

Reformed

A MAGAZINE FOR THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

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Volume 38 Issue No. 3

PERSPECTIVE

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DO WE "LIKE" SIN?

P.39

REAL PROGRESS:
CANADA IS WARMING UP
TO AN ABORTION LAW

P.37

ON TIDYING UP
WITH AND WITHOUT
MARIE KONDO

P.30

NOTA
BENE

p. 9

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ON TIDYING UP WITH AND WITHOUT MARIE KONDO

P.30

by Rachel Tenney



BASED ON A TRUE STORY
- Hannah Grieser P.27



**MAINTAINING MOTIVATION
FOR OFFICEBEARERS**
- Rev. Jack Moesker P.15



**ONLINE TOOL PROMOTES
FRIENDSHIP... AND
SOMETIMES MARRIAGE**
P.32 - Sharon L. Bratcher

FROM THE EDITOR P.6
- Jon Dykstra

NOTA BENE P.9
IN A NUTSHELL P.13

**CANADA IS WARMING UP TO
AN ABORTION LAW** P.37
- Mark Penninga

**IT IS TIME FOR A RETIREMENT
REFORMATION!** P.44
- Bruce Bruinsma

READER RESPONSE

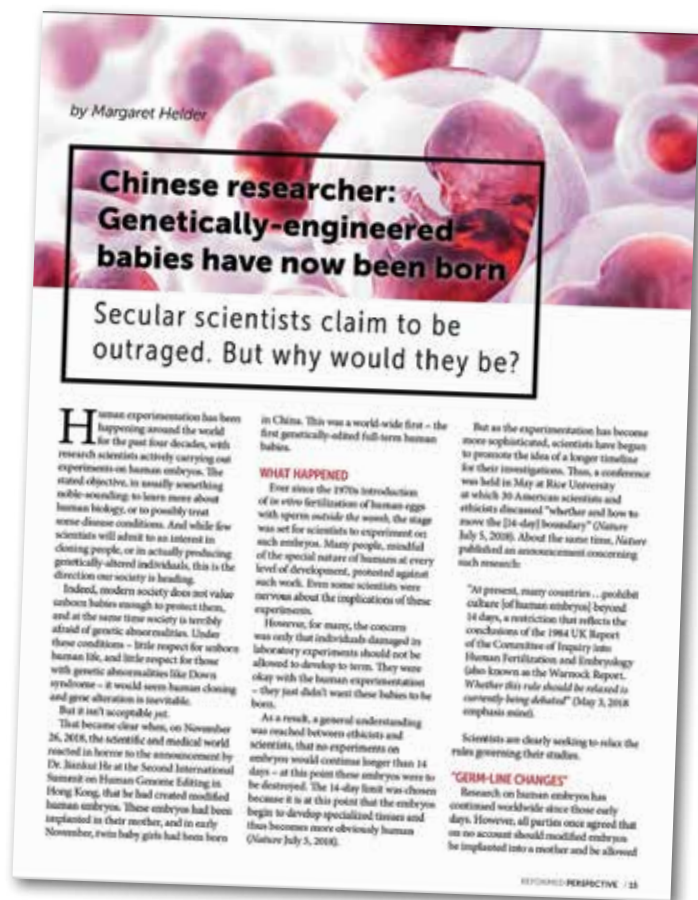
DEAR EDITOR,

In Margaret Helder's "Genetically Engineered Babies Have Now Been Born" in the Jan/Feb 2019 issue, Dr. Helder outlined the implications of Dr. Jiankui He's inhumane experiments with embryos. Dr. He's goal was to create babies that were HIV-resistant. However, He's methods have sparked controversy throughout the scientific community.

Dr. Helder's article was well-written and informative, but her conclusion that "manipulation [of human genomes] in laboratories should have no place in our society" wrongly condemns this research. While Dr. He's methods are no doubt unethical, it does not mean that there will never be ethical ways to modify a human's DNA sequence to cure genetic diseases in the future.

Upon completion of the Human Genome Project in 2001, scientists began looking for ways to apply our knowledge of the DNA sequence medically. Many of the recent experiments, involving CRISPR/Cas-9 technologies and other similar devices such as TALENS, have displayed incredibly promising results. Recently scientists have reduced the severity of genetic deafness in mice and edited mouse bone marrow to treat sickle cell disease. They have even successfully treated, and possibly cured, leukemia in two children. To the best of my knowledge, these experiments were done ethically.

The rash actions of Dr. He must be condemned, but we must not be equally rash in eliminating research on human applications to this technology altogether. Genome editing has the potential to cure millions of people. The technology is currently too dangerous to use ethically on humans, but one cannot deny that it may be possible to ethically experiment on humans in the future. When we have a better understanding of gene-editing technology, I believe that it is possible that genome



manipulation will revolutionize the way we treat currently incurable diseases.

Melannie Teitsma
Winnipeg, Manitoba

DR. HELDER'S RESPONSE

Ms. Melannie Teitsma's understanding is that in my article I intended to condemn all potential treatments of genetic diseases in humans. But that isn't so. While the article did condemn germline research and possible treatment, I wasn't speaking to type of therapeutic gene therapy that involves only the somatic cells in an individual. Somatic cells are the cells which make up most of a person's body and which die with that individual; the content of these cells will never be passed on to future generations. Germline cells, on the other hand, are the eggs and sperm which combine to form a new individual. Any changes to the eggs and sperm or to fertilized embryos, have the capacity to be

passed on to the descendants of that individual.

So the key question then is whether it is ethical to experiment on, or change, germline cells which have the potential to transmit any genetic changes to future generations. This question is a major concern even to some secular scientists such as Jennifer Doudna, who first described the gene editing capacity of the CRISPR-Cas9 system. In her book, *A Crack in Creation*, Dr. Doudna firstly discussed *therapeutic* uses of CRISPR:

"Although we still have a ways to go before CRISPR-based therapies will be widely available to human

patients, their potential is clear. Gene editing holds the promise of life-changing treatments and, in some cases, lifesaving cures."

Nobody is suggesting that such research and approaches are not ethical and promising. However, Dr. Doudna's approach to *germline* applications of CRISPR is totally different. She declared:

"This possibility gnawed at me. Humans had never before had a tool like CRISPR, and it had the potential to turn not only living people's genomes but also all future genomes into a collective palimpsest upon which any bit of genetic code could be erased and overwritten depending on the whims of the generation doing the editing."

She was so oppressed by these concerns that she began to have nightmares. In one she encountered Adolph Hitler (with a face like a pig) who asked her for information on her amazing technology. Thus she reported:

"His terrifying appearance and sinister request were enough to jolt me awake. As I lay in the dark, my heart racing, I couldn't escape the awful premonition with which the dream had left me. The ability to refashion the human genome was a truly incredible power, one that

could be devastating if it fell into the wrong hands."

Dr. Doudna later declares: "As I thought about it, the implications of any research involving gene editing of the human germline became more and more troubling." Later she changes her mind somewhat:

"If CRISPR could eliminate a disease-causing mutation in the embryo with high certainty and only a slight risk of introducing a second off-target mutation elsewhere, the potential payoffs might well outweigh the dangers."

But this process depends on PGD (or preimplantation genetic diagnosis) of embryos fertilized *in vitro* and the discarding of those embryos/individuals who do not carry the desired trait. Obviously Christians cannot support the killing of human embryos in treatment and in earlier research protocols. Lastly Dr. Doudna declares: "The fact is that editing a particular gene will always carry the risk of unforeseen effects."

It was thus my contention in that article, and still is, that Christians cannot condone alterations to the human germline. So yes, let's wholeheartedly support gene therapy, but not changes to the human germline such as Dr. He carried out in China. Ms. Teitsma is to be commended for entering into a conversation on this important topic.

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Are we “BLESSED” or “PRIVILEGED”?

They might seem close synonyms but the Devil is in the details

by Jon Dykstra

A couple of years back a viral video showed a large group of older teens getting ready to race for a \$100 bill. It was men and women, blacks and whites, athletic sorts and not so, and all things being equal, we’d expect one of the long lean guys to run away with the money.

But the point of the video was to explain that things are not equal. The leader of the group, Adam Donyes, had a series of eight statements to tell the students before the race got started. The teens were supposed to take two steps forward for each one that applied to them:

- “Your parents are still married.”
- “You grew up with a father figure in your home.”
- “You had access to a private education.”
- “You had access to a free tutor growing up.”
- “You never had to worry about your cellphone being shut off.”
- “You never had to help mom or dad with the bills.”
- “It wasn’t because of your athletic ability that you don’t have to pay for college.”
- “You never wondered where your next meal was going to come from.”

Donyes was trying to make a very specific point. He told the group that

each of his statements had “nothing to do with decisions *you’ve* made.” The students up front were there not because of anything *they* had done, but because of the position they had been born into, or their parents had put them in. He told those students:

“...if this was a fair race, and everybody was back on that line I guarantee you some of these black dudes would smoke all of you. And it is only because you have this big of a head start that you’re possibly going to win this race called life. That is a *picture of life*, ladies and gentlemen. Nothing you’ve done has put you in the lead that you’re in right now.”

Then he shouted “go!” and the race was on.

DRAWING OUT BIBLICAL TRUTHS

There are some clear biblical truths that could be drawn out of this video. Luke 12:48b might come to mind:

“From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.”

Or we might think of how the three servants were given different amounts of money in the Parable of the Talents in Matt. 25. It’s important for us to understand that for those who have been blessed with more, God has raised expectations for us.

The video also lines up well with 1 Cor. 12 where Paul notes our different gifts, comparing them to parts of the body. One person might be a hand, another a foot, and another an eye. And just like the “eye cannot say to the hand ‘I have no need of you’” so too we shouldn’t look down on those with different gifts than our own. That’s an important lesson, and Donyes tries to make that specifically to those out in the front.

But in this same chapter Paul makes another point, one that would have been an important one for all those farther back. We are *all* part of the body, and we shouldn’t overlook what God gifts has given us:

“...the body does not consist of one member but many. If the foot should say, ‘because I am a hand I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body....

*Being blessed makes us grateful,
but being privileged brings guilt.*

As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.”

GUILT VS. GRATITUDE

So there was a lot to love in this video. But what made it go viral was how it seemed the perfect illustration of “privilege,” and specifically “white privilege,” since blacks were clustered in the back, and the very front was populated with whites.

The way the term *privileged* is used it can seem like a close synonym to *blessed*. One person says, “I’m blessed to have always had a roof over my head” and another says, “I was privileged to never have to worry about being homeless.” Just a matter of *tomato/tomato*, right? Two terms for the same idea.

But there’s an important sense in which the two words are actually opposites.

Blessed is an inherently positive word. When we say we are blessed in this way or that, it is a note of appreciation to our “blessor” whether that is God, or maybe our parents, spouse, friends, or children.

But whereas we *celebrate* the ways in which we are blessed, we *admit* to being privileged – we’re supposed to “check our privilege.” Being blessed makes us grateful, but being privileged brings guilt. Parents stayed together? You got to go to a basketball camp last summer? *Lucky you, but not all of us are so privileged.*

There’s more to *privileged* than just guilt. Often times it is shorthand for something like: “You’re privileged so you don’t know me – you haven’t lived through what I’ve had to endure.” There’s truth to that – if we’ve been sheltered from some of the world’s harshness that can bring with it a naivety. And that might leave a gulf between us and others who haven’t been so blessed. But even in this usage *privileged* is a negative word. Noting differences can be a step to understanding, to beginning to know one another. But the way *privileged* is used it is not a conversation-starter. This is a putdown used as a

conversation-stopper.

While Donyes didn’t use the word *privilege* in his video, there was a reason so many others thought it fit – his wasn’t a celebration of blessing; there was a touch of shame instead.

If the difference between *blessed* and *privileged* is still muddy consider this: when we are blessed and others are not, what do we want for them? Don’t we want them to have what we have?

But when we admit to being privileged, is that a state we’d wish on anyone else? Being privileged isn’t something you aspire to. This is part of the “victimhood culture” where the worse off you are, the less guilt you have to feel for what you have. But when it’s good, or at least less shameful, to be hard off, then it’s bad to become more “privileged.”

A wise man once said that the cultural battle we’re in is all about language, and this is an example. These two words – *blessed* and *privileged* – seem almost synonyms, but whereas the first takes us to gratitude and God, the second leads to unremitting guilt and stagnation.

INEQUALITY VS. POVERTY

Inequality and *poverty* are also used interchangeably. When we see people who don’t have a warm bed to sleep in, or don’t have money for needed medical expenses, then we’ll quite naturally wish their situation wasn’t so *unequal*. We want them to have what we have, and wish that they could live like we do.

But what we’re really lamenting here is not *inequality* but *poverty*. If inequality was our concern, we could be happy as long as everyone was equally needy. But that’s not what we’re after. Our real goal is for the poor to be raised out of poverty. So here, too, there’s a sense in which this is all just *tomato/tomato* – we might use

different words, but we all want to help the poor.

Yet, once again there is an important sense in which two seeming synonyms have dangerously different meanings.

While “fighting poverty” is focused on helping the poor, fighting inequality can be about tearing down the rich. That shift of focus happens whenever we start believing that one person’s success happens at other people’s expense.

That’s what Donyes taught in his video. He told students that his \$100 race was like “this race called life – this is a picture of life, ladies and gentlemen.” But his race had only one winner. And that winner could only succeed if others failed. In this setting every two steps someone got to take forward diminished the chances of winning for all those left behind.

If that’s how you thought the world operated, what sort of attitude would you have towards millionaires and billionaires? If you believed they got their wealth by impoverishing the rest of us, what would you see as the best way to help the poor? Just that quick, concern for the poor becomes “Let’s get the filthy rich!”

The world’s wealth isn’t fixed and limited. If it was, would the Tenth Commandment make sense? There God tells us it’s none of our business what our neighbor has, but if our neighbor could only get wealthy by keeping others poor, wouldn’t we all have a legitimate interest in making sure he didn’t get too much?

The truth is, life is not a winner-take-all-race. We can thank God that’s true spiritually, with God’s children numbering as the sand on the seashore – God has made us all champions, and there are too many of us to even count.

And it’s just as true materially. Even if someone beats me out for my dream job, that doesn’t mean I have to go jobless. There are other careers. I, too, can succeed. And if I start a successful

Just that quick, concern for the poor becomes, "Let's get the filthy rich!"

business, yes, I might grow wealthy, but I'll be making my money by creating a product that others find useful enough to pay me for. I won't become wealthy at my customers' expense. They're only buying my widget because they think it is worth *more* than I am asking for it (or they would never buy it). In a very real way in all the countless merchant/customer exchanges that take place around the world *both sides* are the wealthier for it. That's why both customer and merchant will say thank-you at the conclusion of a sale – both have become richer...and at no one's expense.

Of course, robbers do exist – some people *do* become wealthy only by taking from others. But that's not the rule. God has so made our world that we can work together to each other's benefit. That's why the Tenth Commandment makes sense. And when we realize that our neighbors' wealth isn't making anyone poor, then we can get back to fighting poverty in fruitful, rather than covetous ways.

CONCLUSION

Does that mean we should shake our finger at anyone who speaks of being *privileged* or uses the word *inequality*? Not at all. We can put some care and attention to what terms *we* use, but we don't need to stress it when others use something else. Rather than going all grammar-nazi on them we can listen in humility, try to be understanding, and use context to hear what they are saying.

What's actually important is seeing through the Devil's gambit here. Many a best-of-intentioned Christian loves the Lord with all his heart, but there's a reason God also demands our minds (Matt. 22:37). The Prince of Perversion loves to misdirect what is good and right to his own completely different ends. Our guard against him is knowing God's Word, and learning how to apply it. Otherwise the Devil might have us, in the name of helping the poor, casting covetous eyes at the wealth of our neighbor. And if he could, he'd love to rob God of the

praise that is His due by making us feel guilty, not grateful, for all the blessings our Father showers on us.

Thankfully, in the great blessing of the forgiveness of sins, we can put away all guilt and all envy, and instead respond in wholehearted, full-throated gratitude to our great God. RP



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

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NOTA BENE

News
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BAD NEWS FOR PLANNED PARENTHOOD IS GOOD NEWS FOR THE UNBORN!

BY JON DYKSTRA



If something makes Planned Parenthood sad, then it's likely there's something for the unborn and their advocates to celebrate. That was certainly true when the abortion giant issued their press release "New Data on abortion bans show alarming spike" at the end of March. The report gave reason for pro-lifers to thank God for what progress is being made.

So what's the good new? In the first four months of 2019 we've seen:

- "250 bills restricting abortion have been filed in...state legislatures"
- 41 states have seen some abortion-restricting bill proposed
- "Seven states have proposed total bans on abortion"
- "Six states are down to one abortion provider"

While most pro-life bills aren't successful, this is the path William Wilberforce took to end slavery in Britain. He proposed unsuccessful bills and kept on proposing them again and again until finally one of his bills wasn't unsuccessful after all. In the same way, these 250 bills in 2019 are keeping the plight of the unborn in the public eye. We can hope and pray that God will bless these efforts to provide these little ones the protection they need.

MALE RAPPER "BREAKS" WOMEN'S WEIGHT-LIFTING RECORD

BY JON DYKSTRA

For a world increasingly confused about gender, February was an illuminating month with not one, but two well-publicized examples of how it is God, and not our feelings, that makes us male and female (Gen. 1:27).

In the first instance two boys identifying as girls placed first and second in the girls' 55-meter dash at Connecticut's state indoor championship. One brave competitor dared protest, telling the Associated Press: "We all know the outcome of the race before it even starts; it's demoralizing."

While the two boys are the best "girls" in their state, they aren't even in the top five nationally. So the ridiculousness of having boys – albeit not particularly speedy boys – running against girls was lost on some.

