Variations of this month’s cover were used throughout the 1970s and into the early 1980s.
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**CHURCH NEWS ANNOUNCEMENTS**
Melinda Bleyenberg
Email: dmbleyenberg@gmail.com

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You will be eligible to vote in the upcoming election. Some of you already are eligible. And surely your parents and grandparents are eligible (and we know that they read us too). This will pose some issues for all of us, especially concerning the presidential election, which is my focus in this article.

Before I go further, I must issue a disclaimer. *Beacon Lights* is not a political magazine. It does not and will not become involved in the political process, nor will it endorse any candidates. Under the American system there is a separation between church and state, and I do not intend to blur the line between them. In addition, so that there can be no lack of clarity on this subject, it should be understood that I do not involve myself in politics. I am a member of no political party, and I do not necessarily support a particular candidate or do anything to advance the cause of a political party. Politics is a dirty business, as you young people will soon figure out if you do not already know this, which is likely. The political scene is thoroughly corrupt, with only a handful of decent and even Christian participants. Most politicians are concerned only with getting re-elected and with money. Consequently the business of the country does not get done, as recent history makes abundantly clear. My attitude in most instances is “a plague on all your houses.”

This does not mean, however, that I do not observe the candidates and the political process. I do, both as a private individual and in my capacity as *Beacon Lights* editor. I will not tell you how to vote. This is a personal and individual choice that each of us must make: each person must vote his or her conscience.

Nevertheless, I am constrained to comment particularly on the presidential election this coming November. This election affects our lives in a secular, general sense. What will be the policy of the new administration regarding many aspects of our lives? What will be the taxation (already a heavy burden) and fiscal outlook? But I am much more concerned with the implications of this election for the church. A simple but outstanding example is the selection of a new justice for the Supreme Court, which will affect the church. We need to think only of last year’s decision to legalize same sex marriage, thus contradicting the teaching of the church.

The choices in this presidential election are unattractive.

On the one hand is Hilary Clinton. She is liberal on virtually any topic that you can think of. She is in favor of big government to the extent that her views partake of socialism, a demonstrably failed system. She is an inveterate liar. She is untrustworthy. She is pro-abortion, or should I say pro-murder. She is personally unattractive: she does not talk, but screams and shouts, which is extremely annoying. Is this who we want as president?

On the other hand is Donald Trump. He has been successful in business and is a very wealthy man, which does not necessarily qualify him to be president. He is a greedy money-grubber, and he wants America to be the same. He is narcissistic. He comes across as a buffoon and a bully. Some even think that he has the definite potential to try to become a dictator. From an ethical viewpoint, he is a serial philanderer and adulterer who is on his third marriage. Is this who we want as president?

The two candidates seem to be unable to distinguish between personalities and politics. Instead of arguing the policies that will best serve the country, the candidates call each other names. They both act like petulant little children who throw a tantrum when they don’t get their way. Neither candidate is by any stretch of the imagination a Christian. Both have serious character flaws. This matters, because contrary to the views of some, character defines and determines actions.

In light of the above, what must we as Christians do? There are two main possibilities.

First, vote for the lesser of two evils. This often seems to be the preferred option. The theory is that neither candidate is acceptable, but that one is less
distasteful than the other. The problem with the lesser of two evils theory is that both are nevertheless evils. If both are approximately equal evils, then what? This is clearly an option, which many practice, I suspect also among our Reformed people. There is room for disagreement on this subject, but also in this instance one must vote his conscience.

Second, don’t vote, especially if you must vote against your conscience. This is also a viable option. We must remember here that voting in America is not a requirement, but a right, which means that one is not obligated to vote. The problem is that in this instance your vote does not count because you did not cast it. In this case it behooves you to keep your mouth shut when things don’t go as you think they should.

So what must you as Reformed Christian young people (and the older generation) do?

The answer is that we must look at this election in the context of God’s sovereignty. God’s sovereignty definitely extends to the 2016 election. Nothing happens apart from his will. Scripture clearly teaches this. In Proverbs 21:1 we read, “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.” Psalm 118: 8–9, 14 says, “It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes. The Lord is my strength and song, and is become my salvation.” And in Psalm 146:3 we read, “Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help.”

These passages speak of kings, princes, and man. These Old Testament terms equate to the present day authorities, including the president, Congress, and the Supreme Court on a national basis, and all lesser officials on a local basis, that is, all those who are in authority over us. Our obligation to choose and then to obey them is mandated by the scripture passages quoted, which are so clear that they do not warrant further explanation.

But how do we practically apply the truths that scripture teaches? There is no easy answer. What if the choices we must make are approximately equal? What if the authorities that we must choose are about equally evil?

Scripture says that we must judge on the basis of the heart, not just on the basis of words and actions, which are the revelation of what lies in the heart, as Proverbs 4:23 teaches: “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” Again, in Proverbs 16:9: “A man’s heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps.” If one’s heart is evil, it will manifest this in his actions. This is why I was so admittedly harsh in my characterization of the presidential candidates. Their actions and words are the revelation of what lies in their hearts, and what is in their hearts is evil.

The answer therefore lies in what Proverbs 21:1 says when it speaks of the hand of Jehovah, the sovereign God of heaven and earth and of all the affairs of men. His hand is a figurative expression that means his sovereign power and control. His turning the heart of rulers according to his will is for the sake of the church, as is everything that he always does. It is not always easy to discern that he is doing this, but he does. Just as a river runs to the sea, so he directs all things toward the accomplishment of calling his elect people unto their eternal salvation, even through the choices and actions of wicked rulers. This, young people (and all of us) must clearly understand.

Based on the teaching of scripture, I have a suggestion: don’t sit out the election, but vote for the candidate who does the least damage to the church of Christ, but is most favorable to the cause of the continuation of the preaching of the gospel. Who that will be you will have to determine for yourselves. We cannot know the future, but be aware of what is happening politically, know the current situation, and act accordingly.

But remember: God is always sovereign. This is our comfort and assurance that all things happen according to his will.
Ask Schuyler

Cremation

Recently I received a note from Mr. Ray Kikkert, member of the Protestant Reformed congregation in Wingham, Ontario, Canada. Beacon Lights thanks him for his interest and his comments.

He begins with two questions: “Who is Schuyler?” And: “Is it Mark Hoeksema, the editor?” My answer is also two-fold.

First, Schuyler’s identity is a deep, dark secret. There is a tiny handful of people who know who Schuyler is, but they are sworn to secrecy; not even all members of the staff know his identity, and we intend to keep it that way to protect the anonymity and objectivity of both the questioners and of Schuyler (who does not know who submits questions, and who therefore cannot tailor his replies to the person or the situation). Only one or two people know who sends in questions, one of whom is the editor, and he’s not talking.

Second, I have received multiple guesses as to his identity, none of which are even close. In this connection our readers require a little sense of humor (which they have exhibited), though the reasons for anonymity are serious, not frivolous. Allow me to assure Mr. Kikkert that Mark Hoeksema is not Schuyler, as many have supposed. This assertion reduces the number of possibilities by one. I hope this is helpful. More guesses are welcome, although they will likely be wrong. Hint: Schuyler is a scholar, as his name indicates.

Now to the essence of Mr. Kikkert’s missive.

He refers to the May 2016 Schuyler rubric of Beacon Lights, the subject of which was cremation. He writes the following: “The May 2016 installment of Ask Schuyler regarding cremation seemed to me to be a weak response from a conservative and Reformed Christian magazine to the question. For Christians under normal circumstances, burial ought to be the only answer to the question. Cremation seems to be the quick, easy, me/myself way of skirting what the Lord has to say favorably in 1 Corinthians 15:35–44. Christianity from its inception has always advocated burial, while pagans use cremation. While I agree with the other points presented, we ought to take a firm stance here. Too much of what calls itself Christian takes a neutered position on issues under the guise of Christian liberty. This brings me back to my first question; anonymous responses are weak on accountability. It’s the little things that get eaten away in our churches that lead to bigger problems.”

Mr. Kikkert concludes: “Thank you to those who write for Beacon Lights and provide thought-provoking articles for our children and for us as parents.”

—MMH

Schuyler answers Mr. Kikkert’s comments as follows:

I thank Mr. Kikkert for his interest in Beacon Lights and his follow up question. Please note that I answer the questions as they are asked. In this case, I was asked “How do we respond to a relative who has decided on cremation?” My answer was not, “I would tell that person that burial is one hundred percent non-negotiable, that cremation is sinful and pagan, and I would absolutely forbid my relative to do such a wicked and ungodly thing.” I cannot respond that way, although I share Mr. Kikkert’s conviction that burial is the preferred option over cremation. Certainly, I would seek to explain that to my relative, and perhaps find out why he/she is contemplating cremation. I am sorry that some might find the response “weak” or “neutered.” I simply do not make a law where the scriptures give none. The scriptures give principles on the proper disposal of the dead, and it is indeed true that Christians have always advocated burial over cremation, which is what I stated in my response. It is, as Mr. Kikkert indicates, an important testimony to our Christian hope in the resurrection of the body. I hope that the young readers of Beacon Lights (and their parents) continue to profit from this rubric and all the articles of the magazine.

