<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Watchmen</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter and Response</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Obligations Regarding Black Lives Matter</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sounding Out the Word: The Personal Witness of Young People</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flourish: How the Love of Christ Frees Us from Self-Focus</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning to Love the Psalms</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Schoolers’ Questions About the Seminary and Ministry</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devotional—The Book of Judges: A Time of Darkness in Israel</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jehovah Is Our Shepherd</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church News</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four Wonderful Things in the Earth Part 1:</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Eagle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We see the signs of Christ’s return all around us. They are enough to cause the heart of the child of God to grow fearful. Will we be able to stand against the certain onslaught of the evil one?

God, who is ever faithful, does not leave his flock defenseless against the attacks of the devil or the wicked world. These attacks will increase as the day of our Lord approaches and will be so strong that the elect will almost be deceived (Matt. 24:24). To preserve his church, God has appointed watchmen to warn and protect her.

Although the command to watch comes to each of us (see Matthew 24:42), this charge comes especially to office-bearers, and more directly to ministers. In this article we will look at the calling of ministers to be watchmen and examine our response to their warnings, admonitions, and rebukes.

Watchman

The calling of a minister is compared to that of a watchman on the walls of a city: “Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me” (Ezek. 3:17). A watchman was the city’s first line of defense, and its most vital. Not only did he scan the horizon for the approaching enemy, but he also made sure the wall of the city was strong. Should there be a weak spot that could be exploited by an approaching foe, the watchman would see to it that the breach was repaired.

So too with the minister as spiritual watchman of the church. The warnings will have to do either with our doctrine or our walk. In 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul expressed his fear that his flock would fall away from the truth and have their minds “corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.” In his letter to the Thessalonians, he warned against fornication and stealing, teaching the church that God calls them to holiness (1 Thess. 4:7). There is also a cheap form of Christianity against which the minister will warn the people. J.C. Ryle addressed this when he wrote, “There is a common worldly kind of Christianity in this day, which many have, and think they have enough—a cheap Christianity which offends nobody, and requires no sacrifice—which costs nothing, and is worth nothing” (J.C. Ryle, Holiness, intro). Faithful ministers today are duty bound to warn the people against danger, especially the danger of false doctrine. In the Formula of Subscription, the minister vows to “refute and contradict” all errors, and also “to exert [himself] in keeping the church free from such errors.”

This command is especially pressing in the last days. According to Matthew 24:11, false prophets will arise that will deceive many. Because of these false prophets, there will be a great falling away, which means many who once professed the truth will corrupt it and finally deny it all together (2 Thess. 2:3). Life and death are at stake in the minister’s work in the church. If a minister fails to warn his flock of danger within or without the church, the blood of those people will be required at his hand (Ezek. 3:20).

The Warnings

Against such a backdrop, the faithful minister of God will warn the people not only against apostasy, but he will even sharply warn the people against indifference toward the truth. The church at Thessalonica had the truth, but they did not love it, and for that reason, God sent them “strong delusion, that they should believe a lie” (2 Thess. 2:11).

These warnings must come often, and more frequently as the day of our Lord approaches. Paul told the church that he “ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears” (Acts 20:31).

We have received such rebukes recently from two of our ministers. In the March 1, 2020 issue of The Standard Bearer, Rev. Jon Mahtani called attention to a “widespread problem in our churches.” In his letter to the Thessalonians, he warned against fornication and stealing, teaching the church that God calls them to holiness (1 Thess. 4:7). There is also a cheap form of Christianity against which the minister will warn the people. J.C. Ryle addressed this when he wrote, “There is a common worldly kind of Christianity in this day, which many have,
us. I boldly insist that it is; denial is often due to the blinding power of sin or our proud naiveté.” His reason for issuing the rebuke was noble: “It is not just hell that should be of concern to us. It’s the spiritual health of Christ’s church.”

The second warning came in the August 2020 issue of Sword & Shield. Here, Rev. Andy Lanning warned us that if “the Protestant Reformed Churches fail to acknowledge the precise topic of theological controversy, they will be ignorant of the heresy that threatens them. Being ignorant of it, they will fall into it again and embrace it again. The urgent warning must be sounded to the churches: Be aware of this false doctrine! And beware lest it overcome you!”

Our response to rebukes like these will say a great deal about our spiritual state. Are we proud and haughty, unable to receive rebukes? Or do the words of John Calvin describe us? “Believers humble themselves and are willing to be treated severely so that they may profit in God’s school” (T.H.L Parker, Calvin’s Preaching, 14).

To focus on just one of the rebukes, what is your relationship to alcohol, young person? Do you laugh at the jokes and listen to the music that glorifies the misuse of alcohol? Do you attend parties where you know it will be available, even though you are underage? Such an act is rebellion and a sin against the 5th commandment. What about the wedding you are planning? What will the “after-party” look like?

And for our older readers, what was your response to Rev. Mahtani’s warning? Did it make you angry? “How dare he accuse us of this!? Did you just write it off and move on to the next article? Or did you examine your use of alcohol and conclude that it plays far too large a role in your life? Did you examine yourself and your behavior, and resolve, by the grace of God, to walk in this sin no longer?

Our response to rebukes like these will say a great deal about our spiritual state. Are we proud and haughty, unable to receive rebukes? Or do the words of John Calvin describe us? “Believers humble themselves and are willing to be treated severely so that they may profit in God’s school” (T.H.L Parker, Calvin’s Preaching, 14).

The Response of Unbelief

We must not allow our response to be shaped by the carnal wisdom that wells up within us: “Away with that troublemaker!” This has often been the response of churches that are apostatizing. Jeremiah was beaten, abused, and thrown into a pit when he warned back-sliding Israel. Micaiah was fed with the bread and water of affliction because he would not fall in line with all of the other prophets and speak “good” to the king (2 Chron. 18). Zechariah was stoned for rebuking Israel (2 Chron. 24:21). In modern times, J. Gresham Machen rebuked the Presbyterian Church for her toleration of error, and the church acted quickly and tyrannically, charging him with “renouncing and disobeying the rules and lawful authority of the Church,” with “advocating rebellious defiance against the lawful authority of the Church,” and with “not being zealous and faithful in maintaining the peace of the Church.”

It then acted as every apostatizing church has acted, by putting the faithful minister out. The Christian Reformed Church in 1924 did the same, killing the faithful prophets sent by God who warned them of their errors. These are the proud, carnal, unbelieving responses of a church who is taking on the marks of a false church, when she “persecutes those who…rebuke her for her errors” (Belgic Confession, 29).

Machen and Hoeksema are in good company. It took Jesus only one sermon before the people tried to kill him. John Calvin speaks of this ungodly, devilish response in his commentary on Luke 4:28 when he writes, “instead of having their consciences stung to the quick, and seeking a remedy for their vices by correcting them, they are only driven to madness. Thus ungodly men not only resist, with obstinancy, the judgments of God, but rise into cruelty against his servants.”

Another unbelieving response is stubbornly to refuse to hear the rebuke. This was the response of Israel to Isaiah, saying, “Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy

2 Andy Lanning, “Our Present Controversy (2),” Sword & Shield 1, no. 3 (August, 2020): 6–9
3 https://www.opc.org/books/conflict/ch8.html#note14
4 Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema, The Rock Whence We Are Hewn, ed. David J. Engelsma (Jenison, MI: RFPA, 2015), 497
deceits: Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us” (Isa. 30:10–11).

Slander is another wicked response. People resort to name-calling when they are offended, accusing the prophet of being arrogant. David learned this firsthand when he asked the question about Goliath “for who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?” (1 Sam. 17:26). David’s reward for his courage was a strong reproach from his brother Eliab. Matthew Henry’s commentary on this text is insightful and reveals the carnal response to rebuke. “In times of general formality and lukewarmness, every degree of zeal which implies readiness to go further, or to venture more in the cause of God than others, will be blamed as pride and ambition, and by none more than by near relations, like Eliab, or negligent superiors.”