But two weeks later British rapper Zuby offered up his own helpful bit of clarity when he decided to break the British women's weightlifting records. First up was the deadlift record. Though only a self-described "recreational lifter" Zuby bested the British women's record by a "wide margin." Then he tackled the squat

record, and finally bested the women's bench press record too.

Afterwards, he posted short videos of his efforts to Twitter, assuring viewers it was all okay because he was "identifying as a woman at the time."

When someone pointed out his women's records weren't official because Zuby hadn't demonstrated his level of male testosterone was "below 10 nanomols per litre" (as apparently international competition standards require men to do when they want to compete as women) Zuby had the perfect PC response: "Stop questioning my lived experience."

Or, in other words, what was this de-tractor doing, bringing in objective measurable standards when the world has already concluded feelings trump reality. If being a woman is simply a state of mind, if a person's genitalia and genetics don't matter, then why should "nanomols"? Or as Zuby put it, "Stop being a bigot."

The best supportive tweet? A Steve Green shared he was setting some records of his own: "I broke the Olympic men's record because my 2 kg dumbbell identifies as a 400 kg weight."

CAREER OVER KIDS: SOUTH KOREAN WOMEN AREN'T HAVING BABIES

BY JON DYKSTRA

A new report has South Korea's population beginning to decline in just ten years' time. Statistics Korea reported in late February that the country's fertility rate dropped to 0.98, or less than one child per woman. To put this in context, women need to be having at least 2 children each to keep the population stable: one to replace her, and one to replace her husband (the exact figure is even a bit higher – more like 2.1 – to account for infant mortality). This less-than-1 rate means that South Korea's population is headed for a precipitous drop.

Statistics Korea numbers released a month later bore that out. This year, for the first time, the country expects more people to die than be born, with an estimate of 309,000 births, and 314,000 deaths. Immigrants will keep the population stable for a few more years, but starting in 2029 the coun-



try's population is expected to take a seeming irrevocable downward turn.

The country's coming decline seems to be caused by both women and men devaluing marriage and motherhood. The government has tried to encourage couples to have more children by extending maternity leave, and expanding state daycare. But these measures don't get at the fundamental issue – is being a mother honorable? When a culture values women only for the career they have outside the home, then women

aren't going to want to do anything to impede their progress in that career. Maternity leave – especially longer maternity leave – can't help but slow a woman's career progress (it's hard to get noticed by the bosses when you aren't there). And while easier access to daycare will mean it's possible to juggle having kids and a career, if career comes first, why even bother with the juggling?

As a Church we need to show the world a different way, making it clear we understand children are the blessing (Prov. 17:6, Ps. 113:9, 127:3-5), and the priority (Gen. 1:28, Prov. 22:6) that God says they are. Whether that's mom sacrificing her career, or dad giving up nights with the guys, or the pair of them forgoing any sort of "me time," we know parenting is our priority...and our privilege.

SOURCES: Shannon Roberts' "Childbirth and marriage are 'just a pain' in Korea" posted to Mercatornet.com on Mar. 29, 2019; Choi Kyu-min's "Population starts dwindling a decade earlier than expected" posted to English.Chosun.com on Mar. 29, 2019

WHY HAVEN'T WE HEARD FROM ET?

BY JON DYKSTRA

Some 70 years ago physicist Enrico Fermi looked up at the stars and wondered where everyone was at. With billions of galaxies, each with billions of stars, it seemed inconceivable to him that ours would be the only planet to evolve life. So where was everyone?

His query is now called Fermi's Paradox, and on March 18 a group of about 60 scientists met in Paris to share their latest theories as to why we haven't heard from any of our galactic neighbors. *Live Science's* Mindy Weisberger shared some of their creative ideas:

- The "zoo hypothesis" - Earth is like a galactic animal reserve where aliens are leaving us alone to be observed in our natural habitat.
- We've been quarantined - Aliens

know about us, but don't like us.

- Aliens are trapped by their super-planets' intense gravity.
- Aliens have come and gone, dying off before we had a chance to meet them.

But while these make for great fiction, there are no facts to back



them up. The only evidence for these theories is that aliens *haven't* contacted us. So why did scientists bother meeting to swap what amounts to just-so stories? And why did *Live Science* and other media outlets bother covering the event?

They covered them because these stories, to the undiscerning, *seem* to offer an explanation to

Fermi's Paradox and the problem it presents to the evolutionary theory. But what does it say about the theory if its defenders are willing to hype stories that the public will mistake for scientific, factual, or evidence-based?

SOURCE: "Are Aliens Ignoring Us? Maybe We're Already Their Captives in a 'Galactic Zoo'" posted to LiveScience.com Mar. 25, 2019



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

BY JON DYKSTRA

GEOFFREY CHAUCER ON THE PULL OF PORN ON YOUR KIDS TOO

Some parents make the mistake of thinking it is only bad kids – other people's kids – who get sucked in by the lure of pornography. Well, Geoffrey Chaucer has a thought for you.

Ful ofte tyme I rede that
no man truste in his owene
perfeccioun, but he be stronger
than Sampson, and hoolier than
David, and wiser than Salomon.

If you didn't quite catch that, here's an updated version:

I've read that no man should trust his own perfection unless he is stronger than Sampson, and holier than David, and wiser than Solomon.

These here are the strongest, wisest, and most devoted, men in the Bible and they all succumbed to sexual sin. Do we really think our kids are so much better than them? Let's not be that naïve (1 Cor. 10:12).

While our children are not strong enough to stand up to temptation on their own, they can run to Jesus, relying on His strength and not their own. This means regularly talking to Him in prayer and hearing from Him by reading His Word. We also need to teach our children how to use God-given wisdom in fleeing digital sin by using accountability partners (Eccl 4:12), or by going to the seemingly extreme measures of "cutting off" (Matt. 5:29-30) certain apps, and eliminating or severely curtailing their smartphone or Internet access.

But we can't go on doing nothing, and pretending our kids are, "stronger than Sampson...holier than David, and wiser than Solomon."

DON'T DO THE "DISMAL SCIENCE" DISMALLY

"It is no crime to be ignorant of economics, which is, after all, a specialized discipline and one that most people consider to be a 'dismal science.' But it is totally irresponsible to have a loud and vociferous opinion on economic subjects while remaining in this state of ignorance."

- **Murray Rothbard** (echoing the wisdom of Prov. 10:19)

CURING THE POSTMODERN DISEASE

During the two years RC Sproul Jr. taught post-secondary freshman English it became clear that many of his students had

succumbed to the sickness of postmodernism. But Sproul was ready with a cure for their disease. In a 2006 speech he recounted how he administered the cure to one student:

[A] student in the back blurted out, "There's no such thing as objective truth." Just like that.

And I said to him "you get an F in this class for this semester" and then I went back to the conversation we were having. And, of course, in the corner of my eye I could see his blood pressure rising, and his face getting redder and redder. And he's holding his hand up.

"Yes what is it?"

What do you think he said? "That's not fair!"

I strung him along a little longer. I said, "I'm sorry. You must have misunderstood me. I'm not giving you the F because anybody stupid enough to say there's no such thing as objective truth obviously deserves an F. That's not my thinking at all! You misunderstood. No, I'm just giving you the F because I want to." And then I went back to the rest of the class.

He got madder. By now some of the students had figured it out. Some of them hadn't, including that one. And he said, "I'll tell the administration!"

Finally I had pity on him and I said, "What are you going to tell them? Are you going to tell them I have failed to measure up to some external, objective, transcendent standard of what's right and wrong? Because you told me there is no such thing!"

"Oh... okay. Well... I guess there is."

"Welcome back to the human race," and then we went on with our business.

SOURCE: Speech entitled: "The Weapons of our Warfare: Beauty"

STRONG MEN CAN LAUGH

"Moderate strength is shown in violence, supreme strength is shown in levity." – **G.K. Chesterton**

ON GIVING

"We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give." – **Winston Churchill**

AN IPHONE HACK TO TRY

"Two months ago, I pulled the trigger on a revolutionary move for me: I deleted the internet from my iPhone. I have access to all my essential apps, but I no longer have social media or access to any websites. I can do a quick Google search, but nothing more. I. Am. So. Glad I did.

"It broke my addictive habit of staring off into iPhone-world,



and I don't miss it a bit. I wish I did, actually: it would justify the *3 hours* of time (according to Screentime) I've saved every day NOT looking at my phone.

"Here's how to do it: Under Settings > Screen Time > Content & Privacy Restrictions > Content Restrictions > Web Content choose "Allowed Websites Only" and don't choose any except a few that you need access to (the only one I allowed was my bank account's website, connected to my banking app).

"Do it. Try it for a week. Write me then."

– **Nicholas McDonald**, reprinted with permission from his email newsletter The Bard Owl (ScribblePreach.com).

HOW MANY TYPES OF PEOPLE?

While there are just two types of people in the world – those willing to ask for directions, and men – that has become a contentious point.

But after doing some extensive research we've discovered that even as the binary nature of Mankind is being disputed in the broader culture, in the world of humor the consensus still leans heavily towards just two.

- There are 10 types of people in the world: those who get binary and those who don't.
- There are 3 types of people in the world: those who can count and those who can't.
- There are 2 types of people in the world: those who have the paper come up over the toilet roll, and monsters.
- There are 2 types of people in the world: those who think there are 2 types of people in the world, and those who don't.
- There are 2 types of people in the world: those who finish jokes...

WHAT IS SOCIALISM?

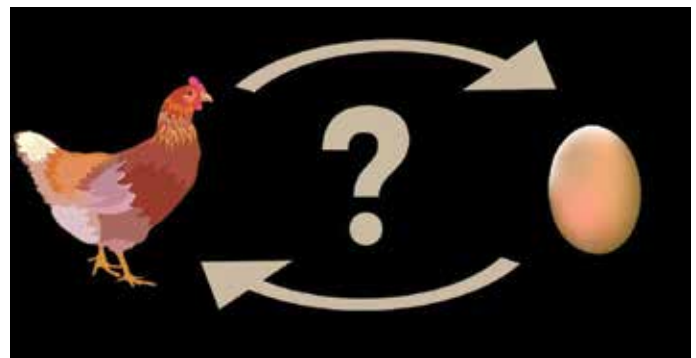
"Let's first define the term socialism.... Socialism isn't happy thoughts, nebulous fantasies, mere good intentions, or children sharing their Halloween candy with one another. In a modern political, economic, and social context, socialism isn't voluntary like the Girl Scouts. Its central characteristic is the concentration of power to forcibly achieve one or more (or usually all) of these purposes: central planning of the economy, government ownership of property, and the redistribution of wealth. No amount of 'we do it all for you' or 'it's for your own good' or 'we're helping people' rhetoric can erase that. What makes socialism socialism is the fact that you can't opt out, a point eloquently made here by David Boaz of the Cato Institute:

'One difference between libertarianism [a personal choice and liberty-based system] and socialism is that a socialist society can't tolerate groups of people practicing freedom, but a libertarian society can comfortably allow people to choose voluntary socialism. If a group of people – even a very large group – wanted to purchase land and own it in common, they would be free to do so. The libertarian legal order would require only that no one be coerced into joining or giving up his property.'

"Government, whether big or small, is the only entity in society that possesses a legal monopoly over the use of force. The more force it initiates against people, the more it subordinates the choices of the ruled to the whims of their rulers – that is, the more socialist it becomes. A reader may object to this description by insisting that to 'socialize' something is to simply 'share' it and 'help people' in the process, but that's baby talk. It's how you do it that defines the system. Do it through the use of force, and it's socialism. Do it through persuasion, free will, and respect for property rights, and it's something else entirely."

– **Lawrence W. Reed**, in *Rendering to Caesar: Was Jesus a Socialist?*

EASY CHRISTIAN ANSWERS TO PHILOSOPHY'S DEEPEST QUESTIONS



There's no end of mysteries to explore in this weird, wacky, and wonderful universe. How is it that light can be both a particle and a wave? How is it possible that the complexity of a single cell surpasses that of the largest city? And how come there's no synonym for thesaurus?

Among life's many questions there's a small collection that garners special attention – they are the deepest and most unfathomable of them all. Or, at least to secular sorts. It turns out that God has given clear and ready answers for these to any who have the ears to hear.

Q. Which came first, the chicken or the egg?

A. The chicken.

How can you have one without first having the other? But when we understand that God created everything in just six days then we can conclude that, just as He created Adam full grown, He probably started chickens off with their adult versions too.

Q. If a tree falls in the forest, and there's nobody around to hear it, does it make a sound?

A. Yes.

Is sound the vibrations in the air, or do those vibrations only become sound when they are heard? Before you answer, consider how there are other vibrations in the air – too low or too high for us to hear – that we consequently don't regard as sound. However, the problem here is that the premise of the question is wrong: Christians know there is always Somebody around.



Q. How did life begin?

A. With a word.

Evolution has no explanation for the origin of life since evolution's two mechanisms – natural selection, and random mutation – require an already living, already replicating organism to exist before they can act on it. Just as there is no possibility of selecting until there's a pool of candidates to select from, there can be no mutation until there's an original to mutate from. While secular sorts have no answer to give, Christians can read all about life's origins in Genesis 1 and 2.

Q. Is my glass half empty or half full?

A. Half full.

Nothing we have in life is deserved so if we're given a glass that's got water right up to the midway point we should view that gratefully, happy for the gift given.

Q. If God can do anything, can He make a rock too heavy for Him to lift?

A. No.

God *can't* do everything. Specifically, He can't do anything contrary to His own character. That's why He can't ignore sin – His character won't allow it. And that's why, to offer us mercy Jesus had to come to Earth to take our sins on Himself – God could only offer mercy in a way that still satisfied His need for justice. It would also be contrary to His character, as a God of order, to make rocks too heavy for Him to lift...or to make square circles, or any number of other nonsensical things.

Q. Is there life after death?

A. Yes!

Unbelieving sorts will speculate about there being something after life, but Christians don't have to. That Jesus died and rose again is the assurance of our own resurrection. He's beaten death!

Q. What is the purpose of life?

A. "To glorify God and enjoy Him forever" (Q.1 Westminster Shorter Catechism)

Money, fame, power, status and even family bring only temporary joys. What Man was created for was an eternal relationship with our infinite God.

Bonus: Q. Did Adam have a belly button?

A. No.

Belly buttons are scars from our umbilical cord connection to our mothers, and since neither Adam or Eve was born, neither of them would have had this scar.

Double Bonus: Q. Who did Cain marry?

A. His sister (or possibly his niece).

While we aren't supposed to marry relatives now, that prohibition came 2,000 years after Cain's time (Leviticus 18:6). So why could he marry a close relation and we can't? The explanation probably comes down to genetics. We all have genetic defects - damaged information in our DNA - but so long as we marry someone unrelated, the effects of those errors won't generally be seen in our children, as the most serious effects of the error are likely to be countered by the corresponding and error-free section in our spouse's genes. But close relatives may share the exact same defects, and were they to marry, their children would be more likely to have genetic diseases. This didn't apply to Adam and Eve, because they started off with perfect genes, and when their children married, they still didn't have many errors to pass on. It was only after a couple thousand years that genetic errors would have so accumulated that close relatives had to be barred from marrying.

With a view to long-term continuity, **Cornerstone Christian School** in Lynden, Washington seeks candidates interested in filling a full time opening at the **elementary** and **high school** levels for the 2019/2020 school year for the position of

GRADE 5/6 TEACHER

Our school has approximately 120 students in grades 1-12, thirteen full or part time teachers, excellent staff relations, a beautiful and functional facility, and a high level of community support. The Lynden area is an idyllic one, with access to a virtual cornucopia of outdoor leisure and recreation activities, and yet is within ninety minutes drive of the major urban centers of Vancouver, British Columbia, and Seattle, Washington.

Interested parties who are committed to serving in the field of Reformed Christian Education and who submit to Scripture as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity are encouraged to contact either the school's Principal:

Mr. Darryn Kleyn

dkleyn@cornerstoneschool.us,
p:(360) 318-0663

or the Chairman:

Mr. Darren Leyenhorst

darren@faberconstruction.com
p:(360) 815-4234

Complete applications consisting of a résumé summarizing university and teaching qualifications, contact information for three references, and a statement of educational philosophy can be sent electronically to either of the above email addresses, or via mail to:

Mr. D. Kleyn, Principal
Cornerstone Christian School
8872 Northwood Road, Lynden,
WA 98264



by Jack Moesker

MAINTAINING THE MOTIVATION OF OFFICEBEARERS

The Bible speaks both to what demotivates elders and deacons and to their motivation

This is an edited transcript of a speech Rev. Moesker gave in 2018 which you can also watch at ReformedPerspective.ca.

According to the dictionary “to motivate” is to spur, or stimulate to action.

There's a whole field of psychology connected with motivation, and you can see some of it in action if you've ever shopped at Costco. They've set up their store strategically to motivate us to buy what we probably don't need. Electronic stuff and jewelry are near the entrance – you'll notice every store is organized the same that way. Clothing and dry goods are in the middle, with the food items toward the back. Most people go there for the food items but we have to pass through all the other stuff to get there, and on the way our carts fill up with all this other stuff as we go on. It's a motivation thing – it's psychology.

There's a whole field of business management that has developed theories of motivation in the work context too. They know what can stimulate employee's behavior; they have desires for: money, success, recognition, job satisfaction, teamwork, etc. Companies will hire motivational speakers to stir up the troops. That makes me think of

the motivational speakers who said, “Whatever you do, always give 100%... unless you're donating blood.”

There might be some psychology connected with the motivation of officebearers in Christ's Church too. I wouldn't count that out. But I'm no psychologist and I believe the topic has to be approached spiritually rather than psychologically. That doesn't make it less practical, not at all. Looking at spiritual things has always got to have practical implications. Serving the Lord concerns real life, also as officebearers.

