
*Be a man
of words
and deeds*

*He that goeth forth and
weepeth, bearing precious
seed, shall doubtless come
again with rejoicing,
bringing his sheaves with
him.*

Psalm 126:6

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Special Higher Education Issue



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PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE FEDERATION OF PROTESTANT REFORMED YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIETIES

All Walks of Life

by Steve Spencer

What occupations are appropriate for Christians? What areas of study? The reformers were distinctive in their day in teaching that all occupations, excluding those that required sin, were pleasing in God's sight. In this issue of the *Beacon Lights*, we explore a number of occupations that young people should consider as they determine what is God's calling for their life. We have placed a particular emphasis on occupations that require higher education. We made this emphasis for two reasons. First, we felt that young people may have less knowledge and experience with these occupations. Second, few people currently enter these occupations in our churches and we felt that young people may not understand that these occupations can be appropriate for the Christian.

Some may feel that Christians should be careful not to pick certain fields of study because these fields of study may lead them astray. I know that I have been asked numerous times by well-meaning brothers and sisters, "Why do you want to study psychology? Can a Christian really study that?" In the recent history of the Protestant Reformed Churches there have been a number of people that while pursuing advanced education left our churches, but this in no way should stop us from encouraging our young people from these pursuits. People from all walks of life have left our churches not only those who pursue higher education. If a young person has such a calling for their life, we must encourage them, trusting God to maintain them in their walk and life. We must teach our young people as Calvin says (Institutes 3, XI, 6), "that no task will be so sordid and base, provided you obey your calling in it, that it will not shine and be reckoned very precious in God's sight."

But is the pursuit of higher education a reasonable calling for a Christian? In the current day and age there are no colleges or universities that hold fast to the truth in all or perhaps even most respects. Can the Christian learn from the ungodly? The reformers, and Calvin in particular, argued that understanding the knowledge that God has given, even the knowledge given worldly men, is not only a reasonable calling but a duty of the Church. As Calvin writes (Institutes 2 II, 15) "If we regard the Spirit of God as the sole fountain of truth, we shall neither reject the truth itself, nor despise it wherever it shall appear, unless we wish to dishonor the Spirit of God. For by holding the gifts of the Spirit in slight esteem, we contemn and reproach the Spirit himself. What then? Shall we deny that the truth shone upon the ancient jurists who established civic order and discipline with such great equity? Shall we say that the philosophers were blind in their fine observation and artful description of nature? Shall we say that those men were devoid of understanding who conceived the art of disputation and taught us to speak reasonably? Shall we say that they are insane who developed medicine, devoting their labor to our benefit? What shall we say of all the mathematical sciences? Shall we consider them the ravings of madmen? No, we cannot read the writings of the ancients on these subjects without great admiration. We marvel at them because we are compelled to recognize how preeminent they are. But shall we count anything praiseworthy or noble without recognizing at the same time that it comes from God?"

While Calvin recognizes that God gives even the reprobate these gifts of knowledge he is not proposing some sort of common grace. Calvin recognizes that these gifts are given to the reprobate for the sake of the Church. He further explains, (Institutes, 2, II, 16), "But if the Lord has willed that we be helped in physics, dialectic, mathematics, and other like disciplines, by the work and ministry of the ungodly, let us use this assistance. For if we neglect God's gift freely offered in these arts, we ought to suffer just punishment for our sloths." Calvin's argument is straightforward. It is evident that God has given some ungodly men the gift of knowledge. This knowledge was given for the edification of the Church and the Church must use this knowledge to glorify God. Calvin's argument is forceful. The pursuit of higher education, even education from the ungodly, can be an appropriate calling for the Christian. With this thought in mind the current issue of the *Beacon Lights* is devoted to exploring several professions and fields of study in higher education, with the aim that our young people may be able to discern the path to which God is calling them.

FROM THE EDITOR

As yet another year slips by, we ponder the goodness and graciousness that God has shown to us. Through the happy weddings and births and the sorrowful deaths, God has remained faithful to us, His chosen people. Despite the times we have sinned and gone astray, and even through the moments when we forsook God, God did not leave or forsake us. During this time of year, as we reflect upon the past year and the wonders and trials God has brought to us, remember that God will be faithful to us again in the coming year. During the happy moments, do not forget to thank God for His lovingkindness, and during the times of trial, remember that God will always be there. Let us look forward to a year filled with the goodness of God.

During the past year the *Beacon Lights* experienced changes and challenges, both of which will continue into the coming year. It is the hope of the staff to make 1996 one of the best years for the *Beacon Lights* and we ask for your help in several ways to achieve this. First, your concern for both the magazine and the denomination, evidenced by contributing articles, is greatly appreciated. Second, the staff appreciates letters of all sorts, especially letters of encouragement. Positive letters stimulate all the writers of the *Beacon Lights*. Along with articles, letters are an indication both of support for the magazine and the denomination as well as spiritual strength. Third, and most important,

we covet your prayers that the *Beacon Lights* and we may be used to the glory of God.

The first new member of the staff in 1996 is David Overway. David is presently studying at Grand Valley State University with an eye to entering the ministry. David includes an article in this month's edition on the study of history.

This month is a special edition focusing on the importance of higher education and the various college majors that can be pursued. Nathan Brummel, a strong supporter of higher education, compiled this month's edition (thanks for the break, Nate). He wrote two articles, one on philosophy as a major and the other on a pre-seminary education. Steve Spencer, a psychology professor at Hope College, wrote the editorial and an article on the possibilities of pursuing psychology. He has some really interesting quotations from Calvin in his editorial, and I encourage you to read it. As I mentioned earlier, David Overway wrote an article on history. John Huizenga wrote about the pursuit of an engineering career and how one goes about doing this. Rhonda Gritters tells us what it is like to be a teacher and the benefits of doing this. Finally, Nate talked yours truly into pinching an article on mathematics.

One prominent theme in the Bible is that during the times we think that we are strong, we are actually weak, and the times that we realize that

we are nothing in ourselves and put all of our hope and trust in God, we are really strong. This is true not only in the Bible, but in our lives as well. I can well remember many times when I tried to accomplish things on my own, only to be subjected to the correcting rod of God. But when I put my trust in God and let Him control my life, those were the times when I was truly strong. That is the theme of this month's meditations, written by Cynthia Molenaar and her daughter, Sarah. If you do not read the meditations, I encourage you to do so, because, along with reading the Bible, I find them to be a great source of inspiration.

Melinda DeMeester starts the church news section next month, and she wrote an introduction to

that. The church news will include such things as births, baptisms, confessions of faith, marriages, and deaths. The purpose of the church news is to bring greater awareness of important events in the lives of friends and family around the world as well as to promote church unity. Thelma Westra submitted not only a poem celebrating the new year, but also a quiz on the names of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Last, but not least, Connie Meyer wrote something for all the little lights in our lives.

Next month we will finish Pastor Mahtani's speech on Daniel. I have received a letter regarding Pastor Davis' article *Pastor or Reverend?* and that will appear next month as well. May God be with you both in the coming month and the coming year.

Guest Article

Psychology

As A Christian Profession

by Steve Spencer

Psychology is a discipline, which more than most, is greatly misunderstood by the average person. Most people come in contact with psychology through the flood of self-help books in bookstores or the ramblings of some therapist when she appears on Oprah. This unfortunately creates a lot of misunderstanding about the nature of psychology. Broadly speaking psychology has always had two broad branches. The clinical branch started by Freud which has aimed to treat people with "mental problems" and the academic branch which grew out of philosophy and which attempts to develop a scientific understanding of people's thoughts and actions. For a young person who might consider psychology as a potential field of study it is important to understand this division; while psychology considers the treatment of "mental problems" and therapy for these individuals, this is not the sole focus of psychology.

I teach psychology at Hope College, and our students are about evenly divided between those who pursue the clinical branch and those who pursue the academic branch. We actually have slightly more graduates who pursue careers in business and teaching and the like (utilizing the academic branch) than who pursue clinical careers. In a re-

cent survey of our graduates 24% are in business, 18% are in teaching, 18% are in clinical psychology, 7% are in the ministry and the remainder are in a variety of other occupations. Each of these potential careers present challenges and rewards to the Christian. In the current article, I don't have time to present the challenges and rewards of each of these professions, but I will write briefly about the challenges and opportunities of the clinical branch and the academic branch.

One of the main challenges for Christians studying clinical psychology is that this branch of psychology has had a tendency to follow certain influential men. The field began with a strong following a Sigmund Freud, later Carl Rogers, Albert Ellis, and numerous other men gained status and reputation that influenced many. The difficulty with this approach for the child of God is that these men have all displayed remarkable ungodliness and often open hostility to Christianity. Following these men and their teaching is nearly or completely impossible for the Christian. Fortunately, clinical psychology has gradually moved away from this emphasis of following particular men or particular schools of thinking. It is now quite possible for clinical psychologists to not endorse the views of any

particular theorist and to develop views that are consistent with their own beliefs. Yet the arguments and views contrary to God's Word are something the student of clinical psychology will have to face. The child of God who enters clinical psychology must be strong in the face of these challenges.

