Beacon Lights

May 2015

EDITORIAL  Wise Strangers and Sojourners  -  Page 2
CHRISTIAN LIVING  Implications of Public Confession—XI  Page 5
OUR GOODLY HERITAGE  Interview with Raymond Bruinsma (Part 3)  Page 8
POEM  Sing Praise  Page 12
DEVOTIONAL  The Daily Press—May 8–June 7  Page 13
CHRISTIAN LIVING  Facing Our Last Enemy  Page 19
  Seeking Success  Page 20
  Not Unto Us, O Lord  Page 21
POEM  Mother’s Day  Page 23
SERVING THE CHURCH  Lively Youthful Sober Servants: Active in Society Life  Page 24
CHURCH NEWS  Page 26
LITTLE LIGHTS  The Dark Valley  Page 27

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Volume LXXIV Number 5
Youth people, are you wise? I suspect that most of you would answer affirmatively. Some of you may be correct to a degree. But I suspect that not everyone who answers positively is completely honest. Most of you have a ways to go when it comes to wisdom. Young people generally are not noted for their wisdom. I write this not as an insult to you, but as a fact based on observation and experience. If you are honest with yourselves and with me, you will have to admit that all of us to one degree or another are not always wise.

I do not pretend to be the world’s expert on wisdom. When I think back to when I was a teenager (despite the fact that that was a long time ago), I did some stupid stuff. By the way, in case anyone does not like my choice of words, I would point out that John Calvin himself used the word stupid with exactly the same meaning that it has today; he equated it with foolish. Nor would I pretend, even at my advanced age, that I have arrived at ultimate wisdom. I’d like to have the chance to make different choices and decisions. I won’t tell you what these are, but the truth is that there are no do-overs in life, as you no doubt are learning.

However, it is your calling and responsibility to be wise. Wisdom does and must characterize us as strangers and sojourners. This leads us to ask, what is wisdom? This question needs to be answered because the Bible teaches us that wisdom is one of God’s attributes. We therefore must answer what wisdom is.

Noted Reformed theologian Louis Berkhof de-
fines wisdom as God’s perfection whereby he applies his knowledge to the attainment of his ends in a way that glorifies him most. God’s own glory is his ultimate purpose, and he uses the best possible means to achieve the result of that glory, whether or not we always understand the means. The apostle Paul teaches this truth in Romans 11:33 when he exclaims, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!”

Although both knowledge and wisdom are mentioned in this verse, Berkhof goes on to say that although they are closely related, knowledge and wisdom are not the same. Knowledge is acquired by study and learning, while wisdom results from an intuitive insight into things. Knowledge is theoretical, while wisdom is practical. The relation between the two is that knowledge forms the basis for wisdom. Wisdom should arise out of knowledge, and should be the application of knowledge, although this is not necessarily true. A person can be very knowledgeable without being wise, and vice versa.

An example will make this point clear. During my high school and college years I worked for a man who had only an eighth grade education. Yet he was one of the wisest people I have ever known. Despite his lack of formal learning, he served repeatedly as an elder in the church. Besides being my employer, he also monitored my life, and when I dated a girl of whom he did not approve, as I sometimes did, he would say (in Dutch, which was funnier than in English), “There is no pot so crooked that you can’t find a lid to fit it.” It’s a good thing I listened to him, because he was almost always right.

It should be emphasized that wisdom is a spiritual and ethical concept. Wisdom is not natural and earthly. People are not born wise, and the natural man cannot become wise by learning or by practice. The world has its philosophical idea of wisdom, but this is not the same as the scriptural idea. In fact, often the wisdom of the world is really stupidity.

True wisdom has its root in God. God is the all-wise; he is wisdom. Proverbs 9:10 makes this clear: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.” To worship the only all-wise God is to be truly wise, and to know the holy God is understanding. Proverbs 8 personifies wisdom, beginning in the first verse: “Doth not wisdom cry? And understanding put forth her voice?” Please take the time to read this chapter, which tells us the content of what wisdom cries.

Moses calls the people of Israel to keep God’s commandments, “for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people” (Deut. 4:6). Conversely, if the people of Israel corrupt themselves and become a crooked and perverse generation, they will be called a “foolish people and unwise” (Deut. 32:5-6).

James makes this point by way of contrast when he says that the wisdom of this world is “earthly, sensual, devilish,” while “the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy” (James 3:15, 17).

Just as the opposite of knowledge is ignorance, so the opposite of wisdom is foolishness. This is clearly taught in Psalm 14:1 and Psalm 53:1, where we read the identical words, “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.” Foolishness is not ignorance of the truth that God is the true God, but a refusal to acknowledge that he is indeed God and man’s putting himself in God’s rightful place.

Solomon is the ultimate example of the difference between knowledge and wisdom. According to scripture he was the wisest man who ever lived. People from all over the world came to learn from him, and he wrote 3,000 proverbs or truths, which still today are true and profound. He knew the truth of God in the Old Testament as did no one else. But although he knew better, he took hundreds of women sexual desires overcame and annulled his wisdom. Despite his extensive knowledge, in his later life his sexual desires overcame and annulled his wisdom. Although he knew better, he took hundreds of women from heathen nations as his wives and concubines, which resulted eventually in the division of the kingdom of Israel. He was indeed wise, but yet foolish.

I would be remiss if I did not point out that the ultimate manifestation of God’s wisdom is Christ. I have already pointed out that God’s own glory is his ultimate purpose, and that he uses the best possible means to achieve the result of that glory. God’s wise purpose is his glory through the salvation of his people. Christ is the means that God has chosen to use to realize this goal. Through the salvation of his people in Christ, God is glorified. Proverbs is the ultimate book of wisdom, and it has rightfully been said that wherever you find the word wisdom, you may substitute the word Christ. We may therefore say that wisdom=Christ. This means that as we believe
in Christ and follow his teachings, we are wise in the sense that we live out of Christ and that we govern our lives as those who are saved.

Now that we have defined and explained what wisdom is, we must ask how all of this applies to you as young people. Wisdom is not a theory, but a very practical idea that has specific implications for your lives.

In terms of our calling to walk as strangers and sojourners, wisdom means that we do not walk on the wide road that leads to the broad gate, which in turn leads to eternal destruction. This is crucial and basic. Such spiritual foolishness and stupidity result in everlasting death. If you do not conduct your lives in harmony with Christ’s teachings to the glory of God, you go lost. On that scripture is clear. In contrast, to walk along the narrow road that leads to the restricted gate, which in turn leads to eternal blessedness, is true wisdom. I do not say all of this as a threat that is intended to scare you into heaven (which is impossible), but as a biblical fact.

Rather, the point is that wisdom is exceedingly practical. It has to do with how you live your lives. Wisdom implies that you live your lives in harmony with reality. This applies to your finances and your making provision for the future, as illustrated by the example of the ant. Ants are one of the smallest insects God made, but they are perhaps the most industrious. Proverbs 6:6–8 gives us an example to follow: “Go to the ant, thou sluggard (lazy person); consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.”

Commenting on this passage, Herman Hoeksema in his *Reformed Dogmatics* writes:

What are the ways of the ant? The wise man explains: The ant gathers her food in the time of harvest and provides her meat in summer, not in winter. She adapts herself to that reality by gathering her food when it may be had, thus providing for the time when food cannot be gathered. In contrast with this wisdom of the ant, the sluggard is the fool who faces the same reality, fails to apprehend it and adapt himself to it, and therefore is put to shame and destroyed by that reality (vv. 7–11).

As you mature and have to deal with the finances of your future family, young people, wisdom dictates that you remember and follow the example of the ant. Don’t forget that this is God’s example for you to follow as you walk on your earthly sojourn.

Another example is the figure of the two builders that Jesus used in Matthew 7:24–27. The foolish builder constructed his house on the sand; it did not have a proper foundation. Probably in an effort to cut corners and increase his profits, he did not take into account the inevitable and predictable storms and floods. The result was that his house was destroyed. The wise builder built his house on a rock; it had a solid and firm foundation. The result was that despite the ravages of storms and floods, his house stood strong. This example applies to those of you young people who are thinking about entering the building trades. You need to be wise in all aspects of your trade, from architects to framers to the various trades, to the completed building.

As Hoeksema points out further, wisdom is skill. When he was building God’s temple, Solomon sought out the best tradesmen he could find, since God’s house required the absolute best possible workmanship. While the people of Israel had at least some of the required skills, apparently they needed some assistance and supervision. Solomon therefore sent to Huram, the king of Tyre, with the request found in 2 Chronicles 2:7: “Send me now therefore a man cunning to work in gold, and in silver, and brass, and iron, and purple, and crimson, and blue, and that can skill to grave with the cunning men that are with me in Judah and Jerusalem, whom David my father did provide.”

According to account of scripture, the result of this wisdom (skill) was the wonderfully beautiful temple, an Old Testament picture of the dazzling splendor of heaven, where God will dwell with his people in the brightness of his glory eternally. The point is that wisdom was necessary to the building of the temple. The means of using skilled (wise) workmen was necessary to the goal of constructing the temple according to God’s instructions and to his glory. Once again there is application to you young people in the choice of your vocation. There is probably more than one application, but from the viewpoint of wisdom, one thing that we can take away from this example is that if something is worth doing, it is worth doing well, and to the glory of God.

Acquiring wisdom is a learning process not just for you as young people, but for all God’s people, regardless of age. The difference, I think, is in the steepness of the learning curve. In turn, the steepness of the learning curve depends in large measure on
Dailly experience teaches us that privileges always involve obligations. It is therefore readily understood that he who attains the full communion of his church and the privilege of partaking of the holy supper is also called upon to share the financial burden of the church. The term financial burden must, however, be immediately suppressed and be translated into the Christian terms: a free-will offering. Your promise to contribute for this purpose is one of the important implications of your confession, and although few think of it on that occasion, it does represent one of the stipulations demanded of you.