—Schuyler
Interview with Don DeVries

It is April 12, 2008, and I am at the residence of Mr. Don DeVries, near Randolph, Wisconsin.

Mark H. Hoeksema: Mr. DeVries, can you tell me where and when you born?
Don DeVries: I was born in Rural Route Randolph, on July 21, 1934.
MHH: What can you tell me about your childhood, your family, anything that you can recall that stands out in your mind? What was life like?
DDV: Life was kind of hard. Things were not easy. My folks were poor. We lived on a farm. When the kids were all born, there were nine of us in the family (eleven with the folks). So we had a big kitchen table full. Growing up wasn’t easy, but at the same time we had everything we needed.
MHH: Was your father a farmer?
DDV: My father was a farmer.
MHH: So, I imagine that you and the other children probably worked on that farm?
DDV: We worked on that farm. And I worked on farms till I was 17.
MHH: And then what?
DDV: Then I started plumbing and heating, working for a plumber.
MHH: You’ve been doing that for a long time.
DDV: It’s been a while (laughter).
MHH: What was your church affiliation when you were a child and a youngster?
DDV: We went to East Friesland Christian Reformed Church, and I remember when we were kids, walking the mile over there to catechism. We’d go there on Saturday afternoons. And Sundays, there to church. That’s about all I remember—going back and forth. The minister, I remember, his name was Rev. Hoogerdah.
MHH: How long did you attend the Christian Reformed Church there?
DDV: Until the PR church started in Randolph.
MHH: Which was—1943, possibly 1942?
DDV: Somewhere in there, I forget.
MHH: What made you and your family change church affiliations at that time? What was the history behind that?
DDV: The doctrine history. Because my father and then one of his sisters changed, too. And some of her children changed. And then my folks did that too then.
MHH: Why?
DDV: Because of the doctrinal issues—you know, like the common grace issue. That’s kind of what I remember mostly is the common grace issue. But I do remember when we were kids (and then I wouldn’t even have been 10 years old yet) that we would go and hear lectures by Rev. H. Hoeksema. That would be in a park pavilion in Randolph.
MHH: Really?
DDV: That would be in some other buildings, too. But I remember yet going to some of them. That was during the week.
MHH: And he came to lecture against…
DDV: Against the doctrines of common grace.
MHH: So was there opposition to that? Were there family problems? What effect did those lectures have on the population?
DDV: Well, some of them took it to heart and some of them didn’t. They didn’t want any changes. They didn’t want anything else. But there were some of them, they could see the light.
MHH: And that, in turn, led to the formation of the Protestant Reformed congregation in Randolph?
DDV: That’s what led to that.
MHH: Do you remember approximately how large the congregation was in the beginning?
DDV: If I am right, it was 8 families.
MHH: And you met where?
DDV: In the old Congregational church.
MHH: Was that on a rental basis?
DDV: That was on a rental basis. We’d have to have church in the afternoon and evening because they would have church in the morning. Then, later on, in the ‘50s, we bought that basement church from the Christian Reformed Church.

MHH: What memories do you have of the life of the congregation in general? How would you characterize the congregation in Randolph?

DDV: At that time?

MHH: Yes, and perhaps subsequently.

DDV: I would say that it would be like one big family. Because everybody knew whoever and we would all go to the get-togethers and even the church picnics on the Fourth of July. In fact, we had a cow pasture right next to the lake, and that’s where we had it two or three different times. That would be the church picnic. I won’t forget this, either. One of the first church picnics out there, Rev. Lubbers was our minister. Then, of course, he had to have a speech before dinner. Well, when you’re a kid, and you sit there for a 45-minute speech on a picnic day, that doesn’t go so great (laughter)! But he meant well.

MHH: But you were ready to eat and play!

DDV: That’s right.

MHH: Did that harmony that was evident in the early years continue through later history in Randolph, do you think?

DDV: Yes. With the majority. Then there was slowly on more added because families in the church grew up and got married. And then that grows with them.

MHH: Was there any effect, for example, of the division of 1953 on the congregation? Or, maybe it would be better for me to ask what was the effect of the controversy in the ‘40s and in the ‘50s?

DDV: Yes, there was some effect, there were some of the families that left us who were originally with us.

MHH: Was this the issue of conditions in the covenant, was it contested and debated a lot, or were these simply a minority of people? Was the church in danger of a division, in your opinion?

DDV: Not really. Because there weren’t too many families that were opposed. So it really wasn’t a big worry.

MHH: And those who were opposed…

DDV: They left.

MHH: What can you tell me about the various ministers that served in Randolph? What are your memories and your recollections and your opinions?

DDV: Well, Rev. Lubbers was first. I know with Bible class, first we would have it at our house—out on the farm. Then later we had it by him in the study in Randolph, by the park house there. Then after he left, we were vacant. Then H. H. Kuiper came. He was only here a few years and then he left. Then after that there was Emmanuel. He was here a number of years and then, well, there was always one big problem—that his wife never did come to church like she was supposed to. Then we had a problem with that, and we had another sister congregation’s consistory come and help us. Then he was more or less disposed of.

MHH: Could you explain that—what the problem was, what some of the history was? What happened and how it was resolved?

DDV: Not all of it because that was kind of in my younger days. I forget what year that he left, but there were also two years when he was here that I was in the army and wasn’t even home. By the time I got home, I forget how that all was. But I think right after that, or just before that, he was out.

MHH: But you don’t really know why?

DDV: Not all the details, because I wasn’t involved in it yet. And I can’t say for sure. But I know it was some doctrinal issues and a whole lot of it was family issues.

MHH: Do you know whatever happened to him?

DDV: I heard that he went out east to some church. The last I heard he was in Florida. But I think he’s retired from it by now.

MHH: So, after he was no longer there, what happened next?

DDV: Then we were without [a minister] for some years. Then we called Rev. Van Baren. He was here three years or so. After that we were without for awhile. Then Rev. Dale Kuiper was here. That was only a few years. But we had a lot of years in between that we didn’t have a minister and we relied on Classis East to fill most of [our pulpit]. We got married in 1959, and then a year or so later I got put in consistory. I was in and out of consistory for the next 30+ years. But that was OK. But anyway, I know we had a lot of years when we had to teach Bible class and all that stuff. Then Rev. Ken Koole was here.
MHH: And Bekkering was maybe in the mix there someplace too?
DDV: Bekkering was here before Ken Koole, I think. Yes, Bekkering and then Koole. And then we had Rev. Slopsema and Rev. denHartog.
MHH: But, during the years of vacancy, if I understand you correctly, a fairly heavy burden fell on the elders.
DDV: Very heavy. Yes. And there were quite a few years in between times that we had to take care of everything.
MHH: And, in your opinion, were the elders able to do that?
DDV: Well, yes and no. We all feel that we were not able to. But, at the same time, we were compelled to do so and to do it to the best of our ability. That’s how that went.
MHH: And Randolph has survived?
DDV: And Randolph has survived. We were not going to close any doors. No.
MHH: Randolph’s survival or continuance was, to your knowledge, never really an issue?
DDV: There was never a question.
MHH: Strong people.
DDV: Yes. No, that was never a concern.
MHH: So, would you say on balance that life, from the perspective of the church, life in general was positive for you?
DDV: It was positive and at the same time it was good. As the congregation got older and the kids got married within the church, you could see some generations coming up, and it all looked very positive.
MHH: Now we all know that Randolph has a new church building and, in fact, it is going to add on to that. And Randolph also has a fairly new Christian school. Were you involved in the Christian school movement here in Randolph?
DDV: Yes and no. I didn’t belong to the society. Yet we supported the school, and we would go to all the school functions. When the school was built, we gave them a break—we did all the plumbing and heating, the whole works, too. So I figure we did our share for that to help them out.
MHH: Do you see benefits to the congregation from having our own school?
DDV: Oh, yes, very much so. That’s a big benefit. And if I’m not mistaken, even now this past year, all the kids from church go to our school. Yes, it’s been good.
MHH: So that has also helped and to draw the congregation together?
DDV: That would keep it together, yes.
MHH: So there is, in your opinion, good support for the school, then?
DDV: I would say there is good support. Collections have been good and everybody cooperates. It seems to be going real good.

75 Years Meghan Zevenbergen

Conventions of the Past and Present

Our churches started conventions in 1938 with a purpose in mind for our churches’ youth. The goal of writing this is so that the reader can be informed about what conventions were like in the 1940s and how they are different from conventions held now. There are many things that are different about our conventions now than they were back then, but also many things that have remained constant throughout all of the conventions that were ever held. It struck me when doing research for this essay that my parents, my grandparents, and possibly even great-grandparents may have had the same experience of convention as I did this past summer at my first convention.

