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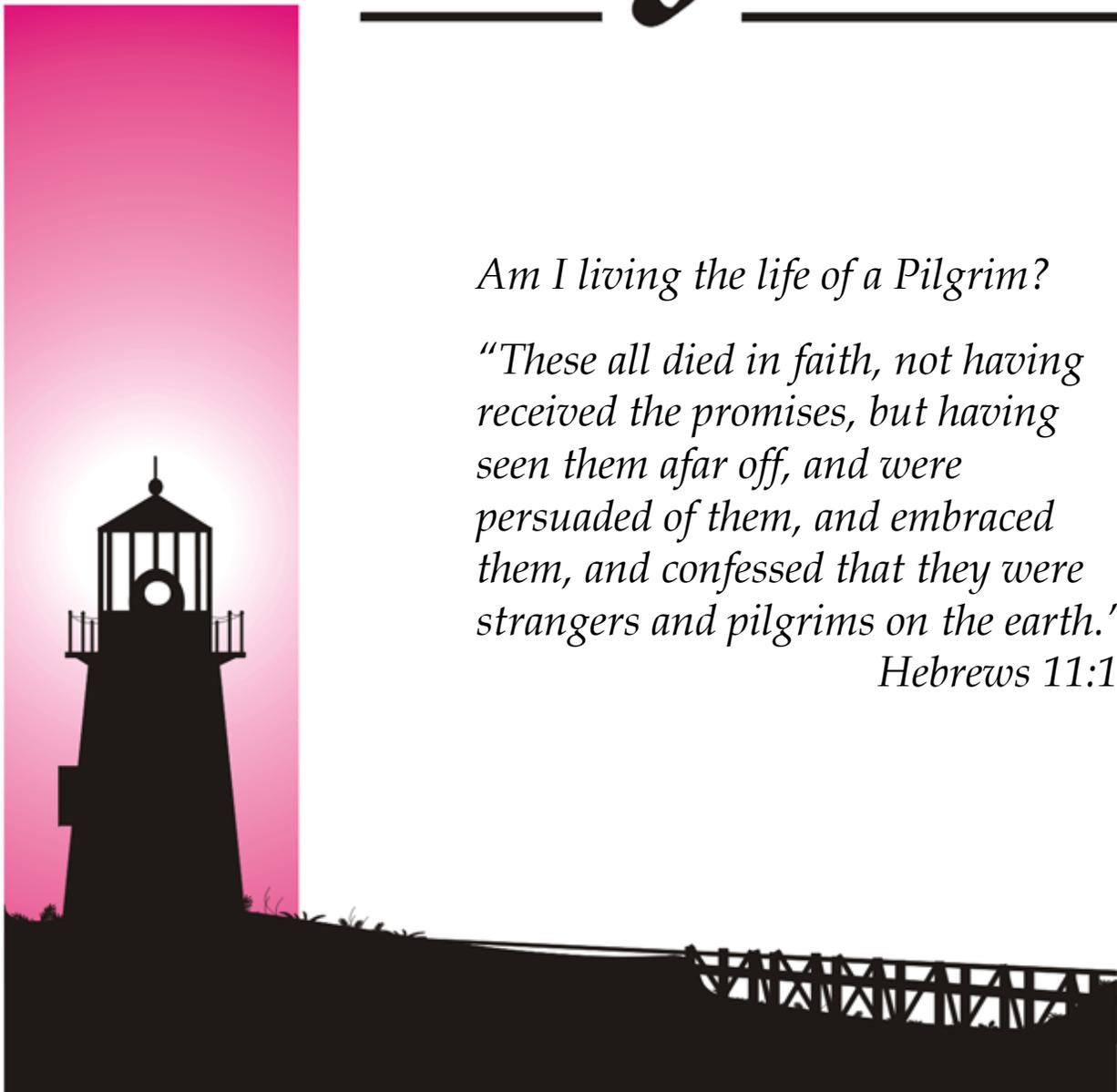
# Lights

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*Am I living the life of a Pilgrim?*

*“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”*

*Hebrews 11:13*



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# Departing to a Desert Place



## Long Before the Crack of Dawn: The Importance of Personal Prayer

by Brian Huizinga

**W**hat is true of the life of every young adult, and every child of God of any age for that matter, is that we are all busy, very busy. There are seemingly more things to do than time to do them. Another school year looms before us and promises to demand our time. Strikingly, what is true of our situation is not all that different from the circumstances of Jesus' earthly ministry. In fact, not only were his works more important than most of our endeavors, but Jesus was busier than we will ever be. In such conditions it is especially important that we make time to pray. Jesus did. Amid everything else he did, Jesus made time for private, personal prayer. That comes out in Mark 1:35, "And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed." Jesus' own life teaches us the importance of personal prayer. Let no one suppose the pace of his life is so frantic that to pray would be unreasonable and too demanding. Personal prayer is necessary and a busy life only increases our need for it.

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**Jesus was busier than we will ever be. In such conditions it is especially important that we make time to pray. Jesus did.**

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Nowhere in Mark 1 is there explicit reference to the importance of prayer, nevertheless verse 35 in its context reveals that personal, private prayer is vitally important. Read Mark 1 and you will be impressed by how busy our Savior was in his earthly ministry. Consider what Jesus was involved in during the course of one day. He entered into the synagogue and taught so that the people were astonished at his doctrine (vv. 21, 22). Jesus was not simply reading from the Old Testament like any scribe could do, but he was preaching new doctrines—blood, sweat, and tears kind of teaching that drained a man. Then he cast an unclean spirit out of the man who was ridiculing him, and again the people were astonished at his authority (vv. 23-27). The crowds were gathering and Jesus' fame was spreading. Immediately, Jesus left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew where he healed the mother of Simon's wife (vv. 29-31). By this time it was evening—when the normal man retires for the day and rests, but not Jesus—and the whole city had gathered at the door (v. 33). They brought "all that were diseased" and those "possessed with devils" (v. 32) and Jesus healed them. Imagine the commotion and chaos of a house surrounded by demon-possessed men, the paralyzed, those coughing, groaning, and crying out in pain, the lame, deaf, dumb, and blind. This was certainly not a scene one looks forward to after a long day of work. Into the late hours of the night Jesus was busy about the work the Father sent him to do (works of mercy the Father sent him to do even on the Sabbath (v. 21)). He must have labored to the point of exhaustion.

To emphasize the point and make sure that we do not overlook the very active ministry of Jesus, Mark recorded this history, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, using a little Greek particle that gets translated into the KJV as “immediately, anon, forthwith, or straightway.” Reread the history of Mark 1 and notice all the appearances of these four particles each conveying the idea of Jesus immediately moving on from one thing to the next with not a moment to spare. Never was Jesus idle.

Then come the astonishing words of verse 35. Notice what Jesus did the morning after a long and arduous day of labor. He did not “sleep-in” or even sleep until sunrise. He arose early, literally “exceedingly early by night,” and went out to a solitary, or desert place and prayed. Jesus was all alone in the dark, quiet desert place where the throngs could not distract him. How very important prayer was for Jesus! If Jesus saw the need to get up early in the morning, leave the house and go to the desert to pray in peace, apart from any possible distraction, what a valuable lesson this is for us. Jesus is the model. His life is exemplary. How do you compare? Did you designate time for your own personal devotions this morning? Did you even pray this morning? The temptation for many is to set the alarm clock for the latest possible second in which one will have just enough time to race into the shower, grab a bite to eat, and fly off to school or work. Before one knows it, it is evening and there were so many things one wanted to do, but now the eyelids are heavy and the day is over. What about prayer? To be sure, we pray as families in the home, and in the school, and at many other occasions, but the Word of God is not satisfied. Did you pray today, by yourself, alone, just you and your God? God grant us the grace, for improvement and progress are always possible.

Why is personal, private prayer so important? What drove Jesus out into a desert place long before the crack of dawn? We can reflect on our own lives and look at what motivates us to frequency and fervency in prayer. Often the child of God, like David (Psalm 32), is burdened by the crushing weight of a particular sin and plagued in his conscience, so he is driven to pour out his soul before God in penitential prayer. Other times, when the giver and taker of life takes a loved one away, prayers are offered like never before. When an unforeseen disaster strikes and shakes the very foundations of our life we feel the need to pray often, in fact, even non-praying people start to pray. After the horrific flooding near Cedar Rapids, Iowa in early June, a local sheriff told the press, “We’re just kind of at God’s mercy right now so, hopefully, people that never prayed before this, it might be a good time to start, we’re going to need a lot of prayers” (A.P.). There are many situations in life that would propel us to the prayer closet for earnest beseeching of God. Yet, none of these pressing concerns moved Jesus to pray. What did? Surely Jesus recognized the need to pray to God for strength for all his labors but such prayers could have and would have been offered right along with each healing or teaching exercise. Why the dark, quiet desert when the others are fast asleep?

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**When two people love each other, there is a strong desire for fellowship. Fellowship is at the heart of love, and true fellowship is impossible without communication.**

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I submit to you that prayer was so important to Jesus because of what it was and what it meant for him. Prayer is the divinely appointed, holy, sanctified, means of covenantal communication between covenant friends. It is fellowship between God and man, between God and the man Jesus Christ. When two people love each other, there is a strong desire for fellowship. Fellowship is at the heart of love, and true fellowship is impossible without communication. That is not hard to understand. Suppose a young lady calls up her boyfriend and he is gone so she leaves a message for him to call her back. She waits, and waits, and waits. He has rec-league softball one night, he typically hangs out with his friends the next

night, and he needs to work on his car the following night. Soon half the week has passed and no call because he is preoccupied with other interests. You immediately respond: “Why, he doesn’t love her at all!” How much more is this not true of our relationship with God? Do you love God young people? Do I? Or are we like the young man so that our life is so busy we never find time to speak to our God in prayer, because in the end it’s really not so important to us. If we truly love God we will never neglect prayer because, like the psalmist, “there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee” (Psalm 73:25).

What drove Jesus out into the desert was his great love for God. Jesus craved the sweet, spiritual, covenantal fellowship of his heavenly Father and would not let his busy earthly ministry distract him from the object of his love. So demanding and time-consuming was his labor that the only way Jesus could escape distraction and engage in the vibrant prayer that brought him close to God was to get up before his disciples and settle in a desert place. Does our love for God motivate us to such measures? Does your “flesh and heart fail” apart from God? If so, you will go out into a desert place to be all alone with God in prayer. Get up early if you must. Find a “desert place”—a quiet room or outdoor locale of solitude. We must not squander the opportunity and privilege of grace granted to us by the eternal Son of God who was sent from the fellowship of the Triune God, became flesh, sacrificed his own life by shedding his blood, rose again, and ascended into heaven that we might have access to the Father by his Spirit. The norm for a young adult in 2008 seems to be the need to stay connected to everyone and everything through cell phones, Ipods, Facebook, etc. Let’s disconnect our connections for a time and find a desert place to draw near unto the God who first drew us to himself.

But notice this too: out of fellowship with God in prayer we draw strength and renewed vigor for the day that lies ahead. It is like a young woman engaged to be married to a man hundreds of miles away. She longs for that phone conversation in which she can speak to her beloved. Her long days in the office or behind the counter are endured in the hope of speaking to her fiancé. When the phone call comes she pours out her heart. Having retold all of the events of her life since they last spoke, and having heard his voice, she has her strength renewed. She is full of vigor, and zeal. Anticipation of the consummation of their relationship motivates her to press on with energy each day. The same is true for us in our relationship with God. We long for that day of perfect fellowship, but until then we draw our strength for the new day out of our fellowship with God in prayer. In the fellowship of prayer we draw nigh to God by utilizing all the elements of prayer we know so well. We praise his name, give him thanks, confess our sins, and make our requests known—especially grace and strength for our labors. Without private, personal prayer we become spiritually weak and begin to falter.

Be encouraged young people. When you begin your day in prayer by entering into covenantal fellowship with God the Father through the Spirit of Jesus Christ, you will be strengthened. God will give you grace sufficient, for another active, busy day of service in his kingdom and for his glory. That was true of Jesus. We read that Peter and the disciples followed after him and found him, saying, “all men seek for thee” (vv. 36, 37). Notice how Jesus does not respond: “Peter, have a little compassion would you? You saw how exhausted I was yesterday. You saw everything I did and what I had to endure. I need some time alone, some rest. Come back tomorrow.” Not so. Jesus responds, “Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, for therefore came I forth” (v. 38). “There is a world of darkness out there,” said Jesus, “that needs to see the light of God’s gospel, and this is what I came to do. Let’s go.” Praying to the Father encouraged Jesus and gave him a sense of commitment and determination. God will do the same to us.

