Beacon Lights

Magazine of the Protestant Reformed Young People

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Strangers and Sojourners: Individually Responsible

Strangers and sojourners are individually responsible before God.

In previous articles we have observed that all who travel the road of life walk either on the broad way or the narrow way and pass through either the wide gate or the strait gate. All sojourners travel the narrow way and enter through the strait gate. This they have in common. We will look at this communal aspect of being strangers in the next article on this subject.

Although sojourners travel together, each walks his own way, and is individually responsible for that way, and for his conduct along that way. It is necessary to stress this idea because it is under attack in today's society. In fact, I often wonder if this concept has already disappeared.

I don't know how often I have seen on television news a person who has shot and killed someone. The liberal media must, of course, get a comment from the killer's mother or other relative. The person invariably says, "He can't be guilty of murder. He didn't do it. He's such a good boy." No, he's not. He's evil. He's a murderer who is responsible to society and before God for his actions.

This example is symptomatic of a pervasive idea in today's society. Whatever is wrong, it is not the fault of the individual. If someone drops out of school or flunks his courses, it's the fault of the educational

EDITOR
Mark Hoeksema
Email: editor@beaconlights.org

CONTENTS COMMITTEE
Ryan Kregel (Associate Editor)
Email: ryankregel@gmail.com
Monica Koole (Contributing Editor Correspondent)
Email: monica@kleynelectric.com
Matt Kortus (Contributing Editor Correspondent)
Email: mgkortus@gmail.com
Matt Rutgers (Business Manager)
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BUSINESS OFFICE AND SUBSCRIPTIONS
Beacon Lights
Matt Rutgers
PO Box 37
Hudsonville, MI 49426-0037
Phone: (616) 209-2824
Email: subscriptions@beaconlights.org

BEACON LIGHTS AUDIO
A free service to the legally blind. Contact
Brad Vander Veen
11395 Hunters Meadow
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Phone: (616) 291-0465

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system. Maybe the teachers didn't like him. If someone is poor, it's the fault of the economic system that oppresses the poor and favors the rich. Heaven forbid that he should go out and get something called a job. If someone is a drunk and homeless, it's the fault of the alcohol companies. Whenever someone acts badly, it must be because of circumstances beyond his control—lack of money, living in a bad neighborhood, a poor education, racism, an unfair economic system, the temptation of drugs, a marriage gone wrong, being bullied, and any other causes you can think of. In summary, everybody seems to have a victim mentality. Everyone is a victim of something or someone, and it drives me crazy.

The logical conclusion is that we must fix the external circumstances that cause the problems. We need to spend millions and billions of dollars to achieve economic equality, to improve the educational system, to end racism (perceived or actual), to eradicate drugs, to build more homeless facilities, to fix marriages through counseling, to eliminate victims, and in general to improve the condition of mankind.

Never could the problem be lack of personal responsibility, and never could the solution be taking individual responsibility for one's actions. When you think about it, the victim mentality in society eliminates the whole idea of individual responsibility.

This, young people, is the world in which we live. This is reality. Maybe you have already observed this. But in case you have not, this is the world that you will inherit from your seniors (shame on them).

The scriptures and the confessions paint an entirely different picture, and you need to pay attention not to what man says, but to what God says. And God teaches that strangers and sojourners are characterized by personal responsibility. To actions there are always consequences. God knows nothing of a victim mentality.

We find this truth in Lord's Day 3 of the Heidelberg Catechism. In answer to the question, "Whence then proceeds this depravity of human nature?" we are instructed: "From the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in paradise; hence our nature is become so corrupt, that we are all conceived and born in sin." I can do no better than to quote here from Herman Hoeksema's remarks on this matter:

> Does not the doctrine that all men are conceived and born in sin, so that they are incapable of doing any good, exempt man from all responsibility? I am born corrupt, totally depraved. I came into this world with a nature that was incapable of doing any good. This I cannot help. I never had a chance…I am by nature prone to hate God and my neighbor, and I always was, without fault of my own. But does it not follow then that I cannot be held accountable for my sin? If it is not my fault that my nature is corrupt, how can actual sin that arises from this nature as a foul fountain be reckoned to me as guilt? Can God hold me responsible for what I cannot and never could do? Am I not rather a victim of circumstances, of cruel fate, who is to be pitied rather than condemned?[1]

Hoeksema then expounds at length why this is wrong thinking and sets forth the true doctrine of man's depravity. Briefly stated, we are guilty in Adam because he is our legal and organic head.

Article 14 of the Belgic Confession teaches along similar lines. Notice how the Confession does not allow man to make excuses, but puts the blame for his depravity squarely on man's doorstep:

> We believe that God created man out of the dust of the earth, and made and formed him after his own image and likeness, good, righteous, and holy, capable in all things to will agreeably to the will of God. But being in honor, he understood it not, neither knew his excellency, but willfully subjected himself to sin, and consequently to death and the curse, giving ear to the words of the devil. For the commandment of life which he had received, he transgressed; and by sin separated himself from God, who was his true life; having corrupted his whole nature; whereby he made himself liable to corporal and spiritual death. And being thus become wicked, perverse, and corrupt in all his ways, he hath lost all his excellent gifts which he had received from God, and retained only a few remains thereof.[2]

Scripture teaches the same truth of individual responsibility. Many instances could be mentioned from the New Testament, but I prefer two similar, graphic passages from the Old Testament.

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1 Herman Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1970), 1:146–47.

2 Belgic Confession 14, in *The Confessions and Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 38–39.

The first is Ezekiel 18:1–4, in which through the prophet the word of God comes to Israel: "What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?" Young people, you can easily understand what God is saying here about sour grapes. All of you have at one time or another managed to find a sour grape out of a bunch of grapes. What happens when you bite into one? It makes you pucker up and sets your teeth on edge. The point of God's word is that when you bite into a sour grape, it sets *your* teeth on edge. It does not set someone else's teeth on edge. But there was apparently a proverb in apostatizing Israel to the contrary: the fathers ate a sour grape, and the children's teeth were set on edge. Spiritually applied, this is an avoidance of personal, individual responsibility on the part of Israel. The fathers have sinned, but the consequence is that their children reap the reward of sin. Conversely, the children are responsible for the sins of their fathers. In either instance there is no personal responsibility for the fathers or the children. Both are pointing their fingers at one another.

What does God say about this? He takes this attitude very seriously, for he swears by himself in contradicting and condemning Israel (v. 3): "As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel." God goes on to say in verse 4: "Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die." The language of God is clear: No more using the avoidance proverb. He has created the souls of both fathers and children, and he holds every person responsible for his or her own actions.

A similar and even clearer passage is found in Jeremiah 31:29–30. Speaking of the time of Israel's redemption, the Lord says: "In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge." Then in verse 30 God states the concept of personal responsibility: "But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge." How much clearer can it be?

Young people, do not avoid this issue. Don't say, "This does not apply to me. I don't evade my personal responsibility. I don't blame someone else for what I have done."

Yes, you do. So do I. So does everyone.

How do I know this? Because that is exactly what our first parents did, and what they did applies to us, since we are their children both legally and organically. What did they do? They refused to take individual responsibility for their actions. After both of them ate of the forbidden fruit, God came looking for them to confront them with their sin. God asked Adam, "Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" What did Adam instantly answer? He blamed Eve: "The woman you gave me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate it." When God turned to Eve for an explanation, asking her what she had done, she said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." So Adam blamed Eve, and Eve said, "The devil made me do it." Nobody was personally at fault.

We know better. And this is also our experience, is it not?

When we mess something up—and it doesn't matter what it is—what is the first thing we do? We make excuses and do our best to blame someone or something else. To be a bit more blunt, when we sin either against God or against our neighbor (and they are essentially the same), what do we do? We deny it, we try to cover it up, and we blame someone else. This is sin.

What is the remedy?

The remedy is grace, which is always the answer to sin. More specifically, the remedy is the grace of sanctification, according to which we confront our sins and take responsibility for them. We recognize the consequences of sin. In the light of scripture and by the redemptive grace of God we take responsibility for our lives and our actions. We make wise choices that are consistent with God's will as revealed in his law. We do not blame others, but face and deal with responsibility, considering the consequences if we do not do this.

As strangers and pilgrims, travelling together on the road of life, we help each other take responsibility for our individual lives as members of the community and friendship of the body of believers. We all travel together on the same road, but each of us, as distinct individuals, must walk our personal ways, thus fulfilling our calling as strangers and sojourners on our earthly pilgrimage.

Editor's Notes

Mark H. Hoeksema

In this issue *Beacon Lights* begins a series of five (maybe six) articles on the subject of dating. They are written in the form of letters, two each by Lisa DeBoer and Nathan Lanning. The first two, one by each author, are addressed to young people who are dating; the next two, also one by each author, are written to those who are not dating; and the fifth, by Becca Joostens, deals with the subject of single life. All of them are very practical. We hope that they will be valuable to our youth.

Also, a comment regarding the article on the Namibian manifestation of the universal church. It is lengthy. Usually we would divide such an article. But because it is cohesive, we found it difficult to break it into two parts, and therefore have decided to run it in its entirety. The reader will be interested to know that the author's first language is not English, but Afrikaans (a language closely related to Dutch). She has done a fine job in her second language! Perhaps I can be charged with being slightly biased in my opinion because my wife and I have been privileged to travel to Namibia, to meet and become friends with the people named in this article, and to learn firsthand something of their lives. I plead guilty to the charge.

Our Goodly Heritage

Mark H. Hoeksema

Interview with Rev. Henry deMots
Part 1

This interview was conducted on April 5, 2008, at Raybrook Manor, Grand Rapids, MI. This was the first interview I conducted. Without intention on my part, this first interview and my last interview were with the two oldest people I encountered.

The value of this interview is that it gives the perspective of a Christian Reformed minister on the years following 1924 and surrounding 1953, both of which were definitive dates in the history of the PRCA. Rev. deMots was unapologetically a common grace man, and this comes out in the interview. Yet he also seems to have some reservations about its application. He did not press the doctrinal issues, since our conversation was not the appropriate forum to do this. But knowing my background because of my last name, he made me promise that in the fall of the year I would return to argue common grace with him. Unfortunately he passed away during the summer, so I was never able to fulfill that promise. Here follows his interview in two parts.

—MHH

MHH: Rev. deMots, where and when were you born?

HdM: I was born in Edgerton, Minnesota on January 16, 1911, so I'm 97 years old. I was the next to the youngest in my family. All of them are gone. There were many of them—not all full brothers and sisters, but half-brothers, but in all there were thirteen. There were five children from my Dad's first marriage. Then he married [*the woman*] who became my mother. She had two children. And then to the union of my dad and mother, six more were born. So that adds up to 13. All of them, as I indicated, are gone.

I am the only one in the family who graduated from Calvin College. My younger brother went there a year or a couple of years, I don't recall, but never finished. So, of that entire large family, I am the only college graduate. Then, of course, I'm the only seminary graduate too (laughter).

We lived on a farm. It was a good farm. I think my father was considered to be an excellent farmer. My neighbors thought that he was rather wealthy,

too. But he wasn't, of course. Perhaps by those standards he had some money.

