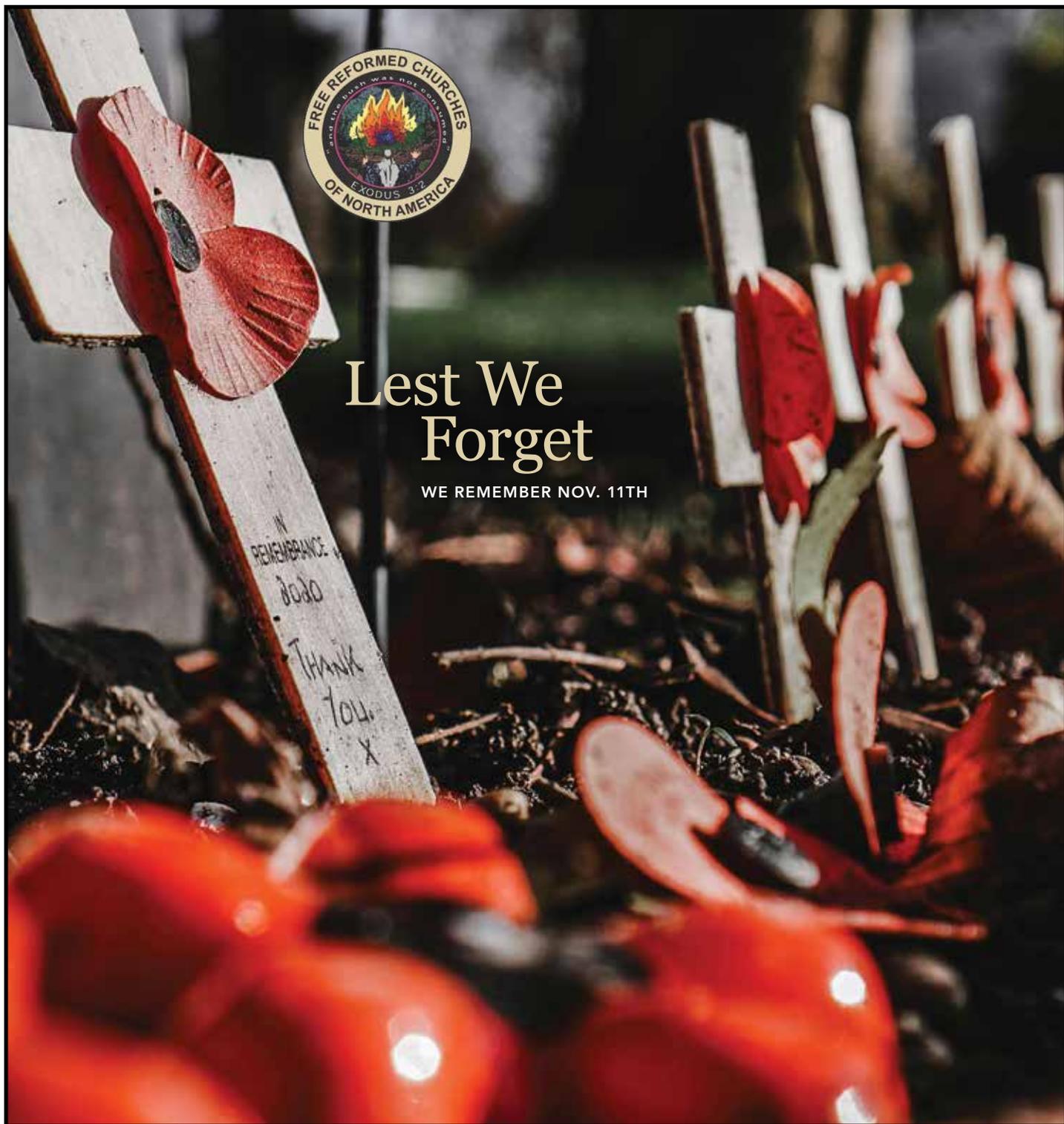


THE MESSENGER

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF NORTH AMERICA



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THE BRIDE'S ADORNMENT

This meditation is a slightly adapted selection of a new book authored by Rev. J. Lewis, entitled Behold the Bridegroom: A Pattern for the Heart of Husbands, available on amazon.com. The applications have particularly Christian husbands in mind. However, the Scriptural message of the Bride's adornment pertains to all of us, unmarried, wives, or husbands. – Editors

*“And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints”
(Revelation 19:8).*

*“Then I washed thee with water; yea, I thoroughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil”
(Ezekiel 16:9).*

There she stands. Pure, radiant, adorned in white, every thread, unfiltered light. The thunder of heaven surrounds her. But was she always like this? This bride, now fit for the feast — was she always ready? Quite the contrary. Read Ezekiel 16:1-14. She was filthy, bleeding, and abandoned in the field (vv.4-6). That is how the Spirit describes the church and every member of her. Her beauty is *borrowed* (vv.13-14). Her garments were *given* (Isaiah 61:10; Revelation 19:8). Her cleansing was done by Another (Ezekiel 16:9; Ephesians 5:26). The One who calls her lovely is the One who made her so (Ezekiel 16:14; Song of Solomon 4:7; Titus 3:5-6).

Ezekiel 16 paints a dirty picture in brutal honesty. An infant cast out, cord uncut, wallowing in her own blood. None pitied her. No one cared to care. But the LORD passed by. And with the words that have echoed through every generation since, He said unto her, “*Live.*” He brought her to life by His Word and Spirit. Then, He washed her. He dressed her. He anointed her. As she grew, He adorned her with bracelets and earrings and silk and fine linen. In other words, He *saved her*. And then, only then, was she beautiful.

Christ found His bride in the ditch. He still does. He does not wait for her to climb up and meet Him half-way. He climbs down. He takes her filth upon His spotless self. He

washes her shame. The linen she now wears is dipped in His cleansing blood. The oil of gladness was pressed out in Gethsemane. Her purity proves nothing of her intrinsic worth, but of His wondrous mercy.

And now she sings. She remembers the pit. Augustine says about the saints' past sins that in heaven their memory will remain. What else would make them sing? Yet, that memory will be sanctified. The redeemed will recall the depths from which they were drawn, now with no pain of guilt, but with the gratitude of worship. Just as the scars of Christ remain in His glorified body as memorials of victory in John 20:27, so too will the memory of our past ill be a testimony to the greatness of God's saving work.¹ She remembers her stains, the blood, the muck, and the mire. And that memory is not her shame, but the strength of her voice, the glory of her Alleluia! Because every spotless thread she now wears was spun by His righteousness to cover her guilt. "It was granted unto her," the text says. Granted. Not earned, not spun by her own hands. *Granted.*

This is the gospel, Christian husband. Free and unmerited. If you have tasted this mercy, if you have been clothed by this Christ, then you are called to lead your wife as one who remembers his own pit. You are called to love her with a bending, covering, washing, beautifying love. That's husbandry. A love that loves her toward fruitfulness, holiness and heaven.

Christian husband, do not forget, just like you, your wife is a sinner too. This book is not just about *your* repentance and growth, but your *response* to her as a sinner. There will be moments when she will hurt you, when her words will be sharp, her spirit withdrawn, or her priorities misplaced. What will you do in the presence of her sin? Will you snap back? Withdraw? Freeze her out? Or will you remember the Groom who came for you in your ugliest hour? Christ bled for His bride while she spit in His face. That is the measure. That is the model. Your response to her sin may become the loudest sermon she will ever hear. Let it be a sermon of mercy. Let it say, "I remember who I was, and I know who He is. Let me show Him to you."

The sad truth is that many Christian husbands neglect their wives in this way. They are not cruel, but silent. Unaware. Distant. They do not pray or read with her. They do not speak to her of Jesus. They notice her dress, her cooking, her body, her tone, but not her soul. They feel the weight of provision and protection, but not of adornment. And she is left very much alone. Don't be that man!