It's strange – I have a number of books for, and about, officebearers. I checked them all out for some direction for this presentation but none of those books gave practical encouragement and direction on how to stay motivated as an officebearer. So there wasn't a lot to go on from that direction. However, the Bible does speak to this topic.

TWO POINTS

Being an officebearer can be an emotional and spiritual rollercoaster ride. Hopefully this presentation and discussion will be helpful for present and future officebearers as far as staying motivated in their work, and staying on task. So my approach is:

- 1) First, to consider how officebearers can become demotivated pastorally and personally.
- 2) And then think about how to stay motivated, personally, and together as counsel. We'll also look at how we can help each other as officebearers.

1. DEMOTIVATION

So let's look first of all at demotivation. In your pastoral work you can become demotivated. The Bible actually talks about demotivation, on the part of officebearers. In his letters the Apostle Paul writes about being anxious for the churches, and of frustration with church members. But I think the most clear mention of officebearers becoming demotivated is in Hebrews 13:17:

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Consider that last line “Let them do *this* with joy.” Now often that word *this* is connected to *give an account* – that they give account to the Lord, not with groaning but joy – but that's not what



It can be that officebearers watch over the souls of those under their care with joy. They do the work – they see growth, repentance, correction, change, and submission.

the *this* here is referring to. While it is true that officebearers have to take to heart that they have to give an account for their work to the Lord, that's not what *this* refers to.

According to Johann Bengel – he wrote *Exegetical Annotations on the New Testament* – the word *this* dramatically refers to the leaders *watching over the souls of the church members*. So “let them do *this* with joy and not with groaning” – let them *watch over the souls of the church members* with joy and not with groaning.

It can be that officebearers watch over the souls of those under their care with joy. They do the work – they see growth, repentance, correction, change, and submission.

But it can also happen where they are watching over these souls with a lot of groaning. And that groaning is because they do their work and they don't see any change. They don't see growth, repentance, correction, or submission. And they can end up groaning because their work as elders or deacons is not

respected, or accepted. Their bringing in, and applying, of God's Word doesn't bear positive fruit in church members. Maybe there is a hardening of the heart even, or a refusal to listen to the correction given by deacons. In any case there's groaning, frustration, and sadness on the part of the officebearer.

That's also how John Calvin approaches this passage. He has a few interesting statements about the last part of the text where the Spirit adds *for that would be of no advantage to you*. Calvin says in connection with that, “nor is it a wonder how few at this time are found who strenuously watch over the Church of God.” He's referring to this text, and he says that it's no wonder that officebearers are demotivated if they have to groan. He adds, “we suffer the punishment of our own perverseness when leaders grow cold in their duty or are less diligent than they ought to be.”

In other words if church members cause their leaders to watch over their souls with groaning, they shouldn't

be surprised that those leaders aren't motivated to look after their souls. In fact God gives them over to those kinds of leaders. Hebrews 13 shows us that officebearers can groan and be demotivated due to dealing with disobedient unsubmitive church members.

Now, it is possible for elders and deacons to do their work with joy but *also* groaning. In fact Bengel says in his commentary that a truly good officebearer will actually, besides rejoicing, also groan in his work. He's going to find that he will have times he has to groan in his work – it is part of being an officebearer.

I'd like to look at some of the practical things that can cause an officebearer to groan in his work.

SITUATIONS WE MIGHT NOT UNDERSTAND

While in church office, men will meet with people who are abused, or addicted, or suffer from mental illnesses like depression or maybe even schizophrenia, and you want to understand them to help them. But you have a hard time with that.

HALF THE STORY

You want to love them as the Lord's people but they often make it hard for you, to give them care, show them love. Sometimes even though you try to win their confidence, you only get half the story of what they're dealing with, perhaps because they're ashamed of the whole story.

That makes it very difficult to understand or support them. I've sometimes said to a person when I was trying to find out what they were dealing with, that the situation was like playing cards, except, the person deals me five while they have ten. I can't play cards that way – you have to give me the whole story.

It makes it difficult to understand and support them if they don't tell us everything. Then you might keep pushing for more, and find that eventually they'll just refuse to talk to you anymore. They want another elder, or they want another deacon to come. Sometimes church members can almost seem unpastorable – you don't know how you can help them. They seem to block you every time you want to help them. They block that. It can be very frustrating.

ONGOING STRUGGLES

Every ward usually has at least one very difficult personal or family situation or deaconal circumstance to deal with that can claim a lot of your precious time and attention. And sometimes those difficult situations have gone on for years. You've spent a lot of time and effort trying to guide and support, but things don't seem to move forward at all. You might end up completing your term in office after the three years, only to find, maybe a couple years later when you are in office again, then the very same situation is still ongoing. And you might find it in your ward again. That can be just very frustrating.

CONFLICT

Conflict situations among church members can be extremely difficult to deal with. It's often difficult to understand what in the world is going on here and what the big point is here. Sometimes it doesn't seem like there's

a good reason for a conflict, but what happens is that all kinds of side issues enter into the picture over time. And it becomes hard to see the forest for all the trees. It can be very hard to understand either side of a conflict like that.

You can't give direction either; you try to mediate and don't want to take sides. But both sides end up thinking then that you're supporting the other side. Then conflict situations can be very difficult and discouraging for officebearers to deal with.

DENIAL OF AUTHORITY

Most officebearers have experienced how people sometimes don't recognize the responsibility and authority of the office given to you by Christ. You try to follow up on something, and you end up being accused of harassment: "Why don't you leave me alone?" Then you come to the door and it's "Oh...you guys." They talk about "you guys" and so on.

We all know how problematic it can be to arrange a home visit with certain families. They just can't fit you in anywhere. Sometimes you get no respect and that can be very discouraging. You might start your term in office thinking, *the Lord has given me this task*, but find out that your role is not accepted by other people in the congregation who you are trying to help.

FRUITLESS MEETINGS

Consistory and council meetings aren't necessarily a night out, right? As officebearers you are required to deal with all kinds of matters, some which are difficult to make decisions about. Maybe you propose something and fellow officebearers don't see your point. You think it's really important, so others not recognizing it as such can be frustrating too. Possibly every time you've proposed something others are not in favor of it.

Or you find that a matter gets put on the council table again which has been turned down many times over the years and it seems that somebody just can't let it go. There it is again – we've dealt with that in the past and it's been rejected then, so how come it comes up again? That's frustrating.

Or consistory meetings and council meetings drag on and are disorganized. It's a hard task to steer a discussion in a good way. And when it becomes disorganized, things just don't seem to want to move forward, and it drags on. Meetings that go on until midnight are difficult for officebearers. Sometimes a meeting takes a long time to get over – you might have a hard time getting to sleep afterwards. You're mulling things over in your mind yet, and you worry about situations going on in the congregation, or in classis or even in the federation. You think *where in the world are things going?*

DOUBT

All of these are demotivators. That comes with your officebearer work.

And it can have a personal effect – I'm talking about personal demotivation. Sometimes it seems as if your work has so little impact. Then you wonder about the power of the Holy Spirit. Does He really work and change lives? You have your doubts then. And then you have to deal with those personal doubts, and cynicism. You might be thinking, *I don't know about this whole setup*. That's especially so when your work of trying to bring about a financial or spiritual correction brings angry responses and maybe causes people to stop attending church or withdraw from the church. When that happens then you almost inevitably, at first, take that personally, and wonder if it says something about your work as an officebearer.

Now, it can be good to ask yourself *Did I do my work as best as I could?* But you can't take whatever happens personally all the time. That becomes a really big burden, and it weighs you down. You might think that perhaps you're no good at this task – you might think on Hebrews 13:17 and think that you are not looking forward to giving an account to God for your work.

GUILT

As an officebearer you might also deal with a lot of personal guilt. As a brother once said to me, you have to deal with the fact that you're never finished with



Officebearers, when they go out, can be greatly encouraged if they know that when they are doing their best out there, that their wife is also at home and able to keep the home fires burning.

your work. It's a tough thing. As a pastor I had to get used to that – I was first an auto body spray painter and the way that worked, I would finish one job, before moving on to the next. There was a sense of completion. But in the Church it's never done, never finished. It seems to go on and on; just as one issue is settled down, then there's another one. It seems as if it's a full-time job, sometimes.

There's always this to-do list hanging above the heads of officebearers: I should do that; I could do that. It can happen, while you are enjoying an evening at home or time off with your family, you feel *guilty* because you think, actually I should be visiting there, or I should be reading up on this. It can be difficult to balance family and your task as officebearer – not just time-wise but also brain-space wise. It's hard to balance that. Your responsibilities as officebearers seem to want to use up a lot of space in your head.

2A. ELIJAH AND MOTIVATION

Now as you listen to all these discouraging and frustrating things about being an elder or deacon I should make clear that I'm not trying to depress you if you're a novice right now. This also isn't about discouraging others who might be future office bears.

No, this is just to show that there is a pressing need to think about motivation because there is much that can drag down an officebearer in his work. Even though they know that they've been called to their office by the Lord, officebearers can become demotivated and can groan a lot in the office. And those who are demotivated then need to be re-motivated. That's what we'll do now.

There are examples in the Bible of church leaders who were demotivated and who were re-motivated so I'd like to use an Old Testament example, Elijah, after the confrontation with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel in 1 Kings 19.

Queen Jezebel heard what Elijah had done – “how he had killed all the [Baal] prophets with the sword” (1 Kings 19:1) – and she swore that she would have him killed. So, obviously, not a whole lot changed in Israel even after what had happened on Mount Carmel. It was a miraculous, wonderful thing, that fire came down from heaven and consumed everything on that altar and consumed

the altar itself even though everything had been made wet. Yet it didn't impress the people to any great extent, and especially not Jezebel.

So Elijah had to flee into the wilderness of Beersheba. Then he sat down under a broom tree here and said, “It's enough Lord, it's enough. I'm done, take away my life because I'm no better than my father.” So he was feeling pretty down about his office as a prophet. Despite what had happened on the mountain, there was no wave of repentance in Israel.

You might remember how the Lord twice sent an angel to Elijah there in the wilderness, and brought him food and water. And on the strength of that food and water, he traveled for forty days without anything else. He ended up in a cave on Mount Horeb, and the Lord told him that He was going to appear to him there. There was a great windstorm, there was an earthquake, there was fire on the mountain, but the Lord was not in those things. After the fire Elijah heard a little whisper and he realized that the Lord was there in that low whisper. So he stood at the entrance to the cave and he covered his face and the Lord asked him again “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (1 Kings 19:9).

And Elijah replied: “I've been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts, but the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, throwing down your altars, killing your prophets with a sword, and I, even I alone, am left and they seek my life to take it away.” He was downright sick and tired of it.

The Lord God tells him to go and anoint Hazael king over Syria, and Jehu king over Israel and He assures him that the ungodliness of Israel would be punished in the future, and then God also adds, “Yet I would leave 7,000 in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal.”

... your task is only to bring that Word, and to apply it to the best of your ability.

GOD'S CHURCH ENDURES

So what does that tell us? That the Lord God makes sure that the Church continues.

Even if it seemed that Elijah's work as an officebearer wasn't bearing any fruit at all, the Lord was still busy gathering and keeping His Church. Article 27 of the Belgic Confession takes that incident with Elijah as evidence that God preserves his Church because Christ is our "eternal King who cannot be without subjects." I love that little statement: the "eternal King who cannot be without subjects." That's something to think about after Ascension Day. He reigns and therefore the Church will not die. It might look small, in the eyes of the world, but it will not be wiped out. He will keep His Church. And the fact that the Lord wasn't in the storm, that powerful storm with a mighty earthquake, or the dangerous fire, but in that small whisper, says something about how the Lord works.

IT IS ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT, NOT YOU

So how does this passage help with motivation for officebearers in their task? When your work of bringing and applying the Word of God doesn't seem to have much impact, remember that it is the Lord who gathers, preserves, and defends His Church by His Spirit and Word. We confess that in Heidelberg Catechism Lord Day 21. The Lord does that.

Calvin, when he talks about church offices, emphasizes that too, and then he says, the Lord works via small, sinful men. He's just amazed that the Lord uses people who are no different than other people in their sinful human nature. Yet He uses them for His purpose. In other words, *you* can't give people faith. *You* can't make people repent. As officebearers, you can't do that no matter how hard you try, no matter which techniques you might think of using. People come to faith and repentance only through the working of the Holy Spirit through the Word. And your task is only to bring that Word, and to apply it to the best of your ability.

You need to leave the outworking of what you bring up to the Holy Spirit. You can't do the Spirit's work for Him, no matter how much you'd love to do that. You'd love to change this person but the Spirit has to do that, and you know that He works quietly, in His time, via the Word. So that's what you need to focus on – bringing applied Scripture to the people in your care.

I want to emphasize that: the Word is your tool. It is the only tool that you have to use, to the best of your ability. Officebearers have to accept, too, that this Word has a two-fold effect when you bring it. It can bring to faith and repentance and growth, but that same Word can also bring to hardening of heart, to alienation, to hostility.



The Board of **Covenant Canadian Reformed School** invites applications for the 2019/2020 school year for the following position:

TEACHER/VICE-PRINCIPAL

Teaching and Administrative duties to be determined upon hiring of successful candidate

Covenant Canadian Reformed School (CCRS) is a vibrant K-12 school community with a current student population of around 250. We are situated 3 km east of the hamlet of Neerlandia and approximately 25 km north of the Town of Barrhead. Between these two locations there are three Canadian Reformed congregations and one United Reformed congregation. CCRS is located about an hour and a half north of the cities of Edmonton and St. Albert.

We anticipate growth over the next number of years and are currently planning for future expansion.

We encourage energetic, qualified (or soon to be qualified) educators, committed to Reformed Christian education, to apply. Under our Father's blessing of a broad, highly supportive membership base and current levels of government funding in Alberta, we are able to offer a very attractive wage and benefits package.

We would love to arrange flights for applicants who are out of province to come and visit our community!

All interested individuals can apply by submitting a resume, a statement of faith, a philosophy of education, and references.

Please visit our school's website at www.covenantschool.ca

Applications can be sent in writing to

3030 TWP RD 615A
County of Barrhead, AB T0G 1R2

or to the Board secretary:

Mrs. Tara Tiggelaar - secretary@covenantschool.ca

If you would like further information about the school and the area, please contact the Board chairman:

Mr. Jordan Tiggelaar – 780-307-8449
chairman@covenantschool.ca

or the principal:

Mr. Mike Nederveen – 780-674-4774 (school)
principal@covenantschool.ca

GOD HAS CHOSEN TO USE SINFUL PEOPLE TO WORK HIS WILL

Sometimes that can bring elders and deacons to feelings of frustrations and inadequacy, as we mentioned. You lay it out for somebody as best you can – *it's right here in the Bible, you know* – showing to them how very clearly it makes sense. And yet they don't want to accept it; they just don't want to see it. And afterwards you drive home and think *I should've said this* or *I could've said that* and *I could've done this differently*.

But, no. Just leave your imperfect work; leave it up to the Spirit. As long as you have opened the Bible and let the Spirit work, you never know what can happen. The Spirit knows God's elect from eternity already, and He uses the imperfect words of God's officebearers to work out His purpose in His time to salvation or to condemnation.

Another thing that 1 Kings 19 shows beautifully is, it can be hard for an officebearer to see gross sins taking place in the Church, and ongoing resistance to the admonitions of the Bible. However, he can be greatly encouraged if he figures, well, I've done my best and I have to leave that in the Lord's hands. The Lord came to Elijah in that little tiny whisper. And Elijah can know *It's not by my might, but by his Spirit that He works*.

GOD GAVE YOU A HELPMEET

Officebearers, when they go out, can be greatly encouraged if they know that when they are doing their best out there, that their wife is also at home and able to keep the home fires burning. Because that's a hard thing to figure out: how much can I be away from home? You're preoccupied with other things, and a supportive wife is a huge motivator for an officebearer too.

GOD USES CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Elders should be willing to admonish and apply biblical discipline where there's obvious and continuing disobedience or indifference to what the Lord says in His Word. Do your best to understand and empathize with the person you're dealing with. Sometimes people might be dealing

with a mental disability, or a mental illness, and you might have to give them more time and leeway. Every person is different, and every person is unique. But if there outright continuous rejection of any part of the Word, then elders should not be afraid to apply discipline on the basis of that Word. Admonishing and applying church discipline is ultimately a redemptive act; it's calling them back to the Lord. And when these things drag on and on, it's demotivating for officebearers, and for a consistory. Discipline applied, when it's properly applied, is very motivating, though never pleasant – you don't like to apply it.

But applying it when there's continued walking in unrepentance can be a relief and encouragement for officebearers. It's evidence that the consistory is really watching over the souls of the members of the congregation.

GOD GAVE YOU YOUR OFFICE

Finally, it can help officebearers' motivation when they understand that they are chosen by the congregation, they're appointed by the council, and they're given their offices by God Himself. It says in the questions addressed to the elders and deacons in the form for ordination: "First, do you feel in your hearts that God Himself through his congregation has called you to these offices?" God Himself, calls elders and deacons to their respective offices.

Maybe a brother thinks, "that sounds rather high-minded. You know, I've been asked to do this work and so I'm doing it but don't make more of it than it is." However, while modesty is good, when a man says "I do" to the questions of the form then he has to accept that God has given him that responsibility to watch over the souls of the people under his care.

GOD WILL EQUIP YOU

And nobody should live in continual disobedience to his Word. Nobody should live in continual need without having mercy shown, uncomfited, and uncared for in the congregation. And if God has called you, He promises that He will stand by you when you work.

The more you do your best in office, the more you'll discover He does that too. I have to say that sometimes you have those times of cynicism, that you think *is God really working there?* But when you dive into things and you push through and you realize yes, He is at work. I can accept that. I see that. He works in tiny increments; He doesn't work necessarily very quickly, all at once. But we can see changing hearts.

