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Your education is valuable.

That statement is easy to say, but it’s something that’s even easier to lose sight of in the middle of a long school year.

If you are (or were) like I was, your attitude toward your education and the school year looks something like the following timeline.

August: I’ve got some new school supplies and some new clothes. I’m excited to get back into the daily routine of school.

September: School is in session and going well. I am engaged and generally enjoying my time here.

October/November: Still here, but I’m starting to get bored. I can’t wait for Thanksgiving break though!

December: Whew! I made it to Christmas break. January/February: Christmas break was refreshing. A few more months to go. I can do this.

March: Pure drudgery. The weather is starting to change, I don’t want to be in this classroom.

April: Spring break!

May: My effort is at its yearly low. I just need to finish my assignments and projects and I’ll be free for the summer.

As you can see and maybe even identify with, I was always looking ahead to the next break. Most of what I valued was the time I was not in school. I should have valued what was graciously given to me: my education. What I saw as something I didn’t want to do, something boring, something to survive, was actually the Lord’s work. What I saw as too many school years filled with too many assignments that were “too long” or “too hard” in subjects I was “never going to use” were actually the years of my God-given vocation as a student within which I was called to serve God.

If you are a young person like I was who can’t wait to get out of school and get a job, you need to slow down. Value your education. See your schoolwork as your current job, your work within the kingdom of God. Were you assigned another science project and you just “don’t see the point”? Were you given another math worksheet that you “don’t want to do”? Do you have to read “another long chapter” in your history textbook? Instead of thinking about these things negatively, I challenge you to see them positively, as tasks that God has placed before you for his purpose of shaping you as an individual within the body of his church.

Value your education.
“I’m working for the weekend.” “Life’s a beach.” TGIF—Thank Goodness It’s Friday. These and many other messages promote the idea that work is drudgery, only a necessity, and that real living is a vacation, relaxation, and lounging. Our society overemphasizes lounging and minimizes man’s need for labor.

But God created man to labor and to lounge only in moderation. He created man with a nature that needs labor. God said, “Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth... Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it...” (Gen. 1:26, 28) “And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it” (Gen. 2:15). Rev. Herman Hoeksema taught that these verses indicate that man has an irresistible impulse to labor with the creation and develop it. He described this impulse as a “cultural urge.” (Christian and Culture, 1940)

The word culture has to do with the development and growth of something because of human influence. Agriculture is the development and good use of a field. Aviculture has to do with the development and growth of a population of birds. Bacteria are cultured when they are grown and developed for a purpose. That man has a cultural urge means that man has a need, a deep internal need, to work with creation and develop it.

Adam had a cultural urge, and that urge has been passed along to us. We also have a fundamental need to be productive. We can’t help but work. We labor to satisfy a human need. It’s not just the need to put food on the table or to pay the bills. Instead, we also labor because we are human. Laboring is like an itch that needs to be scratched. Genesis 1:28 and 2:15 are not merely commandments that God placed in Scripture as a description of what man was instructed to do. “Go and work the garden.” Rather they are commands spoken into us. These commands affected the fabric of man’s soul. Laboring is now a part of our nature. Birds fly, fish swim, and men work. Man is driven to seek out work, to be productive, to develop things. This urge needs to be satisfied. Man is restless when not productive. Not only physical labor is necessary for our soul, but mental labor is also good work that soothes the soul. The doctor and the ditch digger, the author and the artisan, the teacher and the tailor, the counselor and the cook go home satisfied as a result of their labor. A life of lounging is unsatisfying. Young person, keep this perspective of labor. Don’t work for a living but work to live.

Before the fall, Adam joyfully labored with the wonderful properties that his Friend placed in the creation. God filled the earth with powers and properties that were intended to be discovered, understood, and then used by man; not for our own glory but instead to better serve his God and give him glory. Certainly Adam walked with God in the cool of the day as a major aspect of their relationship, but Adam also enjoyed his God when God was not physically present. Adam worked in the garden, was amazed at the physical properties he found and enjoyed engaging with those properties. With labor, by labor, through labor, Adam had yet another way to enjoy and love his God.

It is interesting to note that Jesus himself, before beginning his public ministry was known as a carpenter! Jesus worked the wood around Nazareth. He crafted useful products. Manual labor was not below him. He wanted to work. He felt an urge to work. Manual labor was part of his sinless and faithful service to his Father.
Man is satisfied when he knows he has purpose, when he is able to scratch his cultural urge itch. What a great punishment it is when one is forced to live life without purpose. Failure to have a sense of purpose is one of the greatest trials of the teenager. Teens groan and complain because they don’t feel purposefully directed. They have to “find themselves.” Some Christian counselors will encourage those who have depression to be useful, to go to work, as one small part of the therapy given. Lack of significant work was the peculiar punishment that the mythological figure Sisyphus had to endure. He was forced by the gods to roll a boulder up a slope to a summit. Just as he reached the summit, the boulder would roll back down, and Sisyphus had to repeat that pointless and wearisome effort over and over. The Greeks understood the penalty of pointless work. Interestingly the right to have meaningful work is a human right guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights created by the United Nations after World War II. It was so demeaning to pointlessly haul piles of rocks and sand back and forth day after day that it is now a protected right to subject others to work only with purpose, even as a prisoner. The Christian employer ought to take this to heart and point out to the man on the assembly line why his position is important and why his particular job ought to be done well. The employee may feel that they are only one cog in a big wheel. But cogs have significance, and satisfied cogs are those that see the scope of the whole.

God glorifies himself as he guides his people to produce a well-plowed field, a shingled roof, good software programs, a finely tailored suit, or a good loaf of bread. We lovingly serve him as we labor. Labor, rightly pursued, is a covenantal activity.

Actively being employed in labor is necessary for a satisfied soul, and our good God gives what is needed. He covenantally gives labor to his people. In Isaiah 28:23–29, Isaiah makes it clear that knowing when and how to plant, cultivate, and harvest a crop, as well as which tool to use and how and when to use that tool, are all given from the Lord. How to cultivate different crops in various soils and the skill of using properly crafted tools is tied to God’s good guidance in this chapter. Rather than being characterized as dreary labor, work is described as a gift given by God. In love God teaches us how to produce from the treasures of the earth. With knowledge and skill God equips us for earthly life. “LORD” in Isaiah 28:28, 29 reference Jehovah, our covenant God. “This also cometh forth from the LORD of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working” (v. 29). It is the covenant God that teaches the godly craftsman his skill. Adequately equipped for work, man’s soul is satisfied, he fellowships with God as he interacts with God’s creation, he elevates the physical existence of his neighbors, he provides for the poor, he skillfully uses talents given, and he maintains the kingdom causes. The text ends with “This also cometh from the LORD of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in doing.” God glorifies himself as he guides his people to produce a well-plowed field, a shingled roof, good software programs, a finely tailored suit, or a good loaf of bread. We lovingly serve him as we labor. Labor, rightly pursued, is a covenantal activity.

Of all the generations that have ever existed, your generation is far more equipped for working in God’s kingdom. Adam labored with little. God’s eternal counsel has delivered fantastic cultural advancements into your hands. Are you using them for God’s glory as you ought? You’ve been given much, and now much is required. Avoid digital distraction! Limit your hours lounging in front of the television. Your generation no longer has to work many hours just to put food on the table or to bring water into your homes. You have air conditioning and electric lighting to keep your minds alert and fresh. Be thankful for the spiritual but also cultural inheritance you’ve been given. What a gift! What a responsibility! Let’s labor with this abundance of riches. Lounge in moderation. Labor in love.

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THANKFUL FOR EDUCATION

Congratulations! If you are reading this, you are educated. It might not seem like a big deal, but it is. According to UNESCO, only 74% of the world is literate. You are on the good side of that percentage. When you consider statistics about educational opportunity from The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and others, you realize just how few people in the world get the chance to be educated.

The majority of the readership of this publication constitutes a very unique group indeed. You have been given the opportunity to have not just an education, but a good one. Most of you have been given the opportunity to have not just a good education, but a Christian education. Many of you have been given the opportunity to have not just a good Christian education, but a Protestant Reformed Christian education. You are in a small subset, an incredibly blessed subset.