You are not her saviour, but you are her head (Ephesians 5:23). You cannot cleanse her, but you can lead her to the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness (Zechariah 13:1). You cannot sanctify her, but you can make room for her to behold Christ. This is your calling. Help her grow beautifully in Christ. Whoever repents first wins. Lead by repenting first (James 5:16). By opening the Word first. By breaking the silence in prayer first. By pointing her to the One who clothes you both first.

And if she is not yet converted, then this burden is all the greater, isn't it? She must see in you the radiance of a better Groom. She must feel the pardoning mercy of Christ. She must hear the word "Live," from your example, in the tone of your voice, the look in your eyes, and the tears in your prayers for her soul.

Christ adorns His bride. Will you adorn yours? 

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1. Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Modern Library, 1950), 22.30. "Those who shall remember their past evil with no pain, and recognize that they have been delivered from it by the mercy of the Redeemer, will have cause therein for joy, and not for sorrow."

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BONDS AMONG CHURCHES

Do you feel your church has stronger or weaker bonds with other churches now than decades ago? On the one hand several things indicate weaker bonds among Free Reformed Churches. Decades ago young families spilled out of old cars to pack together for church day. Now, a scattering of older couples stepping out of newer cars are the common sight. Attendance at or even the holding of young people's annual meetings has declined. Pre-synodical prayer service attendance is down. The Sunday School association no longer has meetings. What connections does the congregation of St. Thomas have to the Hamilton congregation, let alone the congregation of Blackfalds to the congregation of Pompton Plains? What denominational consciousness is there among our churches?

On the other hand, there may be stronger bonds to other churches than decades ago. The Interchurch relations committee is much busier in the exercise of charity toward other denominations. At a local level Free Reformed churches work together with churches of other denominations in schooling, outreach, and events. More broadly, parachurch organizations with significant Free Reformed involvement have shortened the distances between our churches and churches in central America, Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe. Those bonds have increased.

If in the past there was a danger of 'churchism' building high, fortified denominational walls; today there is a danger of independentism letting churches float about on the sea, enjoying their own voyage. Does being bound together as a denomination still have value? Let us look at some scriptural principles for bonds among churches.

Mutual Concern

In the New Testament, local churches didn't live as scattered pebbles on the beach: separate, self-contained congregations, living in independence of each other. They had mutual concern and interaction.

Sometimes this mutual concern functioned within a city. Antioch had many preachers and teachers, implying there were multiple congregations with their own body of members and elders. Yet, these ones worked together (Acts 13:1-3 and 15:3,35). Jerusalem had a large church. Acts 2 and 4 speak of thousands being converted. They could not all meet as one gathered congregation. Yet the elders act together and Acts 15:4 speaks of "the church" at Jerusalem.

These bonds among congregations also extended over large territories. Letters were written to churches in various areas. The epistle to the Galatians is written "unto the churches of Galatia" (Gal. 1:2). Peter writes to "the strangers scattered throughout

Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Pet. 1:1). James writes “to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” (1:1). To be addressed by a common letter indicates they had fellowship with each other. Note also how greetings were passed from churches of one area to another. Paul tells the Corinthians that “the churches of Asia salute you” (1Co 16:19).

The New Testament shows that mutual concern was shown among congregations close by and far away. What did that mutual concern involve?

Practical and Spiritual Concerns

Mutual bonds between churches involved several aspects:

1. Churches acted together in caring for the needy. Paul exhorted the “churches of Galatia” and of Corinth to collect offerings on the first day of the week for the church in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-3). He also reports that the churches in Macedonia gave generously (2 Cor. 8:1). Acts 11:27-30 speaks of money being sent from Antioch to the church at Jerusalem by the hand of Paul and Barnabas who give it to the elders there (cf. Rom. 15:25-27). This shows that the principle of when one member suffers all the members suffer does not just function within congregations but also among congregations. That is why we have a needy churches’ fund and give support to church plants as well as why collections are held in various congregations for the needs of a particular congregation.
2. Churches had a concern for each other’s spiritual welfare. In Acts 8:14, Jerusalem sends Peter and John to investigate Philip’s work in Samaria. They heard that ones in Samaria had received the word of God and wanted Peter and John to witness what was happening. In Acts 14:27, Paul returned from his journey to report what the Lord has done in the various areas and churches. It reported that “when they had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the gentiles.” The churches expressed a concern for the spiritual welfare of one another. That is why each congregation gives a report on its welfare and asks advice on matters of concern.
3. Churches together sent out missionaries. In Acts 13:1-3 the teachers in Antioch are together, ministering and fasting. The Holy Ghost calls them to send Barnabas and Saul out with the gospel. Barnabas and Saul did not just go off on their own, but were sent by the large church of Antioch. That is why we have an outreach committee and missions committee that oversee missionaries and by extension a theological education committee that oversees the preparation of ones to be sent out. Joining together in sending out men enables the federation to do more than if it is left to a local congregation.
4. Churches expressed common agreement concerning doctrine and practice. Paul speaks of a unity and common awareness when he says: “For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints” (1 Cor. 14:33). When Paul deals with head coverings as an expression of submission, he concludes: “if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God” (1 Cor. 11:16). Jude speaks of the “faith once delivered unto the saints” in general which is to be contended for together as churches. Paul tells Timothy that the church is the “pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). If it is so in general, then congregations are to be bound together in the confession of that truth. Common agreement regarding doctrine and practice was expected in the churches. That is why our federative bonds are confessional standards and a church order which enable us to confess the truths of God’s word in unison.
5. Churches expressed common concern for discipline. Have you ever wondered why Paul writes about heretics and troublemakers by name? Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim. 1:20), Phygellus and Hermogenes (2 Tim. 1:15), and Demas (2 Tim. 4:10)? Isn’t it so that the churches would be united with regard to discipline? That is one of the reasons why discipline is taken so seriously in the denomination.
6. To summarize, the New Testament gives many indications that churches are not to be separate, independent units, but live in fellowship with each other with common care for the needy, concern for spiritual welfare, desire to spread the gospel, agreement concerning doctrine and practice, and concern for discipline.

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Someone could ask: does this necessitate having synods or broader church gatherings?

A Gathered Assembly

Delegates of local congregations gathering together makes the bond between congregations visible and enables that bond to function. A precedent for such gatherings is in Acts 15. Someone has called this “the most important meeting ever held in the history of Christianity.” Let us turn there for instruction.

The occasion for this meeting is that some Judeans came to Antioch to teach that Gentiles cannot be saved unless they are circumcised (cf. Gal. 2). The issue here concerned salvation and the church or concerning who are saved and who may be members of the church. In verse 2, the brethren sent Paul, Barnabas and some others to Jerusalem “unto the apostles & elders about this question.” Notice the references to elders here.

When they reached Jerusalem (v.4), they were “received of the church, and of the apostles and elders.” However, a party supported the judaizers (v.5). Rather than simply wait for an apostolic decree, “the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter” which involved much “disputing” (v.6). There was mutual consultation and several speeches decided the matter. First, Peter stresses God sent preachers to the Gentiles and blessed their ministry (vv.7-11). Then, Barnabas and Paul confirm what God has done (v.12). Conclusive is then that James arises and shows that these observations agree with Scripture, quoting Amos 9:11-12 (vv.14-21).

The conclusion was that circumcision is not required, but that to avoid offence and temptation they abstain from meats offered to idols, fornication, and from blood. The “apostles and elders, with the whole church” send “chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas” to deliver and explain the decision of the assembly written in a letter (v.22). They confirm their esteem for Paul and Barnabas and write in their letter (v.28): “it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things.” This decision is brought not only to Antioch but also to the other churches. Acts 16:4-5 records: “as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.”

What do we learn from this precedent? First, that church membership criteria and the message of the gospel is not determined by the local church but in the gathering of the elders and apostles of the churches. These consulted with each other and together listened to God’s Word, led by the Holy Spirit. Second, the outcome of this council in Jerusalem had authority. Their letter included “*ta dogmata*” – the rules, regulations, or decrees to be obeyed. They didn’t regard each congregation as independent,

but expected all the churches to listen to these instructions. The authority of broader assemblies of the churches does not rob the local congregation of its authority. Local churches covenant together in the bond of a church order to abide by the decisions of the broader assembly, provided it not conflict with Scripture, the confessions, or existing church order.

