

JUNE 2018
VOL 77 #6

BEACON LIGHTS

A letter to my younger self

- The Issue at Hand 3
- Reflecting Back for Living Now 3
- Letters to My Younger Self 5
- Devotional 10
- Letters to My Younger Self 18
- Damage of Digital Distraction 24
- Church News 26
- Synod of Dordt Part 5:
The Persecution Increases 27

A Protestant Reformed Youth Magazine
beaconlights.org

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EDITORIAL POLICY

Beacon Lights is published monthly by the Federation of Protestant Reformed Young People's Societies. Subscription price is \$15. Please send all business correspondence, address changes, and subscriptions to the business office.

The articles of *Beacon Lights* do not necessarily indicate the viewpoint of the Editorial Staff. Every author is solely responsible for the contents of his own article. *Beacon Lights* encourages its readers to contact the business office with any questions or comments. Letters may be edited for printing. We will not publish anonymous letters, but will withhold names upon request. All submissions should be sent to the editor six weeks prior to the publication date and must be written in Microsoft Word format. If any material of *Beacon Lights* is reprinted by another periodical, we will appreciate your giving the source and forwarding the printed periodical to the business office.

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Magazine design by Erika Kiel
Typesetting by Bob Vermeer

Have you ever thought, “If I only knew then, what I know now?” Or, “If I had a chance to go back and talk to my younger self, I would have done quite a few things differently!”

It is impossible not to look back on our lives and have regret and sorrow for our behavior when we were younger. Proverbs 22:3 teaches us that the “prudent *man* forseeeth the evil, and hideth himself,” implying that it is more likely for a young person or child to see the evil, but then to plunge headlong into that evil. Never an excuse, but a command for progression of spiritual life.

As we age there must be visible growth in our spiritual life. Is there anything more tragic than an older person living and acting as if they were still in their 20s, someone who is never able to say, “when I was a child” because they still act like that child? Looking back on our younger days we can and should identify those sins and weaknesses that we exhibited, so we can repent and turn from them. If you are still merrily walking in the same sins you did ten years ago something is terribly wrong. And we should learn from the wise words of those who have walked this path before us.

The letters you find in this issue of *Beacon Lights* were written by a wide variety of saints, but they all have a common theme. They write about the things

that they have learned with the passage of time that they would tell their younger self if they had the chance.

A letter to our younger self adds nothing to God’s word, nor does it seek to fill a void found in the Bible, which is “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16).

Rather, what you find in this issue is obedience to the command found in 1 Thessalonians 5:11 to “comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also you do.”

Reader, in this issue you will find letters that are written ultimately not to the authors’ younger selves, but to you. The goal is that you would be edified by the honest confessions of saints of various ages. Read this issue carefully, as in it you will “hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end” (Prov. 19:20).

God’s people should not morbidly dwell on the past, always beating our breasts about the sins of our youth. With the apostle Paul we do not look backwards, but forwards. “But this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13–14).

REFLECTING BACK FOR LIVING NOW

I still remember it like it was yesterday. My grandfather had passed away after a long struggle with dementia and after one of the visitations, I brought my grandmother home. During that car ride, she said with an unwavering voice about the man to whom she had been married for the majority of her existence, “We buried him, but it wasn’t him because he wasn’t here anymore. And there is no reason to cry

because he is so happy right now. He was a wonderful grandfather and father who raised every single one of his children in the fear of the Lord.”

Why do I remember that so clearly? What value is there in reflecting on this memory? Why have I held on to it? How does it affect me today? I am tempted to ask God why he let my grandfather suffer from dementia for so many years. But I also praise him

for bringing his child to heaven at the appointed time and for teaching me valuable lessons through the way he lived and how my grandmother cared for him. As you can see, there are right and wrong ways to reflect on the past.

We all have memories that stick in our minds like the one I shared with you. We may even have the same memories as others. Sometimes, though we have the same memories, we may differ in what aspects of those memories stand out in our minds. We might remember some details that others do not. Those details may have special significance to us more than others. Even though the memories we have stored away in our minds are innumerable and varied, there are general themes that we can see in each memory. These general themes are some examples of how we may properly (and sometimes improperly) reflect upon the events that have shaped our lives. These themes help us as we live here and now.

First, we can reflect on how God in his providence has ruled our lives. What value is there in reflecting on the providence of God? Lord's Day 10 of the Heidelberg Catechism describes it beautifully. Question 28 asks, "What advantage is it to us to know that God has created, and by His providence doth still uphold all things?" The phrase, "still uphold all things" implies that God always has and always will uphold all things. Therefore, we can reflect on how he in the past has governed all things. The value in this is that we can be confident that he will continue to do so, so that "we may be patient in adversity; thankful in prosperity; and that in all things which may hereafter befall us, we place our firm trust in our faithful God and Father, that nothing shall separate us from His love." Belgic Confession, Article 13 describes knowledge of the providence of God as giving us "unspeakable consolation" because we know that all things that befall us are by his direction.

All events in the past (and present and future) are ruled by God because as the Sovereign one, he has ordained that they would occur. Reflecting on these past events is important, but it must be done with a proper attitude. There are right and wrong ways to reflect on the past. When reflecting on a specific event in our lives, maybe a mistake we made, we might often think to ourselves, "if only I had known...then I could have..." You can fill in the blanks. This type of reflection is good in so far as we think about the good lessons we learned by making that mistake. But we cannot let this type of reflection rule us. There comes the point where we need

to move on. If we have become so fixated on the past that it can be said of us that we are living in the past, then we need a change of course. Our reflection on the past should be done in a way in which we are using the lessons learned and applying them to the present, not living with constant negative thoughts about the past.

There is value in reflecting not only on our own lives but also on history in general. History has many valuable lessons. We see God's hand in history, guiding each event in such a way that he is glorified and his church is preserved. We might become anxious when we reflect on the depths that society has fallen to in its general acceptance of horrendous immorality. Not only is immorality accepted, it is promoted and even forced on many people. We may wonder what the world will be like 20 years from now. What types of evils will we have to live through? What about 50 years from now? What great evils will our children and grandchildren have to suffer through? We worry. We are also tempted to ask, "Why Lord?" We know and are comforted by the fact that he is in control, that he is glorified, and that his church is preserved, but we still want to know why. We try to pry into the mind of God, but this is where we must stop. "O the depth of the riches of both the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counselor?" (Rom. 11:33-34).

Second, we can and we must reflect on sin and redemption. When we think of the past, we often think of our sins or the sins of others. Those sins haunt us and we often experience their consequences in the present. But in our reflection on sin, we must remember that God, who is rich in mercy, provided the sacrificial lamb, Jesus Christ, to atone for our sins. Christ willingly plunged himself into the agonies of hell so that "in my greatest temptations, I may be assured, and wholly comfort myself in this, that my Lord Jesus Christ...hath delivered me from the anguish and torments of hell" (Heidelberg Catechism, LD 16). Is this how we reflect on the sins we have confessed and repented of in the past and the sins we fall into daily when we are tempted? Do we view them as God does, washed away in the blood of his Son? Or do we look on them with doubt in our minds that since we are so sinful, they can't possibly be washed away with Christ's blood? It is possible for us to become so depressed when we reflect on our lives of sin that we doubt the efficacy of the grace of God to remove our sins. When we

look back on our lives and remember how many times we have fallen into the same rut of sin over and over, doubts about our salvation can creep in and we become, as the Canons of Dordt describe, “not always sensible of this full assurance of faith and certainty of persevering” (Canons, 5.11). We may be tempted to lose sight of the assurance given us by the grace of God. It is in those moments that we need to remember that God in his mercy “does not wholly withdraw the Holy Spirit from His own people, even in their melancholy falls; nor suffers them to proceed so far as to lose the grace of adoption and forfeit the state of justification, or to commit the sin unto death” (Canons, 5.6). He brings us back to our senses. Our hearts become restless, as the church father, Augustine said, until they rest in God. Read

a little further in the Canons. The “certainty of perseverance...is the real source of humility, filial reverence, true piety...so that consideration of this benefit should serve as an incentive to the serious and constant practice of gratitude and good works” (Canons, 5.12). Reflecting properly on our sin and also the mercy of God in forgiveness and assurance spurs us on to a life that bears good fruit!

So look back on your life. See how God has guided every event in your life for your good. When you lost that loved one, he was there. When you fell into that same sin again, he was there. As a tender Father he pulled you out of the pit and gave you the certainty of perseverance. Now as you reflect on past events, you see how God has used them for your profit so that you are better equipped to live now.

Dr. Roderick and Evonne Kreuzer

Dear Young Believers,

We were asked by a member of the *Beacon Lights* staff to write an article giving advice to young believers. My wife and I have chosen to do this in the light of the knowledge we have gained and the experiences we have had as we have traveled life’s pathway as children of God. It is advice that we believe would have been profitable for us when we were young adults and we desire that the advice will be profitable for you today as young people in your Christian walk.

Young people are busy people. They are involved with church, catechism, school, young people’s society, sports, part-time jobs, family obligations, and their friends. They are also faced with many decisions and choices. And along with that comes a lot of stress in their lives. As part of the advice we would give to them, it is extremely important for young believers to realize that they must have a solid foundation in their youth and continue to strengthen that foundation throughout all of their lives. God instructs us concerning that foundation in Matthew 7:24–27. In that passage Christ instructs the hearers to build their house upon a rock. That rock is a spiritual rock and is Christ Jesus. When the storms of life such as all manner of sin, sickness, hardship, disappointments, and death assail the children of God, they will be able to stand spiritually strong because of that foundation. Those who do not have that solid foundation will not be able to endure those storms which they face in life and instead will be greatly fearful, troubled, or even overwhelmed by

them. It is of utmost importance that young people have Christ as their spiritual foundation in life. In Psalm 62:6 we read, “He only is my rock and my salvation: he is my defense; I shall not be moved.”

Furthermore, we must remember that we have totally depraved natures and that we live in a world that abounds with sin. We need guidance and direction in our lives if we are to avoid being swept along by those forces of sin which surround us. That guidance and direction can come only from God. It comes to us as children of God from his word and by the Holy Spirit opening our hearts and minds to that word. That instruction from the word of God is sound instruction which we must heed not only as young believers, but throughout all of our lives until we are taken to glory. We must diligently follow the words of Proverbs 3:5–6 where we are instructed to “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”

Also, the temptations which we face daily can be great and many because the world is filled with wickedness and continues to develop in that wickedness. As you well know, temptations are found even in our homes by way of television and computers and even in our hands through the use of smart phones. We are to use these instruments with great discretion because the devil uses these devices to tempt us by presenting images that appeal to the lusts of the flesh and cause us to waste a great amount of time. We are called upon by God to stand against these temptations. In addition, peer pressure can be especially

powerful to give in to these temptations and we may not have the spiritual strength to stand against that pressure when it is exerted on us. It is essential to remember that it is far more important for us in life to please God than to please those who would seek to lead us astray. God's blessing is upon those who strive to do his will. We must strengthen ourselves against the sins that so easily beset us. How can we strengthen ourselves? One very important way is to be diligent in reading God's word and spending time in prayer. This is one area in which most of us, both young and old alike, fall short. In addition, one must also be faithful in church attendance and in attendance at Bible study society. These are ways in which God strengthens our faith and enables us to resist the many temptations that young and old alike face day by day. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Ps. 119:11).