It’s easy to take this blessing for granted. I recall being at young people’s conventions with friends from our western churches who would say how “lucky” we were to have Covenant Christian High School. They pointed out just how quickly we forgot that blessing in our lives. Now, by the grace of God, many students from our western churches have the opportunity to be educated in a Protestant Reformed high school too. Congratulations.

So from a global perspective on education, you are unique. Unique doesn’t always mean blessed and thankful. We are blessed, and we should be thankful.

Thankful for what? A Protestant Reformed education is particular in that it emphasizes the sovereignty of God in every way. God is sovereign first in salvation, but also sovereign in creation and order and reason. God is sovereign in the giving of talents, in the development of skills, and in the application of education. God is sovereign in science, but also in math and grammar and in every subject ever taught in our schools. We can be thankful that there is one absolute in the universe. We must be thankful that we are given the opportunity to be taught everything from that perspective.

Thankful to whom? Our covenant God, of course. But God uses means. God uses the means of parents, teachers, coaches, staff, and supporters to give you the opportunity to be educated. This has been true all throughout history. From Moses to Daniel to Timothy, through the Reformation and the fathers at Dordrecht, passed on to the founders of our own schools, people have had to sacrifice for the education of the youth of the church. This continues in all of our schools today. By God’s grace, parents and school board members give of themselves to build and maintain our schools. By God’s grace, our teachers invest themselves in the training of covenant youth. We should thank God and then thank our teachers.

So now what? You’ve been given this education. Why? Why you? God didn’t give it to you to put on a shelf and admire. What are you going to do with it? Remember the unique subset into which you have been placed when you consider that question. Young men, consider that when determining whether you are called to the gospel ministry. Young people and young adults, consider the great blessing that you have been given, and prayerfully ask whether God gave it to you in order that you might help fill the urgent need for Protestant Reformed schoolteachers.

Most of us aren’t called to those two professions. I know that I am not. Are the rest of us then excused from considering what to do with the great gift of the education that God gave to us? No. We are still members of the blessed subset. Why? What should we do with it?

Make money with it. Doesn’t that sound greedy? Look at the purpose though. Use your education to make money not for you, but for the God who gave you the education. Consider using your education as a basis for more learning. Use your education to further your education if that is what you need to do to support his kingdom. God gave you the education; now serve him with it. Your family will need to be fed. The Lord’s poor will need to be helped. The ministry of the gospel costs money, and you are the means which God will use to accomplish that end.

Last but not least, read Deuteronomy 8:18. God has given you the ability to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant. One of the most obvious covenant blessings that we have been given is our schools. Use your education to support our schools. Get educated and be thankful for your education to support more education? Isn’t that just circular
The desire for knowledge is dying. No, not a real death, but a metaphorical one. Knowledge, now so easily obtained, is disparaged. With high supply and low demand, her value has plummeted. In that sense, she is dying. She is dying, and we would do well to mourn her loss in our culture.

You are called to be a member of God’s church. At some point, you may be given the calling of mother, father, minister of the gospel, Christian school-teacher, church office-bearer, school board member, or any kind of laborer. Your education prepares you to fill those roles. Be willing to serve. The people whom God used to give you your education were. You can say that you are thankful for your education, but when you use it for God’s glory, then your educators really want to say, “Congratulations.”

Ron Schipper is a member of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church and has served on the Board of Adams Christian School in Wyoming, Michigan.

Rick Mingerink

DYING ON THE VINE

The desire for knowledge is dying. No, not a real death, but a metaphorical one. Knowledge, now so easily obtained, is disparaged. With high supply and low demand, her value has plummeted. In that sense, she is dying. She is dying, and we would do well to mourn her loss in our culture.

The opening letter of Uncle Screwtape to his nephew Wormwood is worth considering. Screwtape, an experienced devil, is giving his young apprentice, Wormwood, advice in deceiving a certain man. Screwtape writes:

It sounds as if you supposed that argument was the way to keep him out of the Enemy’s [the enemy here is God—RM] clutches. That might have been so if he had lived a few centuries earlier. At that time the humans still knew pretty well when a thing was proved and when it was not; and if it was proved they really believed it. They still connected thinking with doing and were prepared to alter their way of life as the result of a chain of reasoning. But what with the weekly press and other such weapons we have largely altered that. Your man has been accustomed, ever since he was a boy, to have a dozen incompatible philosophies dancing about together inside his head. He doesn’t think of doctrines as primarily “true” or “false,” but as “academic” or “practical,” “outworn” or “contemporary,” “conventional” or “ruthless.” Jargon, not argument, is your best ally....

(The Screwtape Letters, C.S. Lewis)

Jargon, not argument, is your best ally. That is an interesting lesson for C.S. Lewis to begin with, is it not? Jargon is specialized language that is difficult to understand. It is a word with deep technical meaning but thrown around with relative ease.

Unlike jargon, an argument is setting forth true or false propositions or statements with the necessary evidence for proving its truth value. In its simplest form, argument is reasoning. It is the ability to reason that sets humans apart as the pinnacle of God’s creation. Argumentation is a good thing.

Jargon, not argument, is your best ally, says Uncle Screwtape. Jargon can be as influential today as any well-formed argument. Instead of convincing a man through argumentation, it is so much easier to convince by applying a big word or by using a jargonied label. When someone labels a man, woman, or child with a specialized or technical word, it does not matter what argument you may have against it or evidence to the contrary, you begin with a significant disadvantage.

We live in an age when jargon, not argument, is valued. Arguments require knowledge. They require a depth of thinking. And this takes me to the main point of this article. Knowledge is losing value in our culture, both abroad and close to home.

There is an increasing disregard for knowledge in education. I know that seems absurd. One would think knowledge is the chief commodity of a school. But knowledge as the content of one’s knowing is increasingly disparaged in the sphere of education. Instead, an emphasis is being placed on learning. Educational success isn’t measured in the depth or breadth of knowledge acquired, but in the activity
of the learning process. Although the words learn, learning or learner are valid concepts in education, when used in the place of knowledge, a new meaning is established whether we know it or not.

To illustrate, pretend a certain man received an enrollment flyer in the mail from two local schools: West Elementary and East Elementary. Similar statements were printed on each flyer:

The goal of West Elementary School is building and developing the knowledge of students in an ever-changing world.

The goal of East Elementary School is building and developing the learning of students in an ever-changing world.

Would this man really come away with a different understanding of what each school is saying? Probably not. If he even noticed the difference (which he likely wouldn’t), he would probably attribute it to simple nuance of language. It is not, however, a matter of nuance. Because we do not carefully recognize the difference, the replacement of learning for knowledge is happening quickly and quietly.

What did the man miss? Knowledge is the content of our thoughts; learning is the process by which that knowledge is acquired. One does not acquire learning. One only acquires knowledge. Knowledge is a noun; it identifies a thing. Learn is a verb; it identifies an action. Knowledge is the substance of our knowing; learning is the activity of acquiring this substance. They are very different concepts.

Why does this matter? Knowledge and learning are not interchangeable. The words are not synonyms by any stretch of their meaning. And the real issue is rooted in the fact that the use of learning over knowledge is deliberate. There may be some people or schools making the mistake out of ignorance, but there is theory behind it.

Since the end of the modern era, certain schools of thought emerged that developed a suspicious view of knowledge. It is too objective. It is too passive. It is too apolitical. Yet more concerning, it suggests an existence of truth.

Increasingly, knowledge is considered a mental construction. As a construct, it is formed in the mind through the learning activity. The focus of a teacher, then, is to build quality learning activities. By emphasizing learning over knowledge, theorists and all those who follow them are creating an environment which minimizes content and exalts the activity. If this were a play from Shakespeare, it would be a tragedy.

I will use a certain Miss Ignor Amos as an illustration. Miss Amos wants her children to be learners. She just came back from a conference over the weekend and is on fire for student learning. At this conference, a dynamic speaker lauded the importance of students analyzing and applying their learning to real-life situations. The passionate speaker extolled the usefulness of getting students to create their understanding.

