

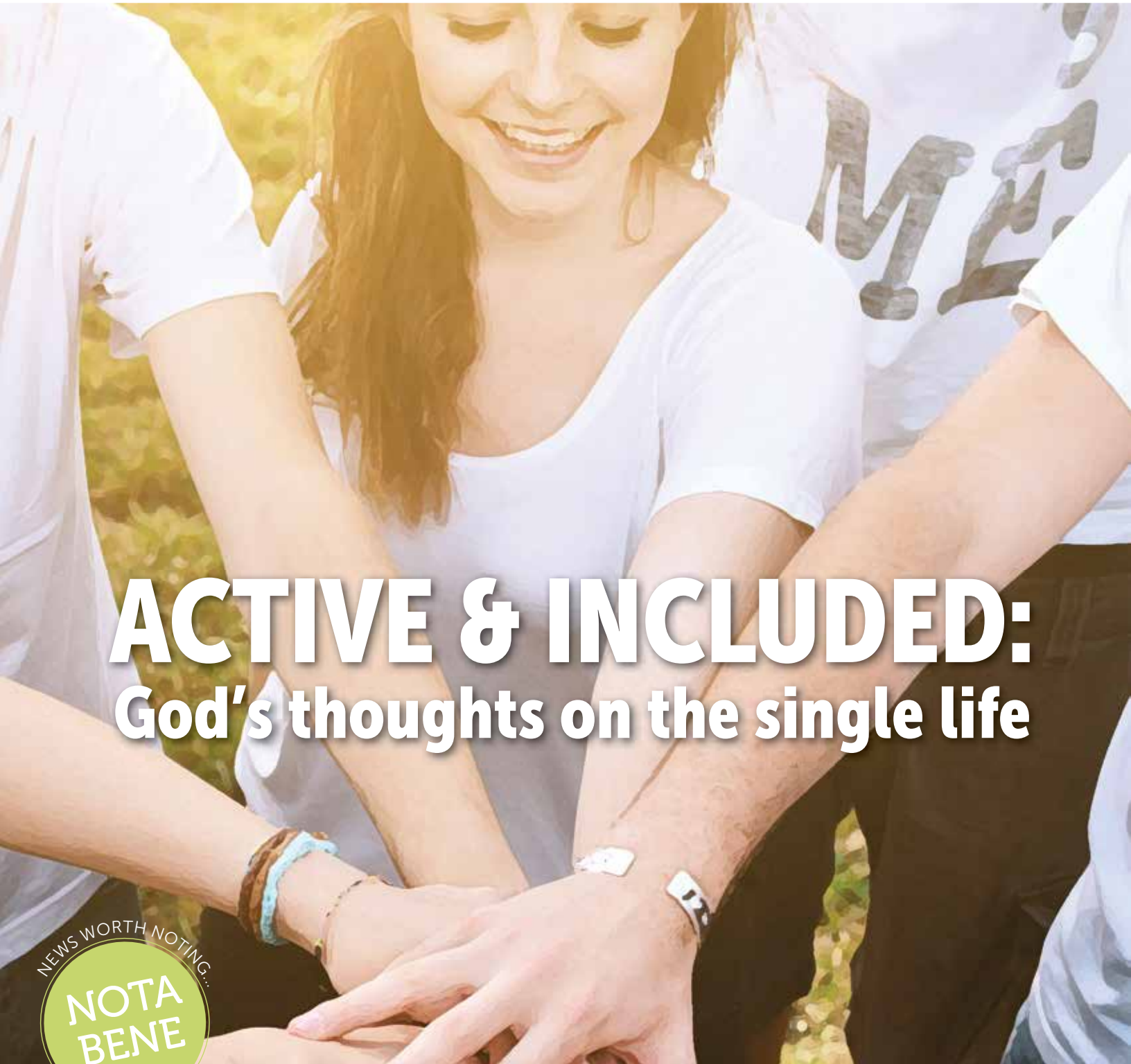
Reformed

A MAGAZINE FOR THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

MAY 2016
Volume 35 Issue No. 7

PERSPECTIVE

CELEBRATING 30+ YEARS



ACTIVE & INCLUDED: God's thoughts on the single life

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ACROSS THE BACK FENCE:

Talking to your neighbor about...

ISLAM

by Jon Dykstra

Islam is a violent religion, but lots of Muslims aren't violent. So how does that make sense? And if we can't make sense of it ourselves, how do we boil it down to something that we can easily relate to neighbors and friends? Or to MPs and MLAs? Or to that really contrarian cousin who's sure to comment on anything we say online?

Here's three points we can pass on, each summed up in only a short quote, but each quote memorably put by three brilliant men.

1. ISLAM SPAWNS TERRORISTS BECAUSE MUHAMMAD IS NOT LIKE JESUS

Dr. Patrick Sookhdeo is the director of the Institute for the Study of Islam and Christianity. In an article on "The Rise of Islam" he explained why Islam spawns mass terrorism.

Muhammad's figure towers over Islam not just as its founder, but as the perfect man who is divinely inspired not only in the Qur'anic revelation, but in all his sayings and deeds. He is infallible, free from

sin, and the supreme example all Muslims are obliged to emulate in every detail.

...Great men usually have great foibles. The Qur'an and hadith actually expose the violence, cruelty, immorality, treachery, and assassinations in the words and deeds of Muhammad. The elevation of Muhammad to a position of sinless infallibility has served to turn his human weaknesses into virtues in the view of many Muslims who seek to emulate him. His use of violence has been sanctified, and this remains one of the unresolved problems of Islam.¹

So just as Christians seek to be Christ-like, in a similar way Muslims seek to be like Muhammad. But while Christ set us the ultimate example of selflessness by dying for others, Muhammad set a very different example. He won victories with the sword; Jesus triumphed by dying on a cross.

It is Muhammad's example – and the encouragement to imitate him – that makes Islam a violent religion.

2. MOST MUSLIMS ARE PEACEFUL BECAUSE THEY'RE LIBERALS

And yet the majority of Muslims are not violent – why is that? Nabeel Qureshi is the author of *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus: A devout Muslim encounters Christianity*. In an interview with Ron Rupke he explained that the reason most Muslims are peaceful is because of the culture in which they've been raised.

Most Muslims inherit their understanding of Islam from those around them...We were told Islam was a religion of peace. Whenever the topic of jihad came up, it was always contextualized, at least in my experience, as a defensive effort. Muhammad had to fight to defend the Islamic religion. [So don't] conflate Islam with Muslims. For though Islam might be violent, and the Qur'an might

ISIS is the Islamic reformation

teach violence, and Muhammad's life exemplifies violence, that doesn't mean that your Muslim neighbor is violent. Muslims have inherited different traditions of Islam and the vast majority are peaceful people.²

Just as the majority of professing Christians live like pagans, many Muslims are also more impacted by their culture than their religion. That's why most Muslims aren't violent, even though their religion is. And here's where we come to the pressing problem. A cure that is often prescribed for Islam is that it undergo its own Reformation. Just as Christianity's Reformation spawned new freedoms, prosperity and democracy, the hope is that an Islamic Reformation might do something similar, freeing it from violence.

But as Qureshi pointed out in this same interview, the reason the Protestant Reformation spawned so many good things is because it involved a return to the Bible, and a return to God. But we don't want Muslims taking their Scriptures more seriously. As Qureshi explains:

When we think of reformation we think it's something that will make a religion more modern, more peaceful, because we envision the Christian reformation. The fact is, when you go back to the roots of the Christian faith, Jesus says, "Turn the other cheek," "If you live by the sword you'll die by the sword," "Love your enemy, pray for those who persecute you."... In Islam, though, when we bypass the traditions we've inherited over the centuries and go straight to the Qur'an, we come away with a very violent message. That is what those who tried to reform Islam in the 20th Century kept encountering...ISIS is the Islamic reformation – an attempt to go back to the roots of Islam and curry favor with Allah.³

3. RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IS NOT A SUICIDE PACT

The Christian basis for freedom of religion is, among other things,

based on the understanding that it is impossible to compel anyone to love God (that is the work of the Holy Spirit, not the State). But what if someone wanted to use our religious freedom to import and spread a religion that did believe in compulsion? Then we would be faced with a situation in which we would still not tell them what they must believe, but we would have to tell them what they could not practice. As OPC elder and author Dr. E. Calvin Beisner has explained:

...religious liberty is not a suicide pact. A religion that officially condemns religious liberty cannot be protected by religious liberty. That doesn't mean we have to try to stamp it out, but it does mean that we need not extend to it all the protections we extend to religions that affirm religious liberty.⁴

CONCLUSION

Saying Islam is violent is an incredibly controversial statement in our culture. But it's also true. And we can't stay silent about it because Christians around the world are suffering at the hands of its violent followers. If we are going to speak up for our brothers and sisters – and press our government to let more Christian refugees in – then we need to be able to speak to our friends, neighbors, MPs and MLAs with clarity and courage on this issue. We have to know how to quickly explain how Islam is different from Christianity, and be able to explain why we should treat it, as a religion, differently too. Silly bigoted talk would sabotage any efforts we do make, so we must not only watch our tongue, but ask God to help us love our Muslim neighbors as ourselves. We should have compassion for them, trapped as they are in a religion that directs them away from God.

These three men – Sookhdeo, Qureshi, and Beisner – have given us three wonderful quotes/tools to set our own thinking aright. Now let's use them to help any others who are confused.

RP

Jon Dykstra can be reached at editor@reformedperspective.ca.

ENDNOTES

¹ TableTalk magazine, August 2007, as found at www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/rise-islam/

^{2,3} Ron Rupke's "Countering jihad with clarity and charity: an interview with Nabeel Qureshi" as published in Christian Courier April 11, 2016.

⁴ Relayed to me by Al Siebring (thanks Al!) and also later confirmed with Dr. Beisner

Looking for a few good contributors

We know the questions are coming...

- "Rachel and Lisa just got married and we're collecting for a wedding present from the staff. How much are you in for?"
- "As of Monday Rob will now be Robin, and I know I can expect everyone to encourage and embrace Robin as the key and courageous team member that she is, right?"
- "Our company is a proud sponsor of this year's pride parade. So why don't you have a rainbow ribbon decorating your desk?"

"**Across The Back Fence**" is a new feature for RP. The aim is to, in just a page or two, give readers a few nuggets they can use in conversations over the office cooler, or over the back fence with the next-door neighbor. We want to help you get ready for the questions that are coming.

But what topics should we tackle? And who should we get to tackle them? We'd love your suggestions – please email them to the editor at Editor@ReformedPerspective.ca

NOTA BENE

News worth noting

CANADA'S DEFICIT: IT'S NOT THE ECONOMY

BY JON DYKSTRA



The Liberals campaigned on deficit spending so it was no surprise that, when their first budget was unveiled on March 22, the government was indeed in the red. But the size of the deficit was surprising. While promising a “modest” \$10 billion deficit last year, the real figure is three times that.

Finance Minister Bill Morneau attributed the increased deficit – rising from \$5 billion in 2015/16 to \$30 billion for 2016/17 – to a sluggish economy. “Our starting point is much further back than we thought.” But as analysts Ben Eisen and Charles Lammam of the Fraser Institute have pointed out, the vast majority of the deficit is attributable to spending increases rather than revenue decreases.

Revenues for 2016/17 are projected to be just \$3.5 billion less than the previous year, but program spending will go up by \$20.5 billion. So the bulk of the deficit isn't due to any economic downturn, but rather to the government wanting to fund its political interventionist vision for the country.

Prov. 13:22 speaks of a good person leaving an inheritance for his children's children. The Liberals are talking about saddling our children with a monstrous debt. According to their projections the budget won't even be balanced until 2020/21, a year after their term ends.

SOURCE: Charles Lammam & Ben Eisen's "Liberal spending increases drive big deficits, not a weak economy" March 29, 2016 in The Financial Post

CANADIAN REFORMED BUSINESSMAN NOW A MANITOBA MLA

BY JON DYKSTRA



Election Day finally arrived and the hard work of “Team Teitsma” paid off at the polls. When all the results were in, Teitsma had over 50% of the vote and he was the next Member of the Legislative Assembly for the riding of Radisson.

The former *Reformed Perspective* and ARPA Canada Board member is now looking forward to taking up his new task. In a Facebook post the day after his victory he pledged to serve with integrity and made a “Solomonic” request (2 Chron. 1:10) of voters, volunteers, friends and family. He asked that we pray for him, that he would “have the strength, wisdom, courage and confidence to do what's right each and every day.” That is a wise request from a wise man.

Congratulations James Teitsma; may God equip you to your challenging and vital task!

Two years ago James Teitsma set out to run for the Progressive Conservative Party in the next Manitoba election. His riding was an NDP stronghold so it was clear that if he was going to win, it was going to take a lot of effort. After countless rounds of door knocking and front porch conversations with potential voters,

AMERICAN ALLIES FIGHT AMERICAN ALLIES IN SYRIA

BY JON DYKSTRA



Just how much of a muddled mess is the United States' involvement in Syria? A March 27 article in the *Los Angeles Times* had the details:

Syrian militias armed by different parts of the U.S. war machine have begun to fight each other on the plains between the besieged city of Aleppo and the Turkish border....

One of these clashes occurred in mid-February when a militia armed by the US's Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was said to have been "run out of the town of Marea" by militia backed by the Pentagon (the US military). In trying to make sense of this chaos the LA Times piece explained:

While the Pentagon's actions are part of an overt effort by the U.S. and its allies against Islamic State, the CIA's backing of militias is part of a separate covert U.S. effort aimed at keeping pressure on the Assad government in hopes of prodding the Syrian leader to the negotiating table. [emphasis added]

Is there any way the US could have avoided this mess? Well...yes. In Romans 13 we learn God appoints rulers, even the bad ones. That means that, short of self-defense or the defense of an ally being attacked, there is no biblical justification for taking out the leader of another country – like our own rulers, they were placed there by God. So when the US and other Western nations backed the Syria rebels they were doing what God

doesn't permit. We simply have no right to remove Assad.

