

# BEACON LIGHTS

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# BULLYING

Bullying is an intentional, unprovoked, repeated action by one person to hurt or dominate a weaker person. Bullies often think of themselves as superior to the person they are attacking. A 2013 study conducted by UCLA in a public middle school uncovered some chilling facts about bullying. Middle school students who bully more are described as cool by their peers. Would this be true in a Christian school as well?

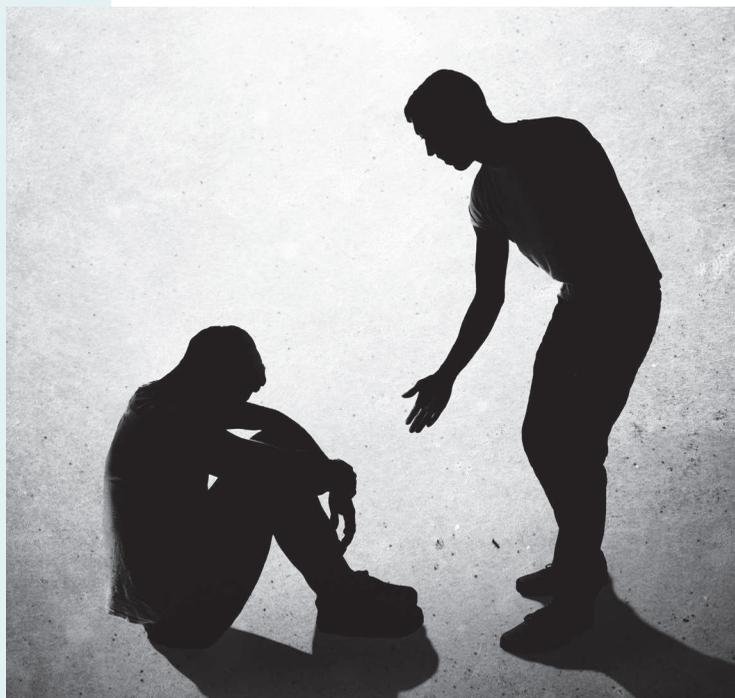
Throughout the history of mankind since the fall of Adam and Eve, violence, whether through deeds or speech, has been regarded as macho, something to attain, something to give you power over another person. This violence has also been boasted about. Wicked Lamech boasted to his wives, “hearken unto my speech: for I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt” (Gen. 4:23). As if his boasting wasn’t depraved enough, he even taunted God: “If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold” (v. 24).

Today, the violence of bullying exists in homes and workplaces. Bullying happens in schools, public and Christian. Bullies come in all ages, male and female. Bullies use many means to accomplish their goal of dominating another person. Sometimes physical abuse is the method, whether a violent, even bloody assault at one time or the daily slapping, spitting, and tripping of the victim. Bullying is also manifest in words. Sometimes the victim endures a barrage of insults day after day. Other times the words are written in notes passed around the classroom, sent as text messages, scratched into the wall of the bathroom stall, or posted on social media. No matter their form, they are meant to hurt, cut down, and kill.

Maybe you have witnessed bullying at school or elsewhere. You probably noticed that the victim didn’t go on the defensive because most victims do not. So did you do anything about it? Did you make their unspoken voice heard? Did you defend the victim or did you join in? Keep in mind that helping

a victim of bullying must go further than just “telling off” the bully. Helping ought to include befriending the victim. Through this action we show an awareness of how we ourselves have been befriended by God through Jesus Christ.

Thanks be to God that there is comfort for the victim of bullying. God promises to “give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways” (Ps. 91:11). He also says of the one in need of help, “He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honor him” (v. 15). Further, Psalm 68:6 states, “God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains.” The emphasis of these words is, according to John Calvin, “That we ought to comfort ourselves under the worst afflictions, by reflecting that we are in God’s hand, who can mitigate all our griefs and remove all our burdens.” This is true comfort for the believing young person who is bullied.



## MURDER ON A SCHOOL BUS

The children entered the bus loudly, the way that most children do. Each of them had a better story than the next, and each was determined to tell it louder than the other. But not all of them. One girl did not have anyone to talk to, no stories to share, no friends to share a story with her, so she slipped quietly to a seat towards the rear of the bus.

As the rest of the bus filled up, it just so happened that a group of boys took seats surrounding this girl. This might have been ok, but today it wasn't. You see, this girl had a difficult home life. Her father had left her mother several years before, and the family was poor. And the boys knew it.

It didn't take long for their attention to switch from sports or homework or whatever they were talking about, to this young girl who was sitting there quietly. On this day, not of any fault of her own, she was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

They started asking her questions. The questions seemed innocent at first. To the casual observer, nothing too serious. But this wasn't the first time she had experienced this. She knew what was coming. What was going to again play out on this school bus was a classic case of bullying: superior power inflicting pain on a weaker, more vulnerable target repeatedly over time for no good reason.

She felt that the best course of action was to ignore them. And who could blame her? But the boys had a goal, unspoken, but shared among all of them. So the questions continued.

In the face of her silence, the intensity of the questions increased. Now each boy was trying to best the other as to who could take it further, who could land a stronger blow. Her home life was now introduced, her poverty. Stories the boys had heard, rumors that were flying around about the family, shared perhaps by their parents, were all now relayed to this poor, broken, and shattered child on a school bus. The only difference between what was going on here and what went on in the Roman coliseum was that the Christian who was facing the lion at least knew relief would come in the form of death. This child had no such hope.

But everyone has a breaking point, and this child was no exception. There is only so much that a person can take. So finally, it happened. The goal of the boys from the beginning. She snapped. She screamed at them to stop, so that her voice filled the entire bus. Now, a deathly silence filled the previously noisy bus, heads whipped around. All eyes were now trained on the girl. As if the pain of the mockery was not enough, she now experienced deep shame. The boys, having accomplished their mission, went back to laughing and talking among themselves. The girl? She sunk her head on her chest and sobbed.

On a bus full of children, she was desperately alone.  
Murdered, without a drop of blood being shed.

# DELIVERING THE HELPLESS

God hates bullying.

That needs to be stated not only because there is truth found in the quotation of George Orwell that “restatement of the obvious is the first duty of intelligent men.”

It needs to be said, because it is the truth: “These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood...” (Prov. 6:16–17).

God hates bullying because God loves and cares for those whom bullying victimizes: “All my bones shall say, LORD, who is like unto thee, which deliverest the poor from him that is too strong for him, yea, the poor and needy from him that spoileth him?” (Ps. 35:10).

God hates bullying because too often it is committed by one member of God’s family to wound another member of his family. In other words, it is a sin against the covenant of God itself. Hatred is shown against the one whom God has commanded us to love (John 15:17).

We use a word that has lost its force—bullying—to describe something that God views as murder: “That neither in thoughts, nor words, nor gestures, much less in deeds, I dishonor, hate, wound, or kill my neighbor” (Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 105).

The story that opened this magazine relayed the true story of a girl who was murdered. There was “innocent blood” shed on that bus (Prov. 6:17).

What do we say when we read this story? Does the fact that it was perpetrated by Christians against a Christian fill us with horror? It should. Does it fill us with anger? How could it not? Although we cannot do anything about that incident, we can examine our own responsibility when confronted with such a situation. The question could be asked, “In the absence of teachers or parents, what can be done?” The answer lies in the children who witnessed it, and Job’s life is instructive as to the solution.

We are all familiar with the history of Job. Given

great riches, many children, prestige, and honor; all of it taken away by the devil who was convinced that Job worshipped God only because of his earthly circumstances.

What may be less familiar to us is the defense that Job gave of his own life in chapter 29. He was determined to prove to his friends that he was not being punished for his previous sins, as they alleged. In fact, the truth was very much the opposite. We read Job’s confession of his own life in chapter 29, “I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgment was as a robe and a diadem. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was father to the poor, and the cause which I knew not I searched out.” And then this in Job 29:12, “I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him.” Job “delivered...him that had none to help him.”

This girl had none to help her. She was in the true sense of the word, helpless. All it would have taken was one voice, one boy or one girl to say, “Stop, this isn’t right! We should not be doing this!”

All of this could have been stopped just as soon as it began. You see, when a child or young person is being bullied, there are no teachers around, no parents, no playground monitors, only other children; the bullies see to that. Although the responsibility to stop this murder starts with the bullies themselves, those who are witnesses also have the power in their hands to stop it. And if they will fulfill their calling before God by protecting those who are persecuted, the young person could be spared. Job teaches us by his own example how we ought to act when we witness someone being bullied. We too are called to “deliver...him that has none to help him.”