In talking to my father about going to college, he said, "Well, if you go into the ministry, I'll support you. But if you have something else in mind, you're on your own" (laughter). I think he sort of forgot about what he said, because there wasn't much financial support coming from my dad.

We were members of a church in Leota, Minnesota. I remember the church at that time. It was, I presume, relatively small. Just an idiosyncrasy, the women would sit on one side, the men would sit on the other side on the row of pews, and the center was integrated—women and men together. I think that was because the other parts of the church were filled.

Then we moved to Edgerton and became members of the Edgerton Christian Reformed Church. I went to catechism. Most of that was all in the Holland language. We spoke Dutch at home. The services were in Dutch. Also in catechism the minister used the Dutch language. Ministers that I recall were Rev. Leek, Rev. VanderAark, and finally, when I was a young fellow and the person who married us was Rev. Ehlers, the father of Vern Ehlers, who is a [*State*] Representative here in Michigan.

I recall—and some of this is more hearsay or second-hand, because I moved out of the community—there were some who were really quite unhappy with the church. They evidently did not preach (unintelligible) very much. So they came together early to the services so they could all sit together under the clock. That group, for example, was opposed to collection plates: the right hand did not have to know what the left hand was doing, you know—misuse of scripture. They were opposed to bulletins. They were opposed to standing up to sing. I know my brother-in-law, who eventually went to the Protestant Reformed Church said, "No, standing up is wrong because then you're thinking, Here I stand in my self-righteousness." I pointed out to him that if you really respect a person, you rise in the person's presence.

It was at that time that Rev. Bernard Kok came to Edgerton.

MHH: Approximately when would this have been?

HdM: I don't recall the exact date, but I was at Calvin already. It could be 1930 because 1928 [he means 1924] was the time of the secession and the founding of the Protestant Reformed Churches. So it must have been in the 1930s somewhere.

What Bernard Kok would do, so I was told, was to come to the services. They were in the morning and the afternoon. And then in the evening he would hold a service of his own. They were all there—called the (unintelligible) Memorial Hall. And this group particularly would go there to worship in the evening.

MHH: Still in the Christian Reformed Church?

HdM: Yes, they were still members of the Christian Reformed Church. And he would analyze the sermon of Rev. Ehlers. And he would point out how it was defective, so I was told, and point out where he had gone astray. These people, because, seemingly at that time, for some reason, they had banded together and didn't particularly appreciate the pastor at that time. And they were very receptive to what Rev. Bernard Kok was saying. Gradually that group organized and became the Protestant Reformed Church, as I understand.

Among them were some of the older members of my family. None of my full brothers or sisters went there. My sister-in-law and her husband went there. And, also, the son of my mother who was my half-brother, they also went there. And then, from my wife's side, also a couple (two or three) families joined.

What I found is that it created a breach between that segment of the family that went there and we who were in the Christian Reformed Church, or a couple in the Reformed Church too. And social contact practically broke off for that part of the family. Because, as you know, Mark, when families get together and are involved in the church, it's difficult to spend a social evening with them and never mention the church. Because if the church were mentioned in that context, it obviously would become controversial. So that part of the family simply didn't associate with the rest of us and we didn't associate with them.

They were members of the Protestant Reformed Church. They built an old church there. I don't know whether you've ever been to Edgerton? You've seen the little church there?

MHH: I have.

HdM: Well, then you've also seen the Free Christian School there, haven't you?

MHH: Yes.

HdM: Again, so I was told, they were very much concerned about instructing their children in the first eight grades. It was impossible in Edgerton, because of the financial undergirding, to have a Christian

high school there. So they sent their children upon graduation to our Christian high school. And they were welcomed there.

I questioned the wisdom of that. I was told they had commencement exercises in the Protestant Reformed Church for one graduate. She was obviously the president of the class, the valedictorian, the salutatorian, the treasurer (laughter). That was held there. I don't know who that first minister was there. But eventually, I believe, Herman Veldman became their pastor. I never got to know him, although I met him. But I'm digressing a bit here.

MHH: Go ahead.

HdM: But I met and got to know Richard Veldman. He became a minister in the Christian Reformed Church at Oak Lawn, as you may remember. And I was in that classis eventually—my last church, Orland Park.

One of the young men of the Christian Reformed Church married the daughter of Rev. [Herman] and Mrs. Veldman. And to add insult to injury, she transferred to the Christian Reformed Church—his own daughter. Well, I assume that you know something about Herman Veldman, his character, his personality. Well, I was told that in due process a child was born there. But actually it took two years before he and his wife (the grandmother) went to see that child. I would think he was terrible unhappy and perhaps a bit of hatred entered in.

Richard was an entirely different personality. I found him to be a friendly person.

Gradually, of course, time moves on and I entered the ministry. But while at Calvin, my father and I were living on College Avenue. And I would walk from the seminary to College Avenue, down Franklin Street. And sometimes I would meet Rev. Hoeksema. There was no conversation. But his eyes bored into me. I don't know whether you can visualize that. I felt that he thought, "Here comes one of these heretics (laughter) who's going to preach in the Christian Reformed Church." I felt that that was a subjective reaction on my part the way he looked. And you will remember that President Bush said rather early in his presidency that he had looked the president of Russia right in the eye and he felt he could do business with him. Well, later on, I felt Herman Hoeksema did the same thing with me (laughter). That was the only time I met Rev. Hoeksema.

Eventually, after other places where I served (I don't know whether you care to hear that?)

MHH: Sure, go ahead.

HdM: I served first of all in Delico, Wisconsin five years—a small church. Beautiful area. And then I went, of all things, to the Christian Reformed church in DeMotte, Indiana. And it took me a long time to live that down (laughter). And I was there four years. Then I went to Bellflower, California, which was at that time an enormous church of approximately 300 families.

MHH: Wow.

HdM: And I had to do all the work. One of my neighbors there in the Protestant Reformed Church—they had a small Protestant Reformed Church in Bellflower—was Lambert Doezema. Well, strangely, Lambert and I did not have much fellowship. I was too busy, for one thing, I believe. But I did hear that Lambert Doezema married a daughter of Rev. Hoeksema, and that he had come there to visit his daughter and perhaps grandchildren. But, even although he had come all that way, he never met Lambert Doezema, because Lambert Doezema had gone over to the DeWolf faction of the church. And he so resented that, evidently.

Well, Rev. Hoeksema was a man of deep passion. Perhaps he also felt that he had been wrongly treated by the Christian Reformed Church. My brother heard a lecture one time by Rev. Doezema [*he means Hoeksema*]. That was in Edgerton, and it was in Dutch. According to my brother who has passed on, he made the statement in Dutch—now maybe you can't understand that—"That accursed offer of salvation." And then he characterized the preaching or the way the gospel was presented as hawking the Lord Jesus. And he likened it, at least from what I understand, to a man who peddles his goods down the street with a little cart and tries to sell it to the people along the street. So deep was his passion.

Eventually, after Bellflower, I became the pastor of First Dennis Avenue, but Dennis Avenue was in transition and we soon became Mayfair Christian Reformed Church, where I spent 15 years after spending 7 years in Bellflower. Quite soon after we moved there, (perhaps I have this correct—the DeWolf faction disintegrated, didn't it? All right.) quite a few people from [*the DeWolf faction*] became members of Mayfair. I think it was 7 or 8 families. And let me say, those were fine families. They fit in well with us. Several of the men served in consistory while I was there and were good consistory mem-

bers. Never once, that I recall, did they indicate that they were unhappy to be back in the Christian Reformed Church.

Of course, they didn't come directly from the Protestant Reformed Church. They came by way of the DeWolf faction. They were never a denomination. They were real good members—faithful in attendance. I don't know whether you knew Frank Doezema.

MHH: I'm not sure.

HdM: Well, Frank was very much in love with the Protestant Reformed Church. But he had gone through the DeWolf experience. He was a member and became an elder. But I remember one time—and this indicated how Frank thought that was, in a sense, the glory time of his spiritual life (in the Protestant Reformed Church). I told Frank, "You know, I was in your former church the other day. And I sat on the platform." I said, "We had convocation for Calvin. They still didn't have their facilities and so we met in the First Protestant Reformed building. Being president of the board, I led in prayer, and Dr. Spoelhoef gave the address. And I sat there on the platform. And those balconies to the sides—why, everything was packed. And my mind went back to you, Frank. I thought, "That must have been an exciting time for Frank." And Frank became almost euphoric (laughter). And he told me about Rev. Hoeksema. He said, "Oh, yeah, he was a great preacher." I said, "Yes, I understand that he was." He says, "He had a little white handkerchief, I think it was a white one, in his pocket (you know, to adorn himself, which was fine)." And then he said, "When he'd come near the end of his sermon, he would take that handkerchief out of his pocket and wave it. And then when he'd really come to the end, he would throw it down on that ledge on the side of pulpit." That must have been dramatic, you know (laughter). Oh, undoubtedly he was a great preacher, a dramatic preacher. And that's why it was so amazing that actually so many left him. I understand that it was due to a sermon that DeWolf had preached there in which he preached what Hoeksema considered "conditional theology." And the rest, you would say, is history.

I got to know a couple of other Protestant Reformed people. Rev. Lubbers, you know him?

MHH: Absolutely.

HdM: I got to know him because we lived together in the Beckwith Hills Condominium complex. I got to know Agatha a little bit. I think she became the principal of Covenant Christian High School. Agatha? A very able person. And Rev. Lubbers, a very fine… we had a very cordial relationship. We rarely talked about the church. He would bring me a *Standard Bearer* once in a while, and he did that in a very cordial fashion. So we had a cordial relationship. And his wife was not well, as I recall, and she eventually died, as did Rev. Lubbers.

So, my relationship with the Protestant church has been not extensive, but it's been somewhat on the edge, if you will. Most of what I've said here is pretty much hearsay from others. But I felt that it was pretty much what I would expect, knowing Rev. Hoeksema and having heard about him.

I translated (and I did that for Heritage Hall), the 1924 *Acts of Synod* [*from Dutch to English*], so I got a little bit more of what happened (VanBaalen, and so forth and so on). And I think that it wouldn't have been so good if it had not happened.

But I recall—and perhaps there's some truth in this—that in those *Acts of Synod* was a rather lengthy statement by Rev. Herman Bavinck of the Netherlands. And this was, in essence, what he said (and that was after '24 that he dealt with this.) He said, "I agree with the stand on common grace. But I want to say this (and that was incorporated in the Acts), I want to say this: Don't emphasize common grace." He went on to say, "Remember (and this is in a sense rather amusing) the world comes into our homes by way of the public press." And, as I translated that, I thought "Herman, you ain't seen nothin' yet" (laughter). Talking about the world! And his warning was, if we allow the world to enter too much, we say, "Yeah, there's a lot of good out there, you know, in common grace." If we emphasize that, then we are in peril of over-emphasizing perhaps even the acceptability of things that happen out there in the world.

