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THE ISSUE AT HAND Brendan Looyenga

At the time of writing for this issue of *Beacon Lights*, the summer is just wrapping up and schools are opening once again. I have the unique opportunity this year to be sending three of my daughters off separately to college, high school, and grade school—all Christian institutions—while another begins her own first year of teaching in southern California. Meanwhile, the annual Young People's Federation scholarship writing contest has wrapped up, and funds have been dispersed to another group of young people who are headed off to college for training to become Christian school teachers and pastors. All around us are reminders of God's faithfulness in providing for our schools this year and, Lord willing, for their needs in the future. Thanks be to our Lord for his mercies, which are new each day!

This month *Beacon Lights* features one of the two open issues for this year. As always, these issues provide an avenue for us to include a variety of articles that stand on their own rather than being organized around a specific theme. If there were an organizing theme for this month, however, it would be something like "Spiritual Growth" or "Personal Sanctification." Readers will notice that each of the feature articles covers an issue related to these themes in one way or another. Thanks go to our authors who, without direction from the staff, were able to identify some of the more pressing spiritual challenges that young people face, as well as several helpful points of application for personal growth in sanctification.

Readers may also notice what is missing this month, namely a contribution to the *Ask Onderwijzer* column. Emails to Onderwijzer have been sparse of late, so anyone reading this is encouraged—*strongly encouraged*—to send in a question or two. Please send your questions to **askonderwijzer@beaconlights.org** so that we can continue to publish them with answers for the benefit of other readers.

Holiness in a world of violence

Prof. Brian Huizinga

This editorial is based on a speech from the Hope (Redlands) PRC Young Adults retreat held in July 2023.

Man's heart, and therefore our world, is filled with violence. This is Scripture's description of the world before God destroyed it with the flood: "The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence" (Gen. 6:11). Violence increasingly fills our world today, making it ripe for judgment in the day of Christ. God hates all this violence and even the lovers of it: "The Lord trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth" (Ps. 11:5). In opposition to all this violence, God has called us to be holy as he is holy.

Violence

The violence Scripture condemns is a sinfully motivated, willful, destructive infringement upon another's property or person, often making use of physical force and brutality.

- Violence is sinfully motivated, rooted in an evil heart. The principal motive is hatred in violation of the entire second table of the law, where we are called to *love* our neighbor.
- Violence is willful. The Mosaic law taught (Deut. 19:4–5) that if you and your neighbor were chopping wood, and your axe head flies off and strikes him in the head, killing him, that is

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not necessarily sinful violence. If that action full of deadly force was not intentional, and your heart was not full of hatred, you may flee to the city of refuge and live. But when Cain rose up to kill Abel, probably using physical force, that was *willful*, and *that* was violence.

- Violence is destructive and always includes the intent *to hurt*, *to damage*, or *to kill*.
- Violence is infringement upon another's property or person. A violent man smashes to pieces his neighbor's front door or punches him in the face. Fundamentally, violence is infringement. God gives someone property, or life and a name, and then with his law, God calls us to respect, love, and care for that person and their property. Violence always infringes, intrudes upon, and does damage to something or someone.
- Violence often makes use of physical force and brutality. This is not always the case. The most basic meaning of the word "violence" in Genesis 6:11 is not "destructive force" but "injustice or oppression in society." Without laying a finger on the poor and weak, oppressors can still do violence through intimidation, deceit, and fraud. Nevertheless, most often violence makes use of physical force and brutality, as Abimelech did (see Judges 9).

Violence in the world

It is not difficult to demonstrate that our world is filled with violence. While it is true that anyone who reads a weekly crime report at their local police station will probably be startled by all the small-scale violence that never makes headlines, I want to name some big issues on a wider scale.

- Mass shootings—think schools: Columbine, Colorado; Newtown, Connecticut (Sandy Hook); Parkland, Florida; Uvalde, Texas; and Nashville, Tennessee. Your parents will remember Columbine from one generation ago. Are we becoming so desensitized that the shock of Columbine is wearing off?
- Abortion—millions of babies are slaughtered in the womb every year in this worldwide infant holocaust.
- Islam—particularly extremist organizations that murder in the name of Allah and terrorize much of our world.
- Woke "cancel culture"—this new wave of violence is tearing through the American entertainment industry, media, businesses, colleges, and most recently, sports. Through intimidation and pressure to conform-or-be-canceled, "wokeism" destroys

reputations, livelihoods, and businesses.

- Gender reassignment surgeries—this new violence is the self-mutilation of one's own God-given genitalia so that males can attempt to transition into females, and vice versa.
- Persecution—Many Christians now experience violent persecution for Jesus' sake. Soon, all Christians will suffer even more under the reign of antichrist (Dan. 7:25; Rev. 13:7). The great tribulation will be the ultimate manifestation of violence in the world and will be the filling up of the reprobate's cup of iniquity, serving to bring about Christ's return.

Violence in the church

The church is threatened by violence, and not merely because God's people are the *objects* of it. Worse, sometimes we are the active *subjects* perpetrating violence. In addition to the aforementioned forms of violence attributed to the world, consider the following.

- Spousal and child abuse in Christian homes.
- Violent entertainment, such as video games involving real-life gore and bloodshed with the rat-a-tat-tat-tat sound of machine guns in the foreground and pulsating music in the background, as the participant plays to murder.
- Unholy polemics in which God's people love to fight each other, hurl ad hominem attacks to sully reputations, and misrepresent another's position by twisting their words out of context to make the person or their position look as bad as possible.
- Social media spats with toxic, emotionally charged, disrespectful, self-righteous, and vengeful responses that are fired back and forth between Christians debating issues on social media.
- Our own hearts, which according to our sinful flesh make us prone to hate our neighbor and think angry and vengeful thoughts, so that we speak violent words and perhaps even engage in violent activities. Often the worst violence is found within us.