Our calling is to speak out in defense of the bullied person. Step in between bully and bullied and say to the oppressor, “Stop it! This has to stop right now!”

Oh, how our flesh cries out against this! Our mind says, “Step in the middle of this? Are you kidding

me? Then the bullies will turn on me! Best just to be quiet and let this run its course.”

So, the persecution continues and the Holy Spirit of God is grieved (Eph. 4:30).

But we are no longer ruled by our flesh (freed from the “bondage of sin” according to the Belgic Confession Article 24). Although our flesh is prone to cowardice, a sin for which the ungodly perish everlastingly (Rev. 21:8), it is a sin which the redeemed Christian, by the strength of the Holy Spirit, can overcome.

Our calling before God is to step in, to speak words of justice and love, and according to Psalm 82:3–4 to “defend the poor and fatherless, do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked.” This calling comes to all of us, young and old alike. Do justice and judgment! Help those who cannot help themselves, and deliver those who are oppressed!

God hates murder (“abhors” according to the Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 106). He especially despises the persecution of the vulnerable. He is determined to bring swift judgment on those who oppress the weak, as we read in Malachi 3:5, “and I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against...those that oppress...[the] widow, and the fatherless....”

But so too the commandment comes to help those in need, when it is “in the power of thine hand to do it” (Prov. 3:27).

And yet, how many reading this (and especially the one writing it) look back on events in their own life and find that we did exactly that? We sat quietly by while a child or young person was bullied—murdered, really—and we did nothing to “deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor” (Jer. 22:3). Or perhaps we joined in? Or led the persecution ourselves?

The memory of these events is impossible to shake, and the shame seems to linger as smoke on a garment.

Job gives us an example of how we are to deliver the oppressed, but Job can never do more than that. Job was merely a type, a shadow of someone greater. A shadow itself has no lasting glory; it is there for a moment, and then it is gone. It simply draws our attention to something or someone else.

Where then for relief, for the bullied, the bully, and bystander alike? For that we must look to the one of whom Job was merely a type. And it is that someone greater who not only provides a *perfect* example of a holy life, but himself gives courage to the redeemed bystander, so that they no longer stand idly by, but jump up to the defense of the bullied person, and show “mercy and compassion every man to his brother” (Zech. 7:9).

Where else for relief but the cross that stands at Calvary? At the foot of that cross three parties come together in peace at last, the bullied, the humbled oppressor, and the repentant bystander, all clinging to the One crucified. For it is the bullied child herself, the reed that was not broken, and the flax that was not extinguished, who finally by the grace of their Savior experienced “judgment unto victory” (Matt. 12:20). It is the bully himself who is transformed by God into a blessed peacemaker, and who now is at peace with his God through the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1).

And for you, the young person who doubts they have the strength to stand up for the bullied person? You are right. When God’s people rely on their own strength, “even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall” (Isa. 40:30). You don’t have the strength. You will fail time and time again. Until you finally find your strength in the Son of God, the Son who not only stood up for you, but gave *himself* for you (Gal. 2:20). This is the one who empowers you courageously to defend the weak and powerless, so that when you have against all odds delivered “him that had none to help him,” your victory cry will be, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13).

Macy Schimmel

## BULLYING: A SURVEY

Before you begin reading this article I want to preface it by confessing that this was one of the most

challenging things I’ve ever had to write. I received so much emotional feedback, and because many

individuals responded with such powerful and painful words I was even brought to tears. Thank you for sharing your experiences.

For those who don't know, I created a survey on the topic of bullying which I had high school students take. I've taken those results and written an article based on them; most of what I have to say comes from high school students, with a little of my own writing as well. I know that this was not a scientific survey, but there is much to be learned from it.

I started the survey with a simple question on the definition of "bullying." One student explained bullying as an act of judging others, where the bully breaks down someone else by means of words, actions, or social media. Another said bullies look down upon those around them, those they deem unworthy of normal treatment. The hierarchies that are created by bullies segregate the "wolves" from the "sheep;" those who are eager to prey on someone "lesser" and more vulnerable than themselves. And there are those who don't participate in bullying, but tend to be easy targets for the bullies' attacks.

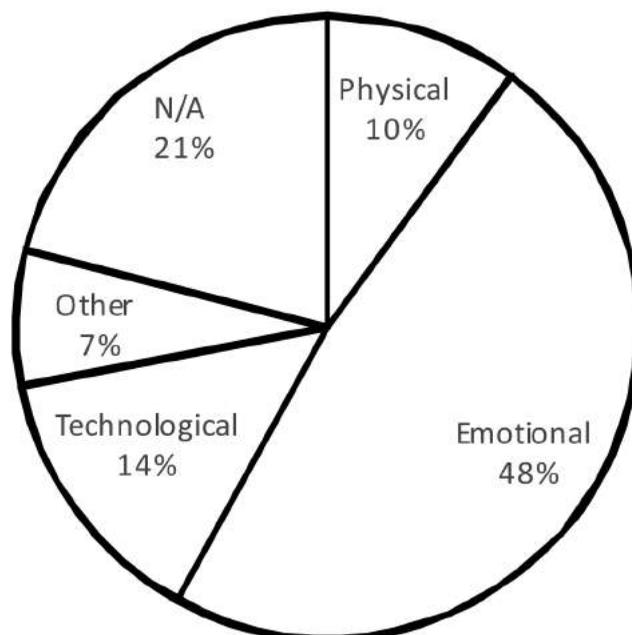
The proof of our depravity is demonstrated in the fact that out of the students who took the survey, 68% reported having been bullied. That's almost 7 out of every 10 students. This isn't an uncommon occurrence, and we shouldn't be naïve to think that our schools are outside of the realm of bullying, because they aren't. No one can escape the reach of sin, "for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

68% of students have experienced one or more of the following types of bullying: verbal, technological, physical, and emotional. From the chart,<sup>1</sup> you can see that emotional bullying is by far the greatest type of bullying students experience. Emotional bullying is the largest percentage because it encapsulates all the other types of bullying. One cannot be attacked physically or verbally without feeling some type of emotional pain as well. No two bullying experiences are the same, but most have the same consequences: emotional hurt leading to feelings of worthlessness, betrayal, fear, anxiety, and humiliation.

One student confessed how they would fake an illness to skip school because they were too afraid

<sup>1</sup> This chart illustrates the types of bullying that students experienced during high school. Students were able to select multiple, so there are students who have experienced more than one type. I also gave the opportunity to share an "Other" where students wrote a type I had missed, but most restated a type I had already given.

## TYPES OF BULLYING



to face their bully, the attacks being so bad that dying felt like it would be easier than living. Another student shared that after being made fun of for having some supposedly "undesirable" trait, they felt unimportant, unloved, and attempted suicide at least twice, ending in a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder from the entire ordeal. Bullying is not a light matter and shouldn't be treated like a joke or something to be swept under the rug. There are students, adults even now, who have been brutalized to the point of severe depression.

Therefore, we need to be proactive in how we treat bullies and bullying situations. Too many bullies get away with what they've done to other students, and too many bullied students fall through the cracks. We need to make a stand as parents, as fellow classmates, and as teachers to adequately address bullying.

With the rise of social media, which most students have, bullying is easier than ever. About 17% of the students who have been bullied have been bullied through some form of social media—Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, etc. Social media is an easy way to confront someone without having to see their physical reactions; it's a place where bullies can hide in plain sight and erase their existence in one click, a quality that makes it all the more dangerous for younger children to have access to. Parents, be conscientious about what your children are doing, who they're talking to, what apps they're using, because without supervision, your child could become a

bully or be bullied without you even realizing it.

Consequently, the number of students who have witnessed some form of bullying is 92%. Even though this number is tremendously high, only 51% acted in some way to stop bullying. Those who did do something shared what types of things they did to step in. Many stood up to face the bully while others went over after the incident and comforted the person who was bullied.

Why is there such a disconnect? If students are seeing it happening, why aren't they doing anything about it? Someone admitted to having opportunity to stand up but didn't, explaining, "I do not do enough. It is hard to stand up in a high school environment. You can do all [that can be done], but the bully will just find a new target." This person seemed hopeless, not finding it worth it to stop bullying because they knew it was going to continue anyway. This seems like an excuse to sit and watch rather than to be actively helping others. We are constantly reminded that sin covers everything we do, yet we still are called to live lives pleasing to God, even when we know nothing we do will be perfect. I understand that sometimes situations do seem hopeless, but "[you] can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth [you]" (Phil. 4:13). He might use your single word, "Stop!" to do great things. There is more harm in staying quiet than telling someone else about what you saw.