Arise early! Go to the desert! Pour out your soul in fellowship. God will strengthen you and give you grace sufficient. Go forth in his service and strong in his might to conquer all evil and stand for the right in the home, in the school, in the workplace, and in all the busyness of life. ❖

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# Oh Be Careful Little Eyes What You See

By Lisa Kalsbeek

While the words to “Oh Be Careful Little Eyes” are rather simple in nature, in light of the previous verses of this song, it is easy to see that this song contains some rather profound truths, which we would all be wise to live by. Sadly, some things are more easily said than done; even such simple things as paying heed to what we look at, being careful where we go, and guarding our tongues against speaking evil. With our sinful human nature, these sins are by no means new. “And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat” (Genesis 3:6).

Sight quickly led Eve to sin, and today the visual temptations are stronger and brighter than ever. We are bombarded with all sorts of visual advertising, brain-washing, and selling and we need to be aware of the powerful effect this has on our lives. Because we use our eyes to understand the world around us, we can often let this sense control our other senses and affect our judgment.

Television takes up a vast amount of the average American’s visual input. The most recent figure from Nielsen Media Research, Inc. is 4 hours and 35 minutes per day, up three minutes from last year. Now, let’s add that up. That is 31½ hours every week (almost a second job!). That is also 5½ solid days per month and more than two whole months every year. By age 70 that is over 13 years watching television!<sup>1</sup>

Much of the same type of statistics can be applied to the internet. The internet, though, as opposed to the TV for the most part during daytime hours, does NOT have

enough filters to handle all the garbage that saturates it. A seemingly harmless video on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) could be pornography, but listed with other things because of the information loaded in its search engine. So instead of seeing a video clip, you could see pornography or very close to pornography with a simple click of a mouse. Even images on the well-known search engine Google are filled with sexual content, and anti-God glorifying material.

Books, bulletin boards, movies, newspapers—you name it—all contain massive amounts of advertising, with much emphasis on certain aspects of our sinful nature. After listening to a Public Storage ad, I was quite confused. The whole ad shows how much inflation has affected our culture. You can buy a tiny bit of gasoline for \$1. After a few examples of what \$1 can buy, it says that you can buy one month’s worth of storage for only a dollar. Why would we need storage if things are so expensive? Wouldn’t we have less, if the value of a dollar can buy less? That just emphasizes that we cannot discern good reasoning. Our American culture is obsessed with material goods; goods we can see: shiny, brand-new, and hyper-inflated by retailers just so they could make 18% profit on a sale. Are we truly any happier after purchasing one item? No. Since our flesh is governed by our covetousness, it is impossible from our nature’s point of view to be content.

All these types of media are not passive. There are distinct virtues and ideals emphasized by certain personalities which need utmost discernment by all audiences of every age. Parents must be able to see through what the media says. Oprah has been quoted as saying, “It is confidence in our bodies, minds and spirits that allows us to keep looking for new adventures, new directions

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.trashyourtv.com/>

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to grow in, and new lessons to learn—which is what life is all about.”<sup>2</sup> Granted, not all of Oprah’s quotes are so blatantly humanistic, however, her message is clear. Life is all about finding out who you are, and being confident in who you are. It’s not about a life of humility before God. It’s not a life striving for the good of your neighbor. It’s a life satisfying your own personal desires. Is that living out the antithesis?

Disney movies are clearly not a place where we should look for affirmation of our system of beliefs. Walt Disney himself said that “I would rather entertain and hope that people learned something than educate people and hope they were entertained.” The movies can stand for themselves as being not necessarily the BEST form of entertainment that godly men, women, and children should be filling their time with. Despite the many entertaining scenes, we are also subject to many vulgarities, sexual innuendos, new age philosophies, not to mention the idea of what our body image is supposed to be.

Movies by Walt Disney are not the only misleading source of technological brainwashing. “Television is altering the meaning of ‘being informed’ by creating a species of information that might properly be called disinformation. Disinformation does not mean false information. It means misleading information—misplaced, irrelevant, fragmented or superficial information—information that creates the illusion of knowing something, but which in fact leads one away from knowing.”<sup>3</sup> Neil Postman in this quote, shows us an important point. Given all the technology in our era and all the possible ways we can receive information, is that information in actuality all that relevant to what really matters? Is our God, the God of grace, the God of creation, the God of supreme holiness being honored through what we feast our eyes on at all times of the day?

I know many people who can list off massive amounts of statistics regarding the Cubs or White Sox. Still others can list the finalists of American Idol, or brag up the latest plot twist in a *Lost* episode. What is that saying about our priorities when those types of thoughts are constantly at the forefront of our minds? Shouldn’t we be concerned with the widows’ welfare in our church? Helping out our brother or sister in need? Do you worry about what clothes you wear to church more than your spiritual preparation for coming to the Supper of the Lord? Fel-

low believers, how do you spend your time after work? What types of books do you read? How much time do you spend in front of the television after school? These are but a few of the questions that we as elect children of God should be asking ourselves every day. Are we fighting the battle of faith? Or are we relaxing with the world and letting Hollywood entertain us?

It is so easy to point the finger at others who you know are deep in these types of sins. We all are drowning in this quick sand of materialism, individualism, commercialism, hedonism—you name it. We know from the Bible that we often promptly point out the mote in someone else’s eye, before looking at our own self. That’s the easy way out. It’s a lot more painful looking at our own sinful natures, and realizing the God knows all that we think about, and is judging us by our works. “And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire” (Matthew 18:9).

When we look to him and consciously fill ourselves with Light, our purpose in life should be made more clear, our comfort in life will be made manifest, and the continual struggle against our flesh will lead us to strive for heaven. Shouldn’t we all desire to be in the place where there is neither sorrow, nor crying, nor any more pain?

Heaven is our goal as believers. That means we have to walk the straight and narrow path. Over high hills, and down into deep valleys. Ours is a life of service to God. This means hardships, many hardships. This means spending more time with God in prayer, reading his word, understanding the doctrines that you stand for. It means reading God-glorifying books. It also means saying no to things though that may not be popular to your friends.

In all things, fellow believers, remember that God is watching us too. “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Prov. 15:3). He sees what we watch, read, and do. He knows the inner workings of our hearts. The road we walk is hard. Keep on fighting the battle of faith against the lust of the eyes all our days. ❖

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*Lisa is a member of Peace Protestant Reformed Church in Lansing, Illinois.*

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<sup>2</sup> *Oprah Magazine*, May 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Neil Postman; *Amusing Ourselves to Death*.

# The Antithesis and Witnessing (3)

by Prof. Herman Hanko

The key to understanding what Christian witnessing is all about is Peter's words in I Peter 3:15: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." It is the key also to understanding the relation between Christian witnessing and the antithesis.

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The text does not promote "door-to-door evangelism." Nor does it find real Christian witnessing in arbitrarily approaching people with questions concerning their salvation, or their personal relation to Christ. The text takes an entirely different approach and gives us a viewpoint to witnessing that we frequently forget.

We must always be ready for a defense of our hope when others ask us for an explanation of it. The text talks about an explanation or a defense of our hope. Ah, there we have the key to it all.

We are really talking about the antithesis. It was in an earlier article that I mentioned the fact that the antithesis is really the life of one who is a stranger in the world and, therefore, a pilgrim. Even from the viewpoint of our natural life here in God's creation, we always prefer home. We enjoy traveling, for there is always a certain allurement about foreign countries and exotic places on the globe, and to learn how other people live is always interesting even to the most jaded of travelers. But the fact remains that, as people are wont to say, "There's no place like home." Indeed, the longer one stays abroad, the more desirable home seems; and the nearer he comes to the date scheduled for his return, the more eager he becomes to start homeward. That kind of eagerness is increased greatly if the citizens in the country in which the stranger lives are hostile.

So it is with the Christian pilgrim. The Bible calls that longing to go home "hope." He *hopes* for the day he will be home. There is, after all, no place like home. The "hope" to be home becomes more evident in his life.

He may even pack his bags three or four days early; or, at least, begin to pack them. The Christian who hopes for the day he will be home will show this hope in his life. It will be impossible to hide. Others will say to him, "You are eager to go home, aren't you;" and he will have to admit it.

That hope that becomes evident in a Christian's life is what is called an antithetical life. The world about him becomes increasingly drab and dull; he understands more clearly that the "pleasures" of the world are not pleasant at all and cannot make a person happy and content. The accumulation of many possessions are a drag for a pilgrim who is on a journey—at best; and they tie him down so that he cannot travel at all, should they become too dear to him. In other words, he says "No" to sin and "Yes" to God. And that is what the antithesis is all about.

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The child of God is an odd character.

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But the more he lives out of hope, the more odd he becomes. To those with whom he comes into contact he seems extremely strange, somewhat titched in the head, unaware of reality and one who does bizarre things. The worldly people find it impossible to comprehend such conduct. He is not "out for money." Partying on weekends is all that many live for, but here is someone who longs for weekends so that he can go to church. To others drunkenness (along with its hangovers) is "fun" and we all are having a good time drinking our beers and becoming increasingly idiots who gradually sink into a stupor; but this guy over here drinks milk or pop, and that is about all, except maybe coffee. He stays married to his wife. He spends thousands of dollars on Christian education for his children when he could go on expensive vacations. He doesn't sit hours in front of the TV inviting the devil and the world's whores into his living room and mind. And you should see what he reads: dry, dull,

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incomprehensible books on things people talked about 500 years ago, but which no one reads today.

And so it goes. The child of God is an odd character. I was still going to college but working for the Grand Rapids Park Department with a fellow church member when such a simple thing as praying before we ate our lunch at noon elicited questions from our co-workers: What are you doing? Why do you do that?

These are the things that people notice. These are the things that are important to Scripture. Jesus defines letting our light shine before men as doing good works (Matt. 5:16) and not as accosting people in a hurry to get to work and inquiring about their salvation. Others are, in God's good pleasure, turned to Christ by the witness of our good works. That is, good works become the occasion for witnessing. The order is important: good works; then witnessing.

The man who goes door-to-door to hand out tracts and then goes home to his second "wife," because he divorced his first one does harm to the gospel, not good. The man who corners busy people to discuss salvation with them while disinterested in going to church or studying the Scriptures is a fake. The man who has religion on the tip of his tongue, but is a grasping, grabbing miser is worse than a fool. The man who makes a lot of noise about religion, but will not live the quiet, overlooked, dedicated life of humble service to God in the place God has placed him is useless in the kingdom.

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I recall that many years ago a man came to see my father, quite agitated. He claimed that he had been persecuted for Christ's sake because he had been fired from his job on a GM assembly line for witnessing. A bit of additional questioning brought out the fact that the man had been neglecting his work to go up and down the assembly line to talk to others about Jesus. He was told rather emphatically that such conduct was not witnessing,

but sinning against the fifth commandment; and that his witness was to be faithful, hard and diligent work in his place on GM's assembly line.

There are many in the last day who will tell the Lord, "Lord, Lord, did we not distribute tracts in thy name, and speak of our religion with every one we met?" But the Lord scathingly says to them, "I never knew you. Go away."

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When our "life-style" attracts the attention of others so that our good works become the occasion of our witness, such witnessing has the added advantage of witnessing to those whom God sets on our path.

We do not do missionary work in a willy-nilly way. We do not throw the names of fifty cities in a hat and then, blindfolded, pull one slip out to see where we are going to do missionary work. We make it a matter of principle to go where the Lord directs us by some obvious and unmistakable way. Many years ago when I was on the Domestic Mission Committee a request came to the committee from a man whose name I have forgotten. He asked the committee and our churches through the committee to take over the work of caring for churches he had established in Jamaica. The committee, inexperienced in that kind of mission work, leering of assuming responsibility for such an undertaking, and not convinced that our churches had the resources for Jamaican missions, tried desperately to decline the request. I no longer remember the chain of circumstances, but it soon became obvious to the committee and to Synod that we could not get out of the responsibility of doing the work even when we wanted to do so. That began many years of commitment to Jamaica. The Lord set Jamaica on our path. We could not get around it.

