was sleeping only three to four hours a night and drinking more and more each week. Once he increased his sleep, his desire for alcohol decreased.

SPIRITUAL CONSEQUENCES

But it's more than morality that's at stake; it's also our spirituality. Ponder this paragraph from Don Carson:

If you are among those who become nasty, cynical, or even full of doubt when you are missing your sleep, you are morally obligated to try to get the sleep you need. We are whole, complicated beings; our physical existence is tied to our spiritual well-being, to our mental outlook, to our relationships with others, including our relationship with God. Sometimes the godliest thing you can do in the universe is get a good night's sleep—not pray all night, but sleep. I'm certainly not denying that there may be a place for praying all night; I'm merely insisting that in the normal course of things, spiritual discipline obligates you get the sleep your body needs.¹¹

MINISTRY CONSEQUENCES

Unsurprisingly, all the damage outlined above inevitably leads to ministry fallout too. A pastor shared with me that he

had been raised and trained to think that "if we punish or neglect our bodies in the service of the kingdom, God will magically override any negative consequences." He warned, "We may not realize we are believing this until He lets the consequences materialize and we act confused or bitter toward God."

When lecturing about Charles Spurgeon's suffering with depression, John Piper said:

I am emotionally less resilient when I lose sleep. There were early days when I would work without regard to sleep and feel energized and motivated. In the last seven or eight years my threshold for despondency is much lower. For me, adequate sleep is not a matter of staying healthy. It is a matter of staying in the ministry. It is irrational that my future should look bleaker when I get four or five hours sleep several nights in a row. But that is irrelevant. Those are the facts. And I must live within the limits of facts. I commend sufficient sleep to you, for the sake of your proper assessment of God and his promises.¹²

1. James Gallagher, "Arrogance' of Ignoring Need for Sleep," BBC, May 12, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/health-27286872>.

2. Many of the statistics and quotations for this section come from *Sleep Disorders and Sleep Deprivation: An Unmet Public Health Problem* (Washington DC: National Academies Press, 2006).

3. L. Xie et al., "Sleep drives metabolite clearance from the adult brain," National Center for Biotechnology Information, October 18, 2013, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24136970>.

4. Christine Gorman, "Why We Sleep," *Scientific American*, October 1, 2015, <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/sleep-why-we-sleep-video/>.

5. Tony Schwartz, "Sleep Is More Important than Food," *Harvard Business Review*, March 3, 2011, <https://hbr.org/2011/03/sleep-is-more-important-than-f.html>.

6. Ulrich Wagner et al., "Sleep Inspires Insight," *Nature* 427 (Jan. 22, 2004): 352–55, www.nature.com/nature/journal/v427/n6972/full/nature02223.html. An additional study supports the idea: Michael Hopkin, "Sleep Boosts Lateral Thinking," *Nature*, January 22, 2004, www.nature.com/news/2004/040122/full/news040119-10.html.

7. See a summary of Akerstedt's research at Karolinska Institutet, Department of Clinical Neuroscience, <http://ki.se/en/cns/torbjorn-akerstedts-research-group>.

8. Charlie Hoehn, *Play It Away: A Workaholic's Cure for Anxiety* (CharlieHoehn.com, 2014), Kindle edition, locs. 1081–89.

9. "Drowsy Driving and Automobile Crashes," *NCSDR/NHTSA Expert Panel on Driver Fatigue and Sleepiness*, http://www.nhtsa.gov/people/injury/drowsy_driving1/Drowsy.html.

10. Nancy Jeffrey, "Sleep is the New Status Symbol for Successful Entrepreneurs," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 2, 1999, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB923008887262090895.html>.

11. Don Carson, *Scandalous: The Cross and Resurrection of Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 147.

12. John Piper, "Charles Spurgeon: Preaching through Adversity," *Desiring God*, January 31, 1995, <http://www.desiringgod.org/biographies/charles-spurgeon-preaching-through-adversity>.

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REST FOR WOMEN

The practice of getting a good night's sleep is rooted in the outworking of our theology. We believe that God has made sleep an integral part of our humanity (Ps. 127:2), but as with all good gifts from God, we have a sinful tendency to refuse it or misuse it. While some may struggle with wanting too much sleep, many of us struggle with wanting to make do with too little. In our productivity-mad society, we idolize activity and minimize the need for sleep. We can even pride ourselves in how little sleep we seem to need. Stories of famous Christians throughout history who reported getting by on very little sleep fuel the idea that less sleep is more godly and an example of great faith. What is often forgotten is that many of these Christians also suffered terribly ill health, and others died young. Hopefully we realize that good sleep is a must. But how do we get there when there seem to be so many obstacles in the way? Here are a few helps to improve our sleeping habits and so receive God's good gift of sleep.

KNOWLEDGE

If our schools substituted sleepology for algebra, our society would be a much healthier, safer, and brighter place. Despite sleep taking up a quarter to a third of our lives and having such an influence on the remainder, most of us leave school in total ignorance of the why and the how of sleep. As knowledge will not only guide us but also motivate us, why not read *The Power of Rest* by sleep doctor Matthew Edlund?¹

DISCIPLINE

Once we understand the physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual importance of sleep, the next challenge is to make it happen regularly. We need God's help to translate this conviction into action. Ask Him for the willpower to make the necessary schedule adjustments and lifestyle changes (Phil. 2:13).

ROUTINE

Build routine and regularity into your sleeping and waking times. God made us with certain bodily rhythms and has so ordered it that the more we align with these rhythms, the more we flourish. You might have a few wakeful nights at first as your body adjusts to the changes, but you'll soon notice your body click with it, and going to sleep and getting up will become a lot easier.

MEDIA FAST

Earlier in the evening we need to switch off the technology, email, Facebook, Instagram, and movies and remove our devices from view, to another room. Let's help our brains climb into bed with the rest of our body, switched off and ready to sleep.

FAMILY COOPERATION

I'm a night owl, and my husband David is a morning lark. Early in our marriage we established a healthy compromise, but now with five kids, ranging from twenty-one all the way down to four, life is much more complicated. Our older kids are both night owls and morning larks rolled into one, and like most young people they are still mastering their noise-reduction skills. Add to that the muscle-bulking protein shakes whizzing around in the blender at dusk and dawn, and the last-thing-at-night "forgot to do my homework" crisis. So, what do we do? We have the occasional family conference and come to a mutual arrangement which works for all of us. Some time ago, we established a 10:00 p.m. noise curfew Sunday to Thursday to ensure that everyone gets their needed sleep. We explain that it's part of doing to others what we would have them do to us (Matt. 7:12).

EXERCISE

We all know that exercise is important for our physical health (1 Tim. 4:8). When our kids have a full day at the park or beach we say, "They'll sleep well tonight." Have you ever thought of applying this principle to your own sleep habits too? It may seem more obvious if you sit at a desk all day, but what if your job involves being on your feet all day? Is exercise still necessary? Yes, because even if we are working on our feet, we build up tension as we move from one task to the next to the next, trying to get everything done. On top of that are the inevitable frustrations we face in juggling multiple tasks or children. Some of us can spend hours in "fight or flight" mode with lots of adrenaline swirling around our system with no place for it to go. This is damaging to our brain, emotions, and other parts of our body. Then bedtime comes, and we are still in that mode, unable to switch off the production of stimulating adrenaline. Non-work-related exercise redirects all this nervous energy and gives it a physical outlet. This kind of exercise produces in us a healthy kind of tiredness

that is conducive to sleep, not the mental tiredness that leaves us unable to sleep.

CONTENTMENT

Few things foster contentment like a good night's sleep, and few things lead to insomnia more than discontentment. A life of relentless striving for money, stuff, position, or fame leaves a deep discontentment that eats away at sleep. Perhaps this is the main reason our society is so sleep deprived. When we seek our contentment in God alone, it is far more likely that we will experience deep and satisfying sleep (Ps. 37:4).

FAITH

On the occasional night that I can't get to sleep, the most common reason is anxiety about something, either about my family, my church, or my country (or, at the moment, trying to sell a house). These worries seem to shout very loud in the middle of the night. But so can God's Word. In the silence of the night, when anxiety crawls into bed with me, it's a good time to exercise faith in biblical truth and let it wedge between anxiety and me. When I worry about my family, I believe God when He says: "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows." (Matt. 10:30–31). When I worry about my lack of spiritual vitality, I believe Him when he says: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Luke 11:13). When I worry about a perplexing providence and struggle to understand it, I believe Him when He says: "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Prov. 3:5–6). When I worry about the future, I remember that God says: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5).

These especially are the times in which we must remind ourselves that God is in total control. When we are able to sleep in these moments, we are resting securely in God's promises like the sleeping baby in his mother's arm.

ACCEPT SPECIAL PERIODS

There are times when, for exceptional reasons, we have to make do with less sleep. These times are usually short-lived and God-ordained, such as when mothers have babies, when we are looking after a sick relative, or when we have to be on call for work. God gives special sustaining grace at these times, but it's not supposed to be the norm or be prolonged. Such special seasons may require compensation in the short-term, perhaps with a daytime nap. It is the long-term habitual pattern of sleep deprivation that leads to trouble.

NAPPING

Many women, myself included, have found that a twenty- to thirty-minute daytime nap improves productivity, moods, and interpersonal relationships. Even some high-tech companies such as Google have set up nap pods or napping areas for staff. You may not always fall asleep, but the relaxation of a naptime can still be incredibly refreshing.

SLEEP DOCTOR

What if you've tried all these things and you're still exhausted through lack of sleep? It's not that you're neglecting sleep. No, you desperately want to sleep but can't. Perhaps the problem may have a physical component, such as the hormonal changes associated with menopause. It may be something such as sleep apnea.² Whatever it is, visiting a specialist, a sleep doctor, may be part of the solution. Use the multiple, legitimate God-given resources that are available to help you get to sleep.

SLEEP THEOLOGY

Ultimately, sleep, like everything else, should lead us to the gospel and the Savior. It prompts us to think about death, that we shall all close our eyes as in sleep and wake up in another world (1 Thess. 4:14). It teaches about our Savior. That Jesus slept (see Mark 4:38) is as profound as the fact that "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). It reminds us of Christ's full humanity, that the Son of God became so frail, so weak, so human that He needed to sleep. What humility! What love! What an example! What a comfort! What a sleeping pill! It illustrates salvation. What are we doing when we sleep? Nothing. That's why Jesus used rest as an illustration of His salvation. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). It points us toward heaven. There remains a rest for the people of God (Heb. 4:9). That doesn't mean heaven is going to be one long lie-in. It means it will be a place of renewal, refreshment, comfort, and perfect peace.

1. Matthew Edlund, *The Power of Rest: Why Sleep Alone Is Not Enough* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010).

2. According to the Centers for Disease Control, about 50–70 million U.S. adults have sleep or wakefulness disorder. "Insufficient Sleep Is a Public Health Problem," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, September 3, 2015, <http://www.cdc.gov/features/dssleep/>.

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DIGITAL REST

We live in a world that has changed dramatically with the rise of digital technology. The fact that we have gone from computers the size of a room to the size of a watch on our wrists is astounding. Every aspect of this world has been impacted, from the way business and economy functions to the realm of entertainment. Just like every other change throughout history, the ever present digital age has impacted the church and Christianity as we know it. While the digital realm may provide us with new avenues to study the Bible and grow closer to God, we also can easily become sucked in too far and have it negatively enshroud our spiritual lives. One may easily waste time perusing the internet or shopping online. A child's creativity is broken with mindless video games. People are often allured by the terrible world of pornography. Often these problems develop because we begin utilizing electronics without taking the time to pause and consider the risks and benefits to our relationship with God. It is vital that we stop and consider how we can and need to rest from the digital elements of the day.

I want to be clear with two things from the beginning. First, electronics are not sinful and contrary to God in themselves. When God created mankind He made us unique, creative beings with the capacity to develop incredible things, which include smartphones, the internet, and more. Electronics can be tremendous tools if used properly. Yet, second, we find that the Bible is very clear that, just like with anything in this world, the devil and sinful mankind will look for new means to turn people from God. We will discuss how important it is to examine our digital lives and determine how we dishonor God, but also more importantly, how we may honor Him through this area of our life.