Defying God brings with it some predictable and disastrous consequences – and that's just what we've seen happen in the Middle East with our meddling in Syria, and Libya too. The Syrian Civil War isn't the US's fault, but now that they've taken an active role in it they can share at least some of the blame for the refugee crisis that has resulted. American involvement in Syria has been a mess precisely because it has been sinful, seeking to do that which God doesn't permit.

So what should we do when a wicked leader tortures his own people, or like Assad is said to have done, gasses them? Doesn't that justify us overthrowing the man?

That's a good question, and one that can also be directed right back at Western nations. How so? Consider the abortion holocaust happening in all our civilized countries, with 100,000 murders permitted and paid for by the Canadian government, and 1,000,000 such murders in the US, many paid for by its government. If Romans 13 doesn't stop us from plotting Assad's overthrow, then Matthew 7 should – what hypocrisy it would be to wag our fingers at Assad when our own government's body count vastly surpasses his.

So we can do nothing? Not at all. While we can't control what happens within other countries' borders, we do control our own borders. We can open them, and take in refugees fleeing these oppressive regimes. And we can start with the Christians, because they are in the greatest need, having nowhere else to go.

International relations are incredibly complicated but we can simplify things and do far less harm by limiting ourselves to only that which God allows.

SOURCE: Nabih Bulos, W.J. Hennigan & Brian Bennett's In Syria, militias armed by the Pentagon fight those armed by the CIA* posted to LATimes.com on March 27, 2016.

NBA, NFL, NHL PROMOTE LGBT AGENDA

BY JON DYKSTRA



NBA Commissioner Adam Silver took advantage of a timeout during the April 16 Warriors/Rockets playoff game to take the state of North Carolina to task. His message? If they didn't change a recent law that requires transgenders to use the washroom of their actual gender the NBA might pull next year's All-Star Game from the state.

This isn't the first time a major sports league has promoted the LGBT agenda. The NFL's Superbowl half time show last year concluded with one side of the stadium holding up placards that made up a huge rainbow and the words "Believe in Love." In the NHL earlier this year the Edmonton Oilers became the first team to use "Pride Tape" – multicolored hockey tape meant to promote sexual "diversity." And all 30 teams have taped messages promoting the LGBT lifestyle as praiseworthy.

Now, when we tune in for sports and get politics instead that's annoying, but the real harm is being done to young people. These major sports leagues are using their popularity to teach the youth that God's thoughts on sexuality are bigoted and backward, and they are promoting a lifestyle that harms and enslaves.

That's beyond annoying. So how much is too much before we just tune out?

BETTER TO DELAY HAVING KIDS? NOT SO FAST...

BY DAVID HOSPERS



In April a headline on CTVnews.ca read: “Children of older mothers healthier, taller and more educated: study.” The premise was that delaying childbirth is good for the child, i.e. it will give you a better chance of getting a superior child. How does it do that? The “proof” was that postponing bearing children would put your child into a “better” decade – ie. it would have been better to have your child

born in 1990, instead of in 1970, because access to college and public healthcare have improved in that timeframe. According to the article, timing is everything.

But the article is misleading. If better healthcare and education are the reason to delay childbearing – waiting for the “right decade” – why not simply move to an area where better healthcare and education are available? Or why not simply feed your child healthier food, point him to good friends, and seek out good teachers, and so on? The article ignored the great influence a great home and caring environment, including a community of saints, can have on the development of children.

Although as Christians we consider healthy, happy, well-educated children to be a blessing of the Lord, this is

not our ultimate goal for them. In the community of faith, all covenant children are part of the Body of Christ. No matter the education level, height, or health status, all are a significant part of the church. The ultimate goal for a covenant child is to grow up to know his Lord, and serve Christ Jesus, lifelong.

We ought not to believe in the false promises of the world. Raising children later in life does not guarantee them worldly success. For a married couple it only means that those years were spent without being parents, and it could mean that a couple has wasted their opportunity of raising a family altogether.

And that would have been the plan of the one who hates people all along.

SOURCE: Karolyn Coorsh's "Children of older mothers healthier, taller and more educated: study" posted to CTVNews.ca April 12, 2016

ARCHIE: KEEPING UP WITH THE TIMES

BY JON DYKSTRA

Archie Andrews was in the news again this past month, with the announcement of standalone comic book for his gay friend Kevin Keller that will give the writer more space to explore Keller's romantic life.

This is just one of the notable changes *Archie* comics have undergone in recent years, including:

- Keller's same-sex "marriage" to an Iraq War veteran
- Jughead Jones declaring himself asexual
- a spin-off series, *Afterlife with Archie*, featuring a zombie Jughead trying to kill and devour his friends and family (with some success)
- another spin-off series, *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, featuring occultism and a character by the name of Madam Satan

Parents who grew up reading the old

Archie comics might be shocked at this new direction, but before we ask “Why were the former days better than these?” (Eccl 7:10) let's remember rightly the Archie of old.

I came across a few of my old *Archie* digests and, looking at them with adult eyes, I was struck by something: Archie was never a paragon of virtue.

At best “America's favorite teenager” could be described as an indecisive boy who led girls on (poor Betty!). But would it be a stretch to describe a guy who secretly dates two girls at the same time (sometimes on the same night!) as a player?

A frequent storyline involved Betty and Veronica vying for Archie's leering attention by wearing as little as the Comic Code Authority would allow. This was every timid teenage boy's dream – two bikini-clad gorgeous girls after a goofball guy. As the comic's creator, John Goldwater explained, he reversed “the common wisdom. Instead of ‘boy

chasing girl,' I would have girl chasing boy.”

And while sexual tension and romance were a constant theme, nuptials were never mentioned – in Archie's world dating was a simply a social activity, completely unrelated to finding a spouse.

Archie and his pals had a lot of laughs and adventures too. But the subtext to the series was always dating, dating, dating. And it always got that wrong, wrong, wrong.



SOURCE: David Colton's "Archie, teen angst and 70 years of sexual subtext" accessed on USA Today.com on April 22, 2016

LET'S NOT DECEIVE OURSELVES. KILLING OUR PARENTS ISN'T CARING FOR THEM.

EUTHANASIA BILL: RADICAL, RADICAL, RADICAL...AND CRAZY

BY JON DYKSTRA

The day after the government unveiled the draft of their euthanasia bill, a *Toronto Sun* poll asks readers, "Do you think the Federal Government's proposed doctor-assisted death law is too restrictive?" What is, as columnist Andrew Coyne puts it, "the chief complaint? That it does not include children and the mentally incompetent." The *Toronto Sun's* poll question was an example of carefully parsed verbiage meant to lead readers in a very specific direction. According to an old adage whoever frames a debate wins the debate. That's why we're called "anti-abortion" and "anti-choice" rather than "pro-life" – the other side wants to frame us as obstructionists and troublemakers. And that's why the *Sun* wants this debate to be about whether the proposed law is "too restrictive." It's an attempt to frame the choice so it will be between going with the Liberal legislation as is *or going further*.

Neither option is acceptable. That's not the debate that needs to be had. What we need to be talking about is how very *radical* this bill is. That's the word we need to use again and again, with maybe a *crazy* thrown in here and there. It is *radical* to:

- assert some lives aren't worth living
- require doctors become killers

(either doing it themselves, or finding someone who will – there is no conscience protection in this bill).

- encourage suicide rather than prevent it
- portray death as a medical treatment
- craft a culture in which parents who require care from their children could now be viewed as selfish compared to other aged parents who took the "selfless" option of killing themselves
- remove the firm anchor that all lives are worth living and replace it with a standard that isn't firm and won't anchor anything – by what standard can we ensure this suicide option won't be extended and extended and extended?

The Devil wants this discussion to be about whether this bill is "too restrictive." As God's people we need to shift the discussion to how *devastating* this bill is, how *unloving*, how *devaluing*, how *arbitrary*, how very *radical* the notion that some lives are not worth living.

A word on winsomeness: we don't need to scream these words. They don't need to come out as some sort of screech, though it would also be strange to talk about a life and death issue dispassionately. Thus to frame the debate properly we need to speak with passion, and also self-control. We need to present the choice as it really is, between going with this *radical* legislation, or returning to the *sanity* of acknowledging all life as precious.

ET TU, TWU? TRINITY WESTERN PROF SIDES WITH EUTHANASIA

BY JAMES KANIS



On March 17, Trinity Western University (TWU) held a debate on assisted suicide. What

might have been unexpected is that the panellist from this Christian university, political science professor John Dyck, was the one arguing that physician-assisted dying should happen "when God and I agree." After all, he argued, if an individual has a progressive, terminal disease, should we really put them in a straightjacket to keep them from pursuing an end to their suffering?

This kind of rhetoric is becoming increasingly common even in Christian circles.

As Christians living in a sinful world, we need to be as aware of the emotional and logical issues surrounding euthanasia as we are of those arguments that are inconsistent with Scripture. Then, as those who know that life belongs to God (Psalm 24:1) who created man in his image (Gen. 1:26), and who forbids murder (Gen. 9:6), we can confess with the catechism that "[God] commands us... to protect [our neighbour] from harm as much as we can" (HC, QA 107). I will see to it that I serve my neighbour who has a progressive, terminal disease by ensuring he has access to all the love and care he could need at the end of his life.

BETTER AND BETTER: PORN SITE BANS SOCIALLY CONSERVATIVE STATE

BY JONATHAN VAN MAREN

Rarely these days does a news article make me laugh out loud...until today, when the *Huffington Post* announced: "Porn Site Bans North Carolina Users Due To State's Anti-LGBT Laws." By "Anti-LGBT laws," of course, the *HuffPo* means North Carolina's new law stating that biological men cannot go into bathrooms reserved for biological women. The totalitolerance police and their enforcers in the corporate mafia, of course, have been going nuts, with a number of Hollywood executives threatening to cease doing business in North Carolina and rock star Bruce Springsteen cancelling one of his concerts there. From the *Huffington Post*:

There's a new kink in North Carolina's LGBT controversy: A popular porn website is banning all computers from "The Tar Heel State." ----.com has been refusing to serve anyone from North Carolina since 12:30 p.m. EDT, Monday. Instead, users with a North Carolina IP address are just seeing a black screen on their computer – no porn.

Now that, ladies and gentlemen, is what I call a win-win situation. North

Carolina passes a law recognizing biological reality, and a porn site voluntarily blocks their own sleaze! But it gets better. One of the sanctimonious sleaze-peddlers solemnly descended from atop an enormous mountain of filth to attempt a scrabbling ascent onto the moral high ground:

----.com spokesman, Mike Kulich, said the website believes in equality for everyone. "We have spent the last 50 years fighting for equality for everyone and these laws are discriminatory which ----.com does not tolerate," he said in an official statement sent to *The Huffington Post*. "Judging by the stats of what you North Carolinians watch, we feel this punishment is a severe one. We will not standby and pump revenue into a system that promotes this type of garbage. We respect all sexualities and embrace them."



So there you have it. A man who is employed in the business of pumping the cultural cancer of pornography into the minds of millions, a man who helps to disseminate on a mass scale depictions of degradation, sexual assault, and rape – *this* man is going to deny North Carolinians access to his product.

The horror.

For some strange reason, I don't think that will be an overly compelling method of getting social conservatives to change their mind.

SOURCE: This post was first published on *TheBridgehead.ca* on April 11, 2016.

FRANKLIN GRAHAM CALLS PAYPAL "HYPOCRITE OF THE YEAR"

BY MARK REIMERS

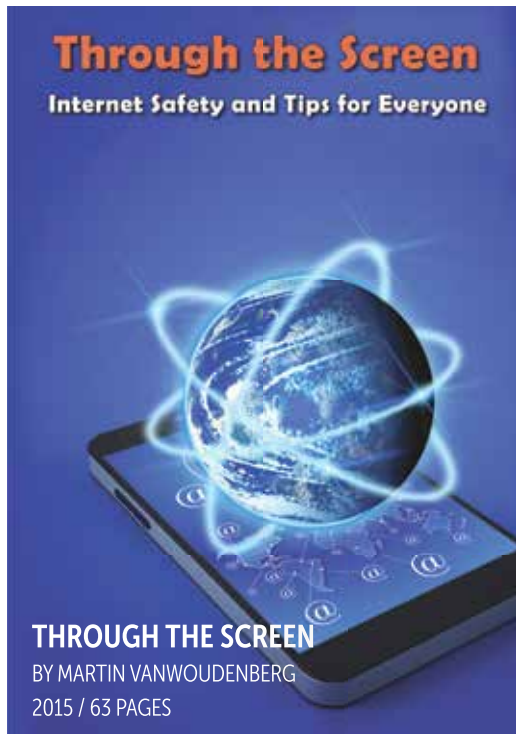
In North Carolina a recently passed law says that public restrooms may be restricted to persons of the biological sex indicated. In other words, if a man feels like a woman, that won't grant him access to the ladies room...at least in North Carolina. But transgender activists have made concerted efforts to force all businesses and public institutions to allow transgendered people access to whatever bathroom they "self-identify" with.

On April 5, in letter written by PayPal CEO Dan Schulman, he announced that because of this law the company had decided to cancel its planned campus expansion in

Charlotte, North Carolina. The move means the loss of 400 jobs that had been planned for the site.

Evangelical leader Franklin Graham called out PayPal, the next day in a Facebook post. He pointed out that PayPal is willfully turning a blind eye to persecution of LGBT people in other countries when it is convenient and profitable:

PayPal operates in countries including Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, and Yemen for Pete's sake. Just last month PayPal announced they would be expanding in Cuba, a country in which homosexuals and transgender people have been imprisoned, tortured, and executed.



A GREAT GUIDE TO ONLINE DANGERS

REFORMED TEACHER'S BOOKLET HELPS PARENTS AND CHILDREN AVOID ONLINE "OOPS!"

by Ryan deJonge

Avoid traps and goofs. That's good advice, but hard to do, especially online – the Internet is full of traps and those who use it make many goofs. Martin VanWoudenberg wrote *Through the Screen* to help us avoid those traps and greatly decrease the likelihood that you or your children will be one of those goofs who thinks, “Oh no, now what have I done?” after making a mistake in the online world.

