

Dedicated to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith

# The Outlook

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THE light HAS COME

- IN A FEW WORDS ■ SKELETONS IN THE CLOSET OF CHRISTMAS ■ REFORMED FELLOWSHIP IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
- PROMOTING THE WORK OF MISSIONS ■ WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE REFORMED? IN THE HOME ■ FAITH AND FRUIT IN A POST-CHRISTIAN WORLD: THE NEXT GENERATION ■ HIGHLIGHTS FROM LOGOS, SUMMER 2019 ■ HOW TO HELP WIDOWS
- SEVEN WAYS A WIFE CAN CULTIVATE HER MARRIAGE ■ BIBLE STUDIES ON JONAH: WHO IS JONAH?
- DIVINE JEALOUSY DEMONSTRATED ■ SINGING THE SACRAMENTS: INTRODUCING A NEW HYMN ON BAPTISM
- ALIVE IN A SOCIETY OF DEATH ■ THE GOAL OF LIFE ■ BOOK REVIEW ■ CHRISTMAS PRAISE
- BAPTIST TRAINED INMATES AND REFORMED FELLOWSHIP

Title	Author	Synopsis
3 In a Few Words	Rev. James Admiraal	A few words on libraries, especially libraries that contain Christian study materials and their importance in our lives.
4 Skeletons in the Closet of Christmas	Rev. Kevin Hossink	A Christmas meditation from <i>The Outlook</i> , December 2002.
6 Reformed Fellowship in the Twenty-first Century	Mr. Myron Rau	Increasingly Reformed Fellowship is having an influence throughout the world by means of the Internet. An email received from someone on the other side of the world gives us encouragement of the Spirit's working and how Reformed Fellowship can be instrumental in nurturing a soul to accept and understand the gospel.
8 Promoting the Work of Missions	Rev. Michael G. Brown	How does the elder in the local church fulfill his responsibility to "actively promote the work of missions"? What does this look like practically? How should we define the work of missions? What is the goal? How can the elder encourage this work in the church he serves? If you have ever asked these questions, please read this article!
11 What Does It Mean to Be Reformed? In the Home (2)	Rev. Steve Swets	In this series on what it means to be Reformed, this article will focus on establishing your homes with headship, family worship, hospitality, grace, and stewardship. "Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain" (Ps. 127:1).
14 Faith and Fruit in a Post-Christian World: The Next Generation	Mr. Michael R. Kearney	We must commit to ardent prayer and diligent labors so that the church of tomorrow might be more faithful and fruitful than the church of today.
17 Highlights from LOGOS, Summer 2019	Mr. Michael R. Kearney	A review with pictures of the LOGOS 2019 Summer Conference, held August 7–10 at Potter's Ranch in Union, Kentucky.
18 How to Help Widows	Mrs. Annemarieke Ryskamp	What a widow goes through and how the church community can help her.
22 Seven Ways a Wife Can Cultivate Her Marriage	Mrs. Sarah Najafpour	This article provides practical and biblical ways by which a wife can cultivate her marriage.
24 Bible Studies on Jonah: Who Is Jonah? (1)	Rev. William Boekestein	We think we know who Jonah is. But we might be surprised: the better we see him the more he begins to look like us.
27 Divine Jealousy Demonstrated	Dr. Norman De Jong	Many Christians prefer positive messages, but such ignore clear biblical teaching. God is love, but He is also righteous Judge. He punishes persistent evil! Fear of him is a necessary response!
30 Singing the Sacraments: Introducing a New Hymn on Baptism	Rev. Jonathan Landry Cruse	God has created the church to be a society of song. We sing to praise his person and work, we sing to petition him in our time of need, but we also sing to proclaim to one another the truths of Scripture. In this article, you will get an inside look at how one such proclamatory hymn was composed.
32 Alive in a Society of Death	Mrs. Elisabeth Bloechl	When a culture's highest priority is personal happiness, death is the result. But as Christians, we must model and cultivate a culture of life by laying down our own.
34 The Goal of Life	Mr. Cornelius VanKempen	When meditating on what is my life, I was led to see that though we must go through life doing what God has giving us to do. Our family must be cared for, help the poor, bring God's word to those we meet, but ultimately to do those things we must be rooted and grounded in God's word. Please read this article to find out how our words and deeds can have meaning.
35 Book Review	Rev. Benjamin Davenport	Review of Rev. Brian G. Najafpour's new book: <i>A Hearer of God's Word: Ten Ways to Listen to Sermons Better</i> .
36 Christmas Praise	Mrs. Nancy Moelker	A Christmas poem praising God for his unspeakable gift.
37 Baptist Trained Inmates and Reformed Fellowship	Mr. Myron Rau	A letter from an inmate, one of three, from a Texas prison who are taking seminary courses.

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*"Exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."*  
—Jude 3

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Editor, Dan Van Dyke  
3718 Earle S.W., Grandville, Michigan 49418  
Email: djvan1951@gmail.com  
Website: www.reformedfellowship.net

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**Editorial Office**

Dan Van Dyke  
3718 Earle S.W., Grandville, Michigan 49418  
Email: djvan1951@gmail.com

**Circulation Office**

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(877) 532-8510 Phone Toll-free in US and Canada

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Email: office@reformedfellowship.net

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# In a Few WORDS

**I wish to write a few words about one of my favorite places—libraries.** Whenever my wife and I go on a little trip, one of the places I like to stop at and look around in for a while, even sit down in briefly, is a library—typically city libraries or college libraries. (My wife even tells me to look the other way when I pass by a library, knowing I might want to halt there.)

The reason I like libraries is first, because I like books (not unusual for ministers) and second, because it gives me a glimpse into the community—its local history, sites, and interests. In the case of college libraries, they give me an insight into what they are teaching there.

A little browsing of their religious bookshelves will tell you very quickly whether it is theologically liberal or conservative; and whether it is Reformed or of another religious persuasion.

And that makes me think of some other libraries—specifically, church libraries and personal libraries. I have been in quite a few churches and like to look around a bit in them, including whether they have a library and where that library is located. In some churches it is off their fellowship hall, visible and accessible. In other churches, it is hidden—in a basement room, or in some small nook. That makes me wonder how much such libraries are valued and used. I have a feeling they are regarded by many people as not that important. Only a few members ever visit them, or take out a book.

They may have a section of children's books, for children to take out and enjoy. Or they may have a fair number of popular Christian

fiction books, which mostly women like to read. Or they may stock videos and CDs for children and adults to take out.

But one section, or portion of bookshelves, that is typically neglected contains religious nonfiction books: Bible commentaries and dictionaries, books on Christian doctrine or on Christian living, the family, ethical issues, evangelism and missions. Many of those books rarely get taken out, so it seems. Some are old and dated besides.

So, here I come to my point. God's people need to cultivate a greater desire to read and learn from the numerous books available that will help us grow in our knowledge of the Word of God and how we must live in obedience to it in our secular age. We need to hunger for and be filled with knowledge that has eternal value. And church libraries are one good way to help us in that.

That must be true of our homes as well. We need the Bible above all, to be sure. But in addition, we need to have a shelf of books that provide further spiritual instruction—Bible



commentaries and study guides and books that teach us and inspire us for Christian living.

The prophet Hosea wrote long ago, "My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge" (Hos. 4:6, English Standard Version). God's warning is applicable to our times as well. We live in an age where entertainment has become uppermost in people's lives, including Christians' lives. We often spend many hours watching television and movies, or sports and shows, or exercising in fitness centers, or having fun. But that does not make for strong Christians or churches. We need above all to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as Peter ends his second letter (2 Peter 3:18).

So visit your church library this Sunday, and build up your own home library, for your spiritual benefit. And by the way, check to see if your library also carries *The Outlook*. Better still: get it in your own home.

## Rev. James Admiraal

is a member of the board of Reformed Fellowship, Inc.



# Skeletons in the Closet of Christmas



Rev. Kevin  
Hossink

“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David”  
–Matthew 1:1, NKJV

Skeletons lurk in the closet. Every family has at least one if we are honest enough to level with one another. Adultery, divorce, alcohol and drug addiction, suicide, and physical abuse are just some of the skeletons we keep under lock and key in our family’s cellar. The painful memories of relatives enslaved by the death grip of sin still haunt us today. Let’s face it: a private eye could dig up enough dirt on us to bury our family’s reputation.

The Christmas story tells us that we are in good company. There are skeletons in the closet of Christmas. What is amazing in Matthew’s Gospel is that God directs the skeletons to come out of the closet so that the stage may be set for Advent. God could have easily moved Matthew to airbrush the rough edges of his Christmas message. However, God never glosses over the historical facts that the ancestors of Jesus were not what we might call Girl Scouts or choirboys.

God comes right out and tells us that Jesus Christ descended from a long line of hard-core sinners. But to echo Jesus’ tough talk: be my guest to throw the first stone if you are without sin (John 8:7). True enough: Jesus’ family tree is full of bad apples. However, God casts these shady characters in his drama of salvation to tell us the greatest news ever told.

For starters, take Adam and Eve. Our first parents were guilty of high treason. They would have rather ruled in perdition than serve in Paradise (Gen. 3:1–24). Even though she had it all, Eve took Satan’s bait—hook, line, and sinker. And Adam followed suit. Adam and Eve teamed up with Satan to go to war with God. Instead of washing his hands of the mess, God promises Christmas to regain Paradise lost. God graciously curses the serpent to rescue the seed of the woman from the Fall (Gen. 3:15).

Just when we thought it couldn’t get any worse, Judah and Tamar hooked up in a story of sexual immorality (Gen. 38:1–30). Judah was a man who up and left the church for the fast times of the nightlife. Tamar wanted a baby so badly that she committed prostitution. These are the kinds of Old Testament stories we usually skip over during family devotions because little ears are listening! In spite of all this high-

handed sin, God sent Perez to continue the line of Judah for the sake of Christmas (Matt. 1:3).

The road to Bethlehem takes a turn through the pagan land of Jericho, where we meet another bad girl of the Bible (Josh. 2:1–24). Rahab’s neighbors would have thought nothing of two men getting a room at her place. After all, Rahab was a shady lady who turned tricks to make money. But despite Rahab’s checkered past, God moved closer to the miracle in the manger. The Lord reached outside of the church to turn this shameful prostitute into a mother of Jesus. God tied the knot between Salmon and Rahab and blessed them with Boaz, from whom came Jesus, the Kinsman-Redeemer (Matt. 1:5).

Jerusalem is our last stop on the road from the Garden of Eden to the little town of Bethlehem. Here is where King David was on top of the world, and yet he was another ancestor of Jesus who blew it big time. David sinned royally. He slept with another man’s wife. To make matters worse, David murdered his girlfriend’s husband to cover up the child he conceived out of wedlock (2 Sam. 11:27; cf. Ps. 51:1–19). This story reads like one of those tabloid headlines you read at the grocery store checkout lane. David’s sin found him out, and he paid for it dearly. Nevertheless the God of new beginnings broke more ground to pave the way for Advent. From great

**ADAM &  
EVE**

**JUDAH  
&  
TAMAR**

**PEREZ**

**RAHAB**

**SALMON  
& RAHAB**

**BOAZ**

**KING  
DAVID**

**JESUS**

David came his greater Son Jesus, the perfect pastor of God's people (Matt. 1:6).

It is literally a miracle that Christmas ever came! No thanks to this rough crowd, the God of grace sent his sinless Son in whom he forgives Adam and Eve's high treason, Judah and Tamar's sexual immorality, Rahab's prostitution, and David's adultery. That's the good news of Jesus' family tree we celebrate this Christmas season. This cast of social riffraff standing in the backdrop of the Advent scene means that there's room around the cradle for you and me.

We are looking in the mirror when we see these sinners. Come out of the closet with all your skeletons and go to God with your checkered past. Lay all your cards on the table this Christmas. Come clean with Bethlehem's Baby by admitting that you have sinned royally. Believe in your heart that God laid the King of forgiveness in a manger to wash away all the dirt of sin he has on us.

Confess with your mouth that this man-child was born in Bethlehem's cradle to die at Calvary's cross for the forgiveness of your sins (Matt. 1:21). And then unite your voice with this choir of sinners turned saints to thank God for the indescribable gift of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 9:15). Pray like you have never prayed before that God's surprising grace in the advent of Jesus would shock you into a change of heart and a transformation of life.

There was not much to that first Christmas: an ordinary-looking baby boy born to peasants in a small city and cradled in a feed trough. But because it was not much, it's a fitting place this Christmas for us to kneel and confess in faith: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (2 Tim. 1:15).

#### **Rev. Kevin Hossink**

is the pastor of Hudson Valley United Reformed Church of New Hampton, NY.

At the time this article was written, December 2002, Rev. Kevin Hossink was the pastor of the Bethany Covenant Reformed Church in South Holland IL.

# Reformed Fellowship in the Twenty-first Century

Mr. Myron  
Rau



The Reformed Fellowship board often agonizes over how to accomplish effectively the organization's stated purpose in the twenty-first century. According to Article 2 of the Reformed Fellowship Articles of Incorporation, "The purpose or purposes of this corporation are as follows: to study the Reformed faith and to develop its implications as it relates to all of human life and activity; to disseminate and defend the Reformed faith in opposition to all errors, heresies and trends of thought hostile to the development of a full-orbed and fully committed Christian life; to encourage and promote respect for the Reformed tradition by all lawful means; to publish Reformed periodicals and literature."

