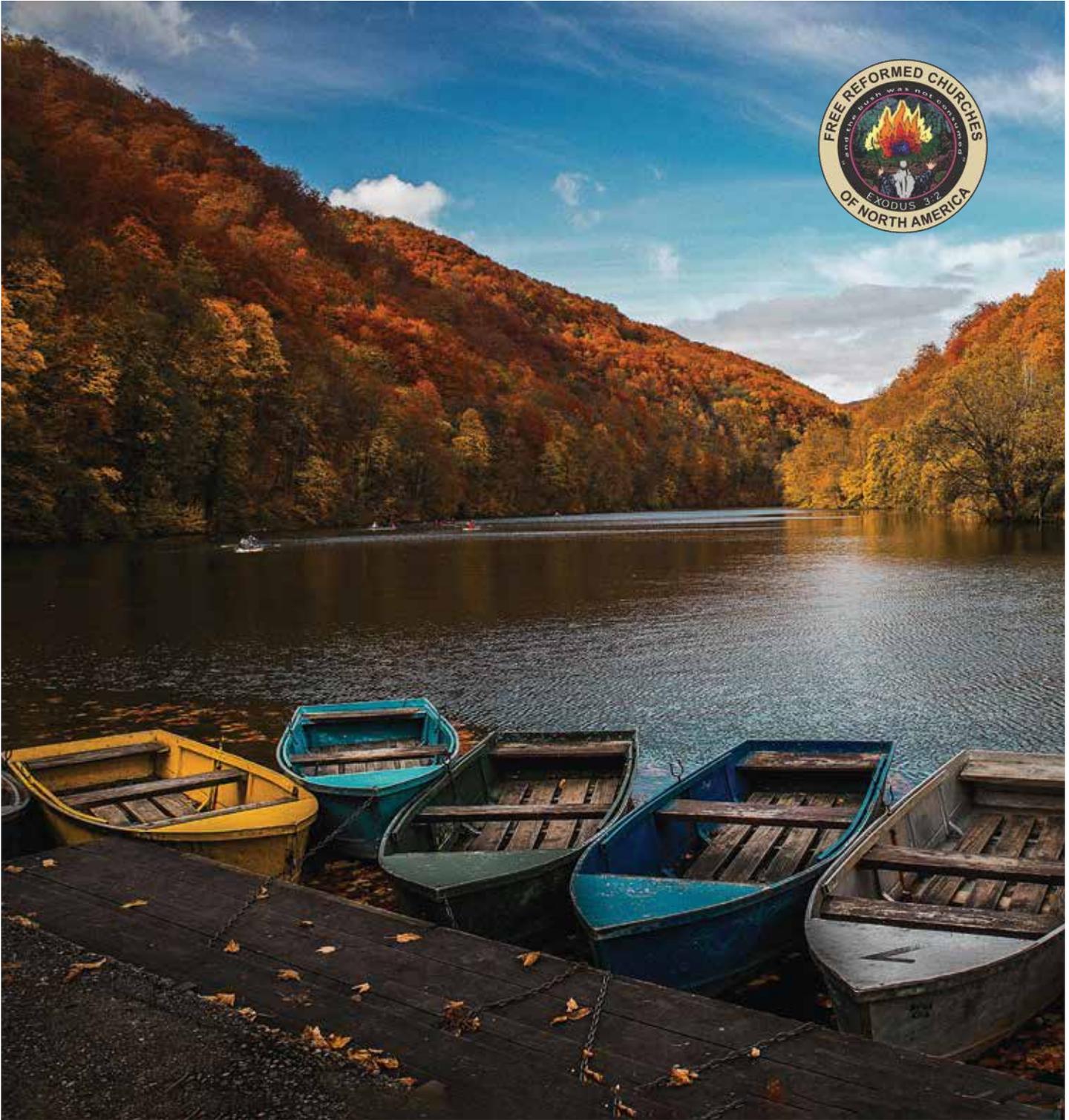


VOLUME 72 NUMBER 09 · OCTOBER 2025 EDITION

# THE MESSENGER

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF NORTH AMERICA



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# *SOLA FIDE:* BY FAITH ALONE

*Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him:  
but the just shall live by his faith.*

*Habakkuk 2:4*

*For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from  
faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.*

*Romans 1:17*

*But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God,  
it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.*

*Galatians 3:11*

*Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back,  
my soul shall have no pleasure in him.*

*Hebrews 10:38*

As members of the Reformed churches, we are once again to celebrate and remember the most important historical event that formed the foundation and heritage of all Protestant and Reformed Churches. The Roman Catholic Church had to be reformed. Amid the church's errors and abuses, God brought about what is known as the Protestant Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Some ecclesiastical bodies celebrated the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this historic Reformation era during the year 2017. At that time, the year 1517 was marked as the very beginning year of the Reformation in Europe. There was a man whom God used mightily. This man posted his far-reaching 95 Theses at Wittenberg, addressing the serious problems within the church. The name of this Roman Catholic monk was Martin Luther.

Even though the year 1517 is widely accepted as the beginning year of the great spiritual movement, the Reformation, the core of Luther's contribution to the Reformation was not as clear in the 95 Theses. His crucial emphasis on the doctrine of the justification by faith alone, which in Latin is expressed as *Sola fide*, is recorded in other sources that Luther produced during his life and ministry. For example, Luther's commentary on Galatians after 1519 is a well-known work that emphasizes faith alone. What Luther rediscovered was the foundation to his own soul's comfort and central to the entire movement of the churches at that time. Had he not gone through the spiritual breakthrough within his soul by studying specifically the epistles to the Romans and Galatians, humanly-speaking,

church history might have been written differently. I strongly believe that to know the meaning of these repeated verses in four different Bible books is key to our eternal hope of being righteous and justified before God. That is what the Apostle Paul and the Reformer Martin Luther discovered. Let us consider two things: first, the righteous; second, faith.

### The Righteous

First, the basic question you must ask yourself, whoever you may be, is: Are you righteous before God? Job's friends asked the same question (Job 25:4). It was repeatedly alluded to that man cannot be righteous before God because God is so holy, just, and righteous. Being just before God as a man is impossible because of the sin that we have committed. Article 3 from the Third and Fourth heads of the Canons of Dort describes every man's depravity this way: "Therefore all men are conceived in sin, and by nature children of wrath, incapable of saving good, prone to evil, dead in sin, and in bondage thereto, and without the regeneration grace of the Holy Spirit, they are neither able nor willing to return to God, to reform the depravity of their nature, or to dispose themselves to reformation." In other words, every man's natural condition throughout all ages is as black as it could get.

Then, how can you be right with God? How can you live and die peacefully without being terrified about God's wrath against you with all your sins? Wouldn't He be justly angry at your unrighteousness after you lived all your days here on earth given His eternal character of being right? How can you expect God's love when there was nothing good within you and when all you had was nothing but sin and falsehood in you? How could you ever start the relationship with God? How can we ever experience God's love without being guilty of breaking God's law so many times and in so many places? So many social gospel preachers skip this character of God's justice, and they hurry to preach only half of God's character without His justice. The church father Irenaeus wisely said that justice without goodness is not just, and goodness without justice is not good, so the true God must be both good and just. As Augustine said, "God's grace cannot be unjust, and his justice cannot be cruel."

Out of those three places in the New Testament where Habakuk 2:4 is quoted and emphasized, Paul's epistle to the Romans and epistle to the Galatians are outstanding in relation to justification. The epistle to the Hebrews cites Habakuk 2:4 to show forth what it looks like to live by faith and the importance of persisting in faith. Faith is more illustrated than faith is contrasted with obedience to the law. Hebrews 11 illustrates what it means to live by faith using the lives of faithful men and women.

### Faith

Let's look then at how we could become righteous before God through the contrast between the law and faith. What is faith? The biblical definition of faith is this: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). In other words, the law is not of faith. The law requires us to produce work, but faith requires us to believe the promise of God. The most qualified exegete of the Hebrew Scriptures and the most well-known preacher of Christ, Paul, never failed to distinguish faith from other important spiritual fruit. Paul never wrote or said, The just shall live by love. He did not say, The just shall live by hope. What he wrote was this: "The just shall live by faith" alone.

The foregoing statement is important for two reasons. First, most people in the days of Paul, or in the days of Luther, or even in our days think alike. People think that what they keep in terms of law, whether civil, ceremonial, or moral in its content, will do them good somehow when they come to stand before God after death. But let me emphasize again: By faith alone we go to heaven.

Second, so many people universally and naturally underestimate the value of faith. One of the major reasons why they underestimate it is because they underestimate the object of true

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

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## MEDITATION

faith, which is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the only mediator between God and man who died on the cross. On the one hand, people elevate the work of man according to the law to become an efficient and sufficient means by which they go to heaven. On the other hand, the same people depreciate the value of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Let me emphasize again: By faith alone in Jesus Christ we go to heaven.