Officerbearers will sometimes feel inadequate about stepping into the office again. I read somewhere about somebody being ordained to office. He said to minister, "I feel like a soldier and I've been put on the front line but I don't have a gun." And then the minister said, "The Lord will give you the gun you need."

2B. NEHEMIAH AND MOTIVATION

So far we've spoken about personal motivation – things to think about when you personally are doing your work, to keep you going. I want to also speak about the group. When it comes to council's motivation, I've mentioned how long and disorganized meetings are demotivators for elders and deacons. Poor cooperation and poor organization in a consistory are a discouragement.

My wife and I are reading through the book of Nehemiah at this time. Nehemiah was really instrumental in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem after the exile. The temple had already been partly rebuilt but the walls were still in ruins.

Now Nehemiah was cupbearer of King Artaxerxes. After hearing about the sad state of affairs in Judah, Nehemiah got the king's permission to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the city and its fortifications. A lot of resistance came from non-Jews like Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobias the Ammonite. But Nehemiah got the leaders of the Jews together on the same page so that despite the threats and resistance, they got together and rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem in 52 days. That was a huge project to manage in just 52 days! Now, the walls were only half the height they were before, but still, amazing for just 52 days.

Nehemiah implemented quite a few reforms, including arranging the

The ultimate motivation, though, is what the Apostle Paul says motivated him and his fellow workers in their task as bringers of the gospel.

provisions for the temple, and the priests, and the hallowing of the Sabbath Day, and beginning the feast days again. The thing is, Nehemiah had to get the leaders on board *every* time again. We know of one instance where he didn't get them on board and then they didn't join in rebuilding the wall. But for the rest he was able to get them organized – their names are all listed in the book of

Nehemiah, at various times. Also, when they renewed the covenant with the Lord, the leaders were there. And then, because of resistance from outside and even from within, there had to be ongoing encouragement to keep the building and the reorganization going.

It is wonderful to read how so many were able to keep working at the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and keep working at the reformation of worship. Imagine how those leaders had to keep encouraging and also admonishing each other, while Tobias the Ammonite and Sanballat the Horonite were resisting them. They had to work with weapons at the same time as they were building the walls.

BROTHERLY ADMONITION

So yes, that's an example to us. How do we encourage each other to keep building? Every consistory and council has a matter of *censura* on the agenda – *censura morum* [censure of one's conduct or life] or *censura fraterna*, which I think

is the better term: brotherly admonition or brotherly censure. It's right near the end of the agenda usually. That's in line with article 73 of the [Canadian Reformed Churches] church order, which says the following:

The ministers, elders, and deacons shall mutually exercise Christian censure and shall exhort and kindly admonish one another with regards to the execution of their office.

So every meeting of officebearers needs to include the item of *censura*. And the deacons' meetings too.

I'm afraid that this is underutilized in our churches. I have to admit, myself too, that you get to the end of a meeting and you open your eyes and see the brothers there and you think, *Okay let's just get this over with; All the important stuff has been dealt with, and this is just an extra thing on the agenda.*

But it isn't. At the end of a meeting, you might not want to get into exhorting



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LIFE
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and admonishing one another with regard to the execution of our offices anymore. But it's an important part of motivating one another to the work.

You get a good leadership and the work gets done as happened in Nehemiah's day because Nehemiah had to go there to those leaders and he had to tell them every time *This is what we need to do*. Some of them doubted him, but no, he would tell them *This is what we need to do*. It was a form of *censura*.

This *censura* ought to be used especially when there are difficult matters to deal with, and a brother is having a hard time. Then is the time to ask: "Are you having a difficult time with this brother?" or "Is it time to redistribute the tasks in the consistory or among the deacons?" It might be a time to kindly admonish one another if it was apparent that a brother isn't fulfilling his task as he should. Sometimes that needs to be done. I know one council we had an officebearer who was just busy with something else related to his business, and he just wasn't on task. We had to remind him, this is your *first* task, and you might have to put other things on hold for a while.

It can be difficult to talk about where we need help, or hear about where we are falling short. But it's vital, because it's a matter of watching over the souls and the well-being of the congregation members

that you're responsible for together... *together* as consistory and as council.

BROTHERLY ENCOURAGEMENT

I believe *censura fraterna* could be made use of in every meeting as a means to motivate all the officebearers in the duties of our offices. And also to *exhort*. You can raise encouraging points: "Brothers I think we need to think about this" or "Let's keep this up" or "Let's look at that." In fact, I would recommend that a council, on the basis of this article 73 of the church order, could do what I noticed some of the Free Reformed churches of Australia do. Those churches set aside time at four meetings a year for an evaluation of the work of the minister, elders, and deacons. They have a list of what they deal with in each of those four sessions and I believe that such an evaluation of the work being done by the officebearers would help the brothers stay on task, and encourage them to fulfill their task too, and motivate them.

THE BIGGEST MOTIVATOR OF ALL

I hope that I've been able to give present and future officebearers some things to think about in order to stay motivated.

The ultimate motivation, though, is what the Apostle Paul says motivated him and his fellow workers in their task as bringers of the gospel. Paul actually wrote *three* letters to the Corinthians:

first Corinthians, and then he wrote a sorrowful letter which we don't have anymore, and then he wrote 2 Corinthians. So in 2 Corinthians what we have is actually 3 Corinthians.

He wrote those three letters to the Corinthians because there was a lot of things happening in Corinth. It was a tough, tough haul for the Apostle.

He had to keep encouraging them. Remember 1 Cor. 5? There was somebody living with his father's wife. Paul said that person needs to be put out of the Church. He had to tell the officebearers in Corinth they need to put them out because this one sin is like yeast – it leavens the whole lump. Everybody's affected by that in the church. When you look at the church, it's like a basket of apples. One rotten apple in there will affect all the other apples too eventually.

So he tells them that they need to put this couple out. So there were issues. There was a lot of strife in the church – groups against one another. So this is a reminder there is nothing new under the sun. All the things that you have to deal with, have happened before.

In 2 Cor. 5, the Apostle Paul says, *I'm not commending myself and the other officebearers to the Corinthians* – he's not boasting about them and saying the church has to listen to them. No, Paul says in verse 14 "for the love of Christ compels us." And that that's the biggest motivator of all. "The love of Christ compels us" because, he adds, we have concluded this "that one has died for all."

See congregation, the Lord has died for these people. "So that those who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Cor. 5:15). That's your task: that they live for Him. That's your calling as officebearers – that you exhort your people and admonish them to no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised. So the love of Christ is the ultimate motivator that we need to keep in mind as officebearers. If we know His love for His people we will want to make sure that we watch over their souls. ^{RP}

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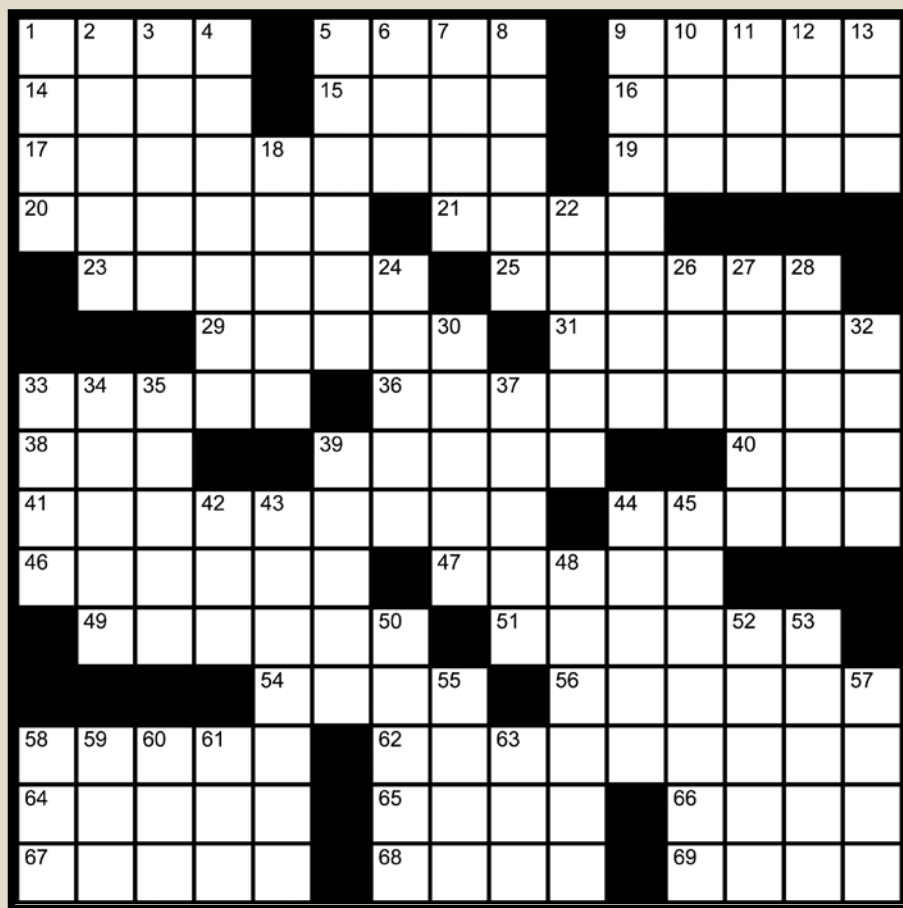
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CROSSWORD PUZZLE

BY JEFF DYKSTRA



SERIES 4-5

PUZZLE CLUES

ACROSS

1. Grating noise or scraping tool
5. The sign realtors love
9. Pillow fibre obtained from tree of same name
14. Where the sail is
15. Smallest Great Lake
16. It can get you out of trouble.
17. The other way around (from Latin phrase)
19. Enzyme secreted by kidney
20. "he who _____ his lips" (Prov. 16)
21. "The LORD has heard my _____" (Ps. 6)
23. "Raving one" of Greek mythology
25. They can keep the other person awake.
29. What cattle did in "Away in the Manger"
31. Skit or drawing
33. One of 150 in the Bible
36. Part of what slows cars

38. High, rugged mountain in European range
39. Inquiry; question (partly combined?)
40. "____ on the side of caution."
41. Vehicle useful in 49 Across?
44. "has... _____ witness" (John 5)
46. Boil; simmer; fume; smolder
47. Fabric with glossy surface and dull back
49. Place where 41 Across might be useful
51. Rankle; irritate; get to (not in a good way)
54. "I _____ that you are... gracious" (Jonah 4)
56. The crooked picture needed to be _____.
58. A very small island (only a nice place to visit)
62. Quebec has had two on

independence.

64. Russian pancake made with buckwheat flour
65. Goddess in Egyptian mythology
66. Asterix and Obelix's homeland
67. Microscopic organisms that love moisture
68. Fittingly, this means "I burn" in Greek.
69. Rock formation containing specific minerals

DOWN

1. Expected response to invitation
2. Genus of 20 species of flowering plants
3. Supposedly sacred bone at base of spine
4. What builders do in new developments
5. Back & forth (& up & down), Marjorie Daw
6. Bobby the best (or, who

LAST ISSUE'S SOLUTION



SERIES 4-4

- else?) in hockey
7. Words are hard to pronounce if you have this
8. "everyone _____ falsely." (Jer. 6, 8)
9. Singing along to the bouncing ball
10. Something served where you do 9 Down?
11. "I will ____ David to the wall" (1 Sam. 18)
12. Sash for a kimono, or the "first name" of ____-Wan Kenobi
13. Relative (or relatives)
18. "The _____ of asps" (Rom. 3)
22. Exalt (praising to the sky?)
24. Take out the trash (in the computer program)
26. In medias ____ (in the middle of the action)
27. Early anesthetic
28. "My friends _____ me" (Job 16)
30. "drain it down to the _____." (Ps. 75)
32. "You sit _____ in a good place" (James 2)
33. Short form of alternative to 36 Across
34. Skids or slides sideways

35. Temporary cessation of breathing
37. Ancient Indo-European
39. Hand mill for grinding grain
42. Archaic (King James Version) verb ending
43. Hindu "devotions"
44. Dog with something worse than his bark
45. Always in motion (the going phrase)
48. "Mother" in Calcutta who opposed abortion
50. An eagle rests in ease (here, initially?)
52. Relating to the moon
53. Provide with a quality or ability
55. "split... from east to _____" (Zech. 14)
57. "Buffalo _____, won't you...?" (song lyrics)
58. Computer company
59. _____-mo replay
60. Little way to say *little*
61. "beginning and the _____." (Rev. 21, 22)
63. It sticks out of an airplane or a fish.

THE TIME *RP* USED A CLICK-BAIT HEADLINE



by Jon Dykstra

Last month I had the opportunity to talk about where *RP* is at with two business groups and I thought it might be fun to frame my presentation as a David Letterman-style Top-10 list. My better half didn't like the idea – David Letterman was way too old school, she informed me. It was a good point.

Then I asked her what I could do to make my presentation hip and happening. She shared that it would certainly help things along if I stopped using phrases like “hip and happening.” Clearly I've married a wise woman.

That's when I finally hit on something way more 2019-ish. I'd start things off with a click-bait headline:

***7 ways *RP* is reaching the world.
And you won't believe #6!!!!***

Here's some highlights from the presentation...

1. *RP* ARTICLES HAVE BEEN READ IN 6 LANGUAGES

Whereas in our earlier days we used to translate articles *from* Dutch, we're now getting translated *into* Dutch. We've also had articles translated into French, Portuguese, and just recently Chinese and Spanish.

2. *RP* ARTICLES ARE BEING TURNED INTO VIDEOS

Some years back a creative graphic artist, Breanne Kanis, took an article I had written with the tongue-in-cheek title “Why men are superior to women” and turned it into a far more polished and far less inflammatory pro-life video. Her video has been viewed by thousands, and been used by at least a couple of different pro-life organizations.

Then, at the beginning of this year, a group called Kingdom Focus released

an impressive video they'd made based on Michael Wagner's *RP* article, “The Queen on our coins testifies to Canada's Christian roots.”

And in this very issue, we've also flipped the script, turning Rev. Moesker's video presentation “Maintaining motivation among elders and deacons” into an article.

3. WE'RE NOT AFRAID

Speaking of videos, last year *RP* had the privilege of live-streaming a debate between two Reformed pastors – Rev. Hiebert and Rev. Zekveld, one Baptist and one Canadian Reformed – on the question of “Should we baptize infants as well as adults?” We were a little nervous: what if Rev. Hiebert was a stunning debater and presented a powerful case for adult baptism?

But we could proceed confidently knowing that results are in God's hands. He calls on us to do our best, yes, and our side was doing that in having its own able defender in Rev. Zekveld. In addition, in the lead-up to the debate, *RP* openly declared our position and shared more than a half dozen great resources on infant baptism on our website. So we put in the work.

But we only took the opportunity because we could be confident that while God does choose to work through us, His success isn't dependent on our cleverness, or brilliance, or effort. He's in charge. He's got this. And that means we don't have to worry.

Interestingly Tim Challies, a Reformed Baptist blogger who has 140,000 followers on Facebook, shared our list of resources with his followers. Thousands of Reformed folks, baptists among them, were now reading and watching resources making the best case for infant baptism.

4. WE'RE TRYING EVERY WAY WE CAN TO REACH FOLK

Three years back we were a print magazine. And it was a great magazine. But now Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, our weekly email newsletter and our speaking tours have us reaching so many more – our website is getting roughly a thousand page reads a day.

5. WE'RE BEING USED AS A TOOL


Because we're online, article like “Is Recreational Marijuana sinful?” and “Is Jordan Peterson the Champion we're looking for?” are so easy for parents to share with their kids and get conversations going.

6. OUR CONTENT IS BEING STOLEN

I don't go looking for it, but with increasing frequency I'm discovering *RP* articles that have been reposted in full on other people's websites without permission. We love it when our articles are reprinted and say yes to 99% of requests but it is still nice, and right, to be asked. That said, even in this God's Truth is reaching further and helping more.

7. WE'RE GETTING HELP

Whether it's readers sharing articles, or blogger Tim Challies directing his thousands of readers our way, our expanded reach is due to all the help we've received. That help also comes from the growing number of people who have become ongoing monthly supporters – it is because of all them that *RP* can share everything we have for free.

But first and foremost it is so very clear that God is behind it all. You and I can only do what He gives us the strength to take on, and we leave the results to Him. And we are so very grateful for the results He is giving. 



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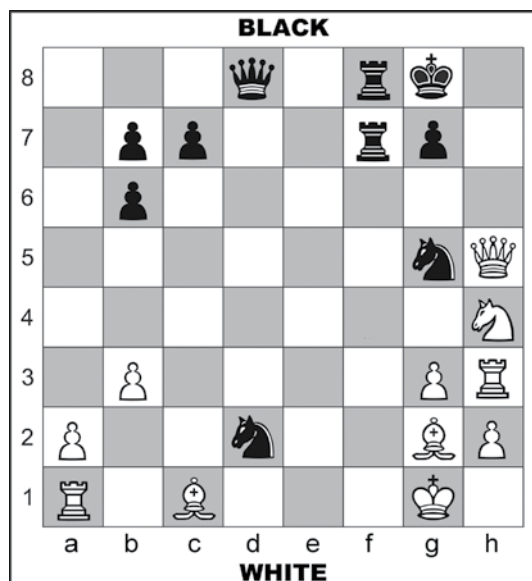
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ENTICING ENIGMAS & CEREBRAL CHALLENGES

Chess Puzzle #251



WHITE to Mate in 3

Or, If it is BLACK's Move, **BLACK to Mate in 4**

Riddle for Punsters

#251 – "Political motivations?"

Why did the carpenter decide to go into politics?

He was hoping that someday he could become a c _ _ _ _ _ et minister.

Why did the janitor go into politics?

He was hoping that the party would make s _ _ _ _ _ ing changes across the country.

Problem to Ponder

#251 – "Expecting a wet spring?"

