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Before reading this article, it would be beneficial to read Mark Hoeksema’s editorial from the May issue of Beacon Lights.

What you read in this article may shock you. It may be something you’ve never taken into consideration. Or it may be something your parents are constantly badgering you about. Whatever the case may be, please consider what I have to say, so that we can combat such temptations and habits together.

What fellow Beacon Lights staff member, Jake Dykstra, and I decided to do was to calculate how much time we spent on social media and on our phones in general for three days as a follow-up to the previous editorial. Our findings emphasized some scary things, much to our chagrin. Here are our findings.

For the three days, Jake used an app that tracked his total phone time, which apps he used most, longest usage time, etc. Jake’s average time spent on his phone was about two hours and thirty-one minutes per day. This app also recorded how many times he “quick checked” his phone (“quick checks” being turning his phone on, unlocking it, looking at the screen, and shutting off the screen). In one day, he checked his phone 95 times.

I, too, downloaded an app that tracked my phone usage, although I deleted Instagram and Snapchat weeks ago, so my data will be skewed—my usage time would have been much higher if I still had those apps. My average daily phone usage was about two hours and sixteen minutes. Instead of “quick checks,” my app counted the number of times I opened my phone in general, which was, at its peak, 154 times per day.

The data shocked me, as it should. Putting numbers to the amount of time I spent on my phone made how much time I was on my phone more of a reality. After I sat ashamed for a while, I began to ponder some things: what was I removing from my daily schedule to make room for my phone? If I cut down the time spent on my phone, what could I be doing instead? Daily devotions, art projects, helping more around the house, homework, interacting with my family, or learning a new hobby? The amount of time spent on my phone demonstrated a lack of prioritizing, or at least warped priorities.

Whenever we talk about priorities, the matter becomes one of our hearts. Are they concerned with the things of God? Or are they more attached to the things of the world? Something that has stuck with me comes from one of Rev. Haak’s sermons. He said that you would know where your heart lies by what you first pick up in the morning. If you pick your phone up first, then you are giving your heart to the physical and temporal things of the world and to the devil. But if you pick up your Bible first, then your heart belongs solely to God.

In my case, my heart was more connected to my phone than to God. I was giving my phone precedence over God, which is blatant idolatry. I didn’t even notice how my phone slowly and sneakily took over my time so that I had little to no room for God. The number of “quick checks” alone demonstrated this.

God warns of such idols taking over our lives in Matthew 6:24, but rather than using the word “idol,” he inspired Matthew to write “master.” The word master connotes a hierarchical relationship, the master controlling his servant, the servant obeying every command. It isn’t a coincidence that God chose this word because if we really think about it, our phones have become our masters. Our lives revolve around them, their battery life, and the amount of data we have left. They ring, vibrate, or chime, and we come running, like any good servant would.

Our phones might not be graven images, but they can take over our lives just as naturally, effectively, and entirely as any pagan god. Through
a combination of our sinful natures and Satan’s deceptive ploys, we are susceptible. Satan tells us that having our phones nearby is a good thing in case someone needs to contact us in an emergency or so that we can quickly Google something we have a question on. Don’t get me wrong, these can be good things, but, as the saying goes, you give an inch, he will take a mile. Once Satan has his foot in the door, it will be difficult to get him out.

Checking our phones only for emergency calls or texts becomes a constant checking of our other social media apps or mindless games. As we sink deeper into the social acceptance of being on our phones constantly, our master, the phone, takes full control, rather than our master God. I know that I am at a point where I can’t tell who controls me more, God or my phone.

How can I change this? I don’t want to be reined to my phone, a bit in my mouth, but I want to be able to feel free, which God offers to me. I want him to be my master, not some technological device that can only offer me brief satisfaction and instantaneous contact.

I challenge you to join me in the next couple of weeks to participate in a few things to help us lose the addiction, break the bonds of our earthly master, and let God command our lives. First, I advise you to get an app that calculates your phone usage. It helped Jake and me uncover what our sinful natures didn’t want us to see, showing us our need for God. Second, delete those apps that lure you in, that you spend too much time on. It will hurt at first, believe me, but in the end, you’ll find that they aren’t worth the time you give them. Third, every time you want to “quick check” your phone, pick up something else instead, like a book, some homework, your Bible, etc. This diversion should help you forget about your phone for the time being. Fourth, pray for yourselves and your brothers and sisters in Christ as you all struggle with this addiction. The best way to be comforted comes from direct conversation between you and God (Matt. 26:41; John 14:16; 2 Cor. 13:4–9, James 5:16). Fifth, if you feel as if your efforts to change are pointless, and you want to give in to the temptations of your phone, trust that God is your strength (Ps. 46:1) and will never leave you to fend for yourself, even after you turned from him. He carries you through the battle against your earthly master, your phone. Sixth, reorganize your priorities. Put God first in your life because he’s most important and all that matters.

So, I ask one more time, where does your heart lie? Will you pick your phone up first tomorrow? Or will you pick up your Bible?

Mary Grace is promotions manager for Beacon Lights.

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**Ask Schuyler**

**1 JOHN 5:7**

Is 1 John 5:7 a sufficient source in defending the Trinity?

**Answer**

There is more to this question than meets the eye. First, one text is sufficient proof to teach any doctrine. The question is, “Does 1 John 5:7 teach the Trinity, and does it do so sufficiently and clearly to be used as a proof text of that doctrine?” Second, the question is, “Does 1 John 5:7 belong in the New Testament?”

The first question concerns *exegesis* or the interpretation of Scripture. The second question concerns *textual criticism* or the study of the manuscripts in order to determine the actual words of Scripture.

**Textual Criticism:**

The more controversial question on textual criticism should be answered first.

The KJV reads thus:

(6) This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.

(7) For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.

(8) And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one (1 John 5:6–8).

The vast majority of modern versions produced
after the KJV have a shorter reading, omitting verse 7 almost entirely from the text.¹

The shorter reading, represented, for example, in the NIV, is as follows:

(6) This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. (7) For there are three that testify: (8) the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement (1 John 5:6–8).²

In the NIV, the “heavenly witnesses” (“the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost”) vanish from the Bible, while the “earthly witnesses” (“the Spirit, the water and the blood”) remain, although even the words “in earth” (v. 8) are omitted in the NIV.

Modern Bible versions omit other passages as well, or question their authenticity and authority in misleading footnotes. Examples of these are John 5:4 (the stirring of the water of the pool of Bethesda), John 8:1–11 (the adulteress whom Jesus pardoned), and Mark 16:9–20 (the so-called “longer ending of Mark”). Many modern Bible versions mark these passages with footnotes, “The best and earliest manuscripts do not contain these words” or “Many ancient witnesses omit these words,” or “The most reliable and accurate manuscripts have a different reading,” and the like.

When you see such footnotes, recognize the bias behind them: certain manuscripts are supposedly the best, the most reliable, or the most accurate because they are the oldest or most ancient. The age of a manuscript is a fact (as far as they can be dated accurately). The quality, reliability, or accuracy of a manuscript is an opinion.

Textual criticism is an issue because we no longer possess the autographs, that is, the actual pages or parchments on which John, Peter, or Paul wrote the words of scripture. We only have copies, or copies of copies of the original. This does not mean, however, that we do not have the text of scripture. Any misuse of textual criticism in order to undermine the authority of scripture must be vigorously rejected. We have the very words that the Holy Spirit moved holy men to write (2 Peter 1:21). A plethora of modern Bible versions with their misleading footnotes has eroded the confidence of God’s children in God’s word and has confused many of the saints. This is not only regrettable; it is indefensible and deplorable.

During the copying process, mistakes occurred, most of which were very minor: variations of spelling, the inclusion/omission of conjunctions (“and,” “but,” “for,” etc.), slight differences in word order (“Christ Jesus” vs. “Jesus Christ,” for example). In cases where scribes miscopied a text, the original text can still be determined. It is important to note that no doctrine of the word of God is affected by these textual variants. Moreover, there is more manuscript evidence for the Bible than for any ancient text. There are some 5,000 manuscripts of the New Testament, although only about 200 contain the whole New Testament. Besides the many manuscripts, we have vast numbers of quotations from the New Testament from the early church fathers, as well as from ancient translations of the Scriptures (Syriac, Coptic, Latin, etc.), which enable us to “reconstruct” the original Greek words of the New Testament.

