

BEACON LIGHTS

JANUARY 2018
VOL 77 #1

Editor's Note	3
I Resolve...	4
Interview with Terry Elzinga	5
Devotional	9
Diverse or Perverse? Today's Diversity Agenda	16
Digital Device Overdose and Its Effects on Communication (1)	19
Church News	22
Tulip: An Allegory	23

A Protestant Reformed Youth Magazine
beaconlights.org

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Beacon Lights is published monthly by the Federation of Protestant Reformed Young People's Societies. Subscription price is \$15. Please send all business correspondence, address changes, and subscriptions to the business office.

The articles of *Beacon Lights* do not necessarily indicate the viewpoint of the Editorial Staff. Every author is solely responsible for the contents of his own article. *Beacon Lights* encourages its readers to contact the business office with any questions or comments. Letters may be edited for printing. We will not publish anonymous letters, but will withhold names upon request. All submissions should be sent to the editor six weeks prior to the publication date and must be written in Microsoft Word format. If any material of *Beacon Lights* is reprinted by another periodical, we will appreciate your giving the source and forwarding the printed periodical to the business office.

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Magazine design by Erika Kiel
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Editor's Note Dewey Engelsma

This new year brings a significant change to *Beacon Lights* magazine. After six years of manning the helm, Mark Hoeksema is retiring as editor. He has provided outstanding guidance to the staff, and the magazine is better for his leadership.

Mark, I express a debt of gratitude for your patient instruction over the last six months in what it takes to run the magazine and also in the art of copyediting. As I have said, “six months of learning doth not a copyeditor make,” so I trust you will be longsuffering when you find participles that dangle and infinitives that are split. I wish you God’s blessing in your retirement from the editorship.

To the reader, I ask that you be involved in *Beacon Lights* magazine. Let us know when we are doing something right, and when you think we stumble.

You will find us receptive and appreciative for your feedback. Are there issues that endanger our young people? Let us know, we want to address it. Do you know of a young man or young lady who shows spiritual gifts that you think could be used by God as a writer in *Beacon Lights*? We want to contact that person; this could be the encouragement they need to continue growing in their spiritual life.

Although the editorship of the magazine is changing, the purpose is not. We will continue to “give expression and application of the Protestant Reformed truth in various spheres of life, and through this means of edification to draw our young people closer in their common bond of unity” (Constitution of the *Beacon Lights* Staff).

Editorial Dewey Engelsma

I RESOLVE...

Has it ever struck you how often our New Year’s resolutions mirror those made by the world? “I am going to eat healthy and lose weight this year!” “This year I am going to commit to exercising at least three times a week!” There are things we commit to doing and any number of things that we commit to living without, including candy, carbs, clutter, and more. The list goes on and on. Maybe the resolution has to do with our relationships. “I am going to spend more quality time with my parents (said no young person ever, but hey, maybe this is the year!).” Maybe we are going to commit to spending our money more wisely, cut down on credit card debt, or save more money every month. All of these are fine resolutions, and worth keeping. But why is it that so often, as Christians, as those who are called to be separate from the world (2 Cor. 6:17), we actually look a whole lot like the world? Maybe it’s time for all of us to make a resolution that is radically different from that made by the world, a resolution that

no unbeliever would ever make.

In his book *Habits of Grace*, David Mathis points out that “the vast majority of our lives are lived spontaneously. More than 99 percent of our decisions about this and that happen without any immediate reflection. We just act. Our lives flow from the kind of person we are—the kind of person we have become—rather than some succession of time-outs for reflection.” Rarely does it take place that someone asks a question or an everyday activity takes place in our lives that we stop what we are doing, and say, “You know, I would like to take 10 or 15 minutes to think about that before responding.” What happens most often is that someone cuts us off in traffic and it takes about one second for us to react. A friend at school says something that we don’t like, and we have a retort on the tip of our tongue in seconds. And this happens all day long. The question is, what is shaping our responses in those situations? What are the principles that are

guiding our words, thoughts, and actions in those spur-of-the-moment situations? Too often the world is our guide, and not our heavenly Father.

What does it take for our spontaneous actions to be guided by God, and not by the world, the devil, or our sinful flesh? How do we know what pleases and displeases God, and just as importantly, how do we train ourselves to act out of that knowledge? The best way to know what pleases or displeases anyone is by spending time with them. For the reader who lives at home, he or she knows what it is that pleases their father and mother. By living in close proximity with their parents, they have learned—at times the hard way—what their parents’ likes and dislikes are. And this shapes their behavior at home. A godly young person or child who wants to please his parents knows what it is that makes them happy, and strives to do it.

So, the question is, how do we know the mind of God? Is it even possible? How do we mold our minds and our hearts, so that when we are confronted by a situation, our initial reaction is not one that is shaped by the unbelieving world, but is shaped, even unconsciously, by that which we know will please our Father in heaven? To answer negatively, if we haven’t been studying (2 Tim. 2:15, Acts 17:11), memorizing (Ps. 119:11), or meditating on God’s word (Ps. 1:2), then as events unfold around us, we would do well to be skeptical of our initial reaction. If we are spending all of our time in social media or watching the ungodly and profane television programming orchestrated by the devil, then the “wisdom” we are relying on is the wisdom of man, and of the world. To the extent that our time is spent in worldly exercises and not in reading spiritually edifying materials (starting with the Bible), then to that extent we have ignored the command of God given in Jeremiah 10:2, “Learn not the way of the heathen.” And shamefully, we too have “followed vanity, and become vain and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the Lord had charged them, that they should not do like them” (2 Kings 17:15).

It is possible for us to know what is pleasing to God. In fact, it is our *obligation* to know what is pleasing to God, and then to do it (Jer. 11:4). The apostle Paul teaches us in Ephesians 5:10 that we are to walk as children of light, “Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.” And again, in Romans 12:2, we are admonished to “prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” To prove is to test, to study, and to examine from the Bible what is acceptable and pleasing to God. How we do that

is by sitting under faithful preaching as a member of a true church of Christ. We then discipline ourselves to be engaged in the study and memorization of the Bible.¹ We put away the literary trash of the world, and we read good, spiritual material that edifies. We engage in Bible study, formally through the church, but also informally with a handpicked group of fellow Christians who will challenge us, admonish us if needed, but assist us as we delve into the mysteries and truths of the Bible. We refuse to waste our time by sitting on our bed and thumbing through our phone for hours, or by endless texting or posting. We pray every night and every morning before we pick up the Bible that God would bless us in our study and memorization of his word. We meditate on the word by asking ourselves, “What is God teaching me in this section of his word? What behavior does this text reveal to be pleasing to him, and what should I start doing or stop doing?” And what starts as work, God, in his tender mercy, transforms into joy, and what starts as duty, is transformed into choice, as put so beautifully by William Cowper:

To see the Law by Christ fulfilled
And hear his pard’ning voice
Transforms a slave into a child
And duty into choice

So, this new year go ahead and resolve to lose weight, get organized, or make new friends. But those should not be the first resolutions we make. The unbelieving world makes those resolutions. Our first resolution should be so resoundingly different that the world could not even begin to understand it, and it could go something like this: “I resolve, by the grace of God, the mercy of his Son, and through the power of his Spirit, to read, study, and meditate on his word, until I know what is pleasing to him, and then to live out of that knowledge to the glory of his great name and to the benefit of his saints.”

1 Please don’t think that Bible memorization ends with Sunday School. If that is the case, when you are faced with a temptation, you will be powerless to defend yourself, or as Donald Whitney put it in his book *Spiritual Disciplines*, “the Holy Spirit enters your mental arsenal and looks around for available weapons, but all he finds is a John 3:16, Genesis 1:1, and a Great Commission.” We must be armed with the “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17).

INTERVIEW WITH TERRY ELZINGA

January 5, 2009

Mr. Terry Elzinga, Zeeland, Michigan

Mark H. Hoeksema: Mr. Elzinga, where and when were you born?

Terry Elzinga: I was born in September of 1940, in Borculo, Michigan.

MHH: Who were your parents?

TE: My parents were Tom and Edith Elzinga.

MHH: Where did you grow up?

TE: When I was about four months old, my parents moved from Borculo to Holland, Michigan, in the Tunnel Park area (that would be west of Holland).

MHH: Why did they move there?

TE: My dad had a farm in Borculo, Michigan. But then he took a job in town at the Holland Furnace Company. And they had become members at Holland Church in about 1938. They moved in January of 1941. So, the draw was to Holland for them as a family.

MHH: Prior to that time, where was their church membership?

TE: Originally my parents were members of Borculo Christian Reformed Church. My father was excommunicated from Borculo Church because he opposed the three points of common grace. Then their membership moved to Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church, I think, shortly after Hudsonville was organized. I'm not sure whether they were charter members, but it was right in that time frame.

MHH: So he was excommunicated over the issue of common grace.

TE: Yes, that's correct. He opposed that. My uncle, who lived in Grand Rapids, was a member, I believe, of Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church, and he was a follower of Rev. Hoeksema. And he was quite an influence upon my father, and, I think, convinced him of the error of common grace. And my dad, being quite a feisty individual (laughter), opposed that pretty strenuously in his congregation in the Christian Reformed Church.

Then he was disciplined for that and eventually was put out.

MHH: So, by way of Hudsonville, they eventually made their way to Holland. So he was a long-time member at Holland?

TE: From 1938 on, until he passed away in '81.