Despite the challenges of clinical psychology, the opportunities can be quite appealing to some. Clinical psychologists work hard to help people recover from difficult problems in their lives, depression, abuse, anxiety and the like, and the treatment that clinical psychologists offer quite often provide at least modest relief from these problems. The skills and practice of clinical psychology still has a long way to go, but even at the present clinical psychologists do offer some treatments that can go a long way to helping people recover from certain problems. For the child of God, this means that if they study clinical psychology they can offer these services to those that are in our churches. The child of God will realize that just addressing symptoms of these problems is often not enough, sin will need to be dealt with. However, they can work together with the shepherd of the flock, and provide an important service. Anyone who has had to seek psychological treatment can testify how difficult it is to find a therapist who supports and does not undermine one's religious beliefs. The child of God who enters clinical psychology can provide this valuable service to the Christian community.

The academic branch provides it own unique challenges and opportunities. For the Christian studying academic psychology they will be less likely to face people who are following the teachings of one particular man, yet ideas that challenge and threaten one's beliefs will be prevalent here as well.

For example, in recent years the theory of evolution has crept from biology into psychology at an ever increasing rate. The child of God studying academic psychology (or any other field) must be able to discern the truth from the lie. He or she must reject the lie, such as the teaching of evolution, but embrace the truth when it is taught. This means that Christians must be firmly grounded in faith if they are to study academic psychology. They will be presented with many ideas only some of which are truthful and valuable. This challenge is true for a Christian studying any discipline, but it is especially true for the Christian studying academic psychology.

Despite the dangers of academic psychology, it presents some interesting opportunities. Studying academic psychology will often take extra schooling beyond four years of college. To teach at the college level five more years are often required and work in business and other setting often requires two more years of schooling. This schooling takes much time and effort, but usually results in interesting work where people have more freedom in their work that can allow them to spend more time with their families. Christians in these settings are usually able to direct their own work and to engage in activities that do not contradict their religious beliefs. Careers in academic psychology are much like the careers of businessmen and high school teachers that most young people are familiar with. I hope that as young people consider the calling to which God is directing them they realize that a career in psychology is a possibility.

Steve is a member of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church and is a Psychology professor at Hope College in Holland, Michigan.

Guest Article

Philosophy

by Nathan Brummel

When you arrive in class the professor is talking about ancient men and ancient ideas. What he is saying seems quite abstract, very much caught in the past. He is a professor of philosophy.

This is the experience of many beginning students of philosophy. The subject matter seems ab-

stract and hard to understand. Why in the world would someone want to study philosophy?

While it must be admitted that at the lower levels in philosophy it often seems that things are unconnected from life, this changes when one studies more philosophy and takes higher level classes

Then important issues for contemporary times present themselves.

I turned to the study of philosophy when I was a sophomore at Calvin College. I was still undecided on my major during my fourth semester in college. But I took a philosophy class with a Calvinistic professor who laid great emphasis on incorporating one's Christian views into the study of philosophy. He showed me that one could study philosophy while being a Calvinist and a pious Christian.

I was attracted to philosophy in large part because of the important issues that were studied there. In philosophy one runs up against Atheistic thought in its most powerful objections to Christianity. I understood that in order to defend and develop my views against Atheism and secular humanism that it was necessary to understand where they were coming from. I became interested in philosophy because I was interested in Christian apologetics, that is, defending the faith.

The Philosophy department at Calvin College had been reinvigorated by some important thinkers in the Christian Reformed Church like Harry Jellema and Alvin Plantinga. What has been called a revolution in Christian philosophy had been started by Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Richard Mouw, and others. These men had emphasized that one need not take on the presuppositions of non-Christian philosophers in his discussions with them. Rather Christians must develop their philosophic views based on their Christian theology. They must think within the guidelines of what the Bible teaches. Whether these men did this properly is outside of my field of inquiry here.

The premier reason why college students might want to major in philosophy is because it is the premier liberal arts curriculum. Liberal arts colleges were started so that students could get a broad array of learning. The idea was that Christians need to have a broad education because this best prepares them for life. Going to college was not just so the student could get a job when he graduated, but also to prepare him for life by providing him with a broad education.

I know that today the idea of a liberal arts college is under attack. Because of the expense involved with going to college many students wish to get through college or vo-tech as fast as they can to get out and have a job. Colleges have brought on an antipathy to liberal arts by introducing silly courses that are politically correct like gender and multicultural classes.

But today as much as ever I think that young people should have a liberal arts education. We are in a time when unbelievers and liberal Christians are hard at work attacking orthodoxy. In this situation we need Christians who can understand the opponents of the Reformed world-view and stand up for the truth.

If one is interested in a liberal arts education, philosophy is one of the best majors to choose. To demonstrate this I need to say what philosophy as a discipline involves. As might be expected there are great controversies in philosophy over this very issue. But I think that I am safe to say that philosophy involves (among other things) the study of theology (including philosophical theology), politics, aesthetics, ethics, metaphysics, language, philosophy of mind, and the history of philosophy. It deals with theology because it deals with the issues having to do with the existence and nature of God. It studies psychology because it attempts to develop a philosophy of mind. It studies language in order to understand the logic and rationality of our thought. In the study of metaphysics, philosophy deals with the ultimate questions about the nature of the universe as they have been answered by the great thinkers.

Philosophy can be described as the history of thought on the ultimate questions concerning the nature of God, man, and the universe. These questions and issues are relevant for Christian thinkers in every age. Our young people need to get involved with these issues because they are the next generation who must stand up and defend the church against the world.

Philosophy is of importance if one wants to understand why people believe the things that they do today. If one studies theology then they must realize that it has throughout history been influenced by philosophy. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, for example was influenced by neo-Platonic thought. Thomas Aquinas the greatest doctor in the Catholic church was influenced by Aristotle. The contemporary church has been greatly influenced by Kant, Hegel, Spinoza, Nietzsche, and other philosophers.

Attempting to get people interested in philosophy is a difficult task in our circles. What are some of the reasons for this? Part of the reason is that our circles are not all that much into the academic community due to the fact that we do not have a Protestant Reformed College. Therefore it is probable that Protestant Reformed students will not know someone who has studied philosophy or teaches it. The majority of the parents of Protes-

tant Reformed students are in business, whether working for small or large companies. And of course not a few parents have begun their own businesses. There is a tendency of children to imitate the jobs of their parents. Therefore to get Protestant Reformed students interested in liberal arts majors is difficult. The reason for this is that there does not seem to be a practical advantage in majoring in philosophy because it does not necessarily help you get a job in the business world.

I think that our young people have to develop the notion that it is important to get involved in the liberal arts because that is where the great conflicts in thought between Reformed Christianity and all wrong opinions exists. What happens in philosophy and the other liberal arts like English, history, psychology, and etc. have a tremendous impact on how people live their lives and what they believe. It is all too easy to pick out a famous Philosopher, English writer, theologian, psychologists, or a liberal arts thinker in another field and show the powerful and detrimental effect that their teachings have had on twentieth century America. Therefore we must get involved in the liberal arts in order to defend our Reformed worldview.

Our young people must consider the calling of being a professor in the liberal arts. Christian professors on the college and university level can have great influence for good on students. It is rare to find good Reformed and orthodox professors today in the colleges and universities that can help you as a young struggling scholar develop your views in a positive manner. It is much more often that you have professors who are theologically liberal or plain atheists. Young people must see that the truth must be promoted in every area of thought. In all of the academic disciplines secular humanism and evolutionary thought must be fought against. The Scriptures are relevant for every dis-

cipline and we need young scholars to demonstrate this.

What are some additional reasons for studying philosophy? I think that majoring in philosophy at the college level helps the student learn how to think and write. Philosophy is the most critical discipline when it comes to thinking. Philosophy professors focus on getting the students to think things through in a logical and rational manner. This sort of focused thinking in which one zeros in on language and logic is necessary for tough Christian thinking. One of the greatest benefits that the student of philosophy will receive is that he will learn how to study things in depth. One professor of mine would spend classes on very short passages in Augustine or Plato in order to demonstrate the complexity and importance of the thought.

Studying philosophy is not without danger. Studying in any academic discipline today is dangerous. This is because there is a dogmatic anti-Christian perspective that controls much of the thought that occurs in Academia. But as Christians we want to learn more about God and his creation. As Reformed Christians who live in the tradition of Dutch Reformed thought that goes back to Abraham Kuyper we know that Christians are called to search out the wonder of God's creation. In philosophy the nature of the beauty in God's creation is studied in aesthetics. Our complex minds are studied in the philosophy of mind. The way in which we think and come to believe in truth is studied in epistemology. Therefore in all of the various fields within philosophy as well as in all of the liberal arts we must as Reformed Christians search out the beauty, wonder, and complexity of God's creation. And let us make sure that in doing this we give praise to Him alone.

Nathan is a member of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.

Guest Article

Perspectives on History

by David Overway

The challenging but rewarding task of the college student is to take what is taught in one's classes and test the validity of the material by comparing it to biblical truth. By making this statement, I do not mean to exclude

those who are not college students. All of God's children, whatever their position, are called to place the teachings and philosophies of the world under the light of Scripture in order to clearly see the flaws and imperfections of these teachings. College

students, are however, with more frequency than any other group within the church, exposed to unbiblical ideas. As a student myself and a history major in particular, I have been introduced not only to the facts of history but also to the secular view of the field of history in general. This has forced me to define and refine my own understanding of history by heightening my awareness of the revelation of history found in the Bible. Briefly then, I would like to first comment on the world's limited and distorted view of history. One of the clearest and most precise books on the subject of history as a field of study that I have come across is written by Edward Hallet Carr, a Professor of History at Cambridge University and is entitled *What Is History?* In it Carr denies any belief in divine providence "or any other of the abstractions which have sometimes been supposed to guide the course of events." By attempting to remove God from the picture, Carr leaves an opening for an alternate view of history which he immediately fills with a quotation from Karl Marx:

History does nothing, it possesses no immense wealth, fights no battles. It is rather man, real living man, who does everything, who possesses and fights.