Early on it is important to understand the concept of rest. After creating the universe, God ordained the Sabbath and He rested on the seventh day. It is important to note that "rest" is not a passive word. When we think of rest we often think it simply means stepping away from busyness and relaxing. However, in order to rest from something (say work), we need to decisively turn towards something else. Our resting should also have a beneficial component. For example, I just came off of a long stretch of work and I decided to sleep a little extra last night. Sleep was the way I chose to rest from my labors. The sleep I had was beneficial as it allowed my body to regain strength for the coming days. God also calls us to find our rest in Him: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). One could say digital rest is deciding to

step away from digital things which are wearing us down spiritually and actively choose other elements of life that draw us nearer to God.

So, why should we digitally rest? I've already mentioned the risks of falling into various paths of sin through digital media. Yes, if we are leading sinful lives through digital technology we should turn from those things. Yet, I find what really should inspire us to desire digital rest is when we are reminded that, as a good friend put it, "Jesus died for us because a good God chose us to be with Him for eternity." We need to look beyond the sin and see that we turn from sin so we can focus more on Christ and on the relationship God wants us to have. The reality is that the devil, the world, and our own hearts often use digital things to the excess, thereby damaging our relationships with God. Christians all need to pause and consider how they can pursue digital rest and in that rest look to develop a deeper relationship with our loving God.

Consider all the ways we use electronics. For me, my usage of digital devices likely looks very different from an elderly individual. For me, I am much more likely to spend extended amounts of time online and on social media whereas for others it may be time spent watching television, playing video games, or listening to music/radio. Our society pushes digital things down everyone's throats day in and day out. It is hard to be different. I periodically take breaks from social media (especially use of my smartphone). It is actually hard to step away because we learn to think that we must always have digital connection to the world around us. Regardless of where we spend our time digitally it is worth hearing the well-known words of Paul in Romans 12:1-2: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."

So let's talk about some practical ways we can start to digitally rest. In Psalm 139, David cries out, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (vv. 23-24). The very first thing we need to do is go humbly to God and ask Him to walk with us and transform us to desire and to seek Him more. In Psalm 51:10-11, we read, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from

thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.” As you embark on a journey of digital rest, do not be discouraged. The Christian life is one of continual transformation and the amazing part is that God promises that if we are His children, then He will walk with us.


So, after seeking God’s guidance, take the time to consider all the ways you use electronics. Ask a friend or family member to appraise your electronics usage with you and look for areas of concern. If your issue is the amount of time you spend online, then discuss limiting your time. If your problem is pursuing pornography online or another clearly defined sin, then you need to take a much more hardline approach to cut that area off with the supervision of a fellow believer. But remember, if you cut something off (such as internet on your smartphone) or attempt to decrease your time on social media, then you will need to find positive ways to rest from those electronics.

Remember why you are digitally resting: the God who has chosen you to be His own longs for you to embrace Him. So instead of indulging in these problem areas online, refocus your attention to nurturing more time in the Word and in prayer, time spent with family and with the church, or time spent in God’s creation. If our digital rest is to be beneficial, it must redirect our priorities to God. Also, be

encouraged that if you turn from a sinful area of life and run to God, He will embrace you and He will give you rest for your soul.


Now as we come to a close, it may have seemed I painted the picture that Christians need to just turn from all things electronic. I did want to emphasize that if our digital usage is inhibiting our relationship with God and dishonoring Him, then yes, we must turn from those elements. However, it is possible to redirect our digital use to more beneficial, God-honoring things. For example, my father loves to use his Bible apps and online searches to assist him in studying the Scriptures. I enjoy sharing my photography and thought-provoking blog posts on Facebook. Be encouraged; technology can be used in a useful and God-honoring manner. Overall, as you consider digital rest and all that entails, be reminded that God has His arms out to you and wants you to embrace Him and His ways in faith. “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you” (1 Peter 5:6–7).

Phil Kenyon is a nurse and a member of the Mitchell FRC. He is passionate about communicating with and supporting people through their times of need. Learning how to navigate the digital world with God has proven to be a daily challenge in his life.




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MISSING OUT ON ETERNAL REST

“There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.”
—Hebrews 4:9–10

The previous articles in this overall topic of “Rest” have dealt with resting in Christ, Sabbath rest, and some additional practical perspectives of rest. What remains to be considered is the reality of a future eternal rest for the people of God. This article will briefly deal with the prospect of entering that eternal rest as well as the danger of missing out on it.

THE PROSPECT OF ENTERING ETERNAL REST

Eternal rest, which can be equated with eternal life, or the eternal Sabbath, is the glorious future of all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is also the rest which our God-man mediator Himself now enjoys. Hebrews 4 reminds us that this is a vital component of what is promised in the gospel: “a promise being left us of entering into his (Christ’s) rest” (v. 1). After proving this truth in various ways in vv. 3–8 from Old Testament references, the chapter then concludes clearly that, “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God” (v. 9).

We gain a foretaste of this eternal rest when we become true believers and receive rest for our souls. “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matt. 11:28–29). However, we will much more fully enter into this rest the moment we die, although our bodies will return to the dust, just like Jesus promised to the thief on the cross, “Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). The Westminster Confession of Faith summarizes Scripture well on this, when it says,

The bodies of men, after death, return to dust, and see corruption: but their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them: the souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God, in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies. And the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in

torments and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day. Beside these two places, for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledges none. (WCF 32)

Furthermore, as glorious as that rest will be when we die, the full glory of eternal rest will not be realized and experienced until Christ returns, resurrects our bodies, reunites our bodies with our souls, and reforms our body “like unto the glorious body of Christ” (HC 57; see Phil. 3:12) The resurrection of the body to a state of eternal rest at the last day is what we also read in Job’s well-known testimony, “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God” (Job 19:25–26).

We see, therefore, that there truly remains a future rest to the people of God. Believers who can often be weary, can look forward to this rest for when we die and for when Christ returns. We can look forward to endless rest for soul and body. It is true! There remains a rest worth having for the people of God. Hebrews 4:10 adds, “For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works.” This means a wonderful cessation of our labors, of tears, pains, sufferings, stresses, trials, losses, sicknesses, temptations, and sin. There remains an eternal glorious rest for all those who truly believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. However, that will not be the case for all those people who die as unbelievers.

THE DANGER OF MISSING OUT

The historical example of missing out on a promised rest is that of the children of Israel in the wilderness. Many of them could not enter the promised rest of Canaan because of their unbelief. This land had been promised to them as Deuteronomy 1:8 summarizes: “The land which the LORD sware unto your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give unto them and to their seed after them.” However, when they had opportunity to enter, the people refused to believe Caleb and Joshua, refused to put their trust in the LORD, and refused to enter. Joshua and Caleb preached: “If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it to us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread

for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not" (Num. 14:8–9). However, the people still refused and agreed to stone Joshua and Caleb (Num. 14:10). Therefore, the LORD said in His wrath, "Your carcases shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me. Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I sware to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun" (Num. 14:29–30).

Moreover, in Hebrews 4, this historical example is applied as a warning for the New Testament Hebrews. It is also still very applicable for us today. The warning is: let us not fail to believe the gospel message but let us truly put our trust in the greater Joshua, the Lord Jesus Christ, or we will eternally perish and never enter the pictured rest—that future, eternal, glorious rest. "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, *any of you should seem to come short of it....* Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, *lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief*" (Heb. 4:1, 11).

How terrible that would be! To miss out, to come short, to be shut out as the five foolish virgins were (Matt. 25:1–13), and to fall into the eternal unrest of hell, that place of torment (Luke 16:19–31), where God's wrath will be justly experienced forever. God said, "Unto whom I sware in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest" (Ps. 95:11). Many have already, and many more will yet, miss out. People all around us in our own cities, towns, and in

neighboring nations will miss out and be eternally ruined. There will also be no escape. It will be final. Will you be among them? We do not know how soon we must die; therefore, we must be prepared. These testimonies and truths of Scripture serve as a warning for everyone, but especially for church members, including those of us who have attended church for many years. It is a warning to the complacent unbeliever, the deceived, and the backslidden. It is a warning to us all to wake up, to make sure that we truly believe God's Word about our guilt problem, and to ensure that we are truly obeying the gospel call to put our trust in the Lord Jesus so that our unrighteousness is covered with His righteousness and so that we are made inheritors of eternal rest.

"Let us therefore fear" (Heb. 4:1). In other words, let us give great respect and reverence to this matter of failing to enter because of unbelief (Heb. 3:19). In doing so, "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest" (Heb. 4:11). We must not ignore the fact that there is such a thing as temporary faith. That is why we need to labor by being diligent to affirm that we are truly believing, by the grace and Spirit of God; that we don't only believe "about" Jesus, but that we are consciously and continually trusting, depending, and relying "on" Him, which is what true saving faith does. Can you, like the father in Mark 9:24, even though he had to confess, "Help thou mine unbelief," also confess, "Lord, I believe"? If not, has the danger of missing out on eternal rest ever concerned you?

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



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The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. —John 10:10

ENJOYING ETERNAL REST

To consider eternal rest is to contemplate the glorious, indescribable future for all who die in the Lord, who will enjoy the glories of heaven. Although the Bible does tell us many things about heaven, it certainly is not exhaustive, which leads many to speculate and produce wrong perceptions of what heaven is. Furthermore, most people in this world are not interested in considering the life to come since we are often too preoccupied with and comfortable in the here and now. We have traded singing and living the pilgrim hymns of faith for relentlessly pursuing the prosperity and fame of the present time. Maybe we need a spiritual nudge to consider eternal rest from Revelation 7 and 14:13 that we might even begin enjoying rest in this life.

The world might want us to paint heaven as a picture of their favorite golf course, fishing hole, or vacation retreat, but the pictures of heaven painted in Revelation revolve around Christ and our enjoyment in Him. In order to enjoy eternal rest, we must come face to face with this searching question that concludes the vision of the six seals of God's wrath in Revelation 6: "For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (v. 17). Isn't that the evangelical question that must be answered positively in order to enjoy eternal rest? But how can we stand in the day of God's wrath? Revelation 7 grants us at least five reasons we can stand by His grace and enjoy eternal rest.

The first reason is that there is *security* in God's sealing of His servants. The primary purpose for the sealing of His servants is to provide security or guaranteed protection for them. It is notable in Revelation 7 that the angels at the four corners of the earth are holding back the winds that would harm the earth and the sea until the servants of God have been sealed. Although in this life Christians struggle just like unbelievers, yet there is a fundamental difference when, by faith, a Christian looks at the dark providences in this life as God preparing him for eternal rest because all His people are secured by His seal for all eternity. Have you ever considered why the walls of the new Jerusalem in Revelation 21 were so impermeable and its gates so guarded? Since there is no rest without security, the answer is that we will enjoy eternal security in glory. There is nothing more certain than God's seal to guarantee security and protection. God even confirms this security with a symbolic number of 144,000 who are sealed, which testifies that no one will be left behind and no one will be there that shouldn't be there.

Second, there is *solidarity* in heaven. There is perfect harmony and unity among the innumerable multitude from all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues. In our fallen

world, nation rises up against nation, boundaries are set, and because of language barriers, communication is broken down. In our own countries there are divisions in politics, in churches, and even in families, leading to brokenness and unrest. However, that is not the picture of eternal rest. In heaven those who are sealed stand in solidarity before the throne and the Lamb dressed in white robes with palms in their hands (Rev. 7:9). Today, identity crises lead to great unrest in youth as well as adults. We may even feel a bit uneasy when we go to an event and are either way overdressed or underdressed for the occasion, or discover that it is a social event that conflicts with our values. You can rest at ease knowing that in heaven there is unmistakable, identifiable solidarity.

Third, the solidarity of the sealed servants' worship is to praise God for His complete *salvation*. Notice how salvation is the focus of their solidarity here as they cry with a loud voice, "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb" (Rev 7:10). Salvation is the theme of the angel's commentary of the vision, "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (v. 14). This salvation is provided through the blood of the Lamb, the one who was found worthy to open the seals in chapter 5, the one who stands on Mount Zion with His sealed servants as they sang a new song before the throne of God in chapter 14. These truths encourage us today when trials and tribulation come our way and we can by grace say that our salvation comes through the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Then we can rest in the knowledge that He has conquered sin, Satan, and hell itself to redeem His servants out of tribulation. When in this life your garments continue to get filthy and stained, don't you get tired of trying to scrub them clean? You can rest from your scrubbing and cast your filthy garments at the foot of the cross to be dipped in the blood of the Lamb. No wonder the sealed servants exclaim, "Salvation to our God!" (Rev 7:10). They can confidently and joyfully rest in the complete salvation of the Lamb.