The 63-page booklet is helpfully arranged into four sections – for kids, for young teens, for older teens, and for adults – though parents will probably want to read the whole thing. Each section contains a handful of direct statements – “Watch out for... Beware... Be careful...” – each with a few paragraphs of explanation.

Most of the tips are general and require no technical know-how, such as my favourite for young teens, “Realize that not every time is a good time to use a phone.” Who knew?!? A few are more technical and technology related, but Martin explains these in simple, jargon-free language. Each tip is set on a bright, attractive, colour-coded page.

Parents really should read this cover-

to-cover. In fact it's worth studying, reminding ourselves of the tips we might already know and taking note of the ones we did not. Then, if you have children, have them read through the section that

Parents really should read this cover-to-cover. In fact it's worth studying,

applies to them, talking about each tip as you work through the book. After that, keep the book near the computer or the household “charging hub” so that it can live on in your household as a helpful resource.


I've noticed in recent years that many parents are doing an excellent job of talking with their children about the “birds and the bees,” and doing so in a timely, engaging way that makes use of some of the good literature that is out there for that topic. I think that the time has come when not only the “birds and

the bees” but also the “bits and the bytes” need a talk. *Through the Screen* will help parents talk to their young children and teenagers about living a trap-resistant and goof-free life on the Internet.

For more insight into navigating life on the Internet, Martin has developed an excellent presentation called “Behind the Screen,” and a website by the same name: BehindTheScreen.ca. Martin's presentation is only for parents to help us (among other things):

- gain insight into the world of social media
- help our children learn how to properly use cellphones
- understand what the best options are for home filtering and Internet monitoring

As a high school teacher and parent of teens, Martin is an excellent and engaging guide.

I highly recommend both his book and his presentation. You can buy a copy of his booklet at www.behindthescreen.ca/book.html. 

Pastor deJonge is a minister in the Langley Canadian Reformed Church.

IN A TIDBITS RELEVANT, AND NOT SO, TO CHRISTIAN LIFE NUTSHELL

BY JON DYKSTRA

THIS IS SURE TO END BADLY

"A 5th grader with an iPhone is like a 5th grader with the briefcase containing the nuclear codes. It's staggering people will pay for Christian school yet give their 5th grader an iPhone."

– *Christian counselor Heath Lambert (as relayed by Tim Bloedow)*

A ONE-QUESTION TEST FOR POLITICAL CANDIDATES

If you can ask your local political candidates just one question, how about this one: "What position do you hold that you would keep on holding even if you knew it was going to cost you an election?" Whatever their answer – even if they refuse to answer – it will give you the measure of the man. Its been said "politics is the art of compromise" but a politician who won't stand firm on anything is the sort that will be tossed to and fro by everything. Vote for them and you aren't electing a leader but simply a limp, languid sort who will bow to whatever side tops the polls.

However there are some politicians made of firmer stuff. Some are willing to lead – to risk it all – on issues that are near and dear to them! Earlier this year a US presidential candidate, Marco Rubio, told voters:

I just believe deeply that all human life is worthy of protection of our laws....I would rather lose an election than be wrong on the issue of life.

Here in Canada a recent example of this firmer sort is former prime minister Stephen Harper. In 2010 he said:

There are, after all, a lot more votes – a lot more – in being anti-Israeli than in taking a stand. But as long as I am prime minister, whether it is at the United Nations, the Francophonie or anywhere else, Canada will take that stand, whatever the cost.

Rubio was willing risk it all to speak up for his country's smallest citizens. In Harper's case he was willing to risk losing votes to defend the citizens of Israel (though not to defend Canadian unborn children). God says we can know false prophets by their fruit. When it comes to politicians we can know them by their non-negotiables.

LET THEM EAT CAKE...SOMETIMES

"...the reasons certain professions have been singled out is because they are the glorifying professions – photographers florists, bakers. They are the professions that give approval, that render societal applause. This is why [we should] be happy to bake a cake for a homosexual's birthday party, but not for a wedding." – *Douglas Wilson*

A MOTHER-IN-LAW JOKE

Having been married twenty years a couple decided to celebrate by taking a little trip. While talking over their plans one evening the husband now and then glanced into the next room where a little old lady sat knitting. "The only thing," he finally said in a hushed voice, "is that for once I'd like to be by ourselves. I'd like to take this trip without your mother."

"My mother!" exclaimed the wife, "I thought she was your mother!"

SOURCE: Bernadine Kielty in Book of the Month Club News as found in *The Bedside Book of Laughter*, with jokes selected from *Reader's Digest*

THANK YOU, THANK YOU CAPITALISM!

T. Norman Van Cott wants to know, why are so many people saying thank-you?

This economics professor noticed that when we buy something not only do we say thank-you, but the salesperson does too! Why do customers and salespeople both say "thank-you"? Why isn't one of them saying "You're welcome" instead?

It's because in the free market people make *voluntary* exchanges. That means the reason they are going to make an exchange is because they believe they will benefit from it. For example, when a person buys an iPad for \$600 they do so because they want the iPad *more than* \$600. When they receive it, they are grateful for the exchange and thus say "thank you!" Meanwhile the salesperson, and the company they represent, wants \$600 more than the iPad *so they are grateful for the exchange too*. Both have reason to be grateful. So both say "Thank you!"

The wonder of the free market is that it leaves both parties happier.

SOURCE: I ran across this thought in T. Norman Van Cott's article "Why Is Everyone Saying, 'Thank You?' Why Don't Customers Say, 'You're Welcome?'" posted to FEE.org on Mar 21, 2016

TWO-SIDED DANGER

When interacting with the world around it, a church can face two dangers that amount to being the flipsides of a coin. The first is the danger of being absorbed by the culture, or as author Alistair Begg puts it: "You have a lot of people to talk to, but nothing to say." The second danger is being isolated from culture. Or as Begg puts it, "You have a lot to say, but no one to talk to."

Two dangers, and being safe from the one only makes you the more susceptible to the other. Which of the two do you think our churches are more susceptible to?

SOURCE: Solid Ground January/February 2002

ALL'S WELL WITH THE EARTH

A child's little hands,

Quite grubby with green
And yellowish clay,
Condition, squeeze through
In serious play.

He thumps and he whacks,
While newspapers grey,
Receive the dry flakes
Of modeling clay.

Small fingers design
A floppy, red car,
Racing flat wheels on
Afghan's Kandahar.

Budgets plan billions,
Stocks gain and stocks lose,
The deficit red,
Bleeds out on clay's blues.

Middle East unrest
And murders abound,
As snippets of clay
Drop down to the ground.

His kneading needs no
Interpretation,
Stained fingernails smile,
Scraping inflation.

Black, yellow and white
Roll about in his palms,
A mystery realm,
He grins without qualms.

Fickle, wee sculptor...

***For what it is worth,
Our Potter's in heaven,
All's well with the earth.***

Christine Farenhorst



“WHAT ENTERTAINS YOU?”

THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION, ENTERTAINMENT AND CHRISTIAN ART

by Brian Mattson



The Sexual Revolution was in large part successful because it used entertainment media as a principal tool of cultural subversion. There were other tools, of course: the massive takeover of academia and political activism, to name two. But when we ask the question, “What entertains you?” we are getting closer to the center of the cultural upheaval of the past five decades.

So what does entertain you? This is a personal question at the heart of our identities: what delights you? What satisfies you? It is the question of what you – or society more broadly – worship. If you subvert and change the very nature of what entertains/delights/satisfies people, you can change the object of their worship. That means you change people, because human beings become what they worship. That means you change culture.

Many understand that the recent victories of the Sexual Revolution were achieved because of the contributions of the entertainment industry. Lawyers are not responsible for *Obergefell* (the US Supreme Court’s recent ruling in favor of same sex marriage). That distinction

belongs to *Will & Grace*. No – actually, that is not true. I would argue that it is considerably more subtle than that: we owe the collapse of sexual ethics to Archie Bunker.

FROM ARCHIE BUNKER TO FRASIER

The year was 1971, during the peak years of cultural turmoil. The show was *All in the Family*. What was the show about? Everybody thought it was about the Bunker family, but it wasn’t. It was about *the* family. That is, the institution. And it doesn’t take too much skill in hindsight to observe the message: the family as it existed up until 1971, purely typified by its leader, Archie, is an outdated, patriarchal, homophobic, narrow-minded, and bigoted institution.

It’s a radical message, one that never would have stood a chance if it attempted its cultural coup *d’etat* by demanding immediate acquiescence. It succeeded by making Archie... *entertaining*. The lovable, but woefully misguided, Archie Bunker. The current show *Modern Family* owes its existence to *All in the Family*.

Hollywood continued to push the

boundaries further and in every direction using the same playbook.

- *Three’s Company* soon directly attacked the outdated, prudish convictions against cohabitation – the “villain” of the show is the landlord, who only allows the newfangled “progressive” living arrangement (two women and one man in one apartment) because they trick him into thinking the male character is gay – of which he also, of course, disapproves.
- Fathers became optional first and famously with *Murphy Brown*, and later with the *Gilmore Girls*.
- Homosexuality was given beautiful, airbrushed treatment in *Will & Grace*.
- Soon thereafter HBO’s *Big Love* gave polygamy its day in the sun.
- *Sex and the City* glamorized the casual hookup lifestyle.

Meanwhile, at the box office one “romantic comedy” after another preached the message that personal self-fulfillment exhausts the meaning of romance, marriage, and weddings.

The ripple effect of these main stage attractions spilled into everything, with the eventual result being the complete normalization of rampant promiscuity. *Frasier* is hilarious, consistent, warm, character-driven, and brilliant in nearly every way. Yet it is difficult to miss how normal is the portrayal of Frasier's rather casual sex life. That is precisely where the architects of the Sexual Revolution were aiming. Their radicalism succeeded by being *entertaining* radicalism.

Where are we now? We have largely lost this long, quiet, guerilla campaign against the family as the institutional channel for human sexuality. And we can certainly say that the Sexual Revolution's entertainment victory has brought in its wake important political and legal victories.

A WAR AGAINST REALITY

There are, however, silver linings in all these dark clouds.

First, we need to remember – we must always remember – that the war against sexual purity and the family is a war against God. And that means it is a war against reality. Wars against reality cannot truly succeed. Hollywood can turn promiscuity into a virtue, but it has no cure for the ills it produces – fatherlessness, single motherhood, poverty, depression, addiction, and crime. As someone important once put it, “the wages of sin is death,” and the real-world slaying is often done by sin's own effects. Just this last year *Playboy* magazine announced it will no longer publish nude photographs; not because they've experienced some sudden conversion, but because the culture of pornography it created is literally destroying their business.

Second, since this is a war against reality itself, the more the bitter fruit of the Sexual Revolution is felt – that is, *the more successful it is* – the more likely it shapes its own demise. The Prodigal Son had an epiphany when he got to the pig trough, and I believe prodigal cultures can experience such epiphanies, too. As an example, I would point to the fact that in recent years there have been a number of thoroughly secular films that are yet

almost unintentionally pro-life, like *Juno* and *Knocked Up*. The recent film *Don Jon* explored the devastating effects of pornography on sexual intimacy, *Chef* is a full-throated anthem of praise for fatherhood and marriage, and one of the top rated television shows is called *Parenthood*. To be clear, these are not film recommendations, but they are early signs of some people waking up.

Third, as far as entertainment goes, there are frankly few boundaries left to press. Unless HBO decides to produce a blockbuster series glorifying bestiality – and I wouldn't put it past them – the agenda items are frankly tapped out. Who is a rebel when the revolutionaries win? Someday, hopefully soon, to be “edgy” and revolutionary in entertainment art will mean moving back toward the reality that marriage and family are beautiful, noble, and the way God intended it.

A NEED FOR GRITTY, PATIENT, CHRISTIAN FILMMAKING

Finally – and this is more a challenge and opportunity than it is a silver lining – Christians need to be in the entertainment business. Note: I did not say, “The preaching and teaching business.” That is the job description of “pastor” or “teacher,” not “filmmaker.” Christians have not been particularly good at film, which is a whole discussion of its own that we could take all day to discuss. But one reason is that they do not fully understand the medium. We tell, instead of show. And we try to tell everything at once, for that matter. We teach, rather than entertain and delight. It may be true that aesthetics aren't everything, but they're not *nothing*. Pictures do teach, and moving pictures can teach *movingly*.

Our films also tend toward the Gnostic in their often unrealistic portrayal of what life in a sinful world is like. The “faith based” market is, for now, completely synonymous with “uplifting and inspiring,” which is why its suffering is never very gritty, its heroes never disappoint you...and why you're left unsatisfied at the end. An airbrushed, gauzy “Christianity” world is no more real than the airbrushed, gauzy world of

the sexual revolutionaries. This is God's world and his story, and that story often involves horror and tragedy. Christian entertainment needs a healthy injection of a theology of the cross.

Moreover, the Sexual Revolution did not make one big show pushing every boundary at once; they made lots of shows, lots of angles, lots of characters, lots of stories. Yet Christians seem intent on cramming their entire worldview, complete systematic theologies, into every single product as if God is somehow dishonored if we don't say everything. You know, it is okay for a talented Christian to write a cute romantic comedy that elevates self-sacrifice above self-indulgence. A couple of centuries ago Jane Austen did it all the time.

