

BEACON LIGHTS

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BEHOLD THE MUSK OX

You belong to an organization that is much-maligned, despised, and ridiculed. The world takes one look at it and laughs. You are mocked for being a part of it. “You belong to what and it demands what of you?” The persistent and persuasive call to leave is a siren song that many before you have blindly followed. You are tempted to believe the arguments because of what this organization requires from you. It interferes with your plans and disrupts your relationships. Boys that you want to date are off-limits because this group demands your allegiance. Your parents insist membership in it is one of the most important things in the world, but you don’t see it. “Seems a bit old-fashioned and antiquated to me,” you say. There are other groups you could join that would demand far less. And you’re sick of it. So, you request your papers, avoid the calls and visits of the elders, and leave the church. You suppose yourself to be free.

Your parents weep, but the devil laughs with delight. Now, you are vulnerable.

In 2015 BBC Earth released a series of eight videos called *The Hunt*. Narrated by the inimitable David Attenborough, it follows hunter and prey across six continents and is a stunning visual display of Alfred Lord Tennyson’s declaration of nature as “red in tooth and claw.”

On the frozen tundra of the Arctic, a life and death struggle is being played out. A pack of wolves is on the hunt. The musk ox is one of the most formidable opponents a predator can face. If there were easier prey, the arctic wolf would take it. But after a long, hard winter, they are willing to take on even the largest animal in their territory.

The scene is riveting as the pack of wolves charge toward the musk oxen. “First, they run directly at the herd. The aim is to panic them. A stampeding herd might leave a calf behind. The tactic begins to work. But then the herd regains control. They stand defiantly in a protective ring around the calves. There is no way in.” The wolves call off the hunt.

You breathe a sigh of relief; the musk oxen are safe.

But not all of them.

The next scene opens with a lone bull standing at the bottom of a ravine. The wolves spot him and start loping in his direction. The fact that “a single bull weighs more than the entire wolf pack put together” and “has a reinforced skull, armed with horns” does not deter them. He is alone. They surround the bull and begin to bite at his long, dense coat. “The bull is easily their match physically, but the wolves take it in turns, to wear him down.” Spinning in circles the bull fights for his very life, but he is trapped and has nowhere to go. Although it will take them hours to get him down, the wolves are relentless, and as the camera zooms out, there is no doubt as to the eventual fate of the bull musk ox. Formidable, feared, and fearsome, even this mighty beast is no match for the pack, who are intent on his blood.

As I watched this scene unfold, I could not help but think of a parallel to life in the church. The pack of wolves, representing the devil and his host, charge the musk oxen, representing the church. The church, startled at first by this fearsome attack, and perhaps lulled by years of peace, are caught unawares. They are spooked and begin to run. “The aim is to panic them; a stampeding herd might leave a calf behind.” But the church, led by a few, regains control and turns to face the attacks of the devil, the false church, and her prophets. “They stand defiantly in a protective ring around the calves. There is no way in.” The calves—the young men and young women—are preserved.

There is safety in the church for you, young person. The church is that protective ring that defends you against the onslaughts of the devil. Those attacks are real. The devil is real, and he hates you. He knows you by name, and he knows what your strengths and your weaknesses are. He knows the situations that leave you vulnerable, and he wants to keep you in those moments. He also knows his best chance to

get you is when you are alone, and away from the church.

The church is the place of safety. There are spiritual thieves who come to “steal, and to kill, and to destroy” (John 10:10). The walls of the church keep the predators out, and the watchmen on those walls diligently warn you about the dangers without and the temptations within. Those walls take the shape of the doctrines that are faithfully taught, the reformed confessions that guard against false teachers, and the elders who watch for your safety. “I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night” (Is. 62:6). You hear it every Sunday, at every catechism class, in the lectures you attend, in the books your parents insist you read, and from the elders when they visit your family every year. The magazine you are reading right now is a testament to the concern of your church for your safety.

But does it matter which church you join? The Belgic Confession Article 29 lays out the marks that distinguish the true church and the false church. Those include the “pure doctrine of the gospel” that is preached, the “pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ,” and the Christian discipline that is administered.

But you say you are just going to that other church that, ok, sure, they teach some different things than we do, but they love God just the same! Young person, “try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). Don’t you see the danger? Are you moving closer to Jesus Christ whom you love, or farther away? You have your reasons for leaving, but what are they? Does doctrine enter in at all? It should be primary. Rev. Huizinga writes: “Why take heed to doctrine? Because doctrine is what we say about God, and what we say about God is more important than anything else.”¹ “Close enough” are words never uttered by one who loves Jesus Christ with all of his heart, soul, mind, and strength. Re-read the last paragraph. You will see the word pure repeated twice. We will never have perfection, but we must strive for purity. You want more freedoms on Sunday. God wants, and will have, the truth taught about his name: “For mine own sake, even for mine own sake will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? And I will not give my glory unto another” (Isa. 48:11).

1 Rev. Brian Huizinga, “Why?” *The Standard Bearer*, February 1, 2018, pg. 207

The temptations to leave are strong. That girl who says she loves you will never join your church, and you have to pick, her or your church. “They are so bigoted and hateful and close-minded, I will never join!” You imagine you can choose the girl and be fine without the church. But at what price? Are you willing to risk fellowship with your God for her? “The spiritual fellowship that a believer enjoys with his Redeemer, is not a solitary or a selfish joy, but one which he cannot possess alone” (James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, 20). But you imagine yourself strong, and where others might fall, you can stand! Physically and mentally you *are* a match for anyone. Outside the walls and defenses of the church, however, you are alone, and “a solitary Christian is worse than a contradiction, he is an anomaly, standing out against the express institution of God” (Ibid., 22). Your strength means nothing when you are alone. The devil and his slaving hosts have been patiently watching. Who do you think put that attractive girl in your path in the first place? When you leave, when you make that decision casting caution and the warnings of your parents, elders, and friends to the wind, the “grievous wolves” (Acts 20:29) will move in.

The church is the means that God uses to unfold all of the doctrines that teach us about who God is, as Herman Bavinck teaches in his *Prolegomena*; “Scripture is a gold mine; it is the church that extracts the gold, puts its stamp on it, and converts it into general currency.” This is the truth found in 1 Timothy 3:15 where it speaks of the “church of the living God” as the “pillar and ground of the truth.” You stay because you love truth, and you love the One who is truth, Jesus Christ. So closely does Jesus identify with the church that when Saul was confronted on the road to Damascus, Jesus said to him, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou *me*?” (Acts 9:4). Jesus is the head, and the church, his faithful church, is the body (Col. 1:18, Eph. 1:22–23).

Give thanks for the church, be active in her, give yourself for her, as Jesus did. “Prefer [it] above [your] chief joy” (Ps. 137:6). It is not just someplace you *have* to go on Sunday. It is a place, a tremendous, glorious, magnificent place, that we are *privileged* to go to hear about God and his Son. A place where we not only hear about Christ, but hear the voice of Christ. When you have poured out your life for her know that you have done nothing more than your Christ, who loved the church so much that he went to the cross and “purchased [it] with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

Psalter #163 sums up beautifully the truth found

in Psalm 63, “My Savior, ‘neath Thy sheltering wings, My soul delights to dwell; Still closer to Thy side I press, For near Thee all is well, My soul shall conquer every foe, upholden by thy hand; Thy people shall rejoice in God, Thy saints in glory stand”. The church is the God-ordained place where you press as close as possible to your Savior.

The call to leave is strong. The devil’s lie is the same today as it was 6,000 years ago, “Yea, hath

God said?” Your flesh (described as “wicked, perverse, and corrupt” by the Belgic Confession Article 14), the greatest enemy you face, beguiles you with the thought of a life with no boundaries, no rules, no rebukes. It’s a lie. Safety and true joy lie within the embrace of the church.

Never leave her.

Your life depends on it.

Our Goodly Heritage Mark H. Hoeksema

INTERVIEW WITH VIVIAN HUNTER (2)

Vivian Hunter: Next I got discharged. No, I never did get a discharge. I was separated from the service. They could call me back at any time. I went home to my family because I’d been gone for all that length of time overseas. I’d made up my mind that I was not going back to Oregon on a train. I was going to fly back. Well, you didn’t just call up and make a reservation in 1946. You had to wait until there was an opportunity. I didn’t get to go back until March. So we were separated for almost three months right after we were married. Then I did go to Astoria, Oregon, and set up housekeeping with my husband. We lived in military housing, which was much more basic than what I have now.

Mark H. Hoeksema: And he was still in the service at this time?

VH: Oh, yes, he was in the service for twenty years—active duty. He only had ten of it in when we got married.

MHH: Was it his intention originally to stay in that long?

