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# Beacon

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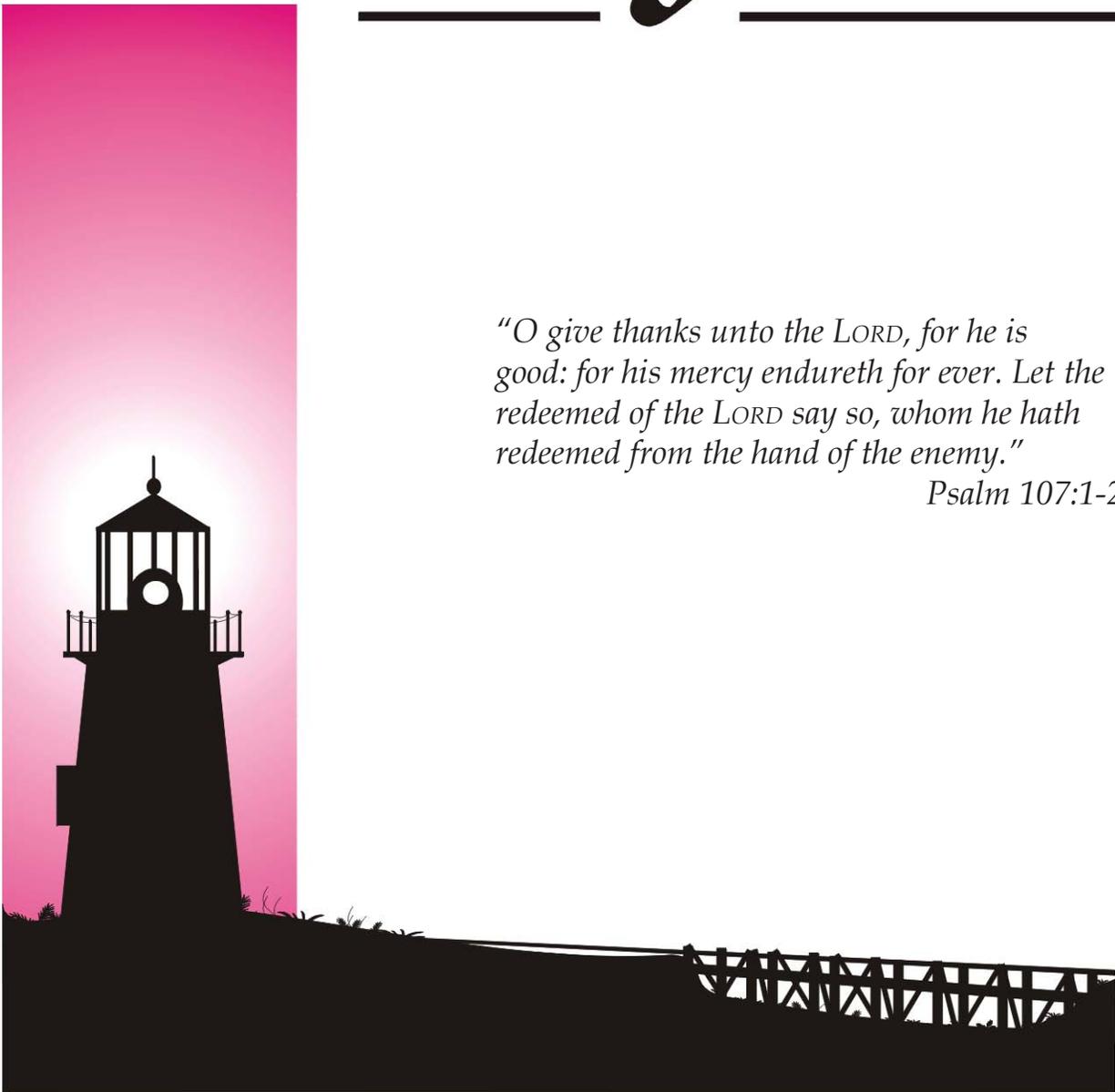
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# Lights

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*"O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy."*

*Psalm 107:1-2*



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# “The Great Thanksgiving”

by Rev. Carl Haak

**T**oday I would like to give to you three examples of thanksgiving from events in our Lord’s ministry. I will put these examples into a modern context. As I describe them to you, I would have you answer two questions: Which one is an example of true thanksgiving? And, Which one is true of you?

For our first example, we have to journey to a temple, a very beautiful structure with massive oak doors and marble floors. There are many worshipers today coming and going. Inside we find, in the center, one well-dressed man with a long robe. Before the eyes of all, and within the ear distance of all, he cries out in the temple, “I thank thee, O Lord, that I am not as other men are: thieves, lazy, adulterers, incompetent. I’m a notch up. I pray. And I’ve done many good works throughout the year. I thank thee for all that I am.”

In the same temple, there is another man off in the corner, cast down. He can hardly look up. This man prays, “Lord, be merciful to me the sinner.”

As the first, well-dressed man makes his way out of the temple that day, a wind blows through the door, parting his robe. And it reveals a heart of stone.

For our second example, we need to journey to the beautiful countryside. Picture southern Indiana or Illinois. Fields of corn and soybeans have been harvested. We come to a large farm on a beautiful country road. On this large farm we see a complex of buildings, all new and shiny—a new barn, in fact, and another one coming up, the foundations of which have been laid. And we see a house. A long driveway with a white fence on both sides with trees planted. We come up to the house. It is a beautiful house with a great big bay window. It is decorated for the season.

Inside we see a very large gathering of people who are obviously very happy, a very nice family we would think, within a beautiful dining room, beautiful décor, crystal, food, and on the table are all types of food. In the center is a brown turkey. At the head of the table is a man who stands up and says, “Dig in.”

But on his right is his wife. She says, “Dear, shouldn’t you say grace, first?”

“Oh,” he responds. “Lord, I thank thee for my diligence and hard work, for my planning and foresight which, if others had, they would have a slice of the pie, too. I thank thee that all of my grain is in my barns and I thank thee that my brokers are holding out for the top dollar. Amen.”

Later that night, when all of the family has left, this man is upstairs in his nice study with leather chairs. The blueprints are on the desk in front of him when, suddenly, there is a pain in his chest. He is having a heart attack. He falls over his desk. His wife finds him and the paramedics are summoned. They rush to the hospital where they have the best equipment working on him. But he is dead.

Only a few days after the funeral, his children are fighting over the inheritance.

For the third example we need to go to a suburb of a city, not a very well-to-do suburb, in an apartment room. There is a widow who lives alone in her apartment. On Thanksgiving Day she makes her way to the church, as she always does. She enters in to worship. She has, that day, two dollars. That is all she has till the next Social Security check. Now she has two of them. She could put one, you know, into the collection plate. She could separate. There are two. But she takes both of those dollars and puts them into

the collection. She goes home for a quiet dinner by herself. Later that night, when she is taking the garbage out, she falls down and breaks her leg. She is finally found and brought to the hospital and left alone in her hospital room that night.

The nurse is about to come in to check on her one last time when she hears the woman praying all alone. The nurse stops to listen.

“Lord, I thank thee for all thy blessings. I deserve none of them. Thou hast richly blessed me with thy grace and love. Thou hast made me an heir of life eternal, all of grace. Lord, I thank thee for everything!”

Which one of those three events was Thanksgiving? Which one is true of you?

True thankfulness, according to the Scriptures, is rooted in the knowledge of God’s grace. True thankfulness can only be found when one understands that God has been gracious, that is, that a sinner has been shown undeserved favor in salvation from sin—his own salvation. Out of that knowledge, true thankfulness confesses that all things are for our good and, therefore, we thank God for everything. For everything—both that which is pleasant to us and that which is most difficult—because we know that all things serve the purposes of his grace. Therefore, true thanksgiving is always, it is for all things, it is for God’s grace. True thanksgiving is every day. It is not a day; it is a life. It is a life that only grace can begin and teach.

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day; it is a life.

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The apostle Paul knew of this great thanksgiving. He writes to us in Ephesians 1:3, 4: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ... according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.”

Let us look at those words of the apostle for a few moments today. That is a great thanksgiving that Paul is giving there—one of the most profound and rich to be found in all of the Scriptures.

The epistle to the Ephesians is not unique in that it begins with a thanksgiving to God. That was Paul’s customary method in beginning his letters. But the epistle to the Ephesians is unique in that Paul expresses a marvelous richness and fervor in his thanksgiving. Very often in the other epistles the apostle draws the theme of his thanksgiving from the special condition of those whom he is addressing, or in the remembrance of certain persons for whom he wants to give thanks. But in the book of the Ephesians, the apostle’s mind is not upon any particular person, not upon any particular circumstance or situation in the church. But his mind is thrown back on the great principles of the gospel. He is contemplating the eternal truths that God has revealed in Jesus Christ. He has come face to face in his mind with the grace of God which has brought salvation through Jesus Christ. With a depth of feeling, and in magnificent inspired statements, he expresses a great thanksgiving before God. From verses 3-12 of that chapter he deals with the salvation that is to be found in Christ. He describes to us the loving activity of God the Father in planning that salvation, the work of God the Son in securing that salvation, and the work of God the Holy Spirit in applying that salvation. Paul traces that salvation in Christ, for which he is thanking God, to its preparation in election. He says, “Blessed be God ... according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world (that is, before the world began), ... having predestinated us (predetermined us) unto the adoption of children.”

His mind, then, thinks of the execution of salvation (vv. 6, 7). He has made us accepted in the Beloved, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins through his blood. Then he speaks of the publication of that salvation (vv. 8-10). He speaks of the fact that God has made known to us the mystery of his will. God has shown to us his good pleasure, which he has purposed in himself. Then, finally, Paul speaks of the application of salvation (vv. 11, 12). He says that it is through the Spirit, through whom we have trusted in Christ, and through whom we have also obtained an inheritance.

