Drive through any residential neighborhood after dark. What do you see? Look through almost every living room window on the street, and you will see a flashing glow. It’s a TV. Most homes have them, and they are turned on more than they are turned off. Go to most restaurants, and you can see about ten of them from any place you sit. Go into the bathrooms of some of these restaurants and you will most likely see some there too. It’s almost obnoxious. Often we dedicate entire rooms to a TV. All the furniture is arranged in just a certain way, so that no matter where you sit, you can see the TV. Don’t misunderstand me, I’m not condemning our arranging our furniture in this way. I merely bring attention to the fact that the TV has a very prominent place in our homes and almost everywhere else.

We hear warnings against various abuses of entertainment all the time, but it is good to remind ourselves again of some of the dangers, especially in the light of the inheritance we have been given. We will focus our attention on what is probably the chief means of entertainment, the TV. Keep in mind that what we used to be able to access solely through the TV can now more easily be accessed online using Netflix, Hulu, Google Play, and the others. This changes things quite a bit. Now we are able to access
whatever we want, whenever we want, wherever we want, not just whatever happens to be on TV at any given time.

I think we can agree that the vast majority of TV shows and movies are clearly full of sin, and the rest of them are probably not even worth taking the time to watch. Why should we even try to watch some of this stuff, thinking it might be OK when in the back of our minds we know that it is not OK anyway? The key to this is knowledge. We must take care that we are not willfully placing ourselves in danger by watching some of this stuff. This is dangerous ground. “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries” (Heb. 10:26, 27).

So what makes the majority of Hollywood’s productions wicked? It’s not just the fact that one watches the actors sin by breaking every single commandment; it’s the fact that one considers this entertaining. Not just being entertained by the sins of others, but glorying in their sins; laughing as they curse God or give most conversations a sexual innuendo; salivating as they fornicate with each other, cheat on their spouses, and bare all for the viewers to see. When one enjoys watching the world sin, he joins himself to that sin and is every bit as guilty as the one acting the part.

We need to consider what we are doing to ourselves if we are viewing this kind of stuff. Those images can be so easily burned into our memories, only to resurface again and again, making us fall over and over. Every single time we join ourselves with the sins of the world in this way, we are burning ourselves. Even if we are just dabbling a little bit every now and again, we still are burning ourselves little by little until our spiritual pain receptors are destroyed, and we become desensitized to these sins. They become the norm. The breaking of the law of God does not grieve us anymore as it should. We are burned, we are hardened, and we have forgotten our inheritance. This is right where Satan wants us, because once we become so desensitized to sin, it is very hard to break free from it. But God’s grace is sufficient, and he leads his straying children back to the sheepfold, just as in the parable of the prodigal son.

There are plenty of legitimate ways we may entertain ourselves. But we can abuse even appropriate entertainment. One of the ways we can abuse appropriate entertainment is by overconsumption. While watching sports is an appropriate way to entertain ourselves, it might be really easy for us to devote the greater part of most Saturdays to sitting in front of the TV watching our favorite team. We feel as if we need to catch every minute of every game, while at the same time forgetting about what other responsibilities we might have. It may become such a part of our life that our life seems to revolve around sports. We plan our lives around what time a certain game starts and ends. We can’t have a conversation with someone without talking about this team or that player. We find ourselves with more knowledge of player and team stats than knowledge of scripture. This is why with overconsumption necessarily comes idolatry. We have forgotten what is important. We have forgotten our inheritance, just as Israel of old. Same concept, just a different type of god.

Facebook and other social media outlets can be valuable tools. They are valuable tools that our evangelism committees can use in the spread of the gospel. They are valuable to us in our personal lives as well. We can keep up with friends and family that live far away. They can be an effective means for our personal witness as well. We can also appropriately entertain ourselves by playing games with other friends. But how do we portray ourselves on Facebook, for example? What kinds of pictures do we post for the world to see? What kind of videos are we posting or watching? How are we commenting on other people’s pictures and videos? Do we show that we belong to Christ, or does our online presence match that of an ungodly person’s profile? Facebook can be abused the same way sports are. Overconsumption can be a very real problem. We feel we need to stay connected at every moment of the day. There is the danger that it becomes such a part of us that we are more devoted to checking our Facebook every day than we are to taking time out of every day for reflection on God’s word. We get updates on our phones via email that so and so commented on this, so and so posted that, or so and so “likes” this. We can’t pull ourselves away from it. The next sin we can fall into is idolatry. Why do we use Facebook? Do we use it in the proper way, or do we use it to groom our profiles in such a way so that others can be impressed by us, look up to us, and “like” us? Do the things we say and the pictures or videos we post reflect the inheritance that we claim.
as our own?

We might be tempted to say, “There’s nothing else to do, so I’m just going to go on Facebook, or watch TV, or rent a movie.” We need to remember that there always is something else to do. We need to be feeding ourselves continually with the good stuff, the things that have eternal value. Remember what Rev. Decker said in his speech at convention this past summer. If you did not hear the speech, you can read it in the October issue of Beacon Lights. “You are what you eat.” If we feed on junk day after day, or even just spend too much time doing things that aren’t necessarily bad in themselves, but really don’t help us, the results are devastating. The entertainment industry is one of Satan’s favorite and most effective tools he uses to prevent us from developing in our inheritance. He uses even good entertainment to this end. We get so distracted by entertainment that we forget or just plain ignore what we should be doing.

Keep in mind what the Lord has given us. We have inherited much, and there is much we are called to do with our inheritance during the short time we have here on this earth. As children of God placed in a world saturated by entertainment, we may entertain ourselves, and we may delight in doing so, but there are more urgent things at hand. We are called to develop in our inheritance, and in doing so our greater delight will be in the Lord, because at his right hand is lasting pleasure. To this we turn next month.

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Book Review

Tell the Truth


In Matthew 5 Christ calls the church to go into the world and “teach all nations.” As members of this church, it is our personal calling to witness to others, but it is easy for us as young people to excuse ourselves from this important duty. We may argue that we have no opportunities to witness, or we may settle for simply setting an example with our lifestyle. While being a godly example is certainly an excellent way to witness, God also calls for intentional action. Psalm 96:3 commands, “Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people.” Witnessing can be an intimidating task, and the book Tell the Truth is an excellent guide in this difficult area. Described as a “training manual on the message and methods of God-centered witnessing,” Tell the Truth teaches clear, practical steps for witnessing in the doctrinally barren culture of our day.

Tell the Truth is written by Will Metzger, a campus minister at the University of Delaware. At this university, Metzger works with an evangelical group called Intervarsity Christian Fellowship that connects churches with college campuses. Although his evangelical views are not entirely scriptural, his personal experiences in evangelism give him valuable insight into the best practices for witnessing. I found his background particularly valuable in his understanding of the current culture of acceptance and diluted love that Christians face.

I attend a Christian college, and during my first year, I realized that the majority of people on campus did not have a Christianity based on scripture. I expected others to ask me about my beliefs and to debate issues like predestination and common grace. In reality, others smiled and nodded about my beliefs, then talked about how “refreshing” chapel was or just changed the topic. I found people who loved God but could care less about the details. I didn’t know how to lead people beyond their vague ideas about loving Jesus, let alone explain the gospel to someone who had never heard a sermon.

It was this atmosphere of indifference that led me to read Tell the Truth, and Metzger pinpoints it perfectly early on in his book. He analyzes how
the culture today has created a “reduced” and “me-centered” gospel. He calls it “something far worse than secularism: a humanistic and relativistic worldview overlaid with a religious veneer” (145). He also notes that if we fall into the trap of this reduced gospel, evangelism becomes “nice people being nice to others in hopes that they will be nice to God, a compromised gospel with a mild god that exists to benefit me” (13). With statements such as these, Metzger demonstrates an accurate and clear perspective on the situation we face as witnesses.

The rest of Tell the Truth describes how to counteract this sinful world view and reduced gospel. He shows how our evangelism must convey a sense of urgency, a proper Christ-centered perspective, and the need for God’s grace. Much of Metzger’s witnessing instruction is centered on a five point summary of the gospel that follows a natural progression, showing God’s sovereignty, his standards, our failure and need for Christ, and the necessary response of thankful obedience. Although his summary certainly does not cover every aspect of God’s word, that is not the intent. Metzger presents this summary as a tool for teaching basic truths, giving examples and proof texts that support each point.

These five points are one of many ways that Metzger uses to teach a practical approach to witnessing. He gives concrete examples and organizes many of his points into charts and diagrams. He also lists excuses and difficulties that a Christian may face while witnessing and advises how to direct the conversation beyond them. Although some of his methods are reminiscent of the advertisement-like tracts you may find handed to you on a street corner, Metzger actually acknowledges the “forced” nature of some witnessing and challenges readers to overcome our aversion to it. He suggests that this forced atmosphere may merely be a product of our fear of criticism and failure to put our call to witness into practice. Metzger challenges readers to speak God’s word at every opportunity, pointing out that our sinful pride is the only thing we stand to lose.

Tell the Truth contains some points with which we would disagree. Metzger’s book does include a defense of the doctrine of predestination, showing how sovereign grace is the only logical and comforting means to salvation. However, he does not specifically state this position until halfway through the book, and up until that point, I questioned where he stood on the issue. Metzger often uses the language of accepting Christ, the offer of salvation, and responding to Christ’s call, despite his insistence that man is totally depraved and God is sovereign. Also, he follows his defense of election with a promotion of common grace. He points out how reprobation can seem unfair when it comes to “kind old ladies” that are under God’s judgment, and he uses common grace as the explanation, citing it as “the source of human kindness” (122). In the midst of his practical, logical defense of God’s works, I was disappointed to find this section lacking in Reformed truth.

Although Tell the Truth is missing some parts of “the whole gospel,” I highly recommend it for the discerning reader. This book serves as an excellent resource of practical help in witnessing, especially for young people entering the challenging atmosphere of college. It also provides a needed nudge to those who find themselves in an environment with “no opportunities” to witness. I know that I will keep my copy on hand as a reminder and guide for fulfilling God’s command to tell his truth.