MHH: Tell me a little bit about your childhood and your youth. What do you remember as far as growing up was concerned, in general, but also in the context of the church? I'm sure you have some memories.

TE: I'm from a large family. I'm the tenth of eleven, so consequently, material things we didn't have much of. My dad had quite a way with making things stretch. I recall that we went to the Dutch Boy Bakery that was in our neighborhood and got day-old bread. He also went to the Holland Co-op and he got the corn cobs from there. As kids, we would take the few kernels of corn that were left on the cobs to feed the chickens and then burn the corn cobs in the furnace (laughter).

MHH: He was definitely frugal then. Probably had to be.

TE: Had to be, I think, with a family the size he had. And, of course, my folks lived through the depression. My folks lost a farm in the depression and had to stretch to make things go, I guess.

MHH: Where were you educated?

TE: I went to Holland Christian schools all but one year. In 1954 Holland began sending their kids to Hope Protestant Reformed School, so I went to Hope School in the ninth grade. But I graduated from Holland Christian High School. So I spent all but one year in the Holland Christian School system.

MHH: You were born into the Protestant Reformed Church. What are your earliest memories? Where did the church meet at that time?

TE: The Holland Church, when I was born and when I was growing up, had their own building on 20th and Maple. Prior to that I think they met in a bakery at one time. And there was a little chapel on North River in Holland. As a matter of fact, when my folks became members of Holland Church, they went to that little chapel. But that's where I recall going to church—in the building on 20th and Maple. We

lived, as I said, in the Tunnel Park area, which was probably a mile and a half west of the church. So consequently, we rode our bikes to catechism for the most part, and lived fairly close to the church, then.

MHH: Do you recall any of the pastors? Or, do you have any memories in connection with growing up in the church?

TE: The first pastor of Holland Church was Rev. [M.] Gritters. And I was baptized by Rev. [P.] DeBoer. I don't recall either one of those. But I do remember Rev. [W.] Hofman, the first pastor that I have a recollection of. I remember Rev. Bernard Kok quite well. I had catechism under him. He was the minister in Holland at the time of the split in '53.

MHH: Speaking of the split, you would have been about 13 years old at that time. What are your memories of that time period, perhaps preceding and even post-dating the split? And what were the effects that it had as far as your family was concerned, as far as the church was concerned?

TE: Yes, I have some memories. Like you say, I was just a lad at the time. I remember my dad being quite involved in the discussions and maybe even the arguments at the time. And I recall Mr. Kortering being the sole consistory member who was, as we called it, on [Herman] Hoeksema's side. And, of course, the majority of the congregation did go the other direction with Rev. [Hubert] DeWolf. That's how we always separated the two—the Hoeksemas and those that were behind DeWolf. But I recall some very heated discussions, and I can remember listening one-sidedly to my father on the telephone with a member of the church and debating and discussing the issues. And I do recall one time in particular when, after church, we were in the car getting ready to go home. My father noted that the consistory hadn't left the church at all yet. And he said, "Mr. Kortering is down there doing battle alone." He said, "I have to go and help him." And he left us sitting in the car for some time. And he went back in church. I don't know exactly what transpired, but I guess you can almost imagine.

As far as my family is concerned, I'm the tenth of eleven, so towards the bottom. And at that time several of my siblings were married already and had families. And they all were of the same bent, I guess, as my father and my parents. So there was no disruption in the family at that time over the split of '53.

MHH: What about the church? What do you remember as far as the effects on the church—property questions, location questions, numbers?

You say most of them went with the DeWolf faction.

TE: I think it was approximately 2/3 to 1/3. And I recall that we lost our building. We had to find a different place to worship. I recall distinctly the first worship service we had on our own—it was, at that time, called the Federal School building on East 8th Street in Holland. And I remember looking around to see what faces would be in the congregation—who moved in one direction and who didn't.

So, it was quite an interesting period of history as far as our church is concerned.

MHH: Was there continuing fall-out from the split in the years afterwards?

TE: Not that I recall. I don't know how much you personally are aware of the difficulties that followed closely on the heels of the split of '53. But there was a big controversy in our congregation in which my family was quite involved. I think, prior to that controversy our family (that would be my brothers and sisters and their families) probably constituted at least a third of the congregation, probably more. But there was a real controversy in which, once again, our congregation was diminished in numbers. I think we went down to about 13 families by 1960.

MHH: That is not large. Could you describe and speak about the controversy to which you alluded? I think that's an important part of history that needs to be recorded, certainly from your perspective. I am not all that familiar, but I would very much like to hear what you have to say about that. What were the issues? What happened?

TE: Interestingly enough, after fifty years, on the next classis the same issue is going to come up again. It came up, I think, in September, but it was ruled out of order because it was not finished in the lower assembly, I believe. But I don't know what classis will do with it. It started this way. It's so involved, I can't provide you with all the details, but.... My brother-in-law, my oldest sister's husband was nominated to the office of deacon and was elected.

After the election, there was a member who had just transferred to Holland Church who approached the consistory with a protest, you might say, because he was a conscientious objector to the union. He worked in a union shop but he was a conscientious objector. Consequently, the amount of dues that would be required from a union member were taken from his check and given to a charity. And this individual protested against that. The consistory basically dropped him from the office of deacon, even though he had been elected.

Several of my brothers and sisters protested that action. That was the beginning of the controversy. And it went to classis and synod. Classis and synod, at least in the beginning, pretty much upheld the protestants (that would be my brothers and sisters, who were protesting the action of Holland Consistory). From there it escalated, from my perspective, I would say it became more a matter of personalities. The end result was that several of them were excommunicated from Holland Church.

MHH: Several of the protestants—your brothers and brother-in-law?

TE: Yes, I think two of my brothers and at least two of my sisters and at least one brother-in-law. I don't know the exact number, but, several of them.

MHH: On what grounds were they excommunicated, or first disciplined and then excommunicated?

TE: Well, originally, they were disciplined for neglecting the means of grace because they went to other congregations. They went to Grand Haven, quite a few of them at that time. My brother Louie eventually ended up in Hope Church. But then they were reprovved by the synod for that discipline because they were going to a Protestant Reformed Church. That, to their mind, did not constitute neglecting the means of grace. But it came down to the grounds for excommunication was not being willing, I guess, to being reconciled to the consistory.

MHH: And perhaps not being submissive?

TE: I think that certainly would be part of it. From my perspective, they were wronged. Classis and synod agreed with that in the beginning. But from my perspective, I would say that the Lord brought them through a severe trial and they failed. They became very hardened. There, again, I was a lad at the time. But I know that they did not receive the committees that were sent to them, that worked with them, at least not in a brotherly way. And I know your grandpa [*Herman Hoeksema*] was involved as a member of the classical committee that met with them, because classis, of course, had to concur with the excommunication. From what I understand, they said some very harsh things about the consistory, even calling some of the members reprobate. So that's where it got to be.

MHH: Subsequently, what happened to those of your brothers and sisters who had the problem?

TE: Well, that's quite interesting to consider. Some of those moved *en masse* to California. Six of my siblings moved to California (to Redlands), because

there was a member there that they got to know and, I guess you might say, sympathize with. It was one of the Feenstra twins—there were two of them. It fails me which one it was.

MHH: Was it Kryn Feenstra?

TE: I think it might have been Kryn. Who was the other one, do you recall?

MHH: I know, but I can't recall.

TE: It was one of those brothers that had also been put out of Redlands Church. So they moved to California. I still have a brother and sister in California who are basically non-church, I guess you'd say. I would say hardened in their way, too. I had a brother Jim who was (that's my oldest brother). His wife, as a matter of fact, is a member at Hope Church. And he's going to be the subject of the matter that is brought to classis this month. My brother Pete has made reconciliation with the Holland Consistory and is a member in an independent Reformed church at present.

MHH: So this whole episode obviously had great consequences for your family. What I'm curious about is your understanding of why an individual protested against the deacon in the first place? Because he was a conscientious objector and his dues went to charity?

TE: Pine Rest, at that time.

MHH: Do you have any understanding or any knowledge what were the grounds or the motivation behind a protest such as this? My understanding is that the way you described it is pretty much the way the situation was handled in other cases.

TE: I guess I can't get in the individual's mind and know what motivated him to do that. I know it was dealt with on a classical basis and classis did rule that it was acceptable to be a conscientious objector working in a union shop. I know that the argument was that it was a forced contribution. But that argument was refuted, I know, on the floor of classis. And classis did rule that that was an acceptable thing to do.

MHH: Yes, that was my understanding of the situation as well. So you say the consequences, as far as Holland congregation was concerned, was that it was greatly reduced in size. What happened from there? Where did Holland meet and what was the history that followed what you just described?

TE: Well, at the time Holland was meeting in a temporary building—after the split. Like I said,

we first met in the Federal School. From there we moved to various vacant store buildings, just small Mom and Pop old store buildings. That is where we were meeting at the time of all this controversy. So the meeting place really wasn't affected by that. But obviously the numbers and the support of the congregation was diminished. Yes, Holland struggled quite a bit at that time.

MHH: For quite a long time? This would have been, perhaps, in the early '60s?

TE: The controversy began at the election in 1955. So that's in the latter part of '55. I think that excommunication occurred for most of them in '58, I think. So by 1960, the Holland congregation was depleted considerably.

MHH: Who served Holland in those years? Obviously you were older by that time and you would have knowledge of some of the history there.