VH: Well, he never had a real good relationship with his mother. She told me one time that she really never enjoyed him until he was old enough to help on the farm. She was very dictatorial. That was the main reason why he went to Washington, DC, to try out for the Navy band. He didn’t make the band. So then the recruiter got hot on his tail and said, “You want to be in the Navy? We can put you in the regular Navy.” He was not quite nineteen, so they had to call his parents to get permission. He didn’t know at that time whether it was going to be a career or not. So after his first four-year enlistment,

he was discharged from the Navy. Every time you re-enlist, you’re discharged first. And he had thirty days’ leave. So he took his leave and went home, and he decided he wanted to go back in the Navy after one month at home. From then on, it was to be his career. I knew when I married him that he was going to stay. He told me that; it was one of the first things he said, “I don’t plan to leave the Navy just because the war’s over.”

MHH: So now you’re both together in Oregon. What happened next?

VH: Next, his officer’s rank was temporary because it was a wartime appointment. So in September of the same year we got married (in 1946), he reverted back to enlisted chief. He knew that was going to happen. We were prepared for it, but it was kind of a disappointment.

MHH: A step backwards.

VH: Two steps backwards, because he had both warrant and chief warrant. He enjoyed the chief’s rank too. After ten years in the fleet reserve, after he retired after twenty years (and they never did call him back the ten years he was in the fleet reserve), he reverted again to a chief warrant and received that retirement pay for the rest of his life. So there were advantages in his having been a wartime officer. He did get that permanently after thirty years.

MHH: Did you stay in Oregon for a long time?

VH: No, no. We only stayed there from January to September, and then he took some more leave. His first assignment after we left, was to the USS Antietam. He had never been in the Navy Air arm before. They

really didn't love the Navy there, either. He went there in October of '46 and then the next March, (I was pregnant) they went overseas to China. I don't know where else they went in that time. I, who only had had a drivers' license for a few months, had not had my baby yet before he went overseas. So he was gone when she was born. He came back in October of '47 and then we were in Richman, California for awhile. And then we were in Alameda which was where the flat-top was stationed. We were there until Vivian [VH's daughter] was about a year old. Then they went to sea again, so then I drove back from the San Francisco area to Philadelphia with my year-old child all by myself, and I stayed there the nine months that he was overseas.

MHH: With family?

VH: With my family, yes. I stayed with one of my sisters and worked the 3 to 11 shift at the hospital. She had three children, one the same age as mine, so I had a built-in babysitter and a family atmosphere for her and for myself. Yet I wasn't in the way all the time, but I could help out when I could. So then after that we went to Corpus Christi, Texas. He was the fire chief of air station down there—Cabot Field. We were there almost four years, and then we went to Guam the first time.

And that's where we met up with the Reformed faith for the first time. We had been going to a chapel. We were satisfied with it—a nice chaplain was stationed there. One Sunday morning we went to chapel and there was a whole different atmosphere. There were at least twice as many people as normally came to chapel, and it was an atmosphere of expectation. When this chaplain came in, there was just something about him that you knew why all these people were here. That was Chaplain Len Wade. He was a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

There were people in that audience who had been under his command, been where he had been before, some aboard ship, some on other stations, different places in the world. But they were all in Guam at that time, and he was stationed on Guam. He was so enthusiastic. He not only did all of his Navy requirements, but he also had missionary efforts going on in other places. There was a camp that used to be a Philippine Camp and there was a chapel there. He utilized that, and he ministered to the Philippinos and the Guamanians. This was not required, but on Saturday mornings he would take his vehicle and go around the islands where the Navy people were, pick up children, a whole batch of them, and he had the Children's Bible Hour in

the Navy chapel. He gave these children what he called the Bible alphabets to learn—they were to learn a verse for every letter of the alphabet because that was a good way for them to remember. As they went along, they learned a certain number of verses, I think about 8, and they would get a small prize. When they finished, they would get Vos' *Children's Bible Storybook*. Then they would start on another alphabet. Every Saturday morning, he would come to hear my daughter say her verses. When he first came, his preaching antagonized us. We could see that we were nowhere beginning to measure up to what he says the Bible says we should measure up to in many ways—in Sabbath observance and just the whole thing.

MHH: But this was all news to you?

VH: Yes. I never heard the words “the sovereignty of God” before I heard that man preach.

MHH: Really?

VH: The Evangelical Church was completely Arminian, and it was your choice to become a Christian or not become a Christian or to know Christ in any way. I used to weep into my dishpan on Monday mornings. Finally, I just prayed, “Lord, show me the way. Either we go somewhere else” (because there were many other chapels on the island—we didn't have to go to that one) or, “Let me understand what you're trying to tell me.” And one day my husband came home and said, “Rev. Wade's going to have a series of Lenten sermons at noon.”

MHH: By the way, he was attending with you, correct?

VH: Yes, yes. From the day we were married he went to church with me every Sunday.

MHH: And he went to this chapel of the Orthodox Presbyterian man?

VH: Yes. I wasn't on Guam when he first went there. We had to wait awhile—Vivian and I—until they had housing. He'd gone to chapel all the time that I was not there. I don't know how much he understood at that time. But he could use his lunch hour to go hear him instead of just eating and resting. So we did that. And somehow everything just fell in place during that week.

MHH: Yet it seems from what you're saying that you were somewhat conflicted about what you should do.

VH: Right. We were. But, like I said, somehow (and I don't know whether it was his subject or whether

the way he presented the Passion Week or what it was), we just felt that we could follow his leading, and we enjoyed it from then on. We changed our lives in many ways from then on. Before we left Guam the bishop of the island of Guam went to see the Admiral and said to him: “Get that man off my island!”

MHH: When you say “bishop,” what do you mean?

VH: Of the Catholic Church.

MHH: Because obviously he did not like...

VH: No, because some of the Catholics were coming to this chapel that he had outside of the Naval chapel—some of the Philipinos and some of the Guamanians. We had a radio program called the Challenge to Faith. I really think that what God presented to us was a challenge to our faith to bring it to where it should be, because it was really understood what was in his work. That was the first time I’d ever heard of TULIP. I knew nothing about the Reformed faith before that. Gone to church all my life, made profession of faith when I was twelve years old, but it was a whole new life, really. So then he was removed from Guam and the Navy went even further. He was within four years of retirement. And they removed him for the good of the service because he believed every word of the Bible to be true and expected all of the men to do the same.

MHH: How did they get rid of him?

VH: They discharged him under those reasons—separated him from the service.

MHH: Really? Within four years of having his twenty years in. Wow!

VH: But he left behind this little group that he was pastoring outside of the Navy. And two men, who had belonged to First [*Protestant Reformed*] Church somehow or other got word of it. There was a sailor who had become converted to Christianity when he was in the brig because he had been drunk and disorderly. The only thing he had to read was the New Testament, and when he read the twenty-first chapter of Revelation he said he was so scared he had to believe. This man, who had not even had a high school education at that time, learned the word well enough that he could expound it—maybe not the way you’re used to it. Anyway, these two guys, who had left our church in ’53, heard of this mission work that was going on.

MHH: Were these men...

VH: They were school teachers.

MHH: In Guam?

VH: Yes, they were on Guam at that time because the man who was superintendent of schools in Guam was Christian Reformed. And he had an advertisement in *The Banner* that he needed to raise the standard of education in Guam to the standards of education in California or the Navy was going to build its own schools because the kids got back in the States and they didn’t meet the standards there and they couldn’t manage to go from grade to grade as they should have. So he was advertising for State-side teachers to come and teach for two years, and they would give them a free trip around the world. So that’s why these two guys were out there.

MHH: And these were two men who had left...

VH: Our churches in ’53 and were members of the Orthodox Protestant Reformed Church.

MHH: And this would have happened approximately in what year? Obviously after 1953.

VH: It was somewhere between ’56 and ’60.

MHH: So now you’re back in the States.

VH: We’re back in the States.

MHH: But you know about these men who went to Guam to help.

VH: Well, we found out about it. We didn’t know at that time. We didn’t know what had happened to the little group we left behind.

MHH: Because you’re in the States now.

VH: We were in the States. Johnny Reynolds was carrying on even before we left. We knew them. He was part of that group of people who were so excited to have Rev. Wade there because, after his conversion, all by himself just reading the New Testament, he was on a ship that Rev. Wade was on. So don’t talk to me about the providence of God (laughter). When my husband retired in 1956 we bought a farm in Bend, Oregon.

Before Rev. Wade left Guam, he had started instructing us to become members of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, even though there was no Orthodox Presbyterian Church on Guam or even a mission. He was almost finished when he had to leave. We had talked about where we were going to go because we knew that retirement was going to be within a year. My husband had a vision that retirement from the Navy meant hunting and fishing and that kind of stuff. He didn’t know he’d still have to support his family (laughter). Anyway, it sounded to him like the best place for us to go was

Bend, Oregon. Preaching there at that time was a protégé of his, Rev. Robert Sander. Through classis and presbytery, they had made arrangements that we could become members of that church while we were still on the island of Guam. Rev. Wade had to leave, so he left the finishing of our instruction with John Reynolds. And when Johnny finished it, he came with the same questions that were asked of anybody that came into the Orthodox Presbyterian churches. We were able to answer those questions to his satisfaction.