When you feel as if you cannot do any more, go tell a teacher or parent. Only 2 out of 86 people said that they had talked with an authoritative figure about a bullying incident. High school students, your teachers are ready and willing to help in a bad situation. They have the training, the resources, and the authority to step in when you no longer can. I encourage you to go to them with your problems, especially if you see someone being bullied, either in person or online. By doing so, you will be helping all parties involved. Not only should you go to a teacher, but you should go to God. He hears all your prayers, your cries for help. He has the power to "heal the broken in heart and bind up [your] wounds" (Ps. 147:3).

Since I requested honest answers, I asked difficult questions. I dared to ask how many had bullied other students and 35% said they had in some way. Although this number is still 1/3 of the population, I suspect the number should be higher. What does this number say about our youth? Everyone has the potential to be a bully because we all have the old man of sin badgering and tempting us to pick on and point out others' faults. But, this doesn't mean

that we should accept the inevitable. Rather, we are called to fight back by living a holy life. Following in the footsteps of Christ is the best medicine for the epidemic. Not only must you talk the talk, but also walk the walk. Christ will give you the strength to step in and show kindness to those who need it.

We aren't entirely helpless. We can take preventative measures to ensure the safety of our children, students, and classmates. According to some students, we can start by setting good examples through kindness and living daily lifestyles of love. A smile of encouragement, a few short words of affirmation, or a hug is a simple, yet effective, way to show the love of God to others. Use love to "overcome evil" (Rom. 12:21). As one student commented, "A little kindness can go a long way."

Students aren't the only ones called to treat their peers with love and respect; parents, this applies just as much to you as to your children. Your children watch everything you do and hear everything you say. As someone very dear to me used to say, "Little kids have big ears." Yelling at the referee or your own coach because of a call or substitution you think was questionable, or replying with snark and disgust at something your spouse said are not ways to demonstrate respect and love to your children. God has given you the responsibility to teach your children the importance of kindness and respect. So, when you treat others without the respect they deserve or talk maliciously behind their backs, you are doing absolutely nothing to give your children the correct message of love.

Not only is setting a good example of kindness an important path to emulate, but also standing up and saying something to the bully is as well, as students suggested. A full conversation isn't necessary—simply starting a conversation provokes thoughts. Words like, "Hey, please stop. It's not nice," puts a seed of thought into the minds of the bullies, pricking their consciences. I also want to emphasize the importance of rebuking in love. Don't, by any means, fight fire with fire; you will only cause more issues (2 Tim. 4:2). Solomon responds to such situations in Proverbs 15:1, where he writes, "A soft answer turneth away wrath..." By speaking kindly and respectfully to the bully, you do not ostracize them, rather you give them a chance to return to love.

In no way must we have the mindset of "us vs. them". It is always us, together. We are the body of Christ, and when one of our members struggles with a sin, we encourage them, and pray with and for them. When one of the members of the body

of Christ suffers, we all suffer with them. When a member creates schism, our Christian calling is to fix the gaping wound in our body by using the love we have for one another, given to us by God, remembering that “the greatest of these is charity” (1 Cor. 13:13).

I want to end with three simple words: pray, forgive, and hope.

Pray—for your brothers and sisters struggling with bullying, for those who have been hurt by words and physical abuse, and for yourself that God will give you strength to stand up for what’s right and to use love to help others.

Forgive—those who have bullied you, just as God

has forgiven you.

Hope—not in ourselves, for we are weak creatures and the strength that we need is not to be found in us. Rather hope the “hope (that) maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Rom 5:5). In all things put your trust and confidence in God knowing that “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1).

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Jon Van Overloop

## THE OFFENSE OF CYBERBULLYING

How dare anyone mock another of God’s precious children? How dare anyone laugh at the physical or mental limitations that God in his wisdom gives to one of his children! We all have thorns; physical and psychological problems that cause us to feel inadequate. These thorns are given us by God for countless reasons. They cause us to hope for glory, they lead the body of believers to aid one another, they teach us patience, and they also lead us to not glory in the abilities, recognizing that they also are from God. How dare one member of Christ’s body make a mockery of another’s God-given limitations?

Perhaps a “slip of the tongue,” in an unguarded moment, can be understood and overlooked. The tongue, after all, is that powerful member of the body that no man can tame and is set on fire of hell (James 3). But the fingers, they don’t function as the tongue does. They make no sudden slips. The tongue may spew a stream of consciousness so that that which is present in the mind is formed into words by the tongue. That which is in the heart comes out at the mouth. But when the fingers do the talking, simple excuses fail. Consciousness does not pour out of our fingers. Our fingers only make intentional movements. Designed by God to do work and manipulate the world, our fingers are under the purposeful, resolute direction of our soul. How incredibly intentional and incredibly cruel is bullying when practiced by our fingers!

Online bullying is known as cyberbullying. Bullying occurs when a person repetitively abuses or mistreats others weaker than themselves. The internet has become a vehicle for bullying. The same repetitive and aggressive power displays that otherwise happen face to face is also done online. Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, blog sites, email, online polls, and the comments section of news sites can all be used to shame and demean others.

Cyberbullying is committed when one takes an untimely picture of another and posts it all over social media with degrading comments. It happens when a poll is produced asking which of the following students is the biggest loser in the senior class. Cyberbullying occurs when a student directly messages another about the uncool clothes, shoes, styles, etc. that another wears. Cyberbullying can take the form of rumors that are fabricated and spread on social media. It happens when one student makes fun of a comment or post that was made in an online chat room that includes multiple people. Finally, it can happen when a student produces a fake profile of another student and fills it with demeaning and embarrassing content.

The significance of cyberbullying is understood when one understands what the online environment has become. Originally, the internet was a medium for sharing information and promoting one’s business. Today it is a virtual or online public space.

Similar to other public spaces, the internet is a place to gather, to gossip, to share stories, to make friendships, and to put one's best face forward. Young people prefer to meet in real, physical, public spaces. They desire to meet at school, at the park, in the gym, at the beach, or at each other's homes. But opportunity is limited, so this new virtual public space has become their public space to maintain sociability when they are otherwise restricted by time and their own demanding schedule. This public space is open 24 hours a day and can be accessed within seconds whenever there is a tiny break in their busy schedule.

Unlike the public spaces of the school playground, the gym, the library, and a friend's home; there is no official monitor online. Those impulses that may otherwise be restrained by the presence and watchful eye of an authority are often not present online. As a result the conversation can quickly become ugly, and bullying comments are both produced and subsequently liked by others.

Cyberbullying is more intentional than other forms of bullying. One has to compose, edit, and then finally publish an online attack. Multiple opportunities to exercise self-control have to be suppressed before the missive is broadcast for other's enjoyment.

What's worse is that the public space of the internet is a competitive environment. With everyone posting it is hard to capture everyone else's attention. Attention is the currency of the internet or the online status symbol of choice. When people post, they want a good number of looks, shares, retweets, and forwards. Bullies have discovered that exaggerated, harsh, humiliating, and degrading comments about others pay handsomely.

It can be argued that cyberbullying is more damaging than traditional bullying. Other forms occur when one is out in public. The victim could always retreat to their home. Today the home provides less protection. The computer, the tablet, and the smartphone are all open doors for additional attacks. Today's victims of bullying have no place of escape.

The internet also makes the attacks much more public. At school the victim is degraded in front of those currently in ear shot. But the sound waves of the internet do not attenuate. The comments linger for all to see for days and weeks.

The internet's public space provides a safety barrier behind which the bully can cower. Online media distance the bully from his victim. Hiding behind a screen gives those who otherwise are not bold enough to bully in person an opportunity to bully from a distance and bold bullies are less restrained.

The immediate facial expressions of the victim are not seen, their cries are not heard, and so the taunts grow more aggressive and have a longer duration.

Cyberbullying is an issue of the heart. As the regenerate soul grows in conversion so that he hates his sin and lives a sanctified life he will stop his behavior of bullying. Addressing the heart of the bully can reduce the incidence of cyberbullying.

A Christian's heart is affected by the preaching. May we all hear God's command to love the neighbor, to seek the neighbor's well-being, and may we be convicted of our sins.

A Christian's heart is affected by friends. Degrading online comments will be seen in the public space that friends choose to occupy together. Close friends ought to go the way of Matthew 18 and admonish their erring brother. Repentance ought to be sought and forgiveness given.