In her classroom the next day, Miss Amos gives her students (whom she now calls learners) newspaper clippings about the disappearing rainforests. After a brief introduction to the topic, she has them write a paragraph on what it would be like to live in a threatened rainforest. The students write vociferously. They are engaged with the activity because they are all imagining themselves in a rainforest. So far, so good! she thinks. One of her better students writes the following:

Living in the rainforest would be awesome. I think living in the rainforest would be awesome because I like rain. Whenever the rain comes down in the forest, I would run through it and jump in the puddles. I would be sad if people cut down my rainforest. If the trees were cut down, I would only be left with the rain and not the forest. But I would still have puddles to jump in, so I think I wouldn’t be too sad. I think living in the rainforest would be terrific.

Wow, she thinks, I really like how my student connected the beginning of the paragraph with the end. My students really are good learners!

But Miss Ignor Amos is terribly mistaken. She does not have learners; she only has students who can express their feelings on the subject but have little knowledge of it. Her students may have ordered words on paper, but the words are meaningless. The message they give is substantively bankrupt.

Miss Ignor Amos’ student who wrote that paragraph applied nothing in the written piece because that poor student had nothing to apply. That student had no knowledge because Miss Amos did not teach the child any facts about the rainforest. Miss Amos did not teach any facts because the conference she attended said nothing positive about facts. It taught, rather, the quickest way to disengage learners from their understanding is to give them facts. They must imagine and create. The conference said learners would create their own knowledge by being active in the learning process.

Tragically, it injures our children and students to
subvert knowledge with poorly constructed activities. I’m convinced this problem is significant. We would do well to understand it fully. The emerging educational philosophy in the United States cries, *Skills! Activity!* What our children really need is knowledge, knowledge, knowledge, and then more knowledge. They need to know facts, not factoids, about God’s vast universe. Of course, skills, too. Knowledge and skills are hard to separate anyway. But, a deep pool of knowledge will do more to shape a child properly than finely crafted skill sets.

The importance of acquiring knowledge, sometimes even in rote, is hard to mask. Consider the small squiggle of a line we call “a.” It makes a specific sound. There is nothing in that squiggle that infers any meaning. A child must simply memorize the fact and, thus, obtain the knowledge that that squiggle of a line is the letter “a” which makes a specific set of sounds. No learning activity can be structured that causes a child to construct that knowledge in his or her head without a teacher explicitly teaching it as a fact and then expecting them to memorize it.

Memorization is a naughty word these days. Often, the word conjures up images of children sitting in perfect rows with a stern teacher (usually a prudish, unmarried female with a tight hair bun) walking up and down the rows ready to rap the knuckles of the first child to break order (usually a nice boy who just happens to be a little restless because he has ADHD). But the idea of memorization doesn’t have to conjure such images. It would be a shame if we teachers think memorization or even building deep knowledge in our students must be cold, always rote, and boring. It can be carried in many exciting vehicles. It can be carried with riveting stories, interesting manipulatives, or fascinating experiments. It can be cultivated and refined with probing questions and proper discussion. Whatever method is appropriate and effective, memorization of facts and the acquisition of knowledge should not be relegated to the dust bin of history. It is in its very essence the education of our children.

When we memorize facts, our brains build a *schema*. This schema is a web of connected facts previously learned which forms a foundation for understanding. From that schematic, we will continue to assimilate more facts. It will begin to grow. Soon, schematics connect to other schematics, and we are not only able to assimilate more facts more readily, but we are able to better analyze, apply, demonstrate, and critique the vast sea of information around us. That cannot be done if we don’t have knowledge.

Brain researchers and cognitive scientists know this. They have produced numerous studies showing the importance of knowing facts. Children need to know facts. They need knowledge.

Our own experience validates this, too. The more you know about a topic, the more easily you can assimilate new facts into your mental schema on that topic. A Civil War nut will read a biography on Stonewall Jackson and draw out more knowledge than the person who knows very little of the Civil War. The Civil War nut has a profound schematic of the Civil War in their brain, and all the little facts presented in the book can attach themselves to his or her prior knowledge. To someone who knows little about the Civil War, so much of the book’s content will go right over their head. It will also be the reason why reading such a book can be exhausting to the person with little knowledge. The brain is in hyper-drive trying to make sense of what is being read. The expert’s brain, not bogged down with every piece of information in the book, is able to mine the deeper items with relative ease. Knowledge builds, and the more you know the more you are able to know.

**Consider who are the most susceptible to lies.** The ones who have little knowledge, that is, the ignorant. We are all ignorant in some way or another, but it is harmful to remain in this state if we can leave it. The ignorant don’t have the storehouse of knowledge to discern truth and falsehood properly. Instead, they are swayed by popular opinion. They are usually issue-oriented. They cling to talking points. They are easily convinced. They rely on their feelings. They are persuaded with jargon, not argument.

But more importantly, when you have a deep and broad schema, you can discern new information more effectively and appropriately. If you are presented with a piece of information that contradicts what you already know to be true, you will reject it. It will not become a “truth” in your schema, thus, your understanding of the topic will not be tainted with falsehoods. Jargon does not easily crack the
For many members of the Protestant Reformed Churches, Christian education is the only type of education that they have ever known. As a student of Christian education from the age of 5 in a room of Hudsonville PRC to the age of 21 at a Christian university in West Michigan, the same can be said for me. Morning devotions, prayer, and Bible readings both before and after lunch, Bible classes, and a Christ-centered curriculum were normal to me. They were too normal to me. I can say that over the course of my 17 years of Christian education, I didn’t fully appreciate it for the blessing that it was. However, my experiences student aiding in an urban public school of Grand Rapids have given me a greater appreciation for my Christian education.

Students of a Christian education share a common faith. As a result, the community created in the Christian classroom is one centered around Christ. Each member of the classroom, both teacher and students alike, are bound together by Christ, and their lives reflect this.

They worship the same God, share common values, attend many of the same churches, and observe the same religious practices. The same cannot be said for most students of public education. What unites these students is the school district in which they live. Now, this is not to say that a positive community cannot exist in a public school classroom. On the contrary, I have been in many classrooms of public education in which such a community existed; but the relationships within this community are not deeply rooted. They are classmates and peers, not brothers and sisters. In my internship classroom alone, there were students who were Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Christians, and atheists. Not all students serve the same master.

Each student and teacher of a public school is guaranteed the right to practice his or her own religion by the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment of the United States. Students and teachers are free to pray before and after meals, wear religious garb, and read their own religious texts during school hours. However, a teacher in a public school walks a fine line in expressing his or her faith to ensure that those actions do not endorse one religion and violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. The public school teacher must remain neutral in how he deals with religion in his classroom.

This means that a teacher or student can silently pray alone before lunch, but he or she cannot lead the class in prayer. Likewise, teachers and students can read their Bibles in school, but this must be done individually and during a time when students can read any book of their own choosing. Obviously, this means no class devotions take place during school hours. This was probably one of the weirdest...
parts of my time student aiding. It felt unnatural to begin each school day by jumping straight into a lesson instead of with prayer and Bible reading, or for students just to leave for the cafeteria without praying first. Students may have come to God in worship throughout the day, but they did so alone and without the guidance of their teacher.

It is also up to the students to see God in their learning about his creation. In a Christian school, all subjects are taught from a Christian perspective. Students are led to see God’s orderliness in mathematics and his wisdom in the creation of the complex systems of the human body, along with many of God’s other attributes. In a public school, however, students study the subject neutrally and without examining it in the light of God’s word.

The necessity for neutrality toward religion means that many opportunities for Christian comforting are missed out on in a public school. I vividly remember a second-grade student telling me that his cousin had died in a car crash and had gone to heaven. I wanted to tell him that he was right, that his cousin was in heaven with Jesus, and that someday he would be there with him too. Instead I told him that I was sorry to hear that news. The public school teacher cannot pass his or her own religious views as those endorsed by the government. If I had been in a Christian school, I could have spoken my mind instead of giving a cheap, neutral response.