MHH: I'm going to read the pertinent part of the bulletin into the record because it is relevant. This is the bulletin of the Westminster Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Newport Avenue and Drake Road, in Bend, Oregon. Robert D. Sander is the pastor. The bulletin is dated July 24, 1955. Appearing in the "announcements" on that bulletin is the following: "Mr. and Mrs. Chester E. Hunter, on the island of Guam, were examined by elder D. Reynolds for membership into our local church at Bend. Mr. Reynolds reports: 'They have met all the qualifications for membership into the visible church of Jesus Christ.' We wish to welcome the Hunters into our fellowship. They have one covenant child, Vivian, 8 years old. They write: 'I cannot tell you how our hearts are thrilled to be one with you. God bless you for receiving us. We are so happy to be no longer orphans without a church home.' The Hunters have left the Presbyterian Church USA to become affiliated with ours. They would like to hear from members of our church. Their address: Chester E. Hunter, *US Naval Magazine*, c/o FPO San Francisco, California. Let us remember them and elder Reynolds in our prayers as they seek to establish a true witness for Christ on Guam."

VH: We went to San Diego before we went to Bend when we left Guam. We were only there about 9 months. Skipper was born there in the Naval hospital (he really is Chester Hunter, Junior). Then it was time for my husband to retire from the Navy. His twenty years were up and he was ready to go. We already had our membership in the Bend church, so that's where we went. We went up there the summer before he retired and looked at property and found a farm that we liked (40 acres), and we bought that. Then we went back to San Diego until October. He retired from the Navy on October 8, having served twenty years and one day (laughter). And then we lived there. The town was beautiful. It was a wonderful town. But as we found, the longer we belonged to the OPC, it was not like our PR

churches where you go from church to church and you hear the same doctrine, the same preaching. It's consistent. You know where they've been trained. Here it depended on who was the minister. They had absorbed people from other denominations, as is common in these days, even as we have done some in the PR churches.

The man that was minister had been CRC, and he was more controlled by the consistory than he was the controlling factor in many ways, and he bowed to their wishes. There was one man on the session who was opposed to infant baptism, and he was an elder in the church.

MHH: Amazing!

VH: So we were really not church-happy there, not like we were under Rev. Wade's preaching. In the meantime, he had been discharged from the Navy, and the work on Guam went on under the leadership of John Reynolds. The two men who had belonged to the PR churches in Grand Rapids, who were school teachers, came out there and affiliated themselves with the group. They said to themselves, "We need a missionary. Who we really need is the man [*Wade*] that started this work, who is now a US citizen, so there's no way that the ship can keep him off the island of Guam unless he's been a criminal or some such thing." So they got in touch with him. He consented to go, and he had the permission of presbytery to go. In the meantime, just before he was ready to go, he became aware of the fact that he had lymphoma. It had settled within his kidneys. He was very blessed in the fact that his association with the Navy was so recent that it was considered "duty-acquired" and the Navy took care of him medically. After he'd been back on Guam for a couple of years, he came back to the United States for cobalt treatment. He received that at the Naval hospital near Portland, and while he was there, he came to see us on our farm. He said, "I need help. I need help that knows me and knows how we operate, what our church stands for." He knew we were not real happy where we were. "Would you be willing to come and help me?" My husband said, "Find me a job and I'll come." I about lost (laughter) my cool. It wasn't too many months later till the phone rang one morning. My husband was out plowing a field. This lady said, "I'm in Oakland, California. I have a few minutes. I want to speak to Mr. Chester Hunter." I said, "Will you give me your number, I'll have him call you back." I have to go get him." She said, "Just go get him. I don't have enough time to wait around." So, I went out and got him to come answer the phone.

And I heard him say to this lady, “When do I have to be there?” This is March. She said, “June 1.” I had a ten-month old baby and a two-year old, plus my mother-in-law was living in her trailer on our property. So we had to find a place for Mom to live, and we had to get ourselves to Guam by June 1. And we did. I made a trip to Philadelphia so I could say good-bye to my family too.

MHH: What happened to the farm?

VH: We sold it. We left with it unsold. It wasn’t sold for several months after we left. But we just trusted the Lord and left it.

To be continued...

Devotional Ben Laning

THE DAILY PRESS

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

July 8

Read Ecclesiastes 3

What do you think about the idea of youth pastors? Can they be helpful for connecting with the young people in the congregation? Should we think about having something similar in our churches? We recently had a presentation done for our school by a youth pastor. Someone I was talking to afterward said they weren’t sure they liked the presenter’s style of interspersing jokes and serious discussion. He said that’s a problem with youth pastors, and it’s not good for the youth they’re “connecting” with. I thought about this as I read that there is a time for everything in Ecclesiastes 3. It prompted me to do a Google search on why others think youth pastors are a wrong idea. I found an interesting article on patheos.com, which said that youth pastors tend to trade real authority for persuasion and advertisement. Since they don’t have proper authority over the young people, they try to mask the gospel as something “cool.” In addition, the author said youth pastors are only seen as a necessity in the first place when the family has failed. We need to instruct our children in the right way, always asserting the authority of the gospel. *Sing or pray Psalter #282.*

July 9

Read Ecclesiastes 4

We just finished studying Daniel in Bible class at school. It’s amazing to think about how Daniel was such a strong witness for the truth that the only thing the princes could find “wrong” with him was his unwavering worship of God. What faith! Could the same be said if it had been us those princes were

scrutinizing? To my shame, I must confess that the princes would readily find plenty of fuel for the fire. We must constantly pray for strength to live a godly life and worship him rightly, even in the face of persecution.

Ecclesiastes 4:4 says, “Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbour. This is also vanity and vexation of spirit.” The reality of the Christian life is that the wicked will turn our good works against us. They will drag our name through the mud, even when we are in the right. Our job, then, is to continue worshipping him in confidence and not give them a reason to blaspheme. *Sing or pray Psalter #109.*

July 10

Read Ecclesiastes 5

Ecclesiastes 5:4–5 states, “When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.” This made me think of the parable of the sons in Matthew 21:28–32. Here, a man had two sons. He told the one to go work in his vineyard, but he refused. Later, however, he repented of his sin and went. Meanwhile, the man told his other son to go work, and he quickly agreed but never ended up going. Jesus makes it clear that the first son is like the publicans and harlots, who were living in grievous sin but repented at Jesus’s call. In contrast, the second son represents the Pharisees, who were supposed to be living holy lives but had rejected him. Jesus continues to represent the wicked

Pharisees by telling the parable of the husbandmen killing the householder's son. By nature, we are the second son and the husbandmen, but by God's grace we see our sin and go work in the vineyard. *Sing or pray Psalter #88.*

July 11 Read Ecclesiastes 6

The second verse here talks about how a man can have all the earthly riches available to him and yet be unable to enjoy them. Someone in our church used to work for the multi-millionaires of the world, and he came away thinking they're the unhappiest people on earth. I remember one story where the construction crew had spent the entire day making this gigantic, custom-tile mosaic around the fountain in their courtyard. When the homeowner arrived, she decided she didn't like it and proceeded to smash it to bits with a sledgehammer.

Another story that comes to mind is God delivering the Israelites from the Syrians in 2 Kings 7. Although the people were starving, Elisha told them that they would soon have abundance. One of the king's men mocked and said it was impossible. Elisha looked at him with the eyes of judgment and said he would be able to see the riches, but he wouldn't be able to partake. Can you remember what happened? When the people went to gather spoil from the Syrian camp, he had to stand watch at the gate, and he ended up getting trampled to death in the scramble. *Sing or pray Psalter #97.*

July 12 Read Ecclesiastes 7

The beginning of this chapter talks about how sadness is better laughter. Why would that be? Don't we tend to enjoy being around happy people more than those who are negative? Isn't joy an important part of the Christian life?

Yes, there is definitely a proper kind of laughter, but that's not the laughter described here. This is the type of laughter that would seek to joke away sin instead of having sorrow for it. There have been a lot of examples of that in the wicked feasts of ancient emperors we've been studying in history this year. We just finished talking about Esther and Artaxerxes, who had all his rulers come to the palace so he could show them all the kingdom's riches for half a year. All of this boasting culminated in a week-long feast full of drunkenness and wicked deeds. In their search for pleasure, historians say these feasts often involved deliberate purging so the guests could continue eating. The laughter that was constant at these parties was an evil laughter, the kind we must

flee from daily. *Sing or pray Psalter #83.*

July 13 Read Ecclesiastes 8

Ecclesiastes 8:15 says, "Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun." Didn't we just hear yesterday that sadness is better than laughter? Why does Solomon appear to be contradicting himself in the next chapter?