**The Response of Faith**

Our response in the face of rebuke must be to bow our heads and cry out, “God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13). Again on Luke 4:28, Calvin says “we ought to implore the Spirit of meekness.” This is our calling, even if everyone else seems to be united in fury against the faithful prophet. Remember, it was “all the people” that were gathered against Jeremiah (Jer. 26:9). It is in our nature to hate such a man, as Jehoshaphat hated Micaiah because he “never prophesied” good, but “always evil” (2 Chron. 18:7).

**Fellow believers, we know the days in which we live are evil days. These are the days Jesus promised we would see before his second coming. Apostasy and lawlessness will abound. We are prone to both. Our nature sees to it! We ought to give thanks to God that in his love for us he does not leave us to our folly, but through his watchmen calls us to repentance and righteousness. Above all, let us remember the command of Psalm 105:15, “Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm.”**

Fellow believers, we know the days in which we live are evil days. These are the days Jesus promised we would see before his second coming. Apostasy and lawlessness will abound. We are prone to both. Our nature sees to it! We ought to give thanks to God that in his love for us he does not leave us to our folly, but through his watchmen calls us to repentance and righteousness. Above all, let us remember the command of Psalm 105:15, “Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm.”

---

5 William Gurnall in his work, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, describes the battle this way: “The subject of the treatise is solemn: a War between the Saint and Satan. And it is such a bloody one that the cruellest war ever fought by men will be seen as but sport and child’s play compared to this.” This is not language we are familiar with, or even comfortable with. But we should be.
Dear Dewey,

I write to you as editor of *Beacon Lights* with a concern over a statement made in the article on Christian friendship by Elijah Roberts. I have the utmost respect for Elijah and *Beacon Lights*, so I do not do this lightly.

The statement I have an issue with is this: “We are bound not only to regard belligerent atheists and all members of cults and false religions as unbelievers, but also many who even go by the name ‘Christian’ today in the modern church world. Arminians, Dispensationalists, Pentecostals, Roman Catholics, free-will Baptists, and the like are, as an organic whole, unbelievers.” While I agree that friendships influence our lives and we need to use good judgment (by their fruits ye shall know them), I do not think it is right to say that all those who do not hold to our same doctrines are “as an organic whole, unbelievers.”

I think God has his people spread all over this earth, many who may not know all the doctrines we do. The Bible helps us identify believers. 1 John 4:1–3 says, “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God.” Or Romans 10:9, which says, “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”

Certainly there are those who do not confess Christ that we may rightly call unbelievers, but the Bible tells us that those who confess and believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that he died for our sins and rose again, are saved. This is the gift of faith that God freely gives to his elect. While we have serious differences with many who call themselves “Christian,” and this may affect our friendships, let’s not become judges of salvation. Salvation is of the Lord, and he alone is Judge.

In Christian love,

Aric Bleyenberg

---

**Response to Letter** Elijah Roberts

Dear Mr. Bleyenberg,

Thank you for your letter and concern with my statement. I also deeply respect you as a friend and as an elder in the church, hence I do not take this exchange lightly either.

Although I did not say that “all those who do not hold to our same doctrines” are to be viewed organically as unbelievers, I did say that “many who even go by the name ‘Christian’ today in the modern church world... are, as an organic whole, unbelievers.” Perhaps my statement may be rephrased: those in the church world who maintain doctrines or practices inconsistent with Scripture walk in unbelief and thus deny Christ.

My original statement is apparently making me a “judge of salvation.” I am not interested in such judgment, but I am interested in the judgment of God. Therefore, I will prove that my statement is confessional and biblical.

What the issue comes down to here is the doctrine of Christ. Scripture and the confessions teach one doctrine about Christ, not many. And since salvation is only in Christ, we must have the right Christ. Jesus says there are many “false Christs” (Matt. 24:24). And there are many who call themselves Christians who will soon find themselves at the judgment seat, and hear, “depart from me, ye workers of iniquity” (Matt. 7:23). The demons also believe that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that He died for our sins and rose again”1 (see James 2:19). If such a bare confession is all it takes to be saved then we must do away with the confessions and abandon the saints who valiantly fought for the pure truth in all ages.

With reference to Arminian, Roman Catholic, and Baptist doctrine the confessions judge a unanimous condemnation. Terms like “too gross a

---

1 Quote from Mr. Bleyenberg’s letter. Although the demons do not believe that Jesus died for their sins personally, the point still holds true, for the demons undoubtedly believe that Christ died for the sins of the elect.
blasphemy,” a detestable error, a denial of Jesus, an accursed idolatry, the Pelagian error “out of hell,” a fancy of men’s minds, an injurious error, and “the denial of all the efficiency of God’s grace,” are used to describe the doctrines of these churches/denominations. Now, do we assure those who believe the doctrines condemned by Scripture and the confessions that they are believers in Christ and will be saved regardless of their impenitence in false doctrine? Shall we coddle, overlook, and slightly heal the wounds of the church world that rejects the true doctrine of Christ by saying “Peace, peace when there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14)?

Mr. Bleyenberg makes appeal in his letter to 1 John 4:1–3. Let us suppose that a man says, “I believe that Jesus Christ came in the flesh and that he was married to Mary Magdalene and had eight children while he was on earth.” Would you agree and say that you believe in the same Jesus? Of course not. Why? Because the confession is not biblical. The believer who confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh confesses the whole gospel of sovereign grace in Christ alone. He is therefore opposed to anyone that would diminish the glory of this confession and thereby agrees with the apostle that they (the false professors) are “not of God.” Trying the spirits is simple: (1) Doctrine. “If they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them” (Is. 8:20). (2) Life. St. Paul says concerning those who walk after the flesh impenitently that they “shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:21). God’s judgment is clear. In light of God’s word, we “judge them that are within” the sphere of the church world (1 Cor. 5:12).

Mr. Bleyenberg also quoted Romans 10:9. The child of God confesses the “Lord Jesus” by faith. His confession is that God raised him from the dead. In other words, the believer confesses Christ alone and nothing else. The unbeliever adds something to Christ. In the case of the Arminian, he adds his faith making it a work. For the Roman Catholic, Christ is not enough, he must add his works. For the Baptist and Pentecostal, Christ is not sufficient, he must baptize himself and activate God’s blessing of the Spirit. Anyone who attempts to add to Christ’s perfect work is “fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:4).

In conclusion, viewed organically (not head for head), those who maintain doctrines or practices inconsistent with the true doctrine of Christ walk in unbelief toward their condemnation. We therefore may not have fellowship with them or view them as partakers of the common faith once delivered to the saints. Rather our calling is to live antithetically; boldly, humbly, and earnestly to point them to the truth of the word of God and call them to “turn from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thess. 1:9).

---

2 Belgic Confession 22.
3 Belgic Confession 34.
4 Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 30. This same Lord’s Day asks “Do such then believe in Jesus who seek their salvation and welfare of saints, of themselves or anywhere else? A: “They do not.” The Catechism says that although they say they are believers, in reality their walk and doctrine discount their confession and hence the Catechism identifies them as unbelievers.
5 Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 80.
6 Canons of Dort 2. error 3
7 Canons of Dort 1, error 2.
8 Canons of Dort 1, error 3.
9 Canons of Dort 3–4. error 8

---

OUR OBLIGATIONS REGARDING BLACK LIVES MATTER

The 21st century in which we live, while having brought technological and social advances, has also bloomed new problems, responsibilities, and obstacles which a Christian must address. In the current social climate, Black Lives Matter (BLM) must be understood not only for what it is, but also regarding how we should treat the movement and whether our involvement is justified. One way to determine the merit and morality of such an organization is to examine its history and actions, as well as its current trajectory, in relation to principles set forth in God’s word. On a deeper level, not only is the history of
BLM one which is antithetical to Christian values, but BLM is also part of the culture that encourages rebellion, hating the neighbor, and denying God’s faith, justice, and grace.

On a deeper level, not only is the history of BLM one which is antithetical to Christian values, but BLM is also part of the culture that encourages rebellion, hating the neighbor, and denying God’s faith, justice, and grace.