Textual critics identify different kinds or families of manuscripts. A very rough division is as follows. The first is the Majority Text (MT), which is the basis for the Textus Receptus, or the Received Text, which underlies the KJV. The second is the NU Text (The Nestle Aland or United Bible Societies Text), or critical text, which relies heavily upon the Alexandrian texts, which are favored by many textual critics because of their supposed greater antiquity. Some of these ancient and favored texts are Aleph (Codex Sinaiticus, discovered in a monastery in the 1800’s), B (Codex Vaticanus, discovered in the Vatican library in 1480), A (Codex Alexandrinus), D (Codex Bezae) and C (Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus or Ephraim).

For centuries the church used a Bible containing 1 John 5:7 (and the other disputed texts). Certain manuscripts, many of them discovered later, omit such verses. Because these manuscripts are supposedly more ancient and superior, modern Bible versions began to be published without the verses.

But the question is, “Why do these ancient manuscripts not contain these verses?” Why, for example, does the text received by the church...
(the Textus Receptus) differ from the text favored by scholars? Why is the MT set aside in favor of Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, and other “ancient witnesses”? One plausible answer is this: the church did not use these ancient manuscripts because it did not favor them. The manuscripts which the church did use and which were circulated in the church wore out and were replaced by “newer” copies, while the unapproved (and even corrupted) manuscripts lay unused until scholars discovered them. You may have several Bibles (I certainly do). Which Bible wears out more quickly? The one you use. Which Bible is still in pristine condition on your bookshelf? The one you do not use.

One thing many textual critics ignore (and this is certainly true of the unbelieving critics) is the doctrine of scripture’s preservation. God not only inspired men to write his word (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20–21), but he also preserved the text of scripture in his providence so that in all ages the church has the word of God. God’s word does not belong to critics and scholars; it belongs to God’s people, the church. That is where the Bible is used, read, studied, propagated, and preserved.

Consider the Westminster Confession of Faith:

The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old) and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God and, by his singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical; so as in all controversies of religion the Church is finally to appeal unto them. But because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God who have right unto and interest in the Scriptures and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come, that the word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship him in an acceptable manner, and through patience and comfort of the Scriptures may have hope (The Westminster Confession of Faith, Article 1, paragraph 8, italics added).

1 John 5:7 is the most difficult textual variant to explain, mainly because there is no record of it in any Greek manuscript dated before the fourteenth century. It is also very difficult to prove with any certainty that the early church fathers quoted it. It is possible that the text dropped out of the Greek manuscripts very early in a scribal error where the phrase translated “there are three that bear record” (v. 7) and “there are three that bear witness” (v. 8) is the same in the Greek. Such a scribal error was not corrected in later copies. However, it is also possible that the text was preserved in the church through Latin translations. This is the view of Edward Hills:

On the basis of the external evidence, it is at least possible that the Johannine comma is a reading that somehow dropped out of the Greek New Testament, but was preserved in the Latin text through the usage of the Latin-speaking Church, and this possibility grows more and more toward probability as we consider the internal evidence.

I apologize for the overly technical nature of this response. For further information, the reader is advised to consult the material of the Trinitarian Bible Society.

Exegesis

Although we might like to have one text to prove the Trinity, no such text exists. The Bible teaches the Trinity, of course, but it does not do so by means of one proof text. Certain texts such as Matthew 28:19 and 2 Corinthians 13:14 come close to teaching the Trinity, but we believe the Trinity on the basis of the testimony of the entirety of God’s word.

1 John 5:7 (“and these three are one”) must be explained. What is the meaning of “one”? Is “one” oneness of being, of person, or of will? If oneness of being is the meaning, 1 John 5:7 teaches the Trinity, that the Father, the Word (the Son), and the Spirit are one God. If oneness of person is the meaning, 1 John 5:7 could be appealed to in favor of Sabellianism or Modalism, a heresy that asserts that the Father, the Son and the Spirit are modes or faces of one person, but not distinct persons.

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4 Why I John 5:7-8 Is In The Bible (G.W. and D.E. Anderson), Trinitarian Bible Society (TBS), http://www.tbsbibles.org/pdf_information/40-1.pdf . Another useful article, although not from TBS, is http://www.studytoanswer.net/bibleversions/1john5n7.html . Moreover, Matthew Henry comments extensively on 1 John 5:7 in his commentary, which the reader is advised to read carefully.
BEACON LIGHTS

Our Goodly Heritage Mark H. Hoeksema

INTERVIEW WITH HENRY HOEKSTRA (1)

It is June 9, 2009, and I am interviewing Mr. Henry Hoekstra, a member of Hull Protestant Reformed Church.

Mark H. Hoeksema: Mr. Hoekstra, where and when were you born?

Henry Hoekstra: I was born in 5/15, 1934, Boyden, Iowa.

MHH: Who were your parents?

HH: Peter and Florence Hoekstra.

MHH: Where did you grow up? Could you tell me a little bit about your childhood, your youth, the family into which you were born?

HH: I’m the youngest of eleven. Born on a farm by Boyden, Iowa. As a matter of fact, the day before the house was demolished, I took a picture of it (laughter). But, anyway, at the age of seven, my dad bought a farm by Hull, and we moved to Hull. I went to the country school there through half of the third grade. When we moved to Hull, we started in the Hull Christian School. When I was in the country school—one teacher, eight grades, 32 students.

MHH: Wow! And what type of farm did you live on?

HH: We lived on a rented farm. It was a crop farm. And they had livestock—hogs, dairy cattle, I guess that was it.

MHH: What was your church background, your church affiliation when you were young?

HH: All my life, I have been a member of the PR church. I’m the only one that was a member in the PR church all my life. My parents joined in 1932 or ’33. When my brother Deek and sister Dorothy (twins) were born, they were baptized in the Christian Reformed Church, I think, in Sheldon, because my parents once upon a time lived by Sheldon. Then they moved to Boyden. And then they joined the PR church, I think, in ’32 or ’33. And my grandpa did, too. He was a widower. My grandma died in the Netherlands.

I always remember one remark my dad said; I wrote that down: Grandpa Hoekstra’s comment was that when he came to the PR churches, “Now we hear what God does for his people in Christ.” I thought that was remarkable (laughter)!

MHH: Apparently he was not used to hearing that?

HH: Evidently not. He was a member in a Christian Reformed church before that.

MHH: So you went to catechism and to services in Hull?

HH: All my life.

MHH: Do you have any particular recollections as far as ministers were concerned and any events that happened when you were young? Either positive or negative, it doesn’t matter what they are.

HH: We had a member—that was something I never forget. He was a carpenter. They did some remodeling in the church, and they didn’t give it to him. So he became angry, and he didn’t come...
to church anymore (laughter). So, the consistory worked with him at length, (I don't remember how old I was), but I remember that distinctly. And pretty soon they worked with him and excommunicated him. After that he wanted to become a member at the Reformed Church of America in Hull. They wouldn't take him until he apologized to confess the sin to our church. I thought that was something.

MHH: That they honored our discipline?
HH: Yes. They did. That doesn’t happen today any more. I remember hearing the letter. I can’t say what it was, but it was a confession of sin. And then they took him. I thought that was really remarkable. Today, they don’t even look at it. They say, “Well, you’re all right.”

MHH: I can see why that would stick in your mind.
HH: I’ll never forget that.

MHH: I have never heard of that before.
HH: You never did?
MHH: No.

HH: It would be in the minutes of the Consistory all right. I’m sure that that happened unless they didn’t take good minutes. Who was the minister then? I think Rev. Andrew Cammenga. [Rev.] C. Hanko was minister when I was baptized. I was baptized by C. Hanko.

What other thing can I remember? Oh, yes. When Rev. Andrew Cammenga was there, his son participated in a play in Western Christian [High School]. Got a protest about that, I guess. Anyway, he read an apology off the pulpit that he shouldn’t have done that.

MHH: So that was certainly an issue way back then.
HH: It was.

MHH: That’s interesting.

HH: Other things. I can remember sitting next to Rev. Ophoff. I didn’t know who he was. He said, “It’s hot.” I don’t know if it was synod in Hull or if it was a speech by your grandpa [Herman Hoeksema]. He was sweating like a horse. And he’d “Mmm” (laughter). That was Rev. Ophoff. That’s something I can remember of him.

MHH: That is interesting. Ophoff was a bit of a character, to say the least.

HH: That’s another thing I can remember. This was during the time of the split [1953]. We went to Edgerton to hear Rev. Ophoff. He was going to make a remark on something that was written in the Concordia, and he couldn’t find it. He said, “Doesn’t make any difference what Concordia says. This is the way it is” (laughter).

MHH: Speaking of the split, I’m curious as to your recollection of not only the split itself, but of the events that led up to the split. You must have been at an age where you could understand…. I’m interested in your thoughts.