Paul never said that the law is not important or that the righteousness by the law is unbiblical. The law is what God gave to His people through Moses. It's all about love, love between God and His people and love between one another as fellow human beings. Nevertheless, we should remember that we are not justified by love or by work. No one is justified by the law or by the works of the law, but we are justified by faith alone in Jesus Christ.

Let us aim to receive this grace, faith, which is the gift of God, throughout this month of October whenever we have an opportunity to hear God's promises (Genesis 15:6; Ephesians 2:8). Also, let us be a willing helper for those struggling to believe God's promises for them. For example, think of those inmates serving their life sentences in the local jail who struggle to believe that their sins can be forgiven, and that they could also be justified in Christ, and that they could be called brothers and sisters in the Lord before they die.

**The law is what God gave to His people through Moses. It's all about love, love between God and His people and love between one another as fellow human beings.**

My seminary professor never failed to distinguish grace from work this way. If somebody gave you money, say a twenty-dollar bill in return for your work, it would never be a gift. It is your wage or service fee for what you have done. If somebody gave you a twenty-dollar bill in return for nothing or in anticipation of no work from you, it would be a gift. If somebody gave you a large cheque after you had been unkind to them it would be a gracious gift. There is nothing God needs from us and there is nothing we can give to the most holy God except our sins and falsehood. Let us therefore first believe the gospel, and go to Jesus, who still invites us, sinners, saying, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” 11

*Pastor Young Jae Lee is a Free Reformed home-missionary pastor residing in New Jersey and available for call.*



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By editors Scott Brown and Jeff Pollard

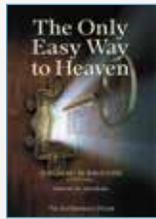
From Luther to Bunyan, from Spurgeon to Sproul, this 2025 publication brings forth rich gems on fatherhood and motherhood, marriage, childbearing, bringing up children, abortion, modest apparel, advice to young people, and much more. Authors include Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Bunyan, William Gouge, Richard Baxter, Thomas Watson, John Gill, Jonathan Edwards, Matthew Henry, Charles Spurgeon, Archibald Alexander, B.B. Warfield, John Angell James, J.C. Ryle, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, A.W. Pink, R.C. Sproul, Joel Beeke, George Grant, and 37 more! This recent book will be a classic, heirloom coffee table book. Attractively and beautifully designed, it features 'Timeless Wisdom for a Christ-centered Family.' "We need strong families, rooted in Scripture, that are built to flourish." This book gives the tools for the task. Spanning 500 years of biblical teaching, it gathers sound wisdom and practical truths from 56 different authors on how to cultivate a thriving Christian family. This book is a spiritual treasure chest filled with pure gold from proven writers, both old and new. It touches on a variety of subjects beneficial for every family member. I heartily recommend it!" Hardcover, 752 pages, Church & Family Life **RBS Price \$48.00**



### The Only Easy Way to Heaven

By Jeremiah Burroughs

This seems like an odd title for a Puritan work, but it is Burroughs' actual title. The title page says, "Showing that the way that Jesus Christ teaches is an easy way." Based on Matthew 11:30, "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light," Burroughs shows that the way of salvation is indeed easy if compared to any other way. The yoke of Christ is certainly easier than the yoke of the law. It is easier than the yoke of sin. It is easier than trying to earn God's favour through human effort. This book should be of great encouragement to all God's children. Jeremiah Burroughs (1599-1646) was loved for his preaching and his gentle spirit, yet the government persecuted him because of his nonconformity to the Church of England. Forced to flee to Rotterdam, Holland, for a time, he eventually returned to England and preached to congregations in Stepney and Cripplegate in London, two of the largest in England.

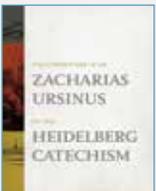


Hardcover, 142 pages, Northampton Press **RBS Price \$ 28.00**

### Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism

By Zacharias Ursinus

Quote from the book: "The question of comfort is placed and treated first because it embodies the design and substance of the catechism. The design is that we may be led to the attainment of sure and solid comfort, both in life and death."—Lord's Day 1. Designed to comfort God's people with instruction in the gospel of Jesus Christ, this was the main reason the Heidelberg Catechism was written. This 2025 edition of the Commentary is improved in readability and consistency compared to previous editions but still remains faithful to Williard's original English translation. Bibliographical and explanatory footnotes have also been added to improve the reader's study. Now in an enhanced format, the Commentary is a theological classic that would find a home in any Christian library. Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583) was a Reformed theologian and professor. Through his works and teaching, and as the main author of the Heidelberg Catechism, by God's grace, Ursinus left an ongoing legacy for Reformed churches worldwide.



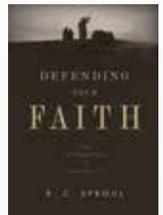
Hardcover, 718 pages, Reformed Free Publishing Association **RBS Price \$78.00**

## RECENT BOOKS

### Defending Your Faith: An Introduction to Apologetics

By R. C. Sproul

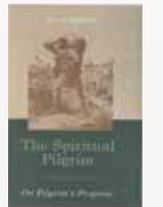
This apologetic primer explains how reason supports Christianity's claims. From the classroom to mainstream media, Christians regularly find their fundamental beliefs discounted and mocked by opponents who consider faith to be incompatible with reason. Faith is viewed as subjective, emotional, and a crutch for those who find the real world too hard. The late R. C. Sproul, however, claims faith reveals just how rational Christianity truly is. This book surveys the history and fundamentals of apologetics to demonstrate how reason and scientific inquiry actually support Christianity's claims—thus equipping believers to defend the existence of God and the Bible's authority. It is comprehensive in that it deals with arguments from philosophy, science, reason, logic, and history. It is ideal for new and seasoned believers alike and a great resource for individual, small group, or classroom study. A study guide and a DVD are also available. Softcover, 201 pages, Crossway **RBS Price \$17.00**



### The Spiritual Pilgrim: 55 Meditations on Pilgrim's Progress

By A. T. Vergunst

This is a recent publication of addresses given by Rev. Vergunst during his ministry in the Netherlands during weekly meetings. In this book of meditations, he reflects in an understandable and practical manner on Pilgrim's Progress. At various times, Rev. Vergunst served congregations in the United States: Corsica, Iowa, and finally, Kalamazoo, Michigan, where he passed away. In a quote from the book, Rev. Vergunst states that Pilgrim's Progress by Bunyan is a book everyone should have read because this book presents to us the way the Lord holds with His own in a special way. Hardcover, 417 pages, GA Publishing **RBS Price \$41.00**



### How Then Should We Die? A Christian Response to Physician-Assisted Death

By Ewan C. Goligher

"My times are in thy hand," the Christian believes. As more people accept the practice of physician-assisted death and it is legal in Canada, Christians must decide whether it is ethical for physicians to assist patients in hastening their own death. Should Christians who are facing death accept the offer of an assisted death? Physician Ewan Goligher draws from general revelation and Scripture to persuade and equip Christians to oppose physician-assisted death. The questions he answers are: "Why Not?" and "Why Assisted Death?" His answer is that it devalues people, is an act of secular faith, and is an escape from despair. The author, Ewan C. Goligher (MD, University of British Columbia; PhD, University of Toronto) is assistant professor of medicine at the University of Toronto and has published over 100 papers and several book chapters. As a physician practicing critical-care medicine, he is regularly involved in helping patients and families navigate difficult decisions about medical care at the end of life. The book comes highly recommended—among them, Tim Challies, who states: "Dr. Goligher helps us understand why euthanasia is deceptively attractive to those who are suffering or fear the loss of what they consider a life not worth living. Combining Christian faith and reason, analysis and experience, his insights shine needed light on how we should think about death, dignity, and the value of every human life and how euthanasia medicalizes death and devalues life. His wise counsel reaffirms the need for faith, hope, and love to address our darkest fears and satisfy our deepest yearnings for comfort, both in life and in death." There is a Study Guide Download to go with this book. Softcover, 145 pages, Lexham Press. **RBS Price \$26.00**



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# THE LORD'S SUPPER: THRILL OR CHILL?

Robert Bruce, successor to John Knox and James Lawson at St. Giles's, Edinburgh, preached a series of sermons on the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in 1589. In these, he pressed the great importance and value of, and the care with which we should view and handle, the Lord's Supper. He began his series like this:

There is nothing in this world, or out of this world, more to be wished by everyone of you than to be conjoined with Jesus Christ, and once for all made one with Him, the God of glory. This heavenly and celestial conjunction is procured and brought about by two special means. It is brought about by means of the Word and preaching of the Gospel, and it is brought about by means of the Sacraments and their ministration. The Word leads us to Christ by the ear; the Sacraments lead us to Christ by the eye: of the two senses which God has chosen as most fitting for the purpose of instructing us and bringing us to Christ. That doctrine must be most effectual and moving which awakens and stirs up most of the outward senses, for that which awakens not only the ear, but the eye, the taste, the feeling, and all the rest of the outward senses must move the heart most and will pierce into the soul. And so it is. ... Therefore, if we come to it well prepared, it must be most effectual in stirring up the inward senses of the dull heart."

