Strangers and Sojourners in the End Times (1)

Strangers and sojourners has been the theme of the editorials for quite some time. We began with the biblical idea of strangers, sojourners, and closely connected, pilgrims. We defined being strangers and sojourners in terms of a lifelong journey with a beginning, a route, and a destination, all of which are determined by God’s counsel and guided by God’s providence. We observed that their journey is spiritual in nature. Although they live in the same world as do the wicked and have almost everything in common with them, there is an essential difference between them and God’s people, and that difference is grace. We further observed that strangers and sojourners are characterized by hope, individual responsibility, the lonely nature of their journey, traveling with friends, being chastened, being wise, being like our fathers, and more.

There is something timeless in everything written above in the sense that all of this is always true. God’s people in one way or another are strangers and pilgrims in the earth throughout the more than six thousand years of earth’s (and the church’s) existence. Nothing seems to change much. With the deniers of Christ’s coming, perhaps we are tempted to say, “All things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (2 Pet. 3:4).
However, we live in a new era called the end times. The journey that all God’s people walk is almost finished in terms of the execution of God’s counsel. We (and especially you, young people) live at the end of the ages. This unique period of history will soon be completed, and time, together with the earthly creation, will be no more. I remember hearing the late Rev. Herman Hoeksema saying many decades ago in a sermon that it was 11 P.M. on God’s clock of history. Since then much time has gone by and a great deal of history has transpired, and we have come much closer to midnight on God’s clock. Exactly because the clock of history is rapidly ticking to its end, all of us must pay attention to what is happening around us. I single out you, young people, because you will be the ones who experience the signs of the end times. It is certainly true that all of us experience them, but let’s face the facts. The older generations—your parents and grandparents and maybe your great-grandparents—are either aging or are already old. Soon they will go the way of all flesh. You, in contrast, will live on for many decades (according to God’s will) and will experience the signs of the times with increasing intensity.

Having put the general situation into perspective, we must ask and answer some questions. What is happening all around us? What is the meaning of disastrous events in nature, of upheaval in society, and of trouble in the church? How are we to understand the coming of antichrist and the signs that precede it? What will the future hold for me personally and for the church?

The short answer is that Christ will come. He has been coming ever since he ascended into heaven. We need think only of the words of the angel to the disciples as they watched him go up into heaven: “This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). He has been coming throughout the New Testament, although the signs of that coming are often difficult to discern. It is especially near the end of time—the age in which we live—that the time grows nearer and the signs are more clearly discernible.

The longer and more complicated answer is that the age in which we live is characterized by the coming of Christ. The answer is further that he will come by means of the signs of the times. In order to understand Christ’s coming, we must know what the Bible teaches about it. While many scripture passages mention the coming of Christ and the signs that precede it, Christ’s instruction to his disciples in Matthew 24 is perhaps the most definitive. In this passage are two key words that we need to understand.

In order to understand them, we must look first at the context in which Jesus used them. After Jesus prophesied the destruction of the temple (vv. 1–2), according to Matthew 24:3, the disciples asked Jesus privately, “Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” In reply, Jesus did not give them a straight answer in terms of time. He could not give them a precise date because he was unable: “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only” (v. 36). Instead, he replied by giving the disciples a description of the signs of his second coming.

The expression that the disciples used in their question is both correct and instructive for us. They spoke of “the end of the world,” and connected this with Jesus’ coming. The expression is more accurately “the complete finish of the eon.” An eon or an age is a definite period of time from the viewpoint of its content or nature. It has a unifying factor that defines it. The idea is therefore a period of time that is characterized by the coming of Christ. In the broadest sense this refers to the entire New Testament throughout which Christ comes. More narrowly this refers to the period immediately preceding the final coming, during which the signs of the times can be clearly discerned. When all the signs have taken place and the fullness of time has come, and when the eon is completely finished, then Christ will come.

The other key word is “end,” used in verse 6 and often in scripture, especially in the book of Revelation. We normally use “end” in a temporal way. For example, when a certain number of hours have gone by, we say that the school day has ended. But in scripture the word means end in the sense of goal. An element of time is doubtless included and implied. A certain amount of time must pass before Christ comes. But the emphasis is on the content of the end—what must happen before Christ will come again. This is clear from Jesus’ words, “but the end is not yet.” The signs of the times begin to intensify, but God’s goal—Christ’s final coming—has not been reached and will not be reached until all of the signs of it are complete and finished.

Thus Jesus says that all these things must come to
pass. He emphasizes that the signs of the times are necessary and therefore inevitable. For this reason we who live in the last eon must know what these signs are as they are described in scripture. We must also be able to recognize them not just as random events, things that “just happen,” but as the signs that they are.

We must know these things in order to know how we are to live as strangers and sojourners amidst the signs that are taking place all around us.

How are we to live? We are to redeem the time because the days are evil (Eph. 5:16). This means that in the midst of all the trials, troubles, and wickedness of the last days, we are to use our time to live as Christians to the best of our ability and to take every opportunity to do this.

Our attitude must also be one of faith in the face of apparent evil and hopelessness. In the face of all the negative events of the last days—apostasy, many antichrists, wars, famine, earthquakes, pestilence, persecution, and more—Jesus says to his church (v. 6), “see that ye be not troubled.” Why? Because all these things must come to pass before Christ returns.

But return he will. Of that, young people, you can be sure, for this is God’s word to us. Live then as the young strangers and sojourners that you are.

Mark H. Hoeksema: It is March 21, 2008, and I am at the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Cornelius Jonker in Walker, Michigan. I am about to interview Mr. Cornelius Jonker at his residence. In the interview there is considerable participation by his wife Truda, so this is in many respects a dual interview. It should also be noted that Mr. Jonker is my uncle.

MHH: Mr. Jonker, where and when were you born?

Cornelius Jonker: I was born in Rusk, Michigan. That is near Allendale, Michigan, in a little town where my father was pastor of Rusk Christian Reformed Church. I was born on September 25, 1924.

MHH: Where, Mr. Jonker, did you grow up?

Cornelius Jonker: My father was deposed from the ministry because he would not subscribe to the three points of common grace, so we moved to Baxter Street, near Eastern in Grand Rapids, and attended First Protestant Reformed Church. I was born on September 25, 1924.

MHH: Where, Mr. Jonker, did you grow up?

CJ: I don’t know if I can answer all the details. However, he graduated from Calvin College Theological Seminary. His first call was to Sibley, Iowa, where my older sister was born in 1921, just when they moved to Rusk. My father was deposed by his consistory, I believe, either in 1924 or 1925, because he would not subscribe to the three points of common grace, which also led to the formation of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

MHH: After he was deposed, what happened next?

CJ: My father never received another call. My father worked as a visitor of the shut-ins and sick of First Protestant Reformed Church. I don’t remember much of Baxter Street. From there we moved to Cooper Avenue, where my younger sister was born in 1927. Shortly thereafter my folks purchased a home at 1107 Dunham, and that’s where most of my boyhood memories occur.

MHH: Before we go into those boyhood memories, could you back up for a moment, please, and tell me more about your father—his education, his deposition. Where was he educated and when and under what circumstances was he deposed?

CJ: I don’t know if I can answer all the details. However, he graduated from Calvin College Theological Seminary. His first call was to Sibley, Iowa, where my older sister was born in 1921, just when they moved to Rusk. My father was deposed by his consistory, I believe, either in 1924 or 1925, because he would not subscribe to the three points of common grace, which also led to the formation of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

MHH: After he was deposed, what happened next?

CJ: My father never received another call. My father worked as a visitor of the shut-ins and sick of First Protestant Reformed Church. It was a large congregation. Rev. H. Hoeksema was the only pastor. With four sermons on a Sunday, plus Standard Bearer and Theological School, you can imagine he did not have time to call on the sick. That fell to my father.
Truda Jonker: He called on me when I was sick—around 4½–5 years old. I remember that.

CJ: So my father did a lot of sick calling. He made the bulletin announcements—it was quite a paragraph every Sunday in First Church. And somehow he served continuously in the consistory. He never had a year off, as was the custom. He always served. I never sat with my father in church.

MHH: He served as elder, then?

CJ: He served as elder. He was also stated clerk of synod for many years.

TJ: And he preached.

CJ: And he would preach. I would go with him to Portland and to Byron Center. So his income really was from First Church, supplemented by some preaching. He also did proofreading for Doorn Printing, who printed a lot of the publications of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

MHH: Why do you think it is, Mr. Jonker, that he never received a call, given his talents and abilities and his obvious usefulness to the church?

CJ: I’ve often wondered that myself—just why the Lord didn’t see fit to direct a call to him. I heard him preach on occasion. He was no dynamic speaker, but I thought he was a pretty good preacher. But why he never received a call, I don’t know.

MHH: There’s not a lot known about him. How would you characterize his personality and temperament?

CJ: I would say he was not a fiery man. He was generally mild-tempered. But he was also tenacious when he thought a cause was right and proper according to the word of God. I recall that he was the author of (seemingly to me) many protests, the last being in 1952–53 at the time when Rev. DeWolf made those famous statements. He would help people too in formulating protests. Sometimes he even took advantage of some of my typing skills and I had to type them for him. So he was rather mild-mannered, but if he thought a cause was right, he would pursue it, you might say, to the end, unless they proved him wrong.

MHH: Subsequent to 1925, what did he do for a living?

CJ: As I stated before, he was full-time visiting the sick for First Church. That was his vocation until First Church started calling more pastors. And then my father worked for Kelvinator (nothing related, of course, to his education), and later at Imperial Metal Products, but not as a skilled worker.

MHH: But all during that time he continued to serve as elder? And he made a definite contribution to the church?

TJ: And he was always working with proofreading Standard Bearer, and wasn’t he clerk to the synod for years and years and years?

CJ: He was stated clerk of synod for many years, as the volumes of the Standard Bearer will testify, and he was always in consistory. So, he kept active in church life, even to the day of his death. Even though he had other jobs, he still was very active. And he was always an elder. I don’t know what kind of an exception they made for that, but he never sat with his family—just like Rev. Ophoff was always in consistory in First Church when he was around.

TJ: Did you go to the Dutch service with him when he was an elder, because you went as a child, didn’t you?

MHH: That’s a good question. Did you attend the Dutch services? What do you remember of the early ecclesiastical history of the PR Churches?

