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THE GAME

On Sunday evening, February 4, millions of people will gather around their TVs to watch the Super Bowl. Sadly, many Christians will also sit down and watch “the game that everyone has to watch.” Some might even scornfully ask you why you will not join them. What is our response to this massive event that “everyone” watches?

“I can’t believe they watch the Super Bowl. It’s on Sunday after all. You know, they just spend way too much time watching sports, especially if they think they need to watch it on Sunday too.”

Have you ever said or thought something like that?

I have.

Then I thought about my own consumption of sports.

Super Bowl Sunday aside, how much time do we spend watching sports, sports news, or checking up on our favorite teams online?

My original thoughts while planning for this month’s editorial centered around addressing the idolatry and Sabbath desecration that surround the Super Bowl. Then, after devoting several Saturday afternoons to watching Michigan football games for three, sometimes four hours at a time, I thought to myself that maybe the problem is not just out there. Maybe the problem is in here, in my own heart as well. A true and honest examination of my own consumption of sports does not merely focus on whether or not I spend Sunday afternoon and evening watching the Super Bowl or other games, but extends to my consumption of sports during the entire week. My neighbor may struggle with the temptation to spend the Sabbath watching sports and I may not. But do I struggle with the temptation to spend too much time watching games and checking scores during the week?

Let me be clear, I’m not trying to guilt you (or me) into not watching sports. This is a legitimate activity for a Christian to engage in. But as with all things, each one of us must take a balanced approach and

examine the circumstances of our lives when deciding how we engage in this activity. It’s different for each person. So how do we proceed? How do we decide on the amount of time we may devote to sports? How do we know when we may watch sports? There are a few principles we may use to guide us in these decisions.

First, as my pastor has aptly described it, “Has ball become Baal?” Consider the possibility that sports is becoming an idol. Do we devote so much time to the activity that it is taking away from time we must be devoting to other things like family, public worship, and private Bible study? Is our consumption of sports that which causes us to forget the name of our God and stretch out our hands to a strange god (Ps. 44:20)? Consider the first part of the Heidelberg Catechism’s explanation of idolatry. “That I, as sincerely as I desire the salvation of my own soul, avoid and flee from all idolatry...and learn rightly to know the only true God; trust in Him alone, with humility and patience submit to Him” (Lord’s Day 34). The positive side of the first commandment is that we “rightly know the only true God.” Has my entertainment by sports turned into an idol? Am I spending more time with my favorite players on the TV than I am with my God? If I spend four hours watching a football game on a Saturday afternoon, would I be willing to devote the same amount of time to reading and studying God’s word even in a whole week?

Second, we must consider our identity. When speaking to our classmates, coworkers, or other acquaintances do we define ourselves by our team colors or by our identity in Christ? Do we find ourselves saying things like, “I bleed maize and blue” or “I am a Spartan (or a Hawkeye)”? Would we be bold enough to say things like, “I am Christ’s” or “Christ is mine”? While talking after church, are we more likely to discuss sports than the sermon? In everyday conversation, is it always about this or that team, or are we able to put ourselves “out there” and talk

about a Bible passage or a book we just read that really applies to the circumstances in our life?

Third, and more applicable to the Super Bowl and other Sunday sports, consider what we are telling God when we flip on the TV on Sunday afternoon or evening. By this action it is as if we are telling God, “you had your time this morning, now it’s time for me.” By this action, we are now desecrating the Sabbath, because we are not keeping the entire day.

What’s the big deal if I spend a little bit of time in front of the TV on Sunday if I still go to church twice? Think about what the Sabbath day is a picture of. It points to the eternal Sabbath in glory, where all earthly cares and activities will be laid aside. We will spend eternity in worship of God. We will not be sitting in front of a TV, mindlessly entertaining

ourselves. We will be engaged in constant praise of our God and our Savior Jesus Christ with the hosts of God’s elect. Therefore, we should devote our entire day to worship of God and fellowship with members of Christ’s body.

As you examine the circumstances of your life and consider how much time you may devote to sports, stay balanced. Watch your favorite team, but don’t let it define you. Root for your favorite players, but be better acquainted with the people in God’s word. Raise your children to enjoy playing and watching sports, but more importantly, raise them to enjoy covenant fellowship with their God even more. As with all the activities and entertainment available to us, direct your involvement in sports using the principles laid out in scripture.

Our Goodly Heritage Mark H. Hoeksema

INTERVIEW WITH HAROLD SCHIPPER

It is January 6, 2009, and I am at the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Harold Schipper in Holland, Michigan.

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

Harold Schipper: I was born in Holland, Michigan, on 236 East 11th Street.

MHH: And when was this?

HS: January 14, 1926.

MHH: Who were your parents?

HS: Mr. and Mrs. Peter and Grace Schipper.

MHH: Can you tell me a little bit about your family: where did you grow up, what did your father do for a living, how many siblings did you have? What was your family like?

HS: My father worked at the Holland DePrie Chemical Company. He was a stock-cutter. He cut all the labels to go on medicine bottles. We had eight in the family: four boys and four girls. My mother’s name was Grace.

MHH: What was your position in the list of siblings?

HS: I was the youngest, the baby.

MHH: Did you live most or all of your life in Holland, then?

HS: Yes, I was born and raised in Holland.

MHH: What was the church affiliation of your family?

HS: My folks at that time belonged to the Christian Reformed Church of Fourteenth Street. That’s where HH [*Herman Hoeksema*] was at that time (I call it the blitz of 1924), from which they went out because of the schism of common grace. So, I was born, like I say, in 1926. When they built the church, my dad and a good group helped, like digging out with horse and scoop. And they got the church taken care of. Well, then, of course, when ’53 came, then it was different, you know.

MHH: But you were essentially then born into the Protestant Reformed Church.

HS: Absolutely.

MHH: You’ve been a member all your life.

HS: I’m the only confessing member of the church right now from that time.

MHH: Really? And have you been a member of Holland congregation all your life?

HS: Absolutely.

MHH: What are your earliest memories of church life?

HS: Well, you came out from Sunday School, and then as you got older, you got into things—what things were, and how things developed. It was a good education.

MHH: You had good catechism instruction?

HS: Yes.

MHH: Do you remember any of the pastors; does anything stand out in your mind as far as the ministers were concerned?

HS: Sure. We had good ministers until the time of the split, of course. I had good catechetical instruction from the elders and the ministers. We had Rev. [M.] Gritters at that time. We started out in the bakery, that is, the first starting was in a bakery. And then we had different ministers as we went along.

MHH: What are your recollections of the Protestant Reformed Church prior to the split of 1953? Were things on a pretty even keel in Holland for most of those years?

HS: They were. We were only about 25 families.

MHH: But nothing particularly remarkable or anything that really stands out in your mind?

HS: Not really. I thought everything went all right.

MHH: But it must have become apparent somewhere along the line that not everything was going all right? What do you remember about those days?

HS: I can remember quite a bit. We were only with nine families after that split, and we started out again in a house—Henry VanPutten's. In fact, I gave the history of our church, I've got it on paper—meeting in store buildings and back and forth in store buildings. We were only nine families when HH (Hoeksema) came and re-organized us again. We were in a house of Henry VanPutten on East State Street in Holland. Most went the other way.

MHH: If you had approximately 25 families prior to the split, and you ended up with nine—about a third.

HS: That's right.

MHH: Did the division of '53 have any effect on your family?

HS: Yes, it did. We had ones that left—one family. And that hurt. That really hurt.

MHH: Was there conflict and animosity?

HS: Yes, I think so. But I think most of this here in '53 was personality. And what has personality got to do with the truth, with the word?

MHH: It's interesting that you say that. Could you elaborate on that or maybe give me some evidence? You say personalities were heavily involved. What is your reason? I'd like to hear your thoughts on that.

HS: Well, I just think that they swung at random on things. I don't think that they really thought thoroughly about it—those who left. I say again, I had good catechetical instruction from those elders. And how can they do that?

How can one not give God the glory when he's turned a hottentot in Africa to him? That's tremendous, isn't it? That's really the heart and core of what's given to us.

MHH: That's what we fought for in 1953 without doubt.

HS: Yes! I can say that.

MHH: But you feel that personalities got too tangled up in it?

HS: No, I know it had to go the way it went, because the Lord did it. He had a reason for doing that. And I can say this too: we had better behave ourselves and know that he speaks and all those things can change. I believe that whole-heartedly.

MHH: What has been important to you in your church life? Earlier you mentioned catechetical instruction when you were younger. Now you talked a little bit about going through the division of 1953. Is there anything else that stands out in your mind?

HS: First of all, I'd like to say that in 1946 I came back from the service—May 1, 1946. And I had quite a deal with it. But I also know that the Lord was with me because at one time I took out my Bible. When I was reading it I had twenty guys around me. I know that a lot of those twenty guys didn't know what I knew. And that helped. It helped me all the way. In fact he brought me home, which it could have been the other way. So, quite an experience.

When I came back, I made confession of faith. I had been highly blessed. I had a brother who was a minister too. He was the oldest. He could have been my father, he was twenty years older than me.