Such seriousness does not dampen how the believer thinks of the Lord's Supper. Quite the contrary. The glory of the Lord's Supper makes the believer "rejoice with trembling" (Ps. 2:11), or as the Psalter #3 renders it: "Mingle trembling with your mirth." The celebration of the Lord's Supper will be a thrilling celebration to those who regard it as Scripture teaches, and prepare for it as the Lord directs.

The Reformed churches have always recognized this, speaking in glowing, almost breathtaking terms about the Lord's Supper. The Belgic Confession calls it a "spiritual table at which Christ communicates himself with all his benefits to us" (Art. 35). The Heidelberg Catechism teaches that through the Supper "we are as really partakers of his true body and blood by the working of the Holy Ghost, as we receive by the mouths of our bodies these holy signs" (Q&A 79). The Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper speaks of Christ's body broken for us, His blood shed for us, the cause of our eternal death taken away, and our true communion with Him, being made partakers of all His blessings—life eternal, righteousness, and glory.

**Invitation**

The first thrill of the Supper lies in the fact that it is not the church's invention but the Lord's command and His invitation. He Himself said on the night in which He was betrayed, "This do in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19).

When the believer comes to the Lord's Supper, he or she comes at the personal invitation of the King of kings. How easily we forget this! We can slip into thinking the Supper is our act of devotion toward God. But in truth, it is God's act of devotion toward us. Christ is the host. Christ calls the guests. Christ Himself serves the meal. If that does not send a thrill through your soul, what will?

**A Visible Sermon**

Secondly, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a visible sermon. A few months ago, we considered how preaching should thrill us. If that is true, the visible sermon that the Lord's Supper constitutes should thrill for the same reason.

Paul writes, "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come" (1 Cor. 11:26). The bread is broken before our eyes to portray His body broken. The wine is poured out to portray His blood shed. The Lord knows how slow we are to believe, how easily distracted, how prone to forget. Thus He stoops to our senses, putting His gospel into believers' hands, into their mouths.

**Intensely Personal**

Thirdly, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is intensely personal. The Heidelberg Catechism states:

As certainly as I see with my eyes the bread of the Lord broken for me, and the cup communicated to me; so certainly was his body offered and broken for me, and his blood shed for me (Q&A 75).

By the Holy Spirit, Christ is spiritually communing with His children. By faith, believers truly feed on Christ, the living Bread. The Supper seals to us what the gospel promises: that all His sufferings and obedience are ours, that we belong to Him and He to us.

**Strength**

Fourthly, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper strengthens weak faith. Contrary to what many think, attendance upon the Lord's Supper is not a badge of spiritual achievement, but a means of grace for needy sinners.

Our Lord knew that His disciples would often falter, that their faith would grow faint, that doubts and fears would haunt them. And so He gave the Supper as food for the path. The Form for the Lord's Supper says it beautifully: "Let us not cleave with our hearts unto the external bread and wine, but lift them up on high in heaven, where Christ Jesus is our Advocate at the right hand of His heavenly Father."

Faith does not feed on bread, but on Christ. And every trembling believer who lays hold of Him in the Supper finds new strength, new courage, new confidence.

**Communion**

Fifthly, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper binds believers together. Paul writes, "The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body" (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

Sadly, there are divisions today, as there were in Corinth. Yet, in the Lord's Supper, there are no two tiers, or separate sections. Our Form for the Administration says: "For as out of many grains one meal is ground and one bread baked, and out of many berries being pressed together one wine floweth and mixeth itself together; so shall we all, who by a true faith are ingrafted

**As certainly as I see  
with my eyes the bread  
of the Lord broken  
for me, and the cup  
communicated to  
me; so certainly was  
his body offered and  
broken for me, and his  
blood shed for me  
(Q&A 75).**

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into Christ, be altogether one body, through brotherly love, for Christ's sake, our beloved Savior, who hath so exceedingly loved us ....”

### Forward

Sixthly, the Lord's Supper brings the future close. Paul reminds us that we show the Lord's death “till he come” (1 Cor. 11:26). The Supper has a forward look. It is a foretaste of the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9). Every time we partake, we are reminded that history is moving toward a great banquet, where Christ will sit down with His bride and rejoice over her with singing. The best is yet to come! The bread and wine are tokens of a greater feast. Here we taste; there we shall eat and drink with Him in fullness of joy.

### Reality

Seventhly, the Lord's Supper faces us with reality. Not all thrills are pleasant. Some are solemn, sobering, even terrifying. Paul warns that “he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself” (1 Cor. 11:29).

The Supper is no casual meal. It is holy ground. To come impenitent, unbelieving, hypocritical, is to provoke the judgment of God. Yet this warning has a gracious aim. It is designed to drive us to self-examination, repentance, and humble reliance on Christ.

The Form directs us: “Let every one examine his heart, whether he doth not believe this faithful promise of God, that all his sins are forgiven him, only for the sake of the passion and death of Jesus Christ.”

### Conclusion

If there is a chill with the Lord's Supper, it should be so for the indifferent or presumptuous. It is a chill when we approach it thoughtlessly, mechanically, or hypocritically. It is a thrill when we come in faith, humility, and joy—looking away from ourselves to Christ.

Here, Christ Himself feeds us, and strengthens our weak faith. Here, He knits us together in love and points us to glory.

Let us not despise such a gift. Let us not treat lightly what cost Him His life. Instead, let us come trembling, yet thrilled, with awe for the grace that sets a table for sinners, and that one day will seat us at the marriage feast of the Lamb. “Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:9). That is the great thrill. ①

## THE WAY TO HEAVEN

*The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan. With Fourteen Illustrations by William Strang. The Banner of Truth Trust, 2023 reprint; hardcover, 391 pages.

Is it necessary to write a book review about a book written in 1678? Next to the Bible, *Pilgrim's Progress* is the most-read book. But it is also a timeless book. When I “googled” for confirmation, I received an overview by way of AI. “*The Pilgrim's Progress is a 17th-century Christian allegory by John Bunyan about an ordinary man named Christian, who journeys from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City, symbolizing a spiritual quest for salvation. Christian carries a heavy burden of sin and faces temptations, obstacles, and allegorical characters representing spiritual struggles, such as the Slough of Despond and Vanity Fair, before his burden falls at the cross and he reaches his heavenly destination. The story, presented as the narrator's dream, is divided into two parts, with the second part following Christian's wife, Christiana, and her children on their own spiritual journey.*” If you have read the book, you will probably agree that this is an accurate overview.

Bunyan's book is an allegory, a story with a deeper meaning. Instead of stating a message directly, an allegory encourages the audience to find meaning through characters, settings, or events. The stories of Christian and Christiana and their fellow travellers, who are presented as being on a journey, which is the way of salvation, are as relevant for today's pilgrims as ever.

Several things stand out particularly. First, it is not, as the title suggests, only the journey of Christian, a male pilgrim on his way from the *City of Destruction* to the *Celestial City*, as recorded in the first part. The book has two parts. The second part is about the journey of his wife, Christiana, with her four young boys, accompanied by Mercy, a neighbour girl, who take the same journey as Christian.

In the first part, we meet Christian weeping and in great distress with an unbearable burden on his back, asking again and again, “What shall I do?” (p. 1). Neither his tears nor entreaties can persuade his wife to follow him. But in the second part (pp. 203ff), when the news of Christian's happy ending has become known in the city, Christiana has second thoughts. She misses her loving husband and begins to have guilty feelings due to her unkind behaviour towards him, disregard of his tearful invitations, and the hardening of her heart. When she confesses this to her children, they too, are heartbroken and weep. In her sleep, Christiana is further awakened to her sin and cries out: “Lord, have mercy upon me, a sinner.” Soon, a messenger, named *Secret*, knocks at her door with the gentle greeting, “Peace be to this House.” But the message he brings is disturbing to Christiana, and she blushes when he addresses her. “My name is *Secret*, I dwell with those that are on high. It is talked of where I dwell, as if thou hast a desire to go thither, also there is a report that thou art aware of the evil thou hast formerly done to thy husband in hardening of thy heart against his Way, and in keeping of these thy babes in their Ignorance” (p. 209). *Secret* also gives her a letter from the King, inviting her to “do as did Christian her husband, for that was the way to come to his City...” (p. 211). Joined by an elderly gentleman and

by young Mercy, this little company meets the same objections from their neighbours as Christian did. Mrs. *Timorous*, Mrs. *Inconsiderate*, and Mrs. *Lightmind* try to hold them back and accuse them of madness.