As alluded to yesterday, there is a type of innocent mirth that can be contrasted with the wicked laughter of the world. As Matthew Henry puts it, a man who walks in this way is "soberly and thankfully to make use of the things of this life according as his rank is, and to be cheerful, whatever happens." We must be thankful for what we have and try not to control things that aren't for us to worry about. Although we have many earthly things, there are still always some with more. We tell ourselves that happiness would come if we just had this or that. Or maybe we'd be happy if this trial would go away. We worry about the future instead of trusting in God. *Sing or pray Psalter #7.*

July 14 Read Ecclesiastes 9

The phrase, "One sinner destroyeth much good" (v. 18), stood out to me in this chapter. I think there are a couple of different ways of looking at it. As Matthew Henry says, "How many of the good gifts both of nature and providence does one sinner destroy and make waste of—good sense, good parts, good learning, a good disposition, a good estate, good meat, good drink, and abundance of God's good creatures." These are good things, but they are corrupted when used for sin. The wicked have so much, yet they waste it all.

In a little different connection, my first thought when reading the verse was regarding the sinner's effect on others. I had a parent come to me recently saying their child claimed everyone was calling them names, but upon further questioning, it was discovered to be just one individual. That single strained relationship had started to overshadow all the other great friendships that child had. It's the same for us when we are sinned against. Instead of letting that one bad situation eat away at us, may we live in joyful remembrance of all the "good" Christ has accomplished for us. *Sing or pray Psalter #65.*

July 15

Read Ecclesiastes 10

Ecclesiastes 10:16 says, “Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning!” This verse addresses the responsibility that those in authority have to act responsibly, not like a child. All the major empires throughout history started to fall apart when the rulers became given over to luxury. They started to live to eat, instead of eating to live, as Matthew Henry puts it.

One story that exhibits the effect of irresponsible rulers is found in 1 Kings 20. Here, Benhadad, king of Syria, laid siege to Samaria with a huge army. Under God’s direction, Ahab sent the princes of Israel and a measly 7,000 soldiers out to fight them. Meanwhile, Benhadad and his rulers are drinking themselves drunk. When informed of the approaching Israelites, Benhadad simply tells his men to capture them alive and goes back to partying. This makes the unorganized Syrians easy targets for the Israelites, and they’re badly defeated.

Good leaders are necessary. We all have the opportunity to be a leader at some point, whether it be in the workplace, church, school, or home. Will we take up the responsibility gravely or get drunk in the pavilion? *Sing or pray Psalter #392.*

July 16

Read Ecclesiastes 11

When I first read this chapter, I wasn’t sure what much of it meant, but after spending some time looking at Matthew Henry and John Gill, I think I’m beginning to grasp it. The idea towards the beginning of the chapter is that we should always give liberally as much as we are able. Verse 3 says that if the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves. Similarly, if we are full of charity, we will give to others. The chapter explains that it’s important to give when we can because we don’t know what hardships will befall us later. Ironically, this is often used as one of the main arguments *against* giving. Don’t we tend to think, “I will give more as soon as I have this bill paid, or as soon as I get that fixed?” There are always things in our life that we “need” money for, so if we start thinking that way we will never give anything. That’s why the Bible commands us to give whenever we have the means, without worrying about God’s perfect plan for our lives. *Sing or pray Psalter #113.*

July 17

Read Ecclesiastes 12

Yesterday, we had a sermon about the third commandment. Our pastor brought out the fact that God’s holiness is emphasized in the scripture above all his other attributes, even love. This instills in us the necessity of coming before him with awe and praise. It also shows us the seriousness of using his name flippantly, as the world constantly does in their every-day speech. In fact, this is so common that we can become hardened to it and guilty of the sin ourselves when we don’t speak out against it.

The last two verses of the book give us the conclusion: “Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.” Fearing God is very closely connected to acknowledging his holiness. Since God is holy, we must live holy lives in glorification of his name, recognizing that we will be required to give an account of all our works before him on the last day. *Sing or pray Psalter #265.*

July 18

Read 1 Kings 10

July 18- Read 1 Kings 10

1 Kings 10:16–17 read, “And king Solomon made two hundred targets of beaten gold: six hundred shekels of gold went to one target. And he made three hundred shields of beaten gold; three pounds of gold went to one shield: and the king put them in the house of the forest of Lebanon.” What was the purpose of these targets and shields? Matthew Henry compares them to the entourages of other kings. As he puts it, kings often have swords and maces carried before them to illustrate their power, but Solomon had golden shields and targets. This showed everyone that he used his power to defend and protect the good, not to destroy.

In the next verse, we read that Solomon made his throne with ivory, which he then overlaid in gold. If you are going to overlay something in gold, why make it out of ivory? This seems like a waste of very expensive and precious material. Henry must have thought of this as well, because he mentions some think it was embroidered with gold designs, not completely overlaid. Either way, the extreme riches of Solomon’s kingdom picture for us the spiritual riches we have in Christ. *Sing or pray Psalter #194.*

July 19

Read 1 Kings 11

In Deuteronomy 17:16–17, God commands the kings of Israel not to accumulate riches, horses, and

wives for themselves. Sadly, as Solomon got older he started to succumb to these temptations. In 1 Kings 10:29 we are told that Solomon got horses from Egypt, which nation was specifically mentioned in God's command. We all know about Solomon's abundance of gold and wives. He had a staggering one thousand wives and concubines from all the surrounding heathen nations, and these wicked women led him to serve their gods. Because of this, 1 Kings 11:4 says of Solomon, "his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father." Was David's heart really perfect with God? What about the story of Bathsheba and Uriah? Yes, David committed some very grievous sins, but he never wandered away from the worship of God. David was not guilty of idolatry as Solomon his son was. David speaks of his faithfulness in Psalm 18:21, where we read, "For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed from my God." *Sing or pray Psalter #35.*

July 20 Read 2 Chronicles 9

In history class, we recently learned about the trade routes that developed during the Middle Ages. The Crusades played a big part in starting these trade routes because Crusaders came back with spices and other exotic products from the East, which quickly became in high demand in Europe. Although these trade routes may have taken that long to supply Europe consistently, caravans of merchants had been traversing Arabia since the Old Testament. In this chapter, spices were one of the main gifts the Queen of Sheba gave Solomon. In Genesis 37:25, we read that the Ishmaelite merchants who bought Joseph from his brothers were carrying spices down to Egypt. Spices were a great money-maker because a little went a long way, they were high in price, there was consistent demand for them, and they were used for so many things. Spices played a role in religious services, burying the dead, personal hygiene, and adding flavor to food. We tend to take them for granted today, but throughout much of history, spices have been nearly as valuable as gold and silver. *Sing or pray Psalter #402.*

July 21 Read Proverbs 30

Proverbs 30:8–9 say, "Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain."

We recently talked about this subject in Bible study.

I think we tend to think of ourselves as somewhere in the middle of this range, but both extremes are a danger to us. We're all extremely rich. The very fact that we have a choice about what to wear or what to have for supper illustrates this. We live like the kings of days gone by. However, there are always those who have more. Sometimes paying all the bills can be difficult, and it doesn't seem like we're making headway. This can make us bitter against God, but we have no reason to be angry. We must trust that God will always supply us with our daily bread, which is not defined as whatever we want for the day, but what he's decreed we need to fulfill the work he has for us. *Sing or pray Psalter #393.*

July 22 Read Proverbs 31

I know that you will be reading this much later, but as I'm writing this devotional, it happens to be Mother's Day. The Bible often talks about the importance of mothers, including here in Proverbs 31. At the beginning of the chapter, King Lemuel's mother is instructing him about keeping God's commandments. Godly mothers who train up their children in the right way are a wonderful blessing. Our mothers have done so much for us since the day we were born that we often take them for granted and forget how much they loves us. Isaiah 49:15 says, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." Mothers cherish the little things. In Luke 2:51, we read that Mary kept memories about her son Jesus in her heart. We need to obey our mothers as Ruth did, who said to Naomi in Ruth 3:5, "All that thou sayest unto me I will do." Especially as we grow older, we need to care for our mothers, as Jesus did on the cross in John 19:26, 27. *Sing or pray Psalter #215.*

July 23 Read 1 Kings 12

Have you ever thought about why the Israelites in the wilderness and under Jeroboam wanted golden calves? Why calves and not any other animal? When we studied Egypt in ancient world history, I started to see some connections between these calves and the Egyptian gods. The main Egyptian god was Ra, the sun god. When Ra walked on the earth, it was believed that he did so in the form of the Apis bull. According to Jewishbible.org, the Egyptians looked at heaven as a cow standing over them, which gave birth to Ra, the sun, in the morning and watched him grow into a bull throughout the day. In other words, the morning sun was viewed as the golden

calf, Ra. A young bull was also associated with fertility, making the worship of such manic and sexual. Do you think the Israelites, in worshipping the golden calves, were actively worshipping the god of Egypt, the wicked nation they had been brought out of? This could help explain why it was punished so harshly and often mentioned throughout the Old Testament. In a world of excess, we must always be on guard against worshipping the gods of Egypt ourselves. *Sing or pray Psalter #308.*