In my last work that I had, the teamsters' union got in, and I had to deal with it. I didn't have to belong, because I was there before it got in.

MHH: You were grandfathered in, then?

HS: Two of us. The other was Christian Reformed. But I stuck to my guns. I told them, "No. I must not have it." And I gave my reasons. And so, as life went on, they bucked you. Why aren't you...Why? They kept pestering you. Even had my car on blocks. Even

opened the hood of my car. That was OK. Finally three guys come to me: “Skip, why aren’t you one of us?” I said, “I told you why in the beginning. But you want a letter from my consistory to let you know why?” They said, “No, we won’t go that far.” I said, “Then keep your mouths shut and leave me alone.”

MHH: I don’t blame you.

HS: That’s what I said. And they did leave me alone. [Later] I had one of them come up to me while I was working at the park—I had Centennial park downtown—seven acres, across from City Hall, beautiful with nature. Before that I had a garbage route where you had maggots and all that. What a history. And he wanted to take my place when I retired. But he came to me before that and put his arms around my neck and said, “Skip, you were right. We didn’t get nothing.”

But see, they were mad because you get a slip that you could take off on your income tax of the premiums that you have to pay. And I was glad that it didn’t get to that flower fund too, because the flower fund is just the same. And Christian Labor Union is the same thing.

MHH: But you definitely stood your ground.

HS: Yes. Stood my ground.

MHH: I want to ask you also about your recollections or your views on a controversy that happened in the mid and late fifties in the congregation of Holland. It had to do with the whole question of labor unions that you were just talking about, with various members of the Elzinga family. I would like to know your recollections and your thoughts on that. What happened?

HS: We just have two of the Elzingas left in the church (Al Elzinga and Terry). At the very last, the parents were there. But there was a group that left. It was over perfectionism—that we are all ready, it doesn’t make any difference how we act now. We’re perfect in the eyes of God, so it was perfectionism.

MHH: That was the issue?

HS: Yes, that was the issue at that time. Where they ever got that is beyond me. The parents weren’t that way. Allen and Terry weren’t that way. But it was the others who were left. A lot of them went to California. They split all over the place.

MHH: How did this issue of perfectionism come up? What prompted it?

HS: I don’t know. I have no idea.

MHH: Mr. Schipper, how would you compare the

church of today with the church of your youth?

HS: Well, the word of truth that’s given today is solid. It was solid then and it’s solid now. I do say that I can be very thankful that others came from the outside in. But it’s to a point now, I think, that you’re going to grow within instead of much from the outside, because I don’t believe that many are really interested anymore in the word. Now, I say that with all respect, because I’m only saved by grace alone.

MHH: But, perhaps, the differences between various denominations are getting large enough that they are so different from us that we are not likely to get a lot of growth from outside?

HS: Absolutely. A good share of it is that way, yes.

MHH: Now you mentioned that we have stayed strong doctrinally. Do you see any significant changes in our walk of life?

HS: We’ve got to check ourselves always in our walk of life. And that means that we’ll sin to our dying day. And we hate it. That’s why we pray, “Lord, forgive!” in the night when we go to bed on our knees. You know, another nice thing about that is our death comes too. And we don’t know the day and the hour. He’s got a reason for that too, because if I knew the day and the hour of my death right now, I don’t think I could talk to you like this. That’s a wonder, isn’t it? You can shed tears over that. And I’m quick to shed tears over that. I really am. Normally I’m kind of hard-boiled in a way. But I can be glad that I can shed tears over that. ‘Cause when I go to the [church] service, I get the word, so that I can say when I walk out of there, “It was good.”

I want to say something else that hit me. Your dad [*Prof. Homer C. Hoeksema*] was out there in Tasmania. Two ministers—one that you got, and the one we got—were out there (the Kleyns). He did a wonderful work out there, your dad did.

MHH: So I hear.

HS: Well, I’m glad you’re hearing it, because it’s true. And you know what I said to ours when he came here from Minnesota when we called him? I told him that. I said, “You had a nice education, didn’t you?” And he said, “Yes, I did.”

MHH: We got two ministers, two Kleyns out of there.

HS: Yes, two Kleyns out of there. You may be happy you got that one. And I know I’m happy that we got this one.

I've been highly brought up, I tell you. And I got discipline in the Marines too. They taught me. I became a man when I got out of there. I was a boy when I went in—just 18. The officer said to me, “Is that a little fuzz under your nose?”

RBH: Did you get drafted?

HS: I got drafted. I waited for that. Otherwise it would be my fault to go in—when you enlist.

MHH: Your responsibility.

HS: That's right.

MHH: But in those days, it was almost the inevitable that you would get drafted, right?

HS: Sure. Not like today. We've got a highly different war today.

MHH: And a different military.

HS: And a different military, yes.

MHH: You had some experiences along the way.

HS: I had good experience, when God took my first wife too. Thirty-eight years old, right in the prime of life. I had five kids to bring up after she went. And, you know what words she said to me before she couldn't anymore? “I can't see you staying single the rest of your life. But get one that loves God!” Isn't that terrific?

MHH: Certainly the right perspective.

HS: And I got one!

MHH: How many years later did you marry?

HS: We both waited eight years. We didn't know each other till we met. Our spouses passed away a month apart the same year, with cancer.

MHH: Mr. Schipper, thank you very much for your time. Thank you for your thoughts, your memories, your recollections, your opinions. They are much appreciated.

CHRISTIAN LIVING Abby Van Solkema

SEEKING THE LORD IN THE MORNING

What is the first thing that you reach for in the morning? Do you immediately pick up your phone to check social media? Do you look at your work or school emails and start thinking about all the tasks you need to complete? Do you grab your running shoes and head out for some exercise? Or do you press the snooze button to get twenty more minutes of sleep?

If any of those descriptions sound like you, I'd like to suggest something different to reach for when you first wake up—your Bible. While prayer and Bible study are certainly beneficial at any time of the day, it is especially important to set aside time for communion with God first thing in the morning. There is no better way to start your day than with a few moments of quiet reflection and fellowship with the Lord. In the Psalms, we see that David recognized the value of seeking God in the morning. In Mark 1 we read of Jesus himself going to a quiet place early in the morning to pray. And in Luke 10 Jesus teaches us by his words to Mary and Martha that we need to sit at his feet before we rush off to accomplish our tasks for the day.

Sleep provides much needed refreshment for our

bodies, but our souls are nourished by the word of God and prayer. When we start out our day by meeting with God and meditating on his word, he will give us the strength that we need to face whatever comes our way; the strength to put on the armor of God and pick up that sword of the Spirit right away in the morning, ready to do battle. We will receive wisdom and guidance from the word of God about how we are to conduct ourselves and make decisions on a daily basis. And the peace that comes from spending time in fellowship with your heavenly Father carries over into all aspects of your day. It will have a positive effect not only on your relationship with God, but also your relationships with others. I know from experience that I am a far more patient wife and mother when I have taken the time to start my morning with Bible study and prayer.

What we reach for first shows our true priorities. It's not wrong to check our phones, answer emails, or work out in the morning. But if we make time for those things and not for our personal devotions, then they have become idols. So push those activities back a few minutes and start off your day by thinking about spiritual things instead of earthly things, even if it means getting up a little earlier. And if you are a lover

of the snooze button, you are probably thinking, “I’m not a morning person! I can’t get up early!” Why can’t you wake up earlier? Is it because you’re staying up too late at night reading, watching Netflix, or scrolling through social media? Do you procrastinate on homework and need to stay up all night to finish at the last minute? Do you have too much to drink and it makes it difficult for you to get out of bed in the morning? Be honest with yourself.

Young people, now is the time to establish good habits! It is very easy to convince ourselves that we are just too busy right now, and that we will make spiritual things a priority as soon as this ends or that happens. But one busy season inevitably leads to another. If you think you have too much going on right now with work, school, and relationships, I can assure you that life isn’t going to get any less hectic once you are older and, Lord willing, get married and start a family. We cannot live our lives apart from God. Choosing not to spend time in the word and prayer is essentially saying to the Lord, “I don’t need you. I can do this myself.” That is a terrifyingly arrogant thought.

It is only because of Jesus’ death on the cross that

we are privileged to have access to our heavenly Father. What an amazing opportunity! Are you excited about that? We should all be jumping out of bed in the morning, eager to take advantage of it. Once you get in the habit of spending quiet time with God in the morning, you really start to look forward to and treasure those few moments of peace and spiritual nourishment. And with a little practice, waking up early in the morning gets easier too.

Whether it is about rescheduling our mornings or committing to waking up a few minutes earlier, we need to be disciplined and reliant on God’s grace in order to spend consistent, quality time with him. Christ reminds us in John 15:5, “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.” Before you fall asleep tonight, pray that God will help you to start your day tomorrow by giving your first thoughts to him.