As teenagers and young adults we must remember that sin has its consequences. If we think that we can go about our own willful way without suffering the consequences of our sins, we are sadly mistaken. The results of sinful behavior in one's youth can trouble a child of God for many years or even for the rest of one's life. Regrets and guilty feelings associated with sinful behavior in one's life may linger for years, even though for the child of God that behavior is forgiven through the blood of Christ. "Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2:22).

We also urge you to choose your friends wisely. If among your friends there are those who tempt you to engage in activities which you know are sinful, you should sever your friendship with them. Those who tempt you to sin are really not your friends. True friends are those who have strong spiritual values and who do not try to lead you astray. True friends want what is best for you. Remember the words of Proverbs 17:17a: "A friend loveth at all times."

Also in regards to the matter of friends, it is extremely important that we date only those who

are of like mind and faith. The best advice for us to give concerning dating is that if we know that one is not a believer we should not even consider dating that person. Whom should one date? The answer to that is that as members of the Protestant Reformed Churches one should date only those who are members of the Protestant Reformed Churches or who are members of churches who hold to the same beliefs and doctrinal standards to which the Protestant Reformed Churches hold. This is the best way to be sure that a potential spouse is of the same mind and faith. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3).

Last, we urge you to heed the advice of godly men and women such as parents, grandparents, ministers, elders, teachers, and others who seek to give you instruction based on the word of God. Such men and women have gained experience as they have traveled life's pathway and have accumulated knowledge based on God's word that can be of great benefit and guidance to you as young believers. Psalm 78:4-6 speaks to us regarding such instruction, "We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children."

In conclusion, we urge you by the grace of God to stand strong, dear young believers. Search the scriptures! Spend time in prayer!

Our prayers are with you,
Dr. and Mrs. Roderick Kreuzer

Dr. & Mrs. Kreuzer are members of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Wyoming, Michigan.

Deane Wassink

Now that I am old and gray (I would be gray if I had hair), I have learned a few things that I would remind my teenage self. I guess more than 40 years of experience, a wonderful wife, seven children, and eighteen grandchildren have given me a few lessons.

Here they are in no particular order:

1. Follow your heart guided by God's word. Your heart, in itself, will lead you into all sorts of delusion, sin and self-seeking. By immersing yourself in the study of the Bible on your own and in

fellowship with fellow saints, God will guide your heart by his word and Spirit. In this way, God will lead you to a godly spouse (if that is his will) and your particular calling in his church and kingdom.

2. Work hard when you are younger to prepare for the future. Work! Study! Prepare! Learn! Follow your interests. God's way for you is more blessed and wonderful than you will ever imagine.
3. Even in your difficulties, now and in the future, know that God is guiding you and preparing you for his purposes. Be assured, there will be difficult and painful times. Even in those times, know that our Father is teaching you to lean on him and find support and joy in family and church.
4. Seek to see God's bigger picture. If you focus on your troubles or the weakness and sins of others, your life will be consumed with pettiness and frustration. Trust him to take care of the details.
5. Have a heart of forgiveness for yourself and for the sins of others. No matter how wrongfully you are treated, and you will be in ways you cannot imagine, you must trust God to take care of you and work his way even with those who hurt you. Any other way will lead to bitterness with God's will. Bitterness and anger is rebellion against God and will destroy your soul.
6. One of God's greatest blessings is the joy of a

godly spouse who has the same heart and purpose as you have been given. Choose wisely!

7. Don't ever stop fighting against temptation. Your own heart, other people, and the wicked world will seek to lead you astray. His word and Spirit with the guidance of older saints will keep you on the straight and narrow.
8. Remember the sacrifice of godly parents, grandparents, Christian teachers, and fellow church members that God has used to prepare you for life in his service. Live in such a way to show them honor. When you are called on to contribute to the raising of the covenant children in the church and help your fellow saints, do so with all your heart and strength.
9. Learn to live day by day without worry for the future. You are in the loving arms of the Good Shepherd, who will lead you in green pastures and beside still waters. He is faithful to bring you to your heavenly home when the days of your journey are ended. Rest in him.

If you follow this advice, you will be spared untold misery and find joy in God's way for you.

Now, back to fighting my own battle of faith with the trials and temptations that belong to us "older saints."

Deane is a member of Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

Donna Wassink

Hello dear friend.

I was asked to write a letter to my younger self. That's kind of a hard thing to do. I really loved my teenage years and feel like I filled them with people who were good role models. As a junior and senior in high school I surrounded myself with friends who were examples of Christianity. Not that we never did things wrong, but we tried to do what was right. However, we all struggled at some point to consider our own self-worth. This is usually the time of our lives when that is the most prevalent, so that is what I have chosen to focus on. That is when we feel that we are of little significance to the congregation we have been placed in, and it would be so much easier just to float away from our church family and melt into the background—no one will notice. Do not be fooled into thinking this; you have a most important

role to play! I want to take a minute to point out your importance to this family and in doing so also go back to the feelings I also felt as a teenager.

God has called us to treat others with love and respect, and we know we must do that. But so often we forget to treat ourselves with those two things. We need to look in the mirror and see the daughter of the King that we are meant to be. *His* daughter! A friend is someone who will build you up and confirm that you are a beautiful person. As God's children, we must see ourselves as beautiful, created in his image. It's hard to do that when we're teenagers. Sometimes we see ourselves as too tall, too short, too heavy, or just plain not attractive. What a shame and yet so normal. Remember to love and respect yourself and pick friends who are Godly examples of being his children so they can build you up at the

times you are discouraged. Remember that the true beauty you display for others to see is the love of Christ living in you.

Be compassionate. Help those who you know are hurting, whether it's spiritual, physical, or emotional hurt. Sometimes that means going outside of your comfort zone. The ones you show compassion to might not be your best friends. In fact, usually it will be someone who is not all that popular or accepted. Get outside of that box and show not only your friends and family but the outside world around you that you truly are concerned with their spiritual and physical lives. Don't be self-absorbed. In fact, go out of your way to share with and serve others. You will be blessed to see the impact you have on someone's life when showing compassion to them.

Be a servant! Use the talents you've been given to share with others the joy that you have in serving. Go out of your way to serve the needs of others. Sometimes this means in a hands-on way, but usually it's as simple as a smile and a hug. Share that gorgeous smile! Go visit your grandparents! Sit and listen to them and ask questions of them. They love you and time spent with you is a most precious time for them. Visit the elderly in your congregation. Can you imagine sitting in your chair all alone all day and then seeing the sweet face of a young person come through your door? You know how lonely and depressed you get when you don't have friends texting and calling you. You will be the highlight of their week!

After you've finished high school and moved on to college or the workforce, don't forget whose you are. Remember to continue to have devotions, morning times in prayer, and time spent in his word. That's how you will continue to grow in grace and wisdom. These are years of temptations! Satan is

watching your every move and would love to take that assurance of being a daughter of the King away from you. You might fall prey to these temptations, but you must not despair. Even the things that we do to make our lives a constant reminder of being pulled into the grip of sin can be turned to our good. God has not turned his back on you! Philippians 1:6 is one of my favorite verses. "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Sometimes God places us in some very desperate situations. Remember this if that happens: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Don't despair at these times, but know that your family and also your church family have been praying for you and rejoice in your repentance. You are loved!

Above all, keep yourself connected to your church family. It is vitally important that you worship with them regularly and involve yourself in things pertaining to the building of his kingdom. Sometimes that means that the beautiful doctrines of salvation that you have been taught since a little child can be used to teach those outside of God's church. Be a witness to those in your neighborhood and be actively pursuing ways that you can be a beacon in this world. Your church family needs you! What a blessing to see our young people helping with causes that promote his kingdom. You are loved as a part of the church and your presence and smile does not go unnoticed!

Love to you my sweet friend!

Donna Wassink

Donna is a member of Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

Jonathon Kamps

When you get old, like me, you tend to look back and think, "I wish I knew then, what I know now." For that purpose, this article is a letter from me, Jonathon Kamps, at 44 years old to my younger self at the age of 16. Who better to write a letter of advice to Jonathon as a young person than the one who knows him then and now? Don't get me wrong, I am fully aware that everything that happened in those 28 years was the providence of God,

so this letter is more of a "hypothetical, if you could do it again" letter. Here goes...

Dear Corny,

You are just heading into Covenant Christian High School, and if I remember correctly you are clueless, howbeit, very excited to be out of grade school and wishing you were completely done with school.

I want you to know that I am not going to try to change who you are. God made you. He does not make mistakes, and he created you as his workmanship for this time in history. Who am I to try to change you? However, the old adage is true, “Hindsight is 20/20.” Looking back, I am going to try to help you do a better job of walking as one of God’s children.

Knowing you, you are a carefree kind of kid that loves to have fun. This is not necessarily wrong. The Bible is clear that we are not to worry, but instead we are called to enjoy the life of service to God we have been given. But it is also one of God’s commands to be a good steward of everything he has given us to use. This is really the point of this whole letter.

Now that I am a father, I can see in my own six children that being a young man of your age comes with temptations. Not just temptations to live like the world. For example, filling your eyes and soul as you watch the world sin. This was primarily done with movies and television when I was your age. Now access to the world is so much easier. With the phones of today, everything there is in the world is at your fingertips. The Bible is clear that we are to “put no evil thing” before our eyes. Have you obeyed this command today? I could go on for a long time talking about the temptations of today, but what I really want to alert you to is the internal temptations that you do not even realize are happening.

A temptation of youth is selfishness. It comes very easy to you. I state it this way because I know that you do try not to be selfish, but you have an old man of sin, and because of this *you* are the most important one in your life. I will give you an example to try to explain what I mean. When you woke up this morning, think about what came into your mind. If I remember correctly, you thought about what *you* were going to do, what *you* were going to eat, what *you* were going to wear, what *you* were going to do for fun. Corny, again, there is nothing wrong with these things, but did you ever think about anyone else? And this self-centeredness happens within the first minutes of waking up! You have not even looked at all the important stuff on your phone yet.