Fourth, through the salvation of the Lamb, we are again restored to *serve* God! Notice the flow again of this chapter from chapter 6. "Who is able to stand?" The sealed *servants* of God. Servants who are sealed in solidarity through the salvation of the Lamb. God has created us as servants and recreates His servants to enjoy His service. It is no wonder His servants are "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"

(Rev. 7:15). Maybe as a child you thought that heaven would be a boring place, just sitting around and singing, but in reality the Bible speaks about heaven as a place of great activity, worship, and service day and night while in constant communion and fellowship with God. This might seem to conflict with the idea of rest; however, rest does not mean inactivity but rather resting from the sin-cursed labor in this world. It also testifies that our service or works do not merit anything before God, but rather we are able to rest in the finished work of Christ. However, we must not imagine that we are not called to service as His servants on earth, for the Spirit says in Revelation 14:13, "They (who die in the Lord) may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them." There is blessed rest and blessed gracious reward upon God's Spirit-enabled works! It is incredible that despite our failures God gives His Spirit, graces us with faithfulness, and then rewards His own graces in our life. Maybe you go to work day after day and don't always enjoy it, but in heaven there will be immense enjoyment and privilege to be in the service of God.

Finally, our service in eternal rest will not depend on our strength but on our *Shepherd's provision*. As the psalmist confesses in Psalm 23:1, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want," we shall fully experience the blessedness

of resting in our Shepherd's provision. Revelation 7:16–17 says it best: "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." Enjoying eternal rest is enjoying unspeakable provision in absence of the curse of sin and unspeakable comfort, guidance, and protection in the presence of our Shepherd forever (Ps. 16:11).

A BLESSED CONCLUSION

"And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth" (Rev. 14:13). What a privilege it is for God's servants to write, to speak, and to proclaim this truth! Yet the question must be personally answered in order to enjoy eternal rest, "Who shall be able to stand?" (Rev. 6:17). Those who die in the Lord, securely resting in Christ and on His work with solidarity, having been saved through His blood, restored to His service, and strengthened through His provision. To be with Christ and to rest in Christ is to enjoy eternal rest.

Rev. Scott Dibbet is privileged to serve as the pastor of the Lacombe Free Reformed Church in Alberta.

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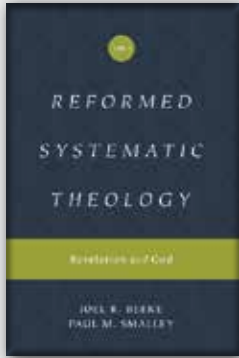
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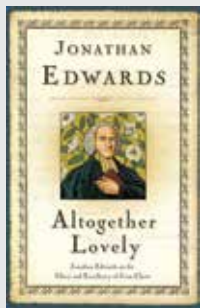
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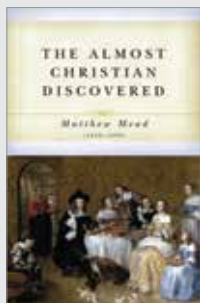
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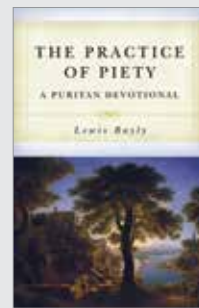
Matthew Mead

To those who looked to some external act for confirmation of a regenerate heart, the Puritans pointed to proper motives as well as proper conduct. To those who looked merely to their orthodox beliefs, the Puritans pointed out that the demons are orthodox in their creeds, but not in their conduct. Ever mindful not to stir up

unnecessary doubts in weak believers, the Puritans, nevertheless, felt it imperative to awaken the carnal hypocrite out of his undeserved security.

In this book, Matthew Mead shows twenty ways that a person can be deceived into thinking he is a Christian when he really is just an “almost Christian.” Mead also explains important topics like the need for self-examination, signs of the unpardonable sin, and reasons for a believer’s lack of comfort. He concludes with three matters that every reader must be convinced of: the evil and filthy nature of sin, the misery and desperate danger of the unregenerate, and the utter insufficiency and inability of anything other than Christ Jesus to minister relief. This Puritan classic is meant to shake nominal believers out of their complacency and to comfort true believers.

(Soli Deo Gloria, PB, 166 pages) ~~\$15.00~~/\$11.00



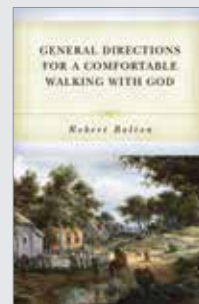
The Practice of Piety:

A Puritan Devotional Manual — Lewis Bayly

The Practice of Piety presents the substance of several sermons Lewis Bayly preached while minister at Eversham. It was made into a devotional manual and soon became one of the most popular books in England. It was translated into Welsh, French, Hungarian, Polish, and several other languages.

The Practice of Piety is filled with scriptural and practical guidelines on the pursuit of holy living. Bayly begins his work with “a plain description of God in His essence, person, and attributes,” understanding this to be the basis for piety; every grace that sinners need springs from the gracious character of God. He emphasizes the necessity of true faith and holy living, and explains how to attain and maintain readiness for Christ’s second advent. Bayly then shows how to overcome obstacles to the pious life, stresses how piety is to be cultivated, and offers wise advice on the spiritual disciplines. He shows how to guide our thoughts, words, and actions in times of health as well as in times of sickness and affliction. He even provides directives to protect us from despair and the fear of death. In short, this is a book about how to live godly and die well.

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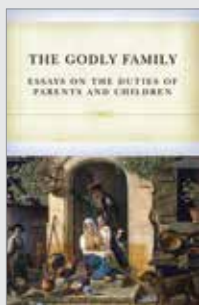
General Directions for a Comfortable

Walking with God — Robert Bolton

While Robert Bolton originally wrote *General Directions* as a spiritual guide for himself, its publication led to its becoming an instant classic. This book encourages us to abandon our loved sin, hate hypocrisy, exercise self-denial, live the life of faith, form right conceptions of Christianity, guard against worldliness, be warmed with the love of God, treasure reconciliation with God, keep the heart, and meditate

on future bliss in order to loosen sin’s grip on the soul. Bolton also excels in describing particular Christian duties, such as tending to family, governing the tongue, and managing every action of our lives. Read Bolton’s book, be directed in your Christian walk, and find out first hand why generations of believers have cherished this sound volume of pastoral advice.

(Soli Deo Gloria, PB, 443 pages) ~~\$18.00~~/\$14.00



The Godly Family: Essays on the Duties of Parents and Children

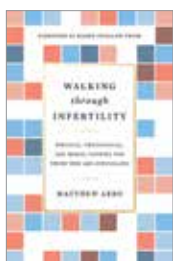
The Godly Family presents timeless counsel from several seventeenth- and eighteenth-century pastors on ordering the home God's way. Although some circumstances of family life have changed over the years, the basic purpose, relations, and duties remain the same. Reading this book, Christian parents will appreciate and benefit from a host of essays related to family religion, the duties of parents, the duties of children, and the eternal family in heaven. Authors in this collection include Samuel Davies, George Whitefield, Samuel Worcester, Henry Venn, Samuel Stennett, Arthur Hildersham, Philip Doddridge, and Thomas Houston. Allow the wisdom of generations past to guide you today in cultivating a godly family. (Soli Deo Gloria, PB, 341 pages) ~~\$18.00~~/\$14.00



Heaven Taken By Storm: Showing the Holy Violence a Christian is to Put Forth in the Pursuit After Glory — Thomas Watson

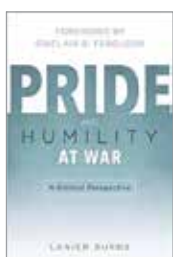
Building on Jesus's words that "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matt. 11:12), *Heaven Taken by Storm* reminds us that Christians are spiritual warriors and the kingdom advances through warfare. As Watson puts it, "Our life is military. Christ is our Captain, the gospel is the banner, the graces are our spiritual artillery, and heaven is only taken in a forcible way." In his typically heart-searching style, replete with practical illustrations and gripping remarks, Watson describes how the Christian is to take the kingdom of heaven by holy violence through the reading and exposition of Scripture, prayer, meditation, self-examination, conversation, and the sanctification of the Lord's Day. Moreover, he poignantly calls the believer to be vigilant against the flesh, Satan, and the world. Soldiers of Christ will find this a practical handbook on Christian living. (Edited by Joel R. Beeke.) (Soli Deo Gloria, PB, 129 pages) ~~\$15.00~~/\$14.00

OTHER BOOKS



Walking Through Infertility — Matthew Arbo

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Pride and Humility at War: A Biblical Perspective — J. Lanier Burns

The world we live in and are called to serve often sends strong messages that pride is the ultimate virtue. However, the Bible teaches that it is the root of many detrimental and destructive sins. Being more than debate of mindsets and perspectives, pride, humility, and the essence of the gos-

pel are at war. Burns encourages us to seek God-centeredness and to find our purpose, joy, fulfillment, and significance in the unfamiliar connection between true humility in our dependence on the Lord.

(Presbyterian and Reformed, PB, 240 pgs.) ~~\$18.00~~/\$13.50



The Pastor's Soul: The Call and Care of an Under-Shepherd — Brian Croft and Jim Savastian

This is a book that is not only a wonderful check-up and reminder for pastors to read but an excellent little volume if you are a congregant seeking to encourage and help your pastor. It heeds the realities of the spiritual and physical neglect that can occur when a man is caring for the needs of so many in a church.

(EP Books, PB, 154 pgs.) ~~\$9.99~~/\$7.50



The Christian Mind: Escaping Futility William Edgar

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Rethinking Door-to-Door Evangelism

“Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it” (Rev. 3:8).

I do door-to-door evangelism and actually believe in it—in 2019. I’m not a Jehovah’s Witness or a Mormon. I’m not a Fundamentalist Baptist. I’m a confessional Presbyterian, relatively well educated, and comfortably middle-class. So, why embrace what many Reformed and Evangelicals consider pointless at best and counterproductive at worst?

Since I was converted back in the early nineties, I’ve practiced a number of methods of evangelism. I do not consider any one of them a silver bullet, nor do I think that door-to-door is always the most ideal method in every case. Yet, for the last thirteen years, I’ve engaged in regular, door-to-door evangelism as a key part of my overall outreach effort. I do not presume to have the final answer on all questions, nor can I boast impressive success. Do I do this perfectly? Not at all. I’m always going to be on a learning curve. Consequently, I’m open to other suggestions and critiques. But after these many years and after many, many discouragements, I still keep coming back. I still plod and hope.

Here are a number of reasons why I believe that ignoring door-to-door ministry is worth seriously re-thinking.

1. *It’s always an adventure.* I’ve talked with sweet little old Italian ladies, MAGA-type individuals, gun-toting contrarians, liberal atheists, straights and gays, cafeteria Catholics and diehard pre-Vatican IIs, mainline Protestants, goofy Pentecostals, and people of many colors and languages. If bland is your taste, this is not for you. No monochrome here. No same old same old. Even if you stick to familiar turf, you can often find buried treasure in a nondescript field.

Many times I’ve been pleasantly surprised. I’ve had long, long conversations after fearing a “dry day.” I’ve had many actually invite me from the doorstep into the warmth of their homes. I have been served coffee and food. I have been given many opportunities to read the Bible and speak of Jesus in people’s living rooms. I’ve learned about family histories, been invited into sickrooms, prayed for people in their sufferings, and seen them shed tears. In one instance, I had just begun to speak about God and His call to mankind, and a poor soul broke down right then and there. A hard-shelled grown man, weeping like a child.

2. *It’s not as daunting as it seems.* It need not be much more

than an introduction, the sharing of a leaflet, and a short word of truth. It takes only a moment to say, “The Son of man came to seek and to save that which is lost.” “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.” “I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no man comes to the Father but by me.” If the seed is planted, the job is in essence done. Express appreciation for their time, then move to the next house. Of course, as the worker increases in boldness, he can expand. He can ask, even probe. “What is the purpose of life?” “Who do *you* say that Jesus is?” “Would you say you are a sinner? A sinner from birth?” Before you know it, you just might have had a thirty minute conversation with a lost, perishing soul, bringing church right down to them.