TE: Rev. James McCollam was the minister at the time. As a result of the difficulties that he had, he came from outside of our churches. There were three ministers who came at that time: McCollam, Harbach, and Emmanuel. He left in '59. Part of it was because of the grief that he went through, although, I personally don't think he was ever truly Protestant Reformed.

MHH: What happened after that?

TE: Eventually we called Rev. [George] Lanting, from Grand Haven Church. Grand Haven was in the process of disbanding at that time, and Rev. Lanting came and served us for seven years.

MHH: When was it that you were able to build your own facility? I believe it might have been off 16th?

TE: Yes, off of 16th. Actually on 18th Street, just off from Hazel Avenue. We moved in in 1965. We began construction in '64. That's kind of an interesting history. Holland congregation was struggling financially in those years. But when Grand Haven disbanded, they gave Holland their church building. And Holland, not being able to use that in the location where it was, sold the building and with a good share of those funds we were able to build a building of our own.

MHH: Great. I had never heard that before about Grand Haven. That certainly was an appropriate gesture on their part.

TE: Yes, we appreciated it.

MHH: I'll bet you did. More recently, you outgrew that facility and you're obviously in a much newer

building today.

TE: Yes. After Rev. Lanting received the call from Edgerton, he accepted the call. Then we called Rev. [John] Heys from South Holland. He came to Holland and during his ministry there, Holland grew considerably. We really outgrew the building that we had. In the late '70s we added on to that building and continued to grow. Eventually we outgrew even the addition that we put on. Then the decision was made rather than try to add on again, to relocate. I happened to be on that building committee at that time. I think I served about seven years from the time we decided to relocate to when it really came to fruition, by the time we built our present facility and moved in.

MHH: A lot of work. I want to switch gears here just a little bit. What has been important to you in your church life?

TE: First, I think what did make an impression on me in my formative years, being a member of the Protestant Reformed Church, is that I felt quite different from the other friends that I had. I went to the Christian School, so I had a little different perspective, I think, from most of my fellow students. One interesting incident that occurred in high school. At that time we had a class in Reformed Doctrine, which was taught by a Mr. Bratt. He knew that I was PR, and he would single me out. I remember one particular incident where in the textbook it made a point of saying that when the word "all" appears in scripture, that it does not necessarily mean everyone head for head. And he posed the question to me in 2 Peter 3:9, where it says, "God is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness, but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." His question to me was, "Who is that all?" And I tried as best I could to explain that from a PR perspective. But what was interesting to me, he posed that question to the entire class. But he also singled me out, knowing that I was PR.

But every other member of the class differed from me as far as their perspective was concerned, except for one individual who was a member of the Reformed church, which was kind of unusual in the Christian school. He eventually became a Reformed minister. But that was kind of an interesting experience for me. But I think the distinctives of the PR churches were quite impressed upon me, especially being in the situation that I was going to a non-PR school. In our neighborhood there were not many PRs—probably no other Protestant Reformed

people in our neighborhood.

So from that perspective I felt a little different from those that I dealt with.

MHH: Mr. Elzinga, how would you compare the church of today with the church of your youth?

TE: Oh, I think in many ways it has not changed dramatically, especially when you view other churches, how much other churches around us have changed. I'm convinced that the Protestant Reformed churches substantially have remained the same in doctrine. I think that in some of the practical matters, as I recall growing up, were probably more restrictive than they are today. For instance, when the television came out, my parents never had a television set. I think it was for the most part viewed as an evil in itself. And we all know that there are things that can be said about many things that can be used in the wrong way. But I think that we have

to remember that the evil is not found in the object. I think that's the main difference that I would recall growing up in the Protestant Reformed Church.

It does seem that the pendulum may have swung too far the other way—being too permissive, I would say, in our walk of life and, maybe what has become quite commonplace in our practices today. But I do believe that, from what I've experienced from the pulpit, we've been warned against worldly-mindedness and conforming to the world and have been admonished to be transformed by the spirit. I think that has remained consistent in the Protestant Reformed churches.

MHH: Thank you very much, Mr. Elzinga, for talking to me and for the thoughts and ideas that you've expressed and the history that you've given. This concludes the interview with Mr. Elzinga.

Devotional Ben Laning

THE DAILY PRESS

“press toward the mark...”
(Philippians 3:14)

January 8

Read 1 Chronicles 11

I have a couple quick observations regarding David's mighty men listed in this chapter. First, I find it interesting that Joab isn't mentioned, although his brothers, Abishai and Asahel, are. Joab was the leader of David's army, a man feared by many, yet it appears that his wickedness keeps him from being listed here. Second, Uriah the Hittite is listed among the mighty. This means that when David betrayed and murdered him he wasn't just doing it to a random soldier, but one of his best and most trusted men.

On another note, do you think it was right of David to pour out the water his mighty men had worked so hard to get for him? I can't imagine being too happy with David if it had been me who fought for that water, but the Reformation Heritage Bible seems to say it was a good thing for a couple reasons. First, David is showing his focus on God by dedicating this “sacrifice” to him. Second, David is demonstrating that what he really needs is much more important than earthly water. *Sing or pray Psalter #210.*

January 9

Read 1 Chronicles 12

Isn't it amazing to see all the Benjamites who came to David in Hebron ready to fight against the house of Saul, a king from their own tribe? God worked even in the hearts of the people of Benjamin to see that he had given the kingdom to David.

Something else I want to point out is that verse 26 of this chapter talks about 4,600 Levites who were ready to help David fight for the kingdom. This was puzzling to me, because I had read recently that Joab didn't bother to count the Levites when David numbered the people, because they didn't go to war. Have you ever heard that? It doesn't appear to be true, because here is an example of the Levites going to war with David. It was true that the Levites were distinct from the other tribes. Their calling was to care for the worship in Israel. With this in mind, they didn't have their own homeland, so they wouldn't be involved in individual battles of conquest, like the other tribes. However, when all of Israel was called to fight God's enemies, it appears that the Levites would have been included as well. *Sing or pray Psalter #16.*

January 10 Read Psalm 133

This chapter speaks about the importance and blessedness of unity in the church, a topic on which I recently heard a sermon. One great point made in that sermon was that we don't create unity, we just keep it. God has perfect unity within himself, and we are merely brought into that. We can promote that unity by remembering that God refers to the communion of the saints, not of the family. Yes, it's true that our earthly families are a beautiful picture of the covenant, but we must not fall into the trap of exalting them above our church family. It is vital that we learn to love all our fellow saints in the church. This is a difficult task, because we can have very different opinions about certain things, but our spiritual oneness demands it. We must strengthen others in times of trial and also be able to receive that strengthening ourselves. By nature, we like to think that we can handle something ourselves and don't need to get the rest of the church involved, but an important aspect of unity is being able to pray for and bring comforting words to each other. *Sing or pray Psalter #371.*

January 11 Read Psalm 106

We've been studying Ancient Egypt in history this last marking period. The Egyptians worshipped hundreds of gods, but one of the main ones was Osiris, god of the river. The Nile River was an integral part of Egyptian life, as it brought them water and fertile soil from the mountains for their crops. Osiris was credited with bringing them good harvests, and he was believed to take on the form of the Apis bull when he went on land. Our history book makes the connection between this bull and the golden calf worshipped by Israel in the wilderness, as recounted in verses 19 and 20. Moses was taking too long on the mountain, so the people decided they'd better come up with a new god to lead them. Naturally, the first god they'd turn to would be one they were familiar with from their days in Egypt. Israel would revert back to this god again during the reign of Jeroboam, when he made two golden calves in Israel for the people to worship (1 Kings 12:26–30). Just like the Israelites, we need to be on constant guard against the gods of this world that appeal to our sinful nature. *Sing or pray Psalter #308.*

January 12 Read Psalm 107

A few years ago, we studied the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl in American History class. It was a very interesting time period to learn about. In the 1920s, the economy and the American Midwest were booming. Photos were being circulated showing gigantic fruits and vegetables, which convinced more and more people

to move west and farm the fertile land. Unfortunately, the crops were performing so well that man's greed took over, and he stopped caring for the ground in an effort to make as much money as possible. This weakened the soil, bringing disaster when the winds came. Seemingly overnight, what had been extremely lush farmland became a vast expanse of rolling dunes. Many families had to pack up and leave, because their land and even their homes were getting covered in sand.

Psalm 107 speaks of how God is in control of all things, and verses 33–34 talk about how he is the one who makes fertile land into a wasteland. Just like God showed the world at the time of the Dust Bowl that he was in control, God is doing the same today with all the natural disasters that have been taking place. *Sing or pray Psalter #296.*

January 13 Read 1 Chronicles 13

Lord's Day 35 of the Heidelberg Catechism talks about how we are to worship God only in the way he has commanded us. The idea that we should only bring things into the worship service that are commanded in God's word is called the regulatory principle. I learned about this during the Reformation conference we had here in Loveland. At the time of the Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church had long since abandoned the regulatory principle. They worshipped idols, corrupted the teaching of the sacraments, and sold indulgences. Preaching was done in a language that the people didn't even understand. John Calvin and other reformers restored the primacy of the preaching and guided the true church back to worshipping God exactly as he has commanded.