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If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee.

—Proverbs 25:21–22
Implications of Public Confession

VIII
He Alone Receives Us

“I will receive you.”
2 Corinthians 6:17

What is the relation between your confession and being received into the church? About the time you contemplate making your confession, perhaps you are frequently asked, “When will you be received?” We hear it said on a certain day that next week occasion will be given for receiving members into the church. Sometimes the attitude prevails that the important thing has happened when the receiving has taken place, and that except for the formal incidental of confession, all is done and passed. It was the receiving that caused you all the anxiety; for it you studied especially hard during the last few weeks. When that has been successfully survived, the worst is passed. Some have become so absorbed in this attitude that they neglected to participate in the public confession, and neglected also to partake of the holy supper.

That attitude represents a lie in the church, and a lie that results always and only in fatality. There should be no receiving. Formerly it did not exist. He who desired to confess his Lord and Savior arose in the presence of the congregation and made his confession in clear, audible tones. In those days the confession of Jesus involved sure sacrifice, self-denial, and suffering. Consequently he who was courageous enough to face so much opposition could certainly be trusted. The congregation would welcome such a person with grateful joy.

The time came, however, when the scourge of persecution was lifted and when it was esteemed an honor to be counted a Christian. Many then came forward who could in no sense be trusted. To protect herself, the church had to set up standards, had to examine those who would confess, and had to demand that instruction be given. In that way the custom gradually originated of granting permission to individuals to make their confession.

These steps had to be taken in order to safeguard the church against spiritual decay, and in order to spare certain individuals the sin of making a merely verbal, insincere confession. That preliminary examination in faith has now evolved into the practice of receiving. Upon this occasion the consistory delegates the minister of the word and an elder to examine the persons who desire to make their confession. If these find that the persons in question

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1 The fact that the procedure now differs from that which obtained when this description was written does not affect the argument.—Translator
possess enough knowledge of the word of God to know what they are doing, and if they manifest evidences of the fact that they have turned away from the world and unto their Savior, they grant them the permission to make their public confession in the presence of the congregation. As such, the practice of "receiving" is legitimate and necessary. But it must be insisted that confession itself remain the important event. The receiving, which should never have been so designated, is and should be merely a preliminary examination. It is the public confession and not the receiving that qualifies one to approach the Lord’s supper.

The notion suggested by the word receiving is unsound: it confuses the issues and results in spiritual havoc. It obscures the significance of baptism. If it were a Jew or a Turk or a pagan who desired to make a confession, the matter would be quite different. We could appropriately speak of receiving him into the church. But a baptized child of the congregation, a child sanctified in Christ even before its baptism, cannot be received into the church as though he were a foundling. But he is not. A baptized child is a member of the family. He has been reared in the household of faith. “But,” you reply, “the visible church has not yet extended to him the rights and privileges of membership.” That is true, but it is also true that these rights are not extended to him at the time of receiving by the minister and elder. They are his only after his public confession of faith.

If a term is necessary, we could name the receiving the “admission to making public confession.” This preliminary examination may never represent anything more than the vestibule through which one passes to public confession. Not the being received, but the public confession represents the holy and decisive moment for the great decision of your life. It is at the public confession that you vow to be forever faithful to your Jesus. Never break that vow!

But there are those who would not agree. These wanted the event of receiving to represent a touching and exciting ceremony. Hence this event was converted into what the Lutherans had long made of it. The pastor and the elder took the confession. Later the church confirmed it.

This fallacious conception of the matter must be uprooted. Doubtless an examination must precede the public confession. It must, however, retain the characteristics of an examination. Its sole purpose must be to determine, to the extent that is humanly possible, whether or not the person who desires to confess knows and means what he wishes to do. That examination should inquire into one’s conduct, into the attitude of one’s heart, and into the extent of one’s knowledge of the full counsel of God for the salvation of sinners. To recite the books of the Bible, to know the names of all the patriarchs, to name all the kings of Israel in order—these attainments merit praise but have no place in this preliminary examination. This examination should determine only whether one has a knowledge of the plan of God for the salvation of sinners, and whether one is earnest, is sincere in his intention, i.e., whether one means for time and for eternity what one is about to do.

How different that is from what frequently occurred when some forty individuals came to make their confession at one time. One of them, for example, would be asked: “How many children did Isaac have?” He would answer, “Two,” and with that be received into church. That is a mockery of holy things, a mockery of the spiritual life of the soul. In this the spirituality of the Roman Catholics puts us to shame, for these find time to consult often with each person individually in the confessional. It may be that a minister or an instructor knows his pupils personally, and that a single answer from them at the examination suggests more to him than a single answer would indicate to another. But that examination should prove to the attendant elder also that every individual who desires to confess appreciates God’s plan. (That plan of God would be better appreciated if the catechetical booklets were abandoned, and if the Heidelberg Catechism itself were employed to serve as an outline of study for a number of successive years.)

Must the receiving, as it is called—the examination in faith, as it should be called—then be a purely academic affair? Is the announcement, “You are admitted to public confession,” all that may appropriately be said? Is there no room for touching, emotionally exciting words, no room for solemnity? The answer can be given comparatively easily. Tears may never be the objective; the kingdom of God does not consist of an emotional upheaval, but of the workings of the heart. The attempt may not be made to add significance to the event of receiving by robbing it from that of public confession. But it is appropriate, and it is necessary that earnest words be spoken after the examination concerning
the confession that is to follow. These words should inspire personal introspection and should plead for loyalty and for integrity. If the minister wishes to touch upon his personal relation to those present, now that they are no longer to be his catechumens, why should he not do so at this time? Not to do so would represent a cold and unnatural attitude. The important thing to be guarded against is confusing the receiving with the public confession. The former may never deny the essence and validity of baptism.

Is there then no being received? Yes, there is an acceptance of God. He confirms it with the words: “Wherefore come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” This being received does most certainly have significance for public confession. Your appearance before the assembly of believers is a public acknowledgment of the fact that you have heard the commands of your God, that you wish to separate yourself from the world, from association with evil things, and from sin, and that you believe the promise that the Lord, as your Father who is in heaven, has received you as one of his own. This being received is spiritual, is holy, is true, and it is the only one that may be thought of in connection with your confession. Only because he has received you may you confess his name.

The conception that you can be received by a minister and an elder obscures the fact that there is an acceptance with the Almighty God. Hence it cannot be too strongly insisted upon that that false receiving be forever banned from the church. You and your church must always affirm that there is acceptance for you and your children only with the Lord God.
growth. A lot of financial problems. I remember my first consistory meeting. It struck me how much time we spent on finances. The zeal was tempered by the fact that we were always looking at that property and struggling with that question whether to go out on our own. I don’t think that was good for the congregation. It went on too long.

Rev. Heys was our first minister and then Rev. Kortering. We were vacant for four years. We were thankful when Rev. Kortering accepted our call and came back to us in 1970.

MHH: Did things tend to smooth out then after the settlement was achieved?

TK: Yeah, that was a plus. We experienced growth in our congregation through the years and now have a daughter congregation in Hull.

But through it all, in spite of many of our shortcomings, we have to say that the Lord preserved his church. We still have a name and a place in this community. If you look at the history, humanly speaking, you would say, “It wouldn’t happen.” We’re extremely thankful for that because we have our children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren in one of our churches today.

I appreciate the preaching and the catechizing that they’ve received, and I think that’s the only place that I can look, because I can’t look to myself.

MHH: Mr. Kooima, are there any other events or aspects of history that stand out in your mind?

TK: I think looking back, I’m aware of the impact that the war had on the congregations and some of the experiences that they had to go through. I know that the Dykstra family here in Hull had four sons in the service at one time. In Rock Valley there were two of my uncles that were in the service. That’s probably close to me because the one had been a country schoolteacher and had lived in our home with our parents and walked across the section to teach school, so I got to know him quite well. He volunteered for the Air Force because he knew he was going to be drafted. It was against my grandparents’ wishes. After 23 missions as a pilot out of England over Germany, his plane was shot down, and four crew members got out, but the rest of the crew blew up with the plane, and he was declared missing in action. That went on until his body was found after the war. That was a strain on the grandparents and the whole family.

I remember when the notification came. I was helping my father. We were putting the line fence in and I was just a lad of eleven years. And the legion came out and said that he had been missing in action. And I remember dropping the tools and walking to the house. But that was hard on my grandparents. After the war two of the surviving crew members were released from prison and came to visit my grandparents. I think there were many others in the churches that faced similar trials.

So finally they found his body in 1950. They had a memorial service in Rock Valley then. Yeah, he was shot down in ’43.

MHH: It took them that long! Wow.

TK: And I had an inquiry from Bruce Koole. Is that a son of Rev. Koole?

MHH: Correct.

TK: He was researching or writing a paper on the effects of the families. And I wrote him a few letters how I felt what I thought the effect was. I think it was a paper in college. I looked into it and sent him information. And that was one of the questions: “What was the reaction of the parents?”

MHH: Were there other people from our churches who lost family members in the war?

TK: There was one from the Hull congregation too. Gerrit Vis.

MHH: Mr. Kooima, we’re meeting presently in the pastor’s study at a new church building in Hull. What can you tell me about the process of acquiring this building and what has happened to the old church to which you referred earlier in our conversation that it had a strong attraction for many in the fifties and in the sixties?

TK: Well, we were growing quite rapidly in the middle-to-late eighties, and we were full. We had to do something. We had some drives. I think we wanted to have $750,000 before we went ahead. And that didn’t take a real long time. And we were able to purchase this property here for $30,000, I think, or $35,000. I can hardly imagine that we could buy it for that at that time because that’s just ’89 or ’90 that we purchased the property. The church was built in ’92. I think we had sixty-five families when we started, and I think when we moved in here we had 82. Before Calvary started, I think we had about 104. So we were full here again—balcony was full.

Shortly thereafter we built the parsonage. And we’ve been expanding the grade school here quite often, and now we made progress in the high school.
MHH: Whatever happened to the old church building?