Relax. They are almost always more nervous than you. Guaranteed. Most of them are polite—if they answer the door. If they don’t answer, maybe they will next time. Most of them will let you say your piece and ask a few diagnostics. If they don’t want to talk, that will become quite clear soon enough.

Full disclosure: some will not be happy. Some may be gruff, and a few will be belligerent. You can’t shine light and expect darkness to love it. I was once physically threatened by a butch homosexual who wanted me off his property yesterday, but that’s the only instance in thirteen years of doing this ministry more or less weekly. There is still a lot of common grace here. There is still religious freedom. As of yet, there are not any minarets dotting the skyline. And there is even still some cultural respect for the clergy, however fast it is evaporating. Why not capitalize on it before it’s gone?

3. *There’s life beneath the ice.* Folks can be cold, spiritually as well as socially. That is, they are holed up in their homes, strangers to their neighbors, whose names they probably don’t even know. And what is more, they certainly don’t know *you* from Adam. (Adam who?) So yes, ice-breaking will be necessary.

But it is not all ice! People will talk. Some more than others, but they will talk nonetheless. Even if you’re a stranger, if you care for their soul and are willing to endure rejection and come back next year anyhow, if you remember their name, show interest in their life, their job, their family, and their very real suffering, you just might sense a thaw. And who knows where it might end?

4. *It is a rich legacy.* Many of our forefathers approached evangelism by visiting neighborhoods, house by house. Many a pastor considered his soul-care to reach beyond the communicant membership into the districts of the outcasts and ignorant. Richard Baxter of Kidderminster is perhaps best known for this kind of visitation evangelism, bringing the gospel of salvation to hearth and home, to as many as would receive him. It was said that when Baxter arrived at Kidderminster the town was spiritually desolate, but through his diligent house-to-house work, around six hundred people professed the faith and became communicant members. By the end of his ministry in 1661, he could write that on the Lord's Day, "you might hear an hundred families singing Psalms and repeating sermons, as you passed through the streets," a sound quite uncommon before.

What more should I say? For the time would fail me to speak of Boston, Chalmers, M'Cheyne, Bonar, and Shedd.

5. *It opens up opportunities to help those in need.* God calls His church to the task of reclaiming souls. We distribute heavenly, not earthly bread. The people we encounter on these doorsteps are people with real bodies, real life-issues, real hopes, and real problems. Some of their problems are self-inflicted; others aren't. Some problems are a combination of the two. Some people will have marriage issues, employment issues, and even mental issues. They need help—practical help. Who would be the best kind of helper? An experienced Christian.

Now, we must take care of our own first and foremost. We can't go save the world if mommy is at home frazzled with two screaming twins. If we've got our bases covered at home, we must next care for the household of faith. Unlike the Social Gospel-types, Jesus never browbeat His people into fixing the world's woes. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these *my brethren*, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40, emphasis added). The principle of love reaches far: "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good *unto all men*, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10, emphasis added).

6. *It promises unexpected romance.* Ah, where do I start? I love the roads, the twists, the turns, the busted doorbells, even the ill-lit staircases, and the bulge in the sidewalk where the tree roots muscle upwards. I love the street names. Tennyson, Balcom, Corinth, and so on. I love it all because, well, it's mine. Or rather, it's Jesus's—only, He lets me share it with Him.

Above all, I love the people who live here. I love Tony and Wilma, little Onelda, Mary, and Patrick. Ha! Patrick. What a character! I remember walking up to his house for the first time. As he was talking on the phone, he answered the door. "Whaddya want?" "I'm a Christian pastor. Pastor Michael Ives." In his Irish brogue, he quips with a wry smile, "Gimme ten dollars!" Hmm. How do I respond to

that? "Well, I tell you what, you come to church, and I'll give you ten dollars." I've never done that before, and I'm not sure I'll do it again. Still, what I have spoken, I have spoken! "Well, then, I'll just have to take ye up on that one. You're gonna love me!" He still hasn't come, but we've talked again—this time at much greater spiritual depth.

Lloyd-Jones spoke of the romance of preaching. Well, I think the same can easily be said of the romance of door-to-door evangelism. Until you really give it a chance, it will remain off-putting. However, once you've tried it, *really* tried it, you just may fall in love with it. (I dare you!)

7. *It is nothing short of collaboration with Jesus.* Jesus did not wait for the lost to come to Him. *He* went to *them*. As the Father sent Him, so He now sends us. Frankly, there is no evangelism that is perfectly comfortable. No method can eliminate all sweaty palms, stutters, stammers, or heart palpitations. Evangelism by its very nature crucifies our comfort, or, at least, it subordinates our comfort to the interests of perishing souls. Yes, it was to a Christian church that Jesus spoke, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock" (Rev. 3:20). Can we not apply it to the homes that we visit, where we seek out those who "do not seek after God?" Is not Jesus knocking through us? Is He not graciously, lovingly, tenderly going after stray sheep—through us? "I am found of them that sought me not" (Isa. 65:1).

Let me address some objections.

1. *It is artificial and unnatural.* These people, one might say, are perfect strangers. They didn't initiate any contact with us. Isn't it more natural to communicate the gospel to friends and family, those whom we already know?

I understand that. I can testify from personal experience that it is very easy to fall into a canned, stale approach in door-to-door work. It can be very easy to treat each visit as a cold, impersonal sales transaction, but I would say that this is a danger, not an inherent flaw. It is only because my heart is cold that I run into problems. As long as I carry this "body of death" along with me, I will never be free from formality. So, I must pray before, during, and after that God would sanctify me and make me a vessel fit for His use.

To be sure, natural contacts are always fair game for every believer. Let us make the most of the social capital we've accrued with loved ones, friends, and co-workers. Let us spend social capital as the Lord gives us opportunity. So, I'm all for friendship evangelism—just not as the *only* appropriate method. For my part, I tend to think door-to-door is more a field of labor for office-bearers anyhow since they are the official "face" of the church (but I won't die on a hill for that point; the harvest is great, and the laborers are few!).

Yet there's a deeper problem, as I see it. This objection could easily make strangers *de facto* off limits to gospel proclamation. It could inflexibly demand some tangible acts of kindness to merit a hearing. There is an element of truth

here, but it is easily overplayed. Yes, “Let your light shine” (Matt. 5:16), but did Jesus and the apostles *only* practice friendship evangelism? Hardly (John 4:1–45, 7:37–38, Acts 4:1–22, 17:22–34).

2. *This is an infringement on privacy.* Yes, I suppose it is. Then again, so is all evangelism. Even if one’s home seems more “off-limits” than other spaces, just remember that “the earth is the LORD’s and the fulness thereof” (1 Cor. 10:26). He, who is “the Possessor of heaven and earth,” gives you a warrant (Gen. 14:22). Just don’t walk on the grass, and do leave if they don’t want you there.

3. *That was then; this is now.* I am a romantic, I admit. I pine for the days of old. I would love to see Christendom rise from the ashes (minus the crusades). Yet, I’m not blind to the fact that Christendom appears to be dead and gone. I would be a fool to think that I can waltz up to any house and expect them to accept me as a man of God, build me an upstairs prophet’s chamber, and let me stay there anytime I pass by.

I also get that people don’t think or act locally anymore. Neighborhoods now are just groupings of dwellings: places to eat, sleep, and bathe in the blue glow of television and iPhones. Neighborhoods are now only a collection of launchpads for so many work and athletic commutes. Is that *a good thing*, all in all? Should we just resign to that? Can neighborhoods—true communities—actually be restored, brick by brick? If so, wouldn’t the mortar of the gospel be the perfect means to rebuild it? If the Spirit should bless our evangelism and several households were converted within a neighborhood, wouldn’t it just be possible to have a local church again—to walk to church like our forebears did? This all may seem like silly, Quixotic idealism. However, did the Savior speak truth or mere platitude? “With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible” (Mark 10:27).

4. *It’s got stigma.* Okay. Maybe it does. Perhaps where areas have really been burned-over by Jehovah’s Witnesses I can really sympathize, but unless I am extremely misinformed, the Jehovah’s Witnesses do not approach things systematically. There seems to be a big push, then radio silence for a good while. I’ve *never* had the same Jehovah’s Witness come to my door twice within a few years, have you? Much less three times in three years or four in four. That’s what I’m suggesting: one man, one district for the long haul.

5. *I can’t go on my own.* What about personal safety or the danger of finding oneself in compromising situations, especially with the opposite sex? Caution is advised, to be sure. Going in pairs is wise. Take along a zealous young brother—you can mentor and protect yourself at the same time. Take your wife. Take your child (they’re great ice-breakers). I’ve done all of these partner options before.

However, if they can’t be had each and every time, personally, I wouldn’t let it stop you. Just use your sanctified common sense. As a rule, don’t go after sunset. Don’t enter a house with a woman alone or children alone. You can talk on the stoop. If it’s a good enough conversation, schedule a time to bring your wife back. In the end, don’t be foolish, but do take reasonable risk. We may not be jungle missionaries to headhunters, but we are missionaries nonetheless. “Only be strong, and of a good courage” (Josh. 1:18).

6. *It doesn’t work.* Well, from more than a decade’s worth of experience, I readily concede that it’s not a surefire recipe for conversion or church growth. In my case, it is paired with a confession-focused Presbyterian church. Not a lot of curb appeal! Then again, I’m not convinced that there is any magic method.

Yet, I do think that systematic house-to-house visitation has at least two virtues. First, it is efficient. You can get gospel literature distributed to twenty households and have on the average three meaningful gospel conversations in sixty minutes. Second, when systematic, when you return to the same area again and again over the years, you earn social capital. Opportunities open up over time, and perseverance pays. You may invite them to church five times in as many years, and they never come. Maybe on year six, they get cancer. Then they’re rummaging through their papers to find some literature you gave them to find your number.

Yet, I can personally say that it has worked and is working for me. I wish I could report loads of conversions, but I can’t. For a very small church, though, we’ve been encouraged to see an ebb and flow of visitors through the work. Some of them we’ve had to transport because they didn’t have wheels. Our church is not located in any residential community, so everyone has to drive fifteen to twenty minutes. Perhaps if my districts were much closer, we’d see more. I don’t know. Still, we’ve seen individuals and families: some coming just once, some staying a few weeks, some for several months, and some for six to twelve. One professed faith and was baptized this year. It is easy to despise the day of small things, but at least they are things!

Last, I ask: have you actually tried it? Especially if you are a pastor or an elder, have you given it a fair shake? It just may not be the dry well you or others have made it out to be. Yes, you’ll run into hard hearts and blind eyes, but that’s everywhere. Some doors will be closed on you, and some will never be opened, but Jesus can open doors. He’s been in that business for more than two thousand years. If you’re unsure, then ask Him. “Knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Matt. 7:7).

Rev. Michael Ives is a PRTS graduate and pastors the Presbyterian Reformed Church of East Greenwich, Rhode Island.



POWERFUL PRESERVATION

Sometimes when we hear of the Lord's faithfulness to His promises, doubts still rise. We might say, "This is all good, but what if I fail in the end to persevere?" In the first chapter of his first epistle, Peter reminds us that God the Father, through Jesus Christ, is the one who has caused us to be born again by the Spirit. Peter also reminds us that our spiritual protection and preservation as children of the Father is God's work. God guards and sustains His children, faithful to complete the good work begun in them (Phil. 1:6; Rom. 8:31–39). By God's power we are preserved.

One of the means by which God guards and preserves His people is through faith. Faith is a gift of God, a work of the Holy Spirit by the Word. It is the saving grace by which we receive and rest on Christ alone for our salvation. Faith consists of knowledge, conviction, and trust. By faith we are justified and united to Christ. God, by His power, preserves us in faith until this earthly race is complete, our salvation fully realized, and our faith made sight.

There is no greater power than that of God. He is omnipotent; all power is His. Peter reminds us in his second epistle that by the power of God's word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment of ungodly men in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed

with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burnt up (2 Peter 3:7–10). The God who spoke the universe into existence is the one preserving it for that day, just like by his power He is preserving His people for that day for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. It is a salvation so great that the apostle Paul exclaims by the Spirit, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. 2:9).