And I think maybe some of that has happened. Now we have that stand (that's interesting, too, Mark) the stand of amusements that took place in 1928, four years after 1924. I don't know, but I kind of thought at times that that was set up for what they thought would be a safeguard against worldliness, worldly amusements. We believe common grace, but as Herman Bavinck says, don't emphasize it.

MHH: As a young man at that time who was nearing college age, or you were perhaps in college, how did you personally react to some of the events that

were happening, or weren't you aware of them?

HdM: Oh, I was aware of the matter of the common grace issue. Yes, I was aware of it. And I was in the ministry part of that time too. I entered into the ministry in 1938. But yet I didn't contact it head-on. A lot of this, as I would come back to Edgerton and talk to my relatives, I would hear these things. And I believe them to be true. I never felt animosity. But neither did I fraternize. No, I didn't. I suppose the closest I came to that was with Richard Veldman. And yet we didn't talk about it either.

So, briefly, unless you have questions—ask me. That in substance is what I know. And it's much second-hand about that period of time.

To be continued…

Christian Living — Lisa DeBoer

Letter to a Dating Young Woman

Dear Friend,

So, you're dating. I heard he's a pretty cool guy, and easy on the eyes too. Oh, and he's on the soccer team, and he gets good grades, huh? I bet you love hanging out with him. Those dating years are so much fun. So, are you going to marry him?

Say what?! Yeah, I know. You're only 16 (or maybe 18 or 21). Way too young to think about getting married, right? Wrong. You may not be old enough or mature enough actually to *get* married yet, but you're old enough to *think* about getting married. If you're old enough to date, then you're old enough to think about marriage. Because after all, why are you dating? It's so easy to date just for fun…because let's be honest, having a boyfriend can be a lot of fun. But you should be dating in order to get to know him better. Because it's only after you know him well that you can decide if this is someone you could (or should) marry someday.

So think about your boyfriend. If you married him, would you be marrying in the Lord?

"Marrying in the Lord." That's a phrase that you've probably heard quite a bit. Of course, it means that you marry a fellow believer. Someone who worships the same God and Lord as you do. 2 Corinthians 6:14 reminds us to be "not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." But what exactly does that mean? I'm going to tell you right now that marrying in the Lord doesn't just mean that you marry someone that belongs to a denomination with the right initials. Or that you marry someone who is willing to join your denomination. It goes much deeper than that.

You should be dating someone who can and will become a godly husband and father. He will need to step up to the plate as the spiritual leader in your home someday, as we read in 1 Corinthians 11:3: "the head of the woman is the man." You and your children will need to rely on him for spiritual guidance and support. I don't mean that he needs to have the maturity and wisdom of a 40-year-old father right now, today. But you should see signs that he could someday fill that position, and he should be showing a desire and willingness to grow into that role.

So how in the world do you know if your boyfriend can be all that if you would marry him? Of course, none of us can predict the future. And maybe it's even a little bit scary to think that far ahead. But there are almost always signs, whether positive or negative, that will become clear if you ask yourself (and maybe your boyfriend) some questions. These aren't necessarily first-date questions. These are questions that you can and should be asking as your relationship progresses. Some of the "right" answers will depend on your (and his) situation. But if you don't like most of the answers, then you should probably ask yourself one more question: Why am I dating this person?

How was he raised? For what did he get disciplined? What was let go? Would he raise his children the same way, or would he do things slightly differ-

ent than his parents did? Did his parents obey the command in Ephesians 6:4b to "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord"?

What is his dad like? How does he lead family devotions? How does his dad treat his mom? What kinds of things do he and his dad do together? Do they watch and play sports together? If so, that's fine. But do they discuss sermons too? If his dad is not a positive role model, does your boyfriend see and understand this?

What kind of relationship do his parents have? Remember, this is the marriage model he has observed for much of his life and may try to imitate.

How does he treat his siblings? Does he get along with them? If he has older siblings, are they a positive or negative influence on his thoughts and decisions? Do you like his siblings? If you get married, they will be part of your family for the rest of your life.

How does his family observe the Sabbath? Does he faithfully attend both services? What about between services…is the TV on? Or is *Beacon Lights* open?

Is he someone you can respect? Can you see yourself submitting willingly to his leadership? Ephesians 5:22 doesn't say "sometimes" or "most of the time" when it instructs us to "submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord."

How does he react when you bring up spiritual matters? Does it make him uncomfortable to talk about the sermon? Or can he discuss preservation of the saints just as willingly as he analyzes his most recent soccer game?

How does he handle disagreements? Does he argue loudly and get upset, or does he discuss things calmly?

Is he active in church life? Does he attend Bible Study and/or Young People's Society? This is important for his spiritual development, especially since he will someday be head of his home.

Is he good-looking? Oh, wait, that doesn't really matter. If you're attracted to his personality, then his outward appearance automatically becomes attractive to you as well, doesn't it?

Does he listen to and willingly take advice from those older and wiser than he? Or does he always have all the answers? Proverbs 1:7 reminds us that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction."

What kind of work ethic does he have? How does he speak about his employer? Laziness is not cool, and someday it will mean that you might not be able to afford groceries or pay the tuition bill. 1 Timothy 5:8: "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." As well, is he a good steward of his money, or does he spend it on frivolous things? Does he give to the church? Is he willing to support you so that you can someday stay home with your children?

Does he listen to what you have to say? Or does he brush it off as unimportant? Does he treat you the same when you're alone together as he does in front of his friends, or does he act "too cool" and put you down when his guy friends are around?

Does he make you want to be a better person? Does he encourage you to grow in your relationship with Jesus Christ?

Do you like him for who he is right now? Of course, we all grow, learn, and change as we mature. But if you think you can change someone's personality after you get married, you're dreaming.

Does he respect your body and your desire to remain pure? Or does he push to make your relationship more physical than you want it to be?

For that matter, are you concerned about remaining pure? The temptations are ever-present and very real, aren't they? 1 Corinthians 6:18 says to "Flee fornication." That doesn't just mean walk around it, but run away from it. So many things could be said here, but the best advice I can give you is to use common sense. Don't hang out in your bedroom with the door closed. Go on dates in public places. Don't send texts with double meanings. Go on double-dates with your friends, or hang out in group settings. Keep your jokes clean. Don't wear shirts that give your boyfriend an eyeful. Don't sit in a car in the corner of a dark parking lot to "talk". Pray regularly with your boyfriend. Before, during, or after your date…or all three would be fine too! It makes it a whole lot more difficult to "go too far" if you know you're going to pray together at the end of the night.

So, back to all these questions you're asking yourself. The point of these questions is to encourage you to look beyond how much fun you've been having with your boyfriend on the weekends. There's nothing wrong with having fun together. In fact, if you don't have fun together, then you should seriously consider breaking up with him. But think about

what kind of man he will mature into. Think about building a life, a home, a family together. A marriage is much more than a series of Friday nights. If you cannot imagine spending a lifetime together, or you do not think your boyfriend will ever grow to be a spiritual leader, then by all means end your relationship now. The longer you wait, the harder it will be to have that conversation.

If you like the answers to a lot of those questions, and all signs point to your boyfriend's growing into a godly father and husband, then we have a few more things to talk about. I was in your shoes not all that long ago, so hopefully you don't mind if I pass along a few words of advice. Not because I know it all, but because I care about you and your relationship.

Be yourself. Don't hide your true personality. Not only is this living a lie, but it's not fair to your boyfriend. Be honest and open. If he doesn't like you for who you are, then he's not someone you'd want to marry anyway.

Laugh together. Enjoy your time together! But ask the hard questions and have the serious talks too. This is your opportunity to get to know each other. Take advantage of it.

Be realistic in your expectations. Romance doesn't have to be expensive, and guys don't always remember important dates. Extend grace, offer to plan the outing once in awhile, and remind your boyfriend that a five dollar pizza eaten at the beach together is wonderful!

Don't ditch your girlfriends. Yes, it's important to spend time with your boyfriend, getting to know each other. But time apart is healthy too. As well, ask your girlfriends their opinion about your boyfriend. I don't mean you should "kiss and tell" or gossip, but you can ask your friends for their honest opinion about your relationship. Good, true friends usually have solid insight and advice.

If texting, Instagraming, tweeting, and posting Facebook statuses are the primary ways you communicate with each other, then you need to schedule a real date that doesn't involve any sort of screen. Face-to-face communication is vital to any relationship. Marriage means you'll spend a lot of time together, and hiding behind your keyboard is no way to prepare for that. Fifty or sixty years is a long time to live with someone whom you can't look in the eye.

Pray. Pray with your boyfriend, and pray for your boyfriend. Pray for guidance in your relationship. Ask God to help you remain chaste. Pray that God will form and shape each of you into a godly spouse.

Enjoy this time in your life. Marriage is a good and beautiful thing, but don't wish away these months or years of dating. Almost every girl daydreams about getting swept off her feet, but the reality is that it takes time to get to know someone.

Talk to your parents. And to his parents. Tell them where you went on your date and what you did. Or go out for dinner as a couple, but then have dessert and play cards with Dad and Mom. Ask your mom how she knew that your dad was "the one". Make sure your boyfriend can look your dad in the eye. Don't forget that Dad and Mom dated too. Your parents faced the same issues, temptations, and questions that you are facing right now, so believe it or not, they really do "get it."

Don't expect perfection. I gave you a list of questions as a starting point. But those questions are not designed to help you find a perfect guy. They're supposed to help you decide if the guy you're with is the perfect guy for you. If you dump your knight the first time you see a crack in his armor, you'll probably find something wrong with the next guy too. And the next one.

Be careful about dropping the L word. Just because he says it doesn't mean you have to say it back if you're not ready. True love is not that warm fuzzy feeling you get when you hold hands for the first time. Nor is true love portrayed by anything that comes out of Hollywood or Nashville. Love is a choice and a commitment.

Remember that your identity is found in Christ. Your worth does not depend on your boyfriend's remembering to text you, and your value does not rest on how many dates it took to get your first kiss. You are a sinner saved by grace, fearfully and wonderfully made in his image…and as such, are a beloved child of God.

I sincerely hope that he's "the one", and I'm praying that God will guide your relationship.

Your friend, Lisa

Lisa is a wife and mother, and a member of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.

Watching Daily At My Gates

April 12 ***Read Matthew 8***

Jesus was a great preacher. That is what we saw in the preceding three chapters. Now the gospel writer shows that he was truly God. In this chapter we have a number of the miracles that Jesus did. As you read through them, you see that they are not only numerous, but also of great variety. They were truly wonder-works of God in which the usual creation was changed. We also see in each of these miracles the sign of grace. God heals the sickness of sin in each of us. He calms the storms of life that rage around us, and he calms the storms of life that rage within us. May we give thanks for the great miracle, the gift of salvation. Sing Psalter 213.

April 13 ***Read Matthew 9***

Matthew continues to give to us proof that Jesus was truly the Messiah, the Son of God. In this chapter more miracles are reported. Matthew also reports on his call to be a disciple of Christ. Do we heed the call to "follow me?" Do we follow Christ every day in whatever situation in which we are placed? Do we see the multitudes around us that need the gospel? Men and boys, have you examined yourselves for the call to be a laborer in God's fields? Take some time to reflect on the last two chapters and see what God has done for us, and what his will for us is. Sing Psalter 195.