A Christian's heart is affected by adults. Parents, elders, ministers, and teachers ought to be present and actively monitoring the public spaces of the online world. Especially those who have authority over the platforms and devices that bullies use ought to be monitoring those devices. The teacher that produces a chatroom must monitor that room. The minister that chooses online platforms to interact with his sheep must be present in that environment.

A Christian's heart is also affected by laws and punishments of the land. Cyberbullying is against the law. As of Oct. 1, 2015 all public school districts were compelled by law to adopt a policy against bullying and were authorized to execute that policy. The law stated that cyberbullying must be included in policies that these schools produced. The bullying policy must be implemented whenever a student uses school sanctioned sites for academic work. You can read about this yourself by searching Michigan Compiled Laws, Chapter 380—The Revised School Code, Act 451 of 1976, Section 1310b. Private schools ought to adopt similar policies to suppress the ungodly behavior of cyberbullying.

May God give us wisdom and love as we interact with one another. May the words of Psalm 19:14 guide our online and offline interactions, "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer."

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## THE DAILY PRESS

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

March 8

Read Psalm 13

At first glance, the beginning and end of this chapter don't really seem to go together. David is crying out to God asking when he will be delivered. Verse 3 especially stands out, where he says, “Consider and hear me, O LORD my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.” David needs God to help him understand all the trials he is going through so that he will not despair and become bitter. He's also concerned that his state of weakness will give his wicked enemies a cause to blaspheme, as stated in verse 4.

Suddenly, the chapter turns around in verse 5. God gave David strength to trust in him and to rejoice in his salvation. This gave David so much joy that he can end the psalm by proclaiming that God has “dealt bountifully” with him, even though his earthly life is extremely difficult. As we are also taught elsewhere in scripture, our earthly situation shouldn't be the barometer of our spiritual strength and joy. *Sing or pray Psalter #22.*

March 9

Read Psalm 28

We just finished studying the ancient Greeks in history class. It was amazing to see how the Greeks were able to hold off a much larger Persian force at the battles of Marathon and Thermopylae. The secret to their success was the phalanx formation. Here, the Greeks stood shoulder to shoulder with their shields overlapping and their spear tips poking out. This meant that the Persian infantry was throwing themselves at a bronze wall covered in razor-sharp spikes. In addition, the fact that the Greek shield was attached at the elbow and the hand, instead of just held with the hand, allowed the Greeks to use it as a weapon and to plow the enemy over.

I thought about this as I read the first part of Psalm 28:7, “The LORD is my strength and my shield.” God is our shield to protect us from the darts of our spiritual enemies and to fight back, like a hoplon shield with double grip. When God's people are united and trusting in him the enemy can do nothing against them, but if some of those shields begin to come down the entire

spiritual phalanx is in danger of crumbling. *Sing or pray Psalter #75.*

March 10

Read Psalm 55

Psalm 55:12, 13 reads, “For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: But it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance.”

Who could David be talking about here? One example that comes to mind immediately is Ahithophel. Ahithophel was a greatly respected friend and counselor of David who sided with Absalom when he rebelled. So respected was he that 2 Samuel 16:23 compares his advice to the “oracle of God.” However, Ahithophel was two-faced, as explained in Psalm 55:21. He acted like he loved God, but he actually hated him. Because of this, God's judgment spoken in Psalm 55:23 became reality for Ahithophel when he hung himself after learning Absalom had taken the advice of Hushai, David's spy. Many of God's enemies may live a long life on this earth but still do not live “half their days,” in the sense that they experience everlasting death in hell, instead of heavenly glory. *Sing or pray Psalter #149.*

March 11

Read 2 Samuel 12

What do you think we are to learn from the story of Ziba and Mephibosheth? Greedy Ziba comes to David with a gift and a lie, trying to gain Mephibosheth's estate for himself. Instead of looking into the situation and talking to Mephibosheth about it, David just tells Ziba he can have all of it. A few chapters later, in 2 Samuel 19, David discovers he has been tricked, and, ashamed (according to Matthew Henry), he gruffly tells Mephibosheth that the two of them should share the land again.

What are we to learn here? One thing is certainly the importance of learning both sides of a story before passing judgment. Think about all the perceptions you have of people. Are many of those perceptions tainted

by something you heard someone else say that person did or said? Sadly, we are often quick to judge others rashly and pass on hurtful rumors we don't even really know are true. David fell into this trap, condemning righteous Mephibosheth unheard, and we must always be on guard against this sin in ourselves. *Sing or pray Psalter #120.*

**March 12** Read 2 Samuel 17

David is helped by three men in 2 Samuel 17:27. The first of these is Shobi, the son of Nahash. It's shocking to see an Ammonite mentioned here, as it was the Ammonites that 2 Samuel 12:31 says David killed with saws, axes, and fire, because they had ripped open the pregnant women of Israel. Shobi must have spoken out against this gruesome attack, as well as the way that Hanun, also a son of Nahash, degraded David's messengers in 2 Samuel 10:4. The second helper was Machir, who took care of Jonathan's son Mephibosheth for a while, as we read in 2 Samuel 9:4. Third, there was Barzillai the Gileadite. David asked this kind, old man if he would come live with him in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 19:37), but Barzillai said he wanted to die in his own country and sent his son Chimham instead. In 1 Kings 2:7, David tells Solomon on his deathbed to show kindness to the sons of Barzillai, and we learn in Jeremiah 41:17 that the sons of Chimham were still living by Bethlehem. *Sing or pray Psalter #113.*

**March 13** Read 2 Samuel 18

As we can all imagine, even if we haven't gone through it ourselves, the death of a child is one of the most difficult trials that we can endure on this earth. When a child dies in the church, the grieving is ongoing and severe, changing the lives of the family members forever. Still, even during intense sorrow, the parents have the wonderful assurance that their child is in heavenly perfection with God. Can you imagine what that trial would be like *without* that assurance? That was the reality for David. The grief he experienced was so much more intense than the typical grieving of a parent for a deceased child, because he didn't have the assurance that Absalom had gone to heaven. Of course, parents in the church today sometimes have to face the death of a wayward child. What words of comfort could be brought to a fellow saint going through such a trial? *Sing or pray Psalter #117.*

**March 14** Read Psalm 26

David says he doesn't want to commune with "bloody men" in verse 9 of this chapter. Wasn't David a bloody

man himself? In 1 Chronicles 28:3, God tells David, "Thou shalt not build an house for my name, because thou hast been a man of war, and hast shed blood." Wouldn't that put David in the same group as those he's speaking out against in this chapter? The difference is found in the fact that David and these "bloody men" were on opposing sides of the battlefield. God called David to fight his enemies, and he did so as a picture of how we fight our own spiritual battles every day. On the other hand, the men spoken about in this chapter are the enemies David was sent to fight. David is justified in the battles he fought, but these men are not. Their purpose was not to do God's work, but to thwart it. We must always be on guard against "bloody men" in the world around us. *Sing or pray Psalter #69.*

**March 15** Read Psalm 40

The first thing I thought of when I read verse 2 was the story of Joseph. This verse reads, "He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings." Joseph was literally thrown into a pit by his jealous brothers. He continued in that state even as he was plucked out, for then he was sold into slavery. Joseph struggled in the miry clay as he withstood the temptations of Potiphar's wife and his subsequent time in prison. However, Joseph never lost his faith in God, and God set his feet on a rock, removing him from prison, and making him second in command over the kingdom.