Holiness in Christ

God calls us to holiness. Holiness is found in Jesus Christ, the Son of God who became man and entered our world of violence for us and for our salvation. Of him, Isaiah 53:9 states, "And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth." When did he have a heart of hatred, envy, and greed? When did he devour widows' houses, come to blows with the Pharisees who harassed him, or pick up a sword against Pilate or Herod? To be sure, as the exalted Christ of

authority, power, and honor, he is a mighty man who will come with garments dyed in blood as he angrily treads underfoot his foes, but that is not the condemnable sin of *violence*. He is the revelation of the Holy God executing just judgment upon the unrighteous for the honor of his own name and the salvation of his people. Jesus Christ is not a violent Savior.

However, he knew violence as no other, not as the subject of it, but as the object. Especially at the end, his foes lied about him, plotted against him, buffeted him, spit upon him, scourged him, and then nailed him to a cross. Still worse, the Father himself, according to Isaiah's prophecy in chapter 53, struck him, smote him, afflicted him, wounded him, and bruised him for our iniquities. This was not the violence of cosmic child abuse, as the liberal scholars contend, but the high and heavenly truth of the satisfaction of divine justice by a perfectly righteous and willing substitute. He bore all our sins, including our violence, and paid for them. He obtained righteousness and the quickening Spirit for us.

Now in Christ, there is forgiveness and the Spirit of holiness. Holiness is separation from sin. May the Holy Spirit cause us to abhor and flee violence, repent of the slightest inclination toward it in our own hearts, and make a testimony by our life that we stand against all violence. Holiness is also separation unto God, manifested in obedience to the second table of the law. May the Holy Spirit cause us to live in true love for the neighbor, intentionally seeking the good of others.

Holiness manifested

- We do not go to school and open fire with bullets or words, but as loving servants we wash our classmates' feet (John 13:5).
- We do not abort our babies or support abortion but love and care for unborn babies and their pregnant mothers as a tender shepherd does his lambs (Isa. 40:11).
- We do not support Islam but biblical Christianity, which is not a violent religion of physical force but a loving religion of the *heart*, where we employ spiritual means like the preaching of the gospel so that hearts may be turned to God in fear (Luke 1:16–17).
- We do not support wokeism, but to the utmost of our power we live peaceably with all men (Rom. 12:18), confess the name of Jesus before men (Matt. 10:32), and count our masters worthy of all honor that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed (1 Tim. 6:1).
- We do not support gender reassignment surgeries but lovingly

testify that we are fearfully and wonderfully made by an all-wise God (Ps. 139:14).

- We do not persecute other Christians but are willing to be persecuted for what is right. Then we love our enemies, bless those who curse us, do good to those who hate us, and pray for those who despitefully use us and persecute us (Matt. 5:44).
- We do not abuse our spouse or child but reflect the tender love of Christ by nourishing and cherishing them, as Christ does the church (Eph. 5:29).
- We do not waste our time and do damage to our soul with violent entertainment, but in whatsoever we do, whether we eat or drink, we do all to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).
- We do not engage in unholy polemics but avoid all unnecessary conflict (2 Tim. 2:14). And when we must strive, we strive lawfully (2 Tim. 2:5), speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:15).
- We do not engage in toxic social media spats, but we love our neighbor with fitly spoken words, which are like apples of gold in pictures of silver (Prov. 25:11).
- Let each guard his heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life (Prov. 4:23).

PRCA Young Adults Retreat 2023, photo courtesy of Dawn Howerzyl

Overcoming spiritual lethargy

Christina Wieringa

Spiritual lethargy is a weapon used by Satan to weaken our faith and to damage our relationship with God and our neighbor. Maybe you've heard this term before in a sermon or during a discussion at young people's meetings. Lethargy is a lack of energy or enthusiasm. Spiritual lethargy is specifically a lack of energy or enthusiasm for spiritual life. Let this article be a reminder to us about the danger of becoming spiritually lethargic. Pray that we may be able to better identify it in our own hearts and lives, and to encourage our family and friends as we walk through the life that God has given us.

At first glance, the definition for lethargy may seem rather harmless. But don't be deceived, young people. That definition is another way of saying "weak or tired." Spiritual lethargy is the perfect opportunity for the devil to tempt or distract us. Think about yourself when you are physically or mentally tired and weak. Are you not more vulnerable to things such as accidents, forgetfulness, or sickness? To further my point, other synonyms of lethargy include passivity, apathy, laziness, sluggishness, and, most concerning, lifelessness. These terms imply a serious spiritual problem! We must therefore be on guard against this sin. We must know how to identify spiritual passivity or laziness within ourselves.

Spiritual lethargy can look like us physically sitting under the preaching, bowing our heads and closing our eyes in prayer, while our minds are totally elsewhere, completely and shamefully (and sometimes purposely) inattentive to the meat and drink of God's word. We may see this in our attitude toward other spiritual activities, such as Bible study or catechism. We do not

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sincerely desire to be part of these spiritual functions and would rather be with our friends, entertaining ourselves in other fun and easy ways. We don't want to put in the hard work of being built up through these means of spiritual exercise.

Perhaps you've also noticed a lack of care within yourself for your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. This comes out as complacency and withdrawal from the life of the church. When there are opportunities to serve, we don't step up to help or we hang back and let others do the work. We don't view serving as a blessing, but rather a burden. Instead of using our gifts for the glory of God and the good of the neighbor, we use them for ourselves—or not at all. We display a lack of interest and love for our neighbor.

There are so many things in this world that serve as distractions from spiritual faithfulness, whether that be endless scrolling on TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook, or the busyness and stress of our daily lives. Sometimes these distractions are weightier, such as chronic pain or illness, or even difficult family problems. These burdens and cares can often cause us to take our eyes from Jesus. Our prayer and devotional life can become minimal or nearly nonexistent. When we do read the word, we're often rushed or not in the proper mindset to absorb the truths God would set before us. When we pray, our prayers may be superficial or become increasingly self-serving.

God's word gives us example after example of fellow believers who struggled, just like you and me, to keep their hearts steadfastly on God. David comes to my mind as a "man after God's own heart" who nonetheless became tired of running and fighting, and who often fell into sin. His heart and soul were severely beaten down and broken. David's words, recorded in many of the psalms he wrote, testify of the way God repeatedly leads his people back to himself. God's purpose is clear; even through our times of spiritual weakness, he will always bring us back to spiritual faithfulness. Psalm 23 showcases this work of our great Shepherd: "He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (vv. 3–4).