April 14 ***Read Matthew 10***

In the preceding chapter we saw in a general way the call of the disciples. In this chapter we see that Christ formally called them, ordained them, and equipped them for the work that they had to do. Officebearers in Christ's church today are also called, ordained, and equipped. While the day of signs and wonders is over, today's ministers, elders, and deacons are also called, ordained and equipped. They are given the word and the Spirit to use that word for the good of Christ's church. In the end of the chapter is an admonition to those who are ruled by Christ through the officebearers. May we heed that word. Sing Psalter 265.

April 15 ***Read Matthew 11***

How do we receive Christ? Are we doubtful, as John the Baptist was while sitting in prison? Do we look for a different Christ from the one portrayed in the Bible? John did, and he had to be reminded by Jesus of the Old Testament scriptures. Do we believe, as many of those in Galilee and Judea did not believe, that Jesus was the Christ? We must seek the Son of the Father, knowing that in him and by him is our salvation. We must come to the one whose yoke is easy. We must learn of him in the scriptures inspired by the Father, and we must cling to him for rest in this world of sin and trial. Sing Psalter 333.

April 16 ***Read Matthew 12***

Are we quick to find fault with others, but then ignore our own sins? That is the error of Pharisaism. Throughout Jesus's ministry on earth those supposed leaders of God's church were looking for ways to accuse him. There is some of this sin in each of us as well. Do not misunderstand, however. Those in authority must seek to remove sin from God's church. We must love our neighbor by turning him from his sin. Matthew will show this to us later. Let us remove the motes from our eyes and help our brothers keep their lives pure as well. Sing Psalter 25.

April 17 ***Read Matthew 13***

Do we seek the mysteries of the kingdom? Do we do this by searching out the truths of scripture daily, and then look at creation for the pictures that God has placed there to teach us those truths? Throughout his ministry Christ used parables to teach his people those mysteries. Those parables were means of instruction, so that believers might learn about the kingdom of heaven. These are not just earthly stories; these are profound truths that lead us to Christ. Sing Psalter 169.

April 18 ***Read Matthew 14***

How much do we trust our Father and his Son? Do we trust God enough to speak the truth even when much may be at stake, as John did? For speaking the truth John was killed to satisfy evil. Do we trust our Father enough to realize that he will provide our food, both physical and spiritual? The five thousand saw that lesson; not all understood it. Do we live a life that shows that we need more than earthly bread? Do we trust Jehovah enough to know that he is the Lord of all and will care for us through all the storms of this life? A life of trust is a blessed life; let us live it. Sing Psalter 152.

April 19 ***Read Matthew 15***

Jesus both did miracles and preached great doctrine. We have both in this chapter. To the Pharisees and to us he taught that the speech of man is that by which man is judged. Physical food goes into the body, and after it

makes its way through the body, it leaves with no spiritual effect. What we speak shows who and what we are. Do we hunger for the spiritual food that will affect our speech, even as the four thousand really hungered after bread? Do we have the faith of a woman who knew that she did not deserve grace, but by grace begged for her daughter's healing? Let us pray for the grace to show our faith to all who are around us. Sing Psalter 334.

April 20 *Read Matthew 16*

Which leaven do you use in your spiritual life? Is it the leaven of today that identifies with common grace, the free offer of the gospel, free will, and all the other doctrines that pervade the church world and the lives of those who attend those churches? Sometimes that leaven gets into our spiritual life, and we become tainted with those false doctrines. Or do we have the leaven of the Holy Spirit, who moved Peter to say, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"? Do we attend churches in which the keys of the kingdom are present not because of the men who lead those churches, but because they are built on the foundation of Peter's confession? Seek those churches, young people; help the young people in this, fathers and mothers. In doing this we will please the God of our salvation. Sing Psalter 318.

April 21 *Read Matthew 17*

As Jesus began to near the way of the cross, he continued to teach those around him who he was. He first showed the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration about his coming kingdom. That kingdom had been announced by John the Baptist. That kingdom would not be an earthly kingdom as many, including his closest friends, assumed. Second, he taught those around him that that kingdom would be obtained by faith alone. Even as the boy's father needed faith that is by grace, so do we or we will misrepresent the kingdom, even as Peter had done. By grace are we saved, and by grace we will wait for the coming of the kingdom of Christ, which will be manifest by his coming. Sing Psalter 306.

April 22 *Read Matthew 18*

As Christ spoke to the multitudes around him, including the disciples, he took time to teach them how they must live in his kingdom. Living in that kingdom means that there must be repentance from sins. Sometimes those sins need to be pointed out by others. We often speak of the way of Matthew 18, but do we truly understand what that entails and what we must do in that way? We must not wait for a great sin to walk in this way; we help our brothers and sisters in little matters, so that they do not grow into bigger matters. Addressing our fellow Christians in private can have more effect than waiting until that is too late. Let us walk in the way of forgiveness, even as Christ forgave us. Sing Psalter 283.

April 23 *Read Matthew 19*

As Jesus moved inexorably toward his crucifixion, by the Father's providence he is provided with many teaching opportunities. The Pharisees give to him the opportunity to teach about marriage. Few in the world today will pay heed to the words of our Savior. Most will either ignore or disparage them and those who hold to them. We must see that lifelong marriages are God's way for us to glorify him and to bring forth children for his kingdom. We must bring the covenant seed to Christ each day. We also learn that the kingdom is not of this earth, but it is heavenly, and in it earthly riches have no value. May we seek that kingdom in all of our daily lives. Sing Psalter 360.

April 24 *Read Matthew 20*

This chapter, which is a continuation of the one before it, contains a parable, some teaching, and a miracle, all given to us to show us more about the kingdom of heaven. First, we see that our works do not merit us any place in that kingdom. Second, we see that our place in that kingdom is ordained by God and not by any earthly desires. Finally, we see that entering that kingdom is by grace. Just as the blind man was made to see by Christ, our eyes are opened to the kingdom of heaven only by grace. Let us live lives of gratitude for that grace as we wait for the coming of the kingdom of heaven. Sing Psalter 275.

April 25 *Read Matthew 21*

The final eight chapters of Matthew deal with the end of Jesus' humiliation and the beginning of his exaltation. The opening verses show how he was humiliated as he came to earth, but they also give to us glimpses of his exaltation as he ascended into heaven. Riding the colt of a donkey was not the way kings returned from battle. However, Jesus was not returning from battle, but was making his final entry into the battle against Satan. As the week ended, Jesus would bruise the head of Satan one last time, ensuring our salvation. Do we seek this kind of Jesus, or do we seek the good man, as the world likes to portray him? Jesus went to the cross for us willingly; let us seek that lamb who was slain for our sins. Sing Psalter 320.

April 26 *Read Matthew 22*

As part of Jesus' final week on earth, sometimes called the passion week, he had to face his earthly adversaries, the Pharisees and all their cronies, numerous times. Whether it was by parable or by direct teaching, our Savior bested them each time. No, they did not give in and say he was the Son of God. However, they knew, and that knowledge would lead to their downfall. We must not just know intellectually; we must believe. In believing we will seek to live a life of sanctification guided by those two great commandments. People of all ages, do those commandments guide your life? If they do not, knowledge of them will not help you at all. Sing Psalter 322.

April 27 ***Read Matthew 23***

People of God, do we have tendencies of the Pharisees? Do some of the woes Jesus pronounced upon them describe us? They do, unless we rely solely upon the word of God. The Pharisees had gone beyond what had been laid out for worship and life in God's law. They had added to the law, they had subtracted from the law, and they had twisted the law to fit their own needs. We only need to run down the commandments to see where we fall short in this matter. Do we worship when and how we please, rather than in accordance with the first two commandments? Do we fail to honor God's name and day because it is not convenient for us? What about the second table of the law? Do we put ourselves first rather than our neighbor? These were the sins of the Pharisees. Jesus condemned those sins and those who committed them. What would he say about us? Sing Psalter 24.

April 28 ***Read Matthew 24***

After spending the first three days of the passion week with the multitudes in Jerusalem, Jesus retires with his disciples to the Mount of Olives. In answer to one of their questions, he instructs them in the things of the last days, or eschatology. What do we think about those last days? Are we looking for a heaven on this earth? Are we hoping that our favorite earthly activities will be the main part of our heavenly existence? Do we dismiss the hardships of the last days as not happening? If we answer positively to any of those questions, we deceive ourselves and need to spend time studying these discourses of our Savior, whose kingdom is not of this earth. Sing Psalter 30.

April 29 ***Read Matthew 25***

Jesus continued teaching his disciples on the Mount of Olives, maybe in the quiet of Gethsemane. The subject of his instruction was the last times. He taught them using two parables. The instruction given was to watch, to pray, and to be busy in the work of the kingdom. We too, as Christians of those last days, must also heed that instruction. We must be watching for the return of Christ. The signs given in the last chapter are all around us. We must be often found in prayer. As Paul taught us, we must "pray without ceasing." We must also do the work given to us in God's kingdom. People of God, will Christ's final coming find us busy in those things? Sing Psalter 407.

April 30 ***Read Matthew 26***

Do we see ourselves in this chapter? Do we love Jesus even as the woman loved him, weeping as she anointed him? Do we hate Jesus even as the rulers of the church of that day hated him, despising him and condemning him to death? Do we deny him as Peter denied him, swearing that he did not know him? Throughout our lives all of these actions are probably ours. We must seek to be like the woman, loving our Savior in all things. When we deny him, let us seek repentance even as Peter later would. Let it never be said of us that our actions show that we hate our Savior. Christ died for us; let us love him in all things that we do. Sing Psalter 47.

May 1 ***Read Mathew 27***

God had foreordained that Christ would die at the hands of those wicked men who brought him to Calvary. This is the testimony of Luke in the book of Acts. We may think that we would never cry out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" We may think that we would never give him over to be crucified as Pilate did, even while he knew that Jesus was an innocent man. We may think that we would not mock him as he hung on the cross. Yet we do these things daily. That is why Christ went to the cross. He went for his people who daily crucify him. He took those sins upon himself for our sakes. Thanks be to God! Sing Psalter 185.

May 2 ***Read Matthew 28***

The earthquake did not free Jesus from the grave. The earthquake announced that Jesus by the power of the Godhead had risen from the dead. Jesus begins the state of exaltation with his resurrection. He arose that we may arise when he returns on the clouds of heaven. The disciples did not believe at first. They all were somewhat like Thomas. Do we believe? If we do, then we must go forth and tell the nations. Our work in God's kingdom right now is to spread the gospel. We are not all preachers or missionaries, but we all have the calling to do that work in the station in which God has placed us. We can do this because he is with us at all times, and will help us in all our needs. Sing Psalter 31.

May 3 ***Read Mark 1***

The gospel according to Mark is a gospel of action. Notice that in this first chapter, the history of the first thirty years of Jesus' life is omitted. The temptations are told in two verses. The calling of his disciples is also summarized. The writer quickly gets to the two main works of Christ: his teaching and his miracles. He teaches about the kingdom of heaven, and he does miracles to show his followers the authenticity of that teaching. Let us too be instructed about that kingdom, and let us, as children of Pentecost, believe. Sing Psalter 332.