So when we look at the New Testament, we see the mutual concern churches have for each other show itself as elders meet together to discuss and prayerfully seek resolution to challenging issues for the benefit of all the churches.

Lessons

Realizing that Scripture shows churches are to be bound together does several things:

1. This reality gives us reason for thanks. We may be thankful that God does not isolate us as individuals but places us in congregations and does not isolate us as congregations but places us in a federation and does not isolate federations but places them in relation to other churches. Just as members of the local church as a body need each other, so do local congregations need each other. The Holy Spirit gives gifts to each member of the church (Rom 12:4-5; 1Co 12:4-7,12,14-26) that are to be used for the good of others (1Co 14:19).
The Spirit’s gifts are to promote mutual dependency not only within the local congregation but also among congregations. These gifts include the governance and ministry in the church.
2. This reality challenges us. It challenges our individualism and our self-focus personally or as congregations. If God has arranged that churches have mutual care and concern for each other, shall we not show these things? Shall we not be willing to be challenged and corrected? Shall we not be thankful to be able to support various activities we do together as a denomination financially, showing interest and concern for the welfare of the churches and our joint witness in the world? Shall we not seek the good of not just ourselves, or families, or even congregation, but the churches?
3. This reality stirs us to prayer. All our churches and their office-bearers are weak and sinful. We are not each other’s source of blessing and keeping. We are all dependent on God, on Christ as the King of the church, and on the Holy Spirit who has been poured out to dwell in the church. So let us be in prayer for each other, that the greatest bond would not be with each other but with Christ Himself by His Spirit. Prayer goes to God knowing that the churches belong to the Christ who says: “I will build my church.”
4. Having a spiritual perspective on bonds among churches realizes the deepest bonds are grounded in the covenant bond with God in Christ. Then we will long to see that gracious bond known and manifested in the denomination and among churches throughout the world to the praise of the triune God.

Churches had a concern for each other’s spiritual welfare. In Acts 8:14, Jerusalem sends Peter and John to investigate Philip’s work in Samaria.



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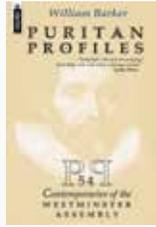
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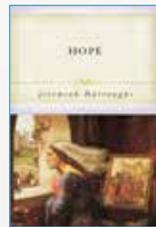
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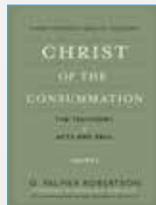


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THE PROMISE OF PLAY

As Reformed people, we are deeply committed to the covenant. We have a solemn responsibility to our children—who, after all, are not ours, but the Lord's. We make solemn, public vows. With faith, we lay hold of the gracious promise, yet with a real trembling for the stewardship that is ours to raise them up in the "fear and admonition of the Lord."

Yet, while our covenant-tradition is clothed with solemnity, the lighter side of life shines through – or it ought to! There is a place for *play*; and, in fact, there is great *promise* in it. I'm increasingly convinced after twenty years of pastoring, twenty-five years of parenting, and now almost two years of grand-parenting that one major ingredient of parenting and even pastoring, involves play.

But before we get too far, what are we really talking about? By "play," I only mean any kind of lawful and moderate recreation. It can be physical play, like sports and other forms of outdoor recreation, or the play of the mind and spirit, in music, games of strategy, or the reading of good literature. But whatever shape it takes, by "play" I also intend to mean that this recreation is not only done in solitude, but is shared, and especially with those whom we love and who have been entrusted to us to shape and mold for service in their generation.

Let's start with some principles. Out of the gate, some play is bad. "Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play" (1 Cor. 10:7). There are also forms of lawful play that turn unlawful when we should be at work or worship. What we are interested in is healthy play within the proper bounds of God's law.

Make no mistake: play is good! God made the oceans as a playground for the leviathan's pleasure (Ps. 104:26). Then he harnesses the beast to amaze a curious world. "Wilt thou play with him as with a bird? or wilt thou bind him for thy maidens" (Job 41:5)? David was a skillful player of the harp, soothing the troubled mind of King Saul. The prophet's future hope painted a portait of a jubilant Zion, "full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof" (Zech 8:4-5).

For that matter, God made dance. David self-forgetfully danced before the Lord (2 Sam. 6:21). Yes, much dancing is sinful and sensual. But not all. 'Rabbi' John Duncan, when he converted from atheism to belief in God, was so overcome with joy that he danced openly on a bridge. Our Lord Himself portrayed heaven's rejoicing over penitent prodigals as a father's homecoming celebration, complete with feasting, "musick and dancing" (Luke 15:25). When our children were very young, I danced a lot with them around the living room, as their children-spent mother retreated to her room for an hour! I have zero regrets.

These are heavenly gifts. Lawful recreation is healing, even regenerative. “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine” (Prov. 17:22). Piety is not life-hating austerity. H. L. Mencken wrongly blackened our godly forbears, claiming that the essence of Puritanism was “the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy.” Not so, Mr. Mencken! Do not confuse piety and pietism. Pick up Leland Ryken’s *Worldly Saints*, and see for yourself.

Engage in play for yourself, in your godly stewardship of body and mind, and do it for those entrusted to your care; indeed, do it *with them* as much as you can. To our main point here, play is a gift especially useful to forge bonds and to create, sustain, and enliven relationships. Yes, play is a team-builder in family and church! Our children and indeed all of us need to belong, all the more in this fractured, individualistic, extremely mobile world. As Chalmers put it, let’s “awaken an *esprit de corps*” among those under our influence.

Finally, some examples. Luther, of course, was eminently playful. He often delighted to tease his wife and children with his rapier wit. He loved playing music and games with the family, sometimes also with visitors. One modern biographer wrote, “Luther advocated that adults use play and games to lure their children into voluntary patterns of learning and obedience.”

William Wilberforce, the great British evangelical MP and victorious champion in the abolition of the slave-trade, was well known for his love of story-telling, repartee, and healthy amusement. Above all, he cherished domestic happiness in the bosom of his large family. Once, he broke off a letter to Hannah More, evangelical philanthropist, with the words, “I am irresistibly summoned to a contest at marbles, and in these days of the rights of man, as I would not furnish any valid ground for rebellion . . . I obeyed the call.” He was also known to have chased his squealing, exhilarated children around the house with anything but gentlemanly reserve.

The great Scottish Presbyterian William Guthrie was well-known for his playfulness as a pastor. He was clearly an enterprising evangelist, as John Howie relates in *Scots Worthies*:

He would frequently use innocent recreations, such as fishing, fowling, and playing on the ice, which contributed much to preserve a vigorous state of health; and while in frequent conversation with the neighbouring gentry, as these occasions gave him opportunity, he would bear in upon them reproofs and instructions, with an inoffensive familiarity. Mr Dunlop has observed of him ‘that he was animated by a flaming zeal for the glory of his blessed Master, and a tender compassion for the souls of men, and as it was the principal thing which made him desire life and health, that he might employ them in propagating the kingdom of God, and in turning transgressors from their ways, so the very hours of recreation were dedicated to this purpose...’

