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Our Eternal Home: Thinking About It

During the last few months of my grandfather's life, I distinctly remember that there was only one thing he *really* wanted to talk about. Before these last months he enjoyed talking about family trees, serving in the army during World War II, gardening, and the things going on in our lives. In the last months of his life he would talk about these things, but they were not on his mind like they once were. Something else occupied most of his thoughts and conversations. Heaven. My grandfather knew he was going home, to heaven. He wanted to go. He was waiting for Jesus to take him. When I said goodbye to him through tears, the last words he spoke to me were, "If I don't see you here again, I'll see you in heaven."

How often do we think about heaven? Certainly not as often as my grandfather did in the last days of his life. We should not expect to think about heaven as much as a man on his death bed. Yet thinking about heaven is not reserved only for the old. In our youth, thinking about death and heaven may not be much of a priority with all that we have going on: school, work, homework, sports, and screen time. But it should be. Thinking about heaven is not simply for the old who seem *closer* to death. None of us knows how close we are to death. God does not guarantee we will live to see tomorrow. One of us could die in a car crash, from an aneurism, or be diagnosed with fast-growing cancer that gives us only months to live. We all are close to death.

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Our pilgrim journey on earth ends in death because we all have a terminal disease called mortality. Three people die every second; one hundred and eighty people die every minute; eleven thousand die every hour. This means that every day roughly 250,000 people are either going to heaven or hell. These numbers include old and young. Our days are numbered. Life on this earth is brief. God uses the brevity of our lives and the reality of death to get us thinking about where we are going to spend eternity. We should all be thinking about our eternal home.

Are we? How often did you think about heaven today? In the past week? In the past year? How often have you thought about heaven outside of church?

Mistakenly, we may think that thinking about heaven will distract from the things we need to do presently. After all, the old (and false) adage goes something like this: he is so heavenly minded he is of no earthly good. But thinking about heaven does not mean that we cease and desist from our normal, everyday activities like homework, work, cleaning our rooms, playing sports, checking our email, and Facebooking. The opposite is true. If we are not heavenly minded, we are of no earthly good in the service of God. This is true because thinking about heaven is something we do while we do our homework, work, clean our rooms, play sports, check email, and Facebook. Meditating on heaven is the only thing that makes us of any earthly good because it includes thinking about how we can serve our Savior until we arrive at our heavenly home.

The last verse of 1 Corinthians 15 teaches that thinking about the final resurrection and heaven leads not to inactivity, but to faithful work in the service of the Lord. The Holy Spirit always puts the right word in the right place in Holy Scripture. 1 Corinthians 15:57 is beautiful, and we would think this is a fitting end to the chapter on the resurrection to heavenly life: "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." But this is not the last verse of this section. Verse 58 says, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." The truth of our resurrection to heavenly life does not encourage being of no earthly good, but encourages us to abound always in the work of the Lord. Thinking about heaven keeps us focused on serving the Lord in our lives.

Satan knows this. This is why one of the ways that the roaring lion attacks us is by distracting us from thinking about heaven. He would like our minds occupied with sports, money, fashion, my looks, guys, girls, sex, shopping, work, cars, sports, money, fashion…without any thought of heaven. We should be so thankful to God for the luxury and comfort God has abundantly given. But there is a danger in abundance. The danger is that we live distracted lives. Individual happiness and comfort becomes the goal of life instead of the fullness of life with God in our heavenly home. How is Satan trying to distract you from thinking about heaven? This is something important to ponder.

How do we learn about heaven so we can think about it more? If you asked some Christians today this question they might point you to a book or a movie. Recently, one of the *New York Times* best-sellers, *Heaven is for Real*, was made into a Hollywood movie. The story is of Colton Burpo, the three-year-old son of the pastor/author of the book. When Colton was almost four, his appendix ruptured. He claims that during his surgery he went to heaven, where he saw amazing things. He met his sister who had died before birth as a result of a miscarriage, and his grandfather, who died before Colton was born. He petted Jesus' rainbow-colored horse, listened to angels singing "Jesus loves me" to him, saw Jesus' crucifixion wounds, and that everyone except Jesus had wings. And God was "really, really big." This is only one of a plethora of books in which people claim to have gone to heaven and returned.

Truth about heaven cannot be learned from a movie or a book. In fact, many of the things these people claim to see are not consistent with what scripture says to us about heaven. Don't go to see the movie or pick up one of these books. We learn about heaven from a book, but not from those books or a movie. The holy scriptures reveal everything we need to know about the beauty and glory of heavenly life. God has revealed all we need to know about the glories of heaven. All the questions we have about heaven will not be answered, but there is so much to learn.

I have heard many people over the years say that there is not much we know about heaven, citing as proof what we read in 1 Corinthians 2:9: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Certainly there

is much about heaven that we do not know at this time. What will we do? What will those who died in infancy or old age look like in heaven? And we have many other questions. But the Bible says plenty about heaven, especially in the last two chapters of the Bible (Rev. 21 and 22).

Scripture says heaven is the eternal home of God's people. The end of the Shepherd's psalm points us to our future home: "Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Ps. 23:6). We find this same language in 2 Corinthians 5:1, "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

When we die, our souls will be taken to our heavenly home, where we will see Jesus (Luke 23:43). When Jesus returns to this earth at the end of the ages, our bodies will be raised, reunited with our souls that were in heaven, and taken to a new heaven and new earth (1 Thess. 4:15–17).

God is guiding our pilgrim journey to this home. Jesus promised before he ascended into heaven that a purpose of his ascending was that he "go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). Not only is Jesus preparing our place in heaven, but also he is preparing us for that place. God is polishing and purifying us through the hardships and difficulties of this life to prepare us to live with him in heavenly glory. Asaph confessed this truth in Psalm 73:23–24, "Nevertheless I am continually with thee; thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory." We believe that God is preparing us for this home.

This everlasting home is ours because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our savior. Jesus suffered God's wrath on the cross in our place so that we will dwell in this home. We will experience this in part when we die, for at that moment our souls are taken to heaven to be with Jesus. We will experience life in this home most fully after Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead. After the judgment, Jesus will live with us in "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1).

Let me tell you that this home will be amazing! In these articles, I want to show you how awesome this home will be. No million dollar mansion with 12 foot ceilings, elegant staircases, backyard pool and jacuzzi, and manicured flower gardens can compare. What is better than this? We will have perfect fellowship with God, Jesus, and each other. Heaven will be free from sin, suffering, enemies, and fighting. It is home because we will be there with our family. Our heavenly Father will continue to shower us with the blessings of his love. We will see our elder brother Jesus, whom we cannot see now because he is in heaven and we are on earth. What could be better?

Because heaven is our everlasting home, don't we want to know as much as we can about it? Consider this from the perspective of preparing for a vacation. If your parents chose to vacation in Washington D.C., they would prepare by learning all they could about what to do and see there. You can hear the conversation around the dinner table: "When we get there we will…." How often do we have these conversations about heaven? "When we get there we will…"

When we see how grand heaven is, we will think about it more. Probably not as much as my grandfather at the end of his life. But we will learn that to be of any earthly good, we must be heavenly minded.

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

It is not for kings, O Lemuel,
it is not for kings to drink wine;
nor for princes strong drink:
lest they drink,
and forget the law,
and pervert the judgement
of any of the afflicted.
Give strong drink unto him
that is ready to perish,
and wine unto those
that be of heavy hearts.
Let him drink,
and forget his poverty,
and remember his misery no more.

—Proverbs 31:4–7

Implications of Public Confession

III
Prayer As A Training School For Confession

"I prayed…and made my confession."
Daniel 9:4

The seed of faith that it frequently pleases God to sow within the heart of a child does not grow and flourish of its own accord. Imagine, for a moment, that a child within whose heart this seed had been planted had been kidnapped soon after its birth by a tribe of savages, that it had been taken far from its father and mother and far from the blessed influences of Christ's church. Do you suppose that child's faith would have developed? By no means, though he were now a man of thirty years of age. If the seed of faith in any child is to sprout, grow up, and burst into bloom, that child must be kept in contact with the church that baptized it, must be kept familiar with God's holy word, and must, in short, be *prepared* for making its confession.

That emphasis does not mean to imply that external means alone can ever succeed in causing faith to develop and to flourish. External means cannot cause that. All external cultivation will avail nothing unless God the Holy Ghost causes that seed of faith to germinate and unless he supports that tender growth by His divine power. If the divine influence were wanting, that seed of faith would be as unproductive as that which falls upon stony places, and all external attempts to cultivate it would be as effective as plowing a bed of rocks.

A farmer sweats at his labor and expends great care and tireless energy at tilling his fields. But unless his efforts are accompanied by the life-imparting rays of the sun, he will reap no harvest. It is equally true that the internal operations of the Holy Spirit must accompany the external means of preparation for confession if a child's confession of his Lord is to be genuine. That is not saying that God's omnipotence is limited or that it is dependent upon external means to bring faith to its full fruition. A child who dies as an infant can be saved even though it has never comprehended the word of God. God has other means of saving such infants, other means of educating to a full appreciation of their Savior. The arm of the Lord is never shortened. But for those of us who grow into consciously responsible maturity, it has pleased God to fix this law: The internal work of the Spirit and the external means of grace serve as complements to each other.

It is obvious therefore that preparation is necessary for making public confession.

Of what should that preparation consist? Merely of home and catechetical training? Does an accumulation of knowledge, a committing to memory, a familiarity with various facts and particulars suffice to prepare the child for a true confession? Indeed not. To "make confession" is a much weightier matter than to "recite a lesson," and actively to join God's church involves much more than to be able to repeat the tenets she embraces and the canons she professes. True, study is necessary and indispensable, and committing to memory is invaluable. Much time and attention must be devoted to giving the child a vivid impression of Christ and of his word. But these means do not, to use a figure, exhaust the curriculum in the school for the preparation for confession. If they did, one could with as much hope for success attempt to prepare pagan and Jewish children for making their confession of faith. To suppose that such means suffice would be assuming that confession is only an intellectual matter, and that the heart does not enter into it at all. Such an assumption is surely unwarranted.

It is for that reason that the preceding meditation emphasized the fact that a child must be constantly confessing Jesus among his companions at school if ever his public confession is to be a true one. To confess is to "show one's colors" for one's king, to be loyal to Jesus, to allow oneself to become incorporated into Christ's battalion, and in that way to be active for his majesty and kingdom.