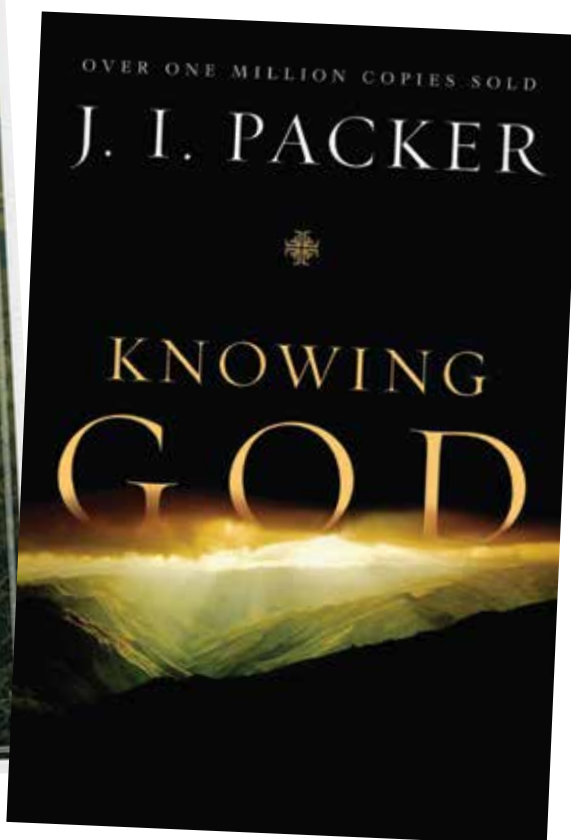
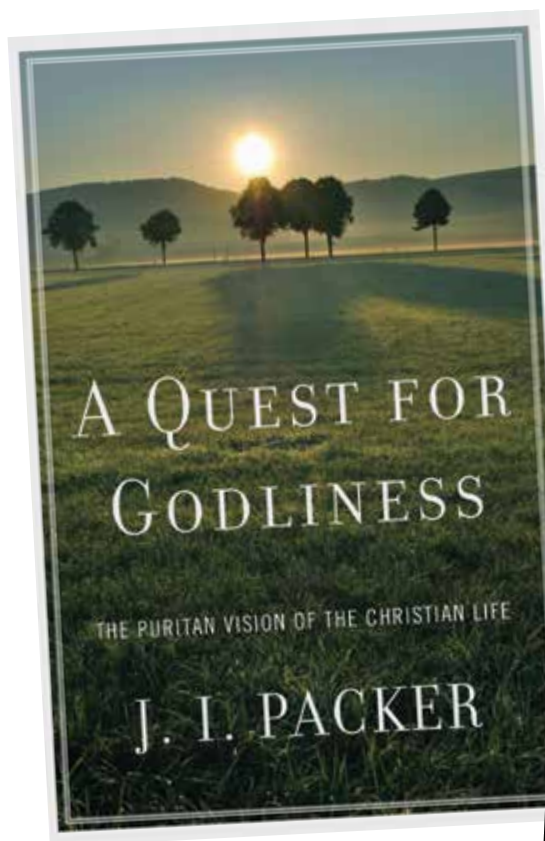
The opportunities have never been so widely available for people to make great cinematic art, both in television and at the box office. The democratization of the technology and delivery of entertainment makes it possible for anyone with talent, vision, and modest finances to succeed. Calling our culture back to God's design for human sexuality is going to mean – it simply must mean – using the technologies of entertainment. The answer to the question, “What entertains you?” tells you what god you worship. And the truth is there is nothing more entertaining/more delightful/more satisfying than God—have you *seen* a Hubble telescope photograph? Have you *heard* the Gospel story? Have you *felt* the transforming power of grace making beauty out of ugly things and turning trash into treasure?

Those are stories worth telling, and the only thing stopping Christians from telling them is a reductionist view of what Christian art can and should be. It is a brave new entertainment world; making art that goes against the flow of the Sexual Revolution requires bravery. But, on the other hand, the darkness of the current backdrop makes the truth shine all the more brightly. ^{RP}

Dr. Mattson blogs at DrBrianMattson.com where this article was first published. It is reprinted here with permission of the author.

People We Should Know Better: J. I. PACKER

by Wes Bredenhof



James Innell Packer is a rather well-known author in Reformed circles. In fact, many people assume that Packer himself must belong to a Reformed, or at least a Presbyterian, church. Instead, Packer has been an Anglican his entire life, first in England (the land of his birth) and then later in Canada.

The son of working-class parents, Packer was born on July 22, 1926 in Gloucester, England. He became a Christian during his education at Oxford University. Through exposure to Puritan authors like John Owen, Packer also became a convinced Calvinist with

regard to the doctrine of salvation. At several points in his life he was tempted away from the Church of England, but he has always remained a member. He was ordained in the Church of England, but only served in parish ministry for a short while before discovering his real vocation as a teacher of theology. In England, he taught at Tyndale Hall, Latimer House, and Trinity College. Finally, in 1979, he skipped over the pond to take up a professorship at Regent College in Vancouver, BC.

WRITER AND EDITOR

Packer has been well known as a

conference speaker and writer, but probably less so as an editor. Notably, he's been the general editor of the *English Standard Version Bible*, as well as the theological editor of the *ESV Study Bible*. He's also served as an editor and advisor for *Christianity Today*.

One of Packer's most well-known books has been *Knowing God*, first published in 1973. By 2001, this book has sold more than 1.5 million copies and been translated into more than 20 languages. It's a book that puts the doctrine of God in simple language. Even when Packer tackles difficult subjects like propitiation (the turning

away of God's wrath through the cross), he communicates winsomely. It's really not surprising that some Canadian Reformed pastors have even used *Knowing God* for their pre-confession instruction. It's a solid book!

BACK AND FORTH AND BACK AGAIN

While there are many ways in which we can appreciate what God has done through this man, we also have to honestly acknowledge some of his weaknesses and failings. There was, for example, his involvement with a 1994 statement entitled *Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT)*. This was an effort to unite Roman Catholics and evangelicals on a common theological basis with a view to taking a stand against societal evils like abortion. Unfortunately, this common basis resulted in the lowest-common denominator form of essential doctrines like justification. Packer was a key player in the events leading to ECT and a signer.

Subsequently, Packer teamed with up with URC pastor Michael Horton to

Packer was pushed out of the Anglican Churches of Canada because he refused to endorse same-sex marriage.

produce another document, *Resolutions for Roman Catholic and Evangelical Dialogue*. Now this statement, also from 1994, was soundly orthodox on the issues highlighted by ECT. But then, what one hand gave, the other took away (again!). In 1998, Packer was involved with yet another ecumenical statement along with Roman Catholics, *The Gift of Salvation*. This statement again compromised on the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

It's regrettable that Packer has been rather inconsistent on some key biblical teachings. As just mentioned, he claims in some places to maintain justification by faith alone as a foundational doctrine, yet he readily gives this up when working with Roman Catholics. As another example, he claims to hold to the ultimate authority of the Bible, yet is lenient when it comes to evolution. In his 2015 biography, Leland Ryken writes that he cannot understand why some people get so angry at Packer. It's no mystery: it's because of his inconsistency.

STANDING ON SCRIPTURE

However, one of Packer's greatest controversies did see him taking a very bold stand. In 2008, Packer was pushed out of the Anglican Church of Canada because he refused to endorse same-sex marriage. This came at a great cost – he was defrocked as an Anglican clergyman. We can certainly commend him for his courage. Incidentally, soon afterwards, he was relicensed as clergy and admitted into the Anglican Church of North America. Thus, he continues to be an Anglican, though not in the "mainstream."

TWO MORE GREAT TITLES

On a personal note, I've benefitted from especially two of Packer's writings. The first I came across was his volume on the Puritans, *A Quest for Godliness*. This had a huge impact on shaping my attitude towards those saints of old. For many people, this book has been instrumental in overturning misconceptions of the Puritans.

Later, when I pursued further studies in missiology, one of my required readings was one of Packer's first books, *Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God*. I loved it! This slender book powerfully argued that a Calvinistic belief in God's sovereignty is anything but a death knell for outreach – quite the opposite. Armed with what I've said about some of his inconsistencies, I'd say that this is one author with whom *Reformed Perspective* readers should definitely get acquainted.

RP

The quotable Packer

THE GOSPEL IN 3 WORDS

"[W]ere I asked to focus the New Testament message in three words, my proposal would be *adoption through propitiation*, and I do not expect ever to meet a richer or more pregnant summary of the gospel than that."

– *Knowing God*

REAL REPENTANCE

"Repentance, as we know, is basically not moaning and remorse, but turning and change."

– on Twitter

HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY AND GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

"God's sovereignty is a reality, and man's responsibility is a reality too.... To our finite minds, of course, the thing is inexplicable. It sounds like a contradiction, and our first reaction is to complain that it is absurd.... We ought not, in any case, to be surprised when we find mysteries of this sort in God's Word. For the Creator is incomprehensible to his creatures. A God whom we could understand exhaustively, and whose revelation of Himself confronted us with no mysteries whatsoever, would be a God in man's image, and therefore an imaginary God, not the God of the Bible at all."

– *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*

WRETCHED MAN THAT I AM

"A deepening sense of one's sinfulness remains a touchstone of the genuine Christian life."

– *Rediscovering Holiness*

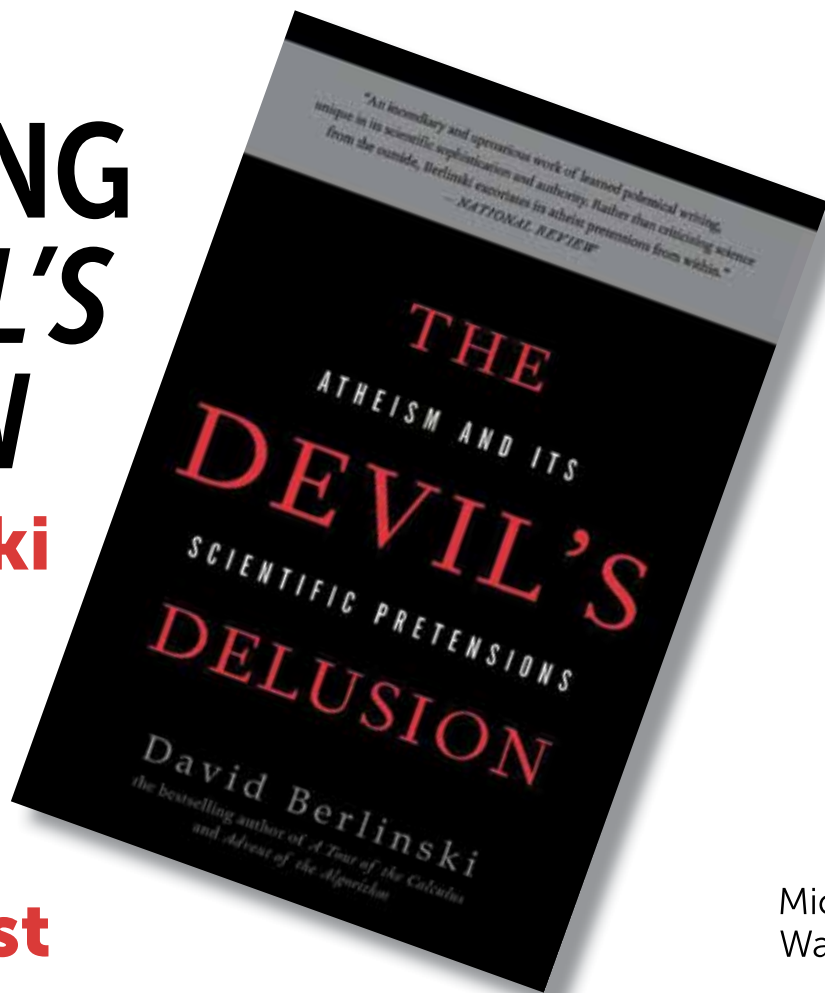
FAITH AND WORKS

"Historical Exegesis is only the preliminary part of interpretation; application is its essence. Exegesis without application should not be called interpretation at all."

– *Engaging the Written Word of God*

DISCUSSING THE DEVIL'S DELUSION

David Berlinski and the Baseless Confidence of the Certain Atheist



by
Michael
Wagner

Some atheists, such as the late Christopher Hitchens, were very certain about their doubt. This sort of sure skeptic will argue that society should make a clean break from religion of every sort and instead embrace science and all its implications. But their assertions about science – that it proves God is not – don't approach anything close to the truth. It was to counter such ridiculous claims that mathematician David Berlinski wrote *The Devil's Delusion: Atheism and its Scientific Pretensions*.

Berlinski is as interesting as his book. He is not a creationist or even a Christian. This self-described “secular Jew” doesn't oppose atheism and mindless evolution on any religious grounds. He just wants to pop the bubble of pretentious atheists, and as such the purpose of his book is not to determine whether God exists “but whether science has shown that He does not.”

It has not, as Berlinski humorously shows.

BIG BANG THEORY

Secular science has a very different origin story than the one we find in Genesis. According to the Big Bang theory view, billions of years ago something of incredible density suddenly started to expand, leading to the universe as we know it today. The Big Bang theory is relatively new – the 1920s – and, from its very beginning, it has made atheists very uncomfortable. As Berlinski writes,

If the Big Bang expresses a new idea in physics, it suggests an old idea in thought: *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*

Christians don't have to agree with the Big Bang theory to be amused by the implications – even this secular theory suggests the universe had a starting point. And that prompts the unavoidable question: *Who* or *what* caused it to start? While atheists insist “Not God!”

they have *no scientific reasons* to be so insistent. The Big Bang theory hardly requires an atheistic conclusion.

APPEARANCE OF DESIGN

Many aspects of the universe are precisely ordered to sustain life on earth, and Berlinski shares several, beginning with the “cosmological constant.”

The cosmological constant is a number controlling the expansion of the universe....And here is the odd point: If the cosmological constant were larger than it is, the universe would have expanded too quickly, and if smaller, it would have collapsed too early, to permit the appearance of living systems. Very similar observations have been made with respect to the fine structure constant, the ratio of neutrons to protons, the ratio of the electromagnetic force to the gravitational force, even the speed of light.

*“Scientists,”
the physicist
Paul Davies has
observed, “Are
slowly waking up
to an inconvenient
truth – the universe
looks suspiciously
like a fix.”*

Why stop? The second law of thermodynamics affirms that, in a general way things are running down. The entropy of the universe is everywhere increasing. But if things are running down, what are they running down *from*? This is the question that physicist and mathematician Roger Penrose asked. And considering the rundown, he could only conclude that the runup was an initial state of the universe whose entropy was very, very low and so very finely tuned.

Who ordered *that*?