Although forewarned about the trials and obstacles to come, they set out at once. Reaching the *Wicket Gate*, Christiana and her children are welcomed, but not Mercy, who faints, realizing she was not invited. Yet, they all receive pardon from the Lord. "I grant Pardon, said he, by word and deed: by word, in the Promise of Forgiveness; by deed, in the Way I obtained it" (p. 224). Bunyan records, "So I saw in my dream, that they walked on in their Way, and had the weather very comfortable to them" (p. 227).

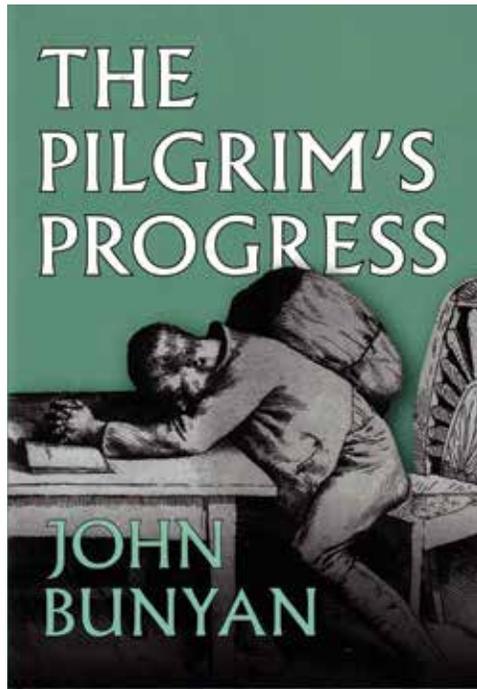
Part one records that Christian had a much more difficult time and encountered many more temptations to turn back before he lost the burden on his back. He almost lost his footing in the "Slough of Despond," experienced the terrors of the law at Mount Sinai, and continued in hope and fear. It was not until he came to the cross that his burden loosened and fell off his back, directly into the open sepulchre, and he saw it no more (p. 36). At this point, he saw that his sin was paid for and forgiven and went on his way singing.

Yet, on their pilgrimage, Christian and Christiana's small company meet the same dangers and similar tempters until they cross the river and enter the *Celestial City*. Among the many enemies who oppose them are evil spirits, the *Hill of Difficulty*, *Doubting Castle*, and *Vanity Fair*. However, Bunyan portrays Christiana's obstacles as less severe or sometimes absent, so that in the city of Vanity they receive hospitality and rest for the weariness of their journey, whereas Christian was severely beaten and his companion lost his life in a merciless manner. Neither Christian nor Christiana were alone on their journey. Christian had a fellow traveller, *Faithful*, to share difficulties. Similarly, Christiana, her children, and Mercy were continually helped by guides such as *Great-heart* and others.

It is very helpful to read both parts of *The Pilgrim's Progress* together. Christian's journey may be viewed as the journey of the individual mature Christian, while the pilgrimage of Christiana and her small group has the character of a family's journey with guides and counsellors accompanying them. Christian's courage was often challenged, but he was equipped to fight, meet his enemies head-on, and take leadership. It is interesting that when Christiana and young Mercy are overcome by two men who "will make Women of you for ever" and attempt to assault them, they are rescued upon their shrieks (with a reference in the margin to Deut. 22:23,26,27). During the long journey, the boys meet godly partners and are married. The fact that Christiana and her company help needy fellow travellers on

the way highlights the compassion, fellowship, and support of the Christian church for the needy.

Bunyan, the author of this allegory, was an English Puritan preacher. He lived from 1628-1688 and was a contemporary of Thomas Brooks, Thomas Goodwin, Richard Baxter, and John Owen. The doctrines taught in this book, although not named explicitly – conviction of sin, justification, sanctification – all take place in the



pilgrim's conversation along the way with each other as well as with interpreters and guides. There are examples of kindness, comfort, hope, doubt, fear, and especially perseverance in the progress of the pilgrims on their way to the Celestial City. But also, pilgrims with names of *Mr. Worldliness*, *Hypocrisy*, and *Demas* are exposed for who they are, and their just judgment and end are portrayed graphically. The wages of sin are meant to warn the pilgrims. This may seem severe, but doesn't the Bible do that too? And don't we need severe warnings from time to time?

Moving examples of Christian kindness, compassion, and patience are portrayed in the treatment of *Mr. Despondency* and his daughter *Much-afraid*, whom the pilgrims take into their protection. No one is despised because of their little faith, slow progress, or stumbling. They too are given

entrance into the Celestial City, although one of the pilgrims does give one of them a bit of a reprimand for his little faith.

When Christiana's time has come to cross the river, her farewell is filled with hope and comfort for her son's wives. Bunyan describes how her entrance into heaven differs from that of Christian. He had a struggle and was somewhat overwhelmed by the river the pilgrims must cross to enter the Celestial City. But Christiana and her companions are gladly welcomed. Yet, the end is all-glorious, and the description Bunyan uses may well move to tears.

The text, spelling, and pictures in this book are taken from the edition published in 1895 in the original English. However, there are several faithfully edited publications in up-to-date language, some with colourful or "legacy" covers. Devotional commentaries, such as those by Spurgeon, and contemporary daily devotionals are also available. Part Two, Christiana's journey, should appeal to women, especially those who think the Puritans did not value women. Part Two of *The Pilgrim's Progress* lays this criticism to rest. May the ageless value of *Pilgrim's Progress* continue and be appreciated as a biblical, allegorical account of pilgrims on the way of salvation. ①

This book is available from Reformed Book Services ([info@reformedbookservices.ca](mailto:info@reformedbookservices.ca)) and may also be purchased at Reformed Book Services in Calgary, Alberta, and Reformation Heritage Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, U.S.A.



# POSTSCRIPT TO ARTICLES ON THE BAPTISMAL FORM

Having finished the articles on the *Reformed Form of Baptism*, a reader asked me to provide biblical evidence for what most Reformed people assume to be true, namely, that infant baptism has replaced circumcision and that both sacraments have the same spiritual meaning. Baptists firmly deny this connection.

One of the clearest Scripture proofs to support this claim is found in the apostle Paul's letter to the church at Colosse. In chapter 2: 10 and 11, he writes: "*Ye are complete in Him (i.e. in Christ), which is the head of all principality and power. In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.*"

## The Teaching of Judaizers

The apostle was teaching a fundamental doctrine to the Colossian congregation. This church was largely made up of Christians with a pagan background. They had come to faith in Christ and had received the sacrament of baptism as a sign and seal of their union with Christ. But false teachers had come along, claiming that to be saved, they needed more than faith in Christ. They also needed to observe the Jewish religious laws and customs such as circumcision, special feast days and dietary regulations.

These teachers were Christians with a Jewish background. They felt that Christianity was basically a Jewish religion with some new teachings. In their view, becoming a Christian required identification with the Old Testament people of God and their ways. They insisted that those who merely believed in Christ were not complete. The minimum requirement for a full-fledged Christian was that male members had to be circumcised.

These Judaizers warned the Colossians that they were not yet fully Christians because they had only been baptized and had not been circumcised. The apostle strongly disagreed with these Judaizers and assured the believers in Colosse: "*You are complete in Christ.*" You have everything in Him, including everything circumcision stood for in the Old Testament dispensation.

## The Meaning of Old Testament Circumcision

What exactly did circumcision mean for believers in the Old Testament? According to Baptists, circumcision is essentially different from New Testament baptism. They hold that circumcision was only a sign of membership in the Jewish nation and not a sign of spiritual blessings. Reformed theologians, on the other hand, have always maintained that, while circumcision was indeed a sign of membership in the nation of Israel, its **essential** meaning was

spiritual and covenantal. For proof, we turn to Genesis 17:11, where circumcision is called a sign and seal of the covenant between God and Abraham. That covenant is defined in terms of the promise: *“I will be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee.”* The core meaning of this covenant, therefore, is fellowship with God. Since circumcision is the sign and seal of that covenant, it must include spiritual benefits.

Circumcision also signified and sealed the removal of the **defilement of sin**. Moses exhorts the people of Israel in Deuteronomy 10:16: *“Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart.”* Similarly, Jeremiah calls, *“Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart”* (4:4). Circumcision was not just a sign of membership in the nation of Israel, but had a deep, spiritual meaning: the removal of that defilement which hindered their fellowship with God.

Circumcision also stood for **justification**. We are explicitly told in Romans 4:11 that for Abraham circumcision was a sign and seal of the righteousness of faith (i.e., of justification by faith): *“And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of faith which he had while he was in uncircumcision; that he might be the father of all them that believe.”* To restrict the significance of circumcision to Abraham alone, as our Baptist friends do, is therefore unwarranted.

Summing up these three points, we learn that circumcision stood for (1) fellowship with God; (2) the removal of the defilement of sin; (3) justification by faith. These same spiritual realities are represented by both baptism and circumcision.