May 4 ***Read Mark 2***

Do we have the faith of the four friends? While we do not have the opportunity to bring our friends to a physical Christ, we have many opportunities to bring them to the Christ of scripture. Many of our friends may need that check-up that only scripture can provide. We may need to bring them comforting words, or encouraging words, or chastising words. Whatever they need, they can find from the great physician in his word. Do we bring it to our friends? As with Jesus, it may bring us oppression, but it is the calling that Christ has given to us as his disciples. Sing Psalter 101.

May 5 ***Read Mark 3***

The world watches Christ's followers even as they watched him. Does this fact affect you, people of God?

Christ was ready and willing to do what was right as he followed the will of his Father. We too must be ready and willing to do what is in accordance with the word of God. We may not, as his disciples did, choose to do things that are convenient for us. Our choice must be predicated on the right words of Holy Writ. We also must be willing to forsake what is familiar to us for the sake of the gospel. All this Jesus did. All this he did for our sakes, as we will see as we journey through this book of good news. Sing Psalter 99.

May 6 *Read Mark 4*

The writer of this gospel also relates to us the parables found in Matthew. These means of instruction concerning the kingdom of heaven are important for us to learn and to use as we wait for the coming of that kingdom. The miracles too are a means of instruction. When Christ says, "Peace, be still" to the winds and waves, he says the same words to us as we face the storms of life. Satan tries to batter us as we go through our daily lives. Only the master's words can calm our fears. We need to seek out that word in his word and use it as we live out our lives on this earth. Sing Psalter 278.

May 7 *Read Mark 5*

Three miracles dealing with healing are found in this chapter. In the first we see that Christ heals from the devil. Satan was able to possess many with his legions in Christ's day. He still tries to possess us and cause us to walk in his way. Little sins that stay within us for long periods of time will eventually cause us to die, just as this woman was going to die. We need to be raised from this spiritual deathly nature even as the little girl was raised from physical death. What can accomplish all three? Only the grace that is portrayed in these miracles is able to set us free from Satan's clutches. That grace is irresistible and is freely given by God. Seek grace, people of God, and give thanks for that free gift. Sing Psalter 310.

May 8 *Read Mark 6*

We see two kinds of unbelief in this chapter. First, we see the unbelief in his hometown of Nazareth. They heard him preach, and they saw his miracles, but they would not believe. After all, he was only a carpenter. They knew him, and there was no way that he could speak such wise words. Second, there was Herod's unbelief. His unbelief was prompted by the fact that he had thought he had removed his tormenter from him. What does he do? He cannot get to Jesus, but he orders John the Baptist to be killed. We too can be guilty of either type of unbelief. Only by the grace of God are we delivered from that sin. Let us believe, and then let us praise God for his blessings toward us. Sing Psalter 253.

May 9 *Read Mark 7*

The Pharisees also exhibited unbelief. They knew the law; that is, they knew the law with their minds. Their hearts were full of Satan's works. Those works characterized their lives. Jesus elsewhere calls them hypocrites. Do we know God's word with our minds and not our hearts? If that is the case, we are no better than the Pharisees. We need to seek the crumbs of God's grace. We need to seek them each week in his house, and we need to seek them as we go about our daily work, for the crumbs of God's grace are more filling than the feasts of the wisdom of this world. Let us not be faithless, but let us see God's grace and believe. Sing Psalter 236.

May 10 *Read Mark 8*

In capsule form Mark presents some of the important events in Christ's life. In this chapter after the feeding of the four thousand, Jesus teaches the disciples about doctrine. There are only 2 kinds: false and true. Those who seek after work righteousness follow the doctrine of the Pharisees. Jesus warns not only his disciples but also the church of all ages, about this false doctrine. In it man is everything and God only a silent partner. Later in the chapter the crux of true doctrine is stated by Peter. Jesus is the Christ, the one anointed to deliver his people from their sins. As we live, which doctrine is evident in our lives? Sing Psalter 168.

May 11 *Read Mark 9*

After being given a glimpse of the glory that would be his, Jesus and his disciples are confronted with an ugly scene of unbelief. This unbelief is not in the helpless father, but in the crowd around him and his son. This crowd was mocking the disciples, who could not heal the boy. The world, egged on by Satan, mocks those who follow the true doctrine. As Jesus talks to the man, it is evident that this man is not faithless; in fact, he knows that his faith needs strengthening. After calming his fears, as only Jesus can do, he heals the boy and quiets the crowd. Does he change their hearts? As a body, no, but for any believers in that body, the germ of regeneration is fanned as it is preparing to spring forth. Do we believe? Then let us pray for our heavenly Father to help our unbelief. Sing Psalter 232.

May 12 *Read Mark 10*

Marriage, children, and eternal life are three of the topics found in this chapter. They are all related by a fourth, found near the end of the chapter. When we walk by faith and not by sight, we will know how to live our lives. When we have faith that marriage is the unbreakable bond that pictures our covenant relationship with God, we will have no trouble remaining married even when times may be tough. When we walk by faith, we will know that children are a blessing from God; we will desire them and care for them in a way that is pleasing to him. When we live out of faith, we will see that riches do not cause us to inherit eternal life. As we read this chapter and all of Holy Writ, let us pray for the gift of faith necessary to live a life that is pleasing to God. Sing Psalter 360.

My Story

Our Life as Reformed Protestants...in Africa

I was asked to share with you the story of my life. But this is not my story, because I really can't think of myself without thinking of so many people who were and still are part of my life since my birth. I truly believe and realize, when looking back over the years, that not one of all these people, or anything—even in the smallest detail—that has been part of my life, happened without God's wonderful, perfect predestination. It gives me such comfort and peace to know this: God, the almighty creator, was and still is the sovereign ruler of the universe—also of me and my (seemingly simple, unglamorous) life here in the Kalahari region of Namibia, Africa.

Why share our life with you? What do you and we have in common? What is our connection?

Our Reformed faith is what we have in common, even though we are ±8,000 miles apart. This is one of the most stirring and inspiring things we, as only a small number of solidly Reformed believers in Namibia, Africa, became aware of a few years ago. It made us thankful and gave us new strength to know that God foreordained other believers who also have the desire to be faithful to God's word and its truth as it was instilled in us since the Reformation. This fact gives us renewed comfort, as stated in the Belgic Confession, art. 27:

> And this holy church is preserved or supported by God, against the rage of the whole world; though she sometimes (for a while) appears very small, and in the eyes of men, to be reduced to nothing: as during the perilous reign of Ahab the Lord reserved unto him seven thousand men, who had not bowed their knees to Baal. Furthermore, this holy Church is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed over the whole world; and yet is joined and united with heart and will, by the power of faith, in one and the same Spirit.

What a joy and comfort. Let us not be disheartened while part of the church militant here on earth because we are also part of the church triumphant!

Our history: How our ancestors came to Africa

The ancestors of most of the white people currently living in Southern Africa came originally from either the Netherlands, France, or England. The first white man to come to Africa was Jan van Riebeeck, who arrived in the current Cape Town harbor in April 1652. He was sent by a company in the Netherlands with the assignment of establishing a way-station for ships on the trade route between the Netherlands and the East Indies, because many sailors died on that route due to a shortage of fresh provisions.

Jan van Riebeeck was of the Reformed faith and the first man to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to Southern Africa. Jan's wife, Maria de la Quellerie, was a French Huguenot. The history of these French Huguenots included that in 1685 the Reformed faith was outlawed in all of France. Those who practiced it were persecuted and even killed. Thousands of Huguenots fled from France after that. The majority of them found refuge and a new existence in the Netherlands. Some of them fled to South Africa, and these farmers were sent by the Dutch company as settlers to strengthen farming activities. (You can read more about this history at http://www.huguenot.org.za/histSA.htm).

The interesting thing about this is that God by his grace ordained this history so that the gospel also was brought here to the far southern tip of Africa.

The rest of this history includes a huge trek/migration of mainly white farmers to more northern parts of South Africa and from there to the current Namibia (which was formerly a German colony and was known as Southwest Africa). Since England, which ruled South Africa during those years, did not protect the farmers against black tribes' repeated looting of their livestock and also forced them to teach their children in English, they decided to migrate to more northern parts, farther away from English ruling. More information about

this part of our history at (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voortrekkers)

How did our ancestors come from South Africa to Namibia? My husband Michael's grandparents were *Dorslandtrekkers* (*Dorsland* can be translated as "Thirstland," and a *trekker* is a migrant or pioneer), which involved a long journey of families with ox-wagons from the northern parts of South Africa, through Botswana to Angola during the years of 1875–1880. Many people died during this long and difficult trek through the most arid parts of Southern Africa. Due to the lack of any surface water for long stretches, many died of thirst. Some of the following trek-families decided instead to trek near the wetter Okavango delta parts of Botswana to be nearer surface water, but sadly many of those trekkers then died of malaria (lots of deadly, disease-carrying mosquitoes near the rivers). It was a much smaller number of families who eventually arrived in Angola, which was then a Portuguese colony. The Portuguese authorities encourage these farmers to settle in their country and establish productive farming communities. You can read more about this history of the *Dorsland Trekkers* at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dorsland_Trek.

However, the Portuguese did not allow them to teach their children in Afrikaans and also tried to convert these Protestants to Catholicism. They farmed for about 50 years in Angola. Between 1928 and 1930 they accepted the invitation of the South African government to settle in the current Namibia (which was then ruled by South Africa) to build up strong and productive farms. The government gave some of these Angolan farmers land in Kalahari (the driest region) and thought that they would not succeed in any way because of the harsh conditions.

This was the final movement of our grandparents to Namibia, and many grandchildren of these families are still farming today here in the Kalahari. Our grandparents proved the government wrong, because by the grace of God they adapted to the conditions, and due to hard work, resilience, and courage, they built up one of the most productive farming communities here in eastern Namibia.

Both my husband Michael and I were privileged to be born as part of these faithful, hard-working and strong-minded farming families.

Michael was born the eldest child. He has two younger sisters. Their youngest brother, Johan, was born with Hurler Syndrome (a very rare genetic disorder) and died at the age of 8. Johan was dearly loved by all of his family and so many people in the community. His family still misses this very special child they had.

The Duvenhage farm is just 30 kilometers from another farm my father had, so they were practically our neighbors. This Kalahari farm boy didn't look far for a suitable wife. He took the neighbor girl! But more about that later.

My childhood

I was born as the third child in my family. I have two elder brothers and one younger sister. Both my brothers are still today farmers nearby.

My mother always told me that when she expected me, they were sure it would be another boy. Of course they did not have any ultrasound. At the end of her pregnancy, she went to stay for the last week or so in Aranos, our nearest town, which is about 100 kilometers (±65 miles in your terms) from our farm, because the road to town was partly thick sand and partly gravel and it took quite a while to get to town. As you can expect, my father was late for my birth. But when he heard, upon arrival in town, that this baby was a girl, my mother said he was beyond himself with joy. Every year, when it is my birthday, my mother tells me again just how truly happy my father was that day! It makes me thankful that I was welcomed into this life—also by my earthly parents.