On the night of February 26, 2012, in the gated community which George Zimmerman called home, a physical altercation was initiated between Zimmerman and a mixed-race teen, Trayvon Martin. This led to Zimmerman sustaining facial and head injuries, as well as the unfortunate death of Trayvon due to one shot to the chest by Zimmerman (CNN, 2020). Across America, the prominent reaction was that of immediate anger and accusation toward Zimmerman despite the various investigations being conducted into the incident by state, local, and federal law enforcement. On July 13, 2013, Zimmerman was acquitted of charges, including the second-degree murder of Trayvon Martin the year before (Alvarez, 2013). On the same day as the acquittal of Zimmerman, the hashtag BlackLivesMatter was first used. Stemming from this, on July 20, 2013, protests, violence, and destruction of property rocked more than one hundred cities across the U.S. (Williams, 2013). Since this birthing of the movement, many protests have been perpetrated across the U.S. throughout the years. Looking back and peering forward shows no slowing of the mob mentality and reactionary thinking which shaped BLM into what it is today, and it is for this reason that it stands as imperative to maintain a firm grasp on the morality of association with and support of the movement.

As children of God, we stand for those principles which he sets forth in his word. Although many principles are provided for those in specific church roles (for example, 1 Timothy 3:1–10 regarding office-bearers), there are certain principles that extend to all of God’s children equally. The fifth commandment stands as the most obvious of these principles and calls for respect toward those whom God has appointed to rule. Black Lives Matter holds that rebellion, violence, and treason against authority and/or state is acceptable if done for a progressive reason. This has led to riots perpetrated consistently over the years for any death that the organization feels (with or without evidence) is wrong. In 2014 alone, BLM started riots over Dontre Hamilton, Eric Garner, John Crawford III, Michael Brown, Ezell Ford, Laquan McDonald, Akai Guley, Tamir Rice, and Antonio Martin, to name a few. In short, many of these riots not only took place over incidents that were not racist killings (Brodigan, 2020), but BLM also disrespects and hates the authority put in place by God. There is no doubt that racism exists within the sphere of law enforcement or that the legal system can occasionally fail, but this stands as no justification for any of the rash or ungodly actions demonstrated by BLM. Romans 13 states, “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God...Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness” (vv. 1, 13). Not only does this make clear that the reasons for BLM’s actions are invalid, but it also condemns the method through which the organization attempts to create change.

How ought we treat and view our neighbor? Scripture provides us with clear guidelines and even states, “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Gal. 5:14). During an August 2015 BLM riot, and hours after the brutal public murder of a Houston officer at a fuel station, rioters were heard chanting the phrase, “Pigs in a blanket, fry ‘em like bacon” (CBS, 2015). Although sickeningly wrong, this display was not inconsistent with the methods and moral standards continually shown by the organization. In showing love for our neighbor, it is obvious no Christian should in good conscience be capable of supporting these and other actions of BLM.

Lastly, if we were to support BLM, we would show distrust for God as a just God and deny Christ’s sacrifice for us. As children of God we are saved through grace alone and do good works only through Jesus Christ. Romans 3:24 puts it this way: “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

We should not need to belong to Black Lives Matter for a sense of morality, security, or friendship, as those are provided by grace through Christ. While activists riot in the streets, one must remember the hand of God in every event and the reality of his justice. For every unjust action which may arise from law enforcement or riots in the streets, God will ultimately bring just retribution. As man scrabbles to exact revenge for supposed wrong acts,
his denial of the afterlife becomes evident. As it is put in Revelation 21:8, “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.”

In conclusion, from conception to ideology and practice, BLM stands as a wicked movement which is antithetical to the laws of God. While we have a responsibility to stand up for what is right, we must remain faithful to God’s commandments and avoid the reactionary, hateful ideology and methods of the organization.

In conclusion, from conception to ideology and practice, BLM stands as a wicked movement which is antithetical to the laws of God. While we have a responsibility to stand up for what is right, we must remain faithful to God’s commandments and avoid the reactionary, hateful ideology and methods of the organization. Let us respect the authority of the magistrate and God in how we address issues, as well as be slow to anger: “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city” (Prov. 16:32). God has given his only begotten Son for his people; let us not take that for granted as we go about our lives. While evil deeds seem to go unpunished and we struggle to stay positive, let us remember the justice and grace in the word of God.

“The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him” (Ezek. 18:20).

“The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy” (Ps. 145:8).

**Bibliography**


Caleb is a member of the Covenant of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Spokane, WA. He currently works as a painter and is pursuing a university degree in biology.
evangelism” because I object to it. Some do because evangelism is the official work of the church. The evangel is the good tidings of the gospel. Evangelist is listed as a special office of the church, along with apostle, pastor, and teacher; and both times it is used in scripture, it refers to officebearers: first to Philip, the apostle or deacon who preached to the Ethiopian eunuch; secondly, to the minister Timothy, whom Paul called to do the work of an evangelist. So strictly speaking, evangelism is the official work of the church, the fulfillment of the great commission from Christ to “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 28:19). This commission the church carries out primarily in two ways: by calling ministers to preach the evangel, or gospel, and by sending forth specially qualified ministers to preach that gospel in what we call missions. So we must be careful with the term “personal evangelism,” lest we give the impression that individuals may take it upon themselves to preach, which only the church may do through ministers. Yet the phrase itself does not mean that, nor is this how it is commonly used. By it, we simply mean what I call personal witness—the calling of each of us to be a witness of the gospel to others, not as preachers, but as prophets, priests, and kings of Christ; and not with the authority and power only preaching has, but in the course of our everyday life by the sanctifying power and ability of the Spirit given us individually by faith.

Also, regardless of what we mean by personal evangelism, the Bible places great emphasis upon the individual person’s calling toward this official evangelism of the church. Exactly because evangelism is the official work of the church, and the church is a body of individuals, every person in that body has a responsibility to carry out this work. It is to this body of persons that God gave the mandate to teach the nations by calling and sending preachers and missionaries. This is why your church has an evangelism committee of lay persons, who help share the gospel in various ways. This is why, although we churches band together and help each other evangelize through a denominational committee, an individual church calls and sends the missionary, and some churches engage in mission work directly without the assistance of the other churches. This is lawful and good, for it reminds us that evangelism is the work of the church, only the individual congregation is the church, and the church consists of individual persons engaged in this work.

But each person also has a calling to witness to the gospel without a special office in his own personal life. Now some of you, being men, have a special opportunity to do this as preachers. Our churches need them, so consider studying for the ministry, and that with a view to being called by God to teach all nations on behalf of God and his people. There is no higher, more glorious, and more rewarding calling in all the earth.

But each person also has a calling to witness to the gospel without a special office in his own personal life. Now some of you, being men, have a special opportunity to do this as preachers. Our churches need them, so consider studying for the ministry, and that with a view to being called by God to teach all nations on behalf of God and his people. There is no higher, more glorious, and more rewarding calling in all the earth. But you all as members of the church are also called to evangelize by supporting your minister and church and denominational mission labors by your gifts, prayers, and perhaps even involvement; by joining and supporting your local evangelism committee; and by witnessing in your life to the truth of the holy gospel. And, I might add, all these things should be an incentive for you to become members in full standing by public confession of your faith as soon as possible.

I use the term “personal witness” for two reasons. First, it is a biblical term for the specific work of personally sharing or confessing to others your faith in Jesus Christ—it is to witness. Second, it emphasizes that personal evangelism is not simply a matter of words, but actions; and not simply conscious, deliberate actions, but even unconscious actions in which we seem quite passive. We are quite active if we would hide our light under a bushel, but if it is not covered that light will shine brightly in the darkness without seeming to do anything or ever going anywhere (Matt. 5:15).

Some scripture can prove these points. The Old Testaments saints who lived by faith, listed in Hebrews 11, are called a great cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12:1). The souls of persecuted believers in heaven are called those who died for their witness of
Jesus Christ and the word (Rev. 20:4). And the risen Jesus said before he ascended that all those who received the Spirit would be witnesses of him unto the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). This faith and Spirit have been given by Jesus to you.

These passages make clear why this calling is not optional. The reason is this: Jesus is THE witness of God. He repeatedly claimed that he is the faithful and true witness (Rev. 1:5; 3:14). He came to bear witness to the light, that through him men might believe (John 1:7). If now you are joined to him by faith, then like the heroes of faith, you are a witness of him. If you have faith, then the Spirit of Jesus lives in you, and like the saints on Pentecost you will be a witness of him unto the uttermost parts of the earth; for the Spirit of Jesus is the Spirit of witness and testimony of God, whether in Jesus Christ or in you. And this is why Jesus said, “I am the light of the world” (John 9:5), and why Jesus could also say to us, “Ye are the light of the world” (Matt. 5:14), and this light cannot or may not be hidden.