8

July 2016
The main goal of convention is one thing that has remained the same ever since conventions were first started in 1938 and continued throughout the years: learn more of God and his word. The young people all together can grow spiritually, increasing in their love for God, and be spiritually edified by the fitting words of the preachers through speeches and discussion groups. Not only is there a spiritual benefit, but the young people get to enjoy the fellowship and friendship with others of their same faith (Vol. 2, no. 8, p. 2; Vol. 9, no. 6, p. 23; Vol. 8, No. 4, p. 18).

From reading through Beacon Lights, there were many different opinions such as whether conventions should have activities or not. Over time more activities have been added, but we have not lost sight of the spiritual aspect of conventions. Beacon Lights editors often wrote articles in Beacon Lights to encourage young people to come. From the March 1949 issue one person wrote, “SO: IF you enjoy Christian fellowship, IF you would like to see Iowa, IF you would like to taste food where it is raised, IF you would like to meet all our young people, IF you like a good time, then don’t miss the 1949 Convention in Iowa.” (Vol. 9, no. 7, p. 10) These were some of the goals of convention planners back then, and still are the goals of our conventions today: learn more of God and his word, and still be able to get to know other young people from our congregations across the country. The conventions are always a big hit and every year since they started, the number of young people getting registered and attending the convention grows.

So where are these conventions held? In the 1940s, the conventions were not quite as large as they are today. WWII was going on during this time period, so many of the young men were drafted to go fight in Europe. Also, our churches have grown considerably in size since then. For this reason, conventions could be held at the church that was hosting, or at camps (Vol. 4, no. 9, p. 18) (Vol. 2, no. 8, p. 1).

Lodging was hard to find because they did not know how many to expect to come. Many conventions hosted the visiting Young Peoples in the homes of the nearby members of the congregation. One minister said in the March 1949 issue, “But let me assure any society that may plan on inviting the Convention to be held in their community, that also this problem is not insurmountable. Young peoples are easily accommodated. If need you can put three or four in to a bed. At our last convention we even had them sleeping on the floor. It is a fine experience to have a group of these young people in our homes for a few days, and gives us an opportunity to exercise the Christian virtue of hospitality” (Vol. 9, no. 6, p. 29).

Today we have our conventions at retreat/convention centers, places built specifically for conventions like ours. Also, they have been held at colleges in the area of the church hosting the convention. Last year we slept in large cabins that could hold quite a few people; this coming year we will stay in a big hotel-like building that can hold many people as well. Although we no longer stay in other families’ homes while the convention is going on, we do sometimes stay in their homes the weekend before the convention will take place.

Transportation to the convention was about the same back then as it is now. Depending on how far away you are from the hosting church, you can take plane, train, car, bus, or whatever means are available (Vol. 5, no. 10, p. 20). This past year, many of the young people rode on a large charter bus to get to Grand Rapids. You can get to the convention by any means that is available to you.

In the 1940s our churches’ conventions were held for two days. The young people would sign in and get registered on Wednesday morning of convention week, then spend Wednesday night, Thursday, and Friday enjoying the convention (Vol. 1, no. 5, p. 11; Vol. 2, no. 8, p. 1). Now our conventions usually have registration on Monday morning bright and early, the convention being held Monday night through Friday morning.

Now some people may be rather “concerned” as to what they were going to eat. Apparently the food was great in the 1940s at our conventions, and it still is now! “The food was delicious. Just right. Also spiritually, the food had all the nutritious value it could possibly have contained and as a result every one of our reformed youth, in those two days, have eaten and digested food which most surely cause us to grow in strength and beauty.” Jean Dykstra, Grand Rapids (Vol. 7, no. 1, p. 11).

At convention this summer, Ryan Dykstra, who let us know everything that we possibly needed to know to survive the week, graciously told us on our first day there that he had tried the food and that it was delicious! Once we had tried it for ourselves,
we learned that he did not lie, because the food was
great and we were well-fed throughout the whole
week.

Although the goals of our convention have not
changed, above was mentioned that a few things
have been added over the years. Many games have
been added. For example, on the first day at our
convention we played mixer games, and every day
after that we had a few hours to have fun playing
team games. The team games are very popular and
are definitely a good addition to the conventions. A
lot of free time is given to the young people during
convention week. Some free time is good to have
just to do whatever you like to do, but too much free
time on the schedule tends to steer us away from
the purpose of our convention.

The banquet was always present at our conven-
tions; this was something that was done in the past
and continues to be something all the conventioneers
look forward to every year. On the last night there,
great food is served and the young people enjoy a
night of fellowship together. After banquet, games
are played involving many of the young people.
These are also fun and looked forward to.

In conclusion, the conventions themselves are
an awesome experience: if you are debating wheth-
er or not to go, go this coming year and try it! It’s
definitely worth the time to go. The speeches are very
edifying, the games are fun, and our chaperones
are always making things great. You get to meet new
people! The conventions from the 1940s compared
to conventions now are quite different, but also very
much the same. I hope that by reading this you are
informed and can use it for a good purpose.

Meghan is a senior at Trinity Christian High School in
Hull, Iowa.

My Country

My country ’tis of Thee,
Who telleth the number of the stars.

And with Thy stripes we are healed.

Absolved from all allegiance to sin,
we, the pilgrims, seek a more perfect city.

Declare independence:
where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty,
secured for ourselves and our posterity.

O death, where is thy sting?

Land for which my fathers died,
of thee I sing,
my hand over my heart.

Meghan is a senior at Trinity Christian High School in Hull, Iowa.

Poem

Sarah Mowery

My Country

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my hand over my heart.
Read Psalm 102:1–12
What makes hell so terrible? It is full of God’s wrath. Psalm 139:8 states, “If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.” There is no comfort in hell, just the wrath of God being poured out eternally.

We go through trials in this life, but these pale in comparison to experiencing the wrath of God upon us. The psalmist in Psalm 102 speaks of this. He explains that he is old and withered, brought near to death. He has been wallowing in his grief and despair. Why? Psalm 102:10 provides us with the answer. It says, “Because of thine indignation and thy wrath: for thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down.” When we put our trust in him, God will give us peace in even the most trying of times, but there is no peace for those under God’s wrath.

Sing or pray Psalter #272.

Read James 4:13–17
There are many Bible verses that talk about how short our life is and how quickly it is gone. One example is James 4:14, which says, “Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.”

Why is it so important for us to know that life is short? When I hear of a tragic death, it always makes me want to hug my loved ones and tell them I love them. At times like that, I’m scared by how quickly they could be taken from me. However, God didn’t tell us how short our days are so that we will love our family more. Psalm 90:12 gives the reason. “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.” We must fill our lives, however long or short, with the study of God and of his word. That is wisdom and the reason we are here on this earth. Ephesians 5:15–16 says, “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”

Sing or pray Psalter #274.

Read Psalm 102:13–28
Psalm 102:20 assures us that God hears “the groanings of the prisoner.” The amount of strength that God gives his people in times of trial is such an amazing testament to his care for us. There are many stories in the Bible of horrible persecution that are stated so matter-of-factly. The Bible does not need to dwell on the emotional aspect of it, making us feel how horrible this must have been. All we need to know is that God gave his people the perfect measure of strength they needed for that trial, and he will for us as well.

Take, for example, the story of Paul’s being stoned at Lystra in Acts 14:19. Here we read, “And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.” That’s it. I can’t even imagine how terrifying something like that would have been, and, yet that’s all we’re told. Then verse 20 goes on to state that Paul got back up, went back into the same city, and continued his journey the next day.

Sing or pray Psalter #275.

Malachi 3:1–6
Fashion is something that has never made any sense to me. Three inches of fabric on the top of my sock can be the difference between my being socially accepted and being ostracized. The same people that snicker and point at someone for their supposedly ridiculous attire will be sporting the same outfit within a few years.

Malachi 3:6 says, “For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.” Psalm 102:27 adds, “But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.” We can be very thankful that our God never changes his mind on a whim as man does. Imagine living in a world where God might decide to kick us out of the covenant at any moment and damn us to hell. How terrifying that would be! We have nothing to fear, however, for our God never changes.

Sing or pray Psalter #273.

The Daily Press
“press toward the mark…” (Philippians 3:14)
It's at times like this that I need to be reminded of what a longsuffering God we have. In Numbers 14, God is ready to destroy Israel for their rebellion. God has brought them out of Egypt and to the promised land, but once they see that there are giants there, they lose all trust in him. In rebellion, they decide to choose their own leader to bring them back to Egypt, the house of bondage. Yet God doesn’t desert them. We constantly need to be humbled by the fact that, “The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy” (Psalm 103:8).

Sing or pray Psalter #278.

Read Psalm 104:10–14

Hindus worship the Ganges River. Tourists flock to its banks every day to bathe in and drink its putrid waters, an activity which can be fatal. Hindus believe that it is a blessing to have your ashes scattered into the river, and corpses are being burnt on shore around the clock for this purpose. If a relative is unable to purchase enough wood to finish burning their loved one, whatever’s left is unceremoniously dumped into the water.

