Dating

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“We just need to stick it out until we get married, then all our issues will be resolved.”

Have you or your significant other said something like that?

It’s not true. Marriage—after the “waiting period” (dating) your parents impose upon you and always seem to want to know too much about—is not a switch. Flipping the switch does not immediately introduce sunshine and rainbows into your life. Simply put, marriage is hard work. Two different, sinful people must now live together for the other. That’s why the marriage form begins with the words, “married persons are generally, by reason of sin, subject to many troubles and afflictions.” Sounds pretty bleak, doesn’t it? By God’s grace, the transition into marriage is more blessed if it is begun properly. To begin marriage properly, you must date properly. But what is dating?

Dating is not. Dating is not a game in which you play with the fire of lust and hope not to get burned. Dating is not a challenge to date that person because they are the most popular. Dating is not for you to satisfy your desires. Dating is not “just to have fun” because you can grow up later. Dating is not just that period of time you have to endure until you are old enough or able to get married. Dating is not a time in your life where you act like someone you are not so that you can get with that girl or that guy. Dating is not the tool you use to convert an unbeliever to the faith. Dating is not wearing that shirt with a low enough cut to show just enough to catch his eye while hopefully not raising their eyes. Dating is not going to those places and doing those things you normally wouldn’t (and shouldn’t) in order to bump into that girl.

Dating is. Dating is for getting to know your possible future spouse. How does she think? How does he act? Dating is for working together to resolve any differences that would imperil your future marriage. Does she really love Christ and his church? Would he really give thousands of dollars per year to send our children to a Christian school? Dating is for having those deep, honest, and open discussions about the realities of married life. Don’t get married and then say, “If only I had known he really thought [this] about [that].” Dating is for investigating how your future spouse will act in marriage. Is he an abusive tyrant who walks all over you now? He will probably continue to do the same when you are married. Is she a brawling, contentious woman now? She probably will not stop when you are married. Dating is not. Dating is. But how should you date? Read on.
EXPRESSING THE IMAGE OF GOD IN OUR DATING
(AS ADAM AND EVE DID IN THEIRS)

There is something special about being in a relationship. The desire for companionship, already present in childhood, takes on more urgency as we pass through adolescence into adulthood. To desire a relationship is good and natural. Solomon says that “Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord” (Prov. 18:22). God expressed the goodness of relationships to himself in the creation week. “And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him” (Gen. 2:18). Next, God made the value of relationships evident to Adam as Adam named the animals. The cattle, the beast of the field, and the fowl of the air were all paraded before Adam. In the process of naming the animals, Adam quickly realized that no creature was similar to him. None were rational and moral as he was. None could walk and talk with God at the spiritual level that he could. None were created in the image of God as he was. Such was Adam’s great need for companionship that, although Adam had a right relationship with God, Adam was unfulfilled as the only human. He was alone. The Holy God himself said so! “It is not good that the man should be alone” (v. 18). After Eve was created, Adam expressed the joy of having another like him with the words, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (v. 23). It was not good that Adam was alone with no one created as he was. Now, with Eve as the second image bearer of God, Adam had companionship. That was good...even very good.

The fact that both Adam and Eve were created in God’s image impacted their relationship. The character qualities that God’s image imprinted on their souls enhanced the relationship that they enjoyed. The instruction of Colossians 3:10 and Ephesians 4:24 define the image of God as possessing true knowledge, true righteousness, and true holiness. The verses following these texts give abundant practical examples of “image qualities” that benefited their relationship. Some examples include speaking truth, not holding grudges, edifying one another, being kind and tenderhearted, forgiving one another, having humbleness of mind, and using the greatest gift of charity.

Think about dating relationships as you read what the Canons of Dordt, Head 3/4 Article 1 says about the image of God. “Man was originally formed after the image of God. His understanding was adorned with a true and saving knowledge of his Creator and of spiritual things; his heart and will were upright; all his affections pure; and the whole man was holy.” Their hearts were full of love (true knowledge) for God and one another. They lived to serve God (true holiness). They enjoyed living according to God’s will (true righteousness).

Let’s focus on true knowledge, righteousness,
and holiness as they can be applied to our relationships. The result of this study ought to demonstrate that the relationships that Christians have with one another are of a higher quality and different character than the relationships of the ungodly. Please note that the examples given are by no means exhaustive and that each example given could easily be applied to the other aspects of the image of God.

The Christian’s whole life, but also his dating ought to demonstrate true knowledge. True knowledge has to do with knowing God in a personal way such that we love him. True knowledge is informed love that comes by the instrument of faith. “For whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate” (Rom. 8:29) means; “For whom he did fore-love.” When the Bible speaks of Adam knowing his wife Eve (Gen. 4:1), it means that Adam loved Eve.

True knowledge of God gives us both a motivation for serving the other, and it gives us discernment in our dating. To love is to be determined to work for the good or benefit of another. Knowing and loving God is also knowing and loving his body, the church…and our friend. In serving the least of these our brethren, we serve (love) Christ (Matt. 25:40). Rather than dating to fill our needs and our desires, we date to serve the other. The world dates to satisfy self—the Christian dates to serve other. Marriage is not for you. Instead, marriage is a relationship that better enables you to serve another. True knowledge also equips the Christian to know what God likes and dislikes. We are conscious to live as God requires of us in his word. With true knowledge (informed love) we will have the discernment only to pursue relationships with other Christians—whom we desire to serve.

The Christian’s whole life, but also his dating ought to demonstrate true righteousness. True righteousness has to do with delighting to live wholly in harmony with God’s will. As a couple, we will delight to live in devotional life. Perhaps we provide and encourage other couples to join us in good, creative, and entertaining group activities. In righteousness, we could take long walks, enjoying and commenting on God’s good creation. Together we may try to capture creation’s beauty in photography, painting, or even poetry. Enjoying working with God’s good creation is a narrow aspect of the righteousness that we already have. Together we could craft an end table, a rocking chair, or a dresser. The man will delight in beginning to take headship and lead and nurture his friend, while the woman delights in being a creative, loving responder. In righteousness, we might together take out a special needs friend or enjoy a meal with one of our aging grandparents.

Finally, Christian dating ought to demonstrate true holiness. True holiness has to do with a purity of mind and dedication to God’s service. Holiness is not just avoidance of sin but instead has a positive consecration quality to it. The holy instruments of the temple were those set aside exclusively for the direct service of God. Our relationships demonstrate holiness when they are dedicated to God, to church, and one another. Christian couples express holiness when they have devotions. They may also trace the news-worthy events of the day toward God and admire him in the movement of men and nations. A musically talented couple should consider playing and singing together as a way to worship God; not necessarily in an old people’s home, not necessarily in public, but instead as an act of private devotions. A dating couple could also demonstrate holiness by joining a group like Young Calvinists and preparing for the discussions together.

In Paradise, Adam and Eve had a fullness of earthly fellowship that will remain unparalleled until the new heavens and earth are created. Because they had the image of God without sin’s corruption, they were united emotionally, physically, and spiritually in a way that our relationships can’t be. Emotionally, they shared joys, shared the excitement of their faith, and shared an eager anticipation for their future. Physically, they embraced one another, desired to serve each other, and worked harmoniously in the garden. Spiritually, they loved God, lived consciously for him, and were amazed at his good creation. With his image imprinted on their souls, Adam and Eve were very good. Our relationships will not quite be like theirs was before the fall into sin. We will have to work at it. Be prepared to forgive one another’s sins, to forebear with one another’s weaknesses, but also be prepared to foster your relationships through the activity of your faith. Live in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness with each other and toward God. Be united in faith and live out of that faith towards each other and your God.

The Christian’s personal relationships ought to be different from the relationships of the people of the world. We are new creatures. Our souls have new qualities. We have the image of God!

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By dating, I understand a special relationship of fellowship between an unmarried young man and an unmarried young woman, the nature and purpose of which is the possibility of marriage.