While I may have found myself in an elementary school in which I could not freely talk about God with students and faculty, several of my peers did not find themselves in such an environment for the first time. Hearing my college classmates who had never experienced Christian education before college was one of my favorite experiences of my internship. They raved about how beautiful it was to hear students sing songs of praise to God, how teachers could freely lead their students in prayer during the day, and even how the entire school assembled each week for chapel. What my peers couldn’t keep to themselves had become ordinary to me.

Past and present students of Christian education, do not take for granted the great blessing that you have been given. Value the oneness that you have with your peers and teachers. Treasure the moments that you and your classmates spend in worship, no matter how frequently they occur. Cherish viewing the world through the lens of scripture. Enjoy your ability to learn from men and women who have already been where you are now. What you have is something that not every child of God has the privilege to experience. Hold dear your Christian education, and don’t let it go to waste.

Josh is a senior at Calvin University studying elementary education. He attends Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church and serves on the staff of Beacon Lights.

Becca Boeve

CHRISTIAN TEACHERS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS


This was a textbook for one of my education courses at Calvin College this past semester, and honestly, I hardly read any of it. I simply read the title and figured its content didn’t apply much to me since I will be teaching in one of our Christian schools in the future, Lord willing. When I was asked to do a book review on it, at first I was slightly worried that I would not be able to get much out of the book in the way of application. However, when I gave the book a thorough reading, I found several points of application that I thought were worthy to share with my fellow Christians, whether teachers or otherwise.

First, we are incredibly blessed to have our Christian schools, where we can gather together with fellow believers to teach the future generation of the church. There we may freely express and profess our faith in God through our actions and words without the threat of breaking laws set in place by the government, as found in the public schools. There are numerous laws in the public schools that restrict, prohibit, or allow certain aspects of religions to guarantee equality for everyone’s beliefs. Christian Teachers in Public Schools extensively discusses the laws and legal rights regarding religion within the
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“press toward the mark…”
(Philippians 3:14)

August 8  Read Luke 7

Jesus shows miraculous grace to several different people in this chapter, including a centurion’s servant, a widow’s only son, and an immoral woman. Notice especially the contrast between the sinful woman, whom the Pharisee did not think was even worthy to touch Jesus’ feet, and the centurion, whom the elders of the Jews deemed deserving of Jesus’ attention. Despite the opinion of the Jews, Jesus helped both of these people and commended them for their great faith.

Do you ever find yourself thinking that someone is unworthy of Jesus’ attention? Or have you ever thought that about yourself? When we contemplate our sinfulness over against Christ’s goodness, the realization of our unworthiness can be overwhelming. Yet we must remember the words of Paul (a former persecutor of God’s people) in 1 Timothy 1:15 and take them for our own: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.” God brings dry bones to life; he makes new what is old and saves those who are hopelessly lost. There is no child of God who is too far gone to be redeemed by the blood of Christ. Sing or pray Psalter #83.

Devotional  Abby Van Solkema

public school setting. The balance of maintaining a safe zone for every religion as required by law and still holding to personal religious beliefs can be a difficult struggle for many Christians who teach there. Through the gracious hand of God, our Christian schools are places where we may freely teach and discuss our faith, which we often take for granted, especially when we are students attending them.

Second, although our Christian witness is restricted in a certain manner in the public schools by law, such as by not being allowed to speak about or discuss our personal faith, we can and must demonstrate our faith in God through our actions and in the ways we live our lives in and outside the school. Others may face similar limitations in their workplaces as well, yet we must always be witnesses of our faith through our actions and lives. In the way that Christian Teachers in Public Schools presents this, it reminded me of our calling to be witnesses of our faith in every aspect of our lives. We don’t know how God brings his people to faith, and he might use our witness and testimony to gather some of his flock. This can also serve as an encouragement to Christian schoolteachers to continue to fill every aspect of their classrooms with their Christian faith in God to further instruct the children of God in the fear of his name.

Finally, Christian Teachers in Public Schools discusses two purposes of education. The first generally applies in the Christian and public schools: preparing students for their lives in the world and giving them all the necessary knowledge to succeed. The government has set standards and guidelines to help accomplish this goal. However, the second purpose is the most important goal in a Christian school: teaching students to come to know God, his wonderful creation, and how to care for his world. As Christian schoolteachers, we must not lose sight of this primary goal of Christian education, especially amongst all the current pressures of the academic context.

Every Christian teacher will have a different experience within the public schools, whether their time spent there is for a college course, student teaching, or some other situation. Whatever the case may be, it is good to know the general rules and guidelines made by the government regarding religion, because although we do not agree with other religions, we must still obey the government God has placed over us. The various laws remind us of the immense blessings we have in our Christian schools. And no matter what situation God has placed us in, we must be continual witnesses of the faith we have in God.

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Read Matthew 11

When you read about Jesus’ earthly ministry, do you ever wish that you could have experienced one of his miracles in real life? What an amazing sight that must have been! It is hard to believe that anyone who was physically in the presence of the Son of God on this earth and witnessed his mighty works firsthand could still remain unrepentant. But when you think about the fact that we have access to the full text of the Bible in our own language, we are also witnesses to the mighty works of God in the context of his entire revealed word. How can we not believe as well?

It is tempting to become proud of the knowledge of God that we learn from reading the Bible and hearing sound gospel preaching. But with greater revelation comes greater responsibility. Doctrinal knowledge alone cannot save sinners. If it does not lead you to true repentance, it only serves the purpose of increasing your condemnation. Matthew Henry comments on this chapter, “Though the damnation of all that perish will be intolerable, yet the damnation of those who had the fullest and clearest discoveries made them of the power and grace of Christ, and yet repented not, will be of all others the most intolerable.” Sing or pray Psalter #85.

Read Luke 11

Prayer was an important part of Jesus’ life on this earth. There are numerous instances recorded in the Bible of Jesus praying with others or withdrawing to pray in solitude for long periods of time. Following his example, prayer must be an essential part of our lives as well. However, it can be difficult to prioritize prayer, because it can feel like a waste of time. It is often more satisfying to try to fix a problem ourselves rather than pray about it. Yes, it is true that we will not always immediately receive what we ask for. But if we consistently pray according to the will of God, our prayers will certainly be heard and answered.

Persistent prayer does not serve the purpose of persuading God to give us what we desire; instead it nurtures our relationship with him. Even though he already knows all of our needs, God still delights in the prayers of his people. Our prayers show that we trust him to take care of us and give us what is good because he is good. And just as an earthly father will not ignore the request of his child, or a neighbor will surely give assistance to his brother in need, even more so our heavenly Father will always answer the prayers of his dear children in his perfect timing. Sing or pray Psalter #91.

Read Matthew 13

One purpose of the parable of the sower that is recorded in this chapter was for Jesus to teach his disciples to expect mixed reactions when he sent them out to preach the gospel on their own. But this parable is also instructive for the church today because it illustrates several improper responses to the preaching of the word that we must be on our guard to avoid. Although we certainly need the Holy Spirit to prepare our hearts in order even to receive the preaching of the gospel, we are still responsible for how we respond to that preaching.

The seed that falls by the wayside represents those who hear what the pastor says but find it boring and are easily distracted during the service, so they don’t really take anything away from it. The stony soil represents those who are enthusiastic at first about the word of God and being a part of the church, but when persecution comes, they very quickly fall away. And the thorny soil represents those who are too anxious about their daily life, money, and pleasures really to focus on heavenly things. Do you recognize any of these bad listening habits in your own life? Pray that the Holy Spirit will cultivate the soil of your heart so that the word of God can take root and grow, producing the fruits of faith and obedience. Sing or pray Psalter #92.

Read Luke 8

Jesus displayed his divine authority over the forces of nature when he calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee. He soothed the raging seas with only the power of his word, the same word by which he created the heavens, the earth, and everything in them. “Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast” (Ps. 33:8–9).

The almighty creator that is sovereign over everything he has made is also sovereign over all the parts of our lives. When we face physical or spiritual difficulties in our lives, we can trust in God’s supreme power and heavenly protection to carry us through the storm. Psalm 107 speaks of God hearing the cries of his people in their trouble and that he brings them out of their distress, calms the storm, and brings them into the refuge they desire (vv. 28–30).