CJ: I remember very well Sundays. My father would be up before the family was. He would drive to the West Side, where his parents (my grandfather and grandmother Jonker) resided. He would pick them up. Then he would go to Henry Street in Grand Rapids and pick up an aged aunt with her Down syndrome son. He would take them to the early Dutch service and attend himself. After that service, he would bring the four of them to our home on Dunham Street, and then he would go again to the second service (which was the first English). We would all have dinner together at our home (my mother having prepared most of the victuals the day before). Then he would take those four people to the Dutch service in the afternoon. Following that service, he would drop them off at their homes on Henry Street and the West Side, come back, and go to the evening service. So he for the most part attended four services—two Dutch and two English (laughter). I remember many years of that routine. My grandfather and grandmother helped him buy a car for that purpose.

MHH: And the time-frame of these events would have been roughly what?

TJ: You don’t think they were already going when they built First Church because, if I understood my parents, I was baptized in the basement of First
Church, so it must have been in the process of being finished at that time already.

CJ: I don’t remember anything but the big edifice of First Church at Fuller and Franklin. We would always walk four blocks from Dunham Street to the church. But exactly the years, I don’t know.

MHH: Would it be fair to say that the ecclesiastical life of First Church in those days, given the fact that they held four services a Sunday, that that life was thriving?

CJ: Oh, yes. First Church was a big congregation. Rev. H. Hoeksema was a tremendous spokesman, a tremendous theological figure, and the church was full. I don’t know about the Dutch services. I did not go to the Dutch services. But the English services were full.

MHH: Now you mentioned, Mr. Jonker, that your family lived on Dunham Street, which is in Southeast Grand Rapids. Other than those that you have already expressed, what are any other memories that you would have of the Protestant Reformed Churches? For example, besides the four services a day, what is your recollection of catechism instruction, of the general life of the church, of the membership, the attitude of the church? What can you tell me about all of this?

CJ: Well, as a child, you just sort of took what came. You attended catechism faithfully. That was for the most part on Saturday mornings. The catechism classes were divided according to boys and girls. Sunday School was different. Sunday School was by ages. Little groups would meet in various sections of the main auditorium. That was our Sunday School, but catechism was in the basement. It was in the big classroom where they held the Theological School, and students taught us. I had candidate or seminarian VanWeelden (James VanWeelden, who later became a minister in the Protestant Reformed Churches). And there was Lambert Doezema, who also became a minister. I remember that the boys tried to get away with things if they could. They learned how to surreptitiously hide their books when questions were asked. The instructor soon caught on. Instead of asking from the front, he would wander to the side so he could look down the rows, which was rather effective.

I remember as a kid (and I almost hate to tell you this one), but one day I took along a little pet white mouse in my pocket to catechism (laughter). In retrospect I guess it was rather foolish, but it sounded like fun at the time. Fortunately, he stayed in my pocket (laughter). But I always had to know the answers to my questions—both my parents would see to that. But I always knew my questions and knew my answers.

MHH: Was any of this instruction carried out by Herman Hoeksema?

CJ: No. I never had classes by him. The only class that I know that he taught, other than seminary, was that famous Wednesday night catechism class for adults. That was a very popular class. But I was quite young. I think about the only time that I attended a class (and that was just before I was married and my older sister, Gertrude, prevailed upon myself and my girl friend Trudy—now my wife—to sing a duet at the last meeting of the season, which was sort of a little social). That was probably our debut as far as duets is concerned. But I never had Rev. Hoeksema as a teacher other than minister and pastor.

MHH: But you did remain as a duet for many, many years and decades after that point, is that correct?

CJ: Music has been a big part of our lives, and a lot of it in the Protestant Reformed Churches. We would sing on the live broadcast of the Reformed Witness Hour on Sunday afternoons. We would sing at programs. I remember that First Church had a big platform in the front that would pull out on rollers almost to the front row. That was done when they had special programs or performances. One was the Choral Society. It was an adult choir of the church. They would perform, believe it or not, different oratorios—not really dramatize them, but they would have different singers as, for example, in the oratorio “Esther.” There was a Mr. Herman Karel who sang the tenor role of Mordecai. I was entranced with the choir, but especially with him. I thought to myself, “Oh, if I could only do that, why that would just be…” And, as the Lord led, eventually I was singing the part of Mordecai myself, and my wife was Zeresh, Haman’s wife. It was sort of a high point in my young life. We did a lot of singing. I love to sing. I still do.

MHH: But it is fantastic to think that oratorios were formally presented on the platform of First Church.

CJ: And we even had, I believe, Seymour Swets, who directed the Calvin Oratorical Society. He directed for years. Then there was Al Smith. There were different ones, outside directors, and they produced
some oratorios that maybe now would lift eyebrows off the forehead. But they had some good stuff too. They really did. And I think Esther was acceptable. But whether that would be done today, I doubt it.

MHH: I’m curious as to your thoughts on that. Was the general attitude of the people in those days more liberal than it is today? As you say, this is unheard of today. Yet it was commonplace and well attended at the time that you mention. Do you have any thoughts as to why this could be?

CJ: Not really. I don’t know whether all the music at that time had to be approved by a certain committee. I think they had a few sad experiences. Maybe that changed a little later—that they had to have all program material approved by the consistorial committee. I recall that on a couple occasions, they frowned at some submitted numbers—wanted them either deleted or changed. As a result, the group refused to perform, so I think they tightened up on it, for what reason, I don’t know. Maybe it got a little bit out of hand or maybe there were some protests. But I think that for a while they tolerated some things that probably wouldn’t go over so well today.

MHH: Is it fair to say that these events that you are describing took place in the 1930s?

CJ: Let’s see. I was probably—maybe I was 12, 13 years old, which would make it in the mid-to-late 30s.

TJ: And early 40s. That was before I went to high school.

CJ: I would say that was before the war, before I went into the army. I really didn’t do any singing then. I didn’t know that much about it. I appreciated it, and I loved it, and I could sing, but I didn’t really understand music. Then I was away from the church for three years in the Army. When I came back, we would do a lot of singing at night around the piano with groups, singles, and some couples. One day in the service, I happened to sit behind Doris VanDellen, who was radio choir director. She had a good soprano voice. And I sat behind her and didn’t think that much of it, but right after the service she called me. She said, “You come to radio choir tomorrow.” Oh, I didn’t really know notes, but I learned, and that was the beginning of my singing career, you might say. I learned fast. I don’t know all the aspects of music, but I can read music. The rest is history. Trudy took voice lessons. We sang in radio choir. We were picked for soloists and the choral society. We sang duets all over the place. I sang for hundreds of weddings. There were a lot of weddings that took place after the veterans came home. I wish I had kept track of all of them, but it was well in the hundreds. So it’s been a big part of our life, and very rewarding.

TJ: We had the radio choir (a big part of the church at that time). They had a Men’s Chorus which was very good. And the radio choir would at that time sing right on the air. They didn’t record right away.

MHH: It was live?

TJ: It was live.

MHH: Wow.

CJ: The technician from WFUR at the time would set up right after the Dutch service. The speaker would be in the consistory room. The technicians would be up in the north balcony. We would have a live broadcast, signaling from the consistory room to the balcony to the announcer and to the choir. I remember when Prof. Schilder, from the Netherlands, conducted the afternoon Dutch service. It was a long service. We were outside of the church biting our nails because it was about quarter to four (the broadcast was scheduled for 4 PM), and they weren’t out yet. And so at about ten or five to four, the people streamed out. While they were streaming out, the radio choir and technicians streamed in. We had to tell the people to be quiet so we could have this live broadcast. I remember that was a hectic afternoon (laughter).

MHH: What a memory!

CJ: I remember one day (this must have been in November or December of 1961), Trudy and I came to church to sing on the broadcast. It was live. We sang the broadcast, and my brother James played for us. [James Jonker, 21 years of age at the time, was an excellent musician (organist) and composer, who at this time had decided to enter the seminary. To put this into perspective, the organ was located in the south balcony of first church, while the singers were on the main floor of the church]. He was up in the balcony at the organ. He said, “I just wrote some lines of a song, and he threw down the paper. He said, “Let me just play it.” So he played it while we read it. Then he said, “Now try to sing it.” So we did. He said, “Do it again.” We did it, a little bit better. About that time Clare Prince [of the Reformed Witness Hour] perked up his ears and he says, “Do it once more and I’m going to record it.” So we did. It was...
the song entitled “Perfect Peace.” So we sang it, and it was recorded. We didn’t think anything more of it until a few weeks later my brother suffered fatal injuries in an accident in Pennsylvania (right after Christmas that same year). Then, of course, the recording became very valuable and meaningful. It was reproduced in many 45 RPM records and distributed. Later on my older sister (Trude Hoeksema) had it published as sheet music. And it’s been a big part of our lives.

TJ: But don’t forget that it was played on the radio the Sunday after he was killed.

MHH: Can you explain that to me, please? It was recorded prior to his death?

TJ: Prior to his death, but they played it on that next Sunday.

MHH: After he passed away in this accident?

TJ: Right.

MHH: Which was at Christmas time of 1962, correct?

CJ: 1961. My brother Jim played for the [Sunday School] Christmas program on Christmas Day. There was a morning service on Christmas Day, and the Sunday School program followed immediately after the service. Then he picked up a friend of his and they headed to Pennsylvania [to see female friends] and they drove all night. His friend was driving, and they ran into the back of a steel truck. My brother was killed, the driver was badly injured.

TJ: Fallen asleep.

CJ: Yes, he had fallen asleep. The song was “Perfect Peace.” And it was very fitting and very touching. It was played, as my wife said, the Sunday after Jim was killed, with the notation that he had composed that song and it was recorded just prior to his death. [To be continued…] 

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After months of planning and hard work, the Beacon Lights’ staff is eager to share with our readers the new beaconlights.org. The website reveals a professional design and layout. Bold colors, sharp pictures, and fresh content fill each page. The user friendly website contains a clear-cut layout that is easy to navigate for readers of all ages.

Why the change?

The old site consisted of a dated design and layout, limited online purchase options, and incomplete archives that were difficult to search. It was time for an overhaul. The new website has been professionally developed by a local design company, and the results speak for themselves.

Start your tour by visiting the home page; it has been completely transformed. This page features an overview of the latest issue, a quick search tool for navigating the site, and easy access for submitting your questions to Schuyler (who is always hungry for more questions). Spend a few minutes exploring the other pages on the site to see all the changes, including our new professionally designed logo.

Archives

Enhancing the Beacon Lights’ online archives has long been a priority of the staff. In fact, some have spent years working on this project. Most of the old Beacon Lights volumes needed reformatting before being published online. With the much appreciated help of many volunteers, most of these volumes have been re-typed. This is still an ongoing project, but there is now a good amount of archives available on the new website for you to explore.