There is some biblical defense of dating. Jacob dated Rachel seven years with a view to marrying her (Gen. 29:20). In the New Testament, there was the peculiar practice in the covenant community of “espousal.” Joseph was espoused to Mary (Matt. 1:18). Espousal was not the same as present-day dating. It was more solemn and binding. Nevertheless, it was a relation between a man and a woman that preceded and had as its purpose the full reality of marriage. It was a special relation of a man and a woman that did not include the sexual relation (Matt. 1:18). It was a relation that could be broken off, as marriage cannot be, and could be broken off privately (Matt. 1:19).

Dating can also be defended practically, and this is the defense I offer, and commend, to the young people, in this article.

The purpose of dating is not to play sexual games, that is, to play with fire. This is the threat always to dating. Dating is not marriage, and marriage alone permits, indeed requires, sexual intimacy.

But the purpose of dating is to be assured that this man or this woman is the one chosen for you, and given to you, as your mate for life.

“Mate for life” underscores the seriousness of dating. A mistake in marrying has life-long consequences. One is bound to a disagreeable man or to a shrewish woman for all of his or her life. Then the unique intimacy of marriage becomes the most intense misery—for life. The poet gave expression to the consequences of a hasty, careless decision to marry: “Sin in haste, repent at leisure.”

Even then, although the married person laments, “I made a mistake,” God, who rules over miserable marriages also, did not make a mistake. Although the miserable husband or wife repents of his or her decision to marry, the will of God constrains him or her to live as best he or she can with the miserable mate his or her life-long. God’s grace will enable him or her to do so. But the marriage will be a lifelong burden, rather than a lifelong delight.

What is preferable, what is wiser, what is far more enjoyable is that the young men and women marry one about whom they are as sure as they can be in this world of woe that the one whom they marry is one with whom they will be able to live happily, one who will prove to be, not sinless, but godly, one who will show himself or herself to be, not perfect, but fundamentally loving, one who will not seek himself or herself with a cold, callous, cruel selfishness, but who will seek the other, putting the other first, before himself or herself. At least, the mate will take the other into consideration!

Essential is that the other is a genuine, sound, practicing Christian—a brother or sister in Jesus Christ. Without this, the marriage of a Christian is the severest misery. The Dutch have a rhyming saying about a “mixed marriage,” and its built-in misery: “Twee gelooven op een kussen; daar slaapt de duivel tusschen,” that is, “Two faiths on one pillow; there, the devil sleeps in-between.”

Such a marriage is a real marriage, unbreakable until death parts the two (the Christian thinking in such a marriage is, “unfortunately”), but such a marriage is fraught with sorrows and sometimes insuperable problems. “Will he allow me to attend church?” “Must I go with him or her to the ungodly parties he or she insists on attending?” “Will he or she allow me to have the children baptized, and then reared in the church?” “What about the Christian school and its tuition?” “Who will control the children’s upbringing in the home, with its effects for time and eternity upon my own dear children?” “Will his or her hatred of God soon become hatred of me?” And many more such distressing questions. Many more!

It is also important for dating that the young man or young woman worships God according to the gospel of grace in a true church. This consideration directs a Protestant Reformed young person to another Protestant Reformed young person. “Date and marry in the churches” is good parental counsel to their young people.

But dating in the churches is not the end of the matter. For one thing, not all members of the Protestant Reformed Churches are necessarily true believers and saved children of God. There are hypocrites, tares in the wheat field, sowed by Satan (see
Matt. 13:24–30). The unique activity of dating can reveal that the young person whom the Christian young man or woman is dating is unspiritual and unsaved. The Christian young person may have another calling with regard to this member of the church as well. But one thing he or she must do is break off the relation of dating with the prospect of marrying.

For another thing, a young person in the Protestant Reformed Churches, although a Christian, may have traits that make him or her a very poor choice as a husband or wife.

The girl may be intensely selfish, concerned mainly, if not only, about herself. The will and happiness of her boyfriend mean absolutely nothing to her. She has no intention of living for him, as a help to him. In her thinking, he is for her sake. She wants a husband, merely because all girls have husbands. In addition, she likes to have children, for her own sake, not for God’s sake or her husband’s sake. If he displeases her in any way, she is immediately as cold as an iceberg. While they are dating, she shows these ugly, unchristian traits. If the young man sees these wretched characteristics, he must run from her—fast and far. She will make his entire married life miserable. Dating has a purpose in this regard.

Or, the young man may have and yield to, a sinful nature consisting, in part, of abusiveness. Even though he is Protestant Reformed! He too is self-centered. He regards the young woman as someone he can use, unlovingly, even brutally. He does not intend to guide, as the head in marriage. But he intends to dominate, like a slave-owner. The girl, and later the wife, exists for him. To enforce his abusive thinking, he uses degrading language, language that will reduce her to nothing in her own estimation. Already while dating, he will use or threaten physical force upon her. Or, he will deliberately ignore her, especially in public, in order to impress upon her that she is nothing to him, and worthless. The biblical truth of loving, honoring, and serving the wife as Christ loved, honored, and served his beloved church (see Eph. 5) does not so much as enter his warped mind. He may be a Christian, although his abuse of his girlfriend, and later his wife, makes this questionable. But he will not behave as a Christian husband. Dating is likely to expose all this to the young woman. Seeing the signs of her impending cruel, destructive slavery, should she marry him, she ought to end the relationship, quickly, and run for her marital life.

A godly young man, who will make a delightful husband in a joyful Christian family, woos the young woman, showing himself attentive to her and her welfare. He does not force, demean, threaten, or generally leave the distinct impression that he is her self-seeking master.

Dating serves these good purposes.

I do not know of an alternative, other than the unsatisfactory imposition of a mate upon the young man or the young woman by the parents.

Young people, date! Date with these right purposes!

There is also legitimate pleasure in dating. One enjoys the companionship, pure and innocent, of one of the other sex.

But the purpose, ultimately, is marriage.

Marriage to one about whom you are sure, as sure as is possible, by accompanying prayer, that he or she will be the husband or wife with whom you can live a godly and happy life until death parts you—perhaps 50 or 60 years!

Marriage to one at whose funeral, you will weep naturally, as at the loss of one who has become half of yourself—the better half—rather than faking sorrow while secretly thinking, “Thank God, I am finally delivered.”

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**DEAR LORD, HOW DO I DATE?**

After being asked to write this article, I struggled for some time as to whether I had the courage to approach this subject. However, I didn’t want to let an opportunity pass to encourage you in godly
living. I think many of us agree that the topic of dating is important, but when someone, something, or Someone Greater tells us how we should live in a sex-saturated culture, how do we respond? Do we embrace God’s word? Or do we allow current trends or even our own feelings to govern the decisions that are made as we date?

It is obvious that following natural feelings is never wise; however, it is not always wise either to simply mimic the dating we have seen in our siblings and friends. Instead of this thoughtless mirroring, we need to look to Scripture and have it be the one true light that leads us as we date.

This principle, Scripture Rules, has to be the main, overarching standard that we use in life. We know this has to be true, but do we sometimes want something different and attempt to trump God’s rules with our own feelings and desire for fun? Are we allowing lust to have a place in our relationships as we attempt to captian our own ship?

Godly dating means that God is the God of dating. Godly dating searches for a spouse, one who you will, in marriage, be able to share your life with completely—emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Is there any other purpose to date? Some might say, “Just let us have fun while we’re young!” Today’s culture readily agrees and says, “Absolutely! Enjoy the experience! Find out which kind of girl or guy is ‘right for you!’ See who ‘works’ with what type of person you are!” Don’t misunderstand, dating done in a godly way can be fun. One of the fruits of godly dating is that it is an enjoyable experience, but this must not be the primary purpose.

God knows our path. Let him lead! As we walk this road, searching for a spouse, we naturally and selfishly look for someone who will satisfy us. But in our attempt to find a godly spouse are we neglecting the need to examine our own walk? If we have not set ourselves apart from this world, striving to walk a new and godly life, how can we think that we are in the right mind spiritually to date? This reminds us of the questions that one answers when he or she makes confession of faith. Are you resolved to adhere (cling to with all of your heart) to the doctrine of your church? Are you dedicated to rejecting heresies (not allowing evils to creep in)? Are you whole-heartedly devoted to leading a new and godly life? How would one expect to find a godly spouse if they are not living in godliness themselves?