My favorite anecdote of the promise of play is that of one whose name is largely forgotten, the Rev. Aeneas Sage (1694-1744). John Kennedy of Dingwall recounts the tale:

Matters continued in this state [of barbarous heathenism in Sutherland] till the induction of Mr. Sage, nearly eighty years after. He was just the man for the work of breaking up the fallow ground of a field so wild, and a rich blessing rested on his labours. On the night of his first arrival at Lochcarron, an attempt was made to burn the house in which he lodged, and for some time after his induction, his life was in constant danger. But the esteem he could not win as a minister, he soon acquired for great physical strength. The first man in Lochcarron in those days was the champion at the athletic games. Conscious of his strength and knowing that he would make himself respected by all if he could only lay big Rory on his back, who was acknowledged to be the strongest man in the district, the minister joined the people on the earliest opportunity at their games. Challenging the whole field, he competed for the prize in putting the stone, tossing the caber, and wrestling, and won an easy victory. His fame was established at once. The minister was now the champion of the district, and none was more ready to defer to him than he whom he had deprived of the laurel. Taking Rory aside to a confidential crack, he said to him, “Now, Rory, I am the minister, and you must be my elder, and we both must see to it that all the people attend church, observe the Sabbath, and conduct themselves properly.” Rory fell in with the proposal at once. On Sabbath, when the people would gather at their games in the forenoon, the minister and his elder would join them, and each taking a couple by the hand, they would drag them to the church, lock them in, and then return to catch some more. This was repeated till none were left on the field. Then, stationing the elder with his cudgel at the door, the minister would mount the pulpit and conduct the service. One of his earliest sermons was blessed to the conversion of his assistant, and a truly valuable coadjutor he found in big Rory thereafter.

Truly, there is “a time to laugh” (Eccl. 3:4)!

Now, to be clear. Pray on. We must diligently cultivate personal piety and reverence, in God’s house especially, but also in our homes and our lives more broadly. Do take care not to forget yourself with excessive or carnal mirth, lest your dishonor God and degrade your place. But there is also a time and place to play. If our priorities are right, then we can validate the real promise of such play amid some good clean fun. ❶

Rev. Michael Ives, a graduate of PRTS, serves as pastor of the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Corbin City, NJ.

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HOW SHOULD WE THEN DIE?

*HOW SHOULD WE THEN DIE? A
Christian Response to Physician-
Assisted Death.* By Ewan C. Goligher,
M.D., Lexham Press, Bellingham, WA.
Softcover, 145 pages.

The title may not clearly convey that this book is about euthanasia, a topic which should very much concern everyone because it is legal in Canada and becoming widely practiced since the June 2016 Supreme Court decision. Although still illegal nationwide in the US, it is legal in 12 US jurisdictions, where terminally ill adults can receive a prescription for a life-ending medication to be self-administered at a time of their choosing, often at home.

Sadly, Canada has a very broad definition of MAID (Medical Assistance In Dying). It includes two main forms: a physician or nurse practitioner directly administering a medication to cause death, or prescribing medication for the person to take themselves. There are several conditions a person must meet, but the law is scheduled to be broadened even further on March 17, 2027, to include mental illness. We ought to be thankful for organized attempts and individual protests to try to stop this part of the law. Yet, because MAID has been legal for almost ten years, a significant number of people choose this way to die. Its acceptance can be noticed in obituaries and the experiences of Canadians when they are given a choice between 'active' and 'passive' care when hospitalized with a life-threatening condition. It also has practical implications for health and medical personnel, ICU physicians and students.

In light of current developments, Tim Challies' call to read this book is clear: "I urge all Christians to prepare themselves to be able to provide a truly biblical response to one of the defining ethics of our day."

The author cites a conversation with a student whom he asked for an opinion on physician-assisted death. The student's answer: "Why not? If that's what they want, why not?" (p. 3). This reflects a commonly held position in our diverse, multicultural, and pluralistic society, where everyone has the right to his/her own opinion to



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determine their life and destiny. The author answers this question in six separate sections, each offering a well-researched answer from various perspectives – always keeping the biblical Christian perspective in focus.

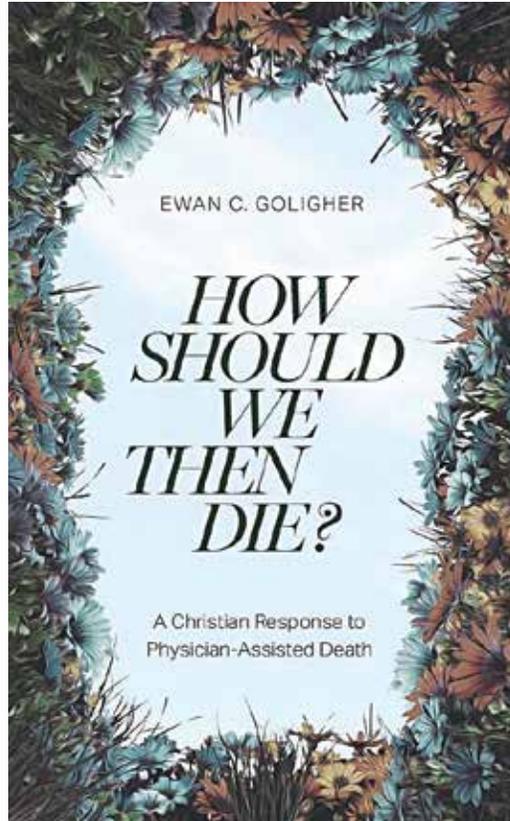
Christians will answer the “Why Not? question from a moral Christian viewpoint because they understand “the gospel” of creation, fall, redemption, and glory. They also realize God calls us to exercise compassion. Therefore, this “understanding of ourselves becomes profoundly relevant to the question of causing death out of mercy.” The author believes that especially “Christians must therefore be concerned to understand how the truth about humanity revealed in the gospel of Christ applies to the question of assisted death” (p. 5). They, “therefore, seem to face a conflict between personal religious convictions and professional ethical obligations” (p. 6). The author aims to “show how Christian belief grounds, strengthens, and enriches one’s understanding of the issues.” He will also argue that the secular belief system (regarded as nonreligious because it functions without reference to God or concern for the afterlife) is really another religious viewpoint. So far, Part I.

Part II answers the question, “Why Assisted Death? It is introduced by a real-life experience the author had with a terminally ill cancer patient, suffering excruciating, unbearable pain, which could only be alleviated by administering strong pain medicine. The author saw how this gave the patient back her dignity and allowed her to breathe, rest, to be human. By offering this relief, it is made possible for such a terminally ill patient to die in relative peace and relieve the agony of the bystanders.

In this part of the book, the method of physician-assisted death is explained. However, more to the point: “The essential argument for physician-assisted death is that the option of physician-assisted death gives patients the confidence that they can avoid suffering and thereby maintain their dignity up until they decide to end the timing of death.” By using MAID, the patient has control and decides. Advocates do not see it as suicide. According to statistics, 90 percent of those seeking assisted death say, “that the main reason for ending their life is a loss of autonomy, the sense that they are no longer able to control their lives or circumstance” (p. 17).

In Part III, the author shows that “Assisted Death Devalues People.” He argues that assisted death denies human value. “In providing or administering the lethal agent, the operator inevitably expresses a belief about whether it is good for the person to exist. By intentionally causing the death of the person who has requested death from them, they show that they believe that it is good for that person not to exist” (p. 38). The law as it exists in Canada devalues people (p. 41). Many

more insightful arguments are presented in this part, and it ends with a treatise on the Bible’s value of human life. We alone of all creatures are made in God’s image (Gen. 2:7). God is praised for the high position given to man (Psalm 8:4-6). Jesus tells us not to be anxious because we are of much greater value than the birds of the air (Matt. 6:25-31). The King of glory took on human form and died for humans who had defaced God’s likeness by sin (Philip. 2:4-7; Rom. 5:7-8; 1 John 4:9-10).



In Part IV, “Assisted Death an Act of Secular Faith,” the author, an ICU doctor, describes the struggle of patients and families who are confronted with the inevitability of death and the hopelessness of life support. The point here is that we all know death is inevitable, and this indicates the importance and relevance of dealing with death before it comes to us and our loved ones unexpectedly. Therefore, “For those who have followed the Way [the Bible-Way], death is the way to life, true life in the company of the one who loved us and gave Himself for us. In Jesus, we have stared death in the face, but we will live forever if we have died to ourselves and our life is hidden with Christ in God” (p. 83).