As brought out in these verses, water brings life, as a picture of Christ, who is the water of life. Clean drinking water is necessary to sustain life, just as it is only through Christ that we can obtain eternal life. How fitting it is that Hinduism’s warped view has even caused them to destroy the earthly picture. The very water that has been created to nourish life now brings only death. That’s what life without Christ is: death.

Sing or pray Psalter #286.

Read John 3:11–21

I saw a commercial recently for some new smartphone that’s coming out. The main sales pitch was that this phone had a better dim light camera than its competitors. The commercial provided a list of worldly entertainment that takes place in poorly lit locations. It ended with something like, “the most fun always happens in the dark.”

We are children of the light. Psalm 104:2 says that God covers himself “with light as with a garment.” We are in that light through the blood of our Savior Jesus Christ. On the other hand, those in the world are children of the darkness. In Jesus’ answer to Nicodemus regarding the meaning of being born again, Jesus states in John 3:19b, “that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” The invention of electricity and the nightlife it has created in our society is just another example of how each new technological advance gives the wicked more opportunities to sin.

Sing or pray Psalter #334.

Read Numbers 14:13–19

We’ve just completed a project, and I decide to give the students each a piece of candy as a small reward for their achievement. As I’m handing it out, I start getting annoyed by the fact that many of them have neglected to thank me for it. Some have the gall to complain about the piece they have been given, and one student even disgustedly declines the reward when he sees that it’s not what he was hoping for. By this time, I’m furious. How can they be so ungrateful?
The pastor was excited by this and made it clear that his church was all about getting together with others that loved the Lord, not about teaching very specific doctrines. After he left, I was left wondering if I should have said more.

Psalm 105:1 says, “O give thanks unto the Lord; call upon his name: make known his deeds among the people.” God calls us to be engaged in the difficult work of spreading the gospel every day. We must be prepared whenever an opportunity arises. I find that I’m often taken off guard in such a situation, and, by the time I recover enough to say something, the moment is already past. May God strengthen us, that we might always be ready to give an answer.

Sing or pray Psalter #71.

Read Psalm 104:10–24

Living in a few locations around the country has brought me to a fuller appreciation of God’s creation. Growing up in Michigan, I always wanted to live near the mountains. Sometimes I thought my home state must have about the most boring landscape on earth. Now that I live in arid Colorado, I’ve learned to appreciate a good thunderstorm. Living in northwest Iowa led me to appreciate the woodlands I had taken for granted during my earlier childhood. The bustling city life of Loveland and Denver sometimes makes me wistful for the rolling fields and small town lifestyle I had in Iowa.

My point here isn’t to sound discontented (I still love the mountains), but to show how clearly God’s glory shines forth in so many different aspects of his creation. The psalmist here does a wonderful job of bringing this out. God is seen in the running water that brings life to flora and fauna, in the trees where the birds make their nests, in the hills where the goats roam, in the sky where he controls the sun and the moon, and so much more. As the psalmist states in verse 24, the earth is full of God’s riches.

Sing or pray Psalter #285.

Read Psalm 142

There aren’t many things in creation that give us a clearer picture of hell than caves do. Imagine walking into an enormous cavern miles underground. Your headlamp is barely able to penetrate the total darkness clinging to you. As you swivel from side to side, the dim light catches some movement. In disgust and horror you realize it is millions of giant cockroaches crawling over a landfill-sized pile of excrement. A flutter of wings turns your attention to the ceiling where you find the source of the mess. One bat falls into the guano, where he’s devoured within minutes by the roaches, while another is snatched out of the air by a writhing snake.

As I read about the leviathan in Psalm 104:26, it reminded me of an amazing documentary on caves I watched recently. Caves are a picture to us of what life without God is like. A hunted king David writes Psalm 142 from the depths of a cave. He feels forsaken and cries out to God to deliver him. He has been “brought very low,” literally and figuratively. We cry with David, “Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name.”

Sing or pray Psalter #287.

Read Psalm 105:1–3

Yesterday, the pastor from across the street came to our door, asking if the multi-tool he’d found lying in the road belonged to us. He said that if we ever had an urge to come to church we would receive a warm welcome over at his. I almost just thanked him and closed the door, but caught myself and explained that we did go to church at Loveland Protestant Reformed.

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Sing or pray Psalter #71.
We need to keep this in mind in the church, as well as in the state. That hits home as we near the time for another presidential election. No matter whom our next president is, God has placed him/her in authority over us, and we must respect him/her because of that.

Sing or pray Psalter #291.

Read Psalm 106
Psalm 106 is much like Psalm 105. It gives us a brief recounting of the history of the Israelites. However, whereas Psalm 105 focuses on God’s faithfulness and grace, Psalm 106 focuses on Israel’s faithlessness and God’s justice.

How like a naughty child those Israelites were! How many times have we told our daughter not to throw her cup on the floor? How many times have we told her to be quiet when we read and pray? Even with admonitions and punishments, she keeps doing it again. We suffer from the same sins and weaknesses as our children. We are all like the Israelites.

How wonderful then that God gave us a psalm like Psalm 106 where we can see how God never will forsake us. Psalm 106:45 reads, “And he remembered for them his covenant, and repented according to the multitude of his mercies.”

Sing or pray Psalter #290.

Read Psalm 106:1–5 and 47–48
Yesterday we discussed how God will always forgive us if we are truly sorry. At the beginning of Psalm 106, the psalmist reminds us that the reason God saves us and forgives us is for his own praise and glory. “Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto thy holy name, and to triumph in thy praise” (Ps. 106:47). He does not save us because of anything that we have done, and yet pride is such an easy sin to fall into. We so quickly start to think we are better than others.

I remember playing whiffle ball as a young child with friends. They were going on and on about how good they were and showing off. I finally just went inside and I told my mom how they were bragging and how “I would never say stuff like that.” Sadly, I was proud of my supposed humility, and just as much to blame as they were.

Sing or pray Psalter #290.

Read Deuteronomy 6:1–9
Writing devotionals on Psalms has been harder than I had anticipated. I often feel as if they repeat themselves and that my writing is starting to sound like a broken record. Today, as I sat and tried to find something new to write about in Psalm 106, it crossed my mind that the repetition really shouldn’t bother me. After all, God must have seen our need for repetition because he gave us all these psalms to read in the first place. He must have known our need to hear about his mercy, grace, justice, goodness, love, and our terrible sinfulness over and over again. He knew that we would need to be reminded every day about how much we owe him and how much we fail to praise him as we ought.

As a teacher, I should have thought of this right away. It seems that I say EVERYTHING at least twice and most things more than twice to my students, and still they don’t remember the instructions or the answer. God is our teacher, and I must admit that I often don’t follow his instructions or remember his word even though he has told me over and over again.

Sing or pray Psalter #292.

Read Psalm 107:1–32
In the children’s book Pollyanna, a young orphan girl plays a game called “the glad game”. Her father taught it to her before he died, and the point was to look for something to be glad about in every situation. For example, when the missionary barrels arrived and there were crutches in them instead of a doll, she was glad that she didn’t need the crutches. Towards the beginning of the story when Pollyanna moves to live with her strict aunt, she meets several miserable people, whom she teaches how to play “the glad game”. Then tragedy strikes Pollyanna again, and these same people have to come and help her find something to be glad about.

We, God’s people, shouldn’t have to think too hard about what we can be glad about. After all, God’s “mercy endureth forever” (Ps. 107:1). Just as he rescued the Israelites over and over again, God rescues us from our enemies every day. Psalm 107 tells us four times, “Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!”

Sing or pray Psalter #297.

Read Psalm 107:33–43
These final verses of Psalm 107 tell us of many things that have happened, are happening, and will happen in the world. Verses 33 and 34 speak of fruitful land being turned barren and barren land being turned fruitful. Look at modern-day Israel. What once was the “land flowing with milk and honey” is now a desert. Verses 36 through 41 speak of the poor being made rich and the mighty man being brought low. The life of Job is a perfect example of one who was brought low through “oppression, affliction, and sorrow” (Ps. 107:39), and then once again restored to his former glory. I Samuel 2:8 says, “He raiseth the poor out of the dust…to set them among the princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory…” Interestingly, an important part of the poor being raised up is surrounding them with family. “Yet he setteth the poor on high from affliction, and...
Beacon Lights 15

Praise God in a special way for his mercy in promising us all the riches of salvation and for his truth in keeping every one of those promises. Whatever we know of God’s mercy and truth, there is always more to learn.

Finally, because we fall so short of glorifying God as we ought, we must beg him to glorify himself and to make himself a name. Every act that God does is for his own glory. Isaiah 48:9–11 says, “For my name’s sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off. Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction. For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? And I will not give my glory unto another.”

Sing or pray Psalter #299.