July 24

Read 1 Kings 13

I remember being surprised by the lack of opposition I experienced when I started attending community college. I had expected that I would be shown a lot of hatred and disgust whenever I resisted teachings such as evolutionism and the Big Bang theory, but I underestimated the enemy. Instead, I was often met with acceptance, the hallmark of today's society. One science teacher even applauded my conviction and willingness to stand up for what I believed in. I was taken aback. It felt almost...Christian. But what I failed to realize immediately is that all the acceptance and encouraging speech would end the moment I told them what they had to do. The one unforgivable sin today is telling others they must live by the truth prescribed in God's Word. It was fine if I wanted to believe that myself, but I better not dare tell them they had to. The wicked have always hated those who rebuke them, as shown by Jeroboam's reaction to the prophet's speech in this passage. The world scorns those who think they have the right to tell others how they should live, and we must pray for strength to continue proclaiming the truth boldly. *Sing or pray Psalter #144.*

July 25

Read 1 Kings 14

I noticed this chapter mentioned Rehoboam's mother, Naamah an Ammonitess. Matthew Henry thinks this is emphasized to show the consequences of being unequally yoked with unbelievers. In Exodus 34:7, we read that the sins of the father come upon the children. Solomon sinned greatly by marrying vast numbers of women, including this Ammonite, one of Israel's greatest enemies. Now, we see that the wicked Ammonite raised her son Rehoboam to live wickedly as well.

Something else I found of significance here is that Rehoboam replaced the golden shields and targets Solomon had made with ones made of brass. We can see this as a picture of Judah's fall into sin. 2 Chronicles 1:15 says of Solomon, "And the king

made silver and gold at Jerusalem as plenteous as stones, and cedar trees made he as the sycamore trees that are in the vale for abundance." These physical riches pictured the spiritual riches that Israel had at that time as well. God dwelt with his people in Solomon's beautiful temple. Now, God no longer dwelt with his people in the temple, and that became manifest physically as well. What was once gold was now dulled by sin and made brass. *Sing or pray Psalter #156.*

July 26

Read 2 Chronicles 10

We all know the story well. The people come to Rehoboam asking him to make their life a little easier than it had been under Solomon. The old men advise Rehoboam to listen to them, as it will begin his reign on a positive note. However, Rehoboam decides to get the advice of his young friends before making any final decisions. These tough guys tell Rehoboam to assert his authority right from the start and bring the hammer down. Rehoboam's pride likes this advice, and he listens to them, with disastrous effects for the kingdom.

Rehoboam failed to recognize the wisdom of the older members of the church, which is brought out often in scripture. This is clearly stated in Job 12:12, which reads, "With the ancient is wisdom; and in length of days understanding." God commands the older members of the church to be examples to the younger, as Paul instructs in Titus 2:2. In return, the younger members are to show respect for the elderly, as commanded in Leviticus 19:32 and 1 Timothy 5:1, the first part of which says, "Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father." *Sing or pray Psalter #213.*

July 27

Read 2 Chronicles 11

Interestingly, after Rehoboam's extremely shaky start as king, where he lost most of the kingdom to Jeroboam, Rehoboam was successful early in his reign. He listened to God's command not to fight Israel. Then he built many cities of defense, which he supplied with soldiers, food, and weapons. The priests and Levites and all those who walked according to God's law that had been living in Israel came to him because Jeroboam was persecuting them. He fell into the sin of taking many wives, but not as Solomon did. Obviously, he had a lot less, and we don't read of him marrying any strange women as Solomon did, just some from David's family. It can also be argued that he managed his family better than David did. The latter part of David's life is full

of his sons plotting against one another and him, but Rehoboam was wise in splitting up his sons around the kingdom, as verse 23 states. However, this success was short-lived, for he became proud, which led to his downfall. *Sing or pray Psalter #323.*

July 28

Read 2 Chronicles 12

As I read in this chapter about Shishak, king of Egypt, coming and ransacking Jerusalem and carrying away the temple treasures, I started thinking about how many times this happened throughout Israel's history. A few chapters later, in 2 Chronicles 16, we read about Asa giving Benhadad, king of Syria, silver and gold from the temple to get him to break his league with Israel. Then, in 2 Kings 14:14, we have the nation of Israel coming and taking these treasures from their fellow countrymen in Judah, which really shows you how far they had departed from God. A couple of chapters later, in 2 Kings 16:7–8, Ahaz uses them to bribe the king of Assyria to help him against Syria, telling Tiglath-pileser in verse 7, “I am thy servant and thy son.” Hezekiah continues the pattern in 2 Kings 18, using things from the temple to try and get Sennacherib to leave him alone, but Sennacherib just took it and continued his assault. Finally, Nebuchadnezzar comes and takes what's left to Babylon with the captives in 2 Chronicles 38:18–19. *Sing or pray Psalter #418.*

July 29

Read 1 Kings 15

“But the high places were not removed: nevertheless Asa's heart was perfect with the LORD all his days,” 1 Kings 15:14. I found this verse puzzling, as Asa shows quite a bit of weakness towards the end of his life. First, he sends temple treasures to Benhadad to try and get him to break his league with Baasha, as discussed in yesterday's devotional. Then, when Hanani rebukes him for this Asa throws him in jail and begins oppressing the people. In judgment, God gives him a rotting foot disease that leads to his disgraceful death. Even as he faces death, Asa turns to the heathen physicians, not God.

Does that sound like someone whose “heart was perfect with the LORD all his days?” Matthew Henry explains this by saying it's a comfort to know that we might be found upright with God, even when we sometimes fall short. One could also argue that Asa's life is a testament to us of what happens when we don't fight the battle of faith to the end. What do you think? How do we merge the words of verse 14 with what happened near the end of Asa's life? *Sing or pray Psalter #31.*

July 30

Read 2 Chronicles 13

In Leviticus 2:13, God commands, “And every oblation of thy meat offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat offering: with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt.” According to Biblestudytools.com, this led to the connection of salt and covenant-making. Salt is a very important part of the diet, so eating together can be viewed as sharing salt. When two people eat together, they can grow in friendship, having a covenant relationship with one another. Similarly, since salt is not only used to add flavor, but also to preserve, the word carries with it the idea of an enduring covenant. These things help explain 2 Chronicles 13:5, where Abijah mockingly asked Jeroboam if he was unaware of God's covenant of salt with the line of David. Ironically, by the very act of shoving God's promise in Jeroboam's face, Abijah showed he wasn't worthy of it. *Sing or pray Psalter #35.*

July 31

Read 2 Chronicles 14

Although we talked about the weakness Asa showed at the end of his life a couple of days ago, he shows a lot of spiritual maturity in the story today. Asa had an army of 580,000 men, but his force paled in comparison to the massive army of one million commanded by Zerah the Ethiopian. However, instead of calling to Benhadad or some other ruler for help, Asa looks to God. This beautiful prayer is recorded in verse 11, which reads, “It is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O LORD our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O LORD, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee.” Asa confessed that all things are possible with God, no odds are too great for him. Whether they won the battle did not depend on their own strength but on God's decree. Asa called upon God to give them the victory, not for selfish reasons, but because he wanted Jehovah's name to be glorified. May we have the same goal in mind when we call upon God's most holy name. *Sing or pray Psalter #233.*

August 1

Read 2 Chronicles 15

Although Asa goes downhill in the next chapter, in today's story he's still strong in the faith, even deposing his own mother because she made an idol. In verse 13, the people made a covenant saying, “That whosoever would not seek the LORD God of

Israel should be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman.” In God’s perfect plan, this bold confession was made soon before Asa sought Benhadad, instead of God. As he confessed himself, this sin was worthy of death, and it was the beginning of his downfall.

This story reminded me of David after his murder of Uriah the Hittite. Nathan the prophet told David a story about a poor man who had one lamb, which the rich man uncaringly took to feed his guest. David was livid when he heard this and immediately ordered that the man be killed, without realizing that he was the man in the story. *Sing or pray Psalter #143.*

August 2 Read 2 Chronicles 16

There are some significant similarities and differences between the sickness of Hezekiah and Asa. Both kings were God-fearing, and they both became sick, as judgment for using treasures from the temple to bribe wicked rulers. However, the way that they approached the sickness was very different. Asa continued in his sin and did not look to God for healing. Instead, he sought help from the heathen physicians, just as he had looked to wicked Benhadad for deliverance from Israel. On the other hand, the first thing Hezekiah did when he heard he was going to die was pray. In this prayer, he asked God to remember the faithfulness he had shown throughout his life. While Asa rotted away and died in shame, Hezekiah’s prayer was answered, and within three days he was healed. God added fifteen years to his life and gave him a son so that the line of David could continue to Christ. When we experience trials in our life, may we react as Hezekiah did and look to the God who supplies his people with everything they stand in need of. *Sing or pray Psalter #141.*

August 3 Read 1 Kings 16

In 1 Kings 16:4 God said, “Him that dieth of Baasha in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth of his in the fields shall the fowls of the air eat.” The literal fulfillment of this was seen with Ahab and Jezebel. Wicked queen Jezebel was thrown out a window and then ridden over by Jehu, who then went to lunch. By the time he returned the dogs had eaten all the flesh and taken nearly all the bones. Similarly, after Ahab dies in battle, the dogs lick up his blood while the chariot is being washed out.