We have previously reported how more recently prison inmates learn about Reformed Fellowship and as they contact us how we are able to minister to them. Also in more recent years, the Internet is playing a significant role in our ongoing ministry. People in foreign countries find the Reformed Fellowship website and learn about our books. We continually receive requests to translate some of our books into other languages, which so far have been translated into eleven languages.

An interesting and encouraging email was just recently received from a man in Pakistan: .....

When a man asks these questions that we take so much for granted, what an opportunity. Because it seemed that he knew about the Internet, since he found our website, and due to his fear of being caught with a Bible, I sent him a link to find the Bible where he can read it online.

A reply was soon received in which he said: .....

*I am very happy to write you this email in the hope to hear from you. I found your website and came to know more things about Christianity. I am interested to learn about Christianity therefore I request you to send me some information about basic knowledge. What is Christianity? What is Bible? Who is Jesus? I have very limited knowledge about it, as I live in very strange country Pakistan where I am not able to find any Christians. Even it is not allowed to learn about Christianity in my country. I live among Muslim majority and I belong to Hindu religion. I will be thankful to you for your help by sending me some material to learn about Christianity. I am careful and not to tell others about it, otherwise I will be get in troubles.*

*Thank you very much for your very encouraging email. I am very happy to hear from you. The teaching is very beautiful to understand it teaches me many new things about Christian faith. Yes, it is very hard to get Bible copy here but I went online and am able to read it online that you gave me the link. It helps me a lot to learn about God and creation and story of Jesus. I have come to know and realize that I need salvation and I want to believe in Jesus. I need your prayers for me. I have not told my wife yet but I would help her to understand about Christianity.*

Another message was received where he asked about prayer. The latest communication from this man came with the following good news: .....

I am sorry for the delay in replying, because of my wife was not agreed with me to learn about Christianity. She was against of it. My father in law also forced me not to contact any Christians. I was very sad and disappointed at this point. But I continued to pray for my wife and for my father in law. I am very thankful to you for your nice email and with very nice detailed information about Prayer which I learned deeply from you. It taught me so wonderful about how to pray. Now after many days, my wife noticed once that I was praying for her and for my father in law in my room in my privacy. It touched my wife and she came to me and asked how it is possible to be soften by heart. I shared with her things about how God has changed my life. I shared so many things which she found good to hear. She listened to me very carefully. I taught her about what I learned from you. Now I have been learning more things in deep about Christian faith. It is so nice that I am feeling such a joy spiritually, my wife is now also happy to be learning about Christian faith. Please pray for my father in law and for my wife that we both continue to grow in our spiritual growth.

Another email was received from someone as follows: .....

Sadly, sending Gary a number of encouragements that he can have assurance of salvation and that he must bring it to Jesus, at the time of this writing the same concern continues to be received.

To God be the glory for his work in these people's lives!

Please note that the emails are reproduced here without editing.

My name is Gary i am 61 and grew up in church but i was never one of Christ's sheep i hear Christ in the Bible but i don't hear his inward voice in my heart i am so frightened i don't hear inwardly because i am not one of God's sheep i want to be one of God's sheep how do i do that i am so afraid i was like this for a long time and i am frightened and scared all the time.

**Mr. Myron Rau**

is chairman of the board of Reformed Fellowship, Inc.

# Promoting the Work of Missions



Rev. Michael  
G. Brown

**H**ow does the elder in the local church fulfill his responsibility to “actively promote the work of missions”?<sup>1</sup> What does this look like practically? How should we define the work of missions? Why is it necessary? What is the goal? And how can the elder actively encourage this work in the church he serves?

If you have asked these questions, you are not alone. It is common for church leaders to wonder how their congregations should be involved in missions. The goal of this article is to provide some clarity and confidence regarding the elder’s task of promoting the biblical work of missions in the local church. It cannot possibly say everything that needs to be said on the vast subject of missions, but it aims to encourage church leaders by taking a closer look at our Lord’s Great Commission in Matthew 28 in order to understand how we can apply its principles in the life of the church.

After he finished his work on earth and before he ascended into heaven, Christ commissioned his apostles, saying, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:18b–20, English Standard Version). Known as the Great Commission, this is arguably the most important text in all of Scripture for understanding the church’s responsibility in missions. It provides us with the basis, goal, means, and promise of the church’s mission to the world. In this article we will look at the goal and the promise of missions.

## The Goal of Missions

The goal of doing missions is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Christ did not commission his church to make mere converts but to make committed followers who are set apart by and devoted to Christ and the Christian faith so

that God will be worshiped and glorified: “Go therefore and *make disciples* of all nations” (Matt. 28:19a, emphasis added). The main verb in this sentence is not “go” but “make disciples.” This is the whole point of missions: to train people to become worshipers of the living God. As John Piper once put it, “Missions is not the ultimate goal of the Church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.”<sup>2</sup>

We should be careful, therefore, not to confuse missions with evangelism. Evangelism is a necessary part of missions, but it is not the complete missionary task of the church. “Evangelism,” as J. I. Packer said, “means declaring a specific message . . . [It] means to present Jesus Christ, the divine Son who became man at a particular point in world-history in order to save a ruined race . . . Evangelism means to present Jesus as Christ,

God's anointed Servant, fulfilling the tasks of His appointed office as Priest and King.<sup>3</sup> Evangelism is essential for bringing the gospel to the unconverted, for "how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? . . . So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:14, 17). But the whole scope of missions is not limited to evangelism. If the goal of missions is to make disciples and worshipers of Jesus Christ, then evangelism is only one component of a larger process.

Church planting, therefore, both on domestic and foreign soil, is the *sine qua non* of missions; without it there is no mission. It takes precedence over all other mission-related endeavors, especially parachurch organizations. It is in the local church that the new convert enters the lifelong school of discipleship. It begins at baptism and continues until death as the disciple is continually instructed by God's Word. Throughout their pilgrimage in the wilderness of this world, disciples are being nurtured in the faith, trained for good works, and sustained with the nourishment of the gospel. This is our Lord's chosen way for gathering his redeemed people, feeding them with

his Word, receiving their worship, nurturing their faith, and bonding them as a community rooted and established in love (Rom. 12; Eph. 4; Phil. 1:27–2:11). The local church is a manifestation of the people who belong to Christ, and also the place where he meets them through the means he has ordained.

Since this is true, we must conclude that every local church is a mission church. Regardless of whether a church is established with its own elders and deacons or is still in the infant stages of a church plant, it is the primary place where disciples are being made. The elders, therefore, as they seek to "actively promote the work of missions," must consider how they can be faithful in the task of making more disciples. The leaders in the local church must devote time, thought,

and energy in discovering how they can reach out to their communities, be involved in the planting of a new church, and sending out missionaries to foreign fields. No church is exempt from the Great Commission. Not only must elders be faithful to make disciples with the flock entrusted to them, but also they must be zealous for the cause of making disciples in places where there are very few.

### The Promise for Missions

Just as Jesus' Great Commission to the church begins with an encouraging indicative, so also it ends with one: "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20b). This should fill us with confidence as we evangelize our neighbors, send out missionaries, and plant churches. It should cause us to be unashamed

# FAITHFUL AND FRUITFUL

ESSAYS FOR ELDERS  
AND DEACONS



Edited by William Boekestein and Steve Swets  
Foreword by Michael Brown

of the gospel, and to have an urgency for reaching the lost. Christ has promised to be with his church in all of his authority until the great day of his return. He has already been victorious in his conquest. Our task is to be faithful in announcing his victory throughout the world and instructing those who receive it.

Until the end of the age, Christ continues to advance his kingdom and create his new society from peoples all over the globe. The old covenant confined God's kingdom to one particular nation and language, but the new covenant expands Israel's borders to ends of the earth, making one new man between believing Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:14). The gospel is for people of every race, tribe, and nationality. God promised Abraham that he would be a light to the nations, and that has come to pass. The apostles were sent as Christ's witnesses not only in Jerusalem and in all Judea but also in Samaria and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). It is because of God's promise to Abraham that Christians are black, white, Asian, Hispanic, and more. The Christian faith is not a northern European faith or a Semitic faith but an international, global faith in which "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). In a world that is typically segregated by our cultural identities, consumer preferences, and political affiliations, the gospel creates a multiethnic community that is "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession" (1 Peter 2:9a). Nothing but the gospel of Jesus Christ can create a community like this one.

In light of all the above, we can summarize several practical ways

that elders can "actively promote the work of missions" in the churches they serve:

Remind the congregation that Christ possesses all authority in heaven and on earth, and that we need not fear or be apprehensive about the work of missions.

Remind the congregation that Christ has commanded us to go into the world and make disciples of all nations, and that we must be obedient to him.

Instruct the congregation on the necessity of church planting on domestic and foreign soil, and how it is God's primary way of making disciples through the means he has ordained.

Help the congregation to become familiar with their denomination's missionaries by praying for them regularly, staying updated through the missionaries' newsletters and websites, and inviting the missionaries to preach in a worship service and/or give a presentation.

Invite the denomination's missions coordinator or general secretary for foreign or domestic missions to give a presentation of the current work in the field.

Consider adopting one or more missionaries by committing to regular financial support and communication.

Volunteer to serve on the church's missions committee or a Joint Venture Committee with neighboring churches in the mission of planting a church or overseeing a missionary.<sup>4</sup>

Encourage the congregation to pray earnestly for an open door of opportunity in missions, and to give thought to where and when a new church might be planted.

Christ has not yet returned. He is still bringing the gospel to the nations

and making his disciples throughout the world. And he continues to use ordinary local churches, led by ordinary elders, in this great missionary task. This is an exciting time to be alive and, by God's grace, bring the gospel to the world. Having received so much, it is an enormous privilege for us to participate in the planting of churches where there are few. May God fill our sails with wind so that we never tire of making disciples of all nations!

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1 CO art. 14 states, "The duties belonging to the office of elder consist of continuing in prayer and ruling the church of Christ according to the principles taught in Scripture, in order that purity of doctrine and holiness of life may be practiced. They shall see to it that their fellow-elders, the minister(s) and the deacons faithfully discharge their offices. They are to maintain the purity of the Word and Sacraments, assist in catechizing the youth, promote God-centered schooling, visit the members of the congregation according to their needs, engage in family visiting, exercise discipline in the congregation, *actively promote the work of evangelism and missions*, and ensure that everything is done decently and in good order" (emphasis added).

2 John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 17.

3 J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1961), 38.

4 For more information on the URCNA model of the Joint Venture Committee, see "Biblical and Confessional View of Missions: Study Committee Report Recommended to the Churches by Synod Escondido of the United Reformed Churches of North America 2001," <https://www.urcna.org/urcna/StudyReports/Biblical%20and%20Confessional%20View%20of%20Missions.pdf>.

## Rev. Michael G. Brown

serves as missionary to *Chiesa Riformata Filadelfia* (URCNA) in Milan, Italy.

# What Does It Mean to Be Reformed? Part 2: In the Home

Rev. Steve Swets



As I was sitting down in the home of an elderly couple from our congregation, I noticed a nice sign which read, "Christ is the head of our house, the unseen guest at every meal, the silent listener to each conversation." I have seen that sign before, but I thought about it a little longer this time. It was a wonderful testimony that this is a Christian home. Along the same lines, my wife and I received a wedding present which quotes Joshua 24:15 (English Standard Version), "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." This must be a central conviction for any Reformed believers as they establish their home.<sup>1</sup> There are six characteristics of a Reformed home.

## Headship

As the opening quote stated, "Christ is the head of our house." Christ has redeemed for himself a people. The Reformed confess that because of that atoning work, we are "not our own" (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 1, Q&A 1). We belong to Christ, and so does all that we possess. Our homes then operate under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

This lordship is extended to heads of homes. Ephesians 5:22–33 teaches us that the husband is the head of the home. This is the patriarchal model of home and family that has existed since God brought Eve to Adam in Genesis 2. Herman Bavinck states, "At the head of the family stood the father who was master of everyone and everything. That is not to say that wife and children were his property ... but man was nevertheless the head, the master, the owner and the maintainer of the great entity of the

family."<sup>2</sup> We live in a day and age that has sought to undermine such a biblical structure time and again.

What does it mean to be the head of the home? It means to be a servant leader and protector.<sup>3</sup> The husband is given the responsibility to love and care for his wife and children. The wife and children are to respect the head of the home. If you have ever been in a home where children are disrespectful to the parents, it likely left a sour taste in your mouth. The reason oftentimes, though not always, is that disrespectful children are not being properly disciplined.

Firm, loving correction is the nurture that God calls parents to perform. Correction sets children on a proper course of love and respect for their whole lives. The wisdom of Proverbs rings true: "Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but the one who loves him is diligent to discipline him" (Prov. 13:24). You could add to that a myriad of other biblical wisdom (Heb. 12:7; Deut. 8:5; Prov. 3:12; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13–14; 29:15, 17). The discipline of children is not easy, but it is the task given to parents in the home.

## Family Worship<sup>4</sup>

Family worship, when done well, can be a daily highlight in a Reformed home. Though each family might have a different schedule and lives can be busy, it is of paramount importance to ensure that time each day is spent in family worship. Family worship is to be centered around the Word of God: read, discussed, prayed upon, and sung.

