

The Outlook

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DEDICATED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH



**BIBLICAL AND UNBIBLICAL
VIEWS OF PSYCHOLOGY**

**THEMES IN JAMES: THE WAY
TO FIND PEACE, BOTH OUTSIDE
AND IN**

**BIBLE STUDIES ON JONAH:
HOW REVIVAL HAPPENS**

**SOCIAL MEDIA: MORALLY
NEUTRAL OR IDOLATRY 101?**

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KNOW THE WORD (PART 1)**

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**THE BEST USE OF OUR TIME
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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

**RESPONSE TO LETTER TO THE
EDITOR**

BOOK REVIEWS

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Editorial Office

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

Circulation Office

8541 Vincent Ave S.E.
Alto, MI 49302-9744
(877) 532-8510 Phone Toll-free in US and Canada
Business Mailing Address
8541 Vincent Ave S.E.
Alto, MI 49302-9744
Email: office@reformedfellowship.net

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Spring cherry blossoms.
It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, Even with joy and singing.
—Isaiah 35: 2a
Layout and design by Jeff Steenholdt.

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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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Send all copy to:
Editor, Dan Van Dyke
3718 Earle S.W. Grandville, Michigan 49418

Email: djvan1951@gmail.com

Website: www.reformedfellowship.net

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Biblical and

Unbiblical Views of Psychology

The focus on men instead of God has permeated the whole of life and society in our times. Therefore we need to be alert whenever we are presented with something worldly combined with a Christian-sounding flavor, like so-called Christian psychology. There are Christians who are trained as psychologists, but the discipline of psychology is not Christian or non-Christian in and of itself. This is a difficult issue, because many so-called Christian psychologists work within the secular worldview with just a Christian veneer, thereby leading their patients away from the gospel without them even realizing it. There is a great need for psychologists who will help their patients by pointing out the sufficiency of Scripture.

The goal of this article is to make you aware of the differences in approach, and to provide help to distinguish between the biblical and the secular practice of psychology, and why the biblical one offers much more.

Terminology

The new and unbiblical psychology has developed a whole new terminology. Most of it has the purpose of replacing the ideas of a sin nature and being in bondage to lust. The word *disease* is the most common. A disease removes the main idea of original sin. *Addiction* is another replacement word. Although there are real addictions, used in this context the word suggests helplessness and innocence. It can go as far as replacing the word *idolatry* with addiction.

Dysfunctional is another favorite substitute word for sin. People are coming from a dysfunctional home and have therefore acquired dysfunctional behavior. It's not their fault; they are just *victims*. This is a much broader usage than just for the people who are genuine victims, and it's meant to remove the personal responsibility and sinfulness.

The term *self-actualization* has replaced the word *sanctification*. The part “self” shows who is doing the actualization instead of God. The next step in self-actualization is *reprogramming*, which takes the place of the phrase “renewing of the mind” (Rom. 12:2).

People who use other people and try to control them are no longer guilty of self-glorification. They are sick with *codependency*.

Some words have become familiar to Christians, because these words sound so Christian. The word *brokenness* is one of them. This word is not in the Bible and is used in a different way than the original Christian meaning. Another word is *self-esteem*, which replaces the healthy word *self-confidence*, which really should be called “fear of the Lord.” One can be confident in Christ, but self-esteem is something a person needs to work on in order to achieve it.

All these words are meant to avoid the word *sin*. Sin is not a virus we catch from someone else. Nor is it a character role imposed on us by outside forces. It is our very nature outside Christ, and we need to acknowledge it at all times. We cannot avoid responsibility for our sin, even if others have treated us badly. One does not come to Christ complaining that others have forced us to become sinners against our will. Failure to take sin seriously will weaken every other aspect of our understanding and worship of God. We need to realize that it is *my* sinfulness that is the only issue I must deal with at the cross.

Biblical language doesn’t lend itself to a pathologically defined society. It doesn’t give us license to feel and talk about the hurts and disappointments our defenseless psyches have had to suffer.

What should be taught is that the focus should be first and foremost on Jesus Christ and not on ourselves or our past. He is to be the center of our life, in the here and now.

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Method

New psychology also has an unbiblical method. This is not a discussion about the how-to of any counseling or psychology profession. It is an attempt at pointing out that there are two kinds of approaches to psychology: the secular or the biblical approach.

The secular or humanistic approach has its roots in historical developments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, like the Enlightenment, humanism, and Darwin’s theory of evolution. Within a few decades after the acceptance of Darwinism by the American intellectual community, practically every major seminary capitulated to liberalism. Within the new view of psychology as a science, new approaches and ways of counseling were developed. They were non-Christian and therefore based only on human ideas about our human problems. This means it’s opposite from the Christian approach, where faith in God and his Word are the central assumptions.

Victimization therapy, as favored by “Christian” or secular psychology, is not so much a spiritual process achieving spiritual goals by spiritual means as it is a rationalistic process seeking behavioral goals and using humanistic means. Even though any Bible-believing psychologist can use the methods thought out by humanistic psychology, at the root still lies the fundamental belief in either man or God as the ultimate authority.

By viewing people as victims first, psychology seriously inhibits our willingness to believe that the cross has the power to change

a sinner, which in turn inhibits our willingness to call sinners to the cross as sinners under God’s condemnation. It is saying that nothing was your fault and you should first handle your trauma and only then you’ll feel the love of God. This is bypassing the meaning of Christ’s suffering and death.

This is how humanist reasoning goes: self-esteem and victimization are inseparably connected. My sense of self-worth is based on the way I was treated when I was growing up, especially by my parents and immediate family. My parents failed, and my self-esteem suffers because of this. If I ever hope to live my Christian life, I first need to deal with these childhood hurts and disappointments. I must dig them up and relive them emotionally. I need to understand how these hurts have kept me in bondage and have caused me to make “wrong choices.”

Following this process will never lead us to a deeper faith or a more intense Christian life. That’s because sin was never dealt with.

What should be taught is that the focus should be first and foremost on Jesus Christ and not on ourselves or our past. He is to be the center of our life, in the here and now. In him are all the treasures of knowledge (Col. 2:3), and every thought is to be brought into captivity to his lordship (2 Cor. 10:5). The Bible tells us the old is gone, finished, dead and over. We have been crucified with Christ and have been buried with him and raised to a new life.

Yes, people can be in bondage to sin, but the cross breaks that enslavement. This is the great liberating message of the New

Testament. This has been the proclamation of the church for two thousand years, and we shouldn't deny it.

Goal

Unbiblical psychology ultimately has a different goal. It strives first for better self-esteem, but it leaves us with a self-esteem that's extremely fragile and always close to collapse. Any perceived offense can bring us down into depression. We see the fear of being offended throughout society nowadays. The next goal should be feeling comfortable in a person's old (sinful) self. Through a system of behavioral changes, we learn to deal with our trauma and then can feel happy with ourselves again. This is a worldly happiness and leaves us with an emptiness that supposedly can be filled with God's love, except that our sinful nature is not at all dealt with.

God and biblical counseling aim first for a stronger faith, which comes through trials. God values our faith too much to spare us the rigors of whatever will strengthen it. Our Lord despises a half-hearted faith that demands and takes but never wants to be tested. Yet this testing should not leave us considering ourselves victims, as if God had turned on us. If God disciplines us, we are to bring the pain of it to him so that we might be comforted and strengthened in our faith. Faith expresses itself in love and obedience. We will be rooted and built up in him, and it will provide the road back into the fold of God. Thus, our trials shouldn't be excuses for sin; they should point us to God and strengthen us in our faith.



Mrs. Annemarieke Ryskamp

was born and raised in the Netherlands. She graduated with a master's degree in Dutch Language and Literature from Utrecht University and worked for the Dutch l'Abri and as a secondary school teacher at United World College in Singapore. She attends Dutton United Reformed Church (MI) where she leads various Bible study groups and mentor groups. She has two sons who are currently in graduate studies.

Another very important goal of the Christian faith is to be renewed. It is my opinion that the modern system of dealing with the old, traumatized self leaves one with an empty mental house, and the emptiness is not, or is insufficiently, filled with God's Spirit. Jesus foresaw this, giving the warning in Matthew 12:43–45 (English Standard Version): "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation."

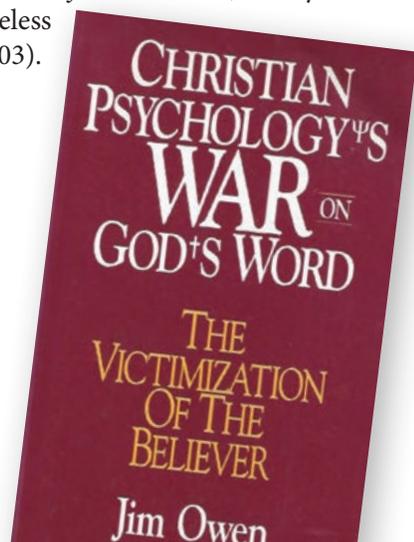
The way to get a new self is, as Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:22–24, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

When we have put off our old self and are renewed in our mind, we experience God's closeness to us which will give us (supernatural) joy. Paul's thorn in the flesh was not removed, because God wanted Paul to experience that he had to live in God's strength and power every moment of every day. Realizing that we too are doing all our works because he is giving us the strength, and that therefore we are doing

it to God's glory, will give us joy that is much more than worldly happiness. Patience in suffering is a spiritual gift. The mature believer is identified by the fruit of the Spirit, not by a behavior that works. A critical key for receiving this kind of favor is to focus on God's kingdom in everything you do: Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you (Matt. 6:33). Put the Lord first in your life, and learn to run joyfully the race with perseverance, in his strength.

Concluding, we can say that whereas unbiblical psychology wants to protect us from trials and make us feel complacent in ourselves, God wants to strengthen us through trials, and he wants our old selves to die so we can put on the new life in Christ. Please keep the fundamental differences in mind when you seek counsel or talk with others who are being counseled.

I'm indebted to Jim Owen, *Christian Psychology's War on God's Word: The Victimization of the Believer* (Stanley, NC: Timeless Texts, 2003).



Themes in James:

The Way to Find Peace, Both Outside and In



Mr. Gerry Wisz

James, as we've seen, is interested in calling out non-Christian behavior among Christians, not because he's a moralist but because he wants to show them that what they're doing and how they're acting are not in keeping with what and who they are professing. There's a lot of animosity in the world, especially lately it seems. It's not surprising that not everyone will agree all the time in this fallen world of ours, and that includes in the family and the church.

Even a brother, the Scriptures tell us, seems born for adversity (Prov. 17:17). That's something James and his brother Jude likely knew to some degree in regard to their half-brother, Jesus, with whom they couldn't really come to terms and hadn't embraced as Messiah until later. I remember a kitchen table discussion that took place years ago among myself and two other Christian men. Another fellow and I disagreed on a point, even though we agreed about the doctrine from which the point arose. We went back and forth for the better part of an hour until the third fellow, who mostly had sat quietly listening, finally spoke up, and said that I and the other fellow were saying the same thing, just expressing it differently, and he showed us from Scripture how this was so.

The other Christian brother and I piped down and conceded, at least somewhat, and I remember saying later to someone that this was a spiritual a-ha moment—a kind

of revelation that scriptural truth transcends our styles or emphases in how we present it. That doesn't mean every time we disagree with a fellow believer that there is some higher truth that envelopes the argument so that both are right: It may be that one is off, way off, and needs to be corrected. But often there's something other than zeal for the truth that causes communication between believers to go awry. It may be what we least suspect, and even think we have a handle on as we're so zealously communicating: the flesh or the natural man.

Battles to Fight and Not to Fight

James puts his finger on the culprit. "What causes fights and quarrels among you?" he asks. "Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?" (Jas. 4:1, English Standard Version). The word *war* is important here. It means that there is a battle between our spirits (informed by the Spirit) and the flesh in the believer, although in James's example, the flesh is apparently winning. Also significant are the words he uses, that these passions war within "your members" (King James Version), recalling the apostle Paul in Romans 7, who likewise teaches that it is not you as a Christian, a new creation, that leads you astray, but the sin that still dwells within you. This is the untamed desire that if left to run amok will of course end in quarrels and fights, even among believers.

James also introduces a familiar ogre that pops up in these kinds of frays: covetousness, whether for money, power—and concurrently attention—or for physical satisfaction. Here it seems to be about money and position (4:2). It's a delicate thing to find that place between what God has given man to do openly—that is, take dominion in the world according to calling—and to not fall into idolatry so that the tools of this dominion, among them money and position, override the God-given calling, and even God himself. In fact, finding this place is such a delicate thing—like finding that tiny click while adjusting a sophisticated machine—that if it were left to us, we'd never find it. It would go too far in one direction or the other. Thank God that he gives more grace (4:6).

James knows his audience, the local Hebrew Christians in and around Jerusalem who likely are already feeling the pressure of identifying with Messiah. They want business success but don't have it, and James points to the reason. It's not because they're Christians so much as because their motives are impure. They want success to satisfy their desires first and foremost, whatever that means: money in the bank, bragging rights, bigger barns. And James doesn't let them off the hook. He calls them adulteresses—in the feminine form—using the term God uses with Israel through the prophets in the Old Testament (4:4). That means as Christ's Bride, they've

turned their backs on their husband and are playing the harlot, not with false gods like Baal or Asherah, but with other, more familiar idols. They prefer friendship with the world to friendship with God (4:4), and James rebukes them openly. Whew! How would you like to have James as a pastor?

Tough Words for the Wayward

James identifies his readers with a wayward wife, a familiar image in the Old Testament, as Israel is depicted in Ezekiel 16. She was chosen and received by her husband and given everything, but then she cuckolded him for others who weren't even of her husband's stature. That's a significant lesson, isn't it? That God our Father has done so much for us, and that because of who we are, namely sinners, that we can come to take that for granted. We may do so even to the point that we become not only unappreciative of his goodness and grace but also disdain them, and like the prodigal son, go looking for our own versions of goodness and grace, thinking we can find fulfillment elsewhere.

It's an old story, and a contemporary one at the same time. For James's readers, this is expressed as their friendship with the world—it's there where their hearts beat, where their nostrils flare, where what seems to them the richest fellowship can be found. But wait. Why is this bad? The world, after all, is a big place. In fact, it's everywhere where we are. And besides, aren't we to find fulfillment in our endeavors, our work, our dominion, as God certainly wants us to do? Doesn't the Lord himself tell us that we're to be in the world, though not of it (John 17:14–16)?

