

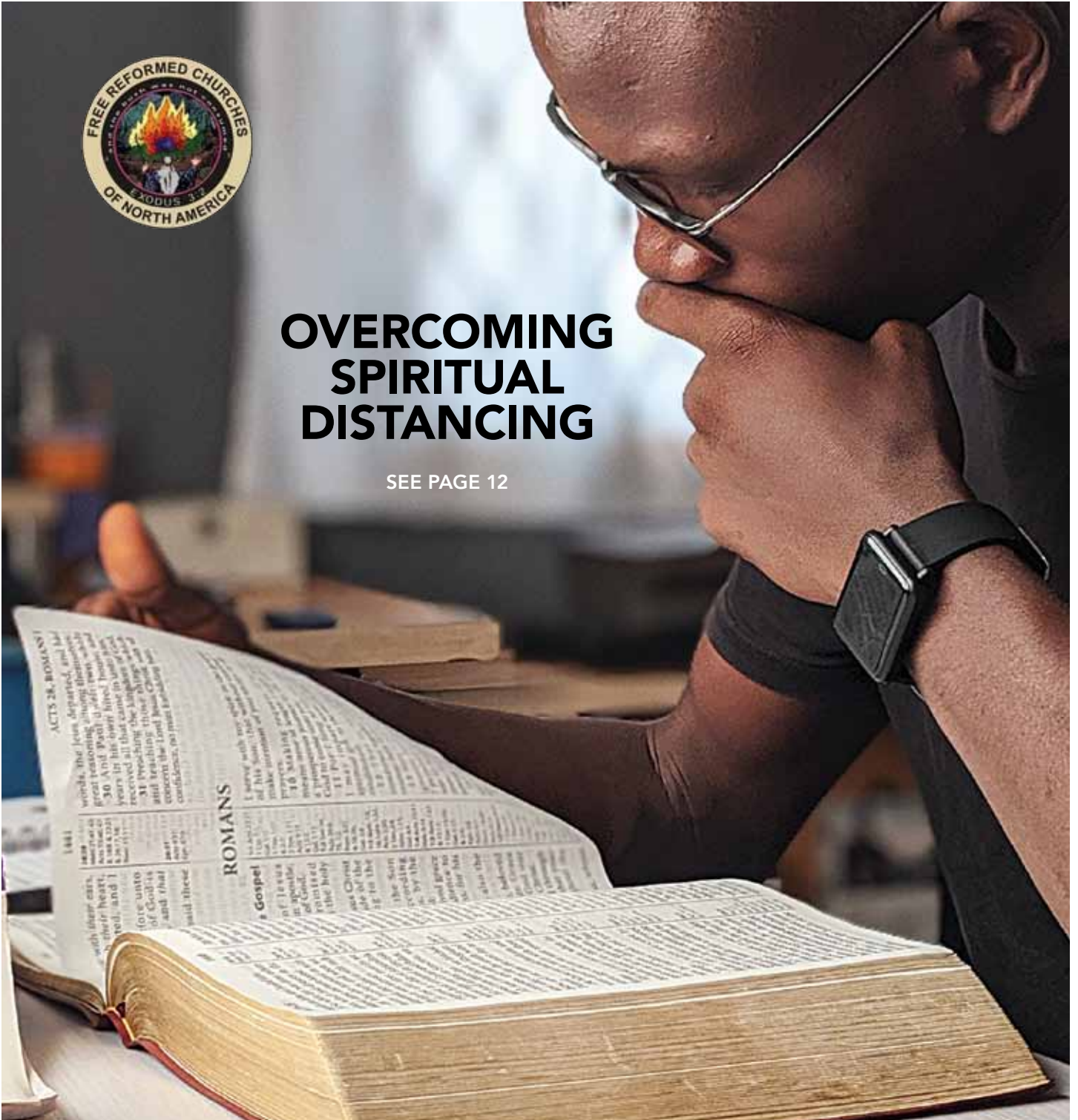
THE MESSENGER

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF NORTH AMERICA



OVERCOMING SPIRITUAL DISTANCING

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PRAYER FOR EVANGELISM & MISSIONS

GOD'S MIRROR

“For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass” - James 1:23

We live in times when people claim to be able to self-identify as whatever they want. Rather than shake our heads at our culture, this meditation aims to test our Christian identity. Do you self-identify as Christian? James, as a good pastor, is concerned with testing such claims. His whole letter contains heart-piercing probing, not to leave people hopeless, but to shake their lives so that empty claims can be replaced with Christ's claims.

In the closing verses of James 1, the Spirit of God is testing Christian profession with Christian practice. Are you just a hearer of the word or also a doer of what you hear? James presses his test with something we use every day – a mirror. Every reader of this article almost certainly used a mirror today. You can't do your hair without one, and you test whether you dressed properly with a mirror.

Why do we use mirrors? First, we need their impartial authority. We have blind spots. We can't see ourselves clearly without a mirror. Spiritually, we have blind spots too. You can't see your own face clearly spiritually without God showing you who you are. Every other mirror than God's Word is like the fun house mirrors which make short people look tall or slender people look like they gained 400 pounds. The Word of God is the only mirror that can give you a totally honest view of yourself.

This is why people determined to live in sin don't like the mirror of God's Word. A witch doctor once saw herself in the mirror of the missionary. She had never seen herself before. She was dressed to frighten others, covered in tattoos, with frightening occult symbols painted on. Her face looked like a horror. She immediately demanded that the missionary sell her the mirror. Realizing that she would not take no for an answer, a deal was reached. She smashed the mirror to bits the moment she got it. The missionary asked, why did you do that? She replied, now it can't pull ugly faces at me anymore.

The Bible shows us our own ugliness as sinners. But this mirror you cannot smash. You can leave it closed or tell yourself it is not really talking about you, but it is. It speaks not to leave you stuck, but to send you to God for His cleansing and renovating grace in Christ! It will not do to say, this is all too heavy and old fashioned for me. Would you say this to the mirror in your bathroom? You know you wouldn't! So why then treat the Word of God like this?

Second, a mirror has a magnetic attraction. You can use a mirror

to become vain, but also for many good reasons. Why do you look in the mirror every morning? You want to know, how much damage did a night's sleep do to my appearance? Is my hair sticking up, or my collar crooked? Is there a stain from dinner last night that I didn't notice? Is my tie crooked? If you are going out for supper with your husband, you want to look nice for him because you love him.