Being on your phone can make your self-centeredness even easier. This age in your life makes it easy to forget about everyone around you. You have many new things, like being able to leave the home by yourself because you can drive now, being able to date if your parents approve, being able to buy things on your own. Thinking about these things can consume all of your attention so that you never think of others. This is not being a good, godly

steward.

When we think of being a steward, most of the time we think of the money the Lord has given to us, but what about all the other gifts he gives, like our time and our abilities? We are called to use all things to the glory of God, not just our money. The Lord is not glorified by selfishness. When you wake up tomorrow morning, think about how your mother has prepared your breakfast and washed and ironed your clothes. Think about how your father has made it possible for you to have a car and has fed you since you were born. And those are still only a couple of things that they have done for you. What about all the things that your parents and the others in your life do for your church family and the others the Lord has put in their path? Think of the countless hours your mother has spent serving others at school, your father has served others on the council at church or school board. Open your eyes to how you can become that “good and faithful steward” that the Holy Spirit speaks of in Matthew 25:21: “His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”

I am starting to sound like Dad right now, aren’t I? Well, that is because he loves us. And I love the godly young people that may be reading this.

I should wrap up because I also know that your attention span isn’t that great. But before I go, I would like to leave you with a few things as advice. First, the worldly people around us would say that confidence and humility do not go together. But in God’s word we find his instruction to us saying that we must go ahead confidently, in “his strength.” If we are walking humbly, we will not go forward selfishly. So work on walking humbly. If you can figure out humility, the rest will fall in line.

Secondly, it seems that everyone in high school always wants to be cool. Well, let me tell you one thing that I remember from the kids we went to high school with: the kids that were *actually* cool, and not just thought they were, were always kind.

Finally, remember that little sign that Ma gave to us with the Abraham Lincoln quotation: “Whatever you are, be a good one.” Go have fun, kid! But do it by serving others humbly for the glory of our God.

Love,
You

P.S. Corny was my nickname.

Jonathon is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.

THE DAILY PRESS

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

June 8

Read Proverbs 21

What’s Your Motive?

Proverbs 21:1 teaches that the hearts of the rulers of this world are under the sovereign control of our God. What comfort! Not only are the hearts of kings open to him, however: “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts” (v. 2). What does he see when he searches our hearts?

What is God’s evaluation of a proud heart? “An high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin” (v. 4). Other translations render verse 4 much differently. The ESV, for example, reads, “Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, are sin.” Ultimately, the verse means the same thing. If haughty eyes and a proud heart are the lamps that guide the wicked, even his plowing is sinful, for “two things are required to make an action right. One is that it be lawful in itself. The other is that it be done with a right motive. If the thing done is itself wrong, no motives can make it right. On the other hand, the thing done may be right in itself, but the motive which governs us may be wrong, and so the act may be sinful because the motive is sinful” (William Plumer). *Sing or pray Psalter #384.*

June 9

Read Proverbs 22

Train Up a Child

Proverbs 22:6 reminds parents that the calling to train their children in Jehovah’s ways is their highest privilege and greatest responsibility. How often we parents neglect that duty because of misplaced priorities and busy schedules!

[Children] must be trained to understand and interpret their behavior in terms of heart motivation... The goal of correction is not simply to modify behavior, but to bring the child to sweet, harmonious, and humble heart submission to God’s will that he obey Mom and Dad...The child trained in biblical obedience [and the parent, who knows how difficult that godly training is!] is better able

to understand the gospel. The power and grace of the gospel is most deeply understood, not by those who never face their biblical duties, but by those who do (Ted Tripp).

Proverbs 22:15 warns against refusing to discipline our children. Left to themselves, they will pursue the way of the fool. The duties of Christian parenting are not that complicated. In fact, they’re very straightforward. What’s difficult is the consistency that’s required of us for those means to be effective! Let’s pray for the grace we need to be diligent. *Sing or pray Psalter #359.*

June 10

Read Proverbs 23

The Glutton and the Drunkard

According to *Merriam Webster’s Dictionary*, a “foodie” is “a person who enjoys and cares about food very much.” One won’t find the word “foodie” in Proverbs 23, but a term that is perhaps more accurate: “glutton.” How serious is gluttony? So serious that Solomon commands, “Put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite” (v. 2). Philippians 3:19 describes “enemies of the cross of Christ” this way: “Whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.” A glutton worships his stomach. Proverbs 23 also contains many warnings to the drunkard. Like the glutton, “the drunkard... will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags” (v. 21). For all alcohol promises to deliver, in the end “it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder” (v. 32).

We need grace not to make idols out of food and drink. Rather, those pleasures should point us to far more wonderful spiritual realities like partaking of Jesus Christ by faith, the communion of the saints, and the heavenly bliss that awaits all who are in Christ Jesus. *Sing or pray Psalter #288.*

June 11

Read Proverbs 24

Be Diligent

Proverbs 24:1 warns against envying or joining evil men. In contrast to evil, which produces destruction,

wisdom establishes one's house (v. 3). And it's not earthly riches that make that home a pleasant place to be; it is knowledge (v. 4). As Job taught, that knowledge can't be mined like gold or silver. "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding" (Job 28:28).

My neighbor's yard looks like the field of the slothful man in Proverbs 24:30–32. Where it's not overgrown with thistles and waist-high weeds, it's heaped with piles of junk. In contrast to the slothful, a diligent man tends his fields well, for his substance is precious (Prov. 12:27b). How well are we tending our gardens? Do we water our marriages with thoughtfulness and godly communication? Do we pull out the weeds of sin that threaten to choke the communion we're called to have with our parents or our children? Our other relationships require constant nurture as well, and so do our spiritual lives. Do we feed our daily walk with the word of God, water it with prayer, and weed it by living in fellowship with the other members of Christ's body? *Sing or pray Psalter #40.*

June 12 Read 1 Kings 5

Temple Builders

Solomon reigns, and, as Jehovah promised, he gives David's son rest. Solomon begins the work of building the temple by making a league with Hiram, King of Tyre. In exchange for the cedar and fir wood that grew abundantly in that coastal nation, Israel would trade them food. Solomon raises a levy of 30,000 men. This levy isn't a tax but a draft of forced laborers. Samuel had foretold this in 1 Samuel 8:11–16. In addition, 150,000 strangers served the house of God (see 2 Chron. 2:17 and Josh. 9:21–27). Were the men who built the temple "filled with the Spirit of God," "wise-hearted" men, "in whose heart the LORD had put wisdom, even everyone whose heart stirred him up to come unto the work to do it" (Ex. 31:3 and Ex. 36:2)? That's the way the tabernacle builders were described.

Our Lord Jesus Christ has won the victory and now rules from his heavenly throne. Though he has entered his rest, he is not inactive. Rather, "He is using His wisdom to enlist people from the nations to build His living temple, the church" (Reformation Heritage Study KJV Bible). Do we devote ourselves to that cause as willing, Spirit-filled laborers? *Sing or pray Psalter #368.*

June 13 Read 1 Kings 6

The Temple of God

The temple was built in reverent silence. Similarly, Christ builds his church without "Ostentatious display or fanfare" (Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible). "Clamor and violence...never further [the work of God]" (Matthew Henry). The Hebrew suggests that the temple's windows were broad on the inside but narrow on the outside (v. 4). Henry explains, "Such should the eyes of our mind be, reflecting nearer on ourselves than on other people, looking much within to judge ourselves, but little without to censure our brethren." The temple was twice the size of the tabernacle and included chambers on its sides, which were built three stories high and used for storage, and two large cherubim that guarded the ark of the covenant. "Solomon made everything new, except the ark...the token of God's presence...is always the same with His people whether they meet in tent or temple..." (Ibid).

Glorious as it was, God's presence in the temple depended on the king's obedience (v. 12). Our King, Jesus Christ, is greater than the temple (Matt. 12:6). On the basis of his perfect righteousness, we are assured of God's presence forever. *Sing or pray Psalter #243.*

June 14 Read 2 Chronicles 2

Great is our God

What 1 Kings 6 describes in one chapter, 2 Chronicles details in several chapters, for the temple is central to the chronicler's plot. Remember, 1 and 2 Chronicles were written around the end of the Old Testament, during the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. In his recounting of Israel's history, the author emphasized heartfelt worship of Jehovah and God's presence with his people. He intended to encourage true worship of Jehovah among the exiles who had returned to Canaan and point them to *the* Son of David in whom God's promises would be finally and fully fulfilled. These people faced much opposition in re-building God's temple and were tempted by the same sins that had led Solomon astray (Neh. 13:26). They needed the reminder of 2 Chronicles 2:5, 6: "Great is our God above all gods...the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain him." Though even Solomon's beautiful temple could not contain so great a God, the temple was necessary for Jehovah's people, for there they would enter his presence through sacrifice (v. 6c).

Through the one sacrifice of our savior, we have access by faith into God's gracious presence. Do we

daily resort there through his word and prayer? *Sing or pray Psalter #132.*

June 15 Read 2 Chronicles 3

God's Tabernacle with Men

Many years before Solomon ruled, God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac on Mt. Moriah, and there he provided a ram in Isaac's place (Gen. 22:2). On that mountain also David built an altar to turn away God's wrath by sacrifice following his sin of numbering the people (1 Chron. 21:18). Now Solomon built the temple there. There Jehovah would dwell among his people: "those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice" (Ps. 50:5).

Many things about the temple pointed back to the Garden of Eden: the palm trees and pomegranates, the cherubim guarding the entrance to the most holy place, and the gold. Those things also point forward to the new heavens and earth, for the book of Revelation describes heaven using many of the same images.

In heaven, the tabernacle of God will be with his people. "God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:3-4). *Sing or pray Psalter #350.*

June 16 Read 2 Chronicles 4

Abundant Offerings

1 Chronicles 4 begins with a description of the brazen altar of burnt offering, which is omitted from the parallel account in 1 Kings 6. The temple's altar is very large, approximately 30' by 30' by 15' high. In contrast, the altar constructed for the tabernacle was about 7½' by 7½' by 4½' high. Why the difference in size? First, the tabernacle and its furnishings had to be transportable. Second, "Now that Israel had become both numerous and more rich...it was expected that there would be a greater abundance of offerings brought to God's altar than had been. It was therefore made such a capacious scaffold...God had greatly enlarged their borders; it was therefore fit that they should enlarge his altars" (Matthew Henry). Already at the dedication of the temple Solomon and all the congregation of Israel sacrificed sheep and oxen "which could not be told nor numbered for multitude" (2 Chron. 5:6).