Abby Van Solkema is a wife and mother and member of Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

Devotional Sarah Mowery

THE DAILY PRESS

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

February 8 Read 2 Samuel 8

From Communion to Conquer

We read in 2 Samuel 7 that the Lord gave David “rest round about from all his enemies.” During that time of rest, the prophet Nathan brought David Jehovah’s word, and David spent time in prayer. Now chapter 8 begins, “And after this...David smote the Philistines, and subdued them.” God’s word and prayer strengthened David to fight and overcome his enemies.

In his masterful book *The Life of David*, A. W. Pink asks, “Why are such matters as these recorded in God’s word, to be read by his people in all generations?” These are more than matters of historical interest: there is something of profit for our souls in every portion of our Father’s word. Be encouraged by this history, dear Christian, that in communion with God you will find the strength to overcome your enemies—the lusts of your flesh, your sinful habits,

and your evil ways. David’s battles increased Israel’s territory. Likewise, by giving diligence to making your calling and election sure “an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:11). *Sing or pray Psalter #36.*

February 9 Read 1 Chronicles 18

Dedicated unto the Lord

David’s conquests of his enemies picture the mortification of sin to which God calls all his people. Colossians 3:5 exhorts, “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” In commanding that we give diligence to make our calling and election sure, does God’s word suggest that our works merit our salvation? By no means. David won such great victories because

“the Lord preserved David whithersoever he went” (2 Sam. 8:6 and 14). The Spirit of Jehovah strengthened David to fight. But the Lord blessed him—and blesses us—in the way of diligence, not sloth.

In both 2 Samuel 8 and 1 Chronicles 18 we read that David dedicated the riches he seized from all the nations he conquered to Jehovah’s service. These he prepared for the temple that his son Solomon would later build (1 Chron. 22:14). Likewise, we’re exhorted that “as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness...even so now yield your members servants to righteousness...” (Rom. 6:19). *Sing or pray Psalter #383.*

February 10 Read Psalm 60

Prayer’s Banner

In both 2 Samuel 8 and 1 Chronicles 18 we read that David deviously attacked Hadadezer, king of the Aramean kingdom of Zobah, when Hadarezer’s army was employed on their opposite border. Meanwhile, Edom opportunistically attacked Israel’s southern border, forcing David to dispatch Joab to that front. David, deeply shaken, owes the dire situation to his own impatience and heedlessness. Psalm 60 records David’s lament. He and his people sense God’s displeasure in their enemy’s victory. Still, they turn to him in their plight, raising the banner of prayer, for they have this assurance: they are his beloved. Isn’t it a wonder that we can go to our heavenly Father in confident prayer, too, even when our troubles are of our own making?

Jehovah responds in vv. 6–8. Not only, he says, do I rule over all Israel: your enemies, too, are my servants. And his people reply in confidence, assured that he will give them the victory and confessing that “vain is the help of man” (v. 11). That mighty God is also on our side in our battles against Satan, self, and the sinful world, and he gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:57). *Sing or pray Psalter #158.*

February 11 Read 2 Samuel 9

Undeserved Favor

God’s grace can be simply defined as his undeserved favor. David’s kindness to Mephibosheth typifies God’s grace in such a remarkable way, only the sovereign God himself could have orchestrated it. First, it is not Mephibosheth who comes to David, but David who finds and fetches Mephibosheth. Indeed, Mephibosheth was unable to come of himself: he been crippled...*in a fall*. Nor did he desire to seek David. The grandson of Saul, David’s bitterest enemy, had completely lost his inheritance and was hiding from David

at Lodebar, which means “the place of no pasture.” What motivates David to show kindness to this lame man, whose very name meant “a shameful thing”? Years prior, Jonathan had acted as mediator between David and Saul (1 Sam. 20). David and Jonathan made a covenant in which David vowed to show kindness to Jonathan’s house forever. Consequently, the grace that David shows to Mephibosheth is based on a covenant made with a mediator before Mephibosheth had even been born. David grants Mephibosheth life and peace, restores to him his forfeited inheritance, and takes him into his fellowship as a son.

Mephibosheth responded to the grace shown him with humility, gratitude, and love. Is it so with us? *Sing or pray Psalter #204.*

February 12 Read Psalm 50

Jehovah’s Court

In Psalm 50, the mighty God, the judge, calls the whole earth to witness at a trial. He himself descends from Zion, accompanied by devouring fire and a fierce storm. The defendants see him coming and tremble. Who are the defendants? Not the wicked, but Jehovah’s own people, those with whom he has made his covenant. What charges does he bring against them? First, some of them are content with religious formalism (vv. 7–15). They offer sacrifices continually, but they do not worship him from the heart. Then there are those who despise his law (vv. 16–21). Specifically, they repeatedly trespass against the seventh, eighth, and ninth commandments, excusing their shameful treatment of their neighbors with the presumption that Jehovah is like them. But He isn’t: he is holy and just. Thankfully, he is also merciful. The verdict in his peoples’ case is “guilty,” but another will bear their just sentence: Jehovah promises to show his salvation to those who offer thankful, heartfelt praise and walk in his ways.

We also stand on trial before the judge of heaven and earth. Do we worship him from the heart? Is our love for him evident in the love we show our neighbors? *Sing or pray Psalter #137.*

February 13 Read Psalm 53

Freely Justified Fools

Psalms 14 and 53 are nearly identical. Both psalms begin with a description of the practical atheist, the fool who says in his heart, “There is no God.” In Psalm 14, these unbelievers are Israelites who deny God and prey on their poor brethren. But the psalmist adapted Psalm 53 to a different situation, providing an extended definition of “the workers of iniquity”: they are not the ungodly within the nation of Israel,

but heathen encamped about God's people, ready to attack. God put those foreigners to shame: they feared and scattered, though no man pursued them (Prov. 28:1, 2 Kings 7:6–7).

In Romans 3:10–11, the psalmist's observations about the fool are applied to all men: "There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God..." That's God's sober evaluation of your heart and mine, and to our shame, that's often our experience, too, isn't it? Yet all in Christ Jesus need not fear. Though we could never be justified by the deeds of the law, we have been "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24). *Sing or pray Psalter #146.*

February 14 Read Psalm 75

Wondrous Deliverance

Psalm 75 was written after Jehovah delivered his people from some great threat. God's people speak first, twice thanking him and exulting, "that thy name is near thy wondrous works declare." God responds with the declaration that at his appointed time he judges uprightly. God's people must have thought that he had forsaken them for a time. He admonishes them now to be patient, reminding them that the earth is secure in his hands, even though circumstances may seem to testify otherwise. Even the most arrogant human rulers are subservient to him. In Psalm 75:6–10 the psalmist reaffirms the same truth found in Romans 13:1b, that "the powers that be are ordained of God." Not only does God appoint rulers: he holds them accountable for their actions. Wicked rulers will drink the cup of his wrath.

The judgment of our God is a reality that, though sobering, we celebrate with thanksgiving, for we know that in the way of judging the wicked, our God saves us. The dregs of the cup that we deserve to drink have been drained by our Savior. Do we thank him again and again for his wondrous deliverance? *Sing or pray Psalter #206.*

February 15 Read 2 Samuel 10

The King's Servants Avenged

In 2 Samuel 9 we read of the magnanimity David showed to Mephibosheth. In 2 Samuel 10 David again determines to show kindness, this time to the bereaved king of Ammon. He sends his servants to Hanun, who rejects the comfort they bring and puts them to an open shame. David correctly interprets Hanun's actions as a declaration of war, and the remainder of the chapter records his avenging of his servants. David's kindness

to Mephibosheth pictures the grace God shows to his elect in Christ. What does this incident typify?

Our Lord Jesus Christ also sends his servants to preach the gospel indiscriminately, and to all nations. Though we might not be ordained ministers, you and I are also called to be his witnesses, letting our light shine before all, for all live under the shadow of Adam's sentence: death. But Christ's servants who share "the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man" (Titus 3:4) are often reviled, persecuted, and spoken evil of falsely (Matt. 5:11). Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: our king will also avenge his servants. *Sing or pray Psalter #199.*

February 16 Read 1 Chronicles 19

Friendship with the World

1 Chronicles 19 records the same incident as 2 Samuel 10. Like 2 Samuel 10, the chapter begins, "It came to pass after this," yet the contexts of the two accounts are different. 2 Samuel 9 records David's kindness to Mephibosheth, while 1 Chronicles 18 relates David's victories over his enemies. A.W. Pink maintains that the difference in context warrants approaching the incident from two "widely separated angles." He writes, "Oftentimes the same incident which manifests the goodness and grace of God, also exhibits the depravity and sin of man." David sought to honor the memory of wicked Nahash. Whatever personal favor Nahash had shown David, he was a proven enemy of God's people, the cruel king who had threatened to thrust out the right eyes of the men of Jabesh-Gilead (1 Sam. 11:1–2). David's was "an attempt to promote amity between the ungodly and the godly. The Lord *blew upon this move*, and caused it to come to nought" (Pink).