Therefore, he brings us before that whole salvation in Christ which comes from God, from eternity to eternity, the eternal purpose formed in the loving heart of the Father, to the eternal consummation when all things in heaven and on earth will be summed in Christ under one head. In the highest doxology, and in a splendid way, and with profound words, Paul sings of that salvation which has now come to us through Christ.

As these truths play upon his heart and mind, Paul bursts out in praise: “Blessed, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That word “blessed” means “to speak well of.” Paul blesses God. He speaks well of God, contemplating what we have received in Christ, contemplating the graciousness of it, the magnitude of it. He says, “Blessed be God—God be thanked, God be praised!”

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**To be brought to the experience of saving  
grace means that thankfulness will be at  
the core of your being.**

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Do you? Do you, today, do you always? As a child of God, is this the theme of your life, the repeated chord, the song of your life, growing in power? Also growing in power through all the trials and distresses that God sends upon you? It must be. To be brought to the experience of saving grace means that thankfulness will be at the core of your being. When you are brought, by the grace of God, to know the wonder of salvation in Christ and all that God of mere grace has done for you, then thankfulness must be at the core of your being—whether today, for the most part, it all goes your way, or whether you have heartache and weariness and pain. Thanks be to God because he hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, says the apostle.

We think that Paul’s heart is almost running away with him here. God has blessed us. And then Paul adds, “with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” He keeps piling it on higher and higher. They are spiritual blessings, blessings that are given to us by the Holy Spirit. They are not earthly, vanishing, tarnishing blessings but spiritual, enduring blessings that grow more and more. And all of them, all that God conceived to give to us—how shall we begin to give a list of them? The blessings of pardon and forgiveness. The blessings of love and mercy. The blessing of adoption unto children. The blessing of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The blessing of the knowledge and presence of God. And Paul says that God has given to us these blessings in the heavenly places. The idea is that we do not receive these blessings for the first time in heaven. No. He hath blessed us now. But these blessings will be fulfilled in the heavenly places. They will be perfectly ours in the heavenly places. These blessings are other-worldly. They do not consist in homes and computers, cars and investments, land and clothing, jewelry, earthly honor and fame. But they are other-worldly. They are great blessings. We have them right now in this world. And one day in the heavenlies we shall have them perfectly. No, we do not despise the good things of this world given to us by God. How much has he given to us! Oh, he has given to us so much! But we praise and bless him for these things in the light of those spiritual heavenly blessings. We praise him today because we do not belong to this world. We praise him because our worth is not counted on a spreadsheet. It is not counted in earthly categories.

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**We praise him because our worth is not counted on a spreadsheet.**

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But we are blessed in Christ. All our blessings come to us because of him. God has blessed us in Christ Jesus because of what Christ has done. Do you thank him? Do you return to give him thanks? Is your life, day after day, one of mumbling and discontentment and despair? Do you say, “I’m not very

happy. I don't like this—my job, my wife, my cars, my looks, my weight, my friends"? Or are you, by the grace of God, looking to Christ and to your God and rejoicing in the blessings that have been freely given to you? Shall we not join the apostle today and every day in giving this great thanksgiving: "Blessed be God for the salvation in Christ, with every kind of spiritual blessing that is in Christ"?

God has blessed us with every possible spiritual blessing in Christ. It is all of God. That is the keynote. It is not of our deserving. It is not of our doing. It is all of God. So, with a fervor of language, with all of our heart and our soul: "Thanks be to God!" Because salvation is all of grace alone, a grace prepared from eternity and poured upon us by the Spirit and given to us to be ours in Christ, now thank we all our God!

Do you? Today and always?

True thanksgiving does not depend upon your external situation today. You may be poor, sick, or have cancer. You may be deeply wounded and hurt by other people. You may have been ridiculed for your faith. You may be living among lions. Thankfulness does not grow out of an earthly situation, but it grows out of the heart which knows God's grace.

The early Christians had to endure all the hardships and difficulties of belonging to Christ. But they were characterized by a spirit of praise and thanksgiving. They were people who were known for having a spirit of peace and happiness and joy which the world had never known. Now here is the test of the Christian profession: Are you thankful to God for his grace? Are you overwhelmed, so that grace is not just a glib word but is your treasure and your joy and is manifested by thanks? It is heartfelt thanks!

In a world that is miserable and unhappy and sour and fearful and filled with complaints and fears, thanksgiving must be the mark of the Christian. Oh, I know we are deficient in this. And we cannot make up for it in one day. I know that that principle of thankfulness is very small in us. How much does thanks pay a part in our prayers? In our worship on Sunday? In our daily life? How often during the day do we cry out: "Blessed be God"?

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### How often during the day do we cry out: "Blessed be God"?

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Nevertheless, this is the end and the purpose of our salvation - that we should be to the praise of his glory who first trusted in Christ (Eph. 1:12). Although it is imperfect, and although it is small, this thankfulness is there. It is in every child of God. It must be there and it must deepen in you. Not in mere words and outward show, but deep in your heart. Oh, how much we have for which to give him thanks. It is staggering, until finally we are ushered up into his presence where we shall gaze upon him face to face, where no sin will detract, and where we will have the fullness of God forever.

So, which one are you? Are you the man in the temple thanking God that you are not like other men? Are you the rich farmer thanking God for all that you have done? Or are you the poor widow who thanked God out of poverty for the richness of his grace?

Which one is in you today? Tomorrow? No, this is the question: Which one will be the summary of your life?

May we say, by the grace of God, today and always, "Blessed be God who hath blessed us abundantly." ❖

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# Covenant Courtship: A Proper Perspective

by Aaron Lim

*“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge”  
(Hosea 4:6).*

If Christian courtship is to be properly approached, then it demands first of all a proper definition. Our young people and their parents must know what covenant courtship involves. They must believe in their hearts the spiritual nature of a covenant relationship and seek to apply biblical principles in their relationships. Only then will their relationships and marriages be strong. Only then will their families be spiritually happy ones. Only then will the church grow in true spiritual strength and unity. Only then will the cause of God’s covenant be established and promoted in the midst of this world.

A Christian courtship is most importantly a relationship between two individuals with God at its center. In his sovereign providence, God brings a young man and a young woman together. Whether they are in the same locality, church or denomination, the covenant God in his wisdom causes their individual paths to cross. It is important to know that God does this in eternity. According to his eternal counsel he has purposed the specific young man and woman to meet, engage in courtship and then marry. The sovereign God does not simply leave it to the will of his children to decide by themselves whom they will marry, but leads them by his hand each step of the way. Christian courtship is therefore covenant courtship because God is the source of the couple’s life and journey together. This is a profound truth which deeply humbles the child of God as he considers the extensive power of God’s providence.

Covenant courtship is essentially covenantal because these two individuals are friends of the living God. They delight to be intimate friends with each other because they share a common, intimate friend. Courtship with unbelievers is not covenantal because they are the enemies of God. This is why the apostle sternly warns believers against being unequally yoked together with

unbelievers (2 Cor 6:14-17). Therefore only a couple who are equally yoked together will grow in true love because that love is rooted in God. God binds them in holy union as members of his covenant.

In covenant courtship, God is the head of the couple. He governs the couple’s way of thinking, feeling and deciding on issues during the course of their relationship. He rules by leading them according to his Word and Spirit. He directs their minds to the Holy Scriptures and governs their relationship by his revealed will. A godly couple thirsts for the Spirit’s guidance and instruction. No wonder a couple that prays together stays together!

Covenant courtship prepares a young person to leave his father and mother and to cleave inseparably to his wife. It must be approached with all seriousness because it must always be done with a view to marriage—a lifelong commitment. Relationships are not playthings. They involve a great degree of emotional attachment, often leaving painful scars when not properly handled. Far too often these relationships end in breakups because they were not given due seriousness when they were established.

What beautifully characterizes covenant courtship is the spiritual unity established and growing between both believers. Together they are bound by the same faith, truth and love for each other and for the God who has first united them in his eternal love. This unity is an expression of the unity that Christ shares with his bride, the church. As the couple grows in their love for God, for his covenant, his truth and his kingdom, so do they grow united in their love for each other. Together they become one as this unity finally reaches its strongest manifestation in marriage.

Covenant parents play a crucial role in the way their children engage in courtship. What kind of partners their children choose is strongly dependent on the instruction given by them and the way they live with each other in the home. Indeed Scripture insists on training up a child to prepare him for covenant courtship and marriage.

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Covenant instruction is the instrument that God uses to save his people and their seed.

So then we shall proceed in further depth what covenant courtship entails. May our covenant God establish our minds and teach our willful hearts his truth on this

subject, so that we may humbly obey to his glory and our eternal good. In the next issue, the Lord willing, we will explore the topic of “choosing wisely.” ❖

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*Aaron is a member of Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore.*

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## Book Review

# The Reformed Faith of John Calvin: The Institutes in Summary

by John Huizenga

*The Reformed Faith of John Calvin: The Institutes in Summary*, by David J. Engelsma. Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2009. Hardcover ISBN 978-0-936054-00-8, 472 pages. Available at <http://www.rfpa.org>.

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Professor Engelsma has done the church a great service with this book. He has taken the weighty volumes of John Calvin’s *Institutes* from the “I need to read this, but it’s so big and not so easy to read” shelf and presented it to us in a very attractive volume that is difficult to put down. Young people, you really need to get a copy of this! Those of you who have your copies of Calvin’s *Institutes*, and have from time to time picked it up for some meaty reading, this book will help you see things in Calvin and the truth God used him to set forth that you may not have noticed before. Now in one handy volume we have a wonderful sketch of Calvin and his life, three very helpful chapters explaining the nature, history, style and structure of the *Institutes*, and a summary of the *Institutes*. All excuses for not being familiar with Calvin’s *Institutes* have by this book been forever rendered empty.