In Part V, “Escape From Despair,” the author tries to answer the question as to “Why?” He uses the example of a 30-year-old man struggling with multiple sclerosis and the severe consequences of this chronic illness, showing why physician-assisted death can be seen as the only way to help

such a person. The patient’s illness was compounded by loneliness and a hopeless future. Goligher states that “The desire for physician-assisted death should be understood as a cry of despair, a cry that cannot be ignored” (p. 92). How can we help? We must help such persons and others to give them a meaning and purpose to live. The author quotes various sources, including Christian theologians who contemplate suffering. The ultimate solution is to know the Lord and derive meaning from our suffering through the gospel, which is by “Entrusting Ourselves To A Faithful Creator” (Part VI).

The author claims this book is not totally comprehensive; yet he gives so much information that it might be somewhat overwhelming. It is filled with explanation, thoughtful Christian insight, and wisdom for “end of life decisions.”

Highly recommended for pastors, office bearers, church members and anyone working in the health and medical field. The author, Dr. Ewan C. Goligher, is Canadian, with a PhD from the University of Toronto, a researcher and professor who has written many papers and book chapters. He is a critical-care physician regularly involved in helping patients and families navigate difficult decisions. ¹¹

Mrs. Ricky (Frederika) Pronk is a member of the Grace Free Reformed Church of Brantford, ON.

25 YEARS IN THE MINISTRY

INTERVIEW WITH PASTOR J. SCHOEMAN

Introduction

It was a privilege to interview my colleague and friend, Pastor Jack Schoeman. He is well-known to most of us, having served in churches in Alberta, Ontario, and now in British Columbia. He has also served on the executive of our synod, often as chairman. Having been a high-school teacher, his knowledge and gifts have been helpful to our denomination in the training of theological students for the ministry. He has been the chairman of our Theological Education Committee for many years. While few people realize the challenge of the task, he has also served as the radio pastor of our denomination for many years. We are so thankful for our faithful brother's service. His pulpit ministry has been a model and a blessing to me, both personally and for my ministry. In addition to all this, we immensely enjoy our shared hobby of exploring the mountains and backwoods of British Columbia on our quads. Pray that our God would continue to bless him personally and in the ministry of the gospel as Christ's ambassador.

Calling and Early Years

When did you first sense God's call to pastoral ministry, and how did that unfold?

In high school when I was about 14 years old. I was converted under the preaching of Rev. Den Butter who was the minister in Hamilton where I grew up. His preaching was very searching and passionate and it left a deep impression on me. I saw my sin like I never saw it before. But my eyes were also opened to see that the Lord Jesus is a gracious and a willing Saviour. He drew me to Himself and saved me.

Since that time, I began to struggle with whether the Lord was calling me to the ministry. I finished high school and then went to university and earned my BA in history. But I had no clarity. I still saw so many deficiencies in myself. I also had such a high view of the ministry and the inward call to the ministry that I simply could not bring myself to apply. I listened to Rev. Al Martin's lectures on the call to the ministry (on cassette tape!) several times over, but they made me feel even more unqualified and unworthy. During this time, I became acquainted with and was very much affected by the lectures of Dr. Sinclair Ferguson on the Marrow Controversy. I thought to myself: If I ever went to seminary, I would like to go to Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia where Dr Ferguson was teaching. Desiring finally to come to a resolution of the matter and not knowing what else to do, I visited Rev. Pronk who at that time was the minister in St Thomas. Pastor Pronk suggested that I enrol at Westminster, confident that the Lord would make His will clear while I was



Pastor Jack & Susan Schoeman.

engaged in theological studies. That seemed like good advice. And so, that is what I did. I enjoyed my studies at Westminster very much, but when I graduated, I still lacked clarity. So I decided to enrol at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario where I completed my MA degree in history a year later. After this I taught at Heritage Christian School in Jordan, Ontario for six years. At the prompting and encouragement of a dear sister in the Vineland congregation, I finally had the liberty to apply and was accepted. Two years later I was ordained. And now here I am - 25 years later!

Looking back, what do you wish you could tell your younger self on the day you were ordained?

I need to think about that. Although I was 33 when I was ordained and had several years of teaching experience behind me, I was not fully prepared for the challenges of pastoral ministry. I think that is probably true for most men who enter the ministry. So I guess I would have told myself: "You graduated from seminary. You are ordained. But you are not yet a minister. That will take many years of experience. Even then you will feel like you have so much to learn. So be patient and look to the Lord for help." After 25 years I still have to say this to myself.

Was there a particular moment or mentor who confirmed that this was the path God had for you?

Pastor Schouls was my pastor in Vineland when I applied as a student for the ministry. I will always be grateful for his prayers, guidance and support and for giving me a very good model of preaching. I learned a lot from him. He supported me

through my journey, but consciously and carefully refrained from being overly enthusiastic. I think this was his way of keeping me humble (aside from frequently referring to me as a “kleine broekie” - a Dutch expression that means “little pants” but refers to someone who is inexperienced and still has a lot to learn. He still calls me that on occasion!).

I should also mention my father, Wayne (who hopes to turn 89 in December). My Dad was an important spiritual mentor and guide for me when I first came to faith in Christ and first began to struggle with a call to the ministry. I thank God for giving me a father who loves the Lord and who took the time to hold my hand as I took the first few steps in the life of faith.

Joys and Challenges

What has been your greatest joy in 25 years of ministry?

There have been many. But if I had to choose one it is probably serving as the pastor of my first congregation of Monarch, AB. When we arrived there the church was relatively small – about 160 members. It had just left the RCA to join the FRC – a decision that created some upheaval in the congregation. But within a few years, the congregation grew a lot. At the same time, the Lord opened the door to start two church plants – one in Calgary and the other in Lacombe. We were also given an opportunity to start a weekly radio program out of High River AB. It was a busy time and our children were still quite young but I look back on these years with great fondness and thankfulness. What I found especially gratifying was witnessing many people who were in bondage to hyper-Calvinism and yet hungry for the gospel, coming to liberty in Christ. I have never experienced anything like that since.

What has been the most difficult challenge you've faced as a pastor, and how has God sustained you through it?

There have been challenges in each of the congregations I have served. Thankfully, very few were of a doctrinal nature. Most had to do with interpersonal relationships – a brother or sister



Pastor Schoeman at his ordination with Pastor Schouls.

who, for whatever reason, fell out of fellowship with another brother or sister in the congregation requiring consistory involvement. Or a broken marriage relationship. I was also involved in several difficult church visitations over the years which I also found quite challenging. In all of these situations I have had to remind myself that I can't change people's hearts. Only God through the Holy Spirit can do that. Nor does God call me to do this. He only calls me to bring the Word of God to bear on all of these situations (with a sprinkling of sanctified common sense) and encourage people to do what the Bible says. The rest I must give over to Him.

But without question the most difficult challenge I have ever faced was the sudden death of our dear daughter Catherine 8 years ago. This affected me and my wife very deeply. Still today I cannot think or speak of it without sorrow. But the Lord sustained us though the prayers and tangible expressions of love and support from so many people both within and outside our denomination. It was a sad time but also a very special time. And it was a time in which the Lord drew both me and my wife closer to Himself.

How has shepherding people through both their celebrations and sorrows shaped your own faith?



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RIGHT: Pastor Jack and Susan and family at ordination.
ABOVE: Pastor Jack and Susan and family today.

One of the privileges of pastoral ministry is entering into what you call people’s “celebrations and sorrows” – the birth of a child, the death of a loved one, times of sickness and recovery from sickness, a sudden accident, a wedding, etc. In all of these situations, I try faithfully to represent the Lord Jesus Christ who is our sympathetic High Priest and who was tempted in all points like we are yet without sin and who Himself enters into all of our joys and our sorrows. My hope and prayer is that in my role as shepherd I may become more like the Great Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Describe the involvement and impact of your wife and family on your ministry.