Each family has to figure out their best time of the day, whether after supper, in the evening, or another time, but it is important to keep that time reserved each day. If we know ourselves, we know how easily things can be forgotten when times get busy.

In our home, our practice is that when each child reaches the age of reading (five to seven) we purchase them a Bible with their name engraved on the front cover. They are always proud to have their own Bible. After supper, we read Scripture, taking turns to read a verse until we are done. Then we discuss the passage with either parent asking questions. As children grow older, they are more likely to ask questions in return, and then a beautiful discussion can take place. After Scripture reading, we sing a psalm and then a hymn, often singing an extra song that the children are memorizing. After singing, which usually happens a capella (otherwise it is done around the piano), then we pray. We have an assigned child pray, and our church gives us a prayer calendar for members in our congregation. This is the schedule; the children are used to it, so they expect it and behave accordingly. As with habits, they become expected and children will hold parents accountable. As a father, the highlight of each day is spending that time around the supper table eating and then having family worship. I cherish that time, for before I realize, those children will be grown and will be, by God's grace, having family worship in their own homes.

**“...a home filled  
with love, grace,  
and forgiveness  
is one where  
even the guest  
or stranger is put  
at ease. A home  
characterized by  
love is a place  
others will want  
to be.”**



Another important function of family worship in our home is that it is a great way to prepare the children for the coming Lord's Day. In our church, the bulletin is emailed to the congregation on the Friday before Sunday. On Saturday night, we study the passage that will be preached upon, we go through each song that is to be sung, and if they are unknown, we introduce the children to them, so that when Sunday comes, they know what to expect and they can be more informed worshippers. God has blessed this effort, and as a whole family, we are prepared for the Lord's Day.

### **Hospitality<sup>5</sup>**

As Reformed Christians, we recognize that God has given us homes for a purpose. One purpose is to use them to be a blessing to those around us. When I attended college, I had a list of churches to visit and choose which one to attend. The first Sunday I was there, I attended a church and a kind family invited me over. They said that I was welcome there every Sunday. I quickly became a student member there and sat under four years of faithful preaching and four

years of beautiful hospitality by many in that congregation.

When you open your home to others, you are opening your world to them. When you sit and share a meal with someone, then you can really get to know them. It removes so many barriers to fellowship by showing loving hospitality.

This past Christmas our family made small invitations and walked to each house on our street and invited everyone over on a Saturday afternoon for hot chocolate and Christmas cookies. We invited more people than our house could hold (my wife was a little nervous). On that Saturday about twenty-five of our neighbors showed up. They thought it was such a great idea, and they had such a great time. Some of our neighbors had lived across the street from each other for twenty years and had never had a conversation with each other. We opened up our home and because of that, we have opened up our lives.

Opening your home to visitors, strangers, or even friends can be stressful. But what we must remember is that people don't care if your home is a bit messy. People

don't care if you don't have an elaborate meal planned. They are appreciative to be invited to your home. Practice hospitality (Rom. 12:13), and you will see that it is contagious.

### **Grace-Filled**

A Reformed home should be one that is filled with grace. Of all people, those who believe in total depravity and unconditional election should realize how much we have received in Jesus Christ. Without grace, where would we be?

The application of that grace in our homes must be permeating. Children should feel comfortable to speak the truth to their parents, because they know that their parents love them. Children need the security that grace gives. This is first exemplified in the home.

A child will learn first about God from their parents. In terms of headship, the father is to be a reflection of God himself. He obviously is not sinless, and he should repent when he sins, but children should learn about God from the character of their father and mother. Their character affects the whole home and sets the tone

for life in the home.

If you were raised in a home or have visited a home filled with strife and fighting, then you know that it is something of a rotten place. It leaves a spiritual and relational stench. But a home filled with love, grace, and forgiveness is one where even the guest or stranger is put at ease. A home characterized by love is a place others will want to be.

It is the parents who establish this type of home.

## Children Blessed

When God brought Adam and Eve together in the first marriage, he exhorted them to "fill the earth and subdue it." That command is often called the creation mandate. In it, God called Adam and Eve to have children within their marriage relationship. It is important to note that God is addressing them as a couple. It takes a man and a woman to produce a child. No one can do it alone. Bavinck says, "If this calling of the image-bearer of God . . . to fill the earth and subdue it . . . then the single individual person, even though he may be a man and a son of God, is not capable of exercising that calling."<sup>6</sup> One grand purpose of marriage is to produce offspring.

The Reformed have been known to have large families. My grandfather is one of fourteen children born to his parents. Though having a dozen children is not necessarily the calling of a couple today, they are called to produce children if they are able. Though there are a variety of opinions on the size of families, it is a Christian principle to see children as a blessing from the Lord (Ps. 127:3–5).

There are many couples who have unnecessarily put off marriage and children because they do not think they are financially able to have such. Even though God gives us wisdom, we had better make sure that we are not being selfish. What role does trusting God to

provide for a family come in the picture? Being part of a broader covenant community brings with it the commitment to help those in need, "especially to those of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10).

Families established on the Word of God submit themselves to the authority of God. Each child God gives is a blessing from the Lord, whether it is born in the home or adopted or fostered. God has given us a tremendous opportunity to be countercultural in our view of family and children. Walk through a supermarket or go to a playground with four to six kids and you will have an opportunity to explain why you do what you do.

## Stewardship

If a child receives an inheritance at a young age, that money is put into a trust and the one with authority over that trust is called a trustee. The money does not belong to the trustee but rather to the child. The trustee is responsible for it. The same is true with all that we have. Our homes, our children, our churches, our schools, our possessions do not belong to us. We are entrusted with them. At the end of the day, we will stand before God and have to answer the question of what we did with what was God's.

We teach our children to save money, to make good decisions, to try to get ahead in life. But what have we taught our children upon the foundation of all of those things? As Reformed believers, we do not simply recognize the fact that we do not deserve anything. We recognize the fact that God has given us so much. But why has God given us more than we need? One purpose of work is "that I work faithfully so that I may help the needy in their hardship" (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 42, Q&A 111). All that we have is the Lord's. Keep that in mind when you look around at the material

blessings God has given to you.

When we think of the role of the home in the life of the believer it should be our prayer that God might use us to be a blessing to those around us. Our society continues to attack the home. The home is the foundation of society. What do we think will happen if Christians don't stand up in boldness and with conviction upon the Word of God? Yet do not be afraid; this is all in the good plan of the Lord. We are given the handbook of the Scriptures as we establish Christ-centered homes. Be encouraged to establish your homes with headship, family worship, hospitality, grace, children, and stewardship. "Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain" (Ps. 127:1).

1 In this article I am writing from the perspective of a home having a husband and wife and potentially children. The same would apply to the home of a single believer.

2 Herman Bavinck, *The Christian Family* (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press, 2012), 135–36

3 Bryan Chapell gives an excellent treatment of the husband as a servant leader in the home in *Each for the Other* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006).

4 A helpful and brief resource on the subject of family worship is Joel Beeke, *Family Worship* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2002).

5 A helpful resource on the subject of hospitality is Rosaria Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018).

6 Ibid., 6.

## Rev. Steve Swets

is the pastor of Rehoboth United Reformed Church in Hamilton, ON, and the co-editor of *Faithful and Fruitful: Essays for Elders and Deacons* (Reformed Fellowship, forthcoming)..

# Faith and Fruit in a Post-Christian World: The Next Generation



Mr. Michael  
R. Kearney

A few months ago, I held the newborn son of dear friends in my arms, and I reflected on the flood of emotions that accompanies the welcome of a new life into the world. In addition to the joy and relief at the safe arrival of a baby, we also encounter hopes and fears and questions about the future. What sort of person will this child grow up to be? What sort of friends will he have? Will he grow up in the knowledge and admonition of the Lord? What will God do in this child's life?

And, for those who watch the news and meditate on the state of the world today, there are other questions too: When this child goes to college, will he be allowed to talk about his faith? Will he be able to find a Christian spouse and raise a God-fearing family of his own? Will there be churches for him to go to? Will those churches still teach the Scriptures?

It is possible to ask such questions in a posture of cynicism and unbelief. But it is also possible to ask these questions in faith and sincerity, seeking to discern

a God-honoring course of action in troubling times. It is this second perspective, I hope, that has motivated this past year's series on faithfulness and fruitfulness in a post-Christian world. I stand with both feet firmly planted on Christ's promise that the gates of hell will not prevail against his church (Matt. 16:18). And yet, looking toward our world and the future, I also cannot avoid the gravity of the crisis the next generation of the church will face. Jesus himself asked, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on



earth?" (Luke 18:8, English Standard Version).

Nor can I comfort myself with the thought that at least our Reformed congregations on the margins will be immune to such a crisis. If today we are not clear on the doctrines of the Christian faith, our particular identity as Reformed churches, and our responsibility to teach and mentor the next generation of believers, then we may very well be the last bodies to warm United Reformed pews before our congregations, like so many others before them, pass into oblivion. And if we are to avert that possibility, we must examine the connecting link between this generation and the next—a link best summed up in the word *tradition*.

That word can conjure up a host of objections. Reformed churches have never upheld tradition, one might protest. That's why we have the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. Didn't Jesus condemn the Pharisees for their hypocritical adherence to "the tradition of the elders" (Matt. 15:1–9)? Didn't tradition lead the Roman Catholic Church to forsake the gospel? What rightful place can tradition have in the Reformed faith?

## Tradition under the Scriptures

In fact, the word *tradition* comes from the Latin *traditio*, which refers to something being "handed over" or "handed down." Without question, this is a biblical pattern. In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses called the people of Israel again and again to pass on the commandments of God to their children (Deut. 6:7–9). Historical songs such as Psalm 78 recount the deeds of the Lord "that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God" (vv. 6–7). The apostle Paul commended the Corinthian church for maintaining the traditions

he had delivered to them (1 Cor. 11:2). Traditions serve as intergenerational conduits for the message of the gospel.

The error of Roman Catholicism is to assign tradition a voice independent of and equal to the authority of the Scriptures. But underneath the Scriptures as the ultimate rule for faith and life, the Reformed church has always affirmed the legitimacy and value of traditions as historic practices handed down through the ages. Where else did the creeds and confessions originate? How else did books like the Genevan Psalter impact our churches so dramatically? In what other way can we justify such familiar aspects of Reformed worship as the votum—"Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made the heavens and the earth"—or the liturgical forms? Our particular practices may be biblically rich, but not all of them are biblically mandated. .

This point bears particular emphasis in a cultural context that often denies its connections to tradition. And a community in danger of denying its traditions places itself in other kinds of danger as well. For if we discard tradition as a ground for evaluating our particular practices, the only remaining options are total objectivity or total subjectivity. Either we must prove, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that our position is the *only* scripturally legitimate one, or we must resort to decision making based solely on personal likes and dislikes. The stakes are ultimate or nil. Either we must identify a prooftext for the practice of weekly or quarterly communion, or we must abandon the discussion to the realm of personal preference. Either we must prove that a new songbook is the most biblical or the least biblical collection of music available, or it is merely a matter of taste. If we claim that we have no traditions, we lose the capacity to grapple with Paul's caution that "All things are lawful," but not all

things are helpful" (1 Cor. 10:23). The middle ground where we can debate not lawfulness but helpfulness slips out of view.

Our culture often frames these debates in terms of traditionalism and progressivism. Traditionalism ignores the future, and progressivism ignores the past. If we adopt such an oversimplified perspective, we have not grasped the real nature of tradition. Traditions cease to exist if they are not passed forward. Progress requires the continuity of a tradition in order to progress. Traditions and genuine progress are inseparable. The real threat to our churches comes through tradition that refuses to be examined and progress that refuses to be questioned. And the antidote to such a threat comes through consideration of the communal value, not merely the biblical grounds, of the habits and practices of our communities of faith.

## A Vision for the URCNA

Again I return to the question that has guided Rev. Murphy's columns in *The Outlook* this year: What's happening to our young people? Well, the only thing we can say with a fair degree of certainty is that they are getting older. And there is some seriousness to this tongue-in-cheek comment. The young people are becoming the church. Their first welcome into the community of saints occurred in their baptism, and their professions of faith further confirmed their membership. They are the future of the church. And the more convicting question Rev. Murphy has encouraged us to ask about the next generation is, What are we handing down to them?

I am aware that this is a somewhat impertinent question for me to ask. For I too am a young adult, and I am the grateful recipient of a beautiful spiritual inheritance passed down by

the diligent labors of more individuals than I could name (Ps. 16:6). It is gratitude for that inheritance that compels me to continue to seek the welfare of the URCNA as a spiritual mother. So I pose the question in hope and confidence that the Lord will use the zeal and passion of young believers to sustain our congregations for ages to come. But in order for this to occur, our churches must devote themselves to the practices of discipleship, mentoring, and catechesis—oral instruction, the passing down of tradition. We must know more than the contents of our Bibles and the doctrinal contours of Calvinism. We must know the origins and history of our federation, its particular identity and mission, its central tenets as well as its peripheral quirks. We must catch a compelling vision for why the United Reformed Churches in North America should continue, and we must become acquainted with the mantle of leadership that we will one day, by God's grace, take up. Such traditions cannot be taken for granted. They must be handed down to us.