Read Psalm 108:6–13
Lake Victoria in Africa was once a beautiful lake full of cichlids, the catching of which was the livelihood of the people living there. Then the fishermen decided that the enormous Nile perch should be introduced into the lake as a means of making them wealthier. These fish quickly destroyed the cichlid population. Therefore there were no more cichlids eating the lake plants, and the plants overgrew the lake. Soon there were so many plants that they starting decaying and rotting in the lake. Also, the fishermen who were catching the Nile perch were cutting down trees around the lake so they could cook the fish right on the shore. This caused erosion, and soon what God had made beautiful, man had destroyed.

Psalm 108:12 says, “Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man.” Man can do nothing. In pride they think that they know what is best and how to fix things, but it often ends in failure and destruction. Man likes to fool himself into thinking he’s in control, but he only manages to bring the world around him to ruin.

Sing or pray Psalter #99.

Matthew 5:38–44
When you Pray, written by Herman Hanko, is an excellent book, and I highly recommend it. One thing he says in his book is that we may only ask for forgiveness of our sins once we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. By forgiving others, we show true thankfulness to God for forgiving us, and only through the cross are we filled with the desire to truly forgive others. This love for our enemies (and our neighbors) is a necessary sign of our salvation.

David prayed for his enemy at the beginning of Psalm 109. He is surrounded by those who hate and ridicule him, even though he shows them love. Christ did the same thing during his life and death. Surrounded by the mocking Pharisees, Christ prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Furthermore, Christ prays for us, who, because of our old man of sin,
often act like his enemies. Matthew 5:44 says, “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.”

Sing or pray Psalter #301.

**Read Psalm 109:1–20**
During the time of John Calvin, you could hire a Franciscan monk or even a group of them to curse someone you didn’t like. John Calvin tells the story of a wealthy French lady who was at odds with her only son. She hired a group of monks to curse him every day, and the words they used to curse him were the words of Psalm 109.

It is a terrible thing to use the words of God in wrong and evil ways. These monks, however, couldn’t have used more terrible curses than are found in Psalm 109. In this psalm, David is praying for the destruction of one enemy in particular. We don’t know who this particular enemy was, but he was worse than all others. David does not wish evil upon this man because of a desire for revenge, but he desires justice against sin. He prays that this wicked man be sentenced as a criminal and put to death, that his family should be outcasts and vagabonds with no mercy shown to them, that all his wealth should be given to others, and that his name should be blotted from history.

Sing or pray Psalter #300.

**Hebrews 7:11–28**
Psalm 110, the psalm most quoted in the New Testament, can be divided into three sections. The first three verses speak of Christ and his place as sovereign king; verse 4 speaks of Christ’s place as eternal priest, and verses 5–7 speak of his role as victorious warrior. I am going to focus on verse 4 and Christ’s place as eternal priest.

Psalm 110:4 reads, “The Lord hath sworn and will not repent, Thou art a priest….” God the Father is talking to his son, Jesus Christ. Jesus, our eternal priest, is the fulfillment of all earthly priests. He is a mediator between us and God, fulfilling all the pictures of what the earthly priests did.

Christ was made priest by an oath, “The Lord hath sworn and will not repent…” The earthly priests, like Aaron, were made priests without an oath (Heb. 7:21). God the Father shows no reluctance about making Christ our priest.

Furthermore, Christ is our priest forever. God will not “repent” from making him our priest, as he did concerning Eli’s priesthood (I Samuel 2:30). Unlike the earthly priests whose priesthood ended when they died, Jesus, “because he continueth forever, hath an unchangeable priesthood” (Heb. 7:24).

Sing or pray Psalter #303.

**Read Psalm 110, Hebrews 7:1–10**
Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of the Most High God, remains mostly a mystery to us. He was the “king of righteousness” and the “king of peace” (Heb. 7). He was “without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life” (v. 3). He sounds a lot like Christ himself. Many use the titles “king of righteousness” and “king of peace” and the fact that it says he was “without father, without mother, without descent” as proof to say that Melchizedek was Jesus Christ in Old Testament form; however, neither Genesis nor Hebrews support this theory. The phrases “made like unto the son of God” and “after the order of Melchizedek” make a clear distinction between the two men. Moreover, Melchizedek was more of a title than a name. Melek means “king,” tsedeq means “righteousness,” and Salem means “peace,” he was the king of righteousness and peace. Likewise, there is historical evidence of other kings at that time with names ending with zedek (Josh. 10:1). That he was “without father, without mother…having neither beginning of days, nor end of life” means simply that we are not told these things about him.

Sing or pray Psalter #302.

**Read Psalm 110, Genesis 14:17–20**
What do we know about Melchizedek? We know that he was a priest of the Most High God, and he was so important that Abraham, to whom God had given the covenant promise, knew him and respected him. Melchizedek received tithes from Abraham “and blessed him that had the promises” (Heb. 7:6). Also, Melchizedek was the king of Salem, which some believe was where Jerusalem was later located.

He was the one (not Aaron) of whom God said about Christ, “Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.” (Ps. 110:4). For as Melchizedek was “without father, without mother, without descent,” so was Christ. As Melchizedek had “neither beginning of days, nor end of life…abideth a priest forever,” so Christ is “the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last” (Rev. 22:13). As Abraham brought his tithes to Melchizedek, so we must bring our tithes of thanksgiving and repentance to our eternal high priest, Jesus Christ.

Sing or pray Psalter #50.

**Read Psalm 111**
The psalmist begins Psalm 111 by telling us to praise the Lord and by declaring that he will praise the Lord “with [his] whole heart.” He goes on to tell us what the subject of our praise should be: God’s works. Mentioned are eight characteristics of God’s works that make them praise worthy.

First of all, God’s works are great and magnificent. They
are like God himself, full of infinite wisdom and power.

Second, they are spoken of as if they are one. Verse 3 says, “His work is honorable and glorious.” They work together in perfect harmony according to God’s will. It is similar to how the four wheels on a wagon or a car work together to go in one direction. Ezekiel speaks of this in Ezekiel 10:10–13, “...they four had one likeness, as if a wheel had been in the midst of a wheel.... As for the wheels, it was cried unto them in my hearing, O wheel.”

Third, God’s works are interesting and entertaining to his people. As God’s people, no subject will be more interesting or give us more delight than to think about and learn about the works of God.

Sing and pray Psalter #304.

Fourth, God’s works are just and holy. He has never done and will never do any wrong to any of his creatures. His works are without any hint of lies or trickery.

Fifth, they will last forever. Ecclesiastes 3:14 says, “I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him.”

Sixth, every one of God’s works is worth noticing and remembering. Much that we do is trifling and better to be forgotten, but that is not so with God. God has even made ways for his works to be remembered. For example, Israel was commanded to celebrate the Passover feast in remembrance of God’s deliverance of them from Egypt.

We celebrate the Lord’s Supper to remind us of Christ’s work for us on the cross. Psalm 77:11, 12 says, “I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings.”

Sing or pray Psalter #166.

Sing and pray Psalter #180.

2016 Convention Discussion Outline: Prayer

- Read James 5:13–20
- Idea of Prayer
  1. What is prayer?
  2. Who can pray? (John 9:31)
  3. Why pray when God knows everything already? Does prayer actually change things?
- Necessity of Prayer
  1. Is prayer important? Why so? (Ps. 50:14–15)
  2. Why must we pray for each other? James 5.
- If prayer is so important, why do we find it so difficult to pray regularly and genuinely? (1 John 1:8–9)
- Improving Our Prayers
  1. What are some weaknesses in our prayers?
  2. What things can we do to have a more regular, genuine, prayer-life?
  3. What specific ways can we praise and thank God?
  4. What specific petitions for ourselves ought to be included in our prayers? (1 Pet. 3:7).
  5. It is relatively easy to pray for ourselves, our family, and our friends. But how can we improve in our prayers for the world-wide church? (Ps. 122:6; Eph. 1:16–17)
Does the Bible forbid or allow one human to judge another human in light of Matthew 7:1, “Judge not that ye be not judged”? In general, today’s society advocates tolerance. Every person is believed to have the right to determine good and evil for themselves and may do so without any opposition from another.

We will strive to see that this text does not condemn all judging. Rather, we will consider what kind of judging the citizens of Jesus’ kingdom are to avoid. We will also consider how the citizens of Jesus’ kingdom are to judge.

Does Jesus forbid all forms of judgment?
1. Read Matthew 7:6.
   a. Does Jesus forbid making evaluations and judgments?
   b. Who are to be considered “dogs” and “swine?”
2. Read Matthew 7:15–16. Who are “false prophets”? How does one determine whether a prophet is false?

In the Sermon on the Mount (of which Matthew 7 is a part) Jesus establishes the principles of his kingdom. In many places he declares that the righteousness of the citizens of his kingdom must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (5:20). In Matthew 7 Jesus is condemning the way in which the Pharisees judged.