Has dating changed so discreetly throughout the past decades (i.e., from parental approved and monitored dating to today’s style that is often so secret and hidden from our parents) that we do not see the negative trends? Are we not scared of what’s going on? Or is my dating experience fine because “it has worked in the past,” or “it’s supposed to be fun,” or “we don’t…” or “our dating doesn’t look exactly like the world’s.”

Unbiblical dating encourages the young guy and girl (sometimes even before or at the time when a driver’s license is obtained) to spend too much of their time and life together. Unbiblical dating encourages young people to seclude themselves from other friendships, spending every spare moment together, sharing every feeling, struggle, joy, and secret. It urges young people not to let their parents be involved. It’s all about what I want. Unbiblical dating says the primary goal is: “Find the right person for you” instead of “Be the right person before God so that you can better serve your friend and possible future husband or wife.”

The danger is that this dating is becoming more acceptable in our lives. If you have these commitments when you are not spiritually mature or can’t understand this danger, your ability to think wisely and rationally is jeopardized. With carelessness, most, if not all, wise thoughts are thrown out the window. God and purity are far from your minds. You may have committed yourselves physically, emotionally, and mentally—commitments that ought to be fully shared only in the bond of marriage. Is it true that many have come to believe that living together and sex (and maybe a couple of other things) are the only changes that happen when one gets married? We need to be careful in our commitments. How much time are we spending together? What is the level of our emotional intimacy? Physical intimacy? What do we talk about? Marriage is much more than enjoying God’s gift of knowing your spouse intimately. Are we saving any of these things for marriage?

Although there are many opinions about physical intimacy in dating, God’s command is singular: Be pure! The Bible teaches only two types of love relationships between a man and a woman. There is that of a husband showing love to his wife, and there is the relationship between a man showing love to his sisters in Christ (daughter, mother, sister, friend). Although many aspects of these loves are shared, they are very different as well. The first includes a love that is only reserved for marriage. The second love (this love would include the love in a dating relationship) is described in 1 Corinthians 13:4–7. This love is patient, kind, and humble. This love doesn’t allow one to behave unwisely or to think about themselves. This love is a love of service.
This love does *not* include lust. Solomon warns against the appeal to follow after lust—a desire that is so great in every man’s (and woman’s) heart. We all know well the command of God in Proverbs 6 to bind God’s word around our neck and write his commands upon our heart. Do we remember the context of this command? You bind them in order to “keep thee from the evil woman” so that you don’t even “lust after her beauty in thine heart.” Young people, this is quite a command and warning!

Did you ever hear somebody ask, “Well then how far can we go?” At the core, this question really means, “How far can I go in satisfying my own sinful desires before it becomes wrong?” Instead of asking this, answer these questions for yourself: “Does [insert any action in your dating relationship] spark a lustful desire?” “Am I doing this to love Christ?” Don’t forget to include even the ‘smallest’ and generally accepted actions. Carefully consider what physical things happen in your relationships and how they fit (or don’t fit at all) with how God has demanded we live. If it is too awkward to talk with your friend about appropriate ways to show love or affection and what the limits are, you are not ready to date. 1 Corinthians 6:20, “Ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body!”

Young people of God, the process of searching for a godly spouse is a good thing. It’s a wonderful thing. As you walk this road, let the authority of Scripture lead you. Look to the wisdom of your parents as well! Seek their advice and allow them to guide you through this process.

Solomon says that the way of a man with a maid is beautiful. Your process of coming to the point of marriage can be a beautiful thing as well. This article was not written only to point out the fire that we may have allowed to burn in our bosoms (Prov. 6:27), but also as a means of encouragement to live and date in a way that pleases God. Remember this: when you run, you are not only running away from bad behavior, but you are also running towards something. Even as Lot’s wife ran away, her one last glance to something sinful that she enjoyed caused her last breath. Young people, run towards God without looking back. Throw away everything that could cause you to stumble in your relationships and see your Savior! His eyes are on you! That can be a scary thing when we’re living recklessly. Yet many of us are kept from evil by the thought of, “Thou God, seest me.” What a comfort it is to know that our relationships are guarded by his watchful care. Knowing his love, we are able to share that love with each other. Think first of whether God is pleased, and if he is, keep running straight and don’t look back.

Be faithful, guarded, and wise as you discuss this topic with your parents and friends. Keep each other accountable! Be convicted of the truth so that you choose to follow God’s ways in your relationship. Throw yourselves down on your knees in prayer together before God—pleading for wisdom and discretion, and the strength to fight against every evil way.

May this be our prayer for each other and for our friends: “Most Holy Father, as we live in a world that does its best to influence our lives, may I stand strong in the truth. May it not be said of me that I bend to the lifestyles of the world. If it pleases thee to have me date, guard my heart. Deliver me from all temptation because I understand the strength of the sinful desires of my heart. Lust and sexual sins are a raging fire, so help me not even to warm myself by coming too close. Let sin never reign in my heart, but Father, keep me pure and holy. Help me to be an example to those around me in godliness and purity. Make me always walk with thee. All this because of Jesus’ sacrifice for me, Amen!”

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**DATING CORAM DEO**

*Coram Deo* is a Latin phrase that means “in the presence of God,” or “before God.” R. C. Sproul summarizes the idea well: “To live *coram Deo* is to live one’s entire life in the presence of God, under
the authority of God, to the glory of God.”! Now, we apply the phrase to dating. What does it mean for you and your significant other to date in the presence of God? The history of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife furnishes us with much material for an answer.

You are familiar with the history. Joseph, having been sold into slavery, found himself in the service of Potiphar, a high-ranking official in Egypt who quickly made Joseph “overseer over his house, and all that he had put into his hand” (Gen. 39:4). Potiphar so completely trusted Joseph that he did not even feel the need to keep an eye on him. Then along came Potiphar’s wife, who “cast her eyes upon Joseph”—lusted after him—and said, “Lie with me” (Gen. 39:7).

Two remarks before we consider Joseph’s response: First, Joseph did not seek out Potiphar’s wife, rather the opposite, and neither ought a child of God to seek out a Potiphar’s wife. Second, I wonder if we do justice to the question of whether this was a temptation for Joseph or something he was simply able to brush off. Based on Genesis 37:2 and Genesis 41:46, there is reason to suppose he was a young adult—that’s say in his late teens or early twenties—and there is no reason to suppose Joseph did not have the usual hormones associated with that age. And then there is Potiphar’s wife, who being the wife of so lofty a man as Potiphar was, likely physically attractive and being a woman of the world, knew how to make herself attractive to young men. That is, she knew how to seduce.

Joseph’s response to her indicates that he lived coram Deo. He tells her of the trust that Potiphar had placed in him, and that Potiphar had only kept his wife back from Joseph. But those things were not the ultimate reason for Joseph’s refusal. Nor did he refuse because he was afraid of the potential consequences of such a thing (“What if Potiphar finds out?”, “What if one day father Jacob finds out?”, “What if refusing Potiphar’s wife means my head?”), or the scars such a deed might leave him. Rather, it culminated in this: “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Gen. 39:9). His relationship with God came first. However gratifying to the flesh an affair with Potiphar’s wife might have appeared, he would not let it be to the hurt of the God who loved him and whom he loved. In the same way, date coram Deo! Let the relationship of the both of you with your God come first, and your relationship with one another be second and subservient to that.

But there is more gold for us in this history. Potiphar’s wife persisted: “she spake to Joseph day by day,” but he “hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her” (Gen. 39:10). Finally, a day came when “Joseph went into the house to do his business; and there was none of the men of the house there within” (Gen. 39:11). Potiphar’s wife seized the opportunity, grabbed Joseph by the coat, and with her voice trembling in a passion said to him, “Lie with me.” But Joseph “got him out” (Gen. 39:12), even though it meant leaving in her hands the coat that would be used as the incriminating evidence against him.