This past summer, I attended the annual LOGOS conference sponsored by Reformed Youth Services. What emerged during this week of teaching and fellowship in northern Kentucky was, in some ways, a cross-section of the next generation of the church. The conference included workshops from seminarians of the same age as some of the conference participants. But all attendees, whether or not they are preparing for full-time ecclesiastical vocations, received encouragement to practice the kind of intergenerational vitality that should mark the homes and pews and fellowship halls of our congregations week after week. The energy and love for the church manifested at the conference was invigorating—a reminder of the Lord's

promises that extend from generation to generation.

Where are the young people? Here they are! They stand ready to invest their time and talents in the kingdom of God. What are we handing down to them? Do we believe that the traditions of our federation, feeble and flawed though they may be, are worth preserving and strengthening? Here are souls who can carry on the fight.

There's a joke that the unofficial motto of many Reformed churches is, "But we've always done it that way." On closer inspection, this statement offers a place for a healthy understanding of tradition to begin. The explanation is not illegitimate, merely incomplete. It should be stated in a tone that invites young believers to ask: Why? How does this practice reflect the biblical narrative of redemption? How does it build us up in the faith? How does it respond specifically to the needs of today's lost and lonely world? And how can we continue to evaluate and adjust this tradition so that it can continue to serve future generations of the church?

### **Prayer and Work**

I began this series with reference to the particular traditions and history of my home congregation in West Sayville, Long Island. One of the archives I treasure most is a cassette tape of a farewell service for a young minister in the 1970s. In it, one of the church's elders, Jake Klaassen, spoke of the "shadow upon the horizon" that he could discern in the church's current denomination and emphasized the continuing need to reevaluate its traditions in light of the unchanging Word of God. "But," he added, "we

can rest in the promise of God: He will send his Spirit, he has promised us, to lead and guide his church into all truth. And I believe he will do that in the future, as he did in the past, by raising up men—men with keen minds, men with discerning spirits, men that are filled with the spirit of the Almighty." Klaassen's eyes were on the next generation. Decades later, his encouragement to that young pastor to "lean hard upon the Lord" has also strengthened my own life and work—a beautiful reminder of the tradition I have inherited.

If we are to be faithful and fruitful servants of Christ and his church in the twenty-first century, we must commit to traditions without traditionalism and progress without progressivism. We must look back to the Scriptures and our history and forward to the next generation. We must commit to ardent prayer and diligent labors so that the church of tomorrow might be more faithful and fruitful than the church of today.

I know a pastor who often prays at infant baptisms, "May this child grow up to love the Lord more than we do and accomplish greater things for his kingdom than we can." It is significant that Jesus' question about finding faith on the earth immediately follows a parable about persistence in prayer. When Christ returns, will he find a generation on their knees, daily and earnestly imploring him on behalf of their children for a greater measure of the strength and encouragement and wisdom that he promises to provide to his church? Is that our prayer? Is it our deepest longing and delight? May it be so.

### **Mr. Michael R. Kearney**

is a graduate student and research assistant in the Department of Communication and Rhetorical Studies at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. He is a member of Covenant Fellowship Reformed Presbyterian Church (RPCNA) in Wilkinsburg, PA.

# Highlights from LOGOS, Summer 2019



Mr. Michael  
R. Kearney

Approximately sixty young adults gathered for the LOGOS 2019 Summer Conference, held August 7–10 at Potter's Ranch in Union, Kentucky, just south of Cincinnati. Keynote speaker Rev. Tim Scheuers, associate pastor at First United Reformed Church of Chino, California, and a PhD student at Fuller Theological Seminary, delivered three keynote addresses on the theme, "Inerrant or Not?" Rev. Scheuers emphasized that faith stands or falls based on the position one takes toward the Word of God. Challenging the self-righteousness of a culture that attempts to stand in judgment over the Scriptures, Rev. Scheuers described faith as placing oneself under the Scriptures, in total subjection to the Word's authoritative claims about God and humanity.

Five workshops addressed various aspects of wise Christian living for young adults seeking to follow that Word faithfully. Mr. Dan Ragusa, a seminarian from West Sayville, New York, and a PhD student at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, explored some of the philosophical and theological implications of a cultural emphasis on "political correctness." Rev. Nick Smith of the United Reformed Church of Nampa, Idaho, counseled attendees about the reality of anxiety and depression in the Christian life and the need for the members of the body to strengthen one another in the faith. Rev. Matt and Lisa Nuiver of Faith United Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan, led parallel sessions for men and women on the importance of discipleship between older and younger generations in the church. Rev. Nuiver led an additional workshop for all attendees about the critical necessity of earnest prayer.

For the afternoon away, attendees had the option of exploring downtown Cincinnati or visiting the nearby Ark Encounter museum and park. Additional activities at the conference location included archery, canoeing or kayaking, horseback riding, paintball, and a lively volleyball tournament. Board games, singing, and deep conversations during free time lasted into the early hours of the morning. A talent show held the last night of the conference ranged from the virtuosic to the hilarious, with a variety of skits and musical numbers.

A young adult ministry of Reformed Youth Services, LOGOS events provide teaching and fellowship for adult singles 18–30 in college or working. The board of Reformed Youth Services recently approved a change so that married couples under age 30 may also attend future events. The next LOGOS event will be a winter retreat, scheduled for January 2–4, 2020, at Kettunen Retreat Center in Tustin, Michigan.



Rev. Tim Scheuers



Mr. Dan Ragusa



# How to Help Widows



**Mrs.  
Annemarieke  
Ryskamp**

**L**osing a loved one will happen to most us. Although many of the points made will be applicable to all people who grieve the loss of a loved one, this article was written with widows in mind who are in middle life. Those who are widowed at an early age or still have young children, or those who lose their husband after more than half a century of marriage, and widowers, have different issues to deal with that cannot all be discussed in the scope of this article.

## God's Command

God's command is to not oppress the widow. In many places (Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5) the law from Exodus 22:22–23 is repeated: "You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. If you mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath will burn" (English Standard Version). Verse 24 tells you how serious God is about it.

Usually the fatherless, the widow, and the sojourner are mentioned together because they are easy to take advantage of or to exclude. It's specifically mentioned that they need to be included in the God-ordained feasts (Deut. 16).

In Acts 6:1–7 the first seven deacons were appointed because the "widows were being neglected in the daily distribution" (v. 1).

So, when there is a new widow in the church, how will she go about her grief and new status, and how can the church community best help her? This I want to talk about in this article.

## My Story

Every widow has a different story that she may want to tell over and over again. Here is mine.

Six months after he turned fifty, my husband, Richard, was diagnosed with a rare aggressive bone cancer. It was growing in his thigh bone and was skillfully removed and replaced with titanium by an oncologist. Seeing our two young sons (ages nine and thirteen at the time) when she came to report to me after the surgery, she cheerfully remarked, "I got to use my power tools!"

The scans showed the cancer had not spread, so the only long-term effect was that Rich limped and needed a cane.

After five years he was declared a cancer survivor. In the eighth year the cancer resurfaced in a little sore on his scalp. It had also spread to his liver and lungs.

For nine months he went through grueling chemo treatments and surgeries. In between, he went through all the papers he had always kept and so relived his life, which made him thankful. He gave last instructions to me and his now grown sons and showed a calm and acceptance that could only come from God himself. God also allowed him to organize his own memorial service and write his obituary.

He passed away the day after Labor Day, nine years to the day after his first diagnosis. Those were nine very good years in which he had served the Lord better than ever before. In the same week, our younger son left for college, and I went from having a family at home to care for, to being all alone in a big old family home.

## Grief

Obviously, every widow's story is different. A friend of mine lost her husband in a split second in a car accident. Another's husband had a sickbed of many years. The loss is always devastating, and a long process of grief starts at the moment of the loved one's passing. Even if we know our loved one is with Jesus, we are still here on earth, dealing with all the consequences of this person's death.

The biggest change for the widow is the loss of her spiritual leader. Not only spiritual matters but in all practical matters she always had a person to go to. Now God needs to replace this person, and he is eager to do so. In Isaiah 54:5 it says: "For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name." And in Psalm 68:5 it says, "Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God." If she takes God at his word, she'll experience that he really can replace her husband, even down to the practical details of finding that important file.

People want to know how long the period of mourning is. This is different for every person. In general

it may take two to three years for the widow to feel she has started this new chapter of her life.

Many books are written on grief, and some of them are mentioned at the end of this article. I collected those titles from widow friends who found them helpful. So many books are written, because everybody's grief experiences are different. Yet there are also similarities, which makes it possible to talk and write and to advise on how to be of help.

### The Grieving Process

The best description of the grieving process I found is that of a sea with many waves. You are in it, and the waves come crashing down on you with such frequency and force that you think you are drowning. But ever so slowly the waves become a little less high and a little less frequent, and you realize you can catch your

breath in between them. Over time the waves will become much less high and frequent, but still every once in a while one will crash over you with unexpected force and will take you by surprise.

Grief is not an enemy to be avoided but a process to be followed. When you grieve, you need to be allowed by yourself and others to grieve; otherwise no healing can take place. A broken heart must be healed, not fixed.

There is no right way to grieve. Every person (and every relationship) is different and how you grieve may even be a surprise to yourself.

There are certain phases that every grieving person will go through, and some of those are the following:

Right after the death there is usually a time of shock, or fog,

or denial. This in a way is good, because it upholds the widow during the process of the burial.

But there comes a time that feelings need to be acknowledged and crying needs to be done.

The first year is a year of firsts and very difficult. All the holidays and family traditions and celebrations will take place without the loved one. This is an extremely lonely time.

There are so many practical problems: the upkeep of house, yard, and car; the finances; tax season; going through the deceased person's clothes and stuff.



The treasured gift of memories needs to be built. Realize that the loved one will always live in your heart; give the good and treasured memories a place in your heart (and home) where you can visit them often.

Then you slowly need to realize that you are starting a new book or chapter in your life. The book of (this) marriage is closed and needs to be put on the shelf with the other closed books of your past life.

Realization that God has a plan for you in your new life, part of which is to help other widows, as you are very much equipped for that now (2 Cor. 1:4).

## How to Help a Grieving Widow

For this part I collected the ideas from my widowed friends and myself. Most people who want to help will come up with most of these points themselves, but sometimes it is good to get some ideas from others.

At the beginning, all you can do and need to do is give a hug. The widows all love hugs: it's a physical show of affection, sympathy, and love. I still love hugs!

And right after that, she needs prayers and she needs to know that you are praying for her. Sometimes a widow is angry with God, and praying for her will help her deal with those feelings. She may not feel the presence of God, but she will know he is there, because you are telling her that you are praying.

My sons and I literally felt uplifted by prayers. They prevented our grief from becoming overwhelming and kept us close to God. Therefore we were able to see God's grace in almost all of the circumstances surrounding the death, which was very comforting.

However, be careful when you quote

Bible verses. A verse like Romans 8:28, "all things work together for good," could come across as hurting rather than comforting. The same is true for asking "How are you?" only to be polite and not waiting for the answer, or making the inconsiderate remark that she's no longer a couple.

However, it is wise for the widow to know that she shouldn't make any life-changing decisions in the first year, and sometimes she needs to be reminded by others.

For practical help, the list is endless and different for every situation. But here are some of the things that were helpful to me and my widow friends, and I quote:

Meals brought over and staying to eat with me.

Being invited out for a meal or coffee with friends.

Others listening and weeping with me.

Notes, especially when they expressed how much my husband meant to them.

Out-of-town (or not) family and friends coming over for a weekend visit to help with cleaning, household repairs, and organizational necessities.

Being invited over for the holidays, even if I opted not to go.

A box of chocolates or a bouquet of flowers on Valentine's Day or his birthday (or another memorable day).

Being invited out for dinner on the day of our wedding anniversary and my birthday.

Spending time with/interacting with friends who are also widows.

Books and booklets about grieving and receiving an encouraging note in my email inbox every morning (see below for a website that does that).

People remembering my husband and telling me. Even still on the first (and next) anniversary of his death.

Elders in church calling on me.

Elders in church talking to my sons with genuine interest in their lives. (I think when there are younger sons, the men in church need to fulfill that role or help find male mentors for them.)

Help with navigating the finances, especially if the death was sudden or a business is involved.

## The Widow in the Church

I was blessed with my church community and my family, as together they did all of the above. Gradually the widow needs to start taking on her new position and role in the church community.

There are several things she should be doing, according to 1 Timothy 5:4: "If a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God." I would add that she is well equipped now to help other women who become widows, knowing just what they need. If she is open to it, God will often send women in her life whom she can help, and in doing so, she will find healing herself.

If the widow is all alone, according to 1 Timothy 5:5, "She . . . has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and

day." She will become a pillar in her church if she does that.

When most of the urgent practical problems are taken care of and the grief starts to subside a bit, it is good for the widow to devote more time to mentoring or other services to women within her church.

When the church community steps up to help widows and when the widow, when she has recovered enough, steps up to do her part in the church, they are all in God's will, and God will be well pleased and bless them all.

## Resources

The following resources were collected from widows and are written here in random order.

*Journeying through Grief* by Kenneth C. Hauck. A series of four books by the founder of Stephen Ministries.