Carr is not satisfied, however, with merely quoting Marx. Later in the book, he offers his own suggestion of the purpose of studying history. He writes "To enable man to understand the society of the present is the dual function of history."

In a certain respect this is true. We are to seek to understand the past in order to more wisely proceed through the present and gain direction for the future. This is in part the purpose of the Old Testament. We read in I Corinthians 10:6 that we are to learn from the examples of the Israelites. In verse 11 of this chapter, we read that these things "are written for our admonition" that we may be instructed from history and through this instruction seek to avoid falling into the same temptations as the Old Testament Church.

Job also, in his anguish, was instructed by his friend Bildad to "enquire, I pray thee, of the former age" (Job 8:8). Bildad here is attempting to comfort Job with the knowledge that God helps those that seek Him and he encourages Job to look at God's faithfulness toward their fathers for evidence of this fact.

Not only do we learn from biblical history, but we can also learn valuable lessons from historical happenings that are not included in the Bible. Negatively, we learn of the heresies and vain philosophies that become prevalent in the past and even

found their way into the Church. By a study of history we can be forewarned of these things and more knowledgeably guard against them in the present and future. Positively, we can see throughout history God's providence as He has raised up men who loved and defended the Scriptures and the truth that they contain. We think of men such as Martin Luther, John Calvin and more recently, Herman Hoeksema. We agree then with secular historians that part of the usefulness of history is that from an understanding of it we can more adequately face the challenges of the present and future.

We disagree, however, with the ridiculous assumption of Marx that there is no controlling power behind the course of history and that it is "man who does everything." We also disagree with Carr's limited idea that the function of history is to merely increase man's understanding of and mastery over society. Instead we believe that not man but God is sovereignly in control of history and that He directs all things so that *His Name* is glorified and *His church* is gathered in time. Therefore, we believe that history is not an endless repeating cycle to learn from, but a divinely controlled continuous development. This field of study is not man's story but His story.

We denounce the "wisdom" of secular historians as they in their pride seek to elevate man to the throne of God. Instead we listen to the voice of the Lord as He speaks to us from Isaiah 44:25, "I am the Lord that maketh all things...that turneth wise man backward and maketh their knowledge foolish...." Truly, the knowledge of knowledgeable men becomes foolishness when they use their knowledge in the service of man rather than God.

A knowledge of God's Word causes us to shudder at the plight of wicked man as he remains in his foolishness. For they are blind to one of the greatest promises of the Bible concerning world history—that it will end! They are willingly ignorant that earthly history will come to its awesome conclusion when our Lord returns with fire and judgment (II Peter 3).

Yet it may be asked, why does God reveal His glory and sovereignty through time? Why does He work through history to gather His Church? Why did He not do this immediately or at least in a much shorter time span? I can only answer that God, in His goodness, chose to work in this way. He chose to wait several thousand years before He sent His Son the first time to redeem His children and He has chosen to wait at least another couple thousand years before He returns for the final harvest.

Peter reassures us, however, that this apparent delay from our perspective is not slackness on the part of our Lord, but an evidence of His longsuffering as He through time brings all His children to repentance (II Peter 3:9). We are satisfied with this and joyfully exclaim "How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33).

There are many things about this world that we do not understand. There are the mysteries of history as well as riddles in every field of study. It

is a good thing to educate ourselves and to learn about this great creation of our God but we must always balance our study of the world's wisdom with the study of God's Word wherein lies the highest wisdom. As dutiful children of the Most High God we seek to gain our ultimate wisdom not from the world but from the Word.

David is a member of First Protestant Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan.

Guest Article



I Am A P. R. Congregation

by Thelma Westra

1. It's fitting to start with me, I suppose—
A land filled with love from my head to my toes.
2. My namesake, Mr. Johnson, our president beame
And even our state bears a presidential name.
3. With "Lorna" my name is often united,
Or else as a sand hill I'm usually cited.
4. My name's like a high school, my state's a new cow,
And the city asks, "Why are you coughing now?"
5. I'm as graceful as can be
Standing in the ale, you see.
6. It all began with me; I'm sorta at the core.
The rapids still are grand as they were in '24.
7. My name also comes first, but not in U.S.A.
The couple, Ed and Alberta, should help you on your
way.
8. I have a new building; my symbol's a dove.
And Lynn would come to the place I love.
9. I sound as if I'm on the edge of town
Where many sodas are of great renown.
10. "I've got a gal" or is it a kazoo
On Green Acre Drive. Can't miss it, can you?
11. The villa is grand, and the shape of the state
Is so neat—it's a mitten! Now isn't that great?
12. I hope to make it clear to you
I walk a lot in the mitten too.
13. My opposite would be northeast.
And Ivan rests by me at least.
14. I live by Ron, just in the center—
Wipe your feet before you enter.
15. The just shall live by me, the Bible says anew;
It's not found in Genesis; however, that's a clue.
16. "Randy" is the nickname could be used for our town;
When you go to the Dells, won't you please stop
around?
17. My church name is the three-fold name of God.
Our state is huge; both length and width are broad.
18. "The House of God" our church name is translated—
Large deer, many trees, village—is where we're
located.
19. My village is named for Mr. Hudson, and
The trees are beeches in my fair land.
20. The outer covering of a shell am I
In the midst of the corn fields as you pass by.
21. Hopefully you'll guess my name;
My land is red, and earthquakes are may game.
22. Another first, I come with wooden shoes,
With tulips in my hair, and windmill news.
23. I'm a southpaw pitcher—I threw due east—
It came by the bridge and then it ceased.
24. And south with klompen feet I come
But I am ill of noisy drum.
25. The town's name is George, and it's the hour
To sit in the shade under a bower.
26. I'm like a pelican that flies
And I owe wampum to some guys.
27. My name means "God with us;" my home
Has something to do with Alberta's comb.

Answers on page 17.

Watching Daily At My Gates

by Cynthia and Sarah Molenaar

As we contemplate the recent past celebration of our Lord's first advent and actively, patiently await His second, let us do so with joy but also with obedience to Him by His Spirit in our own lives. This month we will look into Scripture at those who waited both patiently and obediently and what resulted there from and also consider some examples of those who willfully disobeyed direct commands or impetuously moved forward with no consideration or fear of God.

January 1

Read Genesis 3:15-24.

Imagine the utter despair that must have filled the lives of Adam and Eve as they left the garden to face life on the outside so to speak. Ah, but they were not without hope! God had promised a Redeemer, One who would crush that awful Serpent's head. They must live in that hope or be overcome by the awareness of the significance of their rebellious disobedience. With what joy Eve must have borne Cain with the hope, the anticipation, that this was the one whom God had promised. His name reflected that hope. The fact of his covenant disobedience does not negate their assumed covenant obedience in his rearing which included the instruction of a proper sacrifice to a sovereign God. That they were faithful in their instruction is evident in Abel's sacrifices of praise to Him. May we, who are blessed with the entire canon of revelation always draw from it the power by the Spirit to covenant obedience in our lives.

January 2

Read Genesis 6.

In this passage we see a remarkable trophy of God's grace. In a day and age when sin was increasing to the point of God's cup of wrath being full, we see a man tenaciously hanging to the amount of God's revelation he had for an obedient life of faith. Verse eight says that Noah found favor in sight of God. And we know from elsewhere in Scripture that God has very specific attributes with which He endows those with whom He finds favor. Some of these include, a contrite spirit and a fear of Him. Noah must have exercised these gifts of God's grace in the face of overwhelming temptation. He even endured the ridicule of those around him for, count them, 120 years. In this day and age of the Internet, fast food and instant gratification, that is a very long time. May God grant us the patience of Noah to live grateful, faithful lives for our King Jesus.

January 3

Read Genesis 12:1-9.

Abram directly obeyed the Lord's command to go to the land the Lord would show him. He had to leave his country, people, father's household and everything he was accustomed to, to go to some foreign country. Why would anyone want to do that? Well, Abram was a God-fearing man and he knew that God knew what was best for him even though he might not have been able to see the good in the plan. That is what you call faith. Faith is acting on what God says he will do. When Abram arrived at the land that the Lord showed him, the place was full of heathens, Canaanites, but God promised that he would give the land to his offspring. What did Abram do

then? He built an alter to the Lord which was a testimony to his belief that God would fulfill that promise. We must have faith and not doubt that God knows best. If we do not, we have a prideful attitude, we rebel, and are bitter against His authority. Trust and obey for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

January 4

Read Genesis 16:1-3.

Prior to this incident, God had promised Abram that He would make his descendants as the stars of the sky, so many that they could not be numbered, humanly speaking. What did Abraham do? He did not trust and took matters into his own hands and went in to Hagar, Sarai's maidservant and she bore a son to him. Now, Abram should have either remembered the promise that God had made to him or he should have been in such close communion with God that he talked with Him about it (not bowing to his wife's wishes). The result of this sin of rebellion has been the source of bitter quarrel in the world ever since. Rebellion never has private consequences. Remember and believe.

January 5

Read Genesis 28:10-22.