What do we learn from this with regard to dating? For one, Joseph’s conduct shows us what it means to “flee fornication” (1 Cor. 6:18). He was not one of the “simple ones…among the youths” (Prov. 7:7) who instead of going out of his way to avoid the strange woman “went the way to her house” (Prov. 7:8). Joseph would not even let himself be near Potiphar’s wife (Gen. 39:10): he kept his distance. Finally, he literally fled. Does this mean we may not be near the one we are dating? No, but if the circumstances are like those Joseph was in, and there is this kind of pressure to do the unholy, then yes, get you out. But “flee fornication” means avoiding tempting occasions to begin with.

Then, there is that line that God includes in this history: “and there was none of the men of the house there within” (Gen. 39:11). There was no one watching that day in Potiphar’s house, and yet Joseph knew there was because he lived coram Deo. Dating coram Deo means dating in the consciousness that God is present. He is in the back of the car, as it were, or on the chair across the living room. But he is much closer than that: “Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?” (1 Cor. 6:19).

A couple of years ago, I think, someone mentioned to me and others the practice of praying with your boyfriend or girlfriend at the end of each date. That is a good practice that goes hand in hand with dating coram Deo. Not only does prayer guard us from entering into temptation (“Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation” (Matt. 26:41))—we are going to come before God later this night, and he is not ignorant—but it keeps our relationship with God before us as we date. Resolve to do this.

In 1 Corinthians 6:19 we are told, “ye are not your own,” and the next verse tells us why: “For ye

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are bought with a price.” This is the gospel for us. Whether we are dating and find ourselves so weak and vulnerable to all kinds of temptation, whether we are dating or married and looking back with pain and sorrow see so much impurity and unholiness, this is the gospel for us: “Ye are bought with a price,” in body and soul. A very great price to redeem such great sinners that we are, the precious blood of Christ, but God “spared not his own Son” (Rom. 8:32). And he forgives us so really that it is as if we had never sinned. And Christ who loved us so much that he gave himself for us also renews us so that not just Joseph but we too can live coram Deo, in gratitude and thankfulness to him. “Therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:20).

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**THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER IN THE DATING RELATIONSHIP**

That is a foolish man indeed who, traveling down the road, refuses to be led. He’s unsure exactly how to get to his destination. And yet he refuses to look at the map. Refuses to ask for directions. Refuses even to listen to the good counsel of others when they sense that he just might be lost. And all along he assures himself “It’s just a matter of time. Other people have made it. So will I.”

Such is the foolishness of that young dating couple who refuses to come to God in prayer.

In the sermon on the mount Jesus instructs us, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Matt. 7:7–8). God has given us the gift of prayer. Every one of God’s children must engage in this holy exercise. And now I write simply to emphasize the importance of prayer for that young man and young woman who find themselves dating.

If you, young couple, desire to have a healthy, godly relationship with each other and with Jehovah God, then you will pray. You will pray individually. And you will pray together. Prayer is the means God has given us to communicate with him. Prayer is the means whereby we are able to thank God for all he has done for us, and the means whereby God gives us more grace and a richer measure of the Holy Spirit. Through prayer, we cry out to God in our distress. We call upon him in the day of trouble. Through prayer, we worship and praise the God of our salvation. From beginning to end, Scripture presents God’s people as a praying people. And you—who find yourselves in a dating relationship—must be a praying couple.

Be wise and discerning when you begin praying together. You ought always to be praying privately. Whether or not you are dating, you must be bringing your petition to God every night, “Father, lead me and guide me in that good and perfect way.” But when God does see fit that you begin dating, praying with the other need not necessarily be on your first date. Perhaps not even in the first few weeks. But there will come that point in your relationship when you’ve spent time with each other, you’ve grown comfortable in one another’s presence, and now you’re able to hold hands and in reverent humility approach God’s throne of grace together in prayer.

What then are those things you ought to be praying for? What I list are matters you ought to be praying for individually, but then in the course of time that you ought to be praying for together. First, pray that God will lead and guide and teach you. Psalm 25:5, “Lead me in thy truth, and teach me.” Psalm 143:8, “cause me to know the way wherein I should walk,” and verse 10 “Thy spirit is good, lead me into the land of uprightness.” Implied is that you and I cannot lead and guide and teach ourselves. We don’t know how to do these things naturally. If the health and welfare of any of our relationships depended upon us, then our relationships would end up in ruin! Rather, we look to the
Lord for guidance. We seek the Spirit for his leadership. And we always resort to and submit ourselves to the good instruction of God’s word.

Second, pray that in your dating relationship, while you would enjoy one another’s friendship and fellowship, that all things may be done to the glory of God. “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do” which includes the places you go and the things you do together, “do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).

Third, pray for grace that you may always submit to God’s will. We may not use prayer in an attempt to persuade God to perform our will, but we always pray in the consciousness and fervent desire that God’s will be done. This can become especially important when, in some instances, it becomes apparent that God’s will is that you no longer be in a dating relationship with that other person. He or she might decide to break up with you. Will you become angry? Will you become bitter? Will that anger and frustration now dominate your life? When we submit our will to the Lord’s will, then that frees us from anger and bitterness. Breaking up may not be what we wanted to happen, but insofar as we know this is God’s will, we rest assured knowing that God’s will is best and always good. He is in control of my life, and not me. God sees and knows everything, and all I see are the few circumstances surrounding me at the moment. So even in the case of a difficult breakup, I can proceed on in life, submitting my will to God’s will, and believing that my God does all things for my good and my salvation. Young people and young adults—pray for this grace that you submit your will to the will of your heavenly Father.

Then finally this—pray for godliness. Young man, do you want to present yourself as handsome and attractive? Young woman, do you want to present yourself as lovely and beautiful? Of course you do. This is your beauty; this is your attractiveness—GODLINESS. To be godly means that the life of Jesus Christ is within me, and I know myself to be a child of God. To live godly means that I will deny myself the things this world holds precious, and I will take up my cross and follow my Savior. Godliness is holiness—separation from sin and devotion to God. Pray that you may recognize that godliness in others and that you personally grow in that godliness.

We don’t want to be like that foolish man who refuses to ask for directions. In his pride, he thinks he can do it all by himself. In his pride, he ignores the good counsel of others. But the same man, in his pride, becomes lost. He finds himself in unfamiliar territory. And his last state becomes worse than the first.

There are so many more things that can be said about the importance of prayer between boyfriend and girlfriend. I’ve mentioned only a few. But in all things let us be a praying people. Praying for grace. Praying for guidance. Praying for contentment. Praying that the Lord’s will be done. Praying for godliness. In so doing you may have the confidence that the Lord will bless you personally, and that his blessing will also extend to your relationship with others. “Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass” (Ps. 37:5).

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that they needed to find a new inheritance, as we see in Judges 18. Open warfare between Israel and Philistia started with the Battle of Ebenezer, where the Philistines stole the ark (1 Sam. 4). The most well-known Philistine is probably Goliath, whom David slew in 1 Samuel 17. Interestingly, David later fled from Saul to the Philistines and lived amongst them as a mercenary for a while. What do you think we learn from that move by David? Was he wrong in doing it? Why or why not? Sing or pray Psalter #361.

March 9  Read Jeremiah 48

This chapter talks about the severe judgment proclaimed on Moab. In verse 10 we read, “cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood.” The prophet is addressing the Chaldeans here so that the Jews would clearly see the coming judgment. God commands the Chaldeans not to have any mercy. Verse 37 tells us that the Moabites would be miserable and lose control in their judgment, even tearing themselves apart.

Interestingly, the last verse begins, “Yet will I bring again the captivity of Moab in the latter days.” After all this pronouncement of judgment, is God saying he will restore the Moabites’ strength? Calvin explains that this promise was given, “not for the sake of the Moabites; but that the Jews might feel assured that God would at length be propitious to them; he promises pardon to the Moabites as it were accidentally, so to speak, and thus unavowedly stretches forth his hand to them, but with a design through this mercy to give to the Israelites a taste of his paternal favor.” Sing or pray Psalter #362.