That child will never become an audacious soldier who, as a child, does not exhibit courage and daring among his fellows. It is even more true that no decisive confession was ever made by an adult whose eyes, when he was a child, had not sometimes lowered with indignation at every reproach heaped upon his Savior.

However, one other thing is needful for one's preparation for confession. It is a requisite that generally is not sufficiently emphasized. The Bible names two kinds of confession: a confession of one's Savior, and a confession of one's sins. These two kinds should coexist in the heart of a Christian, be he an adult or a child.

Your confession of your Savior and Lord before the congregation must include a confession of your personal wretchedness. A confession that desires Jesus but that is not characterized by a profound conviction of personal sin and guilt is false. Paul would call that a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. Indeed, it would be a weak and flimsy confession. That is self-evident. Why a Redeemer if there be no need for redemption? How yearn for a Savior except there is a consciousness of the bonds of death? Again, why should you seek the Physician if you do not sense that your soul is sick? Yes, there should be a consciousness, a poignant, painful consciousness of personal sin and guilt. That does not mean that you must have the full and profound consciousness of your depravity in the moment you say yes before the congregation. Those who profess the necessity of that drift toward emotionalism and depart from the meaning of the word of God. But it is unequivocally true that he who confesses his Savior must confess his wretchedness also. To a degree and in a way appropriate to his age and experience, he must fully sense that he is lost, and that therefore he, together with all God's children, is taking refuge under the Savior's wings.

If one is to make one's confession in that way, one must be prepared for it from youth up. Then the child must be educated according to Daniel's rule: "I prayed, and made my confession unto the Lord."

A child must learn to pray. You must teach him to do so. Does that mean that you must convert him into a little preacher by having him display his cleverness at making prayers? No, for that would be destroying the tenderest qualities in the child's soul. Children should be kept from all attempts at ostentation. A child must learn to pray in a childlike fashion: modestly, shyly almost. There is a custom in some homes to have four or five children "rattle off" their "Lord, bless this food, Amen" successively, after the father has completed the family prayer. That custom ought to be discouraged. It thwarts fervent, heartfelt prayer in the soul of a child. Perhaps children cannot enter into the petitions of the father. Perhaps they need their own intercessor. If that is true, let one of the older children be that intercessor. Teach him to pray slowly, reverently, so that his praying may be true prayer.

And as for the rest, let their morning prayers at arising and their evening prayers at going to bed be their quiet training school for confession. In that school you must be the teacher. Hence you must give them a model, but in giving it you must pray. Then they must pray it with you. In that way they will reach the stage at which they can pray alone. Their prayer may be a formulated one sometimes, provided it be discreetly chosen and infrequently used. Formulated prayers are to be used only when the spirit is too dull to shape its own petitions. Personally engendered prayers should be the goal, the ideal. Each child should pray in his unique, individual way; he should pray not in the language of adults, but in that of children. He should express his thanks for what has made him glad, and his petitions for what troubles him. And he should give his praises just as he might give them if his Jesus were present to receive his embraces.

Above all, teach your child to pray on special occasions. The bidding "In all thy ways acknowledge him" is a fountain of riches for prayer. Mornings, at noonday, evenings—yes, indeed. But these occasions do not suffice for prayer to attain its own true value. True prayer attains its richest quality when every obstacle that life presents causes the soul to send a cry of help to God, when every joy that throbs at the heart engenders a note of praise and sends it up on high. Your child must know intimately that prayer is that. Nothing is too trivial for God's attention. A difficult lesson at school perplexes a child as much as a difficult campaign annoys a general. And the Lord God wishes to be acknowledged in all things. Hence, teach your child to pray not because you ask it, not because he knows you will observe and be pleased, but because he knows he needs the peace it gives his heart.

In that way a child should also pray for the forgiveness of sins. It is very easy to change a child

into a little Pharisee. He can repeat the words "I am wretched, Lord and deserve to die," very sanctimoniously. Yet after he has cheated, or lied, or wounded his mother's feelings he has not the least personal conviction of guilt. Nevertheless, your purpose in teaching him prayer should be to augment a conviction of guilt in him. He should sense that in a childlike way but in a heartfelt manner, and should ask God to forgive him. You know how your child reacts when he has injured you. He regrets it later, comes to you ingratiatingly, sincerely, whispers into your ear that he is sorry and that you must not be angry any more. His confession to God should be as real and sincere as that. He should confess his guilt in specific terms, should name his naughtiness as he himself appreciates his sin in them. If he does so, he prays sincerely and in a heartfelt manner. Then he is learning what justice is, and he is learning what it means to live honestly and uprightly before his God.

A mother has an especially responsible and holy calling in this matter. She cannot fulfill her responsibility unless she herself knows and has experienced the reality of prayer in the sense in which it has been defined. She must share with her children a sure and a quiet trust in God. Mothers, older sisters, housemaids—these have a holy calling and a precious privilege in teaching children to pray. Christian education is a sacred matter and a beautiful privilege. And it costs the soul many an exacting effort.

Christian Living — Kailey TenBrock

Finding Hope in the Midst of Affliction

One thing that I have learned in my years here at Covenant is that finding hope in the midst of affliction is possible. Not only have I learned this from my personal experiences or from the instruction of the teachers, but I have also seen it proved to be true in the lives of so many of you here.

Many of you, if not all, have struggled with some type of affliction in your life. There are some of you who have battled against anxiety or depression. Some, difficulties within the home. Others of you have had a family member brought low by illness, such as cancer. And still more of you have experienced the sorrow and grief that come with losing a loved one. The list goes on.

Sometimes these afflictions that we face can overwhelm us. They can take control of our lives and bring us to confusion as to what we are supposed to do. There are many sinful things that we might go to for an escape, but they are all the wrong way out.

Some of these diversions would be things such as drinking, smoking, or doing drugs, sex, cutting yourself, or forcing upon yourself an eating disorder. I can personally say that I know and understand that if you do any of these things, or other things, as a way to try to dull your pain, it might seem at first that it's working. It might seem like these things take away the suffering that your affliction is causing you. But the truth of the matter is, they don't. They simply give you another kind of pain, a deeper pain, to focus on. And in the end, they only add to the pain that you felt before.

I know that some of you are probably thinking, "Well, what else am I supposed to do? No one cares about my pain. No one can help me. I feel so alone." I can't tell you how many times I've thought the exact same thing. But when we think this, we are so far from the truth.

The first thing I want you to realize, yet not the most important, is what we've been gifted with while we're here on this earth: friendships. So many of us just go through our daily lives as if they were an act. We put that fake smile on our faces and just pretend like everything is great, when in reality we are going through one of the most difficult times in our life. But God doesn't give us friends so we can pretend around them. They are gifts. The purpose for which

they are given to us is especially for encouragement and support in hard times, and also for rejoicing with us through the accomplishments. To be honest, friendships are one huge thing that have gotten me through high school. Conversations that I've had with people, little gestures of kindness I've been shown; those moments have really encouraged me.

There was a conversation I had with one of my good friends this past weekend that really caused me to grow in my appreciation and gratitude for the people God has given me. While we were talking, one thing we discussed really struck me. We were talking about prayer, and how God doesn't always answer our prayers the way we want, but he answers them with what we need. We have times where we just want a trial gone from our life right here and right now so we can move forward. But God says, "No, child. This trial is part of my plan for you, and I have a purpose in it." This person also reminded me that as much as I would desire to do so, I can't change things myself. The perspective this person gave to me was this: "You're not the Holy Spirit. You can only do so much for people. You can be there for them, but you can't fix their problems. Only God can provide that turning point, and all you can do is pray and trust him." This wasn't a foreign idea to me. But it's something I know I need to be reminded of time and time again. This is just one example of the reasons I am SO thankful for friendships. Friends are truly one of the most precious gifts from God. Don't ever miss an opportunity to tell your friends how much their love and support means to you.

Aside from the gift of friends, I want to talk about all the ways that God has shown me the hope that I am able to have in Christ. First, in his perfect wisdom, he has a purpose for giving to us our affliction. This purpose is for his glory, for our good, and to strengthen our faith. He is directing all of our suffering toward the specific goal of eternal glory. We can know that he is in control of every moment of our lives. Before any heartache can so much as touch our life, it has to go through his hands.

We must also remember that we are not alone in our suffering. For one, God is ALWAYS there. He's holding us at all times. But we can be confident too that Jesus knows and understands our pain. His suffering was much more than we will ever have to face, and he did it out of love for us.

By this we can be assured that anything we are afflicted with is absolutely nothing in comparison to the love that God has for us. He loves us so much that he sent his own Son to die so that we might have eternal life. Not only did he give us eternity, but he gave us much more that we can even experience in our life here. Through the death of Jesus, we have the ability to approach God in prayer with confidence. Through his death, we also are able to call God our Father, because he has adopted us as his own children. We must view ourselves in the light of what he has done for us. We are the handiwork of God, a masterpiece bought with the price of the blood of God's Son.

The final point that I want to make is this: all of the affliction that we face is not meaningless, but is totally meaningful. I don't know about you, but for me, the question that I most often ask when it comes to my affliction is, "Why me? What's the point of all this pain? If God is SO good, then why do I feel like I'm drowning in an endless sorrow?" To answer these questions, I want to read to you an excerpt from a sermon by a man named John Piper.

"Not only is all your affliction momentary. Not only is all your affliction light in comparison to eternity, and the glory there. But all of it is TOTALLY meaningful. Every millisecond of your pain from the fallen nature or fallen man, every millisecond of your misery in the path of obedience is producing a peculiar glory you will get because of that. I don't care if it was cancer or criticism. I don't care if it was slander or sickness. It wasn't meaningless. It's doing something. It's not meaningless! Of course you can't see what it's doing! Don't look to what is seen. When your mom dies, when your kid dies, when you've got cancer at 40, when a car careens into the sidewalk and takes her out, Don't say "That's meaningless!" It's not. It is working for you an ETERNAL weight of glory. THEREFORE, do NOT lose heart! But take these truths and day by day, FOCUS on them. PREACH them to yourself every morning. Get alone with God and PREACH his word into your mind until your heart sings with confidence that you are NEW and CARED FOR."

You see, the sole purpose of our affliction is to work for us the eternal and peculiar glory, of which we are undeserving, yet with which God has so graciously blessed us. God promises us that every moment that we spend suffering is not meaningless, but is working for our good, and that he will never forsake us through it. We see this very promise in our class text, Joshua 1:9 "Have not I commanded thee?

Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee withersoever thou goest." It is inevitable that in this life we will suffer. It's part of being a child of God. We are in a place that is not our home. The devil is going to try with all he has to use our affliction to turn us against our God. But he will not prevail. We already have the victory. Knowing this, that glory awaits us, where there is no pain, no tears, no sin, and no suffering, we can live our lives, even in the midst of our affliction, with a bold confidence and a burning passion for the hope that we have in Jesus Christ, who is our calm in the midst of the storm.

Kailey is a member of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan, and a graduate of Covenant Christian High School. This article is the text of a chapel speech she gave at Covenant.

Christian Living — Becca Joostens

Letter to a Single Friend

I'd like to preface this letter by asking that you read it with your Bibles readily available. I reference a lot of verses, but quote very few of them. I am sure these verses are familiar, but you may not have read them from the point of view of a single person in the past. Please take some time to read the whole passage as you read through the letter and search the passage for what God is saying to the single church member.

Dear Single Friend,

It is ok to acknowledge that being single is difficult. Perhaps you are like me and wish that single Christian life could be more openly and comfortably discussed. Therefore, I'm going to be very open and address this in a very personal manner. I will refer to the real struggles I have had in my life as a single Christian. Maybe you have experienced some of the same feelings, or maybe you have had other struggles, but I hope this helps you understand that you are not alone.

So here is my full out confession—one uncomfortable paragraph about the feelings that the weakness of human nature allows a single person to feel: First, it is very scary to think of being alone in everything that I do: no one to make life decisions with or help support me in my various undertakings. Second, most of my friends are married and are now raising families which leaves me with fewer friends and feeling very different. Last, it is no secret that there is a big emphasis on marriage and raising covenant children in the church; this leads me to feel left out, worthless, or that I am inconsequential to other church members or to God himself.

It is important to acknowledge the truth of my human nature and to confess the sin of my doubt and weakness (Ps. 32). Instead of wallowing in this weakness, I need to look at how I can and will (through the grace of God—Heb. 4:16) view the single life as the carefully and lovingly planned life that my God has created for me and made possible through my Savior (Jer. 29:11). But like all other Christians, I need help to find contentment in the life that God willed for me and to be able to say with the apostle Paul, "For I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content" (Phil. 4:11).

1 Corinthians 12 is a great passage to start with. Especially focus on vs 12: "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ." This passage reminds us that each church member has his place and is important. The church body is not whole without each individual member, including single members. This is a great verse (and there are many more) to comfort a single individual. However, this speaks only to one aspect of single life. I would like to speak about some of the struggles experienced by the single person that are not so easily seen by others. The following are lessons learned through some of my life experiences, personal Bible study, and through the blessing of the preaching of the word.

My first struggle is the feeling of loneliness. It is disheartening to feel alone. Sometimes I wonder if I

matter to anyone. In these moments I am reminded that I do matter to God. God has determined to save me. I may not be able to say that I have a counterpart with whom to spend my life, but in all of my weaknesses and human nature, God has chosen to call me friend, to be part of the church, to be Christ's bride. Isn't he the friend I need? 1 John 3:1–3: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God…" Remember how David through all of his life struggles was dependent on his relationship of friendship with God and insistent on continuous communication with God? His relationship with God was most important to him, and I need to make this relationship most important to me also. Wanting to be married (for self-centered reasons) should not be marked number one in my life; God should be number one in my life. He will direct my life and fulfill this desire if he pleases. Think of the story of Abraham and Isaac—how badly Abraham wanted children, and yet he put God's will before his own desire, so much so that he was willing to sacrifice the very child he prayed for so desperately. Am I willing to sacrifice my heart's desire for the purpose of following God so explicitly? Read Genesis 22, especially verses 16 and 17 about how Abraham is blessed for unhesitatingly following God's will.

What has been helpful for me to remember is not to be overly consumed with wanting to get married and have a family. Being consumed by this desire and therefore thinking only of myself prevents me from seeing the present blessings that God has given me. Rather than thinking of what I may want in life, I must ask myself, What does my family need from me? What do my friends need from me? What can I do for my church family? And most importantly, what must I do for my God? 1 Corinthians 7:34 states, "The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit; but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband." Single individuals clearly have a larger opportunity to think on spiritual things and act on them. Read also Philippians 2, especially verse four.

The next lesson I have learned comes through many tears over how friends perceive my life as a working woman. So, I hold this lesson closely to my heart. I have to be careful in my explanation so as not to take away from the blessing of a young person desiring to enter into marriage, but I think it is necessary to discuss options for another future besides marriage. This would need to come through a lot of prayer so as to not hinder, prevent, or delay a family that God may have planned for you. But one can plan for a future that is fulfilling even if marriage is not included. Don't disregard the possibility that God may use your future as a platform in which to witness to others. Embrace the possibility and pray that you may be the tool that God uses to bring someone to the faith. It is likely that these opportunities come from a career (If God is showing you that marriage is not in your near future, there is nothing wrong with pursuing a career, but always put God's will first: if he is calling you to be a wife and mother, a career must not be further pursued). Career paths such as teaching or nursing are both great (but not the only) options to serve the church, witness, and are also talents that can be used readily should you have a family one day. Whatever future you pursue, consider that a secluded life (which a single person may be tempted to have) doesn't allow for interaction with other people and certainly not for witnessing. So pray for and plan a life that gives you opportunities to witness and serve God. Read from scripture and understand our calling to witness (1 Pet. 3:15 and Matt. 5:14–16). Submersing yourself in this intense study of God's word (which is what witnessing requires) will change the focus away from what you may think is missing in your life, and you will be abundantly blessed in return. Don't waste your time: spend it in the word and find these opportunities to witness and serve. Read 1 Timothy 4: 4–16; verses 12–16 are especially beautiful. Also read 2 Timothy 2:24–26.

Now, to tackle the feeling of not fulfilling what is so stressed: producing covenant children. I think this is the aspect of singleness that I struggle with the most and not for the reasons you may think. For myself, it is not as painful to think of a life without a husband as it is painful to think that the people of the church view me as inconsequential because I am not producing covenant children. The truth is that if God has not willed it, I do not need a husband or children to fulfill his command (Eccles. 12:13–14): "Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man." 1 Corinthians 7 tells us that in whatever state we are, we have a calling to serve the Lord. The single members of the church are blessed with more opportunity to focus on serving the Lord (1 Cor. 7:7–8, 17, 20–28, 32–35). Again, use

your time to witness and serve. Although we tend to focus a lot of energy on the children of the church (and rightly so), the children of God who join the church in adulthood as a result of witnessing are important also. They are in need of both witnesses (to plant the seed of the gospel) and strong Christian examples after which to model their lives. Matthew 5:16 instructs us, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

In my current state as a single person in the church, I believe that God has blessed me with a platform to find fulfillment in witnessing and godly service. Whether I am a wife, mother, or single person in the future, the ability to love someone in a way that I desire their salvation will certainly be used time and again (Rom. 10).

Whether you are desiring marriage, desiring singleness, or desiring contentment with where God is guiding your life, first remember to ask that his will be made clear to you (1 John 5:14–15 and John 15:16). Further, be intentional about praying for your future (read Philippians 4:6–7). If you desire marriage, pray that God prepares you for marriage. Pray also that you find contentment while waiting for marriage. If you are content in the single life, pray that God reveal his will to you in this. Pray that God uses you for the furthering of the gospel and for the purpose of the church.

In conclusion, it is not right or wrong to be single or to be married. We must look to God for what he has willed for our lives. We may not understand why God has placed us in a single life when we desire marriage; we may have insecurities about being lonely, being different or not producing covenant children. But remember, God's way is perfect and every detail is planned in such a way that it leads to our salvation. Isaiah 55:8 and following states "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord… My ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts… so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace."

In Christian Love,

A single friend

Other verses that I have found helpful in my personal devotions:

Philippians 2:12–17: God working my salvation through my current life situation

James 4:10: drawing close to God through prayer

Isaiah 40:31 and Matt 11:28: When I am feeling weary about going through life "alone"

Psalm 37:4: praying for what my heart desires

Colossians 3:23: living for God, not for other men

Romans 12:1–2: Doing everything to work towards the will of God

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Christian Living — Kimberly DeVries

What Does Beauty Mean to You?

What does beauty mean to you?

Is beauty seen in the outward appearance or is beauty found deep within the heart?

The focus of this article is mainly what beauty means to you as a young woman of the church, but I also strongly encourage the young men to read this as well, and gain insight into what kind of woman you should seek to date and marry.

What is beauty? According to the *Merriam Webster Dictionary* the definition of beauty is: 1. the qualities of being physically attractive. 2. The qualities in a person or thing that give pleasure to the senses of the mind. 3. A beautiful woman. But is that really the true meaning of beauty?

The world's standard of beauty is based on

outward appearances. The latest clothing styles, makeup, jewelry, and hairdos are what enhance one's beauty. That kind of beauty is based on body size, body shape, skin color, and dress size. The world portrays its view of beauty in magazines, advertisements, pageants, television, and in movies. A young woman will often find herself paging through magazines seeing the latest styles, reading articles on how to lose weight, how to get the body of this celebrity, how to dress for certain events, and so on. It's all about building self-esteem by striving to have the perfect body.

A woman will find herself looking in the mirror and comparing herself to that standard. She may find that she has a little extra fat here, a skin blemish there, a piece of hair that is just out of place, clothing that's out of style, jeans that make her butt look too big, and the list goes on. She realizes that what she is isn't good enough. She starts to think she is ugly. She forgets what true beauty really is.

A woman of God will often find herself in a similar situation—comparing herself to the world's beauty and finding herself influenced by the vanity of it all. Have you ever looked through a magazine or seen a picture on the internet of a celebrity woman in her bikini, and the picture focuses on her cellulite or her belly fat, pointing out every flaw of her physical appearance? I know I have come across that, and it's sad that when a person has such physical flaws on her body, she is criticized and mocked for the entire world to see. The media is portraying her to be ugly by judging what they see on the outside. The world's view of beauty is always changing and developing into something new. What once was a fashion statement is now out of date and out of style. One must constantly be changing her wardrobe to keep up with the latest fashion. The world spends lots of time and money to achieve such beauty. A woman who desires that kind of beauty is praised by the world, and her body is flaunted for all to see. Worldly beauty is flawed and marred with sin and vanity. Even the most beautiful person in the world is ugly because of sin. Satan uses the beauty of the world to tempt us and to deceive us into thinking we aren't beautiful. Proverbs 31:30 tells that favor is deceitful and beauty is vain.