True Christians care about what God thinks of them. Psalm 139 ends with a cry to God to search me and know my heart, to reveal ways in which I am straying, and to lead me in the way everlasting. God is looking for the beauty of holiness in His bride! Love then is the magnetic attraction of the mirror for Christ's bride!

Third, a mirror has a practical effect. How bizarre it would be to look in a mirror and then do nothing about what you see there. A look in the mirror produces an instant practical response. You reach for a washcloth, a comb, or your shaver. You do not look in a mirror to ignore what you see, but to correct what you see.

The Word of God shows you what needs to change in your life. When you ignore it, no matter how ugly the picture was, you are deceiving yourself. Walking away from the mirror will not make your hair look good. Changing the topic and filling your mind with anything and everything other than what God just said won't change your life. Only those who have prayerful dealings with God after looking into His Word are using it rightly.

Spiritually the connection between seeing yourself clearly and dealing with what you see can get cut. Then you stop caring about how God sees you even though you do care about how others see you. This is idolatry! For you are at that moment telling God to mind His own business and to keep His Word to Himself. It sounds shockingly rude and nastily rebellious when you say it like that, but that is precisely how we are as sinners.

Every true Christian at this point responds with grief. “Lord, so often my love fails. I love the wrong things. I care about everyone else's opinion more than Thine. Lord, please lead me when in sin I stray to choose the everlasting way.” But the spiritually deceived person who wrongly self identifies as Christian just brushes it off.

Calvin, when commenting on this text, rightly points us to 2 Corinthians 3:18, which can be paraphrased like this: “but we all, beholding as in a mirror the glory of Christ, are changed into His likeness.” The mirror of God's Word is a unique mirror. For it can change you to reflect its own glory. Those who look into it with hungry longing hearts may see the mirror of God's Word has a golden rim.

One day those who are joined to Christ shall perfectly reflect His glory. Each command of God is framed with Christ, and shows the vision of perfected Christians free from all sin, set free by Christ. No wonder the fruitful hearer gazes so intently into the law of God, for it drips with the grace of Christ and the promise of the future! Yes, the law painfully exposes how far believers still have to go. But it also says all God's believing children shall one day reach the final destination. If you look at God's royal law of liberty (Jam 1:25) only as a ladder you have to climb to the top of before God will have anything to do with you, you will despair. But if you see its demands as graciously supplied in Christ, you begin to pant for God's commandments.

Sinners see law as handcuffs, bondage, and a jail cell. But true believers see it as the law of liberty. This means that the three words describing the law of God should be love, liberty, and hope! What a mirror God's Word is! What does it reveal about you? Are you a mere hearer, a mere auditor of God's Word, or also a doer through the liberating renovating grace of Christ?

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Rev. E. Moerdyk was recently installed as pastor of the St. Thomas Free Reformed Church.

“Lord, so often my love fails. I love the wrong things. I care about everyone else's opinion more than Thine. Lord, please lead me when in sin I stray to choose the everlasting way.”

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THE MATURITY WE NEED

One sign that we are growing in grace is that we value the more solid virtues of the Christian life. A young Christian, like a young horse, is apt to think that nothing is worth doing if it cannot be done at a gallop. This is an understandable feature of youth and immaturity. Life to the young is nothing unless it is lived at full-speed. The young Christian is therefore driven along by high spirits and boundless energy. He runs with the wind and flies with the eagle. He is in search of new mountains to climb and fresh fields of knowledge to explore. Nothing is so dull to us at first as patient plodding or routine regularity.

It would be wrong to say anything against zeal for God and eagerness to serve Jesus Christ. And it would be unnatural to expect to find an old head on young shoulders. The early stage of our Christian experience ought to be one of seeing visions and dreaming dreams, of surveying the whole field of divine knowledge in all its length and breadth, and of trying our strengths in preparation for our life's work ahead. Healthy youth does not plod but race. There are ten thousand books to read and ten thousand tasks to do. Boundless zest and activity are right for us in our early Christian life just as they are in our natural life.

In the course of time, however, it is right and proper that we come to possess the deeper and calmer qualities of patience and reliability. It is normal for us to undergo a visible change of character from exuberant and erratic adolescence to responsible manhood. This is not a mere evidence of our growing older but of our growing wiser. A newly-made fire sends forth many sparks and crackles, but a fire that is matured gives out a steady, constant heat. So does the believer who has come to the stage of spiritual adulthood. The noise is less but the energy is better directed.

When the Bible tells us that we 'have need of patience' (Heb. 10:36), it means that we must expect a Christian to have to pass beyond the immature stage of grace. At first, we find exhilaration in the novelty of God's dealings with us. Everything at the start of the believer's life of grace is new and wonderful. We enter into a new world of thoughts and ideas, of emotions and expectations, of joys and conflicts. The newly-converted person is at first amazed and dazzled by the glories of the gospel: the plan of God, the Cross of Christ, the work of the Spirit. He has entered upon a life rich in truth, in comfort, in hope, in fellowship. He has become the blessed possessor of life more abundant.

At this early stage of his 'first love' (Rev. 2:4), the Christian has so many exciting things to enjoy that there is scarcely time to realise that one day he will need to live less by his feelings and more by the rule of God's Word. When the ship is close to the shore, the sailor may steer by the land. When he is out at sea and in the dark of night, he must steer by the stars. The young and inexperienced believer will one day need other things to live by than meetings and feelings. He must also have in his soul a body of truth and principles of conduct which will tell him what is right and what is wrong when he is in situations that are new and uncongenial to him.

Growing maturity means that, as Christians, we must think for ourselves more than formerly we did, and that we stick steadfastly to the Word of God

no matter how unpopular it may be. The more mature the soul of the believer is, the more determined it is to please God at any cost. Faithfulness and patience in well-doing may not have appeared to us previously to be very important or necessary virtues. But now we see that they are of very great value. We are shocked as young Christians to meet with the question, 'A faithful man who can find?' (Prov. 20:6), because we innocently supposed the world to be full of them. Experience teaches us that those who 'follow the Lord fully' (see Num. 14:24) are comparatively few. As in a marathon, so in the Christian life, a hundred begin the race but only a handful run well to the very end, and some, sadly, drop out altogether. What matters is obedience to God's Word and faithfulness to Christ when there are no earthly prospects of reward for it.