March 10  Read Jeremiah 49

This chapter begins with God’s judgment upon Ammon, who’d been stealing land from the tribe of Gad. God decreed that their land would be taken away instead and given to the Jews. The section ends with the same promise not to completely wipe them out that we read yesterday.

Judgment is next pronounced against Edom with wording like that found in the book of Obadiah. We read here that Edom’s destruction will be so great that even a thief would be taken aback by the extent of it. There will be no one to care for their orphaned children. The land will be made like Sodom and Gomorrah.

The chapter finishes by pronouncing judgments on Syria, Kedar and Hazor, and Elam. Syria’s capital, Damascus, was a great city praised by men, but it would be destroyed. Kedar was the son of Ishmael, and Hazor might refer to the Canaanites who were driven into Arabia. Elam refers to Persia, who descended from Elam, the son of Shem. Their judgment also ends with God saying he will “bring again the captivity of Elam in the latter days.” Why do you think this phrase is included for some nations and not others? Sing or pray Psalter #361.

March 11  Read Jeremiah 50

God would use Babylon to destroy the nations listed previously, and then we read in this chapter that she would be judged herself. God’s people are commanded to remove themselves from her before this takes place. Verse 8 reads, “Remove out of the midst of Babylon, and go forth out of the land of the Chaldeans, and be as the he goats before the flocks.” Proverbs 30:31 tells us that male goats are leaders, so the elect are told to lead the people out quickly and without fear. In verses 19 and 20, we read of the remnant returning and their sins being forgiven. They were brought to Carmel and Bashan, the best parts of the land. The wording of the verses also beautifully illustrates just how fully God has forgiven their sin. God will remove his people and then destroy the land like Sodom and Gomorrah, as we read in verse 40. God does not always bring his judgment upon the wicked immediately, but longer life doesn’t profit them, for it only gives more opportunity to sin and makes their condemnation all the greater. Sing or pray Psalter #201.

March 12  Read Jeremiah 51

Jeremiah 51:15 reads, “He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heaven by his understanding.” We recently had a sermon entitled “Meekness in Wisdom.” We were taught that true knowledge and wisdom come to expression in a godly walk, which is characterized by meekness. Wisdom is the ability to apply the knowledge of God’s word to circumstances in our life, and meekness is the ability to do that in godly humility. This trait is not a weakness but is strength that shows a loyal subjection to God’s will. One who is meek is under control, and we should be so governed by the love of God that our whole life is lived that way. This verse in Jeremiah 51 talks about God’s wisdom, but meekness isn’t mentioned. Is God meek? Wisdom and meekness go hand in hand for us, but is the same true for God? What do you think? Sing or pray Psalter #259.
March 13 Read Jeremiah 52

Foolish king Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar reacted quickly, bringing a large army to lay siege to Jerusalem. King Zedekiah, who should have been acting as a picture of Christ, fled the city with his army at night. Instead of caring for the people God had entrusted to his care, he decided to do things his own way and fled the place where God dwelt. This turned out to be a decision he paid dearly, because Nebuchadnezzar quickly caught him, forced him to watch his own sons be murdered, cut out his eyes, and took him in chains to Babylon.

In what ways are we like Zedekiah? We all have responsibilities. Some of us are students. Others are mothers in the home or fathers in the workplace. Some are school or church leaders. Some of us hold the responsibilities of single life and others those found in a marriage relationship. In all these responsibilities we have the command not to flee Jerusalem, but to perform our callings to the best of our God-given ability, putting his glory before our own desires. Sing or pray Psalter #283.

March 14 Read Lamentations 1

As I read about the detailed destruction of Jerusalem, I wondered who wrote this book. I discovered that the top read, “The Lamentations of Jeremiah,” but my Reformation Heritage Bible says we don’t necessarily know if that’s the case. The vivid descriptions in the book suggest it was written by someone who saw it firsthand, such as Jeremiah. We first hear of the book being attributed to Jeremiah in the Septuagint, and most other Bible translations have followed suit, including the KJV. The fact that Jeremiah 9:1 states the prophet was going to write a lament over Jerusalem’s fall further supports the theory. I learned elsewhere that traditionally, Catholics viewed Jeremiah and Lamentations as one book, although new translations have split them into two.

As some have put it, in Lamentations the prophet goes from “warning to mourning.” The warnings hadn’t been heeded and judgment had been carried out. The book clearly demonstrates our need for Christ. Jerusalem is portrayed here as a widow, who was once highly sought after for her beauty, but is now disgraced and rejected. The only way out of this despair is to be restored by her first love, her true bridegroom, Jesus Christ. Sing or pray Psalter #284.

March 15 Read Lamentations 2

Lamentations 2:15 reads, “All that pass by clap their hands at thee; they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying, Is this the city that men call The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth?” Calvin addresses the fact that this verse might seem unnecessary. Isn’t this just hitting them when they’re down? No, Calvin explains, these words were needed, because the Jews still hadn’t confessed their sin.

When I read the verse, the first thing I thought of was the danger of giving the world a cause to blaspheme. We need to be conscious of the example we are setting because the world is always watching and questioning our actions. What do you let your kids do? How do you treat your wife? What kind of language do you use? What party were you at? What did you say about the boss? What church was it you go to again? Wasn’t that supposed to be where the truth of the gospel is preached? We must let our lights shine, that the world might not blaspheme God by hissing and wagging their heads in scorn as they pass by. Sing or pray Psalter #338.

March 16 Read Lamentations 3

Matthew Henry divides this chapter into five sections. The first is entitled, “A sad complaint of God’s displeasure and the fruits of it (vv. 1–20).” The prophet speaks of being in darkness and having no strength. He felt as if God had attacked him and humbled him before all the nations. The second section is, “Words of comfort to God’s people when they are in trouble and distress (vv. 21–36).” Verses 22 and 23 tell us, “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.” The title of the third section is, “Duty prescribed in this afflicted state (vv. 37–41).” That duty was to repent, cast their burdens upon the Lord, and trust in him. For the fourth we find, “The complaint renewed (vv. 42–54),” and the final title reads, “Encouragement taken to hope in God, and continue waiting for his salvation, with an appeal to his justice against the persecutors of the church (vv. 55–66).” We have the wonderful assurance that, even in the most grievous of trials, our God is in control and is working everything for our profit. Sing or pray Psalter #149.

March 17 Read Lamentations 4

Lamentations 4:3 reads, “Even the sea monsters
Matthew Henry says that this chapter is different from the others in Lamentations, as it’s not written in alphabetical order. As it turns out, Chapters 1, 2, and 4, are all written so that each line starts with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Chapter 3 is similar, but it actually has three lines for each letter. While researching this, I also learned on myjewish-learning.com that Lamentations, Esther, Song of Solomon, Ruth, and Ecclesiastes make up the five scrolls of the Hebrew Bible, which are each read in synagogue on a different Jewish holiday.

Henry breaks this chapter up into a few different sections. In verses 1–16, we read about the sad state of God's people in captivity. Verses 17 and 18 tell of their sadness at the destruction of God's house, and verses 19–22 are a supplication to God to turn his lovingkindness upon them once again. Sometimes this chapter is referred to as “The Prayer of Jeremiah,” even though it ends with the statement, “But thou hast utterly rejected us; thou art very wroth against us.” Why do you think the book ends in this way, instead of with something redemptive? *Sing or pray Psalter #139.*

### March 18 Read Lamentations 5

Matthew Henry says that this chapter is different from the others in Lamentations, as it’s not written in alphabetical order. As it turns out, Chapters 1, 2, and 4, are all written so that each line starts with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Chapter 3 is similar, but it actually has three lines for each letter. While researching this, I also learned on myjewish-learning.com that Lamentations, Esther, Song of Solomon, Ruth, and Ecclesiastes make up the five scrolls of the Hebrew Bible, which are each read in synagogue on a different Jewish holiday.