Our God never fails to deliver and restore his people. Thank the Lord for his steadfast love! Sing or pray Psalter #94.
August 13  Read Mark 4
As we read through the parable of the sower again, pay special attention this time to the seed. A seed is a truly amazing thing. The work that the farmer does to cultivate the soil helps the seed to grow bigger and stronger, but the spontaneous act of starting to grow is worked mysteriously inside the seed, and no one can affect that. How a seed starts to grow is unknown to the farmer, yet he labors and has faith that his crops will yield a plentiful harvest.

The seed in this parable represents the word of God. In the same way that a farmer cannot make a seed sprout, no mere man can make another person a believer. Both pastors and those doing personal evangelism put forth effort to spread the message of the gospel, yet they must trust that the Lord is carrying out the actual work in people’s hearts. We do not know exactly how this happens, but we must continue to share the gospel with others and have faith in the power of the Holy Spirit to change their hearts. Sing or pray Psalter #96.

August 14  Read Mark 5
While actual demon possession may not be common today as it was during the earthly ministry of Jesus, we still may experience times in our lives when Satan seems to be in control of us. We may be caught in a habitual sin that we just can’t seem to overcome or plagued by anxiety or depression. Even if they have a physiological basis, the devil most certainly takes advantage of mental afflictions to attack our minds and cause us to sin. In the midst of our suffering, it can feel as if there is no escape from his power.

But there is hope! Jesus had the power to cast a whole legion of demons out of the man described in this chapter, and he has the power to cast out your own personal demons as well. By his death and resurrection, he has overcome the power of evil. But if we try to rely on our own strength, the devil will win every time. If you find yourself under attack from Satan, put on the full armor of God (especially the shield of faith) and trust in his power. Only then will you be able to defend yourself against the “wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:11). Sing or pray Psalter #103.

August 15  Read Matthew 10
For a Christian pilgrim living in an ungodly world, the fear of man can be a crippling affliction. We may be afraid of life-threatening things such as persecution and bodily harm. Or we may have lesser fears such as the disapproval of those around us, facing difficulty in our careers, or just plain discomfort. These fears cause worry and anxiety and may prevent us from spreading the gospel or making public confession of our faith.

But when we open God’s word to passages like Matthew 10, we come to realize that the only thing we really need to fear is God. Our Lord is the only one who has the power to destroy not only the body, but the soul. Only he can save us unto an eternal life where there will be no suffering and we will live in peace forever. When we weigh these two fears against each other, it is clear that the approval of God is so much more important than the approval of men. As Jesus proclaimed in verse 32, “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.” Sing or pray Psalter #106.

August 16  Read Matthew 14
Peter exemplifies all of us in our Christian walk by showing both great faith in Jesus and doubt even within a single situation during the storm on the Sea of Galilee. At first he shows great faith by trusting in Jesus and walking out on the water to him. But as he starts to look around and notice how strong the winds are and how big the waves are, his faith wavers and he begins to sink. Just like Peter, when we take our eyes off Jesus and focus on our surroundings instead, fear will begin to creep in. Or if we trust in our own measly strength and forget how strong our God is, our troubles will seem exaggerated and insurmountable.

Because of our sin, we will never be able to have perfect faith in this life. There will be times when we will sink in the waves. But our Lord will never let one of his little ones drown. As we mature spiritually and know God more and more through studying scripture and through prayer, our faith and trust in him will be strengthened. 1 John 5:4 reminds us, “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” Sing or pray Psalter #112.

August 17  Read Mark 6
When you read about the actions of Herodias surrounding the beheading of John the Baptist, did you notice the similarities to wicked Queen Jezebel from the Old Testament? Both of these women were ambitious and manipulative and exercised ungodly influence over their weak husbands. Jezebel had innocent Naboth killed for listening to God’s commands instead of what Ahab and Jezebel wanted.
And Herodias similarly has John the Baptist killed because he openly condemned her and Herod Antipas for divorcing their other spouses and committing adultery. Even the way in which she schemes to take John the Baptist’s life by convincing her daughter to dance for Herod (in a manner that was so provocative he offered to give her whatever she wanted) shows that Herodias would use whatever means necessary to get what she wanted.

Yet as evil as these women were, they could very easily be heroines from today’s popular movies and shows. Hollywood tries very hard to glamorize sins like adultery, divorce, disrespect, and even murder. Are you watching these types of dramas? I would encourage you to evaluate your media habits and make sure you are not consuming shows and movies that are making you increasingly desensitized to sin.

Sing or pray Psalter #113.

August 18  Read Luke 9:1–17

When Jesus sent out his disciples, he instructed them to preach the gospel and heal the sick. Although he had equipped them with miraculous power to cast out demons and cure diseases, these tasks were not the primary focus of the disciples’ assignment. They were sent out first and foremost to preach the kingdom of God.

The primary mission of the church today as well is urgently and sincerely to proclaim the kingdom of God in a way that people can understand. This is not to say that the church should ignore the needs of those whom they are evangelizing. Evangelism must involve the whole person. But we must not make the mistake of elevating social work to the main mission of the church. It is incidental to the preaching of the kingdom of God. Our first concern must be for the soul and eternal life of our neighbor. “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Matt. 16:26). Sing or pray Psalter #117.

August 19  Read John 6

After the feeding of the 5,000, the people got very excited because they thought that Jesus must be a great prophet like Moses, perhaps one that would care for their physical needs or help them gain power against the Roman government. They wanted him to do more miracles similar to the ones that Moses had done in the wilderness. You will remember that the children of Israel had been held captive in Egypt, and they were unable to save themselves. But God sent Moses to bring them out of slavery in Egypt and then sustained them by sending manna in the wilderness.

But what the multitude did not understand was that Moses was just a dim picture of this even better Savior. Similar to the children of Israel, we are stuck in slavery, slavery to sin. But God sent his only begotten Son to free us from this bondage. And as the bread of life, he sustains not just our physical life, but he also gives us everlasting life. Jesus is sufficient to meet every need that we have. He assures his people, “he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst” (v. 35). Sing or pray Psalter #119.

August 20  Read Matthew 15

Why do you worship God? Is it so that other people see you and think you are a good person? Is it to make you feel better? Is it to follow the traditions of your family? It can be very easy to worship hypocritically because we are concerned about our image, while inwardly our heart is far from God. This type of false worship is the sin that Jesus condemned in the religious leaders of his day, and one that we must be on our guard against as well.

The purpose of our worship must simply be to worship, not to gain anything for ourselves. Worship is about honoring and drawing near to God. It is not just a matter of outward actions, but an experience of the heart. It is important for our worship to contain sound, theological content that stirs in us godly emotions such as repentance, fear, awe, gratitude, hope, and joy. And these godly emotions should in turn motivate us to live thankful, godly lives. Sing or pray Psalter #123.

August 21  Read Mark 7

Not every part of the Christian life is a matter of black and white, right and wrong. Many things are matters of personal conscience before God, which we sometimes refer to as Christian liberty. For example, we must not look down on those whose conscience compels them to abstain from doing something that we think is fine. And we must not rebuke others for refraining from doing something that we think is a good thing for Christians to do but is not necessarily commanded in scripture.

The religious leaders of Jesus’ day were too concerned with their own non-biblical traditions, such as the way that they should wash their hands, pots, and pans. They were making their own rules more important than the doctrines of God. Because of this, they excluded everyone who did not keep these
traditions like they did, and were preventing people from learning about God. Have you ever hesitated before inviting someone to church because you were afraid that they wouldn’t follow the traditions that you are used to, such as how people dress for the worship service? We should never let inconsequential traditions get in the way of sharing the true preaching of the word with others. Sing or pray Psalter #124.

**August 22 Read Matthew 16**

Sometimes we can get the idea in our minds that if we are living our lives the way that God commands us to, things will be easy. But when you study the word of God, you will clearly see that that is not the case. As we read in verse 24, self-denial and suffering are important parts of the Christian life. Starting from his humble birth in a stable, Jesus’ life on this earth was one full of suffering that peaked with his crucifixion. So as those who are being conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29), we should also expect to endure adversity in this life.