One example of personal witness is the church of Thessalonica. In his letter to them, Paul writes: “For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything” (I Thess. 1:8). Paul here is speaking about what the church did—it sounded out the word of the Lord in all of its surrounding areas and places far away. But he isn’t speaking about how they did this through the official preaching or missions. Rather, he refers to what they did as individuals, for he speaks of them doing this: “in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad.” The idea is this: that wherever each person went to work or play, their faith went and spread abroad. This hardly needs to be said, for it is difficult to share any word without speaking. The chief way that we come to know and understand the Word, Jesus, is by someone proclaiming, teaching, and explaining that Word by speech. Faith comes by hearing and by the word of God. Now the working of faith occurs through preaching, the official means by which the Spirit usually works conversion. Nevertheless, your words may be instruments to lead someone to the preaching, sometimes in surprising ways, so don’t be afraid to invite your neighbor to church. And the Spirit may have already given someone faith, but they are weak and immature, and your words may be used to edify them.

When we witness by our words, we witness to what we know and believe. Therefore, there is an important, but often minimized, step that especially young people must take first in order to witness. That step is to learn. The instruction you receive at church, school, and catechism is not only for your sake, but for others. You must learn not only for yourself, but for others. Learn not only how to say, “I believe Jesus is God,” but how to prove it. You make for a poor witness who will turn people away if all you can say is, “This is what my church believes”; or “This is what I believe, but I cannot tell you why.” If you ever think to yourself, “I don’t really need to learn all this stuff because I know I’m saved,” then ask yourself this question: “Do I know it well enough to witness to it, to explain it, and to prove it to others?”

You also need to learn how to speak wisely and effectively. You need to learn how to initiate such a conversation; learn methods, such as how to discuss sin and the need for salvation before discussing the savior from sin (the method even the Catechism uses); and learn how, like any good teacher, to break down the truth into simple concepts and phrases, or explain with familiar examples. And these are just a few things. But do not be intimidated—God equips us all with his Spirit and faith, which are most powerful. And you can learn and practice these skills by first speaking to one another about your faith.

Also remember there are many others with experience who have said things better than you can. Don’t be afraid to say, “I am sorry if I cannot explain this well; why don’t you read this?” Of course, this also takes some planning; you can hardly expect anyone who has read little more than tweets and texts and is unfamiliar with terms like “faith” to plow through heavy material. But you also may be surprised at what people can understand—a small blurb, quotation, meditation, something from scripture like the book of John, or parts of our creeds or catechism books. Experiment.

As important as is speaking, the primary witness you make is by what you do. And it will likely be first. Usually, you don’t get an opportunity to speak to anyone without first giving a good witness by your actions. You would not expect anyone to listen to your witness if out of your mouth came both blessing and cursing (James 3:10). Likewise, you can expect no one will listen to what you say about how you believe and trust in Jesus if your actions say you
are embarrassed about Jesus and trust in uncertain riches; nor will anyone ask if Jesus is your God when your actions say your body or money or pleasure is your god. And do not minimize this; even the world recognizes that actions speak louder than words.

The importance of this is demonstrated by scripture and our creeds, which often speak of personal witness by our actions. The Catechism asks, “Since then we are delivered from our misery merely of grace...why must we still do good works?” One reason is so that “by our godly conversation others may be gained to Christ” (L.D. 32). Why? Because the whole of our conduct is a witness to our gratitude for this salvation by grace. Either that, or it’s a testimony that we think little of this grace. Scripture calls us to holy living, in part, so that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed by others on our account (1 Tim. 6:1). And, like the light from the candle, this witness goes forth in everything you do. Yes, we must put forth conscious effort to speak and do things that witness to our faith and God’s Spirit, but also remember we witness at all times and in every circumstance. To witness, we need not stand on a street corner with a Bible, publicly call out our college teacher, knock on doors, or travel to foreign lands. Some of these certainly could be done, and others not, because they are not a witness but obnoxious. But we give personal witness even when we drive down the street, learn quietly at college, are respectful of our neighbor, hammer a nail, play ball, or marry and raise children. We witness when we respond as only a Christian could in stressful or difficult situations—with patience or calm—which may be an occasion for someone to ask about the hope within us. And we need to be ready to give an answer.

Although personal witnessing is something I said is not optional, the Bible still calls us to this work. It does so because we are sinners with an old man of sin who is easily embarrassed by the gospel, doesn’t like to be mocked or rejected, is lazy, and easily comes up with all kinds of excuses to avoid witnessing. For this reason, scripture also gives us many motivations to witness. One is the reminder that personal witnessing is one reason we were chosen by God to receive faith by his grace—it is given so that we may testify of our gratitude not only to God, but before the world and to our neighbor. One reason for the gift of our spiritual life and existence is to witness about it. What disrespect when the divine potter makes us vessels of honor by grace, only for us to act like vessels of dishonor or be ashamed of who we are. We were given light to be light and shown grace to show grace, and Jesus witnessed of God to us so we might witness of him to others. Another motivation is that it is rewarding and beneficial work. If God is pleased to use our witness to bring someone into the church, such members add a certain liveliness and zeal that is invigorating to the church; and I can assure you that nothing is so invigorating personally as being used by God to this end. And when it happens, you will give God the glory, for you know how weak and feeble you were, and yet God was pleased to do such great things by it.

There is another motivation. It is the same one that explains why you have faith: God’s decree of election. Ironically, we often use this as an excuse to avoid witnessing. We say, “Well, whoever is elect is elect, and God saves, not me; and he will see to it that they are saved.” Not so fast. Certainly in the church, we have no reason to doubt the election of our brothers and sisters. But outside the church, do you think none of them have been chosen by God? And do you know whom God has chosen to salvation? I don’t. Among those now running blindly down the path to eternal destruction, do you know which ones God may be pleased to call to the narrow path leading to eternal life? Me neither. And wouldn’t you, if you saw hundreds of people about to be consumed by flames of fire, try to warn them or try to get them help? Me too. And that is why scripture calls the preacher, whether in the church or on the mission field, to preach promiscuously to all whom God is pleased to place in the hearing of the word, without regard to whom we think they might be. So likewise, we are called to witness to all and sundry whom God, in his good pleasure, makes our neighbors. So witness to them of the wondrous love and grace of God that he has given to you. Sound out the word with your mouth and with all of your being.

Rev. Bill Langerak is the pastor of Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan. This was a speech given for the Young People’s Mass Meeting in December, 2019 at Trinity PRC.
**FLOURISH: HOW THE LOVE OF CHRIST FREES US FROM SELF-FOCUS**

*Flourish: How the Love of Christ Frees Us from Self-Focus.* By Lydia Brownback.

At only six chapters long, *Flourish* may be one of the shortest Christian living books I have ever read, and yet it took me about three weeks to finish it. This was not because the book dragged or was boring, believe it or not. In fact, the reason it took me so long was the exact opposite: this short book is packed with so much biblical, relevant, helpful, applicable information that I read and reread each chapter many times, highlighter in hand, before I actually got to the end. In a time where self-help and personal development are popular ideas and themes of well-known books, Brownback will help turn your focus off yourself and toward Christ as you read this book.

In the introduction to the book, the author says, “We want to see how wrong teaching about God can give us wrong ideas about God and how these wrong ideas keep us from flourishing.” This is the heart of the book. Most of us can read non-Christian “self-help” literature and see that it’s not lining up with what God says in the Bible. But what about books, speeches, or articles labeled as Christian? Brownback goes on to point out that “any teaching that sets self-love as the highest good is false teaching, and we are susceptible to it because it appeals to that deep yearning for affirmation we feel at our very core...it just feels so right.” When I read that, I agreed wholeheartedly, and I am guessing you did, too. I just didn’t realize how much this was a problem in my own life. Brownback shows in each chapter different ways we can be fooled, so that rather than focusing only on Christ and his love for us, we begin to focus more and more on loving ourselves.