Long ago the Lord God said: “Take ye from among you an offering unto the Lord; whosoever is of a willing heart, let him bring an offering of the Lord: gold, and silver, and copper.” From this it may be concluded that he who does not bring an offering has not a willing heart. One who is unwilling to serve the Lord with his goods may not come to make his public confession. By your confession you promise to love God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. You certainly are not doing that when you refuse to lay an offering of your goods upon his altar.

One person is inseparably attached to his money; another transcends the miserliness of that. These

Christian Living

Implications of Public Confession

XI

THE ART OF GIVING

“Of a willing heart.”
Exodus 35:5

Some of you learn wisdom in the hard school of negative experience. Many examples could be given, and you can make your own. Perhaps a simple one will be sufficient. Let’s assume that you live in a cold winter climate that receives snow, which in turn produces slippery roads. You drive too fast around a curve, lose control of your car, and wrap it around a tree. After that it doesn’t run very well. After purchasing another car, you drive around the same curve, but this time you slow down and don’t crack up your car. This is wisdom. If, however, after purchasing another car, you go too fast around the same curve and hit the same tree, this is foolishness. The score is now tree two, car zero. Admittedly this is a pretty juvenile example, but I think it drives home the point: we learn—or should learn—from our mistakes. The wise do; the foolish never quite get it.

Most of you who are reading this article are students either in high school or in college. This means that you are acquiring knowledge: mostly factual information that you need to know. The question is whether or not this knowledge translates into wisdom. For the unbelieving world it does not, because the wicked cannot use this knowledge and apply it correctly; their understanding is darkened, so that they cannot rightly use the knowledge of God even in the creation or in history. But for you who are strangers and sojourners, knowledge forms the basis for wisdom in the scriptural sense.

So what is your calling? Proverbs 23:12 instructs: “Apply thine heart unto instruction, and thine ears to the words of knowledge.” The Hebrew word translated “apply” means “to cause to go in.” This means that instruction and words of knowledge (synonyms of wisdom) must become part of us. Similarly in Proverbs 2:2 we are enjoined to “incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding.” Nor may we postpone the acquisition of wisdom, for Psalm 90:12 asks God, “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”

Strangers and sojourners, may you be blessed with wisdom!
two attitudes definitely manifest spiritual conditions. You can observe that this is true from the case of the rich young ruler. We might say that he also wished to make his confession. Jesus asked about his relationship to the law, and he replied that he thought he fulfilled the requirements. Then Jesus asked whether he was willing to sell his goods for the sake of the poor. That demand broke his resolve. He went away. He kept his money, but he lost his God.

It is obvious therefore that one’s readiness to offer freely is mostly a part of one’s confession. The church that neglects to examine those who come to her to make confession also in this matter does not do her full duty.

“Whosoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it.” That is what God said. The statement is a touchstone by which the quality of your spirituality can be tested. The implications of the statement are that you cannot by one gift absolve yourself of responsibility for giving. A special offering on the day of confession does not suffice. You should then declare yourself and ever after show yourself to be willing to serve your God by means of your goods.

Yes, you must both serve and honor him by means of these. To serve in this connection means that you must help to maintain what is necessary for the service of the Lord. To honor means that besides this you must periodically give special offerings. A child faithfully serves his father when his father needs his services. But when his father’s birthday comes, the child honors him by some token of regard, of esteem, and of love. It is in that way that you must both serve and honor your Lord with your gifts.

One practical difficulty perhaps militates against the fulfillment of this requirement in the case of those who are just beginning to attend the holy supper. Young men and women frequently have no independent income at this time. Those among the lower classes who work have funds of their own, and those among the higher classes who are granted legacies or allotments have them also; but the others, who are many, still live with their parents and have no independent income. Now it is remarkable that in the past the lower and higher classes gradually learned the art of giving, and that stinted giving is most characteristic of the many in the middle class of society. This phenomenon can be ascribed to the fact that those who earned independently were in a position to begin giving as soon as they had made their confession, and that the sons and daughters who live for a time with their parents after their confession missed this desirable discipline. For that reason it is important to emphasize that giving depends on a principle rather than upon the quantity of one’s earthly goods.

It frequently happens that sons and daughters do manage to honor their parents by an occasional gift, but that the urge, the desire, and the zeal to contribute to the Lord seldom stirs them. At collections taken in church they contribute what father or mother has put into their hands. In that way they themselves give nothing. Hence it is to be advised that children, small tots excepted, be urged to give from their own funds. There is more of true giving in one penny from their own bank than in ten simply conveyed from their pocket to the collection plate. He who makes his confession must give. He himself must give, even though he must earn what he gives.

“Whosoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it.” He must bring it because it is needful and because it blesses him. Yes, his offerings are needful. The church of God is expensive; it costs a great deal. Jesus said to the rich young ruler: “Sell all thy goods.” The service of the word and of the sacraments may not be allowed to suffer because of financial embarrassment. The ministers of these must be provided with the needful things. Of them the holy apostle says: “Who goeth a warfare at any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard and eateth not of the fruit thereof? Who feedeth a flock and eateth not of the milk of the flock?” And there are other needs within the church. The service of education and of mercy should flourish. The Heidelberg Catechism advises that in order to keep the Sabbath day truly, you must see that the ministry of the Gospel and the schools are maintained. That is the service of education. And the service of mercy, according to the Catechism, is “to contribute to the relief of the poor, as becomes a Christian.” Besides, the church of God is not an anthill that gathers up for itself only. Hence the gospel of the kingdom must be brought through the church to all the miserable without. Remember that there are two kinds of missions: that of the word and that of mercy. The more bountifully and flourishingly each of these can be carried on, the more gloriously is the name of the Lord praised. Indeed, a church is costly. Ideally the church should be much, much richer than she now is.
It is needful therefore to bring an offering and to bring that offering willingly. That must be done not only because the church needs it, but also because it blesses him who gives. God could have created a church that needed no money. The life of the church in the wilderness proves that. Hence the fact that he has now called into being a church that needs money, and that needs much money, has a spiritual significance. Our giving is a part of our sanctification. “The love of money is the root of all evil.” Anything therefore that restrains us from a love of money is a redeeming and sanctifying influence. Our giving must prove that we are Christians and must each year add to the genuineness of our Christianity. That fact does not suggest that we can earn our salvation by our gifts. Our gifts affect our salvation not at all. If we sold all our goods and gave the money to the poor, and had not love, we would be nothing. Our offerings bless us only when we give them willingly. If we give in order to get praise for ourselves, if we give stingily, if we give in order to get an honorable place in heaven, our offerings avail us nothing. We must give because of love, and only because of love, for God and for our neighbor.

Such giving, however, does most certainly bless us. Our money seems to say to us, “Love me, and forget God and the poor.” God calls, “Give me your heart, and give it not to Mammon.” Hence he who is of a willing heart must bring his gifts, and he will bring them. His giving is far from making him poorer; it makes him much richer.

Bring gold, silver, and brass. These are three metals, and they are listed in the order of a descending scale of value. Accordingly the statement means that each must give in proportion to the amount of wealth it has pleased God to give him. A man says, “I have saved so large a surplus that I think I will retire from business.” But has that man frankly asked himself: “Have I perhaps saved what rightly belonged to God and to his service? Is my surplus really so large that I can live from it, and that I can also help the church to flourish?” Unless he asks and satisfactorily answers those questions, it is sinful for him to desire retirement. God’s demands in this matter of giving are as exacting as that.

The truth is that by nature we are inclined to say, “I and my family must live, must have food, clothing, and shelter; if anything remains after that, let it be given to the church.” However, he who thinks that way about it may not make his confession, for it is obvious that to him the service of God is still a secondary matter. The exact opposite would be far more appropriate: “I and my family need God and his service more than all things else; we will provide for that first, and afterwards for food, shelter, and clothing.” That would be applying Jesus’ rule: “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.”

A tenth of our income should be the least we give. That is little, but it proves that God and his service figure in our lives. After all, giving is a matter of how important we think our bodies and souls, respectively. He who thinks most highly of his body will have little to sacrifice for his soul, for his God. Only he who can confess that his soul is much more important than his body will sacrifice more for it than he does for his body. He only has a willing heart; he only brings his offering.

If you rank among the well-to-do in society, bring gold, not silver or copper. If you rank among the financially poor in society, bring copper. And if your position is between these two, bring silver; bring a nickel or a dime, if you have little; give a dollar if you have been given much.

Place the kingdom first in your life, and give as you have been given. If you follow that rule, all your offerings will be pleasing and acceptable to God. Yes, then the widow’s mite is most acceptable to him.

They that forsake the law praise the wicked:
but such as keep the law contend with them.

Evil men understand not judgment:
but they that seek the Lord understand all things.

—Proverbs 28:4–5
It is July 3, 2008, and this is a second interview with Mr. Raymond Bruinsma. He has additional material that he would like included in this oral history.

RB: Due to my oversight, I left out a lot of information as concerning the family of Louis and Anna Bruinsma. I left out that I was the third of a family of five. I have three brothers, Edward being the oldest, and Wilbur, who has a son, Wilbur Bruinsma, better known as Rev. Bill Bruinsma. I also have a sister, Irene, and a younger brother, Louis Junior—a total of five children, and Mom and Dad, of course.