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### March 19 Read Ezekiel 1

One of the interesting features in this chapter are the wheels, which we will talk more about in Ezekiel 10. After looking through several different commentaries, this appears to be a difficult passage. One thing that can be said is that two wheels intersect at 90 degrees, which allowed the spirits to move in all directions. Also, eyes on the wheels may symbolize God's awareness and direction of events.

Another interesting feature is the four cherubim. Each of these has four wings and four faces. These four faces are that of a man, lion, ox, and eagle. Each has hooves like a calf, and the rest of their body is like a man’s. They burn like torches, and the wings of one touched the wings of another. This connection could illustrate that together they are a complete whole. What do you think these cherubim picture? Why do you think there are four of them and that number is seen so much in the chapter? *Sing or pray Psalter #399.*

### March 20 Read Ezekiel 2

In Acts 26:16, God says to Paul, “But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee.” A similar call comes to Ezekiel. Matthew Henry points out that he’s the only prophet who's repeatedly called the “son of man,” a name which serves two purposes. First, it’s a dignifying name, because it’s the name of the Messiah in the Old Testament (Dan. 7:13). Second, it’s a humbling name, because it reminds Ezekiel that he has no strength of himself. That is shown from the fact that the Spirit had to lift him up in verse 2. The prophet needed strength because the message he had to bring was lamentations, mourning, and woe. This was what it would be to God’s people who heeded Ezekiel’s words, and it was not an enjoyable message to bring. Yet, he would find peace in submitting to God’s will for him, as we will discuss tomorrow. *Sing or pray Psalter #107.*

### March 21 Read Ezekiel 3

I recently heard a father talking about his distaste for vegetables, especially brussel sprouts. He said he always tried to choke down the veggies without complaint, so as to be a good example to the kids, but the brussel sprouts required every ounce of his resolve to get the job done. Similarly, Ezekiel was told to eat a very distasteful book, filled with lamentations, mourning, and woe. The prophet showed his spiritual strength by eating without hesitation, not shirking his duty like Zedekiah did at the end of Jeremiah.

Not only did Ezekiel eat the book, but verse 3
tells us that it tasted, “as honey for sweetness.” Why would such a negative book taste sweet to Ezekiel? Maybe it was because the prophet was submitting to God’s will, which gave him peace and made the book taste sweet. We all have trials in our life. Sometimes those trials can be very grievous, but we have the assurance that God will always supply us with what we stand in need of, which gives us peace. Is that why you think the book tasted sweet? *Sing or pray Psalter #38.*

**March 22** Read Ezekiel 4

In studying for these devotionals, I studied some YouTube sermons by a Pastor Roger Jimenez from Sacramento, CA that I found very helpful. I definitely don’t agree with a lot of the tangents he goes on, but he does a good job of explaining the chapter verse by verse.

In this chapter, Ezekiel acts out a siege as a picture of what will happen at Jerusalem. As the texts say, he lays on his side for 390 days and then on his right side for 40 more, picturing the years of Israel and Judah’s trespass against God. He lays bound, as they will be in captivity, and puts an iron pan in front of his face, signifying God separating himself from them. Ezekiel is only allowed a small ration of food and water each day, as would take place in a siege, and he had to bake his food using dung for fuel.

Do you think Ezekiel literally did this just as it’s described here? If so, is there an argument to be made for getting creative with trying to make sermons memorable? Why or why not? *Sing or pray Psalter #199.*

**March 23** Read Ezekiel 5

In the first few verses of this chapter, Ezekiel is commanded to shave his head and beard, divide the hairs into three parts, and destroy them. One third was to be burnt with fire in the city, one third was smitten with a knife, and one third was scattered in the wind. The hairs signify the Jews, and their division pictures the ways in which they perished. Some died right when the city was attacked, some died as they tried to flee, and some died after they had fled to other nations. The phrase, “and I will draw out a sword after them,” in verse 2, shows that they wouldn’t even be safe when they fled to other nations.

However, not every hair was destroyed by these means. Verse 3 says, “Thou shalt also take thereof a few in number, and bind them in thy skirts.” God always saves a remnant, although even this remnant had to be whittled down, as we see in verse 4. Here we read that even some of these hairs are burnt with fire, leaving only the tiniest of remnants. Isn’t it amazing that we belong to that minuscule cluster of hairs that remained? *Sing or pray Psalter #273.*

**March 24** Read Ezekiel 6

Ezekiel 6:12 says that the people will be destroyed by war, famine, and pestilence, which we see all throughout scripture. God brought Israel and Judah into captivity when they were defeated in war. Famine was destroying the kingdom when Elijah met the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17. In 2 Chronicles 21, we read about how Jehoram was judged with a gruesome disease that causes his bowels to fall out. Can you think of other places where judgment is brought in one or more of these three ways?

In other passages where God lays out the ways in which God pours out his judgment upon men, wild beasts are included along with the other three. We see this in Ezekiel 14:21, for example. Can you think of any reason why the wild beasts wouldn’t be included in the passage for today?

These judgments are in line with the four horses found in Revelation 6:1–8. The white horse is seen as conquest (sometimes pestilence), the red horse as war, the black horse as famine, and the pale horse as death itself. God had used these means all throughout history to punish the wicked and chastise his people. *Sing or pray Psalter #106.*

**March 25** Read Ezekiel 7

The heading I have for this chapter is “The Day of the Wrath of the Lord.” One of the results of that wrath is seen in verse 12, where we read, “The time is come, the day draweth near: let not the buyer rejoice, nor the seller mourn: for wrath is upon all the multitude thereof.” This verse refers to the fact that all the people will go into captivity. Therefore, the buyer will have no reason to rejoice in his good deal, and the seller won’t mourn the sale of his property, because he was losing it anyway. The seller here doesn’t refer to a regular businessman, but someone who’s property was being sold because of their debt. Maybe you will remember that Jewish law stated that a family’s inheritance would be returned to them in the year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:13), which took place every fifty years. This year of redemption was a wonderful picture of our redemption and God’s preservation of his people, but that illustration had
been destroyed by Judah’s sin and removal into captivity. *Sing or pray Psalter #151.*

**March 26 Read Ezekiel 8**

Here we read of four different abominations the people were committing, which can all be summarized as idol worship. In verse 4, we see that they had placed an idol in the temple porch. Verse 10 tells us that they were worshipping beasts everywhere. Ezekiel had to dig through the wall to see this whole thing, just like we often have to work on our spiritual life in order to understand just how horrible it is to blaspheme God. In verse 14 we see that women were crying in the north gate. Calvin thinks “Tammuz” here refers to the Egyptian god Osiris. He continues that Osiris was yearly wept for by the Egyptians and that his worship included women exposing themselves to his idol. Finally, Ezekiel sees men turning their backs on the temple and worshipping the sun in verse 16. These horrible abominations provoked God to jealousy (v. 3), like a husband who has been cheated on by his wife. *Sing or pray Psalter #340.*

**March 27 Read Ezekiel 9**

In Psalm 73:3, Asaph says, “For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.” He almost lost faith in his affliction, because he looked at the wicked, and they seemed to have easy and prosperous lives. However, Asaph is made to see that, although things can appear that way at times, God is ripening them for their final judgment and preparing his people for heaven.

In Ezekiel 9:6, God commands all the idolaters in Judah to be slain, but he says all the faithful with the mark on their forehead will be spared. Matthew Henry thinks this means quite literally that the lives of all God’s people were spared when the Chaldeans took over, but Calvin takes a different approach. He says this simply means that, although the righteous suffered physically along with the wicked, God preserved and cared for his people through it all, a teaching which harmonizes with passages like Psalm 73. Although it often looks like the righteous actually suffer even more than the wicked, all the earthly things they have and abuse only make their condemnation all the greater, while God uses trials to strengthen the faith of his people. *Sing or pray Psalter #340.*

**March 28 Read Ezekiel 10**

This chapter is very similar to Ezekiel 1, where we also hear about the four cherubim and the wheels around them. Calvin believes these wheels symbolize “the changes which constantly occur in the world.” The world is always changing like the turning of a wheel.