When our bodies are tired or sick, we seek to alleviate this by way of rest or a good night's sleep. When our minds are stressed and burdened, we seek quiet and calm. When our souls and our faith are worn, the answer is found in God himself. He is the bread and water of life. If our bodies need daily sustenance and rest, so also do our hearts and souls. Partake of God daily, young people,

so that you may regain strength and steadfastness in your faith. Our God is a God of means; he gives us his word and Spirit. He also gives us our fellow members of Christ's body to come alongside us and walk through this life with us.

Though our faith is imperfect, we are called to be lively and full of the life of Christ. We are called to be active partakers of the preaching and to have a real desire to be in the word, especially so that we may then share it with others. We are called to sing his praises and witness to the hope we have in Christ Jesus (1 Pet. 3:15). In our young people's groups and in our catechism classes, we are called to do more than just show up. We must be ready and prepared to discuss God's truth.

When the Bible describes us as the beloved of God, it is because his Spirit is in us and love for our neighbor flows from us. The calling we receive is to love "in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18). God has given each of us gifts and talents. Some of us are blessed with a kind spirit; others love to give of the fruits of our hands. Others have the gift of a joyful heart. Young person, what are your gifts? Ask yourself, how may I use them to glorify my God and serve my neighbor?

We do not walk this life alone. So often we hide our struggles from each other, afraid and ashamed to admit our failings. But there is freedom and comfort to be found in bringing our battle with the sin of spiritual lethargy to light (Ps. 32:3–5). When others know that we are struggling, they are better able to pray for us and provide spiritual support. God uses his church to counsel and encourage us. Young people, remember to check in on your friends and to pray for them. Work to create an environment where you may be a help to each other in your daily walk of faith. I pray that you would be comforted by the truth that we belong to an unchanging God whose love and mercies never end!

The need for a personal relationship with God

Jake VanderKolk

I've heard mentioned by some of my peers a general discontentment with church matters, and I've often had similar feelings. In Bible studies, sermons, or perhaps even this magazine's articles, it all seems repetitive, even to the point that "I never learn anything new." Some of us express a concern that there is little development in thought, and that the same topics are discussed without any meaningful improvement in our spirituality. Now, I understand that theology has been developed over hundreds and even thousands of years, so sermons and Bible studies are intended more to hold on to the truth, rather than add to it. I still feel, however, that this critique is relevant, so in this article I will be addressing it.

A. W. Tozer, a Christian pastor in the early- to mid-1900s, wrote in *The Pursuit of God* something that directly addresses the former critique. He says, "How tragic that we in this dark day have had our seeking done for us by our teachers."[1] In application to our current day, I see the same tragedy. Christians in the Protestant Reformed denomination have inherited a great deal of true doctrine, but it is tragic if we don't feel the need for spiritual improvement. Tozer goes on in the subsequent chapters of his book to write about the need for a personal relationship with God, not just a theologically based knowledge. He urges Christians to long for God in personal experience and to cultivate an intense and real relationship with him. As the early church father Augustine phrases it, "Restless is our heart until it comes to rest in thee."[2]

1 A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God: The Human Thirst for the Divine* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2006), 22.

2 Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Albert C. Outler (London: Westminster Press, 1955), 31.

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I think that many of the concerns that I've heard (and have had myself) result from a subconscious awareness of this—the need for a *personal* relationship with God. We might be tempted to look at our churches (especially after the recent split, sexual abuse cases, and lack of pastors) with a discouraged, cynical perspective, but we need to remember that our faith is about personal communion with God, not the state of the church.

The eighteenth-century Puritan Jonathan Edwards also suggests an important idea in this discussion. In the first part of his book *Religious Affections*, he argues that genuine Christianity consists largely in developing religious affections.[3] To put it simply, Edwards' idea of "affections" refers to the will or strong desires of the soul. Edwards writes, "He that has doctrinal knowledge and speculation only, without affection, never is engaged in the business of religion."[4] Religion is more than a matter of the mind; if it doesn't reach the heart (affections), our religion is vain.

Tozer said that we need a *personal* relationship with God, and Edwards added that when a Christian has this personal relationship, it will purify his inner *desires* (affections). Both elements are crucial. When one's personal relationship with God increases, then so do his affections for God. For that reason, it is not surprising that nominal Christians without a personal relationship to Christ have little desire to attend Bible studies.

Now that we have looked at these two essential concepts (a personal relationship with God and religious affections), we can focus once more on the critique at the beginning of this article by considering a few solutions. None of these proposals will individually offer a complete fix, but taken together, they will start to address the problem.

First, I think every individual needs to cultivate a personal relationship with God through devotional life (reading Scripture, prayer, etc.). No one can do that for you. It must be done by *yourself*. Of course, I don't mean that you can do it on your own without God. Tozer addresses this concern when he writes that God's work "is always previous. In practice, however... man must pursue God."[5] In our experience, we cannot wait for God to act upon us. We must seek God and, in looking back, we will see that he was guiding us every step of the way. Tozer observes that the church has suffered from a *passive* faith that waits to be acted upon, and he urges us to embrace a life of *active* communion with God.

3 Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise on Religious Affections in Three Parts* (Ames: International Outreach, 1961), 6.

4 Edwards, *A Treatise on Religious Affections*, 9.

5 Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 18.

Second, I would strongly recommend reading a wide variety of Christian books. In addition to reading books by Protestant Reformed ministers, reading books by various Christian authors can be very beneficial. Members in any church circle grow up talking a certain way about theological topics, and I've found that when I read Christian books by authors of diverse historical and cultural backgrounds, it helps to reawaken my heart to the same spiritual truths that I have grown up with. People like R. C. Sproul and Kevin DeYoung, who are both Reformed and differ only slightly from us doctrinally, can reteach the same doctrines to us with a slightly different perspective. Other writers like C. S. Lewis, Charles Spurgeon, and John Bunyan may be able to convey Christian ideas that you have never encountered before.