Yes, most certainly. But it's clear here in James's letter that this is

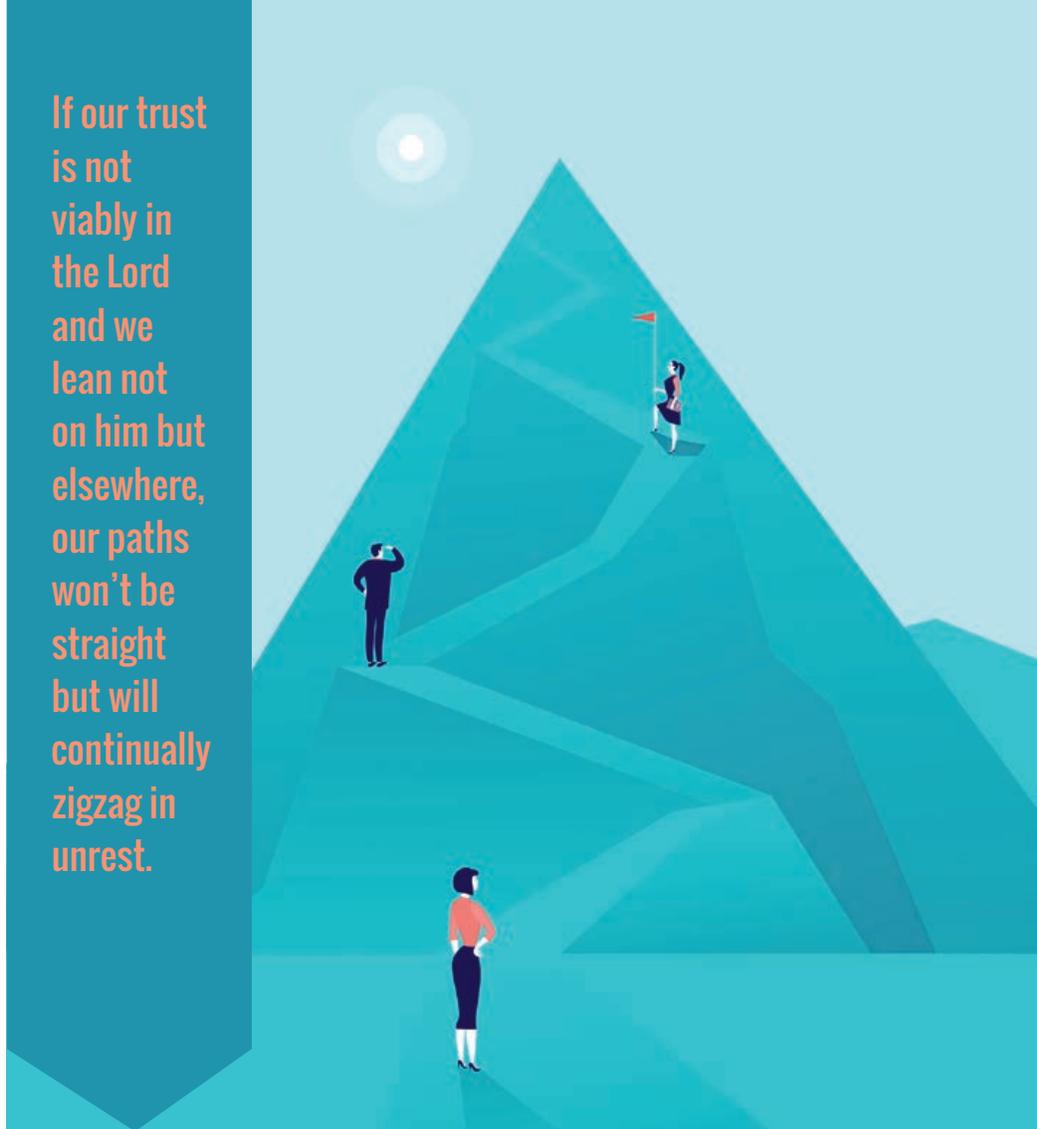
If our trust is not viably in the Lord and we lean not on him but elsewhere, our paths won't be straight but will continually zigzag in unrest.

He draws us not to the top of the mountain but to the bottom of the valley so we can see how high the mountain really is. Submit yourselves therefore to God (4:7), James tells them, if you hope to stand on the mountain.

precisely the problem. The saints to whom he's writing are not only in it—in fact, they'd like to get more deeply in it if possible—but are demonstrating traits of being of it. Their passions and desires have blurred the antithesis that they as Christians should keep clear: the divide between ultimate good and evil, light and darkness, the kingdom of God and all else that is not of his kingdom. But they are not only in the world. No, in a big way the world, James is saying, is in them.

Which World?

This is not the world of creation or simply of men's events, business and life, but as John tells us in his first letter, of the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). Anyone who makes himself a friend of these habits of the heart, James writes, makes himself an enemy of God (Jas. 4:4). Notice too that for Christians, the corollary to living this way is, in short, misery: fights and quarrels, unsatisfied desires, hatred, covetousness, and as we've



already seen, an untamed tongue, as well as partiality or injustice. If our trust is not viably in the Lord and we lean not on him but elsewhere, our paths won't be straight but will continually zigzag in unrest.

Thank God for his mercy. That's where James moves next. God yearns over the spirit that he's made to dwell in us, James writes (4:5). He yearns for the Spirit given us in our spirits, and so draws us forth with him. Believers may bury or drop into a vault the Holy Spirit's presence in their lives, even to the point of deeply grieving him. But for Christians, the Holy Spirit is always there, waiting to rise phoenix-like. That's why the apostle Paul tells his protégé, the young pastor Timothy, that the Holy Spirit is to be fanned into flame (2 Tim. 1:6). God, not we, makes himself, the Holy Spirit, living and active in us. But that doesn't mean we just

sit as couch potatoes waiting for that to happen. We are to fan the Spirit into flame.

How do we do that? James tells us. God gives more grace (Jas. 4:6). Good thing, since if it were left up to us, we'd give up. To fan a flame so that it rises means that the wood or coals in the fire need to be further consumed. God gives more grace, but to the humble (4:6), James writes, to those who are willing to have their lusts consumed away instead of continuing to have these lusts consume them. The humble are those who know who they are before God—sinners deserving his judgment, who are poor in spirit and mourn for their sin. The proud, however, will only be opposed by God.

God is the one who gives more grace, but notice, as James explains, this means he draws us not to the top of the mountain but

to the bottom of the valley so we can see how high the mountain really is. Submit yourselves therefore to God (4:7), James tells them, if you hope to stand on the mountain. But wait a minute. We're Christians. We've already been there and have done that. We already know all this. Next time I'll take a look at what these off-kilter Christians need to learn that they think they already have. It's not complex but simple, and if we're honest, we'll see we're also like these first-century believers more often than we may want to admit.

Mr. Gerry Wisz

is a writer, college instructor, and semi-retired public relations professional who, with his family, is a member of Preakness Valley URC in Wayne, NJ.



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Bible Studies on Jonah

How Revival Happens (Jonah 3:4–10)



Rev. William Boekestein

Of all the strange and unexpected details in the story of Jonah the true miracle is the revival in Nineveh. The morally clueless (4:11) people of that great city repented of their notorious wickedness and found grace in the sight of God.

We want to see more of that kind of miracle in our day and in our place, don't we?

We want those who are born into gospel-loving homes to own their sin, from the earliest age, and find refuge in the covenant-keeping God. We want those who have grown up in the church but have remained spiritually indifferent to be convicted by this truth: religious habits are not enough to make a person right before God. You must be born again! We want those who have no connection to the church to realize that they are sinners in the hands of a righteous God. We want them to seek and find Christ through the ministry of the gospel among us. We want to know the power that accomplished the greatest revival in the history of the world.

Our text invites us to witness how revivals happen. As we watch we should learn from the message of the preacher, the repentance of the sinners, and the mercy of God. And more than learning from the text we want to be transformed by the power of God's Word.

Revivals Demand a Subversive Message (3:4)

Revivals are subversive; they overthrow the status quo of unbelief. For this reason Nineveh was a perfect place for God to work a revival. Built by the great-grandson of Noah (Gen. 10:11), Nineveh was one of the oldest and greatest cities of the ancient world. During the Neo-Assyrian Empire Nineveh expanded significantly with impressive architecture and art. The city is a symbol of human accomplishment and pride. If God can work here he can work anywhere.

To this great city Jonah preached his hard sermon: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh will be overthrown" (New King James Version). It is fair to ask, How does this sermon qualify Jonah as an evangelist? How is Jonah's message good news? Calvin is right. "He did not gently lead the Ninevites to God, but threatened them with destruction, and seemed to have given them no hope of pardon."¹ From the Bible's record we can say that "a denunciation of destruction was precisely all of his commission."² In just five Hebrew words God's message through Jonah encapsulates the basic point of the ministry of the law.

Before the gospel settles our consciences the law must overthrow us. In his work of salvation God graciously uses the law to assist the elect to engage in penetrating self-examination. The law is subversive; it works to undermine the established

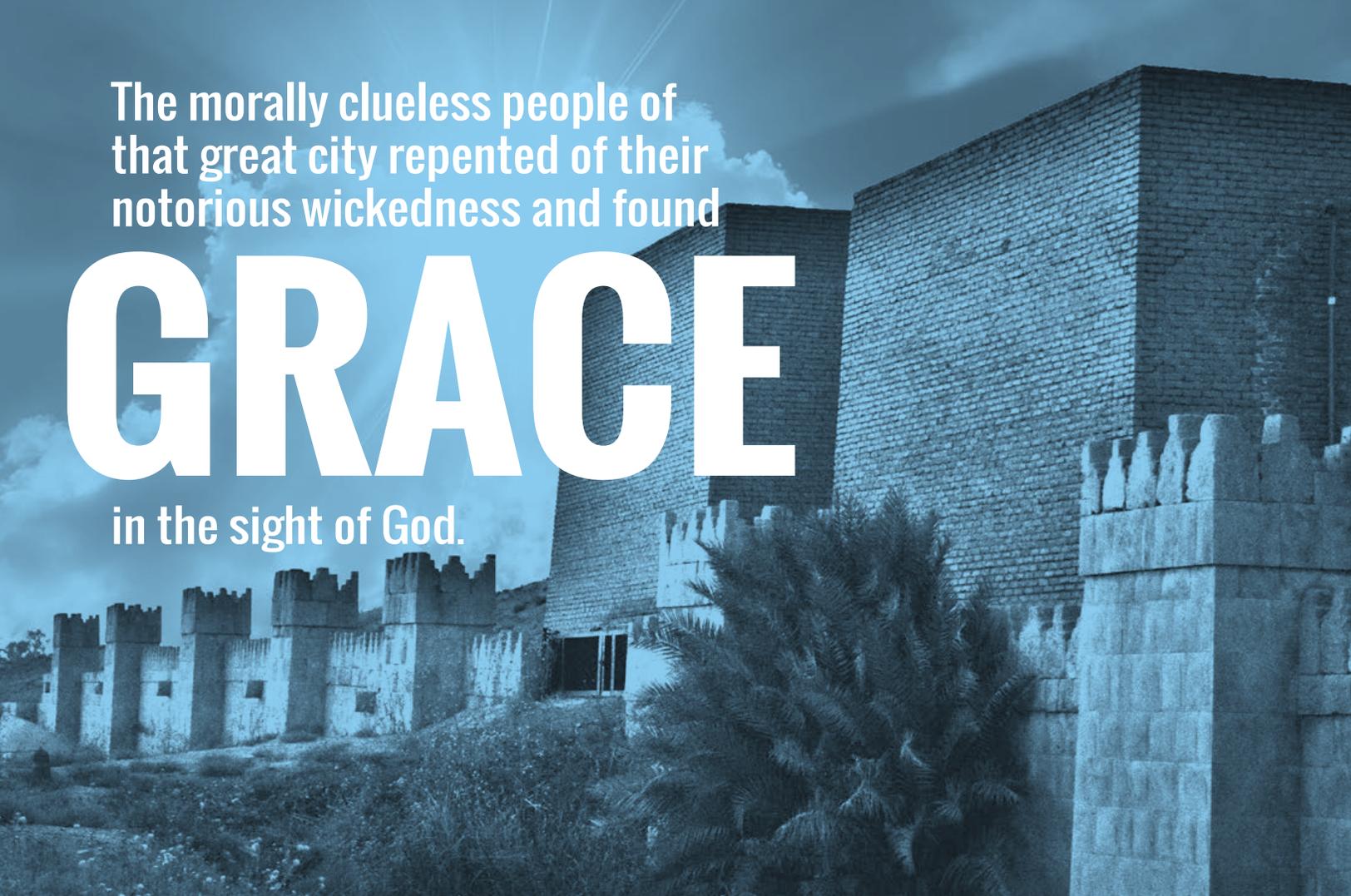
system of self-confidence. The law says that you have sinned, fallen short of God's glory (Rom. 6:23), and have earned the wages of death (Rom. 6:23). Here's how reformer Ulrich Zwingli describes how God uses hard messages like Jonah's. The law induces the elect person to find "nothing but despair. Hence wholly distrusting himself, he is forced to take refuge in the mercy of God."³ We need to know three things in order to live and die in the joy of abiding comfort. The first is how great our sins and misery are. Only when we know our sin can we be delivered from spiritual slavery into a new life of gratitude.⁴ "Unless we repent, are disgusted with ourselves, ashamed of ourselves, Christ does not become saving and valuable to us."⁵

The law declares a hidden message of grace. The God who overthrows can also pardon. David summarized the gospel in this way: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity" (Ps. 32:1–2). God is just to charge sinners with guilt for their sin. The good news is that for the sake of Christ God is also able to not implicate the guilty. What is implied in Jonah's message is explicit in Jeremiah's: "The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it" (Jer. 18:7–8).

The morally clueless people of
that great city repented of their
notorious wickedness and found

GRACE

in the sight of God.



Nineveh, Mashki Gate

The law has stopped our mouths and revealed our guilt (Rom. 3:19). The gospel invites us to turn from our sin with hope that God may relent from his threat of punishment.

Revivals Follow Sincere Repentance (3:5-9)

Repentance is hatred of sin and turning from it unto God in the light of his mercy.⁶ The revival of the Ninevites is beautiful because it documents clear and compelling repentance in response to a short and harsh sermon. Even through half-hearted, imbalanced preaching God can effect regeneration through the Spirit's influence! Scripture highlights four parts of the sincere response of the Ninevites, which serve as a model of genuine repentance today.

Repentant People Believe God's Word of Judgment (v. 5)

"From whatever preaching Jonah did," the Ninevites "gathered enough of God's true identity not only to believe in him and trust his mercy, but to recognize God's sovereignty despite" the predicament in which they found themselves.⁷ The Ninevites came to believe that they were living in God's world but not according to God's terms. They believed that he had the right to destroy them and their city. This didn't even surprise them. The law was written on their hearts. Their consciences bore witnesses. Their own thoughts accused them (Rom. 2:14-15). The most basic response to a confrontation with God is to believe him. True faith believes God even apart from the evidence one

might like (Heb. 11:1). Without believing God, there is no salvation.