TK: We thought we had that thing sold once. And that was to an OPC group that was out of Sheldon. I think a Rev. Williamson.

MHH: The name Williamson would be associated with Presbyterianism. I’m thinking of G. I. Williamson. Possible relation.

TK: I think that’s who it is. I think he was in Sheldon. I think they were contemplating starting an OPC, but it fell through. So then the NRC (Rock Valley) had the split with the Beeke group that’s in Grand Rapids now.

MHH: Say that again, which group in Rock Valley?

TK: The NRC group (Netherlands Reformed congregation). They had a kind of a split there over that Beeke question. He’s in Grand Rapids now. He was a pastor in Rock Valley at one time. So they called themselves the Heritage Netherlands Reformed congregation now. And they’re the ones that bought our church. So it’s still being used today.

MHH: Before I interrupted and asked you that question, I think you were about to make some comments about the new high school that has been started here. What can you tell me about the history and maybe the current status of that endeavor?

TK: Well, we’re pretty well on the road now. We have a temporary location operating right now—on Main Street in Hull. And by next fall we hope to start with two classes in our new building. We don’t have enough funds to finish it completely, but there is about a $2 million expenditure this fall.

MHH: For building the facility itself?

TK: That’s right. But there’s going to be a lot of expenses to finish it off.

MHH: A little bit earlier in our conversation, I’m quite sure that you made reference to having served in the armed forces of our country. Could you discuss that subject, please?

TK: OK. We were married in August of ’53, and in July of ’54 I was drafted. At that time we were married less than a year. We were expecting our first child. I went to basic training in Texas.

MHH: This was Army?

TK: This was Army. Against really the advice of those in authority, a young fella from Sioux Center and I decided we were going to take our wives along the second eight weeks to Virginia, to quartermaster school. Clarine was expecting Melinda, our oldest daughter, and the eight weeks were up. That was the 19th of December, and we were expecting the baby in January. So I got orders to ship out to Korea in the middle of December. We had been attending post chapel pretty regularly, or a Presbyterian Church in Hopewell, Virginia. We decided that I wanted to try to stay here in the States until the baby was born. So I went to the chaplain, Colonel Smith, and I told him our situation. The first thing he said to me was, “Young man, you know you weren’t supposed to have your wife here.” “Yessir,” I said, “I know that, but we were expecting our first child and it meant a lot to us to be together.” But he went to work for us. A chaplain’s got a lot of pull, I found that out. I think it helped that we went to his chapel (laughter). And he got a delay. So then the baby was born, 11th of January. Now I faced the same problem. The young couple that we were living with, he had moved on, they had shipped out in December. So now the time was up that I had to go. I got my orders again—had to go to Fort Lewis, Washington. But we’d like to have the baby baptized. So I went back to the chaplain again and had Rev. Heys write a letter with the request that we had made to the chaplain. He gave us a “delay en route” so I could drive home with my wife and child and have the baby baptized here. About a week later I got on the train and shipped out to Korea. Clarine and baby lived with her parents and she taught in the country school while I was gone.

MHH: And how long were you gone?

TK: Fifteen months.

MHH: Was the Korean War active at that time?

TK: No, it was over in ’53, and I went in ’54. So the hostilities were over, but there was a lot of evidence when we were over there. I ended up in an infantry company which I wasn’t supposed to be in. I tried everything to get out of that thing. I even went to the company commander and I said “I’d like to be a chaplain’s assistant.” I knew they needed one. Tried out for the 8th Army baseball team. (Laughter) Nothing worked. I was sent to NCO leadership school and later chosen to try out for the 8th Army Honor Guard in Seoul, Korea, headquarters of the 8th Army. And I was a good soldier down there, because I did not want to go back up in the hills and live in the tents.

MHH: So you were successful?

TK: I stayed there the rest of the time in the Honor
Guard outfit.
I’ve got to tell you this. One Sunday afternoon we were going to tour an orphanage. So we went to the NCO Club where we were going to pick up the bus. And there are two men from Grand Rapids: Andrew Cammenga, who I had known in Hull (laughter), who is presently a minister in the URC, or minister emeritus, and John DeHoog from Grand Rapids. And they were friends. So we toured that together and then other weekends we’d get together. I think it was about the first weekend they asked me if I got the Reformed Guardian. “No,” I said, “but I get the Standard Bearer” (laughter). So we knew which side of the fence we were on (laughter). But we still got together.
CK: He didn’t even know they were in Korea.
TK: I didn’t know they were in Korea.
MHH: And you just met them…
TK: Just both going on that tour for that orphanage.
MHH: That’s amazing.
TK: And later on my picture was with them in the Reformed Guardian as a fellow member, which wasn’t quite right (laughter).
RBH: So what did you do in the Honor Guard?
TK: Oh, whenever there were visiting dignitaries from the States you had to put on a parade and stand guard at the general’s office and around his house at night, twenty-four hours. Lots of spit-n-polish. But we had house boys and good living. Too many privileges for most of the ones stationed there. The base was wide open. They could bring the Korean girls into the base, into the NCO Clubs. At first, when you started in the hills we’d guard the perimeters to keep anybody out. Now the Honor Guard threw open the gates, and it was a sad situation, something that I soon found out that I could not go to the NCO club.
So some of us stayed in the barracks at night.
MHH: But it was certainly better than being in the infantry.
TK: That’s for sure. And Rev. Heys was very faithful sending me the sermons every Sunday, a written out sermon.
RBH: Written out? Handwritten?
TK: No, typed. After my time was over—I got out three months early because my father sent a farm-lease to headquarters in Korea. They had a provision that if you had a good reason to be released early, you could so do. That worked for me, and I got out. Instead of serving twenty-four months, twenty-one months total. I came back home to a rented farm right on the Doon blacktop. That’s where we began our farming career, and never got very far away from that area the rest of our lives.
MHH: So you farmed pretty much till your time of retirement.
TK: Yeah, I’m still farming a little bit. I help with the planting and harvest, and I enjoy that. My two sons are farming, and the other two are in ag-related positions. So I’m kind of involved yet.
MHH: Mr. Kooima, how would you compare the church of today with the church of your youth?
TK: When you speak of the church of my youth, that goes back to the Rock Valley Protestant Reformed Church, prior to ‘53. And as far as the preaching, I was not really aware of the change in the preaching that was coming with the question of the conditional covenant.
I look back on my own catechism instruction, and I think the church of today is doing a much more thorough job of catechizing our youth. A person often takes it lightly, I think, at that age. But I can see the differences as far as the knowledge that our young people have, the instruction they’re given, and their ability to express themselves. I notice that in men’s society among the younger element. It’s something that we were not able to do. I know there’s more education now. There are more college graduates in the church, and they are able to express themselves ably. But I think as far as the catechizing of the youth, we’ve made a lot of progress. In ‘53 there was a lot of emphasis in the preaching on the conditional covenant and the result of the split and so forth. An emphasis was made there. I remember when I was young, I thought that [regarding] that common grace thing, that we rode that horse to death. But as through the years I see how things progressed, I see how right your grandfather [Herman Hoeksema] was in his prediction, because it’s come to pass.
I’m happy with the preaching. I think the young men that are coming out of our seminary are well prepared, probably more so prepared than they were in the early years of our church history. Maybe there’s a little more practical application than what I remember in former years. But we live in perilous times, and I think that’s necessary too.
I am a little concerned in my experience through the years, serving as an elder; I think we made
some mistakes as far as laying down rules—things that should remain under Christian liberty. We had to do some back-tracking in Hull, I know that. And I’m scared of that. I remember reading some of your grandfather’s material that he held the position that Christian liberty isn’t a license to sin, but if we’re living out of that liberty, then we don’t need all those rules. Wasn’t that kind of his philosophy, if I remember right?

MKH: I think that’s an excellent summary.

TK: The Rock Valley church was organized in 1928, so that was four years after ‘24. I really don’t know anything about those four years, if there was a conflict within the CRC or with those ‘24 decisions, or how it came about. That’s part of the history that I have no knowledge whatsoever as far as Rock Valley.

I do think it must have been quite a step for them to start, which it was for many of our congregations, I’m sure. I have the history of Rock Valley, and they quote the history of how it started. They rented a hall, and your grandfather came for three lectures. They decided the crowd was going to be too big, so they rented another hall. They didn’t realize it, but for the electric lights you had to drop a quarter in a slot. Halfway through, the time ran out, so your grandfather completed the speech in the dark. It was in the paper. I admire those people, for that was a step. Times were so tough, you know. 1928, 1929, there just wasn’t any money. In those minute books, there is an entry there of the poor fund, benevolence fund. That Byker family I talked about, they related that every Monday the deacons would come with a little bag with nickels in it to present to that family. They had a record of the collections for the benvolence. Wasn’t even a dollar, quite often. So it just showed there just wasn’t much money. But even in those times, they went ahead and started a new church.

MKH: You mentioned in the course of the conversation that in the years following the split that there were a lot of financial difficulties. And you apparently have some further thoughts and some further information on that.

TK: Yeah, I think I mentioned that we spent a lot of time in the council meetings on the finance part of it. But in ‘58 and ‘59, and following years—this is when we were in the community building until ‘64—we were running behind in our contributions. There were two lengthy letters that were submitted in ‘58 and ‘59 that we weren’t bringing up the budget. It ended up that in November, I think our synodical assessments were $2,000; we only had paid $300 in the period, and we weren’t going to be able to do any better. That carried on then to the next year. One of the letters states that the Synod was very patient with us, but we couldn’t expect that to continue. Efforts were being made with the letters.

So finally we had a meeting. I think the Synod sent a delegation to meet with us. I’m almost positive that after that meeting we had a drive, and I think half of the debt was forgiven (some people in Hull don’t agree with me on that, but I think I’m right). The other half we came up with, and from then on we met our quota. But we were in dire straits for awhile financially, partly, I think, because we were struggling with the church property thing and legal expenses involved. We didn’t know quite which way to turn. I think it had an effect on our giving. The budget in ‘58 and ‘59 was only $4.50 a week.