“Scientists,” the physicist Paul Davies has observed, “Are slowly waking up to an inconvenient truth – the universe looks suspiciously like a fix. The issues are the very laws of nature themselves. For 40 years, physicists and cosmologists have been quietly collecting examples of all to convenient ‘coincidences’ and special features in the underlying laws of the universe that seem to be necessary in order for life, hence conscious beings, to exist. Change any one of them and the consequences would be lethal.”

Those arguments are very much of a piece with those that [atheist] Fred Hoyle advanced after studying the resonances of carbon during nucleosynthesis. “The universe,” he grumbled afterwards, “looks like a put-up job.”

Creationists often point to additional features, not specifically mentioned by Berlinski. Some examples include:

- The earth’s orbit is precisely in a zone where it is not too close to the sun (which would cause water to boil) and not too far from the sun (which would cause water to freeze).
- The earth’s rotation helps to regulate the planet’s temperature, preventing one side from becoming too hot, and the other side from becoming too cold.
- The tilt of the earth’s axis is perfectly aligned to result in regular seasons that are necessary for many forms of life to thrive (think of trees in the fall and spring, for example).
- The earth’s atmosphere is a thin layer of nitrogen and oxygen held in place by gravity and indispensable to maintaining life.

The list goes on and on.

Atheistic scientists have proposed speculative theories to explain this unlikely string of coincidences. Berlinski demonstrates that these theories are not at all convincing, which poses a big problem for the atheists, because if their theories

...do not suffice to answer the question why we live in a universe that seems perfectly *designed* for human life, a great many men and women will conclude that it *is* perfectly designed for human life, and they will draw the appropriate consequences from this conjecture.

In other words, the reason the universe appears designed to support life is because it has been designed. But by Who?

One answer is obvious. It is the one theologians have always offered: *The universe looks like a put-up job because it is a put-up job.* That this answer is obvious is no reason to think it false. Nonetheless the answer that common sense might suggest is deficient in one respect: It is emotionally unacceptable

because a universe that looks like a put-up job puts off a great many physicists.

They have thus made every effort to find an alternative. Did you imagine that science was a *disinterested* pursuit of the truth?

Well, you were wrong.

DARWINIAN EVOLUTION

Everyone is familiar with Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution. Over long periods of time, mutations occur in various organisms. Some mutations help the organisms to survive and even to thrive. As this process continues over millions of years, different species emerge. This is called “speciation.” One species evolves into another through a series of small and gradual developments.

Unfortunately, for its proponents, the fossil record does not show the gradual advance of one species into another. Each species appears in the fossil record fully developed. Evidence of transitions from one species to another has not been found. Yet such evidence is precisely what Darwin’s theory requires.

Besides the absence of fossil evidence, Berlinski points out that

there are no laboratory demonstrations of speciation either, millions of fruit flies coming and going while never once suggesting that they were destined to appear as anything other than fruit flies. This is the conclusion suggested as well by more than six thousand years of *artificial* selection, the practice of barnyard and backyard alike.

In short, there is no genuine scientific evidence that any species has gradually developed into another species.

ATHEIST WORLDVIEW

So if science doesn’t back unguided evolution, why do atheists insist it does? This is where we really get to the crux of the matter. Berlinski writes,

If Darwin’s theory of evolution has little to contribute to the content of the sciences, it has much to offer their

ideology. It serves as the creation myth of our time, assigning properties to nature previously assigned to God. It thus demands an especially ardent form of advocacy.

Like everyone else in the world, atheists have certain presuppositions about the nature of the world, life, and reality. They have a worldview. When they try to explain the existence of life and the universe, they interpret everything through the lens of their worldview. Because they begin with

the presupposition that God does not exist, their worldview rules out certain conclusions right from the very start.

Berlinski understands this and points out that behind the current wave of aggressive atheism “is a doctrinal system, a way of looking at the world, and so an ideology.” Atheists formulate arguments using science to make it appear that science supports their beliefs. But as Berlinski writes,

Arguments follow from assumptions, and assumptions follow from beliefs,

and very rarely – perhaps never – do beliefs reflect an agenda determined entirely by the facts.

ATHEISM AND MORALITY

Interestingly, Berlinski discusses the implications of atheism for morality. Many atheists like to assert that their beliefs pose no problem for ethics. Atheists can still make moral judgments. The problem is that if they do make moral judgments, those judgments cannot be based on their atheistic beliefs. Atheism provides no basis for

God is visible to any who will see

by Jon Dykstra

Our universe, if just slightly different, would never have been able to support life. For example, a proton’s mass is 1,837 times greater than that of an electron, but it carries a positive charge that is exactly equal to that of the electron’s negative charge. How very strange that the two, so different in size, would yet be perfectly matched in charge! If they weren’t paired just so, then the vast array of elements could never have formed and life could never have existed.

This is but one example of the fine-tuning that so troubles atheists that they’ve resorted to “what if” stories to explain it away. Yes, they acknowledge, the universe is too finely tuned to have come about just by chance...*if we’d had only one role of the dice to get here.* But what if this wasn’t the only universe? What if there were a “multiverse” of billions and trillions and gazillions of universes out there somewhere? What if we could stack the odds in our favor by supposing as many universes as we might need? Then it wouldn’t seem so very improbable that at least one of these might be suited to life...right?

And these same atheists will ridicule Christians because we speak of faith!

There is no evidence of these other universes. None at all. So on what basis do they propose this theory? Because they need it to be true. The only case that can be made for it is that the

alternative is too terrible for them to consider – that a Fine-Tuner brought the balance, order, and wonder to our universe.

Atheists can be clever, but God won’t leave them with any excuse. As Psalm 19 explains, the heavens declare His glory. Want to explain away fine-tuning by postulating a multiverse? Well, then answer this: why would the Sun just happen to be 400 times bigger than our moon and also 400 times further away?

This precise pairing means that the moon and sun appear to be the exact same size in our sky. This allows us, during a solar eclipse, to study the Sun’s corona in a way that we just can’t any other time and wouldn’t ever be able to if the two celestial bodies weren’t sized just so. As the moon passes in front of the Sun only the corona is still visible – flaring fire crowning the moon in the dark daytime sky. Yes, dear atheist, we are not only in a universe impossibly finely tuned for life, but implausibly suited for us to study our own Sun.

Why would that be?

The multiverse doesn’t

explain it. There is no reason that the one universe in which all the dice rolled just right for life would also be the same universe in which we’d be gifted with a moon that was sized exactly right to study our own Sun.

Atheists have no explanation.

But we do. We know our God created us as the very pinnacle of His creation (Psalm 8:3-9, Genesis 1:26-28) and that our purpose is to glorify Him. So it isn’t surprising to us that God would so arrange things that the sizing of the moon enables us to study our Sun – God is showing us His wonders!




ethics aside from subjective personal preferences. Berlinski writes,

If moral imperatives are not commanded by God's will, and if they are not in some sense absolute, then what ought to be is a matter simply of what men and women decide should be. There is no other source of judgment.

Morality is either determined by God or by man. If God does not exist, there are no external ethical restraints on man's behavior.

CONCLUSION

So does science prove "God is not"? No, and atheists who claim otherwise are only showing their willingness to look past the evidence. They've started with atheistic assumptions and arrived at atheistic conclusions that are dictated by their worldview.

Berlinski is not a Christian and he accepts many aspects of the secular worldview, including a long age for the universe, and, seemingly, aspects of evolution. But even in accepting these secular tenets he can't look past the overwhelming evidence for design, and thus some sort of Designer, apparent in the world around us. 



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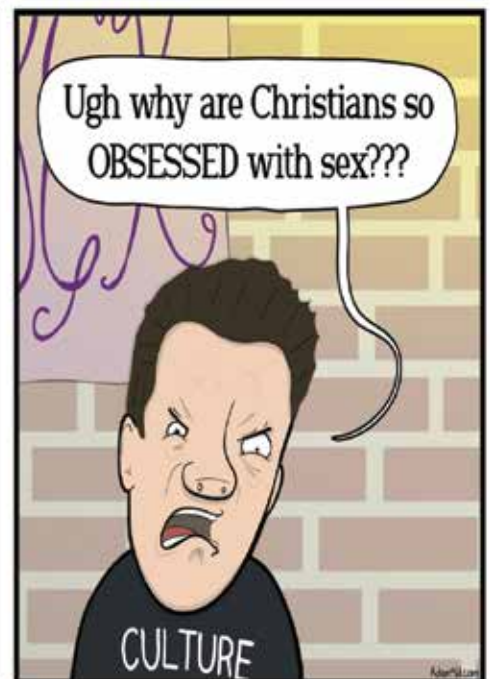
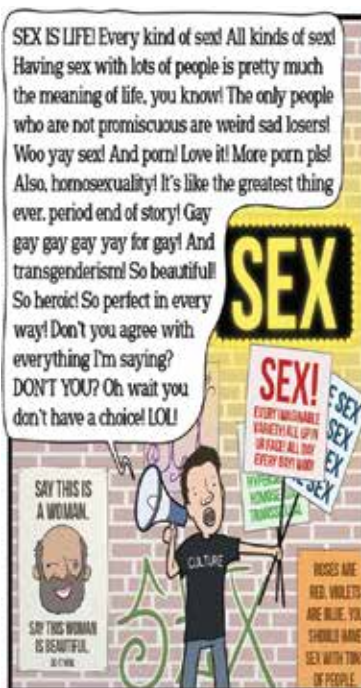
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SINGLENES

On being active and included in the body of Christ

by Rebecca Korvemaker

Singleness. I often think there should be some kind of thunderclap after that word. This word and what it entails has caused unnumbered tears from the people of God. But while there are prayers and sermons for children, mothers, fathers, seniors, spouses, and young people, I have yet to hear a sermon on singleness. It is very possibly the most forgotten aspect of Christian living within the church.

CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

When we talk about singleness, as in everything, we need to start with Jesus and what He has done for us. Christ's death removed our sin, ended our separation from God, and changed

forever our status to one another. This is one of the first things that Nancy Wilson touches on in her book, *Why isn't a Pretty Girl like You Married?...and other helpful comments*. Because of Christ's reconciling work, singles are not on their own: "Our individualistic culture wants to label unmarried people as singles, but in the covenant community of God, there are no singles. God calls us family."

Family.

Our Trinitarian God is not individualistic. God does not save us and then declare "every man for himself." We are family. Just as every family contains members of differing ages and abilities and is not complete when someone is missing, so it is with the

we place on ourselves and others. Then, when marriage isn't part of the picture, we wonder what's wrong with us, and start to realize that others are probably wondering the same thing. This combination of our own and others' disappointment means that some questions and statements can impact us quite painfully.

"How can it be that a nice young man like you still hasn't found a wife?"

"This will be good practice for when you're a mom."

"Maybe if you weren't so picky you wouldn't be alone."

For a long time I felt (and sometimes still feel) like I wasn't meeting everyone's expectations for my life, that I was not on par with the rest of the world. It wasn't until I realized that I didn't need to meet the expectations of others – my only requirement being to live before God as He commands – that I started developing a gracious attitude towards things some said that used to bother me (I still have a long way to go). Jesus' blood makes us complete – through Him, we now measure up to God's standards. And since this is so, then why does it matter what requirements others place on you?

This is why we need to forgive others' thoughtless comments. Some people are sincerely clueless and don't realize that questions like "Why are you still single?" hurt. Pray for a gracious spirit every morning when you get up, smile, and respond with kindness. And tell your hurt to God.

The rest of the Church can do better here. Comments like "Why isn't a nice man like you married?" rarely come across as a compliment, but rather a reminder to your single friend of what is not there. He would probably like to be married, but God has written his story a different way. We get it that you want us to be happy. Thank you. But reminding us of what we are missing is not helpful. Rather than say such things please *encourage singles where they are at now*. Did a single someone bring you a meal after your baby was born? Instead of saying how lucky her future husband will be, express

your thankfulness and compliment her cooking.

LONELINESS

Singles struggle with loneliness, which is partly their own fault and partly everyone else's.

"How is it my fault? I can't help being alone!" you ask. Well, you are part of a church family, so go fellowship with them! Not just with the other single people around your age but with the widows, children, older people, married couples – all of them. As a member of the church you are responsible for its edification and well-being. Don't be self-centered. Don't presume others need to reach out to you first. Be hospitable by inviting people into your home (yes, single people can invite entire families over for Sunday lunch) and by being willing to go to their homes, even if it means going by yourself. Be brave.

But what about the rest of the Church? Remember, a single person cannot be his or her own companion. Being on their own all the time is not healthy or wise (no lone rangers), so the Church body needs to embrace singles. Embrace them in your hearts, conversations, homes, and families. This means being interested in each other and not envying each other. The single person may need to ask a young mother if her new baby is sleeping through the night and the young mother may need to ask what the single person did on the weekend.

One thing that has greatly endeared my pastor's family to me is that when my brother (who I lived with for almost two years) got married, my pastor told me that I should feel free to come over, whenever. Some times during the week can be more lonesome than others. Ask. Maybe Friday nights are hard – try to get together and do something.

BEING KNOWN

Now, being lonely as a single person is not just about sitting at home alone on a Saturday night with a bowl of popcorn, a Hallmark flick, and a box of tissues (though that can be part of it). It's also about no one knowing you. This is something we tend to forget. God gave Eve to Adam as a helpmate because he

family of God. *You need the church and the church needs you.* You do not become a member of the church after marriage vows, you become a member at your baptism – married and single we are all parts of the body, which is something we would all do well to remember.

With that thought in mind I would like to discuss some of the struggles in singleness and how singles and the rest of the Church can face these things together. When one member of Christ's body hurts we all hurt (1 Corinthians 12:26), so this is important for all of us.

FEELING INCOMPLETE

Singles can struggle with not meeting their own and others' expectations. People in our churches typically get married in their early twenties so this is the expectation

was alone (Genesis 2:18) and she not only helped him physically but also spiritually and emotionally. Single people don't have that. Our souls get lonely.