While living in Highland, Indiana, my father built a nice home on Lincoln Avenue for the family. After a few years, the great depression of 1929 happened. Father lost his job. He could not keep up with the mortgage payments. The rich in those days went about buying up second mortgages, and as soon as a person could not come up with the mortgage payment, they would foreclose and take their profit away.

These were very difficult times for our parents. I can remember the time our father came home from looking for a job. Mother said, “Lou, we don’t have food in the house to feed the family. But I know that we can go to South Holland, to Marie’s (our aunt—my mother’s sister). She will feed us.” Her husband had work in a laundry, which was able to continue during the depression years. Dad agreed, but he said, “I don’t think there’s enough gas in the old Model T to get us there. We will go as far as we can. The Lord will provide.”

Mother went into the closet to get clothing for us children, and she heard a coin drop to the floor. It was a quarter, which could buy two gallons of gas. Off to South Holland we departed to Aunt Marie. She provided a meal for us and sent us home with a box of food.

Our parents had to apply for government relief. And dad finally received a job on the WPA [Works Progress Administration], which was a government work project repairing sidewalks and street repair. Because our parents lost their home in Highland, we moved to Lansing [Illinois]. That was about the year of 1930. We lived in a small home, just a block away from the public school, which we three or four oldest ones attended for a year. I was six years old.

After a few years in Lansing, our parents joined the Protestant Reformed Church in South Holland. One of the VanBaren brothers asked our parents if they would be interested in moving to a small home they had built on their farmland on the Glenwood-Lansing Road, just east of the small town of Glenwood. They could live there rent-free if we would take care of the horses that they used in farming in those days before the tractors came into view. My parents accepted the offer, and we moved into the house which came to be our home for the rest of our childhood into adulthood.

Four of us children completed our eight years of schooling at the Brookwood Public School in Glenwood. Louis Junior, the youngest of the family, went to Calvin Christian School in South Holland. Now that we lived in a farming area, my two oldest brothers and myself were able to find jobs working for farmers in the area, and helped our parents financially, bringing in a little extra money.

Then in 1932 our father received a job at the Ford Motor Company in South Chicago. Things were beginning to turn around. 1937 was the beginning of World War II in Europe. The United States joined in war in 1940, at which time they started to draft, setting up a draft board—all citizens 18 and upward had to register at the local draft board. Ed, already married with one child, was trained in the infantry and sent to Germany in the thick of the battle. God preserved his life, and returned him to his wife and child. Wilbur was in the Navy—a Seebee, myself in the Army as a medical aid man. We both were in the Pacific theater of war, both being exposed to enemy fire. I was wounded in the right shoulder by
shrapnel when a bullet went through my Bible and billfold, even a coin that was in the coin pocket of the billfold. One marvels at the almighty power of our God who guides all of our life, in its every detail. The church and the family of God had been such a blessing to us through the years.

We had been members of the Protestant Reformed Church, receiving faithful catechetical instruction through the years of childhood. Now in our adulthood we have had the truth of the word of God faithfully preached every Sunday, even at this late time in history. We still have young ministers who are faithful in bringing to us the truth of the scriptures. We are hearing the voice of Christ speaking in and through the preached word, comforting and strengthening our spiritual lives. May God keep our churches faithful to the rich heritage he has entrusted to our churches. To God be the glory!

Another thing I would like to add is that we grew up there into adulthood, and we were led by God to our mates. I married Tena Lenting and God blessed us with five children. We received such blessings from the church even in the rearing of our children and the faithful catechetical instruction which they received. It was a marvel how that God spared my life that we had to wait a year before we got married. I was discharged June 2, 1945. My mind was in such a state that I couldn’t have good control of myself. At the drop of a pin, hitting a doorknob, I would dash for a foxhole. So we decided that it would be wise for us to wait for at least a year before we would marry. So we were led by the Spirit, after just a very short courtship (which only began in January of 1943). After waiting that year, on April 25, 1946, we were married by Rev. Schipper.

God led us through many trials. Our children grew up. We had difficulties with the children. Some were rebellious. Some were not. Each child is different from another. When our oldest son was disciplined he would say, “I’m gonna hop on the first train going west, and I’m gonna be gone.” (laughter) The gist of the story is, he grew up and married Grace Tuinstra. They lived in the area around our home in South Holland, but they decided they wanted to go to Loveland, Colorado. So he moved to Colorado. He wrote us a letter and said, “John Heys and I have gone out to Boulder, Colorado. We’re each going to purchase a motorcycle. It’s a big one.” His wife Grace also consented to it, and she signed on the dotted line. She knew how I felt about motorcycles. Well, they purchased it on Friday evening and rode it home. They decided on a Saturday evening they would take a ride up into Estes Park, through the canyon. On their journey to the top of the canyon, they, (and John Heys too) passed two cars. They landed up on the high side of the curve and lost control (this is back in 1971). We received a call that Saturday night at 9:00 informing us that they had been involved in this cycle accident. Our son Ray had already been taken away, and our daughter-in-law was living, just hanging on by a thread.

I can’t help but think how that the church, in all the instruction we have received through the years, came to the forefront. The first text that came to my mind is that text in the Psalms: I kept silence. I didn’t speak a word because I knew the Lord had done it. It’s amazing how immediately you feel the undergirding of God’s almighty arm, strengthening and sustaining you in these trials. It always impressed Tena and me, how that God used this all for bringing Raymond face to face with his Savior. He had to move out there. You know, we speak of accidents. But there are no accidents. It’s all in God’s sovereign control. And we have to be so thankful for God giving to us a church that is faithful in teaching us the sovereignty of God. Immediately, when you have experiences of that nature, it comes to play in your soul. You even have time to thank God for that which he has given to us in Christ. We knew that he took our son who now faced his Savior face-to-face in all his glory.

So, there have been hard trials in our life that the Lord has brought us through. And it’s always thanksgiving to God for that which he has given to us through all these years. Because of all the instruction we’ve received under the preaching of the word, our catechetical instruction which all came to the forefront, and our own personal study of the Scriptures—that’s why we today yet are so thankful that our churches have yet, in this late hour of history, remained faithful to the truth of God’s word. We thank our leaders for that. It’s not that we give them the praise, but God receives all the praise and the glory because he has given to us men who love the truth and defend the truth. And they developed the truth. I have high hopes that in the future, the younger men that are with us today are going to continue to develop that word and we’re going to be continually led in the truth of God’s word. It’s a great blessing to have been a member of the PR churches from an early age already. I was about nine years
old at the time that my parents joined up with the Protestant Reformed Churches, and God has led us faithfully every since.

MHH: That whole incident with the death of your oldest son still bothers you, doesn’t it?

RB: Something, that it bothers me? No. But that you forget, no. God has given us grace sufficient to endure and overcome that trial. But that was ’71, and we still talk about Raymond. “I wonder what Ray would be saying today if he was still living, with the changes that have come about since ’71.” Because there have been many changes in the world situation as well as in the church situation. The younger ministers that have taken over the pulpits. All the old warriors have deceased and gone on to glory, and we have many warriors. I was always impressed because we were friends with your family, Mark. We had times that we would be over at your house and Grandpa Hoeksema would come over—the old, late Herman Hoeksema. There were so many misconceptions of people who did not know him. They thought he was such a stern man. But I said, “No, when you once get to know this man, he has such a love for the truth of God that he has to be dedicated to that.” You don’t make any jokes about any of those religious things. But you could have a good time with him. I always enjoyed it when we’d have an occasion that we would be visiting your folks, and we’d get to meet him. It was a joy.

MHH: Even my own personal recollection of him, which were obviously in his old age, was that he could be and usually was a considerable instigator of problems. He was very good at doing that.

Now, let me follow up a little bit on the interesting comments that you made regarding the time of the Depression. You gave some general background and you told us the general situation of your family. Specifically, you related the incident of going to your aunt’s house to get food because you had none. Follow up on that just a little bit, if you will. So you had supper for one night. What happened then?

RB: We had supper for one night. She sent a box of groceries with us that tided us over for a couple of days. And like I mentioned, my parents went to the government to get relief.

MHH: And that consisted of what?

RB: That consisted of my father finally getting this job on the WPA—that was a government work job. And then we were given a box of food (dried peaches, dried prunes, spaghetti, this canned salmon—my mother made a lot of salmon patties and things like that) and that kind of got us through. My father was an electrician by trade, and he’d pick up a little odd job here and there; if somebody had an electrical problem, he’d go ahead and repair it. And that’s how we got through those years that we didn’t have anything. But it took up until 1940 that they finally got all their medical bills and everything else paid up from the depression years—1940!

MHH: And meanwhile, they did not own a house.

RB: They never owned a house after that.

MHH: Never?

RB: Never. They lost the house in Highland. They rented every time; in Lansing we must have moved three or four times before we went out to the farm of the VanBarens there. We lived in different houses and never owned a home. My father died suddenly of a heart attack in 1949. Things had been picking up, and he had a new automobile ordered. He went into Henderson’s car showroom to see once whether his vehicle came in. My youngest brother, Louis, was with Dad, and Irene and mother were in a store just down the street. My father said, “Son, I am getting sick” (he was waiting for the salesman), and he went to put his head in his hand. And he reared back and gave a snick, and he was gone. So Louis went across the street and he said, “Mom, come on. We have to follow the ambulance.” She said, “Follow the ambulance?” He said, “Pa has just had a spell. I think he passed away, because he said he got so sick. He put his head in his hand, took a snick, and he was gone. When they put him in the ambulance, his feet were just plopping back and forth, so, I don’t think he was living anymore.” So they went to the hospital and then the doctor came out and said, “Your husband has expired.” Those were trying times, too.