After the chapters to introduce Calvin and his work, Professor Engelsma opens up the *Institutes* chapter by chapter and delivers Calvin from the tangles and pecu-

liarities of unfamiliar times and language. He does so by explaining Calvin’s basic points, showing how they have influenced the Three Forms of Unity, and using carefully selected quotations which capture the essence of his thought. One section from Book One on “Creation, Human Nature as Created, and Providence” caught my attention; it demonstrates how the book is written and how timely Calvin is for us today:

Whatever we may think about it, Calvin certainly is timely in our age. The fiction of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Frank Peretti, and others expresses and encourages a fascination, if not an obsession, with regard to angels and devils. It is good to be reminded what a sober, sound theologian believed about angels and devils, and what a Reformed believer should believe about the spirit world. (page 93—Of late we could add the obsession with the wizards of Harry Potter and the fascination with the vampires in the Twilight craze. JH)

I would like to quote another part from the same section in which the positive truth about the spirit world is set forth:

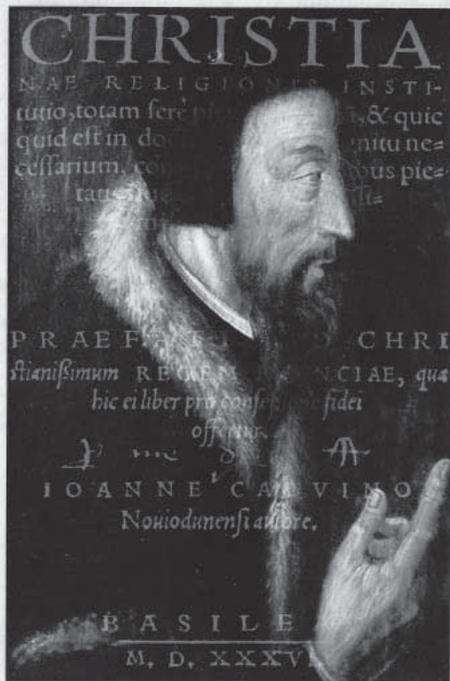
The preeminent service of God that Satan and the devils render is that “they exercise believers in combat, ambush them, invade their peace, beset them in combat, and also often weary them, rout them, terrify them, and sometimes wound them.” (*Institutes* I.14.18, I.176)

God directs the unholy host against believers to teach them warfare; to mature them in combat.

This assault upon believers by Satan and his demons

# THE REFORMED FAITH OF JOHN CALVIN

## *The Institutes in Summary*



David J. Engelsma

includes the spiritual, psychological distresses of the people of God. Calvin is saying that when the believer has his peace of soul invaded, becomes weary in the Christian life, and is terrified and wounded, he must not immediately reach for pills or liquor, or call a psychiatrist, but he should consider rather that the infernal hosts of Satan are coming against him and that fundamentally God is sending these spirits to exercise him in combat. He ought to be aware of this spiritual struggle and vigorously fight with the spiritual weapons he has at his disposal: justification by faith alone, God's providential care and love, and the confidence that God's strength is made perfect in the believer's weakness (2 Cor. 12:9).

We live in an age when this aspect of psychological

distress is in danger of being ignored. Paragraph 1.14.18 of the *Institutes* is worth reading and rereading: the preeminent service rendered by the devils is to exercise believers in combat. God's purpose is not that devils overcome the believers, but that believers are strengthened in the battle. Because of the divine sovereignty over devils, Satan can never conquer or destroy one elect member of the church. "Because that promise to crush Satan's head [Gen. 3:15] pertains to Christ and all his members in common, I deny that believers can ever be conquered or overwhelmed by him [Satan]" (Page 97).

The more we read the work of Calvin, the more we see the wonder of God who sovereignly worked a great wonder in the church through men such as Martin Luther and John Calvin. From a human perspective, the man made institution of the Romish church had become a life and mind controlling monster ready to snuff out any remaining truth of God's word. But God prepared men for His mighty work. This is a work of God along with all the other wonders worked throughout history that the believer must know and remember. Professor Engelsma has given us a very useful tool, but we must actively use it before we experience any blessing in our life.

Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, showing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments (Psa 78:1-7). ❖

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*John is a member of Randolph Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin and is editor of Beacon Lights.*

# Watching Daily At My Gates

by Chester Hunter

## **October 18 Read Revelation 18:1-8**

The antichristian kingdom grows richer and richer. Those who are her servants prosper. But along with this growth comes the growth of sin. Along with this growth comes persecution to those who have not been defiled with the mark of the beast. When it seems that she has won, an angel announces her destruction. Her cup of iniquity is full, and God in his sovereign power ends her influence upon this world. God's people are called to live separately from her. Now, physically this is impossible. We must do this in a spiritual sense. We must not partake of her sins, but rather we must flee from them. Her destruction is sure because God, the almighty judge, will give the final sentence. May we continue to pray, "Thy kingdom come." Sing Psalter 202.

## **October 19 Read Revelation 18:9-19**

Paul, in the book of Romans writes, "The wages of sin is death..." As the antichristian kingdom falls, those words are borne out. As it falls, even those who enjoyed its debauchery will mourn. Will they mourn because of their sins? No, they mourn because of the consequences of it. They mourn because their pleasures are gone. What about us? Do we see what will happen to the wicked world? Do we want to enjoy its pleasures? These words are written for our comfort, of that there is no doubt, but they are also written for our warning. Let us flee sin and seek "the city which hath foundations." Sing Psalter 23.

## **October 20 Read Revelation 18:20-24**

The righteous are called to rejoice over the fall of the antichristian kingdom. We are allowed to do this because God who is the sovereign king of heaven and earth has decreed its fall. While this provides comfort during times of afflictions, it also gives to us warning to remain pure from the sins found in the world. We are called to live an antithetical walk. That is the only way to remain pure. As we go through this valley of the shadow of death, let us remember that we have an house prepared for us in heaven. It is an house that cannot be taken from us. Let us prepare ourselves for the eternal Sabbath before the throne of the lamb. Sing Psalter 300.

## **October 21 Read Revelation 19:1-5**

We come to the end of another portrayal of the history of the world. It is also the end of John's vision begun in

chapter 17. The church triumphant rejoices over the fall of Babylon, the figure of the antichristian kingdom. These are the saints who cried out "How long," at the revealing of the fifth seal. And not only the church is rejoicing, but also creation that is symbolized in the four beasts. God is victorious; there was never any doubt. We must remember to raise our voices in doxology to him who sitteth upon the throne in heaven. Sing Psalter 246.

## **October 22 Read Revelation 19:6-10**

Are we making ourselves ready for the marriage feast that awaits us? We do this by study of God's Word and living a life in accordance to that Word. This is not something that we can do once in a while. We must do this every day as we wait the final summons to the feast. We do this in the hope and hearty confidence that we are given through faith. We will be given those robes washed white in the blood of our Lord and Savior. God's people are the truly happy ones as they are the called ones to the feast. Sing Psalter 333.

## **October 23 Read Revelation 19:11-16**

Another vision is given to John. Once again he is given a glimpse into the very last things on the earth. The hosts of Satan are gathered together to make a last attempt against Christ and his people. Then Christ himself appears on the white horse of battle. He is arrayed in all the symbolic clothing that belongs to him alone. This is our King. He will give to us the victory over death, the grave, and hell. When the battle is over we shall sit before him in heaven with the church of all ages. Are we watching the signs, people of God? Sing Psalter 200.

## **October 24 Read Revelation 19:17-21**

Our only comfort in life and in death is that we belong to our faithful Savior. That faithful Savior is the captain of the host that will defeat all that which belongs to the antichristian kingdom. As we read this vision, we know that the victory is sure. We know that Satan and all his hosts will be destroyed forever. What a truth! What a victory! What a comfort! Does this make us complacent in our lives on this earth? It had better not. In fact we must continue to "make our calling and election sure." It had better spur us on to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling." The work of sanctification wrought by the Holy Spirit in our hearts must be more

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and more evident as we wait this great and terrible day of our Lord. May we pray, “Lord, give to us the grace to live a life of sanctification.” Sing Psalter 234.

**October 25 Read Revelation 20:1-10**

Once again John is shown a different view of what will happen before Christ returns. Once again in the cycle of the end of time we are brought back to an earlier point. We are brought back to the beginning of the new dispensation. Satan is bound that he can not marshal all the forces of evil to fight against the church of Christ. It is not as if Satan is completely neutralized. Nothing could be further from the truth. But during the new dispensation, Satan must wait until the time of the sixth vial when the way for the heathen nations is prepared for them to join themselves together to fight against the church. But this is also the time when the antichristian kingdom is brought together to be destroyed once and for all. Fear not, people of God, the victory is ours through Christ our Savior. Sing Psalter 358.

**October 26 Read Revelation 20:11-15**

John and we are offered a small glimpse into the Day of Judgment. On that day God will sit upon his throne and pass judgement on all those who have ever lived upon this earth. All will pass before him. Those who have attempted to avoid this day in some manner are not spared. Every living man and his works must pass before God’s gaze and judgment seat. For those whose works have been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, the judgment is eternal life in heaven with God. For those whose works have not been cleansed, the judgment is the lake of the fire of the second death. This is a comfort for us, but it is also a warning to live lives pleasing to God. Sing Psalter 162.

**October 27 Read Revelation 21:1-8**

After being given a revelation into the final judgement, John is afforded a picture of the church of Christ gathered together for the rest of eternity. We see the church pictured as a city and a bride. Here we have the Old and New Testament pictures of her being brought together. Here we see the blessedness of this church as it is gathered together in joy without sorrow. What a blessing this glimpse is for us! We must still go through the last days, but we have this vision to sustain us as we wait the day of Christ’s return on the clouds of heaven. Now we see pictures, but then we shall partake of the real living water and will be granted the inheritance which was gained for us by the Alpha and Omega. Thanks be to God! Sing Psalter 125.