Likewise, in his love for us, the Lord often causes once-friendly neighbors and unbelieving relatives to reject our attempts to befriend them. Can you recall a time in your life when you disregarded that friendship with the world is enmity against God and God himself intervened, to your spiritual profit? *Sing or pray Psalter #27.*

February 17 Read Psalm 20

A Prayer for the King

Psalm 20 is a psalm of David, but the first verses record a prayer that his subjects offer on his behalf. These are their petitions for their king: they desire that the Lord will hear his prayer, preserve his life, strengthen him for his many tasks, accept his sacrifices, and crown his efforts with success. They know that their king will face trouble, but because their mutual salvation is the

joyful basis of their prayers, they pray in confidence. David is encouraged by their prayers for him: “Now know I that the Lord saveth his anointed,” he exclaims in verse six.

Do we remember to pray for those who rule over us? We can pray the same things that the Israelites prayed for David for our parents, teachers, pastors, and office-bearers. God also commands us to pray for those who rule over us in the secular sphere (1 Tim. 2:2). Let’s pray for their salvation, and let’s pray that God will use their rule to ensure our ability to “lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.” *Sing or pray Psalter #44.*

February 18 Read Psalm 65

The Blessed Man

Psalm 65 is a song of harvest thanksgiving. In vv. 9–13, David describes the bounty with which God crowns the year. He delightfully and memorably writes of paths that drip with fatness, hills that rejoice, singing pastures clothed with woolly sheep, and shouting valleys covered with corn. But David doesn’t prize these gifts of abundance more than their giver! In vv. 5–8 he focuses on the giver himself. He is a God of power, the God who answers prayer. He is not only the God of creation, but the God of salvation. But many fear his mighty signs (v. 8a). That’s why the psalm begins with the greatest blessing of all: being one chosen to dwell in God’s courts.

Do we count fellowship with God as our greatest blessing? Are we confident that though our sins rise up against us, he will take them all away? He is the God who hears and answers prayer. Let us find abundant satisfaction in the fatness of his house (Ps. 36:8). *Sing or pray Psalter #170.*

February 19 Read Psalm 66

Come and Hear

Psalm 66 begins with a call to all the earth to praise God for his terrible works. The psalmist recounts some of those works in vv. 5–12. He mentions Israel’s crossing of the Red Sea and the Jordan River as well as God’s preservation of his people through great affliction. Consideration of these corporate blessings compels the psalmist to consider God’s goodness to him personally. He cries, “Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul” (v. 16). Jehovah’s salvation has borne the fruit of integrity, not hypocrisy, in the psalmist. He prays to his Savior in the confidence that his prayer will be heard. And it was: Jehovah again hears the psalmist’s sincere prayer and bestows upon him the mercy that

he desires.

If God’s salvation and preservation of the Old Testament saints compelled all nations to fear him, how much more should his redemption of his people in Jesus Christ move all men to fear him! Do the terrible works he’s done on his peoples’ behalf and the goodness he’s shown to you personally compel you to witness to others? *Sing or pray Psalter # 174.*

February 20 Read Psalm 67

With Blessing Comes Responsibility

Psalms 66 and 67 share a common theme. When the writer of Psalm 66 considered the blessings that Jehovah showered upon his people, he was compelled to declare God’s goodness to others. In v. 1 of Psalm 67, God’s people pray for his blessing. Psalm 67:2 acknowledges the purpose of that blessing, “That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations.” In Genesis 12:1–3 and 22:17–18, God promised to bless Abraham, but his blessing wouldn’t stop there. He added, “And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” That is, in Christ people from all nations of the earth would be blessed (Gal. 3:16). That’s the truth of which Psalm 67 speaks.

That truth implies a responsibility for we who are God’s people, saved by his grace, and daily loaded with his benefits. The riches of salvation that we know are meant to be shared. That responsibility belongs to Christ’s church as well as to the individual believer. Do our joyful, thankful lives testify of the righteousness and goodness of God? Do we readily share the reason of the hope that is in us with meekness and fear? *Sing or pray Psalter #176.*

February 21 Read Psalm 69

Scripture Fulfilled

Perhaps David wrote Psalm 69 as he procured resources for the future temple. It’s likely that others attacked him personally as he amassed great quantities of riches for that purpose. It’s also likely that the relentless intensity with which he pursued his goal (see Ps. 132) incited bitter hatred in the Israelites who did not love Jehovah.

Ultimately, Psalm 69, the psalm most quoted in the New Testament, is the word of Christ. When he cleansed the temple, “his disciples remembered that it was written, ‘The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up’” (John 2:17). On the night before he was crucified, Jesus reassured his disciples, “But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled... They hated me without a cause” (John 15:25). Our Lord was

given vinegar to drink (John 19:29). Peter quoted Psalm 69:25 as he preached about Judas: “Let his habitation be desolate” (Acts 1:20). Paul referenced Psalm 69:22–23 in Romans 11:9–10 as he expounded the truth that “They are not all Israel, which are of Israel.” Regarding our liberty in Christ, Rom. 15:1–3 declares, “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak.... For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me” (see Ps. 69:9 and 20). *Sing or pray Psalter #169.*

February 22 Read Psalm 70

Hurry, God!

Does it seem to you as if you repeatedly face the same troubles and trials, so that you are often praying for the same things? That was David’s experience, too. Psalm 70 repeats Psalm 40:13–17, but Psalm 70’s brevity highlights its sense of urgency. The psalm begins, “Make haste, O God,” and ends, “O LORD, make no tarrying.” For what does David pray in this dire circumstance? First, he prays that God will thwart the desire of his enemies, the destruction of David’s soul, shaming them. Second, he prays that Jehovah will restore a joyful, praising spirit to those who love and seek him.

Note that the focus of David’s prayer is not his physical circumstances, nor is it self-centered. Even in his plight, David’s concern is for the state of his soul and the spiritual welfare of his fellow saints. Can the same be said of us? *Sing or pray Psalter #188.*

February 23 Read 2 Samuel 11

How are the Mighty Fallen!

Why is David’s grievous fall recorded in Holy Scripture? “For our admonition” according to 1 Corinthians 10:11. First, we must avoid the things that occasioned David’s sin. David laid aside his armor when it was his duty to fight; he slothfully indulged himself in the palace (he arose from his bed at “eveningtide”: there he had been indulging himself in the afternoon.) He allowed his wandering eye to covetously dwell upon an unlawful object. Second, David’s attempts to conceal rather than confess his sin occasioned even greater sins. “A guilty conscience estranges the heart from God, so that it is no longer able to count upon his protection” (Pink). Third, though his youthful conduct had been exemplary, David fell in middle age: he gave over the work of mortifying sin before his work was at an end (John Owen). Fourth, beware your deceitful heart! David once felt guilty about cutting off a piece of Saul’s robe. Now he callously tempts Uriah to break

a vow (v. 11), makes him drunk, and then orchestrates his murder, who was a faithful servant and an honorable man. All this because David feared men rather than God and desired to preserve his reputation.

Seeing we know these things before, let’s beware lest we also fall from our own steadfastness (2 Pet. 3:17). *Sing or pray Psalter #82.*

February 24 Read 2 Samuel 12

Conviction, Repentance, Forgiveness, Chastisement

“The thing that David had done displeased the LORD” (2 Sam. 11:27). But God in his mercy didn’t send enemies or death to David: he sent a prophet. Nathan didn’t directly accuse David; he told him a parable. (Perhaps we can learn from his wise example how to confront fellow believers who walk in sin.) David’s reaction to the parable reveals “What a strange thing the heart of a believer is...often filled with righteous indignation against the sins of others, while blind to its own!” (Pink). Then Nathan plainly declares, “Thou art the man.” David’s hard heart is pricked. He confesses, “I have sinned against the LORD.” Nathan immediately responds, “The LORD also hath put away thy sin.” But he continues, “Howbeit....”

“Though God forgives His people their sins, yet He frequently gives them plain proof of His holy abhorrence of the same, and causes them to taste something of the bitter fruit which they bring forth...There is mercy in our chastenings, and no matter how heavily the rod may smite, we have good cause to say, ‘And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds... Thou our God has punished us *less* than our iniquities deserve’ (Ezra 9:13)” (Pink). *Sing or pray Psalter #140.*

February 25 Read Psalm 51

Pleas for Pardon

David’s brief confession of sin in 2 Samuel 12 is notable because of the recognition that his sin was ultimately *against the LORD*. To consider the depth and sincerity of his repentance, we turn to Psalm 51. Notable there are the many terms he uses for sin. “It is ‘transgression’...the revolt of a subject’s will against its true King...It is ‘iniquity’...acting unjustly or crookedly. It is ‘sin’ or ‘missing the mark’.... It is pollution and filth, from which nothing but atoning blood can cleanse. It is ‘evil’ (v. 4) ...It is a fretting leprosy, causing him to cry, ‘Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean...’ (v. 7)” (Pink).