Something like this must happen also in Christian witnessing. God knows which people in this world ought to hear the witness of a Christian, for God has his own purpose in each case when the calling to witness is forced upon us. ❖

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*Prof. Hanko is professor emeritus of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary.*

# Are You Going to the Convention?

## Are you going to the Convention?

### Do you like to

- Take pictures
- Talk about the pictures
- Preserve the experience
- Serve in the kingdom of God

### Then you are wanted!

You would be of great value to the readers and staff of *Beacon Lights*. Your fellow conventioners will love looking back to see and remember the convention. Those who did not go enjoy seeing what you did and how the convention had an impact on you. The readers of *Beacon Lights* are very interested in your life as young citizens of the kingdom of God and your experiences at the convention. You can do this! We will help to make it as easy as possible for you.

### We need you!

You all have various gifts and abilities that would be very useful for us. Some just like to take tons of pictures. Maybe you have figured out how to post them on the internet. Keep in mind that in sharing the pictures, we NEED to have some sort of caption that tells what is going on.

It would be AWESOME if you would be able to put the whole convention together in a photo essay that describes the convention from start to finish with captions and brief paragraphs to tie it all together.

## Some suggestions and ideas:

Get a group of your friends together to help.

Collect quotes and pictures from others.

You could put them together on a Facebook or other internet site and let me know where I can go to download the pictures and captions for publication in *Beacon Lights*.

Use your cool little Ipod or mp3 player or whatever gadget you may have to make audio recordings.

### You can do this!

I know you can. Please send me a message on email or give me, John Huizenga, a call. [edi-tor@beaconlights.org](mailto:editor@beaconlights.org) (920) 326-6186. I would be very happy to hear that you might be able to help out in some way. Our readers would be grateful as well.

So, once you've collected all sorts of cool things like pictures, captions, recordings, or whatever, how does it get published in *Beacon Lights*?

Easy!

Just send me a message or give me a call.

I will take care of it.

Just take lots of pictures, or collect pictures from your friends. If you have posted your collection on the internet somewhere, just let me know where they are. If you can put your pictures and captions on a CD or jump drive, great!

**Thanks for your help.**

**John Huizenga**

# Watching Daily At My Gates

## The Song of Zion

A Psalter-Psalm Devotional of Praise to Our Sovereign, Covenant God

(Reprinted from August/September, 2000)

by Skip Hunter

### August 4 Read Psalm 147:1-11

Psalm 147:1-3 We continue with the group of Psalms which exhort us to praise Jehovah. These three verses have three parts. First of all, we are exhorted to praise Jehovah. This should be our goal with anything and everything that we do. Secondly we are told that the praise of Jehovah is beautiful. It must be beautiful. If it is not, it is not Jehovah's praise. Of course our praise is only beautiful through the blood of Christ. Finally we are told the reason for our praise. We must praise him because of the great salvation he has given to the church and its individual members. Our covenant God cares for every member no matter what trouble they may be in. He cares for all those for whom the world, and sadly enough even the church, does not care. Let us praise our great God for his care for us. Sing Psalters 402:1 and 403:1.

### August 5 Read Nahum 1:1-7

Psalm 147:4-7 There is contrasting language in these four verses. Can you find it? First of all in verses four and five the Psalmist makes several statements about God's greatness. Our God is the creator of the universe—even of the multitude of the stars. We may think that their number is infinite. It is not! Only God is infinite. The multitude of the stars only gives us a small picture of his infinity. Then this great God who has created all things cares for the meek. That is the contrast. The greatness of Jehovah over against the meekest of men. This lifting up is salvation for those meek people. Notice two other truths in these verses. The Creator is also the Saviour. Take away creation and salvation goes away as well. Secondly not only is election spoken of in verse six but reprobation as well. Let us be thankful unto our creator God who saves us from our sins. Let us do this with the song he has given to us. Sing Psalters 402:2 and 403:2.

### August 6 Read Matthew 6:24-34

Psalm 147:8-9 We continue with an exposition of who God is. He is the One who causes all kinds of weather to come upon the earth. God rains, blows, snows, etc. It is not the chance happening of weather patterns or air masses. Each weather condition has his fingerprint upon it. If drought is drying up the farmers' crop now, it is his good work. If floods carry away our houses, it is by God's design. If we are enjoying weather that we like; this, too, comes from God and is a reason that we must praise him. Not only does he give to us weather, he cares for all of his creatures. Every animal upon earth is in his hands. Because he does this, we can be confident that he will care for us in all situations of

life. Let us pause and praise the Lord for such wonderful care. Sing Psalters 402:3.

### August 7 Read Psalm 147:1-11

Psalm 147:10-11 Man is quick to boast over his accomplishments. In the upcoming summer Olympics we will witness great boasting about man and his accomplishments. Advertising is full of man and his goodness. What does God think about all this? Reread verse ten for the answer. It means nothing to him. What is his pleasure? God delights in those that fear Jehovah. Young people, what do you think about day by day? What God-glorifying activities are you going to take part in tonight, tomorrow, or the next day? To praise God we must glorify him. We may never take delight in ourselves, but only in his wonderful work of salvation. Let us fear Jehovah and hope in his mercy alone. Let us do this in every activity in which we may take part. Sing Psalter 403:3.

### August 8 Read Psalm 147:12-20

Psalm 147:12-14 The last several verses focused on God's care for his people as individuals. Now we see God's care for his church. As we prepare for the Sabbath, do we have a care for the body of Christ? Are we thinking about the members? Are we physically helping those who need our help? Do we bring the needs of the members before God's throne of grace in our prayers? He has cared for his church. We must imitate that care as best we can in this life. And we must praise him for caring for that church of which he has made us living members. Sing Psalter 402:4.

### August 9 Read Job 38:22-30

Psalm 147:15-18 Today's verses are an expansion upon the truth first stated in verse eight. Take a minute and reread that verse. Notice how God carries out his desires upon the earth. He does this by his Word. This is the truth of Genesis 1 and John 1. All things happen not by chance but by his Word. This Word is Christ. Christ was present at creation. Through Christ creation was carried out. This is the same Christ who died upon the cross to save us from sin. This is the powerful Christ who bore the wrath of God during those hellish hours upon the cross. You do not think Christ is powerful enough to create? You think he needs millions of years to accomplish all that is on the earth? If you think that, then your Christ is not powerful enough to save you from sin. What do you think about the Word, people of God? Are you praising the Maker of heaven and earth? Sing Psalter 402:5.

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## **August 10 Read Psalm 147:12-20**

Psalm 147:19-20 The psalmist continues with the idea of the Word. Here the idea is more toward the fact of election and salvation. What a comfort to know that we are chosen by the grace of God and not because of anything we have done. We can find the idea of the covenant in these two verses as well. There are definitely two kinds of people in this world—those who are chosen to experience the favor of God and those who are not. People of God, are you thankful for this truth? Do you live this truth? Do you praise God for this truth? As we go throughout our work week, let us do so in the knowledge that we are the people of God and must praise him in and through all of our lives. Sing Psalter 402:6.

## **August 11 Read Psalm 114**

Psalm 148:1-3 In this Psalm, which again calls us to praise God, we see an emphasis on God's works in his creation. Summertime is traditionally a time in which many people can and do spend more time in that creation. What do you experience, people of God? Young people, what are your thoughts about the outdoors? Do we stop and contemplate the various attributes of God that are shown to us in nature? Every facet of creation is called to praise God. Just as we must praise him in everything that we do; so, too, this is the calling of creation. Just as we anxiously await the coming of Christ, so does all of the creation. Let us look around us and see the wonderful works that God has wrought, and then let us break forth into the singing of his praise. Sing Psalters 404:1 and 405:1.

## **August 12 Read Hebrews 11:1-6**

Psalm 148:4-6 God's work of creation is not a temporary work. Oh, this world as we know it will be destroyed by fire at the end of time, but the new heavens and new earth will continue to reflect the everlasting goodness of our covenant God. Are we looking for this time? Or are we living lives that expect this present world to continue for ever? God's Word and works are unchangeable. What a beautiful and comforting thought that is. We need not fear what may happen to this earth, because a better home has been promised to us by the unchangeable God. Even the body that we have now will be replaced by a much better one. In our new homes and new bodies we will perfectly praise the Creator of this temporary place. People of God, who are pilgrims on this earth, praise the Lord. Sing Psalters 404:2 and 405:2.

## **August 13 Read Isaiah 43:14-21**

Psalm 148:7-8 In our reading for today we see God's word to Israel through his prophet Isaiah. That word is one of rebuke, but also hope. Israel was rebuked for not following the paths that God had originally set forth at creation. In the passage in Isaiah as well as in our text for today we see that the creation will honor God. But God's own people do not at times. What do we do? Do we observe from nature the wonder works of God, and then do we follow them, or ignore them? God's people were taken into captivity for ignoring God and his commandments. What about us? There is hope as well, because we see that God has created a new way, the way of the cross for us. Let us be thankful and praise the Lord for this goodness. Sing Psalters 404:3 and 405:3.

## **August 14 Read Isaiah 44:21-28**

Psalm 148:9-10 These two verses continue the lesson on God's sovereignty that we have been observing in this Psalm. As the reading in Isaiah shows us, God is sovereign over all. In Isaiah we see that he is sovereign over our salvation, his creation, and the world of wicked men. Heathen kings like Cyrus have to obey God's will. As our nation elects new leaders this fall, are we aware of this truth? Do we realize that this is part of our salvation? The doctrine of God's sovereignty should be very comforting to the people of God. Do we bow to it in our daily lives? Do we see it in the working out of history? God is sovereign, and we are under his care from now until death or Christ's return. Sing Psalter 405:4.

## **August 15 Read I Timothy 2:1-8**

Psalm 148:11-12 In yesterday's devotional I alluded to the rulers bowing before God. Today's verse bring this truth home for us. God gathers his people from all classes of men and from every race. All kinds of people are commanded to praise Jehovah. As Christians, we sometimes shake our heads at the actions of those whom God has placed in authority over us. But we have two commands concerning that authority. First of all, we must obey them (Romans 13). Secondly, we must pray for the salvation of those rulers whom God has elected from all eternity. We must also see from these verses the necessity of each member of our families praising Jehovah. Our children must use the songs of Zion at home and in church to praise our covenant God. Sing Psalters 404:4 and 405:5.

## **August 16 Read Philippians 2:1-11**

Psalm 148:13 God's name is great! Of that there can be no doubt. Do a word study on the word name as it refers to God. You will find many places in Scripture where this truth is expressed. We open our worship services with the words taken from Psalm 124, "Our help is in the name of the Lord..." Do we glorify that name? Do we give proper praise to it? Quite often we will work hard that our names be not defamed. Do we work that hard to keep God's name holy? Are we jealous towards his glorious name? What about it, young people, do you take God's name in vain? Do you say nothing when your friends take his name in vain? God's name should be precious to us. Let us take great pains to glorify it and praise him. Sing Psalter 405:6.

## **August 17 Read Psalm 148**

Psalm 148:14 This final verse of this Psalm gives reasons why we should praise the name of the Lord. Those reasons can be summed up very simply: he has done great things for us. Are we constantly aware of those great things? Sometimes when we see a storm or witness a birth, we say that God is truly great. But what about some things which we may take for granted? What about every bite of food that we eat? What about every breath of air that we breath? What about the gift of language? God has done great things for his church. The greatest, of course, being Christ Jesus. He has done great things, so praise the Lord daily. We must do this in our prayers, in our words, and in our deeds. With every breath that we take, we must praise Jehovah. Sing Psalters 404:5 and 406:7.

## **August 18 Read Psalm 149**

Psalm 149:1-2 The people of God should be a singing people. Throughout all of Scripture, we can find instances of the church

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singing. Israel sang at the Red Sea. Judah sang going into battle. David sang on the hillsides as he cared for his sheep. We do read of them not singing because of the sadness caused by the captivity. The Bible also speaks of the angels singing together at creation. Paul sang in prison. Finally, we find many places in the book of Revelation which speak of the singing in heaven. Young people, are you a singing people? Do you sing the songs of Zion that God has given for us to praise him? We will have a new song in heaven. This is the song of triumph which cannot be tainted by sin. Let us practice in this life to prepare to join the heavenly choir which praises God day and night. Sing the first stanzas of Psalters 406, 407, and 408.