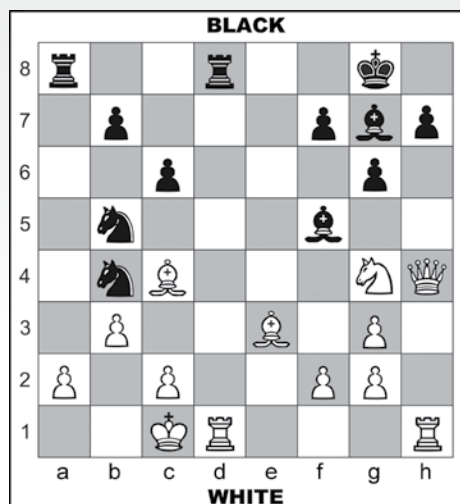
The melting of "wet" settled snow can produce an average of 1 cm depth of water from a 5 cm depth of snow. Chantal's back yard measures 10 m by 25 m. The average depth of snow in her yard is 75 cm or 0.75 m. Find the equivalent depth of water produced when that snow melts. The density of water is 1 gram/cubic centimeter or 1 kg/m³. Also determine the mass (in kg) of the water produced by the melting of that snow.

Send Puzzles, Solutions, Ideas to Puzzle Page,

43 Summerhill Place, Winnipeg, MB R2C 4V4 or robgleach@gmail.com

Last Issue's Solutions

Solution to Chess Puzzle #250



WHITE TO MATE IN 4

Descriptive Notation

1. RxR ch R x R
2. QxR ch B-B1
3. N-B6 ch K-N2

4. RxP mate

OR

3. N-B6ch K-R1

4. QxB or RxP mate

BLACK loses sooner IF

1. RxR ch B-B1

2. QxP mate

(NOTE that the white queen taking the rook pawn, resulting in Check, requires 7 more moves for a forced mate so is not part of the solution here)

Answer to Riddle for Punsters

#250 – "Seeing through One but not the Other "

Mr. Black was a shadowy politician who darkened his party's reputation.

Mr. Glass was clearly an open advocate for more transparency in government.

Answer to Problem to Ponder

#250 – "Can You Describe the Person For Me? "

The following people have either blue or brown eyes, have blond or dark hair, and are either tall or short. Mr. Adams and Mr. Chan have the same colour eyes. Mrs. Banks and Mrs. Dunn have different colour hair and different height but both have the same colour eyes. Mr. Adams has to look up to Mr. Chan and Mrs. Dunn. Mrs. Banks dyed her hair a dark colour (similar to the colour of Mr. Chan's hair). Only two of the people have blue eyes and Mrs. Banks does not. Two people have blond hair. Describe the height, eye colour and hair of Mrs. Banks and Mr. Chan.

Mrs. Banks is short (since she has different height than Mrs. Dunn who is tall since Mr. Adams has to look up to her) and has dark hair (at present dyed dark) and has brown eyes (since she does not have blue eyes).

Mr. Chan is tall (since Mr. Adams has to look up to him) is has dark hair (we are told) and has blue eyes (Mrs. Banks does not have blue eyes and so Mrs. Dunn does not therefore the other two people do).

BLACK TO MATE IN 3

Descriptive Notation

1. ---- NxRP ch

2. K-N1 BxP ch

3. KxB N-R6 mate

Algebraic Notation

1. ---- Nb4xa2 +

2. Kc1-b1 Bf5xc2 +

3. Kb1xc2 Nb5-a3 ++

Algebraic Notation

1. Rd1xd8 + Ra8xd8

2. Qh4xd8 + Bg7-f8

3. Ng4-f6 + Kg8-g7

4. Rh1xh7 ++

OR

3. Ng4-f6 + Kg8-h8

4. Qd8xf8 or Rh1xh7 ++

BLACK loses sooner IF

1. Rd1xd8 + Bg7-f8

2. Qh4xh7 ++



BASED ON A TRUE STORY

by Hannah Grieser

"Um, excuse me?"

I am kneeling next to a newly planted row of tomato starts and pulling weeds when I hear a woman's voice from over my bent shoulders. Several small businesses share the busy alley next to our back yard garden, and I assume the voice is speaking to someone else. I do not look up. With the back of my gardening glove I brush some loose hairs away from my eyes, and I continue weeding, tossing a few more invasive cheeseweed seedlings onto my growing pile. But then I hear the voice again, louder this time, "Hello? Miss? *Excuse me.*"

Because of the steady stream of foot, bicycle, and car traffic that passes by the garden each day it's not uncommon for passers-by to stop and say a kind word or two about the new raised beds or about how nicely our plants are coming along.

"Oh, hi," I say, rising stiffly from my knees and turning to face the voice, "Sorry. I thought you were talking to someone else just now." I smile and wait for her to speak.

She has stopped her vintage bicycle next to our bent chicken wire fence and rests her hands on her narrow hips. Her eyes are a blue so pale that I seem to be looking not at the eyes themselves but at two vacant holes in her head through which I can see the cloudless sky behind her. I reach over and grip the splintery handle of my shovel and lean my weight into it so that I can stretch my legs. I look at her expectantly. She does not smile back.

After running her eyes over the whole garden plot, she finally says, "Well," with a voice as crisp and sour and cool as the stalks of rhubarb growing behind me, "I just was riding by here and couldn't help noticing what you're doing, and I have to say that I am genuinely shocked. What, is with this heap of dead plants?"

"Oh those?" I chuckle a little. "I'm not keeping those, actually. I'm just going to toss them in the compost when I'm done."

"I *figured* you weren't planning on keeping those. And I'm appalled. That's why I stopped – it looks like you're *killing* them."



A TIME FOR LOVE AND A TIME FOR HATE

God calls on us to love even our enemies (Matt 5:44), and at the very same time, David, inspired by the Holy Spirit, boasts of hating "them that hate you, O Lord" (Ps. 139:21-22). So which is it? Are we to love or hate our enemies?

Well, there is love and there is love.

In speaking of hate as a virtue in Ps. 139 David is speaking against the wrong sort of love. There is a love for our enemies that is a hatred for God – it is a love based on *affection* or *like-mindedness* for those who speak against God "with malicious intent" and who use His name in vain. This love treats God's enemies as bosom buddies and would have us join in common cause with them. David wants it to be clear he doesn't have this type of love for God's enemies – far from it!

The love Jesus calls us to in Matthew 5 might be understood as *compassion* or maybe *pity*. This isn't a reciprocal love – we aren't being kind to those who've been kind to us – but instead involves compassion for the undeserving, the unlovable, even the persecutor. This compassion mirrors God's own when he adopted rebels to be his very sons and daughters. This is a love that wouldn't have us join in with our enemies, but has us inviting even our persecutors to become children of God.

So yes, we are to love our enemies. But, as the Preacher knew, there remains both a time for love and a time for hate (Eccl. 3:8).

- Jon Dykstra

To show love to wolves is just another way of hating sheep. To love sheep, as all good shepherds must, is to hate wolves.

- Douglas Wilson

"Yesss? Um, I guess I am," I respond with a nervous laugh-cough. "Take that!" I say, leaning sideways and yanking a young dandelion out of the carrot bed. I intend it to be a lighthearted joke, but it flops somewhere in the dust near the bicycle tires and dissolves into the gravel.

The cyclist widens the pale blue holes in her head and tightens her lips. Clearly I am not making a new friend. After a long and uncomfortable pause, the words, "What in the *world*?" shoot toward me, and I resist the urge to duck. "How can you even call yourself a gardener? How can you treat plants this way?"

I blink.

I blink again, speechless, and tighten my grip on the shovel.

"Well? Do you call yourself a gardener?" she demands.

This is a relief, a question I can answer. "Oh, well, yes. An amateur, but yeah, I guess I'm a gardener."

"Ha!" she says. I can taste something bitter on the back of my tongue as she opens her mouth to continue. "Correct me if I'm wrong here, *gardener*, but last time I checked, gardeners are people who love plants. Gardeners are people who *nurture* plants. So explain *this*!" She flings her hand toward my little pile of wilting dandelions and pigweed seedlings and then turns with raised eyebrows to scan the alleyway – as if she is trying to find somebody willing to join her in her triumphant outrage.

"Well, this is actually an important part of caring for the vegetables I planted here." My voice has a bit of a nervous shake in it. I can't believe I'm having to defend my weed pile. "This is what nurturing a garden looks like."

"Oh *right*. Then why are you brutalizing perfectly innocent seedlings? Seriously. Why do you hate plants so much?"

"They're weeds, not *good* plants." I resist the urge to roll my eyes.

"Says *you*. The difference between a so-called 'weed,'" she says, making scare quotes in the air with her fingers, "and a 'good' plant [more scare quotes] is just your *opinion*. You have no right to determine which plants should live and which should die. What do you have against them, anyway? What right can you possibly have to inflict your opinion on every other plant?"

I stare at her for a moment, trying to weigh whether this is some kind of satire, some kind of practical joke. But her cold eyes are glaring so widely that I can see the whites completely encircling the blue.

"Well," I begin, "I have gardener's handbook that I can check whenever I'm not quite sure which kind of plant I'm looking at. But after a few years of seeing these things grow up, you get pretty good at identifying..."

"What! You have this book, so now you're some kind of expert? Seriously? These things look just like all the other plants around here. They're really not that different. See that one? It's not even touching the ones next to it. Not hurting a thing! And anyway, they're *tiny*. Look at them! Totally. Harmless. And if you just gave them a *chance*, you might actually learn to see the unique beauty in them!"

"Actually, I..."

"I am dead serious," she continues, "I cannot understand how any gardener could do...*this*." She broadly sweeps her arm toward the weed pile again. "If you really loved plants – if you were a *real* gardener – you would treat them with care and help them grow and appreciate them for what they are." She crosses her arms, satisfied in the irrefutability of her argument.

Suppressing the chuckle that is trying to escape, I cough into my shoulder and glance around the alleyway, looking for a hidden camera. Maybe this is some kind of skit for reality television. But no, I see nothing. "That's the thing," I say. "You're missing the point. I love

the plants that are *supposed* to be in the garden. I love these snap peas. I love the carrots. And *if* I love these plants, then I have to root out the invaders." I point to a dandelion.

This is total discrimination. Either you love plants or you don't. You are obviously a plant hater.

"Look. This is total discrimination. Either you love plants or you don't. You are obviously a plant hater. You're *hurting* plants. There's the proof!"

"But if I don't get rid of the bindweed, then *it* will get rid of my snap peas. I am not raising a garden in order to eat bindweed for dinner. You're welcome to try some, however, if it would sooth your conscience." Sarcasm is getting the better of me, and I can feel my suppressed smirk has surfaced. I can't straighten it out quickly enough, so I look down at my dusty shoes and pretend to scratch an itch on the bridge of my nose.

"I'm sorry," she says, not sounding sorry in the least, "but I don't know why people like you take these things so simplistically. Not everything is so black and white. The concept of a 'weed' is just a social construct, and nobody needs to take sides here. There should be harmony among *all* plants—no! exceptions!" She pounds her handle bar to punctuate those last two words and then sighs. "Bindweed and snap peas can peacefully coexist."

I look up at her pained expression and exhale slowly so as not to outright guffaw in her face. "Uhh, not really. Not without doing serious damage to the snap peas. Not without choking out the plants that are the whole point of this garden."

"You have got to be kidding. You are a total weedaphobe! I *knew* it! You're afraid of bindweed! This is so unbelievable. You're acting out of irrational fear. I mean, look at these things. Look at how tiny and harmless those little bindweeds are." She leans her bicycle toward my tomato bed and points them out to me for my edification. "They have these beautiful white flowers. *Beautiful!* What are you afraid of?"

"I'm not *afraid* of them. I just know what they will do if I let them grow unchecked. If I call myself a gardener at all, I will call a weed a weed and then I'll cast it into the outer darkness, so to speak."

"Ahhh, so then what about the ones over there?" She points to the opposite side of the alley where a small forest of thistles and dandelions have sprung up next to the neighbors' dumpster. "You think you're going to get rid of all the so-called 'weeds' in the world? Think again. They are stronger and more resilient than you think."

The laugh finally escapes, despite my best efforts. "Believe me. I am fully aware of how resilient they are. That's why I'm out here doing this again for the umpteenth time this summer. But I am certainly not trying to single-handedly take down *every* weed in the world. I'm not even trying to get rid of the ones next door. It's my *garden* I'm concerned about. I am focusing on the weeds right here because they are the ones I'm responsible for. I am focusing on the ones that are trying to take over my good plants."

"Are you kidding me? '*Good* plants'? These plants that you're killing had just as much right to be here as those peas do. In fact, I bet a lot of them were here first. But obviously you're too closed-minded to appreciate what they have to offer. Do you realize how useful and beautiful some of these plants can be? Look at this dandelion you've ruined. If you had just let it grow, it could produce lovely yellow flowers and friendly little fairy puffs! But ooooh. It's scaaary, isn't it? Can't let it grow freely, can you?" She snorts. "I guess you're afraid of flowers, too. Flowerphobe."

I roll my eyes toward the sky. A redtail hawk is riding an updraft directly overhead, scoping out his lunch options. Then I turn my gaze back to the lady's face and look hard through her sky-colored eyes. "This has nothing to do with fear. It has everything to do with wanting to take care of my peas. It has everything to do with loving my garden."

"So pulling plants up by the roots. You call that love?"

"Yes. I do." My nose is starting to itch for real now, so I rub at it with the back of my wrist.

"Well. If that's what you call love, then I would not even want to imagine how you'd treat the things you hate. Look at how damaged those poor little plants are."


I look. And I smile a broad, genuine smile. "Yes. Totally damaged. Isn't it great? And once they're all *dead* and *rotted* and *decomposed* in my compost heap? *Then* they will be given the opportunity to return to my garden. At that point they will be welcome. But not before."

"Garden hater." She climbs back onto her bike. "Plantphobe."

"Come back in a month or two, and I'll let you have a bite."

She snorts again. "Oh *really*. Of what?"

"Bindweed, if you like."

She narrows her pale eyes and opens her mouth as if to respond, then closes it again and pushes off without a word. I listen to the crunch of gravel under her tires as I lean my shovel back against a T-post and return to my knees to take care of my tomato starts. The soil is warm between my fingers. Come July, there will be fruit. 

Hannah K. Grieser is the author "The Clouds Ye So Much Dread: Hard Times and the Kindness of God." She lives in Idaho where she designs graphics, photographs landscapes, dabbles in the garden, and (with her husband, Jayson) is raising five pig-farming, music-loving, baseball-playing sons—including one cancer survivor. She has also written for Relief Journal, Books & Culture, and Desiring God.



ON TIDYING UP WITH AND WITHOUT MARIE KONDO

By Rachel Tenney

Marie Kondo has been famous in Japan for almost a decade, but only gained fame in North America in 2014 when an English translation of her book *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* was released here. Then at the beginning of 2019 Netflix released an 8-episode series *Tidying Up With Marie Kondo*, and since then her name has been everywhere.

I started watching the series mostly out of sheer curiosity. I saw articles floating around the Internet back when her first book came out, and again when the Netflix show aired, so I decided to see what all the hype was about. After two episodes, here's what I learned.

DON'T HOARD

I'm really glad I watched this show at this particular season in my life. I just got married a few months ago, and I am in the fun and overwhelming process of setting up our home. I'm organizing, decorating, and decluttering. I am making a lot of decisions that are going to impact the way that our family is run in the future.

I can so easily see myself accumulating a house full of stuff over the years and

then feeling overwhelmed. Getting to step into the lives of the people on the show for a few minutes was a wake up call for my own life! I want my possessions to serve me, not for me to serve them – that's why I don't want to have too many things, disorganized things, or be a slave to the idea of a perfect home.

THINGS REALLY DO SPARK JOY

Marie Kondo says her tidying approach is inspired in part by the Shinto religion. So when she speaks about keeping possessions that “spark joy” that might sound a little too mystic. But some things really do spark joy and that's okay! God gives us good gifts to enjoy. Every morning, I make my espresso and drink it from mugs that I got from Target. They are from Joanna Gaines' Hearth and Hand collection. I get a little spark of joy every time I get to

use one. God delights in our delight, just as we delight in a small child's joy over a silly toy. We don't care much about the toy itself, but we love taking part in their delight.

FOLDING

I learned how to fold my shirts in a really cool way, so they all stand upright in my drawer. Boom.

BE GRATEFUL

As a Christian, I have to evaluate what Marie does through God's perspective. I don't believe in “greeting” a house, thanking items of clothing, or even living as minimalistically as possible. These ideas come from Marie's worldview of Eastern mysticism.

However, I still found those scenes powerful. Marie thanked an inanimate shirt, with no ability to hear or appreciate her (Ps. 135:17). But what she

... some things really do spark joy and that's okay! God gives us good gifts to enjoy.



got right, and what I too often forget, is that a shirt is something to be grateful for. What would it look like for me to thank God for the house I live in? What would it look like for me to thank God in prayer when I throw something out?

Gratitude changes our hearts from feeling discontented when we have to leave Joanna's cute home décor at Target, to feeling grateful for the things God has abundantly given. As Charles Spurgeon said: "It is not how much we have, but how much we enjoy, that makes happiness."

LOVE THE GIVER

Taking that idea a step further, we need to lift our eyes to the One who has given us these gifts. What if God gives you these gifts as a reminder of His love, to draw your affections to Him? John Piper says that God gives us good gifts... "to be with us as our all-satisfying

Treasure and Father and Friend and Savior." We all would cringe at a story of a man who proposed to a woman, and the woman's response was to fawn over the ring and never thank and love the giver! We get that concept on a human level, but do we believe it about God?