The question is for each of us to answer: Do you believe God? Is he telling the truth when he says that unrepentant sinners will not inherit the kingdom of God? (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

Repentant People Grieve Their Wicked Condition (v. 8)

The Ninevites' grief was blatant; they wore it! In the ancient Near East sackcloth and ashes externalized inner grief and mourning (Job 1:20; 2:8). By donning stiff, unfashionable cloth and smudging their bodies with ashes the Ninevites weren't putting on a show. They were using the body as an auxiliary to the soul. By fasting they afflicted their bodies to bring them into harmony with their

afflicted souls. It was as if the entire city was attending a funeral. The pervasive body-and-soul grief we usually reserve for personal tragedies like death is the right response to the realization that an unrepentant life will result in our eternal death. Paul cried out in Romans, “O wretched man that I am” (7:24). Picture him in sackcloth and ashes. Sin isn’t a joke to repentant people. It is a tragedy. When confronted with their sin the Ninevites “were sorrowful, miserable, broken, and grief-stricken over their sin as they suddenly realized that their wickedness had offended God . . . A similar experience of repentance is needed today.”⁸

Repentant People Put Away Their Sin (vv. 8, 10)

A truly penitent person turns from his evil ways. Sinners cannot draw near to God simply by affirming he exists or by regretting their shortcomings. “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:8). Friends, parents, and elders might be fooled by a mere verbal profession of faith. God isn’t. The king told each Ninevite to turn from “his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands” (3:8). What is your evil way? What violence are you holding in your hand? We can’t expect salvation if we refuse to part with the sins for which Christ died.

Repentant People Appeal to God for Mercy (vv. 5, 9)

The thought of being rejected by God so horrified the Ninevites that experiencing God’s mercy became their main concern. The king’s decree asked, “Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish?” How did the people get the idea that God might

The thought of being rejected by God so horrified the Ninevites that experiencing God’s mercy became their main concern.

.....

have compassion on them? Maybe they simply reasoned from odds. Thomas Goodwin put these words in their mouths: Salvation “must be somebody’s lot . . . why not mine?”⁹ Even this modest hope “may quicken you, and stir you to cast yourselves upon his free grace, and since all is in him, to refer yourselves to his mercy, depending upon him in the use of all means.”¹⁰ Why assume that you must remain unsaved? The Ninevites didn’t. They also deduced the possibility of mercy from the prophet who had come to warn them. Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites (Luke 11:30). God had compassion on Jonah. Maybe he would have compassion on them also.

“The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here” (Matt. 12:41). The Ninevites are our sign. They teach us how to repent. They warn us to lament our sins now or to lament them forever in hell.

Revivals Depend on God’s Mercy (3:10)

“God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and he did not do it” (3:10). The Lord is not the God merely of second chances, but the God who accepts even those who have squandered their entire lives in rebellious living.

God’s relenting raises important questions. Did God change course? Is God himself repenting? Answering these questions can help us better understand God and how he saves sinners.

First, the rest of Scripture assures us that God never adjusts his intentions based on newfound information. “I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure,’ . . . Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it” (Isa. 46:9–11). God’s mercy wasn’t a new decision for God. God’s foreordination of “whatsoever comes to pass” includes his eternal decree of clemency for repentant sinners.¹¹

Second, sometimes the Bible uses anthropomorphic, or human-shaped, language to describe God. He changed his mind about destroying Nineveh in the same way that he led Israel out of Egypt by a strong hand and outstretched arm (Ps. 136:12). Calvin said that it is as if God speaks to us in baby talk. As leaders in many human fields could spin the minds of non-experts with technical jargon, so God could speak to us in ways that we could not begin to understand. But God is a communicator. God graciously condescends to help us relate to the Almighty.

Third, God’s judgment is always conditional. He promised Adam and Eve that the day that they ate the fruit they would surely die (Gen. 2:17). God presents judgment as a conditional consequence of disobedience and unbelief. God graciously sets before us life and death, blessing and curses. His judgment is always conditioned on sin.

Fourth, God didn’t change his mind; he changed the Ninevites!

The proud, wicked, atheistic people against whom he had threatened judgment ceased to exist when they were made into a new creation by God's grace.¹² God saw their works, "that they turned from their evil way" because he had changed them. God had answered for Nineveh a similar prayer to Jeremiah's: "Turn us back to You, O LORD, and we will be restored; Renew our days as of old" (Lam. 5:21).

Fifth, God didn't retract the judgment that he had promised; he redirected it. God saved Nineveh from overthrow by following through on his threat to overthrow his Son. The Ninevites did not know Christ like we do. But they had before their eyes a sign of Christ who had tasted something of God's justice. Jonah doesn't mention Christ. But Jesus' righteousness saturates this narrative. God doesn't excuse sin. He either punishes it in the sinner or in his Son.

God's judgment is terrifying.

But for believers the gospel answers that fear. Christ "has satisfied the divine justice for our trespasses. When once there is faith in Him, then salvation is found; for He is the infallible pledge of God's mercy."¹³

Questions

1. Revival is always a miracle. But what makes the revival in Nineveh particularly remarkable?
2. Describe how God uses the negative message of the law toward the salvation of the elect. How should this fact impact our personal evangelism?
3. How do the Ninevites model proper grief over sin?
4. Why must true conversion include an appeal for God's mercy in addition to grieving over and turning from the sin that exposes our ruined condition?
5. How should we understand God relenting from his threat to destroy Nineveh?
6. How can we see Christ in the mercy God showed toward Nineveh?
7. What grounds do we have for believing that the conversion of the Ninevites was genuine? (see Matt. 12:41).

1 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1989), 97.

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

3 *The Latin Works of Ulrich Zwingli*, ed. Clarence Nevin Heller, vol. 3, *Commentary on True and False Religion* (Philadelphia: The Heidelberg Press, 1929), 122–23.

4 Heidelberg Catechism, Q/A 2.

5 Zwingli, *Commentaries*, 120.

6 Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q/A 87.

7 Daniel Timmer, "Jonah and Mission: Missiological Dichotomy, Biblical Theology, and the *Via Tertia*," *Westminster Theological Journal* 70 (2008): 167.

8 Steve Lawson, "The Power of Biblical Preaching: An Expository Study of Jonah 3:1–10," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158 (July–September 2001): 343.

9 Goodwin, *Works*, 230.

10 Goodwin, *Works*, 567.

11 Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q/A 7.

12 Martin, *The Prophet Jonah*, 290.

13 Zwingli, *Commentaries*, 122–23.

Rev. William Boekestein

is the pastor of Immanuel Fellowship Church in Kalamazoo, MI.

GOOD QUESTION

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HOW CAN I HELP OTHERS REPENT?

Repentance is a change of mind that leads to a changed life. Like the prodigal son repentant sinners come to their senses and return home to God (Luke 15:17). Truly penitent people believe they are unworthy of God's kindness but that God loves them anyway. That good news changes them, empowering them to truly obey God.

We want others to repent. But only God can turn people (Lam. 5:21). Only he can change a person's attraction to sin. We can't force what only God can grant (Acts 11:18). We can't shout, argue, threaten, belittle, or bribe people into repentance. Human might is the wrong tool to reform a sinner,

the same way a sledge hammer is a poor sculpting tool. Still, sometimes we try to use sledge hammers to change others.

But God is most often pleased to work repentance through loving, patient, humble engagement. God's servants must be "able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses" and escape the devil's snare (2 Tim. 2:25).



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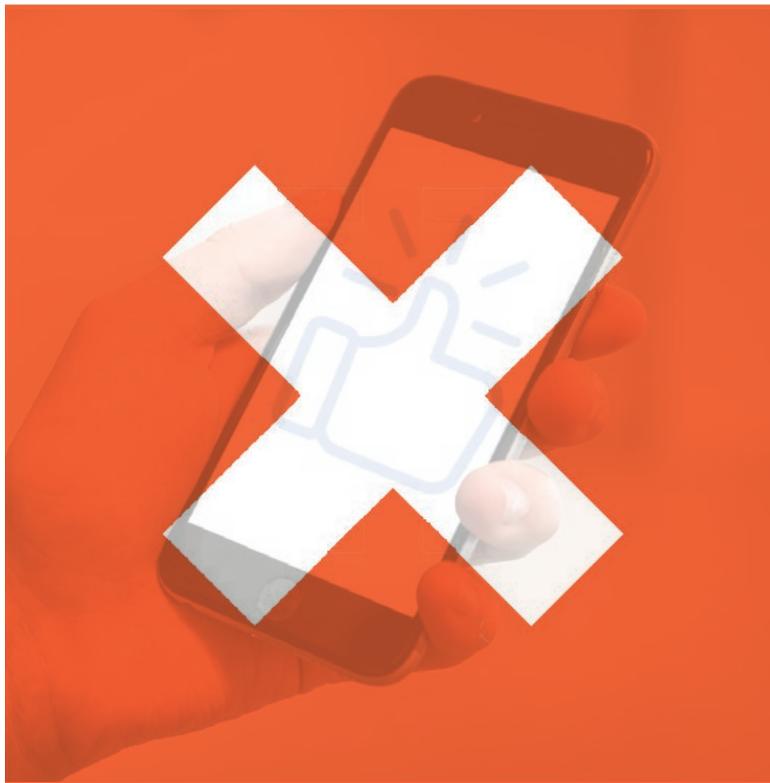
Social Media: Morally Neutral or Idolatry 101?



Mrs. Vanessa Le

When is the last time you smashed one of your idols? I'm talking about the obliterating, completely destroying, burning-it-to-the-ground kind of smashing. Like the smashing that Gideon did when he tore down his father's altar to Baal. Like the smashing the Ephesians did when Paul first preached to them and they burned their magic books that were worth fifty thousand pieces of silver.

Perhaps your idols are not like that. Maybe you think that idolatry is not an issue for you. Sure, the Old Testament Israelites seemed to have a problem with idols, but not the modern man. We don't make images or bow down to a false god. One of the psalms that we sing in our church is a rendition of Psalm 16, which goes like this: "Those running to idols will multiply griefs. I will not pour out their drink off'rings of blood, nor will I confess their vain names with my lips. The Lord's my inherited portion and cup." It would be easy to dismiss that imagery, wouldn't it? "Pour out blood to a piece of wood? That is definitely not a temptation for me. I guess I don't have to worry about idolatry." Let's consider what else the Bible teaches us about idolatry.



problem is that today's idols are sneaky. Satan has woven them into the fabric of our lives; they are not just places you can avoid. It seems the Israelites should easily have walked right past that shrine to the goddess of fertility, yet for some reason they were drawn into idol worship again and again and again. So what about us? Where are the idols in your life? Let's explore one area where idolatry loves to flourish: social media.

When we think of idolatry, we often think that it is making images or bowing down to a false god. In reality, idolatry is an issue of the heart, and modern-day American Christians commit idolatry just as much as the Old Testament Israelites did. The

Think Critically about Your Use of Technology

In Christian circles, there seems to be a general acceptance of the idea that social media is morally neutral. It can be used to harm others and promote lies, or it can be used for the

greater good of the community and to broadly disseminate God's truth. While there is some value in this perspective, perhaps this evaluation becomes an excuse for us to avoid thinking critically about our use of technology. Tim Challies says about social media,

We have accepted these media hastily and often without carefully examining them to see what ideologies are embedded deep within—ideologies that inevitably attempt to shape us as we use them. While no medium is intrinsically good or evil, each has been formed around certain ideas and certain emphases, some of which will help us and some of which will harm us. For that reason it is wise and good to examine the media we use to see how they are shaping us, not just by their content but also by their form.¹

But what about the many benefits of social media? Social media does bring many benefits to many people, especially in our world where we often live far away from family. Some of the connections with old friends are essentially meaningless, but others can facilitate a meaningful relationship. My husband found a biological brother whom he has still not met in person, through Facebook; they are forging a relationship and have started studying the Bible together. What a blessing! We can see pictures of family and friends who are far away; some people can use social media without it becoming an idol. However, for others, social media has become a big problem.

Unlike the idols in the days of Old Testament Israel, social media isn't necessarily a one-size-fits-all kind of idol. The Israelites were told, "Don't sacrifice to foreign gods, don't speak their names, don't marry the daughters of the families that believe in them." It was complete separation. For us, although complete separation

can be an option, it isn't quite as black and white; we're certainly not required to never speak the name of Twitter. Social media is not even necessarily always an idol. I know several people who use it without making it into an idol. However, it would be wise for us to consider the ways social media shapes us; are there idols that are intrinsically embedded into its format and use?

Idolatry Defined

How is social media shaping us? Is it a natural springboard for obeying God or is it prime breeding ground for idolatry? Let's start with Jesus' summary of the law in Mark 12:30 (New King James Version): "And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." This is the first commandment.

Does social media turn your heart toward God or toward idolatry? To know that, we need to know how to identify idolatry. We know idolatry is not just pouring out blood to a piece of wood, so what is it? Idolatry is loving God with a divided heart, imperfect love, incomplete worship, or alongside other gods.² In our "modern" era, Satan uses many things that are good and causes us to worship them instead of God. So how do you know if social media is stealing your heart, compromising your love for God, commanding your worship, or replacing God? Think through the following questions.

- What do I believe about the source of true happiness in this circumstance? Is it in God or in the way others make me feel? Perhaps I believe that true happiness comes from the number of friends I have, the number of likes my posts get, or the number of events I get invited to.
- Where am I looking for my identity and fulfillment? Is it in being a child of the one true King or is

it in others' evaluations of me? Perhaps I feel that I don't measure up as a mom because I don't have Facebook-worthy photos of my children, am not good at arts and crafts, or need to serve cereal for dinner sometimes.

- Which is more important to me, my comfort or God's glory? Perhaps I believe that I deserve to have some "me time" whenever I want it. There may be times when I am clearly confronted with a choice of obeying God—perhaps by reading his Word or actively loving others—but instead I purposely procrastinate because of the pull of social media.
- Why am I frustrated or upset? Is it because of sin in myself or others or is it because the universe is not revolving around me? Social media is intrinsically designed to revolve around me, my preferences, my interests and hobbies, my political interests.
- Why is social media so important to me? Perhaps I believe that my quality of life will decline if I don't use social media.

Let's answer these questions the way they should be answered if we are loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

- What do I believe about the source of true happiness in this circumstance? Is it in God or in the way others make me feel? Even if I don't get invited to events, don't get many likes for my photos, and don't have many friends, true happiness comes from having God as my portion. "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Ps. 73:25–26).
- Where am I looking for my identity and fulfillment? Is it in being a child of the one true King or is it in others' evaluations of me? I don't



have to earn the favor of others around me by conforming to their ideas of what makes me a good mom. Almost none of the things that social media emphasizes even begin to touch on faithfulness to Christ and preaching the gospel to myself and my children. Since I am united to Christ by faith, I know that God has already counted me perfectly righteous—and now I can obey him in the strength of that righteousness. “And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’” (Gal. 4:6).

- Which is more important to me, my comfort or God’s glory? God’s glory is always more important than my comfort. This doesn’t mean that every spare minute must be spent reading my Bible and praying, but it does mean that I will continually evaluate the use of my time and talents. “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15–16).
- Why am I frustrated or upset? Is it because of sin in myself or others or is it because the universe is not revolving around me? If I notice that social media causes me to be frustrated and anxious about the way things are going, either in my personal life or in the world at large, I will remind myself that God is in control, and he will receive the glory no matter what happens. “It is better to trust in the Lord than to

put confidence in man” (Ps. 118:8).