Here we have the story of Jacob, the deceiver, who is now on his way to Padan Aram, on the request of his father, to find for himself a believing wife. He here struggles with the Lord and receives from Him the covenant promises issued also to his forefathers. This struggle is significant because He will embark on a long indenture to his relative Laban for the hand of his beloved Rachel. It would not have been surprising, knowing his character, for him to have given up long before. He, by faith, does not and becomes the father of what would become the twelve tribes of Israel to whom God would bless all the nations of the earth and from the one son, Judah, would come his and our Savior. God does continue to work out His plans despite our sin and rebellion, but that we would bring glory to Him by our faithfulness should be our constant prayer and delight.

January 6

Read Exodus 2:11-12.

In this short passage we first get a glimpse into the character of this man who will become the great leader of God's people. He is not a good example at this point though. It is as if He were telling God and showing to the Israelites that he is bold enough and brave enough to not only smite one but perhaps thousands of Egyptians. God is not yet finished with him though. In the following chapters we see the long and tedious work of God being done on him to prepare him to be such a great leader. God so works His grace in Moses' heart that when God's time comes for him to be that leader, he is quite sure God is mistaken in His choice of him. Hopefully that attitude in him and in us through our trials of patient waiting is the development of humility.

January 7

Read Matthew 26: 36-45.

"Not as I will but as Thou wilt." Christ, the perfect Son of God, was to endure God's wrath. He was sorrowful. Death on a cross probably seemed unbearable to Him, but despite this he repeated three times, "Not as I will but as Thou wilt." This is the example we are to follow. In every situation of life we are to say, "Not as I will but as Thou wilt," and not rebel saying, "I know better than God. I can do things my way." The root of this attitude is pride (Proverbs 13:10). God hates pride and arrogance. By grace we can follow the example of our blessed Savior who faced the tortures of the cross because it was His Fathers will and who trusted His Father without fail.

January 8

Read II Samuel 24:1-17.

In these verses we see David numbering the fighting troops out of his pride for the great accomplishments of his regime. Even his not so godly commander, Joab, saw through David's desire and tried to dissuade him. But, David plunged ahead without fear of God. The result was more devastating than that of his sin with Bathsheba in terms of the nation of Israel. God was merciful to him in spite of his sin and God did use this event in His purposes to chastise his people. We are all responsible for our own actions but God does work through our sin to achieve His purposes. We should never test God however. This is the lesson.

January 9

Read II Samuel 7:1-13.

We see here the gifted prophet Nathan, who dealt so very wisely with David in the revealing of David's sin with Bathsheba, miss the boat here and urge David to go right ahead and build the Temple. That, of course was what David wanted to hear. But God had other plans. David had to set aside his own wishes in this instance and not have the final word. God did allow him the privilege of guiding his son Solomon in the planning of the temple. But, in the end, this great man of God had to bow to the wishes of his God and ours. We often plan and scheme for what we think would be best for the kingdom of God and not ask God how we might best serve His purposes. God will often leave us to our foolishness. We pay the price. Trust in Him and waiting on His will always brings His blessing.

January 10

Read I Samuel 13:5-14.

Saul, although he was chosen by God to be king of Israel, was reprobate. It was commanded by God that only the priests were to sacrifice to the Lord but he became impatient and sacrificed anyway. The people were afraid and were scattering from Saul. This, the fact that Samuel had not come to meet them at the appointed time, and that the Philistines were near compelled him to offer a burnt offering to the Lord. Again, this is an example of one who took matters into his own hands instead of trusting God to do what He said he would do. This resulted in the disestablishment of his kingdom. We have here the added problem of the situation looking desperate and the thinking that is so common that we simply must take things into our own hands. God is wholly, completely trustworthy and will never honor our going outside His revealed will in Scripture to do what we think is best.

January 11

Read Judges 1:27-2:4.

We sometimes think that we can make trade-offs in our lives and bargain with God so to speak. Maybe, we think, if we do a little extra good here or there we can get away with just a little sin. God demands wholehearted obedience. The conquest of the Promised land is a repeated theme here. The people did not wholly wipe out the entire Canaanite population. This was a direct command of God because of the evil character of those pagan nations. The Scripture says in Joshua 2:3 that God then made those pagans a "thorn in their side and their gods a snare." Oh, what a remnant of sin will disable us. We must cut it out completely by God's grace and on reliance on Him. We must know what God's will is from the Scripture, trust Him to help us do it and then actively obey that Word no matter what the conse-

quences appear to be. We must not rely on our own strength or wisdom. It will always fail us.

January 12

Read Ruth 1:1-18.

Like Abraham, Ruth left her native land and the things with which she was familiar. Her husband had died and it would not seem that she would have such a strong bond with his mother but nonetheless, she did. She was a Moabitess, but still she devoted herself to being with Naomi, and embraced her God. She did not know what was ahead of her. This was a seemingly blind sort of faith. God blessed her for this and provided her with a husband to care for her and Naomi to love her. If we trust God with our future, will He not bless? Of course He will. Don't fret but leave it in God's hands. If we trust Him and wait on Him, He will work it out according to His own purposes. This gives God glory.

January 13

Read I Samuel 24:1-7; I Samuel 26:7-12; Psalm 18:1-3.

David has been pursued to the various nooks and crannies of his homeland by the relentless hatred of King Saul. David in fact has already been anointed as the next king of Israel after the inevitable demise of the failed reign of Saul. He must wait and wait and wait to inherit the crown in God's timetable of events. He is even advised by those fighting men around him to take things into his own hands and do the Lord's work for himself. He adamantly refuses to harm the Lord's anointed even though his reign is causing difficulty for the nation. Even his symbolic act of cutting off a piece of Saul's garment disturbs his soul (1 Samuel 24:5). In the Psalm which he wrote after his deliverance from Saul, he does what we all must do when God delivers us from all our struggles. Praise Him and give Him our love and obedience.

January 14

Read Psalm 37:1-11.

This passage is filled to the brim with instructions for everyone, but applies very well to the younger generation. Some of you may look at unbelievers and think, "Man, they have it so easy. They just do whatever they want and have all the fun." Be assured of this: they will not be having such a "fun" time in eternal fire. Their very breath is blasphemy to God's holy name. Never think that the Christian life is a drudgery. It is a joy, an unspeakable joy to serve our Lord and King Jesus. Therein and in trusting in him do we find peace. Teens always seem to be waiting for things — waiting to drive the car, waiting to get a job, waiting to be married, waiting for this and that. God says for us to rest in Him and wait patiently for him. He also commands us to commit our way to Him, trust Him, and he will bring it to pass. Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart. Ask God to make His will yours also. He will honor that prayer.

January 15

Read Jeremiah 10:23-24.

Jeremiah had the unenviable task of prophesying to a wayward people who hated to hear what he had to say. Yet, He was very aware that he had to place his future in God's hands. As we ask Him to direct our lives, we needn't question or fear tomorrow He will lead us each day. If we base our decisions and hope for the future on anything else, we will surely be miserable and dissatisfied. Only when we follow God's leading will we experience that inner quiet confidence that comes from knowing we are heading in the right direction. With our minds we explore our options, evaluate our preferences, seek advice, and consider the consequences of our decisions. Our ways are in His hands for all time. Soli Deo Gloria.

January 16

Read Jeremiah 17:5-10.

It is all fine and well for us to say that God rewards our trust in him and all and that trusting in our own strength will bring bad results for our lives, but this passage makes it very clear that God takes very seriously his command to trust in Him. "Cursed be the man who trusteth in man." This is not just good advice. God does not give suggestions in His Word that would be nice for us to follow every now and then. The root of all trusting in our-

selves is pride which was the root of the first sin as well. God abhors it. Not only that, but it appears from verse nine that we cannot even tell when we are acting and thinking in this way! Our hearts are deceitful above what we could imagine. Think of that! We cannot even think correctly without the intervening power of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and minds to transform them into what would please Him. May we humbly beg an all powerful God to cleanse our hearts from all unrighteousness and to make His will ours day by day.

January 17

Read Read Judges 14:1-3.

Young people, take Samson as an example of how you should NOT demand what you want when you want it, particularly in going about finding a spouse. Look at all the trouble he got himself into because he demanded that his parents get that Philistine woman, Delilah, for him to marry. He was impatient and demanding. The time that you are single (especially the teen years) is a special time given to you by God to grow in grace and knowledge. Don't waste your energies and emotions looking around for a boy/girlfriend. Just concentrate on your spiritual growth, seek the Lord (Matthew 6:33), let your parents have authority in this matter, and wait (Psalm 37). Don't rush into close relationships with the opposite sex when you are young because as one wise man has said many times, "If you're not going to Chicago, don't get on the train to Chicago." Translated—if you are not ready to get married, don't go looking around for a spouse. Patience in this and so many other matters of the teen years is of great value in the sight of the Lord and He will reward that effort.

January 18

Read Isaiah 30:15 and Isaiah 32:17.

Pursuing this month's theme for meditation, we see that when we try to do things on our own, we always seem to make a mess out of them. But, when we realize that we live under the reign of the King of the universe and live accordingly, it is then that we are truly strong. In these two brief verses nestled in Isaiah amongst God's pleas to His spiritually wayward people, He is holding out for them the blessing of peace and quiet as a benefit of right behavior. We may believe He offers this to us also as His covenant people. This does not mean that God will fight our spiritual battles for us. When we see clearly from Scripture what we must do to be at peace in our lives, then we must do it. He will not fight the battles for us though He will give us the strength always to act biblically. Find other places in the Psalms where the Psalmist finds rest and peace with when he acts in accordance with God's law (Word).