### **August 19 Read Matthew 21:10-16**

Psalm 149:3 God has given to us the wonderful gift of music. How are we using that gift? There are many ways in which music can be used. Some fall under Satan's tempting and use it in very godless ways. It becomes the vehicle to promote sins of the worst kind. Sad to say, many people of God, some young and some not too young, have fallen to this temptation. Others, like those children who greeted Jesus as he made his entry into Jerusalem, use music as it was meant to be used. God created music. Jubal corrupted it. Christ has redeemed it for us. Not every type of music or musical expression has been redeemed. There is some, and you know what I mean, which remains in Satan's control. Flee that type of music, people of God. Flee to the music redeemed by Christ and praise the glorious name of God with it. With that praise God will be pleased. Sing the second stanzas of Psalters 406, 407, and 408.

### **August 20 Read I Peter 2:1-10**

Psalm 149:4 Once again we see a verse beginning with the word "for". Once again we must remember the grammatical use of that word. That word, used in this way, means that a reason for the preceding ideas is being given. What is the reason why we must praise Jehovah? We must praise Jehovah because he loves us and has given to us salvation. Just because this thought is repeated often in Scripture is not reason to think it trite. Scripture repeats things in order to emphasize them. We must pay attention to this reason. I hope that you read the Scripture reading carefully today. Maybe we need to read it again. God has done much for us who are nothing. Let us praise his name today, tomorrow, and every day. Sing Psalter 406:3.

### **August 21 Read II Chronicles 20:20-30**

Psalm 149:5-6 Here we have further exhortations for the people of God to praise him. We are to be joyful as we glorify God. Being joyful can sometimes be hard. It might be hard because of the circumstances that we are in. These circumstances might cause us to look upon the dark side of life. We may think that God has forgotten about us. But God calls us to be joyful. We might lie awake at night worrying about tomorrow and about the future; God calls for us to sing as we lie upon our beds. This call to be joyful must be answered by us. We must take a song upon our lips and his Word upon our hearts, and glorify him in whatever state that we may be in. Let us pray for that grace even when we might not feel like singing. Let us pray for the grace to sing songs of joy unto our gracious heavenly Father. Sing Psalters 406:4, 407:3, and 408:3.

### **August 22 Read Psalm 149**

Psalm 149:7-9 The final verses of this chapter give to the people of God work to do. In verse six, we are commanded to take the praise of God in our mouths and his Word in our hands. These verses tell us that we must go in his service and conquer the evil and stand for the right. This is the battle that we are in every-day. At our workplaces we must stand up for the name of God. Positively we must exhibit the graces which become the child of God. Negatively we must rebuke those who scorn our righteous God. Young people, you must be busy about this work as well. Wherever you are, you must stand for God. You must fight sin and Satan. This is not easy, and it cannot be done in our strength. We must do this only with the Word of God in our hearts, on our lips, and in our actions. Let us serve God as he has called and commanded us to serve him. Let us do this in praise to the Lord. Sing Psalters 406:5 and 407:4.

### **August 23 Read Psalm 150**

Psalm 150:1-2 We come to the grand doxology to the book of Psalms. In it the Psalmist makes one last grand exhortation to praise Jehovah the sovereign God of the covenant. Twelve times the word "praise" is used in this short Psalm. It is good for us to consider the idea of praise, as that is the meaning of the word "Psalm" in the Greek. Every Psalm, whether it be a praise Psalm, a Messianic Psalm, an imprecatory Psalm, or any of the other types is a Psalm of praise to our God. The word "praise" is paired with "him" nine times in this Psalm. We must praise him! Our God is worthy of our praise! In fact he is the only One worthy of our praise for all that he has done for us. Praise ye the Lord. Sing the first stanza of Psalters 409, 410, 411, 412, and 413.

### **August 24 Read Isaiah 38:16-20**

Psalm 150:3-5 Once again we are called to use the musical instruments that God has given to us to praise him. We may not use these verses for a clamor to introduce all types of music into our worship service. The principles of solemn, Reformed, God-pleasing worship must be followed. But we are called to use all kinds of instruments to praise God. This can be done in the home, at school, at social occasions, and even at functions in the church building. But when we use them, we must praise God as he has commanded us to praise him. We may not be the judges of what praise is. Scripture is that judge. Let us praise the Lord using what he has given to us. Sing Psalter 409:2-4.

### **August 25 Read Psalm 150**

Psalm 150:6 We come to the end of our journey through the Psalms and the Psalter. It is our desire that this has been as profitable and instructive for you as it has been for us. We have seen that God has given to us a book that covers most, if not all, of life's circumstances. Whether young or old we may all profit from his Word as the Spirit has poured it out in this book. The last verse of the book calls everyone alive to praise the Lord. Are you attempting to praise the Lord, people of God, and especially our young people? Have you hid these precious words in your hearts so that you might not sin against him? Be God praisers, people of God, and know that he will surely be pleased with you in your praise of him, our almighty covenant God. Sing Psalters 409:5, and the second stanzas of 410, 411, 412, and 413.

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## **August 26 Read Proverbs 1:1-9**

We are going to spend some time in the book of Proverbs. Rather than travel through it verse by verse, we are going to look at various sections of the book. Sometimes we will focus on one verse, and sometimes we will look at more than one. This first section serves as an introduction to the book. God endowed Solomon with much wisdom. The Holy Spirit used this wise man as well as others to give to us this book. The book centers on wisdom as it must be manifest in our lives. Some of the book speaks of the life of sanctification that we must lead. There is much profit for young and old alike. In this first section we see that it is the duty of the child of God of all ages to seek after wisdom. We need knowledge which comes from having the fear of Jehovah. This wisdom must be seen by those around us, and it must be the beautiful wisdom found by grace. Sing Psalter 325.

## **August 27 Read Proverbs 1:10-19**

Parents, make sure your young people read this section of Scripture. Grandparents call your grandchildren and teach them the knowledge found here. Young men and women, consent not to do evil. School is starting. With school comes social occasions for our young people. Sometimes these occasions lead our young people into sin. What must we do? Solomon gives to us the answer. "Consent thou not!" Don't agree to walk into sin. Say no to those who would entice you to do evil. This is walking the way of the antithesis that is commanded by God. Adam and Eve had that commandment. The last man on earth will have that commandment. There is much evil to be found very near to us. People of God, "consent thou not!" Sing Psalter 27.

## **August 28 Read Proverbs 1:20-27**

The wisdom that cometh from above is all around us. We can find that wisdom, first of all, in the Scriptures. But we can also find it in creation. God teaches us wisdom in the world around us. Are we studying those lessons? Are we learning those lessons? Are we paying attention to those lessons? Are we applying those lessons in our daily lives? This section also gives the results of not learning those lessons. If we do not walk in wisdom's way, we will be of all men most miserable. We will have many problems in this life. Let us learn wisdom's way and avoid sin's pitfalls. Sing Psalter 114:6-10.

## **August 29 Read Proverbs 1:28-33**

In this section we see a poetical device used often in this book. That device is called personification. It is most evident in verses 28 and 33. The word "me" refers to wisdom. Wisdom is speaking to all men. Some listen; some do not. What about you, young people? Do you listen to the catechism lessons that you have been taught? Are you ready to take up your work in school, catechism, and society with all your hearts? If you are not ready, you are ignoring the call of wisdom. You are called to be students. Some are more able and therefore are going to be held more responsible. Others do not have as many abilities, but they are still called to use those abilities to their fullest and to God's glory. They must give account of themselves before God in the day of judgment. Wisdom calls; are we listening? Sing Psalter 71.

## **August 30 Read Proverbs 2:1-9**

If you are reading this before church this morning, I hope that you are going to put its admonitions into practice. As the minister

speaks, he is speaking the wisdom of Christ. Are we listening to that wisdom? Are we seeking to understand it? Are we working to learn more about its implications? Are we desirous to put it into practice today, tomorrow, throughout this week? There is much so called wisdom to be learned. But when it is weighed upon God's balances, it will be found wanting. Stay away from that kind of wisdom, people of God, and seek the wisdom of the Lord. Sing Psalter 36:1-3.

## **August 31 Read Proverbs 2:10-22**

One of the results of obtaining wisdom is the ability to be discrete. This attribute is mentioned in verse 11. People of all ages need to exhibit discretion in their lives. Parents must be discrete around their children. They must be discrete about many of life's activities that are for adults only. This is not sheltering children and young people. Rather, this is not allowing them to be affected by things in life for which they are not ready. Young people must exhibit discretion when with their peers. Just because a matter is truth and fact does not mean that it has to be said. Young people must be discrete as they choose the clothing that they wear. Even our young children must learn discretion. Discretion's reward is preservation in the life to come. Be discrete, people of God, and cultivate this grace in yourselves and in your children and young people. Sing Psalter 146:1-6.

## **September 1 Read Proverbs 3:1-12**

This chapter, as well as others in this first section of Proverbs, begins with the words "My son." Solomon gives instruction to sons of all ages. We do well to read these words often and see what instruction they have for us. Notice that in these words which admonish us to keep the law of the Lord is the requirement that we remember that our material wealth comes from the Lord. Our offerings must not be what is left on Sunday, but our offerings are to be from our paychecks before other bills are paid. This applies to you as well, young people. Giving to God from what he has given you is your responsibility as much as it is your parents. In doing this you will be honoring God and showing wisdom. Notice that there is a blessing in such an honoring. This blessing will be peace with God both now and in eternity. Sing Psalter 95.

## **September 2 Read Proverbs 3:13-26**

From instruction concerning our material goods, Solomon goes back to instruction on wisdom. First of all he tells us that happiness is to be found in seeking and finding wisdom. This is a much different philosophy from that of the world. The world will tell us to seek after material wealth or man's wisdom. This is not Solomon's instruction to his son and is not God's instruction to his sons. Seeking after God's wisdom is more precious than any amount of money that we can obtain. Young people, during this school year, will your focus be on the wisdom of God or the world? You will learn worldly wisdom; by God's grace you will also learn God's wisdom. Pray for that grace. And parents, help your children and young people seek after the wisdom which comes from above. Sing Psalter 1.

## **September 3 Read Proverbs 3:27-35**

Included in the instruction on wisdom is instruction on loving our neighbor. Can you help out those whom God places on your paths? Maybe the proper question is "Are you helping out those whom God has placed on your path?" Children, you have

this opportunity in school. If your friend needs paper or a pen, do you willingly lend from your desk? Do you help those who have forgotten their lunches? Young people, are you characterized by your love for your peers? Adults, are you examples for your children and teenagers? There are many admonitions about loving the neighbor in Scripture. This is one of the ways in which we show our gratitude for our salvation. Are we truly grateful? Sing Psalter 305:1-5.

by John Huizenga

Psalm 31—“This song of mingled measures and alternate strains of grief and woe was intended for public singing, and thus a deathblow is given to the notion that nothing but praise should be sung” (Spurgeon).

#### **September 4 Read Psalm 31:1 & Psalter 80:1**

We can not know the great power and love of our sovereign covenant God if we don't know the greatness of our sins and miseries. Once again, we find David in the troubles and distresses of this life which lead to God through Christ. Are you distressed with family troubles, great loss, money problems, or discontent with your lot in life? Do these things weaken your faith and leave you miserable? Does it seem as though the ungodly neighbor is more happy and content than you? May God so work in your heart by the Spirit that you turn to God with these words of David every day as you walk as a child of God with your Creator and Redeemer. Shame is experienced when we are found wandering away from God in pursuit of our own self fulfillment and lust. God delivers his people from shame in “his righteousness,” i.e., his covenant faithfulness in which he never departs from his eternal plan to save. Sing the Psalter.

#### **September 5 Read Psalm 31:2 & Psalter 80:2; 82:1**

David uses language that demonstrates familiarity with God. He knows God as a Friend. He knows God is exalted infinitely above him, yet he does not hesitate to request that God, as it were, stoop down and listen to his plea like a child to his father. He prays that God would be to him a rock and a house. God is often called a rock in the Psalms, but we need to experience what this means. David wants to experience security and contentment in God. Fear has taken hold of him, he is weak and unable to go on. Every one of us has reason for such distress when we realize how far short we fall in our love and obedience to God. Meditate today upon your sins and pray this prayer of David. Sing the Psalter.