Correspondingly, “David prayed that his sins might be “blotted out’ (v. 1), which petition conceives of them as being recorded against him. He prayed that he might be ‘washed’ (v. 2) from them, in which they

are felt to be foul stains...He prayed that he might be 'cleansed' (v. 7), which was the technical word for the priestly cleansing of the leper...not only lepers, but those who had become defiled by contact with a dead body, were thus purified (Num. 19); and on whom did the taint of this corruption cleave as on the murderer of Uriah?" (Pink). Above all, David prays for a clean heart (v. 10), a full measure of the Holy Spirit (v. 11), and restoration to full communion with God (v. 12). *Sing or pray Psalter #141.*

February 26 Read Psalm 32

The Blessed Forgiven

Like Psalm 51, Psalm 32 is usually attributed to the period of David's life following his exchange with the prophet Nathan, but Psalm 32 follows Psalm 51. Psalm 51 is full of earnest contrition and pleas for forgiveness. Psalm 32 begins with the joyful exclamation of one who has been assured that he is forgiven. "At the close of Psalm 51 David had prayed, 'O Lord, open Thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise' (v. 15): here the prayer has been heard, and this is the beginning of the fulfillment of his vow" (Pink). Truly, David had experienced that "the way of transgressors is hard" (Prov. 13:15). Now he knows from experience that "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

In Psalm 51:13 David had vowed that teaching would follow his restoration of communion with God: "Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee." That vow he also begins to fulfill in Psalm 32:6 and vv. 8-9. He exhorts the godly not to hide their sins, but to pray to God (v. 6). And he commands the sinner not to be stubborn, for "many sorrows shall be to the wicked." Do we heed these inspired admonitions? *Sing or pray Psalter #83.*

February 27 Read 1 Chronicles 20

In the Power of His Might

1 Chronicles 20 begins like 2 Samuel 11 but skips over David's fall into sin and repentance, focusing instead on Israel's capture of Rabbah, the capital city of Ammon, and their subsequent victories over the Philistine giants of Gath. Regarding the Ammonites, 1 Chronicles 20:3 relates that David "cut them" in pieces with saws, plow shears, and axes. Some commentators agree with this rendering, noting that such violent executions were fitting to the worshippers of Molech. Since the word "them" is not in the original, however, others think the phrase is better translated "put them to saws, etc.," meaning that they became

forced laborers like those referred to in 1 Chronicles 22:2.

David's former victory over Goliath inspired his men to courageously face additional giants. Likewise, the victory of the captain of our salvation over sin and death should inspire us to face the spiritual giants in our lives with courage. What temptations and besetting sins rise up against you today? Put on the whole armor of God and face them in the confidence that the victory is ours in Christ Jesus. *Sing or pray Psalter #392.*

February 28 Read 2 Samuel 13

Grievous Fruits

David's grievous sins now begin to bear their natural, grievous fruits. His chastenings "corresponded exactly to the character of his iniquities" (Pink). Amnon and Absalom committed the same sins that their father had committed; fornication and murder. And David, who as king was the rightful executor of justice, shamefully failed to punish either of them. David was an unwise, indulgent father (1 Kings 1:6). Writes Pink, David allowed "his natural affections to override his better judgment, instead of (as it should be) the judgment guiding the affections—it is not without reason and meaning that the head is set *above* the heart in our physical bodies! No doubt the fact that David had several wives made it much more difficult to rule his offspring as duty required—how one wrong leads to another!"

Both Amnon and Absalom's sins were unconsciously premeditated. (And Amnon's was abetted by a godless friend, Jonadab. "A companion of fools shall be destroyed" (Prov. 13:20b).) Amnon was an adulterer and Absalom a murderer long before they acted. Both were overcome with unbridled lust which brought forth death and sin. But "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5:24). *Sing or pray Psalter #64.*

March 1 Read 2 Samuel 14

Devilish Wisdom

Though occasioned by Amnon's incest, Absalom's murder of his brother was a means to an end. Amnon was the oldest of David's sons, the expected heir of the throne. But Absalom, the second son, desired that throne. Absalom had fled to his maternal grandfather, the king of Geshur (1 Chron. 3:2). Now Joab, "an astute politician—an unprincipled man of subtle expediency," conspires to bring him back to Jerusalem. Joab's instrument is a "wise woman" from Tekoah, but her so-called "wisdom" descends "not from above,

but is earthly, sensual, devilish” (James 3:15). With her contrived parable she attempts to soothe David’s conscience for not executing his murderous son. She appeals to David’s natural affections, and David authorizes Joab to bring Absalom back. Yet, still he puts on a show of sternness, refusing to see Absalom. And so, Absalom resorts to further lawlessness. “There is no escape from the outworking of the principle of sowing and reaping” (Pink). Fellow parents, let’s be warned!

All of Absalom’s actions revealed “what a godless and unscrupulous scoundrel he was” (Pink). Despite his reprehensible character, the people esteemed him for his beauty. How like today’s world and the people they idolize! Who or what do we value?

March 2 Read Psalm 86

A Prayer to the Sovereign One

A number of psalms are attributed to this turbulent period in David’s life, some on the basis of their headings, others on the basis of their content. These psalms give us further insight into the historical account of 2 Samuel. Psalm 41 and 55, for example, offer one explanation regarding David’s apparent passivity as Absalom’s conspiracy strengthens. Not only is David’s heart sick: he is physically unwell. He writes of his “bed of languishing,” “sickness,” “evil disease,” and “the terrors of death.” Similarly, he begins Psalm 86 by acknowledging his poor and needy condition.

Notable in Psalm 86 are David’s many references to Jehovah as “Lord,” meaning “Sovereign One” (vv. 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 12, 15). In his troubles, he took comfort in the knowledge that Jehovah controls all circumstances and all people. Also notable are the many explanations David adds to his petitions, denoted by the words “for” or “because” (vv. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 13, 17). David notes his own helplessness, his covenant relationship to Jehovah, his readiness to pray, his confidence that the Lord will answer his prayers, and Jehovah’s incomparable goodness, mercy, greatness, and faithfulness. Are we quick to turn to the Sovereign One in our troubles? *Sing or pray Psalter #233.*

March 3 Read 2 Samuel 15

Hearts Revealed

All of the princes rode mules (2 Sam. 13:29) except arrogant, scheming Absalom. And now “From the employment of force, he resorted to craftiness...the leading characteristics of the devil: the *violence* of the “lion” and the *guile* of the “serpent” (Pink). How does Absalom sow discontent among the people? He does not attack David’s person, but his government. So, too, our enemies would tempt us to be dissatisfied with our

king’s government, with the requirements of his law and the difficulties he bestows in his providence. Then Absalom announces his reign in Hebron, his birthplace and the city in which David had also commenced his reign. In response, David, betrayed by Ahithophel, his familiar friend, flees over Kidron (see John 18:1–2) to the wilderness. Why? He was the rightful king, but he understood that Jehovah was using his reprobate son to chasten him, and he humbly submits. The Holy Spirit works through “Changing circumstances... for the development and exercise of different graces” (Pink). What graces is he cultivating in you at present?

Absalom’s rebellion revealed the hearts of those who were unfaithful to David as well as those who were unswervingly loyal. “Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel” (v. 6), but *all* the Cherethites, Pelethites, and Gittites (foreigners!) remained true to David. How wondrously again David typifies Christ, who was rejected by many in Israel, and so turned to the Gentiles. *Sing or pray Psalter #163.*

March 4 Read Psalm 122

Pray for Zion’s Peace

Psalm 122 may have been written at a different time in David’s life, but let’s consider this earnest prayer for Jerusalem’s peace in light of the current context. In Psalm 55:9–11 David describes the unrest that Absalom and Ahithophel stirred up in Jerusalem this way: “I have seen violence and strife in the city. Day and night they go about it upon the walls thereof: mischief also and sorrow are in the midst of it. Wickedness is in the midst thereof: deceit and guile depart not from her streets.” Perhaps he penned Psalm 122 as he lay on his sick bed. Or maybe this is a prayer he uttered as he fled Jerusalem, desiring the peace of Jehovah’s dwelling place more than his own safety or comfort.

Brothers and sisters, how greatly do we desire the peace of Jehovah’s dwelling place, the church? Do we pray for that peace? Do we do all we can to promote peace within our congregations and denomination, or do our words, actions, and attitudes sow discord in Christ’s body? Do our responses to current issues—the proposed Psalter revision comes to mind—encourage godly discussion or cause unnecessary division? “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matt. 5:9). *Sing or pray Psalter #348.*

March 5 Read Psalm 3

A Song in Distress

Matthew Henry wrote that “weeping must never hinder worshipping.” A.W. Pink added, “We may worship God in the minor key as truly as in the major.”

Did you notice that Psalm 3 is titled, “A Psalm [that is, a song] of David, when he fled from Absalom his son”? Perhaps this is the song David sang when he “was come to the top of the mount, where he worshipped God” (2 Sam. 15:32).