So what is true beauty? True beauty is not what is on the outside of a person, but what is found deep in the heart. One must seek to be beautiful on the inside. It doesn't matter what style of clothing you wear, how much makeup you put on, or what your dress size is. What matters is what comes from the heart. Only a believer, a true child of God, can have such a beautiful heart. We do not and cannot obtain this beauty ourselves, although many try by following all the latest trends that we find in the world. That doesn't mean we have to dress in rags and let our hair go wild, but we must be careful about how we dress and the appearance we give to others. That doesn't mean we can't shop and buy new clothes, get our hair done, or wear lipstick, but when we walk into the department store, our focus should not be on what we can buy that will enhance our physical appearance, but our choices must reflect who we are.

We are women of God. God determines what is modest and what is beautiful, because he himself is beauty. We must remember that our clothes are given to us by God, and we must wear what is pleasing to him, not to the world. God doesn't want us to dress like the world with low-cut shirts and short skirts. It's a shame when I see young women even in our own churches starting to dress like that. What are you accomplishing when you do that? Do you want to attract the attention of the young man who is enticed by such clothing? Do you reflect the image of Christ when you dress like that?

God calls us in 1 Timothy 2:9 to adorn ourselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety. So keep that in mind on your next shopping spree. The clothes you grab off the rack should reflect your inner beauty, not enhance your outward appearance.

Beauty is something we desire. But do we desire it for the right reason? We are to seek to be beautiful on the inside. When one is beautiful on the inside, all outward appearances and actions will reflect that. God created woman to be a beautiful creature and to reflect the beauty of his church. One cannot always see that inward beauty, but it is carried out by the virtuous life of a woman. It is seen in what she does, how she serves God, how she gives herself for the service of others. Many women can do good and notable deeds, but a woman of God excels them all. God blesses her with such wonderful virtues, and only because of that she is most beautiful. "Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies" (Prov. 31:10).

Men, do you seek such a beautiful woman to date and to marry? Or are you concerned only with what she looks like and how physically attractive she

is? Her body size and weight should not matter to you. A man of God is called to seek a woman for a wife who is beautiful on the inside. That is what should be attractive to you—not her long legs, not her flawless face—but a beautiful heart. A heart dedicated to serving God and others, a heart motivated by a love for Christ and his church. So men, next time you look at a woman, remind yourself to look past her physical appearance and see what's inside. Ask yourself if she is a woman of God. If she is, you will be attracted to her no matter what she looks like. Her inner beauty will shine out, and you will have the most beautiful wife you could ever dream of.

Women, do you desire such a godly man to be your husband? Or are you seeking the most drop-dead gorgeous, good-looking guy to date? You should find yourself being attracted to a man of God, a man who looks at you for who you really are: a godly woman. Women, we all desire to be called beautiful, but to be called that by the world means nothing. When a man of God calls us beautiful, it means everything, because our inner beauty is what he sees. Ask God to bring such a man into your life. Only then will you both be attracted to each other and desire a marriage that reflects Christ and the church. You will have the most beautiful marriage a person can ask for.

True beauty is a reflection of God in us, a beauty that those of the world can never obtain no matter how hard they try. Don't praise a woman for her looks, but praise the woman because she fears the Lord. Seek that beauty described in 1 Peter 3 that is found in that hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.

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The Universal Church — Pastor Joyce Álvarez León

Providence Biblical Presbyterian Reformed Church, Cienfuegos, Cuba

About 17 years ago my wife and I met at a Baptist church in the village where we lived. We married 6 years later and began to preach the gospel in the rural areas of our country. We had favorable results during this time, but our thirst for the study of the word of God grew when we encountered the doctrines commonly called "Reformed;" it was as if we were "born again;" we spent entire nights studying the Reformed classics: Calvin, Thomas Boston, Edwards, Hoeksema, etc. A few years later we decided to leave our Baptist denomination to start a Reformed Church.

The Lord provided us with a passion for souls and a sincere desire to understand the human soul. In spite of the poverty that breathes in our nation we saw how people came to the true God, confused by the diabolic political system and helpless because of the false religion that still oppresses us today. Errors like theological liberalism, Arminianism, and Charismaticism accompanied by the Roman Catholic fallacy were the opiate that put the people in our region to sleep.

Process of adaption

At first it was difficult to get ourselves involved in the ministry of preaching, since out of all the believers among our people we were a new sect; we were labeled "strange" because we didn't take part in the pagan Christmas festivals, because we had a rigid system of regulated worship, because we didn't have female pastors, and because our soteriology was so completely different from that of Arminianism and Charismaticism. Yet, the Lord's hand was always on our side; many we persuaded; some we simply avoided. Our reading of church history and her stages—persecuted, established, medieval, Protestant Reformation, and even today—has helped us

understand that our forefathers paid a high price to raise their pious teachings on high.

Time of harvest

Today our church consists of the following community: 25 members, 23 congregants, and 15 children—63 total brethren. These brethren are spread in:

- **Cienfuegos City**: 12 members, 8 congregants, 9 children
- **Santa Susana**: 50 km (31 miles) from Cienfuegos City. 2 Members, 3 congregants, 4 children.
- **Ajuria**: 45 km (28 mi) from Cienfuegos City. 5 Members, 10 congregants, 3 children.
- **Lajas**: 40 km (25 mi) from Cienfuegos City. 5 Members, 2 children.

For each of the groups we have the following services:

- **Cienfuegos**: Prayer service – Wednesday at 8:30 PM; Bible study and worship service – Sunday at 10 AM.
- **Santa Susana**: Saturday 2:00 PM
- **Ajuria**: Saturday at 4:00 PM
- **Lajas**: Saturday at 8:00 PM

Purpose of the Church

Our mission is to establish new Reformed churches by means of gospel preaching and Bible study, thus fulfilling the great commission to make disciples (Matt 28:19–20). Also we aim to influence positively the life of the members of the church by teaching them the directives of scripture: to live piously, to relate with others, to act Biblically in culture, in play, or in business, subjecting everything to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). Our goal is to establish Presbyterian churches in every city in our province (8 in total), and then one in every province (14 in total).

Work of the Local Church

Diorthosis is a monthly newsletter with subjects of interest and a spirit of developing debate and reporting on the life of the congregation. We also distribute classic Reformed literature. (We have received permission from the publisher Faro de Gracia to publish some titles for Cuban pastors, since there are no Christian bookstores in Cuba and of those that come in from outside, much is lost in the mail.) We give out the DVD "Amazing Grace" or Sublime Gracia (with the permission of Cimiento Estable ministry), which teaches about the history and development of Calvinism. We evangelize in houses at least 3 days a week, and we visit the sick and other objects of grace. We have a seminary, John Knox Presbyterian Theological School, where we equip pastoral candidates and leaders who want to study. We have in total about 15 students in the country, who take classes such as Christ-centered Homiletic Preaching, Hermeneutics, Introduction to Theology, Progress of Dogmatics, and Marriage Counseling. We pray for books for our Seminary's library, and that we can put up a classroom in order to hold traditional classes.

Accomplishments

By God's providence we were able to acquire our own place in Cienfuegos City, with the help of some brethren in Canada. The location is wonderful and sufficient for our church. We started two new congregations in 2013. In each, a teaching elder was ordained and a ruling elder is being examined. We have established a body of deacons as well as a local consistory in the church.

Needs of the Congregation

Seating: the number of people in attendance has risen, and the seats we have are no longer enough. Resources: to buy Bibles and help some brethren who preach the gospel. Help with projects to reach the Cuban youth who are slaves of sin and marginalization.

Conclusions

We ask all who read this modest article to pray for our nation and its leaders; under current Cuban authority many opportunities are opening, and it is a good moment for the Reformed faith to be established and for the gospel to come to our nation. However, the torments of 50 years of intransigence and marginalization have left a wake of misery and dismantling, so that only with the help of interested brethren is it possible to start up ecclesiastical structures and systems. So far we have been helped by God and his providence, and that's why we ask your help so that the Spirit who moved the churches of Macedonia and Achaia will revive in you the desire to help the saints, just as those early saints were pleased to help those in Jerusalem (Romans 15:26).

May God bless Cuba.

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Thanks to Brent De Jong of Holland Protestant Reformed Church for translating this article from Spanish.

Watching Daily At My Gates

August 11 ***Read Romans 12***

From the beautiful doctrines of the preceding chapters, Paul exhorts us to a right way of life. It is a life of sanctification in whatever calling God has given to us. We would do well to reread this chapter throughout the year. Our life of Christian service is not one in which we do good deeds for the deeds' sakes, but our life of Christian service is one in which we thank God for our salvation. These are not planned acts of service, but a right way of living every day. When we do this we glorify God and live at peace with the whole body of Christ. Sing Psalter 369.

August 12 ***Read Romans 13***

There are three sections in this chapter. The first deals with the requirement to obey those whom God has put in authority over us. By obeying we live in accordance with the tenets of the fifth commandment. Think of when Paul wrote this. Obeying the cruel Roman government was no easy task, but it was the will of God for the Christians of that era. Next, Paul enjoins us to live peaceably with our neighbor. This is another aspect of the second great commandment. Finally, we are called to live a godly life even as we look ahead to the return of Christ. The true Christian religion is not just doctrinal; it is very necessarily practical. Sing Psalter 223.

August 13 ***Read Romans 14***

Paul continues with a practical application of the doctrine of justification by faith. We must love our brothers and sisters in the Lord. This does not mean we love some of them; we must love them all. If we cause a brother to fall because of our actions, even though that action may be permissible, we are guilty of not loving that brother. This is one aspect of Christian liberty. We do well to heed the last verse of the chapter. As James says, we show our faith by our right walk before God. Let that be our goal as we live out of our salvation. Sing Psalter 371.

August 14 ***Read Romans 15***

Paul finishes the discussion of the preceding chapter in the beginning of this one. Then he begins his closing remarks. He plans to come to Rome if it be the will of God. He uses the words of Isaiah to show these Gentiles that it is God's will that they were brought into the church of Christ. We too must use the whole scripture as we seek how to live our life and to find the principles needed to live that life. His final words of the chapter are instructive as well. He calls upon the God of peace. The church of Christ of all ages needs the peace that comes from the God of peace. In all the actions of a congregation peace must be evident. May we seek the peace of God and live peaceably with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Sing Psalter 304.