The Heidelberg Catechism beautifully echoes these verses of Peter's first epistle, answering the question, "What is thy only comfort in life and in death?": "That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who, with His precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto Him" (HC 1). Our salvation is secure in Him.

—William VanDoodewaard

NEW STUDENT HOUSING



Saturday, January 12, Dr. Beeke opened the new student housing dedicatory service with a meditation on Psalm 107:7–9. Our builder, Bruce Kwekel, thanked a variety of people and then gave a beautiful meditation based on Hebrews 11:8–10. Then, our videographer, Darryl Bradford, gave a fascinating five-minute video of the old seminary building being torn down and the dorm project being built in its place. Henk Kleyn thanked several people and closed with prayer. We sang “Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow” since He is worthy of our gratitude. We went to see the interior of one of the apartments and the community food bank on the premises. It was truly an edifying hour. We thank all who donated for this worthy cause. \$2,408,000 of the \$2,750,000 project has been given. We continue to look to the Lord for the \$342,000 still needed. Please pray that these apartments

will become little houses of Bethel—houses of prayer and worship—for our students and their families.

The students occupying our fifteen new apartments come from eleven nations: four from China, two from the Netherlands, two from Singapore, two from South Korea, two from the USA, one from Egypt, one from Brazil, one from Italy, one from Turkey, one from Indonesia, and one from Lithuania. Our prayer is that this community will prove to be a blessing both while they are here and for many more years after leaving us to serve the church of our Lord.

This development and project completion has been a personal blessing for me as I saw the gifts the Lord entrusted to Bruce Kwekel and his company used with expertise and devotion to the vision of PRTS. It was truly a privilege to have worked with brother Kwekel to provide a community of dwellings for these forty-eight PRTS residents.

—Henk Kleyn

Interview *with Alumnus*, Rev. Michael Ives

Please share a little about your life (for example, about your family or ministry opportunities) since graduating from PRTS.

We are encouraged by God’s grace towards us both in our family and church. Our four children, all homeschooled, have been growing. Our oldest two, Gabriel and Geneva, recently earned the black belts in karate, so now I have my own personal bodyguards! Gabriel turns 18 in January and is planning to go into computer engineering and has professed the faith. Our girls are showing talent with the ukuleles, which is rather enjoyable.

As for the church, despite the small numbers, we labor on. I continue to engage in regular door-to-door outreach in my own community and in South Providence, which is a much more ethnically diverse, working class area. While results have not been great, we have had many encouragements. I write about it at wesportexperiment.com (“Reformed Parish Mission”). On Sabbath mornings, I’ve been preaching through Exodus, and in the afternoons, we’re exploring the doctrine of God. One of my great delights is teaching catechism to our young people. What a joy to have a hand in the formation of the next generation!

Since leaving seminary, what changes have you made in your own approach to ministry, and why?

Well, in many ways, not much. As one old Scottish Presbyterian elder’s daughter once said, “Father never liked anything new...except for the New Testament!” But I do believe I’ve matured, becoming more comfortable with letting folks grow at the pace that God has for them. To overthink the problems of God’s people and to overwork oneself in trying to fix them is at once an insult to the Spirit, ineffective, and a sure recipe for self-harm.

How have you led your congregation (and others) in incorporating family worship practices? What resources and/or recommendations would you make to someone looking to start a family worship practice in his or her own home?

Three ways, mainly. I teach it from time to time from the pulpit, we discuss it during family visitations, and, perhaps most importantly, we model it through hospitality. As for recommendations, don’t overthink it. Pray, read, and praise. Sing a psalm, read a chapter from the Bible, have a bit of discussion, and then close with prayer. Don’t draw it out

overmuch, wearying yourself or your loved ones. Above all, find a time that works and create the habit.

PRTS believes biblical, Reformed, experiential preaching and teaching is extremely important. Assuming it is for you as well, how has your attempt to preach and teach from this perspective affected those you shepherd? How has it impacted your own spiritual development?

So much can be said. I would say that it has helped them holistically, maturing them as Christians rather than as caricatures of Christians. Preaching that is lopsided and imbalanced yields lopsided and imbalanced Christians. We must preach to the head and push further to the heart and to the hands. I am a Christian first and then a preacher. I need this comprehensive approach myself. Anything else is not addressing the whole of who I am by the grace of God and who I yearn to be.

What advice do you give to someone looking for help fostering personal piety and spiritual formation in their family members and/or others?

Be diligent in the means of grace—the Word, the sacraments, and prayer. Be diligent in the house of God, in the family, and in the closet. Read good books. More often than not, the older the book the better it is for you. The Puritans stand head and shoulders above their brethren. Pick up *The Bruised Reed* by Sibbes, *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices* by Brooks, or *The Trial and Triumph of Faith* by Rutherford. Last, rediscover the lost art of biblical meditation. “My meditation of him shall be sweet” (Ps. 104:34).

Looking back on your own theological education, what would you say to someone looking to enroll at PRTS or considering a financial partnership with the school?

My years at PRTS were an unspeakable blessing. The school is dead serious about training preachers who preach in the light of eternity. PRTS is worth the serious consideration of anyone who is looking at entering the ministry or is desirous of supporting a school that will send true ministers of the Scriptures out into the world.

—Michael J. Ives, Presbyterian Reformed Church of Rhode Island

FACULTY ITINERARIES & PUBLICATIONS

JOEL BEEKE | Itinerary

March 4–8: Sun Valley, CA: Shepherds Conference

March 14–16: Orlando, FL: Ligonier Conference

April 5–7: Lakeland, FL: Covenant Presbyterian Church Family Conf.

April 17–22: Brazil: Youth Conference

May 3–4: Ontario: Home Schooling Conference

May 5: St. Catharines, Ontario: URC and HRC

May 17–19: British Columbia: Conference, Bulkley Valley Reformed

May 24–26: North Providence, RI: Conference, Grace Community

Recent Publications

Reformed Systematic Theology, Vol. 1, with Paul Smalley (Crossway)

Works of William Perkins, Vol. 6, ed. with Greg Salazar (RHB)

Leviticus Jounible, with Rob Wynalda (RHB)

Prepared for Grace by Grace, with Paul Smalley (in Korean; cMaeng2)

JERRY BILKES | Itinerary

March 10: St. Thomas, Ontario: St. Thomas Free Reformed Church

March 19–20: Hamilton, Ontario: FRC Denominational Meetings

March 24: Bradenton, Florida: Florida Reformed Fellowship

April 12: Dundas, Ontario: Dundas Free Reformed

April 19–21: Greenville, South Carolina: Greenville Presbyterian Church

Recent Publication

How Can I Stop Worrying? (RHB)

DAVID MURRAY | Itinerary

March 15–16: Grand Rapids, Michigan: Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology (PCRT)

April 26–27: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: PCRT

May 17–18: Netherlands: Student Teachers Conference

GREG SALAZAR | Itinerary

March 4–8: London, United Kingdom: English Puritan Theology for The Pastors Academy

March 24: Grand Rapids, Michigan: Reformation OPC

April 22–24: Jackson, Mississippi: Twin Lakes Fellowship

April 27: Ada, Michigan: OPC Presbytery Meeting

May 26: Wyoming, Michigan: Harvest OPC

Recent Publication

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

DANIEL TIMMER | Itinerary

January–April: Montreal: Faculté de théologie évangélique

April 12: Montreal Conference (Synchrone et diachronie dans l'étude de la Bible), organized by the Faculté de théologie évangélique.

Recent Publications

“The Wisdom of Solomon: Subaltern Existence as the Path to Perfect Empire,” in *Postcolonial Commentary and the Old Testament*, ed. H. Gossai (London: Bloomsbury/T & T Clark, 2018), 142–60.

“Where Shall Wisdom Be Found (in the Book of the Twelve)?” in *Riddles and Revelations: Explorations into the Relationship between Wisdom and Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. M. Boda, R. Meek, and W. Osborne (LHBOTS; London: T & T Clark, 2018), 147–63.

“Nahum,” in *Daniel–Malachi*, ESV Expository Commentary, vol. 7, ed. Jay Sklar, Iain M. Duguid, and James M. Hamilton, Jr. (Crossway: Carol Stream, 2018), 503–32.

WILLIAM VANDOODEWAARD | Itinerary

March 8–9: Hampton, VA: Grace Baptist Conference

April 4–5: Woodstock, ON: Canadian Presbytery (ARP) meetings

Recent Publications

“The Marrow Controversy” in Mark Jones and Michael Haykin, eds., *A New Divinity: Transatlantic Reformed Evangelical Debates during the Long Eighteenth Century* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018).

“Genesis and Ancient Histories at Princeton Seminary (1812–1851)” in *Westminster Theological Journal* 80 (Fall 2018) 2:261–78.

“The Life and Ministry of Thomas Boston” in *The Banner of Truth Magazine* (December 2018), 8–13.

Review of Alan D. Strange, *The Doctrine of the Spirituality of the Church in the Ecclesiology of Charles Hodge*, Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2018, in *Puritan Reformed Journal* 11 (January 2019): 1:206–10.

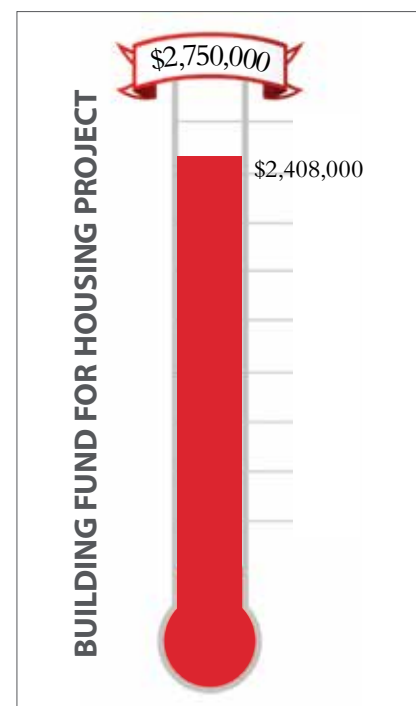
FINANCIAL REPORT

For period 8/1/2018–1/31/2019

	Year to Date Actual	Annual Budget	Variance	Percent of Annual Budget
Income				
Donations	1,726,759	2,156,100	(429,341)	80%
Tuition Income	400,020	530,000	(129,980)	75%
Scholarship Donations	115,949	385,000	(269,051)	30%
Other Income	159,900	423,900	(264,000)	38%
Total Income	\$2,402,627	\$ 3,495,000	\$(1,092,373)	69%
Expenses				
Instruction	\$ 783,498	1,754,348	(970,850)	45%
Scholarships	281,192	385,000	(103,808)	73%
Administrative	588,476	1,355,652	(767,176)	43%
Total Expenses	\$ 1,653,166	\$ 3,495,000	\$(1,841,834)	47%
Net Income	\$ 749,461			

Thank you for supporting PRTS. The Lord has graciously provided for the Operating Fund and the Student Housing Project. Our current need to finish paying off the housing project is \$342,000.

—CHRIS HANNA



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MEET OUR HRC THEOLOGICAL STUDENTS

In this article, we have asked our five HRC theological students to provide a brief summary about themselves.



JOHN BYL

This year, the Lord willing, my wife, Jessica, and I will celebrate our 14th wedding anniversary. We have been blessed with three children: John (10), Owen (5), and Jocelyn (4). Prior to the Lord's call to the ministry, I had the privilege of working with and teaching young people for 14 years at two different Christian schools in Ontario. I taught high school level mathematics and served as the Guidance coordinator for the past eight years.

Prior to my acceptance as a student, the Lord began showing me in a number of ways the need for men to pursue the high calling of gospel ministry. At the same time, He began removing my desire to teach mathematics and has given me a desire to bring His Word and to serve the church of Jesus Christ as a pastor. Discerning where the Lord wanted me to serve was a struggle. In Isaiah 55:8–9 the Lord says, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” This is a summary of the struggle of my heart during the year prior to being accepted as a student. Our God knows what He is doing. He is King of His church. We praise the Lord for this!

I began my studies at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in August 2018. The first semester of study went well. It has been interesting to be immersed in the original languages of the Scriptures. The practical pastoral courses, my New Testament studies class, and Soteriology will be very beneficial for future ministry. It has been a privilege to be under the instruction of godly men and to be studying with people from all over the world. We pray that the education we receive at PRTS will be used for the building up of God's great kingdom.