God has given us spiritual and material abundance. Do our returns "bear some proportion to our receivings?" (Ibid.). *Sing or pray Psalter #311.*

June 17 Read 2 Chronicles 5

As One

The glorious temple was complete. The tabernacle and its furnishings were replaced with things larger and more lavish, except for the ark, which symbolized God's presence in Christ. "For the presence and the grace of God are the same in little assemblies that they are in large ones, in the poor condition of the church that they are in its prosperous estate" (Matthew Henry). It, along with the tabernacle and its furnishings, the elders and Levites solemnly bring to Jerusalem. Solomon and the congregation greet the ark with innumerable sacrifices. It is placed in the most holy place, and as the singers and trumpeters lift praise and thanks as with one voice, Jehovah's glory fills the tabernacle.

I thought of this passage during the combined PR high school choir concert this past April 12, as nearly 300 young voices, accompanied by instruments, sang, "One in Christ, we lift our voice." What a glorious testimony to the truth that the song of praise and thanksgiving delights our heavenly Father more than sacrifice (Ps. 69:30-31). And it is when his people praise him in unity that he commands his blessing (Ps. 133). *Sing or pray Psalter #186.*

June 18 Read Psalm 136

His Mercy Endures Forever!

Psalm 136 begins with three commands to thank Jehovah, the God of gods and Lord of lords. He is the God of wonders. The psalmist first lists Jehovah's wonders in creation (vv. 4-9). He then recounts Jehovah's wonderful redemption of his people, his providential care for them, and the bountiful, undeserved inheritance he has given them (vv. 10-24). The psalm comes full circle when the psalmist acknowledges Jehovah's sustenance of all his creatures (v. 25) before once more enjoining his people to thank him (v. 26).

Psalm 136 is unique and memorable because of its refrain, the same refrain with which the trumpeters and singers praised Jehovah at the dedication of the temple (2 Chron. 5:13). Perhaps that refrain strikes us as unduly repetitive, especially when we hear the psalm read aloud. But that repetition is not without purpose. The psalmist would have us consider the greatest wonder of all: the God of wonders loves sinners like you and me. What a wonder that his mercy—his steadfast, committed love for his covenant people—is the reason for all things! And his love for us endures *forever*. *Sing or pray Psalter #378.*

June 19

Read 1 Kings 8

Jehovah's Dwelling Place

1 Kings 8 also records the bringing of the ark to the temple. Then follows Solomon's prayer of dedication. Solomon had built a house for God, yet he realized, "The heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee" (v. 27). Repeatedly he prays that when Jehovah's people prayed toward the temple, Jehovah would hear—not from the temple, but from heaven, his dwelling place.

The prophet Jeremiah foretold the new dispensation in which the temple wouldn't be needed; indeed, even the ark of the covenant would not be remembered nor come into mind (Jer. 3:16). We are privileged to live in that new dispensation: "But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven...and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel" (Heb. 12:22–24). Our God now dwells within the members of Christ's body by his Holy Spirit. Do you experience his powerful, sanctifying presence today? *Sing or pray Psalter #141.*

June 20

Read 2 Chronicles 6

Solomon's Prayer

Throughout Solomon's dedicatory prayer, he assumed that Jehovah's people would pray to him from inside or facing toward the temple. The temple "was a shadow: the substance is Christ; whatever we ask in his name, it shall be given us" (Matthew Henry). Also, Solomon prayed for forgiveness with the understanding that true confession of sin includes turning from that sin, followed by walking in Jehovah's ways (vv. 26–27). Are our lives characterized by such true repentance? Solomon expressed the desire that all people might fear God along with Israel, and he assumed that this would happen, for they *would* hear of Jehovah's great name. "Thus early...were the indications of favor towards...the Gentiles: as there was then one law for the native and for the stranger (Ex. 12:49), so there was one gospel for both. Herein he aimed at the glory of God and the propagating of the knowledge of him" (Ibid.). Is that our desire and aim, too? Finally, Solomon mentioned those who would pray in battle. We're exhorted to "put on the whole armor of God," "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit" (Eph. 6:11, 18). Is that the way in which

we confront the enemies that tempt us? *Sing or pray Psalter #350.*

June 21

Read 2 Chronicles 7

A Better Land

On the wall of my high school history classroom hung a framed photograph of the United States flag. Below the picture was printed 2 Chronicles 7:14: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." Since then, I've heard the same text quoted by prominent evangelicals and conservative politicians, often in the context of discussions regarding abortion or homosexuality. Though they may be well-intentioned, my former teacher and those other men and women misapply this verse. Old Testament Israel was God's chosen, covenant people. They were the church. No one nation represents God's people now. Nor will the fervent prayers of American Christians turn the tidal wave of wickedness that rushes over our nation. Israel experienced prosperity through repentance and obedience. Likewise, the members of the new testament church, men and women from all nations, tribes, and tongues, enjoy spiritual prosperity. They, who are joined to Christ by a Spirit-worked faith, "will enjoy God's presence forever in a better land than Canaan" (Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible). *Sing or pray Psalter #230.*

June 22

Read 1 Kings 7

A Shadow of Heavenly Things

1 Kings 7 first summarizes Solomon's other building projects: his palace, the hall of judgment, where his throne was situated, a palace for Pharaoh's daughter, his wife, and the large Palace of the Forest of Lebanon, which probably served as a reception/banquet hall. All these buildings were, with the temple, located within a "great court" (vv. 9, 12). Then follow detailed descriptions of Hiram of Tyre's brass work, which included the large ornamental pillars that framed the entrance to the holy place, named Jachin and Boaz. Hiram also fashioned the enormous molten sea, which had a capacity of about 10,000 gallons. This sea replaced the tabernacle laver and held the water in which the priests washed. And he made ten moveable lavers, each of which held about 240 gallons and in which the steady stream of sacrifices was washed.

Again, the temple and its furnishings served as a shadow of heavenly things, things revealed to us in

the New Testament. We have a high priest, “Who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man” (Heb. 8:1–2). *Sing or pray Psalter #302.*

June 23 Read 1 Kings 9

An Imperfect Type (1)

When Solomon had completed building, God again appeared to him. Once more Jehovah reiterated his promise: “If you walk in my ways, *then* I will establish your throne.” Furthermore, the LORD impressed upon Solomon that the welfare of the entire nation is contingent on his obedience. If Solomon leads them into idolatry, Jehovah will cut Israel off. There is a hint of ominous foreshadowing in this second, solemn warning, isn’t there? We know the sad sequel to Solomon’s glorious debut. All the terrible things of which he spoke in his dedicatory prayer—defeat, famine, captivity—will soon come to pass. And he will lead the way. And yet, we also know that Solomon would fail: he must fail. For the people of Israel could not put their trust in a mere man, though they enjoyed unsurpassed peace and prosperity under his rule. They must still look for the Messiah.

Like Solomon, though we know the consequences of sin, too often we don’t do the good that we would (Rom. 7:15). We cannot look for assurance of our salvation in ourselves. We look to Christ. He “is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Rom. 10:4). *Sing or pray Psalter #198.*

June 24 Read 2 Chronicles 8

An Imperfect Type (2)

2 Chronicles 8 lists some of the cities that marked Solomon’s northernmost borders (vv.3–4). Under Solomon’s rule, the borders of Israel reached their greatest extent. But in this, too, Solomon failed as a type. Solomon desired, “that all people of the earth may know thy name, and fear thee, as doth thy people Israel,” but never did he rule over all nations (2 Chron. 6:33). For that reality to be fulfilled, Jehovah’s people were also to look for the Messiah. Revelation 11:15 tells of the day when, “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.”

Already now, Jesus Christ reigns in the hearts of his people, whom he gathers from the four corners of the earth. Yet still, there are more who must be gathered. Do you pray the Lord of the harvest, “that

he will send forth laborers into his harvest”? (Matt. 9:38). Is he calling you to be one of those laborers? *Sing or pray Psalter #199.*

June 25 Read Psalm 134

Come, Bless Jehovah

Psalm 134 is the last of the Psalms of Degrees (or Ascent), which begin with Psalm 120. These are pilgrim psalms, songs that God’s people would sing as they traveled to Jerusalem to worship. The pilgrims who speak in Psalm 134 have arrived at God’s house. It is late in the day; perhaps they have been traveling since sunrise. Though weary, they are filled with joy as they arrive at their destination. Once there, they enjoin the Levites serving there to bless Jehovah from their hearts as they perform their outward duties. Perhaps these Levites are night watchmen. Maybe they belonged to the singers, who “were employed in that work day and night” (1 Chron. 9:33). Or perhaps it is the time of Passover, for Passover was a night festival.

These servants of Jehovah respond in verse 3 by pronouncing a blessing upon the pilgrims. They bless them in the name of Jehovah, the all-powerful Creator of heaven and earth. Yet they remind the pilgrims that the Almighty Creator is also their covenant God, who dwells among them: he blesses them *out of Zion*. Do we bless him at all times? Are his praises continually in our mouths? (Ps. 34:1). *Sing or pray Psalter #372.*

June 26 Read Psalm 146

A Grand Finale

Each of the books of Psalms ends with a doxology. Psalms 146–150 comprise the doxology that concludes not only book 5, but the entire book of Psalms. There are no laments here. No cries for help. Just a sustained “Hallelujah! Praise Jehovah!” The praise to which we’re called in Psalm 146 is both corporate—“ye” in the KJV denotes a plural “you”—and personal: “Praise the Lord, O my soul” (v. 1b). Verses 3–4 warn us of the folly of placing our trust in men. Included among those in whom there is no help are our own selves. There is no salvation in our knowledge, strength, frugality, punctuality or perseverance. But “happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help” (v. 5a).

The psalmist then describes Jacob’s God. He is the Creator of all things, executes judgment for the oppressed, loves the righteous, turns the way of the wicked upside down, and reigns forever. Can you think of anyone else to whom that description

belongs? Jesus Christ, the Messiah. In him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2:9). And the preaching of his gospel still turns the world upside down (Acts 17:6).

Sing or pray Psalter #40.

June 27

Read Psalm 147

Jehovah's Transforming Word

Psalm 147 contains three calls to praise Jehovah. These appeals, which are found in verses 1, 7, and 12, divide the psalm into three sections. After each call to praise, the psalmist focuses on one or more of God's attributes as they come to expression in the creation and in his people.