HH: I can remember your dad was preaching a series on Hosea. I’d like to hear him again (laughter). And I tell you, at the split, there was a lot of controversy. My dad and Uncle John Sietstra and Hank Kuiper would get together once in a while, smoking their cigars and discussing it. What was wrong with the conditional theology? Oh, in those days if you weren’t a cigar smoker, you couldn’t even speak about theological anything (laughter).

MHH: So it was definitely a time of considerable discussion and debate.

HH: Yes, it was.

MHH: What about among the younger generation? Was there unrest amongst the younger?

HH: I think there was. They were taking sides, so to speak. It was accusation. There was some unrest about that. We stuck together, my cousin and I and my brother Pete. But really getting into arguments, I don’t think we ever did that.

One time in catechism, I got into an argument with Rev. DeJong. And he said, “I will have no arguing in this,” he said. “That’s enough.” My cousin, Mark Boer, said, “We mayn’t argue with you?” “Nope,” he says. “If you want to argue, there’s the door.” We all got up and walked out.

MHH: Really? Wow.

HH: But we came back again. My dad said, “You have to go back again.” But my cousin Mark never came back to catechism. No, he never did.

MHH: What was the subject of debate, do you remember?

HH: Predestination.

MHH: What was the argument about? What was the issue there as far as his teaching was concerned? Obviously you disagreed with it.

HH: I had read your grandpa’s book, Predestination, the Heart of the Gospel. That’s where I really got it out of that I argued with him a
little bit. It was really just a short, brief argument. He right away shut us down.

MHH: Did that make you suspicious at all?
HH: Oh, yes. Because of all the discussion I heard from my father and mother and my uncles coming over.

MHH: What are your recollections concerning the split itself as far as the implications for the church, or the implications for your family or other families?
HH: Well, there were implications on a couple of my brothers, I guess. Their wives wouldn't come along. You want me to talk about that too?
MHH: Sure.
HH: Well, neither one is living any more. My brother Mart, my oldest brother, his wife was very bitter about it. Matter of fact, her dad said to her, “If you don’t want to come along with the church, you just come home with me.” I'll never forget it, because I was working for him. That was terrible, really. It was awful. My brother Martin became very angry and really reprimanded him severely.

And the boys came over and said, “Yah, Dad can’t sleep and he’s weeping because of what you said to him.” “Good,” says Martin. “He’s got something to weep about” (laughter). And he did, really.

And my brother John had a problem with his wife, who wouldn’t come along. But the rest of the family didn’t.

And for the rest of the family, what shall I say? The implications were that we studied and read a lot more about what was going on and studied scripture more. It was an impetus to your spiritual life, too, because of what was going on.

MHH: Sometimes that happens at times of controversy.
HH: It does, it really does.
MHH: It makes people learn...
HH: That’s why I read that book of your grandpa (laughter).

And my family is all (thank the Lord for that) in the PR church even the grandchildren and great grandchildren—80 some, maybe close to ninety, I don't know.

It’s not because of my faithfulness, but because of God’s blessing on my feeble efforts, or our feeble efforts, I’d better put it that way.

To be continued...

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**Devotional** Sarah Mowery

THE DAILY PRESS

“press toward the mark…”
*(Philippians 3:14)*

**June 8** Read Leviticus 27

**Vow and Pay**
The principle throughout Leviticus 27 is this: if one vowed to dedicate someone or something to Jehovah and then changed his mind, he was required to pay the value of the offering plus 20 (one-fifth) percent interest to redeem it. (God does not value the souls of females, children, and the elderly less than he does the souls of able-bodied men. The estimated worth of people here is based on their ability as physical laborers.) Why that principle? God desired to discourage rash vows. This is the final chapter of Leviticus, the theme of which is “Ye shall be holy; for I am holy” (ch. 11:44). Our God is forever faithful to his covenant. In light of his faithfulness we are warned, “When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it...Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay” *(Ecc. 5:4–5).*

Have you professed your faith, married another, or presented a child for baptism? On those occasions you made vows before God. Are you faithful to the vows that you made? Sing or pray Psalter #207.

**June 9** Read Numbers 1

**The Numbered People**
The book of Numbers can be divided into three sections. The first section takes place at Sinai, the second section in the wilderness of Paran, and the third section in the Moab plains. Prophets, psalmists, and apostles frequently refer to the stories recounted in this book. Numbers includes two censuses, one at its beginning and one near its end.
The men counted in Numbers 1 are those 20 years old and up who were able to go to war. These are the same men who were previously required to pay half a shekel as “a ransom for his soul” (Ex. 30:12). Jehovah’s elect are a numbered people. Are you among those purchased by his son’s blood? Jesus’ work for a person is always accompanied by his work in that individual. Those who are ransomed must take arms to fight against Satan, the world, and their own sinful selves. 2 Timothy 2:19 declares, “Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.” Do you claim his name? Then fight your sin. Sing or pray Psalter #292.

June 10  Read Numbers 2

God in the Midst
God instructed that when Israel camped, the tabernacle would be in the middle of the people, with the Levites, who were not numbered with those able to go to war, surrounding it. The remaining tribes were assigned stations to the east, south, west, and north. When they marched, Judah, the tribe from which the Captain of the Lord’s hosts would one day come, set out first, followed by the camp led by Reuben, the Levites bearing the tabernacle, the camp led by Ephraim, and the camp led by Dan. Whether camping or marching, the tabernacle was in the middle of the entire company. “God is in the midst of her,” Psalm 46:5 declares of the city of God, “she shall not be moved.” That was true of “the city of God,” that is, God’s people, in the wilderness as well. The center of something is not just its middle point. It is “the point from which an activity or process is directed, or on which it is focused.” Consider the sun, which is the center of our solar system and the source of all life-giving energy for our planet. Who or what is at the center of your life? Sing or pray Psalter #128.

June 11  Read Numbers 3

Station and Calling
Moses now numbers the Levites. The Levites from one month old and upward are numbered, for they were to take the place of the firstborn, whose lives Jehovah claimed when he spared Israel’s firstborn in Egypt. All firstborn were to be redeemed at one month of age (see Num. 18:15–17). Then Moses counts all the firstborn from the 11 other tribes. Finally, Moses collects five shekels for each of the surplus 273 firstborn and gives that money to Aaron and his sons. How tedious all of that counting must have been! Yet Moses did it because Jehovah commanded it.

In the words of my study Bible, “All priests were Levites, but not all Levites were priests.” Aaron’s line was the priestly line; his son was appointed “chief over the chief of the Levites.” Aaron did not take this honor to himself; he was “called of God” (Heb. 5:4). So also Christ was appointed to be our eternal high priest, the “author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb. 5:5, 9). Do you attend to the duties of your station and calling, no matter how tedious or honorable, willingly and faithfully? (HC, LD 39). Sing or pray Psalter #302.

June 12  Read Numbers 4

Set Apart for Service
Now Moses numbers the Levite males between the ages of 30 and 50 years. They would serve in the tabernacle. Why did one have to wait until he was 30? As much as we hate to admit it when we are young, “foolishness is bound in the heart of a child” (Prov. 22:15). God mercifully strips away some of our youthful foolishness as we age. This principle still applies in the New Testament. An elder must “not [be] a novice…” (1 Tim. 3:6). Do you wonder if the sons of Gershon or Merari ever grumbled as they folded up the many curtains or collected the endless pillars and pins that they had to carry? “Why can’t we carry the most holy things?” Notably, it was one of the sons of Kohath, Korah, who rebelled because he coveted a more honorable position. With greater privilege comes greater responsibility – only the Kohathites were in danger of dying if they looked at or touched the furniture they were assigned to carry—as well as greater temptation and greater opportunity to wreak havoc. Those called by God to places of authority must serve humbly, “knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation” (James 3:1). Sing or pray Psalter #9.

June 13  Read Numbers 5

The Cup of the Curse
In Numbers 5:1–4 Jehovah restates that all who were ceremonially unclean must be put outside the camp. It was not necessarily a sin to be ceremonially unclean; in fact, periodic uncleanness was inescapable. The point was this: spiritually, all are unclean. In verses 5–10 Jehovah commands that those guilty of fraud confess their sin and pay restitution to the
one they had wronged. The remainder of the chapter details the strange test for adultery.

As a woman, it is difficult for me to read about this test without feeling some resentment. What if a wife suspected that her husband had been unfaithful? Why does the test for adultery apply only to women? I don't know the answer to that question. But I do know this: male or female, you and I are all spiritual adulterers. Were we to drink the cup of the curse, we would not be able to withstand the bitter pain of God's justly inflicted wrath. But our Savior drank the bitter cup that belonged to you and me. His blood has blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us. Thanks to his sacrifice, our cups now run over with blessing. Sing or pray Psalter #52.