#### **September 6 Read Psalm 31:3,4 & Psaltr. 80:3; 82:2**

Notice the titles of the two Psalters from which we are singing: “God Our Resort in Trouble” & “Security in God.” These titles reflect the theme of the first 18 verses of Psalm 31 and our devotions through the next week. We will see how David's persistent request in time of need is turned into praise of God's goodness. While seeking security in God, David brings before God various details and truths about his covenant life with God. In the verses we consider today, David recalls the truth that God is his rock and fortress. There are many things that we know about God also, but that does not mean our feelings and life reflect this knowledge. We need to pray to God as we know him, and seek the work of God in our heart to open our eyes to him. God is pleased to use the meditations of his people to work assurance of salvation and covenant fellowship. Sing the Psalter.

#### **September 7 Read Psalm 31:5 & Psalter 80:4**

Do you give over your life to Jehovah? This is something you must do continually. By nature we easily imagine that success in school, work, dating, friends, or marriage depends upon our own abilities, and we have no need of help from the outside. Though one may prosper in earthly things, one really has not begun to live until he commends his life to God in all things. It is not enough to depend upon our own abilities until we fail, and then, as a last resort, hand over our messed-up life to God. It is sometimes easier to commit our life to God after we have utterly failed and can do nothing else, but a godly walk requires that we learn to commend our lives each moment of the day. Knowing that God has washed away our sins, we know that the afflictions we face will draw us near to God, we know that God will bring a suitable marriage partner, too, in the time appointed, or give grace to live as a single. Above all, when we commend our lives daily, we will be ready to commend our life to God in death. Sing the Psalter.

#### **September 8 Read Psalm 31:6, 7 & Psalter 80:5**

Ungodly men thrive on lies as they seek to advance themselves in life. We all face the great temptation to present a false image of ourselves to gain attention and friends. Are you attracted to the popular people who in reality are putting on a big show? Many will say they want to be friends with people who are honest and true, but they will not seek God or friends who love God, in whom alone is truth. These people love the false. The child of God hates those who love lying vanities. Separate yourselves from the crowd that hovers around the deadly fumes of lying vanities and put your trust in the Lord. Meditate upon his Word. Have fellowship with his people. Stamp out the fires of lying when they appear in your life and friends. In God and his mercy you will find happiness and joy. Sing the Psalter.

#### **September 9 Read Psalm 31:7, 8 & Psalter 80:6**

Did you find happiness and joy in God's mercy yesterday? By nature each one of us has been wooed by Satan, forsaken God, and boarded the train headed for the concentration camp of Satan—hell. By nature our pride lifts us up so that we are willing to forsake the good purpose of God for us, in favor of our own idea of happiness in the thrills of this world. An enemy has never had better hold of his captives than the devil with man. Man has no hope of escaping by himself, because he does not want to escape and is even dead in sin and powerless to escape should he want to. Neither does God have any obligation to rescue man. God is perfectly just in sending us with haste to eternal damnation. This truth is gloomy and terrifying indeed. The only hope is God's mercy; his desire to deliver, and to reveal his glory and power in doing so. He comes in the power of His Spirit to open our eyes and make us alive to see our plight. Do you see? Sing the Psalter.

#### **September 10 Read Psalm 31:9, 10 and Psaltr. 80:7**

Who is God? We must all have a ready and accurate answer. So many people who may even call themselves Christians think of God as a Being Who is more powerful than the individual man and influences man, but does not have sovereign control and leaves the destiny of man in a large degree to man himself. The role of Jesus in salvation is minimized to his being a good example. Their concept of salvation is based on man's ability to direct the affairs of the world. But God himself makes very clear what he wants

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man to know. God is the One who has eternally decreed that man fall into the rebellion and death from which he would save. Who is God? He is the Creator of all things, and known by the children of God from day to day as the One who is constantly delivering us from our guilt and shame. He is our Savior. Sing the Psalter “God Our Resort in Trouble.”

**September 11 Read Psalm 31:11-13 and Psltr. 80:8**

The way in which we walk in covenant friendship with God is not bustling with friends who want to include you in their fun all the time. God often makes our way lonely from an earthly point of view in order to impress upon us the richness of friendship with God. David is crushed under the burden of his sin, and afflictions and human companions have forsaken him. Jesus experienced the dismay of friends who turned away when the disciples fled and Peter denied him. Job’s friends turned against him when they came with their criticisms. Though earthly friends are important, God uses hard times to separate us from ungodly friends and strengthen our bond with Christ Who never forsakes his own. Sing the Psalter.

**September 12 Read Psalm 31:14, 15 and Psltr. 80:9**

“My times are in thy hand” sang David. These words are a most beautiful expression of God’s providence, a doctrine cherished by every believer and strongly defended by the Reformers in the Canons of Dordt, Fifth Head of Doctrine. God upholds every sparrow. He sends hurricanes and tornadoes. He maintains life of every form, and every believer confesses that every aspect of his or her life is in the hand of God. There are no “accidents” that just happen by cold chance. Statistics may determine your chance of getting hit by lightning or living to be 100, but statistics only reveal the constant work of God in and through the means he has established to work out his eternal plan. God is intently playing the instrument of your life in the grand orchestra of the universe for his glory and your salvation. Submit to God and pray that he will show you the joy of salvation. Sing the Psalter.

**September 13 Read Ps. 31:15, 16 and Psltr. 80:10**

“Make thy face to shine upon thy servant,” sang David, another beautiful desire placed by God in the hearts of his children. This desire and its fulfillment is the fruit of “serious repentance” as we read in the Canons, Fifth Head, article 5. Speaking of the times when the saints fall into sin, we read in the Canons “By such enormous sins, however, they very highly offend God, incur a deadly guilt, grieve the Holy Spirit, interrupt the exercise of faith, very grievously wound their consciences, and sometimes lose the sense of God’s favor, for a time, until on their returning into the right way of serious repentance, the light of God’s fatherly countenance again shines upon them.” Take the time now or sometime today to meditate upon the Fifth Head of the Canons and Rejection of Errors in the back of your Psalter. Sing the Psalter.

**September 14 Read Psalm 31:17 and Psalter 80:11**

Shame overwhelms when the hope which we defend and upon which we govern our actions and words and direct our entire life, is shattered, and we stand exposed and naked to all who laugh at our foolishness. We hope in God who has revealed himself and the way of salvation in his Word. We struggle our whole life to flee the life of sin which God forbids, but the world enjoys. We strive to crucify our pride and give God all the glory. We believe God’s

promise of life with him in heavenly glory after death. The world laughs and says “this life is all there is, get all you can now or you will forever miss out on life.” God gives us a taste of heavenly bliss now through the preaching of his Word and a life of obedience, but when times of doubt and sin overwhelm, the fear of shame may be strong. The world’s trust in science often challenges our hope in order to bring us to shame. We can be certain that God’s work will never come to naught. May we ever call upon God that we may never be ashamed. Sing the Psalter.

**September 15 Read Psalm 31:18 and Psalter 80:12**

Lying lips surrounded Christ with their incessant blather, they surrounded Christ as he taught in the cities and died on the cross, and they surround us today. The discontented factory worker spews forth vulgarities in every sentence, the scientist relentlessly scours God from every discovery, the “theologians” never give up trying to make myths of God’s Word. God speaks in all creation and from the pulpit “I AM” and man responds, “He is not, I am.” Lying lips; do you hear them and cry out to God that he silence them, or are you listening to them with indifference or even interest? Listen for lying lips today and pray each time you hear them “Let the lying lips be put to silence.” Watch your own lips too that they join not in the grievous speech against the righteous. Sing the Psalter.

**September 16 Read Psalm 31:19 and Psalter 81:1**

The new Psalter number sets forth the tones of praise which always follow the cries of God’s people in distress. God answered David’s prayer in such a way that David saw the riches of God’s goodness. Sin—Deliverance—Gratitude. This is the pattern of the Heidelberg Catechism. This is the pattern of the Psalms. This is the pattern of life. The better we know this pattern, the closer will be our walk with God. God is pleased to show us the riches of his goodness in the way of the troubles and distress of life which he sends. When you find yourself walking the valley of the shadow of death, you know what to do: pour out your heart to God, read his Word, listen to his Word in church. He will reveal to you something that is not revealed to the ungodly. He will reveal not only that he is good in himself, but also the effect of his goodness, i.e., the salvation wrought by Christ and tasted here on earth. Sing the Psalter.

**September 17 Read Psalm 31:20 and Psalter 81:2**

What are the riches of God’s goodness? He hides us in the secret of his presence. The idea here is that he gives his people a share in his own hidden life. He brings them into covenant friendship; into the sphere of his fellowship, a region where the brightness of his glory shines from his face in Christ, a region into which the ungodly are unable to go. Presently we find this secret sphere of God’s presence in the hearing of God’s Word which is wisdom to God’s people but foolishness to the ungodly. In this sphere we have peace which can never be quenched by the pride of man and the strife of tongues. Do you long for the day when we enter into eternal life with God, being forever in his presence? Seek the shelter of God’s grace whenever the pride of man and the strife of tongues penetrate your life. Sing the Psalter.

**September 18 Read Psalm 31:21, 22 and Psltr. 81:3**

These verses tell us about another of God’s riches—his marvelous kindness. In the Psalter we sing “His love beyond compare.”

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David came to know the love of God through the experience of distress. God's love is at the heart of all the riches of his goodness. When David thought about the goodness of God, he was reminded of his weakness. Even though he had felt that he had failed and was cut off from before God's eyes, God did not forsake him. God loves his elect people and will never forsake them. Though we often speak words of foolishness in our haste and weak faith, God hears us in Christ. Let us also bless Jehovah for his steadfast covenant love. Sing the Psalter.

**September 19 Read Psalm 31:23, 24 and Psltr. 81:4**

At the close of this Psalm, David exhorts the saints to love Jehovah and be of good courage. What a marvelous conclusion to a Psalm which began with sorrow and shame. God sovereignly works this love in our heart by means of sin and deliverance. We do not love God blindly, we love in faith knowing all that God has done for us. We read in I John 4:19, "We love him, because he first loved us." David recognizes the love of God in the doctrine of God's providence. God preserves those whom he has cleansed in Christ. In preserving his people, God rewards the proud doers with their just destruction. Thus a clear knowledge of the doctrine of reprobation which serves the doctrines of election and preservation is necessary for our love for God. May you also find courage in the wonderful works of God. Sing the Psalter.

**September 20 Read Psalm 32:1, 2 and Psltr. 83:1**

Psalm 1 speaks of blessedness in a godly walk, and the Psalm we begin testifies of a blessedness that comes after being forgiven an ungodly walk. The sin of David which was covered was his sin with Bathsheba and killing Uriah. David wrote Psalm 31 before he confessed his sin and while experiencing terrible guilt, but he wrote this Psalm after the heavy burden was lifted from his shoulders. God uses this Psalm in Romans 4:6-7 to teach us that the great blessedness experienced by David comes to the child of God in the way of knowing the doctrine of justification by faith alone and not of our own works. This was a favorite Psalm for Augustine who also was delivered of great sin. Martin Luther also expressed his great delight and peace found in the doctrine of justification by faith alone. May you also know the happiness of forgiveness by God in this day. Sing the Psalter.

**September 21 Read Psalm 32:3-5 and Psalter 83:2**

Guilty silence, what a miserable condition. We sin against someone, we know it, but we are too proud to admit it. We feign joy and peace, we may even speak and talk freely with the one against whom we have sinned, but a wall stands between, and true fellowship is virtually silent. Meanwhile inside we are being ripped violently apart. Though outwardly silent about his guilt, David roared inside and his strength was wasted; all because he was proud and wanted to live in his sin. Left to ourselves, our pride would bring us to death. In grace, God sent Nathan the prophet to bring the sharp word of God which cut his festering sore and let the poison of his unconfessed sin drain out. Confession of sin is the only way to experiencing the blessed forgiveness of God. Pray that God would crush our pride and open our hearts to confession of sin. Sing the Psalter.