Mature Christians are what every church on earth very greatly needs. They give strength to congregations, joy to ministers and elders, and they add lustre to the gospel. Ask any missionary what gives him or her most anxiety and the answer will probably be, 'The immature and unstable Christians in the fellowship.' Ask any pastor of a church what robs him most of his sleep and he will probably say, 'The immaturity of some professing Christians.' The immature are childish and, like children, they too quickly fall into squabbling and into mischief. One difficult child in a good class gives the teacher more trouble than the other thirty put together. So too, one difficult and cantankerous church-member can spoil the atmosphere of an otherwise happy fellowship.

God's providence seems to be largely ordered so as to test and try the measure of our maturity as God's people. Happy is the Christian who is patient under trials and faithful to Christ in his temptations. The fear we may well have is that when we are really tried, we shall prefer the way of comfort and popularity rather than the way of truth and duty.

To do what God requires is always right and yet seldom popular. But it is the way of blessing, sanctification, and of a good conscience. The soul grows towards obedience under trials and sufferings. The believer who is at first faithful in small things will probably be so later in the greater matters of his life. The smaller trials prepare him for the larger. Daniel and his three friends learned to say 'no' to idol-meat first before they faced the lions and the furnace of fire.

When the history of our own times comes to be written by the church of tomorrow, it will no doubt reveal that immaturity was the hall-mark of our age. Our age has revelled in personalities, but it has not appreciated the importance of Christian character. No doubt we are as much the children of our age as other generations of Christians were of theirs. The faults of our times are reflected in our churches and in our families and the feature which is common to them all is immaturity of one sort or another, either in knowledge, or in grace, or in godliness.

Perhaps the surest gauge of maturity in our souls is this: How do we react when we must choose between sin and suffering? This is no mere theoretical question but one which we shall face more or less every day we live. The coward chooses peace at any price; the wise man righteousness at all costs. The principle upon which each one acts is clear. The coward opts for his own comfort. The wise Christian aims at obedience to God. He knows that the least degree of sin is worse than the highest degree of suffering.

Christian maturity is ripeness of soul and readiness for action. It can only come as we store our minds with sound doctrine and good knowledge. The mature Christian is prudent, knowing when to speak and when to keep silent (Eccl. 3:7). He 'discerneth both time and judgment' (Eccl. 8:5). The mature Christian is mostly in the main things: the Bible, preaching, prayer, good fellowship, meditation, and spiritual reading. The unstable man is crotchety. He majors in minor things, or else he rides a hobby-horse, or else he plays to a gallery. The immature man is like a child. He must draw attention to himself and to his own peculiar opinions. Truth and good sense begin and end with him - or so he thinks. He is wiser in his own conceits than seven good men who can

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argue their view from Scripture (Prov. 26:16). Christian maturity is reached by adding to faith every grace (2 Pet. 1:5-8). It demands that we apply ourselves to the task with 'all diligence'. The lazy Christian will never attain to it - or, at least, not till he (or she) mortifies the lazy streak within our fallen nature. Just as no student earns a good university degree without much effort and many hours of study, so no believer comes to maturity without strenuously applying himself to the God-given exhortation of Scripture to mortify all known sin and to put on the

"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved"
Romans 10:1

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John 6:12

graces of the new man.

If a Christian who is still young in the faith should be so favoured as to make the acquaintance of a mature and experienced Christian, let him strive to benefit from the friendship as much as he can. He who 'walketh with wise men shall be wise' (Prov. 13:20). Hardly anything better could befall us in this life than to have as our friends those who are consistent and wise Christians. They are 'the excellent of the earth' (Psa. 16:3). They are 'epistles of Christ' (2 Cor. 3:3). The experienced and wise Christian is a living Bible in whose behaviour the teachings and commandments of God's Word receive their illustration and their exemplification. Not many have been able to say with Paul, 'Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ' (1 Cor. 11:1).

There is a fault common in our times which explains why few Christians rise as high as they might. It is the practice in many churches of separating Christians into age-groups so that the young learn only from one another. The practice is an evil and foolish one and its fruits are to be seen everywhere. Let the young Christian meet with the best and most experienced Christians he (or she) can find. We all tend to measure ourselves by those we mix with and we take our standards as a rule from those who are closest to us. If we would become a Joshua therefore, let us choose out a Moses to have as our example and as our pace-setter. If we would become another Timothy in our day, let us go out and find (if we can) a Paul to show us by his life what it means to follow Christ closely.

There is no coming to Christian maturity without a thorough knowledge of the Bible in all its parts. This is why we must conclude that the most profitable writers for the Christian to read are Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and the Puritans - together with more recent writers who follow in their path. The more light we have, the brighter we shall shine. Bible light is holy, heavenly, and divine. Those who have much of it in themselves will illuminate others in their turn. 'If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light' (Luke 11:36).

The call of the hour to us all is to become full-orbed and mature Christians. God has given us the books. We must strive to translate them into the language of everyday life. The churches are crying out for Christians who are faithful, reliable, and steadfast. The watching world is looking to see if we mean what we say and if we will practise what we preach.

Oh, if only it might be said of us in heaven while we are still on earth, "These people are Christians indeed".

Rev. Maurice Roberts is emeritus minister in the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), with whom the Free Reformed Churches have a relationship of limited correspondence. This article is taken from www.banneroftruth.co.uk/Magazine/the_maturity_we_need.htm

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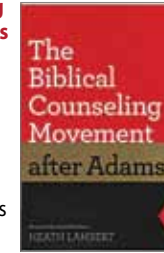
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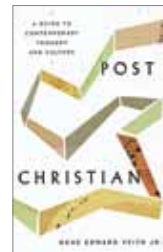
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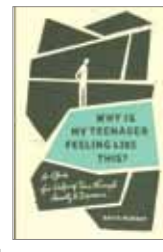
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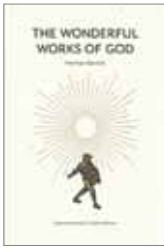


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WAVES OF EXODUS (9): THE WAY OF ESCAPE

READ: 1 CORINTHIANS 10:1-14

The Lord gave Paul grace to write much about the redemption believers have through Christ's blood (Eph. 1:7; Col 1:14). He speaks about being translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light (Col. 1:13-14). Believers were once "in bondage under the elements of the world" (Gal. 4:3), "servants of sin" (Rom. 6:17). Their bondage was much deeper and darker than the bondage of the Israelites to Pharaoh and more than the sacrifice of a mere lamb was necessary to free them. "Christ our Passover is sacrificed," Paul says (1 Cor. 5:7).