January 19

Read Read I Samuel 17:26-36.

Besides the great faith and courage of David which is clearly seen in this passage, another important point is brought up as to how others will view our courageous stands for the Kingdom of God. David needed, as a very young person here, to take a stand in spite of what his family and elders thought of him. He, along with Joseph, were not very popular in their families. They were godly young men and their families thought they were goody, goodies. Godly people tend to be right a lot of the time! They had to endure the rejection and ridicule of even those who should have really supported them the most. However, this passage gives a most resounding example of how we should behave in the face of blasphemy against the Holy, Almighty God. How often do we neglect to stand for right because of what it might mean to our reputation with our peers. Yes, indeed, it can be a lonely business to stand alone. But, as David testifies in verses 32 and 37, God will strengthen us for the battle. Remember, David had to throw the stone. It did not simply fly out of his hand. May we prepare ourselves for battle and then fight.

January 20

Read Genesis 22:1-12.

God chooses to use trials and tests in our lives to see if we are truly made of His metal. Now, of course He truly knows the outcome, but it is for us that He does these things. That is hard to believe when the trial is hard upon us.

We tend to want the pain and struggle to just go away. We live in a culture which glorifies leisure and has little regard for duty. In this passage we are not told what went on in Abraham's mind. Did he believe that this sacrifice was the Seed promised to his forefather Adam? Or was he so certain that God would provide that animal sacrifice when they arrived on the top of the mountain? Neither he nor Isaac seemed to have questioned God on this, at least not from the text. But, even from a human standpoint, Abraham must have recoiled at the thought of driving a knife into the bosom of his only son. This was not one of those things he could talk over with his wife either. Abraham had to simply trust very hard that God was in control and "set his face like flint" for obedience to God's command. In this test he did not fail.

January 21

Read Genesis 12:10-20.

Since we last saw a test of Abraham's faith which he passed by God's grace, we must look here at a time when he should have wept before the Lord a bit before making such a rash decision. Can anyone imagine this? In our day and age, this would be spouse abuse of the highest magnitude and yet Abraham fell not once but twice into this one (see Genesis 20). What seems strange though is that Sarah was really willing to sacrifice what would have been very dear to her (her honor), for the sake of protecting a nation yet unborn. Did she really think she was doing this? It is all speculation as the Word does not tell us. This does not excuse them or us from imploring God for guidance and direction in areas where we are unsure. Actually, we are to be in constant communion with God, and reading the Word for His will to be made clear in what we consider the mundane decisions of our daily lives. It is undoubtedly best that when we are uncertain as to a course of action and we have prayed and prayed about it and God does not seem to be leading us, that we simply wait for Him to show Himself faithful. He will do so.

January 22

Read Isaiah 39.

Here is a perfect example of God testing Hezekiah right on the heels of his thanksgiving to God for extending his life after threatening to take it from him. He had just written this beautiful hymn of praise and testified to his unflinching desire to show his gratitude for the rest of his life (38:20) and now in his pride, he delights himself not in God but in the company of a bunch of reprobates! The Scripture says he was "glad of them." We are reminded that emotion is not the fountainhead of obedience. We can fool ourselves into thinking that God would be pleased with our praise and then go off and disregard his direct commands. A little light should have gone off in his head, "No man, this is not a God glorifying thing to do." That light would have been lit by his knowledge of God's repeated commands to Israelite kings to not be friendly with any foreign regimes. God used this event to point out His coming punishment of His people in the form of alien bondage. May we always be vigilant for His glory and be aware of our own pride.

January 23

Read Daniel 3:8-18.

There is a point in all our lives when we must simply say "no" no matter what the cost. These three young men did not really know that they were not going to be burned alive. The history of the Reformers is rife with the stories of Christians in what we might call modern times, going to the stake for much lesser infractions. Just read *Fox's Book of Martyrs*, which is available at your local public library and you will see that God does not always deliver His people from the physical tortures of evil men. These young friends had stood together very long and this was not the first test. Remember that in Daniel 1, they had refused to accept the lure of even the foods to be eaten. The other important point is that they had done this together. There is power in the right peer group. If you choose godly friends, they can be of lifelong support to you and help you to be accountable to God in your words and deeds. May we all be blessed with courage to choose and keep the right companions and to obey God in spite of the consequences.

January 24

Read Luke 22:54-62.

What a blessing that this passage is in the Scripture. We are all like this. We fear for our skin. We like to fit in. Pain is not fun. Peter was going on adrenaline. He had just missed killing a soldier by a misguided swing and was now watching as his best friend was accused and beaten and bloodied. This was not at all what he had hoped for. He was frankly scared to death. Everything was out of control. He did what was natural in his human nature. He failed the test. Then came the look from his Savior and we experience that also by His grace really when we look into His word at places like Psalm 32 or 51 and see there what it was that required the ultimate sacrifice on the part of our Lord Jesus Christ. We all fail and we should not too hastily forget those times. The Puritans used to call this period in the Christian life "a season of repentance." It is very necessary for us to learn the lessons of a test or trial, not morbidly dwelling on our sin but contemplating the offense to the glory of God that we not repeat the sin. Let us all rely on God's grace to provide the strength for these times and submit all emotions to our will in His strength.

January 25

Read I Kings 17:8-16.

The widow had to trust that she was going to be provided for. She had virtually no means with which to support or provide for herself and her son. Elijah came to her asking for something to drink and eat and she said in essence, "If I have hardly enough food for one more meal for my son and me, how am I supposed to feed you too?" Nevertheless, Elijah assured her that she would be provided for and she had to rest in that. Sometimes we face things like this in our lives when it seems that God is requiring something rather unreasonable from us. We know that He is a God of order and reason, but the task seems daunting or the request seems too much. This dear woman trusted God and His prophet and did what we as reasonable people would say was almost a foolish thing. In faith, she went forward.

January 26

Read John 18:1-11.

This is the Peter we know so well, even as we look in the mirror. He is the leader of the group, ready to really take charge of this situation. Where was his head? Did he really think he could outmaneuver an entire large detachment of trained soldiers with one sword. Get real. Obviously he had little experience with the weapon. He completely missed the cutting off the head. He was not thinking and yet we would have to say that his heart was with His Master in wanting to protect Him. But God does not promise to bail us out of every unthinking position that we get ourselves into in spite of what may be very good motives. We must consider the cost of building the tower before we begin. We must use our heads and submit every emotional response to the will. In fact, it is a good idea for young people to especially do this in the volatile situations in which they find themselves running on adrenaline. That alone should be the clue that we must simply stop and turn from the course and think. If we wait on the Lord, He will provide the answer.

January 27

Read Matthew 14:22-33.

In this passage we see Peter at his prime so to speak; that is, in his human nature. He is so very much like us. The disciples are afraid and Jesus has comforted them with His presence and all Peter wants to do is to be with His Master. And Jesus grants his request. This was truly a test of faith for him. Jesus is not toying with him but using this incident as well as others of Peter's own making, to mold him into the man he would become; the great Apostle and inspired author of Holy Scripture. What is so very helpful to us is to know that the lessons were truly learned and that God could use someone as apparently unqualified to give us lessons on patience and joy in the midst of persecution (see 1 and 2 Peter). So often we pray for things that we know for sure would be best for us and yet they are not. But, God may grant us those requests to try our faith and refine us in the fire to be found as gold for His use. We must keep our eyes fixed, stayed, on the goal that is set before us and on the Cross of Christ which is our glory.

January 28

Read Philippians 1:1-14.

This passage is a great encouragement to any who may be in the bonds of some struggle or handicap over which they have no control. Think of this. Paul, the great missionary preacher, had fearlessly preached the gospel and suffered much for its sake. He had been persecuted and now was in bonds or chains in prison and could not do that to which he had been called. And yet he did not let that stop him. The calling was there and He simply adapted however he could. We see that in this perseverance he was blessed by God so that this seeming problem turned out for the furtherance of the gospel. Philippians 1:14 says, "And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear." He did not just sit in prison and pine away with the desire to be out preaching in some synagogue somewhere. He used the opportunity to preach even in prison and God rewarded that with believers there (remember the Philippian jailer) and with the emboldening of the other pastors to preach even more fearlessly. We must use our seeming weaknesses and our struggles for the glory of God and in His power move forward in the life and tasks he gives us to do. Philippians 4:13 says, "I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me."

January 29

Read Matthew 9:18-22.

Here is another example of a person who had great desire and motivation to be healed by our Lord. But, she was afraid. Here she was a timid woman knowing that Jesus had many things to do and would not likely pay attention to her. In fact, it is likely that the type of her disease excluded her from many Jewish activities and even ostracized her from worship. However, she needed to press through those natural tendencies and even the fear of rejection and of public ridicule and even punishment of the Jewish leaders. She really had hoped to get this taken care of without any real public notice at all. Jesus did not let that happen but dealt gently with her. We must remember that her faith made her well because the blessings of the kingdom come to those who look to Jesus for the solutions to their problems, not because of any power of faith in itself.

January 30

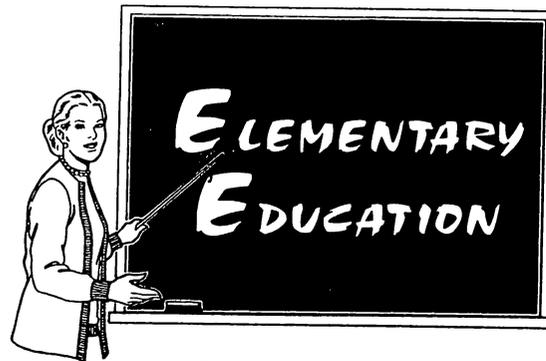
Read Mark 10:17-22.