That's the point made in this story as well. At first glance, it might seem a little harsh of God to strike Uzzah dead just for reaching out to steady the ark. After all, he had good intentions, didn't he? However, this story serves to illustrate just how important it is that we do things God's way, not our own. *Sing or pray Psalter #1.*

January 14 Read 1 Chronicles 14

We recently had a lively discussion in young adults' Bible study about lying and deceit. What exactly is a lie? Is there any situation in which we should lie? Is there a difference between lying and deceit?

Many would say that a lie is trying to convince someone of something that isn't true. This is always wrong, some claim, even if it is only a lie of omission (not telling a key part of the truth in an effort to deceive). After all, we confess in Lord's Day 43, "I avoid all sorts of lies and deceit, as the proper works of the devil."

The problem comes in when you start considering specific situations. In this chapter, God commands the

Israelites to go around behind the Philistines and attack when they “hear a sound of going in the tops of the mulberry trees” (v. 15). Wasn’t this deceiving the Philistines? Wouldn’t that be a lie? Obviously, this was not a sin, because God commanded them to do it, but can you explain why it was proper? What does this mean for lies like Rahab’s? Are there times God commands us to say something that’s not true? *Sing or pray Psalter #60.*

January 15 Read 1 Chronicles 15

After the death of Uzzah, David made sure he transported the ark exactly as God commanded. First, the Levites sanctified themselves. The Levites then carried the ark between poles on their shoulders, instead of on a cart pulled by oxen. The Levites continued to show the proper reverence by offering sacrifices of thanksgiving when everything had been prepared safely. In addition, they provided music for the procession. David wore his priestly robe and danced with spiritual joy as they travelled. When they arrived without accident, David pitched a tent for the ark, offered burnt offerings of thankfulness, and blessed and fed the people.

As we talked about with the story of Uzzah, this history brings to light the absolute necessity of worshipping God exactly as he commands. This means being mindful of who it is that we are coming to and doing so with the proper awe and reverence. David did this by listening to God’s commands and directing all praise to his holy name. How must we do the same when we come to our God in congregational worship and in prayer? *Sing or pray Psalter #250.*

January 16 Read 1 Chronicles 16

1 Chronicles 16:34 says, “O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever.” We just had a sermon about that word “good.” We tend to use it so flippantly to describe how we are doing in general, someone’s basic morality, or anything that we mildly enjoyed. However, when it comes down to it, God is the only one who is truly good. As Jesus himself says in Mark 10:18, “There is none good but one, that is, God.” Those who sin are corrupted and have no goodness of themselves. That’s why we don’t use the world’s phrase, “my goodness.”

Verse 9 also stood out to me in this psalm of David, which says, “Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him, talk ye of all his wondrous works.” The command to talk about God’s wondrous works is so simple, and yet such a great reminder for us. How can we really be a witness in this world if we don’t talk about God’s works? Simply living a “good” outward life isn’t enough; the Mormons can do that. We must seek opportunity to glorify our

Father in heaven by talking about our faith. *Sing or pray Psalter #378.*

January 17 Read Psalm 1

Psalm 1:2 speaks of the righteous man, “But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.” Do you meditate on God’s law “day and night?” Do I? The world rejects the idea of meditating on anything today, much less the word of God. Meditating requires sitting and pondering, a foreign concept to our “connected” generation. At this past teacher’s convention, I heard an excellent sectional about what technology does to the brain. We need to realize that our brain is constantly being rewired, and we should be mindful of the content we’re rewiring it with. With all the constant messaging, popups, and short videos that constitute social media, our brains are quickly losing the capability to have a sustained, concentrated thought. We need to care for the mind God has given us. As a recent *Beacon Lights* article stated, the devil lost the battle in 1517, but we are winning it for him 500 years later. We must guard ourselves and not be like the child who continues making mud pies in a slum when he’s been offered a glamorous vacation at the ocean (C. S. Lewis). *Sing or pray Psalter #42.*

January 18 Read Psalm 2

When we talk about the sins of the righteous and the wicked in Bible class, the question often arises, “Why did they do that if they knew it wouldn’t work?” There are so many examples of this. Pharaoh kept rejecting God’s demand to let the people go, even though he was destroying his own kingdom by doing so. Pharaoh led his army into the Red Sea, even though he knew he was placing his life in the hands of the God he’d rejected. Hiel rebuilt Jericho, even though he knew his sons would keep dying as a result. Shimei left Jerusalem, even though he knew Solomon said he’d be killed for doing so.

Although history has made it clear that man is powerless before God, yet the wicked continue to try and defeat him. Psalm 2:4 says of God’s reaction to their vain attempts, “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.” God holds everything in the palm of his hand and it’s ludicrous to think man has any power over him. Yet we do the same whenever we sin blatantly against God’s law. *Sing or pray Psalter #3.*

January 19 Read Psalm 15

Psalm 15:5 describes the righteous man as, “He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward

against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved.” There are many other passages in the Old Testament that also talk about lending money and charging interest. Leviticus 25:35–37, Deuteronomy 23:19, and Exodus 22:25 are a few passages that also command the Israelites to lend to the needy brother without usury or interest. In addition, the debts that Israelites did owe to their brethren were all forgiven at the seventh year, as explained in Deuteronomy 15:2. However, Deuteronomy 23:20 states that interest may be charged on a loan given to a foreigner.

So is it wrong for Christians today to charge interest when they loan fellow Christians money? It is true that there is a great warning for us here. Countless relationships have been destroyed because of money that was owed and not repaid. Still, it would be going too far to say that charging interest is evil. Sometimes these loans can benefit both parties. The real message for us here is that we must be careful not to take advantage of those in need. *Sing or pray Psalter #24.*

January 20 Read Psalm 22

It is amazing to see how God worked in David to write this psalm as a type of Christ hundreds of years before our Savior was crucified. In verse 15 he says, “My tongue cleaveth to my jaws.” Nearing the end of Jesus’ crucifixion, he said “I thirst,” and a sponge filled with vinegar was placed on his lips, as stated in John 19:28–29. Going on to Psalm 22:16, we read, “They pierced my hands and my feet.” Even our smallest children know the story of how our Savior Jesus Christ was nailed to the cross. We also know the story in John 20:24–29, where Thomas believes Jesus is risen when he’s able to touch the holes in Jesus’ hands and feel where the spear thrust into his side. Finally, verse 18 continues by saying, “They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.” This event is recounted in Matthew 27:35, which states this took place “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet,” apparently referring to King David, the author of Psalm 22. *Sing or pray Psalter #47.*

January 21 Read Psalm 23

Reading excerpts from the book *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* helped me understand this passage more fully. I had always thought of the rod and staff as the same instrument, but they are not. The rod refers to the curved club every shepherd carries, which pictures power and authority. This club is used to protect the sheep against predators, either by striking out or by throwing it at them, a skill that shepherds spend a lot of time mastering. Another way the rod can be used is to discipline the sheep who wander astray. Finally, the rod is used at times to

help part the wool and carefully examine the health of the sheep, as denoted in the phrase “under the rod” (Ez. 20:37).

Whereas the rod shows authority, the staff pictures kindness. The staff is a long, slender stick with a curved end specifically designed for sheep. Whenever the sheep start to wander off in the wrong direction, the shepherd uses the staff to gently lead them back to the right path. In addition, the staff is also used to reunite a lamb with its mother and to gather up an individual for special inspection. *Sing or pray Psalter #52.*

January 22 Read Psalm 24

I have a couple things to note in this chapter. First, verse one is used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:26 and in 1 Timothy 4:4 to explain to the New Testament church that everything belongs to God and previously unclean foods weren’t to be viewed as such anymore. Now that Christ had come the time of types and shadows were no longer needed, so Christians had no reason to feel guilty about the type of food they were eating.

Second, verses 7 and 9 repeat the words, “Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.” What are these everlasting doors that are being lifted? Spurgeon explains this by saying, “Doors were often taken from their hinges when Easterners would show welcome to a guest, and some doors were drawn up and down like a portcullis, and may possibly have protruded from the top; thus literally lifting up their heads.” This imagery demonstrates how we will always be welcomed into heaven through Christ’s shed blood. *Sing or pray Psalter #58.*

January 23 Read Psalm 47

The power of music is undeniable. A study done at Western Washington University found that students who were given a difficult word puzzle got a song stuck in their head more than those whose puzzle was easier. The conclusion was that our brain searches for rhymes and patterns to help solve problems, while also seeking a distraction when we feel overloaded or bored. Because of this, our brain tends to store songs quickly, which might make it difficult to store other forms of information later. Although our brain has plenty of storage space, it can be hard to convince it that songless content is important enough to wire into our long term memory, according to a study in *Scientific Reports*.

Psalm 47:6 commands us to sing praises to God. As was stated in a recent Reformation Day lecture, singing is a natural response to the gospel. The joy of our salvation makes us want to express that happiness, and what better way to do that than with song? It’s amazing to see what

even small children can remember when the content is put to a tune. Music is an extremely powerful tool, so we must be careful to use it correctly. *Sing or pray Psalter #130.*

January 24 Read Psalm 68

I like to talk about current events once a week in class. I think it's important that we understand what's going on in the world around us in order to learn more about God and his plan. The problem is that due to so much of today's news being absolute trash, it's very hard to find news sites that are appropriate for kids to browse. With this in mind, we searched and found a few sites with decent current events quality. One of these sites is worthynews.com. As I looked the website over, I saw a lot of articles about Christian persecution around the globe. One that stood out was an article about two pastors in Myanmar, where Rev. Titus is minister, who were sentenced to prison on false charges.