*Continuing Care Series* by Doug Manning. A series of four books published by In-Sight Books, Inc. ([www.InSightBooks.com](http://www.InSightBooks.com)).

*Grieving, Hope and Solace: When a Loved One Dies in Christ* by Albert Martin.

*Dying Thoughts* by Richard Baxter.

*Heading for Heaven* by J. C. Ryle.

*No Pain Among the Blessed* by Isaac Watts.

*A Widow's Journey* by Gayle Roper.

*Getting to the Other Side of Grief* by Susan J. Zonnebelt-Smeenge and Robert C. De Vries.

*Traveling through Grief: The Five Tasks of Grief* by Susan J. Zonnebelt-Smeenge and Robert C. De Vries.

*Hope for an Aching Heart: Uplifting Devotions for Widows* by Margaret Nyman.

[www.AWidowsMight.org](http://www.AWidowsMight.org) (also on Facebook)

[www.Griefshare.org](http://www.Griefshare.org), where you can find support groups or receive a daily email in your inbox.

## Mrs. Annemarieke Ryskamp

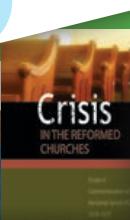
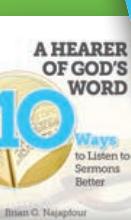
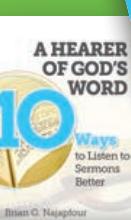
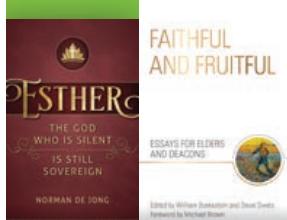
was born and raised in the Netherlands and worked as a secondary school teacher at United World College in Singapore. She was married to Dr. Richard Ryskamp and was widowed in 2015. Their two sons are now in graduate studies. The family has lived in the Grand Rapids, MI, area since 1997 and are members of Dutton United Reformed Church.

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# Ways a Wife Can Cultivate Her Marriage

As a parallel piece to my husband's article "Thirteen Ways a Husband Can Cultivate His Marriage," which appeared in the July/August 2019 issue of *The Outlook*, I would like to borrow his first paragraph, changing it slightly to fit my article's context: "Marriage is like a garden. If you are a gardener and want to have a beautiful garden, you should work hard on your garden. Likewise, if you are a wife and do not invest time and energy in your marriage, you can't expect to have a wonderful marriage. And as a garden needs constant care, so does marriage. Like a gardener, you as a wife should 'water, fertilize, and weed' your marriage regularly in order to have a healthy marriage."

Here are seven ways in which a wife can cultivate her marriage.

**1** Pray daily for your husband. As a leader and provider of the family, your husband has weighty responsibilities. What a comfort it can be for your husband if he knows that each day his wife is praying for him—that God will strengthen, direct, and protect him. I find *Lifting My Husband Through Prayer* a helpful tool as I pray for my husband. This prayer card, produced by Family Life in 2014, uses Bible verses as a guide for a wife as she prays for her husband.

**2** Encourage and support your husband's leadership in your home. In today's culture, the idea of a wife submitting to her husband

seems absurd. However, when a wife obeys God's command to submit willingly to her husband as unto the Lord, it is a beautiful picture of the relationship between Christ and his Bride (Eph. 5:21–24). And biblical submission does not mean that you become a doormat. On the contrary, God calls you as a wife to be a helper to your husband—to work alongside him for God's glory. A godly husband will value his wife's input and will not abuse his authority and demean his wife. Just as a husband's tender love increases his wife's desire to honor him, so does a wife's willing submission to her husband increase his desire to cherish more his wife.

**3** Make an effort to show interest in your husband's work, hobby, or passion. Continue to date your husband. Engaging in your husband's hobby or passion can build sweet friendship in a marriage. My husband loves basketball. When we were first married, I knew little about that sport. Now, I'm not sure who enjoys watching a basketball game more, he or I.

**4** Listen (really!) to your husband. Women are so used to multitasking, and sometimes they continue to multitask even when their husbands are talking to them. Yes, generally they are listening, but their actions can show disinterest. Depending on your situation, putting down your grocery list, setting aside your cleaning cloth, or putting your cellphone down are some meaningful ways to show your husband that he matters to you. If you really can't listen well at the moment he is trying to share something with you, you may want to kindly say, for example, "Dear, what you have to say is important to me. Could we talk about it tonight after supper so I can really listen to you?"

**5** Praise and compliment your husband, not only privately but also publicly (and if you have children, in front of them). Make sure he knows that you admire him, value his care for your family, and appreciate his leadership. A wife who intentionally esteems her husband will be surprised how her admiration can motivate her husband to lead and serve more their family.

(This point is especially for moms with young children.)



**6** Remember that before you became a mother, you were first a wife and are still a wife. Our precious little ones can consume so much of our time that we neglect to cultivate intimacy with our husbands. As a mom of four small children, I know how hard this can be! I also know how much my husband appreciates it when I make an effort to show him that he is still number one. A small love note sent in his lunch or placed on his desk, cooking his favorite meal, planning date nights away from the children are just some ways wives can communicate love to their husbands.

**7** Treat your husband as God treats you. (I've borrowed this point from my husband's article as it excellently applies to both husbands and wives.) God does not deal with us according to the multitude of our sins but according to his rich mercy. Your husband is not perfect; he has flaws and weaknesses, but so do you. Therefore, as God is gracious to you, so be gracious to him. When you are wrong, be humble enough to admit your mistake. When you sin, ask for forgiveness. When your husband sins, forgive him as God has forgiven you (Eph. 4:32). Grow with him in God's mercy and love.

The above list is by no means exhaustive but is meant to give some practical suggestions for cultivating our marriages. We need to realize, however, that ultimately apart from God's grace in Christ we cannot be the kind of wife God calls us to be. Therefore, we need his grace for us to grow more selfless in our marriages. We need his forgiveness for the many ways in which we fail to respect and submit to our own husbands (Eph. 5:33). And we need his Spirit to enable us to nurture a happy and holy marriage.

### Mrs. Sarah J. Najapfour

is a stay-at-home mom. She taught at Cascade Christian School in Chilliwack, BC, and Plymouth Christian High School in Grand Rapids, MI. She is co-author of *Amazing Grace*, the first part of the series called "Stories Behind Favorite Hymns for Ages 3 to 6." She and her husband, Brian, have four children.

# Bible Studies on Jonah: Who Is Jonah? (Jonah 1:1)



Rev. William  
Boekestein

The book of Jonah is one of the most familiar stories in the Bible. Every Sunday school child will eventually meet this stubborn prophet who got swallowed by a great fish.

Yet Jonah the man remains mysterious. Aside from the reference to his father, almost no biographical details are revealed in the book bearing his name. He is mentioned only one other time in the Old Testament. Matthew and Luke record the only other biblical references to Jonah: Jesus said that no sign would be given to that “evil and adulterous generation . . . except the sign of the prophet Jonah” (Matt. 12:38–42; 16:1–4, New King James Version; cf. Luke 11:29–32). Even that reference is cryptic.

So, who is Jonah? And how does understanding him open up the meaning of the story? Scripture doesn’t yield easy answers. But maybe the fact that the details of Jonah’s life are sparse helps us answer the question, though in a way other than we might have first imagined.

Jonah is a real person. But he is also a symbol. Jesus says that in Jonah we see the Christ in shadowy form. Jonah is Jonah. But Jonah is also Christ. There’s more. Jonah is an individual person, but he also embodies the ignorance, stubbornness, exclusiveness, and missiological disobedience of Old Testament Israel. Israel was called to be a light to Gentiles (Isa. 42:6). But Jonah speaks for his country (Jon. 4:2) in angrily denouncing God for showing grace and mercy to the Ninevites, the people who populated the symbolic capital of the unbelieving Gentile world. Jonah is

Jonah. But Jonah is also Israel. There’s more. Jonah is an ancient prophet. But he is also a member of the invisible church, the body of believers, that “community chosen for eternal life and united in true faith.”<sup>1</sup> Believers “one and all, as members of Christ the Lord, have communion with him and share in all his treasures and gifts.”<sup>2</sup> Jonah is Jonah. But Jonah is also us.

Only when we understand what the historical man Jonah teaches us about Christ, Israel, and ourselves are we prepared to study afresh this seemingly familiar story.

## Jonah Is Jonah

Jonah is a historical person, an Israelite (a Hebrew; Jon. 1:9) who lived around eight hundred years before Christ. He came from Gath Hepher (2 Kings 14:25) located in the territory of Zebulun (Josh. 19:13). He is the son of Amitai (Jon. 1:1), about whom nothing else is known.

Jonah is also a believer. Jonah announced to the sailors of his getaway vessel, “I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land” (Jon. 1:9). Jonah believed that God the almighty creator was also active in providence: “I know this great tempest is because of me” (1:12). In other words, I ran from God, but he caught me! Jonah rightly understood God’s character. “I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm” (4:2). Jonah knew Psalm 103 (vv. 7–10) which references Moses’ report of God’s grace and compassion (Ex. 33:12–23; 34:5–7, etc.). Jonah’s prayer from within the great fish is a humble expression of

repentance and hope in the God of salvation (Jon. 2:1–9).

Still, Jonah is a selective follower of the Lord. It was his privilege to announce by the word of the Lord that some of the lost territories of Israel would be restored under Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25). Some prophecies are easy—We’re going to regain lost ground! And sometimes you get tasked to announce to your enemies the possibility of pardon. Imagine training for ministry because you wanted to pastor a church similar to the one in which you grew up, where people’s stories were rather like yours. But upon graduation you received a call to serve as a missionary to Ku Klux Klan groups in the rural South? Or, how would you feel if your church began an outreach ministry to the kinds of Middle Eastern terror groups that executed the 9/11 attacks? Jonah believed that mercy is for Israel, not Nineveh, not Gentiles, not outsiders. His motto was Us first! Or, maybe, Us only! “It is evident that Jonah was an ardent nationalist, pro-Israel and anti-foreign; at least, anti-Assyrian . . . he was . . . capable of being peevish and stubborn, even against God.” “The prophet is portrayed in a distinctly negative light, as one whose entire approach to fulfilling God’s call is incorrect.”<sup>3</sup>

Jonah is a complex person. He would identify as a believer. But he also had very strong feelings about how far he would go to serve the God he claimed to love.

## Jonah Is Israel

Jonah illustrates the general attitude of the Old Testament church toward

**Jonah is a complex person. He would identify as a believer. But he also had very strong feelings about how far he would go to serve the God he claimed to love.**

non-members. Israel was meant to be a guiding star in a dark world. “Israel, the ancient church [was] in a peculiar sense the servant of Jehovah, protected and sustained by Him, enlightened by a special revelation, not for his own exclusive use, but as a source of saving light to the surrounding nations.”<sup>4</sup> The apostle Paul understood the Old Testament’s message (e.g., Isa. 42:6; 49:6) to mean that the church of all ages, the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16), has a missionary calling to “be for salvation to the ends of the earth” (Acts 13:47). That more Gentiles did not embrace the true religion before Christ came is “partly the fault of the chosen people, who neglected or mistook their high vocation as the Messiah’s representative and as Jehovah’s messenger.”<sup>5</sup> The Israelites embraced the occasional stranger who pledged to live as one of them (Ex. 12:43–51). But they were mainly disinterested in going into the world and preaching the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). Their covenantal presumption, which among many had replaced a humble and submissive trust in God the Savior, easily nursed “their own proud, cold, stern, and malignant spirit of ecclesiastical self-righteousness and bigotry, and national intolerance and pride.”<sup>6</sup>

Jonah embodied Israel as a warning to Israel. “The main purpose of the writer [of Jonah] was to enlarge the sympathies of Israel and lead the chosen people to undertake the

great missionary task of proclaiming the truth to the heathen world.”<sup>7</sup> “The audience of the book is . . . invited implicitly to revise their understanding of what God is like, if they have indeed shared Jonah’s selfish views.”<sup>8</sup> Jonah is the Old Testament’s anticipation of the parable of the prodigal son. The Gentiles are that son who had forfeited all rights to sonship. But the Father intends to welcome them back into the family. In God’s providence the gathering of Gentiles came at the cost of Israel being temporarily cast away (Rom. 11:15) for failing to honor the God of worldwide salvation. Refusing to reverence God as the Lover of the world (John 3:16) demotes him to a local deity, effectively dethroning him, a sin otherwise known as unbelief.

See in Jonah the embodiment of the Jewish people who failed to understand that as God’s special treasure they were also “a kingdom of priests” (Ex. 19:6) called to “proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

### **Jonah Is Us**

No matter how great our parents are, at some point we cringe when we’re told that we are just like them. Right? We don’t see it. We don’t want to see. We might feel the same way about Jonah. You wouldn’t mind if someone told you, You know, you remind me a lot of King David. Or, Did anyone ever tell you that you have the wisdom of

Solomon? But how would you feel if someone told you, You sure have a lot in common with Jonah? James Boice was right to say that “there is not a single point of the story in which we cannot see ourselves.”<sup>9</sup> Boice explains how, when the book of Jonah is read in Jewish synagogues on the Day of Atonement, the worshippers respond in unison by saying, “We are Jonah.”