I recently heard a sermon entitled “The Changeless Jesus Christ.” As the sermon was preached on the last Sunday of the year, the minister was bringing out the comfort we have that, in an ever-changing world, our God is always the same. Everything else changes. We change from high faith to low faith, from health to sickness, from young to old. Society changes, as technology advances and wickedness grows. Opinions change, authority figures change, circumstances of life change, doctrines change, but Christ never changes. He has decreed he will save us and never changes his mind. Our salvation is sure. As we go forward into another year, we have that comfort. We are and always will be his chosen people, and no matter what he has in store for us this year we know he will never leave us nor forsake us. *Sing or pray Psalter #376.*

**March 29 Read Ezekiel 11**

We have a lot of talk about cauldrons and flesh in this chapter, but what does it all mean? In verse 3, the people are saying, “this city is the caldron, and we be the flesh.” They believe they are safe from destruction, like flesh inside of a cauldron. They are, no doubt, mocking Jeremiah’s prophecy in Jeremiah 1:13, which says that the Chaldeans would come like a fire under a pot and consume them. In Ezekiel 11:7, God turns their own parable on them, saying, “Your slain whom ye have laid in the midst of it, they are the flesh, and this city is the caldron: but I will bring you forth out of the midst of it.” God is stating that all those they had slain in the streets were the flesh, and these dead citizens were the only safe ones among them. Then, in verse 11, God states clearly that the city would not be a place of security for them. Man loves to give himself a false sense of security in his sinful ways, but God’s justice will always be satisfied. *Sing or pray Psalter #372.*

**March 30 Read Ezekiel 12**

There are five sections in this chapter, each beginning with Ezekiel stating that the word of the Lord came to him again. In verses 1–7, Ezekiel is told to move from one place to another in a way that the people will see. He’s told to make it look like he’s going into captivity and to dig through the wall like he’s trying to sneak out. Then, in verses 8–16, God
explains that this is what Zedekiah is going to do when Nebuchadnezzar takes over. It says he will die in Babylon, but not see it, pointing to his eyes being plucked out. In verse 17–20, God tells the people their judgment will be so severe that they won’t even be able to eat without shaking, like Belshazzar did when the hand wrote on the wall in Daniel 5. God continues by reminding them of how foolishly they love to tell themselves that these words of judgment are just talk that never actually takes place (vv. 21–25). Finally, God declares in the last three verses that his decree will always take place, and we must never fool ourselves into thinking we can get away with sin. Sing or pray Psalter #365.

The people had become so wicked that even these three heroes of faith wouldn’t be able to make them repent. They could escape the judgment themselves but wouldn’t be able to help others do so.

Part of the judgment these men would be unable to save Judah from is described in the previous verse as “breaking the staff of bread.” Just as an old man leans on a staff for support, so we rely on earthly bread to restore the strength of our body. However, without the Bread of Life the staff of bread is always broken. It may fill us up for the moment, but it doesn’t profit us anything. Sing or pray Psalter #12.

April 2 Read Ezekiel 15

In this chapter, Judah is portrayed as a vine tree. A fruitful vine is beautiful and pleasant, but it’s not better than other trees in and of itself. Not only is the vine tree no better, but it’s actually useless if you’re looking to get wood from it. The value of the vine is all in its fruit. We are only valuable to God when we produce fruit. God gave her many gifts, but she took those gifts, including the children God had given her, and offered them to pieces of wood.
and stone. Ironically, the wicked men whose praise she sought were ultimately the ones who brought about her destruction. She forgot the relationship of friendship and fellowship she had with God, but he did not forget, and restored her to him once again. That’s us. That’s how horrible we are, and yet God’s lovingkindness never fails. What a wonder! *Sing or pray Psalter #30.*

### April 4  Read Ezekiel 17

This chapter holds an interesting parable about two eagles and a vine, which is then explained. The first eagle represents Nebuchadnezzar, who carries Jehoiachin, the top of the cedar, away captive. The king of Judah couldn’t resist Nebuchadnezzar any more than a twig could resist the king of birds. The cedar that Jehoiachin was the top of represented the royal family. Nebuchadnezzar sets up Zedekiah, illustrated by the willow tree, to be king in Jehoiachin’s place. Things went well at the start of his reign, and he became like a vine which gave fruit to his ruler and looked attractive before the other nations. Zedekiah had no reason to complain, but he decided to follow after another eagle instead. This eagle, representing the king of Egypt, was not as strong as Nebuchadnezzar, and Zedekiah was foolish to trust in him. The Babylonian eagle responded by returning to Judah to pluck up the vine and carry the rest of them into captivity. *Sing or pray Psalter #94.*

### April 5  Read Ezekiel 18

In verse two, we read that the captives were speaking a proverb that, “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” What does this mean? Calvin and Matthew Henry explain that the Jews here are complaining about being judged for something their ancestors did. Just like it doesn’t make sense that a child would taste the spoiled grape bitten into by his father, so they thought it was unjust that they were getting punished in Babylon for sins they hadn’t committed.

Verse three follows with, “As I live, saith the Lord GOD, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel.” Calvin says that here God is stating that he would make clear to all that the Jews deserved their punishment because they hadn’t ceased to rebel against him since the day they were carried away. This is evidenced by the fact that only a tiny portion would ever return to the Promised Land. In verse four, God further explains the folly of thinking he relishes his people’s adversity, because it’s only natural that he would care for his own creation. *Sing or pray Psalter #116.*

### April 6  Read Ezekiel 19

This chapter is divided into two parts: verses 1–9 is about the kings of Judah and verses 10–14 is about the state of the nation. In the first part, Judah is portrayed as a lioness, which we see in other passages, such as Genesis 49:9 and Numbers 23:24. This lioness had a baby who grew strong and powerful. This whelp pictures Jehoahaz, who was taken to Egypt by Pharaoh Necho, as we read about in 2 Chronicles 36. Necho made Jehoiakim (the next whelp) king instead, but he was soon bound by Nebuchadnezzar and brought to Babylon.

Verses 10–14 switch to Judah being described as a strong and fruitful vine, which had lost all strong leadership under Zedekiah. This reminds us that leaders are held accountable to a higher standard, as we see from Moses being judged for striking the rock and Adam being blamed for bringing sin into the world. However, when human leadership fails God makes plain to all that he’s the one in complete control and is working everything perfectly according to his plan. Men fail, but God never fails. *Sing or pray Psalter #126.*

### April 7  Read Ezekiel 20

This chapter reminds the Jews of all the ways God cared for them throughout their history. He brought them out of Egypt, giving them riches and leading them to the land flowing with milk and honey, but they still rejected him and served other gods. He didn’t destroy them in the wilderness, even though they rejected his laws and desecrated the Sabbath. They constantly complained, saying they wanted to return to Egypt, even after he saved them by wonders time and again. When they arrived in Canaan, they tried to be just like the nations they’d been commanded to destroy, worshipping their gods and even sacrificing their own children.

Do the sins of others ever frustrate and anger you? Do you teachers and parents ever wonder, “Why don’t they just obey?” We all think like that at times, and we need to be reminded of the simple answer. We’re all sinners. Although at the moment it might be more obviously seen in the person or people we’re angry with, that’s how we all are spiritually. We are all like the Israelites or like small children, who rebel again and again, selfishly forgetting all that has been done for us. *Sing or pray Psalter #141.*

Look up from this page right now and observe your current surroundings. If there are people around, spot what they are doing. Are they talking to one another? Or are they looking down at their phones, completely oblivious of any kind of activity going on around them? *Reclaiming Conversation* is a book written by MIT professor Sherry Turkle that talks about how our phone usage has affected our ability to communicate and to connect with others around us. Important social skills such as empathy and teamwork are becoming more and more absent in society largely due to our phones.