MKH: And they struggled to bring that up.

TK: Didn’t bring it. That was supposed to cover the synodical assessments and the minister’s salary and the rent on the community building and other expenses. But we made it through.

MKH: Mr. Kooima, you mentioned [off the record] that you knew a funny story. I’m all ears.

TK: Well, I got this from Rev. [George] Lubbers himself. Whenever I’d meet him when he’d come to the Midwest, he’d always start talking about the old times and going to classis and synod with my grandpa Kooima. Anyway, he talked about how poor things were and there wasn’t any money in and near the depression. He was a minister in Doon. He said there were two Rev. Lubbers in Doon at that time. He said, “We heated the house with coal, and there was hardly money to buy coal.” It was brought out from the local lumber yard. The other Rev. Lubbers that was in Doon, I think it was the First Reformed Church, ordered coal from the local supplier. They came and they put it in the Protestant Reformed basement. That was nice, because we needed coal, but we didn’t have the money to pay for the coal (laughter). They brought the coal to the wrong Rev. Lubbers. But they got it straightened out. (laughter).

MKH: This concludes my interview with Mr. Tim Kooima. Thank you very much, Mr. Kooima, for your time and for your thoughts, for your stories, for your history. It’s much appreciated.
The Daily Press
“press toward the mark…” (Philippians 3:14)

February 8
God is Love
Read 1 John 4:7–21
As a mother of small children, I don’t get out much. When I do, I’m usually grocery shopping. This time of the year, roses and chocolates crowd the entrance of our grocery store, and hearts dangle above the aisles. The glamorous celebrities whose faces adorn the magazines at the check-out continue to flit from one romance to another. However limited, my exposure to the outside world is enough to convince me that our world is as in love with the idea of love as it ever was, and it is as clueless as ever when it comes to knowing what love really is.

The Bible teaches us that God is love. God is love first within his triune being. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exist in “the bond of perfectness” (Col. 3:14). As love, God chose those who believe on him. He chose them, that they should be holy and dwell before him in love (Eph 1:4). John writes that it is impossible for one who doesn’t love to know God. The reverse is also true: it is impossible for one who doesn’t know God to love.

Sing or pray Psalter #283

February 9
Love Defined
Read 1 Corinthians 13
We’re so quick to define love as a feeling, as that little thrill of joy that makes your heart skip a beat when one you love comes into view. That delight can be part of love, but love is much more than that. We also are quick to reserve love as an emotion shared by those who are dating, married, or family members. Don’t forget that “the Love Chapter” is part of Paul’s letter to the congregation at Corinth. He enjoins the believers there to exercise love with their fellow church members.

I use the term love since it is the expression with which we are more familiar in our day, but the term charity, which is how the word is rendered in the KJV, is helpful. Charity denotes action—typically volunteer work or philanthropic giving. In contrast, the word love in our day is too often used in place of the word lust or to express one’s preference for everything from pizza to people. Love as the Bible defines it is not “victim of our emotions” but “servant of our will” (Elisabeth Elliot).

Sing or pray Psalter #369

February 10
No Greater Commandment
Read Mark 12:28–34
We are commanded to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and we are commanded to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. To see how far we fall short from keeping this command, here’s an exercise for you. I learned this from Elisabeth Elliot—it’s something she would do when she was feeling bitter toward her husband. Consider 1 Corinthians 13 again, but as you do so, put yourself in place of “love,” only negatively. The chapter reads this way when you do that: I do not suffer long and am not kind. I envy; I vaunt myself and am puffed up. I behave unseemly; am arrogant and rude. I insist on my own way, am easily provoked. I rejoice in sin, rather than in the truth. I do not bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things. My love fails.

What a sobering, realistic evaluation of ourselves as we are by nature!

Sing or pray Psalter #141

February 11
Love Suffers Long
Read Psalm 106
God has redeemed you, and he has given you his Holy Spirit. He sustains your life from day to day, and he preserves you as one of his saints. What thanks do you give him in return? Like the saints of the Old Testament, you and I resolve one moment to fight against our sin, God helping us. In the next moment, our resolve is forgotten, and we turn from the service of God back to idolatry of self. But “the Lord is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy” (Psalm 145:8). Were he not so patient with us, we would surely perish in our sin. “The longsuffering of our Lord is salvation” (2 Pet. 3:15). So be diligent that you may be found of him without spot and blameless, for “The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression,” but he will by no means clear the guilty who refuse to repent of their sin. (Num. 14:18).

Are you longsuffering toward your neighbor, your parents, your friend, your sibling, your spouse? Jesus commanded us to forgive seventy times seven (Matt. 18:22).

Sing or pray Psalter #290
Love is Kind
A chalkboard hangs on the wall in our kitchen. Periodically I write a Bible verse across its top, choosing texts that are especially pertinent to our family at the time. Right now the chalkboard reads, “Love is kind” in big, bold letters.

Too often we forget that the neighbors we are called to love are those of our own house. Frequently we’re kinder to strangers than we are to our own parents, children, siblings, or spouse.

A while back we considered the reality that we have enemies, and that sometimes those enemies are those of our own family. Love must be kind, even when it is love for our enemies. We can sometimes piously proclaim that to love our enemies is to show them their sin. That is true, but we must show them that sin with kindness. So walk in wisdom and kindness toward those who are within and without, and let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt (Col. 4:6).

Love Does Not Seek Self
Read Philippians 2:5–11
Jesus gave three instructions to those who would be his disciples: Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow him. Those same three qualifications apply to anyone who would love.

John 3:16, perhaps the most familiar verse in the Bible, explains how God chose to reveal his love: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.” God gave. And Christ, who is very God, gave. He became a servant, humbling himself to the will of the Father. He humbled himself even to the death of the cross. We are called to follow his example, in love serving one another.

Does your love for neighbor manifest itself in sacrificial action? True love demands that you deny yourself for their sake. Sing or pray Psalter #25

Love Rejoices in the Truth
Read 2 John
I once read a beautiful analogy of marriage: that of a triangle. Husband and wife are points “A” and “B”; God is the apex. As each spouse strives to glorify God and know Him more fully, they move nearer the apex, growing closer to each other at the same time. That analogy applies not only to marriage, but to all true love relationships. That’s true because love rejoices in truth, that is, in the gospel. In God, as he is revealed in the face of Jesus Christ.

When we delight in others’ failures and fail to commend the godliness that we see in them, we demonstrate that we rejoice in sin rather than in what is true. When we harbor discontent or discouragement with regard to the life God has given us, we demonstrate that we do not delight in what God’s word declares to be true: that he does all things well,

and that he will equip his children for the work that he gives them to do.

Love does not rejoice in iniquity: it rejoices in the truth. Sing or pray Psalter #27

Love Does Not Envy
Read Romans 12:9–21
In its exposition of the sixth commandment, the Heidelberg Catechism states: “In forbidding murder, God teaches us that he abhors the causes thereof, such as envy, hatred, anger, and desire of revenge; and that he accounts all these as murder.” How quick we are to envy others’ personalities, talents, looks, and possessions! God commands to weep with those who weep and to rejoice with those who rejoice. Not only do we fail to sympathize with those who sorrow: we envy those who rejoice rather than rejoice with them!

If love does not envy, how can God, who is love, call himself a jealous God? The answer to that question is found in God himself. Unlike our self-centered envy, God’s jealousy is a righteous jealousy. God knows himself to be the only one worthy of our praise and adoration, and he desires the well-being of his bride. When we give our love to other gods who are no gods—including the god of self—he is moved to jealousy for his own name’s sake.

Read or sing Psalter #260.

Love Does Not Parade Itself
Read 1 Peter 4:1–11
1 Cor. 13:4 reads, “Charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.” To be “puffed up” is to have an inflated view of your own importance. Love is not puffed up.

Sometime ago I read the results of several studies of teenagers. They showed that young people are increasingly narcissistic, that is, irrationally vain or self-centered. This trait characterizes not only those who are young, however: all of us think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think.

The Bible uses a different word to denote our undue fascination with ourselves: idolatry. Idolatry is the pursuit of anything other than the glory of God as one’s purpose for being. When we are puffed up, we are as much idolaters as the one who prostrates himself or herself before a piece of wood or stone.

But there’s hope for us. That hope is found in Jesus Christ. He was no idolater. Because he made himself of no reputation, you and I have been set free from our absorption with ourselves to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Pray or sing Psalter #308.

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Pray or sing Psalter #308.
This admonition is fitting in our day of social media. Many today crave fame more than anything else. Even we are tempted to use social media to turn ourselves into faux celebrities with a multitude of “friends” or “followers.”

1 Pet. 4:8 says this to us who live in the last days: “Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves.” How are we to manifest that charity? By our hospitality. In our day of abundant material possessions, we too often focus on “entertaining” rather than hospitality. Those who entertain desire that they—or their home or cooking—is the center of attention; those who are hospitable focus on their guests.

Let’s follow the Friend worth following by using the technology and the possessions that he’s entrusted to us to seek his glory and not our own.

Pray or sing Psalter #369.

February

18

Love Is Not Rude

Read Matthew 7:1–12

Love “doth not behave itself unseemly.” I frequently paraphrase 1 Cor. 13:5 to my children this way: “Love is not rude.” Love is not rude at the supper table. Love is not rude at the grocery store. Love is not rude when driving down the road. Love is not rude to one who has sinned against you. Love does not give a cold shoulder or the silent treatment. Love does not refuse to make eye contact, nor does it do its best to embarrass another, snub them at church, act extra friendly to others in their presence, or belittle them in public or in private. In other words, one who loves treats his or neighbors in the way in which he or she would like to be treated.

When we treat others in the ways I mentioned above, we show that we really don’t understand the horrible reality of our own sin and the wonder of God’s redeeming love. We also show that we forget that we will be judged according to our own standard.

Love is not rude: it is courteous, gracious, tactful.

Pray or sing Psalter #25.