Paul no doubt loved the story of the exodus. Often he refers to the book of Exodus and different incidences in it, with even an eye to what seem small details. For example, he refers to Jannes and Jambres, two of the magicians in Pharaoh's court (2 Tim. 3:8). He makes much of Moses going up mount Sinai to receive the two tables of stone and coming down with a veil on his face (2 Cor. 3:13). In the passage we wish to study, Paul makes much of the whole wilderness wanderings, especially to warn us of the snares and traps that meet believers on the way to the promised land.

Privileges

The church in Corinth was comprised of people who had heard Paul preach to them the kind of preaching which many stumble over and others consider foolishness (1 Cor. 1:23): the preaching of Christ crucified. Paul knew no other preaching, no other wisdom, no other righteousness or sanctification, no other redemption (1 Cor. 1:30). Christ's redemption is what we all need.

The Corinthians had come to see in Christ an only foundation for time and eternity (1 Cor. 3:11). The Lord had chosen Him, given Him, set Him as the only Redeemer. Those who believed in Him were "bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:20). Their redemption was secure in the only way anyone enslaved to sin and death could be redeemed, namely, Christ's blood (Romans 3:20-26). Paul loved to speak of no other redemption than redemption through blood, the blood of Christ. This was a beautiful redemption, a full redemption, an irreversible redemption, unto God and eternal glory forever.

However, the way that God chose to reveal this redemption exposed man for who he really was – not loveable, eager to be redeemed, and already working toward his redemption. No. In fact, as there were many in the original exodus, who never partook of real spiritual deliverance which it signified, so too, there are many in the professing church, who are there in name and nothing more. Yet even they have privileges.

Paul mentions how "all our fathers were under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink" (1 Cor. 10:1-4). In other words, so many had privileges, but not the true freedom that complete redemption brings. They may have been

out of Egypt, but never out of bondage. Their spirit had never submitted to the righteousness of God pictured in redemption.

The privileges, meanwhile, were real and rich. They had a "spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:4). None other than the Savior from sin and death was following them. He provided them with daily food and drink. You could say that they had God's mercies each day on their lips, but not in their hearts. They partook of Christ merely in an outward way, not an inward and lasting way. Yet, don't underestimate such privileges. They include the spiritual privileges we have of a Bible, preaching, and the sign and seal of baptism. Yet, these things alone will only testify against us in the day of days. In the day of judgment, the Lord will say to countless numbers of people: I followed you with manna, water, Christ, warnings, invitations, pleadings even, every day, "and ye would not" (Luke 13:34). The epistle to the Hebrews explains it: "Unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it" (Heb. 4:2). Our passage says: "But with many of them God was not well pleased" (v. 5). How we need Christ, who always pleased the Father (John 8:29).

Temptations

Many of us, when we go through times of difficulty or testing, complain. We wonder why this is happening to us. We want to get out of the times of testing because they bring tension to our spirits, minds, and emotions. We want to find the quickest way out of these times, and the quickest way is usually what temptation offers. That only brings more guilt and misery and temptation becomes then only more difficult to endure. What wretches we are!

Israel was tempted to idolatry in the wilderness (v. 7), and they failed by making a golden calf. They were tempted to murmur and they did murmur (v. 10). They were tempted to lust and they lusted (v. 6). They were tempted to commit fornication and they did (v. 8). The Bible is very honest about the ease with which we fall into temptation and the terrible results of doing so. How we need to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matt. 6:12; Luke 11:4).

When we are tempted, little do we think of the fact that we tempt Christ. That's what verse 9 says: "Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of the destroyer." If only we saw temptation as something where-

by we are putting Christ or God to the test that would completely change our view from being self-centered to God-centered. It would also show us that, whatever we do, we cannot and should not tempt God or Christ, though we do it so easily and often.

One thing should be clear: if we indulge temptation, we cannot, apart from God's grace and pardon, expect anything less than being "overthrown," like the Israelites in the wilderness. That is a serious consequence. Let that warning drive us to Christ, who alone can help us, and who is, the true Way of Escape.

Way of Escape

None of us are beyond falling in this life. Paul warns us: "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (v. 12). When we are confident

in ourselves, we have already fallen, because pride goes before a fall (Prov. 16:18). Instead, we need a way of escape. We need a way to bear up under the temptation. That way involves being low on the ground, needy in self, and dependent on the Lord.

So often we think that falling into the temptation will let us escape from the tension and torment of the temptation, but it only makes us fall into guilt and misery. Then we come into a prison or pit which none can escape, except by God's grace. Despite whatever the devil promises, the devil's escape door leads to the pit of regret, the prison of despair, or the place of indifference and hardness. What lies he tells!

True escape comes through faith, a look outside of ourselves to the very Christ who stands near. He is the Rock that follows us. He is the Manna who feeds us. He is the Lord who is there to help us. He is the One to whom we must flee for safety and shelter. Fleeing to Him involves humbling ourselves and finding God exalt us in Christ, who is the true Way of Escape. He bore up under temptation and can help any and all that are being tempted (Heb. 2:18).

God was Israel's way of escape out of bondage in Egypt. He was her Exodus. But He was also her escape from the temptation in the wilderness. He was her Exodus in all difficulties, temptations, dangers, and storms. Some people charge Christians with being "escapists" from the real world. Some people may indeed put their head in the sand and pretend there is nothing wrong in their lives and in the world. However, we should be escapists in the sense of seeing and knowing Christ as the only true and lasting Escape from sin, death, and hell. Do we know Him as such? ①

QUESTIONS

- 01 In what ways are we privileged like Israel? What should the privileges God gives us bring about in our lives?
- 02 What truly pleases the Lord and what displeases Him? What does a life look like that pleases the Lord and how do we know we have such a life?
- 03 Explain how God is put to the test (v. 9). Doesn't James 1:13 say that "God cannot be tempted with evil"?
- 04 How does the perspective that we put God to the test change our focus? How does it help us persevere in the hour of temptation by His strength?
- 05 Show how Christ can be our true Way of Escape in trouble and trials.