This is a struggle that I don't believe will leave us until we reach Heaven, which is actually a good thing. My soul's loneliness has caused me to reach out to God more than any other reason. God understands your heart and He is closer than you can imagine – so bring all the sorrows and struggles to Him. He is the only One who call fill up the lonely hole in your heart to overflowing. *Preach His promises to yourself even when the emotions don't agree.*

I understand that everyone has this kind of loneliness to one degree or another, but with singles it can be a bit different. If you are married, you have your spouse to relate to in a deep way. With single people, it's the feeling that no one has your back.

Not every day is a lonely one, of course, so don't assume the singles you know are in dire need of a heart to heart chat over a cup of cocoa. Just be aware that the struggle is there. Please pray that Jesus

will be the One who fulfills us and that we would be content in Him.

GRACE IS KEY

It doesn't matter what church you attend, it's going to be full of sinners. That means there will be people who annoy you and hurt your feelings, and you will do the same to others. So before you jump into the mix after the service, take a deep breath and pray for grace. Then decide to be interested in others. Rejoice in their joys and try to understand their struggles. Ask questions. Care about their lives.

While on the subject of fellowship, let me put in a quick plug for hospitality. The commands of the Bible are given to the Church, and so hospitality is a requirement for single and married persons alike. This is where singles need to be brave.

Inviting people into your home is intimidating. I recommend that you have more than one family over at a time. I know, that's more people to seat and feed – but the more people there are, the more they can talk amongst themselves while

you prepare the food or do whatever you have to do.

Going to someone else's home also requires you to be brave. Since I moved out of my parents' home, I have done a lot of things by myself, from sitting in church to going to weddings, and these things can be very daunting. Something I do is remember that Jesus is with me and I am not alone. I talk to Him in the middle of an awkward conversation and smile with Him at a young family's craziness.

WHERE WE END

One day the entire church – made up of countless generations and people of differing age, mental ability, race, and marital status – will comprise the Bride of Christ at the marriage supper of the Lamb. The church, this wonderful thing we call family, our Lord calls His Bride. As we look forward to His return may He grant us the grace to live together in unity and love. And may He bless us with joy as we seek to serve each other and our King. RP

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ON THE SINGLE LIFE

WE ARE ONE FAMILY

...the nuclear family should not be the center of church life. Rather, the family of God is the center.... It is *the church* (not married people) that provides a home where all of us find the stability and rootedness that we need.

– Peter and Ginger Wallace, “The Church and Singles” in *New Horizons*, Jan. 2016

...in the covenant community of God there are no singles. God calls us family: brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers in Christ. We are each to be wonderfully connected to the other as part of a church community, where each person is needed and attached to others in her own family as well as to the broader church family.

– Nancy Wilson, *Why isn't a pretty girl like you married? ...and other useful comments*

SINGLES ARE NOT SECOND

The Bible is clear that singleness is not a second-rate status in the church (1 Corinthians 7:8), and it provides several compelling portraits of singles (Paul, Mary, Martha, Lazarus, Lydia, and possibly John the Baptist and even Timothy.)”

– Carolyn McCulley

...the Bible refers to Ruth as a virtuous woman (Ruth 3:11) with the same Hebrew phrase used in Proverbs 31. Two uses of the same Hebrew phrase give us data points so that we can

better understand the term. We can examine the narrative around these data points and use it to draw conclusions. I totally changed how I thought about Proverbs 31 after seeing the data (for you left-brainers) and story (for you right-brainers) of the virtuous woman of Ruth. Once you see that Ruth was known as a virtuous woman when she was a barren widow from a foreign land, we understand that our ability to be a virtuous woman doesn't depend on a husband and children...

– Wendy Alsup, “A Post Mortem on A Year of Biblical Womanhood” posted to *TheologyForWomen.org* on Jan. 26, 2016

ON SEEKING A SPOUSE

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable.

– C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*

If you want God to provide you with a husband, you have to consider whether you are the kind of woman that the kind of man you want to marry would want to marry. Shall I go over that again?

What kind of woman is that kind of man looking for? Are you that kind of woman?

– Nancy Wilson, *Why isn't a pretty girl like you married? ...and other useful comments*

One of the dangers with male/female friendships is that more often than not, one of the two wants something more from the relationship. In the end, usually either a heart is broken or, at the very least, the person with the crush is wasting time not looking elsewhere. If you are holding on to a long-term friendship in hopes that one day it will magically turn to love, you are lying to yourself. The chances that your friend will wake up one day and see you in a *totally different* and romantic light are miniscule. Save yourself the heartache. Keep friendship with the same sex and save the opposite sex for love

– Hayley & Michael DiMarco, *Marriable*

Men, are you taking the servant-leader role (Ephesians 5:25) in the relationship right from the beginning? In any guy-girl dynamic, someone has to be the first to say “I like you” and with that comes the very real risk of being the only one to say it. When that happens, it stings. Are you willing to stick your neck out for this woman? Are you willing to risk looking the fool, so she doesn't have to? Or are you waiting for her to take the lead and ask *you* out?

– Jon Dykstra, “Marriable Men” in *Reformed Perspective*, Dec. 2012

ONE MEANS...

Marriage is a means, not an end. It is one of the means God uses to glorify His name among us, but it is not His only means.

- Nancy Wilson, *Why isn't a pretty girl like you married? ...and other useful comments*

JESUS NEVER HAD SEX

The most fully human person who has ever lived, or ever will live, is Jesus Christ, and He never once had sexual intercourse. This can be powerfully liberating to single people who may think at times, "This is one thing I will never have, sexual relations, and in not having it I will not be all I was meant to be." To this thought Jesus, the virgin, says, "A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40). We will always have mountains of truly human Christ-likeness yet to climb, but sexual intercourse is not one of them. For He never knew it. And He is infinitely whole.

- John Piper, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, Foreword xix.

SINGLENESSE HAS ITS OWN CHALLENGES

I was almost thirty-four when I got married, so I know something of the loneliness of adult single life. And even after marriage I struggled with discontentment at our son's soccer or basketball games because I was at least ten years older than the other parents around me.... I do want you to know that if you struggle with discontentment, I'm right there with you.

Whatever situation tempts us to be discontent, and however severe it may be, we need to recognize that discontentment is sin. That statement may surprise many readers. We are so used to responding to difficult circumstances with anxiety, frustration, or discontentment that we consider them normal reactions to the varying vicissitudes of life....When we fail to recognize these responses to our circumstances as sin, we are responding

no differently from unbelievers who never factor God into their situations.

- Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*

There is nothing in the world wrong with wanting to be married. It is only wrong to be miserable about it. And wanting to be married does not equal discontent. Many women are feeling false guilt about this.

- Nancy Wilson, *Why isn't a pretty girl like you married? ...and other useful comments*

The apostle Paul, who himself was single, provides encouragement for the unmarried by noting that he himself had to *learn* the secret of contentment (Phil. 4:11). Paul was not born content, nor was his discontentment eradicated at conversion.... How then did Paul learn this contentment? Like his Lord, he learned contentment through the things he suffered (Heb. 5:8). The apostle admits to the Corinthians that while under Satanic attack, he prayed three times for deliverance. Yet the Lord denied his requests and told him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:8-9). Singleness may be one of those afflictions tailored to you, but his grace is perfected in your weakness. The single Christian who suffers weakness through unrealized marital aspirations and the disappointments of unanswered prayer may yet find grace at work through the unhappiness.

- A. Boyd Miller IV, "Contentment in Singleness" in the January 2016 issue of *New Horizons*

A discontented woman is also very vulnerable when it comes to receiving attention from men that she knows full well are wrong for her. She rationalizes....she will be more likely to consider someone who will make her far happier than she is now.

- Nancy Wilson, *Why isn't a pretty girl like you married? ...and other useful comments*

To quote another [single], "The main difference (between singles and married

folk) is a heightened risk of loneliness, and heightened temptation to self-absorption, leading to selfishness." The cure for both of these is hospitality and incorporation: being invited to participate in everyday life, and being expected to contribute to everyday life – in the church and in particular families in the church."

- Peter and Ginger Wallace, "The Church and Singles" in the January 2016 issue of *New Horizons*

SINGLENESSE HAS ITS OWN OPPORTUNITIES

I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs – how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world – how he can please his wife – and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world – how she can please her husband.

- 1 Cor. 7:32-34

I was single when I was senior pastor of a church on the west coast of Canada, and there were all kinds of advantages to that. There were some disadvantages too. But there were some wonderful advantages in terms of the hours I put in, evening visitation, calls when I could get people at home. So there are advantages to being single in the ministry, and singleness should not be despised.

- D.A. Carson

Look for ways to serve in the church. Can you take charge of such things as organizing church workdays or organizing the church's ministry to a soup kitchen or food pantry? What are some ways that you can serve because you are single?

- Peter and Ginger Wallace, "The Church and Singles" in the January 2016 issue of *New Horizons* 

The High Cost of Fatherhood

Being a blessing to your children is hard work

by Rob Slane



Sociologists and politicians on the right of the political spectrum often tell us that one of the biggest problems facing society is the lack of fathers. Very often they will present the problem merely in terms of sheer numbers and statistics:

- “The number of households where there is no father present has risen from X to Y in 40 years.”
- “The number of teens with their parents still married is now just X, compared to Y just 30 years ago.”
- “Children who grow up in homes with a mom and dad are X times more likely to get better grades than those children who grow up in homes where this is not the case.”

These sorts of things are perfectly true and valid. It’s perfectly true that there has been a massive increase in fatherlessness and that this has had devastating consequences for children, families, and society as a whole. It’s perfectly true that the explosion in the divorce rate over the

last half century has sown a vast number of problems which are perhaps only just coming to fruition.

NOT SIMPLY A MATTER OF MORE, BUT BETTER

However, there is a danger with this kind of statistical approach that can lead us to believe that the problem is simply one of a lack of fathers. Or to put it another way, we can come to see the problem of fatherlessness as simply a quantitative problem – lack of fathers – and then tend to see the solutions in the same terms – more fathers needed.

Yet much as the quantitative side of the fatherlessness problem is true, it is not the be-all-and-end-all of the issue and in fact it only really scratches the surface of the fatherhood problem.

In addition to the quantitative issue of fatherhood, there is also a qualitative issue that often seems to pass conservative analysts by. Of course a father is better than no father (unless of course the father in question is actively abusing his children, in which case the child

will be better off in a home where he is not present), but there is more to it than this and we ought not to suppose that fatherlessness, per se, is the only problem that needs solving. Rather, there is also a much deeper issue of what fatherhood actually is.

Here’s another way of looking at it. You will no doubt have heard politicians and employers bemoan the fact that there is a skills gap in the workforce. Often, it will be in areas such as engineering, and they will claim that we need X amount of engineers to fix the engineering skills gap. No doubt we do need more engineers, but the question that rarely gets asked is “which type of engineers do we need?” In other words, although there may be a shortage of engineers in the workforce, if we were to train up masses of civil engineers in a region, only to find that the real needs of that regional economy are actually for chemical engineers, we wouldn’t have solved the problem. A similar principle is true in the realm of fatherhood. The problem isn’t just one of a lack of fathers in homes – crucial as this is

– rather, it is also about the type of fathers we have.

I think it almost certainly the case that one of the many reasons we now have an epidemic of fatherlessness is that back in the day, when fatherlessness was not the problem it now is, many fathers failed to grasp what fatherhood should really look like. Certainly most men grasped that being a father meant providing for their family and protecting their family – which is well and good – but unfortunately many men didn't go beyond a superficial interpretation of what this means.

FAILING FATHERS AND FEMINISM

While children are the obvious victims of fatherlessness the damage isn't limited to them. Their children's mothers, and women in general, are also hurt when men won't take up their role as family head.

Now, I have no desire whatsoever to defend feminism. It is an unbiblical ideology, "liberating" men from their responsibilities as the heads of their families. Yet it must be recognized that its success did not appear out of a vacuum. It came from somewhere. Where? Many answers might be given, and the role of Government and Big Business – with their promises of a better, more fulfilling life for women via career success – are certainly well worth a study or two in themselves. But behind all this, feminist ideology is at heart basically parasitical, feeding on the discontent of women. Where does this discontent stem from? Unfortunately, much of it grew out of the failure of many – perhaps even most – men to fulfill their roles as husbands and fathers, above and beyond the basics of providing and protecting.

As a general rule – and I do emphasize the word general – a woman who has a self-sacrificial husband who loves, devotes, and really gives himself to their children, is not going to be discontented enough with her lot to want to embrace an ideology that sees marriage and motherhood as a curse. Yes, there might be exceptions, but they will be rare. As I say, none of this is to defend feminism one iota, but it is simply to recognize

that it has its origins in something, and that something is to a large extent due to the failure of men.

DON'T LOOK TO THE GOVERNMENT

All this is to say that simply fixing the numbers – upping the number of fathers – if that were possible, won't work... although of course it would be way better than the train wreck we have now. Nor is there any no point in looking to government solutions to fix fatherlessness either. The State is both parasite and host in all this, feeding off the discontent of women to grow fatter and fatter.

One way the State has done this is by embracing egalitarianism, and aggressively promoting it everywhere. So they talk about a glass ceiling in the workplace. They continually pump out statistics on men getting paid more than women, without ever being honest enough to bring the word "baby" into the conversation. On a more general level, they have legislated for no-fault divorce, the very existence of which is bound to lead to people allowing their discontent to drive them to divorce, rather than seeking to address it.

All these things have helped to create a situation where women are no longer content with raising their own children. They want another life. And when this causes them difficulties or problems, who comes riding in on the white stallion again? Why, the State, with its promises of free childcare.

I should add that I am in no way blaming the State for everything. The other big culprits are Big Business, Media and Advertising. But it is the State we turn to for solutions, and we need to understand why there will be none coming from that direction. They have no motivation – they sow discontentment among women, and then reap the reward of more taxes and more control of our day-to-day lives.



Fatherhood may mean that you can't watch what you want. But you can still be entertained!

THE HIGH COST

So State is not the solution. The real answer is to be found on the micro level and it involves every father out there striving every day to become a better father. It involves every father out there not contenting himself with being merely provider and protector on some superficial level, but rather having a deep desire to bless his children through his words, his character, and his way of living each and every day. It involves every father out there striving to understand what God – the Father – is like and through His grace striving to reflect this towards his children.