Our farm, like many other Kalahari farms, is 8,000 hectares (which is ±20,000 acres). Our nearest neighbors were ±7.5 miles from us. I know today that for many city dwelling children, it is just unimaginable to have such a vast space around you to live and grow up in.

When I was 17, I had the opportunity to go as an exchange student to Germany. It was the first (and only) time that I left this African continent and had to live for 3 months in a city. I remember that when I arrived back home here in the Kalahari, I couldn't wait to get in the back of my father's truck and drive with him to the veldt. As I was standing there on the open vehicle that day, with the wind blowing through my hair and I saw again the welcome sight of red sand with no buildings or other people as far as the eye can see, I realized what a privilege it was to have this wide open space to live in! As with so many things in life, I first had to experience being without something to realize what a gift it is to have it.

My father was very strict in his upbringing of us. As a child I sometimes felt that he was too strict,

especially when Michael and I started dating. My father since died of cancer, but I wish I could tell him today, now that I have experienced having children of my own, that I now agree with him on so many things, and I know he did what was best for us. It is indeed necessary for children to be disciplined: "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes" (Prov.13:24). Until today I remember my father as the rock and head of our family. His strong principles, his faith in God, and humbleness are the outstanding characteristics I'll always remember. He was a wonderful example to all of us.

We grew up without electricity, television, cell phones, computers, and such things. My father had a generator to pump water from the borehole, and that generator was also used to charge batteries that were used for 36 volt lights in our house at night. We had paraffin freezers, which were not nearly cold enough for the Kalahari's heat in summer. Our telephone worked on a party line system. That means that we had about 6 to 8 families on one line, and that we had to make a phone call via an operator who was in our nearest town. When someone else on the line was making a call, you had to wait for them to finish before you could make your call. Some neighbors were always very interested in other people's conversations, and you could hear whenever somebody else was listening in on your conversation! It was quite a frustration.

We have had electricity and automatic telephones since 2002.

My sister and I were always very excited when we knew we would go visit the neighbors, because they were the only friends we had. I remember one such visit very clearly.

I was a little girl. My father was not at home, and the neighbors invited us to stay overnight with them because those were the years of the war between Angola and Namibia (Southwest Africa at that time) and, although the actual war was far north of us, they thought it too dangerous for a woman with two little girls to be alone on a farm at night. Halfway to the neighbors, our vehicle got stuck in the thick sand. It was already dark by that time and I thought I'd never seen such darkness. We had no choice but to start walking. That walk in the pitch darkness and thick sand, with only the starlight as our guidance, is still vivid in my mind. I remember that I often stumbled and almost fell, but I kept holding onto my mother's hand. I don't know how far we walked, but eventually the neighbor farmer came looking for us with his vehicle. That light that came out of the darkness that night was such a relief and a wonderful sight in the eyes of a young, scared child. Now, as a grown-up, that episode always leads my thoughts to Revelation 22:16, where Jesus is referred to as "the bright and morning star". He came and will come again to this dark sinful world to take us with him to heaven, where there will be no darkness and where we will dwell with him forever.

Another thing I remember is our nights sleeping under the stars. Every night during summer we would carry the beds from the veranda onto the lawn, where it was the coolest. We looked at the stars each night, and we four siblings competed to spot the most satellites in the sky. Satellites look like moving stars. We knew the names of several stars or groups of stars, just by watching them so many nights before falling asleep. Always when I woke up during the night and saw that most wonderfully and brightest star in the east (the morning star, which was most of the time planet Venus, heralding the coming of morning), I knew that it was nearly morning and that my father would get up very soon and bring us coffee in bed. And until today, our children can't wait for the summer when we sleep outside on the lawn every night.

Boarding school

Since we lived about 65 miles from town, we had to go to boarding school from Grade 1 onwards. It was hard to be 6 years old and leave your mother and father and to see them only on weekends. Some weekends we even had to stay at boarding school because our parents couldn't always afford to drive to town to get us and drive us back again on Sunday. Those were the longest weeks.

At age 12 we went to high school in a town called Mariental, which was 250 kilometers (±158 miles) from home. We could go home and see our parents only every third weekend. We had to take a bus, and so arrived home late Friday afternoons and departed again from home Sunday at noon to go to boarding school. The weekends at home were much too short! When things or someone made you sad at school, it was often already forgotten by the time you saw your parents again. I guess we knew that we just had to cope. There was no other way. The saddest times of those many weekends at boarding school were Sunday afternoons. I still remember that

sad, lonesome feeling, because you knew there was another long week ahead—away from home!

The university we went to was a 15-hour drive from home. During that time we saw our parents only four times a year during holidays. Those long stretches of up to 12 weeks away from home made us miss the Kalahari so much.

At the end of Grade 12, my father told me that I had to go study something because education is something nobody can take away from you, and every girl needs an education. So I went to a university in South Africa, and although I was only one year there and then got married to Michael, I finished the rest of my degree (B.A. in Psychology and Languages) via long-distance education from the farm. I also finished a Teacher's Diploma this same way, when our eldest daughter was three years old. Today, even though I am a housewife and mother, I am still grateful that my father insisted that I get higher education. Circumstances in our schools changed so much in recent years that we now home-school our children through the seven years of primary school. Those years of studying alone on a farm, with no professors or live classes, taught me a certain discipline for which I am still grateful. I am now using that education to the benefit of our own children.

Michael...a Godsend husband

Since we grew up practically neighbors, Michael and I knew each other from a very young age. My sister and I were always so happy to see the neighbor girl friends that we didn't really take notice of the young males in the family. Until that lion hunt. I was 15.

Michael's father called my father that morning. Since both the farms are situated next to the Botswana border, we often have problems with lions, leopards, and other predators coming in to feed on our precious sheep. Asking for assistance from the neighbor farmer in hunting down a predator on a killing spree was a common occurrence. That day, the phone call sparked my sister's and my enthusiasm, because for us this meant the opportunity to go visit the neighbor girl friends (Michael's sisters).

As we entered their farm, their workers showed us the way to go directly to the border area where the lion was. My father immediately was very irritated with the fact that my sister and I asked to come along, because now it meant that he had two young girls with him who were not supposed to be on a lion hunt. It just is too dangerous. As we drove up to where Michael and his father were waiting, his father also found it not good that we girls were there. They decided that my sister and I had to take their vehicle and drive to their house. The men could then proceed with the hunt with my father's vehicle. The problem was that although I could drive a manual transmission vehicle, this vehicle's stick shift was on the steering column and not on the floor as I was used to. So…Michael's father told him to show me how to do it while he and my father discussed the plans for the hunt. I can't really remember more details, but I know that this up-to-now-unobtrusive Duvenhage boy showed me with a lot of patience how to handle the shift. We girls then drove to their home and they proceeded with the hunt. Michael killed his first lion that day.

From that day onwards, something changed in the way this neighbor boy and I took notice of each other.

To make a long story short, we started dating a few months after that on 8-8-88. We were 5 years together before we got married. In January, God willing, we will be married 20 years, and what a blessing it has been and still is. We are still in love with each other and are also best friends.

I can't tell you, women, how important it is to marry (or to be, if you are a male reading this) a husband who is a faithful and true child of God and a worthy head of the home—as Christ is the head of the church. By the wonderful grace of God, I was led to such a husband. Michael is a wonderful companion and friend who leads, protects, and loves our family. He instructs and sets an example for me and the children—in faith, love, and hard work. It makes me thankful every day for this blessing God bestowed upon me. I know I didn't deserve it, but God loved me so much and used my husband as a wonderful instrument in my life. It changed my life in so many ways. Since I didn't grow up in a solidly Reformed home, I had a lot of questions for many years. He always answered my questions patiently and with thorough knowledge of the Bible. His sincere devotion and zeal confirmed the work of the Holy Spirit in him. Every day when we have family devotions, and I see again just how sincerely and earnestly the head of our home goes about with the word of God, how he truly wants to get to know God better and live to glorify him, I just can't not be touched in my heart.

If you are married to such a faithful man, love

him in reverence and strive also to be the wife and woman God intended you to be when he created Eve.

Pray that God will lead you to such a husband and that he will also give you the grace to be a faithful wife and mother, because only then you will be happy, your life and children blessed, and will you be able to glorify God in your marriage. If it is possible for you to be a stay-at-home mother, know that you have the highest responsibility to teach your children at home the principles of true religion.

Young men, pray that God will work in you to become a husband who lives according to God's word, and love your wife in such a way that God be glorified. Let daily family devotions be the most important appointment in your homes. Instructing your children in the ways of the Lord is the most wonderful gift you can give them.

If you have a godly marriage, then when evil and suffering come upon you, you will be able patiently and gratefully to accept it, as it is all from the hand of the Lord.

Our life different from yours...in general terms

In some ways our lives are totally different than yours. Here are some things I can think of:

• You live in the northern hemisphere; we in the southern. When you have winter, we have summer. When you have autumn, we have spring. Most of us have never in our lives seen real snow, except on television. Most of you have never seen such a vast expanse of red sand, as can be found here in the Kalahari.

• Afrikaans is our home language. I'm sure the editor of this article will have to correct several grammar mistakes in this article before publishing it, because my line of thought is not in English. (The editor had to correct very few errors—MHH)

• In summer we sleep every night outside on the lawn. We now have air conditioning in the house, but we still prefer making a big family bed outside. Some nights during the full moon phase, the moon is so bright that you wake up often, and it takes a night or two to get used to that brightness outside, because we are used to sleeping in complete darkness. No street lights anywhere near.

• Most of the time we don't have mosquitoes here in the Kalahari (the environment is too dry), so we don't need to worry about that when sleeping outside. We just know not to put on a light near our beds, because lights draw bugs. However, I was stung by small scorpions on two occasions. Fortunately they were small ones. One night I had a close encounter with a big scorpion. I was lying on my stomach, ready to fall asleep outside on the mattress on the lawn. I felt something moving over my back and shoulder and then off on the pillow. As I switched on the flashlight, I saw the critter and killed it. I was happy not to have been stung by that one! It is still one of my biggest fears that the children will be stung by a really poisonous scorpion. It will cause them severe pain.

• We think that we probably live in one of the safest environments in the world. The thought of the scorpions and predators we sometimes encounter may terrify you. But in our opinion, the things you are confronted with every day, such as heavy traffic, the high population, danger in terms of what other sinful people can do to you or your children, the crime rate in cities, etc., are much worse than the nature surrounding us. We are so used to this quiet life that we get stressed as soon as we are two hours in a city. We can't wait to get back to the "outback"!

• Our nearest decent hospital (one with trained nurses, good and hygienic interiors and a 24-hour available doctor), is 500 kilometers (310 miles) away in Windhoek, the capital city of Namibia. We have a doctor in our home town, but he can't operate (no one to assist), is an atheist, and is usually not available after hours. It's not your ideal state of affairs. For births or emergencies we have to go to the city. Thus our thankfulness for every healthy or accident-free day.