**October 28 Read Revelation 21:9-19**

John is transported in his vision so that he gets another view of the glorious church of Christ. He sees it described in earthly terms, but without the flaws that we see on earth. It is beautiful, it is complete, it is finished, and it belongs to Christ. Notice how both the saints of the old and new

dispensations are represented in the apostles and tribes. The church is one and it is complete. Today we wait for that unity and completeness. We must do this in prayer and meditation upon God’s Word. Let us pray for the grace to do this day by day waiting for the coming of our Lord and Savior. Sing Psalter 198.

**October 29 Read Revelation 21:20-27**

The new creation will be different than the old creation. The most obvious difference will be that no sin will be present. And not only will sin not be present; that which reminds us of sin will be absent. There will be no night. The figure of always-opened gates shows to us that there is nothing that might harm the church. There is no need of the temple as God by his presence dwells with his people. All of this is hard for us to comprehend today, but the day is coming when it will all be reality. Pray without ceasing, people of God, and patiently await that day. Sing Psalter 134.

**October 30 Read Revelation 22:1-7**

In the continuing tour of the new heavens and earth, John is shown more features of that glorious place. He sees a river whose water brings life to the elect forever. We will see God face to face because our salvation is made complete with Christ’s coming. We do not have to doubt the reality of this vision as God himself has testified of its truth. He is coming quickly. Let us keep his sayings as we watch and wait for that glorious event. Sing Psalter 127.

**October 31 Read Revelation 22:8-15**

In the final verses of this chapter, John is reminded to speak the words of this vision to the churches and ultimately to us. It is our calling to keep these sayings. We are called to worship God. We do this as we prepare for the eternal Sabbath that will be ours in heaven. We do this as the blessed or happy ones. We are these because our transgressions have been forgiven through the blood of the Lamb. Let us look forward to the day in which we shall enter that city “which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God.” Abraham did this by faith and we must as well. Sing Psalter 1.

**November 1 Read Revelation 22:16-21**

Once again we are reminded that this revelation is Christ’s and not John’s. This affords to us a tremendous comfort and hope. It is comfort because we know that nothing can take us out of Christ’s hand. It is also comfort because we know that death is not the end but rather the beginning of our life in glory. It is hope because even though Satan and his hosts wage war against us, they cannot win. Our victory is sure in Christ. He is coming; are we waiting? Are we watching? Sing Psalter 309.

**November 2 Read Isaiah 14:1-11**

It is obvious from verse 1 that chapter 14 is connected to chapter 13. Verse 1 begins with that little word “for.” This word says that a reason is being given. The reason that

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God will destroy Babylon is that he will have mercy upon his people. Our sovereign God cares for us and will have mercy upon us even though we do not deserve it. As we sing in our Psalter, “Our sins rise up against us, prevailing day by day.” Then the next line reads, “But Thou will show us mercy and take their guilt all away.” God cared for Judah, and he will care for us. Blessed be our sovereign, merciful God. Sing Psalter 170.

### **November 3 Read Isaiah 14:12-23**

In the beginning of this passage we see the intent of Satan. Ever since he induced Eve to fall, he had been scheming to prevent Christ’s coming. He had used many nations and evil rulers as his pawns. In every case God had thwarted his plans. Babylon is no different. Satan would use them to try to cut off the church from this world. God would permit it as far as it was in his plans to chastise his wayward children. But the sovereign God would not permit Satan to completely eradicate Judah. He would send his Son who would crush Satan’s head. Our salvation is sure! Thanks be to God. Sing Psalter 379.

### **November 4 Read Isaiah 14:24-32**

There is much comfort in this passage for the people of God. Judah is being told of its impending captivity as well as her deliverance. These things are sure. That is the teaching of verse 27. Nothing or no one can disannul the things of Jehovah. Notice God uses his covenant name here. This in itself is blessed assurance for God’s people. Then in the last verse of this section we are told that Jehovah has founded Zion. That gives to us the confidence to trust in him and his promises. The day is coming when he will release us from the captivity of this Babylon. Our pilgrimage will be over, and we will inherit the blessed promised land of the new heavens and the new earth. Trust in Jehovah, people of God, and his sure promises. Sing Psalter 134.

### **November 5 Read Isaiah 15:1-9**

There is much history between Israel and Moab. As you may remember they are related. Moab is the son of one of Lot’s daughters. It was Moab who would not let Israel pass through their land as they made their way home from Egypt. Balak and Eglon were Moabites. The day will come when God will bring judgment upon Moab. Through that judgment Israel would be delivered. We have our Moabites as well. The nominal Christian world will be brought to judgment. In that way we, and all of God’s people, will come to glory. Sing Psalter 87.

### **November 6 Read Isaiah 16:1-5**

This chapter and the one preceding it tell of the upcoming punishment of Moab because of its sin. In the midst of the foretelling of afflictions comes the one way of escape. That way is in following the God of Judah. Will it happen? Not for most of Moab, as they will follow the way of their

reprobate fathers. The righteous judge will be found in Jerusalem—the picture of the church of God. In his judgment will come deliverance for the faithful in Judah and for the faithful in the church throughout all ages. No matter who rules and rages in the world around us, the Moabs of all time will be destroyed, and his almighty hand will preserve God’s people. Sing Psalter 224.

### **November 7 Read Isaiah 16:6-14**

The wicked have pride, but the righteous are also guilty of the same sin. We must learn from Moab’s burden not to walk in her ways in order that we do not suffer her punishment. Moab was noted for her beautiful vineyards. She took pride in them. God would destroy them all. This is the lot of those who are without Christ. We also see of God’s victory over such things that people think are gods. Now we know that there are no other gods but Jehovah. But do we sometimes make gods of things on this earth? Let us pray daily to be delivered from the sin of pride and all that goes with it. Sing Psalter 308.

### **November 8 Read Isaiah 17:1-6**

Back in chapter 7 Isaiah had promised to Ahaz that Israel and Syria, whose capital is Damascus, would not prevail against them. Here in this chapter we have a prophecy of their fall. Israel was once one of the mightiest countries in that world. Now it would be reduced to a handful of the very poor who would remain in it. The rest would be scattered by mighty Assyria and would never return. In the judgment of these two nations, Judah would be saved. This is a picture of our salvation when all the wicked are judged at the end of time. The virgin would bear a son, and that son will return and take us to the heavenly Canaan. Sing Psalter 244.

### **November 9 Read Isaiah 17:7-14**

Have we forgotten the God of our salvation and the rock of our strength? As we have gone through life will this be said of us? If it is, then we will be smitten by the troubles found in the rest of the chapter. If God is not our rock, we will have no salvation. A rock is something strong, something to build on and have no worry. Without God as our rock, our life will be a continual worry. Let us go in faith and pray to God, the rock of our salvation, each day. When we do this in faith we can be assured that the storms of life will not prevail against us. Sing Psalter 123.

### **November 10 Read Isaiah 18:1-7**

God brings to his people this word of comfort. It may not seem like comfort as it speaks of judgment to a nation. It is a type of judgment that is extreme. But in that judgment God assures his people that he will never leave them. In this world which offends God at every turn—just listen to the nightly news and see in what new way he is trampled—we

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know that the day will come in which evil will be brought to judgment and God's people will come to glory. The two go hand in hand. Wait, people of God, for that day. Be patient for our God comes quickly. Sing Psalter 300.

#### **November 11 Read Isaiah 19:1-8**

Egypt was one of the major world powers of that day. It had the audacity to come up against Assyria. It also is a picture of both the complete wicked world and of hell itself. Their civilization was very advanced with accomplishments in both academia and the arts. But they knew not God. Because of this failure every aspect of their society would be burdened until Alexander the Great would come and would end Egypt's domination. Egypt's judgment was part of Judah's deliverance. This world's judgment is part of our deliverance. Let us not become enamored with this world; let us look unto the world to come. Sing Psalter 420.

#### **November 12 Read Isaiah 19:9-17**

The wisdom of the world is foolishness indeed. These were the words of the apostle Paul to the church at Corinth. But as we see from verses 11-12, these words were also spoken by Isaiah. As Egypt's wisdom became folly, they became afraid of little Judah. We must take these words to heart. Many in the world profess a type of wisdom. We might be inclined to follow it. But if we do, we will suffer Egypt's fate. We must be discerning about what we see and read. And we must apply God's wisdom, found in Scripture, to all that we see and read. Only in this way will we find the peace that passes understanding. Sing Psalter 337.

#### **November 13 Read Isaiah 19:18-25**

Now Isaiah looks further ahead until the time when the Gentiles shall be brought into the church of Christ. Israel's enemies would now be one with them in the cause of Christ. Not all, of course, but only those whom God would call. Historically many Jews did move to Egypt. In fact, the Greek translation of the Old Testament would be written there. This truth had to be hard for Israel of old. The idea of Gentiles being one with them was unbelievable to them. We must learn from this. Christ's church is universal. It is a catholic church. Let us always pray for the day when the whole church from all over the globe is gathered together in heaven. Sing Psalter 237.

#### **November 14 Read Isaiah 20:1-6**

The history of this chapter is useful for its interpretation. Isaiah was sent by God to the people of Judah during the time of Hezekiah to warn them against dependence on Egypt and Ethiopia instead of Jehovah. He shows to them by his appearance in their midst what would happen to the heathen upon whom they were placing their trust. Upon whom do we place our trust? Is it upon Jehovah the sovereign God of

heaven and earth? Or is it upon some man, group of men, or man's accomplishments? Let us trust in God our maker and redeemer. Sing Psalter 152.