Most people have little idea how great burden a pastor’s wife and children have to bear. I am very thankful to God for giving me a wife who has stood beside me all these years and who has often given me sound counsel and advice. She was especially a great help to me in my first few years in the ministry when life was very busy and our children were still very young. If I was spent for the sake of the gospel, so was she and still is, albeit in a different way. I am also thankful for my children who have had to be uprooted several times in their lives and who had to endure the anxiety of being uprooted again every time I received a call. This was not always easy for them – especially when they were younger. But they understand that their Dad has a special



calling and has to go where he feels the Lord is sending Him. In addition, a pastor can sometimes become preoccupied with the next sermon he is writing or a situation in the congregation or a task he has to perform for a certain committee. My wife and children have always understood this and adjusted accordingly. I am thankful for that too.

Ministry and the Church

How have you seen the church change over the last 25 years, both locally and in the wider Reformed tradition?
 I think I can answer that question more fully if I go back beyond 25 years. I am part of the first generation whose parents immigrated from the Netherlands as children and / or

teenagers, got married here and raised a family here. So while I am thoroughly Canadian, I am still a little bit Dutch too. I love Dutch food and can speak a bit of Dutch and understand the Dutch language. You could say I have one foot planted in the old country (through my parents, grandparents and aunts and uncles) and one in the new.

My experience as a child growing up in the Hamilton church was shaped by this reality. I grew up under the preaching and ministry of Dutch ministers. The first table at the Lord's Supper was always conducted in Dutch. On Sunday afternoons a Dutch reading service was held in the basement of the church while the English service was taking place upstairs. During periods of vacancy, we had ministers come from Holland to serve us for several weeks at a time. You could say the Dutch connection was still strong.

That is no longer the case today. Most of the people in our churches (at least those under 50) have little or no connection to the Netherlands anymore. They are thoroughly North American - especially many of our members in the USA who have much deeper roots in this continent than most of our members in Canada. I do not regret this. It is a natural development. I just mention it as a difference.

Ecclesiastically this means we are far more closely connected to Reformed and Presbyterian churches here in North America than we are with the churches in the Netherlands. That can have positive as well as negative consequences which I will not get into now. The challenge we face as churches is how can we hold on to the best of what we have inherited from the previous generation while at the same time relate to and speak to this generation who grew up in a North American context. That is not always easy. But I think it's possible.

What do you consider to be the most pressing spiritual need of the church today?

The need of the church today is the same it has been from the very beginning of time – we need Biblical, doctrinal, experiential, discriminatory, Christ-centered, searching, uplifting, encouraging, inviting, practical, culturally relevant and, above all, Spirit-blessed preaching. The Word of God teaches and history confirms that the Lord is pleased to bless such preaching. May God bless our denomination and all churches with such preaching!

Do you approach preaching differently today than you did at the beginning of your ministry?

In terms of form, no. I still preach with a theme and points (as I was taught at seminary and as I heard growing up). Most of the time, when I preach a Catechism sermon, I preach the Catechism. I do this not because I think it is the only way to preach, but because it is the best way to preach as it helps to ensure that the message of the text (or Lord's Day) is preached in all its fulness. Having said that, I think I am more direct than



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INTERVIEW SERIES

I used to be, especially when it comes to confronting sin. And I tend to use more contemporary language and expressions and even style of delivery so that people can better relate to what I am trying to communicate.

How does your broader ministry (in the denomination and community) impact your local ministry to your congregation?

I have always been highly involved in denominational work, having served on several committees over the years. Most of the time I enjoy committee work. It is necessary for the proper functioning of the church. It also helps me to stay abreast of what is happening in the denomination. I enjoy meeting and fellowshiping with my colleagues and other brothers several times per year. But I also learn a lot. For example, for quite a few years I have served as chairman of the Theological Education Committee. This has afforded me a front row seat (as it were) when it comes to the training of our students and future ministers. But it has also exposed weaknesses in my own ministry. For example, when one of my colleagues gives a critique of a student sermon, sometimes I learn things about the text I never saw before, or I learn a better method of structuring the sermon and what to include and what not to include. When it comes to preaching, we have never arrived. There are always things we need to learn and to improve upon.

Personal Growth

How has your understanding of the gospel deepened over the years?

I have come to understand more deeply the depth of human depravity and inability but also the wonder of salvation in Christ and the amazing love of God in the salvation of sinners.

What spiritual discipline has most anchored you through the highs and lows of ministry?

Prayer. Like most people, my prayer life leaves much to be desired. But when you look back on 25 years of ministry (as I have) and you see so many shortcomings and deficiencies and when you wish there would be so much more fruit on your labours, it is such a comfort to bring it all to the Lord in prayer and give everything over to Him.

Can you share a passage of Scripture that has been especially precious to you as a pastor?

There are so many. I am currently team teaching a preaching course at PRTS where we are taking the students step by step through the process of writing a sermon on a verse from 2 Corinthians 5:12-21. In verses 20-21 Paul writes: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him *to be* sin for us,

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who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” Three things struck me recently about these verses: 1. The great and awesome task of the minister of the gospel: He is an “ambassador for Christ”; 2. The glorious message he proclaims: “Be ye reconciled to God”; 3. The astounding love of God for sinners: “He made Him [His only begotten and well beloved Son, Jesus Christ] to be [not just bear!] sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” Enough said.

Advice and Reflections
What encouragement would you offer to young men considering pastoral ministry today?

With all of its challenges, disappointments, struggles and trials, to be a minister of the gospel is the most blessed calling a man can have in this life. So, my question to young men: if you have the necessary gifts (which have been verified by your local church), a clear sense of call from the Lord, a burden for souls and a desire to magnify God in His Son Jesus Christ, then why would you not want to do this work? And why would you want to do it anywhere else than in the churches where the Lord has placed you and which has such a rich heritage?

If you could condense 25 years of pastoral wisdom into one sentence, what would it be?

I am thinking of the words of 2 Corinthians 4:7 “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.” Despite our special calling, pastors are not special people. We are just earthen vessels - clay pots. Nothing more.

And this is by God’s design – so that whatever fruit there may be on our labours, God may receive all the glory. I think if we as ministers can keep that before us, we would do well.

In all that has changed around you, what truths have remained unshakably the same and continue to center your ministry?

We are poor, miserable, hell-deserving, impotent sinners. But Christ is a loving, gracious, compassionate, and merciful Saviour.



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Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. JAMES 1:19-20

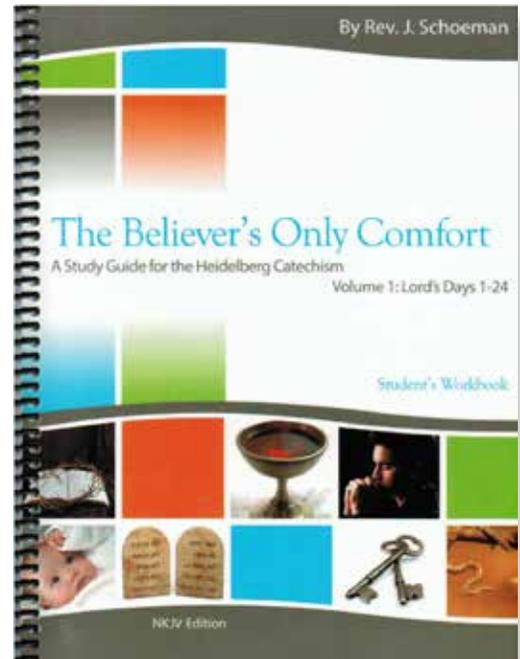
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Heidelberg Catechism workbook by Pastor Schoeman (Free Reformed Publications)