Third and finally, at Bible studies and even in our everyday conversations, I think we need to strive to speak more about matters of the heart. In Bible studies, it can feel difficult to contribute anything that seems meaningful to the discussion. However, if we come prepared with just one idea that will fill everyone's souls, instead of a fact that will only fill their minds, discussions will be much more engaging. Similarly, in conversations, instead of talking only about the weather or hobbies, we can also bring up spiritual matters.

Applying all these ideas will cultivate in us a growing appreciation for both God and his word. Once we get a glimpse of God's glory, revealed to us through Christ, our souls will forever long for him and nothing more. As Tozer states, "God is so vastly wonderful, so utterly and completely delightful that He can, without anything other than Himself, meet and overflow the deepest demands of our total nature."[6] We might be discouraged on earth, and even in the church, but God, through grace, fills our souls when we seek him.

6 Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 48.

Creating a life of thanks

Abigail Feenstra

Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Eph. 5:20)

Give thanks *always*. Give thanks for *all* things. This is an incredible calling, but also a very hard calling. Thanks does not come naturally to us. It is something we have to work very hard at doing. We are much quicker to see the negative side of life and tend to focus on the ugly. We walk through a valley of tears where we encounter many trials. The Christian life is not easy, and we are faced with many seemingly good reasons to complain. Trials surround us. The circumstances of our life are often difficult and far from perfect in our eyes. And yet we are called to give thanks *always* and for *all* things. How can we possibly do this?

This is possible because in all things we thank the God of providence who upholds and governs all things. The God from whom every good and perfect gift flows. The only source of any beauty and goodness we see. The God who chose us out of the millions of people who ever lived and made us his own. The God who works every single thing that ever has and ever will happen to us for the goal of our salvation and the good of his church (Rom. 8:28). So in the truly thankful life, there is no room for discontentment.

As pilgrims we will face sorrows, but even in sorrow the truly thankful can say, "I thank thee, O my Father, for the peace of knowing that thou dost work even this to my salvation and that I am not subject to random fate." As Ann Voskamp says in her devotional, *One Thousand Gifts,* "Giving thanks is only this: making the canyon of pain into a megaphone to proclaim the ultimate goodness of God."[1] In

1 Ann Voskamp, *One Thousand Gifts: A Dare to Live Fully Right Where You Are* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 175.

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giving thanks we proclaim that no matter the circumstances or trials, God is good unto his chosen and redeemed people.

Think of the popular saying, "Gratitude turns what we have into enough." When we truly give thanks for all things, we will find that thanksgiving turns the "weeds" of our lives into "flowers." Remember that a weed is just a plant we don't want. Recognizing God's perfect wisdom and providential control over circumstances in our lives turns the thing we don't think we want into something we realize we really do need. And when we realize God is in control of these circumstances, we are given the grace to see ugly weeds as flowers, which makes us able to thank God for them. Make a point of seeing beauty in the life God has given you. This will allow you to ask, "Why all this beauty?" instead of "Why all this ugly?"

Remembering our salvation makes giving thanks a humble activity. How can we be proud if we acknowledge that everything, including salvation, comes from God? Pride does not need God or anything he gives. If we refuse to thank God for something, we are refusing to believe that God can use that thing for our good. Giving thanks requires knowing who our God is. To truly give thanks, we need to focus less on ourselves and more on God. We need to acknowledge that life is not all about ourselves.

When I was searching for ways to make my life a more thankful one, I realized that what I was really trying to figure out was how to make myself happy. Happiness cannot and must not be our goal in life. However, God in his goodness does work so that a life of thanks results in a life of happiness. But if we are to truly give thanks, our own happiness cannot be our primary motivation.

True thankfulness can only be motivated by who our God is and what he has done for us. Ephesians 5:20 says to give thanks "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." This is the key to our calling. In Christ alone I have every reason to give thanks, and in him alone I have the power to give thanks. It is only by his power and the work of his Spirit in us that we will ever be thankful. Look to him for strength to make thanks a focus in your life. Thanks has to be an intentional activity, or it will not happen at all. So look to Christ for the power to *intentionally* give thanks.

Giving thanks leads to communion with God. The Heidelberg Catechism says that prayer is the chief part of thankfulness.[2] Thanks must always be an important part of our prayers. Psalm 100:4 says, "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving,"

2 Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 116, in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 134.

and Psalm 95:2 states, "Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving." Whenever we come into God's presence through prayer and enter his courts in worship, it must be with thankful hearts. He has given us more than we can ever imagine, so how can we not bow before him in thankfulness for what he has done for us? When we think of his sacrifice at the cross, not to mention all the countless blessings he bestows in our lives, we should be overwhelmed with gratitude.

Christ came to serve his people. What an incredible truth! Give thanks for that incredible truth by serving him in return. Romans 12:1 says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." Be a living sacrifice because that is your reasonable service. And in serving him, you will become something that others can give thanks for. We become instruments that proclaim God's goodness so that others praise and thank him for his marvelous work through weak means such as us.

The champion of love

Gabriel Overbeek

Weary soldiers in the faith, do you cry out in pain and travail? Does the warfare waged by the serpent cause your heart to become tired from fighting, even troubled? All saints throughout the extended history of God's established church have experienced, to varying degrees, the stress placed on their souls to conform to this world. We become exhausted in the struggle against evil opposition, and often we stoop

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to weakness when our strength is not based on the foundation given to us by our heavenly Father.

But there is one who is void of weakness. An individual who is fully human, yet equally divine. A champion robed in white, our Lord Jesus Christ is *the* omnipotent warrior. This Christ, who calls us his own sheep, is the unassailable ally in whom our weary souls find rest and shelter. Hell quakes in reaction to Christ's promise to judge the wicked, and Satan cowers in fear when the name of Jesus is uttered within his fiery domain. Sin and its power are vanquished, the saints are preserved, and this warrior is crowned victorious!