There were times when David felt like he was stuck in a horrible pit and miry clay, such as when he hid in caves from Saul and when he was fleeing from his son Absalom. Matthew Henry also relates this to Christ, who suffered unimaginable agony all his life and especially on the cross. We can sometimes feel like we're in miry clay, but must always trust that God will set our feet on a rock. *Sing or pray Psalter #111.*

**March 16** Read Psalm 58

Psalm 58:10 reads, "The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked." We wash our feet in the blood of the wicked? That reminds me of the Vikings who believed in a heaven where they drank blood from the skulls of their enemies. How can we teach our children this kind of language and defend it against those that speak out against us? God uses this graphic language to illustrate a picture. Just as a traveler enjoys having his feet washed after a long journey, so we rejoice when we see God glorified in all things, including the destruction of his enemies. In addition, maybe there's

something to the fact that seeing God's judgment on the wicked causes us to grow in holy fear of him, thereby cleansing us, like washing one's feet. Do you see a connection there? Can you think of anything else God is teaching us by using this type of language? *Sing or pray Psalter #156.*

**March 17** Read Psalm 61

In the last verse of this chapter, David states that he will daily perform his vows. What are these vows that David is talking about? They are summarized in our baptism form. Here we read, "Whereas in all covenants there are contained two parts, therefore are we by God, through baptism, admonished of and obliged unto new obedience, namely, that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; that we trust in Him, and love Him with all our hearts, with all our souls, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a new and holy life." As those in the covenant, we are always under oath. From birth, we have vowed to love God and live according to his commandments. These vows are further confirmed when we make confession of faith, stating that we believe the truth that is being taught in this church, that we will live according to it and submit to church discipline if necessary. This public vow shows just how serious it is when one leaves the church after making that vow. We must live conscious of the weighty vows we have made. *Sing or pray Psalter #159.*

**March 18** Read Psalm 62

One of our study Bibles at home talks about how this chapter is a "psalm of confidence." It brings out five nouns in the psalm that are used to describe God's protection: rock, salvation, defense, glory, and refuge. Can you describe how these words show God's protection? How about glory? This question came up when we read this chapter for family devotions. The other words were fairly self-explanatory, but we weren't sure how "glory" could be used to describe God's protection. One thing we came up with was that God's glory shows his power and makes man tremble before him. What do you think?

We also wondered what the phrase, "I shall not be moved," means at the end of verses 2 and 6. Charles Spurgeon says we cannot be moved from the point of view that God always strengthens us and never leaves us to despair. He compared it to an anchored ship on the water. The ship rocks back and forth with the waves, but it can never be swept away. We sometimes falter in times of great trial, but we are safely under

the shadow of God's wings and can never fall out of the covenant. *Sing or pray Psalter #161.*

**March 19** Read Psalm 64

Psalm 64:5 talks about how bold the wicked are in their sin, because they convince themselves that no one will find out. They forget that God is in heaven, can see all, and is directing all according to his purpose. One of scripture's clearest examples of this can be found in 2 Kings 6. In this chapter, the king of Syria is attacking Israel. He isn't very successful, however, because Elisha keeps telling the king of Israel where Syria is going to be, so there is no element of surprise. The king of Syria is livid when he finds out what's going on, and he sends an army after Elisha. God wants to remind the Syrians that he knows all and is in complete control of everything. Upon Elisha's prayer, God makes the Syrians blind, and then Elisha leads them right into Israel's capital city of Samaria. In a very humbling display of hospitality, Israel simply feeds the Syrians and sends them on their way. 2 Kings 6:23 says that after this "the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel." *Sing or pray Psalter #165.*

**March 20** Read 2 Samuel 19

Isn't it amazing what flattery can do? Evil flattery is a tactic often employed by God's enemies, because it appeals to our old man. In this story, David promises Shimei he won't kill him after the latter makes a show of being one of the first to meet David after he crosses the Jordan and bows before him, asking for forgiveness.

It's kind of surprising that David fell for this performance, but not as surprising as Jehoshaphat falling for Ahab's lies in 1 Kings 22. God has already made it clear that they will lose the battle and Ahab will die, yet Jehoshaphat agrees to go anyway. As if that isn't enough, Jehoshaphat wears his kingly robes while Ahab goes into battle disguised. What? A little sweet talk and Jehoshaphat is completely blinded to the gigantic bullseye on his forehead?

We can see some humor in Jehoshaphat's naiveté here, but we must realize that we are no better. Psalm 12:2 says of the wicked, "They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak." We must be on guard against those who flatter us into ways of sin. *Sing or pray Psalter #21.*

**March 21** Read 2 Samuel 20

Gertrude Hoeksema and Matthew Henry have opposing viewpoints on this chapter. Matthew Henry seems

to think it was wise of David to put Amasa as his new captain, but Hoeksema thinks it was foolish. According to Henry, putting Amasa at the head showed the people that David was merciful. Hoeksema argues that this move was unwise, because Amasa was inexperienced; he was the defeated general of Absalom's rebellion, and the people would probably be afraid of following him because of Joab. Regarding David's reason for calling upon Abishai when Amasa took too long, Matthew Henry argues that this was done to rub it in Joab's face, but Hoeksema thinks David was secretly hoping Abishai would pass the command along to Joab. According to her, David felt he needed Joab again, but couldn't ask him directly, since he had just been deposed. With whom do you agree, or do you have a different explanation altogether? One thing we can probably say with certainty is that David is trying to get around the problem of Joab without really punishing him, and God is showing that it doesn't work to try to fix things our own way. *Sing or pray Psalter #253.*

### March 22 Read 2 Samuel 21

There are a few different things to be brought out in this chapter. First, how can verse 8 say that some of Michal's sons were killed if 2 Samuel 6:23 tells us that Michal remained barren for mocking David's dance of worship? Gertrude Hoeksema answers this by saying that the name should be translated Merub, another of Saul's daughters.

Second, was it really right of David to let the Gibeonites murder these sons of Saul? The answer is yes, because God tells us in Exodus 20:5–6 that the sins of the father come upon the children, and God would not have "intreated for the land," or sent rain (v. 14), if this had been the wrong thing to do.

Finally, it's interesting to see that David is almost killed by a giant in this chapter, when it was killing Goliath that started his being a leader of the people. Do you think this might be used to show us that, along with the departure of his physical strength, David had also lost some of the faith of his youth? Faith was the weapon with which he fought Goliath, but now he needed Abishai to do it for him. *Sing or pray Psalter #134.*

### March 23 Read Psalm 5

One of our study Bibles said that this psalm is a morning psalm, in contrast to Psalm 4. This is clearly brought out in verse 3, which reads, "My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up."

Do we take David's example and begin our day with prayer to God in this way? The substance of David's morning prayer stood out to me. David began the day fully conscious of the serious trials he would face and the fact that his enemies had set out to destroy him. Because we have such extremely easy earthly lives at this time, we can quickly fall asleep spiritually. We begin to lose the battle against our spiritual enemies, because we aren't really fighting. The danger doesn't feel real. The danger was very real for David, and he cried to God to give him strength for the day, because he didn't have it of himself. When we do that we can say with David in Psalm 4:8, "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety." *Sing or pray Psalter #11.*

### March 24 Read Psalm 38

There's a TV series that aired in the UK a number of years ago called "Horrible Histories" that we watch clips from once in a while in history class. I don't recommend all of their material, but it can be a humorous way to learn more about interesting facts from the past. One of the skits is about awful medical cures used throughout history. These are anything from drilling a hole in one's head to relieve pressure from a headache, to smearing animal dung ointment over an injury, to sleeping by a human skull to ward off evil spirits.

In Psalm 38:5, David says, "My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness." Ancient "cures" often only led to the situation getting more serious than it had been before, which is a picture of how trials only increase when we try to do things our own way. David learned this hard lesson when Uzzah died while they were moving the ark of the covenant, and we must learn it as well. When we trust in God our wounds will heal and not become infected. *Sing or pray Psalter #103.*

### March 25 Read Psalm 41

Our study Bibles at home break up the psalms into five books. It appears that most, but not all, Bibles do this, although there is disagreement about how each group of psalms is linked together. According to our study Bible, the five books are the Genesis Book, the Exodus Book, the Leviticus Book, the Numbers Book, and the Deuteronomy Book. However, Bible.org names the five books David's Conflict with Saul, David's Kingship, The Assyrian Crisis, Introspection about the Destruction of the Temple and the Exile, and Praise and Reflection on the Return and the New Era. Those titles don't look very similar, do they?

Either way, Psalm 41 is said to mark the end of Book 1. The final verse of this chapter is seen as the doxology found at the end of each book. Of course, the ultimate Psalm-doxology is found at the very end of the book: “Let everything that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.” As long as we have breath, may God’s praise be our goal. *Sing or pray Psalter #411.*

### March 26 Read Psalm 42

David says he will remember God “from the land of the Hermonites, and the hill Mizar” in verse 6 of this chapter. What area is this referring to? John Calvin says that the land of Hermon was very mountainous, and Mizar was likely one of the peaks in that range. He also makes known, however, that some believe the word “Mizar” should actually be translated “little.” Instead of referring to one of Hermon’s peaks, then, it could be talking about Mt. Zion. Although Mt. Zion was small compared to the mountains of Hermon, it was much greater in the eyes of God and his people.