February

19

Love Is Not Easily Angered

Read James 1:19–27

Love is not easily provoked: that is, it is not easily incited to anger. As a mom, I sometimes respond to the slightest irritation my children cause by raising my voice and allowing frustration to replace any semblance of self-control. I’m sure that you see the same tendency within yourself, no matter your age. Maybe you’re a young person, and your parents really get on your nerves. Maybe a habit of your spouse triggers bitterness in your heart. After all, anger doesn’t always manifest itself in violent outbursts. It’s often more deadly when it smolders stealthily within the heart.

Our anger, writes the inspired apostle James, does not bring about the righteous life that God desires: not in us, and not in those with whom we are angry.

It’s true that there is a righteous anger. God’s righteous anger burns against sin (Psalm 90:7–11). Jesus exemplified holy anger at hearts that were hardened in unbelief (Mark 3:5). But we’re prone to be unrestrained and self-centered when we’re angry. That’s why we’re cautioned, “Be ye angry, and sin not” (Eph. 4:26). That’s why, when Jesus says, “If your brother trespasses against you, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him,” he first says this: “Watch yourself!” (Luke 17:3).

Pray or sing Psalter #26.

February

20

Love Bears All Things

Read Galatians 6:1–10

Love bears all things. That is, love bears not only the burdens of weakness and sin that are its own; it also comes alongside others and shoulders their burdens with them. So the wise preacher declares, “Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Ec. 4:9–12).

To bear another’s burden is not to indulge or overlook his or her sin. Rather, it entails the loving correction of those who are our brothers and sisters in Christ and fervent prayers on their behalf. When we bear another’s burdens, we fulfill the law of Christ. That law is the law of love.

Pray or sing Psalter #305.

February

21

Love Believes All Things

Read Ephesians 4

What does it mean that love believes all things? It cannot mean that love is gullible. Nor can it mean that love believes the lie. After all, we are called to “henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.” We are called instead to speak the truth in love, and grow up in our knowledge of that truth. The “all things” that love believes are all the promises of the gospel as revealed to us in the inspired word of God. We believe that we have been justified. We believe that God sanctifies us. We believe the resurrection of the body.

Love believes these things not only for the sake of one’s self, but on behalf of one’s fellow believers as well. Love believes that Christ saves a body. This believing is accompanied by the renewing of one’s mind and evidenced in one’s life. It is demonstrated in kindness and forbearance toward others.

Too often our thoughts, words, and actions reveal that we do not believe the promises of God. Then our prayer must be, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief” (Mark 9:24).

Sing or pray Psalter #40.
Love Hopes All Things  
Read 2 Corinthians 1  
One who believes has hope: “Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost” (Rom. 15:13).  
When the word hope is used in the Bible, it does not mean “hope so” as we understand it. It means “know so.” As Paul writes in 2 Cor. 1:7, the hope of the Christian is a steadfast knowledge. It is a steadfast, loving knowledge that can be applied to our brothers and sisters in Christ as well as to ourselves. Like the saints in Corinth, we can be as sure of the heavenly consolation that awaits us as we are sure of the present trials that we face.  
The Christian finds his hope in the Bible, “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). The written word reveals our Savior, Christ Jesus. In him all the promises of God are “yea and Amen.” That is, they shall truly and certainly be.  
Sing or pray Psalter #87.

Love Endures All Things  
Read James 5:7—11  
Love not only bears all things, it bears them patiently, and for a long time; it endures them. We who are believers are called to endure chastening, mindful that the chastening of God is evidence of his love for us. James points to the prophets and Job as our examples.  
With regard to fellow saints, love endures their weaknesses. “Grudge not one against another, brethren.” We’ve learned that when love bears, believes, and hopes all things, “all things” does not include the lie. So too with the things that love endures. Love endures all things “that ought to be endured...For we are not to bear with vices, so as to give our sanction to them by flattery, or, by winking at them, encourage them through our supineness [moral weakness]. Farther, this endurance does not exclude corrections and just punishments” (Calvin).  
Happy are they who endure, even now, when iniquity abounds and the love of many waxes cold. Happy are they, for they that endure to the end shall be saved (Matt. 24:13).  
Sing or pray Psalter #98.

Love Never Fails (Part 1)  
Read Ephesians 5:22–33  
Before we were married, I had my husband’s wedding band engraved with the date of our upcoming wedding and these words: “Love Never Fails.” I still remember when I first showed him his ring. “I asked the jeweler to engrave those words not because my love will never fail you,” I said, “but because God’s love will never fail us.”  
As we’ve considered the characteristics of love over the past couple of weeks, we’ve focused on love as it must come to expression among fellow saints. That love has its source in the love of God in Jesus Christ for his people, Christ’s bride.  
We are called to imitate Christ’s never-failing, sacrificial love. In no relationship is this truer than in marriage. When you marry, God, who loves those who are his for eternity, requires that you love as long as you and your spouse live.  
By nature we are unable to keep this command, but God gives to us his Holy Spirit, who sheds God’s love abroad in our hearts and causes us to bring forth the fruit of love.  
Pray or sing Psalter #125.

Love Never Fails (Part 2)  
Read 1 Peter 3  
Those who are married in the Lord experience the true blessedness of marriage when their spouse helps them carry their cross. But other times your spouse’s sin will add to the burden you bear. That’s when it’s important to remember that God’s goal for us, whether single or married, is not our happiness; it’s our holiness. As co-heirs of eternal life, Christian spouses share a relationship that goes beyond this life, and God uses the earthly marriage bond to sanctify us, refining each of us for our place as his bride.  
The Bible teaches that God hates divorce (Mal.2:16). Better for you, he says, that you not vow, than you vow and do not pay what you’ve vowed (Eccl. 5:4–5). Yet divorce is increasingly common in the church. We must not conform to ungodly notions regarding love and marriage, but put on the mind of Christ. He gave himself for us, though we are most unworthy.  
Dear Christian, cherish the one who gave his life for you, and imitate his sacrificial love in marriage or in single life.  
Sing or pray Psalter #360.

Christ’s Efficacious Work  
Read Philippians 3  
I intended to return to the Psalms after our study of love, but before we do so, I would first like to take a few days to explain the rubric under which these devotional are printed. Why The Daily Press?  
The subtitle of our rubric comes from the familiar, compelling third chapter of Paul’s inspired epistle to the church in Philippi. This letter is Paul’s “little book of joy.” He delights in these saints, and he desires that they also be full of joy in the Lord.  
In this chapter Paul warns the saints to beware of those who maintained that righteousness was earned by keeping the law. “Not so,” says Paul. “I could boast in my outward conformity to God’s law more than any other man. But I count all my works as less than nothing in comparison to knowing Jesus Christ as my Lord.” Paul desired one thing: to know Christ, and to experience in his soul and life Christ’s efficacious work. Christ’s death and resurrection are efficacious: that is, they are powerful and effective in the life of the believer. They bring forth fruit: the mortification of sin, freedom from condemnation, righteousness, the hope of heaven.  
Are you able to say that you desire to know Christ and to...
experience the power of his death and resurrection more than you desire anything else?
Pray or sing Psalter #1.

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| Sometimes people will say, “I found Christ,” or “I claimed Christ as my Savior.” That kind of terminology and theology isn’t Biblical. Instead, Paul describes his salvation this way: Christ apprehended me.

We neither hear nor use the word apprehend often. We probably hear it most often in the news in reference to the arrest of a criminal: “So-and-so has been apprehended and is now in custody,” or something like that. And that’s Paul’s idea in this passage, too. “I was a guilty, bloody criminal, intent on running my own way, and I was apprehended. Seized in my tracks. Arrested by the Lord of heaven and earth.”

But Paul doesn’t leave it at that, because Christ doesn’t leave it at that. I was apprehended, writes Paul, for a purpose. Jesus seized him so that Paul, in turn, would grab hold of Christ, clinging in faith to all the promises of God. It’s our Father’s will that those whom he apprehends no longer live as lawbreakers but that they be conformed to the image of his Son (Rom. 8:29).

That’s his will for me. That’s his will for you, too.
Sing or pray Psalter #325.

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<th>February</th>
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<td><strong>A Singular Focus</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Read Philippians 3</strong></td>
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| The Bible uses many metaphors to describe the Christian life: a battle, a wrestling match, a journey. In Philippians 3 the Holy Spirit employs the metaphor of a race. As we saw yesterday, a believer is one who has taken hold of Christ. He’s done so because he was first apprehended, and his salvation is sure. Yet he knows that as long as he’s on this earth he has not attained the full stature of a perfect man in Christ: like Paul, he doesn’t consider himself to have arrived. So he follows the apostle’s example, striving to walk worthy of his calling, of the name “Christian.” He runs toward that goal like a sprinter, not allowing himself to be distracted, nor looking back over his shoulder, lest he trip. Instead, he sprints with all his might, leaning for the tape, eyes on the prize.

How easily you and I can be distracted from the spiritual focus that should be ours. Follow my example, writes Paul in verse 17. Imitate my single-mindedness. This one thing I do: I press toward the mark.
Pray or sing Psalter #234.

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<tr>
<td><strong>Imitators of God</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Read Ephesians 5:1–21</strong></td>
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| How children love to imitate their parents! I can’t help but smile when our daughters repeat my pet expressions. Our sons can often be found with Dad’s tape measure dangling from a belt loop or a screwdriver stuck in one of their pockets.

In Philippians 3 Paul encourages the saints in Philippi to imitate his example. He also tells them to follow the example of other devout men and women and warns them to note those who walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Do not follow their example! Whom do you long to be like? Godly brothers and sisters whom God has placed in your life or those who, though worldly, are successful in business, sports, or entertainment? Do you lead a life that is worth imitating? Can you truly say to your neighbors, friends, or children: “Imitate me! Do what I do!”?

Ultimately, the one we are called to imitate is our perfect, holy Father in heaven (Eph. 5:1). We press toward the mark when we walk as his children, the children of light.
Pray or sing Psalter #89.