The chapters each focus on freedom from different ways self-love and self-focus show themselves in daily life. They look at self-consciousness, self-improvement, self-analysis, self-indulgence, self-condemnation, and self-victimization, all using biblical references and truths, small anecdotes, and practical applications to show the way to freedom and flourishing. To help in your reading and studying, there is an extensive study guide in the back with lots of room to write.

*Flourish* was easy for me to read, but also hard for me to read at the same time. It exposes the heart and how much self-love and focus is there. However, it is a Christian’s calling to put off sin and put on holiness no matter how hard it may be (Eph. 4:22–24), and *Flourish* will help you do this. I would dare say there is no better book for any woman to read to help keep the focus away from self and re-focus back on Christ.

Abbie is wife to Bryce and a mom to one son. She is a member of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

---

**LEARNING TO LOVE THE PSALMS**


One hundred fifty psalms. Have you ever thought that when the time came to organize this book, they were just randomly put in order based on when they were discovered or when they were written or by some kind of lottery drawing? We know better than
that, as God is a God of order. Something divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit could not have been produced with that type of chaos. Is there structure and are the patterns clear in the psalms?

Dr. W. Robert Godfrey is president emeritus at Westminster Seminary in Escondido, California, and current chairman of Ligonier Ministries. In his book Learning to Love the Psalms, Dr. Godfrey breaks down the psalms into five distinct books. Each has its own clear theme, relation to its surrounding psalms, earthly manifestations pointing to a future spiritual fulfillment, and ending doxology. According to Dr. Godfrey, the one great theme of the psalms is “God’s goodness and unfailing love for the righteous.”

After several introductory chapters explaining overall themes and styles used in the psalms, Dr. Godfrey goes into detail explaining the five books in the psalms. Within each book section, he first takes a step back with a chapter explaining the structure and purpose of the book. Then he spends an entire chapter on five or six specific psalms within that book. Doing this brings to life how the book’s aspects are illustrated.

Dr. Godfrey does a wonderful job of helping us see who is speaking in the psalms. Seventy-three psalms were written by King David, but that means that 77 have other authors. These men wrote psalms about their own struggles, and psalms of praise. They also wrote psalms on behalf of Israel, God’s Old Testament church. But psalms are such a large part of the New Testament canon, as the New Testament contains 326 quotations from the psalms. The psalms about the king ultimately point us to our king Jesus Christ. As Dr. Godfrey states, “(Jesus) lived in the Psalms.” In Luke 24, “Christ declared that the Psalms were about Him.” Even the book of Hebrews is so influenced by the psalms that when the author brings out the authority and kingship of Christ, he uses passages from the psalms as confirmation.

Another thing Godfrey brings out in this book is how to understand the Hebrew poetry. That is the foundation for psalm structure. He generally uses the English Standard Version translation of the Bible. But when he laments the fact that the psalms are not as treasured and appreciated in the overall church world today, one of the reasons he gives is the diminished use of the King James Version of the Bible. The KJV was able to keep so many of the Hebrew poetic expressions. Modern Bible versions of today have lost these poetic expressions with their efforts to be contemporary in their language and sentence structure.

One poetic form explained in the book that I thoroughly enjoyed learning about was the importance of the center of the psalm. We are used to poems and books whose dramatic force is at the end. However, Hebrew poetry puts that dramatic force in the very middle. Think of a psalm now as a pyramid. Knowing this has totally changed the way I look at a psalm now. Godfrey gives an example of Psalm 23, so well-known to everyone. What is the very middle of that psalm? “Thou art with me.” That is the main point of that whole psalm. I bet you can now look at some of your favorite psalms, find the middle verse and the pyramid pinnacle, and realize there is a reason for why a verse is exactly where it is!

Our pastor likes to remind us to think of a certain thread that makes it way throughout the entire Bible. Think of the seed of Christ, which begins with the promise of Genesis 3, makes its way through the patriarchs and King David, is kept alive in the book of Esther, is shown as preserved in the genealogy of Matthew 1, and goes all the way through Revelation 22, where the seed is promised life in heaven with Christ eternally. The reverse of that is true in that the thread of the entire Bible is woven throughout the psalms. Where is the creation history of Genesis 1 also recorded and celebrated? Psalms 19 and 104! Israel’s deliverance from Egypt is written about in Psalms 105 and 114. Psalm 137 speaks of the future suffering of Judah in Babylon. Where is the suffering and death and exaltation of our Lord prophesied? Psalms 21–26! Think of many verses in the psalms that express the joy of being in the house of God, which points us to our heavenly sanctuary and being numbered with the great voice of many people in heaven, as mentioned in Revelation 19. Dr. Godfrey does a fantastic job of opening our eyes to all these inter-biblical connections that are found in each psalm.

As you read through this book, it will make you appreciate the King James Version even more. The English Standard Version that Dr. Godfrey uses can seem so casual and modern that you will find yourself reciting the King James Version of the verse in your head as you read. The poetic form and higher reverence that the KJV provides is a real blessing to us, especially in the book of the psalms.

John Calvin referred to the psalms as “an anatomy of all the parts of a soul.” Every part of your soul will be touched as you discover seemingly hidden gems and find different sections of encouragement and confidence in God, even in the midst of sin and
From the Pastor’s Study
Prof. Barry Gritters

HIGH SCHOOLERS’ QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SEMINARY AND MINISTRY (2)

2 Timothy 2:2: And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.

Note: The first article, about preparing for and entering the seminary, can be found in the September issue of Beacon Lights.

Questions about the ministry itself

1. **Q:** How long does it take to make a sermon?
   **A:** This varies from minister to minister, but it takes most of them between at least 10 and 20 hours to make each sermon. This is the great majority of their work each week. Good preaching demands this kind of time and effort. A minister must “rightly divide the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Think, once, about what a sermon requires. First, the minister prayerfully translates the text from the original language. Then, he prayerfully studies the meaning of each word and phrase and asks all kinds of questions of the text. He prayerfully looks at the text in its context—the chapter and book it’s found in—and in the context of the whole Bible, the gospel. He determines what is the main idea of this text, what other ideas are found in the text, and how these fit with the main idea. Through the entire process he is thinking about the practical importance and necessary applications for the people of God. After he has completed hours of work like this, he compares his conclusions with commentaries. Then he determines what is the text’s theme which will go into the bulletin and the best way to organize all the ideas in the text: what are his “three points.” You can see that this is much more than looking at the text for an hour or two and “shaking a sermon out of his sleeve,” as some describe a poorly prepared minister. Like Nehemiah, he must read distinctly, give the sense, and cause the people to understand the reading (Neh. 8:8). This takes long preparation—many hours.

2. **Q:** Are there times when you find it hard to write a sermon? **A:** This question is similar but allows me to say just a little bit more about sermon-making. As I said before, sometimes sermon-making is “blood, sweat, and tears.” But wrestling with the text for hours and hours is what is required to come up with a good sermon. Of course, there are times when making a sermon on one text is easier than the week before; that’s the difference from one text to another. But to make a quality sermon—proper and clear explanation of the text in which Christ is clearly proclaimed, with pointed applications for all the different kinds of people in the audience, and in a way that even the children can understand it—this is always very strenuous work. The Bible describes it that way: “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Here, study means “be diligent,” or “exert yourself.” The “hardness” or “hardships” that a good soldier must endure, as Paul taught Timothy (2 Tim. 2:3), include the hardships of wrestling with texts until the fruit of two good sermons is produced.

3. **Q:** How many hours per week are spent making sermons, practicing sermons, visiting the sick, leading societies, teaching catechism…? **A:** The answer to this question isn’t a number, like 60 or 80, even though most ministers work more than that. Most Protestant Reformed ministers that I know simply work all the hours they have. They work Saturdays, most nights, and Sundays, of course. Just as the seminary students, though, they carefully budget their days and hours, and reserve time for their families, for exercise, for outside suffering. I highly recommend this book, as you will definitely “re-)learn to love the psalms,” both in reading from the Bible and singing from the Psalter. You will also have fun finding your very own new pyramids, even though they aren’t so new.