David follows up this verse with “deep calleth to deep” at the beginning of the next one. His trials seem to pile up on one another and threaten to pull him under, but “the Lord will command his lovingkindness in the daytime” (v. 8). When we remember God in whatever state he has placed us, whether in the mountains or in the valleys, then we will always experience his lovingkindness and blessings that are new each morning. *Sing or pray Psalter #115.*

### March 27 Read 2 Samuel 22

Buffalo farms are growing in popularity around the country. The meat is said to taste fairly similar to beef, but is much higher in nutrition. I remember listening to an interview with a buffalo rancher on the radio a while back. The man was explaining the difference between owning cattle and buffalo. Cattle are domesticated, but buffalo are wild animals, and you always have to remember that when you’re caring for them. He said they can do things you’d never expect, like jump sideways over a six-foot privacy fence from a standing position. Doesn’t that seem impossible?

Just like it doesn’t seem possible for a giant buffalo to spring nimbly over a tall fence, it can sometimes seem impossible for us to be victorious over our enemies, but God will provide us with all the strength we need to vault over an obstacle. This is expressed in 2 Samuel 22:30, which says, “For by thee I have run through a troop: by my God have I leaped over a wall.” As the well-known passage in Matthew 19:26 puts it, “With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.” *Sing or pray Psalter #230.*

### March 28 Read 2 Samuel 23

We recently studied Ancient Greece and Alexander the Great in history class. I remember one story where Alexander’s army was extremely thirsty while on the march. Finally, they came to a tiny pool of water. Quickly, a couple soldiers scooped up the water in a helmet and brought it to their commander. Alexander accepted the water graciously, and, as the men all watched, he poured it out on the ground.

This is similar to what David did in 2 Samuel 23:16. The difference between the two actions is found in the motivation. Alexander poured out the water simply because he was a savvy commander. He understood that his men would follow him to the death if he showed them he was willing to endure the same hardships they endured. David was also a savvy commander, but his motivation in doing this was glorifying God. David was sorry that his words had led his men to risk their lives for him in this way, and he wanted to show God that he would be a good steward of the loyal men God had given him and that he would be thankful for what he had. *Sing or pray Psalter #114.*

### March 29 Read Psalm 57

It’s neat to read the Foreign Mission Committee Report found in the most recent Acts of Synod. Our churches have an established mission field in the Philippines, consisting of three churches, which have adopted the name Protestant Reformed. The work there is directed by three of our ministers: Rev. Daniel Kleyn, Rev. Holstege, and Rev. Smit. In addition, there are a number of new fields our churches are investigating in Myanmar and India. The work in both these countries has been going on for some time, and numerous visits have been made to Rev. Titus in Myanmar and Rev. Paulraj in Vellore, India. Besides this official work going on in the report, we have contact with saints all over the globe. Besides our sister churches in Northern Ireland and Singapore, there are contacts in Australia, Ireland (Rev. McGeown), Germany, Namibia, and others I’m sure I’m not aware of.

Psalm 57:9 reads, “I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people: I will sing unto thee among the nations.” By God’s grace our churches have been able to spread the gospel among the nations, and we pray that God will continue to strengthen us in that aspect of our calling. *Sing or pray Psalter #155.*

### March 30 Read Psalm 95

In 1 Kings 20, we read about Benhadad, king of Syria, attacking Ahab, king of Israel. He came to Samaria

with a huge army and plenty of confidence, demanding that the Israelites become their servants. Ahab was unsure what to do, but then God sent a prophet to tell him Israel would be given the victory to show them that God was in control. According to the command of God, seven thousand princes were sent out against Benhadad's host. Benhadad was so sure of victory that he was getting drunk with his generals at the time and simply demanded the princes be captured alive. The Syrian soldiers didn't know how to proceed without any leadership, and the Israelite princes each killed one of them as they stood in uncertainty. When the Syrians saw this, they fled before Israel and were slaughtered. When they returned home, the Syrians assured themselves that they had lost because Israel's God was a god of the hills. Surely they would win if they fought Israel in the plains. This was foolishness, of course. Psalm 95:4 says, "In his hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is his also." *Sing or pray Psalter #256.*

**March 31** Read Psalm 97

I listened to a business organization book on our most recent drive to Iowa over Christmas break. One thing this secular author stressed was making sure we learn to enjoy work. Most of the population views work as a necessary evil. We do as little as possible, so we can spend time doing what we really want. People that think this way often use the phrase, "Nothing personal, it's just business;" one apparently used by President Trump on his previous TV show. This mantra becomes an excuse to live very wickedly in our work life, and then think everything will be ok if we make sure to show up in church on Sunday and act pious.

Psalm 97:10 tells us that those who love God hate evil. It's impossible to do both. As Matthew 6:24 puts it, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Which master are you serving right now in your life? Which master am I serving? *Sing or pray Psalter #260.*

**April 1** Read Psalm 98

There are some fellow Christians we have close ties with that believe we shouldn't have music accompaniment in the worship service. How can they defend this stance when many Bible verses, including verses 5 and 6 of this chapter, speak of instruments being used in praise to God? The stance they take is that using instruments ended with the Old Testament sacrifices. To support

this, they quote verses like 2 Chronicles 29:28, which reads, "And all the congregation worshiped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded: and all this continued until the burnt offering was finished." This supports the idea, they say, that there is nowhere in the New Testament where we're commanded to use instruments. According to the regulatory principle, we keep the elements of worship limited to the things God commands us to do. Our churches respond that instruments are a circumstance of worship, not an element. They're simply played while we are doing something that's commanded, like singing psalms or taking collection. We enjoy the accompaniment during these times, but we don't claim it's necessary. What do you think? Does the regulatory principle become threatened when we add these circumstances of worship to the elements? *Sing or pray Psalter #264.*

**April 2** Read Psalm 99

Psalm 99:4 reads, "The king's strength also loveth judgment; thou dost establish equity, thou executest judgment and righteousness in Jacob." According to Calvin, the beginning of this chapter focused on setting God on his throne, and this verse delves into the way in which he rules over his kingdom, the church. He says there are two possible explanations for the phrase, "thou dost establish equity." One explanation is that God commands us to practice perfect equity, while another possibility is that the phrase refers to God's stressing of equity in his own dealings.

Either way, what is this equity referring to? Equity is defined as "the quality of being fair or impartial." God commands us to deal with others in this way. Showing favoritism is no way to witness. Governments and consistories must also not judge people rashly or unheard. However, the way God works doesn't always seem to be fair. God chose some and not others. How do we fit that truth together with God's equity? *Sing or pray Psalter #265.*

**April 3** Read 2 Samuel 24

The first verse of this chapter reads, "And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah." We know that God was angry with David for numbering the people, but this verse says that David was moved to number the people *because* God was angry. In other words, God's anger came first. This raises a few questions. First, did God really make David sin? This is answered in 1 Chronicles 21:1, the chapter to read for tomorrow, where we read that "Satan stood up against Israel." From these verses we

can understand that God directed Satan where to go, but Satan was the one that actually tempted David to sin. Second, why was God angry with Israel? This is tough to answer, because the few chapters before don't really give us any clues. However, if we keep going back we can see that this was soon after the rebellions of Absalom and Sheba. Many Israelites had sided with these men, and God was very displeased with them for this sin. *Sing or pray Psalter #291.*

#### April 4 Read 1 Chronicles 21

What was so bad about numbering the people? Did 70,000 men really need to die because of this? The truth is that there wasn't anything inherently wrong about numbering the people. The membership of each congregation in our denomination is printed in the Acts of Synod, for example. David's sin here was in his motivation. He wanted to number the people, not just for the sake of educating himself on the size of the kingdom, but because he wanted to see how great and powerful he had become. In addition, remember that God moved David to do this because he was angry with Israel in the first place, so it makes sense that many Jews were killed as a result.