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<td><strong>Three Sufficients</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Read Matthew 6</strong></td>
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| Paul describes how he presses toward the mark this way, “Forgetting the things that are behind and reaching for the things that are in front of me.” Paul doesn’t allow the temptation to dwell on past sins—or past blessings—to hinder his progress. Neither must we cling sentimentally to the past or despair over sins of which we’ve repented—sins that God has forgiven. Nor may we worry about the future. The evil that you will face today is sufficient to the day; that is, it is the full amount that you are called to bear and that you are capable of bearing today. You are capable of bearing it because there is another sufficient: God’s grace, the strength that is made perfect in weakness. He has promised, “As thy days, so shall thy strength be.” (Deut. 33:25).
Your days may be hectic or dull and lonely. Whatever the case may be with you, God gives each of us sufficient
The Foundation of God Stands Sure
Read Psalms 11 and 12
I’m currently reading the memoir of a woman who survived World War II. As I read, I tremble at the cruelty she and her loved ones endured. Yet through their trials they clung to this truth, “The Lord trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth.” They trusted that the Lord would recompense those who harmed them for their evil deeds.

Occasionally I take the time to check the news. Every time, without fail, there are horrible headlines, headlines that detail gruesome murders, terrible wickedness, and the persecution of our fellow saints who live in other lands. What David writes is true still today, “The wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted.”

Do you trust in God’s foundation even when you are confronted by the darkness of this evil world? “The foundation of God stands sure,” declares the Holy Spirit in 2 Tim. 2:19. “It has this seal: The Lord knows those who are his.”

Pray or sing Psalter #21.

Speaking the Lord’s Pure Words
Read Psalm 12
David cries out to the Lord in Psalm 12. It seems to him as if there are no more good men on the earth. What is the defining characteristic of the unrighteous who surround him? Their wicked and deceitful speech.

People of God, do you guard your tongues? Our tongues are capable of great evil or great good. According to the Heidleberg Catechism, God’s ninth commandment requires that we falsify no man’s words, that we not backbite or slander, and that we avoid all lies and deceit as the work of the devil. Not only that, it also demands that we speak the truth and defend and promote the honor and good character of our neighbors. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh,” said our Lord in Matt. 12. “A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.”

Knowing that, our prayer should be Psalm 141:3, “Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.”

Pray or sing Psalter #386.

The Prize
Read Revelation 21
Paul presses toward the mark, the finish line, because he desires the prize. The prize of the high calling of God is realized in stages. First, it is realized when one is redeemed, purchased by the death of Christ. One who is redeemed is also regenerated: the power of Christ’s resurrection life is planted in his heart. That one grows in his knowledge of our Savior, and he also partakes in the suffering that our Lord also endured. The one who suffers for Christ’s sake rejoices in this truth: “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him” (2 Tim2:12).

The kingdom over which we’ll reign with our Lord is not an earthly kingdom. It’s a heavenly kingdom, in which we’ll finally and fully realize what it means to be found in Christ. Of those who live with that hope as the earnest desire of their hearts Paul says, “Our conversation is in heaven.” By conversation he means not just their speech, but their entire course of life. Is that true of your life?

Pray or sing Psalter #32.

God’s Foundation
Read Psalm 11
We considered Psalm 11 in part several weeks ago, focusing on the truth that the righteous Lord and his people love righteousness. Today we return to Psalm 11.

David pens this psalm as the city of God is under attack. As the wicked ready their weapons, David wonders, “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?”

Those literal structures of which David spoke pointed to a New Testament fulfillment. The foundation of God’s church is the doctrine of the scriptures. “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph. 2:19, 20). The foundation of God’s truth is attacked in our day as really as Jerusalem was being attacked by enemy troops before David’s eyes. You and I are called to defend that foundation. That calling requires that we have a thorough and accurate knowledge of God’s truth. When his word is our foundation, we will withstand the attacks of the enemy like a house built on a rock withstands the storm.

Pray or sing Psalter #20.

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Pray or sing Psalter #20.
The Reformed confession of providence includes the confession that God is sovereign over evil. This is a particular emphasis of the Reformed confession of providence. The Belgic Confession in article 13 gives a general statement of the doctrine of providence and quickly moves to an extended treatment of the doctrine of providence and evil. The Heidelberg Catechism in its teaching of providence singles out “whatever evils he sends men, in this valley of tears” and speaks not only of “prosperity,” but also of “adversity.”

This brings up the problem of evil: if God is all-good and all-powerful, why is there evil in the world? From one viewpoint the explanation of evil in the world is rather easy because of evil’s origin in Satan through his corruption of his glory and then through the sin of Adam; evil is in the universe. Often the statement of the problem of evil ignores the origin of sin: God made Adam in the garden on the sixth day and told him that in the day he ate of the forbidden tree he would surely die. God did not make men so evil or the creation so marred, but he made them very good, which at the very least means perfect and without sin or suffering. Evil is man’s fault, and ultimately every believer in his suffering in this world must confess his part in the existence of evil in the world because he is guilty of Adam’s sin.

This is the practical purpose of the penetratingly bold question regarding misery in the Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day 3: “Did God, then, make man so wicked and perverse?” Man, every man, must confess his fault in the existence of evil, for in Adam all sinned. Over that fall God was sovereign, controlling and executing it.

From another viewpoint the explanation of evil, especially the suffering of the ungodly in this world, is not perplexing for the believer who knows the righteous and holy wrath of God against sin, and that God punishes sin “temporally and eternally,” as the Heidelberg Catechism teaches. Sometimes the punishment of sin is success and hardness in sin so that in the language of Psalm 73, God sets the wicked in slippery places by their earthly prosperity in order to cast them into destruction. The wicked lays his head on his silk and feather pillow and wakes up in hell, like the rich man in Jesus’ parable. Sometimes the punishment is such that the unbeliever and wicked suffer in this life.

The worst of suffering for the wicked in this life is nothing compared to hell. To suffer at man’s hand is nothing in comparison to the presence of God in his wrath. This is what Jesus meant when he said, “Do not fear those who kill the body only, but fear him who kills body and soul in hell.”

But that does not yet answer the question, why the fall and all that misery? Was it included in God’s decree and controlled by his providence? Why? Further, what of the suffering of God’s dear children, his friends and servants, those whose sins he has forgiven for Christ’s sake and whom he blesses so that his favor rests on them all their days? How is the suffering of the elect to be explained?

So we must explain and we can explain the teaching of the Bible and the Reformed creeds that God in his providence is sovereign over all evil. God’s sovereignty over evil means that God decreed evil in his counsel, that he controls and carries out in the world the execution of his counsel, yet in such a way that he is not the author of sin, and cannot be charged with those sins or that wickedness.

With regard to wicked men and devils, God upholds them in their wicked natures and rebellious lives. With regard to the sins of men and devils, God decreed these things as that which he hates and for which he has determined a good end. With regard to his government of sin, he does so in such a way that he cannot be charged with those sins or that wickedness.

With regard to the suffering of his people, nothing befalls them in this life except by his will; it comes
from his own hand, and he turns it to their profit. By the confession of God’s sovereignty over evil we mean that God governs and controls it all for a good purpose: he averts all evil or turns it to the profit of his people. All things work together for good to them that love God, who are the called according to his purpose. All things must serve Jesus Christ. That is, God has determined the utter defeat of evil and its just punishment too.

Whenever we say that, objectors immediately say that this doctrine makes God the author of sin.

First, we reply to these objectors that the burden of proof lies with them. They must prove that to say that because God decrees evil and controls it, since he is not a man and his relation to all things is not like a man’s, that such a teaching makes him the author of sin. We also add what the apostle Paul said in reply to a pernicious comment of man, “Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God.” Let the objectors establish that the teaching that God as God is sovereign over evil makes him the author of it. The Reformed faith simply says in article 13 of the Belgic Confession: “His power and goodness are so great and incomprehensible, that he orders and executes his work in the most excellent and just manner, even then, when devils and wicked men act unjustly.”

Second, we say to these objectors that the alternative is terrible. If God is not sovereign over evil so that he decreed it and carries it out, then who is sovereign? Is evil a power outside of God? Is the devil sovereign? Or are good and evil two equally sovereign forces dueling in and for the world, while the believer is in the midst, and the outcome is in doubt? Is the relationship between God and evil dualistic? About such dualism the Reformed believer says in the Belgic Confession article 13, “We reject and abhor the error...of the Manichees.” The Manichees taught dualism. Rejecting that Manichean doctrine that evil has its origin of itself, the creeds also reject any denial of the sovereignty of God over evil.

Third, the creeds are perfectly clear on the doctrine. No one who claims to be Reformed can deny this teaching that God is sovereign over evil. The Heidelberg Catechism in its treatment of providence in Lord’s Day 10 teaches that God sends not only herbs, grass, meat, drink, health, and fruitful years, which are certainly good, but also that he sends adversity, drought, barren years, sickness, and poverty. The Belgic Confession, teaching about providence in article 13 that “nothing happens in this world without his appointment” goes on to apply this to the greatest evil—the devil’s and wicked men’s persecution of the church. The Reformed faith says, “God neither is the author of, nor can be charged with, the sins which are committed.”

Fourth, the Reformed faith teaches this on the basis of scripture. The reason that many deny God’s sovereignty over evil is not because scripture is unclear. To deny it is to deny some of the clearest and most pointed scriptural passages about the sovereignty of God. In Moses God says that according to his decree to destroy Pharaoh God hardened Pharaoh’s heart. Amos teaches in Amos 3:6: “Shall there be evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?” This teaching the Bible makes abundantly clear in Job. Job would not have had a problem if he would have said that the devil had done it. That would have been the end of the book of Job. But Job’s problem came—and he gave it the most poignant expression—when he said, “The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” And for forty-one more chapters the book explains that theme.

The Bible teaches with regard to one of the most wicked things done in the whole Old Testament—the cursing of David: “So let him curse, because the LORD hath said unto him, curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so?” (2 Sam. 16:10).