What triumph of faith is found in Ps. 3! David acknowledges that his enemies are numerous, active, and confident. The conspirators were well aware of David’s sins—Ahithophel was Bathsheba’s grandfather (see 2 Sam. 23:39 and 2 Sam. 11:3)—and likely presumed that Jehovah was no longer on David’s side. But he fixes his gaze not on them, but on Jehovah. David had ascended Mount Olivet with covered head: Jehovah lifted his head and ensured his peaceful rest in the wilderness (vv. 3 and 5). Though battle looms, David is so certain of Jehovah’s aid that he sings of victory in the past tense (v. 7). And notice again, his concern is not solely for himself, but for all the people of God. *Sing or pray Psalter #5.*

March 6

Read Psalm 4

Facing Another Night

David confidently sang Psalm 3. He had awakened aware of Jehovah’s faithfulness and new mercies and had declared, “I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people that have set themselves against me” (v. 6). But he sings Psalm 4 as he faces another night. He is weary, and his enemies draw nearer. Still, he doesn’t despair: he cries out again to Jehovah. Dear Christian, is that where you turn as darkness falls and the troubles and the sins of the day gone by would arise and accuse you?

After David calls to Jehovah, he addresses his enemies, calling them to repentance and defending his status as Jehovah’s anointed one. He orders them to “Stand in awe, and sin not.” “Stand in awe” could also be translated “tremble,” “a word by which he rebukes their stupidity in running headlong in their wicked course, without any fear of God, or any sense of danger” (Calvin). David exhorts them to self-examination in the still of the night, and condemns their outward show of religiosity. Though they were the ones with access to the altar and the ark, David trusts that Jehovah will hear him, and in that confidence, he sleeps. *Sing or pray Psalter #8.*

March 7

Read Psalm 12

Pure Words

Psalm 12 begins with a brief, heartfelt cry: “Help, Lord!” David cries to God because it seems as if the wicked have overtaken the land; he can scarcely find a godly man. Especially notable about the numerous

ungodly is their wicked speech. With their words they speak vanity, flatter, oppress the poor and needy, and exalt those who are vile. Though David rightly maintains that Jehovah will cut off flattering lips and the tongues that speak proud things, these unbelievers boast, “Our lips are our own; who is lord over us?” (v. 4).

Then David contrasts the speech of the ungodly to that of Jehovah: “The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times” (v. 6). David trusted that Jehovah’s pure word would preserve all who trusted in him from the mighty enemies that surrounded them. Likewise, his word is the means by which our God preserves his church still today. And as his people, we’ve been bought with a price. Not even our lips are our own. Do the words that we speak edify and minister grace to the hearers? *Sing or pray Psalter #21.*

Poetry Monica Koole

THIS IS THE DAY WHICH THE LORD HATH MADE

Wispy tendrils of rising mist,
Rainbow droplets by sunlight kissed;
Hushed peace, a stillness oh so sweet,
As scenes slowly dance forth and meet.

A peaceful new morn is arrayed,
New mercies lovingly displayed.
Gently our Lord’s presence is known,
His lovingkindness sweetly shown.

Heavy eyelids softened in awe
Behold scenes unfold without flaw.
World weary traveler is still
As joy anew his soul doth thrill!

Psalm 118:24 “This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.”

DIGITAL DEVICE OVERDOSE AND ITS EFFECTS ON COMMUNICATION (2)

In my first article, I explained and proved five basics of good communication—logical speech, face-to-face interaction, attentive listening, truthfulness, and depth of content. I took the time and space to do so to aid us in honest evaluation of whether our use of technology has been detrimental to our good communication. I pray that you were honest in your self-examination. Evaluation of my own personal life, as well as my observations of others, convinces me that our use of technology today is indeed inhibiting good communication.

But my concern is not only that our overuse of technology is threatening good communication. My concern is that this leads to weak relationships. Mediocre forms of communication are forming mediocre relationships—with each other and with God.

To understand the seriousness of my unease, you need to realize that good communication is absolutely necessary to every relationship. When a young man and woman are soon to be joined in marriage, I sometimes in pre-marriage counseling make this overstatement: There are three ingredients to a healthy marriage—communication, communication, and communication. The point is that good communication is essential to a good marriage. And that is true of any relationship. Young people who do not actually speak to one another usually are not friends. Teenagers who think it is lame to converse with their parents typically do not have a good relationship with them. High school buddies who do not maintain contact after graduation grow apart. Why? Because good communication is the means by which people both experience and strengthen bonds of friendship. Good communication is the life of a relationship.

There is a mysterious power in the words that one human being exchanges with another. When deep, logical thoughts are arranged into truthful sentences and breathed out into the ear of another who receives them with careful understanding, an invisible binding takes place. Through friendly dialogue there is a knitting together of hearts. On the other hand, if there is miscommunication, evil communication, disjointed communication, or no communication at

all, damage to or even destruction of the relationship will follow.

Not only is good communication essential to earthly relationships, it is also vital to our relationship with God. We can even say that good communication is the way God saves us! Having chosen us in Christ, and having paid for our salvation with the blood of his Son, God begins the conversation with us by regenerating and calling us to faith through the gospel. With his word and by his Spirit, He communicates with us, especially through the preaching. In this way, we hear him speak to us. Having heard him, we respond by his Spirit; that is, we communicate with him, prayerfully expressing our faith, repenting of our sin, and worshipping him for his precious forgiveness. Good communication is absolutely necessary for our relationship with God.

Having saved us in this way, God sanctifies and preserves us through such communication also! Think about our worship services—they are a means by which our faith is strengthened. We often think of going to church simply to hear a sermon, but what is going on in our entire worship service is communication—a holy dialogue or conversation with God. He speaks, “Beloved congregation in the Lord Jesus Christ,” and we respond, “Our help is in the name of Jehovah who made heaven and earth.” He speaks a benediction, and we respond in song. He speaks his law, and we respond with another song. We speak to him by praying and confessing our faith, and he speaks through the scripture and preaching. We sing doxologies, and he blesses us through benediction. Back and forth, back and forth, there is a meaningful conversation in worship. This communication is how our hearts grow in relationship with God.

This continues throughout the week. Devotions mainly consist of meditation upon scripture and prayer, because in a personal manner, God continues his conversation with us. He speaks as we read the Bible, and we respond when we pray. Through each day, as we pursue our individual callings, he reminds us of his word, and we pray to him continually. In this way, we have a continual conversation with him. In this way, our relationship with God

is built and fortified. If a believer has a close relationship with God, his entire life will be filled with conscious communication with him.

To explain it in slightly different terms, good communication is necessary for a covenant with God. The biblical term, you see, for our relationship of friendship with God, is *covenant*. In order for us his people to have and experience this covenant, there must be good communication. Without good communication (begun by him, of course), there will either be no covenant with God or a very weak experience of such valuable friendship.

Now think. If Satan is trying to attack our relationships with each other and our relationship with God (and you can be sure that he is), then what do you think he is going to aim for? Indeed, he has his sights on the very building blocks of our relationship: communication. With great cunning, he works with technology night and day to interrupt, make shallow, halt, and destroy good communication. In doing so, our relationships with each other and with God greatly suffer.

I warn you of this because I personally feel these attacks as well. I not only notice some of the negative effects of technology on communication among others, but I experience it in my own life. I feel a struggle in my family life, in my devotional life, and in my mind itself as Satan seeks to make my use of technology detract from my communication with those closest to me. I know him to be successful at times, and am disgusted at the thought that he has used technology to the detriment of my relationship with my children, my wife, and my God! If we truly cherish our relationships with each other and with God, then good communication should be of great concern to us.

Knowing how essential good communication is to our relationships, let us go back to the five basics of good communication and ask some questions. Is your *logical speech* affected by your use of technology? Do you know how to speak clearly in complete sentences, or are the abbreviations and run-on clutter of device chatter dumbing down your speech? Do you know how to keep a conversation going without a phone? Do you know how to describe verbally how you are feeling without an emoticon? Instead of conversing after church, do you find yourself habitually going to the car to snapchat or text another young person in the same church parking lot? Would you rather text your parents or talk to your parents? When you sit around a table or in a living room, how much of that time is interrupted by a device? You may laugh at these questions, but

I ask you to take them seriously. My observations of you *and my own life* make me conclude that the technological way of communicating is distracting, detracting from, and even destroying our logical speech with one another.

Is your *face-to-face interaction* affected? Do you know how to make eye contact when you talk to someone, or would you prefer to use an iPhone to contact them? Is face-to-face conversation your go-to method of conversation, or is it Facebook and Facetime? Are you seeking out a date in person, or is it through Snapchat or some other form of social media? As a pastor, I seriously wonder if people do not look me in the eye when I talk to them because their use of technology is eliminating that ability! The distant way of communication through today's technology might make conversation more comfortable, but it is also removing the basic structure of face-to-face conversation that is essential to our relationships. Frankly, many are so accustomed to screen communication that they are terrified at the thought of actually talking to a real face.

Is your ability to *listen attentively* being affected? How often does it happen that your attention to your loved one is arrested by a tune, beep, or vibration, which feels more important than your present conversation? When your parents are talking to you, do you hear everything they say, or do your efforts to multi-task on a laptop, tablet, or phone make you miss their point? Are you getting so used to the stimulation of five or more conversations going on at the same time on your device that you find it difficult to pay attention to one conversation even when you put technology aside? How is your attention span in church, class, or day-to-day conversation? Young people, it has been scientifically demonstrated that the hyper-communication through the electronics of today impacts your brain's thinking. Specifically, it reduces your attention span. If the overuse of technology is making all of us suffer from short attention spans, can we not see how that will affect the development of our relationships with one another?