DARRYL DEDERT

I grew up in the Heritage Reformed Congregation in Jordan, Ontario. It was here as a young man of 19 years old that the Lord brought me to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Soon after, I became strongly convinced He was calling me to the ministry. With this on my heart I moved to Grand Rapids to attend Reformed Bible College to prepare for attending seminary. Aware of my own newness as a Christian, I changed my degree and began studying to become a Bible teacher.

After graduation, my wife Kara and I moved to the other side of the world with our firstborn, Sophie. I served as a Bible teacher at an international school in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. We loved the work and Christian community and thought we might be in Cambodia for the rest of our lives. This was not the Lord's plan. After being blessed with the birth of two healthy children, Noah and Evelyn, the Lord blessed us with the birth of Calvin—a precious gift with significant needs caused by the Zika virus.

Our life changed dramatically as we returned to Michigan. I taught at a local Christian school for three years before beginning my own business. However, throughout all these years I could not erase God's calling to the ministry. My desire to preach and teach the Word of God continued to follow me and the calling of Ezekiel continued to be impressed upon my heart. After seeking guidance of pastors and friends, I approached our consistory and went before the denominational Synod to begin seminary as a student of the Heritage Reformed denomination.

Adjustment to seminary life was not that difficult considering that we were living in Grand Rapids. However, the adjustment from work to full-time study was challenging for both Kara and me. I am now in my third semester at Puritan and am greatly enjoying it. The studies can be difficult, but this only promotes greater learning. One of the things our family loves about seminary life is interacting with other believers from around the world. We hope that these friendships will last for years to come!

As a family, we love to have people over and often have a busy household. Almost every day we have a nurse in our home to help us with Calvin's medical care. Our children have adapted well, by God's grace, and all of them keep very busy with school and life. Kara loves to read and write; when she's not running our busy home, she can often be found writing for online publications or supporting parents in the special-needs community.

We are thankful for all the support and prayers that our church and friends have shown us. Our desire is that the Lord would make us useful, that we would bring Him all glory, and that we would continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.



ISAAC EPP

I am thankful for this opportunity to introduce myself, as well as my dear wife, Lydia. We look forward, the Lord willing, to meeting a number of you personally as we visit the different Heritage Reformed churches in the coming years.

I grew up in a home-schooled family of nine on the west coast of Canada. Throughout my childhood and teen years, we attended a small Scottish Presbyterian church in Vancouver, and in 2010 moved to the Heritage Reformed Church in Chilliwack. We were greatly blessed there under the preaching of first Rev. Elshout, and then Rev. Klaver.

I began to feel the Lord drawing me to a life of ministry in my later teens as He laid on my heart both the power of the gospel and the need for God's truth to be proclaimed in our churches and in our world. I struggled with this calling into my twenties until I could not ignore the ministry desires the Lord had placed in me. In the years following, through three years of Bible college and now my first year in seminary, the Lord has confirmed that call both by laying a deeper burden for God's people on my heart and by opening the doors to becoming a student in our denomination. My lovely wife has been a great encouragement to me in this also, and I thank the Lord for her faithful support as together we walk this road of preparation for the ministry.

My heart is filled with thankfulness also for the faithful training the Lord has provided for me here at PRTS these past six months. I have been impressed both by the godliness, sincerity, and faithfulness of the professors, and by their devotion to the Word of God as supreme authority in all matters of life and doctrine. I am looking forward to these next years of study with anticipation.

We are grateful for your prayers and support thus far, and hope you will join us in prayer for the Lord's blessing both on us as denominational students and on all other students preparing for the Lord's service at PRTS. May our faithful, covenant keeping God be with you and your loved ones this coming year, and may each one "know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph. 3:19).



MARTIJN HEIJBOER

I am married to my wonderful wife, Abigail, and as of last year May we have a beautiful baby girl named Mae. I was born and raised in the Netherlands in a conservative Dutch Reformed community. During my college years I was able to study and intern in the US (in

Kentucky and Ohio respectively). After graduating I wanted to stay in the United States, yet at the same time I wanted to return to my Dutch Reformed roots.

So, I moved to Kalamazoo to pursue a post-graduate degree and attended the local Netherlands Reformed Congregation there. In Kalamazoo the Lord converted me. After having completed my masters I found my dream job back in Ohio. However, at the same time I had started dating my wife who is from Grand Rapids. For a few years I commuted every weekend between Columbus, Ohio and Grand Rapids. After we got

married in 2015, I knew it was time for me to leave my job and to return to Michigan.

Upon my return I joined my wife by becoming a member in the Grand Rapids HRC. The Lord has greatly blessed me here. Shortly thereafter the Lord started calling me to the ministry by stirring my desires and interest. As I was freelancing and working on various jobs my career became less and less satisfying, while the desire to the ministry became stronger and stronger.

Needless to say, it has been a gradual process; however, the Lord has continued to open and close doors in order to lead us in the right direction. When the denomination accepted me as a student at the synod of 2018, I knew my calling to have been true. I started at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in September last year and am enjoying my study a lot. I truly feel that I am finally in the right place where God called me to be.

As a family we appreciate your prayers for guidance in the future: after completing my MDiv, the Lord willing, but also for wisdom and guidance in maintaining a healthy work-life balance during these years in school.



SIMON YIN

My sense of calling for the ministry has been deepening over several years. I have been serving the HRC Chinese Congregation (HRCCL) in Grand Rapids for over four years, serving as an elder at the HRC in Grand Rapids

for one year, and studying at PRTS for more than five years. Recently, my desire has increased to devote myself full-time to the pastoral ministry. My wife (Chunzi Pei) has been very active in serving the HRCCL, and is deeply committed to our growing Chinese congregation.

Spiritually, my family is improving steadily. Under the faithful preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ in a Reformed, experiential way, my wife and I can frequently connect our daily lives, both in their blessings and challenges, with the gospel. This has brought my wife and me closer together and sometimes to weep together, especially in times of challenges, thinking about the wonder of the gospel, and about how God has treated us so graciously.

The Lord impresses me about the importance of prayer. I do my devotion by reading John Calvin's *Institutes* on prayer and by meditating on its scriptural proofs. The Lord uses these daily devotions to nourish my soul greatly, making my morning devotion my sweetest hour of the day. My family attends the HRC Grand Rapids worship services three times on each Lord's Day. Plymouth Christian School, our church, and family worship work well together to help shape our children's faith. My children are growing spiritually in a visible way.

I am growing in my understanding and appreciation of Reformed experiential preaching. I truly love such preaching. Presently, I am reading Dr. Beeke's new book on Reformed

experiential preaching, and am praying for God to enlighten me with more crucial, heartfelt understanding.

Financially, the HRC student stipends are greatly helpful and cover our expenses almost exactly. We are very thankful for the gracious donations from all HRC churches and for those who raise the funds for us.

I would like to use this opportunity to thank our LORD and our HRC churches. My God called me and continues

to cultivate my calling and to lead my spiritual life step by step, together with my family. I am also greatly indebted to the preaching of the gospel by our HRC ministers from our whole denomination, living examples of godly people, and solid PRTS education. I understand I still have much sin and weakness to conquer, but I know our God has won the battle and is leading me to manifest such victory experientially by His most powerful Holy Spirit.

HRC STUDENT SUPPORT FUNDS NEEDED

We hope you enjoyed reading about our HRC denominational students. Please pray much for them, their theological studies, and their families.

With the joy of having five new theological students, also comes the responsibility to support them financially. In this short note, we would like to inform you of how much support is needed and where we are at financially. In total, we need to raise as churches and individuals about \$20,000 per month (or \$240,000 per year) to enable these students to make it financially through their years of schooling according to the level of support stipulated by Synod.

Since the students have begun their study, expenses have been about \$104,000 (as of the beginning of February) and receipts of donations have been about \$63,300. Thus, receipts from congregational collections are about 40% short of what they need to be. That is a significant shortage which, at this point, is being bridged by permitting the Student Support Fund to borrow funds from the Denominational Fund, resulting in a low balance in this fund as well.

As you can see, this trajectory is unsustainable. Hence we are appealing to our HRC churches but also to you as individuals to prayerfully consider raising the number of collections and the level of your personal support for our theological students as soon as possible. The need is great and becoming more pressing.

Please send all personal and church collection donations to: Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, ATTN: Ann Dykema, HRC Student Support Fund, 2965 Leonard NE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49525. Checks should be made out to HRC Denominational Fund with a notation on the memo line: for HRC Student Support. Many thanks in advance for responding to this urgent appeal.



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time of old age; forsake
me not when my
strength faileth."
Psalm 71:9

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The 26th volume of the Russian magazine has just been produced and is about to be sent to readers in some 28 countries. The goal of this project is to reach out to Russian speaking Jewish people with articles that present the reformed basis of our faith. The response by the recipients usually results in 300 to 400 letters from the readers, with questions or comments on various theological or other issues. It is a great ministry for proclaiming the whole council of God beyond Israeli borders.
(from Grace & Truth Congregation newsletter)

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WHERE *Do You* BELONG?

Dear Young Reader, can you tell me what the name of this animal is? It has the legs of a zebra, the body of a big horse, and the head of a mule deer. Could it be a science experiment? Is it a mixed breed? It is neither of the two. It is not even a relative of the zebra, the horse, or the mule deer. The Lord created it as its very own kind. It is an Okapi (pronounced oh-COP-ee). If you ever were to see one in its natural environment, you would have to travel to the tropical forests in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is in Central Africa. Even then, you would have a hard time spotting one. The okapis have been so hunted for their meat and skin that their number has slowly dwindled. Now the okapis are protected by law.

As unique as the okapi is, it does have a close relative. A relative you all know and have seen in the zoo—the giraffe. If you see pictures of the giraffe and the okapi side by side and don't focus on their different markings, you can see their similarities. Of course, the giraffe has a much longer neck than the okapi, but they both have a very long, athletic, black tongue. The okapi's is actually longer—it uses its tongue to clean its nose and ears! Another thing they have in common is the way they walk. The okapi and the giraffe move both legs on one side of their body and then both legs on the other side as they walk. But when they run, they run like the zebras and other animals, swinging their rear legs and front legs together.

Without having all the information about the okapi and when going just by its looks, the okapi almost seems to be an animal who tries really hard to fit in. It wants to belong to the zebras, the horses, and the mule deer all at the same time. By trying to fit in multiple groups all at once, the okapi doesn't fit really well in any group.

Doesn't that sometimes happen with us? We like to be accepted by the other boys and girls at school, at band practice, or at softball games. So, we try to wear the same clothes, use the same words, and move like the others, but deep down we still feel alone.

The Lord doesn't want us to be loners. He wants us to belong, to fit in, and to be united, but not in the way we think we should match each other. He doesn't want a special brand of gym shoes or a certain kind of hairdo (for boys or girls) to be what unites us. He wants us to be united in the Spirit of the Lord Jesus. He wants us to be of one *mind*! He wants us to *think* biblically and to *act* in a gracious, Christ-like way. I hope you feel you belong among Christians—followers of Christ. I hope you have a group of friends that are like-minded in that you all want to serve the same amazing God. You can look very different from each other—some can be young, some old, some musical, some athletic, some in wheelchairs, some plain, and some not so plain—but all accepted by the Lord because you believe the blood of the Lord Jesus is the only thing that can cleanse you of your sin. Then you have the one thing in common that really matters: you belong to God.

“Now may the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 15:5–6).

Elina VanderZwaag is a homemaker, wife of Rev. Foppe VanderZwaag, and member of the Grace Reformed Christian Church (HRC) of Harrison, Arkansas, where her husband pastors.

WORSHIP OUR GREAT GOD!

We can worship God by singing with others or by praying quietly. We also worship by listening carefully to the message to see how God's Word applies to us. Did you know that it is even worship to meet with friends to talk about God and what He is doing? We don't have to be in a church building to worship. We can read God's Word and pray or sing His praises anywhere. God's people can worship Him in everything they do if they do it all for His glory. So jump and run for God who gave you strong legs. Thank Him for a sunny day, your family, your friends, every meal, and every blessing.