### Proof from Colossians

Colossians 2:11 offers further confirmation that this is so. Here, circumcision is explicitly identified with baptism as having the same spiritual meaning. This is what the false teachers denied. But Paul affirms this is so. Although the Colossian Christians for the most part had not been circumcised, he assures them that *they had undergone its equivalent when they were baptized*. You were circumcised, he says, with a circumcision not made with hands. The meaning is that when you were baptized, you were actually circumcised, although not literally. No one approached you, knife in hand, to perform a mini-surgery on your flesh. Nevertheless, you received the full spiritual meaning of this Old Testament sacrament.

When you were baptized, you were circumcised with Christ. You participated in His circumcision. The circumcision of Christ refers not to the ceremony our Lord underwent when he was eight days old, but to His crucifixion. By dying on Calvary’s cross, Christ put off the body of the sins of the flesh, fulfilling in this way what was symbolized by the Old Testament ordinance of circumcision. This ordinance spoke of the defilement of sin and the consequent need for an atoning sacrifice to cleanse from

sin. When a male infant was circumcised, a small piece of flesh was removed as a sign that the whole body needed cleansing. This total cleansing took place when Christ brought His perfect sacrifice for sin on the cross. His death, therefore, resulted in His *“putting off of the body of the sins of the flesh.”* Needless to say, the reference here is not to the human body as such but to the whole complex of sin with which our existence is permeated.

So, Paul’s message to the Colossian Christians is this: Your baptism is a sign of what circumcision also signified, namely, the total renewal of your life. When Christ died, He put off or discarded that old sinful existence of all His people. Like someone taking off an old, worn-out coat, so Christ rid himself of your sinful, old nature.

But there is more. The apostle goes on to say that the Colossians had not only **died** with Christ; they had also been **buried** with Him in baptism. The old body of sinful flesh was not only discarded when Christ died, but it was also buried out of sight. In other words, the old sinful life of believers is a thing of the past. Not only have they died with Christ and been buried with Him, but you have also

been *“raised with Him through the faith of the operation of God who hath raised him from the dead”* (Col. 2:12). The old order is over and done with, and a new order has been inaugurated. God no longer views you as defiled and guilty sinners. Instead, He looks on you as His dear children, as new creatures in Christ His Son.

### The Rich Meaning of Baptism

All this, Paul states, you possess. You received these blessings the moment you believed the Gospel of Christ and that was expressed in being baptized in His name. Therefore, don’t let these false teachers tell you that you are still lacking important things for salvation. You have all you need. You are *complete* in Him.

Sometimes I wonder whether we ever look at baptism this way? Does our baptism have the same rich meaning for us as the apostle says it had for these Colossians believers? Maybe someone says, the problem is that Paul is talking to people who were baptized as adults. They first believed and then received this sacrament. Therefore, they were in a position to understand these things. With us, it is different. Most of us have been baptized as infants, and that is where the confusion comes. We don’t know what to make of our baptism. Are the Baptists right after all when they insist that only believers should receive this sacrament?

No, our text clearly proves that baptism has taken the place of circumcision. It has the same spiritual meaning. Since circumcision was administered to infants of believers in the Old Testament, we may rightfully conclude that baptism must also be administered to the infants of believers today. This, in turn, implies that the rich meaning of baptism is intended for us also, whether we are baptized as infants or as adults. The only

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difference is that our children cannot **yet** understand these things. Therefore, they should be taught these blessed truths as soon as they are capable of grasping spiritual concepts.

Our *Belgic Confession of Faith* expresses our appreciation for the riches of God's grace revealed in baptism. In Article 34, the author, Guido de Brès had to defend the true biblical meaning of baptism, especially when its infant mode came under attack by his fellow Protestants. Already in Reformation times, there were those who denied the validity of infant baptism on the grounds that infants cannot believe. They advocated rebaptism.

Our fathers opposed this idea and used very strong language to refute them: "We *detest* the error of the anabaptists." They used very strong language, which we don't like to use today, but they felt deeply that speaking of *ana* or *re-baptism* implied that the original baptism was invalid, even worthless. This offends God, who comes to us in grace and embraces us in His covenantal love already as babies. Our *Confession* states that baptism is of abiding value. It is a sacrament on which we should reflect and to which we must give our believing response

This does not mean that baptism, whether infant or adult, saves us automatically and *en masse*. The language of the creeds may be strong and positive but should not be taken as if all this is already possessed by every baptized member. These strong statements must be understood as promises which need to be appropriated by faith worked in us by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. We know both from Scripture and experience that many baptized children, as well as their parents, repudiate their baptism later in life. In the Old Testament, we read that Esau, Ishmael and Absalom, and others, although circumcised in the flesh, remained uncircumcised in heart. Also in the New Testament, we meet temporary confessors like Ananias, Simon the Magician and Demas who forsook Paul, "*having loved this present world*" (2 Tim. 4:9).

Let this admonishment sink in: Seek the Triune God in whose Name we have been baptized and received wonderful promises. They are for everyone, parents and children, who ask the Holy Spirit to give them a new heart, the forgiveness of sins, power to put off the old man and put on the new man, and to live the resurrection life to His glory and our eternal salvation. ①

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## PREPARING FOR DATING AND MARRIAGE

*Preparing for Dating and Marriage:*  
A 31-day Family Devotional  
by Cory Griess.

Reformed Free Publishing Association,  
Jenison, Michigan, 2020.  
Softcover, 99 pages.

You may wonder, "A *family devotional* on preparing for dating and marriage?" The author explains. "One of the most important decisions our children will make regards who they will marry" (Preface). Not only their lives but also the lives of children and grandchildren to come, and even the future of the church, are impacted by who our children marry. The author, an experienced pastor, father, and seminary professor, claims that the most important lessons about dating and marriage are learned at home, although the church and school have a task as well. "In fact, training about dating and marriage belongs chiefly to the sphere of the home. And it is the responsibility of the home to teach on this point before the children start dating" (p. 2). Intended to be a guide and mostly a *help*, each brief family devotional focuses on biblical truths. The author uses a simple, up-to-date style with personal applications, inserting many practical insights, indicating that he understands youth.

Each devotional begins with referencing a short Scripture passage and explaining how its teaching fits into the process of dating and marriage. They each conclude with a few questions or discussion points for parents and children. The author realizes young children may not understand everything, but it will not harm them to be exposed to important family issues. Sensitive topics or words to be omitted for young children are in *italics*—there are very few and always very discreet.

The 31 devotionals (or chapters) are divided into sections, explaining what marriage is, its goals, what children and parents are to be like, preparing for the search, being aware of dangers, and the mystery and joy of marriage. The final devotionals include extensive discussion questions on each of the four chapters of the Bible's book of Ruth.

Each short daily devotional focuses on one particular issue. Day 1 begins with an explanation

of the "God-Ordained" definition of marriage according to Genesis 2:18-25. Day 2 explains this further by stating that God performed the first wedding ceremony, "bringing his daughter, Eve, to a godly man, Adam, and giving her away to him. God still does this. As the Reformed form for marriage puts it, this passage is God's witness 'that He doth yet as with His hand bring unto every man his wife'" (p. 19; Form also used by the Free Reformed Churches). From here on, the daily devotions follow a logical sequence that answers every question a parent or family member may have regarding the process of dating and courtship. The author is aware that how children leave father and mother by "cleaving to a wife (or husband)" varies culturally. However, "The key is that we learn this process from the Word and not the world" (p. 11).

Next follow five devotions concentrating on the goals of dating and marriage. Marriage is intended to glorify God, to raise a godly seed, to promote the health of the church, to provide the woman's security and to encourage the man's confident and loving service. These themes are filled in with fresh and surprising nuggets of wisdom. The goal of marriage and dating is first about God. "He created it as a good gift, for sure. But more than that, it was created for his own glory" (p. 14). The main point for parents and children is to know and serve God. Life and marriage are temporary. "Earthly marriage will eventually give way to the eternal reality of Christ's marriage to his church. That glorious end is what our marriage now is supposed to point to" (p. 15). Speaking to children, the author says that this is the reason parents so urgently "want you to marry the right kind of person for your benefit and the benefit of our grandchildren" (p. 15). Another marriage goal God is looking for is for parents to raise a godly seed (Malachi 2:11-16). The question that dating children should ponder is: "Can I raise godly children with this person?" (p. 17).