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**June 14** Read Numbers 6

**The Blessed Sinners**

If a Nazarite’s vow was broken unintentionally, he or she was required to bring three offerings to the priest before beginning again. When one successfully fulfilled his Nazarite vow, he or she was required to bring five offerings to the priest. Why? Even one who satisfied the strict conditions of the Nazarite vow was still a sinner in need of atonement. You and I are prone to pick and choose our piety. When we meet our own meager standards, we think that God must be rather pleased with us as well. James 2:10 reminds us that we are all guilty of the entire law. Does that knowledge compel you to the feet of the one who offered himself for your salvation?

In Numbers 6:22-27, God gives Moses the words of the blessing that Aaron was to use when he blessed God’s people. Pronouncing this blessing was not an afterthought. In fact, Deut. 10:8 and 21:5 state that the Levites were set apart for this purpose: “to bless in the name of the Lord.” Do you joyfully receive this blessing from Lord’s Day to Lord’s Day? Do you see yourself as one set apart to bless others? Sing or pray Psalter 176.

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**June 15** Read Numbers 7

**Offer to the Lord**

On the day that Moses finished setting up and consecrating the tabernacle, the princes of the tribes of Israel bring an offering of six covered wagons and twelve oxen. Moses distributes them among the sons of Gershon and Merari, who had the responsibility for carrying most of the tabernacle, according to their need. Do you generously support the cause of the gospel ministry in your congregation, mindful of your pastor’s needs?

Did you read all of Numbers 7? Perhaps not. After all, what is the point of restating the offering 12 times? The point is this: God does not weary of our offerings. Every day we are called to offer to God the same sacrifices of praise: repentance, prayer, growth in the knowledge of God, thanksgiving, doing good, etc. With those small, repetitive sacrifices, our God is well pleased.

Did you note the place from which God speaks in verse 89? He no longer speaks with Moses on Mount Sinai, but in the tabernacle “from off the mercy seat that was upon the ark of testimony, from between the two cherubim.” Sing or pray Psalter #267.

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**June 16** Read Numbers 8

**Sprinkled for Service**

I knew a godly man who insisted that the sacrament of baptism must be administered by full immersion since baptism symbolizes one’s baptism into Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. We are baptized into Christ’s death (see Rom. 6:4 and Col. 2:12). But the mode of sprinkling symbolizes that reality, for it pictures the washing away of our sins by the blood that Jesus shed when he died. This mode of baptism dates back to the sprinkling of Levites with water, which signified their purification from all that was unholy and their consecration to God (Num. 8:7). Are you among the “many nations” who have been sprinkled with the blood of the Lord’s Servant? (Isa. 52:15).

Then you are consecrated to his service: “Forsake the world, crucify [your] old nature, and walk in a new and holy life” (Baptism Form).

The Levites were excused from their more laborious duties when they reached the age of 50, but they were not dismissed from service all together. Those who were older still brought forth fruit, ministering with their brethren in the tabernacle as those who had oversight. Can you think of ways in which this principle still applies? Sing or pray Psalter #109.

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**June 17** Read Numbers 9

**A Clean and Willing Heart**

It is the 14th day of the first month, Passover. Several men approach Moses, deeply troubled. They are unclean because of a dead body. (Perhaps they have just buried a loved one.) Now they must remain outside the camp for one week. Remember the strict regulations of Passover? A man was required to eat the feast in his house with his family. These men know that they are unable to keep the feast, but
they know the seriousness of failing to observe it as well. What are they to do? Moses goes to Jehovah, who makes provision for those who truly desired to worship him. Those who were providentially unclean or on a distant journey at the time of Passover—and only those—would be permitted to commemorate the feast on the 14th day of the second month. When the Shekinah cloud moved, Israel followed. When it settled on the tabernacle, they set up camp, sometimes only for a night, sometimes for several months. They were not to speculate where they might be next but to serve the Lord fully in the present, in the place where he had put them. At the same time, they were to be ready to follow promptly and eagerly. Is that your attitude toward your heavenly Father’s providence and the way you follow the leading of his word and Spirit? Sing or pray Psalter #325.

**June 18**  Read Numbers 10

**At the Trumpet Sound**
The second section of Numbers begins in chapter 10. Israel had camped at Mt. Sinai for nearly a year. What excitement must have filled the camp as the cloud lifted off the tabernacle and led them to the wilderness of Paran! Moses urges his brother-in-law to accompany them to the promised land. Do you have family members whom you must urge to join God’s people on the pilgrimage to the heavenly Canaan? Before they depart, Jehovah instructs Moses regarding the creation and use of two silver trumpets. The trumpets were to be blown by the priests. The sounds they made depended on the message. They were used to summon and to signal the breaking up of the camp. When the priests blew the trumpets at the threat of war, Jehovah came to their rescue. The trumpets also marked the beginning of Israel’s feasts and the first day of each month. Today the trumpet call of the preaching of the gospel still goes forth from the mouths of God’s appointed servants. Are you among those who gather at that welcome, certain sound, which proclaims the glad tidings of salvation and calls its hearers to prepare for battle? (1 Cor. 14:8) Sing or pray Psalter #222.

**June 19**  Read Numbers 11

**The Voice of Complaint**
The book of Numbers records several instances of Israel complaining. We don’t know what occasioned the murmuring noted in chapter 11:1, but it kindles the fire of God’s wrath. Astoundingly, God’s judgement doesn’t silence the complaining for long! Soon the mixed multitude begins whining about their food, and how great a matter a little fire kindleth! Before long, nearly every man is weeping in the door of his tent. Many of these complainers God slew while the meat they craved “was yet between their teeth” (v. 33). But it seems that Moses also complains, doesn’t it? Moses complaining is different: he brings his legitimate complaint directly to the Lord. Jehovah regards his cry and lightens his burden. Do you turn to Jehovah when you are overwhelmed, or are you prone to murmur, in your heart or to others? We live in the day that Moses longed to see: all of Jehovah’s people are prophets, for his Spirit dwells in us! Therefore, covetousness and foolish talk must not even be named among us, “but rather giving of thanks” (Eph. 5:4). Sing or pray Psalter #183.

**June 20**  Read Numbers 12

**An Example of Meekness**
How painful it must have been for Moses when Miriam and Aaron, his own brother and sister and his closest assistants, spoke against him. But he does not retaliate. Indeed, he intercedes on their behalf, proving the statement inserted in verse 3: “Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.” As meek as Moses was, our Savior was meeker still. Hebrews 3:1–3 enjoins, “Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house. For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house.” Do you respond to those who despitefully use you as Christ Jesus, “Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously”? (1 Pet. 2:22–23). Sing or pray Psalter #113.

**June 21**  Read Numbers 13

**An Example of Unbelief**
God has safely brought his people to the doorway of the promised land, and Moses sends 12 men to search it out. After 40 days, the spies return with glowing, visible reports of the land’s fruitfulness. But ten of the spies insist that even though the land’s fruitfulness is great, the giants that inhabit it are greater still. Indeed, they cannot be conquered, even
by the people among whom Jehovah dwells. The congregation hears this report, and their hearing is not mixed with faith, but unbelief. Fellow Christian, the fruits of the Spirit are a foretaste of the heavenly rest that awaits us. Have you tasted love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness and self-control in your own life? Are you encouraged to see those fruits in your fellow saints? Then believe too that Spirit of Christ within you will strengthen you to fight the giants that you face, even unto death. **Sing or pray Psalter #392.**

**June 22 Read Numbers 14**

**A Breach of Promise?**

The people respond to the report of the ten unbelieving spies with weeping and murmuring. This is the tenth time they have murmured, and their cup of iniquity is full. They will not enter Canaan. Jehovah declares, “After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise” (v. 34). Wait. “Breach of promise”? Don’t the scriptures teach that “If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgressions, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips” (Ps. 89:31–34)? Yes. The phrase “breach of promise” is a figure of speech, an anthropomorphism expressing Jehovah’s intense displeasure with his unfaithful people.

Aren’t you thankful that “God is not a man, that he should lie”? (Num. 23:19). In Jesus Christ, all of his promises are “yea” and “amen” (2 Cor. 1:20). Do you look forward to his glorious rest? (Is. 11:10). **Sing or pray Psalter #241.**

**June 23 Read Psalm 90**

**Israel’s Dwelling Place**

Psalm 90 is the only psalm with its authorship attributed to Moses. Even if Moses didn’t pen it following the events recorded in Numbers 14, it’s likely he wrote it while he led the Israelites through the desolate wilderness. What defined those weary years? Not first strength, followed by labor and sorrow. No, the line translated in the KJV “yet is their strength labor and sorrow” means this: the very best of this earthly life is characterized by struggle and sadness. The Israelites wandered, mindful that their wandering was God’s judgement for their sins. The shadow of death hung over them: most of them, Moses included, would perish outside the promised land.