Isn't it interesting that Joab of all people was the one to tell David he shouldn't follow through with this? The wicked are quick to show they recognize the difference between right and wrong when it works to their advantage. Joab the great warrior wasn't too thrilled about having to travel around numbering people. Also, having reprobate Joab correctly rebuke David was more shameful for David than if a godly man had rebuked him. *Sing or pray Psalter #321.*

#### April 5 Read 1 Chronicles 22

How does all this talk about temple building apply to us today? Well, 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20 says, "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." Our bodies are the New Testament temple, and we must take care of them. The world also preaches care for our bodies, but to glorify self. We care for these bodies because they belong to God, not us. Paul brings this out in 1 Corinthians 6 relating to fornication, but it can be applied to other ways of harming or defiling our bodies as well. Back in Leviticus 19:28, the Israelites were commanded, "Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the LORD." Self-mutilation is connected with pagan religion, as also

seen in the story of Elijah and the Baal prophets on Mt. Carmel. May we care for these temples God has given us, that he might be glorified. *Sing or pray Psalter #133.*

#### April 6 Read Psalm 30

Yesterday, we had a teacher in-service day about mental health. We learned how to spot mental health warning signs in students and what to do about it. We watched a series of videos about Kevin, a man with bipolar disorder. As an adolescent, Kevin continuously went through a cycle of mania and depression, not understanding what was going on. He got to the point where he decided the only way out was to end his life. He felt completely alone and thought no one cared whether he lived or died. As Kevin rode the bus to his chosen jumping point, he made a pact with himself that he wouldn't do it if just one person asked him how he was doing.

Kevin ended up surviving his jump and becoming an advocate for helping people struggling with mental health disorders, but it was shocking to hear how full of despair he had become so early in life. God's people can sometimes feel this way, but this psalm reminds us that God is our help. As verse 2 states, "O LORD my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me." *Sing or pray Psalter #79.*

#### April 7 Read Psalm 108

In Psalm 108:1, David says he will praise God with his "glory." What is our glory? According to Matthew Henry, it's our tongue. It's true that the Bible talks frequently about the tongue's power, either to sin or to glorify God. There are a number of verses that contrast this. Proverbs 18:21 says, "Death and life [are] in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof." Similarly, Ephesians 4:29 states, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." The tongue is a very powerful thing, which can move people to action. As Proverbs 15:1 puts it, "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger." We need to be aware of the tongue's power and make sure that it's our "glory," not our disgrace. This begins by thinking before we speak, as stressed in Proverbs 10:19, James 1:26, and Psalm 141:3. Our tongue is a powerful tool, and may we use it to do the cause of the kingdom, not as "an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (James 3:8). *Sing or pray Psalter #299.*

## A LETTER OF COMFORT FOR THE BULLIED YOUNG PERSON

Dear brother/sister in Christ,

I can truly say that I don't know what you must be going through right now. I have seen how they treat you and I hear the things that they say about you. I see the Snapchat and Instagram postings that say all those terrible things about you. It all makes me very angry and very sad at the same time. I can't understand why they do these things to you and I can't understand how it must make you feel. After spending much time in prayer seeking wisdom from God, I feel that I must help you. I hope that through this letter I can help in two ways. First, I want to help you deal with this within your mind and your soul. Second, I want to help you take steps to bring this to an end. Both of these things will involve trust, courage, and a deep love for the brother and sister in Christ.

First, remember that you have done nothing wrong to bring this on and it is not your fault. We have to see that in all of our lives we are locked in a spiritual battle with the forces of evil and their leader, Satan himself. Satan attacks each of us in different ways and these ways are often the points of weakness that are part of who we are and how we live our lives. He will tempt those who are strong to use their strength in evil ways. Those who are quiet and meek will become prey for those who would wish to raise themselves up by bringing others down. What you are facing right now is a spiritual attack. The devil not only wants you to feel bad about yourself and despair about your situation, he also wants you to blame God for this and hate him and your Christian brother or sister as well. You can see this happening, can't you?

Your life has become miserable because of the actions of those who are trying to build themselves up by bringing you down. Everyone seems to walk away from you and leave you alone in your misery. They don't want to associate with you. They don't invite you, but they show you what you are missing. They don't return your texts, and they cut you off from their social media. You know that they are talking about you and you know that nothing good is said. That's how they are. I think deep down you

know it, but don't forget that you are not alone in this. It may appear so at times. Satan does not want you to experience God's love or for you to experience his love through the love of a brother or sister. But even in the worst of times you are not alone. God is with you. He has promised never to leave you or forsake you. You must never forget who you are and who you belong to. You must never forget the price that was paid for you to become his, and that he has a plan for you, including what you are going through right now. You are a child of God whose life has been purchased by the shed blood of Jesus Christ who knows your every need and has a plan for your life. God loves you. God is faithful to his children and his grace will be sufficient to face every trial that he puts in your path. You have to trust him in all things, especially in these difficult times. He understands what you are going through. Hebrews 4:15 reminds us of this, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." There is a beautiful hymn that puts this thought to music:

### No one understands like Jesus

No one understands like Jesus, Every woe  
he sees and feels  
Tenderly he whispers comfort, and the  
broken hearted heals.  
Chorus: No one understands like Jesus,  
when the days are dark and grim  
No one is so near, so dear as Jesus, cast your  
every care on him.  
No one understands like Jesus, when the  
foes of life assail  
You should never be discouraged, Jesus  
cares and will not fail.

At times you might feel like the psalmist in Psalm 42 and ask the same question that he asks in verse 5, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me?" But have open ears to the response to that thought in verse 8, "Yet the Lord will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and

my prayer unto the God of my life.” Psalter #115 stanzas 3 and 4 express this so well.

Thou wilt command thy servant’s consolation, thy loving kindness yet shall cheer my day, and in the night Thy song shall be my comfort; God of my life to Thee I still will pray.

Why, O my soul, art thou cast down within me, why art thou troubled and oppressed with grief? Hope thou in God, the God of thy salvation, hope, and thy God will surely send relief.

Never feel hopeless about your situation. Remember God’s promises.

Those who bully you are also a part of this spiritual battle. They have been enlisted to serve with the forces of evil which are trying to ruin your spiritual life. There are two ways that you could respond to this situation. The easiest and most logical way is to hate them, seek revenge, and wish evil upon them. Even though there may not be anything that you could do, you wish the very worst upon them and you feel good when they get into trouble. Take to heart the words of Romans 12:17, “Recompense to no man evil for evil” and in verse 19, “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay saith the Lord.” Do not retaliate. Do not think of how you could get back at them. Do not speak evil of them to others. “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (v. 21).

The other way to respond would be the biblical way. How do you overcome this evil with good? You must go against your natural inclination to hate, and instead pray for them. Matthew 5:44 instructs us about this: “But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.” Those who bully are not your real enemy in this battle. The real enemy is Satan and his goal is to have you turn your eyes away from and stop looking for the love of God in your life. Satan is using the bullies in your life to bring this about. But we know that God can reach into the lives of evil hearts to change them. They need your help! They need God’s help. They are sick and their minds are not working correctly. They often are very insecure themselves, and do these things to gain acceptance in their own circles. They need to grow in their faith and develop in their understanding of God’s love. If you do not pray for them and show your love for them in the proper way, they will not see the love

of Christ in you. This is why we are told to pray for those who persecute us. Keeping them in your prayers will help you to preserve a proper attitude in your soul and allow you to continue to show that love.

The other main purpose in writing this letter is to encourage you to be active and take steps to make this activity stop. We need to get those who bully to recognize that what they are doing is wrong and to stop doing it. The sooner they are confronted with this sin the less likely others will be bullied as you have been. There may be others suffering right now in the same way that you are by this same person and if he is not held accountable he will hurt others in the future. You need to tell someone, anyone in authority that you can talk to. Tell your parent, a teacher, counselor, or principal at school, your minister, or an adult that you work with and trust. There are ways that this can be done privately at school so that no one knows. This is something that you are not going to be able to do on your own, and it is going to take courage to work through this process. But it must be done. There is help available and you do not have to be afraid to get it. There is a great awareness today of this problem and people are prepared to help you. If you mention it to someone and they do not help you or take you seriously, go to someone else. Take a friend with you if you don’t want to go alone. Do not ignore it. Do not isolate yourself. It will not go away. You may think that this is a coward’s way out or that you will end up paying the price for this by having more and worse bullying done. In truth this is the bravest, most courageous thing that you could do. This is the only way to get the bullying to stop for you and to protect others from this in the future. It is also the only way for the bully to be forced to acknowledge that what he is doing is wrong and begin to change. This must be seen as an act of love on your part for the one that is hurting you.

This is not going to be easy to do. I am praying for you every day that God gives you comfort in your affliction and the strength to persevere and grow stronger in your faith through this trial. Remember the text from Psalm 42, especially that part about the song? “And in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life.” I hope that you fill your heart with that song and with prayer. I remember a beautiful song sung by the Covenant Choir. Go to the YouTube channel and listen to it. Let these words comfort you and remind you of that unending and everlasting love of God for you.