Jonah provides a paradigm for unbelievers. Through his disobedience, he becomes much like the ungodly who are constantly running but never resting until they find their rest in God (Isa. 57:20).

But Jonah also is like believers. If we could, for a moment, set aside the more extraordinary parts of the story, we would see a godly man whose wandering heart chaffed against the holiness of the God he truly loved. Jonah’s flight illustrates how Christians respond to conflicts with God. We want a God who perfectly fits our paradigms. We all resist God when who he is doesn’t fully square with what we want him to be. If you treasure some of God but not all of him, you are like Jonah. If can list things you would change about God if you could, you are like Jonah. If you love God’s grace for you but not for others, you are like Jonah.

Until we can say, “I am Jonah,” we will fail to use Jonah as a means of proper self-examination.

### **Jonah Is Jesus**

When the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees demanded that Jesus give them a sign to validate that he was who he said he was, Jesus said that Jonah was the only sign that his evil and adulterous generation would receive (Matt. 12:39; 16:1). Jonah reveals enough about Jesus to be properly called a sign. Jonah is a lesser Jesus; Jesus is “a greater than Jonah” (Matt. 12:41). Jonah is like Jesus similar to how the lesser light of the moon reflects the greater light of the sun (Gen. 1:16). So what does Jonah reveal about Jesus?

### *Jesus’ Death and Resurrection Bring New Life*

Jesus’ use of Jonah as a symbol of his own death and resurrection (Matt. 12:40) is crucial to understanding who Jonah is. The book of Jonah is best understood as genuine history; the great fish episode is not a fairy tale. But the book does contain metaphors. Jonah symbolically died and was raised to life (Jon. 1:15–2:10). No one—apart from God’s guiding hand—survives three days after being cast into a sea that had been stirred into “a mighty tempest, so that the ship was about to be broken up” (1:4), and of which seasoned “mariners were afraid” (1:5). No one, without God’s intervention, survives three days in the belly of a fish. The sea and the fish were Jonah’s grave; the convulsions of the fish’s gut, his being vomited on the shoreline, his resurrection. The old Jonah—the one who hated Gentiles, who craved selfish comfort—symbolizes the old man. The new Jonah—still imperfect as the story freely conveys—symbolizes the new man. Humanity is changed by spiritual resurrection because it is a genuine union with Christ. The new man, the last Adam, the life-giving Spirit, the heavenly man (1 Cor. 15:45, 49), the greater than Jonah, is Christ. Jesus interprets the pivotal point of the story of Jonah as a picture of his death and resurrection. The book teaches us that if we died with Christ

we shall also live with him (v. 8).

“Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4).

### *Jesus Is the Gift of a Missionary God*

Jonah’s reluctant outreach to Nineveh prepared Israel to expect a greater prophet who would willingly seek and save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). No God-fearing Jewish person could have read Jonah and thought that God’s people whom he embodied were on-mission. Christ alone can fulfill God’s audacious promise to bless “all the families of the earth” (Gen. 12:3). Thomas Goodwin puts it simply: “the Ninevites were a first installment of the Gentiles’ conversion to come”<sup>10</sup> Nineveh anticipates Pentecost. Both seminal events, and myriad other miraculous conversions of sinners, provide the backstory for the completion of God’s rescue work. Because of God’s indescribably gift (2 Cor. 9:15) to Jews and Gentiles, one day “ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands” of redeemed people will sing of the matchless worth of the Lamb who was slain (Rev. 5:11–12).

Jonah reveals the loving heart of God toward lost people—not by his own virtue, but by serving under the providential care of God as a type of Christ. Pay attention to Jonah. Not because we find in him a model of godliness but because we, like him and like Israel before us, need the Christ that he portrays. Jonah isn’t the hero of this story. God is. And God’s heroics are precisely what we and our neighbors—especially the bad ones—still need today.

### **Study Questions**

Reread all of the places in Scripture Jonah’s name is recorded. What composite sketch of the man do the verses help produce?

Why is it important to understand Jonah as a sinful believer?

What hints does Scripture give that Jonah typifies the missionary apathy of Old Testament Israel?

How do you see yourself in Jonah?

What is it about God that troubles you, that tempts you to resist him?

How do we know that Jonah is a type of Christ?

How does Jonah teach us about Jesus?

How can you learn to trust in Jonah’s failure to love the compassion and mercy of God?

1 Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 54.

2 Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 55.

3 Douglas Stuart, *Hosea—Jonah*, Word Biblical Commentary 31, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glen W. Barker (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 431, 435.

4 J. A. Alexander, *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, Zondervan Classic Commentary 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1953), 132.

5 Ibid., 131.

6 Hugh Martin, *The Prophet Jonah: His Character and Mission to Nineveh* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 9.

7 James Orr, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), s.v. “Jonah, the Book of,” by John Richard Sampey.

8 Stuart, *Hosea—Jonah*, 434.

9 James Montgomery Boice, *Can You Run Away from God?* (Wheaton, IL: SP Publications, 1977), 7.

10 *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 23.

### **Rev. William Boekestein**

is the pastor of Immanuel Fellowship Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, MI, and the author of several books, including *The Future of Everything: Essential Truths about the End Times*. This article appeared on The Gospel Coalition website (May 15, 2019).

# Divine Jealousy Demonstrated



Dr. Norman  
De Jong

Scripture reading: Ezekiel 9

If you have been reading the first two articles in this series, you will remember that we began with a discussion about the names of God. We were reminded that God has many different names given to him in the Scriptures, all of which are appropriate and useful for worship. On a somewhat divergent note, we focused on the name of Jealous. At the time of God giving the Law on Mount Sinai, God exhibited tremendous anger at the sin of idolatry and informed Moses and Aaron that his name was Jealous. He would not tolerate or ignore idolatry.

We noted then that jealousy is an attribute of God, by his own declaration, and that his jealousy is often demonstrated on the pages of the Bible. We noted, too, that some of our New Testament translations erroneously designate jealousy as a sin, in need of repentance. We concluded then that the original Greek word, *zelos*, should be translated as “coveting” or “envy” whenever it applies to wrongful desires. There ought never to be a conflict between the Old and the New Testaments.

In our second article we directed our attention to the situation described for us in the eighth chapter of Ezekiel. In response to complaints from some of the exiles in Babylon, the Holy Spirit transported Ezekiel to the temple still standing in Jerusalem. The Jewish leaders, still inhabiting the temple, were engaged in a wide variety of idolatrous practices. They complained that the glory of the Lord had left the temple

and that God no longer cared for them or observed their behaviors. With God supposedly absent, they conjured up a variety of substitutes. God’s wrath was riveting.

When you read and reflect on the ninth chapter of Ezekiel you will see divine jealousy demonstrated in a powerful, almost scary kind of way. God the Father is explaining to Ezekiel what he is going to

Therefore I will act in wrath.  
My eye will not spare, nor will  
I have pity. And though they  
cry in my ears with a loud  
voice, I will not hear them.  
—Ezekiel 8:18



In our day, it is quite possible that many of us worship the buildings that we have built more than the God who meets us there. Some of us are in greater fear of Mother Nature than we are of the Ruler of nature.

do in response to their heinous desecrations. John Calvin concludes, “They not only worshiped the sun in private houses, but in the temple itself, and that not without gross and pointed contempt of God. For when they turned their back upon the sanctuary, they made a laughing stock of God.”<sup>1</sup> In response, God declares, “Therefore I will act in wrath. My eye will not spare, nor will I have pity. And though they cry in my ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them” (Ezek. 8:18, English Standard Version).

What we have in Ezekiel 9 is an organized, systematic demonstration of God’s anger against sin. He calls immediately for “the executioners of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand” (9:1). Behold, six men came from the north, ready to do God’s bidding. We might ask: “Who are these men? Why are there only six?” The answer to such questions can be found in the prophecy of Jeremiah, where God names Nebuchadnezzar as his “servant” (Jer. 25:9). These six men represent soldiers in the army of Babylon. They are God’s designated agents of punishment. God had already used them in the first wave of invasion, occurring in 605 BC. He had also employed them in 597 BC, when Jehoiachin, Ezekiel, and a host of others were taken into captivity. Commentaries find extensive agreement on that interpretation.

The second player in this disciplinary scene is not so easily discerned. That is the “man clothed in linen,” who is with the six executioners. He gives them specific instructions,

thus acting as their superior or as their master (Ezek. 9:2–3, 11). The English Standard Version concludes in a footnote that this is an angel who is “a scribe apparently charged with keeping the heavenly record.” Calvin concludes that “this man then doubtless sustained the character of an angel.”<sup>2</sup> He goes on to add, “Some, whose opinion I do not altogether reject, restrict this to Christ.”<sup>3</sup> Calvin’s conclusion leaves the reader wondering: Is this merely an angel? Or, is this “man in linen” a picture of the preincarnate Christ?

I would contend that this “man in linen” is none other than Jesus Christ in preincarnate form. This is a theophany. This shows the Lord as the second person in the Trinity, doing his Father’s bidding. On what grounds do I make that claim? First, I would make reference to the book of Daniel, where “the man in linen” is clearly the person of Jesus Christ. The description given there (Dan. 10:5–7) is similar to a later description of that same person (Dan. 12:6–10). Daniel addresses him as “my lord” and is not rebuked for that. In the book of Revelation, we have an occasion where the apostle John bowed down to an angel and was rebuked for it (Rev. 19:10).

A similar revelation is given to Ezekiel in the first chapter of his book (Ezek. 1:26–28). That picture is preceded by the picture of a throne and the man sitting above it has a “bow” on his head. Angels are not ascribed thrones and none are permitted a rainbow as a headdress. That is ascribed to Jesus Christ, as he appears in Revelation 1:12–20. That

picture is undeniably Jesus Christ. He tells John, “I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died and I am alive forevermore” (Rev. 1:17–18).

An even more compelling argument can be made when we recognize that “the man in linen” has “a writing case at his waist” (Ezek. 9:3). The Lord then instructs him to “pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations” (9:4). God, the Father, the righteous Judge, instructs the executioners to go throughout the city and to kill everyone else, “but touch no one on whom is the mark” (9:6). This is an implied evidence for the doctrine of election. Some persons, even though they live in a sin-prevalent culture, are not to be killed. Given that, we need to ask: Would an angel know whom to mark and whom to spare? Are angels privy to the secret counsel of God?

The answers to such questions are given in Revelation 5, where John is confronted with a “scroll within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice: ‘Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seven seals?’” (Rev. 5:1–2). The answer is explicit: no one in heaven or on earth can break those seals. Only Jesus Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, can do that. Only Jesus Christ knows whom the Father has elected from before the creation of the world.<sup>4</sup> We are given signs and indicators as to who are in Christ, but we have no iron-clad guarantees. In Ezekiel’s vision, he is also afforded some indicators. The ones who

receive the mark on their foreheads and are thus allowed to live are those “who sigh and groan over all the abominations” (9:4). If Jacob Arminius and his followers focused on this verse, they might conclude that God looked down and observed the righteous behavior of those men and then chose to spare them by virtue of their righteousness. The Canons of Dort address that attempt and label it as heresy. Unconditional election is without any conditions.

If “the man in linen” were simply an angel, a scribe, he would have no authority to do what God tells him to do. Given that this “man” is Jesus Christ, he knows precisely whom to mark and whom to pass over. In this capacity, he is acting as Judge and the Ruler of nations. He declares not only those who sigh and mourn to be innocent but also all the idolaters to be guilty. God the Father instructs him to “begin at my sanctuary” and start “with the elders” (9:6). In a further demonstration of his wrath, God tells the executioners to “defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain” (9:7). The implications are alarming: God recognizes idolatry with unmistakable clarity. He is not fooled by our hypocritical actions. Jesus demonstrated that with alarming intensity when he called the Pharisees “hypocrites,” “blind guides,” and “whitewashed tombs” (Matt. 23:13–36). One of their major sins was that they worshiped the temple more than they worshiped the Lord of the temple. In our day, it is quite possible that many of us worship the buildings that we have built more than the God who meets us there. Some of us are in greater fear of Mother Nature than we are of the Ruler of nature.

Ezekiel’s reaction to this slaughter is truly prophetic: “Ah, Lord God, will you destroy all the remnant of Israel in the outpouring of your wrath on Jerusalem?” (9:8). This prophet of God is demonstrating genuine compassion for his fellow church members. He doesn’t try to excuse or justify their behavior. He recognizes their sins. He has seen it demonstrated with his own eyes. But he pleads for mercy. He wants his Father to exhibit grace and mercy. We need to do that, too.

Too many of us, elders in our evangelical churches, worship a God who is too small, too narrow. We want to see God only as that pleading Father in the parable of the prodigal son. We want him to be begging us to return but powerless to compel us. We don’t want him to be Jealous because we consider that to be a sin. We want him to say, “I love you. Please come home!”

1 John Calvin, “Commentary on Ezekiel,” in *Calvin’s Commentaries*, 22 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 11:294.