#### **November 15 Read Isaiah 21:1-10**

Isaiah now prophesies of the destruction of Babylon who had taken Judah captive. Remember these are prophecies. God had given to Isaiah messages concerning Judah's future. He has shown them their sin, he has told of the coming captivity, and now he foretells the deliverance for the true people of God. God does bring to us deliverance. Are we waiting for it? Are we praying for it? In praying for God's will to be done, we are praying for the persecution which will be ours in the last days. But out of that persecution will come deliverance as Christ appears on the clouds of glory to take us to the new Jerusalem. Sing Psalter 380.

#### **November 16 Read Isaiah 21:11-17**

Notice those last few words of verse 17. When God speaks, whatever he speaks comes to pass. Think of Genesis 1. He spoke and there was light and the rest of creation followed. John 1 tells us Christ is the Word. When he will speak at the end of time, the world will be over, and the church will be brought together into heaven. He speaks today in the various natural occurrences such as floods, tornadoes, earthquakes, etc. God speaks throughout our lives. God speaks, are we listening? Sing Psalter 85.

#### **November 17 Read Isaiah 22:1-14**

Isaiah now prophesies of the coming siege and defeat of Jerusalem. This would not be a battle in which Judah's soldiers would fight valiantly. Rather they would be shut up inside Jerusalem and await its destruction. What did they do in there? Did they pray? Did they worship? Did they listen to God's messengers? They did not; instead, they ate and drank supposedly without a care. This is the reaction of the wicked. Their judgment is recounted in the last verse. They would die. Thanks be to God for giving us a Savior. Let us go to him at all times. He will deliver us. Sing Psalter 134.

#### **November 18 Read Isaiah 22:15-25**

There is a beautiful figure of speech in this passage of Holy Scripture. In Bible times nails were driven into buildings to hold up utensils that were needed quite often. They were significant in the daily life of the people of that time. A wicked leader, Shebna, was going to lose his nail, and all that pertained to him would fall. But God would not leave Judah leaderless. A faithful man, Eliakim, would be given his position. This man would have a sure place; this man would be a picture of Christ who leads his people to eternal glory. May our prayer be that God gives to us the nail of grace firmly fixed in his house forever. Sing Psalter 271.

#### **November 19 Read Isaiah 23:1-9**

Again Isaiah turns to the judgment of the wicked. In this case it is the city of Tyre. Tyre was known for providing

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materials for the building of Solomon's temple. From its land, Phoenicia, came wicked queen Jezebel. It was a rich country, but wicked in that it worshipped Baal. Its cup of iniquity would be full, and Jehovah decreed its destruction at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. The people of Judah also in captivity would see that Jehovah was a sovereign God and must be obeyed. We, too, must recognize and bow before the sovereignty of God in our lives. Sing Psalter 182.

**November 20 Read Isaiah 23:10-18**

Tyre was not utterly destroyed. At the end of seventy years when the Medes and Persians defeated the Chaldeans, Tyre returned to its homeland and took up business once more. We might wonder at this because their wickedness also returned with them. But God would establish his church there. There are numerous references in the book of Acts to Christians in that country. God is sovereign and he watches over his people of every nation and race. Sing Psalter 195.

**November 21 Read Isaiah 24:1-12**

The next four chapters form one prophecy. It appears to be a prophecy of the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem and its subsequent restoration. We can also look at it as a prophecy of the destruction of the world and the establishment of the New Jerusalem where Christ will reign with his church for ever. Notice that this destruction is total. Every class of people will be affected. Every aspect of life will be taken away including that of joy and gladness. This is what will happen to this world. We cannot make it better; it is doomed to total ruin. We must never forget that our home is not here but rather we must look for that "city which has foundations." Sing Psalter 133.

**November 22 Read Isaiah 24:13-23**

Even though Judah would be taken into captivity, God's true believers would be preserved no matter where they were taken. Not only would they be preserved, they would be brought together at a time appointed by God. Isaiah is given a peek into the new dispensation when Christ will come, gather his church together, and reign gloriously with them in a kingdom in which sun and moon are not needed. The wicked will everlastingly be punished and the church will live forever. Thanks be to God! Sing Psalter 198.

**November 23 Read Isaiah 25:1-5**

Once again we see one of those songs of praise which are sprinkled throughout Isaiah. Isaiah has had to prophesy of many terrible things for the people of God, but yet he could testify, like Paul, that all things work together for Judah's good. He could do that because Jehovah had done wonderful things. He was and is faithful, and he is truth itself. As we live our lives on this earth, are these our testimonies? Can we say with the Psalmist, "The Lord has done great things for us; whereof we are glad."? Sing Psalter 357.

**November 24 Read Isaiah 25:6-12**

It must have been hard for Judah to hear these words of Jehovah through Isaiah. They would have to share their precious mountain, temple, and faith with Gentiles. God would be the God of those with whom he had told them previously not to fellowship. We must be careful in this as well. God's church, the body of Christ, is "an holy catholic church." We must take in those from all races if they are those whom God has taken in. Let us joyfully await that day when the church of all tongues is united together speaking the language of God. Sing Psalter 354.

**November 25 Read Isaiah 26:1-7**

What beautiful words we find in verse 3! Perfect peace is impossible to achieve without the help of our Father who has given to us the Prince of Peace. While we go through this valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil because the Prince of Peace is with us. He has made it possible for us to trust in Jehovah who is everlasting strength. No matter what path he has selected for us to walk, we will find the peace that passeth understanding. Let us trust in our covenant God today and every day. Sing Psalter 232.

**November 26 Read Isaiah 26:8-14**

We find two verses of note in this section of Scripture. First of all verse 9. Our covenant God knows that we have need of him. Even in the night we can come to him, and he will hear us. As the morning dawns and we do not know how to face the day ahead, his directive to us is to seek him early. Then in verse 12 we read that he will and has given to us peace. Whatever trouble we are in, there is a way of escape ordained by our heavenly Father who has done all things in us and for us. People of God, whatever afflictions we face, our God will deliver us because we have an advocate in heaven who has gone through affliction. Sing Psalter 391.

**November 27 Read Isaiah 26:15-21**

Faithful people in Judah, as they continued to be oppressed, came to God in prayer. In hearing their prayers, He answered them by calling them to him for refuge and taking vengeance upon those who troubled his people. Do we know what it means to hide in Jehovah? Do we pour out our needs to him through Christ our redeemer? God is our God. He will care for us now and until the end when, by vanquishing our foes, he will deliver us to eternal glory. Let us flee to him who has promised us a covering under his wings. Sing Psalter 231.

**November 28 Read Isaiah 27:1-13**

In this chapter we have the assurance from God that though his people have been taken captive and scattered from Babylon to Egypt, they would be gathered and taken to Jerusalem by their gracious God. It is all of God's grace that this would take place. We also see a looking ahead until Christ returns and gathers the church from the four corners

of the world and delivers it unto the new Jerusalem. This, too, is all of grace. Sing Psalter 381.

**November 29 Read Isaiah 28:1-6**

This chapter was probably written before the fall of the ten tribes to the Assyrians. The first four verses deal with those ten tribes. These are the apostate church. They had been given all the advantages of the church, but they had rejected those advantages and of course God himself. We see a description of their destruction. The remnant who still remained in Judah were to be saved. We will see that as we continue through the chapter. What are we doing with the advantages that God has given to us? Do we cherish his word and ways? If we do not, we will be like Ephraim of old. Sing Psalter 246.

**November 30 Read Isaiah 28:7-15**

The sins that were the cause of Israel's destruction were not foreign to Judah. Judah was guilty of committing those same sins. Judah's leaders whether prophet, priest, or king were guilty of leading the people in an evil way. Judah, too, would be chastised for those sins. This is a lesson for us. Those who are leaders must lead only by the Word of the Lord. It must be his Word alone and not man's or man's interpretation. We must keep ourselves clean from the world's evils. Only in this way will we enjoy the rest that will be ours during the eternal Sabbath. May we strive to do this each and every day. Sing Psalter 83.

**December 1 Read Isaiah 28:16-21**

Once again Isaiah brings forth the good news of the Messiah. He uses an older figure for Christ—that of the cornerstone. David used this in the Psalms and Jesus himself referred to it. This stone has a twofold effect. Those who believe will have a sure foundation that can never be moved. It is a precious stone to us. For the unbeliever they will only mock until Christ uncovers their devious ways and sends them to eternal destruction. Let us trust on that sure stone our Savior. Sing Psalter 320.

**December 2 Read Isaiah 28:22-29**

Isaiah uses a common occurrence in Judah to teach them how God works. Just as a farmer or gardener has certain techniques that he uses on certain crops, so God uses certain techniques upon the peoples of this world. He has planted and cared for his crop. The time will come when he will harvest them. The fruit he will store in his barn, and the chaff will be destroyed. Let us be instructed even as we see the workings of farmers around us. This is for our instruction and comfort. Sing Psalter 1.

## Resist the Devil

*The scripture says if we resist  
The devil and his pow'rs  
That he will surely flee from us;  
The vict'ry then is ours.  
But how do we accomplish this?  
The task takes much persistence,  
For Satan doesn't just "let go";  
We'll meet with great resistance.*

*To steadfastly obey our Lord  
Requires a prayerful life,  
For human nature does not want  
To face this awful strife.  
We much prefer the easy way  
To drift along in sin  
Enjoying pleasures of the flesh;  
Foregoing discipline.*

*But as God's children we will pray;  
The Spirit works within  
And strengthens our oft weak desires  
That we the conquest win.  
We thank the Lord for giving us  
The faith to trust and pray;  
May we seek first our Father's will  
And walk in wisdom's way.*

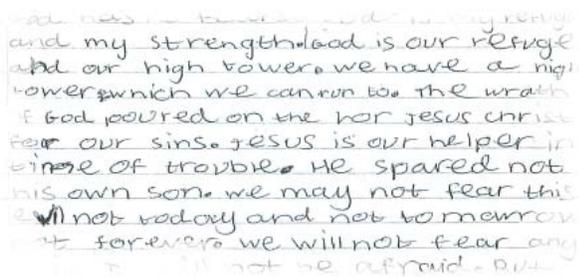
Thelma Westra

# Excerpts of Hope

by a mother in Zion

Our son wrote down these sermon notes before he had to be taken into care and kept on medications to help calm and control him. In spite of his severe handicaps, he wrote these notes himself while attending the Sunday sermons.