• Our eldest girl was born naturally in our home town. The local doctor we had then has since retired. He believed each and every mother can give normal birth and that's it. He told me, when I was pregnant for the first time, that he did not expect any problems, so it was not necessary to go to the city for a birth. To make a long story short, I went 12 days over my due date. Then the doctor gave me an induction and after a long and very traumatic birth, our firstborn saw the light. I was too tired to be really happy that evening. The state of the hospital was just totally unprofessional. The day after our baby was born, Michael had to bring (it was winter) from friends' home in town big buckets of warm water because the hospital's hot water installation (geyser) was out of order and still is today after 15 years. Michael and

his mother gave me a bath because nobody thought to help me clean up a bit after the ordeal. That is my main memory, except the birth, of those few days. Our next two children were born via C-sections. We went to the city (310 miles from us) a week before each birth had to take place and the better, clean hospital and its more professional staff made me feel as if I was having a picnic. I could experience the real joy and blessing giving birth is!

• Sometimes I don't see the inside of a grocery store for 3 or 4 weeks. Since we live so far from town, four families take turns to drive the children to boarding school and back on weekends. The person who drives usually brings whatever supplies are needed for the other families from town. Our grocery store in town gives an excellent service in this regard. About once a week I can phone them and read off my list of groceries needed. They then get it together, charge it to our account, and pack it carefully in boxes until it is collected by whatever neighbor is picking it up that day. Fresh vegetables and fruit get to our town only on Wednesdays. When we then have the opportunity to get some on Fridays or Mondays via a neighbor, the best veggies and fruit are usually not available any more. We try to grow some vegetables on the farm, but with our extremes in climate, it is not easy to get good growth.

• We have an average of only 20 overcast days in a whole year. The rest are pure sunshine days. Overcast, rainy days are always welcomed here, because they bring the prospect of rain!

• We home-school our children until the end of Grade 7. Years ago, as our eldest daughter got ready to start Grade 1, we did not take this decision lightly. The nearest Christian school is 110 miles from us. It is not a Reformed school, but has lots of Pentecostal influence, with which we do not agree. The children going there are in boarding school every week and only at home on weekends. We wanted to have our children for a longer time at home to be able to give them solidly Reformed catechism lessons. How can you send someone to war without first giving the soldier some good training?

Home-schooling requires good discipline and routine and is not always easy, but we don't regret it for one day. The hour or more we can spend every morning together as a family reading, talking, and learning from the Bible, is something money can't buy. It is a wonderful gift from our Lord. May he continue to give our children this water of Life so that it becomes in them "a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14).

Our lives different from yours... in terms of church

• We live 65 miles from church. It takes at least an hour to drive there. The first part of our road to church is a thick, heavy sand track for which you need a 4x4. We have seven gates to open and close on the way. When opening gates, you have to put on running shoes or go barefoot; otherwise the sand goes into your church shoes, which is not nice. The children take turns opening gates and put their church shoes back on when we get to town.

• Our minister and his family are stationed in Windhoek, where one of our other churches is and where most members live. It is 500 kilometers from us—which is ±310 miles. We have a live sermon by our reverend once a month and then reading sermons in between. Can you imagine how wonderful it is for us when we see our reverend and his family? We were for several years without a minister, and during that time our consistories organized ministers from South Africa to come visit us, lead a meeting of the consistories and serve the Lord's Supper ± once every three months. So to see our reverend now once a month is just wonderful!

• Michael is an elder. When he goes on home-visitation (huisbesoek in Afrikaans), he can visit a maximum of two families per day because the families live too far apart. One of the families he often visits is a two hour drive from us, with 21 gates to open on the way and the same back. The elder usually takes his wife with to help with opening and closing of gates. It gives the term helpmeet a different meaning.

"One body in Christ..."

As I mentioned earlier, you and we have one most precious thing in common. That is our Reformed faith—the faith that we are loved by the one God of heaven and earth so much that he has sent his only Son to die for the sins of his chosen people. Reformed means also that it is through Christ only, by grace only, through faith only and to the glory of God only that we are part of the body of Christ: his universal catholic church, whom he "has redeemed…out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Rev. 5:9).

So how was it ordained by God that we came in contact with brothers and sisters of like faith 8000

miles from us? Looking back, it was an amazing combination of circumstances.

We are farmers and raise sheep for an income. Due to the herds of game we have on the ranch and the fact that we have to control their numbers so that they don't become too numerous and destroy vegetation, we have a trophy hunting business, which adds to our income. The purpose of trophy hunting is to give international hunters the opportunity to hunt mostly the best animals in a herd (only about 12% are trophy animals) for the best price.

For some time we were looking for a special gift to give to each of our visiting hunters. Then one day we read on an email from Reverend Slabbert le Cornu (see his blog at www.proregno.com) of South Africa, who had a Reformed bookshop, about a book that is basically short and easy explanations of Reformed theology. We always wanted to share our faith and be instruments to spread the Christian gospel, but due to our lack of the best English vocabulary, we always felt incompetent and not proficient to do the best we can in this regard. We immediately realized that God provided here for us a perfect help and tool for our circumstances: the ideal gift for our hunting friends! What a wonderful way to share our faith with people whom God sends to us in our business. We ordered 20 of these books for a start and were extremely impressed when we received them. Until today, we give our hunters copies of *Doctrine According to Godliness* by Rev. Ronald Hanko.

We publish a free newsletter from our website and were looking for good, Reformed devotionals to include in the newsletters. We found the website address of the Reformed Free Publishing Association, and on it information about the Protestant Reformed Churches of America. Already then we realized that members of these churches, according to their distinctive doctrinal issues as set forth on the website, are of like faith! We contacted the webmaster of the PRCA website and asked permission to use their online devotions for our newsletter. Permission was granted.

One day we received an email from one of our newsletter readers from Michigan, USA. This person is an avid hunter but has never hunted with us. He told us that he enjoyed our newsletters and saw that we quote devotions of PRCA therein, and mentioned that his neighbors were members of PRCA. He asked if he could give our email address to these people because they seemed interested in this connection. We were likewise interested and very excited about this.

Next thing was that we received an email from Deb Dams, a member of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church. This was the first of many more emails to and fro between us and Deb Dams. We shared with each other our history, our lives, our common faith, and our circumstances. Until today we are in contact with Deb and her family, Jeff and Angie de Vries (Jeff worked together with Deb and they are members of Trinity Protestant Reformed Church) and several more special people of the PRCA. Isn't it amazing that God used this person, who may be a non-believer, in his service and for the benefit of his children.

We and many of our PRCA friends have never met in person, but for several years now, our common faith has been the source of great comfort, joy and inspiration in our lives! This comfort and joy, can sprout and grow only through the common love for each other when part of the one body of Christ.

God gives us each other as friends, family, husbands and wives, parents and children, or whatever the relations may be, so that we can support, uphold, and advocate for each other during this life on earth.

Let us cherish, nurture, and regard these relationships with fellow believers.

They are gifts from heaven.

Conclusion

Thank you for letting me share our life with you. Reflecting on our lives, our history, our joys and sorrows, and the path as God has led us until now, I am filled with thankfulness, because "the Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage. I will bless the Lord" (Ps.16:5–7).

Therefore, "Be not thou ashamed of the testimony of our Lord,…but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim. 1:8–9).

Solus Christus, Sola Gratia, Sola Fide,
Sola Scriptura, Soli Deo Gloria!

~ Tienie Duvenhage, Namibia

Tienie lives near Aranos, Namibia, and is a member of Gereformeerde Kerk Aranos (The Reformed Church of Aranos).

Called to the Ministry

A couple weeks prior to writing this article, I had the privilege of giving a chapel speech at Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The topic on which I spoke was the same as that of this article, namely, God's work in my life to lead me into the ministry of the gospel. I spoke to high school students on this particular subject because God's work of leading me to consider the ministry took place when I was their age, walking those same halls as a high school student. The hope, therefore, was that they could relate to and learn from the experiences God led me through to pursue the ministry. I have the same hope for the young people who read this article.

For some men who pursue the ministry of the gospel, the desire to do so was present in their hearts as a child. That certainly was not the case for me. Although I grew up in a thoroughly godly home in Grand Rapids, Michigan and attended both Protestant Reformed churches and schools my entire life, the thought and desire to pursue the ministry of the gospel were never present throughout my childhood and into high school. Instead, my thoughts and desires were centered on something very much different. God, however, worked in a powerful way to change the inclinations of my heart.

Wilson Pro 1000 11.5 inch infield glove, Nike cleats, Louisville Slugger 32-inch 29-ounce bat, batting cages, ground balls, double plays—these words would characterize my interests throughout most of high school. I had a singular focus on baseball. I thoroughly enjoyed playing the sport and spent a lot of time doing so. Summers were spent working during the day, practicing at night, and playing in tournaments on the weekends. To a certain extent it even played a part in determining my plans for after high school. I always wanted to go to college, continue to play baseball, study to be an educator, all with the hope of one day teaching and coaching in high school.

These desires and plans began to change the summer after my junior year in high school. The day of my first summer league game, I injured my left hand while at work in the morning. Originally, I thought nothing of it, but by the middle of the game that same evening, I could not squeeze my glove nor grip a bat. The next morning my hand was swollen twice its normal size, and off to the doctors I went. The diagnosis was a fractured scaphoid bone in my left hand, and the prognosis was three to four months in a full arm cast to heal due to limited blood supply to this particular bone. The summer plans of work, practices, games, and tournaments ended. That original fracture and time of healing were followed by a re-fracture as well as multiple surgeries, thus keeping me from playing for the better part of a year during my senior year. As a result of the injury, the post-high school plans of playing in college were no longer as well.

Although at the time I was disappointed because I was unable to play the sport that I thoroughly enjoyed, in reflecting upon that time now I am able clearly to see the work of God to re-direct my life to pursue the ministry. There are two things that stand out in my mind that led me down this path. First, I began to develop a love of reading theological literature. Instead of practicing and playing that summer I was injured, I began reading. I am convinced that if God had not worked in such a way so that I could no longer play baseball, this love would not have developed. Second, I remember clearly the many petitions offered during congregational prayers concerning the need for men for the ministry of the gospel. At this time I was a member of Faith Protestant Reformed Church, which was without a pastor. Often, therefore, visiting pastors would pray that the young men consider the ministry of the gospel. Those petitions left a deep impression upon me. Hearing those frequent prayers coupled with developing this love for reading caused me to consider for the first time the gospel ministry as a potential life-calling. After much reflection and prayer, I became convinced that God was in fact leading me down this path of the ministry.

With the goal of entering seminary, I enrolled at Hope College in Holland, Michigan for my under-

graduate studies. After completing in four years a major in history and minor in psychology as well as the necessary pre-seminary courses, I entered the Protestant Reformed Theological School in the fall of 2007. The summer between college and seminary I married my wife Jessica (nee Karsemeyer; God has since given us two daughters, Kate and Emma). Throughout the eight years in college and seminary, the doubts concerning the call to the ministry were there. The desire to serve as a minster, however, was always present and strong in my heart, and never did God in a clear way indicate that the door to the ministry for me was shut. Thus, I pressed on in my studies and eventually graduated from seminary in 2011. The internal call in my heart was confirmed by the external call that I received from God that same summer through Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan, where I have been serving as a pastor ever since.