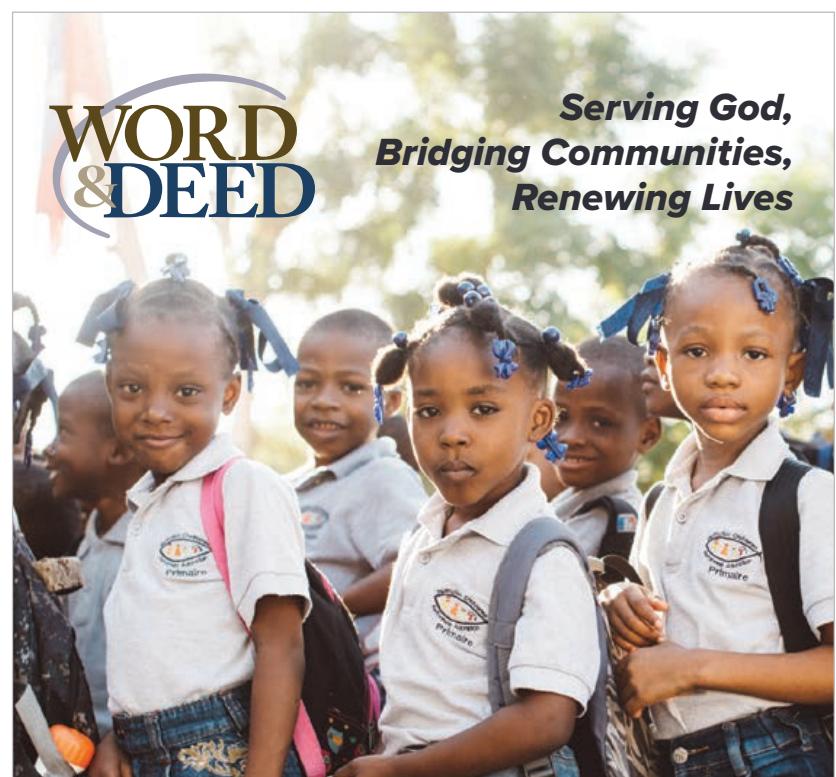
2 Ibid., 302.

3 Ibid.

4 For more extensive analysis of this mystery, see Norman De Jong, *The Cross and the Double-Edged Sword: God Hates Sin and Sinners, But Loves Saints* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press), chap. 1, 13–31.

## Dr. Norman De Jong

is a semi-retired minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.



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# Singing the Sacraments: Introducing a New Hymn on Baptism



Rev. Jonathan  
Landry Cruse

While singing in corporate worship primarily serves the function of addressing God, we cannot discount the fact that it also is a means of proclaiming God's truth to one another. This is what the apostle Paul teaches us about the role of singing in worship when he instructs the Colossian church to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Col. 3:16, English Standard Version). Notice how he parallels "teaching and admonishing" with "singing." Congregational singing acts as a sort of communal preaching. Reformer Martin Luther understood this when he wrote, "Music and notes, which are wonderful gifts and creations of God, do help gain a better understanding of the text, especially when sung by a congregation and sung earnestly. . . we are made better and stronger in faith when his holy Word is impressed on our hearts by sweet music."<sup>1</sup>

As a modern hymn writer, I share the conviction with our Reformed heritage that hymn singing is an appropriate forum for teaching doctrine. Songs in worship at times should be jubilant and marked by praise, at other times prayerful or meditative, but it is also fitting to put into song the beautiful theological truths that God reveals to us in his Word. To that end, I wrote the hymn "Here We Witness Covenant Surety" that the church might both study and celebrate the sacrament of the baptism.

Looking through a number of hymnals (mainly Presbyterian and Reformed hymnals) I was struck by how many so-called baptism hymns are in reality dedication hymns. While there is an aspect of baptism that is about dedicating our lives to the Lord (which is captured in the final stanza of this hymn), that is not all that baptism is. Our confessions rightly teach that in the sacraments God is the primary Actor and we are the recipients of his grace (e.g., see Westminster Confession of Faith 27:1). The grace exhibited in holy baptism is multifaceted, and so in this text I sought to bring out the many rich symbolisms associated with baptism throughout all of Scripture. Let's take a moment together to walk through the theology, poetry, and musicality of this new hymn.

The first verse establishes that baptism, by definition of being a sacrament, is a seal or guarantee of God's promise. When we witness the administration of the waters of baptism, we are witnessing a "surety," or a down payment, of God's covenant of grace. This seal of God's covenantal promise revealed in visible and tangible ways is a means of strengthening our oftentimes fragile faith in God's Word. Hence, we sing that we "are strengthened by Thy sign."

Most evidently, baptism represents our cleansing from sin: as the water washes over the recipient we are given a picture of how "the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7; cf. Titus 3:5), which is put to verse in stanza 2. Stanzas 3 and 4 exposit what Romans 6 teaches us about the sacrament:

namely, that it is a sign of our union with Christ, both in his death and in his resurrection. Paul writes, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (v. 4). Congregations will echo this beautiful truth: "We were dead, but by Thy favor have been raised to life anew."

Reformed theologians have recognized that baptism is a "solemn admission" into the covenant community (WCF 28:1; Heidelberg Catechism 74), outside of which lies only curse and judgment. The sacrament signifies that sober reality as well. Throughout Scripture, baptism is correlated with various "water ordeals" by which God's people are brought safely through, while others are destroyed by God's judgment. The flood and the crossing of the Red Sea are the primary examples. For the Christian, baptism is a sign of safely passing through this divine judgment and entering safely on the other side. This aspect of baptism is often forgotten and is certainly rarely sung about. Yet I wanted to draw it out in this hymn, and thus verse 5 explores how as our children receive this sign, we are assured that the Lord has brought them safely through his judgment and that they belong to the covenant.

The tune, written by gifted composer Jared M. Salyards, is extremely intuitive and easy for congregations to learn. The melody

draws out the natural stresses of the text. At the beginning of each line, for example, the melody assigns the repeated "here we" phrase to what is known as the pick-up and places the strong verbs ("witness," "see," "claim") on the emphatic downbeat. Likewise, the high D in the penultimate measure, with its dotted half note, draws attention to the importance of being "strengthened" by baptism, or draws our voices upwards as we sing about being "raised" with Christ in stanza 4—complemented by the ascending sixths in the bass and tenor. You will also hear minor chords introduced in the second line, which draws out that "we were

dead" in our sins, or that we have "passed through judgment waters."

In all of these ways and more, I think the music beautifully expresses the meaning of this text, but you will have to sing it for yourself. I pray this song will be used to promote the Reformed understanding of the glory and grace of this precious sacrament, to the praise of our God. You can download a free PDF of the sheet music and listen to a full recording at [www.hymnsofdevotion.com/herewe-witness](http://www.hymnsofdevotion.com/herewe-witness).

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Paul S. Jones, *Singing and Making Music: Issues in Church Music Today* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006), 3–4, emphasis added.

### Rev. Jonathan Landry Cruse

pastors Community Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Kalamazoo, MI.

## Here We Witness Covenant Surety

The musical score consists of two staves of music in common time (indicated by '2') and G major (indicated by a sharp symbol). The top staff uses treble clef, and the bottom staff uses bass clef. The lyrics are written below the notes, corresponding to the musical phrases. The lyrics are as follows:

1. Here we wit - ness cov-nant sure - ty in the bap - tized, Lord Di - vine.
2. Here we see our need of cleans - ing from our eve - ry stain and sin.
3. Here we claim we are u - nit - ed to Thy cov - nant - keep-ing Son.
4. Here we share with that same Sav - ior in His death and ris - ing, too.

Below the first four stanzas, the lyrics continue:

Here we wit - ness true se - cur - 'ty  
Yet we, too, see Thou dis-pens - ing  
And by faith we are de - light - ed  
We were dead, but by Thy fa - vor

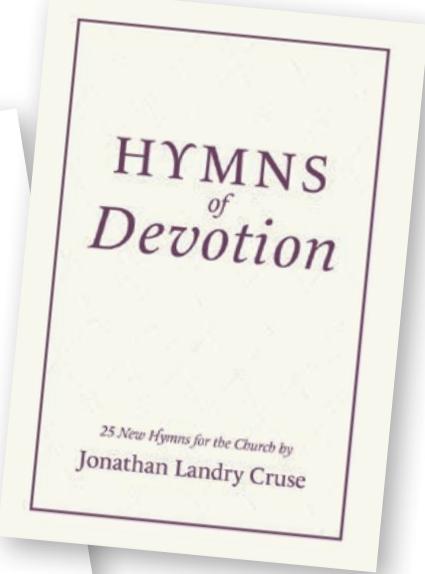
and are strength - ened by Thy sign.  
grace to wash us pure with - in.  
to re - ceive what He has won.  
have been raised to life a - new.

5. Here we pray our sons and daughters  
will be ever safe in Christ.  
For they've passed through judgment waters  
and have entered cov'nant life.

6. Here we ask this sacred blessing  
close at heart will always be.  
Hence may we lead lives professing  
we belong, O Lord, to Thee.

Jonathan Landry Cruse, 2015

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FELICITY JO 8.7.8.7.  
Jared M. Salyards, 2018

# Alive in a Society of Death



Mrs.  
Elisabeth  
Bloechl

## Death Dregs

Ancient Greece, on the edge of collapse, was a pleasure-driven society. The people's primary objective was their own happiness. In a society that had revoked the gods and organized religion, happiness was whatever satisfied unbridled lust and desire. Men fornicated with countless women and as many men—and boys. Women offered their wares to unnumbered men. When contraceptives failed to hinder, the inconvenience was aborted or exposed to the elements. Society shrank to perilously small numbers.<sup>1</sup>

Living for self, they drained dry the dregs of death.

## The Cost of Happiness

America is a pleasure-driven society. Our primary objective is our own happiness. We've forsaken all gods but the god of self. The god that tells us to "love who we are," "embrace yourself," "make time for yourself." Our motto has become, "If it makes you happy, do it." Or in the words of Sheryl Crow, "If it makes you happy/it can't be that bad."

Turns out, what makes us happy is satisfying our unbridled lusts and desires.

Americans, on average, have about seven sexual partners in their life. With easy access to contraceptives and societal acceptance of abortion, the average number of children per mother is only 2.4 (when only fifty years ago it was 4+). Compare that with the staggering 879,000 babies who were aborted in 2018 alone, with rarely a more noble reason given than ones societal or economic. And more than babies are sacrificed on this bloody altar.

"According to *USA Today*, adults purchase children for sex at least 2.5 million times a year in the United States." And on the other end of the spectrum, we have started

encouraging assisted suicide among the elderly. This, not to mention the proliferation of underage drinking, use of illegal drugs, and pornography, exemplifies the attitude "if it feels good/it can't be that bad."

But our passionate pursuit of personal fulfillment does nothing but destroy.

Sexually transmitted diseases wrack our bodies, more than two thousand unborn babies are killed each day, children exploited for sex usually live only seven years, drugs debilitate us, and pornography dehumanizes both the viewer and the viewed.

We are a society that, in the name of personal happiness, promotes death.

But God is a God of the living, not the dead. God calls us, his children, who were once dead to new life (Luke 20:38). As living people, we are to protect and promote not death, but life.

### How?

Know. Pray.  
Build.

First, we must know what is happening. We must open our eyes to the culture of death surrounding us; open our ears to the groaning of the innocent; smell the stench of burnt sacrifices.

Then, accepting our own frail limitations, we must pray. Like Daniel, we must earnestly confess our own sins and the sins of our nation (Dan. 9:20). Asking God to show mercy, destroy those things which cause death, and give us wisdom to build.

One of the most effective ways to counter a culture of death is by building one of life.<sup>2</sup> We can begin by cherishing life in our own homes. We can protect and value the lives of our children and spouse, parents and siblings. Treat them with honor and dignity as living, breathing images of God. Teach your children to do the same, not only in

your home but also in their schools, with their relatives, on the playground.

Live a life that celebrates life. A life that is willing to sacrifice personal happiness and convenience to defend those who cannot defend themselves, whether that means housing an aging parent, putting in extra hours to help your mentally challenged student learn to read, or doing the dishes so your spouse can rest after a long day.

Whatever the cost, we must promote and defend life, as did Jesus, who laid down his own life to give it.

"By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers" (1 John 3:16, English Standard Version).

1 Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, vol. 2, *The Life of Greece* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1939).

2 Toby Sumpter, associate pastor, Christ Church, Moscow, ID, sermon series on culture building.

**Mrs. Elisabeth Bloechl**

a member of Orthodox Presbyterian Church Hammond, is a house cleaner and aspiring writer in Griffith, IN.

# THE GOAL OF LIFE



**Mr. Cornelius  
VanKempen**

"And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." –Luke 12:18–19, KJV

Everyone has a goal in life. Goals can be commendable and bring satisfaction of a job well done, but with the knowledge that our life is not our own. This includes our childhood as we study and prepare for our life's work, marriage, and raising a family. We need to view all of life as unto the Lord. All that we have here in the world is a gift from God to use to his glory.

"If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you."

–Luke 12:28–31

As we work and prepare for our life in this world, we must remember the most important need that we have. We must work and provide for our families, but as we do so realizing our greatest need.

"And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." –Luke 10:41–42

It is not sin to provide and do well for your family in the world, but God must receive the glory for our success, for he said,

"Without me ye can do nothing." –John 15:5b

As we come to the end of another year and look back on the many goals we set for ourselves, they may or may not have been realized. The question is, would our lives have been different if they could have? Would that have been for our good? More than likely not, but one thing we do know: God has spared our forfeited lives. Why?

"He [Jesus] spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And

he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down."