Psalm 68:19 says, "Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits." Even though God's people in other parts of the world and throughout history experience fierce persecution, yet they are still daily loaded with benefits. God always preserves them and teaches them to set their eyes on heaven, their true home. How much easier it should be for us, who have so much, to count our blessings! *Sing or pray Psalter #183.*

January 25 Read Psalm 89

In my Bible, the heading for this psalm reads, "Maschil of Ethan the Ezrahite." So who was Ethan the Ezrahite? He is also mentioned in 1 Kings 4:31 as one of the wise men of the day, though he wasn't as wise as Solomon. According to the Institute for Creation Research, it is this Ethan that is listed in 1 Chronicles 2:6 as a son of Zerah, which is probably where the term "Ezrahite" comes from. This verse also refers to Heman as another son. It is this Heman that is another one of the wise men listed in 1 Kings 4:31, and who wrote Psalm 88. It is believed that these brothers were lead singers with Asaph at the tabernacle. 1 Chronicles 15:17 talks about an Ethan the son of Kushaiah, who was a magician. He was also one of the Levites involved in bringing the ark to Jerusalem, and some people believe that he's the same Levite as Ethan the Ezrahite of Psalm 89. *Sing or pray Psalter #241.*

January 26 Read Psalm 96

Charles Spurgeon brings up a good point in his commentary on this chapter when he says that we must explain the truth to the heathen in the face of so-called Christians who corrupt it. The world is always looking for an excuse to attack God's people, so we must be careful whom

we allow ourselves to be associated with and be quick to condemn those spreading the lie under the guise of Christianity. One example of this would be President Trump. The media loves to associate white evangelicals, a group nearly every member in our churches would be lumped into, with the president. Although we can support some of his conservative decisions, we mustn't give the heathen reason to believe we're wholeheartedly behind his disobedient lifestyle. Similarly, the world loves to make Christians the scapegoat when confessing Christians perform heinous acts. News of the latest shooting always makes me apprehensive that the shooter will turn out to be a radical Christian with a warped understanding of scripture. We need to be ready to give an answer when the wicked look at passages in the Bible about hatred and murder and claim we are supporting this kind of abominable behavior. *Sing or pray Psalter #257.*

January 27 Read Psalm 100

We are reading a book titled "... and now Miguel" in reading class right now. This story is about a Hispanic family of shepherds. It's interesting to see how a number of things we know about sheep from the Bible are confirmed in the book. Scripture tells us that we are like sheep in the sense that we are so weak and easily wander off into ways of wickedness. The sheep on Miguel's ranch are very dumb and need to be watched constantly. They are so dumb, in fact, that ewes and their lambs easily get separated from one another and can't find their way back, so the family has to brand each mother-child pair with the same number. There's one scene where a mother and her lamb are bawling in search of each other, even though they are no more than ten yards apart and looking directly at one another. Speaking of dumb sheep, Miguel also confirms the words of Isaiah 53:7, "as a sheep before her shearers is dumb," when he tells about the shearing time. He laughs at how the sheep just stand there looking proud and lazily chewing their cud while the men sharpen their blades. *Sing or pray Psalter #268.*

January 28 Read Psalm 101

Earlier this month, we talked about lying and deceit. Psalm 101:7 brings us back to this subject with the words, "He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight."

I have always believed that lies of omission are sinful. However, when I tried to find some passages that directly state this, I found nothing. From what I see, there are no passages in the Bible that condemn lies of omission. I think some of you will find that fascinating. I know I did! What we do have, however, is an intriguing passage

in 1 Samuel 16, where God tells Samuel to say he's going to offer a sacrifice if asked where he was going, omitting the fact that he was also anointing the new king. I think it's important to note, though, that God never told Samuel to say something that was false. There are no passages in the Bible where God commands his people to say something false, even if it's for the "right" reasons. On the other hand, it appears that good activity can be concealed when necessary, without saying a lie. What do you think? *Sing or pray Psalter #271.*

January 29 Read Psalm 105

This chapter talks about God's care for Israel throughout history, including during their time in Egypt. Our ancient world history book also has a short section on Israel's time there. It is likely during the reign of the Hyksos that Joseph was sold into slavery and became a key figure in the empire. No one knew exactly where the Hyksos came from or what happened to them after they were pushed back out, but we know that they ruled Egypt from 1782–1570 BC, according to the *Ancient History Encyclopedia*. Their name has been mistranslated to mean "shepherd kings," a mistake our textbook makes, but it actually means simply, "rulers of foreign lands." This explanation provides the answer for why "shepherd" kings would see shepherding as an abomination, a question which one of my students stumped me with. Well, the Hyksos might have respected the Israelites, but the native Egyptians did not. Exodus 1:8 says, "Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph," and he decided to enslave them. *Sing or pray Psalter #289.*

January 30 Read Psalm 132

My study Bible summarizes this psalm with the words, "David expresses his zeal for the ark of God that it might be in its rightful place." As I was reading through the chapter, I started wondering if there was a connection between the ark of the covenant and the one that saved Noah's family and the animals during the flood. As it turns out, they are different words in the Hebrew, one could be translated "box" and the other "chest." These words are similar, however, as both point to an object used to store things. The ark of the flood stored the church, while the ark of the covenant stored the tables of the law and a couple other things. In doing so, both arks are a symbol of God's covenant with his people. Those who obey God's commandments are saved, just as Noah's family was preserved in the ark. Today, those are saved from death who have God's law written within their heart. Can you think of any

other similarities between these two famous arks of scripture? *Sing or pray Psalter #367.*

January 31 Read 2 Samuel 6

The teaching of common grace was at the center of the controversy that led to the formation of the Protestant Reformed Churches in 1924. At that time, this false doctrine was laid out in three points by the Christian Reformed Church. While the second and third points talked about restraint of sin in the wicked man and his ability to do some good, the first point claimed that "there is also a certain favor or grace of God which He shows to His creatures in general." After all, the rain falls on both the just and the unjust, does it not (Matt. 5:45)?

It is true that God gives material things to all men, elect and reprobate alike, that are good from an earthly perspective. However, while those things are a blessing to God's people, they're nothing but a curse to the wicked. This story is a great example of that. The ark was only a curse to the Philistines. It destroyed their god and many of their lives. On the other hand, that same ark was a blessing to the house of Obededom for the entire three months it was there. *Sing or pray Psalter #368.*

February 1 Read 2 Samuel 7

The beginning of this story serves as a reminder for us not to think we can know the mind of God. When David approached Nathan about building God a permanent house, the prophet immediately told him that God was with him in this endeavor. Nathan didn't even bother to ask God before responding, because he felt that God's approval was rhetorical. It must have been a bit of a humbling experience for Nathan to have to go back to David and explain why it wasn't God's will that he proceed.

God sent Nathan to tell David that he wasn't going to be the one to build the temple for a few different reasons. First, God brings out the fact that he hasn't needed a permanent house up to this point, and he doesn't need one now. Second, Israel had been in a state of nearly constant war under King David, and the temple needed to be built at a time when they had stability and peace. Third, God had preordained that Solomon would build the temple. *Sing or pray Psalter #363.*

February 2 Read 1 Chronicles 17

David wasn't the one God chose to build the temple, but Gertrude Hoeksema convincingly argues it could still be called David's temple just as much as Solomon's. David was the one who organized the remaining Canaanites in the land to help with the manual labor. He was the one who gathered much of the cedar wood, iron for nails, gold,

silver, and brass for the building. In addition, David also gave much of his personal wealth for the temple (1 Chron. 29:3) and called upon the people to help. Furthermore, David put together a work schedule by which the 38,000 Levites over the age of 30 would perform their duties at the temple. This rotating schedule ensured the Levites ample time to spend at home with their families when they weren't needed at the temple. It was very detailed, even scheduling when each Levite would perform certain temple tasks. Most importantly, God gave David the plans for the temple, which he then gave to Solomon (1 Chron. 28:19). *Sing or pray Psalter #402.*

February 3 Read Psalm 25

There are always new teaching strategies being pushed in college education classes around the country. Each one is supposedly revolutionary and provides the answer to our education woes. I remember one of the ideas really pushed in my college days was turning the teacher into a mere facilitator. Instead of telling the students what they should know, the teacher's job, it was taught, is simply to guide the students in their own discussion on the topic. Now, with this strategy as with most of the others, there are good elements that we can glean from it to incorporate into our own teaching, but it should not be looked at as the magic bullet. Psalm 25:6 says, "Remember, O LORD, thy tender mercies and thy lovingkindnesses; for they have been ever of old." God's love for us never changes, and neither does the way in which he speaks to us. God spoke to his people in simple sermons thousands of years ago, and he continues to do the same today. Just as we oppose bringing new approaches into the preaching, so we should be wary of teaching strategies that reject what has worked for generations. *Sing or pray Psalter #67.*

February 4 Read Psalm 29

Psalm 29 speaks of God's power. No one can hide from him, not even in the densest of forests, as mentioned in verse 9. This is true of all mankind, elect and reprobate alike. We see a direct example of this all the way back at the fall. Adam and Eve were ashamed of their sin, so they tried to hide from God among the trees of the garden (Genesis 3:8), but their sin was discovered. Another example of man attempting to hide from God in a forest would be Absalom. This wicked man rebelled against his own father, God's anointed. When his men started losing the battle they fled to the wood of Ephraim, as recounted in 2 Samuel 18. However, Absalom's army could not hide from God's wrath in the forest, and verse 8 says "The wood devoured more people that day than the sword devoured." In addition, Absalom himself was destroyed as his hair caught in the boughs of a tree, leading to his

murder at the hand of Joab. *Sing or pray Psalter #76.*

February 5 Read Psalm 33

Psalm 33:10 reads, "The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect." When I read this verse I immediately thought of Ahithophel. Ahithophel was David's trusted adviser, whose advice was so good it "was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God" (2 Sam. 16:23). Although Ahithophel was very wise, he was also wicked, which he showed by siding with Absalom when he rebelled against David his father.