The rich young ruler is an example of one who wanted to do things his own way and not by faith. At this point in his life, he had apparently not yet received the gift of faith prerequisite to true salvation. Yet we see that the Scripture says that Jesus loved him. Whatever the final outcome or who this man may have been, the lesson is that we cannot try to work our way into heaven or into the blessings of time and eternity. It simply cannot be done. If we have not true saving faith, there is no hope. Of course all the elect will be given grace by the Spirit to trust and be justified and then want to do those things the law requires by His grace. But, the point here is that mere human strength and effort is not enough. Jesus told him to go sell all things because Jesus knew that the man's heart was not right and that such a request to follow the tenth commandment to not covet would be too much for him. Where are we before the Lord and Savior of His people? We must examine ourselves to see if we are truly His also.

January 31

Read Proverbs 3:5-6.

This is the capstone of our meditations. Here we have the wonderful admonition of the Scriptures in all that we do in the coming hours and days and years and ages of our lives. We cannot go forward in our own strength. We lean on Him and trust in His Word for our guidance in life and holiness. We must examine ourselves daily to see if we are truly living for Him and not leaning on our own understanding. It is a constant struggle but not without hope or without the strength of the Holy Spirit. For young people especially this is a hard thing to do. We want to live our lives and have our fun and yet have the blessings of the covenant. We cannot live on both sides of the fence. We must make a commitment to the truths here laid down and we must do that publicly for His glory and kingdom.



By Rhonda Gritters

RING!!!! 8:05 A.M. the students file in. Lockers slam. News is shared with fellow classmates. As teachers, we look on, listen to yesterdays stories, or help students. A lot of times you hear stories about pets, family members, or news about Iowa—since I am from that state, they love to come up with any information about Iowa. This is all before class actually begins. Once in the classroom, the day begins. Devotions start off the day followed by the subjects you must teach.

A lot of lesson plans must be prepared in advance. Papers have to be graded; materials are photocopied off; notes are written; things are written on the board. So, why become a teacher? It sounds like a lot of hard work. Is it because the school day is so short? After all, school only runs from 8 or 9 A.M. until 3 P.M. or so. Don't forget that we also are allowed three months off during the summer. PLUS all of our holiday vacations! WOW—only nine months of work!

I would hope that you would not enter the profession of teaching with these ideas in mind. Teaching takes dedication, patience, and a willingness to work hard. As teachers, we have a goal to instruct our children all the subjects, doing so through the Holy Bible. We must “teach our children in the fear of the Lord.” This is a great calling and not one to take lightly. I Corinthians 12:28 states, “And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles...” Teachers are a model. They must witness in word and in deed that their life is God-centered, not only in school but also in the community. As teachers, we have a calling to help the students recognize their God-given abilities and gifts for the Kingdom of God.

There will be times when we will be tried or have some disagreements. There will be teacher

meetings or committees that you will serve on. Children will not have their work handed in on time or forget an assignment. They will cause hurt to one another and we have to deal with those situations. Students of all abilities will be in our classes and we have to work with them. Busy, busy, busy!

As a teacher, you can set your own classroom schedule. We love to sing in the mornings and can usually generate a lot of volume that always sends chills down my spine. We have story time and art. The kids love to have gym. A lot of joy is seen in the faces of the students.

Why be a teacher? We have a love for children. Teachers try to guide the students in developing their talents. I always tell them that they never know what they can do until they at least try and then remember to “do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men,” Colossians 3:23b.

We also have the fellowship of other teachers. Teachers are always willing to offer advice when needed. Ideas are shared. Respect of others is seen. We share in each others' joys and burdens. Teachers must learn to live as responsive disciples of Jesus Christ.

No matter what field you choose to enter remember one thing. Ephesians 4:1b says this: “I beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.” Do you think about being a teacher someday? Call the school nearest you and ask to visit it a couple of days. It would be great to see a teacher in action and then you might be able to get a slight understanding of what is all involved in becoming a teacher. I enjoy it!!

Rhonda is a teacher at Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, Michigan and is a member of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan.

Engineering

by John Huizenga

The first thing which often comes to mind when engineering is mentioned as an occupation is "train operator." Perhaps it is because children are often fascinated by trains and everyone knows that the operator of a train is the engineer. Years ago the task of operating and supervising the operation of big engines in boats or trains was more prominent than it is today. Today an engineer does a lot more than scamper around machinery making sure everything is oiled properly.

Engineering is the science concerned with putting scientific knowledge to practical use. The engineer, for example, takes the scientific theory that electricity can be used to make light, and he sets out to make a light-bulb which will actually change electricity into light. The engineer needs to have an interest in mathematics, science, and theory, but also an interest in applied manual skills. Some engineers are better with the mathematics and theory and therefore have a more scientific bent, whereas others are better at putting ideas into practical uses and therefore are of a more technological bent. The balance between theory and practical is about even in engineering but generally the strict engineer emphasizes mathematics and theory more than the practical.

Engineering does require a college education. Those who are more interested in the practical tend to go to the trade school and not college. When you get to college, you will discover that there are many different branches of engineering such as electrical, mechanical, civil, biomedical, chemical, and even architecture and technical writing. You will have to study a good deal of mathematics, chemistry, and physics. It is a lot of work, but well worth it. The actual jobs to which this training will lead you range from designing tooth brushes and farm machinery to medical equipment and space shuttles. Civil engineering has to do with things ranging from designing dams and roads to managing the cleaning up of chemical spills.

If you go to a secular college, you will discover that the primary philosophy behind engineering is to make the world a better place to live. This philosophy has even affected Christian colleges where you may find the idea that the goal is to subdue the earth in such a way that heaven will be attained on earth. As a believer, however, you are a pilgrim and stranger on this earth. Your goal is spiritual and not earthly, but this does not mean you can't be an engineer. You are called to use your talents for the service of the church and the kingdom of heaven. We subdue this earth and make it comfortable only in so far as it furthers the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth. When the Word of God reaches every nation, then Christ will return and take us into the new heavens and earth.

Your fundamental concern in seeking an occupation must be the church. The church preaches the Word, and sends missionaries to the ends of the earth. The church needs men and women who do all they can to use their talents for the kingdom of God. God has used engineers to make roads, airplanes, ships, and telephones which are used by the church. The church also needs money in order to establish schools and preach the gospel. Engineers generally make a very good living and are able to put much more in the collection plate than others. They are expected to put more in the plate because there are poor who are unable to give much and serve the church in other ways.

If you have the necessary gifts I would encourage you to become an engineer. Expect to work hard in college. If you are willing to work hard, and your goal is the service of the church, then I would also encourage those who are young men to consider the work of the ministry. In all your considering, come first to God in prayer. Seek first the kingdom of God and you will be content whether you become an engineer or go to work in a factory.

John is a member of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.

HAPPY NEW YEAR

“Happy New Year!” ring the words
 So glibly from our lips.
 “Have a good day!”—“Have a good year!”
 Do we mean those quips?
 I suppose that in our minds
 We wish the brother well,
 Hoping that in peace and safety
 He this year may dwell.

And yet as each new year unfolds
 The end draws ever near;
 The day when Christ comes on the clouds
 In judgment to appear.
 Yes, *that* will be a happy year,
 'Twill be a happy day
 When earth-bound sinners leave this land
 To live with Christ always!

So, until then, greet brethren true
 And wish them happiness—
 The happiness of saints of God
 Who wait for Him to bless.
 With happiness we even walk
 Through pain and grief and woe.
 Our happiness is based on this:
 God walks with us, we know.

Then with our hands enfolded
 Within the hand of God
 We walk the way of holiness—
 The path our Saviour trod.
 We flee the evil motive,
 The sinful act and word;
 We pray, we thank, we praise, we sing
 To glorify our Lord.

Thelma Westra

Answers to P.R. Congregations, page 10.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Loveland, Colorado | 14. Byron Center, Michigan |
| 2. Lynden, Washington | 15. Faith, Jenison, Michigan |
| 3. Doon, Iowa | 16. Randolph, Wisconsin |
| 4. Covenant, Wyckoff, New Jersey | 17. Trinity, Houston, Texas |
| 5. Grace, Standale, Michigan | 18. Bethel, Elk Grove Village, Illinois |
| 6. First, Grand Rapids, Michigan | 19. Hudsonville, Michigan (on Berchtree) |
| 7. First, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada | 20. Hull, Iowa |
| 8. Peace, Lynwood, Illinois | 21. Hope, Redlands, California |
| 9. Edgerton, Minnesota | 22. First, Holland, Michigan |
| 10. Kalamazoo, Michigan (on Green Acre Drive) | 23. Southeast, Grand Rapids, Michigan (on Cambridge) |
| 11. Grandville, Michigan | 24. South Holland, Illinois |
| 12. Hope, (Walker) Grand Rapids, Michigan | 25. Georgetown, Bauer, Michigan |
| 13. Southwest, Grandville, Michigan (on Ivanrest) | 26. Pella, Iowa |
| | 27. Immanuel, Lacombe, Alberta, Canada |

Pre-Seminary Major

by Nathan Brummel

One possible college major is pre-sem. The word 'pre-sem' confuses some people. It merely means that the person is on a pre-seminary program of study. Similar to this is the word 'pre-med' which is the college major that prepares a student for going to medical school. We will look at the pre-sem major from two points of view. First, we will look at what being a pre-sem student means academically. Secondly, we will examine what the call to the ministry involves in order that young men might have some direction when they think about this issue.