When we face the very real difficulties of life on this earth, remembering that we are sharing in Christ’s suffering is an incredible consolation. Jesus’ suffering ultimately ended in heavenly glory, and the same is true for the child of God. Our suffering is not only a blessing, but also serves to confirm our salvation. In Romans 8:17 we are reminded that our suffering means we are children and heirs of God along with Christ. And if we suffer with him, we will also be glorified together. Sing or pray Psalter #127.

**August 23 Read Mark 8**

Those who would follow Christ must obey his command in Mark 8:34 to “deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” But what exactly do these three commands mean? Self-denial means that we must renounce our own will and seek to obey God’s will instead. To take up our cross means to accept the trials and suffering that we have been appointed to endure in our lives on this earth and bear them willingly. And to follow Christ means to live in communion with him and in obedience to his instruction.

The only way to be a disciple of Christ is to do these three things. God did not place us on this earth so that we could chase our own ambitions and pleasures, but to bring pleasure to him. Although in this life we can only be imperfect disciples, by the power of the Holy Spirit even our flawed discipleship can be a witness to the world around us. And we look forward to heaven, when we will be able to learn from Christ firsthand in an even better way than his disciples were able to while he was on this earth. Sing or pray Psalter #130.

**August 24 Read Luke 9:18–27**

One question that I had when studying this section of the New Testament was, why did Jesus instruct his disciples on more than one occasion not to tell anybody that he was the Messiah? Wasn’t the purpose of his earthly ministry to proclaim who he was? Why would he want them to keep it a secret?

After reading several commentaries on the subject, I believe the reason was that his disciples did not yet fully understand what it meant that he was the Messiah. They were still hung up on the belief that Jesus was going to establish an earthly kingdom, as evidenced later in the chapter when they started to argue about who would be the greatest in this kingdom. Although they were beginning to understand who Jesus really was, they still were not prepared to preach Jesus as the Messiah until they fully learned what this meant by witnessing his final suffering, death, and resurrection.

The disciples were so intent on making Jesus the kind of savior they wanted him to be that they were missing out on the complete truth of the gospel. Do you sometimes make God out to be a certain way in your head so that he serves your purposes? We must carefully study God’s word to remind ourselves who he really is, and not trick ourselves into believing that he is only who we want him to be. Sing or pray Psalter #133.

**August 25 Read Matthew 17**

During Jesus’ transfiguration, his earthly body was temporarily transformed into a more glorious form. We read that his face shone like the sun and his clothes flashed like lightning. Jesus radiated just a tiny glimpse of his full, divine glory for a select few of his disciples to see. If there was any doubt left in their minds about whether Jesus was truly the Son of God, this event drove away all uncertainty.

Think about something on this earth that you would describe as “glorious.” Maybe you pictured a natural wonder that you have visited, such as the Grand Canyon? Or maybe you pictured that awesome car you wish you could afford? Or maybe you have a certain person in mind? God’s glory is so much more than any of these amazing things. We cannot even begin to comprehend his glory and majesty, because we can only relate it to earthly things
and it is a heavenly glory. How wonderful it will be to experience God’s glory even more fully when we get to heaven! Sing or pray Psalter #136.

**August 26** Read Mark 9

Unbelief is often the root underneath a variety of sins. Our outward actions reveal the unbelief that lies in our hearts. When we worry and have anxiety about the future, we are not trusting in God’s plan for our lives. When we lose our temper when things don’t go our way, we are seeking comfort from being in control and not from trusting in God. When we become obsessed about our finances, we are seeking security in money and not in God.

The father who was seeking healing for his demon-possessed son in Mark 9 perfectly summarizes every Christian’s struggle against unbelief with his tear-filled statement in verse 24, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.” When we try to believe on our own we will continually fail. But when we cry out to God for help, he will work faith in our hearts by the power of his Spirit. And as Jesus told this desperate father, “all things are possible to him that believeth” (v. 23). Sing or pray Psalter #139.


As he prepares to make his final trip to Jerusalem, Jesus commands two different men to follow him. But they both have different excuses for why they cannot. It is interesting to note that both of their responses contain the words “me first” (vv. 59, 61). There is no room for “me first” when following Jesus. Jesus must always come first. No part of our life on this earth is an excuse to defer our duty to God.

The man who wanted to wait for his elderly father to die before he would follow Jesus is an example of prioritizing your own desires above what God wants you to do. He wanted to be a disciple, but just not yet. Perhaps this same thought would pop up in your head this way: “I really need to focus on school/work/dating/having fun right now. I’ll get serious about following Christ later, once I’m finished with what I want to do.”

The man who wanted to go say farewell to his family is an example of only half-heartedly following Christ, while gazing longingly at the things of this world. Sing or pray Psalter #143.

**August 28** Read Matthew 18

Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 18 concerning how we should deal with brothers and sisters in the church who have sinned against us is probably quite familiar to you. However, it is always good to review these verses, because when someone sins against us our natural inclination is not usually to seek out reconciliation with them in private. More likely, we want to text ten other people to tell them about how horrible this person is or write a very passive-aggressive social media post to let everyone know that we have been wronged.

Proverbs 10:12 instructs us, “Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.” The idea of this verse is not that we are forbidden to confront sin in others. Matthew 18 makes it clear that confrontation is necessary. Rather the idea is that we forgive others easily and do not get unnecessarily aggravated over the slightest of offenses. In the Lord’s forgiveness of our sins, he perfectly exemplified the characteristics of longsuffering and sacrificial love that we should strive to show to our fellow believers. Do you forgive others as you have been forgiven? Sing or pray Psalter #145.

**August 29** Read John 7

Following the example of Christ in this chapter, those who are in leadership positions in the church must be willing to have their doctrine tested against scripture. A pastor or teacher who believes that he is teaching the truth should have no reason to take personal offense if his doctrine is questioned, because in the words of Jesus, “My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me” (v. 16). It is necessary for each of us to listen carefully to the preaching of the gospel to discern if it is in line with what we know to be true from scripture. In this way the church can make sure that it is following the will of God and not being led astray by the will of man.

At the same time, those who raise inquiry against the doctrine of others must do so for the right reasons. It must not be to promote their personal interests or to serve a hidden agenda. Rather, one who confronts potentially false teaching must act out of a desire to please and glorify God, just as Jesus did in his life on this earth. Sing or pray Psalter #146.

**August 30** Read John 8

After the Feast of Tabernacles has ended, Jesus
resumes his teaching in the temple courts. He is interrupted by an incident involving the scribes and Pharisees and an adulterous woman, but afterwards he begins to speak to them again by proclaiming, “I am the light of the world” (v. 12). As was just celebrated at the Feast of Tabernacles, God had guided the Israelites through the wilderness by the light of a pillar of fire. Jesus proclaims that he is a light and guide not just to the Israelites, but to all of God’s people throughout the world. He is Immanuel, God with us.

Light is essential to our existence on this earth. It provides sight so that we may carry out the necessary tasks of our daily lives, and it allows us to gain knowledge by illuminating the things around us. As the light of the world, Jesus is essential to our spiritual life. It is only because of his light that we are able to come to God. On our own we hopelessly wander around in the darkness.

When children of God are exposed to the light of Jesus they do not simply stare at it; they follow the light by doing what God commands. It is a light not just for our eyes, but for our feet as well. “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Ps. 119:105). Sing or pray Psalter #147.

By describing the life of the blind man who was healed by Jesus, this chapter also paints a picture of how Jesus saves all of his people from the spiritual blindness of sin. We are all born spiritually blind. Our heavenly Father takes the initiative to heal us of this blindness; we do not seek him out, because we are not able to. God works spiritual sight in us by his own power, and after he works in our hearts, we are obedient to his commands.

As regenerated children of God, we must display faithfulness to Jesus in the face of persecution and testify of his work in our lives to those around us, just as the formerly blind man did. This man worshipped Jesus after discovering that he was not just a prophet, but the Son of God. We also continue to grow in our knowledge of God by reading the Bible and praying. This knowledge leads us to even greater worship and love for our Savior. Sing or pray Psalter #149.