Christ took the form of a human when he was conceived by the Holy Ghost in the virgin Mary's womb. Jesus, however, was not only of human nature. Being the second person of the Trinity, and therefore in essence being God himself, Christ had both a human and a divine nature. In fact, even after his suffering, death, and resurrection, Jesus continues in this dual nature today so that the saints in heaven can look upon their Lord in all his glory (Matt. 26:64). The divine aspect of Christ's character is the source of his ability to atone for the sins of his people: only one who is both very God and very man can pay the price for the salvation of elect sinners.[1] Only a human can pay for the sins of the human race to satisfy God's perfect justice. At the same time, the Savior must also be fully divine, meaning he is perfectly righteous and able to bear the wrath of Jehovah against sin. Only in this way is he capable of atoning for the sins of others.[2]

If Christ has conquered sin already, what more punishment is there to bear in this life? Should not the suffering be over? These questions point us to the original sin committed by Adam, the federal head and representative of all mankind. Because of his sin the curse of God fell upon the entire creation (Gen. 3:15–19). While we live in this world before the second coming of the Messiah, we still suffer under the weight of wickedness. Our relationship with sin, however, has been changed following Christ's victory. No more are we slaves to sin and bound to the law; rather, we are made free from sin and servants unto the living God. We have been born again and regenerated into a new life with the Holy Spirit living within us, though we still fight against the wiles of sin while we live in this cursed world.

This raises another important question. May we continue to willfully sin because God, in his grace, has saved us from the penalty for our sins? The answer is that we assuredly may not, for being dead to sin, we must live in newness of

1 Belgic Confession 19, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 45–46.

2 Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 16–17, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 88.

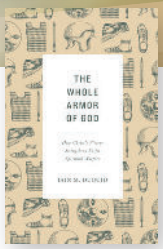
life through our engrafting into Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:1–4). As sin-polluted humans, we are by nature prone to hate God and the neighbor.[3] Therefore, we continue to fight against the temptation of sin all our earthly lives long. It can be easier to fight sin at times when there is not a tribulation weighing down our souls. When we face suffering in the trials God sends us, however, our ability to fight sin is challenged.

Suffering in the face of trials involves two parts. The first part is a temptation to bend under the weight of trials by engaging in sinful reactions to them. We certainly do suffer in tribulations, and yet we are commanded by God's word to defend our hearts from turning to sin as a way of responding. The core danger during times of trial is turning away from God and not placing our trust in his power to preserve us. This leads to the second part of trials, which is the realization that our Lord never leaves us to deal with them by ourselves. He gives us a certain measure of his grace, which is always sufficient for us. When we are at our weakest, we rest in Christ who is strong to save (2 Cor. 12:9–10). It is in his strength we find deliverance.

In this life we are soldiers in the spiritual fight against the devil, the world, and our own sinful natures. But we fight as soldiers of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our loving and victorious leader. There is no warrior like Jesus who can fight on our behalf! Our merciful Savior gave the ultimate sacrifice in the battle against sin; he stooped to the lowest humiliation, was denied and persecuted, and was tempted like as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). He knows all his people's infirmities because he too suffered them, even to a much higher degree than us in his enduring of hell on the cross.

The final outcome of the Messiah's suffering and shame was certain victory. In our Lord Jesus Christ we are made free, and now, while we live waiting for his return, we rely on Christ's strength to overcome sin (Phil. 4:13). He loved us so much as to give his life, even when we turned away. When we feel the powerful hand of sin looming over us, when our own strength is exhausted, let us echo the words of Luther: "Here I stand, I can do no other, God help me!" Yet this is not by our power, but through Christ in us (Gal. 2:20): Jesus Christ, the all-time, undisputed, undefeated champion of love.

3 Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 5, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 85.



The Whole Armor of God

Reviewed by Ashley Mulder

The Whole Armor of God: How Christ's Victory Strengthens Us for Spiritual Warfare
By Iain M. Duguid
Wheaton: Crossway, 2019

Some years ago, a friend and I were searching for a book to use for a small group Bible study. We decided to check out the Protestant Reformed Seminary's library, where we found a copy of Iain M. Duguid's deceptively slim volume *The Whole Armor of God*. In only 128 pages, Duguid provides a detailed exposition of each piece of the entire set of armor described in Ephesians 6:11–18. This book was a helpful guide for our Bible study and is a great follow-up to last month's issue of *Beacon Lights*.

After a short introductory chapter ("Dressed for Battle"), Duguid dives into an exposition of each aspect of the armor of God, reflected by each of the next six chapter titles ("The Belt of Truth," "The Breastplate of Righteousness," "Gospel Boots," "The Shield of Faith," "The Helmet of Salvation," "The Sword of the Spirit"). His concluding chapter, "Praying Always," explores the most important aspect of a godly soldier—constant prayer. After all, "We wear God's armor because Jesus wore it first. In the final analysis, standing our ground simply means clinging desperately to Jesus Christ as our only hope of salvation. In that attitude of dependent trust is true victory" (p. 22).

Duguid's book reads as though it is intended for young believers; he doesn't take prior knowledge of the passage for granted, and he includes simple but profound study questions at the end of each chapter (a good element for group Bible studies). Yet he makes no secret of the horrors found in this world.

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Spiritual evil really exists around us, he argues, an evil that must—and comfortingly, *can*—be fought. "Life is a battle for Christians," he writes (p. 21). "Jesus told his disciples to take up their cross (Matt. 16:24), not to take up their armchair. We are engaged in conflict against an enemy whose strength and skill far outmatch our own."

As you might expect from the optimistic subtitle, however, the author doesn't stop at noting the sheer difficulty of the battle: "It is a battle that we have been equipped to fight in the sure knowledge that we've been enlisted on the winning side" (p. 22). Indeed, he continues:

> Sometimes God will demonstrate his power in you by enabling you to stand strong against Satan's devices; at other times, his purpose is graciously to allow you to fall to teach you equally important lessons about your own weakness and the glorious sufficiency of his grace to save and sustain the weakest of the weak.

During a recent Sunday evening sermon, my pastor noted how incredible it is that no matter where in the world we find ourselves, we can recognize other believers there. Despite differences in culture, dress, and even language, a true believer in a new place is often blessed to find others who read the same Bible and speak the same spiritual language as we do, calling Jesus "Lord." Duguid would certainly agree. In *The Whole Armor*, the reader learns to recognize other believers not by hairstyle or eye color, but by their spiritual dress.