How thankful we are that we worked for the most part diligently with him while he was in our care. May these notes be an incentive to work faithfully with our children while we have opportunity. That opportunity stopped quite suddenly for us. We thank the Lord for all that our son has in his mind and heart where ever God places him to live now.



God is my refuge and my strength. God is our refuge and our high tower. We have a high tower which we can run to. The wrath of God poured on the Lord Jesus Christ for our sins. Jesus is our helper in time of trouble. He spared not his own Son. We may not fear this evil—~~not~~ today and not tomorrow not forever. We will not fear any evil. I will not be afraid. ... We are in the midst of God. The child of God makes this confession to the end of the world. ... The text speaks of a blow and the blow of God's heavy hand. That now he has no joy in this life. We are separated from our fellow beings. I will not speak evil of God. Whether it be bad or whether it be good. A storm or a flood or an earthquake. God has all power in heaven and on earth. We may not complain of God's justice. Thou

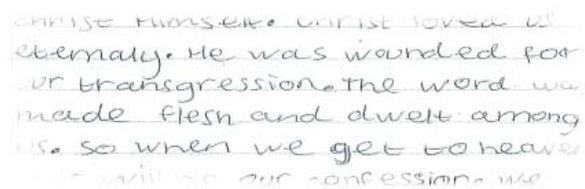
... Christ loved us eternally. He was wounded for our transgression. The word was made flesh and dwelt among us. So when we get to heaven this will be our confession. We need help in times of trouble. Jesus our Saviour gives us help. Christ Jesus succors us. Christ had to be like us so that Christ can give us his help. Christ gave us his very own life.”

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Let us never underestimate the power of God's grace to work saving knowledge within the hearts and minds of our children in spite of the severe handicaps they might have. “Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD” (Psalm 31:24). ❖

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Christ Jesus loved us eternally. He was wounded for our transgression. The word was made flesh and dwelt among us. So when we get to heaven this will be our confession. We need help in times of trouble. Jesus our Saviour gives us help. Christ Jesus succors us. Christ had to be like us so that Christ can give us his help. Christ gave us his very own life.”

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# Abstruse Melancholy

by Dan Bergman

## Part I: Depression and Anxiety— What They Are and Their Symptoms

There are so many different topics that we read about in books and magazines and other fine literature. Some of what we read about can even give us a pretty clear picture and understanding of what is being written about. For example, fictional story books can give us a good picture of what is happening just by us using our imagination. We can also do that with many how-to books and magazines. We can read this various literature and feel that we are now “experts” or even pretty good at it and know a lot about it, and we can be quite right. However, one topic, I believe, that we can read a lot about and not fully understand is depression. You may have read numerous books and other literature about depression, but how much do you really understand and know about it? I have talked with a handful of people who have gone through depression (and are still going through it), and what they have all told me is, that, you can not fully understand depression until you have gone through it yourself. I am certainly not wishing that anyone have that kind of knowledge and experience with it, but I do want people to better understand it and know what they can do to help someone who is going through it—that is my whole purpose of this article. It is to inform and educate people who are not really aware of what depression is and how much it can affect a person and their family.

By God’s grace, I pray that this may open some eyes of the uninformed and those who think they know “all about it” because they have a cousin, nephew, etc. going through it, even though they do not see that person very often. Even though you may have a close relative that you live with that suffers with depression, you can still have much difficulty in grasping the whole idea of it. While reading this article, take into consideration that I wrote this with first-hand experience. Not to say that I personally have suffered from major depression—although I have gone through some depression in my lifetime—but I speak of my sister Julie, who I currently live with. She has suffered from major depression for much of her life, howbeit, she is (to my knowledge) better than she was. In a way, I thank God for the experience of witnessing a

person close to me go through such a difficult illness. It has really opened my eyes, hence the writing of this article. It helped remind me of the words the Apostle Peter wrote in his first epistle. “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your cares upon him; for he careth for you” (I Peter 5:6, 7). I have certainly been humbled.

I will try and lay out what depression is, some signs and symptoms associated with depression, the many faces of depression and some of the risk factors. The next parts of the article will deal more with the help and recovery aspect of depression. Remember, this article is but a drop of the ocean of knowledge and information that is available on depression. It is more common than we might want to admit, so I pray that all who read this may be better aware of what to look for and have more empathy for the depressed individual. So, whether you are suffering from depression yourself or have a loved one who is suffering from it, I pray that these words may be of help and comfort to you and those around you.

### Depression Numbers

Of all the health conditions in the world, one of the most common is depression. Estimates vary considerably, but today depression appears to occur in 15 to 20 percent of all people over the course of a lifetime. Furthermore, in any given 12-month period, somewhat under 10 percent of the population experiences an episode of significant depression. And at this very moment, an estimated 121 million people are suffering from depression throughout the world. (Estimates taken from *Depression for Dummies*, 2003)

Estimates on depression are only rough approximations. Because most people with depression fail to seek treatment and many people with depression don’t even realize they’re depressed, reliable statistics are few and far between. Whatever the real figures are, huge numbers of people suffer from depression at some point in their lives. And depression has all kinds of costs associated with it. Joshua Wolf Shenk, in his book *Lincoln’s Melancholy* wrote, “Affecting more than 100 million people a year, depression is the world’s leading cause

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of disability. In 2000, about a million people worldwide killed themselves—about equal to the number of deaths from war and homicide that year put together. Adjusting for population growth, unipolar depression (another name for major depressive disorder) is ten times more prevalent than it was fifty years ago.”

### **Defining Depression**

According to the Mayo Clinic, depression is not a weakness, nor is it something that you can simply “snap out of.” It’s a medical illness that involves the mind and body. It affects how you think and behave and can cause a variety of emotional and physical problems. You may not even be able to go about your usual daily activities, and depression may make you feel as if life just isn’t worth living anymore—that is where our family and friends and the rest of our support group comes in. But, more on that a bit later.

We all know that it is not possible to escape life’s ups and downs. It is normal to feel unhappy or sad in response to disappointment, loss, frustration or a medical condition. Many people use the word “depression” to explain those kinds of feelings, but that is really situational depression, which is a normal reaction to events around us. Clinical depression, though, overwhelms and engulfs your day to day life, interfering with your ability to work, study, eat, sleep, and have fun. It is unrelenting, with little if any relief.

There’s a vast difference between “feeling depressed” and suffering from clinical depression. Some people describe it as “living in a black hole” or having a feeling of impending doom. They can’t escape their unhappiness and despair. However, some people with depression don’t feel sad at all. Instead, they feel lifeless and empty. In this apathetic state, they are unable to experience pleasure. Even when participating in activities they used to enjoy, they feel as if they’re just going through the motions. The signs and symptoms vary from person to person, and they may wax and wane in severity over time.

### **Signs and Symptoms of Depression**

Depression symptoms can vary greatly because different people experience depression in different ways. For example, a 30-year-old man with depression may not have the same symptoms as a 75-year-old man. For some people, depression symptoms are so severe that it’s obvious something isn’t right. Others may feel generally miserable or unhappy without really knowing it.

Depression is a loaded word in our culture. Many associate it, however wrongly, with a sign of weakness and

excessive emotion. This is especially true with men. Depressed men are less likely than women to acknowledge feelings of self-loathing and hopelessness. Depression is expressed in men, frequently, by it coming out in more “socially acceptable” forms. Anger, aggression, reckless behavior and violence, along with substance abuse, can be signs of an underlying depression. You might hear complaints about fatigue, irritability, sleep problems, and loss of interest or sudden excessive interest in work or hobbies. Even though depression rates for women are twice as high as those in men, men are higher suicide risk, especially older men.

Here are some signs and symptoms to look for in someone that you suspect might be suffering from depression: Loss of interest in normal activities; feeling sad or down; feeling hopeless; crying spells for no apparent reason; problems sleeping; trouble focusing or concentrating; difficulty making decisions; being easily annoyed; feeling fatigued or weak; unintentional weight gain or loss; irritability; restlessness; feeling worthless; thoughts of suicide or suicidal behavior; unexplained physical problems, such as back pain or head aches. If you notice any of these signs or symptoms, contact your family physician or someone you think would be able to help.

### **What Causes Depression?**

It is not known specifically what causes depression. As with many mental illnesses, it’s thought that a variety of biochemical, genetic and environmental factors may cause depression. As Dr. Brian Decker wrote in “Dealing With Depression: A Christian Perspective,” a pamphlet published by the Faith Protestant Reformed Church Evangelism Committee, “It would be convenient if we could simply say that depression is a chemical imbalance, but it is not that easy.”

“In fact,” writes Joshua Wolf Shenk, “major depression, in people who are vulnerable to it, can be set off by all manner of circumstances. What would appear to a nondepressed person to be an ordinary or insignificant stimulus can through a depressive’s eyes look rather profound.”

He goes on to say that of those who’ve had a single episode of major depression, more than half will have a second. “Major depressive disorder, recurrent,” he adds, “is a illness that is characterized by two or more major depressive episodes, separated by at least a month. More broadly, it suggests an underlying problem that can be expected to surface in various ways throughout a person’s life.” He says to consider that someone with

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two episodes of major depression has a seventy percent chance of experiencing a third. And someone with three episodes has a ninety percent chance of having a fourth. (The phrase “clinical depression” can be applied to any incident of major depression or to people who experience major depressive disorder.)