August 15 ***Read Romans 16***

Paul talks about two kinds of people in this concluding chapter. First, there is a list of those whom he wishes to be greeted or about whom he has good things to say. These are people who have either been zealous in the work of the gospel or upon whom the grace of Christ has abounded. The second group are those about whom the church must be on guard. These people do not seem to love the gospel and even attempt to do despite to the church of God. Finally, Paul closes with a loving benediction. May we seek the God of peace who gives grace to his people. Sing Psalter 315.

August 16 ***Read 1 Corinthians 1***

On his three missionary journeys the apostle Paul visited many of the churches more than once. He first came to Corinth during his second missionary journey. While in Ephesus during his third missionary journey, he received news that things were not going well in Corinth. A major problem was a lack of unity in the congregation. This is evident in chapter 1. While there were other problems within the church, many of them stemmed from this primary problem. Notice that right away Paul says that proper preaching answers these questions. Who is to be preached? The answer is the crucified Christ. May we cherish this kind of preaching, knowing that in heeding it we will stay away from divisions in the churches. Sing Psalter 371.

August 17 ***Read 1 Corinthians 2***

Paul continues with his discussion of the content of his preaching. Paul says that his preaching was not infused with the wisdom of the world, but the wisdom of God given to him by the Holy Spirit. The Corinthians seemed

to have been enthralled with a good speech showing good logic. Yes, preaching needs to have sound logic in it, but it must be the logic found in the word of God. Let us seek that preaching weekly and not be desirous of preaching that is based on the wisdom of the world. Sing Psalter 334.

August 18 ***Read 1 Corinthians 3***

This chapter is a continuation of the thoughts of the previous two. Paul reminds the Corinthians of their sinful divisions. He shows them that they are divided because they give not God the glory due to him in the preaching of the word. They are considering the preacher and not the content of the preaching, which is to be Christ. Christ is the foundation of his church, and he must be the foundation of the preaching that we seek. As we listen each Sunday to the preaching of the word—and we do listen, don't we?—let us seek to hear Christ in each sermon. Only then will God's name be glorified. Sing Psalter 428.

August 19 ***Read 1 Corinthians 4***

People of God, in what esteem do you hold the ministers of Christ? Do you hold them in high esteem? Of course, that esteem may not be for earthly characteristics that they may or may not have. We may not esteem a preacher for his eloquent preaching, nor may we lightly esteem a man because he is not as eloquent as others are. Our esteem must be based upon the content of the word that they preach. If they preach the word, even if it is not in a way that we desire, we must esteem them, for it is the word that brings to us salvation. Let us esteem the messenger for the message that he brings. And preachers, bring the word and the word alone. Sing Psalter 325.

August 20 ***Read 1 Corinthians 5***

The church of Corinth had allowed a man who had committed a terrible sin to continue in their congregation. For this Paul must take them to task using the word of God. Church discipline is one of the marks of the true church of Jesus Christ. To ignore this mark is to refuse to follow the commandment of our Lord Jesus. The keys of the kingdom have been given to the church. The church is to use all of their functions, one of which is discipline. If the elders must come to you using this key, receive them with thankfulness, as they have the care of your soul. In the end of the chapter Paul reminds the congregation with whom they may have fellowship. Who are your friends? Sing Psalter 216.

August 21 ***Read 1 Corinthians 6***

The congregation of Corinth had a problem of not living with one another in love. This seemed to be the root of many of their problems. We must love one another even as Christ loved us, as another sacred writer has exhorted us. We cannot pick and choose which saints we will love. We must love all those in the church. A second problem that plagued the Corinthians was misuse of Christian liberty. Christian liberty is not a license to sin; some in the church then and now have this wrong notion. Christian liberty is the glorious calling to please God in all that we do, and not to please ourselves. Let us walk in that glorious liberty we have been given and love one another as Christ loved us. Sing Psalter 369.

August 22 ***Read 1 Corinthians 7***

Marriage is honorable, is the confession of the writer to the Hebrews. He also tells us to flee sins against the seventh commandment in our marriages. This was a problem for the Corinthians. They did not understand the beautiful relationship that is established in marriage. Just as Christ and his church have been joined together in an unbreakable bond, so must the bond between a man and a woman be unbreakable. Seeking marriage in the Lord is a good thing. Is that the kind of marriage that you are seeking, young people? Marry, but marry in the Lord who bought you with his blood. Sing Psalter 125.

August 23 ***Read 1 Corinthians 8***

Another aspect of the proper use of Christian liberty is to not offend the Christian brother. Paul instructed the church at Rome in this matter, and now he has to instruct the church in Corinth. Not offending the brother is part of living with that brother in love. There are many aspects to this matter that must be examined. The proper use of this passage must be studied carefully. We must be careful not to take offense where it is not present. If we are the weaker brother, we must move past that weakness. Living in love with all in the church is a two way street. Let us share the street of love with all in Christ's church. Sing Psalter 24.

August 24 ***Read 1 Corinthians 9***

In this chapter Paul defends his right as an apostle over against charges that were leveled against him in the Corinthian church. We might ask why he felt he had to do this. The reason is simple. Paul has denied himself many things in order that the gospel might be brought to Corinth. It was not for his benefit that he was a preacher, but for the benefit of God. How do we treat those whom God has given to us to lead us in the green pastures of his word? Don't think that it is just the minister whom we must hold in high esteem. We must also honorably treat those who have been called by God to be elders and deacons in our congregations, for they too are watchmen on the walls of Zion. Sing Psalter 362.

August 25 ***Read 1 Corinthians 10***

At the end of the previous chapter Paul not only shows how he has denied himself, but he also shows how the child of God, in his denial of self, walks in a great gift. In this chapter he warns them that they must not let that gift go unused. He uses the example of the Israelites as they passed through the desert. Some thought that just because they had received the law at Sinai they would receive the promise of Canaan. Many died in the wilderness in their sins. Paul goes on to remind them to use their liberty in Christ in a right way. They were not to do evil, but they were also not to offend the brother in their use of earthly things. May we walk in liberty in a way pleasing to God. Sing Psalter 326.

August 26 ***Read 1 Corinthians 11***

Throughout this letter Paul answers questions that the Corinthians have for him. In this chapter there are two of them. First, there is the matter of the proper conduct of women in the church. The Bible shows that we are to esteem the sister in Christ very highly. We can find many references where this is so. Yet just like a man, a woman must conduct herself in a proper manner in the church of Christ. Second, there was a misuse of the sacrament of the Lord's supper. This is one of the marks of the true church of Christ. How do we use that holy sacrament? Do we wish it to be more than it should be? Do we make of it less than a mark? Proper conduct in the church helps us to live a life of sanctification before our God. Sing Psalter 203.

August 27 ***Read 1 Corinthians 12***

Another issue in the church of Corinth was the use of spiritual gifts. It appears that the Holy Spirit had poured out many of these gifts upon this congregation. However, they had become proud and boasted that their gift was better than another. To show them a proper use, Paul compares the church of Christ to the human body. Just as no organ is unneeded, so no gift and its possessor are of no use in the congregation. From this analogy Paul hints at the beautiful exposition to come in the next chapter. Sing Psalter 369.

August 28 ***Read 1 Corinthians 13***

In this short chapter we find the way that the child of God must walk is not only to live in harmony in the church of Christ, but also to glorify God in that walk. All of our gifts must be used in love. This is not self-love, but this is the love that keeps both aspects of God's law. We must first love God above all things, and then we must love our neighbor as we love ourselves. In this way we can properly use whatever gift God has given to us in a way that is pleasing to him and profitable for his church. Sing Psalter 348.

August 29 ***Read 1 Corinthians 14***

Paul continues and concludes his teachings about the use of spiritual gifts. It appears that the gift of speaking in tongues was a preferred gift in the church at Corinth. Paul implores the Corinthians to seek prophesying as a gift that will aid their worship of Jehovah. He goes on to rebuke them for a misuse of their gifts when they hinder a right worship of God. He finishes the chapter with a few other admonitions concerning worship ending with the well-known verse, "Let all things be done decently and in order." May this be our desire as we worship God. Sing Psalter 137.

August 30 ***Read 1 Corinthians 15***

It seems that another issue in the Corinthian church dealt with the truth of the resurrection of the dead. The Sadducees had long denied this truth, and now the error had come into the churches of the new dispensation. After a logical argument why the doctrine of the resurrection had to be correct, Paul shows to the church of that day and to us the blessedness of believing this truth. In the resurrection we find extreme comfort. At the end of this exposition is the admonition to live a life of sanctification, fully expecting a greater glory to come. Sing Psalter 28.

August 31 ***Read 1 Corinthians 16***

In the final chapter of this epistle, Paul deals with some practical matters concerning a collection and with his impending visit. Christ had told the church that they would always have the poor with them. In the time of this epistle, the church at Jerusalem was suffering extreme poverty. These new churches were encouraged to give liberally for the care of the saints in Jerusalem. We too need this admonition, as we also have the poor with us. In caring for our needy neighbor we care for Christ. Paul closes the epistle with a final admonition concerning those who do not walk in the truth. This too is for us. Sing Psalter 13.

September 1 ***Read 2 Corinthians 1***

Since Paul had written the first epistle to the church at Corinth, he desired to see if his admonitions had had an effect. He was also worried that he had been too harsh on the church and that he had done despite to them and the cause of the gospel. By his providence God had not allowed him to go immediately to Corinth and had not let his messenger, Titus, meet up with him. This allowed the church at Corinth to use his advice with a good result. God cares for all of his people and makes it so that the work of the gospel will prosper. May we seek grace not to run ahead of God. Sing Psalter 234.

September 2 ***Read 2 Corinthians 2***

In Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, he gave them strict instructions to discipline a sinner. Now that Titus has met him and given to him the news of the man's repentance, he instructs them in how to receive the sinner back into the fellowship of the saints. This is the goal of Christian discipline. We must be instructed first to keep this mark of a true manifestation of the church of a Christ, and second, when discipline is applied and has its appointed goal, to receive the sinner back into our fellowship. This takes grace upon the sinner and upon the congregation. Let us seek this grace each day as we walk with one another in love. Sing Psalter 83.