After overtaking the palace and sending David on the run, Absalom was eager for advice on how to proceed next. Ahithophel smartly advised Absalom to run and attack David as quickly as possible, while David's men were still scattered and unorganized. This was the right move to make, but God worked in the heart of Absalom to take the advice of Hushai, David's spy, instead. When Ahithophel saw that Absalom was going to sit back and allow David to round up his troops, he knew that all was lost, so he went home and killed himself. The despair of a wicked man when his counsel is brought to naught is utter and complete. *Sing or pray Psalter #86.*

February 6 Read Psalm 36

When we understand God and his perfect plan, our eyes are opened to the pictures of spiritual things we see in creation. This is brought out in verse 9, where it reads, "For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light." The sun setting in the west is a picture of the Son of God dying on the cross and descending into hell. The rising of the sun in the east pictures Christ rising from the dead in the victory over sin. The dying of organisms in the fall is a picture of death entering the world after the fall of our first parents, making us totally depraved. The winter snow pictures the cleansing that's ours through Christ's shed blood, and the renewal of life in the spring pictures the new heart we've been given. The constant battle going on inside us against parasites and viruses is a picture of our internal spiritual battle. This warfare usually can't be seen outwardly, but it's going on within us throughout our whole life. These infections start small, but they can quickly take over the entire body, just like sin can when we don't fight it. *Sing or pray Psalter #93.*

February 7 Read Psalm 39

This chapter talks about how short our life is. David calls upon God in verse 4 to show him how frail he is. Verse 5 goes on, "Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily

every man at his best state is altogether vanity.”

Both the wicked and righteous speak of life’s shortness, although they apply that truth to themselves in opposing ways. The wicked man’s answer to life’s shortness is to live it up and gain as much wealth and prestige for himself as possible, as mentioned in verse 6. The “eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die” (Eccl. 8:15; Isa. 22:13) mentality is celebrated in the world around us.

Since God doesn’t exist, and this life is all we have, we should enjoy it while it lasts.

In contrast, the response of the righteous man to life’s shortness is to come to God in repentance asking for forgiveness, as stated in verse 8. We have been created for one purpose, to glorify God. Life is so short and when we walk in ways of sin, we’re wasting the time God has given us to glorify him. *Sing or pray Psalter #105.*

CHRISTIAN LIVING Philip Rainey

DIVERSE OR PERVERSE? TODAY’S DIVERSITY AGENDA

Each era of world history has not only its own notable personalities and events, but also its own leading ideas. These ideas shape every sphere of man’s life in the world so that the religion, ethics, politics, literature, and music of each historical period are all governed by the intellectual side of man. We are well acquainted with the sixteenth century Reformation and how the recovery of biblical truth transformed both the religious and political life of Europe. Or we think of the seventeenth century Enlightenment and how European society was largely restructured according to the ideas of that movement.

The leading ideas of each historical epoch also have their own terminology. Widely accepted ideas must be formulated, and thus they come to be expressed in certain phrases and statements that assume universal form. For example, the leading ideas of the Reformation came to be expressed in such terms as justification by faith alone, the sufficiency of Holy Scripture, and the priesthood of all believers, to name but a few. Alternatively, one of the great terms or watchwords of the Enlightenment was rational enquiry (by which was meant that human reason alone would decide every question).

Our day too has its leading ideas with their own terminology. You know the terms; they include diversity, inclusiveness, tolerance, equality, and LGBT rights. These are the watchwords or slogans of the Western world today. It is my contention that as Christians we need to become a good deal more self-conscious about these terms; specifically we need to do so in order to appreciate the dangerous, deceptive, and wicked thinking that lies behind them.

Before proceeding, it is well to point out that we have no problem with such terms as diversity and inclusiveness in themselves. As Reformed believers

we understand, for example, that in the very being of Jehovah God there is both unity and diversity: there is one divine being and yet three distinct persons. We understand also God’s command that man should disperse over the face of the earth, that there be a diversity of nations (Genesis 1:28). From this rich diversity our God gathers a catholic church. Oh yes, we believe in diversity. The diversity that God creates and which we see in the “one, holy, catholic church” is a beautiful thing. Neither do we have a problem with inclusiveness. We include in our fellowship all those who confess the truth and live a godly life. I am taking issue with the current use of such terms by the ungodly in the advancement of their anti-Christian agenda.

The terms mentioned above are applied to every aspect of life today. Public and national life, we are told, must respect diversity and promote inclusiveness. Thus, for example, the US military recently dropped its ban on practicing homosexuals and lesbians serving in its ranks. Thus a small bakery in one U.S. state that refused to bake a cake celebrating a sodomite “marriage” was prosecuted and forced out of business. Recently, on a Saturday, the leading English soccer teams displayed the rainbow colors on armbands and boot laces as a very public display of support for LGBT “rights.”

All of these things have been done in the name of diversity, inclusiveness, and associated terms. Obviously such terminology is very powerful; after all, our whole society is presently being transformed in line with it. My reason for drawing attention to this is that these terms are not neutral. That is how those who promote these concepts like to portray things; and that is how, wittingly, or unwittingly a majority of people in our nation have come to see things.

As Reformed Christians, however, we must subject all beliefs including their associated terminology to the judgment of the word of God. In doing so we will see that the terminology of our day and its application to every area of society is by no means neutral, but is the expression of a rabidly antichristian and wicked idea. The controlling idea behind every sphere of western society today is the philosophy of postmodernism. I have come to believe that postmodernism is one of (if not the greatest of) the devil's lies. It may even be the culmination and goal of all Satan's false ideas by which he deceives countless millions today.

If you are not familiar with the term, you are certainly familiar with the central claim of postmodernism: there are no absolutes. By this is meant there is no absolute right or wrong; everything is merely a matter of individual perception. You do not like same-sex marriage and may even think it wrong; I am completely fine with it; both are a matter of perception and therefore neither is right or wrong.

I would be confident in saying that every Protestant Reformed believer reading this article would recognize and reject the example I cited above. You would say quite rightly that same-sex marriage is contrary to the Bible and is therefore wrong; you would go further and declare it to be grossly sinful, an abomination; and in this you would be absolutely right.

But let me take you to the college classroom, a far cry from the safe confines of your Protestant Reformed family. Or let me take you to your new job where you are surrounded by youthful zealots of postmodernism thoroughly indoctrinated by the public school system. When you let it be known that you believe same-sex marriage is wrong, you are met with howls of protest and sentiments such as these: "What right have you to make such a claim?"; "you do not accept diversity"; "your position is bigoted and long out-of-date"; "you should really be ashamed of yourself and learn to be more tolerant." How are you going to answer? In such circumstances, and let me tell you I have experienced them, we can easily be put "on the back foot" and become defensive.

And speaking of the college classroom, lest anyone reading this article is tempted to think that I am engaging in mere quibbles over words—that I am playing a game of semantics—let me take you to a college classroom in which at least some of you may even be sitting. Let me take you to Calvin College, Grand Rapids. If you go to their official website and open the page on "Diversity and Inclusion," you will see the terminology of diversity that I have outlined;

you will also see that this terminology has exactly the meaning that I described.

On one of the webpage links you may read a lengthy report adopted by Calvin College in 2014 which fully commits the college to the wicked diversity agenda. On page eleven, the report declares that a proper definition of diversity "should recognize the existence of differences other than race and ethnicity including difference of gender, ability, socio-economic status, and sexual identity." Sexual identity refers to homosexuality and heterosexuality. And, of course, gender now refers not only to feminism, but also to trans-genderism.

It is clear from the webpage that Calvin College implements its diversity agenda across every aspect of college life. For Calvin College, diversity includes LGBTQ "rights." This is clear from the report just quoted; but it is also clear—shamefully so—from the upcoming events listed on the webpage: there the college promotes "A Primer on LGBTQ" rights. This event, to be held on campus in March 2017 (and for which you may sign up on the webpage), will introduce participants to LGBTQ rights and assess how welcoming Calvin is for LGBTQ students. Does someone still say that I engage in mere quibbles, that I play a game of semantics?

It is my fervent prayer and desire that especially the youthful readers of *Beacon Lights* be able to see today's diversity language for what it is—a great delusion; or to put it even more simply, a big lie. To quote the writer of Proverbs: "For [as a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he" (23:7). If we think a lie in our hearts, we will also speak lies. The terminology of diversity is a deceit and is rooted in the false thinking (philosophy) of postmodernism. Hence, we need to be able to debunk this false thinking, showing that it is both intellectually incoherent and unethical.