Looking Ahead

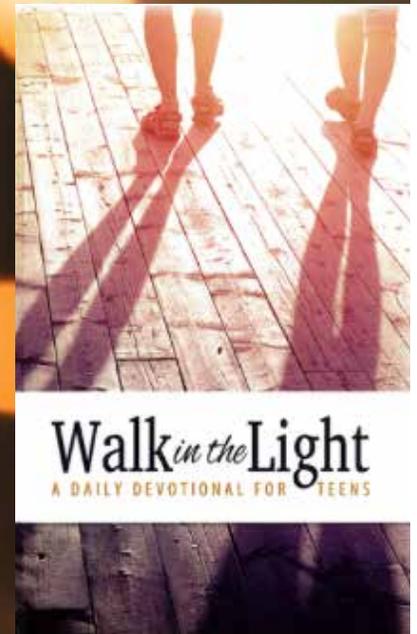
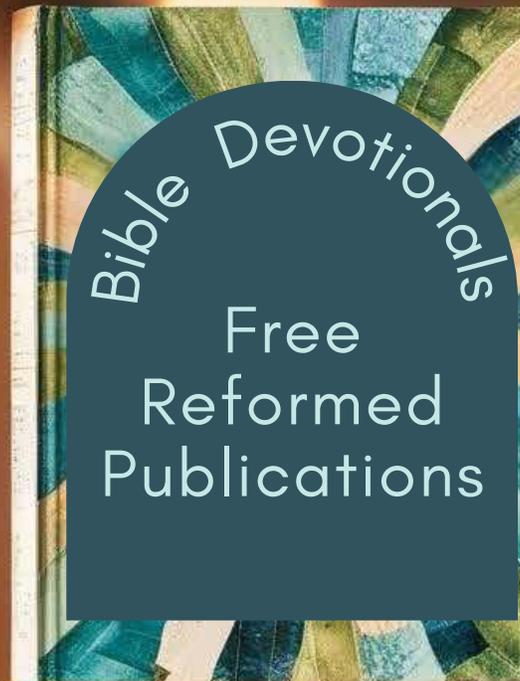
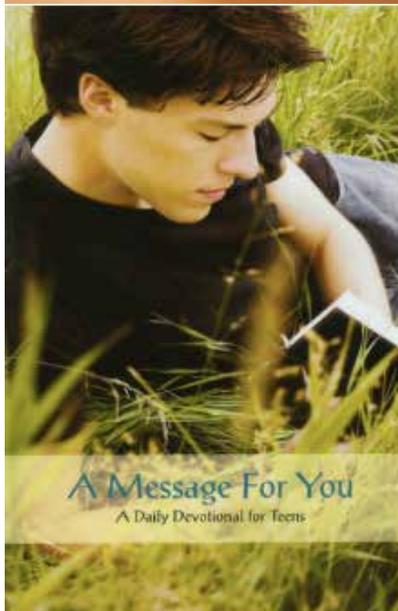
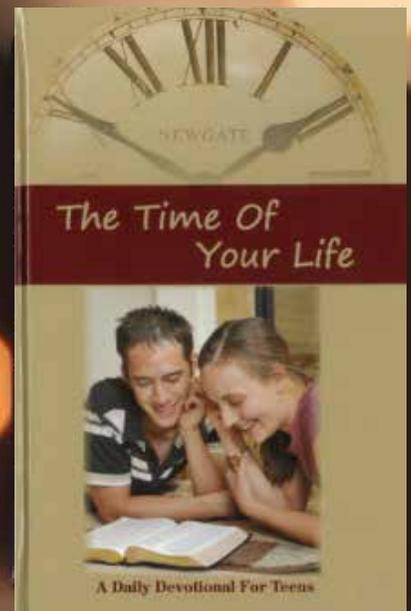
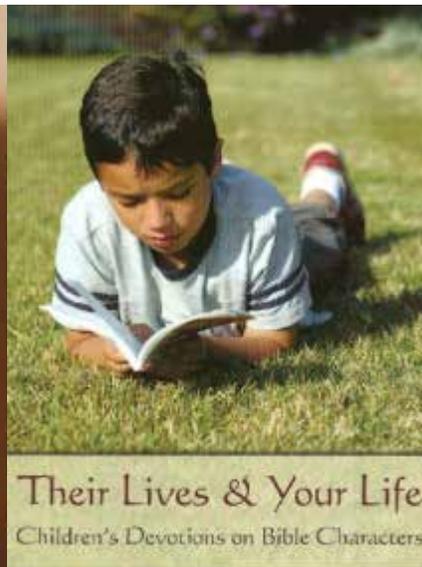
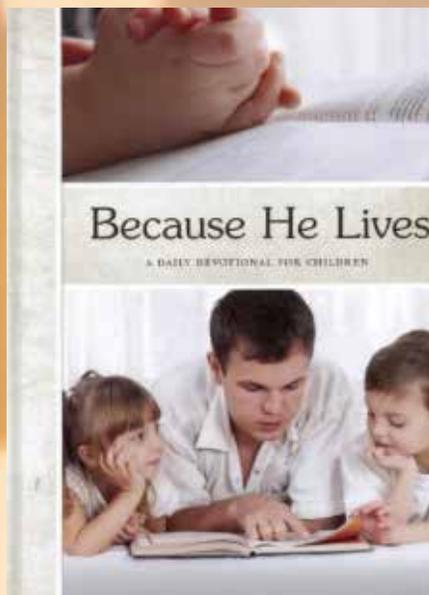
How do you hope the next season of your ministry will be used by the Lord?

I would like to develop a curriculum on the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort from a distinctly “Free Reformed” perspective to complement the curriculum I have already written on the Heidelberg Catechism. I would also like to read several books of preaching (especially the kind of preaching that we have come to love and appreciate in the Free Reformed churches) and perhaps take some courses to better equip me to train a future generation of preachers in our churches and beyond. Hopefully this could be a project for a future sabbatical.

What legacy would you like to leave behind for your congregation—and even for your own family?

I am not a great evangelist, preacher or theologian. I have not accomplished “great things” for the Lord in my ministry. No one will write a book about me when I am gone. I doubt any of my sermons will ever be published. I am just a pastor of a small FRC church in Abbotsford, BC and I am content with that. But I hope that the Lord may keep me faithful – faithful to Him and faithful to His Word. ¹¹

Pastor John Koopman serves the Free Reformed Church of Chilliwack, BC, which is around a half-hour drive from the church of Abbotsford, BC, which is served by Pastor Jack Schoeman.



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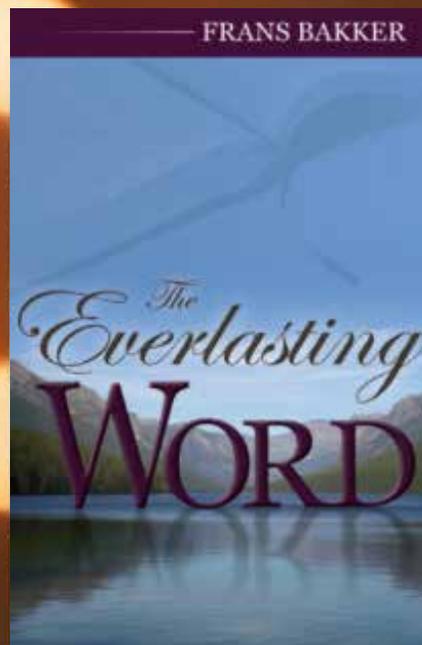
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MUKHANYO EXPANSION: A VISIT TO THE NEW CAPE TOWN CAMPUS

The streets were teeming with diesel-fueled vehicles, trucks bellowing smoke into the air, while shanti villages sprinkled the not-too-distant hillsides surrounding Cape Town, South Africa. We noticed a great chasm within the socio-economic status of a society that is a mixture between extreme poverty and wealthy neighborhoods. Affluent homes, each protected by razor barbed wires and walls, scattered the landscape as a winding highway moved around the various foothills of Table Mountain, each ridge carrying its own unique and beautiful vista.

South Africa is a country whose culture and history is complex. The city's history has its origin tracing back to 1652, when a Dutch admiral, Jan van Riebeeck, working for the East India Company, established the first settlement in Cape Town. Cape Town possesses a unique natural beauty, possessing one of seven flora kingdoms, with mountain ridges descending into ocean waters bringing awe and wonder as we witnessed the beauty of God's general revelation. "In his hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is his also. The sea is his, and he made it: and his hands formed the dry land" (Ps. 95:4-5).