First, the psalmist observes Jehovah's great power and infinite understanding. He calls the stars by their names. How can we doubt that he is powerful enough to gather together the outcasts of the church, heal the broken-hearted, lift up the meek, and cast down the wicked? After the second call to praise, the psalmist describes Jehovah's gracious and sustaining provision for his creation. Do not doubt that he will provide you with all things necessary for body and soul also, but remember, it is not your physical strength that delights him. He takes pleasure in them that fear him. In the third section, the psalmist focuses on the efficacious word of God. God's word sends the snow and hail, and it is also the transforming power that melts them. That powerful word he entrusted to Israel, the church. What kind of transformation has (and does) his word work in you? *Sing or pray Psalter #402.*

June 28

Read Psalm 148

The All and the Alone

Psalm 148 is a systematic, all-encompassing call to creation to praise Jehovah. The psalmist begins with the angels and then works his way down to the sun, moon, and stars, earth's atmosphere, and the clouds. Then he descends to the lowest parts of the earth and works his way up. He addresses the mythical creatures that dwell in the depths of the sea, the so-called "elements of nature," the mountains and hills along with the plants, animals, and birds that populate them, and, finally, he enjoins the king of God's creation: man. No age, sex, or social status escapes his attention; all are called to praise Jehovah. Why? Because "his name alone is excellent."

Although all created things belong to Jehovah, the psalmist reserves the possessive pronoun "his" for only two groups. He refers to "his angels" and "his hosts" (v. 2), and he writes of "his saints" (v.

14). These two groups belong to Jehovah in a special way. They are moral, rational beings. The angels "do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word" (Ps. 103:20), and his saints are those in whom he works "both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). *Sing or pray Psalter #405.*

June 29

Read Psalm 149

A Bed and a Sword

Psalm 149 begins again with "Hallelujah!" The Psalmist enjoins Israel to rejoice in their Maker and King. Why? He takes pleasure in them and has saved them (v. 4). Their salvation gives Jehovah's saints cause to celebrate, even when they are lying on their beds (v. 5). They are resting, but they're not asleep: they're singing at the top of their lungs. Similarly, the glorious salvation rest that we've been given doesn't mean we're inactive: it compels us to praise. And not only are the saints singing as they rest, but they also hold a sword in their hands! This deadly sword is the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17), "the word of God" (Heb. 4:12). It is to be used to execute vengeance and to bind kings.

Who has the honor of wielding this sword? "All his saints." The gospel is brandished by the church, leaving Jehovah's enemies without excuse, conquering his people from every tribe and tongue, taking them captive to Christ, and making them citizens of Israel. We also must turn that blade on our own hearts day-by-day. "With this two-edged sword believers fight against their own corruptions...sin... is crucified...[and] self...is...brought into subjection to the yoke of Christ" (Matthew Henry). *Sing or pray Psalter #407.*

June 30

Read Psalm 150

A Hallelujah Chorus

If you've ever attended a performance of Handel's *Messiah*, perhaps you were startled when, three-fourths of the way through the concert, the audience suddenly stood for the "Hallelujah" chorus. Legend has it that at the oratorio's London premiere, King George II became so excited during the "Hallelujah" chorus that he leaped to his feet. Out of respect, the audience followed suit, and from that time on, it became a tradition to stand during that climactic piece.

The grand finale of Psalms climaxes in Psalm 150. Thirteen times in six verses the psalmist sounds this note: "Hallelujah!" He calls on "all his works in all places of his dominion" to praise Jehovah (Ps. 103:22). Nor is it enough that a solo instrument is

employed in this endeavor: the psalmist conducts an entire orchestra in a symphony of praise to God, and he calls on all that breathe to join the chorus. Indeed, it's hard to read (or sing) this psalm without leaping to one's feet. And yet, at its conclusion lingers the recognition that all do not praise Jehovah and yearn for the day when the Messiah will return and that prayer will become a reality (see Rev. 5:11–14). *Sing or pray Psalter #409.*

July 1

Read Proverbs 25

Bridle Your Tongue

Proverbs 25 instructs us regarding our speech. God's word in this chapter commands us not to pass along others' secrets (v. 9) and warns against boasting about ourselves, exaggerating our abilities (vv. 14 and 6). Verse 18 equates one that bears false witness to a maul, a sword, and a sharp arrow. Confiding in such a person is like eating with a bad tooth or walking on a crippled foot (v. 19). Verse 20 teaches that one who sings merrily to another whose heart is heavy (rather than sympathizing with them) is like a person who snatches another's jacket off his back on a cold day. But there is also positive instruction regarding our speech. Verse 11 reads, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures [or baskets] of silver." Verse 12 praises a wise reprover. Verses 13 and 25 liken one who brings good news to one who refreshes another with a glass of ice water on a hot day. Would you like to persuade another of something? That will require patience and "a soft tongue" (v. 15).

Sanctified speech requires much temperance, self-control. Do we pray earnestly for that fruit of the Spirit? *Sing or pray Psalter #26.*

July 2

Read Proverbs 26

Wise Words

Proverbs 26:4–5 seem to contradict: "Answer not a fool according to his folly... Answer a fool according to his folly..." The implication is this: when a fool boasts, rails, lies, slanders, or banter, the wise man will not answer in kind. But when given the opportunity, the wise man will use his wisdom to convict a fool. He is not wise in his own conceit, however (v. 12); the wisdom he applies is the wisdom of God's word. That great God will justly reward all fools (v. 10).

We heated our former home with a wood-burning stove. It was then that our young children memorized Proverbs 26:20–21. Since then they've learned verses 18–19 too. Those verses teach that the person

who deceives his neighbor and then says, "I was only joking!" is as destructive as a madman throwing flaming darts and deadly arrows. The words of a talebearer, declares verse 22, are like wounds in the stomach. Such a man might attempt to cover his hatred with gracious or flattering speech, but eventually, his wickedness will be publicly exposed (v. 26). Do our words minister grace or feed strife? Where no wood is, the fire will go out. *Sing or pray Psalter #89.*

July 3

Read Proverbs 27

Contentious Tongues and Faithful Wounds

Proverbs 27:1 admonishes: "Boast not thyself of tomorrow..." Must we make no plans or provisions for the future? No. We must do so mindful that only if the Lord wills, "we shall live, and do this, or that" (James 4:15).

Verses 15-16 observe that attempting to restrain an argumentative woman is as futile as holding back the wind or clutching oil in one's fingers. Such a woman is like a leaky roof on a rainy day. The roofs in Israel were flat: a little leak was a big problem. Similarly, the contentious woman is not only annoying; she's destructive. Slowly and subtly she tears down the very home she's called to maintain (Prov. 14:1). Sisters, we're quick to employ the deadly weapon of the tongue. But we've been anointed with God's Spirit: may soft, wise, healing words characterize our speech (Prov. 12:18, 15:1–2).

Verse 17 teaches that just as metal sharpens metal, so wicked men sharpen their companions to do evil (Prov. 5:4), while Christians sharpen fellow saints to godliness. Sometimes that sharpening comes in the form of a painful but necessary rebuke. In that case, "Open rebuke is better than secret love," for "faithful are the wounds of a friend" (v. 6). *Sing or pray Psalter #90.*

July 4

Read Proverbs 28

The Froward and the Flatterer

Proverbs 28:2 notes the instability God visits on the governments of wicked nations. Verse 15 contrasts the oppressive ruler with one who hates covetousness. Do we pray for those who rule over us, the good and the froward? Not only covetous rulers will be judged for oppressing the poor, however. The poor even oppress one another (v. 3). Are we faithful to give to the poor, and do we seek provision for our earthly needs through the God-ordained means of hard work? Verses 2, 8, 19, 20, 22, and 27 all warn against making haste to be rich and turning

our eyes from the poor.

Verse 13 teaches that we must not attempt to cover our sins, but confess and forsake them. Verse 23 condemns flattery, the use of excessive—and often exaggerated—compliments to bring oneself into the favor of others. A flatterer will be trapped by his sin (Prov. 29:5). Instead, Proverbs 28:23 commends rebuke. We hesitate to rebuke for the same reason that we flatter: we fear what others will think of us. Psalm 141:5 declares, “Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil...” Is that the attitude with which we give and receive rebuke? *Sing or pray Psalter #83.*

July 5

Read Proverbs 29

Which Way?

Proverbs 29:1 cautions against disregarding reproof. Following that solemn statement are several familiar texts regarding child-rearing (vv. 15, 17.) Verses 2, 4, and 14 contrast righteous and wicked rulers. Aren't you thankful that “the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will”? (Dan. 4:32).

Do we need more admonitions to watch our tongues? To our shame, we do daily. Verse 5 warns against flattery, and verse 20 condemns hasty speech. According to verse 22, many of our sins are rooted in anger. If anger is not the root of a sin, you can be sure that pride is: “A man's pride shall bring him low: but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit” (v. 23). This chapter's frequent use of antithetical parallelism reminds us that throughout the entire book inspired Solomon presents us with two ways or paths: the way of the righteous and the way of the fool. They lead in opposite directions: they are antithetical to one another. Sometimes those paths are presented as two women: Dame Folly, the strange woman whose house is the way to hell, and Lady Wisdom, who bestows eternal riches upon those who love her. Which way do you walk? Which woman do you embrace? *Sing or pray Psalter #325.*

July 6

Read Ecclesiastes 1

The Preacher and his Text

Ecclesiastes is the wisdom of “the Preacher,” aged Solomon, whose great sins have brought him great bitterness. The word translated “Preacher” is a Hebrew feminine word that means “to gather.” Perhaps Solomon refers to himself this way because he would have all gather around to hear his final words. Perhaps he uses this feminine term to “upbraid himself with his effeminacy, which contributed more

than anything to his apostasy; for it was to please his wives that he set up idols” (Matthew Henry). Or maybe, Henry also speculates, Solomon views himself from a spiritual perspective. He had gone astray like a lost sheep, but, now penitent, he has been gathered back to Jehovah's fold.

Solomon is the Preacher; Ecclesiastes is his last sermon; this is his text: “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity” (v. 2). The word translated “vanity,” which appears nearly 40 times in this short book, means “breath” or “vapor.” Not only is Solomon face-to-face with life's brevity; he finds that defining life's meaning is like grasping a handful of smoke. “Time and chance” happen to all, whether rich or poor, weak or strong, fool or wise (Eccl. 9:11). Do we live in the consciousness that the ever-rolling stream of time is bearing us away? *Sing or pray Psalter #246.*

July 7

Read Ecclesiastes 2

Pleasure, Wisdom, or Work?

In Ecclesiastes 2 the preacher recounts his attempts to find meaning in life. Once he thought pleasure would give life meaning (vv. 1–11). But, to put it in today's terminology, he found that even if he partied all weekend, Monday always came. Then he sought meaning in wisdom (vv. 12–17). But, though he recognized the superiority of living wisely, he was forced to admit that the wise man had no real advantage over the fool: both are subject to calamities, death, and oblivion. Perhaps work would give him the meaning he so desperately sought? (vv. 18–23). No. Not only did his hard toil bring him sorrow, he knew that the things at which he labored long and hard would be left to others who did not value them as he did.

