

Farewell

Mark Hoeksema

“I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.” —Psalm 37:25.

These words apply to me as I write my last editorial as editor. During my tenure as editor of *Beacon Lights*, I have studiously avoided or minimized interjecting a personal element into my writing, preferring to focus on ideas and principles. In this article I will continue this practice, but the reader will kindly indulge me for adding a personal element to my comments. In so doing I want to apply the words of Psalm 37:25 to David, the author of these words, to myself, as well as to our Protestant Reformed young people.

The main idea of the text is God’s covenant faithfulness in the line of generations.

David knew this truth by experience. As he pens these words, he is an old man, as he says. He is looking back over his life, reviewing the events that have occurred from the days of his youth.

“I have been young.” David had lived a hard life. As a young shepherd, he had killed a lion and a bear—no mean feat for a youth. As a young man he had unexpectedly attained a position of leadership in Israel by killing Goliath. After he was anointed as the next king of Israel—while Saul was the actual and reigning king—he had to flee for his life when Saul sought to kill him because he perceived that David was a threat to him. As king he fought many wars to establish the kingdom of Israel. During his reign his son Absalom attempted to usurp David’s throne. Again he had to flee for his life until his son was killed. All of this is undoubtedly on his mind when he says, “I have been young.”

“I have been young.” In no way can I match David’s experiences and the difficulty of his life, but I also do not have positive memories of my youth. I grew up in the days of the Vietnam war with its horrors and atrocities and its 58,000 deaths in a futile conflict, the only war that America has ever lost. They were the days of civil disobedience, sit-ins on college campuses, and demonstrations in the streets. They were the days of rampant racism and riots in the streets, they were the days of unbridled political corruption, of Watergate, of the resignation of Richard Nixon from the presidency and the ascension to the presidency of Gerald Ford. They were the days of the assassination of John F. Kennedy, of Robert Kennedy, and of Martin Luther King. There were troubles in the church, and general social upheaval. It

was difficult to avoid being caught up in the spirit of the age, and thus to be a Reformed Christian. I realize that all of this is likely foreign to you, young people, but as the saying goes, “You can look it up.” I suggest that you do precisely that, both from secular sources and in the *Beacon Lights* archives, available online.

“I have been young.” That was so long ago that I cannot remember many of the details of those days. I do remember that in one or more instances I was a convention delegate, and I also served on the Federation Board, though the details are fuzzy in my mind. I also remember that upon graduation from high school, I produced an index to *Beacon Lights* with the help of Don Offringa, my contemporary, who remains a member of the PRC. So, I was involved in leadership positions. I have no doubt that my involvement was flawed, since young people of my age were still developing their judgment and wisdom abilities.

David’s words about his youth make me think of the *Beacon Lights* staff. They are young, as befits a youth magazine. Most of the members are between eighteen and twenty-five years old. They are remarkably capable, inventive, and enthusiastic, which speaks well of the young generation in the churches. During my tenure as editor there has been a complete turnover of the staff, with the exception of Ryan Kregel, our managing editor. Yet when the young staff members move on, as is to be expected, there remains a certain continuity in the staff, which insures the quality that our readers expect. For all the hard work by our young people I am most thankful.

But everyone matures and eventually becomes old, as David points out: “and now am old.” This leads me to reflect on how I became editor of *Beacon Lights*. When I received a phone call and a letter asking me to assume the position, I was incredulous. I was 63 years old. My children were long gone, and we did not even subscribe to *Beacon Lights*. Imagine: as a relatively old person, I was asked to take over a youth (teenage) magazine. I must confess that initially I mentally rejected the request as being impossible, and even a bit absurd. At first I did not really give the idea serious consideration.

I was requested to appear at the next staff meeting for an interview and an answer to the request I had received. As I was getting ready to leave for the meeting, my wife asked me, “What are you going to do?” I replied, “I’m going to listen politely and respectfully to what they have to say, and then I am going to refuse the position.”

The *Beacon Lights* staff, however, had other ideas. In the course of their interview of me (and I of them), they produced compelling and cogent reasons that I could not gainsay. Exactly what they were is

irrelevant. But they were extremely persuasive. Five months prior I had had quadruple heart bypass surgery with complications that necessitated three open heart surgeries in three days, followed a month later by a stroke, all of which prompted my physician to forbid stressful activities (such as being responsible for the publication of a monthly magazine). Despite his injunction and my own misgivings, I succumbed to the staff's persuasiveness and agreed to accept the position. When I returned home that day, my wife asked me, "So what did you do?" I replied, "You won't believe what I just did."

Now almost six years later, it is time to pass the torch to a much younger man. When I interviewed for the position, my major argument against becoming editor was that I was too old, and that it would be much wiser to choose a younger person who could relate better to our young people. Now this will happen, in the person of my capable successor, Dewey Engelsma. We have worked together for six months to insure a smooth transition, and I have no doubt that he will do a wonderful job. I ask that you give him your encouragement and support, as you have to me.

Now it is time for me to say, "I have been young, and now am old." I have almost reached the biblical three score and ten. Because *Beacon Lights* is not about individuals, but about a cause, I am convinced that the magazine will continue to exist and flourish in the days to come. It is already more than 75 years old, and I hope it continues long into the future.

I write this farewell letter to our young people in the confidence of David: "yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." David can say these words because he rests in God's covenant faithfulness to his people. He knows that God always maintains his covenant and always sends his blessings upon his people, both young and old. This truth of the covenant means that in our generations our seed will never spiritually beg for the bread of life, even though they may not always prosper materially.

In the context of David's words, I have good confidence that *Beacon Lights* will continue to prosper as a means to prepare the coming generations to take their places in Christ's church. I sincerely thank all those who have served with me, for without them I would have been abysmally lost. Now as I take my leave, I wish the staff and all of our readers God's richest blessing.

Originally Published in:

Vol 76 No 12 December 2017