- Why is social media so important to me? My true source of meaning, fulfillment and joy should be in Christ, not in some external thing like social media. “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God” (Ps. 42:1).

A Time Killer

One way that social media divides our hearts and makes itself an idol is in regard to our use of time. I do not have a social media account because I noticed that every time I was using it, I was wasting time. I would think, “I’m just going to log on for a few minutes” and then realize later that I just spent waaaaay more time online than I had intended. The Puritans were adamant in their emphasis on the need for daily time spent in the Bible—not only reading it but also meditating on it. In fact, they said that a baby Christian should meditate for thirty minutes a day, and a more mature Christian should meditate for an hour every day. Today, most Christians think that meditation is only for super-spiritual Christians. And most American Christians are too busy and don’t have enough time. “Read the Bible and pray for thirty minutes a day? Impossible!” Yet do we never think twice about beginning and ending our day with social media? My new iPad came with an automatic screen time monitor. Every time I look at it, I am shocked. Is it possible that I spent 1 hour and 51 minutes looking at a screen today? As a specific exercise, I challenge you to

record the amount of time you spend on social media for a whole week. I think you will be surprised at how many cumulative hours are frittered away without your knowledge.

Evaluate Your Heart

Is social media morally neutral or Idolatry 101? Yes. Does social media help us grow in Christ or make it easy for us to sin? Yes. The real question is, What is social media for you? Are you serving the Lord or dabbling with idols? Next time, before you log in, take some time to evaluate whether this activity is going to divide your heart, compromise your love for God, command your worship, or replace God. And if social media is sucking your life, feel free to hit Delete. If it has truly been an idol in your life, then smashing it is the best thing that you can do.

1 Tim Challies, “When Solomon’s Fool Created a Social Media Platform,” @Challies, August 28, 2020, <https://www.challies.com/articles/when-solomons-fool-created-a-social-media-platform/>.

2 Some of the following ideas are drawn from Elyse M. Fitzpatrick, *Idols of the Heart: Learning to Long for God Alone* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002).

Mrs. Vanessa Le

is a wife and mom to four children age five and under. She enjoys reading, playing the piano, studying theology, and generally being Mommy. She is a member of Orlando Reformed Presbyterian Church in Orlando, FL.

Friendship: The Reality of Risk



Mr. Michael R. Kearney

How has your view of other human beings changed in the past twelve months?

I am writing this in the last few days of the calendar year 2020, but I expect little will be different by the time this issue reaches your hands. The past year saw the infiltration of terms like “asymptomatic,” “silent spreaders,” and “social distancing” into public discourse. More pervasive than these words, however, is the troubling underlying implication that contact with other people is a risky and irresponsible activity. “Stay home, stay safe” also suggests, “Stay away.” Keep your distance—other people are dangerous.

The awareness of the potential danger of other people is nothing new, as headlines about terrorists and child predators constantly remind us. The pandemic has merely brought this inherent risk into particular focus. And so the coronavirus offers us a unique opportunity to ponder the basic vulnerability of interpersonal relationships.

In the last issue, I described Christian friendship as a high and holy calling which offers a foretaste of the kingdom of heaven. That picture is incomplete without acknowledging that relationships, even Christian ones, also involve a considerable amount of risk. Christian friendship requires us to count the cost.

In *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making*, Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp write, “Some of our deepest joys and most painful hurts have been in relationships. There are times we wish we could live alone and other times we are glad we don’t. What is certain is that we all have been shaped significantly by relationships that are full of both sorrow and joy.”¹ Lane and Tripp’s acknowledgment is the starting point for the soul searching that should accompany any serious examination of Christian friendship. We need to understand both the fundamental brokenness of human relationships after the Fall and the transformative power of grace, forgiveness, and new life which Christ enables us to bring to such relationships.

Look Away

As we have adjusted to the incredible capabilities of modern telework and videoconferencing, there are still some things digital technology cannot replace. For example, when I Skype with a friend, we never have the shared experience of real eye contact. Because our webcams are in a different place than our screens, we see each other looking slightly away from the other person. The lack of eye contact is a constant, subtle frustration in every digital conversation.

Eye contact is an eerily powerful phenomenon. The novelist Walker Percy described looking into the eyes of another person as a “perilous” experience.² Perhaps you would agree. Prolonged eye contact with

a casual acquaintance suggests an uncomfortable level of intimacy. Yet what sustains any good conversation, even with a stranger, are those tiny rhythmic glances back and forth that assure us that some kind of genuine communication with the other person is really happening. Otherwise, our conversation takes place in an impenetrable cloud of anxiety. And although persistent staring might be considered an interpersonal problem, so too is an inability to make eye contact at all—just think of the mother who admonishes her child, “I said, *look* at me!”

The deeper issue is that eye contact comes with vulnerability. Perhaps, as you look into the eyes of the other person, you’ll catch a glimpse of something you didn’t want to see. Perhaps they’ll catch a glimpse of something similar in you. Perhaps they’ll make the decision to turn and walk away. Perhaps such a decision wouldn’t be unreasonable. The risk is tremendous. For those agonizing few seconds, everything is on the line.

But a similar level of risk also accompanies other forms of interpersonal interaction. Why do people get nervous singing in public? Is it just because they think they lack a “good singing voice”? Or is it an aural analogue to my previous observation about eye contact—the unsettling realization that as we sing, we might be baring some vulnerable part of our soul for public scrutiny?³

Because risk is a regular component of our interactions other people,

we develop a variety of everyday risk management strategies to help us cope with our vulnerabilities. We learn that it's neither practical nor safe to have a soul-baring conversation with everyone we meet on the street. We learn how to force smiles. We learn the value of small talk. We learn how to be insincere. For a select few deep friends, we might be willing to open up. But for the rest, we learn how to put up invisible shields.

Or visible ones. Hiding behind technology is another proven tactic for mitigating interpersonal risk. That's the key claim that Sherry Turkle, a behavioral researcher at MIT, has been making for years in regard to communication technologies.⁴ Apprehensive of a face-to-face encounter, we call instead and hope to leave a voicemail. Or perhaps we're so nervous at the thought of a real-time conversation that we won't even answer the phone. Instead we text: "Saw you called—what's up?" Think, too, of the pamphlets you might find in a public school health clinic warning about the dangers of "unprotected" encounters and the importance of practicing "safe sex." Whatever the context, our

culture often seeks out technological solutions to fundamentally spiritual problems.

I'll attempt to retell this story in theological terms. Hiding behind technology is an ancient reflex dating back to Adam and Eve. They called their technology fig leaves. Their clothing attempted to hide their nakedness not just from God but also from one another. The Fall not only separated humanity vertically from God; it also brought blame, shame, and conflict into horizontal relationships among humans.⁵ In the words of twentieth-century philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, "Hell is other people."⁶ From this perspective, every technological advancement represents a new attempt to come to grips with the fundamental alienation from God and one another which makes up the human condition.⁷ Our ambivalence toward eye contact, just like clothing, is a continuing reminder of the presence of shame and brokenness in our interpersonal relationships.

Vulnera is the Latin word for "wounds." Vulnerability refers to our capacity to be wounded by other people. In light of the tremendous

potential for wounds both given and received in interpersonal relationships, there may be many times when we are tempted to give up on a particular relationship or on all of them. But opting for solitude can carry its own heavy cost of loneliness and despair. So we must be wisely vulnerable—and the greatest example of wise vulnerability is our great Friend, Jesus Christ.

Where Are You?

In Psalm 55, David mourns the betrayal of a close friend: "For it is not an enemy who taunts me—then I could bear it; . . . But it is you, a man, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend. We used to take sweet counsel together; within God's house we walked in the throng" (Ps. 55:13–14, English Standard Version). Indeed, betrayal is a sadly familiar theme throughout the Book of Psalms (see Pss. 35, 38, 41, 88, and 109). These constant reminders of treacherous friends give us a window not just into David's life, but into the experiences of many faithful believers in both Testaments whose fundamental loyalty to the Lord came with great relational costs. More than that, the Psalms anticipate the moment when Christ allowed himself to be betrayed by a man within his closest circle.⁸ His example charts our course for courageous biblical friendship which comprehends how high the stakes are.

The specific example of Judas's betrayal of Jesus is merely the climax of the broader betrayal of



our covenant God which occurred in the Fall. In our natural state, individually and collectively, we fill the role of the Lord's unfaithful bride pictured throughout the Old Testament prophets.⁹ And yet the Lord keeps to his unrelenting pursuit of his people until the day when he will dwell together with us forever (Rev. 21). That pursuit began in the first question that God asked the human race. It came after Adam and Eve had just made a choice that would set off a physical and spiritual pandemic of death throughout every subsequent generation. Knowing the decision that had just been made and the consequences it carried, the Lord still came to walk in the cool of the day in the garden, ground zero of the plague. And there the all-knowing Creator of the world spoke three words which are the water of life to every soul suffering in the miserable vulnerability of the human condition: "Where are you?" (Gen. 3:9).

"For there is one God," wrote the apostle Paul, "and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). As our merciful mediator, Christ not only bridges the chasm between us and God but also breaks down dividing walls between humans (Eph. 2:11–21). Our love for the brotherhood of believers is possible only because of the redeeming and reconciling love of God. Christ is the Head who makes possible any relationship between the members of his body, here on earth as well as in heaven. Not only does he want to dwell with us; he also makes it possible for us to dwell with one another without seeking conquest or assuming victimhood in our relationships.

Returning to the imagery of fig leaves for a moment, notice that the New Testament does not speak of nakedness in heaven. Although the effects of the curse will be wiped

away, the Scriptures consistently describe the saints as clad in white robes (Rev. 6:11, 7:9–14; see 2 Cor. 5:1–5). If these robes are symbolic of the righteousness that is ours in Jesus Christ, they also suggest something of the relationship to fellow believers that we are promised in the life to come. We are to see one another first and foremost as redeemed sinners whom Christ has gathered together under his banner. The robes of righteousness that Jesus provides for me are infinitely better than the rags of my own attempts to insulate myself from risk. That vision of the saints clothed in white enables me to lay down my pride, my preferences, and my positions for the sake of the other person, because Jesus has already laid down everything for me.

Coronavirus as a Case Study

This article is not meant to be a critique of the variety of responses to the pandemic that have developed over the past year. Nevertheless, seeking technological coverings for the physical and spiritual nakedness of the human condition has become an even more prevalent habit in a post-coronavirus world. After all, the big questions today are whether you've been exposed and whether you've exposed other people. So, too, we take refuge in the hope of vaccine technologies that will enable a "normal" future. Perhaps, by God's grace, these technologies will succeed. But when we ignore deeper spiritual decay and mask it with a technological covering, we sacrifice being human for the sake of being perfectly safe. We win the battle while losing the war.

Listen to those deep longings that stir inside you during this time of temporary isolation. Hear the beautiful reality to which they point: We were made for body-and-soul friendships with other incarnate human beings. And what sustains those friendships is not the absence

of risk but the presence of love—love that lays down all, just as Christ our Savior did. Love protects the vulnerable, as the social distancing measures we've been patiently enduring were designed to do. And love also knows that staying away is ultimately neither the best nor the final answer.

1 Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp, *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2008), 6.

2 Walker Percy, *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1983), 8.

3 This calls to mind the scene from the movie *Elf* in which Buddy tries to prove how easy it is to sing in public by intoning, "I'm in a store, and I'm singing!" What is it that makes Buddy such an innocently comedic character, for that matter? Isn't it the fact that he has no conception of interpersonal risk?

4 Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011); Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin, 2015).

5 Francis A. Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1972), 98–101.

6 Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit*, <http://vtheatre.net/script/doc/sartre.html>.

7 For a fuller discussion, see Michael R. Kearney, "Communion with Babylon: Alienation, Sacralization, and Hope in Ellul's *Technological Society*," *Journal of Communication and Religion* 41, no. 2 (2018): 58–74.

8 Note that the apostle Peter specifically interprets Psalms 69 and 109 as prophecies of the betrayal of Jesus by Judas (Acts 1:16–20).

9 Rut Etheridge III, *God Breathed: Connecting through Scripture to God, Others, the Natural World, and Yourself* (Pittsburgh: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2019), 280–82.

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.

For Their 70th Anniversary, Reformed Fellowship Will Publish a New Book for the Occasion

This book will consist of articles found in early issues of the *Torch and Trumpet* (now *The Outlook*). These articles are timeless treasures from the past, and are relevant for the present and the future.



To Whet Your Appetite

- “Peter” Palmer
- *Sunday Morning – 1900*
- C. John Miller
- *Love and Sentiment*
- Katie Gunnink
- *The Christian’s Supreme Calling*

The Bible

- William Hendriksen
- *The Truth about the Bible*
- Harry Mulder
- *Are There Discrepancies in the Gospels?*
- Oswald T. Allis
- *The Time Element in Genesis 1 and 2*
- Edward J. Young
- *The Nature of Genesis 1*
- Peter de Jong
- *John Wycliff and the Road to Church Reform*

Biblical Doctrines

- Leonard Greenway
- *How Modernism Enters the Churches*
- Peter Y. de Jong
- *The Covenant Idea in the Reformed Churches*
- Alexander C. de Jong
- *Covenant Consciousness*

Roman Catholicism

- Edward Tanis
- *The Roman Catholic Challenge*
- Gordon Spykman
- *“Ave Maria”*
- *Only One Name—or Mary’s Also?*

Worship

- Johannes G. Vos
- *Are Bones a Luxury?*
- Edward B. Pekelder
- *Why Do Not Our Ministers Preach Catechism?*

- William Hendriksen
- *Catechism Preaching*
- John de Jong
- *“Prepare to Meet Thy God”*
- William Kok
- *Preparation for Worship*
- *The Place of the Decalogue in Divine Worship*
- *Baptism*
- *Self-Examination and the Lord’s Supper*
- “Peter” Palmer
- *The Pinanskis Go to Church*

Reformed Evangelism

- Alexander C. de Jong
- *Personal Witnessing (Part One)*
- *Personal Witnessing (Part Two)*
- Katie Gunnink
- *Calvinism and Passion for Souls*

Church Government

- Peter Wobbema
- *An Elder Views the Eldership*
- Peter Y. de Jong
- *Needed—Wide-awake Elders!*
- *Preaching and the Elders*
- Henry J. Kuiper
- *Use and Misuse of “Matthew 18”*

Education

- John H. Piersma
- *Christian Schools and Christian Missions*
- Walter A. de Jong
- *Are Non-Academic Students Dull?*

The Christian Home and Family

- Peter Y. de Jong
- *Living the Covenant Life in Our Families*
- Edward Herema
- *A Social Code for Young Teen-agers and Their Parents*
- Leonard Greenway
- *Ye Fathers!*

- “Peter” Palmer
- *Occupation . . . Housewife and Mother*
- Pearl Tadema
- *Praying Mothers*
- Grace Bruinsma
- *Spiritually Yours*
- Henry J. Kuiper
- *The Future Of Our Family Altars*
- *Can We Improve Our Family Altars?*
- Mark Vander Ark
- *How to Teach Sunday School*

Meditations

- Leonard Greenway
- *Devotional Studies in Ephesians*
- *An Apostle of Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:1)*
- *Saints (Eph. 1:1,2)*
- *Blessed Be God! (Eph. 1:3–5)*
- *Redemption Through Christ’s Blood (Eph. 1:7)*
- *The Mystery of God’s Will (Eph. 1:9,10)*
- *Sealed With the Spirit (Eph. 1:13,14)*
- *The Head of the Church (Eph. 1:22,23)*
- *Dead in Trespasses and Sins (Eph. 2:1–3)*
- *Saved By Grace (Eph. 2:8,9)*
- *God’s Workmanship (Eph. 2:10)*
- *Christ in Our Place (Eph. 2:13–19)*
- *Strong in the Lord (Eph. 6:10,11a)*
- *The Wiles of the Devil (Eph. 6:11)*
- *The Belt of Truth and the Breastplate of Righteousness (Eph. 6:14)*
- *Our Shoes and Our Shield (Eph. 6:15,16)*
- *Helmet and Sword (Eph. 6:17)*
- *Praying Soldiers (Eph. 6:18–20)*

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How to Help Children Know the Word (Part 1)



Dr. Joel R. Beeke

You have probably heard the saying that the most important things we learn are caught rather than taught. In other words, students often learn more from the demeanor, actions, and character of the teacher than from the content of the lesson. This is a key perspective in communicating big truths to little hearts, for if children do not see Christians modeling what they teach, big truths will have little impact. We parents are called to communicate eternal truths to our children out of the overflow of an intimate, accountable, and obedient walk with God.