**September 22 Read Psalm 32:6,7 and Psalter 83:3**

The child of God who desires covenant fellowship with God must never procrastinate to enter into that fellowship in all its

fullness. David's misery only increased when he refrained from seeking God's forgiveness. It is very foolish to seek your own pleasure while you are healthy and strong and wait until you are in desperate need before seeking God. God is near right now as you meditate upon this portion of God's Word. He is near in the preaching. May God open our eyes to see the great blessedness we receive when we confess our sins immediately. God saves his people by means of his presence in the preaching of his Word. Woe is he from whom God removes the preaching of his Word. Seek him diligently now while he may be found. Sing the Psalter.

**September 23 Read Psalm 32:8,9 and Psalter 84:1**

The doctrines of sovereign grace are often criticized as doctrines which force men to obey God so that men become machines and not willing, joyful followers of Christ. God's sovereign power over us, however, works in such a way that we are given new hearts and made willing followers of Christ. Yet, the old man of sin remains to make us sluggish and ignorant. Except God constantly and graciously guide and teach us, we would become ignorant and stubborn like a mule. Let us be diligent to study God's Word that we might not be ignorant of God's marvelous grace. We can not expect to be found in heaven when we wander in beastly ignorance and indifference to the preaching of God's Word. Sing the Psalter.

**September 24 Read Psalm 32:10,11 and Psltr. 84:2**

Under God's gracious guidance, his mercy shall compass us about. This means that when we walk in obedience to God through the trials in our lives, God will always be present and ready to lift us out of our miseries. Don't imagine that a godly walk, due to the demands of God which are contrary to our sinful nature, is a way of greater sorrow than a walk in our own sinful desires. We have sorrow because we know our sin, but when we strive to walk in obedience, we will always be near unto God's Word, and the consciousness of God's mercy will quickly restore the joy of our heart when we fall. The ungodly try to cover up sorrow with more pleasure. They may appear happy, but it is only a mask. Those who are cleansed in the blood of Christ have every reason to rejoice. May this be a day of joy for you. Sing the Psalter.

**September 25 Read Psalm 33:1-3 and Psalter 85:1**

Praise is comely, i.e. beautiful and suitable for the righteous. You and I could do nothing better than praise Jehovah. How must we praise God? With our voice moved by our love for God. Musical instruments in themselves do not praise God except they help train your voice to lift up the best music possible. Our love for God, not music, must inspire us to sing. Highest praise comes from the lips of the godly saint who sings from the heart without the aid of musical instruments. Sing as loudly as you can without distorting the quality of your voice. Sing a new song. A new song does not mean a different song, but it is a song sung with zeal that is newly inspired by a deeper knowledge of God. Take the time to learn the music of this Psalter and so meditate upon the words that you can sing it joyfully from the heart without musical accompaniment.

**September 26 Read Psalm 33:4, 5 and Psltr. 85:2**

We sing praises to Jehovah because his goodness fills the earth. The Word of Jehovah is in the Bible, and also includes the entire decree of God's counsel according to which he created all

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things and governs them for the salvation of his people. In all of his words and works, God is good. We live in a world in which lying, pain, hate, and distress bring sadness and death, but God loves truth and lives in eternal bliss. All the scientific wonders and history of the earth reveal his goodness. Even sin and its terrible effects on the world reveal God's goodness, because it is the means whereby God reveals the fullness of his grace to his people. We have much reason to praise God. Show forth his praise as you sing the Psalter.

**September 27 Read Psalm 33:6, 7 and Psltr. 85:3**

We sing praise to Jehovah because he has created all the wonders of this world and the universe. The Word of God is Christ (John 1) and his Breath often refers to the Holy Spirit. Thus we praise the triune God. The very existence of every atom and the energy and life within the living creature is upheld each moment by God. He spoke and the massive stars and galaxies of the universe came into existence. If you stand by an ocean you can see the curve of the earth and it appears as though the water is in a big pile. God holds the water in place by the mysterious force of gravity which he has created and upholds every moment of the day. We must remember that God continues to uphold the creation which he created. For this, too, is a reason to sing praise to our God. Sing the Psalter.

**September 28 Read Psalm 33:8-9 and Psltr. 86:1**

This Psalm of praise began with an exhortation to praise God, and gave reason for praise in the goodness of God and the wonder of creation and preservation of that creation. In the section covered by Psalter 86 everyone in the world is exhorted to stand in awe of and fear God for his providence and grace toward his people. The God who gathers his people to be with him in heaven has created the world to accomplish this purpose. Because the ungodly hate this fact and seek ever to erase it from their minds, God declares it in his Word so that they are unable to hide from God. The doctrine of providence causes the ungodly to tremble, but makes the godly lift up their hearts in praise. Do you find peace and joy in the doctrine of God's providence? Meditate upon this doctrine today and sing the Psalm.

**September 29 Read Psalm 33:10, 11 and Psltr. 86:2**

It is very common today to find people who confess faith in God and his salvation in Christ, but deny that his will and plan for them and the world never changes. They do this because they want man to have some control. Some who see the clear language of God's sovereignty in Scripture say God sovereignly decided in his counsel to give man a will that is free to choose Christ if he wants. But God makes it plain that even though man has a will and nations make counsel to do this or that, it means nothing as far as the goal and purpose of man is concerned. God's plan, his eternal and sovereign good pleasure, his counsel according to which he has created all things and governs them, stands certain forever. Nothing which he has created will interfere and change it. Blessed are we who belong to God! Sing the Psalter.

**September 30 Read Psalm 33:12 and Psalter 86:3**

Indeed the eternal counsel of God is reason for praise! We can be at peace knowing that everything is in God's hands. The world is so big and so many things are happening every day. We watch developments in the nations and peoples of the world, stand help-

less when denominations of churches slip into apostasy, and fear the power of the world will influence our churches and persecute the faithful. But God is in control of every event and heart of man in the world. Woe is he whose God is not Jehovah, whose god is evolution and the "forces of nature," whose god is man. But we belong to the God who created all things and governs all things for our salvation and to his glory. Blessed indeed are we when we remain near unto him. Sing the Psalter.

**October 1 Read Psalm 33:13-15 and Psalter 87:1**

The psalmist sets forth yet another reason to praise God: his omniscience and omnipresence, doctrines which comfort God's people in the midst of an ungodly world. Jehovah is exalted above all that is created and looks down upon man which he has placed on earth to care for the earth and live in obedience to him in love. He gave to man a mind and body suited for his service. But what does he see? We know that God is angry with man, who has forsaken Jehovah and serves himself in pride and rebellion. Remember, God is also watching your every move. What does God see when he looks at you and considers your works? Does he see a humble and repentant sinner who hates his sin? Does he see one who seeks a refuge in Christ? Do not look to man for your salvation, come to Christ alone that your works may be seen in him. Sing the Psalter.

**October 2 Read Psalm 33:16-19 and Psalter 87:2**

Does not a king depend upon his army to deliver the kingdom from the invading enemy? Does not a man depend upon his strength to fight off the foe? Would not a horse be invaluable to escape from danger? Human strength and physical power may preserve earthly life for a time, but the preservation of life in time itself only brings every man closer to death. Forget earthly strength. Behold, look over here, look at Jehovah who rules over all. His eye is on those that fear him and hope in his mercy. His goal and his aim in all things is his glory in their salvation. Devote all your attention to that which is important: a right knowledge of God and his counsel. He is gathering his church. Are you busy in that work? Go to God in prayer and ask how he might use you and show you his great salvation. Sing the Psalter.

**October 3 Read Psalm 33:20-22 and Psalter 87:3**

Above all things, the child of God seeks God's mercy. All the virtues and truths about God's glory, righteousness, power, and providence bring fear to the sinner apart from the assurance of God's mercy revealed in Christ. It is important that we know God as our help and shield. It is important to know God and put our trust in him. In all our spiritual growing and hearing God's Word, we must always pray "Let thy mercy, O LORD, be upon us, according as we hope in thee." Our hope is rooted in our faith, which is given to us by God. Our hope grows as we grow in our knowledge of God. We must seek to know God's mercy revealed to us in Christ with every particle of hope that we have. When we live in peace, our heart shall rejoice, and we will render the praise due unto him. Sing the Psalter.

# A Preview of Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan

**P***ilgrim's Progress* was written while John Bunyan was imprisoned for preaching in England and was originally published in 1678. See related articles in this issue: "Living a Pilgrim's Life" and "The Antithesis and Witnessing."

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The first few lines of THE AUTHOR'S APOLOGY FOR HIS BOOK

*WHEN at the first I took my pen in hand  
Thus for to write, I did not understand  
That I at all should make a little book  
In such a mode: nay, I had undertook  
To make another; which, when almost done,  
Before I was aware I this begun.  
And thus it was: I, writing of the way  
And race of saints in this our gospel-day,  
Fell suddenly into an allegory  
About their journey, and the way to glory,...*

## The First Stage

As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place where was a den,<sup>1</sup> and laid me down in that place to sleep; and as I slept, I dreamed a dream. I dreamed, and behold, I saw a man clothed with rags, standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a book in his hand, and a great burden upon his back (Isa. 64:6; Luke 14:33; Psalm 38:4). I looked and saw him open the book, and read therein; and as he read, he wept and trembled; and not being able longer to contain, he brake out with a lamentable cry, saying, "What shall I do?" (Acts 2:37; 16:30; Habak. 1:2, 3).

In this plight, therefore, he went home, and restrained himself as long as he could, that his wife and children should not perceive his distress; but he could not be

<sup>1</sup> Bedford jail, in which the author was imprisoned for conscience' sake.

silent long, because that his trouble increased. Wherefore at length he brake his mind to his wife and children; and thus he began to talk to them: "O, my dear wife," said he, "and you the children of my bowels, I, your dear friend, am in myself undone by reason of a burden that lieth hard upon me; moreover, I am certainly informed that this our city will be burnt with fire from heaven; in which fearful overthrow, both myself, with thee my wife, and you my sweet babes, shall miserably come to ruin, except (the which yet I see not) some way of escape can be found whereby we may be delivered." At this his relations were sore amazed; not for that they believed that what he had said to them was true, but because they thought that some frenzy distemper had got into his head; therefore, it drawing towards night, and they hoping that sleep might settle his brains, with all haste they got him to bed. But the night was as troublesome to him as the day; wherefore, instead of sleeping, he spent it in sighs and tears. So when the morning was come, they would know how he did. He told them, "Worse and worse:" he also set to talking to them again; but they began to be hardened. They also thought to drive away his distemper by harsh and surly carriage to him; sometimes they would deride, sometimes they would chide, and sometimes they would quite neglect him. Wherefore



*Engraving from The Pilgrim's Progress, published in London, 1778. This image shows Pilgrim entering the wicket gate, opened by Good-Will.*

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he began to retire himself to his chamber to pray for and pity them, and also to condole his own misery; he would also walk solitarily in the fields, sometimes reading, and sometimes praying: and thus for some days he spent his time.

Now I saw, upon a time, when he was walking in the fields, that he was (as he was wont) reading in his book, and greatly distressed in his mind; and as he read, he burst out, as he had done before, crying, "What shall I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30, 31).

I saw also that he looked this way, and that way, as if he would run; yet he stood still because (as I perceived) he could not tell which way to go. I looked then, and saw a man named Evangelist coming to him, and he asked,

"Wherefore dost thou cry?"

He answered, "Sir, I perceive, by the book in my hand, that I am condemned to die, and after that to come to judgment (Heb. 9:27); and I find that I am not willing to do the first (Job 10:21, 22), nor able to do the second" (Ezek. 22:14).

Then said Evangelist, "Why not willing to die, since this life is attended with so many evils?" The man answered, "Because, I fear that this burden that is upon my back will sink me lower than the grave, and I shall fall into Tophet (Isa. 30:33). And Sir, if I be not fit to go to prison, I am not fit to go to judgment, and from thence to execution; and the thoughts of these things make me cry...." ❖

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Church Family

# Living According To God's Will: In Friendship

by Vicki Cnossen

**A**s a young, maturing child of God, you have surely experienced the true blessing of God in the gift of friends. Who are your friends? What is a friend? Webster's Dictionary gives us this meaning: "friend: (n) a person whom one knows well, and is fond of; an ally, supporter, or sympathizer," and, "friendship: (n) the state of being friends; intimacy united with affection or esteem; mutual attachment, goodwill." You, being God's precious child, have a far more beautiful definition of friendship. Let's take a closer look.