But that’s where the church comes in, because you find such comfort of your fellow Christians. They come in and they feel your pain and they let you know that they’re praying for you. And God, by his grace, gives you grace sufficient to endure those trials.

MHH: I want to pursue a little more the matter of the Depression as it related to the status of the church. You mentioned government aid. Was there any benevolence available, or was the church itself in such dire financial straits that that was not possible?
If you could tell me a little bit about the Depression in terms of the relation between the church and the economic situation, I would appreciate that.

RB: Right. That was just exactly the situation. There were so many poor in the church that needed help that the benevolent funds were exhausted. The consistory advised the people that that was the best that they could do, and they even sometimes applied for that relief, either state or federal, for the families. That was the dire need of the churches at that time. Their benevolent fund was exhausted in no time. They didn’t have much of a benevolent fund to begin with. The church started in 1926 (South Holland), and right upon that, the Depression hit. The church was very poor and they just didn’t have a benevolent fund large enough to help the people.

MHH: The church did not have time, in other words, to become firmly established with a healthy balance in its books.

RB: That’s right. That was the whole problem. It just wasn’t there. I don’t remember how that turned out with my father; I don’t recall that when we were still members of the First Christian Reformed in Highland, Indiana, whether he sought benevolence from that consistory or not.

MHH: Were there many other families that lost their homes?

RB: Oh, there were a lot. I don’t know so much in our congregation, but in the larger congregations in the CR churches, there were a lot of members that lost their homes. The big thing about that was because the people that had money were well-to-do. They were foreclosing on these people. They were buying up these second mortgages, and that’s a shame.

MHH: And sometimes re-renting it back to the individuals who lived there, who then no longer owned the house. They were merely tenants.

RB: That’s right.

MHH: Let me ask you one other question, Mr. Bruinsma. Did the people, on an unofficial level, on an informal level, help each other during the time of the Depression? Seeing that there was no formal benevolence available—did that happen? Or was it pretty much everyone for himself?

RB: It was pretty much everyone for himself.

MHH: So even within the confines of the church, people did not or could not help each other? What is your opinion?

RB: Well, my opinion was there were many that could not. But there were those that could.

MHH: And did they?

RB: They helped my family financially by giving us the home free of charge, for taking care of the horses. In that respect you could say they helped our family a lot because we didn’t have to come up with any rent; we just took care of the horses.

[At this point Ray finishes the interview with a side trip.]

When my parents had three of us in the service, one of the members of the church said, “Mrs. Bruinsma, you have to have faith, you know. God will take care of your boys in the service, as well as at home here.” She said, “I understand that. God’s hand is not shortened.” “But,” she said, “put yourself in our shoes and see once how you would feel if you had three boys in the thick of it.” There was a fear of not seeing them again. Whenever my father would get the reports from the war zone on the radio, he was tracing it all. He often said, “Sons, I sure hope that you never fall into the hands of the enemy and become a prisoner of war.” He was so concerned. The Lord was good to allow him to live long enough that he could see all his sons return, and he could see two of his grandchildren. It was so uncertain as to what was going to happen to your sons who were in the thick of the battle, you know? This is exactly all the trials that they went through while we were gone.

MHH: Being wounded didn’t help any.

RB: No. This friend of mine was a left-handed writer, and he wrote a letter to my parents. He said, “If Ray was left-handed like me, he could write his own letters.” (laughter). They had my hand all bandaged up. I couldn’t move. So, they thought, aw-w-w, I bet he lost his arm. As the bandage loosed up, why, I got my hand free enough and I wrote a letter. I drew a picture of my shoulder, best I could. I wasn’t an artist. But showed where it went in and where it came out. I said, “I still have my arm,” but of course, it’s incapacitated. I can’t move it. But after being in a station hospital for several months, I arrived back in the United States on April 26, 1945.

It was such a joy to come over the Golden Gate bridge. You know why they call it the Golden Gate bridge? Coming from overseas it looked like a mass of gold when we flew in over it. Then they brought us to the cafeteria, and they were setting quarts of milk in front of us. I never was a milk lover, but, boy,
I sure enjoyed that one (laughter). Oh, a quart of milk! Fresh milk! You had nothing but this powdered milk overseas. So it was really an experience. And then, that I could be back in our own country. That was such a joy, too, because you don’t know what it is to be away from your loved ones and your church. In fact, that was something that was brought home to me in basic training already. How I missed the fellowship of the saints in the church. So you can see what the church really means to you in all of your life, from childhood on. If it wasn’t for that which you received under the preaching of the word and your own personal study of God’s word, and being as the Berean Christians… scripture tells us we have to be as the Berean Christians. The Berean Christians loved Paul, and he brought to them the word of God. But what did they do? They went to

the scriptures to see if that was so. We, as individual Christians, have to do that too. Not that we mistrust our ministers. What they bring to us has to be the word of God. And that we experience. We hear the voice of Christ speaking to us through the preached word, because that’s what our ministers are doing. But personal study of God’s word is all-important for us, too. We have to know the scriptures.

**MHH:** You’ve made that very clear in the interviews that we have had together. Hopefully anyone who hears or reads the written version of this interview will benefit from the comments that you have made.

This concludes Mr. Bruinsma’s second interview. Once again, my thanks to him for this valuable addition.

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**Poem**

**Thelma Westra**

**SING PRAISE**

*Lift up your voice to praise the Lord;*
*His name alone must be adored;*
*He showers blessings day by day*
*And leads us in his chosen way.*
*Let songs of praise fill heart and tongue;*
*Revere His name, both old and young.*

*He is the mighty King of kings*
*Whose arm to us salvation brings;*
*Though trials threaten, he will guide,*
*We’re not alone—he’s by our side,*
*His tender mercy to us shows;*
*He all our cares and sorrows knows.*

*Sing praise; he is the Lord of all,*
*Let us, his children, prostrate fall.*
*O come, his holiness proclaim*
*And magnify his holy name.*
*With adoration bend the knee;*
*Exalt his name eternally.*
Beacon Lights

**Anointed to be a King**

As long as we are on earth, we are kings at war. Today’s devotional is in the form of a poem about that war:

Within each one of God’s elect a fearsome war doth rage.

There is a side who seeks for God: the other would that love assuage.

The man who drives this earthly side is bloodied, ugly, dead.

For he was crucified with Christ—yet he bears his mangled head.

The mightiest weapon this man yields is called complacency.

For he conspires to make his foe leave off intensity.

The other man is clothed in white—the garments aren’t his own.

They were bought with the shed blood of him who for sin atoned.

The sword that this man bears is a sword that dwells within.

It is the Holy Spirit of God who can only conquer sin.

He empowers this new man to fight his mortal foe;

A brief cessation from the fight brings only bitter woe.

I know the sorrow of this war—it rages within me.

For fighting to possess my soul are Friend and Enemy.

I do not fear the battle’s end: the outcome is secure.

Yet I know the peace of heavenly life—when only I endure.

The sin that lives within my heart I must mortify.

For only as I combat self, do I God glorify.

Sing or pray Psalter #141.

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**Our King Carries a Kind of Heaven**

**Read Acts 5:17–42**

This beautiful quotation from Puritan Richard Sibbe reiterates what we considered yesterday:

“Nothing but heaven, or rather Christ in heaven itself, will content the child of God. In the meantime, his presence in the congregation makes their souls, as it were, heaven. If the king’s presence, who carries the court with him, makes all places where he is a court, so Christ carries a kind of heaven with him…It is no matter where we are, so long as Christ is with us… If with the three children in a fiery furnace, it is no matter, if ‘a fourth be there also’ (Dan. 3:25). So if Christ be with us, the flames nor nothing shall hurt us…

It changeth the nature of all things, sweeteneth everything, besides that sweetness which it brings unto the soul, by the presence of the Spirit; as we see in the Acts, when they had received the Holy Ghost more abundantly, they cared not what they suffered…Whence came this fortitude? From the presence of Christ, and the Comforter which he had formerly promised.

So let us have the Spirit of Christ that comes from him; then it is no matter what our condition be in the world.”

Sing or pray Psalter #65.

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**The Holy Spirit Leads**

**Read Luke 4:1–13**

Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit. Immediately after he was baptized, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

There are some who teach that the Holy Spirit leads only in paths of prosperity, pleasantness, and peace, and not in ways of trial or sorrow. But Jesus taught that no servant is greater than his Master. Since our Lord endured temptation, we also can expect to be tested.

Because the Holy Spirit led Jesus to suffer being tempted, he is able to succor, that is, aid or give relief to his people who are tempted. “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:14–16).

Sing or pray Psalter #65.

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**How Does the Holy Spirit Lead?**

**Read Jeremiah 17**

How did the Holy Spirit lead Jesus into the wilderness? “Jesus, being full of the Holy Spirit, felt its pressure in the very depths of his soul”
May 2015

Spirit-Led Sons
Read Romans 8:1–17

It is in God’s word, through the preaching, reading, and study of that word, that the Holy Spirit witnesses to us that we are God’s children. And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, ‘This is the way, walk ye in it,’ when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left’ (Isa. 30:21). That beautiful truth brings to mind the lyrics of two dear hymns:

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, Is laid for your faith in his excellent word!

What more can he say than to you he hath said, Who unto the Savior for refuge have fled?

And:
When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word, What a glory He sheds on our way!

While we do His good will, He abides with us still, And with all who will trust and obey.

Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

Are you led by God’s word and Spirit? Rest assured: as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God!

Succored in Temptations
Read James 1:1–27

Though the Son of God was eternally pure and spotless, in humbling himself to be made in the flesh he subjected himself to the ministry of the Spirit… Now, if the incarnate Son of God required the Spirit for his birth, holy living, and holy service to the Father, we too must always rely upon the Spirit’s ministry” (Chantry).