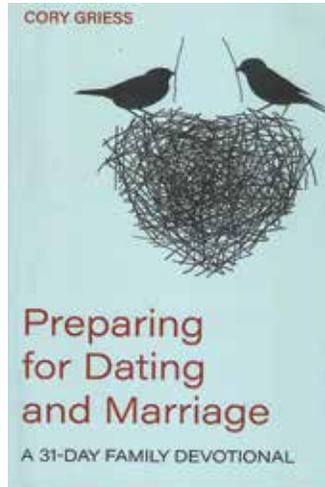
Weak marriages make weak homes, and "weak homes generally make for a weak church" (p. 19). The author states that this may sound weird to dating youth. But "one of the goals of marriage ought to be the good of the church, present and future.... [And] a strong godly, unified marriage is a good example to others in the church." In the Question/Discussion point at the end of this devotional, the author seems to read the minds of young people who may be ready to say. "Come on! Dating and marriage are only supposed to be about feelings and romance, right?" (p. 20). Yes, these are important and are God's gifts, but not goals.

Another important goal for marriage is to provide security for the woman. Ruth and Naomi are cited as examples. Marriage provides physical security, emotional security, and spiritual security (p. 22). The author is aware that there are marriages that are "prisons for a woman" (Question/Discussion Point 1, p. 23). Yet, the goals stand and, when carried out, are beneficial in so many ways, having a powerful effect for good or evil.

The devotional on "Filial Fear," is taken from Psalm 19:14 and emphasizes the importance of prayer. "Daughter, seek a man who, in doctrine and life, makes much of Christ! Oh Lord, grow our son to be such a man!" (p. 32).

Referring to the common themes of the husband's headship under

King Jesus (1 Cor. 11:3) and the wife's submission, the author makes some important statements. It is the husband, as the head of the family, who is to follow the example of Christ's love to the church, while the wife is to "reverence," that is, respect or honour him. Of course, a woman needs to express love too, but the emphasis is on the husband expressing his love to his wife, and this is very important, the author emphasizes (pp. 24-25).



The familiar Scripture passage on the marital relationship, Ephesians 5:22-33, is given a lot of attention. Several devotionals deal extensively with the position and relationship of husband and wife. The husband's submissive attitude "begins with submission to God in Christ." The wife is to honour his leadership. The husband by no means is to see this as a kind of dictatorship. If the husband persists in requiring sinful submission from his wife, "she must run, and not walk," to inform the proper authorities, beginning with the elders of the church (p. 42).

The author is very aware that there are exceptions to every principle Scripture states. A marriage which does not produce godly children is a painful experience

(Day 4). It is even possible to marry "the wrong person," although that is included in God's providence. Marriage is for life, and divorce is not an option in the view of the author, which is a Protestant Reformed standpoint. Yet, the author is realistic, and he acknowledges that God can draw a straight line with a crooked stick. In grace, he has done that in the past for people who have dated and married unbelievers in disobedience. "He can convert an unbeliever to a believer and even create a healthy marriage that honours him. But God also draws crooked lines with crooked sticks. And he has done that a lot more often. Best to trust in that in the way of what he commands we will experience what he says can be expected that way" (pp. 55-56). On the other hand, there is also the "dangerous ditch" in "dismissing God's genuine work in someone's life despite their background or family situation," as displayed in the story of Rahab and Ruth and other women the Bible.

The reality of infertility and singleness is addressed in a devotional entitled, "Making an Idol Out of Marriage" (Day 24). There is a danger that marriage is seen as the only goal in life, and there is a possibility and temptation to look at singles as having a lesser status and considered to be not as important to God as others. Griess recognizes the pain of childlessness and singleness.

The reviewer of this book agrees with the author that this book may be the most comprehensive biblical study available on the topics of dating and marriage. It is written from a biblical standpoint and mirrors a tradition which we as parents, grandparents, and churches would and should uphold. This study may be used for daily devotions as suggested, but due to its relevance for youth and its fresh, comprehensive yet brief format, it would be suitable for group study, couples, and also church leaders. 

*This book is available from Reformed Book Services (info@reformedbookservices.ca) and may also be purchased at Reformed Book Services in Calgary, Alberta, and Reformation Heritage Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, U.S.A.*

# INTRODUCING THE CORNERSTONE FREE REFORMED CHURCH OF BLACKFALDS, ALBERTA

**With an aim of growing familiarity across our denomination, we are asking each of our congregations to give an introduction to or brief update about their congregation. - The Editors.**



*Cornerstone Free Reformed Church is located in the town of Blackfalds, a town of just over 10,000 residents, halfway between the major Albertan centres of Calgary and Edmonton.*

## **Founders' Recollections**

Cornerstone began as a preaching station in Lacombe, a ten-minute drive to the north. It held its very first service on March 10, 2002. We began meeting in the gym of the local Christian school. Pastor Schoeman, who was in Monarch at the time, became our counsellor and helped us become established.

Most of the original attendees were from other Reformed Churches, looking for more experiential preaching. Some of the original members were Dutch immigrants who had attended the CGK in the Netherlands and longed for that type of preaching. Some of our early members were members of the FRC in Red Deer in the early 1960's. When that church dissolved in 1967, they "inherited" the Lord's Supper service set and donated it to us when we became a preaching station. We continue to use it to this day.

On August 27, 2004, we were officially instituted as Lacombe

Free Reformed Church. The Lord had blessed us with many visiting pastors, and we had enough eligible men to serve on Consistory. We moved from the school gym and rented the Anglican church for a few years. We then bought our own building and worshipped there for a few years, but it soon became too small.

During this time, we also received our first pastor, Rev. J. Lewis. Pastor Lewis was no stranger to Lacombe as he grew up here. Our membership continued to grow, and we rented a larger building from the Lutheran Church. This served our needs very well for many years, but the Lutheran Church was dwindling in numbers and decided to sell the building. During this time, Rev. Lewis accepted the call to Pompton Plains, New Jersey.

After calling several pastors and receiving declines, we called



Heritage Reformed candidate Scott Dibbet in 2011. We were now renting in a Nazarene church and had to hold our services around not only the Nazarenes but also another group that was renting from them. This made for some very interesting Sundays! Five different worship services held in the same building at different times meant that we had to sometimes wait in the foyer until one was done. This was not an ideal situation, and we soon started looking around for our own building. Lacombe, with a population of around 15,000, had more than 15 churches, so we expanded our search and found our current building in nearby Blackfalds. This town of approximately 11,000 had only four churches, one of which was for sale.

Pastor Dibbet served us until 2019, when he accepted a call to the St. George congregation. We then began searching for a new pastor again. After a few declined calls, we gladly received Pastor Neels into our congregation in April 2021.

### A Pastor's Perspective

I am blessed to be the pastor of Cornerstone FRC. Arriving mid-COVID 19, my wife Gayle and I were warmly welcomed by the congregation. Pastor Schoeman officiated at my installation, preaching on the 153 fish Jesus' disciples caught (John 21:11). Our prayer has been that the Lord would bring at least that many people to this church. According to the latest yearbook and our most recent records, we are getting close to that number. Like other congregations, our people come in all ages, from the oldest widow in her eighties to the youngest newborn just a few weeks old. We have many children, and it is a delight to see our parents striving to raise them according to God's Word. Our consistory consists of three elders, two deacons, and one pastor.

Recently, several families have moved to our area from other places in Canada and some from the Netherlands. So, our overall picture is gradually changing. As we gather for worship on the Lord's Day, we pray to be united in the gospel of Christ. Despite our various backgrounds, we experience the unity and

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the love of our church family. Some families are going through trials and sometimes deep ways, and we come alongside them in support.

Our two main evangelistic endeavors are our Salt and Light ministry and Vacation Bible School. 'Salt and Light' is our monthly community outreach. On the last Thursday of each month, three volunteer families prepare and serve a delicious meal to members of the local community. On average, about twenty-five people attend. We share our meal with them, and we have opportunity to talk with them, hear their stories, and share the true gospel story with them. We have free Bibles and Children's Bibles available for whoever wants them. This outreach has become a great blessing for others, but especially for our own people as we experience coming out of our comfort zones and mingling with our fellow citizens.

Our Vacation Bible School is held the second week of August. We have up to sixty children, about half of them coming from outside of our church. Some attend other churches, but some have no church attachment at all. So, it is a privilege to bring the Word of God to those who are already familiar with it and to those whose Bible knowledge is nil or little. On the final day, we have a barbecue supper for the families of the VBS children. After supper, we host the closing program where the children sing

the songs they learned and we have a brief meditation on the final lesson for VBS. We invite those who are not currently attending a Bible-teaching church to join us on the Lord's Day. On the Sunday after this year's VBS, one little girl came to church and stayed for both services. A neighbour man and his little daughter came in the afternoon and returned the next Sunday.