PRAYER FOR EVANGELISM AND MISSIONS

In addressing prayer and missions, John Piper wrote, “We cannot know what prayer is for until we know that life is war.” He goes on to say that “Life is war. That’s not all it is. But it is always that.”¹ Life for the Apostle Paul was a life of war. In 2 Timothy 4:7 he writes, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.” He advises Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:12, “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called....” The weapons we use in this fight do not come from the arsenal of human weaponry, because our war is not against flesh and blood, “but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” Because of the spiritual nature of the battle, the Christian is urged to put on the “whole armour of God.”

The battle that we are involved in is a life-and-death struggle for the salvation of souls. This conflict is particularly intense where soldiers in the Lord’s army engage the enemy in the field of missions and evangelism because, in doing this, they are entering deep into hostile territory. Countless souls are held captive there in the dread darkness of sin, unbelief, superstition, and idolatry. The Bible teaches us that when the strong man armed keeps the palace, his goods are in peace until enemy agents infiltrate his ter-

ritory and seek to deliver those whom he holds captive. As soon as this happens, the strong man becomes very agitated, as a roaring lion, in fact, seeking by all and every means to keep his captives in bondage. He would succeed unless one who is stronger comes and overpowers and despoils him (Luke 11:21-22). That One, we know, is the Lord Jesus Christ. He triumphed over the devil and his hordes, making a public show of them by His cross (Col. 2:14-15). Having defeated sin, death, and the one who had the power of death (Heb. 2:14), our Risen Lord has been exalted to a position “far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come” (Eph. 1:21). From this lofty place, He rules as the Captain of the Lord’s army.

As Christians who are engaged in missions and evangelism, we must realize that it is prayer that forms the vital channel of communication between the soldiers engaged in battle at the front line and their Commander-in-Chief, who is Jesus Christ. In this regard, we need especially to be alerted to the vital role of intercessory prayer. There is a strong connection between the missionary’s extremity and his deliverance through intercessory prayer. This the Apostle Paul makes clear when he says, “We were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life... [but God] delivered us from so great a death....Ye also helping together by prayer for us” (2 Cor. 1:8-11). Paul also believed that intercession was the means of deliverance of beleaguered and battleweary mission workers from the plotting of their enemies and opponents. “Finally, brethren, pray for us..., that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men” (2 Thess. 3:1-2).

J. Oswald Sanders, one-time director of China Inland Mission, gives us some very important reasons for dependence on prayer in the area of missions.²

First, God achieves His worldwide missionary purpose through prayer. For this reason, Jesus taught us to *besech* the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into the harvest (Matt. 9:38).

Second, we are members of the body of Christ together and we are dependant on one another. In fact, we might even go so far as saying that we owe prayer to one another.

Third, the very nature of missionary work makes prayer absolutely essential. Missionaries in the front lines are not so much overcoming cultural prejudices and superstitions, but are engaged in hand-to-hand conflict with the prince of this world and his followers. This battle, as stated above, requires spiritual weapons to overcome the spiritual foe, and prayer is one of the weapons God has provided (Eph. 6:12, 18).

Fourth, the missionary is very human in his reactions to testing circumstances such as loneliness, absence of stimulating Christian ministry and fellowship, weather extremes, and language limitations. This makes the prayer of friends doubly necessary.

Last, missionaries are usually in the minority and tend to be overwhelmed by the task at hand. Joshua and his army were down in the plain locked in battle with the Amalekites. Up on the hill was Moses, with his two lieutenants, Aaron and Hur. Moses was engaged in intercession, of which the uplifted rod was the symbol. He was far removed from the battle itself, yet it was his prayer that controlled the swaying tides of the battle (Ex. 17:8-13).

William Cowper summarizes the story in four lines:

*When Moses stood with arms spread wide
Success was found on Israel’s side.
But when through weariness they failed,
That moment Amalek prevailed.*

The key to victory lay in the hands of three octogenarians.

Is this not an encouragement to elderly believers who are no longer fit for front line service? Not arms but the weaponless hands of prayer controlled the outcome. The focusing of many prayers on one life, one family, or on a situation can change defeat into victory.

How do we go about the work of intercession for missions so as to make the maximum contribution?

Here are some encouragements in this direction:

- Set aside, by firm resolve, time for regular intercession.
- Ask the Lord to guide you to a specific field of interest. Gather as much information on the work as possible.
- Seek a personal link with a missionary for whom you can exercise a prayer ministry. Regular communication with regard to particular prayer requests would be helpful.
- Obtain literature on the places for which you desire to pray.
- Have a prayer list in which you note the names of the missionaries as well as their fields of labor.
- Do not be discouraged if results seem meager. This is a reason for praying more earnestly.
- Be open to special burdens that God may lay on your heart.

Because you prayed –

*God touched our weary bodies with His power
And gave us strength for many a trying hour
In which we might have faltered, had not you
Our intercessors, faithful been and true.*
— Charles B. Bowser

Dr. Arthur Miskin is a minister of the Heritage Reformed Congregations who serves as pastor of the Reformed Church, Tshwane (Pretoria) and lecturer at Mukhanyo Theological College in South Africa. This article is taken from *The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth of May/June 2007*.

1. John Piper. *Let the Nations be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).
2. J. Oswald Sanders. *Prayer Power Unlimited*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), 150ff.