Not only is there additional content, but also searching the archives has been significantly improved. The advanced search feature allows you to filter quickly through nearly 75 years of Beacon Lights. Search results may be filtered by volume, year, author, rubric, and tags, which are the main themes of each article. After the initial search, results may be narrowed further by filtering within the results. The
options for viewing the articles or issues have been expanded as well. You can read the articles on our website, download a PDF of the article, or download a PDF of the entire issue.

What a great resource to have at your fingertips. Readers of all ages stand to benefit from it, but especially the young people. Use it as a resource for school-work, young peoples’ society, and bible studies. Or, instead of spending free time on social media, devote a few minutes scrolling through articles your parents and grandparents may have read or written. Learn about the issues our churches faced in the past. Use it as a tool to learn more about our God and his mighty works.

**CHECKOUT PAGE**

The products and subscription offers available for purchase through the website have been expanded. One, two, or three year subscriptions are now available. The two or three year subscriptions will be offered at discounted prices. A multi-year subscription is also an option if you renew by mailing a check. Refer to your next renewal notice for more details. Also available online for purchase are recent back issues and Rev. Harbach’s booklet, An Exposition of Christian Liberty.

Another upgrade to the checkout page is the option to make an online donation. Beacon Lights relies heavily on your financial support. In fact, over half of our revenue is from donations and church collections. As a result of this, we are able to keep our subscription price at a minimum. Thank you! As a side note, did you know that in the 1940s, Beacon Lights published the names of donors and their donation amounts? Use our advanced archive search tool and see for yourself.

**ACCOUNT LOGIN**

There is one final exciting addition. Each subscriber now has his own online Beacon Lights account. Accessing this account allows you to see your subscription details, update your address information, and renew your subscription at any time. Your online account specifies the number of issues remaining on your subscription, your recent purchase history, and the issues that have been mailed to you. Keep in mind, it will only show activity on your account since the launch of the new website and will not show any prior history. If you renew your subscription by mailing a check, your online account will show this payment history as well.

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As you can see, the website has been completely transformed. Take a few minutes to explore it. If you have comments or questions, contact us through the website. Visit us today at beaconlights.org!

Matt is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan and the business manager of Beacon Lights.
Serving the Church with Our Time: What Can I Do for You?

A page ripped out of a coloring book with bold strokes of crayon running over the picture as a get well card. A six-year old using his entire body to hold the door open for his family and the one coming in after them. A handwritten thank you for the meal given to her family.

From a very young age Reformed parents teach their children to serve others. Why would they do this? To gain the compliments of others for such thoughtful children? In order that when the kids get older parents can relinquish some of their own responsibilities? Let’s hope not! More likely it is that they know and want to instill in their children that serving others is a way of showing love and thankfulness—love for the church and thankfulness to God for including them in it. Unselfishly giving of your time and energy for the good of others creates bonds that unite the church.

For some, serving seems to be just a part of who they are, it flows so naturally. For others, it takes conscious thought and effort. For all of God's children it can and should become a way of life. We must follow Christ’s example. He served (think of his washing the disciples’ feet).

Excuses quickly come to mind why you don’t think you can or should have to: too young, not enough time, too shy, don’t know what I can do, plenty of others in the church to fill the need. But God has placed you here in his church. From the perspective of a young person, God shows you opportunities to fill needs that no one else sees. He gives you the strength and time to be a huge blessing to his church.

Evaluate how you use your time. When you have blocks of free time each week, what do you deem as most important to fill that time? How can you carve out a little time each week to ease the burden for, bring joy to, or connect with a fellow believer? It doesn’t have to be hours each week. It doesn’t necessarily have to be a weekly commitment, but if the opportunity arises and you have the time available...in love for God, for the benefit of others, and for the humbling of yourself, why wouldn’t you do it?

In order to serve, you need to see the need. To see the need, you need to be involved with the church. Don’t go from pew to parking lot. Stick around after the services. This may scare you, as you don’t know anyone and really have no idea what to say if someone were to approach you. To help you become more comfortable, go through the church directory. Learn everyone’s name. As you read the bulletin or scan social media sites, you will recognize names and become aware of specific needs or reasons to celebrate with them.

Your church also has many volunteer opportunities available for serving: nursery attendants, ushers, valet parking attendants, writing to a missionary family, making meals/baked goods, doing yard work, playing piano/organ, visiting the shut-ins/widows/widowers. You cannot do it all, nor does God require it. As there are many different needs, so there are many members with various gifts. God equips you with specific gifts and abilities to use in his service.

• Do you have a knack with young kids? See if Sunday school teachers are needed. Find out when societies meet for the parents in the church. Offer to watch their kids during that time so they can go together. If there is a young girls or young boys group in your church, volunteer to help at one of their meetings.

• Have you been given patience and a soft spot for the elderly? Visit them to break the monotony of their day and ease their loneliness. Ask them about their life. Talk to them after church services. Offer to drive them to and from the Young People’s soup supper or other events. Sit by and talk to them at these events. Make them a meal or baked goods. Take them out for coffee. Remember them with a card or personal greeting on their birthday.
• Are you able to put together thoughts and ideas, transferring them from mind to paper in an organized fashion? Read and write a review for a book in your church’s library. Write an encouraging note or email to lift the spirit of one who is struggling and feeling overwhelmed with the circumstances of life. Write an article for Beacon Lights. Send a message to a missionary and his family or a family (young person) on the mission field.

• Have you been gifted with a sense of humor? Look for one who is traveling a dark path who could use some laughter to brighten the way. Think of random acts to bring a smile to one feeling left out or discouraged.

• Do you have leadership qualities? Organize a few groups to visit the elderly on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon, contact the deacons to see if there is work a group of young people can help with—maybe a day to do yard work for a family in need or annual cleanup around the church or parsonage. Be one to engage others to participate in the discussion during young people’s meetings.

Opportunity to show love and service can simply be taking the time to remember others by acts of service. Remember that we are a body that rejoices with those who rejoice and weeps with those that weep (Rom. 12:15). If you don’t see where you can help, pray. Pray that God will open your eyes to opportunities and also give you the initiative to act on it. Pray for those in your church. By keeping them in mind you become attuned to their needs, and ways to bless them may present themselves.

You are a member of Christ’s body. You are a necessary part of that body. You have a place and purpose in it at this time in your life. There are things you can do that no one else can. For the good of his church and to show love and thankfulness to him, make serving others a priority in your life even now.

Send an encouraging note to the person waiting for surgery or recovering from surgery. Hold the door for the family coming in behind you. Yes, if you’re not artistic, even get a coloring book and color a picture to bring a smile to one who is not feeling well. You will be amazed at how something that to you seems like such a small gesture (and doesn’t take much time) can have a huge impact on someone else and how it strengthens the tie that binds us in Christian love.

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Poem

Thelma Westra

School

Now again the time has come
When school doors open wide,
And kindergartners look with awe—
Wondering, what’s inside?
Of course, they want to feel grown-up,
Accepted by their peers—
But deep inside they often quake
With certain nameless fears.

Those who’ve been to school before
Return with feelings mixed;
The freedom of the summer’s gone,
Their schedules now are fixed.
Yet eagerly they come to learn;
They thirst for knowledge true.
They feel the need for Christian friends
And competition too.

The older students wander in
Pretending “school’s a drag!”
Pseudo-sophistication reigns
And purposes are vague.
Yet, yearning for learning awakens here;
They’re channeled to find their niche,
And their minds expand, they grow in grace
As they ponder their heritage rich.

And then the college crowds again
Take up their studies too;
Preparing for their lifetime work,
They try to keep in view
The goals they’re striving to attain
That they may take their place
With the employment of their skills
And all that they must face.

Where’er you are as new terms start,
We pray you’ll have this goal:
That you will diligently seek
The welfare of your soul.
Your parents, friends, and teachers know
While through your work you plod,
Their hope for you is based on this:
To be approved of God.
Don’t Fret
Read Psalm 37:1-11
Psalm 37 is another acrostic psalm. It contains eight precepts, six of which are found in verses 1–8. The psalm begins with this two-part command: Do not fret because of evildoers: do not envy them. The sixth precept, which is found in verse 8, is similar: “Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil.” I sometimes tell my children, “Don’t fret.” I say that when they are anxious about something trivial or something that’s out of their control, and I want them to stop worrying. But “fret” as it’s used in these passages has a slightly different meaning. It means, “Do not get hot with anger.” This kind of fretting is fuming, fuming that kindles the fire of envy. Why should we not envy the wicked? Because “evildoers shall be cut off” (v. 9). The wicked who disregard God’s law and live only for their own pleasure are like animals who are fattened in order that they might be slaughtered (James 5:5). “But those that wait upon the L ORD, they shall inherit the earth” (v. 9). There in that inheritance his saints “shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace” (v. 11).
Sing or pray Psalter #95.

Trust and Do
Read James 2:14–26
In Psalm 37:3 we’re commanded: “Trust in the LORD, and do good.” In other words, we’re called to have an active faith in our covenant God: we’re called to demonstrate our faith in word and deed. The glorious truth of the gospel is that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Our works don’t save us, but we were saved to do good works! Titus 2:14 teaches that Jesus Christ “gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” Eph. 2:8–10a reads, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works...” We’re called not only to trust, but also to do: “Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone” (James 2:17).

Is your life consistent with your profession to be a follower of Christ? “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).
Sing or pray Psalter #95.

Delight in the Lord
Read Isaiah 55
The third precept contained in Psalm 37 is this: “Delight thyself also in the LORD.” We’ve noted previously in our study of the psalms that the righteous man delights in the law of God. The good works that he does are driven by that delight. In this text we’re called to seek our happiness in God himself: in his being, his perfections, his friendship, and his love (Barnes). Do you find joy in meditating upon God? Does your heart cry out, “I will love thee, O L ORD, my strength” (Ps. 18:1)?

There’s a promise attached to this command: “and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.” One who delights in God desires above all to know him more and more. That’s a request God never denies! He has mercy upon those who seek him; he abundantly pardons those who forsake their wicked ways. As to your other desires, “the fact that you seek your happiness in him will regulate your desires, so that you will be ‘disposed’ to ask only those things which it will be proper for him to grant” (Barnes).

Sing or pray Psalter #95.

Arise, My Fair One
Read Song of Solomon 2
Most women can readily rattle off a number of things they don’t like about their face and figure. If they are married, those self-preoccupied thoughts usually don’t encourage intimacy with their husbands. Instead, they lead them to resolutions to diet, exercise, whiten their teeth, or dye their hair. If the Christian wife of a godly husband would instead focus on delighting in her husband, he would likely soon dispel her insecurities with his reassurance that he finds her beautiful and desirable.