September 3 ***Read 2 Corinthians 3***

There is a difference in the way God comes to his people in the old and new dispensations. In the old, God came to his people in the law and its ordinances, which were but types and shadows of the glorious gospel to come in the new. Now that we are recipients of that gospel, we must look ahead to a more glorious way that will be ours in glory. Both the law and the gospel have the intent of bringing God's people to salvation. Let us learn from the old to live in the new as we prepare for the future. Sing Psalter 40.

September 4 ***Read 2 Corinthians 4***

As we live this life on earth, we must always look above for the life that eye has not seen. We know that there is a glorious place and end awaiting us when our savior will return on the clouds of heaven. Yet the life on this earth is often marked by affliction and troubles. The Holy Spirit through Paul has comfort for us, as found in verse 17. The afflictions that we bear on earth are light when compared with the grandeur of glory that awaits us in heaven. People of God, do not despair of your afflictions. Look up and watch and wait for the glory that will be yours when Christ returns. Sing Psalter 29.

September 5 ***Read 2 Corinthians 5***

Paul continues with the theme of the previous chapter in this one. We see that in the little word *For* that begins the first verse. We do not know when Christ will return, but if he tarries, the end for us is the dissolving of our earthly body by death. This is not a sorrowful event, as death is the passageway into glory for the child of God. Those of us who stand by an open grave may mourn our earthly loss, but we should rejoice at the gain of our dear, departed family member or friend. We who remain on this earth must constantly seek Christ, who gave himself for us that we too may have eternal glory. These are Paul's words to us in the last part of the chapter. Sing Psalter 33.

September 6 ***Read 2 Corinthians 6***

In the first part of the chapter Paul describes his work of preaching to the Corinthians. We should remember that while Paul's preaching may not have won him any awards in Corinth for exemplary oration, his preaching was with power, the power of the word of God. By preaching God's people are brought to salvation by justification through faith alone. In the last part of the chapter, Paul admonishes the Corinthians and us not to become unequally yoked with unbelievers. This admonition is one to which we would do well to pay heed in the world in which we live. Who are our friends? In what activities do we join with our neighbors? What would Paul say to us? Let us live a sanctified life in all that we do. This is the way of thankfulness for our salvation. Sing Psalter 206.

September 7 ***Read 2 Corinthians 7***

Paul returns to one of the purposes of this epistle. That purpose is his joy at hearing that a sinner had repented of his sin through the work of Christian discipline. After digressing into other subjects, Paul comes back to this purpose. He tells the Corinthians to receive this returned saint into their midst. He wants them to enjoy the unity that this event gives to the church. He is also comforted by this news. Christian discipline is a remedy for sin. It must be used in the right way, and when it brings the desired results, we must rejoice and be comforted in this way that God has given to his church. Sing Psalter 371.

September 8 ***Read 2 Corinthians 8***

Paul now returns to another purpose of this epistle. The church in Jerusalem was suffering financially because of their faith. The churches of Greece had been exhorted to take benevolent collections for these suffering saints. Now Paul is reminding the church of Corinth that God had blessed them physically and spiritually. They needed to give gifts of thanksgiving that God had given to them for those suffering saints. We too need this instruction. Christ has told us that the poor we have always among us. Are we caring for them? Sing Psalter 24.

September 9 ***Read 2 Corinthians 9***

Are we cheerful givers? As we place our offerings in the collection plates, what is our attitude? Do we give grudgingly, wishing that we could use that money for our own benefit? This is the subject of this second chapter concerning giving. Along with singing, giving is an active role that we have in our weekly worship of Jehovah. When we give, we are worshipping God. How are we worshiping—cheerfully or grudgingly? God has given to us a gift that cannot be described in human terms; it is "unspeakable!" What is our reaction to that gift? Sing Psalter 113.

Interview with Elizabeth Schwarz

June 18, 2008

Here follows an interview with Elizabeth Schwarz from Loveland, Colorado, widow of Hugo Schwarz and mother of Marilyn DeVries, at whose home in Michigan the interview took place.

Mark H. Hoeksema: Mrs. Schwarz, where and when were you born?

Elizabeth Schwarz: I was born October 21, 1920, in York County, Nebraska.

MHH: Who were your parents?

ES: My parents were Theodore and Lydia Ehly.

MHH: What can you tell me about their background and your background?

ES: My grandparents came from Russia. They emigrated from Germany into Russia, and from there, they came to America. And my father and mother were born in the United States.

MHH: What made your ancestors come from Russia to the United States?

ES: Mostly because of the government. I know my grandpa left before his parents to avoid the army in Russia.

MHH: They settled in central or east-central Nebraska. Was there a large population of German-Russians in that area?

ES: Yes, there was.

MHH: And what type of religion or what type of church was characteristic of these people?

ES: They were Reformed. Not Protestant Reformed, of course, but Reformed. I always went to a Reformed church.

MHH: Did they have their own clergy?

ES: For a while. Yes, my parents were married by Rev. Hofer.

MHH: I've heard the name.

ES: I was baptized by him. Rev. Hofer was the only minister that that church ever had.

MHH: Really?

ES: Well, no, I'm wrong there. I think they had one before. Anyway, after Rev. Hofer died in 1929, that church remained unto this day in the German language. No minister.

MHH: Really?

ES: Right.

MHH: Does it still exist today?

ES: It still exists today. Every Sunday they hold services led by the elders. Rev. Hofer used to write out his sermons. And that's what they read for a sermon.

MHH: Really!

ES: Really. They have Sunday School. Last time I was there was 2–3 years ago, and they had about six children. After they grow up, they get married and they move away or join other churches. They don't stay there. They have very few young people—mostly older ones left.

MHH: So you are knowledgeable in the German language?

ES: Yah. I can still read it and talk it some.

MHH: You can understand the sermons that they…

ES: Ach, I can understand better in English, you know. I can't say that I ever understood those sermons, and I went there until I was married. Then we were excommunicated. And when Rev. Hofer… it's a long history.

MHH: No, go ahead. You were baptized in that church?

ES: Yes.

MHH: What happened next? You made confession of faith?

ES: I made confession of faith. And then, after Rev. Hofer died they had 4–5 elders. Two of them were brothers-in-law to my father-in-law. Well, my father-in-law (Grandpa Schwarz), he was the only one that had an education, so Rev. Hofer appointed him

to read the sermons. Towards the last Rev. Hofer was blind. He preached, but he couldn't read any more. So he appointed Dad to be his Sunday School teacher and whatever he needed.

So then they continued for years. Finally trouble started. They took Dad off of the Sunday School and the reading. Finally they held him back from the Lord's Supper. I can't tell you the exact problems that started. I was too young to care, really. But then anyway, they held him back from the Lord's Supper. So none of us children went either. If Dad can't go, we can't go either, you know?

So that went on for awhile. Finally, because we didn't go to the Lord's Supper, the consistory came around with letters to each of the men asking them to come to a meeting at the church such-and-such a time, you know? So they attended that meeting. And there they were warned, If you don't repent, you're gonna be out next Sunday.

MHH: They didn't give them much time!

ES: No, no. So that's what happened. We still kept going to church. And finally they read the names off. We were all excommunicated.

MHH: And approximately how old were you when this happened?

ES: I was eighteen and a half when I got married, and after we were married, we were excommunicated.

MHH: You and your husband. Was he a member of the same congregation?

ES: Yes.

MHH: But you're not sure as to how the trouble started or what the issue was?

ES: It was doctrinal, but, they just didn't agree with what Grandpa Schwarz was teaching or was saying. And they were the ones that were wrong, because he pointed out scripture after scripture. They would just not submit.

MHH: So, after you were married and then excommunicated, what happened next?

ES: We met at Grandpa Schwarz's house. He had a big house, and we all met there on Sundays. We had Sunday School and also read Rev. Hofer's sermons. I don't remember that we ever held the Lord's Supper. But I know several children were baptized by the elders during that time. I can't say how many years, but we were married in '39 and we moved to Colorado in '43, and it was between that time. After Dad died in January of '43 we were so hated. People couldn't even talk to us or look at us. Finally, one day my mother-in-law said, "I'm so tired of this. I'd like to move to Loveland if somebody else would." My husband said, "We're going." So we had our public auctions, both of us. My brother-in-law had a big truck. He loaded our furniture and we took off for Colorado.

MHH: Were you farmers in Nebraska?

ES: Yes.

MHH: So you had some roots.

ES: Oh, yes. Hugo's uncle bought this farm and we rented from him. That was our livelihood.

MHH: So it was no small thing for you to pick up and leave.

ES: No, it wasn't.

MHH: What made you choose Loveland?

ES: Because he had relatives out here—an uncle, and cousins. His cousin Irene Schwarz married Gus Huber, and he was from Sutton, from that same church. But he had left before all this trouble came in. So they kept after us to move to Colorado. So that's where we ended up.

MHH: Was a German Reformed congregation in the Loveland area?

ES: Yes. We were in the Reformed Church.

MHH: You were excommunicated in Sutton. Was Loveland a member of the same denomination of churches?

ES: No. In fact, the Sutton Church didn't even belong to any classis or synod or anything.

MHH: Was Loveland part of Eureka Classis?

ES: Seems to me they were. I think they were.

MHH: From the standpoint of Reformed Church government, what was your status when you went to Loveland? Did they recognize the discipline and the excommunication of Sutton?

ES: No. They didn't even bother to ask.

MHH: So, you were accepted as members in the congregation in Loveland in 1943?

ES: 1943, yes.

MHH: When you got to Loveland, what did you do as far as making a living was concerned?

ES: My husband worked for Crow Brothers Nursery and I worked in a dairy—bottled milk, made ice cream and things like that.

MHH: And at that time, did you have children?

ES: No. We had one child that died in 1946. And then Marilyn was born in 1948. And then Phyllis in 1950. We rented a farm. We lived on a farm. We had a lot of cows' milk. And that was our income—the dairy.

MHH: What are your memories of that period in your life as far as the church was concerned?

ES: It didn't mean much. I have to say that. It really didn't mean much. We were taught to go to church, but we did things on Sunday that I wouldn't think of doing now.

MHH: For example?

ES: Oh, we'd take a ride to Wyoming. It wasn't necessary. I have to go back.

MHH: Please do.

ES: This Reformed Church in Loveland had a Lutheran minister from Greeley. They hired him as a Reformed minister in Loveland. So he came over and he preached, I think every other Sunday? He would come over and preach in German, but finally it turned into English too.