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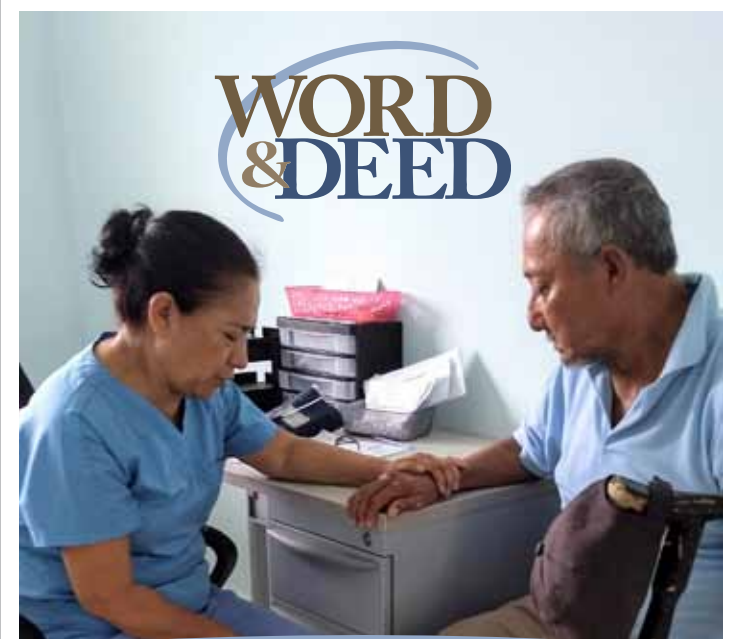
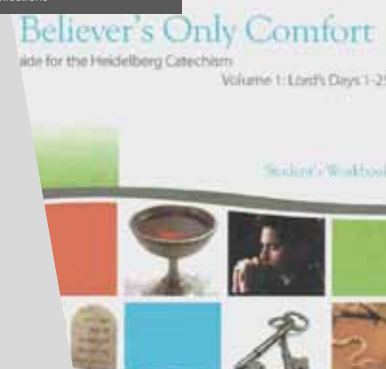
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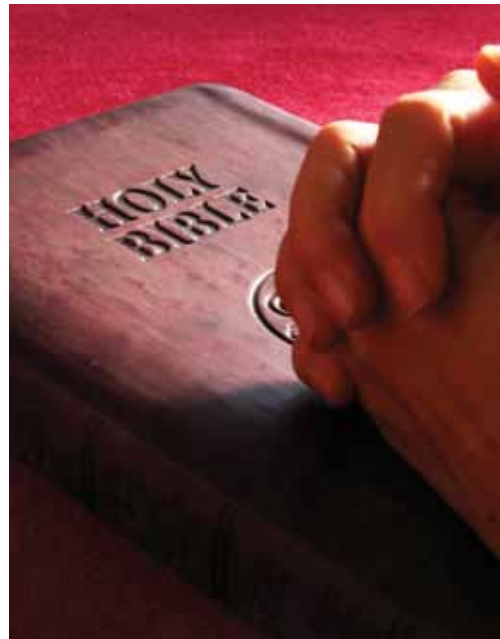
Colossians 3:17

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OVERCOMING SPIRITUAL DISTANCING

Our secular age and culture require by definition that spiritual things must be kept at a distance. Religious matters are shut out of public discourse and must not influence public policy. A technological order controls our world and it has apparently eliminated any need for God. In contrast to past eras, where belief in spiritual things was natural and normal, we live in a secular age in which such belief is presented as unnatural and abnormal. Living in this atmosphere, it is easy for our lives and hearts to be shaped by it without realising. It is not easy to walk with God in a world that has shut Him out. In every age there is a sinful tendency in the heart to depart from the living God. How can we overcome these influences by God's grace to draw near to Him constantly?

Psalm 73 describes someone who found it difficult to live in the light of God's presence in the midst of those who rejected Him. They seemed to prosper by doing so. This became a real trial to the psalmist. Yet he reaches the point where, in the context of worshipping God, he can understand something of the divine purpose. Ultimately, he can say "it is good for me to draw near to God". It is helpful to meditate on the fulness of what this means and, in the following updated extract, William Guthrie helps us to do that.



1. WHAT IS IT TO DRAW NEAR TO GOD?

(a) Seeking deeper peace with God

A person should make their peace with God in and through the Mediator Jesus Christ. Until that has been done, they may be said to be far from God. There is a partition-wall standing between God and them. It is the same with that advice given by Eliphaz to Job to be at peace with God (Job 22:21). Be friends with God and all will be well with you. You must come up to some measure of conformity to the blessed will of God and quit that life of estrangement from Him. If you draw near to God, He will draw near to you (James 4:8). This drawing near is explained in the words that follow in the same verse, "Cleanse your hands...and purify your hearts". Leave that filthy life of estrangement from God by being more conformed to Him and His will, as He has revealed it to you in His word.

(b) Seeking deeper fellowship with God

To draw near to God is to seek more after communion and fellowship with God, and to pursue after intimacy and familiarity with Him. It is to have more of His blessed company with us in our life and walk (Psalm 89:15). This is to walk through the day, having a good understanding between God and us; to be always near Him, keeping up communication with Him.

(c) Seeking deeper assurance

Drawing near implies confirming or making sure of our relation-

ship to God. It assumes someone's peace to be made with God already. The author of this psalm goes on to say, "I have put my trust in the Lord". That is to say, I have trusted my soul to God and made my peace with Him through a Mediator. It is good whatever comes; it is always good to be near to God in that way and to be made sure in Him.

(d) Seeking deeper conformity to God

It implies to be more and more conformed to the image of God. His nearness to Him is as opposed to being far from God. "It is good," he says, "to draw near to God in my duty when so many are far from Him."

(e) Seeking deeper dependence on God

It implies laying aside all things in the world to seek fellowship and communion with God. It means to be more set apart for His blessed company and to walk with Him in dependence upon Him, as the great Burden-Bearer, who is to be all in all unto us. In a word, to draw near unto God is to make our peace with Him, and to secure and confirm that peace with Him. It is to seek conformity to Him and to be near to Him in our whole manner of living.

2. WHY IS IT GOOD TO DRAW NEAR TO GOD?

It is good and advantageous to draw near to God. It is good to take good in that way. It is good concerning the blessed consequences that it brings.

(a) It is a pleasant good

Wisdom's "ways are pleasantness, and all her paths are peace" (Proverbs 3:17). Although many of you think that the people of God have a sorrowful and sad life, this is not due to their nearness to God, but because they depart out of His way, or step aside from following Him.

(b) It is an honourable good

Is it not good to be at peace, and in good terms with God? Is it

not also good to be conformed to His will (the supreme rule of all righteousness) and to have intimate fellowship with Him? We would think it a very honourable thing to be in favour and on good terms with a man that ruled over all nations (assuming he was a good man). But it is quite another thing to be in favour and on good terms with He who rules over all laws and all people.

(c) It is an eternal good

It secures a man's soul and eternal well-being. It keeps him in perfect peace. It has many experiences of God's countenance, which is better to him than barns full of corn, or cellars full of wine and oil. God is all good. "The Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." Who are they? Those who are near unto God. Thus, it is a good thing to draw near unto Him. Would you be forever happy in the enjoying of that which is supremely good? Well then, draw near to God.