Mike is a member of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.
reading. But there is always work waiting. Please remember, though, that a good minister says what Paul said: “I will very gladly spend and be spent for you” (2 Cor 12:15). They run till their tank is empty, work till their energy is exhausted, for their love for Jesus Christ and his grace to them.

4. Q: Do you get nervous when you speak in front of large groups? A: Yes, in front of small groups, too. For experienced ministers, although the nerves improve over time, they usually return when it’s a new and different audience. But even in their own congregations ministers often have some nervousness. If you think of how important it is to speak on behalf of King Jesus, this isn’t surprising. Years ago, one minister said that he got sick to his stomach every time he was preparing to preach. Yet the Lord answers ministers’ prayers when they ask him for a settled spirit so that they can go to the pulpit with confidence and joy. For ministers it’s true in a special way, that “God will give His grace and Holy Spirit to those... who with sincere desires continually ask them of Him, and are thankful for them” (Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 45).

5. Q: How do you prepare for your work with different ages and abilities? A: One of the minister’s greatest joys is to teach catechism to the children and young people. He takes a lot of time to prepare lesson plans for each different age group of catechism students. Jesus said both “Feed my sheep” and “Feed my lambs.” Even if the material is the same for different classes, he prepares differently. Teaching God’s judgments at Babel to grades 1–3 is different from grades 4 and 5, which is different yet from grades 6 and 7. One of our classes in seminary gives instruction to the students for this very thing. We also ask the students to visit area school teachers who are experts at teaching children so that we can observe good teachers. Teaching children with different abilities is another question, because children of the same age have varied abilities. There, the minister needs to be wise and careful so that he does not embarrass anyone with lesser abilities or puff up anyone with greater. The main point is that he must make his instruction so clear that even those of the least abilities are able to understand the instruction so that they can believe in Jesus Christ.

6. Q: How many times on average does a minister move during his ministry? A: This is something like asking: how many children does the average P.R. mother have? There is quite a range. As I scanned the numbers, it looks like the average number of churches our older ministers have served is about four. Some have served only two, others as many as six or seven. If you look in our Yearbook in the back of the Acts of Synod, you will find listed all the ministers—active ministers, retired ministers, and deceased ministers—and be able to see for yourself how many churches each one served. And some moved great distances; others hardly at all. Before I came to the seminary, I served only two churches in 20 years, and Hudsonville was only ten miles from Byron Center. But most ministers have served in different states and even different countries.

7. Q: How difficult is it to move from place to place for missionaries or pastors? A: The children in ministers’ families usually talk about how difficult it is to move, but also how good it is to establish friendships in such different places. My wife’s parents (they had five daughters) moved to Iowa, Michigan, Iowa, California, Colorado, and then back to Michigan again. Even though one story has it that the girls cried all the way from Iowa to California, they did recover from that, and have good friends and memories from all the different places they lived. Then, when the daughters were all out of the house, their parents served in Singapore for ten years. God gives rich grace for this, too. Soon, another of our ministers may take the call to Singapore. If you would ask the children of some who served as missionaries (Bruinsmas, denHartogs, Holsteges, Lannings, Smits...), I trust they would say that God richly blessed them in these different places and through the difficult moves. We can be very thankful for God’s grace that enables families to do what you might never imagine they would be able to do.

**Questions about ministers’ and seminararians’ wives**

1. Q: What role does the minister’s wife play in the ministry? A: This is a question that could take a whole article, and maybe we should ask someone to write it. Let me say a few things here. First, if a seminary student is married, his wife is invited to regular meetings with the professors’ wives to talk about their role in the parsonage. The wives of a few who married after they were ordained are invited to these meetings, too. There are about eight or ten different subjects the women discuss together. Some of the meetings have an area minister’s wife come to talk about her experiences in the ministry. One thing these meetings emphasize is that every minister’s wife is different; each one has her own gifts; and God can use many different personalities to be a blessing for a congregation. Having said that, the minister’s wife plays a very important role in a church. Even
though she isn’t in any leadership position, her support of her husband and her example in rearing their children can be a great blessing for the congregation. I have been preaching lately about the need for ministers, and at the same time call attention to the fact that the girls who may marry a minister have a very important calling too. What Proverbs 31 says of every godly woman is true in a special way for a minister’s wife. Let her children rise up and call her blessed. Her husband also praises her. This woman that fears the Lord shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates.

2. Q: How would being a minister’s wife be different from the wife of a man with a different job? A: Unlike most wives, the wife of a minister has her husband home for almost every meal, which is a great advantage. He can be home when the children come home from school to assist his wife at this time. Very few other women have that privilege. It’s true, her husband must be gone most evenings, and that can be a hardship for her. But he tries to make up for that by assisting in other areas and times. Also, he doesn’t get to sit with the family during church very often; so when there is pulpit supply it’s very nice for him to be able to be with his family rather than sit with the elders. Her husband is in the public eye like very few are, so she may feel some pressure there. But many congregations are very supportive and helpful.

3. Q: How much time does a seminary student’s wife have with her husband? A: Seminary is a time for preparation for the seminarian’s wife, too—that is, if they are married during seminary. The students need to train themselves to give enough time to their wives and children, even during seminary, because the Bible is very clear: if a man does not know how to rule his own house, he cannot rule the church of God (see 1 Tim. 3:5). If he cannot or will not care properly for his wife and children, he shows that he will not be able to do it when he’s in the ministry either. Of course, ministers’ wives and children learn to sacrifice here, too. And then they cherish and guard jealously the special times Dad carves out for them, like we did with our Friday late afternoons and evenings when the children were little.

Questions about the ministry, generally

1. Q: How are we to view the importance of the ministry? A: Ah, the best question of all! Let me answer it in a backwards way. Try to imagine not having a minister. Try to imagine a life where you did not attend church and hear sermons that fed you. You did not go to catechism to learn the gospel. You did not learn of Jesus’ loving sacrifice that makes you acceptable to God, the Great Judge, before whom you must stand someday. On Sunday, instead of going to hear a sermon, you went to watch or play ball games. Imagine going to bed at night without praying, but very much aware that there is a God in heaven who sees you in your sins. What a terrible way to live! Then realize that the blessing of having faithful ministers is that you and your parents are taught the gospel, enjoying spiritual feasts on Sunday and in catechism lessons. You do know the forgiveness of your sins. You do stand before God every night and hear him say, “I forgive you, for Jesus’ sake! I will not punish you for your sins.” And when there are troubles in your life, you remember your Heidelberg Catechism lesson when the minister explained how you can be “patient in adversity,” and that when you look into the uncertain and scary future, you are sure that “nothing shall separate us from His love; since all creatures are so in His hand, that without His will they cannot so much as move” (Lord’s Day 10). Of course, you learn these things from your parents, too. But without the gift of the ministry, your parents would not know them either. That is, you cannot emphasize enough how important our ministers are. They are God’s messengers, sent to us with a very special message we must hear. Please pray for your minister. And pray to know whether God has called you to a place in the ministry—as a minister or a minister’s wife.

2. Q: Do you feel like you are making an impact? A: I can answer this as a professor in the seminary or from the point of view of a minister in the congregations. (Before I do, please be aware that both ministers and professors know that “making an impact” means that God uses them as a tool to bring the word as a saving power for his people. Apart from God blessing our work, we accomplish nothing.) (1) As a professor, I pray every morning that God will use me for the good of the students here at seminary. I ask God to use my instruction for their good (insofar as it accords with scripture); to forgive and overrule what I do that’s sinful; and, through the other professors, to fill in what gaps there are in my knowledge and experience for the instruction of the students. The three current full-time professors have all taught the last 23 ministers who have entered the ministry in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Prof. Dykstra, who has taught since 1996, also took part in the training of the eight before that. That’s 31 of the 39 active ministers in
the churches. We thank the Lord that he is using our seminary for good. (2) If the professors pray that they have an impact, so also do ministers in congregations. I cannot think of a deeper desire in the heart of a faithful minister than the well-being of the sheep God has entrusted to him. And when God answers those prayers, often the minister can see it. Young people to whom he taught catechism make confession of their faith. Young couples who heard his preaching marry in the Lord and have children whom they rear in the fear of the Lord. Young men in the congregation mature under his ministry and become fruitful members, sometimes faithful deacons or elders. Dying saints die in peace through the word he brings. I think you understand that we don’t credit the man for any of this, for it’s God’s work. But God uses means, and the minister is the earthen vessel that carries this precious word for the saving of souls. Ministers think often of Paul’s exhortation to Timothy: “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Tim. 4:16). The salvation of the people of God is bound up in the work of the ministers. Is there anything more important (“impactful”) than that?