The Holy Spirit strengthened Jesus to resist the devil with the word. Similarly, he applies the word expressly to us in our temptations. When we covet material possessions, the Spirit warns us, “Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness deliveredeth from death” (Prov. 11:4). When our tempers would flare, the Spirit instructs us, “The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God” (James 1:20). When we are prone to despair, the Spirit encourages us, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” (1 Cor. 10:13).

Succored in Temptations
Read James 1:1–27

Jesus Offered Himself through the Eternal Spirit
Read Hebrews 9:11–14

A little more than a month ago marked Good Friday, that day of the year on which we commemorate the crucifixion of our Savior. The suffering and death of our Lord is terrible to consider, yet only meditation on this truth—on how great our sins and miseries are, on the only way in which we may be delivered from all our sins and miseries—will drive us to live the grateful life of the Christian. When I consider that the holy Son of God endured the eternal wrath of God for my sins, this haunting melody comes to mind:

Sing or pray Psalter #65.

Sing or pray Psalter #65.

Sing or pray Psalter #65.
“Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble. Were you there when they crucified my Lord?”

How was it possible that Jesus offered himself as the spotless Lamb of God? Hebrews 9:14 answers that question. He offered himself through the power of the eternal Spirit. We can be certain that that same Spirit will cleanse our consciences from dead works and equip us to serve the living God.

Sing or pray Psalter #29.

May 18

The Holy Spirit Walks With Us in the Valley of the Shadow

Read Proverbs 3:1–6

A little less than three months ago, I sat in a pew at the funeral of my dear Grandma. Her pastor, Rev. Engelsma, spoke to us who mourned from Proverbs 3:5–6: “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” He comforted my grandmother by encouraging him to consider the goodness of the Lord to him throughout life and by reassuring him that God would continue to guide him. Through our tears we rejoiced that Grandma was experienced the glorious reality of Psalm 73:23–24: “Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.”

Our Lord faced death triumphantly in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, the Comforter, also walks with us in the valley of the shadow. In a certain sense we live all of our lives in that valley. The consequences of Adam’s fall surround and fill us. But when those shadows press especially close, the Spirit does not leave us comfortless.

Sing or pray Psalter #29.

May 19

The Holy Spirit Raises from the Dead

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

How does the Holy Spirit comfort us when death draws near? He comforts us with the hope of the resurrection. In Romans 8:11, the inspired apostle writes, “But the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.” The Spirit raised Jesus. He also raises us to heavenly life. He raises us to heavenly life already now as he sanctifies our souls, gradually mortifying our sinful natures and renewing in us the image of Christ. One day he will raise our bodies, “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Cor. 15:52). “And so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:17)

Do you comfort your fellow saints with “these words”?

Sing or pray Psalter #29.

May 20

The “Come-Forte”

Read Luke 4:14–15

Do you remember when we considered the truth that the Holy Spirit is the divine, personal breath of God? When we think of the breath that is the Holy Spirit, we shouldn’t think of the shallow respirations that characterize our breathing. After all, one of the three signs that accompanied the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was the sound as of a mighty, rushing wind. God’s Breath is powerful. That powerful Breath empowered our Lord to do the will of God in his earthly ministry. Jesus rose from death in the power of the Spirit, and so will we. Though we cannot see the Spirit, we see the fruits of his powerful, efficacious, sanctifying work already now in the lives of those who are God’s children.

Some time ago I listened to a lecture in which the speaker pointed out that when Jesus called the Spirit “the Comforter,” he was not implying that the Spirit is mild or soft-spoken. The “Comforter” is the “Come-Forte.” Not long ago our son learned in his piano lessons that in music, “forte” means “play loudly or forcefully.” The Holy Spirit is the “Come-Forte”: he comes with power.

Sing or pray Psalter #29.

May 21

That Which Is Perfect Is Come

Read 1 Corinthians 13

1 Corinthians 13 is more than “The Love Chapter.” It is a chapter in which Paul teaches that the fruit of love is more desirable than the gifts of speaking in tongues or prophecy.

Some today still teach that when the Holy Spirit comes, he still empowers believers with miraculous gifts, and he inspires new revelations. We confess with the church throughout history that “The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men” (Westminster Confession, Chapter 1, Art. 6). The miraculous gifts that the Spirit gave to the apostles were given to them to confirm the gospel that they preached (Heb. 2:3–4). Now “that which was in part” has been done away with: “that which is perfect is come.” The doctrine that is contained in the Old and New Testaments is the true and complete doctrine of salvation. That scripture is all that we need to mature “unto a perfect man,” “thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (Eph. 4:13; 2 Tim. 3:16).

Sing or pray Psalter #29.

May 22

The Fruits of the Spirit Are Inward Graces

Read Galatians 5:13–26

Not long ago I read the one-time Pentecostal bestseller The Cross and the Switchblade. Several times in that book Pastor David Wilkerson, the author, describes those who had been baptized with the Holy Spirit as producing a soft, melodic, bubbling language that they themselves did not understand. That speaking in tongues, according to Wilkerson, was the sign and seal that the prayer for the Holy Spirit had been answered.

But the Spirit-inspired Holy Scriptures disagree. First, even those who spoke in tongues in the times of the apostles were required to be able to interpret what they said (see 1 Cor. 12). In addition to that, the Bible repeatedly testifies that the life of the Spirit is evidenced by a hatred of sin and a fighting against the affections and lusts of the flesh. The marks of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit are not outward gifts, but inward spiritual graces that reveal themselves in these fruits: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control.

Those are the fruits that characterize those who live in the Spirit and walk in the Spirit. Those are the fruits that characterize the
sons and daughters of God.
Sing or pray Psalter #29.

May 23

The Holy Spirit is Invisible
Read John 3:1–21
Throughout The Cross and the Switchblade the baptism of the Holy Spirit is described as a literal warmth in one’s breast or a trembling or tingling that fills one’s body. Modern charismatics sometimes use similar terminology. The Spirit-inspired Holy Scriptures disagree. Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit is like the wind: he is invisible. Since he is Spirit, we do not feel him working. But like the wind, we can see the effects of his work.

Do you wonder if you are one of Christ’s elect, and if you have been given the Holy Spirit? Don’t despair because you’ve never felt a warmth or tingling in your body. Look for these evidences of his work: one in whom the Spirit dwells hates sin. One in whom the Spirit dwells strives to be holy. One in whom the Spirit dwells loves God’s truth. One in whom the Spirit dwells loves God’s people.

The work of the Holy Spirit is an invisible work, but its manifestation must be highly visible in the life of the Christian.
Sing or pray Psalter #29.

May 24

“A Deeper Healing”
Read John 5:1–18
In the fall of 2013, John MacArthur hosted a conference called “Strange Fire.” The conference “evaluate[d] the doctrines, claims, and practices of the modern charismatic movement, and affirm[ed] the true Person and ministry of the Holy Spirit.” Joni Eareckson Tada gave a memorable speech as part of that event.

Joni was paralyzed in a diving accident in 1967. As she lay in the hospital, coming to grips with life as a quadriplegic, friends and family visited her. Joni would ask them to read to her from John 5—the account of the healing of the lame man at the pool of Bethesda. A short time later, Joni’s sister took her to see a well-known faith healer, who was much like the Benny Hinn of our day. Joni wasn’t healed. Years later, Joni traveled to Palestine. For a brief time, she found herself sitting alone near the now-dry pool of Bethesda. There she wept and thanked the Lord for not healing her physically: the Lord had used her accident to grant her a deeper, spiritual healing.

Do you long to be free from the trials in your life? They are the means through which the Spirit gives you a deeper healing, too.
Sing or pray Psalter #391.

May 25

The Holy Spirit was Poured out upon the Church
Read Ephesians 4:1–16
In only two days it will be Pentecost Sunday, the day on which the Spirit was poured out upon God’s people as they “were all with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1). There is significance to the fact that when the Holy Spirit was poured out, he was poured out upon the church, upon believers as they were gathered together as a body. Those of us who live in the U.S. belong to a very individualistic society. That reality can contribute to our forgetfulness of the truth that we are called “by this same Spirit [to be] united as members of one body in true brotherly love” (Rom. 12:5). We must realize that the Holy Spirit is called the third person of the Trinity because he is the third person revealed in the Scriptures, not because he is third in importance. After all, “The Spirit’s ministry consists in his bringing the promises of Christ to remembrance, in his glorifying him in our hearts, in his shedding abroad the love of God in us, in his witnessing with us as to our spiritual state and condition, in his sealing us to the day of redemption, in his being the earnest of our inheritance, in his anointing us with consolation, in his confirming of our adoption, in his being present with us in our supplication” (John Owen). That is a very important work indeed!
Sing or pray Psalter #391.

May 26

The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity
Read Acts 2
The word “Pentecost” means “fifty.” Pentecost was the Old Testament Feast of Weeks, which took place seven weeks – or 50 days – after the Passover was held. It was on this day that the church was gathered together, and the Holy Spirit, the third person of the divine Trinity, was poured out upon all saints.

We must realize that the Holy Spirit is called the third person of the Trinity because he is the third person revealed in the Scriptures, not because he is third in importance. After all, “The Spirit’s ministry consists in his bringing the promises of Christ to remembrance, in his glorifying him in our hearts, in his shedding abroad the love of God in us, in his witnessing with us as to our spiritual state and condition, in his sealing us to the day of redemption, in his being the earnest of our inheritance, in his anointing us with consolation, in his confirming of our adoption, in his being present with us in our supplication” (John Owen). That is a very important work indeed!
Sing or pray Psalter #391.