(d) It is the highest good

Everyone readily pursues something they think to be good. Many say, "Who will show us any good?" Most want some visible or apparent good. But this is a more sure and permanent good. Then go and acquaint yourselves. Seek to have communion with Him, to be confirmed and conformed to Him.

3. HAVE YOU DRAWN NEAR TO GOD?

(a) Have you known anything of His voice?

If you do not, you are yet far from Him. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." What God speaks in this gospel is foolishness to many, but those who are His sheep know His voice, and to them, this gospel is the wisdom and power of God.

(b) Do you know His face?

Do you know anything of the difference between the smiles and frowns of God? Do you know what it is to have your hearts and souls warmed with the heat and light of His countenance? Has your soul ever been made to weep within you with His love? If not, it is a bad sign; for the people of God know His face; and whenever they hear Him named, their affections go out after Him.

(c) What dealings do you have in your ordinary way and walk with God?

Do you acknowledge Him in all your ways? Do you venture on nothing without God's counsel? Do you keep your eye on Him in your ordinary business? Do you give an account of what you have done to Him? If it is so, it is well. But if you forget God apart from a little time to pray and lose any thought you have had of Him all day long it is a bad sign that you are yet far from God.

4. Overcoming Distance from God

(a) Remove anything in the way

If you want to have your relationship to God made clear to you,

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-Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord." Ps. 127:3

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draw near to Him and be resolved to do what will be well-pleasing to Him. Remove whatever stands between Him and you. When you go to prayer, or when you would lay claim to any promise; do not regard sin in your heart. Put away all idols of jealousy. Let none of them come in with you before the Lord. If you do, He will never regard your desires in prayer. This is a time in which many are careless about this.

(b) See where you should be

Strive to be convicted that you are far from God in your life and walk and from that communion with Him that you might attain to, even while here. If you were convinced of that, you would think it your unquestionable duty to draw near to God in all these respects we have mentioned.

But where are that labour of love, unweariedness in duty, and readiness to suffer everything for Christ? Are not all these, in a great measure, gone? What fainting, failing, and taking fright at the cross? Where is that appetite and desire after Christ, and His righ-

teousness, which folk pursued so vigorously before? Where is that esteem and enquiry for marks of grace in the soul? Where is longing to know your duty and submission to reproof you once had? Are you not rather afraid to hear your duty laid out before you? And where is that happiness people had in hearing the Word when they were not so skilled in evading it except what pleases their fancy? They would not allow the convictions of conscience to continue all night without mourning for it before the Lord until it was removed? Many can maintain an accusing conscience all night, and not be troubled with it. Where is that tenderness of conscience that would have made people abstain from every appearance of evil? That would have made them walk circumspectly for fear of offending and mourn for it before God? Where is that true zeal for the interest of Christ there once was? Is that not gone, and are there any rightly exercised when they see the matters of God going wrong? You should draw near to God in all these things.

(c) Pursue nearness to God

There was a time when you would not have been satisfied if God had not been drawing out your hearts after Him. But is this not almost gone? Draw near to Him and return to your old practice.

Let someone be as near unto God as he can imagine, it is still good to draw near to Him and seek nearer fellowship and more intimate acquaintance with Him. The psalmist was near, yet he seeks to be nearer to Him, to have his arms full of God, so to speak. This is because the life of true religion in the world is a strong appetite and heart hungering after God. Hunger still, therefore, and seek after more from Him. You cannot keep what you have already attained unless you are still in pursuit of more. You lose what you have got, and scatter as fast as you have gathered if you are not still making progress and increase. Thus, we pray “hold up my goings” (Psalm 17:5), i.e. take fast hold of me otherwise I will suddenly go wrong. You will not come to much if you do not draw nearer and nearer to God.

Where experience is real, the soul will still look for more. Strive to go forward; otherwise, you will hardly keep what you have already. Open your mouths wide, and the Lord will fill them abundantly. There are treasures of good things with Him, that you have never yet seen. There are sweet fills of love, peace, joy; perfect victory over sin; self-denial, and dying to the world, being alive to nothing but Christ, being filled with all the fullness of God. All these and much more are to be had through seeking after them.

CONCLUSION

These meditations should encourage us to overcome any distance that has developed between God and our souls by drawing near to Him. John Owen wrote many profound things but a very simple observation he made is that “Friendship is most maintained and kept up by visits.” “Christ is our best friend, and ere long will be our only friend. I pray God with all my heart that I may be weary of everything else but converse and communion with Him.”

This article is a summary of the thought of William Guthrie (1620–1665), a minister of Fenwick in Ayrshire best known for his valuable book on salvation and assurance, The Christian’s Great Interest. Summary and introduction is by Matthew Vogan and taken with permission from www.reformationscotland.org/2020/06/11/overcoming-spiritual-distancing/. 11 Jun, 2020

CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHIES FOR YOUNG READERS

John Bunyan by Simonetta Carr. Published by Reformation Heritage Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2020. Hardcover, 61 pages.*

This is the sixteenth book in a set of biographies which introduce children to important people in the Christian tradition. Every volume has a similar, durable cover with a subtly coloured illustration of the person featured in the book. Throughout each book there are beautiful life-like illustrations on high quality paper. The font size and the vocabulary of the text make it accessible to children approximately ages eight and up, while its style does not come across as childish or pedantic to adult readers.

The latest publication features the well-known John Bunyan, but previous important men and women in this series are John Calvin, Augustine of Hippo, John Owen, Athanasius, Lady Jane Grey, Anselm of Canterbury, John Knox, Jonathan Edwards, Marie Durand, Martin Luther, Peter Vermigli, Irenaeus of Lyon, John Newton, Julia Gonzaga, and B.B. Warfield. Some are well-known, and others are less-known, which adds to the interest of the series.

The author’s credentials are impressive: born in Italy, exposed to various cultures, a former school teacher and homeschool mother of eight children. For many years, she has also been a Sunday school teacher in a United Reformed Church in California. Her stories are checked for historical accuracy by professionals.

The books in this series are high quality and should last a lifetime, but the content of the books is most valuable. The narratives go beyond the simple story of the central character’s life. The author teaches readers the historical and theological relevance of each character and she includes a time-line and additional teaching applications.