In conclusion, I would like to urge the young men who read this article to do just one thing. It is simply this: prayerfully and carefully *consider* pursuing the ministry of the gospel. It may be the case that the Lord's will is that you are not called to serve God in this way. That is okay; the gospel ministry is not for everyone. But at the very least then, you stand before God honestly having considered prayerfully this calling. I am thankful to God that he worked in a very clear way, as I explained above, to lead me to consider the ministry. The fact is, however, that prior to those events taking place, I would have dismissed without any thought even the possibility of being a pastor in Christ's church. It was something that I never thought of seriously. Looking back on it now, however, I write with humility that it is something that I should have considered simply as a Christian young man in God's church. Young men, have you considered prayerfully whether God is calling you to study for the ministry? I urge you to reflect in a personal way upon the well-known words of our Lord in Matthew 9:37–38, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest."

Rev. Decker is pastor of Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

Christian Living — Rev. Angus Stewart

Youth Worrying About Their Future

Prone to Worry

Young people (and older people) are liable to worry about their future. Given our old sinful natures, legitimate questions can easily lead to illegitimate concerns, unhealthy doubts, and damaging, even crippling, fears. Just as "I am prone by nature to hate God and my neighbour" (Heidelberg Catechism, A5), so we are prone to worry.

Should I go to college or university? Which one? Will I get the grades to get in? What subjects should I study? What courses should I take? What if I don't like it there? Can I afford the fees? Will I be able to pay back my student loan? Or should I learn a trade or serve an apprenticeship?

What job should I do? Will it provide enough to provide for my family (if God gives me one), Christian school tuition, and my church? Will I even be able to get a job in these economically unsettled times? Do I have or will I have the requisite skills?

Young people are also prone to worries about dating and marriage. Whom should I court? Who would want to date me, since I am unattractive, unpopular, or whatever? Would anyone want to marry me? I'd probably make a terrible spouse! I'd be no good in a marriage! How could I cope with children? Maybe God is calling me to a life of singleness? If so, what will others think?

The temptation to worry about these and other things is present especially for young people—those of you in your late teens or early twenties, because you are approaching and entering a period of transition in your life. You are moving from the security of

living with your parents in the family home into situations in which you have to take more responsibility and find your own way.

Worry Is Sin!

The first thing we must be entirely clear about is that worry is sin. It is appropriate and necessary to think and plan for the future (submitting, of course, to the sovereignty of our merciful and just Father in heaven). However, anxiety about the days and months and years ahead betrays a lack of trust in the goodness and wisdom of our covenant God, for it contradicts our confession of the loving providence of our creator and redeemer (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 9–10).

Since scripture promises (concerning the future too) that all things work together for good to those who love God (Rom. 8:28), we must not work ourselves up with anxiety and fear by thinking that events will conspire against us for ill. Do not, like foolish Jacob, reckon "all these things are against me" (Gen. 42:36). This is sinful unbelief!

In the middle of his famous sermon on the mount (Matt. 5–7), which explains the calling of the citizens of the kingdom of God, our Savior addressed the issue of worry (Matt. 6:24–34). He forbids us to be anxious about food, drink, and clothing (for ourselves or our future spouses or children), and thus the jobs required to pay for such things and the education and training necessary for such jobs.

Listen closely to Christ's crucial concluding commands: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought [i.e., do not worry] for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matt. 6:33–34). Believe and obey!

God's Sovereignty and Our Calling

When we worry, we foolishly ignore our human limitations, for we do not know and cannot control the future. These are solely divine prerogatives, for Jehovah alone has decreed and governs all things.

Our calling defines our responsibility. Those in education are to make good use of their God-given abilities, studying faithfully, as unto the Lord, not merely regarding man (cf. Eph. 6:5–8). Through confession of our all-too-frequent laziness and disobedience, God grants us cleansing by the blood of Christ (1 John 1:9).

Regarding future training or education, learn about the options available, discuss the issues with teachers and/or parents and/or people in these fields and then decide on the basis of sufficient information. Those who seek God's glory in making decisions (small or large) in accordance with biblical principles have no reason to lie awake at night worrying, but should sleep in peace, knowing the future is in the Lord's gracious hands.

The same principles apply regarding a job. What skills do you have? What are your interests? What training do you need? What openings are there? Learn about the company and position you seek before your interview. Do the best you can and leave the results to the sovereign God. Keep trying, if at first you don't succeed. The Lord is with you as you truly seek to serve him; that is more important than a job, even the "ideal" job.

Concerning a spouse, if God wills that you marry, you will. Your calling meanwhile is to grow in grace so that you are ready to be a godly husband or wife. Prepare for confession of faith and make the church central in your life. Attend Bible studies and go to church lectures. Do not use your increased freedom to indulge in worldliness!

Those who can truly confess, "I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts" (Ps. 119:63) are the young men and women who will be blessed in singleness (1 Cor. 7:1, 7–8), courtship (as you seek to ascertain if this is the biblically qualified person God would have you marry), and in the covenant of marriage, according to Jehovah's sovereign purpose. Marriage, like this present world, is temporary, "but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John 2:17).

Trust and Pray

While it is wrong to dodge or run away from your responsibilities, heaping up and compounding your problems and fears is also self-destructive. By God's grace, do not give in to self-pity or despair through worrying about the future.

Instead, trust in the goodness of the God who holds you, the future, and the world in his hands. Pray to him through Jesus Christ, "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Pet. 5:7). Continually and especially when you are feeling anxious, bring all your burdens to the Lord, telling him all the things that oppress you and your fears for the future. Our heavenly Father, like a good parent, understands, comforts, and guides his children.

Psalm 62:8 puts it so well: "Trust in him at all

times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us" (Ps. 62:8). All our cares and worries build up like pressure in our hearts. Release them through prayer to the Lord and you will find him "a very present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1), like Hannah (1 Sam. 1–2), even through the uncertain years of young adulthood.

Rev. Stewart is pastor of Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Ballymena, Northern Ireland.

Church News — Melinda Bleyenberg

BAPTISMS

"But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children." Psalm 103:17

The sacrament of holy baptism was administered to:

Seadon Philip, son of Mr. & Mrs. Phil & Laura Kalsbeek—Faith, MI
Riley Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jon & Alyssa Pastoor—Faith, MI
Layton Michael & Ryder Jay, twin sons of Mr. & Mrs. Ben & Brenda Rau—Faith, MI
Skylar Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Adam & Sandee Dekkinga—Georgetown, MI
Brynlee Kate, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brad & Katelyn VanOostenbrugge—Grace, MI
Raegan Alexis, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brad & Amanda Schut—Grandville, MI
Everett Ray, son of Mr. & Mrs. Dustin & Tina Hall—Grandville, MI
Liam Joseph, son of Mr. & Mrs. Todd & Nicole Kooienga—Grandville, MI
Daniel James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Matt & Stephanie DeBeor—Grandville, MI
Weston Lee, son of Mr. & Mrs. David & Amanda Roseboom—Hull, IA
Jordan Evan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Evan & Kim Bleyenberg—Hull, IA
Kenzie Jo, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Tom & Kristin Huizinga—Hope, MI
Haley Marie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Justin & Maria Miersma—Hope, MI
Clint Joseph, son of Mr. & Mrs. Dan & Rebecca Regnerus—Randolph, WI
William Jase, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jared & Lisa Langerak—Southeast, MI
Alexandra Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Joseph & Audra Ophoff—Southeast, MI
Adult baptism was administered to Katiedan Wigfield—Redlands, CA

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

"Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:1

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

Gloria Hoving—Georgetown, MI
Jarrod DeBoer—Lynden, WA
Lisa Heystek—Lynden, WA
David Tolsma—Lynden, WA

Connie Meyer

A Turn of Events: From Chaos to Comfort

A History of the Heidelberg Catechism (Part 6)

Luther had nailed his ninety-five theses to the door at Wittenberg nearly fifty years ago. Now it was 1562 and many doctrines still needed further explanation. Lack of understanding especially about the Lord's Supper caused much chaos and confusion in the land. The need for clear explanation of doctrine was great. This would be a year for creeds and confessions.

Elector Frederick III ruled from his castle in Heidelberg, Germany. He saw the need for a new and clear catechism to be written. His own wife was Lutheran and tried to persuade him to see the Lord's Supper from the Lutheran point of view, but he was not sure. What if Calvin's view was right? There had been much trouble and confusion in Heidelberg over the Lord's Supper, and now he did not know where to turn, except to God.

Frederick shut himself alone in his rooms to pray and to study the Scriptures. God answered those prayers. Frederick came forth with confidence. The Calvinistic view was the scriptural one. He was sure. He also knew what kind of men ought to write the new catechism.

Twenty-eight-year-old Zacharius Ursinus had recently become a professor of doctrine at the university in Heidelberg. Twenty-six-year-old Caspar Olevianus was the new pastor of the Church of the Holy Spirit there. Both men had already shown themselves to be extremely gifted in teaching, preaching, and godliness. Both had been taught by John Calvin, Peter Martyr, and other important reformers. Frederick assigned the task to them.

Frederick could not have known that the words these men would write would be just as important 450 years later as they were in his day. But God knew. God had brought these men to Heidelberg. God had prepared them for the task. Olevianus' bold and eloquent preaching would combine with Ursinus' logical and poetic mind to result in writing that would be amazingly clear and beautiful.

The Lord's Supper would be explained too. In all their studies, Ursinus and Olevianus came to understand that Luther had gone too far in saying Christ's body and blood were present in the Lord's Supper in a physical way. What is the biblical view? Jesus Christ is indeed present in the Lord's Supper, but in a spiritual way. This truth would now be made clear to all. In 1563 the Heidelberg Catechism was adopted by the church and received with much thanksgiving. The issue of the Lord's Supper was settled.

But one truth never stands alone from the rest. Confusion over the Lord's Supper helped to make the time ripe for a godly ruler to call for a catechism to be written, but all truths fit together in perfect harmony. God led both writers of the catechism to see that as well. Out of the chaos of those times, they wrote a document that would show the way of peace and comfort to all God's people, for all time, in all circumstances. Such would be the turn of events….

"LITTLE LIGHTS" … let it shine!

FIND THE FOLLOWING WORDS FROM LORD'S DAY 29, Q&A 78 IN THE PUZZLE BELOW. SOME TWO-LETTER WORDS MAY HAVE MORE THAN ONE POSSIBILITY.

Do then the bread and wine become the very body and blood of Christ?

Not at all: but as the water in baptism is not changed into the blood of Christ…so the bread in the Lord's Supper is not changed into the very body of Christ…

I	D	C	H	R	I	S	T	V	Y	A	B
W	N	E	B	L	O	O	D	D	E	T	E
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N	O	T	H	E	E	B	D	E	T	L	U
K	N	D	E	G	N	A	H	C	O	O	T
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O	S	H	V	C	H	R	I	S	T	E	G
F	T	H	E	N	L	D	N	O	T	R	V

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

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"Ye are all children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober."

I Thessalonians 5:1-8

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