Please pray for us and with us that the Lord will bless the preaching in our church for the salvation of the lost among us and for the upbuilding of those who are already believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Pray that the Lord will bless our evangelistic efforts in the community to draw lost sinners to Himself. We are the furthest North of all FRC congregations, so we have very few visitors from other churches. If you are ever in the Edmonton/Red Deer/Calgary areas, we warmly invite you to come worship with us on the Lord's

Day and to visit us any day of the week. We wish all of our churches the Lord's richest blessings. ①

*On behalf of Cornerstone FRC, Elder Clayton and Jackie De Groot and Pastor Jan Neels. Elder De Groot and his wife are the only remaining original members of this church. They wrote the first section of this article. Pastor Neels has only been here since April of 2021 and wrote the remainder.*



**Two elders and one deacon were installed during a special service led by Rev. J. Schoeman (of Monarch) on January 19, 2003, in Lacombe, Alberta.**



**The original congregation in Lacombe, Alberta.**



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# BIBLICAL MENTORSHIP

## Part 1: Why Does Biblical Mentorship Matter?

In John Bunyan's timeless allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian and Hopeful find themselves trapped in Doubting Castle, held captive by Giant Despair on their journey to the Celestial City. At a crucial moment, Hopeful lifts Christian's eyes to the faithfulness of God when he says, "But let us remember what we have already received from Him, and how we have been saved from perils before, and let us trust that He who has delivered us will still deliver us." In response to Hopeful's steady encouragement, Christian replies: "Brother, I see the truth of what you have said, and I am comforted. We shall yet escape!"

Here we see a remarkable example that points us to the need for mature, rooted, and faithful Christ-followers to walk alongside other believers. One of the most beautiful aspects of this journey is that we are not called to walk alone. In God's wisdom, He provides fellow saints to travel with.

One of the richest and often untapped blessings of belonging to the church as a young person is the opportunity to learn

from others who have walked ahead of you. Paul provides bold instruction to the Corinthian church when he writes, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1).

## Deepening Discipleship Through Mentorship

The Christian pilgrimage is a lifelong call to discipleship, which is simply learning to follow Jesus Christ day by day. Discipleship was exemplified clearly in Jesus Christ's earthly ministry (Matthew 4:19, Mark 6:7-13, Mark 8:34) with those He called to be His disciples. The risen Christ then commands His disciples to "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" (Matthew 28:19 NKJV). Paul extends the call to Timothy to further disciple others in 2 Timothy 2:2, "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." We see a biblical pattern for members in the church to be discipled and disciple others. In the life of the church, we disciple primarily through the proclaimed Word, but also through Sunday school, Bible study, and catechism

classes. One other tool, perhaps undervalued or underused, in the toolbox of discipleship is biblical mentorship.

**Biblical Mentorship** is a discipleship relationship that focuses on *equipping* younger believers for the work of ministry so that they grow in *maturity* and *unity* in the faith with the ultimate goal of glorifying God. (A definition from “Growing Together” by Melissa Kruger)

This definition is derived in part from Ephesians 4:12-13 - For the *perfecting* (NKJV has ‘equipping’) of the saints, for the *work of the ministry*, for the *edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ;*

To whet our appetite, a few blessings of biblical mentorship include the opportunity to sharpen our view of God, to draw us closer to Christ, to put sin to death, to help us pass through difficult times, to develop the fruits of the Spirit, and to grow our appreciation for the Spirit’s beautiful work in others. Mentorship is a powerful means in the toolbox of discipleship, helping us grow as active, living members of Christ’s church!

Is the tool of mentorship accessible in your spiritual toolbox? Too often, Christians miss out on the blessings of biblical mentorship due to some common misconceptions. Let’s take a look at five myths that may be holding us back.

**Myth #1: Mentorship isn’t in the Bible.**

Scripture is filled with mentoring relationships; Moses mentored Joshua (Deut. 31:8-9), Elijah mentored Elisha (2 Kings 2:9-13), Solomon instructed his son (Proverbs 1:8), Jesus disciplined the twelve, Barnabas mentored Paul (Acts 9,11,13), Paul instructed Timothy to teach others (2 Timothy 2:2), and Titus 2 calls older men and women to guide the younger. The Bible provides abundant examples of mentorship in action.

**Myth #2: Mentors must be “Super Christians.”**

Mentors don’t need to have all the answers or be spiritual giants. Mentors walk alongside, teach by example, ask thoughtful questions, and listen well. There is grace for a mentor to say, “I don’t know, but let me find out.”

**Myth #3: Mentorship must be formal.**

Mentorship can be formal or informal. Structured plans with regular meetings and goals are useful, but informal settings are also impactful—such as a kitchen conversation, a shared project at work, or a consistent Sunday School teacher. Intentionality, not necessarily formality, is key!

**Myth #4: Mentorship takes too much time.**



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Consider how important the disciples were in Jesus' brief three-year public ministry. He intentionally called and taught His disciples in the majority of that time. Mentorship can be woven into daily rhythms: helping a young mom for a few hours, running around the block with a mentor, or calling a mentee during a walk. By prioritising deliberate, practical, and thoughtful opportunities, mentorship can become woven into the fabric of everyday life.

**Myth #5: Mentees must have a specific problem.**

Mentorship is not only for those in crisis. While it can be very helpful during trials, to overcome a particular sin, or to get advice for a certain stage of life, the goal is growth in Christ. If you feel stagnant, a mentor can help you move forward. Mentorship encourages deeper discipleship, even when everything is going "well."

Let's not let these myths rob us of some of the most meaningful relationships God has given members of the

church. Let's meaningfully pursue mentoring relationships and learn the instruction, the joy, and the encouragement that they can be!

**Part 2: How to Begin a Biblical Mentorship Relationship?**

**Starting a Mentorship Relationship**

So, you think to yourself, "Great, I am on board with this idea of biblical mentorship, but how do I start?"

Asking someone to be a mentor can be a little intimidating and perhaps for them too! What a wonderful example it can be when a more mature believer asks a younger person if they would like to be mentored.

If you are seeking a biblical mentor, search for someone who is farther along the discipleship pathway than you are. Seek for someone whom you can trust and who evidences wisdom in past interactions with you. Maybe you have a small relationship with them, but pray about it and then have a real

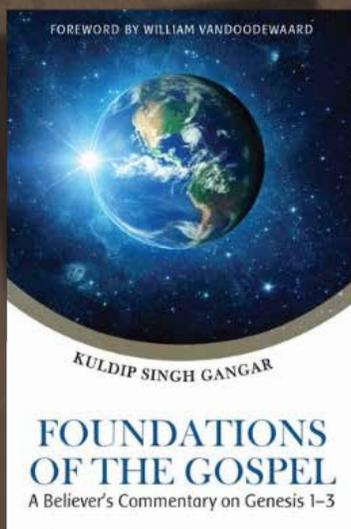
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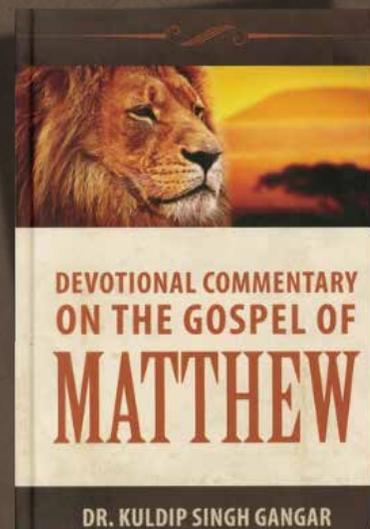
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**PRACTICAL SUBJECTS**

conversation with them about biblical mentorship when it seems suitable. Most often they will say "Of course!" Perhaps share this article with them as a way to get them thinking the same way about mentorship.

If you are seeking to mentor someone, seek for a younger believer who could spiritually benefit from such a relationship. Pray about them, ask them about it, and then go for a coffee as a start!

**The 5 W's of Mentorship**

Once you have had an initial meeting or discussion and both agree on the desire for biblical mentorship, it is wise to put in place an agreement or "terms" that help guide the relationship. This would apply to the more formal path of mentorship. Together, identify the following W's:

**Who** - Hopefully this is clear by the time you meet.

**When** - Discuss how often you would like to meet (monthly, bi-weekly, etc). It is good to set an ending point (6 months or 1 year) to evaluate how things are going and if the formal meetings need to continue.

**Where** - Discuss an appropriate place to meet. Is it in a public setting, in a home, a workplace, hiking, or getting a coffee?

**What** - Discuss what will be the purpose or focus. Are there areas you would like to work on, sins to overcome, or a topic to work through? Often, a book can be a helpful launching pad for discussion.

**Why** - Reinforce that the goal of the relationship is to better know Christ and for the equipping and encouraging of others.

**Helpful Tips for Mentors and Mentees**

Finally, the following are helpful tips gleaned from the sources below or from others who have been biblical mentors in the past.

**For Being a Mentor**

- Know the gospel (sin, grace) yourself to be able to share the gospel.
- Realize mentors often learn from the mentee (Malachi 4:6).
- Realize imposing your own ideas or views on minor points may not be helpful or most important.
- Mentor with intentionality and confidentiality.
- Listen and ask questions.
- Include books or other resources in the process.