Do you recognize the vanity of which the preacher speaks in your life? Do you wrestle with the emptiness of your pleasures, the fruitlessness of your wisdom, the futility of your work? There is hope at this chapter's conclusion: though we don't control our lots, they do not come to us at random. God gives them to us. Do you humbly confess that your lot in life is the gift of a good God? *Sing or pray Psalter #27.*

Dealing with failure and mistakes

Live in the moment of rejection, failure, or mistakes while controlling your response to such experiences. Avoid becoming angry, downcast, or overly moved by the situation. Take setbacks in stride. Understand that making mistakes are necessary growing pains. Take calculated risks and do not avoid failure, embarrassment, or fear your lack of knowledge. Don't quit or shrink from facing these seeds of growth. These moments bring reflection and revelation that sharpen your focus and put what matters in life into perspective. Identify what went wrong, seek guidance, or simply correct the error to improve and continue to apply this new knowledge. Positive growth will result.

Determine why and what God's purpose is for you

God writes your story, but it is his story, not yours. Draw near to God in personal devotions and prayer to him, seeking his direction. God exposes to you, and sometimes others before you know yourself, what your gifts are. If others see abilities in you that you can use in God's kingdom, take these conversations seriously and consider them before dismissing them. Capitalize on your time by determining the *why* you do what you do; otherwise, a bunch of experiences can lead to a waste of time. Prayerfully consider decisions and evaluate whether they meet God's approval. Trust God to open and close doors.

Keep learning and seek mentors/models

Set aside time to learn and resist the attitude that you have arrived. Consider taking continued education. Don't wait to solicit advice and guidance from others who are wiser and have insights that could prove valuable to you because they are further down this path than you are. Follow their advice, so long as it is in keeping with God's word and confirmed through prayer, regardless of difficulty or discomfort. Be respectful of their time, ask them questions, and follow through with applying their advice. Otherwise, you're wasting their time. Study deeply.

Thankful for wise counsel

Surround yourself with older, wiser adults with good, godly reputations. When I heeded their advice (solicited or unsolicited) on matters about self, friendships, dating, what kind of woman I ought

to strive to be, trials, career, what to look for in a husband, and more, I benefited greatly.

Contentment

Be thankful in every state you're in. Know God is in control of every aspect of your life. You may desire good, godly things, so supplicate in prayer to your Father for them. Stay close to God knowing he does *all* things for your good and he knows your deepest needs. He is a mighty God! Trust him and avoid seeking your own solutions, especially those that do not align with his written word. True happiness is found when you walk with your Lord.

Enlist accountability

Make a point to meet with like-minded friends, set goals, encourage each other and discuss progress or shortcomings. Make a plan and implement baby steps and revive your motivation by making small achievements and rejoicing in them too.

Delight in God first and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Talk often with your mighty Father in prayer, and he will change your heart. No one has ever regretted being more Christ-like, being kind, taking a stand for the truth, doing what is right, and forsaking one's sinful self. Grow an insatiable thirst for God's word. Make time to read his word and good reformed literature to gain a God-centered worldview and how it ought to affect your relationships, career, goals, outlook, attitude, self-love, and more. Study deeply, not faster as our culture promotes. We will fall short at this devotional life, probably our whole life; nonetheless, I have found that when I focus on my relationship with God, everything here below becomes small. I find more contentment and the "quiet" life grows more appealing. Take advantage of your single life knowing you are married to Christ and grow in holiness. Be involved in the church and school life.

Dealing with others you struggle to like

Succinctly, it becomes easier to love others when you pray for them specifically and sincerely.

Honor and respect those in authority and persons of any age. Be kind; no one has ever regretted being kind. You'll be amazed how God brings people back into your life. We will love each other perfectly in

heaven, but charity goes with us from this earth to heaven. Do not be contentious but peaceful.

Redeem the time

Ultimately, strive to press your time in service to God. Don't wait until tomorrow or when you're older to put away childish things or sinful habits. It is easy to be busy yet waste a lot of time. Time is a creature created by God, and Christ died for it. Learn from those who are industrious while maintaining a healthy balance with their devotional life, relationships, work, play, exercise, talents, and more.

Give yourself to others: namely parents and the family of God, especially those who are fatherless, widows, or widowers—you'll gain the most from these experiences, and the recipients will appreciate your effort no matter how weak it may be.

Screen time has its appropriate place but be willing to evaluate how you spend your time and how it can better be used. Satan is subtle and preys on our sinful addictions. It will bear fruit; good or bad for you, your mental health, your relationships, and church family, especially long term. On social media, not everyone is having such an amazing time as you think. You're not missing out. Satan feeds you these thoughts. Don't believe his lies. Consider your posts: Are they a good reflection of your heart and whose approval matters to you?

Consider the consequences of your decisions before acting on them; your sinful decisions always affect more people than just yourself. Be punctual; it never hurt anyone to be early.

Be a steward of money/possessions & give

Happiness is not born in riches. Those who have less pray for us as we have greater temptations in our affluence. We have abundance! We could stand to exercise self-control, living with fewer things, giving more, and not winking at our covetous hearts. After all, possessions we think are important will only burn up with fervent heat in the end. Let it not have power over us or divide our relationships.

Comparison

You will always find someone better than you. This is true for each of us. Avoid such an exercise because Satan is nearest you filling your mind with negative thoughts that you tend to believe. As the son or daughter of God, he, as your Father, does not want his child believing such lies. Be patient in your weaknesses and be thankful for your body, ability, health, strength, and the mind God gave to you. Be you while knowing whose you are.

Dating

Samuel learned from God when looking to anoint a future king of Israel from the sons of Jesse: look not on the stature of a man but look at the heart. Be attracted to one who does not love you first but loves you second to God. You know a person by their fruits, how they spend their time, their habits, what they involve themselves in, how they respond emotionally to situations and more. Refrain yourself in your physical involvement; physicality will impair your judgment of the person. Returning to certain boundaries becomes difficult. If someone truly loves you, they will honor you and respect your body and seek God's help with you. Start a devotional life; praying with each other, studying a reformed book together, or reading God's word together. This will strengthen you to resist temptations with each other, enable you to grow closer to God and each other and it will lay the most important foundation for your marriage. Date to marry or don't date until you're ready. Marriage has its challenges and hardships when you're married in the Lord, so date antithetically! Marriage is not a mission field, and it is not meant to make you happy but holy. Marry in the Lord. God's love letter to you prescribes what to look for in a spouse and how to behave together if you want a fulfilling relationship.

Be humble

This can be harder for some more than others. For those of you who tend to struggle with pride, understand that you do not know it all, God does not need you, and you are replaceable. This is a harsh reality. Be confident in the abilities God gave you and allow others to speak well of you.

Allow no one to extinguish a good and upright passion or allow others to get you down. There are those among us, even in our own church family at times, who may be jealous or even envious of anything you may possess because God gave it to you. They may cut you down and make you feel small at times. These words may even cause you to second-guess your abilities, your person, and your goals. Try to listen for any truth in what they are saying and if possible, give them the benefit of the doubt and evaluate whether it is something you should improve. Then run your thoughts past a trusted, wise advisor, who seeks your best benefit for guidance and encouragement.

Listen to your parents

Besides God and a spouse, you will be hard-pressed to find anyone who loves you more than

your parents. Take their words to heart. They've been your age before and likely have regrets and see now what they should've done. They concern themselves most about your soul and rejoice when you walk with God. Heed their warnings. Allow them to prevent your hurt and shame, and honor them and their rules. Ultimately, their love desires

that you join them in denying self, dying to self, and following Christ, so that you may give God glory and enjoy him forever together.

Gracia is a wife and mother and attends Grandville Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.

Sid Miedema

Dear younger me,

After nearly 40 years of life experience since I was a teenager, I would like to give you some advice you will greatly appreciate in the years ahead. Please take this advice and encouragement from me realizing that I really do know what will be important to you in the future, and how much your decisions and actions now will impact your life.

I want to emphasize to you the importance of living for the Lord right now. I know how hard it is to be "different" from friends and acquaintances, but to live for the Lord now is so much more fulfilling and will have a significant impact on your life. So be willing to be different for the Lord's sake. When you do this, it will surprise you that some friends who now seem to enjoy and encourage living for the world will appreciate your stand for the Lord and even join you in it. It may not seem like that now, but you will find that to be true. Many of your friends are like yourself, and just need someone to be a godly leader and make the change.

What types of things am I talking about when I encourage you to be different? Turn off worldly music. I know how hard it is to turn it off, but I also can tell you from my own experience that if you turn it off and instead listen to God-glorifying music, you will be amazed at the impact this will have in your life. Instead of being influenced every day to live for the pleasures of this world, you will be influenced to live for the Lord. Music can control emotions and shape thoughts. God made it this way, so we should use it in the proper way. By simply committing yourself to listening to only godly music, you will find that first your thinking will change, and then your life will change. And what a positive experience this change was for me! I was brought much closer to the Lord. It helped me make much better decisions. I was more able and willing to be a witness. I challenge you to try it for a month. I assure you that you will be amazed at the change.

Another important way to be different: Spend adequate time reading God's word and in prayer. I know you hear this all the time, and that you know you should do this more. What you don't know is the significance this will have on your life. When I finally started to do this regularly, God gave me much greater spiritual growth and enabled me to have godly discernment. What a blessing this was, not only when I made the change, but also as I grew older. Make this change now. God will use this to guide you to make good decisions. Bad decisions, made often without the influence of God's word and without prayer, have consequences, and I can tell you that these consequences go with you throughout your whole life. Yes, decisions made now and their consequences will go with you through your whole life. Consequences like being reminded of my sinful actions every time I see certain people. Now that I am older, when I see these people, I am embarrassed because of my sinful actions they know about. How can I talk to them about the Lord or about the importance of living for the Lord? This is a sad experience that repeats itself throughout my life.

Finally, look for that person who is lonely or made fun of or just rejected by others. Be kind to them. Be a friend to them. This is used by the Lord as a great encouragement for those who need it so much. You will be blessed by being kind also. I never realized how the seemingly insignificant things I said or did would impact a classmate so that many years later they would still remember and go out of their way to thank me for this.

There is much more I could talk to you about, so many things I would warn you about, or encourage you to do. But you know in your heart the right way so let me leave you with this; as I said in the beginning of this letter, *live for the Lord now*. This will give you true joy. Trying to be popular by "going along with the crowd" will bring disappointment and even grief.