May 27

Praying God’s Names
Read Psalm 18:1–19
Now that Pentecost has passed, we’re going to set aside our study of the Holy Spirit and his work and resume meditating on the psalms.

Psalm 18 is a prayer-song. David begins this song by exclaiming how he loves the Lord, and then he continues by listing names of the Lord. Jehovah is David’s rock, his fortress, his deliverer, his God, his strength, the one in whom he trusts, his buckler (or shield), the horn of his salvation, and his high tower.

Do you sometimes struggle to know how to begin your prayers? I sometimes begin my prayers by meditating on one of God’s names. After all, Jesus taught us to begin our prayers with this petition: “Hallowed be Thy name.” According to Lord’s Day 47 of the Heidelberg Catechism, that petition is a request first that we might rightly know God and praise him in all his works. It is also a plea that we might “order and direct our whole lives…that [his] name may never be blasphemed, but rather honored and praised on our account.” That’s the petition with which David begins Psalm 18.
Sing or pray Psalter #34.

May 28

Call Upon the Lord in Your Distress
Read 2 Samuel 22:1–20
Psalm 18’s lengthy heading tells us that David spoke this song “in the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul.” The same words are recorded in 2 Samuel 22.
After David prays the names of Jehovah, he remembers his distress. Fear of his enemies had rolled over him like ocean waves. The threat of death had closed in on him and entangled him. In his distress David cried to God.

Our distresses—we usually refer to them simply as “stresses”—don’t seem quite as pressing as the troop of armed men who sought David’s life, do they? But we would do well to remember that whatever causes us distress or stress is given to us by God in order to draw us to himself and to encourage us to make necessary changes in our lives. What is the source of the distress in your life? Homework? Your job? Needy children? A besetting sin? Does that distress drive you to call upon Jehovah?

Sing or pray Psalter #34.

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To Whom Will Ye Liken God?
Read Isaiah 40:18–31

Do you see the mighty hand of God in creation? In the sunrise, in the seed that springs from the ground, in the creation and birth of a baby, in the beating of your own heart? We become immune to these workings of God because he is so faithful. With every sunrise we should exclaim, “He did it again!”

In a precise definition of the term, a sunrise is not a miracle. Neither is the sprouting of a seed, conception and birth, or the beating of our hearts. Miracles are the works of God in the physical realm that are “uncommon to human experience, and unexplainable in terms of the physical secondary agents” (Chantry.) But the usual workings of God in this world are no less the effects of God’s power. Every beat of your heart and every sunrise testifies to his mighty providence. He is the creator who calls the stars by their names. He is the one who upholds all things by the word of his power. By his Son all things consist (Heb. 1:3; Col 1:17).

Do you wait upon that mighty Lord?
Sing or pray Psalter #39.

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The Invisible Things of Him are Clearly Seen
Read Romans 1:16–25

Psalm 19:3 teaches, “There is no speech nor language where their voice [the voice of the heavens] is not heard.” Romans 1:20 reads, “For the invisible things of [God] from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.” Poet Gerard Manly Hopkins echoed, “The world is charged with the grandeur of God. / It will flame out, like shining from shook foil.”

What is the response of the reprobate to creation’s inescapable testimony? “When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.” Instead of worshipping the Creator, they make themselves idols out of his creatures.

In contrast, we who have been sanctified by God’s Spirit can see our Father’s power all throughout his world. Take note of the ways in which he reveals his power in your life today. Do so in order that you may glorify him as God, and be thankful.

Sing or pray Psalter #39.
Three Sieves

Read Psalm 19:7–14

The pure and precious word of God drives David to exclaim, “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.” David knew that “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matt. 12:34). He was also aware that “the tongue is fire, a world of iniquity” (James 3:6). No doubt you’ve experienced the destructive nature of the tongue—that of your own tongue and of the tongues of others.

Have you ever used a sieve? Maybe you’ve seen your mom use one when she’s cooking macaroni and cheese: once the pasta is finished boiling, she might pour it into a sieve to strain off the water. Missionary Amy Carmichael referred to “three sieves” through which a Christian’s words must pass. These three sieves will not let many of the wicked things we might be tempted to say filter through their holes. Here’s a rhyme to help you remember them: “Before words from your mouth may go, they first through these three sieves must flow: Truth, Kindness, and Necessity.”

Are the meditations of your heart and the words of your mouth acceptable in God’s sight?

Sing or pray Psalter #40.

A Prayer for the King

Read Psalm 20

Psalm 20 is different from the other psalms that we’ve considered. David composed this prayer, but it’s a prayer that his subjects offer on his behalf. These are their petitions for their king: they desire that the Lord will hear his prayer, preserve his life, strengthen him for his many tasks, accept his sacrifices, and crown his efforts with success. They knew that their king would face trouble, but because their mutual salvation is the joyful basis of their prayers, they prayed in confidence. David was encouraged by their prayers for him: “Now know I that the LORD saveth his anointed,” he exclaims in verse six.

Do you remember to pray for those who rule over you? You can pray the same things that the Israelites prayed for David for your husband, your parents, your teachers, your pastor, and the office-bearers in your church. God also commands us to pray for those who rule over us in the secular sphere (1 Tim. 2:2). Pray for their salvation. Pray that God use their rule to maintain a country in which you’re able to “lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.”

Sing or pray Psalter #44.

Jehovah Nissi

Read Exodus 17:8–16

Psalm 20:5b reads, “In the name of our God we will set up our banners.” Verse seven says, “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God.” The confession of the Israelites in David’s day echoes the name of God that Moses records in Exodus 17:15: Jehovah-Nissi means “The Lord is My Banner.” Their confidence is ours yet in the 21st century.

Jehovah Nissi

My country ’tis of Thee,
Who telleth the number of the stars.
And with Thy stripes we are healed.
Absolved from all allegiance to sin,
Declare independence:
where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty,
secured for ourselves and our posterity.
O death, where is they sting?
Land for which my fathers died,
Of thee I sing,
My hand over my heart.
Sing or pray Psalter #44.
Death. What a dreaded word. What havoc and fear such a small word raises! Immediately the questions come. Who died, how did it happen, why, etc.? Shock is the initial reaction, then denial of the truth, then as shock wears off, slowly acceptance and heart wrenching grief follows. Death is our mortal enemy. It severs strong earthly ties and leaves a wake of emptiness in the hearts of those left behind. It forces us to face the reality that this is the end of man here below, and that we will have to face it one day as well. The worst thing about this dreaded word is that we brought it upon ourselves. By the sin of our organic head Adam, death came upon all men. We have all sinned and must face this last enemy.

As young people we often have the attitude that death is a long way away for us. We push away thoughts of death when they arise, thinking we will save those thoughts for a later date. We all know that death is inevitable, and yet we don’t like to consider it seriously while in our youth, because it creates a soberness that we don’t want to address. We don’t want to think that one day we will die and leave all the people and possessions we have behind. We don’t want to “shape up” quite yet, but would rather “live it up” for a few more years. We fear to think of death because of the uncertainty of how we might die or how soon it could be. We would rather think on how we can fulfill our own desires while here on earth. After all, who wants to think on death when we are so full of life and energy at a young age? Then God removes someone who is close to us and we stare this truth of man’s mortality in the face.

Fear is the natural instinct that arises in the heart of every man when death is faced. Death is a mortal enemy, and we still have a human nature prone to fear. There are so many fears that naturally arise. We question God’s goodness. We wonder if the person who died is in heaven, even though we should be comforted in knowing that God is the judge, not man, and that every elect child of his shall most surely be there. Satan bombards us with our own sins and creates doubt concerning the love of our Father in heaven and our own worthiness. The fears of our human nature go on and on. Those of the world refuse to deal with the reality of death. When faced with it, they either become despondent and depressed, or they ignore it and dwell only on what the deceased person accomplished in his life. They would rather celebrate the life a person lived rather than dealing with death and the reality of what happens after death, because for them there is no comfort in death.

If not for the grace of God and for his gift of faith whereby we cling to the promises he has given to us in his word, we would follow in the footsteps of this world when faced with the reality of death. Facing our last enemy would be terrifying without Christ. But in Christ we are able to say the words of 1 Corinthians 15: 55-57: “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Christ is victorious over death! What a beautiful truth that God gives us. All of the fears of our human nature are extinguished when we stand at the foot of the cross where Christ accomplished our victory over sin and death. We refute Satan’s attack with Paul’s words in Romans 8:33–34, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.” Our head is in heaven interceding for us! How will not the body be united to the head one day in heaven? Those ties that have been severed on earth with our fellow brethren in Christ will not remain so, for we will be united with the body of Christ in heaven to live forever with him. We say with Paul, “I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ.
Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38–39).

Young people, God gives us so much comfort and assurance in the face of death. Death, our last enemy, is inevitable and is a reality that we all must ponder. We must not ignore it, but rather must view death as it has been conquered in Christ. Death has no power over us, but is a mere passageway from this life into our heavenly life with Christ. As we look at death, we remember the psalmist’s words in Psalm 116:15, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.” Knowing this, and hearing the words of the apostle Paul concerning our victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, we also take heed to his words in 1 Corinthians 15:58, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoving, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.” Notice, young people, we don’t just “forget” to live rightly because after all we are saved and are going to heaven after we die. We don’t just go on in our sins with the attitude that we may sin that grace may abound. This is impenitence, and God specifically tells us that no such impenitent sinner will inherit the kingdom of heaven. This impenitence is what God has saved us from. Therefore as children of God who have been redeemed, we remain steadfast in the truth of the one who has made heaven and all things possible for us, and ALWAYS abound in serving him.