Pre-sem is the course of studies that prepares one for going to seminary. It is true that few if any students at the Protestant Reformed seminary have ever graduated with a pre-sem major. But at college it is quite an extensive course of studies and because of this it is almost considered a major. In the past some graduates of our seminary had their pre-seminary education through our seminary, so that would be a clear instance of a pre-sem course of studies. But the recent college graduates who have attended our seminary do have a major in a specific field. Among the majors represented are history, philosophy, Latin, theology, English, and psychology. These show that a pre-sem student can major in any field that he wants. I have a friend who majored in math, something that does not seem specifically geared towards preparing you for seminary. But since this was Sinclair Ferguson's (a prominent Westminster professor) major that did not deter my friend.

So a pre-sem course of study will involve the student getting a major in a specific field, in addition to which he has to finish pre-seminary core classes. These count up to a lot of classes. For example one has to take 12 classes in foreign languages which includes four semesters each of Latin, Dutch, and Greek. In addition to this he must take three English, two western civilization, three philosophy classes, including two on the history of philosophy, and a few additional classes. These classes must somehow be worked into one's liberal arts degree so that one can finish up in four years of college. It is very difficult to do this. At least half

of the seminary students do not have their pre-sem cores completed upon arrival. When you realize that most colleges have a large number of core classes, in addition to which you need 10-12 classes for your major, and need probably 15 more classes for your pre-sem core, you realize that the college career of a pre-sem student is quite busy. For example, I took summer classes and still have not fulfilled my core yet.

These are the academic requirements which a young man who is interested in entering the ministry can expect. Now I want to talk about what the correct reasons might be for entering the pre-sem program. Louis Berkhof in his *Dogmatics* discusses how God calls ministers of the gospel to their office. He states that there are two parts to the calling. First there is the internal calling and secondly there is the external calling. The internal calling is what is relevant for our discussion. The external calling refers to the calling by the local church whereby they call a minister to be their pastor, and then the pastor is ordained by the church through the laying on of hands.

The internal calling is what occurs subjectively in the mind of the person who feels himself called. A young man experiences the internal calling when he believes that God is impelling him to enter the ministry. God gives him such a love for Himself and for His kingdom's cause that he feels that he must enter into the ministry. God shows him that there is a great need in the church for pastors and he is inwardly convinced that God is calling him to this high office. The young man is and must be interested in God's glory and in the promotion of His glorious gospel.

Unfortunately some young men seem to think that the call to enter the ministry is something that is mystical or involves a special revelation. They seem to expect God to speak directly from heaven to them in the same way that Jesus appeared to Saul as he was on the way to Damascus. But this is not the case. God does not use an extraordinary means to call young men to the ministry. He uses the usual and wonderful means of speaking to them by His Word through the Spirit. In our own

churches I have come across young men who seem to expect something almost miraculous. Some of these men seem to have the spiritual gifts necessary for the ministry, but they act as if they are waiting for an extraordinary happening or a momentous event to occur before they will commit themselves to seek the ministry. God does not use astonishing events to call a young man. Rather it is by the study of the Word of God and by prayer that the young man must seek to know whether God has called him.

Berkhof states two other aspects of the internal calling. He says that the young man must be convinced that the spiritual gifts that are necessary for the pastorate are present. It is quite useless for a young man to enter a pre-sem program if he does not have certain gifts. The academic gifts necessary to do well in school play an important role. If one was never interested in studying or reading then it is quite clear that they do not have the gifts necessary. If the young man as a student could not get good grades in school, then he has a serious roadblock before him when it comes to pursuing a pre-sem course of studies. But by saying this I do not want to give any support to a lot of young men, who have the ability to get good grades, but yet claim that they could not handle the foreign languages that are necessary for going to seminary. The fact of the matter is that anybody can learn a language. It just comes down to how long it will take, and how much struggling you will have to go through to learn it.

But spiritual gifts are also necessary for one to know that they have the call. Not only are they "also necessary," but they are the fundamental gifts that are necessary. No man who is unspiritual can think that God is calling him to the ministry. If a young man is into partying, extra-marital sex, or any other grievous sins it is quite clear that he is not pre-sem material. In the past many unspiritual men have entered the pastorate. The church has been plagued by men who enter the church out of personal greed. This kind of men seek the honor and the praise of men. They seek positions of power. God has no use for such young men in his vineyard.

Rather God calls young men who have a heart for prayer. He seeks young men who in their prayers cry out in praise of their Saviour. God calls to the ministry young men who are continually dependent in prayer upon Him. God does not need men who think that they can do things themselves; such men are utterly useless to him in the ministry. So a life of faith is necessary for a young man who wishes to preach the holy gospel.

The final element that Berkhof gives for what the internal calling must involve is that the young man must "experience that God is paving the way to the goal" (p. 192). If one feels the call and seems to have the gifts but God is closing the door to him, then the young man must not think that God is necessarily calling him. It might be that God is indicating that it is not His will that the young man seeks the ministry. For example, God might do this by not providing enough money for the young man to go to college.

Why is it important for young men who are close to graduating from high-school or are in college to consider the ministry? It is because the Christian church is in great need today of good pastors and missionaries. Young men must seriously consider entering the ministry. If he feels that God might be calling him, he must not take this lightly. He must seriously examine what God would have him to do with his life. If a young man does feel called, then he must analyze this call in order to ascertain whether his desire to enter the ministry is legitimate. Is it based on the correct reasons and motives?

But he must not just be self-centered and look at himself. He must also look at the state of the church today. He must look at the crying need for missionaries. Throughout the third world the church is growing in huge spurts, but preachers are needed to build up these new churches. In the churches at home in the United States it is quite clear that conservative Bible believing preachers are at a premium. The seminaries around the country are turning out graduates but the vast majority deny the authority of the Scriptures and have a weak-kneed evangelical theology.

When I was at Calvin College I realized for the first time the radical decline of orthodox Christianity in Reformed circles. I would never have suspected the way of reading the Bible that was taught in the Religion Department. The evangelical Reformed faith as it comes to expression in our creeds is under heavy fire. It is safe to say that the traditional Reformed faith is quickly disappearing in the large Reformed Churches. Therefore in these last days when the battle is becoming greater than ever, when the truth is in a smaller minority than ever, the church is in need of young men who will step forward to defend and promote the truth. Young men who are considering the ministry must bear in mind the great importance that is assigned to the preaching of the gospel in Reformed churches.

It must be remembered that the preaching of the word is the chief means of grace. By the preaching God calls his people to repentance and faith in

his Son. Paul writes concerning the primacy of preaching in Romans 10:14,15:

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!

Young men who feel called must see the need for preachers of the gospel and have the desire to

see men called out of darkness and into the gospel of Jesus Christ. They must delight in being used by God for the salvation of the elect. They must have a heart for lost souls. So young men must look to their own gifts and to the crying need in the church today when they consider entering the ministry. They must not self-centeredly consider the pastorate, but with true piety seek God's will in prayer and Bible-reading in order that God might be praised and His will accomplished.

Nathan is a member of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.

Guest Article

M Mathematics

by Michael Kortering

Newspapers, magazine, and journalists herald our generation as the information age. The rate of information available to consumers like you and me continually grows exponentially and there appears to be no end to this growth. Vast amounts of information are available at libraries, and through interlibrary loans one can obtain even the rarest books on the most obscure subjects. Cellular telephones, satellites, faxes, and certainly the Internet, increase the efficiency of locating and obtaining this information so that within seconds one can obtain an answer to almost any question.

Because of this spreading of information and the increased ease of obtaining it, many occupations have become specialized. Doctors, for example, no longer need to be thoroughly acquainted with the entire body, but can specialize in one area, such as the heart, lungs, hands, or feet. If there is a medical problem outside the expertise of a doctor, he can either communicate with another doctor or refer the patient to someone else. Lawyers, engineers, auto mechanics, and even theologians have followed the trend toward specialization. One simply can not begin to delve into the abyss of knowledge in a career field, and the only way to remain competent and competitive in this day and age is to become specialized. As a result, it is important not only for unbelievers, but also for young members of the church, especially young men, to get a

good education if they wish to financially support their families and the church in the coming generation. The idea that, "I never went to college, so my son or daughter doesn't have to go," simply is not valid.

Many are concerned about the heresies and ungodly ideologies taught at colleges, even Christian colleges, and for a good reason. One can hardly enter a modern biology classroom without being introduced to evolution, or a physics classroom and not hear the mention of the big bang. Although this is lamentable, I believe that a response of locking ourselves at home will have disastrous consequences not only now, but also in the future. As Christians, our justification for higher education lies both in our need to support our families and church in the future and our calling, as Christian soldiers, to fight the enemies of Christ, even in the classroom.

When you or your son or daughter considers what courses to take in college, I believe they should strongly consider mathematics, a subject too often overlooked. Mathematics, along with English and religion, is one of the few subjects which touches almost every other subject. It is the foundation of a good education. Mathematics is a tool employed by chemistry, physics, geology, biology, computer science, and business. One can study physics without a knowledge of geology, or business without knowledge of chemistry, but none of these can be

studied without mathematics. Thus, it is no coincidence that almost all standardized tests contain a section on mathematics. Along with English, mathematics is the only subject regularly tested on almost all standardized tests. Test writers did not choose a subject by pulling a name from a hat, and *voila*, mathematics is chosen. Rather, mathematics is vital for the study of many other subjects.