To what comfort did God’s people cling as they wandered through the harsh desert, homeless? Their dwelling place was the everlasting God. They belonged to the One who was, even before there was a beginning. When he commanded, their bodies would return to the dust, a just penalty for their sin. But their God was also a God of mercy. He would establish the works of their hands and remain forever faithful to them and to their children. Is that God your eternal home? **Sing or pray Psalter #247.**

**June 24 Read Numbers 15**

**Ignorance and Presumption**

Jehovah spoke these wonderful words during his people’s weary years of wilderness wandering: “When thou comest into the land” (Num. 15:2). Though he chastened them, his word remained steadfast. Next he instructs regarding sins committed in ignorance. Though unintentionally committed, sins of ignorance still required atonement and forgiveness. Ignorance is never an excuse for breaking God’s law. There was no forgiveness for those who despised God’s word and sinned presumptuously, however. How fearful! Let’s join the psalmist in this prayer, “Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me” (Ps. 19:12–13).

Jehovah also commanded his people to add fringes and a blue ribbon or tassel to the edges of their garments. This detail would distinguish them as his peculiar people, but more importantly, it would remind them to follow God’s commandments from the heart with every step they took. Our Lord Jesus observed this law (Matt. 9:20). So did the Pharisees, but they did so to be seen of men (Matt. 23:5). The borders of their garments were enlarged, but inwardly they were full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Does your obedience come from the heart? **Sing or pray Psalter #40.**

**June 25 Read Numbers 16**

**One Mediator**

Korah, a Levite from the family of Kohath, and two Reubenites, Dathan and Abiram, along with 250 well-known leaders of the congregation of Israel,
rebel against God’s appointed mediators, Moses and Aaron. Jude warns the New Testament church of false teachers who likewise creep in “unawares” and “despise dominion.” Like Korah, those men will experience God’s just judgement. Does God make an exception in this chapter to the rule that children must not be put to death for the sins of their fathers? (Deut. 24:16). No, all the men who appertain unto Korah are swallowed up, but “the children of Korah died not” (Num. 26:11). (In fact, the sons of Korah became worship leaders to whom several psalms are dedicated.)

By nature we also despise authority, and we’re quick to excuse our sins and approach God on the basis of our own works rather than through the divinely-appointed mediator. We take too much upon us. “There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). Do you come unto the Father by him? Sing or pray Psalter #368.

June 26 Read Numbers 17

The Fruit-Bearing Rod
Following Korah’s rebellion, God works a wonder that puts to silence all who would gainsay Aaron’s priesthood. At Jehovah’s command, Moses places twelve rods, one rod from each chief of the twelve tribes, before the ark. Aaron’s rod blossoms and brings forth almonds. The children of Israel now recognize Korah’s error. Whoever would approach God apart from his appointed mediator would perish. They cry, “Whosoever cometh any thing near unto the tabernacle of the LORD shall die” (v. 13). Likewise, we will be consumed by Jehovah’s holiness unless we approach him through the One who was called of God to be a priest forever. It is as he declared: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). The salvation obtained for us by our eternal High Priest works a wonder pictured in us like the wonder of Aaron’s dead rod blossoming and bearing fruit. We who were dead in sins have been ingrafted into the vine and now live and bear abundant fruit. Are the fruits of his Holy Spirit manifest in your life? Sing or pray Psalter #303.

June 27 Read Numbers 18

A Covenant of Salt
The Levites were given no inheritance in the land of Canaan, but Jehovah ensured their provision: the tithes of the children of Israel belonged to them. “All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer unto the Lord, have I given thee, and thy sons and thy daughters with thee, by a statute forever: it is a covenant of salt forever…” (v. 19). As Lev. 2:13 teaches, every offering the Israelites made was to be salted. “It was the one symbol that was never absent from the altar of burnt-offering, showing the imperishableness of the love of [Jehovah] for his people. In its unalterable nature, it is the contrary of leaven” (Barnes). Salt not only preserves, it adds savor. Ezra 7:20-22 implies that the offerors did not bring their own salt; it was provided at the tabernacle. Calvin comments, “The true seasoning which gives grace to sacrifices is found nowhere except in God’s word. Hence it follows that all modes of worship fabricated by men are rejected as unsavory.” Have you been purified and refined with the salt of the gospel that you might present yourself a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God? (See Mark. 9:49 and Rom. 12:1) Sing or pray Psalter #111.

June 28 Read Numbers 19

Purge Me With Hyssop
In Leviticus 14 hyssop is used to cleanse a person who had been infected with leprosy. In Numbers 19 hyssop is used to cleanse those who were unclean because they had come into contact with a dead body. The hyssop was dipped in water and the ashes of the red heifer that had been burnt without the camp. Our Lord Jesus, “that he might sanctify the people with his own blood” also “suffered without the gate” (Heb. 13:12). The unclean person was then sprinkled with the hyssop.

In familiar Psalm 51, David alludes to these ritual cleansings when he prays, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean” (v. 7a). David knew that no outward rite would cleanse his heart as God desired. He had just declared, “Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts” (v. 6a). But he prayed “that God would effectually accomplish, in his experience, what he had signified to his Church and people by these outward rites” (Calvin). Is that your prayer, too? Sing or pray Psalter #140.

June 29 Read Numbers 20

Meribah and the Mediator
We’ve read of the place called Meribah in Exodus 17. We encounter a second Meribah in Numbers 20. Again the children of Israel chide and tempt Jehovah because there is no water. This is not the same group
of people, however. Verse 1 notes that it is the first
month; that is, it is the first month of the fortieth
year from the Exodus. These are the children whose
parents have now all fallen in the wilderness because
of their unbelief. Now their children repeat their sin.
What a humbling lesson for us, fellow parents! Let’s
earnestly pray for the strength we need to forsake our
sins, giving our children an honest example of what it
means to live the Christian life. Let’s humbly confess
our sins to our children. And let’s be careful to guard
against the sin for which Moses forfeited entrance
into Canaan, rash speaking that flowed out of an
angry and bitter heart.

Like every other type of Christ, Moses was not a
perfect Mediator. But our perfect Mediator, Jesus
Christ, “is able also to save them to the uttermost
that come unto God by him” (Heb. 7:25). Sing or
pray from Psalter #213.

**June 30**

**Read Numbers 21**

Again?!
It’s discouraging to read yet again of the Israelites
complaining. But let’s consider for a moment the
nature of their sins. 1) They accused God of seeking
their destruction, not their welfare. 2) They were
discontent with and unthankful for God’s provision.
How often you and I commit the same sins! Do we
believe (and live as though we believe) that God
works all things, from the smallest inconveniences
to the greatest heartaches in our lives, for our good?
And what is our attitude toward his provision? Are
we content with the homes, possessions, bodies, and
talents that he’s given us? Compared to those who
wandered homeless in the desert and ate the same
food at every meal for forty years, we have little
reason to complain!

Can a serpent represent Christ? Yes, as Jesus himself
tested in John 3:14. God sent his Son in the likeness
of sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3). He was made a curse for us
(Gal. 3:13). It was not enough that the bronze serpent
was lifted up on the pole: only those who looked
upon it by faith would be healed. Likewise with the
Savior. Only those with faith in him will not perish.
Sing or pray Psalter #203.

**July 2**

**Read Numbers 23**

**Balaam (2)**

Whenever our children have considered the story of
Balaam for the first time, they’ve inevitably asked,
“Did Balaam love God?” Balaam has a form of godli-
ness, but he denies the power thereof. He puts on a
show of religion, but his religion never penetrates
to his heart, influencing his life or restraining his
sinful passions. You profess Christianity. Is your
religion more than outward show? Do you know
others whose Christianity doesn’t influence their
life or restrain their sinful passions? With regard to
acquaintances like that, we’re commanded, “From
such turn away” (2 Tim. 3:5).

Balaam not only lacked true faith: he lacked also the
assurance that attends true faith with regard to death
and the judgement. He cried, “Let me die the death
of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!” (v.
10). It is as Prov. 14:32 teaches, “The wicked is driven
away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope
in his death.” Do you face death with hope? “Thanks
be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord
Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:57). Sing or pray Psalter #99.