Every brother and sister in Christ is clothed in the armor of God, by the grace of God. *The Whole Armor* is an excellent reminder that this set of armor, which clothes every believer—belt, breastplate, boots, shield, helmet, and sword—has been battle tested by our Lord Jesus himself. The book especially reminds us that even while we struggle and are refined through our own personal set of battles on this earth, Jesus has already won the war in our stead, and "the glory will all be his on the last day" (p. 22).

Awestruck

Scott Van Uffelen

How do we respond to the dizzying, disgusting, and devastating world we live in? How should we make sense of the darkness in us and all around us? Should we just pretend it doesn't exist? Do we complain about it? These are the questions that face us each and every day. As Christians, we are tempted to conclude that because nothing in this life matters in comparison to the glory that awaits us, there is no real point in responding to or caring about this world. Such a conclusion not only lends itself to despair and inactivity, but it also keeps our eyes focused downward instead of looking at God as the sovereign ruler of all things now and in the future.

Taking a quick snapshot of the news over the past few weeks, we get a glimpse of how the world around us presents and processes life. Though the war in Ukraine is still being waged, it has been reduced to page six of most newspapers. Far more interesting, it appears, is former president Donald Trump's fourth indictment. His standard response has been to describe the charges as lies (a "conspiracy" to keep him from being reelected), slander those who bring the charges, and rally his supporters to intimidate those involved in the legal process. Meanwhile, the newest strain of COVID-19 (EG.5, "Eris") is making its debut in hospitals and offices around us, although pleas from doctors and health officials are falling on deaf ears.

In Hollywood news, the new *Barbie* movie has come out as number one at the box office, thanks in part to its definitively feminist agenda. It has already been labeled as "the most influential movie of the year," maybe even the decade. On the other side of the aisle, two new country songs have grasped the hearts of conservative listeners with their raw, repetitive, and complaint-filled lyrics (despite a noticeable lack of solutions).

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Rounding the entertainment news off, the United States Women's National Soccer team faced an early exit from the World Cup. Though forced to laugh at their own demise on the world stage, most of the players, including past team members, blamed their woke leaders for being so distracted with themselves and their social agendas that they failed to prepare for actually playing soccer.

These recent news events remind me of a comedian's skit about his teenage daughter claiming a minor event in her social life was "the worst." A similar shallow attitude seems to be the perspective that comes from media outlets, especially social media. Regardless of the fact that people are currently starving, Christians are being persecuted for their faith in multiple countries, and countless families are being broken up by abuse and assault, our culture's emotional focus has been on movie stars, country singers, presidential shenanigans, annoyance at COVID-19, and the embarrassment of "professional" athletes. It is striking which of these two lists raises more raw emotions in our world—and, sadly, in our own hearts too.

A few questions may help us gauge our spiritual priorities. First off, how vocal do we become when talking about Trump/Biden in comparison to when someone asks us about Christians being persecuted (in India for example)? We tend to know plenty of details about the one, but do we even have questions and concerns about the other? And what about families with children who are watching the *Barbie* movie? Are you appalled by reports of its progressive worldview? If so, are you equally appalled by the sexually offensive image portrayed by Barbie dolls for the past sixty years? Culture has a way of slowly conditioning us to its norms so that what was offensive a few generations ago has become trivial by today's standards. We may protest the new offenses that continue to pop up, but do we think about how deadened we've become to the long-standing iniquities all around us?

All of this material begs an important question: What good comes from becoming immersed in the social life of our culture when its primary effect is to work in us an attitude of discontentment? Ephesians 4:29 says, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister *grace unto the hearers*" (emphasis added). If this is our standard, complaining about the circumstances of our world without offering much in the way of solutions doesn't do a whole lot of good. It certainly doesn't offer grace to anyone listening.

An alternate option is for us to put up a figurative "Ebenezer stone."

When God led his people to victory over the Philistines in the Old Testament, Samuel erected a large stone and named it "Ebenezer," meaning "the stone of help." Samuel recognized the source of Israel's victory and declared it publicly. By commemorating God's goodness in a permanent way, it ensured that the Israelites would not forget God's grace toward them.

Grace is God's good pleasure toward those whom he loves. A proper view of grace never ignores the awful reality of our sins or the sins of the world in which we live. In fact, it emphasizes them. Paul says that if men were good enough in themselves, then Christ would have died for nothing (Gal. 2:21). If we don't see the reality of how ill-deserving we are, God's grace won't seem amazing. If we minimize our unworthiness, we minimize God's grace. The problem of how to reconcile evil in our world with a God who hates evil is the greatest problem of history.[1] It calls for the greatest solution ever devised, one so radical as to be nearly unthinkable—the cross. As Martyn Lloyd-Jones once wrote, "The ultimate test of our spirituality is the measure of our amazement at the grace of God."[2] How long has it been since *you* have allowed yourself to be fully awestruck by the magnificent miracle of God's grace?

It's important that we not be ignorant about national and world events. Where we get our news matters, along with the words used to express what is going on. But our response to what we hear matters even more. The news should cause us to think deeply about our world, pray to God for his providential guidance, and live a life of thankful servants. The truth of what is happening around us should move us to compassion, to love, and to obedience. More importantly, however, it should move us to humble worship and adoration of our sovereign King who rules over every event, every person, and every nation, now and always. That, my dear reader, is nothing to complain about!

1 Randy Alcorn, "God's Grace: More Than Amazing," *Eternal Perspectives Ministries*, January 4, 2023, https://www.epm.org/blog/2023/Jan/4/grace-more-amazing.

2 Martyn Lloyd-Jones, quoted in *Reformation and Revival Journal* 13, no. 3 (2004): 173.

Hebrews: Jesus our high priest

Rebekah Buiter

The book of Hebrews is a treatise on Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament laws and ceremonies. It leaves no room for doubt about the legitimacy of Jesus as mediator, or the sufficiency and efficacy of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. This is the book to read if one is struggling with guilt, doubt, or weak faith. It leads the believer to fellowship and friendship with God through our merciful high priest, Jesus Christ.