It has been my observation that too many people drop a study of mathematics too soon, and once the continuity is lost, the subject is lost. A student can study the history of World War II without a knowledge of the Crimean War, but the student who does not study algebra can not understand trigonometry or calculus.

An education, however, is much more than a tool to get a good job. An education can be used to expand one's horizons and give him a better understanding of God and His creation. Mathematics, for example, exhibits some of God's attributes better than anything else I know. Although a study of the mathematical concept of infinity leaves us with an incomplete picture of God's infinity, much like a physical study of the sun leaves us with an incomplete picture of God's glory, it nevertheless begins to open the door a crack for our finite and human minds to God's infinity. Infinity, or the addition of one number after another, produces the thought of

a number so large, so unimaginable, that it even surpasses the thought of sand particles on the beach or stars in the heavens.

Mathematics also poses the concept of precision and exactness. When writing English or performing a chemistry experiment, rules and laws can be fudged and glossed over with minimal consequences. The rules of mathematics, however, are firm and solid, and the rules which exist can not be changed and there is no deviation from the right way. I sometimes think of this as an analogy of God's law. We can make a small mistake somewhere in life, and if left uncorrected, can lead to disastrous results at the end. There is only one way of mathematical computation, and that is the right way. There is only one way of living in harmony with God, and that is God's way.

Whether one gets a job after high school or whether he pursues mathematics, English, or philosophy in college, is an individual decision each student must make. One way is not right and the other wrong. As the world changes and becomes more complex, creating an ever-increasing need for skilled workers, I encourage you to consider the talents God has given to you, and question whether you would be using them to the best of you ability by not going to college. To whom much is given, much will be required.

Correspondence

Responses to "A Church United"

Recently the "Cults" class at Covenant Christian High School, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, wrote responses to an article in the October 1995 Beacon Lights entitled "A Church United."

A few are published here with a "thank you" to all the writers who spent time to write. It was greatly appreciated.

This article addresses a very interesting point. Because of all the movements for church unity, the point is also important.

Jeff does well in pointing out what the Church really is and what its purpose is. Jeff uses the picture of a growing tree to explain how Christ's Church grows. He points out the unity of the Church is a spiritual unity. The Church of all ages is united in confession and in faith, not in a man-made organization.

Jeff does a good job of explaining that what the Holy Spirit reveals to the Church throughout history has always been the same. The Spirit is revealed in the same way to all of God's people. There are no differences in the message given.

Jeff uses substantial proof from Scripture and the Belgic Confession to support his points. This is good.

I am surprised by the quote from *The Banner*. The Christian Reformed Church is sliding so far as to say unity in "love" is more important than unity in doctrine?!

I do have one question with the article. This question is regarding missions. Christ said in the Great Commission to go into all the world and preach the gospel. I understand that the point of missions is not for unity of all beliefs. No mention

is made, however, of missions to gain others to Christ.

This is a valuable article and I am glad I read it.

MARK FEENSTRA

I read the article, "A Church United" by Jeffrey M. Kalsbeek. In this article, Mr. Kalsbeek tries to describe the modern movement in the modern day churches toward church unity. He begins by showing that true unity is not merely physical unity. True unity is unity with God in heaven. The church on earth is only an earthly manifestation of the heavenly church.

We must try to preserve the doctrines as laid out by Christ in His Word as best as we can. Even if doing so means separating ourselves from the church, as the PRC did with the CRC, or as the reformers did with the Roman Catholic Church. We must follow the true doctrine, even if the unity of the church is at stake. We must realize the primary purpose of the church is to preach true doctrine, and since uniting with other groups may cause our doctrines to be compromised, we must stay separate from other churches that differ from us in essential doctrines.

Mr. Kalsbeek points out that many churches argue the point of unity over the fact that we must be united to act effectively in mission work. Missions are a very important part of the duties of a Christian church, how else can God's elect learn about Him? But we must remember that it only damages the church to spread the gospel if we are spreading false doctrines.

ERIC PETROELJE

This article has many valuable points for the orthodox Christian to consider. An issue in many churches today is church unity. These churches want to overlook doctrinal differences and become one church in love.

The article is correct in explaining our Christian calling to seek peace as found in Matthew 5. However in our quest for peace, which goes hand-in-hand with unity, we may not ever compromise biblical truths. This would bring about a false church with false teachings.

The article also points out that those who seek to unify churches on earth overlook the fact that the Church (capital 'C') is already united in Christ Jesus. This spiritual unity is eternal and stronger than earthly bonds. The Church is one Body of Christ with all the saints of the past, present, and

future. This is comforting when we may think we are the only ones who humbly hold to the truth.

The article quotes another article in *The Banner* (3/6/95). That article says: ...unity in love, if not always unity in doctrine, is crucial if the church is to fulfill its mission to proclaim the gospel. What a horrible thing to say! "to proclaim the gospel"? A gospel of compromise and heresy. This is no gospel at all but another false church teaching false doctrine. We must not ever allow Christ's Most Holy Name to be dishonored.

It is extremely important that we never compromise doctrines. However this does not mean we must totally separate ourselves from other denominational churches. I know people from other churches, particularly at my place of work. In discussions with some of them religion does come up from time to time. I do not ignore the issue but enjoy discussing it. But some of the people I talk to say the difference doesn't matter, we're all going to heaven any way.

Debating in a loving but non-compromising way can and does strengthen one's faith. I can testify to this from personal experience. Many churches do not make up The Church of Christ but instead God takes saints from many churches to make His Church this is where the unity really is.

BRIAN ENSIN

Concerning the article, "A Church United", I totally agree. I believe that our churches and our faith are not to be compromised so that we might unite with other beliefs. Some might say that this article suggests that only Protestant Reformed believers are saved. I truly did not see this article to be implying that. This article merely shows how very wrong it is to unite with other churches.

I believe that there are many reasons why we cannot unite with other churches. We're not united with them and cannot be united with them because of doctrinal differences and life viewing differences. Those who want all churches to unite together, such as Promise Keepers, want us to show love and understanding for all views and faiths. As the writer noted, "this is not a calling to show love to people of different faiths only, but actually to show understanding for their beliefs, erroneous or not." This article has given me a chance to think about and explain the error of groups like Promise Keepers and the error of an united front with those who believe differently and whose faith is not based on the Bible.

ALISA OPHOI

Goodness (Part 7)

by Connie Meyer

Julie stood still and listened carefully. What was that sound coming from upstairs? It sounded like somebody was crying softly. Should she investigate? Without a sound she tiptoed halfway up the stairs. Yes, somebody was definitely whimpering. She boldly continued up the rest of the way and around the corner.

"Lydia!" exclaimed Julie with true concern when she saw her little cousin crouched in the corner of the hallway.

But the little girl didn't even look up at Julie. She simply could not stop sniffing.

Julie was alarmed. Lydia's parents would be gone for a whole week, and during that time Lydia was to stay at Julie's house. Both cousins had looked forward to the visit, but now what was wrong?

Julie gently put her arm around Lydia's shaking shoulders. "What's the matter, Lydia? It's okay," she said as soothingly as she could.

"I-I just want to go home," cried Lydia.

Julie didn't know what else to do, so she kept trying to comfort her cousin. Julie had been homesick before, too, so she knew how awful Lydia felt. But then Julie had an idea. "I'll be right back," she said.

Within minutes Julie returned with a glass of ice water and a cool washcloth. "Would you like something cold to drink? and let me pat your face with this cloth. There. Do you feel a little better?"

Lydia nodded.

"C'mon, let's find my Mom. Maybe she'll be able to help."

* * * * *

Later that week Julie was sitting by her desk, staring out the window, and feeling rather lonely. Just then Mom walked in and sat on the bed next to her.

"I'm proud of you, Julie. You really helped Lydia through her stay here, and you didn't let your disappointment over her leaving early make her feel bad. You put *her* feelings first."

Julie still missed Lydia, but she was glad that Lydia was where she could be happy again.

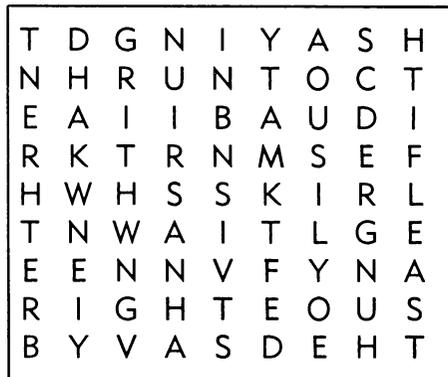


Find the underlined words of the text in the puzzle below:

"Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty and gave thee drink?"

And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

Matthew 25:37, 40



Connie is the mother of 5 children and attends Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.

Church News

Dear Readers,

Many of you have expressed a likeness for the "Church News" that used to appear in the back of the Beacon Lights. The staff is once again going to begin printing the "Church News." We have enlisted the help of the Young People's Societies of every church in this matter. Each society has been contacted and was asked to send in their bulletins for us to compile the news from. We hope to print the news as promptly as we are able. If for some reason you do not see news from your church and would like to, see your Young People's Society. We hope that you profit from the Beacon Lights and hope that you will enjoy this addition to the magazine.

*Sincerely,
The Beacon Lights Staff*

Melinda DeMeester