We are made for one purpose, to worship God—to give Him all the glory. Nothing brings God more joy than when we rejoice in Him above everything else. (Taken from *The Ology* by Marty Machowski)

1. Revelation 4:11 tells us why we worship God: "Thou art _____, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."
2. Glory and praise to God is the Lord's purpose for all of creation—including you and me! What does the last verse of Psalm 150 call each of us to do? "Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. _____."
3. Jesus taught in John 4:24 that the Lord doesn't just want our outward worship, but desires us to worship Him from our heart—"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in _____ and in _____."
4. Psalm 98:4 is a cheerful response to the Lord's great work of salvation: "Make a _____ noise unto the LORD, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise."
5. Giving thanks to God is also a way to worship Him. In Ezra 3:10–11, we read about the celebration of praise and thanks when the foundation was laid to rebuild the temple. "And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is _____, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel."
6. 1 Chronicles 16:8–10 says we can honor God by giving thanks, praying, singing, and telling others about how great He is—"Give thanks unto the LORD, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the people. Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him, talk ye of all his wondrous works. _____ ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the LORD."
7. Paul and Silas even worshiped God in their prison cell! What two things did they do in Acts 16:25? "And at midnight Paul and Silas _____, and _____ praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them."
8. Psalm 145 praises God for how great He is. What does verse 2 tell us about how often we should worship God? "_____ will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever."
9. 1 Corinthians 10:31 explains that even the small things in our lives should be done for God's glory—"Whether therefore ye _____, or _____, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."
10. In Revelation 7:9–12, John writes about a beautiful vision he saw of the redeemed worshipping God in heaven. What seven words did they give "unto God for ever and ever" in verse 12?

ANSWERS TO LAST MONTH'S PUZZLE

Across:

1. persecuted
4. die
6. Agrippa
8. viper
10. Agabus
11. Jesus
13. Macedonia
14. stoned

Down:

2. Elymas
3. Melita
5. Ananias
6. Athens
7. Berea
9. Barnabas
10. afraid
12. Silas

The answer for #1 was actually found in Acts 22:4 rather than Acts 21:4.



SWEETER *than* HONEY



Stretching on his tiptoes, Ethan eagerly reached for a huge clump of shiny black raspberries. *Plop, plop, plop!* Each berry bounced as it hit the bottom of his pail. He had already filled one bucket and was onto his second even though many of the berries hadn't quite made it into his pail. His lips held the stain of many more berries that he had popped into his wide mouth, but Ethan was a quick picker. His brown eyes always seemed to notice large ripe clumps of berries hidden under some leaves.

"Aha," he mumbled to himself. "You can't hide from me!" *Plop, plop, plop!* The bottom of his second pail was already covered.

While Ethan picked, he had forgotten one thing: his sister Maryellen. He had promised to keep an eye on his four-year-old sister. In the beginning, it had been easy. Ethan had warned her not to go into the prickly bushes, which could scratch her arms. "Just stay on the grass," he had told her, and after discovering a brown toad hopping by, Maryellen had spent the next fifteen minutes following it around. Whenever the toad hopped too close to the black-raspberry bushes, she would squeal and pick it up, carrying it back into the grass. One time she was not fast enough and the toad made a final desperate leap into the thorny bushes. That ended her fun!

Crouching down, Maryellen spotted an ant carrying a strange white object through the grass. She flopped down on her stomach and looked more closely. Was it a bread crumb? Or a little egg? Or a grain of rice? Whatever it was, it was almost the same size as the ant. In fact, Maryellen soon noticed that the ant wasn't alone. It was actually part of a long line of marching ants, all carrying those strange white objects. Where were they coming from? Maryellen decided to find out. She stood up, but then realized that from this

distance she couldn't see the ants. On hands and knees, she began crawling through the grass, following the trail of ants. Without her realizing it, the ant trail led her right around the prickly bushes and into the edge of the woods. Here the grass grew really tall, and Maryellen had a hard time finding the ants that were marching along the bottoms of the tall blades of grass, but that was fine. She decided that she had had enough of crawling around.

Standing up, she began to hop. Now *she* was the brown toad! *Hop, hop, hop!* Maryellen glanced down at her shoes with delight. Her brand new shoes flashed every time she landed. Out in the sunshine, she could barely see the blinking lights, but here in the shade, her new shoes flashed even brighter. Mom had rolled her eyes when Maryellen had begged for shoes that lit up, but then she had given in. Maryellen was thrilled, and here in the woods, she could stamp as much as she wanted. So, Maryellen bounced away, her shoes flashing and blinking with each hop, but she didn't watch where she was going. She didn't notice the angry buzz ahead of her. All she noticed were her flashing shoes.

About twenty feet away on the other side of the bushes, Ethan continued picking berries. "A few more minutes, Maryellen," he called out. He began to whistle when suddenly he heard a piercing scream. It was Maryellen! He dropped his pail and began to run, the thorns scratching his arms and pulling at his shirt.

Another scream filled the air. Rounding some bushes, Ethan saw Maryellen waving her arms frantically. Her eyes showed her terror. Her mouth was wide open in a yell. Around her swirled an angry buzz of wasps. Without thinking, Ethan ran forward, lifted his younger sister up and ran. If you had asked Ethan to run a race with rubber boots on, he would have laughed at you, but never did he run so

fast—rubber boots and all. The wailing of Maryellen and the pain of being stung himself made his feet fly along through the field beside their house and finally to their back door.

Dad, who was in the driveway washing the car, rushed over to see what was wrong. Quickly he yelled for Ethan to get Mom and told Maryellen to stand still. In what seemed like a blur, Mom and Dad checked both of them for any remaining wasps in their clothing and then brought them in the house. Maryellen couldn't stop crying and already her skin was puffing up in several patches where she had been stung. "Let's get some ice packs, some lotion, and some medicine that will help with the pain," Mom told her sobbing daughter.

Maryellen was beginning to calm down when she glanced down at her feet. "My shoe!" Maryellen wailed even louder than before. "One of my new shoes is gone! I left it behind!"

Mom smiled as she promised her daughter that she could get her shoe back. "And Maryellen," Mom asked, "did you say thank you to Ethan for being such a brave big brother?"

Maryellen turned her tear-stained face to her brother. "Thank you, Ethan," she said.

Later at supper time, Maryellen looked at her dad seriously and asked, "Dad, why do you think God made bees? I don't like them."

"Well, those weren't bees that stung you," Dad said. "They were wasps. Still, God created bees with stingers to protect themselves. If they think that you are going to ruin their home, they will sting you so you go away. And it worked, didn't it?" Dad smiled.

"And bees have many other wonderful sides to them," exclaimed Mom. "In fact, I picked up a special treat for you from the farmer's market this morning. Something that's even sweeter than black raspberries." Mom reached into a small paper bag and pulled out little straws filled with

honey. "Without bees, we wouldn't have honey. And this is a special kind of honey. Taste some and see if you can guess what's special."

Ethan cut off the top of the honey straw and slurped some up. His face scrunched up as he let the flavor roll over his tongue. "It tastes just like honey, but something is a little different."

Dad also took a sip of honey and closed his eyes. "Let me see..." he said. "Hmm...I think it has some kind of citrus flavor to it."

"Yes!" Mom smiled. "The man who sold me this honey told me that he ships his bees down to Florida in the winter and that the bees are used to pollinate the orange trees down there. So this honey that we're eating comes from the nectar of the orange blossoms!"

"And so," Dad said, "bees have two huge benefits to people. They make honey and they pollinate flowers and fruit trees. Now I have a question for you. If honey is sweeter than black raspberries, what is sweeter than honey?"

"Sugar?" asked Maryellen.

Pulling his Bible off the shelf, Dad flipped open to Psalm 19 and began to read. When he reached verse 9, he slowed down and read:

The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb (Ps. 19:9–10).

"You see, God's Word tells us that if we follow His commandments we will be satisfied and that they will bring us more joy than any pair of shoes, or any other possession, ever could. Taste the honey again. Isn't it sweet? And yet, the judgments of the LORD are sweeter even than honey for God's people."

Andrea Scholten is a school teacher, a writer for children, and a member of the HRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Adapted from *Open Windows*.





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.

HRC 2019 SYNOD MEETINGS

The HRC 2019 Synod will be held at the Dundas, Ontario FRC on June 4–5, concurrently with the FRC Synod—each day commencing at 8:30 a.m. Please honor the March 9, 2018 deadline for all agenda submissions. The Pre-Synod Prayer Service is planned for June 4 at the Dundas FRC. All the Lord willing.

In anticipation of the 2019 Synod Meeting, the HRC Theological Student Committee (TSC) encourages men considering a call to the ministry to talk to their pastor and/or consistory for guidance before March 1 (if you have not already done so). If the consistory decides to forward you further, the consistory will correspond with the TSC and the TSC will prepare the application for Synod's consideration. Please pray earnestly that God would provide converted and called men for theological training in the HRC and from other denominations all across the globe. The fields are white and ready to harvest.

HRC WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

The ladies of Jordan Heritage Reformed Church invite all women to attend the Annual Women's Conference on May 1, 2019 D.V. at Jordan HRC. The theme this year will be "Finding Joy in the Ordinary." Registration begins at 9:00 a.m. Please RSVP by April 1, 2019 by emailing womensconference.jhrc@gmail.com or by calling Hanna at 289-668-4936. A registration fee of \$20.00 CND is payable at the door, with warm lunch provided. Looking forward to seeing you there!

OBITUARIES

BLOK, Anna, age 87, of Ada, passed away on Saturday, February 23, 2019. She was preceded in death by her husband, Bastian Blok, and her children, Shirley Gridley and Gary Blok. Anna is survived by her children, Tina and Jim Holderman, Pam Blok, Dr. Barb Blok and Dr. A. J. Montes, and Alvin Blok; sister-in-law, Marie Nooteboom of the Netherlands; brothers/sisters-in-law, Hugo and Thelma Staal, Al and Mary Staal, Marinus and Connie Staal; sisters/brother-in-law, Dena and Milo DeWald, Pauline Spaans, Ginny Staal; 9 grandchildren; 2 great-grandchildren; several nieces and nephews. (Dr. Joel R. Beeke, 2 Corinthians 5:1–2).

TEACHERS NEEDED

The Board of **OXFORD REFORMED CHRISTIAN SCHOOL** invites applications for elementary and high-school teaching positions.

Oxford Reformed Christian school is a vibrant, unified, parent-run Christian school that has been serving the educational needs of several local Reformed communities for the past 13 years. We have been blessed with a new facility located in Mount Elgin, a rural village in south-western Ontario. Our enrolment has grown

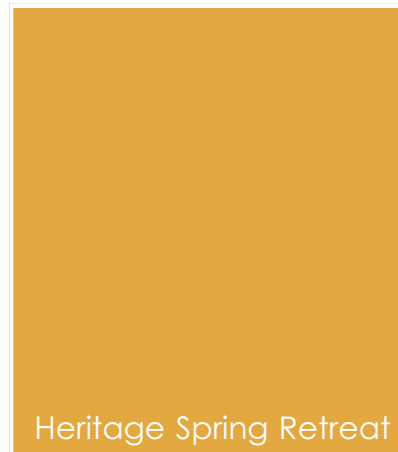
to over 340 students and we offer a Kindergarten to grade 12 Christ-centered education. Visit our website for more information: orcschool.ca.

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

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

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

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 part-time elementary teaching position (mat. leave) beginning Spring 2019, and potential full-time positions for



ROMANS 12:1-2
TRANSFORMED:
Holy & Acceptable

MAY 17–20, 2019

TOPICS
Pattern for Holiness
Purchase of Holiness
Pursuit of Holiness
Power for Holiness
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SPEAKERS
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Pastor David Lipsy
Pastor Ian Macleod
Pastor Steve Richardson

Early Bird: \$225 | After May 1: \$250
REGISTER @ HERITAGERETREAT.CA

2019-2020. 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.

REHOBOTH CHRISTIAN SCHOOL invites applicants for the position of Principal for the 2019/2020 academic year. Located on a beautiful rural setting between Brantford and Hamilton, RCS is a K-12 parent-run school that serves the needs of four local Free Reformed Churches and beyond. God has blessed RCS with both a strong and supportive community as well as a committed faculty. Since its inception in 1978, the school has grown to an enrollment of nearly 400 students.