Let's consider how to communicate big truths to little hearts by teaching children theology through Bible study, family devotions, and singing God's Word together.

Teaching Children Theology through Bible Study

The word *theology* may sound like the academic accumulation of facts about God. But William Ames said that "theology is the doctrine or teaching of living to God."¹ Theology is about learning to live the new life in Christ, which requires instruction in the character and will and work of God.

The Bible perfectly lays out all we need for theology, life, and godliness by its own presentation of the fourfold drama of salvation—creation, fall, redemption, and new creation. We can present all the topics of theology to our children by exposing them, over and over again, to the treasure trove of stories, commands, poetry, laws, proverbs, biographies, prophecies, and letters that the Bible yields. The Bible is sufficient to address

all the key questions of theology—who God is, where we came from, what went wrong with humankind, how God is redeeming sinners, how we ought to live as Christians, and what final things God is accomplishing. Let us, then, observe three guidelines to keep in mind as we teach theology to our children through Bible study.

1. Teach children the whole counsel of God, both law and gospel. Be determined over a period of approximately two decades of family worship to teach your children the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). As you teach your children God's precious truth, you are to address the mind, the conscience, the heart, and the will of each of your children. The best way to do this is to begin in family worship—eventually reading through the whole Bible with them and looking for situations in daily life to reinforce biblical teaching. In particular, we should let both the law and the gospel determine the way we administer discipline in the home.

Major on the basics. Teach your children about each Bible book's major theme and how each book reveals who God is and how he leads us as needy sinners to Jesus Christ. Teach them the origin, comprehensiveness, and seriousness of sin and the necessity of the new birth and personal repentance and faith in Christ alone for salvation. Teach them about the atoning blood of Christ and its efficacious power. Present the whole Christ to your children—tell them about his person and natures, his offices and states, and his beauty and all-sufficiency. Teach them about God's call to holiness and obedience and how to live a lifestyle of thankfulness. Set before them the reality

of death, the solemnity of judgment, the joy of heaven, the dreadfulness of hell, and the eternality of eternity. As J. C. Ryle said, "Fill their minds with Scripture. Let the Word dwell in them richly. Give them the Bible, the whole Bible, even while they are young."² A whole Bible makes a whole Christian.

2. Teach by catechizing. Creeds and catechisms are valuable tools by which we may communicate the truths of the Bible to our children. They provide concise definitions of basic doctrines, which our children can easily memorize, accompanied by Bible references that anchor them in Scripture. Catechisms cast basic Christian instruction in the form of questions and answers (Acts 18:25), which gives opportunity for further explanation and Bible study through Scripture proofs. Today, we have largely delegated the responsibility of catechizing our children to the church, but this should not replace family worship. By regular catechizing, fathers will have led their families through the whole field of biblical truth in a year or two. Then they can start over again, and by the time young people leave home, they will have made this journey several times. These truths will have become ingrained into their souls, where the Spirit can convict their consciences, call their hearts to true faith, and stir their wills to bring forth godly fruit.

3. Teach with passionate love. When a prophet spoke on behalf of God to his people, the message from God filled him with such intense passion that he cannot help but speak, as when Jeremiah said, "His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones" (Jer. 20:9, King



James Version). Amos, a farmer whom God called to prophesy, said, “The lion hath roared. . . . The Lord GOD hath spoken, who can but prophesy?” (Amos 3:8).

Our children must understand that we love their souls more than anything else on earth. As Ryle said, “Love is one grand secret of successful training. Soul love is the soul of all love.”³ Many times, my dad wept as he taught us the truths of God. He often said with tears, “Children, I cannot miss any of you in heaven.” Aim to teach in a way your children can understand; be plain in meaning and style. Be experiential, relevant in application, affectionate in manner. Reach down into the life of your children by using age-appropriate illustrations and concrete concepts. Foster a conversational approach to family worship, asking questions and encouraging your children to respond. Don’t leave them on the receiving end of religious things, but help them to actively think about and communicate biblical truth. Encourage them to ask questions; search for answers together as a family. Have one or more good commentaries on hand. Remember, if you don’t provide answers for your children, they will get them elsewhere—and often, those will be wrong answers.

Teaching Children through Family Devotions

Family worship has fallen on hard times. Parents often say they are too busy to do it. Or else, they don’t know how to do it because their parents never did it.

When my parents commemorated their fiftieth anniversary, all five of us children decided to express thanks to our father and mother for one thing without consulting each other. Remarkably, all five of us thanked our mother for her prayers, and all five of us thanked our father for his leadership of our special Sunday evening family worship. My brother said, “Dad, when I was three years old, God used you in family worship to convict me that Christianity was real. No matter how far I went astray in later years, I could never seriously question the reality of Christianity, and I want to thank you for that.”

Family worship has been a potent force in winning untold millions to gospel truth throughout the ages. We should not be surprised, then, that God requires heads of households to do all they can to lead their families in worshiping the living God. As Joshua declared, “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Josh. 24:15). This word *serve* is translated as *worship* many times in Scripture.

Family worship will require some preparation. You should pray for God’s blessing upon that worship. Have your Bibles ready and a Scripture passage selected. Catechisms and books of questions and answers for children are very helpful. Sometimes you might read through a book like John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* or *Holy War* and discuss it together. Choose some psalms and hymns that are easy to sing. Pick a place to gather, such as the kitchen table or living room. Set the times for family worship as it fits your family’s needs—ordinarily at breakfast and dinner. Whatever times you establish, carefully guard those times like a precious jewel.

During family worship, aim for brevity. Be consistent. It is better to have twenty minutes of family worship every day than to try for extended periods on fewer days.

Lead family worship with a firm, fatherly hand and a soft, penitent heart. Speak with hopeful solemnity. Talk naturally yet reverently during this time, using the tone you would use when speaking to a deeply respected friend about a serious matter. Expect great things from a great covenant-keeping God.

According to Scripture, God should be served in special acts of worship in families today in the following three ways.

Daily Instruction in the Word of God

God should be worshiped by daily reading and instruction from his Word. Through questions, answers, and instructions, parents and children are to interact daily with each other about sacred truth. As Deuteronomy 6:6–7 says, “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.”

When reading and teaching the Bible as a family, consider these suggestions.

- 1.** Have a reading plan. Read ten or twenty verses from the Old Testament in the morning and ten to twenty from the New Testament in the evening. Or read a series of parables, miracles, or historical portions. Just be sure to read the entire Bible over a period of time.
- 2.** Involve the family. Every family member who can read should have a Bible to follow along. Set the tone by reading Scripture with expression, as the living, breathing book it is. Assign various portions to be read by your wife and your children. Teach your children how to read articulately and with expression.
- 3.** Be plain in meaning. Ask your children if they understand what you are reading. Be plain in applying scriptural texts. The 1647 Church of Scotland Directory for Family Worship wisely teaches us that if a sin is rebuked in the Word, then call the family to keep watch against it; if a judgment is threatened, warn them of it; if a duty is commanded, press it upon them; if a promise is offered, then urge them to trust it and receive its comfort.
- 4.** Encourage family dialogue around God’s Word in line with the Hebraic procedure of household question and answer (see Ex. 12:26–27; 13:14–15). That’s where this family worship Bible guide can help you. Read aloud with

your family the thoughts for each Bible chapter each day. Dialogue about the thoughts expressed. Answer the questions asked. Especially encourage teenagers to ask questions; draw them out. If you don’t know the answers, tell them so, and encourage them to search for answers. Have one or more good commentaries on hand, such as those by John Calvin, Matthew Poole, and Matthew Henry.

- 5.** Be pure in doctrine. Titus 2:7 says, “In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity.” Don’t abandon doctrinal precision when teaching young children; aim for simplicity and soundness.
- 6.** Be relevant in application. Don’t be afraid to share your experiences when appropriate, but do that simply and concisely. Use concrete illustrations. Ideally, tie together biblical instruction with what you recently heard in sermons.
- 7.** Be affectionate in manner. Proverbs continually uses the phrase “my son,” showing the warmth, love, and urgency in the teachings of a God-fearing father. When you must administer the wounds of a friendly father to your children, do that with heartfelt love. Tell them you must convey the whole counsel of God because you can’t bear the thought of spending eternity apart from them. Tell your children, “We will allow you every privilege an open Bible will allow us to give you—but if we say no to you, you must know that flows out of our love.”

Daily Prayer before the Throne of God

Again, let me offer some specific guidelines for leading the family in prayer.

- 1.** Be short. With few exceptions, don’t pray for more than five minutes. Tedious prayers do more harm than good. Don’t teach in your prayer; God doesn’t need the instruction. Teach with your eyes open; pray with your eyes shut.
- 2.** Be simple without being shallow. Pray for things that your children know something about, but don’t allow your

prayers to become trivial. Don’t reduce your prayers to self-centered, shallow petitions.

- 3.** Be direct. Spread your needs before God, plead your case, and ask for mercy. Name your children and their needs one by one on a daily basis. That holds tremendous weight with them.
- 4.** Be natural yet solemn. Speak clearly and reverently. Don’t use an unnatural, high-pitched voice or a monotone. Don’t pray too loudly or softly or too fast to be understood or too slow to hold attention.
- 5.** Be varied. Don’t pray the same thing every day; that becomes tedious. Develop more variety in prayer by remembering and stressing the various ingredients of true prayer, such as calling on God to hear your prayers, adoring God for his titles and attributes, declaring your humble dependence and need, confessing family sins, asking for family mercies (both material and spiritual), interceding for friends, churches, and the nations, giving thanks for God’s blessings, and blessing God for his kingdom, glory, and power. Use a prayer list to remember different persons and organizations on different days. Mix these ingredients with different proportion to get variety in your prayers.

Perhaps you struggle teaching God’s Word in family worship and don’t feel gifted in this area. But be encouraged: your skill will increase with practice.

1 William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1997), 3.

2 J. C. Ryle, *The Duties of Parents* (Conrad, MT: Triangle, 1993), 10–11.

3 Ryle, *Duties of Parents*, 9.

Dr. Joel R. Beeke

is president and professor of systematic theology and homiletics at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, a pastor of the Heritage Reformed Congregation in Grand Rapids, MI, and a prolific author and frequent conference speaker.

Teaching Children to Sing God's Truth (Part 2)



Mrs. Hope Staal



Dr. Joel R. Beeke

There are some practical ways the faithful family can pursue learning deep truths through singing the beautiful hymns and psalms of the church. Even very small children can learn melodies quickly, and they tend to memorize words easily when set to music. This makes the psalms and classic music of the church a wonderful way to teach your children theology that will stay with them all their lives.

Let's first consider a few basic truths about music that will be foundational to parents teaching children to sing the songs of the church, then some benefits you may expect from singing in your family life and in your children's future lives, and finally, some practical helps for how to do this.

Basic Biblical Truths about Singing Psalms and Classic Hymns

First, here are some general contrasts between a secular and a biblical worldview of music. The secular world thinks of music as an expression of human talent, but God made music to express who he is. The secular world thinks of music as a way to glorify an individual singer or performing group, but God made music to unite us in his praise. The secular world thinks of music as entertainment for us, but God made music to be a sincere communication of heartfelt truths about himself. In short, the secular world sees music as horizontal activity, from human to human, but God made music primarily as a vertical expression of praise from his creation to himself. This is helpful for the family learning to sing together, for a

vertical emphasis on singing can remove so much pressure and anxiety from us. Rather than feeling a need to perform, your children—and perhaps you as well—can have freedom to rejoice in the Lord, using the wonderful tool he has given us, the gift of music.

Second, your children need regular instruction, correction, and encouragement from you to see singing in a biblical way. To help you with this task, here are some positive biblical truths about music in general and singing in particular.

- 1.** God created music for his glory. Singing is a primary way we may show our delight in our wonderful God. Psalm 147:1 says, "Praise ye the LORD: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely."
- 2.** We are commanded to sing. More than fifty times in the Bible God commands us to praise him with singing; in fact, this is one of God's most prominent commands in all Scripture. Psalm 47:6 says, "Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises unto our King, sing praises"—that's four imperatives to sing in one verse! It's clear God expects every one of his children to praise him in this way. Point your children frequently to these commands.
- 3.** God is pleased by the sincere praise of his people. Ephesians 5:19 commands us to sing and make melody to the Lord with our hearts. This is especially encouraging for those of us who feel less qualified in this area. Because God looks on the heart rather than on the outward appearance, he is able to discern when praise is from the heart, and this is very

sweet to him, no matter how sweet or sour our own efforts may sound to us.

- 4.** Singing is essentially corporate in nature, a form of communication. Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the Word of Christ God dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." We minister to one another and to our children when we sing together. It's important for your children to learn that they, too, can minister to others in this way.
- 5.** Music and singing are powerful to engage both heart and mind. Memorization of poetry, particularly poetry set to music, such as the psalms and hymns, has been a key element of literacy education for centuries. The music of David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, calmed Saul's troubled spirit (1 Sam. 16). Since music is a powerful force that opens our hearts, we must be very aware what gets into the hearts of our children through music.
- 6.** Singing is one of the major eternal activities we can engage in on this earth (Rev. 5:8–11). What a privilege! When we sing God's praise, we are joining with the church of all the ages. There is truly a timelessness to singing, which is one of the many reasons it seems the classic songs of God's people never grow old. How can they? We will sing such praises throughout eternity.