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus knows his flock, and we know him. Jesus knows his people not just as a group, but each one individually. He does not simply know their names, but each individual’s unique personality and characteristics. Jesus cherishes each one of them like a husband cherishes his beloved wife. And he loves his sheep so much that he is willing to lay down his life for every single one of them. Because Jesus has such an intimate knowledge of his people, he is aware of every single one of their needs. What a comfort that is for us! Church leaders must follow the example of Jesus and know the flock so that they can care for them. We must also strive to get to know our fellow church members so that we can care for their needs as well. Sing or pray Psalter #152.

Have you ever been told that your emotions are bad, or that you should not pay attention to them? Although we can certainly be led astray by only listening to our emotions, they are part of God’s good design for man. We read several times in the gospels about Jesus showing emotion during his earthly ministry. In verse 21 of this chapter he rejoiced, and we read in other passages that he marveled, grieved, and even wept. Godly emotions that are in harmony with God’s word serve the purpose of motivating us to godly action. The parable of the good Samaritan demonstrates how godly emotion (pity) moved the Samaritan man to godly action (mercy).

But our emotions can also serve the purpose of exposing sin that is in our hearts. You will be able to tell what you truly care about most by the intensity of your emotions. What makes you the most angry or upset? Do your emotions reflect your love for God and your neighbor (v. 27)? Or do they reflect a love for yourself? Sing or pray Psalter #154.

So many things in our lives are uncertain. We just don’t know what the future holds. You may be unsure about what school you will go to, what classes you will take, what kind of job you will end up doing, or who your future spouse will be. But the salvation of a child of God is one thing that we never have to be uncertain about.

John 10:28–30 bring out this wonderful doctrine of the preservation of the saints. They remind us of the great assurance we have in our Savior. We are preserved in Jesus Christ! Our salvation is not in our own care, but under the protection of a powerful mediator. No matter what lies ahead in our lives on this earth, we can rest in the knowledge that our salvation is secure. Paul writes in Romans 8:38–39 that he is confident that neither angels nor demons, nor
any other creature, nor time nor space can separate us from the love of God that we have in Christ Jesus. And we can have this same confidence as well. *Sing or pray Psalter #156.*

**September 4** Read Luke 12

While Jesus is teaching the people about heavenly things, a man interrupts to ask a petty question about earthly riches. After rebuking the man, Jesus goes on to instruct the people with regard to his sin of covetousness, using the illustration of the parable of the rich fool. The rich fool made the mistake of placing all his hope in his possessions and forgot that they actually belonged to God, not him.

We must properly view our possessions as tools to help us on our pathway to heaven, not as sources of peace, joy, or contentment. What benefit is anything that we have gained on this earth if we are cast out of the kingdom of God? The only thing that we will be able to take with us is the spiritual treasure of the word of God. Do you put more effort into hiding his word in your heart than into accumulating earthly possessions? *Sing or pray Psalter #157.*

**September 5** Read Luke 13

The healing of the crooked woman in the synagogue that is described in verses 10–17 is just one of the numerous examples of Jesus healing people on the sabbath day. The reaction of the Pharisees to these acts of mercy exposed their erroneous view of both Sabbath observance and the law in general. They were more concerned with following their list of rules for what you could and could not do on the Sabbath than they were about showing mercy to their sister who was suffering. This behavior stemmed from the Pharisees’ belief that they must earn their own salvation by keeping the law.

We have been rescued from the bondage of having to follow a list of specific rules to earn our salvation. Therefore, we are free in Christ to worship and serve him. Resting on the sabbath day is not about following specific guidelines or being idle. It is about setting aside things that you can do during the rest of the week in order to focus on the things of God. As Rev. Langerak pointed out in a recent sermon on this text, if we concentrate on filling our sabbath day with worship and showing love to our neighbors, there will be no time left for questions of whether we should be doing this or that for our own personal pleasure. *Sing or pray Psalter #158.*

**September 6** Read Luke 14

The parable of the marriage supper presents us with quite a different message than today’s popular beliefs. Jesus says that if we proudly strive after the glory of men, God will humble us. But if we humbly esteem others better than ourselves, we will receive honor from God. What is more important to you? Honor from those around you, or honor from God? Being accepted and applauded by your peers in person or on social media can seem so important in the moment, but once we take a step back we can recognize that glory from men is fleeting, but honor from God is everlasting.

We can look to Jesus’ life on this earth as the ultimate example of humility. Though he is God, he took on a weak, human form. He chose to suffer for our sins to save us from eternal suffering. But this path of suffering ended in glory when he was exalted to the right hand of God. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5). If we cultivate a mindset of humility, we will be able to recognize that the opinion of God matters much more than the opinions of people. How would having this mindset change the way that you act? *Sing or pray Psalter #160.*

**September 7** Read Luke 15

God is not like people. This may sound like an obvious statement, but it is easy to forget. Because we are human, we tend to think about God in human terms. But if we think of God as a human, we severely limit his power. This thinking manifests itself in our actions when we do things such as sin in private and think God doesn’t see us, or we worry about the future because we don’t trust that he is really in control of everything.

Our heavenly Father is so much better than even the most loving and generous person that we know. He loves and pursues those who reject him, as exemplified by the love of the prodigal son’s father for his wayward son. God loves us even while we show hatred to him; he forgives us when we don’t deserve forgiveness and will probably commit the same sin again.

God has no need for us, which is what makes his love for his people so remarkable. But we desperately need him. When we are aware of how great God really is, our fears of other people and the future will fade away in the light of his glory. *Sing or pray Psalter #162.*
LOVE DEFINED: EMBRACING GOD’S VISION FOR LASTING LOVE AND SATISFYING RELATIONSHIPS


When I was 13, my mom gave me the book *Lies Young Women Believe*. I didn’t read it right away, but when I did, and I looked up the website listed inside: www.liesyoungwomenbelieve.com. I signed up for the emails and was presented with another website: www.girldefined.com. I signed up for their emails too. After a while of sending out blog posts and taping vlogs, Girl Defined, an organization run by two sisters, released its first book, *Girl Defined*. Kristen Clark and Bethany Baird’s first book was good, but then they wrote the second book, *Love Defined*. This book was awesome.

First, the cover was adorable. Second, the content was amazing and spoke right to my heart. The book lists and expands on the abundant ways women can show love to everyone around them, including boyfriends and husbands. The book looks at love and marriage from two different stages of life. Kristen is 36 and has been married for seven years. Bethany is 29 and single (or was single at the time the book was published, but recently got married at the end of 2018). Because of their unique situations and stages of life, they were able to write a book that has a diverse audience and speaks to the hearts of women of every age. They give insight, truth, and wisdom from God’s word to women of all ages and in many stages of life.

The book has five sections. The first section lays out the disastrous romantic cycle many of us find ourselves in today, the cycle that leads us to do stupid things for attention, and then later leaves us feeling low. In the second section, Clark and Baird introduce a new, biblical way of “doing relationships.” Then there is my favorite section, “Single and Waiting to Mingle.” Part four gives insight into questions about relationships that many girls never ask. The fifth section is a compilation of five women’s answers to questions about marriage. This book is definitely worth the read and a good one to pass on to friends and daughters as well.

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MEASUREMENTS IN THE BIBLE (1)

The science of measurement, metrology, is foundational for science and critical for much of human activity. To measure something is to assign an object or event a number so that it can be compared to other similar objects or events. Much of man’s understanding of God’s creation is based on measurements. Measurements are used in all the physical sciences—physics, chemistry, biology, earth sciences, anatomy, engineering, aerospace, and the rest. Measurements are used in many human activities, including construction, trading, buying and selling, baking, and much more.

The science of measurement is divided into three basic activities.

1. Defining units of measurement
2. Methods or practices of taking measurements
3. Establishing traceability of measurements back to a common standard or reference measurement

Defining units of measurement is extremely important. Scientists around the world rely on the International System of Units as a common foundation to record, interpret, and report their findings. These units consist of the meter, kilogram, second,
kelvin, ampere, etc. A science teacher will likely deduct points from your correct numeric answer if you forget to label your answer with the correct units of measurement. When units are mixed up, calamity can be expected. With a mix-up between the metric and English systems of units, NASA lost a Mars orbiter costing $125 million dollars. All this points to the importance of defining the units of measurement.