Another thing that stood out to me is the last verse, where Hiel the Bethelite rebuilds Jericho. Israel was

forbidden to do this 500 years before in Joshua 6:26, where we read, “And Joshua adjured them at that time, saying, Cursed be the man before the LORD, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it.” The fact that someone would so blatantly disregard God’s command and judgment shows how far Israel had fallen under Ahab. *Sing or pray Psalter #139.*

August 4 Read 2 Chronicles 17

Did you notice how massive Jehoshaphat’s army was? If my math is correct, he appears to have had 1,160,000 mighty men of valor at his disposal. Where did all these men come from? Back in Chapter 14, we read about Asa having 580,000 men against the one million of Zerah the Ethiopian. Since that time Judah had only experienced the fall of king Asa into sin, so it wouldn’t seem that Judah’s army would have been growing that significantly. How then does Asa’s son have an army that’s fully twice the size of his father’s?

Besides physical strength, Jehoshaphat also showed himself spiritually strong. He banned the worship of Baal and began removing some of the high places (v. 6), although he didn’t make much headway, because 2 Chronicles 20:33 says they were not removed. Jehoshaphat had priests and Levites travel throughout the kingdom, teaching the people the law of God. He worked hard to restore proper worship in Judah, but the kingdom would soon suffer from his weakness of choosing bad company, as shown from his alliances with Ahab and Ahaziah. *Sing or pray Psalter #117.*

August 5 Read 1 Kings 17

In this chapter we read about God commanding the ravens to supply Elijah with food. According to Britannica.com, the raven is closely related to the common crow, but it’s not as social and is quite a bit larger, with a wingspan of about 4’. Ravens will often act as scavengers and are very clever. I remember seeing a video clip where a raven or crow would drop peanuts into the middle of a bustling intersection to let the cars smash them, wait for the red light, and then go out and collect his nuts when the cars had stopped.

This bird is mentioned in several other places in scripture. Noah first lets a raven out of the ark, which didn’t return, presumably because it fed on drowned animal carcasses. Proverbs 30:17 says that the ravens will pluck out the eyes of those who

disobey parents. Biblestudytools.com says this is the first part of the carcass the raven will usually go for. They also say that the raven drives its young from the nest very early, which helps explain Luke 12:24, where Jesus says that if God supplies even the young ravens, how much more will he do so for us. *Sing or pray Psalter #355.*

August 6 Read 1 Kings 18

We just had a sermon tonight entitled, “Fruitful Servants to God,” and one of the points was, “A Liberating Enslavement.” That sounds like a contradiction, doesn’t it? However, we were reminded that the only true freedom is the freedom to worship God, the one who has purchased us with the price of his Son’s shed blood on the cross. Although the world loves to gloat about all the freedom they enjoy, the truth is that every man is a slave. Those who don’t belong to Christ simply hail the deceiver as their master. Theirs is a bondage of despair, which can only lead to everlasting death.

The prophets of Baal in this chapter were in bondage to the devil. Their actions speak loudly of their despair and hopelessness. They cried piteously to their god all day, even resorting to cutting themselves and jumping on the very altar they were attempting to light to grab his attention. Their self-destruction was pointless, for the one whom they

sought didn’t even exist. In contrast, ours is the God who consumes all who oppose him in an unquenchable fire. *Sing or pray Psalter #407.*

August 7 Read 1 Kings 19

In a cycle repeatedly seen throughout history, God’s people go from the mountaintops of faith to the depths of despair in a very short amount of time. Yesterday, we read about Elijah trusting in God to consume his sacrifice in the presence of all Israel, most notably the prophets of Baal themselves, and today we find him at the mouth of a cave depressed that he’s the only child of God left on earth. What was the point? He had worked tirelessly, and all he had to show for it was a nation full of reprobates who were hunting him down. Elijah couldn’t see any way for the situation to improve.

We can feel this way sometimes. We are struggling with a certain trial in our life and become convinced that there is no way out of it. The devil rejoices when this happens, for we have just said that he’s more powerful than God. We must not forget that our God is the all-powerful one. Our God is the one who manifested his awesome power by sending fire from heaven not much earlier. And our God is the one who always leads his people to green pastures. *Sing or pray Psalter #52.*

Convention Discussion Outlines

DISCUSSION OUTLINES FOR THE 2018 YP CONVENTION

Theme Verse: Psalm 73:24, “Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory”

I. Guided in Our Relationships

1. Read Ephesians 4:1–13.
2. 1 Timothy 3 talks about the attributes that should be seen in a deacon. This passage does not focus on the personality of a deacon, but rather his character. This can be applied to our friendships as well as our dating life. We must look at the character of the other person, not just at their personality. What is the distinction between one’s character and one’s personality? How do you find this to be a challenge in your relationships (both friendships and dating) with those around you?
3. Titus 1 talks about the attributes of an elder.

What are some characteristics that apply to both the elder and those with whom you are friends?

4. Proverbs 18:24, “A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.” What does it mean to “shew himself friendly?” What are some examples of ways we can show ourselves friendly?

5. 1 John 4:7, “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.” What does this passage show about the wicked and their ability to love? What does this passage mean for you in relationship to your friends? What does it mean for you in relationship to your parents? In your daily interactions with others, how must you strive more to apply this verse to yourself?

6. Proverbs 10:12, “Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.” What does God’s word say about forgiveness and its role in our friendships? Is it difficult for you to resolve conflict with your friends? How should we approach disagreements? Read Matthew 6:14–15, Psalm 86:5, and Luke 7:36–50.

7. What does God’s word say about how we must behave towards our parents? Do we see our parents as a reflection of our relationship with God? What should we be doing in our relationships with our parents? Think about your communication with your parents and consider your relationship with God. Read Psalm 103:13, 1 John 3:1–2, Matthew 10:37, Ephesians 6:1–4.

8. How does God guide us in our dealings with all those in authority over us, both in church and state? Read Romans 13:1–7.

II. Guided in Worship/Church Life

1. Read Psalm 119:97–105.
2. Why must we worship God? Read Psalm 29:2.

3. How must we worship God according to John 4:24? What does this mean? What does Matthew 15:8–9 say about how we must not worship?

4. Many in the world argue that we cannot know truth; we cannot discern the truth from the lie because the Bible is available for our own interpretation. How can we as Christians say that God has guided us to know the truth vs. the lie? Read 2 Peter 1:20–21 and 2 Timothy 3:13–17.

5. Why must we worship God with other believers as opposed to worshipping at home by ourselves? Read 1 Timothy 3:15, Matthew 16:18, Hebrews 2:12, and the Belgic Confession Article 28.

6. What should determine where we go to church and of what kind of church may we become a member? Read Belgic Confession Article 29.

7. What are some ways in which the young people can be more involved in church life? Read Romans 12:9–13.

8. Why do we have catechism? Why do we have young people’s society? How often do you look at the passage ahead of time before you go to young people’s society? How many days beforehand do you begin study of your catechism? Why or why not? What should we be doing?

9. When the catechism and young people’s society year ends, how do you continue in your diligent study of God’s word throughout the summer?

10. What is the significance of making confession of faith? How does that contribute to your role as part of the church? Read Lord’s Day 25, Q&A 66

& 67.

11. Why should prayer be a part of our life of worship? Read Lord’s Day 45.

12. How often must we pray? Consider this quote: “Prayer is to the Christian what breathing is to a healthy person. Without breathing a person cannot live. Without prayer a Christian dies. Breathing is spontaneous; in many ways so is prayer.” (Hermon Hanko, *When You Pray*, page 1) Read 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Ephesians 6:18, and Colossians 4:2.

13. Do you delight in your church life and worship of God? Read Psalm 122.

III. Guided in Our Future Callings

1. Read Psalm 37:1–11.

2. Share: What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about your future?

3. The future can be tomorrow, next week, next year, 5 years from now, 10 years from now, 20 years from now, etc. At each different stage of the future, where do you see yourself? What or who influences your thoughts about where you see yourself at each different stage of life? Why?

4. Who or what *should* be our guide for our future callings? Read Proverbs 3:5–6, James 1:5–8, Psalm 119:105.

5. What do we mean by the word *callings*? What is a calling? Where do we see the word call or calling used in Scripture? Read Genesis 1:5, Genesis 3:9, Romans 8:28–30. Can you think of other places this word is used? What meaning do we speak of when we say our “future callings?”