You will find that as you and your children grow in understanding of a biblical approach to singing, it will become very encouraging to your whole family.



Benefits of Singing the Psalms and Classic Hymns

Here are some thoughts about the benefits of focusing on psalms and classic hymns in your family worship, particularly as you teach your children to commit them to memory.

1. Being steeped in Scripture and theological instruction. There is a wonderful history of using psalms and hymns to educate church members, especially children. The Psalms are filled to bursting with theology. Nothing accomplishes God's theological commending of his own glory more effectively than the Psalms. But classic God-centered hymns come a close second. Martin Luther was a gifted composer who wrote hymns in four parts—especially, he said, to keep young people out of trouble. This tradition would continue with hymn writers such as Isaac Watts, who was extraordinarily gifted in writing beautiful poetry to express the beauty of God and his work. Over the centuries, hymnody has followed the trends of the church, and as the doctrines of grace became less valued, hymns become shallower in their content. However, many of those

classic old hymns have stood the test of time, while less valuable songs have been forgotten. We are seeing a return today to hymns with rich gospel content among some modern hymn writers such as the Gettys. Such hymns are valuable as memory aids for your children and will often sink deep into their hearts for a lifetime.

2. Learning emotional integrity and intelligence. John Calvin said the Psalms were an anatomy of all parts of the human soul. They contain every emotion, every life circumstance, every impulse of our heart; they are directed Godward so gloriously. The Psalms are a place to which we can turn to teach our children about godly emotion; here we find human emotions examined as if under the microscope of the Holy Spirit himself. The Psalms are so lively, warm, and full of the gospel that when they are sung, they have remarkable, divine power to train our responses. In Scripture, singing is associated with many of our strongest emotions—joy, gratitude, grief, even anger. Don't be afraid to make this part of your family life, especially when strong feelings need to be processed.

3. Rooting protective truth deep in the heart before the mind is able to comprehend. Our children may be too young to understand all the words contained in the Psalms and classic hymns, but they will remember the words all their lives. Gloria Gaither likens memorized psalm and hymn lyrics of biblical truth to a lifeline that comes to us when we are in serious trouble and then says, "If we don't hide [psalms and hymns] in our hearts before we need them, then they won't be there to pull us out when we do need them." The Psalms remind us of what God has done for us in the past and has promised for the future. God often uses them to protect the hearts and minds of his people while battling depression.

Practical Tips

Having discussed the theology of music and the benefits of singing the classic psalms and hymns of the church, here are some practical helps to incorporate them into your family worship and family life:

1. Have a positive attitude. If singing is a chore for you, that will transmit to your children as well. While it's true that singing God's praise is an act of

obedience, it is also intended to be from the heart. The biblical model for true obedience is that of joyful obedience—be joyful in this!

2. Begin simply. Whether you have a degree in classical singing or find it intimidating to sing even in church, the simple approach is best. Find psalms and hymns suited to your children's ages and abilities, then introduce them to your children one at a time.

3. Have a system and a plan. What will you sing, and how will you choose the songs? Will you ask children to choose favorites, ask for advice from musicians or teachers, or work on a song you remember from your childhood? When will you sing? Even where you sing can be important. Will it be around a piano in the living room or around the kitchen table? This may depend on whether you have a pianist in the family or are confident enough to sing a capella. You might also use recorded music to help you.

4. Don't be afraid to be interactive with your children while singing, especially when they are very young. Speak the words as well as sing them. Use memory games: Can you fill in the word? Can you make up your own rhyme? These are highly effective tools for literacy, and the words memorized will also build your child's spiritual literacy, which is even more significant.

5. Guard your ears and the ears of your children. Remember, serving God is something we do in all of life, and your children learn that by watching you. So, just as you wouldn't listen to worldly lectures with swearing or unholy topics or watch movies with unbiblical themes, you show wisdom by making discerning choices in what music you listen to. Secular song genres are not only likely to be unhelpful to your children's musical development; they are also full of ungodly worldviews, and they train your children's minds and hearts as well as their ears. It's possible this may require a change of life and heart for you, as you examine whether to continue listening to music you've enjoyed all your life. If that's you, ask yourself these questions: Would I give my child into the care of the person singing these lyrics? Would I trust this person to be responsible for my child? Would I have confidence for my child's eternal future if this singer or group were responsible to lead their hearts to Christ? (Remember, music is powerful; you are exposing your child's heart to the influence of every artist they hear.)

6. Incorporate these psalms and classic hymns into your family life. Listen to singable, God-glorifying music with your children. Many modern music styles are not designed to be sung by the average individual and require professional abilities and supportive

accompaniment. If we want to teach our children to sing, we need to sing good lyrics full of biblical truth set to a solid tune that sticks in the mind. This is true of most songs composed for congregational singing, so if you use a psalter or hymnal to find songs for your family, you are likely to be successful. Since the Christian faith is a holistic and all-encompassing commitment to live to God in all of life, remember that music is not just what comes out but also what goes in. If we expect to teach our children to use their voices in praise of God, we need to be sure the music they listen to is also praising and glorifying to him.

Mrs. Hope Staal

holds a bachelor of Music and an MS in Library Science; she currently freelances as a choral director, voice teacher, and writing teacher. A full-time homemaker, Hope resides in Grand Rapids, MI, with her family and is a member of Bethany URC in Wyoming, MI.

Includes edits by

Dr. Joel R. Beeke

is president and professor of systematic theology and homiletics at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, a pastor of the Heritage Reformed Congregation in Grand Rapids, MI, and a prolific author and frequent conference speaker.

Beautiful music is the art of the prophets that can calm the agitations of the soul; it is one of the most magnificent and delightful presents God has given us.

Next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world.


Martin Luther



4 Four Places to Look When Facing Criticism



Dr. Joel R. Beeke and Rev. Nick Thompson

If you are in pastoral ministry or some other form of leadership, criticism is inevitable. At times, criticism can result in exasperation, insomnia, cynicism, burnout, and even despair. It is imperative for pastors and leaders to be equipped to handle verbal or written critique when it comes. Whether the criticism is constructive or destructive, receiving and responding to it well is largely a matter of perspective. Where ought we to turn our eyes when criticism comes? Here are four suggestions.

1 THE GARDEN OF EDEN. It was here that the first criticism was uttered. By his words, the serpent placed a major question mark over the goodness of God, slandering him as a restrictive, envious, unloving liar (see Gen. 3:1–5). When we suffer from the false accusations and character-disfiguring words of others, our minds should be quick to return to this grim garden conspiracy. It is one thing for creatures like us to be criticized by fellow creatures, but it is the atrocity of atrocities for the Creator of all things to be verbally assassinated by a mere creature.

2 THE CROSS OF CHRIST. Nothing will keep us humble and enable us to receive criticism like Christ's cross. To behold Christ suffering upon the accursed tree is to be critiqued in the most comprehensive way imaginable. The cross reminds us that we are always worse than our worst human critic makes us out to be. But as we behold the cross, we also catch a glimpse of the unfathomable love of God for sinners. The cross humbles us lower than the most scathing human criticism, but it simultaneously opens to us God's heart so that the negative and false appraisals of our fellow man no longer devastate us.

3 THE JUDGMENT DAY. The apostle writes, "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court" (1 Cor. 4:3, English Standard Version). How many of us could say that? To be judged, misunderstood, slandered, or condemned by others is anything but "a very small thing." We are easily consumed by the verdict of a human court. But Paul is not. He is almost entirely indifferent to the matter. What is the verdict that matters ultimately? It is God's: "It is the Lord who judges me" (v. 4). Such an eschatological perspective frees us from being consumed with the human courtroom we often find ourselves in. What is the judgment of man in light of the judgment of God?

4 THE NEW HEAVENS AND EARTH. Those who are in Christ are journeying toward what Jonathan Edwards called "a world of love." The cosmos ushered in at the consummation will be entirely free of criticism. In our glorified humanity, there will be nothing in us worthy of criticism, nor will there be anyone who possesses the ability to criticize us unjustly. All criticism will be forever silenced. Fixing our eyes on this glorious future loosens our grip on our reputation, our comfort, and our life, enabling us to bear up under the critical words of others as we walk this earthly pilgrimage.

This article is adapted from Joel R. Beeke and Nick Thompson, *Pastors and Their Critics: A Guide to Coping with Criticism in the Ministry* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2020).

Dr. Joel R. Beeke

is president and professor of systematic theology and homiletics at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, a pastor of the Heritage Reformed Congregation in Grand Rapids, MI, and a prolific author and frequent conference speaker.

Rev. Nick Thompson

is a graduate of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary who was ordained into the ministry in the Cornerstone Presbyterian Church (Orthodox Presbyterian Church) in Chattanooga, TN.

Book Review—The Way of Salvation



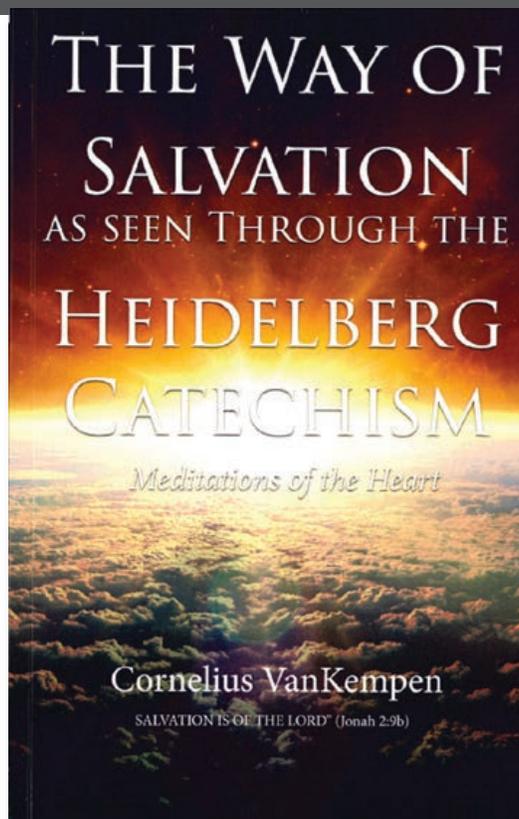
Rev. Jonathan Landry Cruse

The Way of Salvation As Seen Through the Heidelberg Catechism: Meditations of the Heart, Cornelius Van Kempen. 2017. 224 pages. Paperback. \$13.99.

The Way of Salvation As Seen Through the Heidelberg Catechism delivers precisely what the title promises. In this devotional meditation, Cornelius VanKempen draws out the doctrines of salvation in Jesus Christ through this beloved and enduring seventeenth-century doctrinal confession. Much like the Scriptures they teach, the classic Reformed standards seem to be inexhaustible sources of study and reflection, and those wishing to grasp more of the riches of the Heidelberg Catechism will find VanKempen's work a welcome addition to the already impressive library of literature on the subject. Let me highlight four strengths of the volume.

Brief. The book is in the truest sense devotional. VanKempen does not get lost in the weeds, so to speak, when handling any of the rich doctrines of the catechism. He says just enough to prompt fruitful reflection, but not too much to eclipse any sort of personal study. Each Lord's Day devotional is about a page long.

Scriptural. One easy pitfall for the Reformed is to love our confessions more than we love the Scriptures which the



confessions unpack for us. VanKempen doesn't allow this to happen. Each meditation is saturated in biblical teaching and is replete with biblical references (helpfully highlighted by the fact that all Scripture passages are in italics). This helps the reader learn the biblical truths that are the foundation for the Heidelberg and see how all of the Bible proclaims the one message of man's sinful condition and the need for salvation in Christ alone.

Christ-centered. Building off this last point, I appreciated that VanKempen intentionally labored to draw out the Heidelberg's emphasis on salvation in Christ alone. This is particularly clear in the early chapters explaining man's misery and our only escape from death. But even in later pages opening up the Ten Commandments, VanKempen consistently shows their fulfillment in Christ.

Evangelistic. A wonderful surprise was that this little book is written with the understanding that not everyone who picks it up will have a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. Perhaps VanKempen is writing from his personal experience—though for many years he was outwardly religious, his heart was not changed. So he explains the doctrines simply for those who have never encountered them before. He explains, through the helpful imagery of the surgeon, how God works in our lives to reveal sin and bring the remedy of the Son. And he occasionally will prompt the reader with convicting and piercing questions: "Have you met this Divine Surgeon who has promised never to forsake the works of His own hands?"

Structured around the catechism's fifty-two Lord's Days, *The Way of Salvation* will serve as a edifying year-long walk through this beautiful Reformed confession, reminding readers that their only comfort in life and in death is that they belong to God through Jesus Christ.

Rev. Jonathan Landry Cruse

pastors Community Presbyterian Church
in Kalamazoo, MI.

Book Reviews



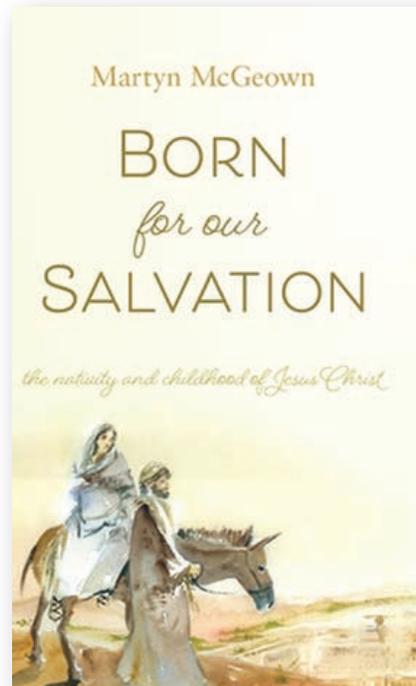
Rev. Jerome Julien

Born for Our Salvation: The Nativity and Childhood of Jesus Christ, Martyn McGeown. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2019. 279 pages. Hardback. \$26.95.

<https://rfpa.org>

It is well-known that the Gospel accounts are *not* biographies of our Lord's life on this earth. We know that only two Gospels, Matthew and Luke, give us the account of the earliest days and years of our Savior's sojourn on earth. The reason for this part of the Gospel accounts is just as the title puts it: He was *Born for Our Salvation*. In every way the author has made this clear.