“Child of God” by Layton DeVries  
“O child, child of God, rest assured, the Lord is with you.  
When you wake up in the morning and the sun is shining down, the Lord watches over every step you take.  
When the world has knocked you down and you don’t know which way to turn, rest assured, the Lord is with you.  
When your friends have turned against you and you feel all alone, the Lord watches over every move you make.  
He will always be right there to protect and love his child, rest assured that Lord is with you.

When darkness drifts around you, and your eyes close in sleep, you have no need to fear. Rest assured, the Lord is with you.”

(Search YouTube: CovenantChoirs “Child of God” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HiirVIKZ7WY>).

I send this with my love.  
Your brother in Christ,  
Rick Noorman

*Rick Noorman is the administrator of Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

## Poem Gertrude Hoeksema

### LOVE

Come, let us look and see what love is;  
All love is God and God is love.  
Love starts with God. All love is his;  
Love had its birth in heaven above.

Come, let us look and see what love says:  
“I love Thee first—I really do—  
With all the strength my spirit has,  
And for thy sake, my neighbor, too.”

Come, let us look and see how love sounds:  
Love does not echo from a hollow heart.  
With praise of God all love abounds;  
The sound of peace is love’s true art.

Come, let us look and see how love acts:  
Love tells the truth, and quietly.  
The poor and weak it soon attracts;  
Love lives in perfect harmony.

Come, friends, and look at love with me:  
Look up and see the Giver great;  
Look round and see how beautifully  
Love flows from us to all our mates.

Come, friends, what’s wrong? Your love is not  
At all so perfect as you’d like?  
Your tongue unkind, your temper hot?  
You do the evil you dislike?

Come, let us look now at the sin  
That makes us blind to Love’s great light,  
And pray that God will work within  
Our hearts, to make us love aright.

## ACCUSATIONS AND ANSWERS

In a low state of mind when I feel quite weak,  
There's a voice in my mind that will start to speak.  
He accuses, and brings up all of my sins  
And just like that, a battle begins.

(Ps. 69:2)  
(2 Cor. 11:3)  
(Rev. 12:10b, 12b)  
(Eph. 6:12)

“A child of God you can't possibly be.  
Just where are those good works we all should see?  
The outside you might present fairly well,  
But of the inside there isn't much good to tell!  
The thoughts of your heart should cause you much shame.  
How dare you let others call you by his name?  
A Christian? That really could not be true.  
Let me tell you of all of the darkness in you.  
You are proud, you are selfish, a hypocrite too.  
And to those of your church—if they only knew!  
That the “good” you did them still had sin deep inside,  
And it's still there within, and from God it can't hide.  
What makes you think you're a child of God?”  
And to all this I simply begin to nod.

(I John 3:10)  
(Rom. 7:15-24)  
(Matt. 23:25)  
(Matt.23:28)  
(Matt. 15:19)  
(I John 3:6)  
(Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 2, Q&A 5)  
(Prov. 16:5; 1 Cor. 13:5; Matt. 7:4-5)  
(Is. 64:6)  
(Ps. 69:5)  
(Ps. 51:3; Ps. 40:12)

“All this is true, plus more than you said.  
The sins found in me are a deep, scarlet red.”  
So these thoughts I take captive and bring to the Word  
For THIS is where the whole truth will be heard.

(Rom. 3:9-10)  
(Ps. 51:4-5)  
(2 Cor. 10:5)  
(John 17:17)

“LORD, I come and I reason with thee,  
My sins of deep crimson I know thou dost see.  
My iniquities rise and I'm brought very low.  
Is it possible I too, thy pardon can know?”

(Is. 1:18a)  
(Ps. 11:4)  
(Ps. 79:8)  
(John 8:10b-11a; Luke 18:13)

“The sins you commit are as scarlet, it's true,  
But My child, you don't end with looking at you.”  
He tenderly lifts up my head so I see  
The Lamb that was offered at Calvary.

(Rom 3:19-20)  
(Matt. 1:21; Rom 6:23; Eph. 2:5)  
(Ps. 3:3)  
(John 1:29)

“I know you can't pay for your sins, precious one,  
And that is why I've sent forth my son.  
All of your sins, that you grieve when you see,  
Have been blotted out and washed completely.  
Thou art all fair My love, there is no spot in thee.  
When I look at you I see a reflection of me.  
My work, it transforms you, it makes all things new.  
You're clean, every whit,” says the Faithful and True.

(Luke 17:10; Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 5, Q&A 13)  
(John 3:17)  
(Rom. 7:23-24)  
(Ps. 103:10-12)  
(Song 4:7)  
(Zech. 13:9; Rom. 8:29; Col. 3:10; 1 Cor. 15:49; 2 Cor. 3:18)  
(2 Cor. 5:17)  
(John 13:10; Rev. 19:11)

I weep with relief and with joy in my heart  
 And return to tell that voice from the start,  
 “My Father is just, but that is not all.  
 He is merciful when on Jesus I fall.  
 My sins have been paid for, they’re no longer there.  
 My burden is lifted, no more must I bear.  
 What God says is true. Your words do not stand.  
 Your accusing can’t pluck me out of his hand.”

And at this, the accuser was no longer heard.  
 The doubts and the taunts can’t speak back to his Word.  
 To the chosen of God, no charge can be lain,  
 For the answer is settled in the Lamb that was slain.

(2 Cor. 9:15)  
 (Mat. 4:4a; Heb. 10:22–23)  
 (Ps. 101:1)  
 (Neh. 9:31)  
 (1 Cor. 6:11; Is. 1:18b)  
 (Is. 53:4–5; Matt. 11:28–30)  
 (1 John 3:20; Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 23, Q&A 60)  
 (John 10:29)

(James 4:7)  
 (Matt. 4:11a)  
 (Rom. 8:33–34)  
 (Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 15, Q&A 39; John 19:30)

## 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:  
 Micah William, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joel & Liz Koerner—Byron Center, MI  
 Peyton Jo, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Andy & Carissa DeJager—Doon, IA  
 Marcus Henry, son of Mr. & Mrs. Mark & Bethany Feenstra—Georgetown, MI  
 Maddox William and Lennon Marie, son & daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Kyle & Lyndsey Corson—Georgetown, MI  
 Emmitt Immanuel, son of Mr. & Mrs. Ben & Becky Peterson—Grace, MI  
 Skyler Jo, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brad & Kerri Vogel—Grace, MI  
 Trevor James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Ben & Rebecca Laning—Loveland, CO  
 Aubrey Marie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jeremy & Brittany De Jong—Loveland, CO

### 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:

Olivia Miedema—Georgetown, MI  
 Andrew Groenhoff—Georgetown, MI  
 Kayley Langerak—Grace, MI  
 Grant Reitsma—Southwest, MI  
 Austin Van Dyke—Trinity, MI  
 Dana Van Dyke—Trinity, 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. Mitchell Kaiser and Miss Jesse Griess—Southwest, MI



## SYNOD OF DORDT PART 2: REFORMATION IN THE NETHERLANDS

In the 1540s, the Netherlands—at that time seventeen provinces of what we call the Low Countries—was ready for a sweeping Protestant Reformation. The first part of the Reformation to make progress in the Netherlands was Anabaptism. The Anabaptists didn't believe in baptizing infants and they would often retreat into their own communities away from the rest of the people. The works and writing of John Calvin made its way into the Netherlands only a few years after he wrote them. Due to the printing presses and freedom allowed in the Netherlands, the works of John Calvin and others were published. People discussed the teachings of the Reformation amongst themselves. Especially in the northern provinces of the Low Countries, what is today the country of the Netherlands, many people became Calvinist. By 1560, Calvinism had a firm hold across the seventeen provinces. Calvinist churches began worshipping in a manner similar to how the

Protestant Reformed Churches worship today. In 1566, a psalter was created for singing in the Dutch Calvinist churches, which borrowed several tunes and translated songs from the *Genevan Psalter* produced by John Calvin. Several of these songs are ones we still sing today in our *Psalter*.

### Something to think about:

With your parents, discuss why we baptize infants and not just adults. Why is this important?



ANABAPTIST  
CALVIN  
NETHERLANDS  
PSALTER  
REFORMATION

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



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## Chaperone & Nurse Registration for the 2018 Convention is now open!



Chaperone & nurse registration for 2018 Young People's Convention hosted by the five Midwest churches is now open. The convention is planned for August 13-17 at Lake Geneva Christian Center in Alexandria, MN. To register, go to [www.prconvention.com](http://www.prconvention.com), and follow the instructions under the Chaperone or nurse tab. If you have any questions, email us at [Chaperone@prconvention.com](mailto:Chaperone@prconvention.com)