6. What is our primary calling? Read John 8:12, Deuteronomy 13:1–4, Mark 8:34, 1 Peter 2:21–25, and Matthew 19:21.

7. Our primary calling leads us to seek God’s will for our lives. Will we be called to be single or married? Be a husband/wife? Father/mother? Construction worker/teacher? Doctor/secretary? How do we know what to do? How does Scripture guide us in these decisions? Read Colossians 3:23, Ephesians 2:10, Proverbs 4:20–27, Proverbs 3:1–3.

8. To whom else can we look for advice for guidance in our future callings? To whom should we NOT look for advice? Read Ephesians 6:1–3, Proverbs 6:20, Proverbs 16:21–23, Psalm 1.

9. What does Scripture say should be our attitudes about our future? Read James 4:13–17, Matthew 6:25–34, Proverbs 19:20–21, 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11, Romans 14:8, 22–23.

10. The Lord will take care of us! Read Psalm 34:8–10.

FEDERATION BOARD NOMINEE INTRODUCTIONS

As another year comes to a close for the Federation Board, we look forward to new members joining the board. This article serves as an introduction to our nominees for Spiritual Advisor, Vice-President, Vice-Treasurer, Vice-Secretary, and Youth Coordinator. Rev. Van Overloop, Brandon Kaptein, Dan Gritters, Katie Van Overloop, and Dan Langerak finish their terms in a few months, and we thank them for all the time, work, and energy they put into the Fed Board the last two years.

The Spiritual Advisor provides counsel and guidance to the members of the Federation Board. This year's nominees are Prof. Barry Gritters and Rev. Bill Langerak. Prof. Gritters is currently Professor of Practical Theology and New Testament at our seminary. His calling is to prepare young men to be pastors. He previously served as pastor of Byron Center PRC and Hudsonville PRC, and he remains a member of Hudsonville PRC. Prof. Gritters was born and raised in the Redlands congregation, and he is married to Lori, the oldest daughter of Rev. Kortering. Together, they have six married children and a rich treasure of grandchildren. He loves fellowship with the young people and often looks for opportunities to teach catechism to high school ages in vacant churches. He loves the young people and believes it is very important for our pastors to stay in close contact. He is glad to be nominated and desires to serve because he would love to give counsel to the young people about their spiritual lives in the church and world.

The other nominee for Spiritual Advisor is Rev. Langerak. He is currently the pastor of Southeast PRC and has served there for the entirety of his ministry, the last 15 years. He and his wife, Karen, have six children; four are married, and two are in high school. Soon, Lord willing, they will have six grandchildren. He has served four previous times on the Federation Board. He would like to serve the Federation Board with spiritual advice that helps them carry out their labors on behalf of our young people to the honor and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The nominees for the position of vice-president are Austin Brower and Jake Kamps. The vice-president serves for one year as vice-president before

becoming president the following year. The president presides over Federation Board meetings and takes part in other committees and their meetings. Austin is currently a member of Hudsonville PRC, and he is a sales associate at Mingerink & Associates. He graduated from Grand Valley State University in April 2018. He desires to serve because he wants to help the churches and this is a great opportunity for him to serve the Protestant Reformed Churches and the various committees and societies the Federation Board represents.

The other nominee, Jake Kamps, is a member of Grandville PRC. He is a third-year electrical apprentice at Kleyn Electric, and he attends Grand Rapids Community College for his electrical classes. He wants to serve because he loves Christ's church, and he sees it as a nice opportunity to serve God and the young people of his church in this way. He believes it is good for young adults to serve more broadly, and he is pleased to have this opportunity if God so wills.

The next position is for vice-treasurer. Similarly to vice-president, this person will serve as vice-treasurer one year and as treasurer the next. The treasurer is responsible for keeping a record of all money received and distributed by the Federation Board, delivering financial reports to meetings, and performing all financial work. The two nominees are Brandon Kuiper and Aaron Van Dyke. Brandon Kuiper is a member of Trinity PRC, and he attends Grand Valley State University as a full-time student studying accounting. He believes that at this point in his life, serving on the Federation Board would be a good way for him to serve and volunteer his time in the church.

Aaron Van Dyke attends Faith PRC, and he is currently pursuing a degree in secondary history education at Calvin College. He would like to serve on the Federation Board because he wants to serve Christ's church in whatever capacity he can, and he sees service on the Federation Board as an obvious opportunity to do that. Additionally, he is and has been a beneficiary of the Federation Board's work in all of its various aspects, and he would like to give back to the Board out of appreciation.

The secretary of the Federation Board is

responsible for taking record of the minutes of the Board meetings, conducting all correspondence, and keeping charge of all records. The nominees for the position of vice-secretary are Rachel Rutgers and Kara Zwak. Rachel Rutgers attends Hope PRC, and she currently works as a medical assistant at Michigan ENT & Allergy Specialists. She is also pursuing a nursing degree at Davenport University. She is thankful to have the opportunity to be on the Federation Board, and she thinks it would be a great way to become more involved in our denomination, particularly by promoting Christian fellowship among the young people. As a potential member of the Federation Board, she especially looks forward to encouraging our young people to grow in faith by reading good Reformed literature.

The second nominee, Kara Zwak, is a member of Hudsonville PRC. Currently, she is a full-time employee at Bid-2-Benefit Youth in the online auction and eBay departments. She wants to serve on the Federation Board to help continue to encourage young people to hold fast to the Lord and to stay true to his word because she recognizes that it is becoming harder each day to stay focused on him. She would be honored to aide in the development of faith in young people and provide means for them to grow closer to the Lord and stronger in their faith.

The last position to fill this year on the Board is that of Youth Coordinator. The Youth Coordinator also gives counsel and guidance to the members of the Board, and may also play a major role in the organization and further development of the Young Calvinists. The nominees for this year are Andy Peterson and Andrew Veldman. Andy Peterson is a member of Hudsonville PRC, and he is both president and owner of KML Specialty Chemicals and

A+ Lighting Solutions. He is married to Donna, and they have five children and three grandchildren. He has served on the board of Heritage Christian School, on the Foundation Boards of Heritage and Covenant Christian High School, and on the Special Education Board twice as President. He also served as an elder at Hudsonville PRC. He has had the privilege of being a Young People's Society leader for 15 years combined at Grandville PRC and Hudsonville PRC. Presently, he heads the Young Adults' Society at Hudsonville and has done so for the last seven years. He also had the opportunity to head the Steering Committee when Hudsonville hosted the Young People's convention at SpringHill Campground. His service commitment has always been to the young people of the church either as society leader or through the various school boards he has served on.

Andrew Veldman is also currently a member at Hudsonville PRC, and he works as an AP Coordinator at Gordon Food Service. He is 26 years old and has been married to Renae Koole for five years. He has two daughters, ages three and one. He is excited about the opportunity of possibly serving on the Federation Board to become more involved with the young people in our churches.

The Board thanks all those who accepted their nominations and expressed their willingness to serve. We ask for your prayers for all these nominees as we wait for voting to take place at the 2018 Protestant Reformed Young People's Convention at the Lake Geneva Christian Center in Minnesota. We also ask for your prayers for our work and that God will bless our work for the young people of our churches.

CHRISTIAN LIVING Rev. James Slopsema

DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY (3)

In our previous article, we talked about stress. Although one's genetic makeup may make one vulnerable to depression and anxiety, mental and emotional stress are almost always contributing factors. Stress will sooner or later bring on either depression and/or anxiety. And stress is often self-induced. It is true that situations arise in our lives in which we

become very stressed. But the stress is not so much generated by the situations that arise as it is by the way we view ourselves and handle these situations. An important key to avoiding depression then is to learn how to keep stress in our lives to a minimum with biblical thinking and behavior.

We need to address three unbiblical viewpoints

that most depressed people have, that make life very stressful, and that contribute significantly to their depression.

The first of these is low self-esteem.

Low self-esteem is an extremely low opinion of one's self. It is a feeling of inferiority and worthlessness. One who has low self-esteem sees many good qualities in others but can find very little that is worthwhile in himself. He concentrates on all the inadequacies and failures of his own life (real or imagined) and convinces himself that he is a failure. He compares himself to others whom he esteems highly and imagines that he must be like them to have worth and value. But he is not like them, and so he is unhappy with himself and perhaps even hates who he is.

This is very stressful and puts one on the pathway to depression and anxiety.