Questions about professors and the seminary

1. Q: How long did you have to go to school to become a professor? What training is necessary for a professor in our seminary? A: In our churches, a man must be a minister for some years before he can be a professor. 2 Timothy 2:2 teaches that ministers must train men to be ministers. So, further university training is not as important as good experience in the ministry. Prof. Cammenga (and soon, Prof. Huizinga) does not just teach dogmatics; he teaches men to use dogmatics as ministers. Prof. Dykstra (and soon, Prof. Kuiper) does not just teach church history; he teaches the students the importance and use of church history for ministers who preach sermons and teach catechism. And it would not make sense for me to give instruction on how to preach and teach catechism (a couple of my courses) if I had not spent many years preaching and teaching catechism. Now, it is also true that when a minister accepts synod’s appointment to teach in the seminary, he gets further education to help him teach in his area of specialty. Prof. Kuiper just finished his degree at Calvin Seminary in church history; Prof. Huizinga is studying for a further degree in some area of dogmatics. If a minister gives himself full-time to these studies, he can finish in two years.

2. Q: How many professors are needed at the seminary? A: Our seminary has three. Each has to teach many different subjects, with the result sometimes that the professor can become an “expert” in only a few. From 1924 until 1973 we only had two professors. Three is much better than two, but four would be a great help. As much as we could use another professor, we need students. How urgently we need students! Today, we have four vacant churches, eight ministers aged 65 or older, and next summer another minister must be called to take my place.

3. Q: How many classes do the professors teach? A: Our catalog shows that each professor regularly teaches about 15 or 16 different courses, plus each has taught two different subjects for the yearly interim. You can understand, then, that he can be a “master” of only a few of these subjects. And you can understand why it takes a few years for a new professor to prepare for teaching all these different courses.

Thank you for reading. If you are in Grandville, Michigan, please stop in the seminary to say hello to us. We are very glad to have visitors. Especially, please pray that the Lord of the harvest would send laborers into the fields. And then remember that, when Jesus told his disciples to pray this, they were the ones the Lord called into the ministry.

Prof. Barry Gritters is the Professor of Practical Theology and New Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Seminary in Grandville, Michigan.
When you think about the book of Judges, what comes to mind? Is it the familiar stories of heroes such as Gideon and Samson winning victories over Israel’s enemies that you learned as a child? Although the great victories that God gave Israel during this period may be the most memorable portions of Judges, if you spend some time reading through the whole book, you will realize that it is not all about Israel triumphing over their enemies. Judges is one of the darkest books in the Bible. It records a time of great unbelief and hypocrisy in Israel. The entire narrative, but especially the last five chapters, paints a picture of the awful reality of human depravity apart from God’s saving grace.

The author of Judges is unknown, although many commentators believe that it was written by Samuel or one of his contemporaries. It is written in the style of historical narrative and covers the history of the nation of Israel from about 1390 to 1050 B.C., from the death of Joshua up to the beginning of Samuel’s ministry. After the death of Joshua, the people of Israel did not trust in God and failed to obey his command to eradicate all the heathen people from the land. In the time of the book of Judges, they are dealing with the consequences of this disobedience. The various tribes are facing attacks from these heathen nations even as the entire nation of Israel is increasingly departing from God and giving themselves over to wickedness.

Judges 21:25 summarizes this period in Israel’s history by stating, “In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” The book of Judges serves as a grim reminder of what happens when God’s people follow their own sinful desires and their pagan neighbors instead of obeying God’s commands. Christians today have much to learn from the book of Judges because the world that we live in is very similar to the situation in Israel at that time. In our postmodern society, God has been cast aside and everyone is doing whatever they think is best according to their own personal values. We must be on our guard so that this attitude does not creep into the church as well.

The book of Judges also reminds us of the true ugliness and repulsiveness of sin. Sin is extremely deceptive. The Devil, the world around us and even our own sinful nature, tries to sell the lie every day that sin is not so bad. In the books, shows, movies and advertisements of the world, sin is portrayed as glamorous and exciting, even something to be pursued. But the fact is, sin is a big deal. Sin deserves death and demands punishment. Every time that we sin, we are violating the covenant. Every time we sin, we deserve to spend eternity in hell. Unconfessed sin has terrible consequences for the personal and spiritual life of a child of God and the lives of those around them. It is humbling and necessary for the believer to realize the depth of their sin and their need for a Savior.

Yet the believing reader should not come away from Judges with a feeling of hopelessness. As Psalm 112:4 reminds us, “Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness: he is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous.” Commentator David Guzik writes, “What we find out about man in Judges is depressing; but what we find out about God in Judges is wonderful”. When we read the book of Judges we are not only reminded of our sin, but of God’s great mercy towards rebellious, undeserving sinners. Even when he brings judgment to Israel on account of their sin, God is working through these trials to draw his people back to him. The faithfulness of God shows up clearly in stark contrast to the unfaithfulness of his chosen people.

The repeated unfaithfulness of the Israelites throughout their history proved that they were no more deserving of salvation than the Canaanite people that surrounded them, just as God’s people today are no more deserving of salvation than the
reprobate. By recounting the events of this period in Israel’s history, the book of Judges called God’s people to repentance and a life of thankfulness. It still carries the same message for believers today. When we truly seek forgiveness from our merciful God, he will never fail to hear one of his dear children.

The book of Judges contains many stories that easily capture our attention. Some are amazing and miraculous, and some are bizarre and even grotesque. But these stories are not just meant to be entertaining; they are full of meaning. As you read each story, try to notice the details that are provided such as the setting, characters (including God), dialogue and conflict. Then prayerfully consider why these details were included in the narrative. What does God want you to learn from this story? Thinking about how the section you are reading fits in with the entire book of Judges and the bigger story of the whole Bible will also deepen your understanding of the text.

As you read through the history of the Judges, it will become evident that although God gave a measure of victory to the judges that he raised up, they were ultimately limited in their abilities to save Israel. Each one of the judges had God-given strengths, but also evident weaknesses. When you read the history of each judge, see if you recognize any of their faults in your own life. Let their weaknesses convict you of your own sins and lead you to repentance. The fact that God used these men and women despite their faults is comforting for every believer. We are told of the judges in Hebrews 11:34 that “out of weakness [they] were made strong.” By his power, God will also use you to serve and glorify him even in your weakness.

The many weaknesses and limitations of the judges also serve to emphasize man’s great need for a perfect Savior. Each judge leaves the people (and the reader) wanting for a better leader. The people of Israel saw kingship as a solution to their problems, but they did not understand just what kind of king they needed. They thought that an earthly king would be able to save them. And while the judges did foreshadow the Davidic kings that would bring a time of peace and prosperity to Israel, even these kings were only dim pictures of the ultimate Savior. What the people needed and what we still need today is not a better man, but our Lord Jesus Christ, the only perfect Deliverer and King.