Visiting all this beauty and wonder while viewing the blended people groups from Africans to Afrikaners to Asians and more left me wondering, "Where is the knowledge of God and of His Son?" A quick Wikipedia search reveals 85% of South Africa identifies as Christian. A more in-depth analysis shows that much of this so-called Christianity is rather a syncretistic blend of tribal religions and Christianity. The largest of these religions is a cult

called the Zion Christian Church. Syncretism abounds, tribalism holds a tight grip on many, and racism has not departed. Simply stated, the country and culture of South Africa, which includes Cape Town, is extremely complex and in need of the Gospel.

Setting my visit in this brief context, let me introduce Mukhanyo Theological College (MTC) into the Cape Town landscape. The MTC board heard the call and necessity for a Reformed gospel ministry in Cape Town. With real estate at a premium and a city population of almost 4 million, they prayed to see if a new campus could be established. God provided.

I was privileged to attend mid-week campus devotions led by both Dr. Brian DeVries, principal of MTC, and the new Centre Director, Neil Henry. The audience consisted of various staff, a couple of lecturers, and several students and visitors. Dr. DeVries expressed appreciation for all the challenging work in transforming a previous prosthetics laboratory into a Christian education centre. He gave thanks to God for answering prayer by directing Neil Henry to become the new centre director. He brings with him 25 years in education and management experience. He is also a pastor who brings wisdom and maturity to help lead and instruct young men interested in church leadership and becoming pastors.

The initial stages and growth of this campus were extraordinary, an answer to many prayers. The MTC board searched several sites in this crowded city and felt God leading them to Waverly Office Park in bustling downtown. Having found a suitable

facility and centre director, MTC signed the lease without any faculty yet recruited. The next answered prayer was the addition of a new registrar who was moving to Cape Town to be married, securing one faculty member. Initially, there was only one registered student, who then chose to relocate to another of MTC's campuses. Despite concern about low enrollment, the board encouraged them to start with two students to build momentum. But by the time the college opened, 14 students had enrolled. God provided once again!

The newly renovated (and still being renovated) facility can host seminars, several classrooms, and a growing library. God provided again with another employee, Ms. Tougheeda, who has been instrumental in getting the library up and running. As this new campus gains local recognition, the goal is to expand MTC Distance learning sites in the region from seven to twenty-one by the end of 2025. Currently, this new campus offers higher teacher certificates and bachelor degrees in Theology and Education. Biblical counselling modules are being recorded and produced as well. There is a vision for the campus to eventually offer an honors program.

Much prayer and support is needed for MTC, especially with the addition of the Cape Town centre. Please pray that the Lord of the harvest would send forth laborers into this centre and the other five campuses of MTC. Pray that this new campus, nestled in the heart of Cape Town, would gain traction through word of mouth and other avenues of advertisement. Pray for the pastor's conference this fall with 60 pastors attending, that it will stir up a new and renewed spark for sound, Reformed Biblical teaching. Pray for the new leadership, staff, and guest lecturers as they teach and serve.



We take hope and heart in the promises of God throughout Scripture. Jesus said in Mark 16:15, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Acts 1:8 provides more encouragement: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." And then this wonderful promise in Romans 10:13-15: "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!"

Psalter 200 (Psalm 72)

"Christ shall have dominion Over land and sea,
Earth's remotest regions Shall His empire be;
They that wilds inhabit Shall their worship bring,
Kings shall render tribute, Nations serve our King.

Free Reformed Missions International serves to promote the expansion of the gospel of our Lord Jesus. We do believe there is a role for our churches to be a means in the hands of our Sovereign God in the upbuilding of His Church. A primary means of doing so is in the theological strengthening of churches and denominations of the developing world. We believe that church planting should be carried out, as much as possible, by local pastors who know the language and culture of their people. 

Mr. Duane Rogers serves as secretary for FRMI and is a member of the Free Reformed Church of Pompton Plains, NJ.



PREACHING, ROBOTS, AND SYNODS

Report of Ministers' Retreat held October 16-17, 2025



Each year, via the FRCNA Theological Education Committee, a two-day Ministers' Retreat is organized. The late brother Connor Keuning was the organizer for years and now brother Peter Kranendonk has been given that role. This year we met at the Ivey Spencer Leadership Centre in London, Ontario. We were well hosted there, and all appreciated this venue a lot, including the very good food provided!

While ministers from other federations are also welcome to attend our annual retreat, this year we had a smaller attendance with 17 brothers (fourteen were from the FRC, two from the HRC, and one from Providence RCA). Two pastors who had registered to attend also had to cancel on account of either congregational or family circumstances.

The purpose of the annual ministers' retreat is fellowship, instruction, and relaxation. One of the reasons for a lower attendance is the fact that another three-day ministers' retreat with Reformed pastors and their wives was scheduled for the same week we have our retreat. The smaller number this year in no way negatively affected this year's retreat. Starting from 9:00 am on Thursday to 3:00 PM on Friday, three main presentations are given, with wholesome follow-up discussion times, and ample time for relaxation and fellowship, including an update from each participant and prayer together for one another. The time together is generally very edifying for all who attend.

While Pastor John Koopman was to chair this year's retreat, Pastor Jack Schoeman did so in his place as Pastor Koopman was unable to make it on account of two funerals. Pastor Schoeman

gave an opening meditation on 2 Corinthians 3:5, where Paul by the Spirit says especially in reference to ministers of the gospel (though not exclusively so), *"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God."* This was an encouraging opening word!



Pastor Hans Overduin gave a message on 2 Timothy 2:8.

Professor David Kranendonk gave us two talks relating to preaching. The first speech was entitled Drawing Experience from Exposition and the second speech was entitled Applying Exposition to Experience. Both talks drew from a late CGK Homiletics professor in the Netherlands, Prof. L.H. van der Meiden. Both these talks were very informative, and, with our discussions on the talks, the aim was to help us as ministers of the gospel to be faithful in Biblical, experiential, Reformed, practical preaching.

Professor Jerry Bilkes gave us a speech related to our Synod meetings and aiming to have them more worshipful and united under the ministry of the Word while in session. The title of his talk was Beholding the Grace of the Lord: Reforming our View of Synod. This challenging topic resulted in a stimulating discussion. Perhaps that speech may and should be in the Messenger before our next Synod.

Dr. Bilkes also gave an extra mini-speech entitled, Is a Robot Preacher at a Church near you?—Artificial Intelligence and the Pulpit. As you can imagine, this too resulted in a robust discussion! It's a subject we need to be most discerning and careful about, appreciating and benefitting from the advances in technology, surely, but not misusing that technology to produce sermons mechanically by a robot. Sermons are to be developed organically, spiritually, prayerfully, and pastorally by pastors who are in themselves also sinful men needing the same gospel message that is feelingly preached to the congregation.

At the close of the retreat, one of the ministers gives a parting message, again intended as a word of encouragement as each minister returns to his own place for his ongoing calling as preacher and pastor and/or professor. Pastor Hans Overduin had a message based on 2 Timothy 2:8. The Apostle Paul says there as part of his last words to Timothy, *“Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel.”* This verse gives us the Apostolic Spirit-inspired *“Exclamation and Exhortation Concerning Jesus’ Exaltation!”* It was an added encouragement for us as ministers to press on in our holy callings. *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord”* (1 Corinthians 15:58).

As ministers, we thank the churches for granting us this retreat and the seminary professors for their helpful instruction every year again. While it's not always so easy to attend (for all kinds of reasons), yet no participant privileged to attend regrets coming and mostly goes home thankful for the extra special relaxation, instruction, and fellowship. Praise God from Whom all blessings flow! 🙏

Pastor Hans Overduin is an emeritus pastor and member of the Free Reformed Church of Calgary, Alberta

“For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” 1 Corinthians 2:2



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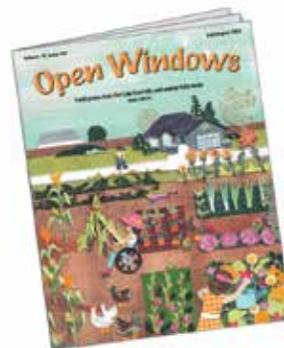
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