–Luke 13:6–9

We need to be born again, to be reconciled to our Creator, and to be restored into communion and to glorify him. The God who gave us life has also set a time for our death.

"My times are in thy hand."  
–Psalm 31:15a

This makes all the goals we set here secondary so that even if we would reach every goal we set with but have no thought of eternity we would lose everything in the end. Life is short; eternity is never ending. Today is all that we have; tomorrow is too late. Jesus said,

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." –John 10:27–28

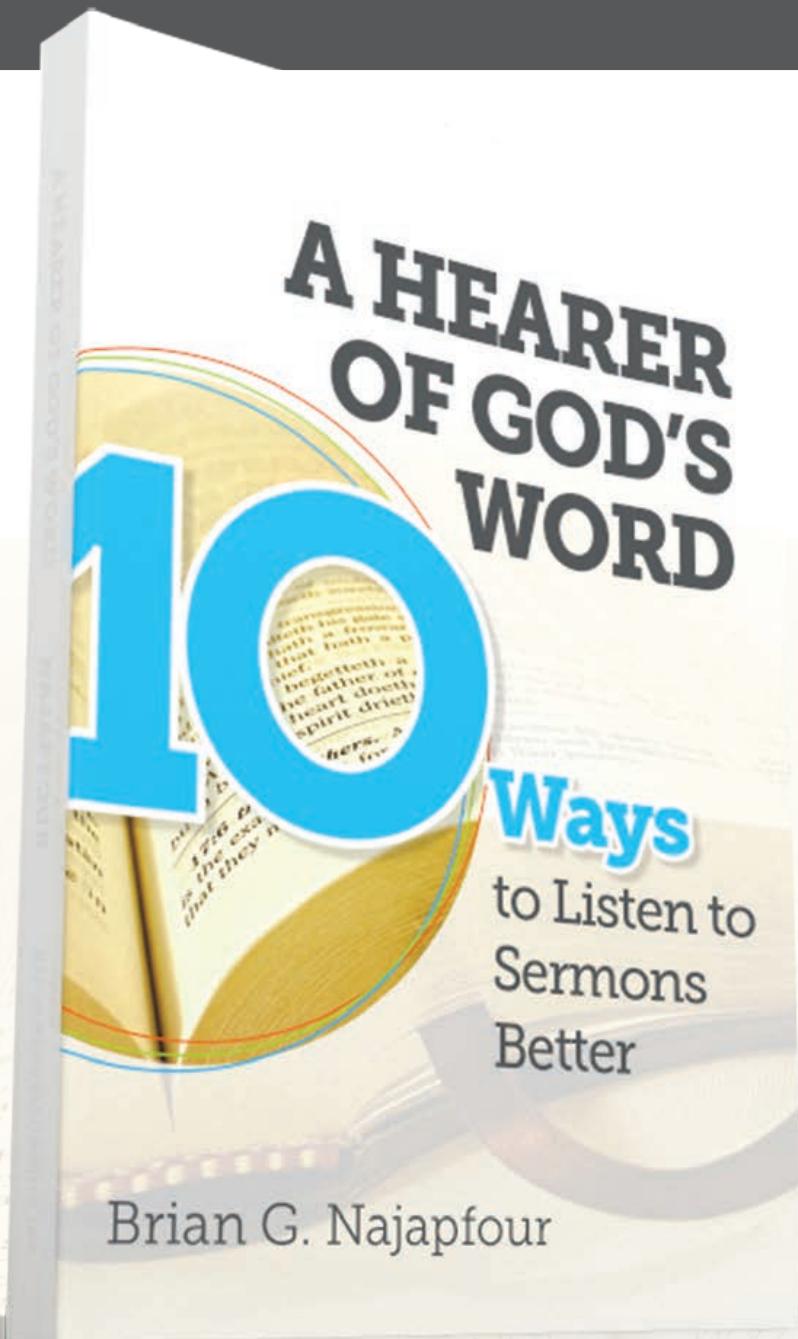
## **Mr. Cornelius VanKempen**

known as Case, has been married to Susan for fifty-four blessed years. They attend and are members of Heritage Reformed Congregation in Grand Rapids, MI.

# Book Review



Rev. Benjamin  
Davenport



**A Hearer of God's Word:  
Ten Ways to Listen to Sermons Better**  
Brian G. Najapfour. Grandville, MI:  
Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 2019.  
Paperback. 100 pages.

This book is a great resource for churches. It's short and sweet, and could be easily read in an hour on a Sunday afternoon—or a short chapter could be read each Sunday morning in preparation to hear God's Word proclaimed to his people. Brian brings up many valuable points in an approachable way, drawing readers to the Scriptures time and again throughout the book. There is also a lot of practical wisdom to be gained here—and anyone who by God's grace puts it into practice will become a better listener to God.

The appendices at the end are also helpful, with advice to both preachers and listeners. Especially helpful are "How to Criticize a Preacher," "15 Pointers for Preachers," and "Respect the Time Your Pastor Needs for Prayer and Sermon Preparation."

This is great material, and every church should make copies available to their congregation.

**Rev. Benjamin Davenport**

is pastor of Bellingham URC in Bellingham, WA.

# Christmas Praise

Come to the manager now! Come, one and all!

See the small baby asleep on the straw.

Bow down in worship on bended knee;

here God Incarnate lies! How can this be?

Why would God give up His only begotten Son?

And why would Jesus gladly leave Heaven to come?

What made them willing to pay such a cost?

God's infinite love for a world that was lost!

Wonder of wonders! So hard to believe!

God's only Son, by a virgin conceived,

Left Heaven's glory for this sinful earth

And died on a cross just too give us new birth.

How shall we worship this Savior divine?

What shall we give Him at this Christmas time?

How can we show the deep love of our hearts?

How can we thank Him for the joy He imparts?

"Jesus, we offer ourselves to You alone;

Heart, mind, and body - please make them Your throne.

Accept the praise that our lips gladly sing!

Humbly, we thank Thee, our Savior and King!

"Joyfully now, may we live lives of praise,

Thankful, oh Lord, for your sovereign grace.

And someday, in Heaven's bright mansions above,

We'll shout ' Hallelujah' for Your saving love!"

"Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift."

2 Corinthians 9:15



**Mrs. Nancy Moelker**

and her husband, Roger, are members of Bethany United Reformed Church. The poem, "Christmas Praise", is taken from *In God's Arms: Inspirational Poems for the Christian Soul* by Nancy Moelker.

# Baptist Trained Inmates and Reformed Fellowship



Mr. Myron  
Rau

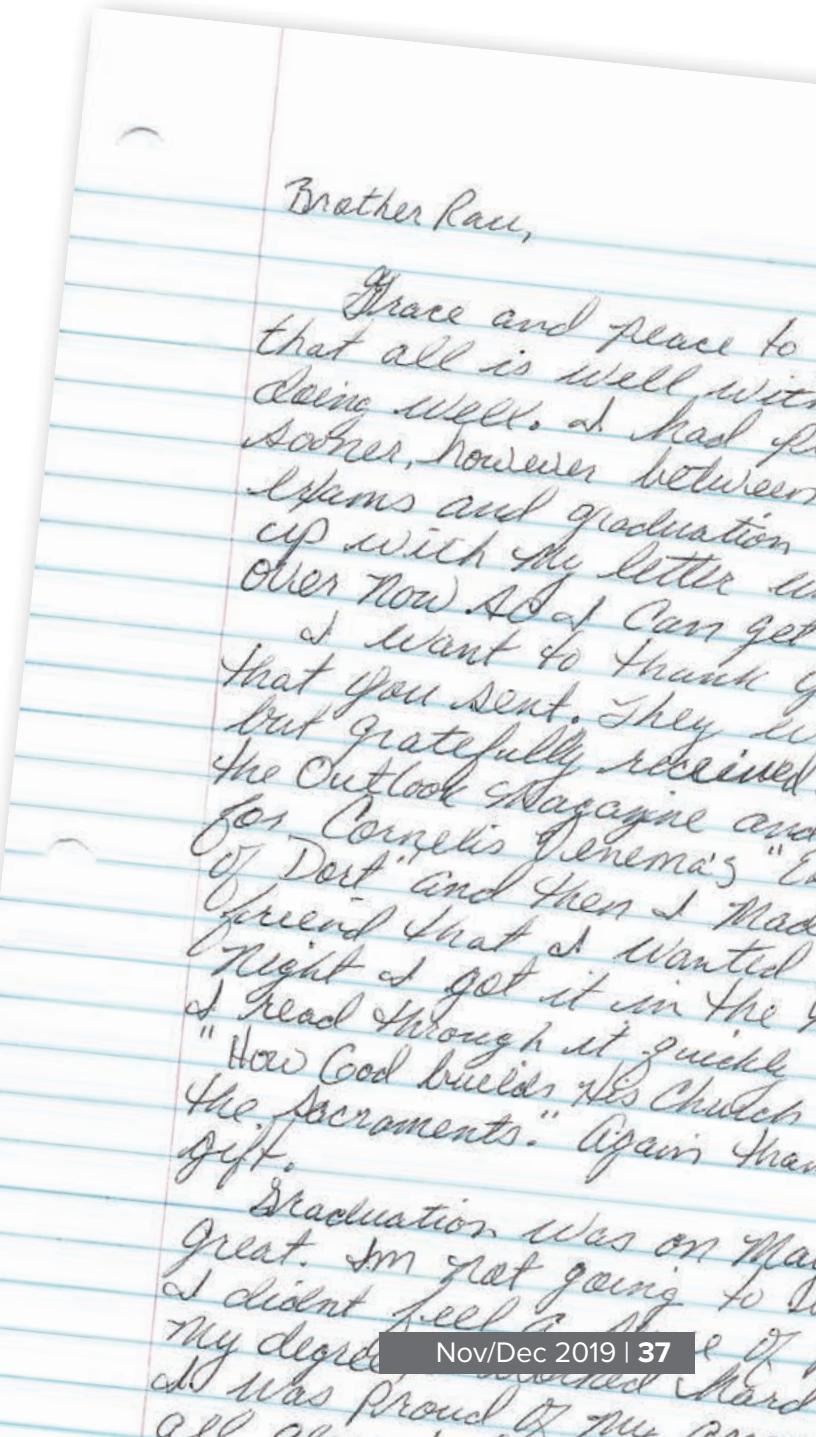
Showed here is a letter from an inmate, one of three inmates from a Texas prison who have been in contact with Reformed Fellowship. They have been taking seminary courses at the prison, similar to what Divine Hope Reformed Bible Seminary offers, provided by Southwestern Baptist Seminary. They represent ten students who have

come to embrace the Reformed faith even while being taught by Baptists. Because they were wanting to know more about the Reformed faith, Reformed Fellowship sent them a couple of our doctrinal books. This inmate and another one have completed their studies and now will be assigned to other prisons within the system where they will be preaching, teaching, and mentoring inmates.

Brother Rau,

Grace and peace to you my friend. I trust that all is well with you. I myself am doing well. I had planned to write to you sooner, however between doing papers final exams and graduation, I could not keep up with the letter writing. Everything is over now so I can get back to normal.

I want to thank you for the books that you sent. They were certainly unexpected, but gratefully received. I was looking through the Outlook magazine and I saw the advertisement for Cornelius Venema's "Exposition on the Canons of Dort" and then I made a comment to a friend that I wanted that book, and that night I got it



in the mail. That was awesome! I read through it quickly and now I'm on how "God Builds His Church Through The Word and the Sacraments." Again thank you for your generous gift.

Graduation was on May 13 and it was great. I am not going to lie and say that I didn't feel a sense of pride by earning my degree; I worked hard for 4 - 1/2 years and it was and I was proud of my accomplishment. I give all glory to God for giving me the ability to achieve this goal. The best part of it all was to share the experience with my mom, wife, and brother, and then to present my mom with my diploma. She was very happy for me and was touched by my gesture. We shared a few tears of joy.

If you want to know more about the program you can go to [heartoftexasfoundation.org](http://heartoftexasfoundation.org).

In your reply you spoke about the Hope Reformed Bible seminary in the Indiana prison. Is

this in a classroom setting or is it through correspondence? My next question is: is it just for Indiana prisoners or is it an institution with accreditation? I am asking because at some point I am going to further my education and I want to know what my options are. I am interested to know more about H.R.B.S.

There has been a few changes regarding field placement so I will be at Darrington for about another month or so. I can wait to get out into the field to do the Lord's work.

I have been rambling on so I will close for now. I thank you for your friendship and support. Take care and God bless.

In Christ  
Erin

### Mr. Myron Rau

is chairman of the board of Reformed Fellowship, Inc.

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Healthy churches have healthy elders and deacons. When a local congregation is blessed with faithful officers the results are bountiful (Acts 6:7). *Faithful and Fruitful: Essays for Elders and Deacons* provides current and future church leaders with an exciting opportunity of personal development. Like its companion (*Called to Serve*), this collection of essays offers biblical and practical essays written by seasoned churchmen drawing upon a wealth of leadership knowledge, experience, and wisdom. Engaging study questions for each essay can help readers make the most of the Bible's instruction and encouragement for those tasked with the responsibility and privilege of leading Christ's church.

Continuing education is often required of secular thought leaders; should anything less be expected in Christ's church?

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