**July 3**

**Read Numbers 24**

**Balaam (3)**

Balaam abandons his sorceries in Numbers 24.
“Under the forced influence of God’s Spirit,” he
pronounces further blessing on Israel (Reformation
Heritage KJV Study Bible). He acknowledges God’s
blessing on Israel’s past, present and future. In the
past, “God brought him forth out of Egypt” (v. 8a).
Presently, Israel “hath as it were the strength of an unicorn” (v. 8b). In the future, Israel “shall eat up the nations his enemies, and shall break their bones, and pierce them through with his arrows” (v. 8c). Balaam also beautifully foretells the coming of Christ, the one on whom God’s favor toward Israel depended. Do you thank God for his care for you in the past, rely on him to give you grace sufficient for today, and trust him with your future?

Balak thought to promote Balaam “unto great honor,” but the Lord prevented him. In loving the praise of men more than the praise of God, Balaam forfeited both. “Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith… them that honor me I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed” (1 Sam. 2:30). Do you covet the praise of men or the praise of God?

Sing or pray Psalter #247.

Read Numbers 25
July 4

Neither Let Us
Other than the fact that those who entice the Israelites to fornication and idolatry are people from Moab (and Midian, Moab’s close ally), the events of Numbers 25 don’t seem to be directly related to the story of Balaam. But in Numbers 31:16 Moses notes, “Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord”. Balaam couldn’t curse Israel. Instead, he shrewdly advised Balak to tempt Israel to break the law of God, so that they would fall out of his favor for a time and experience his judgement for their sins.

Calvin comments: “From this narrative we learn assuredly that the people were no more able to bear prosperity than adversity…now, when they have entered a habitable land…they are incited by their more comfortable dwelling-places, and more pleasant mode of life, to lasciviousness, and the indulgence of filthy lusts.” How well do you bear prosperity?

For “these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted… Neither let us commit fornication, as of some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand” (1 Cor. 10:6, 8). Sing or pray Psalter #31.

Read Numbers 26
July 5

The Second Census
At God’s command, Moses numbers the people for a second time. The reason for this numbering concerned the division of the soon-to-be inherited land of Canaan. Generally speaking, the land would be portioned according to the size of each tribe. “To many thou shalt give the more inheritance, and to few thou shalt give the less inheritance” (v. 54).

The chapter ends on a sobering note. Among all whom Moses numbered, there was not one who had been numbered at the first census, save Caleb and Joshua. It had taken nearly 40 years, but Jehovah’s just sentence on Israel’s unbelief had come to pass: God will have his justice satisfied. That’s true regarding our sins as well. Knowing that, let’s go to the cross of Christ Jesus, “who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption”(1 Cor. 1:30).

Sing or pray Psalter #121.

Read Numbers 27
July 6

A Godly Request and a Spirit-Filled Successor
The daughters of Zelophehad approach Moses, Eleazar, and the princes of the congregation before the people and request that they be given the inheritance that would have been their father’s. Their father had died and they had no brother, yet they desired a name and a place in the land of promise, which typified heaven. “The modest, candid manner in which they asked, without secret murmurs or discontent, are a good example” (Matthew Henry). When you have a grievance that you would like addressed, do you bring it before the elders of the church as Zelophehad’s daughters did, or do you sow discord by murmuring and grumbling about it among the congregation? Moses’s response is also instructive. He’s not certain how to answer these women, so he goes to God. Do you go to God’s word for instruction regarding difficult decisions that you must make? Moses’s time to die has come. He has one concern: who will now lead Israel? God appoints Joshua, noting only one qualification that Joshua possessed: the Holy Spirit dwelled in him (v. 18). Is that the qualification you esteem above all others in your leaders?

Sing or pray Psalter #159.

Read Numbers 28
July 7

Offer to the Lord
Jehovah again instructs his people regarding the daily burnt offering: one lamb was offered every morning and one every evening. Do you come before God with a sacrifice of praise at the beginning and end of each day? On Sabbath days the offerings were doubled. Matthew Henry notes, “The sabbath rest is to be observed, in order more closely to apply ourselves to the sabbath work, which ought to fill
up the sabbath time.” Do you apply yourself to the worship and work of the Lord on his day, or is it a day you spend doing your own ways, finding your own pleasure, and speaking your own words? (see Isa. 58:13). The chapter also details the offerings made at the beginning of each month, the Passover offerings, and the offerings made during the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, was crucified on Passover. He rose, the first fruits of them that slept, at the time of the offering of first fruits (the third day after Passover). And he poured out his Spirit on the day of Pentecost, which marked the beginning of the great harvest of souls that will continue until the day he returns. Sing or pray Psalter #195.

**Christian Living** Tim Rus

**DID YOU SAY YOUR PRAYERS TONIGHT? (1)**

Note: On August 2, 2007, the Lord took unto himself our beloved daughter Charity Hope Rus in an auto accident. After Charity’s death I started to write down some of my thoughts, feelings, and experiences into what I now would call my reflections on various events that unfolded before and after her death.

It took me over two years to complete this work.

Often I would simply capture an event, thought, or feeling, and write it down on a piece of paper, coming back weeks or sometimes months later to fill in the details.

It is my prayer that God may use these reflections to help others who may be struggling with some great affliction, and that his name may be glorified.

This title is of great significance to me, as these were the last words I spoke to my beloved daughter Charity Hope Rus, whom the Lord took from my wife’s arms into his fatherly arms on August 2, 2007. I am not a professional writer nor do I profess to be a biblical theologian; however, the Lord has laid it upon my heart to capture on paper some of the events surrounding his work as they relate to the calling of our 11-year-old daughter unto himself.

I will be writing from a very personal point of view as to the works of God and his sovereign plan for each of us as it relates to the salvation of his people in Christ Jesus.

I thank God for his word, for it is a light unto our path and a lamp unto our pathway.

The primary purposes for writing are for the edification of his church and as a thread of hope for those who are walking through the valley of the shadow of death, or for that matter, any fiery trial. However, it will certainly be written in the context of the valley of death.

I would only hope that God would use these words to glorify his name and encourage Christians within their station in life. God is a God that is in control of all events and our only comfort is that we belong to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ. With that I think of Matthew 11:28–30: “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” I think of the fact that my yoke is easy and my burden is light. How can this possibly be?

Sometimes God speaks to us in a still small voice, yet other times he sees fit to speak in such a way that we need to place our hands over our mouth and simply be still and know that he is God. I hope to put into words a few thoughts regarding God’s hand as it relates to finding rest for our souls as we pass through the valley of tears and take up an “easy yoke.” I can write this only from a father’s and husband’s point of view, as this is where I have found myself in God’s plan.

It’s difficult to know where to start. However, I think a brief description of our family is a good place. My wife and I have been married for thirty seven years. During this time, we have been blessed with five children: one son, the oldest, and four daughters. One thing that is interesting is how so many people would comment, after hearing we have four girls and one son, “Oh, so your son is the youngest?” The natural assumption is that we kept trying to have a son, and only after four daughters did we achieve this goal. Most people are surprised to learn that our son is the oldest. The purpose of making this observation is to emphasize that God
determines the sex, the number, and the order of children we have.

Some couples may never have children, which is itself a calling to wait upon the Lord’s will in this situation as well.

With that said, I firmly believe that we need to know who we are in relation to God and truly to understand his sovereignty.

Knowing our relationship to God begins with the knowledge that the wages of sin is death—not only physical death, but also spiritual death. This goes way back to the beginning when God stated, “The day thou eatest thereof ye shall die.” Now what did the devil say about this statement? “Thou shalt not surely die.” This simple statement from the devil clearly demonstrates the fact that his primary goal is the spiritual and physical death of mankind.

What’s amazing is that by nature man does not even realize that he is dead in his sins and that the chains of sin bind him so tightly that no man can break those chains. Being a visual kind of person, the first thing that comes to my mind is how God broke the chains that bound the apostle Paul while he was in prison.

Only with this knowledge of self are we able to begin to understand God in the proper perspective. Knowing that of ourselves we only deserve God’s punishment helps to see through the darkness into God’s wonderful power and his work of salvation. The reality of death is incredible! The absolute finality is unquestionable! You can plead, cry, beg, rend your clothes, shed a river of tears, and even cast your self upon the dead; however, a dead person is simply unable to respond.

This is such an incredible picture of us in our sin that no one with a reasonable mind could deny this truth. This is in fact a truth that the Bible clearly teaches; man has no part of his salvation, but it is of God and God alone who is able to make the deaf to hear and the blind to see and to raise us up at the last day. With this knowledge of self we understand that we are only stewards of everything God gives to us. This includes EVERYTHING: our lives, money, houses, cars, bank accounts, children and even our own bodies. If we really believe that we are stewards, then what can be taken away from us that is not really God’s? If we understand our nature and that we are only stewards, we will have a humble spirit; only then are we able to take Christ’s yoke and experience it to be light!