1. How did the Pharisees judge?
2. What is to be our only standard in making judgments?
3. What is to be our spirit and attitude when judging another?
4. What is to be our self-examination before we judge another?
5. What is to be our motivation for making judgments?

May we judge? How are we to judge?

According to 1 John 1:4, the very goal of the gospel of the covenant of grace is that we may experience the fullness of joy. It is certainly our prayer as pastors that you yourselves live in the consciousness of the joy of your relationship with our covenant God in Jesus Christ.

In the light of Psalm 43 we are given to see that this exceeding joy is ours even in darkness. This is an important perspective. It addresses the struggle of our own experience. Trials seem to us the threat that would remove joy from us. Yet the Holy Spirit through James tells us to consider even our trials “all joy.” How does that come to expression? Psalm 43 gives confession to my exceeding joy—even in darkness.

The psalmist identifies God as his exceeding joy (verse 4).

It is important that we immediately notice that, because you and I quite stupidly seek our joy elsewhere. Almost without thought we find ourselves seeking our joy in earthly things, earthly activities,
and earthly relationships. We can take those things that in themselves are good gifts of God and make them idols. We could mention money, toys, entertainment, friends, sex, wine, food—you get the idea—all of which are good gifts of God when used for the purpose for which he gave them. But any one of them can become a snare to the soul when we give them a place never intended by God.

So we easily move from one idol to another.

To have friends—it doesn’t matter what we have to do to keep them—that promises to be the source of joy.

Then comes work, and money becomes a focus.

And if you are old enough to drink, what place is that going to occupy? For some, that drinking becomes slavery to an idol.

The culture that we live in today is overtly sexual. The Bible speaks openly about sex as a precious gift of God to his people from the beginning. But that precious gift of God was so special that it was given solely for marriage, and that between one man and one woman for life. Today we are told that sex is for anyone to indulge in. After all, if you’re going to be happy, you have to do what makes you feel happy.

Not only are we told that sex is the source of joy, it’s “in your face” promoted as a necessary part of a happy life. And it doesn’t even have to be for marriage. In fact, it can be for yourself as you sit before the computer screen or your smart phone.

The Bible talks about the pleasures of sin. There’s a recognition that sin satisfies a certain lust for pleasure. But the Bible also makes very clear that if you are looking for those sinful pleasures to provide you a life of joy, of happiness, you are going to be devastated by the disappointment, because the pleasures of sin are only for a season. Then what? That’s the problem with idols, you see. It doesn’t matter what form an idol takes. It promises to give you what you want, to make you feel good, to give you happiness, maybe even to help you cope. But the promises turn out to be big lies. Deception is never going to lead you to joy.

The psalmist prays, “O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy.”

God is the identity of our joy, yes, our exceeding joy. While deception will never lead us to joy, God’s light and truth will. For there is only one joy, that found in God himself and in the fellowship of his own covenant life as the triune God.

Probably the most astounding aspect of the Christian religion is the wonder of God choosing to take a people into the joy of his own covenant life. That’s the heart of the gospel!

To live in the fellowship of God, as partakers of his covenant life, is alone our exceeding joy (1 John 1:3–4).

That’s what the psalmist is speaking about. Do you know something about that? Are you growing in the consciousness of that? Without that all is vanity. Life is empty without the joy of living in the consciousness of the fellowship of God in Jesus Christ. You must know that. But we also have to grow in our consciousness of that wonder and of that joy. Because as is also evident from this psalm, we live facing a multitude of threats to our joy, and Satan would like nothing better than to obstruct our sight of that wonder and to lead us in a pathway that brings us to despair.

The psalmist himself speaks of matters in his own life that threatened his joy, that obstructed his sight of God’s fellowship and favor.

It is thought that David wrote these psalms during his flight from Absalom, his own son. David therefore was cut off from the sanctuary of God and the fellowship with Jehovah that at that time centered in the tabernacle. But the occasion for that disruption was certainly found in the attacks upon his faith.

The psalmist had enemies, and not just a few either. It may well have been Absalom leading the pack. But when you look at verse 1, David asks of God, “Judge me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation.” Considering that David was God’s chosen king, the very type of the Messiah, their rejection of David was the rejection of Christ. It was apostasy. And as always has been the case, where there is apostasy, there is deepest hatred for the church.

If you have ever been misrepresented, been slandered, had your motives falsely judged, then you know of what David speaks. We certainly do as churches. And we have to expect that. Not only that, but you know as well as I that if someone wants to find something to criticize, a reason to hate, they don’t have to look very hard. The sins in our midst are many.

The same is true in the broader Christian church. A powerful evidence of the increasing hatred toward Christianity in our own country can be seen if you
read any news articles online and just glance at the “Comments” section that often follows those news articles. Christians are being blamed for just about every heinous sin and every social problem seen in this country. When you are slandered, when you see the name of your God defiled, don’t you find that a disruption of the joy of your life? David did.

In addition, when we think about that which threatens our joy, we certainly have to consider our own infirmities. Sometimes it’s easy to forget that in that brief period of time that we live in the strength of youth. But even the strength of youth is no guarantee that you won’t face affliction and serious trial in your own life or that of a loved one. That’s part of life, even as Christians. But Satan would use those things to obscure our sight of the glory of God and the riches of our joy of living in the fellowship of his love.

Then there are the sins that mar our lives, which rob us of the joy of the gospel. We know that God cannot have fellowship with those who walk in sin. And while the gospel would point us to Christ, our righteousness, who himself paid the debt of our guilt and sin, we still stumble and fall. And those sins that we commit remove from us the consciousness of God’s favor. And God forbid, should we walk in sin, impenitent, clinging to whatever idol we insist on worshiping, we can only experience what David himself experienced during the course of his life when he had been ensnared in an impenitent walk. He would later write about it in Psalm 32: “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer.” No peace, no joy, because no fellowship with him who alone is our joy. Yes, there are many threats to our joy.

But the chief threat is our own perspective, improperly colored by our own sinful nature.

That too is clearly faced in Psalm 43. The psalmist gives expression to the struggle of his own soul. He relies on the God of his salvation, confessing, “For thou art the God of my strength.” But in the very next phrase he calls into question God’s faithfulness. “Why dost thou cast me off?”

Do you think God doesn’t know your needs, your struggles? Read the psalms. The Holy Spirit inspired them as God’s word to us in answer to our needs and struggles. Have you sometimes felt like God is far away? Don’t think you are alone in that.

It is important to see here, though, that even in his struggle David is being upheld by the tender mercies of God and his almighty hand. That is true with you and me as well.

But that struggle is a matter of our own perspective nevertheless. We want things to go “our way.” And when we face disruptions to that way that we determine is our way, our faith is tried. We want God to show us that our way is right. “Take away the trial; remove the enemy; deliver me from this problem.”

But God reminds us and would have us remember that he is God. He’s not there to give us whatever we ask for. He’s not there to show us that our way is the right way. He will answer us according to his will, because he knows in perfect wisdom what the best way is for us and how to accomplish his perfect purpose in our lives and for our salvation. We tend to mope in our own self-pity, rather than fixing our eyes upon the wonder who is God our Savior.

So David needed to be drawn to the strength of his joy. That’s true for you and me too.

By the Spirit’s work in him, David asked that God lead him, not out of his oppression, but to God’s holy tabernacle. What he needed for the restoration of joy was the fellowship of his God.

That’s true for us too in the trials that are ours. We might express to God our desire for a change of circumstances. But we have to realize that joy does not come by the change of our circumstances, but by living in the fellowship of God, our exceeding joy.

To live in that joy we have to be led by God’s light and his truth.

Our perspective has to be changed from the earthly, naturally self-centered focus that is ours to one that focuses on the wonder that God has taken us in Jesus Christ into the tabernacle of his own covenant life and love. God’s light and truth, applied by the Holy Spirit, alone change us and our spiritual perspective. God’s light and his truth alone are able to lead us into God’s holy hill, into the spiritual consciousness of what it is to live in the fellowship of God.

“Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy.” That altar pointed God’s people to Christ, to the cleansing of their sins by the shed blood of the sacrifice. Only by our sins being taken away, covered by Christ’s blood, do we have that fellowship with the Holy One. By God’s light and truth leading us to Christ, we are given to see the wonder, the absolutely amazing wonder, that God has taken us with all our sinfulness, with all our struggles, with
all our weaknesses, with all our afflictions, with all our sorrows—God has taken us and has said, “You are mine. I have loved you with an incomparable love. I have cleansed you. I am sanctifying you. I am leading you to joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

Stand in awe before the wonder. “I belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.” Is that your confession? Then you will see in God himself your exceeding joy—even in darkness. And you will be able to say, “For I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.”

Rev. Key is pastor of Loveland Protestant Reformed Church in Loveland, Colorado. This article is an abridged version of a speech given at the Colorado Young Adults Retreat, March 16, 2016, the theme text of which was Psalm 118:24—Ed.
in such beautiful and dignified language, and yet also with such a simple and clear style, that what you have in the King James Version is due in large part to the work of this one man, William Tyndale. It is no wonder that William Tyndale has gone down in history with the title, “the Father of the English Bible.”