To extend the last point, Doug Wilson has brilliantly argued that all fathers are images or reflections of God the Father to their children. Each and every father is constantly speaking to his children through his words, character and behavior about what fathers are like, and thus are constantly teaching their children about the Father all the time. So, in the way he acts, a father will either be speaking the truth or telling a lie to his children about the Father.

That's a challenging mirror for those of us who are fathers to look into. Of course we are not going to see perfection, but are we telling the truth about God the Father in our life towards our children, or are we telling a lie? Are we telling the truth about the Father by reflecting His generous, benevolent, loving, forgiving, just, merciful, gracious nature?



Fatherhood may mean you rarely have “alone time.”
But you’ll have roughhouse buddy
or two always at the ready.

Or are we teaching our children a lie about the Father through our harshness, our indifference, our aloofness, our coldness or our absence?

We could put it this way: True Fatherhood is costly. The cost of God’s mercy and love being shown to His children was the death of His only begotten Son at Calvary. If you are a father, how much does fatherhood cost you? Generosity, benevolence, love, forgiveness, mercy and grace are far costlier than harshness, indifference, aloofness, coldness or absence. They require daily prayer and struggle against sin. They require humbling ourselves to say sorry to our children when we’ve wronged them. They require listening patiently to them and taking pleasure in what for us may seem trivial, but what for them are really important. And a whole

lot more.

I don’t know about the fathers who are reading this, but I struggle with these things. They are not easy requirements for a sinful and selfish human being. Yet they are part of a struggle that all fathers should delight to be in the midst of, since victory in this struggle means blessing to your children. And if enough fathers engage in the struggle, ultimately it will bring blessing to our society too.

PAUL ON ENGAGED FATHERS

The Apostle Paul has the uncanny ability to pack more into one sentence than most of us can pack into several thousand words. How does he instruct fathers to behave towards their children?

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).

Is that it Paul? Is that all you have to say to fathers? Don’t make our kids angry and bring them up in God’s ways? Not really. Paul’s one-liners are like the opening of a treasure cave and we need to dig deep if we are to get to the heart of his teaching and mine the gold.

As he often does, Paul begins with a negative, moves it to a neutral, and then takes the whole thing over to a positive. An example of this is Ephesians 4:28 where he says this:

Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

Imagine a dial with three markings. On

the left hand side is stealing. In the middle is not stealing. And over on the right hand side is laboring to give. Moralistic Christianity only sees the need to turn the dial from the left to the middle. “Don’t do this,” and “Don’t do that.” As if the absence of stealing is all that is required. But Paul says no, that’s not all that’s required. God doesn’t just want “non-stealers”; He wants cheerful givers.

Paul does the same with the father passage. The notch on the left is marked Provoking, Exasperating, Frustrating, Angering your children. And there’s a whole range of different ways that this can be done. Paul says to turn the dial. Where to? To the “no longer provoking, exasperating and angering my children” spot in the middle? No, he says, dial it all the way to the right hand side. So just as the antidote to stealing is not “not-stealing” but rather giving, the antidote to provoking our children is not “not provoking our children,” but rather nurturing and admonishing them (some versions have this as training/discipling and instruction/correction, but the sense is roughly the same).

BERATING VS. ADMONISHING

What might sound odd here is that having turned the dial from the negative notch – provoking to wrath – to the positive notch, we find Paul speaking of admonition (or correction). But isn’t admonishing (or correcting) a negative action?

Of course it can be, and I’m sure we can all think of examples of ways fathers can rebuke their children in a wholly negative manner (if you’re anything like me, you will have done this yourself). And if such a way of rebuking becomes the norm, then it can clearly lead to exactly what Paul tells us to avoid – exasperating and provoking our children to wrath.

So how can admonition or correction be positive? It’s surely a question of why we do it and how we do it. If our whole wholehearted desire is to see our children corrected and restored, and if we deliver the admonition or correction in a way that reflects that, then it is an undoubtedly positive thing and our children will generally respond positively to it.

WHAT DOES NURTURING LOOK LIKE?

What of nurturing? That has a more positive ring to it than admonition, but what does it mean? Perhaps an illustration might help. At a home education co-op recently, some of my children and their friends did an experiment where they put six different seeds into six different jars, subjecting each seed to different conditions. The first was given air, water, soil, light and warmth, whilst the others had one of these elements missing. Some didn't grow at all. Others grew a little, but very weak and stunted. No prizes for guessing which one grew properly!

Just as the nurturing of plants needs all the elements in order to grow properly, so too do our children. And just as the seed that is deprived of one or more of the elements will either not grow at all, or perhaps produce stunted growth, so is the case with our children. Although I don't want to belabor the analogy too much, there is a fairly close correspondence to some of the elements that are needed for the seed to grow, and that which we need to be nurturing our children with. For instance, it is possible to give them the light of God's word, both in the home and at church, and think that this will suffice. But if the environment at home or in the church is frigid, or if we so stifle their characters, gifts and creativity that they feel suffocated, they may well come to despise the teaching. There are countless "testimonies" out there of people who have gone through that.

Nurturing is about making sure our children have all the elements they need to so that they thrive and grow up into men and women who really love God and who have a genuinely loving, servant spirit. So we need to aim not just to teach them from God's Word, but to do so in an environment that is warm and wholesome. We need to produce a home where Christ is honored, both in teaching and example, but we need to do so making sure that we do not stifle our children or place heavy burdens on them. They need air to thrive, and I've seen a good many people reject the faith of their parents chiefly because their parents tried to squeeze them into a particular mold of what they thought Christians ought to look like.

Fathers, can I urge you to strive to get closer to your children? Cuddle them more (especially girls). They need to feel wanted and secure, even the ones that don't communicate this very well. Talk to them more. Be interested in them and their lives. Speak kindly to them and well of them. Get rid of any hindrances in your life which might be a stumbling block for them, or which might breed resentment and create a distance between you and your children. Strive to teach them from God's Word, both by words and example. Seek their forgiveness, not just God's if you have wronged them, or shouted at them, or failed them. Make them know that you would give your life for them. Fill your home with love and with grace.

WHEN WE FAIL...

Having said that, the wind seems to be taken out of my sails somewhat. Thinking of what nurture and admonition ought to look like is one thing, but if your house is anything like mine, the reality is often a far cry. Occasionally I might approximate to some of these things, but there are too many times of miserable failure to recall. What then?

The things I have listed above are hard things which require self-sacrifice, determination and above all the Spirit of

God. We are bound to mess up; bound to fail. But this should make us press on, not give up. Christianity is not a religion of beating ourselves up over such failures. Rather, it is a religion which says get down on your knees, seek God's free and full forgiveness through Jesus, and then ask for his Spirit to enable you to be a better father to your children.

Fatherhood is the most important social issue of our day, and the lack of good fathers is behind so much of what has gone wrong in our society. So if you don't already, will you join me in making it a regular prayer to pray for fathers? Pray that every child in the land would know their father throughout their childhood. Pray for every child to know the love and the warmth of a good father. Pray for fathers in your church to be enabled to lead their families, and to "nurture and admonish their children in the Lord" with love and grace. Pray for good fathers to become better fathers. Pray for absent or poor fathers to repent and be given God's grace to succeed where they have previously failed. And above all pray that God would reform our churches, our communities and our society by turning the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers. RP



Fatherhood may mean that you don't have time anymore to head to the gym.
But you'll still have opportunities to exercise!

REVIEWS

CHILDREN'S GAMES THAT MOM & DAD CAN PLAY WITHOUT GOING BATTY

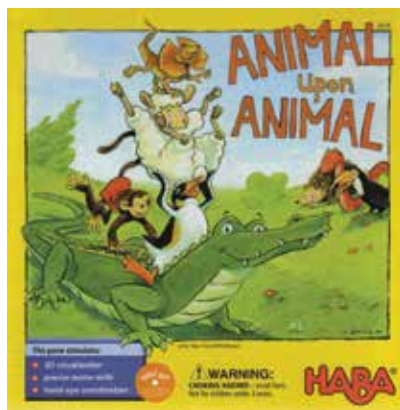
BY JON DYKSTRA

ANIMAL UPON ANIMAL

BY HABA

10-20 MIN TO PLAY / 2-4 PLAYERS

AGES 5 AND UP



This is a stacking game, with the wooden pieces all shaped like various animals. The variety is interesting: it has penguins, snakes, sheep, and monkeys – not animals that normally hang out – and at the bottom of the pile is a big long alligator that everybody piles on. Players start with seven pieces and take turns adding one or two animals to the stack, trying to make sure not to knock any down. The first one to get rid of all their animals wins.

Of course the little beasties are going to come tumbling down, so one nice feature of the game – especially for youngsters whose fingers aren't yet so nimble – is that if you do end up starting an animal avalanche you only have to put a maximum of two of them in your own pile. So no player is going to fall too far behind.

Our oldest daughter really enjoyed this, but while the game says it is for four to 99, our four-year-old found it just a bit too hard and frustrating for her. However, I'm thinking that by the time she hits five this will be a real hit. *Animal upon Animal* is a good one for the whole family.

COOCOO THE ROCKING CLOWN

BY BLUE ORANGE

5-10 MIN. TO PLAY / 2-5 PLAYER

AGES 4 AND UP



This is a balancing game, with players taking turns adding a "ball" (actually a wooden cylinder) to one side or the other of CooCoo's outstretched arms. Put too many on one side and he'll tip over!

That's all there is to it. So, simple enough for 4 years olds to play...but there's still enough here to keep adults challenged too. I can play this with my kids and try my best; I just leave the easy spots for them and challenge myself by going for the harder ones.

Though it isn't in the rules, it works both as a competitive game (placing your ball so it will be hard for the next person to find a good spot) and as a collaborative effort (How many balls can we work together to get on CooCoo?).

All the pieces are wood, which is wonderful. The only downside to this solid construction is that CooCoo himself is heavy enough that, if he manages to fall off the table, he may well chip (our CooCoo has a few bits broken off from the tips of his fingers). So don't place him near the edge of the table!

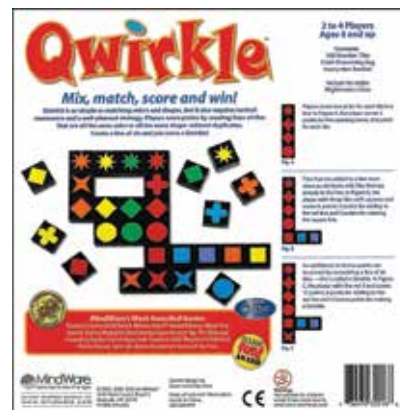
This is great fun in half hour doses, and mom and dad may even find themselves playing it when the kids are in bed.

QWIRKLE

BY MINDWARE

30-45 MIN. TO PLAY / 2-4 PLAYERS

AGES 6 AND UP



Qwirkle is a great strategic game, which takes less than a minute to explain. It comes with 108 solid wooden tiles, coming in six different shapes, in six different colors. Points are scored by laying out a line of tiles that match each other either by color or by shape. So, for example, I could lay out a line of three that was made up of (see the left side of the back of the box picture above): an orange sun, an orange star, and an orange diamond. That would get me three points. Next turn someone could expand off of my orange diamond by laying a yellow, green and red diamond beside it.

Simple, right? True, but this is also an intriguing enough game for MENSA to endorse too.

I've tried this with my four-year-old, and while she enjoyed it, I had to help her every turn – I was essentially playing against myself. Six seems the lowest age for a child to be able to play on her own. It says it's for groups of two to four but we've done it with as many as six successfully.

Everyone we've played this with seemed to enjoy it. That's probably why it has sold millions, spawned several spin-offs and even has its own app.

SPOT IT JR.!

BY BLUE ORANGE

5 MIN. TO PLAY / 2-6 PLAYERS

AGES 4 AND UP



On a turn the dealer will lay down two of the round cards and then players race to spot and call out the name of the one animal that is shown on both cards. Every card has pictures of six different animals, shown in various sizes, and somehow they've managed to arrange it so that whenever you flip two cards over there will always be one, and only one, pairing. The first to name it gets to keep the set, and the person with the most sets at the end wins.

This is a simplified version of the adult Spot it!, with the only difference being that the adult game has more items per card. I found I did sometimes have to go a bit easy on my kids – I couldn't try my hardest – but already my six year old is hard to beat. It says it is for 2-6 players, but I'll add that with my younger daughter this is a fun game only if it's just me and her. In the larger group she just can't compete and it's no fun.

I appreciate how fast it is – five minutes or less – which means there's always time for at least one round!



GOBBLET GOBBLETS AND GOBBLET

BY BLUE ORANGE

2-5 MIN TO PLAY / 2 PLAYER

AGES 5 AND UP

Our oldest, on account of being the oldest, wins most games our girls play. She's a fairly gracious winner, but I wasn't so sure she was a gracious loser. To give her some practice I picked up *Gobblet Gobblers*, a quick game that takes some skill that I could play with her. That way she would get lots of practice at losing. Or at least that was the plan.

This is tic-tac-toe with the added feature that some pieces can eat others. Each player gets three big gobblers, three medium sized ones, and three small gobblers. The big ones can stack on top of (or eat) the medium and small gobblers, while the medium gobblers can eat only the smaller ones. And the smallest gobblers are stuck at the bottom of the food chain: they can't eat anyone.

It's a very fun and very short game: it takes just a couple minutes to play. That means in just ten minutes of competing against her dad my daughter got a chance to lose – and practice doing it the right way – a half dozen times. It is a children's game, but not a childish game – parents don't have to turn their brains off to enjoy playing it. In fact I've played this with my wife. Some of my nephews and nieces, ranging in age from 5 to over 20 have all found the game quite addictive too. It's about \$25, with solid wood pieces that will stand up to good use.