PRAY FOR WHAT I NEED

One of the things I want to grow in, is the discipline of praying for items I need. Instead of having constant feelings of want, what if I learned to wait expectantly for God to provide? I would not only be more grateful for the things God provides, but I would be more likely to link those blessings to the Giver Himself. As Augustine once said, "God could have bestowed these things upon us without our prayers, but He wished that by our prayers, we should be taught from where those benefits come." ^{RP}

Rachel Tenney and her husband blog at bytesizedtheology.com where a version of this article first appeared. It is reprinted here with permission.

Join ARPA & We Need A Law for the **March for Life & Prayer Service** at a location close to you!

On **THURSDAY, MAY 9**, pro-lifers will march as a witness to the lack of abortion laws in Canada and to unite in prayer. Marches will occur in Victoria, Edmonton, Regina, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Toronto, Halifax, and St. John's. Find more information about the march nearest you at MARCHFORLIFE.CA/EVENTS or for the Toronto event at TORONTOMARCHFORLIFE.CA.

PRAYER SERVICE LOCATIONS: Victoria: Reformed Prayer Service 12:00 pm | CENTRAL BAPTIST CHURCH, 833 PANDORA AVENUE
Ottawa: Reformed Pro-Life Prayer Service 10:00 am | FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 140 LAURIER AVE. W, OTTAWA





by Sharon L. Bratcher

AN ONLINE TOOL PROMOTES FRIENDSHIP ... AND SOMETIMES MARRIAGE

"We'll love you until somebody else does."

This light-hearted, rather amusing slogan belongs to the Facebook phenomenon known as Reformed Harmony (hereafter RH). It is a group of Reformed Christian singles over the age of 18, including members in their 30s, 40s, and 50s, who have been introduced to one another through the technology of the Internet. It is considered by Facebook to be one of the most active sites that they have. It started as a joke 4 years ago with about 30 people, and currently brings together approximately 1,100 people from the USA, Canada, and around the world.

FRIENDSHIPS, FELLOWSHIP, AND GLORIFYING GOD

"RH exists," as former member and Administrator (or Admin) Sarah Wolfe of Florida stated, "to provide friendship and fellowship to Reformed Christian singles over 18 and to glorify God."

"Reformed Harmony exists to provide friendship and fellowship to Reformed Christian singles over 18 and to glorify God."

Despite the name "Harmony," which immediately evokes thoughts of the well-known dating website e-Harmony, Wolfe noted:

The group is not a dating site. You are not there to "sell" yourself or

impress anybody. You don't just browse through available people - it's about friendship and fellowship and supporting each other.

She adds that, "it's wonderful and a blessing when two people meet on RH and get married, but it's not by any means the only reason." She knows of people whose deep friendships have led them to join a friend's church or even move to another city to become roommates and build stronger godly relationships that encourage them to serve the Lord. Some find themselves in very small and isolated Reformed communities, leaving them floundering socially, even while surrounded by excellent preaching and a few families who love them. Even those who are surrounded by hundreds of other Reformed singles, sometimes find it difficult to actually connect on a deeper level. They feel too old to attend Youth Conferences and Bible Study weekends. So how can

they meet like-minded Christian singles? Members of RH revel in the fact that they can find other Reformed Christian singles who are serious about their faith in Christ.

Joe Tenney, of Virginia, was an Admin until he married in October 2018. He encountered singles who had bought into the devastating view that they really haven't started their lives until they got married. He said:

Our identity is not wrapped up in who we marry - it's wrapped up in Christ, and we are all promised the wedding of Christ and the Church. In a lot of ways, RH is kind of a foolish thing, but sometimes God uses foolish things. RH accidentally hit a niche and became something that has filled a need: a safe, healthy community where people can work out their issues and hurts. No church started it; the Lord in His grace allowed this kind of ridiculous group to form that's been used to help so many people.

"Loneliness is one of the forefront struggles of single Christians in their 20s," states Taylor DeSoto, of Phoenix, Arizona, one of the original brains and organizers of RH. And Tenney told of specific members who overcame depression and of some who returned to worshipping in church as a result of participating in RH.

POSSIBLY FINDING YOUR BELOVED

Some people do find their spouses through RH, as well as friendship. DeSoto states that, "While many RCS may put the thought aside verbally, the brutal reality is that getting married is definitely on their minds." DeSoto adds:

There's just not the pool of Reformed Christians in local Reformed churches that maybe there used to be, so people end up marrying non-Reformed Christians and then having to teach them.

Or arguing about the differences, one might add.

DeSoto met his wife Laura, of

Johnstown PA, through RH. They held "structured Skype dates" for three months, were engaged for three months, and then married. Both are in their mid-20s. The "structured" dates were partly the idea of Laura's father, Rev. Bob McKelvey, an Orthodox Presbyterian minister in Pennsylvania. (Please note the sidebar for the list of ten questions that DeSoto suggested on RH that couples discuss when they are seriously considering one another.)

Sarah Wolfe is another who was blessed to meet her spouse on RH. She joined this Facebook page fairly early in its 4-year history and became one of the Admins. She enjoyed building quality friendships for two years and then she hit it off with her husband David, of California, who actually met her online on his very first day on RH! The twain did meet. Both in their early 30s, their discussions grew from "Hi, welcome to RH" in April 2017 to deep chats about important subjects, to daily conversations, phone calls, and visits. They were engaged in November of 2017, married in January of 2018, and are now expecting their first child.

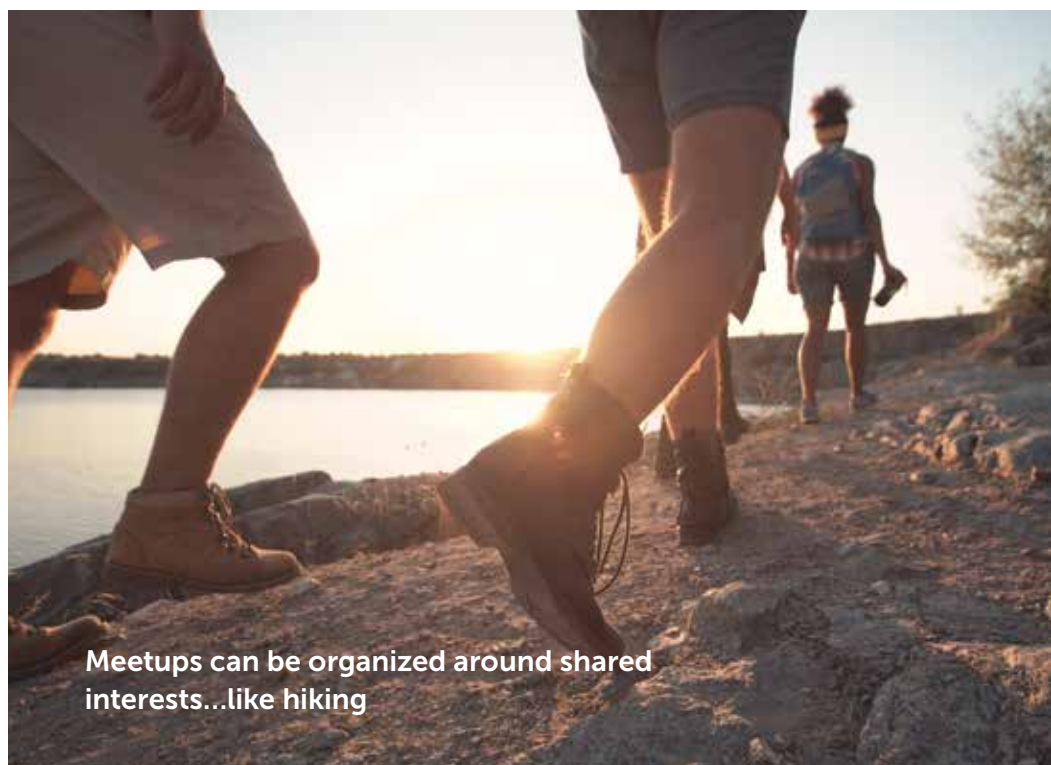
RH statistics show that in the 4 years of its existence, thus far 85 couples have met through RH and married. The Wolfes count three couples in their own congregation. Some of the marriages have been within "local" distances, but many have crossed state and even international lines, with some people either moving to or from the United Kingdom, Netherlands, or Australia. Some couples are in their 40s or 50s, though the majority are younger.

DeSoto says that most seem to prefer shorter engagement periods. He believes this works out well because the couple spends more time getting to know each other well on numerous topics and it's more intentional than if they were local and just dating to a baseball game or dinner.

HOW DID IT ALL BEGIN?

So how did the group first get started? There's a Facebook group online called Reformed Pub that was started in 2013. It's described on its page as:

The place to be when you want to kick back, have a beer, and talk about the



Meetups can be organized around shared interests...like hiking

important things in life with like-minded brothers and sisters... but above all we want to see God glorified through Jesus' name being lifted high.

As of March 2019, it has nearly 21,000 members worldwide.

In January 2015, a large number of single members decided to post personal ads as a joke, some of which were described as "over the top." After a few days, the Admins suggested to these single members that perhaps they should go and make their own group. A member named J. T. Hoover took the initiative to start the group as a light-hearted endeavor, and about 30 single people joined. For the first few months, it was called Reformed Pub Harmony. Taylor DeSoto reached out to several of the Admins with his ideas, asking to be on the Admin team, and permission was granted. About 6 months later, differences of opinion with Reformed Pub regarding rules and procedures arose, and so Reformed Harmony became its own organism around December 2015.

DeSoto believes he's the one who came up with their slogan: "We'll love you until some-body else does." He devised many of the rules, and in many other ways shaped the culture of the group. There were often themed posts for each day, and members were encouraged to post info about themselves, to help people interact and get to know one another. Once people started meeting and getting married, the enrollment increased a lot. About 50 marriages happened within the first two years. Membership grew from 200 in the first year to 600 by the end of the second year. At 4 years, there are now approximately 1,100 members.

One RH rule is that, upon marriage, the couple ceases to be members of RH.



But many continue to nourish the deep friendships that they built there, but now communicating outside of RH. Admins are single members as well, to protect existing marriages. It's not a good idea, for instance, for single women to be contacting married men with their concerns.

GROUP "HANGOUTS"

RH quickly expanded to include Google Hangout chat groups. These chat groups involve a member inviting others to join in on a separate discussion group on any number of shared interests, from political and theological topics to interests in food or movies. Sometimes groups are formed by geographical proximity. It is in these smaller groups that people really get to know one another as they share their thoughts and experiences.

Member Laurel Bareman of Washington says:

I've enjoyed the way the discussions have really challenged me to think about my beliefs. I've seen the diversity that exists among churches/peoples in the Reformed faith. RH has brought home how diverse and broad the spectrum of Reformed is. There is a solid foundation of people our age who seek to honor the Lord and follow Him. RH has provided fellowship and friendship and been a great blessing to my life. If you are seeking the

fellowship and friendship, just like with a local church, you will get what you give. You have to be involved with the discussions, go to some Meetups, be involved in group chats, and put effort into it.

Some people have questioned whether RH interferes with church membership. On the contrary, Sarah Wolfe stated:

RH has never intended in any way to take the place of one's own church. It's not a church, and people don't treat it as if it was. Women can be in leadership here too because it's just a website. There is constant exhortation to go to your own pastor and elders, and to seek to serve in your local church."

MEETING OFFLINE, IN PERSON

Face-to-face "Meetups" have been a part of RH from the very beginning. Any member of RH can plan one just by setting the dates, and organizing activities, food, and sometimes lodging for those who come from afar. Meetups have been held in British Columbia, Florida, Kentucky, Georgia, New York City, California, Colorado, Washington State, and other places. It's a "Y'all come!" sort of gathering that draws anywhere from 5 to 80 people, mostly from the USA and Canada. It's a whole lot of fun mixed with Bible devotions and getting to know other believers.

My son, Kevin Bratcher, attended his first Meetup in Phoenix, AZ with some trepidation. About 30 people were expected, of whom he had interacted with about 5 online. He said,

I discovered that while we had many different backgrounds, the sense of family and fellowship was so clear to everyone there. I had hours-long conversations with people I'd never talked to before, played games, joined a local charity event with several friends, and left with a profound sense

of awe and gratefulness at the common connection we had.”

He added:

Later Meetups reinforced these emotions, particularly when I attended them with the express intent of only making friends. Wherever you go – whether it's splitting an Airbnb with 5 men you haven't met for a conference in Atlanta, or piling 60 people into a couple homes in Seattle, or just a handful of folks for a retreat in the Grand Tetons and Yellowstone . . . you're at home with family.

Wolfe hosted three Meetups in her Florida home, and attended one in New York City. Bareman said that she loved both Meetups she attended, discovering that the people she'd interacted with online “were even more amazing that I

thought they would be.” She has found it to be affordable travel too, sharing costs with others. Helping to plan the Meetup with a new RH friend was a lot of fun for her and it helped to cement the friendship.

Scott Vander Molen describes an RH Meetup thus:

It's like a foretaste of what life will be like on the new earth. Everyone is so welcoming and accepting of each other for who they are. You can really feel the Christian love and by the end of the weekend you feel very close to your new friends. My RH friends have really helped me to improve my attitude towards women and marriage; I've learned that our focus should be on friendship, and the relationship will come when God decides that it should. I had to learn that important lesson before I could find contentment

in my singleness and truly be ready for marriage.”

He met his fiancée Mary – who lives in South Africa – in 2018, and he adds that “RH has been a tremendous blessing to me.”

A FEW CONCERNS

On an average day in January 2019, there were 98 notifications on RH. These are comments that people have posted on various topics, and sometimes there are even more. If we let it, Facebook could end up taking up a lot of time, causing us to neglect more important activities or people in your life; but that's a choice. To deal with the flood of RH comments some members change their Facebook settings to ensure they don't get notified every time someone says something – instead, they can go to the RH page when desired.

10 QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS WHEN “INTERVIEWING” SOMEONE FOR MARRIAGE

by Sharon L. Bratcher

These 10 questions were crafted for Reformed Harmony by Taylor DeSoto, with the hope that they could provide guidance for prospective couples to get to know one another more deeply. He encourages singles to keep their emotions low at the outset, until compatibility on the most meaningful levels has been established. The questions are reprinted below with DeSoto's permission, and my commentary accompanies them in the brackets.

1. When did you know your sin and misery and when did you feel the love of Christ in your life?
2. What are the core tenets of your theology? What are the secondary tenets of your theology? (Which issues are important to you, or not?)
3. What political views do you hold? (Do you have strong views regarding political parties, poverty, abortion, the environment, or list any other topic important to you).
4. How do you view the husband-wife relationship regarding headship, chores, division of labor?
5. What are you passionate about? What are your hobbies? How do you spend your time?
6. How is your relationship with your parents and family? Do you want your parents to be involved in our relationship?

7. How do you serve your church as a single person? (This is geared to rooting out the people who don't go to or participate in church in a meaningful way. DeSoto believes that if you are not serving your church while you are single, then you are not going to serve it as a married person OR serve your family).
8. Do you hope to have children, and how many? How do you want to raise them - what type of schooling or catechism? Do you believe in the baptism of infants?
9. What are your deal breakers in a relationship? This covers everything - where to live, job to have, smoking, drinking alcohol, sports - he encourages people to make a list.
10. How do you want to manage finances when married? This includes views on spending money, finances, credit/debt, and how to share assets.

DeSoto adds that an eleventh question could be: May I contact your pastor if I want to? This may seem extreme, but if you are going to live with this person for the rest of your life, his or her character should be known objectively, as well as possible. And if you have nothing to hide, why would it bother you?


Sometimes there are arguments in the group, and some members shared that they didn't want to find themselves stressing out over Internet discussions with people they didn't even know; it didn't seem to be a very good use of their time. Sometimes referred to as "dumpster fires," these are the most controversial discussions, and usually draw the most comments. Some people enjoy the debates; others do not. And just like with any group, there can be silliness and pettiness, with people saying things it would have been better that they not say. And there's a wide circle within the title of "Reformed", so there may be differences of belief on issues such as baptism, creation, and even eschatology.

That means that at times the Admins have their work cut out for them, with Wolfe describing her Administrator role as being like a part-time job. Admins will discourage guys who keep messaging any and every girl they find attractive even though the girls are not really interacting back. As Wolfe put it, "RH is not a meat market!" There are rules as to what can and cannot be posted, and members told me they feel that the Admins do a great job of stopping inappropriate posts. Early on, it was arranged that there would always be female Admins as well, because female members might feel more comfortable reporting problems to them, and sometimes even seeking counsel.

When problems happen, Admins will usually begin by advising those with the problem post to stop their bad behavior, and then, if the person does not comply, he or she will be removed from membership. There was a situation, for instance, where a man was very actively pursuing two women at once without either of them knowing about the other. When it was discovered, the Admins removed him and informed the women. In another serious situation, they even contacted the member's elders and family to report what had taken place.

CONCLUSION

Reformed Harmony is a connecting tool that helps Reformed Christian singles to locate like-minded people who love the Lord as sincerely as they do. Once they have found these folks, they can put in the effort necessary to build deep friendships. And for approximately 200 individuals thus far (counting currently engaged couples as well), God has used it to bring together men and women to marry and establish homes that seek to further His Kingdom.

If you are single and want more information, open up a Facebook account and just type in "Reformed Harmony" in the search bar. 

Sharon L. Bratcher is the author of the devotional book "Soup and Buns: Nourishment From God's Word for Your Daily Struggles" and "Bible Overview for Young Children, 2-year lesson plans." Contact her for information at sharoncopy@gmail.com.



The Board of **Covenant Canadian Reformed School** invites applications for the 2019/2020 school year for the following full/part time positions:

SENIOR HIGH SCIENCE TEACHER

GENERAL ELEMENTARY/JR. HIGH/SR. HIGH TEACHER

Covenant Canadian Reformed School (CCRS) is a vibrant K-12 school community with a current student population of around 250. We are situated 3 km east of the hamlet of Neerlandia and approximately 25 km north of the Town of Barrhead. Between these two locations there are three Canadian Reformed congregations and one United Reformed congregation. CCRS is located about an hour and a half north of the cities of Edmonton and St. Albert.