Spiritually speaking, we must know how great our sin and misery is. We aren’t just flawed: we’re totally depraved! But we don’t stop there. Focusing on our sins and sinfulness only drives us to despair or to thinking that we must work harder in order to save ourselves. We must move on to focus on our Savior, our heavenly Husband, to delight in his being, his perfections, his friendship, and his love. His righteousness has been imputed to us, making us beautiful in his sight. To us he says, “Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.” Sit “down under his shadow with great delight.”

Sing or pray Psalter #95.
Commit Thy Way unto the Lord
Read 1 Peter 5
What is the fourth precept found in Psalm 37? “Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass” (v. 5). 1 Pet. 5:7 echoes this command. We must roll the heavy burden of our cares and concerns onto the mighty shoulders of our God. That’s how we commit our way unto him: Thy way, not mine, O Lord, however dark it be; Lead me by thine own hand, choose out the path for me. Smooth let it be or rough, it will be still the best; Winding or straight, it leads right onward to thy rest. I dare not choose my lot; I would not, if I might; Choose thou for me, my God, so I shall walk aright. Take thou my cup, and it with joy or sorrow fill, As best to thee may seem; choose thou my good and ill. Choose thou for me my friends, my sickness or my health; Choose thou my cares for me, my poverty or wealth. The kingdom that I seek is thine: so let the way That leads to it be thine, else I must surely stray. Not mine, not mine the choice in things great or small; Be thou my Guide, my Strength, my Wisdom, and my All. Sing or pray Psalter #96.

Rest in the Lord
Read Leviticus 10:1-11
God chose Aaron and his four sons to minister before him in the priests’ office. When Nadab and Abihu failed to sanctify God before the congregation, God’s judgment was immediate and severe: he devoured them with fire. But Aaron wasn’t permitted even the customary signs of mourning: his appearance and behavior were to testify to the justice of God’s punishment upon his sons. How did Aaron respond? He “held his peace.” Romans 15:4 teaches us that “whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.” Psalm 37:7 commands us to hold our peace as Aaron did: “Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him.” The word translated “rest” there means “to be silent before the Lord.” That silence is a humble acknowledgement that God is God. It’s a hopeful, patient quietness of soul that is possible only by the work of the Holy Spirit. Do you face the trials in your life with a quiet heart? “Thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel; in returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be thy strength” (Is. 30:15). Sing or pray Psalter #96.

Better than Riches
Read 1 Timothy 6
“A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked” (Ps. 37:16). That’s a truth that’s easy to confess but difficult to live. My children will sometimes work hard to save their money for a special toy. As soon as they buy it, they have their eyes on something better. We adults are no different. The Scriptures teach that godliness with contentment is great gain, yet Christian contentment is a “rare jewel.” “A Christian comes to contentment, not so much by way of addition as by way of subtraction…Contentment does not come by adding to what you have, but by subtracting from what you desire. The world says that you will find contentment when your possessions rise to meet the level of your desires…The Christian has another way to contentment, that is, he can bring his desires down to his possessions” (Jeremiah Burroughs). Yesterday we considered the Christian’s calling to be quiet before the Lord. “Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit” (Ecc. 4:6).

Can you say this with the apostle Paul? “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” (Phil. 4:11). Sing or pray Psalter #97.

The Art of Discontent
Read Luke 12:13–21
Christians must not only learn to be content: we must learn to be discontent. The rich fool was satisfied with his “much goods laid up for many years.” When we have all the earthly things we desire, we must long for the spiritual treasures that alone can satisfy. “Believers ought to see to it that after they have learned that this life will soon vanish like a dream, they transfer the things they want truly to enjoy to a place where they will have life unceasing. We ought, then, to imitate what people do who determine to migrate to another place, where they have chosen a lasting abode. They send before them all their resources, and do not grieve over lacking them for a time, for they deem themselves the happier the more goods they have where they will be for a long time” (Calvin).

Do you “desire a better country, that is, an heavenly”? Then God is not ashamed to be called your God: for he has prepared for you a city. Lay up your treasures there. Sing or pray Psalter #97.

Christ is More to Me
Read Luke 16:1–13
This week my children are learning about the parable of the unjust steward in their Sunday school lesson. The steward in Luke 16 is not only unjust, he’s shrewd. He believes that this world is all there is to live for, and he acts accordingly. In contrast we who are the children of light say that our home is in heaven, but we spend the majority of our time and resources pursuing earthly treasures. We forget that we are stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1) and that only our works that cannot be destroyed by fire will endure (1 Cor. 3:11-15). “Moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1 Cor. 4:2).

So “love Christ more and you will love money less. When you have less you will find yourself saying, ‘I am learning to be content. Christ is more to me than all the world.’ When you have more you will say, ‘How can I use what I have to serve Christ? Because Christ is more to me than all the world!’” (Pastor Colin Smith). That’s a life that’s consistent with this confession: “A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked.”

Sing or pray Psalter #97.

The Steps of the Good Man
Read Psalm 37:12–26
A sister from our congregation visits the 3rd and 4th grade classroom at our school weekly to play her autoharp and teach the students new songs. One of my daughter’s favorite
songs from this past year was the words of Psalm 37:23–24 set to music: “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand.”

Several days ago we considered the reality that the LORD directs our way. More specifically, he providentially directs our every step. We don’t know what this day holds, not to mention the coming week or year. But God does. “He does not always show [us our] way at a distance, but leads [us] step by step, as children are led, and so keeps [us] in a continual dependence upon his guidance” (Matthew Henry). So we devise our future way mindful that only if the LORD wills will we live and do this or that. What a comforting truth: for he orders all things for our good and directs our steps to an expected end.

Sing or pray Psalter #98.

He Delights in My Way
Read Zephaniah 3

We must delight in the LORD, but what a wonder that he also delights in us! He does so not because of anything that we have done. By nature we’re like the Israelites of old: we refuse correction, don’t trust in the LORD, and don’t draw near to him (Zeph. 3:2). All that we do is corrupt (v. 7). But “the LORD hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy” (v. 15). Instead, God himself dwells in us. Not only does he rule over all the events that concern us in his providence: he directs us through the work of his Holy Spirit in our hearts. He makes us sorry for our sins (v. 18) and causes us to bring forth “fruits meet for repentance” (Matt. 3:8). Because he is mighty, “he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing” (Zeph. 3:17). “The LORD taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation” (Ps. 149:4).

We live in a world that is hostile to all that is holy. May we be comforted knowing that God delights in our way.

Sing or pray Psalter #98.

Not Utterly Cast Down
Read Psalm 51:1–12

Psalm 37:24 says this about the righteous: “Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand.” Canons of Dordt, Head 5, expounds this truth:

“Converts are not always so influenced and actuated by the Spirit of God, as not in some particular instances sinfully to deviate from the guidance of divine grace, so as to be seduced by and comply with the lusts of the flesh; they must, therefore, be constant in watching and prayer, that they be not led into temptation. When these are neglected, they are...drawn into great and heinous sins...By such enormous sins, however, they very highly offend God, incur a deadly guilt, grieve the Holy Spirit, interrupt the exercise of faith, very grievously wound their consciences, and sometimes lose the sense of God’s favor for a time, until, on their returning into the right way of serious repentance, the light of God’s fatherly countenance again shines upon them. But God...does not wholly withdraw the Holy Spirit from His own people, even in their melancholy falls, nor suffer them to proceed so far as to lose the grace of adoption and forfeit the state of justification...”

Sing or pray Psalter #98.

The Number of My Days
Read Psalm 90

As the sovereign Ruler over all, our heavenly Father determines the number of our days. “The LORD knoweth the days of the upright” (Ps. 37:18a). The Scriptures are full of metaphors that describe the fleeting nature of our earthly lives. Whether we die when we are young or old, our lives are like a vapor, a shadow, a flower, and the grass that springs up and withers in a day. Job 14: 5–6 reads, “Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass; turn from him, that he may rest, till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day.” You and I are hirings, servants who serve their Master only for a short, set time (v.6).

Knowing that our lives are so brief, how should we live? We should make this prayer of Moses ours: “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (Ps. 90:12).

Sing or pray Psalter #100.

Till My Change Come
Read Job 14

Not only are our lives short: they are sinful. “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one” (Job 14:4). Furthermore, God, who numbers our steps, sees every sin (v. 16). And the wages of our sin is death (Rom. 6:23). But there is comfort for the upright in Psalm 37:18: “The LORD knoweth the days of the upright: and their inheritance shall be for ever.” And Job answers his own question—“If a man die, shall he live again?” — in faith: “All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands” (v. 14–15). Not only Job, “but we shall all be changed, 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. 15:51–52).

How is that possible? “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

Sing or pray Psalter #100.

Metamorphosis
Read 1 Corinthians 15:51–58

Two plastic jars sit on our kitchen window sill. In one of them, five rapidly growing caterpillars squirm over each other, littering their cramped quarters with droppings at the same astonishing rate at which their food disappears. In the other jar, three still, seemingly lifeless chrysalises dangle from the lid. But something is taking place within those chrysalises: metamorphosis, “a profound change.” During this pupal stage, the larvae that entered those chrysalises liquefy into a protein soup. Out of those elements God creates a beautiful adult butterfly that emerges only a short week later.

Today I think about death—and about our metamorphosis—as I wash the dishes and watch our caterpillars. As remarkable as it is to see an earth-bound, creeping caterpillar transformed into a colorful butterfly, fluttering in the rays of the sun, the change that awaits us is far more glorious. We are going to be changed profoundly. “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...thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Sing or pray Psalter #29.

Vessels Fit for Destruction
Read Matthew 25:31-46
Our children once found two swallowtail caterpillars in our garden. They captured them, dutifully fed them until they pupated, and then waited eagerly for the beautiful ebony butterflies to emerge. To our shock and dismay, two large, ugly wasps came out of the chrysalises instead. They were parasites. Injected into the body of the caterpillars as eggs, they ate them from within, waiting to kill them until they pupated. The wasp larvae then went through their own metamorphosis before chewing their way out of the chrysalises.

Many assume that after death all people will be changed into a glorious body and live joyfully for eternity. Matthew 25 and 2 Thessalonians 1 teach that “when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,” he will take “vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.” They will be punished “with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.” Their bodies will be changed into vile, ugly bodies suited for the terrible place in which they will spend eternity. Thank God: that’s the punishment from which you and I have been saved.

Sing or pray Psalter #149.