It was through William Tyndale that God gave the English-speaking people a Bible they could read and understand for themselves. And it was through William Tyndale that God gave the English-speaking people a Bible they could personally afford and possess. But all this work would cost Tyndale his life. It would cost him his life at the hands of the Roman Catholic Church and the government authorities.

**His Early Life**

William Tyndale was born in England around 1494. He was born in a country that was covered in spiritual darkness. England was under the dominance of the Roman Catholic Church, and the Roman Catholic Church was ruthless in its suppression of gospel truths. The priests themselves were nearly entirely illiterate. It is said that of the 20,000 priests in England, not one could translate a line from the Lord’s Prayer from Latin to English. Besides that, the priests were characterized by gross immorality and corruption in their personal lives and in church government. The church played upon the superstition and ignorance of the common people, who were dreadfully being taken advantage of. The people had no Bibles of their own, and had nothing to go off of but the word of the priests. If the people wanted any hope of salvation, they had to pay their priests and submit to them. It is hard for us to imagine living in this kind of bondage.

However, there had been glimmers of spiritual life and of reformation before Tyndale’s day. Over one hundred years before Tyndale, there was a man by the name of John Wycliffe. He was a professor at Oxford who was given the grace to see through the darkness of the Catholic Church, and who emphasized that the Bible needed to be given to the ordinary church member for him to read for himself. Wycliffe translated the Bible into English from the Latin version, and had men who copied this English translation by hand, and spread these copies throughout England. But so angry was the Roman Catholic Church with Wycliffe’s translation, and they felt so threatened by it, that the Roman Catholic Church in England made it illegal for anyone to translate the Bible into English without a license from a Roman Catholic bishop. If anyone should translate the Bible into English, or make copies in English, they would risk being burned at the stake. That law was still in effect in Tyndale’s day, so that when Tyndale was growing up, Bibles were very rare, and were not in a language that the people could understand.

Not much is known about Tyndale’s childhood. When Tyndale was 12 years old, he went to Oxford University—the most prestigious university in all of England, where he received probably the best education in all of Europe and all the world. Tyndale showed himself to be a very hard-working and gifted scholar, especially in the languages. Throughout the course of his life, Tyndale would become fluent in no fewer than eight languages—Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, English, German, and French. He was a linguistic genius.

After his time at Oxford, in 1519 Tyndale went to study at Cambridge University, which had recently become the center of the Protestant teachings of Martin Luther (1483–1546), who had nailed his famous 95 theses on the castle church door in Wittenberg only two years earlier. On the campus at Cambridge, students of Luther-like convictions would meet together at a place called “the White Horse Inn”, and debate the ideas of Luther. Some scholars believe that Tyndale was among this group of students. It seems that it was during his time at Cambridge that Tyndale began to see the gospel more clearly and embraced it.

In 1521 Tyndale left Cambridge and became a tutor and the chaplain for a family in the countryside of England. While living there, Tyndale saw just how ignorant the Roman Catholic priests were, and how they were taking such horrible advantage of the common people. (Again, the common people did not have any access to the scriptures, so that it was easy for the priests to deceive them. Tyndale, of course, could read the Bible for himself, and even read the original Greek New Testament for himself.) In one conversation with a Roman Catholic priest, Tyndale got into an argument about how God saves his people. And the Roman Catholic priest said, “We had better be without God’s laws than the pope’s” (Meaning it would be better to obey the pope rather than obey God). In response, Tyndale said, “I defy the pope and all his laws. If God spare my life, before many years, I will cause the farmer-boy who works with the plough in the fields to know more of the scriptures than you.” And from this time forward, this
became Tyndale’s mission in life: to get the Bible itself into the hands of the common people. Not only was it his mission, it was the calling that God had given Tyndale in life. God had given Tyndale the needed gifts, and had worked everything in Tyndale’s life for this purpose.

In order to carry out this work, Tyndale knew what the appropriate steps would be: first, get the approval of a bishop. In 1523 Tyndale went to London and spoke to a bishop about getting permission to translate the Bible into English and publish it. However, the entire Roman Catholic Church was well aware of the kind of social and religious upheaval that was taking place in Germany because of Martin Luther’s translation of the Bible into German only a year earlier. The bishop refused to give Tyndale permission to translate the Bible.

There were only two things for Tyndale to choose from: either go home and ignore the great need that the people had for the gospel, or leave England, never to return again, to carry out his translation and publication of the Bible in English. Tyndale chose the latter. And like the patriarch Abraham, and like many others of God’s people throughout the years, Tyndale went out, not knowing where he was going. But he went out, knowing that he had to obey God, and trust God.

Tyndale knew that the gospel would not come to England, and that reformation would not take place in England unless the people had the Bible in their own language, and could read it themselves.

Let us never take for granted the great privileges we have—to own our own copy of the scriptures (many copies, sometimes), and to be able to read the scriptures whenever we want.

To be continued…

Rev. Guichelaar is pastor of Randolph Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin.

The Meaning of Necessary Good Works

You have always been taught that good works are necessary. What does “necessary good works” mean? Those who promote error give the word necessary just their one meaning that is often the first meaning listed in many dictionaries. We are called sometimes to explain the proper meaning of terms that have been corralled into one culturally popular meaning.

We learn in catechism that good works are much more than helping a little old lady cross the street, starting a soup kitchen in the city to feed the homeless or building a school, and digging a well in a third world country. Although those things are fine to do, they are not always good works. Good works are what we do throughout our daily existence. It is the “regular” stuff that doesn’t really seem like a big deal or make a big splash that anyone is going to congratulate us for. Things like prayer, repentance, crucifying our old man, happily going to church, willing obedience to authority, discussing the truths of scripture together, taking care of our responsibilities, guarding our tongue, and being nice to someone who hasn’t been nice to us are good works, even though they seem like just average life.

We would agree that for even these regular things to be good works, they must meet the standard that the Bible tells us they should meet. They are to be done in accordance to the law of God as found in the ten commandments and the summary that teaches us to love God above all else and love our neighbor as ourselves. They are also to be done for God’s glory and not our own honor or advantage. And they are to be done out of faith.

What about that word necessary? Our first thought is often that it means a requirement or obligation. This would be the meaning that many use today including Arminianism, many evangelical groups, promoters of the federal vision, and Ro-
man Catholics. These teach that good works are a requirement that we must do in order to get conversion for ourselves, maintain our salvation, or finish the work that Christ started in us. That meaning of necessary would amount to trying to earn our salvation or be a form of works righteousness. Good works are also not a requirement that we must do in order to prove that we are saved as if it were a hoop to jump through similar to a dog’s performing a trick to prove that he learned it.

The second meaning of necessary listed in the dictionary is: inevitable, unavoidable, predetermined and preordained as in a result of something or a “necessary consequence.” This is the biblical understanding of necessary as explained in scripture by the picture of fruit. The idea is that if a tree is healthy and well sustained by the gardener, it will be fruitful. It will be. It cannot be unfruitful. It will be unavoidable that the tree produces fruit. That is an explanation that many of you have been taught. Continuing with the idea of fruit, when you think of a new baby, the Bible calls that the fruit of the womb. It is a necessary result of what happened within that womb. The newborn must come out of or spring forth from the womb. It is necessary. It is inevitable. If a child doesn’t emerge from the womb, it dies. So also our good works: they must emerge and flourish, grow and mature. When we are born again spiritually, good works must inevitably come out of our now-livened hearts. Good works are signs of spiritual life even though they are polluted with sin. The works of our hands, the thoughts of our hearts, and the speech of our tongues display the life of Christ within us. This is the life that God sees when he looks at us and delights in us as his own. The Bible is teaching quite a lot by calling regeneration our being born again because it is at the same time teaching how our good works are necessary. Thankful actions of obedience necessarily and inevitably spring forth from a regenerated and justified heart.

Let me give you another example that I recently ran across. Good works are necessary like the noise of a cannon is necessary when it is shot off. The noise does not cause the cannon to shoot. Rather, the noise is a part of the effect of the cannon being shot. The timing you see is important when you are considering the necessity of something. Is something necessary before something else or after that something else? Good works are not to be related to justification as happening before justification or during it or even as finishing it, as John Piper is teaching lately. They are related to justification as happening after it. Christ performs 100% of the work of justification, and our good works follow that justification. Good works are related to justification much like the noise of a cannon is related to the shot itself. The noise does not cause the cannonball to fly through the air. The noise is not part of the cannon or the cannonball, and it is not part of the flying. It does not contribute to the process at all. But the noise is always there, accompanying and resulting from the cannonball being fired. Good works are always there, accompanying and resulting from our justification. The intensity and amount of them are directly related to our awareness of and gratitude for that justification.