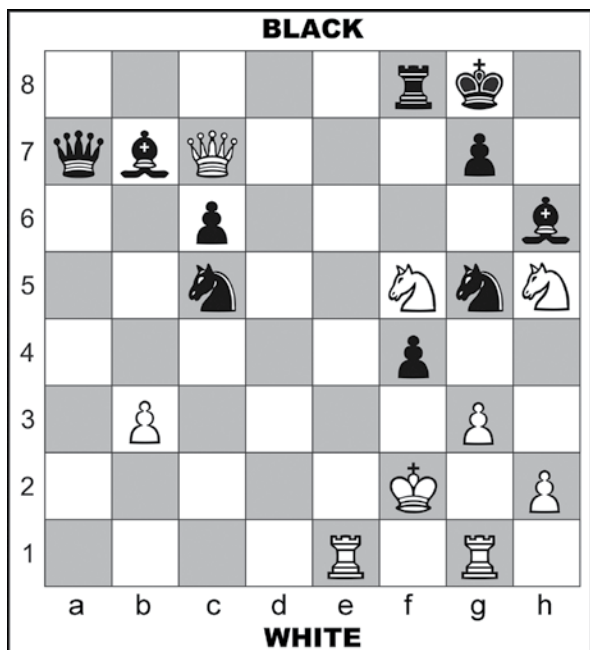
I should add that my 6-year-old happened upon a winning strategy that, if she starts with it, *will win every time!* It took her dear old dad quite a while to figure out why she had started winning every time, so I also got some good practice at losing graciously. (This was not going quite as planned!) So, we later upgraded from the 3 by 3 *Gobblet Gobblers* board to the adult version, *Gobblet*, which features a 4 by 4 board, and 12 pieces per player instead of 9. And it seems to have no guaranteed way to win. Both games are being put to regular use in our home even now more than a year after we bought them.



ENTICING ENIGMAS & CEREBRAL CHALLENGES



Chess Puzzle #232



WHITE to Mate in 2

Or, If it is BLACK's Move, **BLACK to Mate in 3**

Riddle for Punsters #232

"Cameras Ready! Let's Shoot Those Scenes!"

A young man was exceptionally fast drawing a handgun and was hired to play the starring role as the sheriff in a western TV show. His meteoric rise to fame was appropriate for such a s_____ing s_____.

Problem to Ponder #232

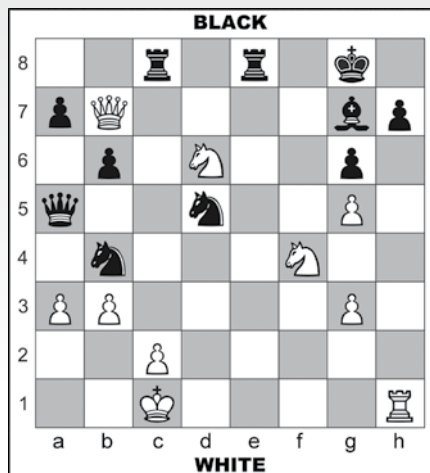
"Field Work – Something to be Ditched?"

Summer is coming and a 6 km long drainage ditch needs to be dug in the middle of Farmer Hans' field for carrying away floodwater. Three workers can dig 60 m of ditch in one 8-hour day. If they work 12 hours per day, they get tired and can dig only 80 m of ditch. How many days will it take to complete the 6 km ditch if

- There are 10 workers working 8 hours a day, 6 days per week (They do not work on Sundays.)
- There are 12 workers and a third of them work 8-hour days while the rest work 12-hour days, with both groups working only Monday to Friday, so 5 days each week.

Last Month's Solutions

Solution to Chess Puzzle #231



WHITE TO MATE IN 2

Descriptive Notation
 1. Q-KB7 ch K-R1
 2. NxP mate

Algebraic Notation
 1. Qb7-f7 + Kg8-h8
 2. Nf4xg6 ++

BLACK TO MATE IN 2

Descriptive Notation
 1. ----- QxP ch
 2. K-Q2 B-B6 ch
 3. K-Q1 Q-R8 mate

OR
 1. ----- RxP ch
 2. K-N1 N-B6 ch
 3. K-R1 R-QR7(or QxP) mate

MATE SOONER IF

1. ----- RxP ch
 2. K-Q1 N-B6 mate

Answer to Riddle for Punsters

#231 - **"Check the King and Check the Cheque?"**

The school chess club had durable chess pieces but the boards were made of cardboard and needing replacing. The school board was asked for the money to do so. Approval was given at a board meeting with the condition that the club not go overboard on the money spent. The ones purchased were somewhat borderline extravagant but when the receipt was submitted the school accountant was feeling rather bored and approved the purchase and sent the club a cheque without checking into it further.

Answer to Problem to Ponder

#231 - **"Give that Car Room to Really Move!"**

A remote-control toy car, speeding up from rest at a constant rate of acceleration for 10 seconds, traveled 16 m in the first 4 seconds. How far will it have travelled 10 seconds after it started moving?

The initial speed is 0 m/s. Acceleration was constant for 10 seconds.

Distance in the first 4 seconds was 16 m. Distance = average speed x time so 16 = average speed x 4 so the average speed was 16/4 = 4 m/s = average of

the initial speed and the speed at 4 seconds. 4 = average of 0 and 8 so the speed at 4 s was 8 m/s. The accelerate rate = change of speed/time taken = (8-0)/4 = 2 m/s per second. Therefore, after 10 seconds the change of speed will be 2(10) = 20 m/s. Since the starting speed is 0 the speed after 10 s will be 20 m/s and so the average over the first 10 s will be (0+20)/2 = 10 m/s. At an average speed of 10 m/s for 10 s **the distance travelled = (10 m/s)(10 s) = 100 m.**

Algebraic Notation

1. ----- Qa5xa3 +
 2. Kc1-d2 Bg7-c3 +
 3. Kd2-d1 Qa3-a1 ++

OR

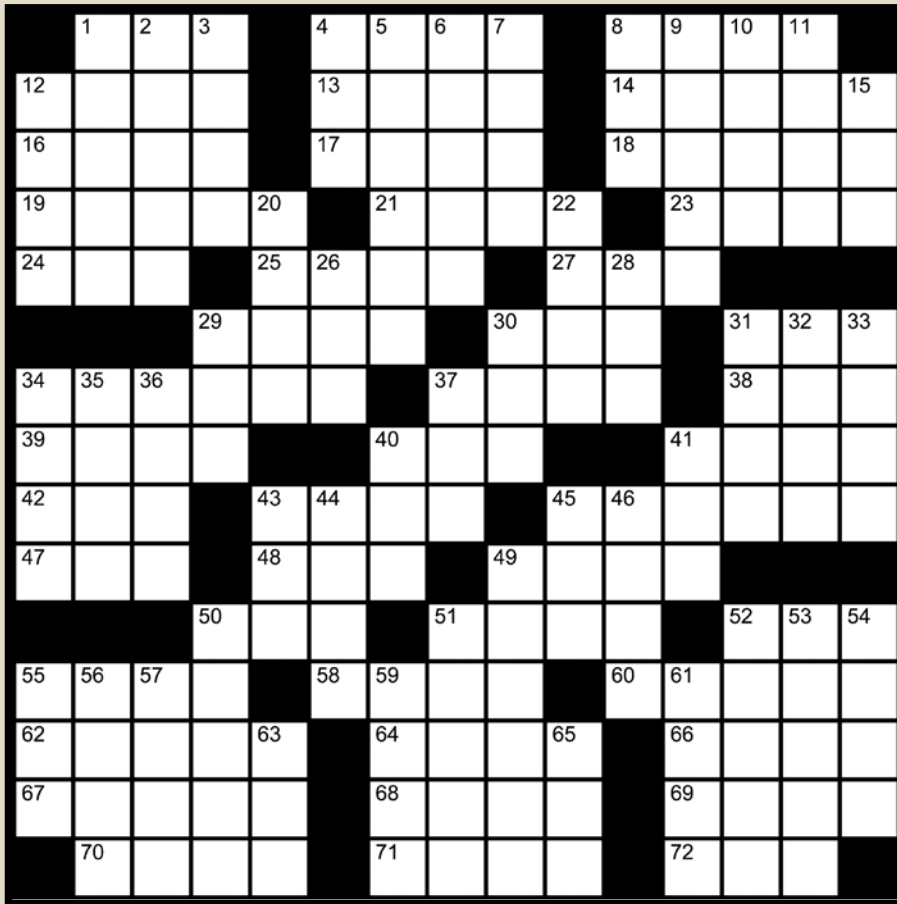
1. ----- Rc8xc2 +
 2. Kc1-b1 Nd5-c3 +
 3. Kb1-a1 Rc2-a2
 or Qa5xa3 ++

MATE SOONER IF

1. ----- Rc8xc2 +
 2. Kc1-d1 Nd5-c3 ++

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

BY JEFF DYKSTRA - SERIES 2-9



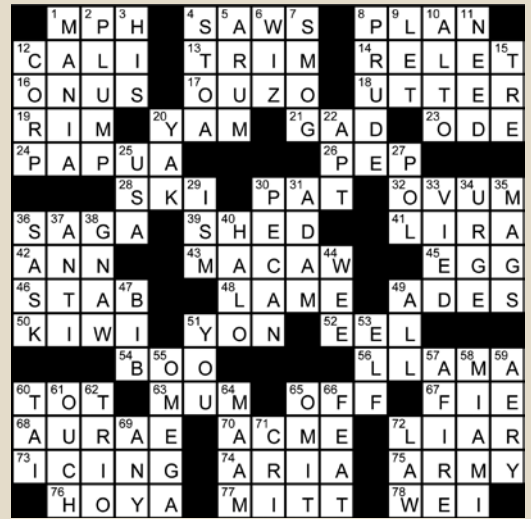
ACROSS

1. Madam ____: witch in *The Sword in the Stone*
4. "have cast up their siege ____" (Job 19)
8. What's left after a fight (for the loser)
12. Prefix meaning *half* (e.g. of a sphere)
13. Anything that becomes like God to us
14. Relating to the ulna in the forearm
16. Hannibal took his elephants over them.
17. Richard Henry ____, author of sailing saga
18. This high flatland is a real ____, eh!
19. Language with a 28-letter alphabet
21. It's criminal what this group gets up to!
23. "You ____ not be afraid" (Deut. 18)
24. It's fitting that this be used for a lock.
25. Opposite of *base* in chemistry
27. A bad newspaper
29. Swedish brand of wooden toy trains
30. "used to ____ under the palm" (Judges 4)
31. Definitely *the* only definite article
34. ____-____ Pete (Mickey Mouse's archenemy)
37. "...____ yesterday, today, ..." (Heb. 13)
38. Short name for your beloved
39. Undersized animal in a litter
40. "will ____ your flesh like fire." (James 5)
41. "____ was set... to eat." (Gen. 24)
42. Notable historical period
43. "will ____ with a rod..." (Rev. 2, 12)
45. Prefix referring to fakery or poor imitation
47. "chop them up like meat in a ____" (Micah 3)
48. "if we ____ according to his will" (1 John)
49. ____ Grey (author of early Westerns)
50. Say it twice to a captain to

51. Structure housing grain or missiles
52. "they have ____ a pit" (Jer. 18)
55. "Enoch, the seventh from ____" (Jude)
58. "As day was about to ____," (Acts 27)
60. "your sins... as ____ as snow" (Isaiah 1)
62. Reasoning, or the system that allows it
64. Set of options for eating or word processing
66. "You can't fool me. I'm ____ you!"
67. Favored instrument of Chopin and Liszt
68. Oasis where Israel camped (Ex. 16)
69. "does it ____ good to... oppress...?" (Job 10)
70. Site for a ten-year war in Greek legend
71. Open-handed hit, usually to the face
72. Make a mistake; slip up

accept an order.

LAST MONTH'S SOLUTION



SERIES 2-8

DOWN

1. Hand-to-hand fighting
2. Give the clear impression (that...)
3. "sling a stone... and not ____" (Judges 20)
4. Get ____ of = eliminate
5. Slow tempo for music
6. One third of a triad?
7. "Do not ____ evil against..." (Prov. 3)
8. Large sandwich (best enjoyed underwater?)
9. "While he ____ to Peter and John," (Acts 3)
10. Prefix meaning *before*
11. Speed at which something happens
12. "the ____ spreads his wings" (Job 39)
15. Sea parted to save Israel (Ex. 14)
20. Fast but unclean animal (Lev. 11)
22. Adjective describing dark humor
26. It has more smoke than fire (short form).
28. "he... neither ____ nor drank" (Acts 9)
29. Abbreviation for deli sandwich
30. "they ____ down to eat" (Gen. 37)
31. "How Great ____ Art"
32. Parka part
33. Prefix meaning *within* or *inner*
34. What you do before painting (short form)
35. Monetary unit for Greece, Italy, Portugal...
36. What blind guides strain out (Matt. 23)
37. "It's not ____ much" (Scottish modesty), or envelope addressed to self
40. Largest deer species besides moose and sambar
41. Charge for services
43. ____ Charles: American singer and songwriter
44. "the vessels ____ in worship" (Heb. 9)
45. Good friend
46. "his clothing white as ____" (Matt. 28)
49. Flower native to southern U.S. and Mexico
50. ____ acid (type of biological compound)
51. Really fine, excellent (often used ironically)
52. Less formal eatery, or one who eats there
53. "the gloom of ____ darkness" (Jude)
54. Topic in math (abbr.)
55. Singular of 16 Across
56. "Just ____!" (slogan for brand of sneakers)
57. Jelly-like substance used to culture bacteria
59. If you minus Jay from James
61. Object used to cover legs or water lawns
63. Shy, or perhaps just playing shy
65. Baseball arbitrator (found in *Uzbek Empire*?)

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REAGAN VS. OBAMA P.26

MY DEMOCRACY IS BETTER THAN YOUR DEMOCRACY P.23

ARE THEY WINGING?

AND THE CHURCH P.16



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TIME TO LAUGH!

...AND A TIME TO CONTEMPLATE AND CRITIQUE

OR AND THE OF FAITH P.11
EDY AS A CALLING P.16

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PERSPECTIVE

LEST WE FORGET

On May 5, 2015 the Netherlands celebrated the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II with a re-enactment of the liberation.

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