We anticipate growth over the next number of years and are currently planning for future expansion.

We encourage energetic, qualified (or soon to be qualified) educators, committed to Reformed Christian education, to apply. Under our Father's blessing of a broad, highly supportive membership base and current levels of government funding in Alberta, we are able to offer a very attractive wage and benefits package.

We would love to arrange flights for applicants who are out of province to come and visit our community!

All interested individuals can apply by submitting a resume, a statement of faith, a philosophy of education, and references.

Please visit our school's website at www.covenantschool.ca

Applications can be sent in writing to

3030 TWP RD 615A

County of Barrhead, AB T0G 1R2

or to the Board secretary:

Mrs. Tara Tiggelaar - secretary@covenantschool.ca

If you would like further information about the school and the area, please contact the Board chairman:

Mr. Jordan Tiggelaar – 780-307-8449
chairman@covenantschool.ca

or the principal:

Mr. Mike Nederveen – 780-674-4774 (school)
principal@covenantschool.ca

by Mark Penninga



REAL PROGRESS: Canada is warming up to an abortion law

In October of 2011, *Reformed Perspective* published an article I wrote called “Saving some is not a compromise – the case for advancing abortion legislation one step at a time.” In the article I made the case that passing an abortion law is realistic in Canada, and can be promoted by Christians without compromising our faith.

Looking back, that article has likely had more impact than anything else I have written.

While the initial response did include some strong criticism, most pro-lifers were both intrigued and encouraged to know that new strategies were being advanced, as we have gone for decades without any laws restricting this mass injustice.

The ARPA Canada team welcomed the encouragement, but we also carefully listened to the critique, and over time it was evident that the majority of the criticism, though passionate, wasn’t interacting with the actual arguments the article had advanced. And since it was first published, the key points of the original article have been validated time and again. Because over 100,000 children were dying every year in Canada alone, we knew we had to continue pursuing

prudent political initiatives, without compromising our faith.

So we moved forward.

That same year I was blessed with the full-time help of a bright, principled, and hard-working lawyer André Schutten, who now serves as ARPA’s Director of Law and Policy. And the following year we were blessed with the full-time help of a modern-day Wilberforce, Mike Schouten, who has been capably directing the We Need a Law campaign since, and now serves as ARPA’s Director of Advocacy. By God’s grace, we are now surrounded by a capable team of staff and a much larger team of big-hearted Canadians who are striving for protection for pre-born children from coast to coast.

At times it is valuable to pause and reflect on where things have gone, as we all have much to learn. Now that over seven years have passed since that article was published I look back with thankfulness on the progress that has been accomplished. This isn’t a result of my work, or ARPA’s work. Sometimes it was in spite of us. It is a result of God’s work. And we can be encouraged that He uses each of us to accomplish this.

“Progressives” today are often associated

with championing abortion, sexual freedom, and “climate justice” among many other things. But a truly objective analysis, done with a biblical worldview, will show these causes to be regressive rather than progressive. True progress should involve moving us forward. In regard to abortion, it means taking steps to protect pre-born human rights.

Since that article was published in 2011, I can look back with thankfulness to God for the true progress that is being made:

- 1) A principled, legally-sound, and politically realistic strategy has been carefully developed:** This strategy includes draft legislation (an actual abortion bill) and has been vetted past numerous experts. We are so grateful and blessed to now have multiple staff, including a lawyer, devoting their ongoing time to advancing this strategy.
- 2) The strategy has garnered the support of a growing base of Members of Parliament:** The law will only change if MPs champion the change. We are so encouraged to see dozens of MPs on board with this strategy and building support among their colleagues. And they are very grateful that the political arm of

the pro-life movement is now willing to work alongside them in this regard. They understand that it is going to be a long-game and are increasingly committed to working together to see this made a reality. These MPs are even getting prolife apologetics training so they can publicly defend the need for abortion legislation.

3) Canadians are increasingly aware that we have no abortion laws: Although most of our efforts are focussed on working with those who can change the law, we have also been educating the public. This includes our huge billboard campaign “Canada has no abortion law” which reached Canadian cities from coast to coast last summer. It also includes our now-famous pink and blue flag displays, which started with 100,000 flags on Parliament Hill and has been replicated dozens of times in towns and cities across the country (and even being replicated in other countries!).

4) Our talking points have become increasingly accepted by the mainstream media: Ten years ago it was common to hear the media sharing inaccurate information, such as the claim that the Supreme Court has determined that women have a right to abortion. We have been respectfully challenging this for years, including through ongoing press releases. We are so encouraged to see the misinformation substantially declining and to even hear our talking points being shared by the mainstream media. We are now even seeing pro-choice advocates calling for an abortion law.

5) In general, it has become far more accepted for our mainstream leaders to question the status quo on abortion: ARPA Canada has long pointed to the Overton Window theory to explain how ideas can transition from unthinkable, to radical, to acceptable, to sensible, and eventually to policy. And we are so encouraged to see that the idea of an abortion law has gone from radical ten years ago (and under a Harper government) to acceptable today (even under a Trudeau government). For example, Ontario’s Premier Doug Ford publicly challenged the fact that

teens don’t need permission from their parents before they can have an abortion, and this didn’t hamper his efforts to become Premier.

Progress is being made. I believe it is realistic that Canada can pass an effective abortion law in the next five to fifteen years. That big margin is because there are many factors that we simply can’t control. If that strikes you as painfully slow, I will agree – the life and death nature of this battle means we want the unborn protected *now*. But also bear in mind that to this point there has been no protective legislation for 30 years. This law will save many lives and also serve as a testimony to Canadians that pre-born lives deserve protection. If the Lord wills it, it will be a stepping stone from which more restrictions can be passed and more lives saved, as we see occurring in the United States, which passes dozens of pro-life laws each year.

And this can be accomplished without compromise. We support complete protection for every human being. Advancing laws that protect a growing number of humans are important steps in the right direction. These steps can be taken without undermining the value of those who are not yet protected in law.



RP Chairman Bruce Deboer and wife Helena at the Ottawa 100,000 flags display in 2014.

Compromise involves a concession. We don’t have to concede anything.

Although moving forward since the original article was published has been challenging and stressful, I’m grateful to God for answering our prayers and giving the strength to move forward, one day at a time. And I heartily thank all those who have been praying for a blessing on ARPA’s and We Need a Law’s efforts. The Lord willing, we will be able to look back ten years from now with more reasons for gratitude at the progress God has made possible. **RP**

Mark Penninga is the Executive Director of ARPA Canada.

I believe it is realistic that Canada can pass an effective abortion law in the next five to fifteen years.



Do we Like sin?

by Holly Vreugdenhil

Welcome to the Information Age. With apps like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, we now have a window into the lives of our friends, family, acquaintances and even complete strangers.

Business owners can now Google prospective employees, parents can check Instagram to vet new friends of their children, and a woman can search Facebook about a potential boyfriend. We can track down long lost friends from high school and keep in touch with family around the world. The benefits are evident in our churches too, in how we can share information about prayer requests, children's illnesses, bus routes being late, weather conditions, and new study groups.

Via these social media forums, users are connected together in an online virtual world where our interests and ideas can be shared at the speed of light to our online peers. We can share articles that we deem interesting or important, and we can take political stands on issues. With a click of the button we can friend and follow almost anyone we want. We like or dislike our way through thousands of gigabytes of information, telling everyone our favorite TV shows, games, authors, preachers, speakers and much more.

But how does our online presence reflect our allegiance? Do our likes match up with God's own?

Many brothers and sisters seem to disconnect the online version of

themselves from the real (or maybe their social media presence is their true self?). Christians will watch horrific godless shows and discuss them and like them on Facebook. Some may share photos of themselves in provocative poses with minimal clothing, or share pictures of drunken partying. We'll fight with others online, speaking wrathfully, and assume the worst of whomever we're arguing with. Disputes with our consistory, or our spouse, will be aired publicly and captured for all eternity. We'll speak derisively about our employers, or our minister, family members, or friends. Online Christians will use filthy language, or casually take God's name in vain in ways that they would not in the offline world.


The Bible calls this disconnect unstable "double-mindedness" (James 1:8, 22-25) – we are trying to be two people, each serving a different master (Matthew 6:24).

Not only are we responsible for how we present ourselves online, we're responsible for what we like and follow. When we see pictures of brothers and sisters sinning and like them, when we click thumbs up to a godless show, or blasphemous musician do we understand what we are telling everyone? Though it may take little thought – just a quick click of the mouse and a friendly like or thumbs up – what we are saying is *I agree, I like this, I love this, this is good*. Though it seems harmless, this is encouragement. When I sin and someone

...what we are saying is I agree, I like this, I love this, this is good.

says *good job*, they are enabling me. That is not love. That is sinful. It is *wicked*. We should not condone sin whether online or off. In fact, we should love one another enough to be willing to privately approach and hold our brothers and sisters accountable.

Maybe we think this a task better suited to elders. But not all consistory members are on these online forums. They don't always know what is happening on Facebook or Instagram. And it is not their job to follow every one of us everywhere we go. As brothers and sisters in the Lord, we need to hold each other accountable out of love for each other (Eccl. 4:9-12). And we need to do so out of love for our Lord – the world will get their ideas of Who He is based in large part on how we, his ambassadors, act.

Finally, whether we sin in daily life or online, God sees. In a world of both hate and tolerance, filth and fanaticism, we need to be careful not only in how we behave online, but also in what we like, share and post and therefore condone, as well. 



by Wes Bredenhof

Not the Same and the Same Always: An Interview (of sorts) with Jackie Hill Perry

*Jackie Hill Perry is an American poet and recording artist on the Humble Beast label. Married to Preston, she is the mother of two children. Last year, she published her first book *Gay Girl, Good God: The Story of Who I Was and Who God Has Always Been* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2018). This is an "interview" of sorts, with her responses coming as excerpts from her book.*

WES BREDENHOF: At its heart, what is your book really about?

JACKIE HILL PERRY: Every sentence is the pursuit of showing off God....This is a book with a lot of me in it but with a whole lot more of God. He is what the soul needs for rest and what the mind needs for peace. He is the Creator God, the King of Glory, the one who, in love, sent the Christ to pay the penalty for and become the sin that we are all born with. It is the words from

and about this resurrected Lamb of God that I hope will lift off the page and into the heart. This book is a lifted hand, a glad praise, a necessary hymn, a hallelujah overheard and not kept quiet. This work is my worship unto God that, with prayer, I hope will leave you saying, "God is so good!"

WB: You say that it was the story of who you were. So who were you? What were you like?

JHP: To me, the devil made more sense than God sometimes. Both he and God spoke. God through His Scriptures; Satan, through doubt. I'd learned of the Ten Commandments in Sunday school in between eating a handful of homemade popcorn and picking at my stockings. The "Thou shall nots" didn't complement the sweet buttered chew I found myself distracted by. They were a noise I didn't care to welcome. "You can't. You shouldn't. Do not," didn't sound like a song

worth listening to, only a terrible noise to drown out by resistance. Satan, on the other hand, only told me to do what felt good or what made sense to me.

WB: When you finally came out as gay, what were you thinking about God? And what do you think He thought about you?

JHP: As much as I wanted to believe God grinned when He thought of my life, I knew He didn't. My conscience spoke to me throughout the day. In the morning, it reminded me of God. A few minutes before the clock brought the noon in, it brought God to mind, again. Night was when it was the loudest. On the way to sleep, my head lay relaxed on my pillow surrounded by the natural darkness of night, I thought about God. I was His enemy (James 4:4). How could I, an enemy of God, have sweet dreams knowing that He sat awake throughout the night?

WB: So by God's grace you became a Christian in 2008 – through his Spirit and Word you were miraculously brought to faith and repentance. What impact did your conversion have on your same-sex desires?

JHP: To my surprise, being a Christian delivered me from the power of sin but in no way did it remove the possibility of temptation. A common lie thrown far and wide is that if salvation has truly come to someone who is same-sex attracted, then those attractions should immediately vanish. To be cleansed by Jesus, they presume, is to be immune to the enticement of sin. This we know not to be true because of Jesus. He being completely perfect and yet He still experienced temptation.

WB: What was that temptation like for you?

JHP: It was slapping me around like a weightless doll in the hands of an imaginative child. Being tossed between fun and funeral, who would I decide to trust more? What the temptation wanted me to believe or what God had already revealed? The struggle with homosexuality was a battle of faith. To give into temptation would be to give into unbelief. It was up to me to believe Him. His Word was authoritative, active, sharp. The simplicity of faith is this: taking God's Word for it. And I might not have felt like it, but I had no choice but to believe Him.

WB: Why do we have a hard time believing that a gay girl can become a completely different creature?

JHP: Because we have a hard time believing God. The Pharisees saw the man born blind, heard his testimony,


... being a Christian delivered me from the power of sin but in no way did it remove the possibility of temptation.

heard about his past and how it was completely different from the present one, and refused to believe the miracle of *Who* the miracle pointed to. The same power that made a man born blind able to see through the means of something as foolish as spit and mud is the same enormous power contained in a foolish gospel brought into the world by a risen Saviour. It is through faith in Him, initiated by His pursuit of me, that I, a gay girl, now new creature, was made right with God. Given sight, able to recognize my hands and how they'd been calloused by sin, and how Jesus had come to cleanse me of them all. Now seeing, I worship. One thing is sure, if ever I am asked, how am I able to see now, after being blind for so long, I will simply say, "I was blind, a good God came, and now, I see."

WB: You have experienced the struggle with same-sex attraction. Should those who are tempted with that identify themselves as "Gay Christians"?

JHP: I don't believe it is wise or truthful to the power of the gospel to identify oneself by the sins of one's past or the temptations of one's present but rather to only be defined by the Christ who's overcome both for those He calls His own. All men and women, including myself, that are well acquainted with sexual temptation are ultimately not what our temptation says of us. We are what Christ had done for us; therefore, our ultimate identity is very simple: We are Christians.

WB: In your book, you warn about the "heterosexual gospel." You write that "God isn't calling gay people to be straight" and it's actually dangerous to teach that he is. Why do you say that?

JHP: Because it puts more emphasis on marriage as the goal of the Christian life than knowing Jesus. Just as God's aim in my salvation was not mainly the removal of my same-sex desires, in sanctification, it is not always His aim that marriage or experiencing an attraction for the opposite sex will be involved. 

Excerpts from Jackie Hill Perry's "Gay Girl, Good God" have been used with the gracious permission of the author (and publisher).

APOLOGETICS 201

by Gary DeMar

Atheists can't explain evil

Given an atheistic or even an agnostic starting point, how can someone be outraged by evil? Without God, being outraged over the presence of evil is a subjective notion borrowed from the Christian worldview. "If God is nothing," according to Russian novelist Feodor Dostoyevsky (1821–1881), "everything is permitted; if God is nothing, everything is a matter of indifference."¹ Greg Bahnsen stated it this way:

"The question, logically speaking, is how the unbeliever can make sense of taking evil seriously – not simply as something inconvenient, or unpleasant, or contrary to his desires.... On the unbeliever's worldview, there is no good reason for saying that anything is evil in nature, but only by personal choice or feeling."²

This type of thinking has trickled down to the law where legal positivism rules the courts.

"Legal positivism holds that there is no necessary connection between law and morality and that the question of what is and is not law can be identified by reference to social facts and need not involve moral assumptions."³

How could there be, given the operating premise that those standing before the court are animals whose origin is a chance one, and whose evolution is a violent struggle for survival?

HOW CAN THE WORLD CONDEMN EVEN TERRORISTS?

The person who murdered 50 Muslims in New Zealand this past month was committed for the survival of his species. He's made this point clear in his manifesto. In a sick but logical way he was attempting to justify his actions. What outside transcendental source of ethics can be used against his thinking and actions that hasn't first been borrowed from a biblical view of morality but officially barred from consideration?

Thomas H. Huxley, "Darwin's Bulldog," said as much in 1893, writing that "Cosmic evolution may teach us how the good and the evil tendencies of many have come about; but, in itself, it is incompetent to furnish any better reason why what we call good is preferable to what we call evil than we had before" Darwinism came on the scene. He goes to write that one day we may "arrive at an understanding of the aesthetic faculty; but all that understanding in the world will neither increase nor diminish the forces of the intuition that this is beautiful and that is ugly."⁴

IF ETHICS EVOLVED, WHY WOULD WE LISTEN TO THEM?

And little has changed since 1859 when Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* was published.



"If ethics is simply an adaptation that evolved over by natural selection, then we acquire another reason to think it has no compelling justification. Ethics had no being, no ontology beyond what whatever our genes and brains and environment generated to keep the social world functioning. Darwinian metaethics thus further weakened the case for an objective foundation for ethics."⁵

What philosophy of value or morality can the atheist offer which will render it meaningful to condemn some atrocity as objectively evil? If according to Feuerbach, "Man is man's only God" – *Homo homini Deus* – then Hobbes's dictum, "Man is a wolf to his fellow man" – *Homo homini lupus* – eventually becomes the law of a society.

Who are we to object or be outraged when accidents of nature (what we call human beings) maim and kill other accidents of nature in a world governed (if such a word can be used) by chance?⁶ For example, although atheists are "morally outraged" by slavery, "If we are all biological accidents, why shouldn't the white accidents own and sell the black accidents?"⁷

SADLY, THE WORST CRIMES ARE NATURAL

Atheist Sam Harris, writes in his *Letter to a Christian Nation*, the sequel to his bestseller *The End of Faith*:

"While we do not have anything like a final, scientific understanding of human morality, it seems safe to say that raping and killing our neighbors is not one of its primary constituents."⁸

Mr. Harris ought to take up his unsupported conclusion with Randy Thornhill's and Craig T. Palmer's thesis and their book *A Natural History of Rape* published by MIT Press (2000). He might also want to establish a dialog with David Buss, author of *The Murderer Next Door: Why the Mind is Designed to Kill* (2005). Why object to the worldview of the man who murdered 50 Muslims in New Zealand, or to the worldview below of one

of Charles Manson's followers, if God does not exist?