So why are good works always there? God makes sure that they are always there for his own glory. Good works are a core part of the sanctification that God works in us as he conforms us to the image of Christ. They are basic, entry-level participation in the Christian life as the commonly shared life of the family of God. Good works are “sanctification 101,” straightforward, uncomplicated, easy to understand and do. They are central to the Christian life because they are how we show love for God and our neighbor. Good works equate to our serving others instead of being consumed with ourselves. Good works promote growth in sanctification because their presence in our lives encourages us in our life of gratitude. They are the activity of what we know about God and his word of salvation to us. Even our very desire for good works is a great comfort and reassurance to us against the lie of Satan that tries to tell us we are too evil for Christ to bother with us. Our good works are evidences that Jesus Christ dwells in our hearts. They prove our faith like our pulse proves we are alive. Because they are an assurance to us that we can see, we are moved to praise God with thanksgiving even more. This leads to more good works and then to more thanksgiving. The bringing forth of praise to God is how our good works glorify God, whether it is praise from others upon seeing our good works or whether it is from us for what he has done in us. This type of glorifying God is not an attempt to add something to him. Do we praise God often enough for the good works that we see in others?

Good works are for our benefit as assurance

1 Standard Bearer, vol. 92, #7, pg.154
of our personal salvation according to Q&A 86 of the Heidelberg Catechism. They are proof to our weak and doubting hearts that the seed of spiritual life has sprouted and is growing. We need them in our fight against Satan's continual accusations. Scriptural knowledge is a wonderful thing to have. Pure doctrine is wonderful. The rich young ruler had knowledge and pure doctrine but he still went away sad because he did not have good works, Matt. 19:16–22. His knowledge did not produce true action because his heart was not yet changed. We read in 1 Corinthians 2:10–14 that if one can understand spiritual things, then he already has the Spirit within his heart. Proof of our salvation that is shown to us in our own personal lives in a personal way with good works is a true gift of the Spirit for us. Our good works make our own salvation known to us in a way that an academic “A” on a spiritual test will not. God graciously sets forth and causes us to perform good works that are designed especially for each of us to do, Ephesians 2:10. Our good works are unique and particular to each one of us. Our personalized good works are a strong form of personal witnessing to others, 1 Peter 2, especially verse 12. The calling of Matthew 5:16 is to let our light shine so that others may see our good works and glorify God. When others see our good works, this gives us opportunity to speak of God’s message of salvation. These then may rejoice and glorify God with us. This is why we should not be consumed with a false humility that causes us to hide our good works or only to show them to a few fellow believers in the household of faith. We are called to let all our light shine before all and this includes the good works God gave us.

Good works are also the fulfillment of the promises of scripture. Every time we read an ‘if/then’ statement in the Bible, we should read that as a promise and not a condition. Our natural and corrupted mind that is tied down by our own selfish thought process assumes that the Bible is full of all of these conditions: “If thou shalt obey, then thou shalt be...” To our natural minds this sounds like a condition. If we read these as promises, we see these passages in a whole different light. Now we see these promises as ways to validate to our fearful and doubting selves the truth of our salvation. Our redemption is sure because it is based on the work of Christ. But it is shown to each of us because when we examine ourselves, we see the fulfillment of all of these promises actually transpiring in our own lives as we willingly perform good works. If/then statements however, are not to be used to judge each other or measure each other’s purity or Christianity.

Good works are also the inevitable and preordained finishing touches on our being born again because we are God’s workmanship according to Ephesians 2:10. They are God’s finishing what he started in us spiritually, and God does not leave his work unfinished, Philippians 1:6. Trials and sufferings are not the only thing that God uses to prepare us for eternal life or strengthen our faith. He also uses our good works for this purpose according to the parable of the talents, Matthew 25:14–30. Good works do not earn heaven for us, but without them we will not be prepared to enter into heaven. Good works are expressions of submission to God, and putting the needs of others above our own desires. If we were not living from that mindset now, then why would we want that activity in glory? It is not our calling just to wait for perfection to happen in heaven. Being perfected in heaven doesn’t just mean “without flaws,” but it means also a completion and fullness of what was started here, including good works that we did in faith and by grace. It is amazing to me that God not only saves such poison worms as we are, but he then gives us work to do and calls it good! Heaven is where our good works will be rewarded according to grace. Heaven for us then becomes the fruition, fulfillment, and completion of the grace and the good works that were given us in this life (Rom. 8:30). We often say when someone dies that his or her work here was done. It is a very true thing because it is their good works being finished by God and the completion of the last of their good works that God crowns with their entrance into their eternal home.

So you see, properly understanding the word necessary is important for us to understand the place of good works in our lives as gratitude. Our good works are not our own doing and contribute nothing to our salvation, and this keeps us humble. Yet, because our good works are not our own doing, we rejoice in them and praise God for them. We are thankful for the necessary presence of good works, the fruit of our salvation.

Brenda is a member of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.
Church News

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:

Keagan Jude, son of Mr. & Mrs. Philip & Susan Hall—Ballymena, N Ireland
Emery Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Matt & Jory Oosterbaan—Byron Center, MI
Milly Jo, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Caleb & Deanna Spriensma—Byron Center, MI
Cooper Steven, son of Mr. & Mrs. Bryan & Liz Landheer—Byron Center, MI
Amelia Raye, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Joel & Tara VanderKolk—Georgetown, MI
Remy Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Cody & Erin Cammenga—Grace, MI
Wyatt Aaron, son of Mr. & Mrs. Aaron & Maggie Kamps—Hope, MI
Harrison Glen, son of Mr. & Mrs. Nathan & Sarah Holstege—Loveland, CO
James Elliot, son of Mr. & Mrs. BJ & Sarah Mowery—Loveland, CO
Hunter Wade, son of Mr. & Mrs. Chad & Paula Kamminga—Loveland, CO
Benjamin Gerrit, son of Mr. & Mrs. Glen & Lissa Regnerus—Randolph, WI
Jack Berend & Joey John, twin sons of Mr. & Mrs. Chad & Maria Meelker—Redlands, CA
Ezra Benton, son of Mr. & Mrs. Charles & Katedan Hopkins—Redlands, CA
Seth Otto, son of Mr. & Mrs. Scott & Emily Geastra—Redlands, CA
Mary Camille, daughter of Dr. & Mrs. Paul & Erin DeJong—Sioux Falls, SD
Levi David, son of Mr. & Mrs. David & Briana Ophoff—Southeast, MI

Adult baptism was administered to Lloyd Gordon—Spokane, WA
Mia Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Chad & Lori Van Overloop—Trinity, MI
Skyler Helene, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Clint & Katie Karsemeyer—Trinity, MI

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

“In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”

Proverbs 3:6

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

Isaac VanBaren—Crete, IL
Noah Griess—Loveland, CO
Samantha Stains—Loveland, CO
Carly Regnerus—Randolph, WI
Gary Gordon—Spokane, WA
Lloyd Gordon—Spokane, WA
Meghan Groenendyk—Southwest, MI

MARRIAGES

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

Mr. Dillon Mee and Miss Brittany Schimmel—Georgetown, MI
Mr. Matthew Meulenberg and Miss Nicole VanDyke—Grace, MI
Mr. Eddie Nienhuis and Miss Emma Engelsma—Hope, MI

Lord, Teach Me

Thelma Westra

Lord, teach me how to pray
To praise and honor Thee,
Extolling all thy virtues,
Thy grace, boundless and free.

Thy glory fills the heav’ns.
Thy wonders crown the earth,
Thy ways, past understanding,
Thy name, unmatched in worth.

Thou hast made in thy image
Mankind, a faint reflection
Of thy own attributes.
Immeasurable perfection!

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Of thy own attributes.
Immeasurable perfection!

Poem

Thelma Westra

Danny’s mom rested a hand on his and Becky’s shoulders. “The caligae or sandals that the Roman soldiers wore had another purpose. The Roman soldiers did more than fight. They were also builders. They, and the workers who traveled with them, built roads for the army to travel between places easier. When they stayed in one place for a while, they built buildings and aqueducts to carry water. The roads, aqueducts, and buildings all prepared a place for peace after the Roman army conquered it. Wherever the Roman soldiers walked, they left behind them the preparation for a country’s peace.”

“So they weren’t just soldiers. They were also builders.” Becky said.

Their mom nodded. “Yes. And like Roman soldiers, when we walk in the world, we don’t just encounter battles. God uses our spreading of the gospel to build his church and prepare his church for the future peace of heaven.”

Questions to think about:
1. Read Ephesians 6:15 and Mark 16:15 by yourself or with your parents. How does a Christian spread the gospel?
2. How are Christians builders as well as soldiers?
August 8-12, 2016
Lake Williamson Christian Conference Center
www.prccconvention.com

Speeches to look forward to:

1. Content with God’s plan. (Rev. R. Kleyn)
2. Content with what you have. (Rev. R. Barnhill)
3. Content with what you are. (Rev. R. VanOverloop)

Philippians 4:11 “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.”