Postmodernism is the idea that there is no such thing as truth. By truth is meant any statement or belief that is absolute and universal. Accordingly, truth is not and can never be objective; truth is always a matter of individual perception. Perhaps an example will help: recently I overheard a conversation between two people in which it was the burden of one participant to say that we really should stop arguing about Calvinism and Arminianism. Calvinism and Arminianism are both true; they are two sides of the one coin; one teaches the sovereignty of God, the other teaches the responsibility of man; they are merely different perspectives of the one truth. Of course, nothing could be farther from the truth: Calvinism and Arminianism stand in a

relation of outright contradiction, so that Calvinism is the truth and Arminianism is the lie. But the position of the debater described above makes truth relative—one may be an Arminian and hold to the truth, or one may be a Calvinist and also hold to the truth. The mind boggles, but this is precisely the kind of nonsense to which postmodernism leads.

Of course if there is no such thing as truth, then neither can there be any absolutes, for nothing is absolutely true (or false). It is not hard to expose the incoherence of this position: If there are no absolutes, then the statement “there are no absolutes” cannot be absolutely true! Postmodernist philosophy is logically absurd—it asserts there are no absolutes at the same time claiming that this assertion is absolutely true! And to think that all of this passes for the most profound wisdom—and is by far the majority opinion in every public college today—only shows how the devil has blinded the mind of those who believe not the gospel.

But postmodernism is not only intellectually incoherent (to put it simply, it is nonsense); it is also a wicked rejection of Almighty God and his truth. Postmodernism is no different from any other false philosophy in that it has its roots in the totally depraved mind of man: “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5).

Furthermore, every false way of thinking and every rejection of God’s truth is implied in our first parents’ sin. The sin of eating the forbidden fruit was a sin of both mind and will. The devil appealed to the mental faculty of man when he suggested to Eve that by disobeying God’s command both she and her husband would “know good and evil” and that “your eyes shall be opened” (the eyes of their understanding). The devil is very clever, and he knows full well something that we ignore at our peril, namely, that the light of God’s truth enters a person via the mind. The mind is the faculty by which either the light of truth or the darkness of the lie dwells within the whole man.

In effect, the devil’s lie was that our first parents could have true knowledge of God and themselves in relation to God without divine revelation. In other words, they could dispense with the authority of God’s word and still have true knowledge of God and all things. By their own unaided reason they could investigate the world and themselves and thus create their own system of ethics (“knowing good and evil”). The knowledge thus acquired would be “truth” for them; but it would not necessarily be

truth for anyone else; consequently truth becomes subjective—a matter of individual perception—and subjective truth is no truth at all. My point here is that postmodern thought is not new; it was essentially the lie of the devil already at the beginning: truth is not something absolute reflecting the mind of Jehovah God who has all knowledge and is thus the arbiter of truth, but is rather something subjective and relative.

Since the thinking that lies behind the terminology is incoherent, so also is the terminology itself. Those who promote such concepts as diversity and inclusiveness today like to make us believe they mean them absolutely. If you were to question such people about their advocacy of diversity as to whether they mean every religious belief and every sexual expression, none excepted, they would answer without hesitation, “Yes, of course! Every religious belief is equally valid and every sexual orientation is legitimate.” This all sounds very tolerant and broadminded. But what about biblical Christianity which holds that Jesus Christ is the only way to God and that every religion that denies this is by definition false and is consequently under the condemnation of God? Is that view also “equally valid”? In other words, can those who promote diversity accept as equally valid that belief which alone claims to be right? Their answer will be “we cannot accept this belief because it denies diversity.” And so you see their high-sounding claim for diversity is a sham and a fraud: they loudly proclaim how they accept and tolerate every religious belief and yet here is one—biblical Christianity—they will under no circumstances respect nor tolerate.

Protestant Reformed youth are, thankfully, shielded from the wicked philosophy of postmodernism. Our churches still hold to the inspiration and authority of the Bible; for us the Bible is truth regardless what men may think of it: “thy word is truth” (John 17:17b). The same belief in the authority of Holy Scripture is held in our Christian schools and in our homes. For this we are thankful. We love the truth of God and are determined not to sell it. But our young people need to be prepared for the day when they will attend college and/or enter the workplace. There they will most certainly be confronted with the terminology of diversity and inclusiveness. I should rather put it more urgently: our covenant youth need to be readied for battle; we must see to it that they are skilled in wielding the sword. That sword is the word of God (Eph. 6:17).

Protestant Reformed young people, make sure you are skilled in the use of that sword! You are

going to need it. The battle lines are sharply drawn today. The wicked philosophy of postmodernism and its associated corrupt terminology represent a frontal assault of the enemy. The assault is all the more dangerous in the form that it assumes—it wears the garb of tolerance, diversity, and broad-mindedness. Its disciples want you to think that any opposition to the diversity agenda renders you intolerant, bigoted, and narrow-minded. They mean

to put you on the defensive; and in this way to have you give up the antithesis (the sharp opposition to the lie). You are engaged—as perhaps never before in the history of the church—in mortal combat for yourself, your church, and for the truth of your God. In the strength of our God, may you do exploits.

Philip is a member of First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, MI.

FROM THE PASTOR'S STUDY Rev. Jonathon Mahtani

DIGITAL DEVICE OVERDOSE AND ITS EFFECTS ON COMMUNICATION (1)

About eight years ago, I remember sitting in a restaurant on a date with my wife, discussing a disturbing phenomenon surrounding us. People-watching being a bad habit of ours, we had noticed around us young dating couples, husbands and wives, families with children, sitting around their respective tables, eyes fixated not on each other in normal conversation at a meal, but on their phones and devices. There was an eerie silence. And after having bowed our heads to pray before our meal, we noticed that the heads of our neighbors were also bowed, still over their screens. This hindrance to good communication troubled us.

What concerned us more, however, was our observation of many in the church, consumed by the same technology and allowing the same to distract and detract from their fellowship. Young and old (though mostly young) would come to our home, sit in our living room, and chat with each other—digitally. We honestly wondered if some of them even had the ability to communicate without their phones.

What drives me most to write this article however, is this: The interruption of communication that I observed in that restaurant and among church people I am startled to find in my own home and in my personal habits! In the last five years, we have accumulated in our home two cell phones (with unlimited text and talk), a desktop, a laptop, and an iPad. And too frequently, we have caught ourselves staring at a screen rather than enjoying communion with those we love the most.

This article is not merely another general critique

of technology and social media. Young people, you probably hear enough complaints from your parents about how you are always wasting time on your device through texts, calls, Facetime, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, and numerous other forms of social media. You probably even hear application from the pulpit warning about the dangers that these advances in technology present to you—how devices can become an idol, how they can increase the temptation of sexual sin, how they can waste your time, etc. Listen to these many wise cautions! But this article (and the next) is not a broad critique of technology. Rather, this is about how the use of technology, which is acclaimed to help communication, can be deceptively detrimental to it instead.

Let us then examine our lives and hearts and ask this question: Is our use of technology hurting good communication and thereby also our relationships with God and fellow saints? Honest evaluation will prove that while there are many benefits of technology—even to aid in communication at times—there are also many hindrances. These negative aspects are not easily noticeable, especially because our sinful hearts are not willing to see them. Our addiction to digital devices may even be blinding us from seeing the problem. To help in the evaluation of the effects of technology, consider five basic characteristics of good communication that our use of technology endangers.

First and foremost, good communication includes *logically spoken words*. This is not to deny that there are other appropriate ways to communicate, but it should be common sense that the highest form

of communication is the spoken word. If friends communicate in all kinds of manners, but omit or neglect speaking audibly to one another, communication is deficient. Spoken words must enter the ears of the hearer and be understood. Those words not only have to be audible; they have to make sense. The speaker must use simple enough vocabulary, sentence structure, and proper transitions to connect ideas so that the brain of the hearer can follow the meaning of the speech. Logically spoken words are part of good communication. How is our use of technology interfering with this?

The need for logical speech is not only common sense, but biblical. What is the means which God chooses primarily to use when he communicates with us? While he can use all sorts of means, he chooses the spoken word, in preaching especially. “And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Romans 10:14b). And yes, that word must be logical. The very meaning of “word” in the New Testament is *logos*, from which we derive our English word *logic*. God’s way of communication to us in the covenant with him is through logically spoken words. If this is God’s preferred way of communication with us, then we should realize that audible, logical speech is also the best way to communicate with him and with each other.

Second, good communication consists of a *face-to-face meeting*. To clarify (and this is necessary today), that means a face-to-face encounter not through a screen, but *in the literal presence of one another*. Again, this is not to deny that some good communication can take place in the absence of the one with whom you want to communicate. But the best communication takes place when there is a literal meeting. In this way, we can hear better, read lips, see gestures, make eye contact, sense true feelings, and even make physical contact. Such close proximity during conversation significantly increases the positive effects of communication in a relationship.

This is also God’s preferred way of communication with us. When the scripture speaks of communication with God, it frequently speaks of being in God’s presence. Literally, the Hebrew word for “presence” is “face.” Psalm 95:2 says, “Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving.” Here the Psalmist is calling us to come before God’s face, that we might have a face-to-face conversation with the Holy One. Though his face is invisible to human eyes, he is truly present, especially in his house of worship. Heaven’s glory will be that we will converse with him in the

greatest way: face-to-face. When we communicate with God, he commands us: “Seek ye my face” (Psa. 27:8). If God speaks of this face-to-face communion as the highest way of communication, we ought also to see it as best for our relationships on this earth. Is technology interfering with this?