You are a Saint
Read Psalm 37:27–33
Charles Spurgeon calls Psalm 37:27-29 the quintessence of Psalm 37. These verses contain the psalm’s seventh precept: “Depart from evil, and do good.” The incentive to obey that command follows in verse 28: “For the LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off.”

The LORD does not forsake his saints. Who are his saints? Saints are not an exclusive group of apostles, martyrs, and others who attain a seemingly greater measure of holiness. Sainthood is “a status into which God brings every believer. All Christians are saints” (Jerry Bridges). A saint is someone who has been sanctified, that is, set apart. Saints are set apart by God, for God. “For ye are bought with a price,” the inspired apostle writes in 1 Cor. 6:20. What was the purchase price of your life? “The precious blood of Christ” (1 Pet. 1:19). We no longer serve sin: Christ is the Lord—the Owner—of our lives. “Therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:20b.) Or, in the words of Psalm 37, “Depart from evil, and do good.”

Sing or pray Psalter #100.

The Meek Shall Inherit the Earth
Read Psalm 37:34-40
Psalm 37:34 commands: “Wait on the LORD, and keep his way.” For “evil doers shall be cut off,” “but the meek shall inherit the earth” (v. 9, 11). Our Lord Jesus quoted this psalm in his sermon on the mount. We saints, the citizens of the kingdom of heaven, must be characterized by meekness. One who is meek esteems others better than himself. He is mindful of all that he’s been forgiven and is ready to forgive others. That means he is characterized by self-control and is not quick to retaliate when he is wronged. One who is meek humbly receives rebuke and reproof. He is teachable: he longs to learn the way of Jehovah. “The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek he will teach his way” (Ps. 25:9). That meekness is the work of the Holy Spirit by the Word.

By nature we equate meekness with weakness. In this life the strong seem to conquer. But “the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God...therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours.” All things, including “the world,” “things present,” and “things to come.” How can that be? “Ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s” (1 Cor. 3:19–23).

Sing or pray Psalter #100.

A Burden Too Heavy
Read Psalm 38:1–4
The psalmist cries to Jehovah because he is overwhelmed by two things: God’s anger and his own sin. His sin is a flood that has gone over his head and a burden that is too heavy for him to bear. I am thankful he does not specify the sin or “foolishness” for which he is chastised. By nature we’d like to know, wouldn’t we? It’s easier for us to focus on another’s sins than it is to apply the words of Scripture to our own hearts and lives.

Instead, let’s each take a moment to consider our own sins. Too often we make light of our sins: we excuse the transgressions for which our Savior died. When we rightly assess our sinful state and the chastisement that God has sent on account of our wickedness, we should be overwhelmed. Pray Psalm 38:1-14 as you consider your sins, and thank God that you do not have to bear the punishment due to you for them. “And when I think, that God, his Son not sparing, sent him to die, I scarce can take it in. That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing, he bled and died to take away my sin!”

Sing or pray Psalter #102.
**September 28**

**A Disquieted Heart**
**Read Psalm 38:5–8**

The consequences and the chastisement that have come upon the psalmist as a result of his sin compound his grief. Is his lament hyperbolic, or is he really suffering from stinking wounds and a loathsome disease? “Whatever his horrible condition was, he makes it clear that it was caused by his ‘folly’” (Ross). He writhes, is brought down, mourns, and is restless.

Can you discern the Lord’s chastening in your life? I hope so, “for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (Heb. 12:6). Perhaps a certain sin leaves you plagued with guilt or a loss of peace. Sometimes God chastises our sins with tense or broken relationships, unpleasant circumstances, or spiritual laziness or weakness. Perhaps your marriage is suffering because you refuse to love or to submit. Perhaps your child wanders because you refused to discipline them. Too often we complain about circumstances or to submit. Perhaps your marriage is suffering because you refuse to love or to submit. Perhaps your child wanders because you refused to discipline them. Too often we complain about circumstances without considering whether or not they are the consequences of our sin and the Lord’s discipline for that sin. Consider your chastisements as you pray the words of Psalm 38:5–8, and thank God for the one who bore chastisement for our peace. With his stripes we are healed (Is. 53:5).

Sing or pray Psalter #102.

**September 29**

**Groaning Not Hid**
**Read Psalm 38:9–10**

To whom do you turn when you are troubled? The writer of Psalm 38 knows that the only one to whom he can turn in his trouble is the one who chastens him. Nothing is hidden from the Lord: not only is he omniscient, he has sovereignty decreed all things from eternity. And yet, the psalmist understands that he is responsible for his sin. A young woman once asked Charles Spurgeon if it was possible to reconcile God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility. “Young woman,” said he, “you don’t reconcile friends.” It is impossible for us fully to grasp these two truths, yet they are inseparably woven throughout Scripture.

The psalmist tells God that his strength is failing and his vision is declining. Does he refer to a literal loss of sight or lost perspective? 2 Corinthians 4:17–18 gives us perspective when we are enduring trials: “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory…for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” Let those truths guide you as you pray today.

Sing or pray Psalter #103.

**September 30**

**Our Sympathetic High Priest**
**Read Psalm 38:11–14**

The psalms are God-breathed: they are the words of the “Word made flesh.” Our Savior prayed the psalms even as he hung on the cross. “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Ps. 22:1a). “My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God” (Ps. 42:2a). For our sakes he was abandoned by friend and kinsman. His enemies sought after his life; they conspired and falsely accused him. Throughout his mock trial and during his crucifixion, they added insult to injury. “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth” (Is. 53:7).

Does your three-fold enemy seek to add insult to your injury? “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. 4:15–16).

Sing or pray Psalter #103.

**October 1**

**God Hears the Repentant**
**Read Psalm 38:15–20**

As we near the end of Psalm 38, the psalmist’s sorrow persists. His enemies are lively and strong. But he hopes in God, and he is confident that the Lord will hear him. How can he be confident? His sorrow is not a worldly sorrow, it is the godly sorrow that works repentance (2 Cor. 7:9). What is the difference between worldly and godly sorrow? “The sorrow of the world is, when men despond in consequence of earthly afflictions, and are overwhelmed with grief; while sorrow according to God is that which has an eye to God, while they reckon it the one misery—to have lost the favor of God; when, impressed with fear of His judgment, they mourn over their sins. This sorrow Paul makes the cause and origin of repentance” (Calvin). Repentance, remember, is a change of heart and a subsequent turning from sin to walk in the way of righteousness. God has granted the psalmist true repentance: he has confessed his sin and now follows that which is good.

Pray today mindful that “he that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Prov. 28:13).

Sing or pray Psalter #103.

**October 2**

**The Basis of our Prayer**
**Read Psalm 38:21–22**

The basis for the psalmist’s prayer is his covenant relationship with Jehovah. The psalmist first refers to that relationship negatively: “Forsake me not,” he says. Moses, before he died, spoke these words to God’s chosen people: “Be strong and of a good courage…for the Lord thy God, he is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (Deut. 31:6). In our Savior Christ Jesus, of whom Moses was only a type, God says, “And I will betroth thee unto me forever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness…” (Hosea 2:19-20). The psalmist goes on to plead God’s nearness and help: “The LORd is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth (Ps. 145:18). Finally, he names the Lord: “my salvation.”

The result of the psalmist’s discipline is renewed faith and a restored relationship with God. Nor does his sin hold him captive any longer. Do you see that fruit of God’s discipline in your life? Express your confidence in and thanksgiving to him as you pray.

Sing or pray Psalter #62.

**October 3**

**To Bring to Remembrance**
**Read Isaiah 38**

Psalm 38 is entitled: “A psalm of David, to bring to remembrance.” Like the words that Hezekiah penned after God had healed him, David wrote Psalm 38 to bring to his own
remembrance his sorrow and God’s salvation. How quickly we minimize or forget our sins, their chastisements, and God’s faithfulness to us! Perhaps we should follow the example of David and Hezekiah and write down those experiences so that we remember them better.

But these men didn’t record their experiences only for their own benefit: they did so to instruct and encourage fellow saints. Likewise, God “comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God” (2 Cor. 1:4).

Finally, they wrote these prayers to remind God of his promises. God cannot forget his covenant with us, but he delights to bless us in the way of our making our requests to him in prayer. To us he says, “I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions, and will not remember thy sins. Put me in remembrance: let us plead together…” (Is. 43:25–26).

Sing or pray Psalter #217.

Think Before You Speak

Read Psalm 39

Psalm 39 is another psalm in which the Psalmist is experiencing severe chastening. In verse eight he prays for deliverance from his transgressions, and in verses 10–11 he pleads with God, “Remove thy stroke away from me: I am consumed by the blow of thine hand. When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth…” But before he cries out to God, he determines that he will hold his tongue. Why?

A war rages within the psalmist. He knows that if he would speak while fighting anger and doubt, the words that he would say would likely give unbelievers an occasion to ridicule his faith and his God. Instead, he keeps his mouth as though it were muzzled. (“Muzzle” is a better translation than the word “bridle” here.) Are you able to control your tongue like the psalmist did? “If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain,” (James 1:26). When you are troubled, do not disclose the thoughts of your heart before men. Instead, go to your heavenly Father in prayer.

Sing or pray Psalter #104:1–6.

But That which is Good

Read Ephesians 4:17–32

The psalmist in Psalm 39 is so fearful of sinning with his tongue that he resolves not to say anything at all, not even anything good. “In trying to avoid one fault, he fell into another.

To use the tongue against God is a sin of commission, but not to use it at all involves an evident sin of omission” (Spurgeon).

That’s why Ephesians 4 commands us not only to put away lying, but also to speak truth. And, “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto them. He prays, “Deliver me from all my transgressions.” Transgressions are presumptuous sins; sins that are willfully and knowingly committed. He also acknowledges God’s correction of his iniquity. Iniquities are deeply rooted sins in which men persist without repentance.

God does not leave the psalmist to wallow in his sin. His chastisement is severe—it eats away at the psalmist’s strength and beauty—but God hears his prayer and gathers his tears, for the psalmist is a stranger and a sojourner with him. Not to God, but with God. Jehovah steadies his steps, and does not let iniquity—or despair—have dominion over him (Ps. 119:133). Do you walk with God today? This is the word he whispers to you in Jesus Christ: “I will be merciful to your unrighteousness, and your sins and your iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb. 8:12).

Sing or pray Psalter #107.
Covenant Christian High School has come to mean a lot to me. I think it is important to reflect on this a moment. So often I hear complaints, and I myself complain about homework and how school stinks. This is something we may not do. What we must see is that CCHS is a blessing to us, and what we have here is a true gift. We have dedicated teachers who teach us every day in the Word of God, a school board that works for hours to benefit us, and we have Christian fellowship with the friends we make.