This is the attitude we young people must have concerning our last enemy. We don’t satisfy our earthly cravings and build up treasures on earth; no, we face the reality that death is our end in this life here below, and therefore we don’t labor in vain for that which perishes, but we lay up our treasures in heaven, where our king dwells. We cast off our fear of death, and with hope we look forward to the day when it will be said, “So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor. 15:54).

Monica is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan and serves on the Beacon Lights staff as a contributing editor correspondent.

Seeking Success

Would you like to be successful? Do you want to prosper? The culture around you calls and encourages you to be successful in the academic, athletic, physical, relational, social, and even spiritual aspects of your life. The self-help sections of our local bookstores are well-stocked with books to give direction, and a quick web search will yield many resources for obtaining the “right stuff” for success. If you stand in line to pay for groceries or other items, a multitude of magazine articles assaults your eyes in order to awaken your appetite for success in one area of life or another. An ever-increasing number of motivational speakers and programs are offered to those desirous of finding success in business, education, medicine, and many other areas. And on top of that, the mailbox of the average high school student in America is stuffed with options for obtaining a successful career at a variety of colleges and universities, each claiming statistics that support the success of students who have followed their programs to stunning success. Clearly, being known as “successful” is important—not only in American culture, but worldwide.

To be considered successful, one must have succeeded at doing or being something. But what is it to succeed at something? This word’s roots are in the classical Latin verb *cedere*, meaning “to go or to walk along.” Its prefix *sub*, which changes form slightly when added to the verb form, means “beneath or behind.” Together, the prefix and verb contain the meaning of either “following another” or of “climbing up”. We are familiar with the transitive form, used to refer to one who follows another in some position, thus “succeeding” them. From its intransitive form, however, comes the idea of having climbed up from beneath or ascended from below.
By the 15th century, succeed had come to mean in its English form “to turn out well; to have a favorable result.” Later in the 16th century, as you may recall from your history lessons, England was becoming a world power, and a prosperous middle class was rising. It was during this time that the adjective successful was first being applied to people who had succeeded well at some endeavor, making a name and/or a fortune in a society previously ruled by the nobility.

The world in which we live defines success in various forms: achieving fame, fortune, academic renown, status, athletic prowess, artistic creativity, or any goal that he or she has chosen to pursue. The man or woman who is considered to be successful has supposedly gained something others desire to have or to be, and has met goals and objectives that define achieving it. Today, even the nominal church has embraced the cause of making people successful as Christians. A widely popular “gospel” promising prosperity to those who choose to follow Jesus Christ and tithe abundantly assures believers that they will reap hefty financial rewards. Known also as the “gospel of success”, this form of theology has attracted many followers in the United States.

But what has the word of God to say about success? Interestingly, the English word is used just one time in the King James Version of the Bible, in Joshua 1:8: “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein; for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.”

It is interesting to note that the Bible translators here translated the Hebrew word sakal as meaning “to be wise; to prosper; to do wisely” and “to have good success” in this verse. In other places in the Old Testament, sakal is translated “prosper”, which has a slightly different shade of meaning—a meaning that can also be related to growth: “to flourish, succeed, thrive.” The Latin root spero, “to hope for, expect, trust in, wait for” is the basis for the English word prosper, which with the prefix pro shows the idea of achieving what one has hoped for. The parallelism of the text in Joshua 1:8 is significant, therefore: “... then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success [italics mine].” Here prosperity and success are shown as being equivalent, and according to the Spirit-filled writer of the book of Joshua, both of these begin with speaking of and meditating upon and living according to the word of God—a very different kind of success than the kind of self-promotion the worldlings of our day are seeking and promoting.

While the world of our day measures success and prosperity by determining various goals and objectives for success in business and in education, in athletic competition and economic management, and lavishing praise upon those who achieve them, God’s children prosper by immersing themselves in God’s word, in finding their hope in the Savior of mankind, and their success from following him in order to receive a reward that far surpasses the heaped up treasures and tributes of this world. If you would be successful, open the word, and walk in its light, and you will “prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth (3 John 1:2).”

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**Christian Living**

**Emily Langerak**

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**Not Unto Us, O Lord**

As a child, wanting to prove I was right and hoping to stump my parents, I often countered a ruling with the question, “But how is that even wrong?” This always seemed like a totally valid argument, but it never really got me far with my parents; they always countered back, “It’s wrong because I say you can’t do it, and I’m your parent.” However, growing up means taking this farther and...
doing what is right, not because my parents say it is right, but because I know it brings glory to God. Sadly, for me and, I think, many others, this is not always in the foreground of our minds, and either out of ignorance or blatant selfishness, we miss the heart of our lives as Christian young people. As godly youth, we are called to live a life unto God, which inevitably includes generating every decision, whether a daily life choice or a stand on a major issue, with the glory of God as its ultimate and fundamental purpose.

I have always been told to do everything to the glory of God, but what does this really mean? To give God the glory is to acknowledge in everything I do who God is and to act accordingly. God is glory. He alone deserves to be praised, worshipped, and honored. Not only did he create the universe intricately and orderly, but even now he upholds every aspect of his creation. Remembering his greatness in our daily life, I want to give him the honor he deserves. This implies not only that I agree with everything he states in his word, but also that I obey his every command. When an issue arises that is not specifically addressed in his word, I choose to do what will be the most pleasing to God and will bring out his essence the most clearly in my actions.

It is of utmost importance that I and all we young people understand this to be our calling in everything we do. 1 Corinthians 10:31 states, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” This verse implies that even the most menial tasks, such as eating, must be done to honor God. As young people we, myself included, often place actions into a “neutral” category, saying that it is neither glorifying to God nor sin. Things such as entertainment and use of the Sabbath are sometimes thrown into this category without much thought. Our calling, however, is to examine the matter to see if both sides are actually equally pleasing to God, or if we just say that to justify an ungodly choice.

I have heard several times, and sometimes catch myself thinking this as well, that it does not matter what we do during the sabbath as long as we go to church twice. This is not addressed specifically in scripture, but is this even an option when God commands that we “do all to the glory of God”? Can we really justify doing as little as possible to get to know our Creator and Redeemer on his very own day? Does living unto God really amount to going to church services and then convincing ourselves we do not have to do anything more? No matter how much we often want to persuade ourselves there is no right or wrong choice in situations like this one, we often see a clear right and wrong but are too selfish to admit it.

Another instance in which this excuse is sometimes used is in connection with listening to certain songs. Many popular songs played on the radio today are infused with worldly values and ungodly ideas. Yes, we may be able to tune out the bad lyrics, and yes, there are parts of these songs that are not so bad, but is that really the line of thinking we should follow? Instead of trying to prove why it is okay to listen to such songs, our focus should be on whether or not listening to them helps or hinders us from glorifying God.

The joy of being a child of God is that we can choose what is glorifying to God, no matter how difficult it often is. An unregenerate person can never choose to do the right. This is shown in question and answer 8 of the Heidelberg Catechism, which states: “Q. But are we so depraved that we are completely incapable of any good and prone to all evil? A. Yes, unless we are born again by the Spirit of God.” Even a work that seems good cannot be so because God has not given a reprobate a new heart to be able to do even a little bit of good. This is why it is such a shame when Christian liberty is so often wrongly used. We, as regenerate people of God, have the ability to do right, and often we do not want anything to do with it. Our liberty should be viewed not as a chance to get away with something wrong, but as the freedom to choose to do what is right, as only a remnant have this great freedom. This is true freedom, and it is the right use of this freedom that will bring God glory.

The purpose of this article is to reiterate what we should keep in mind as we go about making decisions every day. Our whole life and our every choice must have as their goal the glory of God and must be focused on pleasing him. With the psalmist, let us say, “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory!” (Psalm 115: 1).

At the time this was written, Emily was a senior at Covenant Christian High School in Walker, Michigan and is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church.
MOTHER’S DAY

Why do you honor Mom today?
Because she gave you birth,
Because she fed and clothed you:
Does that comprise her worth?

Your heavenly Father chose her
To fill this special place,
That you might be instructed
In His ways and by His grace.

Her labors are not easy,
Her griefs, oft hard to bear;
Yet, strengthened in her duty,
She continues in her care.

Do not begrudge, but thank her
For correction that she gave,
For God so uses mothers
That their children He may save.

Yes, show your mother honor,
Rise up, and call her blest;
For she’s the instrument God gave
That He might be confessed.
Lively Youthful Sober Servants: Active in Society Life

Young people, what is your role in the church of God? How ought you to fill that role? Are there things you should be active in as a member of the body of Christ? Do you consider your place in the church important? Is it a significant and valuable place in Christ’s church?

I can assure you that you do have a role, and it is important. In fact, it is so important that it is necessary for the very survival of the church of Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:18 and 27 teach that each of us is a member according to his purpose. God’s purpose is important: “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.” From the perspective of an elder, I assure you that your place and function is of great importance to the body of Christ in the church today. Along with all God’s people, you young people are called to serve.

How are you to serve? There is a multitude of ways, but to address all of them here is outside the focus of this article. One thing, however, is certain: You need to know how to serve. You need to be trained, and training requires listening to God. To hear God speak requires Bible study. To be of service means to be a servant. To serve requires knowledge and the activity of getting knowledge. Faithful church attendance and paying heed to the doctrine of pure preaching are primary. The preaching is unique because it is Holy Spirit infused. I trust you know that going to church is not optional but required, and that you are faithful to attend worship twice every Lord’s Day.