Hebrews begins by explaining Jesus' divinity. Jesus is the Son of God, the express image of his person: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). Jesus is not a mere creature or angel, but the only begotten Son of God (Heb. 1:5).

Next, Hebrews proves that Jesus is God *and* man. "For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham" (2:16). This is necessary "that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people" (v. 17). Not only is it necessary for our reconciliation, but it is also necessary for our preservation as God's people. Since Jesus suffered in our flesh, he is able to help those who are tempted (2:18; 4:15).

After establishing *who* Jesus is, Hebrews goes on to show how Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament laws and ceremonies. By an oath, Jesus was made high priest after the order of Melchizedek and not after Aaron (Ps. 110:4). This is important because Aaron was made a priest after the law and the law made nothing perfect. Even worse, the sacrifices of the Old Testament priests could not take away the guilt of the conscience (Heb. 9:9), which often weighs on the child of God long after his repentance. The people of God needed a different high priest after a different order with a better hope (7:19).

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As the high priest, it is Jesus' ministry to offer gifts and sacrifices (8:3). The Old Testament priests offered gifts according to the law, which served as types and shadows of heavenly things. The old covenant was earthly, but the new covenant is spiritual: "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people" (v. 10). Jesus has obtained a better ministry in the new covenant as mediator. By the sacrifice of his own blood, Jesus obtained eternal redemption for us so that we might enter the very presence of God and enjoy friendship and fellowship with him.

There are three main ways we should respond to such a gracious salvation. Hebrews 10:19–39 shows that we must respond with boldness, unwavering faith, and love and good works.

First, we must respond to this redemption with *boldness*. There is no room for shame or timidity when approaching our God by the blood of Jesus (10:19). The guilt of our sin has been purged from our hearts by Jesus' blood (v. 22), and God promises in the new covenant that our "sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (v. 17).

Second, we must have *unwavering faith*. This has to do with our faith in God's promises and not doubting his word in the face of opposition, trials, and suffering. The enemy loves to use the difficulties in our lives to tempt us to question God's faithfulness and to be unfaithful ourselves. Hebrews 11 is full of saints who trusted God's promises, faithfully lived as God had called them, and looked ahead to the heavenly city prepared for them (v. 16).

Third, we must be provoked unto *love and good works* (10:24). There are many practical applications in the last part of the book, such as "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together" (v. 25) and "let your conversation be without covetousness" (13:5). Hebrews also strongly warns against hypocrisy and apostasy. The willful sin of despising the blood of the covenant, after receiving the "knowledge of the truth," dishonors the Holy Spirit and treads underfoot the Son of God (10:26, 29). God will certainly punish this sin: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (v. 31).

Hebrews ends with this beautiful blessing: "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (13:20–21). May this month's study in Hebrews be a means to strengthen your faith in your high priest, Jesus Christ.

Date	Read	Study	Psalter
Oct 8	Heb. 1:1–4	Who is God's Son?	243 (vv. 1, 2, 5, 9, 15)
Oct 9	Heb. 1:5–14	How are the angels different from the Son?	279
Oct 10	Heb. 2:1–8	Why must we give "earnest heed" (2:1) to the word of the Son?	89 (v. 1)
Oct 11	Heb. 2:9–18	Why did Jesus become a man and not an angel?	403 (v. 1)
Oct 12	Heb. 3:1–12	How is Jesus different from Moses?	200
Oct 13	Heb. 3:13–19	How has the book of Hebrews proven the legitimacy of Christ as Messiah so far?	302
Oct 14	Heb. 4:1–10	What is the "rest" Hebrews 4 speaks of, and how do we enter it?	254
Oct 15	Heb. 4:11–16	How is it possible that we may come boldly before God?	268
Oct 16	Heb. 5:1–10	What is the job of a priest?	141 (vv. 1, 3)
Oct 17	Heb. 5:11–14	Why does the writer speak harshly to the Hebrews here?	123
Oct 18	Heb. 6:1–9	How does God view apostasy?	35
Oct 19	Heb. 6:10–20	How reliable are God's promises?	362
Oct 20	Heb. 7:1–6	Who is Melchizedek?	132 (v. 5)
Oct 21	Heb. 7:7–17	What is the significance of Jesus being a priest after Melchizedek's order instead of Aaron's?	266
Oct 22	Heb. 7:18–28	Why is Jesus' priesthood effective to save?	241
Oct 23	Heb. 8:1–6	As high priest, what is Jesus' ministry?	47
Oct 24	Heb. 8:7–13	What was wrong with the first covenant? What is better about the new covenant?	325
Oct 25	Heb. 9:1–10	What was the purpose of the first covenant?	213 (vv. 1, 3, 4, 7, 11)
Oct 26	Heb. 9:11–18	How is the new covenant enacted?	44
Oct 27	Heb. 9:19–28	What is different about Jesus' sacrifice?	83
Oct 28	Heb. 10:1–10	If it was not possible for the blood of goats to take away sin, why did God command the Israelites to make sacrifices?	109

Oct 29	Heb. 10:11–25	How do we know Christ's sacrifice was successful?	183
Oct 30	Heb. 10:26–39	Why does it matter how we live if we must cease from our works (4:10) and enter the holiest by the blood of Jesus alone (10:19–20)?	271
Oct 31	Heb. 11:1–12	Is faith simply blind acceptance of God's word and promises, or is it something deeper?	100
Nov 1	Heb. 11:13–22	What motivated the Old Testament saints to live by faith?	32
Nov 2	Heb. 11:23–31	How do we fight against spiritual shortsightedness?	389
Nov 3	Heb. 11:32–40	What is the "better thing" God has provided us?	203
Nov 4	Heb. 12: 1–17	What is the difference between chastisement and punishment?	317 (vv. 1, 4)
Nov 5	Heb. 12:18–29	What must be our attitude when approaching Mount Sion and serving God?	304
Nov 6	Heb. 13:1–14	How should we treat the neighbor?	24
Nov 7	Heb. 13:15–25	How should we view authority (in the church or the world)?	223

The Return of the Prodigal

Prof. Cory Griess

Awake my soul to thy God,
The restless are exhausted there.
Dive no murky shallow pond,
Though first it glitter, bright and fair.