I think that only with this knowledge of self (that God must work in us) can we begin to heal from the loss of a child. Where do I begin to describe some of God’s works in our lives with his incredible timing and perfection? We are bound by time; there are seasons in our lives for various events: births, deaths, graduations, weddings, but there is sadness too, as we experienced on August 2, 2007. Not only was God preparing our family and our church, but he was also preparing Charity for heaven, her eternal home.

There were several events that we look back on now that helped us to see God’s sovereign plan.

I bought a motorcycle that Sharon and I did not see eye to eye on. Charity knew this fact. One Saturday when Sharon was not at home Charity came up to me in the garage and said to me, “Dad, Dad, take me for a ride on the motorcycle.” In my younger days, I would have done one of two things. I would have said to Charity either, “Ok let’s go,” or simply, “No”. I thought about that for a moment though, and realized that within just a few short years Charity would be a teenager, and how important it is that she knows that mom and dad stand together on issues, so I paused for a moment and told her that Mom and Dad do not see eye to eye on this, and that if anything would ever happen to her on this motorcycle, Mom and Dad could never forgive ourselves. With that statement, Charity did not say a word but simply wrapped her arms around me and went into the house without complaining.

Now I thank God for that moment. Why? As a parent, you want your children to know not only that you love them, but also that they feel secure in that love. It also speaks of how we need to know that we too are secure in our heavenly Father’s arms. What a wonderful place of security…in my Father’s arms, under the shadow of his wing.

Lord’s Day 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism states it so clearly that my only comfort in life and in death is to know that I belong to my faithful Savior. I can tell you experientially that that is the absolute truth!

There is nothing in this world that will bring peace, for it is all vanity and vexation of spirit.

Another example that shows that God was preparing Charity and our family was the songs that she loved to sing. Two weeks prior to the accident, Charity continually sang a song with the main lyrics being, “God, you are my God.” Charity continually sang this song, even to the point that I asked her once to sing something different; nevertheless, God put it in her heart and on her lips to make this testimony of her faith and as a gift from God to us. What a blessing! What
What can man plan this? God was speaking to us.

With that I said, “I love you, bye,” and those were weeks before Charity was taken from us. So with Charity had supper all prepared. Three place settings, napkins, and even two lit candles. Looking back, I am simply amazed at God’s timing in this. What man could plan this? God was speaking to us.

How could we have known that God was going to take Charity home to glory? But in his mercy, he gave us such a wonderful gift—father, mother, and daughter enjoying their last meal together prepared by the one who only had some 18 hours to live. I am so amazed at this gift from God that I simply cannot find words to describe it.

Another wonder of God is that I had been working with Charity concerning her saying her night time prayers. She often would call me at work, and that night she must have called two or three times just to say, in her excited way, “Hi, Dad.” The last time she called me was around 11PM. We talked for awhile and then I asked her if she had said her prayers. She replied, “Oh, I already did that, Dad.” With that I said, “I love you, bye,” and those were the last words she spoke to me, as not only was she preparing for a night of restful sleep, but God was also preparing her for eternal rest in the morning.

I am also amazed at the fact that God worked in me to ask her about her prayers and to have the last words I would speak to her be, “I love you!” No man could plan this! I have never been one to memorize scripture very much. However, God moved me to rememorize Psalm 23 just a couple of weeks before Charity was taken from us. So with those final words, Charity and I said good bye. I thank God so much for his mercy in giving to me those lasting memories. I would want to encourage parents to love their children while they have them, and let them know that they are loved not only by their parents, but most importantly by God, the creator of heaven and earth.

I think that at this point it is a good time to talk about the family and the covenant. The Bible reveals to us the beautiful relationship between Christ and his church, which helps us to pattern our own marriages this way. Within a strong Christian marriage, children are then able to grow up spiritually minded and are assured that all their needs are taken care of by their parents.

Wednesday night, August 1, I came home from work very tired and fell asleep quickly. The next morning, I woke up around 11:15AM and made a pot of coffee and just sat in my chair, when the phone rang. Alisha, our second to the youngest daughter, answered it, and someone on the other end asked to speak with Timmy. Alisha handed me the phone and had a funny look on her face; who would be asking for Timmy?

No one ever calls me Timmy. So I answered the phone, and the voice on the other end said that my wife had been in an accident and gave the location.

I asked if anyone was hurt, to which he replied that one of the girls was. At this point I put my shoes on. I did not even have my hair combed yet and told Alisha the news. I quickly looked at the caller ID and gave the guy a call back just to confirm the location. Alisha and I hit the road. I remember my body shaking and telling Alisha that I hoped no one is hurt and praying to God that everyone was ok. In some ways, it seemed to take a long time to get to the accident scene, and yet in another way it went very fast.

Webster describes grief as “emotional suffering caused by or as if by bereavement. Disaster.” Personally, I feel these words fall far short of what grief really is. From my perspective grief is so much more. You simply cannot put it into words. No one can accurately describe grief, in part because each person’s grief is unique unto himself. My grief is very different from my wife’s grief. Nevertheless, there are some common experiences. We should never compare our grief with that of others, as on each journey a person must walk his or her own path—not totally alone, for God is with his children through the valley of the shadow of death—but it is a very personal experience that you must travel alone with God. No one can take the journey for you and you can’t go around, under, or over it; but you must pass through it. What is passing through grief?

I will share with you my experience and leave it at that. I liken grief to a tsunami. You don’t see it coming, and it hits you with such force that it is total and absolute devastation: physically, mentally, and spiritually. Yes, spiritually! Some may say that a Christian should be strong and never devastated spiritually, but I tell you Christ himself was devastated in the garden when he poured out bloody sweat and cried out to his Father, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” Not only do you have the initial devastation, but there are also
so many after-shocks. Moreover, grief is such a mind-numbing experience; it hits you at so many different levels and is so multifaceted that you simply can not explain it.

After the tsunami of grief rolls over you, be assured that you will never be the same person you were. The loss of a child changes you forever. I am not at all saying that this change is negative, but rather a humbling experience that affects a person at all levels. Personally, I have found it to be that the day we lost our daughter has become a reference point for current events. God has and continues to supply grace sufficient for the day. With this knowledge I know that should other trials fall upon me, God will supply the measure of grace I need for that day. Just think of the apostle Paul, how he so desired to have the thorn in his flesh removed, but God would not remove it even after Paul prayed three times, but rather taught him that his grace is sufficient.

As I am writing this, the word loss strikes me hard. I remember the strong feeling that Charity was simply lost and I needed to go and find her, call the police, or start searching the neighborhood. She must be somewhere or she would be home by now. She needs me to help her find her way home! Once I literally went into the back yard to call out her name and look behind the barn trying to find her. This is such an empty feeling that words fail me. Nevertheless, the fact is that we ourselves are lost; Charity is not lost for she is in our Father’s house of many mansions, secure in the arms of her Savior, Jesus Christ. She no longer needs to be held in my arms, arms that are limited.

Coming to this understanding is difficult. Notice I said “is,” not “was.” For the fact is that I “was” lost, not Charity, and desperately in need of the great Shepherd of the sheep to save me! Here again is a wonderful truth concerning our Lord and Savior; he seeks the lost sheep and will never give up, even to the point of leaving the 99 to search for the one that is lost. Praise God for his marvelous desire to find the one lost sheep. With that I would so encourage you never to give up. God will absolutely save all of his sheep. Not one will fall prey to the wolves and perish eternally.

For me, forgiveness has a whole new meaning. First, I do not believe forgiveness is forgetting. God made us with a memory that simply is part of who we are as God’s creatures. However, since forgiveness is not forgetting, what is it? I believe that it is, in a negative sense, not living with bitterness, hatred, or wishing a person harm. In addition, it is not simply the lack of wishing someone harm and therefore feeling neutral about a person. It is, in the positive sense, actually desiring the well-being of the person who has offended us both physically and spiritually. Probably the best example that comes to mind is how the Lord summarizes the law in the second table. We are to love God and our neighbor. We are called not to hate but to love. Now we must remember that there is no true love apart from God, for as the scriptures state, “God is love.” Once again we need to go back to the reality of who we are in relationship to God and remember that God loved us while we were yet sinners.

We did nothing to deserve this love, but it is only of God’s mercy and grace. What is so amazing about God’s love and forgiveness is that he loved us and forgave us while we were yet sinners. Nothing we have done contributes to our salvation. This truth is so amazing when I think about standing before the judge of heaven and earth.