### **Different Faces of Depression**

In some people who suffer from depression, it can persist at a low level for months and even years. In others, the symptoms can be stronger and severe enough that it makes suicide a real concern. There are a number of faces of depression. Let’s take a moment and look at those different faces of depression.

Clinical (major) depression is characterized by the inability for life to be delectable. The associated feelings of this depression normally persist for at least two weeks in order to be considered a major depressive episode. In dysthymia (recurrent, mild depression), the depressive symptoms are not as strong as in a major depressive episode, but are lengthy, lasting at least two years. With this face of depression, more times than not, you may feel mildly or moderately depressed, although you may have some temporary mood lifts. Then there is postpartum depression, which is experienced by new mothers just after they have given birth. What many call, “the baby blues,” are normal; postpartum depression, however, is longer lasting and more serious. One thing that can be especially dreadful to mothers suffering from postpartum depression are feelings of wanting to avoid the baby or even cause it harm. Postpartum depression does not always happen right after delivery. It can happen up to a year after childbirth. There is one type of depression that is more common in climates with more severe winter weather patterns and limited sunlight, like the northern climates (Michigan would certainly count). And that type is Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). There is also manic depression, which is also known as bipolar disorder—of which I will not go into more because it is a whole other topic in and of itself. However, it is characterized by cycling mood extremes, and, when depressed, a person with bipolar disorder exhibits the usual symptoms of major depression. However, the treatment for bipolar disorder, especially using medications, is normally different.

### **Depression Is Complicated**

Some medical illnesses have a specific biological or chemical cause, making treatment, like a medication or surgery, more straight forward. Unfortunately, depression is more complicated. It is not just a result of a chemical

imbalance and is not simply cured with medications. That is not to say that medications don’t work or are not a good idea. What makes depression so difficult to treat is that what seems like depression may actually be something else. If you are stuck in a work position where you feel as if you’re not going anywhere and feel hopeless and helpless, for example, the best treatment might be to find another job which challenges you more. In a case like this, the depression is situational and is remedied by changing the situation.

Being aware of what depression is, knowing the warning signs, and learning how to handle it is so crucial because it will often lead to a solution and cure. Do not despair, for, let us remember the words of David that he wrote in Psalm 34:18-19 & 22. “The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all. . . . The LORD redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate.”

Although precise statistics are not known, depression is considered relatively common. In any given year, about 12 million adults in the United States have depression. Depression goes through all racial, ethnic and economic divides—no one is immune from the risk of getting depression. Depression typically begins in the late 20s, but it can surface at any age, affecting everyone from young children to older adults. Twice as many women are diagnosed with depression as men, but this may be due in part because women are more likely to seek treatment for depression.

### **Risk Factors of Depression**

Although the precise cause of depression isn’t known, researchers have identified certain factors that seem to increase the risk of developing or triggering depression. Let us now take a moment to look at some of the risk factors associated with depression: having other biological relatives with depression; having family members who have taken their own life; stressful life events, such as death of a loved one; having a depressed mood as a youngster or early childhood trauma or abuse; illness, such as cancer, heart disease, Alzheimer’s or HIV/AIDS; alcohol, nicotine or drug abuse; having recently given birth; loneliness and lack of social support. A key risk factor for depression is isolation and loneliness.

### **Suicide is a Real Danger**

Although, as Christians, we tend to view suicide as sin, it is important to note that depression is a major risk factor for suicide. The deep despair and hopelessness

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that goes along with depression can make suicide feel like the only way to make the pain go away. Suicidal individuals often give warning signs or signals of their intentions. Suicide is a very real danger in depression, so it's important to know the warning signs: talking about suicide, dying, or harming oneself; preoccupation with death; expressing feelings of hopelessness or self-loathing; acting in dangerous or self-destructive ways; getting affairs in order and saying goodbye (giving away precious, sometimes valuable, items); seeking out pills, weapons, or other lethal objects; sudden sense of calm after a depression. If you think a friend or family member might be considering suicide, one of the best things you can do is to talk to him or her about your concerns—it could very well save their life!

We may not always be aware of the signs or signals related to suicide. That was evident with my sister Julie. She was suffering from major depression and had even considered suicide as an alternative. One reason was because of the voices she was hearing in her head. I was not even aware of it until after she informed me of it. Not to say that there were no warning signs or signals, but I was just not aware of them nor did I know what to look for. My point? EDUCATE YOURSELF! The best way to prevent suicide is to know and watch for those warning signs and get involved if you spot them. One thing that helped prevent Julie from going through with it was that she saw an image of her nephews. Alas, some people may not be so fortunate this way, so we need to do what we can to help prevent them from going through with it. If you are fighting depression and thought about suicide as an alternative, think about these words; "Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved" (Psalm 55:22).

### **Importance of Awareness**

Suicidal thoughts are a symptom of severe depression and must be taken seriously. In the next parts of this article I will be getting into more about what is needed to be done if you or a loved one is suffering from depression and even considering suicide as an alternative. I will also be exploring the different treatment options and tips, various suggestions when dealing with someone who is going through depression, and also some information I received from various people I talked with who have either gone through depression or are medical professionals who directly help others get through it.

It is my prayer that this information has helped shed some light on the issue of depression and the vast need for it to be mentioned. It is also certainly not an issue

that should be esoteric, but rather should be divulged to many (if not all); for there's a large number who are not even aware of the severity or commonness of it.

Now that you are more aware of what depression is and how much of a toll it can take on a person's life, are you not a bit more inclined to do something to try and help? Do you even feel a bit lugubrious yourself? Do not despair. Let us find comfort in these words we find in the book of Isaiah. "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee" (Isaiah 41:10, 13).

### **Important Link Between Depression and Anxiety**

Many people suffering from depression often experience anxiety as well. In fact, as many as 90 percent of people who've been diagnosed with depression also have symptoms of anxiety. Depression and anxiety disorders are not the same though, although at first glance they seem very similar. What's the difference? Depression, as mentioned earlier, generates emotions such as hopelessness, despair and anger. Energy levels are usually very low, and depressed people often feel overwhelmed by the day-to-day tasks and personal relationships so essential to life. A person with anxiety disorder, however, experiences fear, panic or anxiety in situations where most people would not feel anxious or threatened. The sufferer may experience sudden panic or anxiety attacks without any recognized trigger, and often lives with a constant nagging worry or anxiousness. Without treatment, such disorders can restrict a person's ability to work, maintain relationships, or even cause one to leave the house. Be sure to tell your doctor about all of your symptoms so you will get the right diagnosis.

Although no one knows exactly why, a great number of depressions are also accompanied by anxiety. In one study, 85 percent of those with major depression were also diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) while 35 percent had symptoms of a panic disorder. Because they so often go hand in hand, anxiety and depression are considered the fraternal twins of mood disorders.

Believed to be caused in part by a malfunction of brain chemistry, generalized anxiety is not the normal apprehension that one feels before taking a test or awaiting the outcome of a biopsy. A person with an anxiety disorder suffers from what President Franklin Roosevelt called "fear itself." For a reason that is only partially known, the brain's fight-or-flight mechanism becomes

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activated, even when no real threat exists. Being chronically anxious is like being stalked by an imaginary tiger. The feeling of danger never goes away.

Being both anxious and depressed is a tremendous challenge. Clinicians have observed that when anxiety occurs “comorbidly” with depression, the symptoms of both depression and anxiety are more severe compared to when those disorders occur independently. Moreover, the symptoms of the depression exacerbated by anxiety has a much higher suicide rate than depression alone. (In one study, 92 percent of depressed patients who had attempted suicide were also plagued by severe anxiety.) Like alcohol and barbiturates, depression and anxiety are a deadly combination when taken together. Unfortunately, over 60 percent of major depressions are accompanied by varying levels of anxious feelings and behavior. But, let us remember: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge” (Psalm 46:1, 11).

### **What Are Anxiety Disorders?**

So, I now have a better understanding of what depression is and that there is a distinct link between depression and anxiety, but what about how to better understand what anxiety disorders are? Well, we all surely know what anxiety feels like. Our heart pounds before a big presentation or a tough exam or even a job interview. We get butterflies in our stomach during a blind date—especially when we’re about to hold hands or even get that first kiss. Especially these days, we worry and fret about where the money will come from for the next bill(s), or, if we’re fortunate enough to even have a job in this rough economy, we feel jittery at the prospect of asking the boss for a raise. However, if worries and fears are preventing you from living your life the way you’d like to, you may be suffering from an anxiety disorder. The good news is, there are many anxiety treatments and self-help strategies that can help reduce your anxiety symptoms and take control of your life. I will be exploring those treatments in the next part of this article, along with the treatment options for depression.

It’s normal to worry and feel tense or scared when under pressure or facing a stressful situation. Anxiety is the body’s natural response to danger, an automatic alarm that goes off when we feel threatened.

Although it may be unpleasant, anxiety isn’t always a bad thing. In fact, anxiety can help us stay alert and focused, spur us into action, and motivate us to solve problems. But when anxiety is consistent or overwhelming, when it interferes with your relationships and activities

(like not being able to be around people, such as going to church), that’s when you’ve crossed the line from normal anxiety (which is preached about in our churches) into the territory of anxiety disorders.

### **Identifying An Anxiety Disorder**

So how do I know if I have an anxiety disorder? If you identify with several of the following signs and symptoms, and they just won’t go away, you may be suffering from an anxiety disorder: Are you constantly tense, worried, or on edge? Does your anxiety interfere with your work, school, or family responsibilities? Are you plagued by fears that you know are irrational, but can’t shake? Do you believe that something bad will happen if certain things aren’t done a certain way? Do you avoid everyday situations or activities because they make you anxious? Do you experience sudden, unexpected attacks of heart-pounding panic? Do you feel like danger and catastrophe are around every corner?