Measurement methods or practices are vast and specific for science, industry, and the trades. We can think of a skillful contractor with a tape measure on his belt ready to be his guide. The tape measure provides the necessary information for the craftsman to develop a plan, make an accurate cut, and complete his work.

I too am fascinated with measurement and the uncertainty surrounding measurement methods. As a student, I am researching air pollution measurement methods and have found that all measurement methods have uncertainty and measurement errors. Air pollution can be measured by highly accurate (expensive) instrumentation or by low-cost sensors that may have large measurement errors and uncertainties. Some pollutants, like dust in the air, can be measured by passing satellites equipped with specialized imaging equipment as they fly overhead. These remote satellite measurements are limited with regards to time, as measurements are taken when the satellite flies overhead and no clouds obstruct the measurements.

The third activity of metrology involves the traceability of measurements back to a common standard or reference measurement. For measurements of like objects to be comparable, the measurements need to be based on a standard. With regards to weight, special prototype standards have been developed for the kilogram and distributed out to countries to serve as national standards. These national prototypes serve as standards to calibrate scales that are used throughout every facet of society, including laboratories, factories, bakeries, marketplaces, and even the scale in your home.

**Measurements in the Bible**

Metrology is not a new science. Practices and methods of measurements can be found throughout the Bible. In Genesis 6, God commands Noah to build an ark and provides the specifications by which Noah was to fashion that ark: 300 x 50 x 30 cubits. According to Genesis 6:22, Noah did all that the Lord commanded him and built an ark according to those dimensions. A cubit is considered the length from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger of a man and is estimated at 18 inches. This length would differ between individuals and would therefore need to be standardized. In the construction of the temple, the cubit was standardized according to the “length by cubits after the first measure” (2 Chron. 3:3). This first measure can be understood as a standard by which the temple was built so that men of different stature (arm lengths) could build the temple accurately and according to the pattern that God provided (1 Chron. 28:11–13). We find parallelism in the construction of the tabernacle, with God providing Moses a pattern for the construction of the tabernacle and instruments in Exodus 25:9. As the tabernacle and temple represent God dwelling with his people ultimately in Christ, the accuracy and precision in constructing these buildings according to their God-given dimensions was of utmost importance. God commanded Moses in Exodus 25:40 to “look that thou make them after their pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount.”

Not only would the builders have taken care that the measurements were correct, but the structure would be checked for plumbness (vertically straight up or down) with a plumb line. A plumb line is a string with a weight at the bottom of it and is used by carpenters to build pillars and posts that are perfectly plumb or vertically straight up and down. The plumb line is not only used to build walls and pillars, but it is also used to test or evaluate what has been built to determine if the wall is truly plumb. Suppose in the construction of the temple that a wall was found that deviated from being perfectly plumb, or the length of a wall did not measure in length according to the pattern given to David by God. When tested and found to deviate from the pattern or plumb line, this wall would have undoubtedly been destroyed and rebuilt to be perfectly plumb and according to God’s pattern.

Not only did God give measurements for the construction of the temple, but God measures his church. God commissioned John to measure the temple in a vision recorded in Revelation 11: 1–2. This temple represents the present church militant that is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together growth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph. 2:20–22). While the temple of God, the altar, and the worshipers are measured in Revelation 11, God forbids John to measure the outer court and the holy court, which...
is given to the Gentiles to tread under foot for a specific time period—42 months. The passing of time before Jesus Christ returns is measured precisely and known only by our heavenly Father (Matt. 24:36). The last days will be as the days of Noah, with great wickedness abounding. The cup of iniquity will be full, reaching even unto heaven, where God will remember these sins and pour out his judgment upon the world (Rev. 18:5–8). In contrast to the cup of iniquity remembered by God, Christians have confidence that God will forgive and not remember the trespasses of his dear children. For God hath made his beloved Son to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God. Knowing that God will not impute our sins to our account, let us be thankful for this great gift and be ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor. 5:18–21).

Next time we will examine our sense of measurement with respect to the pattern for our lives that God gave Moses on the mount.

Brandon attends Hope Protestant Reformed Church with his wife and four children in Redlands, California. He is currently working on a PhD in Chemical and Environmental Engineering and works full time at the local air quality management district, the government agency responsible for air quality in Southern California, as an Air Quality Specialist.

**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:

Elijah Hope A., son of Bro. Joseph & Sis. Charity Sabiniano—Berean, Philippines
Dalton Hale, son of Mr. & Mrs. Cody & Suzie Altena—Doon, IA
Jed Louis, son of Mr. & Mrs. Alex & Heather Dykstra—Georgetown, MI
Bowen Lee, son of Mr. & Mrs. Trent & Chelsea Wierenga—Georgetown, MI
Olive Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Matthew & Brenda Duncan—Grace, MI
Calvin Nicholas, son of Mr. & Mrs. Derek & Lynette Bleyenberg—Grace, MI
Emelyn Ruth, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Josh & Carrie Meulenberg—Grace, MI
Logan James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Mark & Shannon VanMaanen—Hull, IA
Lucas Daniel, son of Mr. & Mrs. Marcus & Paige Andringa—Hull, IA
Naomi Claire, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Joseph & Faith Bootsma—Hull, IA
Isaiah Jeremy, son of Mr. & Mrs. Justin & Holly Tolsma—Immanuel, Lacombe, CAN
Charlotte Mae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brent & Kaitlyn Hanko—Lynden, WA
Mark Dave G., son of Bro. Mark Anthony and Sis. Annie Asilum—Maranatha, Philippines
Isla Patrice, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Justin & Natalie Hiemstra—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:

Nick Ikerd—Georgetown, MI
Nathan Kaptein—Grace, MI
Courtney Moelker—Grace, MI
Morgan Van Der Griend—Peace, IL
Micah Medema—Peace, IL
Andrew Sitter—Peace, IL

**MARRIAGES**

“For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.”

Psalm 48:14

Mr. Andrew Howerda and Miss Tonya Zwak—Georgetown, MI
Mr. Nate VandenTop and Miss Kaylee Hoekman—Grace, MI
Mr. Aaron Wierenga & Miss Kayla Tolsma—Immanuel, Lacombe, CAN
Mr. Eric Hanko and Miss Molly Moore—Loveland, CO
Mr. David Tolsma and Miss Alaina Rypstra—Lynden, WA
Mr. Trevor Poortinga & Miss Amber Reitsma—Southwest, MI
The Psalter (1): Importance of Learning Psalter Numbers Young

It was the summer after my senior year of high school. I went to the Young People’s Convention. Perhaps you’ve heard stories about the convention from your older brothers and sisters?

I enjoyed the conventions, but my favorite memory is not the banquets or hanging out with friends or the games or anything you’ve probably heard stories about. These were Psalter numbers we’d grown up learning, memorized as children at home, at church, during Sunday School, at school. It might seem like a lot of work now, memorizing a Psalter number for Sunday School or a school program. But the songs you learn now will be the ones you can sing to praise God even when you don’t have a Psalter with you. They are the songs that will ring in your heart when you’re happy and comfort you when you’re sad. They are the songs you share with your family, and they are the songs we share as a church.

For the next few months, we’re going to look at the history God in his providence used to bring about the Psalter we use today.

It was a clear night. The stars flickered far above. About a hundred of us had gathered around a bonfire. And we started singing—not your usual campfire songs, but Psalter numbers. None of us had a Psalter with us. It was all from memory, with Rev. Van Overloop helping out with the first lines of the verses if we ran stuck.

Long into the night, we sang, singing a large chunk of the Psalter by the time we were done. Often, we had all four parts of harmony, even when singing without a piano and from memory.

Tricia is a member of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.
YOUNG PEOPLE’S CONVENTION

2019

WATCHING AND WAITING

AS IN THE DAYS OF NOAH

AUG 12 THROUGH 16