MHH: I can see you're struggling with the idea of having a Lutheran minister speak in the Reformed Church.

ES: Right. I think some of them asked him, "How can you be a Lutheran minister and preach Reformed?" He said, "Well, over there I preach Lutheran and over here I preach Reformed." (laughter) Anyway, we went there several years, but we just weren't satisfied with what we heard. Gus Huber was an elder in the church and so was my brother-in-law Albert. They went to Rev. Schoenhaar [*the Lutheran minister*] and said, "We'd like to have our own minister." He said, "Well, OK, that's fine. I'll resign. I'll announce it next Sunday in church." Sunday came, we all felt so good. We could have our own minister. Well, after his sermon, he announced that he's not going to leave. He was going to stay. He had talked to the other elders, and they talked him into it, you know. They didn't want another minister.

There was an older man, Mr. Kitzman, who was an elder, and he had relatives in Dakota. So he went off to visit relatives, and he met Rev. [*Herman*] Mensch. He heard him preach and he liked what he heard. So he asked him if he would come to Loveland and preach for us during the week, so he did. He came down and preached, and we all enjoyed him. I don't know how many times he came down and preached for us on Sunday, but that didn't go on with the other elders. Finally they put a lock on the church door. We couldn't go in there anymore.

MHH: These were the ones who were in favor of keeping the Lutheran minister?

ES: Right.

MHH: So there was division in the consistory?

ES: Oh yes. So there was another split for us there. We fought for the church building, and took it to court, but we lost the church building. So then we rented a school house south of town during the summer months when there was no school. By fall we had to get out. So then we rented kind of a little school building behind their church that they weren't using for I don't know how many years. Then for some reason we had to give that up. Then about four miles north of Loveland was a two room schoolhouse that had sat empty for years, so we just thought we'd rent that. We all had to go in and clean it up because it had been empty for years and years, and that's where we ended up.

MHH: How big of a group, roughly, was this that we're talking about?

ES: Very small. I would say, maybe twenty.

MHH: And during this time period, what did you do as far as preaching was concerned?

ES: I should go back again. When Rev. Mensch was here, he recommended that we should go to the Mission Committee in the PR churches. So then, through him, we got Rev. [*George*] Lubbers. Rev. Lubbers came here and he was here three or three and a half years with us. After Rev. Lubbers came, then every once in a while we had one of the ministers come and preach for us. Rev. Kuiper came and preached for us in the schoolhouse. And, yes, Rev. Lubbers brought Rev. C. Hanko. But Rev. Lubbers was our missionary/minister. And we'd gather in the evenings sometimes with Rev. Lubbers. We learned a lot from Rev. Lubbers.

But then everything turned to English, see. That was was my biggest problem. I memorized everything in German—catechism and everything.

MHH: Was there a significant number who spoke German in the congregation, because your services were all in German?

ES: Yah. All of us that came from Nebraska were Germans.

MHH: Did folks as a whole have a struggle with switching to English?

ES: I think most of the older people did.

MHH: Later on a lot of Dutch people moved to Loveland. Was that a problem to the German folks in Loveland ?

ES: No, that was no problem. We enjoyed them.

MHH: Well, they're sort of cousins, right? The Dutch and the Germans?

ES: (Laughter.) I don't know. You talk Dutch, I can't understand you.

MHH: Maybe distant cousins?

ES: Rev. Lubbers used to say, "Oh, it's so similar to the German." And he'd say a word. Well, it was altogether different to me than the German.

MHH: Tell me a little bit about Loveland congregation and some of the history of Loveland. When it started out, it was obviously quite small.

ES: Yes. It was. I can't remember how many families we were when we started out. Maybe seven-eight-nine families?

MHH: That's all? Much, much smaller than it is today, that's for certain.

ES: Oh, my. We outgrew everything.

MHH: Where did your growth come from in Loveland? Was it internal growth, was it external growth?

ES: I think it was both. There was some growth; some got married. But I think most of it came from outside.

MHH: Are there any events in the history of Loveland congregation that stand out in your mind? For example, how did you come to have your church building?

ES: After we rented this two-room schoolhouse I talked about, we outgrew that, and we figured we'd either have to build a church of our own or rent something. Gib Griess (brother-in-law of mine) owned the farm about a mile east of that school, and he donated some land so we could build a church there. And Rev. [*Henry*] Kuiper kept after us to start our school. Well, even before we moved out of that schoolhouse, we had our own school.

MHH: You did?

ES: Yes, we did. Rev. Kuiper came in 1958; he was the first minister we called. So, we started our own school in the basement of that building. We had five children, and Ruth Kuiper taught the first year. And from there the school grew There were more kids coming. So after we built the church, we had school in the basement. We finally grew into two teachers. Now we have four, and it's still growing. We outgrew the basement too, so we built a new schoolhouse. We finally outgrew the church, so we built a bigger church.

MHH: Those are good things.

ES: Those are good things. Ach, the Lord has blessed us! We're rich. And I think he still does.

MHH: So, would it be fair to say that Loveland is a well-unified congregation?

ES: I'd say. I think so.

MHH: Mrs. Schwarz, I'm going to ask you a question that I regularly ask during these interviews. You've lived a long and eventful life, you've seen a lot, you've lived through a lot, you have changed locations, you have changed church membership, and there probably have been a few bumps in the road; as you look back on your life, my question to you is this: How would you compare the church of today with the church of your youth?

ES: I think it's much stronger and our children are taught a lot more than we were, because we have our own Christian school to start them off with. And I think spiritually, through the preaching and the discipline, and all those things, we have grown and we have been strengthened.

MHH: Are there any issues that you would like to address, or any opinions that you would like to express on virtually any subject?

ES: I can say this: That I am thankful that my children grew up in the Protestant Reformed Church. They know a lot more than I do, and can understand it better, can express themselves better. But I'm still thankful for what the Lord has given me. And now we're going to celebrate 50 years this fall as a church. I think we've had 8 or 9 ministers through these 50 years. Wonderful.

I just thank the Lord for giving us all these years.

MHH: I can tell that you're very appreciative and very thankful.

ES: I am.

MHH: And I appreciate the fact that you have taken the time to talk to me and that you have been very free in expressing your opinions. I thank you kindly for participating in this oral history project.

ES: You're welcome.

Erin Huizinga

Devotions in a Young Person's Life

How high a place does the activity of devotions hold in a young person's life? Is it right at the top of one's to-do list for the day? For some people, the activity of praying and doing devotions is an easy and natural part of the day, but for many people, finding time for daily devotions can be a struggle. However, that is not the problem for everyone; sometimes one is kept from praying because one feels as if he cannot pray. Other times, one struggles with finding the right reasons for praying. Even though one can have many reasons for not praying and doing devotions, the need for doing them is still very great. A Christian young person has a need for personal prayer and devotions, but with this need comes the necessity of knowing why one does them.

How often does a young person do personal devotions? Some would say every day, but many would say not very often or barely ever. Why does a young person not do private devotions regularly? There are many reasons that a young person can give. One such reason is that everyone does devotions several times a day in school. This may be true, but this is not a valid reason because devotions and prayer by oneself are still being neglected. Other times a young person just does not want to do devotions at the time, or does not feel any sort of desire whatsoever to do them. There are no excuses for this lack of desire to do private devotions, but with some people it is the case.

The most common reason for the neglect of daily devotions is the busyness of life. One simply does not have the time or cannot make time for devotions. This can be because of work, school, or other obligations that fill a day's schedule. Oftentimes a young person is just too tired at the end of the night to do devotions, and wakes up too late to do them at the start of the day. Instead of making time out of one's busy life to pray and do devotions, the devotions are just neglected, and only done when time is available.

Another excuse for not doing personal devotions could be that one does not feel the need to do them. In most cases, this is because the young person is at a high or easy point in his life and is happy and content with how things are going. Many young people view prayer as necessary only when they are at a low point in their lives and need comfort. This is a misguided and false assumption, but it can very well be a reason.

For some young people, the reason for not praying is because they feel like they cannot pray. The main cause of this is the feeling of guilt that plagues many of us. This guilt can be caused by all kinds of sins; some sins affect young people in such a way that instead of bringing them to their knees in repentance, they run away from God and prayer. They cannot face God and the weight of their sins because of their fear, so they just do not pray privately.

The other cause of this feeling is that some simply do not know how to pray. There are young people who have not prayed enough or stopped praying for various reasons, thereby losing their ability to pray well and strongly when they actually want to pray. There are others who just do not know the proper way to pray, who have never had personal prayer as a daily ritual, and have never learned to pray for the right reasons. More often than not, these young people do not realize that practice makes perfect, and instead give up on praying.

However reasonable or logical they may sound at the time, all of these reasons and excuses for not doing personal devotions are selfish in some way, because a young person is putting himself before God and his calling to pray. That is why none of these excuses should validate why one does not do the necessary devotions.

Why should a young person do personal devotions? There are many reasons why it is so necessary to do them. One reason is simply that young people need to get in the habit of doing them regularly. If a young person falls out of that habit, it is very hard to start again. Also, if someone does not pray often enough, praying becomes hard; one might run out of things to say or not know what to say. That is why

praying on a regular schedule is very important.

Prayer gives a person the ability to talk quietly one-on-one with God, and this should be another reason to do devotions. This ability is a great gift to a child of God. When one has a rough day, or one needs comfort, or one needs a friend, or one just needs to talk to someone, this is the perfect opportunity to pray. Being able to set aside the troubles of the day to come to God in prayer is a great blessing. A Christian is also called by God to pray. Fulfilling this calling to pray to God quietly and privately should be an easy task, even though very often it can be difficult.

Another reason that personal devotions and prayer are so necessary is that through them, one praises God for all he has done. God calls us to pray, not only to ask for help, guidance, or needs, but to praise him for his works. How often does a young person neglect to praise and thank God for his gifts? Many times one is praying just for oneself; often one just skims over the part of praising God and goes right to the part of asking for God's help. This can be very selfish, because prayer should be focused not only on oneself, but on God. When one prays with the focus on God and his glory, prayer changes and is not self-centered.

Personal devotions also help a young person grow in one's knowledge of God and his works. On Sunday, one hears sermons where the word of God is taught. But that is not enough. A young person can also learn from doing devotions and reading the word privately. A young person needs both of these in order to learn properly and to grow in his own spiritual life and knowledge. One can learn so much about God, his creation, and the history of the church, by taking the time to go through the Bible privately and slowly.