Is *truthfulness* being affected? With less face-to-face interaction, the pressure to speak the truth drastically diminishes. It is much easier to lie to a person over the phone than it is to do so in person. How easy is it nowadays for you to text, tweet, or post a lie? Many are getting so used to dishonesty over social media that their consciences are no longer bothered. Blogs of false doctrines and posts full of deceit surround us on the internet. You can make your life look perfect on Facebook. You can photo-shop your pictures, construct a bogus profile,

hide all your flaws, and present to the world someone very different than who you really are. Through social media, consciences are getting numb to guile. With easy communication comes the ease of lying, and it is slowly taking a toll on our relationships.

Is your *depth of content* in conversation being affected? Is it even possible for the content of a chat or tweet to be deep? Through technology, you might be able to share a video of a sweet dunk, pin an outfit idea, or communicate snippets of information, but how many deep conversations actually take place? Are your minds getting so shaped by shallow conversations that you cannot think deeply, much less converse deeply about any one topic? Does the quantity of information at your fingertips help you, or have you begun to respond to this information overload by trying to think about ten things at once, never getting deep with any? Are you able to store information in your memory, think critically about the same, and then articulate your original thoughts in conversation? Or has your overreliance on technology made you a lazy thinker and talker with no depth to your conversation? If your use of technology is filling in your conversations with shallowness, you can be certain that shallow relationships will result.

My greatest concern, however, is our relationship with our God. If our use of technology is negatively affecting how we listen and talk to each other, then would it not also affect our communication with God? When he communicates with us through logical speech, face-to-face encounters, with truthfulness and depth, are we able to receive it with attentive listening? The glazed-over looks and sleepy eyes that I see from my vantage point on the pulpit in worship make me concerned that technology is weakening our ability to listen to God. After listening to him speak to us, are we able to respond to him with the same good communication

of logical speech, consciousness of his face, and with truthfulness and depth? When many people admit boredom in church and coldness in their devotional life, I am concerned that our overuse of technology might be the issue. One nasty side effect due to the overdose of the digital drug is deficient intimacy in our relationship with God. We must beware that our abuse of the ever advancing technology may result in a church similar to the people in the time of the Judges. “There arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD” (Judges 2:10).

It is time to take drastic action by gouging out chunks of technology usage from our lives. These devices are not evil of themselves, but they may be devices of the devil, used to tempt and destroy us. We may need repentance of this kind: “And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell” (Matthew 5:29). Jesus is not saying that we must literally pluck out our eye, nevertheless, the meaning for us in this technological age may be a plucking out or a cutting off of certain devices which we often treat as such precious body parts.

I am confident that God will preserve his people in the midst of this dangerous technological age. The warning of this article is not meant to bring doubt to our minds concerning his unfailing covenant with us. Yet we have a duty of gratitude before God to show that we cherish his covenant with us by guarding and nurturing our relationships with one another and with him. Let us seriously re-evaluate our use of technology, making the necessary changes in our lifestyle for the benefit of closer experiences of covenant with God and each other.

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

Truth vs Error Brenda Hoekstra

PRACTICING THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Did you ever hear someone say, “I can glorify God by washing the dishes for him” or, “I can worship God by working on my car engine or while taking a walk in the woods”?

People that speak this way often have been

influenced by a teaching that is called “practicing the presence of God.” It originated with a 17th century monk named Nicolas Herman, better known as Brother Lawrence, in a secluded French Catholic Monastery. *Practicing the Presence of God* is a book

put together after the death of Brother Lawrence from a collection of personal correspondence and recalled teachings. Lawrence taught that our sanctification did not mean that we needed to change our daily deeds or habits. Instead, it meant simply doing regular, ordinary daily things for God's sake that we commonly do for our own sake. Built from the truth of Colossians 3:23 that we are to do all things "heartily as to the Lord, and not unto men;" his message was one of cultivating a keen sensitivity to the presence of God in everyday life. He claimed that "the most excellent method he had found for going to God was that of doing his common business without any view of pleasing men but purely for the love of God." He was pleased when he could take up a straw from the ground for the love of God, seeking him only, and nothing else, not even his gifts. He was satisfied with his method of being governed and motivated *only* by selfless love for God. According to Lawrence, this habit soon brought an awareness of God's love, inwardly exciting him to every action, and he interpreted this as God's presence.

Finding this presence of God in each task made every task equal to Lawrence. Thus, the prayer times called for by the Holy Father were no different or more desirable to him than regular activities. Lawrence was saddened as he saw his fellow monks addicting themselves to special activities like times set aside for prayer, the Mass, devotions and verbal reciting. He viewed these activities as selfish. Brother Lawrence grew to find such activities and calls to prayer by the Holy Father of the monastery to be a distraction. Lawrence stated, "The time of work does not with me differ from the time of prayer. In the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great a tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the Blessed Supper". According to Lawrence the "prime discipline of the Christian life is to devote oneself to 'God's presence' in all tasks." By this discipline, Lawrence engaged in what he considered a "continual conversation with God."

Practicing the presence of God is said to be useful today as a way to teach us to be in constant prayer and consciousness of God, but the truth is that our prayer life *must* be informed and guided by the scriptures. Without the guiding light of the word of God, our prayer life will be deficient. Internal thoughts to ourselves or to God about how much we love him as we walk in the woods or wash our dishes may fix our minds on God but is not true prayer. Contemplating God as we gaze at a dish-soap

bubble could be prayerful, but is not true prayer as Christ taught us in Matthew 6:9–13.

If practicing the presence of God is not profitable to prayer life, is it still a good way to find God or go to God, as Lawrence teaches? The scriptures teach us the only true and safe way we can go to God and not be consumed because of our sins is through the mediator that he provides. In the word is where we find that mediator who is Christ. The most excellent way to go to God is only through Jesus Christ as we find him in the word. Brother Lawrence's teachings give us no focus on Christ with his redemption and constant mediation.

Do the scriptures teach us to *practice* anything? In the time following the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost, Luke outlines God's means of grace that we are to practice. In Acts 2:41–42 we learn repentance and baptism is in the forefront and is followed by believers *continually devoting themselves to the apostle's doctrine* (teaching) and to *fellowship*. These believers were called to continue in the gospel (attend to the public preaching), prayer (including and especially corporate prayer), fellowship (friendship together in God's word and its study), and the Lord's Supper. To continue in the gospel is to be in the word. This is the divinely prescribed *practice* of the Christian.

The Spirit uses our time in the word as the means (of grace) to *draw* his people closer to God through Christ. The Spirit uses our time in the word to conform us to Christ so that our lives can be centered on him. The study of God's word, including attendance to the preaching and to catechism, gives our hearts and minds the inexhaustible treasures of the scriptures. And, in the learning and understanding of these treasures, we are more able to know Christ, grow in him and live unto him. Growth in Christ, spiritual maturing, is the promised result of being in the word as taught in Hebrews 5:12–14, "who by reason of use [in the word of righteousness] have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." Without such discernment, we would be unable to root evil out of our hearts and lives and be conformed to Christ. And, with such discernment, we are increasingly better able to 'handle' life, live our life unto him, and to spread Christ's word to fellow Christians and to others. Finding God's presence and feeling closer to God sounds lofty but is not the same as knowing and growing in Christ by being in the word.

We would all agree that practicing God's presence cannot be held as a substitute for being in the word. But, what if we add it to our rich life of being in the

word that we already have? Wouldn't that make our lives more filled with holiness or help us to be the best possible Christian? God does not encourage us to find him in such an inward, secret manner. This is a spiritual elitism because such efforts do not edify others in our church or provide us a way to better witness to those outside of our church. It is an unproductive spiritual dead end much like liturgical dancing or the gibberish of a Pentecostal. Is Lawrence's idea of finding God's presence even compatible with a gospel-centered life? The gospel message is: Christ and him crucified. It is about redemption and relationships. It is summarized by Jesus himself when he said that as his redeemed people we are to love God and our neighbor as ourselves. Brother Lawrence's teachings of finding God and being closer to God by way of worshipfully doing ordinary, daily things is not even half of our calling or duty as taught by Christ. Loving God is more than loving him in every activity. Loving God is in loving Jesus Christ, his Son and our Mediator. We love Jesus Christ by sacrificially loving and serving others (Matt. 19:21, 25:40; James 1:27).

What about this idea of the presence of God? We know that God is omnipresent or everywhere-present, as we find in Psalm 139:7–10. We know that the attributes of God are evident everywhere throughout creation, as Romans 1:20 teaches. We also know that there is a special kind of presence of God for his people—one that is a relationship of friendship by way of our being redeemed. This special presence is first highlighted when the tabernacle is established, as we read in Exodus 25:8–9, where God will dwell among his people. God's special presence took on a radical new step closer to his people in the incarnation of the Son. In the Son, the relationship of friendship and redemption itself was humanly personal as we read in Matthew 1:21–23. After Christ's ascension, he sent the Spirit to maintain his special presence with his people (Acts 2:1–4). This presence is not dependent on what we feel or anything subjective. It is not dependent on what we practice. It depends on God's sustaining and renewing activity.