"Whatever is necessary, you do it. When somebody needs to be killed, there's no wrong. You do it, and then you move on. And you pick up a child and you move him to the desert. You pick up as many children as you can and you kill whoever gets in your way. That is us."⁹

On what grounds can the unbeliever object?

ONLY CHRISTIANS - AND CHEATING ATHEISTS - CAN CONDEMN EVIL

Atheists must *assume* something of God's moral character to make a case against God in light of the existence of evil. "The unbeliever," Bahnsen writes, "must secretly *rely upon* the Christian worldview in order to make sense of his argument from the existence of evil which is *urged against* the Christian worldview!"¹⁰ In the end, the unbeliever uses stolen credentials (Christian presuppositions), establishes himself as the defense attorney, prosecutor, and judge, and then takes his seat in the jury box to render a verdict against God.

None of this is designed to demean atheists who claim they are just as good as anyone else. That's not the issue. It's being able to account for goodness and evilness given certain underlying presuppositions. But we are justified in putting their arguments on trial since they've seen fit to put God's existence on trial. In an interview, Vincent Bugliosi, author of the books *Helter Skelter* and *Outrage*, when he was asked whether he believed in God, stated, "If we were in court, I'd object on the ground that the question assumes a fact not in evidence."¹¹ The evidence is there, but Mr. Bugliosi has set the ground rules for what he will accept as evidence. If the evidence does not fit his operating presuppositions, then for him it is not evidence. John Frame answers such flirtations with wholesale autonomy in an unbending manner:

"Unbelievers must surely not be allowed to take their own autonomy for granted in defining moral concepts. They must

not be allowed to assume that they are the ultimate judges of what is right and wrong. Indeed, they should be warned that that sort of assumption rules out the biblical God from the outset and thus allows its character as a faith-presupposition. The unbeliever must know that we reject his presupposition altogether and insist upon subjecting our moral standards to God's. And if the unbeliever insists on his autonomy, we may get nasty and require him to show how an autonomous self can come to moral conclusions in a godless universe."¹²

Mr. Bugliosi consistently criticized the prosecutors in the O. J. Simpson trial for not raising crucial points of evidence. One wonders why he nowhere deals with the argument that if there is no God then there is no morality or a call for outrage when personal sentiments (like his own) are offended.

The world is in crisis. Presidents and Prime Ministers have long ago abandoned a biblical view of the world claiming that it's archaic. As a result, its rejection has released the worldview of Cain (Gen. 4:8) on this world with no moral brake to rebuke it. RP

This article, reprint with permission, first appeared on AmericanVision.org.

ENDNOTES

- 1) Feodor Dostoyevsky, *The Devils* (The Possessed), trans. David Magarshak (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1953), 126. Quoted in Vincent P. Miceli, *The Gods of Atheism* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1971), 141.
- 2) Greg L. Bahnsen, *Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith* (Atlanta, GA: American Vision, 1996), 169–170.
- 3) Jonathan Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society: Aspects of Law and Legality in the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 68.
- 4) Thomas H. Huxley, "Evolution and Ethics," *Evolution and Ethics and Other Essays* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1899), 80.
- 5) James Davidson Hunter and Paul Nadelisky, *Science and the Good: The Tragic Quest for the Foundations of Morality* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 78.
- 6) See Barbara Reynolds, "If your kids go ape in school, you'll know why," *USA Today* (August 27, 1993), 11A.
- 7) James Scott Bell, *The Darwin Conspiracy* (Gresham, OR: Vision House, 1995), 64.
- 8) Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 24.
- 9) Sandra Good quoted in Vincent Bugliosi, with Curt Gentry, *Helter Skelter: The True Story of the Manson Murders* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1974), 462.
- 10) Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, 170.
- 11) Quoted in Bugliosi, *Outrage*, 247.
- 12) Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, 169.



WHAT'S YOUR PLAN FOR RETIREMENT?

by Bruce Bruinsma

HOW IMPORTANT IS “NOTHING”? IT'S TIME FOR A RETIREMENT REFORMATION!

My Grandmother found me in the pantry of her house and demanded, “What are you doing?” My quick response was nothing. “Oh, you must have been doing something,” she said. “No, I wasn’t. I was doing nothing,” I declared. And so goes the process of getting caught with my hand in the cookie jar.

“Nothing” is so easy to say and usually doesn’t mean “Nothing.”

I’ve met with multiple Christian leaders heading into retirement. When I ask them what they are going to do next, I get a quizzical look and often the erudite answer, “nothing.” Now sometime it comes out as “I don’t know,” or “I don’t know yet,” or “I haven’t figured it out,” or “I’m going

to take some time off.” Seldom is the answer definitive or part of a new life’s direction. It’s mostly a response suggesting what is being left behind, and not what is ahead.

THE ALLURE OF NOTHING?

Kind of strange, isn’t it, that a large majority claim *nothing* as their goal in retirement? Instead of a move from success, or even meaningful existence to significance, it’s a move from something to nothing. A quick look in Webster’s suggests the following about nothing: *not any being or any particular thing, a state of non-existence, worthlessness, or unconsciousness.*

This eruption of nothing has exploded to the point where January 16 is identified as our National Day of

Nothing. If more people were aware of it, less would get done. A lot of nothing for sure. The more or less official description of the goal of the day is to provide Americans with one national day when they can just sit without celebrating, observing or honoring anything. Raise the flag for nothing? No, that would be doing something.

I thought I’d see what else I could learn about nothing. In the Biblical book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon takes about all of man’s desires as meaningless, or nothing compared to the majesty of God. The word is used to describe the lack of value as in Proverbs 13:7 where Solomon again opines, one person pretends to be rich, yet has nothing; another pretends to be poor, yet has great wealth. Nothing and

why in...our faith-based culture, have so many bought into the cultural priority of doing nothing in retirement?

“naught” are often used to portray the nothing of man compared to the wealth of God. Interestingly, in John 1 Jesus says that without a relationship with him, you can do nothing. Following the logic, if you are doing nothing, you will not have a relationship with him. Not only no relationship but no meaningful action either.

So why in our culture, our faith-based culture, have so many bought into the cultural priority of doing nothing in retirement? The allure of making every day a Saturday is certainly there when you have worked at a job for 30 years. But 30 years of Saturdays leaves much to be desired.

MADE FOR MORE THAN GOLF

Part of the cultural allure, even deception, comes from the desire to escape from work and then tie leisure to value. Thirty years of playing golf won't bring meaning or purpose to the Christian who realizes that we are called to be faithful for a lifetime. Another subtle meaningless thought is that church, bible study, etc. alone reflects God's plan for your life. God does have one, you know. And it does not stop when you retire from your job, sell your company, or even leave the pulpit. There is more to be done, perhaps interspersed with a bit of nothing thrown in. But nothing as a goal, as a reflection of God's plan for the rest of your life? Absolutely not.

Here is some encouragement to move beyond nothing. It's from a 1981 United Technologies Corp. ad that appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*, likely written by their CEO Harry Gray, who was close to retirement at the time:

Retirement doesn't have to be a red light. It can be a green light. Othmar Ammann would agree. After he

“retired” at age 60, he designed, among other things, the Connecticut and New Jersey Turnpikes; the Pittsburgh Civic Arena; Dulles Airport; the Throgs Neck Bridge; and the Verrazano Narrows Bridge. Paul Gauguin “retired” as a successful stockbroker and became a world-famous artist.

Heinrich Schliemann “retired” from business to look for Homer's legendary city of Troy. He found it. After Churchill made his mark as a world statesman, he picked up his pen and won the Nobel Prize for Literature at age seventy-nine. *Don't just go fishing when you retire. Go hunting. Hunt for the chance to do what you've always wanted to do. Then go do it!*

SHIFTING GEARS IS DIFFERENT THAN STOPPING

I had a conversation with a man on the plane. He'd sold his companies 6 years prior. When asked what he'd been doing, he answered, nothing! How is that working out for you? I asked. Not so good. As a matter of fact, I think I'm about at the end of nothing. God did not prepare him for nothing. That's true for you and me too.

Too often we make nothing into all-or-nothing. Either I'm working, or I'm doing nothing. We don't leave any room for shades of gray. I'm convinced we need to change how we think about the nothing we call retirement. Need to find meaning and purpose. The meaning and purpose God intends for us during these last three stages of life.

A comedian used this phrase to define the word “nothing”; “Nothing” is an air-filled balloon with the skin peeled off. A graphic description don't you agree. Nothing is not anything until we think or reflect on it, then it


becomes something. Starting to think about our next life stage of nothing, is important, valuable, encouraging, and yes, exciting. Every little kid has asked, “what are we going to do next?” Their voice is full of anticipation; ours should be to whether we are in our 50s, 70s, or 90s.

Here is some accumulated wisdom from those who should know:

- Edmund Burke said, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”
- Robert Schuller, “I'd rather attempt to do something great and fail than to attempt to do nothing and succeed.”
- Helen Keller, “Life is either a great adventure or nothing.”
- “There is a definite cost to doing nothing.” Edward Livingston

And here is the thought that challenges me the most: The hardest work of all is to do nothing. I'd rather be excited about the day, week, and months ahead. How about you?

So how important is nothing? Victor Hugo said, “Doing nothing is happiness for children and misery for old men.”

Stay with us as we journey together. Don't disturb me either, as I am very busy doing nothing. 

Bruce Bruinsma champions the emerging Retirement Reformation Movement (RetirementReformation.org) along with other key members of the Retirement Reformation Roundtable. The Retirement Reformation Manifesto is an initial step to encourage Christians to radically change the way they think about retirement. For the last 30 years he has given leadership to a financial services firm providing retirement plans to ministers, missionaries, churches, and faith-based organizations. He lives in Colorado Springs with his wife of 56 years, Judy. This is reprinted, with permission, from his blog at www.BruceBruinsma.com.

BOOKS

NOVELS: SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

JOHANNA AND HENRIETTE KUYPER

BY ABIGAIL VAN DER VELDE

243 PAGES / 2017



Aimed at young teenaged girls, this is a novelization of the lives of Johanna and Henriette Kuyper, the wife and daughter of the theologian and Dutch prime minister, Abraham Kuyper.

It's in three parts; Johanna's childhood, her marriage to "Bram," and their daughter's story. The reader will get some insight into society at that time such as rules of courtship and expected behavior of young women.

I was somewhat disappointed that the author, rather than focusing on facts, used the story of these two interesting women to primarily teach moral lessons. This is clearly shown in the "Go Deeper" section at the back, with questions such as, "Do you know a girl...who doesn't share your faith? What in Jo's story could help you be friends with that girl?"

Nevertheless, the reader will be introduced to an historical figure in the Dutch churches through the women who loved him, and to the famous Kuyper quote, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!" This book could spark an interest to "go deeper."

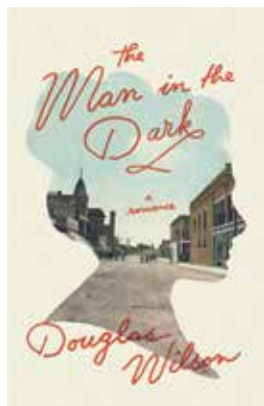
Included are family photos, a recipe, and a craft project. It also has a helpful timeline and comprehensive list of bibliographical resources.

— ALIDA VANDERHORST

THE MAN IN THE DARK

BY DOUGLAS WILSON

258 PAGES / 2019



Savannah Westmoreland, a self-assured schoolteacher, finds herself in the middle of a love triangle. Except that it wouldn't be accurate to call what the town's biggest businessman feels for her *love*. Desire...hunger...lust, maybe? And while the church's newly arrived pastor is interested, and a worthy sort, he can't get past the walls Savannah has set up.

But events – and friends – conspire against Savannah, putting her repeatedly in the pastor's company. Even as he uses these moments to make a good case for his marriable merits, Savannah is actively discouraging him. Why? Something from her past still has a hold on her. The pastor is trying to get around this obstacle, but the businessman is trying to discover her secret so he can use it to control her.

As you might suspect of a book written by a Reformed pastor, there is a lot of theology, from the dinner table conversations to the metaphor underlying the whole story. But this is not a sermon disguised as a story. This is, instead, great fiction telling something true. And if you think the ending a tad contrived, I might agree with you. But I'd also invite you to consider what the author is saying about this God of wonders that we serve.

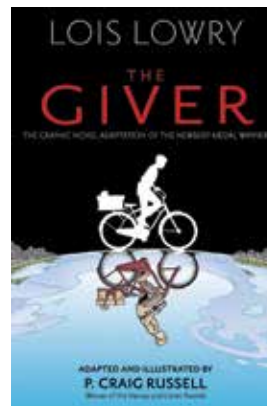
I'll also add that this was so fun I had to read large chunks out loud to my wife.

— JON DYKSTRA

THE GIVER (GRAPHIC NOVEL ADAPTATION)

BY LOIS LOWRY / ADAPTED BY P. CRAIG RUSSELL

176 PAGES / 2019



In this dystopian story, conflict has been eliminated via the chemical muting of people's emotions. 12-year-old Jonas has a unique role, being trained by *The Giver* to study the past so he can advise the community in times of crisis. But knowing how things used to be shows him that the present is not as idyllic as he supposed.

P. Craig Russell shows us Jonas' muted world in black and white. But as Jonas learns more, we begin to see increasing flashes of vibrant color to show his growing awareness of how intriguing the world can be. In these sections, the comic is even better than the book.

But showing can be more problematic than telling. When Jonas helps bathe the elderly, Russell has to use just the right angles to ensure all we see are the knees down, or the shoulders up. In another scene a baby is shown fully naked and while detail is scant, we can see it is a boy.

It's a fantastic comic, with highly relevant warnings: the danger of government overreach, the false compassion of euthanasia, the peril and blessing of emotions. But the comic's teen target audience will need a parent or teacher to discuss and guide them through these ideas.

—JON DYKSTRA

WINTERFLIGHT

BY JOSEPH BAYLY

216 PAGES / 1981



In this dystopian novel, Joseph Bayly takes us to a not-so-distant future in which abortion for disabled children is mandatory, euthanasia is compulsory soon after 75, and Christians are so confused about Romans 13 they think God wants them to submit to even these demands.

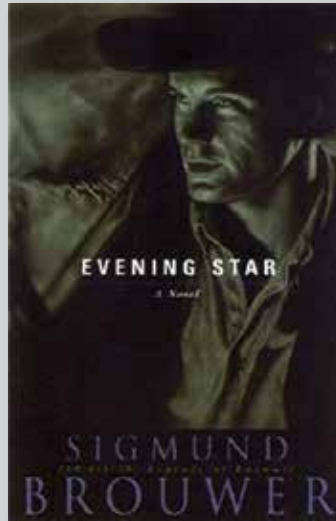
Winterflight was written almost 40 years ago, but it got my heart racing – it all seemed far too probable for my liking. Abortion is already being used to “cure” genetic disabilities like Down Syndrome. When it comes to killing the elderly, the *National Post* has already had an article exploring the cost savings that can be had from their early departure.

But what hit closest to home was Bayly’s portrayal of the confused Christian response to government abuses. Instead of Christians acting as light, we have Christian milquetoast. That’s too familiar.

There are just a couple cautions to note. First, there is a small bit of language – I think “damn” might be used two or three times.

Second, without giving away the ending, when the book was first published some Christians misunderstood the ending as being *prescriptive* – they thought the actions of the book’s confused Christians were what we *should* do. But that forgets that Bayly is using this novel to warn us what *not* to do.

–JON DYKSTRA



EVENING STAR

BY SIGMUND BROUWER

317 PAGES / 2000

In *Evening Star* the prolific author Sigmund Brouwer takes on the Western genre. Or that’s the setting – the American frontier in 1874 – but it could as easily be called a mystery, as Sam Keaton, from the moment he steps into the town of Laramie, has to solve one puzzle after another. It all starts with the mysterious Indian that Keaton saves from a vicious beating. This good deed puts Keaton behind bars, and when this Indian next shows up, he’s got a message from an even

more mysterious woman named Rebecca, who promises to help Keaton escape. But before she can engineer his rescue, the town’s Marshal, yet another mysterious sort, decides to help Keaton escape first and sends him off to find out about some gold that may, or may not exist.

So the mysteries abound in this very fast paced book but what brings some depth to it, and sets it apart, is the growth Keaton goes through. Early on, he’s trapped in his tiny jail cell facing a very large, very angry man who has been sent to kill him. Staring down the wrong end of a shotgun barrel changes Keaton. When a pretty, and very willing young woman throws herself at him, Keaton turns her down, but finds himself...

“wondering why I had not pursued the company she had been offering.... Because of that shotgun I could not deny the nagging feeling that I was missing something, that life had to be bigger than finding ways to satisfy the varied demands of my body. I could not escape the feeling that deep down, I’d always known life had to be bigger, but along the way I had always chosen whatever distractions it took to keep me from wondering about God. Except now, try as I might, I couldn’t ignore what some certainty told me was beyond. If I turned my back on whatever instinct now pulled me to seek answers, if I chose distractions like this Suzanne, I would have to fool myself real good not to find those distractions sour and hollow.”

Keaton isn’t done with his spiritual wrestling by the end of the book, but he has made a good start of it.

But while there is a lot to love about this book, it is worth noting that there is some adult material here – there is some grit. One example: Keaton recalls a time when he was seduced by a “wild” woman. It never gets lascivious but Brouwer does describe sexual temptation in a pretty frank way. So this is a book I would recommend for adults only.

–JON DYKSTRA



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