A third basic of good communication consists of *attentive listening*. Communication is impossible if no one is listening. Did you hear that? Communication is impossible if no one is listening. If a pastor preaches a powerful sermon, but everyone is either sleeping, distracted, or absent, he has communicated nothing. If a man passionately expresses his love to a woman, but her thoughts are consumed only with the last Hollywood production she has watched, he has communicated nothing. If a mother repeatedly asks, yells, and begs for her teenage son or daughter to come to dinner, but the sound is turned up on his headphones, she has communicated nothing.

Good communication requires attentive listening—not only ears that work, but minds that are active with something called an attention span. It is necessary for the mind to grasp what the other person is saying and to be engaged for a sustained period of time without boredom or interruption. In this way, he is then able to continue the flow of conversation and respond appropriately. Such attentive listening prevents the erratic jumping in conversation from one topic to another, a pattern too common today.

When we communicate with God, it should be obvious that attentive listening is crucial. We must listen to him first in order to know how to respond. Our communication with him ought to be more listening than speaking. After all, he has much more to tell us than we have to tell him. If such attentive listening is necessary in our communication with God, should it not also be true of our communication with one another? How well do we listen in this technological age?

Fourth, good communication consists of *truthfulness*. Fabrications and exaggerations do not build a relationship, but rather, tear it down. Deception destroys trust, and without trust, a relationship is seriously damaged. But when truth and nothing but the truth is spoken, communication thrives and friendships prosper. When friends continue speaking the truth in love (see Eph. 4:15ff), they grow in their unity with one another.

This is obviously how God communicates with us also. His word is truth. He speaks to us the truth of Jesus Christ, that being the only way to a relationship with God (see John 14:6). It is the truth

preached that causes us to grow in relationship with him. It is the Spirit of truth that invades our deceitful hearts and creates in us a desire to respond with honest confession that we are depraved and are in desperate need of his mercy. When he works truth in us, we are enabled to confess that truth back to him and before men. Truthful communication grows relationships with God and each other. How is our use of technology distorting this?

A fifth and final basic of good communication is *depth of content*. While it is appropriate to talk about the weather, the game last night, hobbies, and other easy topics of conversation, if that is all we ever talk about, such shallow communication will result in shallow relationships. The purpose of these lighter subjects is to set each other at ease, and then to draw one another into deeper discussions. Minds are engaged in using truth and logic, while hidden passions of the heart are revealed through intonation, gesture, and word choice. “Iron sharpeneth iron” (Prov. 27:17) as profound thoughts are shared and discussion develops. Social activity becomes a spiritual bonding through depth of content.

When God develops his relationship with his people, he is very concerned about depth. You will find proof of that by simply glancing at the content of your Bible. Skim any passage and observe that God’s communication with us is deep. The Psalmist exclaims, “O LORD, how great are thy works! And thy thoughts are very deep” (Psalm 92:5). So deep is God’s communication with us that without a mind of faith illuminated by the Spirit, we cannot understand him. But Psalm 25:14 says, “The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant.” In order to grow our relationship with him, he reveals these deep secrets to us. God has ordained that his relationship with us be deep, and therefore makes the content of his conversation with us the same. If depth of content is a characteristic of our conversation with God, this should be reflected in our earthly relationships as well.

Do you find yourself engaged in these basic and biblical principles of good communication? Is this how you communicate most of the time? Is this how you communicate especially with those with which you have the closest of relationships? Authentic examination will lead many of us to conclude that good communication among peers in school, in families, or in dating and marriage relationships is lacking and diminishing. This is detrimental to our relationships. But what is the real cause of this?

While there are many factors involved in the

breakdown of good communication, one culprit that we must be warned about is the overuse of technology for communication. To be clear, we may not blame technology itself, for technology is a good gift of God and is not evil in and of itself. But have we allowed our use of a good tool to detract from good communication? Have we allowed technology’s mediocre forms of communication to replace the best way of communication? Have we allowed our digital way of communication to so shape us that we have distorted ideas of what good communication truly is? Are we even able to communicate well without a device nearby? Are you sure?

The communication that we have on our cell phones and over social media is not wrong of itself, but the basics of good communication—logical speech, face-to-face interaction, attentive listening, truthfulness, and depth of content—are too often missing. As many bars of Wi-Fi or cellular service as we have on our screens, communication on our devices is still an inferior form. For relationships to thrive, we must maximize the good communication as described above and limit the subpar methods on our devices. I fear that Satan is working with our sinful natures to overuse modern technology in our communication, leading to the neglect of the highest forms of communication which God gives to us. Mediocre forms of communication are forming mediocre relationships. Reduction of good conversation replaced by an increase of digital communication results in cheap relationships. With our technological style of communication, I wonder if we still have warm, spiritual connections with one another, or if we are merely joined by a cold internet connection.

Rev. Mahtani is pastor of Cornerstone Protestant Reformed Church in Dyer, Indiana.





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Church News Melinda Bleyenbergh

BAPTISMS

“Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”
Mark 10:14

The sacrament of holy baptism was administered to:
 Logan Jay, son of Mr. & Mrs. Matt & Jori Oosterbaan—Byron Center, MI
 Abigail Anne, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jon & Elsie Miersma—Edmonton, Canada
 Shaun Isaac, son of Mr. & Mrs. Ben & Stephanie Tolsma—Edmonton, Canada
 Daxton Reid, son of Mr. & Mrs. Matt & Brianna Fisher—Georgetown, MI
 Grady James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Ken & Lynnelle Terpstra—Grace, MI
 Colin Jay, son of Mr. & Mrs. Tim & Hannah Kortering—Southeast, MI
 Jordan Charles, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jordan Pipe—Southeast, MI
 Calvin Matthew, son of Mr. & Mrs. Matt & Stephanie Hanko—Southwest, MI
 Ava Danielle, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Craig & Erika Ferguson—Wingham, Canada

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.” Matthew 10:32

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

Austin VandenTop—Grace, MI
 Elyssa Schwarz—Hope, MI
 Meghan Vink—Hope, MI
 Claudia Engelsma—Trinity, MI
 Amber Griess—Trinity, MI

MARRIAGES

“For this God is our God forever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.” Psalm 48:14

Mr. Travis Hanko and Miss Averly Kikkert—Wingham, Canada



TULIP: AN ALLEGORY

Once there was a great, dark building guarded by a tall, dark creature.

A man dressed in white strode to the door and handed the dark creature a bag of gold coins. “That is the exact amount for the ones I come for,” the man in white said as he pushed inside with barely a glance at the creature.

Inside lay rows and rows of dead men, women, and children killed by a deadly plague that had infected and killed the entire country.

The man in white strode purposefully between the rows before he knelt, his face compassionate even though this corpse looked no different than the hundreds of others in this room. The man in white laid a hand over the corpse’s heart. “Live.”

The word was a command even the dead could not refuse. Color came back into the corpse’s skin, and the once-dead man blinked and sat up.

The man in white handed him a scroll of paper, “Follow me.” A command the awakened can’t refuse.

The awakened man nodded, read the instructions, and walked from the building, following the road that would lead to his new home.

The man in white continued through the building, stopping here and there so deliberately it was clear he knew the ones he’d come for and recognized them even in death’s decay.

Some time later, another man walked up to the great, dark building and its guard. His robes were gray and he hefted a huge sack of money. He set it down with a panting breath at the guard’s feet. “This should be enough, I think. I really don’t know how many will take my offer and come with me. I really hope I don’t run out.” The man in gray rocked back and forth on his heels. “So, uh, can I go in?”

The creature guarding the door looked down his nose scornfully and didn’t say anything.

The man in gray shrugged and timidly pushed the door open.

Kneeling by the first corpse in the room, the man in gray crossed his arms. “Would you like me to heal you? All you have to do is say yes. I won’t force you to be healed. But I can do it, if you want me to.”

The dead and decayed corpse said nothing.

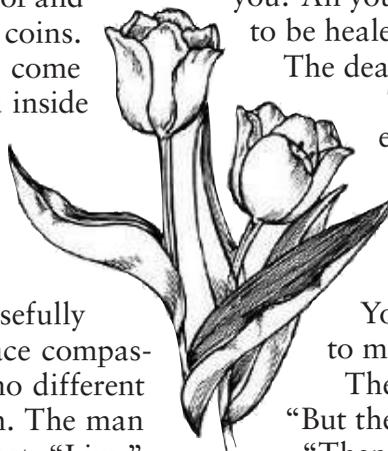
The man in white strode back to the entrance having given life to all those he came for. He paused by the man in gray still bent over the first corpse in the room. The man in white stared down at him. “These are beyond you.

You will have to find someone less dead to make your offer.”

The man in gray blinked as he looked up. “But there is no one left alive.”

“Then you cannot save them. Only my words have that power.” The man in white brushed past him and left the building to walk the path with those he’d saved to preserve them from falling prey to the plague and death ever again.

The man in gray hurried after him. If he couldn’t awaken anyone on his own, he’d have to try to steal a few the man in white had already saved.



Something to think about

With your parents, discuss the difference between the five points of Calvinism and Arminianism. What do the man in white and the man in gray represent? Can you find all five points of Calvinism in the story?

Matching

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| ___ T – Total | A. Grace |
| ___ U – Unconditional | B. Of the Saints |
| ___ L – Limited | C. Depravity |
| ___ I – Irresistible | D. Atonement |
| ___ P – Preservation & Perseverance | E. Election |

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



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