Live for the Lord now. This will bring you true happiness and peace.

Live for the Lord now. So you don't have to deal with feelings of shame later.

Live for the Lord now. I have observed that the witness of a godly young person is a most powerful witness. It is so unique, so radically different that the people of the world take notice. God uses this witness powerfully for his glory. You will have the rest of your life, and all of eternity too, to thank the Lord for this blessing of being a godly witness.

Mindy Bergman

Hi, Mindy. This may creep you out, but this letter is from you. I mean me. You, only older...or is it me, only younger? What I really mean is that you're going to be a high school senior this year, but eventually you will grow up to be me, the 41-year-old version of Mindy. Don't give me that look. Forty-one is not that old, and besides, I'm way smarter than you are. You couldn't pay me to go back to being you, with that hair and those jeans. Sorry. I'm getting ahead of myself (or it is getting behind myself?). If I know you (and I do), you probably won't listen to me anyway, but I want to tell you a few things that you need to know.

The Cubs really will win the World Series eventually. Don't tell Jeremy D, or he will gloat for the next 20-some years; don't tell the rest of the guys, either, or you'll ruin all their fun in ribbing Jeremy for being a Cubs fan.

There are a few things you're doing well, so let's start with those. Remember that awkward year last year when you totally switched friend groups? Brilliant. Yes, you stood at the entrance to the cafeteria for too long a few times, looking for someone to sit with, but it was the right thing to do. The previous group was doing things they shouldn't have on the weekends, and you didn't need that kind of trouble. I'm glad you were still friendly to them in the halls and in classes, because many of them grew up to be perfectly nice people, but it's good that there was distance there. Too much temptation, too much risk, and who knows where I'd be today if you'd have stuck with the original group? I'm also grateful that you ended up in a social group made up mostly of guys. So much less drama than an all-girls group! Spoiler alert: the friends you made during junior year—including the guys—are the ones that I am

How happy this will make you, both now and in the future. I can't come up with adequate words to describe the blessings of being a godly person in your youth, but by God's grace, you can experience it!

Don't wait. Pray about this now and ask God to give you the grace and strength to be different now—to be a godly young person living for the Lord. How thankful you will be!

Sid is an elder at Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.

still in contact with, the ones who send Christmas cards even though I live far away. Those guys are also why I know what a 6-4-3 double play is, appreciate a good diving catch, and know how to keep a baseball scorebook. Thank them, because right around 2001, I was grateful to have some baseball knowledge.

Something else you're doing reasonably well at is avoiding [most] illegal activity. Note, though, that if you drive the car for underage friends who have alcohol, that's not being a friend who's just trying to keep them safe, and I'm sure it was illegal. I know, I know, you told them that and didn't do it again, but that was world-class stupid stuff. It never occurred to you to smoke or do drugs, and that's good. You had no real interest in drinking either, but it's good you switched to a safer group of friends, or you would have drifted into it eventually.

You need some work on avoiding foolish behavior. What on earth were you thinking, dating that guy...and that other guy? Seriously. Such a bad idea. You were way too young and immature to be dating anyone at all, much less guys who had no interest in your church. Yeah, I know you're making better choices now...but I still wish you weren't in such a hurry to date. You should focus more attention on your friends (male and female) and spend a whole lot less time thinking about dating. Dating is for getting to know a person with the intention of learning if this is a person you can marry. You are not ready to be thinking about marriage. Some of your friends are ready for dating and have healthy relationships (spoiler: some of them will marry the person they're dating now!), but you are not ready. Wait until you are ready, and then you'll date—never mind. No more spoilers for you!

Look closely at your mom and your sisters. They will be some of the best friends I have. Be nice to them and stop borrowing their clothes without permission. Even those pesky little brothers will be dear to you some day, so don't be so annoyed.

Here's the thing. Just because you don't smoke or drink or do drugs doesn't automatically mean you are a great kid. You're listening to music that you will not even realize that you're singing along with in the grocery store when you're 40, and you'll be embarrassed to realize that you still know all the words...and that the words are NAUGHTY! (Mom told you that the words were bad, remember?). You're not forming good study habits, something you'll regret in college. You're watching things on the TV and in movies that you have no business putting before your eyes. Please pay better attention in catechism. That's actual, useful information about your real life, not just stuff to quickly memorize to get our parents off your back. You're not doing personal devotions regularly...hardly at all, honestly. You need to do that! The habits you are forming right now are surprisingly long-lasting. It would be a whole lot easier for me to be faithful with my devotions at age 41 if you build better habits at age 17.

Good, godly character is not defined only by what you don't do on the weekends. You can work Friday nights and Saturday mornings, hang out later with friends who cheat at Rook (you know the ones!) and watch ESPN for hours, and none of that has sharpened your character at all. Sure, those friends were Christians, and (another spoiler) they're still good Christians today, but what did you do together to make yourselves stronger young Christians? What did you discuss? Did you serve anyone but yourselves? Don't get all self-righteous and figure that because you didn't do this or that on the weekend, you're any better than those who did. Of course they shouldn't! But what did you do to grow closer to your Savior?

I leave you now with this request from your future self: Save those jeans you're wearing, and a few shirts, please. Oh, and that banana clip from 8th grade, if you can find it. Maybe even that eyeshadow. Trust me—you'll want that stuff later, for future homecoming weeks.

Mindy is a member of Providence Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

Gene Braaksma

Dear Younger Self,

As you grow older and face the many trials and temptations of this world, remember this little poem I've written for you, and always put God first in your life.

The Promise

The clock ticks down, the time is near
When our risen Savior shall appear
Beware, sweet daughter, watch out, young son
The world cries out, live just for fun
God's word tells the story plain and clear
The Son of God will soon be here
The devil's plan is oh so sly
Don't let the action pass you by.

God's promise made so long ago
To his children it must go
Seek not the world and all its woe
Flee from sin, set yourself apart
Seek the Lord with all your heart
And from you he will not depart.

When the devil comes with his sly plan
Remember you can't serve God and man
For one you'll love and one you'll hate
There's no time to negotiate
Black is black and white is white
You know what's wrong and what is right.

Seek first the kingdom that's above
Flee from the world and its false love
The day of judgment is so near
The signs are getting oh so clear
Watch and be ready, don't be deceived
As in a cloud he was received
He will soon on the clouds appear
The day of Christ will soon be here.

Gene is a member of Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

Dear younger self,

I remember you; I remember you very well. I know that you are fearful of not knowing what the future may bring. You are fearful of not being able to control your future, you are fearful of not knowing what the next step in life should be, and you are fearful that you aren't capable enough to accomplish what you want. I know you look at others and think they must have a secret way of knowing the future, running to it, and having confidence in their ability to make their future great. You look at them jealously and wonder why you must work so hard to appear to know what you are doing. I know you feel out of place, thinking others will find out the truth of your inadequacy and dislike you for it.

But, young girl, don't YOU know...

God is in control! I know you hear it on Sunday and in school. But really hear it! God knows the future and every step of your future is lovingly planned by him. What's even more amazing is not only is it planned, it is for a purpose, and that purpose is for your good! "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end" (Jer. 29:11).

Though you know God is in control, you still stress about work, school, family, and relationships. You are even tempted to worry about decisions you've already made in these aspects of life:

What if I choose the wrong school? The wrong classes? The wrong career? What if I'm not smart enough for the career I wish to pursue? What if I don't get the right grades? What if I don't get the job I think I need? What if I do something wrong that might keep me from dating or getting married? What if I don't have the right personality? What if I look the wrong way?

Guess what young girl, you are not so powerful that you can or will overcome God's will for your life. God is sovereign; you cannot accidentally be the wrong person for what he has called you to do or accomplish; it is not possible: "But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? And what his soul desireth, even that he doeth" (Job 23:13). Rest in this, young self! "Blessed be the Lord, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised;

there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant...that God maintain the cause of his servant, and the cause of his people Israel at all times, as the matter shall require" (1 Kings 8:56, 59).

Knowing that God is in control, refuse to believe your self-doubts. Refuse to believe that the life God gave you is anything less than good! You are not defined by your grades, your school, your career, or relationship status; you are defined as a child of God! Comparison to the life God gave to another only robs you of the peace and happiness of knowing that God's plan is lovingly and uniquely created for you.

So, boldly pray to seek his purpose in your life knowing it is good, knowing it is enough. God created you for your unique purpose—you are valuable! Man's measure of what is valuable has no hold on us when we know that we are chosen by him! You don't need to be pressured to accomplish the goals of man if you follow God's will. "Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord and not to men" (Eph. 6:6, 7). You worry about giving up your goals but do not yet understand that in following God's will, your future will be more than you even dare to imagine.

The story of Esther is a favorite of mine. She would not have known what God would call her to do and the massive impact this would have on the whole nation. Read all of Esther keeping this verse in mind: "And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14b). With this story in mind, witness to others, show love to others, and befriend others because you never know what God has called you to accomplish in their lives.

Confidence in God's will for your life and your value in God's kingdom will cause you to live in confidence, without comparing yourself to others. Without the fear of not quite making the grade, you are free to follow Christ boldly and lovingly to serve others. Understand, young girl (knowing what you know now about your insecurities), that everyone else has these same worries. So let others see your heart, encourage others, take courage, and be kind.

Young girl, girl who frustrates me, makes me laugh, brings me to tears, girl whom I now love as

a child of the King: God is working in you, working out your salvation. You are learning your value in him. Now trust him to bring about your unique purpose, and walk humbly with him.

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

CHRISTIAN LIVING Jon Van Overloop

DAMAGE OF DIGITAL DISTRACTION

The smartphone is an amazing device. Its sleek, glassy screen enables us to connect with friends, watch TV, search the web, process email, take photographs, read books, play games, and even do our devotions. What's not to love about that?

The answer may surprise you. It's a lot, actually. There is evidence that our digital devices are changing our brains so that we have smaller attention spans, reduced comprehension, and are more forgetful.

In the past, people used to think that our brain was hard-wired, rigid, and relatively unchanging; like the hardware of your computer. But scientists today are astounded by the number of changes that are constantly occurring. Rather than being hard-wired, our brain is plastic. It is moldable, changeable. For example, every memory that you have is a result of brain cells connecting. Memory is stored in connected neurons. Reading this article will give you new memories. Neurons that never had before connected will now be touching, and that union will constitute a memory.

Some brain neurons are dedicated to forming a mental map of locations. The excessive use of GPS navigation in the last decade has caused a lack of connections in this area. The number of people that have lost the ability to know their geographic location is astounding. People no longer look at maps for planning routes. They don't have a clear sense of direction. Reliance on GPS devices has caused this generation not to form a mental map of their world. Following the little blue line on the screen has resulted in a loss of spatial awareness. Although they've visited many cities, they are clueless about the location of one city compared to the next; nor do they know the major US highways like generations past. But mapping has little spiritual impact.