At the heart and as the key to unlock the truth of providence in God’s sovereignty over evil stands the cross of Jesus Christ. The most wicked and most perplexing suffering in the world is not that some human suffers. It is not even that one of God’s elect people suffers, or that I suffer, but it is that the Son of God suffered so at the cross. About all Christ’s suffering the Bible says that God did it. Preaching the cross of Jesus Christ on Pentecost morning, Peter said, “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” (Acts 2:23). Again, explaining its own suffering of the evil of persecution, the church looks again at the cross of Jesus Christ in Acts 4:27–28: “For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.”

The cross unlocks the sovereignty of God over evil. Only by faith in the Christ of the cross, the cross
at which God bruised Jesus Christ for our sins, does one also confess about all evil that God is sovereign and for that evil works the good end. By the greatest evil—the cross—God worked the greatest good—salvation. We see there too the particularity of his dealings with men, for the cross was for his sheep, as Christ said, and not for the reprobate.

Also, by implication, to deny that God is sovereign over evil is to deny that he was likewise sovereign at the cross and thus to deny the cross and to deny salvation in the cross. For if the cross in every detail was not of God, the cross is worthless to accomplish salvation.

Further, in my suffering evil in this world, the cross is the ground of my hope that I stand immovably in God’s favor. God in his providence is not favorable to all, but only to those who are in Christ Jesus by election, redemption, and faith. In the cross of Jesus Christ I believe by faith that I am righteous before God; therefore whether he sends me good or evil, he sends it to me for my profit, and especially any evil that he sends to me in this valley of tears cannot come as a punishment for sin, because he has already judged the believer in the cross.

The cross is also the power to sanctify me in the midst of evil so that that evil works patience, experience, and hope. The cross is God’s testimony to me in the midst of evil that God is favorable toward me and working my salvation. Christ and his cross are the gifts of grace that abound over and above all that was lost in Adam.

In Christ Jesus and his cross we also see the sweeping scale of the scope of providence as it comprehends evil within it. The scope of providence includes all things and brings all things to the goal through the cross, that is, through the way of redemption, through the way of death, darkness, sin, the curse, through resurrection to glory.

In Jesus Christ we see that the purpose of God in the creation of the world never was Adam, but that Adam and his fall and everything that happens after it serve Jesus Christ and the revelation of the glory of God in Jesus Christ, by whom and for whom God made all things and in whom he is determined to wrap up all in a new heaven and a new earth as the eternal habitation of God, Jesus Christ, and just men, women, and children made perfect, and from which all the wicked are dis-inherited.

In God’s sovereignty over evil we have particularly the comfort of the doctrine of providence, which is why the Reformed confess it with such relish. To that comfort we turn next time.

Rev. Langerak is pastor of Crete Protestant Reformed Church in Crete, Illinois.

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The Twenty-ninth Century of His-Story: The Church under the Judges Needs the Office of King

This one hundred-year period includes a great deal of material and marks a shift from life under the judges to life under kings. The familiar stories of Eli and Samuel span this period—Eli serving as a priest and judge at Shiloh at the beginning, and Samuel serving as judge and prophet at the end.

Nine judges served during this last hundred years under the judges, and many judged at the same time but at different places. This period also includes the story of Ruth as God reveals his sovereign work to prepare and bring his anointed king at last to the throne as a picture of Christ. The tapestry of stories
that fill this period of time vary greatly, but all direct our attention to the need for the office of king among God’s people.

As the time for the anointing of a king drew near, the need for the strong exercise of a godly king became more and more clear. Along with the strengthening of the office of king, we also see God providing the blessing of his word and covenantal fellowship in the strengthening of the offices of prophet and priest. God’s people were getting closer to the time when God would set before them a full and complete picture of the church and the wonder of the deliverance from sin that God would work in Christ.

The land had enjoyed rest for forty years after the service of Deborah and Barak, but again plunged deeper than ever into sin. They kept up a superficial worship of God at Shiloh, but gave unashamed expression to their unbridled lust for earthly pleasure in Baal worship. Gideon, whom God would call to be judge, lived in a home and neighborhood where an altar had been erected to Baal. This altar had become the all-important focus of the neighborhood fun and entertainment, and anyone who dared to attack this altar would be sure to feel the wrath of Gideon’s father and the men of the city. In judgment God prepared the Midianites as well as the Amalekites, who stripped the land of its crops and forced many in Israel to live in dens and caves (Judges 6:2). So severe was the oppression that Israel became “impoverished,” as we read in Judges 6:6.

This may well have been the famine that prompted Elimelech and Naomi to leave Israel with their two small boys and flee to Moab to find a place with decent shelter and food to raise their boys. What motivated them seemed to be chiefly a desire to have some earthly peace where they could take care of the earthly needs of a growing young family. Outwardly this would seem to be a reasonable and even wise move, but true godly wisdom would have sought the will of God at Shiloh, stayed where God was pleased to dwell with his people, and faced the enemy in God’s name like a king. Elimelech as the head of this home failed to be a strong spiritual head, and God brought severe judgment upon this family even in Moab. Elimelech died, leaving Naomi a widow with two boys. The boys grew up and married, but they died too, leaving a desolate widow who appeared to have lost everything, even her spiritual heritage.

The story of Ruth is familiar, and we see how God was please to reveal his wisdom and strength even in the weakness and failures of man. God worked with the power of his grace in the heart of Ruth, the widowed Moabitess, wife of one of Naomi’s sons, and she and Naomi returned to Israel. As we well know, this part of the story ends beautifully as God unveils his plan to raise up king David from the generations of Ruth and Boaz.

Meanwhile God had raised up Gideon, a poor farmer, to fight and deliver Israel from what appeared to be an impossibly powerful enemy. In Gideon we see many qualities of a godly king. His name was changed to Jerubbaal to reflect his calling as a “Baal-fighter.” He began with great boldness and zeal for God by opposing Baal worship in his own house and neighborhood, undaunted by the rage of his neighborhood. He then gathered an army and used weapons to fight the Midianites, but God made the army small and the weapons strange to emphasize that the real power behind the king of God’s people was God himself (Judges 7:2). Unlike Elimelech’s weak leadership, the men with Gideon displayed daring, disciplined, and self-denying kingly leadership.

When Israel saw the great value of Gideon as a leader, they wanted to make Gideon a king, but he refused because they saw only Gideon’s bravery
(8:22) and not the reality that it was “the Lord their God, who had delivered them” (v. 34). The people were not ready yet for an earthly king in whom they would be directed to the spiritual kingship of Christ. Gideon also displayed his weakness. He understood the office of king, but brought trouble and sin into Israel by his foolish intrusion into the office of priest by making an ephod (8:24–27), which introduced worship and fellowship with God in a way God had not commanded. Blessing among God’s people comes only in the way of exercising the offices in accordance with God’s direction. Not until Christ comes and the Holy Spirit is poured out is God pleased to have the threefold office of prophet, priest, and king exercised in the heart of each believer.

At this time God is pleased to give us an intimate peek into two more covenant homes in Israel: Eli’s and Elkanah’s. As Elimelek’s, these also were weak and sorely lacking in the godly spiritual direction of the husband as head and king. At the beginning of this period, Eli was about fifty years old. He was married, raising his family of two boys, and serving as priest in Shiloh. As the priest, his heart ached to see so much confusion and apostasy in Israel as the people came with their sacrifices and news from across the land. Though his heart ached, he seemed to lack the zeal and courage to exercise this office properly. Without the exercise of the office of prophet to bring God’s word, and the office of king to enforce godly rule, even Eli’s home life was in a sorry state. As Eli’s own sons began to take up the work of the priesthood, they did what they wanted and gave no regard to the word of God concerning what parts of the sacrifice they might eat. Living for their own self-satisfaction, they eventually began to molest the women who came, and they made a complete mockery of the priesthood. This became the occasion for God to reveal to Eli that his family would soon be removed from the service of the priesthood. God has a purpose in this sad history too, as he turns the priesthood over to the last remaining family of Aaron to picture Christ as the one and only high priest.

While Eli neglected to discipline his boys, a young wife, Hannah, was sinking into the misery of a home where she had to share a husband with a woman who mocked her for failing to bear children. Those in Israel who sought covenant fellowship with God came to Shiloh to bring their offerings to God and be reassured of God’s covenant promise to send the Savior who would deliver his people from the bondage of sin. Some, like Hannah, prayed fervently, but had little in the way of instruction and guidance. Many of the people that the high priest Eli encountered at Shiloh were living ungodly lives, so much so that Eli’s first thought concerning Hannah was that she was drunk. Eli listened to her desire for a child and her willingness to consecrate him to serve God in Shiloh, and God blessed his church with Samuel, who would grow up at Shiloh and become a great leader and prophet for the people of God. By the end of this period, God raises up Samuel to be a strong and faithful prophet and prepares the way for a strong and faithful high priest in Zadok, and a strong and faithful king in David.

The story of Eli, his sons, and the work of Samuel serve as a setting for the work of the remaining judges and the story of Ruth. In all this history, God directs our attention to his work of preserving his church and preparing his people for the coming king. God’s people had now been in Canaan for about 250 years. If we can make an analogy with child development, this had been the time of emerging adulthood when the young person has left father and mother to live on his own. The prospect of entering into real life with a good job, paying one’s own expenses, and having one’s own place and property is exciting. “I’m free from the rules of living under the roof of mom and dad, and am able to establish my own life within the sphere of God’s laws.” After some years of living in independence and experiencing some troubles and hardships, the fun and excitement wears off and we begin to look again to mom and dad for advice. Israel too was gaining a new appreciation for the power of sin and the need they had for the promised Christ before they could enjoy covenantal fellowship with God. Every man had been living and doing what was right in his own eyes; but not having the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to live in each heart and the power of the resurrected Lord ruling as king in their hearts, life in Canaan had become miserable.