To be continued...

Tim is a member of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.

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Prayers for the Universal Church

Susan Hall

PRAYING FOR THE CPRC IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Many Beacon Lights readers need little introduction to the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church that meets in Ballymena, Northern Ireland, being familiar with our congregation through reading our pastor’s regular newsletters, visiting our website, and/or seeing us in person.

Reformed believers have been meeting in some form in this country for over 25 years. The two men who now serve as our church elders were among those who first met and made contact with the Protestant Reformed Churches of America. Rev. Ronald Hanko of the PRCA was called to
serve here as missionary from 1993–2000, and our current pastor, Rev. Angus Stewart, raised in Northern Ireland, was trained at the PRC seminary and became the minister here in 2001. The congregation has gained many members over the years, and others have left, but it has continued in its current form since 2006, when it was re-established as a self-sufficient church after having existed as a “fellowship” for a few years. In 2010, we completed and moved into our new church building, which has provided an ideal meeting place for all our church functions and also helps to establish a permanent presence in the community. Besides the two services on the Lord’s Day, our pastor leads two weekly Bible studies at church, and some ladies and men meet less formally for study groups.

Our official current membership consists of 35 confessing members plus 12 baptized members, children of 4 different families. Some new members are expected to be added soon, and there are a number of people who worship regularly with us who are not actual members. Several members are often unable to make it to church services because of chronic health issues, although live webcasting provides an opportunity for some to listen in. Many members do not live in the town of Ballymena itself, the majority driving from various other towns, some over half an hour’s drive away. Quite a few members are of the older generation and many were converted as adults, so are first-generation Christians. One family consists of three generations. Two more babies are expected to be added to the congregation soon; church growth through baptism is a cause of special rejoicing in a smaller congregation.

Some additional church social activities include “teas” held occasionally after the evening service; invitations to gatherings at the church manse several times a year, such as barbecues in summer which often attract some friends from around the country who maintain contact with our church but are not members; and a yearly congregational dinner, usually scheduled for the time when the delegated church visitors come from the PRCA.

Also, every other summer, the British Reformed Fellowship, an organization founded over 25 years ago and now chaired by our pastor and unofficially associated with our church, plans a week-long family conference, inviting Protestant Reformed professors and ministers as speakers. These weeks of fellowship, attended by Reformed believers from across the UK and many other countries, have been a blessing to hundreds young and old over the years, and have even led to a few international marriages!

For a small congregation, our church represents an amazing international outreach, especially through the information published on the church’s website, which is run by our pastor and his wife, who serves as full-time secretary and bookstore manager. They have organized about 2,000 translations of our denominational creeds and other Reformed articles and book excerpts, in over a hundred languages, accessible online, and they distribute many other written publications through the website and bookstore. This work has blessed countless Christians across the world and has brought a few individuals to join our church, such as Marco Barone from Italy, who is currently living in Ballymena while taking doctorate level classes.

Beyond the website and busy bookstore which sells and ships Reformed publications, our church and particularly pastor are responsible for other evangelistic outreach, including regular lectures in Wales, Ballymena, and occasionally other towns in Northern Ireland, broadcasting the Reformed Witness Hour in this country, and even writing letters to newspapers to advertise church events or to challenge current wicked trends in society. The sermons, lectures and some Bible studies are recorded for downloading online as well as on CD/DVD. This audio-visual editing and publishing requires many hours of labor each week, ably carried out by one of our church members, Stephen Murray. Many of these ongoing labors go unnoticed, yet all of the Protestant Reformed churches should be grateful to God for our pastor and his wife’s great work in establishing and maintaining these ministries that represent our stance for truth in the world.

The political situation in Northern Ireland is quite complicated, since opposing parties are supposed to work together in a power-sharing government, although they do not share common goals, with the Irish Nationalist/Republican parties wishing to unite Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland to the south, while the British Unionist parties want to remain united to mainland Great Britain. The population of Northern Ireland still has a nominal Protestant majority, although it is marginal. Ballymena and the area around it have strong Presbyterian roots, dating back to settlers from Scotland four centuries ago, and many conservative values remain. Schools have traditionally
been divided into state-maintained Protestant schools and Roman Catholic schools, although in recent decades some integrated schools have been created. Religious education is a standard subject offered to all schoolchildren, and most people in this country are aware of basic biblical principles, although the younger generations are increasingly secular. Many politicians who hold more conservative values continue to strive to protect religious freedom in this country. Recent legal proceedings have managed to uphold laws that make abortion and same-sex marriage illegal in Northern Ireland, although these wrongs are allowed in the rest of the United Kingdom and are constantly being pushed here. As in the rest of the Western world, we can see signs of future persecution for our faith especially as we speak out against sin.

So what would we ask our sister churches to pray for regarding our congregation? Many of our prayer requests would be similar to that of most churches: for growth, first of all spiritually, as individuals and as a body; and for numerical growth through God’s drawing his people to us from the unsaved or departing churches in our community and beyond. We pray to be preserved in the truth of the Reformed faith in this wicked world. We can be thankful for the sacrificial labors of our pastor, and pray for continued blessings on the outreach of the website and other evangelistic efforts.

The fact that our small congregation includes people with a wide range of ages and interests, spread out geographically, represents one of our greatest challenges: church unity and sharing in each other’s daily lives. It is particularly difficult for the children of the church to build friendships with fellow believers when they have little opportunity to interact beyond church services and catechism classes. Apart from preschoolers and the youngest catechism class, there are very few children around the same age in our congregation. So one of our greatest concerns and prayers is that our church’s youth will be preserved in the truth as they grow older and face challenges to their faith without a strong peer group for encouragement.

We are thankful for the continued prayers of our Reformed brothers and sisters in other countries. If you are ever able to visit this green, rainy isle, the opportunity to fellowship with fellow saints from sister congregations is a mutual blessing.

_Susan is a member of Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland_

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**Church News Melinda Bleyenberg**

**BAPTISMS**

“Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” Mark 10:14

The sacrament of holy baptism was administered to:

- Conner Jackson, son of Mr. & Mrs. Tim & Pam Boverhof—Byron Center, MI
- Brennan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Matt & Leah Ferguson—Edmonton, AB, Canada
- Liam David, son of Mr. & Mrs. Dave & Alexa Wassink—Georgetown, MI
- Haylee Alisabeth, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brian & Tricia Kotman—Loveland, CO
- Joel Harold, son of Mr. & Mrs. Frank & Marisa Tolsma—Loveland, CO
- Ivy Holland, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Mike & Stephanie Uittenbogaard—Loveland, CO
- Nora Jane, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Joel & Connie De Vries—Southwest, MI

**CONFESSIONS OF FAITH**

“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.” Matthew 10:32

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

- Peter Chesebro—Byron Center, MI
- Kristin Holstege—Georgetown, MI
- Rachel Holstege—Georgetown, MI
- Megan Veldman—Georgetown, MI
- Jonathan Moore—Loveland, CO
- Nick Gleason—Spokane, WA
- Elijah Roberts—Spokane, WA

**MARRIAGES**

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

- Mr. Chad Van Baren and Miss Kezia Carins—Grace, MI
- Mr. Ryan Griess and Miss Lydia Noorman—Southeast, MI
True Courage

This October, we’ll celebrate the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther pounding the 95 Theses onto the door of the church in Wittenberg, starting what we now call the Reformation. We’ll hear a lot about heroes of faith and courage, and we might wonder how those heroes had such courageous faith.

The Bible uses the phrase “good courage” sixteen times. That means there are different kinds of courage. There is the courage that the people in the world find in themselves. They urge others to dig deep and trust in their own strength.

As God’s children, we don’t trust our own strength. We trust God, and in trusting God, we find our courage in him and him alone. True courage comes from God.

This is the courage of Martin Luther and the other Reformers. It wasn’t found in themselves. It was found in God, the same God we follow today.

So put on the full armor of God, stand fast in him and in your own way, whether as a student on the playground or at home or wherever God has called you to be at your current time in life, hold on to God’s true courage.

Unscramble the words below to find the 16 Bible passages that mention good courage.

MBSENRU _______________ 13:20
DTYENOEUORM _______________ 31:6, 7, 23
JOUAHS _______________ 1:6, 9, 18; 10:25
LESMUA II _______________ 10:12
REAZ _______________ 10:4
PASLSM _______________ 27:14; 31:24
AHISAI _______________ 41:6

Tricia is a member of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.
PRYP CONVENTION 2017

Holding forth the word of Life
Philippians 2:15-16

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