The comfort that comes from prayer and personal devotions is the main reason why a young person should do so. Praying to God gives a person the much-needed strength to go throughout one's life. There is something so comforting about being able to go to God about anything and everything, and having him constantly listening. Many people can comfort one who is having a bad day, but no one can offer the comfort and understanding that God does. No matter how petty or minor a problem is, God is always there, listening to and offering comfort to his child. This truth takes some time and practice to learn, because some people find praying hard because they doubt that God is really listening. But even when it seems as if he is not, He is always there and always listens to his people's prayers.

Doing devotions and praying by oneself is so important to a Christian young person's life. For many young people, this activity is pushed to the side and does not take priority in the to-do list for a day. Many forget how important and valuable personal devotions and prayer are, and they do not realize the necessity of personal time with God. However, this should not be the case. The blessings of private prayer and devotions not only bring a child of God comfort and knowledge, but also help one praise God for his works. Private prayer and devotions are very necessary in a young person's life. One must keep in mind why prayer is needed and pray often.

Erin is a recent graduate of Covenant Christian High School in Walker, Michigan.

From the Classroom — Monica Engelsma

Beauty Is Vain

Everyone at one time or another has heard the cliché phrase, "It doesn't matter what you look like on the outside; it only matters what is on the inside." Whether it was heard from a parent, friend, or minister, the truth is, deep down, everyone dreams of having the flawless body and a face with no imperfections. You know who I am talking about; we have all seen her. The world we live in today injects our minds with the idea that beauty is the flawless, size zero super model on the cover of

the latest magazine. The Bible teaches, however, that beauty is only skin deep.

As I scan through the pages of a beauty magazine at the checkout, I find myself growing more discontent with the way I was made. If only my eyes sparkled like hers or my face was as naturally beautiful, I think to myself. Maybe if I just buy this product, everything will be fixed. And just like that, the world grabs hold of you.

Many young women neglect to see that the woman staring back at them in the picture has been altered beyond recognition. The photographer has digitally brightened her eyes, airbrushed her face, lengthened her legs, shrunk her waist, and enlarged her chest. This woman is plastered all over the television screen, magazine covers, and billboard advertisements. The company then uses this photoshopped picture to sell their products to the millions of desperate women striving to be her.

The world has definitely corrupted the purpose of beauty. Therefore as covenant young women, we must be careful not to get sucked into the lies of what a perfect body should look like. This means guarding against what magazines we read and television shows we watch. We already find ourselves following their fashion trends and dieting plans on Pinterest, an ever-growing source of a woman's discontentment.

In the midst of all the lies and deceit, we must remember beauty is only skin deep. This is where the cliché phrase actually holds meaning. We must take seriously the idea that "How pretty your face is matters so little in comparison to how pretty your heart is" (Pretty Heart > Pretty Face). God needs those pretty hearts in his church, not the pretty façade. This is proved in 1 Samuel 16: 7, where we read, "But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart."

Sometimes we can even find ourselves wondering why God created beauty in the first place. After all, beauty just creates jealousy among the members of Christ. We are so busy worrying about what we look like in comparison to this girl that we neglect our true purpose on this earth: to please and glorify God. Beauty distracts every individual from a content life devoted to our creator, who created every person special in his or her own way and in his image. Proverbs 31: 30 says, "Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised."

This does not mean God hates and has no need for those whom he created beautiful both externally and internally. They too have their purpose. When we see a beautiful person, we are given a small understanding of how Christ views his church (VanOverloop). He loved her so much so that he paid the ultimate price: his life. We all wish to be skinnier, have no imperfections, have this skin tone and that eye color. Truth is, if Christ finds us beautiful, and God has created us in his image, why would we want to change a thing about ourselves?

As young women, it can be a struggle to stop comparing ourselves to the girl next to us. We need to understand the flawless model on the magazine cover is not real, and she never will be. Christ's love for his church, however, is. We must strive more and more every day to glorify him and seek his kingdom, and by doing so, we will gain a beautiful heart.

Works Cited

"Pretty Heart > Pretty Face." n.d. *Modern Day Prodigal Daughter*. Web. 30 October 2013.

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Monica is a recent graduate of Covenant Christian High School in Walker, Michigan.

A word fitly spoken
is like apples of gold
in pictures of silver.
As an earring of gold,
and an ornament of fine gold,
so is a wise reprover
upon an obedient ear.
—Proverbs 25:11–12

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:

Brody Joe, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brett Zandstra—Crete, IL
Jesse Michael, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joel & Michelle VanEgdom—Doon, IA
Alexander Jeffrey, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jeff & Kristin Griffioen—Faith, MI
Barbara Esther, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Dwight & Cynthia Quenga—First, MI
Sylvie Elise, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Joel & Lisa Kortering—Georgetown, MI
Cienna Nancy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Allen Jordan—Grace, MI
Beckett Alan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Geoff & Becky Veldman—Grandville, MI
Noah Lee, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brent & Katlyn Tanis—Hope, MI
Dakota Wayne, son of Mr. & Mrs. Wayne Bleyenberg—Hope, MI
Josie Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Bruce & Rachel Koole—Loveland, CO
Sean Edward, son of Mr. & Mrs. BJ & Sarah Mowery—Loveland, CO
Ellen Winna, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Michael and Jenna Brands—Loveland, CO
Kenna Mikal, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Joe & Erika Dykshorn—Peace, IL
Caitlyn Renae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ben & Lauren Feenstra—Redlands, CA
Remi Elizabeth, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brad & Leanne Pipe—Southeast, MI
Harper Avery, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Karl & Megan Dykstra—Southeast, MI
Emmett James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Adam & Catherine VanDyke—Trinity, MI
Lena Rae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jared & Cassie DeVries—Trinity, MI
Adult baptism was administered to Ashley Johnson—Grandville, MI

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

"In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." Proverbs 3:6

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

Tyler Poortinga—Crete, IL
Matthew Ferguson—Edmonton, AB, Canada
Nolan Groeneweg—Hull, IA

MARRIAGES

"For this God is our God forever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death." Psalm 48:14

Mr. Nick Elzinga and Miss Kathryn Overbeek—Byron Center, MI
Mr. Ted Bolema and Miss Betsy Newhof—First, MI
Mr. Nicholas Gleason and Miss Lydia Kleyn—Grace, MI
Mr. Charles Hoekstra and Miss Monica Vink—Grace, MI
Mr. William Streiff and Miss Jayna Warner—Holland, MI
Mr. Joseph Regnerus and Miss Heather Laning—Hull, IA
Mr. & Mrs. Justin Zandstra—Hull, IA
Mr. Jacob Maatman and Miss Rachel Kamps—Southwest, MI
Mr. Brett Bylsma and Miss Kaitlin Haan—Trinity, MI

Little Lights
Answer key:

Across
2. prodigal
3. confess
8. allowance
10. generous
Down
1. father
4. spend
5. wise
6. waste
7. son
9. foolish

Tricia Mingerink

The Generous Father (1)

Matt bounced over to where his dad and sister were weeding their garden. "Dad, Luke asked me to spend the night at his house Friday. We are going to the fair, and I'm going to need money. Can I have all my allowance for the month now?" Normally, Matt's dad would give him only part of the allowance each Saturday, but Matt wanted to have lots of money when he went over to Luke's house.

His dad straightened, brushing dirt from his hands. He tugged his wallet from his back pocket and pulled out the money. Before he handed it to Matt, he gave him a firm look. "Remember, Matt, you need to save part of this to put in the collection plate at church each week and part to put in the bank. You can't spend all of it."

Matt nodded, eagerly snatching the money. "Thanks, Dad!" He dashed off to tell Luke.

Friday night, Matt and Luke did every ride they could. They ate lots of junk food until they felt sick and buzzed around the fair until they were dizzy. Matt had so much fun that he forgot to watch how much he was spending. By the time he and Luke left, Matt had spent all of his money. Every last penny had been used up.

Matt could barely sleep that night thinking about it. He didn't want to return home Saturday morning and have to tell his dad that he'd spent all the money he was supposed to save. In the morning, Luke's mother made them pancakes and sausages, but Matt couldn't eat anything. His stomach churned with too much guilt and too much junk food.

Luke's dad brought him home and dropped him off in his driveway. Matt trudged up to the house, his head hanging, his legs shaking. Would his dad be angry? Would he be punished?

Matt's dad was out in the garden again. He stood and walked towards Matt, smiling. "Did you have fun?"

Matt nodded, but he blinked at tears. He would have to confess. "Dad, I spent all the money. I'll work extra hard around the house, and I'll weed the garden all by myself, and anything else you want me to do."

Matt's dad knelt in front of him. "I'm disappointed. I trusted you to be wise with your money."

Matt hung his head, blinking at tears. He had been very foolish. "I won't do it again."

His dad hugged him. "I know."

Matt's stomach rumbled. It was almost time for lunch, and he hadn't eaten much for breakfast. His dad stood and smiled. "Let's see if Mom get can you something to eat, okay?"

Matt walked beside his dad to the house. Matt wanted to do something to show his dad that he was thankful. He spotted the garden. "Dad, after lunch, can I help you weed the garden?"

His dad grinned and patted him on the shoulder. "Of course, son."

"LITTLE LIGHTS"

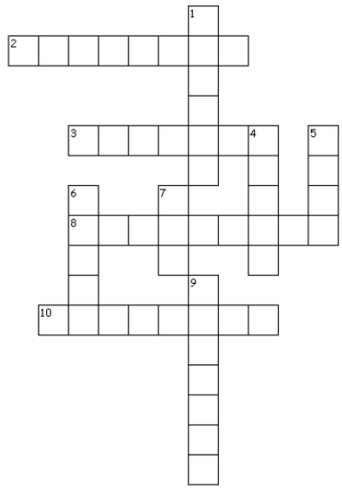
... let it shine!

Questions to think about

1. Read Luke 15:11-32 by yourself or with your parents. How was Matt like the younger son in the story? Are you ever like Matt?
2. Look up the word *prodigal* in a dictionary. What does the word actually mean? Who was prodigal in the story? The son, the father, or both? How is God a generous father towards us?

Words used across:
confess, generous, prodigal, allowance

Words used down:
son, spend, wise, foolish, waste, father



Tricia is a member of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, 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

http://prcconvention.com