Heap thyself in single eye,
Complacent once for all to be.
No more tremor from the sty,
But Son-kissed life and beauty see.

John Chrysostom, the golden-mouthed preacher

Prof. Doug Kuiper

Thinking back a few months to the June issue of *Beacon Lights*, readers will remember that the early church father Origen taught at a school (seminary) in Alexandria, Egypt. Also remember that he interpreted Scripture allegorically, finding deep spiritual meanings in a passage that weren't really the passage's intended meaning.

The main rival to the school in Alexandria was the school in Antioch (Syria), where the disciples were first called Christians. This seminary taught a much sounder way of explaining the Bible that sought out the literal meaning of a passage. John Chrysostom attended this school and was later known as the best preacher of his day. The name "Chrysostom" literally means "golden mouthed" and was given him because he was a gifted speaker.

John's life

John was born in Antioch in AD 347. Although his father died soon afterward, his mother raised him as a Christian and asked the best teachers in Antioch to instruct John. He studied the Greek fathers and rhetoric (public speaking). Later, preparing to use his rhetorical gifts in the service of the church, John studied theology. During his training he also became a monk, following strict rules of self-denial so closely that his health was impaired.

After becoming a deacon in 386, and later a presbyter (elder), he was appointed Bishop of Constantinople in 397. This was the second-highest church position in all Christendom, second only to the Bishop of Rome. But the influence of the Bishop of Constantinople was great, for Constantinople was both the

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capital of the Roman Empire and the center of the Christian church in John's day. He was faithful in his office, but controversy erupted, and he was exiled about 405. He died two years later.

John's sound exegesis

One characteristic of John's preaching was his sound exegesis, which means he demonstrated an ability to interpret the Bible in a reliable way. Rather than looking for unnecessary spiritual meanings in a passage, John simply explained the grammar and words of the text as they were intended.

Such preaching has two benefits. First, the gospel truths of the text are presented more simply and in a way that the listener can see for himself. Second, such preaching enables one to make a more powerful application of the passage. John's interpretation of the text permitted him to make applications that struck home to his congregation. Many of John's sermons are printed today; I have five volumes of them in my study. They make for good reading and clearly illustrate his skill at exegesis.

John's skillful delivery

Another characteristic of John's preaching was his skillful delivery. He had learned to speak well, but he did not intend to draw attention to himself by his delivery. His goal was to convey the meaning of a passage to his hearers so they could understand. Every minister who desires to be understood will take care how he delivers his sermon.

God's people eagerly listen to a preacher who combines sound exegesis and skillful delivery. Preachers who are not sound in exegesis or skilled in their delivery often leave their congregation spiritually unsatisfied. Not so for John Chrysostom.

John's boldness

Another characteristic of John's preaching was its boldness. He was bold in taking the emperor and other high-ranking officials to task. If they weren't living as Scripture required them to live, John pointed it out. He was also bold in addressing the sins of the people. They were rich, but were they good stewards? Did they care for the poor and needy? In his sermons, John "stepped on their toes" in true love, calling for repentance.

Some preachers are bold because they desire to have a following. These are not bold in truth. Others are bold because they understand the Bible's meaning, submit to it, and view it as authoritative. The latter explains John's boldness.

John's theology

John was not involved in any theological controversies during his service to the church. The Councils of Nicea (AD 325) and Chalcedon

(AD 381) had made declarations regarding the Trinity and Christ, and John was orthodox in these areas.

At times, however, John spoke of man working with God's grace. We understand that God works *through* humans, but we do not work *with* God. But remember that the church in John's day often spoke this way because they had not yet faced the matter of the relationship between God's grace and fallen humanity. The great controversy between Augustine and Pelagius would start soon but had not yet begun. So John, while wrong in light of later developments in theology, did not contradict any established teaching of the church in his day.

John's legacy

Next to Augustine, John Chrysostom is considered the most significant ancient church father. Augustine was the notable theologian; John was the greatest preacher. Every preacher who explains the simple meaning of the Scriptures, and applies it to the congregation, follows in his footsteps.

The Protestant Reformed Churches in America need more Johns. Young people, pray that God raise them up. Young men, if you have the desire to preach the gospel, prepare for the work. The preaching of the gospel is God's power unto salvation!

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Church news

Ruth Baas

Baptisms

"Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of heaven." –Mark 10:14

Jace Kyle, son of Jason & Carly Pollema Calvary, IA

Jaycie Renae, daughter of Trent & Michelle VanBemmel Calvary, IA

Theo Ryan, son of Mrs. Courtney Andringa Calvary, IA

Elliott Warren, son of Russell & Gwen Birkett Crete, IL

Stetson James, son of Devin & Arika Terpstra Georgetown, MI

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Tommy Nathan, son of Brent & Katlyn Tanis Hope GR, MI

Zacharias Ursinus, son of Jon & Elsie Miersma Hosanna, Edmonton, CAN

John Aaron, son of Aaron & Nikki Freeman Hudsonville, MI

Rhett Thomas, son of Zach & Erin VanEngen Loveland, CO

Sherah Lynn, daughter of Luke & Debbie Regnerus Randolph, WI

Lennon Elizabeth, daughter of Scott & Shelby Mingerink Southeast, MI

Theodore Thomas, son of Caleb & Kim Pastoor Southwest, MI

Asher Alan, son of Brendan & Casey Brower Trinity, MI

Photo: *Faith Protestant Reformed Church*

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

Megan VanMaanen, Marissa Westra Calvary, IA

Isabel Boer, Daniela Boer, Kenzie Dykstra, Noah Lenting, Keagan Ward, Kent Ward Cornerstone, IN

Sara Holleman, Collin Lenting, Hannah Lenting, Abby Zylstra Crete, IL

Aliyah Tolsma Loveland, CO

Clara Feenstra, Sam Feenstra Redlands, CA

Madalyn Elling Southwest, MI

Weddings

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

Daniel Olsson & Josie Ophoff Crete, IL

Joshua Penna & Breanne Pipe Southeast, MI

Nathan Mulder & Ashley Huizinga Southwest, MI

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