The story of John Bunyan is well-known. Most people know him because of *Pilgrim’s Progress*. But he also wrote *The Holy War*, a story of his life entitled *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, letters, poems, and discussions based on his sermons. In this book, you will learn many details of his life which are not well-known, such as that the well-known John Owen, a Puritan theologian and professor, highly esteemed even by the king of

England, probably helped release Bunyan from his final prison term. Owen admired the self-educated Bunyan so much that he invited him to preach at his church on a few occasions. How could a learned and famous person like Owen admire an ordinary mainly self-taught preacher? “Owen replied that he would gladly exchange all his learning for Bunyan’s ability to preach the gospel to the common people” (p. 45).

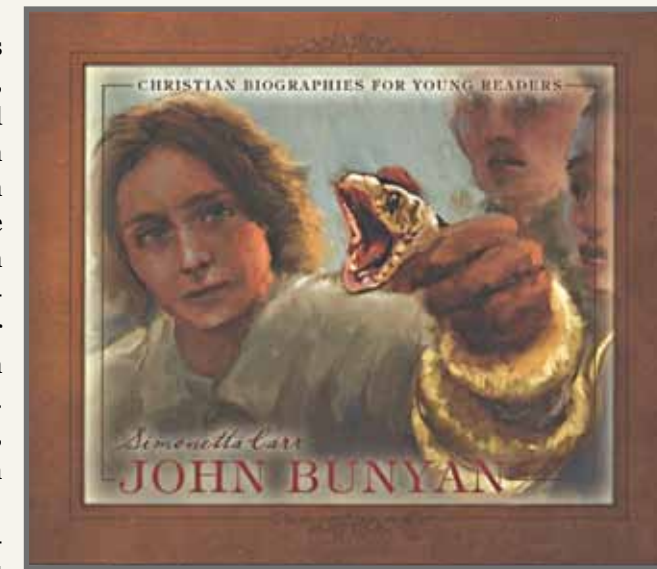
Most of John Bunyan’s writings are in print today, especially *Pilgrim’s Progress*: some in beautiful editions in the original Elizabethan English, some in updated language, some simplified for children, some with beautiful glossy pictures, and some in electronic format (video, etc.). Various commentaries and studies with discussion questions are available as well.

John Bunyan had a rough and tough childhood, earned his living as a tinker, a repairer and seller of metal utensils, and became so convicted by the Gospel that he studied on his own all he could and was helped by his local pastors, so that he could become a preacher. That is why he would rather go to jail than stop preaching during the persecution of the Separatists in 17th century England. He was so gifted and so eager to spread the true Gospel of faith and repentance towards the Lord Jesus Christ that he used his writing talents while in jail.

Why not begin by buying this book (and others in this series) to teach children, teens, young adults, and others at home, in school, and church, how God used an imprisoned former “blue-collar” worker, who is still preaching to us today through his writings.

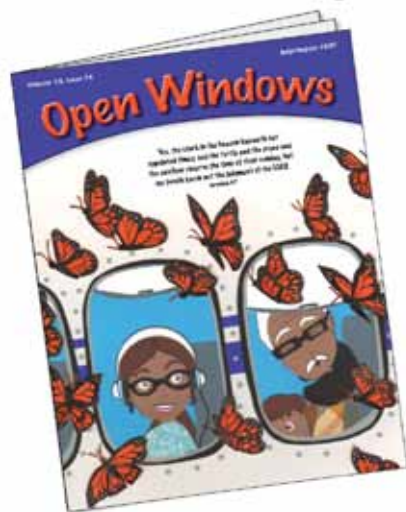
All the books in this series will be enjoyed by young and old. You will turn to them again and again to be reminded of a significant character in the history of God’s church.

**This book and others in this series may be purchased in Canada at Reformed Book Services in Brantford, Ontario, and at Reformation Heritage Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, U.S.A.*



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ANNOUNCEMENTS

OBITUARY



NAVES, JANNA ELIZABETH ('BETS') **NEE VAN THUYL,**

passed into glory on **July 19, 2020**, at the age of 96,
and is now with her faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Beloved wife of

Gerard van Dijk (predeceased 1946) and Dirk Naves (predeceased 1978).

Dear mother of Willy Vissers (predeceased 2013), Han and Alice Vissers, Tina and Aubrey Neven, Nellie and Andrew Groen, Ryk and Anke Naves, Betsy and Murray Zwiep, Jerry and Henrietta Naves, Dick and Carolyn Naves, and Tony and Laurie Naves.

Beloved Oma to 28 grandchildren, 63 great-grandchildren and 2 great-great-grandchildren. Predeceased by two grandsons.
Survived by two siblings in The Netherlands.

The funeral took place at the Hamilton Free Reformed Church, Rev. W. Klaver officiating. The funeral text was Psalm 42:5, *"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance."*
Rev. P. VanderMeyden spoke at the graveside.

Born in Rhenen, The Netherlands, on February 13, 1924, Bets was the eldest of seven children. Following her school years, she worked in a bakery. She married Gerard van Dijk in 1945. The following year, she was left a widow with an infant daughter when her husband died while serving as a soldier in Indonesia. In 1949, she married Dirk Naves, a bookbinder by trade. In 1959, they immigrated to Canada with six children, the youngest only four months old, and settled in the Hamilton area. Two more children were born in Canada. Bets stayed home to raise their children while supplementing the family income by helping her husband complete extra book orders after hours. She was again suddenly widowed in 1978, with three teenage boys to raise. She eventually moved to a seniors' apartment at Wellingstone Christian Home in Hamilton, where she lived for 29 happy years. The last four years of her life were spent at Shalom Manor in Grimsby where she received exceptional, loving care. She will be greatly missed by all of her family.

"So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."
Psalm 90:12

60TH ANNIVERSARY



1960 - September 10 - 2020

"and his window being open in his chamber towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed."

Daniel 6:10b

With great joy and thanksgiving, we announce the **60th Wedding Anniversary** of our dear parents, grandparents and great-grandparents.

BILL & BETTY LAMAN (NEE VAN SCHUBERT)

We pray for God's continued care and keeping.
With love from:

William & Brenda Laman

(William & Lauren, Matt & Autumn {Owen & Miles}, Ashley, Brittany, Caitlin) Rock Valley, IA

Rob & Maryanne Laman

(Gavin, Cameron & Anna, Ethan, Sebastian, Olivia, Gillian) Fenwick, ON

Mike & Yvonne Laman

(Jon, Austin, Alexa) St. George, ON