As you well know, friendship is nothing new. In God's perfect wisdom, He has created this bond, this intimacy we call friendship. God himself, in all eternity, dwells in perfect friendship and unity with himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And, having created man in his own image (Genesis 1:26) he created man capable of experiencing the joy of the friendship bond. When we, through Adam, fell into sin, we lost the right to fellowship with God.

How dreadful and miserable we would be if we were to stop there! But, thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift (II Corinthians 9:15)! In his perfect wisdom he has chosen you to be his adopted child. "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ

to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will" (Ephesians 1:5). Being his child you are partakers of Christ (Hebrews 3:14), having again the joy of fellowship with God. "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement" (Romans 5:10-11). And, I John 1:3: "And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." God has called you into covenant friendship with himself. How, then, does this friendship with God show fruit in our earthly friendships?

In the very same chapter of I John 1, we read in verses 6 and 7: "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanest us from all sin." So, not only do you have a covenant friendship with God and Jesus Christ, but you are commanded to have fellowship, friendship, with your fellow believers. Jesus himself had friends during his time here on earth. Luke 12:4 and John 15:15 speak of Jesus calling his disciples his friends. And in John

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11:11 Jesus calls Lazarus his friend. The Old Testament records many friendships for us: II Samuel 15:37, and II Samuel 16:16 (the friendship of David and Hushai); I Samuel 20 (the friendship of David and Jonathan); and throughout the entire book of Job (the friendship of Job and Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar).

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desires of the unbeliever.**

There is no doubt that friendship plays a vital role in the life of the child of God. We are commanded repeatedly in God's Word to choose our friends wisely. II Corinthians 6:14-15 tells us: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" Although we must not completely cut ourselves off from the world in which we live, we must never choose to be friends with the unbeliever. As God's child, your interest, your desire, your goal, your purpose is to honor and glorify God in all that you say, think, and do. That is the exact opposite of the interests, goals, and desires of the unbeliever.

Reading further in II Corinthians 6, we find in verses 17 and 18: "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; And I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." Matthew Henry explains it in this way in his commentary on this passage:

...keep at a due distance, to be separate, as one would avoid the society of those who have the leprosy or the plague, for fear of taking infection, and not to touch the unclean thing, lest we be defiled. Who can touch pitch, and not be defiled by it? We must take care not to defile ourselves by converse (walk, vc) with those who defile themselves with sin; so is

the will of God (command of God, vc). ...God has promised to be a Father to them, and that they shall be his sons and his daughters; and is there a greater honour or happiness than this? How ungrateful a thing then must it be if those who have this dignity and felicity should degrade and debase themselves by mingling with unbelievers!

We find the same command in Ephesians 5:7: "Be ye not therefore partakers with them" (verse 6 describes "them" as the children of disobedience); and again in Ephesians 5:11: "And having no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." And yet another passage, James 4:4: "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." There is no "gray" in this text. We cannot have a little of both. If we befriend the world, we are the enemy of God. What a powerful, powerful warning!

Finally, one more warning found in Proverbs 22:24-25: "Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul."

Now that we've looked at the warnings of the kinds of friendships to avoid, let's look at what God's Word tells us about the joy of having friendships with fellow believers. We must begin by looking at the perfect friendship of Christ our Lord. John 15:13: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend." (Jesus is speaking to his disciples here at the Last Supper.) The commentary of Matthew Henry is helpful here:

The highest proof of love is laying down one's life for a friend to save his life.... The life which others have laid down has been but of equal value with the life for which it was laid down, and perhaps less valuable; but Christ is infinitely more worth than ten thousand of us. Others have thus laid down their lives for their friends, but Christ laid down his for us when we were enemies (Rom. 5:8, 10).

Let's look at the verse just preceding, John 15:12: "this is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you." In the context here, Christ speaks of himself as the vine, and his elect as the branches, who must bring forth fruit. Christ's love should direct our love toward each other in our friendships.

What do you look for, strive for, in your friendships? Is it your comfort, your pleasure, your well-being, your honor? Or rather, is it first to bring honor and glory to

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your God, and in so doing, seek the well-being (spiritual as well as physical) and comfort of your friend? Proverbs 17:17: “A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.” That last part of this verse may be confusing; some commentators explain it in this way: “a friend that loves at all times is born—that is, becomes—a brother in adversity, and is so to be valued.” Friends must be constant to each other, whether in riches or poverty, health or sickness, prosperity or affliction. Proverbs 18:24: “A man that hath friends must show himself friendly; and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.” The bond of friendship proves to be stronger than the natural bond of a brother. The child of God encourages, comforts, exhorts, and admonishes his friend in humility. He doesn’t ignore the sin of his friend, nor does he gossip to others about it. He humbly goes to his friend, seeing the need for sorrow and repentance. Nor

does a child of God desert his friend when the friend is in need. In an article in the *Standard Bearer* (Vol. 52, Issue 13) Rev. Kortering points out four qualities of true friendship: *companionship, protection, loyalty, and honest correction*. Can these be said of you in your friendships?

One final passage; Proverbs 27:9: “Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man’s friend by hearty counsel.” The friendships that have God’s Word as their foundation will be joyful and rewarding. Pray for godly friends. Pray that God will strengthen you to be a godly friend. Pray for God’s blessing on your friendships. Together, with your friends, walk with God. ❖

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*Vicki is a member of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.*

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## Living A Pilgrim’s Life

by Andy Tanis

*I Peter 2:9-11: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light; Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.”*

Many of us are familiar with John Bunyan’s story, *The Pilgrims Progress*. If you have not read it, it should not be too difficult to find a copy to read this summer before starting school again. In this book, we see a man named Christian, dwelling in his house with his wife and children. One important thing to notice here in the setting of the story is that Christian is carrying a heavy burden on his back. This burden represents the heavy burden of sin that every

believer carries, but only when the Spirit of regeneration works in the heart does the Christian realize it as a grievous burden sinking him deeper and deeper. At the very moment when the Spirit gives the conviction of the existence of sin in the sinner, he also gives the feeling of guilt or regret for these sins, and a desire to be rid of that burden of sin. The Spirit then continues to work to bring the guilty sinner to his knees with the earnest, desperate cry, “What must I do to be saved?”

This was exactly the kind of conviction that Christian had, which led him to flee from his house and from the City of Destruction, and seek deliverance. Once he came to the place where the cross stood, and beheld the glorious mystery of the work that was accomplished there, he experienced that deliverance. Finally the burden he had so earnestly wanted to get rid of fell off from him, and rolled down the hill and was buried in the sepulcher at the bottom of the hill. Now that he was free, he had no desire to head back to the city in which he dwelt. He saw that city as Egypt, the spiritual place of bondage. Rather, he looked for a home far away from the vanities of this present world. He continued his journey until he

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reached the Celestial City, which was a picture of heaven. During the course of this journey, the Word of God was his only rule for faith and life. He turned to this Word whenever he fought against his spiritual foes; through that Word he gained the victory.

Such is the experience of every child that God has called out of this world into his marvelous light. The Spirit gives us a deep awareness of our sin and misery, causing us to seek some way to be delivered from the guilt and power of sin. The Spirit then points to the cross, and draws the elect irresistibly by its power to believe that the sacrifice of the Lamb of God on the cross undoubtedly covers his sins. The believer is granted the assurance that this Lamb of God is his complete Savior, so he knows that in the sight of the holy and just God he is righteous, but only through the death and resurrection of the Lamb.

Because of the victory that Christ has accomplished for us, we are called to be pilgrims and strangers here on earth. A pilgrim is defined as a traveler to a holy place. Our life here on earth is set in that light. We set our eyes toward that goal, and seek to do so without looking to the left or right. With all fervency, we “press toward the mark” of our high calling. We learn that we are those who are set apart from the citizens of the kingdoms of this world.

Is this pilgrim’s life for everyone? Do all men have a desire to flee from sin in all of its forms? Of course not! The Bible is clear that only some people belong in the categories mentioned in the text in 1 Peter 2. In the context of verse 9, Peter refers to a chosen generation and a peculiar people. This means that from the vast multitude of all of the people that have lived or will live, there is a certain remnant that is looking for a city “which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10). These elect are brought to realize the need for a spiritual mindset, “for to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Romans 8:6).

A spiritual mind is crucial for living a Christian life. Romans 8:7 reminds us that we are engaged in spiritual warfare against carnality. The carnal mind is enmity against God! In a materialistic culture, we often lose sight of the fact that we are fighting a battle against earthly-mindedness. In our abundance, we feel pretty comfortable with this world and what it has to offer. Our inclination is to surrender to the enemy, forgetting our victory that we have over the enemy in and through the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Satan uses cunning tactics and military strategies that

are designed with all craftiness to allure us to walk after the flesh, and not after the Spirit. One enticing way he does this is by causing us to forget our obligation to be good stewards of our time. Satan uses Hollywood to snare Christians to take their mind off of their heavenly home and to find a life of fun and entertainment here below. How easy it is to spend several hours a day watching the television and very little time praying and meditating on the things of God! We can easily be deceived into thinking that if its behind a TV screen, the filth of this world isn’t really so bad.

The internet is another tool Satan uses to keep the Christian from a pursuit of holiness. We all know the dangers in their vilest forms (pornography, violence, blaspheming God, etc.). Understand that Satan will stop at nothing to make our spiritual senses numb! Some more crafty and cunning ways Satan snares us are through the time we spend on Facebook, YouTube, etc. These things can be used for the spread of the gospel and the edification of the church, but I believe that if most of us are honest with ourselves, we would realize that most of our time online usually is wasted.

Scripture makes it clear that the devil masquerades as an angel of light, causing us to lose sight of the reality that he is a “roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Paul reminds us in Ephesians 6 that we wrestle against principalities and powers, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

If we are those who be of a spiritual mind, we must put on the whole armor of God. Ephesians 6 says that we must be equipped to fight these spiritual foes. We are equipped with truth, righteousness, faith, and the gospel of peace. We wear the helmet of salvation, so that our head is guarded against any carnal doubt that may be instilled in our minds concerning our redemption in Christ. We fight with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. We fight also by means of prayer. We pray for boldness as we fight to make known the mystery of the gospel. We have the assurance that God’s Word will not return to him void. We must be fervent, and lay down our lives for the sake of that gospel!

May God grant us a deeper knowledge of our salvation, and always cause us to persevere as those who seek a heavenly country that God has prepared for us, where he is not ashamed to be called our God! (Hebrews 11:16). ❖

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*Andy is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.*

# Scripture's Teaching Regarding Alcohol (6) The Effects of Drunkenness

by Rev. Douglas Kuiper

*Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow? Who hath contentions? Who hath babbling? Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. ... Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I yet awake? I will seek it yet again.*

*Proverbs 23:29-30,34-35*

*And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess;  
Ephesians 5:18a*

**T**hat God declares drunkenness to be sin, we noted in our last article. God's Word prohibits the child of God to be drunk, not only in the extreme instance (being passed out), but also in the sense of being impaired (unable to function normally).

Because drunkenness is sin, God judges it. In this life, he judges it by leaving the drunkard to bear the effects of his sin in both his body and soul.

Drunkenness leaves one feeling miserable and sick. Habitual drunkenness destroys the body by causing liver disease and other physical problems.

Drunkenness also destroys one's soul. One who is under the influence of alcohol is not living out of the power of the Spirit; so one who is drunk is susceptible to more sin. Habitual drunkenness destroys one's ability to have a meaningful relationship with others (thus destroying marriage and family relationships), and one's ability to perform meaningful work (thus leading to loss of income, and so to poverty).

Because it is sin, and because it leads to more sin, drunkenness is a picture of the spiritual drunkenness of one who is not in the kingdom of God, and who will bear God's judgment to eternity. This explains why, under inspiration, the apostle Paul mentions drunkards as those who will not inherit the kingdom of God (I Corinthians 6:10, Galatians 5:21). It also explains why he calls us not only to physical sobriety, but also to spiritual sobriety (I Thessalonians 5:6-8).

The wise man will avoid the sin of drunkenness.

\* \* \* \* \*

Proverbs 23:29-35 graphically depicts the effect of

drunkenness on one's body and earthly life.

At first, as you read this passage you might feel pity for the man described. He cries out in his misery and sorrow; the words "woe" and "sorrow" (vs. 29) refer to his cries of despair and grief. He has wounds without cause, and redness of eyes. He speaks of being stricken and beaten. Is not this a man of whom others have taken advantage, one who cries out for justice?