Because the anxiety disorders are a group of related conditions rather than a single disorder, they can, just like depression, look very different from person to person. One individual may suffer from intense anxiety attacks that strike without warning, while another gets panicky at the thought of mingling at a party. Someone else may struggle with a disabling fear of driving or uncontrollable, intrusive thought. Still, another may live in a constant state of tension, worrying about anything and everything.

But despite their different forms, all anxiety disorders share one major symptom: persistent or severe worry in situations where most people wouldn’t feel threatened.

In addition to the primary symptoms of irrational and excessive fear and worry, other common emotional symptoms of anxiety include: feelings of apprehension or dread; trouble concentrating; feeling tense and jumpy; anticipating the worst; irritability; restlessness; watching for signs of danger; feeling like your mind’s gone blank.

Anxiety is more than just a feeling. As a product of the body’s fight-or-flight response, anxiety involves a wide range of physical symptoms. Because of the numerous physical symptoms, anxiety sufferers often mistake their disorder for a medical illness. They may even visit many doctors and make countless trips to the hospital before their anxiety disorder is discovered.

Common physical symptoms of anxiety include: pounding heart; sweating; stomach upset or dizziness; frequent urination or diarrhea; shortness of breath; tremors and twitches; muscle tension; headaches; fatigue; insomnia.

Anxiety attacks, known as panic attacks in mental

health circles, are episodes of intense panic or fear. They usually occur suddenly and without warning. Sometimes there's an obvious trigger—getting stuck in the elevator, for example, or thinking about the big live performance you're giving in a few hours—but in other cases, the attacks come out of the blue.

Anxiety attacks usually peak within ten minutes, and they rarely last more than a half hour. But, don't get me wrong, during that short time, the terror can be so severe that you feel as if you're about to die or totally lose control. My sister [Julie] certainly felt that way when she had her severe anxiety attacks. So frightening themselves are the physical symptoms that many people believe they're having a heart attack. After the attack is over, you may be worried about having another one, particularly in a public place where help isn't available or you can't easily escape. These attacks even made it difficult for my sister to go to church. It's certainly hard to watch someone go through it, just imagine how much more difficult it is to personally go through it!

### **Anxiety Attack Symptoms**

You may be wondering what some of the symptoms of an anxiety attack include. They include: surge of overwhelming panic; feeling of losing control or going crazy; heart palpitations or chest pain; feeling like you're going to pass out; trouble breathing or choking sensation; hyperventilation; hot flashes or chills; trembling or shaking; nausea or stomach cramps; feeling detached or unreal. I know that these symptoms are real because I saw my sister go through some of them. Thankfully she is much better today since she got the help she needed.

Take comfort in these words we find in Deuteronomy 31:8: "And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed."

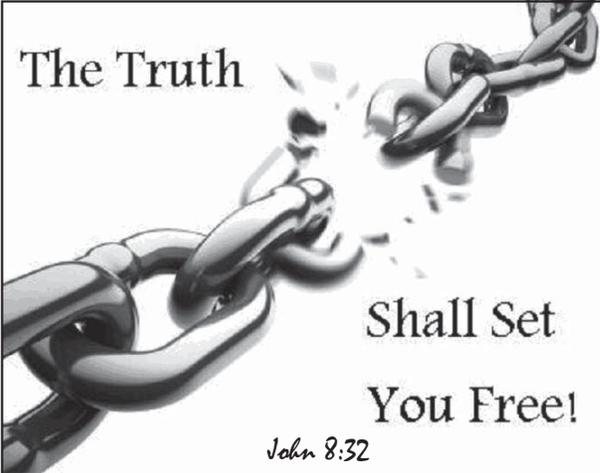
### **There is Hope**

Whether you suffer from depression, Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), or both, it is imperative to seek the care of a healthcare professional. Depression and GAD are serious illnesses that require medical intervention. If you suffer from either of these disorders, you are not alone. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, each year approximately 19 million Americans suffer from depression, and about 4 million suffer from GAD. Men and women of all ages are affected. The good news is that depression and GAD are both treatable. That treatment will be discussed in the next part of this article.

You have now seen some of the symptoms and statistics of depression and the linked anxiety. I now ask you to

go and educate yourself some more on this whole matter that is so widespread. The more you know the better it will be for you and the one you are trying to help fight through it. Granted, no one will ever completely understand the vastness of depression and anxiety, but we are called to do what we can so that we can better help those who are suffering from it. Pray to God that he will give you the knowledge you need to better understand and help the sufferer, and that God will give you the strength you need to fight through it. Cast your cares upon him, for he careth for his own. ❖

*Dan is a member of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.*



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## Just Wonderin'

"Look at that bird!" Alyson pointed to the sky as she shielded her eyes and bent her neck back as far as it would go. A swallow glided far overhead of herself and her little brother. "It flies so smoothly."

"Swooo-o-osh!" Aaron's arm imitated the bird's flight, except faster.

Alyson giggled. "You goofball. It's a bird, not a jet."

"Well, it flies like a jet," Aaron said as he began to run ahead of Alyson on the path with his arms stretched out like wings. After reaching top speed, he flapped his arms up and down and jumped. He almost fell. He looked up at the swallow disappearing behind the trees and trudged back to Alyson.

"So you're not a bird."

"Birds don't wear backpacks loaded with school-books," he said. They walked a little farther. "But I still wonder what it's like to be a bird." Aaron crossed his arms. "I'd only see the top of your head and shoulders. You'd be small. Just a dot. The wind would rush past my beak and feathers and wings—it'd be cool."

"You'd be cold—and wet when it rains."

"I'd land in my dry, comfy nest."

"Well, I'm glad I'm a person, with clothes and shoes and a jacket and a nice, warm house." Alyson lowered her eyelids and looked at Aaron out of the corner of her eye. "And what would you eat?"

Aaron smiled as he opened his eyes wide. "I'd eat worms! Big fat ones. And bugs. Lots of 'em. Moths and mosquitoes and dragonflies!"

"Ew!" Alyson winced. "Look, the leaves on that tree are almost all orange."

Aaron wouldn't let his sister change the subject so fast. "And just think, in the winter I'd fly far, far away, where it's warm and sunny, and where I could eat bugs all day long. And you'd still be here—where it's cold and snowy."

Alyson crossed her arms as well. "You can eat your bugs in the sun."

Aaron stuck his chin out a bit farther as they neared their home. "Well, I really do wonder what it would be like to be a bird."

"Well, we better be glad God made us what we are, and thank him."

"Yeah, I'm glad," Aaron sniffed. "I'm just wonderin'."

# "LITTLE LIGHTS"

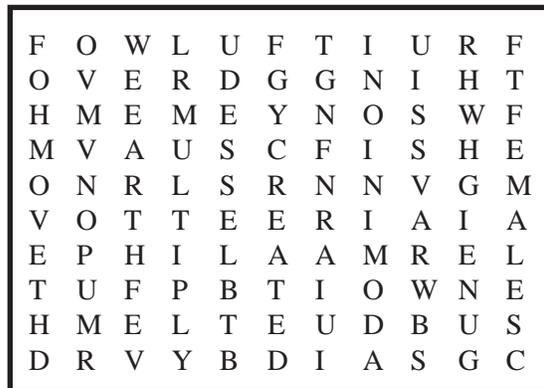
... let it shine!

by Connie Meyer



**Find the underlined words from Genesis 1:27, 28 in the puzzle below:**

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."



*Connie is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

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## Church News

### BAPTISMS

“For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” Act 2:39

The sacrament of Holy Baptism was administered to:

- Skylar Nicole, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Trent VanBemmel—Calvary, IA  
Danica Jean, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Dan Blankespoor—Calvary, IA  
Ali Mae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Kyle VanDerBrink—Calvary, IA  
Evan Michael, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brent Boon—Doon, IA  
Kobe Reid, son of Emily Griffioen—Faith, MI  
Ellery Joyce, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jason Engelsma—Grandville, MI  
Jacob Logan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brian Huizinga—Grandville, MI  
Meghan Kate, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ryan Kooienga—Grandville, MI  
Daniel Gerrit, son of Mr. & Mrs. David Langerak—Hope, MI  
Calvin Kenneth, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joshua Engelsma—Hope, MI  
Landon Emmett, son of Mr. & Mrs. Kyle Kooienga—Holland, MI  
Bryce Dale, son of Mr. & Mrs. Chad Uittenbogaard—Hull, IA  
Job Arthur and Josiah David, twin sons of Mr. & Mrs. Darrell DeVries—Hull, IA  
Kylee Jean and Bethany Grace, daughters of Marissa Kortus—Loveland, CO  
Neil Alexander, son of Mr. & Mrs. Adam Bosman—Peace, IL  
Isaac Edward, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joseph Ophoff—Southeast, MI

- Kendra Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ryan VanOverloop—South Holland, IL  
Douglas Mitchell, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joe Mancusi—South Holland, IL  
Max Cooper, son of Mr. & Mrs. Chad Dykstra—South Holland, IL  
Cady Jo, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jeremy Ward—South Holland, IL  
Levi Daniel, son of Mr. & Mrs. Dan Kooienga—Southwest, MI  
Willem Vern, son of Mr. & Mrs. Geoff Haveman—Trinity, MI  
Piper Jo, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Mike Holstege—Trinity, MI  
Fiona Bea, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Henry deVries—Wingham, CAN  
Adult baptism was administered to Jessica Baker—First, MI

### CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

“Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established.” Proverbs 4:26

Public confession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ was made by:

- Don Lotterman—Hope, MI  
Marissa Kortus—Loveland, CO

### MARRIAGES

“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” Proverbs 3: 5 & 6

United in the bond of Holy Matrimony were:

- Mr. Nathan Maassen and Miss Lora Kroese—Hull, IA  
Mr. Ross Kaiser and Miss Shari Hanko—Southwest, MI