To avoid this we must see ourselves biblically. The Bible teaches that the born-again Christian, who is living his faith in Jesus Christ, is not worthless. Nor is he inferior to others. Rather he is very important and valuable to God and to his kingdom. This is not the case with the unbeliever. Even the most gifted and successful unbeliever does not please God and contributes nothing to the kingdom. He has every reason to feel inferior, to esteem himself as nothing and hate himself. This is true even of those whom the world praises for their great achievements. But with the believing child of God it is different. He is eternally loved of God. He has been chosen to eternal life with God. He has been redeemed in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ he is a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17). He is the workmanship of God (re) created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that he should walk in them (Eph. 2:10). God has a good work for each of his redeemed people to do. This is an important work in God's kingdom that no one else can do. And to accomplish that work God has wonderfully gifted each one of his people. Each one is the marvelous workmanship of God, wonderfully crafted for good work in God's kingdom.

These spiritual realities must guide us as we seek to come to a proper estimation of ourselves.

For the Christian to have feelings of inferiority and worthlessness overlooks and even denies the work of Christ in his life and the wonderful place that God has for him in his kingdom. Quite often a person comes to this improper and low estimation of himself because others have a low opinion of him. This can be a parent that is overly critical. It can be a teacher that constantly puts down his students.

It can be a bully at school or a group of students that sinfully excludes someone and are even verbally abusive.

As we stated earlier, when a person has low self-esteem, he tends to compare himself unfavorably to others. He sees qualities that others have and that make them acceptable and even bring them praise. Some of these qualities have very little if any value for the work God has for us in the kingdom, such as athletic skills and physical beauty. Other of these qualities may be very valuable and necessary to do the important work of the kingdom of God. The work that God has for some in the kingdom requires academic abilities, an outgoing personality, or great mechanical skills. But this is not true for all. Many good gifts of God that equip us to do the important work of the kingdom are unnoticed and unrecognized by others. But one that is plagued with low self-esteem concludes he has no gifts at all because he is not gifted by God in things that bring recognition and praise to others. He fails to see that he also has an important place in the kingdom of God for which he is wonderfully gifted.

With a proper view of one's worth the Christian can accept himself, even with his weaknesses. This is true because God accepts him. According to Romans 14:17-18, "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." And "he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God." To be acceptable to God is to be well pleasing to him. And God is well pleased with those who use their gifts to serve Jesus Christ in righteousness, peace, and joy of the Holy Spirit. We are acceptable to God even though we do not have the gifts that are recognized by others. We are acceptable to God even though the work we do in the service of Jesus Christ goes unnoticed and unappreciated by others. And when we sinfully fail to serve God, as we do every day, we are still acceptable to him when we confess our sins to him and seek forgiveness in the cross of Jesus Christ. If God accepts us, then we can accept ourselves.

For this we must strive! Our calling is to live lives that are pleasing to God. We must seek to be acceptable to him. And we must be content with the good work that God has given to us and for which he has equipped us. We must be content even when our God-given work and gifts are not recognized by others as important.

This is extremely important to avoid the scourge of depression and anxiety. How stressful and troubling to see yourself as having little worth and value. That is a sure recipe for depression. How liberating to

see that you have tremendous worth in the kingdom of God and that you are acceptable to God as you serve Christ in your God-given place. This brings joy and peace. It also enables us to love ourselves, as required by the second great commandment of the law (Matt. 22:37–40).

It is in this light that we must also see and treat others in the church. Just as we are to see ourselves in Jesus Christ as having great value and worth, so also must we see our fellow Christians. We are to do all in our power to build each other up and to edify

one another (Rom. 14:19). This begins by seeing the true worth and value of each other in Jesus Christ.

There are two more matters that deserve our attention. We must seek God's approval in life rather than man's approval. And we must avoid the trap of perfectionism. These we will treat in a future article.

Rev. Slopsema is minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches

Poem James Jonker

HIS BLOOD ON US

The frenzied mob, ferocious, fearing nought,
Pressed closer, shouting for the life they sought,
And raised their voices in a mighty flood:
“On us and on our children be his blood.”

The scarlet stains, on that spike-studded cross
Where hung the bleeding body, with each toss
Of pain re-echoed that rebellious cry
Until it reached beyond the vaulted sky.

Soon streets ran red; and women, children, men
Were slain with sword: and through all time since then
The rebel race has had its wish fulfilled.
His blood on them, they were despised and killed.

But another cry had reached the Father, too,
It was: “Forgive; they know not what they do.”
And those forgiven can pray amid sin's flood,
“Lord, on us and on our children be his blood.”

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:
Gabriel Thomas, son of Mr. & Mrs. John & Rachael VanBaren—Byron Center, MI
Ethan Lammert Jr., son of Mr. & Mrs. Ethan Lanting—Crete, IL
Graham Sullivan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Ryan Worries—Crete, IL
Iyla James, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Josh & Trish Nagelkerke—Georgetown, MI
Samantha Jane, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. David & Anna Waldorf—Kalamazoo, MI
Josie Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jared & Lisa Langerak—Southeast, MI
Lily Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Matt & Gabrielle Gritters—Trinity, MI
Samantha Jean, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Tim & Kate Bleyenbergh—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:

Esaias Bosman—Georgetown, MI
Zach Koole—Hope, MI
Steven Brummel—Sioux Falls, SD
Andrew Bratt—Southwest, MI

MARRIAGES

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

Mr. & Mrs. Tyler & Polina Ondersma—Byron Center, MI
Mr. Collin Mulder and Miss Madeline Meulenberg—Grace, MI

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L is for Leopard
A fearsome cat of prey;
But in God's new creation,
A child will lead his way.

"The wolf...shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid...and a little child shall lead them."

—Isaiah 11:6



SYNOD OF DORDT PART 6: A TRUCE

In 1584, the Calvinist Dutch appeared to be on the brink of defeat by Philip II of Spain. But during this time, Spain and England had begun to have tensions of their own.

Before this, Philip II had been married to Queen Mary of England, who is also called Bloody Mary for her persecution of Protestant Reformers in England. But when Mary died, Elizabeth I took control of England. She was more sympathetic to Protestants, and tension between England and Spain built for several decades.

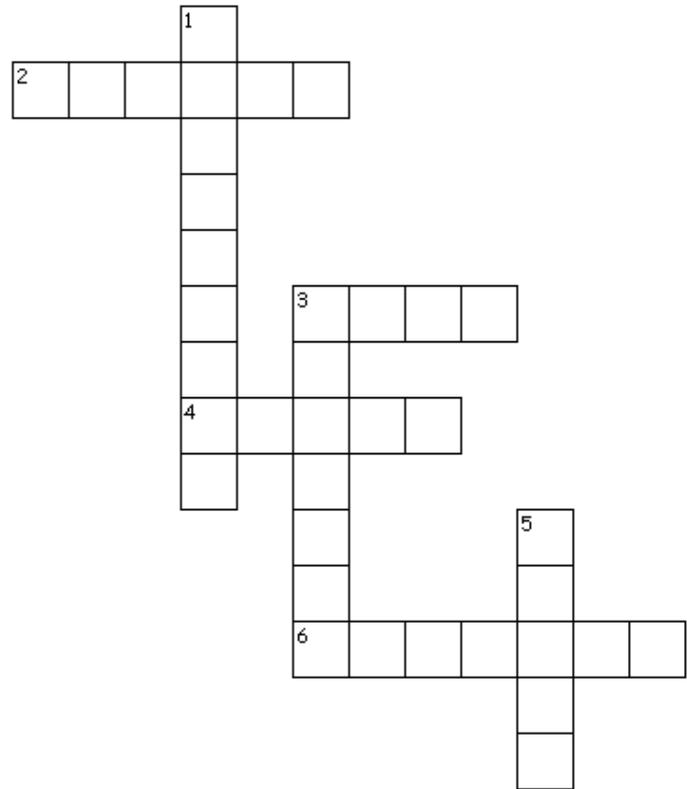
In 1585, Elizabeth I decided to send armies to the Netherlands to aid the Calvinist Dutch, now led by William's son Maurice of Orange. This helped the Calvinist Dutch push back the Spanish armies.

The wars against both England and the Netherlands became costly for Spain. When Philip II died and his son Philip III took the throne, Philip III sought a truce to end the fighting.

The truce was signed in 1609, making the northern provinces the Republic of the Netherlands while the southern provinces remained in Spanish control. By this time, many Calvinists in the southern provinces had fled north to safety there while many of the Catholics in the northern provinces had gone south.

While this truce ended the fighting, it was only agreed to last for twelve years. At the end of that twelve years, Spain and the Netherlands either could renew the truce or continue the war. While many of the other nations in Europe now recognized the Republic of the Netherlands as its own country, Spain didn't.

Finally, after over forty years of fighting, the Calvinist-held Netherlands had peace, at least for a time.



Across

2. _____ II of Spain
3. Queen _____ of England was also called Bloody _____
4. Twelve Years' _____
6. It was too costly for Spain to have a war against both _____ and the Netherlands

Down

1. Queen _____ I of England was more sympathetic to Protestants
3. _____ of Orange was the son of William the Silent
5. Philip III of _____ inherited the throne from his father

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



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