Judges Reading Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTEXT/INTRODUCTION:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 8 Read Joshua 23</td>
<td>Sing or pray</td>
<td>Psalter #77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 9 Read Joshua 24</td>
<td>Sing or pray</td>
<td>Psalter #78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 10 Read Judges 1:1-2:5</td>
<td>Sing or pray</td>
<td>Psalter #79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORSHIP OF FALSE GODS:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 11 Read Judges 2:6–3:6</td>
<td>Sing or pray</td>
<td>Psalter #123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 12 Read Judges 17</td>
<td>Sing or pray</td>
<td>Psalter #255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 13 Read Judges 18:1–13</td>
<td>Sing or pray</td>
<td>Psalter #256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 14 Read Judges 18:14–31</td>
<td>Sing or pray</td>
<td>Psalter #257</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MORAL DECLINE OF ISRAEL:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 15 Read Judges 2:16–23; 19:1–15</td>
<td>Sing or pray</td>
<td>Psalter #95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 16 Read Judges 19:16–30</td>
<td>Sing or pray</td>
<td>Psalter #96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 17 Read Judges 20:1–25</td>
<td>Sing or pray</td>
<td>Psalter #97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 18 Read Judges 20:26–48</td>
<td>Sing or pray</td>
<td>Psalter #98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 19 Read Judges 21:1–15</td>
<td>Sing or prayer</td>
<td>Psalter #99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 20 Read Judges 21:16–25</td>
<td>Sing or pray</td>
<td>Psalter #100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOD RAISES UP JUDGES:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 21 Read Judges 3:7–11, Joshua 14:6–15, 15:13–19, Judges 1:11–15</td>
<td>Sing or pray</td>
<td>Psalter #292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 22 Read Judges 3:12–31</td>
<td>Sing or pray</td>
<td>Psalter #231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 23 Read Judges 4</td>
<td>Sing or pray</td>
<td>Psalter #293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 24 Read Judges 5</td>
<td>Sing or pray</td>
<td>Psalter #294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 25 Read Judges 6:1–18</td>
<td>Sing or pray</td>
<td>Psalter #260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 26</td>
<td>Read Judges 6:19–40</td>
<td>Sing or pray Psalter #261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 27</td>
<td>Read Judges 7</td>
<td>Sing or pray Psalter #262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 28</td>
<td>Read Judges 8:1–21</td>
<td>Sing or pray Psalter #265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 29</td>
<td>Read Judges 8:22–35</td>
<td>Sing or pray Psalter #266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 30</td>
<td>Read Judges 9:1–29</td>
<td>Sing or pray Psalter #202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 31</td>
<td>Read Judges 9:30–10:5</td>
<td>Sing or pray Psalter #204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1</td>
<td>Read Judges 10:6–11:11</td>
<td>Sing or pray Psalter #214</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>November 2</th>
<th>Read Judges 11:12–40</th>
<th>Sing or pray Psalter #41</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 3</td>
<td>Read Judges 12</td>
<td>Sing or pray Psalter #215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 4</td>
<td>Read Judges 13</td>
<td>Sing or pray Psalter #321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 5</td>
<td>Read Judges 14</td>
<td>Sing or pray Psalter #343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 6</td>
<td>Read Judges 15</td>
<td>Sing or pray Psalter #121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 7</td>
<td>Read Judges 16, Hebrews 11:32–40</td>
<td>Sing or pray Psalter #297</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Poem Vi DeBoer

JEHOVAH IS OUR SHEPHERD

Jehovah is our Shepherd; we are his precious sheep. 
He cares for us when we’re awake and when we are asleep. 
Though his pastures green are best for me, I often go astray; 
His rod and staff restore my soul to walk in his good way. 
He gives us Living Water as we listen to his word; 
His Spirit dwells within us; by this we are assured. 
Jehovah is our Shepherd; to him we belong 
As sheep we are feeble; in him we are strong. 
We never walk alone; our Shepherd goes before us. 
Even in dark shadows, his love is shining o’er us. 
When we meet the enemy, as fierce as he may be, 
Our Shepherd still assures us, “I am still with thee.” 
He pours down his mercies from his abundant store, 
Each day our cup of blessing runs over more and more. 
His goodness and his mercy attend me every day 
As He gently leads me along my earthly way. 
And when finally, I am brought in his great house to dwell 
My Shepherd’s praises I will sing, and all his wonders tell.
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:
Lara Zoe, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Samuel & Anganeta Watterson—Ballymena, N Ireland
Miraeya Charity, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ryan & Hannah Gritters—Byron Center, MI
Reid Emmett, son of Mr. & Mrs. Blake & Rhonda Kaptein—Byron Center, MI
Brooks Lee, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brad & Amanda Gritters—Grace, MI
Abel Jax, son of Mr. & Mrs. Dustin & Cassidy Nienhuis—Grace, MI
Myles Christian, son of Mr. & Mrs. Keith & Melissa Doezema—Holland, MI
Elizabeth Marie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Andrew & Anna Beelen—Hudsonville, MI
Ava Nichole, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Andrew & Cori Peterson—Hudsonville, MI
Mable Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ryan & Amy VanPutten—Hudsonville, MI
Lucy Jo, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Alex & Kendra Overbeek—Hudsonville, MI
Lena Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Nick & Liz Schipper—Hudsonville MI
Jaxtyn Cade, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jason & Alyssa Butler—Hudsonville, MI
Olivia Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Darren & Karen Solanky—Loveland, CO
Madelyn Faye, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Karl & Hilary Schwartz—Loveland, CO
Tori Brooke, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ben & Rebecca Laning—Loveland, CO
Hendrik John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jeff & Marissa Krosschell—Randolph, WI
Thea Wilhemina, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Tom & Tanya Buiter—Randolph, WI
Tyse, son of Mr. & Mrs. Eric & Annie Pastoor—Southeast, MI
Daniel Jay, son of Mr. & Mrs. Alex & Katrina Kaiser—Southeast, MI
Samantha Jade, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jordan & Kaylynn Dykstra—Trinity, MI
Tessa Kate, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Matt & Jori Oosterbaan—Unity, MI
Brooke Elizabeth, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Joshua & Karla Lennon—Unity, 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:
Tibor Bognar—Ballymena, N Ireland
Tyler Decker—Georgetown, MI
Trent Miedema—Georgetown, MI
Riley Dykstra—Holland, MI
Leah VandenBerg—Holland, MI
Michael Hoeftstra—Hudsonville, MI
Kimberly Braaksma—Randolph, WI
Ashley Veltshouse—Southeast, MI
Ella Pipe—Southeast, MI
Alaina Baas—Southwest, MI
Lydia Langerak—Southwest, MI
Austin Bouma, Veronica Engen, Emily Hunderman, Charlie Engen & Alex Landheer—Unity, MI

MARRIAGES
“For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.” Psalm 48:14
Mr. Tyler Decker and Miss Alexis Smith—Georgetown, MI
Mr. Zach Schimmel and Miss Kayley Langerak—Grace, MI
Mr. Noah Griess and Miss Lanae Wierenga—Immanuel, Lacombe, Canada
Mr. Ben DeJong and Miss Taylor Griess—Loveland, CO
Mr. Troy Koning and Miss Emma Atwood—Southeast, MI
Mr. Joshua Moelker and Miss Caitryn Hassevoort—Georgetown, MI
Mr. Darin Wierenga and Miss Hannah Bos—Immanuel, Lacombe, CAN
Mr. Derrick Span and Miss Courtney Huisenga—Immanuel, Lacombe, CAN
Rev. Stephan Regnerus and Miss Tori Mowery—Lynden, WA
FOUR WONDERFUL THINGS UPON THE EARTH PART 1:
THE EAGLE

“There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not: The way of an eagle in the air” (Prov. 30:18-19).

The eagle spreads its great wings and soars along the air currents high in the sky. It drifts on the breeze, never fearing another bird as it is the mightiest bird in the sky. Smaller birds flee before it, knowing better than to fly into its path. The eagle ignores them all. It has no reason to fear as long as it soars in the sky.

Have you ever seen an eagle soaring? It is a majestic sight. Eagles are very large birds, and the length of their two wings is often very large...perhaps even wider than your dad is tall! When an eagle soars, it looks like it takes no effort.

Even if you have never seen an eagle, you have probably seen a hawk or some other large bird, and that will give you an idea of what an eagle might look like when flying.

In the Bible, the image of an eagle flying is sometimes used as a picture of strength and security. In Exodus, the Israelites are told that God “bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself” (Ex. 19:4). Isn’t that a beautiful picture? God, with might and majesty surpassing the eagle, soars his people above the trials of this world to bring them to himself.

You are about a month into a school year that is different from ones you have experienced before. You are being asked to wear a mask and to have less contact with your friends. By now, the excitement of a new school year has worn off and each day might feel long and hard.

While we hope for things to eventually return to the way it used to be, our hope is not in the earthly scientists or even in a return to normal. Our hope is in God who can lift us up on powerful eagle’s wings to soar above the present trouble.

“Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the L ORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isaiah 40:30–31).

Tricia is a member of Unity Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.
Looking for a good book?

To order:
call 616-457-5970
e-mail mail@rfpao.org
visit rfpao.org