Rev. McGeown has done an excellent job of writing about



Christ's early life on earth. He has worked hard to give the necessary

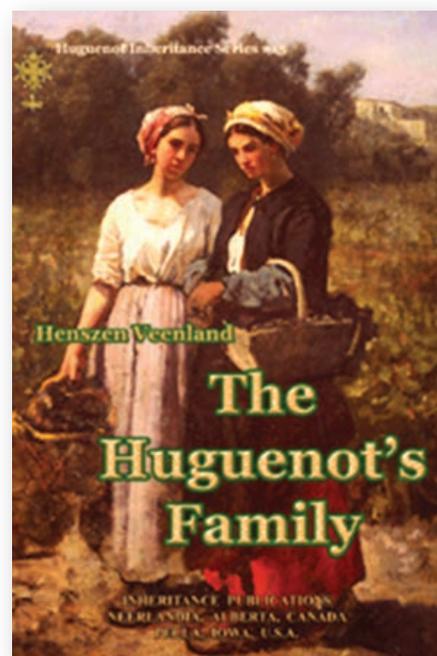
background to the various parts of this glorious story. In twenty-one chapters he has given us much important information. Much of this information is available for those who would like to dig for it. *But* it is all here, especially for those who need it in only a few minutes. For example, it explains the circumcision and the presentation in the temple. Also, it helps us understand something about the wise men. Every part of the biblical account is explained. If I have any concern about the book, it would be that from time ideas are repeated.

Every time I put down the book I was overwhelmed by what our God did for us on that holy night so long ago. Here is a book for our homes, and for our church libraries, and for our ministers. What a valuable book!

The Huguenot's Family, Henszen Veenland. Huguenot Inheritance series. Neerlandia, AB, and Pella, IA: Inheritance Publications, 2020. 134 pages. Paperback. \$12.90.

<https://inhpubli.now.sh>

There came a time when the Huguenots were told to deny their faith and return to the "holy mother church." Times were hard for the Reformed people in France. Chapter titles like "Robbed Parents," "Freed," "The Edict Revoked," and "The Flight" all tell us something about the agony of those days. It was a time of great trial.



Huguenot Inheritance series, Deborah Alcock:

The Well in the Orchard. Neerlandia, AB, and Pella, IA: Inheritance Publications, 2017. 86 pages. Paperback. \$8.90.

The Friends of Pascal. Neerlandia, AB, and Pella, IA: Inheritance Publications, 2017. 321 pages. Paperback. \$8.90.

In the Desert: A Story of the Church under the Cross. Neerlandia, AB, and Pella, IA: Inheritance Publications, 2016. 227 pages. Paperback. \$13.90.

In the City: A Story of Old Paris. Neerlandia, AB, and Pella, IA: Inheritance Publications, 2017. 220 pages. Paperback. \$13.90.

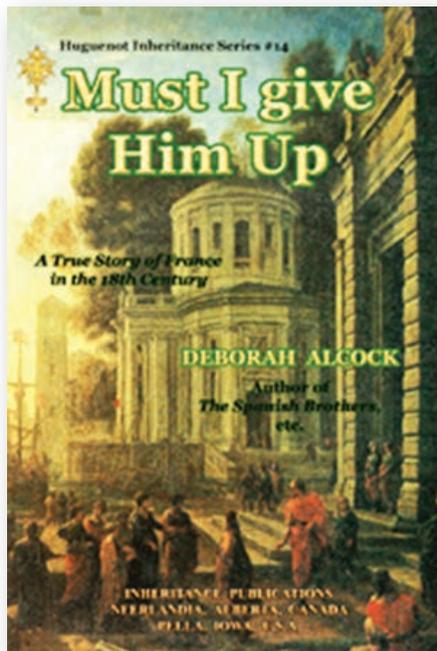
Must I Give Him Up? A True Story of France in the Eighteenth Century.

Neerlandia, AB, and Pella, IA:
Inheritance Publications, 2016. 61 pages. Paperback. \$8.90.

<https://inhpubli.now.sh>

While many of us know something about the Reformed churches of the Netherlands, few know about our Reformed brothers and sisters in France, called Huguenots. For them, life was not pleasant. For a number of years Inheritance Publications has been printing volumes about the Huguenots. By reading them we can begin to understand what our French brothers and sisters experienced for their faith.

In the first volume listed we see how the Huguenots lived—always with fear for their lives, and always trusting the Lord. The second volume listed above tells the reader about Port Royal in France, the nunnery there, and its tendency toward reformation. Of course, Pascal must be brought in, also. This book allows



us to see another side of Huguenot life.

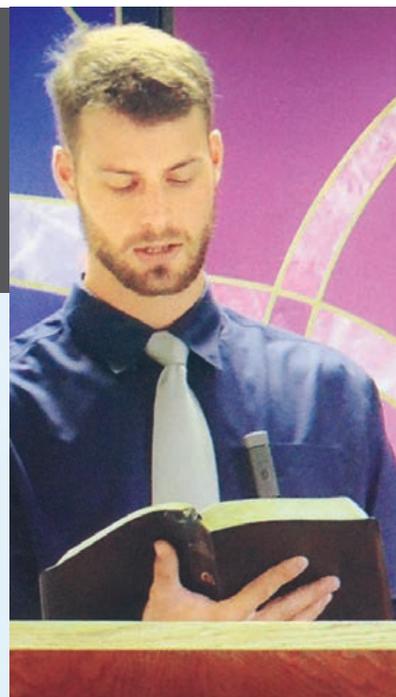
The next volume mentioned is a story of the church under the cross, as the Huguenots were called. Though it is fiction, as are all of these except *Must I Give Him Up?*, it used true historical events to make the

story move our minds and hearts. *In the City*, a companion to *In the Desert*, reveals what had happened to society because of sin. It lays before us something of the life of the Huguenots in the midst of the development of sin and the corruption of society.

The final volume in the list gives us a true story of the eighteenth century. Imprisonment was the lot of those who sought to worship God. The Reformed were under great trial. Through reading we can place ourselves in the day when Reformed people were being tried for their faith. We had better know something of this, and how they lived through it. The day is yet to come when we shall see days like they experienced. Scripture gives us the comfort.

Rev. Jerome Julien

is a retired minister in the URCNA living in Hudsonville, MI, and serves on the board of Reformed Fellowship. He and his wife, Reita, are members of Walker URC in Grand Rapids, MI.



CHURCHES ARE ENCOURAGED...

Churches are encouraged to apply for a seminary intern for the summer of 2021. Please contact Mid-America Reformed Seminary to let us know of your interest in having a seminary student serve in your congregation. Summer internships help to advance the training of godly men for gospel ministry.

Church councils should contact Rev. Mark Vander Hart, Mid-America Reformed Seminary, 229 Seminary Drive, Dyer, IN 46311-1069.

His email is the following: mvanderhart@midamerica.edu. Or call (219) 864-2400, ext. 408.

mid-america
REFORMED SEMINARY

Excerpts from a Prison Inmate's Letter



Mr. Myron Rau

Reformed Fellowship continues to correspond with a number of prison inmates who have contacted the office and who receive *The Outlook*. Some have requested books which were sent to them. This is made possible through generous contributions from Reformed Fellowship supporters. Here are some excerpts from a Texas prison inmate.

This morning I am reading John Calvin's *Institutes* (cover to cover), I am at 3.2.30 and enjoying my third time through his masterpiece, although I reference it regularly. I took a moment to listen to an atheist TV program, *The Freedom From Religion Foundation*, and I was sad that I believed like them once. They relish in calling themselves "free thinkers" and love sharing "conversion" stories of men and women who finally gave up their religion and converted to "reason" and "science". I once trusted in myself and denied God and agreed with the evolutionists and cult of scientists that many blindly follow.

I have about five sovereign grace friends here. I am the only "Reformer" while they are more in line with John MacArthur or C.H. Spurgeon, but I can at least agree with them on the doctrine of grace.

My true love is to study doctrine in the scriptures and to teach others at Bible study as God opens the door.

I live in a microcosm of the world's religions. Just walking past the closest 50 cells I can find Roman Catholics, Jews, Baptists, Non-Denoms, Jehovah's Witness, Satanists, Agnostics, Atheists, LBGTQ, Buddhists, Druids, several confused men who combine various religions or worldviews into a confused mess comprehensible only to themselves. I would be remiss not to mention a few who believe they are actually prophets, apostles, and one says he is the "seventh angel" Yet even in this Babel there is a remnant of God's people who are called chosen, and faithful, those who have not bent their knee to Baal. Yes, I am saved by grace lest I would be lost in that world from which He has called me.

Mr. Myron Rau

is past president of the Reformed Fellowship board.





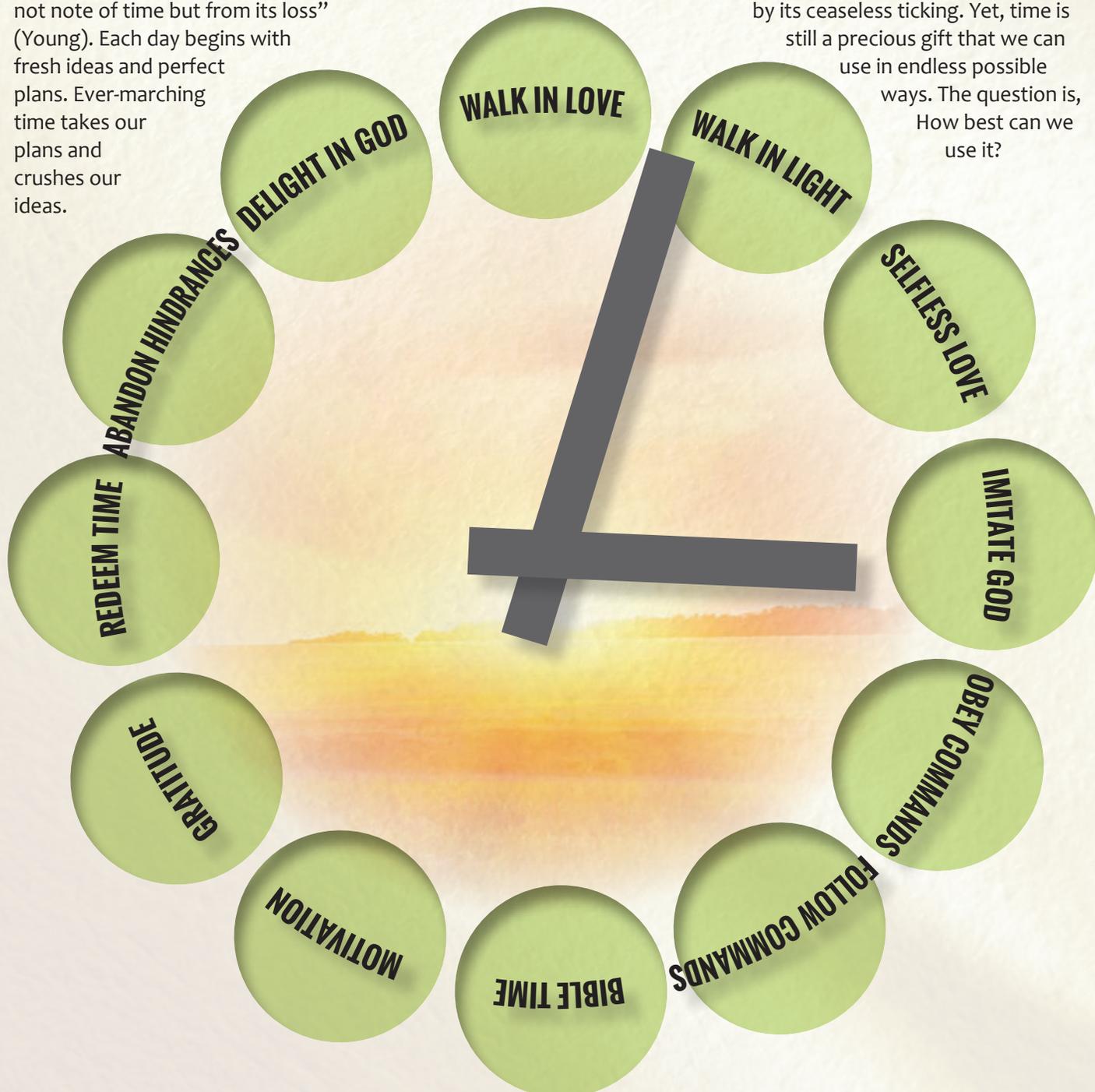
Mrs. Elisabeth Bloechl

The Best Use of Our Time

Time is a precious gift, but one which we spend rapidly. Often we spend it so quickly that “we take not note of time but from its loss” (Young). Each day begins with fresh ideas and perfect plans. Ever-marching time takes our plans and crushes our ideas.

There is never enough day to tie up all the dangling ends. Frustrated we cry, “O, call back yesterday, bid

time return” (Shakespeare). But we cannot turn back the clock. No, we are those constrained and restrained by its ceaseless ticking. Yet, time is still a precious gift that we can use in endless possible ways. The question is, How best can we use it?



We must use our time in obeying God. In order to do this, we have to know what he commands. As Paul says, “Try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord” (Eph. 5:10). Therefore, we should order our day around the dual purpose of discerning what God commands and doing it.

In Ephesians 5:15–17 (English Standard Version), the apostle Paul writes, “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” To understand what Paul means by the phrase “making the best use of the time,” we need to look at the context of the chapter. In the beginning of Ephesians 5, Paul tells us to walk in love, imitating God (vv. 1–2). He then immediately contrasts that command with how we are not to walk (i.e., live). We are not to live immorally or impurely. We are not to covet or use our tongues for evil (vv. 3–5). Rather, we are to expose such darkness and avoid partnering with those who obstinately walk in these sins (vv. 7, 11–14). We are to walk in the blazing sunlight and in selfless love. John Calvin explains, “This is done, when [we] do not live according to [our] own will, but devote [ourselves] entirely to obedience to God,—when [we] undertake nothing but by his command.”¹ In short, we are to obey God even if others doggedly disobey him. This truth directly affects how we use our time.

We must use our time in obeying God. In order to do this, we have to know what he commands. As Paul says, “Try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord” (Eph. 5:10). Therefore, we should order our day around the dual purpose of discerning what God commands and doing it. Though many people have written helpfully

on what it means to obey God, his Word is our primary source. So we ought to spend time in it. There we will find not only what we are to do with our time but also the motivation to do it: gratitude for God’s great love toward us. We need this motivation because using our time to follow God in obedience costs.

Calvin translated Paul’s phrase “making the best use of the time” as “redeeming the time.” He writes, “And what shall be the price of its redemption? To withdraw from the endless variety of allurements which would easily lead us astray; to rid ourselves from the cares and pleasures of the world; and, in a word, to abandon every hindrance.”² He means that we must not use our time—as is our tendency—to feed fleshly desires. Or as Paul says, “Sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place” (Eph. 5:3–4a). For using our time on these things does not please God.

Do we fritter away hours gossiping on Facebook? Do we fill our minds and minutes with planning our next meal or snack? Do we waste evenings watching raunchy movies? Do we work unnecessarily long hours for a bigger paycheck than our brother’s? Would God be pleased with how we spend the gift of time he has given? Surely we are all guilty of sometimes squandering our time—we must repent and praise God for Jesus.

While on earth, Jesus always used his time to do what pleased the Father (John 8:29). Jesus himself said, “But I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father” (John 14:31). Ultimately, Jesus’ obedience meant his death on the cross (Phil. 2:8). Jesus’ obedience led him to sacrifice his time, energy, and life to do what pleased the Father. The fruit: God attributes Jesus’ obedience to all who trust in him.³ In other words, though we may drain our time in disobedience, God sees our disobedience as covered by Christ’s obedience.