The message of the gospel is not about how to find God, but how God finds his people and changes them (Ps. 65:4). He finds us...dead...and makes us alive *in* Christ and *to* those around us. That 'aliveness' shows his special presence is already with us. It is the result of God's sustaining and renewing activity through Christ in us for the benefit of the universal church. God's special presence in the church as the source of the 'aliveness' of its individual members by the Holy Spirit has a purpose.

The purpose of the presence of God is that we as individuals and as a whole, corporate church are more and more conformed to the image of Christ. This is much more than a warm, inner awareness of God on a personal level that makes us pleased and perfectly satisfied. The purpose of God's presence is to gather us together in a unified faith as his body, to encourage and exhort each other so that we are not "forsaking the assembling of ourselves together" as we "see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:25). The purpose of the presence of God is to fuel us in continuing the gospel mission to "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo I am with you always, even to the end of the world" (Matt. 28:19, 20). God's promised presence is already with us, we don't need to practice it to have it. Lawrence and those who embrace his teachings totally miss this truth.

While Lawrence's monastic lifestyle is rarely recommended, his inner-meditational teachings have been around since the 1970s. Lately they are finding their way into Reformed circles. Ann Voskamp, a former blogger for the Gospel Coalition, heavily advocates his ideas throughout her book, *One Thousand Gifts*. While Ann upgrades Lawrence's 'love' with 'giving thanks', the idea and theology remain the same as Lawrence's. Another example of Lawrence's influence among Reformed circles is found in the book *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace* by James M. Boice. According to Ryan Habbena, a writer for the blog *Critical Issues Commentary*, the book thoroughly reaffirms the doctrines of the Reformation, but the concluding chapter on pragmatic issues holds Brother Lawrence's teaching in high regard (pp. 196–197).

The Spirit indeed leads us to pray at all times (Eph. 6:18), and we surely need to attend to our everyday duties "as for the Lord." Yet, our calling as Christians, the work we are assigned to do, is that we grow in our knowledge of our Savior Jesus Christ. We are to grow both personally and together in the knowledge of Christ. We can only fulfill that calling by being in the word. Contrary to Brother Lawrence, being in the word *does* differ from our everyday efforts. God's gracious means will cultivate genuine assurance but it involves special effort on our part. It involves time spent specifically in the scriptures, in prayer, observance of the Sabbath, and attendance to the preaching. In Luke 10:38–42 we read of Martha who was busy with much serving. I'm sure that with the actual presence of Jesus in her

house, she was very much doing her tasks “as for the Lord,” in very true and selfless love for him even as Brother Lawrence taught. And yet, this behavior was discouraged when she was told by Christ himself that “Mary had chosen the good portion which would not be taken away from her.” That is the message of the passage, to *prefer* the study of and instruction by Christ when it is made available. The tasks Martha involved herself in for the purpose of serving were not sinful in themselves, but Christ taught her to prefer the means of grace over daily mundanities, to set aside daily things to be in the word in a special way as Mary had done.

Devotion to the word of God and attending the preaching is the scriptural discipline and practice of the Christian life. We don’t skip church to bring a meal to a sick friend. We don’t skip devotions to go talk to a straying brother. We certainly don’t forsake the means of grace as Martha did to accomplish our mundanities of life like preparing meals, cleaning the house, or fixing the car. These average things of life should rather serve our efforts to partake of the means of grace. We fix our car so that we can

get to Bible study or catechism. We finish our work and go to bed early enough on Saturday night so we are able to get to church on time, attend to the preaching, and not be distracted or fall asleep. And then, from the activity of attendance to God’s word, we go forth in regular life with the people around us rather than into ourselves. We outwardly express our love by helping our brothers and sisters in Christ with our service and by verbally and outwardly witnessing to each other and to those around us of the salvation we experience. Follow Mary’s example and obey the call to worship that your elders send out, including those special mid-week calls. Make time to be in the word in special ways of devotions, catechism, prayer, and Bible study together with your friends. In so doing you will surely be “choosing the good portion.” You will be practicing what God has prescribed and you will find his presence is already with you.

Brenda Hoekstra is a member of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

Poem Gertrude Hoeksema

SERENITY

*“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.”
—Isaiah 26:3*

Evil days, we often hear, are these.
Restlessness and strife in all degrees,
Hate and turbulence and riot rife
Seem to be our troubled way of life.
...And our children’s, too.

Inner conflicts -- Lust for living well,
Packing life with pleasure ere death’s knell,
War against our wish to strangers be,
Striving to live lives of sanctity.
...With our children, too.

Deeper worries: How can we whose sin
Seems to burst from ev’ry depth within
Teach our children how their sin to fight,
And to struggle more to do the right?
...For our children do.

Probing problems: Need our harried pace
Sweep us on to lose a futile race?
Is there not an answer we can find,
Giving us our needed peace of mind?
...For our children, too?

Perfect peace the Lord has promised them
Who in trust have stayed their minds on Him.
In the Lord is everlasting strength,
Bringing courage to our souls at length.
...Promised our children, too.

Sweet serenity and quiet calm,
Sought through prayer, the precious, soothing balm
Is the gift our Lord for us reserved
Freely given, although undeserved!
...To our children, too!

T is for Tree

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E is for Ear

To hear what's wise and true;
Like seeking hidden treasure
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*"My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom...and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God."
—Proverbs 2:1-2, 4-5*



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:
- Lena Joelle, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Tyler and Ally Ophoff—Byron Center, MI
 - Leah Elise, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Seth Kamps—Crete, IL
 - Ryan James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Nick Lubbers—Crete, IL
 - Douglas John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Ethan Kalsbeek—Immanuel, Lacombe, Canada
 - Oliver Gilbert, son of Mr. & Mrs. Kelsey & Ashley VanBemmel—Loveland, CO
 - Kathryn Lou, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jon & Aryn Schwarz—Loveland, CO
 - Aspen Mae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ben & Heidi Soodsma—Randolph, WI
 - Carter James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Mitch & Kelli Van Overloop—Trinity, MI

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:

- Atyce Lubbers—Byron Center, MI
- Aaron Westhuis—Byron Center, MI
- Bro. Eduardo M. Bautista—Berean, Philippines
- Calvin VanBaren—Crete, IL
- Rick Miedema—Georgetown, MI
- Kayley Langerak—Grace, MI
- Eliese Moelker—Grace, MI

MARRIAGES

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

- Mr. Joel De Jong and Miss Dana Griess—Loveland, CO
- Mr. Tyler Koole and Miss Lisa Vander Veen—Southwest, MI



SYNOD OF DORDT PART 1: NETHERLANDS IN THE 1500S

This year, the Protestant Reformed Churches will celebrate the 400th anniversary of the Synod of Dordt. This was a synod in the Netherlands from 1618 to 1619 that defended the five points of Calvinism and wrote the Canons of Dordt. At the time that the Canons of Dordt were written, the Netherlands was going through both a reformation and revolution. In studying the history around it, we can see how God guided history to preserve the truths of scripture in not one but two of the Three Forms of Unity that our churches hold to today.

In the early 1500s, the Netherlands was a loose union of seventeen different provinces of what is today the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg, and parts of France and Germany. Each of these seventeen provinces was ruled by a governor called a *stadtholder*. These stadtholders would meet together in the States-General.

But the Netherlands wasn't free. The Netherlands was under the rule of the Holy Roman Empire, which controlled a lot of countries in Europe. But the Netherlands was mostly ignored by the Holy Roman Emperor. He gave the Netherlands a lot of freedom, more freedom than almost any other country in Europe at that time.

When the printing press was invented, lots of presses across the Netherlands were allowed to print nearly whatever they wanted. While most of the early part of the Reformation started by Martin Luther in Germany didn't have much effect on the Netherlands, it was an area ready for later waves of the Reformation.

Something to think about:

With your parents, discuss why the Three Forms of Unity are important for our churches. Why do we hold to them even four hundred years after they were written?



S	C	F	W	U	S	E	W	S	D	U	G	E	A	L
D	M	A	T	Y	R	S	F	K	Q	J	N	A	A	V
N	X	L	N	W	A	E	Z	I	S	O	I	J	Y	T
A	U	O	G	O	Q	X	W	X	I	I	Z	E	L	Q
L	D	V	R	S	N	Y	W	T	A	W	J	G	H	X
R	Z	Q	V	E	N	S	A	S	A	B	U	J	U	O
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N	M	E	S	M	F	M	B	L	T	O	X	O	N	U
G	R	E	G	L	D	D	Y	D	X	D	E	O	I	E
C	O	N	F	E	S	S	I	O	N	R	A	X	T	U
J	K	Q	B	S	J	I	O	O	A	A	S	T	Y	S
V	A	V	L	U	T	V	U	Q	S	S	E	Y	S	Q

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



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