## For Being a Mentee

- Grow in discipline and self-control. Be controlled by the Spirit of God.
- Mentorship can be particularly helpful in overcoming fear (2 Timothy 1:7)
- Don't demand too much time from your mentor.
- As an adult, mentoring can build on the good foundations laid by your parents or family members.
- The mentor's responsibility is not to make you grow – it's yours.
- Follow in the footsteps of the flock (Song of Solomon 1:8).

May this brief article encourage you to discover the blessing of biblical mentorship ultimately to "... grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen." (2 Peter 3:18)

## Recommended Resources and Sources

Here are some books or sermons you may find helpful on the topic of mentorship, or these are books that can be used in a mentorship relationship. These have helped prepare the above content and you may read similar ideas echoed throughout the article above.

**Sermons** (All can be found by searching Sermon Audio)

1. Biblical Mentoring - Dr. J. Bilkes (January 11, 2023)  
<https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermons/1102320373340>
2. Part 1: The Disciple-Making Church - Rev. Wagenaar (Sept. 22, 2024 am)  
<https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermons/922241510405724>  
Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20, Ephesians 4:1-16
3. Part 2: Helping Others on the Way - Rev. Wagenaar (Sept. 22, 2024 pm)  
<https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermons/922242026543848> Scripture: Acts 18

## Books

1. Devoted to God's Church - Sinclair Ferguson
2. A Heart Aflame for God - Matthew C. Bingham
3. Growing Together - Melissa Kruger
4. Spiritual Mothering - Susan Hunt
5. The Godly Man's Picture - Thomas Watson

*Scott Dekorte is a member of the Free Reformed Youth & Ed Committee and involved in the Plants & Pillars website it oversees. This article was originally written in two parts for [www.plantsandpillars.net](http://www.plantsandpillars.net).*

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# CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

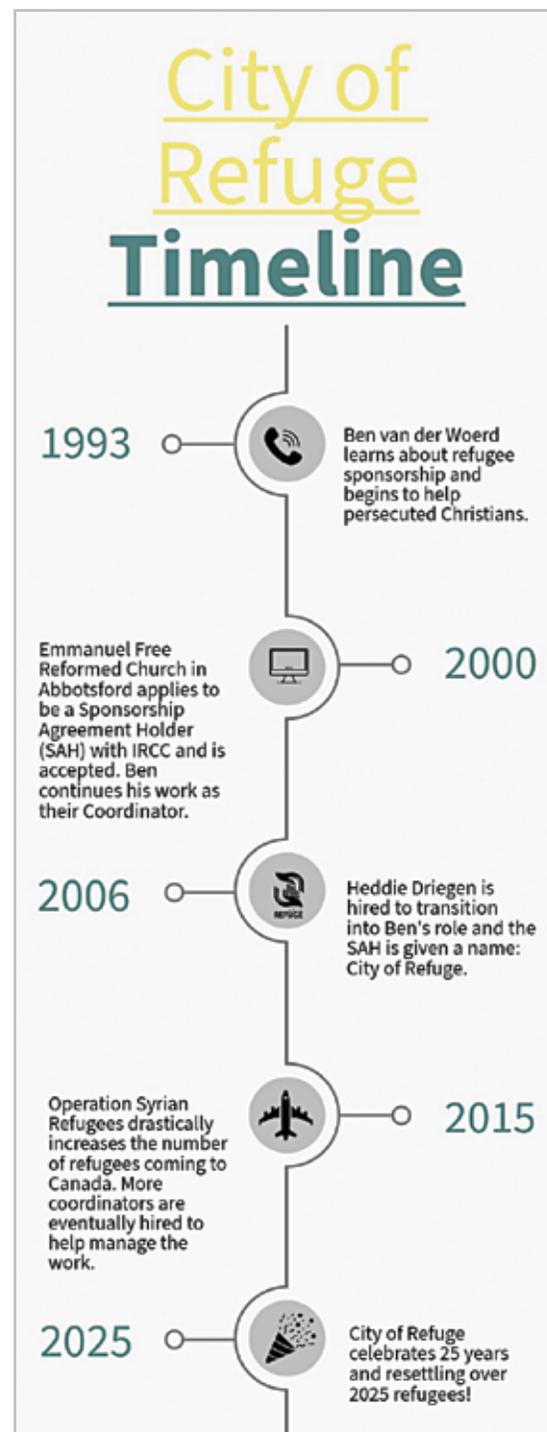
This year marks the 25th anniversary of City of Refuge. Since its official inception as a Sponsorship Agreement Holder in the year 2000, City of Refuge has been able to bring 2,053 refugees to Canada.

Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) Program began in the late 1970s in response to the plight of refugees from Southeast Asia in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. Over the years, tens of thousands of refugees have been resettled in Canada under the PSR program. This program is a unique opportunity for churches to help persecuted Christian refugees and bring them to safety. As Free Reformed Churches, we have had the privilege to help fellow believers find refuge from the persecution they face. Even though bringing a few persecuted believers into Canada can seem so insignificant compared to the vast number of suffering believers around the world, we may believe that God uses City of Refuge in a significant way to provide deliverance for these individuals. There are various ways to support the persecuted in their own countries, but for many believers, there is no option left other than to flee. For these, City of Refuge is one avenue through which they can find hope and help from the church in Canada. In Hebrews 13:3, we are called to remember those who are in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

For a brief history of City of Refuge, in 1990 Ben van der Woerd heard about some refugees being resettled in British Columbia. He learned about the resettlement process from John Wind of the Langley Christian Reformed Church, who was helping several newcomers from Vietnam. As he became aware of the needs of Christian refugees and the resettlement process, Ben began to take on more of this work and assisted many refugees from various countries. Initially, he worked with the Mennonite Central Committee and the Christian Reformed Church. In 2000, the Emmanuel Free Reformed Church in Abbotsford, BC supported him in this work by signing a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) agreement and bearing the responsibility for the ministry. In 2005, the responsibility was passed on to the Free Reformed Synod, at which time it was called City of Refuge. Ben then began to hand over his tasks to Heddie Driegen.

Heddie Driegen served for ten years as the Refugee Sponsorship Coordinator from 2007 to 2017. Eventually, she was joined by Lieneke Stiksmā, Esther VanMiddelkoop, Rachel Kamstra, and Stephanie Visscher now continue the work of assisting churches in this vital ministry of sponsoring refugees.

The Lord has graciously provided financial support for this ministry through the Free Reformed Churches and other donors. We have many reasons to thank God for using City of Refuge as an avenue to bring these persecuted brothers and sisters to Canada. Please remember this work in your prayers. There are many people and families anxiously waiting for help and looking for hope. There are more requests for help than the churches can accommodate, but it is a blessing to know that through the churches in Canada, we can help some. You can visit the website or look for the regular newsletters to keep updated on the work and to see how you or your church can support the persecuted believers around the world.



# THANK YOU MESSAGE FROM ADAM

Adam is a Syrian national who converted to Christianity from Islam, and arrived in Canada on August 14, 2025. After war broke out in Syria, Adam fled Aleppo when he turned 18 in 2012. He was also baptized in 2012 after he arrived in Lebanon. He has been in Lebanon until his arrival in Canada. Adam was sponsored by a church in Toronto who has welcomed him with open arms. He writes:

*My first month in Canada was filled with new opportunities I had never experienced before. Living here has given me a strong sense of stability, security, and hope for the future. From the very beginning, I felt welcomed and supported, and I'm truly excited about what lies ahead. I am so thankful to God for you all.*



*Adam at the airport upon arrival.*



*Adam (third from left) arriving on Canadian soil at the airport.*



*Adam having a meal with church members.*

## THANK YOU

City of Refuge would not exist today without the Free Reformed Churches of North America. And we, as coordinators, would not be able to experience the incredible blessing of helping so many persecuted brothers and sisters come to Canada without the support and encouragement of this church denomination.

We are so grateful for the beautiful opportunity and incredible responsibility we have been given to facilitate this outreach work. We are thankful to our heavenly Father for allowing us to help care for His children in this way. Thank you to the coordinators who have gone before us, faithfully establishing and growing this ministry. We are grateful to the many churches that have undertaken the intense, hands-on work of sponsorship, and we are thankful to the refugees who have literally trusted us with their lives. As we reflect on the last 25 years of City of Refuge, we thank you all for the contributions you have made and for allowing us to play a small role in saving so many lives.

All glory be to our God!

*Rachel Kamstra, Esther VanMiddelkoop, and Stephanie Visscher*  
City of Refuge Sponsorship Coordinators

**Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.**

**ISAIAH 41:10**

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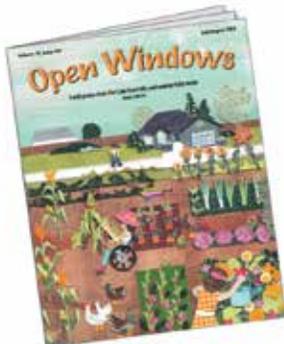
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