The book is divided into six short sections and is based on a quote by 19th century philosopher Henry David Thoreau pertaining to the “3 chairs” that he kept in his cabin in the woods. Each chair symbolized a different type of human relation: solitude, friendship, and society. The book explains how our phones affect all three types of those “chairs” of relating to ourselves and others. For solitude, Turkle explains that we need to be alone at times in order to “find ourselves.” This is our desire and intention with the people, places, and things that we encounter on a daily basis. Phones prevent that reflection time because they stimulate an insatiable appetite for constant bits of information. The result? Because we have little reflection time to understand ourselves, we develop a significant lack of empathy for others around us.

This lack of empathy will inevitably spill over to the “second chair,” that is, friendship. One of the people the author interviews for the book is a college student who explains that she thinks seven minutes is the amount of time it takes for a group conversation to change from an awkward to an interesting vibe. However, that same student reluctantly admits that many (including herself) are not even motivated to develop a group conversation that lasts that long. Instead, we turn to our phones because conversation there “feels enclosed and self-contained” (Turkle, 154) and not as disorganized when compared to real-time, face-to-face talks. Our education at school and our working lives are also affected by this lack of empathy, as Thoreau’s “third chair” symbolizes society. Our education is negatively affected by our phones when we choose to multi-task by having them out during classroom lectures, resulting in “[forgetting] how to read human emotions” (213) as well as a decreased ability to understand what is being taught in class. Work is affected as well as employees at desk jobs increasingly prefer sending emails to solve any kind of work problem with a co-worker rather than talking about the matter face-to-face. This significantly hurts employees’ unity, collaboration, and teamwork. The solution to all these societal problems due to our increasing phone usage? Arguably the most powerful sentence in the book: “Put away your phone” (319) when others wish to have a conversation. The mere presence of a phone creates a vibe of distraction and lack of interest in what others have to say.

This book is beneficial for a Christian young person to read because it will increase personal awareness of how powerful technology is in changing patterns of thinking and behavior towards the many neighbors that cross paths with us on a daily basis. It will also renew a personal desire to have more face-to-face conversations with others, which is really the only sincere way to build true empathy as well as the ability to inspire a friend, family member, or coworker. I would highly recommend this book! Although it is a little long at 362 pages, it is definitely worth the read. Some of the quotations in the book are stunning as they clearly show that humans are behaving more and more like robots because of their phones.

“Wherefore comfort yourselves together and edify one another, even as also ye do” (1 Thess. 5:11).

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A three-day conference sponsored by the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary

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REV. BRIAN HUIZINGA has been the pastor at Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California since 2011.

The Doctrine of the Covenant in the Canons
PROF. DOUGLAS KUIPER was appointed by Synod 2017 as the professor of Church History and New Testament. Currently he is working on getting his ThM degree from Calvin Seminary, with a concentration in church history.

The Polity of Dordt: Om Goede Orde in de Gemeente Christi te Onderhouden (Maintaining Good Order in the Church of Christ)
REV. WILLIAM LANGERAK has been the pastor at Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Wyoming, Michigan since 2003.

The Call of the Gospel
REV. MARK SHAND was ordained in 2001 as a minister in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia, and from 2009 to the present he has been the minister of the Launceston congregation.

The Canons as the Original “Five points”
REV. ANGUS STEWART is the pastor of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church (CPRC) in N. Ireland and chairman of the British Reformed Fellowship.

Held at Trinity PRC April 25–27, 2019 | dordt400.org
**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:

Declan Reed, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jason & Brandi Boone—Byron Center, MI
Weston Daniel, son of Kaitlyn Gunnink—Edgerton, MN
Olivia Noelle, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Gord & Rebecca Tolsma—Edmonton, Canada
Josiah John, son of Mr. & Mrs. John & Elsie Miersma—Edmonton, Canada
Levi Todd, son of Mr. & Mrs. Nathan & Susan Lubbers—Georgetown, MI
Gemma Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jess & Danielle Busscher—Georgetown, MI
Calen En Sheng son of Mr. & Mrs. Josiah & Hui Qi Tan—Georgetown, MI
Madison Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Eric & Kristie Miedema—Georgetown, MI
Casey John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Dave & Gina VandenTop—Grace, MI
Payton Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Allen & Michelle Jordan—Grace, MI
Kayla Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Zach & Amanda Klamer—Grace, MI
Annie Lou, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Bennet Meyer—Grace, MI
Evelyn Anne, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Andrew & Anna Beelen—Hudsonville, MI
Zade Micah, son of Mr. & Mrs. Stefan & Jaimy Griess—Hudsonville, MI
Caden Randall, son of Mr. & Mrs. Randy & Heather Veldman—Hudsonville, MI
Embry Gloriann, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Tim & Lacey Key—Hudsonville, MI
Evan Dale, son of Mr. & Mrs. Nate and Lauren Boddy—Hudsonville, MI
Jaylee Ann, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Derek & Leanne Cnossen—Hudsonville, MI
Henry James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Darren & Karyn Solanyk—Loveland, CO
Theodore William, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jonathan & Katie Camarigg—Lynden, WA
Charlotte Joanne, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brandon & Breanna Feenstra—Redlands, CA

Amos John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brent & Stacy Meelker—Redlands, CA
Levi Jase, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jason & Deanna Langerak—Southeast, MI
Liam Carl, son of Mr. & Mrs. Carl & Jennie VanDenBerg—Southeast, 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:

Ashlie Estabrook, Curtis Dykstra, Daniel Lubbers & Joshua Overbeek—Byron Center, MI
Jocelyn Holstege—Georgetown, MI
Luke Stoel—Grace, MI
Nathan Negelkerke—Hudsonville, MI
Aaron Freeman—Hudsonville, MI
Julie Reinholt—Kalamazoo, MI
Megan Whitehurst—Redlands, CA
Kim Blakeslee—Redlands, CA

**MARRIAGES**

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

Mr. Brandyn Brummel and Miss Meghan Zevenbergen—Doon, IA
Mr. Paul Kirschenman and Miss Marlena Wynia—Doon, IA
Mr. Austin Brower and Miss Rachel Rutgers—Hudsonville, MI
Mr. Brendan Brower and Miss Casey Gritters—Hudsonville, MI
Mr. Caleb Pastoor and Miss Kimberly Pryor—Kalamazoo, MI
Mr. Alvin Mejeur and Mrs. Sarah Bishop—Kalamazoo, MI
Mr. Blake DeBoer and Miss Samantha Stains—Loveland, CO
Mr. Jonathan Oosterhouse and Miss Leanne Bruinsma—Redlands, CA
Mr. Luke Kamps and Miss Emily Langerak—Southwest, MI
Mr. Travis Ver Strate and Miss Lauryn Meyers—Trinity, MI
Trees of the Bible (4) Fig Tree

The fig tree is the third tree mentioned by name in the Bible, after the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Adam and Eve used the leaves of the fig tree to try to make aprons for themselves to cover themselves after the Fall.

Fig trees are mentioned as part of the prosperity of the Promised Land (Deut. 8:8). In Judges, one of the judges uses the fig tree as part of a parable where the trees go to the olive tree, fig tree, and grapevine to make them king over all the trees. The olive tree, fig tree, and vine all refuse since they have already been given the duty by God to provide fruit and will not leave that duty even for the power to reign over the others (Judges 9).

As having fruitful fig trees was a sign of prosperity since the people would have food, destroying the fig trees is mentioned often as part of God’s wrath (Joel 1:12, Amos 4:9). It was a fig tree that Jesus cursed in Matthew 21.

Fig trees take at least two years to mature before they begin to bear fruit, but some trees can take up to six years before they bear fruit. In Luke 13:3–9, Jesus told a parable about a vine-keeper who waited three years for a fig tree to bear fruit and decided to wait another year before cutting the tree down. In the New Testament, the fig tree’s coming fruit was a sign of repentance and the coming of the kingdom of heaven (Luke 21:29, Mark 13:28).

As children of God, we are to be like the fig tree, bringing forth fruit. God gives us life, and when we have God’s life in us, it flows through us so that we bear fruit like fruitful fig trees.

Tricia is a member of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.
WATCHING AND WAITING AS IN THE DAYS OF NOAH