We have already taken a brief look at Gideon’s work of deliverance from a powerful alliance of enemies and noticed how his godly leadership had given Israel a taste for the blessings of the office of king. One man in particular could see the value of having the offices of prophet, priest, and king combined—a man able to communicate with God through the ephod and priesthood and to lead...
boldly against all enemies—but this man tried to combine them apart from God for personal glory and ambition. His name, Abimelech, means “my father, [a] king.” He tried to take the offices upon himself through his own wicked scheming and for his own glory and power (9:1–3), but it is God himself who will choose and establish these offices. Abilimelech’s way is the way of antichrist within the church—to use the offices of prophet, priest, and king for man’s glory. Even though his motives and goals were entirely ungodly, God used his ambition and activity to judge and destroy the worship of Baal that had developed to the point that it had incorporated the doctrine of God’s covenant and now Baal was worshiped as the covenant God.

God preserved his church through the work of a number of other judges all throughout Israel before he established the office of king. Tola (10:1) judged in northern Israel on the west side of the Jordan for 23 years while Jair served on the east side of Jordan for 22 years. Jephthah served in the east against Ammon, bringing a period of about 50 years of rest during the middle of this century for this part of the land, a rest preserved by Ibsan, Elon, and Abdon.

As this twenty-ninth century of his-story comes to a conclusion, we find Samson in the southwest of Israel displaying in a unique way the quality of a king that stands at the forefront of the office of king. In himself he is a weak and sinful man just like everyone else, but being ordained of God and serving under him in obedience to him, he leads with great boldness and strength to defeat the enemies of the church. Clearly his awesome strength did not reside simply in his muscle and bone, but it was to be found in obedience to God. Samuel needed to remind Saul and all Israel of this when Saul failed as a king in his pride and disobedience. When Samson looked to God, God used him to bring deliverance.

Samson died fighting, and even though the slaughter was great, the destruction of the Philistines was completed shortly after his death by Samuel at Mizpah (1 Samuel). Samuel was chiefly a prophet who spent his time and energy bringing God’s word to the people, and as a judge he demonstrated the power of God to deliver his people from their enemies. “So the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more into the coast of Israel: and the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. And the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron even unto Gath; and the coasts thereof did Israel deliver out of the hands of the Philistines. And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites. And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. And he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places. And his return was to Ramah; for there was his house; and there he judged Israel; and there he built an altar unto the Lord” (1Sam. 7:13–17).

To Samuel God spoke and gave hope to Israel that God had not forsaken his people. He battled hard against apostasy, and God used him to open the eyes of Israel and speak to them his word. His role as prophet came to its conclusion with the anointing of two kings: the first king, Saul, and then David. By the end of this century, the people of God are able to see more clearly the need and value of the office of king exercised according to God’s purpose for his people.

The time of the judges is now coming to a close, and soon God will reveal more about the glory and power of the coming Savior through the office of king. The earthly enemy is only a picture of our spiritual enemies of sin. Only in Christ our king do we find victory and peace from the oppression of sin. This time of the judges made more and more clear the depth of sin and the kind of Savior that would be necessary to deliver man fully from the bondage of sin. It also makes clear that we can begin to enjoy the blessings of deliverance from sin even while we live on this earth when the ministering offices of prophet, priest, and king are alive and well in our day-to-day life. When the judges restored the office of prophet and preached the gospel faithfully, God used this preaching in connection with the office of priest to restore covenantal fellowship with God. The covenant also needs the office of king actively ruling in the church. It is a rule of power over the wicked and a rule of grace within the people of God. May we also exercise the offices of prophet, priest, and king in our own lives and in our own homes as we wait for the final coming of our Lord and King.

John is a member of Hull Protestant Reformed Church in Hull, Iowa and a former editor of Beacon Lights.
Be still, my soul: the Lord is on thy side. 
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain. 
Leave to thy God to order and provide; 
In every change, He faithful will remain. 
Be still, my soul: thy best, thy heavenly Friend 
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end. 

Throughout our journey here on this earth we come across so many different things, some of which may be joyful, and others of which we don't see happening. We are tried, we are tempted, and we are brought low. We meet people, and some stick by us, and others come and go. Some we grow up with, others we find along the way. Whatever is put in our pathway, we must remember this is God's perfect plan for us. We may get angry and we may not like what is happening, or even understand why. We often times don't have an answer for anything and the best we can come up with is, “I don't know.” We feel lost, we feel beaten down, we feel alone, and we feel broken. We don't understand why, and often times we wish we could reverse the clock and wish it all away, or wish we didn't say or do a certain thing. The fact is we can't; time goes on every day, and what God plans for us will happen, good or bad. As sinful human beings, we may get angry with God and shake our fist and say why? We don't understand it, neither do we want to bring ourselves to understand it. And sometimes understanding it may never fully come to you; other times it's clear and plain to you down the road. 

God has a purpose in everything he does. Nothing happens by chance. It’s all in his will that everything happens. He brings upon us trials and tribulations, so that our faith can grow stronger. He brings people in and out of our lives so we can learn to build true relationships and make other relationships stronger. He brings grief and sadness so we can learn to be happy and grow past the tears. He brings silence and anger to teach us a lesson. He brings problems and stress to teach us to rely on him and search his scriptures. He closes doors, and lets others open. 

Everything has a purpose, whether we see it right away or not. It's all of him, and it's all of grace. He brings mercy to those who cry out to him for forgiveness. He shows compassion to those who cast their burdens on him. He shows us love by being our heavenly Father, so that we may grow closer to him each and every day. He gives answers to those who pray faithfully and sincerely. He shows compassion and sends relief to those who show they are truly his children. He is our God. And as weak, sinful, dead humans we don't always understand. We are afraid and lost and often don't know where to turn. We don't know what is next or where to go from here. Be still, my soul. We must not fret or wonder why or how. God is always there. He is on our side during our best moments and during our weakest moments. He is our Father. He is faithful. He will provide. He never forsakes us. 

“In every change, He faithful will remain. Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.” God is there. If something is gone or taken away, or something is thrown at us unexpectedly, it's for a reason. Sometimes, God brings things back. He may heal us from a sickness, or someone who wasn’t there anymore God can lead back to us and us back to them. But it’s all of his will; I say it again, but it’s so true. He deems what he seems fit to do. He will never leave us. He is always there. Lean on him. Trust him. Pray to him. Love him. There is a reason. There is a time. There is a purpose. Be still, my soul.
BAPTISMS
“...that He will dwell in us and sanctify us to be members of Christ, applying unto us...the washing away of our sins and the daily renewing of our lives.”
The sacrament of holy baptism was administered to:
Whitney Renee, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Lee & Lauren Wiltjer—Crete, IL
Keturah Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Luke & Rebecca Koops—Georgetown, MI
Bella Ann, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Craig Feenstra—Grace, MI
Clara Ann, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brent & Kara Kregel—Grandville, MI
Henry Jay, son of Mr. & Mrs. Matthew & Erin Rutgers—Hope, MI
Benjamin Richard, son of Mr. & Mrs. Rick & Mari DeVries—Hope, MI
Brooklynn Ann, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Justin & Candi Vink—Hull, IA
Troy Ryan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Mark & Nancy Kooima—Hull, IA
Daisy Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ed & Mandy Tolsma—Pittsburgh, PA/Southwest, MI
Sadie Darlene, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Keith & Pam Wynia—Sioux Falls, SD

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:
Caitlin Smeda—Faith, MI
Jared Cammenga—Faith, MI
Cody Bomers—Hope, MI
Sydney Burrows—Hope, MI
James Kamps—Southwest, MI
Kevin Schipper—Southwest, MI
Jonathan Tash—Spokane, WA
Sarah Kleyn—Spokane, WA

MARRIAGES
“For this God is our God forever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.” Psalm 48:14
Mr. Drew Looyenga and Miss Hope Start—Georgetown, MI
Mr. Clint Meelker and Miss Lesley Tolsma—Redlands, CA
The Hungry Sheep

The sheep’s stomach rumbled. It wasn’t a gentle, almost hungry rumble, but a growling, twisting rumble that shook the sheep’s body. He needed to find something to eat. He trotted into the windswept hills and looked for something to eat.

All around him, dust blew into the air. The little tufts of grass were all spiky and dry. The hungry sheep nibbled on a few of them, but the sharp, dry stalks cut his mouth and dried out his tongue. He couldn’t eat grass like that, so the hungry sheep kept searching. But no matter how far he searched, he couldn’t find any grass that he could eat.

All that dry grass made him thirsty. The sheep heard the rumbling of a river. He followed the sound to the banks of a roiling, muddy river. His hooves sank into the mud as he tried to get close enough to the water to drink. When he could take a few sips, the muddy water tasted bad and made his stomach hurt, so the thirsty sheep kept searching. But no matter how far he searched, he couldn’t find any water that he could drink.

The hungry and thirsty sheep collapsed in the dust. He couldn’t find anything to eat or drink. Hopeless, the sheep looked for help. The shepherd leaned over him. “Come with me, my sheep. I have green grass and still waters.”

The sheep followed the shepherd. The shepherd led the sheep to a pasture that had been carefully tended by the shepherd so that the grass grew green and lush even though it was surrounded by wilderness.

The sheep munched happily on the grass. The tender stalks felt good in his mouth and filled his stomach. The sheep had never tasted grass that good and green.

When the sheep was filled, the shepherd led him to the well set in the middle of the pasture and surrounded by a stone wall. The shepherd showed him the gap in the stone wall and guided him down the winding stairs that led down into the depths of the well. At the bottom, a round pool held the clear-est water the sheep had ever seen. The sheep knelt and slurped at the water. It was cold and sweet. It soothed his aching mouth.

When he was done, the sheep lay down in the green grass because he felt safe in the Shepherd’s care. And in the shepherd’s green pastures beside the still waters of the well, the sheep was always filled.

Questions to think about:
1. Read Psalm 23 and Matthew 5:1–12 by yourself or with your parents. What is the connection between these passages?
2. In the area of Palestine, grass had to be tended and watered by the shepherds to make it green. Wells had to be dug and stairs built to them so the sheep could drink. What can we learn about how our Shepherd actively provides green grass and clear water for us?
“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:” 1 Peter 5:8

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