Then one realizes the cause of this man's misery. He has tarried long at the wine (30)! His misery is his own fault! He is feeling the effects of drunkenness!

Verse 29 speaks of several effects of drunkenness on his body. First, he feels sick ("woe, sorrow"). Second, he cannot talk clearly; he babbles incoherently, or at least slurs his words ("babbling"). Third, he is full of bruises and other evidence of falling or bumping into things ("wounds without cause"). Fourth, his eyes are bloodshot ("redness of eyes"). Anyone who has ever seen a drunk person immediately visualizes what Solomon is saying.

Also verse 34 speaks of the effect on his body, in speaking of the sensation of dizziness that a drunken man feels. The verse emphasizes this, not only by speaking of one who lies down in the midst of the sea (lies down on a ship, thus becoming dizzy from the movement of the ship), but by referring to one who lies upon the top of a mast—near the very top of the sails, where the effect of the waves on the ship is felt all the more, and the sensation of dizzying movement is all the greater.

What misery! Who would intentionally inflict such trouble on himself?

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No sane person. Only fools who tarry long at the wine.

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Proverbs 23:29-35 also speaks of the effect of drunkenness on one's soul.

Drunkenness leads to sexual sin, and to forms of sexual sin that one might otherwise have found repulsive; the strange women whom the drunkard beholds are the easy women and the prostitutes in whom a man might be completely uninterested, if sober (vs. 33).

Drunkenness leads one to speak perverse things (vs. 33). Especially, in light of the first part of the verse, one thinks of sexual perversity. But drunken people also speak like unbelievers. A professing Christian, if under the influence of alcohol, is in danger of transgressing all the commandments in his speech. Be warned, young people: if while drunk you blaspheme the name of God, or show your contempt of any holy thing, do not think that the Lord will hold you guiltless!

Drunkenness leads one to contentions (vs. 29)—that is, to strife and brawling, first with the mouth, then perhaps with his fists. The drunken man, no longer able to discern reality, views others as a threat and strikes out at them, or has some false illusion of grandeur, and thinks he has to show all around him that he is somebody by being quick to fight.

And drunkenness leads to habitual drunkenness, to alcoholism, even though this habitual drunkenness destroys him. In verse 35 we read of the drunkard asking “when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.” He desires to reach a certain point of sobriety, to be delivered from this trouble that wine has had on him. Good, you say? Not in this instance; he desires to be delivered so that he can drink himself drunk again! The effect of drunkenness on one's soul, in other words, is that it makes one a slave to alcohol, both when drunk and when “sober” (if there is such a thing, in this instance).

To this effect of drunkenness on the soul, the inspired apostle Paul also refers when he says in Ephesians 5:18, “wherein is excess.” In drunkenness is excess.

The Greek word translated “excess” means literally “not saved,” and refers to a grossly immoral life of riotous wickedness. The text means to say that the drunkard acts like one who is not saved. One who is saved lives under the influence of the Spirit, governing all his thoughts, words, and actions in accordance with God's law so that they manifest the life of Christ in him. By contrast, the drunkard lives under the influence of alcohol, so that not he, but the alcohol governs his thoughts, words, and actions, directing them in the way of sin.

No wonder God's word says that the drunkard will not inherit the kingdom of God (I Corinthians 6:10, Galatians 5:21)! One who persists impenitently in drunkenness manifests that God has not delivered him from the power of darkness and translated him into the kingdom of God's dear Son!

God and God's undeserved grace are the drunkard's only hope. God saves drunkards—not each, but some—by working in them the conviction of their sin, true repentance, and the desire to obey God's law; and by giving them a new mind and a new heart, so that they now live as one who is saved.

\* \* \* \* \*

Young people, these effects of drunkenness on your body and soul are inevitable; if you become drunk, these will happen.

Perhaps you think these things will not happen to you; you can experiment with alcohol, but you will keep all these harmful effects from coming upon your soul and body. Perhaps you take it a step farther: because you know that these are the effects, you will be better able to guard against them, as you drink! So you can get drunk, and drive! So you can get drunk, and remain a virgin! So you can get drunk, and avoid murder! So you can get drunk, and honor God! Armed with the knowledge that drunk people are in danger of doing these things, you will get drunk, and not do them!

Such thinking is foolish.

God's word speaks of these effects as certain. In drunkenness is excess; notice that the Spirit does not lead Paul to say “might be,” or, “sometimes is.” Also Proverbs 23 indicates that these effects are certain. First, Solomon speaks of some effects as though they are—he describes a man who presently is suffering the effects of drunkenness. He is suffering them, because they are inevitable. Second, Solomon speaks of some effects as being future (vs. 33, 34)—but certainly in the future.

Read about Noah (Genesis 9:20-23)! And don't forget about Lot (Genesis 19:30-38)!

How to avoid these effects? Simply this: do not become drunk!

But God requires more than bodily sobriety. He also requires spiritual sobriety. This one has, who is filled with the Spirit.

That is the gospel's remedy against drunkenness. God sets it forth in Ephesians 5:18. And we will examine it, God willing, in our next article. ❖

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*Rev. Kuiper is pastor of Randolph Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin.*

# "LITTLE LIGHTS"

## Safety in the Storm

... let it shine!

by Connie Meyer

An ominous sky loomed over Richard's head as he skipped down the driveway to retrieve the mail. He was going to be seven years old tomorrow and maybe, just maybe, an early birthday card had come. Thunder cracked and rumbled in the distance. A storm was on its way.

Richard wandered back, flipping through the mail to see if any letters were addressed to him. Thunder sounded again as he walked in the door. The house shook and rattled as a gusty wind picked up. Pitter-patter, pitter-patter. Rain hit the windows like marbles. Richard looked outside and discovered the sky had become a ghostly green color. "Mom," he called, "can you come here? The sky looks funny."

"Oh, wow. That sky looks menacing. It could be tornado weather. We'll keep a close eye on it," Mom answered.

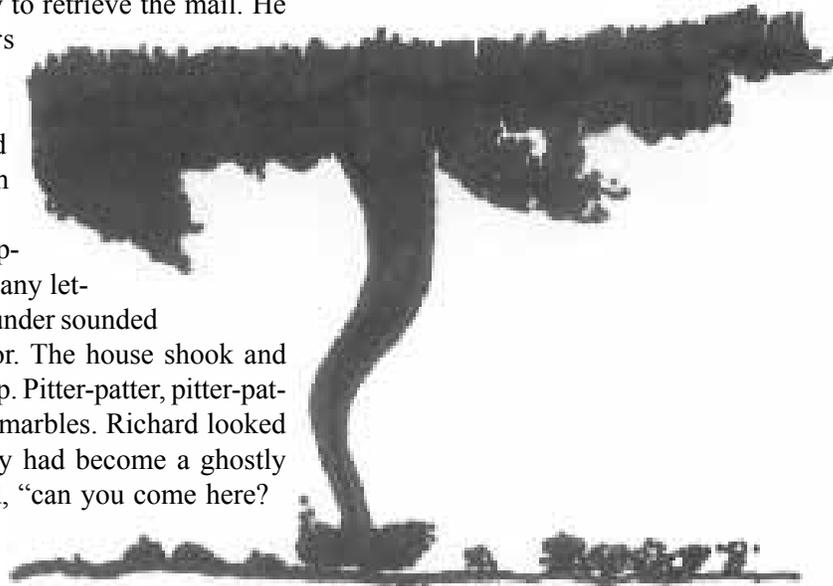
"What happens if a tornado does come?" asked Richard excitedly.

"Either it stays in the sky and goes away or it touches down and destroys things. We trust in God with anything that happens because he, in his providence, has a plan for everything, and he takes care of all of us according to his will. We never have to fear, even if it's scary."

The wind blew harder; the raindrops pelted faster; bright lightning streaked the sky. "Let's get Dad and go in the basement," said Mom, "That's the safest place to be in a dangerous storm."

Just then Dad walked in the door. "There's sure a storm out there, possibly a tornado too. Let's head downstairs."

The three trooped down the steps. A horrible deafening roar filled their ears. The family found shelter under a sturdy stairwell. They could hear ripping, crashing, pounding, and scratching from above them. The thunderous sound brought tears to Richard's eyes. Father and Mother reminded him of God's sovereign and powerful control. Then Richard's father led the family in prayer, "...and keep us safe according to Thy will..."



### Unscramble the words in the brackets from the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 10, Q & A 28 to see what this teaches us about God's providence:

Q. What advantage is it to us to know that God has created, and by his providence doth still uphold all things?

A. That we may be [intepta] \_\_\_\_\_ in [yeardstiv] \_\_\_\_\_; [flahkutn] \_\_\_\_\_ in [orsptyirpe] \_\_\_\_\_; and that in [læl] \_\_\_\_\_ things, which may hereafter [balfel] \_\_\_\_\_ us, we place our firm [uttsr] \_\_\_\_\_ in our [aftihuff] \_\_\_\_\_ God and Father, that [toinhgn] \_\_\_\_\_ shall [ptasreae] \_\_\_\_\_ us from his [oevl] \_\_\_\_\_; since all [serutaerc] \_\_\_\_\_ are so in his [dahn] \_\_\_\_\_, that without his [iitw] \_\_\_\_\_ they [tcaon] \_\_\_\_\_ so much as [emvo] \_\_\_\_\_.

*This Kid's Page was written by Tabitha Meyer as a submission from Mr. Scott Van Uffelen's Senior Writing class at Covenant Christian High School, Walker, Michigan. Tabitha is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.*

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## Church News

### BAPTISMS

"He is the LORD our God: ...He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations."

Psalm 105:7, 8

The sacrament of Holy Baptism was administered to:

Samuel Ian William, son of Mr. & Mrs. William

Graham—Ballymena, N Ireland

Mekenzie Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jon Lubbers—

Byron Center, MI

Hayley Anna, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Nathan

Gallagher—Edmonton, CAN

Micah Ross, son of Mr. & Mrs. Dan Hanko—Faith, MI

Joel Levi, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jon VanOverloop—Faith, MI

Claire Elisabeth, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Eric VanDyke—

Faith, MI

Trevor Matthew, son of Mr. & Mrs. Vance Hayes—First,

MI

Ryan Lee, son of Rev. & Mrs. Richard Smit—Immanuel,

Lacombe, CAN

Kinsley Lin, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Eric Mowery—

Holland, MI

Mara Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Andy Kuiper—

Hudsonville, MI

Joseph William, son of Mr. & Mrs. Justin Pipe—

Loveland, CO

Drew Timothy, son of Mr. & Mrs. Tim Kortering—

Southeast, MI

Oliver Reid, son of Mr. & Mrs. Victor Kuiper—Southeast,

MI

Andrew James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Aaron Regnerus—

South Holland, IL

Tressa May, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Pat Lenting—Trinity,

MI

Charlotte Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Tom

VanderWaal—Trinity, MI

Amber Lorraine, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jeff DeVries—

Trinity, MI

### CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

"Teach me, O LORD, the way of they statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end." Psalm 119:33

Public confession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ was made by:

John Gustafson—Holland, MI

Justin Warner—Holland, MI

Nathan Rau—Hope, MI

### MARRIAGES

"For this God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death." Psalm 48:14

United in the bond of Holy Matrimony were:

Mr. Peter Westra and Miss Christiana DeJong—Holland, MI

Mr. Jordan VanBaren and Miss Alyssa VanOverloop—Hope, MI

Mr. Matthew DeBoer and Miss Stephanie Koole—Hope, MI

Mr. Chad Skolny and Miss Kim Schakel—Pittsburgh, PA/Southwest, MI

Mr. Zachary VanGinkle and Miss Mary Huisken—Redlands, CA

Mr. Jeff TeSlaa and Miss Bethany VanEgdom—Sioux Falls, SD/Edgerton, MI

Mr. Karl Dykstra and Miss Megan Streyle—Southeast, MI

Mr. Ryan Bylsma and Miss Courtney DeJong—South Holland, IL

Mr. Stefan Griess and Miss Jaimy VanDonselaar—Southwest, MI

Mr. Raphael Neff and Miss Joanna Kuiper—Trinity, MI

Mr. Joel DeVries and Miss Connie DeVries—Trinity, MI