Our teachers work hard to help us learn. They put in numerous hours to make our lives easier. Yes, even the homework is for our benefit. What we also must see as vitally important is that our teachers teach us on the basis of the Word of God in every subject. I did not immediately appreciate the value of this. I wondered “why does my English teacher or my Computer Applications teacher bring up spiritual matters in class?” But I have come to realize the importance of this. They work to give us a Christian education.

Christian education is important for us. We see that many of God’s people are forced to go to public schools or other Christian schools, for example the Singaporeans go to a public academy. In such schools they do not receive a distinctively reformed education. This is why we need to see our teachers and our school as a blessing. Not only do we learn facts and content that will prepare us for work in the future, but also more importantly, we learn how to be a godly Christian in every sphere of life. For this we are thankful to our teachers.

We also have a dedicated school board of men who put in hours at night, having meetings to make decisions that benefit us. We also see them walking around school once in a while. What they are doing is making sure that our teachers are teaching according to the Word of God. This too is a benefit to our Christian education. Our school board hires our teachers, and they hire the teachers who best benefit us. So often I have wondered about the purpose of the school board, but I have come to realize that they too are a blessing. In the decisions they make and the good teachers they hire, they seek to make it possible for us to have the best Christian education possible.

We also may not take for granted or ignore the sacrifices our parents have made for this school to be established and to grow. Our parents have worked hours to pay for the up-keep and additions to the school as well as paying the tuition. So especially seniors, who are preparing to leave this school, should remember the sacrifice of parents in providing us with a Christian education.

One final thing that I would like to address is the blessed fellowship with friends and teachers that we have at CCHS. My hope for us all is that we cherish the friendships we have made, because as we get older and do not see each other as much, we will rely on and see the blessing of these relationships. One of the ways that fellowship is promoted with one another is through the work of the Student Council. Those students and Miss Knott work hard to schedule events to bring the school together. What a blessing Christian fellowship is!

Finally I would like give a word of advice to those still in schooling at CCHS. Do not lose focus. Cherish the years you have left because they go by very fast. I know you hear that all the time, but it is true so make sure you don’t take them for granted.

To the freshman, you are just beginning. Apply yourselves while enjoying this new phase of your life. To the sophomores, you’re almost half way there. Keep it up, it will go by fast. To the juniors, you have one more year after this, so cherish this year, because next year you will have to start making the harder decisions of moving on to college and a life away from true Christian education. Also, remember that next year you become seniors, so set a good example for the classes who will follow you.

To the seniors, this is your last year, and then you
are done with your Christian education. My hope is that we all cherish the friends we have made and see the education we received in the last three years and take it to heart. Soon many of us will move on to college where we will hear about evolution and other heresies, so remember what we were taught here at this Christian School. I also hope that the classes behind us will see a good example of how to walk as Christian children of God, and will follow the example we have left in the past 3 years. May we as seniors continue to be “an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, and in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). Caleb is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan and gave this speech at Covenant Christian High School as a senior.

The Believer’s Battle Plan

This is the revised version of a speech given on April 7, 2015, at the young adults retreat hosted by Loveland Protestant Reformed Church. The theme of the retreat was “Our Calling to be Holy” from Colossians 3.

Every soldier in the U.S. Army can appreciate a seasoned general’s battle plan, one that pinpoints the enemy’s defenses and places him in the best position to gain the field. Every collegiate basketball player can appreciate a savvy, veteran coach’s game plan, one that shows how best to stifle the opponent on the defensive end and expose him on the offensive end.

So also is it important for us to have a battle plan as we carry out our calling to be holy. The Christian life and experience is a war. We are engaged in a life-or-death struggle with the devil and the world, but I have in mind especially the spiritual war that takes place within every child of God between the old man and the new. As soldiers in the army of Christ called to fight this daily battle, we need a battle plan, the believer’s battle plan.

Know the Enemy

That battle plan, in the first place, exposes the enemy within. There are especially two important things that we need to know about ourselves.

First, we need to know that we are dead (Col. 3:3a). Paul is not referring in that passage to the fact that we are dead in sin and totally depraved, but we do need to begin there. By nature sin is our lord and has a claim upon us. Sin demands that we obey. And we are sin’s slaves. We willingly serve sin and do all things for it. All our life is determined by Lord Sin.

But we are dead! We have died and are no longer under the service of that lord. That lord no longer has a claim upon us. No longer does he have dominion and rule over us, and we no longer are his slaves. We no longer render service to that lord. Where once our whole life was determined by sin, now no longer is that true.

We are dead because of the death of Jesus Christ (Col. 2:20). When Christ died on the cross and made atonement for our sins and sinful natures, he put sin to death. And from the moment that he applies that saving work to us by his Holy Spirit, we are dead to sin.

The second important truth that we need to know about ourselves is that we are also alive. We are dead, and our life is hid with Christ (Col. 3:3b). Christ is our Lord, and he has a claim over us. He demands that we obey him. And we are his slaves, quickened and made alive so that we are able and willing to serve him. The life of Christ is the power in us. That life has dominion and rule over us.

We are dead because of the death of Christ, and we are alive because of his resurrection (Col. 2:13; 3:1). When he went through death and rose again on the third day, we also died with him to sin and arose with him. Through his resurrection we have
the holy life of heaven in us. It is this new principle of life that rules and has dominion over our lives.

This is who we are! When someone asks, “Who are you?” your and my answer is, “I am dead to sin and alive to Christ! Sin is not my lord and has no claim over me. But I am the willing servant of the Lord Jesus.” Despite the presence yet of the old man, we are dead to sin and alive to Christ. The new man reigns in us.

This provides proper self-esteem. Not the self-love that the world promotes, but healthy self-esteem wherein we know God’s esteem of us in Christ.

But perhaps you wonder, “Why then do I still sin? When I examine myself, I see all kinds of sins. But I thought I was dead to sin?” This is the case because of the way in which God carries out his work in us. When God applies the work of Christ to us at our regeneration, he does not remove the old man. Neither does he improve or reform that old man so that we are without sin. When he regenerates, God gives to us a new principle of life that exists alongside of that old man of sin. The old man and the new man exist in you and me at the same time.

This knowledge provides the basis for our pursuit of holiness. This truth shows us that holiness is possible. We are dead to sin, and we are alive to Christ. The old man, although present, does not rule in us, but the new man does. Therefore, we are able to put off the earthly and sinful and seek those things which are above. This truth also forms the basis for the command of God to be holy. God calls us to be holy, because we are dead to sin and alive to Christ.

God says, “You are dead to sin. Now, be who you are, and fight against sin. You are alive to Christ. Now, be who you are, and live in devotion to me.”

**Know How to Fight**

The second part of our battle plan teaches us how to fight and engage in the battle.

In deep humility, we must first acknowledge that we often don’t engage in this battle and don’t strive after holiness as we should. The excuses are legion. We might say, “But Christ did it all. He finished the work of salvation, so away with any talk of holiness. To speak of my living in holiness is a threat to salvation by grace alone.” Or this: “Living a holy life makes me stand out at work and school. Others laugh at me and mock me. I am not going to do that again.” Or this: “Being holy is impossible. All of my best works are as disgusting rags, so why even try?”

And then there is this unspoken, yet real excuse: “I am simply too tired and lazy. Living a holy life is hard work, and I don’t like hard work. Besides, I secretly love that sin, and putting it off is too painful for me.”

But our King calls us to holiness. And that requires a radical, flesh-killing, sin-destroying, lust-quenching, warrior-like mentality. This mentality starts by knowing our sins. Each one of us must know our own, specific nature and our own particular besetting sins. We must know the strategies of the old man, and how he has attacked in the past. This means that we must constantly be in God’s word, and constantly seeking to examine ourselves in the light of that word. As we examine ourselves in the light of the word, we also must be diligent in praying the words of David: “Search me, O God, and know my heart” (Ps. 139: 23–24). We need God to show to us the sin that we cannot or will not see. It is easy for us to overlook our sins, to excuse a certain sin as not being that serious, to justify what we have done because of our circumstances. But a radical, flesh-killing, sin-destroying, lust-quenching warrior sees his sins and acknowledges them as such.

Seeing and acknowledging our sins, we mortify them by sorrowing over them and hating them. There is such a thing as insincere sorrow, a “sorrow of the world” (2 Cor. 7:10), which is only a sorrow over the painful consequences of sin. True sorrow is a sorrow not merely over the consequences of sin but over the sin itself. We are grieved because we have provoked God, our Father, who is gracious to us and faithful to us in his covenant. Taking this view of our sins, we start to despise and detest them as the hated enemy in our spiritual warfare. We hate those sins that we used to love because they are abhorrent to our Father.

Finally, engaging in the battle against the enemy within involves the actual fleeing from sin and fighting against temptation. The sorrow of heart and hatred for sin must produce the actual turning from sin. In warfare the man who flees from the enemy is a coward, but that is not the case in our spiritual warfare. The man who flees from his sin is not a coward, but rather is a hero of faith. This means putting up barriers and boundaries where we know we are weak: thinking about something pure, talking about something else, going somewhere different, shutting down the computer, unplugging the TV, deleting the app on the cell-phone. Don’t try to ignore your sin. Don’t justify it. Don’t tolerate it. Don’t

**Know What to Expect**

The last part of the believer’s battle plan is intended to send us off to war with a realistic expectation of what we are going to face.

First, expect this to be a daily battle. Every day, from the moment you get up in the morning until the moment your head hits the pillow again at night, you are called to fight. There are certainly times when we wish that we could have a break, when we wish that sin would retreat for a time so that we can relax. But there is no reprieve, no sabbatical, no time off. Every day we find ourselves on the front line of this great conflict with the calling to fight. So every day we must strap on our armor, take up the shield of faith, grip the sword of the Spirit, and go war a good warfare.

Second, expect this daily battle to be difficult. Every day until we die or Christ comes again, we are going to face a violent attack from our enemy within. That old man will always be attacking the new man in Christ, seeking to get his hands around the new man’s neck and wring the life out of him. In this war there is going to be blood, sweat, and tears. There are going to be times when we fall and are laid low by a sin. And there are going to be times of success and advancement. But there is always more fighting to do, more blood-thirsty enemies to be on guard against, more deadly assaults to ward off. This is going to be the hardest, most difficult thing you will ever do. Expect it.