Now let’s talk about the other ways you are called to be active in gaining knowledge. Certainly you attend or have attended catechism. This also is considered your calling. This instruction, like the preaching, is official church instruction. But there is a third way for you to gain knowledge of the truth.

This is the way of active society life.

Why is Young People’s Society such a big deal? What makes it vitally important for you? There are many reasons. Here we will consider seven of them. As we do this let’s apply the words of instruction Paul gave to Titus, his younger fellow servant in the gospel ministry: “Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded. In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned. Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Titus 2: 6–8 and 12). Young people’s society is an excellent tool for developing the life of the godly, lively, and sober servant of the Lord.

The first of the seven reasons society life is important is that God speaks to you personally through the Bible. It is his word to you. The words of scripture are the most important words you will ever hear. To read and make a serious study of them is life itself for you. Would you choose death? To ignore your Father’s word is to do exactly that. For you to do so is unthinkable. Scripture study involves taking in and thinking deeply about the word. It is the story of the purest love that exists. It is the story of salvation in Christ. It is also the Father’s word by which you receive his guidance and admonition.

Yes, it is true: you could read and study God’s word alone in a closet. You would not be ignoring his pure word of grace and salvation. But you know that being strong alone is not easy, nor is it right to isolate yourself. It is not normally the experience of the sin-battled saint to be an active student of God’s gospel alone. The God-designed way for you to be the sober, lively, active servant is in the context of the covenant. This is why we emphasize the concept of the covenantal community in all aspects of our daily walk and life. Young person, value this covenantal
community! Be active in your Bible study society life!

The second reason that society based-Bible study is important is that God’s word is your guide to godly living. Very likely you have sung the words, “How shall the young direct their way? What light shall be their perfect guide? Thy word, O Lord, will safely lead if in its wisdom they confide” (Psalter 322). How you are to live your life is the most basic, fundamental, practical thing you will ever consider.

Third, young people’s society is the template (pattern) for becoming active in Bible study for a lifetime. Society life does not end when one makes confession of faith. This marks the beginning of a lifestyle, one that will be marked by diligent searching of scripture together with other like-minded saints. We find a good example of persistence in Bible study in Acts 17:10–11: “And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” Young people, follow the example of the Bereans.

The fourth reason for active society life centers on fellowship. In the context of society life, you have opportunity to develop close friendships within the broader covenantal community. This can be the best circumstance for getting to know one another on a deeper and spiritual level. This potentially represents steps that may lead you to find your life’s mate, and if not that, then it is still the setting that when developed properly will bring you into the closest friendship possible this side of heaven. Bible study with others is the pathway that leads to the deepest and most often intimate friendship and fellowship.

Fifth, young people’s society affords you the opportunity for good, godly activities. It is in this setting that other activities for young people are developed. Many of our young people’s games, evening get-togethers, and day trips are organized through our societies. Good activities include hiking trips (for some western churches) to the mountains, canoe and kayak river trips, boating and tubing adventures at the lake, cook-outs, and barbequing at the beach. Other worthwhile events include sports and games at one of our local Christian schools. These are ways to get to know one another and use up some of your youthful, endless energy in good, clean, healthy activities. These types of things bring balance to the daily life of the Christian young person.

Sixth, your society life serves as springboard for interactions within the congregation. There is the traditional singspiration, which is good, but there is also smaller group singing and making of good Reformed music at church or in our homes. Other worthy interactions include young people’s hosted dinners. Some serve as fundraisers for convention expenses, an excellent idea. But better than that is to do what some of our congregations are enjoying: young people’s society hosted supper and game nights for the seniors. This activity is expressly for the young people and the 70 and older members. This promotes excellent interactions between the youth and the seniors of the congregation. In this type of activity the elderly members are literally thrilled, and the young people are surprised (sometimes amazed) at the fun that can be had with “those old people” we call our more elderly members.

The seventh reason is that society life is the place where you can become involved in wider denominational activities. It begins with the annual young people’s conventions. Many local young people’s activities are directed toward the good goal of fundraising for the convention. Attending the annual convention ought to be top on the list of every young person. Our conventions are great opportunities to get to know others from the entire denomination and provide an excellent way to grow in godliness, in faith and in life. There are also regional retreats organized by some of our western churches. These smaller group settings are also worthwhile for personal growth in the truth and for additional inter-congregational fellowship.

Your active society life is also likely to lead to the days when as an older young person you may be privileged to attend those fantastic post high school retreats. A person who begins as an active teen-aged society member will be ready and excited to continue, God willing, to attend retreats in the west and in Canada. And, I will add, some of you may even be so blessed as to be able to attend the British Reformed Fellowship conferences. Having experienced young peoples conventions as a young man and then as chaperone, post high retreats, and also several BRF conferences, I heartily recommend these aspects of society life. Remember, young people, it begins with the right involvement and good habit of faithful attendance in young peoples society.

Active Bible study and covenant based fellow-
ship are central to your active and lively place in the church. When we think about the future of the church, an older person such as myself sees your place as very important—in fact, more important than is mine. This is true because you are the hope for tomorrow. On your shoulders, young people, rests the future for our congregations and denomination. In the older generation we see today’s leadership, but for tomorrow, you are that portion that will be called to carry out Christ’s command to lead in the way of truth. This is your place; you are growing into that role. You will become the mothers, fathers, Sunday School teachers, society leaders, pastors, elders, and deacons in the near future.

The future begins now. Are you thinking about this? As leading, you must serve; as servants, you must lead. This is what the church is about. You are called to be servants ready to lead. You won’t do this by yourselves. God’s grace is there. Exercise yourself in his grace! You may be assured, young people, that God will guide you. “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). Young people, be lively, sober servants! Be active in society life!

Doug is an elder in Grandville Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.

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Church News

Melinda Bleyenberg

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:
Nora Jo, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Derek & Brittany Koedam—Doon, IA
Louisa Allison, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ben & Elizabeth Kuiper—Faith, MI
Hailey Marie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. AL & Marie Karssemeyer—Faith, MI
Ivylynn Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jonathan & Maryann VanDyke—Georgetown, MI
Kinsley Nicole, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. David & Alexa Wassink—Georgetown, MI
Jasper Henry, son of Mr. & Mrs. Travis & Katie Vander Kolk—Grandville, MI
Trever Allen, son of Mr. & Mrs. Aaron & Kristen De Jong—Hull, IA
Joseph Thomas, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jason & Katie Westra—Hull, IA
Lani Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Chad & Dawn Andringa—Hull, IA
Jako Edward, son of Mr. & Mrs. Pieter & Cindy vanIperen—Immanuel, Lacombe, CAN
Landen Ray, son of Mr. & Mrs. Lee & Laura Koosenga—Loveland, CO
Courtney Elizabeth, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. David & Jessica Vermeer—Peace, IL
Luke James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Bob & Jenna Alsum—Randolph, WI
Alvin James, son of Mr. & Mrs. James & Heidi Kooiker—Randolph, WI
Emerson Deno, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Marc & Andrea Velthouse—Trinity, MI
Lachlan Paul, son of Mr. & Mrs. Phil & Paula Steenwyk—Trinity, MI

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH
“In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths.”
Proverbs 3:6

Public confession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ was made by:
Ryan Buiter—Lynden, WA
Jocelyn DeBoer—Lynden, WA
Dallas Moore—Lynden, WA
Peter Mahtani—Southwest, MI/Pittsburgh, PA
Corinne Brucato—Southwest, MI/Pittsburgh, PA
Tyler Kemps—Southwest, MI
Jenna Van Overloop—Trinity, MI

MARRIAGES
“For this God is our God forever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.” Psalm 48:14

Mr. Andy DeJager and Miss Carissa Vink—Doon, IA
Mr. Seth Engelsma and Miss Rosalyn Stouwie—Georgetown, MI
Mr. Jonathan Van der Waal and Miss Kimberly Kooiker—Hull, IA
The Dark Valley

Summer heated earth with white rays of sunlight. The grass withered under the heat. Even with their wool shorn short, the sheep panted.

The shepherd gathered his flock. The older sheep trotted along. They knew what this meant. Each year, the Shepherd led them into the mountain grasslands where the air was cooler and the grass greener. They had traveled this way before. Sometimes it still scared them, but they remembered their past journeys with their shepherd.

The younger sheep dragged their feet. They had never traveled this journey before. They worried about leaving their safe pasture for the first time.

The shepherd led them towards a high mountain range. The sheep trudged slower at the sight of the huge mountains rising above them. How were they ever going to climb to the top? It seemed impossible. They could never climb those steep sides.

They approached a dark valley that sliced into the mountainside. The younger sheep dug in their heels. They couldn’t enter that scary valley where black shadows covered the ground. What was in there? It looked like a place where danger lurked under each rock and behind each tree. But the older sheep kept trudging forward. They’d walked this path before. They knew that the only way to reach the higher ground in the mountain pastures was to walk through the valley.

They scrambled over the fallen rocks and dead trees twisted through their path. The way was difficult to walk. Some of the sheep stumbled. Some wanted to give up because the path was so hard.

But the shepherd led them up the dark valley until even the younger sheep lost their fear of the darkness and learned to trust their shepherd’s guidance, and the older sheep learned to trust once again. The dark valley wasn’t a scary place, but a path to the higher ground.

Questions to think about:
1. Read Psalm 23:24, Psalm 48:14, and Isaiah 58:11–14 by yourself or with your parents. How are these passages connected?
2. To bring his sheep to the mountain pastures in the summer, a shepherd must lead his sheep through the valleys because the rest of the mountain is too steep to climb. The valleys look scary and the path is difficult to walk. How does God lead us through valleys in our own lives?
August 10-14, 2015

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“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” 1 Peter 5:8