The lure of social media, online gaming, YouTube videos, and frivolous content is impairing the

digital addict from valuable reading skill. This more important loss affects our knowledge of Jehovah as revealed in his word. The Biblical authors were fishermen, but they were also poetic, philosophical, trained in law, doctors, and lawyers. The Holy Spirit guided them to produce passages of scripture in the form of song, poem, metaphor, linear argument, and half-interpreted stories. If one's brain is unpracticed at processing a novel, a nonfiction linear argument, or a good poem, then he is at a disadvantage. Digital media is dominated by the frivolous, easy to understand, short and sweet, terse, emotionally charged snippets of content. Digital media is shallow. But the word of God is clear but so, so deep.

Digital technology is also changing the way that our brains take in and process information. That's of concern as well. I fear that the lure of the screen and the distraction of its notifications is shortening devotional time and leaving souls less sanctified. Your brain remembers not only facts but also stores processes. Learning to run efficiently with the right posture and stride is a procedure that can become an automatic habit over time as the mechanism is encoded in the brain. Learning to type and drive a stick-shift car are additional examples of procedural memory.

The procedure of reading on a digital device is stored in the brain in a different way than paper reading is. Reading on a digital device is not like reading a book. When reading on a digital device, your mind is constantly stimulated. There is the blue glow of the screen which shows us pictures, incoming notifications, hyperlinks to explore, menu buttons, and pop-up ads that all together keep our brains in a heightened state of alert. Also with the tap on the screen, you can check Facebook, Instagram, and your favorite blogs. Microsoft Windows just added a "People" button in their taskbar so that now you can "pin contacts to your taskbar and talk to them

whenever.” As if I need yet another way to interact with people! I can no longer type a paper without seeing the “people button” and thinking about contacting someone. Stop the madness! By design and for profit, your digital devices are made to distract you. They are designed to capture your attention. The result is that the procedural memory of sustained, focused, deep, and linear thought remains underdeveloped. Although many words are read on a screen, the process of digital reading has taught our brains to crave a high level of stimulation. We are unknowingly making ourselves dissatisfied with paper books that inherently have a lower level of interactivity. Our brains become dissatisfied with the medium of paper and the longer deeper content that it contains. We zone out before we have grasped the scope of the whole argument. The result is that we don’t think deeply. We’ve become shallow. We ought to dampen down our overactive brain circuits with proper media so that we focus. Reading without distraction forms the preferred reading procedural memory and results in deeper understanding.

In contrast to the buzz and glow of a screen, the thirsty soul of the meditative man of God thrives on a less distracting experience. In that lower key environment, the Holy Spirit applies the word so that it becomes the very air that he breathes. King David was a busy man and knew the value of a quiet environment. He woke up early while all was calm and during those early morning hours the king after God’s own heart meditated. Psalm 119:147–148: “I prevented [got up before] the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word. Mine eyes prevent [opened up before] the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word.” Psalm 63:1: “O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.” A wise man places himself in a more subdued zone of stimulation that is profitable for his soul. And the Spirit, as the breath of the holy God, himself, nourishes that soul.

Our use of digital devices may also change how we experience and remember life. We are becoming more forgetful. Vivid and long-lasting memory of life’s experiences is formed when our senses are fully tuned into the experience. You’ve experienced these vivid memories. Your first time being completely out of control on a snowboard is burned into your mind. Now, imagine a long hike up to the top of a mountain. The hike is exhausting, you are sweating, and your leg muscles are burning. Upon reaching the summit, your focus goes to your smartphone. You

think, “This is a prop for my online content. I’m going to stand on my head and get a picture taken. That will be great for my profile.” A few selfies and maybe a panorama later you head down excited to see the likes. But will you remember that experience vividly? In reality, you just converted a beautiful, rich, God-sculpted scene that he made for his glory into an instagrammable prop that you intend to use to glorify yourself. If that’s how you experience the summit of a mountain, then I would argue that you just exported an amazing multi-sensory memory out of your brain where it should have been stored and enjoyed for years to come and put it instead into your phone. You took an amazing experience that could have benefited you into old age and flattened it out into a two-dimensional image whose vividness will be greatly reduced in a year. A properly focused mind would have captured (truly captured!) the songs of the birds, the cool breeze, the fresh alpine scent, the stream at the base of the glacier, the colors of the birds hopping from rock to rock, the butterflies fluttering around that berry bush, and the layered mountain ranges with intermittent meadows and snowy peaks. Young people, don’t waste the experiences that God gives you by focusing on yourself! Your digital device is degrading your memory. The wise man who summits the mount will “stand still and consider the wondrous works of God” (Job 37:14).

If you think it a travesty to, by digital distraction, obscure the glory of God on a mountain top, then what about obscuring his glory in the Scriptures! Do your love of self and the world keep you from seeing his glory in the Scripture? Read, young people. Kingdom treasure is in the Scriptures. “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field” (Matt. 13:44).

Wise young people, buy the field! Expend your energy embracing the treasure. Forsake idle pursuits. Forsake idol pursuits, too.

Jon teaches at Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan and is a member of Zion Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan with his family.

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:
David Samuel, son of Mr. & Mrs. Josh & Sara
Lubbers—Byron Center, MI

Asher, son of Mr. & Mrs. David & Madri Mahtani—
First, MI

KayLeese Rae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Tyler &
Lexi Wassink—Georgetown, MI

Liam Curtis, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jason & Tarah
Bertsch—Grace, MI

Carter Thomas, Chloe Grace & Collin Robert, chil-
dren of Mrs. Rebecca Barton—Grace, MI

Nathan Lee, son of Mrs. Katharina Rosario—Hope,
MI

Naomi Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. B.J. & Sarah
Mowery—Loveland, CO

Ayla Breelyn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Derek &
Jennifer Van Uffelen—Loveland, CO

Caleb Jasper, son of Mr. & Mrs. Bruce & Rachael
Koole—Loveland, CO

Harvey Phillip, son of Mr. & Mrs. Glen & Lissa
Regnerus—Randolph, WI

Jade Renae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Kent & Sandee
Hoksbergen—Randolph, WI

Mikayla Ruth, daughter of Rev. & Mrs. Eric &
Cherith Guichelaar—Randolph, WI

Beau Jakeb, son of Mr. & Mrs. Ross & Jill Van
Baren—Randolph, WI

Levi James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Tunis & Kayla Van
Baren—Randolph, WI

Hannah Rose, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Owen &
Rosie Wiersma—Trinity, MI

Porter Douglas, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brad & Beth
Van Singel—Trinity, 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:

Dolan Boonstra—Loveland, CO

Dustin Heys—Loveland, CO

Molly Moore—Loveland, CO

Kaitlyn Schritchfield—Loveland, CO

Nicole Buitter—Randolph, WI

Colleen Potjer—Southwest, MI

Lilyia Vaalburg—Southwest, MI

MARRIAGES

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

Rev. Martin McGeown and Miss Larisa De Jong—
Georgetown, MI

Mr. Tom Kuiper and Miss Alyssa Haak—
Georgetown, MI

Mr. & Mrs. Jake & Danica De Vries—Randolph,
WI



SYNOD OF DORDT PART 5: THE PERSECUTION INCREASES

Philip II of Spain decided to crush the rebellion in the Netherlands. He sent the Duke of Alba, a man known for his hatred of the Protestant Reformation, to the Netherlands. The Duke of Alba formed the Council of Troubles, also called the Council of Blood, to persecute the Calvinist Dutch. This council oversaw large arrests, trials, and executions, sometimes up to 40 to 50 people at a time.

William the Silent was declared an outlaw. He organized several armies and fought against the Spanish armies, although he lost nearly every battle.

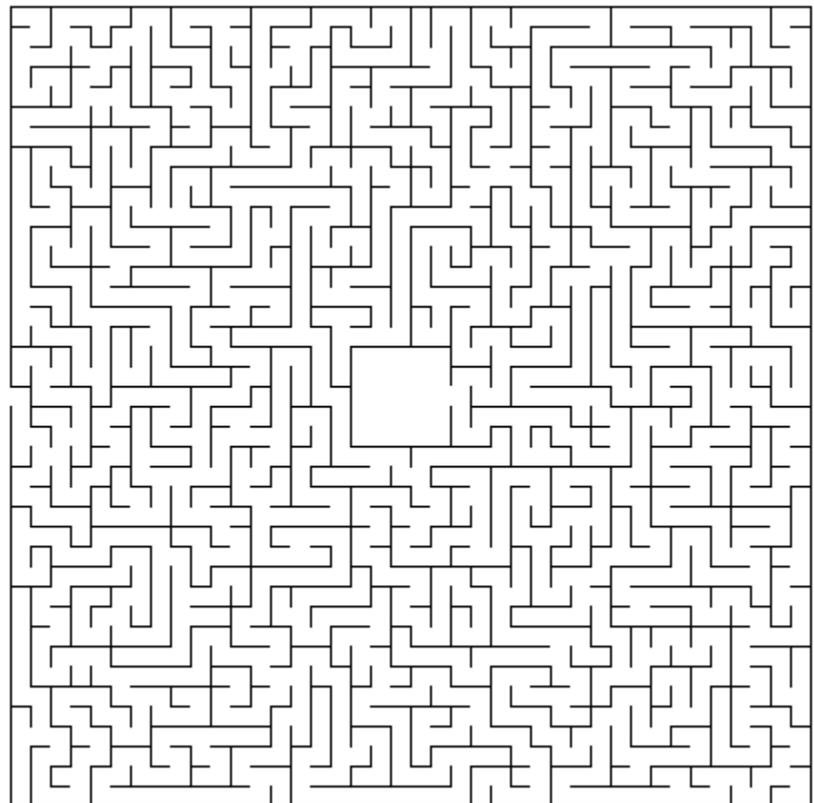
Other segments of the Dutch population formed their own armies. The revolution turned into a messy war. Both armies would sometimes force people in their conquered area to convert to either Catholicism or Calvinism.

Even though the war waged back and forth across the land, for the most part, the Spanish under the Duke of Alba controlled the southern provinces, what today is Belgium and Luxemburg. William the Silent and his Calvinist army controlled the northern provinces of what is today the country of the Netherlands.

In 1584, William the Silent was assassinated by a Spanish sympathizer. When he died, his armies were on the verge of defeat. It looked like the Netherlands' attempt at revolution would be defeated and the Reformation crushed in the Netherlands.



William the Silent, Prince of Orange



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



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