Third, because this daily battle is difficult, expect gradual progress. At times this is not so easy to see. Often we feel as if we can hardly make any progress. We have all sorts of sins that we constantly fall into again and again. And the moment we think one sin has been put to death, another crops up in its place. The temptation is to doubt and despair and give up. But what we need to recognize is that holiness is a slow and gradual process. This work of God in us is not finished in a moment. It’s not finished in a day, or a month, or even a year. As Calvin once said, “This military service does not end except by death.” But recognize too that God does put to death the corruption of our flesh. He does give us the victory over our sins now in a continual, yes, sometimes slow advance. He cleanses us of our filthiness and sanctifies us in order that we may repent of our sins our whole life long.

Fourth, expect to make this gradual progress through the use of the God-provided means. It might seem obvious or might be something that you hear drummed into your ears over and over again, but the way in which God strengthens us for the fight against sin is by reading our Bible and praying. Through reading the word God shows to us our sins and the path of holiness, and through prayer he strengthens us by his Spirit to live holy lives. Another important means is having good friends, friends who are not afraid to talk about spiritual things, friends who can keep you accountable, friends who love you enough to point out your sins. The most important means is your church membership. As a member of a true church of Christ, you sit under the preaching of God’s word, which is the power of God unto salvation, and you also receive the sacraments and enjoy fellowship with and encouragement from other like-minded saints. Make use of these means!

Fifth, in this difficult battle, expect victory. That victory is due only to the cross of the Captain of our salvation. We can be exhorted all day to be holy, but there is no possibility of progress apart from the cross. There Christ took our old man of sin and nailed him to the tree, putting him to death. Although we still have that old man, he is an enemy over whom we already have the victory. We start to experience that victory now already, because we do see progress in holiness. The sorrow for sin is greater, the hatred is more vehement, and the fleeing is more urgent. We can look back at our lives and see that God has given to us the victory over certain sins and we have made progress in other areas. This is not reason for boasting or for slacking, but for perseverance. The cross is the certainty of our final victory also. For now we belong to the church militant, the church that is at war. But we are confident that when God takes us in death, we will be taken into the church triumphant, the church that rests from her fighting in heaven. Our life now is one of constant battle against sin and one of constant sorrow over it. But in the life to come, there will be no more sin and no more sorrow, for God will wipe away all tears from our eyes. The warfare is difficult, but the cause is worth it!

**Onward, Christian soldiers!**

Rev. Engelsma is pastor of Doon Protestant Reformed Church in Doon, Iowa.
Our Proper Christian Attire

This article is an abridged version of a speech given on April 9, 2015 at the young adults retreat hosted by Loveland Protestant Reformed Church. The theme of the retreat was “Our Calling to be Holy” from Colossians 3.

“Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye” (Colossians 3:12, 13).

Colossians sets before us a pointed reminder of the preeminence of Christ when it comes to all Christian doctrine and practice. The Christian faith, unlike any other religion, does not focus on laws, not even divine precepts, and certainly not human ordinances. It rejects all forms of legalism. The Christian faith focuses very intently on Christ himself as the revelation of the amazing grace of God in saving a fallen people, chosen by him from eternity. The Christian faith and the divine revelation of the gospel focuses on Christ as the one in whom is revealed God’s everlasting covenant of grace and therefore the joy of the Christian life. Everything serves to reveal Christ to us who are his. That is a gospel desperately needed in our day. It is also a gospel that alone has powerful effects in the lives of those who come under its power. You young adults will not live in holiness without that Christ-centered focus.

The apostle in Colossians 3 begins to unfold the positive fruits of living with a Christ-centered focus and therefore a knowledge of being one with him in his life of victory and exaltation. The life of Christ in us comes to expression by putting on Christian virtues, clothing ourselves with those spiritual virtues which crowd out those sins that otherwise would rise and consume us. Paul points us in verses 12 and 13 to Our Proper Christian Attire.

What It Is

With the figurative language of the text we are taken to the closet and shown the spiritual wardrobe of the saints, the attire of those who are beautiful in God’s sight.

When we belong to Christ, we wear a uniform that marks us clearly as belonging to him. The way we live and how we appear must be in harmony with what we claim to be. The failure to do so exposes us as imposters, those who claim to belong to Christ. Now let’s look at this wardrobe, and each of the pieces of that spiritual attire that we are to wear to the glory of God.

The first article of spiritual clothing that we are to put on is bowels of mercies. The bowels refer to the seat of all emotion and affection (Lam. 2:11). The apostle tells us here that if we are new creatures in Christ, then we must be compassionate. One of the most powerful examples of such compassion is given us in Jude, verses 22–23: “And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.” Talk about reaching outside your comfort zone! That is the compassion, the true Christian sympathy, that is to gird us, as the apostle expresses by this calling to put on bowels of mercies. Such compassion that would reach out to seek another’s spiritual welfare might even be considered foundational to the other virtues set before us in Colossians 3:12. One must truly know by experience the mercies of Christ before he himself will be characterized by kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, and longsuffering.

Kindness is the second article of our Christ-like clothing. Our nature, our old man of sin, is full of harshness. There is a tendency to look for the worst in others, to speak evil of others, to exalt ourselves above those around us, even if only in our own minds. But kindness overpowers what is harsh. To put on kindness is to clothe yourself with a grace that
pervades and penetrates your whole nature, so that your disposition toward as well as your treatment of others is charitable. You readily understand how important is this article of the Christian’s spiritual clothing. To see in the midst of God’s church those who lack kindness, to see in myself any lack of kindness, is to see the ugliness of Satan himself on display. God knows how often this kindness among us is lacking. He calls us to repentance, which repentance includes a turning from our sin and a putting on bowels of mercies, kindness. It is his kindness, after all, that leads us to repentance (Rom. 2:4).

The third piece of that spiritual wardrobe we are to put on is **humbleness of mind**. There must be not only an expression of humility in our lives, but we are required to put on humbleness of mind, to realize how small we are, that is, to replace that wretched pride of our old natures. We sometimes like to think that the world revolves around self, around my opinions. That pride is inherent in the legalism that the apostle exposed and condemned as the heresy that it is. But have we confronted that pride of our own natures? Have you confronted the pride of your own nature? Looking to Christ we are reminded of the call of Philippians 2:5, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” To put on humbleness of mind is to grow in our knowledge of God and his Christ and to see ourselves in the presence of that brilliant holiness. Only by understanding the exceeding greatness of our sinfulness and the glory of God our redeemer in Christ Jesus as the one in whom we have new life, do we also have a proper perspective of ourselves in relationship to our fellow church members and neighbors. Who am I to think myself higher than my brother?

Then follows that next piece of clothing, **meekness**. Meekness, or what might also be translated gentleness, marks a person as having a steel-like strength. The supreme characteristic of meekness is that of being under control. One who is meek is not easily provoked with the infirmities and even foolishness of others, but continues to seek their spiritual good. We who live in an imperfect world and an imperfect church with imperfect brothers and sisters in Christ need to clothe ourselves with meekness. Being moderate, restraining our passions, and seeking the peace of Zion is required of us as those who are risen with Christ.

The final article of spiritual clothing mentioned is **longsuffering**. Longsuffering belongs to the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). This virtue involves not only patience, but also endurance. It is to live in the consciousness of God’s longsuffering toward us, knowing “that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation” (2 Pet. 3:15). Longsuffering expresses itself in the willingness even to bear reproach and persecution for the sake of the gospel.

Let’s not overlook the fact that this beautiful heavenly garment that we are called to put on as those whose life is in Christ Jesus is a wardrobe that can be worn only in fellowship with others. Notice also that we have here an imperative: “Put on.” Such are the fitting garments of the bride of Christ that must be seen in our relationships within our own congregations and families.

**Putting On Those Spiritual Garments**

These are spiritual virtues. How are we to put on what is essentially spiritual and therefore inward?

You understand that these spiritual garments are the gift of God, who alone adorns us by his Spirit through the word. These virtues are possessed spiritually and inwardly before ever coming to outward manifestation. We put them on by making use of the means the Spirit uses so to clothe us and to make us more and more beautiful—the means of grace.

To put this in the context of this epistle with its focus on the preeminent Christ, this means that we put on these garments by realizing who we are in Christ Jesus. Only when we are standing in the consciousness of our relationship with Christ and therefore with his focus on him who bought us will we put on the virtues of Christ’s life. God has formed us after the image of his own dear Son. What an astounding privilege we have in serving him in thankfulness of heart also in our relationships with other members of Christ’s body.

The exhortation to put on speaks of continual action. It isn’t merely to think about it, let alone excuse our failure to dress in the garments Christ calls us to wear. It is to put them on and to keep putting them on. The work of the Holy Spirit, in the application of the word preached, makes us more and more beautiful by working in us both to will and to do of God’s good pleasure. That is the Christian life.

We must see yet one other critically important truth. As the elect of God, holy and beloved, there are foundational garments that we must put on, without which all the spiritual garments we have considered from verse 12 do not fit and in fact expose us as ugly before God.
The Essential Garments

Verse 13 calls our attention to those essential garments without which we cannot clothe ourselves in a way that is pleasing to God: “Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any.” As if we might readily deceive ourselves as to the importance of this, which is foundational, and redefine forgiveness to such a low standard even an unbeliever could do better, the apostle continues: “Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.”

This is where our lives are really put to the test. Once again the apostle addresses the reality of our daily existence in an imperfect world. In the midst of our own families and in the midst of the church, we not only have our own sinful natures to deal with, but we also have to live with other sinful people. Offenses arise, sometimes even when there is no legitimate reason for one to find offense. How then are we to live in this imperfect, sinful world?

To behave as Christians is to forbear one another. That isn’t simply to overlook or ignore every iniquity. But it is to have an attitude governed by a Christ-centered focus, seeing how he has dealt with us in the face of our offenses. We sing with the psalmist in Psalm 130, “If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?” We confess his forbearance toward us, wretched as we are, and as offensive as are our sins toward him. He forbears, not immediately rising up to inflict revenge, but rather endeavoring to bring us back to our senses, to lead us to repentance. That’s the attitude and approach we are to take toward each other.

Along with forbearance is the garment of forgiveness.

Certainly the one whom Christ has forgiven must be ready and willing to forgive those who have sinned against him. Whosoever refuses to forgive is left unquestionably under condemnation (Matt. 6:15). It is easy to guard the offense in our memory like a treasure. Our old man of sin would keep malice raging in our hearts. But when that is the case, let’s not deceive ourselves into thinking we have forgiven.

Some would defend their refusal to forgive by saying, “But they haven’t confessed their sin against me.” It is true that meaningful forgiveness will not be the act of one alone. The offended must be willing to forgive, and the one who causes offense in the way of sin against God must confess his sin and seek forgiveness.