Does this mean we should take advantage of God’s mercy and use our time to feed our sinful flesh? No indeed! Rather, because of Christ’s work in us, we are free to use our time to please God. Before we were among those walking in darkness, able only to disobey (Eph. 5:3–5). Yet, if we do sinfully use our freedom to squander our time, God is able to redeem it (Joel 2:25). More than that, God promises that one day, we will no longer live under the constraints of time (John 3:15). Nor will sinful passions threaten to steal our time (Rev. 21:4, 27). Instead, we will have all eternity to delight and delight in our God. May this knowledge free us to discover joyfully what pleases God and do it. Not out of drudgery or duty, but for the love of One who first loved us enough to sacrifice his time and life.

¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries*, vol. 21, 310.

² *Ibid.*, 314.

³ Westminster Catechism 8.5.

Mrs. Elisabeth Bloechl

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

Review: Reborn in Christ, who pardoned me



Mr. Michael R. Kearney

When Rev. Brian Najapfour explained the origins of the song “Reborn in Christ, Who Pardoned Me,” he informed me that its original proposed title was “Total Depravity.” Perhaps that’s a bit of a turnoff for a first encounter with a new hymn. And yet it’s worth pondering: How many well-known hymns can you think of which specifically and directly address the doctrine of total depravity? Despite an abundance of historic texts on the atonement (“And Can It Be?,” “Not What My Hands Have Done,” “How Vast the Benefits Divine,” and countless others), our Reformed library of hymnody has little to say about the natural condition of humanity before regeneration. Rev. Najapfour’s composition succeeds in combining the theme of guilt before God with the other two strands of the gospel—grace and gratitude—into a single piece of poetry which affords worthy meditation for all believers.

There is precedent for God’s people to sing about the depths of human wickedness, as a majority of the Psalms attest. Consider Psalm 14, which reflects on the sad condition of a world in which “there is no one who does good, not even one.” Rev. Najapfour’s text personalizes this

observation: I have not done good; I have not sought God. Psalm 14 links human reason and affection under this curse: a lack of understanding leads to the absence of a desire for God. Similarly, Rev. Najapfour’s hymn articulates how the Fall bears upon my physical and spiritual senses (“Satan had destroy’d my sight”), my affection (“To Christ my heart was not inclined”), and my intellect (“Satan had ensnared my mind”). Yet Psalm 14 ends not with despair but with the hope of salvation, and the third and fourth stanzas of this hymn describe this salvation as already accomplished. I am made alive first in terms of spiritual sight, and second in terms of awakening my spiritual hunger for “Jesus Christ, the Living Bread.” The result is a triumphant conclusion with an evangelistic call: “come join with me!”

Bob Azkoul’s tune CEDAR TREE, composed specifically for this hymn, seeks to convey the progression from a dead and stagnant corpse to a living and joyous believer. The dark and foreboding minor harmonies of the first two stanzas transform

into a jubilant major key in the third and fourth stanzas, centered on the phrase “praise to his glory!” This change of pattern in the middle of an otherwise familiar hymn structure may pose a challenge to first-time singers, but the second half of the tune preserves some of the basic rhythm and motifs of its first half, making the transition easier.

“Reborn in Christ” is an admirable contribution to the growing effort to articulate more fully the doctrines of the Reformed faith in musical form. The novelty and the uncommon subject matter of this hymn should not deter Christians from giving it a try in family worship or congregational singing. Rev. Najapfour and Mr. Azkoul are to be congratulated for their work, with the hope that they will continue to produce beautiful and biblical hymns that serve the churches.

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 Wilkensburg, PA.

Reborn in Christ, who pardoned me

Am E Am Am/C Bdim/D B7/D# E

1. By na - ture I was dead in sin, a bod - y but no life with - in,
 2. De - praved was I from birth, in - deed, and drawn to sin was I con - ceived!
 3. Yet by God's mer - cy and His love came new life from His throne a - bove.

Dm7 E7 Am/C E7/B Am Em E7 Am

too dead to see the gos - pel light, for Sat - an had de - stroy'd my sight.
 To Christ my heart was not in - clined, for Sat - an had en - snared my mind.
 He gave my blind eyes light to see the gos - pel truth that set me free.

C Dm7 G7 C/E Bdim/D B7/D# Am/E E7 Am

I had two ears but could not hear the gos - pel sound that was so clear.
 I had no hun - ger to be fed by Je - sus Christ, the Liv - ing Bread.
 A - live in Christ, who died for me, my heart sings

1, 2.

Am/E D7 G G7 C/E F G7 Am

3.
 praise to His glo - ry! 4. And now the God who reigns a - bove

C/E F Bdim/D B7/D# E Bdim/D C7/E F G7

made me a-live by His great love. He gave me faith to eat the Bread:

C/E G7 C C7 F Dm7 G7

A - maz-ing grace! For-ev - er fed! Re - born in Christ, who pardon'd

C/E F Dm7 G7 F/C C

me; hal-le - lu - jah, come join with me! _____



Dr. Norman De Jong

Letter to the Editor

“What Does It Mean to Be Reformed: Education”

To the Editor:

I hesitate to do this, but I find the article by Ref. Steve Swets to be of such a nature that a response must be presented. “What It Means to Be Reformed: Education” offers a perspective and analysis that might cause significant harm to many Christian schools, if implemented by them. My concerns are focused on the amount of emphasis and credibility that he gives to the philosophy of Abraham Kuyper (see p. 22, col. 1). Rev. Swets is apparently ignorant of the confusion and conflict that Kuyper’s ideas and philosophy created in many Canadian and United States Christian schools during the 1960s and 1970s. Many Christians had been part of the Doleantie movement and considered Kuyper to be a world leader. They welcomed his doctrine of sphere sovereignty and thought it gave to their schools the kind of independent governance that was accorded to the Free University in the Netherlands. Many of them thought that the Afscheiding movement no longer had validity. They were wrong.

The problem is that “sovereignty” can never be divided. One cannot have a sovereign church, a sovereign state, a sovereign school, a sovereign business, or any of the other fourteen modalities that his students tried to create. The brighter students saw right through this and were horribly confused. The less perceptive thought they had found a new guru to follow. Dordt College tried to introduce this in 1968 and then found intense infighting for six years until the board banished it in March of 1974. Trinity Christian College removed many of their Kuyperian faculty and had to rebuild about the same time.

A second major flaw in Kuyper’s theology was his theology of God and his Word. When students would want to consult the Word of God, I and many others pointed them to the Bible, the Word of God. What students got was a counterquestion: “Which Word do you want? The Law Word? The Inscripturated Word? Or, the Incarnate Word?” According to Kuyper and his followers, the Law Word was the source of laws for education, for business, for the home, for the church, and for the state. To have a Christian perspective on education, one had to “struggle with the issues” to find the Law Word for education. Some of their answers were illogical, immoral, and contradictory.

In all my work and writing on Christian education, I sent students to the Bible, the Word of God. All the major answers for Christian education can be found there. Sad to say, I was often called a biblicist and worse than that.

If Rev. Swets is open to further discussion, I will be happy to refer him to some readings which will offer a much better perspective than that offered by Kuyper or his followers.

I send this with some trepidation, but I feel that this issue is too important to be ignored.

Cordially, in Christ,

Norman De Jong, PhD

Dr. Norman De Jong

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

Response to Dr. De Jong



Rev. Steve Swets

Regarding the letter from Dr. Norman De Jong responding to the article “What Does It Mean to Be Reformed: Education”:

I am thankful for Dr. De Jong’s thoughtful interaction with my article. Even though he said he sent his response with trepidation, it is an important subject to discuss. Dr. De Jong has certainly read, written, and experienced more than I have regarding the history of Christian education in North America. Nevertheless, permit me to limit my response to three points.

First, my focus is on parent-run Christian day schools. Parents are called to train their children, and to use a school as one of three legs of the three-legged stool of home, church, and school is certainly a fruit of Kuyperian influence. When it comes to university education, where the students are now adults and can be challenged in greater ways, I will leave that debate with Dr. De Jong. He clearly has a history in mind I have not studied.

Second, sphere sovereignty is a helpful principle when it is applied properly. Properly understood, sphere sovereignty teaches that Christ is lord over all. He is the sovereign. Under his lordship, each realm or sphere operates for the Christian under the authority of the Word of God. It is when this Word is undermined that problems will inevitably arise. Sovereignty does not need to be divided, but it ought to be distinguished. For instance, the elders of a local church have authority over my doctrine and life, and this includes my parenting. Nevertheless, they cannot demand that I give a particular amount of money to the church. They would be overreaching their authority and undermining my liberty as the head of a home. At the same time, the Christian home and the work of the consistory must always function under the ultimate authority of God’s Word.

Third, the Afscheiding (1834) and the Doleantie (1886) as reforming movements out of the Dutch state church are not mutually exclusive of each other. These two groups merged into one church in 1892 (Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederlanden). Many of the immigrants who came after that church merger had no trouble assimilating the emphasis of each when it came to education. Those who were already living in the United States especially adopted a number of Kuyperian principles. This is part of the reason we see Christian day schools established where Christian Reformed churches were located. I am a product of such a history in my own family.

I am open to reading more on the subject and I would like to thank *The Outlook* for the opportunity to respond. I hope it clarifies my position on this important subject.

Brotherly greetings in Christ,

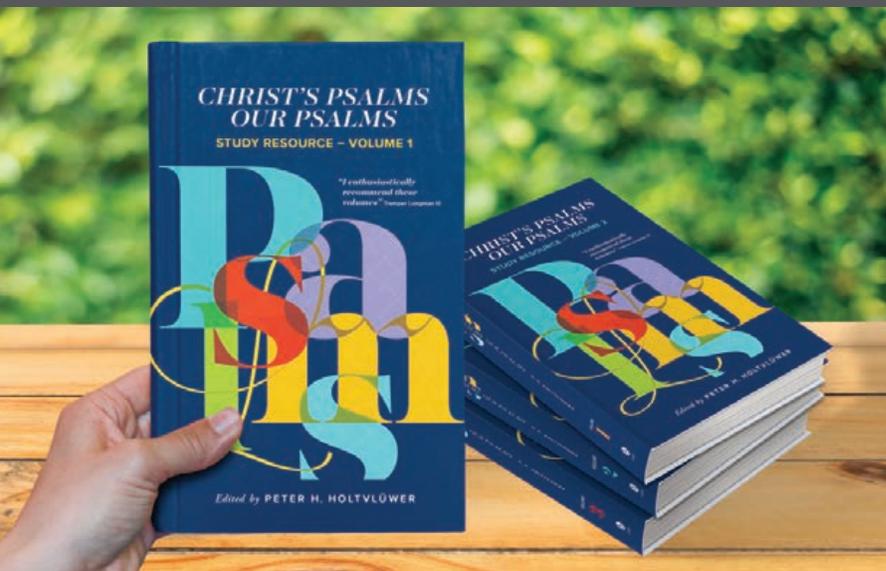
Rev. Steve Swets

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* (now available at reformedfellowship.net).

Book Review: Christ's Psalms, Our Psalms—Study Resource

Rev. Larry E. Wilson



Christ's Psalms, Our Psalms—Study Resource, edited by Peter H. Holtvlüwer. Winnipeg, MB: Reformed Perspective Press, 2020. 4 volumes. Hardcover. \$70.00.

Christ's Psalms, Our Psalms is a commentary on the Psalms, but much more. It calls itself a “study resource.” Its distinctive contribution “is to show the Christ-centered focus of each psalm (cf. Luke 24:25–27, 44–47; John 5:39), along with its application to believers and the church in the new covenant era”. And it does so exceptionally well, not by imaginative allegorical reveries, but by sound grammatical-historical and redemptive historical methods of interpretation and application that comport with good scholarship and a framework of sound doctrine. The introduction to the whole resource is so good that it could be published separately as a useful booklet introducing the book of Psalms. By the way, don't confuse this resource with *Christ's Psalms, Our Psalms—Devotional*, a single volume of daily devotions that reflect fruit from these studies.

Under the guidance of Peter H. Holtvlüwer, a team of Canadian Reformed pastor-scholars worked together to study and distill how each psalm should be understood in its original context, including how it fits into the book of Psalms as a whole; how it reveals Jesus Christ; how it applies to new covenant believers in Christ (individually and corporately)—for example, it has an excellent discussion of how the imprecations (prayers for God's curse) apply in the new covenant; how it relates to other Scriptures in the Old and New Testaments; and suggested occasions for its apt use in Scripture reading, preaching, singing, and counseling.

Its strong pastoral character makes it evident that it's written by pastors. But this resource is not meant to be limited to pastors. It's written in a very accessible, user-friendly style. Still, pastors will find it especially useful. For instance, when a pastor preaches a psalm, he'd do well to be able to show how that psalm in its context specifically calls people to follow Jesus in faith, repentance, and newness of life today. When a pastor selects a psalm to read to the congregation in worship—or to be read by the congregation—he'd do well to make it clear how it fits appropriately at this particular point in this particular service. When a congregation sings a psalm, a pastor would do well to introduce it by showing its meaning and Christ-centered relevance to the worshipers, so that they can sing it with understanding. This resource is an outstanding help toward each of these ends.

In a nutshell, this resource suggests doctrinal, devotional, practical, and occasional uses for each psalm in a Christ-following, new covenant context. I can't recommend it highly enough. Even more, I urge that we try to serve the broader body of Christ and seek to stimulate her gospel renewal and biblical reformation by not allowing this superb resource to remain hidden under the basket of our small Reformed circles, but by making it widely known—even gifting it out—throughout the broader body of Christ.

The four volume study resource set as well as the Devotional are both available on the bookstore at reformedfellowship.net.

Rev. Larry E. Wilson

is an Orthodox Presbyterian minister.

His review was recently published in *New Horizons Magazine* (January/February 2021).

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From the book *In God's Arms*
by Nancy Moelker

Come! See the empty tomb
That through all time, to every land,
Bears witness of the Risen One
Who sits at God's right hand.
That, though He died in agony
Our debt of sin to pay,
He rose triumphant o'er the grave
On this most glorious day!

We stand in awe before You, Lord;
The cost of sin to You
Was nothing less than Your own life—
No other blood would do.
Your finished work upon the cross
Brought us eternal life.
Your resurrection from the dead
Wrought victory o'er death's strife.

And now, when we face sickness, death,
Or any other loss,
We run for refuge to the One
Who died upon the cross.
We find in Him our comfort
And we cast on Him our care,
For we know the tomb is empty
And there's no need to despair.

For this we want to thank You, Lord,
And lift Your name in praise.
For this we want to serve You, Lord,
Through all our earthly days.
And when that great day dawns, Lord,
And You come with trumpet sound,
Because the tomb is empty
We will all be heaven bound.