In addition to being a servant-leader who is committed to instruction from a biblical Reformed perspective, the successful candidate will be passionate about educational excellence and a person of integrity who is relational, motivated and positive. Responsibilities include the following:

- **School Leadership:** articulate and promote a school culture and educational atmosphere consistent with the school's mission, act as an ambassador for the school and communicate effectively with the school community
- **Administrative Leadership:** together with Elementary and Secondary Vice-Principals, maintain good order necessary for operational functionality of the school
- **Educational Leadership:** supervise teacher development and promote professional educational expertise
- **Transformational Leadership:** understand and facilitate change as necessary to promote both the school's mission and educational excellence

If this opportunity excites you and you believe that you may be called to serve in this capacity, please send a cover letter, resume, statement of belief, philosophy of education and references at your earliest convenience or by February 28, 2019 to the attention of the Education Committee Chairman: Joel Hamstra, Rehoboth Christian School, 198 Inksetter Road, Box 70, Copetown, ON L0R 1J0; jmhamstra@gmail.com, (905) 906-6681.

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VISITING REFORMED, PURITAN & PILGRIM SITES

October 15–23, 2019

"I strongly encourage you to join Dr. Michael Haykin, Pastor David Woollin, and myself this Fall as we travel through beautiful New England visiting important Reformed, Puritan, and Pilgrim sites. Come and see the places where Edwards, Brainerd, Whitefield, Eliot, and others were used mightily by God. It is a tour not to be missed." — Dr. Joel Beeke

Register online at bookings.wittetravel.com using booking code **101519BEEK** or call **616-957-8113**.

NATIONAL NEWS

MISSISSIPPI UNVEILS NEW STATE LICENSE PLATES WITH "IN GOD WE TRUST"

"In God We Trust" will be the new standard on Mississippi license plates beginning in January. It will replace the design featuring blues legend B. B. King. Mississippi Gov. Phil Bryant made the announcement last year in May. "I was proud to sign legislation in 2014 that added the United States National Motto, 'In God We Trust,' to the Mississippi State Seal," Bryant tweeted. "I am equally delighted to announce that it will adorn our new Mississippi license plates...available starting in January 2019."

The move has drawn mixed reviews.

Jon Pritchett, president of the Mississippi Center for Public Policy, defended the plates as constitutional. "We have been misinformed and misled by generations of public policy, education, and media leaders on the so-called 'separation of church and state,'" Pritchett wrote. "The concept has been so pervasive that we generally accept the idea that it is inappropriate to bring any faith-based ideas to the public square. The idea that we should separate religion—of any faith or denomination—from politics is not only false, it is virtually impossible."

But the American Humanist Association (AHA) disagrees, blasting the new plates as unconstitutional. "Unlike the use of 'In God We Trust' on money, which is only visible if one makes an affirmative effort to read it, the larger public display of 'In God We Trust' on motor vehicles, alongside bumper stickers and other signage, more clearly makes a statement endorsing the theistic assumptions underlying the phrase," AHA said. "The problem, obviously, is that many individuals do not believe in a God, let alone trust in him, her, or it."

States where people can get "In God We Trust" as specialty plates, by paying an additional fee, include: Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. (Caleb Parke | Fox News)

BELIEF IN GOD—A SURVEY

Nine-in-ten Americans believe in a higher power, but just a slim majority (56%) believes in God as described in the Bible. Belief in a higher power is even common among religious "nones," or those who identify as atheist, agnostic or "nothing in particular." Meanwhile, about half (48%) of U.S. adults say that God or another higher power directly determines what happens in their lives all or most of the time, and three-quarters say they talk to God or another higher power. (Pew Research Center)

OTHER RELIGIONS

SCIENTOLOGY

Beliefs—Scientology focuses on psychological technologies that people can use to make their lives better, calling itself an "applied religious philosophy." It does not have formal doctrines and creeds like many other Western religions. As such, Scientology has very little to say about God, the afterlife, or other religious ideas. Just as Scientology is focused on humanity, so are its beliefs. Its applications emphasize the present life instead of past lives like in many Eastern religions or the next life as in many Western religions. Nevertheless, the Church of Scientology considers itself a religion because of its focus on the soul and spiritual awareness. Scientology also does include some beliefs on other traditionally religious subjects.

God in Scientology—Scientology includes belief in God, but offers no details or doctrine about God. In his explorations, founder L. Ron Hubbard noted the prevalence and importance of belief in a Supreme Being to all peoples. God is, therefore, the Eighth Dynamic, which is also known as Infinity. Scientologists who progress to the Eighth Dynamic come to their own conclusions regarding the Supreme Being.

Human Nature and Thetan—Based on his personal research, Hubbard concluded that a human is made up of three parts: the body, the mind, and the Thetan.

- The body includes the brain, which is not to be confused with the mind. The purpose of the brain is to carry messages; it is likened to a switchboard
- The mind "consists essentially of pictures." It is the accumulation of life experiences, memories, perceptions, decisions, and conclusions.
- The Thetan is the soul, which is the true essence of a human being. Hubbard felt that "soul" had come to have too many meanings, so he coined the term Thetan based on the Greek letter theta. According to the church: "A Thetan is the person himself, not his body or his name or the physical universe, his mind or anything else. It is that which is aware of being aware; the identity which *is* the individual. One does not have a Thetan, something one keeps somewhere apart from oneself; he is a Thetan."

The Thetan can exist entirely independent of the body and the mind. Scientology teaches that, through a process called exteriorization, a Thetan can leave the body but still control the body. This experience results in a person's certainty that he is not identified with his body. A person who is able to practice exteriorization is called an Operating Thetan (OT).

The official Scientology website states: "Man is a spiritual being endowed with abilities well beyond those which he normally envisages. He is not only able to solve his own problems, accomplish his goals and gain lasting happiness, but also to achieve new states of awareness he may never have dreamed possible."

Afterlife—Scientology does not include an official belief about the afterlife. Yet, it reports that during auditing, a person often recalls memories of past lives, and Scientology ascribes to the idea of being born again into another body.

Xenu—In Scientology doctrine, Xenu is a galactic ruler who, seventy-five million years ago, brought billions of people to Earth, stacked them around volcanoes and blew them up with hydrogen bombs. Their souls then clustered together and stuck to the bodies of the living. These events are known as "Incident II" or "The Wall of Fire." The traumatic memories associated with them are known as the "R6 implant." The Xenu story prompted the use of the volcano as a Scientology symbol.

Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard detailed the story in Operating Thetan Level III in 1967, famously warning that R6 was "calculated to kill (by pneumonia etc.) anyone who attempts to solve it."

Much controversy between the Church of Scientology and its critics has focused on Xenu. The Church avoids making mention of Xenu in public statements and has gone to considerable effort to maintain the story's confidentiality, including legal action on both copyright and trade secrecy grounds. Critics claim that revealing the story is in the public interest given the high prices charged for attaining the level of OT III. (Religionfacts.com)



The Power of Jesus

Did you ever wish that you could have witnessed a miracle performed by Jesus? There was such a man in Jesus's day. We meet him in John 4:43–54. He is a nobleman and he is in a dire emergency. Let's follow the dramatic events that brought him to the feet of Jesus. He comes to Jesus on behalf of his sick and dying son. He evokes feelings of pity and compassion as he comes to Jesus pleading for his son's healing and life. He comes in the midst of a health emergency for his son, but Jesus points out that the real emergency is not a health emergency but a heart emergency. The nobleman came to Jesus motivated for his son, but he really came for the wrong reasons. Jesus patiently and powerfully transforms this man's perception of Him. We see the mercy and compassion of Christ as He places Himself in this man's life and makes Himself accessible. Jesus does not turn him away, but takes this emergency and this man's trial to teach him lessons that he would not otherwise have learned. Jesus does the same with you. He uses the afflictions, trials, and extremities of life to draw us to Himself. So, you shouldn't discount the hard things you face; they are what Christ delights to use so that you come to rest in His power alone. That is the point of this sign.

In the midst of the man's emergency, Jesus points out the error with which the man approached Him. Jesus does not turn away the man because he approached Jesus in error. No, Jesus receives the man, teaches him, and graciously corrects his misunderstanding. What was his misunderstanding? He approached Jesus for His miracles alone. That's what Jesus points out in verse 48, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." He was seeking Jesus for the sake of His miracles, not for Jesus Himself. Jesus wants the nobleman to rest in His power and word alone. That is evident when the man wants Jesus to come down and heal his son. Jesus does not do this, but simply tells him that his son lives (v. 50). Why are you seeking Jesus? In order to perform some miracle in your life? To find relief for some affliction? For help for an exam? To land a job? To decide on a career? Jesus can help, but He reminds you here that the sole purpose of seeking Him is not for the things He gives, but to seek Him for who He is—the glorious and powerful Savior of sinners. Are you trusting His Word of promise? This is where so many get discouraged—when Jesus does not respond according to their whims or fancies. They soon forsake following Jesus.

The nobleman does not forsake following Jesus when Jesus rebukes him for following Him for His miracles. The man persists in his entreaty to the only One who can help his son, "Sir, come down ere my child die" (v. 49). The urgency only increases as Jesus tests the nobleman. The man casts himself upon Jesus. Maybe you are like this man—challenged by Jesus. Will you persist in seeking Him for what you need spiritually? Will you

cast yourself upon His mercy? Will you humble yourself as this man did? He was likely a wealthy man, a man of political influence who could have afforded the best doctors. Yet, in all this, he came to understand that only Jesus could help him and his son. He was used to giving orders, but now he comes begging at the feet of Jesus for His power to heal his son. Where will you go with your emergencies?

The nobleman's faith shines through as he persists in asking Jesus to come to his home and heal his son. Then Jesus answers favorably, "Go thy way; thy son liveth" (v. 50). What a tremendous encouragement from the mouth of Jesus; He speaks and it is done. His powerful word carries across the miles and heals the young lad. One word and the fever left him. He is rescued from death. What an encouragement for the nobleman! This same Jesus still lives and still speaks the word of His power. He can heal in an instant. He can save with one word of gospel grace. What do we read about this nobleman? "And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him; and he went his way" (v. 50). What does this mean? It means that faith takes Jesus at His word. The solution to your heart emergency does not lie in the physical presence of Jesus, but it does reside in the Word of His power. That is evident from this beautiful narrative of Jesus's power.

The nobleman's faith is exercised, not in the sign, but in the Savior behind the sign. He believed. The Word of God does not measure his faith, whether great or small. He simply believed, and that is what you are called to do at the display of Jesus's marvelous power in healing the nobleman's son and transforming his heart. How do we know that his faith is active? He leaves promptly to test the word of Christ. In verse 52, he begins to ask when his son was healed and his servants tell him at the seventh hour. That was exactly when Jesus spoke the word of his power and his son was healed! (v. 53). What is the man doing? He is taking the Word of God and matching it with God's providences. He sees that they mesh perfectly. That is an important lesson for you and me to learn as well. As his faith is confirmed and strengthened in Christ, he tells others about the power of Christ, and others also believe (v. 53). Have you received of His saving power? Are you testing His promises? Are you sharing of that saving power to draw others to Christ?

Here is a display of Jesus's power—a sign to lead you to the Savior who is able to heal from physical sickness but also, more importantly, to heal your soul from spiritual sickness. He displays His power for sinners like you—will you follow this sign to the powerful Savior?

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PERIODICAL
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“COME TO ME”

With tearful eyes I look around;
Life seems a dark and stormy sea;
Yet, midst the gloom, I hear a sound,
A heavenly whisper, “Come to Me.”

It tells me of a place of rest;
It tells me where my soul may flee:
O to the weary, faint, oppressed,
How sweet the bidding, “Come to Me.”

When the poor heart with anguish learns
That earthly props resigned must be,
And from each broken cistern turns,
It hears the accents, “Come to Me.”

When against sin I strive in vain,
And cannot from its yoke get free,

Sinking beneath the heavy chain,
The words arrest me, “Come to Me.”

When nature shudders, loath to part
From all I love, enjoy, and see;
When a faint chill steals o’er my heart,
A sweet voice utters, “Come to Me.”

“Come, for all else must fall and die;
Earth is no resting-place for thee;
Heavenward direct thy weeping eye,
I am thy Portion; come to Me.”

O voice of mercy! voice of love!
In conflict, grief, and agony,
Support me, cheer me from above,
And gently whisper, “Come to Me.”

—CHARLOTTE ELLIOT

the **Banner** of Sovereign Grace Truth

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