But don’t point the finger at the one whom you say has caused offense and excuse yourself for your unwillingness to forgive, when you have not even attempted to seek his spiritual welfare by going to him in humbleness of mind with the desire to lead him to the cross. To forgive is to seek a person’s spiritual good, not to persist in hatred. But “as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.”

You see, when the preeminent Christ is the focus of our thoughts, of our spiritual mind, then and only then, will we be seen as Christians. It is not enough in the midst of Christ’s church to put up with each other, barely to tolerate each other, to refuse to retaliate and figure that is good enough. To know Christ is to see his love overcoming our hatred, to see his suffering bearing our iniquities, to see his forgiveness for all our offenses. It is therefore to live in this imperfect world with a spiritual wardrobe that reflects the greatness of his grace and glorious majesty as the one with whom our life is hid in God.

“Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.”

May God bless you in that walk of life.

Rev. Key is pastor of Loveland Protestant Reformed Church in Loveland, Colorado.

A continual dropping in a very rainy day
And a contentious woman are alike.
Whosoever hideth her hideth the wind.
—Proverbs 27:15–16
“That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Ephesians 4:14–15).

In the previous article, I explained four kinds of spiritual childishness to which scripture points: petty fighting, legalism, shallow thinking, and a lack of conviction. The calling to all of us, young and old, when we discover such immature characteristics in our lives, is, “Grow up!” How do you do this? In addition to putting aside the four above mentioned traits, there is a positive side to growing up.

Acknowledging

Essential to spiritual growth is first a humble admission on your part that you still need to grow. It should be obvious that you will not mature if you stubbornly insist that you are all grown up. Such thinking makes you unteachable and hardened in childish sin. Imagine the teenager of about seventeen years saying goodbye to his mom and dad, packing up his belongings and leaving home like that prodigal son, proudly thinking that he is all grown up and ready to live independently. Such a young man will soon discover how blind he had been to his need to grow up. Spiritually that is the case with all of us, not just young people. Sometimes we feel as if we have arrived to the level of spiritual adulthood, only to have God show us again that we are still children. Lord’s Day 44 of the Heidelberg Catechism says, “… even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience.”

Acknowledge it. In Ephesians 4:14a, the apostle Paul writes to the members of various ages in the church: “That we henceforth be no more children.” He uses the pronoun “we” to include himself with all the members. If an apostle admits his continued need to grow up, then we ought to admit it also.

Truthing

“Truthing” is how you put aside childishness and grow up. Although “truthing” is not a word in the English dictionary, it truly is God’s way of spiritual growth. In Ephesians 4:14–15 Paul explains that we ought not to be children and then explains how: “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things…” That phrase “speaking the truth” can be translated “truthing.” It refers not only to speaking the truth, but characterizing your whole life with truth. It is not merely belonging to a church that holds officially to truth, but actually having your life, your thoughts, your words, and your actions exhibit truth.

This is not an unfamiliar idea to most of us. In fact, the need for truth is so often spoken about and pounded into our minds that the temptation for us is to stop listening carefully to such exhortations. Don’t! Be “truthing.”

Learning Truth

Part of “truthing” is learning truth. In order to grow up spiritually, you need to learn truth. You need to take in the word of truth. Christian education, devotions, catechism, sermons, and Bible societies are all ways to learn truth. But young person, if you are going to grow up, you need to take these things seriously. It is possible to be enrolled in a good Christian school, to sit in on family devotions, to attend catechism classes, to be present in a pew during sermons, to gather with groups that study the Bible, and not learn truth. There are many who do with truth what a young toddler might do with food he is not used to. He gets food in his hair, on the ground, in the high chair, smeared on his face and left on his plate, but very little gets in his mouth. To learn truth, you must have an appetite for truth, you must train yourself to partake of truth, and you must put truth in your heart.

Very practically speaking, learning truth involves disciplining yourself daily to read a portion of God’s word for devotions. Learning truth involves
getting enough sleep on Saturday night, drinking coffee, chewing gum, taking notes and other practical measures to pay better attention in church. It means preparing carefully before society meetings so that you are ready to discuss the truth. It means understandingly memorizing your catechism and not ceasing from catechizing yourself after you make confession of faith. It means habitually reading good Christian magazines and books. Grow up by learning more truth. It is the nourishment you need for spiritual growth.

**Speaking Truth**

“Truthing” also involves speaking the truth. Often when we think about speaking the truth, we immediately think that the purpose of it is for the hearer’s benefit. So, the reason we speak truth to our neighbor is so that our neighbor gets witnessed to. Or the reason we speak up in society meetings is so that others profit from our contributions. But we must realize that our efforts to get up the courage and speak the truth also benefit ourselves. It is how we grow up. Ephesians 4:15 says this: “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things.”

It is true that not all of us are extroverts. We do not all have talkative personalities. Yet we all talk at some point in our lives unless we have a handicap. When we do speak, let us speak truth. When we do speak, let us take God’s name upon our lips and reverentially speak of his providence seen in today’s events, his glory displayed in today’s sunshine, his salvation discussed on Sunday. Be not ashamed, push away the fear of men, and squeeze out of your trembling heart words of truth among family members, friends, peers, and the world. The discomforts you feel in speaking the truth are merely growing pains of accelerated spiritual growth.

**Living Truth**

“Truthing” is growing by learning truth, speaking truth, and living your life consistently with truth. You say you believe the truth of God’s law; then obey God’s law. You claim to believe in the truth of God’s grace; then live with grace. Strive for a life of integrity and put aside hypocrisy.

In Ephesians 4:15, Paul points out the specific way in which we are to live the truth. The command is to speak the truth in love! In love for God and for our neighbor, we are to learn the truth and speak the truth. God is love, and if we want to show forth the truth of God in our life, we must live a life of love.

Let it never be, young people, that we act superior to others. There is a difference between confidence and impudence, and the difference has to do with love. Our speaking of truth may never be done in an ungracious manner. Although it is possible for others to judge wrongly our expression of truth as unloving, we must examine our hearts and make sure such judgments are really false. We are not really “truthing” if we speak the truth or live with the truth in contempt of others. Instead, what we communicate with our deeds of disdain is this: “The God in me and the Christ I represent is ungracious like me.” And that is a lie that invalidates the words of truth we might speak. Growing up involves living a life of love, consistent with the truth.

**The Nurturer**

Having understood our need to grow up in the above ways, we must realize that though we have to be active in our growth, we need a nurturer—someone who will help us grow, someone who will nourish us, feed us, teach us, and lead us so that we can grow. A child left on his own will not grow but die. If we admit we are still spiritual children, then we must confess our need for nurture. Ephesians 4:15 points to this Nurturer: “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.” We are joined to Christ by the bond of faith, and it is from this Christ that we receive every benefit for growth. So we conclude with a most essential way to grow up. Pray, and do not stop praying, that Jesus will pour his grace and Spirit more and more in you, that you might grow up to be like him, our mature elder brother.

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A prudent man foreseeth the evil and hideth himself;
but the simple pass on, and are punished.

—Proverbs 27:12
Dwelling in the Shepherd’s Home

After a long summer spent in the high mountain meadow, the shepherd herded his sheep once again into the dark valley to make the long journey back home.

The sheep were scared of the dark valley, but they were reassured by their shepherd’s presence. Their good shepherd followed them all the way down from the mountains.

The fall winds blew in cold and rain. The shepherd hurried the sheep at last to the small pasture and stable they had left behind when they had traveled into the mountains for the summer. Before the winter snow began to fall, the shepherd had all his sheep tucked into their stable with lots of hay to keep them fed and straw to keep them warm. He lived in the stable with them, watching over them as he always did.

While the winter blizzards howled around their stable and blasted snow against the boards, the sheep were content. They were safe from the winter, safe from the dark valley, safe from the wolves and snakes, and safe from the flies that had annoyed them in the summer heat.

They were happy to spend their days in the shepherd’s home.

Questions to think about:
1. Read Psalm 23:6, 27:4 and John 14:2–3 by yourself or with your parents. What home do we want to dwell in forever? Is this only in heaven or do we experience this on earth too?
2. How does God’s mercy and goodness follow us all the days of our lives?

Author’s Note: Inspiration for this series on Psalm 23 came from Phillip Keller’s short book A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23.

Find the sheep’s way through the maze to the safe stable in the center:

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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:
Everett James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Tyler & Marcie Doezema—Faith, MI
Morgan Rae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Kent & Lindsey Boer—Faith, MI
Silas Timothy, son of Rev. & Mrs. Richard & Tricia Smit—First, MI
Jonathan David, son of Mr. & Mrs. Craig & Amy Horvat—Georgetown, MI
Brecken Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brad & Kerri Vogel—Grace, MI
Teagen Juliet, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Mitch & Julie Feenstra—Grace, MI
Elodie Marie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Chad & Kelly Warner—Holland, MI
Clara Beth, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Dave & Laura Rutgers—Hope, MI
Judah Carlyle, son of Mr. & Mrs. Justin & Maria Miersma—Hope, MI
Michael Levi, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brian & Stephanie vanEngen—Hull, IA
Dane Montgomery, son of Mr. & Mrs. Dave & Brenda Pipe—Loveland, CO
Natalie Jean, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brent & Stacy Meelker—Redlands, CA

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH
“In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”
Proverbs 3:6
Public confession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ was made by:
Leah Birkett—Crete, IL
Gary Bleyenberg—Edgerton, MN
Janelle Klein—Georgetown, MI
Jason VanOostenbrugge—Grace, MI
Mary Bogardus—Grace, MI
Hannah Span—Immanuel, Lacombe, CAN
Nathan Pryor—Kalamazoo, MI
Jared Regnerus—Randolph, WI

MARRIAGES
“For this God is our God forever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.” Psalm 48:14
Mr. Justin Kooima and Miss Vanessa Van Den Top—Doon, IA
Mr. Joe Richards and Miss Kaelyn Hanko—Faith, MI
Mr. Nick Talsma and Miss Susan Kleyn—Grace, MI
Mr. Luke Bomers and Miss Sydney Burrows—Hope, MI
Mr. Derek VanUffelen and Miss Jennifer VanDanseloor—Loveland, CO
Mr. Nick Vroom and Miss Erika Poortinga—Randolph, WI
Mr. Jordan Tamminga and Miss Brianna Zandstra—Randolph, WI
Mr. Chad Meelker and Miss Marie Wierenga—Redlands, CA
Mr. Austin Potjer and Miss Lisa Westra—Redlands, CA